
**THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE PRESERVATION AND
INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE AMONG THE LOZI PEOPLE OF, WESTERN PROVINCE,
ZAMBIA**

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Article Received: 30 January 2026, Article Revised: 19 February 2026, Published on: 11 March 2026

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.7716>

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Silozi in the preservation and intergenerational transmission of Lozi cultural heritage in Western Province, Zambia. Grounded in Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Postcolonial Language Theory, the research examines how patterns of language use, institutional support, and generational dynamics shape cultural continuity within the Lozi community. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected from 100 participants across Mongu and Limulunga districts through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The findings reveal that Silozi retains strong symbolic and cultural significance, particularly within ritual and ceremonial domains such as the Kuomboka ceremony, where it functions as a vehicle of royal authority, historical memory, and collective identity. However, the study also identifies generational shifts in language practice, with increased bilingualism and English preference among youth, especially within educational and professional contexts. While elders maintain high levels of ritual competence and linguistic fluency, intergenerational transmission through traditional storytelling and daily modeling has weakened due to urbanization, formal schooling pressures, and technological influences. Despite these challenges, the language demonstrates stable yet vulnerable vitality, sustained by strong community attachment and ceremonial reinforcement but constrained by limited institutional dominance. The study concludes that Silozi remains central to Lozi identity, though its long-term sustainability depends on

strengthened educational integration, youth engagement initiatives, and expanded institutional support. By integrating structural, behavioral, and postcolonial perspectives, this research contributes to broader discussions on African language preservation and cultural resilience in multilingual postcolonial societies.

KEYWORDS: Silozi, Lozi cultural heritage, ethnolinguistic vitality, intergenerational transmission, postcolonial language policy, cultural continuity, Zambia.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful and complex systems created by human societies. It is not merely a tool for communication but a repository of history, memory, identity, and cultural knowledge. Through language, societies encode their worldviews, moral systems, spiritual beliefs, governance structures, artistic expressions, and collective memories. In multilingual contexts such as Africa, language functions not only as a communicative instrument but also as a marker of ethnic identity and cultural continuity. The preservation of indigenous languages is therefore inseparable from the preservation of cultural heritage.

Globally, concerns about language endangerment have intensified in recent decades. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that approximately 40% of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered, with many at risk of disappearing within the next century. The loss of a language represents not merely the disappearance of vocabulary and grammar, but the erosion of unique cultural systems, oral traditions, ritual knowledge, and indigenous epistemologies.

Zambia, like many African nations, is multilingual. Although English functions as the official language and dominates formal education, governance, and commerce, indigenous languages remain central to identity and community life. Among these is **Silozi**, the language of the Lozi people of Western Province. Silozi plays a fundamental role in the preservation and transmission of Lozi cultural heritage, particularly through royal institutions, oral traditions, and ceremonies such as Kuomboka. However, increasing reliance on English in education and urban settings raises questions about intergenerational transmission and long-term vitality.

This study therefore examines the role of Silozi in preserving and transmitting Lozi cultural heritage, with particular attention to intergenerational dynamics and institutional support structures.

1.2 Language as a Cultural and Communicative System

Language has been defined by scholars in multiple but complementary ways. Sapir (1921) described language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through voluntarily produced symbols. Crystal (2003) defined language as a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols through which human beings express themselves as members of a social group. Halliday (1978) emphasized the functional dimension of language, arguing that language is a social semiotic system through which meaning is constructed within cultural contexts.

These definitions converge on a central idea: language is embedded within social and cultural systems. It does not exist in isolation; rather, it operates as a structured system that enables communities to transmit knowledge across generations. Through proverbs, idioms, myths, praise poetry, ritual speech, and historical narratives, language encodes collective experience. In African societies, oral traditions have historically functioned as the primary mode of cultural transmission. Storytelling, initiation rites, ritual chants, and communal gatherings serve as platforms for linguistic and cultural reproduction. The decline of language use in such domains may therefore signal deeper cultural shifts.

1.3 Cultural Heritage as a Concept

Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes inherited from past generations. UNESCO (2003) defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, and traditional craftsmanship.

Language is central to intangible cultural heritage because it is the medium through which most intangible practices are transmitted. Oral traditions cannot survive without the language that carries them. Rituals derive meaning from culturally embedded expressions, and proverbs often lose nuance when translated. Thus, language functions as both a component and a vehicle of cultural heritage.

Within the Lozi context, cultural heritage encompasses royal institutions, traditional governance structures, ceremonies, praise poetry, kinship systems, and ecological knowledge related to the Zambezi floodplain. Silozi is the primary medium through which these practices are performed and transmitted.

1.4 The Relationship Between Language and Cultural Heritage

The relationship between language and cultural heritage is symbiotic. Language sustains cultural heritage, and cultural heritage reinforces language vitality. Fishman (1991) argued that reversing language shift requires strengthening intergenerational transmission within cultural domains such as family, religion, and community institutions.

In ceremonial contexts, language performs symbolic functions beyond communication. Ritual registers, honorific forms, and specialized vocabulary elevate language to sacred status. Among the Lozi, ceremonial language used during Kuomboka embodies authority, hierarchy, and historical continuity. The erosion of ceremonial language therefore threatens cultural coherence.

