

‘Urban Vernaculars’ in Search of Native Speakers: The Case of ciTumbuka Newscasters on the National Radio in Malawi.

Themba Moyo, University of Zululand,

Abstract

This article is primarily concerned with ciTumbuka as one of Malawi’s official languages, also the predominant language in northern Malawi. It argues that while a language of wider communication has continued to form the basis of most contemporary language policies in post-colonial Africa, ciTumbuka like other languages in Anglophone African states, is a product of colonial linguistics. The chosen or designated languages or their dialects were designed to suit colonial masters’ grand designs of evangelisation and colonisation. It becomes misleading to conceptualise, primordialise and present indigenous languages as if they were indeed authentic products of precolonial Africa. This study questions the continued inadvertent entrenchment of these past legacies into post-colonial Africa, which has resulted in much confusion, with the emergence of ‘urban vernaculars.’ Listeners on radio Malawi have seriously questioned the authentication of speech forms of the ciTumbuka aired in the news broadcasters and continue to raise the social legitimacy of the so-called indigenous ciTumbuka. Finally, the need for the standardisation of ciTumbuka along with the other official indigenous languages in the country is raised for use in early education as well as for the general public usage.

Key words: urban vernaculars, mixed codes, discourse elements, *lingua franca*

Introduction

During the colonial period in Malawi (1907-1964), ciTumbuka and ciNyanja were the only two indigenous languages that were used through out the country as instructional languages and also in the mass media. With the coming of Banda to power, 1964-1994, ciNyanja was renamed ciCewa and along with English played a diglossic monopoly and became the two institutional languages in high domains, where English was largely the language in high education and in all documentation. CiCewa became the symbolic national language and also the instructional language in early education in all the three regions. This was whether teachers and learners were proficient in the language or not. All teaching and learning materials were and are still produced in ciCewa in early education. This is in spite of there being six other indigenous languages elevated to official status in Muluzi era with his philosophy of Zinthu Zasintha (things have changed) after the first democratic elections in 1994.

Problems of the lack of standardisation of ciTumbuka and other official languages.

What we observe is that since Kishindo’s (1998) pioneer article on the need to standardise ciTumbuka and ciYao as languages of wider communication, along with other official languages after 1994, up to this time ‘the only language with an officially approved

standard orthography is *chiChewa*' (Kishindo, 1998:85). He (ibid) further noted that it was necessary at that time as it remains necessary now to provide orthographies of other official languages in teaching and learning contexts. Texts in schools would need to have a chosen harmonised and standard dialect. This is even if speakers of *ciTumbuka* resort to using their respective dialects in their respective communities. *CiTumbuka* has seventeen dialects (Vail, 1972). Similarly, it is important to standardise *ciTumbuka*, *ciYao*, *ciTonga*, *ciLomwe* and *ciSena* for their use in school textbooks but also in the mass media.

Given this situation where there are seven official languages in Malawi today, it bears noting that English and *ciCewa* are the only two languages with an institutionalised diglossic role and thus the ones that have been sufficiently developed and standardised. 'Linguists' like Emslie (1981) introduced considerable confusion where they attempted to write down the *ciTumbuka* language, which they only knew 'imperfectly and to which they brought the values of English and the Roman alphabet' (Kishindo, 1998:86). Such influences have given rise to a continuation of old colonial practices and also to the confusion in the printing press and thus in the way the present newscaster on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) present and read the news. This raises much confusion owing to their varying speech forms, which are a result of 'urban vernaculars.'

Urban vernaculars defined

'Urban vernaculars' are essentially a product of mixed codes with discourse elements and lexical items, drawn from different languages. These forms tend to borrow from an indiscriminate choice of the various dialects of *ciTumbuka*, as well as from other languages. This is all a result of the lack of a harmonised and non-standardised *ciTumbuka* that is presented on the national radio. In the absence of written texts in *ciTumbuka*, which is now forty years (1968-2008), since Banda decreed that *ciNyanja*, which he renamed as *ciCewa* became Malawi's sole symbolic indigenous national language, it is not surprising that this confusion is acutely embarrassing and bewildering to listeners to listen to the news read in *ciTumbuka* on the national radio. A similar argument could be made about other official languages, which are tokenly heard in the ten-minute slots of each news broadcasts. Thereafter, these official languages are heard no more in other educational or entertainment programmes. The two languages that predominate the air waves are *ciCewa* or English.

