Reconnecting through language in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an examination of community efforts to *reconnect through language* in Africa. This survey is arranged by geographical area (Northeast Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa) and includes a subsection on the awakening of African writing systems. Cases surveyed include: Coptic, Ge‘ez, Yaaku, Elmolo, Ma'a (Inner Mbugu), Cape Khoekhoe, Nǀuu, Tjwao, and Chingoni. Writing systems that have undergone awakening include Tifinagh and Nubian.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se analizan esfuerzos en África para reconectar por medio de la lengua desde las comunidades. Esta recopilación está organizada con base en las areas geográficas del continente Africano (noroeste, este, sur y oeste) e incluye una subsección acerca del despertar de sistemas de escritura africanos. Los casos que se presentan en este trabajo incluyen las lenguas cóptica, ge‘ez, yaaku, elmolo, ma'a (mbugu del interior), Cape Khoekhoe, nǀuu, tjwao, and chingoni. Los sistemas de escritura en revitalización incluyen tifinagh y nubiano.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the African continent, there are very few cases of language awakening parallel to commonly cited examples which involve the use of extant language materials (cf. Zuckermann, 2020).

This paper is an examination of community efforts to *reconnect through language* in Africa. We find that the promotion of shared language practices, when functioning as a component of a larger initiative to improve community wellbeing (cf. Grenoble & Whaley, 2021), may draw from a diverse set of linguistic resources and knowledge, spanning both the past and the present, especially when documentation of linguistic heritage is lacking.

We begin in section 2 with a brief note on the scope and intentions of the paper. Section 3 is an encyclopedic survey of language awakening in Africa, arranged by geographical area (Northeast Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa), followed by a subsection on the awakening of African writing systems. Section 4 focuses on the patterns seen across the continent as well as the connection between the extent of language resources and the way in which people reconnect through language. Section 5 concludes.

2. NOTE TO THE READER: GOALS, DEFINITIONS, ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS

This study is intended to be a library-based, encyclopedic survey of language awakening and practices in Africa.[1] As the first such overview paper of its kind, we discuss all examples that we are aware of, having done extensive bibliographic research into endangered African languages from the entire continent (cf. Sands, 2017, 2018), and in some cases, we have contacted researchers more familiar with the languages in question. We are scholars of white North American origin, whose research focuses on Eastern and Southern Africa and who have spent time in both regions. It is therefore possible that we are more aware of case studies from these regions rather than from other parts of Africa. Certainly, cases may exist which have not been reported on. This is not a survey of the causes of African language endangerment or shift, which have been the subject of many previous surveys (Batibo, 2005; Sommer, 1992, 1998; Sands, 2017; Lüpke, 2015, 2019; Childs, 2020), nor of the levels of documentation of African languages (see Hammarström, 2007, 2010; Hammarström et al., 2018, 2022; Sands, 2017; Lüpke, 2019), nor of revitalization more broadly (Sands, 2018).

Africa is home to about 1/3rd of the world's languages but cases of attempted language awakening in the continent are little known. According to Glottolog 4.7 (Hammarström et al., 2022), there are 51 language families in Africa (excluding sign languages), and 79 African languages classified as 'extinct'. Of this set of 79, they range from languages with fairly good documentation to those with very little, if

[1] We sympathize with the reader seeking to learn more details about the cases covered in this study, however, most of the literature we draw upon is itself not extensive – we are generally drawing upon short notes in works not focused primarily on language awakening. Sociolinguistic information such as the number of learners and the degree to which different generations are involved in language awakening is generally not reported in the literature. We also cannot provide a detailed analysis of the motivations for participants in language awakening projects.

any, documentation. The better-attested ones are all from northeast Africa: Egyptian (Ancient) [egy], Coptic [cop], Old Nubian [onw], Ge‘ez [gez], while those of eastern and southern Africa (e.g. Kw'adza [wka], Elmolo [elo], Kwadi [kwz], ǁXegwi [xeg]) generally have very poor levels of documentation; still worse is the level of documentation in parts of West Africa (e.g. Gbin [xgb], Nagumi [ngv], Shau [sqh]). Some languages of West Africa are known only by name, without any accompanying documentation (e.g., Basa-Gumna [bsl], Ajawa [ajw]). Even in northeast Africa, however, there are languages such as Birgid [brk], a Nubian language, with very sparse documentation.

A larger number of African languages are labelled ‘dormant’, with similar patterns of documentation to those labelled ‘extinct’ (cf. Hammarström et al., 2022). Readers may not be surprised to learn that cases of attempted awakening roughly parallel the rates of documentation (i.e., accessible resources). Simply put, it is difficult to awaken a language which lacks documentation, or, more broadly, language resources. However, we discuss some instances in which a stand-in language is used in place of the heritage language lacking language resources.

3. AWAKENING LANGUAGES IN AFRICA

Attempts at language awakening have taken place in various parts of the African continent, and here we survey six cases, organized by geographical region: Northeast Africa (Coptic, Ge‘ez), East Africa (Yaaku, Elmolo) and Southern Africa (Cape Khoekhoe, Nǀuu).[2] These cases are the closest examples from Africa that are comparable to the cases of awakening commonly cited elsewhere in the world. There is a great deal of written documentation of Coptic and Ge‘ez, languages which have been in continued use in a liturgical context; we discuss attempts to revitalize the languages to be used in the domestic sphere. These cases contrast with others in which language awakening is being attempted even when linguistic resources are meager, and it is in these cases that awakening appears to go hand-in-hand with emerging political rights and land claim issues. Finally, we discuss the awakening of African writing systems, which in many ways involves similar social dynamics and challenges as the awakening of a language. ǁ ǁ

3.1 NORTHEAST AFRICA

Case studies of attempted language awakening in Northeast Africa include Coptic [cop] and Ge‘ez [gez], both languages with extensive written documentation that have continued to be used as liturgical

[2] In making this geographical division, we would underscore that we make no theoretical claim by the use of the labels but are simply trying to give this section some internal organization. We also question the geographical label “Africa”, which excludes the Arabian Peninsula. These are widely used categories with no significance to the current work beyond allowing readers to more quickly identify case studies that may be of particular interest to them. (See Sands, 2022 for a recent summary of African areas.)

languages. Following the vitality scale employed in Moseley (2010), both languages are classified in Glottolog as “extinct.”

3.1.1 COPTIC

Coptic developed out of Old Egyptian during a time of intense Greek-Egyptian contact, with a standardized writing system emerging around 300 CE (Richter, 2010, p. 403). By the end of the first millennium CE, the shift from Coptic to Arabic was well-underway due to political and social pressures, such as the threat of having one's tongue cut off (Ishaq, 1991). As use of Coptic within the domains of science, medicine, and commerce diminished over time, it became strongly associated with Christianity and was considered by speakers to be a medium through which they “know the truth of their religion” and “the Holy Spirit has spoken” (Richter, 2010, pp. 426-427). By 1680 CE, it was considered extraordinary to find someone who used Coptic as a vernacular language (Prince, 1902, p. 289), though rumors of peasants and tradespeople speaking some form of Coptic persist for another two centuries (Worrell & Vycichl, 1942; Ishaq, 1991).

A version of Bohairic Coptic has continued to be used as a spoken liturgical language over the centuries. This liturgical Coptic developed under the influence of other Coptic dialects (Worrell, 1937, p. 11), as well as Greek and Arabic, particularly as these were used in transliterating Coptic texts (Worrell, 1934, p. 128). Some priests and others used Coptic when socializing amongst themselves (Worrell & Vycichl, 1942, p. 303), so, much like Latin, the language has continued to be taught and used in relatively narrow domains.

Modern initiatives to reform Coptic pronunciation and awaken it as a spoken language can be said to have begun with Patriarch Cyrillus IV (1854-1861) of the Coptic Orthodox Church (Worrell & Vycichl, 1942). Claudius Labīb (ⲕⲗⲁⲩⲇⲓⲟⲥ ⲗⲁⲃⲓⲃ) further promoted the language (Worrell & Vycichl, 1942) through publications and formal instruction at the Orthodox Patriarchal School in Cairo (Basta, 1991; Prince, 1902).

