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Evaluating Language Revitalization in Kenya: The Contradictory Face and Place of The Local Community Factor

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the necessity to revitalize languages that have shown clear signs of endangerment, several proposals have been put forward by various studies (Paulston, 1994; Yamamoto, 1998; Landweer, 1998; Crystal, 2000; Hinton and Hale, 2001; Tsunoda, 2005; UNESCO, 2003; and Grenoble and Whaley, 2006), all of which appear to agree with Fishman (1991) on the centrality of the community whose language is endangered in leading the advocacy for the revival. Some other studies such as Krauss (1992), Rubin (1999), and Crawford (1996) have been very explicit on the community factor, separately arguing that the responsibility of language renewal should first rest upon the local community.

However, such indigenous communities will usually have had their essence of togetherness disrupted to the extent that a concerted effort towards a goal envisaged as 'communal' is near inconceivable. Considering that language shift is often accompanied by a concomitant change in values, to expect local variables to provide the spark as well as sustain the fire for language revitalization is to assume that feelings of group identity remain intact for such a community when language shift takes place (which is not always the case).

This article seeks to report on how factors internal to the Suba community of Kenya are affecting efforts to revitalize their heritage language. An examination of the community variables are here guided by parameters of vitality expounded in Grenoble and Whaley (2006), but with continuous references to the studies cited above.

The data presented and discussed in the article is drawn from a sample of elders and adults from the Suba community. The analysis reveals, among other things, that the progress of language shift from Suba to Dholuo will most likely persist, the revitalization project notwithstanding, but partly due to factors that may be local, but well beyond the community's control.

***Keywords**: African Language Studies, Sociolinguistics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

On a global scale, the problem of language death or endangerment is alarming[1], with the effect that bigger languages continue to expand their territories at the expense of minority languages, some of which do not even have as much as a territory for themselves. With the passing of time, many of such minority languages may not survive the onslaught of dominant others. On the African continent, a survey conducted on language death by Gabriele Sommer in Brenzinger (1992) as well as Batibo (2005) would so far provide a sufficient compilation of all the endangered languages across the continent. As to the causes of such death, language contact has been cited as the main reason. The norm always seems to be that a regional language such as Swahili, Somali, Arabic, Ahmaric or Hausa suffocate smaller others with which they come into contact. But in other cases in Africa, languages of shrinking speech communities are replaced by other relatively small indigenous languages too. Brenzinger (2007) reports the Ethiopian case in which Ongota is replaced by Ts'amakko, Kwegu by Mursi, Shabo by Majang' and Harro by Bayso.

Owing to the problem that is language death and how it affects cultural diversity across the world, language revitalization efforts are slowly becoming commonplace. Through such efforts, a language may be brought back to active use, depending on the state it reached towards death. Worldwide, very spirited efforts as well as weak ones[2] have been reported through which language revitalization[3] may be achieved. However, if language revival means an attempt to turn a language with few or no surviving native speakers back into a normal medium of communication in a community (Nahir, 1984), then Hebrew is the only true instance of this. The two other large and equally strong revival programmes are those for Hawaiian and Maori.

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1 According to UNESCO (see www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangered languages/atlas), 50% of the world's languages may be endangered at various degrees. If we use the estimation of *ETHNOLOGUE* of the total languages spoken as 6 912, about 3 456 languages are on the decline. Considering, as Romaine (2007) does, that linguistic diversity on a world scale reflects a very uneven distribution, chances of survival for the world's minority languages are quite slim. Taking the world's population to be six (6) billion (Gordon, 2005: www.ethnologue.com), 80% or 4.8 billion of that population speaks a total of only 75 languages. In other words 4.8 billion people speak only 1% of the world's close to 7,000 languages (Romaine, 2007).

2 See, for instance, Hale et al (1992) on the Rama language and culture project; Laitin (1989) on the revival of Catalan; Rabin (1963) on the Hebrew revival; McCarty (2003) on Hawaiian revitalization; Yamamoto (1998) on the Mayan revival; Taumoefolau (2002) on Pasifika; Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore (1999) on Athabascan; Ericksen (1992) on Inuit revival, Urla (1988) on the revival of Basque, and Watahomigie and Yamamoto (1992) on the Hualapai bilingual programme.

3 See Chee Chen, Connerty and Paulston, 1994; and Tsunoda, 2005 for the different terms used in reference to language regenesis.

As for Africa, reports on language shift and death have been posted, but not clear-cut accounts of language revival projects (see Batibo, 2005). In Kenya for instance, According to Batibo, of the fifty six (56) indigenous languages, about thirteen (13) are highly endangered while a dozen are either extinct or nearly extinct (– although Heine and Möhlig, 1980, report only about 20 languages as spoken in Kenya; Likewise, Brenzinger, Heine and Sommer, 1991, report 8 of these as extinct, while 5 as in a process of extinction). Yet in Kenya as in other African states, indigenous languages suffer the disadvantage of existing alongside either English (a former colonial language) or Kiswahili (a linguae francae) which may be attributed to the difficult choices based on the politics of language policy in a multi-lingual set up. But this co-existence places indigenous Kenyan languages in bad stead within the school system since the language policy phases them out at the end of the third grade.

