

Cause Of Sabaot Language Extinction: Globalization

Jebamani Anthoney

Department of Languages and Literature

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, P O Box 2500-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

Email : antonyjeba@yahoo.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Corresponding author

Jebamani Anthoney

Department of Languages and Literature

University of Eastern Africa,
Baraton, P O Box 2500-30100,
Eldoret, Kenya

Email :

antonyjeba@yahoo.com

This research mainly focused on the various factors that bring about the slow extinction of Sabaot language. One may actually not realize or even get bothered that native languages are endangered, but in reality they are in great danger than one can imagine. Sabaot language, for instance is at the verge of dying and unless something is done to it, they may end up losing one of the languages that carries with it numerous culture and traditions. Some of these factors that were focused on apply to many other languages that have fallen victim of this big disaster of language extinction, globalization being the main factor that cuts across all those languages that are being threatened to extinction today. This study aimed at identifying how these different aspects, globalization being the main factor, have contributed to a slow but sure journey of Sabaot language extinction

INTRODUCTION

Many endangered languages are spoken in environments rich in biological diversity. When such languages die, a great deal of knowledge of the environments in which their speakers live can also be lost. The main challenge however comes in when one looks at the urban areas where there is a mixture of students who speak different native languages making it difficult to choose one language to use as the medium of instruction. The situation worsens further when these children do not acquire their mother tongue as the language of socialization but instead acquire English or Swahili. This may be due to their parents speaking one language, for example using either Kiswahili or English when communicating with them. In the process mother tongue is easily done away with leading to its death. Furthermore, the increasing mobility of people, goods, and information has driven a powerful trend toward cultural uniformity and the extinction of local languages. Globalized economics and media are changing the face of culture around the globe, reducing the number of languages that humans speak. As the world economy becomes more integrated, a common tongue has become more important than ever to promote commerce, and that puts speakers of regional dialects and minority languages at a distinct disadvantage.

Accommodation theory by Giles, (1973) as mentioned by Miller Gary (2010) in his book "*Language and Linguistics theory*" sees mutual intelligibility among dialects as resulting from the speaker's adjustment of his or her speech to that of a conversational partner who speaks a different dialect. Under this theory, at least one impetus for language change comes out of the psychological motivation of speakers to accommodate themselves to one another linguistically in actual social interactions, both because they wish to please the other person and because they wish to be understood.

According to Bell, (1984) Accommodation theory has both a positive and a negative aspect. The negative, termed divergent accommodation, results when speakers purposely speak with a dialect or a style that will

distinguish them from, or even insult, their listeners. This theory will therefore help in finding out the causes of language extinction and in the process, the theory will be exploited further during the research, its weaknesses and strength will be explored to make it a worthwhile theory to use.

According to Morris, (2003) the future of a language depends on the number of people using it. If people can no longer speak or read a language its future is bleak. The importance of a language has often been determined by the number of people who use it. A language is effectively dead when there is only one speaker left, with no member of the younger generation interested in learning it. Projections of the number of users of a language are generally confined to the population of native speakers. The shift of the native users of a language to the more dominant languages like English is a major threat.

The first way a language can die is when the people who speak it cease to exist. This is language death by population loss, and it has been very common over the years. Population loss can occur by death of all speakers as a result of warfare, genocide, or epidemic diseases. . A good example is when the Europeans invaded America, Australia, and the Caribbean. They murdered the native inhabitants in order to seize their lands and on the other hand unknowingly brought with them lethal epidemic diseases like smallpox to which the indigenous people had no immunity. As whole speech communities died, due to diseases and warfare, numberless languages died with them. (Dixon, 1991) Language death occurs as a result of language shift, and there are two types of language shift.

The first one is forced language shift. In such cases, dominant groups compel minorities into language shift by either making their language mandatory, by enslaving them, by forcing them into a subordinate position, or by occupying the land and resources on which they rely. The disappearance of tropical rainforest peoples following logging and clearance leading to the destruction of the very basis of their economic and cultural self-sufficiency is an example of forced language shift. However it is important to understand that such policies, which destroy small indigenous languages, are directed at the economic resources available to indigenous people and not policies directed straight at the language. This supports the conviction that language should not be seen in isolation but as one result of a more general ecological and economic matrix.

