Voices of linguistic participation in language maintenance and revitalisation: Case of the Nama Dialect of Khoekhoegowab

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Abstract
Although Khoekhoegowab is one of the national languages according to the Namibian constitution, it is not visibly used in many of the formal functions of public domains where we expect to find it as a national language. The data for this study were collected in a town called Keetmanshoop in Namibia. The data collection instrument employed for this study was a semi-structured interview as this allow for the gathering of vast quantities and also due to its greater flexibility. This paper puts agentive speakers at the centre of changes in their communicative economies. This thus suggests the need for an approach that looks at how speakers construct and reconstruct their ideas of language. A notion of linguistic citizenship is attuned to the implications of such communities.

Keywords: language maintenance, language revitalisation, linguistic citizenship, speaker agency, endangered language, Khoesan languages

Background
Namibia is a medium-sized country with a population of just over two million. With an area of 824,295 square kilometres, it is a vast country with the lowest population density in Africa except for Western Sahara (United Nations Institute for Namibia [UNIN], 1981, p. 3). The latest Population and Housing Census refers to different "languages", e.g. "San languages"; "Caprivi languages"; "Otjiherero languages"; "Kavango languages"; "Oshiwambo languages"; "other European languages"; "Other African languages"; and "Other Asian languages" (Steigertahl, 2018, p. 136). All the indigenous languages have been accorded national language status in the country's language policy; However, Afrikaans alongside English is the actively used lingua franca, particularly in the urban areas and the southern parts of the country. The current linguistic situation in Namibia is described by Harlech-Jones (1990) as one of unstable triglossia comprising the indigenous (autochthonous) languages/dialects of the (i) Bantu family, the (ii) Khoesan family (non-Bantu), and the (iii) European family including Afrikaans, English, and German a situation that is still prominent today.

Language is always part of people's struggles for voice and agency. There are many occasions where language revitalisation efforts are central to the recognition and socio-economic mobility of a speaker. It is important to note, that much of the studies on revitalization, maintenance, shift and loss assumes a particular stance on core notions such as language, community, speaker and language mastery namely the Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) paradigm (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This paper on the other hand argues that an important aspect of language maintenance can be seen as the linguistic mediation of a particular form of citizenship modelled around speaker agency.

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Motivation

Nama is a Khoekhoe-language variety spoken in the southern parts of Namibia as one of the dominant languages alongside Afrikaans and English. The non-recognition of this community language would surely have led in time to disempowerment and lack of social participation of the speakers. The importance of language as a dominant feature in any culture cannot be underestimated and more than any other aspect of culture it is in language that the whole cultural heritage of any people is registered and catalogued Prah (1995).

Literature Review

This section provides a review on Language Maintenance and Revitalisation.

Maintenance

Language maintenance according to Batibo (2005) is when a language maintains its vitality regardless of the pressure. This means the language under pressure offers sufficient resistance to counter the pressure which emanates from the dominant language. It implies therefore that the degree of resistance is strong enough to contain any pressure that may be coming from a dominant language. Similarly, to Batibo (2005), Nahir (1974) focused on a number of other pressures like political, social, economic, educational etc which could challenge language maintenance efforts of a given language.

Batibo (2005) has argued that if the domains of language L1 remain largely the same and transmission of the language to the children takes place language maintenance is well on course. The paper finds it important to discuss language maintenance efforts as describe by Nahir (1974) as Dominant Language or Ethnic Language maintenance.

Dominant language maintenance

This situation occurs when a society is being threatened or is feeling threatened by outside languages even though it is still dominant.". threats may be external- from technologically, politically, or economically influential communities- usually resulting in linguistic borrowing rather than in actual language shift. In most cases, however, the threat of an "invading" language is perceived or posed from within the community's boundaries, by a prestigious minority language that is dominant elsewhere.

Ethnic language maintenance

This involves efforts to promote minority ethnic language by according it status so that it can be used by its community.

Another model which is concerned with community language maintenance/shift is Smolicz's (1981) which suggests that 'cultural core values' are important in maintenance. This approach is similar to Prah (1995) where culture is seen as the most important element in language maintenance efforts. Even though culture takes into account norms, values etc, language is at the centre of all these.

Kloss' (1966) model identifies clear-cut factors promoting language maintenance, and ambivalent factors; i.e. can promote either maintenance or shift. The factor which the present paper adopted is the educational level of the speakers. A higher educational level may promote a shift since it brings the speakers of the language closer to the dominant group's culture, and vice versa.