Languages and dialects spoken in northern Malawi.

Apart from *ciTumbuka*, which is effectively the northern region's lingua franca (Moyo, 1995; Matiki, 1997), other languages and dialects include *ciLambya* spoken by the Nthali in Citipa district. Sukwa is a dialect of Lambya from Sukwa Hills. *KiNyakyusa* is spoken on the tip of the border with Tanzania and is intelligible with *kiNgonde* spoken in Karonga. The seventeen dialects of *ciTumbuka* (see Vail, 1972; Kishindo, 1998:85) are largely spoken in Rumphi and Mzimba districts. The dialects of *ciTumbuka* are largely spoken in Rumphi and Mzimba districts. In Rumphi these include *ciNkhamanga*, *ciHenga* spoken in Luzi area, *ciPhoka* in the Nchena-cena-Livingstonia areas, Siska and in Citipa (Vail, 1972; Ethnologue, 2003). *CiTumbuka* is also spoken in the Eastern province of Zambia especially in Isoka, Petauke and Lundazi districts. The dialect of *ciTumbuka* that is spoken in Mzimba district today is referred to as *ciNgoni* (Mphande, 1979).

The other languages that are spoken in northern region are ciTonga in Nkhata Bay district and typical ciNgoni, which is spoken in Mperembe in Mzimba district. The latter is a variant of isiZulu. CiTumbuka was chosen by colonialists (1891-1964) as northern province's main language. For the period (1964-1994) Banda continued with the colonial language policy but deposed ciTumbuka as the instructional language in early education in northern Malawi and as a language for mass media on the radio and in the newspapers. In its place he instituted his home dialect ciCewa, which he promoted to the sole national language and the only instructional language in early education throughout the country.

The historiography of the Tumbuka-speaking people.

The Tumbuka-speaking people were long dominated by the *Balowoka* (Those who had crossed over) from Lake Malawi or Nyasa in Tanzania in the latter half of the 18th century. These established the Chikulamayembe dynasty in Rumphi district in Nkhamanga area and acted as a unifying force among the various Tumbuka-speaking people. It needs to be borne in mind that a continuum of what is referred to ciTumbuka today was spoken by these etho-linguistic groups. The second major event was the advent of the Ngoni, who settled in northern Malawi, having ran away from Shaka Zulu's wrath in the 1820s, during the *Mfecane*, (Vail 1983). These are northern Ngoni, whose language later came to be absorbed by ciTumbuka owing to their dwindling numbers. As a military group, the Ngoni, nonetheless, destroyed the unity of the Tumbuka-speaking peoples by force. For purposes of this discussion, the Tumbuka language, with time, came to absorb the Ngoni language, where the latter is essentially a dialect of isiZulu. Owing to the Ngoni conquering the Tumbuka, various dialect of ciTumbuka came to be spoken in Mzimba where the Ngoni also exerted a much powerful and dominant rule with a Nguni culture akin to Zulu culture, which they had imported from the Zulu in South Africa.

The Tumbuka migration into Rumphi district.

The Tumbuka emigrated from patrilineal areas in Southern Tanzania and North Eastern Zambia and adopted a patrilineal system of descent and inheritance. After they had settled in Nkhamanga area, they mixed with scattered Tumbuka-speakers, absorbed some aspects of Tumbuka and culture, which included their language and imposed on the local people some aspects of their own culture in the localised clan areas.

This is supported by linguistic evidence from Guthrie's (1967) data of proto-Bantu of 488 words, which contained Lambya and Tumbuka words (Vail, 1972:151). The Phoka group inhabited Nyika plateau and the fringe lands between Nyika plateau and the lakeshore. The Nkhamanga comprise the Mkandawires, Luhangas, Sowoyas, Kachales, Khungas and similar clan groups, which are all names that are well known in Rumphi district and these immigrants settled in Nkhamanga as their settlement area.

