

Kinyarwanda Language Change: A Prescriptivism Perspective of Selected Settings

Gabriel Bazimaziki¹
Vedaste Nsengiyumva²
Jean Leonard Ndayishimiye³
Felix Micomyiza⁴
Evode Nshimiyimana⁵
Emilien Bisamaza⁶
Maurice Mpumuje⁷

¹bazimazikigabriel@gmail.com

²vedastenseng123@gmail.com

³jeanleonardn@yahoo.com

⁴micvalixy@gmail.com

⁵nshimiyimanaevode2@gmail.com

⁶bisamazamilien@gmail.com

⁷mpumujemaurice@gmail.com

^{1,3,4,5,6}University of Rwanda-College of Education, ²Kepler College, Kigali, ⁷Rwanda Polytechnic, IPRC, Huye, Rwanda

ABSTRACT

With the advancement of technology, language change has gained a stronghold among the 21st century linguistic studies. Language change is generally fueled by diverse factors. Generation by generation, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed, others are invented, the meaning of old words drifts, and morphology develops or decays. In this study, the researchers explore factors pertaining to Kinyarwanda language change in the post-1994 Genocide period, with particular focus on lexicosemantic features. The study is framed in prescriptivism, which holds that there are correct and wrong ways of using language. Both written and spoken data was collected from various public places and social media sources, where Kinyarwanda is widely used on different occasions. Contextual data analysis was carried out, taking into consideration the general use of standard Kinyarwanda. Findings highlight that Kinyarwanda is negatively affected by historical, technological, and social factors that impede the respect of the prescribed rules of the standard Kinyarwanda language. The study recommends that efforts be made to cope with the identified critical factors so as to preserve Kinyarwanda, which is not only means of communication, reflection of people's culture and identity but also an official and academic language in the Rwandan context and even beyond it.

Keywords: Diachronic Approach, Kinyarwanda, Language Change, Perspective, Prescriptivism, Standard Language

I. INTRODUCTION

Human language is essentially social (Chambers et al., 2013) and it entails diverse knowledge in tandem with what one says and how they say it. Yang (2000) observes that language change occurs when a generation of speakers produces linguistic expressions that differ from those of previous generations, either in form or in distribution. Such change is related to context, time, age, history, and/or region. Jesus (2015b) reported that saying something defines the human subjects before the circumstances they are in at all moments of their lives. Inherently, language has always been subject to variation and change (Bergs, 2017), and this is connected with diachronic analysis. Diachrony provides evidence for the interrelation of lexicon and grammar as well as evidence for the nature of the cognitive representation of phonological and grammatical form (Bybee, 2012). Language usage is a kind of social contact that may occur in a variety of circumstances. Hence, speech communities' language patterns, language abilities and language behavior differ (Ni Made, 2022).

Language change is driven by factors beyond people's control or those they can themselves monitor (Aitchison, 2013). Among the factors that influence language change, Mantiri (2010) identifies political pressures, technological development, as well as social, cultural and moral factors. The authors posit that political factors are connected with foreign invasion, migration, and colonization. For social factors, the authors mean foreign language influences. The unique way that individuals speak also fuels language change. By cultural factors, the authors refer to the exposure of one language group to another via television, radio, films, music, magazines, and fashion, while technological factors mean rapid advances in information communication technology, industries, products, and the economy, bringing in new words that drive language change. In tandem with the authors' findings, this study anchored

on language change with particular interest in Kinyarwanda, a Bantu subgroup language widely spoken not only in Rwanda but also beyond its borders (National African Language Resource Center, n.d.). It is a tonal language which displays variants resulting from regional and social factors, including pronunciation of some consonants and ungrammatical extension verb tense on the one hand; and avoidance of semantic and lexical features linked with social values and taboos on the other hand (Bazimaziki, 2018).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Generally, Kinyarwanda language is used in Rwandans' daily activities, nationwide and locally. It is used in various domains such as administration, health, media, culture and music industries, research, to name only a few. Kinyarwanda is the only national language of Rwanda and is spoken by more than 99.7% of Rwandans, of whom 78.2% are aged 15 years. It is also an official language besides English, French, and Kiswahili. Kinyarwanda is used for all communication purposes, and most official functions in Rwanda are performed in that language. Various official documents, including the official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda, have a Kinyarwanda version too (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2022).

