



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Factors contributing to the loss of Ngoni language: A case of Chipata District in Eastern Province, Zambia

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### Abstract

**Overview:** This journal article analyzed the factors contributing to the loss of Ngoni language in a case of Chipata district of Eastern province in Zambia. The paper explored how Chingoni, a language of the conquering Ngoni, who controlled political, social and economic power could not maintain their language instead lost out to Chitumbuka and Chichewa, the languages of the conquered Tumbuka and Chewa respectively, as a language of everyday communication to the extent of being moribund.

**Contribution to the Body of Knowledge:** Since language is usually considered to be a marker of identity, the link between the Ngoni identity and Chingoni was also explored and concluded that language is not a sine qua non ingredient of group identity.

**Methods:** This study employed a mixed-methods approach, to understand why and how the Ngoni lost language by combining historical analysis, case studies, and interviews with key stakeholders, including traditional leaders, language teachers, civic leaders, scholars, and domains such as hospitals, schools, police stations. Data was obtained by means of interviews and questionnaires. The sample consisted of 148 respondents. frequency, tables and percentages were used to analyze qualitative and quantitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed manually in some cases and also, a combination of software MS Access and MS Excel.

**Results:** The findings revealed that, the Ngoni language loss was due to unwritten records: The Ngoni mother tongue language could not be sustained because there is no single novel, bible, magazine, dictionary, newspaper, or any book, journal article found which is written in Ngoni language.

**Recommendation:** In order to improve and address this challenge in Zambia, the present study recommended establishment of Ngoni Community Radio Station (NCRS) to be publishing Ngoni language lessons to the community.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism; Domains; Language Loss; Medium of Instruction; Multilingualism; Policies.

### 1. Introduction

The world is home to an extraordinary level of linguistic diversity, globally there are roughly 7,000 languages currently spoken and signed in the world. Yet this diversity is highly unstable and is being rapidly eroded through a series of complex and interrelated processes that result in or lead to language loss. Kalasa et al (2023) says that teaching learners in local languages enables learners to learn from known to unknown and learners understand given instructions faster

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while perception influences education and its values. The combination of monolingualism and networks of global trade languages that are increasingly technologized have led to over half of the world's population speaking one of only 13 languages. The estimate number of African languages, which some say they are too conservative, center around 2000 distinct languages. Africa takes a second position at world level in the ranking of languages spoken. And African languages can never be discussed without a mention of official, national, regional, local and mother tongue languages. Unlike other continents most African nations use foreign language as official languages. Official language is the one that has received some type of formal national recognition. The so-called official language has been noticed as the deadly weapon to African languages in Africa. Madoda, et al (2024) adds that social networks such as Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp among others have come to yield unprecedented opportunities for foreign language teachers and learners. This is because it offers them the possibility to exchange limitless numbers of text messages, images, and videos. Such options can give the users and language learners in particular, the opportunity to practice with new texts and learn new vocabulary through interaction, especially if it extends over time.

The decline of the Ngoni language in Zambia can be attributed to a combination of historical, social, economic, and cultural factors. Firstly, colonialism played a significant role in the suppression of indigenous languages across Africa, including the Ngoni language. During the colonial era, European powers imposed their languages as the official medium of communication, leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of indigenous languages like Ngoni. Furthermore, the advent of globalization and urbanization has resulted in increased migration from rural to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities. This migration often leads to linguistic assimilation, as people adopt the dominant languages spoken in urban centers for ease of communication and integration. As a result, the Ngoni language, primarily spoken in rural areas, faces a decline in usage and transmission to younger generations.

