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Language Attitudes and Identity Construction Among L2 Luganda Speakers in Gulu City

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Abstract

This paper investigates how attitudes towards Luganda among second-language (L2) users in Gulu City, Northern Uganda, shape identity construction. Originally spread from the south-central region through colonial administration and missionary education (Green, 2010), Luganda now occupies a prominent place in Uganda's multilingual landscape. The study examines how non-native speakers in Gulu use Luganda as a social resource for negotiating identity in a multilingual urban context. Drawing on ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews, the analysis applies Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) to explore evaluative language that reveals attitudes, emotions, and social positioning. Data were collected across informal settings, workplaces, and religious gatherings to capture diverse interactions. Findings show that L2 users adopt labels such as Mucholi-Muganda and Mucholi wa Kabaka, reflecting both aspirational affiliation and contested legitimacy. These identities highlight Luganda's dual role: enabling positive identity affirmation while exposing users to ambivalence, exclusion, and stigma. The study demonstrates how language attitudes reshape ethnic and linguistic identities in contemporary Uganda and calls for broader research on indigenous language ideologies and L2 identity formation in similar contexts.

Keywords: Luganda, Appraisal Theory, language attitudes, identity construction, Gulu

Introduction

This paper examines attitudes and perceptions about Luganda among its L2 users in Gulu City, northern Uganda. It delves into ways in which these attitudes and perceptions shape societal and personal identities. Gulu is the largest city in northern Uganda and lies approximately 335 km north of Uganda's capital city, Kampala. Despite Acholi being the predominant language here, Luganda, significantly impacts the local linguistic environment.

Uganda is a multilingual nation, with over 41 living indigenous languages, at different levels of development ("Ethnologue: Languages of the World," 2025). Constitutionally, Uganda has two official languages, English (primary official language) and Kiswahili (second official language) (Uganda Constitution, 2005). The presence of

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many languages in Uganda means that there is a sociolinguistic situation where different languages are used to perform different functions in different domains. For instance, English, the primary official language, is used in all formal domains, e.g. schools, offices, and other prestigious events and occasions. On the other hand, Luganda and other area languages, such as Runyankore-Rukiga (in western Uganda) and Acholi (in northern Uganda) are used for intra-ethnic communication as well as in situations where English cannot be used (Nakayiza, 2016). As Nakayiza (2013) observes, local languages, such as Luganda and other area languages, are used in various lower domains, usually in homes, cultural contexts and within close-knit social networks. Multilingualism, therefore, contributes to the identity of some Ugandans. Some individuals use three to seven languages in their linguistic repertoire.

Luganda is the native language of the Baganda, who are the biggest ethnic group in the country, constituting over 18% of the total population of Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). During colonial times, Luganda was spread to other parts of the country due to colonial administration and religion (both Christian and Islam evangelisation). The British leveraged the relatively advanced administrative system of Buganda to govern Eastern, Western, and Northern Uganda (Mukherjee, 1985). Baganda agents, including the notable war chief, Semei Kakungulu, were appointed to administrative roles, enforcing Luganda as the administrative language in these regions (Turyahikayo-Rugyema, 1976). However, in Northern Uganda, resistance was significant; local populations, particularly in Gulu, overthrew Kakungulu, rejecting both Ganda administration and the imposition of Luganda (Twaddle, 1993). This resistance led to a minimal adoption of Luganda in the North compared to the East, where Ganda influence was deeply entrenched (Roberts, 1962). Indeed, researchers such as Lorenz (2019) indicate that Luganda is both minimally acquired and used in Gulu City. Despite this, Luganda has persisted in Gulu through modern channels like media, entertainment, business, and trade, and is now recognised as the country's lingua franca (Ssempuuma, 2011; Ssentanda & Nakayiza, 2017).

Despite being Uganda's most widely spoken indigenous language (Nakayiza, 2018), its use by L2 speakers in daily interactions has not been extensively studied. This is particularly true in regions far from its traditional base in the Southern-Central part of Uganda. While many scholars have pointed out that many Ugandans in areas other than the Southern-Central part of the country use Luganda (Namyalo & Nakayiza, 2015; Ssentanda & Nakayiza, 2017). Even after decades of uttering platitudes about the languages of Uganda, language policy pronouncements have invariably turned out to be public relations statements rather than blueprints for action. A serious setback for the right to linguistic equality and the right to use Uganda's indigenous languages has largely hinged on the language policies, which the government has not fully implemented under the guise of language diversity in Uganda. Against this backdrop, this paper explores three research questions: (i, efforts to understand how, when, where, who and with whom Luganda is used are limited. In this study, therefore, we set out to explore the domains of the use of Luganda in Gulu City, Northern Uganda, specifically focusing on the attitudes and perceptions that are expressed by its users, and how identities, in relation to its use, are constructed.

Language Attitudes, Perceptions, and Identity Construction in Multilingual Settings

Language attitudes and perceptions include beliefs, ideas, and evaluative reactions towards languages, often shaped by political, historical, and educational contexts (Garrett, 2010). Studies on language attitudes are important because they examine the social meanings that people attach to language and its users (Dragojevic, 2018; Dragojevic et al., 2021). Furthermore, as scholars such as Dragojevic et al. (2013), Holmes (2013) and Romaine (2000), among others, have observed, language is one of the most significant markers of identity. It is not merely a communication tool but a symbolic resource through which individuals negotiate belonging, power and self-representation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Bucholtz and Hall further posit that identity is negotiated through complex language choices shaped by internal beliefs, external pressures, and social aspirations. In multilingual settings, these negotiations are heightened as speakers navigate competing linguistic norms and ideologies.

