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REVITALIZING LUKABARASI THROUGH ARC IC ECO-LEXICON IDENTIFICATION BENARD MUDOG

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Abstract

This study aims at identifying and documenting archaic e lexicon found in Lukabarasi language discourse, one o the Luhya clust s of languages spoken in Western Kenya. The purpo e is to find out how much archaic eco-lexicon is in Lukabarasi, and esta ish the potenti l level of threat and extinction of such lexicon. The researc r uses rapid word collection to get data from the respondents. A combinati of native speaker's intuition and interviews with key informants who are very familiar with the Lukabarasi eco-lexicon generates the wo for analysis. The existence of the archaic Lukabarasi eco-lexicons indicates the ishing richness of the Kabarasi environment. Lukabarasi eco-lexi on is at the Beginning Threatened level (level 3). Therefore, there is need or such lexicons to be identified and documented. This will m an archi e for preservation of the language, culture and history of the K barasi people as expressed in language related to the environme

Keywords: Ar ic; dim shing; eco-lexicon; Lukabarasi; revitalization.

Backgroun

Lexicon i a refle ion that shows how people relate to each other, to other organisms and to the nvironment. There are quite several lexicon types that can demonstrate his relationship, among others, is environmental lexi on (eco-lexicon). The eco-lexicon is reflection of the rich of the en onment and ature, both human, cultural, and society. This research on the -lexicon as part of the Lukabarasi language environment aims to uncover wi Alexander and Stibbe (2014: 104-5) term as "the impact of l guage on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment". This is influenced by the fact that, over time and by the influence modernism, schooling and ltilingualism, some of the frequency of using some of the Kabarasi

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LWATI: A Jour. of Contemp. Res.
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RESEARCH

lexicon in native speakers' discourses is getting weaker and weaker. In addition, while Lukabarasi eco-lexicons can be investigated to reveal how the community relate with the surrounding environment, their status remains poorly understood, with limited published materials and only scant research. There is therefore a strong need to understand the linguistic encoding of the ecological wealth of the Kabarasi speech community to establish how any changes in the language may affect this equation.

Eco-lexicons are part of the local language vocabulary that is full of cultural peculiarities of speech communities that originates from the natural environment. However, some of these lexicons are shifted, altered, or marginalized as time goes by and the socio-ecological spatial dynamics that become the living spaces of those languages. This can have significant influence on the interaction and interrelation between the community and the existing environment. Furthermore, the destruction of some ecosystems in Lukabarasi speakers' areas has the potential to cause the loss of some vocabulary in communication. For this reason, this study sought to establish archaic Lukabrasi eco-lexicons so that the vitality of such lexicon is established. This is because, as argued by Maffi, Hindo & Bundsgaard (2000), when the environment changes, the language that lives in the speech changes over time. In the same light, language level that may change quickly is the lexicon. Wanyati (2016) observes that such change is influenced by three dimensions, including ideological, social or sociological, and biological dimensions.

Qorro (2013) has argued for the need to use African languages as media for reproducing cultural knowledge. In this view, African languages have the potential to be utilized for producing, encoding sustaining, and transmitting significant indigenous knowledge that can be lost if the present generation does not preserve it. Further, due to continued domination of these African languages by the foreign languages, a wealth of indigenous knowledge is being locked away in these languages and is gradually being lost as the custodians of this knowledge die out. In this view, there is a need for attention to changes in language that are related to ecological conditions, such as the surrounding natural environment within a given speech community. Thus, by investigating Lukabarasi eco-lexicon, the various of nuances of the relationship between the Kabarasi culture and the surrounding natural wealth of its environment are brought into light.

Lukabarasi Language

LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
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RESEARCH

Lukabarasi is a regional language used as a mother tongue in K mega North Sub-County. According to the Central Bureau of S tistics (20), Lukabarasi has approximately 136,962 speakers in Kenya. However, th survival of some vocabularies - especially the eco-lexi n-in th s lang age is threatened with extinction. This is because of the wide ad ignor nce of its significance and negative mother tongu attitudes mong key stakeholders; the learning institutions and the ge eral public.

