



COMMUNICATING WITH VICTORIA'S EMERGING AFRICAN LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES: ISSUES AND RESPONSES

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INTRODUCTION

- Language policy and language services
 - Australia proactive in formal commitment to language services (Edwards, 2005)
 - Innovative in providing access to civic engagement and info multilingually
 - Egs. Victorian government's 'Language Services Strategy' (launched in 2002) and ongoing issues to improve language services
 - Vicnet and State Library efforts to promote use of LOTE online
- Recent VMC-funded research - complexity of issues in providing equitable and appropriate access to ICT-facilitated communication for many African languages
- Digital Divide and access to information online
 - Technology can create new forms of disadvantage that magnify other disadvantages;
 - Digital divide literature emphasises extending access to ICTs and skilling up in ICTs; Yet beneath this – assumption of basic education skills: mother tongue literacy and numeracy
 - Hawisher and Selfe (2000) - complex interrelationships between culture, literacy practices and the web/internet; 'global village' narrative and its embedded cultural assumptions of the web as a **"culturally neutral literacy environment"** - simplistic and idealistically naive





POTENTIAL AND CONSTRAINTS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES SERVICES PROVISION

- Lacked preparedness for diversity and complexity of African sociolinguistics:

Eg. 1

Sudan - 121 languages, none nationally dominant, 2 major areally dominant (Arabic and Dinka) and 23 minor areally dominant languages (Batibo). Most are multilingual but with different linguistic knowledge in each language

Eg. 2

Woods (1994) re. DR Congo "residents are likely to be exposed to three layers of language: an inner, ethnic language; the outer, official language...and an intermediate, national language."

- Most Africans regularly use well above 3 languages: **BUT** differential levels of proficiency in different languages across communities → need for sensitivity in language (services) planning
- Growing reliance though on national or areally dominant lingua franca → potentially useful for language (services) planning; but status and attitudes may impact – eg. many South Sudanese hostile to Sudanese Arabic





BACKGROUND ON RESEARCH

- Commencing in 2003 VMC/VOMA initiatives to improve government capacity to service newly arrived humanitarian African communities language needs

Project 1 (2005-6):

Estimating nos. of African language speakers given vast change in nos. since 2001 Census (Borland and Mphande 2006) – triangulating statistical data from government and agencies together with key informant interviews with representatives of agencies (government and NGO) providing services to humanitarian groups. as well as some community informants

Project 2 (2007-8):

More in-depth work with 5 language communities about language and literacy usage and communication preferences. 5 languages: *Dinka, Somali, Amharic, Sudanese Arabic and Swahili*





LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN AFRICAN HUMANITARIAN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN VICTORIA

- Lack of systematic and universal approaches to record keeping on language preferences and capacity – none of databases had capacity to capture bilingualism/multilingualism
- Idiosyncratic practices (eg. ways of categorising different Arabic varieties) and inconsistency in accuracy of data entering
- Lack of continuity in service provision agencies (via 'contracting out')

LANGUAGES MENTIONED: STUDY 1 (50 Langs)

Country	Language
Burundi (3)	French, Rundi, Swahili
D.R. Congo (5)	English, French, Lingala, Nyanga, Swahili
Eritrea (4)	Arabic, Saho, Tigre, Tigrigna
Ethiopia (4)	Amharic, Harari, Oromo, Tigrigna
Liberia (15)	Akan/Ashante, Bassa, English (Liberian and Standard), Gio/Dan, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Krio, Kru(men), Loma, Mandingo, Mano, Vai
Sierra Leone (3)	Fula/Pular, Krio, Temne
Somalia (5)	Arabic, Italian, Maay, Oromo, Somali
Sudan (18)	Acholi, Anuak, Arabic (Juba, Standard and Sudanese), Bari, Dinka, Fur, Kakwa, Lopit, Luwo, Ma'di, Moro, Murle, Nuer, Otuho (Lotuko), Shilluk, Tingal



Lang.	Adult Speakers (est. no.)	Adult Speakers with Literacy in Language (est.%)	Knowledge and Literacy in other Languages	Preferred Modes of Communication
Amharic	1,500	<p>Varied estimates: 20-40% good level; further 20-40% have some basic literacy</p> <p>Least likely to be able to read in Amharic have one or more of the following in personal and family circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●from remote areas of the country where there was no/limited access to schooling, ●from families who are illiterate ●not mother tongue Amharic speakers ●younger adults with disrupted schooling 	<p>Many know some Tigrinya or Oromo (depending on their home area) and if they can read in Amharic (Geez script) then also can read these scripts</p>	<p>Majority prefer to get information in oral forms, either face to face in a group or through viewing/listening to a dvd/cd/video</p> <p>Maximum 30-40% of adults access material from brochures written in Amharic – most likely to do this are males in the 30-50 age range.</p> <p>Younger generations with Australian schooling prefer to access information in English</p>



Lang.	Adult Speakers (est. no.)	Adult Speakers with Literacy in Language (est.%)	Knowledge and Literacy in other Languages	Preferred Modes of Communication
Dinka	2,500	<p>Only about 40% of adults can read or write Dinka confidently</p> <p>Most who are literate in Dinka - now 40-60 years Very few between 20-40 years old have developed literacy through formal instruction; some have acquired informally through religious observance.</p> <p>Only L1 Dinka speakers interested in Dinka literacy</p> <p>Lack of shared understandings about language varieties and standardisation leads to intolerance of Dinka written according to other than the speaker/reader's own variety</p>	Some have knowledge of Sudanese Arabic and other languages of their tribal lands.	<p>Older people prefer to get information through face to face explanation</p> <p>Younger people are attracted by media/video. If they are to receive brochures then they would prefer them in English</p> <p>Delivering information in Dinka or English will be accepted by Dinka speakers.</p>