Kinyarwanda was originally and rhetorically used in conversations, and everyone was careful while speaking for fear that they would be blamed or accused of misusing that language (Sekamana et al., 2023). Indeed, one had to know that speaking correctly in public was a tradition and a value, among other norms. However, the inaccurate uses of Kinyarwanda language have now become common among Kinyarwanda speech community at different occasions. That language has undergone changes fueled by socio-historical and technological factors in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi. These changes are therefore perceived as an extension of language at the expense of standard language. Some users deviate from its syntactic, semantic, morphological, and phonological rules as a result of historical background, while others are affected by technology-coined terms that have become recurrent in the Rwandan context.

Rubibi (2013) posits that “Iyo ugiye aho abantu benshi bahurira, aho imodoka zihagarara (Gare), mu mahoteli, ku kibuga cy’indege n’ahandi uhasanga inyandiko ziyobora abahagana, ari gake cyane ziri mu Kinyarwanda (At public places like bus parks, hotels, airports, etc., it is rare to find guiding information written in Kinyarwanda [researchers’ own translation]. Moreso, Rwandans were urged several times to perfect Kinyarwanda, which is their own culture, their unity, and their identity. Most importantly, while the Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy (RCHA) is recommended to safeguard and promote the culture and the Kinyarwanda language (Official Gazette n° Special of September 4, 2020), Ntabareshya (2022) recommends that the use of the Kinyarwanda language be perfected rather than continuing to deteriorate gradually. As research found out that the Kinyarwanda tradition of the fear of using it incorrectly in public no longer matters (Sekamana et al., 2023), the new Kinyarwanda linguistic expressions were observed as different in form or distribution from those of previous generations. Those expressions need to be explored so as to analyze how phonological, lexical, semantic, morphological, and syntactic changes significantly affect the standard use of Kinyarwanda. Thus, this research intends to delve into this situation using a prescriptivist perspective towards selected physical settings generally considered as meeting places for many people.

1.2 Aims of the Study

It sounds strange to say “*umuhaanzi yataanze ibyishimo*” rather than “*umuhaanzi yashimiishije abaantu*” (the artist pleased his fans). In this vein, this study seeks to explore Kinyarwanda language change, with particular focus on its lexicosemantic features. Further, the researchers intend to identify critical factors that influence language change and examine how change in Kinyarwanda language affects its speech community.

1.3 Research Questions

Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following questions: (1) How is the Kinyarwanda language undergoing change? (2) What are the factors that fuel this change? (3) How do these changes affect the Kinyarwanda speech community? The following section describes the theory and methodology used to answer those questions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is led by prescriptive theory, as adapted from Nordquist (2023). According to Nordquist (2023), prescriptivism is concerned with "conscious attempts by language users to control language use by promoting innovations." Prescriptivism holds that language is described as it could be rather than as it is currently seen. Essentially, prescriptivism believes that there are correct and wrong ways of using language.

Indeed, as opposed to descriptive theory, which focuses on language as it actually is, prescriptive theory is significantly concerned with the correct use of language. According to this theory, language is considered a set of

rules that must be learned and practiced in order to use it correctly. Studies (Moschonas, 2021; Straaijer, 2016; Curzan, 2014; Jerro, 2018) report that prescriptive theory focuses merely on the correctness of language. Prescriptivists are preoccupied with the right usage of language in specific contexts. They are therefore interested in what is wrong in a given language and suggest that mistakes should be corrected. Prescriptive theory supports the idea the idea that language should be used by respecting its prescribed rules. In other words, it is concerned with standard language use.

