

Characteristics of Language Shift in Makonde Language, Kinondo Ward Kwale County, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper aims at examining the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language, Kinondo ward, Kwale County, Kenya. Kwale County is a county where people differing in language (Digo, Duruma, Kiswahili and English) are in contact with each other. Kinondo ward, where speakers of Makonde language are found offers an interesting setting for the investigation of language maintenance and language shift. A total of 100 respondents with Makonde ancestry participated in this research. One issue explored was the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language. Data obtained from 100 subjects showed that Makonde language is considered to be an inferior Language in Kenya and as a minority language. The study also found that there was an imbalance in borrowing and that young Makonde speakers were losing their territorial language. However, there were levels of positive language retention of Makonde language, especially at family domain, market places and ritual ceremonies. This showed that as long as Makonde people live in a concentrated area in Kenya, they will have better chances of maintaining their language. This paper is a useful tool for the Makonde community to popularize the maintenance of the Makonde language in Kwale County.

Keywords: Language Shift, Makonde language and Minority languages.

INTRODUCTION

Language shift and maintenance have been a research topic within linguistics for approximately half a century, but there is still no clear and universal definition [1] of these terms. However, in the broadest possible terms, the notion of 'language shift' signifies the phenomenon which can be observed in unstable bi- or multilingual situations in which one community gradually changes 'from the habitual use of one language to that of another [2]. In this sense, language shift represents an alternative to language maintenance and usually occurs among speech communities in a subordinate or minority position in continued language contact with a superordinate, dominant speech community. Thus, language shift is the gradual replacement of one language by another as the primary language of communication within a speech community [3, 4].

Fishman [5] observed that languages (or language variants) sometimes replace each other, among some speakers, particularly in certain types or domains of language behavior, under some conditions of intergroup contact. In such contact situation the endangered language is always the dominated one, i.e., the language of minority group [6]. According to Bon villain [7] even though languages are spoken by individuals, it is the speech community that the languages survive or die. It is therefore suffice to say

that language shift or maintenance occur as a result of choices by an individual in a speech community, in accordance with their own motivations, expectations and goals which may or may not share with other members. Coulmas [8], states that members of a minority community may choose to shift from their language to a new one and finally abandon the old ethnic tongue. It is therefore the choice of an individual that will dictate or impact on the future of a speech community and its language.

The notion of a language shift has been examined by many scholars, such as Fishman [5, 9], Weinreich [10], Clyne [11], Mackey [12]; etc. This literature review shows that maintenance and shift of minority language in different situations and under different circumstances has become an important area of language research. A minority language is simply one spoken by less than 50 percent of a population in a given region, state or country [13]. The key criterion here is the size of the speaker population within a specific geographic context: an individual language may be a minority language in one region or state but a majority language in another [14]. Such is the case with many immigrant languages, whose speakers may continue to be a majority in the homeland but have smaller speaker bases elsewhere. This paper aims at examining the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language, Kinondo ward, Kwale County,

Kenya. Makonde is one of the 'minority' or 'community' languages found at coastal region in Kenya but originally spoken in Tanzania and Mozambique that has not been given considerable attention by scholars within Kenya. This research will discuss the pertinent issue of Language shift and maintenance among this minority language. Literature review on Makonde languages in Tanzania and Mozambique emphasizes on grammatical and phonological features [15-17]. This study therefore is valuable in that it intends to fill knowledge gaps but at the same time be a reservoir of Makonde language. In this line of thought, the research becomes a new reference work for students of linguistics, enhancing their understanding of the Makonde language from a sociolinguistic perspective. Using various models of Language shift and maintenance as propounded by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor [18], Fasold [19] and Hyltenstam and Stroud [20] the study analyzes the characteristics of language shift of Makonde language.

Makonde Language

The Makonde are an ethnic group in southeast Tanzania and Northern Mozambique. The Makonde developed their culture on the Mueda Plateau in Mozambique. At present they live throughout Tanzania and Mozambique and have a small presence in Kenya at the coastal region in Kwale County [21]. The Kenyan Makonde who speaks Makonde language came to Kenya in the 1950s from Mozambique. The Makonde people of Kenya neither call Kenya nor Tanzania home. They are not recognized as one of Kenya's 42 tribes. Their literacy levels are very low and can hardly access employment in government and in the private sector. Politicians have turned their plight to a political agenda every election year. They are promised Kenyan citizenship but to date, they are still regarded aliens and discriminated against by the local Digo and Duruma. They live in a closely knit society where they still practice their customs such as face tattooing for women, female genital mutilation and their famous *Sindimba* dance.

Statement of the problem

Kwale County is a county where people differing in language (Digo, Duruma, Kiswahili and English) are in contact with each other. Kinondo ward, where speakers of Makonde language are found offers an interesting setting for the investigation of language maintenance and language shift. The linguistic

environment in this county for Makonde speakers is significantly different from that of Tanzania and Mozambique, where most investigations on Makonde language has been conducted from grammatical and phonological perspective. However, the study on language maintenance and shift on Makonde language as minority language in Kenya has not been done. Thus, from both theoretical and methodological considerations, a study of language maintenance and shift in the setting of Kinondo ward not only broaden the empirical basis of the field but also can give us a new in-sight into language contact phenomena.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at examining the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language, Kinondo ward, Kwale County, Kenya. One issue explored was the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language. Thus, one research question is put forward:

- 1) What are the characteristics of Language shift in Makonde language?

