# The Impact of Vernacular Scriptures:

# Assessing the benefit of local language Scriptures among the bilingual Malila and Nyiha communities of Tanzania

**Mark Woodward**

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# DECLARATION

This dissertation is the product of my own work. I declare that the dissertation

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Mark Woodward

# *Contents*

4

**ABSTRACT**

# The Impact of Vernacular Scriptures: Assessing the benefit of local language Scriptures among the bilingual Malila and Nyiha communities of Tanzania

*Mark Woodward, 19th May 2014*

In many ways the Malila and Nyiha are typical of Tanzania's numerous multilingual communities, where both Swahili and the local language are used as part of every day life. Given that there are several versions of the Swahili Bible, two of which are generally available in the larger cities, it is often unclear as to what, if any, benefit will be gained from the long and arduous task of translating Scripture portions into the local language.

In this study I first look at the impact of translated Scriptures throughout the history of the church, and what insights might be gained from the sociolinguistic literature concerning the way multilingual communities use and perceive each language that they speak. I then carry out research among the Malila and Nyiha communities, asking them what they feel has been the impact of having access to Scriptures in their local languages in addition to the Swahili Bible. Finally I discuss the perspectives shared by the community members and church leaders, making recommendations for decision makers in other multilingual communities who may be considering translating Scriptures into their local language.

This study concludes that the benefits of translation may extend far beyond simply an increase in comprehension, and so decision makers would do well to bear in mind the fact that sociolinguistic principles play a significant role in how Scriptures are perceived, and should therefore be fully considered when contemplating how a community might best access the Bible.

# LIST OF FIGURES

## PREFACE

Having worked to support Bible translation in Tanzania for five years I have become aware not just of the significance of translated Scriptures in the life of the church, but also the complex way that languages are used in multilingual societies, and the fact that there are numerous underlying attitudes associated with language use.

In this study I have sought to draw on my background working with SIL International, conducting sociolinguistic research among Tanzanian language communities, and my interest and training in biblical and missional theology. First I reviewed literature, regarding both the history of Scripture translation and the impact of those Scriptures, and also sociolinguistic perspectives on language choice and attitudes in multilingual societies. I then spent time with the Malila and Nyiha communities in Tanzania's Mbeya Region, studying what impact translated Scriptures have had in those societies, and seeing if there are lessons to be learned for other multilingual communities contemplating translation of Scripture into vernacular languages.

I would like to thank all those who have given their time and resources to make this research possible, especially those from the Malila and Nyiha communities who welcomed me into their homes and churches and freely shared their wisdom and experience. I am particularly indebted to Heri Mwanjalanje and Lutendamo Silwimba, Scripture Use Coordinators for the Malila and Nyiha, who so expertly coordinated the time I spent in their communities, allowing me to speak with as many people as possible. This research would also not have been possible without the support and encouragement of the Uganda-Tanzania Branch of SIL International, and in particular Richard Yalonde and Susi Krüger, who allowed me to take time out of my assignment as Operations Manager for the SIL Katavi office for the purposes of this dissertation.

I would like to thank the churches and individuals who have supported my wife and me in many ways as we have sought to serve language communities in Tanzania over the past few

years. I am also indebted to the people who have supported and encouraged my tentative steps which have culminated in this MA dissertation, not least Eddie Arthur, Director of Wycliffe Bible Translators UK, who initially inspired me to see mission as something that is at the heart of God and central to his character, Tim Davy, coordinator of the Bible and Mission MA at Redcliffe College, who challenged me to explore more of God's mission throughout the Bible, and Maik Gibson, my dissertation supervisor, who has pushed me to make my thoughts more academically rigorous. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Laura, who has been encouraging and patient as always as I have undertaken this research and compiled the report.

My hope and prayer is that this dissertation will be helpful in some way to those making decisions regarding Scripture access on behalf of minority language communities, and that as a result there may be people who experience God reaching out to them as they engage with his story running through the Bible.

Mark Woodward

# *1    Introduction*

Tanzania is a linguistically diverse country, with over 120 different languages spoken (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2013). Alongside the many local languages, Swahili plays a major role in Tanzania as the national language and the language that is almost exclusively used in business, primary education and the church. There have been several translations of the Bible into Swahili, of which two are currently generally available in the larger towns and cities. Translation work is also under way with the aim of publishing Bibles, or at least parts of the Bible, in a number of Tanzania's local languages.

In many cases it is clear that the production of local language Scriptures would, and does, extend and enhance the ministries of churches and communities, but in the case of highly multilingual communities the situation is often not so clear. In these cases, where the mix of ethnicities often necessitates Swahili being used in church services, any use of local language Scriptures must be alongside the Swahili Bible.

The leadership of local churches, communities and other organisations in Tanzania need to make decisions as to whether and how they will commit their limited resources to Bible translation projects in local languages, and what shape these projects should take. These stakeholders will have different perspectives and priorities, but ultimately their common goal is that people engage with the Bible, and that God uses that engagement to bring about transformation in the lives of individuals and communities. Arthur (2009) identifies some of the issues facing the stakeholders, for example whether they should focus their resources on translating the whole Bible into one language, or parts of the Bible into several languages, and which parts of the Bible should be prioritised as the first, or possibly only, parts of Scripture to be made available in a particular language at that time.

This dissertation will focus on multilingual communities, investigating how they engage with Scriptures in both Swahili and their local language, and how these Scriptures are perceived. The aim will be to assess what benefit, if any, multilingual communities receive from having

access to Scriptures in their local language in addition to Swahili, to provide insight into the strategic planning of current and future local language translation projects.

## 2     *Language and the church*

Languages, and their use as a medium by which both people and God communicate, are mentioned at several points throughout the Bible, with the account of the confusion of languages at Babel in Genesis 11 (see Woodward, 2011), and the miraculous communication of the gospel message in multiple languages in Acts 2 standing out. The following section will take a brief look at the role of language, and particularly translation from one language to another, in God's mission.

### 2.1   Communication and Mission

While Babel and Pentecost are obvious accounts of the use of distinct languages in the Bible, Andrew Walls contends that the most profound act of translation is actually the coming of Jesus to earth. 'Incarnation is translation. When God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language. Here was a clear statement of what would otherwise be veiled in obscurity or uncertainty, the statement "This is what God is like."' (Walls, 1996, p. 27). We can then view the work of the church, translating the Scripture message into new languages, as joining in with a process that is God's 'mode of action for the salvation of humanity' (Walls, 1996, p. 26).

As we consider the day of Pentecost, where each person heard about Jesus in their own language, we see this as a natural outworking of this mode of action, as God makes himself known to each person. Bediako concludes that 'it is through language, and for each person, through their mother tongue, that the Spirit of God seeks to convey divine communication at its deepest to the human community' (Bediako, 1995, p. 60). He even goes as far as suggesting that the deepest significance of the biblical account of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is that God speaks to people, 'always in the vernacular' (Bediako, 1995, p. 60).

Kraft (1983, pp. 149-173) comes to the same conclusion, but from a very different starting point, coming from the perspective of communication. He reflects on the vehicles believers employ to communicate the message of Scripture, and how these affect the message itself, particularly if they are not consistent with the content of the message. If the receiver of a message perceives that it has been communicated in a code (of which language is an important part) that is not appropriate for the message, then 'the incongruity of the lack of fit obtrudes into and radically alters the overall message... The finer the tuning between the intended message and the language (or other) code used, the greater the likelihood of accurate interpretation on the part of the receptor' (Kraft, 1983, p. 154). Kraft (1983, p. 172, c.f. Kraft, 2001, pp. 182-183) illustrates this point with the example of English Bible translations, suggesting that certain translations make God seem like a scholar, or like he has been dead for centuries. Interestingly, this idea of uncertainty and vulnerability in the translation process, as the message is entrusted to the communicator and his choice of medium, ties in with Walls' (1996) view that translation is a dynamic process, bringing with it an inevitable risk as the Christian faith moves into new uncharted territory, interacting with new cultures and worldviews.

In conclusion, we must assert that from both a theological and a communications perspective, the language in which the Scriptures are presented to a community is a vital part of the message, which must be studied with a view to how it affects the perception of the message itself (c.f. Kraft, 1983, p. 173).

## 2.2   Translation in church history

In many ways the reality of Scripture translation throughout the history of the church has borne out the theological and biblical mandate for vernacular translation, with the number and reach of translations increasing exponentially over the past 2,000 years as the church has spread geographically around the world.

Smalley (1991) gives a brief history of Bible translation throughout the history of the church,

from 300 B.C. with the first translation of parts of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, through to translations into the major languages of the Mediterranean in the first few centuries of the Christian church, and other major European languages (as well as Chinese, Arabic and Persian) from 400 A.D. onwards. The printing press provided new possibilities and gave new impetus to the translation movement from the 15th century onwards, opening up the prospect of widespread literacy and Scripture distribution. Whereas up until the beginning of the 19th century Bible translation had mainly been into relatively large influential languages, in the past 200 years, with the birth of Bible Societies and other missionary translation organisations, the number of translations into minority languages around the world has exploded (Smalley, 1991, pp. 21-38). Along with this vast increase in the number of new translations, the last two centuries have seen a major change in the approach to Scripture translation with what Stine (1990, p. vii) calls the "professionalization" of the task. He adds that while the translation task has become highly professional in recent times, there has been relatively little research into the effect of new translations on the life of the church.

As we consider the huge growth in the church in Africa over the past 200 years, we can see translation of the Scriptures into local languages as being very much at the cutting edge of this growth. Mojola describes how Bible translation 'continues to play a key role in opening up dialogue with popular cultures and with the idioms and speech of the heart as well as laying the foundations for the language of the church, of liturgy, Christian evangelism, and even of theological discourse' (Mojola, 2002, p. 203). As our area of interest is East Africa, and Tanzania in particular, Mojola's (2000) brief survey of the various Swahili translations since 1844 is informative. My experience concurs with O'Donnell (2013, pp. 19-20), who reports that the Swahili Union version, completed in 1952, and the newer "Habari Njema" translation, finished in 1996, are by far the most commonly used versions in Tanzania today. As we consider Tanzania's 120 or so minority languages, O'Donnell (2013, p. 19) is correct in suggesting that government policy in Tanzania has generally encouraged the use of Swahili to the detriment of local languages. Her comment that 'although mother-tongue Bible translation has reasserted itself and increased its pace in Tanzania in recent years the effects

are yet to be seen' (O'Donnell, 2013, p. 20) is true on a national level, but I would contend that a number of local language translations have made a significant impact in their immediate location.

## 2.3 Scripture Engagement in Africa

Ezeogu (1998, pp. 29-30) suggests that many African Christians adopt what he calls a dialectical attitude towards their cultures in relation to the Bible, often seeing the Bible in direct opposition to their culture. While expressions of Christianity in Africa are many and diverse, there is no doubt that this is at times true, with Ezeogu believing this is due firstly to the attitudes of overseas missionaries in promoting the idea that indigenous culture is not compatible with the Bible, and secondly to the novelty of the written word in cultures that are predominantly oral. West (2008) explores some other hermeneutics that he believes are commonly used to interpret the Bible in African churches, including inculturation, liberation, feminist and postcolonial hermeneutics, while Kanyoro (1999) brings a different perspective, suggesting that the vast majority of African Christians engage with the Bible in an essentially literal way, seeing it as a message from God, directly applicable to their lives. She explains how many of the situations and concepts narrated in particularly the Old Testament can resonate with the rural culture and way of life across many African countries today, and also warns of the dangers of 'too quickly appropriating the text of the Bible' to modern-day situations, citing examples of child marriage and abuse of power by men in society that have occurred as a result (Kanyoro, 1999, p. 23).

We should not be surprised that the literature gives diverse and at times contradictory views of the ways in which Africans engage with Scripture, given the immense diversity of the continent and of the churches and communities of which it is comprised. However, one theme that seems to recur in the literature is that of the Bible being highly revered throughout much of Africa as the authoritative Word of God (c.f. O'Donnell, 2013, pp. 20-25), with that authority being worked out in various ways in the lives of believers.

## 2.4  Perceived impact of translation

Translation of the Scriptures into languages with no previous Scripture translation has been happening throughout the history of the church. While some of the effects of translation are obvious, particularly the benefit of increased comprehension for those who only speak that language, there are also many other perceived effects of Scripture translation that have been documented.

### 2.4.1  Basic Comprehension

The most obvious benefit of translation is improved comprehension of the Scriptures by individuals and communities for whom the target language is the language that they know and understand best. The Wycliffe Global Alliance (2013) website states that 'Our desire is that every community have access to God's Word in a language that speaks to them so that they can develop their own means of theological understanding and spiritual formation'. According to Dye (2009, p. 90) comprehension is vital to the growth of a Christian's faith, and it almost goes without saying that comprehension of Scriptures is closely linked to the proficiency of a person in the language of the Scriptures. For those who have a low level of understanding in that language, translation of the Bible into a language that they understand well can bring great benefit.

McKinney (1990) gives an example of this from the Bajju community in Nigeria, claiming that certain demographics within that community can only ever fully understand the message of Scripture when it is presented in their local language. She also points out (p. 286) that at times the proficiency of the community in a language of wider communication can be overestimated (and hence the benefit of translating into the local language underestimated) by church leaders and missionaries, who are themselves educated and highly proficient in the language of wider communication.

### 2.4.2 Perception of the message embracing local life

The act of translating Scripture into vernacular languages is in itself a powerful statement about the culture of the community that speaks that language. As Sanneh (1987) points out, 'Translation destigmatizes culture—it denies that culture is "profane"—and asserts that the sacred message may legitimately be entrusted to the forms of everyday life.' McKinney (1990) agrees, looking at what happens when a vernacular language is not used in the Christian domain. In these situations the result can be perceived 'denigration of local languages and cultures... This "not okay" message concerning their own language and culture runs contrary to Jesus' acceptance of people from all cultures and languages' (McKinney, 1990, p. 288). Sanneh (1987) gives examples of how translation of the Scriptures into the language of a community has stimulated theological development among the community, and given the church confidence to make their own decisions as to how to live as Christians (c.f. Sanneh, 1989, pp. 158-164).

Even if a person understands well the Scriptures in a learned language of wider communication, the impact can be lessened because God is perceived as distant and restricted to certain domains of life. Dye (2009, p. 90) believes that engaging with the Bible only in a language of wider communication 'suggests that Christian living is only for one's public persona, and internal spiritual growth is seriously hindered', giving an example of a group of pastors who taught about African Traditional Religion in their local language and Christianity in the national language. He concludes that this dichotomy occurred because 'They believed and taught two incompatible religions, but by using different languages for each they had never noticed a conflict' (Dye, 2009, p. 90). When the Scriptures are translated into the local language, however, they can go a long way to bridging this gap, as demonstrated by Avotri's (2000) account of how the translation of Scripture into the language of the Ewe people in Ghana brought deep resonances and connections between the biblical text and traditional Ewe culture. He focuses on the account of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20, and parallels between the spirit world evidenced in the biblical account and the

supernatural experiences and beliefs of the Ewe people, suggesting that the existence of Scriptures in the Ewe language is a powerful statement that God is active in the domain of the spiritual world which plays a significant part in Ewe culture. 'The vernacularization of Scripture gives space to the basic concerns of the Ewe about the life-destroying powers of the unseen world, but at the same time promises the possibility of deliverance, transformation, and restoration by a force more powerful' (Avotri, 2000, p. 324).