Building on these global insights, this study situates language attitudes and perceptions within Uganda's multilingual landscape, where Luganda's spread beyond its traditional heartland offers a compelling case for examining identity negotiation among L2 speakers. Uganda's ethnolinguistic diversity – with over 50 ethnic groups and 41 living languages – provides a nuanced backdrop for exploring how individuals navigate multilingual identity (Lorenz, 2019). While prior research has explored language attitudes in regions where Luganda is dominant, few studies have examined how L2 users of Luganda in non-central areas like Gulu City construct identity through language use and perception.

In this article, we respond to these gaps by examining attitudes and perceptions about Luganda among its L2 users in Gulu City, a non-central yet increasingly Luganda-influenced urban centre, exploring how they shape and/or reflect identity construction. Specifically, we examine the ways in which L2 speakers perceive, use, and value Luganda. The research further provides insights into L2 Luganda users' experiences, showing ways in which language attitudes can bridge or widen cultural divides, contributing to discussions on language and identity in post-colonial Africa.

With recent studies increasingly foregrounding the affective and evaluative dimensions of language attitudes, and emphasising how language is used to perform stance, judgement and alignment, we apply the appraisal theory as a powerful analytical lens for understanding how speakers express affect, judgement, and appreciation, allowing for a nuanced analysis of evaluative expressions in L2 Luganda speakers' narratives. This approach positions the paper within contemporary sociolinguistic scholarship that explores affective meaning, linguistic ideology, and identity negotiation through discourse. By foregrounding the experiences and voices of L2 Luganda users, the study contributes to emerging literature that challenges top-down understandings of language attitudes and invites participatory, community-grounded perspectives.

Methodology and Theory

The data presented in this article are part of a sociolinguistic work study that was conducted in in Gulu about the use of Luganda in the day-to-day activities of its

L2 users in public spaces. The first phase of data collection involved observations in markets, religious gatherings, bus and taxi parks, and entertainment pubs. Relevant ethical protocols were adhered to, specifically by acquiring approval from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology, as well as obtaining both oral and written consent from participants. These areas were chosen for their multilingual nature, targeting buyers and sellers, religious adherents, travellers, and movie/sports watchers. Observations included casual talks to explore attitudes and identity related to Luganda use.

The second phase consisted of face-to-face interviews with 16 L2 Luganda users, two from each of four sites, selected for their insight into local social life. Interviews were unstructured, based on questions from Fishman (2007), as well as Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), covering when Luganda was spoken, feelings about it, and impressions on language use variation. Fifteen interviews were in Luganda, one in English, with two focus group discussions (FGDs) involving eight participants each, using both languages. Some ungrammatical expressions like Njogera Luganda mutono 'I speak little Luganda', were noted due to participants' L2 status. All sessions were recorded, transcribed, and translated by the author.

Forty-five participants completed questionnaires in either Luganda or English, with only three in English. The qualitative data were entered into Excel for analysis. All participants (77 in total: 57 male and 20 female) were L2 Luganda users, aged 18-80 and selected from male-dominated domains, where fewer women were open to discussing Luganda publicly.

The analysis of attitudes and perceptions followed Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (2005), which provides a systematic way to understand how social experiences are valued through language. Appraisal is divided into three systems of evaluation: Engagement, Attitude, and Graduation. Here, we focus on Attitude to see how L2 users of Luganda's attitudes reflect on their identity construction, offering insight into the link between language attitudes and identity.

The Attitude system comprises Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Affect deals with emotions like happiness or insecurity, while Judgement assesses social behaviour in terms of esteem and sanction. Appreciation, on the other hand, evaluates aesthetics and value (Martin & Rose, 2007; Martin & White, 2005). Attitudes can be directly invoked or indirectly implied. While invoked attitude resources can be lexicalised, for example, 'I don't like...', implied attitude, on the other hand, may not be lexicalised with the grammar of the language, but rather attitudinal meanings are activated by combinations of words in particular contextual settings. To illustrate this briefly:

> In the play Educating Rita, Rita, a working-class woman new to tertiary level academic study, recommends Rubyfruit Jungle (a work of popular culture) to Frank, her university tutor. Since this is not a book valued by those with literary sensibilities, mere mention of it, as Martin (2000:161) explains, acts as a token of evoked attitude (to be precise: negative Appreciation: Valuation).

In the data, participants use both invoked and implied attitude to express their affiliation or disaffiliation to Luganda and its users, setting the stage for our analysis.

To analyse the data for this study, the following typeface conventions, are used to map Appraisal resources used in the evaluative reactions about Luganda among L2 users of Luganda in Gulu City. The conventions are adapted from Thomson et al. (2008).

bold underlining – inscribed (explicit) negative attitude
bold – invoked (implied) negative attitude
italics underlined – inscribed positive attitude
italics – invoked positive attitude

The sub-type of attitude is indicated in square brackets immediately following the relevant span of text.
[af] = *affect* (positive/negative emotional responses)
[j] = *judgment* (positive/negative assessments of human behavior in terms of social norms)
[ap] = *appreciation* (positive/negative assessments of semiotic or natural phenomena according to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field).

For purposes of analysis, the data are presented in a tabular form, where the Appraisal resource is mapped onto the participants' responses. The presentation is in line with the key given above. The first column in the table presents the source of the expressions, that is to say, the data set from which the utterance is got. Participant utterances, mainly in Luganda, with some English code-switching, are in the second column, with their literal English translations in the third column. The second column is left empty in instances where the participants used only English. The fourth column contains brief author remarks on these utterances. In order to keep participants anonymous, a coding system was developed. Thus, IP1 indicates Interview Participant one, FGD1P represents Focus Group Discussion one participant, while QR1 represents Questionnaire Respondent one, and so on.