A final factor contributing to language maintenance, according to Crystal (2000), is the existence of a written standard for the language. Most local languages in Namibia have standard orthographies which aid the maintenance efforts as books and literature are printed in the languages.

Revitalization

The present paper was premised as a language being endangered, so it was important to study some literature around language revitalisation. As was observed afterwards Khoekhoegowab was not endangered which prompted the study to refocus and look at the approach. For the purpose of this paper, we will use Nahir (1974)'s definition for Language revival as the attempt to turn a language with few or no surviving native speakers back into a normal means of communication in a community.

This section reviewed some core concepts, models and approaches to language Maintenance and Revitalisation and suggested that much work in the area rests on a particular theoretical paradigm that does not do justice to the complexity of language and community, language learning, and the organisation of multilingualism in late modern societies. In the analysis, the study proposes an alternative approach to language maintenance and revitalisation in terms of an alternative theorization of politics for language which will offer different inroads. However, before the findings and analysis, the study briefly describes the study and the study design.

Methodology
Selection of participants

The study purposefully selected informants living in Keetmanshoop based on age, gender and educational background as elderly, mixed (Male/female), and educated vs less educated members of the community would be in a better position to provide information in speaker agency research. In this sampling technique, the "researcher uses knowledge of the population to locate the best informants" (Kane, 2004, p. 133).

Design of instruments

The present study is qualitative, with interviews as the main data collection instrument to understand local participation and agency. Essentially to find out their understanding of language, and the perception of speakers in general. Interviews are often likened to a conversation between two people, although in point of fact they are complex communicative events in their own right with their own norms and structures of appropriateness.

The number of respondents interviewed was determined by the willingness of the participants. When arrived in the town I already had one Language expert in mind so I used him as the starting point. After conducting the interview with him, he linked me up with another language expert. The community members on the other hand were approached on the streets and asked to volunteer their participation in sitting for an interview.

The interviews were recorded on a tape recorder. The recorded data were transcribed afterwards and this helped the researcher to revisit the materials and answering some of the ambiguities that arose in interpreting the data

Ethical considerations

A fundamental ethical principle of social research is to never force anyone into participating in a study; participation must be voluntary. Informants have the right not to participate in the study if they are not willing to and to terminate the interaction if they wish to. It was good to note that most of the respondents agreed to be part of the study voluntary. Some were looking for me to be selected for the interviews after they heard from others that there someone was doing a study in the community. Informants for this study remain anonymous and nameless. The information is recorded as i.e. Subjects A, B, etc. Confidentiality goes close together with anonymity but differs slightly. Anonymity protects the identity of a specific individual from being known while confidentiality means that information may have names attached to it but the researcher holds it in confidence or keeps it secret from the public.

Findings and Analysis

Language is always part of people's struggles for voice and agency. There are many occasions where language revitalisation efforts are central to the recognition and socio-economic mobility of a speaker. It is important to note, that much of the studies on revitalization and maintenance assumes a particular stance on core notions such as language, community, speaker and language mastery namely the Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) paradigm (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) which, as we shall note, is not unproblematic. It is namely debatable whether this stance is adequate for contemporary shift and revitalization contexts. In today's late modern context we require an alternative perspective that questions the assumptions in the Linguistic Human Rights paradigm. The study argues that an important aspect of language maintenance can be seen as the linguistic mediation of a particular form of citizenship. In other words, language maintenance is one means of reproduction of liberal democratic modern society. The study subsequently argues that retaining linguistic diversity requires a different social order that can only be attained through alternative civil society institution. This is illustrated in this study, a case study on the Nama Dialect of Keetmanshoop in Namibia.

Much literature in language maintenance suggests that language maintenance efforts succeed only if there is significant participatory input from the population who are the agents themselves. It appears that successful language activism draws on a complex interaction between several factors:

❖ Triggers for community engagement with language endangerment
❖ Top-down (government) support
❖ Bottom-up (community) ownership and action
❖ Resolve on the part of a linguist to work within an empowerment framework
❖ Appropriate training programs to facilitate community involvement in research.

The present study suggests that the speakers of the Nama Dialect entertain a variety of different voices on issues of maintenance and revitalization of their language that bear some similarity to successful maintenance endeavours, as these are given theoretical formulation in the literature. As part of the interviews, community stakeholders were asked how they saw their engagement in Nama, and what variety of alternative strategies they deployed or could envisage for the restoration/revitalization of Nama.

