

Intergenerational Transmission of Vernaculars in Urban Settings in East Africa

Pilot study: The Northern Hema Community and Intergenerational Transmission of Badha in Bunia

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I. Introduction

Recent research by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2007) estimates that by 2030, fifty percent of the Sub-Saharan population will live cities. Whereas the UN and other international NGOs plan to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of such a rapid change, very little is being done in order to understand what the sociolinguistic impact of a massive urbanization of African rural communities will be.

This short report summarizes the findings of a pilot study conducted by Dr Maik Gibson and Bagamba Araali in preparation for the research project designed to anticipate possible sociolinguistic impacts of a rapid urbanization of Africa on minority languages. As well as presenting the answers to research questions, we intend to show the effectiveness of both the research design and the methodology used. First we present the results of the pilot study. Secondly, a short paragraph explains lessons we have learned from this pilot study. Finally, a short conclusion ends the report.

Based on their socio-ethnic make-up cities in East-Africa can be divided into those dominated by large ethnic groups and the melting-pot cities where no single ethnic group is dominant. Therefore, our research project includes both kinds of cities in order to control for this variable. The city of Bunia is the administrative and economic capital of the Ituri district located at the north-east corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The city has more or less 300,000 habitants (Obedi 2007, Ministère du plan de la RDC 2005). The population of Bunia is mainly composed of members of 21 ethnolinguistic communities indigenous to the district of Ituri. In addition, Bunia has a sizable presence of ethnic communities from neighboring districts and all over the country. Therefore, Bunia has been chosen as a representative of melting-pot cities in the pilot study.

The Northern Hema ethnic group is one of major ethnic groups in the Ituri district. This group originally spoke Oruhuma (ethnologue code: nix) but underwent language shift a few decades ago and now speak Badha (ethnologue code: led). Due to the closeness of Northern Hema homeland to the city of Bunia; the community has a visible presence in the city. Thus, the Northern Hema community offers a very good opportunity as a test ground for our research design.

II. Research design, sampling and data collection tools

Investigating intergenerational transmission of vernaculars in urban setting poses a number of methodological challenges. First, members of an ethnolinguistic community one is investigating are generally interspersed within the social constellation of the city. In many

African countries, sociolinguistic information is not collected during census. Thus, the use of well-established random sampling techniques is not an option.

Faced with difficulties of random sampling in cities, social sciences have had recourse to chain-referral sampling techniques. Though useful, Erickson, (Heckathorn 1997) points out four serious shortcomings of these techniques. First, inferences about individuals rely on initial samples which are not chosen randomly. Second, chain-referral samples are likely to be biased toward cooperative individuals. Thirdly, when the target population has privacy concerns, masking may become an issue. Finally, peripheral individuals within the network are less likely to be referred by peers.

Since the work of Erickson, many other sampling techniques have been developed in order to control for the drawbacks of chain-referral techniques. However, according to Spreen cited by Heckathorn (1997), none of the extensions and improvements on chain-referral techniques has convincingly answered the question of “How an initial random sample can be drawn from a hidden population”. Faced with this difficulty, Heckathorn (1992, 1992) has developed a sampling technique termed Respondent-driven Sampling (RDS). This sampling technique differs from the well-known snowball sampling in two ways. First, though both techniques call upon peer recruitment, the RDS rewards an individual for participating in the project as well as for recruiting a peer. Secondly, RDS does not require an individual to identify a peer to the investigator (as in snowball sampling) but he or she is asked to recruit a peer for the interview. This way the RDS reduces masking to the minimal.

Ethnic or minority population-based sociolinguistic investigations in urban settings share a number of challenges with hidden population investigation but also differ in many ways. Similarly to hidden populations; ethnic minorities are interspersed among others and are not easy to identify and locate. Contrary to hidden populations, public acknowledgement of membership is rarely a threat for sociolinguistic studies target populations (at least in East-Africa). Therefore, masking is of little concern while conducting sociolinguistic investigations. Nevertheless, how to draw a representative sample from a population with unknown sampling frame and interspersed among others is a concern shared by both hidden population research and ethnolinguistic community based sociolinguistic investigation in urban settings. However, sociolinguistic investigations in urban settings do not need some fine details of RDS as designed for investigation hidden populations.

The project of intergenerational transmission of vernaculars in urban settings in East-Africa has modified the RDS as designed by Heckathorn 1997 to fit the purposes of sociolinguistic studies. The RDS for sociolinguistic investigation proceeds in 4 stages. First, the investigator uses his or her contacts in the city to identify and recruit a given number of potential interviewers. The most important qualifying criteria are being a native speaker of the vernacular being investigated and a good knowledge of the city. However, younger candidates are preferred to older ones. Second, potential interviewers are identified, they are trained in RDS for sociolinguistic investigation, interview technique and how well to use data collection tools. Third, with the help of native interviewers the main investigator divides the city into meaningful ethno-geographical units. Fourth, a seed-household is identified from every geographical unit, and then data collection exercise can start.

