

Language Factors Affecting the Katanga Language Spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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KEYWORDS Dominant Languages. Strategies. The Katanga Language. Minority Languages. Public Domains

ABSTRACT There have been debates about how languages used in some of the multilingual African countries have had a negative impact on the minority languages and cultures of the people. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), some of the languages are used in both the public and the private domains while other languages are only used in the private sectors. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the language factors affecting the inferior status of the Katanga language in the DRC. The study examined the impacts of French, English and Kiswahili dominant languages over the status of the Katanga language in relation to the strategies used by its speakers to revitalise its usage. The study employed qualitative research method which used a case study design. A purposeful sample of thirty (30) Congolese-Katanga people was used in this study. Data were collected through interviews. The findings revealed that the Katanga language was endangered since it was not used in the public domains such as education in the DRC. The study recommended the use of the Katanga language at the schools or the universities.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, languages are spoken by different communities and have an official or national status in the countries where they are spoken (Messele and Michael 2009; Romaine 2002). According to UNESCO (2003) and Romaine (2002), many languages are not written, they are not learnt at school or spoken by youth, they are not even recognised as the official and the national languages; they are limited to the local community and home functions, and are spoken by a small number of people. Such languages that are not used as official or national languages are on the brink of dying (Fromkin et al. 2011). In addition, Sallabank (2010) and Fishman (1997) stated that endangered languages became such because they were not transmitted to the next generation and lacked a daily life support as they were not being taught in the schools and did not have an official or a national language status, and as such, may gradually disappear. With regards to this, the Democratic Republic of Congo is a good example. The country consists of both minority languages and the dominant languages (Bokamba 2011).

Literature has revealed that in the DRC, the dominant languages affect the minority languages because they are used for high functions in the public domains, while endangered languages

like the minority languages are used for the low functions in the private sectors. For example, minority languages are used when cultural rituals are performed by the people of the same ethnic group. Such situation could lead to the minority languages being extinct especially in the societies in a multilingual setting. The DRC is linguistically diverse and the range of linguistic diversity in every corner of the country is complex (Zouhir 2013). Crystal (2010) supported this idea and pointed out that when a community has a large cultural and language diversity, the community members may shift to some dominant languages. This situation can lead to the variation in the status of the larger community, where one culture dominates the other (Karanja 2006). To this end, the Katanga community is no exception. They have a variety of linguistic influences due to the dominant languages that have impacted on the minority languages.

Many studies have been conducted on the issue of how minority languages are dominated by the elevation of the European dominant languages in their communities of use (Crystal 2010; UNESCO 2003). The results of a study conducted by Bokamba (2011) and Phillipson (2010) revealed that the imposition of the dominant languages had impacted negatively on the minority languages and their cultures. Other studies revealed that the marginalisation of the minority

languages was due to the education system, since it is provided in the dominant languages rather than in the minority language (Omoniyi 2013). The current research sought to investigate the extent to which language factors related to the French, English and the Kiswahili affected the status of the Katanga language in the Katanga province of the DRC.

Research has revealed that many languages are not recognised as the official and the national languages (Kasanga 2012), within the policy documents of the country (Bokamba 2011; Batibo 2009). Sallabank (2010) stated that both the speakers of the minority and the dominant languages are to be blame for the language endangerment. It is clear that the policy makers in the DRC favoured the dominant languages and their cultures to dominate the DRC's activities and languages (Bokamba 2011). Therefore, it is important to conduct a research that seeks to investigate the language factors affecting the status of the minority language spoken in the DRC.

The apparent lack of use of the minority African languages in the public domains is a complex issue in the sense that many of the minority languages in their community of use like in the DRC are not recognised officially (UNESCO 2003). As revealed from the literature dealing with factors affecting the minority languages, one of the main problems is that the Africans have abandoned their languages and preferred to use the dominant colonial languages because of the education and social reasons in their countries (Bokamba 2012; Ouane and Glanz 2010). This is echoed by Bokamba (2011) who noted that when a language has a high status, that language is officially recognised, it is spoken by many people, it has economic power and linguistic resources. In the DRC, French, English and Kiswahili have a high status and the economic power; they are recognised officially while the Katanga language has a low status (Kasanga 2012). Consequently, the dominant languages are used for writing official documents; they are used for international communication and diplomacy (Sesep cited in Kasanga 2012; Mongaba 2012).

