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# Exploring Rural Multilingualism in Ruruuli-Lunyala Speaking Communities of Uganda

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## Abstract

In this study, we examine the nature of multilingualism within the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community. Specifically, we focus on the districts of Kayunga, Nakasongola, Buyende, and Kiryandongo. Additionally, we investigate the factors contributing to the notable level of multilingualism observed in a rural context, challenging the assumption that rural populations are homogeneous. The data presented were gathered using a mixed methods research approach integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods included surveys and group interviews. The findings reveal that the majority of Ruruuli-Lunyala speakers are multilingual, proficient in at least two languages, specifically Ruruuli-Lunyala and Luganda, with some individuals demonstrating proficiency in more than five languages. Notably, there were no monolingual speakers among the 531 participants in the survey. About 36 languages are reported at the community level, with individual and societal multilingualism shaped by social, cultural, linguistic, political, geographical, religious, economic, and mobility-related factors.

*Keywords: multilingualism, Ruruuli-Lunyala, monolingual, societal multilingual*

## Introduction

Individual and community multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community is so widespread that it has been described as the most complex rural multilingualism. This is comparable to urban multilingualism, such as that reported in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda (see Namyalo, 2013). Kampala is one of the most linguistically heterogeneous regions in Uganda, with multiple languages spoken in a small geographical space, (see Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Nakayiza, 2012).

Multilingualism has been ordinarily defined from a psycholinguistic perspective as the ability to speak or to communicate in three or more languages (see Kemp, 2009). Genemo (2021, p.26) defines at multilingualism as "the knowledge and use of a wide range of languages and language varieties with various statuses, for example, such as official, national, majority, minority, non-standard varieties, or mixed languages." Similarly, it is the selection and application of a language across various settings, including home, school, and workplaces. The European Commission (2007, p.6) defines multilingualism as "the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals

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to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives." At the individual level, it could mean the ability of an individual to communicate in more than one language through speaking, writing, listening, or reading. Regarding the societal level, Li and Moyer (2008, p.8) add that multilingualism may be considered the "presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one variety of language." These definitions point to the fact that multilingualism can be understood at two levels, including individual and societal, as the ability of an individual to use more than one language or as a societal phenomenon where several languages are used. Individual and societal multilingualism often intertwine. It is more likely that individuals who live in a multilingual community speak more than one language than individuals who live in a monolingual society. Thus, as observed by Franceschini (2009, p.26), "the study of multilingualism should take into account the practice of using more than one language, including regional languages, minority languages, migration languages, and language varieties such as dialects, to varying degrees of proficiency among individuals and societies."

Multilingualism is one of the oldest fields in sociolinguistics. Early work on multilingualism in Africa tended to focus more on urban centres than on rural multilingualism. Irvine and Gal (2000, p. 38) note that there appears to be two reasons for this. The first has been a tendency on the part of outside linguists to view African rural spaces in terms of "tribes", each associated with its own language, which has led to a kind of "erasure" of multilingual behaviour. The second is that the generalised adoption of diglossia theory in the study of multilingualism in urban areas, rather than rural ones, is more salient to sociolinguistic investigation. Additionally, Lopez (2008, p. 94) observes that another likely reason for the scholarly neglect of rural areas in studies of multilingualism is that "individual multilingual behaviour is more salient in urban areas than in the rural ones." This is because languages foreign to Africans are more likely to be spoken in urban areas, and it is much easier for most outsiders to know when a speaker switches between a colonial language and a local one (see Pierpaolo et al., 2019). This gap in sociolinguistic investigation, relating to rural multilingualism, has left the impression that it is restricted to urban centres. However, the fact is that rural multilingualism existed before its urban counterpart was ushered in by colonisation (see, for example, Akumbu & Chie, 2020).

Despite the early neglect of rural areas in the studies of multilingualism, to date, studies on rural multilingualism have increased due to language contact through migrations and globalisation. This has attracted a new wave of interest among linguists, with a focus on minority languages and rural multilingualism (see Cenoz, 2013). In this article, therefore, we present primary data from a survey and group interviews on the nature of multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community. We also present data on the factors that have led to high levels of individual and societal multilingualism in a rural setting. We begin with a review of literature, followed by an analysis of the data collection methods, a discussion of the findings, and a conclusion.

## Literature Review

### *Ruruuli-Lunyala*

Ruruuli-Lunyala also known as Ruuli, Ruli, and Luduuli has been classified as (ISO 639-3 [ruc]; JE103) belonging to the Nyoro-Ganda group of the Great Lakes Bantu languages (Maho, 2009). In a survey of Uganda's indigenous languages, Ruruuli and Lunyala were considered two independent languages (Ladefoged et al., 1971). These authors observe that Runyara (Lunyala), which is spoken in the north-east of Buganda, is very much like Ruruuli, with 91% mutual intelligibility. van der Wal and van der Wal (2005), however, note that Ruruuli, along with western Ruruuli-Lunyala spoken in Masindi District and eastern Ruruuli-Lunyala spoken in Nakasongola District, form the three dialects of Ruruuli. Based on the high degree of mutual intelligibility of these two language varieties as reported by Ladefoged et al. (1971), and van der Wal and van der Wal (2005), and aware of the debates surrounding what constitutes a language variety to be a dialect and not a language, we consider Ruruuli-Lunyala to be one language. This language comprises Ruruuli, Lunyala, Western Ruruuli-Lunyala, and Eastern Ruruuli-Lunyala dialects. Notably, Ruruuli-Lunyala is a previously undescribed language. Simons and Fennig (2017) previously classified it under status 6b. Although it is currently categorised as vigorous (see Berhard et al., 2023), it is still one of the least described minority languages in Uganda (see also Namyalo et al., 2021). The native speakers of Ruruuli-Lunyala mainly live in the districts of Kayunga, Nakasongola, Kiryandongo, and Buyende, with small Ruruuli-Lunyala speech communities in Masindi, Hoima, Luweero, Apac, and Kamuli districts. By ethnic identity, the speakers of Ruruuli-Lunyala are estimated to be 237,821 according to the national population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Although the numbers of Baruuli and Banyala[1] seem relatively high, the actual number of speakers is probably considerably lower, since most of the young population, especially in towns, do not speak this language (see Nakayiza, 2012; Namyalo, 2023).