Since sociolinguistic investigations require minimal efforts from participants compared to research on drug or HIV (as for hidden population), RDS for sociolinguistic studies does not use any incentive. When interviews are accomplished at the seed-household, the interviewer asks if any adult at home can point him or her to a family from the same ethnic group. The process is

repeated until the quota for the ethno-geographical unit is fulfilled and the desired sample size for the city is reached.

For this pilot study, the city of Bunia was divided into four ethno-geographical units: Bigo, Mudzipela, Lembabo and Simbiliabo. These areas were identified as having significant presence of the Northern Hema community. Then, native interviewers were asked to identify seed-households to serve as starting point in each ethno-geographical unit. As mentioned earlier, the interviewers relied on adult interviewees to point them to the next Northern Hema household. When a household did not have children of the age we were interested in, even if adults were available no interview was conducted in those places. Nevertheless, the household was kindly requested to help the interviewers find another Northern Hema household.

A total of 152 children aged 5-18 and 52 parents were interviewed across the town of Bunia. All interviews with children were conducted in family settings so as to allow parental consent. With regard to adults, any of the two parents found home was interviewed. Once parental authorization was obtained, care was taken to distance the child a bit from the rest of the family to avoid distraction and family members' suggestions for answers to interviewees. Often, the second interviewer interviewed the parent at the same time. Some parents declined to be interviewed but accepted their children to be spoken to.

Self-reported language behaviors are generally hard to interpret. When an interviewee claims to know or speak a language; the self-reported competence may range from a passive knowledge to a native-like competence (Bagamba 2007: 114). Therefore, instead of asking interviewees whether they speak Badha, this research project developed a procedure by which a native speaker-interviewer interviews an individual and makes evaluate the interviewees' level of competence. An interview schedule with thirteen probes was designed for child-interviewees and the one for adults has 18 probes. Items on the child interview schedule investigate language use within family home as well provide speech sample for the interviewer to evaluate. Adults interview schedule on the contrary simply aim at providing information regarding the linguistic behavior of parents towards children within family homes.

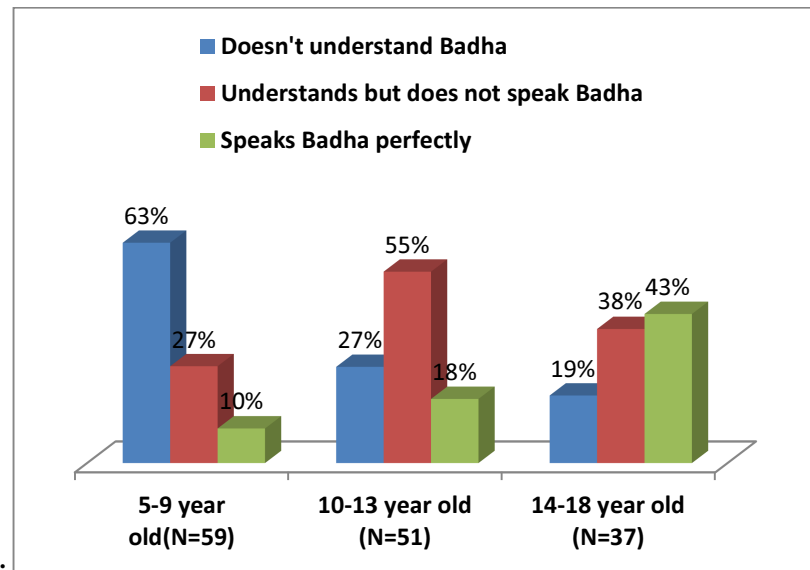
III. Research results

The findings are organized according to seven research questions. The general research questions are presented first then follow questions specific to this pilot research. Brackets [] mark questions specific to the pilot research.

1. *As minority language groups move into urban settings, are they able to transmit their heritage languages to their offspring?*

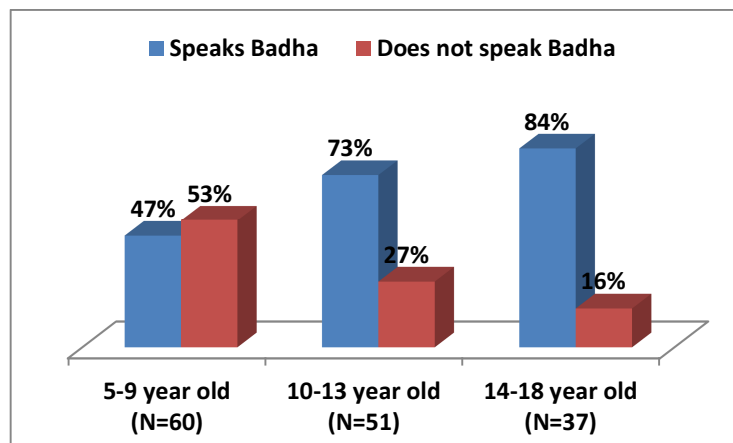
[Are Northern Hema people who live in the Town of Bunia able to pass on Badha to their children?]

