Sociolinguistic Domains in the Usage of the El Molo Language in Kenya and an Assessment of its Linguistic Vitality

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Abstract
This paper analyses the ethno linguistic vitality of Elmolo language through sociolinguistic domains in which its speakers use the language. In particular, it looks at the Elmolo speaking community of Lake Turkana in Kenya. According to Holmes, the term ‘domain’ is usually used to denote the social context of interaction. Speech communities are made up of a number of domains which organize and define social life. This paper analysed four domains in which the Elmolo speaking community used their language. These were home, church, education and work Domains. These domains were analyzed based on indicators of ethno linguistic vitality theory (EVT) by Landweer. Holmes posits that several factors influence code choices within domains in such a way that every domain is associated with a particular code that is used while in other domains the other language is spoken. In this paper, we argue that Elmolo, a minority language spoken in Turkana County, Kenya is an endangered language that faces challenges of code choices within domains in such a way that every domain is associated with a particular code or codes. The findings revealed that education, economic empowerment and the neighbouring communities like the Samburu and Turkana had greatly affected the Elmolo language use patterns within these four types of domains.

Key words: Code-switching, domains, ethno-linguistic vitality, language death, language endangerment.

Introduction
The rapid endangerment through change and death, of many minority languages across the world is a matter of widespread concern not only among linguists and anthropologists but also among all concerned with issues of cultural identity in an increasingly globalized culture. By some counts, only 600 of the 6000 or so languages in the world are ‘safe’ from the threat of extinction (Crystal, 2000). In the Kenyan situation, there is a wide spread concern on endangered minority languages and if not checked they may ‘die’.

Fasold (1990) observes that there is a general agreement among linguists on language change even though the desirability of such changes remains a controversy. While some linguists argue that languages should be allowed to change without interference, others still hold the position that changes that may lead to language death are undesirable and should be checked to guard against the death of such languages. This controversy contributes a lot to the motivation of this paper, thus advising its position that any change in a language that will lead to its death and ultimate extinction is quite undesirable and should be intervened. Trudgill (2000) observes that languages basically change because society itself changes. Such social changes will ultimately contribute to the inevitability of linguistic change which reflects on the complex relationship between speaking, social background, functional aspects of language use and linguistic norms.

The clear cut definition of language death has been a matter of heated debate with several proposals put forward by different scholars. In an attempt to provide the definition of the phenomenon. Tsunoda (2005: 36) lists the following as possible parameters for definition: cessation of development; cessation of transmission of the language in the community as a whole; disuse of the language in the community as a whole; cessation of transmission of the language in all families; disuse of the language in all families and death of native speakers or
fluent speakers; and ‘rememberers’ (a term he uses to refer to people who passively remember fragments of the language). Kioko (2001) observes that every case of language death is embedded in a bilingual situation in which one language dies out while the other continues. This observation is further clarified by Crystal (2000) who observes that the process of changing from the use of one language to the preferred use of another is called language shift while the complete disappearance of a language is called language death.

Himmelman (2010) points out that a description of a language aims at providing it as a record, while language documentation aims at providing a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices which are characteristic of a given speech community. Himmelman (2010) further posits that linguistic practices and traditions are manifest in two ways; one is the observable linguistic behaviour, manifest in everyday interaction between members of the speech community; and two is the native speakers’ metalinguistic knowledge, manifest in their ability to provide interpretations and systematizations for linguistic units and events. Bird and Simons (2003) point out that language documentation provides a record of the linguistic practices of a speech community such as a collection of recorded and transcribed texts.

Brenzinger (1992) is of the view that studies on language death have found three phenomena quite relevant. These include the external setting (ES) which he observes to include the cultural, sociological, ethno-historical and economic processes that create the pressure on the speech community to give up its language; the Speech Behaviour (SB) that he observes to include the use of different languages in multilingual settings, domains of languages and styles, and attitudes towards variants of languages; the structural consequences (SB) that include changes in the structure of the language such as those in phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon (Wardhaugh, 2006). It is this structural formation of languages that can be reconstructed in language formations to avoid death and extinction.