### *Uganda and Ruruuli-Lunyala Speech Community's Linguistic Ecology*

While Uganda is considered to be multilingual and multicultural, the precise number of languages spoken, and the cultures they are connected with have not yet been carefully recorded. This has been explained by the lack of a recent national language survey, and the omission of a question on the language situation in the national census of the country (see Namyalo et al., 2017; Nakayiza, 2012). As a result, the number of languages spoken in Uganda has been recorded with variance. For instance, according to Ladefoged et al. (1972), Uganda has 60 languages and dialects, 30 of which are classified as languages rather than dialects. Relatedly, Kabann et al. (2007) note that Uganda comprises 65 formerly independent traditional societies or ethnic groupings, with a few communities that have their origins elsewhere, such as the Nubians and Ugandans of Asian origin. More recently, Eberhard et al. (2022) state that the number of extant languages in Uganda is 41, with two (Amba and Ruuli) critically endangered and two

1 Like many Bantu languages in Uganda, ru-/lu- is the noun class prefix of class 11 used with language names, e.g. Ruruuli-Lunyala. The bu-prefix (class 14) designates the kingdom, e.g. Bunyala and Burruuli, while the prefix ba- (noun class 2) denotes the people belonging to the respective ethnic group. The prefix ki-, where used, denotes the culture of these two ethnic groups, i.e. Kinyala or Kiruuli culture, with the exceptions for Kiswahili and Kinywaranda where it denotes a language.

(Nyangi and Soo) on the verge of extinction.

Due to the multiplicity of languages spoken in a small geographical space of Uganda (241,551 km$^2$), language contact due to internal migrations, and increased exposure to regional and foreign languages such as English and Kiswahili, many communities and individuals in Uganda are multilingual. In relation to Uganda's state of multilingualism, Rosendal (2010) mentions that:

> Uganda's multilingualism is widespread in regions like Teso and Lwo, where only 27% of the population is monolingual compared to Buganda, where almost 55% of the people are monolingual...35% of the population in Buganda is bilingual (in English and Luganda or Luganda and another local language), whereas 47% of the Lwo/Teso population is bilingual. Furthermore, only 1% of the people who speak Luganda spoke more than five languages, compared to 4% of the Lwo/Teso who spoke more than five languages. (p. 90)

The Ruruuli-Lunyala speech community's linguistic ecology is similar to Uganda's linguistic and cultural landscape. It arose from a long history of contact with neighbouring languages and cultures, particularly Luganda, Lusoga, and Runyoro. It represents one of Uganda's densely multi-ethnic centres, where multilingualism and multiculturalism characterise most of the people's daily lives in this region. Muzoora (2016encourage more children to attend school, encourage parents to send children to school and give all children quality and equitable education. The policy was passed in the 1992 Government White Paper, following the recommendations of the 1989 Kajubi report on education. The policy was given more prominence in 2000 with the revision of the primary school curriculum and later in 2007 with the introduction and implementation of the thematic curriculum that re-emphasised use of non-dominant languages (NDLs, p.102), for example, notes that Kayunga District, where Ruruuli-Lunyala is spoken "was found to be one of the country's most multilingual and multi-ethnic districts, containing almost all the tribes of Uganda and beyond." Kayunga District has ethnic groups such as the Baganda, Basoga, Bagisu, Baruuli, Ateso, Japadhola, Kuku, Bagwere, Banyole, and Banyala. It also contains a non-Ugandan population (refugees) of about 5% of the district population. The non-nationals included Tanzanians, Burundians, South Sudanese, and Rwandans. The situation in Kayunga is not different from other districts, such as Nakasongola, Kiryandongo, and Buyende, where Ruruuli-Lunyala is primarily spoken. Like elsewhere in Uganda, the languages in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speech community are always in contact with each other, and are frequently in competition in terms of their survival and use. Usually, there are basically three possible linguistic outcomes of prolonged contact with ethnic groups. These include: language maintenance, multilingualism, or language shift (see Remysen, et al., 2012).

## Methods

### *Sample of the Study*

The sample size of this study comprised 531 Ruruuli-Lunyala speakers. These included those who speak it as their first language and reside in the districts of Nakasongola, Kiryandongo, Kayunga, and Buyende. The majority of the participants were Baruuli, followed by the Banyala and a few from other Ugandan ethnic groups

as summarised in Figure 1. Participants were chosen on the basis of suitability as per the inclusion criterion and availability. The study used the 'social network' model proposed by Milroy and Milroy (1978), and approached the subjects through a third party. These third parties were community leaders, especially those who have access to the community. Seven research assistants helped with distributing, administering, and collecting the filled in questionnaires. The data collection phase lasted approximately 32 days.

