

Lexical Variation in Lunyore Nouns

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Abstract:-The noun is a vital element in the grammar of any language. In this paper, lexical variation of nouns in Lunyore is explored. Variation is an intrinsic part of any language. No two people in a speech community can speak identical grammars and no one speaker has a complete invariant grammar. A sample size of 20 respondents was selected through judgmental sampling. After being interviewed and recorded, it was discovered that age caused a bigger degree of variation than the other social variables which include gender and social status. 25 words were targeted and they all had two or more variants. Linguistic data collected enabled us to conclude that lexical variation in Lunyore nouns comes as a result of borrowing, word loss, semantic change, word invention and semantic shift.

Keywords: Lunyore, noun, lexical, variation, social variables

I. INTRODUCTION

Languages vary at all levels; phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic from place to place, one social group to another and from one situation to another (Kaid, 2012). This paper was based on nouns only. Nouns were targeted because they are words that are common in daily speech and respondents easily recall them. Lexis refers to words used to put across meaning in a language. The vocabulary of a language is called lexis. Vocabulary variation is common and can easily be identified (Kaid, 2012.) This is also called lexical variation. Lexical variation is a state where words may refer to various concepts and various concepts may be referred to using one lexical item. It can also be called word choice depending on geographical and social factors like age, gender and social status (Kaid, 2012). A speaker of a given language may choose to use different words and expressions to name a thing in different situations. Different speakers of the same language may also use different words to name the same thing. No two speakers of the same language may speak it exactly the same (Jones & Esch, 2002:123). No particular speaker of a language uses it in exactly the same manner on all occasions, the speaker may chose different variants of a particular variable (Penny, 2003).

In Lunyore, one must be able to deal with noun differences (also called variation) because it occurs. Meanings of linguistic variants depend predominantly on the social context in which speakers live (Eckert, 2008). In this paper, social factors considered include age, gender and social class. Variation is vital; it is an important part of any language (Eckert, 2008). As the grammatical structure of a language remains stable, new words, collocations and expressions are encountered at all levels (Masika, 2017). In choosing the

nouns the researcher reflected on all factors that represent the life of the Abanyore. The informants used different terms to name nouns that were targeted. This shows the presence of lexical differences in Lunyore nouns.

Lunyore is a Luhya dialect spoken by individuals called Abanyore. They moved from Niger –Congo in Central Africa and moved in Kenya through Uganda (Alembi, 2002). Before splitting, they settled at a place called Kiliatongo in Uganda. A section of them later progressed to Kenya leaving behind another set who became Abanyoro still living in Uganda up to day. They got across Lake Victoria and settled around Maseno. Lunyore belongs to the larger group of Niger-Congo and is projected to have 61% lexical resemblance with Lunyoro of Uganda (Grime, 2000). Abanyore live in Western Kenya, Vihiga County, Emuhaya and Luanda Sub –Counties. Their neighbours are Luos, Abalogoli and Abakisa. Luhya has at least 19 dialects in Kenya (Marlo, 2007). Luhya belongs to the Bantoid genus of the Benue-Congo sub-family of the Niger-Congo language family (Haspelmath, Dryer, & Comrie, 2008). This paper is organized as follows; section 2 provides the data and methods, section 3 describes lexical variation in Lunyore nouns, section 4 explores social factors in variation which include age, gender and social status. Section 5 provides summary, conclusion and some issues that require further research.

II. DATA AND METHODS

The study was a qualitative analysis of data. A purposive sample of twenty native speakers within Emuhaya sub county, their native location, was used. The informants included 50% male and 50% female both young and old coming from different social classes. The researcher who is also a native speaker utilized her intrinsic knowledge of the language to provide data. Twenty five nouns were identified for investigation. Each noun was presented to the respondents who gave distinct variety of each noun, showing that actually variation in Lunyore exists. The study relied heavily on interview method which made it possible to obtain data that was suitable. The ages of the informants ranged from sixteen to eighty years across gender divide from all social classes. The data obtained was computed for percentages and presented in charts and a table. Variants for each lexical item were given a percentage according to the frequency of its use by all the informants. The lexical frequency of occurrence for each variant was then presented in tables according to the social factors that bring about variation.

