Multilingualism and First Language Maintenance: Nubian Language Speakers in Western Kenya

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this introductory study is to establish the extent of multilingualism and mother tongue maintenance mechanisms among the community in spite of having lived among the Ekegusii-speaking people for almost a century. Data were gathered through interviews with Nubian speakers and adult Ekegusii-speaking neighbours and through observation. The findings are that the Nubians speak up to six different languages which are KiNubi, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili, Dholuo, and English. On first language maintenance, their culture, religious faith, the Arabo-Nubian linguistic connection, and their historical experiences have kept their first language intact. These findings contradict the experience of the Suba-a minority, Bantu-speaking people of the Lake area (Lake Victoria) Nam Lolwe in Luo, Nalubaale in Luganda, and Nyanza in Kinyarwanda, who were assimilated in language and culture by the Luo speakers-suggesting that development of multilingualism and mother tongue maintenance by ethnic minorities or otherwise is a function of a complex of factors.

Key words: minority languages, multilingualism, L1 maintenance, KiNubi, western Kenya

Introduction

This work reports on multilingualism and L1 maintenance among the Nubian ethnic community of Kisii Town of south-western Kenya. Although the Nubians are spread in other parts of Kenya like Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and in Uganda, Tanzania, and Somalia (Amone 2013; Samantha 2012; Timothy 1997), this presentation treats the Nubians in Kisii Town as a distinct ethnic minority because their fellow Nubians live far away in Kenya in which case their neighbours belong to different ethnic communities. Data indicate that the population of those in Kisii Town are about 2,000, and Balaton-Chrimes (2015) puts their population in Kenya to be between 20, 000-30, 000. Kisii Town is the headquarter of Kisii County-one of the two counties inhabited by the Ekegusii-speaking people of western Kenya. The other is Nyamira County. Both have a population of about 4 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS] 2010).

The Gusii is an industrious community who engage in various economic activities mainly crop and animal farming due to rich agricultural soils and ample rainfall throughout the year. They majorly practise subsistence farming and their main cash crops are tea and coffee. They are also a very religious people and most of them are members of either the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) or the Catholic Churches. Evidence of their religiosity is the almost empty streets and closed businesses in market centres on Saturdays and Sundays, the days of worship for the SDAs and the Catholics respectively. The religious aspect is significant in this study as indicated in the discussion. Few Gusii people belong to the Islam religion. Kisii Town is also settled by several people from other Kenyan ethnic communities many of whom are business people, college students, or civil servants. These include the Luo-Gusii neighbours to the west; the Agikuyu-mainly business people from central Kenya. Lately the Somali-mobile telephony/electronics and cloth business people from, originally, northern Kenya.

The Nyanchwa Estate where the Nubians have lived for a century is predominantly settled by members of the SDA Church. On the other end of the Estate is an SDA complex consisting of a primary boarding school, a high school, a teachers' training college, a mission hospital, and a regional headquarter of the church. There is also a missionary-built church-the pioneer spot of the SDA movement in Gusii, which was started in 1912 (Nyaundi 1997).

According to Heine (1982) and Elfversson and Höglund (2017) the history of Nubians in Kenya started at the end of First World War (WW I), when those who came to the country were rewarded with land in Kibera in Nairobi for their successful service in the British Army. Timothy (1997) states that Nubians had been recruited to serve in the King's African Rifles by Captain Fredrick Lugard in 1891. Others are said to have settled in Uganda, others in Tanzania, and in Somalia (Amone 2013). Some of those in Kenya later moved to other parts including Kisumu in western Kenya and a few settled in Kisii Town (Adam, Matu, and Ongarora 2012).