## Data Collection Methods

### *Questionnaire and Interviews*

The data reported in this paper were collected using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods including a survey and group interviews. The research team conducted a survey involving 531 participants in an attempt to investigate the sociolinguistic facts and perspectives concerning the Ruruuli-Lunyala language in general, and the nature of multilingualism in particular. Procedurally, the team first piloted and pre-tested the questionnaire on a sample of 10 participants in Nakasongola, who represented various regions. The pre-test results helped to improve on the questionnaires, especially in terms of clarity of the questions. Then, the questionnaire was administered to 531 Ruruuli-Lunyala native speakers living in the districts of Nakasongola, Kiryandongo, Kayunga, and Buyende. In addition to the survey, the team used a Rapid Appraisal approach in which there was one group interview in each of the four districts surveyed. Each group comprised seven individuals, making a total of 28. Twenty of these were male and eight were female.

## The Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

### *Ethnic Identity of the Participants*

Firstly, the sample reveals that 287 of the participants identified themselves as Baruuli, 205 as Banyala, 8 as Baganda, 5 as Banyoro, 4 as Basoga, 2 as Bagisu, 5 as Banyankore , 7 as Rwandese, 1 as Mugwere, 2 as Iteso, 1 as Mukenyi, 2 as Langi, 1 as Lugbara, 1 as Musongora, making a total of 531 participants. Apart from the Iteso and Langi, who belong to the Nilotic-Sahara ethnic groups, and the Lugbara who are Central Sudanic, the rest of other ethnicities belong to the Bantu group, which is the largest group in Uganda (see Figure 1 for statistical representation).

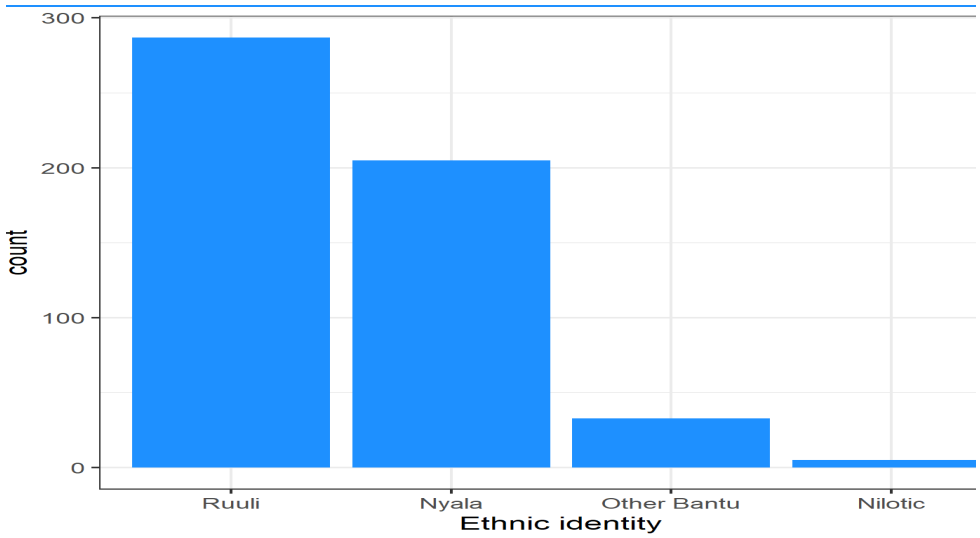


*Figure 1: Ethnic identity of the participants*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

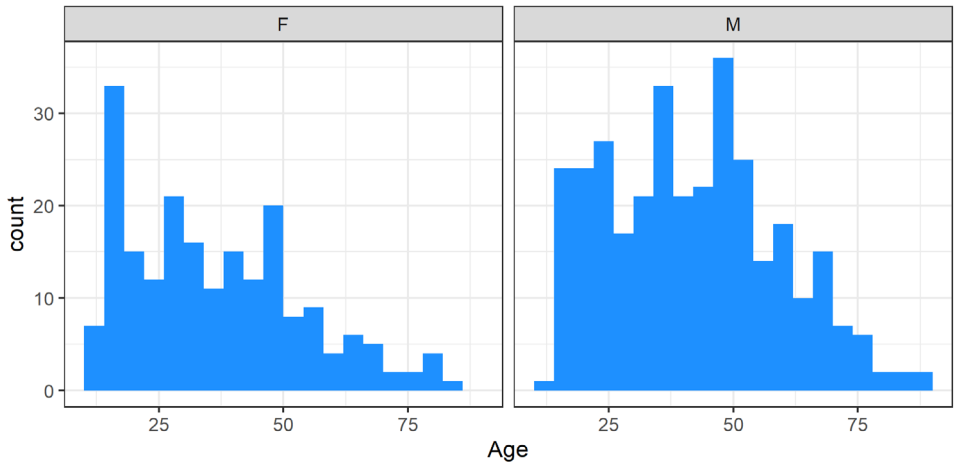


*Figure 2: Gender and age composition of the participants*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

### *Educational Level and Occupation*

The sample population shows a wide range of educational levels. The majority of participants, 293, reported having attended school up to the primary level. These were followed by 182 participants who had obtained secondary school certificates. Those with university degrees and diplomas were 45 and 10 had no formal education.

Regarding participants' work background, 69% were students; 63% had small business-related professions; 63% had formal employment; and the majority (329%) were small-scale farmers. The small business professions included those working as *boda-boda* (motorbike cyclists), charcoal sellers, fashion and design, bar operators, builders, and those involved in fishing, among others. Those in formal employment included; teachers, health workers, journalists, military officers, and veterinary doctors, (see Graph 1 for the summary of participants' work background and education levels).

