Mbugu/Ma’a Project

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SIL International
2003
Contents

Abstract
Background
Anderson Survey
  Remarks
Sowers and Tooley Survey (1996)
  Remarks
Survey Method
  Lewis Survey
The Language of Mbugu
  cha kawaida (Mbugu)
  cha ndani (Ma’a)
Bilingualism with Swahili
Multilingualism
  Sambaa
  Pare
Geographical Distribution
Social Distribution
Church
Development Potential
  A. Social Cohesion (−S)
  B. Attitudes Toward Development (+D)
  C. Middle-aged Leadership (−L)
Future Vitality
Conclusion
References
Abstract

This study of an endangered language in Tanzania shows the progression to date of the shift from Ma’a to Mbugu and from the use of both these varieties toward the two large neighboring languages in most domains. Use of the national language, KiSwahili, is also finding widespread use in certain domains.

The situation is particularly interesting because though the people identify themselves as a single ethnic group, some speak a form that could be described as a Cushitic language, and some speak a form that is primarily Bantu, while others no longer speak either of the two. The people and the language appear from historical and linguistic evidence to be in transition from the Cushitic language family to the Bantu family and then on to abandoning their traditional language entirely for a non-related, neighboring Bantu language.

The author recommends that widespread literature development in either form of the language would not be useful because this transition is so far advanced and widespread. (TGB, ed.)

KEY TERMS:

Cha kawaida – this is the outside or usual variety of Mbugu.

Cha ndani – this is the inside variety of Mbugu, used interchangeably with Ma’a.

LWC – language of wider communication.

Language work in the context of SIL requires that the many languages spoken around the world be identified and documented. Once a language is known to exist, an assessment must be carried out in order to determine that language’s vitality and to determine its relationship to other languages found in the area.

Tanzania is a relatively new field of research for SIL. There are over 120 languages that are rooted in four different language families. The majority of these languages are associated with the Bantu family, but there are ten or more non-Bantu languages that can be found in pockets throughout the northern part of the country. Mbugu is one of these non-Bantu languages.

The first SIL contacts in the Mbugu area were made in August of 1990 in the form of an initial language survey (Anderson 1990). In January and February of 1996 there was a second survey (Sowers and Tooley 1996). These surveys led to the placement of a language team. The Lewis family moved to the area and began language learning in March of 1996. The Lewises initiated a third survey. The purpose of this third survey was to explore questions that remained unanswered by the first two surveys. The initial surveys had arrived at differing conclusions as to which dialect should be the target of translation efforts. In this article I present factors for consideration and evaluation of the Mbugu language for Bible translation.

Background

The Mbugu area is located in the northeastern corner of Tanzania in the Usambara Mountain range. The Usambara Mountains are equidistant from the cities of Same and Tanga. This area has been the focus of linguistic attention for many years (Downes 1885, referenced and annotated in Green 1963, Mous 1994). The Ethnologue lists Mbugu as a language isolate, a hybrid language with Bantu inflectional (prefix and concord) system and Cushitic vocabulary (Grimes 1992:411).

It is important at the outset to understand that the Mbugu people are identified by two distinct language varieties, KiMbugu cha ndani and KiMbugu cha kawaida (Dimendaal 1989:29).

Ethnically, outsiders refer to speakers of both forms as WaMbugu (Swahili) or Mbugu (English). Insiders use Ma’a as the name of the cha ndani variety. They might also refer to those who speak this variety as
Ma’a. The Ma’a speakers themselves refer to the speech of their kin who do not speak Ma’a as either KiMbugu *cha kawaida* or else KiPare since it is so much like the language of their Pare neighbors.

In addition to this division of the ethnic group, there exists another large segment of people who are Mbugu ethnically but who no longer speak either form of their ancestral language.

