Language Attitudes in Uganda – Folk Linguistics as an instrument to access people’s linguistic conduct

Julia Maximiliane Becker
ju.becker@em.uni-frankfurt.de
Institute of African Studies

Folk Linguistics: Language from Speakers’ Perspective
St. Petersburg, Russia
Agenda

• Introduction
  o Uganda – facts & figures
  o Data

• “Ordinary people’s ideas” about language: The case of Luganda in Uganda

• Conclusion
Introduction


- Three perspectives:
  - government’s perspective
  - people’s perspective
  - academic perspective

- Field trips in Uganda
  - 2008 & 2009, funded by DAAD
  - (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst / German Academic Exchange Service)

- Qualitative research methodology
  - 48 semi-structured interviews
  - 6 focus-group discussions
Uganda – multi-ethnic & multilingual

GENERAL INFORMATION

• East Africa, former British colony
• president: Y.K. Museveni
• capital: Kampala
• approx. 30 million inhabitants
• about 40-50 ethnic groups

LINGUISTIC SETTING

• approx. 43 languages spoken
• 2 language phyla
  • South Bantu Languages
  • North Nilotic Languages
• Official language: English
Does Uganda need a national language?

Which language would be an appropriate national language?
Luganda

• Classification:
  Niger-Congo / Bantu Language (Southern Bantoid)
  (Lewis 2009)

• Speakers in Uganda:
  4.1 million → L1
  1.0 million → L2

• Language of “Baganda”
  • Mu-ganda a Luganda-speaking person
  • Ba-ganda -plural-
  • Bu-ganda the kingdom of Baganda people
  • Lu-ganda language
People’s language attitudes…

LUGANDA

The language of...

...“the capital “

...“pride“
Language of the capital

01 ...because first of all there is this
02 issue of making Kampala the city
03 Baganda Baganda's place eh? the
04 getting eh giving the ownership of
05 the city itself to Baganda but it has
06 caused chaos

Example 54: GD Kla2008f (1254-1260, F2)

01 We have one large tribe really and because
02 the tribe happens to be centred around the
03 capital city, it's the language that just
04 has been picked up and spread out. It's
05 it's almost without question the fact that
06 you need to learn Luganda here if you want
07 to do things here it's inevitable.

Example 52: Kla2008-38f (Lugizu) (412-439)
01 JB: ok and what do you attach to Luganda?
02 F1: To Luganda, mh ((laughing)) Luganda I
03 attach pride they I I believe they are so
04 proud
05
06 [...] 
07
08 F1: yeah nay when you find someone if someone
09 comes to Arua and they speak Luganda, they
10 have the sense of showing off we ah ja,
11 we're from WHAT? (.) ja, they they have a
12 supremacy attitude in themselves [...] 

Example 37: Kla2008-36f (Lugbara) (462-488)
Language of pride II

01 JB: Ahm, and do you think, if LUGANDA was made national language, do you think that would cause any consequences or problems?
02 M1: Yes, it would cause consequences.
03 JB: Why?
04 M1: As I told you, this people would think they would be proud, mh, and even take themselves to be the leader and the like (.).
05 JB: mhm

Example 38: Nak2008-15m (Ruruuli) (623-634)
The national language in Uganda

F2: <I know> the disadvantage of Luganda (.) people assume
that the Baganda if they made Luganda national
language the Baganda will be assumed to be MORE
superior than other tribe

[...]
NOW in Uganda we are grappling with the
problem as I mentioned yesterday of creating a
unifying language a national language (.) and the
significance of a language is that it creates some
dominance it creates some mh you know celebrated
level and ahm Buganda seems to be understanding
that much more than any other tribe

Example 40: Gul2009-52m (Acholi) (443-451)
Conclusion

01 F1: at least for Kiswahili would (.) it’s a
02 neutral
03 JB: ok it’s about neutrality
04 F1: ja, you know it becom- you know if it’s
05 neutral we are safer ((laughing))

Example 39: GD Mba2009fm (2754-2756, 2876-3521)

I would love to make Luganda one of the national
languages because it's a widespoken language
amongst the languages we have in Uganda.

Example 49: Kla2008-33m (Luganda) (696-699, 821-829)
Conclusion

Language attitudes & national language policy in Uganda

- Uganda needs a “neutral” language
- Language policy as a matter of folk linguistics
- Folk linguistics as valuable addition to academic linguistics.
Bibliography


Thank you!