



Report

2015



The University of Manchester

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**Choice and Maintenance in a Shona and
Chewa speaking family**

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1. Introduction

Zimbabwe's transnational Diaspora has gradually increased, "prompted by political uncertainty, the disintegration of the economy and the opening up of global opportunities." (Pasura, 2011: 147). The initial wave of Zimbabwean immigrants occurred after independence from colonial power in 1980 when the white Zimbabwean minority returned to the United Kingdom. The second wave occurred due to civil unrest dubbed the Matabeleland Massacres (1982-85) when President Robert Mugabe and his political party ZANU committed genocide in attempt to eliminate the opposing party ZAPU, killing over an estimated 20,000 Ndebele people. (Thorpe, 2010: 17). The final and current wave of Zimbabwean migration can be largely credited to "the country's [deteriorating] economic and political conditions over the last decade" (Tevera, D and Zinyama, L, 2002: 6). The dispersion from the motherland has eroded the heritage language. Shona has been subjugated by English which has emerged as being the more dominate language of commerce forcing a submerged coexistence between the two.

This study aimed to explore language interaction of a multilingual Shona-Chewa speaking family in Salford, Manchester. The family migrated during the current wave of immigration due to the instability within Zimbabwe. The study centres on their interaction with their external (families remain in their native country) and internal families (family members in the foreign country) as well as language use with friends and acquaintances and colleagues. Data was collected from 10 participants through structured interviews and questionnaires. A pilot study was utilised to help reduce the number of unanticipated problems. From this a survey was used targeting two groups were targeted students and parents aged 18-44 as these groups are most likely to engage in varied multi-lingual languages and also to investigate the nature of the discrepancies between the two groups. Particularly if language shift occurred most commonly in a non-home domain compared to a home domain, as well as the motivation for language choice maintenance and shift and the intended outcome when language maintenance and shift occurs. Additionally, this study investigated whether different domains such as the family, the school and the church influence language choice.

1.1. Methodology

The data was collected through the use of questionnaires and observations supplemented with semi-structured interviews which will allowed me to gain a deeper understanding via open questions allowing the participants to express their viewpoints. The aim of the questionnaires was to enable me to build a sketch of the language choices within the family. The questionnaires helped me build a rough picture of what were the daily practices of the family: who speaks what to whom and when. The reasons behind the language choice were questioned during the semi-structured interviews. First names and last name initial were used, or when anonymity was preferred 'X' is used for the surname and first names were changed. As a Shona speaker myself, I was be able to transcribe any Shona dialogue that occurred during observation and the interviews. Data collection took place in the residence of the participants and in my own home. Both environments were safe and secure for both myself and the participants.

1.2. Problems

In the preliminary report, I had intended to observe all three family members equally outside the home domain; however, the places the father, Tommy X frequented with his male friends were not "suitable" for me. Gender restrictions still apply within Zimbabwean communities and it would deemed unacceptable for me to spend time in a male dominated Zimbabwean pub or with the men at a *gochi-gochi* (a barbecue). "For men, the pub and *gochi-gochi* are spaces where their lost manhood is regained and re-imagined." (Pasura, 2014: 53). As a result, the majority to the observation focused on the wife's, Nancy M, interaction outside the home domain.

2. Findings

Domain analysis for the mother: **Nancy M, 40 years old,**

Domain	Interlocutor	Language (passive)	Language (active)
Home	Husband	Shona	Shona
Home	Son	Shona	Shona
Home	Niece (me)	Shona, English	Shona and English
Home	Sister	Shona, Ndebele, English	Shona, Ndebele, English
Church	Pastor/peers	Shona	Shona
University	Teachers	English	English
University	Peers	Shona, Ndebele, English	Shona, Ndebele, English
Shopping	Local grocer	Shona, English	Shona, English
Radio/TV		Shona, English	
Books/magazines		English	
Email/chat		English, Shona	English, Shona
Websites		English, Shona	English, Shona