The Elmolo People and their Language Background
The Elmolo Language is spoken by the Elmolo ethnic community, a small group of people residing on the south east shores of Lake Turkana (currently referred to as Elmolo Bay) in Loiyangalani division of Laisamis sub county, Turkana County in Kenya. In its ethnic population records, Potters (2007) gives the population of the Elmolo at 700 people. However, the total population of the Elmolo is currently about six hundred and thirteen (613) people, divided in two villages located approximately five (5) kilometres apart. The Elmolo are considered Kenya’s smallest ethnic community. Brenzinger (1992) however differs and argues that the notion of the Elmolo being the smallest ethnic community in Africa is an invention and perpetuation of the Kenyan media.

According to the Elmolo oral history which was recorded by Batibo (2005), the present Elmolo ethnic community has seven clans which came from different directions. Originally, there were eleven clans but four have since died out. The seven living clans are; the Urigalgite (the fertility clan), Urikara (the hippo clan), Urisole (the disease protection clan), Urigaiya (the ‘Labeo’ blessings clan) and Urisayo (the fire blessings) clan. The four extinct clans are; the Loipirri, Olaye, Arkirio and Lakarante. Initially, the different clans are reported to have lived separately but due to natural attrition such as death, the few remaining Elmolos settled together as a group. With an exception of a few members of the Uriarpula clan, all the other clans live at Elmolo Bay. Two families of the Uriarpula clan live in an Island in Illeret. Those living in Illeret are reported to speak the Elmolo language but are fast losing it to Dassenech. The Ethno linguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) by Landweer (2000) discussed below presents a hybrid approach to the exploration of the analysis of the survival of the Elmolo Language and that of its speakers-speech community.
Ethno Linguistic Vitality Theory

Ethno linguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) propagated by Landweer (2000) was used to assess the vitality situation of the Elmolo people and their language. The findings were used to establish how that situation contributed towards the current sociolinguistic situation of the Elmolo language. The 8 indicators of Ethnolinguistic vitality discussed by Landweer (1998) are foundational in determining if a language programme is reversing language shift or not. This formed the premise of using this theory in this study.

A second reason that prompted the researcher to use this theory was that the theory consists of several socio-cultural factors that are used in explaining language maintenance and shift within a speech community (Karanja, 2009). Since EVT proposes that the survival of a language depends on the survival of the speech community, it then follows that anyone trying to analyze the survival of the language will also have to look into the survival of the speech community. Language, therefore, cannot be analyzed in isolation.

According to the EVT, the vitality of a linguistic group is determined by its status, demographic representation, and institutional support to its language (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977) while the community status is determined by its economic strength, social status as perceived by, and in relation to other communities and the status of the language of the other community (Karanja, 2009). This theory will be used to assess the vitality situation of the Elmolo people and language and the findings used to establish how that situation contributes towards the current sociolinguistic situation of the language.

Research Methodology

This paper was a qualitative research carried out amongst the Elmolo language speakers found in Turkana County in Kenya. The study used descriptive research design. A descriptive design study involves the usage of primary data collection methods which are geared towards the attainment of the objectives of the study. The sampling procedure was snowballing. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball. As the sample builds up, enough data were gathered to be useful for research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Snowball sampling technique is justified in this study because it is often used in hidden populations such as drug users and sex workers, which are often difficult for researchers to access. The study sampled 40 respondents in a larger project by the researcher. This paper reflects a preliminary report of the larger project and as a result, only 20 respondents were sampled in this paper reflecting a small part of the data collected and analyzed. The data collection tools were interview and observation schedules. Library research was also used to collect data. The samples were arrived at through snowballing technique.