1.2 Community as a Factor in Language Revitalization

There are obviously several possible dimensions to a language programme, ranging from the extra-national to the very local level, but the local factors always seem to affect language revitalization programmes more directly. This is perhaps because situational factors that would determine the nature of a project such as attitudes, vitality, resources, and the like are local in nature. A consideration of these factors would also mean the local community takes centre stage. Various studies have been emphatic on this factor as well. For instance, of Crystal's (see Crystal, 2000) six core factors for language maintenance, five are straight community factors. Likewise, Fishman's (see Fishman, 1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale designed to guide revival programmes is a bottom up campaign aiming to secure community factors before the revived language can expand in domain and function. Nearly all language revitalization programmes regarded as largely successful began with and were based on a strong community.

1.3 Language Situation, Maintenance, Shift, and Extinction in Kenya

A range of studies place languages spoken in Kenya between 30 and 60 (see Heine and Möhlig 1980; Batibo 2005; and Githiora 2006). Of these, about 65% are Bantu, between 30–32 % Nilo-Saharan, while the rest are of the Cushitic family. Exact figures as to how many comprise what group, or the absolute total, have been elusive. Githiora attributes this to the possibility that, in the case of Kenya

> "dialect boundaries are not clearly cut isoglosses, but rather dialect continua...further obfuscation is the result of a lack of distinction between

> language, ethnicity, and culture. Non-linguistic factors (e.g. prestige, historic-cultural ties, etc) in a country where ethnolinguistic nationalism is prevalent may at times overshadow strict linguistic criteria normally applied to demarcate language and dialect boundaries." (Githiora 2006: 181)

With respect to language policy, Mugambi (2002) wraps up the picture in the paragraph below:

> "Kenya is a multilingual country in which over 40 languages are spoken; however, English and Kiswahili dominate in that they are given official recognition while indigenous languages are not. English is used in education, for official purposes and international communication, while Kiswahili is the national language and is used in the political arena, parliament, and as a language of political unity and national identity. Indigenous Kenyan languages however have not been given the same amount of recognition. They are relegated for use at the household level and for interethnic communication. Although English and Kiswahili are regarded as languages of prestige in that they carry certain potential for economic benefit, Kenyan people also place great value on their ethnic languages because they carry the people's culture and oral history. However, as a result of increased social mobility, urbanization, interethnic marriages, and formal education, among other factors, these languages face the possibility of extinction." (Mugambi 2002: 12)

Given their functional and prestigious positions, English and Swahili have expanded considerably in the recent past, to the disadvantage of the indigenous languages. Since the indigenous languages are themselves never the same in vitality, relatively smaller ones have experienced greater pressure, sometimes from a neighbouring other, in addition to English and Swahili. In Kenya, such languages include Bong'om, Boni, Burji, Dahalo, Degere, Elmolo, Kinare, Kore, Lorkoti, Omotik, Segeju, Sogoo, Taita Cushitic, Terik, Yaaku, and Suba. Sommer (1992) summarizes how each of these languages experienced shift and their situations as of then. From his account, none of these Kenyan languages may resist extinction. Despite instances of language shift and extinction in Kenya as above mentioned, some minority languages are on record as having resisted language replacement. As reported in Heine and Möhlig (1980), the Nubi of Kisii , the Logoli of Luo southern Nyanza, and the Waata of Coast province are among these.

However, it must be stated strongly that the Suba case has been unique. Of all those languages here identified as facing extinction, it is the only one upon which the Kenya government attempted a direct intervention with the aim of securing a revitalization. Arguments that the Suba case may have been part of a governmental policy to support small languages do not hold; for such efforts may have been applied on other languages in the situation of Suba as well. This is perhaps why the political view has been more persuasive.

The KANU political party that had ruled Kenya for 30 years experienced shock when section 2A of Kenya's constitution was repealed in 1992 to allow for other political parties to be formed. So desperate was the ruling party's situation that its operatives resorted to amplifying whatever differences that may have existed between neighbouring communities so as to divide and rule. The populous Luo people who live in Nyanza province favoured KANU's opposition, at a time when populous ethnic groups of Kenya appeared to have united against the government. To win an election in Kenya, a presidential candidate requires majority votes, but not without winning 25% of the votes from at least 5 provinces of the overall 8. Left with few options, KANU strategists decided to enlist the support of minority ethnic groups, especially in places where support for the ruling party had nearly ceased. In 1995, the government reactivated the Suba renaissance which had been dull for quite some time in Nyanza province, with such zeal that both the language and culture of the Suba were to benefit from a government-funded revitalization programme 'in recognition of the rights of minority groups'.