### 2.4.3  Language and culture preservation and development

A third and sometimes under-appreciated effect of Scripture translation is the way in which it often plays a key part in preserving and developing the language in question, which can in turn lead to a sense of empowerment among the community of speakers. While this may not necessarily be one of the stated goals of a Bible translation project, in situations where a language is previously unwritten any translation project will necessarily involve a degree of language development, which in turn can have major effects in terms of how the community interacts with the wider society (c.f. Sanneh, 1989, pp. 123-125). Sanneh (1989, p. 123) cites examples of how access to vernacular Scriptures was 'instrumental in the emergence of indigenous resistance to colonialism. Local Christians acquired from the vernacular translations confidence in the indigenous cause' . As oppressed communities engaged with Scriptures in their language, they were 'able to respond to colonial events in light of vernacular self-understanding' (Sanneh, 1989, p. 123).

The significance of language development and translation in the life of a community is also attested to by Batibo (2009) who tells of it giving new impetus to cultures that may have had low self-esteem. He describes the situation of the Naro speaking community in western Botswana, whose language went from being threatened to becoming a vibrant language which attracts second language speakers from neighbouring ethnic groups, 'who find it as a key to better living socially and economically, particularly in having access to the many Naro publications' (Batibo, 2009, p. 199). In the same way Mavesera (2009) recounts how the

Shona language was developed by missionaries for the purpose of evangelism and spreading Christianity. While the process of language development was disempowering in many ways for the speech community, as they were largely marginalised in the decision-making process, the long-term effects of the development of a written standard have nevertheless been positive, with the author concluding that the body of literature produced in Shona 'captures the African spirit and worldview in a way that promotes socio-economic and cultural transformation' (Mavesera, 2009, p. 9).

## 2.5  Translation in a multilingual environment

While from both a theological and a sociological perspective there can be many benefits to the translation and promotion of mother-tongue Scriptures, we must bear in mind that the sociolinguistic reality may be complex. Much of the above literature assumes that each person and community has a mother tongue, a vernacular language which is their primary and preferred mode of communication. However, as we will see in Section 3.1, the reality in an increasingly globalised and urbanised world may not be this simple. When considering the advantages of promoting Scripture use in the local language, it is important to recognise that there are an array of practical issues that church leaders must consider when encouraging their community to engage with the Bible.

Fast (2007) has attempted to explore some of the issues and questions that can arise when a philosophical or theological preference for minority local languages conflicts with the pragmatic realities of life and faith in inter-connected multilingual communities. She found that many expatriate missionaries in Burkina Faso had an "essentializing" ideology towards language use in church, favouring the use of vernacular languages in church settings over and against languages of wider communication. These ideologies were often drawn 'from the discourse of contemporary Bible translation organizations who use the concept of "heart language" as a keyword that equates the first language with the language of spiritual authenticity and identity' (Fast, 2007, pp. 72-73). The church leaders she spoke with, on the other hand, tended to be much more in favour of using languages of wider communication in

the church, perceiving vernacular languages as being potentially divisive, and a threat to the inclusivity and unity of the church. For this reason, Fast (2007, p. 72) found that many church leaders preferred to use Jula (the language of wider communication) 'even when this might mean the exclusion of certain segments of the congregation who are not fluent in Jula.'

While Fast brings up some important issues, her study does not go deeper into the role of each language in daily life, and the associations that speakers may have with each language. She makes the point well that expatriate missionaries should not presume to automatically speak for minority communities when advocating local language use in church, but we must also appreciate that the true language situation may be sociolinguistically complex and that the sub-conscious reasons for language choices are often difficult to identify explicitly. It would be interesting to sit down with the participants in her study and to help them think through in detail the role of each language in the community, to identify any underlying and possibly unspoken associations, attitudes, hopes or fears the communities have connected with each language, and then to see whether their responses about language use in church would change in any way.

Fast's study reminds us that in addition to the abstract sociolinguistic and theological ideas about the role of language in affirming community identity and communicating the biblical message on a deep level, there are also the more pragmatic considerations of unity, inclusivity and the practical demands of communicating in a multilingual society, to bear in mind. We must also heed Fast's warning that an essentializing language ideology can function 'to obscure from view the ways that languages other than the mother tongue are actually contributing to empowerment and inclusion, while subtly legitimizing an ongoing power imbalance between missionaries and church leaders that prevents this ideology from being contested' (Fast, 2007, p.73).

## 3    *Setting the Sociolinguistic Scene*

## 3.1    Multilingualism

For many language communities around the world, multilingualism, where two or more languages are regularly used in the life of the community, is the norm (see, for example, Romaine, 2003, p. 512).

While the terminology used in classifying the languages spoken by a multilingual person tends to assume the languages are learned serially, with the first language being the one that is understood best, Hammarberg (2010) contends that the reality may be more complex. For many people multilingualism is a more dynamic process than simply learning a first language in early childhood and adding on subsequent languages. This resonates with my experience from conversations with many Tanzanians, who do not consider it uncommon for a person to first learn the local language of their community, before learning Swahili at school and during early adulthood when they may move outside of their home area, which takes the place of the local language as the language with which they feel most comfortable. If the person marries from their original local community (or from another community), however, they may settle back in to life in the village, with the local language of the village again taking over from Swahili as the language that they predominantly use and with which they feel most comfortable for the remaining decades of their life. In this kind of situation it is very difficult to speak of one particular language as the person's "first language", or "mother tongue", if by that we mean the single language with which they feel most at home throughout their entire life. Rather, the situation for a multilingual speaker may be much more complex and fluid.

One helpful way to speak of the languages used by a multilingual individual or community can be to look at the domains of life in which each language tends to be used. Fishman (2000, p. 82) believes that the language that a multilingual person uses for any particular situation 'is far from being a random matter of momentary inclination... "Proper" usage, or common usage, or both, dictate that only *one* of the theoretically co-available languages *will*

be chosen by particular classes of *interlocutors* on particular *occasions*'. He discusses four factors, which he calls media variance, role variance, situational variance and domain variance, that affect the language chosen by two or more multilingual people in any particular situation. After reviewing various studies that have developed this idea that language choice is determined by certain factors, Fasold (1984, p. 202) summarises four factors that are often claimed to be influential: location or setting, situation (especially formality), topic and participants.

Ferguson was the first to use the term "diglossia", which he defined as 'a particular kind of standardization where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play' (Ferguson, 1971, p. 1). Others (for example, Fishman, 1972, c.f. Romaine, 2003) have expanded the use of the term to refer to a situation of stable bilingualism in a community, even when the two linguistic varieties are not part of the same language. Mesthrie *et al*. (2000, p. 38) refine this definition, such that the two languages are each 'assigned a definite but non-overlapping role'. They explain how the two languages in question are often given the labels of "high" and "low" varieties, referring to the social prestige of the language in the community. While it is difficult in the rural Tanzanian situation to ascribe high and low prestige labels to Swahili and the local vernacular languages, the concept of two or more languages existing side by side with each having very definite roles in the community is one that is very relevant (c.f. Anderson, 2004, Krüger *et al*., 2009, Abdulaziz-Mkilifi, 1972).

## 3.2 Attitudes of multilingual speakers towards the languages they speak

While multilingual individuals and communities by definition have a high level of proficiency in two or more languages, the attitudes they have towards, and the cultures they associate with, these languages may be very different, and this may significantly affect the ways in which they interact with people speaking, and materials produced in, each language.

One way to explore these different attitudes is through a matched guise test, as explained by Fasold (1984, pp. 147-179). Fasold gives numerous examples of matched guise tests that have shown that people have different attitudes and expectations associated with different speech varieties, whether they are different languages, in the case of bilinguals, or simply the same language spoken with different accents. Ji, Zhang and Nisbett (2004) have developed this approach to study whether bilinguals see the world differently, and reason differently, depending on the language they are using, testing speakers of Chinese and English, as well as bilingual speakers of both languages, and asking them to categorize objects using English or Chinese. Controlling for the differences in worldview of their test groups, the researchers concluded that 'For Mainland and Taiwan Chinese, the language used affected the way they reasoned, even when culture and testing location were controlled for, suggesting that different representations are associated with different languages and that language can serve as a cuing effect for reasoning style' (Ji, Zhang and Nisbett, 2004, p. 64). Grosjean (2010) addresses several similar studies, as well as anecdotal quotes from bilingual individuals, that appear to show that the language in which a bilingual communicates affects the way they engage with the world, or even their personality. Grosjean (2010, p. 126), however, believes that it is not language itself that determines how a bilingual person engages with the world, but rather a person acts differently in different domains, one of the results of which is the choice of different languages.

These findings are relevant to multilingual Tanzanian communities where there is a high degree of bilingualism with Swahili and the local language, with each language being used in certain domains of life and potentially linked to certain values and norms as a result. It is possible that the different functions of the two languages, with each generally used in certain domains, may cause speakers to have certain unspoken attitudes associated with each language, which may in turn affect their attitude towards and expectations of Scripture materials produced in each language, and their response to those materials.

As we might expect, the attitudes that multilingual speakers have towards each language can

make a very real difference not only in how they receive that message, but also how they respond to it. Robinson (1996), a development worker serving communities in rural Cameroon, hypothesises that outside development programmes which are conducted in a non-local language will have 'difficulty in affecting those domains which are bound up with the use of the local language' (Robinson, 1996, p. 54). Moreover

> The choice and use of a particular language in developmental communication affects not only the transfer of referential meaning, but also the (perceptions of the) social role and identity of the speaker and hearer. There may therefore be links between the choice of language(s) (by development agents) and attitudes amongst local people towards development in general and/or their own role in it. (Robinson, 1996, pp. 54-55).

His study explains well how language choice is very much linked to issues of identity and power, and is therefore certainly not a neutral medium by which to convey information (c.f. Fairclough, 2001), in this case concerning development. Rather, the language chosen for such programmes will communicate to the local community a great deal about the nature of the programme, and as a result may significantly affect their response.

Chew (2006) takes a look at the interaction between language and religion in Singapore from a sociological perspective, suggesting that language choice can and does affect religious affiliation. Looking at sociolinguistic and religious trends over the last few decades, she concludes that 'Language predisposes us to certain ways of experiencing. This study has shown that the global spread of English has multifarious consequences, some of which reach to our deepest religio-cultural roots, to innermost areas where we least expect' (Chew, 2006, p. 231). Pandharipande (2006) similarly looks at the relationship between language and religion in South Asia, where Sanskrit, Arabic and Pali have traditionally been viewed as the languages of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism respectively, whereas South Asian vernacular languages have not had the same "functional transparency", and are used more freely for different religions. Pandharipande brings out well the complex interplay of sociological and

religious factors in language choice in South Asia, showing that religious language use changes over time, and is affected by the ideology of the religion (something that Walls, 2002, pp. 29-30, explores in relation to Christianity and Islam), the authority that the language is seen to possess in relation to the religion, and the ability of the language to serve as an identity marker for the religion. From a sociological perspective we can summarise that there can be a perceived link between certain languages and particular ways of thinking, and as a result, certain religions, and conversely there can also be a link between certain religions and particular ways of viewing language choice.

In conclusion, we must be aware that the language or languages in which Scriptures are available to communities in Tanzania may in fact communicate a great deal about the Scriptures, due to the fact that the community may have conscious or sub-conscious attitudes (possibly including issues of power, identity, cultural values and religious norms) towards those languages. In Tanzania the generally expected language for Christianity has, at least since independence in the early 1960s, been Swahili. But the strong link between Christianity and Swahili may mean that the Christian message also becomes associated with other values and expectations that are linked with Swahili from the fact that it is a language of education, development and politics.

## 3.3   Discussion of the language situation in Tanzania

The dominant language throughout Tanzania is Swahili, with the vast majority of the population knowing at least some Swahili. For some (Petzell, 2012, p. 137, estimates 10%, as does Batibo, 1995, p. 57), Swahili is considered their first language, while for many others it is a language that is learned early in life in addition to the local language spoken in their community. Swahili is the language of primary education throughout Tanzania, and as primary education is compulsory, in theory every child will know Swahili by the time they finish primary school. It is significant to this study that the language used in the vast majority of churches throughout Tanzania is Swahili, due to the fact that most local languages do not have Scripture available, and that most church congregations are composed, to some extent,

of a mix of people from different ethnic groups who may not understand the same local languages.

While knowledge of English in Tanzania is generally restricted to the few who have had access to secondary education and beyond, the vast majority of Tanzanians speak at least some Swahili, with many speaking one or more local languages in addition. Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2004, p. 3) estimate that 95% of Tanzanians are fluent in Swahili, although for many it is a second language in addition to their local language. While the concept of fluency is one that can be difficult to define and evaluate, we can agree with Batibo (1995, p. 57) that almost all Tanzanians speak Swahili to some extent, with varying levels of proficiency, particularly in more rural areas.

This multilingual situation is the norm for many Tanzanians, with each language generally used in certain domains of life, with certain people and in certain situations. The Tanzanian government website comments on the roles that the different languages play in every day life, and how

> the use of a particular language comes to be characteristic of a particular social domain... In time the languages themselves take on the complex of emotions, prestige, etc. that are associated with the domains themselves. Thus, local languages like Kisukuma or Kigogo may be linked with the rural homestead or with traditional values; Swahili may be linked with town life or trade and English with government service, the professions and high status jobs." (Tanzania Government, no date)

This paradigm whereby Swahili and local languages (and, to an extent, English) are used in everyday life, with each dominating in certain domains, is consistent with the findings of sociolinguistic research carried out by SIL International in various parts of Tanzania, for example Krüger *et al*. (2009, p. 45), Bergman *et al*. (2007, p. 18) and Lindfors, Nagler and Woodward (2009, pp. 13-14).

It has even been suggested that the multilingual situation for some Tanzanians speaking English, Swahili and a local language is one of stable triglossia, extending the concept of diglossia first put forward by Ferguson (1972). For example, Abdulaziz-Mkilifi (1972, discussed in Fasold, 1984, pp. 44-46) suggests that Tanzania is an example of the intersection of two diglossic systems, with Swahili and local languages on the one hand, and English and Swahili on the other. Batibo (1995, p. 73) rejects this on the grounds that in reality it is difficult for three languages to settle into a stable situation where they do not compete or encroach on each others' domains. Batibo (1995, p. 74) does, however, see that the conflict perspective of diglossia may be applied to Tanzania, both in terms of English and Swahili competing as high-low varieties, and with Swahili competing with local languages in the same way.