Moreover, the education system in Zambia predominantly operates in English, the official language, further marginalizing indigenous languages like Ngoni. Meirion (2013) points out that children are taught in English from a young age, limiting their exposure to and proficiency in their native languages. This educational policy perpetuates a cycle of language shift towards dominant languages and contributes to the erosion of linguistic diversity. Additionally, societal attitudes towards indigenous languages play a crucial role in their preservation or decline. In Zambia, as in many other countries, there exists a perception that proficiency in English or other dominant languages is a marker of intelligence, modernity, and socioeconomic status. Phiri, et al (2023) adds that English is Zambia's national official language that is used as a means of communication and also as the language of particular activities such as education, commerce, and politics. The English language is also commonly used as a means of socialization. This position the English language enjoys demands that an average secondary school pupil should be competent with language skills. These are the receptive skills of listening and reading and the productive skills of speaking and writing. Consequently, parents may prioritize English proficiency over the transmission of indigenous languages to their children, fearing that proficiency in their native language may hinder their educational and economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the lack of institutional support for the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages exacerbates their decline. Government policies and programs aimed at language revitalization are often inadequate or non-existent, leaving indigenous languages like Ngoni without the necessary resources and infrastructure for their survival. Lastly, intergenerational transmission of language is crucial for its maintenance (Ansa, 2022). However, with increasing urbanization and migration, younger generations may not have the same opportunities to learn and speak the Ngoni language as their elders, leading to its gradual decline within families and communities.

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

The general problem is loss of the Ngoni language. The main reason why this problem should be quickly addressed is drawn from the contribution made by Tasaku stating that, "language should be protected as it is a gift from our ancestral being, it helps us know our identity, it is language we speak that joins us to our people, past and it ties us to our land, language loss cannot be allowed because it represents people's beliefs, values, culture, information, wisdom and is a window into human mind. Every person has a right to be recognized as a member of his language community, right to use one's language in private and public, right to receive attention in their own language from the government and right for their language to be taught". This contribution makes language loss a serious problem which ought to be given priority. This problem was defined among the Ngoni people under paramount chief Mpezeni through various literature such as books, journals, newspapers, census report and personal experience through interaction and interviews with the Ngoni people before, during and after Nc'wala ceremony. The figure 1 below illustrates the increased impact and severity of the problem demonstrating how serious and faster the Ngoni language is declining every decade that passes from 7.7% in (1990) to 6.6% in (2000). From 6.6% in (2000) to 4.6 in (2010) and from 4.6% (2010) to 1% in (2020) (ZCHP,2000).

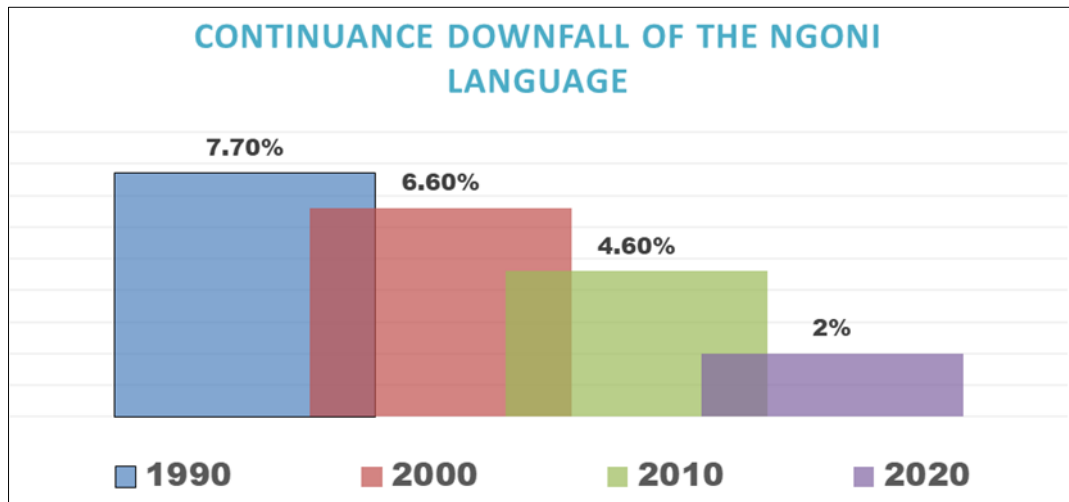


Figure 1 Ngoni Language Decline

### 1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish contributing factors to the loss of the Ngoni language, identify which language is mostly used in different domains such as schools and measure how government language policies have supported local languages.