The data that are analyzed here were collected through a questionnaire survey conducted in Kinondo ward, Kwale County. 40 speakers of Makonde language participated in the current study. The questionnaire was structured in three main parts. The first section sought for the demographic data of participants, such as sex, age, religion, marital status, schooling, main occupation, and mobility. The second section inquired on whether the Makonde language was transmitted to the younger generation or whether there was already an inter-generation Language shift. The third section had questions on language use of respondents in different domains namely; the home, the market place, and ritual ceremonies. These three domains were the only relevant domains to be taken into consideration.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This section analyzes the data that have been collected. Section 4.1 presents the bio-data of the subjects and domains of language use among the Makonde speakers. The characteristics of Language shift among the Makonde speakers is discussed in this section. Mara & Hugo [22] posit that demographic data may influence the outcome of a study.

Background information of the respondents

Table-1: Gender of respondents

Category	Native speakers of Makonde	
	Frequency	Percentage
Male	48	48%
Female	52	52%
Total	100	100%

The study sought to establish the gender of the respondents. The findings were: 52% female and 48%

male. This shows that there were no disparities in response according to gender. The research further

indicates that there was balance as far as gender is concerned during the research.

Table-2: Age bracket of the respondents

Category	Native speakers of Makonde	
	Frequency	Percentages
Below 18	21	21%
Between 18-29	13	13%
Between 30-39	14	14%
Between 40-49	15	15%
Between 50-59	16	16%
Between 60-69	12	12%
70 and above	9	9%
Total	100	100%

The study sought to establish the respondents' age bracket. The study findings are summarized in table 2 above. The study found that the majority 21% of the

respondents was 18 years and above with the minority 9% were of age group 70 years and above.

Table-3: Education level of the respondents

Category	Native speakers of Makonde	
	Frequency	Percentages
Illiterate	46	46%
Primary school certificate	40	40%
High school certificate	11	11%
Diploma	3	3%
Degree	0	0%
Post graduate	0	0%
Total	100	100%

The study established the education level of the respondents, the study findings are summarized in the table 3 above. The study found out that the majority of the respondents' 46% was illiterate followed by 40% primary school then 11% high school certificates while

3% diploma. These indicated very low literacy levels among the respondents who were not able to comprehend the research questions, but were assisted by the research assistants to give accurate responses.

Table-4: Domains of Language Use among Makonde

Language	Family domain	Market Place	Education	Public Health	Ritual Ceremonies	Media
Makonde	88	83	0	0	100	0
English/Kiswahili	12	17	100	100	0	100

Table 4 shows that that Makonde language is dominantly used at Family domain (88%) and in ritual ceremonies (100%). English and Kiswahili are dominantly used by Makonde speakers in Education, public sectors and Media.

Characteristics of Language Shift in Makonde Language

Through questionnaires, the researchers sought to identify the characteristics of language shift in Makonde language. The findings are discussed in the following sub sections:

Makonde language is considered to be an inferior Language in Kenya

The first characteristic of language shift is that language being shifted from will probably be considered inferior to one or more varieties of the variety spoken in communities where the language

being shifted to is maintained. This was the situation of the Makonde language. Through observation, the researchers noted that in Makonde language the situation was of language contact. Therefore, people who speak Makonde were inevitably confronted with difficult choices about which language they wish or need to speak. 70% of the participants through the questionnaire reported that the major driver of language shift is the decision to abandon a more local or less prestigious language in this case Makonde, typically because the target of the shift is a language seen as more modern, useful or giving access to greater social mobility and economic opportunities. The findings were therefore in line with [23, 24] on the causes of language shift. 54% of participants who had attained primary, high school and diploma level of education reported that they shifted to either Kiswahili or English because of their language status. In Kenya English is considered an international language while Kiswahili a National

language (see table 4). Thus, any person leaving in Kenya want to speak English and Kiswahili because of the prestige attached to them. In this case, the Makonde language is seen inferior to either English or Kiswahili languages. The Makonde language is used in family domain and ritual ceremonies while Kiswahili and English languages are used in education, work, mass media, and public health. Thus, English and Kiswahili languages are seen as prestigious unlike Makonde language which is used by the minority and mostly in family domain.