For the sake of this paper I have made the following distinctions: **Mbugu** refers to any individual who can trace his or her ethnic lineage to an Mbugu parent, yet speaks the language variation of KiMbugu *cha kawaida*, a Swahili phrase that means the ‘usual language’. This variation was determined by Anderson (Anderson 1990) to be 72 percent lexically similar to a Bantu language in the area called Pare. *Cha kawaida* speakers comprise between 60 percent and 65 percent of the Mbugu population. I will use *cha kawaida* when referring to the language spoken by this segment of the Mbugu community.
Ma’a refers to any individual who likewise can trace his or her ethnic lineage to an Mbugu parent, while speaking the language variation of KiMbugu called *cha ndani* or the ‘inside language’. The terms Ma’a and *cha ndani* refer to the same segment of the Mbugu population. *Cha ndani* speakers usually can also speak the *cha kawaida* variation. I noted only one exception, a woman who was more than eighty years old. This group represents 35 percent to 40 percent of the people. In turn, Ma’a is 23 percent lexically similar to *cha kawaida* and 17 percent lexically similar to Pare.

**Anderson Survey**

The Andersons’ initial contact in the Usambara Mountains was in August of 1990 when they made contact with representatives of the Lutheran Church. Church officials invited them to return to undertake a language survey, which they carried out in October and November of 1990 with the assistance of church leaders. The geographical location of the Andersons’ survey was focused in the area of Fuizai (see map). The specific villages that they mention visiting are Fuizai, Goka, Emao and Magamba.

**Remarks**

A major contribution of the Anderson survey was the compilation and analysis of a *cha kawaida/cha ndani/Pare* word list. The bulk of the survey was undertaken in the Fuizai area. In Fuizai there are both *cha kawaida* and *cha ndani* speakers. The Andersons indicated a three to one ratio of speakers favoring *cha kawaida* over *cha ndani*. Several factors indicate that Fuizai is a fringe area:

1. Geographically Fuizai is isolated from the rest of the Mbugu-speaking areas by a many-hour foot journey or from one and one-half to two hours by private vehicle depending on the time of year. The other areas are closer together.
2. Socially the Mbugu are mixed with and completely surrounded by Sambaa and Pare people. The Mbugu are few in number in the Fuizai area.
3. The ratio of *cha kawaida* to *cha ndani* is different from the other two areas.

**Sowers and Tooley Survey (1996)**

Sowers and Tooley journeyed to the Lushoto area in order to do a follow-up survey as requested by the Lutheran Church. This survey had a wider geographical scope than the Anderson survey. The areas visited were the Fuizai area, the Magamba/Kinko/Mpanda areas, and the Malibwi area, allowing for a wider representation of Mbugu people to be surveyed.

In this survey Sowers and Tooley stated that their approach was to “hold group, teacher, and religious leader interviews,” which is a rapid appraisal survey strategy. A smaller number of interviews with individuals were conducted than are usually incorporated into a rapid appraisal assessment.

**Remarks**

Group interviews are a good means to learn about language pride and language attitude, but they are less reliable in determining the core values of the group and in learning specific language usage trends. The teacher interviews were with three teachers from two different schools. Among the religious leaders interviewed, none were *cha ndani* speakers and four of five were Lutheran. In reality a majority of the Mbugu people fifty years or age or younger attend the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Church, with a smaller number attending the Baptist Church. I know of eight *cha ndani* pastors, none of whom were interviewed.

An overwhelming number of the teachers and religious leaders interviewed were either non-Mbugu or Mbugu with the ability to speak *cha kawaida* only. These people were answering questions about a group of people different from themselves.
Survey Method

It appears that conclusions drawn in the two initial surveys were not accurate, due to an incomplete corpus of data. This problem may be attributed to a couple of factors. First, the survey tool was expected to do more than it was capable of doing. Second, the distribution of the Mbugu people in small pockets over a wide geographical area was not given adequate attention.

Rapid Appraisal (RA), as the name implies, is a survey method implemented by SIL to obtain an assessment of a language area in a short time (Bergman 1991). Used effectively, RA serves to point to deeper questions that need to be asked and summarily answered in the survey process (Stalder 1996:6). This method incorporates group and individual surveys, which together should point toward the same general conclusions. “The field trip is only complete when a clear idea of the situation is in mind” (Stalder 1996:6). When there is disparity between group and individual surveys, then deeper questions must be asked. These deeper questions are a caution signal, warning that RA may not be the proper assessment tool.

In the Mbugu context it is apparent, after the fact, that the rapid appraisal survey should have uncovered some warning signs along the way. Consider these points:

1. The absence of a significant number of individuals in the target language available for conducting individual interviews.
2. The prominent use of a significant LWC in the area.
3. The presence of two other major languages intermixed among the target population.
4. No definable language center where monolingual speakers could be found.
5. A high percentage of intermarriage with non-related groups.