1.4 LUOIZATION OF THE SUBA

A little more detail on the assimilation of the Suba would help us create a background to revival efforts on it. Based on published oral history by Ogot (1967) and sociolinguistic surveys such as Rottland and Okombo (1986, 1992) and Mhando (2008), the Suba and the Luo of Kenya came into contact somewhere around the middle of the 19th century when the Luo expanded southwards towards the Suba territories. The contact was rather unequal because the Luo were many times more populous than the Suba. After a period of staying together, the Suba got to acquire Luo customs and practices, and thus later became known as Luo-Suba. The assimilation may have been motivated by factors such as trade, intermarriage, education, and evangelization. During the colonial times, administrators and missionaries accessed the Suba through the Luo, as if they were Luo people too. With the passing of time, a growing number of the Suba people were assimilated linguistically as well (see Heine and Möhlig, 1980) to the extent that almost all persons who call themselves Suba speak Dholuo (language of the Luo) either as a first or as a second language (Rottland and Okombo, 1986). A detailed account of the assimilation of the Suba is however recorded in part 3 of Ayot (1979: 153–209).

1.5 REVITALIZING THE LANGUAGE OF THE SUBA

According to Rottland and Okombo (1986), a Suba renaissance began to be felt in the 1940s with the aim of counterbalancing Luo domination in the Bantu-speaking areas under Luo administration. However, this feeling appeared to die

out eventually because "The Luoization goes on mainly because the institutionalized means supporting the process continue to exist and to dominate, while the original motivation on the part of the Suba has disappeared" (Rottland and Okombo,1986: 112).

Nevertheless, another form of the renaissance was to be felt again 50 years later in favour of the Suba culture and language, but this time led by the Kenya government, with the support of the Suba people and some non-governmental organizations. Through the Ministry of Education, the government initiated the Suba language project that has already been tried out in certain primary schools in Suba District. The measures put in place include introducing Suba-as-subject in primary school, revivalist initiatives in the form of cultural festivals, sports, a vernacular radio service, and a language panel created for this purpose at the Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E). The Bible translation and Literacy (BTL) together with SIL have also been involved in literacy, translation and documentation programmes in the language.

Thirteen years into the programme, it is not clear if this campaign is giving the Suba their language back. According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006), the vitality and circumstances of a language are worth surveying well ahead of the revival programme so that the project is appropriately designed. To follow this would then be occasional evaluative surveys with a view to determining if there may be a need to adjust goals, strategies, and approaches so as to answer questions posed by Hinton (2001a, 17) as – Are the learners learning the language as well as they should? Are the materials developed useful? How can the programme improve? Should some directions be abandoned? What is the next goal? etc.

In the case of Suba language, there are no reports as to the initial survey, implying this stage may have been skipped. However, since an evaluation forms an integral part of every project, this article, which is a pull-out from an ongoing evaluative survey on Suba, seeks to report on how enabling the local Suba community have been with regard to the revitalization project on their heritage language and culture. Specifically, the analysis considers responses from a sample of adults of childbearing age as well as elderly speakers. This is because the ability to speak Suba has become an age-graded phenomenon (Kembo-Sure, 1999) since some of the youngest speakers are well past middle age.

2. METHOD

This article purposes to evaluate the involvement and experience of Suba elders and adults with the revitalization of their language. So as to examine this, the domains of evaluation that are guided by some parameters of assessment as highlighted by Grenoble and Whaley (2006) will revolve around the variables of language variation, group identity, goals of the programme, language vitality in a range of domains, Attitudes towards the language and the programme,

resources – both financial and human, existence and response to media, literacy, and some aspects of cultural renaissance. This article subjects to analysis data collected from these two groups by means of interview schedules that were personally administered over a period of time.

2.1 THE SAMPLE

As a speech community, the Suba have been shrinking even when those who identify themselves as such may have grown in number [4]. The choice for adults and elders as the population for this study was based on the premise that Suba has significantly lost young speakers. As of the time of this research, a large number of Suba adults are people who may be characterised only as semi-speakers. This reality caused the researcher to make long journeys within the target clusters to find speakers. To sample adult respondents for this study, certain considerations were taken into account. Since not all adults within the study area are Suba-speaking, purposive sampling was used as a criterion. In that regard, subjective selections of the respondents were pegged upon their presumed typicality to the informers as well as the researcher. Since adults fit in the exclusive male – female categories, an even number, such as four was desirable. In the case of elders, two people were sampled from each area. However, caution was taken not to include spouses in the sample as this would in one way or another cause the possibility of redundancy in the responses.

This way, a proportionate number of representatives from each of the sexes would also be achievable. For this study, however, the stratification was intended to yield an equal number of cases from each gender regardless of the proportions in the population. To this end, the study applied the stratified random sampling procedure. Irrespective of the dialects, the eight areas selected were: Mfangano, Takawiri, Kisegi, Rusinga, Gwasi, Kaksingri, Kibwogi, and Gembe. Altogether, the statistically evaluated sample was made up of 48 respondents. Though this number would appear limiting, the range of questions designed for this study called upon a manageable sample because the administration of the tool required that the researcher translates the individual items of the questions, often into Dholuo, but sometimes into Kiswahili as well. However, the most compelling factor as to sample size is the fact that there aren't as many Suba speaking people within the Suba community.

[4] Notice the rise in Suba identity recorded in Rottland and Okombo (in Brebzinger, 1992: 278) in comparison to findings of an earlier survey by these authors reported in Rottland and Okombo (1986: 125).