III. LEXICAL VARIATION IN LUNYORE NOUNS

Linguists use the term variety to refer to variation in language (Njuguna, 2018). In Lunyore nouns have varieties as brought out in this paper. Lexical variation in Lunyore nouns occurs when speakers employ different words for the same thing in various contexts. This happens due to various factors such as geographical, social and historical. The factors explored in this paper focus on social factors only. Social variation comes about due to a speaker's age, gender and social status. The study focused on word choice depending on one's social characteristics. Hicky (2010) notes that social varieties used by speakers of a language are defined basing on class, education, age, occupation, sex and other social parameters. Only a single meaning of a word is conveyed in the multiple varieties the word conveys (Hicky, 2010).

Varieties in Lunyore nouns, as shown in table 1 below, come about due to borrowing from other languages, word loss, word invention, semantic change and semantic shift. Twenty five nouns which were selected for this study all had two or more variants. This shows that lexical variety in Lunyore is apparent. The table below summarizes the Lunyore noun varieties.

Table 1: Lexical Variation in Lunyore Nouns

No.	Noun	Variants	Frequency of usage among 20 respondents	Percentage
1.	Gossip	Bienyaenya	4	20%
		Biitina	6	30%
		Butonyi	10	50%
2.	Axe	Embako	5	25%
		Esioka	15	75%
3.	Egg	Libuyu	7	35%
		Liyai	13	65%
4.	World	Esialo	6	30%
		Esibala	14	70%
5.	Market	Esiiro	9	45%
		Esokoni	11	55%
6.	Fish	Isutse	7	35%
		Inyeni	4	20%
		Isamaki	9	45%
7.	Banana	Likomia	13	65%
		Liramwa	7	35%
8.	Adult	Mundu-mkhongo	4	20%
		Mundu-mkali	8	40%
		Mundu-mkhulundu	8	40%
9.	Dirt	Obutsafu	12	60%
		Obumwamu	8	40%

10.	Boy	Omuyaayi	7	35%
		Omusiani	13	65%
11.	Money	Amang'ondo	5	25%
		Etsilupia	2	10%
		Etsisenti	4	20%
		Am'mondo	4	20%
		Amapesa	5	25%
12.	Word	Lang'ana	9	45%
		Likhuwa	11	55%
13.	Vegetables	Tsifua	13	65%
		Tsingutsa	7	35%
14.	Chair	Indebe	10	50%
		Sisala	4	20%
		Sifumbi	6	30%
15.	Business	Obukhala	6	30%
		Ebibiasara	14	70%
16.	Grass	Obulimo	7	35%
		Obunyaasi	13	65%
17.	Stream	Esitao	8	40%
		Emwalo	4	20%
		Omuchela	8	40%
18.	Innerwear	Esitwea	2	10%
		Esiruali	12	60%
		Esibunguyi	6	30%
19.	Pot	Indabu	11	55%
		Isiongo	9	45%
20.	Church	Elikanisa	12	60%
		Elibukana	8	40%
21.	Out	Elwanyi	10	50%
		Esioba	10	50%
22.	Mirror	Esilang'i	8	40%
		Esikioo	12	60%
23.	Pocket	Omutaata	8	40%
		Omufuko	12	60%
24.	Girl	Omukhana	16	80%
		Esichong'o	4	20%
25.	Plate	Esahani	11	55%
		Epakuli	8	40%
		Esipangalia	1	5%

IV. SOCIAL FACTORS IN VARIATION

Language is closely related to society. Aside from geographical and historical factors, social factors also cause language variation. The study focused on social factors only.

Social factors in variation discussed include age, gender and social status. People’s way of speaking can differ from one person to another depending on their gender, age and social status.

4.1 The Age Variable

The process of ageing cannot be isolated from the society, its culture and history (Eckert, 1997). Older speakers are conservative and purists in language usage while younger speakers tend to be inventive and liberal. During this co-existence, the varieties of a language are realized. It is in late adolescence or young adulthood that speakers build an independent social and linguistic uniqueness as well as lessen parental influence (Labov, 2001). Young speakers seem to borrow significantly from other languages. Masika (2017) noted that due to this, varieties of a language emerge. In

Lunyore, young speakers have a tendency to use new nouns unlike older speakers who are traditionalists and try to maintain original Lunyore nouns that are less common in daily usage.

Younger speakers are, therefore, innovative and readily embrace linguistic changes. Kaid (2017) asserted that young people are easily swayed by a series of social changes which affect their language and behaviour consequently teenagers’ language is unstable. In order to show the relationship between lexical variation and age as a social characteristic, five nouns were randomly selected and presented to informants. Their responses are presented in table 2 which shows that respondents above 50 years use more conservative nouns that are less common unlike younger speakers below 50 years who use nouns borrowed largely from other languages especially Swahili and other Luhya dialects.

