

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN 2321 – 3108

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT: A CASE OF CHISHONA INFLUENCE ON ISINDEBELE SPEAKERS OF MABOLENI COMMUNITY AND ITS SCHOOLS IN LOWER GWERU

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the influence of ChiShona on the Ndebele people of Maboleni community of Gweru District in the Midlands region of Zimbabwe. It examined the extent to which ChiShona has affected Maboleni village and its schools in respect of IsiNdebele as the mother-tongue of the local speakers. A descriptive survey design was employed in this study. The sample consisted of four Ndebele infant teachers, four Ndebele secondary teachers, two heads of school, two parents, two youths, two peasant farmers, one headman, one kraal head, one local pastor and one Councillor. Interviews, Observations and Document Analysis were the instruments used in the collection of data. Tables and descriptive statistics were employed to analyze collected data. The study revealed that when languages are in contact, new forms result in a language, become part and parcel of it to the extent that even speakers of a certain language are not conscious that those terms were never part of their original language. While the study observed that language is dynamic, people of Lower Gweru or Maboleni in particular have mammoth challenge of preserving the original status of IsiNdebele in the community despite that it is in contact with ChiShona on a daily basis. Precisely, they sincerely believe that, IsiNdebele as a language is their symbol of identity and a tool for cultural transmission; hence they feel obliged to conserve it as it is part of their culture. Although these locals acknowledge that language does transmit culture, they fail to appreciate that Ndebele culture cannot remain static as long as it is expressed through a language spoken in a multilingual society. In conclusion, the study in concurrence with already conducted researches in the world revealed that language influence or change cannot be stopped if two languages are in contact and co-exist.

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Article Info:

Article Received :27/05/2013

Revised from :28/05/13

Accepted on: 17/06/2013

INTRODUCTION

Reputable scholars and academics like Romaine (1995), Yule (1996), Ngara (1977) and Weinreich (1976) have researched on the influence of languages on each other while they are in contact. Pupils in most of the Zimbabwean schools have been found to be facing problems of mother-tongue interference in learning English which they come across at school. Outside school, there are also problems of some of the marginalized languages interfering with the learning of

the national languages, IsiNdebele and ChiShona. Although Lower Gweru is predominantly Ndebele community, it shares its boundary with the city of Gweru which is mainly dominated by the ChiShona speaking people. As a result of this, the Ndebele speakers of Maboleni village have adopted certain linguistic concepts from ChiShona since it has become part and parcel of their day to day formal and informal communication. This interference has subsequently

impacted even on IsiNdebele language in schools where the use of borrowed and phonologized ChiShona words is penalized.

Maboleni village is situated in the Lower Gweru area and is forty kilometres in the north-western direction of the city of Gweru. These people have been for many years exposed to ChiShona and this has led to their adoption of several ChiShona linguistic features and expressions. For instance, some of the Ndebele speakers, especially the young generation, have never known that terms like, *umunyayi* (*munyai*), *umayinini* (*amainini*), *'ukukwanisa'* (*kukwanisa*) and *'inopi'* are not originally Ndebele but ChiShona terms which have been phonologized so as to read as Ndebele words. The researcher observes that IsiNdebele speakers of Maboleni have consciously or unconsciously adapted ChiShona which in turn has made inroads into their language. Nonetheless, this is to be expected in areas where languages are in contact or where isoglosses of the languages meet as IsiNdebele and ChiShona co-exist in the Gweru district. Furthermore, intermarriages involving Ndebele and Shona people have also influenced bilingualism in the village.

While borrowing and phonologizing processes are inevitable where two languages are in contact, Ngara (1977: 47) makes the following observation in respect of the language dominance;

Features of the dominant language can be introduced in a modified form so that they are integrated into phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic systems of the latter. The speaker of the receiving language regards them as features of his language and may not even be aware that they have their source in another language.

This statement, in all probability applies to the borrowing IsiNdebele does from ChiShona which is the dominant language in the Midlands region. However, borrowing cannot be said to be having negative effects on a language as it also promotes growth and development of the receiving language.