From the interviews conducted in this study, those who migrated from Nairobi may have moved to various locations in the larger Nyanza and western Kenya regions. Respondents cite the early 1920s as the initial appearance of the Nubians in Kisii Town in which they have lived, as a small ethnic community, to date. Their houses, built many decades ago, have remained unchanged in design and style (see Figure 1), possibly due to economic reasons; Amone (2013) however indicates that their dislike of western education has made them not to pursue school education (generally western in ideology), which to a greater degree, is a passport to public employment in many African countries. Ng'ang'a (2006) confirms that Nubians prefer Madrasas, a preference which in many cases exposes them to harsh economic realities. Therefore, the fact that majority of them do not have jobs has made many live in the old buildings. Hence, Balaton-Chrimes (2015) argues that as an ethnic minority, the Nubians of Kenya are struggling for equal citizenship by asserting themselves as indigenous and autochthonous to Kibera, one of Nairobi's most notorious slums, and secondly, that for an understanding of citizenship one must consider multiple component parts: status, rights and membership, which are often disaggregated through time, across geographic spaces, and amongst different people that can generate important insights into the risks and possibilities of a relationship between ethnicity and democracy that is of broad and global relevance.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a combination of two words 'multi' and 'lingual'; the former referring to 'many' and the latter to 'to do with language.' Therefore it refers 'to do with many languages'. In the literature, the term is associated with many other words as described below. It is generally used to refer to people who speak many languages, usually more than one, and in this case, some studies use it interchangeably with bilingualism (Ng and Wigglesworth 2007; Rooy 2010). However, some linguists indicate that multilingualism cannot be so simplistically described; one scholar observes that, "a multilingual identity extends from the language of intimacy through the language of proximity to languages of regional, national, and international identification. As the layers are peeled off, a complex network of relations can be observed. In this scenario each language is representative of an overarching culture" (Pattanayak 2003, 57).

Pattanayak speaks to other scholars' view of the term who observe that definitions of the term are represented on a continuum ranging from full fluency to the use of different languages known at different levels of proficiency, driven by specific needs (Bialystok 2001; Rooy 2010). The term has had multiple associations but for the purpose of this study, the following terms will be described: Individual versus societal and national multilingualism; subtractive versus additive multilingualism; and elective versus circumstantial multilingualism. Individual multilingualism refers to incidences where individuals are able to use more than one language in their various circumstances of life while societal/national refers to instances of use of more than one language by people living in a particular region/country (Ouane 2009; Rooy 2010).

Subtractive multilingualism occurs when the learning of more than one's first language inhibits the learning of that first language, while additive multilingualism occurs when the learning of other languages does not inhibit the learning and development of the first language (Prah 2009). Elective multilingualism (also referred to as elite multilingualism; Todeva and Cenoz 2009) refers to cases where persons choose to become multilingual while circumstantial multilingualism refers to instances where persons find themselves required to become multilingual. The Nubians in this study are circumstantially multilingual, to a greater extent.

Multilingualism is increasingly becoming a common phenomenon even in Europe (Ouane 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas 1995) but it is commoner in Africa in which many find it intrinsic to their language acquisition with two to three languages learnt concomitantly (Gerhardt 1990; Ouane 2009; Prah 2009). Researchers attribute both psycholinguistic and cognitive benefits of multilingual persons. These include an advanced ability in the cognitive process of analysis, advantage in the cognitive process of selective attention and inhibition, and an enhanced ability to learn more languages (Baker 2012; Datta 2000; Edwards 2009; Cummins 2009; and Jessner 2008).

Multilingual Kenya

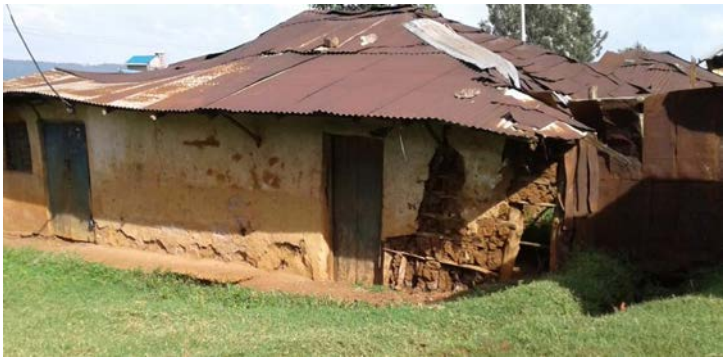
Kenya is a multilingual country with more than 60 different languages spoken by the population (Lewis 2009). While there are individuals who are multilingual in more than one African language, majority are circumstantially multilingual (in their mother tongues, Kiswahili, and English) since the school system teaches both Kiswahili the national language (and also official) and English the second official language from grade one up to the end of high school. Furthermore, English is the language of teaching in post high school institutions. I have, however, in my research encountered persons who use more than four African languages whose knowledge they got from living in various parts of the country or by engaging in prolonged business activities with neighbouring ethnic communities. These include Ekegusii-speaking business people and public transport operators who, for instance, operate between Kisii and Migori Towns; these speak their own Ekegusii, Kikuria, Luo, and Kiswahili-all African languages. Generally though, most persons without school education speak two languages; their indigenous language and Kiswahili the national language which is used for inter-ethnic interaction, and mainly in cosmopolitan centres across the country. Kiswahili has been identified closely with the country's post-independence history and some scholars attribute its use by the general public to its being considered a neutral language. One of the groups of people who are circumstantially multilingual and speak more than the about two/three languages are the Nubians of Kisii Town of south western Kenya. Details of how they manage this multilinguality are presented in the findings section. This study is significant in the sense that its findings suggest that, in spite of UNESCO listing scores of African languages as facing extinction in the near future, some of these languages may still survive. Survival or lack of it is a function of a combination of both linguistic and cultural factors.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study, as mentioned above, was to establish the extent of multilingualism and mother tongue maintenance mechanisms among the Nubian community of Kisii Town in spite of having been sandwiched among the Ekegusii-speaking people for almost a century. Hence, the research questions in this work concern: (1) what is the extent of multilingualism among the Nubians of Kisii Town, (2) what are the acquisition contexts of the languages that the Nubians speak, and, (3) how have the Nubians been able to maintain their language in spite of their small number and having lived among the Ekegusii-speaking people for almost a century?

