

Investigating the language of wider communication and examining the selected medium of instruction for local primary schools in the Livingstone city of Zambia

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Abstract: Livingstone as a tourist capital of Zambia has developed into a multilingual and multiethnic community because a lot of languages are spoken within its boundaries. In this paper an attempt has been made at taking a sociolinguistic perspective of investigating the local language of wider communication in the Livingstone city of Zambia. To achieve this, particular attention was focussed on the assessment of the popularity of Tonga, Nyanja and Lozi, the three community languages of Livingstone townships. The results of the study were used to establish whether or not Tonga language is indeed the appropriate medium of instruction for Livingstone primary schools and also as a learning subject of choice. A case study survey was carried out in schools and Livingstone townships so as to come up with the desired findings of the study. Instances of language use were observed in selected primary schools in Livingstone. The findings of the study indicate that although Nyanja is not the native language or mother tongue of most Livingstone residents, it has proved to be the language of wider communication. It has also been revealed that although Tonga is the officially prescribed medium of instruction in Livingstone primary schools, many school going children do not use it in many domains. Lozi was found to be the mother tongue of most Livingstone residents but the language is only confined to the home domain and family functions.

Key Words: Language of wider communication, medium of instruction, mother tongue, regional official language, language attitude, lingua franca

I. INTRODUCTION

Livingstone is the fourth biggest city in Zambia with several languages spoken within its boundaries. As a cosmopolitan city and like any other city in Zambia, there is always a bridge language that is used for communication among people of different ethnic and linguistic background. Among the local languages used in the city, Nyanja, Lozi and Tonga are the most commonly used languages. This study tries to establish which language among the three has the wider communication.

1.1 Background

The dawning of the industrial revolution that triggered mass migration of people from one place to another in search of employment had remarkable influence on the languages of the

entire world. Because of this sudden interaction of people with different linguistic backgrounds, languages had to wrestle for survival. This scenario meant that speakers of indigenous languages did not only host migrant settlers, but had to learn new languages brought about by these migrant workers. As if that was not enough, native speakers had to stretch further to their limit in order to accommodate new terminologies for new discoveries and technologies.

It was not long before these challenges gradually reached Africa and Zambia in particular. The movement of people from villages to the cities in search of employment and to a lesser extent, to engage in trade, has had a serious bearing on both host and settlers' languages. Like any other indigenous people around the country, the natives of Livingstone and Kazungula districts, the Toka-Leya, Tonga and Lozi speakers, had to interact and live with speakers of other languages who settled and visited the city of Livingstone. This social interaction among residents of Livingstone affected the linguistic landscape of the city. When a community of speakers moving to a region or country whose language is different from theirs, there is a tendency to shift to the new language. Kuncha and Bathula (2004) state that among the factors such as economic, cultural and intermarriage, *migration* is the most influential factor that can facilitate Language Shift and Language Death. Kuncha and Bathula (2004) further remark that when a community of speakers moves to a region or a country where the language spoken is different from theirs, there is a tendency to shift to a new language or hosts shift to the language of settlers. This is typical of the Livingstone linguistic situation where natives from surrounding villages abandon their native languages and adopt Nyanja the language of the city.

When Zambia got its independence in 1964, a number of political, cultural and pedagogical factors influenced the linguistic landscape of the whole country in general. Simwinga (2006) reports that seven local languages were selected to be regional official languages for the country. In the case of Livingstone city of Southern Province of Zambia Lozi was chosen as medium of instruction in primary schools while Tonga remained regional official language for the

whole Southern Province. However, the ministry of education later decided to select and approve Tonga as the medium of instruction in all the schools in the province including Livingstone and Kazungula districts.

1.2 Problem Statement

This study attempts to investigate the local language of wider communication in Livingstone so as to establish the appropriate medium of instruction for Livingstone primary schools. The researcher believes it is necessary to undertake such a study as it will come up with answers to contentious questions in the minds of many linguists, Livingstone residents and academicians as whether or not the linguistic landscape of Livingstone is similar to that of Lusaka and Copperbelt cities where Nyanja and Bemba are regional official languages dominating the native languages of the provinces.