While "prescriptivists generally do not question either the necessity or validity of prescriptive rules and prescriptive practices (Straaijer, 2016), Kinyarwanda is mostly concerned as it is a language governed by well-prescribed rules. As stated before, those rules are not respected in some settings. Thus, the authors are persuaded that prescriptivism fits for this study on Kinyarwanda language change among the speech community as affected by technology prominence in the 21st century.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section reviews studies carried out on standard language use and language change. According to Moschonas (2021), standard language denotes a superposed variety, which has to be learned gradually after language acquisition and has to be re-learned by each new generation of speakers.

Most studies conducted on the Kinyarwanda language adopted descriptive language at the expense of a prescriptive approach. Spoken in a narrow area in East Africa in particular, Kinyarwanda exhibits; for example, Bazimaziki (2018) examined linguistic variables in the Kinyarwanda language. The study discussed social, gender, education, occupation, and gender variables in light of standard Kinyarwanda. However, the author did not tackle any aspect of language change in that study. Similarly, Jarro (2018) describes different derivational strategies in language with a particular focus on one particular single morphological aspect, Kinyarwanda. The author recommends upcoming studies focus on the degree of productivity and lexicalization that are at play with respect to valency-changing morphology.

Another study (Jerro, 2017) investigated the paradigms of change in Kinyarwanda and found out that certain change of state roots lack simple state meanings and always give rise to change entailments. Although this study lays the groundwork for other studies on Kinyarwanda, the room for lexicosemantic change has not been opened up. In the same vein, a study by Nassenstein (2015) recommends an analysis of how linguistic innovations emerge, are spread, and "keep the wheels (of language change) turning" on a linguistic level. Lastly, Gafaranga (2017) looked into the causes of Kinyarwanda deviation and found out that it may result from issues in the medium itself or in order to serve specific discourse-related functions. His study did not adopt a prescriptive approach either.

Although some research has been conducted on the description of Kinyarwanda (Jerro, 2017) and on the practice of substandard Kinyarwanda among natives (Nassenstein, 2015; Gafaranga, 2017; Bazimaziki, 2018; Bicamumpaka, 2019; Radio Rwanda, 2022; Sekamana et al., 2023), some aspects of the same area of contention were not explored prescriptively, mainly how technology-related terms have significantly affected contemporary Kinyarwanda. Hence, the present study was conducted to fill some of the identified gaps in the reviewed studies.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper consists of a descriptive study that used qualitative approach. Using three techniques - reading, listening, and transcription, data were collected from various public settings where Kinyarwanda is generally used. For each of the collected data, translation into English was done for readers who may not understand the source language. The main pools of primary data for this study were not limited to market places, bus parks, bars and restaurants, roads and hospitals, academic environments and school settings, public talks, social media (WhatsApp groups, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), ceremonial occasions, churches, and sports occasions. The researchers also looked at studies conducted on language change in general and on Kinyarwanda in particular. Information was gathered in light of four major linguistic components, such as phonology, morphology, lexicosemantics, and syntax.

To analyze Kinyarwanda users' oral and written language, the researchers used content and contextual analysis. According to Hartson and Pyla (2012), the focus of contextual analysis is the systematic study of data by identifying, sorting, organizing, interpreting, consolidating, and communicating the data gathered in contextual inquiry for the purpose of understanding the work context. The main purpose of using content analysis was to reach the concepts and relationships that can explain available data (Yildirim et al., 2013, cited in Altiparmak et al., 2020).

For this study, the information collected was organized and analyzed based on the context of its users. Discussion of findings based on prescriptive Kinyarwanda as recommended by *Inkoranya y'Ikinyarwanda* ("The Standard Dictionary of Kinyarwanda Language") and in regard to the standard language as recommended by "Inteko y'Umucyo" (The Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy, n.d.).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 New Linguistic Expressions in Kinyarwanda

Throughout recorded history, human beings have shown unbounded capabilities for social interaction and self-expression, governed by complex sets of conventions normally beneath consciousness (Chambers et al., 2013). Human language that is actively used inevitably undergoes changes concerned with new linguistic expressions that are different in form or use generally. Generation by generation, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed or invented, the meaning of old words drifts, and morphology develops or decays (Mantiri, 2010). In light of this, the Kinyarwanda language is not an exception. The following tables present data collected from different sources on different occasions where Kinyarwanda is used for different purposes.

