Is there such a Language as Gikirinyaga?

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Abstract

This paper adopts an interrogative approach to foreground the dilemma currently unfolding in Kirinyaga County, where a section of the county's inhabitants has expressed reservations regarding the use of the name *Gikuyu* to designate their language and *Agikuyu* to refer to the people. This group contends that, although the language they speak exhibits notable similarities with Gikuyu, it constitutes a distinct language and should therefore not be classified as a dialect of Gikuyu. The issue is further complicated by the contrary position taken by the Kirinyaga County Government, which views the proposed change of both the linguonym and the ethnonym as an undesirable development with the potential to drive a wedge between the people of Kirinyaga and their brothers and sisters with whom they are presumed to share the ethnonym *Agikuyu*. Without prescriptively offering a resolution to this impasse, the paper adopts an analytical perspective that integrates historical (archival), linguistic, and sociolinguistic accounts. Historical records indicate that the area currently known as Kirinyaga County was, at one point, part of what was then referred to as Embu District, a configuration that may have been informed by perceived close cultural and linguistic affiliations between the people of Kirinyaga and those of Embu. At the levels of phonology, morphology, and the lexicon, significant similarities are observed between the Gikuyu varieties spoken in Kiambu, Nyeri, and Murang'a counties, on the one hand, and that spoken in Kirinyaga County, on the other. However, noticeable discrepancies within these

same linguistic domains also emerge when the varieties spoken by the two groups are juxtaposed. The sociolinguistic considerations highlighted in this study are therefore critical in determining whether Gichugu–Ndia and Gikuyu warrant recognition in the linguistic record as two distinct entries or as a single entry.

Keywords: Gikuyu, Ndia, Gichugu/gicugu, dialect, languages in Kenya

Introduction

Kirinyaga County is one of Kenya's forty-seven administrative counties. It borders Nyeri County to the west, Murang'a County to the southwest, and Embu County to the northeast. These four counties are predominantly inhabited by speakers of languages that belong to the Bantu family, a major branch of the Niger–Congo phylum of African languages. Given their shared genetic ancestry, the structural similarities observed among these languages are to be expected. However, some of these similarities also arise from sustained geographical proximity and prolonged interaction among speakers, making the borrowing of linguistic forms an inevitable outcome. It is this convergence resulting from both common ancestry and language contact that has generated controversy regarding the identities of these languages, particularly in relation to the language–dialect distinction.

The inhabitants of Nyeri and Murang'a counties, as well as those of Kiambu County, are generally understood to speak Gikuyu, albeit with identifiable regional variations. In contrast, the people of Embu County are commonly described as speakers of Kiembu, alongside Kimbere. When the question of the language spoken by the people of Kirinyaga County is raised, however, a definitive answer becomes less straightforward. A section of the Kirinyaga population has publicly asserted that the language they speak is not Gikuyu. According to this group, speakers of Gikuyu from Nyeri, Murang'a, and Kiambu counties

have long been aware of this distinction but tend to categorize Kirinyaga speakers as Gikuyu only in specific contexts, often for political expediency. This group, operating under the auspices of the Kenya Indigenous Languages Forum (KILAFO), maintains that the language spoken in Kirinyaga County is Gikirinyaga, which they argue comprises Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia as its constituent dialects.

The position taken by the County Government of Kirinyaga is the exact opposite of what KILAFO seeks to advance. The county government argues that the people of Kirinyaga are Agikuyu who speak a language called Gikuyu but with some peculiarities which do not necessarily impede communication with other speakers of Gikuyu. To consolidate its argument, the County Government takes recourse to the oral literature of the people. The people of Kirinyaga share common oral narratives with the Gikuyu speakers from Nyeri, Muranga and Kiambu counties, attesting to the fact that they are one people. This paper seeks to interrogate pertinent issues that may be at play when it comes to the choice of linguonym and ethnonym. This will be done by examining historical, linguistic, and sociolinguistic accounts.