Attitudes and Perceptions About Luganda in Gulu City

In this section, we present ways in which L2 users of Luganda in Gulu City employ different Appraisal resources to express their attitudes and perceptions about Luganda. However, our focus narrows to specific elements, examining the role of the Attitude system, with particular attention to its sub-systems of *Affect, Appreciation,* and *Judgment*. Given the different ways attitude and identity can be expressed and experienced, we have chosen to delve into three prominent themes (perceptions) that consistently appeared across all datasets and were frequently cited by five to seven participants.

Luganda as a Language of National Identity

Luganda was shown to be perceived as a language that identifies its speakers as Ugandans; hence Luganda interpretively resembles a language for national identity. The participants, through inscribed and invoked affect, judgement and appreciation,

perceived Luganda as a language which, when used in public, identifies one as being Ugandan. Conversely, not using it shows that one is not patriotic enough, thus putting into question one's authenticity as a Ugandan, as presented in the extracts in Table 2:

Table 2: Luganda as a language for national identity

Source	Luganda	English	Remarks
QR3	*'Mpulira bulungi [af]* nga njogera Oluganda kubanga kiraga nti ndi Munnayuganda *mutuufu [ap].'*	*I feel good* [af] when I speak Luganda because it shows that I am a *rightful [ap]* Ugandan.'	Expressing satisfaction and pride for speaking Luganda and connecting it to a sense of authentic Ugandan identity
IP1	??	'.... also, another attitude is that they think that...especially now out of the country is that they think **if you don't speak Luganda, you are not so Ugandan** [j]'.	Expressing doubt regarding the authenticity of one's Ugandan identity, hence, the 'Ugandanness' of a non-Luganda speaker is questioned
QR4	'...kati bw'otoyogera Luganda abantu *banaamanya batya nti oli Munnayuganda*? [j]'	'...and now if you don't speak Luganda, *how will people know that you are Ugandan*? [j]'	Speaking Luganda as a criterion for being identified as Ugandan
IP2	'Kati olaba, nze wadde ndi Mucholi; naye okulaga nti ndi Munnayuganda**, nnina okwogera Oluganda [j]. Bw'oba toyogera Luganda [j]**, abantu bajja kulowooza nti oli Muudaani ova Juba, ***olwo bakuseere ebintu [j].'***	'Now, you see, for me although I am an Acholi; but to show that I am a Ugandan, **I must to speak Luganda [j]. If you don't speak Luganda [j],** people will think that you are a Sudanese from Juba, and ***then they will sell things to you at a higher price [j].'***	Speaking Luganda, a criterion for being identified as Ugandan

The extracts in Table 2 reveal that the participants associate speaking Luganda with 'authentic' Ugandan identity. This perception is expressed through positive affect, in which participants link emotional well-being to their linguistic practices. Thus, when participant QR3 says that 'Mpulira bulungi nga njogera Oluganda (lit. I feel good when I speak Luganda)' they directly convey a positive emotional response to speaking Luganda. This positive affect, categorised under happiness and, specifically, cheer (Martin & White, 2005), expresses the speaker's internal emotional state related to the activity of speaking Luganda. It suggests that the speaker's use of Luganda is tied to their sense of self and personal satisfaction. The Luganda adjective *bulungi* (lit. good) encodes nuances of satisfaction and excellence. In this case, therefore, its choice, over other possible descriptors like "happy" or "excited" represents a straightforward expression of positive emotion, which further suggests that speaking Luganda represents a broad, positive emotional state that is somewhat stable and consistent.

The participant goes further to justify their cause for speaking Luganda, saying *"kiraga nti ndi Munnayuganda mutuufu"* (lit. it shows that I am a true Ugandan). The expression *mutuufu* (lit. rightful), which qualifies *Munnayuganda* (Ugandan), emphasises the criterion of using Luganda as a measure of one's Ugandanness. In saying this, the participant links their national identity as a Ugandan to the use of Luganda. In other words, it implies that speaking Luganda affirms one's authenticity or belonging in the Ugandan society. Furthermore, by saying *mutuufu*, the participant uses appreciation to evaluate the act of speaking Luganda as something that visibly affirms their national identity. Luganda, therefore, is appreciated, not merely as a language used for communication, but also as a tool for constructing and evaluating identity tied to national authenticity and legitimatisation of national belonging.

This national authenticity and belonging are elaborated further by participant IP1, who, using judgement, shows that the 'Ugandanness' of a non-Luganda speaking person is questioned '.... ...especially now out of the country ... they think if you don't speak Luganda, you are not so Ugandan'. The negative invoked attitude in this sentence shows an underlying sense of discontent and concern about one's identity and language. The phrase "especially now out of the country" suggests a change or increase in these feelings when Ugandans are abroad. It also indicates sadness or irritation that one's Ugandan identity might not be fully recognised or acknowledged without speaking Luganda. Furthermore, the participant uses judgement, in particular social esteem judgement, by saying that "...they think", when referring to other interlocutors found out of the country. In this judgement, it is implicitly showed that speaking Luganda as a Ugandan is what constitutes normal or expected behaviour for someone claiming to be Ugandan.