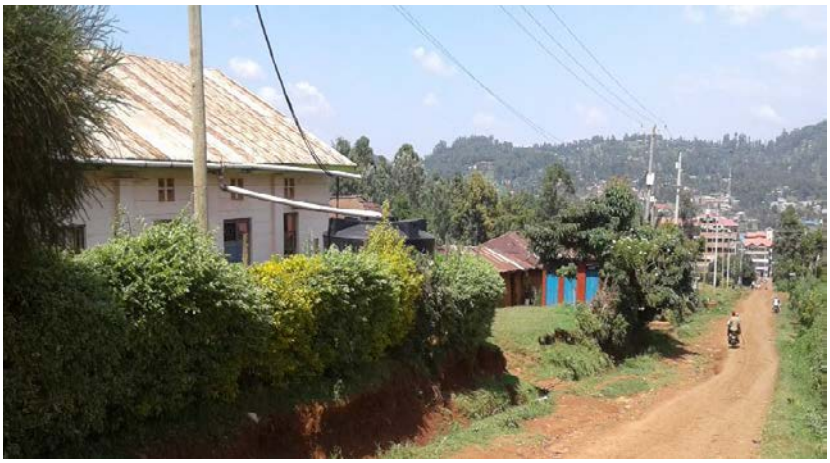
The Nubian-Speaking Community of Kisii Town

This study was conducted among the Nubian-speaking community of Kisii Town of south western Kenya; their immediate neighbours-the Ekegusii-speaking people were also part of the sample. The community lives in a single village in Nyanchwa Estate overlooking the town's central business district. Figure 1 shows one of their houses built decades ago. Figure 2 is a view of Kisii Town which the Nubia Village overlooks. The photo is taken at a tarmac road which forms the western boundary of the Nubia Village. The road in Figure 2 cuts the Nubian Village into half.



(Photo taken in October, 2017)

Figure 1: One of the Nubian houses



(photo taken in October, 2017)

Figure 2: A view of Kisii Town from Nubia Village

Note: The building on the left is the Nubia multipurpose hall and down the road on the left are Nubia houses. The road down passes through the Nubia Village to Kisii central business district past the Kisii River down the valley. The ridge at the horizon is an extension of the Kisii Town.

Respondents

The respondents were 6 adult Nubian speakers; 8 adult Ekegusii-speaking adults. Their profiles are captured in Table 1. A sample of 14 was considered adequate since the six native Nubian respondents were adults; relative to their population in Kisii Town, their responses could be suggestive of the actual situation among all of them. The eight adult Ekegusii neighbours confirmed the observations and interview responses from the Nubians.

Table 1

Profile of Respondents

Respondent	*Age*	*Languages spoken-the first one is the mother tongue*
1. One (male)	63	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English
2. Two (male)	27	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili
3. Three (male)	58	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili
4. Four (male)	62	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English
5. Five (female)	48	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili
6. Six (female)	57	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Dholuo, Kiswahili
7. Seven (male)	71	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili
8. Eight (male)	56	Nubian, Arabic, Ekegusii, Kiswahili
9. Nine (male)	73	Ekegusii, Kiswahili
10. Ten (male)	68	Ekegusii, Kiswahili
11. Eleven (male)	49	Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English
12. Twelve (male)	51	Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English
13. Thirteen (female)	55	Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English
14. Fourteen (female)	69	Ekegusii, Kiswahili

