Language shift and maintenance: social determinants of linguistic change among the Lomwe people

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Introduction

There have been a number of claims (Boeder, 1984; Kayambazinthu, 1989-90) that Chilomwe is a dying language. These claims have generally been based on the observation that only older Lomwes speak the language, while the young seem to be losing their mother tongue. The extent of this loss is not well known because no extensive sociolinguistic study, especially of rural Lomwe, has been carried out. Boeder's report, for instance, is based on oral reports of two students from the University of Malawi. Kayambazinthu, on the other hand, bases her assertion on a study she carried out in the Domasi and Malindi areas. Although her main focus was on Chichewa, Chiyao and English, and given that Domasi and Malindi are not strong Chilomwe speaking areas, she noted the diminishing use of Chilomwe among the few Lomwes found in these areas. She discovered that only the elderly speak it and in very restricted domains. The current study, which was carried out in the main hub of Chilomwe, fills this gap.[1]

The study set out to assess the socio-economic, educational, attitudinal, gender and age factors affecting the state of Chilomwe among the Lomwe people of southern Malawi, the second largest ethnic group in the country. The project had a number of objectives: to confirm the claim that Chilomwe is a dying language; to examine the socio-economic factors that have influenced the loss or maintenance of Chilomwe; to analyze the patterns of first language learned, language use, and language skill; and finally, to relate the relationship of bilingualism and human generations to the possibility of language shift.

This study is of great value to the survival of the Lomwe people as a distinct linguistic group and also as a check on the current national language policies which have neglected minority languages. It is axiomatic that a particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language and a loss of that language constitutes a threat to their survival. Knowledge of the causes of this loss will provide a starting point in attempts to preserve the language and identity of the people.

Literature review

The migration of the Lomwe into Malawi in the 1880s has often been heralded as one of the greatest population movements in the history of Southern Africa (Boeder, 1984). The Lomwe crossed into Malawi from Mozambique mostly to seek employment in the tea plantations of southern Malawi. Their arrival in Malawi was not altogether welcome by the Malawians and the whites alike. Because of this rejection and the oppression they suffered, the Lomwe had to work at the most menial work for very low wages (see White, 1987 for details).

The Lomwe settled mostly among the Yao and the Nyanja. As Boeder (1984) points out, they have had a long history of cultural, economic and linguistic interrelationships with the Yao and the Nyanja people of northern Mozambique and southern Malawi. This relationship was further strengthened by the fact that the Lomwe, like the Yao and the Nyanja, were matrilineal. This similarity in their social organization encouraged intermarriages (see Soka, 1953) which, as expected, also facilitated some form of language shift. Since the Lomwe were a minority group that was generally scorned by the host community, they ended up adopting the Yao and Nyanja languages. There were also other reasons for adopting these languages, but these are examined later in the paper.

The humiliation that the Lomwe suffered at the hands of the Yao and the Nyanja was so real that the Lomwe became reluctant to profess their ethnic identity in public and refused to speak their own language. To make matters worse, Chilomwe was not used in schools and therefore children's exposure to the language was limited to the home. It is against this background that it is claimed the Lomwe have lost their language.

A number of scholars (Fasold, 1984; Aitchson, 1991; Denison, 1977; Dorian, 1978; Gal, 1979) have examined the issue of language maintenance and shift.

Language maintenance occurs when a community collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used. Language shift, on the other hand, occurs when a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one. It is important to note that language shift is also referred to as 'language death' and is the total disappearance of a language. Dorian (1978: 647) further emphasizes that the term 'language death' should properly be used of total shift in one community only, on the condition that the shift is not from one dialect to another dialect of the same language.

What usually happens in language shift situations is that a younger generation learns an 'old' language from their parents as a mother tongue, but are also exposed from a young age to another fashionable and socially useful language either at school or in the community. As Aitchison (1991) observes, one of two things is likely to happen. First, speakers of the old language will continue speaking it, but will gradually import forms and constructions from the socially dominant language. This will continue until the old language is no longer identifiable as a separate language. Second, the old language is suppressed and ousted by the dominant language so that the former language simply disappears. In this situation, the first stage is the decrease in the number of people who speak the language. In most cases, only isolated pockets of rural speakers remain and if these come into contact with a more socially and economically useful language, then bilingualism becomes essential for survival. However, subsequent generations become less and less proficient in the dying language because it is used in fewer and fewer domains.

It is important to note that language shift or death and language maintenance are long-term, collective results of language choice (Fasold, 1984). When speakers collectively begin to choose a language in domains that were until then reserved for the old one, it may be an indication that language shift is in progress. There are a number of conditions that cause people to give up a language in favour of another one.

The most basic condition is societal bilingualism. Studies conducted by Lieberson (1980) have shown that almost all cases of societal language shift occur through inter-generational switching. Typically, one generation is bilingual, but only passes on one of the two languages to the next. The language of a monolingual community is virtually certain to be maintained as long as monolingualism persists. It should also be noted that the existence of societal bilingualism does not mean that a shift will take place. This is not a sufficient condition although it may be a necessary one.

