Working with the Abagusii of Kenya: Applying an 'Empowering' Research Model to Linguistic Fieldwork

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic diversity

- Currently, it is estimated that there are nearly 7000 languages spoken around the world (Lewis 2009).
- Linguistic diversity declined 20% between 1980-–2005 (Harmon and Loh 2010).
- It is believed that half of the world's languages will be extinct by the end of the 21st century.
- The extent, rapidity, and influence of decline only came to be widely recognised by linguists in the late 1980s and 1990s (Genetti and Siemens 2013).

Map of endangered languages in Africa
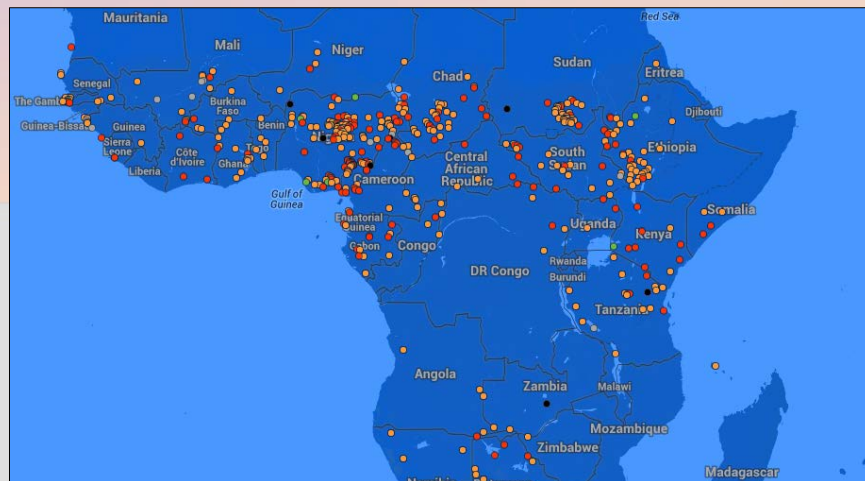
www.endangeredlanguages.com

Responses from the academic community

- Genetti and Siemens (2013):
  - Language documentation, description, and archiving
  - Language revitalization
  - Development of language documentation, conservation, revitalization, and activism training programs

Academics and community members align

- This presentation will provide insight into one specific community-driven project that was facilitated by a language documentation training program.
  - Community-driven project: Ekegusii-English dictionary
  - Training program: InField/CoLang

About Ekegusii

Districts in Nyanza Province Where Ekegusii Is Spoken

About Ekegusii

- According to Ethnologue, there are approximately 2.1 million Abagusii with indications of increasing numbers (Lewis 2009).
- Often are multilingual due to social and economic pressures:
  - migration to large urban areas where Kiswahili is the preferred language
  - the mandatory use of English and Kiswahili as instructional languages in primary and secondary schools,
  - the dominance of English and Kiswahili in the television, radio, and newspaper outlets.

BEGINNING THE COLLABORATION

Meeting my teachers and collaborators

- Infield/CoLang: Capacity-building program, aims to provide skills and knowledge that directly enhances and enables community initiatives (Genetti and Siemens 2013).

- A rich environment
  - academics who wish to share and/or update their knowledge
  - community-members who wish to learn about language documentation and/or network with academics

Sample InFIeld/CoLang curriculum

- audio-video recording
- data management
- models of documentation
- models of activism
- development of orthography
- grant writing

InField 2008

InField 2010

CoLang 2012

CoLang 2014

June 16 - July 25, 2014
Arlington, TX

REGISTER TODAY

Early Bird Registration
Expires April 15, 2014

$750 Two-week Workshops (6/16 - 6/27)
$2250 Six-week Workshops (6/16 - 7/25)
Optional on campus housing and meals are available for an additional fee.

InField/CoLang and Africa

- InField/CoLang has strong tradition of supporting African linguistics
- Field training courses:
  - Mende (Tucker Childs)
  - Ekegusii (Carol Genetti)
  - Amazigh (Yamina El Kirat)
  - Uda (Eno-Abasi Urua)
  - Enya (Amanda Miller)

Interaction of ethics and fieldwork

- Three broad categories of ethical research or models of fieldwork (Cameron 1998, Rice 2006):
  - Ethical: Research 'on' a community
  - Advocacy: Research 'on' and 'for' a community
  - Empowering: Research 'on', 'for' and 'with' a community
- InField/CoLang fosters research that is framed within a model of empowerment.