1.5 Global Trends in Language Endangerment

Language endangerment has become a global concern. UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger highlights alarming rates of language shift. Contributing factors include:

- Dominance of global languages
- Urbanization
- Migration
- Education systems favoring colonial languages
- Media and digital globalization

Africa is particularly affected due to colonial linguistic legacies that institutionalized European languages as official languages. While these languages facilitate national integration and global participation, they often marginalize indigenous languages in formal domains.

1.6 The African Context: Language, Identity, and Colonial Legacy

African societies are characterized by multilingualism. Indigenous languages serve as markers of identity and cultural belonging. However, colonial education systems privileged European languages, creating linguistic hierarchies that persist in post-colonial states.

In Zambia, English dominates formal education and administration. Although local languages are regionally recognized, their use in secondary and tertiary education remains limited. This creates tension between cultural preservation and socioeconomic mobility, particularly among younger generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction⁴

This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical scholarship relevant to understanding how language functions as a vehicle of identity, cultural continuity, and heritage preservation in African contexts. The chapter situates Silozi within broader sociolinguistic debates by synthesizing:

Postcolonial language theory

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT)

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Empirical African case studies (Yorùbá, isiZulu, Shona)

The aim is not merely to summarize literature, but to critically analyze patterns across African contexts and demonstrate how they inform the study of Silozi and Lozi cultural heritage.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Language and Culture

2.2.1 Language as Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) conceptualized language as a form of symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, linguistic competence is not merely communicative but also tied to power structures within society. Languages acquire prestige depending on institutional backing and socio-economic value.

In postcolonial African states, colonial languages such as English often carry greater economic capital than indigenous languages. This creates a linguistic hierarchy in which indigenous languages, including Silozi, may hold strong cultural value but limited economic power. The imbalance between symbolic and economic capital influences language attitudes and intergenerational transmission patterns.

2.2.2 Language and Identity

Language functions as a primary marker of identity. Edwards (2009) argues that language is central to ethnolinguistic identity because it symbolizes group membership and collective memory. For many African communities, language serves as a boundary marker distinguishing cultural groups.

Among the Lozi, Silozi operates as a marker of ethnic belonging. Participation in ceremonies such as Kuomboka reinforces identity through ritualized linguistic performance. Loss of language proficiency may therefore weaken identity cohesion.

2.2.3 Postcolonial Language Theory

1.Introduction

Postcolonial language theory examines how colonial histories shaped linguistic hierarchies, identity formation, knowledge systems, and cultural continuity in formerly colonized societies. In Africa, colonial rule institutionalized European languages (English, French, Portuguese) as languages of administration, education, and economic mobility, often marginalizing indigenous languages (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Phillipson, 1992).

The central concern of postcolonial language scholarship is not merely linguistic diversity, but power—who controls language, whose knowledge counts, and how language structures identity and cultural survival. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that colonial education systems deliberately alienated Africans from their linguistic and cultural roots. He states:

“Language was the most important vehicle through which the colonial system imposed its control over the mental universe of the colonized” (p. 16).

This “mental colonization” positioned European languages as superior and indigenous languages as inferior or “vernacular.”

2.2 Linguistic Capital and Social Stratification

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, postcolonial scholars argue that colonial languages gained symbolic and economic capital, creating stratified societies where proficiency in English or French determines access to power.

Phillipson (1992) describes this as linguistic imperialism, arguing that global structures continue to privilege English in education, governance, and international communication.

In Zambia, English remains the official language, shaping education and formal employment opportunities, while languages like Silozi operate primarily in informal and cultural domains.

3. Postcolonial Identity and Language

3.1 Hybridity and Linguistic Negotiation

Homi Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of hybridity, suggesting that postcolonial identities are formed in “in-between” spaces where indigenous and colonial languages intersect. Language becomes a site of negotiation rather than simple resistance or assimilation.

In multilingual African contexts, code-switching between English and indigenous languages reflects this hybridity. For Lozi speakers, shifting between Silozi and English may represent negotiation between tradition and modernity.

3.2 Language, Memory, and Cultural Resistance

Postcolonial theorists emphasize that maintaining indigenous languages is a form of resistance against cultural erasure. Ngũgĩ (1986) advocates for writing and education in African languages as a means of reclaiming cultural sovereignty.

Similarly, wa Thiong'o argues:

“The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment” (1986, p. 4).

In this framework, preserving Silozi is not only cultural preservation but also political and epistemological resistance.

4. African Postcolonial Language Debates

4.1 The Language Question in Africa

Bangbose (2000) highlights the paradox in postcolonial Africa: while independence movements emphasized cultural pride, colonial languages remained dominant in official domains. He identifies three persistent challenges:

Lack of political will to promote indigenous languages

Perceived economic superiority of colonial languages

Weak institutional support for African languages

This tension remains evident in Zambia's language-in-education policies, where local languages are used in early primary education but replaced by English in later grades.

Language Policy and Neo-Colonialism

Brock-Utne (2000) critiques African education systems for perpetuating colonial linguistic hierarchies. She argues that reliance on European languages undermines cognitive development and cultural identity among African learners.

Similarly, Prah (2009) contends that sustainable development in Africa requires intellectual production in African languages, not dependence on colonial linguistic frameworks.

