

Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Dholuo: Investigating Native Language Retention Among the Immigrant Luo Community in Kisii Town

Mary Buyaki Makanga¹ & Ogone John Obiero²

Abstract

In almost all parts of the world, languages in contact maintain their vitality or experience shift. But whether a language is lost or maintained during contact depends on language choices made by speakers. Ordinarily, a minority language faces shift the moment it comes into close contact with a dominant language. However, cases exist where minority languages threatened by shift survive pressure exerted on them from dominant languages. In Africa, the problem of language shift is persistent given the plurilingual nature of the region. In Kenya in particular, the shift from Suba which is a minority language to Dholuo which is a dominant language in Nyanza region is a case in point (Ogone, 2008, 2010). Yet some minority groups maintain their languages despite pressure from dominant communities with which they are in contact, for instance, Kinubi - a minority language spoken in Kibra area of Nairobi is maintained despite its minority status (Yakub, 2012). These two observations represent two opposing standpoints regarding the fate of minority languages when they are in close contact with majority languages. As such, it is not clear whether a minority language is maintained or lost when in contact with a dominant other. This paper seeks to investigate whether Dholuo language spoken in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town has been maintained by its speakers in the face of overwhelming dominance of Ekegusi language in this area. The paper particularly studies how the various languages available to the residents are used in various domains in Kisii town to determine their relative ethnolinguistic vitality. Arguments in this paper follow the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory which holds the assumption that maintenance or shift of a language is based on a group's vitality to act collectively in intergroup situations. From a population of 525 Luo people living in Daraja Mbili (see Kenya Census report, 2019), the study purposively sampled 53 subjects in total. Data for this study was collected through interviews and observation schedules. The data was analyzed qualitatively using explanations and descriptions.

1. Introduction

A language shift may be necessitated by domains such as daily use and communication. However, in certain areas, minority groups do have the option of using the mother tongue, for example with family, friends and in various settings. This suggests that there are certain factors which play a role in facilitating language maintenance (Fase et al; 1992, Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). Moreover, if the population of speakers is concentrated in the same place, there are high chances of maintenance of the language because there are stronger cultural ties between speakers of a language which lessens the likelihood that a complete shift will occur (Crystal, 2000; Heller, 2011). Language maintenance is concerned with the retention of the minority language by its speakers when it is in contact with the majority language. According to Kloss (1988), six factors reinforce language maintenance, namely religio-societal insulation, time of immigration, existence of language islands, affiliation with denominations fostering parochial schools, pre-immigration experience with language maintenance efforts, and former use as the only official tongue during the pre-Anglo-American period. In addition, or related to these are nine factors categorized as ambivalent, whereby they may promote language maintenance or shift. The factors are high educational level of immigrants, low educational level of immigrants, great numerical strength, smallness of the group, cultural and or/ linguistic similarity to Anglo- Americans, cultural and/or linguistic dissimilarity between minority and majority, suppression of minority tongues, attitudes of the majority to the language or group, and socio-cultural characteristics of the

¹Mary Buyaki Makanga is an M.A. Linguistics Student at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology.

²Ogone John Obiero is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology.

minority group in question (García-Sánchez, 2014; Wren, 2021). In their ethnolinguistic vitality model, Giles et al. (1977) demonstrate the importance of some of these socio-structural and socio-psychological factors in the study of language behavior of group members in contact situations.

Accordingly, the continuity of a minority language relies on the group's success in preserving their ethnolinguistic vitality. Giles et al. (1977) identify structural variables that influence the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group as status factors, demographic factors, and institutional support factors. They contend that these three types of structural variables interact to provide the context for understanding the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. It is argued that the more vitality a group has the more likely it is to survive as a group, and conversely, the less vitality a group has the more likely it is to cease to exist as a separate group (Giles et al. 1977). When a territory inhabited by a majority of the group's members is a politically constituted entity, such as a municipality or province, the situation fosters the group's vitality since it ensures the group can manage certain elements of its community life (Giles et al; 1977). In line with the current development, the meaning of language vitality is extended beyond the concern of minority groups. From the early days of exploration into ethnolinguistic vitality, language use has been further hypothesized as a strong determinant in perceiving identity, which is probably why Gao et al. (1994) and McEntee-Atalianis (2011) argue that ethnic identity influences language vitality.