2.2 THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Touliatos and Compton (1988) define an interview schedule as any predetermined list of instructions and questions used by an interviewer to standardize the interview procedure. In this study, the schedules were simply filled in by the researcher as the interview progressed. The questions were formulated in such a way that they could be easily rephrased, translated, or adapted to the level of understanding of the interviewee.

While some questions were typically open, giving the interviewee the chance to raise an opinion, others were more or less closed; though the respondents were not made aware of this fact. The closed items were not designed to constrain the respondent's thinking but to guide as well as probe the responses. Sometimes leading questions and follow up questions (not directly related to the research questions) were used either to prepare the respondent to give more accurate information or to confirm an earlier response provided. Whichever the case, the questions were designed in an interconnected way so as to form a sequence across the variables being measured. But even with this, the questions would proceed from general to specific or vice versa.

It should be noted, however, that the questions themselves were categorised with respect to the variables listed in the introductory part of this section. For instance, responses that comprise *vitality* of the language as well as the revitalization programme may have been made to derive from 5 different items, probing different aspects of this parameter.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and examines responses to the individual questions presented to the two groups.

In discussing social factors in language maintenance and language shift, Paulston (1994) identifies *exogamy* as one of the key factors in causing language shift. She argues exogamy gives rise to a generation of parents who speak their heritage language with their own parents, but a new language with their children. Both groups were thus asked from which community their spouse(s) came, they responded as is shown in table 1 below.

Community of spouse	**Adult speakers**		**Elderly speakers**	
		%		%
Luo	8	25	5	31.3
Suba	10	31.3	6	37.5
Other	3	9.4	2	12.5
Both Luo and Suba	7	22	3	18.8
Unmarried	4	12.5	–	–

Table 1. *Community of spouse*.

The inference we can make from this table is that exogamy with the Luo is strong among both groups of the respondents, implying the factors of intergenerational transmission, language vitality, as well as cultural continuity may still be strongly affected in disfavour of Suba. This is in line with earlier studies such as Ayot (1979) which reported that Suba assimilation seemed to have been in the direction of Luo language and culture the moment a Suba man married a Luo girl or vice versa.

Since *vitality* is the basis upon which language revival projects should be determined and evaluated, it was necessary to establish from the respondents how, with whom, and in what settings they used Suba. Asked which languages they spoke very well, adults indicated Dholuo by 59.4%, Suba by 34.4%, and Kiswahili by 21.9%. On their part, elders indicated Dholuo by 68.8%, Suba by 81.3%, and Kiswahili by 12.5%. Both groups also indicated low levels of fluency in English and other languages. From these figures, proficiency in both Suba and Dholuo is still evident, with a slight drop among adults able to use Suba in the scale of very well.

However, asked what language they would most likely use in a conversation, the answers came, but grudgingly, with some respondents arguing this could depend on a host of other factors. Nevertheless, they both indicated Dholuo by 50%, Suba by 21.9% for adults and 25% for elderly speakers. 15.6% of the adult respondents together with 18.8% of the interviewed elders were adamant that a choice was difficult to make as to which language they were most likely to use in a conversation. Few of the respondents indicated they would use Kiswahili in this way. As can be noticed, most of the respondents still chose Dholuo, indicating it still enjoyed more domains and functions.

A follow up on the foregoing reluctance with respect to a range of settings yielded even more challenging results. Asked ‘how do you speak Suba in the scale of all the time, sometimes, and never in the following settings?’, they responded as in table 2 below.

	Adult speakers			**Elderly speakers**		
Setting	All the time	Sometimes	Never	All the time	Sometimes	Never
At funerals	2 6.3%	8 25%	22 68.8%	5 31.3%	5 31.3%	6 37.5%
At the market	3 9.4%	11 34.4%	18 56.3%	3 18.8%	6 37.5%	7 43.8%
In church	1 3.1%	12 37.5%	20 62.5%	2 12.5%	7 43.8%	8 50%
At home	7 21.9%	11 34.4%	14 43.8%	8 50 %	8 50%	0 0
At public fora	3 9.4%	19 59.4%	10 31.3%	4 25%	6 37.5%	6 37.5%

Table 2. *Use of Suba in a range of settings.*

As can be seen from this table, the choice for ‘all the time’ was steadily lowest among both groups except at the home setting. Curiously, the choice for ‘never’ was higher than ‘all the time’ in nearly all settings, a sign that Suba is yet to regain these domains. It must be noted, however, that ‘sometimes’ as a response here became difficult to analyse. To the researcher, it meant ‘some use’, but to the respondents, it appeared to mean ‘not sure’.

Since ability to speak Dholuo and Suba are already reported as being nearly at par between the two groups, and given that Kiswahili, English, and other languages had almost no preferences as languages of regular communication among the respondents, it became necessary to establish how the respondents would choose between Dholuo and Suba in speaking to the groups identified in table 3 below.