Table 1

New Linguistic Expressions among Different Kinyarwanda Speech Community Members

New expression	Spoken	Translation	Contextual Examples	Prescriptive use
Ingangi/akavumo	Ingaângi/akavumo	One's shelter/home	Akavumo/ingaangi yacu (Our getho)	Icuumbi (shelter)
Ishumi/iniga	ishumî	A kind - hearted friend	Ni ishumi ye (So and so is their undetachable friend)	inshutî (friend)
Twahatwitse	Twaahatwîtse	We made surprises!	Twaahatwîtse (decently dressed /we have made surprises!)	Twaahaanyuranye umucyô (well done)
imiyaga	imiyaga	Favour/tolerance	Badushyiriyemo imiyaga (We are relieved)	Baatudohooreye (we are tolerated/given relief)
ikiryabarezi	ikiryâabareêzi	An opportunist	Ni ikiryâabareêzi (One is an opportunist)	Rusahuriramundûurû (opportunist)
Kwesurana	kweesuurana	Meet (football teams)	Amakipe areesuurana(The teams will meet)	Guhûura (meet/play against)
Mani	maâni	Any human being	Nyumva Alice mani (Alice, listen to me)	nshutî /muvâandimwê/sha (friend/relative/guy)
Nyiribyondo	nyirîbyoôndo	Landlord	Nyirîbyoôndo yaaje (The landlord has arrived)	Nyir'înzû (landlord)
Kugwa ku ikaro	Kugwa ku ikaro	Get money	Baguuye ku ikaro (They have got money)	Kubôna/kuroonka amafaraanga (Get money)
Ifari	Ifaari/ifeêge	Cigars/cigarettes	Waampaaye ku ifaari (Could you give me some cigars?)	Itaâbi/isigara (cigarettes)
Kurebesha indege	Kureebesha indeêge	Steal	Baamureebesheje indeêge (They stole his money)	Kwîiba (steal)
Idage	idaâge	Fake man	Nikô waa daâge we (You fake man)	Imbûramumaro (worthless person)
Isadunda	isâduundâ	Whore	Geenda waa sâduundâ we (You whore, go away)	Indaâya (prostitute)
Ku myako	Ku myaako	smartly	Ubu turi ku myaako (We are so smart)	Turakêeye (so smart)
Gucoma	gucoma	Smoking	Urashaka gucoma sê (Do you want to smoke)	Kunywâ itaâbi (smoking cigars)
Ipinda	ipînda	money	Bafite ku ipînda (They have a lot of money)	Amafaraanga (money menshi)
ingagari	ingagaari	Money owner	Yabaaye ingagaari (So and so has got a lot of money)	Umuhewê (tycoon)
ibebi	ibebî	Attractive girl	Mbeêga ibebî (What a beautiful girl)	Ihoôho (attractive/beatiful girl)
Kukiroba	kukîroba	Getting engaged	Arashaka kukirôba (He wants to get engaged with her)	Kumugira inshutî /umufashâ (to marry someone)
ibyangwe	Inbyangwe	Modern dresses	Baguze ibyangwe (They bought modern dresses)	Imyeênda mishyâ (new dresses/clothes)
Umusheri/umushu	Umusheri/shu	Friend/dear	Ese ufite umusheri/mushu (Do you have a girl/boyfriend?)	Umukûnzî (boy or girl friend/ a dear friend)
Kunywa lesi	Kunywâ lesi	Drink less	Tunywê lesi (Let's drink less)	Dusomê/Tunywê gakê (drink less)