Historical and Comparative Accounts

Different scholars have attempted to account for the pre-independence linguistic landscape of the region surrounding Mount Kenya and to explain the relationships among the various ethnic groups inhabiting the area (Lambert, 1964; Muriuki, 1974; Njoroge, 2017). Although it is difficult to arrive at a consensus regarding the specific migratory routes followed by these groups from what is commonly regarded as their cradle land to their present settlements, there is near unanimity among these scholars on the existence of a proto-ethnic group known as the Thagicu. Members of this proto-ethnic group are believed to have occupied the area around the Nyambene Hills.

According to Njoroge (2017), the Thagicu are described as: "…the ancestors of the following groups: the Agikuyu, the Aembu, the Cuka, the Mbeere, the Ndia, the Gicugu, and the Tharaka" (p. 17). Several decades earlier, Muriuki (1974) made a closely related observation, noting that: "…on the basis of the available evidence, it is quite clear that the ancestors of the Tharaka, Cuka, Mbeere, Embu, Ndia, Gicugu and of the Kikuyu migrated from Tigania and Igembe in Meru" (p. 49). From the foregoing discussion, it becomes apparent that these ethnic groups are generally treated as having a common ancestry and are therefore related, although each group is understood to exhibit certain distinctive cultural and linguistic features.

With regard to language, Njoroge (2017) further observes that when one moves into central-eastern Kenya, one encounters the Agikuyu speaking a language that is closely related to those spoken by their neighbours, notably the Ameru and the Akamba, and that is "virtually identical" to the languages spoken by the Embu, Mbeere, Gicugu, Ndia, and Cuka (p. 29). This observation underscores the high degree of linguistic affinity that characterizes the languages of the Mount Kenya region.

Earlier scholarly accounts echo similar positions. Crawford (1913), whose work predates Njoroge's by several decades, notes that:

> The Tana River divides the province into two sections; in the Cis-Tana section are the Akikuyu proper, to the number of some 450,000, and the Trans-Tana section is occupied by other tribes which are branches of the Kikuyu family, speaking different dialects of the same language, numbering about 550,000… These kindred tribes comprise the Ndia, Embu, Chuka, Mwimbi, Tharaka and Meru, all inhabiting the territory east and north-east of Mt Kenya (pp. 29–30).

Clearly, the recognition of linguistic consanguinity, or closeness, among the languages spoken in the Mount Kenya region predates Kenya's independence by several decades. Notably, Ndia and Gicugu, the two varieties that constitute the focus of the present study, are treated as being related to Gikuyu in much the same way as Embu, Chuka, and Mbeere. If one were to rely solely on these historical and linguistic accounts, the position advanced by the Kenya Indigenous Languages Forum (KILAFO), that Gicugu and Ndia are not dialects of Gikuyu but rather languages closely related to it, would appear justifiable. Under this interpretation, Gicugu and Ndia stand in the same relational proximity to Gikuyu as Embu, Mbeere, and Chuka, rather than functioning as subordinate subsets within Gikuyu.

Linguistic Account

One of the most highly cited linguistic studies that interrogates the degree of linguistic relatedness among the languages and/or dialects of the Mount Kenya region is Mutahi (1977). The study, titled *Sound Change and the Classification of the Dialects of Southern Mt. Kenya*, provides a systematic comparative analysis of the sound systems of the varieties spoken in this region. What Mutahi (1977) refers to as the dialects of Southern Mount Kenya include Ki-Embu, Ki-Mbeere, Ki-Gicugu, Ki-Ndia, Ki-Mathira, the Northern Dialect, and the Southern Dialect. The Ki-Mathira dialect refers to the variety of Gikuyu spoken in Karatina and other parts of what is today Nyeri County. The Northern Dialect is the variety of Gikuyu spoken in parts of Nyeri County and throughout Murang'a County, while the Southern Dialect corresponds to the Gikuyu spoken in present-day Kiambu County. Ki-Mbeere and Ki-Embu are spoken in what is currently Embu County.

In his analysis of the linguistic proximity among these dialects, Mutahi (1977) observes that: "The linguistic differences between Ki-Embu and Ki-Mbeere are less marked than those between Ki-Gicugu and Ki-Ndia on one side and Ki-Mathira, Northern, and Southern dialects on the other" (p. 6).