Group	Adult speakers		Elderly speakers	
	Suba	**Dholuo**	**Suba**	**Dholuo**
With Luo adults	5 (15.6%)	27 (84.4%)	5 (31.3%)	11 (68.8%)
With Suba adults	21 (56.6%)	11 (34.4%)	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
With young Subas	13 (40.6%)	19 (59.4%)	4 (25%)	12 (75%)
With Suba children	5 (15.6%)	27 (84.4%)	2 (12.5%)	14 (87.5%)

Table 3. *Language preference with some groups.*

From this table, elderly speakers expressed a 50–50 chance to use Suba or Dholuo with Suba adults while the adults expressed confidence they would be using Suba by 56.6% with fellow adults. However, Suba is here shown as spoken in a diminishing trend with people of an increasingly younger age, a sign that language transmission across generations is suffering. Besides, Dholuo is spoken even with adults who have ability to speak Suba, indicating a weakening loyalty towards Suba.

Though used for our argumentation here, these self reported abilities are sometimes problematic. Yet in spite of this inevitable challenge, it can be argued that signs for a returning vitality still remain at a relatively low level for Suba.

Grenoble and Whaley (2006) are very elaborate with the parameter of *resources* in language revitalization. They argue the human resource factor is key to language revival because it is the dimension that lends the energy for both the advocacy and the execution of the plan. From within the local community, the few speakers left are critical to the teaching and the learning of their heritage language. But since revitalization programmes require financial resources as well, it is necessary to determine if the local community is able to spare some money to fund teaching materials, to pay teachers, to outfit schools and so on.

Asked in what way they may have raised or contributed money towards the revitalization of their language, both groups were unanimous that there was nothing of this sort, with some of them observing that, as is the case with other government projects, the government was to fund the revival. Others pointed out they were not asked to raise money, while the rest said they were unaware of the need for funding. All this notwithstanding, the researcher was here persuaded towards the position of Grenoble and Whaley that most minority groups are also people caught in a subsistence lifestyle, who would rather provide food and shelter for their families, with "...little time for language revitalization" (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006: 44).

As to involvement in committee activities, they had the following to say

	Adult speakers		**Elderly speakers**	
Attended meetings at BTL for translation	12	(37.5%)	5	(31.3%)
Was in the dance group at festival	7	(21.9%)	3	(18.8%)
Helped in organizing boat racing	3	(9.4%)	2	(12.5%)
Was an expert on traditions at committee	2	(6.3%)	2	(12.5%)
Was not involved in any way	14	(43.8%)	6	(37.5%)

As may be noticed, a significant proportion of adults as well as elderly speakers were not involved in language committee activities in any way. But even more worrying is the observation that all these responses referred to activities performed in the past, with no reference at all to the present, giving the impression that the initial enthusiasm with the language is as good as dead.

Another important dimension of a revitalization programme is *language variation*. According to Tsunoda (2005), matters of dialectal variation together with standardization may cause problems in a revitalization programme. He rightly observes that side-by-side existence of numerous dialects in the language to be revived may create the challenging need to have them all revived or the need for a consensus. To Grenoble and Whaley, it is important to ascertain which dialectal variants still exist of the language being revived, and how they are viewed by community members. The logic here is that if the variation is adverse, then the dialectal difference emerges as a challenge; but if mutual intelligibility is clearly evident, then a standard form would suffice.

In this study, both groups were asked which of the dialects of Suba they were able to speak, their responses are as set out here

	Adult speakers		**Elderly speakers**	
The one spoken in Gwassi	7	(21.9%)	4	(25%)
The one spoken in Migori	2	(6.3%)	1	(6.3)
The one spoken around Muhuru bay	7	(21.9%)	2	(12.5%)
The one spoken in Kaksingri	4	(12.5%)	4	(25%)
The one spoken at Mfangano	10	(31.3%)	5	(31.3%)
The one spoken at Rusinga	5	(15.6%)	2	(12.5%)

First, emergent issues. From these figures, either the dialect clustering for Suba is not complete or some respondents were not aware of the differences between all the dialects. The areal sampling for purposes of this study did not include people from Muhuru Bay and Migori-Suna, so the presence of speakers of dialects typical of these two areas in the sample may have been indicative of relocation as a result of marriage or some other reason, but some people declared ability to speak more than two dialects, none of which should have been spoken where they lived at the time of this research. Nonetheless, The Mfangano, Muhuru, and Gwassi clusters appeared stronger than the rest, causing the possibility of tensions as to which would be more suitable for the standard. As things stand, Olwivwangano, spoken on Mfangano Island, was already

selected as the standard (see Kembo-Sure, 1999). Of the two groups, it is also notable that some proportion did not declare the dialect they spoke, perhaps because they did not speak Suba in the first place.

Asked how well they understood the Suba variety used on Suba radio broadcast, they said

	Adult speakers		**Elderly speakers**	
Well	8	25%	5	31.3%
Moderately	8	25%	3	18.8%
Poorly	4	12.5%	2	12.5%
Not at all	6	18.8%	0	0
Never listened to Suba	6	18.8%	6	37.5%

Considering well and moderately together, the choice of the variety used on radio may be said to have been appropriate. Given that the radio is important in language spread, the relatively high numbers who never listened to Suba radio broadcast (18.8% for adults and 37.5% for elders) could thus be a matter of worry (but this will be discussed in detail shortly).