This paper focuses on ethnolinguistic vitality within a contact setting that brought together an immigrant community and a dominant native community. In multilingual environments, language contact may lead to two possible outcomes: the minority group adopts the dominant language, forsaking their own, or they persist in using their language despite pressure to assimilate into the dominant language. However, various studies indicate that the outcome of such contact situations depends on multiple factors defining the relationship between the language communities involved and the circumstances of their interaction, making it challenging to predict clear outcomes in advance (Chen and Wang, 2023). Similar to many societies, some native languages in Kenya have become extinct, while others face obsolescence due to language shift, whereas some remain robust and vital. Among these vital languages are minority languages like Kinubi, spoken in limited domains outside the home, while threatened languages include those once spoken by large populations, such as Suba language, which have become marginalized through contact and assimilation. Dholuo is a dominant language in Kenya; however, its speakers, marooned by the Abagusii in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town, exist within a distinct context from their parent communities elsewhere in the country. This paper investigates the extent of ethnolinguistic vitality among the migrant Luo community living in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town, aiming to determine whether they have retained their language or succumbed to pressure from the dominant Ekegusii community in the area. One way to make that determination is by investigating how Dholuo speakers use their native language across different domains within the identified area.

2. Literature Review

Fishman (1972) defines a domain as a social-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, the relationship between communicators, and locales of communication, in accordance with societal institutions and spheres of the speech community. Landweer (2016) argues that speakers make language choices in every interaction, and these cumulative choices suggest which languages are preferred for each domain within the community's repertoire. Domains aim to categorize major interaction clusters common in multilingual settings and the roles different languages play within them. They range from private to public domains in terms of language maintenance, including home/family, cultural, social, worship/religion, education, business/trade, government services, road/street, or mass media. This study selected various domains to determine the extent to which Dholuo is used within them.

The home or family domain is considered the most crucial for language use and the last to be displaced in any linguistic characteristic (Landweer, 2016, 2008; Fishman, 1977). It serves as an 'anchor' domain and is typically the last to change (Adams, 2012). The home domain is significant because it is relied upon by multilingual societies; it is intimate and often involves family members communicating in their native language (L1), making it central (Fishman, 1972, 1977). Veltman (1983) emphasizes that the language used by parents significantly influences their children's language choices; therefore, if parents use a specific language with their children, subsequent generations are likely to follow suit. This study considers intergenerational transmission crucial for ethnolinguistic vitality and examines whether Dholuo language spoken in Daraja Mbili benefit from this transmission between parents and children.

Moreover, the more domains in which a vernacular or indigenous language is used, the more vital the language becomes (Adams et al., 2012; Ahn & Ryang, 2017). For instance, Giddens (1989) observed that the Puerto Rican community in New York regularly used Spanish at home but switched to English in educational and employment settings. The consideration of domains in language maintenance and shift studies is essential for understanding language status across various interactive situations in a speech community, as it indicates which codes are typically selected or maintained in different contexts. This study also analyzed language choices and preferences made by Dholuo speakers beyond the home domain to determine their vitality in those contexts. Landweer (2016) identifies cultural activities such as marriage, funerals, naming ceremonies, and public functions, where language choice is crucial. Members of a speech community select a language that best suits these situations. Additionally, specific cultural functions, like administering oaths during initiation rites, necessitate the use of the native language (L1). In social domains, language use in political campaigns, social gatherings, sports, and legal proceedings holds significance (Landweer, 2008). However, Adams (2012) warns that domains are influenced by various factors including topic, location, and participants.

Of these domains, educational institutions are the most influential in language maintenance or shift. According to Fishman (1972), education is a pivotal institution for language maintenance, as the establishment of ethnic group schools utilizing indigenous mother tongues reinforced comprehension, reading, and speaking skills while fostering allegiance to the language. Although language policy in education in Kenya allows for the use of mother tongues or languages of wider communication up to grade three (Muaka, 2011), this study investigated the use of Dholuo mother tongue as language of instruction in schools attended by children from the interest group. The presence or absence of this mother tongue was observed in the school context, and interviews with teachers were conducted to assess the extent of their usage in school. Other domains include business, which encompasses employment, private enterprise, and marketing. Within the transportation domain, there are vehicles owned by relatives, those owned by members outside the speech community in question, and public transport. The language used in business transactions is crucial for facilitating the exchange of goods and services. The domain of government administration brings people together for specific purposes (Fishman, 1977; Muaka, 2021). The pertinent question for this study was which language is used by whom and for what purpose? A language is considered vital when it is prominently used across various domains.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study applied Giles et al.'s (1977) ethnolinguistic vitality theory, which explains mother tongue maintenance, language shift, and loss in contact situations. The theory views the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group as its ability to remain distinctive in intergroup situations. If this distinctiveness diminishes or is lost, minority groups may eventually cease to exist as distinctive entities. Ethnolinguistic variables include relative status, socio-economic circumstances, language status, sheer numbers of speakers, their distribution, and institutional support through education, mass media, and government services. The theory posits that minority groups tend to identify with the dominant majority in contact situations, thereby relinquishing membership of their own culture.