Data analysis was done using ethnographic approach (Landweer, 2000). This was suitable because the one-on-one interview with the respondents gave the researcher first-hand information as far as the Elmolo language use patterns were concerned. The sampled respondents exhibited homogenous linguistic processes among the members. This paper presented the results of one of the objectives of the larger project which sought to establish the sociolinguistic and economic domains in which the Elmolo people use their language.

Results and Discussion

The researcher used ethno-linguistic vitality theory as the analytical tool. This theory comprises socio-structural factors which can be used to explain language maintenance, shift and code switching within a given domain (Ongarora & Matu, 2002). Giles, Bourhis and
Taylor (1977) proposed three variables which may combine to permit an ethno-linguistic minority to survive as a distinctive group. These three variables are; status, demographic and institutional support. Each of these variables consists of a sub-set of variables. For the purposes of this paper, the second ethno linguistic vitality indicator, which is the domains in which a language is used (Landweer, 1998) proved relevant.

The domain indicator explains the social set up in which a language is used. It further alludes to language use and choice which can function as a mark of group identification and solidarity. This means identifying the domains of life where language choice becomes a factor in determining how many domains each language is used. Speakers choose which language to use every time they interact within a given sub-domain (Cf, Adams, 2012). The cumulative choices then suggest which of the languages in the community’s repertoire the language of choice for each domain is. This paper concentrated on the family (home), church, education and work domains as its scope of investigation.

**Home Domain**

Fishman (1972: 442) defines a domain as a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators and locales of communication, in accordance with the institutions of a society and the spheres of a speech community. In essence, the more the domains, the better the vernacular is used. The home forms the anchor domain in Holmes (2008) domain hierarchy.

The researcher held interviews with Elmolo youths who had acquired primary and secondary education. The researcher posed the question:

**Text 1**

**R:** Which language do you use at home with your family? Is it Kiswahili, English, Elmolo or Samburu?

Three young respondents affirmed as indicated below:

**Y1:** I use Kiswahili and Samburu. Elmolo no, I do not think whether I can remember some good Elmolo words

**Y2:** Yea me I either use Samburu and English but for the purpose my primary school colleagues use Kiswahili as well. Elmolo, just a little I don’t much about it.

**Y3:** Kutumia Elmolo at home zii iyo Ni kali saa kaa hatuijui tutaitumia aje mazee Ni noma Jo

**Translation**

**Y3:** To use Elmolo at home it is difficult because we do not know it

Their responses established that most of the youths preferred Kiswahili code-switched with Samburu or English code-switched with either Samburu or Kiswahili in the home domain for the secondary educated youths. Many of the youths did not know or want to use Elmolo language. The Samburu language that these youths were using was a mixture of the Elmolo language and Samburu called ‘Elmo-Samburu’ variety. The use of Kiswahili and English languages in the home domain by the youths was an indication of how the education they had received at school had affected their language choice and use in the home domain. Interestingly, Samburu language was the preferred indigenous language by the Elmolo youths in the home domain. This was an indication of the negative attitude the Elmolo youths had towards their Elmolo language.
The Kiswahili the youth were using was not pure Kiswahili but some kind of Sheng (a mixture of Kiswahili and English). The reason why English and Kiswahili took the lion’s share in the home domain was that these were the languages these youths were using at school or in their work places for those who were working. Failure to speak English or Kiswahili languages at school was a punishable offence.

The reason why Samburu language seemed to be used more in the home domain than the Elmolo language could be attributed to the fact that when the students were out playing in the field during break time they were using more Samburu than any other language between Turkana and Elmolo languages. The pupils had little supervision from their teachers when they were out during the break, so they were able to use their vernacular language without much restriction. Because the Samburu pupils at school were many as compared to the other indigenous groups, most of the pupils used Samburu more than either Turkana or Elmolo languages.