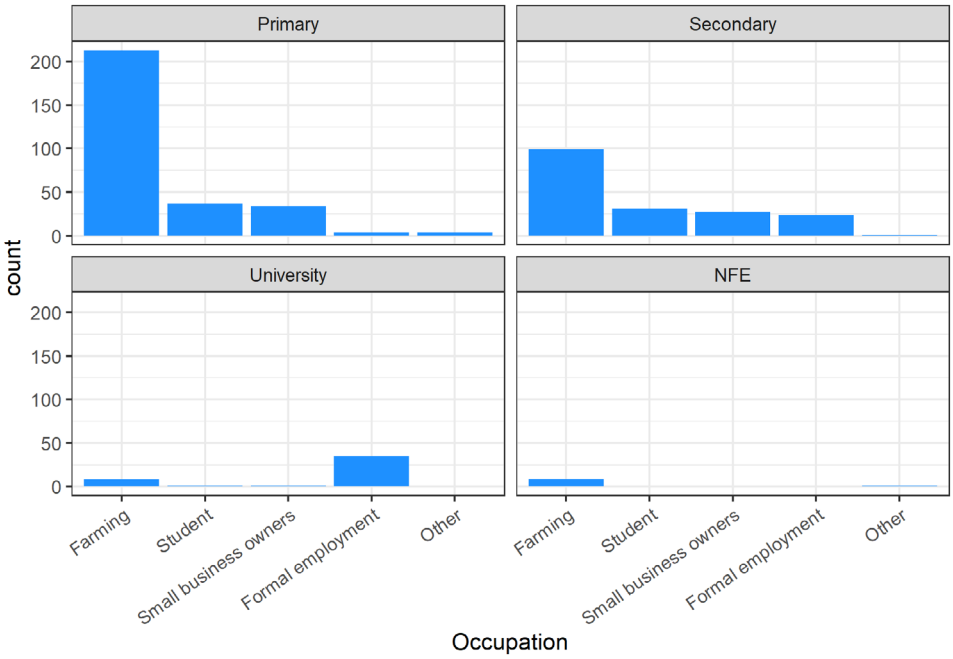


*Figure 3: Educational levels and occupations of the participants*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present and discuss results relating to types of multilingualism and the factors which account for the existence of multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community.

### *Individual Multilingualism*

We asked the participants to list all the languages in which they are fluent. They had the option to mention as many languages as they desired in response to this open-ended question. The outcomes are, therefore, solely reliant on the participants' evaluations of their language proficiency. The survey reveals that 130 Ruruuli-Lunyala speakers spoke two languages, while 301 reported to be speakers of more than two languages. Among those who spoke more than two languages, 220 spoke three languages, followed by 120 who spoke four languages, and 61 spoke more than four languages, as summarised in Figure 4. No monolingual speaker was recorded.

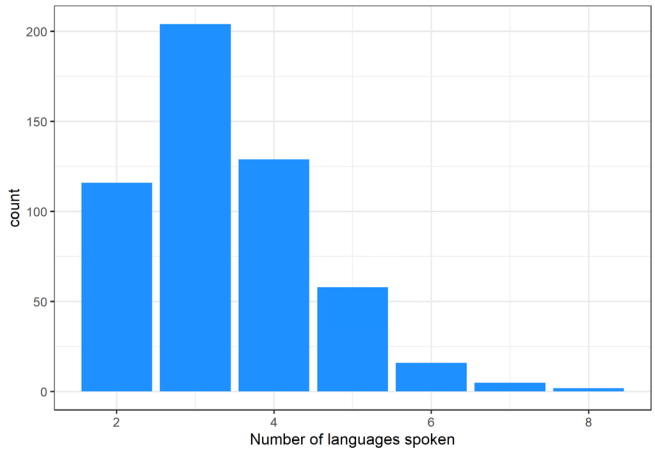


*Figure 4: Individual level multilingualism*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

Based on the aforementioned findings, Ruruuli-Lunyala speakers are primarily multilingual. Besides their mother tongue, Ruruuli-Lunyala, the participants also speak one or more local languages such as Luganda, Lusoga, or Runyoro, among others. Some of them even have some proficiency in a regional vernacular, Kiswahili, which is also Uganda's second official language. Others speak English and Arabic, which are foreign languages.

Results from both the survey and the group interviews revealed several factors that contributed to individual multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community. These factors included intermarriages, bilingual upbringing, language policies in education, and personal motivation and interests. First and foremost, the majority of the participants reported intermarriage as one of the causes of individual multilingualism in this area. Concerning intermarriages, the participants in the group interviews highlighted that in their push for assimilation, or to *Bugandanise* the lost counties, the Baganda who served as the colonial agents forced the Banyala and Baruuli to marry Baganda women (see also Mwogezi, 2004). It turned out that the Baganda women taught their husbands Luganda, a language they had to use in all public domains, such as in churches, mosques, schools, and courts of law, as well as in administrative/government offices. The husbands also taught their wives Ruruuli-Lunyala, a language they needed to use at "home" and during cultural ceremonies. Consequently, many of their offspring grew up speaking both the paternal and maternal languages. Survey data, collected to determine the language and ethnic backgrounds of the participants' parents, corroborate this bilingual upbringing. A large portion of the participants said that their parents spoke different languages and were from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, a factor that has contributed to the acquisition of the languages they speak.

