

**Language Shift among Tonga of Mkoka?**  
**Assessing Ethnolinguistic Vitality in Gokwe South**

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**Abstract**

This paper gives a first evaluation of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tonga community of Mkoka in Gokwe South with focus on the Tonga language. In comparison to the other Tonga communities of Zimbabwe who like them were displaced from the Zambezi valley to make way for the construction of the Kariba dam in the 1950s, the Tonga in Gokwe South have received little attention from researchers if any. This research focuses on the way the Tonga of Mkoka in Gokwe South use their mother-tongue, Tonga (L1), and the second language, Shona, in the primary home/family domain and the secondary domains of language use. Results show that Tonga vitality is based on social status, demographic and informal support variables while its economic, socio-historical and formal support vitality was very low. The Tonga mainly use their (L1) in the family/home domain with interlocutors who are family, friends and neighbours for everyday language use and as they undertake social activities in their environments while for the secondary language use domains, they shift to Shona, the economically more powerful language in the area. Shona was, however, found to be creeping into some Tonga homes but reasons for this encroachment could not be concluded in this paper.

**Background to the Study**

The Tonga language of Zimbabwe being examined here falls under what Guthrie (1948/67/71) classifies as M64. It is under the Lenje-Tonga (M60) group. Bastin, Coupez and Mann (1999) also place the same language in the same Lenje-Tonga group and cluster. It is Ethnologue (1999) that classifies it differently as M60 but still under the Lenje-Tonga cluster. This study adheres to the classification by Guthrie. The paper gives a first evaluation of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tonga community in chief Mkoka (from whom the area is named) of Gokwe South district in Zimbabwe. It focuses mainly on the Tonga language and the purpose is to establish the extent to which the Tonga behave as a distinctive ethnic group in their interethnic interactions with the

Shona whom they are in contact with. Originally the Tonga lived in the Zambezi valley but were forcibly displaced and dispersed from there to make way for the construction of the Kariba dam in the 1950s<sup>i</sup>. While the group under study was moved to Gokwe South, the other Tonga people on the Zimbabwean side of the Zambezi River were displaced and dispersed to Binga (often described as the bastion of Tonga in Zimbabwe), Hwange, Nyaminyami and Gokwe North. The Tonga of Gokwe South have often been left out of most accounts of researchers who have published on the Tonga of Zimbabwe. For instance, Hachipola (1998) who did a comprehensive survey of minority languages of Zimbabwe only mentions the Tonga groups that were displaced to Binga, Kariba rural of Omey and Nyaminyami, Hwange, Gokwe North, Chirundu including the group that went to Mt Darwin that he says has since shifted and assimilated to the Korekore dialect of Shona, the dominant language in the Mt Darwin area. Even more recent researchers have left the group out, (see Ndhlovu 2013; Maseko and Moyo 2013; Manyene 2013; Nyika 2008; Makoni, Makoni and Nyika (2008); Zindoga 2012). It is the Tonga pressure groups that are mostly based in Binga who include the Tonga of Gokwe South in their activities.

While Tonga people are found in the whole of Gokwe South, the present research focuses on the Tonga under chief Mkoka, who is also a Tonga. The present researcher grew up in Mkoka and is motivated to carry out the study by the Tonga-Shona interethnic interaction patterns and sociolinguistic variables observed over time in the area. The Tonga of Mkoka live on the banks of the Kana river alongside the Shona who are further in-land. While Tonga is a former minority and Shona a dominant language, now they are both officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe.<sup>ii</sup> When the Shonas were resettled in this part of the country by the then colonial government, in the 1950s, the Tonga people were already there and so the Shona became subjects under the Tonga chief, Mkoka. Some Shona refer to the Tonga in a derogatory manner by the name MaZambezi (people from the Zambezi river), a term which the Tonga detest as it makes them strangers in the area yet they were there before the Shona people were settled there much later.

The Tonga and Shona of Mkoka share economic infrastructure which include schools, shopping centres, police posts, banks, cotton growing company (COTTCO), grain marketing board (GMB) and clinics. It will be shown in the study how the Tonga interact with the Shona in this shared service economy. The purpose of the study is to establish the extent to which the Tonga behave as a distinctive and collective ethnic entity in their intergroup relations (Giles et al 1977), in this case with their neighbours, the Shona. It seeks to answer the following questions: Which language do the Tonga use at home and in their interethnic interactions with the Shona? What factors influence their language choices? What relationship exists between their language choice and their vitality? The paper applies the framework of ethnolinguistic vitality to the sociolinguistic situation in Mkoka area with the focus on one of the former minority languages of Zimbabwe, Tonga mother-tongue (L1) speakers.