The group of the ages between 40-50 who had acquired some little or no education and who were interviewed by the researcher indicated that Samburu language was their most preferred language, followed by Kiswahili, then English. They did not seem to like using Elmolo language. Probably the Kiswahili they were using had been socially acquired instead of being acquired formally. Kiswahili was frequently used when they were talking with their educated sons and daughters but in the home domain, they preferred using Samburu language code-switched with Kiswahili since they despised Elmolo language. They said it was primitive and sounded like the language of monkeys. The researcher interviewed three Elmolo elderly men in pursuit of affirming the above. This is reported in text two.

Text 2

**R:** Which language do you use at home with your family?

**E3:** I use Samburu language mostly because I do not have much education to use those languages used at school.

**E4:** Mimi iko natumia Samburu Sana Sana lakini Kiswahili iko kidogo nilisoma kitambu lakini natambua Kiswahili iko kidogo. (I use samburu mostly but I know little Kiswahili because I have little education)

**E5:** Kigereza iko jua but iko kidodgo Mimi ilijulia iyo Kwa wazungu. Iko nakaa Na wao. (I know little English and I knew it while interacting with the white people, I was staying with them)

The researcher observed some elderly respondents who were 50 years and above converse amongst themselves at home while preparing to go to the lake to fish. Their conversation was recorded and translated by the research assistants as shown in text three.

Text 3

**E6:** Ne meroyo ne mear atoki oltungana Lang.

**E7:** Amu kore pikutum nyoo machine supati oleng keretu nyoo matum singiri kumok oleng Na keretu Na nyoo enia Te biashara Ang.

**E8:** Nikitum Mali kumok oleng nikiretu pooki lemedimu ate Te atua nyoo.

Translation

**E6:** Our fishing equipments are not safe at all.

**E7:** They were artificial and manmade not modern.
Many of our people have died due to these local fishing equipments. Their conversation established that they encouraged the use of Samburu language more than Elmolo language. This had an implication that even the aged in Elmolo community did not like using Elmolo language in the home domain. The age 50 and above respondents used Samburu language more than any other language because of factors like intermarriage, cultural diffusion, and business interactions because it was this group who were the breadwinners of their respective families. Samburu language has become so entrenched in Elmolo community that it is hard to differentiate an Elmolo and a Samburu speaker in the Elmolo community.

According to Basili (2013: 52), the last good and ‘pure’ Elmolo speaker was called ‘Kaayo’ who died in the year 1999. This implied that from that year (1999) to date, there was no living good and ‘pure’ Elmolo language speaker. The language which was being spoken was a mixture of Elmolo and Samburu; an ‘Elmo-Samburu’ variety. Even the speakers of that variety were semi-linguistic in the Samburu and the Elmolo language; they were not competent in any of the languages. Samburu had been entrenched so much in Elmolo community that it was difficult to differentiate an Elmolo from a Samburu speaker in the Elmolo community.

The researcher interacted with the youths (young respondents between the ages of 18-35 years) who were primary school teachers through interview sessions. The researcher posed the following question in text four:

**Text 4**

Which language would you use at home?

One of them attested as follows in text four:

When I am at home I use Elmolo, when I am with my family but when I am with the Samburu I use Samburu. The Elmolo many of us is not perfect Elmolo it is mixed with the Samburu in fact it is more of the Samburu than the Elmolo. Therefore at home with my family we use indigenous local language which is code-switched between Elmolo and Samburu. The Elmolo we use is mixed up with the Samburu because of intermarriage between us.

Another educated Elmolo teacher had the following to say in text five when responding to the researcher’s interview question:

**Text 5**

Which other language do you expect us to use at home and everyone at home is Elmolo?

She responded:

I will use Elmolo language I even would wish my children speak Elmolo because I am here forever...... It is the language I will be using at home but my children do not always want to use Elmolo because they say it sounds like the sound of a monkey.
They got this stereotype from their Turkana and the Samburu neighbours who say that Elmolo does not have prestige. It is a primitive language. The researcher posed the following to a respondent in text six:

**Text 6**

Do you intend to migrate to the Samburu community in future now that Samburu community is perceived as stronger than Elmolo?

