

2026

Language Choices on Tanzanian Instagram

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Recommended Citation

Ulomy, Carolyn (2026) "Language Choices on Tanzanian Instagram," *Vernacular: New Connections in Language, Literature, & Culture*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://voljournals.utk.edu/vernacular/vol11/iss1/8>

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Language Choices on Tanzanian Instagram

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank my advisor for their guidance and support throughout this research project. I am also grateful to the participants who generously shared their time and experiences.

Manuscript 1178

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Introduction

The Internet has become a central tool for global communication, with an estimated 5.17 billion users worldwide. In Tanzania, internet penetration has grown rapidly, reaching 21.82 million users in 2024, which represents approximately 34% of the national population. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp shape this digital environment by enabling users to create profiles, connect with others, and explore their social networks (Boyd and Ellison 211). These platforms are especially popular among youth. Tanzania currently has about 5.65 million Facebook users, 3.50 million Instagram users, 1.30 million Messenger users, 1.2 million LinkedIn users, and 621.1 thousand Twitter users (DataReportal). As Internet access expands, these platforms increasingly foster multinationalism, multilingualism, and multiculturalism (Cassell and Tversky; Uysal, 183). Tanzania's linguistic diversity, which includes more than 120 Community Languages with Swahili as the official language, raises an important question: how are these languages represented in social media interactions among Tanzanians? The growth of online multilingualism is further supported by tools such as translation services and multilingual keyboards (Lee and Barton 48). This case study investigates the factors that shape language choice among Tanzanian Instagram users and examines how post content influences these choices. Using a qualitative corpus-based approach, we analyzed 400 Instagram posts from 40 users and conducted five techno-biographical interviews. The findings show that language choice is influenced by perceived audience, post content, and the social media brand image users seek to construct.

Multilingualism and Translanguaging in CMC

Multilingualism is well documented in computer-mediated communication (CMC), and translanguaging has become a routine online practice (Ren and Wei 96-98). Translanguaging

involves organizing multilingual and multisemiotic resources to negotiate meaning (Chen et al. 2), and García and Li emphasize that speakers draw on a range of linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to construct meaning (42). Empirical studies show that language mixing is widespread across digital contexts. Leppänen et al. found Finnish youth using both Finnish and English on online forums, with English functioning as a global connector. Similar patterns appear in Africa (1086). Lesame and Malatji report that 40% of Limpopo youth mix English with Indigenous languages (85), and Deumert and Masinyana note that 23 percent of SMS messages combined English and isiXhosa. In Egypt, English dominates the web, although Romanized Egyptian Arabic remains common in informal communication (Warschauer and Zohry). Additional research identifies multiscript and multitext practices across platforms (Lee and Barton 48; Durham). Even in multilingual contexts such as Switzerland, multilingual usage online remains limited at only 3.5–5%.

Factors Influencing Language Choice in CMC

Although language choice has been widely studied in face-to-face settings, research on virtual communication is still developing. Audience remains a central factor: users choose languages based on who they expect will read the post (Lee and Barton 48; Lee 92 ; Gil-López et al. 139). Confidence in a language also shapes digital self-presentation. Prestige and social value influence language choice as well. South African youth frequently select English in SMS communication due to its association with education and social mobility (Deumert and Masinyana). Warschauer and Zohry similarly attribute Egypt's preference for English online to its professional importance.

Content further affects language selection. Posts tied to cultural identity are often captioned in local languages, whereas content with broad or global appeal tends to appear in English (Lee

and Barton 48). Foreign languages may also function as marketing cues that shape consumer perceptions (Hornikx and Meurs 62). Finally, access to domain-specific vocabulary influences multilingual users' choices, particularly in technical or professional contexts (Koslow and Touchstone 580-581).

Given the growing multilingualism of the Internet, especially in Africa, in general, and Tanzania, in particular, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What are the factors influencing language choices among Tanzanian Instagram users?

RQ2: Are there associations between the content of social media posts and choice of language among Tanzania Instagram users?

- a. Are there specific linguistic patterns or contexts where users prefer using Swahili?
- b. Are there certain types of content that are more commonly associated with English?
- c. Are there occasions when Tanzanian Instagram users employ Swanglish/Kiswanglish?
- d. Are there certain types of content associated with Community Languages and other Foreign Languages on Instagram?

Methods

This study used a two-pronged approach: a corpus study and techno-biographical interviews. First, the study used a corpus-based approach to analyze the language choices of Tanzanian Instagram users, following Woodrow's definition of a corpus as a collection of real texts for analysis (42). Al-Khawaldeh et al. highlight that written discourse from social media is suitable for corpus linguistic studies due to its digital, natural, and abundant characteristics (160). Researchers can utilize existing corpora or create new ones; this study created a new corpus comprising 400 Instagram posts collected from 40 users. The first five users volunteered for

techno-biographical interviews, while the remaining 35 were identified using Instagram's 'Advanced Search' and 'Explore Page' features, based on keywords and hashtags like 'tanzanian' and 'mtanzania.' The 'Advanced Search' allows filtering by Top, Accounts, Tags, and Places, while the Explore Page customizes content to user interests (Shaheer et al.) To develop language models, a single post per user is insufficient to capture online linguistic behaviors (Kern et al. 3). Therefore, the researcher systematically collected the first 10 posts and the Instagram Bio from each sampled profile. Following data collection, annotating social media posts is crucial for further analysis. This study employed inductive coding techniques, focusing on emerging themes rather than relying on pre-existing ones (Shaheer et al.). From the Instagram posts, several labels emerged, including personal connections, professional & commercial, lifestyle & leisure, entertainment, current affairs, religious, political, and education & science. The researcher then applied a structural coding strategy to label the specific languages used in each post (Kern et al. 3). Additionally, the language in the Instagram bios of the sampled users was also observed and recorded.