Table 2: Relationship between lexical variation in nouns and age of Lunyore speakers

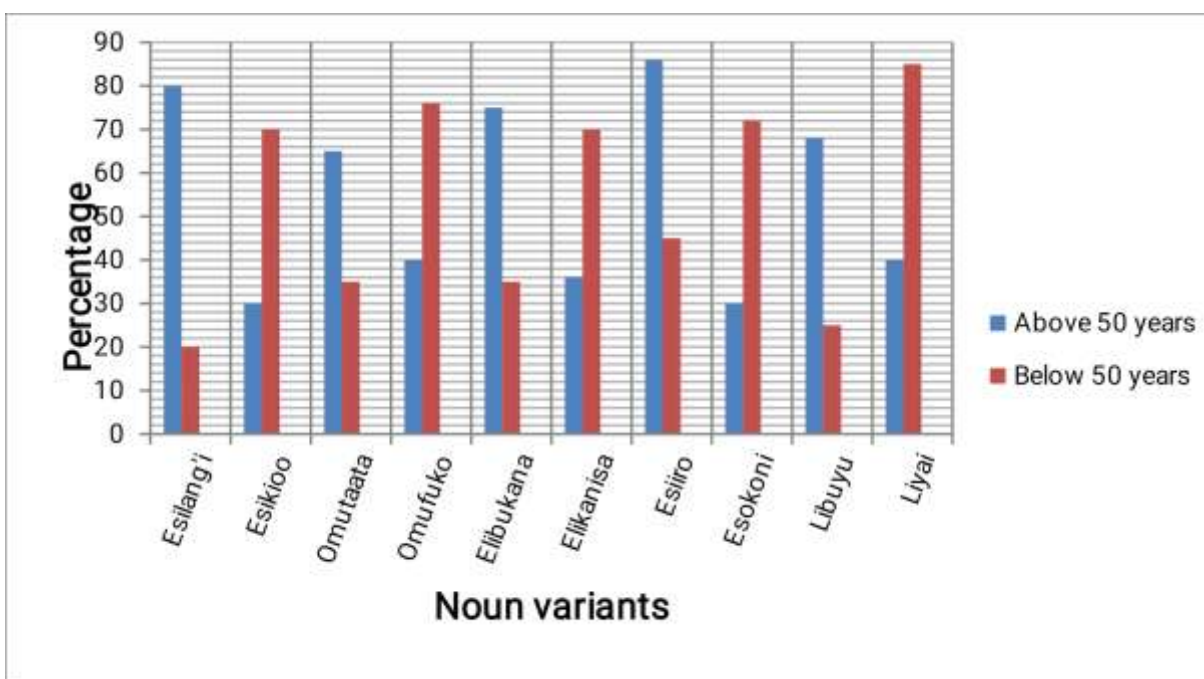


Table 2 reveals that older members are conservative and stick to original Lunyore noun variants such as *esilang'i*, *omutaata*, *elibukana*, *esiiro* and *libuyyu*. These variants are rarely used by young generation who pick variants majorly borrowed from other languages such as Swahili. Most of them picked on *esikioo*, *omufuko*, *elikanisa*, *esokoni* and *liyai* which are borrowed.

4.2 The Gender Variable

Men and women are socially and biologically unique hence have unique behaviours (Kaid, 2017). Sex is a biological category referring to the anatomical reproductive dissimilarity between men and women while gender is a social category (Simpson & Mayr 2010:15). Gender includes biological sex but broaden towards socially specified roles considered fit for