However, while participant IP1 says that the perception about authentic Ugandan identity being tied to one's ability to speak Luganda is among people found outside of Uganda, participant QR4 states, '...now if you don't speak Luganda, how will they know that you are Ugandan?', meaning that even among Ugandans in the country, this perception exists. Participant QR4 also uses judgment, in particular social sanction, to pose a rhetorical question translated as 'Now if you do not speak Luganda, how will they know that you are Ugandan?' The use of the interrogative marker, 'how', does not only question, but it also expresses uncertainty and concern about the recognition of

one's Ugandan identity, without the ability to speak Luganda. There is, thus, a normative expectation that speaking Luganda is a standard or expected attribute for a Ugandan. In this, therefore, the participant expresses judgement of what is considered normal or typical behaviour for a Ugandan. From both participant IP1 and QR4, it is evident that speaking Luganda is a metric for evaluating one's legitimacy or 'Ugandanness'. This further enforces the judgement that Luganda is a defining trait for recognising national identity. This presupposes an expectation that being Ugandan should naturally align with speaking Luganda.

From the interview conversations, it is expected that a Ugandan should be able to speak Luganda, and failure to speak it comes with consequences. This expectation can be read from a Luganda conditional phrase by IP2; *Bw'oba toyogera Luganda* 'If you do not speak Luganda', which emphasises the consequence of not adhering to a perceived standard. The consequence, according to participant IP2, is that *abantu bajja kulowooza nti oli Musudaani ova Juba* 'people will think you are a Sudanese from Juba', which is a social sanction judgement of what is considered normal, in terms of the linguistic identity of Ugandans. In particular, the participant's utterance implies negative judgement, whereby, not speaking Luganda is considered abnormal or leading to confusion about one's origin and identity. Uganda is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. However, as Participant IP2 elaborates, this diversity is not considered when judgments are made:

> You see for me, although I am an Acholi, but to show that I am Ugandan, I must speak Luganda. If you don't speak Luganda, then people will think you are a Sudanese from Juba, and then they will sell things to you at a higher price.

According to participant IP2, failure to speak Luganda leads to being misidentified (by being called a Sudanese, from neighbouring Sudan), and potentially cheated (for example by hiking prices of goods). This reinforces Grad and Rojo's (2008) argument that identity is built by narratives that are shaped both by the person him/herself and by others, as well as by social discourses. Thus, in Uganda, as the participants in the extract above all elaborate, the perception of Luganda being an integral part of Ugandan's national identity is built both by the participants themselves, but also by the societal discourses. While Luganda is broadly recognised as embodying Ugandan identity, it is also closely associated with a specific ethnic group.

Luganda as a Language for the Baganda

Among L2 users of Luganda in Gulu, Luganda is perceived as a language for the Baganda, the native speakers of Luganda, who live in the central part of Uganda. These perceptions are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Luganda as a language for the Baganda

Source	Luganda	English	Remarks
FGD2P	'Kale Kiganda *abo Abaganda* [ap] ababeera ku Buganda Pub ne Kanyogoga be bamwogera. Nze njogera *kitono kitono* [ap].'	'*Kiganda* is spoken by *those Baganda [ap]* who are found at Buganda Pub and in Kanyogoga. I speak only *a little Luganda [ap].*'	Highlighting contextual and cultural understanding of the use of Luganda
FGD1P	'Nze bwe nakomawo eno nga Oluganda *ndwogera nnyo* [ap] naddala mu katale. Naye bannange ne batandika okugamba nti ndi **Mucholi-Muganda** [j]. Era owulidde oyo ky'agambye, bampita **Mucholi wa Kabaka** [j]'.	When I came back this side, I used to speak Luganda *often* [ap] especially in the market. But my colleagues started saying that I am a **Mucholi-Muganda**[j]. You have also heard what that one has said; they call me **Mucholi for Kabaka** [j].'	Highlighting social attitudes and judgements about identity and social belonging
IP5G	'Kati *olaba wano twogera Oluganda kubanga abatusuubuza ebintu Baganda* [j], bava eyo e Kampala.'	'Now *you see for us here we only speak Luganda because the people from whom we buy products at wholesale prices are Baganda* [j]. They come from over there in Kampala.'	Expressing social and practical use of Luganda
IP11	'Ffe ffenna bwe tubeera eno tubeera *Baganda [ap]*. Ate kati bo *tebasobola* [j] kutwawula nti ono Mugisu, ono Musoga. Ffenna batuyita Baganda.'	'All of us when we are here, we are *Baganda [ap]. And for them they cannot* [j] distinguish us that this one is a Mugisu, this one is a Musoga. All of us, they call us Baganda'	Expressing social perceptions about group identity
IP8	'Naye era nze wamma *sibanenya* [j], kubanga naffe bonna tubayita Balango oba Bacholi. Ggwe bw'obalaba awo osobola okubaawula?'	'But as for me, my dear, I *do not blame them* [j], because we also refer to all of them as Langi or Acholi. When you see them there, can you differentiate them?'	Expressing difficulty of distinguishing between people based on ethnicity

As shown in Table 3, participants in Gulu City assess Luganda as a language for the 'Baganda', irrespective of the fact that there are many non-Ganda people from other Bantu groups who speak Luganda. The Bantu ethnic group is the largest one in Uganda, with over two thirds of the country's population belonging to this group ("Ethnologue: Languages of the World," 2025). The Bantu groups speak different languages. However, when the people belonging to the Bantu ethnic group are in Gulu, they all refer to themselves as Baganda, 'Ffe ffenna bwe tubeera eno tubeera Baganda...batuyita Baganda 'When we are here, we are Baganda' and are referred to by other people as Baganda.