In addition to corpus analysis, techno-biographical interviews were utilized as a complementary data collection tool. Lune and Berg define an interview as a social interaction, based conversation that unveils the experiences from the subject's point of view. Techno-biographical interviews are characterized by questions that explore an individual's past, present, and anticipated future experiences with technology (Lee 92). Therefore, a total of 10 open ended questions were asked to the five interviewees in regard to their language choice experiences on Instagram. (See Appendix A for Interview Questions)

For the interviews, criterion sampling was employed to select five participants who met the following criteria: Tanzanian Instagram users aged 20 to 40, who use Instagram for an average of one hour daily and have at least 10 posts. Participants were recruited through a free publicity method, with the first author publishing an open recruitment post on her Instagram account in both Swahili and English (Treurniet and Sanders). The first five respondents who met the criteria were selected. Interviews occurred over two weeks, with each session lasting approximately 30 minutes, including study debriefing. Demographically, three participants were female and two were male. All spoke Swahili as their first language and learned English in school. Additionally, two participants spoke Haya and Chagga (Community Languages in Tanzania), and one had limited proficiency in Spanish. In terms of education, two participants held Master's degrees, two held Bachelor's degrees, and one had a teaching certificate (equivalent to an associate degree in the U.S.

Findings

Techno-biographic Interviews

This study opted for four virtual interviews via WhatsApp call and one in person interview due to the issues of convenience, accessibility and cost-effectiveness. Using WhatsApp calls as a tool to conduct the virtual interviews was based on its end-to-end encryption feature that securely protected the information shared by participants during the interview. To maintain anonymity, the participants of the techno-biographic interviews were coded by 'P' that stands for 'Participant' and were numbered (1-5) in the order in which they were interviewed. Four interviews were conducted in Swahili and one interview was conducted in English. The language of the interview was selected by the participant. Interviews were initially transcribed using Google Docs Voice Typing, followed by a second round of human transcription by the researcher. Finally, the Swahili transcripts were translated into English by the researcher

RQ1: What are the factors influencing language choices among Tanzanian Instagram users?

Perceived Audience or Intended Audience

The audience is at the forefront of the participants' minds when making language choices on the platform. The choice to use Swahili, English or other language on Instagram is heavily influenced by the perceived audience or intended audience or both. For example, P1 states that she mostly uses Swahili on social media, due to her larger Swahili follower base in Tanzania and other Swahili speaking East African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. P1 also highlighted specific instances where she uses Kiswanglish/Swanglish, such as when posting about scholarships. She states, *Maudhui yanayosababisha nilitumia Kiingereza na Kiswahili haswa haswa ni kama haya ambayo nasema labda ya kuna nafasi ya kuja kusoma nje. Hivi kama scholarships nilizozungumzia.* ("The content that influences me to use both English and Kiswahili

especially, is opportunities for further studies abroad. Like the scholarships I talked about.”). P4 mentions alternating between Swahili or English when writing Instagram captions based on the audience intended in that particular post. P4 says, “Mimi nikiposti posti yangu yoyote kwenye Instagram au Facebook hapo inatokana na maamuzi yangu kwamba ninataka watu gani waone. Kwa hiyo ninaweza kutumia Kiingereza au Kiswahili.” (“When I post any of my posts on Instagram or Facebook, it is based on my decisions of which people I want them to see my post. So I can use English or Kiswahili”). For these participants, the intended audience of an Instagram post is a key factor shaping Tanzanian Instagrammers’ language choices, whether they use Swahili, English, Community Languages, Foreign Languages, or hybrid forms such as Swanglish.

Content of Instagram Post

Tanzanian Instagram users in this study consider other factors beyond the ‘intended or perceived audience’ to make linguistic decisions on the platform. Tanzania netizens also consider the content of the post before they decide between using Swahili, English, Community Languages or Foreign Languages. Responses from the interviews demonstrate how content of Instagram posts alters how a Tanzanian Instagram user chooses a language or how they use the language. For example, when asked about what influences their language choices on Instagram, P3 commented on how the choice of Swahili or English is somehow determined with content to be disseminated on Instagram. P3 states that some content is more appropriate when captioned in English not Swahili and vice versa. Expert from P3, “I think I will consider what kind of story I am sharing with language that is appropriate.” Additionally, P1 reflected on how the content area of career and academic opportunities influenced their decision to use both languages for the purpose of making such opportunities accessible to a wider internet audience who uses Swahili or English. In this study, the content of Instagram posts influences language choices, as each language connotes

different viewpoints, something participants consistently highlighted in their reflections.

