

Language and Identity among marginal people in East Africa

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ABSTRACT

Language is one of the strongest expressions of group identity. Many communities in East Africa are multilingual and for some of the smaller communities this leads to language loss and for others to language revival. The article shows how different groups in similar circumstances opt for different linguistic behaviour and how these choices can swiftly change in the light of external circumstances including economic need. The article examines the linguistic attitude of groups such as the Yaaku, Aasa, Akiek, Ma'á/Mbugu from East Africa and compares them among each other and with other former hunter-gatherers such as the Bakola/Bagyele pygmies in Cameroon and the agricultural Mbugwe from Tanzania who are equally small in numbers.

KEYWORDS

Ethnic identity; language loss, dorobo, East Africa, hunter-gatherers

1. MARGINAL PEOPLE IN EAST AFRICA

My aim in this article is to provide an overview and an analysis how various smaller communities deal with group identity and how this affects their linguistic ideologies. I use the term “marginal” despite its negative connotations.¹ Many of those small populations have or had their own ethnic identity and language and now either live in symbiosis with and depending on another population (the various so-called dorobo² groups) or live (still or until recently) from hunting and gathering. What I am interested in is how such groups find a way out in the current society and a way to survive, how they create a self-image that allows them to have enough self-respect to develop. I am more interested in the social unequal relations and the challenges for identity and pride rather than in the economic activity of hunter-gathering. This category of marginal people who are challenged in their identity and independence contains a variety of (former) hunter-gatherers that live in unequal symbiosis with dominant cattle nomads and farmers such as the various dorobo groups among the Maasai (and other dominant groups), the various Waata groups among the Oromo, and occupational groups at the margins of society. I extend the comparison with marginal groups that have no hunter-gatherer past nor present in order to include more factors for analysis.

I first introduce briefly some of these marginal groups that I know from fieldwork experience and that will figure in the rest of the article. The collection is random in the sense that it is restricted to groups with which I have personal experience and it is deliberately very varied with the aim to come to an insightful comparison.

1. The *Aasa*³ are a so-called dorobo group among the Maasai in the Maasai plains of Tanzania. They shifted to Maasai a few generations ago and we have a detailed account of that shift (Winter 1979). Despite the inevitable rumours that there are still speakers of their former Cushitic language I am convinced that Christopher Winter indeed spoke to the last speakers of that language and even then they had Maasai as their dominant language. The present-day Aasa consider themselves to be Maasai (and live among them) but are not accepted as such by the Maasai, as is the typical situation for such dorobo groups. They have a recollection of Aasa identity and some remember

¹ It is more common to speak of “marginalised people” and that may sound more acceptable but it suggests a historical development that is not central to me.

² I use the term *dorobo* as a general term for any group with a hunter-gatherer past that lives in symbiosis with a more powerful society, mostly once powerful cattle nomads such as the Maasai and Oromo. Since I do not use the term as name for a specific society, as is often done, I do not capitalize it.

³ The more common spelling in the literature is *Aasáx* but nowadays the pronunciation is *Aasa*.

some words (Petrollino and Mous 2010). The situation during our fieldwork in 2007 was that they hardly own cattle and earn their living in many different ways such as work for mining activities; act as guides for tourist hunters. There are some temporary camps in the plains that are used for hunting. When I first hunted the Aasa in 1989 their social situation seemed harsher as I had the impression that the Aasa harboured criminals on the run; in fact, all mining activity was criminal at that time. Hunting still is a criminal offence and only legal for tourists who pay expensive hunting permits. In sum, the people of Aasa descent have no ambition to re-create or keep an Aasa identity. Marginally they still make use of their hunting and gathering skills but they consider themselves Maasai.

2. The Yaaku are another dorobo group among the Maasai and they live near Mt. Kenya in Doldol and surroundings (Cronk 2004). They shifted to Maasai allegedly by decision in a general assembly (Brenzinger 1992; Heine 1974/75). The last fluent speakers who were mixing Yaaku with Maasai passed away a few years ago since I briefly worked with them in 2005. There are still a few remembers who lack fluency. They live in a few communities and have a sense of forming a group. There is political activism to become Yaaku again (Carrier 2011). They nurture their hunter-gatherer past.