### 1.3. Research Objectives

- To identify factors contributing to the loss of the Ngoni language in Chiptata District of Eastern Province, Zambia.
- To describe the language used in domains such as school, clinic, market and in meetings in Chiptata District of Eastern Province, Zambia.
- To evaluate the national policies that have been put in place to protect the indigenous languages in Chiptata District of Eastern Province, Zambia.

### 1.4. Theoretical Framework

According to David Crystal theory of language Revitalization, the process of language decline happens in three stages. First, the minority becomes exposed to immense pressure, whether political, social or economic, to speak the dominant language. It may be either "top down", that is "in the form of incentives, recommendations or laws introduced by a government or national bodies" or "bottom up" in the form of peer group pressure or fashionable trends (Crystal, 2000). The result of this pressure (stage two) is a period of emerging bilingualism, in which the minority people become increasingly proficient in the dominant language. During the third and last stage, this bilingualism starts to decline as the younger generation increasingly identifies with the new language and may often be ashamed to use the old language outside their homes. Crystal insists that chances for success are best if efforts to maintain an endangered language are focused on Stage 2, as it would be impossible nowadays to influence the factors which underlie the first stage in this process. Trying to influence the third stage would be too late for most languages. However, in the bilingualism of Stage 2 he sees an option for peaceful co-existence and a state in which both languages are seen as complementary. Crystal establishes several 'top priorities' for saving endangered languages. First, he believes that public relations' activities in favor of language diversity are necessary as is developing in people a sense of the value of a language. Second, the gathering of information on endangered languages is important when pinpointing the most urgent cases.

### 1.5. Conceptual framework

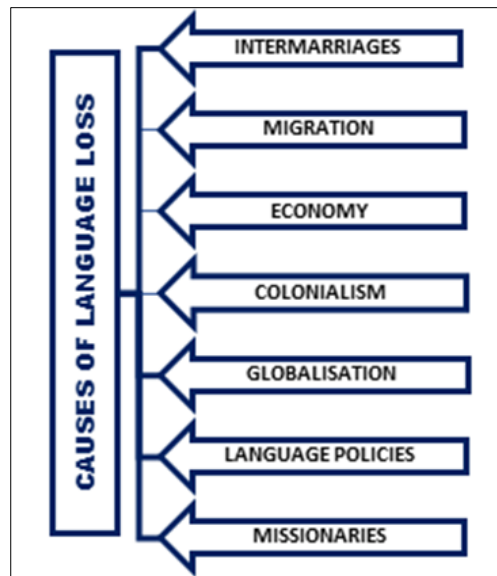


Figure 2 Conceptual framework

### 1.6. Significant of the study

Firstly, the findings of the study will benefit various institutions for instance, it will help to inform the Zambian ministry of education regarding usable local languages in schools among the Ngoni people of Chipata to support the 2013 National Literacy Framework and the 2012 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework the two documents proposed that the medium of instruction in all learning areas be local languages from grades one to four. Secondly, Knowledge sharing enhances efficiency, the findings of the research may inevitably benefit the body of knowledge, if the research may come up with some factors not reported in by previous researchers on language loss at world level. Regional and local level. Then sharing the knowledge through the findings of this research will be a great benefit to the body of knowledge (BOK) and existing literature. Thirdly, the findings of this research will highly benefit the teachers, lecturers, researchers, scholars, doctors, professors in short, the faculty members, academic staff and institutions. Fourthly, it will help future researchers with the latest information on what is prevailing which may motivate and encourage them to change the way they are looking at things and figure out the best possible way to position their new research topic with direction to avoid focusing on what other researchers have already done.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Negative Effect of Intermarriage on the Ngoni Language

Naturally, Elliot Machinyise pointed out that, the intermarriage between the Ngoni and the Nsenga proved later to be disastrous when the Nsenga and all the other people outnumbered the Ngoni. The children from Nsenga and Tumbuka mothers preferred speaking the languages of their mothers to speaking Ngoni the language of the fewer fathers Ngoni language was confined to the grandparent generation and eventually some words remained in royal praises and spiritual incantations.