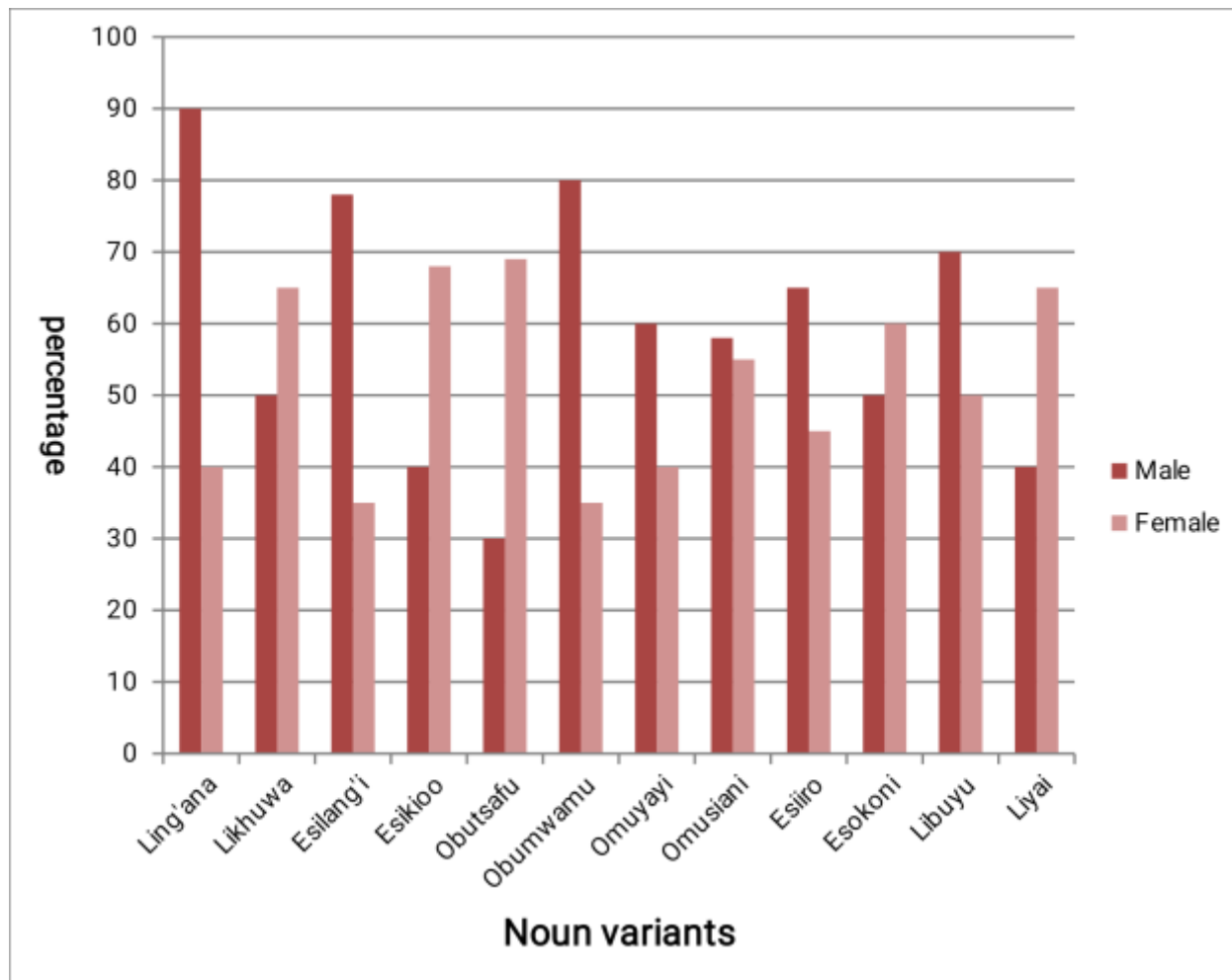
each sex by the cultures we live in (Lee & Aschcraft, 2005). Rao, Yarowsky, Shreevats and Gupta (2010) studied tweets by 1000 authors using a classifier. It was reported that women used emotions, expressive lengthening, complex punctuation and ellipses more than men on their posts. Bamman, Eisenstein and Schnoebelen (2014) carried out a corpus study of 14000 twitter users. They discovered that women used more pronouns, emotion terms and kinship terms than men. Women use fewer nonstandard and stigmatized variants than men of equal social group in the same situation (Chambers, 2003).

Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (1992:90) asserted that women’s language portray their prestige consciousness, solidarity, insecurity and sensitivity to others while the language of men

reveal their control, toughness, competitiveness and independence. Language symbolically places women as inferior to men (Romaine, 2001:70). Women are more polite, collaborative and indirect in conversation whereas men are the opposite (Coates, 2014). In Lunyore as it was realized, the trend is similar. Labov (2001) argued that women use prestigious forms in comparison to men in order to display their value in the society. Women center on family roles, friendships and relationships whereas men center on sports, actions, events and establish the value of being in control (Macaulay, 2003).

This trend is similar in regard to Lunyore speakers. Six nouns were randomly chosen and presented to respondents of both sex. Their responses are presented in the chart below which reveals that Abanyore women use language to keep in touch and maintain relationships with other people, therefore, prefer common nouns than men who prefer uncommon nouns to exercise social dominance. Abanyore women are more polite than men and are linguistically accommodating in communication.

