ABSTRACT

Language is both a means of communication for people who speak the same variety or dialect and a way of expressing as well as extending hospitality to outsiders. Similarly, diversity is a natural phenomenon and a reality which, if embraced, can enable people to thrive. Yet, when viewed in another lens, can divide individuals by magnifying their existing differences.

Self-identity is inherent in all human beings, on the one hand. Hospitality, on the other hand, is a human expression to others even those of different identities. Both aspects of self-identity and hospitality are values that are treasured by humans and are conveyed consciously or unconsciously through language.

There are underlying values attached to the language choices of multilingual speakers in different contexts. While this may not be easily noticeable in written domains, it is a common phenomenon in oral communication. How then can individuals and communities promote tolerance and accommodation of others? This conjoined language aspect may enrich understanding of Scripture from others’ worldview as people seek to express and experience the mission of God together. The assumption of the paper is that linguistic diversity does not have to lead to language conflict but rather promote living out the mission of God in community.

This paper aims to demonstrate the place of language among Luhyia people in promoting Matthew 22:39, among people of different languages as they extend the kingdom of God on earth.
WHO ARE THE LUHYIA PEOPLE?

The Luhya speech community comprises seventeen different dialects under the same language name tag. They number almost 7 million[1]. Like other communities, they are proud of their language and culture. Besides their own language, most of them speak English and Kiswahili, the official and national languages respectively. The intelligibility level for the two extreme Luhya dialects is about 40 percent. Rachel says, “…each group see themselves first and foremost as belonging to their own smaller units” (1983,252). It is a community that is diverse in language and culture. They have learned to practice hospitality among themselves as people come to church with their own language and ethnic identity. The community prides itself in being hospitable and has welcomed many people from other languages who have bought land and settled among them.

The community is faced with migration, urbanization, and globalization issues like any other today. This poses critical tension between sustaining a pure cultural and linguistic identity on one hand, and obeying a divine call of accepting and accommodating others who come with different cultures and languages on the other hand.

The Luhyias are referred to as the “mlembe” people. “Mlembe” is a concept and root word meaning “peace”. Their social greeting is a wish of peace for one another. As a people who love their own language, culture and peace, how then do they relate to outsiders and make them feel welcome without compromising their identity?

What do the songs we sing, the art we create, the poems we write, the metaphors we use have to do with our identity? How do these include or exclude others who are not part of us? To the community, it depends on their need to defend and preserve their identity. To Christians, it depends on the degree to which they understand and seek to promote the mission of God.

THE MISSION OF GOD

My focus is to show how language diversity can be used to demonstrate and share hospitality and therefore promote the mission of God using the Luhyia community as a case study. God among the people is referred to as “NyasayewoMulembe”, God of peace.’ So, when they greet, they are wishing each other that aspect of God, which is peace. From this perspective, the mission of God from the cultural understanding is a people who are at peace with one another and with the environment in which they live. It is the shalom that God intended as it was in the garden before the fall (Gen: 1). People, as a representation of God in the community, communicate the meaning of life and what God desires His kingdom to be. Pasqual says, “…human beings were created in the image of a communicating God, created to use linguistic symbols to communicate meaning” (2011,73).
The mission of God is to promote a community in which humanity shares love and peace with itself and the rest of creation. Christopher Wright says, “The Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation” (2006,22). It is a community where people endeavour to restore God’s glory on earth. People willingly share with and allow outsiders to become one with them -- part of who they are. They promote the mission of God as they recognize others as people made in the image of God with a different linguistic and cultural identity. Wright says, “Christian mission must therefore treat all human beings with dignity, equality and respect” (2006,423). Linguistic diversity shares in the mission of God when people become aware of the tensions that exist, yet purpose to share with others the value of their culture and language.

To the Luhyia people, God’s mission is understood in the context of being at peace with one’s surroundings. This is seen in their culture as they seek to stay at peace with the living and the departed, as their religion has taught them. It is expected that, to be truly human, all people have to seek peace with all that is created, living or dead.

How can language diversity be a means to the mission of God? The community has a saying, “Omundu yemungwa obusumu. Likhuva tawe”: ‘A person may be denied food, but not a word.’ Why is this so? It is based on the principle that, through words, we show the best of our community to others and, therefore, welcome them to be part of us. We offer them skills to survive and help them know how to participate in caring for the community. The stranger needs to feel at home in order to fully participate in the new community life and aspirations. says, “That the stranger not only be greeted, but also will be given loving attention. The stranger not only will be fed and given a drink, his or her voice will be granted space” (2011,21).

The Luhyia being a community of 17 different dialects realized that for them to achieve their aspirations as a community, sharing knowledge with foreigners of different speech communities is very central. … To the Luhyia people, God’s mission is understood in the context of being at peace with one’s surroundings.