Perception of Convenience and Accessibility of Language in Certain Areas

The responses from the techno-biographical interviews also shed light on how convenience and accessibility of a language related to certain themes can influence language choices. For example, P2 prefers to use English for condolences because the phrases such as 'rest in peace (RIP)' are easily accessible within their repertoires in a context where condolence greetings are required as compared to Swahili equivalents. P2 notes that, “Mara nyingi ninaandika neno kwa ufupi kwa mfano ‘rest in peace’, linatumika haraka. Nafikiri ndio neno ambalo linakuwa nakuja kwenye akili kwa wakati huo kwa haraka. (“I often write a word abbreviated for example ‘rest in peace’, which can be used quickly. I think that's the word that comes to mind at that moment quickly.”) P1 reflected on the convenience of using English when publishing professional related posts while adding that some words in Swahili when translated are much harder and uncommon within the Swahili speaking community.

Maintaining Or Building A Certain Social Media Brand Image

Another factor influencing language choices on Instagram, as noted by participants, is the desire to maintain or build a specific image or brand on social media. Tanzanian Instagram users just like other social media users globally create a certain image or brand on social media either subconsciously or intentionally (Jacobson). Responses from the interviews indicate that a type of brand that these netizens aim at maintaining or creating is somehow influential in their language choices. When P4 was prompted in regard to whether they prefer or do not prefer translanguaging on Instagram they responded that their preference is to use only one language in a single post due to the desire to see Swahili used eloquently. P4 also mentioned earlier in their interview that they prefer to use Swahili mostly on Instagram, due to the desire of being a Swahili cultural ambassador

on these social media platforms.

The Original Language of The Social Media Content

Participants in this study indicated that their choice of Swahili, English, Swanglish/Kiswanglish, Community Languages or other Foreign Languages often depends on the original language of the content they intend to post. In response to the question of why they use the two languages they speak on social media, P4 voiced their preference of matching the original language of the post to their captioning language. Excerpt from P4,

Nikiangalia kwenye Instagram na kukawa na video ya Kiingereza halafu ninahitaji kutoa maoni kwa Kiingereza. Basi nitaandika kwa Kiingereza siandiki kwa Kiswahili, lakini kama ni video Kiswahili nitatumia Kiswahili.

If I take a look on Instagram and there is an English video, then I need to comment in English. So I will write in English, I won't write in Swahili, but if it is a video in Swahili, I will use Swahili and so on.

Generally, the original language of the video, photo or reel posted on Instagram is highly likely to be the language used by these Instagram users when commenting or captioning.

Relationship Between Interlocutors

The relationship between interlocutors also determines language choice among Tanzanian netizens. In correspondence to a language of choice for commenting or captioning or commenting on a congratulatory post, P3 asserts that the relationship between the receiver and the giver of the congratulatory remark determines the choice of language. P3 preferred using their first language (in their case Swahili) when congratulating someone to whom they are in close relationship with. P3 states "I would say like a very close friend, Swahili to connect to them deeply. And I feel like Swahili sounds very different and I would rather spare the little knowledge I have in English for

when needed but most of the time I use Swahili.” Additionally, P3 touches on the sense of authenticity that comes with using Swahili when conversing with close friends on Instagram. Excerpt from P3, “I would say like Swahili brings that kind of close connection. I feel like for us to be our authentic selves then we need to use Swahili unless only when it's something that requires us to use English, but most of the conversations that we have we use Swahili unless they're professional.”

The techno-biographical interviews provided insight into the factors Tanzanian Instagram users weigh before posting. Participants described how their language choices are shaped by the intended audience, the nature of the post's content, the practical accessibility of particular languages, the desire to project or maintain a specific brand identity, the original language of the material being shared, and the relational dynamics between interlocutors.

Corpus of Instagram Posts

Tanzanian Instagram users like other netizens globally publish posts in different content areas ranging from professional, personal connections, lifestyle & leisure, entertainment & pop culture, current affairs, science & education, social activism, politics to religion. For the purposes of this study, a new corpus was created, consisting of 400 Instagram posts collected from 40 users of the platform (Woodrow 42). The analysis of this dataset revealed key insights into the language patterns and themes of these posts, which are discussed in this section.

RQ 2A: Are There Specific Linguistic Patterns or Contexts Where Users Prefer Using Swahili?

Analysis of the Instagram corpus reveals six content areas in which Swahili was the dominant language compared to English, Swanglish/Kiswanglish, Community Languages (CLs),

and Foreign Languages (FLs). These areas include social issues & activism, science, current affairs, entertainment & pop culture, politics, and religion. The data shows, Swahili was used in all social issues & activism posts (100%, 4 out of 4), in nearly all science posts (95%, 20 out of 21), and in the majority of current affairs posts (90%, 44 out of 49). It was also used predominantly in entertainment & pop culture posts (74%, 67 out of 91), in half of political posts (50%, 3 out of 6), and in nearly half of religious posts (46%, 7 out of 15).

These findings challenge the conclusions of Lesame and Malatji, who emphasize the minimal presence of African languages on social media and the dominance of English as a preferred language of writing in virtual spaces. The discrepancy may be attributed to the status of Swahili as Tanzania's lingua franca, unlike the regional and ethnic languages discussed in the South African context by Lesame and Malatji (90-91).

Social Issues & Activism was the first Swahili-dominant content area. Posts in this category, which focused on social justice, human rights, and activism, demonstrated 100% use of Swahili. However, generalizations should be made cautiously due to the limited sample size.