Conceptual framework: Language, language change and language contact are central to the problem

under investigation. Hubbard (1978) in Kahudzai (2002:13) defines language as "a culturally transmitted, productive system of arbitrary vocal sounds used for communication." The definition is the sum total of piecing together a number of language properties and uses, namely that language is not only a system but a system of arbitrary 'symbols, productive, culturally transmitted, vocal, species specific and communication (Pearson et al 2003; Poole 1999; Yule 1996; and Brown 1973). Another property of language is that it is dynamic (Keith and Shuttleworth, 2000, Yule, 1996 and Clyne in Ruth, 2006). If it is dynamic as highlighted, it follows to say that language changes over time hence the description 'language change'. One of the factors that influence the way in languages change over time is contact between languages (<http://www.ru.nl/linc/projects/toc-multilingual>).

According to Trask (1997) and Heine and Kuteva (2005), every language which is spoken as a mother tongue changes constantly in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary due to elements taken from another language that is spoken in the same area. In this regard, language influence on another can either be phonic, grammatical or lexical. On the contrary, a language that does not adopt becomes extinct as it would not be in touch with the reality of changing times. History is said to be littered with examples of languages that have become extinct because of their inability to adopt (Keith and Shuttleworth, 2000). Languages that have survived are those that are always in a state of flux (Crystal, 1992), due to several survival strategies such as coining and borrowing because of need and changes in the economic, social and technological climates. For example, a sociolinguistic feature like interference from other languages can bring about change when languages come into contact as it is the case with IsiNdebele and ChiShona in the Gweru District where the two co-exist. Language contact has been defined by Trask (1997:126) as

The state of affairs in which speakers of different Languages have dealings with one another which

are sufficiently intense, that features of vocabulary, Pronunciation or grammar are taken over from one language into another.

Some authorities on bilingualism like Brazzaville (1962), Wenreich (1974) and Beardsmore (1986) concur that language contact is when two or more languages are in contact hence they tend to exert influence on one another. However, Ngara (1977) asserts that in some cases one of the languages becomes dominant and the other subordinate. Of importance to note is that when languages are in contact, new forms come into a language, become part and parcel of it, to the extent that even speakers of the language are not conscious that the terms were never part of their language originally. It is with this contention in mind that the study seeks to assess the impact ChiShona has had on IsiNdebele in Maboleni village of Lower Gweru community. Although the research focused on languages in Zimbabwe, studies carried out involving German as native language (GL1) and Spanish as second language (SpL2) (www.lingwistik-online.de/23-05/herJekat.htm/-[caught](#) accessed on 12/12/12)(17) demonstrates beyond doubt that language influence occurs or is experienced throughout the world.

Methodology: Maboleni village was selected because of its central location in the Lower Gweru area. Pupils from these schools are directly affected because they learn IsiNdebele as it is their mother-tongue but are taught by mostly ChiShona speaking teachers. As a result, infant classes are affected as most of their teaching is done in IsiNdebele the language their teachers may not be conversant with.

Population under study: The population under investigation involved people from Maboleni village and pupils from its primary and secondary schools. Data from Vungu Rural District Council indicated that there are three hundred and forty six (346) homestead recorded in the 2002 population census. Each of these homesteads had an average of six people and these figures included both adults and children, according to Council records. Therefore, the total village population then, was pegged at two thousand and seventy six (2076). At Maboleni primary were six hundred and fifty four (654) pupils and eighteen (18)

teachers while at Maboleni High were eight hundred and twenty five (825) pupils and thirty two(32)teachers at the time of doing this research. This knowledge of population figures in the community and its school under study made the researcher to do his sampling bearing in mind the numbers involved so that he could get samples that were as representative of the population as possible.

