



# *Journal of Arts & Humanities*

## The Source of Language Variation among Chagga People in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania

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### ABSTRACT

This paper intends to find out the source of language variation among Chagga people. The study was guided by four specific objectives which were: to investigate the extent to which language variation exists among the Chagga, to examine the areas (aspects) which mark language variation among the Chagga, to find out the source of language variation among the Chagga, and to determine whether Chagga varieties constitute different languages or varieties (dialects) of the same language. In this study, three techniques were used to collect the primary data, which were sociolinguistic interview (free conversation), reading passage, and the wordlist. Results show that, despite the difficulties that Chagga people experience in communicating through their mother tongue, they understand each other. Their differences in speaking are based on some of the lexicon (vocabulary). Further, the study propounded the following as the reasons as to why Chagga people seem to differ in some vocabulary: geographical location, differences in origin, lack of common socialization, the existence of hostility among them as well as political unrest and the Mangi rule.

**Keywords:** Dialects, language, language variation.

Available Online: 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2015.

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### 1.0 Introduction

#### 1.01 Background to the problem

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Language variation is a notable issue in different areas in the world. The variation is mainly based on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. This issue becomes contradictory especially in deciding whether these variations should be categorized as different languages or they are just dialects of the same language. Globally, the existence of British English and American English as varieties of English language has been discussed deeply, and they are termed as dialects of the same language.

Yule (2006) asserts that every language has a lot of variation especially in the way it is spoken. If we look at English, we find wide spread variation in the way it is spoken in different countries such as Australia, Britain, and USA. We can find a range of varieties in different parts of those countries. The aspect of language variation is based on where the language is used as a way of doing linguistic geography. First we should identify the particular variety that we have normally assumed when we referred to a language as English, Spanish, or Kiswahili.

For example, accent is one of the markers of variation of English language. It is a myth that some speakers have accents while others do not. We might feel that some speakers have very distinct or easily recognized types of accent while others may have more subtle or less noticeable accents but every language user speaks with an accent.

Technically, the term accent is restricted to the description of aspects of pronunciation that identify where an individual speaker is from, regionally or socially. It is different from the term dialect which is used to describe features of vocabulary as well as aspects of pronunciation.

While differences in vocabulary are often easily recognized, dialect variations in the meaning of grammatical constructions are less frequently documented in the following example; two British English speaking visitors [B and C] and a local Irish speaker [A] are involved in conversations in Donegal, Ireland. (Trudgill, 1983)

A: How long are youse here?  
B: Till after Easter  
[Speaker A looks puzzled]  
C: We came on Sunday  
A: Ah, youse 're here a while then.

It seems that the constructions how long are youse here? In speaker A's dialect, is used with a meaning close to the structure 'How long have you been here? - Referring to past time. Speaker B, however, answers as if the question was referring to future time (how long are you going to be here?). When speaker C answers with a past time response (We came on Sunday), speaker A acknowledges it and repeats his use of a present tense (Youse're here) to refer to past time. Note that the form youse (= 'you' plural) seems to be understood by the visitors though it is unlikely to be part of their own dialect.

Similar studies have been done in Africa. Huber (1999) conducted a study on language variation in Ghana and he came up with the reason as to why Ghanaians differ in speaking English from one place to another in Ghana. He termed them as different pidgins. Huber presents the socio-historical background particularly trade with the Portuguese, Dutch, and English people as the main factor for the development of different pidgins in Ghana.

The situation can be observed in Tanzania, Kilimanjaro region among Chagga people being a good example. Despite the fact that Chagga people live in the same region, they do not speak a single language, thus it becomes difficult to understand each other especially from place to place. Lewis (2009) attempted to study this variation and he came up with the claim that there is no language called Kichagga rather Chagga people speak different languages namely Kimashami, Kiuru, Kirombo, Kimochi,

Kivunjo, and Kikibosho. It is Lewis's argument therefore which motivates the researcher to conduct this study.

### 1.02 Research gap

Literature confirms that language variation is a notable issue in the world by identifying vocabulary changes, grammatical construction changes, as well as sound changes as the basic types. This argument is well presented by Sarah (2008).

Then, it raises the question of language and dialect as conflicting subjects since there is no a clear cut judgment as to when the two may be termed as different languages or just varieties of the same language. The study at hand will add knowledge about the source of the existing language variation in different parts of the world based on Chagga varieties.