## 4    *Research Design*

### 4.1    Context

The Malila and Nyiha language communities are both part of a language development and Bible translation initiative, coordinated by SIL International in Mbeya, comprising 13 language communities from Mbeya, Njombe and Iringa Regions. Since 2004 many of these communities have developed orthographies and started to translate portions of the Bible into their languages.
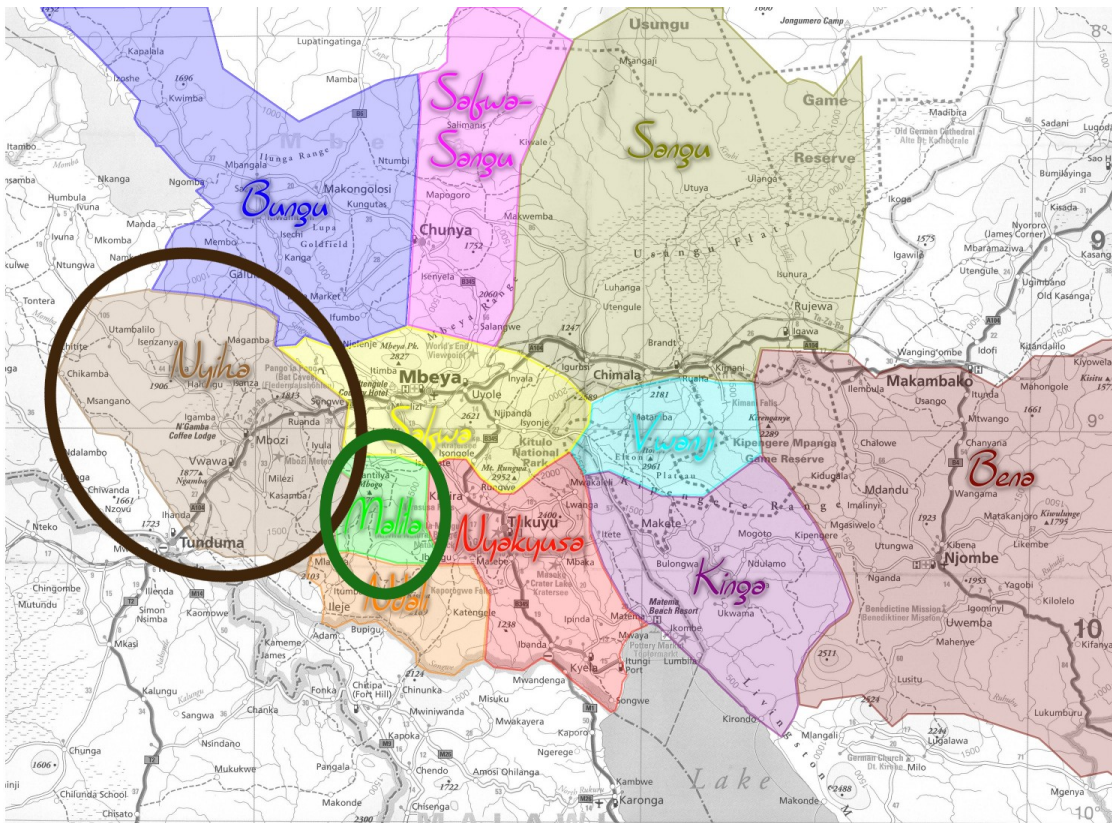
*FIGURE 1: The language communities served by the SIL International project in Mbeya (excluding Kisi, Manda and Pangwa) with Nyiha (brown) and Malila (green) circled. Source: SIL International Uganda-Tanzania Branch.*

Scripture portions have recently been published in both the Malila and Nyiha languages and are being used within the language communities alongside the Swahili Bible. As of August 2013, the following Bible books had been published:

Malila: Ruth, Jonah, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus.

Nyiha: Ruth, Jonah, Mark, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Revelation.

The Malila language community, numbering around 70,000 (Anderson, 2004, p. 3), are mostly located in the highlands of Isangati Division, Mbeya Rural District in Tanzania's Mbeya Region. Mbeya Region was home to 2,707,410 people at the time of the 2012 government census (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2012), with Mbeya town geographically and economically central to the Region. The Malila are one of eleven language communities living in Mbeya Region (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2013).
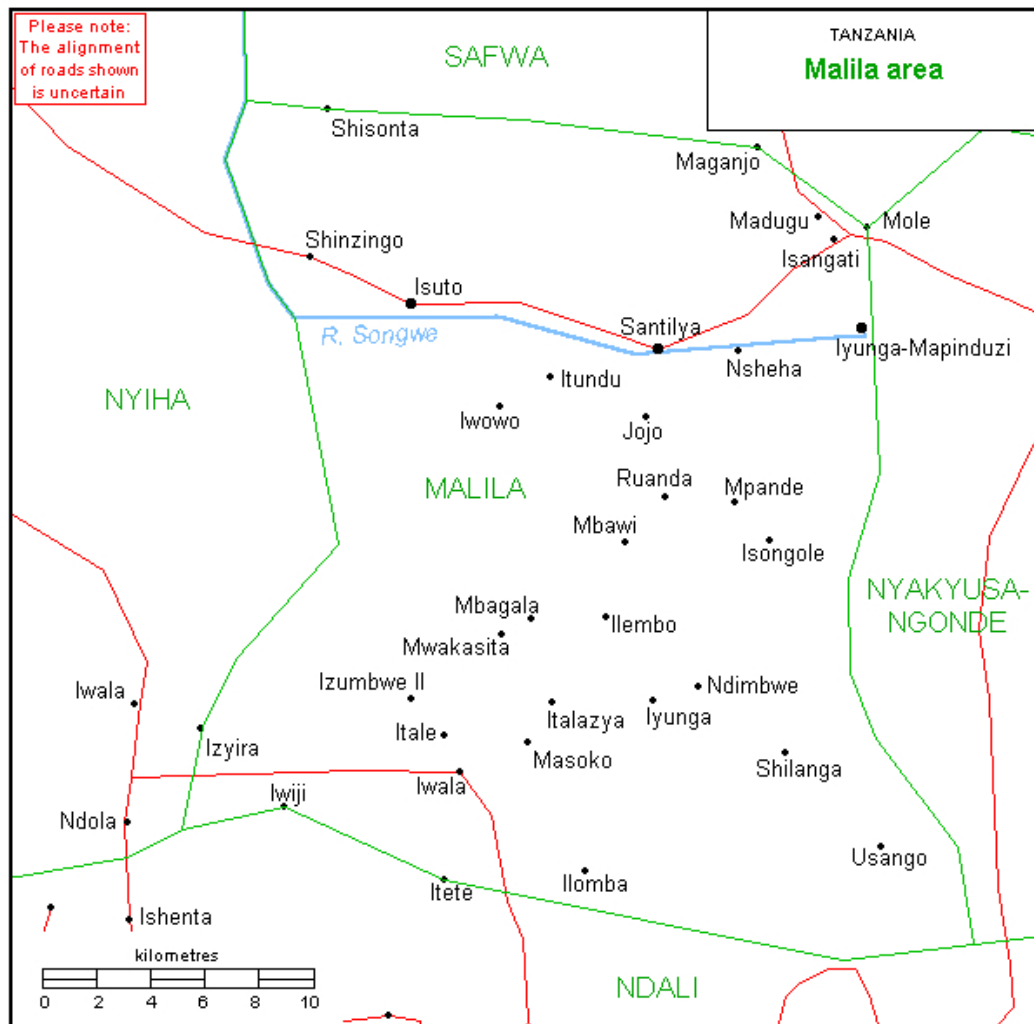
*FIGURE 2: The Malila language community. Source: SIL International Uganda-Tanzania Branch.*

The Malila are predominantly farmers, growing maize, beans, potatoes, millet, peas, sweet potatoes and a variety of other vegetables (Anderson, 2004, pp. 4-5). The central town for the Malila, both geographically and in terms of commerce and social interaction, is Ilembo, which is also generally agreed to be the linguistic centre of the Malila language (Anderson, 2004, p. 14). Ilembo is about 2-3 hours' drive from the town of Mbalizi, and a further 30 minutes from Mbeya town.

The Nyiha language community of 246,000 are located almost entirely in Mbozi District of Mbeya Region, to the west of Mbeya town (Krüger *et al.,* 2009), with the main town of Vwawa at the centre. Vwawa is located about 40 miles west of Mbeya on the main highway

from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka, with the TAZARA railway line also passing through the town.

Vwawa itself is a fast-growing town with many small and thriving businesses, while outside of

Vwawa the vast majority of Nyiha are farmers, growing a variety of crops for their

subsistence needs and for sale.
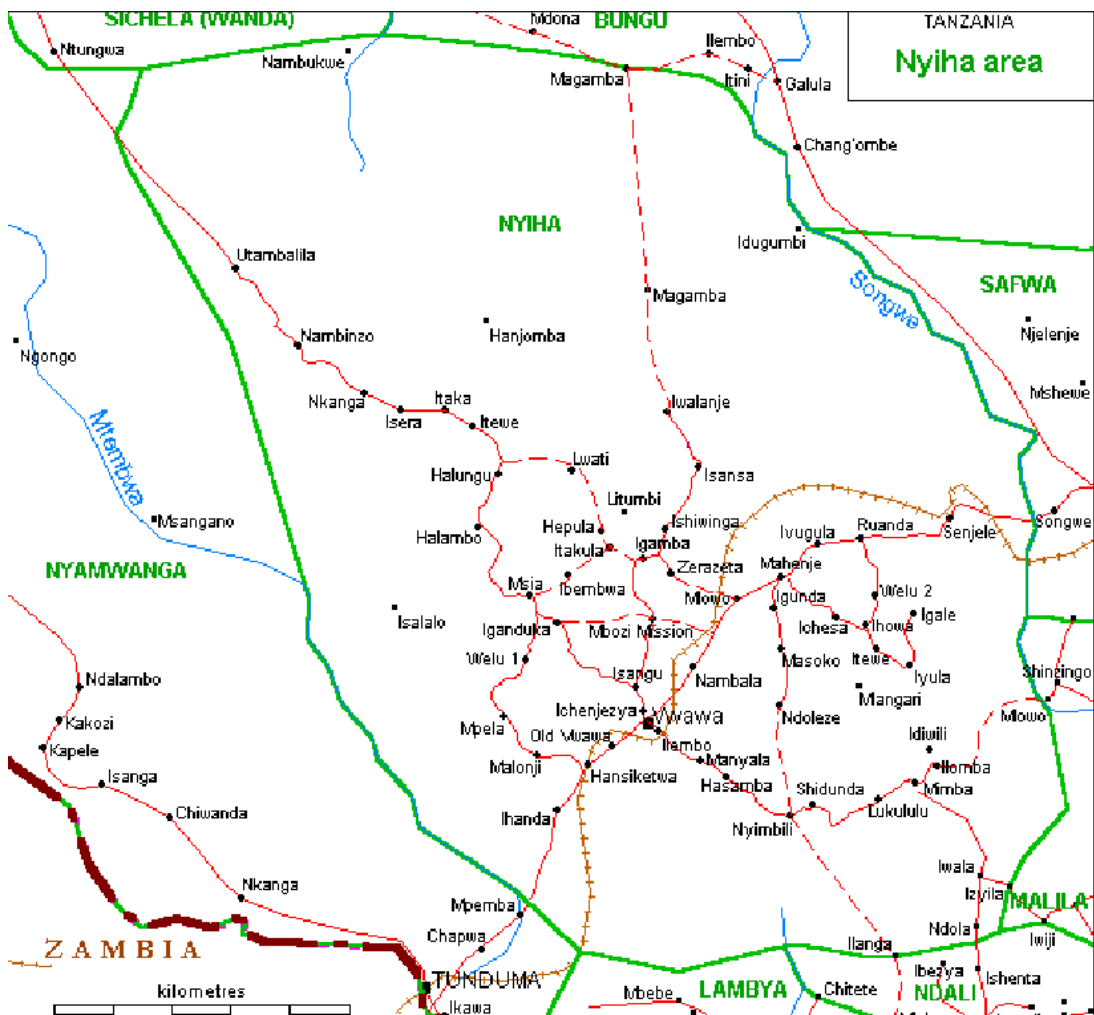


FIGURE 3: The Nyiha language community. Source: SIL International Uganda-Tanzania Branch.

The Malila and Nyiha, like many Tanzanian communities, have a degree of bilingualism with

Swahili, using each language in certain domains of life. Anderson (2004, pp. 6-8) found that

Malila is the dominant language amongst the Malila people, but that Swahili is used in

eduction and at the market, and was the preferred language for prayer among many of the

Malila she spoke with. Amongst the Nyiha, Krüger *et al*. (2009) similarly found that Nyiha is

used in most informal domains of life, with Swahili being used in official domains such as

church, education and government functions. From these reports it appears that while if anything the Malila language is slightly more pervasive throughout everyday life than Nyiha, both languages are used to a large extent in the domains of home, family, agriculture and community life, while Swahili is generally used in education, development, business and often in the church.

## 4.2 Hypothesis

This research will investigate the hypothesis that

- Communities interact with and view the Bible (or portions thereof) differently in their local language than they do in Swahili, hence there may be potential benefits to local language Scripture translation and engagement in addition to the Swahili Bible.

## 4.3 Methodology

There are various methodologies that could be employed to investigate the hypothesis, which could utilise both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Applied theological, sociolinguistic, historical and missional methodologies all have the potential to shed light on how multilingual communities use, or are likely to use, Scripture and whether they engage with the Bible differently in their local language compared to a language of wider communication (c.f. Hiebert, 2009, pp. 160-161).

### 4.3.1 An Applied Theological Methodology

In light of the available options[1], I have decided to proceed with an applied theological methodology, which seeks to engage the language community and church leaders, to understand from their perspective the impact that translated Scriptures have had. My main consideration in choosing this methodology was my desire to put the views of the church leaders at the centre of the research, as it is these leaders who are ultimately responsible for

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1    I have discussed possible methodologies and the advantages and disadvantages of each in Woodward, 2010, pp. 6-10.

the spiritual health of the community. Another benefit of this approach is that it gives me the opportunity to help church leaders and others to consciously think through language choices that they make in their lives and ministries. Basing the research around the opinions and perspectives of the community does, however, mean that it may be difficult to explore the full scope of Scripture use possibilities, given that the churches have only had limited access to Scripture, in Swahili and particularly in the local language, and church leaders may not have had the opportunity to think creatively about how to best encourage engagement with Scriptures in their congregations.

My hope is that by engaging directly with the Malila and Nyiha communities and church leaders, the research will be relevant to other multilingual communities throughout Tanzania, and will have credibility amongst those making key Scripture use decisions in those areas.

### 4.3.2 Research Goal

The goal of this research is to evaluate the impact that the Scripture books produced in the Malila and Nyiha languages are having in their communities, with the intention of informing future decisions in other language communities.

### 4.3.3 Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed:

- In what domains of life is each language used?

- What impact have local language Scriptures had in the communities compared to Swahili materials?

  - How do people perceive the local language books in comparison to Swahili Scriptures?

- What benefit, if any, are the local language Scriptures bringing to sections of the community who are proficient in Swahili, use it in every day life, and have access to the Swahili Bible?

- What barriers are there to local language Scripture use?

- How do local language Scriptures affect church unity?

### 4.3.4    Participatory Action Research

Social scientists have often classified the methods available to them as being either qualitative or quantitative, with each being appropriate in different settings depending on the research goals and the nature of the study. In a previous paper (Woodward, 2010, pp. 11-14) I addressed this briefly, and also mentioned a third type of study, participatory action research.

Rather than seeking to analyse a situation from the outside, as may be the case with qualitative or quantitative research, a participatory action approach is 'inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them' (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 3). The aim is not necessarily to deduce abstract universal truths that can be widely applied, as one might aim to do in a quantitative study, but rather to see each situation as unique and complex, seeking to understand the perspective of the insider, while at the same time acknowledging that the very presence of the researcher and the process of the interviews have the potential to bring about changes in attitude and behaviour.

When researching the highly complex issue of Scripture use in a multilingual context, involving many layers of conscious and sub-conscious attitudes towards the different languages and towards the Scriptures, I feel it is appropriate to use a method that seeks to involve the participants as much as possible. In participatory action research the participants are involved not merely as informants, answering pre-determined questions, but they are

allowed to guide the research, which then becomes shaped by their perspectives and views of the issues. At the same time, as participants are heavily involved in the planning and implementation of the study, it may be that their attitudes and behaviour may change as a result. I believe that facilitating a discussion of how people use Scripture, suggesting new ways that they may not have previously considered, and exploring with them the many complex issues of language use inside and outside the church setting, may be helpful in stimulating a review of the language choices people make when engaging with the Bible.

## 4.4　Methods

Given an applied theological methodology, together with a participatory action approach, I decided that the following activities would be appropriate.

### *4.4.1　Interviewing church leaders*

The interviews with church leaders were largely qualitative in nature, focusing on the language choices that they and their congregations make in daily life and when engaging with Scripture. The interviews were semi-structured in order to leave room for the conversation to progress in ways that I may not have anticipated. I wanted to understand the perspective of the church leaders and what they perceived to be the key issues, shaping the research around their categories rather than imposing a structure from outside. In order to give the research some structure however, and to provide a catalyst for the conversation, I had a list of questions that I generally asked, with the possibility of following other lines of enquiry as they came up. My questions also helped in raising new possibilities that may have been outside the realm of what the church leaders had previously considered.