Example 1: Social Issues & Activism

Original Instagram Post (Swahili):

Ulikuwa wakati mzuri kujumuika na Waziri wa Ujenzi, Mh. Innocent Bashungwa (Mb) katika hafla ya kuchangia ujenzi wa kituo cha wahitaji na wahudumu iliyoandaliwa na Masista wa Shirika la Little Sisters of St. Francis

English Translation:

It was a great moment to join the Minister of Construction, Hon. Innocent Bashungwa (MP), at a fundraising event for the construction of a center for people in need and caregivers, organized by the Nuns of the Little Sisters of St. Francis.

Science was the second category dominated by Swahili, with 95% of posts written in the language. Posts in this area addressed health, medicine, and technology topics.

Example 2: Science

Original Instagram Post (Swahili):

Uchunguzi umeonyesha kwamba akina baba wenye 'umri mkubwa' wanaweza kuwa na uwezekano mkubwa wa kupata watoto wenye matatizo ya ukuaji wa neva. Utafiti uliofanywa mwaka 2010 ulibaini kuwa watoto wa wanaume wenye umri wa zaidi ya miaka 40 walikuwa na hatari mara tano ya kupata Hali ya Usonji (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

English Translation:

The research has shown that older fathers may be more likely to have children with neurodevelopmental disorders. A study conducted in 2010 found that children of men over 40 years old had five times the risk of developing Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Current Affairs was the third category, with 90% of posts (44 out of 49) using Swahili. This larger sample size strengthens the generalizability of Swahili preference in this domain.

Example 3: Current Affairs

Original Instagram Post (Swahili):

Ujerumani imeondoa kikosi chote cha Jeshi lake nchini Mali ambapo kundi hili la mwisho ni sehemu ya kikosi hicho kilichotumwa Nchini humo kusaidia kurejesha utulivu miaka saba iliyopita.

English Translation:

Germany has withdrawn all its troops from Mali, with this final group being part of the

contingent that was deployed there seven years ago to help restore stability.

RQ 2B: Are There Certain Types of Content That Are More Commonly Associated With English?

The data collected from the corpus of Instagram posts reveals three content areas where English predominated over Swahili, Swanglish/Kiswanglish, Community Languages (CLs), and Foreign Languages (FLs): lifestyle and leisure, professional and business, and personal connection. English was used in: 90% of lifestyle and leisure posts (28 out of 31), 61% of professional and business posts (54 out of 88) and 61% of personal connection posts (57 out of 95). These findings suggest that English is the language of choice in content areas that are either aspirational, globally oriented, or tied to professionalism.

Lifestyle and Leisure was the most English-dominant category. Posts under this theme are commonly focused on self-care, travel, hobbies, and general leisure activities. The prevalence of English here may be attributed to the global appeal of lifestyle content and the role of English as a lingua franca for communicating trends and personal experiences to a broader, often international audience.

Example 4: Lifestyle & Leisure

Original Instagram Post:

Blow drying x trimming ends  . How often do you trim/dust your ends?

Also, this time i used proper scissors ☐ Hair dryer from

#naturalhair #4chair #healthyhair

Professional and Business content followed closely, with English appearing in 61% of posts. This content typically revolved around entrepreneurship, career development, academic achievements, networking, and other forms of professional engagement. The dominance of

English in this category underscores its significance in Tanzania's education system, where it is the primary medium of instruction and its association with social prestige and professional authority.

Example 5: Professional and Business

Original Instagram Post:

Get this hairstyle at only 80,000 everything inclusive ✨ #hair #hairstyle #lovely
#greatness #hairgoals #braids #goddesslocs #fashion #beauty #viral

Finally, in the personal connection category, which included posts about relationships, dating, family, friends, and personal experiences, English was used in 61% of captions. This trend diverges from the findings of Lesame and Malatji (2022), who reported that South African youth preferred translanguaging by blending English with Indigenous African languages such as Xipedi, Tshivenda, and XiTsonga for similar content. In contrast, Tanzanian Instagram users in the current study relied primarily on English in these intimate or relational contexts, suggesting different regional language ideologies or digital audience expectations.

Example 6: Personal Connection

Original Instagram Post:

My lovely son

RQ 2C: On What Occasions Do Tanzanian Instagram Users Employ Swanglish/Kiswanglish?

In this study, Swanglish/Kiswanglish refers to a hybrid of Kiswahili and English commonly spoken in Kenya and Tanzania (Kanijo 2). The corpus analysis indicates that while Swanglish/Kiswanglish was not the preferred language in any content area, it was the second most

frequently used language in two particular domains: entertainment and pop culture, and current affairs. This suggests its marginal but notable presence in Tanzanian Instagram communication.

In the entertainment and pop culture category-covering movies, memes, sports, music, and celebrity topics Swanglish/Kiswanglish appeared in 13 out of 91 posts, making up 14% of the captions. Though not dominant, its frequency surpasses that of English, Community Languages (CLs), and Foreign Languages (FLs) in this domain. This usage reflects the rise of translanguaging as a communication norm in multilingual digital environments.

Example 6: Entertainment

Original Instagram Post (Swanglish/Kiswanglish):

#FINALLY ni trh 20 let's go my people ushindi ni wetu kwa juhudi na support yenu

Tangu tunaanza hadi tulipo tumefungua mwaka na hii 🎤 USHINDI MBELE NYUMA

MWIKO. DON KOLI VS GHOTA 🎤 RAP BETTLE

English Translation:

##FINALLY it's the 20th, let's go my people, victory is ours through your effort and

support from when we started until now. We've opened the year with this 🎤 VICTORY

FORWARD, NO TURNING BACK. DON KOLI VS GHOTA 🎤 RAP BATTLE

Swanglish/Kiswanglish also exceeded the use of English, CLs, and FLs in the current affairs category, accounting for 6% of captions in this content area. Posts in this category addressed news, trending topics, and socio-political developments.