## **Ethnolinguistic Vitality Framework**

The framework of Ethnolinguistic Vitality has been applied to sociolinguistic research from its inception Giles et al (1977) and Fishman (1977). It allows for analyses of language use and change on a macro social level (Landry and Allard 1994:15). The concept employs sociostructural factors to explain language maintenance and shift. Vitality of a group has been described as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup relations” (Giles et al 1977: 308) and traditionally, as suggested by Giles et al, vitality of an ethnic group is influenced by three factors, namely, status, demography and institutional support. Status factors include economic, social, prestige and socio-historical aspects. This means that a group with higher economic, social and socio-historical status will have higher status as a collective entity. The status of a group’s language is also considered to have an impact on vitality. For example minority groups whose language is of internationally high status have a clear advantage over minority groups whose language is not recognized internationally (Giles et al, 311). A case in point in Zimbabwe is that of English which is mother-tongue to only 1% of Zimbabwe’s population but because of its international standing, it has a clear advantage over all the indigenous languages of Zimbabwe including the numerically dominant Shona which is mother-tongue to more than 82% of the population (see Zimstat 2012 National Census Report).

Demography variables include absolute numbers, proportion of group size and the space it occupies all of which have a role to play towards a group’s survival:

Minority group speakers who are concentrated in the same geographical area may stand a better chance of surviving as a dynamic linguistic community by virtue of the fact that they are in frequent verbal interaction and can maintain feelings of solidarity (Giles et al 1977:313).

The third variable, institutional support, includes recognition of the group’s language in formal institutions such as media, education, business, and government or informal institutions such as pressure groups. In this paper, it is mainly language that is to be investigated.

These three variables are given by Giles et al (1977) as the most important factors contributing to vitality of an ethnolinguistic group and the claim is that the more status, the more institutional support and the more favourable demographic factors occur in an ethnolinguistic group, the more likely its members will behave as a distinctive collective entity in intergroup situations (Giles et al 1997). This paper focuses primarily on language

The theory has undergone some amendments and modifications. (see Williams 1992; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). It was criticized for using only ‘objective’ ethnolinguistic data without giving room for group members’ subjective perceptions of their own group. That is, though the objective vitality of a group might be low, its own subjective perception of its vitality might be

much higher. This has been found to be an important factor in interethnic relationships (Kraemer et al 1994). For instance, it is necessary to include ‘subjective’ data in instances like prestige status of language which are dependent on subjective factors.

However, though old and with constructive criticism leveled against it, the framework remains one of the major frameworks on sociolinguistic analysis in general when both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ data are considered as proved by (Rudwick 2004: 102; Clyne 2003; Barkhuizen and de Klerk 2000; Bowerman 2000; Yagmur and Kroon 2006; Gogonas 2009; Rudwick 2004; Yagmur 2001; Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011).

In ethnolinguistic vitality tradition, subjective vitality is measured quantitatively by use of a subjective questionnaire but recently a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods have been applied (Komondouros and McEntee- Atalianis 2007). This paper analyses both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ data to establish the vitality of the Tonga language under study. In addition to ‘objective’ data, a questionnaire, interviews and participant observation were used to collect subjective data. To this end 15 upper primary and 5 secondary school students who are Tonga from Mkoka responded to a questionnaire. Some elderly Tonga people, some Tonga youths who are employed as cattle herders and house maids by the Shona and 2 tertiary Tonga students from the area responded to an unstructured interview. Participant observation was also used by the researcher whose rural home area is Mkoka. Below is the general sociolinguistic situation of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tonga of Mkoka.

### **Status vitality of Tonga in Mkoka**

As already indicated above, a language whose status is low socially and economically is likely to be abandoned by its speakers for a ‘high’ status variety. The former minority languages of Zimbabwe which include Tonga are often described as occupying the last rung in the three tier linguistic configuration of Zimbabwe with English at the top, followed by Shona and Ndebele in the second rung and 13 former minority languages at the bottom rung, (see for example Hachipola (1998) and Ndhlovu (2009)). An examination of this placement for the Tonga under study shows that their low status tag is economically and not socially grounded. The Tonga including those in Mkoka, carry a number of social functions in their language in the home and family domains. These functions include day to day language use in cultural practices. One way by which they use their language and practise their culture is through music and traditional dances which include *chilimba*, *malimbwina*, *siyampukutu-mpukutu* and *ngoma buntibe*. Writing about Tonga language and culture, Chinowaita (2011) observed how the Tonga of Zimbabwe have over the years managed to keep their language and culture alive through music despite a number of factors that threatened to dishevel this ethnic clan. They use their music and dance for specific functions. For example, *Siyampukutu-mpukuti* is a courtship dance that encourages good behavior among the youths. *Chilimba* is done in celebration of bumper harvests. *Ngoma buntibe* is performed during *dilwe* (funeral) to accompany the dead *mapwayila* (memorial celebrations). Writing about this dance, Manyene has this to say:

Ngoma buntibe remains the most precious and unique dance of the Tonga. It is an integral part of Tonga institution. Because the dance brings people together, it can be a useful tool for mobilizing people. Ngoma buntibe was the main ingredient that Andrew Muntanga, the first Tonga hero to be buried at the Heroes’ Acre in Harare, used to mobilize and raise political awareness among the Tonga in Bulawayo in the 1970s ( Manyene 2013:52).