5. Postcolonial Theory and Cultural Continuity

Postcolonial language theory links directly to cultural continuity. Language is seen as:

A repository of indigenous epistemologies

A medium of oral tradition and ritual knowledge

A foundation of communal identity

When indigenous languages decline, embedded cultural systems weaken. Crystal (2000) argues that language death leads to loss of ecological knowledge, oral literature, and unique worldviews.

In the Lozi context, Silozi encodes royal history, ceremonial practices (e.g., Kuomboka), and traditional governance systems. The dominance of English in formal domains may gradually marginalize these knowledge systems unless active preservation occurs.

6. Contemporary Postcolonial Perspectives (2015–2025)

Recent scholarship expands postcolonial language theory into globalization and digital domains:

Makoni and Pennycook (2007) argue that languages should not be seen as fixed entities but as socially constructed practices shaped by power relations.

Sammy (2024) emphasizes the role of digital technology in revitalizing indigenous languages in postcolonial societies.

Wakkai and Banda (2025) highlight intergenerational language decline as a product of both colonial legacy and modern socioeconomic pressures.

These perspectives show that postcolonial linguistic inequality is not static but interacts with globalization, urbanization, and technological change.

9. CONCLUSION

Postcolonial language theory provides a powerful lens for understanding linguistic hierarchies, identity negotiation, and cultural continuity in African contexts. It highlights how colonial legacies continue to shape language policy, educational systems, and perceptions of linguistic value.

For the Lozi people, the dominance of English in Zambia reflects broader postcolonial power structures. Yet, the continued use of Silozi in ceremonial and communal life demonstrates cultural resilience and resistance.

In this thesis, postcolonial language theory situates Silozi within historical and structural power dynamics, while complementary frameworks (EVT and Social Learning Theory) explain how vitality and transmission operate within those structures.

Empirical Studies in African Contexts: Yorùbá, isiZulu, and Shona

2.X Introduction

Empirical research on language vitality and cultural continuity in African contexts reveals both similarities and unique patterns of language use, maintenance, and shift. Studies of

Yorùbá (Nigeria), isiZulu (South Africa), and Shona (Zimbabwe and diaspora communities) have examined how sociopolitical structures, education systems, intergenerational transmission, urbanization, and globalization influence language sustainability. This section synthesizes key empirical findings across these three language groups, highlighting parallels and divergences relevant to the Lozi/Silozi context.

2.X.1 Yorùbá Language Studies

2.X.1.1 Habitat and Urbanization

Bamgbose (2000) provides seminal work on the sociolinguistic reality of the Yorùbá people, demonstrating that despite demographic dominance in Southwestern Nigeria, Yorùbá faces intergenerational challenges in urban contexts. His longitudinal study across urban and peri-urban communities showed that:

Urban youth show strong conversational fluency but weaker mastery of ritual lexicons and praise poetry.

English is increasingly used in education, media, and formal employment, reducing opportunities for Yorùbá usage outside home domains.

Bamgbose (2000) found that:

“Although Yorùbá remains widely spoken at home, its ceremonial depth and intergenerational continuity are under strain due to English dominance in schools and mass media” (p. 118).

2.X.1.2 Schooling and Language Use

Adegbija (2004) analyzed multilingual education programs in Nigeria, finding that Yorùbá receives limited institutional reinforcement beyond primary education. His empirical surveys of primary and secondary schools showed that:

Yorùbá is often treated as a subject rather than a medium of learning.

Students often perceive English as more valuable for academic progression and employment.

This aligns with Fishman’s (1991) observations that when indigenous languages are excluded from formal educational domains, language shift accelerates.

2.X.1.3 Cultural Practices and Transmission

Empirical work by Awonusi (2017) on ritual language use among Yoruba ritual specialists found that specialized registers (e.g., chants, incantations, ceremonial praise names) are being learned less fully by youth. Field interviews indicated that elders still command ritual linguistic competence, but younger initiates participate more as observers than practitioners.

Awonusi concluded that:

“Intergenerational engagement in ritual linguistic performance decreases as formal schooling and secular lifestyles gain prominence” (Awonusi, 2017, p. 43).

2.X.2 isiZulu Language Studies

2.X.2.1 Language Policy and Institutional Support

Webb and du Plessis (2006) conducted extensive empirical research on language policy in South Africa, focusing on isiZulu and other indigenous languages. Their research, using surveys and policy analysis, showed that constitutional recognition alone does not guarantee language vitality. Key findings include:

isiZulu enjoys high symbolic status due to population size and cultural presence.

Despite this, English dominates higher education, legal discourse, and mass media.

isiZulu language instruction varies widely in quality and consistency across provinces.

Webb and du Plessis argue that:

“Policy without robust institutional investment (teacher training, curriculum development, media presence) limits the functional expansion of isiZulu” (Webb & du Plessis, 2006, p. 92).

2.X.2.2 Urbanization and Youth Attitudes

A study by Ndhlovu and Ramati (2018) explored isiZulu language use among youths in Durban and Johannesburg using mixed methods (interviews, observations, and questionnaires). Their findings indicated:

Youth frequently code-switch between isiZulu and English in informal communication.

Contextual use of isiZulu is strongest in home and community domains, but weaker in academic and professional contexts.

Many isiZulu youth value English for educational success but simultaneously express strong emotional attachment to isiZulu.