The first few questions asked basic biographical information, including what ethnic group the church leader was from, what church they were part of, and their role in the church. The interviews then moved on to asking about the church congregation and their ownership of Scriptures in Swahili and the local language. Next, I asked the church leaders about

language use in their church, and the language of Scriptures in church, before asking what differences they have seen in the life of the church since the local language Scriptures have been available. Finally I asked other questions that tried to get at the benefits they perceived from the local language Scriptures, whether local language Scriptures increased the potential for disunity in the church, and whether there were parts of the Bible that they felt would be particularly impactful in the life of the church if they were available in the local language.

The insights and perspectives of these pastors were foundational in guiding and informing the rest of the research.

### 4.4.2   Interviewing church members

In addition to church leaders, I also interviewed church members concerning their engagement with the Bible in Swahili and their local language. Ideally I tried to speak with people who regularly use the Scriptures in both Swahili and the local language, but where this was not possible I also spoke with people to whom I was showing the local language Scriptures for the first time. These individuals were generally regular church attenders, and the Scripture formats tended to be written materials as these were what people had experience with, although the conversations often included some discussion about audio Scriptures too.

These interviews were designed to ask about people's language choices in daily life and their experience engaging with Scriptures in Swahili and their local language. My hope was that these discussion would stimulate thought about language choices in daily life, and when engaging with the Bible individually or within the community. Again, these interviews were semi-structured, and I took note of any new topics raised by the participants, in order to incorporate these into other interviews.

Both the church leader and church member interviews were conducted in Swahili[2], with responses translated into English for the purpose of this report. These interviews were

2    Interview schedules can be found in Appendices A and B.

mainly conducted in an informal way, as part of a conversation often in the participants' homes, as I felt this was appropriate given the cultural setting and helped to minimise the inevitable perception of myself as the educated outsider (c.f. Robinson, 1996, pp. 67-69). This fitted with my participatory action approach, as I believe the informal nature of the conversations gave participants the freedom to explore the relevant issues in our conversation, rather than feeling that they were subjects of the research. The choice of Swahili as the medium for the conversations meant that only community members competent in Swahili were interviewed, but this was consistent with the goal of the study which is to focus on bilingual communities and individuals, comparing and contrasting their Scripture engagement in Swahili and their local language.

### 4.4.3   Surveying Scriptures owned

A very rough quantitative method for determining Scripture use was to survey how many people own Bible portions in either Swahili or the local language. This was relatively easy to ascertain by asking pastors about Scripture ownership in their congregations, but it is worth bearing in mind that factors such as the availability of Bibles, variable literacy rates and the tendency for sharing scarce Scriptures need to be taken into consideration when drawing any conclusions about how the Scriptures are valued and used.

### 4.4.4   Observation

A key part of the research was learning through observation, both during the interviews and while spending time in the community. In order to record my observations I carried a notebook and regularly journalled with my observations of the language choices made and the ways in which people engaged with Scripture.

## 4.5  Personnel

Both the Malila and Nyiha communities have full-time Scripture Use Coordinators, whose

role is to facilitate distribution of local language Scripture materials and to encourage their use. I worked closely with these coordinators, Heri Mwanjalanje (Malila) and Lutendamo Silwimba (Nyiha), during the research, and their direction and advice was vital in planning how the research progressed. These coordinators, along with other key community members, devised the schedule for the research and ensured that we interacted with suitable church leaders, groups and individuals.

## 4.6   Data Processing

After concluding the interviews for each day I would sit down with the Scripture Use Coordinators to process what we had learnt from the qualitative research and our observations throughout the day (c.f. Silverman, 2009, pp. 221-223). Our reflections were guided by the critical questions suggested by Silverman, for example 'Which categories are actually used by the people you are studying?' and 'How do my difficulties in the field... provide me with further research topics?' (Silverman, 2009, p. 222). These discussions were instrumental in allowing the perspectives of the participants to inform the directions in which the study progressed.

## 4.7   Informed Consent

Before each interview started I introduced myself to the participants and explained the goals of the interview and the research in general, asking the participants if they were happy to proceed. Once the interview had finished I again checked that the participants were happy for their contributions to be used as part of the research, and asked them to sign a piece of paper indicating this. All the participants I interviewed were happy for their contributions to be used in this way.

## 5    Research Findings

Research was conducted among the Malila community from 29th November to 1st December 2012, and among the Nyiha from 23rd to 28th May 2013. Eight groups of Malila speakers (comprising a total of 33 people) were interviewed along with 20 church leaders from 10 different denominations. 22 Nyiha individuals were interviewed, along with 15 Nyiha church leaders from four denominations.

### 5.1    Homogeneity of the Communities

When asked what percentage of people in their churches were ethnically Malila, the vast majority of responses from pastors in the Malila area were between 90% and 100%. The median response was that 100% of the church attendees were Malila, showing that most Malila churches are entirely or almost entirely homogeneous ethnically.

The Nyiha pastors on the other hand reported much more ethnic heterogeneity in their congregations, with most saying that between 30% and 70% of their congregation was Nyiha. The median estimate of ethnic Nyiha reported by Nyiha pastors in their churches was 50%.

These findings are consistent with observations about the homogeneity of the communities as a whole from previous sociolinguistic surveys (c.f. Anderson, 2004 and Krüger *et al*., 2009).

### 5.2    Domains of Language Use

The Malila and the Nyiha, like many language communities in Tanzania, are highly bilingual, with the vast majority of community members knowing and using both Swahili and their local language to various extents. In order to understand more of which language is used when, and the associations that speakers may have with each language, the domains and situations in which each language is customarily used were researched, focusing on various

places, topics and interlocutors (c.f. Fasold, 1984, pp. 180-212).

Participants were asked which language they typically used in the following domains of their lives:

- At a wedding

- At a funeral

- At school

- At church

- At the market

- At home

- In the fields

They were then asked in which language they would typically conduct the following:

- Discussions about local culture

- Discussions about politics

- Discussions about Christianity

- Discussions about local history

- Mourning

- Speaking with children

- Speaking with elderly people

- Praying (alone)

At times the responses were not clear cut, for example many people responded that at a wedding they would use Swahili if there was a mix of people from different language communities, as often happens in the main towns, whereas they would typically use their local language predominantly at a village wedding. In general I asked participants to imagine that they were in a situation where everyone understood both Swahili and the local language, as my aim was to understand how people perceived the two languages, and which language people felt was most appropriate for certain parts of life.

If participants expressed a preference for one language or the other, I noted that preference, whereas if they reported that they would use either, or both, languages then I recorded that as a valid response. The charts below show general preferences, where 1pt is assigned to the chosen language, and ½pt to each language in the case that it was reported that either or both may be used.

As the Malila were interviewed in groups, their responses represent the consensus within the group, whereas the Nyiha responses relate to individuals.

### 5.2.1 Malila Language Use
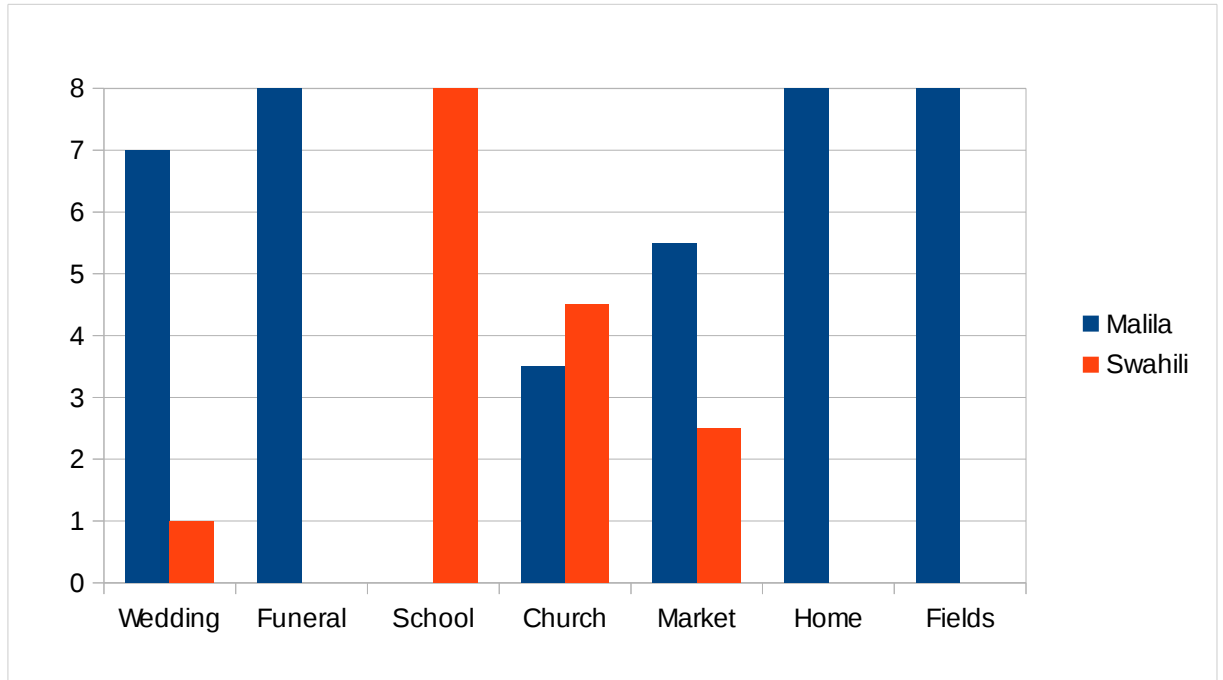


FIGURE 4: Languages used by the Malila in certain settings

From the data presented above it is clear that Swahili is the dominant language in the school system. This is consistent with government policy that Swahili is the language of instruction for primary education, and while English is the language of instruction in secondary schools, Swahili still has a very strong presence in and around secondary schools.

In church and at the market it was reported that both Swahili and Malila are used regularly, with some respondents claiming that they would use both, depending on the circumstances.

Weddings and funerals, together with home life and work in the fields, were almost exclusively reported to be domains of the Malila language. Of these, working in the fields seemed to be the most clear cut, with many participants responding in a way that showed they would never even consider using Swahili in that domain.
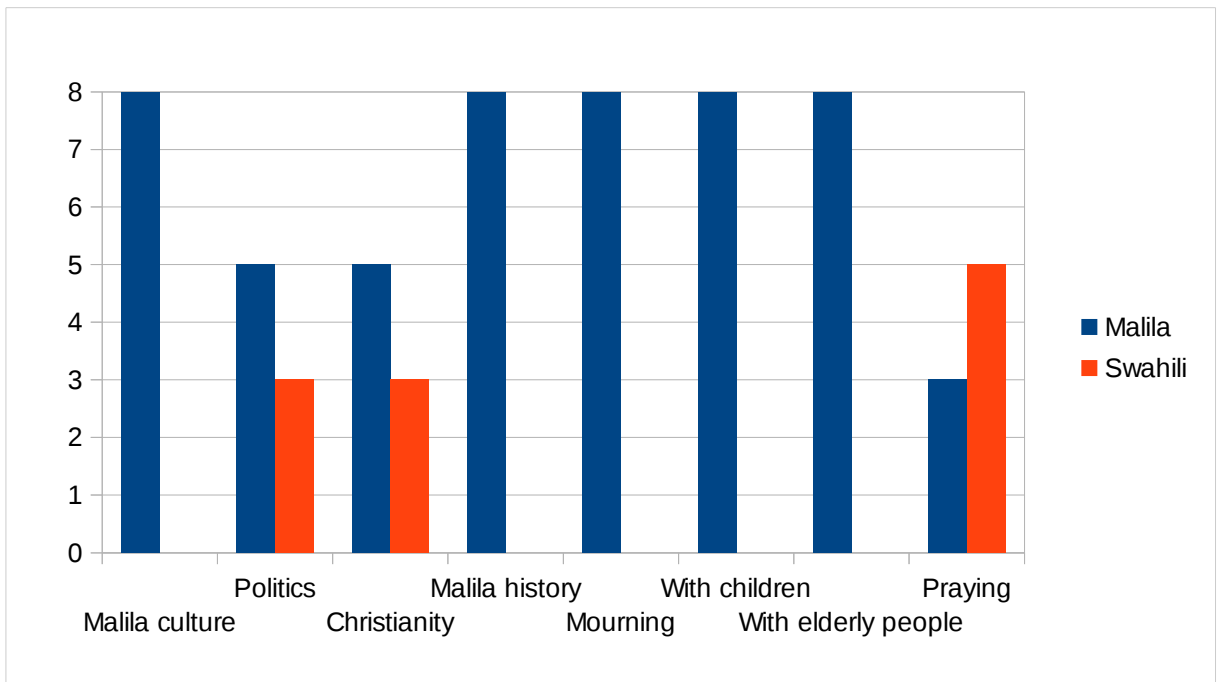
*FIGURE 5: Languages used by the Malila for various conversations*

When asked which language they predominantly use to carry out various functions in life, participants unanimously reported that they use Malila when discussing local history and culture, when mourning, and when speaking with both children and elderly people. Discussions of politics and Christianity reportedly occur in both languages, perhaps showing the influence of national institutions, for whom Swahili is the dominant language, on these domains. Participants also reported praying in both Malila and Swahili, which is consistent with the fact that both languages are used in church.

## 5.2.2 Nyiha Language Use
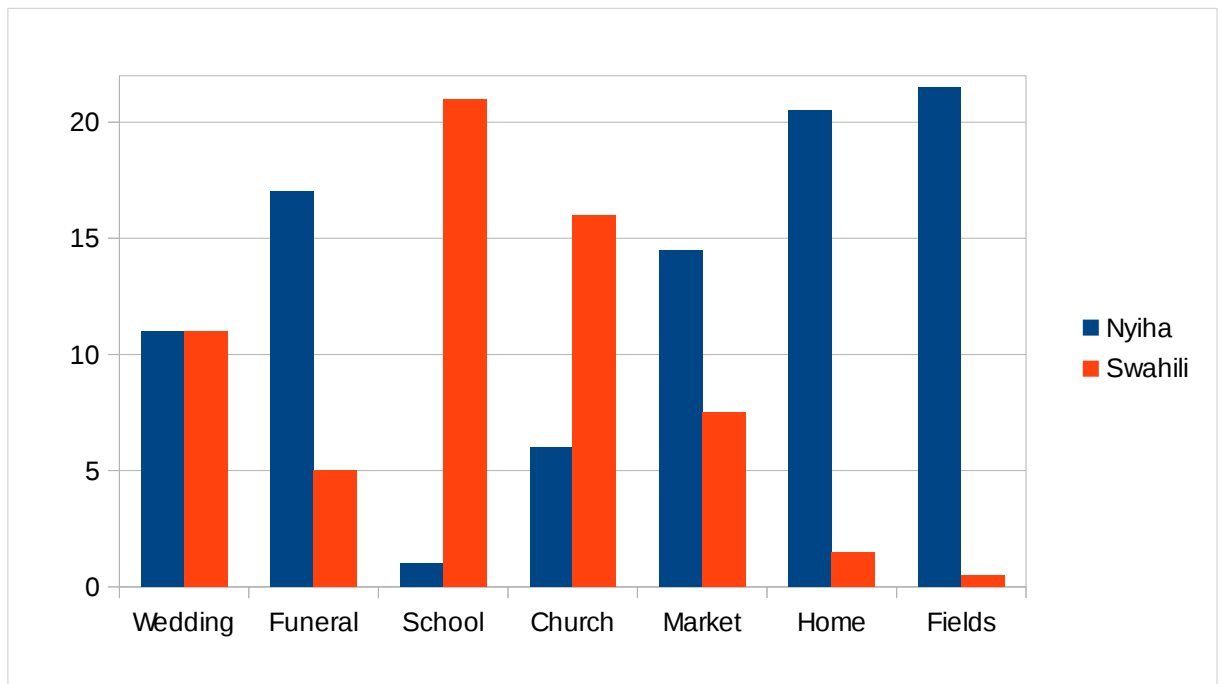


*FIGURE 6: Languages used by the Nyiha in certain settings*

When asked which language is predominantly used in the school environment, the Nyiha interviewed reported that Swahili is used almost exclusively, as is the case to a large extent in church too. Nyiha was also reported by some to be used in church, with one person mentioning that Ndali was used a little in their church too.