3. The Ma'á/Mbugu are a group among the Shambaa in the Usambara mountains with a Cushitic linguistic past and culturally a cattle keeping past. They have a strong separate identity and a recreated language to show it (Mous 2003). The dominant Shambaa neighbours have an ambivalent attitude towards them with some distrust but also respect; these relationships with their neighbours are not of a dependency nature, different from the dorobo cases and are quite independent.

4. The Mbugwe who live north of Babati is a Bantu agricultural community that is losing its identity due to their small numbers and integration into the nation state of Tanzania. Their language is more and more and deeper and deeper influenced by Swahili. There are many communities in Tanzania that are in a similar situation.

5. I will also refer to the Bakola/Bagyele in Cameroon. They constitute several groups of pygmies in South Cameroun. Even though this a community at the other side of the African continent, I find it instructive to include them in the comparison. Traditionally these forest foragers live in symbiosis with their Bantu masters who are farmers. The relationship is in a way similar to the dependency that the dorobo of East Africa experience as well but in a different economic setting with agricultural rather than cattle keeping masters. The Bakola/Bagyele are defined as having a hunter-gatherer identity.

2. RELATIONS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

These marginal groups are connected to their environment, their neighbours and the global world. It would be a mistake to see them as “untouched” remnant populations who do not participate in the world of today. Let me illustrate this with the case of the Yaaku and how I got to into contact with them. One day Jennifer Konainte from the Yaaku People’s Organisation came knocking on the door of my office in Leiden University to urge me to come to Kenya in order to prove that the Yaaku language is still alive. This was my first encounter with “contract” research (though no money for research was involved) and with an explicit assignment and formulation of the expected outcome. The ethnologue website had registered Yaaku as dead. I did go to the Yaaku and found that there were still four speakers of the language but hardly a language community as these speakers did not use Yaaku among each other. But there was a Yaaku community that was very keen on having their own Yaaku language while they were mother tongue speakers of Maasai. First there is the remarkable fact that a spokesperson of such a marginal group would know that I could do such a job and manage to travel to see me. This is in a way the outcome of the 1993 UN year of indigenous people which stimulated educated people such as Jennifer Koinante to see their own descent as something of value. And for human rights activists groups such as the Netherlands Centrum voor Inheemse Volkeren (NCIV) to support such a spokesperson of an indigenous group (Blonk e.a. 2015; Wensveen 2007). But the issues that are of interest for this article are why did the Yaaku feel the need for their language and why now?

We have to see this development in the first place in the context of land claims. The Maasai of the area around Mt Kenya had been making claims on the land (Kantai 2007:107-8; Hughes 2005). Their land had been giving out in one hundred year’s lease to British settlers which ended in 2004. The Kenyan government rejected the claim as they do not recognize treaties made in the colonial period. This led to legal claims and protests, some violent. The Yaaku saw the prospect of claiming the state protected forest in the area where they live. A new Kenyan constitution was in the making which was expected to open the opportunity of community owned land. The Yaaku People’s Organisation also saw economic opportunities of tourist income in that forest. The wider context is one of a newly found self-respect. The international interest in indigenous people and the global appreciation for cultural diversity have their repercussions on the views by outsiders both in Kenya and the world on marginal people. It has an effect on administration and national politics resulting in the situation that some care in treatment of marginal people is politically wise; and it even leads to subsequent legislation and involvement. The changes in the outsider view effect the insider’s self-view too. In the case of the Yaaku we also have to take into account that the

Maasai culture that they looked up to is not viewed with the same admiration by the present-day modern Kenyan citizens and in fact Maasai would also be grouped under that strange label of indigenous people of Kenya. The Yaaku have come to the conclusion that there is little to gain to be Maasai, moreover since they would never be considered to be more than second-class Maasai in their master's eyes. The situation of the Yaaku is in many ways comparable to that of the Elmolo in Kenya (Tosco 2015).