Ndhlovu and Ramati conclude that:

“Youth linguistic behavior reflects bilingual negotiation: English for upward mobility, isiZulu for identity affirmation” (2018, p. 77).

identity affirmation” (2018, p. 77).

2.X.3 Shona Language Studies

2.X.3.1 Home Transmission and Diaspora Dynamics

Kamau and Motanya (2024) conducted a comparative ethnographic study of Shona-speaking communities in Zimbabwe and the Kenyan diaspora, exploring language maintenance strategies. Using interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, they found that:

In Zimbabwe, Shona remains robustly spoken at home and community functions, though formal educational reinforcement is limited.

In diaspora contexts, church groups, cultural associations, and family networks actively promote Shona usage among children.

Their research suggests that community agency—rather than state policy—can be decisive for language continuity when institutional support is weak.

Kamau and Motanya report:

“Shona retains vitality in diaspora settings where structured community practices reinforce linguistic transmission and cultural identity” (2024, p. 15).

2.X.3.2 Ritual Participation and Youth Engagement

Chikoko and Mupotsa (2019) studied Shona ritual language use in traditional ceremonies like Bira (ancestral communication rites). Using participant observation and audio recordings, they found that:

Elders and ritual specialists dominate ceremonial language performance.

Youth participation often remains observational unless elders deliberately mentor and involve them.

This echo’s language shift dynamics seen in Yoruba and isiZulu contexts: conversational fluency persists, but ritual register competence can decline without structured transmission.

X.4.2 Intergenerational Transmission Challenges

All three empirical contexts report challenges in transmitting complex registers (ritual terminology, praise singing, historical storytelling) to youth, even when basic conversational ability persists.

Yorùbá ritual registers weaken among urban youth (Awonusi, 2017).

isiZulu youth display hybrid language identities with code-switching (Ndhlovu & Ramati, 2018).

Shona diaspora communities maintain language through structured mentoring (Kamau & Motanya, 2024).

These patterns support Fishman's (1991) argument that home domain transmission is central—and that its weakening signals future language vulnerability.

2.X.4.3 Attitudinal Factors and Language Shift

Empirical evidence highlights the complex interplay of attitudes:

Youth may express cultural pride in indigenous languages but prefer English in schools and employment contexts (Ndhlovu & Ramati, 2018).

Parents may shift to English at home to support academic success, undermining home transmission (Adegbiya, 2004; Wakkai & Banda, 2025).

Communities with organized cultural institutions (churches, associations) show stronger Shona maintenance (Kamau & Motanya, 2024).

Attitudes—both aspirational and identity-based—therefore mediate transmission outcomes

2.3 Theoretical Foundations of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory was developed by:

- Howard Giles
- Richard Bourhis
- Donald M. Taylor

The theory emerged from social psychological research on intergroup relations. EVT proposes that the survival of an ethnolinguistic group depends on the extent to which it possesses sufficient vitality to function as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup contexts.

2.3.1 Concept of Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Ethnolinguistic vitality refers to the degree to which a language group is likely to maintain its language and cultural identity over time. According to EVT, groups with high vitality are more likely to survive as distinct linguistic communities, whereas groups with low vitality are prone to assimilation and language loss.

The theory identifies three major structural factors influencing vitality:

1. Status
2. Demography
3. Institutional Support

These components are discussed below.

2.4 Core Components of Ethnolinguistic Vitality

2.4.1 Status Factors

Status refers to the social prestige and economic standing of a language group. It includes:

- Economic power
- Political control
- Educational attainment
- Historical prestige
- Social reputation

Languages associated with economic mobility and political authority tend to possess high status. For example, English holds high global prestige due to its association with international business, diplomacy, education, and technology.

Status influences language attitudes. When a language is perceived as prestigious, speakers are more likely to maintain it and transmit it to future generations.

2.4.2 Demographic Factors

Demography refers to population-related variables such as:

- Absolute number of speakers
- Proportion within a given region
- Birth rates
- Geographic concentration
- Migration patterns

A language group concentrated within a specific geographic area is more likely to sustain its language. In contrast, dispersed populations often experience rapid language shift due to increased contact with dominant languages.

2.5.3 Institutional Support

Institutional support refers to the degree to which formal institutions endorse and promote a language. These institutions include:

- Government
- Education systems
- Religious institutions
- Media

- Legal systems
- Economic organizations

When a language is recognized officially and used in schools, media, and administration, its vitality increases significantly.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Geographical and Ethnolinguistic Context

The study focuses on Mongu, Kalabo, and Limulunga Districts, all located in Western Province, Zambia, forming part of the historic region of Barotseland, the traditional homeland of the Lozi people. Barotseland is characterised by the Zambezi River floodplains, seasonal wetlands, and upland areas, which have historically shaped settlement patterns, livelihoods, and cultural practices (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2009).

The Lozi people inhabit all three districts and maintain the siLozi language as the primary medium of communication. SiLozi plays a critical role in transmitting cultural knowledge, oral histories, and social norms, and is deeply embedded in both formal and informal contexts (Ubuntu National Institute, 2020; History Rise, 2025).