### 2.2. The Missionary Language Policy, a Deadly Weapon for the Ngoni Language in Zambia.

The missionaries used indigenous languages as media of instruction (MOI) in all the schools under their control, up to the fourth year of primary education. Even though the desire by the local young men and women was to be taught in English, the missionaries opted to teach them in the indigenous languages. Therefore, wherever the missionaries opened up a School, they used local languages as media of instruction. The missionaries did not only make an effort to study the languages of the local people, but also to produce materials in the vernacular. Consequently, the Bible and other Christian Literature were also translated into local languages. When a mission station opened anywhere in the Country (Northern Rhodesia), the first thing the missionaries did was to study and write the dominant language in that

area Thereafter, they began to teach the chosen local language. among the local languages they used Ngoni language was not among them hence the ngoni language lost its value due to the missionary strategy Machinyise, et al (2020).

### **2.3. Migration Endangers the Ngoni Language**

The views of Chondoka explained that, migration brought the Nguni into Social Contacts with other people along their journey, Zwangendaba Ngoni learnt the Nsenga language which later became the main language of Nthuto Ngoni that have settled in Chipata district. The original Nguni language is lost, only a few elders can speak colloquial Nguni which is now to be original Nguni language reminding them of the relationship with the South African amaNguni.<sup>74</sup>Chondoka is strongly supported by, (Kashoki, P.13.) as he adds that, “the Ngoni as a language is practically extinct and only survives in songs and royal praises and perhaps in speeches of few old people in Chipata Districts Eastern Province. Additionally, it was in Mozambique were the Ngoni under Zwangendaba first experienced the loss of language were the word Nguni changed to Ngoni. He explains very well that, ‘when the Abanguni / Amanguni went into Thonga land in Mozambique it was there were the Ba Thonga called them “Wangoni”. The Thonga language has a tendency to change the vowel “u” into “o” the name, “Abanguni” in Zulu language became “Abangoni” in the Thonga language. This is how Zwangendaba Ngoni in Thonga land, southern Mozambique got a corrupted name Ngoni’. This was the name they began using when they left Thongaland (Chondoka, 2017).

### **2.4. Desire for Economic Growth Contribute to Decline of the Ngoni Language.**

It has been shown by Grenier that, desire for economic growth highly contributed to language loss. Language of economic status contributes to human capital and can be developed in the same way as other productive skills. People can acquire or improve their language skills by studying languages in school, conversing with others, and so forth. Many people, especially those who belong to a linguistic minority abandon their languages to learn new languages because they want to expand their abilities to communicate and, by doing so, be more productive and earn higher wages Grenier, 2015). When deciding what languages to learn, people tend to choose a language that has the highest financial returns. This clearly indicate that all languages with less or without economic status are not learned hence end up in extinction.

### **2.5. Colonialism Defeats Local Languages in Africa**

As explained by Mignolo, it is clear that Colonialism led to language downfall. Plainly speaking Colonialism meant a shift in the way that language was conceptualized, in a process of tying together languages to that of a colonial master, the colonized states and systems of power, lost their precious languages, as a communicative practice, language of learning in schools, preaching in churches, business communities was automatically replaced with a colonial language Mignolo, 2012). This was done by force in the desire of a colonial master to spread their culture and language across the world. When the British arrived in South Africa, they did not hesitate to introduce English as the language of the official document, and language of the law court. The aim was to bring the colony into closer connection with the Great Britain and other parts of the empire. This suppressed the South African languages for instance; the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Veda, Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, Swati and the Dutch Afrikaner. All books were rewritten in English and when it comes to the law court those who did not know how to speak English were expected to hire an interpreter.

### **2.6. Lack of Proper Language Policy Threatens Survival of Minority Languages**

In Canada, out of Indigenous communities themselves, there has been very little effort to raise awareness and create demand for learning an Indigenous language as a subject of study or as a medium of instruction. As well, with few exceptions, governments have not institutionalized teacher training in Indigenous languages, so that even where there may be enabling policy and willingness at a school level adequate learning can take place, and there are rarely qualified teachers who are proficient in an Indigenous language available to teach in the language across all subjects. Thus, in almost all settings, there is scarce support to implement Indigenous language-medium immersion or bilingual programs that require fully certified professional teachers. In short, even when there is enabling education policy, often there is a contradictory imposition of pre-existing restrictions on curriculum and learning outcomes imposed by provincial or territorial education requirements that threatens smooth implementation of the language policy. On the other hand national language policies are just on paper and there is little effort to enforce implementation. However, it is important to note at what point do the national language policies jeopardize indigenous languages? Firstly, its prominent to know that a country may have more than sixty (60) indigenous languages and out these maybe only one (1) or ten (10) may be picked as national official languages. This imply that the remaining languages may be considered unworthy by its speakers to a point of abandoning them (Chishiba, 2016).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