Other studies (Tabouret-Keller, 1968, 1972; Dorian, 1980; Timm, 1980) have shown that migration is another cause of language shift. When members of a small group migrate to an area where their language no longer serves them, they will shift to the socially and economically viable language of the host community. It is also possible that migration may involve large groups. The local population may shift if they are swamped with a new language by the migrants. This is particularly common in situations where the local population is militarily defeated by the migrating group.

Industrialization and other economic changes have also been cited as triggers for language shift (Gal, 1979; Huffines, 1980). Gal's study (1979 cited in Fasold, 1984) of the Oberwart community provides a good example. The community was bilingual with German and Hungarian as the two languages. When monolingual German-speaking immigrants arrived and formed a prestigious class of merchants, artisans and government officials, they reduced the original peasant population to the lowest social and economic stratum of the local society. After the Second World War, because of industrial and commercial development, more and more peasants sought employment in the non-agriculture sector and consequently shifted to German.

Kahane and Kahane (1979) and Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter (1977) have also identified school language and other government pressures as other causes of language shift. Governments usually accord certain languages official status so that they are used in school and all government business. In such cases, people with languages that are different from the official language will be forced to become bilingual to participate meaningfully in the social, economic and political life of the country.

Other causes of shift include the level of prestige for the language being shifted to and the size of the population of speakers who shift. If a language enjoys a higher prestige, speakers of other languages may abandon their languages in favour of the prestigious one. A smaller population of speakers of a language is also more likely to shift to the language of a numerically bigger group (Dorian, 1980; Huffines, 1980).

Although all the conditions discussed above have been widely studied, there has not been any significant success in using any combination of these factors to predict

when language shift will take place. It is also safe to note here that there are a lot of cases in which a speech community is exposed to the very same factors, but maintains its language (Fasold, 1984). It would be interesting to find out which of these factors have influenced language shift among the Lomwe people bearing in mind that 'Language shift will occur only if, and to the extent that, a community desires to give up its identity as an identifiable sociocultural group in favour of an identity as a part of some other community' (Fasold, 1984: 240).

Methodology of the research

The subjects

The subjects for this study were drawn from the Lomwe speaking areas of Mulanje, Chiradzulu, and Thyolo. Three Lomwe-speaking villages were identified by the research assistants who were deliberately drawn from these districts.[2] The villages were selected by virtue of their accessibility by road. Twenty subjects were drawn from each of these villages. The subjects were selected using a convenience sampling technique. As it was not possible to randomly sample the subjects given that not everybody could be found in the village when the research team visited it, the survey team interviewed anyone who was conveniently available in the village and identified themself as a Lomwe. The number of 20 subjects per village was considered optimum given the limited resources available for the project. A total of 180 subjects responded to the questionnaire. At the same time, the rest of the villagers were also actively involved in the project because it also involved participant observation method.

Data collection

The research dealt with primary data since it was the first systematic study of rural Lomwe in Malawi. The data was obtained through a questionnaire, unstructured interviews and participant observations. These three methods were used to complement each other. In similar studies conducted in other countries, researchers always found a mismatch between the subjects' responses to interview questions and their actual linguistic behaviour. It was therefore important to observe the same linguistic behaviours that the questionnaire attempted to solicit so that what was observed could be correlated with the questionnaire data. For this reason, one of the research assistants was a Lomwe and relatively fluent in Chilomwe.

The questionnaire was modelled in some respects on the one used by Kayambazinthu (1990). It covered several areas including general background such as surname, sex, age, marital status, socio-economic status; educational background; patterns of language use; language fluency rating scales; and linguistic attitudes. The questionnaire was pretested among the Lomwe people working at Chancellor College and some modifications were made before the main survey. The questionnaire was administered by research assistants and the principal researcher.

Data analysis

Various quantitative measures and qualitative formulas were used to analyze the data. Given the nature of the data to be generated, percentage computations formed the bulk of the quantitative analysis. These percentages were necessary to determine age-correlation with bilingualism, patterns of bilingualism through generations, and linguistic attitudes.

Results and discussion

Some general characteristics of the respondents

Surnames

The first piece of information about the respondents that the questionnaire asked for was whether the respondent's surname was Chilomwe or from another language group. Surnames are very important in sociolinguistic surveys because they are, in most cases, an accurate indication of a person's cultural and ethnic attachment. Of the total respondents, 64.2% claimed to have Chilomwe names, while the rest (35.8%) had other names mostly from Chichewa and English. This is a considerably high percentage of Chilomwe names considering the level of multi-ethnic assimilation that the Lomwe are known for. However, the figures on surnames should be treated with caution. A random check through those collected indicates that a lot of non-Lomwe names were reported to be Lomwe. For instance, such English names as 'Piyasi' (Pearce), 'William' and so on were reported as being Lomwe.