Indeed *Ngoma buntibe* has become a trademark for the Tonga as they also perform it at big national events such as independence celebrations and to welcome dignitaries in particular government officials at big gatherings in the area. Also writing about Tonga music and dance, Ndlovu (2013) made the following observations, “Tonga tradition and culture is a mixture of mystic and intrigue as one looks at it from afar”. It is also observed that the language barrier for most of the Shona in the area makes the Tonga music and dance most interesting and curious to know what the Tonga people will be saying.

While the analysis of the social status of Tonga above shows a relatively high vitality for the group, their socio-economic variables give a different picture altogether. An examination of the economic activities in the area reveals a stark cleavage between the Tonga and the Shona members of this community (see table 1 below):

**Table 1:** Tonga participation in the local ‘service’ economy:

Service economy	6 health clinics	25 primary schools	15 high schools	Big business centre	2 police posts	COTTCO
Shona Professionals/ Owners	Shona nurses	25 Shona Heads	15 Shona Heads	18 Shona owned shops	Mostly Shona officers	Mostly Shona
<b>Tonga Professionals/ Owners</b>	<b>No Tonga nurse</b>	<b>No Tonga Head</b>	<b>No Tonga Head</b>	<b>2 Tonga owned shops</b>	<b>1 Tonga</b>	<b>1 Tonga</b>

This table shows the following about the ‘service’ economy in the area: all the six health clinics in the area are manned by Shona nurses. The same trend applies in education where all the 25 primary schools and all 15 secondary schools in the community are headed by the Shona. At Manoti, the biggest business centre in the area, with twenty shops, only two of these are run by Tonga people. The same trend applies for the two police posts in the area where only one police detail is a Tonga L1 speaker. Furthermore, the area is one of the prime cotton growing places in Zimbabwe and the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe, (COTTCO) employs only one Tonga official among its team of Shona officials which is close to twenty employees in the area.

In addition, there is not even a single Tonga who is a trained teacher at any of the primary or secondary schools in the area. Only five primary schools began offering Tonga as a subject in their curriculum recently from 2011. Those who are teaching Tonga at the five primary schools

that recently introduced Tonga are temporary Tonga speaking teachers who have only completed Ordinary 'O' Level examinations. The bulk of the teachers in all these schools are Shona speaking.

The negative economic status of the Tonga can be attributed to low levels of formal educational qualifications. This predicament is largely attributed to the historical forced removal of the Zimbabwean Tonga in general from their Zambezi riverside communities in the 1950s to make way for the construction of the Kariba dam. The forced removal negatively affected the Zimbabwean Tonga who include those of Mkoka educationally, culturally and economically. The construction of the dam which is hailed as an engineering feat and boon for the economies of the then Rhodesias (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) is also blamed for its resultant educational, economic and cultural decimation of the Tonga. This decimation left the Tonga on the Zimbabwe side scattered across five districts of Binga, Lupane, Hwange, Nyaminyami and Gokwe. Educationally, the Tonga no longer had an opportunity to offer education to Tonga children in their own language using Tonga books and other resources from Zambia because of distances between them and their Zambian counterparts created by the dispersion. In addition to the decimation of the Zimbabwean Tonga, the collapse of the federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland in 1963 with the attainment of Zambia and Malawi's political independence coupled with the sanctions that were imposed on Rhodesia following its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, made it impossible for free flow of both human and material resources for the teaching of Tonga from Zambia. Consequently whether by design or not, the Tonga language suffered neglect (see Mupande 2006; Ndhlovu 2013). Gradually Tonga was replaced by Shona and Ndebele in schools. This meant that the Tonga learners who like all indigenous people of Zimbabwe, were already disadvantaged by an education system that used a foreign medium of instruction, English, had additional challenges grappling with Shona and Ndebele which are L2 to them while their L1 is sidelined. This can only result in poor performance and high school drop-out rate leading to low educational qualifications among the affected Tonga. UNESCO clearly spells out the importance of L1 to a child when it declared that:

Psychologically the mother tongue is the system of meaningful signs that in the child's mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically it is a means of identification among members of the community to which he (sic) belongs. Educationally he (sic) learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO cited in Mazrui (1993: 531)

In addition to low levels of formal educational qualifications among the Tonga members of Mkoka, the area suffers from brain drain since the few trained Tonga teachers shun the under-resourced local schools and prefer to teach in Binga where community based organizations such as Basilwizi are working towards improving environments for the schools there. For example

through its Tonga Online Project, Basilwizi's major thrust is information access and sharing for the Tonga community in Binga. In addition, the project focuses on Information Technology skills transfer to the community and at the moment they are running 12 schools in Binga. They also subscribe 5 weekly newspapers per centre so that the learners and community are kept informed on Zimbabwe and global news (Costa Mano 2012). No similar activities to these by Basilwizi take place in the area under study.