Note: Table 1 indicates that the Nubian speakers use an average of 5 languages

Data Collection Instruments and Data Collection

Information was informally gathered about the Nubians, their culture, history and language months before the formal study was conducted from September 2017 through December 2017. Two instruments were used in the study; observation, and interview. Observation of language practices were made in twelve visits made to the village during which time interviews with the respondents were also conducted. Observation specifically targeted language choice and use by the Nubian speakers at their homes and-for some of the women-, at the roadside as they engaged in their trade (selling vegetables, nuts, cooking oil, and wheat cakes). For Nubian children, observations were conducted outside at a pitch in the village as boys played football, and as girls played hide and seek; and at the social hall (see Figure 2) as the children cleaned it and as they entered and came out of the hall before and after some of their religious (Islam) lessons. The religious teacher confirmed that religious classes are conducted daily from 7.30 am to 11.00 am except Thursdays during school holidays (April, August, November/December) and 5.00 pm to 6.00 pm when schools are open-public schools usually wind up their programmes at 4.00 pm. The one hour interval is left for the children to arrive at their homes, prepare themselves, and walk to the hall for the religious lessons.

Children who attend religious classes were boys and girls whose age range was 4 and about 17 years. They mainly come from the Nubia village and some few from families neighbouring the village. Girls are generally dressed in dark hijab and some boys in long white/dark robes. All observation activities were recorded in a notebook and the photographs in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 were taken. Observation was on language choices and use in various contexts, with different individuals, and in different activities.

Interviews were conducted with the Nubian speakers at their homes; either in or outside the houses. For the non-Nubians, they were conducted at their different homes outside the Nubia village. The interviews focused specifically on the following aspects; the number of languages they speak, where and when they acquire each of the languages they speak; and practices that help in preserving the Nubian language. Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili for the Nubian speakers and in Ekegusii for the Ekegusii speakers. Interviews with the 14 respondents were audio recorded; other background information interviews conducted prior to the formal conduct of the study were not audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis had been going on, informally, from the first encounter with the respondents through to the conduct of the formal interviews and observation. Every single visit, therefore, was a build-up on the ideas gathered/observed in the previous encounter. This approach to data elicitation ensured access to rich data since each pattern observed was pursued in the subsequent visit. Data for this study were mainly qualitative. Observation notes/data were read thoroughly and emerging themes were noted down. Interview data were first transcribed as captured from the field. No problem was encountered in the transcription of both the Kiswahili and the Ekegusii interview data; I know Kiswahili, it being the national language of Kenya and East Africa's lingua franca. Ekegusii data, similarly, were easy to transcribe since I am a native speaker of the language. Some of the Ekegusii-speaking respondents code-switched a lot from Ekegusii to Kiswahili, to some English, a feature common among schooled Kenyans (they code switch between their mother tongues, Kiswahili, and English). Transcribed interview data were also read and key themes noted and compared with observation data. The themes emerging from both sets of data constituted the substance of the findings and discussion in this contribution.

Findings

(a) Extent of Multilingualism and Contexts of Acquisition and Use

Nubians speak up to six languages depending on whether they are children, business people, or professionals. The languages they speak and the contexts of acquisition and use of each of the languages are as follows:

KiNubi

KiNubi is the first language for the Nubians used for interaction among Nubians and in homes. It is exclusively acquired at homes in which it is spoken except when there is somebody in the homes who does not understand it. Both the natives and the Gusii respondents confirmed that this language is used at Nubian homes as captured in the response from one of the female Nubian respondents;

> *We speak Nubian in the house, each one of us, the man of the house, myself, children, grandchildren and other relatives. If there is a non-Nubian, we speak Kiswahili which they can understand. If you are back in this house, you speak KiNubi. It is the language of our forefathers and we keep it, it keeps us together…*

The response indicates that they use it as an identity marker and as a heritage they may be so keen to preserve. It also confirms that children acquire it at home-it would be not possible to acquire it outside home because the Nubian are sandwiched among the Ekegusii-speaking people and a town dominated by the use of Kiswahili. Additionally, the language is not taught at the nearby school, built specifically for the Nubians but now attended majorly by children from Gusii families. Adam, Matu, and Ongarora (2012) had a similar finding (that the language is acquired and used in homes) among the Nubians in Kibera, Nairobi. It is further suggested, from the responses, that the regard of Nubia as an identity marker and as part of heritage could be one factor for the survival of the language in spite of its micro and macro sociolinguistic ecology in Kisii and Kenya since the early 1920s. According to Landweer (2008), home is the strongest environment of L1 maintenance. According to Fishman (1991), 'the transfer of the mother tongue from parents to children is the central precondition for language preservation and revitalization of minority languages' (p. 153).