Yang (2000) contends that there is language change when a language undergoes new linguistic expressions that are different from the generally used terms. Semantically, words change from their general meaning to their unusual or deviated meaning. For example, a number of expressions or words from the above table fit this situation. In fact, saying “Ahita akiroba” (he directly loved her at first sight) falls into that context. Generally, “Kurobâ” literally means "fishing." But its meaning has now deviated or changed into getting engaged on the spot. Similarly, “ibyôndo” generally means “mud”. However, the term “nyiribyôndo” is conventionally referred to as “landlord” much as “imiyaga”, which generally means ‘wind’, is socially used to connote ‘easing the task’ as in “Baadushyiriyemô imiyaga” (we have been given a relief or solace). Referring to “ibebî,” borrowed from the English word “baby,” the term is socially being used to denote “an attractive or beautiful girl with buttocks.” In the same vein, “byâaratâaye,” which linguistically derives from “gutâ” (reject, lose), is used in some social settings by some speakers to refer to “loss of self-control.” As for “ingagaari,” which generally means “giant of man/strong young man,” some Kinyarwanda speakers changed its meaning to “tycoon.”

The use of “Kureebesha indeêge” denoting “make one watch an airplane” has changed into “steal something from someone” as in baamureebesheje indeêge (they stole one’s things), much as “gutwika” generally denoting “burn” has connotatively been used to mean “get things done smartly/or make surprise” as in “twaahatwite” or “haahîye) (we are smart, we have done it smartly/made surprise) as in “turi ku myaako (we are smart). Deriving from “ubûuki (honey), the term “icyûuki” (beautiful girl) has become common among young lovers, much like the term “umusheri (commonly borrowed from the French word “cheri(e)” (dear). The term “ibebî (borrowed from the English word "baby") is used to refer to a “beautiful girl,” carrying the approximate meaning of “igisaabo” (an attractive girl with big hips), while the term generally means “big milk calabash.” While the term “icyûuma” generally denotes "metal/knife," some speakers deviate its meaning by meaning “beautiful girl/liquor/hard drinks.” In transport, the terms “kubuukiinga” (booking) and “kudiilinga” (dealing which are contextually used when people have a deal between them, fall into that category.

4.2 Terminology Related with Technology

Historically, after the country gradually underwent a significant advancement fueled by science and technology, new words related to information and communication technology (ICT) were now used in the Rwandan context, including mobile money (momo), megabytes, bip, chart, zoom, download, tweet, cashless, betting, loading, uploading, etc. In that context, the standard Kinyarwanda is affected by new invented words by wrongly borrowing from the language of technology. Some of these words are shown in the following table:

Table 2

Words and Epressions Coined from Technology Related Terms

New expression	Possible translation	Example sentence	Prescriptive
Sosho mediya	Social media	Kuri sosho mediya	Urubugâ nkôranyambâga (social media)
Amamega	Megabites	Nta mamega mfite (I have run short of megabytes)	Uburyô bwo kugera kurî murâandasi (megabytes)
Linki	Link	Mukoreshe iyi linki (use this link)	Umuyoboro (the link)
Kubipa	offering little	Muri iri somo yatubipye (They have taught us a little)	Kwîikiza (offer a poor service)
Momo	Mobile money	Unyohereza ukoresheje momo (Send me via momo/mobile money)	Kwiishyura/kugura/koohereza amafaraanga hakôreshejwe ikôranabuûhaânga ryaa telefoôni
Catinga	Chating	Duhora ducatinga (We usually chart)	Kugaaniira kuri telefoôni twaândika (chart)
Zuminga	Zooming	Ese wabizuminga? (Could you zoom a bit please)	Kwâagura/kugaragaza nêeza ibyaânditswe kuri muraândasi (Zoom)
Twitinga	Tweeting	Ndabitwitinga (I tweet it)	Kugaragaza imbaamutima ku rubuga nkoranyambaga
Dawunilodinda	downloading	Banza uyidawunilodinge (Download it first)	Gukûura inyandiko kurî murâandasi (download)
Betinga	Betting	Uyu mukino twawubetinze (We have bet for this game)	Gukina amahîrwê/guteega (betting in sports)
Cashilesi	Cashless	Mukorê/eshe kaâshileesi (You are requested to use cashless)	kwishyuura amafaraanga hîfashiishijwe ikôranabuûhaânga (Cashless)
Gutekinika	cook data	Muratekinika kubera iki? (Why do you cook the data?)	Guhîimbahimba (cooking data)