Table 3: Relationship between lexical variation in nouns and the gender of Lunyore speakers



As can be observed in table 3, for every common noun variant, the number of female informants using it was more than that of males. Most of the female Lunyore speakers used variants like *likhuwa*, *esikioo*, *obutsafu*, *esokoni* and *liyai* that are more common than variants such as *esilang'i*, *obumwamu*, *omuyayi*, *esiiro* and *libuyu* mainly used by male respondents. Most of the common variants are borrowed from other languages, the uncommon ones are deemed to be original words of Lunyore.

4.3 The Social Class Variable

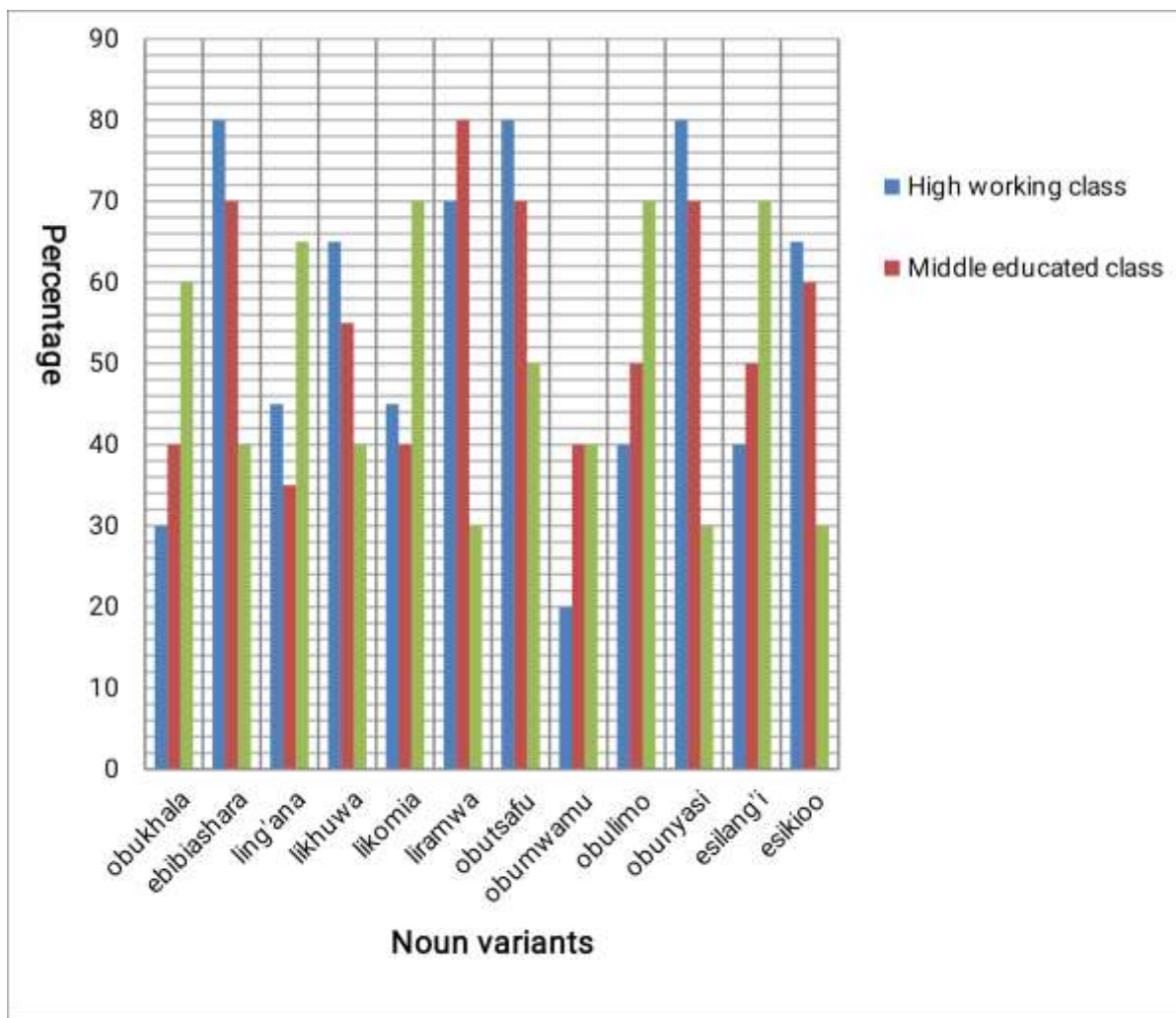
Class is one of the structures of stratification which encourage inequality in the society (Milroy 2004). She further claims that class divides a community into sub groups characterized by varied orientations to family, work and leisure. Social classes are symbolized in a social hierarchy of lower-middle or upper-working classes (Milroy 2004). Variation in lexis may be used by speakers to identify with a particular social group. In this paper our focus on social class would encompass occupation and level of education. Chambers