Arabic

Arabic is the second language spoken by the Nubians taught and learnt at the mosque and mainly used in worship services. Respondents indicate that all Nubians speak the language including children. One of the native speakers of Nubian interviewed is a Madrassa teacher. He said;

> *If you are a Nubian, you know Arabic. Even these children I teach, they know. They know even writing Arabic. I teach them Islam prayers in Arabic, you cannot pray without it. It is like you people have the Bible; ours is the Koran and our religion was handed to us in Arabic…*

Mohammed's response was confirmed by two incidences during the visits. In the first instance, at a male respondent's house, there was a radio on top of a cupboard that spoke in Arabic throughout the stay (to date, it is not understood why the respondent kept it playing throughout the session even when it seemed that it was too loud for a smooth interview). Secondly, in the first encounter with Mohammed (the Madrassa teacher), there was a nine-year-old boy (Mohammed's pupil at the Madrasa) nearby with a mobile phone playing Arabic lyrics. I used this opportunity to introduce myself to Mohammed. Mohammed confirmed that the boy listened to the Arabic music to reinforce his knowledge since he already knew the language following his attendance of Madrasa lessons. Further to that, prayers in Arabic were heard from the loudspeakers mounted on their mosque at midday and at four during the visits. A further hint at the knowledge and use of Arabic is a concrete plaque next to one of the boreholes in the village written in Arabic (stating sponsorship details of the project and the date of construction) captured in Figure 3.

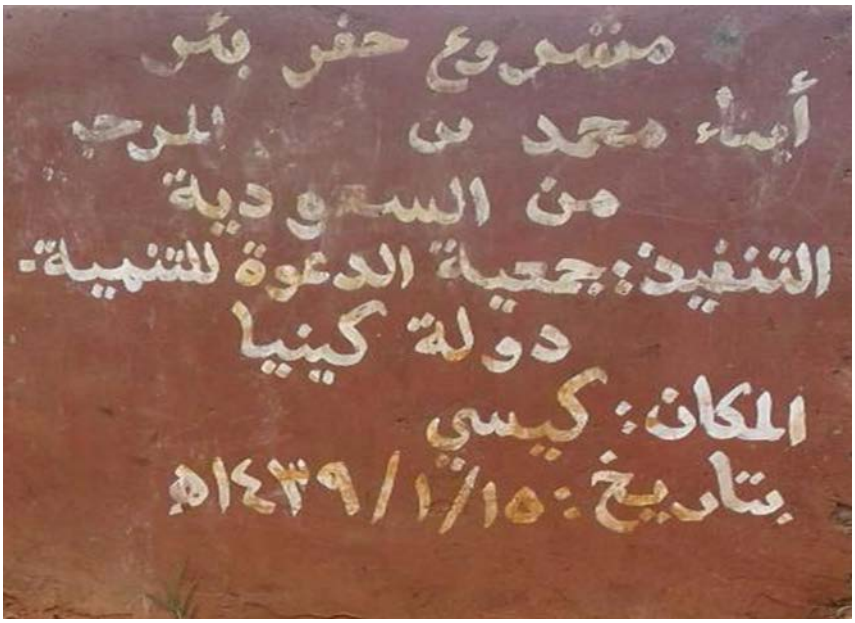


Figure 3: A concrete plaque by one of the boreholes at the Nubia village.

Ekegusii

Ekegusii is the third language that the Nubians learn from the Abagusii due to proximity, speak and mainly use in maintaining relationships with the latter and in business. The Nubians need the neighbours for obvious reasons-they are neighbours whom they cannot ignore. They are their customers, local leaders are Ekegusii-speaking, and their children play with Ekegusii-speaking children both in school and at home. One Ekegusii-speaking respondent said;

These people know Ekegusii. Don't be cheated if you speak and they do not respond. All of them know, even small children. How can they sell to us or buy from us if they don't know our language? Even their old people used to know Ekegusii. How can't they know yet they hear it daily?

The response indicates that Ekegusii, for the Nubians, is known for very obvious reasons-survival and due to the geographical closeness. This is reminiscent of circumstantial multilingualism. Further evidence of use of Ekegusii was observed as the women sold their goods and during the interviews with the speakers. Further still, it is important for them to know Ekegusii since they need to understand what is going on around them; as discussed below, they have always been referred to as strangers and collaborators with the British colonizer and knowledge of their 'enemy's' language could be one of the safety measures.