Despite the fact that some researchers such as Nerbone *et al* (2008) identified that the variation of language can be found geographically or socially conditioned, these reasons do not suffice. Therefore, a need for this study is aroused. Not only the source of these variations, but also the distinction between language and dialect is not clearly covered especially in determining what should be termed as different languages versus varieties of the same language.

The present study suggests the criteria which may be used in deciding whether the particular language varieties constitute different languages or just dialects of the same language.

### 1.03 Statement of the problem

Communication is the main function of language. However, this will be effective if people in contact share a common language hence they understand each other. Different from other ethnic groups, Chagga people speak differently in different areas, something that stands as an obstacle for communication among them.

While some researchers such as Lewis (2009) and others view Chagga people as speaking different languages, other researchers view them as speaking the same language with different dialects. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, I have not come across any study about the source of the language variation among the Chagga; therefore this knowledge gap provides a ground that justifies the need for this study.

The following sections then present the review of the related literature, methodology, results and discussion, conclusion and recommendations as well as the references.

### 1.04 The contribution of the paper in the literature and in policy making

As the number of people using mother tongue language among the Chagga is decreasing day by day, this study throws light to Chagga community on the importance of using their language and preserve it for the betterment of their society. Also, it is expected that the study will establish awareness to other linguists on the source of language variation existing among the Chagga. Having read the findings of this study, other researchers in this field will be stimulated to conduct some other studies on language variation among the Chagga or on similar cases hence this will expand the literature

In policy making, the paper attempts to inform the policy makers on the existence of ethnic community languages (ECLs) and therefore it gives them an alarm that whenever they are planning for the language of instructions in schools, ECLs should not be ignored. For instance, when deciding whether they should opt for immersion or submersion methods of language teaching and learning, ECLs should also be considered.

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.01 Meaning, aspects and the source of language variation

Sarah (2008) explains the type of language variation as vocabulary changes, grammatical construction changes, as well as sound changes. In addition to that, Nerbone et al (2008) addresses that the variation of language can be found especially geographically or socially conditioned.

### 2.02 Studies on language variation

Globally, Scholars' mind have been captured by the basic differences between the two major dialects of English language, that is to say British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) For example, Barrow (2012) asserts that English spoken in different countries has evolved over time. Accents play part in the different ways people speak English around the world. Generally, an accent difference, uses the same words for things, but pronounces them differently. Americans have accent differences in different regions such as the South, Boston, New York and so do the British from region to region

In Africa, language variation is noted in different areas. Mngadi (2000) studied the Zulu varieties in South Africa and concluded that these varieties constitute a single language with different dialects. The mentioned Zulu varieties are: The central KwaZulu variety, the KwaZulu coast variety, the Natal coast variety, the lower Natal coast variety, the South west Natal variety, The Northern – Swati boarder variety, the Natal Eastern Cape boarder variety and some urban varieties.

In Tanzania, some researchers have attempted to study the language variation focusing mainly on the Ethnic Community Languages (ECL). Maho (1995) reported that there is a growing agreement that the Ndengereko and Rufiji languages and peoples are the same. A recent proposed update of the Bantu language family by Maho lists these two as dialects of one language under the language name of Ndengereko. Matondo (2002) conducted a study on the Sukuma varieties and came up with the findings that the language (Sukuma) has four major dialects which are named according to their geographical orientations: Kemunasukuma (Northern dialect), Kemunang'weli (Western dialect), Kemunadakama (Southern dialect), and Kemunakiya (Eastern dialect).

### 2.03 Language versus dialect

Many scholars have tried to discuss the two concepts that is, language and dialect in attempt to make clear what is said to be language and what should be a dialect. According to Haugen (1966) quoted in Hudson (1996), English made no distinction between language and dialect until the renaissance period when the term dialect was borrowed from Greek. Coming into discussion, Chambers and Trudgill (1998) advocated that the difference between language and dialect is based on size and prestige. In case of a size, a language is bigger (has more speakers) than a dialect since a language is considered to be the sum of its dialects. Dialects are therefore considered to be sub categories of a language, so if we take English as a language we might consider varieties such as Cockney, Yorkshire, Australian English, and so forth as dialects of the language English. Prestige plays an important role in differentiating the two in that a language is more prestigious than a dialect. A dialect is popularly considered to be a substandard, low status, often rustic form of a language, lacking in prestige.