Intense efforts to awaken Coptic as a spoken language in daily life were attempted by Labīb, who insisted on the use of Coptic as the sole language of communication in his own home (Miyokawa, 2015). It appears that a few other families attempted to do the same (Basta, 1991). We have come across a report of one Pisanti Rizkallah (1910-1981) who “reached the intensity of his love for the Coptic language that he warned the bread and milk sellers in Alexandria that he would not buy anything from them unless the name of bread and milk was mentioned in the language Coptic first” (“Archpriest Bego Basili”, 2020). Tasuni Hataso, Pisanti Rizkallah's niece, was also a strong proponent of Coptic revitalization, as seen by the following quote:

> “ كنت شاهد عيان علي هذا العشق بنفسي عندما كنت أخدم في كنيسة العذراء أرض الجولف كيف
> كانت تنتهر أطفالها الثلاثة نوفير ورانو وفيرت أذا ما تجرأوا ونطقوا حرف واحد باللغة العربية أنها كانت

تصرخ فيهم باللغة القبطية "تكلموا باللغة القبطية"

"I was myself an eyewitness to the extent of this passion when I used to serve the Church of the Virgin at Ard el-Golf - how she would scold her three children Nofer, Rano, and Ferit; if they dared to speak a single word in Arabic, she would shout at them in Coptic "Speak Coptic!"".

(Translation by Lameen Souag, 6 April, 2021)

There have been continued efforts by the Orthodox church to promote Coptic language learning. Church-affiliated websites provide access to Coptic language materials; examples include Coptic for All,[3] under the direction of Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London, and Tasbeha.org sponsored by the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mark, Jersey City, NJ.[4] The use of digital learning materials and social media accounts to promote Coptic language learning has recently been surveyed by Deschene (2019). Digital materials reach not just speakers in Egypt but also members of the Coptic diaspora in countries all around the world, including North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. We are not aware of any current attempts to revitalize Coptic as a language in the home.

3.1.2 GE'EZ

Ge'ez [gez] is a Semitic language which was widely spoken in Ethiopia from the 5th century CE until between the 10th and 12th century, after which it was primarily used for liturgical purposes within Orthodox Christian churches of the region and among the Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jews formerly known as Falasha (Tesfasilassie, 2010; Appleyard, 1998). In the 1990s, Dessie Keleb founded a club, later named the Society of Friends of Ge'ez, and began producing and distributing Ge'ez teaching materials. In 2004 a philology program was established at Addis Ababa University which included a Ge'ez specialization. After relocating to Israel, priests of the Beta Israel have promoted the continued use of Ge'ez and the dormant language Qwara within ritual prayers,[5] but we are not aware of any efforts by them to promote use of either language in other domains. In Ethiopia, the Society of Friends of Ge'ez reportedly has as many as 3000 members (Tesfasilassie, 2010, p. 27), indicating some degree of interest in revitalizing the language, though successes have been modest, perhaps in part due to lack of funding and a focus on traditional classroom-style instruction.

[3] https://copticforall.com/

[4] http://tasbeha.org

[5] Qwara does not have an ISO code; its Glottolog code is [hwar1238].

3.2 EAST AFRICA

One common pattern which has been observed in East Africa is the assimilation of so-called Dorobo foraging communities into dominant pastoralist ethnic groups such as the Maasai (Huntingford, 1931; Sobania, 1988; Stiles, 1982; van Zwanenberg, 1976, etc.). The assimilation of these small, unrelated communities has resulted in language shift, and has recently spurred interest in awakening their heritage languages. This is exemplified by the speaker communities of two awakening languages: Yaaku [muu] and Elmolo [elo].[6] In both of these cases, it is important to note that the awakening of these languages occurs amid community organizing aiming to address other associated struggles, including land rights (see Mous, 2017, p. 221; Gilbert & Sena, 2018, *passim*), access to services such as healthcare, and the ability to develop local tourism industries.

3.2.1 YAAKU

Yaaku [muu] is an endangered Cushitic language of central Kenya, spoken by a community of former foragers which began to assimilate into the Maasai community over the past century. The Yaaku are sometimes cited as a case of having voluntarily given up their language, because the community decided in the early 1930s to abandon their language (Heine, 1974-75, p. 34). But this decision was made at a time when the community was under extreme economic and social pressures. Language shift (to Mukogodo Maasai) went along with a rapid cultural shift from foraging and beekeeping to pastoralism that occurred between 1925 and 1936 (Cronk, 2002; Brenzinger, 1992). Recently, along with an increase in awareness of, and demand for, human rights, interest in awakening the language has been strong.[7] As of 2005, the number of fluent speakers was as low as three elderly people, with a slightly larger number of people who were less fluent or who knew some vocabulary but not the grammar (Blonk et al., 2005). As recently as 2002, the language was declared by some to have no speakers (Mathenge, 2002). As a response to incipient loss, the community has sought to strengthen the use of their language through several formal methods. Components of this project have included an afternoon club at school such that elderly speakers of Yaaku can interact with children

[6] Note that both Yaaku and Elmolo communities are awakening Cushitic languages but this is not the case for all communities interested in awakening in East Africa. As this article went to print, Samuel Beer (see e.g. Beer 2017), informed us that members of the Nyang'i [nyp] speaker community of Uganda are enthusiastically undertaking efforts to awaken their language, a Kuliak language (Sam Beer p.c. 31/03/2023).

[7] While we have no evidence of language endangerment discourse being promoted among the Yaaku or Elmolo community by missionaries (cf. Lüpke, 2010), the influence of outside groups (including NGOs and linguists) especially in the case of Nǀuu should not be discounted. Most of the languages we mention here are either connected to people who are already Christian (Coptic, Nǀuu) or considered to be too small of a population for missionary-associated language work.

and help them learn the language, a nursery for younger children to learn nursery rhymes from elderly speakers, events as part of a Yaaku language club,[8] and a community-oriented museum for the purpose of promoting cultural transmission to the next generation of Yaaku (Carrier, 2011). Individuals such as Manasseh ole Matunge, as well as Jennifer Konainte of the Yaaku People's Organisation have been central to these efforts. According to Heijkoop (2017, p. 16), most Yaaku are relatively uninterested in seeing the language revived. Members of the Yaaku Cultural Group (YCG), however, do want to see the language revived and Heijkoop worked with two elderly semi-speakers of Yaaku and three members of the YCG to create "A Rough Guide to Speaking Yaaku", an appendix to her bachelor's thesis (Heijkoop, 2017).

3.2.2 ELMOLO

Elmolo [elo] is an endangered or dormant Cushitic language of northern Kenya, spoken by a small community of pastoralists on the southern shore of Lake Turkana who began assimilating into the larger and more dominant Samburu [saq] community in the 20th century (Tosco, 2015).[9] The Elmolo shifted to Samburu, but their Samburu retains some words of Cushitic origin as well as certain other substratum features (Brenzinger, 1992; Heine, 1982). Shift to Samburu was due to the influence of Samburu refugees who lived with the Elmolo in the late 1800s and outnumbered them (Sobania, 1988, p. 51).

The Gura Pau Community Based Organization (Gura Pau, n.d.), founded as the Elmolo Development Group in 1995, and involving community activists such as Michael Basili, has served as a platform for Elmolo awakening efforts (Tosco, 2015, p. 110; Omondi, 2008, pp. 3-4). Given the severity of language loss, several possibilities for revitalization were considered, including having speakers of the related Arbore language come to teach Elmolo people to speak Arbore, encouraging the Elmolo community to relearn the language based on Bernd Heine's (1980) linguistic description, and developing a Samburu-Elmolo mixed language (cf. §4.2 below). Recent conflict has provided an additional impetus to switch back to Elmolo, as power dynamics shift from the once-dominant Samburu to the Turkana (Tosco, 2015, p. 111). Efforts to awaken Elmolo face significant challenges: lack of a well-documented lexicon with few to no language resources related to the grammar, lack of access to neighboring communities speaking related languages, and regional instability.