The Balowoka, on the other hand, came from Tanzania and intruded under the umbrella of Arab slave traders in ivory and leopard skins. They settled in Rumphi, which has become associated with their descendants, which the rise and dominance of the Tumbuka language in Nkhamanga and Hewe areas. With time, the Balowoka established an economic and linguistic unity over the Nkhamanga-Henga-Phoka areas, but this was not restricted to this

area alone as ciTumbuka existed in a continuum, with different dialects of its community speakers; e.g. the Nkhamanga dialect, the Phoka dialect, the Henga dialect in Bwengu and Luzi areas. These are today distinct dialects that mark each ethno-linguistic group and are not to be demarcated using economic hegemony alone or with linguistic boundaries which were erroneously created by missionaries and colonialists. Phokas have always insisted on calling themselves as Phokas. Similarly with Hengas as in Mwahenga, the one who rules these clans. In other words, the cited groups have never called themselves, Tumbukas. Chikulamayembe only became the ruling Mlowoka chief, on the basis of his economic importance and influence, which he had earned with the Arab ivory and leopard skin traders, and not linguistic or on any 'political position he himself held' (Vail, 1972:157).

For our concern with regard to the rise of 'urban vernaculars' of which the present ciTumbuka that is heard on radio Malawi is a case in point, there is clearly a myth that ciTumbuka was the only language spoken in northern Malawi, until 1994 when ciTonga was elevated to be yet a district language that is spoken in the northern region. We have cited other languages that are spoken in the region such as ciLambya, kiNyakyusa and kiNgonde. The last two are intelligible between them. This myth is referred to as the 'myth of simplicity ... of great oversimplification' (Vail, 1972:148).

What effectively happened is that Scottish missionaries, who were forerunners and protagonists of colonial administrators and their chosen 'linguistic scholars' such as Emslie treated African peoples as tribes (Vail, 1972:12). This term tribes implied 'some sort of unity based on what they saw and described as a language, covering ethno-linguistic groups, without identifying the various different speech forms.' Language was a strong vehicle of manipulating the natives. Erroneously, missionaries, colonialists with their commissioned 'linguists' assumed that the various African communities had a historical unity (Vail, 1972:145).

Such histories, it was assumed, were histories of ruling clans of the entire tribe as they saw it. A common language was thus to be a dominant criterion and they proceeded to classify the various ethno-linguistic groups as comprised of what they defined as one group. The central motive was obviously to achieve their intended goal of evangelisation, in the case of missionaries and colonisation, through divide and rule tactics, but where language was a key factor in implementing the overall control over natives. The British colonisation and its language policies often posed a serious threat to the development of the languages spoken in the north, just as in other parts of Malawi and elsewhere in Africa. It is amazing that some of these languages have had a greater capacity for self-presentation, in spite of the mission introduction and invention of the indigenous written word or the 'writability' of these languages as part of the colonial control. These languages must have developed their own hidden mechanisms to ensure that survival of their unwritten forms (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1993).

The simplicity and mythology of language mapping is crucially needed today to escape the assumptions that have been continued from old colonial legacies, which are linguistically and culturally false assumptions. The assumption of lumping the Nthali who particularly

are Lambya speakers, the Nkhonde, the Tumbuka in Rumphi, the Ngoni in Mzimba and the Tonga in Nkhata Bay as all Tumbuka-speaking people is fallaciously wrong. This is a complex story of many different groups and clans and not as simplistically presented. For example, the Tongas in Nkhata Bay district cannot be said to be Tumbuka-speaking. While Matiki (1997) observed that ciTonga is, nonetheless, intelligible with ciTumbuka, this is only correct in as far as this intelligibility is 'one-directional' as he points out, which is a little interesting. We would argue that the Tonga who understand some ciTumbuka are only those who sell their wares, bananas, cassava, etc, at Mzuzu market, which is predominantly Tumbuka-speaking. Naturally these traders have had to learn some ciTumbuka for commercial communicative purposes with their clientele, but there is hardly any intelligibility in the real sense of the word, as a two-way transactional communication.

There is hardly intelligibility between the Tongas in areas such as Lweya, Cinthece, Tukumbo and Dwambazi areas, or indeed in the entire hinterland beyond Lake Malawi and those from Nkhamanga in Rumphi district or those from Emfeni, Embangweni and Edingeni areas in Mzimba district. Those that understand a little ciTumbuka are Tongas from Lusangazi, Kavuzi and Chipimbinga area, which is within the continuum of the Tonga-Tumbuka languages.