In the case of the Mbugu area, a rapid appraisal survey would not have caught these particular nuances at work.

Lewis Survey

The Lewis survey (Lewis 1997) was the third survey of the Mbugu area. The decision to initiate a third survey was made for several reasons. Initially, a former survey director indicated that there were unanswered questions that remained from the previous two surveys. He also indicated that there was insufficient data to warrant a particular conclusion. The previous surveys had come to two separate and opposing conclusions. One of the discrepancies was the absence of a satisfactory number of individuals surveyed. A third survey would endeavor to clear up these ambiguities and move decision-making toward a proper conclusion.

The Language of Mbugu

Mbugu is a name of Bantu origin used by both those inside the language group and those outside the language group. If there were ever any negative associations with the name, they do not remain today. The Mbugu people also call themselves Ma’a; this name is not used outside of the group. There are two dialects among the Mbugu people. The root language is considered to be Mbugu cha ndani or in English ‘the inside’. The other language spoken is called Mbugu cha kawaida or ‘the usual’.

cha kawaida (Mbugu)

The Anderson survey indicated that the language of cha kawaida should be the focus of the project. The reasons cited were a larger target population (75 percent versus 25 percent was indicated) and the ability of all Mbugus to use cha kawaida.

These population figures are skewed to reflect life in the Fuizai area where the Andersons surveyed and do not represent the wider Mbugu population. In addition, the suggestion that all Mbugu people speak cha kawaida is mistaken. I have met several people who indicated to me that they wanted to learn how to speak cha kawaida. Why was the language of Pare a factor in this survey? According to the Anderson word list, the languages of Mbugu cha kawaida and Pare are 72 percent lexically similar. On many
occasions I had cha ndani speakers refer to the language of Mbugu cha kawaida as “cha Pare,” so the association is strong in the minds of those speakers. Mbugu people that speak cha kawaida only are not able to understand cha ndani.

**cha ndani (Ma’a)**

The Sowers/Tooley survey indicated that cha ndani should be the initial focus of the project. There were three reasons cited: a larger cha ndani population than the Anderson survey encountered; an association in the minds of most Mbugu people that cha ndani is the prestige dialect (whether they could speak it or not); and an underlying contention that there is a certain degree of mutual intelligibility between cha kawaida and Pare (which excluded the cha ndani group).

The Sowers/Tooley survey determined that the ratio between the speakers of cha kawaida and cha ndani was different from that determined by the Anderson survey. They gave no figures, but my estimate is that the cha ndani speakers are close to 35 percent or 40 percent of those that claim to be ethnic Mbugu. There is a high degree of identification of all ethnic Mbugu with the language of cha ndani, whether or not they can speak the language (which many cannot).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mbugu Dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swahili cha ndani cha kawaida Pare Sambaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Exchange</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: the above chart and those following explain the languages present in the Mbugu area and the domains of use that each language commands. A large X is a major use, and a small x is a minor or secondary use.]

Mbugu cha ndani speakers speak cha ndani a majority of the time in the domain of the home. Cha ndani also is used occasionally in interpersonal exchanges outside of the home, but the number of those able to use this form is small so its use is limited.

**Bilingualism with Swahili**

An important factor to consider in the Tanzanian context is bilingualism. In the two initial surveys, questions concerning bilingualism were not significantly addressed. There was no mechanism in place for testing bilingualism at the time of the third survey, so a sociolinguistic questionnaire was used to address this issue. It is important to note that by means of a sociolinguistic questionnaire a person’s answers concerning his evaluation of his own bilingual proficiency are subjective. Yet it is believed that respondents usually will report accurately when they perceive themselves to be in relation to the community as a whole.