**DIVERSITY: BLESSING OR HINDERANCE?**

Language is a universal resource that God has given to all human beings. The new linguistic scenarios that are coming as a result of migration, globalization, and multilingualism should not be seen as threats but rather as opportunities to enhance communication. They bring mission and Christian outreach to people where they live. They present the gospel to would-be strangers in places where they can have a chance to hear the message. With technology, strangers can be back in their village and hear a message in their language while in a foreign land. I could be miles away and still join my
local community for a cultural event at 6 a.m. and later that morning attend a church service online before I go to unite with believers at congregation X to worship God. Those three events would be in three different languages for me, each playing an important role in my life.

Language diversity, in itself, is a blessing but, if not viewed in the right sense, could be used negatively and become a curse—a curse because it is one element that can divide a people within a short time. It all depends on how people choose to maneuver the diversity. Language diversity should be a force that pulls communities together in order to share and grow together.

Pasquale asks a question that all God's mission minded believers should ask. “Should churches compel or even encourage the development of monolingual English congregations? Is language the basis of our unity?” (2011,36). How a community of believers responds to this will point them to the core of their unity, which should be faith in the one Lord and not cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or any other identity.

LINGUISTIC HOSPITALITY
Hospitality is that act of showing care and concern for another. I see it as a friendly and generous acceptance and entertainment of visitors or strangers at one’s own choice, cost, and pleasure or ‘pressure’. It has some level of vulnerability to it because one never knows the reaction of a stranger. How could these relate to language? It seems people do not associate language with hospitality. When I ask people who are multilingual how linguistic hospitality promotes the mission of God, most of them ask what I mean by linguistic hospitality. It is sharing one’s language and its aspects with the stranger and helping them acquire skills that would enable them to belong to the new community. Language hospitality demands tolerance with linguistic differences. This act of acceptance and love is an enabler in drawing people towards God. It helps people to focus on the value and humanness of others rather than on their differences. It is hospitality within a language, in using language, and hospitality to other languages. It brings one language alongside another language so that they both exist to serve the people involved. This happens where use of the host language is not possible or the translation for the other is not sufficient to express an idea. Pasquale says, “What linguistic hospitality should involve is tolerance of, interest in, and celebration of other dialects as legitimate linguistic expression, and as part of a large tapestry of a language” (2011, 64). Translators know that no one language is sufficient enough to express the message of God fully; so each language brings with it some aspects that help the hearers understand better. It helps to accept others and allow them to belong. The acceptance matters a lot to their self-worth and identity and, as a result, promotes the mission of God, which enables people to know Him and be known as His own. Kenmogne says, “We need, in this world, to be exercising a bit more of what I have called ‘linguistic hospitality’, where we learn to create room for all the languages that people actually use.” (2020). This is accomplished as we
take time to listen and understand what God is speaking through His Word to others. They listen to our narrative and this builds into the story of God, providing an opportunity to learn from one another and grow together.

To enable this hospitality to happen in church, the leadership could provide an interpreter or translate a document into the “guest” language. They could promote the reading of Scripture in as many languages as are available. When this is done at a church, the guest that speaks a different language would feel loved, accepted, and be more willing to listen to the message.

Achieving the mission of God in a multilingual, multicultural diverse linguistic community requires a focus on the mission of God. This perspective requires understanding issues from other people’s views, enriched by their own vocabulary. Allowing others to enter our space and, conversely, entering into their space linguistically, helps us to share Scripture from other worldviews. This enriches how we understand and apply God’s word. The Luhyia saying that someone is never denied a word could help the community to evangelize.

**SHORT LOOK AT HOSPITALITY IN THE BIBLE**

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the deuterocanonical [3] books, have passages that teach about hospitality to strangers. To take care of a stranger, there must be some form of communication and understanding. The children of Israel are reminded that having been strangers themselves, which we all are, they should treat other strangers well (Lev 19:33-34). Besides food, they were required to provide other forms of care (Duet 10:17-19). Jesus teaches the same in the good Samaritan illustration (Luke, 10:25-2). It is love for all. In this case a neighbor is determined by geographical distance and not blood or clan relations.

Kings used to send out information to their subjects written in several languages so all the people could understand (Neh 2:7, Ezra 4:7, Daniel 4:1, Esther 8:9, 2 Kings 18:6). This is an indication of different tribes not only coexisting but also being linguistically very diverse. Interestingly, the kings understood and valued the need for all to understand their messages. They were being hospitable to all their subjects. This promoted obedience from all subjects, fostering community cohesion, which is God’s mission.