The case of the Yaaku also brings me to three themes that affect such marginal people: modernity, group identity and human rights. Marginal groups are often trapped between different ambitions regarding modernity. They can tap in to certain resources by playing the card of resisting modernity. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations are sometimes ready to help to continue their unsustainable way of life creating new dependency. They can also portray themselves as a tourist attraction. Governments do include their "authentic" marginal peoples in their tourist advertisements as the Ethiopian National Tour Operators does with the Suri (Abbink 2008: 8) and yet initiate disruptive schemes to "develop" them. And national politicians may want to save indigenous people to boost their international profile, or as Hodgson (2009:12) puts it "they hoped to leverage their international visibility and support to achieve recognition and protection of their resources and rights by their nation-states."). The paradoxical attitude towards modernity and resistance to it has complex repercussions for the state of mind of the people concerned, see for example the irritation and resistance in the reaction of the Suri towards companies of tourists (Abbink 2008).

Group identity: The outside world works with a model of an ethnic group and a leader representing them. Not all marginal groups have a strong sense of ethnic identity. The Aasa for example recognize that they have a historical origin of hunting and gathering but do not feel to belong to an ethnic identity other than Maasai and do not have a concept of an Aasa community. This is different for the Yaaku who do seem themselves as a community. The initiative to seek recognition from the outside world in their case was clearly with one individual; a person with the capacity and knowledge to make the necessary contacts. Such a person needs to be able to claim that s/he represents the group. The representative for the outside world is often someone who lives outside the community and is no longer incontestably seen as part of them. These communities harbour various people with authority and the alliances are fluid. Gains are difficult to predict and impossible to control.

Human rights play a role in the discourse among the interested parties around the marginal groups. But rights are luxuries in the harsh world of the powerless. On the one hand the personal contacts with agents from the West often result in dreams of a different world with unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, expansion of the participation of the marginal people with the outside world beyond the common contacts with their immediate neigh-

bours enlarges their options for participation in new activities and makes them less dependent on their powerful neighbours.

3. LANGUAGE AND SAFEGUARD OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

In the following paragraphs, I look into the different attitudes to ethnic identity for the groups introduced in the introduction and I link that to the status of their language and their language attitude.

The Mbugwe have a clear ethnic identity and will readily present themselves as Mbugwe but that identity is not so important for many of them. Living in or near the booming regional centre of Babati they see little need to differentiate from other groups. The area where they reside is characterised by a strong influx from different parts of Tanzania and has been like that for some time, not only because of the growth of the administrative capital of Babati but also due to the large scale rice growing fields which attracted workers from different parts of Tanzania. The Mbugwe language is still spoken, next to Swahili, but Swahili is so dominant in every day conversation that Mbugwe is deeply influenced by Swahili to the extent that many original Mbugwe words have been replaced by Swahili words with a Mbugwe pronunciation when speaking Mbugwe (Mous 2003b). In this way Mbugwe will continue to exist as a language that indicates a separate identity when needed but at minimal extra costs to the preferred language, Swahili. The Mbugwe identity is not central enough for the speakers to develop a purist attitude excluding Swahili words. Their Tanzanian identity is important for them to the extent that they are happy with Swahili intrusion into their language. Boone (2015) shows that the Mbugwe areas Kiru valley and Mamire ward are characterised by high levels of in-immigration, confiscation of land and reallocation of land. She argues that the accepted de-facto control by the state over land in Tanzania has led to a less prominent role of ethnicity in land claims and resulted in national citizenship and nation-building. This is particularly strong in areas like the Mbugwe land north of Babati town where ethnicity plays no role in land distribution.⁴

Despite the close resemblance in names, Mbugu (Ma'á/Mbugu) are a very different people from the Mbugwe. The Mbugu live in the Usambara mountains where the dominant population is Shambaa. They speak Shambaa, and Swahili but they also have their own language which is a variant of the neighbouring Bantu language Pare but with an extensive extra parallel lexicon that