The survey and group interviews further identified Uganda's language policy in education as a significant factor contributing to individual multilingualism. The 2005 language policy permits the use of mother tongues and languages of wider communication as languages of instruction during the first three years of schooling in

all rural primary schools in Uganda. Subsequently, in the fourth year, a transition to English is initiated, and from the fifth year, English is employed as the sole language of instruction (see Kateeba, 2009; Ministry of Education & Sports, 2004; National Curriculum Development Centre, 2006a, 2006b). Such an arrangement implies that all individuals receiving formal education are introduced to either Luganda, Lusoga, or Lunyoro, which are widely spoken as languages of wider communication, alongside English. Additionally, it is common for some schools to offer Kiswahili as a regional language. Consequently, most pupils become multilingual, speaking Ruruuli-Lunyala as their mother tongue, Luganda, Lusoga, or Lunyoro as languages of wider communication, and English as the official language of Uganda.

In addition to Uganda's language policies, the migration of people has led to individual multilingualism in region under study. Numerous participants reported, during the interviews, having relocated to various parts of the country, acquiring additional languages in the process. For example, one participant, a retired head teacher, shared: "I learnt Lango when I was posted to Lango District as a head teacher. Later, I learnt Lusoga when I migrated to Kaliiro due to the inter-ethnic wars between Bunyoro and Buganda" (field interviews, May, 2023). Furthermore, recent advancements in transport and technology have facilitated travel for individuals. As a result, people can choose to move to different areas, whether within the country, across the continent, or beyond. When individuals settle in a new location, they often learn the local language. They may also teach the native population their languages, leading to a mutual exchange. For instance, in Kayunga and Nakasongola, migrants from Tanzania, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who come for fishing, have taught the locals Kiswahili. In return, they have learnt Ruruuli-Lunyala, something which has fostered individual multilingualism.

Another reported factor was the necessity of facilitating communication during trade. For example, Luganda functions as the primary language for trade and business in Kayunga and Nakasongola. One participant in the group interviews stated: "There is no way you can do meaningful trade here when you don't speak Luganda. You must learn it if you want to become a successful businessman." This observation reinforces Ridler and Pons-Ridler's (1984) assertion that individuals select a language that will be advantageous for them in the long term. Furthermore, in many situations, people often shift to other languages that they believe will enhance their socioeconomic status and social mobility (see Schiffman, 1998). Consequently, the majority of Banyala and Baruuli converse in neighbouring dominant languages, such as Luganda, Lusoga, and Runyoro, particularly for business. It also acts as a means of broader communication, in addition to English, which is regarded as a pathway to social mobility and prestige in Uganda.

Long stays in various Uganda's regions other than the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking region was another factor that contributes to high levels of individual multilingualism. Individuals claimed to have chosen to live in non-Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking areas for a variety of reasons, including education, employment, marriage, and other factors. Consequently, they picked up new languages during these protracted stays. Additionally, the existence of numerous languages at the participants' locations of birth and upbringing was another factor contributing to individual linguistic diversity

among the participants. The participants reported that at both their place of birth as well as growth, a number of languages were spoken (see Figure 5 and Figure 6 for the details). It was, therefore, easy for them to pick up these languages especially those which were widely spoken. In relation to this, one of the participants answering the question of how he came to learn the six languages, said:

> In addition to Ruruuli-Lunyala and Kiswahili, which I picked up from my parents, I learned Luganda because it was the dominant language spoken in the village where I was born and raised. It was extensively used in markets and churches; it was also commonly employed in schools. After moving to Masindi, where Runyoro is the dominant language, I had no option but to learn it and I later learned Acholi because it was the only language I could speak when I moved to Gulu" (field interview, Kayunga May 21, 2023).

Other factors cited as contributing to individual multilingualism included personal interest and motivation towards specific languages. Some participants reported having developed a passion for languages such as Kiswahili and Arabic, taking the initiative to learn them. Additionally, the degree of individual multilingualism was influenced by age. Both children and adults claimed to speak multiple languages. However, those asserting proficiency in six or more languages were aged 45 or older. English was identified as one of the languages spoken by all individuals. This demonstrated higher levels of educational literacy, indicating a direct correlation between education and individual multilingualism within this community. Other influencing factors included interactions with members of various ethnolinguistic communities while visiting markets or urban areas, alongside the desire to engage fully with individuals who may not speak Ruruuli-Lunyala. Given the multilingual environment in which the majority of participants have grown up and continue to reside, it was intriguing to explore how they utilised their multilingualism as a resource. Additionally, it was important to understand the variables affecting their language choices across different contexts, including communication scenarios.

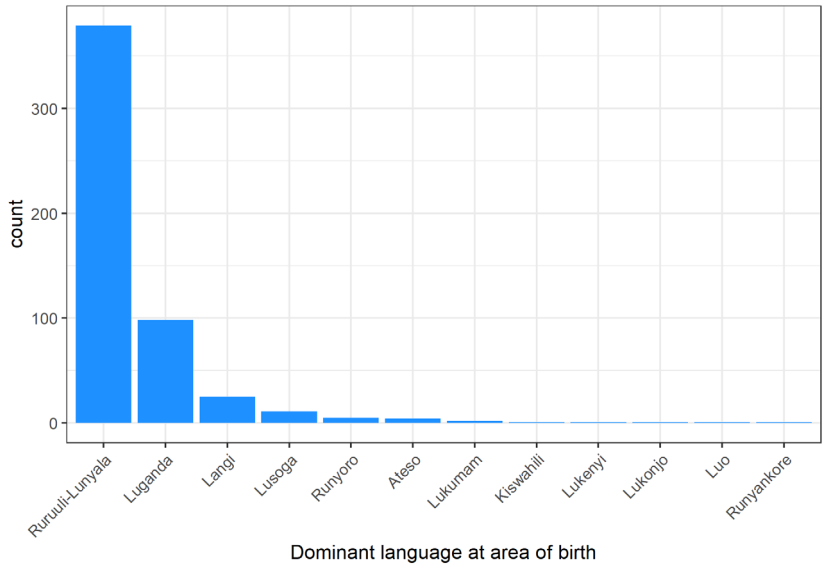


*Figure 5: Languages spoken at place of birth*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