Several studies have been done on L ka arasi lexicon. Mukulo (2016) examined the phonological adaptatie s of Lu barasi loan words. She established the morpho-phonological rules gover g Lukabarasi borrowed words, and the fact that ne words were be ng added into Lukabarasi due to language contact. F rther, a study by Mukulo (2016) found out that English loanwords ada t in Lukabara by being nativized through phonological processes such as vowel lo ering, devoicing of consonants, continuant strengthening, st weakeni , monophthongization of diphthongs, reduction of long vowels and vowel epenthesis. Another study by Luvonga (2017) so t to subject Lukabarasi songs to stylistic analysis to very verify the pro inen s of style employed by the artists in the framework of Elea or's Prototypes Theory. The prominent features of style were found to b displacement because the Kabarasi people tend to avoid o words b eplacing them with displacement features such as m taphor allegory, symbolism, euphemism, neologism and code-switchi . They d face-saving act. Although these studies only provide a prelimi description of Lukabarasi lexicon, there is need for an in-depth analysis on h to preserve efforts to maintain the existence threatened L kabarasi lexicons.

Archaic lexicon

Awe & Fanoku, (201 relates archaic lexicon to vocabulary though not alw ys, is a linguistic form usually used in the past time, but now it is out of date. A observed by Karagulova et al., (2016), many archaic words have en change their meaning or are no longer used by speakers in everyday fe. For the present investigation, our focus was on the archaism lated to the ora and fauna. Scholars are yet to agree on the distinction be ween archaic and obsolete words. Rababah (2016) argue that the term ob eans a word that is completely out of use. In contrast to obsolete, e archaic term is still known today as a part of the language (Traxel, 20). However, Antrushina et al. (2008) content that the distinction

LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
www.universalacademicservices.org

between archaic and obsolete is unclear because it is hard to determine which group this word belongs to. Given this, it can be concluded that the definition does not show a clear distinction. Thus, in the research, the writers agree that the notion of archaic and obsolete is similar because both words are ancient and are no longer used in daily conversation but they can only be found in literary or other written documents.

Language revitalization

Language revitalization is defined as an effort to improve the form or function of language use for languages that are threatened by language loss or language death (King, 2001). In this view, revitalization can be seen as an effort to increase the vitality of any level of language. Increasing the vitality, the vocabulary of a language may include deliberate efforts to develop and protect such lexis as well as fostering language speakers. In this connection, revitalization in this context is paying attention to fast fading Lukabarasi eco-lexicon. Attention to the diverse eco-lexicon will foreground the uniqueness of Kabarasi vocabulary use, which is largely concerned with how the language is used to describe the surrounding flora and fauna. Thus, the research sought to identify archaic eco-lexicon for preservation of the language, which can be used as future reference for the language researchers, historians and the future generation.

Research on the revitalization of archaic vocabulary has been done by several language scholars. One such study was conducted by Dewi et al. in (2018) who sought to identify the various archaic vocabularies in Kaba Cindua Mato (KCM). The object of this study was the archaic vocabulary found in the KCM manuscript. The archaic vocabulary referred to in this study was the vocabulary found in the KCM manuscript, but was no longer used by speakers of the Minangkabau language at this time. The findings revealed that most of the vocabulary in the KCM manuscript was almost no longer used by speakers of the Minangkabau language today. If the vocabulary is no longer used by a speaker, it will become archaic. For the present study, the archaic lexicon in question is the eco-lexicon found in the Kabarasi community environment but is no longer used by speakers of Lukabarasi language at this time.

Similarly, Haidir and Sinar (2019) examined archaic vocabulary identification as efforts to revitalize the Panai Malay Language (PML). They established that the archaic PML eco-lexicon includes the home eco-lexicon, wood, flora, fauna and fish. Further, it was revealed that the flora

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www.universalacademicservices.org

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ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

eco-lexicon is the most archaic eco-lexicon and that PML is at the Beginning Threatened level (level 3). This study points to the fact that some vocabularies may become extinct if not identified and documented. For the present study, there was need to establish the potential level of threat to Lukabarasi archaic eco-lexicon.