Dominant languages are used as the medium of instruction from primary schools up to the universities. It means that knowledge of the dominant languages becomes important in accessing the services as in the case of job opportunities in the world. In the DRC, Congolese and other international employers demand a profi-

ciency in French for job opportunities (Kasanga 2012). Observations have been made that the Katanga language is used in the private domains for cultural activities. This idea is supported by Henderson et al. (2014) who stated that language endangerment occurs when a language is not used in the public domains, but can be used in the private sectors where the community members learn cultural knowledge. Such a situation gives the dominant languages opportunities to be used in education, media and government offices at the expense of the minority languages (Hibbert 2011).

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study was to investigate the language factors affecting the Katanga language spoken in the Katanga province of the DRC, where French, English and Kiswahili are the dominant languages used for high activities in the public domains and strategies that can be used to address the situation of the language endangerment in the Katanga area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research used the qualitative method to investigate the language factors affecting the Katanga language in the DRC. A case study design employed in this study gave an in-depth information and rich details on how the French, English and the Kiswahili affected all the minority languages like the Katanga language in the DRC. Data collection was done through individual interviews, as well as documents analysis from the selected Katanga people on the perceptions of the status of their own languages.

Participants

The participants were eleven and comprised two elders and two parents particularly the speakers of the Katanga language and Kiswahili in general. The researchers interviewed these respondents in their houses for the purpose of collecting original information on how the dominant languages affected the minority language in the Katanga community of the DRC. Further, one chief was interviewed in his house and was

considered as a person with knowledge, power and experience as traditional leaders are generally regarded as custodians of the local cultures and languages. In addition, two PhD supervisors were sampled from the University of Lubumbashi because it was a rich setting where lecturers spent most of their time teaching language courses through the education system where students and other people learnt the minority and the dominant languages. On the other hand, four students were also sampled from the University of Lubumbashi because the researchers wanted to know what languages, the students used to learn their subjects. The researchers interviewed the participants for the purposes of understanding the specific problems causing language endangerment and strategies that can be used to address the situation of the language endangerment in the Katanga area.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed thematically using descriptive analysis. Patterns, similarities and differences emerged and descriptive narrations on these differences enabled the researchers to determine the language factors affecting the status of the Katanga language in the community of use.

RESULTS

Interviews: Congolese Katanga People' Responses

The research sought to establish how the dominant languages as factors affecting the minority language in the DRC. Data collected from the speakers of the Katanga language indicated that the dominant languages like French, English, Kiswahili and other languages were used in the public sectors such as the education system. The data also revealed that the dominant languages affected the lecturers and the students' ability to communicate in the Katanga language. Further, the participants also indicated that people learn how to read and write in the dominant languages at schools or universities. To support this, respondent UVL5 explained:

In the DRC, it is difficult to see Congolese people use their mother tongues such as Kisongo, Lunda, Kimbala, Kibemba and the Katanga language in public environments. They al-

ways use French, English, standard Kiswahili and other languages in public environments and in other important areas. That way, other languages include the Katanga language are affected. I mean that the language factors affect the status of the Katanga language are the official and national languages and other dominant languages. The fact is that at schools or at the universities, lecturers are forced to teach in French, English, Kiswahili and other languages even students are forced to learn the dominant languages. The use of the dominant languages in the education effect the lecturers and students' ability in the Katanga language.

Another response was given by a respondent FGP1 concerning the language factors affecting the minority language. A respondent FGP1 supported the view mentioned above by saying:

The education influences the Katanga language as scholars or people learn how to read and write in the dominant languages at schools. In addition, if a language is not introduced at school or taught at school anybody's ability to read and write the language will be lost.

