



Language Differences between Interviewers and Respondents in Sub-Saharan African Surveys

3MC Conference Presentation

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Acknowledgements

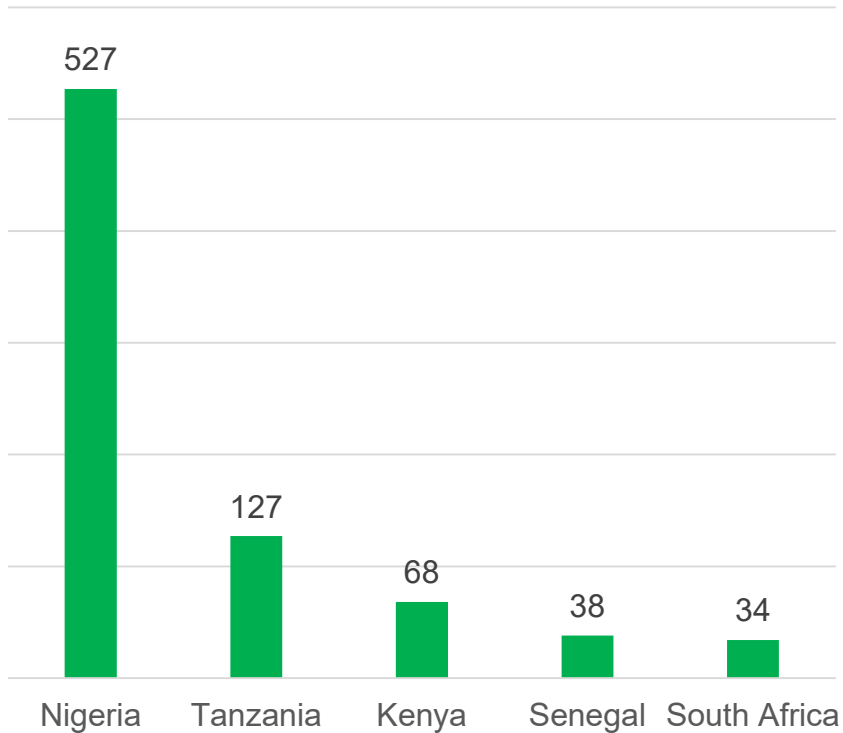
Co-authors (alphabetical)

- Melissa Baker
- Stephanie Eckman
- Ben Piper

Languages in Africa

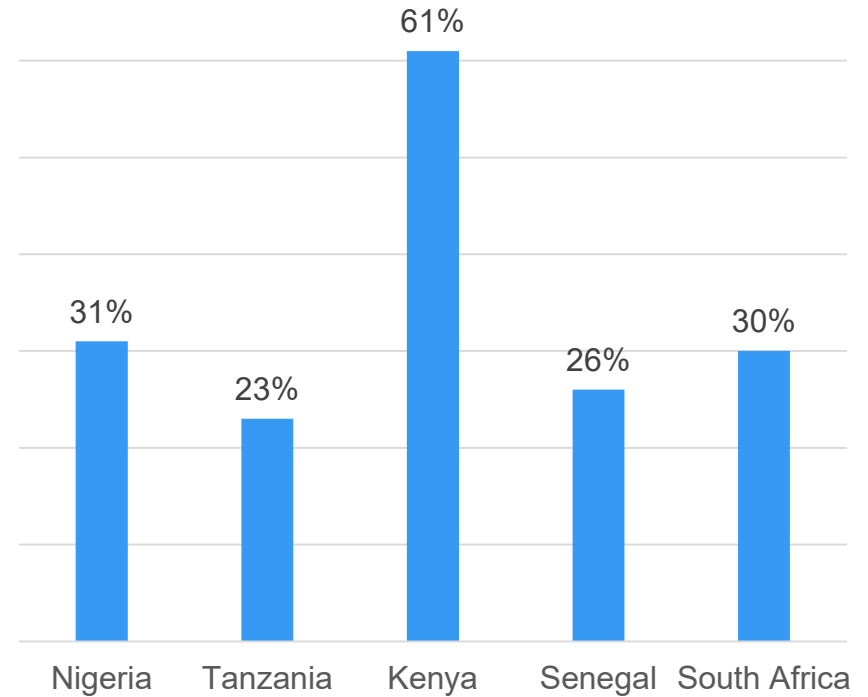
Many countries are multi-lingual

Number of Languages Spoken



Many people are multi-lingual

Percent of Adults that Speak **Three** or More Languages



Source: Ethnologue
(<https://www.ethnologue.com/>)

