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Age and Patterns of Dialect Use in the Contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni

William B. Wanjala

Teacher, Namwacha Secondary School, Kenya

Dr. Nick W. Namunga

Lecturer, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Abstract:

Despite having freedom of choice of the language to use in public domains, majority languages still dominate in communication and interaction among interlocutors. This study looked at inter-dialect contact between Lubukusu and Lutachoni in Bungoma North Sub-county of Bungoma County. The specific study objective was to investigate influence of age on the use of Lubukusu and Lutachoni dialects of Luhya language. The study was guided by two theories: Ethnolinguistic vitality theory which reasons that maintenance/shift of a language is based on a group's vitality to act collectively in intergroup situations; and Domain theory which explains the dominance of languages in domains based on the choice of interlocutors and the language they maintain in different environments for different purposes. Purposive, sampling was used to select the Bukusu and the Tachoni while stratified sampling was used to get proportions of three age groups. Simple random sampling was used to identify 33 respondents in every age group for both the Bukusu and the Tachoni. A sample size of 198 respondents was obtained. Data were collected using a closed ended questionnaire because the researcher wanted to limit the responses to the two dialects, while interview schedule was used to collect data from old age respondents. The study used mixed methods research design. Qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis to get information on the emerging dominant trends in the use of the two dialects in education and home domain. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency tables, line and bar graphs to present information on the frequency of use of the two dialects and emerging patterns based on the three age groups. The study found out that generally in the contact of the two dialects, Lubukusu is dominantly maintained in the respondents in the region of study. In the home domain, the vitality of Lubukusu in the middle age respondents is the highest (61%) followed by the vitality of the young age and old age at par (58%). In Lutachoni, the vitality of the young age and old age is at par (42%). The vitality of Lutachoni in the middle age is the lowest (39%). In the education domain, the vitality of Lubukusu is highest in the middle age respondents (79%) followed by the old age respondents (70%). The vitality of Lubukusu in the young age respondents is the lowest (59%). Comparatively, in the contact of the two dialects; the use of Lutachoni is lower. It's vitality in the old age respondents is 30% followed by the vitality of the young age and old age respondents at par (21%). These findings imply that the maintenance of Lutachoni in education is in favour of Lubukusu. The study recommends the promotion of Lutachoni in education to safeguard the linguistic and cultural identity of the Tachoni. The study contributes to further research into Luhya inter-language competition phenomena focusing on Lubukusu and Lutachoni.

Keywords: Age, patterns, dialect, Lubukusu and Lutachoni

1. Introduction

Kebeya (1997) notes that the Luhya Language has 17 dialects that are mutually intelligible forming a dialect continuum. Lubukusu and Lutachoni dialects are found majorly in Bungoma County although there are no distinct geographical boundaries that mark the beginning and end of each of the dialects, rather we have transitional regions called isolects in which speakers of dialects neighboring each other interact more as compared to dialects that are at the extreme of the continuum or further away from each other. Lubukusu and Lutachoni are dialects spoken by the Bukusu and the Tachoni ethnic people inhabit majorly Bungoma County. The fact that they live in the same geographical area has enhanced interaction between the two ethnic groups. Myers-Scotton (2002) notes that in bilingual settings, the behavior of dialects in contact addresses the language spoken and the individuals who speak the language. It is further noted that language contact typically involves speakers of one language meeting speakers of another language and, then (for various reasons) one group may learn the other's language. Looking at the effects of the contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni meant looking at the choice that speakers of Lubukusu and the speakers of Lutachoni make when they come in contact. To establish patterns of use of their dialects when they come in contact, it was important that the characteristics of the speakers in terms of their age and how it influences their choices on whether to maintain or shift be studied.

1.1. Domains of Language Use

As noted by Fishman (1977), there are different interactive situations in which speakers make a choice on what dialect to use when they come in contact. These interactive situations are the different places in which speakers use their language or dialect. Thus, there are 9 domains in which speakers use their language. These domains are arranged in the order of less public to more public such that those on the extreme left are less public or more private while those on the extreme right are more public. These domains are: home, cultural, social, worship, education, business, road/street, government administration and mass media. This study limited its findings on only two domains: home and education.