The Tonga on the Zimbabwean side have had little linguistic and cultural development compared to their Zambian counterparts. In sharp contrast, Tonga culture for those displaced to Southern Zambia flourished to the extent that their language, literature and culture have been studied at the University of Zambia for some time while the University of Zimbabwe, the oldest university in Zimbabwe, is yet to produce its first Tonga graduates. Also lack of compensation for the removals resulted in their lives dramatically changing in the new settlements. There they met with challenges of low and erratic rainfall, poor soils and tsetse fly. This messy handling of Kariba's resettlement process is invariably described in literature as being a poorly conceived and trauma-ridden crash programme. For instance, a report by the World Commission on Dams (WCD) in Schudder (2005) notes that the people to be resettled "were treated like animals or things rounded up and packed in lorries to be moved to their destinations." The other evils surrounding the Zambezi removals pointed out by (WCD) were that families were separated, traditions were lost and 57% of land swallowed by the reservoir was arable land previously owned by the Tonga. The Tonga who all along had survived on fishing from the Zambezi, hunting in the surrounding forests and on subsistence cultivation on good soils of the Zambezi valley were moved to areas with poor soils and low rainfall. Though at the time of removals the then government had promised that they would provide water and other social services, they did little in that regard (WCD 2000). In addition, most of the Tonga do not enjoy widely the benefits of electricity generated by the dam whose construction claimed their homes, culture and livelihoods. Baboki Kayawe/IPS (2013) puts it vividly when she titled her article on the disadvantaged Tonga as: 'Electricity for all but those the Kariba Dam Displaced'.

These setbacks that apply to the Tonga in general could help to explain the economic dependency of the Tonga of Mkoka on the Shona as is reflected on table 1 above although the later came to the area later. In the Zambezi valley, the Tonga were dependent on the river and the jungle—mostly on fishing and hunting while crop cultivation was done for subsistence. Now the Tonga in Mkoka found themselves in a more intensive crop cultivation based economy in which they are not as well skilled as their counterparts, the Shona who were forcedly removed from cultivation based areas in order to make way for European farmers. The Shona who were more experienced in crop cultivation in subsistence and commercial cotton farming which earned them money to pay fees for their children while most Tonga children dropped out of school for lack of fees and ended up in menial jobs as house maids and herdboys for the Shona (see profiles for

interview respondents in this paper). This explains why more Shonas are in formal employment in institutions like clinics, schools, banks and COTTCO in Mkoka area (see table 1 in this paper).

From this discussion, it may be concluded that while the social status variables contribute positively towards the vitality of the community, an analysis of the economic and socio-historical status factors point towards the Tonga community in question as having very low vitality.

### **Demography issues**

Gokwe South has had both Tonga and Shona elected Members of Parliament something that could point to the fact that the Tonga and Shona in the area are more or less balanced demographically. This means that around 50% of the total 305 982 population of Gokwe South is made up of Tonga people. A breakdown of the activities in Gokwe South shows that Mkoka area is home to close to half of the total population in the district.<sup>iii</sup> These demographic factors point towards a relatively high vitality for Mkoka area.

### **Institutional support**

The third factor, institutional support, is multifaceted since it involves both informal and formal institutional support. In terms of informal institutional support, the Tonga of Mkoka are also beneficiaries of the projects activities by support groups that are working to improve conditions of the Tonga. Most if not all of these groups are based in Binga district, the hub of the Tonga people in Zimbabwe. The informal institutions working to better the situation of the Tonga people in Zimbabwe include the Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO), BasilwiziI, Silveira House and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). Basilwizi Trust which coordinates most of the developmental efforts for the Tonga communities is a community development organization founded in 2002 by the local people of the Zambezi valley with the aim to demand and restore their dignity taken away from them by the displacement from the Zambezi banks. BASILWIZI works to assist the Tonga communities of Binga, Gokwe, Hwange, Nyaminyami administrative districts (<http://www.basilwizi.org/basilwizi/projects/advocacy-programme>). The Tonga chiefs took it upon themselves to improve their peoples' conditions of living because they felt the Tonga were the most disadvantaged ethnic group of Zimbabwe and also their poverty was not of their own making. Manyene (2013. 26) lists more common but rather demeaning descriptions and labels that are often heaped on the Zimbabwean Tonga, those of Mkoka included. They include 'marginalised', 'isolated', 'poor', 'backward', 'minority', 'primitive', 'dangerous', 'degraded' and 'two-toed-people'. These descriptions, most of them in bad taste show the unfortunate situation of the Tonga of Zimbabwe which Basilwizi coordinating the activities of organizations listed above, seeks to redress.

The Tonga of Mkoka also benefit from activities of organizations like Basilwizi. For instance Basilwizi through their Tonga language and culture project recently distributed ChiTonga text books and other literature to schools in the five districts where Tonga is spoken and 5 schools in Mkoka area were among the beneficiaries of the donations.<sup>iv</sup>



Again Basilwizi working together with the umbrella organization for former official minority languages in the country, Zimbabwe Indigenous Languages Promotion Association (ZILPA) also lobbied government on policy formulation and amendment of the 1987 Education Act which served as Zimbabwe's language policy then. This lobbying resulted in the then officially recognized minority indigenous languages being introduced in Zimbabwe's education system and the first Tonga Grade 7 examination was written in 2011 in Binga. Though chief Mkoka's area lagged behind, Tonga was introduced at five pioneer schools in the area in 2011. This means that the first Tonga examination at Grade7 level in Mkoka will be written in 2016. This development was made possible by efforts of informal institutional support.