Example 7: Current Affairs

Original Instagram Post (Swanglish/Kiswanglish):

GAS IT UP....IGNITING IRAMBA'S CLEAN ENERGY MOVEMENT. Mbunge wa

Jimbo la Iramba Magharibi na Waziri wa fedha Mhe. Dkt. Mwigulu L. Nchemba anatarajiwa kuwa mgeni rasmi kwenye hafla ya kukabidhi mitungi ya gesi na majiko kwa Mama Lishe, Baba Lishe, Wawakilishi wa shule za Msingi na Sekondari, Maafisa watendaji wa Kata, Maafisa watendaji wa vijiji, Wapishi toka taasisi za umma.

English Translation:

GAS IT UP....IGNITING IRAMBA'S CLEAN ENERGY MOVEMENT. The Member of Parliament for Iramba West and Minister of Finance, Hon. Dr. Mwigulu L. Nchemba, is expected to be the Guest of Honor at the event to hand over gas cylinders and cooking stoves to food vendors (*Mama Lishe and Baba Lishe*), representatives from primary and secondary schools, ward executive officers, village executive officers, and cooks from public institutions.

These examples reflect the informal and expressive potential of Swanglish/Kiswanglish in digital discourse, particularly in culturally and socially resonant content areas.

RQ 2D: What content area is associated with CLs and other FLs on Instagram?

Interestingly, data from the corpus of Instagram posts shows no Instagram captions written in Community Languages (CLs) and Foreign Languages (FLs). CLs and FLs are hardly used as captioning language among these Tanzanian Instagram users. The absence of CLs could be attributed to the lack of supporting features such as menus, buttons, settings, and other interface elements on Instagram that could translate and make available content in these CLs. Leseme and Malatji adds, “*The structure of social media limits the usage of African languages*” (87). It is worth noting that only one FL caption was detected among Tanzanian Instagram users, and this was found exclusively in the personal connection content area. This highlights the limited use of foreign languages in the study, particularly in more personal, informal contexts.

Example 8: Personal Connection

Original Instagram Post (Danish & English):

Tillykke med fødselsdagen til den bedste svigermor 🥰 @

Happy birthday to the best mother-in-law. 71 looks very good on you.”

English Translation:

Happy birthday to the best mother-in-law 🥰 @

Happy birthday to the best mother in law. 71 looks very good on you.”’

Analysis of the Instagram corpus indicates a possible pattern linking content categories to language choice. Posts addressing social issues and activism, science, current affairs, entertainment and pop culture, and politics tended to be captioned mainly in Swahili. Conversely, English was the preferred language for lifestyle and leisure content, professional and business posts, and posts centered on personal connections.

Discussion

Findings from this study reinforce patterns identified in earlier research on multilingual digital communication. Similar to Lee and Barton’s analysis of Chinese and Spanish Flickr users, this study shows that the intended or imagined audience strongly shapes language choice Instagram users consistently selected languages based on who they expected would read their posts, confirming that audience awareness is not unique to this context but a broader trend in online multilingual interaction (52-53). Content also influenced linguistic decisions. Prior research demonstrates that culturally specific posts tend to be captioned in local languages, while globally oriented content is often labeled in English. Lee and Barton note that cultural photos typically receive native-language captions, whereas images tied to global pop culture prompt users to choose

English (53). Carroll and Luna similarly found that posts related to family and personal life were more often in Spanish, while work-related content was associated with English (77). The present study supports these findings: Tanzanian Instagram users selected languages that matched the topic and communicative purpose of their posts.

Convenience and accessibility further shaped language choices. Koslow and Touchstone argued that some content domains are more naturally expressed in one language than another (580-581). Lesame and Malatji report that 70% of South African youth preferred English because it accommodates a wide audience and offers easily accessible vocabulary (87). The present study aligns with this: participants described English as more convenient for professional or academic content. Because English functions as the language of business and education in Tanzania, users often viewed it as the practical choice for posts addressing work, opportunity, and expertise.

Although Swahili dominated Instagram captions overall appearing in 50.3% of posts compared to 39.5% in English, 10% in Swanglish/Kiswanglish and 0.2% in Community Languages and Foreign Languages Instagram bios told a different story. Of the 40 sampled users, only 1 user wrote their bio in English. This reflects a desire for global visibility, consistent with Lesame and Malatji's argument that many users aim to reach international audiences (86). English is the preferred choice for public-facing self-presentation. Participants in this study similarly described English as a language that requires no translation for most online audiences.

The corpus also challenges prior research suggesting that translanguaging is more common than African-language writing online. Unlike findings from Lesame and Malatji, Swahili not Swanglish/Kiswanglish was the most frequently used written language. Still, translanguaging appeared meaningfully in politics, entertainment, and current affairs (90). The minimal use of Community Languages resembles broader scholarship documenting the marginalization of

Indigenous African languages in media spaces (Adegoju). As Lesame and Malatji note, digital platforms offer limited structural support for African languages, with few available interfaces or translation features (91).