The Ecolinguistic Theory

This research was conducted based on Ecolinguistic theory. Ecolinguistics is a discipline that examines the environment and language. According to Alexander & Stibbe (2014), ecolinguistics is concerned with the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment. It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life. The premise is that language is very closely related to its environment. Thus, the language can be lost or extinct if the ecology that supports it is also extinct. The ecolinguistic study here focuses on the changes of language use due to combination of physical and socio-economic changes in the environment.

The focus on eco-lexicon is because the language that is dynamic is associated with the environment. Therefore, the eco-lexicon changes in accordance with the times and social life of the speakers speaking a particular language. That is, of course, the vocabulary used changes and updates when the old vocabulary is rarely used. This is caused by the negative attitudes of the community in using the language, influenced by modernization, schooling and language shift. Based on empirical facts, some Lukabarasi speakers no longer use and know archaic words and meanings, let alone used in everyday speech events. In this regard, language researchers must pay attention and document such eco-lexicon so that the language vocabulary is not lost and extinct without us knowing.

Methodology

Research data was collected using rapid word collection from native Lukabarasi speaker and the researcher's native speaker's intuition. The collected data were first grouped and classified under two categories; flora and fauna. In this light, 250 words were collected from 5 key informants and the researcher's naïve speaker's intuition (150 from flora and 100 from fauna). Systematic random sampling was used by selecting every third item in each of the two categories to reduce the words to 83 for analysis (50 from flora and 33 from fauna). A digital camera is used to capture the plant

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ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

and animal species bearing the eco-lexicons. The collected words were subjected to a Focus Group Discussion involving 12 native speakers of Lukabarasi. Photos of the plant and animal species were also used to ascertain whether the respondents recognize the names of these species. The data was tabulated and analyzed with descriptive methods. The referential method with the equalizing and differentiating techniques (Sudaryanto, 2016) to describe each of the sampled eco-lexicons. That is, the linguistic data should refer to the observed environmental identities an understanding of the meaning and reference figure. The descriptions of the eco-lexicon were also linked to interrelation and interdependence of the respondents in the area with their natural environment and place where they live (Mbete, 2013). This helped the researcher ascertain whether the respondents recognize and use the lexicons and how they relate with the species bearing these lexicons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Existence of Archaic Vocabulary

The utilization of eco-lexicon in a speech community can have a significant influence on how the community interact with the environment. Fill and Muhlhauser (2001) argue that a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature is greatly determined by the eco-lexicon types are familiar to the people. Given this, the knowledge of the environment lexicon facilitates interactions and interrelations that create dependence between society and nature. For the present case, our focus was to establish the manifestation of the wealth of its environment by native Lukabarasi speakers.

Responses from the FGD were shown on tables 1 and 2 below, which provided the status of the lexicons whether or not it is still recognized and used by the native speakers with three options: Option A for criteria still recognizing and using, option B for criteria still recognizing, but not using, and option C for criteria not recognizing and not using.

Eco-lexicon related to Flora

The first category of the data comprised of flora eco-lexicon.

Table 1: Vocabulary of Archaic Lukabarasi Connected to Eco-Lexicon of Flora

S.No	Kabarasi word	English gloss	Receptor responses			
			A	B	C	Number

LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
www.universalacademicservices.org

LWATI: A Jour. of Contemp. Res.
ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