3.2.3 MA'A OR INNER MBUGU

The Mbugu- (or Ma'a-) speaking people of the Usambara mountains of northern Tanzania are remarkable in that they have access to two distinct varieties of their language, known in the literature

[8] https://yaaku.org/

[9] There were reportedly 84 Elmolo people in 1934, and some 200 in 1980, when only 8 individuals (all over the age of 50) were found to have "a speaking competence of the language" (Heine, 1980, p. 175).

as Normal Mbugu and Inner Mbugu, respectively (Mous, 2003).[10] Both varieties of Mbugu are based on an identical Bantu morphosyntax, similar to that of neighboring languages, but where Normal Mbugu employs lexical items resembling its Bantu neighbors (especially the nearby Pare language [asa]), Inner Mbugu uses lexical items incomprehensible to the surrounding speech communities, many (but not all) of which can be traced to Cushitic (i.e., non-Bantu, non-Mbugu) sources. An example, adapted from Mous (2003), is given below, with the first transcription line in Normal Mbugu, and the second transcription line (in bold) in Inner Mbugu. For the line of Inner Mbugu, the exclusively Inner Mbugu lexemes are italicized (Mous mentions on page 8 that "when one speaks Inner Mbugu one does so maximally but seldom completely"). The third line is the gloss, and the fourth line is the free translation.[11]

Normal Mbugu as compared to Inner Mbugu (bolded) (adapted from Mous, 2003, p. 9)

1)	hé-na	m-zima	é-tang-we	kimwéri
	hé-*ló*	**mw-*agirú***	**é-*sé*-we**	**kimwéri**
	C16-have	C1-elder	SM1-call-PASS	Kimweri
	'there was an elder called Kimweri'			

2)	m-fumwa	w-a	i-i	i-sanga	l-á	lusótó
	Dilao	**w-a**	***yá***	**i-*dí***	**l-á**	**lusótó**
	King	C1-CON	this	C5- land	C5-CON	Lushoto
	'king of this land of Lushoto'					

3)	hé-na	i-zuva	i-mwe	áa-tanga
	hé-*ló*	**i-*'azé***	**i-*wé***	**áa-*sé***
	C16-have	C5-day	C5-one	C1.PST-call
	'on a certain day, he called'			

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[10] There is an ISO code [mhd] for Ma'a and a Glottolog code for Mbugu [mbug1240] but neither coding system distinguishes the two registers. The Languages of Tanzania Project Atlas (LOT, 2009) recorded 33,653 Mbugu speakers in Tanga Region, a population much smaller than neighboring Pare [asa] (Asu, Chasu) and Shambaa [ksb] (Samba, Shambala) groups.

[11] The following abbreviations are used: APL = applicative; C = noun class; CON = connective; DEM = demonstrative; IT = itive; NEG = negation; OM = object marker; PASS = passive; PF = perfective; PST = past; SM = subject marker; SUBJ = subjunctive.

4)	va-mbugu	na	va-shamba	na	va-asu	
	va-*ma'a*	**na**	**va-*sita***	**na**	**va-*'ariyé***	
	C2-Mbugu	with	C2-Shambala	with	C2-Pare	
	'the Mbugu, the Shambaa, and the Pare people'					

5)	vá-vata	vá-zé-m-hand-ía		ma-diyo-akee		
	vá-*so*	**vá-zé-m-*hl*-ía**		**a-*gerú***	***kú'u***	
	SM2-go	SM2.SUBJ-IT-OM1-plant-APL		C6-banana	his	
	'to go and plant his banana trees'					

6)	íji	va-mbugu	v-á-he-fika		twáí	
	Íji	**va-*ma'a***	**v-á-he-*hé***		***ila'í***	
	now	C2- Mbugu	SM2-PST-OM16-arrive		there	
	'well, the Mbugu arrived there'					

7)	kwá kubá	te-vé-kund-ye		vá-ronga	io	ndima
	kwá kubá	**te-vé-*dúmú*-ye**		**vá-*bó'l***	***ka***	***nyamálo***
	with reason	NEG-SM2-want-PF		SM2-make	DEM2	C9.work
	'because they didn't want to do this work [...]'					

Early analyses of Inner Mbugu saw it as a distinct language from Normal Mbugu (e.g. Meinhof, 1906; Copland, 1933-1934), but what is immediately notable from this example, and through the rest of Mous' (2003) work is that Inner Mbugu is maximally interchangeable with Normal Mbugu (in that the lexical items are virtually equivalent semantically), but virtually all speakers are acutely aware of which lexical items are Inner Mbugu, and which lexical items are Normal Mbugu (p. 10), and consciously use Inner Mbugu as a mark of ethnic identity (p. 12).

Even more remarkable is that, rather than Inner Mbugu being a Cushitic language in which most of its grammar has been replaced by a Bantu language, as proposed by Thomason and Kaufman (1988), Inner Mbugu can be shown to have come about as a conscious choice of the speaker community to revive a language which had already fallen out of use in most domains within the speaker community (Mous, 2003, p. 48). That is, at some point after the Cushitic language which the Mbugu people formerly spoke had ceased to be actively used, and most, if not all, of the community had shifted (Mous, 2003, pp. 74-86*)* to speaking the Bantu predecessor language on which both contemporary Inner Mbugu and Normal Mbugu is based (a language most closely related to Pare), the community decided to reclaim this dormant language (Mous, 2003, p. 12, pp. 91-93) by building

an alternate lexicon (Inner Mbugu) to use with the grammar of the Bantu language to which they had shifted. This Inner Mbugu alternate lexicon is at once based upon the Cushitic ancestral language, but at times also very different from it: Inner Mbugu is composed of at least two Cushitic sources, one which can be traced to the ancestral language, and one which can be traced to the contemporary South Cushitic languages Iraqw and Gorwaa.

Inner Mbugu also contains a considerable amount of material from the Eastern Nilotic language Maa (Mous, 2003, p. 14, pp. 24-41). Analysis of the language, as well as of historical and social details of the Mbugu people leads Mous (2003) to conclude the following: the Mbugu people were originally a livestock-oriented culture who probably spoke a Cushitic language. At some point, they became surrounded by (and subordinated to) an agriculturally oriented Bantu-speaking people (the example given above is an excerpt from a common and illustrative Mbugu story, in which the king Kimweri orders the Mbugu people to plant bananas, but the Mbugu people defy him by planting them upside-down and are thus exempted in the future from agricultural work). For a long period of time, the Cushitic language spoken by the Mbugu people existed in a state of slow attrition to the Bantu language(s) of the dominant neighbors, undergoing relexification with Bantu loans. At some point, the Mbugu people shifted entirely from the Cushitic ancestral language to the predecessor of contemporary Mbugu, but the Cushitic ancestral language was retained as secret initiation language (Mous, 2003, pp. 47-50; on secret languages see Storch, 2011).

Not long after this (indeed, perhaps because of this), the Mbugu people consciously decided to employ a parallel lexicon as a marker of ethnic identity and decided to base the core of this parallel lexicon upon their Cushitic initiation language. The parallel lexicon was further expanded by extensive borrowings from nearby Cushitic languages, especially Gorwaa (which the Mbugu people may have been in contact with due to acquiring Gorwaa-speaking people as captives during war), as well as the Nilotic language Maa (which the Mbugu people may have been in contact with due to a long period of Maasai conquest). Eventually, this expanded lexicon became Inner Mbugu. Notably, Mbugu people did not use lexical items from Bantu languages to construct Inner Mbugu but relied on lexical items from Cushitic and Nilotic languages, perhaps to ensure maximal difference from the agriculturalists, or to show affinity with other cattle-oriented peoples (Mous, 2003, *passim*). The result today is a parallel lexicon employed widely across the Mbugu-speaking area - in fact, in the 1990s, Mous observed that many families, and entire village quarters were using Inner Mbugu as their default variety.

3.3 SOUTHERN AFRICA

The number of Khoe and San languages still spoken in southern Africa today represent only a fraction of the Tuu, Kx'a and Khoe (Khoisan, Khoesan, or KhoeSan) languages that were once spoken

in the region (e.g., Jones, 2019).[12] Due to their complex sound systems, documentation of these languages is especially lacking and even when written crucial aspects of their pronunciation are often not noted down. Shift to languages such as Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Setswana has been especially frequent due to the extreme social pressures under which speakers of Khoe and San languages suffered. These “pressures” have included genocide (e.g., Penn, 2013; Hitchcock & Babchuk, 2011; Prins, 1999), ongoing racism, land dispossession, and slavery (Eldredge, 1994).

Efforts to revitalize Khoe and/or San languages in communities where those languages have not been community languages for many decades are underway, but still in very early stages. We discuss two such cases, Cape Khoekhoe and NIuu. In both cases, a reconnection to the language goes hand-in-hand with cultural awakening and efforts to reconnect to traditional lands.[13] It has been estimated that some 2.5 million South Africans may identify as Khoe or San (Lee, 2003, p. 97), but we cannot estimate how many people may be interested in learning to speak Khoe or San languages.