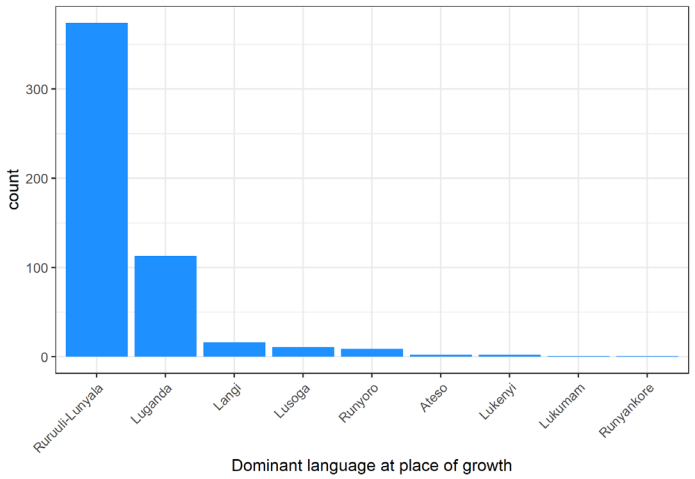


*Figure 6: Languages spoken at place of growth*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

Based on the above discussion, one may argue that the causes of individual multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking region are influenced by a complex interplay of social, economic, and individual factors. These include the region's rich linguistic diversity, historical colonial legacies, migration patterns, and the individual's social environment, including family, education, and community. These findings are consistent with Genemo's (2021) observation in his discussion of language choice and use in Cameroon's markets. Genemo notes that "the expansion of multilingualism is

attributed to the social, linguistic, and cultural changes derived from globalisation, geographical and social mobility, economic and political transformations, and the development of technology" (p. 26).

### *Community-level Multilingualism*

We also asked the participants to make a list of all the languages they regularly hear being spoken in their neighbourhoods, for example, in homes, markets, funeral places, towns, places of worship, and schools, among other places. Thirty-six different languages were mentioned as summarised in Table 1.

*Table 1: Languages spoken in the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking community*

| **Uganda's indigenous Languages** | | | **Non-indigenous languages** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Bantu** | **Nilotic** | **Central Sudanic** | |
| Lusoga, Lukenyi, Runyoro Lugwere, Lusamia, Lugisu, Rukiga, Lusoga, Lulamogi, Runyankore, Ruruuli-Lunyala, Rufumbira, Luganda, Lukidi, Rutooro, Lunyoli, Kinywaranda, Lulamogi, Kiswahili | Ateso, Kuku, Langi, Alur, Japadhola, Acholi, Kumam, Nga'Karimojong | Madi, Lugbara | English, Arabic, South Sudanese[1] |

The majority of the languages used in this region belong to the Bantu language family, as seen in Table 1. This is not surprising, given that the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking community is located in the Bantu-speaking region of Uganda, where a number of them are spoken. For example, the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking community borders communities where languages like Luganda, Lusoga, and Runyoro are spoken. The Bantu languages are followed by the Nilotic languages, non-indigenous languages, and by Central Sudanic languages, which are spoken here. Out of the 36 languages reportedly spoken in the four districts, Luganda is the most widely mentioned, especially in the districts of Kayunga and Nakasongola. Lusoga, on the other hand, is commonly used in Buyende, and is slightly more prevalent in Kayunga than in the other three districts, as shown in Figure 7.

1 The community members could not vividly tell which of the Sudanese language was spoken in this area. However, the elders during the group discussion mentioned that it was Dinka. It is a Nilotic language classified within the Eastern Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan languages and is closely related to the Nuer languages.

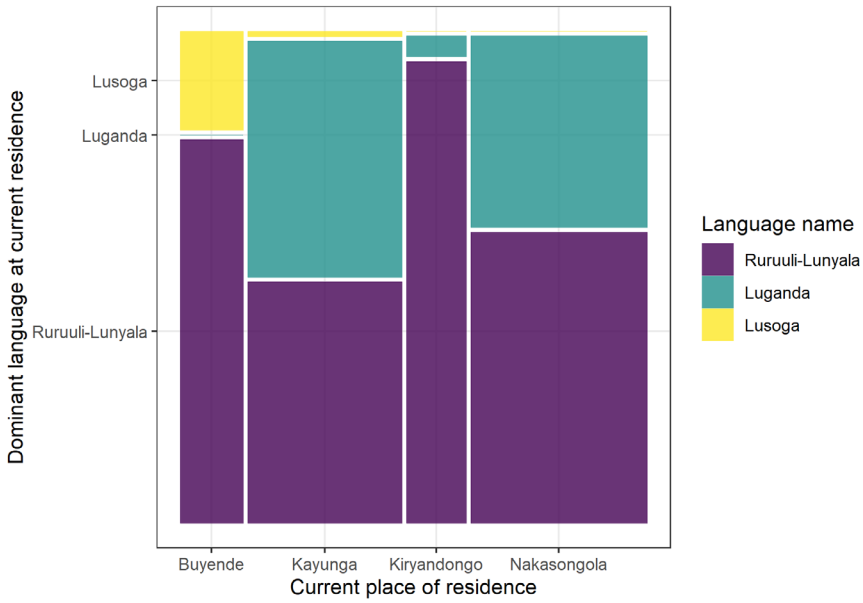


*Figure 7: Dominant languages spoken in Kayunga, Nakasongola, Buyende & Kiryandongo*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