According to Giles et al (1977), dialect maintenance and shift occur when dialects in the same region come in contact. Dialect maintenance is the protection of the first language in an individual or within a speech community (Baker and Jones 1998), while dialect shift is the process whereby a speech community shifts from using its dialect to speak another dialect hence their dialect is replaced with the new dialect. This is in line with Scotton's (2002) observation, that when one group (speech community) learns the dialect of another group, it means that one dialect is being maintained while at the same time another dialect is shifting or being abandoned by its speakers.

In this study, Fishman's (1977) question *who* speaks *what*, *when* to *whom* and *where* was important. (The italics are mine). For the purposes of this research, the researcher subjected the statement to further modification. Only three questions were used, thus *who* speaks *what*, and *where*? This was aimed at capturing data on *who* the speakers are in terms of ethnicity and age, *what* dialect they maintain in terms of Lubukusu and Lutachoni and finally, *where* are the speakers using the dialect in terms of the two domains: home and education.

When speakers of a dialect maintain or shift from their dialect to another dialect in the region, it is motivated by a variety of factors. Among them are demographic factors, societal institutional support factors and status factors (Giles et.al 1977). The presence of these factors means that the vitality of a speech community is high, thus their dialect will be maintained. On the other hand, the absence of the factors is an indicator that the vitality of the group is low, thus a speech community will shift from their dialect to another dominantly used dialect in the region. Appel and Muysken (1987) notes that high vitality impresses on the maintenance of a dialect, while low vitality impacts negatively on its existence, hence dialect shift or loss: "the more vitality a group is, the more likely it will survive" (p.33)

1.2. Use of a Dialect in Education

The use of a dialect in the education of a child cannot be overlooked. A child should not be denied the right to learn in the first language or mother tongue. This view has even been documented in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (adopted in 1992) as noted in Maffi (1997). Articles 1.1, 1.2, and 4.3, emphasizes on the fact that states should protect and put in place legislations that ensure people from minority communities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue and even have instruction in their mother tongue. Similar opinion is also echoed by the Draft Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (DLR), where Linguistic rights of individuals are given an emphasis.

Fishman (1977) notes that the use of a language in education institutions can promote maintenance or shift of a language when children learn reading and comprehension in that particular language. Giles et al., (1987) add that this contributes to the vitality of the speech community that speaks the dialect as its L1. Maffi (1997) states that education is one of the most important sectors that can promote and give children an "opportunity to learn their parents' idiom fully and properly so that they become at least proficient as the parents." (p.49). The school has an important role to play in providing pupils with cultural identity and contributing to greater self-confidence by teaching them about the history and literature of their language, Crystal (2000). Maffi, (1997) adds that as more children around the world get access to education, much of the learning that took place in the community must happen in schools. This is in line with the UN Charter, Art.13; of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in Maffi (1997). The article reiterates on equal opportunities of all languages in the world to be promoted in education.

In Kenya, The Koech Education Report (1999), recommendation 15.7 (as cited in Githinji and Wanjohi, 2010) notes that the first language of a child should be used in the transmission of knowledge skills and attitudes in the children's early years in school. This means that the language of instruction for children in their early years of learning should be their L1. This recommendation, although has a lot of limitations in its application, attributes to the use of the L1 in the education domain as a language of instruction at lower primary (STD 1-3). Furthermore, various education commissions namely, Ominde (1964), Gachathi (1976) and Kamunge (1988), have recognized and recommended the use of L1 in children's language development in school (as cited in Githinji and Wanjohi 2010).

However, all along before even independence, the promotion of indigenous Kenyan languages in education has not been holistic. The Beecher report 1949 recommended only 20 Kenyan mother tongues in primary schools. (Githinji and Wanjohi, 2010) Considering that there are over forty indigenous Kenyan languages, there are still more indigenous languages that are yet to be promoted in the education institution and have even lacked teaching materials. By 1976, only fifteen indigenous Kenyan languages had literacy materials including Lubukusu. Later, there was an addition of seven languages as noted by Githinji and Wanjohi (2010), but Lutachoni is not on the list.

From the foregoing discussions, it is evident that the role of societal institutional support in the promotion of a dialect and the maintenance of a dialect in different domains has far reaching effects in the maintenance of a dialect. Societal institutions namely, education, mass media, religion just to mention a few, can contribute to the maintenance of a dialect if they promote the use of a dialect.

