

Traversing the Sociolinguistic: The Status of Languages Spoken in Southern and Southeast Zimbabwe

by

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyse the status of languages spoken in Zimbabwe, mainly on languages such as Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Pfumbi via a comparative analysis in relation to languages which were traditionally declared as national and official languages namely English, Shona and Ndebele. The Constitution of Zimbabwe supports the promotion and equality of all indigenous languages; however, there seems to be some discrepancies in the usage of English, Shona and Ndebele. Thus, this work found that the speakers of the languages in the peripheries of the nation have contributed to this phenomenon.

Key words: sociolinguistic, landscape, status, language, language attitudes, ideology.

Introduction

Zimbabwe is a multilingual country which has indigenous languages such as Barwe, Chewa, Khoisan (Tshwao), TjiKalanga, Nambya, Ndebele, Shona, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, Xitsonga (which is commonly mistakenly referred to as Xichangana/shangani), Xhosa and English. Sign language and Chindau are also considered as official languages as enshrined in the current Constitution of Zimbabwe. There are other languages such as Hwesa, Sena, Chikunda spoken along the Zimbabwean eastern border with Mozambique but they are not covered in the new constitution. Another endangered variety is Pfumbi a sub-language of Shona/ Venda which is predominantly spoken in Beit Bridge district and also in Maranda area in Mwenezi district.

A language like English, though being a language of the minority in Zimbabwe, has been and still being used for most functions at the expense of indigenous ones. Cooper (1996: 166) supports this view by saying: “*Indeed the spread of imperial languages, particularly English, as languages of administration, and international trade, is one of the most striking legacies of the modern colonial era.*”

The aim of this work is to highlight and discuss the social status of Zimbabwean languages which are spoken in the eastern and south eastern peripheries of Zimbabwe. It is going to unravel the major causes of the status accorded these languages whether by design or otherwise. The aim is to discuss the official and informal functions of these languages in the socio-linguistic space, and analyse the picture on ground in as far as the implementation of the clause on languages enshrined in the Zimbabwean constitution is concerned.

An Overview of Language Matters

Winford (2003) in his chapter entitled “ideology of language and socially realistic linguistics”, talks about ideology and historicity of a language. He argues that history of a language is very vital in the development and legitimacy of any given language. He goes on to say languages of African Diaspora have either a distorted history which was only used for defamatory purposes or to some extent nothing has been said about them.

Winford goes on to discuss about ideology and autonomy of languages. He argues that African American Vernaculars (AAVE) and other minority vernaculars are not autonomous due to the problem of naming where they are given derogatory terms such as “Ebonics”. This is supported by Smitherman (1986) who argues that a name has more to it other than just being a mere word. He says that a name could be a historical symbol which also has values and consequences in real life situation. In line with ideology and prestige Sidnell indicates that the ideologies of a language may be used to exert power and privilege over other languages. Winford basing on this assumption, asserts that African American speech community, would feel as if standard English is “prestigious” while is stigmatized.

In terms of ideology and social control, Milroy and Milroy (1985) also argue that the standard language ideology reinforces inequality in terms of power and privilege among the American communities. In other words this “standard language ideology” favours the promotion of the dominant group at the expense of groups which are less powerful.

Milroy and Milroy argue that to the groups which have power to control can maintain the status quo by misinforming and misrepresenting the under privileged groups and also by denying them influential positions and privilege. They go on to say that the tools such as mass media and institutionalised prejudices against African language and culture were used as control measures to hinder the development of the less privileged groups. On the other hand Ferraro (2008) also mentions that languages which have a large number of speakers and political power as well are not endangered since they enjoy the privileges.

Peil (1977) argues that people may discriminate others according to origin, whereby some think they are the rightful occupants of a certain place or country and hence feel that they are more superior to others who may have migrated from some other places. These immigrants are often treated as strangers.