3.3.1 CAPE KHOEKHOE

Cape Khoekhoe is a dormant variety of Khoekhoe [naq], a Khoe language of South Africa, which was spoken until the end of the 18th century (Fauvelle-Aymar, 2005, p. 174).[14] Cape Khoekhoe is one of several closely related languages of the Khoekhoe branch of the Khoe language family (formerly known as Central Khoisan) (GüIdemann, 2014). Other Khoekhoe languages include Griqua [xii] (Xri, Griekwa) and Korana [kqz] (Kora, !Ora), which have few, if any speakers, and Khoekhoegowab [naq] (also known as Khoekhoe, Nama, Damara, ‡Ākhoe and HaiǁIom) which is still passed on to children in Namibia. There are a few thousand Nama in South Africa's Northern Cape Province who have continued to speak Khoekhoegowab, but Khoekhoe languages have not been passed on to the present generation in most of formerly Khoekhoe-speaking South Africa.[15]

Descendants of Cape Khoekhoe speakers have little access to the tiny amount of (very poor) documentation available on Cape Khoekhoe. Instead, revitalization efforts have focused on using Namibian Khoekhoegowab as a stand-in for Cape Khoekhoe. The choice to adopt a language related to the heritage language of the community appears to be a common consideration when the extent of

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[12] Note that San is not a linguistic label but refers to hunter-gatherers who may speak Tuu, Kx'a or Khoe languages.

[13] See Verbuyst (2022) for a discussion of Khoisan cultural revival in Cape Town. Gabie (2018) refers to the ‘rapid rate at which Khoisan groups are emerging post-1994’, with the implicit connection between cultural revival and emergence of political rights at the end of the Apartheid era.

[14] There is no ISO or Glottolog code for Cape Khoehoe and no speakers of the language.

[15] We have recently learned that Korana [kqz], a Khoekhoe language of South Africa, is being learned by community members, including leaders such as Esmé & William Daniel Human (Prinsloo 2023).

language resources of the heritage language is low, as the same option was considered by the Elmolo in Kenya (discussed in the previous section). This decision has not come without greater misunderstanding from outsiders, however: it was reported that one Khoisan singer was decried in popular media for primarily using Khoekhoegowab in the South African parliament, instead of Cape Khoekhoe (Khoza, 2019).

South Africans in the Western Cape have gained access to Khoekhoe (Namibian Khoekhoegowab) through formal instruction and through apps available at the Google Play Store (Jones, 2019). Classes have been offered by several people in Cape Town including Bradley van Sitters, Pedro Dâusab, Dorothea Davids, and Denver Breda (Jones, 2019; Breda, 2019; Brown & Deumert, 2017; Swingler, 2020). For L2 learners such as Breda, getting information on Khoekhoe proved to be somewhat difficult, as was learning to pronounce the various clicks and contrastive tones of the language (Allison & Seiboko, 2020), but Breda has since published downloadable materials to help other learners such as those at Hillwood Primary School (Breda, 2021; cf. Angarova, 2020). Language activist Bradley van Sitters has articulated the importance of language awakening for connecting people to their heritage:

> The genius of the people, their secrets, their oral traditions, are all intermingled into the nature of the language. There are so many layers within the language itself. It's intergenerational truth that is being passed on, through the medium of language. We've lost that connection, having gone through slavery, oppression. Language was my means to make that connection again.
>
> (Bradley van Sitters, quoted in Allison & Seiboko, 2020)

Community leader Ishsaqua Sabodien has also engaged in language revitalization efforts. He has promoted Khoekhoe language and culture at a youth center in Ocean View, in the southern peninsula of Cape Town (Jones, 2019). Descendants of Khoekhoe-speaking Gorachoqua (!Koraxoullais) and other non-white residents of Simonstown and other communities were relocated to Ocean View during the Apartheid era. A launch party for the NIuu-Nama-Afrikaans-English dictionary (Sands & Jones, 2022) was held for the Ocean View community in Simonstown on 27 October 2022 to reflect the hope that this first dictionary of *South African* Nama will play a role in reconnecting people in the Western Cape to their Khoekhoe-speaking heritage.

The publication of materials in South Africa for the revitalization of a South African language is symbolically important not just as a way of connecting to languages that were once more widely spoken, but also because these languages represent an aspect of the heritage of the country which has often been overlooked. Writing Khoesan languages with special click letters (i.e. ʘ, ǀ, ǁ, !, ǂ) in public arenas such as the national motto in ǀXam (Barnard, 2003, 2004) and the motto of the Northern

Cape Province in NIuu (Crawhall, 1999, p. 323) is, in essence, a political act. Access to Biblical literacy, it is argued, helped Khoekhoe in the early nineteenth century living in the Cape to “challenge colonial

Figure 1: Ishsaqua Sabodien at his home/school in Ocean View, South Africa where he teaches Khoekhoegowab. [photo credit: Bonny Sands, October 2022, used with permission]

subjugation and discrimination" and promote Khoesan national renewal (McDonald, 2020, p. 182). Early religious works written in the Khoekhoe and San languages formerly spoken in South Africa are difficult to access, however, as some are lost (McDonald, 2020, p. 175) and others are out-of-print (e.g. Wuras, 1927).

There are efforts to revitalize Khoekhoe culture and identity (e.g., Besten, 2005; Gabie, 2014); sometimes the link between language revival and cultural revival is specifically mentioned (e.g., Ribbens-Klein, 2016, p. 56; Erasmus, 2010). There is already some connection between language activism and activism surrounding land rights claims, at least in the Cape Town area (e.g., Ferris, 2020), but this may also increase in the future. We are hopeful that communities will engage with other recent works on Khoekhoe family languages, (e.g., Du Plessis, 2018, 2019 on Kora; and Haacke & Snyman, 2019 on Xri (Griqua)).

3.3.2 NIUU

NIuu differs from many cases of language awakening because community efforts have taken place with the help of mother tongue language speakers, most notably Ouma Katrina Esau, the only fluent speaker alive today.[16] NIuu [ngh] (or N||ng) is a Tuu language both formerly and currently spoken in the southern part of the Kalahari, in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. The language had been documented in the early part of the last century under the names such as ǂKhomani and ||ŋ !ke and had been thought to be sleeping since the 1970s (Traill, 1999; Chamberlin & Namaseb, 2001), several decades after the forced dispersal of the ǂKhomani which resulted from the creation of a wildlife reserve/national park in their homeland (Chennells, 2002). People of NIuu/ǂKhomani heritage speak a regional dialect of Afrikaans, but some speak Nama, Setswana and/or other languages as well. Language shift to Afrikaans appears to have been relatively abrupt (Sands et al., 2007). The awakening of the language began during the process of land reclamation.

We consider NIuu to be an example of language awakening because under pressures associated with the institution of Apartheid (including land dispossession and other oppressive practices that preceded it, cf. Brody, 2012), NIuu had not been used as a community language for decades. Some people who had learned the language as children continued to use the language in relative secrecy amongst themselves, keeping both their identity as Saasi (also known as ǂKhomani Bushmen) and their knowledge of the language hidden (Crawhall, 2004, p. 95, p. 242; Crawhall, 2003, p. 16). When Roger Chennells, a lawyer involved in the land reclamation process after the end of Apartheid, commented on the loss of the language (in the 1990s), Petrus Vaalbooi pointed out that his elderly

[16] ǂXuuleeki Katrina Esau is now also Dr. Esau after having received an honorary doctorate from the University of Cape Town on March 28, 2023 for her work to teach and preserve the NIuu language (Evans, 2023; Davids, 2023).

mother, Elsie Vaalbooi, could speak that language (Chamberlin & Namaseb, 2001, p. 27; Crawhall, 2003, p. 16). She had reportedly not spoken the language in 50 years (Crawhall, 2004, p. 14), but her willingness to be “the first person to resurface as a fluent speaker of the Nǀuu language which was declared extinct during 1973” (Nowapane, 2019) was a turning point for the language. Several additional speakers were located, and many interviews with them have been archived at the ǂKhomani San Hugh Brody Archive at the University of Cape Town (Brody, 2016, forthcoming). Teams of linguists from the US and Germany rushed to find funding to start linguistic documentation projects, greatly expanding knowledge of the language compared to what was known from earlier sources (surveyed in Crawhall, 2004).