Many participants, such as FGD2P, thus, claim that they "speak only a little Luganda", because they view it as a language for the Baganda. FGD2P associates it with specific places such as Buganda Pub and Kanyogoga to distance themselves from Luganda, implying that these are typical spaces for Luganda speakers. This reflects implicit judgement about normative behaviour for Luganda users. Fieldwork confirmed that these locations in Gulu indeed have many Luganda speakers, largely non-Baganda settlers from other Bantu-speaking regions, as noted by participants. This perception of Luganda as a "Baganda" language reveals a categorical boundary, i.e. while participants use Luganda daily, they frame it as foreign, marking "us" (non-Baganda) versus "them" (Baganda). They emphasise this through the demonstrative, thus abo Abaganda be bamwogera, 'it is those Baganda that speak it (FGD2P), signalling that Luganda belongs to the Baganda. As Obeng and Adegbija (1999) argue, language in Africa is deeply tied to ethnic identity, explaining participants' efforts to avoid being misidentified as Baganda. This also illustrates the contextual fluidity of identity, as Lemke (2010) suggests, where individuals emphasise identities based on situational goals.

To further express this attitude, participants use negative judgement, in the form of reduplication, to show that their capacity to speak Luganda is low, thus, probably should not be associated with it. Thus, the participants used katono katono 'little little Luganda' expressions. They also mentioned places like Buganda Pub and Kanyogoga where, presumably, authentic or proper Luganda can be found. This reduplication (katono katono) is, thus, used to amplify the participant's limited ability or low-level fluency in Luganda. However, it also shows that their degree of affiliation to the Luganda language is small and, thus, they should not be considered Baganda. However, it should be considered that some participants speak Luganda with a low fluency because of the consequences that follow those who speak it with a higher degree of fluency.

Indeed, for participants who spoke Luganda with a higher degree of fluency and often wanted to use Luganda, labels that question their affiliation to their ethnic group were assigned. A participant in FGD1 expressed negative affect, by pointing out that his use of Luganda resulted in his colleagues labelling him Mucholi-Muganda and Mucholi wa Kabaka '. The label Mucholi-Muganda, as used in this context, is an expression of negative social sanction judgement, and particularly normality of expected behaviour. In this case, the participant is perceived as having mixed loyalties, where he is half Acholi and half Ganda. The label, thus, implies that the participant does not fit the typical or expected behaviour on an ethnic Acholi, majorly because of their use of Luganda, and this results in being negatively judged by others.

As Obeng and Adegbija (1999) observe, sameness of language and ethnicity creates a bond of acceptance, and provides a basis for togetherness, identity, separateness,

and kinship. The need for that kind of acceptance forces some participants to avoid or reduce on their speaking of Luganda. A participant in FGD1 points out, *Nze bwe nakomawo eno nga Oluganda ndwogera nnyo* 'When I came back this side, I used to speak Luganda often'. Reference to past time in *nga ndwogera nnyo* 'I used to speak often', followed by the coordinating conjunction *naye* 'but', implies that the participant has since reduced his frequency of speaking the Luganda language because of the negative labels that the participant's peers have applied to him.

Furthermore, the participant says that his peers have labelled him *Mucholi wa Kabaka* 'King's Acholi Man', which label rhymes with *Musajja wa Kabaka* 'King's Servant'. *Musajja wa Kabaka* is a phrase that many ethnic Baganda men use to show their strong loyalty to the Kingdom, and to identify themselves as Baganda. Thus, when applied to someone from another ethnic group, in this case an Acholi, it shows that one's loyalty lies with the Baganda, while still identifying as an Acholi, something that is highly frowned upon, as evidenced by the underlying negative affect in the participant's statement: you have also heard what that one has said..., which implies a negative emotional reaction to being labelled and/or teased.

The labels also identify one as a coward and, thus, someone who should be avoided. Thus, *Mucholi-Muganda* and *Mucholi wa Kabaka* also identify a coward, because of the war that happened in Northern Uganda, as we learnt from the conversations and observation during fieldwork. Thus, when one is labelled *Mucholi-Muganda* or *Mucholi wa Kabaka* to mean a coward, it is linked to an assumption that one learnt Luganda when they run away from the war, implying that they are cowards who left their 'brothers' to die in the war. For contextualisation, the war in Northern Uganda lasted about two decades (from 1986 to 2006) and led to massive displacement of people (Atkinson, 2009; Gersony, 1997). While some people went to internally displaced people's camps, others went to other parts of Uganda, including Kampala, where, presumably, they learnt Luganda. When the war ended, some of these displaced people went back to their homes, and continued to use the languages they had acquired, including Luganda. The use of Luganda in this context has, however, resulted in being negatively judged, where the participant's identity is questioned and/or mocked with the labels that are applied. These reasons, therefore, show why the participant expresses a shift from a past positive engagement with Luganda, by mentioning that *nze bwe nakomawo eno nga Oluganda ndwogera nnyo* 'when I came back this side, I used to speak Luganda often', to a present, where that engagement leads to social ostracism or teasing (by being given negative labels). This highlights a journey from acceptance to alienation, as is evident in the participant's insistence that Luganda is not their language, but that of the Baganda.

Participants reinforce the perception that Luganda is a Baganda language by justifying their use of it with a kubanga-prefaced utterance, as seen in IP5G: *twogera Oluganda kubanga abatusuubuza ebintu Baganda* 'we speak Luganda because our wholesale suppliers are Baganda'. Nakijoba (2019) identifies *kubanga* 'because' as a causal pragmatic marker that guides the hearer towards the speaker's intended meaning. Here, IP5G distances themselves from Luganda, clarifying that they use it only for economic interactions with Baganda suppliers, not because they are Baganda. This *kubanga* clause reveals the participant's awareness that speaking Luganda in Gulu City,

where it is less common, requires justification. The use of Luganda as a second language (L2) reflects economic necessity, as speakers adopt the language of their trade partners to achieve commercial objectives – a common practice globally, where linguistic adaptation facilitates economic success.