Language Policy in Zimbabwe

A language policy is a crucial instrument in the development and elevation of languages, especially those which have low status. A language policy may also be manipulated or designed to maintain the status quo. Zimbabwe has no clear language policy which stands on its own. Chimhundu (1997:129) supports this when he says: *“In Zimbabwe, as in many other African countries, there is no explicit or written language policy”*.

Since independence there was no language policy in Zimbabwe. Reference was only made to the education act of 1987 (Røyneland 1997:133). This language act in education was used in various sectors as a guideline on how languages could be used. This act did not promote all indigenous languages of Zimbabwe but it only favoured English, Ndebele and Shona. Other languages were labelled as ‘minority languages’ and were later on referred to as marginalised languages. Currently the constitution of Zimbabwe (2013:17) has declared that 16 languages are recognised as official languages which should be developed and promoted equally. This is the only hope of all languages which formally fell into the ‘minority’ category. However, the Constitution (2013:17) section 6(2) further states that *“An act of parliament may prescribe other languages as officially recognised languages and may prescribe languages of record”*. This means the parliament has power to influence the policy which may support or disadvantage other languages.

The ideology also plays a role in influencing the language policy of any given country. This is evident in a country like Zimbabwe where nationalism has caused some remarkable discrepancy in the statuses of its languages. Soon after independence Zimbabwe adopted a policy which in the views of politicians fostered unity among citizens, by choosing languages such as Shona, Ndebele and English as national and official languages at the expense of other indigenous languages which includes Xitsonga, Cindau, Venda, Tonga, Kalanga, Nambya, Sotho, Tswana, Tshwao, Sena, and Sign language.

Findings and Discussions

Zimbabwean history is marred with inconsistencies in issues pertaining to the languages spoken by minorities who occupy peripheral areas of Zimbabwe. Most of the history textbooks do not capture comprehensive issues about these groups in the marginal areas. There is a tendency of portraying Zimbabwe as country which does not have a diverse socio-cultural background. The history also does not cover a wide range of issues which point to a multicultural and multilingual society.

Even naming itself has a bearing on how people would view the status of a language. Xitsonga is one such language which is known by a wrong name, because of inconsistencies in history. The name given to this language in Zimbabwe is Shangani or Xichangana and it is derived from the name of Soshangane who was one of Shaka's generals who broke away from the Zulu kingdom in the 1820s during Mfecane. This Soshangane found the Tsonga people, already established in the present day Mozambique, and he never spoke Xitsonga himself. Mathebula (2013) supports this view when he argues that the Tsonga people had already established themselves along the east coast by the 13th century, before Soshangane was born.

This same language is known as Xitsonga in South Africa and Mozambique. It is only in Zimbabwe where political boundaries are used to separate Xitsonga so as to create an impression that Xitsonga and Xichangana/Shangani are two different languages. Mathebula (2013: 9) points to the exact identity of the Tsonga regardless of boundaries when he says: "The name of the people is actually Vatsonga". Mathebula also goes on to support the idea that the boundary does not change a people, to be known by another name, by saying: "The Tsonga people are also found in the eastern and south eastern parts of Zimbabwe as well as smaller pockets in Zambia and Swaziland".

There is no other language in Zimbabwe whose name is derived from the name of a former coloniser or conqueror of any group. This name is attached to certain stereotypes such as being "barbaric" and "backward", as some participants indicated. This kind of misrepresentation always puts the speakers of Xitsonga language at a disadvantage, most of the time.

Language Attitudes

Various people have shown different attitudes towards other languages or even theirs, thus some of the views which different participants gave about other languages spoken in Zimbabwe will be exposed here. This covers areas such as radio and television broadcasting, newspapers, government institutions, primary and secondary education, and universities. Some of the negative attitudes are evident in the radio broadcasting where some employees may feel that languages such as Xitsonga and Tshivenda should not compete with traditional languages of Zimbabwean broadcasting.

One of senior presenters at *Radio Zimbabwe* supports this assertion when defending why they do not play a variety of music which incorporates Xitsonga language by saying this: “*We have put all the Shangani music to National FM because it is the one which broadcasts in minority languages*”. These words show that this radio station was established to cater to those languages so that they don’t interfere with other stations, which may be offering other languages.

