

Ekegusii Language

Ekegusii is a Bantu language spoken by the Abagusii (translated as people of Gusii) who reside in Kisii and Nyamira counties (see e.g. Nash, 2011; Omoke 2012; Basweti et. al. 2015). According to the 2019 National Census, Ekegusii has an estimated number of native speakers totaling 2.7 million. The Abagusii are believed to have migrated from the Congo forest through Uganda entering Kenya through the Western part of the country. In Gusii folklore, their people's origin is from a place called 'Misiri,' Egypt. The Abagusii community is bordered to the East by the Kipsigis, to the West by the Luo, and to the South by the Maasai, all of whom are Nilotic speakers. They do not neighbour any Bantu speakers.

Guthrie, (1971) in his zonal classification of languages classifies Ekegusii as a central Bantu language part of the sub-family of the Kuria language labeled E. 42 (Maho, 2003). He relates it to other languages including Lulogooli, Ameru (Kenya) Kuria (Kenya and Tanzania) Ware, Ikizu, Ikoma, and Sanjo (Tanzania). Just like the majority of Bantu languages, Ekegusii is a tone language. The following map situates Kisii and Nyamira counties of Kenya, where Ekegusii is predominantly spoken.

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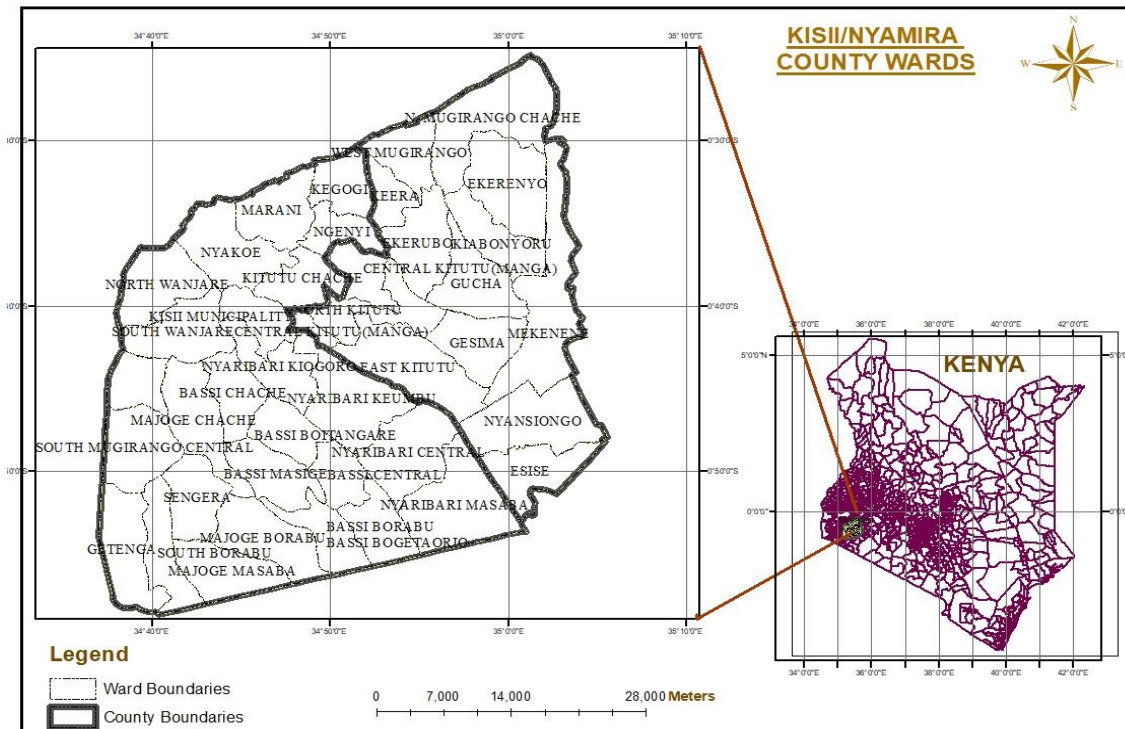


Figure 1: Wards of Kisii and Nyamira Counties on the map of Kenya

Bosire (1993:1), Mecha (2006:4), and Otieno and Mecha, (2019) classify Ekegusii into two dialects, the Rogoro, and the Maate dialect. The main difference between these two dialects is in vocabulary and pronunciation (Otieno, 2020). The Rogoro dialect is mainly spoken in the northern parts of Gusiiland while the Maate dialect is mainly spoken in the southern parts of Gusiiland. The Rogoro dialect is considered to be the standard form because it is the one used in print, and used in a news broadcast in Ekegusii.

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Introduction

The Gusii people are scattered all over Kenya. This is as a result of migrations for those employed or running business outside the borders of Kisii and Nyamira Counties (Otieno and Mecha, 2019). Consequently, these migrants opt to use Kiswahili (regional lingua-franca) and English, reducing Ekegusii domains of use. Young people are no longer speaking Ekegusii as their first language.

Ekegusii language is at a critical stage where revitalization interventions are necessary to salvage a language that is suddenly highly endangered. The language aptly fits in with Krauss', (1992) assertion that world languages are in a crisis and on the slippery path toward extinction. According to Rehg and Campbell, (2018), particular indicators tell of Ekegusii endangerment. The main criteria for an absolute number of speakers from the 2019 National census may not be as apt as 1) lack of intergenerational transmission. That is, the Ekegusii language is not being learnt by children anymore in the traditional way as passed on from one generation to the next, making it essentially doomed for extinction unless revitalization efforts are taken and become successful. Emphasis on modern education achievement has necessitated even banning the use of Ekegusii in school and other formal setups, and 2) decreasing the number of speakers. As the number of speakers decreases, the more endangered the language has become, and 3) decreases in domains of use; the more the domains in which the language is used are reduced, the greater its endangerment becomes.

Ekegusii speakers are faced with the arduous task of competing languages that are used in everyday life sniffing life and the utility of the Ekegusii language in daily linguistic usage. This means that the language is increasingly being eclipsed with ever lessening domains of

use. For this reason, this language needs adequate documentation – creation, annotation, preservation, and dissemination of transparent records of the language where that record is understood explicitly to include language analysis and the production of a grammar and a dictionary, along with a rich corpus of recordings adequately archived (Rehg and Campbell, 2018) as in this present project.

Myriad factors exacerbate language endangerment in Gusiiland. The greatest reason for endangerment is that the community has undergone drastic social changes: the adoption of new religions, political organization, and bans on several customary practices. As a result, the language associated with customary behaviours is no longer being attended to suffer loss and is likely to be lost (Guerin and Yourupi, 2017).