1.3. Age and Language

In Queen and Cheshire's (2013) paper on age and generation specific use of language, they note that the analysis of age and language has been done from two major perspectives: the variation of language used in an individual's lifespan and language of different cohorts of individuals living within a speech community. In the first case, individuals tend to preserve their speech patterns as they grow older (Labov, 1994). This means that there is bound to be different patterns of language use in different individuals as per their age groups. Going by Fishman's (1977) three generation rule, it means that we expect three patterns of language use as per the three generations or age groups, for example the children or young age, parents and the grandparents. If Queen and Cheshire's 2013 research is anything to go by, then we expect a variation of language in interlocutors at different age groups as identified by Fishman (1977) and Appel and Muysken (1987). Indeed, Russel (1982) notes that age can influence an individual's choice and use of language. In the second case of cohorts, Queen and Cheshire (2013) further says that different groups of people within a speech community can have different varieties of a language (Milroy and Milroy 1985) or dialects. In this case different groups of people can vary in their use of language depending on factors like social status (Labov, 2001) economic status and education status.

Eckert (1997) in Queen and Cheshire, (2013) distinguishes between chronological age, biological age and social age. These age categories are tied to life events such as family status for example marriage, birth, initiation. On this note, one can look at language in relation to gender or sex, different age categories like teenagers, adolescents, youth adults and children. In addition, one can also look at language in relation to social age groups like particular age sets, married and unmarried, initiates, elders and custodians of society. What should be noted here is that women and men cannot be categorized in the same age groups because we have in some people gender and social variables interact with age variable (Queen and Cheshire, 2013). It is important to note here that in some communities, women are considered children. The middle age (age 31-52 years) has the highest ethnolinguistic vitality than young or old age. Giles et al (2000). Older speakers are also more tolerant to changes and maintain or stick to their language than the young age.

2. Research Design

This research employed both qualitative and quantitative research designs. This is because of their complementary nature (Mugenda and Mugenda 1992). The design enabled the researcher to find out the most maintained and most shifted dialect by respondents in two domains based on their opinions, attitudes and practices and it allowed for quick data collection as noted by Grinnel, (1993). Second, studies in interactional sociolinguistics frequently adopt a qualitative design where observation and interview methods in data collection are used. In this study, an interview schedule was used to collect data on the views, opinions, attitudes and practices of respondents in the two dialects in relation to the two domains. In this case, qualitative design was thus appropriate in getting information and practices of respondents on how they maintain/shift in the contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni.

Quantitative design looked at numeric data on the number of respondents who maintain or shift in different domains, number of domains in which each of the two dialects are used and how frequent respondents use *what* dialect upon contact. In this case, quantitative design, involved analyzing data to get information on the number of respondents who had similar responses in the questionnaire. The design was appropriate in helping the researcher tally all the responses done in the nine domains to get the most frequently maintained and shifted dialect upon contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni. This was also done in the different age groups.

In the administration of questions the researcher administered similar questions to different respondents. Two methods were used: self-administered and researcher administered. In the self-administered approach, the respondents were hand-delivered questionnaires by the researcher. The respondents responded on spot (before the researcher) and handed in the completed questionnaire. In the second approach, the researcher used the questionnaire to interview respondents especially the old age (above 56 years), and the young age (below 10 years) who could not interpret the questions and write properly. By looking at the frequency of use of the two dialects in the two domains, it was possible to find out the most frequently used dialect.

2.1. Target Population

The target population for this research was the Bukusu and the Tachoni speech communities. The two speech communities belong to Abaluhya people found majorly in Western Province of Kenya.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

3.1. Age and Choice of Dialect in the Contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni

The researcher investigated how different age groups maintained and shifted in their speeches upon the contact of Lubukusu and Lutachoni. The research centered on the home and education domains because as noted by Fishman (1977), the home domain is the most private and important domain of language use characteristics and the last from which a language can cease to be in use by speakers. Furthermore, education domain is one of the public institutions that has a lot of influence on an individual's language of communication and learning.

Three age groups were used in this study: the young age group, middle age group and finally the old age group. The order of presentation was important in understanding the different patterns. The study in this subsection was presented based on the age groups and the domains under study in the two ethnic groups.

3.2. The Young Age (below 18 Years) in the Education Domain

Questions on the education domain included language of instruction at lower primary; language used in school meetings with parents and if there are any educational materials prepared in the two dialects under study. The responses on the most used language variety in the education domain by the young age group are in Table 4 below.