Domain analysis for the father: **Tommy X, 44 years old,**

Domain	Interlocutor	Language (passive)	Language (active)
Home	Wife	Shona	Shona
Home	Son	Shona	Shona
Home	Niece (me)	Shona	Shona
Church	Pastor/peers	Shona	Shona
Work		English	English
Shopping	Local grocer	English, Shona	English, Shona
Radio/TV		English, Shona	
Books/magazines		English, Shona	
Email/chat		English, Shona	English, Shona
Websites		English, Shona	English, Shona

Domain analysis for the son: **Reggie X, 18 years old**

Domain	Interlocutor	Language (passive)	Language (active)
Home	Mother	Shona	Shona
Home	Father	Shona	Shona
Home	Cousin (me)	Shona	Shona
Church	Pastor/peers	Shona	Shona
College	Teachers	English	English
College	Peers	Shona, English	Shona, English
Shopping	Local grocer	Shona, English	Shona, English
Radio/TV		Shona, English	
Books/magazines		English	
Email/chat		English, Shona	English, Shona
Websites		English, Shona	English, Shona

2.1. Language used between the parents

Nancy M and her husband Tommy X spoke Shona between themselves. Although both are Chewa speakers, Tommy is fluent in the language and Nancy struggles with it. She understands but is not a confident fluent speaker as a result they communicate in Shona. Due to Nancy's limited fluency the study focused mainly on Shona.

2.2. Language used with children at home

The father Tommy X uses Shona when speaking to his son Reggie. When asked, Tommy's male Zimbabwean friends also confirmed that they also spoke to their children in Shona. Nancy M also uses Shona when speaking to the son. When speaking to her daughter Tariro M, who currently resides in Zimbabwe, she used Shona. When her sister, Margaret K visits with her children, Shona and English is used. Shona is used to encourage the younger daughters of Margaret K who don't speak the heritage language. Margaret's 15 year old daughter was born in Zimbabwe but migrated when she was only 5 years old. Though the daughter does not speak the language she understands and responds accordingly. As noted below:

Example 1

Margaret K: "Leena huya pano" (Leena come here).

Nancy M: "Waitei nhasi kuchikoro?" (what did you do today at school)

In both occasions the daughter responds accordingly, she comes when called and responds to the aunt's question in English showing understanding of the language but a lack of ability in communicating in it.

The immersion into an English speaking environment has made the maintenance of the heritage language a struggle, at the start Margaret and her husband tried to maintain the use of Shona in the home domain, but after her husband went back to Zimbabwe, the language balance shifted, English took dominance. When asked the reasons behind this shift, she stated that "It was difficult to maintain a balance between the two languages especially when my youngest daughter Keisha was born. Since Keisha was born and raised in this country it was easier to just switch to English." She also stated that using English also made it easier when helping out her younger kids with their education. When questioned about her language choice with her two older children Charles and Patience (me), she stated that she speaks in Shona with her eldest Charles because that is the language they have always used and he came into the UK when he was already a teenager so they just carried on with the language habits that had already been established. However, her interaction with me consists on English and Shona, she states that because I grew up in the UK and after a while I started using both languages side by side, code-switching, she just followed suit. Nancy M also states this as the reason for her interacting with me in Shona and English.

Based on the parent-child result, it is clear that Shona is the main instrument of communication within the home domain when discussing most matters but education.

2.3. Language used with parents at home

The son, Reggie X, communicates exclusively in Shona with his parents. English is used infrequently when explaining subjects from College and when discussing University subject options. He stated that apart from when discussing his education, English is used "some words that I can't get out quicker in Shona and the fact that I just can." He switches when the heritage language does not have the exact word he wants to express and at times he switches simply because he has both languages at his disposal.

When asked during the interview, what motivated the language choice, he motioned the issue of culture and respect was the main motive of speaking in the heritage language when communicating with parents and older Zimbabwean members of the community. The use of Shona is identified with respect. This sentiment was shared by his friends during a family gathering. The older friends Kudzi M, Charles K, Ruvarashe T and Tatenda X stated that they used Shona and English equally when speaking to their parents, only two

participants, the younger daughter of Margaret K, stated that they used English as the main communication language.