Language teachers and collaborators


Kennedy Bosire

Language teachers and collaborators

Gladys Machogu

Language documentation and description (part 1)

- The products of language documentation and description could be used for the sake of
  - posterity
  - furthering academic knowledge
  - informing language learning programs

Analyses to help inform the dictionary

	BILABIAL	ALVEOLAR	PALATAL	VELAR
ORAL STOP		t		k
AFFRICATE			tʃ	
FRICATIVE	β	s		ɣ
NASAL STOP	m	n	ɲ	ŋ
FLAP		ɾ		
APPROXIMANT			j	

Analyses to help inform the dictionary
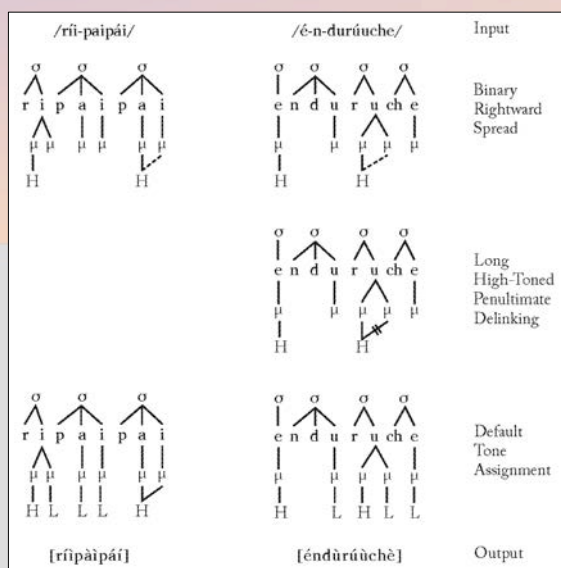
Analyses to help inform the dictionary

CLASS	CLASS PRE-PREFIX	CLASS PREFIX	EXAMPLE	GLOSS
1	ó-	mo-	ó-mò-rèmì	'farmer'
1b	∅	∅	tàà-tá	'father'
2	á-	ba-	á-bà-rèmì á-bà-tàà-tá	'farmers' 'fathers'
3	ó-	mo-	ó-mò-bèrè	'body'
4	é-	me-	é-mè-bèrè	'bodies'
5	é-	ri-	é-rí-ínó	'tooth'
	H	rii-	ríî-bú	'ash'
6	á-	ma-	á-mà-ínó á-mà-bú á-mà-kóómbé á-mà-gòrò	'teeth' 'ashes' 'hoes' 'legs'
7	é-	ke-	é-kè-bákí	'hawk'
8	é-	bi-	é-bì-bákí	'hawks'
9	é-	∅	é-séè-sé	'dog'
9a	é-	n-	é-n-swé	'fish'
10	H	chi-	chí-séè-sé	'dogs'
10a	H	chin-	chín-swé chín-kó	'fish (PL)' 'pieces of (fire)wood'
11	ó-	ro-	ó-rò-kó	'piece of (fire)wood'
12	á-	ka-	á-ká-áná	'honeycomb (DIM)'
14	ó-	bo-	ó-bò-kóómbé	'hoe'
15	ó-	ko-	ó-kò-gòrò	'leg'
16	á-	∅	á-àsé	'place'
21	H	nya-	nyá-àngèrà	'Blackie (cow's name)'

Language documentation and description (part 2)

- From an academic perspective, language documentation and description are often in individual endeavor.
  - Often very little interaction with the community at-large
  - Often the contribution to the community is minimal

Language documentation and description (part 2)

COMMUNITY GOALS

Goals and outcomes

- Often, researchers and communities have different goals.
  - There must be a clear and explicit negotiation.
- Empowerment research involves:
  - Cooperation amongst community member and researchers who are jointly engaged
  - Community members and researchers are equal contributors within mutual respectful strategic partnerships
  - Negotiation of goals, methods, and outcomes
  - Enhances and enables community initiatives
  - Achieves a balance between research and social action
  - Genetti and Siemens (2013)

The community

The community

The community

Goals and outcomes

- After meeting with community leaders and elders, it was clear that they had three major goals:
    - Raise awareness amongst the youth
    - Complete the Ekegusii-English dictionary
    - Develop a language learning program that is operable under current language policies