The theory also addresses factors underlying ethnolinguistic vitality. Currie and Hogg (1994) identified language vitality, political and economic vitality, and cultural vitality as core determinants of language vitality in intergroup contexts. Related studies, such as those by Garcia and Wei (2014) and Canagarajah (2018), further explore the role of sociolinguistic landscapes and community engagement in sustaining language vitality. Allard and Landry (1994) conceptualize these factors in terms of four capitals: demographic capital, economic capital, political capital, and cultural capital. Demographic capital pertains to the number of group members, their proportion in the population, distribution, birth rate, endogamy/exogamy rates, and migration. Economic capital refers to the group's representation and control in commercial and industrial institutions (Heller, 2011). Political capital involves political representation, language services, pressure groups, and social movements. Cultural capital encompasses institutional support in education, religion, culture, and mass media (Jansen, 2023).

The ethnolinguistic vitality theory delineates factors that either support or undermine language vitality and clarifies the close relationship between language and group identity, illustrating how ethnic distinctiveness is articulated through language. Consequently, Dholuo speakers would risk losing a significant aspect of their ethnic identity if they were to lose their native languages. The ethnolinguistic vitality theory also explains critical variables such as the number of language speakers, their distribution within a particular area, and their usage or preference in

the areas under investigation. These variables determine whether a language thrives or diminishes in a contact situation.

4. Methodology

The study was conducted in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town, focusing on the Luo community's interactions with the majority Abagusii population. The study focused on language use in various domains including the home, school, workplaces, places of worship, government services, and in the media. A descriptive qualitative and quantitative design was used to assess language habits and attitudes, with data collected through interviews and observations. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the findings. The sample frame or population of interest in this study comprised a total of 525 Luo individuals residing in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town.

Though a sample frame should reflect the characteristics of the target population, typically up to 10% of it - but not exceeding 1000 individuals, in sociolinguistics, a sample size is often underpinned by the study objectives. In this study, the researchers used cluster sampling to select Daraja Mbili area and purposive sampling to choose individuals speaking Luo in regular contact with Ekegusii speakers. The selected participants were residents of Daraja Mbili who spoke Dholuo and were known to have regular contact with Ekegusii-speaking individuals across various domains within the selected area. Convenience and stratified sampling procedures were employed to select the locations and respondents. Accordingly, the sample size was set at 53 Luo residents.

Interviews and observation schedules were used as the primary methods of data collection for this study. The researchers used interviews with parents, schoolteachers, priests, chiefs, and broadcasters regarding intergroup language usage within the groups with whom they regularly interact. The observation schedule for this study aligns with key questions concerning variables of ethnolinguistic vitality such as domains of language use, language preferences, respondent choices, and language perceptions, all of which underpin language shift or maintenance in intergroup contexts. Observations were made in various domains, including school, the chief's baraza, the church, the market, and the home. For instance, observations in church focused on the most preferred language, by whom, preference order, cases of translation, and language usage levels. In school, observations were made regarding mother tongue usage in the first three grades, preferences from observed language use, and perceptions of available languages in that context. Similar procedures were followed at the chief's baraza, church, school, market, and home domains. The schedule was designed to encompass all key variables relevant to each observed context.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Language Use Domains Influencing Dholuo Vitality

Fishman (1972) defines domains as social-cultural constructs abstracted from communication topics, relationships between communicators, and communication locales within society's institutions and speech community spheres. Landweer (2016) argues that speakers continuously make choices about language usage during interactions, thereby shaping the language preferences within a community's repertoire.

5.1.1 The Home Domain

In the home domain, language used with parents often holds significant importance in maintaining the native language. When asked which language was predominantly used with parents, the data in Table 1 illustrates the language preferences of parents.

Table 1: The Most Preferred Language with Parents

Language	Percentage
Kiswahili	25.0
Dholuo	65.0
Ekegusii	2.00
Dholuo/Ekegusii	4.00
English	4.00
Total	100.0

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that Dholuo is the predominant language spoken with parents, accounting for 65.0% of responses, followed by Kiswahili at 25.0%. Ekegusii is spoken at a rate of 2.0%, while Dholuo/Ekegusii and English are equally used at 4.0%. This shows Dholuo as the primary language of communication within the family setting. Additionally, Ekegusii, despite it not being the mother tongue of Dholuo speakers, is also spoken by them, although at a dismal rate of 2.0%.

The preference of Dholuo at 65.0% in Table 1 suggests its maintenance within the home domain, reflecting the efforts of parents in the purposively selected homes to preserve Dholuo language. Guardado (2002) investigated the loss and maintenance of Spanish among Hispanic children in Vancouver, Canada, finding that parents in immigrant families utilized positive and engaging methods to encourage their children to use their first language. This demonstrates the crucial role parents play in language maintenance, as emphasized by Kouritzin (1999) among other scholars. Following the principles of ethnolinguistic vitality theory regarding dynamics of language maintenance, shift, and loss in contact situations, use of Dholuo at 65.0% within the home domain by parents is an indication of its maintenance in the selected homes.