From speaking Swahili with a great many Mbugu, my assessment is that the community generally speaks Swahili at an FSI level 3 to 3+ and at a level 4 in some aspects of their speech. I would therefore place the majority of those interviewed in the 3 to 3+ range. Most Mbugu people are able to speak Swahili with adequate structural accuracy and vocabulary to satisfy all social, work, and church requirements. Their vocabulary is broad enough so that they rarely, if ever, have to grope for a word. Code switching between Swahili and the mother tongue is easy and natural. Those domains relegated to Swahili are:
This relatively high bilingual ability in Swahili can be attributed to several factors. A structured school system is in place. The Tanzanian government’s goal toward compulsory primary education available to all is a reality in the Usambara Mountains. With few exceptions, children complete education up to standard 7 (grade 7). Primary schools exist throughout the area, including many near Mbugu areas. This availability of schools has contributed to a degree of proficiency in Swahili. Several churches also are building nursery schools in conjunction with primary schools; thus educational opportunities are beginning at even younger ages.

**Multilingualism**

The Mbugu/Ma’a people have been noted for their ability to learn language. Both the Anderson and the Sowers/Tooley reports allude to this skill. Aside from the fact that Swahili is undeniably in control of certain domains, there are two other languages that have a notable influence in the area; these are the languages of Sambaa and Pare. The Mbugu people usually have a firm grasp on one of these languages, and oftentimes both. Mbugu children learn these languages at an early age when they are playing with their neighbors. Although Mbugu children learn Sambaa and Pare, the inverse is not true. The necessity of the Mbugu to use these languages continues during schooling years. For the sake of commerce and the affairs of everyday life, the pattern already has been set by adulthood.

**Sambaa**

The Sambaa language is a Bantu language with adherents numbering more than 500,000. The language of Sambaa is considered the dominant language of the Mbugu area. Sambaa is used in several domains, including the market, business, and often village level government. Mbugu speakers are able to use Sambaa effectively in these domains. The Mbugu show no signs of shifting toward use of Sambaa in the homes where both parents are Mbugu speakers.

**Pare**

The Pare language is a Bantu language with adherents numbering just below 500,000. The Pare people are spread throughout the northeastern corner of the country. Historically, the Mbugu have dwelt together with the Pare people in the South Pare Mountains. After the Mbugu immigrated to the Usambara Mountains, they continued to return to the Pare dominant area of Vudei in the South Pare Mountains in order to continue several rites of passage. These traditions formally ceased as of 1972. It is interesting to note that where cha kawaida and Pare coexist, the former is being taken over by the later. The speakers of cha kawaida noticeably outnumber the speakers of cha ndani. Inversely, the areas where cha ndani is strong, there are relatively few Pare speakers present.
### Geographical Distribution

The Mbugu people are found exclusively in the Usambara Mountains. Ethnic Mbugu have been reported in other places, yet from a linguistic viewpoint they are no longer Mbugu.

The Mbugu dwell in three general areas in recognizable numbers, four if the larger area is split into two parts (along a major road populated by both Sambaa and Pare). The largest concentration of Mbugu is the Magamba/Malibwi area, the second area of concentration is the Tetei/(Bumbuli) area, and the last area is that of Fuizai. In each of these areas, small pockets of Mbugu people can be found. Each pocket is comprised of a small number of houses, from three to twelve. In two areas a collection of fifteen (Malomboi village) and twenty-five (Tetei village) houses exist (These two villages are the exception to the usual distribution of the Mbugu people). The Mbugu people are never found in an isolated situation; instead, they live in villages intermixed with the Sambaa and Pare. The Mbugu people themselves did not seem to be aware of all the little pockets of Mbugu, and this is unusual given the relatively small size of the Mbugu area.

### Social Distribution

The Anderson language survey referenced the World Evangelism Database (Anderson 1990:2). This database estimated the Mbugu to number about 50,000 people. The Ethnologue placed the Mbugu at 32,000 in 1987 (Grimes 1992:411). Green states,

> Those clans which looked to the Usambaras for future succour did wisely… These clans have undoubtedly multiplied. To what extent it is not possible to say, but it is fairly reasonable to assume that they were not 12,000 strong when they emigrated from Vudei. According to the 1931 census there were 2,000 Wambugu living in the Usambaras. The 1948 census showed the number to be 12,000. It is difficult to believe that they have increased sixfold in nineteen years, but those are the recorded figures[sic]. (Green 1963:3)

In 1980 Ehret estimates that there were several thousand Mbugu, while Whiteley states that they numbered 11,000 at the time of the 1948 census (Thomason 1993:224).