The linguistic differences observed between Ki-Embu and Ki-Mbeere are so minimal that, according to Mutahi, they do not warrant treating the two as separate linguistic entities. This position leads Mutahi (1977) to assert that: "…the division between Embu and Mbeere is more historical or political than linguistic. Linguistically, there is no justification for this division" (p. 6). He further adds that: "Linguistically, there would be more justification for a division between the Gicugu–Ndia group and the western dialects of Mathira, Northern and Southern dialects" (Mutahi, 1977, p. 6).

On the basis of a detailed comparative analysis of the sound systems of Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gicugu, on the one hand, and Ki-Mbeere and Ki-Embu, on the other, Mutahi (1977) notes that while these dialects share an identical sound structure, they differ in the phonological rules governing sound realization (p. 8). This observation suggests that the differences among these varieties are not rooted in their phonemic inventories but rather in the phonological processes that apply to these inventories.

From Mutahi's analysis, it would therefore be reasonable to deduce that, on strictly linguistic grounds, Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gicugu exhibit closer affinity to Ki-Embu and Ki-Mbeere than they do to Ki-Mathira, the Northern Dialect, and the Southern Dialect. This conclusion complicates simplistic classifications that group Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gicugu unproblematically under Gikuyu and instead points to a more nuanced linguistic landscape characterized by varying degrees of internal differentiation within the broader Mount Kenya linguistic continuum.

Lexical Differences

It would therefore be appropriate to sample selected lexical items that distinguish Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia, on the one hand, from the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects, on the other hand. Such a comparative examination of vocabulary provides concrete linguistic evidence of divergence and convergence among these varieties and helps to illuminate the

extent to which Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia align with, or depart from, the broader Gikuyu dialect continuum.

Table 1: Lexical similarities/differences between Ki-Gichugu & Ki-Ndia and the Northern, Southern and Mathira dialects

Ki-Gichugu	Ki-Ndia	Ki-Mathira	Northern dialect	Southern dialect	GLOSS
mũcuthĩ	mũting'oe	mũting'oe	mũting'oe	mũting'oe	tail
mũthita	mũthita	mũcuthĩ	mũcuthĩ	mũcuthĩ	penis
kuthũka	kuthũka	teng'era	teng'era	teng'era	run
ndeerũ	ndeerũ	theerũ	theerũ	theerũ	baboon
kabari	kabari	karĩma	karĩma	karĩma	Small hill
kĩthayo	kĩthayo	kĩrimũ	kĩrimũ	kĩrimũ	fool
mabĩndĩ	mabĩndĩ	mahĩndĩ	mahĩndĩ	mahĩndĩ	bones
mũkoni	mũkoni	mũramba	mũramba	mũramba	Banana stem
mbĩndĩ	mbĩndĩ	mbũrũgũtũ	mbũrũgũtũ	mbũrũgũtũ	tablets
ndithino	ndithino	thithino	thithino	thithino	sweat
aba	aba	haha	haha	haha	here

From the table, it is apparent that Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia, on the one hand, share a considerable number of lexical similarities, just as Ki-Mathira, the Southern dialect, and the Northern dialect do, on the other hand. This internal lexical cohesion within the two groups suggests close intra-group relationships. However, it is also noticeable that a significant number of lexical items used in Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia to refer to particular referents are not used in Ki-Mathira, the Southern dialect, and the Northern dialect; instead, alternative lexical forms are employed in these varieties.

Furthermore, it is important to observe that even where identical lexical items occur across the five varieties, the meanings ascribed to these items may differ significantly. Such semantic divergence further complicates the question of mutual intelligibility and classification. For instance, the word *mũcuthĩ* is used by speakers of Ki-Gichugu to refer to 'tail', whereas speakers of Ki-Mathira, the Southern dialect, and the Northern dialect use the same lexical item to refer to 'penis'. Similarly, the word *kĩthayo* /keðajɔ/ is used in Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia to refer to 'a fool', while the same word, realized orthographically as *gĩthayo* and phonologically as /ɣeðajɔ/, is used in Ki-Mathira, the Southern dialect, and the Northern dialect to denote 'a lazy person'. These instances of semantic shift underscore the extent of lexical and semantic differentiation among the varieties under consideration.