Another interesting thing to note is that not all the Lomwe names were in their original Chilomwe form. Most of them were either abbreviated or translated into Chichewa. For instance, it was not uncommon for a Chilomwe name such as 'Hankoni' to be shortened to 'Han' or 'Kolota' to be translated into the Chichewa

equivalent, 'Ndanena' so that they no longer sounded Chilomwe. There were also a lot of cases where Chilomwe names were given a Chichewa pronunciation. In some cases, the Lomwe completely adopted either English names or Chichewa names. Names like 'John Phiri', 'Mary William' were commonplace. The various reasons for the Lomwe's failure to hold on to their names will be discussed later in this paper.

Gender

There were slightly more female respondents (55%) than male respondents (45%). This is not surprising because the general demographic pattern in Malawi is that there are at least two females to one male. The most likely reason for this imbalance in the sample, however, is that most men among the Lomwe, just like other ethnic groups in Malawi, leave their homes and seek paid employment in urban areas. They leave their women in the villages to do much of the cultivation. From a sociolinguistic point of view, this means that the women are more likely to maintain their mother tongue while the men are more likely to acquire a second language and probably lose their first language. There was, however, no significant difference between men and women in terms of their proficiency in Chilomwe.

Other demographic trends

What is of interest here are age, marital status, spouse's ethnic group, education, and place of birth. The age range of the respondents was between 10 and 82. Most of the respondents (70%) were between 10 and 34. Twenty-one per cent of the subjects were not and had never been married; 66.7% were married; 3.6% widowed; and 8.7% were either divorced or separated. In terms of spouses, 65.3% were married to a fellow Lomwe and 18.4% were married to someone outside their ethnic group. The rest were not married. Information on spouses is useful because it may indicate what language or languages are used in the home. For instance, it would be expected that those who are married within the tribe and are fluent in Chilomwe will teach their children to speak Chilomwe. On the other hand, those who marry across ethnic boundaries are likely to raise children who are bilingual.

Most of the respondents (90.3%) were born in the villages where the interviews took place. Those born in a town or district were 3.4% and 6.2% respectively. Although most respondents were born in the Lomwe villages, close to 50% acquired Chichewa as their first language. About 40% acquired Chilomwe as their first language while the rest acquired other languages. Note that all those who

acquired Chilomwe as a first language also acquired Chichewa at the same time. The acquisition of two first languages is not a strange phenomenon among linguistic minorities (see Dyken, 1990).

Education and occupation

Figure 1 shows the information yielded on education. Most of the respondents had either lower primary school education (up to Standard 4) or had no formal education at all. Consequently, most of the respondents were subsistence farmers.

Table 1 shows that most of the parents and grandparents of the respondents speak or spoke Chilomwe. One could therefore expect that they would pass on this language to their siblings rather than Chichewa, which is not or was not spoken to the same extent as Chilomwe.

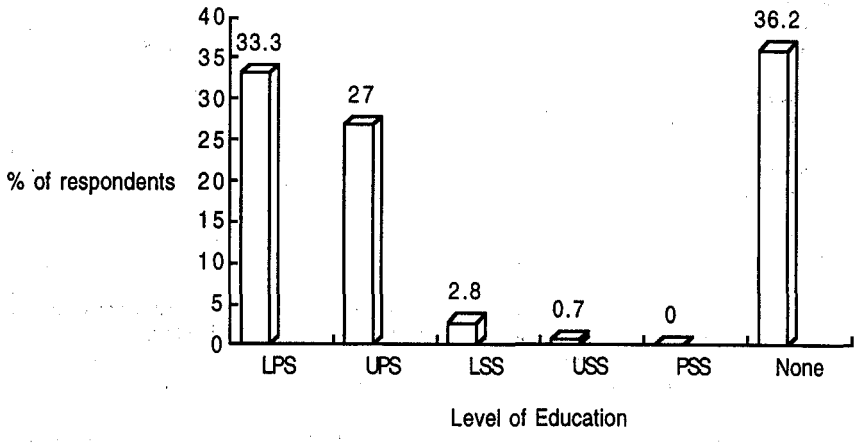
The research also attempted to relate bilingualism and human generations to the possibility of language shift. For this purpose, the respondents were divided into four unequal age groups: 50-82, 35-49, 21-34, and 10-20. These groups emerged naturally in the data. Taking the data reported by the respondents about themselves and their parents and grandparents, four general patterns of bilingualism seemed to emerge according to age. Using the method Fasold (1984) used on his study of the Tiwa, the respondents were grouped into four generations as follows:

- Generation 1: parents and grandparents of the age group aged 50-82 years old and grandparents of the age-group aged 35-49 years old
- Generation 2: grandparents of the age groups aged 21-34 and 10-20 years old and parents of the age-group aged 35-49 years old
- Generation 3: the age groups aged 50-82, 35-49, and 21-34 years old and the parents of the age-groups aged 21-34 and 10-20 years old
- Generation 4: the age-group aged 10-20 years old

	Chichewa	Chilomwe	Chiyao
Mother	26	62	13
Father	27	61	13
Maternal grandparents	18	82	0
Paternal grandparents	20	80	0
Father talking to mother	28	72	0
Mother talking to father	31	69	0

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each language.