Linguistic awareness
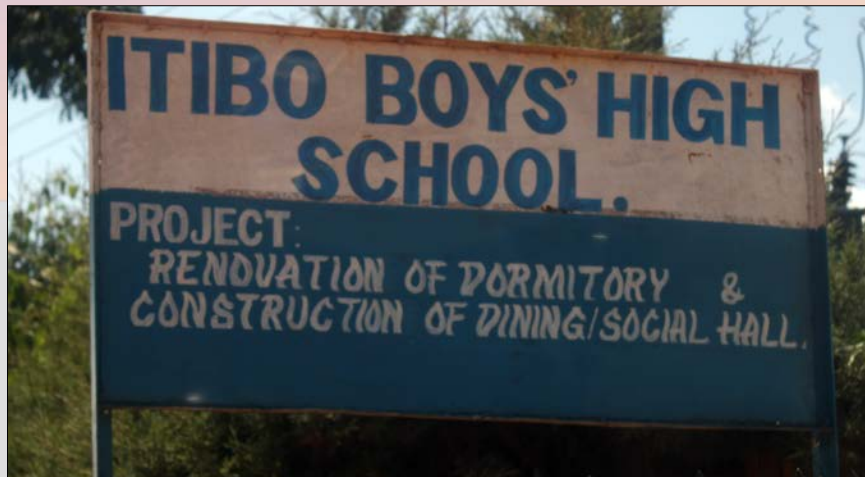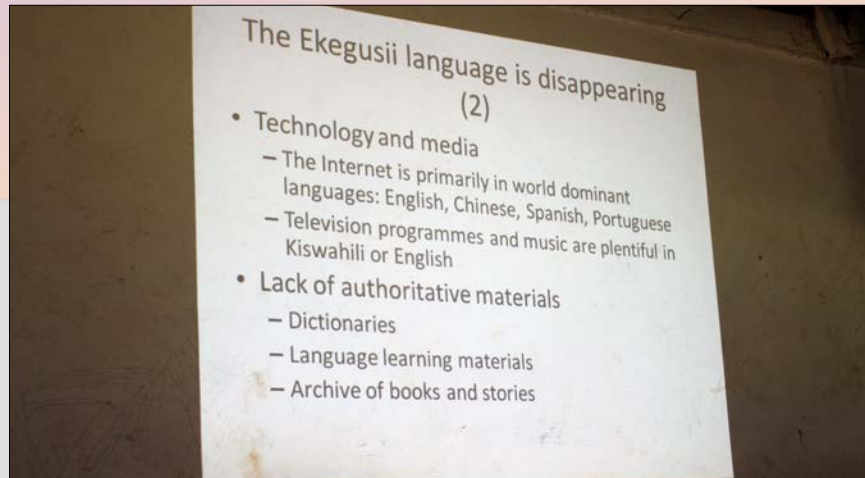
Linguistic awareness

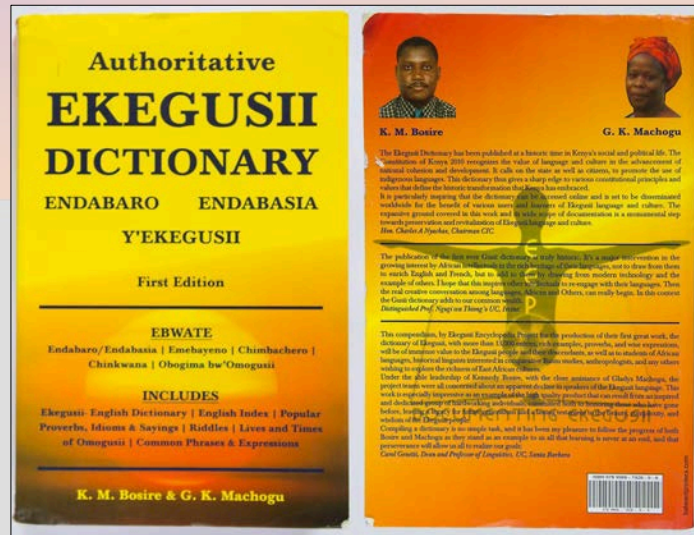# Linguistic awareness

Linguistic awareness

# Linguistic awareness

Linguistic awareness

THE DICTIONARY

The dictionary

The dictionary

The dictionary

- Why is this dictionary so important?
  - It's actually more than a dictionary. It's a cultural product. They [the authors and community] put many things in here that they found valuable within the culture. For them [the authors and community] it is about grasping or solidifying part of their identity."