The market was reported to be a mix of Nyiha and Swahili, as was the wedding setting. Several people mentioned that for weddings and funerals the language used would depend on whether they were speaking with primarily Nyiha speakers, or with people from other communities who did not understand Nyiha well.

The home and fields, as well as funerals, were reported to be settings where the Nyiha language was predominantly used rather than Swahili.
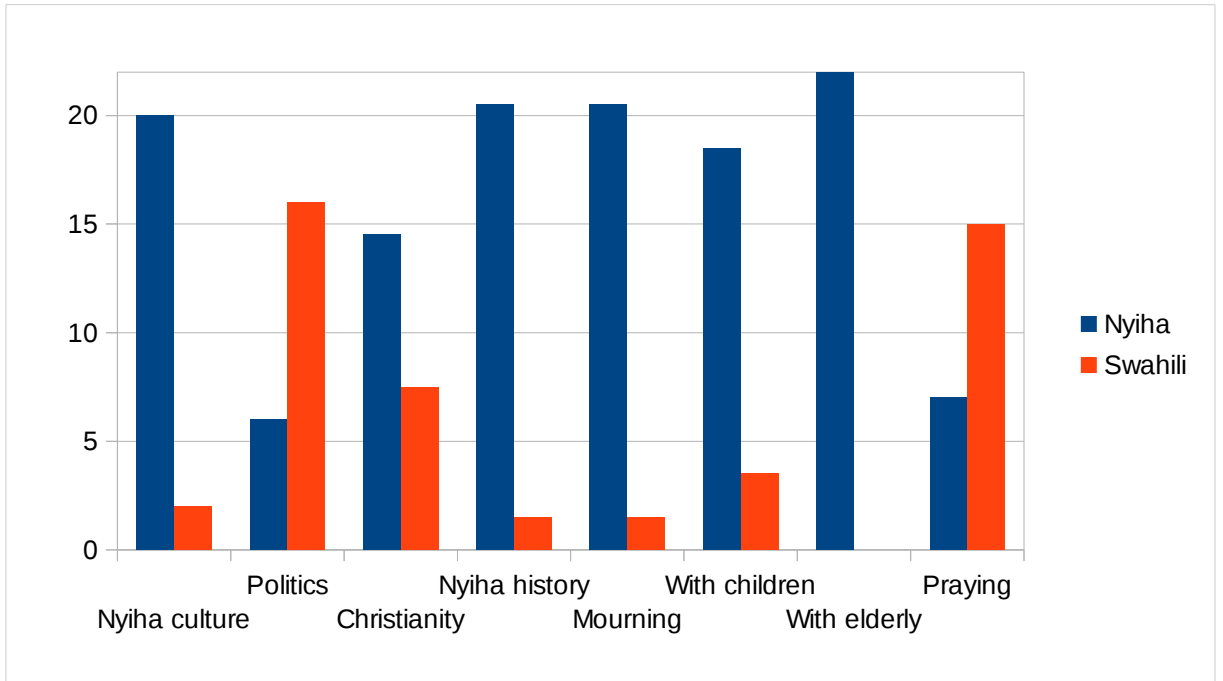
*FIGURE 7: Languages used by the Nyiha for various conversations*

Nyiha was overwhelmingly reported by the participants to be the language of choice when discussing Nyiha culture and history, and for use in mourning, with one participant giving the reason that the language was "deeper" than Swahili. It was also strongly favoured for speaking with children and elderly people.

The domains of Christianity and politics were both split between Nyiha and Swahili, but a majority of people reported using Swahili to discuss politics and Nyiha to talk about Christianity. A majority of people reported praying in Swahili, although some use the Nyiha language.

### 5.2.3   Language of Church

Church leaders were asked what languages are generally used in the life of the church and during church services, with their responses classified as follows.
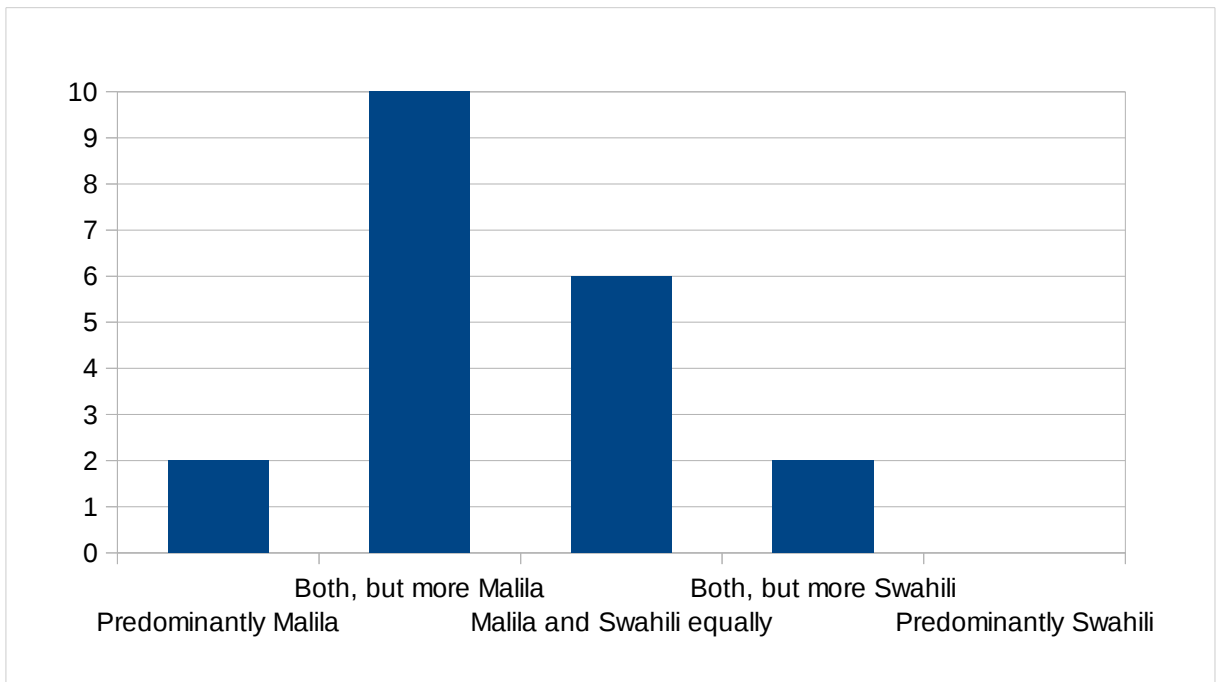
*FIGURE 8: Languages used in Malila churches*
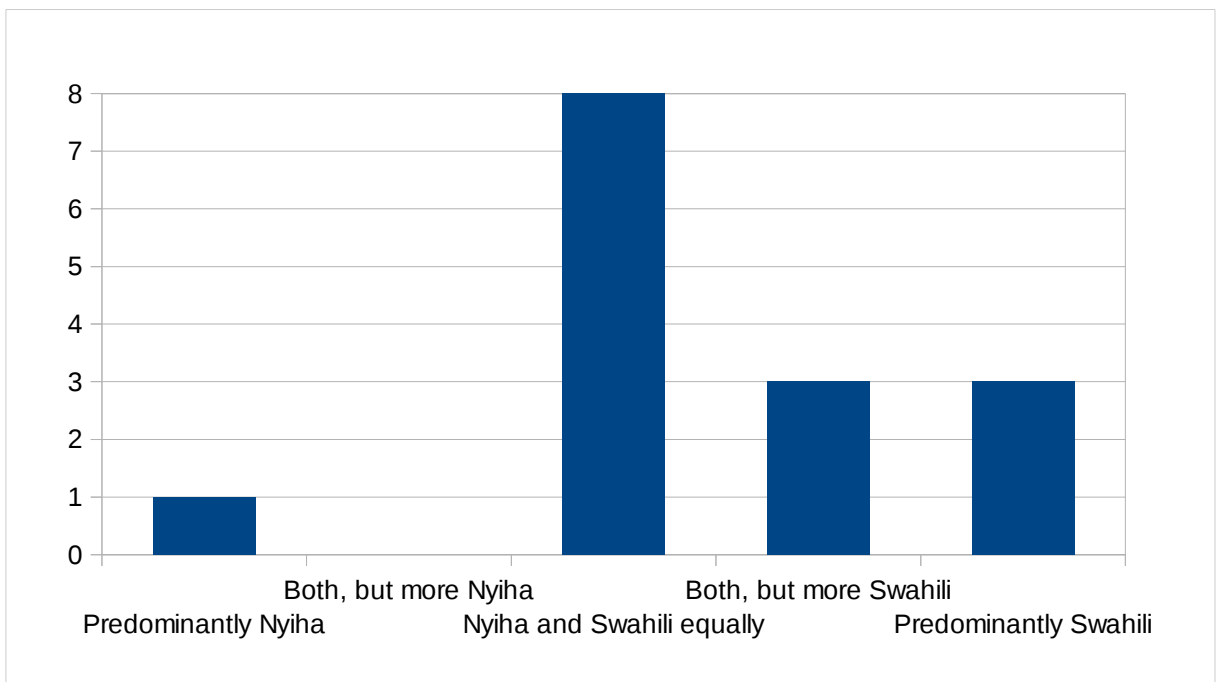


*FIGURE 9: Languages used in Nyiha churches*

These results show that the Malila communities studied generally use their local language more in the life of the church than the Nyiha do, although in both cases Swahili plays some

role in the life of almost every church. The fact that Malila is used more in church than Nyiha is consistent with the observation that the Malila community is much more ethnically homogeneous than the Nyiha, meaning that it is more possible to use the local language in church as there are generally far fewer members of the congregation who do not speak the local language.

### 5.2.4    Summary of Language Domains

It is clear from the data presented that for both the Nyiha and the Malila there are certain domains of life in which each of the two languages is more dominant. The local language was almost unanimously reported to be the language of choice in the home, in the fields, for discussing local history and culture, and for speaking with young and elderly people. In school Swahili is used almost exclusively, and it is also a prominent language in the church. Swahili is used to some extent when discussing politics and Christianity, and when praying.

It is worth bearing in mind that all those interviewed had a high level of competency in Swahili as well as their local language, as they had no difficulties in conducting the interview in Swahili. However, their responses were given on behalf of the community as a whole.

The domains in which Swahili is used tend to be those that are related to national life and development. Swahili is also used to a significant extent in church and for Christianity in general, which was attributed to the fact that the vast majority of church denominations encourage (or prescribe) Swahili use in church for reasons of unity within the congregation, unity at a national level, and in order to allow pastors to be assigned to parts of the country where they may not know the local language.

The domains in which the local language is dominant tend to be those relating to the rhythms of community life, such as farming, the home and mourning deaths, or relating to the identity of the local community, for example in discussing local history and culture.

These language choices set the context for the following section, where I will present how

community members and church groups are engaging with recently translated Scripture portions in the local language, alongside the Swahili Bible.

## 5.3 The Role of Scriptures in the Communities

### 5.3.1 Scripture Ownership and Use

In each language group church leaders were asked to estimate how many people in their congregations owned Swahili Bibles, and how many owned any of the local language Scripture books that have been produced.

Malila

Responses of Malila church leaders when asked about Scripture ownership amongst their congregation were variable, though almost without exception those said to own Malila Scriptures were fewer than those reported to own a Swahili Bible. Swahili Scripture ownership varied markedly from church to church, from an estimated 8% of all adults, to 100% of adults owning a Swahili Bible. Estimates of around 30-50% were typical, although four out of 20 church leaders reported that all, or almost all, of the adults in their congregations owned a Swahili Bible.

When asked about ownership of Malila Scripture books, in many cases the pastors responded that few of the members of the congregations owned the books, with typical responses ranging between 0 and 25% of Malila adults. There were three exceptions, however. In one church of almost 300 Malila adults, most people were reported to own Malila Bible books. Five people in another church of just six Malila adults were said to have the books, and another pastor of a church of 20 reported that he had given books to everyone in his congregation. The leaders of these churches with high Malila Scripture ownership were all very supportive of the Bible translation project, and had actively encouraged people in their churches to engage with the newly translated materials.

Half of the church leaders interviewed reported using Malila Scripture materials in their church services, while the other half reported that while their members may use them at home, the books had not been used in church.

Nyiha

The Nyiha church leaders generally responded that most of the members of their churches owned Swahili Bibles, with estimates ranging from 40% to 100%. Estimates of the numbers who owned Nyiha Scripture books were much lower however, with generally just a few people reported to have copies. The highest estimate was only 20-30% of Nyiha speaking church members owning any of the Nyiha Bible books, although one church leader in Vwawa pointed out that there were also speakers of other local languages in his church who owned recently published Scripture books in their languages.

Eight of the 15 church leaders reported using the Nyiha books in church services, although most added that this only happened occasionally, partly due to the fact that only small Scripture portions are currently available. One pastor pointed out that using the Nyiha Scriptures can make it harder for those who do not own the books to follow along.

## 5.3.2   *Impact of Local Language Scriptures*

During interviews with both church leaders and other individuals I asked a variety of questions aimed at discovering how the communities feel that the newly published Scripture portions in their languages are impacting their lives. These parts of the interviews did not always follow the same schedule or involve exactly the same questions, as I attempted to allow the participants to share their perspectives using their own categories.

In this section I will group some of the responses according to various themes, in order to give some structure to the responses of community members and church leaders.

### 5.3.2.1 Improved Comprehension

The first, and in many ways the most obvious, benefit of local language Scriptures was reported to be improved comprehension of the message. This was the case particularly within those demographics of the community for whom Swahili proficiency was relatively low, for example the elderly and the less educated.

Malila

Among the Malila, all eight groups interviewed, and all 20 pastors, mentioned improved comprehension to be one of the benefits of having Malila Scripture books. The majority first explained how they had seen others experience an increase in comprehension since using the local language Scriptures, with many mentioning the elderly as particularly benefiting. Women, and those who were uneducated, were also mentioned multiple times as benefiting from an increased comprehension of the Scriptures since they had started using the Malila Bible books. Amongst the eight Malila groups interviewed, participants in six of the groups also mentioned that they themselves often understood the Malila Scriptures better than the Swahili Bible, either referring to their previous experience or in response to hearing a section of the book of Ruth read in both languages during the interview.

Interestingly, not one of the 20 Malila church leaders revealed that they personally understood the Malila Scriptures better than Swahili, even though all 20 said their church members had benefited in this way. This may be due to the fact that the church leader interview was mainly framed in terms of how the Scriptures had impacted the life of the church, and so the church leaders were not necessarily considering their own use of Scriptures. It may also, however, reflect the fact that church leaders are almost always trained in Swahili, particularly in the larger denominations. As a result, church leaders may have either felt they already had a thorough understanding of the Bible, which has not been enhanced by the Malila Scriptures, or else they may have been reluctant to report an increased understanding, fearing that this would amount to admitting that they are not

entirely competent in Swahili, the dominant language of the church.