Dialect	Respondents			
	Bukusu	Tachoni	Total	%
Lubukusu	20	19	39	59
Lutachoni	1	13	14	21
No response	12	1	13	20
Total	33	33	66	100

Table 1: The choice of dialect in the education domain in the young age

As shown in Table 1 above, 39 (59%) of the young age noted that Lubukusu is maintained in the education domain. Out of this, there are 20 (51%) Bukusu children who claimed Lubukusu is used at school more than Lutachoni. 19 (49%) of Tachoni children who noted that they have used or heard the use of Lubukusu at school. These results might suggest that Lubukusu is the most promoted dialect in societal institutions like education. On the other hand it can also be concluded from these findings that in the region of study Lutachoni is considered a minority dialect with minimal education support. It implies that at lower primary, STD 1-3, Tachoni children learn in Lubukusu or receive instructions in Lubukusu. When children learn in mother tongue, it makes them develop loyalty in the language they are receiving instruction in (Fishman 1977).

3.3. The Middle Age Group in Education Domain

Information on the most maintained and shifted dialect between Lubukusu and Lutachoni in education domain is presented in Table 5 below.

Dialect	Respondents			
	Bukusu	Tachoni	Total	%
Lubukusu	31	21	52	79
Lutachoni	2	12	14	21
Total	33	33	66	100

Table 2: The choice of dialect in the middle age

As presented in Table 2 above, there is 52 (79%) of the respondents who noted Lubukusu is the most maintained dialect in the education institution while 14 (21%) noted maintenance of Lutachoni. Comparatively, the use of both dialects is higher in the middle age (18-55years) as compared to the young age (below 18 years.) It can be concluded that the middle age group use L1 more than the Young age group.

3.4. The Choice of Dialect in the Old Age (56 Years and above) in Education Domain

Table 3 below is a presentation of the data on the most maintained language variety in the education domain by the old age respondents. These are respondents aged 56 years and above.

Dialect	Respondents			
	Bukusu	Tachoni	Total	%
Lubukusu	29	17	46	70
Lutachoni	4	16	20	30
Total	33	33	66	100

Table 3: The most maintained language variety in the old age

In Table 3 above, 46 (70%) of those aged 56 years and above indicated the use of Lubukusu in Education, while 20 (30%) of the respondents indicated use of Lutachoni. This figures show that Lubukusu is the dominantly maintained dialect in the education. At the same time, these figures imply that more of the Tachoni ethnic minority shift to Lubukusu. 29 (89%) of the Bukusu ethnic respondents maintain Lubukusu, while 4 (11%) shift to Lutachoni. On the other hand 17 (52%) of the Tachoni ethnic respondents maintain Lutachoni while 16 (48%) shift to Lubukusu. Comparatively, more Bukusu respondents maintain Lubukusu, while more of the Tachoni respondents shift to Lubukusu. Lubukusu is the dominantly used dialect in education in the old aged respondents.

Table 7 below presents summary of information from tables 1- 3 on the maintenance/ shift patterns in the three age groups

Dialect	Age groups		
	Young (below 18)	Middle (18-55)	Old (56 years and above)
Lubukusu	59	79	70
Lutachoni	21	21	30

Table 4: Patterns of dialect choice in the three age groups in education domain

The data in Table 4 above shows percentage of use of Lubukusu and Lutachoni in three different age groups. It is evident from the table (4) that there are different patterns of the use of the two dialects as per the three age groups used in this study. The information in Table 4 above can also be represented as in figure 2 below.