Another way to evaluate if a language programme is reversing shift is by assessing *attitudes* towards the local language that had occasioned the shift away from it. The assumption here is that a reverse in the attitudes in favour of the shrinking language would place it in good stead. As Labov (2001) already points out, attitude tests need to be very carefully constructed so that the individual items are made as indirect as possible. In this study, both groups of the respondents were asked to respond to a list of statements by stating agree (A), undecided (U), and disagree (D). Their responses are here summarised in percentages.

	Adult speakers			**Elderly speakers**		
	A	**U**	**D**	**A**	**U**	**D**
It is better for our children to learn Dholuo than Suba	15.6	62.5	21.9	31.3	43.8	25
The use of Suba should be encouraged	40.6	21.9	37.5	75	12.5	12.5
Suba language is as good as dead	31.3	21.9	46.9	12.5	37.5	25
The Suba and the Luo are already one (people)	50	18.8	31.3	43.8	25	31.3
Suba people who can speak only Dholuo are lost	37.5	37.5	25	68.8	31.3	0
It is impossible to revive Suba	40.6	28.1	31.3	31.3	43.8	25
Suba revival was a political trick by the government	25	34.4	40.6	37.5	25	37.5
Dholuo is killing Suba	71.9	6.25	21.9	75	0	25
The Suba are happy with the revival programme	43.8	31.3	25	68.8	12.5	9.4
Suba people who can't speak Dholuo find it difficult to talk to Luo people	78.1	9.4	12.5	56.3	25	9.4

From the layout, there was a strong sense of dilemma over whether it is better for the Suba children to learn Dholuo than Suba, reminiscent of Kembo-Sure's (1999) findings from a similar test. Kembo-Sure attributed this to the indecision based on the pragmatic choices the speakers would have to make in the face of ethnic loyalty on the one hand, and the fulfilment of immediate communicative

needs on the other. But those disagreeing or undecided over whether Dholuo is Killing Suba may have been protesting at the state of affairs rather than the fact of Dholuo's replacement of their language. Incredibly high proportions of the respondents (43.8% for adults and 31.3% for elders) were particularly emphatic that it is impossible to revive Suba, with an even higher percentage among elders feeling confused over this matter. Perhaps this trend may have been motivated by feelings of failure they held with respect to the revival, leading to the conclusion that their language cannot be revived. While opinion on whether Suba is dead was nearly balanced between the groups, the reported unhappiness or indecision as to whether the Suba were happy with the programme may here have referred to the manner the programme was implemented, its apparent flop, or the divisive politics that came with it. Sadly, a large proportion of the respondents agreed (by 78.1% among adults and 56.3% among elders) on the necessity to speak Dholuo, viewing a lack of that ability as a problem or a difficulty. Of note too is the fact that opinions that clearly favoured Suba such as 'the use of Suba should be encouraged' that scored relatively high among the respondents are more or less wishes based on group identity, as opposed to those in favour of Dholuo that would most likely ignite favourable action as well.

Though dismissed by Grimes (1985) as unnecessary in bilingual cases where it already exists in the language of wider communication, *literacy* is viewed by Crystal (2000) as occupying a special place in a language revitalization programme. To Grenoble and Whaley, "the position and nature of literacy in the community help shape people's attitudes about literacy and their expectations of what it can bring to the local language"(2006: 43)[5]. For this study, since literacy would be expected more among adults than elderly people, adults were asked in which language they were most likely to read and write. They were restricted to only one choice. Their responses are set out below –

	Read	**Write**
Kiswahili	6 (18.8%)	3 (9.4%)
Dholuo	9 (28.1%)	13 (40.6%)
Suba	6 (18.8%)	4 (12.5%)
English	7 (21.9%)	8 (25%)
Unable to read/write	4 (12.5%)	4 (12.5)

Asked in what language they lacked reading material at home, they said –

Kiswahili	5 (15.6%)
Dholuo	6 (18.6%)
Suba	19(59.4%)
English	4 (12.5%)

As can be seen from these summaries, nearly all the respondents except 4 were able to read and write. But it was surprising that those able to read and write in

5 Also see Samuel (1990: 138) for a similar comment.

Dholuo were more than those literate in Suba, yet Suba, Dholuo, and Kiswahili use nearly the same kind of orthography. However, the reason was to be found in the second set of results above: Most of the respondents had no reading material in Suba.

Likewise, 'a language project will usually fail if the focus is on language alone. It is much more likely to succeed if it is part of a greater societal movement...if it is perceived as an expression of solidarity or ethnicity'(Anonby, 1997: 16), i.e. if *group identity* perceptions are made salient in the campaigns as well. To Grenoble and Whaley (2006), such perceptions may take the form of how wealthy the local community feels in relation to the dominant other with which they are in contact, how proud they feel as a group, how attached to their cultural history they are, and what control they have over economic matters. With this background, both groups were asked to answer True (T) or False (F) to the following set of questions and statements relating to the parameter of group identity – (The category identified as M were non-response cases)