Respondents were also asked which language they were most likely to use within their households. Table 2 is a summary of their responses.

Table 2: Language Most Used within the Household

Language	Percentage
Dholuo	50.0
English	4.00
Kiswahili	26.0
Dholuo/English	20.0
Total	100.0

These findings indicate that Dholuo was the predominant language spoken at home, accounting for 50.0%, followed by Kiswahili at 26.0%, Dholuo/English at 20.0%, and English at 4.0%. We can therefore conclude that the predominance of Dholuo points to a strong ethnolinguistic vitality at the household level. Though the use of Kiswahili or a mix of English and Dholuo indicate a bi/multilingual tendency among the respondents, the usage of Kiswahili at 26% in the household is a sign that Dholuo is already facing competition from Kiswahili in the household and especially by the younger population. Nonetheless, even when sometimes used alongside English, Dholuo still has a strong vitality at the household level. Confirmatory observations were conducted in the home settings aimed to capture nuances not easily obtained through the interviews. Accordingly, three observations were made at different homes across Daraja Mbili, purposively selected by the researchers. During these observations, Dholuo was observed as predominantly used, with some instances of code-switching to English observed among Luo speakers. Dholuo usage was especially common when both conversational partners were Luo adulspeakers or when Luo friends were present. In contrast, younger people³ preference for Kiswahili over Dholuo especially in homes around Daraja Mbili.

Language Spoken at Home with Children

Having established the preference of Dholuo as the primary language spoken at home with parents, it was essential to ascertain the language used at home with children. Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) emphasize that continuous use of the mother language at home is an effective method for passing on the heritage language and that language usage between parents and children at home is a crucial determinant in language maintenance or loss across generations. Li (1999) highlights the significance of immigrant children's proficiency in their first language (L1), asserting that attitude formation is greatly influenced by parents' positive attitudes toward the heritage language at home. This underscores the importance of parents' supportive interactions with children in their L1, which is likely to enhance the likelihood of maintaining the language across generations.

Table 3: Language Most Preferred with the Children

Language	Percentage
Kiswahili	58.0
Dholuo	4.00
English	38.0
Total	100.0

From Table 3, Kiswahili is predominantly spoken with children, accounting for 58.0%, closely followed by English at 38.0%, while Dholuo usage stands at 4.0%. These findings point to a disruption of intergenerational transmission of Dholuo in the area of study which aligns with Chen and Wang's (2023) observation that young migrant people are particularly susceptible to language loss, especially during their early school years, which can lead to significant challenges in family communication. These authors emphasize the critical role the family plays in preserving children's mother tongue at home. Providing sense of belonging to one's ethnic identity and culture, as well as instilling a sense of responsibility to family and community, are fundamental elements that families should impart at home, as these aspects are unlikely to be learned solely in school. From the findings, use of languages other than Dholuo with children signifies a decline in Dholuo vitality among the younger generation. Role of the home domain in language maintenance has been reaffirmed by studies such as Fogle's (2019) that reiterate the importance of early childhood language practices in sustaining minority languages.

5.1.2 Language Use in Everyday Conversation

Data on language use in everyday conversation among Dholuo speakers as reported in Table 4 presents a different picture.

Table 3: Language Used in Everyday Conversations

Language	Percentage
Kiswahili	20.0
Dholuo	54.0
Ekegusii	2.00
Dholuo/Ekegusii	10.0
English	14.0
Total	100.0

The data reveals Dholuo as being the most commonly spoken language at 54.0%, followed by Kiswahili at 20.0%. English ranks third at 14.0%, while Ekegusii, the least spoken, stands at 2.0%. While these figures highlight the tendency to use Dholuo over other languages in everyday conversation, the fact that about half of the respondents selected Kiswahili, English, Ekegusii and a mix of Dholuo and Ekegusii is an indication that Dholuo is receiving pressure from other languages; something that might undermine its vitality to its speakers in this area over time. Also notable is the fact that 10% of the respondents confessed to using a mix of Dholuo and Ekegusii in conversation meaning their functional knowledge of Ekegusii is growing and might spread to other social contexts.

5.1.3 Mother Tongue in the School Domain

As pointed out from the reviewed literature, educational institutions are the most influential in language maintenance or shift. This is why Kenya's policy in education makes a provision for teaching mother tongue at pre-primary level and during the first three grades of primary education. Studies by Mohanty (2019) and Benson (2021) discuss the critical role of multilingual education in sustaining indigenous languages and the challenges posed by dominant language policies. This study also investigated whether children were taught their mother tongue in lower

primary grades of 1 to 3, as the use of Dholuo in school would serve as an indicator of the language's vitality. Table 5 lays out the responses.