From the illustration given above we note that the linguistic map in northern Malawi amounts to some gross distortion owing to colonial legacies which have contained to reign in most parts of post-colonial Africa. Missionaries schemed that the best way to civilise the indigenous people was through the 'Three Cs': Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation. They condemned indigenous cultures they came across as heathen and marked them for destruction (Mphande, 1996; Moyo, 2001). Mphande (1996) notes that in order to achieve their colonising mission and the setting up of British rule subsequently, missionaries, who were forerunners of British rule appropriated the natives' cultural forms of expression, particularly song. They incorporated traditional songs into the Church of Scotland practices:

Many songs and other forms of cultural expression were appropriated by Christian missionaries, 'exorcised' of their pagan traits, and reconstructed **In accordance with English prosody melody. They then were issued as church** hymns, with little regard by them to whatever had once regulated their prior use. Ingoma war songs thus found their places alongside popular English melodies in church hymnals (Mphande, 1996:93).

These tunes which were already popular among the colonised natives were exploited and used in the Church of Scotland congregations. This obviously suggests that missionaries saw flavour in African songs, which they converted into church hymnals.

Thus in order to convert natives to Christianity this was to be achieved through Christian literature. In this regard the Scottish missionaries started the Hetherwick Press at Blantyre

Mission in 1884. Hetherwick Press initially printed hymns through ciNgoni, which was initially the language of evangelisation. They appropriated Ngoni war songs and its culture and ensured that the native were 'civilised' in their own local language and through their own cultural expressions. The aim of this appropriation of Ngoni war songs was to align culture as a critical axis in the Christianisation and colonising mission within the Church of Scotland. The main purpose was to create an overarching image of a national culture, which through the colonialist indirect rule, would facilitate the proselytisation of the various ethno-linguistic groups. This conversation had the two aspects. The first was the conversion of Africans to Christianity and later the speech forms of the various languages and dialects of the native created the 'writability' of these languages in the colonialists' own orthography, which was markedly different from the speech form that northerners spoke.

In Nigeria missionaries came from neighbouring Sierra Leone and codified a diverse group of languages under the name, Yoruba, which is a Hausa word unfamiliar to the natives it purportedly described (Makoni, et al in press). Elsewhere, languages emerged as the interaction of professionals such as soldiers who were drawn from different ethnic groups. It would appear that a similar pattern pertains in central, southern regions of Malawi, particularly among the Yao, Lomwe, and Mang'anja ethno-linguistic groups as well as in other parts of Africa. Different speech forms exist among the Mang'anja who are Nyanja speaking and also the Sena, who could be argued have been lumped to the Mang'anja ethno-linguistic group as one tribe, therefore share a common language, ciNyanja within Malawi. The argument is thus that these linguistic maps were socially and historically constructed on the nature of colonial ideas about Africa, ethnicity and social processes, which were historically of colonial ideas about Africa. This is if we subscribe to the view that our conceptualisation of *linguageness* of indigenous language was and remains socially and historically constructed (Makoni et al in press).

The Africans in the entire northern province, as it was then called did not and do not all speak ciTumbuka, which means that there were not only Tumbuka speakers. The political entities that came about included speakers of other languages and dialects, which should not have been bounded and boxed (Ranger 1989). Ranger (ibid) has equally observed that in Zimbabwe where the two African languages have been projected as national languages (that is Chishona and isiNdebele), there are also other languages and their dialects. These include Kalanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Korekore and Ndau, etc. Indigenous African languages and their dialects in Zimbabwe were aligned according to missionary establishments, which included the Roman Catholic, the Dutch Reformed Church, the London Missionary Society, etc. These missionaries created bounded dialect zones, which were confined and homogenous communities.

Urban ciTumbuka

The emergence of the present ciTumbuka heard on the MBC is similarly enhanced by linguistic amalgams which have a tendency to mask ethnic identities in the current confused state of ethnic environments – what we note then is that colonial administrators constrained their linguistic identities to facilitate their aims: the spread of Christianity,

the development of commerce and what they called civilisation. The 'writability' of the ciTumbuka that they created through the Hethewick Press in Nyasaland (now Malawi) clearly socially and historically distorted the situation. The written language thus became very different from the natives' spoken variety.

What we hear of today on the MBC is 'urban vernaculars' of ciTumbuka, which is essentially a discrepancy between the actual language use, which is the reification of colonial linguistic heritage of created lexical items and mixed codes, which do not correspond to the ciTumbuka spoken out there in Rumphi largely and Mzimba districts.