Source: Author analysis of
Afrobarometer Wave 3 data

Three Types of Languages in Africa

Mother tongue

- Language of local tribe or community

Local language of broader communication

- Lingua franca
- African language
- Example: Swahili in Kenya

International language of broader communication

- Lingua franca
- Can be official language, even if population has limited proficiency
- Example: English in Nigeria

Three Types of Languages in Africa

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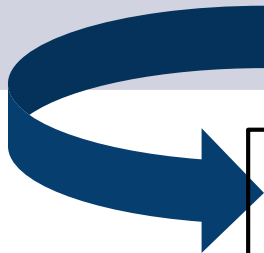
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Issues with Using Mother Tongue in a Survey

1. *Disconnect between written and spoken languages: Some may prefer to speak in mother tongue but read in English*
2. *Some mother tongues are never or rarely written*
3. *Mother tongues may have multiple dialects*
4. *Surveys are “formal” so mother tongue may be used less*
5. *Technical terms are more difficult to use in mother tongue*
6. *Interviewers may not speak mother tongue*

Observations from the Field

- Respondent may shift from mother tongue to lingua franca
- Interviewer may shift to mother tongue of respondent
- Conversation may be in mother tongue with periodic interjections in lingua franca
- Translation on the fly for languages without formal translations.

Description of Linguistic Complexity

Observations from the Field

- Respondent may shift from mother tongue to lingua franca
- Interviewer may shift to mother tongue of respondent
- Conversation may be in mother tongue with periodic interjections in lingua franca
- Translation on the fly for languages without formal translations.

But how often do these things occur?

Research Questions:

1. How often do the respondent and interviewer share the same first (i.e., native) language?
2. How often is the first language of the respondent and interviewer also the language of the conversation (interview)?

Implications of Linguistic Complexity

Possible Implications

- Lack of comprehension increases variance (random error), item non-response, acquiescence
- Using a lingua franca leads to “framing effects” and alters how respondents answer questions about democracy, West

We will investigate these issues in a subsequent project, after the descriptive work is completed

What Explains the Lack of Research?

- Measurement of languages
 - Sheer number of languages
 - How do you measure proficiency?
 - Need to measure multiple languages
 - People switch languages within the interview
- Linguistic issues are tightly linked with logistics and personnel, and are harder to control (contrast to mode/incentive/training)
- Language is not randomly assigned to interviewers and respondents; language confounded with ethnicity, urban/rural, etc.