Various studies on Zambian languages have been undertaken, but little or nothing has been revealed about the status of Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi spoken in Livingstone.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The primary aims of this paper is to study and analyse Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi, the three languages spoken in Livingstone and establish which one of the three languages has the wider communication. .

Indirectly, this study aims to establish whether Tonga language is the appropriate medium of instruction in Livingstone primary schools by coming up with the statistics of domains in which Tonga is used in various domains of Livingstone speech communities. At the end of it all, the study aims at proposing that the language with the wider communication in Livingstone be given the red carpet it deserves.

It is further hoped that the findings of this study will contribute abundantly to the knowledge required in the study of Zambian language by providing future researchers with sound reference material

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study has isolated the Antighettoization theory which is related to the research questions raised

The Antighettoization Theory

According to Haugen (1980), the main view by the Antighettoization theory is that transmitting the minority language by speakers from one generation to another is tantamount to confining the young generation to a barren cultural ghetto in which they are shut out from the mainstream of the general population, while simultaneously losing touch with the traditions and social life of their community of origin. Haugen (1980:96) asserts that,

“Antighettoization theory contends that immigrants who maintain their previous culture are isolating themselves and

their children from the mainstream of national life, while at the same time they are unable to keep up with cultural life of their country of origin.”

By being confined to the linguistic island, the young generation, especially grandchildren, are likely to lag behind culturally. According to Kloss (1971) the young generation will not be able to keep abreast of the current developments in both the old and the new community because of linguistic restrictions resulting in failure to keep pace with their fellow citizens in the mainstream.

Stephen (2005) in her study investigating the impact of bilingual education on the minority languages and languages of immigrants, reports that proponents of bilingual education are consigning or ghettoizing speakers of minority languages within the confines of a language that has little value and use, thus limiting their social mobility. She points out that Bilingual education leads to ghettoizing speakers of minority languages. Stephen (2005) outlines the following points for criticising bilingual education:

- Majority languages are lauded for their instrumental value, while minority languages are accorded ‘sentimental’ value but are broadly constructed as obstacles to social mobility and progress.
- Learning a majority language will thus provide individuals with greater economic and social mobility.
- Learning a minority language may be important for reason of cultural continuity but might amount to ghettoization as it limits an individual’s social mobility.

This theory of Antighettoization in fact facilitates the process of Language Shift as it encourages speakers of minority languages and immigrants to abandon their language and join the dominant languages in the main stream of national life.

However, Mufwane (2000) criticizes the Language Maintenance initiatives put in place by speakers of endangered languages. Mufwane (2000) disapproves the idea of interfering with the natural development of languages through linguistic policies and change the direction of Language Shift in order to stop language progression or decline. He recognizes socio-historical factors that influence, accelerate and slow down language change but supports a natural path a language takes- endangered or not. He argues that changes occurring in the linguistic behaviour of speakers are simply an adaptation to changes in the socio-economic conditions of the speech communities driven by interests related to costs and profits that come along with language use and therefore must be respected. He remarks that languages are parasitic species whose vitality depends on the communicative behaviours of their speakers, who in turn respond adaptively to changes in their social-economic ecologies. Language shift, attrition, endangerment, and death are all consequences of these adaptations. The above views by Mufwane (2000) suggest that the best way to deal with

languages is to let them naturally compete even eliminate each other as they have done for thousand years

1.5 Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives of the study:

- To establish the language of wider communication in Livingstone
- To establish the factors that led to the selection of Tonga as medium of instruction in Livingstone schools.
- To establish the attitudes of Livingstone residents towards Tonga the regional official language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The major challenge faced in this study was lack of literature specifically for the language under study, Nyanja and Lozi. However, there is considerable number of studies carried out in areas related to this study. The government of Zambia shortly after independence promoted and supported the production and publishing of study materials in local languages as pointed out by Simwinda (2006). He posits that Mr. M Sakubita, the nominated Member of Parliament, as early as 1965 stressed that it would be difficult to preserve Zambian culture without books written in Zambian local languages.