The research design: This part of the study discusses data instruments, their reliability, validity, economy and limitation. The study used the qualitative design which is mainly characterized by descriptions and explanations of phenomena using words. In terms of methodology, the study employed interviews, observations and document analysis which work well with the qualitative design in question. Through interviews, the researcher was able to collect and collate words and expressions borrowed from ChiShona by speakers of IsiNdebele. The researcher also listed some of the errors caused by the influence ChiShona has on IsiNdebele and indicated their IsiNdebele equivalents. Participant and partial observations were used to collect data from the target population. These observations enabled him to be involved in the research process without being realized. Participant observation was complemented by video and tape-recordings of conversations and speech utterances during different occasions and gatherings when community members freely interacted and talked among themselves. Document analysis was used to gather data expressed in written form. In order to detect ChiShona influence, Grade 7 and Form 4 Ndebele composition and language exercise books at Maboleni primary and secondary schools were inspected. The data collected through the analysis of compositions and language exercises were reliable and valuable especially when one takes cognisance of the fact that compositions had been written under a free atmosphere without pupils expecting that they will be used in future for documental analysis. Hence, the pupils did not attempt to avoid the influence of ChiShona in their work.

Data Analysis: The presented and analyzed data were a result of interviews, observations, tape or video recordings and analysis of pupils’ written work.

Community Members’ Responses to the Interview: The interviews involved a total of twenty respondents who were selected through purposive sampling. The

researcher left this form of sampling would assist in acquiring desired data pertaining to ChiShona influence on IsiNdebele language speakers. The sample consisted of a headman, farmers, church leaders, business people, teachers, young and old residents of Maboleni village.

Table 1: sex of the respondents N=20

Sex	Male	Female	Total
Number	10	10	20
Percentage	50%	50%	100%

Table 2: Whether respondents understand ChiShona or not N=20

Response	Understand ChiShona	Do not understand ChiShona	Total
Number	20	0	20
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

Tables 3: Whether ChiShona interference can be noticed in IsiNdebele speech N=20

Response	Positive	Negative	Uncertain	Total
Number	15	0	5	20
Percentage	75%	0%	25%	100%

Table 4: ChiShona words used by Ndebele speakers of Maboleni community Below is a table displaying a list of some of the ChiShona words informally collected by the researcher after realizing that they featured regularly as part of IsiNdebele vocabulary.

Ndebelerised Chishona words	Original Chishona words	Ndebele equivalent	English translation	Number of respondents	%of total
Usekuru	Sekuru	Umalume	Maternal uncle	16	80%
Inopi	Nhopi	Isijeza	Pumkin porridge	15	75%
Amabende	Mavende	Izikhewu	Lost teeth	12	60
Umainini	Amainini	umamomncane	Aunt	20	100%
Umunyayi	Munyai	Umkhongi	Marriage go between	18	90%
Amakuwa	Makuhwa	Amanga	Gossip	16	80%
Ukukwanisa	Kukwanisa	Ukwenelisa	To be able	20	100%
Amabhoru	Maboru	Ubuthuku	White discharge on eyes	18	90%
Imenya	Mhenya	Umngane wesintwana	Girlfriend	5	25%
Inedzi	Nhedzi	Amakhowa	Mushrooms	16	80%

Table 5: Reasons for borrowing from ChiShona N=20.

Reasons for borrowing	Number of respondents	% of total
Because some of the words have been accepted as IsiNdebele vocabulary	8	40%
ChiShona terms are interesting to use	3	15%
In order to expand IsiNdebele vocabulary	6	30%
To accommodate ChiShona speaking counter parts	3	16%
Total	20	100%

Table 1 shows a gender balanced image of respondents as they were ten woman and men. This fair distribution in terms of gender meant that the The table reflects that all the twenty respondents understood ChiShona. The understanding of ChiShona by all respondents implied that ChiShona has an impact and that most of the locals were bilingual. Therefore, the chances of ChiShona interfering with IsiNdebele in Maboleni village are high as these languages are in contact.

It is apparent from the shown table that the majority who represented seventy five percent noticed the interference of ChiShona in IsiNdebele speech or conversation. Twenty five percent or five respondents were not certain whether ChiShona interfered with IsiNdebele or not. None of them declared that it did not interfere. Implicit in their responses is that some of the respondents, especially the young, might not be aware that some of the words in their vocabulary are not originally IsiNdebele.