<u>Nyiha</u>

Of the 15 Nyiha church leaders interviewed, only four mentioned increased comprehension as a benefit that they had seen since the Nyiha Scriptures had been available, with women and the elderly mentioned as understanding the Bible better as a result of the Nyiha books. Six of the other church leaders reported little or no change in their church since the Nyiha Bible books have been published, with some explaining that the books have not been available for long.

17 of the 22 Nyiha individuals interviewed reported that the Nyiha books had helped Nyiha speakers to better understand the message of the Bible, with 13 of them mentioning that they themselves had benefited in this way. The other five expounded other benefits of the Nyiha books which will be discussed below, relating to how people perceive the language, and the associations they have with Nyiha and Swahili, but they did not mention increased comprehension as a benefit that they had seen.

From my observations it seemed that Swahili proficiency was generally higher throughout certain demographics of the Nyiha community compared to the Malila, possibly due to the community being more ethnically heterogeneous, and closer to the main Tanzania-Zambia highway where much business occurs in Swahili. This may be one reason why the Malila were more uniform than the Nyiha in reporting the benefit in comprehension brought by the local language Scriptures.

## 5.3.2.2    A new emotional connection with the text

Another often mentioned benefit of the recently translated local language books was an enhanced emotional connection between the reader, or hearer, and the text. Generally this emotion was positive, and the nature of some of the responses was intriguing, shedding light on how the local language and Swahili are perceived.

Malila

Many Malila mentioned that the Malila Scripture books had connected with them on an emotional level, in contrast to the Swahili Scriptures that they were used to using. 16 of the 20 church leaders interviewed mentioned emotions such as joy, comfort and a love for the Malila language. Others spoke of the Malila writings being "alive", "touching" Malila speakers, and drawing people to hear the message. One pastor reported that the Malila prefer to use Malila at the graveside during funeral ceremonies, as 'it is the best language. It enters far, right inside.'

A typical response was that of Daniel Sichone from the Moravian church in Ilembo, who himself is a Nyamwanga who has lived in Ilembo for three and a half years. He reported that 'People are happy if you speak Malila. People understand Swahili, but if you mix some Malila into the sermon people are very happy. They are very comforted to have books in their language. It is grace.' When asked what language Bible he would recommend for someone who knows both Swahili and Malila well, Enocki Mwasenga Mwayinga of the Calvary church in Shilanga responded 'He should use Malila. It will attract many people, especially those who do not know Swahili. People will be drawn to hear their own language.'

Seven of the eight Malila groups mentioned an emotional connection with the text as one of the benefits of the Malila Scriptures. Many people said that joy was a typical response to hearing or reading the Malila books, with several also mentioning that the message touched their hearts when they heard or read it in Malila. One person repeatedly spoke of feeling blessed to engage with the Scriptures in Malila, while another reported that it made her very happy, and showed that she was cared for.

Simon Mwampamba in the town of Ilembo reported that 'Malila gives us heart. It pulls us, it makes us happy, it is sweet. It is our language and pronunciation.' Heri Mwanjalanje, the Scripture Use coordinator for the Malila Language Office, explained that

When I read a book, in Malila it has more strength. For example, when I read "God

told Jonah" in Malila, it is like God is standing next to me. God is speaking directly. I realise that God is right there and he speaks with people. Swahili has truth but it does not touch people. It sounds like it is coming from people. When the message is in Malila it sounds to people like it is coming to them straight from God.

Interestingly, positive feelings towards the Malila Scriptures did not always correspond with participants reporting improved comprehension. After hearing sections of the first chapter of Ruth in both Swahili and Malila, Jessica Askofu from Mbagala village reported that 'Malila pronunciation makes us happy. Swahili is a foreign language. I understood the Swahili well, but Malila brings me joy.' On hearing the Scripture portions in Swahili and Malila, Eva Musa Salende in the village of Shilanga reported that she preferred the Malila section to the Swahili portion, despite the fact that she herself is not Malila and has only a modest comprehension of the language. She later told of how she desires to learn Malila well, and to be able to pray in Malila, because it is a language that people understand in their heart.

Nyiha

11 of the 22 Nyiha individuals interviewed mentioned a positive emotional response as a benefit of having Nyiha Scriptures available, with a variety of responses given. As well as joy at hearing the Scriptures in their language, several interviewees reported that people are touched more by the Nyiha language than they are by Swahili. Two participants mentioned that it is very much appreciated when Nyiha is used at funerals. Bernard Ntenga from Igamba village reported that 'At a funeral, if someone speaks Nyiha it touches people, their hairs stand on end! They know the person is speaking something important.' Similarly, Fabian Mulefu Halinga from Igamba suggested that he perceives the Nyiha language to be more trustworthy than Swahili, reporting that 'Swahili feels like a language of deception. Nyiha you know is for real, you cannot be deceived easily.'

Matias Silwimba from Igamba village related how people prefer it when he speaks to them in Nyiha rather than Swahili, and also how he prefers to hear Nyiha words spoken. 'The Nyiha

language makes me much happier. I am happy to know how my ancestors spoke about God. I feel closer to my ancestors.'

When discussing the benefits that they had seen from the Nyiha Scriptures published, nine out of 16 church leaders suggested that the Scriptures elicited a positive emotional response from readers. Rehema Mgala from the main town of Vwawa reported that when people hear Nyiha being spoken to them it makes them happy, while Silemani Haizulu Siame of Igamba village testified how he had read parts of the gospel of Luke to people, who responded by saying 'today we are full / satisfied.'

As with the Malila, there were several examples of Nyiha reporting positive emotional reactions to the Nyiha language, despite the fact that at times they found it more difficult to comprehend than Swahili. Elika Laiton Silwimba from Wasa village said that she prefers to read the Nyiha Scriptures as they touch her more than Swahili, despite the fact that she sometimes finds them more difficult to read and understand. Similarly, Grayson Mwashela from Igamba reported that he prefers to read the Nyiha books, even though he understands more of the Swahili Bible.

### 5.3.2.3    The association of the Scriptures with different domains of daily life

As already discussed, both the Nyiha and Malila communities are highly bilingual, with the local language and Swahili both having important roles in the life of the community. In Section 5.2 the role of each language in various domains was considered, with the conclusion that there are certain domains where the local language is dominant, and others where Swahili is primarily used.

This section will review responses from participants concerning whether the local language was felt to be more appropriate, or more poignant, for parts of Scripture that relate particularly to the domains of life in which the local language is dominant.

Malila

Around half of the Malila church leaders mentioned that certain things had had more impact when expressed in Malila compared to Swahili, because they related to areas of life where the Malila language is dominant, or because they related to local customs and practices that are strongly associated with the Malila language. For example, two church leaders said that people had understood the concept of a boat on the sea in the book of Jonah much more readily when it was expressed in Malila. The issue was not that the corresponding Swahili words were unintelligible, but rather that people were used to discussing seas and boats (presumably often referring to the nearby Lake Nyasa) in the local language. The church leaders reported that since people were used to talking about life on the lake in Malila, these biblical concepts were more "understandable" when presented in Malila than they were in the Swahili Bible.

Other examples of parts of the Bible that were said to have more impact when heard in Malila include the story of Ruth, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, the parable of the women preparing spare oil for their lamps, and Jesus encouraging people to bring their burdens to him. These were all identified by church leaders as Scripture portions that had a strong impact on people in Malila due to their relevance to the domains of life where Malila is dominant. Much of the story of Ruth is set in an agricultural society at harvest time, which, together with other prominent themes such as inheritance (of both property and wives) and the significance of family ties, strike a chord among the Malila people for whom these concepts have been part of the life of the community for centuries (c.f. Kanyoro, 1999, pp. 22-24).

Masudi Daiman, an elder at Calvary church in Ilembo, testified to the impact of the Malila Scriptures when they relate to everyday activities in the Malila-dominated domains of life. 'The Malila Bible says that Jesus walked, that he went here and there. When we hear these things we know who Jesus is. To hear that Jesus walked, in Malila, is just like you are walking with your friend to the market... Even though you understand it well in Swahili.' For

54

Daiman, the fact that the everyday accounts of Jesus were being related in Malila had a strong impact on him, despite the fact that he had always understood (on a cognitive level) the words in Swahili.

The Malila groups gave similar examples of parts of the Bible that had a stronger impact in Malila. One group in Ilembo gave the same illustration of Jesus talking of burdens feeling more profound in Malila as that is the language that people use in the fields and for manual labour. Another group in Ilembo shared how the books of Ruth and Jonah had both had more impact on them in Malila. 'The story of Ruth relates to our culture. If Naomi had had other sons they would have married Ruth and Orpah. We do this too, although not so much these days because of AIDS... We also understand Jonah better in Malila... the bottom of the boat, the storm, the sea, wearing sackcloth.'

A group interviewed in Mbawi village reported that certain words have more impact in Malila, such as the word for "donkey", adding that they really understand the Malila word for donkey better than Swahili. While they knew that the Swahili word referred to a donkey, there was something about hearing the word, that referred to a Malila domain of life, in the Malila language, that caused the group to "understand" it better. They went on to say 'We are touched by the book of Ruth in Malila, because it concerns things that we do every day in the Malila language. We understand ideas relating to death in Malila. These are much more poignant in Malila... We recognise the things of here. We see God.'

A third group in Ilembo mentioned that agricultural concepts are much clearer in Malila, since that is the language people use in the fields. 'When the Bible talks about olive trees and grape vines this is much clearer in Malila. This is because the Bible is in the environment of home, so people understand it better, even if they understand Swahili well.' Like Daiman, this group spoke of people "understanding" more clearly the concepts in Malila, despite having already understood them well in Swahili, due to the fact that they related to Malila domains of life.

Nyiha

The Nyiha pastors likewise gave some examples of how the Nyiha Scriptures had made the message of those Scriptures more poignant. Grayson Mwashela, a leader of the Moravian church in Igamba village suggested that the Scripture portions where Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, and where he healed people, have particular impact in Nyiha. He reported that 'When people hear that Jesus has the power to heal, in Nyiha, it gives them faith.'

Several of the Nyiha individuals interviewed also spoke of the Nyiha Scriptures carrying more weight than Swahili when they are concerning more personal domains, or areas of life that people consider to be private. Two shared how Nyiha can seem more shocking to people, and makes more of an emotional impact on the hearer concerning private issues. When asked about the difference between the Nyiha Scriptures and the Swahili Bible, Bernard Ntenga from Igamba reported that 'Nyiha has more weight. When people hear in Swahili they do not care as much. Nyiha words are heavy for people. If someone wants to say something shocking, for example concerning private body parts, or adultery, he will use Swahili so that it comes across as less shocking, or crude.' This was backed up by Fabian Mulefu Halinga from Igamba, who described how Swahili is often used to talk of things that would be too shocking if they were said in Nyiha.

Similarly, Laiton Kosam Silwimba from Wasa village reported that hearing the narratives about Jesus in Nyiha had had a greater impact on him than when he had heard them previously in Swahili.

> Nyiha things are explained better. It makes me realise that the Bible narratives are about things that happened here on earth. For example, when I read about Bethlehem in Swahili it sounds like it is a place in heaven. But when I read about it in Nyiha I realise that it is a real place here on earth. It's not just stories. Swahili is very far.

In general the Nyiha gave fewer examples of Scripture portions that were more poignant in their language than in Swahili, compared to the Malila. This may partly be because many of the Nyiha are located within 10-15 miles of the main Tanzania-Zambia highway, and the increased business and development associated with it, whereas the Malila are geographically more isolated. As a result the Nyiha may feel less of a distinction between the domains of home, family and community on the one hand, and business, education and development on the other, than the Malila whose traditional community life tends to be more separate from these Swahili-dominated domains.

### 5.3.2.4    The significance of the act of translating

In addition to the benefits already discussed, the fact that a message has been translated into the language and culture of a community may in itself have a significant impact on that community. In discussions with Malila and Nyiha participants, several people shared how the simple fact that parts of the Bible had been translated into their local language had added to the impact that those Scripture portions had among the community.

Malila

When asking both church leaders and individuals in the Malila community about the impact of Malila Scriptures, one response that was repeatedly mentioned was that "it is our language", or "it is the language we were born with." Sometimes this was to illustrate the fact that a Malila understood the Malila language best because it is the language they have known and spoken for the longest, but at other times it was clear that this statement went beyond the considerations of comprehension, and was very much linked to an individual and corporate identity as Malila speakers.

A group of participants in Mbagala village expressed that the newly translated Malila Scriptures have shown them that 'God knows all languages... He knows us.' Similarly, Heri Mwanjalanje commented that 'Many people did not know that God understands all

languages. Now that the books are available they can pray in Malila knowing that God understands all languages. Translation has helped this.'

When asked which language Scriptures someone should use if they knew both Swahili and Malila well, Daniel Sichone, Pastor of the Moravian church in Ilembo, suggested that the person should use Malila, reasoning that when this person went out to share the Scriptures with others, those people would be very happy, and 'would know that their language has been respected.' Patrick Joseph, Pastor of the Last Church of God in Iyunga agreed, suggesting that if someone were to come to his village and only speak Swahili people would feel that he was despising them. The fact that the Scriptures are not only in Swahili but parts have now been translated into Malila causes the community to have much more respect for the message of those Scriptures.

Major Anderson Lusense, Pastor of the Salvation Army church in Shilanga, spoke of how the Malila language is extremely important to the community, because it is their language of origin. He reported that since the Malila Scriptures have been published, 'People who were previously outside of the church have returned because of the books.' Similarly, Lemsi Nsungwe Ndabhila, Pastor of the Nazarene church in Luanda, shared his opinion that 'In any community in the world you must reach people in their language, in order to attract people and so that they will understand.'

Nyiha

Amongst the Nyiha too there was a strong feeling that the Nyiha language plays a vital role in the identity of the community, and for this reason the translation of Scripture portions into Nyiha was highly significant. As with the Malila, several Nyiha participants expressed how their language carries more weight, and more respect, than Swahili, particularly in the villages. Ali Singogo from Wasa village reported that 'with old people it is better to use Nyiha. If you use Swahili people think you are despising them', reasoning that the same attitudes are evident when Scriptures are available to people in Swahili and Nyiha.

When asked about the difference between reading the Scriptures in Swahili and Nyiha, Bernard Ntenga from Igamba village expressed that 'The Nyiha Scriptures carry more weight. When something is in Swahili people do not care as much. The local language has more insistence, it speaks with more authority.'

When asked what language Bible he would recommend for someone who knew both Nyiha and Swahili well, Elia Said Nzunda, an elder of the Pentecostal Holiness Association church in Vwawa, replied that Nyiha would be understood better by a bilingual person. In addition to increased comprehension, he believed that a Nyiha person hearing a message in Nyiha knows that the message concerns him, reasoning that 'It is his things, it is not just from others.' Laiton Kosam Silwimba similarly shared how 'If something is in Nyiha it is not something new, it is your own... People know they are things of right inside. If you talk to someone in Swahili they think it only concerns non-Nyiha speakers. If it is in Nyiha he knows it is for him.'

### 5.3.2.5    Language development and preservation

In addition to the previous four sections concerning benefits in how the local language Scriptures are received and perceived in relation to the Swahili Bible, the idea that the Scriptures have helped to preserve and develop the local language was also repeatedly mentioned as a benefit of translation. While preservation of the local language does not directly advance the goal of increasing Scripture engagement in the community, it was nevertheless seen as one of the major benefits of the local language books.

