

The Situation of Ndengeleko: A Coastal Tanzanian Language (P10)

Eva-Marie Ström
University of Gothenburg

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and aim

Tanzania is a multiethnic and multilingual country, home to approximately 120 languages. One of these is absolutely dominant, namely the Bantu language Swahili. This language has been used as a language of wider communication along the Tanzanian coast for centuries, but was especially promoted from the 1960's as the national language by Julius Nyerere, the first president of the independent nation.

Use of the other, *minority languages (ML)*¹ of Tanzania has in the past been discouraged because of fear of tribalism. More recently they are recognized as important to the Tanzanian heritage but not promoted or allowed in any formal domain in the country. Nevertheless, some of these languages are spoken by millions of people and hold a strong position in the area where their speech communities live. They tend to be learnt by people from other areas who move into the community in question to live there. Occasionally also smaller languages hold such a position, for instance if the area in question is linguistically homogenous, or if the language enjoys regional or local prestige.

As we shall see, Ndengeleko is not one of these stronger minority languages. As with several other Tanzanian coastal languages, its position is one of low status, and people from other communities moving into the area do not learn it, but rather cause the position of Swahili to become even stronger.

This paper will look closer at the complex sociolinguistic situation of the area where Ndengeleko is spoken, by presenting the results from fieldwork carried out in August 2006. The survey forms part of an extensive study of the language resulting in a grammar. Ndengeleko is so far an unstudied language. It has since long been identified and appears in works on Bantu as a whole, as well as roughly positioned on language maps. But there is no description or even a grammatical sketch of this Eastern Bantu language. Likewise there are no studies of where, how and by whom Ndengeleko is used. A first contribution to shed light on these latter issues is presented in this paper, together with an attempt to answer the question of Ndengeleko's future. In short, the aim of this limited sociolinguistic study is to describe the linguistic situation by addressing the following questions:

- a. In which area is Ndengeleko spoken?
- b. Approximately how many people speak the language?
- c. Is Ndengeleko endangered?

Especially question c. is of a complex nature, and can certainly not be answered only by estimating the number of speakers of Ndengeleko. Many more factors contribute to the death or survival of a language. The rate of endangerment will be estimated in the present study and reference will be made to the criteria as formulated by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered languages (UNESCO 2003). As we shall see, there are strong reasons to be concerned about the future of Ndengeleko.

¹ Refers to a language that is used by a certain speech community and which is not, or in a limited way, spread to other communities, as opposed to a dominating language. In the Tanzanian context ML are all languages except Swahili. They are not used in school, media or any other official domain and do not have any official status.

1.2. Overview of paper

This paper is organized as follows: after a word on the Rufiji subgroup of languages in 1.3, section 2 gives a short summary of the methodology used in gathering and processing the data. After that, (question a) on the area where Ndengeleko is spoken will be addressed in section 3. Number of speakers (question b) will be estimated in 4. The rest of the paper is concerned with estimating the endangered status of Ndengeleko (question c). Two factors, also included in the list by UNESCO, will be given some special attention, as I regard them as contributing very heavily to the question of endangerment: language attitudes, discussed in section 5, and intergenerational transmission, discussed in section 6. The results from questionnaires and interviews are presented when appropriate. In 7 the endangered status of Ndengeleko is discussed while referring to the UNESCO factors concerned. They are not simply listed but discussed according to their supposed importance to the Ndengeleko situation. The paper ends with a conclusion in 8.

1.3. Linguistic affiliation

Before addressing the abovementioned aims of the paper, a few comments on the linguistic affiliation of Ndengeleko are required. It is a Bantu language of the P10 group (Guthrie 1971), or the Rufiji subgroup of Rufiji-Ruvuma (Nurse 1988). Regardless of the classification, Ndengeleko is most closely linked with Matuumbi and (the language) Rufiji in the literature. Concerning these three languages Nurse concludes: “It would be safe to regard them as dialects of one language.” (Nurse 1988:45) Ndengeleko and Matuumbi are indeed closely related and for many speakers mutually intelligible, but by the communities definitely regarded as two distinct groups and language forms. Rufiji, however, is to the best of my knowledge not a separate form of speech.

The people living along the river Rufiji have in early records been referred to as ‘Rufiji people’ or *warufiji* in Swahili, and their language has been referred to as *kirufiji* or in short ‘the way/language of Rufiji’. Depending on whom you ask and under which circumstances, a person can refer to him- or herself as *Mrufiji* or *Mndengeleko*: ‘A Rufiji or Ndengeleko person’. The term *Mrufiji* mostly refers to a person who lives close by the river, certainly in the past. But since the river has given its name to one of the districts of the coast region of Tanzania in the present administration, this term can now also be confused with a more general term ‘someone who lives in the Rufiji district’. To confuse the situation further, *kirufiji* is reportedly also used to refer to the Swahili spoken by people living in the Rufiji district. It seems plausible to have a separate name for a Swahili that has been spoken as a second language in the district for at least a century, as we shall see later.

Be this as it may, since some people started to be referred to as *warufiji* speaking *kirufiji*, the language keeps on being referred to as a separate form. And when being asked about ethnic belonging in the censuses until 1967, it was possible to tick Rufiji from a list of ethnic groups, which different numbers of people also did. When comparing numbers from the censuses in 1948 and 1967 (Legère 1992), the people choosing Rufiji as their ethnic group seem to have decreased in number much more than the ones choosing Ndengeleko. This difference is probably due to the ambivalence as to how to call your group, sometimes Rufiji, and sometimes Ndengeleko.

David Odden, who has worked with this subgroup of languages, has written a phonological and morphological description of Matuumbi (Odden 1996) with some comparative material on the speech form Rufiji, and a survey chapter of the Rufiji-Ruvuma languages (Odden 2003). He treats Rufiji as a dialect of Ndengeleko. I have so far not been able to distinguish any separate dialectal forms in Ndengeleko; differences in pronunciation rather seem idiolectal. Be this as it may, the Ndengeleko speakers themselves turn down the idea that there is any distinct language called Rufiji, and the language name does not occur as an answer to the open question on language in the questionnaire. Following all this, I take Rufiji and Ndengeleko to be the same language.