Grammatical Differences

Mutahi (1977) has examined the grammatical differences that obtain between what calls the dialects of Southern Mt Kenya. In the analysis it emerges that these dialects have more shared common features than those that are different. This is especially with regard to the morphological and syntactic domains. However, there are some salient grammatical features that distinguish the Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia, on one hand, and the Northern, Southern and Mathira dialects on the other. Here are a few examples:

The demonstrative 'here' is aba [aβa] in Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu. In the Northern, Southern and Mathira dialects the word is haha [haha]. In Ki-Embu and Ki-Mbere the word is ava [ava].

The preposition 'of'

The speakers of the Northern and Southern Dialect will use <a-> while speakers of Ki-Ndia, Ki-Gichugu and Mathira will use <ma->. In a sentence this would be:

The Ki-Ndia, Ki-Gichugu and Mathira speakers would say,

Ithũĩ tũrĩ andũ makĩrĩnyaga namo arĩa nĩ makabete . Which means 'We are people of/from Kirinyaga while those ones are of/from Kabete'. Those from the Northern and Southern dialects would say,

Ithũĩ tũ(r)ĩ andũ akĩrĩnyaga nao arĩa nĩ akabete. Which still means 'We are people of/from Kirinyaga while those ones are of/from Kabete'

Regarding the example above, notice that where those from the Northern and Southern dialects use the prefix <a-> (in a-kirinyaga; a-kabete) speakers of Ki-Ndia, Ki-Gichugu and Mathira varieties use <ma-> (in ma-kirinyaga; ma-kabete) Note also that the speakers of Ki-Ndia,Ki-Gichugu and Mathira use 'namo' while those from the Northern and Southern dialects say *nao*.

The Negative Particle

Another salient morphological distinction between the dialect groups under discussion concerns the form of the negative particle. Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu employ the negative particle *[te]*, whereas the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects use *[ti]* to mark negation. This variation, although minimal in form, is systematic and consistently observed across the respective dialects. For instance, speakers of Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu would express negation as follows:

Ûyũ te mũrata wakwa

to mean 'This one is not my friend.'

In contrast, speakers of the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects would render the same meaning as:

Ûyũ ti mũrata wakwa,

which likewise translates as 'This one is not my friend.'

Such differences in the realization of negative particles constitute clear morphological markers that differentiate Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu from the Northern, Southern, and Mathira

dialects. Although these distinctions may appear minor in isolation, when considered alongside other phonological, lexical, and grammatical variations, they contribute to a broader pattern of systematic differentiation among the varieties spoken in the Mount Kenya region. These examples, therefore, illustrate that while the dialects share a substantial common grammatical core, they also exhibit distinct morphological features that are relevant to debates on linguistic classification.

Phonological Differences

One domain in which the distinction between Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu, on the one hand, and the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects, on the other hand, emerges most clearly is pronunciation. Phonological variation across these varieties provides some of the most salient and systematic evidence of differentiation. Several pronunciation patterns have been identified in the literature and through empirical observation.

First, the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects tend to simplify or reduce certain consonant clusters, whereas speakers of Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu generally retain these clusters intact (Ngure, 2005). This tendency toward consonant cluster reduction marks a consistent phonological divergence between the two groups. Second, in some lexical items where Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu realize the consonant cluster *<mb>*, the corresponding forms in the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects exhibit *<h>* instead. This alternation reflects a systematic sound correspondence rather than random variation. Third, where Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu use the bilabial fricative *[β]*, orthographically represented as *<b>*, the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects typically realize the same phoneme as *[h]* or *[ff]*. This variation highlights a significant phonetic and phonological shift across the dialect continuum.

Fourth, in certain environments where Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu employ the velar stop *[k]*, the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects use the voiced velar fricative *[ɣ]*, which is

conventionally represented orthographically by the letter *<g>*. Finally, in some lexical items where Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu use the prenasalized stop *[nd]*, represented as *<nd>*, the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects employ the interdental fricative *[ð]*, represented orthographically as *<th>*.

These phonological correspondences are illustrated in the examples below, where phonetic symbols are used to provide greater precision in representing the observed pronunciation differences.