She responded:

No I do not think as a parent teacher I would wish to migrate to the Samburu community, I will stick around in Elmolo land and teach my children Elmolo.

The above responses showed negative attitude towards the Elmolo language which practically had affected the language use in the home domain and as result, making it extinct. Naturally, we would expect people in the home domain to use their mother tongue as Fishman (1972: 66-68) notes that ‘the more domains in which the vernacular is used, the better’ However, this was not the case with the Elmolo people, especially the educated youth who code-switched the Elmolo language with other languages which were presumed to be more prestigious than the Elmolo language like English, Kiswahili and Samburu.

On further interrogation, the respondent indicated no plans of leaving Elmolo Bay in the near future and had absolute liking for the language. This may not work in future but it showed the researchers the dreams such respondents had for the already dying Elmolo language. Similar sentiments to those respondents were expressed by another educated respondent who affirmed the following: *In my home I use Elmolo language.*

The respondents were categorical on their language use at home. They would choose Elmolo language all the time as the home language. Probably they were being restrained by the negative attitude they had towards the language. However, another respondent, an Elmolo woman who had attained a secondary education affirms the multilingual situation in Elmolo Bay in that Samburu and Kiswahili competed for space as a home language in her family. Samburu language and Kiswahili as she asserts, were considered prestigious in Elmolo Bay.

The use of Elmolo language was discouraged by the existence of extended families. The presence of grandparents, children and grandchildren which was still common in most Elmolo households was found to play a major role in the lack of usage of Elmolo language at home domain. The grandparents spoke Elmolo language and they expected their children and grandchildren to speak it. The parents of the school going children did not want their children to entirely speak Elmolo language due to negative attitude they had towards the language and its lack of marketability in the job market. The children themselves did not want to use the Elmolo language because of the same factors as their parents; negative attitude and its diminishing popularity and marketability.

The researcher asked one respondent the following question:

**Text 7**

Which language do you like using at home in most cases; Samburu, Kiswahili or Elmolo?

She replied as follows:

Samburu; because of the influence of the language has. It is more prestigious than Elmolo language. Kiswahili language is mostly used by our educated children.
The respondent attested that Elmolo language had diminished long time ago in its use at the home domain due to the superiority of Samburu language and the education of their children which prompts them to code-switch between Samburu and Kiswahili language. Through observation, the researcher captured a mother-son conversation at home. The mother was observed to mix codes by using Elmolo-Kiswahili and Samburu-Kiswahili when talking to her son. This code mixing by the woman of the house indicated being motherly and probably understanding the children’s preferences in code-mixing the various languages they picked from the neighbourhood or from school.

If the mother of the house did not use or code-switch languages according to the needs and expectations of the children in the house, there could have been miscommunication in the house. That was the main reason as to why the mother of the house may have used the languages her children had acquired at school like English, Kiswahili and Samburu languages in order to avoid mis-communication in the house. These languages were considered a bit more prestigious than the Elmolo language hence contributing to the diminishing Elmolo language usage at the home domain.

This study established that some parents relaxed their insistence of Elmolo language use at home simply because it was a dying language or because of its lack of prestige as compared the other neighbouring languages. The parents’ thinking was that English and Kiswahili were more economically marketable in the job market as compared to Elmolo language. That was why they did not insist on the use Elmolo language in the home domain. This was observed from some of the mothers of the children. One of the middle-aged mother and who had acquired some education observed as shown in text eight:

**Text 8**

My children speak in Kiswahili but I do teach them Elmolo also. I speak with them Elmolo a little bit.

This showed that some parents would speak to their children in Kiswahili but still insist it was necessary that their children learn the Elmolo language.