Lang.	Adult Speakers (est. no.)	Adult Speakers with Literacy in Language (est.%)	Knowledge and Literacy in other Languages	Preferred Modes of Communication
Somali	3,000	<p>About 70% of Somali adults in Melbourne can read and write some Somali, including most young adults (some difference in estimates - lowest 50%, highest 90%).</p> <p>Only about 30% of adult Somalis can read easily and fluently with approximately a further 40% being able to read a little and with some effort.</p> <p>Most Somalis who are literate would be strongest in Somali literacy.</p>	<p>Many know one or more other languages – English, Italian, Swahili, Amharic, French, Arabic (in descending order of preference),</p> <p>If able to read prefer written information in Somali to English.</p>	<p>Somali community members prefer to receive information orally and in Somali.</p> <p>Women and men all prefer to receive information face to face, although radio, TV and video are also acceptable other than for older people.</p> <p>Transmission from written to oral is common through a chain of communication starting with attendance at or reading notices at the mosque, with those who can read passing the information onto others.</p> <p>Young people -more likely to access information through brochures, TV or the internet; likely to prefer English.</p>

Lang.	Adult Speakers (est. no.)	Adult Speakers with Literacy in Language (est.%)	Knowledge and Literacy in other Languages	Preferred Modes of Communication
Sudanese Arabic	2,400	<p>Level of literacy knowledge and use in Sudanese Arabic affected by age and gender, but approx. 85% are not able to read Arabic very well.</p> <p>Most women are not literate, with men being more likely to be able to read.</p> <p>Most likely to read are males of 30+ years and those who have transited through North Sudan and Egypt</p>	<p>Nuer, Dinka and Juba Arabic commonly used - preferred as lingua francas to Sudanese Arabic. Those who have some literacy knowledge are also likely to have acquired some literacy in their 'mother tongue' language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Arabic (Classical or Sudanese) - not generally well received as the language for government information, except those who fled via North, Egypt •Women prefer face-to-face explanation •Men: written information or face-to-face explanation •Older people prefer video/DVD, face-to-face and audio-visual (graphics etc) •Young: information in English. •Radio in not very accessible (program scheduling) and partly because with low literacy dealing with location of stations etc was difficult. •Video/TV preferred and mechanism such as VHS/DVD well accepted •Computer and internet access very limited, so computer based delivery not likely to provide good access.

Lang.	Adult Speakers (est. no.)	Adult Speakers with Literacy in Language (est.%)	Knowledge and Literacy in other Languages	Preferred Modes of Communication
Swahili	1,000	<p>Diverse range of East Africans have some knowledge.</p> <p>70-90% of those who speak Swahili can read it at least to some extent</p> <p>Lingua franca speakers without formal education in Kenya or Tanzania (eg. refugees) may have good oral skills but not strong in literacy.</p> <p>Transfer of literacy between Swahili and English through shared script etc</p>	<p>Mother tongue English</p> <p>For some Swahili seen as a 'neutral' lingua franca that avoids tribal associations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Most prefer to get government information in English if they can read/write it as this aids interacting with the wider community in English •Women – prefer face to face communication in Swahili with diagrams and pictures •Men – if they can read, they will read printed materials in Swahili; if can't read and write, then prefer face to face discussion with diagrams and pictures •Older people – unless educated through Swahili, prefer face to face communication •Younger people – prefer to receive information through video, audio-visual, listening to radio, diagram and pictures .





COMMUNITY LITERACY PRACTICES AND PREFERRED MEANS OF INFORMATION ACCESS ...1

- **overwhelming preference of adults** still for oral modes of communication (even when basic literacy high – eg. Somali)
- **key information brokering** role - literate community members
- Impact of mother tongue not being used in the education system – few have high level of m/t literacy (eg. Dinka)
- Key factors influencing literacy level in one or more languages: gender, age and urban vs rural in homeland
- Tendency for the alignment of: well-developed literacy in m/t or lingua franca; good level of formal education; confidence in English literacy
- From **equity of information access perspective** – low literacy





COMMUNITY LITERACY PRACTICES AND PREFERRED MEANS OF INFORMATION ACCESS ...2

- ICTs still not attractive and accessible to those with low or no literacy - change with less print literacy dependent forms?
- South Sudanese and other East African refugees often prefer English as lingua franca to other former colonial language/s (eg. Sudanese Arabic);

Sudanese Arabic speakers from South who not literate in Arabic not interested in learning Arabic literacy

- Bilingual materials (LOTE/English) valued
- Majority requesting Swahili - refugees/humanitarian immigrants



IMPLICATIONS FOR ICT DEVELOPMENTS

- Interfaces that can facilitate access for non-literate to non-print-based forms of communication (egs. POD/VOD/mobile phone delivery with point and click visuals to access etc)
- For Adult Education – best potential to break down literacy/cultural barriers in use of ICTs are approaches:
 - that foster multiliteracies,
 - sensitive to indigenous literacy practices and
 - with supportive group learning
- Lack of language standardisation/multiple varieties – sensitivity needed in developing materials
- Critical to assess extent to which speakers have literacy and/or desire to develop literacy in language before investing in developing text-based resources

PROJECT 1

REPORT

Borland, H. and C. Mphande 2006 *The Numbers of Speakers of African Languages Emerging in Victoria*, Report for the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department for Victorian Communities (released May, 2006). - available via VMC Website.