Another area where attitudes on languages are evident is at universities or colleges. Focusing on Xitsonga and Tshivenda we can see that these languages have not been taught until they were introduced at the Great Zimbabwe University in 2008. This gesture came with mixed feelings. Some welcomed the move, whilst some scorned at it. This takes us to the issue of attitudes professed by both speakers of other languages and the speakers of Tshivenda and Xitsonga themselves. The university has employees and students from all walks of life.

Some students are heard asking what kind of jobs will be done by Tshivenda and Xitsonga graduates. Some would say it is just a waste of time for someone to come to university to pursue studies in these languages. This kind of talk shows that these languages are of no value or of less importance as compared to those referred to as national languages. This also led some Xitsonga and Tshivenda students to wander on what could be their future by investing in these languages. One of Xitsonga student had questions which show changing attitudes towards his language by saying this: “*Kasi loko hi heta degree ya Xitsonga hi ta kuma ntirho wa njhani?* [“*What kind of job will we get after finishing this degree?*”]

This kind of question shows a negative attitude towards Xitsonga language as shown by other speakers of the language. They ignore the fact that these languages have gained their status by being introduced at a higher learning institution such as a university. No one had ever dreamt that these languages could be offered at the university level since they were only taught up to grade 3 at primary school. At times, these students are heard temporarily shifting from their language whenever they were in the midst of speakers of other languages. One student had to say this when asked why they choose to speak in other people’s languages when they are among them: “*Ha vulavula Xixona hikuva hi xona xi nga tala eka tihositele laha hi tshamako kona. Vakalanga hi vona va endlaka leswaku hi vulavula Xixona.* [We speak Shona because it is a dominant language in the hostels. They are the ones who make us speak their language].

This answer simply shows how other people have negative attitudes towards their own languages. This is so because there is not a single person who has power to stop them speaking in their language at any given instance. This was just a scapegoat on why they preferred other people’s languages at the expense of theirs. At this same university there are few Ndebele speakers, but whenever they meet, they always speak in their mother tongue. This also supports an assertion that some students want to be viewed as good people, and they also do not want to be known as speakers of particular languages which were formerly referred to as ‘minority languages’.

- a) In support of the point mentioned above, one student responded in this way: “*A hi lavi ku ri vanhu va ehleketa leswaku ha va hleva. Hi swona swi endlaka leswaku hi vulavula leswi va swi twaka*”. [We don’t want other people to think that we are back-biting them. So that is why we speak a language they understand]. This simply shows an inferiority complex within some of the speakers of Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and other indigenous languages in the same category.

Still on the issue of attitudes, it was also evident in this research that some members of staff also had negative attitudes towards the languages of the minorities. Some even had some stereotypes and negative feelings towards people themselves besides shunning the languages. Some still wonder why the languages were introduced to the university curricula. One of the employees at Great Zimbabwe University echoed her sentiments about Xitsonga and Pfumbi by saying: “*Jangani ndakatorimaka, kana ari semupfumbi worse*. These people are barbaric and backward”. [I just dislike Tsonga (Jangani being a derogatory sense of the word Shangani) speakers. If it is Pfumbi then it is even worse].

We can see that from these discussions that some have negative attitudes which impact on the status of languages and sub-languages spoken in the south and south eastern peripheries of Zimbabwe. These attitudes show how some are not willing to see the languages rise to the levels of those languages which have been recognised as official, since independence. These negative attitudes are also contrary to Article 2 of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which is against discrimination of any kind, be it racial, colour, language, sex and other status.

Status of Languages in the Southern and Eastern Peripheries

Hadebe (1996) argues that the status of a language can be evaluated by looking at what the language is used for. Therefore, a discussion of the status of the languages in question is needed while looking at their functions in areas like media, education sector and other government institutions. And also, in this review, how languages are accorded their statuses by looking at their functions in the media is important, because languages in Zimbabwe are not accorded equal time for broadcasting as supported by Mazula (2003:212, 128), as she outlines the policy in the following manner:

According to the Broadcasting Services Act 2001 part 3 section 11, subsection 4 “Not less than ten percent of total programming content broadcast by any licensee shall be: (a) In any of the national languages of Zimbabwe other than Shona and Ndebele.