### 2.04 The concept of mutual intelligibility

Hudson (1996) established a theory of mutual intelligibility as a criterion used in distinguishing language from dialects in that if two speakers are able to understand one another, we can assume that they are speaking different varieties of the same language. The present study will be guided by this concept in deciding whether the Chagga varieties should be considered as different languages or they are just dialects of the same language namely Kichaga.

## 2.05 Research questions

This study then will be guided by the following questions:

- i. To what extent does language variation exist among the Chagga?
- ii. In which aspects do Chagga people differ when they speak?
- iii. Why do Chagga people from different areas in Kilimanjaro region speak differently?
- iv. Do Chagga varieties constitute different languages or dialects of the same language?

## 3.0 Methodology

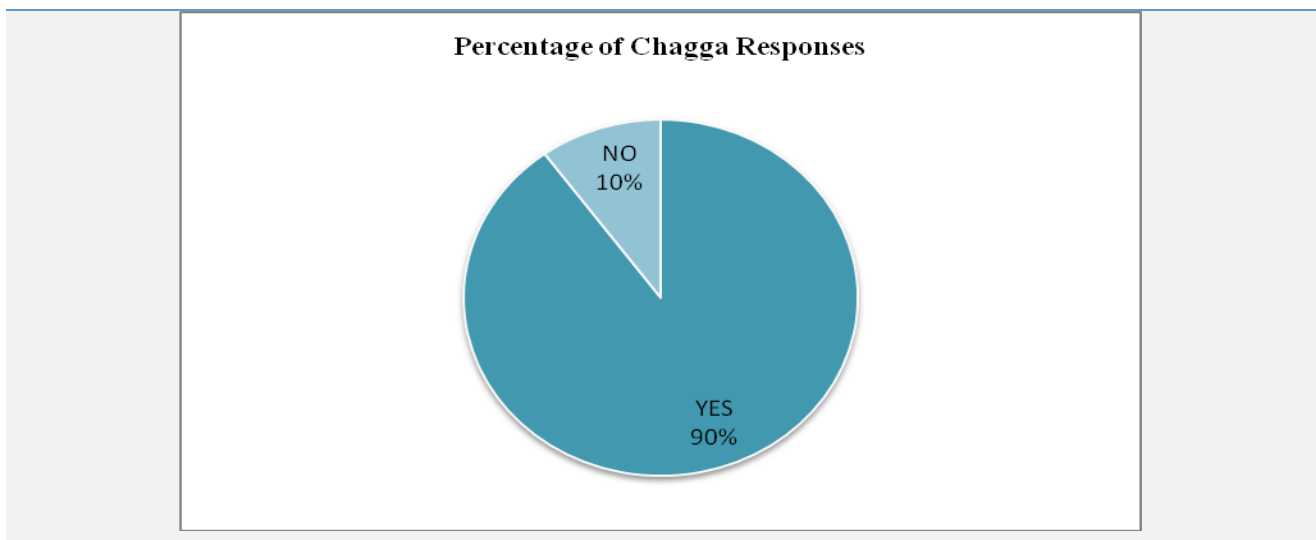
The study was conducted in Moshi rural and Rombo districts in Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania where most of the Chagga people are found. The study surveyed a sample of 30 Chagga people most of them being elders (aged 50 years and above) who are believed to know the history of this ethnic group better than the young ones. Purposive sampling technique was employed based on what is referred to as a friend of a friend method (snowball). In this technique, respondents were selected in an equal proportion that is 5 respondents per geographical area (case study). In this study, data were collected through sociolinguistics interview (free conversation), reading passage, and the word list. Sociolinguistic interview was used to get the historical factors which led Chagga people to speak differently from place to place within Kilimanjaro region as well as the biographical information of the informants. Word list was used as a basis for phonetic and phonological analysis as well as testing similarities and differences in lexicons among the speakers of the mentioned varieties under this study. Reading passage was applicable in identifying the syntactic and semantic differences. A descriptive research design was employed and both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in data analysis. Lexicostatistics was used as a method of data analysis. This is the method of lexical comparison which is interested in items which look alike because they are genetically connected and can therefore be derived from a single item as single hypothetical (or real) proto language . Lexicostatistics involves counting cognates.