Malila

Many of the Malila groups and church leaders mentioned that the status of the Malila language in the community has been strengthened since the books have been available. When asked whether they would recommend other language communities translating Scriptures into their local languages rather than relying on Swahili materials, the Malila were

almost unanimous in advocating translation into the local language. The reasons given were partly so that people, particularly the elderly, would understand the Scriptures better, but partly also came from a conviction that preserving and developing local languages was something that was valuable in itself. Fahari Ntuta Mwinamu, Pastor of the Baptist church in Mbawi village, responded that 'They should translate the Bible into their local language too. Our languages will die if we only use Swahili. It will be a great loss if the languages die... God made these languages. If Malila were to die it would be a great loss. We would not have listened to God.' Samueli Mwasenga, Pastor of the Salvation Army church in Ilembo, suggested that it is important for children to keep learning their local language in order to keep their local identity. This concept was also mentioned by several of the Malila groups interviewed, including one group in Ilembo who expressed that 'It is important to know one's origin. The Malila language is a very important part of knowing one's origin. Without their local language a person is in the air without roots.'

For many Malila, the process of translating Scriptures and publishing books in the local language was seen to be a key factor in encouraging the preservation and development of that language. A few even suggested that Malila written materials have been beneficial in helping to teach the language to children, or to those who do not have an in-depth knowledge of Malila. A group in Mwakasita village mentioned that one of the major impacts of the Malila books has been that they have motivated them to learn some of the deeper parts of their language, learning new vocabulary that they encounter in the books. Heri Mwanjalanje reported that many pastors have felt more confident using Malila in church since the books have been available, and that there has even been an increase in people using Malila in situations where previously they would have felt it was more appropriate to use Swahili.

Nyiha

In many ways the theme of language preservation and development was more prevalent among the Nyiha than among the Malila. This is likely due in part to the fact that while the

Malila community is highly homogeneous ethnically and in terms of local language use, the Nyiha area contains a much greater mix of ethnic identities, with other local languages and Swahili also used throughout the Nyiha villages (see Section 5.1). As a result there is more of a perception among the Nyiha community that their language could be lost if they are not proactive about speaking and developing it.

A number of Nyiha speakers mentioned the importance of continuing to speak the local language. For example, Elika Laiton Silwimba from Wasa village commented that 'It is important to keep speaking Nyiha first, before other languages. It is our language.' Bernard Ntenga from Igamba village shared his fear that 'If people just use Swahili, Nyiha will die in the coming generations.'

For many people one of the key benefits of publishing books in Nyiha was the effect that those publications have in strengthening and developing the language in its multilingual context. Fabian Mulefu Halinga expressed that one major benefit of having a Nyiha Bible would be that 'people would be able to learn Nyiha well.' Silemani Haizulu Siame from Igamba testified about the difference he had seen in his own life since he started using the Nyiha books:

> I was forgetting my local language. My children had lost their language and only spoke Swahili. Now when I read to them in Nyiha they understand it and know it is good. When I show them a picture, I tell them the word in Swahili and Nyiha. They are happy to hear in Nyiha. When I tell them about Jesus in Nyiha they are happy and understand well. I want them to know their language.

Rehema Mgala from Vwawa was an enthusiastic advocate of the Nyiha Scriptures, pointing out that many people want to read the Nyiha books because 'they do not want to lose their heritage.' She expressed her opinion that using the Nyiha books will help to build the language, sharing that the books have helped her to learn more in-depth Nyiha. On the other hand, Elia Said Nzunda shared how people sometimes feel that to read and write in Nyiha is

a backward step, when educational and developmental opportunities are almost exclusively in Swahili and English. His view however, is that one of the main benefits of the Nyiha books is that the Nyiha will not lose their language, and will be able to pass it on to future generations.

## 5.4   Barriers to Scripture Use

A topic that often came up during interviews was the barriers that people perceive as hindering their ability to engage with the Scriptures in their local language, or Swahili, or both.

One such obstacle was the difficulty of obtaining local language books. For some this was because the books are only available in certain locations, while for others it was more a problem of cost. Although the price of the books is generally relatively low (typically ranging from TZS 500/= to TZS 2,000/= per book), several people in both communities mentioned difficulties in affording them.

Another issue mentioned by several interviewees was the fact that reading can be difficult for community members. A couple of people suggested that this was because they do not have a culture of reading, and so are not used to engaging with written materials, either in Swahili or the local language. Respondents were very positive about the possibility of audio and video resources, particularly as they are potentially free if distributed through devices such as mobile phones that people already own.

Finally, several participants also mentioned the importance of face to face interaction with representatives of the Language Development Office, who were seen as advocates for the local language Scriptures and instrumental in coordinating the distribution of the books. A couple of people expressed that while it is vital that the coordinators and volunteers travel extensively throughout the language community, this can also be difficult financially, and there was a feeling that more practical support in this area could be beneficial to Scripture distribution and use.

## 5.5   Potential for disunity

When interviewing church leaders from the two communities, I asked whether they felt that the use of the local language, or local language Scriptures, in church could lead to problems of disunity given the potentially multi-ethnic composition of the congregation (c.f. Section 2.5).

The majority of Malila pastors responded that the use of Malila in church would not be problematic in terms of church unity, citing the fact that their churches are made up almost exclusively of ethnic Malila, and that those who are not Malila invariably learn the language on moving to the area. A couple of church leaders mentioned that Malila is generally more understood than Swahili in their congregation, since there are some who are not very proficient in Swahili. Several church leaders were aware that the issue of using local languages in church could bring problems of disunity in areas where church congregations are more ethnically heterogeneous, but were convinced that generally in the Malila area the Malila language and Scriptures are welcomed in church, and not seen as a point of division.

Almost without exception the Nyiha church leaders reported that the use of Nyiha and Nyiha Scriptures in their churches is not, or would not be, a problem for church unity. Elia Said Nzunda, Elder of the Pentecostal Holiness Association church in Vwawa remarked that the potential problem would be that people who do not understand Nyiha would not understand what was being said, but on the whole he suggested that people in his congregation understood the Nyiha Scriptures better than Swahili.

It is somewhat surprising that the Nyiha pastors were almost unanimous in their opinion that the use of Nyiha would not bring disunity in the church, since the Nyiha churches generally are comprised of a mix of people from various ethnolinguistic backgrounds. It is often the case that church leaders in Tanzania are reluctant to use local languages in church, citing the difficulties for those members of their congregation who are less proficient in that language (c.f. Fast, 2007). However, while Nyiha church leaders suggested that in theory Nyiha use in

63

church would not bring division, it is worth noting that in practice Swahili is generally used more than Nyiha in church (see Figure 9), with only one pastor out of 16 regularly using Nyiha Scriptures in his church, and seven others saying that they had used them occasionally.

## 5.6   Case Study: Meshacki Bona Ventura Mzumbwe

Meshacki Bona Ventura Mzumbwe is Pastor of the Baptist church in Ilembo, and works closely with Heri Mwanjalanje, Scripture Use Coordinator for the Malila Language Office. He has been very active in evangelism throughout the Malila area and beyond as well as pastoring a large church with almost 300 members in Ilembo town.

He reported that his church members were around 90% Malila speaking, and that almost all of the adults in the church owned a Swahili Bible. He also said that most of them owned at least one of the Malila Scripture books that have been published recently. In church he reported mostly using the Malila language, with some Swahili, adding that it is important to use Malila in order to explain something in depth that everyone needs to understand.

Mzumbwe uses the Malila books for preaching in church when they are available for the part of the Bible that he is studying. For example, he used the book of Jonah for a Bible study and for preaching. He recalled how before the Malila books were available he would only use Swahili in church, and found that interpreting into Malila in the service was difficult, although it would make the message easier for people to take in and understand. He expressed how he believes that Malila has a more extensive vocabulary, and it is easier to explain certain things in Malila than Swahili.

Mzumbwe related how he had attended a conference of pastors in the town of Morogoro (about two days' travel by bus from the Malila area) and had met a Malila student at the university. The student wanted to learn how to read in Malila and took some books. After spending time with this student, Mzumbwe reflected on how 'this young man had many things in his head that he had learnt in Swahili, but the language of his birth was Malila...

Malila has strength, and it goes inside. It is like a new university is started inside him.' While the student was pursuing his formal university education in Swahili and English, Mzumbwe considered the young man's interest in reading Malila to open up a whole new realm of learning.

Mzumbwe related how he has long been a believer in the importance of local language Scriptures. He recalled taking some Ndali books to a Ndali village in the past and giving them to people to read. He explained how people had welcomed the books, and 13 had believed in Jesus as a result. He has also preached among the Nyakyusa people, who have had a Bible available for many years. 'When I would preach and teach I would look for people who knew Nyakyusa. I would use a few Nyakyusa words, and people were really touched.'

Finally, he shared that 'A long time ago Christianity was a thing of the Europeans. The church came from the European missionaries, and people thought that God only spoke Swahili. This meant that God could be restricted to the domains of life in which Swahili was spoken.' His experience has been that the availability of Scriptures in Malila and other local languages has done a huge amount to change this perception, and to make the message of the Bible seem relevant to all domains of life.

## 5.7   Case Study: Fabian Mulefu Halinga

Fabian Mulefu Halinga is a 78-year-old Nyiha man who has lived in Mbozi District his whole life. He was happy to talk about the Nyiha language which he had spoken throughout his life, and about the roles of Nyiha and Swahili in the multilingual community. At first he was quite pragmatic about issues of language choice, reporting that he preferred to use the Swahili Scriptures because in church there is a mix of people from different ethnic groups, some of whom do not know Nyiha. He saw the Nyiha Scriptures as bringing benefit insofar as they help to preserve and develop the language, and are useful as an aide for teaching the Nyiha language, but saw little role for them in a multilingual church setting. He also reported that his grandchild has learned Swahili as his first language, and then Nyiha second.

However, the more we discussed both the Swahili and Nyiha languages, the more Halinga's attitude seemed to change. He shared that he felt Swahili is in some ways a language that can be used for dishonest means, saying that 'Swahili is a language of deception – it feels like someone is trying to deceive you. If someone speaks Nyiha you know that they are reliable. Swahili is used for politics, it feels like a language of deception.'

Halinga went on to relate how the foreign missionaries in the early 20th century took Nyiha names for themselves, and translated Bible stories into Nyiha[3]. He believes that because of this they were highly trusted among the community and were successful in their ministry.

As we were speaking, Halinga's four-year-old grandson came into the room, and Halinga told him in Swahili to go away. He then turned to me and explained that he had told the boy to go away in Swahili, which meant that the boy would have taken it in a joking way. If he had told him to go away in Nyiha, Halinga continued, it would have been very offensive. For him, Swahili and Nyiha have different underlying associations, purposes and emotions linked with them, with Swahili used for surface-level communication, and Nyiha being the language of inner trust, cutting to the heart of the matter at hand.

As he reflected on his attitudes towards Nyiha and Swahili during the course of the interview, Halinga became increasingly convinced of the different way that he perceived the content of conversations, and by extension the Scriptures, depending on whether they were in Swahili or Nyiha.

## 6 Discussion

After discussing with members of the Malila and Nyiha communities the impact of the recently published Scripture books in their languages, it is clear that these impacts are many and diverse. The participants' experiences of the benefits of these Scripture portions compared to the existing Swahili Bible have been broadly classified into five areas:

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3    A few copies of this old Nyiha New Testament and Bible stories are still available, but they are reportedly difficult to read as the language has changed significantly since their publication.

- improved comprehension

- a new emotional connection with the text

- the association of the Scriptures with different domains of life

- recognition of the significance of the act of translating

- enhanced language development and preservation.

Interestingly, the first four of these areas seem to be very much linked in people's minds, and would often be reported initially along the lines of "I understand the text better." It was only during further conversation and probing that these concepts were unwrapped, to reveal that the idea of "understanding" (the Swahili word *kuelewa* was almost always used) often extended much further than simple knowledge of the meaning of words, into the realms of emotions, language attitudes and subconscious impressions. This may be because participants had not previously thought in-depth about exactly how their perceptions of the text had been affected by its translation into their local language, or it may simply be that the Swahili word *kuelewa* has a broader meaning than the English word 'understand', and covers these various concepts.

For both the Malila and the Nyiha, improved comprehension was one of the major benefits of the translated text. The extent of this benefit depended, however, on a number of factors relating to how well people understood the already available Swahili Bible. Those said to benefit most from being able to comprehend the local language translation were the elderly, the uneducated and those in more rural locations. The Malila generally mentioned improved comprehension more than the Nyiha, probably because Swahili plays less of a role in everyday life among the largely homogeneous Malila than it does among the more ethnically heterogeneous Nyiha.

While improved comprehension of the text was largely reported by and on behalf of those

with lower Swahili competence, the second, third and fourth responses were often from individuals or groups who were highly bilingual with Swahili. While they understood the Swahili Bible as well as (or in some cases better than) the local language Scriptures, many reported a preference for the local language books for these other reasons related to underlying language attitudes and associations connected with the language. On several occasions, after hearing the first chapter of the book of Ruth read in Swahili and the local language, participants expressed that they had understood the Swahili version better, but had preferred experiencing it in the local language.

It is clear from the responses of the participants that the local language translations had made an impact with many on an emotional level, with many reporting that they felt joyful and blessed to hear the Scriptures in their local language. Another common theme was the idea that certain parts of the Scripture books had a greater impact in the local language, particularly those relating to areas of life where the local language is dominant, for example the home, working in the fields, familial relationships and concerning death and ancestors. Many people reported that portions of the local language Scriptures relating to these areas of life were particularly impactful in the local language, despite the fact that they had previously understood them in Swahili.

Another theme among respondents, as discussed above, was that the act of translation itself was a powerful statement. The translation of Scriptures was said to bear witness to the fact that God sees and cares for people of all ethnic groups, and to give the message more credibility and respect among the community. This is consistent with the views of Kraft (1983) and Robinson (1996) summarised in Sections 2.1 and 3.2.

The final benefit that was repeatedly mentioned by community members was the fact that the Scripture translations play a key role in developing and preserving the local language, and by extension, the traditional culture. While these things may not seem to directly promote Scripture engagement, they do demonstrate practically the importance of the local community in God's kingdom. Development of the language can have the effect of increasing

the self-confidence of the community (as explored by Sanneh, 1989, and Batibo, 2009, summarised in Section 2.4.3), and as such may be seen as a valid and powerful outworking of God's kingdom among that community.

Interestingly, very few of the church leaders interviewed felt that the local language resources, or local language use in church, posed any threat to the unity of the church. While some practical challenges were noted, in principle at least the church leaders seemed convinced that the use of local languages in church was not a problem. This opinion tends to run contrary to the views of church leaders that I have encountered in other parts of Tanzania, who often report the potential for disunity and excluding sections of the congregation as one of the main reasons they are reluctant to use local language Scriptures in the church context. It is difficult to know the extent to which the fact that I was working with an organisation involved in the translation process affected the responses in this study, since it may have been perceived as impolite to suggest that the materials produced by the organisation would have the potential to bring disunity. However, the fact that this opinion was expressed almost unanimously must still be seen as significant. It is also possible that since this issue was generally discussed towards the end of the interviews, after we had already been considering issues of language choice, the church leaders felt more prepared to confront the challenges of using local languages in church in light of the benefits they had been identifying.

One factor that must be remembered is that the study was conducted entirely in Swahili, and therefore eliciting the opinions of speakers with low Swahili ability, or who preferred to only use their local language, was difficult. In one sense the limitation of only interacting with members of the community who were competent in Swahili was consistent with the focus of the research, which was to study those sections of the community who were highly bilingual with Swahili and their local language. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the use of Swahili as the medium of communication could have affected the way the research was perceived, which in turn may influence the responses given, and this must therefore be

taken into account when interpreting the results.