Limitations of the Study

Although this study aligns with previous research, it has several limitations. Instagram is not a fully reliable data source because users can delete or edit posts at any time. During corpus collection, some posts and in a few cases entire accounts were removed, requiring replacement samples. Categorizing posts also presented challenges, as some content fit multiple themes, necessitating researcher judgment. In addition, the techno-biographical sample was small, with only five participants, limiting the representativeness of the findings. All interview participants had completed higher education, which means their perspectives reflect the experiences of a relatively educated group and cannot be generalized to all Tanzanian Instagram users. Together, these limitations suggest that the findings provide valuable insight but should be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion

This study examines multilingualism in Tanzanian social media by addressing two questions: the factors influencing language choices among Tanzanian Instagram users and whether post content is associated with language selection. Using a qualitative corpus of 400 Instagram posts alongside techno-biographical interviews, the study identifies several influences on language choice, including perceived audience, post content, social media brand image, convenience and accessibility of certain linguistic resources, the original language of the media, and the relationship between interlocutors. The corpus analysis further shows clear patterns across content areas. Posts related to social issues and activism, science, current affairs, entertainment and pop culture, and

politics were primarily written in Swahili, while lifestyle and leisure, professional and business content, and personal connection posts were more commonly captioned in English.

Further Research

Beyond captions, Instagram offers additional linguistic data through comments, statuses, audio notes, memes, music, and stories, each providing distinct insights into language choice. These features broaden how content circulates on the platform and can support the development of larger social media corpora. Future research should incorporate data scraping techniques using tools such as Python libraries. Collecting large-scale digital data would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic patterns on social media.

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Appendix

A. Interview Questions in English

Topic: Factors Influencing Language Choices Among Tanzanian Social Media Users

1. a. What social media platforms do you use?

b. Which social media platform do you use the most?
2. a. What language/s do you speak?

b. Do you use all the languages you speak on social media? Why or why not?
3. What influences your choice of language/s while using social media platforms?
4. a. What type of social media content probes you to use one language on a single post, why?

b. What type of social media content probes you to use multiple languages on a single post, why?
5. a. If you are commenting on a family's or friend's wedding/graduation/birthday/baby shower photo on Instagram? What language/s would you likely use?

- b. What might be the reason for that selection?
-
- 6. a. If you are commenting on sad news (loss:death, natural hazard, sickness, war) on Instagram? What language/s would you likely use?
 - b. What might be the reason for that selection?
-
- 7. a. What language/s might you use, if you are posting about a career work/academic opportunity or accomplishment on Instagram?
 - b. How do you come about selecting that particular language?
-
- 8. If you are posting an item for sale on Instagram, what language would you likely use and why?
-
- 9. a. If a friend sends you a funny meme on Instagram, which language/s are you likely to respond with?
 - b. How do you come about that selection?
-
- 10. Do you make similar language choices between Instagram and other social media platforms, when presented in a comparable situation? Why?

Interview Questions in Swahili

1. a. Je, unatumia majukwaa gani ya mitandao ya kijamii

b. Jukwaa gani la mitandao ya kijamii unatumia zaidi?
2. a. Je, unazungumza lugha gani?

b. Je, unatumia lugha zote unazozungumza kwenye mitandao ya kijamii? Kama ndio kwanini na kama sio kwanini?
3. Ni nini kinachoathiri uchaguzi wako wa lugha unapotumia mitandao ya kijamii?
4. a. Ni aina gani ya maudhui ya mitandao ya kijamii hukusababisha kutumia lugha moja kwenye chapisho/posti moja, kwa nini?

b. Nini aina ya maudhui ya mitandao ya kijamii hukuchunguza kutumia lugha mbili au zaidi kwenye chapisho moja, kwa nini?
5. a. Ikiwa unatoa komenti kuhusu picha ya harusi/mahafali/siku ya kuzaliwa/baby shower ya rafiki yako kwenye Facebook au Instagram, unaweza kutumia lugha gani?

b. Je, kuna sababu gani ya katika uteuzi wa lugha?

6. a. Ikiwa unatoa maoni/komenti kuhusu taarifa ya kusikitisha (kifo, janga au ugonjwa) Instagram, unaweza kutumia lugha gani?

b. Kwa nini utachagua lugha hiyo?
7. a. Je, unaweza kutumia lugha gani, ikiwa unachapisha kuhusu mradi wa kazi kwenye Instagram?

b. Je, umefikiaje uchaguzi wa hiyo lugha?
8. Ikiwa una posti kuuza bidhaa Instagram, je utatumia lugha gani na kwanini?
9. a. Rafiki akikutumia meme ya kuchekecha Instagram unaweza kujibu kwa lugha gani?

b. Unafikiaje hayo uchaguzi?
10. Je, unafanya chaguzi za lugha sawa kati ya Instagram na majukwaa mengine ya kijamii unapokutana na hali inayofanana? Kwa nini?