Ekegusii is a tonal language. A tone language is a language in which both pitch phonemes enter into the composition of at least some morphemes. In many instances, the tone is taken to be a segmental property. The main idea is the use of pitch to create lexical contrast whereby, two or more words can have identical segments, but differ in meaning because they are produced with a different pitch pattern. The tone in Ekegusii is either high (H) or low (L) as in the following examples:

Orthography	pronunciation	gloss
biarwa	/β`iarw'a/	comes off
biarwa	/β'iarwa/	to be spread (as sheets)

Language Features: Ekegusii sound system

The sound system of Ekegusii can be analyzed from the segmental and suprasegmental perspectives. A segmental description of consonants, vowels (monophthongs, diphthongs,

and triphthongs), and suprasegmentals, that is, tone, and syllable structure will be discussed here.

3.1 Ekegusii Vowel system

Ekegusii has seven vowel phonemes (for a deeper acoustic discussion on Ekegusii vowels see Otieno & Mecha, 2019) with a length distinction. That is, for every vowel phoneme, there is a corresponding long vowel counterpart. These vowels are /i e ε a ɔ o u /. The vowels are evenly distributed between the front and back distinction, that is, three front vowels /i e ε/, three back vowels /ɔ o u/, and one low, central vowel /a/.

3.1.1 Front vowels

These vowels are articulated with the tongue positioned as far forward as possible in the mouth without creating a constriction.

[i] a close front vowel

[e] a close-mid front vowel

[ε] an open-mid front vowel

The vowels above are in the following words.

Vowel	Standard orthography	Transcription	Gloss
[i]	ita	/ita/	kill
[e]	eta	/eta/	pass
[ε]	ega	/εya/	seduce

3.1.2 Central vowel

Ekegusii language has only one central vowel [a]. in its articulation, the tongue is positioned halfway between a front and a back vowel. Here are examples of the vowel /a/.

Vowel	Standard orthography	Transcription	Gloss
[a]	ata	/ata/	break
[a]	aka	/aka/	paint

3.1.3 Back vowels

Ekegusii back vowels are articulated with the tongue positioned far back in the mouth without creating any constriction as pertains to vowel production. There are three back vowels in the language.

[u] a close back vowel

[o] a close-mid back vowel

[ɔ] an open-mid back vowel

These are captured in the following examples:

Vowel	Standard orthography	Transcription	Gloss
[u]	uba	/uβa/	reach a dead end
[o]	oga	/oɣa/	make noise
[ɔ]	oma	/ɔma/	smear (mud)

The seven vowels in Ekegusii occur both as short and long vowels (see Otieno, Mecha, and Opande, 2020). Omwansa, (2021) proposes that the central vowels in Ekegusii are [a] and [ɑ] but considering their acoustic qualities, I conclude that the variations he observed were just effects of neighbouring sounds. He did not carry out acoustic experiments for the sounds in citation form and compared the results with those in running speech.

The vowel phonemes and their length distinctions are illustrated below:

Orthography transcription		gloss
rina	rina	refuse (to give something)
riina	ri:na	climb
bera	βera	boil
beera	βe:ra	get angry with someone/something
era	εra	get finished
era	ε:ra	five-cent coin
baka	βaka	go astray
baaka	βa:ka	praise (someone/something)
soka	sɔka	pack
sooka	sɔ:ka	get out/married
goka	ɣoka	come to pieces/unhafted
gooka	ɣo:ka	rejoice
buta	βuta	dismiss/sack/fire from work
buuta	βu:ta	tarry/linger

Otieno, (2020) looked at these qualities of vowels comparing productions as produced by informants from the two dialects of Ekegusii. In general, males have glottal vibration, that is, fundamental frequency that is considerably lower than that of females. This finding agrees with Ladefoged (2001a) that adult males have a fundamental frequency of 80-200 Hz whereas females have up to 400 Hz of fundamental frequency (F0). The F0 for children goes up to

500 Hz (Lieberman 1977). This is because of the greater mass, length, and tension of the vocal folds. Men have long and massive vocal folds whereas females and children have shorter and less massive vocal folds. Smaller and less massive vocal cords are associated with a faster vibration of the vocal cords (Clark & Yallop 1995). These findings are a pointer to the variations that result from the sex and age of Ekegusii speakers.

3.1.4 Diphthongs

Ekegusii diphthongs occur at the beginning, center, or end of a word. These sequences of vowels are very productive in Ekegusii as so many words have these sounds as seen in the examples below.

Diphthong	Standard orthography	Transcription	Gloss
[æ]	baete	/βæte/	(they) pass
[æɛ]	bae	/βæɛ/	(they) give
[ai]	kai	/kai/	where
[ao]	kwao	/kwao/	yours (land)
[aɔ]	maoto	/maɔtɔ/	name of a person
[au]	mauti	/mauti/	name of a person
[ea]	eanga	/eaŋa/	cloth
[ei]	egeitano	/eyeitanɔ/	strife/conflict
[eo]	ekeonga	/ekeoŋa/	fish trap
[eu]	aura	/aura/	undigested stomach contents
[ɛɔ]	eome	/ɛɔme/	smear oneself

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[ia]	tiana	/tiana/	swear
[ie]	tiema	/tiena/	leap playfully
[iɛ]	tiera	/tiera/	eat huge food quickly
[io]	sioka	/sioka/	appear suddenly
[iɔ]	erigo	/eriɔɔ/	medicine
[iu]	riuro	/riuro/	foam
[oa]	goaka	/ɔoaka/	to beat
[ɔa]	soa	/sa/	enter
[oe]	moeti	/moeti/	make him/her pass
[ɔɛ]	toe	/tɔɛ/	give us
[oi]	oigo	/oiɔo/	name of a person
[ɔi]	boigo	/βoiɔo/	also
[ou]	bouti	/βouti/	name of a place
[ua]	buati	/βuati/	follow
[ue]	tuera	/tuera/	spit on
[uɛ]	suebeka	/sueβeka/	become less swollen
[uo]	tuoma	/tuoma/	hit
[uɔ]	etuoni	/etuɔni/	cock/roaster

3.1.5 Triphthongs

Ekegusii has a combination of vowels gliding from one vowel to another and then to a third vowel produced rapidly without interruption. A few vowels appear as triphthongs, unlike the highly productive diphthongs.

Triphthong	Standard orthography	Transcription	Gloss
[aei]	baeire	/βaeire/	they have given
[iai]	giaito	/ɣiaito/	ours
[iao]	ekiao	/ekiao/	yours

It is worth noting that some triphthongs could result from a combination of a prefixed vowel combining with those of a root word. Care was taken, for the examples above, to exclude such words as they will not be a true reflection.