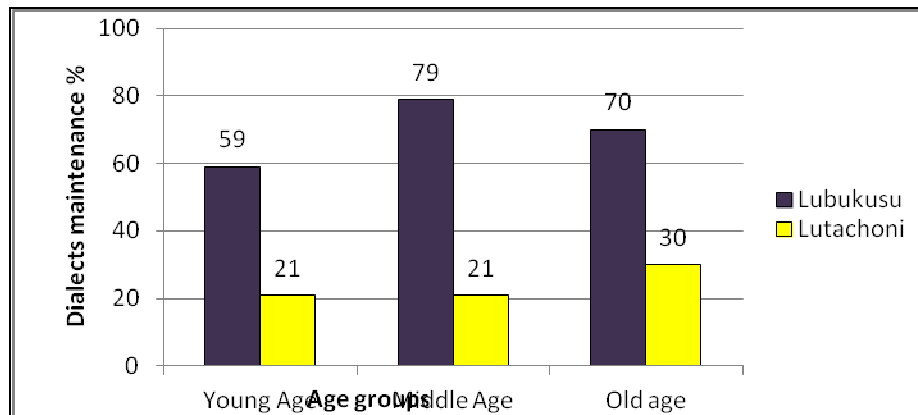


Figure 1: Lubukusu/Lutachoni maintenance in three age groups in Education domain

In figure 1 above the maintenance of Lubukusu in all the age groups is dominant. The middle and old age Bukusu respondents show a higher maintenance of Lubukusu than the young age respondents. This could imply that the promotion of Lubukusu in education was more, in more than 18 years ago. This is if we assume that the youngest middle age respondent in the two age groups (18 years and above) is 18 years.

In figure 1, it can be said from the results that in about 18 years ago, the promotion of Lubukusu in education in the region of study was more than it is now. The fact that the old age respondents (56 years and above) indicated a lesser promotion of Lubukusu could imply that in about 56 years ago and more, or before independence in Kenya (1963), the promotion of Lubukusu in the region of study was not as high as it has been in less than 56 years ago. In addition, the results in the young respondents show that the promotion of Lubukusu in education is the lowest.

These results reflect the government of Kenya's efforts before and after independence in ensuring the promotion of indigenous Kenyan languages in education. About 65 years ago, (in 1949), The Beecher education report in Kenya recommended the use of 20 indigenous Kenyan languages in Kenya. (Githinji and Wanjohi, 2010). At this time, only the old age respondents of 56 years and above could give an account of how Lubukusu and Lutachoni were promoted in the education sector. The fact that only 20 indigenous Kenyan languages were considered for use at primary school, could explain the comparatively lower indication of Lubukusu use in education (70%) compared to (79%) indicated in the middle age (18-55 years). At the same time, after The Beecher report in 1949, there followed other education reports like The Ominde education report of 1964 that put more emphasis on the promotion of indigenous Kenyan languages. This is about 50 years ago. Within the period of 50 years, the middle age respondents (18-56 years had been born). This age group was influenced by the education policy at that time. Githinji and Wanjohi (2010) note:

“Reports on education inquiries since independence have recognized the importance of the first language in a child's development (Ominde, 1964; Gachathi, 1976; Kamunge, 1988; and Koech 1999). The Koech Report, (1999) observed that children were being introduced to foreign languages too early, even before they had properly mastered their first language.”(p.85-86)

The fact that since independence there has been recognition of Kenyan children's L1, which in this case is assumed to be the indigenous Kenyan languages that children of Kenya learn first, points to the emphasis that the government of Kenya has placed on the promotion of the L1 of Kenyan children at school. Most of the commissions mentioned above are between 18-55 years old except The Koech education report and the Beecher educational report of 1949. This emphasis could be the reason for the higher indication of promotion of Lubukusu in the middle age category as shown in figure 2 above.

4. Conclusion

Finally, the three different age groups used in this study have different maintenance patterns. The Bukusu young age had the lowest maintenance of Lubukusu, while the middle age and old age have the highest maintenance of Lubukusu. The maintenance of Lubukusu in all the age groups dominates Lutachoni. This confirms our research assumption that there is a relationship between age and the use of the language varieties, where each age group has a pattern based on the dialect, but Lubukusu is dominantly maintained.

It should be understood, however, that dialect shift or and maintenance are long-term, collective results of choice of language among speakers (Fasold 1984). This means for example, that speakers of a given dialect (for example, Lutachoni) collectively begin to choose another dialect (for example Lubukusu) in domains that were initially reserved for the old one (in this case Lutachoni). This is an indication that language shift is in progress (Matiki 1997).

Many studies have indeed shown that the language used with children in the home is an indicator of future language proficiency. (Aipolo and Holmes 1990, Essowe, 2009). The maintenance/shift of the two dialects in the three age groups that were used namely, young age (below 18yrs), middle age (18-55 years) and old age (56 years and above), all showed different patterns of maintenance. The middle and old age respondents of Lubukusu showed a higher maintenance of Lubukusu as compared to the young age Bukusu respondents. At the same time, there is a diminished maintenance of Lutachoni in the young and middle age Tachoni respondents in the education domain. The old age Tachoni respondents have a higher maintenance of Lutachoni in education domain.

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