Table 2: Phonological differences between Ki-Gichugu & Ki-Ndia and the Northern, Southern and Mathira Dialects

Ki-Ndia/Ki-Gichugu	Southern and Northern Dialect	Mathira	Written form	Gloss
ᵐbɛᵐbɛ	bɛbɛ	bɛbɛ	mbembe	maize
ᵐbɔʃɔ	bɔʃɔ	bɔʃɔ	mboco	beans
ᵐbarika	harika	harika	Mbarika/harika	She goat
ᵐbiti	hiti	hiti	Mbiti/hiti	hyena
moβereɣa	mohereɣa	mohereɣa	Mũbĩrĩga/mũhĩrĩga	clan
mbɛβɔ	hɛhɔ	hɛhɔ	Mbebo/heho	cold
oβɔrɔ	ohɔrɔ	ohɔrɔ	ũhoro	news
roβe	rohe	rohe	rũhĩ	A slap
keðiɔrɔ	ɣeðiɔrɔ	ɣeðiɔrɔ	Kĩthioro/ gĩthioro	bend
koðɛʃa	ɣoðɛʃa	ɣoðɛʃa	kũtheca/gũtheca	To pierce
ⁿdɛⁿgɛ	ðɛgɛ	ðɛgɛ	Ndenge/thenge	He goat

It is worth emphasizing that, in addition to the phonological differences outlined above, which are largely *segmental* in nature and involve specific consonantal or vocalic realizations, there exist other phonological distinctions that do not pertain to individual sounds but instead manifest at the *prosodic* level. A salient example of such prosodic variation is tonal differentiation. In several instances, lexical items in Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu differ in meaning from their counterparts in the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects solely on the basis of tonal configuration. In such cases, the segmental structure of the words remains identical across the varieties, yet differences in pitch patterning result in semantic contrast. This underscores the functional role of tone in distinguishing meaning across these dialects and further highlights the complexity of phonological variation within the broader Gikuyu dialect continuum.

Sociolinguistic Dimension

Sociolinguistics is a critical subfield of linguistics as it seeks to address the ways in which language is used within society. The insights provided by sociolinguistics have proven indispensable in informing language planning and language policy decisions. Within this perspective, researchers analyze the attitudes of speakers toward their own language or languages and interrogate how these attitudes affect language use and perception. Studies have demonstrated that decisions regarding whether a particular variety is classified as a fully-fledged language or as a dialect of another language are not necessarily determined by purely linguistic considerations. Rather, non-linguistic factors frequently come into play and may outweigh linguistic evidence, even when a linguistic determination is required.

Such factors include politics, numerical dominance, economic influence, and the prestige associated with speakers of a particular language (Ngure, 2015). Collectively, these are referred to as sociolinguistic considerations. They account for situations in which two varieties exhibiting minimal mutual intelligibility, therefore, qualifying as distinct languages,

are nonetheless regarded as dialects of a single language. This phenomenon is observed among the Luhya and Kalenjin, where certain "dialects" have a very low degree of mutual intelligibility but are treated as part of one language (Angogo, 1983). Conversely, the same non-linguistic factors may result in two highly mutually intelligible varieties being recognized as distinct languages. Examples of this include Swedish and Norwegian, Zulu and Xhosa, Hindi and Urdu, and Serbian and Croatian (Wardhaugh, 2010).

These observations illustrate that when sociopolitical or social cohesion interests are prioritized, communities may overlook substantial linguistic differences to assert a single-language identity. Conversely, even minor linguistic differences may be emphasized in contexts lacking a desire for unity. In the southern Mount Kenya region, sociolinguistic factors have clearly shaped the linguistic landscape. Early missionary accounts indicate that Kikuyu, Embu, Chuka, Mbere, Meru, Ndia, and Gichugu were recognized as related languages, albeit with noticeable differences (Crawford, 1913). However, when the Bible was first translated into Kikuyu, a combination of the Southern and Northern dialects, the text was utilized by speakers of Ki-Embu, Ki-Mbere, Ki-Meru, Gi-Chuka, Ki-Ndia, and Ki-Gichugu. This situation persisted until relatively recently, when translations became available for some of these varieties.

Currently, the Bible has been translated into Ki-Meru and Ki-Embu, while speakers of Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu continue to use the version based on a combination of Southern and Northern Gikuyu dialects. The availability of an authoritative text in a community's own language often boosts linguistic self-esteem and reinforces efforts to maintain the language. This effect is exemplified by Kitharaka, which was threatened by Ki-Imenti; after the Bible was translated into Kitharaka, language maintenance efforts achieved significant success.