1	Eyingore	Very healthy, mature maize plant	4	3	5	12
2	Amakhola	Dry banana fibres	6	4	2	12
3	Emikusa	Type of plant fibre used for tying grass when roofing a house	2	2	8	12
4	Eshimechelo	Type of edible mushroom	4	3	5	12
5	Ovukufuma	Type of edible mushroom	3	2	7	12
6	Elibanze	Type of weeds that looks similar to millet	2			12
7	Amatere	Type of edible mushroom	1	3	8	12
8	ovusinde	Type of grass used for making brooms	2	2	8	12
9	ovweywe	Type of grass for roofing a house		2	8	12
10	Elise	Type of grass founding swamps	3	4	5	12
11	Eshirietso	Type of wild edible vegetable	1	3	8	12
12	Eyimbindi	Type of medicinal shrub	2	3	7	12
13	Eshirakalu	Type of medicinal shrub	2	2	8	12
14	Elifwora	Type of wild edible fruit	3	2	7	12
15	Eyinderema	Traditional vegetable	3	2	7	12
16	Esarati	Traditional vegetable	3	2	7	12
17	Omunyasia	Type of medicinal shrub	2	3	7	12
18	Total		45	46	113	204
19	Percentage		22	23	55	100

LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
www.universalacademicservices.org

As revealed from the data collected in Tables 1, most words are no longer used and out of date. This is inferred from the frequency of using the lexicon among the respondents.

Indigenous food from plants

Eshimechelo, amatere and *oviova* are types of edible mushrooms and start growing at the onset of rains between the months of March and April. There are several edible and non-edible mushroom types among the Kabarasi. However, as revealed form the collected data most respondents were not familiar with the two items. Similarly, the items *vividerema* and *esarati* (types of vegetables) elicited very few numbers of correct responses. This reveals that the respondents are not familiar with the variety of traditional foods in the environment and the lexicons are threatened with extinction. The trend is the same for wild edible fruits such as *elifwora* which had 7 respondents (58%) neither recognizing nor using the item. This explains why such lexicons are rarely used by the present generation.

Haidir and Sinar (2019) observe that when words are not used in everyday communication, they may become archaic and eventually extinct. However, such extinction may also have a negative impact on the environment as the people are less likely to positively identify and preserve the items that bear such lexicon. This is because they may not be aware with its significance in the ecosystem.

Medicinal Plants

The environment can also provide medicinal plants for the community surrounding it. However, this can only be realized if people are in a position to identify such medicinal plants. From the data collected, it was revealed that names of traditional medicinal plants such as *eshirakalu*, *omunyasia* and *eyimbindi* were not known by most respondents. For instance, 7 out of the 12 respondents neither recognized nor used the three items. It was also revealed that due to destruction of the ecosystem, it is very rare to find this the traditional medicinal species. Furthermore, few of the present generation recognize this type of plant due to their one-sided belief in modern medicine.

Building materials

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ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

The surrounding environment is a rich source of building materials for the community. However, our data established that some building items from the environment were no longer recognized by the respondents. For instance, the word *ovweywe* (type of long grass for roofing houses) and *emikusa* (type of fiber for tying grass during the roofing of houses) had 6 people each (50%) neither using nor recognizing them. This is attributed to the fact that nowadays, it very difficult to find the type of long grass and fibers for roofing houses within the Kabarasi environment due to extensive land use. Moreover, the Kabarasi rarely build grass thatched houses and as such, these fibers and grass are no longer needed by the current generation. This explains why such lexicons are minimally used by the Kabarasi speakers.

In the past for instance, Kakamega North Sub County had thick forest cover harbouring a variety of indigenous plants, grasses and wildlife. Now, a considerable numbers species is threatened with extinction, mainly because of anthropogenic impacts such as over-exploitation, habitat destruction, introduction of exotic species and cultivation. In addition, the Kabarasi used to build traditional round houses with grass thatched roofs. Now, grass for thatching houses is very rare. As a result, the community tends to build houses no longer using the traditional grass thatched roof, but houses with iron roofs. What are the consequences? Of course, it will bring unfavorable effects in the eco-lexicon of Lukabarasi. With people rarely making houses made of grass, words related to different types of grass are no longer used in communication, which may gradually become archaic.

