LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Masaaba is a Bantu language in the Niger-Congo classification. The language is also sometimes referred to Gisu, Lugisu, and Lumasaaba. Some of the main dialects are Dadiri, which is spoken in the northern part of eastern Uganda, and Buya, which is spoken in the central and southern parts. The Masaaba alphabet employs a Latin script. Masaaba language has a large set of prefixes used as noun classifiers, similar to other languages that assign a gender to their nouns. Masaaba has over 18 different noun classifications. The language is also tonal.

The Bamaasaaba are well known for their ornate male circumcision ceremonies held on an annual basis. The ceremony is a cultural link between the Bamasaaba people and Mt . Elgon. The festival is characterized by Mwaga and Kadodi dances, visiting friends and family, feasting, and exchanging gifts. People spend several months preparing for the festival each year.Bamboo strips are handed down to the child by the eldest uncle on the father's side to symbolize the responsbility and strength that will be needed in manhood. The ceremony is very musical. Circumcision marks the formal becoming of a man and the growth of the child's formal contribution to their community.

STUDYING MASAABA IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Laguage Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/

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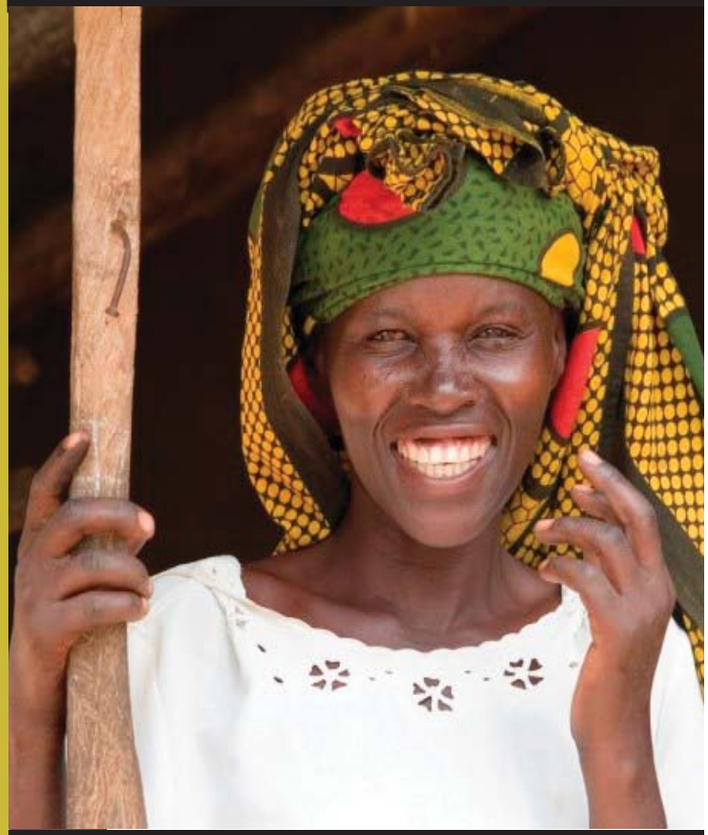
MASAABA



MASAABA WOMAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHO SPEAKS MASAABA

The origin of the Bamasaaba people is unknown, however oral traditions suggest that they most likely originated from Egypt or northwestern Ethiopia. Bamasaaba oral tradition asserts that they are descendants of people called ***Mundu*** and ***Sera*** who migrated to peak of Mt. Masaaba (Elgon) during 16th century. Mundu and Sera had two children, Masaaba and Kundu. Kundu moved south and is thought to be the father of the Basoga people and Masaaba is thought to be the beginning of the Bamasaaba lineage. Due to the believed shared lineage, the Bamasaaba are closely related to the Baganda and Bakonjo tribes of Uganda in terms of the language structure, and the Hermitic groups of the northwestern Ethiopia in terms of culture. The Bamasaaba are also closely related to the Babukusu of western Kenya and many Babukusu clans trace their lineage back to the Bamasaaba people.

The Bamasaaba traditionally organized themselves in to a politically decentralized chieftaincy system. There was, however a , strong clan system that kept the people united as a community.They were known for having a strong group of youth warriors that frequently triumphed in the attacks by the neighboring Luo, Iteso, and Elgon Masaai tribes. They were traditionally agriculturalists raising beans millet, bananas, vegetables, bamboo, sweet potatoes, cassava, and sorghum. They also brew beer, raise livestock, raise poultry.

WHY STUDY MASAABA

Masaaba is a language spoken in Uganda by approximately 1.2 million people. It is the most commonly heard in the eastern part of the country adjacent to Mount Elgon in Sironko, Manafwa, Manjiya and Mbale districts. Masaaba is taught in primary schools and can frequently be heard on the radio in the eastern part of Uganda. Those interested in the African languages and literature, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, peace and conflict studies, international development, non-governmental organization (NGO) work, government work, African art, or African history will find Masaaba very worth while to study.

Some basic Masaaba Greetings:

Watulire? ----------	general greeting
Natulire nili mlahi ---------	reply to Watulire
Mulembe ----------	general greeting
Angolobe atyena ----------	afternoon greeting
Urre enna? ----------	how are you?
Bayuli ----------	I'm fine
Kama kwa? ----------	how are you?
Kasila ----------	I'm fine

Mount Elgon,volcanic location where Bamasaaba people believe their ancestor came out of hole there

A group of kadodi dances performing at a cultural event celebrating Bukusu tradition

Bagisu Dancers