3.1.6 Elision in Ekegusii

Most words in Ekegusii begin and end with vowels. It is a normal speech act for speakers of the language to leave out part of a word when one is pronouncing it. This is frequent and increases in rapid connected speech.

Ekegusii words	Elision	Gloss
Taiyo igaa	taiyaa	he/she is not here
Taracha aiga	tarachaa	he/has not come here
Tarakwana boigo	tarakwanabo	he/she has not said so
Ese embe	sesembe	a bad dog
Aiga inse	insaa	down here

Elision in the language occurs in such a manner that when two vowels are separated by word or morpheme boundaries, the first vowel is dropped as below:

Omoyo one – omoy’one (my heart)

Riote eri - riot’eri (this wound)

This is not always the case as seen in the examples above where word or morpheme boundaries are not the core criteria for ellipsis.

3.2 Ekegusii consonant system

In this section, I will present the segmental phonology of Ekegusii consonants and the phonological rules that they operate in. Some work has been done on this by Cammenga, (2002), Mecha, (2006), and Otieno and Mecha, (2019).

The earliest work on the Ekegusii sound system by Whiteley (1965:3) identifies Ekegusii consonants as follows: [β γ m n ɸ ŋ ɲ r s t j ɥ k p], a total of fourteen. The IPA chart of Ekegusii would then look as seen below:

Table 1: IPA chart of Ekegusii consonants

	Labials	Labiodentals	Alveolars	Palatals	velars
Plosives	p		t		k
Nasals	m		n	ɲ	ŋ
Flap			r		
Fricatives	β		s		γ
Approximants				j	ɥ
Affricate			ɸ		

According to Omoke (2012), the consonant IPA Chart does not include the nasal compounds or the clusters of the glide [w] as shown above.

Nash, (2011) includes [b d g w] into the Ekegusii consonant inventory at the phonetic level. He conjectures that they are allophones or marginal segments. I assert that these sounds are borrowed having come into common use with the borrowed lexical items. Except for [p] which has few examples, the rest are a result of language contact with neighbouring languages like Dholuo, Maasai, Kipsigis, and the official languages of Kiswahili and English. Many of the borrowed sounds have been entrenched into the working sound system of the language as further evidence of sound change or language shift already underway in the language.

3.2.1 Stops

Otieno, (2020) says that Ekegusii has three stop consonants [p t k] unlike Nash, (2011) who presented only two, [t k]. These sounds do not have their voiced counterparts. Otieno, 2020 gives a detailed acoustic and impressionistic description of the three sounds.

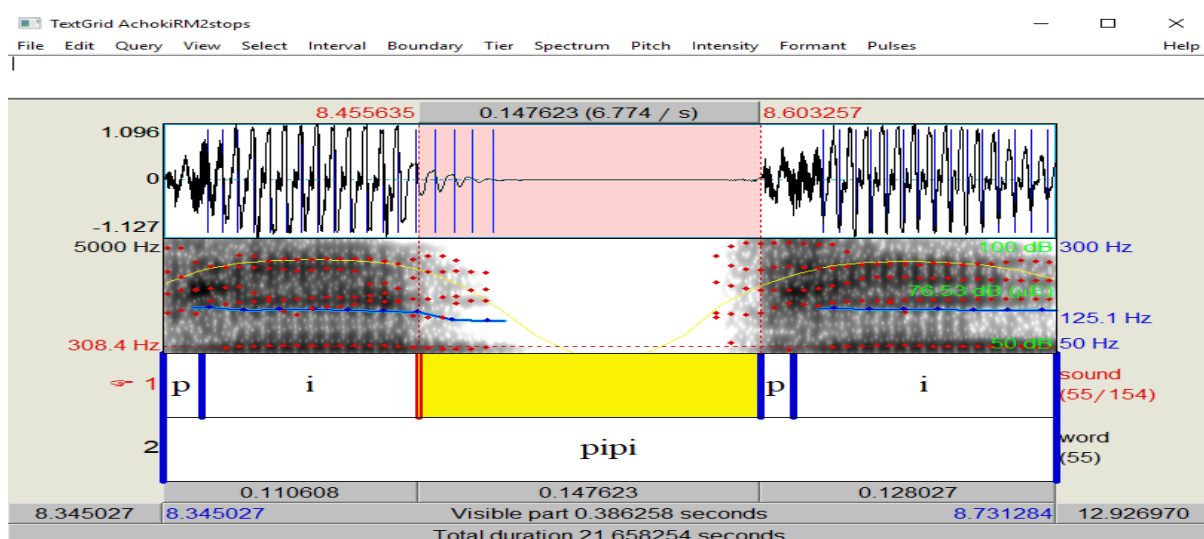


Figure 3: waveform and spectrogram for the closure duration of /p/ (source: Otieno, 2020)

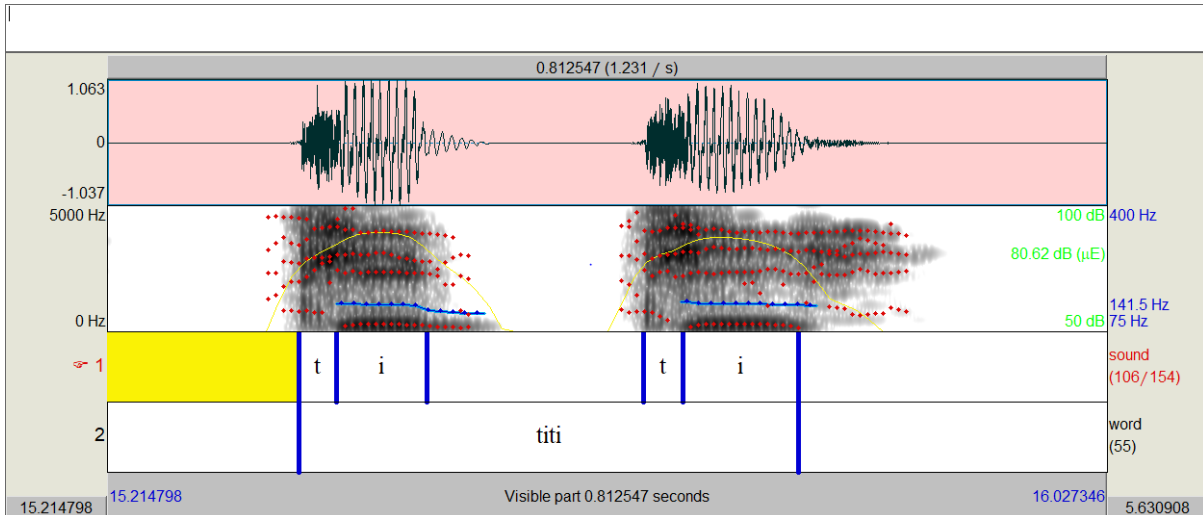


Figure 4: waveform and spectrogram for the closure duration of /t/ (source: Otieno, 2020)