However, some participants in Gulu do not distance themselves from Luganda and the Ganda identity. Using positive appreciation, participant IP11 elaborates thus: *Ffe ffenna bwe tubeera eno tubeera Baganda* 'When we are here, we are all Baganda'.

The participant seems to take pride and feel a sense of unity in being collectively identified as Baganda, despite the ethnic differences. This is expressed by the inclusive *ffe ffenna* 'we all' and the assertion *tubeera Baganda* 'we are Baganda'. From this, we can deduce that while not all L2 users of Luganda in Gulu are ethnic Baganda, they take pride in being collectively termed as so, and do not correct those who assume that they are Baganda. The participant says, *Ate kati bo tebasobola kutwawula nti ono Mugisu, ono Musoga. Ffenna batuyita Baganda* 'And for them, they cannot distinguish us that this one is a Mugisu, this one is a Musoga. They call all of us Baganda'. The statement indicates social sanction judgement and, particularly, normality, where the participant implies that in this particular context or place, the norm or the expected identity for those speaking Luganda is 'Baganda'. This association of every L2 speaker under the overarching 'Baganda' label showcases what Milroy and Milroy (1999) observe, that in the construction of identities, individual identities are subsumed under a more broader, more dominant cultural or ethnic label in certain contexts.

Luganda as a Language for Social Misfits

In Gulu City, speakers of Luganda are judged as social misfits, such as thieves, conmen and prostitutes, as the extracts in Table 4 below show:

Table 4: Luganda as a language for social misfits

Source	Luganda	English	Remarks
IP5	'...Oluganda *si lubi* [af] *lulungi* [af] naye kati ffe eno tufuna challenges, kati olaba nze bwe ŋŋamba nti ndi Muganda omuntu tagaana. So tufuna challenges abantu bagamba nti tuli **babbi** [j] tuli **bafere** [j] ee... zeezo challenges ze tufuna...'	'...Luganda is *not bad* [af], it is *good* [af], but now for us here we get challenges, now you look at me, if I told someone that I am a Muganda they won't deny. So, we get challenges, people say that we are **thieves**, we are **con men**, eh those are the challenges we get...'	Expressing positive emotions about Luganda, and negative emotions about the stereotypes associated with speaking the language
IP4	'.... abantu abamu bajja wano nga bapromitinga ebintu nga boogera Oluganda ate batera kuntuukako wano oba lwaki? Hahahaha. Era nze mbagamba nti mmwe temugenda ffuna ssente oba mwogera Oluganda. You can't kubanga **bagamba nti obacupula** [j]'	...some people come here when promoting their products while speaking Luganda and they usually approach me here first, I wonder why? Hahahaha. And for me I tell them that you are not going to get money if you speak Luganda. You can't because they will say you are defrauding them [j].'	Expressing negative judgements about the effectiveness of using Luganda in business transactions
IP7	'Nze **ekinnyiiza** [af] kutuyita **bamalaaya** [j]...kale olaba wali ku Buganda Pub babeerawo, naye wamma si bonna nti Baganda. Lwakuba bonna beeyogeza mu Luganda ate abasajja wano bagamba nti bo be *baakabi* [ap]...kati awo naffe bwe tubeera eno n'olwogera nga bagamba oli **malaaya** [j].'	'What **annoys** [j] me is referring to us as **prostitutes** [j]...you see they are there at Buganda Pub, but it is not that they are all Baganda. It is just that they all speak Luganda and men here think they are *better* [ap]...so when we are also here and we speak Luganda they call us **prostitutes** [j]'.	Expressing negative judgement and unfair negative labelling associated with speakers of Luganda

The participants in Gulu City, through inscribed negative social sanction judgement, assess Luganda as a language for social misfits, such as thieves, conmen, and prostitutes. These negative stereotypes, as used in this context, refer to people who use Luganda to sell products that buyers think are fake, especially those that are somewhat new on the market. While these lexical items express negative attitudes about the speakers of Luganda, the participants express their disagreement with these judgements. Participants refer to these as some of the challenges they face when speaking Luganda. This is because, on the one hand, participants think that Luganda is a good language. In this case, participant IP5 first expresses positive affect using the Luganda adjective *lulungi* 'good language' and *si lubi* 'not a bad language', when referring to Luganda. The participant, however, contrasts this positive affect with negative affect, using code-switching to mention that ...*naye kati ffe eno tufuna challenges* 'but now for us this side we get challenges'. The term 'challenges', as used by the participant conveys sadness, frustration and discomfort about the negative stereotypes they encounter when using Luganda, a language which they, using affect, think is good.

The negative social sanction expressions of some people who, according to participant IP4, for instance, use Luganda while selling items that are considered *bicupuli* ' counterfeits '. The participant uses negative judgement, *nti mmwe temugenda ffuna ssente oba mwogera Oluganda* 'you are not going to get money if you are speaking Luganda' to judge the capacity of those using Luganda to market their products because, according to the participants, the buyers, *bagamba nti obacupula* 'they say that you are defrauding them'.

For female participants in particular, negative attitudes about Luganda are expressed through being referred to as *malaaya* 'prostitute', something that makes them sad (participant IP7). This, as participant IP7 notes, is because there are indeed some prostitutes at a pub known as Buganda Pub, who mostly speak Luganda, although *si bonna nti Baganda 'not all of them are Baganda'*. During FDGs, which comprised both men and women, the female participants could not respond to the questions, because they preferred to engage with the female interviewer privately in Luganda in the absence of men. We also observed the same situation in the markets, especially with women who were of non-Bantu ethnicity. The women who belong to Bantu groups, such as Basoga and Bagisu, do not shy away from speaking Luganda, but those of Acholi or other non-Bantu groups feared speaking publicly in Luganda, for fear of being labelled prostitutes. While this labelling makes some women sad (IP7), for others, it denotes affect, since, as participant IP7 observes, the women at the pub who speak Luganda are considered as baakabi 'better' by the men. This creates a contradiction for the women, who want not to be associated with prostitution, like participant IP7, but find that the language they have to use comes with such stereotypes that are uncomfortable.