2. Methodology

Two methods for collecting data have been used: open interviews and questionnaires, both shortly described here.

2.1. Interviews

The interviews were held with small groups of people in the same villages where the questionnaires had been used in schools (see below), plus some additional interviews. The survey was restricted to the Rufiji district as this is where most Ndengeleko live. Interviewees were asked to give estimations of percentages of Ndengeleko people and Ndengeleko speakers in their ward and neighboring wards. Speakers in this context are people who actually use the language in communication with others and who are more or less fluent in their language use. Those who do not use the language, but can on demand produce some greetings and simple phrases, are regarded as not speaking the language. The reason for not including these people as speakers is that they most probably cannot be regarded as contributing towards the survival of the language. Questions were also asked about code switching, about how many children learn the language at present, the opinion of interviewees about these issues and about the future of the language. The interviews consisted of open questions, where one question leads to another rather than being rigidly structured. There was ample room for discussion within the group.

2.2. Questionnaires

In four schools around the Rufiji district, a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions was used in grades 5 and 7. When student numbers were small grade 6 was also included. The schools were selected more or less randomly in different parts of the district, but limitations in accessibility also influenced the choice. In Kibiti the questionnaire was only used in grade 5, with the intention to try out the questionnaire. As the questionnaire was not changed after this, the results are comparable with results from other schools and have been included. In general in the district children differ greatly in age, even in the same classroom. This is partly because some children start school late, while others do not know their exact age. The ages of the students in grade 5 ranges from 10 to 18 years, and in grade 7 from 11 to 19 years. Maybe because of this, answers to questions in no case showed any significant difference between grades, and hence these answers have not been split up according to grade or age group in the tables that follow. The villages in which the questionnaire was used are marked on the map in section 3.

The primary aim of using a questionnaire was finding out more about how many children of Ndengeleko parents learn the language, and what their attitudes are towards this language. Because the study is concerned with Ndengeleko, answers from children of other ethnic background have been omitted from the analysis of intergenerational transmission, competence and the like. They did fill the questionnaire though, and their answers were very useful to the study as they gave a picture of how mixed the schools are, and hence the population, in the different villages of the Rufiji district.

All children in the selected classes filled the questionnaire. This means there are 310 answers. 215 of these 310 children have at least one parent from the Ndengeleko community. Of these 215, 170 claim to have Ndengeleko as their *L1*². Others know only Swahili, or have another L1, for example Matuumbi because the other parent is Matuumbi speaking. Depending on the question to be answered, all 215 or only the 170 with Ndengeleko as L1 are taken into consideration, as indicated in the table titles.

The questionnaire was based on questions from similar studies in Tanzania, but was adapted to the aims of the present survey. In summary: except name, gender and age, children were asked about the ethnic belonging of their mother and father respectively, their own knowledge of L1 and that of Swahili, if they learned Swahili before or after entering school, with whom they use L1, which language they prefer and what they think about the importance of L1. Most questions involved ticking, and the last one was open. Here the children were asked to indicate why they think L1 is important or why they think it is not. Some of the questions, translated to English, are cited in the text on the results.

² The language of parents and/or community that you grow up with, and that you can speak and understand. Not necessarily the language you learn first or the language in which you have the best competence.

3. Area in which Ndengeleko is spoken

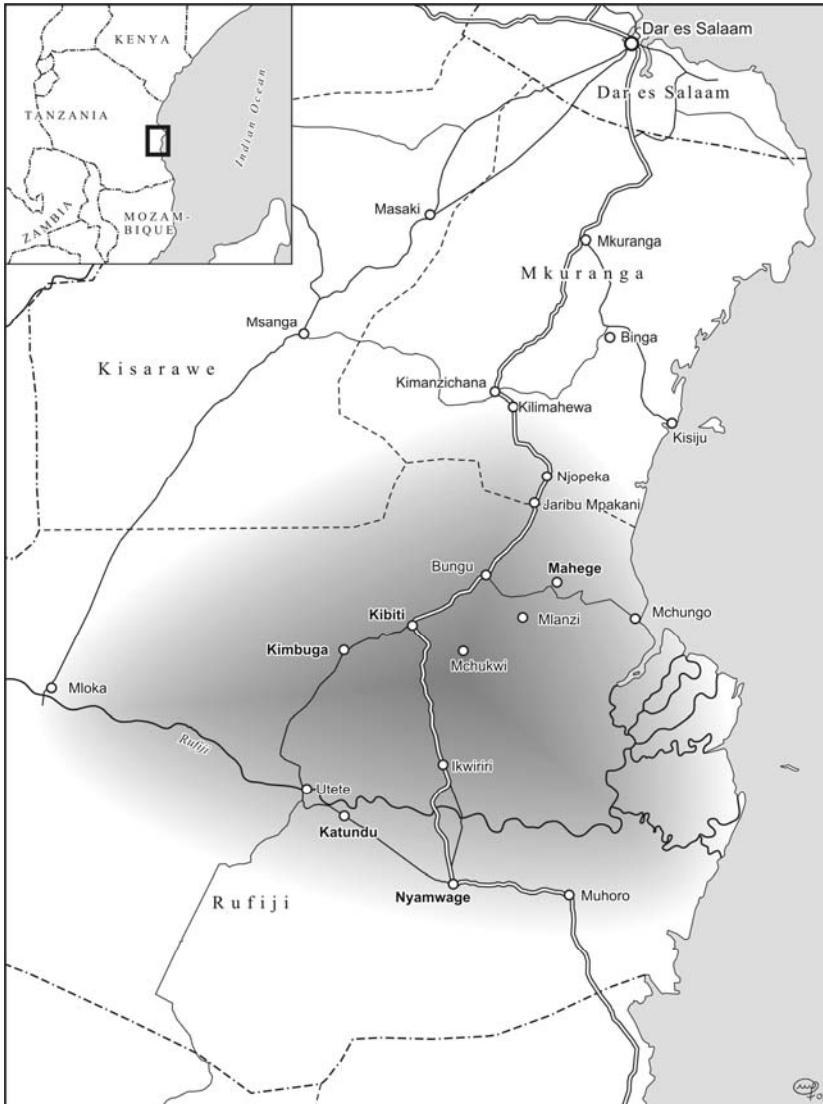
Going south from Dar es Salaam on the road to Kilwa, one starts to encounter people from the Ndengeleko speaking community in the Mkuranga district, as early as the villages of Kimanzichana and Kilimahewa. Around Njopeka and Jaribu-Mpakani close by the border between the Mkuranga and Rufiji districts, they become more numerous. The Rufiji district is the area where most Ndengeleko live. They live in the whole district, with the urban centers Kibiti, Ikwiriri and Utete forming a nucleus triangle.