Data: Afrobarometer Wave 4

27,713 respondents
810 interviewers
20 countries

Multi-stage stratified
cluster samples;
random walk used to
sample households

Paper-and-pencil survey
about political attitudes
and behavior

High levels of item non-
response

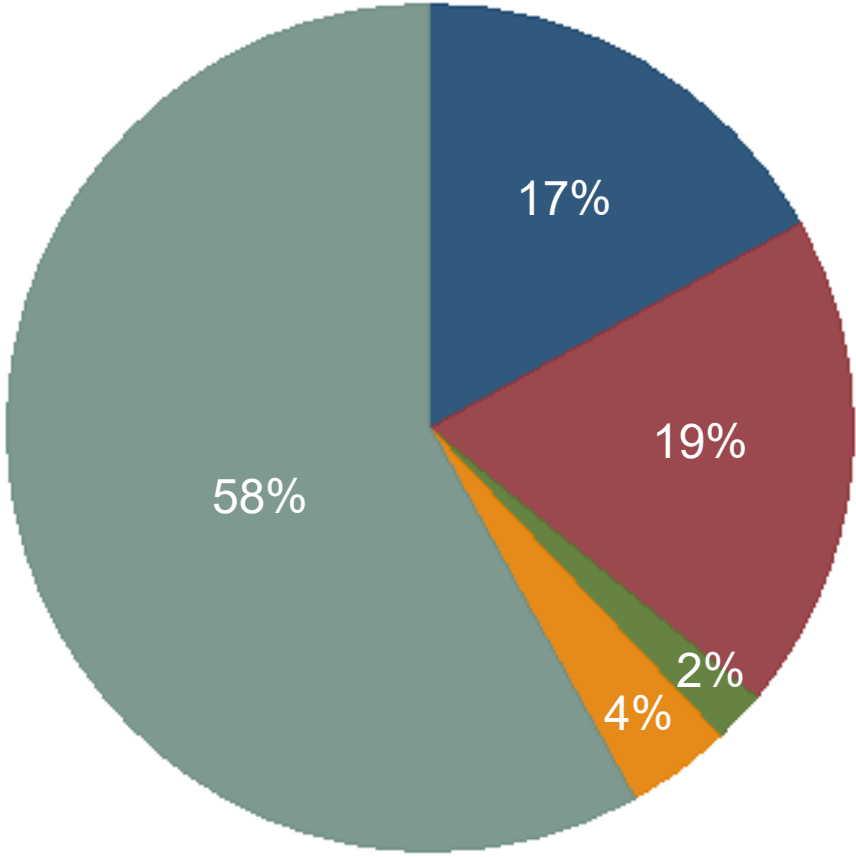
Measures

1. Interviewer first language
2. Respondent first language
3. Language of conversation (i.e., interview)
4. Languages respondent speaks well

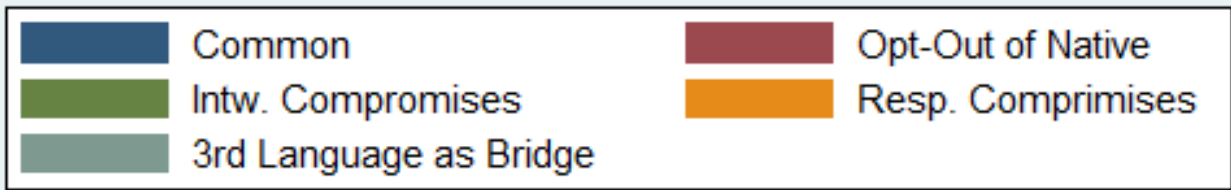
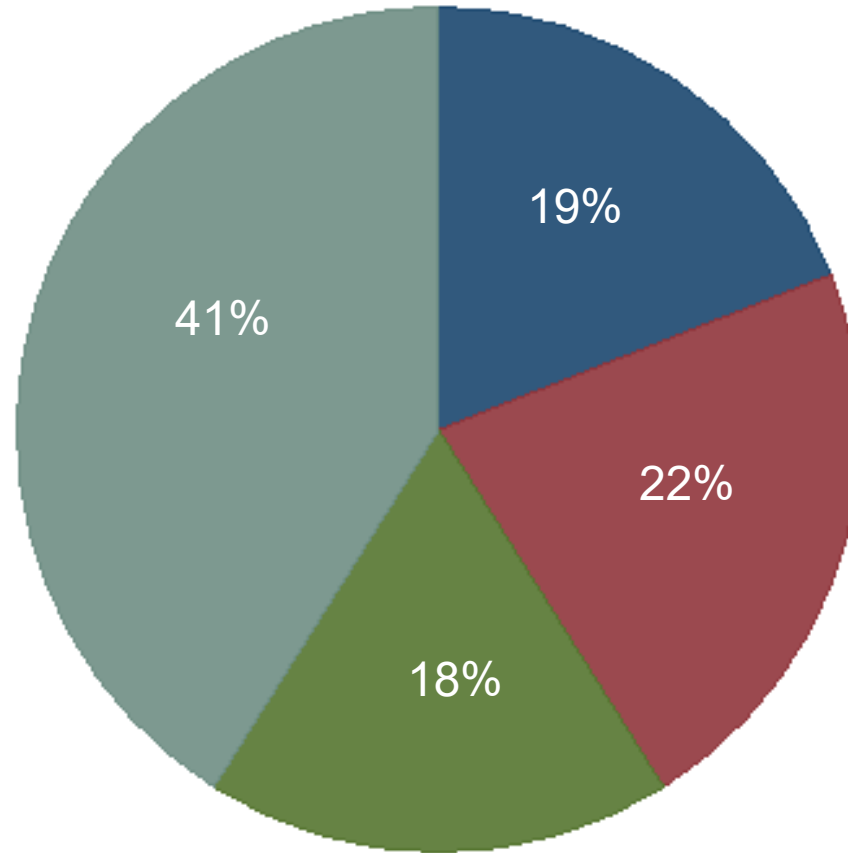
Language Typology