In an attempt to gather information in depth and understand the major reasons that contributed to the loss of the Ngoni language of Chipata district. Qualitative method was employed for appropriate investigation to attain a detailed data from participants, as this design is better placed in exploring feelings, impressions, judgments and stories from respondents.

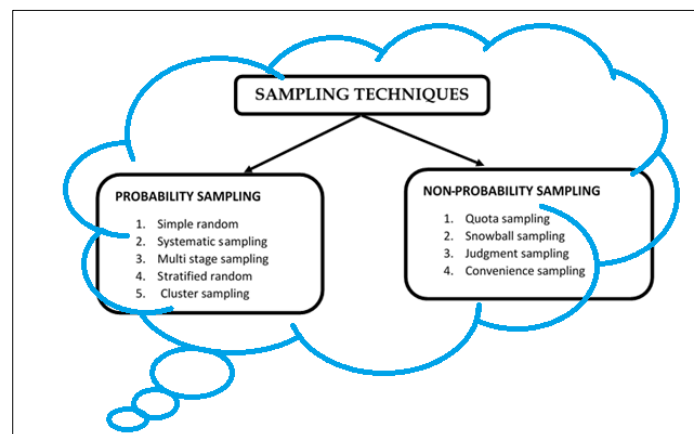
#### 3.2. Research Sites

This study was conducted in different areas which included two chiefdoms, 10 villages, 10 schools that is two community schools, two primary schools, two private schools, two mission schools, and two government schools. Four health centers namely Urban Health, Rural Health center, District hospital and district health office, police station, 12 different churches and market places.

#### 3.3. Population, Sample and Sampling procedure

The target population included chiefs, the grandees (Induna's), the Nc'wala national committee, the village heads, teachers of language and history. Other profession, 35 – 65 years old and those above 60 years old. The sample included 2 chiefs, 4 grandees (Induna's), 2 Nc'wala national committee leaders, 20 village heads, 10 teachers of language and history. 50 other professional workers, 50 Ngoni subjects 18 – 65 years old and 10 Ngoni subjects those above 60 years old.

##### 3.3.1. Sampling Procedure



**Figure 3** Sampling Procedure

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

The study used the questionnaires and interviews as research instruments. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents to elicit information on their views on loss of the Ngoni language. Interviews were carried out on parents whose children are learning at the selected schools and in other domains such as hospitals, courts, churches, markets and traditional offices including villages. Data collected by questionnaires was analyzed by use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel.

#### 3.5. Ethical Issues

With regard to ethical consideration, permission was sought before the interviews and before giving questionnaires as one of the ethical demands of any research. Informed consent was sought from the respondents before collecting information from them and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents. The study avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. In this research, the study was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research.

## 4. Results and discussions

### 4.1. Inter-marriage

According to the responses from the table. When asked to state whether intermarriages contributed to the loss of the Ngoni language? 95% of the respondent agreed and high percentage was those who strongly agreed, while only 5% which covered those who completely disagreed, not decided and those who preferred not to answer. Mwale, suggests that a 50% response rate is good enough for any data analysis while 70% and above is very good. This showed that intermarriage really caused the loss of Ngoni language.

**Table 1** Inter-marriage

Inter-marriage			
S/N	Was inter - marriage a cause for the loss?	Respondents	Percentage
01	Agree strongly	100	68
02	Agree moderately	21	14
03	Agree slightly	19	12
04	Completely disagree	4	3
05	Undecided	4	3
06	Total	148	100%

### 4.2. Missionaries and Christianity

The respondent pointed out the coming of missionaries and Christianity that, it had an adverse impact on the loss of Ngoni language in Eastern Province Zambia. Missionaries were quick to translate hymns from English to Chewa/Nyanja and Tumbuka. without considering Ngoni language.