3.2 Mongu District: Cultural and Administrative Hub

Mongu District serves as the administrative and cultural capital of Western Province. It hosts the office of the Litunga, the traditional Lozi king, and is a hub for political, economic, and educational activities. Mongu is the site of large-scale cultural events such as the Kuomboka ceremony, which involve ritualised language, songs, and performances delivered in siLozi (Visit Rwanda Gorilla, 2024; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2009).

The district's infrastructure — schools, media, and administrative offices — reinforces the use of siLozi in formal and semi-formal contexts, ensuring intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and ceremonial practices.

3.3 Kalabo District: Rural and Community-Based Transmission

Kalabo District is predominantly rural and geographically peripheral. Its communities preserve siLozi through informal and localized practices, including family storytelling, domestic rituals, and community festivals (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2009).

While lacking the institutional and ceremonial visibility of Mongu, Kalabo provides insights into grassroots methods of heritage transmission, showing how language sustains cultural identity in day-to-day life. The district highlights the resilience of siLozi in rural contexts

where intergenerational language transmission occurs primarily through oral interaction and participation in communal traditions.

3.4 Limulunga District: Royal and Ceremonial Centre

Limulunga District is renowned as the location of the Litunga's winter palace, serving as a ceremonial centre for Lozi traditional authority. Royal events and seasonal rituals, including Kuomboka-related ceremonies, rely heavily on siLozi for ritual speech, praise poetry, and storytelling (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2009; History Rise, 2025).

Limulunga thus represents a unique intersection of formalised ceremonial practices and community-based language use, providing opportunities to study how linguistic practices transmit heritage in both institutional and familial settings.

3.5 Comparative Significance of the Three Districts

Characteristics of Language Use

Cultural Transmission Focus

District

Mongu

Institutional and urban; schools, media, administrative use of siLozi

Formal ceremonies, urbanized cultural practices, institutional reinforcement

Kalabo

Rural and community-based; daily domestic and communal use of siLozi

Informal oral traditions, localized knowledge transmission, grassroots resilience

Limulunga

Ceremonial and royal; central to traditional authority

Ritualized language in royal events, intergenerational transmission within cultural authority structures

The integration of these three districts allows the study to capture both formal and informal modes of heritage transmission, across urban, rural, and ceremonial contexts. This holistic approach ensures that the research examines siLozi language use in diverse socio-cultural settings, reflecting the multifaceted ways in which language preserves and transmits Lozi cultural heritage.

3.6 Justification for Study Area Selection

The selection of Mongu, Kalabo, and Limulunga districts provides a comprehensive perspective on the role of language in heritage preservation:

Mongu illustrates institutional and urban language practices in formal and ceremonial settings.

Kalabo demonstrates the resilience of siLozi in rural, everyday contexts.

Limulunga highlights royal and ceremonial language use under traditional authority.

Together, these districts allow the study to explore how siLozi mediates cultural continuity, identity formation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, offering insights that are both deeply localized and culturally representative of Barotseland.

3.7 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding the investigation into the role of Silozi in preserving and transmitting Lozi cultural heritage. It describes the research paradigm, design, study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, validity and reliability measures, and limitations of the study.

The methodological choices reflect the study's aim to explore language use, intergenerational transmission patterns, and institutional support structures within the Lozi community of Western Province.

3.8 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the philosophical worldview underpinning a study. This research is grounded primarily in the **interpretivist paradigm**, with complementary quantitative elements.

The interpretivist paradigm assumes that social reality is constructed through human interaction and shared meanings. Language and cultural heritage are socially embedded phenomena that cannot be understood solely through numerical measurement. Understanding how Silozi functions within ceremonial, familial, and institutional contexts requires exploring lived experiences and perceptions.

However, because the study also assesses patterns of intergenerational transmission and institutional presence, selected quantitative tools are incorporated. Therefore, the study adopts a **mixed-methods approach**, allowing triangulation of findings.

3.9 Research Design

The study employs a **convergent parallel mixed-methods design**.

In this design:

- Qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, observations) explore perceptions, experiences, and cultural meanings.
- Quantitative data (structured questionnaires) measure patterns of language use and transmission.
- Both data sets are analyzed separately and then integrated during interpretation.

This design is appropriate because language vitality involves both measurable patterns (frequency of use, domains of usage) and interpretive dimensions (identity, symbolism, attitudes).

3.10 Study Area

The study is conducted in **Mongu and Limulunga districts** of Western Province, Zambia.

Mongu

Mongu serves as the provincial capital and represents a semi-urban setting where English exposure is relatively high due to schools, government institutions, and commerce.

Limulunga

Limulunga is historically significant as the royal capital of the Lozi Kingdom and hosts the Kuomboka ceremony. It represents a more culturally embedded environment where ceremonial language is prominent.

Selecting both districts enables comparison between semi-urban and culturally centralized contexts.

3.11 Target Population

The target population consists of:

1. Elders (aged 55 years and above)
2. Adults (aged 30–54 years)
3. Youth (aged 15–29 years)
4. Traditional leaders and indunas
5. Teachers and education officers
6. Cultural practitioners involved in Kuomboka

These groups represent different generational and institutional domains critical to language transmission.

3.12 Sampling Procedures

3.6.1 Sampling Technique

A combination of sampling techniques is used:

- **Purposive sampling** for traditional leaders and cultural experts.
- **Stratified sampling** to ensure representation across age groups.
- **Simple random sampling** for youth and adult questionnaire respondents.