## 4.0 Results and discussion

### 4.01 The extent to which language variation exists among the Chagga.

The findings from the study show that whenever Chagga people from different parts in Kilimanjaro region come into contact they experience some difficulties in communication. The level of difficulty is neither uniform nor consistent as differs from place to place. This can be evidenced by one of the informants from Machame (speaks Kimashami) who said *“Whenever we meet Chagga people from other parts we experience some difficulties to understand each other especially in communicating through mother tongue though we can understand each other as the difference is based just on some vocabularies.* This is also claimed by the other informant from Uru who said *“you know although sometimes we differ in some words (vocabulary), but when Chagga people from other parts speak in mother tongue you won’t fail to understand what they mean. In this you can’t speak badly to your fellow Chagga”*. Most of the informants who were asked if they understand their fellow Chagga who speak other varieties said yes, their responses therefore are indicated in the following pie chart:

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#### 4.02 In which aspects do Chagga people differ when they speak?

Yule (2006) argues that the aspect of language variation is based on where the language is used as a way of doing linguistic geography. For example, accent is one of the markers of language variation. This refers to differences in pronunciation (phonological difference). In this study, the *Word list* was used in examining differences in lexicon and phonology and the *Reading passage* was used in examining differences in syntax (grammar)

##### Lexical differences

A word list of 150 words was prepared to be filled by the respondents from Uru, Machame, Rombo, Old Moshi, Vunjo, and Kibosho. Then Lexicostatistical method of data analysis was applied in order to give numerical values to different degrees of similarity of the lexical items between the varieties.

In this study, a scale using six points (0-5) as proposed by Nurse and Philippson (1980), Ngonyani (1988), and Batibo (1985) was used.

5 points were given to perfect cognation. This was where there was complete structural cognation. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho
9	Canal	mfongo	mfongo	mfongo	Mfongo	mfongo	mfongo

4 points were awarded to resemblance with minor phonological difference with the root or as a result of phonological differences only. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho
49	Refuse	lea	lya	lea	Lya	leha	lea

3 points were awarded for intermediate phonological differences. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho
46	fear	uwou			Owowa		ouwo

2 points were awarded for major phonological differences. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho

114	small	tutu	ngitu
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1 point was awarded for any doubtful cognation. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho
145	Who?	Owu?	Mbowi?		Mmawi?	Nyiu?	Lwyi?

0 point was awarded were there was no cognation at all. For example:

SN	Lexical item(s)	Kiuru	Kimashami	Kivunjo	Kirombo	Kimochi	Kikibosho
18	Food	kyelya	shonga				

Then, the process of comparing each language variety to another together with the quantification of the data took place. The quantification of points scored was calculated and the conversion into percentages for each language pair of vocabulary was done. After conversion of the points scored into percentages for each language pairs of the given vocabulary, the results were presented into tables of comparisons as it appears below:

**Table 1:** Degree of cognation between 6 varieties

Kiuru					
97.3	Kivunjo				
9.7	89.2	Kimochi			
55.1	55.3	71.2	Kikibosho		
58.8	58.9	58.4	66.8	Kimasham	
68.8	69.2	69.3	62.8	55.5	Kirombo

**Table 2:** 1<sup>st</sup> collapse

#### Kiuru/kivunio

89.5	Kimochi				
55.2	71.2	Kikibosho			
58.9	62.6	66.8	Kimashami		
69	66.1	62.8	55.5	Kirombo	

**Table 3:** 2<sup>nd</sup> collapse

#### Kiuru/kivunjo/kimochi

63.2	Kikibosho				
60.8	66.8	Kimashami			
67.6	62.8	55.5	Kirombo		

**Table 4: 3<sup>rd</sup> collapse**

Kiuru/kivunjo/kimochi/kikibosho		
63.8		Kimashami
62.2	55.5	Kirombo

**Table 5: 4<sup>th</sup> collapse**

Kiuru/kivunjo/kimochi/kikibosho/kimashami	
60.4	Kirombo

From table 1 then it can be noted that Kiuru and Kivunjo have the highest degrees of resemblance, therefore, it is obvious that the two varieties departed nearly as compared to other varieties. It is again worthy noting that the rate of divergence / departure among these varieties is not uniform. From the table, it is possible to note that Kikibosho and Kimashami have the least degree of closeness with the rest of the varieties, while Kiuru, Kivunjo, Kimochi and Kirombo are closest varieties respectively when compared to Kikibosho and Kimashami.