Table 1. Language spoken by respondent's parents



Note: LPS = lower primary school (Stds 1-4); UPS = upper primary school (Stds 5-8); LSS = secondary school (up to JC level); USS = secondary school (up to MSCE level); PSS = post-secondary school

Figure 1. Educational background of respondents

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

The overriding pattern that emerges in the first generation is monolingualism in Chilomwe (50.8%) followed by Chilomwe-Chichewa bilingualism. Monolingualism in Chichewa has the lowest percentage in this generation. In the second and third generations, monolingualism in Chilomwe has lost considerable ground to bilingualism in Chilomwe and Chichewa, and to a lesser extent, to monolingualism in Chichewa.

By the fourth generation, bilingualism in Chilomwe and Chichewa continues to be the dominant pattern (59.4%). The percentage of monolinguals in Chichewa is also considerably high (40.6%). This generation has no monolinguals in Chilomwe; everyone who claims to have facility in Chilomwe also claims competence in Chichewa. When the language-use data are checked against observations of actual linguistic behaviour of the respondents, the linguistic pattern in the fourth generation would lean more toward monolingualism in Chichewa than the Chilomwe-Chichewa bilingual pattern that is evident in the Table 2. During the interviews, very few respondents were heard speaking Chilomwe. The claims that they are fluent in Chilomwe are probably more attitudinal than practical.

Generation		Language LC	CO	LO	L	C
1.	Number	45	0	0	62	5
	Percentage	36.9	0	0	50.8	12.3
2.	Number	67	2	3	7	14
	Percentage	72.0	2.3	3.2	7.5	15
3.	Number	139	4	4	3	32
	Percentage	76.4	2.2	2.2	1.6	17.6
4.	Number	19	0	0	0	13
	Percentage	59.4	0	0	0	40.6

Key: LC = Chilomwe and Chichewa; CO = Chichewa and other languages; LO = Chilomwe and other languages; L = Chilomwe; C = Chichewa. Other languages include Chiyao, Chitumbuka and Chilambya.

Table 2. Patterns of bilingualism through four 'generations' among the Lomwe

Bilingualism appears to have been a fact of life for the Lomwe for generations, with Chilomwe giving way to Chichewa over the years. As noted above, from the first generation to the second, the loss of monolingualism in Chilomwe is very significant as many of the Lomwe people became bilingual. By the fourth generation there is no one who claims to be monolingual in Chilomwe. This loss is also evident if one examines the changes in the percentage of Chilomwe-Chichewa bilinguals over the four generations. From the first to the third generation, the number of bilinguals in Chilomwe and Chichewa increased by a little over 100%. By the fourth generation, however, the percentage of these bilinguals decreased by 17%. These individuals were most likely monolingual in Chichewa.

The respondents were also asked to rate their own ability to speak, understand, read and write Chilomwe and Chichewa on a four-point scale of ability: none, elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Amastae (1978) reports that studies by Fishman, Cooper, Ma et al. (1971) have shown that this kind of self-report of linguistic skills is generally accurate. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the Lomwe respondents clearly view their ability in Chilomwe as being less than their ability in Chichewa. The lower rating in Chilomwe literacy skills is very likely highly accurate since Chilomwe-speaking people, like all other Malawians, have invariably received their education in Chichewa and English.

Table 3 also shows that 49.6% of the respondents understand Chilomwe. It was quite common to encounter respondents who understood Chilomwe very well but did not speak the language fluently, and in some cases, could not speak other than stock phrases. On average, there were slightly more respondents who understood Chilomwe (29.1%), at whatever level of ability, than those who could speak it (26.2%).

The difference in the level of all linguistic skills for the two languages is highly accurate and correlates with actual linguistic behaviour as observed by the research team. The only suspect skill in this table is the speaking of Chilomwe. Although 41% of the respondents claim to have an advanced ability in speaking Chilomwe, the research team rarely came across any group of Lomwe's who could speak Chilomwe with unqualified fluency. The few respondents who spoke Chilomwe to the research team did so mostly to prove that they indeed spoke the language. It is highly probable that they have an advanced facility in Chilomwe, though they do not speak the language in public for various reasons.

The differences in all the skill levels for the two languages seem to indicate that the bilingual situation among the Lomwe people is not stable but rather transitional. It is evident that much of the bilingual population is moving away from Chilomwe toward monolingualism in Chichewa.