Nǀuu language awakening helps provide cultural awareness and pride in one's heritage to help combat local prejudices against Saasi, as exemplified by this statement made by Petrus Vaalbooi:

> We have lost our language, but if we start at the basis [...]. The small children should now pick up the language and traditions; it should be built up like that. I have problems with the school here; they attacked our children, saying the word Bushman like a curse word… (Rietfontein, South Africa [ǂKhomani])
>
> (Petrus Vaalbooi, as quoted in Le Roux & White, 2004, p. 70)

Revitalization efforts have resulted in the production of a children’s book (Esau, 2021) supported by South Africa's National Arts Council, and a home-based Nǀuu language instruction program. Into her 80s, Ouma Katrina Esau has run a small school on her property in Rosedale, Upington, called Gǂaqe ǁX’oqe (Staar na die Sterre/Gazing at the Stars) (Jones, 2019, p. 62; Sands & Jones, 2022, p. 9), but the school was heavily vandalized during the financially difficult time of COVID-19 lockdown. Nǀuu classes had been sporadically held in Andriesvale (Siegrühn & Grant, 2021, p. 92) but resources are extremely limited there as well. There is a great desire to have teachers from the Saasi/ǂKhomani community, but it is difficult to access teacher training locally and most teacher-trainees would also need free childcare as well as tuition to pursue such training.

Claudia du Plessis, one of Katrina Esau's grandchildren, a language instructor, and a member of the Nǀuu Language Authority (NLA) is deeply involved in Nǀuu revitalization. She says:

> I did not hear it [growing up]. The whites told my grandmother not to speak Nǀuu because it was an 'ugly language'...My grandmother speaks it with me, and I'm reading books about it. I can write it well, but the language is very difficult to speak. But when you get it right, then you get it right.
>
> (Claudia du Plessis, as quoted in Allison & Seiboko, 2020)

The Nǀuu Language Authority is a group of community members who consulted with linguists in preparing a Nǀuu-Nama-Afrikaans-English dictionary (Sands & Jones, 2022). We hope that this publication (distributed for free, with funding from South Africa's Department of Sport, Arts and Culture) accompanied by a phone app and web-based dictionary portal developed by the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) will enable learners to easily access audio recordings of the language.

3.3.3 ǀXAM

With recent attention paid to the Nǀuu language in South Africa, there has been some interest in revitalizing the ǀXam [xam] language as well. The last fieldwork on ǀXam occurred more than 100 years ago and there have been no reports of fluent speakers of ǀXam since that time. Both Nǀuu and ǀXam are members of the !Ui branch of the Tuu (formerly Southern Khoisan) language family (Güldemann, 2014; Honken, 2013; Traill, 2002). In the past, people speaking !Ui (San) languages were subject to forced removal from their land and genocidal commando raids (e.g., Penn, 1996) and descendants still face many challenges today. ǀXam was spoken over a much wider area in South Africa than Nǀuu, and many ǀXam descendants' awareness of their heritage is becoming more widely-known (cf., e.g. Parkington et al., 2019; "Promoting Khoisan voices", 2019). Today, it is not possible to speak of a ǀXam community,[17] but many South Africans have ǀXam heritage. One such person, David van Wyk, one of the members of the Nǀuu Language Authority (responsible for approving translations and spellings of words that have been included in the Nǀuu dictionary), has expressed a particular interest in revitalizing ǀXam as a way of connecting with his heritage (personal communication, June 2021).

The difficulties inherent in revitalizing ǀXam are even greater than those involved in Nǀuu revitalization, however. There are no surviving recordings of ǀXam, and no fluent speakers or known rememberers. The language has many consonants (including a large number of clicks, Bleek and Lloyd, 1911/2001; The Digital Bleek and Lloyd, 2005) and relatively challenging sounds such as ejectives and pharyngealized vowels. Because ǀXam is related to Nǀuu, a knowledge of Nǀuu pronunciation might be helpful in learning ǀXam pronunciation.

The Bleek & Lloyd archive at the University of Cape Town is an important repository of information about ǀXam, including many texts (also published as Bleek & Lloyd, 1911/2001; The Digital Bleek & Lloyd, 2005). The archive consists of handwritten journals compiled over time by a trained linguist, Wilhelm Bleek, and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd. As their knowledge of the language improved, their accuracy in spelling words also improved. As a result, items pulled from these notes can vary widely

[17] Some people of ǀXam and Khoekhoe descent known as Karretjie people have retained a distinct cultural identity and itinerant lifestyle (De Jongh, 2012).

in how they are spelled. The “same” word in ǀXam might be spelled half a dozen different ways across the archive. The lack of certainty of the correct spelling of each word as well as the uncertainty of what pronunciation these spellings correspond to (cf. Traill, 1995) present challenges to any revitalization effort. Digital archives with data on Khoisan languages such as the Bleek & Lloyd archive, the ǂKhomani San Hugh Brody Archive at the University of Cape Town (Brody, 2016), and the Endangered Languages archive (ELAR) in Berlin (e.g., Boden, 2022) are typically unknown to Khoe and San descendants who might be interested in awakening their languages, many of whom do not own computers or even smartphones. Even with such resources, lack of affordable data plans, insufficient computer literacy, and limited literacy in English are barriers to access.

Besides ǀXam, there were other !Ui languages spoken in South Africa, such as ǁXegwi [xeg] (Lanham & Hallowes, 1956) and !Gã!ne [kqu] (Anders, 1934-35), for which linguistic resources are even more limited. The last known mother tongue speaker of ǁXegwi, Job (or Jopi) Mabinda was brutally murdered in 1988 (Boekkooi, 1988). Sands traveled to the formerly ǁXegwi-speaking area (Chrissiesmeer, Ermelo District, South Africa) with Will Bennett of Rhodes University in 2019 to follow up on reports of people who could still remember words with clicks. They found the son of a tour operator who had learned some of these words as a kid from the Bushmen. The words turned out to be Khoekhoe, and in fact, they appear to have been taught to them by a visitor from Namibia. Although we were disappointed not to find rememberers of ǁXegwi, it was still fascinating to see how a very small set of lexical items were shared over such a long distance, connecting people to a Khoesan heritage.

3.3.4 TJWAO

In the case of Tjwao, a Khoe-Kwadi language spoken in Zimbabwe, there remain approximately seven elders aged between 65 and 90 (Phiri, 2021, p. 15).[18] At this stage, documentation efforts appear to be succeeding in producing linguistic materials (Anderson et al., 2014), as well as supporting revitalization (Phiri, 2021, p. 16). In fact, at the time of writing, three young Tjwao community members are currently in higher education, with the aim of both studying the language and eventually teaching it in schools (Tshili, 2021). These three received weekly lessons in Tjwao taught by Davy Ndlovu (Phiri, p.c., 12 March 2022). The community is very keen to revitalize their language and have requested that Phiri write a children's book and dictionary they can use to teach their children.

Tjwao represents a case where a dedicated linguist from the community can make a huge difference in spurring revitalization activities. Activities currently used by Tjwao include indigenous, culturally embedded activities (cf. Dyll, 2020) that do not focus on literacy education:

[18] Tjwao does not have an ISO code but has a Glottolog code [tjwa1234].

> The community has built a crêche in Sanqinyana and Garia to teach the children the language and their culture e.g., Tjwao songs and folktales. In addition, every year they celebrate the International Mother Language Day. During this time they camp for two days in the bush to revive, document the language through oral storytelling, arts and cultural methods and informal learning methods.
>
> (Phiri, personal communication, 10 March 2022)

3.3.5 CHINGONI

Ngoni identity is strong in Malawi (Kishindo, 2002, p. 216) - people are proud to identify as descendants of the original Ngoni migrants who entered Malawi from the south in the early 1800s (Poole 1929-1930).[19] It is doubtful that there are any fluent speakers of Chingoni in Malawi today. Although census figures estimated the population of Malawian Chingoni speakers at 44,000 in 1966 (cited in Kishindo, 2002, p. 207), the language was already reportedly only used by the elderly as early as 1936 (Read, 1936; cited in Kishindo, 2002, p. 207). In contrast to the census figures from 1966, a 1964 study described Chingoni in Malawi as "today completely gone, being used only to sing the chief's praises on ceremonial occasions" (Wills, 1964, p. 68; cited in Kishindo, 2002, pp. 206-207). Because of the dynamics of the great Nguni migration north, and especially marriage patterns of the original Ngoni migrants (marrying the women of those who they conquered, such that it was the languages of the mothers which were passed to their children), there is evidence that, from very early on, those people who identified as Ngoni used the language very little. Compare Wills (1964, p. 68, cited in Kishindo, 2002, pp. 206-207), who stated that "[t]he Ngoni speak the tongues of the people they conquered – Tumbuka, Chewa, Mang'anja and Yao".

