

Language Endangerment in East Africa

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Sponsored by the National Science Foundation

Linguistic diversity is diminishing

- Currently, it is estimated that there are nearly 7000 languages spoken around the world (ethnologue.com)
- It is believed that half of the world's languages will be extinct by the end of the 21st century.

What is an endangered language?

- **Endangered language:** a language that is at risk of falling out of use
- Causes of language endangerment:
 - **Language shift:** the shift of speaking another language

Forces of language shift

- Language shift
 - External forces
 - Military activity / violence
 - Economics
 - Religious
 - Cultural
 - Political
 - Educational
 - Internal forces
 - Negative attitudes towards one's own language

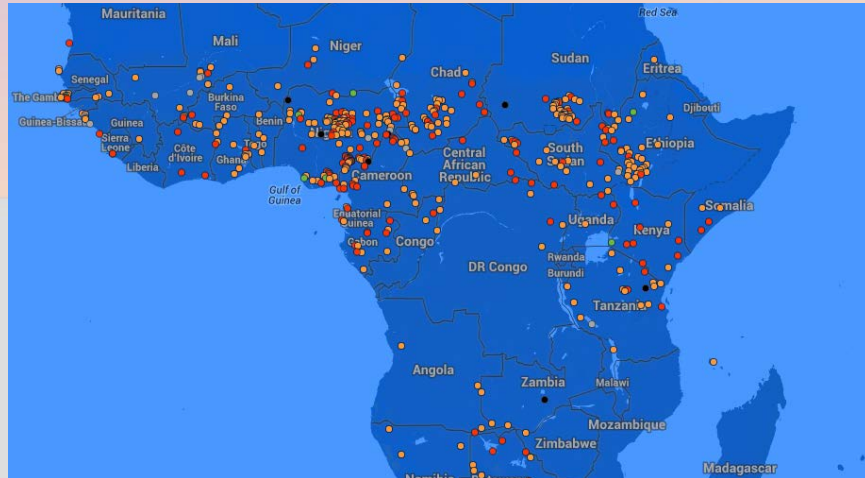
Result of endangered languages

- Often, endangered languages will completely lose all of its speakers.
 - No native speakers
 - No fluent speakers
- This is known as **language death** (also known as **linguicide**).

Some endangered languages in East Africa

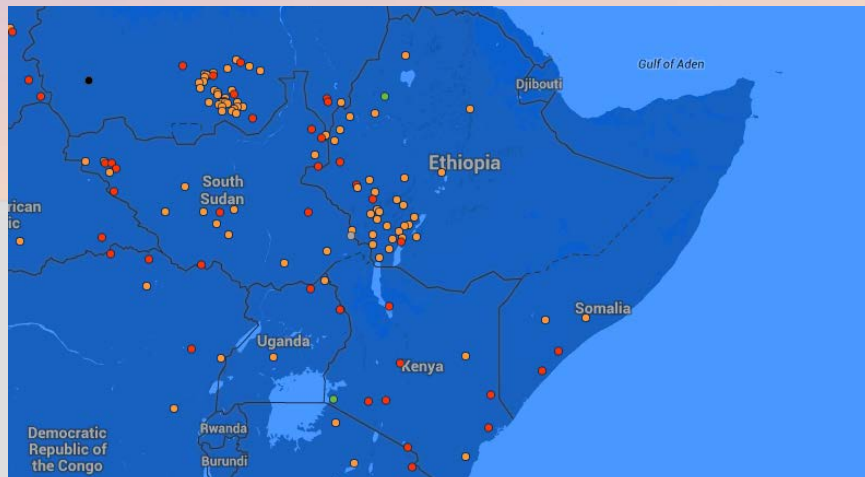
- Kenya
 - Boni (Cushitic)
 - El Molo (Cushitic)
 - Kiwilwana (Bantu)
 - Kordofanian (Nilotic)
 - Okiek (Nilotic)
 - Omotik (Nilotic)
 - Yaakua (Cushitic)
 - Sanye (Cushitic)
 - Suba (Bantu)
- Tanzania
 - Gweno (Bantu)
 - Hadza (Isolate)
 - Ikoma (Bantu)
 - Ngasa (Nilotic)
- Ethiopia
 - Anfillo (Omotic)
 - Arbore (Cushitic)
 - Ongota (Cushitic)
 - Opo-Shita (Nilo-Saharan)
 - Shabo (Nilo-Saharan?)

Map of endangered languages in Africa



www.endangeredlanguages.com

Map of endangered languages in East Africa



www.endangeredlanguages.com

What can we do?

- There are many academic and community projects aimed at reducing the damage that occurs from – or the rate of -- language death.
 - Language documentation and description
 - Language revitalization

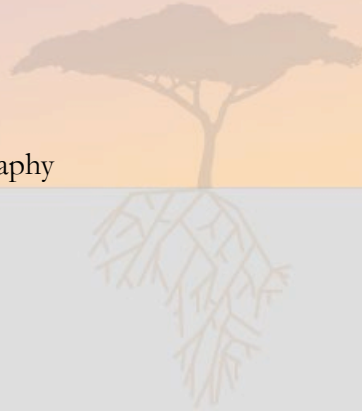
(Genetti and Siemens 2013)

Language documentation and description

- **Language documentation:** the process of recording (documenting) a language in an attempt to provide a detailed record of linguistic practices
- **Language description:** the process of describing/analyzing the abstract system of a language

Language documentation and description

- Typically involves:
 - audio/video recording
 - phonetic transcription
 - development of a practical orthography
 - structural analysis