	T	**F**	**M**	**T**	**F**	**M**
Is it true most young Suba people are given Luo names?	59.4%	40.6%	0	68.8%	12.5%	18.8%
Is there a Suba council of elders?	34.4%	31.3%	37.5%	68.8%	0	31.3%
Are there more Suba agriculturalists than fisherfolk?	21.9%	50%	28.1%	43.8%	43.8%	6.3%
Is it true the Suba want a political constituency of their own because the Luo have dominated leadership in Mbita, Gwassi, Migori, and Nyatike constituencies for too long?	40.6%	21.9%	37.5%	81.3%	0	18.%
The Suba are as wealthy as Luo people these days	43.8%	25%	68.8%	50%	37.5%	12.5%
The Suba are as educated as the Luo people these days	28.1%	37.5%	34.4%	37.5%	37.5%	25%

Despite the non-response cases, factors in favour of Suba identity here were nearly as strong as those favouring Luo identity across the groups. But the fact that a bias towards Suba identity wasn't very clear is an indication that dual identity such as expressed by Ayot (1979) is still as strong among the Suba. With such feelings wavering, the sense of collective purpose needed for a revival programme may be difficult to mobilise in a meaningful way.

As Cotter (in Hale and Hinton, 2001) notes with the accomplishments of Irish language radio, the *radio* can both be language status raising as well as a channel through which speakers interact with their language. This research also sought to establish what proportion of community members listen to the radio service in Suba, what programmes appear most visible, and what items are interactive. As itemized below, none of the respondents identified Suba broadcast on the first instance, preferring instead to mention KBC Kisumu (that hosts the broadcast in Suba) among other stations.

	Adults	**Elders**
Capital FM	9.4%	0
Citizen Radio	18%	12.5%
Radio Nam Lolwe	56.3%	43.8%
KBC Kisumu	34.4%	50%
BBC	18.8%	18.8%
Ramogi Radio	46.9%	50%
Do not listen/Missing	12.5%	18.8%

From these results, KBC Kisumu that hosts both broadcasts in Suba and Dholuo, alongside Ramogi and Radio Nam Lolwe, turned out as very popular with listeners across the groups. Of note, however, is that unlike the former, the latter two stations aired their broadcast exclusively in Dholuo, meaning broadcast in Dholuo was still the most prominent and popular with the listeners. Upon further questioning, a reasonable proportion indicated preference for Suba broadcast on KBC Kisumu, to which they made contributions in the ways below

	Adults	**Elders**
Sent narratives for broadcast	5 (15.6%)	3 (18.8%)
Composed local music for broadcast	2 (6.3%)	0
Sent announcements (e.g. for funeral) for broadcast	10 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)
Sent greetings for broadcast	8 (25%)	3 (18.8%)
Contributed to culture-talk	3 (9.4%)	6 (37.5%)
Never in any way	16 (50%)	7 (43.8%)

As may be noted here, nearly half the respondents did not contribute to the radio broadcast in Suba in any way, which is normal; but worrying is the fact that only one of these contributions (i.e. culture talk) was interactive, and even then, at the relatively low rates of 9.4% among adults. Coupled with the consideration that radio broadcast in Suba lasts only 1hour 15 minutes daily, the impact of this medium on the language may be long in yielding fruits.

In a Report prepared by Mhando for UNESCO – Nairobi (2008), the following is said of Suba oral traditions and cultural practices

> "The process of Luo assimilation of the Suba was accelerated from 1850 by which time the Suba were surrounded by the Luo speaking people. The absorption of the Luo practices and customs was further accelerated by Luo girls who were married into the Suba community and carried Luo traditional ways of life with them. On the other hand, the Suba girls who were married by the Luo were forced to adopt the Luo culture and give up their own. Currently, the Suba have entirely stopped practicing their culture and adopted the Luo traditions. For example, they have stopped circumcising their sons like what is done in most Bantu communities, and opted for the removal of the lower six teeth, as is common in most Nilotic groups. Also gone is their naming system that was based on animals, plants, and natural phenomena; in came the Luo version based on time and objects. The Suba, known to be agriculturalists, have also ditched the hoe for the rod, since fishing is the main economic occupation in Luoland." (Mhando, 2008: 17)

From this account, the cultural assimilation into Luo among the Suba is complete. However, parts of this report betrayed its authenticity, implying a further investigation is necessary. For instance, the removal of six lower teeth is no longer practiced as a tradition among the Luo at present. To suggest the Suba still continue this tradition is therefore not true. Secondly, not all Suba-speaking

people were agriculturalists (see Ayot, 1979). Within the engagement of language revitalization, however, a reversal of shift needs to be accompanied by a cultural renaissance of sorts. Asked to respond True (T) or False (F) to statements below with respect to *cultural renaissance*, the respondents said,

	Adults		**Elders**	
	T	**F**	**T**	**F**
The Suba still circumcise their male children	37.5%	62.5%	37.5%	62.5%
Intermarrying with the Luo is still common	59.4%	40.6%	43.8%	56.3%
Suba and Luo beliefs are nearly the same these days	53.1%	46.9%	50%	50%
Suba traditions are becoming stronger these days	40.6%	59.4%	56.3%	43.8%
More Suba people are now giving their children Suba names	43.8%	56.2%	62.5%	37.5%
The annual Suba cultural festival is very regular these days	28.1%	71.9%	31.3%	68.8%
The Suba now lay out their homesteads like the Luo	62.5%	37.5%	31.3%	68.8%

Out of this, the Suba have not regained circumcision – by 62.5% for both groups, are still torn down the middle between Luo and Suba practices, and already lost the annual cultural festival – by 71.9% among adults and 68.8% among elders. The sticking points between the two groups were mainly over laying out the homestead and naming, a sign that both groups were persuaded different ways, which is not good for the revitalization of the culture, alongside the language.