⁴ Her reference to the Mbugwe as hunter-gatherers is rather puzzling, "Until the 1940s, the Kiru Valley was tse-tse infested and inhabited by a small community of hunter-gatherers (the Mbugwe) in its northernmost reaches." (Boone 2015: 74). Gray (1963:145, 1955) reports for the Mbugwe at the time colonization about six powerful chiefdoms with agriculture and animal husbandry as economic activities.

enables them to speak in a way that is completely different from their Bantu neighbours and totally incomprehensible for these neighbours. I have argued elsewhere (Mous 2003a) that this is at least partly a deliberate creation aiming at expressing their strong sense being different and strong wish to have not only their own ethnic identity but also one that is maximally different from their environment. This extensive extra lexicon provides them with a language of their own that is actually also used daily and intensively at the high costs of maintaining a lexicon that is not needed for communication but only functions to have a language of their own. It is one of the rare examples in the world where the need of a separate identity is so important for the people that they manage to maintain a language just for that purpose.

The Yaaku are comparable to the Mbugu in that they first gave up their original language and then returned back to it because of a renewed interest in their original identity in order to renounce the identity that is associated with the language that they shifted to. For the Yaaku this is the once dominant Maasai; for the Mbugu the agricultural Bantu. For the Yaaku this search for an identity of their own is at the same time a step towards emancipation while the Mbugu do not feel inferior to their Bantu neighbours, just culturally fundamentally different. The Mbugu do not consider themselves to be in a situation of language shift and do not attach strong feelings of identity to their language. They have a positive attitude towards Swahili and let it intrude to their language. The Aasa are in more or less the same position as the Yaaku in terms of shift to Maasai but do not cling on their Aasa identity and see that as a stain. The Akie that live in more or less the same area as the Aasa are less progressed in their shift to Maasai. They master Maasai and use that now even for their “Akie” rituals that the Maasai request them to perform (Heine & Legère 2015). Their Akie identity is of importance to them as it is linked to the few economic options that they seem to have (rituals, assisting commercial hunting trips) in the harsh environment of the Maasai plains in Tanzania. But their life as Akie is a difficult and unattractive and options to enter another society are attractive. For them a U-turn back to their Akie language and identity as the Mbugu have done (Sasse 1992:23) and the Yaaku crave for (Mous 2005) does not seem to be imminent. The Akie attitude to language and ethnic identity may be similar to many other dorobo groups: Adaptation in language; small communities that have to negotiate their space with powerful masters and that define themselves by their life style but by an ethnic identity that is defined by descent.

Leaving the East African plains for the forests of Central Africa I would like to compare the East African groups to the Bakola/Bagyele pygmies of Cameroon. The Bakola/Bagyele forest foragers are linked to several sedentary agricultural groups that speak various Bantu languages and live in small groups, “camps”, but identify themselves as being pygmies. It is very difficult to count how many “languages” should be distinguished among these

Bakola/Bagyele (Ngue Um & Duke 2016). The language of Bakola/Bagyele is like a chameleon; it adapts to the partner in conversation and is always a variant of the language of their masters. Their linguistic adaptation seems to be strategy to keep their identity by avoiding conflict and avoiding conflict by acting adjustment while keeping a sense of self and of being different without a strive of constructing a positively defined identity. The Bakola also perform ritual tasks for their masters. In addition, they are often asked to perform in song and dance and many occasions of their masters. This seems typical for the various pygmy groups but less so for the dorobo groups of East Africa.

Yaaku and Ma'á/Mbugu are identities that are claimed as ethnic identity by the community and crucial for them (see Reid and Chelati Dirar 2007 and the articles in that special issue for reflection on the terms identity and community in the East African context). The Aasa ethnic identity is not positively claimed and of little consequence. The Akie identity is more complex. There are several groups of Akie in the Maasai plains of Tanzania. Their language is similar to that of the Okiek of Kenya of which they have no knowledge and with whom there is no contact. The group and their settlement is the major social factor (Heine & Legère 2015). They know about the other Akie groups, acknowledge that they are similar but have little contact. In fact, the Akie include all the hunter-gatherer bands in the Southern Maasai plains under the label Akie including Aasá and bands with a Southern Nilotic language that is different from Akie.⁵ In certain respects this is similar for the Bakola/Bagyele of South Cameroun who also associate primarily with the camp where they live and which usually consists of only a few families (even though that may move to another camp) and at the same time recognise that they are all Bakola or Bagyele. These two terms are in fact etymologically related and go back to outsider (Bantu) terms for pygmies or forest foragers.