The results showed that only 32% of child interviewees spoke perfectly Badha, the heritage language of their parents. In the homeland the Northern Hema community is very successful in passing on Badha to their children. This research shows that the intergenerational transmission of Badha in an urban setting is very minimal. For the purpose of analysis the same was divided into three groups: 5-9, 10-13 and finally 14-18. Age-grading with regard to the acquisition of Badha was found to be statistically significant with Chi-squared of 16.56 and $p < 0.001$. The 14-18 age group has significantly better knowledge of Badha than younger groups (see graphs #1 and #2 below).



Graph #1:
Graph#1: Competence of Northern Hema children in Bunia in Badha

When the sample is divided into participants do speak some Badha and those who don't speak it at all, age grading becomes very apparent as shown in graph# 2 below.



Graph #2: *Here all those who speak at some competence are compared to those who don't speak at all.*

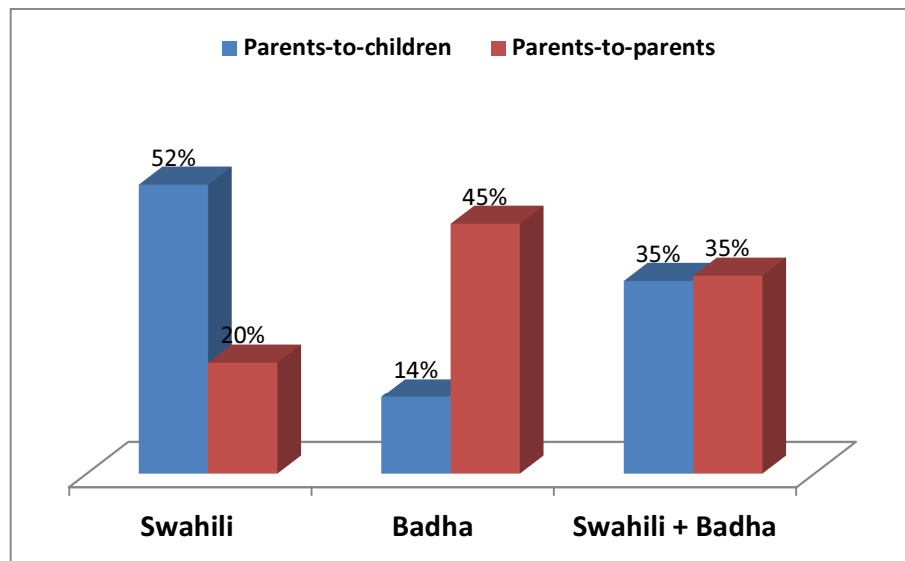
2. *If yes, what strategies have they developed for the purpose of passing on their language? [If the Northern Hema community living in Bunia does pass on Badha to their children, what strategies have they developed for the purpose?]*

62% of parents claimed to make an effort to pass on Badha to their children. However, this effort does not go beyond simply speaking Badha to children. Even so, the fact that children are not very responsive to Badha (according to parents) dramatically reduces the parents' use of Badha to their children. For instance, only 28% of parents who speak Badha to each other speak Badha to their children. Most of them (48%) exclusively speak Swahili (the LWC) to their children, while 27% speak both Badha and Swahili to their children.

3. If not, what are the mediating factors?

Out of 52 parents interviewed, 32% said they did not make any effort to transmit Badha to their children. The two most salient factors in this regard seem to be parents' lack of interest in transmitting the heritage language and their inability to speak Badha.

Some parents claimed not to have enough time to pass on the language to their children. In addition, there is little incentive from the community to encourage city dwellers to learn Badha. Whenever there are communal meetings and activities, translation is readily available, thus ignorance of Badha is not a handicap to community participation.



Graph#3: Parents' language use patterns

4. What is the attitude of city dwellers toward their heritage languages?

[What is the attitude of Northern Hema city dwellers toward Badha?]

First, most northern Hema parents in Bunia see Badha as the marker of their northern Hema identity. Secondly, Badha is perceived as the language that allows northern Hema families to communicate secrets in the presence of members of other communities. However, a minority of parents see Badha as a language their children can do without and don't therefore put effort into passing it on.

5. What is the influence of city dwellers on their respective communities as far as language loyalty is concerned?

[What is the influence of Northern Hema city dwellers on the larger Northern Hema community as far as language loyalty is concerned?]