It should immediately be added that using the word nucleus doesn't in any way imply that this is the area where 'pure' or more Ndengeleko is spoken. The linguistic situation in the area is highly complex. First of all, although the Ndengeleko are in the majority, people from many other ethnic groups live here as well. They interact with each other vividly and intermarriage is common. These groups include especially Zaramo (mostly in the Mkuranga district), Matuumbi, Ngindo, Makonde and Pogoro. Secondly, the coastal Swahili culture has influenced this region during several centuries, and Swahili has also been spoken since long. Historical records give a picture of a region that has been ethnically heterogenic at least since mid-19th century. The language used to communicate in this ethnically and linguistically complex situation was Swahili, a language that had been spreading along the coast since centuries. According to the records of the German colonial rulers, Swahili is understood by all Ndengeleko and is widely spoken around the beginning of the 20th century (Schleinitz 1911). The two languages (along with others) have thus co-existed for at least 100 years. But with the heavy promotion of Swahili after independence and the increased access to education, with Swahili as the sole medium of instruction, it is now definitely the dominating language in almost all domains. Ndengeleko has been reduced to a language the parental and in some families only the grand-parental generation uses, and almost only at home. On top of that, in using their language speakers frequently code-switch between Ndengeleko and Swahili. Ndengeleko is by no means unique in this respect. Many of the coastal languages of Tanzania face the same situation (Batibo 1992:89; Legère 1992:103).

Interestingly, the Ndengeleko people themselves do not seem to realize this. Or rather, they realize their own linguistic behavior, but think that it is better in other places. In Kibiti, I'm referred to places like Mahege and Mlanzi to find the 'real' Ndengeleko. 'If you go to Mahege, even a 3-year old will speak Ndengeleko to you!' they say. In Mahege, the adults complain about the lack of knowledge of the language that the young generation has, and tells me it's better upriver around Mloka and other villages. In Mloka, however, the villagers refer me back to Kibiti and say this is the place where Ndengeleko is really spoken.

Immediately to the south of the river Rufiji, the situation is especially complex with people from many ethnic groups, but also many Ndengeleko. They do generally not live further south in the Lindi region, however.

In conclusion, Ndengeleko is spoken throughout the Rufiji district as well as in parts of the Mkuranga district, but currently in a limited way. The following map shows the area in which a majority of the people claims Ndengeleko ethnic affiliation (the area is shaded), although they might not (any more) speak the language. The villages in which the questionnaire was used are marked with bold letters:



Map of the Ndengeleko-speaking area

4. Estimated number of speakers

4.1. Figures in the literature

When it comes to the number of speakers of Ndengeleko, there are only estimations. No questions about language use or knowledge are included in censuses in Tanzania. Previous censuses did however include the question of ethnic belonging, *kabila* in Swahili. According to the 1967 census, the Ndengeleko³ population was 145 783 people (total mainland). Further back in time, in 1957 they were 122 941 and in 1948 125 935. This would mean a growth by 116% from 1948 to 1967. Compared to a population growth of 155% for the whole country, this implies that the number of people belonging to the Ndengeleko community was on the decrease compared to the total population already in that period (Legère 1992:104). These numbers do of course not say much about competence in Ndengeleko. They are not even very reliable when it comes to ethnic belonging. We know that the ethnic groups along the Tanzanian coast are ambivalent about their linguistic, cultural and ethnic affiliation. Depending on circumstances and the question asked, they might refer to themselves as belonging to different groups (Batibo 1992:92).

³ Including Rufiji, see introduction.