The Bone of Contention

According to the Kenya Indigenous Languages Forum (KILAFO), the continued treatment of Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia as dialects of Gikuyu constitutes a denial of the linguistic rights of the people of Kirinyaga. KILAFO perceives Gikuyu as a hegemonial language that seeks to encroach upon all linguistic spaces belonging to Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia speakers. The forum is particularly critical of the manner in which the issue of the medium of instruction in lower primary schools has been handled in Kirinyaga County. Despite the stipulations of the Ministry of Education, which mandate that children in lower primary school should be introduced to formal education using the language of the catchment area (MOE-TIQET, 1999), Ndia and Gichugu children are not instructed in their mother tongues. Instead, the vernacular books provided are written in Gikuyu rather than Ki-Ndia or Ki-Gichugu.

The group advocating for the recognition of Gikirinyaga as a distinct language argues that the state appears to support the subjugation of Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Ndia by Gikuyu. One example of this is the Kenya Broadcasting Service (KBS), a state-run media house, which has never allocated airtime to Ki-Ndia or Ki-Gichugu within its local languages forum. In contrast, other communities in the Mt. Kenya region have been granted FM radio stations by KBS, which broadcast in their respective local languages. These include Coro FM, which primarily broadcasts in Gikuyu as spoken in Murang'a, Kiambu, and Nyeri; Ngemi FM, which broadcasts in Kiembu; and Mwago FM, which broadcasts in Kimeru.

Notwithstanding KILAFO's efforts to secure recognition for Gikirinyaga, it is important to note that not all residents of Kirinyaga County share this perspective. A significant portion of the population aligns with the county government's view regarding the identity of the people of Kirinyaga and their language. To this segment of the population, referring to their language as Gikirinyaga is offensive, as the term has historically been used

derogatorily by speakers of Gikuyu from Nyeri, Murang'a, and Kiambu counties. Given the apparent lack of consensus on the appropriate name for the language spoken in Kirinyaga County, initiatives aimed at fostering a strong ethnolinguistic consciousness are significantly undermined.

Conclusion

Clearly, the answer to the question, "Are Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu dialects of Gikuyu or are they distinct languages?" is not straightforward. A number of historical, linguistic, and sociolinguistic considerations must be examined in order to construct a reasonable response. If one adopts the position of Mutahi (1977) and bases the evaluation solely on linguistic evidence, Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu would be considered closer to Ki-Embu and Ki-Mbere than they are to the Northern, Southern, and Mathira dialects of Gikuyu. This may explain why, historically, Kirinyaga was once part of Embu District. Such evidence lends credibility to KILAFO's argument that Ki-Ndia and Ki-Gichugu constitute a distinct language, albeit one related to Gikuyu. However, the question of what to officially call the language remains unresolved, as the proposed name *Gikirinyaga* is not universally accepted by the population.

In contrast, the county government of Kirinyaga takes a position grounded in sociolinguistic considerations and maintains that the people of Kirinyaga are part of the Agikuyu ethnic community, and that their language is Gikuyu. As highlighted earlier, the objective of this article was not to prescribe a definitive solution to the apparent impasse between some residents and the county authorities. Nevertheless, from a linguistic perspective, a participatory approach similar to that adopted in South Africa during the onomastic dilemma involving Sepedi, Sesotho sa Leboa, and Northern Sotho could be instructive (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2021). In that case, there was a general perception that the three names referred to a single language.

The decision on which name to adopt was made following a study in which a representative sample of the population was consulted, resulting in 64% of respondents opting for *Sesotho sa Leboa*. A comparable study in Kirinyaga County could provide valuable insights into the proportion of residents who have reservations about the use of the names Gikuyu and Agikuyu for their language and community. Furthermore, such a study could identify alternative names for those dissatisfied with the current nomenclature. The timing of this study would be critical; it should precede initiatives such as the publication of language teaching materials and translation of authoritative texts, including the Bible, to ensure that these resources are embraced by the intended beneficiaries and do not face rejection due to perceived misnaming.

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