For example, when asked if the government is doing enough to promote the language some parents felt that the government was only developing English and Afrikaans in the region. Some felt that even if the government does commit itself, the outcome depends very much on what the speakers of the language themselves do. All the respondents saw a need for an active engagement of maintenance of revival of their language. Some of the respondents claimed that they would like to see Nama to be like Afrikaans. Another respondent felt that the Nama Dialect is like a tradition and needs to be kept alive. A third respondent stated that she felt the language needed to be revitalized because the youth does not know the proper Nama. According to Subject S, not everybody involved in developing and promoting Nama in the Karas region are doing their best and cited as an example parental cooperation on language development as an obstacle. For example, she mentioned that learners do not get enough support after school although she does not apportion blame in any part of this. In fact, Subject S sees a major disadvantage in reviving Nama in the region in the lack of cooperation among speakers. Subject S is an educator and regularly attends workshops. However, she explains that there are very few workshops and also that the subject advisors for the Nama Dialect are too few. It had also come to her attention that one subject advisor was expected to work in both the primary and the secondary phase, something which she saw as practically impossible.

Subject S emphasises cooperation and engagement among a wide range of polycentric stakeholders and actors to effectively work with the language. The political nature of these

approaches is illustrated by the following. When asked about the future of the Nama Dialect in the Karas region this is what one of my respondents had to say:

> *"Things that were prominent in the times of apartheid are appearing again and as such learners are being told that they will never go far with this language. Those are things that are being said by foreign teachers and I also have a problem with our people from the regional office that I assume does not use the money allocated for Khoekhoegowab accordingly. Khoekhoegowab books are always expensive."*

When I asked him to predict the future of Nama, this is what subject T said: *"In this region, I believe it is a predominantly Nama dominant region (Karas and Hardap) so in any case, it must be a language which has its advantages but currently it is not the case."* Just like Subject G, Subject S also echoed the same sentiments by praising the government for trying to give all the languages equal status. She utters: *"The speakers of the language should stand up, the government is trying but the speakers are not interested."*

The community members were also asked whether or not they think the government is doing enough to keep the Nama Dialect alive in the region. What was clear is the fact that some of the respondents were unable to comment about the government. This in turn shows a lack of cooperation between the government and the community at large. Those who responded indicated that the government is not doing enough in revitalising the   Nama Dialect.

Likewise, Subject G who is a Nama subject advisor and therefore a significant language stakeholder strongly felt that the commitment of the people to language revitalization is very important. The ideology that prevails, according to Subject G, is that the Nama Dialect speakers are something of "a minority"; or the language has "low status" and needs to be gotten rid of". In his view, the language should also be promoted.

Some of the informants were uncertain about what needed to be done with the Nama Dialect but there seems to be a consensus that mobilisation and common purpose – unity – was the best weapon to revive the language. According to Subject C4 for example, unity is the only way that one can save the language from dying: *"We don't work together and that is weakening us."*

It was also interesting to note that most of the respondents indicated that they will personally contribute to the revitalisation process in the best possible way that they are able. There were also suggestions as to various ways in which this could be organised for example afternoon classes.

Kloss' (1966) model identifies the education level of the speakers. A higher educational level may promote a shift since it brings the speakers of the language closer to the dominant group's culture, and vice versa. In some instances like in the case of Subject T who is an educated member of the society, it is encouraging to note that he continued as a Nama teacher regardless of his education level Subject To be served that the service from the regional department of education is also slow in supporting the language. The future of the language can be handled by the teachers according to Subject T but in doing that they need support. He believes that *"If there is enough support from the regional office Nama has a bright future."* According to Subject G, almost all the schools in Keetmanshoop offers Nama as a school subject. It was evident that the rural schools outside Keetmanshoop were heading the list of the schools that are offering Nama. If Nama is not offered at a school Subject G thinks that the reasons could be: *"I think the first reason may be the allocation of teachers in schools because we have few teachers who are able to teach at secondary level. It is very difficult task."* He highlighted the scarcity of teachers who are equipped to teach Nama at the secondary level. As such, in most instances, you find that Nama is being taught by someone who is not qualified which in turn can lead to failure. Just like any other resource, human

resource is also very important to make all other resources work. If there is a shortage of human resource it could be a drawback.

According to Crystal (2000), for a language to survive it must be transmitted between generations as the first language of the home, its future is vastly more assured if it can be written down. This can be a challenge if what Subject S observes is anything to go by, According to Subject S's observation parents are instructing their children to take Afrikaans as a school subject instead of Nama. The parents according to her enrol their children in Afrikaans classrooms with the belief that the children will go nowhere with the Nama Dialect. However, she noticed that parents do not often assist the children with the Afrikaans task at hand and that they use Nama to speak to the children at home. She strongly argues that there is no need to send your child to an Afrikaans school when you speak Nama with the child at home. What she also noticed this year is the fact that some parents enrol their children in the Nama classrooms and later move the child because Nama is apparently difficult.