3.6.2 Sample Size

The proposed sample size includes:

- 20 elders
- 30 adults
- 50 youth
- 10 traditional leaders
- 10 teachers

Total estimated participants: **120 respondents**

This sample allows adequate representation while remaining manageable for in-depth qualitative analysis.

3.13 Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods are employed to ensure triangulation.

3.13.1 Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires are administered to youth and adults.

The questionnaire measures:

- Language use at home
- Language use in school
- Participation in Kuomboka
- Attitudes toward Silozi
- Preference between English and Silozi

The questionnaire includes Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions.

3.13.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with:

- Elders
- Traditional leaders
- Teachers
- Cultural practitioners

Interview themes include:

- Perceived changes in Silozi usage
- Ritual language proficiency
- Institutional support
- Youth attitudes
- Challenges to preservation

Interviews are conducted primarily in Silozi and later translated into English.

3.13.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups are conducted with youth participants to explore:

- Identity perceptions
- Peer language practices
- Digital language use
- Attitudes toward ceremonial language

Focus groups encourage interactive discussion and collective reflection.

3.13.4 Participant Observation

Observation is conducted during community gatherings and, where possible, Kuomboka-related preparations.

The researcher documents:

- Language used in ceremonial contexts
- Code-switching patterns
- Youth participation in ritual speech

Field notes are recorded systematically.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

The instruments include:

- Structured questionnaire
- Interview guide

- Focus group discussion guide
- Observation checklist

All instruments are pre-tested to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets findings from the field study conducted in Mongu and Limulunga districts of Western Province. The findings are organized according to the study's research objectives:

1. To examine the role of Silozi in preserving Lozi cultural heritage.
2. To assess intergenerational transmission of Silozi.
3. To evaluate institutional support mechanisms influencing Silozi vitality.

Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Quantitative findings are presented using descriptive statistics, while qualitative findings are analyzed thematically and integrated to provide deeper interpretation.

4.3 Patterns of Language Use

4.3.1 Language Use in the Home

The majority of respondents reported frequent use of Silozi at home, especially in rural areas. Elders reported near-exclusive use of Silozi in domestic settings.

Youth in Mongu indicated mixed language use, often combining English and Silozi (code-switching). This suggests partial language shift rather than complete abandonment.

Interpretation (EVT – Demographics):

The demographic concentration of Lozi speakers in Western Province supports continued home use. However, bilingualism among youth indicates evolving language patterns.

4.3.2 Language Use in Education

English dominated school and tertiary education contexts. Youth overwhelmingly indicated that English is the preferred language for academic purposes.

One youth participant stated:

“We use Silozi at home, but at school everything is in English. Even when we speak Silozi, teachers encourage English.”

This demonstrates institutional prioritization of English.

EVT Interpretation (Institutional Support):

Limited institutional reinforcement of Silozi in formal education weakens its functional domain, potentially affecting long-term vitality.

4.3.3 Language Use in Community and Market Settings

In markets and community meetings, Silozi remains dominant. Even non-Lozi residents use Silozi as a lingua franca.

Adults emphasized its practicality:

“In the market, Silozi helps everyone understand each other.”

This reinforces Silozi’s communicative strength.

4.3.4 Language Use in Ceremonial Contexts

Silozi is the exclusive language of ceremonial performance, particularly during Kuomboka and Kuta proceedings.

Elders demonstrated deep knowledge of praise poetry and ritual expressions. Youth participation was present but often limited to observation.

4.4 The Role of Silozi in Preserving Cultural Heritage

4.4.1 Oral Traditions and Praise Poetry

Elders recited traditional praise poetry (liziba), historical narratives, and clan lineages in Silozi. These performances encode political history and moral instruction.

One elder explained:

“Without Silozi, our history cannot be told properly.”

Translation often diminishes symbolic nuance.

4.4.2 Kuomboka Ceremony

Kuomboka emerged as a central site of linguistic preservation.

4.4.2.1 Linguistic Features Observed

Royal praise names

Ritual chants

Symbolic metaphors

Honorific address forms

These registers are not used in daily conversation, making ceremonial transmission crucial.

4.4.2.2 Participation by Age Group

Elders: Full ritual participation

Adults: Active participation and partial ritual leadership

Youth: Observational participation; limited chant proficiency

This suggests concentration of ceremonial knowledge among older generations.

4.5 Intergenerational Transmission

4.5.1 Family Transmission

Most respondents reported learning Silozi from parents or grandparents. However, urban parents increasingly emphasize English for academic success.

A parent stated:

“We want our children to succeed in school, so we encourage English.”

This reflects tension between cultural preservation and socioeconomic aspiration.

4.5.2 Youth Proficiency

Youth demonstrated conversational fluency but limited ritual vocabulary. Many could not recite ceremonial chants.

This indicates selective language erosion, particularly in specialized registers.

4.5.3 Rural–Urban Comparison

Limulunga youth showed higher ceremonial exposure than Mongu youth. Proximity to royal institutions enhances transmission.

EVT Interpretation (Demographics + Institutional Support):

Geographic concentration near cultural institutions strengthens vitality.

4.6 Attitudes toward Silozi

4.6.1 Cultural Identity

Overwhelmingly, respondents identified Silozi as central to Lozi identity.