And this, in turn, has important ramifications for language revitalization programs. Without a socioeconomic foundation a language will not thrive. The second type of language shift is voluntary language shift. This occurs when a community of people comes to believe that they would have better prospects and opportunities when speaking a language other than their mother tongue. The crucial difference from forced shift is that the endangered speech community can still truly decide to stay where they are and who they are, if they want to. The decay of Irish is - with restrictions - an example of voluntary language shift. (Dixon, 1991; Nettle, and Romaine, 2000; Artchison, 1991; Jean 1994)

Wurm, (1991) asserts that, the most destructive influence on a language, which is often an unwritten language, results from influence upon its speakers by speakers of another language that are culturally more aggressive and mightier. For instance, they may have a written language with a literary tradition, a powerful religion, or be members of a complex civilization with a modern, metropolitan society. Strong cultural influence usually results in the loss of much, if not all, of the weaker people's culture as they adopt much of the dominant people's culture. This often has far-reaching consequences for the indigenous language. First, the language may die and be superseded by that of the culturally more aggressive people, either fully or in a modified, simplified or pidginized-creolized form of it. Various languages of Australia, Aboriginal and native Americans, lacking a writing system, have died, or are dying, this way. An indigenous language with no traditional writing system tends to yield thus to a language of a metropolitan or otherwise aggressive culture which has a writing system.

Language shifts are often gradual, with the dominant language replacing the recessive one over a period of decades. The endangered language retreats from some situations before others. In this context, it is

useful to differentiate between language death "from the top down" and language death "from the bottom up". From the top down, the language disappears from official institutions and public domains like the judiciary system, the church, the economy and politics, so that it is eventually confined to use in domestic settings (examples being the Breton and Gaelic) which withdrew in this manner. They both lacked a function in government or religion, areas which were reserved for English (in the case of Gaelic) and French (in the case of Breton), but survived as the home language of the peasantry. When it comes to death from the bottom up, a language disappears from everyday use and persists for the most part in ritual or more formal use. An example of bottom up death is GrosVentres, the language spoken by the GrosVentres Indians in Blaine County. Although this Native American language has not been anybody's principal language for at least 40 years, it is still used for mainly ceremonial purposes. (Romaine, 2000)

Language death is symptomatic of cultural death; a way of life disappears with the death of a language. Language shift and death occur as a response to social, cultural, economic and even military pressures on a community. Every time a language stops performing a particular function, it will lose some ground to another that takes its place. Death occurs when one language replaces another over its entire functional range and parents no longer transmit the language to their children (Nettle and Romaine, 2000).

Simpson, (2008) observes that, a number of minority languages occupy an important linguistic position in terms of how they inform us about issues of language contact, shift, endangerment and death. About two thirds of Kenyans are bilingual in Swahili and a mother tongue. There's however a small but significant group who have lost competence in their mother tongue as they speak only English at home in school and socializing. Language death occurs when native language speakers change their language priorities to meet their communicative needs.

Wright, (2003) asserts that the process of nation building and globalization is the root for language shift. Nationalism is one of the main reasons why small groups come to be conceived as minorities and nation building is where they are put under most pressure to become bilingual or to shift language. As education, modern state administration, modern forms of media and new technologies enter settings where the local language has no written form and only small numbers of speakers, it is easy to understand how difficult maintenance of local languages can become and how strong the pressure to shift entirely.

According to Kolawole, (2004) most information communication technologies have been designed for use in the English language. Almost eighty percent of the content of global information structure is in English. Less than three percent is from Africa and most of this is in English. Most African languages still remain unwritten and many of those written are not available to modern Information technologies since we live in an information technology age, our native languages have a lesser role to play in our daily interaction with the world.