“There is one terrestrial television services provided by the public broadcaster ZBC. It is called ZTV...The survey results show that ZTV broadcasts in only two local languages namely Shona and Ndebele. The respondents indicate that these two languages are being afforded enough time”.

This makes it clear that other languages other than Shona and Ndebele are not given any chance on the national television station. It also shows that these two languages are in a better position if we are to compare them with other indigenous languages as Mazula (2003:215) says:

The majority of the respondents on the airtime allocated to local languages on radio stations pointed out that Shona and Ndebele are allocated enough time on all radio stations whereas the other languages, commonly referred to as minority languages, are not receiving enough coverage.

This means that Shona and Ndebele are given enough time on the national television, if we compare it with other indigenous languages, which are not heard at all.

Status of Languages in Print Media

Most newspapers and other written material mainly use English as an official language. However there are some which publish news and stories in Shona and Ndebele respectively. There are also very few papers which accommodates both Shona and Ndebele. Newspapers which are found in Zimbabwe are as follows; *The Herald, Sunday Mail, H-Metro, B-Metro, Financial Gazette, Daily news, The Zimbabwean, Kwayedza, Tell Zimbabwe, Umthunywa, The Standard, Masvingo Star, Manica Post, Chronicle* and *The Mirror*. Besides *Masvingo Star*, the rest of papers listed above do not publish any single story written in either Xitsonga or Tshivenda, among other indigenous languages spoken in the Zimbabwe since independence up to now. Thus, Hachipola (1998:72) looks at this issue by saying:

As should be expected the major means of communication in the Zimbabwean media is the English language ...The Herald...prints news in the main, although in such matters as Sending messages of condolences and memorials one sometimes finds such thing printed in Shona or Ndebele. All the popular weekly and monthly magazines are written in English. The only exception is the bilingual paper, called Kwayedza / Umthunywa which is exclusively Shona and Ndebele, but mainly Shona. The so-called minority languages have no place in the print media in this country.

This means English is ranked higher than Zimbabwean indigenous languages, followed by Shona and Ndebele in as far as print media is concerned. Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Pfumbi are at the bottom position when it comes to print media. This situation is not healthy since these people cannot express themselves in important matters and even to air their grievances. They also cannot access useful notices in their languages, and their right in giving their own opinions is being trodden.

Hence, Shona and Ndebele have a better standing even though they also see English as a threat to their survival. They also feel that they are not given equal space as English, which is the language of the minority in Zimbabwe. This however, may be seen as selfishness because there are still a lot of people in parts of Zimbabwe who claim that they do not know that there other languages other than Shona and Ndebele spoken in this country. This is a result of unbalanced media coverage in Zimbabwe.

The Kwayedza and Umthunywa papers are published in Shona and Ndebele respectively. The Financial Gazette, The Standard, H-Metro, Daily News mostly use English only whereas Herald, Sunday Mail, Sunday News, The Mirror, Masvingo Star, Manica Post sometimes give notices in Shona and Ndebele. Serious issues are not written in these indigenous languages spoken in the peripheries. This practice is evidence of unequal treatment given to languages in Zimbabwe. In most papers there is no enough representation of languages like Tshivenda and Xitsonga. When they write something, it will be having some negative connotations on these languages. Some even show how they detest such languages. An unnamed reader of The Herald (2011) gives his views about Tshivenda and Xitsonga languages when he said:

Can someone tell me whats the importance of Chivenda (Tshivenda) and Xichangana (Xitsonga) in our community? Uku ndiko ku pererwa manje. Tipewo zvirinani zvino sumudzira nyika. [This is a sign of desperation. May you give us better things which uplifts the country].