Although the adoption of the recorded words was perceived by villagers as ChiShona influence on IsiNdebele, linguistically, it is not but a positive development on the part of IsiNdebele which is growing in terms of its vocabulary. Major reasons advanced by most of the respondents (70%), were that some of the ChiShona words had been used to the extent that they have been accepted as IsiNdebele vocabulary, hence accommodating their ChiShona speaking counter parts with difficulties in grasping IsiNdebele and expansion of IsiNdebele vocabulary.

Some of the respondents interviewed pointed out that the mixing of IsiNdebele and Chishona had a negative

researcher would benefit from both sexes as they perform different duties and roles that are to do with language issues in life.

effect on the performance of learners in IsiNdebele lessons as they were penalized for mixing the two in their written work. Respondents also raised the effect that villagers and children in the long run may not be aware of the fact that IsiNdebele is the symbol of their identity and a tool for transmission of culture. The research also established that borrowed words were a result of what obtains when two languages like Chishona and IsiNdebele are in contact. That is, borrowed Chishona terms were formed through the process of phonologizing which involved the application of Chishona orthography in IsiNdebele. Borrowing has been defined as the adoption of lexical material to the morphological and syntactic patterns of the recipient language (<http://booksgoogle.co.zw/books?id=IQC8tv=%22>)

(18). Interestingly, although IsiNdebele has gained and added to its vocabulary, phonologized ChiShona words are not regarded as standard IsiNdebele in written work and examinations as they are penalized if used. In this respect, it can be said that language policy on written work is prescriptive rather than descriptive.

Inspected composition and language exercise revealed that ChiShona had an influence on IsiNdebele written work. This was evidenced in incorrect IsiNdebele constructions which were a result of confusion of phonemes, literal translation, maintenance of ChiShona grammatical structure and wrong phonology. Also, in written work, there prevailed

incorrect spellings which were a result of an attempt to apply ChiShona orthography on IsiNdebele.

The reasons given in this table are diverse and justify the borrowing of ChiShona words by Ndebele speakers. Of significance to note from these reasons is that the element of borrowing contributes to the expansion of IsiNdebele, something that cannot be avoided when languages are in contact. The expansion is also due to language dynamism which is also indispensable in such a scenario.

Research has also revealed that the worry about language dominance is not confined to IsiNdebele speakers only and alone. For instance, Channel France 24 reported on 31/03/10 that the culture Ministry is concerned about the number of English words in internet use in France by the French and was running a competition replace them with French ones because they are afraid English threatens to overrun French in this sphere(Channel France24, 31/03/10) (18).

Commenting on the language situation in Lower Gweru area which also embraces Maboleni community, the majority, eighty percent expressed that it is important to preserve their mother-tongue and advised that ChiShona should be used only when it is convenient. On the contrary, twenty percent of the respondents were bitter and strongly felt ChiShona was gradually substituting IsiNdebele, hence they objected as they believed using it was at the expense of their mother-tongue. The perception that the use of ChiShona should be completely avoided is not convincing from a linguistic point of view. Linguistically, IsiNdebele vocabulary is developed and expanded through the processes of borrowing, coining and phonologizing which are inevitable as ChiShona and IsiNdebele are in contact in this part of Lower Gweru.

Findings further revealed ChiShona influence on IsiNdebele written work in schools. Below are some of the examples of incorrect spellings of words which were an attempt to apply ChiShona orthography in IsiNdebele.

- a) Vhura (ChiShona)
Vhula (wrong)
Vula (correct)

Open (English)

- b) Nhopi (ChiShona)
Inhopi (wrong)
Inopi (correct)
Pumpkin porridge

- c) dhorobha (ChiShona)
idorobho (wrong)
idolobho(English)
d) dhadha (ChiShona)
idhadha (wrong)
idada (correct)
duck (English)

Although IsiNdebele has gained and added to its vocabulary, phonologized ChiShona words are penalized in written work as they are not regarded as standard language. In this case, National Language Policy on written work is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Incorrect IsiNdebele constructions which were a result of confusion of phonemes, literary translation, maintenance of ChiShona grammatical structure and ChiShona phonology found in composition and language exercises also revealed ChiShona influence on IsiNdebele written work. In this regard, incorrect IsiNdebele constructions which are penalized in both oral and written work, clearly indicate students do not represent language usage in a way they are expected.