Table 5: Whether Mother Tongue is taught in Lower Primary Schools

Response	Percentage
No	70.0
Yes	26.0
Non response	4.0
Total	100.0

Table 5 indicates that children were indeed taught mother tongue in lower primary schools. The majority responded positively at 70.0%, followed by a negative response at 26.0%, with 4.0% providing no response. Given the affirmative response regarding the teaching of mother tongue, it became imperative to ascertain which specific mother tongue was being taught in these grades. The follow up revealed an overwhelming choice of Kiswahili at 98%, meaning Dholuo was not taught in the Daraja Mbili area where Dholuo speaking immigrants live. Excluding Dholuo at this level amounts to its diminishing use in the school context and beyond. According to ethnolinguistic vitality theory, vitality of an ethnolinguistic group lies in its ability to remain distinctive in intergroup situations. A key determinant of that vitality is the cultural capital that institutional support through education offers (see Allan and Landry, 1994). In their study, Allan and Landry highlight the consequences of disregarding students' language, culture, and experiences in classroom interactions, noting that such neglect places students at a disadvantage, as it disregards their life experiences and knowledge.

Observations made from three primary schools attended by pupils from Dholuo speaking communities in Daraja Mbili confirmed that lower primary teachers conducted their lessons mainly in Kiswahili. However, the researchers observed that some pupils struggled to understand the lessons delivered in Kiswahili, prompting teachers to switch to Ekegusii for pupils from Dholuo speaking backgrounds. Similar observations were made at Nyambara and Kiamwasi mixed primary schools, where Kiswahili predominated as the language of communication, particularly in lower primary classrooms. This discrepancy contrasts with the Kenyan language policy, which stipulates that the language of instruction for lower primary schools should align with that of the catchment area, suggesting a lack of familiarity among Dholuo children with their mother tongue. During playtime outside the classroom, English, Kiswahili or a mix of both were predominantly spoken, reflecting a tendency among children in the area to communicate in languages other than their mother tongue.

To gather more information about these observations, the researchers conducted interviews in English with three respondents from the school domain. The excerpt below provides insights into the responses obtained.

Transcript 1

Interviewer: Is Dholuo spoken in this school?

Respondent: No, Dholuo is not spoken in this school. Kiswahili is the one that is spoken. But secretly some Pupils speak Dholuo and others report them for punishment because it is not allowed in this school. We discourage use of mother tongue in school.

Interviewer: In what languages are children in classes 1-3 taught?

Respondent: Classes 1-3 children are taught in Kiswahili and English.

Given that the sampled schools are situated in an urban area, it is no surprise that languages of wider communication, such as English or Kiswahili, are used in the lower primary grades, as the pupils come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. However, the use of punishment to discourage the use of mother tongues means that Dholuo, or any other native language, is actively discouraged and denied space within the school environment. This undermines their continued use and goes against the principle of encouraging mother tongue education in lower grades to support linguistic diversity (see Heugh, 2020 and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2021).

5.1.4 Language use at the Chief's Baraza

One way to understand language preferences, choices and dynamics at the local level in Kenya would be to focus on the Chief's Baraza as a domain. The Chief's Baraza is a weekly public meeting convened by an area Chief as a forum to share government information, policies, and to consider issues of interest to local communities. In this study, observations made during the Chief's Baraza sessions occurred in two distinct locations. In the Nyambara area, interactions primarily took place in Ekegusii. However, when some speakers noticed unfamiliar individuals who did not understand Ekegusii, they switched to Kiswahili. The same was observed during the Baraza sessions at Soko Mjinga area. The observations revealed the pattern shown below in Table 6.

Table 6: Language Use at the Chief's Baraza

Language	Percentage
Ekegusii	68.0
Kiswahili	30.0
English	2.00
Total	100.0

From Table 6, non use of Dholuo at the Chief's Baraza, where Luo people participate and access government services, exerts pressure on Dholuo speakers to assimilate into the wider community by adopting the dominant languages (Ekegusii at 68% and Kiswahili at 30%). Social dynamics and power asymmetry in this context can lead minority speakers to feel compelled to learn the "necessary" languages to participate and fit in (Spolsky, 2004). As Ekegusii and Kiswahili become more prevalent at the Baraza, opportunities for using Dholuo diminish, paving the way for its obsolescence (Crystal, 2000).