The potential for Lukabarasi eco-lexicon insecurity from extinction is beginning to be seen from the characteristics of native speakers in the Kakamega North Sub County. First, some residents, especially the elites code switch Lukabarasi with other foreign languages such as English and Kiswahili in their daily communication. Furthermore, Kakamega North Sub County has immigrants who have bought land among the Kabarasi community. In daily communication with locals, the immigrants prefer to use Kiswahili although sometimes it is mixed with Lukabarasi. Even so, the variety of Lukabarasi used is not fluent. Thus, the use of Lukabarasi is increasingly marginalized. As a result, some Lukabarasi speakers no longer use and know some eco-lexicons and their meanings, let alone used in everyday speech events. Therefore, this research is needed so that the language vocabulary is not lost and extinct without us knowing.

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ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

Eco-lexicon related to Fauna

This was the second category of the data collected. Results are summarized in Table 2 below;

Table 2: Vocabulary of Archaic Lukabarasi Connected to Eco-Lexicon of Fauna

S.NO	Kabarasi word	English gloss	Receptor responses			
				B	C	Number
1	Eshichenyelwa	Rock dossier	3	2	7	12
2	Eyinyanyanza	Centipede	2	4	6	12
3	Eshilikoma	Puff adder	3	4		12
4	Eyimbulu	Monitor Lizard	2	3	7	12
5	Eyimuma	Type of mud fish	1	2	9	12
6	Elinefwe	Type of edible black ant	2		8	12
7	Amafetere	Type of edible termites		3	5	12
8	Eshing'unyuny unyu	Type of insect	2	2	8	12
9	Etsindukunduku	Type of termites not eaten	4	2	6	12
10	Elitwitwi	Type of bird (not edible)	4	3	5	12
11	Elinyinya	Bat	4	2	6	12
12	Eyimbeya	Rat	2	3	7	12
13	Eyineng	Type of insect	2	2	8	12
14	Eyichenie	Tapeworm	2	4	6	12
15	Total		37	38	93	168
16	Percentage		22	23	55	100

Edible animals

The responses above reveal that in Table 2 above reveal that the fauna eco-lexicon was the most threatened. It is for this reason that words like *elinefwe* (type of edible insect) for instance, had 8 (66%) of the respondents not eating and not recognizing the word. Likewise, in the field of marine ecosystems, the area had several permanent rivers and swamps producing

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ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

different varieties of fish. However, the fish are almost extinct due to pollution of rivers and reclamation of swampy areas for farming and settlement. The consequence is that words related to the different fish types are rarely used. This points to the reason why for the marine ecosystem *eyimuma* (type of fish) for instance was among the words that produced the least number of correct receptor responses.

Names of birds and other wild animals

Due to the destruction of the rich forest cover, some rare animals such are *elitwitwi* (type of bird) and *eshichenyelwa* (type of rock animals) are rare to find within the Kabarasi environment. This, names of such animals are not recognized by the respondents.

The level of threat and extinction of Lukabarasi was determined based on the scale of the threat level of extinction. This scale was compiled by referring to the opinions of Grenoble and Whaley (2006) which made the criteria used by UNESCO, the level of threat and extinction of languages classified 6 scales; Level 1, Safe, Level 2 Risky, Level 3 Starting to be Threatened, Level 4 Severe Conditions, Level 5 Almost Extinct, and Level 6 Extinct.

Grenoble & Whaley (2006) asserts that a language that is in a safe position has several indicators including that all generations of speakers use that language in all domains of language use in the language-speaking community. When compared with other languages in the community of speakers, safe language functions as a language in the realm of government, education, and commerce. In Kenya, English and Kiswahili are the co-official languages used in government, Education and trade. Although the new Competency Bases Curriculum (CBC) that is being rolled out in the country plants to emphasize he teaching of indigenous languages in the school curriculum, these languages still suffer from lack of written forms and negative attitudes from teachers, parents and the general public. Similarly, a language that tends to have the risk of extinction will have limited domains of use and the number of speakers is smaller than other languages in the community. For the present study, it can be concluded that Lukabarasi situation is not risky because it still the highest number speakers compared to other language speakers in the community.