Observed, video-filmed and tape-recorded ChiShona interference/influence

In addition to conducted observations, the researcher had an opportunity to listen and watch recorded and filmed conversations. Tape-recordings, video-filming and observations were carried out during church services, funeral services, on agricultural field days and at wedding ceremonies where villagers freely mingled and interacted. Nobody ever suspected anything sinister since the researcher happened to be a resident of the village. Only those errors resulting from ChiShona influence were noted as shown in table 6 of this study.

Table 6: ChiShona interference in conversation

	ChiShona Expression	Ndebelerised Expression	Correct Expression	Ndebele	English Explanation
1	Anemabori	Ulamabhoiri	ulobuthuku		His eyes have discharge
2	Hazvikwani	Akukwani	akweneli		not enough
3	Masungiro	Masungiro			A goat slaughtered for a newly married pregnant spinster
4	Mari yechema	Imali yetshema	Imali yenyembezi		Money for condolences
5	Mutakura	Umthakhura	umphako		Food provision
6	Akachena	Utshenile	Ucecile		Well dressed
7	Nhedzi	Inedzi			A type of mushroom
8	kukunguruka	Ukukhunguruka	ukugiqika		To roll
9	Mashamba	Amashamba	amajodo		Pumpkins
10	Nhoda	Inota	Igwini		Counting stones game

This table shows a list of ChiShona expressions that have been transformed into Ndebele language in terms of morphology, phonology and orthography. For instance, the word 'nhoda' for a counting game using stones is spelt as 'inota' because IsiNdebele nouns have a vowel prefixed. Secondly, IsiNdebele does not have the syllable 'nho' in its orthography and it also does not have the implosive 'da' hence the spelling 'inota' instead of 'nhoda'. Terms like 'nedzi' for a type of mushroom, 'hoshu' for rattle and 'masungiro' for a goat slaughtered for a newly pregnant lady in Shona culture, have no IsiNdebele equivalents. However, they have been adopted which implies the dynamism and expansion of IsiNdebele vocabulary in Maboleni community of Lower Gweru area.

CONCLUSION

Findings from other researches and the conducted study confirmed that ChiShona and IsiNdebele are languages in contact in Maboleni community of Lower Gweru area in the Midlands region of Zimbabwe. This was clearly evidenced by the data obtained from conducted interviews, observations, recordings and document analysis. IsiNdebele speakers of Maboleni community in particular, borrowed, coined, phonologized and adopted linguistic features or lexis

from ChiShona as shown by expressions and word examples given in this article. For instance, terms like 'ukukwanisa' from 'kukwanisa', 'umayinini' from 'amainini', 'umunyayi' from 'munyai', 'inopi' from 'nhopi' and others, derived from ChiShona have been assimilated and thus demonstrates the impact of ChiShona influence on IsiNdebele language. Some of the locals of Maboleni community did acknowledge and appreciate the growth and expansion of their language, especially through phonologizing ChiShona lexis without their equivalents in IsiNdebele for the purpose of communication where languages are in contact.

While linguistically, it cannot be disputed that language is dynamic, some of the IsiNdebele speakers at Maboleni community were concerned about their culture (values and norms) which they believe cannot be preserved if their language is dominated by ChiShona. This is also expressed by Moyo in Zambezia (2002) who asserts that when lexical items from one language are allowed to dominate another language, the result may be the decay of the dominated language. As highlighted in the study, it is not IsiNdebele speakers only and alone that are worried about foreign language dominance. France is

reportedly worried about their French which they say is threatened by the spread of English in their sphere. Probably, it is from this perception, that Maboleni community people feel that the dominance of ChiShona in their village should be constantly checked. However, this is not convincing from a linguistic perspective as the majority of linguists including those cited in the conceptual framework of this study believe that language change cannot be stopped or avoided when languages are in contact. In this regard, Ndebele language cannot be an exception; hence the language that does not adopt extinct as it would not be in touch with reality of changing times in a bi-or multilingual environment. Therefore, this is meant to enlighten linguists and the larger society that language policies should be descriptive rather than prescriptive since languages are constantly changing and developing due to influence on each other as they do not exist in isolation.

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