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# Lexical Metamorphosis of the Kalanga Language: Towards an Analysis of the Impact of Ndebele Domination of the Kalanga Language

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## Abstract

*This article examines the lexical metamorphosis of the Kalanga language caused by the dominance of the language by Ndebele. It is based on research conducted among the Kalanga-speaking people of Budilima-mangwe in Matebeleland and argues that because of the domination of Kalanga by Ndebele, the Kalanga language is undergoing a lexical metamorphosis which poses a threat to its survival unless measures are taken to promote and preserve it. Preservation of Kalanga is important, given the fact that language is a vehicle of culture and the death of Kalanga would, thus, spell the demise of Kalanga culture.*

## Introduction

This article seeks to investigate Kalanga lexical metamorphosis in the context of its relationship to Ndebele, particularly in the light of the domination of the former by the latter, which has generated concern among Kalanga speakers about the present and future status and sustainability of their language and culture. Kalanga speakers are concerned that, if the Ndebele domination of their language remains unchecked, their language will die and, with it, their culture. It is maintained here that, although language is dynamic, it is essential that the core lexis of a language is preserved if that language is to survive.

Kalanga speakers are also anxious, given the ongoing exercise in Zimbabwe in which researchers are gathering a corpus of lexical items in the minority languages, including Kalanga, that Ndebele or Ndebele-derived words might be erroneously entered into the corpus. Indeed, evidence exists that, as it undergoes a lexical metamorphosis in relation to Ndebele, Kalanga is already incorporating many Ndebele words, while some Kalanga speakers are coining new words which are neither Kalanga nor Ndebele but are the result of the corruption of both Ndebele and Kalanga. Examples of such words are the following:

<b>Kalanga</b>	<b>Ndebele</b>
tjihlabelo	isihlabelo
tjibindi	isibindi
tjindebele	isindebele
hambazi	ilambazi
makholwa	amakholwa

In his description of language, Brown (1980: 5) states that language is 'systematic' and 'possibly generative' and that it 'operates in a speech community'. With respect to the Kalanga 'speech community', it is doubtful whether the adoption of Ndebele words will lead to the growth and development of the language. At the rate at which Ndebele words are incorporated into the Kalanga language, there is a real danger that the process may be more disruptive than generative.

In their turn, Myers and Myers (1985: 115) contend that language is essential for one to understand the world and to interpret and explain one's environment. They argue that words provide the important link with the past and the future and that, through words, experiences can be stored in the mind, recorded in the memory, and later recalled for personal benefit or to be shared with others. In the case of Kalanga, it follows, therefore, that if some words are lost, experiences of the past cannot be remembered and recorded as accurately as would be the case if the language were to survive intact.

In the light of the importance of language as defined by scholars cited above and because language is a vehicle of culture, this article seeks to investigate the impact of Ndebele language domination of the Kalanga language and its implications for both the language and the culture that it expresses and promotes.

### **Methodology**

Research for this study was conducted among the Kalanga-speaking people of Bulilima-mangwe, encompassing the people of Dombodema in the north, Nguwanyana in the south, and Plumtree which is central. Dombodema is regarded as the centre of the Kalanga-speaking population, Nguwanyana is a Kalanga-speaking area with many Ndebele speakers in its population, while Plumtree is more cosmopolitan. To be better able to establish whether there was a noticeable pattern in the increase of Ndebele lexical terms in Kalanga and, therefore, deterioration of knowledge of the Kalanga language, the study sampled three population age groups, namely, under 20 years, 20-40 years, and over 40 years of age. Data collection involved the use of questionnaires and conducting interviews with members of the population

in the above three categories. The data collected was then classified on the basis of whether (a) both parents in the family were Kalanga, (b) one of the parents was Ndebele, and (c) one or both parents were speakers of other languages, such as Shona, Tswana, Tonga, Sotho, and Nyanja. To minimise variables, only evidence from families where both parents were Kalanga is analysed in this article.