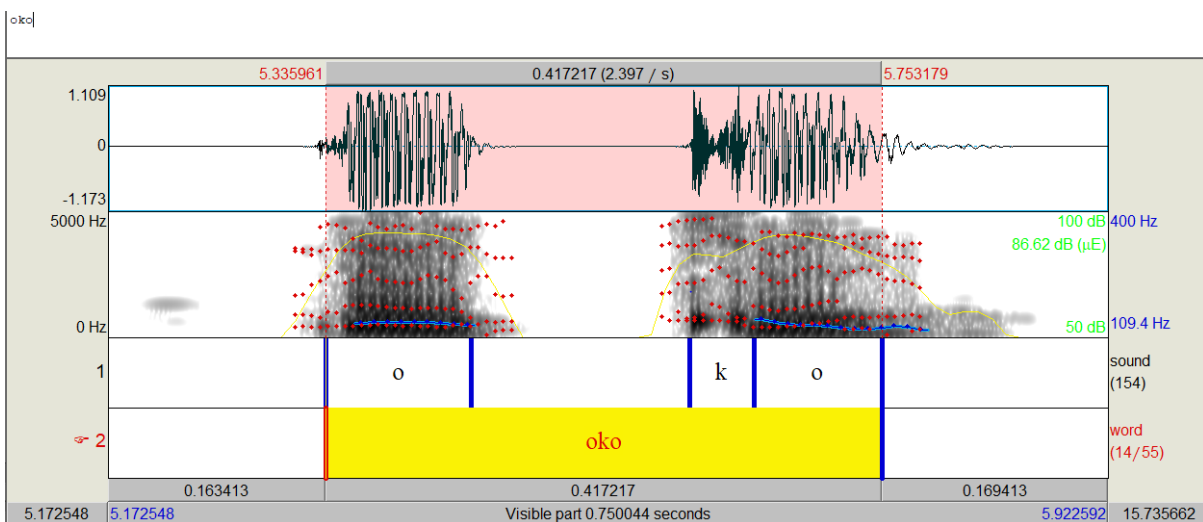


Figure 5: waveform and spectrogram for the closure duration of /k/ (source: Otieno, 2020)

The above waveforms and spectrograms display the acoustic characteristics of Ekegusii stop consonants annotated using Praat. As indicated early, /p/ is not very productive as are other voiceless stop consonants /t k/. Notice that Ekegusii does not have voiced stop consonants.

3.2.2 Nasals

From the chart above you will notice that nasals in Ekegusii are /m n ŋ ɲ/. This class of sounds is highly productive as we find we find many other consonants being pre-nasalized as we shall see in sections below. The phonemic status of the four nasals is exemplified in the minimal pairs given below.

Transcription	Gloss	Transcription	Gloss
/kuma/	be famous	/kuna/	touch
/ama/	grow (plant)	/ana/	bellow/bleat
/kuɲa/	dig	/kuŋa/	accumulate/keep
/ɲɔkɔ/	your mother	/ŋɔkɔ/	name of a person/hen

3.2.3 Fricatives

There are three fricatives in the Ekegusii language: bilabial /β/, alveolar /s/, and velar /ɣ/. The following minimal pairs exemplify their phonemic status.

Transcription	Gloss	Transcription	Gloss
/βi:ta/	ready to attack	/si:ta/	hesitate
/ɣa:ta/	position to attack	/sa:ta/	decorate/beautify
/siri/	lose	/βiri/	eat (them)
/sɔa/	enter	/βɔa/	tie
/ɣora/	buy	/bora/	disappear

3.2.4 Affricate

Ekegusii has a single voiceless palatal affricate [tʃ] as in:

Ekegusii orthography	IPA symbol	Example	Transcription	Gloss
CH,ch	tʃ	choka	/tʃoka/	forage
		chaka	/tʃaka/	start
		gacha	/ɣatʃa/	keep
		achachi	/atʃatʃi/	frequent
		chori	/tʃɔri/	abuse

3.2.5 Flap

The language has one flap an alveolar /ɾ/. It is a very productive sound in the language.

Transcription	Gloss
/roma/	bite
/ɾɛɾɔ/	today

3.2.6 Approximants

Ekegusii has two approximants, labial-velar approximant /w/ and palatal approximant /j/. /w/ is not productive since it usually appears in idiophones in words expressing surprise. It only appears in free variation depending on whether one speaks Ekerogoro or Ekemaate Dialect of Ekegusii (Otieno, 2020). Fig. 4 below shows a waveform and spectrogram of /ɣwɛna/.