Kiswahili

According to the Nubian respondents, all of them acquire Kiswahili from both neighbours and the school system and use it in various ways. The motivation is survival just like it is for Ekegusii, but more so. Kiswahili is the national language of Kenya and it is used for inter-ethnic communication among Kenyan communities (Gorman, 1974). Actually, Kiswahili is a main language in the common code switching in the country. The Nubians interact with people who speak different Kenyan languages and so they need Kiswahili. We interacted with Nubian respondents in Kiswahili. Nubians in Nairobi also use Kiswahili as reported by Elfversson and Höglund (2017) and others. Kiswahili does not only assist them manage communication inter-culturally but it also is instrumental when they travel across East Africa in which they meet and interact with their fellow Muslims. A further possibility for the acquisition and use of Kiswahili is its possible KiNubi linguistic relationship hinted to by Southhall (1975) who indicates that, 'Nubian culture is as hard to define as Swahili, to which it has several similarities' (p. 83). It is possible, there is common vocabulary in both KiNubi and Kiswahili, further suggesting a triune linguistic connection of Kiswahili, KiNubi, and Arabic.

Luo

Some native Nubians acquire and speak Luo, a language of the people who border the Kisii people to the west (Luo-speaking people are also residents of Kisii Town). From the interviews, three factors make this use possible; business, religion, and intermarriage. Many of the Luo people who sell fish and other goods at the Daraja Market (the biggest market in Gusii situated 100 metres away from Nubia village) are neighbours of the Nubians-interaction is therefore regular. Secondly, a number of the Luo people have converted to Islam and so they worship together hence facilitating interaction and knowledge of the language.

Further, some Luo women have married Nubian men; these could be instrumental too in facilitating knowledge of Luo by the Nubians. Some respondents associated Nubians' knowledge of the Luo language to the descent from the Sudan of both groups of people.

English

English is not used by majority but only by those with reasonable school education. The language is used, occasionally, when conversing with non-Nubians. There was hardly any use of English by one of the Nubian male respondents who was a school teacher. Some researchers attribute this to the differences in ideology between Christians and Moslems (Amone 2013).

(b) KiNubi Maintenance Mechanisms

Research and the current study indicate that KiNubi language is intact and that it has defied time and a multilingual environment to survive. Time and multilinguality are facilitative of language shift, attrition, and even death of, especially, minority languages (Winford 2012). The following factors, for the Kisii Town Nubians, are responsible for the maintenance of their language;

Community and Extended Family Factor

The Nubians cherish a communal cosmology which encourages the extended-family-stay-together concept. From observation, the houses (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) house parents, children, grand-children, and relatives. Even married sons, in many cases, live in the same house with the parents. One of the male Nubian respondents, in response to the question of how they have made sure Nubian survives, said;

> *All Nubians are one people. You see here in my house I have my cousin, in-law, a daughter, two sons, and grand-children. And we eat together. Except when there is a stranger, we only speak in Nubian in the house. My grandchild Amina knows KiNubi but she is only four…*

There is a firm tradition that a Nubian family speaks KiNubi at home in which the extended family stays. This seems to militate against the pressure that the language faces from, especially, Ekegusii and Kiswahili which forms the core of a youth code, now widely researched in Kenya, referred to as *Sheng*.

In my observation of children playing, it is Kiswahili that was in common use since Nubian children play with children from the neighbouring villages. Kiswahili, for the children, is also taught in school and it is the language of inter-ethnic interaction. It has been said that there cannot be a better context for the maintenance of a heritage language than the home (Veltman 1983). Community and the preservation of the extended family ties ensure constant interaction among the Nubians further ensuring constant use of the language. Notably, there is scarcely any literature in KiNubi among the Nubians in Kisii, a further repudiation of the claim that an unwritten language is threatened with extinction.

Marriage and Assimilation

Unlike the Ekegusii-speaking neighbours, the Nubians marry from among their clansmen. Nubian respondents indicated that should someone miss a marriage partner from among those in Kisii Nubia Village, they look for one from other Nubians in Kibera, Mombasa, or Kisumu. Other researchers indicate that Nubians keep intact extended/marriage/family relationships to an extent that Nubians from Mombasa (in the East Coast of Kenya) travel to Uganda to see relatives/clans people or attend weddings of relatives (Johnson 2009 and Kokole 1985). Additionally, in the event that a non-Nubian man marries a Nubian woman, the man must become Nubi, convert to Islam (whose language of prayer/faith is Arabic which, according to Amone (2013), is related to KiNubi), change their name, and learn KiNubi, a trend Timothy (1997) confirms. I found evidence of this in the names of the three Kisii men who had converted, married, and lived among the Nubians in Kisii Town; they were Abdi, Mohammed, and Bashir. This implies that the assimilated persons' first languages may not find adequate contexts of use in a Nubian home.