### **Analysis and Findings**

Data collected showed clearly that knowledge of Kalanga lexical items was deteriorating fast. The majority of the under-20s could not supply even 50 of the 100 words asked for in the questionnaire. The average score for this group was 38. Some wrote their responses in Ndebele because they did not know how to write in Kalanga. The 20-40 years group averaged 67 words, whereas the average scored by the over 40 years group was 80 words. The high score among the over 40s may be the result of the fact that they were aware that the study was investigating the use of Ndebele words in Kalanga, and therefore, consciously selected Kalanga words. Indeed, during the interviews, they sometimes corrected themselves if they, inadvertently, used a Ndebele word. In contrast, the younger people continued to use Ndebele words, often without being conscious that they were doing so. All groups were unanimous in expressing the opinion that Kalanga was a dying language as it was neglected and was being overtaken by Ndebele.

Data analysis for this study was influenced by Skinner's (1957) habit-related Behaviourist Theory which argues that language learning is influenced by the environment and enhanced by reinforcement, and by Aitchison (1991:107) who suggests that the two basic causes of language change are socio-linguistic and psycholinguistic factors. According to her, socio-linguistic causes are the following external factors:

- (a) Fashion: Like fashion in clothes, fashions of language change.
- (b) Foreign influence: This mainly involves borrowing 'foreign bits and pieces' of vocabulary that are regarded as useful and which become part of the language, and
- (c) Social need: This is when language is used to suit the needs of the users as situations may demand, especially where the other language does not have lexical items that would express the views and concepts clearly enough.

Psycho-linguistic causes are internal, more deep-rooted and fundamental. They relate to the knowledge of a language and ability to use it effectively. These factors can be influenced by attitudes towards the language so that, where the attitude is negative, there is no desire to learn the language, to use it properly and to maintain and revitalise it. As a result, the language may die.

In line with Aitchison's framework, the prevalent use of Ndebele instead of Kalanga words by the Bulilima-mangwe community can be classified, on the basis of the reasons given by the Bulilima-mangwe community, as follows:

### *Socio-linguistic Causes*

1. Kalanga culture is not officially recognised in Zimbabwe.
2. Inter-marriage between Kalangas and Ndebeles has facilitated the spread of the Ndebele language, sometimes, at the expense of Kalanga.
3. The use of Ndebele has now become a habit and a fashion.
4. Kalangas are considered as a minority group.
5. Living with Ndebele speakers has resulted in Kalangas using the Ndebele language.
6. Kalangas are accommodating to other tribes who may not be flexible.
7. Ndebele has the advantage of being a national language.
8. Kalanga is not used in newspapers, is given very little time on national radio, and is not used on television.
9. Young people shun their Kalanga language, especially when in the city.
10. The interaction of city and country people and the constant movement of people between the two have diluted the Kalanga language in the face of the language of the dominant Ndebele group.

### *Psycho-linguistic Causes*

1. Children are taught Ndebele at school.
2. Most Kalangas are shy to talk in their language.
3. Parents teach their children Ndebele from an early age so that they master it well enough to pass it at Grade 7. Failing Ndebele would lower the quality of the children's Grade 7 results and make it difficult for them to secure a place for Form 1 at good schools. Children taught Ndebele at school use it at home, and thus, influence their parents also to speak Ndebele.
4. Kalanga is not taught in schools.
5. There are many Ndebele-speaking teachers in Bulilima-mangwe who cannot teach Kalanga.
6. Kalangas find it easy to learn other languages because of their positive attitude.
7. There are not many Kalanga books, therefore, children have no opportunity to practise reading their language.
8. Some Kalangas just despise their language.

With respect to causes 1, 4, and 5 above, research for this study confirmed that, with the exception of one school at Dombodema, Kalanga was not taught at Primary school level as stipulated by the Ministry of Education.