From this contention we could safely argue that this is why Banda, Malawi's first president (1964-1994), who claimed that his home dialect ciCewa, which he elevated to symbolic and sole national language was a language that comprised various ethno-linguistic groups, through his language engineering policy of lumping the various distinct ethno-linguistic groups in southern Malawi: the Yao, Lomwe and Sena as Cewa, without their knowing as he publicly claimed (Chirwa, 1994/95).

The argument, therefore, is that the very languages that are called 'native' are products of intricate dialects between colonial and projects of knowledge and the formation of distinct group identities (Breckenbridge and Van der Veer, 1996) in Makoni (in press). In this construction of notions about language, and particularly about dialect of ciTumbuka, there emerged a close association between religion and language. This is as explained earlier on that the missionaries who were forerunners of British colonial rule in Nyasaland protectorate that was declared in 1891, had vested interests to carry out their presetylisation. They managed to achieve this after meeting resistance from the Ngonis. Eventually their evangelisation mission bore fruit by converting the Ngonis in Mzimba and Tumbuka-speaking people in this district through use of the Zulu Bible. This is because isiZulu as a language, which the earlier Ngonis spoke had, had achieved some fair amount of literacy. Their notions about language, therefore, were reified and assigned to bounded areas and confined to what they categorised as linguistically homogenous communities in northern Malawi. In line with their conceptions they created discrete dialect zones as 'frontiers' and developed written languages on widely scattered bases (Fardon and Furnis, 1994).

Much research, however, needs to be carried out, especially in Southern and central Mzimba and in northern Mzimba and in Rumphi among Mwamlowe, Mhahenga and Katumbi in order to establish the various ciTumbuka dialects that are spoken. Only when such an investigation is done into clan histories, could we be able to fully have an accurate picture of the ciTumbuka dialects that were and are spoken by the present Tumbuka-speaking peoples.

It seems insufficient to live and be contented with the current emergent urban vernaculars such as the one we are subjected to listening on the news broadcasts on radio Malawi. What clearly needs to be noted is that there is a distinct dialectical difference in the ciTumbuka spoken in various parts of Rumphi and that, which is spoken in Mzimba district, which also has various dialects. But owing to the Ngoni dwindling numbers as said above, they had to

intermarry with the Tumbuka whom they militarily subjugated. The balance of power with particular reference to ciTumbuka dialect spoken in Mzimba, which Mphande (1979) has referred to as ciNgoni, the original ciNgoni came to be absorbed by ciTumbuka. The result was that this balance of linguistic control began to tilt against the Ngoni in the 1880s. The intermarriages that occurred were, however, a one-way process (Matiki, 1997:445), where the Ngoni married Tumbuka women since the Ngoni regarded the Tumbuka as *wafu* (the conquered and thus subjugated people).

As much as possible, the Ngoni customarily insisted on marrying from clans which specifically included, among others, from the following: the Sibande, Nhlane, Nkosi, Mphande, Phakhati, Mkhaliphi, Mhlanga, Qaba, etc, and these clans assumed powerful positions as *indunas* (second in the ruling hierarchy) from the ruling Jere clan, who to date, assume the chieftaincy position of eight chiefs in Mzimba with their paramount chief called *Inkosi ya Makhosi, Mbelwa*, based at his headquarters in Edingeni.

As missionaries gained access to convert natives into Christianity through ciNgoni, since this was initially the language of conversion and of the Bible, this had considerable success owing to the importation of a Xhosa, civilian Koyi Mtusane, who was based at the Njuyu mission station. He was brought into Ngoniland by Robert Moffat of the Lovedale mission in South Africa, but his conversion of the natives through ciNgoni was only for a brief period, since ciNgoni was subsequently absorbed by ciTumbuka and much as a result of the described Nguni-Tumbuka mothers influence and spread their language through their children (Fraser, 1914).

However, different dialects of ciTumbuka exist among the seventeen dialects of ciTumbuka in Rumphu and Mzimba districts. In Mzimba alone, for example, these include the Ekwendeni–Kafukule–Mzlangwe dialect, the Embangweni–Edingeni- colonialists had a very rudimentary and if any, little knowledge, and were unaware of the intricate lexical differences and nuances in the various speech forms.