Amone observes that, 'Islam and Nubian culture are so intertwined, that it is difficult for one to be Nubian without being Muslim' (2013, 396) and Kokole (1995) adds that Islam remains the most fundamental aspect of Nubian identity across East Africa. This implies that assimilated sons and daughters-in-law acquire Nubian and form part of the younger pool of speakers to perpetuate its use after the grandparents. In a history of almost a century, the respondents said, only three Kisii men converted to Islam, were given Nubian names, moved to Nubia Village, and raised families. The three, now old men speak Nubian fluently. One of them, now retired, worked with the municipality of Kisii. This further explains the survival of the language for a century and counting.

Arabo-Nubian Linguistic Relationship

The Madrasa teacher indicated that Nubian and Arabic have a relationship. According to him, 'there are only slight differences especially in the way we pronounce. There are many words that we use that are used in Arabic.' In one instance during the visits, we (with the Madrasa teacher) met four male Nubian worshippers coming out of the mosque and to the question, 'Is Nubian related to Arabic?', one responded, 'Yes there is, come to the mosque for an explanation'. These responses are confirmed by other researchers. Heine (1982) indicates that KiNubi is an Arabic Creole with 90% of its vocabulary being of Arabic origin. Additionally, Timothy (1997; see also Southhall 1975; Wellens 2005) states that KiNubi is a language with an Arabic vocabulary and African grammar rules. The significance of this relationship is apparent; all Nubians are Muslims and Muslims pray in Arabic and Arabic shares vocabulary with KiNubi. It implies that KiNubi vocabulary is in daily use; there are prayers for the Muslims five times a day.

The Stranger's Syndrome

The neighbouring Gusii people have historically treated the Nubians with suspicion due to the role the latter had played as servicemen in the British army during WW1; the Gusii view them as collaborators. With suspicious neighbours, the Nubians seem to have kept to themselves via their language. One Gusii respondent said that,

> *The Nubians had worked for the whites and so our fathers did not like them; they did not want any association with them. They also wanted to say their things without our fathers understanding because they were now like enemies.*

Samantha (2012, 45) observes that they 'maintained their ambivalent attitude towards other Africans, and a sort of voluntary isolation in terms of religion (expressed in Arabic prayers-Arabic is closely related to KiNubi), language,..and urbanization', and that Nubians are not generally friendly to natives. It is fresh in the psyche of the Kisii people, to date, that the British murdered the renowned Kisii warrior, Otenyo, (during the struggle for independence) and his head (he was beheaded) lies at a British Museum in London. Traditional suspicion by the Gusii-speaking neighbours may have checked intimate association. Amone (2013) confirms that the Nubians have been considered strangers wherever they went and settled. Psychologically then, the Nubians would prefer keeping to themselves, sharing information among themselves in a language tied to their identity hence preserving it.

Discussion

Findings confirm that minorities tend to be more multilingual as indicated by Ouane (2009) but the motivations for multilingualism seem to differ from context to context. In the case of the Nubians of Kisii Town, it is peculiar that ritual, identity, religion, and historical experiences seem to be the motivation for learning and using more than one language. No ethnic community in Kenya has had an identical experience and though referred to as a multilingual country; the multilinguality is, primarily due to the number of ethnic communities in the country. There are Kenyans in their millions who can barely speak a second language competently. In spite of the possibilities for a truly multilingual population with its attendant benefits, Kenya, just like many African countries, discourages this development via public pronouncements, legislation, and the insistence on education in English (Baker 2012; Mose 2015, 2016; Rooy 2011). The net effect of such insistence on English is a hatred of African languages (Thiong'o 1986) and, unavoidably, culture, a poor mastery of English-because the sociolinguistic ecology of the acquisition and learning of English does not provide adequate exposure to the language. An alternative to this subtractive multilingualism approach is to encourage multilingual learning and negotiation of knowledge between teachers and students and among learners in the various languages they know well. In the 2017 final high school examination in which more than 600,000 students were examined, only slightly over 70,000 (about 11 %) students attained a minimum C+ which is the university entry grade. The rest scored C plain and below with a majority scoring D+, D, D-, and E grades. Scholars have attributed part of the cause of this problem on the use of English for learning all subjects in a poorly resourced school system (Piper, Shroeder, Trudell 2015; Trudell 2016; Trudell and Piper 2013).

