Documenting Luyia Together: Talking Wordlists

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This presentation describes research activities of the ASH Scholars research team *Documenting Luyia Together* during the 2019-2020 academic year on our Luyia-Soga Talking Wordlists subproject. The overall goal of our team is to describe and document languages of the Luyia cluster spoken in Kenya and Uganda. These languages belong to the Bantu linguistic group that counts approximately 500-600 languages spoken in sub-Saharan Africa. Within Luyia, we can distinguish several language varieties such as Nyore, Saamia, Khayo, and Tsootso. The language varieties in the region are underdocumented in the sense that most lack much published research about their linguistic properties, and few have been the subject of grammatical descriptions, dictionaries, or collections of oral literature.

Our subteam has focused on processing linguistic materials collected from speakers of 14 languages from the Luyia cluster and from the Soga cluster of language to the west of the Luyia varieties. The materials include a set list of about 600 words written in the language, an English translation, and an audio recording with pronunciations of each of the words on the list from a speaker of the language. Our work has been to process the audio recordings of an interview with the speaker using the Audacity software package. We extract example pronunciations from the longer interview recording and then link individual audio files to the corresponding entries in the wordlist.

Our talking wordlists serve as a precursor to a written lexicon for the language, providing pronunciations and definitions for a variety of classes and types of words. They facilitate the study of prominent features of the languages, such as phonology and morphology. Moreover, the lists allow for the comparison of the languages in the cluster to determine the relatedness of the languages and to establish a language classification and family tree.