While informal institutional support shows a relatively high vitality for Tonga, the same cannot be said for the formal institutional support. In the majority of cases, an examination of the formal institutional support shows a mismatch between policy and practice. For example in the media, the Zimbabwe Mass Media Commission, one of whose functions is to ensure the equitable use and development of all indigenous languages spoken in Zimbabwe (Parliament of Zimbabwe's Amendment Number 19, Chapter XB, Part III, Section 100P, sub-section 1: d), Tonga like the other former minority languages of Zimbabwe is not being given any meaningful support in the media. For example none of the former minority languages of Zimbabwe is used in the print media or for any meaningful television programme and of the four public radio stations, only one is shared by twelve minority languages.

The same mismatch is observed in education. Whereas the Education Act of 1987 amended in 2006 is clear on the teaching of Shona and Ndebele, the same cannot be said about Tonga and other former minority languages of Zimbabwe. The policy leaves the teaching of these languages at the mercy of the Minister of Education who may authorize their teaching if he so wishes (Education Act of 1987, amended 2006 Part XII, 62:2)

The new Constitution of Zimbabwe gives all the former minority languages of Zimbabwe formal status (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013; Chapter 1:6). However, in practice, there is nothing to suggest that Tonga and the other former minority languages are official languages of Zimbabwe. These languages are not accorded the economic and instrumental value normally associated with official languages. They are not given institutional support in the higher domains of language use such as government, business and education. This mismatch between language policies and practice has been attributed to African governments' lack of commitment to multilingualism which they view as posing difficulties in the construction of national identities for Africa (see for instance Bamgbose (1991); Prah (2002); Batibo (2005) and May (2000)). In the Zimbabwean context, the same concerns have been raised by Ndhlovu (2009); Maja (2008) and Nyika (2008) only to name a few.

From this initial analysis it can be concluded that 'objective' data gives an ambiguous picture of the vitality of the Tonga community under discussion. While social status, demographic data and

informal institutional support give a relatively high vitality picture of the Tonga, the same cannot be said for the economic status and formal institutional support.

The following sections of this study will focus on data collected from the members of the Tonga community under study with the aim of showing how this Tonga community views their own linguistic situation. As pointed out earlier on, data was gathered by methodological triangulation of questionnaire, interviews and observation. The questions administered covered data on language use in the primary home and higher domains and Tonga self-perception. Five-point likert scales were used for quantitative measurement of the data where necessary. Below I present and analyse the findings.

### Language use in the home domain

**Table 2:** Language use in the family domain: **Tonga L1**

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Not at all	Rarely	A few times	Many times	Always
Respondents	0	0	0	7	13

**N=20**

Table 2 shows the questionnaire results on the use of Tonga L1 at home. 13 respondents or 65 % of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they use Tonga at home ‘always’ and 35 % indicated they use it ‘many times’. The minimum value of Tonga at home is 4 (‘many times’) and the maximum value is 5 (‘always’).

For interview results on the use of Tonga at home, the Tonga children employed by the Shona as cattle herders and domestic maids gave more or less the same responses as the questionnaire respondents; all the elderly Tonga people and the two higher education interviewees said they always use Tonga at home. Their common response was:

*Twuyambula ChiTonga kumunsa kurindiswe*

(We speak Tonga in our home).

**Table 3:** Language use in the Tonga home domain: **Shona L2**

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Not at all	Rarely	A few times	Many times	Always
Respondents	0	6	9	5	0

**N=20**

Table 3 shows the questionnaire results on the use of Shona L2 at home. 5 respondents or 25 % of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they use Shona at home ‘many times’, 9 or 45 % reported they use Shona at home (a few times) and 45 % indicated they use it ‘rarely’. The minimum value for Shona at home is 2 (‘rarely’) and the maximum value is 4 (‘many times’).

For interview results on the use of Shona L2 at home, the Tonga children employed by the Shona as cattle herders and domestic maids gave more or less the same responses as the questionnaire respondents; all the elderly Tonga people and the two higher education students interviewed said they always use Tonga at home.

On the whole the responses indicate a preference for the use of Tonga at home. A comparison of the distribution of the likert scale values for the questionnaire respondents shows that while the minimum value of Tonga at home is 4 ('many times'), that of Shona is as low as 2 ('rarely'). The maximum values also tip the scale in favour of Tonga with a maximum value of 5 (always') for Tonga and 4 ('many times') for Shona. Again neither questionnaire nor interview respondents reported using Shona only at home while there are some who indicated using Tonga always. It can be concluded from this analysis that Tonga is the predominantly preferred language at home. This outcome tallies with the results from the 'objective' data that shows that the social status variables of the Tonga point toward a relatively high vitality of the group. What seems to be happening is that communication within the ethnically exclusively Tonga primary family domain is mainly in the Tonga L1.