The interviews conducted on the aspects of the language factors affecting the minority languages like the Katanga language in the DRC revealed that dominant languages were the major problems of language endangerment because the education system was done in the dominant languages. Consequently, Katanga people abandoned their own language and lost the ability to speak, read and write the language.

Congolese Katanga People' Responses on Strategies to Revitalise the Minority Languages

The study sought to establish what strategies the Katanga people used to revitalise the minority languages in the DRC. Data from the respondents indicated that only a few strategies were used which included encouraging the people to use the minority language in the private areas and when organising the local meetings. They also indicated that people were permitted to use the Katanga language in the private space. In response to this question, respondent CONGOP1 stated:

The community plays a minor role in maintaining the Katanga language by teaching and speaking the Katanga language when organ-

ising local meetings. The elders in the Katanga community should hold workshops to teach the youths and kids in the Katanga language.

Another strategy was given by FGP1 who explained that:

The authorities prefer people use the dominant languages in public sectors since the Katanga language is not an official language in the country. Students, lecturers and the staff members are allowed to speak French, sometimes English and the national languages. The Katanga language is spoken openly amongst Katanga people and people are permitted to use the minority language in private environments.

Based on the above results, it was clear that the Katanga people did not use a wide range of strategies to revitalise the minority language within the Katanga community. As such, this could lead the language into extinction.

DISCUSSION

The study established that one of the language factors affecting the minority language in the DRC was French, English, Kiswahili and the other dominant languages. It meant that Katanga people did not have the opportunity to use the minority language in the education system because the dominant languages were the most useful languages in the education setting. Other studies revealed that teaching and learning a language at schools or universities or training centres guaranteed its survival (Poggeschi 2012). This implies that the speakers of the minority language were forced to use the dominant languages at the expense of their own mother tongue.

The study revealed that since the minority language was not recognised officially in the policy of the DRC, it was an endangered language. Berker and Goldstein (2011) revealed that people used other languages and they failed to use the minority languages in the public environments. This also became problematic because the people could only use the dominant languages than their own language at the schools or the universities. That way, French, English, Kiswahili and other languages as powerful languages continued to affect the students, lecturers and many other people's ability to enhance their communication in the minority language, since it was not promoted as a medium of instruction in the learning institutions (Alexander 2013).

Data elicited from the interviews further revealed that only a few strategies were suggested which included encouraging the community members to speak the minority language for private use only. That way, the minority language will be spoken openly amongst its speakers as an endangered language. As revealed in the literature review that the minority African languages including the Katanga language are only used in the private sectors (Awobuluyi 2013). Sallabank (2010) stated that in many communities in the world, authorities encouraged people to use their minority languages in both private and public sectors as to keep their languages alive. It meant that the Katanga language was a spoken language amongst its speakers as an endangered language in the DRC.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research was to determine and analyse the language factors affecting the status of the minority language and strategies. Congolese-Katanga people used to revitalise the minority language in the DRC. The interpretation and discussion of the findings revealed that the Katanga language was affected because of the dominant languages like French, Kiswahili, English and other languages that were used in the public domains. Therefore, the research could be seen as a crucial source of information to the policy makers in the government sectors and the linguistics teachers in the DRC and the society about the issue of languages that need to be revitalised through effective language policies. Further, the significance of this study lies in its implications for the Katanga language in general, but also for the African languages in general, as the colonial languages are still limiting the indigenous languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authorities in the DRC must put the minority languages' programmes strategy in place so that Congolese-Katanga people must use their minority language in the public areas such as education.

There is a need for the authorities in the DRC to give an adequate support to the speakers of the minority languages to revitalise their own language. Katanga people must be encouraged to use the minority language at the universities

or the schools so that the ability to speak, write and read the languages cannot be lost and the language can be developed in the country. In addition, Katanga people must be encouraged to use both the minority and the dominant languages at the universities or the schools so that the people might have the knowledge of both the minority and the dominant languages.

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Paper received for publication on July 2016
Paper accepted for publication on October 2016