Sofiya	Traffic/camera	Dore indi Sofiya (This is another traffic camera)	Imâshiniî igêenzûura umuvûduko w'Îbinyâbizîga mu muhaânda (traffic camera)
Kubukinga	Booking	Mwibuke kubuukiinga amatike (Remember to book the tickets)	Gufâta umwaânya booking)
Guhitinga	hitting	Barahitnze (They have become famous/very known)	Kwâamamara/kugerwahô (be famous/on fashion)
guglinga	googling	Twabiguglinze (We have searched it from google)	Gushaakiisha kurî murâandasî (browse/search from google search engine)
Sipidi gavana	Speed governor	Sipidi gavana irabatiinza (Speed governor will delay them)	Imâshiniî igêenga umuvûduko w'Îbinyâbizîga (Speed governor)
Gufolowinga	Follow(on tweeter)	Ikibabaje ntuumufolowiinga! (Unfortunately, you don't follow him)	Arikô ikibâbaje ntuumufôlowiinga (Unfortunately you do not follow him/her)

In this study, three research questions are inherently involved, but all converge on the inextricable bond between language and culture. The first question was concerned with types of change pertaining to Kinyarwanda language use. Changes that occur in Kinyarwanda language are perceived at phonology, morphology, lexico-semantic, and syntactic levels, especially contemporary youth language that functions differently from standardized Kinyarwanda (Nassenstein, 2015).

The second question was concerned with factors that fueled Kinyarwanda language change in the post-genocide period. Nordquist (2020) groups factors pertaining to language change into two categories, as described in Aitchison (2001), such as external sociolinguistic factors, or social factors outside the language system, and internal linguistic and psychological factors, which are found within the structure of the language and the minds of the speakers. For the Kinyarwanda language, such factors are mainly cultural, historical, social, and technological, besides the foreign language factor. Due to the advancement of technology, some Kinyarwanda speech communities wrongly use words derived from tech technology, such as “momo (mobile e money), “kudawunilodinga (downloading), “zuminga (zooming), “amamega (megabytes), “es), "gucatinga" (chatting), "twitinga" (tweeting), "kashilesi" (cashless), and "kubu among others. Indeed, these new linguistic terms borrowed or invented from the English language reflect that technology has by far affected the Kinyarwanda language, thus a language progress rather than its ebbs.

The third research question sought to demonstrate how Kinyarwanda language changes affect its speech community. Jesus (2015a) defines language as something coming from the inside of the speaking subject for the meaningful, intentional purpose of the individual speaker. Contrariwise, the author refers to ‘A language’, as something coming from the outside, from the speech community, something offered to the speaking subject from the tradition in the technique of speaking. Actually, the language one speaks is fueled by factors such as place, age, gender, education level, social status, or the environment they are exposed to (Mantiri, 2010). Language use is central to diachrony, in tandem with historical factors. As Bybee (2012) put it, a diachronic study generally deals with constant language changes such as phonological and inferential meanings, among others.

4.3 Lexical and Phonological Related Changes

Lexical and phonological changes also take place in the Kinyarwanda language. Nordquist (2020) states that changes in language may be systematic or sporadic. The author supports the idea the idea that a sporadic change involves the addition of an item to a vocabulary that has little impact on the rest of the lexicon. Even some phonological changes are sporadic. For instance, some Kinyarwanda speakers have changed word usage as in “ibisobanuro(meaning) to “ubusobanuro”; “inararibonye” to “ubunararibonye” (experience); “ibirori” to “ikirori”, “yego(yes) to “ego”; “ntaabwo (a negative word used before a verb to give it a negative meaning) to “ntaago” as in “Ntaabwo mbiîzi” (I don't know); “turahabaye” instead of “turahari”; (we are available); “umukiinnyi ari muu mvunê”(the player has an injury) instead of saying “umukiinnyi yarâvunitse”. In the same vein, saying “umukobwa w'iwe” instead of “umukobwa we” (his/her daughter); “nuko ndavuga ati” instead of “nuko ndavuga nti (and then I said thatt...) or “umubwiire ati” instead of “umubwiire uti” shows a syntactic deviation in Kinyarwanda usage.