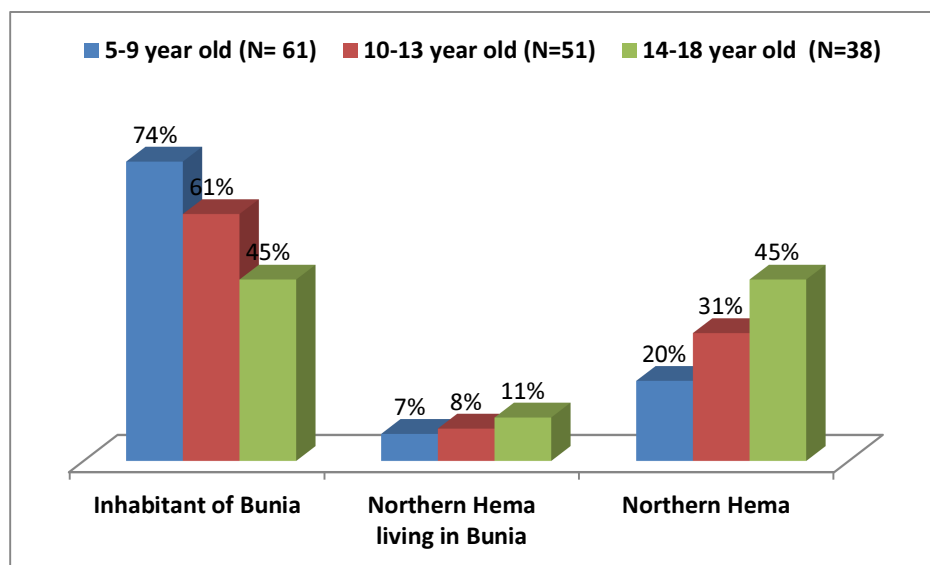
The Northern Hema community living in Bunia has no negative impact on language loyalty of their homeland community. 88% of interviewees (parents) maintained that people in their home villages don't imitate the speech patterns of visiting city dwellers. A few interviewees mentioned the use of Swahili by city dwellers in the Northern Hema homeland is perceived as pride and may negatively impact the relationship between the city dweller and villagers.

Moreover, the majority of Northern Hema city dwellers have no intention of relocating to the homeland. The city is seen to be much safer than the homeland where terrible massacres happened a few years ago.

6. *To what extent are ethnic identities maintained in urban settings?*

[To what extent does the Northern Hema community living in Bunia maintain their ethnic identity?]

The perception of identity among northern Hema children in Bunia evolves with age. The majority (74%) of children aged 5-9 have very little conscientiousness of their northern Hema identity. Among teenagers however, almost half (45%) of them confess to have northern Hema ethnic identity. A minority of children of all ages claimed to have both Northern Hema and city dweller identities.



Graph #4: Identity perception by the Northern Hema children living in Bunia.

7. *What is the resulting language ecology? Does it include new varieties which may need further examination?*

Although Northern Hema individuals born in Bunia may aspire to Badha-Swahili bilingualism, at the moment Swahili has become the dominant language of younger generations contrary to their parents. At the moment no new speech variety has identified.

IV. Lessons learned from the pilot study

1. Sampling technique

A modified version of RDS (we may call RDS for sociolinguistic studies in urban setting) is the nexus of research methodology. We previously hypothesized (anticipated) that when initial seed-households are chosen, the process will continue until the desired sample size is obtained. However, it did not work that way with Northern Hema case study in Bunia. We were faced with

a number of interruptions in the referral process. Sometimes the last households were unaware of the presence of another Northern Hema family in the vicinity or, their description of the location did not allow the interviewers to identify the next family. Thus, we introduced a modification by which we went back to knowledgeable people to point us to new seed-households. This process was repeated as many times as interruptions occurred.

2. Research tools

The two interview schedules that we have worked well. It was however noticed that some children kept their responses to the minimal and this made it a bit hard for interviewers to judge their level of language competence. Thus, while using the same tool among the Vanuma of DRC, a modification was introduced in order to provide interviewers with better samples of speech so that interviewers can make a more informed judgment of speaking ability. Thus, if the interviewer is not reasonably sure of the linguistic competence level of the interviewee, he improvises a two to three minute casual conversation. The modification worked well among the Vanuma and it is now being used by a student conducting a sociolinguistic study among the Logo of DRC. Both Logoti and Livanuma studies are conducted in homelands; therefore did not need to use RDS.

V. Conclusion

Our first pilot research (among the Northern Hema of Bunia) has been successful and we have learned lessons that we can use to improve our methodology. However, we are conscious that challenges will be numerous when we move to cities of which we don't have personal and firsthand knowledge. Nevertheless, the Bunia pilot study has equipped us for challenges ahead the second study to be conducted in Arua or Fort-Portal in Uganda. In addition, it has assured us of both reliability and validity in the other stages of our research.

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