Based on the results from the surveys and the interviews, it can be concluded that Shona is the dominant language at home with those aged 18 and above. However, code-switching to English occurs and English is used “to a larger extent in child-parent than in parent-child conversations and it is used more by younger students than by older ones. It is also used more in mother-child than father-child conversations.” (Namei, 2008: 426).

Language choice scale:

1 = Only Shona 2 = Mostly Shona 3 = Shona and English 4 = Mostly English
5 = Only English 6 = Only Chewa 7 = Mostly Chewa 8 = Other Combination

2.4. Language used with siblings at home

Since Reggie did not have any siblings at home, the question about the “Language used with older siblings at home” was not applicable to him. However, his friends and family acquaintances did have siblings; they stated that they used Shona and English with their older siblings, with the younger ones only English was used.

2.5. Language used with ethnic peers and friends in school

Nancy M attends University and her son Reggie X attends College, both stated that they had Zimbabwean friends at school. When asked, Nancy M stated that she spoke Ndebele with her ethnic peers. Reggie on the other hand spoke a mixture of English and Shona with his Zimbabwean peers. Only English was used when there was a peer who didn't speak the heritage language, when the Shona speakers were alone, then the heritage language was used. The family friends and acquaintances interviewed, Kudzi M, Charles K, Ruvarashe T and Tatenda X, stated that they also used English and Shona depending on the participants and situation.

2.6. Language used with ethnic friends outside school

The same pattern was found when the participants were questioned about their language choice with ethnic friends outside school. They stated that they were mostly like to use mostly Shona outside the education environment. English was also used but only occasionally, when talking about technological matters regarding the internet and social medias.

2.7. Language used during family gatherings and traditional festivals

At family gatherings and traditional festivals Shona is used exclusively. The heritage language is used because the speaker “can properly express their level of respect to the recipient”. Shona is considered more respectful as it contains a series of Shona honorifics suitable when addressing a cleric for example “*Baba*” father which is commonly used in Zimbabwe when addressing the head of the church.

3. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the choice and maintenance in a Shona and Chewa speaking family both inside and outside the home domain. As a native Shona speaker, I hypothesised that English was not just outside the home domain but also inside. The results supported the hypothesis. Shona and English both appeared in all domains and were used to different degrees. As suggested by Fishman (1965), “habitual language choice is far from being a random matter of momentary inclination” (55), there are several descriptive and analytic variables that contribute to the understanding of *who* speaks what language to *whom* and *when*. He states that *group membership, situation and topic* are controlling factors in language choice.

During my observation of the family, I was able to see the three controlling factors in play. According to Fishman the need to feel accepted or to exclude the addressees and bystanders influences the speaker’s language choice, as a controlling factor of language choice. The first incident occurred when Nancy M and I went to visit Margaret K. A mixture of Shona and English is used by Margaret when speaking to me. She uses Shona only when speaking to a niece in Zimbabwe over the phone, when the phone is transferred to me, I also maintain the conversation with my cousin in Shona. When the phone is transferred to my grandmother, Shona is maintained. The reason for this is that I feel a closer connection to my grandmother when I speak to her in Shona. Also, speaking to her in English makes me feel like I have changed from what she knew of me. I don’t want to leave up to the stereotype of the westernised Zimbabwean who cannot maintain a conversation in Shona. When the phone is passed back to Margaret K, she speaks in Chewa to her mother. After the phone call, Margaret K carries on the majority of the conversation, she uses English when retelling the comments made by me earlier on. As highlighted by Fishman (1965), in each instance the speakers identify themselves with a different group to which they belong, want to belong and from which they seek acceptance.

The second instance in which this sense of wanting to belong to, or be identified as one of a group was evident during a conversation between Nancy M and a Passport Officer in London. The conversation starts in English then switches to Chewa. Words of solidarity and nationalism are used in the conversation “brother”, “motherland”. Chewa is maintained throughout the rest of the conversation, names are exchanged and a promise of help in the future is made by the Passport Office. Once the phone call terminates Margaret switches back to Shona when speaking with Nancy M.