In the 1998 study by Funyoy, the English in Cameroon comes at the cost of the languages of the home and the neighborhood. She urges that even though social anthropologists think that encouraging young children to learn their mother tongue will help to develop their thoughts explore and retain their customs and prevent extinction of certain languages and, cultures, they face significant difficulties within such linguistically and culturally diversified background. She poses a question: with increasing urbanization and the cosmopolitan set-up of the cities, which indigenous out of the 279 native languages will be used as the language of education in the city schools? This coupled with increasing rush for education in colonial language(s), leaves uncertain the future of Cameroon ancestral languages.

Batibo, (2003) observes that while the socio-political ills of African languages are readily attributable to colonialism, he observes that the post-colonial social, political and economic development policies of Africa

have been major contributing factors in the observed current situations. And with regards to language policy, Africa's independence did not entail liberation but an emergence of neocolonialism of colonial languages. Except for Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia and the North African Arab States, most of Black Africa has towed the line of the Europeanization of their linguistic policies, albeit here and there some cosmetic introduction of national languages is observed. Nonetheless, this superficial and ineffective role given to African languages does not by and large empower them by policies to successfully act as a credible alternative to European languages.

In normal circumstances, no community would like to see its language die as a language provides a communicative and interactive lifeline for its speakers. Also, in a normal situation no community would be prepared to abandon its language in favor of another since one's language is not only a tool for communication and a vehicle of cultural accumulation and transmission but is also the symbol of one's identity and self-expression. Any speaker of a language that is in a weak position will struggle to resist pressure from a stronger language. The degree of success in resisting the stronger language will depend on: the degree of pressure exerted by that language; the amount of resistance put up by the speaker of the weaker language; and the relative gains if those speakers were to yield to the pressure to give way. (Batibo, 2003)

According to Salzman, (2007) recent statistics show that 96 per cent of the world's languages are spoken by only 4 per cent of the world's population, about 500 languages have fewer than 100 speakers and more than 1,500 languages have only 1,000 speakers at most. This shows the extent of the threat to local languages; the majority of the people speak a few of the dominant languages as the number of native language speakers decline.

Dorian, (1998) argues that if members of a subordinate population have the opportunity to learn the language of the dominant group, some or all of them will usually do so. It seems that it is not so much the tendency to learn a dominant group language which has increased a great deal in modern times, but rather the opportunity to do so, and concomitantly and more importantly for linguistic diversity, the chances of abandoning one's ancestral language in the process becomes inevitable.

It is difficult for individuals to choose the language(s) in which they are socialized and educated since this happens in childhood. The adults responsible for the socialization and education of the younger generation determine the medium. The literature abounds with numerous examples of how the decision of parents or educators to socialize and educate in the majority language has been experienced as deprivation, exclusion and loss by those for whom the choice was made (Dorian, 1998; Crystal, 2000).

It is felt by some that if the traditional language is to die, it is not up to human beings to interfere with this natural process. The kinds of measures that preservation may entail, such as formal teaching, recording and writing are seen as conflicting with the nature of language itself which has always been an oral organism. For understandable reasons, some community members feel that "reducing the language to writing" would do violence to it, destroying its integrity and strength. There are fears that once it is written, this most intimate cultural inheritance will no longer be uniquely theirs but like so many other aspects of their heritage, become accessible to any passersby, people who may not accord it appropriate respect. (Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley, 1998).

Therefore, the above information that have been obtained and cited appropriately from various sources will greatly help in the establishment of the causes of the Sabaot language extinction, the extent to which the language is in danger of extinction, and to come up with possible solutions that can help in safeguarding the language from extinction.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research was employed in the study. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to get as much details as possible within the limited time and resources available.

The study targeted Sabaot speakers in Cheptais Village, Ngachi location. The inhabitants are not all Sabaot speakers; it comprises of the Luhya (Bukusu) and Teso speakers because they are neighbors. There are also intermarriages between the Sabaot and these two neighboring tribes. The population was sampled using stratified sampling techniques to ensure equal representation of gender and age differences. Hence, stratification was based on gender and age. The youths were sampled differently from the older people.