Another section of the questionnaire asked respondents to assess their linguistic performance in some basic areas in both Chilomwe and Chichewa. The results are in Table 4. This data reveal the same trend that we have seen so far; namely that respondents see their ability in Chichewa as greater than their ability in Chilomwe. Although the performance of those who claim linguistic ability in Chilomwe is

	None	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
Speak Chilomwe	21.3	26.0	11.3	41.3
Understand Chilomwe	12.7	24.8	12.8	49.6
Read Chilomwe	45.7	20.0	9.5	24.8
Write Chilomwe	53.8	17.3	8.7	20.2
Speak Chichewa	4.3	6.5	20.3	68.8
Understand Chichewa	2.9	7.3	19.0	70.8
Read Chichewa	17.4	9.2	14.7	58.7
Write Chichewa	19.0	6.7	15.2	59.0

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each rating.

Table 3. Language ability self-ratings by respondents

relatively high (an average of 81.8%), the figures do not say anything about the respondents' levels of competence. These levels are, however, clear from Table 3. While only an average of 45.5% of the respondents claim advanced competence in speaking and understanding Chilomwe, the rest range from no ability at all to intermediate levels of competence.

The figures for those who have no facility in basic skills in Chichewa (average 2.3%) seem to correspond closely with the figures in Table 3. The research team found a few respondents who had very fragmentary knowledge of Chichewa. These respondents were mostly very old, in their late 70s or early 80s. Otherwise, all respondents were competent in Chichewa.

The respondents were also asked to indicate if they could understand written messages in both Chilomwe and Chichewa. The results are shown in Table 5 and clearly indicate higher competence in Chichewa than in Chilomwe. This should be understood in the context of the educational background of the respondents. Two factors are particularly worthy noting here. First, as indicated earlier, Chichewa has been the only local language that has been taught and used in the education system in Malawi. As a result, literacy is limited to Chichewa and the other non-Malawian languages that are also taught in the schools. Those who claim to read in Chilomwe use the same reading skills that they learned through Chichewa. Since Chilomwe and Chichewa are different languages, it is very likely that the transfer of reading skills from Chichewa to Chilomwe does not yield very satisfactory results (see Matiki, 1995). The respondents would invariably read Chichewa more fluently than they would their mother tongue.

Second, not all the respondents have had the opportunity of a formal education. The educational background of the respondents (see Figure 1) indicates that 63.8% have had some form of school education. However, only 56.3% of these claim any

	Chilomwe		Chichewa	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Exchange greetings with someone	88.8	11.2	97.8	2.2
Give and understand simple directions	82.5	17.5	97.8	2.2
Carry on a simple conversation	80.7	19.3	97.8	2.2
Tell and understand jokes	80.3	19.7	97.8	2.2
Understand rapid speeches by native speakers	76.6	23.4	97.1	2.9

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each category.

Table 4. Linguistic perfomance in some basic areas

	Chilomwe		Chichewa	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Signs and advertisements	43.8	56.3	56.3	43.8
Simple instructions	43.8	56.3	56.3	43.8
Newspaper and magazine articles	43.4	56.6	56.3	43.8
Stories and poems	43.4	56.6	56.3	43.8
Textbooks	44.1	55.9	56.	43.8

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each category.

Table 5. Competence in understanding written Chilomwe and Chichewa

reading ability in Chichewa. The remaining 7.5% may therefore have left school before they acquired any reading competence at all.

The frequency of use of Chilomwe and Chichewa (Table 6) again indicates that Chichewa is the most frequently used language. While only 33.1% use Chilomwe regularly, 75.7% use Chichewa. Again, the numbers of those who claim not to use Chichewa regularly are significantly lower than those who do not use Chilomwe regularly. These figures closely correspond with the respondents' professed competence in the two languages as discussed above.

Table 7 shows data on patterns of language use among the bilingual Lomwes in specific domains. The concept of domain has been widely used in other studies (cf. Fishman, Cooper, Ma et al. 1971). Such studies have shown that the use of one language or the other varied systematically according to which of the five domains or contexts of usage, conversation occurred in home, neighbourhood, school, work, or religion. It is common for a bilingual speaker to use one language in one domain and another language in another domain. In this research project one more domain was added — media use. Note that apart from the two languages — Chilomwe and Chichewa — shown in this table, the respondents were asked to indicate on the questionnaires any other language that they use in any of the

	Chilomwe	Chichewa
Very little	31.0	9.0
From time to time	16.9	6.9
Quite often	12.7	7.6
Several times a week	6.3	0.7
Regularly, everyday	33.1	75.7

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each frequency rate for the two languages.