This comment came after an article was talking about uplifting other languages that have been marginalised for quite a long time. This shows negative attitudes some people have, especially those who want to maintain the status quo.

The Use of Language in Education

In education, some incidences portray how indigenous languages are used which includes the situation in district offices and schools as there is a suppression of Xitsonga or Tshivenda since they do not monitor the teaching of these languages in schools. In this research, we have found that there are teachers who are Xitsonga speakers who were deployed in areas where their language is not spoken at all, and when they want to come back home, it is a mammoth task. Hence, contrary to the wishes of the Xitsonga promotion Association (XPA) which wants these teachers to be deployed in areas where Xitsonga is taught. One administrator in this organisation said: “*Shangani speaking teachers should be employed in Shangani teaching schools.*” Some schools do not have qualified personnel to teach these languages, but the officers seem to be reluctant to recruit qualified teachers to teach Tshivenda or Xitsonga in their respective localities.

In the Maranda area there is not even a single school that teaches Xitsonga, even though there are many villages with speakers of the language. This situation puts Xitsonga in danger of extinction in this area, because children will grow up having a low self esteem and end up forsaking their language. The same applies to Tshivenda in other parts of N`wanedzi and Chiredzi districts. Pfumbi is also not considered in the teaching of standard Shona language. It had been relegated to the dust bin as Shona and Ndebele are seen as better substitutes of these languages in the districts.

In Chiredzi district, there is a significant number of Xitsonga speakers, but there is still a number of schools which do not offer the language at both primary and secondary levels. This happens even in areas where the number of non-Tsonga speakers is very insignificant. They will be taught their respective languages, but the same will not happen if Xitsonga speakers are found in the same situation, especially in Chiredzi town. Many schools in this town are reported to have refused to accept donated Xitsonga primary school text books in the year 2011, even though it was found that there is a significant number of learners who speak Xitsonga in schools around Chiredzi and the Hippo Valley estates; and the District education offices have not done much to alleviate the problems faced by learners who speak Xitsonga. One of the officers supports this view by saying: *“The language is not taught properly here in town. Another problem is the shortage of Xitsonga teachers”*.

What this officer said shows that the education office in the district is not under any pressure to make sure that the language is taught to the respective population. A lot of teachers have been trained in Xitsonga at Great Zimbabwe University such that they can be used to ease the problem. If they were concerned about giving equal treatment to indigenous languages as enshrined in the new Constitution, they should have chosen a few schools to introduce Xitsonga in areas around Chiredzi town. What is done by the responsible offices in not taking stern measures on those who do not want to teach the language, and thus, tantamount to giving Xitsonga a very low status.

In Chipinge district under Manicaland province, there are Xitsonga speakers under a Tsonga chief called Mahenye. The speakers in this area want their children to be taught their language, but it seems the district education office is not yet prepared to offer the language in the district. They argue that their district now recognizes Chindau as a language, and as such, they are reluctant to see the teaching of Xitsonga taking off. This is clear evidence of regionalism. In other provinces it is possible to see more than two languages being taught, for instance in Matebeleland South, Venda, Ndebele and Sotho are taught in certain schools. What is happening in Chipinge district is infringing pupils' rights. Therefore, the status of Xitsonga remains very low in the district.

Status of Languages in Parliament

Parliamentary affairs are mostly discussed in English, but the use of Shona and Ndebele is also witnessed during their proceedings. Those who speak languages other than the above mentioned are supposed to use any of those three. We have found that Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Pfumbi and other languages mainly spoken in the marginal areas have no place in parliamentary debates. Minutes in parliament are written in English even though at some instances quotations may be given in Shona or Ndebele and then translated to English. One of the interviewees, a former legislator of the Chiredzi South constituent, Hon. Baloyi supports this finding when he says:

“Eka palamente ya Zimbabwe ku pfumeleriwa Xinghezi, Xixona na Xindhevele ntsena. Xitsonga a xi kali xi pfumeleriwa hambi nikan`we. A va lavi hambi na ntoloki ku komba leswaku Mutsonga u fanele a tirhisa Xinghezi kumbe Xixona na Xindhevele. [In the Zimbabwean parliament only English, Shona and Ndebele are allowed. Xitsonga is not given any chance at all. They do not even entertain the services of an interpreter implying that one is forced to use English, Ndebele or Shona].