The various languages employed in contexts such as village meetings, funerals, hospitals, and sports further illustrate the community's multilingualism in these districts. As indicated in Figure 7, the study reveals that during village meetings, locals may choose to use Rurụuli-Lunyala, or code-switch between Rurụuli-Lunyala and Luganda, or Rurụuli-Lunyala and Lusoga, among other language pairings. One participant noted: "We quite often find ourselves using different languages during meetings or funeral rites, and such diversity is attributed to the fact that it is difficult to use one language that all individuals understand. Although many of us speak and understand Luganda, some new migrants have not yet learnt it" (Group Interviews, May 2023). The situation is similarly varied in hospital settings, where, once again, multiple languages are used, as shown in Figure 8.

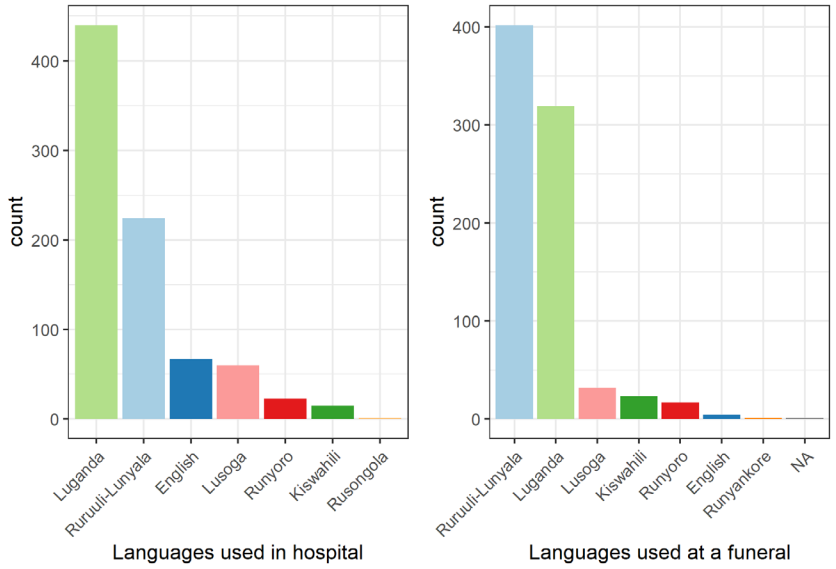


*Figure 8: Language(s) during village meetings and at the hospital*
**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

Community multilingualism in the Rurulli-Lunyala-speaking districts, much like individual multilingualism, arises from various social, political, cultural, historical, and geographical factors. Migration, in particular, has played a significant role in fostering this community multilingualism. Over the years, Uganda has witnessed both internal and external migrations, where individuals move from their home communities or countries to settle in Rurulli-Lunyala-speaking areas. Related to migration, Mirembe et al. (2019) observe that Uganda, recognised as a politically stable country, has long served as a host nation for a substantial number of refugees, particularly those fleeing from neighbouring war-torn regions. These include South Sudan, which introduced languages such as Arabic; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which contributed to the presence of Kiswahili; and refugees from Eritrea and Somalia. Internally, numerous individuals migrate to the Rurulli-Lunyala-speaking region in pursuit of employment opportunities, notably in fishing on Lake Kyoga. This influx explains the presence of indigenous Ugandan languages, such as Ateso, Kuku, Lango, Alur, Jopadhola, Acoli, Kumam, and Nga'Karimojong, languages that were previously not spoken in this area. This means there is continuous contact between Rurulli-Lunyala speech community and other languages originally non-native to this area. Usually, there are three possible linguistic outcomes of prolonged contact with ethnic groups who speak different languages. These include language maintenance, multilingualism, or language shift. In this area, multilingualism is the direct outcome where the members have chosen to keep their mother tongue actively in use, side by side with the dominant languages as well as the official language within the country.

Education policies have, over the years, been significant factors contributing to community multilingualism. Historically, during the colonial period, Luganda served

as the first official indigenous language (see Pawliková, 1996, 2004). It was the sole medium of instruction from Primary One to Primary Six. Consequently, in numerous Bantu-speaking districts of Uganda, particularly in the Ruruuli-Lunyala speaking area, Luganda became the de facto language of literacy, especially at the primary education level. Throughout the British colonial era (1894–1962), Luganda maintained its prominence in schools. However, at higher levels of education, including ordinary and advanced secondary levels, English served as the medium of instruction. As mentioned earlier, according to Uganda's Amendment Act of 2005, English uniquely serves as the only "foreign" language formally used as the medium of instruction in upper primary (from Primary Four to Six), secondary education, and higher education. The introduction of language policies promoting multilingualism resulted in bilingual or multilingual speakers, hence a factor contributing to societal multilingualism.