### 4.3. Migration

This finding was in conformity, with the contribution made by professor Yizenge, (Mwale, 2023) and show that migration did not only negatively affect Ngoni language in Mozambique but also in Zambia. The ngoni left the area where Ngoni language was spoken in large numbers and went places where their children were raised by non-Ngoni speaking parents hence loss of language.

### 4.4. Economy

Ansa Hameed (2022) was supported by the respondents who stated that, People often prefer a language of economic identity over other several languages in a given community; to be straight forward, “parents may not allow their children to acquire the community language that is of no economic benefits. by Ansa Hameed.

### 4.5. Colonialism

The respondent reviewed that, In Zambia the colonial government, recommended that English be given the status of official language for both education and government day to day business. The colonial government insisted that the indigenous languages be used for the sake of preservation of national values and self-identity on the part of the colonized people.

### 4.6. Unwritten records

Respondent added that the Ngoni lost language due to Unwritten records: The Ngoni mother tongue language could not be sustained because there is no single novel, bible, magazine, dictionary, newspaper, or any book, journal article found which is written in Ngoni language.

#### **4.7. Linguistic imperialism**

Indeed, Extinction of language was due to linguistic imperialism. The respondents defined linguistic imperialism in line with Farhan (2019) who narrates it as an aggressive act, practice, theory or attitude of maintaining or extending their power of language over foreign nations through military power, concession, treaties, policy or diplomacy.

#### **4.8. Globalization**

Meirion (2013), was the literature which was almost disapproved in the field. Meirion goes on to suggest that the process of globalization has been promoted on the world stage with the English language being a common driver. Lesser languages have found it difficult to compete and survive on this stage. Hence a number of them have been automatically driven into extinction. Speakers of many of these minority languages which cannot compete at the global level don't believe that their languages have status or economic value, and, as a result, do not pass their language on to the next generation. However, 91% of the respondents refused that Globalization did not affect their language in anyway.

#### **4.9. Struggle for independence**

Mwale M, (personal interview 2023.) explained that, the message of getting impendence needed to reach the masses across the country. To attain this agenda Cinyanja was adopted as the UNIP language of their national anthem." In the process people took Nyanja as a language of political status and opted to use, learn, and transfer Nyanja to their generation other than Ngoni a language without any political and economic status.

#### **4.10. Wars**

The respondents indicated how much time the Ngoni spent in wars while the foreign women they married along the way who were not Ngoni, spent all the time with the new born Ngoni children. the non – Ngoni speaking wives the Ngoni married on their trek, brought up children in their mother tongue language since their fathers who happen to be Ngoni's were busy raiding others for cattle in process, they won cattle through raid and their lost language.

#### **4.11. Demographic Factors (Place of Birth)**

During the filed interviews among the Ngoni elders in Chipata district, the Mpezeni Ngoni elders confirmed that, "most Ngoni children who were born on the way could not speak their father's language; instead, they spoke mother's language" since they spent most of the time with mothers". It was wholly agreed that place of birth is very cardinal to the new born children.

#### **4.12. Linguistic genocide**

Genocide as Onowa (2019) puts it is associated with killing members of the group speaking a common language, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group to a point of giving up their language, the killing of the Ngoni speakers was noted in the war with British where the Ngoni were ruthlessly murdered.

#### **4.13. Bilingualism and Multilingualism**

Notably, the respondent indicated that, Bilingualism and Multilingualism are significant factors contributing to the loss of the language. A bilingualist is a person who speaks two languages fluently, while bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages colloquially. Multilingual is the ability to speak more than one language. A good number of the Ngoni's abandoned their native language in favor of the competitor this was one major factor that contributed to language loss in the Ngoni land.

##### *4.13.1. Lexical (Word Borrowing)*

The respondents reviewed that the Ngoni lost their language due to word borrowing from Chewa/Nyanja, for example the word come in Ngoni is "woza" but it was replaced with "bwera".

##### *4.13.2. School Rules*

school rules highly contributed to loss of indigenous languages in most schools they had rules for pupils like. "The official language of the school is English and no other language may be spoken on the school premises except French."