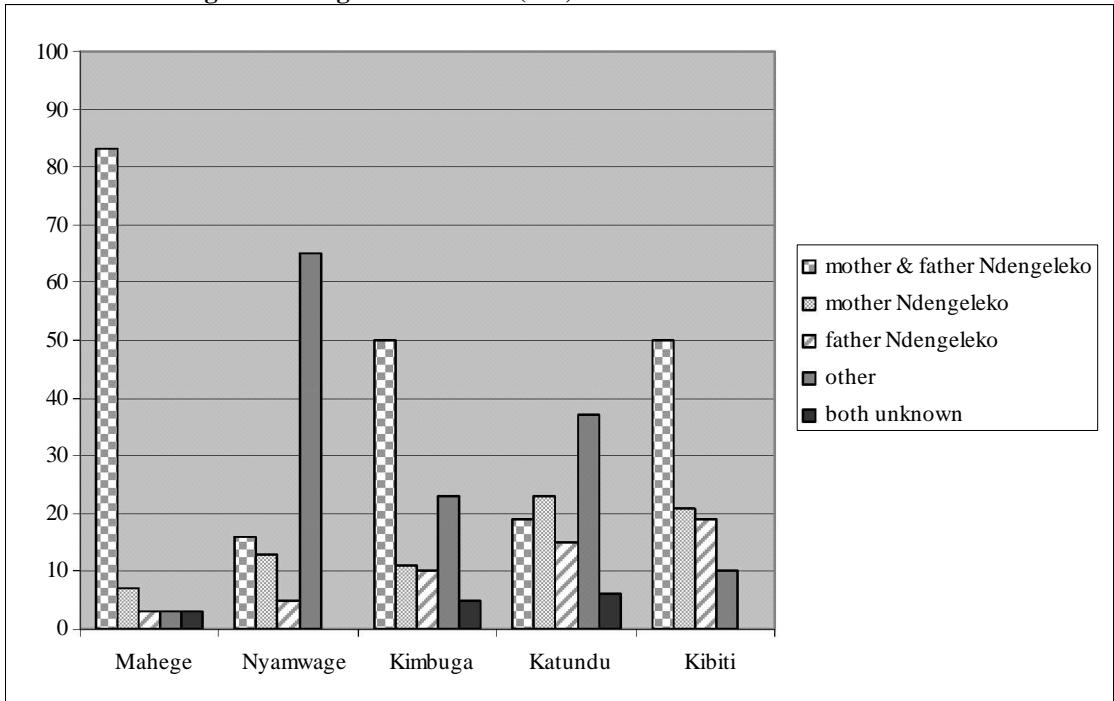
Ethnologue lists a total of 310 000 speakers for Ndengeleko and Rufiji. If these numbers were true, then basically the whole population of the district Rufiji (203 102 people) and two thirds of Mkuranga (187 428 people) would be Ndengeleko speakers. This is clearly not the case.

The Languages of Tanzania (LoT) project of the University of Dar es Salaam reports 93 332 Ndengeleko speakers in Rufiji 2006, which comes closest to my estimation here. The Mkuranga district was however not included in their survey (LoT 2006). Rufiji as a language is correctly not mentioned in their list of languages.

4.2. Methodology and result of estimation

The methodology chosen for the present estimation was in short: 1) the percentage of people with Ndengeleko ethnic belonging was estimated per ward, 2) these percentages were applied to population numbers according to the 2002 census and 3) from this result, a percentage per age group was taken to arrive at an estimation of actual speakers. For step 1), answers by interviewees regarding the percentage of Ndengeleko people in their ward and neighboring wards were used for the estimation. Also, the questionnaire gave additional information on numbers of Ndengeleko people, as it included the question on *kabila*, ethnic affiliation, of the parents. The following information from the children does not always support the estimations made by interviewees:

Table 1. Percentages of Ndengeleko children (310)



These five villages represent different parts of Rufiji. As we can see, only in Mahege are the percentages of children from homogenous Ndengeleko families more than 80 %. In Kimbuga and Kibiti, Ndengeleko are also many although the families are often not homogenous. South of the river, in Nyamwage and Katundu, the picture is truly one of a multiethnic society. Except Ndengeleko, many belong to the Matuumbi and Ngindo, as well as (in smaller numbers) Pogoro and Makonde. These results have been used to lower the percentages of Ndengeleko people arrived at in step 1), in certain areas of the district. I chose not to lower the percentages as much as the results of this questionnaire indicate, in order to also respect the answers of interviewees. This means that if the end result (number of speakers) is not correct, it can be suspected to be rather too high than too low.

In step 2), the percentages arrived at were applied to the population stated for each ward in the 2002 census (Tanzania 2003), resulting in an approximate number of people belonging to the

Ndengeleko community. Finally in step 3), the number of actual speakers within the ethnic community needed to be estimated, as it has already been concluded that not all Ndengeleko speak the language. This has been done by estimating a percentage of speakers per age group, as the 2002 census gives information on age within the district. Here estimations by interviewees have been combined with the answers from children who estimated their knowledge of the language in the questionnaire. Other factors concerning age groups have also been taken into consideration, as for example the dynamic spread of Swahili use in the last decades.

My calculations show that the Ndengeleko community is still large in Rufiji, roughly 155 000 people. But Ndengeleko speakers can now be estimated to not exceed 60 000. The same kind of calculation has been applied to the district of Mkuranga, although with much lower percentages for the ethnic community. From the total Mkuranga population of 187 428, roughly 30 000 belong to the ethnic community and 12 000 speak Ndengeleko. Therefore, the total Ndengeleko community is calculated as being 185 000 people, while those assumed to be Ndengeleko speakers are 72 000.

5. Language attitudes

In this section we will have a closer look at answers from interviews and questionnaires concerning how Ndengeleko speakers regard their language and its future. Attitudes towards the own language are decisive when it comes to the death or survival of a language. If you grow up with the idea that the language you learn from your parents has a low status, it is very probable that you will soon abandon it in favor of the dominating high-status L2, i.e. Swahili in this case.

Of course these attitudes towards the own language have their cause in outside factors. A language that will not bring socio-economic advantages is seen as a waste of time to learn or to maintain. Hence, parents will not make an effort to teach their children this language but encourage them to learn the L2 instead right from the start. Ndengeleko is not a language that enjoys any local or regional status, putting it right at the bottom of the hierarchy of language prestige. This people and their language are frequently looked down upon by other Tanzanians, as confirmed to me in numerous personal communications. This is also reflected in the fact that many Ndengeleko cease to use the ethnonym when they move to for example Dar es Salaam or when they have succeeded in acquiring a high-status job. A contributing factor in this ‘assimilation’ is that the Ndengeleko are Muslims and often want to be included in the coastal Swahili culture and economic life (Middleton 1992:15).

Although not reflected in their behavior, the Ndengeleko do pay lip service to their language. In the interviews with village people, they express pride in their culture and language, and a regret that it is disappearing, as they are convinced it is. They express that the problem lies with the older generation, which has not made enough effort to pass on the language to the younger one. It is regarded as not within their power to change something about the situation, rather it is accepted as a matter of fact that Ndengeleko will die out. Some interviewees do not regret the loss but rather indicate that it is in their interest to abandon their ‘backward’ culture and language in favor of the national language. A majority is however very positive to the documentation of the language and enthusiastic about making a contribution as language consultant.