An Imbalance in Borrowing

The second characteristic of Language shift in Makonde language is an imbalance in borrowing. Borrowing is a natural process of language change whereby one language adds new words to its own lexicon by copying those words from another language. The words which are borrowed although are more like stealing, according to Haugen [25] or a kind of copying, according to Trask [26]. Words from the incoming language are freely borrowed into the traditional language but borrowing in the other direction is much less common. For instance, participants in the current study reported that they frequently borrowed words from Kiswahili and English to Makonde and not from Makonde to English or Kiswahili. Thus, a large number of words were borrowed, particularly from Kiswahili and English since they acted as the source of new items of culture or environment for the other. Precisely this type of language contact accounted for the large number of Kiswahili and English loan words borrowed into unrelated languages Makonde. Borrowing therefore entails transfer of linguistic features between languages in the speech repertoire [22]. The Makonde participants reported that they did not have a native-level command of Kiswahili and English language. Transfer was reflected when comprehending verbal utterances or written language of participants from Makonde to English. English language is SVO and when the participants tried to speak English the structure and prosodic features of Makonde language were reflected in Kiswahili and English language. Features of language convergence were also reflected. There was an increase in shared features between Makonde, English and Kiswahili which resulted to language mixing. For instance, the researcher observed instances of selective borrowing where new words borrowed from English tended to be phonetically reshaped to fit the phonological pattern of the language recipient. Thus, language transfer seems to facilitate the gradual process of language convergence that affects all levels of language, especially the phonology.

Loss of territorial language by Makonde People

Another characteristic of language shift in Makonde language is loss of territorial base of the language spoken by fewer monolinguals. Territorial language is the first language of a people [27]. The

Makonde speakers have become bilingual by acquiring the dominant language. The results show that besides causing language convergence of the types just enumerated, language shift also resulted to some participants abandoning the Makonde speech and adopting either English or Kiswahili language completely. Language shift happens every time an immigrant learns the native language of the new country and passes it down to children in place of the old country language. Makonde language as noted in section 1.2 is an ethnic group in south East Tanzania and Northern Mozambique. At present they live throughout Tanzania and Mozambique and have a small presence at the coastal region in Kenya. Makonde people are immigrants in Kenya hence the possibility of some of them to lose their language completely is expected. The study sought to find out if it was important for parents to transmit to children Makonde language. The results indicated that for most parents Makonde language was the First language but for most children (below 18yrs) and the participants between (18-29yrs) their first language was Kiswahili. This result implies that the younger generation has lost their territorial language. The researchers thus observe that if Makonde people undergo language shift on the level of individuals or isolated small groups, then the effects of language shift on the speech community as a whole will be negligible. Generally, the linguistic peculiarities of a single person or a small group of single persons will not be passed down to future generations.

Makonde language as declining language has a rural base

The fourth characteristic of language shift of Makonde language is that it is a declining language and that it has a rural base only, hence, it lacks strength in towns and cities. Makonde being a language of minority group it had limited functions in Kenya thus it is based in the rural setting only: family domain, market place and ritual ceremonies (see Table 4). Makonde language is thus a language in decline that typically has a predominance of middle-aged or elderly speakers; hence, there is a lack of transmission to the younger generation. This observation was worrying since it means the younger generation is acquiring a new language at the expense of Makonde language which might lead to language endangerment. Moreover, the participants noted that they use Makonde language in the village only and among family members. Thus, Makonde language is a weakening language that is confined to rural areas, and associations are often made between the language and poverty, isolation and lack of sophistication of its speakers. Moreover, 60% of the participants reported that Makonde language might be replaced with dominant-language monolinguals (Kiswahili and English) in younger generation. Thus, the younger generation is for the most part bilingual in Kiswahili and English.

Makonde language is not used in the media in Kenya. The media are two-edged swords for declining languages. It is, on the one hand, desirable that minority languages be represented in them; however, on the other hand, the media act to channel dominant-language influence to the minority group. The Makonde language has no presence in both the print (newspapers, etc.) and electronic media (radio and TV) which lends prestige to the majority languages (Kiswahili and English).

Intergenerational features of Makonde language

The fifth and the last characteristics of language shift in Makonde language is that Makonde language has strong associates with older uneducated rural speakers and lacks progress and modernity. This characterizes decline in two language groups. For example, the older generation reported to use Makonde language often. The Makonde language is characterized by the high age of its daily users. However, families with school children reported that their children switched between English and Kiswahili. The researchers asked questions to young participants (29 years and below) to directly state their language attitude towards Makonde language. The questions asked were in an interrogative structure such as will you prefer to study English, Kiswahili or Makonde? They were also asked open questions such as why do you choose to study English?

The young Makonde speakers showed positive attitude towards English use and Kiswahili language, by agreeing that English language gave them leadership, self-confidence, sociability, and likeability while Kiswahili gave them a sense of belonging in Kwale County.

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of language shift in Makonde language mentioned in this paper show that Makonde language is an endangered language and particularly in Kenya. Therefore, basing on the findings Makonde language may die completely in Kenya if efforts to maintain it are not reinforced. The collected data showed that there was an imbalance in borrowing and that young Makonde speakers were losing their territorial language. However, the study also showed the use of Makonde language at home domain and in performance of ritual Ceremonies. Thus, the study recommends that such efforts to use Makonde language should be supported by the the language being given more functions in Kenya; for instance, this language should also be used in Educational setting and Media. The government should also add Makonde language as one of the languages spoken in Kenya thus improving its prestige. The study calls for the older generation especially parents to reflect a positive attitude on the use of Makonde language for expression of cultural identity and religion hence promoting the maintenance of Makonde language.

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