The issue raised above shows that Xitsonga is a language which is still accorded a lower status as compared to the three above mentioned languages. Refusal to allow interpretation of languages other than English, Shona and Ndebele shows suppression of other people’s voices. People would express their views best when they use their mother tongue. This gives a negative picture to a country whose Constitution puts in black and white that all languages should be used and promoted equally. The situation does not seem that it will change in the near future due to linguistic imperialism, despite reference given in the statutes of Zimbabwe. One of the causes of looking down upon other languages could be the issue of numbers of speakers of these languages in parliament. However, when it comes to the use of English, numbers are not put into consideration even though there is very few or even not one original English speaker present. This also shows that people still have a mentality of shunning their languages in preference of foreign ones such as English. Thus, African languages end up occupying the bottom places in terms of status, and worse still, those speakers live in the peripheries of Zimbabwe.

Status of Languages in Hospitals and Clinics

Hospitals and clinics are places which are frequently visited by people whose health is not in a good state. The majority of people who live in areas surrounding clinics and district hospitals in Chiredzi South and Beitbridge speak Xitsonga, Tshivenda respectively. Speakers of Pfumbi are also found around the eastern parts of Beitbridge. It has been established that most of the elderly people in these areas find it difficult to converse in either Shona or Ndebele, since they are semi-illiterate or completely illiterate.

However, Shona and Ndebele are widely used in most of clinics and hospitals across Zimbabwe, because most of the personnel speak the languages. It seems these employees are not keen to learn the languages spoken in these communities because of the status accorded to the languages which are widely used on daily basis. The employees in the health sector prefer to use their languages, although the people they serve are not competent in those languages, thus, the speakers of the languages in these peripheries are sometimes left with no option if they want to be served, especially those who can converse to a certain extent.

Most of the health personnel will claim that they cannot understand the local languages in the communities they serve. In an interview conversation, one of the nurses at a certain hospital in Chiredzi district expressed what she feels on this issue by saying *“if they don` t want to speak Shona it means they are not yet sick i just leave them like that. There is no one who can` t hear Shona in Zimbabwe”*.

The words above clearly show how some people rate other languages as inferior. There is also some element of arrogance since this person did not express that she cannot understand the local language in question. If one cannot speak the language of the health worker, he or she has to suffer for that. There are other workers who can help interpreting what the patients say, but some officers do not bother taking that route when there is a communication breakdown. Another health worker at the same place, who is Tsonga also makes it plain that even the speakers of Xitsonga can contribute in looking down upon their language when she says: *“ini ndaingotaura neShona ku Chikombedzi vachizvihwa”* [I spoke in Shona even in Chikombedzi and they understood me clearly].

This shows that someone may not even want to associate himself/herself with his/her language of origin simply because of its status, if compared to other languages spoken by the majority. This person simply makes an assumption that everyone knows Shona, even some from those areas where one can hardly find a Shona speaker. The sad part is that she even wants to oppress her own people, because she thinks she is now more enlightened than them.

Status of Languages in Government Offices

Workers are mostly expected to use English as an official language when they are at work. They are also allowed to use vernacular languages such as Shona and Ndebele or any other when serving whoever seeks help at the offices. In Zimbabwe, people who need services come from all walks of life, and some may not be well versed in those three languages namely Shona, English and Ndebele. However, in this research we have found that most notices at government offices are written in English, Shona and Ndebele, even in those areas where the majority do not speak those languages, as some of the people will be coming from those peripheries where the majority are illiterate or cannot speak either Shona or Ndebele (as mentioned above).