Figure 1 Advance search on Instagram using the keyword 'mtanzania

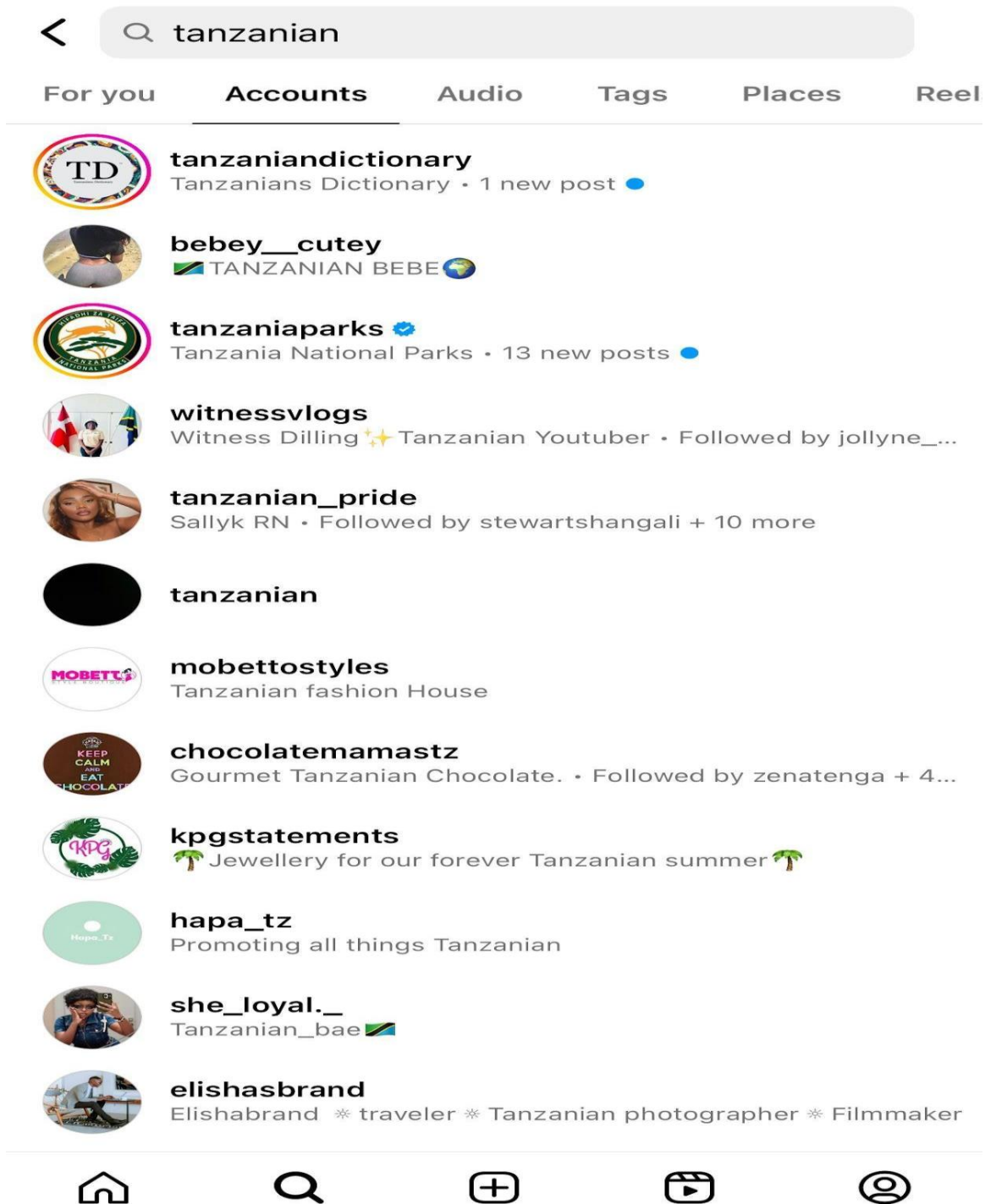


Figure 2 Advance Search on Instagram Using Keyword 'Tanzanian'