As someone who worked for a number of years with the government in promoting the Nama Dialect Subject G had nothing but praise for the government's work in promoting and developing the Nama Dialect. This is what he has to say: "*Really I can say from the side of the government, a lot has been done. You see that from grade 7 level up to grade 12 we have been assisted by the government to develop material.*"

According to Subject C5, the best way to address the issue of Nama Dialect revitalization is to discuss it when there are meetings. She echoed that at some point rumours were predicting the demise of the Nama Dialect, but this is something she does not believe to be the case at all. To revitalize Nama, there need to be more cultural activities around the language. Here we note an alternative to education and political organisation in the emphasis on cultural activities, yet one more sphere of potential organisation. The statement by Subject C5 supports Smolicz's (1981) idea which suggests that 'cultural core values' are important in maintenance.

Some stakeholders, for example, Subject P3, put the onus for language work on the youth, claiming:

> *"You the young ones should meet or us the elders should meet so that we fight to take the language back where it was before. Nowadays Nama is offered in schools; use it more often in the churches, and it should also be used in pre-primary schools. In general, people should be educated in the language especially the youth and the speakers of the language should work together in such a project"*

Most of the parents indicated that they will personally try by all means to contribute to any revitalization projects aimed at the Nama Dialect. Some even said they will help even though they are not competent in the language. This is highlighted by the response from Subject P5 who is an elder thought to be proficient in her mother tongue: *"I don't have knowledge, I don't know much about Nama so I want someone to teach me."*

 When asked how she will personally contribute to the revitalization of the Nama Dialect Subject S had the following to say: "*I feel I should start in the community so that the community can be part, Parents should understand Nama as something that will take the children far in life.*" When asked how he will personally contribute to the revitalization of the Nama Dialect Subject G reiterated: *"I am still promoting the language because I am a writer of lot of text books. I am also in the panel which serves in promoting the Nama Dialect."*

There were mixed feelings from the parents about the survival of the Nama Dialect in the region considering the dominance of Afrikaans. Most of the parents felt that Nama stood a good chance of surviving in the region. According to Subject P1:

> *"If the people who speak the Nama Dialect do not realize this, we give Afrikaans to our children as we don't see the need, I don't see Nama surviving. If the speakers of the language sees a need, than there will certainly be a change. Nama is offered in schools, even in high schools but very few learners are taking Nama"*

Subject P2 also mentioned an interesting point when he said Nowadays if you only know Afrikaans you will be disadvantaged. At the church when there are funerals it is important that you read in Nama and also when you talk to elders.

> *"Two language experts were also asked to comment whether or not there are enough material printed in the Nama Dialect the two respondents had different views. One of the parents also felt that if we don't remove Afrikaans by ourselves than she does not think Nama will fight back, however, she wants the Nama speakers to keep the Nama Dialect as theirs."*

Anonby (1999) points out that has been established that most of the language revitalisation processes that have succeeded are those that placed a premium on literacy. One respondent from the field feels that there are enough materials printed in the Nama Dialect while the other states there are not enough material printed. According to Subject G, there are enough materials printed in Nama: *"At the moment yes, up to grade 12 level enough textbooks in Khoekhoegowab at the moment. Public libraries especially in Keetmanshoop I gifted [sic] a lot of books for the local library for research purposes also for the children."*

This is good for the Nama Dialect that in the past it did not have enough material that could educate and inform its speakers. Taking Subject G's statement into consideration the Nama Dialect is at least in a more advantaged position of having enough resources to be strengthened. However, it is interesting to see if the speakers of the language are using this resource.

According to my respondents, there are books printed in Nama and they often get books from NIED (National Institute for Educational Development). However, one teacher argued that the school library only has the subject books and not general books that can be read. One teacher felt that very few learners are reading the material printed in Nama while the other argued:

> *"Yes, I see that learners from other languages also read the glossary because it is printed in Nama and English. As I am the library and Information sciences teacher I observed that they read this material. The new books also come in beautiful covers which attracts the learners."*

Two language experts were asked to comment on the language speakers' attitude in language maintenance. Both these language experts suggested that the speakers' attitudes need to be changed towards their language. According to Subject G, "they must have a positive attitude towards their language." Supporting Subject G, Subject S states that speakers of the language see little interest and if the ones who are interested do not help the other she feels the language will die. She moves on and says: *"We even explain in schools the importance of the language but they just ignore, they don't see its importance."*

Taking it from another perspective it is evident that Subject S supports the view of Subject G about the commitment of the speakers when he uttered: "People should love their language." Subject G also mentioned that there is a tendency among the speakers of the Nama Dialect to use English rather than Nama because they think English is better for communication at the moment and also in the future.