As is typical with all projects, it was also necessary to hear from the respondents why the revival programme was initiated. They responded as can be seen here

	Adults		**Elders**	
	No.	Missing	No.	Missing
So we could be separated from the Luo	11(34.5%)	21(65.5%)	10(62.5%)	6(37.5%)
So we could use our language normally	16(50%)	16(50%)	12(75%)	4(25%)
So we could save our language from its loss	13(40.6%)	19(59.4%)	9(56.3%)	7(43.8%)
So we could have a district of our own	6(18.8%)	26(81.3%)	8(59%)	8(50%)
So we could be united as a community	17(53.1%)	15(46.9%)	11(68.8%)	5(31.3%)
So our language could be taught in school	12(37.5%)	20(62.5%)	9(56.3%)	7(43.8%)

The missing scores is an indication that a large proportion of the people interviewed had no idea about the *goals* for which the programme was installed, so they said nothing. However, most of those who gave reasons as to the goals for the programme were very clear as to why, even when some reasons such as ‘so we could use our language normally’ sounded a little too ambitious.

4. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The foregoing section indirectly reports on the current status of Suba over a decade after a language programme was applied on it. If the programme was designed in the way Grenoble and Whaley (2006) envisage, such evaluative processes as attempted in this paper would have formed the basis upon which the project itself would be determined. Nevertheless, using 17 questions, the paper has considered the language project from 10 parameters in all, but with the dimension of community as the centre of focus.

From the data and the discussion, circumstances that occasioned the shift from Suba to Dholuo have not changed much within the Suba community, the revitalization project notwithstanding. However, the findings here would serve our understanding of the local-community factor better if they were viewed from the perspective of progress rather than as a final word, because some good things such as Suba identity and Suba on mass-media are emerging from the project as persistent. Perhaps the only new dimension to this study would be its less judgemental stance with respect to the role of the local community in the revival. Most of the parameters above, beginning with exogamy through to goals, expose the local community as less assertive or losing out. However, to hold the local community as responsible for lack of progress with the language would be over-simplistic, so to speak.

The Suba community whose language was to be revived had already experienced a disruption with far reaching effects across many aspects of community life. Taking language vitality for instance, factors that determine what language one speaks where, and with whom, are so difficult to change, just because a language is being revived. In the cases where such trends may have been reversed with overwhelming community support such as with Hawaaian, Hebrew, and Vanuatu, other motivations like political independence were in tandem with the revival, making the goal very worthwhile and within range. The Suba, just like many other Kenyan communities in their situation, are a small group of people who risk further isolation if they emphasize their distinctiveness from the wider community of which most of them already feel part.

Grenoble and Whaley (2006) suggest a thorough planning of issues such as domains in which the shrinking language is to be expanded as if there is no difference between dying and active languages. How, for instance, does a community whose language is receding decide on ways or even contexts in which a language is to be used? While, as we have seen from the data, the essence of community becomes very lose the moment a significant shift has occurred. Aspects of community life expressed in people's attitudes, language or dialect proficiencies and preferences, and group identity get to feature less and less homogeneity to the extent that genuine feelings of community are hard to reconstruct. It would thus be much harder, if not impossible, to mobilise such feelings for the sake of language revitalization. Moreover, people's values will also have changed, socially as well as culturally, with the dictates of

individualism, pragmatism, and materialism. In a word, important as the local community factor is, more investigation needs to focus on what is possible or impossible of the local community in a language revitalization project.

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APPENDIX

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. From which community does your spouse come?
2. Which languages do you speak very well?
3. Which of these languages are you most likely to use in everyday conversation? (one choice)
4. How do you speak Suba (at a range of given places) in the scale of all the time, sometimes, never?
5. Which language will you most likely use with children, young people, and adults?
6. In what way could you have raised money for the revitalization project?
7. In which ways did you involve in the language committee activities?
8. Which of the Suba dialects are you able to speak well? (they were given choices here)
9. How well do you understand the Suba variety used on radio broadcast?
10. (Presented with a list of statements out of which their attitudes towards both the language and the revitalization could be determined)
11. (For adult respondents) In which languages are you most likely to read or write?
12. (For adult respondents) In which languages do you lack reading materials?
13. (Presented with a list of questions and statements out of which their feelings of group identity could be derived)
14. What radio stations do you habitually listen to?
15. (For those who listened to the Suba broadcast) In what ways may you have contributed to the broadcast?
16. (Presented with a list of statements designed to determine from the respondents if a cultural renaissance was accompanying the revitalization of the language)
17. Why was this revival programme initiated for this language?