4.13.3. Languages used in Domains

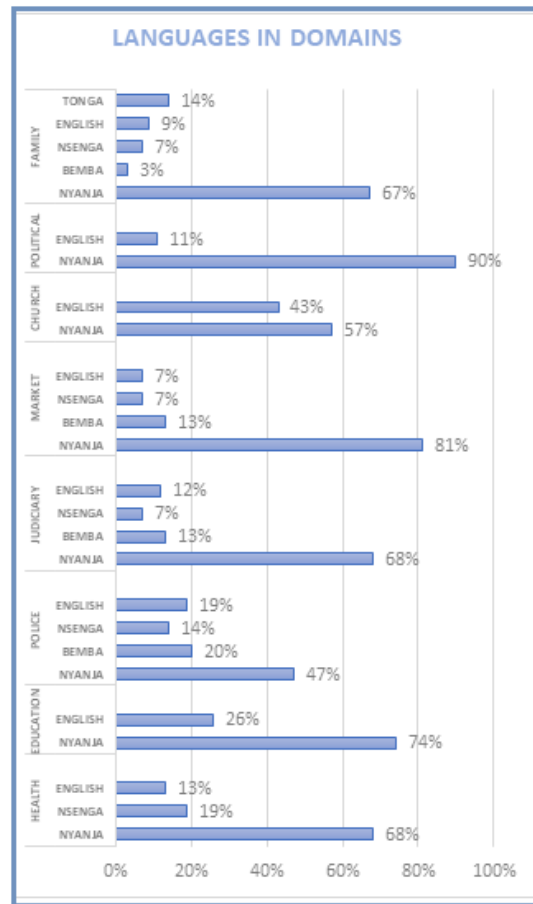


Figure 4 Languages used in Domains

4.14. Language policy in Zambian Schools

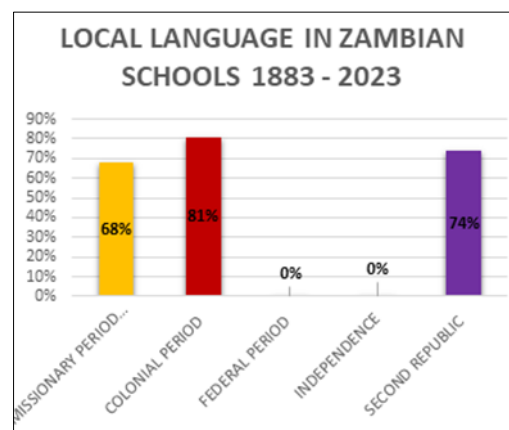


Figure 5 Language policy in Zambian Schools

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the loss of the Ngoni language in Zambia is a complex phenomenon influenced by historical legacies of colonialism, socio-economic factors, educational policies, societal attitudes, and the lack of institutional support for language preservation. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages while recognizing their intrinsic value to cultural heritage and identity. This

article has attempted to highlight the causes of the loss of the Ngoni language. also discussed are the languages used in various domain in the Ngoni area, such as schools, hospitals, markets, police stations and local courts. The language policy was also assessed; However, it has been observed that although Ngoni language has gone into extinction, clan names and traditional ceremonies are still effective markers of Ngoni identity

### *Recommendations*

- There is need to import (Ngoni language) teachers to teach, restore and maintain the lost Ngoni
- Government should encourage the learning institutions to aggressively publish and sell the Ngoni language books on the market and in every Ngoni household.
- Government to work in collaboration with existing language revitalization experts in coming up with strategies to restore the lost Ngoni language.
- Lobby from local political leadership e.g., Member of Parliament (MP), local government leadership e.g., Councilors. relevant national government leaders e.g., ministers to quicken the restoration process of the Ngoni language and other endangered languages.
- There is need for formal awareness-raising campaigns targeting the Ngoni communities and the public at large, to explain to people why each language is a unique cultural treasure which must be safeguarded.
- School rules in education domain to be monitored and discourage rules that forbid mother tongue languages.

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### **Compliance with ethical standards**

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

#### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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### Authors' Short Biography

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