5.1.5 Language use in Church

As with other public domains, the church can serve as a compelling setting for either language maintenance or shift. For example, a study by Clyne and Kipp (1999) demonstrates that the maintenance of Arabic among immigrant communities in Australia is strongly influenced by its use in mosques, during religious ceremonies, and due to the importance of the Quran and Classical Arabic. Key factors contributing to the preservation of Arabic among Australian Muslims include access to the Quran, communication with family members, and connections to their country of origin. Clyne (2003) further highlights Arabic as one of the best-maintained languages in Australia, particularly within the Arabic community in Melbourne. Responses to the question "which language is most likely used in church" in this study confirms a similar trend with the Luo community living in Daraja Mbili area of Kisii town.

Table 7: Language choices in church

Language	Perceptions
Dholuo	54.0
English	6.00
Kiswahili	14.0
Dholuo/Ekegusii	24.0
Ekegusii	2.00
Total	100.0

The data in Table 7 shows Dholuo is the most spoken language in church at 54.0%, a mix of Dholuo/Ekegusii at 24.0%, Kiswahili at 14.0%, while English is used at 6.0%. Ekegusii alone was reported as the least used at 2.0%.

From the findings, it is noted that Dholuo dominates the usage in purposively selected churches within Daraja Mbili, confirming the tendency of immigrant communities to pay homage to their identities. As is the case with the immigrant Arabic speaking community in Australia, the Luo community residing in Daraja Mbili seems to view the church as a vital institution in providing the opportunity for cultural connection with their cultural roots in addition to serving as the domain for sharing native traditions, experiences, and values in Luo language. The church also offers the social support that is crucial for people who are trying to build a community in a foreign land. By conducting prayer in Dholuo, the Luo community in Daraja Mbili get to create a critical context for maintenance of their heritage language, which aligns with the conclusions arrived at by Pak (2003), who examined the role of the church in preserving local speech in Montreal's Korean community. Pak noted that Korean churches provided second-generation children with an environment where they could strengthen their Korean language as a marker of their ethnic identity. But noteworthy from Table 6 are the 24% of the respondents who chose a mix of Dholuo and Ekegusii as the language most likely to be used in Church. In context, this probably means a growing number of the Luo people living in Daraja Mbili already reckon with the need to learn Ekegusii. If this tendency spreads into other domains beyond the church, a state of stable bi/ multilingualism might result, with the languages listed in Table 7 being used and passed down side by side in Daraja Mbili and other areas across Kisii town.

Additional information on language choices in church was gathered through observations made at three selected churches situated around the Daraja Mbili area at which Dholuo was most likely used in sermon delivery or in casual conversations within the church compound. The excerpt below provides insights into the responses obtained.

Transcript 2:

Interviewer: How well do you understand Ekegusii?

Respondent: To some extent. I do not understand Ekegusii well; in fact, I do not speak the language properly. But I understand some common words

Interviewer: In which language is the service conducted in this church?

Respondent: Here they use Dholuo, of course alongside Kiswahili, sometimes. Most of the people who come to this Church are Luo people. But they occasionally use Kiswahili so that young people who do not speak Dholuo well can understand.

Interviewer: Are there people who come to this Church that do not understand Dholuo?

Respondent: I think there are, mostly young people. We live in a mixed community so that is expected.

This transcript features an elderly speaker from the church in Daraja Mbili who acknowledges some understanding of Ekegusii but reports the predominant use of Dholuo during church proceedings. This observation aligns with Pak's (2003) conclusion that the church offers a "safe enclave" for the maintenance of native languages among migrant communities.

5.1.6 Language use in the Market Place

Interviews conducted in the market setting confirmed that Kiswahili is preferred over other available languages as the language of wider communication. However, the concurrent use of other languages alongside Kiswahili provided insights into the vitality of these languages in the public domain. Table 7 outlines the responses to the question: 'Which language are you most likely to use in the marketplace?'

Table 8: Language Preferences at the Marketplace

Language	Percentage
Kiswahili	76.0
Ekegusii	20.00
Dholuo	3.00
English	1.00
Total	100.0

The data presented in Table 8 indicates that Kiswahili is the predominant language spoken in the marketplace, accounting for 76.0%, followed by Ekegusii at 20.0% and Dholuo at 3.0%. English is only minimally used at 1.0%. The researchers conducted observations in three distinct markets where traders from predominantly Luo and Abagusii communities engaged in business interactions namely Ndizini, Bochura, and Soko Mjinga. During observations at Ndizini market, Kiswahili was the primary language of communication. However, Dholuo was rarely heard in the Bochura market. At Soko Mjinga market, Kiswahili was the most used during sales transactions, likely due to the area's multilingual nature. Being the national language of Kenya, predominant use of Kiswahili is no surprise as it follows the usual pattern of language preferences in multilingual settings. A study by Agha et.al. (2021) discusses how multilingual speakers in commercial settings in Dubai prefer to use English at ATMs, demonstrating strategic language choices speakers make in anticipation of social and economic benefits. This strategic language use is reiterated in a study by Kroll and Dussias (2021) in which they found that bilinguals adapt their language to optimize benefits that can arise from negotiation or business relationships in multilingual contexts. Nevertheless, the minimal use of Dholuo in the marketplace diminishes its vitality within that domain. According to Agha (2022), the visibility and vitality of a language for commercial purposes or its “economic vitality” including aspects like control and representation, are crucial factors that influence language vitality in multilingual settings.