In *Language Choice Among Iranians in Sweden*, Shidrokh Namei (2008) develops on the concept of group membership by introducing functions of *interaction*. The need to feel accepted or to exclude the addressees and bystanders wanting to exclude was evident during the conversation between Nancy M and Margaret K in which they switched to Ndebele when describing a friend in Zimbabwe successfully excluding me, the non Ndebele speaker of the group.

Furthermore, language choice seemed like could be used to include and unintentionally exclude at the same time. I observed a conversation between the younger participants, Eleanor, Kudzi, Tatenda, Shannon and I. When I greet and welcome the Shona speakers Kudzi and Tatenda the conversation is in Shona. Once Eleanor arrives conversation switches to English as Eleanor is a monolingual English speaker. Conversation progress in English with a few side remarks in Shona during discussions about cultural expectations of a Zimbabwean woman. Traditional foods are mentioned in Shona (sadza etc), when discussing introducing a wife to a Zimbabwean family in the village (kumusha) the heritage language is used, whole English is maintained to carry on and involve the monolingual speaker. When asked the reasons behind the switch the Shona speakers stated that with certain words they felt it was necessary that they were said in Shona to capture the feeling of “home”.

According to Fishman, “certain styles within every language are considered by particular interlocutors to be indicators of greater intimacy, informality [and] equality” (1965: 70). The participants stated that they associated Shona with informality and solidarity. Nancy M speaks and receives Ndebele at University when she interacts with another student who comes from the same Ndebele speaking city. The two grew up in the same part of the city, they share many common experiences and points of views and therefore they speak in a language that reflects the intimacy they share.

The topic of discussion can be seen “as a regulator of language use in multilingual settings” (Fishman, 1965: 57). During my observations, I observed a discussion about a Zimbabwean priest who had been found guilty of abusing his position within the church that the family once attended. The three participants Nancy M and Margaret K and I held the conversation in Shona with a few English words inserted when talking about the legal aspect of the case “guilty”, “sex offenders register”, “bail”. Reference is made to the comments found on the Zimbabwean news websites. The articles on the incident were written in English and the comments made by fellow Zimbabweans are a mixture of English only (Figure 1), Shona only (Figure 2) and English and Shona (Figure 3).

Anonymous said...

It was coming. It is called BLOG POWER. I said before that Masocha underestimated the power of the internet. In fact his failure to issue an immediate rebuttal statement soon after Jean raised the serious allegations raised suspicions. It was not normal. Of course, he is still to be tried and convicted but to AGAPE this is the final nail in the coffin. To Jean I would encourage you not to blog your evidence or continue discussing it in public. This may be sub judice and may be detrimental to the trial. Masocha's lawyers would be watching closely developments on this blog especially your own utterances. Remain strong girl!!

31 January 2014 at 15:45

Figure 1



Cde Zvinoshupa
“Where can I find the blog so I
can read it?”

Figure 2

Anonymous said...

Best news ever, Masocha waifunga kuti wakangwara. will be in court on Monday too ndinatse kumutarisa face yake, Seka hako exAgape.

Ahoy Team Jean

31 January 2014 at 16:22

Anonymous

“Best news ever, Masocha thought he was smart. [I] will be in court on Monday too so I can properly look him in the eye. Laugh exAgape. Ahoy Team Jean”

Figure 3

<http://hewasmydaddy.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/archbishop-dr-walter-masocha-arrested.html>

When asked about the language switch from Shona to English, both Nancy M and Margaret K responded that it was easier to use English when discussing the legal aspects of the case as there were certain words that existed in English but not in Shona. This supported Namei's observation that "Certain topics of conversation may be better dealt with in one language than in others in particular situations. (2008: 410).

3.1. Conclusion

The results show that language shift occurred just as commonly in a non-home domain as well as the home domain. The need to be part of a group, to exclude, the topic as well as the situation are all controlling factors of language choice. The domain acts as a controlling factor as well, for example, Shona is deemed as the most appropriate during family gathering and religious festivals. The question of language and identity came up during this study, some participants felt that their heritage language did not define who they were; however, the older participants felt that it was a fundamental part of them. Further research will need to be done to determine whether it is true that the younger generation no longer identify themselves with the heritage language.

4. Bibliography

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