Despite this, there is a concerted and organized revival effort by the Abenguni (Ngoni) Revival Association and Mzimba Heritage Association, the former association's first objective being "to revive the language which is not being passed on from their forefathers to younger generations" (Kishindo, 2002, p. 215). However, it is noted that, in practice, the language being used as the target for awakening is South African isiZulu, a language which, though clearly related to Malawian Chingoni and certainly associated with the Nguni/Ngoni dispersal, is a stand-in for the underdocumented Chingoni of Malawi (Kishindo, 2002, p. 217).

At a more basic level, and despite these organized efforts, most contemporary people who identify as Ngoni may equally see their ancestral language as Chingoni, or as Chitumbuka (a language which

[19] The ISO code [ngo] is not specific to Malawian Ngoni. Glottolog 4.6 (Hammarström et al., 2022) distinguishes 7 different Ngoni varieties, of which 3 appear to be Malawian: Ngoni of Malawi [ngon1266], Ngoni (Nyanja) [ngon1270], and Ngoni (Tumbuka) [ngon1272].

has its own history of oppression [see Kamwendo, 2004]), which was widely spoken and used by Malawian Ngoni people for probably more than a century (Kishindo, 2002, pp. 207-208).

In contrast with efforts in Malawi, we are not aware of any analogous efforts in Tanzania. Ngoni in both Malawi and Tanzania derive from an “Old Ngoni” which was spoken by invaders from southern Africa and replaced in the late 1800s (Elmslie, 1891; Spiss, 1904). In Tanzania, “Old Ngoni” was replaced by the (non-Nguni) Manda language known as Ngoni which itself is threatened by Kiswahili (Rosendal & Mapunda, 2014).

3.3.6 SECRET SAN

In the twentieth century, it was commonly expressed that the San people of the Drakensberg (of Lesotho and southeastern South Africa) had “become extinct”. These people have also sometimes been referred to as Abatwa. Since the end of Apartheid in South Africa, an increasing number of people have come forward identifying as San who had been in hiding for generations (Prins, 2009, pp. 199-202). These ‘secret San’ were commonly assimilated into neighboring groups, especially Southern Sotho-, Zulu-, and Xhosa-speaking communities but retained a dual ethnicity (Prins, 2009), speaking the language of the larger community, but remaining San in their connection with ritual and healing practice.

The challenges that these ‘secret San’ have faced as a language community are immense: from successive waves of migration in the distant past (Prins, 2009, pp. 194-195) to displacement, serfdom, and murder during the colonial and Apartheid periods (pp. 199-202). Forced movement of people during the colonial period may even had led the area to become extensively mixed linguistically, one group being reported as composed of “San, Khoi, runaway slave-descendants, and Bantu-speakers [who] [n]evertheless [...] took on a San identity” (p.196). Even today, people who identify as ‘secret San’ struggle for legitimacy as they seek to revive ritual practices associated with traditional sites in the Drakensberg (pp. 202-204).

It has been reported that San descendants in KwaZulu-Natal are interested in language revitalization:[20]

[20] An anonymous reviewer remarks that this initial phrase seems to be from a Western ideological standpoint. While we welcome the kind of inquiry this kind of question begs, this paper limits itself to reporting what people in Africa have done and what they have said and cannot say any more on many of these cases, about which very little is actually known. Tosco (2004) cites cases of African languages threatened by national language policies, so a link between nationhood and linguistic rights is noticed by members of small communities and need not be an idea brought in from outsiders.

> There is no Nation without language and culture. Our intent here is to recreate ourselves and our language. We don't want money from this. We do it for ourselves and for the future of the Abatwa people.
>
> (interview with Richard Duma, July 2004, quoted in Francis, 2006, p. 18)

It is unclear what language resources might be available to use in such an endeavor, or, indeed, what language was once spoken by the Abatwa (San) of this area. Written documentation is very difficult to interpret (even by linguists) without first-hand knowledge of related languages and there are only a few scholars who have worked on !Ui languages.

A question to consider then is: if the San of the Drakensberg, a group who have recently re-emerged, and who are attempting to re-assert their identity, wished to awaken the language of their ancestors, which language (or languages) would that be? This may seem to be an unnecessarily complex example, but cases such as this – groups whose linguistic histories have been submerged, fragmented, and transmogrified by conflict, oppression, or simply by time – are, in Africa, common.

3.4 WEST AFRICA

Our survey of the literature has only revealed one instance of what might be considered language awakening in West Africa. Some Nigerian Igbo Jews have been learning Hebrew as a way to reconnect with their Jewish roots (Subramanian, 2022). The historical presence of Jews in Nigeria (not only amongst the Igbo) has been noted by several researchers (e.g., Bruder, 2008; Lange, 2011). Modern Hebrew, in this case, would be a stand-in for the ancient Hebrew that Jews may have once spoken in Nigeria. We do not know of any similar efforts by others with claims to Jewish descent elsewhere in Africa, such as the Lemba of Southern Africa (cf. Tamarkin, 2020) and Fang of Gabon, though some in Madagascar have learned Hebrew songs as a way of connecting to Malagasy Jewish heritage (Devir 2022, pp. 149-165).

3.5 AWAKENING WRITING SYSTEMS

In addition to awakening languages, there are cases of the awakening of previously dormant scripts in Africa, including the Libyco-Berber and Nubian scripts. The Nubian language of Egypt and Sudan has been commonly written using the Arabic script due to the regional dominance of the Arabic language and the widespread availability of Arabic-script text input software. In recent years, however, the development of literacy materials aimed at promoting use of the Nubian script, in tandem with the creation of the Unicode-compliant Sophia Nubian font, has made it possible for Nubian speakers to use the script both on paper and digital devices for the first time (Taha, 2019, p. 129). Libyco-Berber scripts have been standardized and revitalized as Tifinagh (or, Neo-Tifinagh), largely through the efforts of l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM) in Morocco. As with the case of revitalization

of Maya hieroglyphic writing (Sturm, 1996; Fox Tree, 2020, 2021), the revitalization of African scripts provides a means of symbolically asserting a connection between the ancient past and the present. We do not know how many users there are of these scripts today.

3.5.1 TIFINAGH

Ancient scripts connected to Punic (Phoenician) were used to write Amazigh (Berber, or Tamazight) languages across North Africa, with different symbols being used in Libya vs. Mali, for instance (Aghali-Zakara & Drouin, 1973-1979/1981; Claudot-Hawad, 1996; Basset, 1948/1959). These ancient scripts have been referred to as Libyco-Berber scripts, and texts have been dated from the fifth (Souag, 2004) to the second or third centuries B.C.E. (O'Connor, 1996). Across most of Amazigh North Africa, Libyco-Berber scripts fell out of use more than 2000 years ago (Mezhoud, 2010). However, the script known as Tifinagh has been in continuous use by Tuareg speakers from medieval times up to the present day. Tifinagh has great symbolic importance among the Tuareg though their language is more often written in Arabic or Roman scripts (McLaughlin, 2015, p. 225).

A Neo-Tifinagh script awakening effort first began in the Berber Academy in Paris in the 1960s, followed by the establishment of IRCAM in Morocco in 2001 (Mezhoud, 2005). The Neo-Tifinagh script used by IRCAM is based on the Kabyle language of Algeria (Mezhoud, 2010). Despite some issues with adapting it to other Amazigh languages (due to some phonological differences), the re-emergence of the script seems to be modestly successful. Development of the script has included the establishment of a Unicode font and a cursive script (Lguensat, 2011; Boukous, 2012). The script has been used in a number of books published by IRCAM, including dictionaries and grammars (e.g., Benamara, 2013; Boukhris et al., 2008), some of which are available online.

Neo-Tifinagh has provided a symbolic connection between the Amazigh of today and the Amazigh of ancient times. As Amazigh speakers have gained political rights, their script has increased in acceptance. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the Neo-Tifinagh script seems to have been more often used at political rallies and demonstrations (Mezhoud, 2005, p. 111) than in the private sphere. Neo-Tifinagh is also increasingly used in other public venues such as “signposts, road signs, official notices (in the Berber areas), public buildings (town halls, schools, post offices)” (Mezhoud, 2010, p. 79).