(2003) noted the main aim of linguistic variation is to mark group membership under a certain social class. In many communities differences in social status amongst people occur ranging from those with highest prestige to those with lowest (Kaid, 2012).

Macaulay (2003) claimed that working class speakers use a significantly longer phrase length and spent much less time pausing than the middle class group. Higher class speakers are likely to use a local variety of the standard language; older members of the working class are likely to maintain older forms which have become non-standard while younger

speakers of high standing are likely to use innovated forms (Feagin, 2003). This is also the tendency amongst the Lunyore speakers. It was revealed that social class determines how speakers use the language. Speakers of different levels of education and occupation who belong to different social classes were presented with randomly selected six nouns. Table 4 shows their responses which confirm that Lunyore speakers of particular classes use language for social identity and to differentiate themselves from other individuals who do not belong to their circle or group. In this sense, variation is used to both include and exclude membership to a linguistic or social group.

Table 4: Relationship between lexical variation in Lunyore nouns and social class of speakers



From table 4, we observe that each social class has its preferred variants. The high working class picked on variants such as *ebibiashara*, *likhuwa*, *liramwa*, *obutsafu*, *obunyasi* and *esikioo* more than their variant counterparts. The middle educated class mostly picked on *ebibiashara*, *likhuwa*, *liramwa*, *obunyasi* and *esikioo*. The low unemployed class chose *obukhala*, *ling'ana*, *likomia*, *obumwamu*, *obulimo* and *esilang'i* in higher degree than the other counterpart variants.

This confirms the contention that social classes are related with linguistic choices.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND FURTHER ISSUES

In this study of lexical variation in Lunyore nouns, it is observed that noun variations do exist. The variation is largely related to the speaker's social characteristics. The findings of this paper have shown that social variables such as age, gender and social class have a bearing on lexical variation in

Lunyore nouns. Speakers of both sexes were observed to use different lexical terms to identify the targeted nouns. Male speakers of Lunyore have a preference for less common variants. This, as it was earlier observed is meant to exercise social dominance. Female Lunyore speakers prefer variants that are more common. This is to sustain relationships and keep in touch with others. The study also revealed that speakers of Lunyore who come from different social classes used different vocabulary to name the targeted nouns. It was noted that this happens for social identity and locking out those who do not belong (outsiders).

Age also influenced lexical choice. Young speakers used different vocabulary distinct from older speakers to name the targeted nouns. The young generation is innovative and open-minded in lexical choice often code-switching spontaneously and used common variants largely borrowed from other languages and dialects. They used variants specific to them as a social group as well. The older generation is more conservative and used variants that are not common often considered to be original Lunyore terms. From our study it was discovered that lexical variation of nouns in Lunyore comes about because of borrowing, word loss, semantic shift, word invention and semantic change. Through these findings, it can be argued that age causes a higher degree of variation in nouns than the other social variables. This may be due to the fact that age is a variable that occurs to both genders and all social classes in a community. In addition, the youth invent new vocabulary through borrowing from other languages, advent of new concepts and influence of technology such as the media and internet.

It can therefore be concluded that lexical variation in Lunyore nouns occurs majorly amongst the youth. The old generation attempts to preserve their vocabulary because they are traditionalists and linguistic purists who consider themselves as defenders of the sanctity of their language. In future, it would be interesting to investigate why the vocabulary of these old generation folk is often steady and what actually happens to the youth when they get old.

Our main concern was on lexical variation of nouns. In light of this, we suggest a further research on lexical variation in other parts of speech such as the verb and adjective within the Lunyore dialect. Variation in other linguistic aspects for instance; phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax within the Luhya dialects can also be an area of interest. In order to maintain and promote Lunyore as a language, speakers should be aware of the causes of variation and their impact. This is because variation is the synchronic indicator of change and language change is caused by variation. A study that examines whether this lexical variation is a pointer to ongoing linguistic change would be beneficial to historical linguists and variationist sociolinguists.

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