At Pentecost (Acts, 2:8), it is not the speakers who interpreted the words for the ‘strangers’ to understand. Rather, God allowed and enabled each to hear in their own native language. This suggests to me that God was putting His stamp of approval on multilingualism and the joy that comes when diverse linguistic communities are able to understand the message of God together. I see this as a perfect setting of unifying multilingualism, which brings joy and blessing by removing linguistic
tension. This was the birth of multilingualism among believers who were seeking to promote the mission of God. The mission of God grows through language as it follows language streams and takes with it the message of God. The people at Pentecost went back with some knowledge of God and shared the message in their own language.

Pilate put his message about the crucifixion of Jesus in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin so the different linguistic communities that were present could understand the event of the day (John 19:19;20). Showing that linguistic hospitality is important even when the message is cruel. Through the centuries, translation of God’s Word has been done in many languages by His own divine will and enabling.

Linguistic hospitality and promotion of God's mission are two aspects that become interwoven together through linguistic diversity. When Paul chose to use the Aramaic language in his defense (Acts 22:2). He spoke Hebrew but having learned their language, he chose to use it to share the message of God in his defense. His linguistic diversity helped him to promote the mission of God. Paul himself had heard a voice speak to him in Aramaic too (Acts 26:14). This message to Paul was so clear that the result was a lasting transformation of his life; from a terrorist abducting the believers to a missionary spreading the word on the mission of God.

The culmination of this beauty of many languages being a fulfilment of God's kingdom is seen when all of humanity is in the presence of God. "And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation’" (Rev,7:9). These are people who will have believed and joined the mission of God as a result of hearing His message in their own language because someone extended hospitality to them.

How does this reflect on the church today? The Bible commands believers of Jesus to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Nations here means different ethnicities and languages. For this mandate to be fulfilled, believers have to embrace diversity of languages. There has to be a willingness either to teach the other a new language or to learn a new language; or find the language of commonality that will enable people to communicate. True disciple making fulfils the prophecy of Zephaniah 3:9 where all people will be calling on the name of God and serving Him in unity of purpose. This unity of purpose is the ultimate mission of God.

NEGATIVE EXAMPLES OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Due to our fallen nature, people use linguistic differences against each other. Yet, God created all languages with equal ability to communicate His love. Through language, people manage affairs in
the world and the chaos in it. Pasqual says, “Our linguistic creativity gives us the ability to speak beauty into chaos or speak chaos into beauty…” (2011,69). Some people have misunderstood multilingualism and used diversity to bring pain to others. This does not mean that where only monolingualism exists there can never be misunderstandings. There have been wars in countries that seem to have one language for the whole population. The children of Israel used a dialect difference to determine who would be punished in their midst (Judges 12:6). In the early church, at one moment, the language spoken determined who received service or physical hospitality (Acts 6:1). That should not be. This ugly, sinful nature at times still surfaces in the church. Believers should be seeking to show love to one another (John 13:14) as that is the way to show the people of the world how people of God live and thus attract them to the faith. We are required to love those we may see as strangers to us (Matt 5:44-47).

These negative examples should not be allowed where people are seeking to live in peace with their surroundings. Hospitality to each other should be a vision for all.

**BENEFITS OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN SHARING HOSPITALITY**

**INTRODUCTION**
Christianity was presented to the Luhyia community as a religion that would bring among many other transformational aspects, spiritual, social, political and economic prosperity (Anderson 1977:5,22,111-117). I will present how the community has demonstrated linguistic hospitality with the strangers in these four areas.

Most of the first-generation believers were converted during the East Africa revival movement (Stanley 1977,8). Among the many teachings, love and care for neighbors were very central [4] messages of the movement. The education system that came alongside Christian teaching transformed cultural worldviews; therefore communities started embracing outsiders (Anderson 1977:113-114).

**LINGUISTIC HOSPITALITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH ADVANCING THE MISSION OF GOD**

God created humanity to have a spiritual relationship with Him. He communicates with them through His Word. People experience transformation as they understand His message. In turn, they share their understanding of God’s Word with other people of the same or different speech communities. Each contributes to the collective understanding of who God is and what His ultimate plan for humanity is. Wright says, "Christian mission is not a matter of inviting or compelling people to become Westerners…it is inviting people to become more fully human through the transforming power of the gospel that fits all because it answers to the most basic need of all and restores the common glory of what it is to be truly human–a man or woman made in the image of God" (2006,424). Linguistic diversity is a gift God has allowed us to have as a pre-taste of what heaven will be (Rev: 7:9). Extending
linguistic hospitality to people in religion is not only a principle of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, but also is seeking to worship God in our diversity as we share in His image and message” (Luchivia 2013,84).