From the views of the respondents over eighteen (18) and who had attained secondary education and above, Elmolo language was primitive and for them, they code-switched between Kiswahili-English-Samburu at the home domain. The Elmolo language specifically was used with the grandparents and even though used by these youths, it was not ‘pure’ Elmolo language; it was a mixture of Samburu and Elmolo.

This study established that there was intergenerational transfer of language from parents to children coupled with the challenges of negative attitude towards the Elmolo language and the education the youths acquired at school. This was evidenced by their code-switching in the home domain. From the observations and interviews carried out in the home domain, this paper established that the older generation of the Elmolo community chose Elmolo language in interactions more than the younger people whose language choice and preference ranged between Elmolo, English, Kiswahili and *Sheng*. This domain use by the youths was necessitated by the education they had acquired at school. Because of their lack knowledge of the Elmolo language, they found it difficult to use the language in the home domain. However, the interlocutor types in these speech events were seen to influence language choice patterns (Cf Adams, 2012).

**Church Domain**

In the church domain, the researcher through participant observation attended a church service and recorded a marriage prayer service. From this, it was established that most priests...
were from the Samburu community. In fact most of the church congregation were from the Samburu community hence the reason as to why Samburu language was mostly used in the church domain. Samburu was code-switched with Kiswahili and English as seen in the example in text four:

Text 9

Priest: Nkai tamayiana ana titaai mtoto ii yetu sana ....naishoo; nkanyit airukuru kore, nkoito ee Itung’ana lang sana sana’

Translation

Priest: God bless this daughter of ours so much who has respected and followed me so much so much.

Again, Elmolo language was not the favourite language in the church domain. This may have been associated with majorly the attitude of the speakers towards the Elmolo language and lack of education and also the fact that the Elmolo were the minority group hence had no positions in the church domain.

The Elmolo people’s marginalization had made them to lack priestly training that the Samburu had acquired. Most priests were trained using Samburu language. In order to respond to prayers, the Elmolo people had no option but to learn the language of the church, which was Samburu, or in other cases, it was English and/or Kiswahili.

Education Domain

As far as Elmolo language use in the education domain was concerned, the researcher posed the following question:

Text 10

Which or Languages are used in Teaching at school?

A primary school teacher who was between the ages of 25-40 attested:

English and Kiswahili, but when the learners are out playing in the field during break time one could hear them code-switch between Kiswahili and Samburu languages. But during class time we use English and Kiswahili.

In the education domain, English and Kiswahili were the main languages used in schools. This was attributed to the fact that English and Kiswahili were the only subjects examinable in education. Books were published using these two languages. Teachers taught using the two languages and failure to use the two languages at school was a punishable offence on the part of the learners. In pursuit of establishing the above claim, the researcher posed the following question and got a response:

Text 11

R: Which language do the teachers use to teach at school?

Y4: Which language do you expect teachers to use at school; it is obvious English or Kiswahili.

From the above text, learners had no choice but to use English and Kiswahili as the two recommended languages at the school domain. Neither Samburu nor Elmolo languages were taught at school hence endangering the Elmolo language further. However, major emphasis
was English and Kiswahili. Some Elmolo respondents who were students noted during the interviews that when the pupils were doing homework at home, they communicated in English if they were doing English homework and in Kiswahili if they were doing Kiswahili homework; an implication of how languages used in education domain had entrenched into them. This frequent use of English and Kiswahili had greatly contributed the extinction of the Elmolo language. This was because everything in school was done using either English and Kiswahili hence most students took these two languages as more prestigious than their Elmolo language and therefore insisted on their use more than the vernacular languages. This consequently has affected the use of the indigenous languages in the education domain.

English and Kiswahili were taken as prestigious, marketable and modern as compared to the vernacular languages like Elmolo, Samburu and Turkana languages which were minimally used in the educational domain. This frequent use of English and Kiswahili in the school domain was aggravated by the publication of books. Books which were used at school were published using the two major languages; English and Kiswahili. The above observation was confirmed in text twelve.