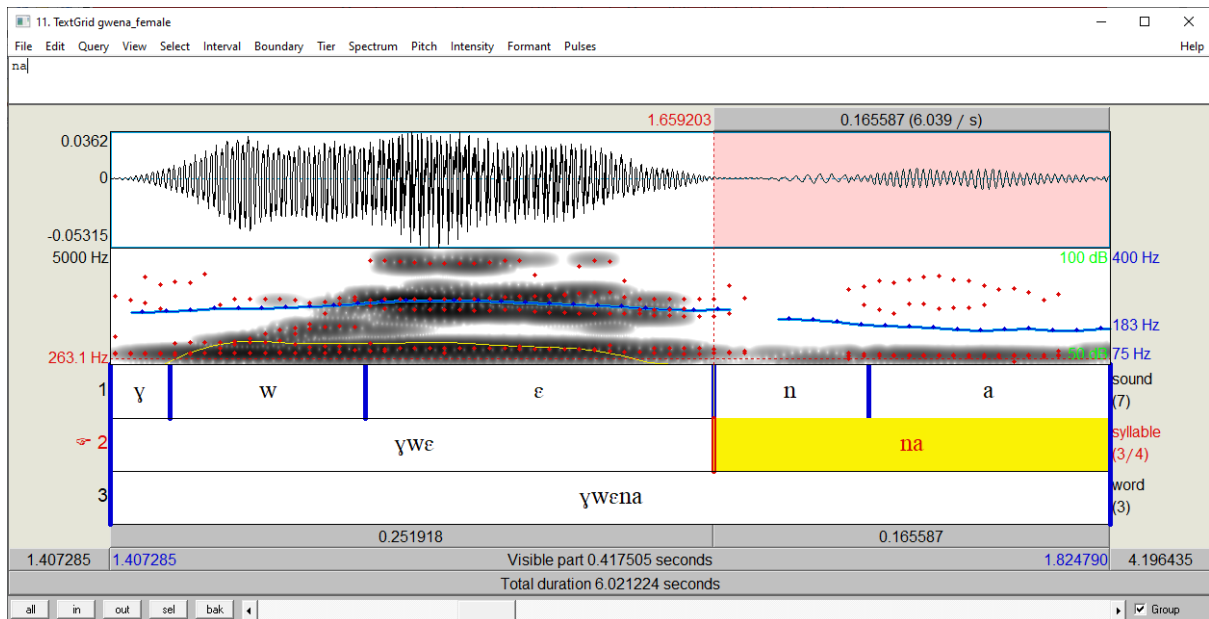


Figure 6: Waveform and spectrogram of /ywenə/ by a female speaker (source: author)

In all instances where segment /w/ appears, it has to be in a C_V environment (Nash, 2011). This makes it to be a peripheral consonant and more so, it comes in free variation with the vowel sequence of /ua/ or /uɔ/as in:

Transcription **Gloss**

/kwani/ or /kuani/ greet

/mwoni/ or /muoni/ (you) sell

As seen above, the labio-velar approximant happens on the surface since the morphemic characterization is as thus:

Mu - ɔ - ni

2P Pl- you - sell

For the speakers of the Ekerogoro dialect, the *mu* is realized as *mw-* in all instances of this combination. This sound always comes in free variation with diphthong combination of /ue/, /uɛ/, /uɔ/, /ua/ and /oe/ as a consequence of coarticulation in running speech.

The labio-velar approximant [w] in Ekegusii is disputed or even eliminated as in Nash, (2011) since we cannot have a minimal pair with it and also by it only co-occurring with other sounds in a cluster as shown below:

Ekegusii orthography	IPA symbol	Example	Transcription	Gloss
BW	βw	bwone	/βwɔnɛ/	my place
CHW,chw	ʧw	chweya	/ʧwɛja/	walk
GW,gw	ɣw	gwena	/ɣwɛna/	get well
KW,kw	kw	kwana	/kwana/	say
MW,mw	mw	mwao	/mwao/	your house
NYW,nyw	ɲw	kanywe	/kanywe/	drink
SW,sw	sw	enswe	/enswe/	fish
NW,nw	nw	inwe	/inwe/	you (pl.)
TW,tw	tw	twara	/twa:ra/	hunt
NGW,ngw	ŋw	ngwani	/ŋwani/	whip/lash

I take the view that /w/ cannot be a consonant in the sound system of Ekegusii for two reasons: one, as it is not contrastive and hence not phonemic; two, it arises from the underlying /u/ in many instances; and three, can be a result of Mid-Vowel Raising (Cammenga, 2002) as in the examples below.

enora + nominal prefix (o-mo-) ----- o-mo-enora - omwenora/ omuenora

The sound /j/ is very productive and contrastive in the language. Minimal pairs establish their phonemic status as seen below.

Orthography	pronunciation	gloss
yacha	/jaʃa/	it came
bacha	/βaʃa/	they came
twacha	/twaʃa/	we came

In a language that is currently experiencing ongoing sound changes, younger speakers of the language have been noted to produce /w/ instead of /ɣw/ as it appears in the traditional C_V environment as noted earlier.

3.2.7 Orthography

The orthography of consonants (and of vowels) as represented in the language is as follows:

Ekegusii orthography	IPA symbol	Example	Transcription	Gloss
B,b	β	baba	/βaβa/	mother
G,g	ɣ	gaki	/ɣaki/	please
K,k	k	kaana	/ka:na/	deny
M,m	m	amate	/amate/	saliva
N,n	n	enogo	/enoɔo/	fool
P,p	p	pi	/pi/	completely

R,r	r	riina	/ri:na/	climb
S,s	s	sata	/sata/	decorate
T,t	t	tota	/tota/	become soft
Y,y	j	yee	/je:/	give it
W,w	w	rigwari	/riywari/	zebra
NY,ny	ɲ	enyanya	/eɲaɲa/	tomato
NG,ng	ŋ	engiti	/eŋgiti/	beast

Whitely (1965:4) also says that some consonants in Ekegusii occur as nasal compounds. This class of consonants is very productive in the language as many words are readily available as examples:

orthography	IPA symbol	Example	Transcription	Gloss
MB,mb	mb	kemba	/kemba/	waylay
ND,nd	nd	enda	/enda/	stomach
NK,nk	ŋk	inko	/iŋkɔ/	give way
NCH,nch	ntʃ	inchu	/intʃu/	come
NG,ng	ŋg	ningo	/niŋgo/	who

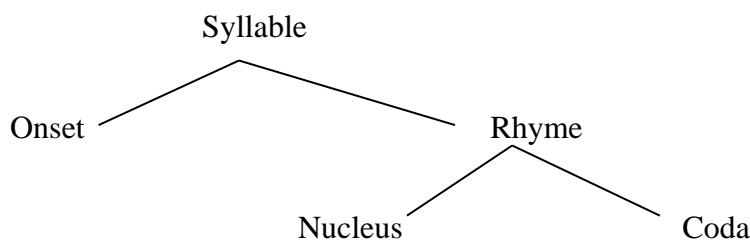
3.3 Suprasegmental features

Ladefoged and Johnson (2011:187) say that speech sounds differ in pitch, in loudness, and quality. Especially, the quality of a sound depends on its overtone structure. They argue that various overtone pitches give sounds their distinctive quality. The various speech sounds can

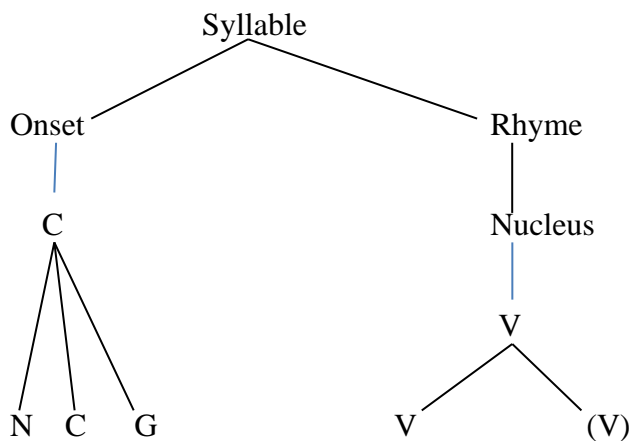
be distinguished by the differences in these overtones or formants. The lowest three formants distinguish vowels from each other. In this work, I will consider the syllable structure of Ekegusii and tone.