Also the children answering the questionnaire appreciate Ndengeleko as L1, even those who barely speak it. The question answered by the pupils read:

12. Do you find it important to have a L1?

Here answers were given by ticking yes or no. Of the 215 respondents of the questionnaire with at least one Ndengeleko parent, 180 or 84% answered yes. The following and last question of the questionnaire was open:

13. If yes (to the preceding question): list three advantages of continuing to use your ethnic language. If no: explain why.

The last question is rather abstract and caused difficulties for some of the children. The students were asked to give three advantages instead of just an open question, in order to avoid short answers.

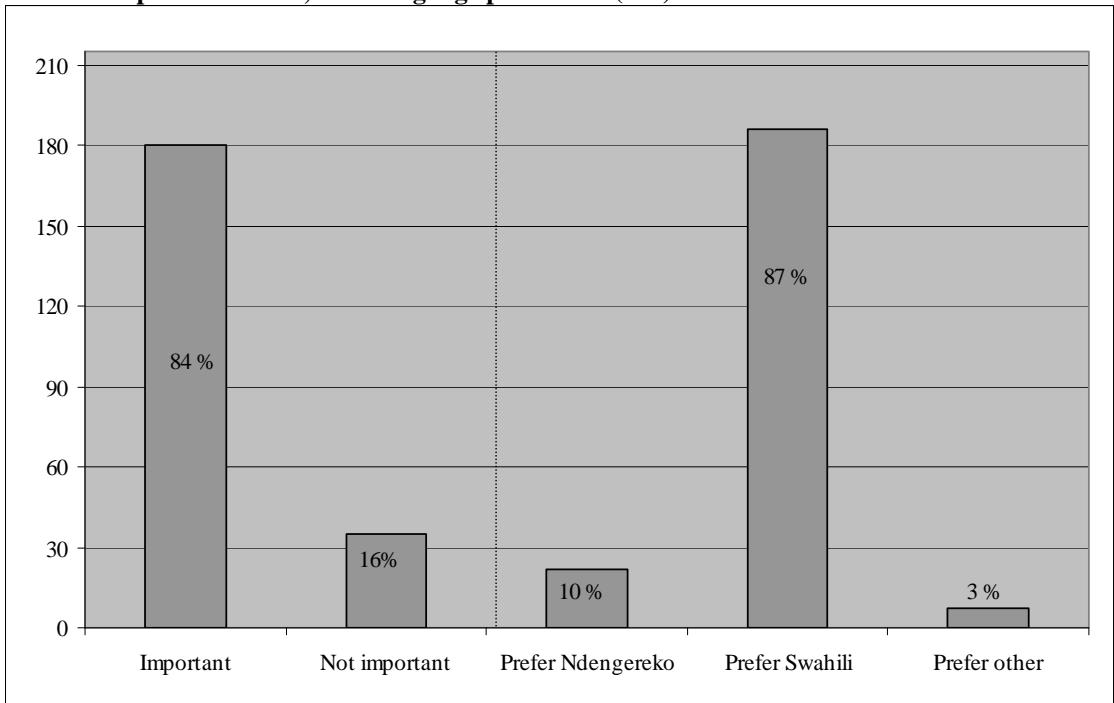
Many mentioned the aspect of identity, being recognized as an Ndengeleko person, as an important advantage of speaking L1. They also regard the language as important in order to preserve culture and traditions. It gives them joy to know who they are and where they originate from. Several of the children complain about the neglect of their parents to teach them L1 although they would like to. At the same time many adults complain about the children not knowing the language. On the other hand, children who do not find Ndengeleko important mentioned the fact that they cannot use it outside the area, that others do not understand it and that Swahili is the language of the nation and should therefore be used instead of other languages.

Interesting in this respect is also question 11:

11. Which language do you prefer to speak?

This was an open question. Of the 215 children, 186 prefer Swahili, 22 prefer Ndengeleko and 7 prefer other languages (the language of the other parent and in one case English).

Table 2. Importance of L1, and Language preference (215)



In conclusion, Ndengeleko is regarded by most as important and worth saving, but in daily life Swahili is preferred as medium of communication. There is pride in one’s own language but the usage is given up partly because of the low status given to this group and language by others.

6. Intergenerational transmission

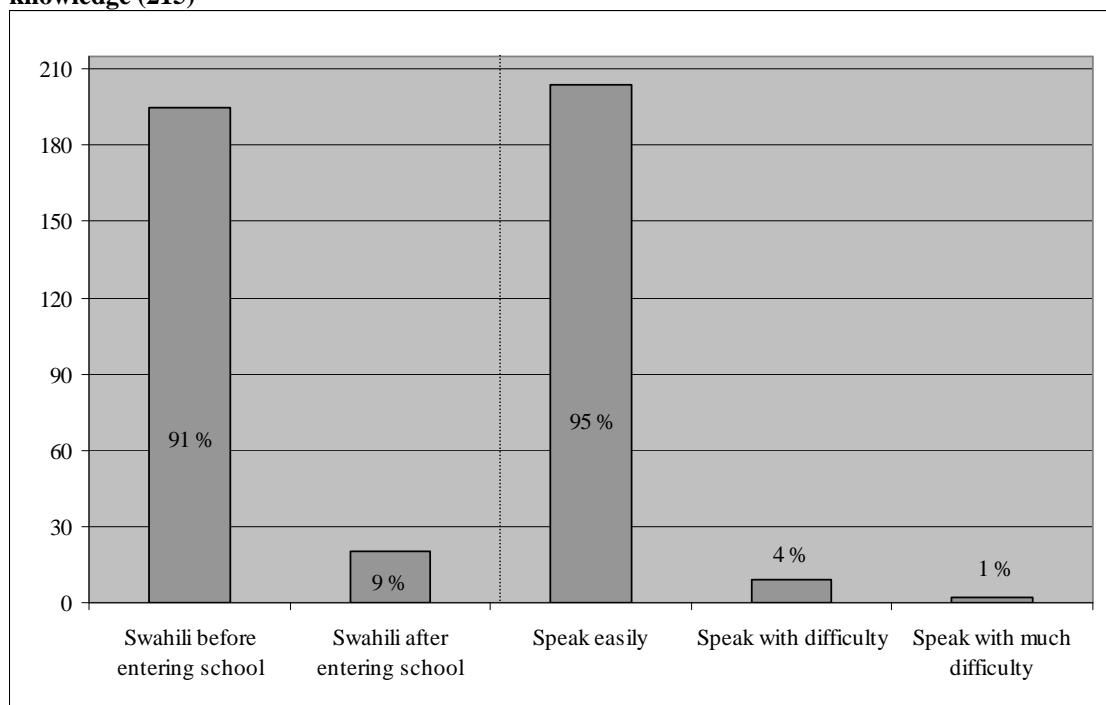
Throughout the area where Ndengeleko is spoken, children learn the language in a very limited way. Almost all children learn Swahili at a very early age, as this is the language of wider communication all around them. Out of all 310 respondents of the questionnaire, only 39 learned Swahili after entering school. More than 87 % learnt Swahili before entering school. Taking into account only those children who have at least one parent from the Ndengeleko community, this number is even higher: 91 %. In responses to the questionnaire it seems that children of for example Matuumbi parents are more inclined to pass on their language to their children than the Ndengeleko, even though the Matuumbi in this case live outside their core area.