Awakened scripts must be viewed in the context of political activism. Just as use of a prohibited language could result in one being punished or imprisoned, so could the use of a prohibited script. In Libya under the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, people were prohibited from using the Tifinagh or other Libyco-Berber scripts by government officials (“Suluṭāt al-amn al-Lībiyyah”, 2007), to the point where authors of Amazigh materials have been forced to abandon the indigenous script entirely in favor of an approved Latin script (Davies & Dubinsky, 2018, p. 255). People across North Africa were

imprisoned for writing or publishing with the Neo-Tifinagh script as late as the 1990s (Becker, 2007, pp. 276-278). Only within the past two decades have some Amazigh languages been granted official status, for example, Tamazight in Algeria in 2002 (Bouteflika, 2002 via Souag, 2019). In Libya, after Gaddafi (but before COVID-19) there were lessons in Neo-Tifinagh and Amazigh held for three hours per week in Tripoli (Zurutuza, 2018). Support for Amazigh in Libya has included language broadcasts on TV and radio (Souag, 2020, p. 263), as well as the publication of a textbook in Neo-Tifinagh for use in primary schools (Madi, 2012, cited in Souag, 2020).

The awakening of Libyco-Berber through the use of Neo-Tifinagh has been driven in no small part due to political activism. Religion has not played a role in the re-emergence of the script, however. Most Amazigh are Muslim, yet Amazigh activists have opposed the use of Arabic script in materials for use in teaching Tamazight in the schools in Algeria (Souag, 2019).

3.5.2 NUBIAN

The Old Nubian script was used from the 8th century B.C.E. at least until the time of the Ottoman conquest 1484-1485 B.C.E. (Breyer, 2021, p. 123). Old Nubian emerged from a long tradition of literacy along the Nile, beginning with Egyptian hieroglyphics, followed by Meroitic, Demotic, Greek and Coptic scripts. Nubians have a “strong folk belief that they are the true inheritors of the ancient civilizations of the Nile valley and that all ancient writings – hieroglyphic or alphabetic – were forms of their own language writing” (Hashim, 2004, p. 239). A reconnection to this ancient past is a motivating factor in the revitalization of the Old Nubian script.

An initial surge in interest among intellectuals in using the Old Nubian script began following Gerald Browne's 1979 publication of “*Introduction to Old Nubian*” (Hashim, 2004, p. 218). More concerted efforts to revitalize the Old Nubian script were undertaken by Nubian linguists in the early 1990s (Bell, 2014, p. 1190) and societies formed in Cairo, Khartoum, and Abu Dhabi to teach the script from 1989-1996 (Hashim, 2004, pp. 233-234). In the early 1990s, Omar Hassan Al-Daboodi wrote a language-learning primer for Kenzi Nubian using a Neo-Nubian script that he devised, because he found that the Arabic script was unable to represent the sounds of the language sufficiently (Jaeger, 2009, pp. 37-38). Similarly, Mukhtar Khalil Kabbara used a modified Old Nubian script to produce a grammar and other materials (cf. Hashim, 2001), as did other scholars (Hashim, 2004, pp. 218-219). Also in the 1990s, the Nubian Studies and Documentation Centre was formed in Cairo and conducted literacy courses using a Neo-Nubian script. The script used by the Centre was a modified version of the Old Nubian script meant to handle both Nobiin and Dongolawi varieties of Nubian; Neo-/Old Nubian script has been taught sporadically by Nubian clubs in Egypt (Jaeger, 2008, pp. 16-17). The Nubian Language Society (*Nobiin Taamenn Orban*) in Khartoum has focused on language instruction using a

Neo-/Old Nubian script since 2005 and seeks to introduce Nubian language into school curricula (Jaeger, 2009, p. 41).

Under the leadership of Nubantood Khalil, the Nubian Language Society (NLS) in Washington, DC has also promoted the Nubian script and Nubian languages,[21] both through publications (e.g., Khalil, 2017, 2021) and language programs. The Nubian Language Society maintains a Facebook page as well as a YouTube channel with over 400 subscribers (NLS, n.d.). In one survey, the Old Nubian script was strongly preferred by Sudanese Nubians over Arabic script, even by younger Nubians who are not fully fluent but who have some passive knowledge of the language (Hashim, 2004). The use of the script reflects "a growing ethno-national ideology" which "aims at bringing together the Nubian past with the present and the future in one continuum that can take them into the long future just as it goes back for thousands of years" (Hashim, 2004, p. 231). Despite the strong emotions attached to the choice of script, however, many Nubians continue to use Arabic script in text messages and on Twitter and Facebook, though awareness of and access to Nubian fonts is on the increase (Taha, 2019, p. 126).

Bell (2014) describes "Language Games" where Nubian speakers can learn to read Old Nubian. In one of these language games, players read geographical signs where a place name is written in Old Nubian, Arabic and Latin scripts. In doing so, they become accustomed to transliterating words into Old Nubian. There is a strong connection to knowledge of place names and the revitalization of Nubian culture and language (Bell & Sabbār, 2011). Nubians were dispossessed of their land due to flooding following the creation of the Aswan Dam (Rouchdy, 1989). It has been estimated that some 60% of Nubian territory was rendered uninhabitable (Adams, 1977, p. 653, cited in Rouchdy, 1989, p. 92). In learning about place names of the formerly inhabited Nubian areas, Nubians learn more about their language and heritage at the same time (cf. Bell & Sabbār, 2017).

4. DISCUSSION

What has immediately preceded was an encyclopedic presentation of language awakening across the African continent: fourteen cases all told, with twelve involving spoken languages, and two involving scripts. We see three main patterns, which are: 1) language reintroduction; 2) language mixing; 3) adopting a new language. These patterns can all be described as part of a larger concept *reconnecting through language*: an intentional introduction, reintroduction, or creation of linguistic practices to deepen connections with culture, community, and ancestors. This puts healing in the

[21] For instance, the NLS website (NLS, 2021) reports on future plans to develop the Nubian Birgid and Ajang languages through various projects. These languages have fewer resources than Nobiin Nubian. The Hill Nubian language Haraza is not slated for language projects; the website notes that the language is only known "from a word list of 36 words."

forefront, and frames linguistic practices as a means of achieving that healing, without any assumptions as to what those linguistic practices consist of or what their relationships are to shared heritage. Cases of reconnecting through language include more scenarios than described in this paper, e.g., creative multilingual language mixing in urban youth languages may be described as reconnecting but not awakening.

The distinction between reintroducing a sleeping language with as few changes as possible and mixing elements of a sleeping language with another language is not clear-cut; nor is the distinction between incorporating elements of a sleeping language with another language and adopting a different language. Instead, reconnecting through language exists in a multiplicity of ways, some of which are schematised in Figure 2 below:[22]

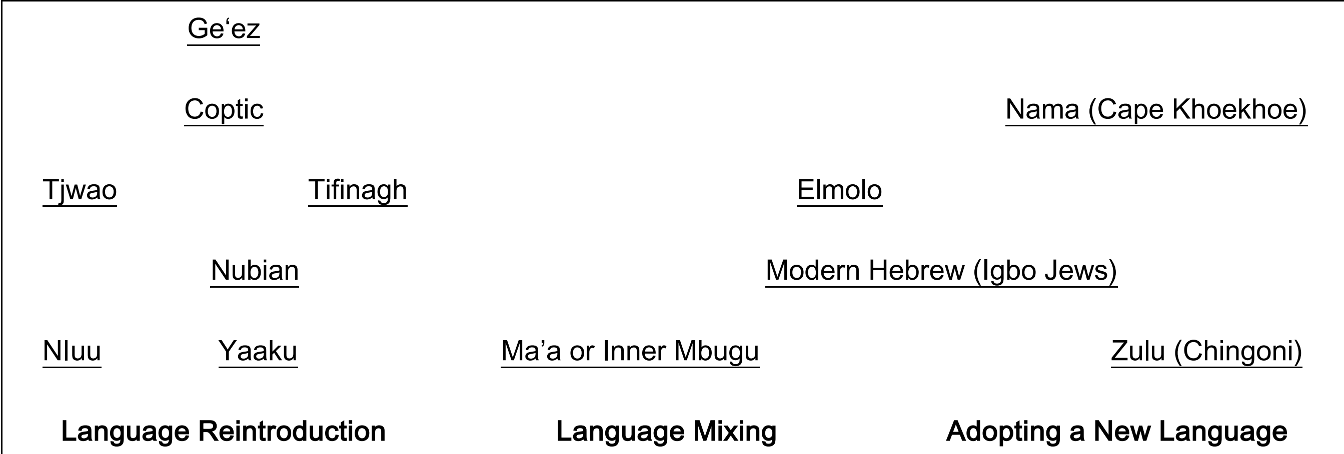

Figure 2. Language Awakening in Africa: Ways of Reconnecting Through Language

Following is a brief discussion of each of these sub-types of reconnecting through language, as well as a section summary in which an observation is given on ways of reconnecting with language and extent of documentary materials available for a sleeping language.