As the result in table 1 shows that Kiuru and Kivunjo have the highest degrees of resemblance, the next step was collapsing the two varieties and comparing them as a single entity with each of the other varieties. The process involved adding up the results of the Kiuru / kivunjo compared to other varieties and then finding the average by dividing the results by two. Table 2 presents the findings of this exercise that the closest relationship is between Kiuru, Kivunjo and Kimochi. A similar process as done after the results of table 2 was repeated by using different figures. The outcome is presented in table 3. The results of table 3 show that the closest relationship is between Kiuru, Kivunjo, and Kimochi. The process was repeated as in table 3 and the outcome is what is presented in table 4 where the closest relationship is between Kiuru, Kivunjo, Kimochi, and Kikibosho. In table 5 the closest relationship is between Kiuru, Kivunjo, Kimochi, Kikibosho, and Kimashami against Kirombo.

**Phonological differences**

Through a word list, a researcher found that most of the words are pronounced the same except some few words especially from Kimashami which are aspirated. *Example: ‘water’ is pronounced as ‘mur<sup>h</sup>a’ in Kimashami.* Again, Chagga nouns are pronounced with stress on the second syllable, example *‘dog’ is pronounced as ‘ki’te’.* In case of a verb, stress is also applied mostly on the second syllable though it is not consistent since some verbs are stressed on the last syllable as in the verb *give which is pronounced as njini’nga* in Kiuru.

Syntactically, the findings from the reading passage contended that sentences from Kiuru, Kimashami, Kirombo, Kimochi, Kikibosho, and Kivunjo have the same structural pattern which corresponds to the structure of Kiswahili. They follow SVO structure.

**4.03 Why do Chagga people from different areas in Kilimanjaro speak differently?**

It is through sociolinguistic interview that the researcher realized the following as the reasons for language variation among the Chagga:

**Geographical location**



This agrees to what Nerbone et al (2008) pointed out that the variation of language can be found especially geographically or socially conditioned. As the area of Kilimanjaro region is mountainous and considering that most of the Chagga people by then were immobile, thus there was no or little contact among them hence it became difficult for them to speak uniformly.

### **Origin**

Originally, Chagga came from different Bantu groups who migrated from other parts of Africa to settle around Mount Kilimanjaro. Early migration of the Bantu from the Niger – Congo led the Chagga to settle in the North Pare mountains; home of the ancestral Chagga. As the population increases, some people started looking for a new place to live. They later settled in the Southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro which was a thick forest by then. All these movements contributed to the addition and reduction of some lexicon. Thus a certain group could coin some new lexicon while other groups remained intact.

### **Socialization (contacts)**

In the free conversation the researcher realized that there is no common socialization among the Chagga. Chagga people contact with different groups hence they develop different vocabulary basing on the languages of their socialized groups. For example, the divergence of Kirombo lexicon from other Chagga groups is due to their socialization with the people from Taveta. This socialization is based on the business activities among them. In this case Kirombo received some of the lexicon from the Taveta. Example, words like 'Sumbai, mwai, watoi, and muu' to mean 'down, farm, grandmother, and the sun' respectively.

### **Hostility**

The study identified some of the enmities existed among the Chagga which led them to have no contacts hence they developed some different vocabularies. For example, it was proposed that the Mashami and the Kibosho developed different lexicon due to the enmity existed among them. In this state there could be no possible interaction between them as the situation is so tense till today where the Mashami never direct the doors of their buildings to Kibosho.

### **Political unrest and the Mangi rule**

It was reported that a state of political unrest emerged among the Chagga in Kilimanjaro region something which led to their disintegration. This is an historical phenomenon which led people in this ethnic group to move here and there in attempt to rescue their lives. All these movements led to the separation among the Chagga hence different Chagga groups moved sideways in attempt to do away with their rivals. This became as such since these groups did not migrate for good sake rather to escape from their rivals (superior/the most powerful group (s)). In this, different groups migrated to the mountain slopes to hide themselves and therefore they tend to develop their own lexicon depending on their socialized group (s).