Some of the respondents could not tell how the Nama Dialect can be revived in the region but one of the respondents cited unity among the speakers as the best weapon to revive the language. According to Subject C4 unity and debate is the only way that can save the language from dying. According to Subject C5, the best way to address the issue of Nama Dialect revitalization is to discuss it when there are meetings. She echoed that at some point there were rumours linked to the demise of the Nama Dialect, something for which she finds no evidence at all. To revitalize Nama, more cultural gathering needs to be organized according to her. It was also interesting to note that most of the respondents indicated that they will personally contribute to the revitalisation process in the best possible way that suits their ability. This was good as it was aimed at assessing the willingness of the general public to be actively involved in saving their language.

I present here for convenience the key points that came out of the discussion in bullet form:

- There was a positive response towards revitalising Nama (Speakers want their language to be revitalised).
- The language is linked with culture thus needs to be kept alive.
- Nama should be as strong as Afrikaans in the region.
- Some people felt that everyone involved in developing the Nama Dialect in the region is not doing enough.
- Some parents felt that the government was only developing English and Afrikaans in the region.
- Some argued, even if the government gives its side it depends on the speakers to revive the language.
- Learners who are studying Nama do not get academic support from parents after school. (This shows there is a lack of cooperation between the school and parents)
- Young people should be educated to save the language from dying.
- There are very few workshops for Nama and also the subject advisors are very few.
- People cited cooperation as a tool for revitalisation
- The language should be used more often in churches.

The study of Nama Dialect contributes to the mounting body of evidence that language maintenance and revitalisation presupposes that members of the speech community are politically engaged with language endangerment and form the goal of language maintenance for themselves (for example, Fishman, 2001).

This brings us to the focus of this paper which is to explore new directions for a politics of language that attend to the critical issues raised above. This starts with a discussion on speaker agency and linguistic citizenship.

Speaker agency and Linguistic Citizenship
Linguistic Citizenship (LC) refers to a view on language and politics that recognizes the manifold challenge posed by the late-modern context of migration and multilingualism for the makeup of speech communities and that takes as a central point of departure the idea of local participation and agency. As we noted above the perception of speakers need revising. We have can be seen that LHR cannot do justice to the work of negotiation and ownership that speakers are involved in on a day-to-day basis.

General developments in late-modern language politics in the direction of greater engagement by a variety of stakeholders at different levels, with a shift away from traditional frameworks of policymaking and centralized structures of language implementation (Stroud, 2009) are finding echoes in the daily lives of Nama speakers. One body of thinking that has addressed the question of creating expanded participatory spaces for the expression of minority voices, and

simultaneously attended to the issue of fluid and multiple political identities, broad alliances and a flexible notion of public and private is that of deliberative democracy.

Not surprisingly, these developments carry implications for sociolinguistic dynamics, specifically in terms of evolving practices and ideologies of multilingualism. Much of this social transformation involves encounters between speakers of different languages in multiple and various urban spaces across which languages and their speakers travel. LC thus recognises that speakers themselves take some stake in the norms of communication (institutional and otherwise) as well as language logistics, and the transport and delivery of meanings across multi-scaled participatory spaces.

Linguistic citizenship and the politics of language
Given the fluid nature of the Nama speech community and the ongoing refiguration of speakership and (re)construction of the Nama Dialect, future work with the restitution of Nama ought to be driven by parameters set by linguistic citizenship, namely a grassroots-based, deliberative democratic driven approach to language. In this process, members of the Nama speech community can be expected to influence each other's language behaviours, the more so when a high degree of face-to-face contact characterizes the community (Ager, 2001). Furthermore, the local interpretations of, and responses to, a national policy that would be the outcome of such grassroots deliberation can carry far more weight than the national policy itself. Evidence is given by linguist such as Canagarajah (2006).

The interaction of national policy with local beliefs and values is especially clear in the arena of language choice for formal educational contexts (Ferguson 2006). It is in this arena that the greatest mismatches between policy and implementation become evident and between nationally set goals and local values (Baldauf & Kaplan, 2004).

Conclusion
This paper discussed an alternative approach to the politics of language, Linguistic Citizenship. It demonstrated how this notion can provide a way forward for understanding how minority speakers maintain or shift their languages. The main aim of the paper was to empower speakers, an approach in terms of citizenship would seem imminently appropriate.

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