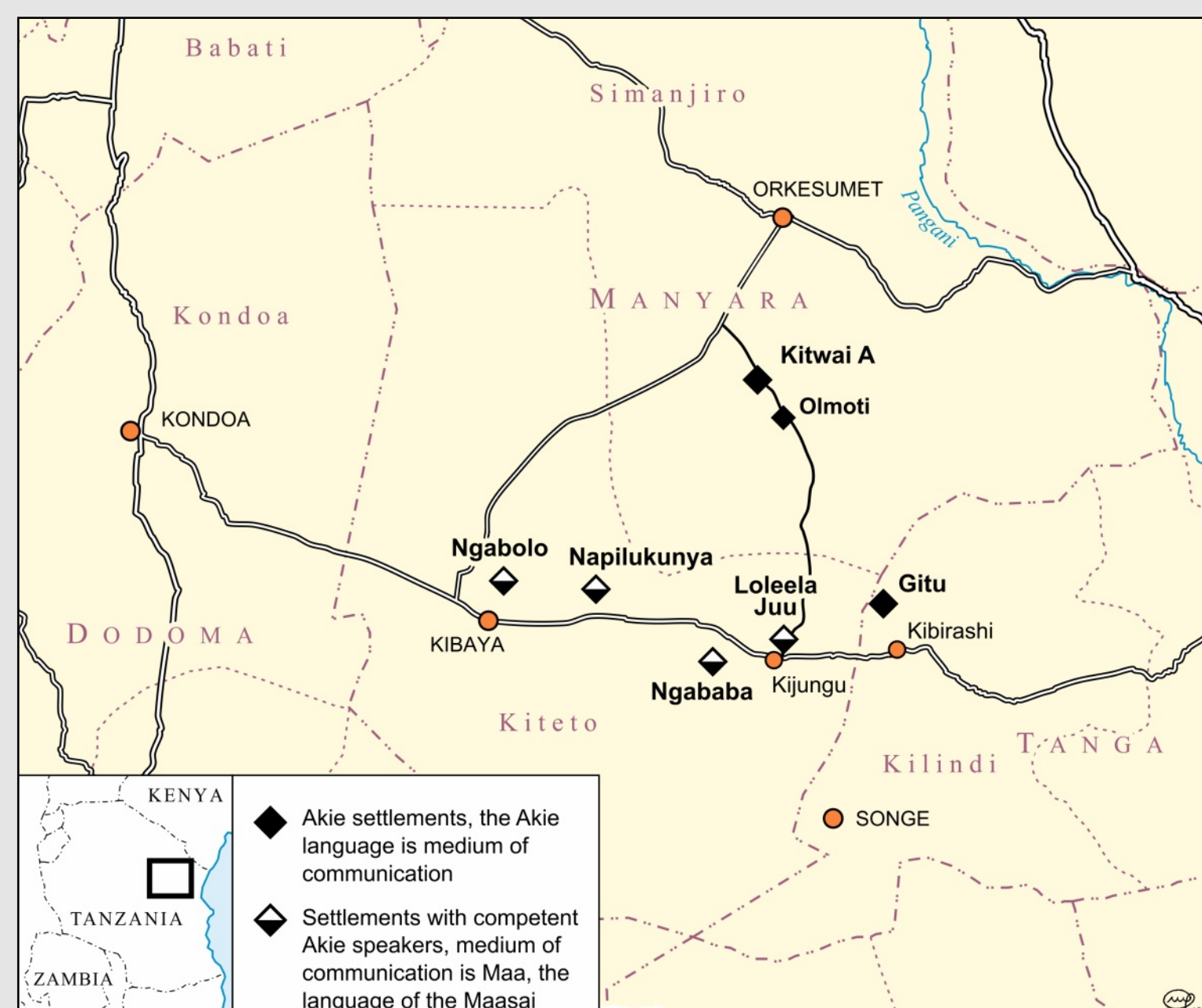


A heavily endangered hunter-gatherers' language in Central Tanzania

The Akie language

Akie is spoken in the Manyara Region (Kiteto and Simanjiro Districts) and in the western parts of the Tanga Region (Kilindi District) of the United Republic of Tanzania in an area which is traditionally called Maasailand. Its speakers originate from what is now Kenya where the speech community is known as Okiek. Occasionally Akie are even officially identified as (Wa-N)Dorobo, which is a Swahili xenonym derived from the derogatory Maa term *Ol-dóróboni* (sg.) and *Il-Tóróbo* (pl.) 'people without cattle'.



Akie and Okiek belong to the Kalenjin languages of the Southern Nilotic languages (*kalenjin* in Akie means 'I speak'). Akie is still actively spoken and the medium of daily communication in the Gito (Losikito) village (Kilindi District, close to Kiberashi, approx. 40 adults plus a not counted number of children, evidencing the intergenerational language transfer) and in Kitwei A (Simanjiro District) approx. 60 speakers have been traced. No details are known for the Okiek language the distribution of which is not a focus for this work.



Akie people in Ngababa and the landscape surrounding them

In addition, there are approx. another 50 persons having a fine command of the Akie language living scattered in various places of the aforesaid districts. Due to the impact of the Maasai, who are the major ethnic community in the region, for the majority of these people, also identifying themselves as Akie, the language of the Maasai community, i. e. Maa, is the predominant medium of communication.



Nanguwinyu LESAKAT, a senior Akie (approx. 70 years old) in Ngababa in conversation with Karsten Legère



The baobab (*Adansonia digitata*, BOMBACACEAE) plays a prominent role in Akie life such as source of honey, which is collected from bees nesting in holes.



Akie resource person - 'Grandma' Natinai TIYANGO in Napilukunya (mind the Maasai necklace, which is not typical for Akie women, but worn here after she received it as a gift)

Focus of the documentation project

General part: Thorough study of the sound system and suprasegmentals for designing an adequate orthography, analysis of morphology and lexicography.

Specific studies:

- » the impact of the Maa language and Maasai culture
- » biotaxonomy and Akie plant names and uses
- » orature, music and rituals
- » gender specific issues.

Challenges

- » Low number of active language speakers that live in a remote area of Tanzania;
- » High expectations of those still speaking Akie with regard to a comprehensive documentation of the language and subsequent production of orature and other books for use in the speech community;
- » The lack of adequate linguistic studies that deal with the Akie language;
- » Identification of those elements (in the widest sense), which originate from Maa and Maasai culture, customs and traditions.

Highlights

Perfect cooperation with the speech community, among them traditional and communal leaders who are in contact with the researchers and the Tanzanian team members.

Even in the preparatory phase of the application a substantial corpus of audio and video recordings (approx. 8 hours) from various resource persons could be collected that is provisionally transcribed.

Particular role played by Akie elders in storytelling, reproducing traditional songs and describing features peculiar to the Akie way of life.

Research team

Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Rainer Voßen, Professor emer. Dr. phil. habil. Karsten Legère, Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Christa König and Tanzanian assistants Peter S. Mkwan'hembo, Lazaro Ole-Wanga



Akie resource persons - left Saloni NGOISOLO (also Chairman, Ngababa village who is literate) and Martha SOLNA NGEREZA (centre)

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