When people use their language to share their understanding of God, it helps the others to see God from a different perspective that modifies their knowledge of who God is. Melchizedek would be considered a traditional priest by most Christians. He needed to be taught about God. Yet it was he who introduced God as “...the Most High God” (El Elyon) (Gen: 14,19-22) to Abraham. From there on, God is seen by Abraham, the prophet and sent out missionary of God, as ‘The Most High God’. We need to encourage people to use Scripture in the various languages available. It is not enough to have translation. Harries says, "While few missionaries doubt the value of having Scriptures in people's own languages, more need to consider the importance of not only having them but also using them, and building on the foundation that they represent" (2011,57).

Spiritual leaders should see value in linguistic diversity and promote multilingual language use in the church. Scripture reading and worship could be done in different languages and cultures to display the beauty of diversity. “It is worth remembering that translations are limited in how well they can reflect the original text of scripture” (2011,54).

When people begin to appreciate the uniqueness of each language and the flavour they bring to worship, then linguistic hospitality becomes a virtue in society and diversity is never seen as a bad thing. As we affirm every language in worship, God is glorified and He delights in His people as they pray, sing, praise, dance, and rejoice together.

LINGUISTIC HOSPITALITY AND COMMERCE ADVANCING THE MISSION OF GOD
People have come and settled within the Luhyia community in search of farmland. The community spans from Lake Victoria to the slopes of Mt. Elgon, which has volcanic soil which is very fertile. Those who came stayed within their small ethnic groups, but soon they had to learn another language in order to trade. seems to suggest that newcomers seek to acquire economic power by learning another language (2011,10). In some cases, it happens as a symbiotic relationship. The Luhyia people, too, learn other languages as they move out to advance themselves (Luchivia 2013,53). God causes profits, and, “it may be necessary for people to use language in order to acquire and create wealth”(Luchivia 2013,79). Language is a social tool to be shared in order to participate in economic growth.

LINGUISTIC HOSPITALITY SOCIALLY ADVANCING THE MISSION OF GOD
As a community of believers, we exist to share God’s love and care for one another. Existing for others means having a willingness to sacrifice something and to receive something. People share their culture knowingly or unknowingly. This cultural learning promotes the wellbeing of those within the same locality. All humans want to understand and be understood as they pursue their aspirations (Luchivia 2013,49). Language defines people and is part of that which gives identity. The “mlembe”-peace concept among the Luhyia is a view that seems to unite this community as Rachel (1983) portrays in her study of the language. We can therefore view Christian lifestyle as a service to others.

LINGUISTIC HOSPITALITY POLITICALLY ADVANCING THE MISSION OF GOD

Many foreigners want to be involved in making policies that run and manage their daily lives. This requires political involvement in the community's affairs. Many do this in ways similar to those used by settlers in the USA. Most spoke their language at the community level but had to learn English in order to be involved for, “…the key to an American identity was being involved in the political process” (Pasquale and Bierma 2011:28,30). Luhyias have shared the gift of their language with their visitors well.

As a way of extending hospitality, the Luhyia community is known to be one that votes for people without caring about their linguistic differences in a country whose politics is largely still determined by linguistic and cultural identity. The community “see positive values of their linguistic diversity and want to promote the good of others” (Luchivia 2013,54).

CONCLUSION

To be truly known and affirmed by others is a universal human yearning. Humans also have a spiritual yearning to know and to be known by God. Both identities, find their fulfillment through Christ and serving other people. Language is the primary means through which people know God through His Word. We come to God to fulfill His mission of service to humanity through kindness. People are fulfilled in society by relating with one another verbally through language(s) created and given to communities by God.

There is power in group learning that comes from language diversity when people purpose to learn from each other. The synergy promotes spiritual, economic, social, and political sharing that aligns to the mission of God. This requires tolerance and accommodation of others knowing that we are different from them yet we each have something that the other can learn. We together grow the knowledge of God through the different languages He has given us to enjoy as co-creators with Him in His creation.
APPENDIX A

Research questions.

Questions for Linguistic diversity and hospitality in the mission of God.

1. How might linguistic diversity contribute to the mission of God in a multilingual society (spiritually, economically, politically, and socially)?
2. How might linguistic diversity hinder the mission of God in a multilingual society?
3. How might language hospitality contribute to the mission of God?
4. What are some of the downsides (if any) of language hospitality to the mission of God?

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[2] This is a term borrowed from the neighboring Luo language which is Nilotic. Despite the Luhyia having their own word for God, “WERE” they took on the new term as one way of sharing in linguistic hospitality.

[3] Besides the 66 books accepted by all Christians, the Catholic church has another extra list of 9 books that are part of the Bible referred to as deuterocanonical books as seen on Catholic website.

[4] Told to me and recorded in 1998 by my grandmother, Doris Lwimbo who was born in 1888, became a believer in 1924 but was very much influenced by the revival.