There is nothing surprising with an ethnically homogenous group using its L1 in its primary home language use domain. In this domain interaction encounters are mainly intra-ethnic among Tonga interlocutors, that is, interactions are between people who belong to the same social networks such as family members, family friends and neighbours. What is surprising and calls for an explanation is a considerable proportion of the respondents who reported that they at least use Shona L2 at home sometimes. 25 % of the questionnaire respondents reported that they use Shona at home 'many times', an additional 45 % reported using it 'a few times' and 30 % use it 'rarely'. Again none of the questionnaire respondents or the Tonga children employed by the Shona indicated a 1('not at all') value for the use of Shona at home. It is the elderly and tertiary students who reported that they never use Shona at home.

The data also give some interesting insights into which languages the respondents who are children use to address their parents, siblings and peers and which language their parents prefer to use with them. The emerging pattern is as below:

45% of the respondents use Tonga 'always' (LS 5)

25% of the respondents use Tonga 'many times' (LS 4)

30% of the respondents use Tonga 'a few times'

In short 70% use predominantly Tonga their L1 when addressing their parents. However when addressing their siblings and peers they go to school with, a remarkable 85 % of the respondents reported using Shona 'many times' (LS 4) and 15% use Shona 'always'. The use of Shona in the home is corroborated by some interview respondents who point out that their children use Shona at home sometimes. They, however, went on to say that they discourage their children from

using Shona at home and none of them say they use Shona at home. However, on the other hand the situation on the ground shows that the children could be right in saying that they sometimes use Shona with members of their families at home. Observations show that some Shonas sarcastically refer to those Tonga people known to be using Shona even in their homes with the double- barreled term, MaShona-Tonga (people who give a misleading picture that they are Shona when in actual fact they are Tonga). Similarly those Tonga who prefer to use Ndebele even in their family/home domain are referred to sarcastically also as MaNdevere-Tonga, (people who give a misleading picture that they are Ndebele when they are Tonga). Another observed pointer towards the use of Shona in the home domain by some Tonga is that Shona first names like Chipo (gift), Tafara (we are happy) and Tatenda (we are thankful) for Tonga children are common. Another example is the Tonga language and culture project which carried a picture of an orphaned Tonga girl who had her fees paid for by Basilwizi and whose first name is Shona, Chioneso (light) (<http://www.basilwizi.org/basilwizi/projects/language-and-culture-project>). Tonga “with Shona or Ndebele names were seen to be more ‘civilised’ than those who stuck to the traditional Tonga names” (Manyene (2013: 48). Manyene further shows how Shona/Ndebele officers at the local home affairs offices and Shona/Ndebele teachers at mission schools in Tonga speaking areas contributed to the spread of Shona/Ndebele names among the Tonga. However, following Jacob Mudenda, a politician who changed his ‘Ndebeled’ surname from Dube back to Mudenda which is Tonga, the Tonga especially in Binga are translating their ‘Shonalised’ or ‘Ndebeled’ first names and surnames back to Tonga. Names like Siphon (Ndebele), Chipo (Shona) is being translated back to Chiwego (Tonga) (Ibid). There is no evidence of this change taking place in Mkoka.

Possible reasons for the use Shona in the home by the Tonga in Mkoka could be that, school going children use Shona to improve their proficiency in it since it is considered to be an important language at school; those children employed by the Shona are used to the language; children refuse to communicate in Tonga, thus forcing their parents to use Shona as well.

From the data on language use at home, it can be concluded that:

- Tonga is used at home more than Shona
- Shona is predominantly used by school children when addressing their siblings and peers
- There are some instances where children use Shona with their parents at home.

The question that begs an answer is; why the use of Shona at home and why do elderly Tonga people refute that they sometimes use Shona at home when they are observed to be doing so? The question of intermarriages of intermarriages was considered but all the children respondents reported that both their parents were Tonga. Possible reasons why Shona is used in the home could be that children use it at school a lot, therefore, they get used to speaking in the language. For instance, it is the medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Form 1 (Education Act 1987 amended 2006). Even when the teachers are supposed to use English as medium of instruction, they have been found to code-switch between English and Shona a lot (see for example, Viriri

and Viriri 2013; Chivhanga 2008; Gotosa, Rwodzi, and Mhlanga 2013). The learners also use Shona with peers in the playgrounds at break times. Also those children who are employed by the Shona either as cattle herders or maids are used to speaking Shona at the homes of their employers, the Shona. These children could be using Shona at home because they are refusing to use a language they get laughed at if they are heard using it by their peers at schools or in Shona homes. In that case they use Shona because they think it is fashionable to do so. Similarly those parents who use Shona in their homes could be having negative attitudes towards Tonga. The question on the use of Shona in the Tonga home domain is, however, not conclusive here, it therefore, calls for further investigation.

### **Language use in the secondary domains**

This section of the study reports on the findings of the Tonga L1 speakers in their interactions with the Shona, in the secondary language use domains shared by the Tonga and the Shona. These interactions take place in both the informal and formal higher language use domains. As highlighted earlier on in the study, the informal domains shared by both the Tonga and the Shona include shops, political gatherings, market places and beer halls at the shopping centers. Formal domains include banks, COTTCO, police posts, clinics, chief's court, district court and Ministry of Home Affairs. It was found out from 'objective' data that most of these domains, except the chief's court where the chief himself is Tonga are owned or managed by the Shona L1 speakers, therefore, the assumption is that the Tonga are forced to use L2 since their Shona interlocutors at these domains do not speak Tonga. The reported data is from interviews with elderly Tonga respondents and tertiary students since it is mainly these categories of respondents who engage in business interactions.