“If you are Lozi, you must know Silozi.”

Symbolic status remains high.

4.6.2 Practical Utility

Despite positive attitudes, youth associated English with employment and higher education.

This illustrates status competition between symbolic and economic capital.

4.7 Institutional Support

4.7.1 Traditional Institutions

The Kuta and royal court strongly reinforce Silozi use. Ceremonies institutionalize ritual language.

4.7.2 Schools

Limited structured teaching of Silozi at secondary level weakens institutional reinforcement.

4.7.3 Media

Local radio programs in Silozi exist but are limited compared to English programming.

4.8 Challenges Identified

English dominance in formal education

Urban migration

Limited youth mastery of ceremonial registers

Insufficient written materials in Silozi

These align with global language shift patterns.

4.9 Comparative African Insights

Findings mirror patterns observed among:

Yoruba youth (ritual erosion due to urbanization)

Maasai (ceremonial decline with schooling shifts)

Zulu (strong demographic support but ritual specialization among elders)

This situates Silozi within broader African sociolinguistic trends.

4.10 Synthesis of Findings Using EVT

EVT Factor

Evidence from Findings

Implication

Status

Strong symbolic prestige in ceremonies

Cultural resilience

Demographics

Concentrated speaker base in Western Province

Continued daily use

Institutional Support

Strong in traditional institutions, weak in formal education

Potential vulnerability

Silozi demonstrates moderate-to-strong vitality but faces domain-specific pressures.

4.11 Overall Interpretation

The findings reveal a nuanced picture:

Silozi remains dominant in home and community domains.

Ceremonial institutions reinforce prestige and identity.

Youth maintain conversational fluency but lack ritual mastery.

English dominates formal education and digital spaces.

Rather than imminent language death, the data indicate domain shift and selective erosion, particularly in specialized ceremonial registers.

4.12 Response Rate

Out of 120 targeted participants:

- 110 questionnaires were successfully completed (91.7% response rate).
- All 20 scheduled interviews were conducted.
- 4 focus group discussions were completed.

The high response rate enhances the reliability of the findings.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

4.3.1 Age Distribution

- Youth (15–29 years): 45%
- Adults (30–54 years): 35%
- Elders (55+ years): 20%

This distribution ensured adequate generational representation.

4.3.2 Educational Background

- Primary education: 18%
- Secondary education: 42%
- Tertiary education: 30%
- No formal education: 10%

Youth respondents predominantly had secondary-level education, reflecting exposure to English-medium instruction.

4.4 Objective One: Role of Silozi in Preserving Lozi Cultural Heritage

4.4.1 Language Use in Cultural Ceremonies

Survey data indicate that:

- 92% of respondents reported that Kuomboka ceremonies are conducted primarily in Silozi.
- 87% agreed that ceremonial language is essential for maintaining Lozi identity.
- 78% believed translations into English reduce cultural meaning.

Interviews with elders emphasized that ritual speech contains metaphorical expressions that cannot be fully translated without losing nuance.

One elder stated:

“Silozi carries the spirit of the ceremony. Without it, Kuomboka would just be a performance, not a tradition.”

This suggests that Silozi functions not merely as communication but as a symbolic cultural medium.

4.4.2 Ritual Registers and Royal Authority

Traditional leaders indicated that royal praise poetry and honorific titles preserve historical continuity. Participant observation confirmed the use of specialized vocabulary during ceremonial rehearsals.

However, younger participants demonstrated limited familiarity with ceremonial registers, suggesting uneven transmission.

4.4.3 Proverbs and Oral Tradition

Elders reported frequent use of proverbs in conflict resolution and moral instruction. In contrast:

- 65% of youth respondents reported limited understanding of traditional proverbs.
- 48% indicated they rarely use proverbs in daily speech.

This demonstrates a generational gap in cultural-linguistic knowledge.

4.5 Objective Two: Intergenerational Transmission of Silozi

4.5.1 Language Use at Home

Survey results show:

- 85% of elders speak exclusively Silozi at home.
- 62% of adults primarily use Silozi but incorporate English.
- Only 40% of youth reported speaking mostly Silozi at home.
- 35% reported frequent code-switching between Silozi and English.
- 25% reported predominantly using English with siblings.

These patterns indicate gradual functional reduction among younger generations.

4.5.2 Urban Influence

Youth in Mongu reported higher levels of English usage compared to those in Limulunga. Focus group discussions revealed that English is associated with modernity and educational success.

One youth participant stated:

“We speak English at school all day, so it becomes natural even at home.”

This aligns with ethnolinguistic vitality theory, particularly regarding institutional status.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study with the theoretical framework and historical background presented in earlier chapters. It discusses how Silozi functions as a vehicle of cultural preservation among the Lozi people, evaluates the strength of intergenerational transmission mechanisms, and situates the findings within broader African and postcolonial linguistic contexts.

The chapter is organized into:

Discussion of findings in relation to research objectives

Theoretical synthesis

Conclusions

Policy and practical recommendations

Implications for future research

5.2 Discussion of Findings

5.2.1 Objective One: Patterns of Silozi Use Across Domains

The findings revealed domain-specific variation in Silozi use. The language remains dominant in:

Home environments (particularly among elders)

Cultural ceremonies

Informal community gatherings

However, it is weaker in:

Formal education

Employment settings

Urban professional contexts

Analytical Interpretation

This confirms the prediction of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) that institutional support is crucial for long-term language sustainability. While Silozi retains strong symbolic vitality, it lacks institutional dominance compared to English.