3.3.1 Ekegusii syllable structure

Languages differ significantly in their syllable structure. The basic architecture of a syllable as in Goldsmith (1990) which is shown below is modified to fit the language phonotactics of Ekegusii.



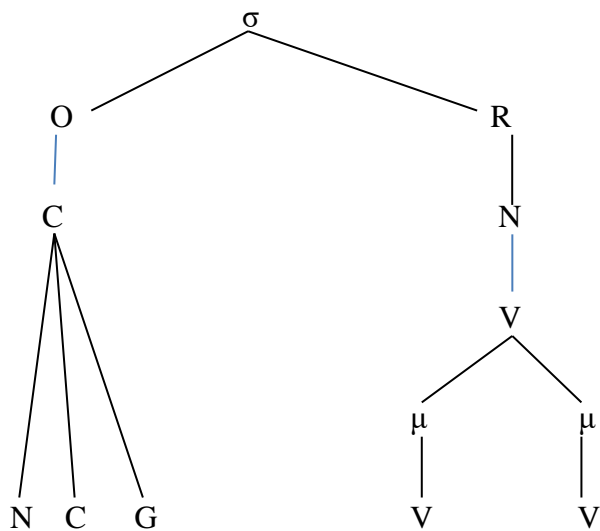
The above diagram can be contextualized in Ekegusii to cut out the coda and maximize the onset.



There are indeed many phonological processes which are activated at the syllable level. One such is tone – Ekegusii being a tone language. As Blevins (1996) aptly quips, “such rules and

constraints are sensitive to a domain that is larger than the segment, smaller than the word, and contains exactly one sonority peak.”

The basic syllable in Ekegusii is made up of a vowel segment preceded by zero or more consonantal segment. Like all languages, the nucleus in Ekegusii is a vowel – the peak of a syllable. This can be represented as:



From the above schema, notice that the nucleus is an obligatory element in every Ekegusii syllable and it marks the end of the syllable. It contains a short vowel, a long vowel, or a combination of vowels. The nucleus must also contain a minimum of one Mora (μ) and at most two moras.

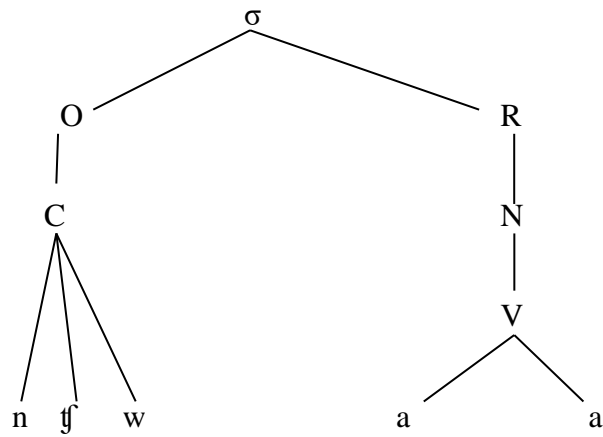
Ekegusii rhyme does not branch. Codas are not possible in the language (Nash, 2011). Ekegusii does not have a coda after the nucleus since every syllable ends in a vowel. For the two constituents, the nucleus is obligatory while the onset is optional. When in other languages like English the nucleus must not be always a vowel (Davenport and Hannahs 2005), in Ekegusii the nucleus must be a vowel.

Onsets of Ekegusii syllables have several possible permutations as seen in Nash, (2011) which is extended in this work to be three from two according to Nash. They are a single

consonant, prenasalized consonant, consonant glide, prenasalized consonant, and glide.

Therefore, a maximal Ekegusii syllable can be represented in a tree diagram for the word

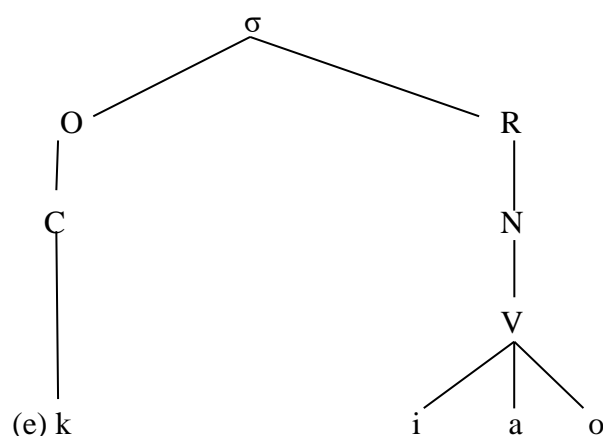
nchaa /ntʃwa:/ ‘come here’ as:



The above tree diagram demonstrates that we can have up to three consonants in the onset.

The rhyme is not branching as noted above but can have as many vowels as three as in the

following schema for the word *kiao* /ekiao/ ‘your thing’



The above syllable has a maximal V branching of the nucleus as a triphthong.

I agree with Nash, (2011) who says that the only possible onsets in Ekegusii are: (1) Ø, (2) C, (3) NC, (4) CG, and (5) NCG. This is demonstrated in the following table.

Table 2: Examples of syllable types in Ekegusii.

Onset	Rhyme	Word in Ekegusii	Gloss
Ø	V	oɣa	make noise
Ø	VV	o:ra	thresh
C	V	sami	grab
C	VV	Se:mi	educate
CG	V	bwata	catch
CG	VV	gwe:na/bwe:na	get well
NC	V	mbare	should I count?
NC	VV	mba:re	should I operate?
NCG	V	mbwate	I have
NCG	VV	emwa:mu	black/dirty

This research disputes Nash, (2011) assertion of some distributional restrictions on some syllable shapes. Especially noted, syllables with long vowels are not prohibited in word-final positions as otherwise noted by Nash. The following are examples:

Transcription	Gloss	Transcription	Gloss
/ta:/	pour out liquid	/karwa:/	go away from here
/kera:/	male name	/mora:/	female name
/oroe:/	slap	/efi:/	diarrhoea

These are counterexamples to Nash's, (2011) observation that long vowels are prohibited in word-final positions. This formation is nonetheless not very productive. One thing still stands out: long vowels are attested at word initial, word medial, and word-final positions.