From the above data, it is important to highlight that Kinyarwanda has undergone both sporadic and systematic changes. The two changes are a result of a number of critical factors, such as technological, historical, social, and the like. Indeed, findings revealed that technological factors take the lead. Due to the advancement of technology in Rwanda, changes related to technology are becoming more and more drastic, resulting in mistaken language use. Additionally, Eyssette (2022) found out that colonization, genocide, and changes in official languages have resulted in the hybridization of languages termed Kinyafanglais, which has now become a household "language.”.

Conversations slip from one language to another, and sentences are peppered with words from all of them. Hence, Kinyarwanda is a language taken as central for all Rwandan people. It is also a means for Kinyarwanda speech community members outside Rwanda to communicate among themselves and express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas among themselves. Having been affected by the ills of colonialism coupled with the effects of the 1994 Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi and the technological advancement and related factors, it is high time Kinyarwanda speakers were back to their originality to grapple with these changes. The reason is that most of the discussed changes are a decay rather than a progress. This finding tallies with another study (Nassenstein, 2015) emphasizing the Kinyarwanda linguistic vacuum among youth in some, if not many, parts of the country.

While language and culture are two interwoven concepts that influence each other, the language of people reflects their culture and their identity. Kinyarwanda language is used in that context to express and transmit “Banyarwanda” culture, while the latter, in turn, plays a significant role in shaping and evolving it by reflecting human values, beliefs, and perceptions of Rwandese people. Yet, Kinyanglais (Kinyarwanda + English) will not, and, in that case, most people will be affected given that the 2022 national census revealed that 78.2% of Kinyarwanda speakers are 15 years old.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Kinyarwanda language changed over time. This change is generally triggered by social, cultural, historical, and technological factors. Generation by generation, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed or invented, the meaning of old words drifts, and morphology develops or decays (Mantiri, 2010). While Akmajian et al. (2001) neither support nor oppose the belief that language change is commonly and variously viewed as a decay and a progress, findings in this study highlighted that standard Kinyarwanda is continually being jeopardized at four levels: phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic. In this study, it was found that Kinyarwanda language changes are more of a decay than a progress. Standard Kinyarwanda has gradually undergone changes fueled by socio-historical and technological factors. These changes are therefore perceived as an extension of language at the expense of standard language. Some users deviate from Kinyarwanda prescriptive use as a result of historical background, while others are affected by technology-coined terms that have been recurrent in the Rwandan context.

5.2 Recommendations

Since language and culture are interwoven, Rwandan citizens, especially youth, have to use the original Kinyarwanda to protect Rwandan culture (Bicamumpaka, 2019; Radio Rwanda, February 23, 2022). People should not be interfered by foreign languages or technologically coined words when they are using Kinyarwanda. Although language speakers constantly find themselves having “to adapt language to changing communicative needs in a changing environment (Haja et al., 2008), any deviation from prescriptive Kinyarwanda language should not be applauded but warned and corrected so as to preserve and uphold Rwandan culture reflected in the only common language of the natives. Language policy should re-emphasize the merits of using a standard language.

Kinyarwanda language generators, translators, users, or consumers, be they parents and children, teachers and learners, young or old citizens, journalists, or public servants, all should ensure that Kinyarwanda is correctly used in both social and academic settings. If not, that language risks extinguishing while it has started to win an international audience since it is used in a great tourist destination (African Language Resource Center, n.d.). To bridge gaps in this study, mixed-methods research should examine how Kinyarwanda language change is either a development or a loss of culture among its entire speech community. Upcoming studies should also delve into the integration of technology in teaching Kinyarwanda in basic education.

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