Table 6. Frequency of use of Chilomwe and Chichewa

Domains	Only Chilomwe	Mostly Chilomwe	Equal use of Chilomwe and Chichewa	Mostly Chichewa	Only Chichewa
Home					
to parents	23.9	7.7	23.2	10.6	34.5
from parents	24.5	8.6	25.9	9.4	31.7
to grandparents	30.6	11.1	22.2	6.9	29.2
from grandparents	34.5	9.9	21.1	6.3	28.2
to siblings	20.3	6.3	23.1	13.3	37.1
from siblings	20.1	6.3	23.6	13.2	36.8
to spouse	22.5	5.4	22.5	11.6	38.0
from spouse	22.7	5.5	22.7	11.7	37.5
Neighbourhood and downtown					
neighbourhood, to friends	5.9	4.4	28.7	8.8	52.2
shopping in neigh/hood	5.0	4.3	22.3	12.9	55.4
shopping downtown	5.2	3.7	16.3	17.8	57.0
School					
primary school, outside class	6.5	2.8	10.2	11.1	69.4
secondary school, outside class	4.2	2.1	0	8.3	85.4
Work					
to fellow employees	0.9	3.5	15.7	3.5	76.5
to fellow home employees	3.3	4.1	13.0	3.3	76.4
Religion					
church/mosque	0.7	0	13.2	16.7	69.4
confession	2.2	0.7	10.2	17.5	69.3
religious language leaders use	2.2	0.7	11.6	17.4	68.1
praying	2.3	0.8	10.6	18.9	67.4
Media use					
reading newspapers	2.7	6.3	26.8	7.1	28.6
reading books	2.7	6.3	26.8	7.1	28.6
writing to friends	3.6	6.3	20.7	11.7	28.8

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each category.

Table 7. Language use by domains

domains specified in the table. At the end of the data analysis, no other language (apart from Chilomwe and Chichewa) was used by the respondents in these domains.

In these data some major trends are apparent. One trend is that Chichewa is the dominant language in all the domains. This is a clear indication of language shift. Even in those traditional domains, such as the home where one would expect the use of Chilomwe, Chilomwe has given way to Chichewa. In the home and neighbourhood domains, the language of choice in general is Chichewa. A combination of Chilomwe and Chichewa was also reported in these domains, albeit to a lesser extent.

Another major trend is that there is a generational differentiation in the home domain since Chilomwe is used more with grandparents than with parents and relatively little with siblings. These data tally with the linguistic background of the respondents and their relatives as reported earlier.

Another part of the questionnaire elicited the respondents' attitude toward Chichewa (Table 8). This section was an indirect attempt to check on the effect of the language allocation policy that made Chichewa Malawi's national language. The responses indicate that the respondents have a very positive attitude toward Chichewa. The data seem to indicate that the Lomwe have come to accept Chichewa as their language. It is not totally surprising, therefore, that they are willing to forgo their own language. Note, however, that only 53.2% of the respondents feel that it is necessary to speak Chichewa to be identified as a Malawian. The lower percentage here is an indication that the Lomwes' acceptance of Chichewa is not a result of the political brokering that came along with the introduction of Chichewa as a national language, but rather the fact that the Lomwe needed Chichewa to survive socially and economically.

Although sentiments against Chichewa as a national language have been voiced in recent years, particularly through the print media, these have generally been sporadic and ill-intentioned. It does seem that most Malawians, or at least the Lomwe, have a rather positive attitude toward Chichewa as a survival language rather than a political tool.

	Yes	No
Do you like to speak Chichewa?	94.9	5.1
Do you think speaking Chichewa is a good thing to do?	91.5	8.5
Is it an advantage to speak Chichewa?	95.6	4.4
Is it necessary to speak Chichewa to be a Malawian?	53.2	46.8

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each category.

Table 8. Attitudes toward Chichewa

The respondents also assessed the practical benefits of the languages within and without the village and also for getting a job. The results are in Table 9. Chilomwe emerges as the most beneficial language in the village (53.2%). This position is however seriously threatened by Chichewa (46.8%). As noted earlier, however, the Lomwe do not use Chilomwe frequently even within their villages. Elderly Lomwes who were unquestionably competent in Chilomwe spoke to each other in Chichewa, they spoke Chilomwe for solidarity purposes in most cases. The choice of Chilomwe here as the most advantageous language within the village is more of an attitudinal statement than a practical one.

Chichewa emerges as the most advantageous language outside the village because it is the language for wider communication in Malawi. It is also rated as the most useful for getting a job. Although this is most surprising since English is the required language for most white collar jobs, the choice should be understood in the context of the educational background of the respondents. Most of the respondents have not had any adequate schooling at all and do not have any facility in English. The jobs they would look for, therefore, may not require any working knowledge of English.

The study also sought to ascertain the language that the respondents would prefer to be used in certain situations. The results in Table 10 indicate that the Lomwe people prefer the use of Chichewa to their own language in schools, newspapers, government offices, and for wider communication in the country. However, they would also want to have Chilomwe as a school subject. The reason advanced by

	Chichewa	Chilomwe	Chiyao	English
Most advantageous to know within the village?	46.8	53.2	0	0
Most advantageous to know outside the village?	67.6	27.3	5.0	0
Most useful for getting a job?	80.9	11.0	0	8.1

Table 9. Practical benefits of each language as assessed by the respondents

	Chichewa	Chilomwe	Chiyao	English
Used as a medium of instruction in primary schools?	52.1	30.8	2.1	15.1
Taught as school subjects?	42.7	42.7	1.9	12.7
Used on the radio?	40.0	55.5	1.3	3.2
Used in newspapers?	65.0	33.6	0	1.4
Used in all government offices?	57.7	16.8	0	25.5
Used by all Malawians for wider communication	89.8	8.0	0	2.2

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing a language for each situation.