It is very rare indeed to hear children speak anything else than Swahili to each other. When the children grow older Swahili is absolutely dominant, and secondary school pupils, in or out of school, abandon Ndengeleko completely in speaking with each other. Self-estimation of competence in Swahili is high, as can be expected under such circumstances. The table shows the answers of 215 children who have at least one Ndengeleko parent.

Question 6: Did you start speaking Swahili: before entering school, after entering school?
(answers given by ticking)

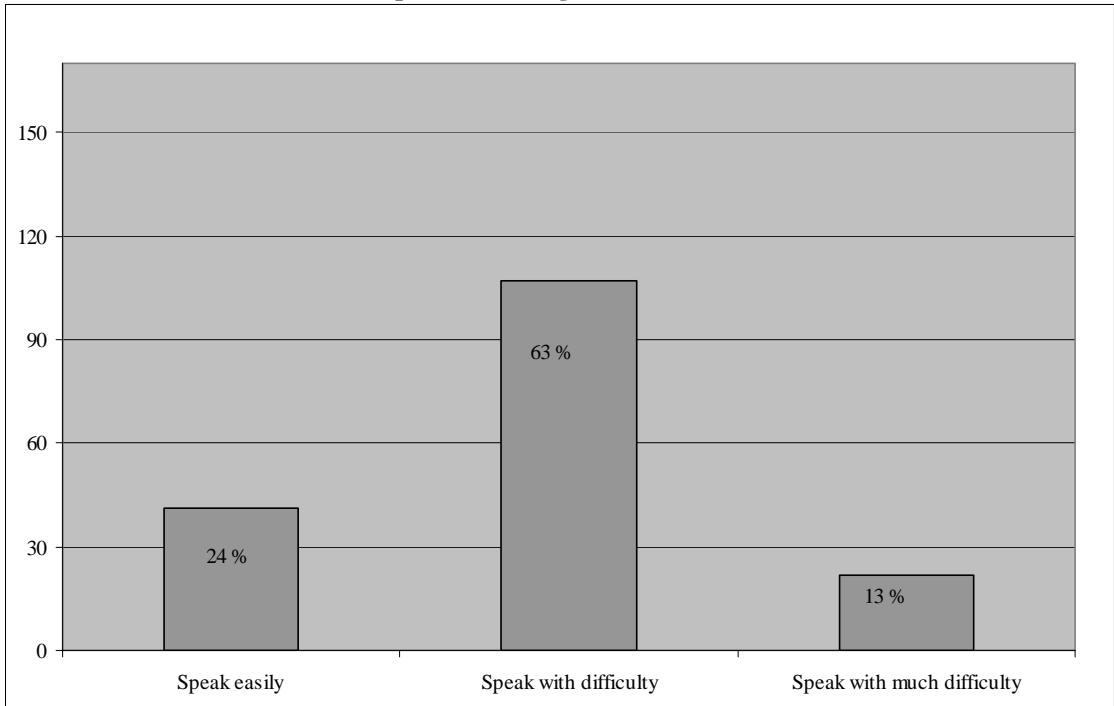
Question 7: Can you speak Swahili: with ease, with difficulty, with much difficulty?
(answers given by ticking)

Table 3. Time of acquisition of Swahili by Ndengeleko children and self-estimation of L2 knowledge (215)



Answers on competence in L1 give a completely different picture, however. A majority of the children who have Ndengeleko as their L1 find it hard to communicate in this language and only 24% claim to speak it with ease. In question 10, they were asked to estimate their competence by ticking. The table shows only the answers of the 170 children who claim to know Ndengeleko. The remainder of the 215 with at least one Ndengeleko parent claim not to know the language at all and have therefore not answered this question.

Question 10: As for now, can you speak and understand this language (referring back to question 8, which was the open question on which L1 they speak): easily, with difficulty, with much difficulty? (answers given by ticking)

Table 4. Self-estimation of L1 competence: Ndengeleko (170)

41 children or 24 percent do not experience any difficulties in speaking Ndengeleko, while 129 do to some extent. To summarize this discussion on intergenerational transmission: of 215 children with at least one Ndengeleko parent, 79% or 170 children learn Ndengeleko to some extent, but only 19% (as a percentage of 215) or 41 children learn it well. This is a very low number showing that the language is often not passed on to the following generation, resulting in a rapid decline of language use.

