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Kampala

A new research has revealed that there are a striking number of similarities between Arabic and several Bantu languages.

The research carried out by Mr Dennis Asimwe, who describes himself as an inter-disciplinary researcher based in Kampala, was presented to a panel of Makerere University academics last week.

It has been generally agreed that Arab influence in East and Central Africa was confined to the coast where the hybrid language of Swahili was created from a combination of Arabic and Bantu languages.

Mr Asimwe's research however exposed a number of similar linguistic intonations between Arabic, Luganda and Runyankore.

"There have been some views that pre-colonial Africa is thought to have possessed perhaps as many as 10,000 different states and polities.

"And most of them lacked written languages. This fragmentation can be viewed as a consequence but also an indicator of a lack of continuity and standardisation due to the absence of the written languages in most of Africa prior to colonisation," Mr Asimwe told Daily Monitor over the weekend.

The research suggests possible Arab occupation of Black Africa long before 1844 when the first

official communication between Uganda and Arabs was made.

The researcher revealed to the panel of historians several instances that suggest Arabs were in Uganda several centuries before European exploration.

“An Arabic word like abaad, which means slave is similar in construction to Muddu or buddu which is slavery in Luganda. Soroti Rock may also have got its name from salaad, which is Arabic for rock,” he said.

“Where the words might not mean exactly the same thing, the proximity of what they mean or the messages they portray, may definitely point to the presence of a common contextual denominator,” he added.

Mr Dixon Kamukama, a senior lecturer in the History department at Makerere University says Asiimwe’s research is instructive.

“The research brings new dimensions of how we should view our history. We have known Arabs to have been here pursuing slave trade in the mid nineteenth century and only in particular places,” he said.

“They were not known to have reached deep Buganda. We might have to revisit the whole story of migration and settlement in Africa,” Kamukama said.

Mr Asiimwe’s research revealed that a place like Kisumu most probably got its name from Qisum, which is the Arabic for division.

Kamukama said the research should be furthered to establish who influenced the other.

“The research raises questions of who wrote the history we read. As we say might makes right,” he added.

Asiimwe holds a Bachelor of Psychology degree from Makerere University and Master of Arts degree from University of Nairobi. He also studied Arabic at Islamic University in Uganda. He says a revision of our history will help solve the ‘African State crisis’.



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