3.3.2 Sonority in Ekegusii

Davenport and Hannahs (2005:75) say that every speech has a degree of sonority determined by factors like the loudness concerning other sounds, the extent to which it can be prolonged, and the degree of stricture in the vocal tract. They say that the more sonorous a sound, the louder, more sustainable, and more open is. They point out that voiced sounds are more sonorous than voiceless ones.

In acoustic terms, sonority is related to formant patterns; the more sonorant a sound, the clearer, more distinct its formant structure. Speech sounds in Ekegusii can be arranged on a sonority scale as:

Least sonorant	voiceless stops /p t k/ Affricate /tʃ/ Voiceless fricatives /β s ɣ/ Nasals /m n ɲ ŋ/ Glides /j w/ High vowels /i u/ Mid-high vowels /e o/ Mid-low vowels /ɛ ɔ/ Most sonorant
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The scale has an important role to play in determining the selection of the nucleus of a syllable and the order of segments within the onset and the coda. The general principle is that the most sonorous sounds are selected as syllabic nuclei with sonority increasing within the onset. The nucleus is the high point of sonority or peak.

3.3.3 Tone in Ekegusii

Ekegusii is a tone language – a language that uses pitch variations as a means of creating lexical contrast (Yip, 2002; Hyman, 1975). Ekegusii is seen to employ tone to distinguish word meanings or to convey grammatical distinctions. The tone in Ekegusii serves to mark different verb tenses, possession, negation, and nominal categories. In this way, the meanings of the same phonemic segments, in the same arrangement, are distinguished by the pitch patterns as in the following example.

Transcription	Gloss	Transcription	Gloss
/m`o'ake/	beat him/her	/m`o`ake/	go away

Tonal variations in Ekegusii are used to distinguish dialectal identities between speakers of Ekerogoro and Ekemaate dialects.

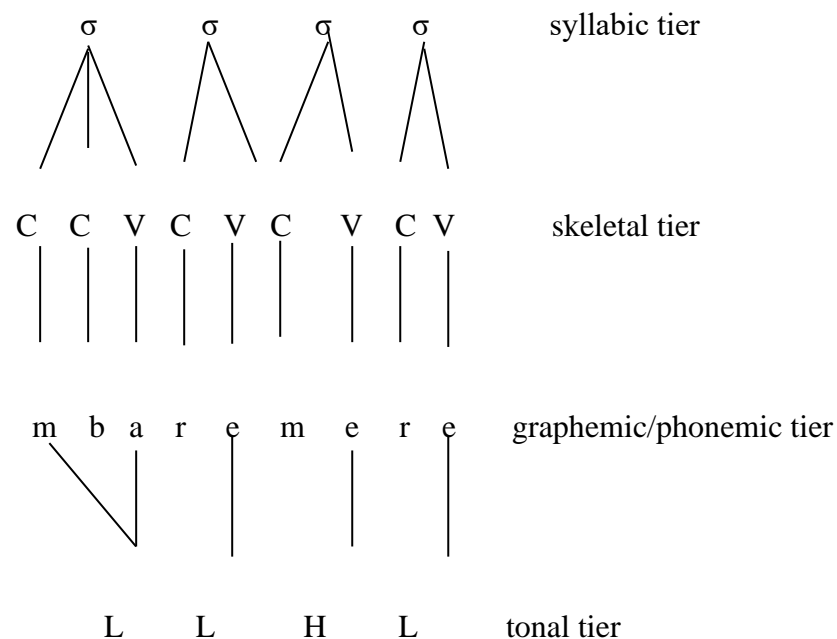
Hyman, (1975) suggests that in a tone language, both pitch phonemes and segmental phonemes enter into a composition of at least some morphemes. We thus observe as in the above examples the segments are alike yet pitch variation sets the two lexical items apart. In Autosegmental phonology (AP) Goldsmith, (1990) gives a way of describing the segments as tone-bearing units.

There are three tone patterns in Ekegusii: High (H), Low (L), and Falling. Nash, (2011) points out that falling tone is only found on long vowels, hence not contrastive in the

language just like H and L tones. We can therefore assume that the falling tone is a kind of movement from H to L in a concatenation.

Autosegmental Phonology (AP) as clearly articulated by Goldsmith (1976), handles autonomous articulatory parameters like tone, voicing, aspiration, and nasalization, which are, in principle, independent. This is also called Non-linear phonology. As regards tone, it simplifies the representation and allows it to be given an autonomous representation on a separate tier in AP. There is no one-to-one relationship between the number of tones and vowels. One vowel can be associated with many tones and vice versa (Kenstowicz, 1994; Odden, 2005). Durand (1990:242) observes that the anchoring device in the entire phonological representation is the skeletal tier, also called the CV tier, which forms the anchor point for elements on the other tiers.

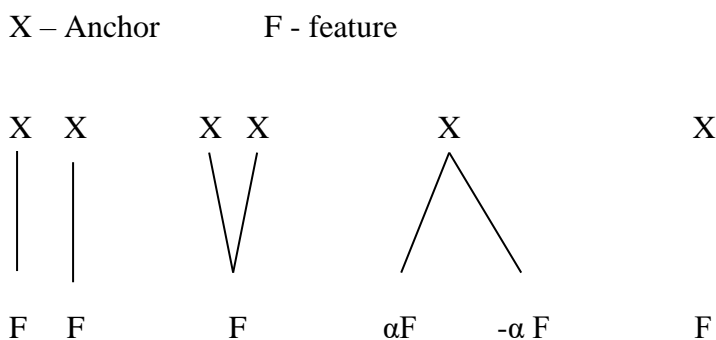
Below is a sample function of AP showing the relationship between the tiers using the Ekegusii word *mbaremere* ‘I will dig for them.’



This is the most common form of tonal representation apart from the other forms discussed later here. The diagrammatic representation makes a chart which is a pair of tiers along with the set of association lines that mediate them.

The following are the major principles of Autosegmental Phonology as described by Massamba (1996) and Snider (1999), which include the multilinear representation of segments, the association convention, the well-formedness condition (WFC), and the obligatory contour principle (OCP).