According to of Grenoble and Whaley (2006) when a language becomes threatened, the number of speakers shrinks from generation to generation. The realm of usage is limited, and the realm of usage especially

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www.universalacademicservices.org

LWATI: A Jour. of Contemp. Res.
ISSN: 1813-222 © June 2023
RESEARCH

in households begins to be replaced by other languages with wider communication power. The research has also found that some of the archaic words are replaced mostly by superordinate, as in the case of *eyimuma* (type of fish) being called *eyinyeni* (fish). The existence of synonym word form can lead to the status of the archaic word, especially when the equivalent form is used more frequently as the replacement word in the community.

As observed by Alexander and Stibbe (2014), when local languages are displaced by dominant world languages such as English, what is lost are the discourses which encode everything people have learned about living sustainably in the local environment. These are replaced by discourses such as those of economic growth, consumerism and neoliberalism that are at the core of an unsustainable society. In this view, it is envisaged that the spread of foreign languages such as English and Kiswahili among the Lukabarasi speaking populations have posed significant threats the environmental vocabulary used by the natives in communication. Consequently, the younger generation who are the majority of the Kabarasi population rarely use the language in general communication. This condition clearly results in the use of Lukabarasi Eco-lexicon in daily communication not being maximized, which results to some lexicons becoming archaic due to their minimal use in communication. In this regard, attention should be paid to the phenomenon of the frequency of Kabarasi usage which is getting weaker and the damage to some ecosystems in the area which is a big threat to the vitality of the Kabarasi eco-lexicon.

However, the general finding was that the use of archaic eco-lexicon Lukabarasi in the community is becoming weaker. This was due to the large number of migrants from outside the region who prefer using other languages in communicating with the natives. In addition, the natures of the children who go to school or work outside the community prefer to use other languages in wider communication. With so many young people whose frequency of Lukabarasi is growing weaker by the day, it can be concluded that the quiet a number of eco-lexicon is at the Beginning Threatened (Level 3).

It can also be noted that Lukabarasi eco-lexicon is not at the severe and extinct levels (Level, 4,5 and 6) because it is still used at all ages, parents still use the language as a mother tongue so that the inheritance is still from generation to generation. Near extinct languages were languages where the number of speakers was only a matter of fingers, especially the

LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
www.universalacademicservices.org

older generation. However, efforts should be made so that the language does not reach those levels.

Conclusion

Eco-lexicons in the Kabarasi Community reflect the richness of nature and the environment where the speaker lived. However, some lexicon is not available to the present generation due to the unavailability of the flora and fauna bearing the vocabularies, while some people use different lexicon borrowed from other languages to refer to the concepts. This has negative implication on the relationship between the community and the environment and the cultural identity of the Kabarasi people.

The eco-lexicon diversity of flora and fauna names is a manifestation of people's understanding of their environment. These insights are inseparable from the cultural reflection of the local community. The more lexicons that contain information about the environment of a language indicate the greater the positive interaction between the community and the ecosystem of the environment within the language community. The archaeological Lukabarasi eco-lexicon includes the flora, fauna and fish. However, Eco-lexicon Flora is the most common threatened eco-lexicon. Lukabarasi eco-lexicon is in the Threatened Beginning (level 3). This has led to a negative impact on the environment like destruction of totemic species from the community.

As a suggestion based on the result of the research, there is need for revitalization for the archaic words by documenting the threatened lexis and encouraging more scholarly attention to this field of study. Moreover, considering that some archaic words are not found in the written dictionaries of these languages. It is critical that the words be included in the later edition of such dictionaries. In addition, the research is not a thorough study of Lukabarasi archaic words because the researcher only focused on eco-lexicon. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that further research involving other lexical domains be conducted. In addition, the archaicity in the research is concluded from the only one variety of the Luhya language group. Therefore, follow up research can consider using more respondents covering all or other Luhya language varieties. The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research 2023, 20 (2): 95-109
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LWATI: A Jour. of Contemp. Res.
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