NAME	DESCRIPTION	KENYA EXAMPLE		
		Respondent First Language	Interviewer First Language	Conversation
Common Language	Interviewer, Respondent, Conversation all in the same language (the ideal scenario)	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Kikuyu
Opt-out of First	Interviewer and Respondent share language, but survey is conducted in different language	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Swahili
Interviewer Compromises	Conversation is done in respondent's home language, but not interviewer's home language	Kikuyu	Kikamba	Kikuyu
Respondent Compromises	Conversation is done in interviewer's home language, but not respondent's home language	Kikamba	Kikuyu	Kikuyu
Third Language as Bridge	Respondent and Interview have different home languages, and conversation done in a 3rd language	Kikamba	Kikuyu	Swahili

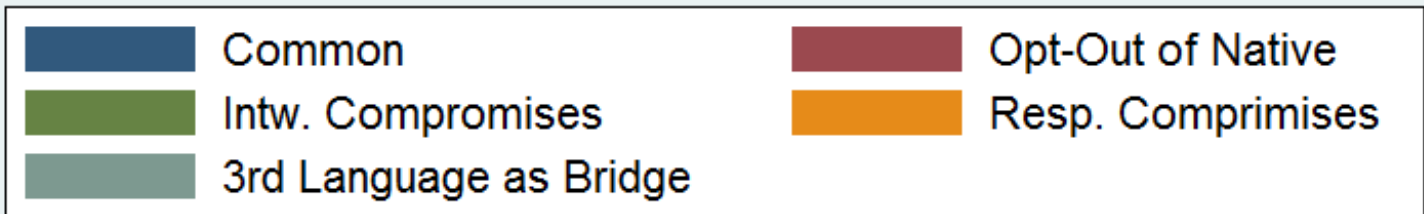
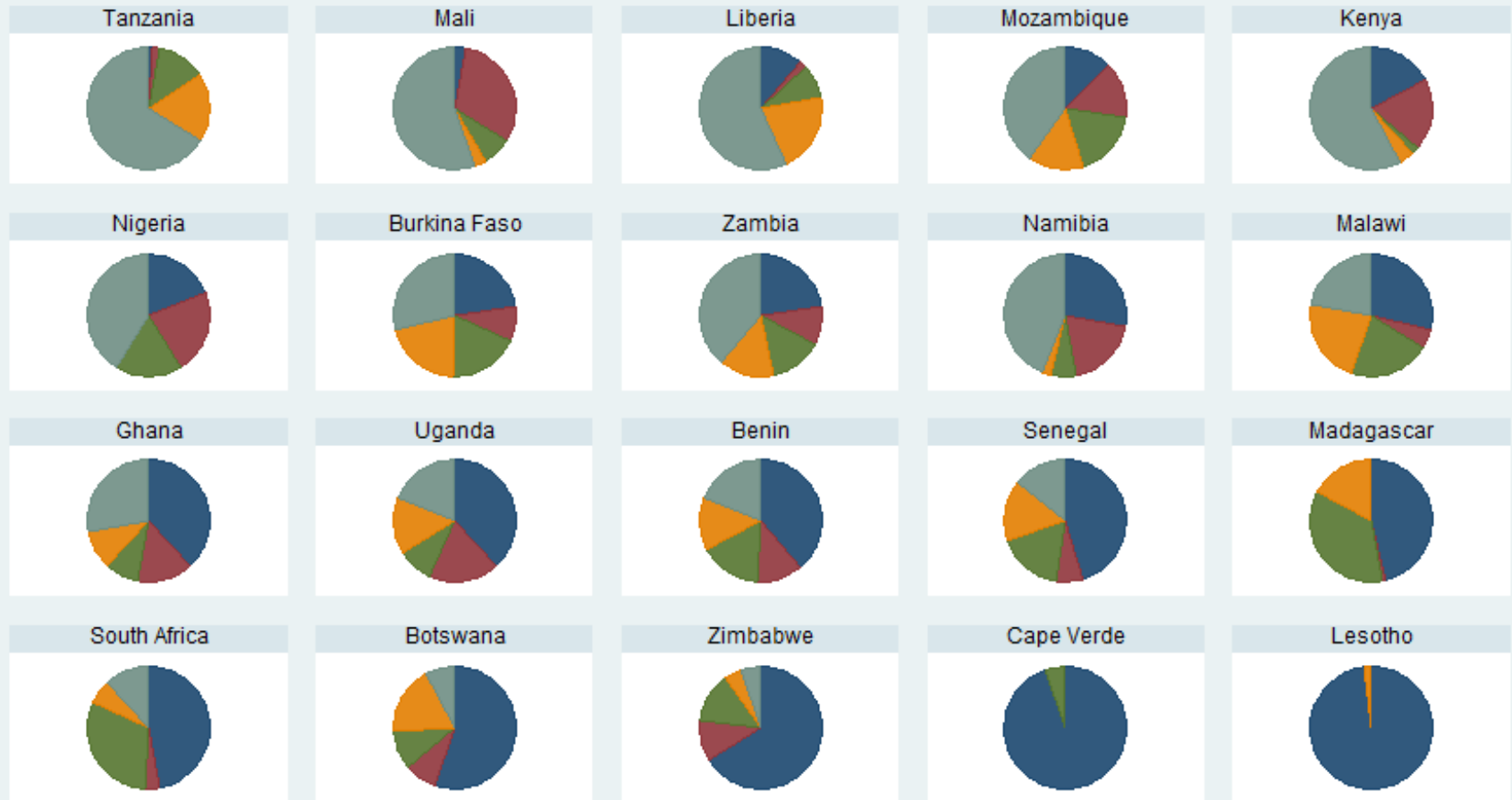
Results: Language Combinations - Kenya