Language documentation and description

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



Language documentation and description

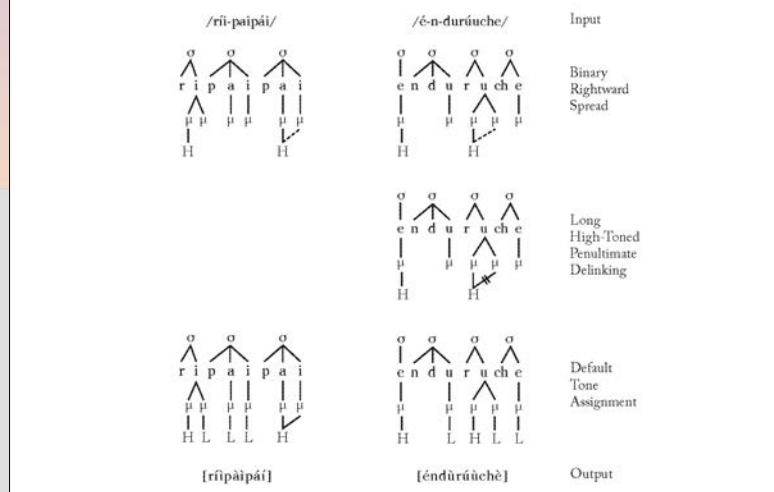
Table 2.2 Ekegusii phonemic consonant inventory

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

(Nash 2011)

Language documentation and description

Figure 3.8 Derivation incorporating binary spread and penultimate delinking



(Nash 2011)

Language documentation and description

Table 3.4 Ekegusii nominal classes with example nouns

CLASS	CLASS PREFIX	CLASS PREFIX	EXAMPLE	GLOSS
1	ó-	mo-	ó-mò-rèmi	'farmer'
1b	∅	∅	tàátá	'father'
2	á-	ba-	á-bà-rèmi á-bà-tàátá	'farmers' 'fathers'
3	ó-	mo-	ó-mò-bèrè	'body'
4	é-	me-	é-mè-bèrè	'bodies'
5	é-	ri-	é-ri-inó	'tooth'
	H	rii-	rii-bú	'ash'
6	á-	ma-	á-mà-inó	'teeth'
			á-mà-bú	'ashes'
			á-mà-kóómbé	'hoes'
			á-mà-gòrò	'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	'fish (pl.)'
			chín-kó	'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-ásé	'place'
21	H	nya-	nyá-àngèrà	'Blackie (cow's name)'

(Nash 2011)

Language documentation and description

- From an academic perspective, language documentation and description are often an individual endeavor.
 - Often very little interaction with the community at-large
 - Often the contribution to the community is minimal
 - These are the results of early linguistic understanding of ethical treatment of research participants

Language revitalization

- **Language revitalization:** an attempt to slow, halt, or reverse language death
- Often involves creating an awareness of current linguistic situation

Language revitalization



Language revitalization



Language revitalization



Language revitalization

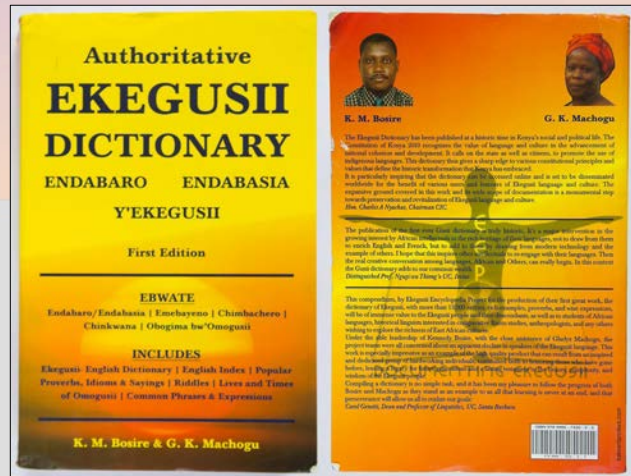
- Many times involves the creation of language learning programs and advocacy for change in local language learning policies.

GREETINGS	
ENGLISH _____	EKEGUSII _____
Are you well? (sing.).....	Imbuya ore?
I'm fine	Imbuya ande
Are you well? (pl.)	Imbuya more?
We're fine	Imbuya tore
Good morning.....	Bwakire buya
Good afternoon/evening.....	Bwairire buya
How was the night?	Kwabokire?
Good/very well	Buya
Goodbye.....	Kwahehi
Remain well.....	Tigare buya
What is your name?.....	Naki okorokwa?
My name is.....	Nkorokwa ...
Nice to meet you (sing.)	Mbuya ase ogokoumera
Nice to meet you (pl.).....	Mbuya ase okobaumera

Language revitalization

- Language revitalization projects often involves the research advocating on behalf of the community.
- Some researchers go even further by implementing models of empowerment.
 - Involves the training of community members (native speakers) in linguistic practices and techniques
 - Aims to give the community the ability to determine their own linguistic goals
 - Collaboration is explicitly articulated as a key concept and underlies this model of field linguistics

Language revitalization



Empowering communities

- Hallmarks of empowerment research (Cameron 1998)
 - It is cooperative with community members and researchers jointly engaged and equal contributors within mutual respectful strategic partnerships
 - participants negotiate the goals, methods, and outcomes
 - grounded in relevant local knowledge traditions
 - capacity-building – enhances and enables community initiatives
 - achieves a balance between research and social action

References

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