Communities: These marginal people vary in terms of settlement. The Yaaku and Ma'á/Mbugu are sedentary. The Yaaku have two settlements that are separate but not too far from each other. Even if they used to consider themselves to be Maasai, quite a few live together in communities separate from the Maasai. Their economy is comparable to that of the Maasai although their cattle herds may be less extensive and their youth does not practice transhumance except when part of a Maasai company. The Ma'á/Mbugu live in three different parts of the Usambara mountains and their settlement can be linked to clan history but these territories are not exclusively Ma'á/Mbugu and some maybe even not even predominantly. The Hadza have their settlements in a large Hadza-only territory and there is some seasonal movement within this area linked to availability of food sources. Contacts with neighbours, Datooga, Iraqw and Nyisanzu are and were superficial, except for the latter.

⁵ The other way around, the Aasa do not feel any affinity with fellow dorobo such as the various Akie groups in the plains.

Relations to masters: The East African marginal groups are not all in a dependent relation to another ethnic group. For example, this is not the case for the Hadza. But the Yaaku, Aasa, Akie and other dorobo groups are considered to be “servants” of the Maasai and the Ma’á/Mbugu claim to have such a history. This master-servant relation is different from those of the West African pygmies. East African dorobo (including waata) are clients of cattle nomads while the Central African Pygmies are clients of farmers. More importantly, the pygmy servant-master relationship is a detailed one in terms of rights and obligations; it is both valid at a personal/family level and at group level. Such personal/family bonds do not seem to define dorobo relations with the cattle nomads. It is unclear to me whether this difference is related to sedentary or nomadic masters or to other factors. Hunter-gatherer groups that have a client relation to farmers are currently less common in East Africa. One candidate of such a relation is that of the Okiek and the Nandi (mixed economy). And the same time another Okiek group relates to the Maasai. More such cases must have existed in the past. Wambua (2012) reports on the Athi among the Gikuyu. The name Athi is from the Bantu root *asi* which means something like ‘original inhabitant’ (Nurse 1979:390-392)) and can be found in various places in East Africa (such as the Wasi or Alagwa of Kondoa Irangi) and many farmer ethnic groups have origin stories that speak of original inhabitants that are related to hunter-gatherers. One such story is that of *Seuta* among the Shambaa, Zigua, Bondei, and others, (Kiro 1953-55, Thompson 1999) *uta* in *Seuta* being the Bantu root for ‘bow’, and *se-* a name giving clitic.

In order to get a deeper understanding of the social mechanisms behind the language contact it would be instructive to have a comparative study of the what this symbiosis and servant status entails in practical terms across the various dorobo groups: (unfair) exchange of meat; ceremonial tasks, ritual (cleansing) tasks; healing and honey; herding sheep and goats; other herding tasks; marriage (women from marginal group to the dominant group). There seems to be little admixture of the dominant group to marginal group despite the fact that temporal shelter of masters among dorobo in times of duress has been reported (e.g. Winter 1979).

4. MODELS OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGIES

There are a number of different language ecologies for these various dorobo groups in East Africa. Here I present an overview.