#### **4.04 Do Chagga varieties constitute different languages or dialects of the same language?**

Hudson (1996) established a theory of mutual intelligibility as a criterion used in distinguishing language from dialects in that if two speakers are able to understand one another; we can assume that they are speaking different varieties of the same language. This theory can then give a ground to reach a logical decision on whether the Chagga varieties constitute different languages or they are just varieties of the same language.

From the study, a researcher realized that Chagga people speak forms of the same language and they have similar marriage, burial, and other rites. This seems to be contrary to what was raised by Maho in the expansion of Guthrie's work; in his classification of the Bantu languages, Maho classified Chagga under E60 and he considered all other varieties as separate languages. It is argued that language is part and parcel of culture as culture is said to be a total way of life. Chagga people therefore have the same cultural practices including the economic activities, celebrations, and all other life conducts.

A contradiction arises mainly in identifying what is considered to be an accent, dialect, or a language. These contradictions can then be cleared by having a look on the following views: *An accent is a way of pronouncing certain words. For example, some people say 'cot' and 'caught' the same way. Then, a dialect may also come with different pronunciations, but usually the words are significantly different. For example, people in the south US say 'spigot' when people in the North US say 'faucet'. Also, speakers with different accents should be able to understand each other. Speakers of different dialects may or may not.* It can be observed that British English and American English have many different words (dialects) which are pronounced differently (accents), but are mutually intelligible.

In this regard, the data obtained through the wordlist and the reading passage provides a ground for justifying that the mentioned cases should not be considered as different languages but rather varieties (dialects) of the same language as they have similar sentence structure, very slight difference in pronunciation as well as a good number of common vocabularies and the speakers understand each other.

Chambers and Trudgill (1998) advocated that the difference between language and dialect is based on size and prestige. In case of a size, a language is bigger (has more speakers) than a dialect since a language is considered to be the sum of its dialects. Dialects are therefore considered to be sub categories of a language, so if we take English as a language we might consider varieties such as Cockney, Yorkshire, Australian English, and so forth as dialects of English language. If that being the case, it should also be logical to consider Kirombo, Kimashami, Kikibosho, Kiuru, Kimochi, and Kivunjo as the varieties (dialects) of the same language namely Kichagga since they are small in size as they are spoken in a single (specific) geographical area. For instance, Kikibosho is spoken in Kibosho ward only, Kiuru is spoken in Uru ward only. Therefore, each variety has a few numbers of speakers to consider it as an independent language.

Lukula (1991) conducted a similar study among Insular Jita in Ukerewe, and through the application of lexicostatistics, Lukula identified that there is 52.75 percentage of resemblance among the Insular Kara, Kerewe Kara, Musoma Jita, Insular Jita against the Kerewe, yet these are termed as varieties of the same language. Therefore, it is very rational to consider Chagga varieties as varieties of the same language namely Kichagga since their percentage of resemblance stands at 60.8. That is Kiuru, Kivunjo, Kimochi, Kikibosho, and Kimashami, against Kirombo. This is observed in the findings from the application of lexicostatistics.

## 5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

As stated in the previous sessions, this study explored the source of language variation among the Chagga in accompany with finding out the extent to which language variation exists among them, the aspects which mark their differences in speaking as well as determining whether Chagga varieties should be considered as different languages or dialects of the same language. The findings obtained in this study enlighten what is happening in Kilimanjaro region among the Chagga especially when communicating through their mother tongue.

As the study revealed, despite the differences in some of the vocabulary, still Chagga people from one place to another in Kilimanjaro region understand each other. This situation could give me a way to recommend that all the mentioned cases, that is Kiuru, Kimashami, Kivunjo, Kirombo, Kimochi, and

Kikibosho should not be considered as different languages rather they are dialects of the same language namely Kichagga. However, this provides a room for other researchers to conduct related researches in this place so as to see if the same results can be obtained.

Moreover, in the study, a researcher identified some of the Chagga groups that have not yet been under the study, for example, Kinarumu, Kisiha, and Kikahe, to mention just a few. Therefore, I suggest some studies to be conducted in these cases to see if they qualify to be grouped among the dialects of Kichagga.

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