It was observed that unlike in the family/home primary language domain, where Tonga has been found to be the main preferred language, Shona is used more if not always in the secondary domains, formal and informal ones included. The researcher was also interested in seeing whether there were noticeable differences in language use between the formal and informal secondary language use domains.

The elderly respondents reported using Shona in all the formal domains except at the chief's court where Tonga was the language of court proceedings. Otherwise in all the other secondary language use domains, the Tonga use Shona L2. One respondent had this to say about the language situation in these domains:

*Ndiyambula ChiShona kukliniki. Nesi tavazipe kuambula ChiTonga*

(I use Shona at the clinic. The nurse does not know how to speak Tonga)

The tertiary students indicated that they used English in these domains. They reported that even if they were fluent in Shona they used English, the language which was commonly used in all official domains in the country. Until recently with the adoption of the (2013) New Constitution

of Zimbabwe, English was the sole official language of Zimbabwe which remained unchallenged in the higher language use domains while Shona and Ndebele were the national languages and the rest of the indigenous languages including Tonga were referred to as minority languages.

The following picture emerged regarding language use in informal secondary domains; The respondents reported that at political rallies, one had a choice between Tonga and Shona because both languages were used with interpreter services. In Shops, markets and beer halls, the Tonga use Shona L2. This is not surprising because though ‘objective’ data shows that the Tonga and Shona ethnic groups in the area are balanced demographically, much of the economic infrastructure in the area is dominated by the Shona (see table 1). Hence the Tonga are forced to use Shona L2 because of their low vitality. They cannot freely choose their interlocutors, instead these are determined by the contexts, that is, languages of the bank officials, COTTCO clerks, Home Affairs clerks and clinic nurses. Thus the Tonga are left with no choice but to accommodate these officials’ language, a process described as *convergence* (Giles et al 1977). With regard to long-term, low ethnolinguistic vitality from a macrosociolinguistic perspective may indicate language shift or even language death (Rudwick 2004:103).

### Self- Perceptions of the Tonga

Self- perceptions of the Tonga were also assessed in this study. As already indicated earlier on in the study, focus on ‘objective’ data alone was not enough measure of the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group. ‘Subjective’ ethnolinguistic vitality which focuses on the group members’ self-perception of their own vitality was deemed crucial in ethnolinguistic vitality measurement. A full subjective vitality study was, however, not carried out in this study because it was outside the scope of this paper which focused mainly on language. However, it was necessary to show in some way how the Tonga under study in this paper perceived their language. Respondents were asked to answer questions to do with pride in their language and culture. They were also required to indicate their attitudes on a 5-point likert scale shown below. The descriptions for the items are presented in table 4 below where responses on likert scale ranged from 1(highest level of perception) to 5 (lowest level of perception).

**Table 4:** Tonga is less important than Shona

Value	5	4	3	2	1
Description	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Respondents	15	3	2	0	0

**N= 20**

Table 4 shows the questionnaire results on the perception of Tonga language by the school children. 15 respondents or 75 % of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they ‘strongly agreed’ with the assertion in the question that Tonga was less important than Shona, 3 or 15 % reported they ‘agree’ with the assertion. 2 or 10 % were neutral while none disagreed or strongly

disagreed with the assertion. Perceptions of the majority respondents is 5 (lowest level of perception) and 4 (the second lowest level of perception). None had high perceptions of their Tonga language. These respondents also gave the same score on the question whether they felt at ease speaking Tonga at school or wherever.

For interview results on the perceptions of Tonga, the Tonga children employed by the Shona as cattle herders and domestic maids gave more or less the same responses as the questionnaire respondents; Tertiary students indicated that they were proud of Tonga culture and language. They scored the highest level 1 ('strongly disagree') with the perception that Tonga was less important than Shona and indicated that they would feel at ease speaking Tonga at school or wherever. The grown up respondents agreed that Tonga culture and language were important. There seems to be a disparity between the elderly Tonga's responses and how they actually behave in their use of Tonga L1 and Shona L2. The examples given earlier on in the study of the term MaShona-Tonga and the giving of Shona names to children could be admiration of the Shona language on their part. There are no instances where the Shona give Tonga names to their children.

### **Factors influencing language choices by the Tonga**

This section looks at variables underlying the choice of language by the Tonga in both the primary and secondary language use domains in the area under study. The data gathered has shown that while Tonga is the main language in the home primary domain, Shona is also used in the Tonga homes to some extent mostly by the children who attended school with Shona peers and those who are employed as cattle herders and maids in Shona homes. Some of these children go on to use Shona in their homes with their parents, siblings and peers. These children seem to play a role in interethnic contacts of their parents and language choices.