Religion plays a significant role in contributing to multilingualism in the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking region. Historically, Luganda was adopted as the primary language of the Anglican and Catholic churches across many Bantu language-speaking areas, including Runyankore, Lusoga, Lunyole, Lugwere, and Lugisu-speaking communities. This dates back to the missionary era in Uganda. While certain regions, such as Bunyoro and Ankole, have since moved away from this practice, the use of Luganda in churches within the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking community remains prominent. Some religions, such as Islam, are closely tied to a specific language. The spread of these religions often compels new followers to learn that language, thereby enhancing societal multilingualism. For instance, many Muslim inhabitants have become bilingual in their native languages as well as in Classical Arabic since they are required to learn Arabic as a religious language. Consequently, nearly all Muslims living in non-Arabic-speaking countries are, to some extent, considered multilingual. The presence of Arabic, particularly among Muslims, is associated with practices and ideologies specific to the Arab community, from which the Arabic language originally derives. One of the participants, who also served as an Islamic leader, stated: "All five prayers in Islam are to be performed in Arabic, the original language of the holy Qur'an." In contrast, he noted: "When teaching or preaching, readings from the Qur'an or other texts may be translated into Luganda, Lunyala, or any other language spoken by the followers." This use of language in religious contexts significantly influences societal multilingualism in this area as further illustrated in Figure 9 below.

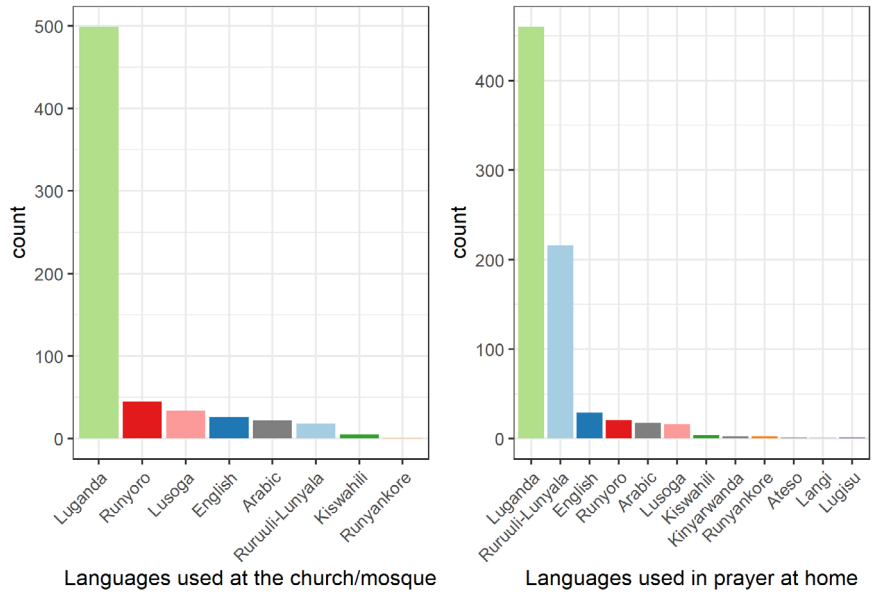


*Figure 9: Language use in religion*

**Source: Fieldwork, 2023**

Furthermore, the presence of dominant border languages in the Rurụuli-Lunyala speaking area contributes to societal or community multilingualism. Rurụuli-Lunyala exists in the shadow of Luganda, Lusoga, and Runyoro. The Rurụuli-Lunyala-speaking region borders the Bunyoro, Buganda, and Busoga kingdoms. This geographical situation means that the districts of Nakasongola, Kiryandongo, Kayunga, and Buyende are often inhabited by speakers of Lusoga, Runyoro, and Luganda. These speakers directly contribute to the number of languages spoken in the region. Typically, in border areas, particularly, when there is direct contact between speakers from neighbouring regions, a bilingual population emerges in both communities. Additionally, it is noteworthy that in these border areas, one can often find individuals who, for instance, speak Luganda yet belong to a different sociocultural group, such as the Baruuli or Banyala. This phenomenon highlights the fluidity of language and identity in multicultural settings, where individuals may adopt languages from surrounding communities while maintaining their own cultural affiliations. Such interactions enrich the linguistic diversity of the region, and foster a dynamic exchange of cultural and social practices.

The desire to preserve Rurụuli-Lunyala as a cultural heritage has also fostered societal multilingualism. Participants interviewed indicated that Rurụuli-Lunyala functions not only as a medium of communication but also as the sole surviving cultural heritage, serving to maintain familial ties. This hypothesis can be linked to research on the interplay between emotions and language (see de Houwer, 1999, 2015; Pavlenko, 2004). The desire to preserve heritage and to strengthen family bonds explains the continued use of Rurụuli-Lunyala in this area.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have demonstrated that the Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking areas, specifically the districts of Nakasongola, Buyende, Kayunga, and Kiryandongo, display a significant level of multilingualism, with as many as 36 languages spoken within this community. Notably, all 531 Ruruuli-Lunyala speakers who participated in the survey were bilingual, with no monolingual speakers identified. The existence of both personal and community multilingualism was due to several reasons, such as social, language, and cultural influences from Uganda's language policy, as well as factors such as moving around geographically and socially, and religious influences, among others. These findings are consistent with Genemo's (2021, p.26) observation that "the expansion of multilingualism is attributed to the social, linguistic, and cultural changes derived from globalisation, geographical and social mobility, economic and political transformations, and the development of technology".

We further demonstrate that Ruruuli-Lunyala-speaking areas are similar to Uganda's urban regions, and are indeed highly multilingual. These findings carry implications for language policies implemented in Uganda, which often operate under the assumption that rural areas are linguistically homogeneous. Such an assumption fails to recognise the complexities of language use in rural settings, where diverse linguistic interactions are commonplace. Consequently, there is a pressing need for further research into multilingualism in rural areas, ensuring that future language policies accurately reflect the true multilingual realities of these regions and promote inclusivity in educational programmes.

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