Luganda as a Language for the Rich

Participants in Gulu evaluate Luganda as a language for the rich, as well as using and learning Luganda, as a sign of being rich, as shown in Table 5:

Table 5:Luganda as a language for the rich

Source	Luganda	English	Remarks
FGD2P	'Olaba wano e Gulu nze njagala njogere *amazima [j]*.... when you speak Luganda, they think that for you *you have money* [ap]...*olina ssente oli boss [ap]* okitegeera!'	You see here in Gulu, for me I want to speak the *truth [j]*... when you speak Luganda, they think that for *you, you have money* [ap]...you have money you are a *boss [ap]*, do you get it!'	Expresses social value and prestige attributed to speaking Luganda
FGD1P	'Wano mu Gulu omuntu ayogera Oluganda abeera **laroka [j]**, obeera **foreigner [j]** nga wasala omugga naye ate *obeera olina ssente [ap]*, kati olumu kituwa obuzibu mwana kubanga naffe *tweyiiya bweyiiya* [j] ...'	'Here in Gulu a person that speaks Luganda is a **laroka [j], you are a *foreigner* [j]** who crossed the river but you also have money, so sometimes it is a challenge for us because we are also still *struggling [j]'*.	Perceived economic status based on one's use of Luganda
QR6		'for Luganda what people think is that the person who speaks it is *rich* [j] because it is them that have most businesses in these areas...'	Perceived economic status based on one's use of Luganda

Participants, through both inscribed and invoked *affect, judgement*, and *appreciation,* perceive Luganda as a language of the rich. This is expressed via lexical items such as 'rich', 'businesses, 'boss' and 'foreigner'. Through this assessment, both positive and negative attitudes about Luganda are expressed. For participants such as FGD2P, there is positive capacity *judgement* in the idea of speaking Luganda, which leads to the perception of having money. The participant's utterance that 'when you speak Luganda, they think that for you, *you have money',* suggests a positive *judgement* on the capability or social status that comes with language proficiency, particularly, Luganda. The participant expresses excitement about this *judgement*, continuing with, *oba boss, okitgeera!* 'you are a boss, do you get it!'. The fact that the participant code-switches from Luganda to English and vice versa also adds a layer of excitement, suggesting that indeed, some users of Luganda enjoy the perceived status of being labelled 'rich' because of their use of Luganda.

For others, however, speaking Luganda is a way of being singled out as a 'foreigner', albeit one who is rich. Participant FGD1P mentions that speaking Luganda in Gulu identifies one as a *laroka;* 'you are a foreigner who crossed the

river but you also have money'. The word *laroka* is an Acholi word meaning foreigner. In Gulu, this is used not just for those who are not Ugandans, but also for those who speak Luganda and are of the Bantu ethnic group. Thus, sometimes, it carries negative connotations of '*othering*' people, showing that one is an outsider and does not fit the norm in Gulu. On top of being judged as a foreigner, and one assumed to have money, there is also negative *judgement* on the tenacity or resilience of some speakers. For instance, FGD1P elaborates that while those who speak Luganda are assumed to be rich, others are struggling. The participant mentions that, *'so, sometimes it is a challenge for us because we are also still struggling'.* This suggests that the association of speaking Luganda with foreignness and wealth creates a divide. On the one hand, the speakers are assumed to be well off, yet their reality speaks otherwise. This assumption is rooted in the historical spread of Luganda, where for many people in Gulu, the first wealthy people they encountered were Baganda traders and, thus, the perception continues.

Indeed, this assumption comes from the fact that, as QR6 opines, *'people think that the person who speaks it is rich because it is them that have most businesses in these areas...'* However, while the respondent's statement uses implicit positive *judgement 'have most businesses in these areas'*, to show that speakers of Luganda are wealthy because of the perception that they have the most businesses in the area, the structure of the statement also critiques the flawed logic of associating Luganda with wealth. FGD1P's utterance that they are also still struggling affirms QR6's statement, which implicitly suggests that associating Luganda with wealth does not account for the diversity of the economic situations among Luganda speakers.

Luganda as a Language for Babysitters

There is a perception that Luganda is for babysitters among participants in Gulu City, as expressed in Table 6:

Table 6:Luganda as a language babysitters

Source	Luganda	English	Remarks
IP6	'.... uh ne bagamba nti olwo olulimi lwa **baby-sitting** [j]. Oba wagenda Kampala **obebbisittinga [j]** n'oluyiga. Era munnange batuyita ba **mukombabookisi** [j] nga gy'oli nti ggwo si mulimu ...'	... and they say that this language is for **baby-sitting** [j]. That you must have gone to Kampala to babysit and you learnt it. And my dear, they actually call us **babysitters/ housekeepers** [j], as if that's not actually a job...	Questions devaluing of babysitting as a legitimate job
QR10		'...that it is a language for the girls who **failed** [j] in school and went to Kampala to babysit.'	Status and role of Luganda
QR14	'...nti Oluganda lulimi lwa **kukomba bookisi** [j] mu Kampala...'	'...that Luganda is a language for **babysitting/ housekeeping** [j] in Kampala'	Status and role of Luganda
IP9	'...ate abantu abamu Oluganda baluyiga bagenze kusoma, si kukola mu maka ga bantu kyokka... naye abantu abamu ekyo tebakimanyi... balowooza oba **malaaaya [j]** oba **mukombabookisi [j]**.... kati nze Oluganda naluyiga nga nkyakolera ku nguudo mu Kampala. Jennifer Musisi bwe yatugoba, ne nkomawo eno kubanga ye waka munnange era kati gye ntudira sitookisi zino....'	'...and some people learn Luganda when they go to school there, not just to work in people's houses... but some people don't know that...they think you are a **prostitute [j]** or **housekeeper [j]**...now as for me I learnt Luganda while hawking on the streets in Kampala. When Jennifer Musisi sent us away, I came back this way because it is after all home and it is here that I now sell these stockings...'	Challenges social judgements about speakers of Luganda and expresses varied ways of acquiring Luganda