7. Endangered status of the Ndengeleko language

In this section the results of the survey will be linked to the criteria for language endangerment as formulated by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages in 2003 (UNESCO 2003) and an attempt is made to assess the current status of Ndengeleko. This expert group of linguists and language advocates worked in collaboration with UNESCO in order to formulate ways of assessing language vitality and published a set of guidelines, after submitting and discussing these in the International Expert meeting on UNESCO Programme: Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, March 2003. Their work marks the commitment of UNESCO to the survival of language diversity, as also stressed in the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity from November 2001 (UNESCO 2001).

The discussion below does not necessarily follow the ordering of criteria as listed in the UNESCO guidelines mentioned above. I will discuss the factors that in my view most strongly contribute to language endangerment first, and refer to the UNESCO criteria while doing so.

As mentioned before in this paper, the attitudes towards a language are crucial when it comes to the level of endangerment, both from outsiders but most of all from the community itself. The Ndengeleko people are ambivalent when it comes to their language and identity. It is regarded as important by most when asked for, but in reality they are rather indifferent to the future of their language. When looking at the UNESCO factor 8, Community members' attitudes towards their own language, the situation of Ndengeleko compares to degree 2. *Some members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.*

A negative attitude towards the own language inevitably causes a decline in intergenerational transmission. This is also the case for Ndengeleko, as we have seen. It is of course important for the survival of a language that children of a community learn the L1, and we have seen that they do this to a very limited extent. In some families, parents speak Ndengeleko to their children, but often they do

not: the exposure to Ndengeleko is restricted to the grandparent-grandchild communication. UNESCO has listed intergenerational language transmission as factor 1, and Ndengeleko can here be positioned as degree 3. *Definitely endangered: The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.*

If language attitude is a strongly contributing factor to language shift because people cease to teach the L1 to the children, then what is the cause of a negative language attitude? It has been mentioned in the section on language attitudes that outside factors are very important. That using Ndengeleko does not bring any socio-economic advantages is strongly linked to the language situation in Tanzania in general. The promotion of Swahili as a national language has been very successful and it has put Swahili on the global map of languages of wider communication. The backside of the coin is that there is no room for the other 120 or so minority languages of Tanzania. There are no official domains in which they are used, and they do not enjoy any official recognition. In fact, they have just been ignored as more or less non-existing until the Cultural Policy document *Sera ya Utamaduni* (Tanzania 1997). In this document, the minority languages are recognized as an asset to the country. It is stated for example that these languages should be taken as sources when one is looking for vocabulary needed for new domains in Swahili, instead of taking such vocabulary from foreign languages (interesting to note that one of these foreign languages, English, has official status in Tanzania and the minority languages do not). But this policy document has so far not caused any changes in the use of or attitudes towards L1 in Tanzania and no supportive measures have been taken. Some of the country's minority languages nevertheless give their speakers socio-economic advantages in a more local perspective, but Ndengeleko is not one of these.

Comparing this situation to UNESCO's factor 7, Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, including Official Status and Use, the situation in Tanzania comes close to degree 2. *Active assimilation: Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.*

The most important implication of this language policy in terms of language survival is that minority languages are used nowhere in education. In parts of the country where the knowledge of Swahili among young children is limited when entering school it is known that L1 is often used by teachers in lower grades. See for example (Petzell [forthcoming]; Wedin 2004) This is not allowed but seen as necessary by the teachers as the pupils would otherwise not understand what is being taught. It is used informally only for explanation reasons in these cases, and there is no language material or strategy for this transition from L1 to L2 in education. In the Ndengeleko area L1 is not used at all as the children are considered to have enough Swahili knowledge to understand what is being taught. As discussed in (Legère 2006), the complete exclusion of L1 from education contributes heavily to language decline. After entering school, the development of L1 competence among the children who have learned this language in early childhood is almost completely brought to a standstill.

Following this language policy in education, there are no materials for language education and literacy (UNESCO's factor 6) in Ndengeleko. In fact, there is no orthography and nothing at all has been written and published in the language. Those who are literate can write something in their language on request and they sometimes also use the language for written notes to each other, although this is rare. In that case they use Swahili orthography. The language is therefore rated grade 0 for this factor. *No orthography available to the community.*

Not only is there no orthography, there is no grammatical sketch of this language or any other publications. It is therefore reasonable to regard the documentation situation as 0 when it comes to UNESCO's factor 9, Type and quality of documentation. *Undocumented: No material exists.*

Following the low status and the lack of incentives to use the language, it is used in less and less domains. Ndengeleko is used mostly at home. It is also used outside, in the marketplace and in the street, when meeting people who also speak the language. As soon as one is unsure about which language to use, as with someone new, Swahili is preferred. But even two Ndengeleko speakers can be heard conversing in Swahili, although greeting and saying goodbye takes place in Ndengeleko. When asked about this they laugh and say they do speak Ndengeleko perfectly well but didn't reflect on the use of Swahili. Because of the lack of knowledge among children, Swahili now also penetrates the home domain. Many parents and certainly grandparents still use the language but children can often be said to be so called receptive bilinguals. Therefore the grown-ups are forced to use Swahili with them, at least partly. The situation comes closest to degree 3 of UNESCO's factor 4, Shifts in domains of

language use. *Dwindling domains: The language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.*

There is certainly no response to new domains and media (factor 5). New areas that continuously emerge in today's global life require new vocabulary and ways of expressing things from the language. If a minority language does not meet these challenges of modernity, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatized. This is exactly what happens to Ndengeleko, which is not used in school, neither in new work environments or media. Swahili loanwords or code switching are used instead. Without doubt the language is inactive in this respect, which is degree 0. *Inactive: The language is not used in any new domains.*

Last but not least, I would like to touch on factors 2 (absolute number of speakers) and 3 (proportion of speakers within the total population). Even though this cannot be called a small speech community, with the number of 72 000 competent speakers of Ndengeleko, the language is by no means safe. With all the other factors taken into account, such a relatively large community can shrink to almost zero within a few generations.