Although Livingstone is in Southern Province of Zambia where the regional official language is dominantly Tonga, Lozi and Toka-Leya are the indigenous languages of the area. Simwinda (2006) points that Nyanja is the regional official language for Eastern and Lusaka provinces while Lozi carters for Western Province and parts of Southern Province, Tonga for Southern Province and parts of Central province, Bemba for Northern, Copperbelt and Luapula provinces. Lunda, Kaonde and Luvale are regional official languages for North-western province. Although Mytton (1978) reports that speakers of minority languages complained about imposition of the seven regional official language on them, it seemed the speakers of the native and indigenous language, the Toka-Leya of Livingstone might have embraced the use of Lozi and Tonga as media of instruction in schools without any offence or complainant. Mytton (1978) further justifies the acceptance and embracing of Nyanja and Bemba languages among speakers of minority native languages. For example he attributes the acceptance of Bemba by Namwanga of Nakonde to the economic and social role Bemba plays in Nakonde.

As mentioned above, the regional official language of Livingstone city is Tonga and the indigenous local language is Toka-Leya and Lozi. However, Nyanja seems to be the dominant language of the city. Although there hasn't been any study at the moment to ascertain the sociolinguistic factors facilitating Nyanja dominance over Lozi and Toka Leya, language shift factors seem to be at play. In the same vein, Romaine (1994) points out that language shift develops when the more powerful groups in any society are able to force their language upon the less powerful. He argues that the less

powerful are forced to learn the language of the more powerful in order to communicate with them whereas the more powerful are not obliged to learn the language of the less powerful. This is what Simwinda (2006) noted when he argues that the relationship of the speakers of the dominant language and speakers of the dominated language is non-reciprocal, so are their languages. As a result of this language shift, the two local languages can no longer withstand the dominance of Nyanja which has become a lingua franca or bridge language in most informal domains of the city, especially in townships and markets. On the other hand, settlers and new comers do not show any interest in learning Lozi or Toka Leya.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study on which this paper is based was conducted using the survey methodology supplemented by observation to try to yield both qualitative and quantitative data on the sociolinguistic landscape of Livingstone city. Interactive interviews among Livingstone residents formed bulk of the data collected for this study in order to establish the sociolinguistic position of the three community languages; Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi. To a lesser extent, structured questionnaires were also administered in this study.

Random recording of Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi conversations among Livingstone residents were made in order to measure oral communicative competence. Normal language conversations in schools and markets were observed and questionnaires distributed at three selected primary schools among teachers and general workers in order to establish language choice and use in various domains. Personal interviews were carried out so as to establish language attitudes by various Livingstone residents. The researcher also recorded speeches in public gatherings such as churches and social meetings.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to carry out analysis of questionnaire data so as to establish the language attitudes and language choice among Livingstone residents. Processing of the interview data included descriptive analysis and categorizing similar items into themes and sub-headings to establish the desired findings.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1 Language Attitude

The study reveals a number of sociolinguistic characteristics of Nyanja spoken in Livingstone that are a result of the contact of Nyanja and Lozi speakers in the Livingstone townships. Data from recorded and observed normal conversations revealed that the Livingstone Nyanja is to some extent infiltrated by Lozi vocabulary which tends to create some variation with the standard Nyanja spoken in Lusaka.

From the interviews conducted, it was established that most of the Livingstone and Kazungula residents have a negative attitude towards their mother tongues. Most of the Lozi and

Toka-Leya speakers preferred speaking Nyanja in public domains because of the role of being a bridge language the language plays. They explained that the knowledge of Nyanja would expose them to economic networks within and outside their communities.

4.2 Domains of language use and choice

(i) *Language used in the district administration domain*

All the 70 participants indicated that English is the language used in the district administration offices in Livingstone while Lozi, Tonga and Nyanja are used by those who are unable to speak English. The researcher also observed a number of official notices written in English on government notice boards of the district offices. On the other hand, 45 participants indicated that they use Nyanja for informal communication while 15 and 10 said Lozi and Tonga are their languages for informal communication respectively.