4.1 LANGUAGE REINTRODUCTION

Language reintroduction can be described as the intentional reintroduction or return of a language into a community where family (parent-to-child or grandparent-to-child) language transmission has completely ceased. The cases of language reintroduction on the African continent fall into essentially two subcategories: languages that were associated with a priestly tradition (Coptic, Ge'ez, and Nubian (whose awakening was kindled within a secular intellectual tradition, rather than a sacred one)); and

[22] Both IXam and Secret San have been left out of this figure, as, in both cases, their reconnecting through language is hoped for, rather than attempted.

languages whose traditions of usage were preserved through small communities of practice (such as the Tifinagh script), small collections of "last speakers" (as for Yaaku and Tjwao), and, in the case of NIuu, a speaker who emerged from silence after 50 years.

A noteworthy question, it would seem, is *why did these speakers decide to continue using their languages?* Indeed, learning more about the motivations of these communities both large and small, serves to turn on its head the often-asked (and often-morbid) question *why did this community stop using their language?* This line of inquiry could provide important models of resilience and resistance for language awakening efforts in the future.

4.2 LANGUAGE MIXING

Both cases that involve language mixing (the Ma'a or Inner Mbugu case of mixing the lexicon of a sleeping language with the grammar similar to the Bantu languages of the area, and the proposed strategy of Elmolo developing a mixed Samburu-Elmolo language) show a similarity which is perhaps evident but important nonetheless. The language with which Ma'a or Inner Mbugu has mixed its sleeping language is one to which Mous (2003) describes the community as already having shifted. This is similar to the Elmolo case, where shift to Samburu has already taken place. In these cases, the language for mixing with the sleeping language is one which most, if not all, of the community speaks. This is informative for communities that share a single sleeping language but not a contemporary language (i.e., Malawian Chingoni community) and which wish to reconnect through language as a community but may find it difficult to successfully choose a language with which to mix their sleeping language.

It should be noted that language mixing may be altogether more common. For example, in Kenya, speakers of the Kalenjin language Terik [tek], have been described as adopting large amounts of lexical material from the Kalenjin language Nandi [niq] – this has been thought to be in response to increasing encroachment from people speaking the Bantu language Luhya [luy] (Heine, 1992, p. 262; Seroney, 2005, p. 97). In a way, linguistic and wider cultural orientation toward Nandi people could be seen as a way in which Terik speakers are attempting to assert their difference (and re-assert their language) in the face of demographic change.[23] However, unlike Ma'a or Inner Mbugu, which is composed of a mainly Cushitic lexicon upon a Bantu grammar, both Terik and Nandi are mutually-intelligible varieties of Kalenjin, so such language-mixing is much harder to observe, and much more likely to go unnoticed. Given that language contact often occurs between closely related (and very

[23] Less than half of Terik people considered themselves to be speakers of the Terik language (Heine, 1992, p. 265, based on Roeder, 1986), with the rest having switched to Nandi. Seroney (2005, p. 97) considers there to have been 50,000 speakers of Terik (citing Heine, 1992). We do not have reliable population figures that are more recent.

similar) languages, cases of un-coordinated language mixing may be a much more common dynamic than currently reported.

4.3 ADOPTING A NEW LANGUAGE

In all cases recorded in this paper where a community has chosen to reconnect through language by adopting a language entirely different to the sleeping language (the Cape Khoekhoe choosing Namibian Khoekhoegowab, and the Malawian Chingoni choosing Zulu), the choice has been a language which is closely related to the sleeping language. The same pattern can be seen in the proposed adoption of the (Cushitic) language Arbore by the Elmolo community (Elmolo being a Cushitic language). The choice to use a related language for awakening has been seen in other parts of the world, for instance, cf. the case of the Tuxpan Nahua and Ayotitlán communities who have used resources from Huastecan Nahuatl as their own dialects are underdocumented (Yáñez Rosales et al., 2016).

4.4 SUMMARY

If there is a correlation to be noted throughout all of the cases examined in this discussion, it is that how people reconnect through language in order to awaken a language is closely related to the amount of preexisting resources that are available to them. Resources might include things like extensive written texts and an oral (liturgical) tradition in Ge'ez, which comes very close to what today might be construed as a documentary collection; as well as things like a version of the sleeping language preserved in an initiation register, as proposed for Ma'a or Inner Mbugu, which would seem rather dissimilar to a documentary collection. In all the cases reviewed here, languages which are being reintroduced are those with extensive documentary resources available to them (and in the cases of Nǀuu, Yaaku, and Tjwao, even remaining speakers), languages which are being mixed have limited documentary resources available to them, and language communities which are choosing to adopt entirely new languages have few to no documentary resources available to them. This is significant not only in that it underscores the relationship between language awakening and language documentation, but also in that, if a language community lacks a sufficient documentary record of their sleeping language for awakening, other meaningful options are available.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper provides an encyclopedic review of all reported cases of language awakening on the African continent: Coptic and Ge'ez in Northeast Africa; Yaaku, Elmolo and Ma'a or Inner Mbugu in East Africa; the Cape Khoekhoe community (learning Namibian Khoekhoegowab), Nǀuu, ǀXam, Tjwao, the Chingoni community (learning Zulu), and the Secret San community in Southern Africa; Nigerian Igbo Jews learning Modern Hebrew in West Africa; as well as two cases of the awakening of the

African scripts Tifinagh and Nubian.[24] In §4, we outline three main patterns of language awakening in Africa: language reintroduction (an intentional reintroduction of a language into a community where family language transmission has completely ceased), language mixing (the sleeping language is mixed with another language) and adopting a new language (an entirely different language from the sleeping language is chosen). These are all instances of communities *reconnecting through language*. It is also noted that, of the cases reviewed in this paper, communities with a greater degree of language resources available to them will often aim to reintroduce their sleeping language; communities with more modest language resources available to them resort to creating a mixed language with elements of their sleeping language, and communities with few or no language resources available to them choose to adopt a language different to their sleeping language.

In our survey of language awakening practices in Africa, we have not encountered efforts that used approaches such as language nests, Master-Apprentice initiatives, and immersion schooling (cf. Pérez Báez et al., 2018). Attempts at awakening in Africa have largely occurred without reference to experiences and methodologies developed in other parts of the world. The successful promotion of language reintroduction, language mixing (and language maintenance) in Africa would benefit from a focus on community access to language resources. Current language documentation archiving standards do not guarantee the creation of resources which rural African communities can utilize for awakening purposes. Practitioners of language documentation, as well as developers of language resources more broadly, who wish to make their collections useful for future awakening will need to consider issues of physical media for communities with limited internet access, community-oriented collection-level metadata, and easily repurpose-able data formats. We concur with Dyll (2020, p. 1) that revitalization ought to include "local, cultural and spiritual expressions" and not be overly concerned with replicating a schoolroom-based literacy model.

Language awakening is just one manifestation of a common desire of marginalized and oppressed peoples around the world to reconnect with each other through shared language practices. The African communities included in this survey provide new insights into the broader nature of these efforts, including both language mixing and adopting a new language along with language awakening as ways of *reconnecting through language*. A focus solely on communities with rememberers or substantial documentation of their linguistic heritage may fail to consider how communities who don't match this description might still utilize the resources available to them to co-create shared practices. Furthermore, complex links between languages and identities and high rates of multilingualism throughout Africa pose significant questions as to what revitalization and awakening might look like in

[24] The cases of Nyang'i [nyp] and Korana [kqz] are not covered in detail here, having only come to our attention in the final stages of the publication process.

multilingual contexts, and what impact it may have on language planning and development.

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