Factor 3 takes into account the number of competent speakers in relation to the total population of the ethno-linguistic group. That is, the number of 72 000 speakers compared to the number of 185 000 people referring to themselves as belonging to the Ndengeleko community. This is not even 40% of the total Ndengeleko community: a minority. In UNESCO terms this means *severely endangered*, degree 2. *A minority speaks the language.*

The following table presents an overview of the situation of Ndengeleko in terms of the UNESCO factors.

Table 5. Overview of factors

Factors	Ndengeleko
Intergenerational Language Transmission	3
Absolute Number of Speakers	72 000
Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	2
Shifts in Domains of Language Use	3
Response to New Domains and Media	0
Materials for Language Education and Literacy	0
Governmental & Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies including Official Status & Use	2
Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	2
Amount and Quality of Documentation	0

8. Summary and conclusions

Ndengeleko is a language with still a considerable number of speakers. Nevertheless, as can be concluded when examining the language vitality factors, the future of Ndengeleko is certainly threatened. Taking a second look at the two factors I wanted to give special attention in this study, Intergenerational Language Transmission and Community Members' Attitudes toward their own language, we can now conclude that Ndengeleko has a very low score on both. The language has a low status, and following this, parents do not teach their children to speak it and do frequently not use it at home. This must be seen as a very heavy threat to the language, as there is no future for a language that is not learnt by the children of the community. Within a foreseeable future Ndengeleko can be lost.

The low status given to the community in my view contributes to low self-esteem and low reliance on the own possibilities among the Ndengeleko. It is not unlikely that this is part of current development problems in the area, resulting in an even lower status and picture of 'backwardness' - a vicious circle. Pride and interest in culture and language might strengthen a people and help them more than attempts to assimilate to the dominating culture, something that has so far not caused the Ndengeleko to be less stigmatized.

When a language is used in less and less communicative domains, parts of it are bound to die long before the language as a whole does. This can already be noticed in Ndengeleko, with frequent use of loans and even more often code-switching: 'out of 20 words, 8 are Swahili' as one speaker in Mahege put it. The result of this is that parts of the vocabulary of this language are not used any more. Only with much effort can people of the older generation can come up with Ndengeleko words long replaced by Swahili counterparts, and these people will soon not be there anymore. This fact, together with a grade 0 for Amount and Quality of Documentation, stresses the urgency of documenting Ndengeleko.

One could argue that as Swahili and Ndengeleko have co-existed in this area since at least two hundred years, there is no reason to believe that they couldn't do so in the future. But the situation in favor of Swahili has changed dramatically since independence in the 1960's, leaving hardly any space for L1. The recent spread of education to all layers of society, although of course positive, hinders the young generation in expanding their language. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that this and coming young generations will abandon Ndengeleko in favor of Swahili.

References

- Batibo, Herman. 1992. The fate of ethnic languages in Tanzania. In: M. Brenzinger (ed.) *Language death: factual and theoretical explorations with special reference to East Africa*, pp 85-98. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Guthrie, Malcolm. 1971. *Comparative Bantu: an introduction to the comparative linguistics and prehistory of the Bantu languages*, vol. 2. London: Gregg International.
- Legère, Karsten. 1992. Language shift in Tanzania. In: M. Brenzinger (ed.) *Language death: factual and theoretical explorations with special reference to East Africa*, pp 99-115. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Legère, Karsten. 2006. Swahili's current spread to a remote area: Data from primary schools in Vidunda ward (Central Tanzania). In: L. Harjula and M. Ylänkö (eds.). *Africa in the long run: festschrift in honour of professor Arvi Hurskainen*, pp 93-109. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.
- LoT, (=Languages of Tanzania). 2006. Tanzania survey data. Dar es Salaam (ms.).
- Middleton, John. 1992. *The world of the Swahili: an African mercantile civilization*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Nurse, Derek. 1988. The diachronic background to the language communities of southwestern Tanzania. *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 9, pp 15-115.
- Odden, David. 2003. Rufiji-Ruvuma (N10, P10-20). In: D. Nurse and G. Phillipson (eds.). *The Bantu languages*, Routledge language family series, pp 529-545. London & New York: Routledge.
- Odden, David. 1996. The phonology and morphology of Kimatuumbi, *Phonology of the world's languages*. New York: Clarendon Press.
- Petzell, Malin. [forthcoming]. *The Kagulu language: grammar, text and vocabulary*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Schleinitz. 1911. *Militärisches Orientierungsheft für Deutsch-Ostafrika (Entwurf)*. Dar es Salaam: Verlag "Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Rundschau".
- Tanzania. 1997. *Sera ya Utamaduni*. Dar es Salaam: Mpiga Chapa Mkuu wa Serikali.
- Tanzania. 2003. *2002 Population and Housing Census. General Report*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.
- UNESCO. 2001. *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity: adopted by the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference*. Retrieved 9 July 2007 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>.
- UNESCO. 2003. *Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages: Language Vitality and Endangerment. Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages*. Retrieved 9 July 2007 from http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/file_download.php/947ee963052abf0293b22e0bfba319cclanguagevitalityendangerment.pdf.
- Wedin, Åsa. 2004. *Literacy practices in and out of school in Karagwe: the case of primary school literacy education in Tanzania*. Stockholm: Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University.

Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: Linguistic Theory and African Language Documentation

edited by Masangu Matondo,
Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2009

Copyright information

Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics:
Linguistic Theory and African Language Documentation
© 2009 Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-429-4 library binding

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.
To place an order, go to www.lingref.com or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, e-mail: sales@cascadilla.com

Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at www.lingref.com. Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Ström, Eva-Marie. 2009. The Situation of Ndengeleko: A Coastal Tanzanian Language (P10). In *Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Masangu Matondo, Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam, 229-241. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

or:

Ström, Eva-Marie. 2009. The Situation of Ndengeleko: A Coastal Tanzanian Language (P10). In *Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Masangu Matondo, Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam, 229-241. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #2150.