During my time in the Usambaras, I endeavored to resolve this numerical puzzle. I traveled to each area in which the Mbugu people were noted to live. Determining what the Mbugu population actually is was not an easy task. If one counts ethnic Mbugu, their numbers are considerably higher than if counted by mastery of the language. For example, if one were to number the cha kawaida speakers, the total would be much lower than ethnic Mbugu. If one were to number the Mbugu according to those able to speak the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>Swahili</th>
<th>cha ndani</th>
<th>cha kawaida</th>
<th>Pare</th>
<th>Sambaa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra Local Government</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Exchange</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church (all domains)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mutually agreed-upon prestige dialect (cha ndani), then the numbers drop drastically. Census figures are difficult to determine in the post-independence period (the time since 1963) in that Tanzania has been actively moving away from tribal distinctions toward a national Swahili-speaking culture. I was able to visit each definable Mbugu area, with only few exceptions—seven villages that I learned about as my research came to an end. I visited each area and estimated the number of homes in each location, generously attributing ten people to each home. The best estimate of the Mbugu speaking population (cha kawaida and cha ndani combined) that I can determine based on my travels is approximately 7,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>VILLAGES</th>
<th># HOMES</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>ndani speakers</th>
<th>kawaida speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BUMBULI</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1460</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGAMBA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALIBWI</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUIZAI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreached Villages</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>679</td>
<td><strong>6790</strong></td>
<td><strong>2870</strong></td>
<td><strong>3920</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mbugu, the Sambaa, and the Pare engage in a great deal of intermarriage. Because the Mbugu are the smaller population, they tend to lose in this exchange. When an Mbugu girl marries across tribe, she is usually absorbed by that tribe. Her language and culture becomes subordinated to the dominant culture. In turn when an Mbugu man takes a non-Mbugu wife, she tends to teach the children her mother tongue.

**Church**

The presence of the Church in its various forms is important when considering the question of Mbugu viability. An active church presence has existed in the area for more than a century. German Lutherans settled the area in the late 1800s. The main denominations are all present with the exception of the Africa Inland Church. I find no examples of a church congregation in the Mbugu area that is entirely Mbugu by composition. This fact, along with the dominance of Swahili in all of the churches of the area, precludes the Mbugu language ever being used in the church context in any substantial way. This factor is significant in that the domain of the church is the primary avenue by which SIL traditionally incorporates the practical use of a translation project in language groups that are predominantly Christian. Not only is the example of an “Mbugu only” model absent, but also the potential for an “Mbugu dominant” model is highly unlikely in the face of the pervasive multilingualism of the area.

**Development Potential**

John Watters (1989) offers a model for establishing project viability. I have cited his article at length and included pertinent comments regarding the Mbugu people. Note that each factor has a binary feature associated with it (+S or −S, for example). This binary feature indicates that the factor under discussion is either present or absent in the language community.

### A. Social Cohesion (−S)

The first factor is dialect variation. The greater the variation from village to village the less cohesive is the community. Mbugu has two dialects that are only considered to be 23 percent lexically similar.

In the cultural dimension, a community, which shares one common culture, is more cohesive. The Tanzanian Swahili culture is common to all three of the language groups of the Mbugu area. Therefore, this is a neutral issue for the Mbugu.
Geographically, the more confined a community is to a central population center, a common valley, a common river basin, or one mountainside, the more cohesive it will be. The Mbugu population is living in several small and disjointed villages often separated by mountains, valleys, and forests.

Politically on a local level, if the community has a centralized structure, with a paramount ruler, it will be more cohesive than a decentralized community. The Mbugu community has no recognizable figurehead or individual leadership. In most instances the Sambaa and Pare people of the area have filled leadership roles.

Politically on a national level, the Mbugu are found in one region of Tanzania. They also rely on one economic center, the District center of Lushoto.

Socio-Religiously, if there are multiple religions or multiple denominations, the community will be less cohesive. The Mbugu area has several denominations present, among which are the Catholics, Lutherans, three different Pentecostal churches, Baptists, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, and the Church of God. There are also a very small number of Muslims among the Mbugu.