Results: Language Combinations – Nigeria



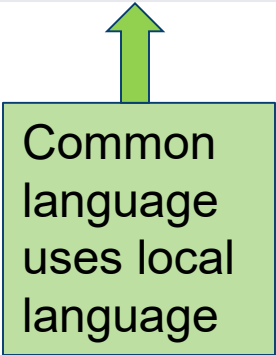
Results: Language Combinations – All countries



Deeper Dive in Kenya

Language of Conversation in Kenya (percentages)

	(1) Common	(2) Opt-Out of First	(3) Interviewer Compromise	(4) Respondent Compromise	(5) Third Language as Bridge
<i>English</i>	0	62	8	0	35
<i>Kiswahili</i>	1	38	52	77	65
<i>Kikuyu</i>	30	0	4	5	0
<i>Luo</i>	28	0	4	8	0
<i>Luhya</i>	3	0	4	5	0
<i>Kamba</i>	13	0	12	5	0
<i>Kalenjin</i>	7	0	16	0	0
<i>Somali</i>	19	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100



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Interviewer, respondent mostly compromise by using lingua franca

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Lingua franca as a bridge

Why Opt Out?

If an interviewer and a respondent both speak the same first language:

Why would they choose to Opt-Out of their first language and use a lingua franca?

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Logistic regression analysis: Higher education, urban, female, young more likely to opt-out

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Hypothesized reasons:

- Easier to speak about technical terms in lingua franca
- Social benefits to showing you can speak int'l language
- Discomfort with reading mother tongue language

Findings

- Linguistic issues are critical, understudied, and are hard to study
- Respondents often switch from mother tongue to lingua franca, but this varies by country
- When possible, respondents and interviewers choose to Opt-Out
- Respondents and interviewers compromise equally

Next Steps: What are the implications of language differences for data quality and response distributions?

Next Steps: Add dataset that contains information on language switching during interview.

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