Table 10. Language preferred in certain situations

Because it is not taught by parents	45.9
Because it is not taught in schools	6.3
Because it is an embarrassing language	31.4
Because it does not have any economic advantage	5.7
Other reasons	10.7

Note: figures represent percentages of sample population choosing each reason.

Table 11. Reasons for not speaking Chilomwe

most respondents for this proposal is that Chilomwe in school will allow the young generation of the Lomwes to acquire the language. A small majority of the respondents would like to have Chilomwe on the national radio. This attitude is much more a counter response to the introduction of Chitumbuka on the radio. The Lomwe people were merely seeking equal recognition of their language even though the language is not widely used.

The respondents advanced a number of reasons for not speaking Chilomwe (see Table 11). Chief among these reasons was that parents are no longer interested in teaching their children to speak the language (45.9%). A small group of the respondents (31.4%) indicated that they do not speak Chilomwe because it is an embarrassing language. Other reasons advanced included the effect of ethnic intermixing, intermarriages, and the ill-conceived belief that Chilomwe is a very difficult language to learn.

It is obviously clear that a number of factors have militated against the use of Chilomwe among the Lomwe people. Although language shift is often counterbalanced by forces for language maintenance where a 'language holds onto its own despite the influence of powerful neighbours' (Crystal, 1987: 360 in Barnes and McĐuling, 1995), such forces have not worked in favour of the maintenance of Chilomwe. Factors that have facilitated the loss of Chilomwe include education, attitudes, religion, contact with the mother country and communication patterns in the village. It is to these factors that the discussion turns.

Social determinants of language shift among the Lomwe

It is probably evident from the data discussed above that a number of factors have been responsible for language shift among the Lomwe. It should be stated that language shift is a slow process and the factors that influence this change may not

be easily identifiable. An examination of the history of the Lomwe people in Malawi and their ethnolinguistic assimilation, however, provides adequate pointers to the various causes of this shift. As Gal (1979) and Mackey (1980) point out, sociopolitical and socio-economic factors predominate in most language shift situations.

Socio-economic factors

Economic factors are the major force behind language shift. The Lomwe entered Malawi from Mozambique in the 1880s to seek employment in the tea plantations of the south. On arrival, the new immigrants discovered that the host community had different languages from their own. It was therefore important for them to shift to the dominant language for purposes of business and employment. Shift to a dominant language in domains of work and business is a universal pattern in immigrant communities (Barnes and McDuling, 1995). Consequently the working Lomwes became bilingual: they spoke Chinyanja in their place of work and for some time maintained Chilomwe in their homes.

It has already been mentioned that because of the long history of cultural, economic, and linguistic relationships between the Lomwe on one hand and the Yao and the Nyanja on the other, the Lomwe people ended up adopting the languages of the host community. There was, however, another more important reason for adopting these languages. From their first entry into Malawi, the Lomwe were held in contempt. One of the targets for this contempt was their language. To most Yao and Nyanja people, Chilomwe sounded very strange and it was likened to the mutterings of a drunk (Boeder, 1984).

White settlers too had a very negative attitude toward the Lomwe. For instance, the 1910 official edition of *A Handbook for Nyasaland* portrays the Lomwe as ...naturally a wild and low-caste race whose ignorance makes them at once savage and timid' (quoted in Kishindo, 1994). The 1922 edition of the same publication further states that the Lomwe 'are represented among the idle and criminal classes to a disproportionate extent.'

Apart from these negative images, most Lomwe could hardly understand any local languages apart from their own (*Handbook for Nyasaland*, 1911: 108). As a result, the Lomwe were scorned for failing to speak Chiyao or Chinyanja properly. As Kachru (1980: 34) puts it, the attitudes of native speakers of a language toward non-

native varieties of their language are 'not based on linguistic value judgment but based on several factors including the native speaker's fear of seeing his language disintegrate in the hands of (or shall we say, on the lips) (sic) non-native users.' The Yao and Nyanja people were protective of their languages and demonstrated this against the Lomwe at every opportunity.

It has also been noted already that Chilomwe was not used in schools and therefore exposure to the language for children was limited to the home. As Kishindo (1994) points out, the Lomwe did not have any strong ethnic ideologies and could not, therefore, promote any notions of ethnic identity that had a popular appeal. It is not surprising that today one rarely hears Chilomwe being spoken in public. As the data in this study have shown, it is mostly the older Lomwe who speak the language and regretfully resent the fact that the young generation of Lomwe are losing their mother tongue (see also Boeder, 1984; Kayambazinthu, 1989, 1990). Kishindo (1994: 10) sees the reasons for the loss of Chilomwe as follows:

'...the Lomwe are willing to forgo their language, first, because it was never used politically as a symbol of their ethnic identity and secondly compared to Chichewa, Chilomwe has no perceived economic benefits. Thus for the Lomwe Chichewa has proven a language of greater value than their own.'