It seems that people who put these notices do not care whether they are supposed to serve their purpose or not. This to a certain extent may be viewed as selfishness. This leaves languages spoken in the southern peripheries with a low status since their functions in official business is very minimal or are not seen at all. Hadebe (1996) echoes the same sentiment by saying: “choosing a language or a group of languages for specific functions in a country has far reaching implications on the status of that language or group of language”.

In some instances, when they consider using the local language, they will write the notice first in English or Shona, and finally include Xitsonga or Tshivenda. In most cases, these languages will be distorted in terms of spelling. Sometimes even the speakers are not worried at all since they were made to believe that this is the traditional order, which cannot be reversed. However, there are a lot of speakers who are not happy about this situation, but there is nothing they can do since they do not hold any positions of influence in the society. Another issue which makes them comply with the status quo is that they want to be served and go back to their rural areas, which will be many kilometres away from the service centres. Sometimes they are ignored if they do not speak in the language understood by the officers. This scenario is clear evidence of low status accorded languages such as Tshivenda, Xitsonga and Pfumbi.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The discussions raised here show that languages in the peripheries which include Xitsonga and Tshivenda have a lower status if compared to English, Shona or Ndebele. Pfumbi which seems to be a sub-language is related to both Shona and Tshivenda and is treated as an inferior language both by speakers of other languages and even by a greater population of its speakers. In official business, English is given the first preference, then followed by Shona and Ndebele respectively. Besides the section in the Zimbabwean constitution, there is no other official document or language policy which governs how languages are going to be used in Zimbabwe.

In education, there are efforts to make sure that English, Shona and Ndebele are offered in the lower and higher learning institutions, including teachers' colleges (they are considered more official than the languages which were formerly marginalised). In almost all towns and cities these languages should be made available for learners, but there are no efforts to make sure that learners from the peripheral areas can be taught their own mother languages. In primary schools, such learners are forced to learn either Shona or Ndebele on top of English, which is also compulsory. This situation favours learners from a Ndebele or Shona background since arrangements can be put in place so they learn their own language.

We can also conclude that Xitsonga, though having a majority number of speakers in Chiredzi and other districts, has a lower status in education compared to Shona and Ndebele since the circulars in schools are not respected, and the heads in the schools ignore the call by the ministry of primary and secondary education to teach the languages at higher grades.

We have also found that Xitsonga and Tshivenda are taught at the University level, but other students rate these languages lowly. In most cases, when they speak to speakers of these languages, they do not bother themselves with speaking in English, because they simply assume that they should know either Shona or Ndebele, and thus, they are reluctant to learn either Tshivenda or Xitsonga. Even some students who have taken up the languages treat them as any other learning subjects, because they do not normally speak in the languages if not in a classroom situation. Some students who are mother tongue speakers of Xitsonga are also seen shunning their language when they are in the midst of non-Tsonga speakers. This is evidence of the low status accorded languages from the peripheries, even at the only university in Zimbabwe which offers Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Pfumbi has not yet gained a status of being a language on its own. Hence, researchers are still in progress to establish whether it's a sub-language of Shona /Tshivenda, or it is an independent language.

Looking closely at our findings, we can conclude that Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Pfumbi also have a lower status in the media if compared to Shona and Ndebele. These languages are not used adequately in television broadcasting, even during news hour. In radio broadcasting and print media, it seems as if the languages reach the speakers, but in actual fact no radio station or newspapers reach the areas which are predominantly occupied by Tshivenda and Tsonga speaking people. Only a few speakers in Harare and other towns benefit from either radio broadcasts or print media. We have also found that the time allocated to these languages on radio is very minimal if compared to English, Ndebele and Shona. In most of official gatherings English, Shona and Ndebele are used to address people even if there are very few or no speakers of these languages at all. We can safely conclude that most of the languages spoken in the South and South eastern peripheries of Zimbabwe still have a lower status when compared with the three languages mentioned above. Since language and its speakers are two inseparable entities, the status of most speakers in the peripheries is also very low. This also prevents the speakers from occupying the most influential positions in society; hence they have no power to elevate themselves linguistically, culturally, politically, economically, or socially.

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