1. Argot: a special lexicon that renders the speakers as different from the group speaking the language within which the argot is defined. The argot is used for internal communication while the base language is used for external communication. Argot can only exist if the need is felt to maintain ethnic dis-

inction. Many argots are reported for specialised occupational groups such as hippo hunters or blacksmiths but the deviant lexicon of the argot allows them to talk in the argot about daily activities and not only on matters related to the occupation. Banti (1997) contains a long list of such groups in the horn of Africa alone that are reported in the literature. Sometimes claims are made that the lexicon of these argots contains the remnants of a former language but that is difficult to prove. The ideology behind this ecology of argot is that of a linguistic association with occupation: Your occupation defines what kind of person you are. This is principle appears in many different situations. For example, the once so powerful Datooga cattle nomads feel a strong pressure towards a sedentary lifestyle and depending more on agriculture; for many that is logically accompanied with a shift to Iraqw. (Kießling 1998)

2. Mixed language: Ma'á is structurally not different from these argots but ideologically different in that Ma'á is viewed as a complete language different from the others even though the unmixed base can be seen as a dialect of Pare. Ma'á are not hunter-gatherers, nor a marginal group like the others; they practice mixed farming and are considered "cattle people" but they once were clients of the Maasai according to their own oral traditions (Mous 2003a) and impoverished cattle owners before that if we attach some credibility to these oral histories. The creation of a mixed language like the Ma'á did is quite extreme and a huge investment in memory capacity for the lexicon. Such mixed languages are extremely rare and some the circumstances under which they come about are those of systematic mixed marriages (like Michif in Canada) or iterant occupational groups (Romani), see Bakker (1997).

3. Multilingualism: Akie speak four languages (Heine, König, & Legère 2015): Akie, Maasai, Swahili, Nguu. They speak Maasai among each other because they find that easier than Akie. They do not consider speaking Akie as crucial for being Akie (some of the ritual experts can do the rituals only in Maasai) and in fact consider other hunter-gatherers in the area also to be Akie.⁶ The lack of a link between language and ethnicity is not unheard of in East Africa. For example, Rendille who speak Samburu are considered Rendille (Ngure 2016). The four languages that the Akie speak are quite distinct. The Akiek conform linguistically to their neighbours by learning their languages and being ready to speak them. The ecology is slightly different from the adaptation strategy of the Bakola because for the Bakola the languages concerned are fairly closely related and the shifting is more sliding and partly adaptation.

⁶ This does not include the Burunge even if the Akiek claim a common origin with them (Heine & Legère 2015). The Burunge speak a Southern Cushitic language and are capable producers of bee hives, the type consisting of two halve wooden tubes from a tree trunk. Bee keeping is central in Burunge culture (Östberg 1995).

Table 1 – Categorization of Hunter Gatherer societies (Stiles 2001) and linguistic ecology

STILES' CHARACTERISATION	STILES' EA EXAMPLES	STILES ON LANGUAGE	MY REMARKS
Traditional society with first superficial contact with others.	Hadza in their contact with Datooga cattle nomads	-	The Iraqw are and were not immediate neighbours but there must have been contact with them predating the contact with the Datooga judging on some linguistic influence both ways.
Contact including sporadic exchange with neighbours that are perceived as more powerful. HG desire for valuable goods; territorial integrity still exists.	Most Hadza in their contact with agriculturalists	Maintenance of original language (no major language change)	
Accommodation: Regularization of exchange relations. Regular visits to agricultural settlement without aggression. Agriculturalist use HG resources. Mutual characterisation in oppositions. Development of patron-client relation.	Aweer, some Waata, Degere. <i>Dahalo</i>	The HGs learn the language of the patrons.	This unbalanced bilingualism is potentially stable.
Acculturation: HG are low caste. They perform roles in ceremonies and services. In case sufficient land resources the HG trade goods; otherwise they work for the agriculturalists. They become at least partly sedentary and may have leaders.	Okiek, Dorobo, Midgan, some Waata <i>Aasá after the rinderpest; Akie</i>	Language shift to the dominant (agricultural) language.	The language shift is a slow and gradual process. Many groups in this situation will still have their original language in a reduced functionality.
Assimilation, annihilation: There is no longer a distinct ethnic entity. Social problems and often dependency on aid. Often settled on missions or reserves.	<i>Current Aasá, Qwadza</i> ; many groups have been assimilated within other communities with only a memory of a HG past.	-	

4. Adapt, but remain separate because of that: This is the model of the Bakola/Bagyele in Cameroun. They are separate in everybody's eyes due to their recognisability as pygmies and because of their occupation and way of life. The various Bakola groups have a slightly different language ecology that is determined by their geography and the languages used by their neighbours and within their repertoire they can adjust to the communicative circumstances and that ability with some unique features makes them stand out as being different from the others linguistically as well (Ngue Um & Duke 2016).