For the purposes of this study I have not sought to explore any differences in how people engage with the Bible by reading it compared to hearing oral Scriptures. Many of the communities in Tanzania, including the Malila and Nyiha, are traditionally oral societies, with widespread literacy being a relatively new phenomenon of the past 100 years or so. For many communities, any local language literacy materials that exist have been developed even more recently, often in the past 10 or 20 years. It would be interesting to research how the conclusions made in this study might be developed further if one were to take into account the differences in how people engage with written materials compared to audio and video Scriptures, in both Swahili and the local language. It would also be fascinating to conduct a similar study with the Tanzanian Deaf community, to understand how they engage with the Bible in Tanzanian Sign Language.

## 7    *Recommendations*

In light of the views of the Malila and Nyiha communities as to the impact of local language Scriptures alongside the Swahili Bible, this section will make recommendations that the various stakeholders in a translation process may want to bear in mind when making key decisions about Bible translation.

### 7.1   Comprehension is key

As expected, this study confirmed that improved comprehension of the Scriptures by those who have limited comprehension of Swahili is a huge benefit of local language translation. This has always been, and should continue to be, a vital consideration when making decisions about whether and how to translate Scriptures into local languages. As is typical throughout Tanzania, it was reported by the Malila and Nyiha that the elderly, the uneducated and those living in rural areas had the lowest proficiency in Swahili, and so potentially benefit the most in terms of comprehension when Scriptures become available in their local

language.

However, the aim of this study was to focus particularly on communities and individuals who already had a competent knowledge of Swahili and access to the Swahili Bible. In these situations the following recommendations may also be relevant.

## 7.2 Publish a few key materials where a full translation project is not viable

A local language translation project can be very expensive in terms of the resources required over a number of years. Often, where there is perceived to be an adequate understanding of the Bible in another language, it is deemed unwise to invest these resources in translating into the local language.

One finding of this study has been that even when there is a high level of comprehension of the Bible in Swahili, the simple act of developing a language and translating portions of Scripture can be hugely significant in the eyes of the community. Where a language has no established orthography or writing conventions, even the publishing of a few key materials in the local language may involve a significant investment of resources. However, decision makers should bear in mind that even a small number of publications in the local language can have a high impact on the community, as evidenced by the many bilingual respondents who reported their attitudes towards Scripture and the Christian message being notably impacted simply by the fact that they were able to experience them in their local language.

This study has also shown that the investment in developing the Malila and Nyiha languages and creating written materials was hugely appreciated by the communities, and was seen to be a very significant milestone in the life of the community, giving great impetus to the continued use and development of the language. This was viewed by many people as a powerful tool to help the community and their language to thrive in the coming generations.

## 7.3  Translate Scripture portions relating to local language domains

One theme in the responses of the Malila and Nyiha was the way in which hearing the Scriptures in the local language was particularly poignant when the text related to a domain of life in which the local language was dominant. This was the case even with speakers who were highly bilingual with Swahili and could understand well the Swahili Bible.

As a result, decision makers may want to consider translating certain key parts of the Bible that are particularly related to local language domains, even in a situation where the community understands well and accepts the Swahili Bible as adequate. For example in a rural community like the Malila or Nyiha Scripture portions could be:

- The book of Ruth, which has themes that resonate with rural Tanzanian life as discussed above

- Proverbs, which are often part of the rhythm of community life

- Genealogies, which echo the respect for ancestors in traditional rural culture

- Short stories and parables, particularly relating to agriculture or familial relationships

This study has shown that even when local language speakers understand the Swahili Bible as well as, or better than, the local language Scriptures, they still find that the local language books particularly resonate with them when they relate to domains of life with which they readily associate the local language.

## 7.4  Publish diglot Scriptures

The theme of developing and preserving the local language was one that kept recurring when community members were asked about the benefits they had seen since the Malila and Nyiha materials had been available. It was noticeable how many people from both communities also commented that the local language Scripture portions had helped them to

improve their own knowledge of the local language. These comments came not only from those who had grown up outside of the language area in question, but also from people who had spoken the language their whole life, but still appreciated the opportunity to increase their knowledge and vocabulary.

One way to encourage and facilitate this use of the local language materials would be to produce diglot publications with the local language and Swahili side by side. This will help those wanting to improve their knowledge of the local language, and would be very popular in the communities in their desire to preserve and develop their languages, raising the prestige of the language and community in the process. Diglot materials would also be welcomed by community members who are more proficient in Swahili than their local language (including many who are educated and living outside the language area), but still have very positive attitudes towards hearing and reading in the local language.

While diglot books can be significantly more expensive to produce than single language materials, this approach should be much more viable with electronic distribution, where there is no physical media to add to the production costs.

## 7.5   Help the language community to think through language choices

One interesting dynamic of the interviews was the way that people's thoughts and ideas evolved as we were talking, with Fabian Mulefu Halinga being a prime example (see Section 5.7). Many times it appeared that people had never before consciously thought through the language choices they face, and they appreciated the opportunity to explore the options open to them. On many occasions I had the impression that the participants left the meeting feeling that they too had learned something about their own language choices, and that they might consider consciously re-evaluating how their language choices affect their own goals and the goals of the community.

I would recommend that when a community has similar language choices to make, a Scripture engagement facilitator think through how they can be a catalyst in allowing people

73

to explore their language choices. This could be through workshops, interviews or community meetings.

## 7.6 Encourage discussion between pastors about the use of local languages in church

Having previously spoken with church leaders in many parts of Tanzania, I had expected that the church leaders in the Malila and Nyiha communities would be wary of excluding people, or creating division in their church, by using local languages and local language Scriptures. Surprisingly, the vast majority of the church leaders interviewed were not concerned about this and spoke only positively about the impact, or potential impact, of the Scriptures in their church.

As this is an issue that church leaders in other communities have often considered an obstacle to local language Scripture use, I would suggest that there may be benefit in bringing together church leaders from various communities, some of whom have experience with local language Scriptures and some who do not, encouraging them to dialogue and to discuss the practical issues that arise when local language Scriptures are used in multilingual communities.

## *8    Conclusion*

Translation has always been, and will continue to remain, at the heart of any authentic expression of the Christian faith. This study has shown that in addition to bringing obvious benefits in terms of improved comprehension of the Bible, translation of Scripture can make a profound impact on the level of attitudes and emotions towards the text. For multilingual communities, the very act of translation of the Scriptures into a language that is used in the home and the fields, a language that may have low prestige and associations of being "backward", but a language that plays a vital role in the identity of the community, can be a hugely significant event in itself, and speak volumes about the message contained in those

Scriptures.

As communities and leaders make decisions about whether, and how, to translate Scripture into the numerous local languages throughout Tanzania and beyond, they would do well to appreciate the profundity of the act of translation itself, and the many and diverse ways that the result may impact the lives of the individuals and communities as a consequence.

19,719 words.

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# 10 Appendices

## 10.1 Appendix A: Church Leader Interview Schedule (with English translation)

Jina:

*Name:*

Kabila:

*Ethnic group:*

Kanisa:

*Church:*

Cheo:

*Role in the church:*

Kuna Waumini wangapi kanisani kwako?

*How many people are there in your church?*

Kati ya hao waumini, asilimia ngapi ni Wamalila / Wanyiha?

*Out of those people, what percentage are Malila / Nyiha?*


Asilimia ngapi wana Biblia ya Kiswahili?

*What percentage of people have a Swahili Bible?*


Wangapi wana vitabu vya Biblia vya Kimalila / Kinyiha?

*How many have Malila / Nyiha Bible books?*


Ni lugha gani inayotumika (au zinazotumika) kanisani?

*Which language (or languages) are used in church?*


Mmewahi kutumia vitabu vya Kimalila / Kinyiha kanisani?

*Have you ever used Malila / Nyiha books in church?*


Umeona tofauti yoyote tangu vile vitabu vya Kimalila / Kinyiha vimetumika hapa?

*Have you seen any difference since the Malila / Nyiha books have been used here?*


Je, kutumia Kimalila / Kinyiha kanisani, au kusoma vitabu vya Kimalila / Kinyiha, kunaweza kuharibu umoja wa kanisa?

*Could the use of Malila / Nyiha in church, or the reading of Malila / Nyiha books, be detrimental to the unity of the church?*


Mtu anayefahamu vizuri Kiswahili na Kimalila / Kinyiha zote, utamshauri atumie Biblia kwa lugha gani?

*For someone who knows both Swahili and Malila / Nyiha well, which language Bible would you recommend him / her to use?*


Kuna makabila mengine ambayo watu wao wanajua vizuri Kiswahili, tena hawana Biblia kwa lugha yao ya asili. Je, watafaidika kutafsiri Biblia pia kwa lugha yao?

*There are other ethnic groups whose people know Swahili well, and don't have a Bible in their local language. Do you think they would benefit from translating the Bible into their language as well?*


Ni sehemu zipi hasa za Biblia ambazo zinaweza kuwagusa Wamalila / Wanyiha wanaposoma kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha?

*Which sections of the Bible do you think will particularly impact the Malila / Nyiha if they read them in Malila / Nyiha?*


Je, una ushauri wo wote kwetu, kwa ajili ya huduma hii?

*Do you have any advice for this ministry [of Bible translation and language development]?*

## 10.2 Appendix B: Church Member Interview Schedule (with English translation)

Jina:

*Name:*

Umri:

*Age:*

Jinsia:          Mme / Mke

*Gender:     Male / Female*

Kabila:

*Ethnic group:*

Ni lugha zipi ambazo unaongea sana sana maishani mwako?

*Which languages do you mainly speak in your day to day life?*

Lugha gani ulijifunza kwanza ulipokuwa mtoto?

*Which language did you learn first as a child?*

Lugha nyingine ulijifunza lini?

*When did you learn the other language(s)?*


Ni lugha gani ambayo unaitumia:

*Which language(s) do you use:*


Kwa harusi?

*At a wedding?*


Msibani?

*At a funeral?*


Shuleni?

*At school?*


Kanisani?

*At church?*

Sokoni?

*At the market?*

Nyumbani?

*At home?*

Shambani?

*In the fields?*

Ukiongea kuhusu:

*If you talk about:*

Utamaduni wa Wamalila / Wanyiha?

*Malila / Nyiha culture?*

Kisiasa?

*Politics?*

Ukristo?

*Christianity?*

Historia ya Wamalila / Wanyiha?

*Malila / Nyiha history?*

Kwa kaombolezo?

*For mourning?*

Kuongea na watoto?

*To speak with children?*

Kuongea na wazee?

*To speak with elderly people?*

Kumwomba Mungu?

*To pray to God?*

Umewahi kusoma au kusikia Biblia ya Kiswahili? Mara nyingi au mara chache?

*Have you ever read or heard the Swahili Bible? Many times or just a few?*

Umewahi kusoma au kusikia sehemu za Biblia kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha? Mara nyingi au mara chache?

*Have you ever read or heard parts of the Bible in Malila / Nyiha? Many times or just a few?*

Kuna tofauti zipi unazoziona kati ya Biblia ya Kiswahili na zile sehemu za Bible kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha?

*What differences do you see between the Swahili Bible and the Malila / Nyiha Bible portions?*

Unapenda ipi zaidi? Kwa nini?

*Which do you prefer? Why?*

Kama umeshajua kuongea vizuri Kiswahili, kuna faida gani kuwa na Biblia kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha pia?

*Given that you already speak Swahili well, what benefit is there to having the Bible in Malila / Nyiha as well?*

Umeona tofauti gani katika maisha yako ya kikristo tangu umeanza kutumia sehemu za Biblia za Kimalila / Kinyiha?

*What differences have you seen in your Christian life since you started to use the Malila /*

*Nyiha Bible portions?*

Soma Ruthu 1:1-10 kwa Kiswahili (au Kimalila / Kinyiha)

*[I asked a volunteer to] Read Ruth 1:1-10 in Swahili (or Malila / Nyiha)*

Soma Ruthu 1:11-22 kwa Kimalila / Kimalila (au Kiswahili)

*[I asked a volunteer to] Read Ruth 1:11-22 in Malila / Nyiha (or Swahili)*

Ulielewa kiasi gani cha sehemu hizi?

*How much of these portions did you understand?*

Kimalila / Kinyiha:

*Malila / Nyiha:*

Kiswahili:

*Swahili:*

Ulijisikiaje kusikia sehemu hii kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha?

*How did you feel to hear this portion in Malila / Nyiha?*

Ulipenda zaidi kusikia kwa lugha gani? Kwa nini?

*Which language did you prefer to hear in? Why?*

Mtu akifahamu vizuri Kiswahili, je, itamsaidia kusikia Biblia pia kwa Kimalila / Kinyiha? Kwa nini? Kuna faida gani?

*If someone knows Swahili well, will it help him / her to hear the Bible in Malila / Nyiha too? Why? What benefit would there be?*

## 10.3 Appendix C: Sample Interview Data

Interviews were conducted entirely in Swahili. Below is a sample of notes that I took in English during the interview, to summarise the views shared by the participants.

*Date*: Friday November 30th, 2012

*Place*:

Ilembo

*Name:*

Meshacki Bona Ventura Mzumbwe

*Ethnic group:*

Malila

*Church:*

Baptist - Ilembo

*Role in the church:*

Pastor

*How many people are there in your church?*

283

*Out of those people, what percentage are Malila?*

90%

*What percentage of people have a Swahili Bible?*

Almost all adults.

*How many have Malila Bible books?*

Most people.

*Which language (or languages) are used in church?*

Mostly Malila, with some Swahili. We have to use Malila when we want to explain things to people.

*Have you ever used Malila books in church?*

Yes, for example we have used Jonah for Bible study. I have also used it in my preaching.

*Have you seen any difference since the Malila books have been used here?*

Yes. Before we had the books, we only had the Swahili Bible. To read that and then translate it into Malila is difficult. Malila is easier for us to use. Swahili reduces some things. Malila has a wider range of vocabulary.

*Could the use of Malila in church, or the reading of Malila books, be detrimental to the unity of the church?*

No, this would not happen.

*For someone who knows both Swahili and Malila well, which language Bible would you recommend him / her to use?*

I would recommend that the person use Malila books too. I was at a conference of pastors in Morogoro. They asked for Malila books and were very happy to receive them. A young man from the university came to my house. He wanted to learn the Malila letters so that he could read the books. He took several books home with him. This young man had many things in his head that he had learnt in Swahili, but the language of his birth was Malila. Other languages cannot speak to him like Malila does. Malila has strength, and it goes inside. It is like a new university is started inside him.

*There are other ethnic groups whose people know Swahili well, and don't have a Bible in their local language. Do you think they would benefit from translating the Bible into their*

*language as well?*

Yes, they would benefit. I took some small Ndali books with me when I went to evangelise in some Ndali villages. I asked for volunteers to read the books in front of people. When people heard the Ndali books they understood them well, and 13 people received Jesus.

*Which sections of the Bible do you think will particularly impact the Malila if they read them in Malila?*

The book of Jonah is very impactful. Swahili just doesn't teach people the same as Malila does. In Malila you hear all the details – running away, boarding the ship, the fish... People can identify with the story. Some of them have run away from ministry that God has called them to.

*Do you have any advice for this ministry [of Bible translation and language development]?*

The Nyakyusa people a long time ago had the Bible in their language. When I preached and taught in the Nyakyusa area I would look for people who knew Nyakyusa to help me. When I used Nyakyusa words people were really touched.

There was a pastor in Morogoro who was Malila. I gave him some Malila books, because he wanted to use Malila in church. When he used Malila people understood him better.

A long time ago, Christianity was something that belonged to the Europeans. The church came from the Europeans. People thought that God only spoke Swahili. The God was restricted to certain domains of their lives.

It would be good if we could have the complete Malila Bible as soon as possible.

We would also very much like a Malila song book.

We would like to develop the teaching of the Malila language, so that children and adults can be taught in Malila. People understand better and are touched more through Malila. There should be kindergartens to teach children in Malila. Swahili is a hard language for children to start learning.

We should have Malila teaching seminars in all villages.