The instruments that were used for collection of data were questionnaires with closed ended and open ended items, and interview schedules which were developed by the researcher. Questionnaires were appropriate; they required less time and reduced biasness. It also gave the respondent ample time to respond to the items. The researcher distributed the questionnaires and collected them later.

The questionnaires were centered on their comprehension in their native languages and what may have led to incompetence. On the other hand, Interview was used for those older people in that village. It mainly focused on the aspects that may be leading to the Sabaot language death and possible solutions on how the language can be safeguarded from extinction.

The methods that were used for collecting data during this research were: questionnaire and Interview. This chapter provided statistics upon which all the findings were based. Conclusions drawn from these data, summarizations and recommendations found in the next chapter (chapter five) of this research are drawn from these numbers.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not globalization is playing a role in the slow extinction of the Sabaot language. Two methods of data collection were used, i.e. the questionnaires and interview schedules. Basically the study sampled the young and the old people to deduce the findings. The study was based on an Alternative Hypothesis which states that “Young members of society are more likely to forget their native languages as compared to the older members.”

The study employed the use of questionnaire and interview schedules to enable the researcher gather adequate information from the field. Sabaot speakers were sampled in Cheptais village, Mount Elgon District in Bungoma County. Stratified sampling technique was used to ensure equal representation of gender and age differences of the population.

Firstly, according to the findings, majority of the respondents mentioned that modernization was the main cause of one losing his or her native language. This is because most children do not speak their mother tongue especially in schools, instead, they are exposed to English and Kiswahili as a medium of communication. This makes them less exposed to their mother tongue. In addition, with increase in technology, most tasks are carried out in English and Kiswahili especially in schools; hence native languages have limited space in their daily lives.

Secondly, a number of respondents mentioned that intermarriages between the Sabaot language speakers and other tribes around them contribute to the extinction of the Sabaot language. This is because intermarriages force the parents to teach their children either English or Kiswahili since they (the parents) use the two languages in communication. These children may also end up mixing the two languages to

come up with a new version of language e.g. ‘Sheng’, and as a result, their mother tongue becomes inactive in their daily speech.

Lastly, the findings showed that, mother tongue needs to be taught to the young ones at their tender age in order to safeguard the Sabao language from extinction. This is because culture and traditions of any group of people is considered successfully passed on to the next generation if that generation is able to speak and carry out the practices of their people without any difficulties.

REFERENCES

- Artchison, J. (1991). *Language change: progress or decay?* Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Batibo (2003). *Language decline and death in Africa: causes: consequences and challenges.* Clevedon: Comwell press limited.
- Colette, G. (1998). *Language endangerment in South America: A pragmatic approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death.* Edinburg: Cambridge university press.
- Dixon (1991). *A changing language situation: the decline of Dyrbal.* New York: Oxford University press.
- Dorian (1998). *Language in society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Funyoy (1998). *Language and society.* Edinburg: Cambridge University press.
- Jean (1994) *Language Acquisition.* London: Routledge press. (Retrieved on Sept 21st 2012 <http://linguisticsociety.org>)
- Kolawole, E. (2004). *Globalization and the Future of African Language.* Ibadan: Vaughan publication.
- Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley (1998). *Endangered Languages.* New York: Kruktuch Publication.
- Miller, Gary (2010). *Language and linguistics theory 1.* New York: Oxford University press.
- Morris (2003). *Language in a Globalizing World.* Edinburg: Cambridge University press.
- Nettle D and Romaine S (2000). *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages.* New York: Oxford University press.
- Romain, S. (2000). *Language in Society: An introduction to sociolinguistics.* New York: Oxford University press
- Salzmann (2007). *Language, Culture and Society.* Colorado: Westview press.

- Simpson (2008). *Children's Language and Multilingualism*. London: Routledge press (retrieved on September 27th 20 12<http://linguisticsociety.org>).
- Wright (2003). *Language Policy and Language Planning*. (Retrieved on August 31st 2012 <http://languagedept.org>).
- Wurm (1991). *Language Death and Disappearance: Causes and Circumstances*. New York: Oxford University press.