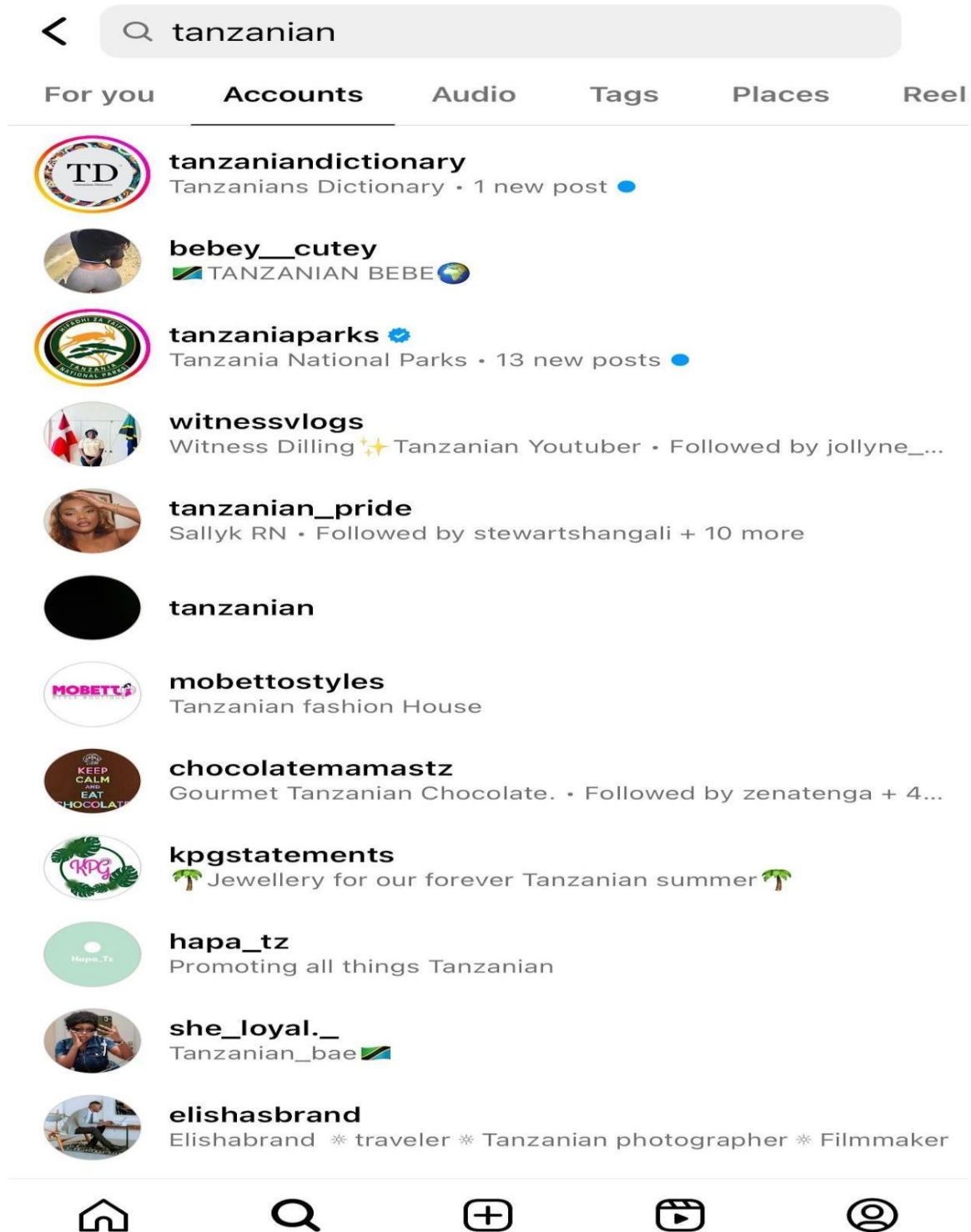


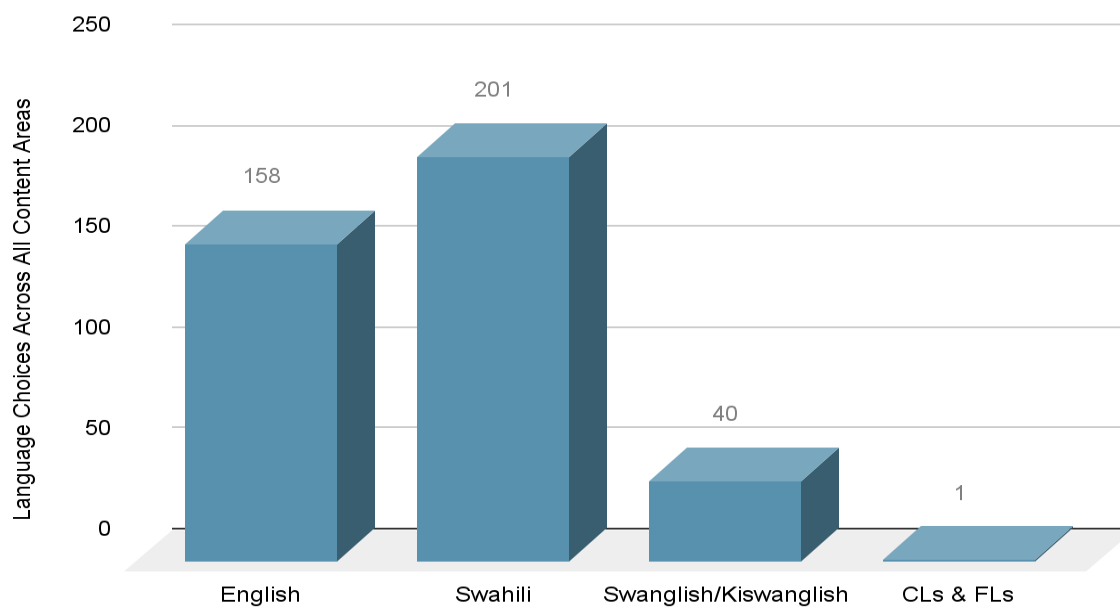
Figure 3 Language Choices Across All Content Areas

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Instagram Posts

Instagram Posts Content	Swahili	English	Swanglish Kiswanglish	CLs & FLs	Total Per Content
Personal Connections	29	57	8	1	95
Lifestyle & Leisure	2	28	1	0	31
Professional & Business	25	54	9	0	88
Current Affairs	44	2	3	0	49
Entertainment & Pop Culture	67	11	13	0	91
Science	20	1	0	0	21
Religious	7	4	4	0	15
Social Issues & Activism	4	0	0	0	4
Politics	3	1	2	0	6
Total Per Language	201	158	40	1	400

Table 1 indicates Instagram posts analyzed in each content area and the frequency of language (Swahili, English, Swanglish/Kiswanglish, Community Languages (CLs) & Foreign Languages (FLs) in different content areas.

Table 2 Participants' Demographic Information

Transcripts	Participant	Gender	Educational Level
Transcript 1	Participant 1 (P1)	Female	Bachelor's degree
Transcript 2	Participant 2 (P2)	Female	Teaching Certificate/Associate Degree
Transcript 3	Participant 3 (P3)	Female	Master's Degree
Transcript 4	Participant 4 (P4)	Male	Master's Degree
Transcript 5	Participant 5 (P5)	Male	Bachelor's degree