Another factor that has contributed to the current state of Chilomwe is that the Lomwe have not made any effort at all to encourage the acquisition and use of Chilomwe. Although clubs and sociocultural organizations are seen as important in the maintenance of a minority language in an immigrant community, there is no such organization among the Lomwe. It should be noted that in 1943 Bandawe (1971) organized the Lomwe Tribal Association (LTA) with the sole aim of persuading the colonial government to change what the Lomwe considered a derogatory name of the tribe, *Nguru* , to Lomwe. This, however, was not the kind of grouping that Fishman (1972: 49) believes is more important for language maintenance than both the print and broadcast media. Although the LTA had branches in the main Lomwe districts of Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje, it did not advance any ethnocentric ideologies for the Lomwe. As a matter of fact, the Association was dissolved soon after a government order abolished the name Nguru in favour of Lomwe in 1945.

Education and the media

The language policy in education in Malawi has worked against the maintenance of Chilomwe. It has been established by other studies (Campbell and Schnell, 1987; Buccheit, 1988; Fishman, 1966) that education is a very powerful factor in facilitating language maintenance as much as it can play a major role in language shift. In Malawi, Chilomwe has never been used in schools either as a subject of study or as a medium of instruction. Chichewa has been the only indigenous language that has been used in school. The educational system has promoted a shift to the dominant language at the expense of minority languages, including Chilomwe. It is worth noting, however, that given the low literacy levels among the Lomwe (see Figure 1) it is doubtful whether the inclusion of Chilomwe in the school curriculum would have any significant effect on its decline.

Although the media is very important in the maintenance of minority languages (Fishman, 1966), it has not been used in the promotion of Chilomwe. Radio broadcasts have only been limited to the official and national languages, i.e. English and chichewa respectively. Since there is no literacy in Chilomwe, there is nothing printed in the language. There were a few newspapers during the run-up to the general elections of 1994 which carried articles in Chilomwe, but these disappeared together with the euphoria at the prospect of a new system of government. The media has not stimulated any interest in the culture and language of the Lomwe people.

Family

Barnes (1990) and Cartwright (1987) point out that the family plays a crucial role in maintaining a language. In the case of the Lomwe, all families are bilingual and unfortunately Chichewa dominates in these families. It was evident in the survey that parents who were fluent in both Chilomwe and Chichewa preferred to talk to their children in Chichewa on the pretext that the children could not understand Chilomwe. The fact that Lomwe women have maintained Chilomwe somewhat more than men has not helped matters for children. This trend says a lot about the attitude that most parents have toward their mother tongue.

The other reason why the Lomwe have failed to maintain their language is that they have not kept any contacts with the people in their area of origin in Mozambique.

Although such contacts on their own may not be the ultimate factor in matters of language shift and maintenance, they usually help to provide a motive for the maintenance of the language.

Attitudes

Language attitudes have also played a major role in the shift from Chilomwe toward the dominant language. Although on the surface one gets the impression that there is genuine pride in being Lomwe, this feeling does not seem to translate very well into the day-to-day lives of the Lomwe. There are, as a matter of fact, Lomwe people who admit to feeling a sense of inferiority because of prejudices that have been directed toward them from the host community and the colonial government since their arrival in the country.

It would be interesting to investigate the extent to which this negative view has been accepted by the Lomwe themselves. What is evident, however, is that the Lomwe feel ashamed to speak their own language. It is mostly among the minority of educated Lomwe's where one finds a strong desire to speak Chilomwe and a subsequent regret that they cannot. It is very common among this category of Lomwe's to give children Chilomwe names. This contrasts sharply with the mainstream Lomwe where Chichewa and English names predominate.

The attitude of the Lomwe toward their own language has serious implications on the much-talked about mother tongue education in Malawi. It would be disastrous to assume that the Lomwe are going to accept Chilomwe in schools because it is their language. It is, therefore, important to sort out the issue of language attitudes before the new policy is implemented (see Matiki, 1994, 1996).

Conclusion

This study had set out to assess the socio-economic, educational, attitudinal, sexual and age correlates of maintaining or losing Chilomwe among the Lomwe people of Southern Malawi. Although the Lomwe culture and traditions have been maintained to some extent, the use of Chilomwe as a mother tongue or second language is decreasing considerably. The current state of bilingualism in Chilomwe and Chichewa is transitional and shifting toward total monolingualism in Chichewa.

Notes

1. I owe a special gratitude to the University of Malawi Research and Publications Committee for funding this project (grant number 9505). I would also like to thank Pascal Kishindo and Edrinnie Kayambazinthu for helpful comments and discussion.

2. I am grateful to the people of Kambenje, Kada, and Msikita villages in Mulanje district; Nanseta, Ndalama, and Khumulike in Thyolo district; and Chitera, Ndalama, and Mwitha villages in Chiradzulu district for co-operating with the research team.

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