The children establish interethnic contact with the Shona early in their lives. They begin to use Shona early in their lives given that the Shona they interact with do not necessarily speak Tonga. These contacts shrink the social distance between the two ethnic groups.

The children grow up with both Tonga and Shona peers in the area so they acquire Tonga and Shona more or less simultaneously. Those children who go to school spend the better part of their day at school in interethnic contacts with the Shona. The same applies for those who are in employment at Shona homes. They thus grow up being bi-lingual such that they can use both Tonga and Shona even in the home domain. Parents of school going children and of those employed by the Shona have increased interethnic interaction with the Shona. For example those with children in school also come into contact with the Shona via their children. For example, they speak with their children's teachers who are Shona on consultation days when they ask the teachers how their children are progressing with school. They also attend school development meetings where deliberations will be in Shona. At such meetings they can also interact with parents of their children's peers. All these contacts increase their use of Shona.

The other factor leading to increased use of Shona by the Tonga is the low economic vitality of Tonga discussed above. It has been found out that members of ‘a low vitality group’ are likely to accommodate the others’ speech styles (Rudwick 2004: 103).

## **Conclusion**

The paper established that Tonga vitality is relatively high in demographic factors, social status and institutional support and consequently the language is mainly used in the home primary domain with family, acquaintances and for cultural encounters. Shona has encroached into the Tonga family domains where it is mainly used by school going children in interactions with siblings and peers they go to school with or herd cattle with. The Tonga children employed by the Shona as cattle herders or maids also use Shona even in their Tonga homes. These children introduce and increase Shona in the Tonga families discourse. In some Tonga homes, even parents use Shona often. It is observed that the Shona refer to Tonga L1 speakers who use Shona in their homes as MaShona-Tonga (lit. someone who is both Shona and Tonga). The reasons why Shona encroaches into the Tonga home domain needs more investigation in a separate paper.

The Tonga economic and formal institutional vitality were found to be very low and they shift to Shona in almost all interethnic interactions in the secondary higher language use domains. Exceptions are at the local chief’s court where the chief is Tonga and deliberations are in Tonga and at political rallies where both Tonga and Shona are used with the services of interpreters. The shift to Shona seems to be motivated by the fact that the Shona and their language dominate the economic infrastructure in the area (see table 1) and as a result encourages *convergence* by the Tonga.

Essentially the Tonga use their L1 for lower domains while for higher language domains they shift to Shona. This set up seems to indicate diglossic potential with Tonga (L)ow and Shona (H)igh. The notion, diglossia explains situations where two language varieties exist side by side in a community but with different functions (see Ferguson 1959 and Fishman 1972). In the Zimbabwean context the notion has been applied to the relationship between Shona and English by Dube (1997) and Chivhanga (2008) to name a few. However, there is need to investigate the rubrics of diglossia in the area in order to see whether stable diglossia is developing.

The paper further found out that the Tonga are introduced to the Shona language when they are still young, for example school children from the first grade and those Tonga children who provide menial labour to the Shona such as herding cattle and domestic chores. The interethnic contact with the Shona continues into mature age groups as the elders take up roles like attending school meetings at schools where their children learn, signing cotton growing contracts with COTCCO and cashing cheques at the banks.

Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality was also analysed. The two students in tertiary education, one at University and the other one at a Teacher Training College interviewed, have a high



perception of Tonga. The reason for their high perception could be their academic level and exposure to lobby groups on the Tonga cause like Basilwizi based in Binga. On the other hand, the young learners have a very low perception of their language. Reasons for this could be the way their Shona peers react should they use Tonga in interethnic interactions with the Shona.

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<sup>i</sup> Sinazongwe, 5 September 2007 (IRIN) Tonga people were forcibly removed from the fertile Zambezi Valley by the former governments of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to make way for the hydroelectric power project that created Lake Kariba. See also Baboki Kayawe/IPS (2013); Tremmel (1994);

<sup>ii</sup> The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013, Chapter 1 Section 6:1) The following languages, namely Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa, are the officially recognized languages of Zimbabwe. Prior to the new Constitution, Tonga together with Nambya, Sotho, Kalanga, Shangani and Venda were officially recognized minority languages of Zimbabwe.

<sup>iii</sup> Chief Mkoka is one of the 4 traditional chiefs found in Gokwe South, the most populous district with 305,982 out of the Midlands province's total population of 1,614,941 from 15 districts (Central Statistics Office, Zimbabwe: 2012 census results). The district is further divided up into 10 administrative wards, 4 of which are in Mkoka. Also 4 of the 9 business centres in the area, 6 out of the 10 health facilities, 25 of the 50 primary schools and 11 out of the 21 secondary schools in Gokwe South are found under chief Mkoka (<http://www.parl.zim.gov.zw/attachments/article/73/Midlandsprofile.pdf>).

<sup>iiii</sup> The breakdown of the book donation was as follows: 119 schools in Binga received books; 50 schools in Hwange; 15 schools in Nyaminyami; 14 schools in Gokwe North and 21 schools in Gokwe South with 5 of them in Mkoka.

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