Using both positive and negative affect, judgement, and appreciation, participants enact a critical assessment of Luganda as a language for babysitters and housekeepers. In the first source, participant IP6 says that, *uh ne bagamba nti olwo olulimi lwa babysitting. Oba wagenda Kampala... n'oluyiga.* They actually call us babysitters. Using invoked negative affect, the participant expresses frustration and irritation towards *bo* 'they', who judge them for using Luganda, as well as towards babysitting as a job. Most prominent, however, in IP6's assessment, is judgement. The participant expresses this through phrases like *bagamba* 'they say' and *....batuyita ba mukombabookisi* 'they call us those who lick saucepans.

The term *'mukombabookisi'* 'one who licks saucepans', as used here, refers to babysitters or housekeepers, but carries a historically derogatory connotation in South-Central Uganda, where it described girls and women employed in domestic work. These workers were often mistreated, receiving inadequate food served on unsuitable plates and excluded from sharing meals with others. Consequently, they resorted to licking saucepans to taste leftover food, highlighting their marginalisation and hardship.

Many of the women interviewed in this study in Gulu City mentioned that whenever they speak Luganda, they are referred to, in an insulting manner, as mukombabookisi. As participant IP6 mentions, it is assumed that a woman learnt Luganda while in Kampala, babysitting. Thus, there is negative judgement associated with learning Luganda for the sole purpose of doing such a low-status job. This judgement is further evident in QR10's assertion that Luganda is a language for the girls who failed school and went to Kampala to babysit. This is also evident in QR14's utterance, *nti Oluganda lulimi lwa kukomba bookisi mu Kampala....* Indeed, participant QR14 expresses negative social sanction judgement, showing that the sole reason for one to learn Luganda is to become a babysitter, specifically, in Kampala.

However, other participants defend this profession, showing that babysitting or housekeeping is a decent/reasonable profession and those doing it should be respected. Using positive judgement (propriety), participant IP6 mentions that *'...as if it is not actually a job'*. In this utterance, the participant challenges the moral or ethical judgement of devaluing babysitting. The statement criticises the propriety or ethical behaviour of those who mock the housekeeping or babysitting profession. Additionally, participant IP9 elaborates that babysitting or housekeeping is not the only reason why people learn Luganda: *...ate abantu abamu Oluganda baluyiga bagenze kusoma, si kukola mu maka ga bantu kyokka...* '...and some people learn Luganda when they go to school there, not just to work in people's houses....'. The participant mentions that some people learn Luganda while attending school in Kampala. This assertion is rooted in the fact that many Ugandans access services such as health, education and others by travelling to the capital city, Kampala, which, linguistically, is a Luganda dominated area. Furthermore, as the participant elaborates, many people also seek employment opportunities in the capital. For instance, participant IP9 mentions that .... kati nze Oluganda naluyiga nga nkyakolera ku nguudo mu Kampala.... '...now as for me, I learnt Luganda while hawking on the streets in Kampala....'. From the participant's utterance, it is evident that for some people, Luganda is acquired when doing other kinds of work (in the participant's case, hawking stockings), and the language is thus appreciated as a resource that is worth having in their linguistic repertoire, despite the negative judgements and identities that are constructed about its users.

Summary and Conclusion

This study set out to explore the evaluative meanings attached to Luganda among L2 users in Gulu City, and how these shape identity. Through the lens of Appraisal Theory, the analysis participants expressed both affective appreciation and moral ambivalence towards the language, which in turn influenced how they positioned themselves in relation to Ugandan national identity This creates a dual identity, where personal pride in using Luganda meets societal expectations, potentially causing exclusion or misidentification, if these norms are not met, especially in diaspora settings, where identity can be contested.

Through Appraisal Theory, identity emerges not just from linguistic choice, but from the affective and ethical evaluations speakers receive. Being labelled *Mucholi-Muganda, Mucholi wa Kabaka* or *malaaya* invokes identity as both relational and ideological, shaped by expectations, stereotypes, and individual agency. The findings have also shown that Luganda is both valued for its beauty and cultural significance, but also tied to negative stereotypes of deviance, especially in commercial settings where linguistic skill signals trustworthiness. The tension between positive affect and societal judgement creates complex identity negotiation, particularly for women facing added stigma, yet finding social leverage in the language. As Lemke (2010, p. 4) notes, identity spans multiple "timescales", reflecting diverse influences. The findings further highlight Luganda's dual role in Ugandan national identity, tied to authenticity and well-being, but subject to scrutiny and exclusion. This interplay of individual practices and societal expectations shows language as both personal pride and social contention. These insights inform discussions on language, identity, and judgement in post-colonial Uganda, underscoring the need for further study of linguistic attitudes and national identity dynamics to promote inclusive language policies and education that destigmatise speakers of indigenous languages such as Luganda, empowering them to engage socially without marginalisation.

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