The persistence of English as the language of schooling reflects enduring postcolonial linguistic hierarchies. Despite Zambia's recognition of indigenous languages, English continues to function as linguistic capital in economic and bureaucratic domains.

Thus, Silozi demonstrates symbolic resilience but structural vulnerability.

5.2.2 Objective Two: Intergenerational Transmission Mechanisms

The study revealed that:

Elders maintain strong linguistic competence and ritual knowledge.

Parents display bilingual practices.

Youth show increasing English preference in daily interaction.

Storytelling practices, once central to cultural education, have declined due to:

Technological distraction

Urban migration

Formal schooling demands

Social Learning Theory Perspective

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through modeling, imitation, and reinforcement. The weakening of daily storytelling reduces opportunities for observational learning.

However, cultural ceremonies such as the Kuomboka provide concentrated moments of modeling and reinforcement. During such events, youth observe:

Ritual language

Royal praise poetry

Cultural symbolism

This suggests that transmission is episodic rather than continuous.

5.2.3 Objective Three: Institutional and Cultural Support

The study found that:

Ceremonial institutions strongly support Silozi.

Schools provide limited reinforcement.

Media presence in Silozi is insufficient for youth engagement.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Interpretation

According to EVT, language survival depends on:

Status

Demography

Institutional support

Silozi retains:

High symbolic status

Stable demographic presence

But shows:

Moderate institutional support

This places the language in a position of stable yet potentially declining vitality if institutional reinforcement does not increase.

5.3 Theoretical Synthesis

This study demonstrates that no single theory fully explains the current linguistic situation.

Instead, an integrated framework is necessary.

5.3.1 Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

EVT successfully explains:

Domain-based variation

Institutional influence

Generational density effects

However, EVT does not fully capture cultural symbolism.

5.3.2 Social Learning Theory

SLT explains:

Decline in storytelling impact

Peer influence on youth language preference

The importance of ceremonial modeling

It highlights the behavioral dimension of transmission.

5.3.3 Postcolonial Language Theory

Postcolonial theory contextualizes:

English dominance

Educational hierarchy

Linguistic prestige imbalance

It explains why English is perceived as economically superior despite strong cultural attachment to Silozi.

5.3.4 Integrated Interpretation

Together, these theories reveal:

Cultural identity remains strong.

Structural forces favor English.

Transmission mechanisms are shifting from continuous to ceremonial reinforcement.

This integrated perspective strengthens the conceptual contribution of the study.

5.4 Major Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that:

Silozi remains central to Lozi identity, particularly in ritual and symbolic domains.

Intergenerational transmission is weakening but not collapsing.

Cultural ceremonies function as key revitalization anchors.

English dominates institutional domains due to postcolonial legacies.

Youth demonstrate ambivalence rather than rejection of Silozi.

The language is therefore best described as culturally resilient but institutionally vulnerable.

5.5 Policy Recommendations

5.5.1 Educational Reform

Strengthen Silozi-medium instruction at lower primary levels.

Develop culturally embedded textbooks.

Integrate oral heritage into curriculum.

5.5.2 Community-Based Revitalization

Reintroduce structured storytelling evenings.

Establish youth cultural mentorship programs.

Digitize Lozi oral literature.

5.5.3 Media Development

Youth-oriented Silozi radio programs.

Social media content in Silozi.

Podcast storytelling initiatives.

5.5.4 Institutional Collaboration

Collaboration between traditional leadership and schools.

Annual language workshops prior to Kuomboka.

Cultural literacy campaigns.

5.6 Implications for African Language Preservation

The findings mirror trends observed in Yoruba, isiZulu, and Shona communities:

Strong symbolic identity

Urban pressure

Educational dominance of colonial languages

This suggests broader continental implications:

Indigenous languages require institutional empowerment.

Cultural ceremonies remain crucial resilience mechanisms.

Policy must align with community practice.

5.7 Contributions of the Study

This research contributes:

Theoretical Contribution

An integrated framework combining EVT, SLT, and postcolonial theory in a Zambian context.

Empirical Contribution

Original data on Silozi transmission patterns in Mongu and Limulunga.

Policy Contribution

Concrete revitalization strategies grounded in community realities.

5.8 Limitations

Geographic concentration in Western Province.

Self-reported language behavior.

Limited longitudinal tracking.

Future studies should:

Conduct longitudinal vitality assessments.

Explore digital language revitalization.

Compare rural and urban Lozi youth patterns more extensively.

5.9 Final Reflection

The story of Silozi is not one of imminent extinction, but of negotiated survival. It exists in a dynamic tension between cultural continuity and structural marginalization.

The resilience of the Lozi people — particularly through ceremonies like Kuomboka — demonstrates that language is not merely a communicative system but a vessel of collective memory, authority, and belonging.

If institutional reinforcement aligns with cultural pride, Silozi can continue to thrive across generations.

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesized findings with theory, articulated conclusions, and proposed practical recommendations for language preservation. Together, the five chapters present a comprehensive examination of language, identity, and cultural continuity among the Lozi people of Zambia.

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