(ii) *Language used in local courts*

Participants identified Nyanja and Lozi as the languages used in local courts in Livingstone city. 40 respondents said that Nyanja was the language used in local courts of Livingstone while 15 indicated that Lozi, 10 Tonga and 5 mentioning Tonga. The researcher observed that in a situation where English is used, a Nyanja or Lozi interpreter is brought in to interpret.

(iii) *Language used in the health domain*

All the participants stated that Nyanja, Lozi and Tonga are the languages they use when they visit health centres. 49 respondents said that Nyanja is the language they use in health centres while 11 mentioned Lozi and 10 Tonga. The researcher also visited some health centres within Livingstone to listen to some public conversations. It was observed that Nyanja was the most common language used by both health workers and patients.

(iv) *Language used in education domain*

In the education domain, the study revealed interesting results. In response to the Educational Reforms such as the 1998 Primary Reading Programme (PRPP), New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) and the 2013 Revised Education Curriculum Framework which directed all schools to teach lower primary school pupils in their familiar languages, all schools in Livingstone started teaching Tonga as a subject and medium of instruction replacing Lozi. The researcher observed that learners from grade one to four were taught in Tonga yet out of class while playing outside, learners use Nyanja. Although Tonga was declared the medium of instruction in the whole of Southern Province in which Livingstone city is located, Nyanja seems to be the predominant language among pupils in schools.

(v) *Language used in the home domain*

The respondents in Livingstone city indicated that Nyanja, Tonga, and Lozi are the major languages used at family level

depending on the family ethnic and cultural background. The study revealed that Lozi and Tonga are the languages commonly used at family level by parent generations while Nyanja is mostly used by children generation. It was also observed that most adults in Livingstone speak Lozi or Tonga at home but switch to Nyanja the moment they leave their homes.

V. DISCUSSION

The study revealed beyond any doubt that Nyanja is the language of wider communication in Livingstone. It is clear from the findings that Nyanja is the language that is used in many domains. The significant role played by Nyanja in public domains has elevated Nyanja to some prestigious status thereby relegating Lozi, Toka-Leya and Tonga to home domain. Nyanja is regarded as the language of civilisation hence most youths would want to associate themselves with it. As a result speaking Lozi or Tonga in the city would render the speaker less civilised.

The role played by Nyanja language in the Livingstone speech community has to a larger extent facilitated the status of Nyanja as a dominant language and lingua franca in the city. Although Tonga has been recommended and being used as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools, learners still use Nyanja outside classroom for communication. Contrary to the 2013 Education curriculum framework which directs that familiar languages should be used as media of instruction from early grade to grade four, schools in Livingstone use Tonga which is third in popularity after Nyanja and Lozi.

Although Tonga is the regional official language of Southern Province, it cannot be considered as a familiar local language of Livingstone city. The study has revealed that Tonga is third in popularity after Nyanja and Lozi. This therefore, can be suggested without fear of biasness that in line with the 2013 Revised Educational Curriculum Framework Nyanja would be the appropriate choice for medium of instruction in Livingstone. Just as observed and stated in the theoretical framework that underpin this study, language vitality depends on the communicative behaviours of their speakers, who in turn respond adaptively to changes in their social-economic ecologies. Therefore, a familiar language selected for medium of instruction should be determined by domains of language use rather than geographical factor.

VI. CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been to investigate the language of wider communication in Livingstone city and to establish the attitudes of Livingstone residents towards Tonga the regional official language and medium of instruction in local schools. The study has revealed that Nyanja language is used in most domains of the city. Although Tonga is the official regional language of Southern Province, it is not used in many public and private domains. Going by the 2013 revised educational policy, Tonga is not the familiar community language of the city but can be taught as a class subject later. The study

suggests that let Nyanja be used as medium of instruction in the early grade while Tonga can be introduced as a subject latter in the second or third grade.

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