This overview is not meant to be comprehensive but only illustrative for the variation in language ecologies for the dorobo groups in East Africa. Many other ecologies do occur in situations of language contact. One example is that of community translators: The community is mainly monolingual but there are a few individuals that are multilingual and that are used by the community as translators whenever the occasion arises. This has been reported for the Trio and other Amerindian groups in Southern Surinam (Carlin 1998). In East Africa, this must have been the situation for the Iraqw society in the early days of colonialization and communication in Swahili.

Stiles (2001) used the Woodburn (1982) division into Immediate Return versus Delayed Return⁷ type of hunter-gatherers and proposed a classification of hunter-gatherers in different stages and included remarks on language use. The five stages are based on 11 general observations, propositions, on IR and 15 on DR type of hunter-gatherer societies. Some of these propositions and characterisations pertain to contact and relations with other societies and in the following table I summarise Stiles distinctions and examples of societies in East Africa and his remarks on language expanded by my own observations. Stiles' differentiation incorporates the following factor: Subsistence technology, settlement pattern, social organisation, social obligations, property sharing, and territoriality. I do not refer to these distinctions as stages since I doubt the validity of a chronological order among them.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

There is wide variety of constellations of ethnic identity and language ecology among the marginal peoples of East Africa. The forces that trigger changes in linguistic ideologies and ethnic identity stance come from external circumstances and can bring about drastic changes. The options and outcomes also depend largely on the circumstances. Ethnic group identity is a versatile multidimensional concept and its importance and role can vary in context

⁷ Immediate Return refers to a type of society that consumes the results of the hunting and gathering immediately, while Delayed Return refers to those where such food is stored.

and time depending on what gain can be achieved. We have seen that for the Yaaku a separate ethnic identity became important again when it provided a prospect on land and with that better life and emancipation. With the quest for ethnic identity comes that for the lost language. While the Ma'á/Mbugu in an earlier period dealt with a similar desire for their lost identity they were able to recreate a language as a strong flag for their identity because they had the circumstances that enabled them to recreate their language in a more or less natural way: they had a model of lexicon creation in the long period of initiation that existed in Vudee, their reputed centre of dispersal; moreover due to their movements they had the means to create a parallel lexicon with a non-Bantu twist in the words from Maasai and Gorwaa that they had access too. These factors are not available to the Yaaku and it is a major challenge to them to keep or create a semblance of their own languages even symbolically. The fact that the Ma'á/Mbugu manage to keep their own "language" that is a luxury in terms of communicative needs is linked to the fact that although the function of that language is symbolic, in its use it is complete, fully functional and hence easier to maintain. It is challenging to keep a language alive that is only marginal in functionality and symbolic function. The linguistic situations of the Aasa and the Yaaku are very similar but completely different in attitude to ethnic identity. The Aasa have given up Aasa identity, they renounce it and see no use for it. The Mbugwe have no outspoken negative attitude to their ethnic identity; to them it is simply not central and not really profitable. There are no strong forces for them to keep their language and hence there seem to be no strive to keep their language pure, without external (Swahili) admixture. On the other hand, there is also no competing ethnic identity on a comparable level that they aspire nor another ethnic language that is attractive to them. Their language will slowly dissolve, unless a there is major change in the external political and economic situation. For the Bakola/Bagyele ethnicity works differently. They do consider themselves different from their surroundings as pygmies but cannot define that identity as linked to geographical area and adhere to other forms of social organisation such as their camps and their relations or alliances with their masters. Their solution for survival is one of invisibility and continuous half-adaptation to their environment. A people's attitude towards their ethnic identity and to a language of their own and strongly linked but not in predictable ways as the political and economic context as well as the accidental linguistic surroundings are major factors in the outcome in terms of the resultant language ecology.

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