One observation made at the market place in Daraja Mbili showed an interesting encounter between a shopkeeper and a customer in which they speak Ekegusi and Dholuo in turns to each other during a conversation. The full text of that conversation is as in Transcript 3.

Transcript 3:

Customer (Speaking Dholuo): Oyaore

Good morning

Shopkeeper (Speaking Ekegusii): Mbuya mono

Good morning too

Customer (Speaking Dholuo): Idhinade?

How are you?

Shopkeeper (Speaking Ekegusii): Imbuyanakiogoteba

I am okay what are you saying?

Customer (Speaking Ekegusii): Olinendeesukari?(Switching to Dholuo) Angiwelo

Do you have sugar? I have visitors.

Shopkeeper (Speaking Ekegusii): Esukariyaerirekoyenyoranakongu mono

Sugar is finished, getting it is hard.

Customer (Speaking Dholuo): Abotedonewendaang'o

What will I cook for my visitors

Shopkeeper (Speaking Ekegusii): Boria an'goaseng'ina Otieno

Look for it at Otieno's mother

Customer (Speaking Ekegusii): Ongina Otieno ngare

Otieno's mother is far

Two key observations can be deduced from Transcript 3. First, both speakers understand each other's mother tongues. Second, the Dholuo speaker appears to demonstrate an adaptive functional knowledge of Ekegusii, as evidenced by their ability to code-switch between the two languages with no difficulty. This interaction showcases a high level of linguistic competence in both languages, suggesting that each speaker maintains their ethnolinguistic identity even during intergroup negotiations. The ease with which both speakers use their own and the other's language indicates a state of bilingual or multilingual capability. Such dynamics in intergroup situations can lead us to conclude that there is no immediate risk of language shift in favour of either language.

6. Summary of the Findings

Findings from this study indicate that Dholuo is actively maintained within the home domain, where it is predominantly spoken by most parents, showing its ethnolinguistic vitality as strong. However, competition from Kiswahili, particularly among younger generations, suggests a gradual shift toward bilingualism or multilingualism in

households. This shift is evident in communication with children, where Kiswahili and English appears to have replaced Dholuo to a great extent, disrupting the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language. In everyday conversations, Dholuo remains the most commonly spoken language, but it faces pressure from Kiswahili, English, and Ekegusii, pointing to a potential language shift over time as bi/multilingualism grows. In the early years of school, Kiswahili overwhelmingly dominates as the language of instruction, with Dholuo excluded from the school domain. As institutional support is key in language maintenance, the exclusion of Dholuo in this context is a direct threat to its vitality in school and the broader community. At the Chief's Baraza, the dominance of Ekegusii and Kiswahili exerts pressure on Dholuo speakers to adopt these languages thereby limiting opportunities for Dholuo use in public settings. While the church serves as a "safe enclave" for maintaining Dholuo among the Luo community living in Daraja Mbili area, the growing use of both Dholuo and Ekegusii suggests a trend toward bilingualism that may extend to other domains. In the marketplace, Kiswahili dominates communication, and the minimal use of Dholuo highlights its declining economic vitality in commercial interactions.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, while Dholuo is maintained within the home domain, indicating strong ethnolinguistic vitality, the language is experiencing a gradual shift towards bilingualism or multilingualism in the Daraja Mbili area. The competition from Kiswahili and English, particularly among younger generations, disrupts the intergenerational transmission of Dholuo, as seen in communications with children. A disruption in the intergenerational transmission of a language is a risk factor in language survival. Additionally, the dominance of Kiswahili in school and the public domain, such as at the Chief's Baraza and in the marketplace, further threatens Dholuo's vitality. Although the church remains a secure enclave for maintaining Dholuo, the growing trend toward bi/multilingualism with Ekegusii and Kiswahili suggests that without deliberate efforts in favour of the heritage language, Dholuo may continue to decline in influence and use across various domains in the community.