For example, in the Ekwendeni-Kafukule-Mzlangwe dialect of ciTumbuka today, speakers would say: *Nkhuruta*, meaning ‘I am going’ while in the Embangweni-Edingeni-Lundazi dialect they would say *Niruta*. Similarly, the word ‘utheka’ for ‘grass’ is the one that is used in the Ekwendeni-Kafukule-Mzlangwe dialect of ciTumbuka, whereas in the Embangweni-Edingeni-Lundazi corridor and also in the Jenda-Emfeni dialect, they say ‘utshani’ which is the same word that is used in the current isiZulu. It further needs to be mentioned that in Mpherembe, ciNgoni, a dialect that is very intelligible with isiZulu is still spoken today. This ciNgoni that is spoken in Mpherembe today is a politically symbolic language in Mzimba district, which is highly ceremonial such as in the installation of a Jere chief, and also in typical Ngoni weddings and funeral of traditional rulers. With reference to funeral observations typical Ngonis still bury their folks facing South Africa, where their forebears came from.

A misconceptualisation of ciTumbuka vis-à-vis other indigenous African languages.

In view of the foregoing discussion, we note that there is need for the false assumption of blanketing a continuum of various languages and dialects as belonging to a single tribe or ethno-linguistic group, which have given rise to 'urban vernaculars' such as a concoction of ciTumbuka. This is in the light of a continued colonial practices, which lumped the various ethno-linguistics groups into a single language and the mistaken continuation of such practices in post-colonial Malawi and other African states such as Zimbabwe.

This is essential as it reveals a complicated and complex picture of linguistic ecologies that have all along defied easy categorisation. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn of the outcries from the listeners of the spoken ciTumbuka on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), particularly after its demise of thirty-seven years (1968-2005) from being heard or read on the radio and print media in Malawi. Apart from Emslie, other anthropological 'linguists' in northern Malawi who were commissioned by missionaries and colonialists included T. Cullen Young, who wrote Notes on the History of the Tumbuka-Kamanga peoples and the History of the Tumbuka-Henga Peoples and the Ngoni of Nyasaland. Such texts as explained above only facilitated colonial rule (Brutt-Griffler, 2002) and saved 'to develop command over language in order to develop a language of command' (Makoni et al, in press). This was a kind of containment policy of limiting the spread of English, the established official language in British colonial Africa. The idea was not essentially to limit the English language as such, but rather to evangelise and control the natives as colonial subjects through a limited number of their created native language(s) in spoken and written form, where a common vernacular was necessary to achieve such colonial control, of divide and rule techniques. This was in accordance with Lord Lugard's Dual Mandate, which was used as the rulebook in British colonial Africa.

The ciTumbuka that we hear in the newsbroadcasts on MBC, is in search of speakers and legitimacy, as it is reduced to unanalysed categories without empirical investigation. This only calls for a linguistic-cultural legacy to be used in early education, in the mass media and to be preserved. This has profound ramifications on the use of this language in non-urban contexts as well as in the emergent urban vernaculars in urban areas.

The problematic situation in urban-vernaculars.

In the light of what we are witnessing today and in the absence of a substantial tradition of available written literary works within ciTumbuka, with the exception of old texts such as *Ciswamsango*, *Midauko* and *Kakuliro ka Mahara Mwabantu*, etc, very little has been written and read, if any, in ciTumbuka. The cited texts could only have been read for those literate in ciTumbuka who are now fifty five years old or so. These were basic readers from old standard three up about Junior Certificate level in ciTumbuka.

Research indications

Different languages or dialects have the central aim as basic communication modes. What happens is that these interlocutors code-switch into a shared rudimentary language to achieve communicative purposes. In dual-lingualism the argument is that interaction might take place in different language or dialects such as current speakers of urban vernaculars.

Research into code switching has shown that dual-lingualism, comes at a price. This might explain the various concoctions of emergent urban vernaculars that are aired on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation which is a far cry from the various rural varieties of ciTumbuka spoke in Rumphi and Mzimba districts. There might be need for such speakers to cross from one ethnic and social class to another. The situation might be that these urban vernaculars on the MBC are multi-layered and thus obviously different; those driven by consensus ideology of how ciTumbuka is supposed to be spoken or written. There is need, therefore, for a conceptual shift away from a code-driven language planning exercise towards a style-oriented one. It is only then that some light could be shed on insight of how ciTumbuka speakers arrive at an agreed meaning. This is even if they do not arrive at a meaning that is agreed upon, as a result of a shared code.