This is mainly because the schools are staffed by many Ndebele-speaking teachers who cannot teach Kalanga. Only at one school in Dombodema was Kalanga offered up to Grade 3 and, as a result, Grade 3 pupils in this school, who had been taught Kalanga by the same teacher from Grade 1, spoke fluent Kalanga with very few Ndebele lexical items. The rest of the pupils at the school were not taught Kalanga because the teachers for lower grades were not Kalanga-speaking. At another school, in Pfumtree, Kalanga books were stacked up in the library and remained unused mainly because Kalanga was not taught in class, since the majority of the teachers were not Kalanga-speaking.

On whether Kalanga can or should be preserved, most interviewees said that this was both possible and necessary and suggested the following remedies which are presented here in order of the frequency of suggestions given by the interviewees:

1. Kalanga should be taught in schools.
2. There should be books written in Kalanga and Kalanga literature should be developed.
3. Kalanga should be used on TV and given more time on radio.
4. Parents should speak Kalanga with their children at home.
5. Kalanga should be taught up to secondary school level.
6. More teachers of Kalanga should be trained.
7. Kalanga should be used in newspapers.
8. Kalanga should be the official language in Bulilima-mangwe District and be used in public offices.
9. Classes in the lower school grades in Bulilima-mangwe should be taught by Kalanga-speaking teachers.
10. Community projects and meetings should be conducted in Kalanga.
11. Kalanga culture should be respected.
12. There should be a Kalanga dictionary.
13. Kalanga should be used in church services.
14. A Kalanga New Testament should be used in church services.
15. A Kalanga Bible should be written.
16. Kalanga hymn books should be used for church services.
17. Kalanga novels should be written.
18. In compiling Kalanga vocabulary, help should be sought from Kalanga elders who were taught Kalanga in school.
19. Old Kalanga books which were used in school in the past should be revived and updated.
20. Young intelligent people should conduct research on the language and help to revive it.
21. Kalangas should be proud of their language.
22. Kalangas should work out strategies to revive their language.

23. Children should be taught Kalanga from an early age so that it becomes their first language.
24. Kalanga musicians should sing Kalanga songs.
25. Children should be given Kalanga names so that they feel proud of their language.
26. The current situation in which most Chiefs in Bulilima-mangwe are Ndebele speakers should be changed so that the majority of chiefs are Kalanga speakers in order to encourage people to use their language.

### Implications

The above findings strongly suggest that Kalanga is in danger of dying out as evidenced by the deterioration of knowledge of Kalanga lexis among the population of less than 20 years of age. Because most Kalangas can neither read nor write in their language, their values and norms, which are normally conveyed through lexical items, cannot be preserved in the written form. They are, thus, in danger of being forgotten with the passing away of the older generation. Unless parents teach their children Kalanga in order to ensure that Kalanga is the first language the children learn, and until Kalanga is taught in schools to consolidate the children's skills in the use of the language, Kalanga stands in danger of disappearing as a language.

Revitalising Kalanga requires a conscious decision on the part of the parents to promote Kalanga in the home. The Ministry of Education should put in place appropriate policies to facilitate the training of Kalanga childhood education teachers and then deploy them to Kalanga-speaking areas of the country. The Ministry would also need to monitor the implementation of the country's language policy. There is need to take into serious account the suggestions put forward by interviewees of this study if Kalanga is to be saved from dying as a language.

### Conclusion

As has been shown, Kalanga has become largely dominated by the Ndebele language and is in danger of disappearing unless steps are taken at the personal, district, and national levels to arrest the decline of the language and to revive it. The causes of the decline and what measures are necessary for the rejuvenation of Kalanga were clearly identified by members of the Bulilima-mangwe community who were interviewed for this study. While it is not unusual for members of one language group to desire to know another language for various reasons, among which, according to Cook (1991:1), are the need to identify 'with people who speak the language, [to get] a job . . . to take a fuller part in the life of one's own country, [to expand] one's literary and cultural horizons or [to facilitate] the expression of one's political opinions or religious beliefs', one should be conscious of when to

use one language and when to use the other. It is clear that when lexical items from one language are allowed to dominate another language, the result may be the decay of the dominated language. This is what is likely to happen to Kalanga if its domination by Ndebele continues unchecked.

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