References:

- Adams, A. M. (2012). Phonological processing and reading in children with specific language impairment. *Dyslexia*, 18(3), 166–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dys.1434>
- Agha, A. (2022). *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Agha, A., Barasa, L., & Keane, M. (2021). *The social lives of linguistic fields: Insights from media discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ahn, J., & Ryang, K. (2017). *Korean as a heritage language: Processes of learning and transmission*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Allard, R., & Landry, R. (1994). Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality: A comparison of two measures. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 108, 117–144. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1994.108.117>
- Benson, C. (2021). *Multilingual education for social justice: Globalising the local*. Routledge.
- Canagarajah, S. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language*. Routledge.
- Chen, L. and Wang, D. (2023) Chinese Heritage Language Maintenance in the Context of Superdiversity: Perspectives from Dialect-background Heritage Learners. *Researching and Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language Vol 4.1*. Equinox Publishing.
- Clyne, M. (2003). *Dynamics of language contact: English and immigrant languages*. Cambridge University Press.
- Clyne, M., & Kipp, S. (1999). Pluricentric languages in an immigrant context: Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese in Australia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 20(2), 126–149.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Currie, A., & Hogg, R. (1994). Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Social Adaptation among Vietnamese Refugees in Australia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 108: 97
- Fasch, W., Jaspaert, K., & Kroon, S. (1992). *Maintenance and loss of minority languages*. John Benjamins.
- Fishman, J. A. (1972). *The sociology of language: An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society*. Newbury House.
- Fishman, J. A. (1977). Language and Ethnicity. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, ethnicity, and intergroup relations* (pp. 15–57). Academic Press.
- Fogle, L. W. (2019). *Second-language Socialization and Learner Agency. Adoptive Family Talk*. Multilingual Matters.
- Gao, X., Wei, L., & Yuan, X. (1994). Ethnolinguistic vitality and language maintenance in Hong Kong. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 15(2), 107–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.1994.9994540>
- García-Sánchez, I. M. (2014). *Language and Muslim Immigrant Childhoods: The Politics of Belonging*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Garcia, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giddens, A. (1989). *Sociology*. Polity Press.

- Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y., & Taylor, D. M. (1977). Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations* (pp. 307–348). Academic Press.
- Guardado, M. (2002). *Loss and Maintenance of First Language Skills: Case Studies of Hispanic Families in Vancouver*. University of British Columbia Press.
- Heugh, K. and Stroud, C. 2020. Multilingualism in South African Education: A Southern Perspective. In Hickey, R. (ed). *English in Multilingual South Africa. The Linguistics of Contact and Change*, pp. 216-238. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heller, M. (2011). *Paths to Post-nationalism: A Critical Ethnography of Language and Identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Jansen, S. (2023). Language Ideologies among Spanish Speaking migrants in Germany: Insights from Language Conflict Narratives. *Estudios de Lingüística del Español Vol. 47*
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Report*. Government of Kenya.
- Kloss, H. (1988). *The development of linguistic minorities in the United States: An overview*. Language Policy Research Center.
- Kouritzin, S.G. (1999). *Face(t)s of first language loss*. New York. Routledge.
- Kroll, J. F., & Dussias, P. E. (2021). Making a Case for Language Study in the US: When the Social Contexts and Cognitive Consequences of Bilingualism Align. In M. Siiner, F. Bonacina-Pugh, & N. V. Høffner (Eds.), *Multilingual Perspectives from Europe and Beyond on Language Policy and Practice* (pp. 25-45). Routledge.
- Landweer, M. L. (2016). Indicators of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Review and Score Sheet. *GLALens Volume 10, No. 1*.
- McEntee-Atalianis, L. J. (2011). The Value of Adopting Multiple Approaches and Methodologies in the Investigation of Ethnolinguistic Vitality. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural development*. Taylor & Francis Group
- Mohanty, A.K. (2019). Language Policy in Education in India. *The Routledge International Handbook of Language Education Policy in Asia*. Routledge.
- Muaka, L. (2011). Language Perceptions and Identity among Kenyan Speakers. Selected *Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Eyamba G. Bokamba et al., 217-230. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Ogone, J. O. (2008). Evaluating Language Revitalization in Kenya: The Contradictory Face and Place of the Local Community Factor. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 17(4): 247–268 (2008)
- Ogone, J.O. 2010. "A case of a Mother Tongue and Another Mother Tongue in School: Efforts at Revitalization of Suba Language of Kenya. *Journal of Third World Studies* 27, 2: 267-94.
- Otsuji, E., & Pennycook, A. (2010). Metrolingualism: Fixity, Fluidity, and Language in Flux. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. Taylor and Francis.
- Pak, S. (2003). Language shift among the Korean-American community. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 27(2), 123–144.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2021). *Growing up in societies where multilingualism is the norm—or not: Educational promotion of monolingualism through violation of linguistic human rights*. Cambridge University Press.
- Slaughter-Defoe, D. T & Zhang, D. (2009). Language attitudes and heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum Vol 22*.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Veltman, C. J. (1983). *Language shift in the United States*. Walter de Gruyter.