B. Attitudes Toward Development (+D)

The second condition or factor has to do with the openness of the society to change and its desire to “better” its living conditions. This has to do with the felt needs of the community to pursue some of the benefits of the modern industrial state. These may include areas of health, agriculture, education, communication, and so on.

There has been an expatriate presence in the area since before the turn of the century. The attitude of the people of the area, and within Tanzania as a whole, is openness to outside assistance.

In the area of health, the Lutheran Church of Germany built a relatively modern hospital in the Bumbuli area. The Catholic Church has also set up several clinics and a hospital in the village of Kwai, near Malibwi and Kinko.

The German government (TGZ Secap) has been in the area teaching reforestation and improved agricultural techniques.

The Catholic Church is quite active in education. They have built a modern school to train teachers in the Montessori method. In addition, the Catholic Church is running a secondary school at Maizinde Juu. They frequently have over 600 applicants each year for the fifty slots.

These factors demonstrate that the Mbugu community, like the area as a whole, is open to improvement.

C. Middle-aged Leadership (−L)

The third condition or factor deals with local middle-aged leadership, those men who fall between the ages of 35–60. In some communities the younger generation of leaders and entrepreneurs is still present at the local village level. They have neither left the area to become the urban poor, nor have they been educated and siphoned off into government positions.

In the Mbugu community, this age set is still present, but there are other mitigating factors that come into play. The cream of the crop, educationally so to speak, is often absent. In Tanzania, a person must pass an exam to enter secondary education. If this exam is passed, then most people must leave the area to find openings in good secondary schools. I am not sure what percentage of these people return. People with a secondary education have more opportunities in the cities than in the Mbugu area. The Sambaa and Pare often fill the leadership positions on the local level. The Mbugu are fewer in number and less dominant in the culture, therefore fewer opportunities are available.)

Summary from the model
According to this model the Mbugu community falls into the last category (−S, +D, −L), that of “The Disintegrating Community.”

This type of community has lost its local leadership, and has lost a great deal of its homogeneity. In many cases, the individual members of the community have adopted a second language and are well on the way to being integrated into the larger, dominant community. In these cases, implementing a literacy program is highly questionable and at best requires a program for specialized groups or isolated individuals. In the most extreme cases, there would be serious questions as to the viability of the language into the next generation. (Watters 1989:6, 7, 8)

Several of these points are true of the Mbugu community: (1) the absence of direction from a middle-aged leadership; (2) the complete absence of any homogeneity in the community; (3) a language shift for the larger segment of the community: the Swahili, Sambaa, and Pare languages are used in every domain outside of the home; and (4) a departure from cultural traditions and an assimilation to the larger Tanzanian culture.

Future Vitality

One of the biggest questions that has been asked is “What does the future look like for the Mbugu language?” This question is not easy to answer. Perhaps the Mbugu people themselves have the best answer. When asked this question or a similar question, two-thirds answered that their language was being lost. In another question over two-thirds answered that the Mbugu young people are leaving their language in order to speak Swahili.

Conclusion

Use of Swahili will continue to be an influencing factor in Mbugu viability. The government aggressively supports Swahili language programs nationwide. The Sambaa and Pare peoples are cohesive groups that surround and overwhelmingly outnumber the Mbugu. The Mbugu have mastered the speech of their neighbors.

There are many social trends at work affecting the future of the Mbugu language. Intermarriage is an undeniable reality. The Mbugu acknowledge that they are a small group of people and intermingling with the Sambaa and Pare peoples respectively is an accepted reality. The villages and outlying areas that once were solely Mbugu now are completely mixed. In the areas where the Mbugu live, either the Pare or the Sambaa outnumber them in most instances.

Increasingly, Mbugu parents are not teaching their children how to speak their own language, a reality that many parents readily admit.

The primary reason for initiating a development program was that it was asked for by one of the denominations. And yet that denomination’s leadership has changed and the request is no longer a strong desire. Even more to the point, there is no single worshipping congregation composed primarily of Mbugu, so it is extremely doubtful that an Mbugu Bible would ever be used in a public service.

The conclusion seems clear. A literature development project into either language variety of Mbugu does not appear to be viable. The language of cha kawaida is actively in a process of language shift and it is unacceptable to the Mbugu Community as authentic Mbugu and cha ndani is experiencing systematic decline.
References