Dictionary launch in Nairobi (13 April 2014)
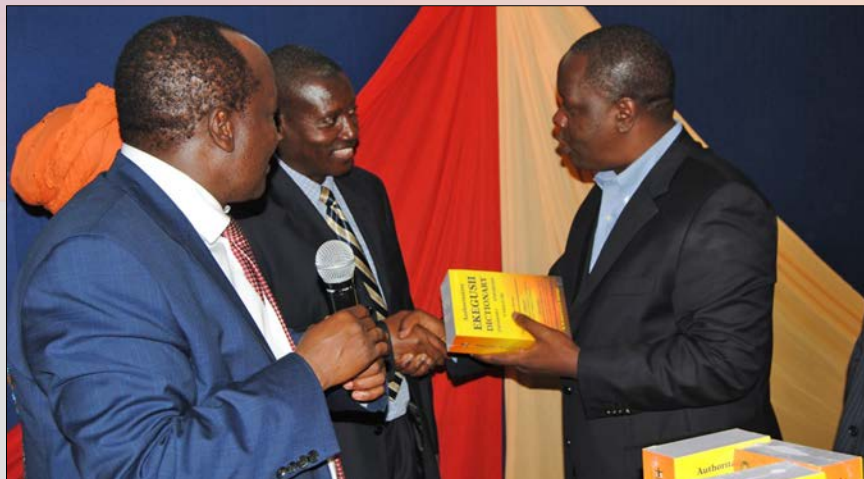
Dictionary launch in Nairobi
(13 April 2014)

- Cabinet Secretary of Education Prof. J Kaimenyi committed to actualizing the learning of heritage languages in schools.
- For their extraordinary work, Cabinet Secretary of Information, Communication & Technology Dr. Matiang'i suggested that the authors should be honored with a doctoral degree.
- Other language communities have expressed the desire to write dictionaries of their languages.

Language maintenance and revitalization

- The next step in our collaboration involves the development of a comprehensive language learning curriculum.
- Some cursory training materials are available:
  - Whiteley's scholarly primary on Ekegusii
  - Ekegusii Encyclopedia Project's web site consisting of greetings and phrases

CONTINUING THE COLLABORATION

Language maintenance and revitalization

- Much of the language learning curriculum will rely on certain scholarly products:
  - grammatical description
  - sociocultural linguistic descriptions
  - pedagogical theories

Why is the project successful?

- Linguistic awareness
  - Collaborators
  - Community
- Dobrin (2008):
  - In many cases, autonomy and self determination are universally desirable and necessary components of empowerment.
  - Linguists should yield to communities the right to decide the direction of work.
- Positive value of their language, which reinforces their desire to preserve their language.
- The network gained through InField.

ENCOURAGING MORE COMMUNITY-INFORMED PROJECTS

Scholarly merit

- One concern for researchers who participate in language documentation research that invokes an empowerment model is the recognition of its scholarly merits.

- May 2011, the Linguistics Society of America (LSA) passed a resolution recognizing the merits of language documentation. http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/resolution-recognizing-scholarly-merit-language-documentation

Scholarly merit

- The LSA recognizes:
  - the practice of linguistic fieldwork is shifting to a more collaborative endeavor based on a commitment to broadening the impacts of scholarship
  - the broadening range of scholarly work to include not only grammars, dictionaries, and text collections, but also archives of primary data, electronic databases, corpora, critical editions of legacy materials, pedagogical works, software, websites, and other digital media

Scholarly merit

- The LSA recognizes:
  - work supporting linguistic vitality are intellectual achievements which require sophisticated analytical skills, deep theoretical knowledge, and broad linguistic expertise
- The LSA endorses:
  - these materials as scholarly contributions to be given weight in the awarding of advanced degrees and in decisions on hiring, tenure, and promotion of faculty

Scholarly merit

- American universities are recognizing and steering toward engaged research.
- Engaged research:
  - focuses on community-defined issues
  - aims to build sufficiency within communities
  - enable researchers to conduct research that integrates, applies, and transfers scholarly knowledge directly beneficial to a community

Summary

- Models of empowerment:
  - Aims to give the community the ability to determine their own linguistic goals
  - Collaboration is explicitly articulated as a key concept so that both research and communities achieve their goals

Empowerment

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