Consistent with the observation that Africa is the most multilingual continent in the world (Prah 2009), the Nubian community in Kisii Town emerges as one such group of people using up to six different languages. The use of six languages indicates that there might be no limit to how many languages that human beings may be able to acquire/learn and use as long as the circumstances of life vary and demand accordingly. The human psycholinguistic ability, it is suggested, is limitless and elastic further pointing to Cummins ice-berg hypothesis (Cummins 1991, 2005, 2008); the single language system, it seems, has synthesized the human language code and both psychological and temporal conditions of an individual provoke an ability to acquire/learn and use any one extra language or set of languages. We observe that as a community, the Nubians emerge as one of the most communally multilingual ethnic group in Kenya; generally, other communities use their mother tongues, the national language (Kiswahili), and for those with school education, English. The multilinguality among the Nubians is sociolinguistically significant; it is not always the case that language planning and implementation from the top makes subordinate and determines language choice, shift, attrition, death, practice, etc among a group of people, especially a minority. As pointed out below, a people's set of beliefs, religion, rituals, history, and ideology may go a long way in determining a community's attitude to and adoption and use of particular languages.

Irrespective of what roles Kiswahili and English play in Kenya (generally regarded as languages of power and success), KiNubi has survived for almost a century among a small number of speakers in Kisii Town and having been surrounded by the Ekegusii-speaking people. The findings also suggest that a first language can be maintained, or otherwise, depending on the extent of attachment speakers have to the cultural elements it bears. Further to this, the findings suggest that one's language combined with strong identity ties seems to bear strong emotional attachments impregnable to sociolinguistic pressures. To what extent a community extends the number of languages they speak, therefore, depends on a combination of several factors irrespective of legislation and sociolinguistic ecologies.

The findings in this study also indicate that maintenance of the L1 among a community of people has two motivations; deliberate and inherent. A community can maintain the use of a language if by its use they access particular benefits. For instance, the Kisii Town Nubians use Ekegusii and Kiswahili for obvious reasons; they need both to get along with their neighbours, conduct business successfully, interact with fellow Muslims from other ethnic communities, etc. But the use of Nubian and Arabic belong to a different type of motivation; the two are inherently tied with a cherished religious and cultural heritage, rituals, and history. This points out to the possibility that languages are not maintained or not because the larger society pronounces them important or otherwise. Languages are maintained, and this seems to be a deeply psychological function, if a community encountered specific memorable experiences. For the Nubians, their Islamic faith is so strong that, in some instances, if somebody leaves it, they become outcasts. Secondly, the Nubians have lived outside their motherland and in all cases they have been treated as strangers. Psychologically, such experiences seem to provoke deep regard for heritage-ritual, linguistic, etc. This can be contrasted to the Ekegusii-speaking people. What happened in the early 20th Century was a systematic denigration of their language by the white people in the schools. They were convinced to think that Ekegusii was an uncivilized language and they needed to learn English. Today, Ekegusii is one of the languages threatened by Kiswahili (Cammenga 2002) and some observers indicate that Ekegusii faces the fate of Suba (Ang'iela 2002), a language with just a handful of adult speakers. Some Ekegusii-speaking parents have been said to punish their primary school-age children at homes if they speak in Ekegusii, their mother tongue. This is supported by various types of punishments in rural schools in Gusii if pupils are found speaking in Ekegusii among themselves (Mose 2015).

Conclusion

This article has confirmed Ouane's (2009), observation that minorities tend to be more multilingual. It has been indicated that there may not be a maximum number of languages a group of people may learn and speak as long as conditions of life vary. Additionally, irrespective of prevailing sociolinguistic conditions, a community, in this case a minority ethnic community, can maintain a mother tongue/heritage language and a language of their religious faith as long as they have a strong attachment to their belief and heritage. Thus, the findings herein indicate that the intersection of strong cultural and religious belief, identity issues, and historical circumstances defy sociolinguistic pressure on a minority language and contribute immensely in the preservation of a first language/heritage language.

Notes

Ekegusii:	The language spoken by the predominant inhabitants of the Gusii region.
Gusii:	The territory inhabited by the Ekegusii-speaking people of western Kenya. Also Kisii.
Kisii:	The territory inhabited by the Ekegusii-speaking people. It also refers to the main town in Kisii County.
KiNubi:	The native language of the Nubians, also Nubian.
Madrasa:	Schools where teaching of the Islamic religion is taught. Among the Nubians of Kisii Town, the teaching is conducted for children at the Nubian multipurpose hall.
L1:	Literally language one, referring to the language a person acquires first.
Nubians:	The ethnic community that speaks KiNubi.

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