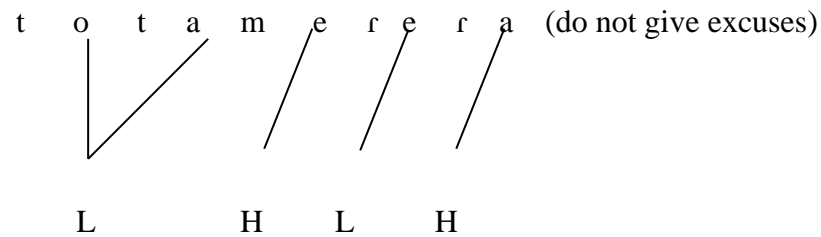
In the multilinear representation, segments and autosegments belong to different levels (tiers). This forms the basis on which Autosegmental phonology is also referred to as multilinear or non-linear phonology since it outgrows the linear ordering of SPE. As Kenstowicz (1994:311) explains, non-linear phonology drops the idea of a one-to-one relationship in phonological representation. Non-linearity, therefore, allows for all such representations:



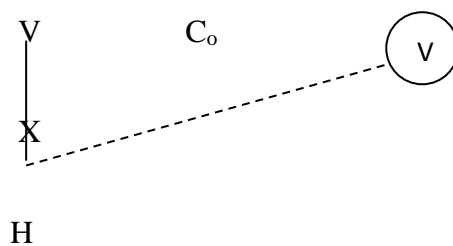
One-to-one multiply many-to-one bare anchor floating feature linked
(Kenstowicz, 1994: 311)

The association convention is described as a mental schema used to show a surface representation of the relationship between the tiers (Massamba, 1996:176, Snider, 1999:7).

To illustrate the principle Goldsmith (1990) shows that each morpheme contributes a tone to the tone melody of the word. This applies to Ekegusii. That is, there is the same number of tones and vowels in the language since segmental tone assignment in the language is in such a manner that every vowel (mora) is a tone-bearing unit (TBU). The following diagrammatic representation illustrates the concept:



In the convention, unbroken lines (as above) are used to indicate relationships that already exist. Part of a structural change is indicated by a dashed line, while a line deleted by a rule is indicated by an X or Z cutting through the line. The High tone shift diagram below summarizes the latter three concepts.



(Goldsmith, 1990:17)

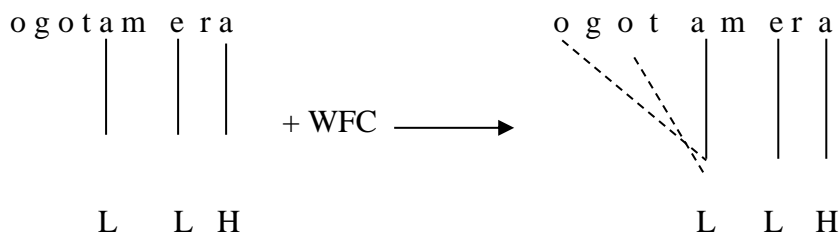
The third major principle of Autosegmental phonology is the Well Formedness Condition (WFC), which enables the lines to perform their correct role and states as follows:

- a) Each vowel must be associated with at least one tone.
- b) Each tone must be associated with at least one vowel.

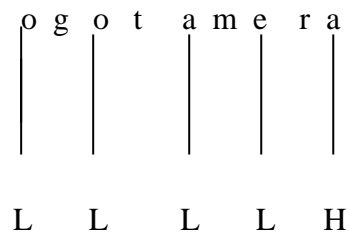
c) No association lines may cross.

(Katamba, 1989:203)

An example of the infinitival word ‘ogotamera’ (place of refuge) can be used to illustrate the well-formedness principle.



The final representation is:



Snider (1999:08) states the obligatory contour principle as follows: ‘Adjacent identical features are prohibited on the same tier’. Fox (2000:224) clarifies this principle thus: It is assumed that identical tones in a sequence constitute a single occurrence of a tone on the tonal tier; sequences of like tones on this tier are not permitted. For instance, the HHL sequence simplifies to HL. A tone, therefore, spreads to another to make it look like two similar tones are adjacent.

Current circumstances challenges and opportunities

The future of Ekegusii is gloomy and uncertain. Modern trends in education science and technology have proved to be the force that will deal a last decisive blow to the language sending it into extinction sooner than later. The language is in a rapidly shifting mode. Words

are always borrowed first, then structure and grammar. Even those who are not fluent in the language that loans a new word to Ekegusii still prefer to use the borrowed term over its equivalent in Ekegusii, particularly if the borrowed word is simpler than its equivalent.

4.1 Multilingualism and how it affects Ekegusii maintenance

Speakers of Ekegusii are all multilingual. It happens that as one is born, he picks up the language from the home environment which is Ekegusii traditionally. When this child starts formal education Kiswahili and English are introduced gradually (Otieno & Mecha, 2019). That gives the child an opportunity to interact with other languages. The speaker then can operate with many languages at his disposal by switching between them.

The majority of parents in Gusii today do not invest time in transmitting their mother tongue to their children. They are ignorant of this or are deliberately ensuring that the children miss out on their linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage that is operating during cross-generational communication and family ties. Parents have a negative attitude towards their language thus influencing the language choice of their children. The language of the home is now Kiswahili and Sheng, a Kiswahili argot, used in Kenyan urban centers. The majority today see language shift from mother tongue to exclusive use of Kiswahili and English as a step to advance academically and hence socially and economically.

We point out here that language shift is a determinant of language endangerment. In a setting where more than one language is spoken, the way languages interact lead to a situation where some languages are progressively becoming less spoken, and even lost (Rehg & Campbell, 2018). In a country like Kenya, several languages are dying out because they are dominated by other languages they make contact with; languages perceived to be an economic and social panacea to ‘success’ in life. This is seen in choices made by its speakers in various domains of language use.

Recent studies indicate that the co-existence of languages in Kenya and the rest of Africa is being threatened especially in most urban settings. As the numbers of indigenous languages face the threat of extinction around the world, the issue of language shift and endangerment becomes an important linguistic inquiry area. Language shift and endangerment of indigenous languages would not only reduce the culture and history of the indigenous language but also endanger their rich source of the whole culture.

Questions for further study

The following questions can be used for further study in an undergraduate setting:

1. What is the degree of language shift/language maintenance and ethnolinguistic vitality of Ekegusii speakers?
2. How has the linguistic history of the South West Kenya region evolved?
3. What does a comparative study of consonant and vowel systems of Bantu languages in the region look like?
4. What are the theoretical underpinnings of Ekegusii prefix dissimilation?
5. Which phonological rules operate in Ekegusii prefixation and word classes?

The following are prompts for further study directed to graduate students:

1. What is the nature of the lexical representation of tone in Ekegusii?
2. Can we have tone spreading or delinking rules that rely on low tones as inputs?
3. What is the importance of the lexicon as a repository of cultural data and its potential to contribute to our understanding of human cognition?
4. How does tone vary in different Ekegusii sentence structures? Like
 - Polar questions
 - Wh-questions

- Declarative sentences
 - Subordinate clauses
 - Yes/No questions
 - Alternative questions
5. What are the acoustic characteristics of Ekegusii consonants?

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