Text 12
R: Is Elmolo language taught in your schools?
Y7: No school has ever used Elmolo language in teaching even during our times in lower and upper classes in primary school' Bolo! Bolo (None! None! None)

Text 12 implies that Elmolo language was never taught at school although the researcher’s independent observation indicated that some minimal Elmolo language code-switched with Samburu was being used in teaching from kindergarten to primary 5. English and Kiswahili were widely used from primary 5-8 because, they were seen as having higher economic viability and one could easily secure a job as compared to vernacular languages.

Work Domain
As far as employment was concerned, the researcher interacted with several respondents with varied educational status. The researcher posed the following question:

Text 13
Which Language do you use at work places and Business interactions?

A middle aged respondent and who had acquired education up to class 7 who was working in Samburu attested as follows:

Samburu has become our language of business. Most employers are from the Samburu so we use their language plus some Kiswahili in cases where the employer is not from the Samburu community.

The implication of the above response on the use of the Samburu and Kiswahili was an indication that most employers in this area were from the Samburu community. The Samburu people were strong economically as compared to the Elmolo people hence frequent use of Samburu and Kiswahili. Samburu and Kiswahili were used as the languages of business transactions in the Samburu community. Samburu language was more prestigious as compared to Elmolo language due to their numbers, cultural strength and their dense multiplex societal networks. Other languages like Turkana had recently begun having
influence in the Elmolo community in the domain because the Turkana had now taken to fishing like the Elmolo people.

In the work domain, Elmolo community code-switched between Samburu, Kiswahili and English. This was especially so with those who were working in the public service like chiefs and teachers. The use of Samburu and Kiswahili in the work domain was evidenced in the conversations between employers and employees that the researcher observed. It was evident that in the work domain, Samburu language was code-switched among Kiswahili and English. The Elmolo employees mostly would code-switch between Samburu and Kiswahili while the employers would code-switch between Kiswahili and English. The above observation was asserted by the following text after the researcher posed the question:

Text 14

Which types of jobs make you code-switch from one type of language to the other?

One of the respondents replied as follows:

Samburu people are the ones who mostly give us jobs and as a result which language you expect us to use? We code-switch between Samburu and Kiswahili

In cases where the Samburu were educated, English and Kiswahili were mostly used in their interactions. The study established that Kiswahili was used in work places to facilitate interaction between the employer and the employee. It was a lingua franca for interaction. The Elmolo, therefore, had no choice but to learn the Samburu language. The use of English was minimal and restricted to few offices like the chiefs’ office, and many other administrative offices available in Elmolo Bay. These were the few who were educated or had some kind of education and were posted and employed in those government offices from other regions in the country.

Conclusion

According to Crystal (2000) the feelings people have towards a variety of languages will dictate their preference regarding the choice. This paper has presented the findings of the respondents’ reactions on language use and choice in the home, church, school and work domains and it can be ascertained that Elmolo language was greatly diminishing in its use. The reported trends in language preference by the respondents in this paper seemed to point to the process of a language shift. This behaviour was in agreement with Adams (2012) and Kamwangamahu (2000) who supported the existence of a triglossic situation in the recent past among the Elmolo community.

It was concluded that the ethnic languages were losing ground especially for the people within the age 18-35. They were also losing ground to the other languages in the interpersonal domain such as communication with family members at home domain. The shift was not only towards English but also other languages. Samburu was the preferred language of communication with friends, followed by Kiswahili, English and Sheng. In fact, as data indicated, it was Samburu and Kiswahili and minimal Sheng usage that seemed to be in competition among the youth. Most Elmolo youths, especially those raised in the urban areas, had grown up in families where Kiswahili code-switched with English was the main home language. The language used by parents had the greatest and the strongest impact on language chosen by their children in Elmolo Thus if some first generation parents decided to use a specific language with their children, the children will in turn adopt the use of that
language with their parents. If nothing is done, the Kenyan minority languages are on the verge of death and extinction.

References