The ciTumbuka that we listen to on the news broadcast on the MBC today seems to be composed of an 'ensemble of varying sub-systems in contact and in process of permanent transformation and evolution' (Canut, 2002:39). It is not the ciTumbuka that one listened to in the mid 1960s, which was read by 'pure' ciTumbuka newscasters such as Chifwepo Chawinga from Rumphi, Manjawila Msowoya from Rumphi, Zaniwe Katumbi from Mzimba, Nyokase Madise from Mzimba district and Joyce Ng'oma from Embangweni in Mzimba district. The ciTumbuka that these radio announcers spoke could considerably be classified as 'pure' and largely suitable to a considerable number of ciTumbuka listeners out there in Rumphi and Mzimba districts. It reflected how the language was spoken in rural areas in their respective communities within Rumphi and Mzimba dialects. We would thus describe the one that the current newsreaders air on the MBC as of mixed linguistic and cultural codes, which are earnestly in need of legitimacy, as it does not reflect the speech, forms available in rural areas among Tumbuka speakers. As mentioned earlier on, there is need to investigate the current discourse for teaching and learning purposes and also for linguistic social justice and preservation of the language, which is the desire that it corresponds with the linguistic-cultural expression out there in the respective rural communities.

A similar scenario is what Banda observed of ciNyanja, when he arrived in Nyasaland in 1958. Following his pet project of promoting his home minority variant of ciCewa, to a national language and changed the name ciNyanja to ciCewa, he strongly felt that the ciNyanja that was spoken around was repugnant to his ear. He categorised and described this as anglicised 'chi-Mission or chi-Heaven or chi-Planter which was current in town.' (Short, 1972:273). As a result Banda became increasingly contemptuous of linguistic advisers and experts and appointed himself 'teacher' of proper Cicewa, where he further introduced the 'h' to reflect how his home dialect of ciCewa was heard. Previously, it was written as ciCewa or ciNyanja without an 'h' but he claimed that the correct form was the ciCewa.

Since then the ciNyanja orthography in Malawi became differently spelt from the ciNyanja spoken in Zambia, Mozambique or in Harare. He did not seek the advice of qualified linguists' as he felt that their views conflicted with his, which he always saw as correct. It was either his ideas or nothing (Dunduzu Chisiza in Short, 1972).

Concluding remarks

Through the presentation of historical accounts of the two main languages of influence in northern Malawi: the migration of the Tumbuka-speaking peoples and the Ngoni, this discussion has attempted to show that the notion of ciTumbuka as described and presented by missionaries and colonialists where they lumped all northerners as Tumbuka-speaking, was an erroneous product of colonial social and historical errors. A similar analogy could be made of other languages of wider communication in Malawi such as ciYao and ciLomwe. The latter is one of Malawi's official languages that very few have seen in print. Through illustration and discussion of the arrival of the Tumbuka and Ngoni in northern Malawi, we have shown that clearly five distinct languages have always existed up to this day in northern Malawi: ciLambya, kiNgonde, and kiNyakyusa are intelligible between them, but not the rest. This simplistic myth of the northern region being Tumbuka-speaking alone is a grossly simplistic besides being erroneous. It seems to be the result of such a misrepresentation, which has resulted in emergent urban vernaculars as in the case of the ciTumbuka that it is aired on the MBC today. There is, therefore, an urgent linguistic need to abandon early ethno-linguistic classification. Finally, there is need to standardise a chosen dialect of ciTumbuka for early teaching and learning purposes and also for other uses such as in the mass media. A similar need is required for other Malawian official languages. The language policy that Malawi has followed merely stepped into old colonial practices, which could at best be described as inward-looking (Matiki, 1997), as it fails to present a clear and accurate picture of the diversity of speech forms in each region. The ciTumbuka that listeners are subjected to listening in the news read on the MBC is based on these urban vernaculars, which are subjected and dependent on the whims of newscasters, which only continues to puzzle and embarrass radio listeners as to the authentication of these versions, in the absence of any empirical investigation to relate such speech forms to these of the Tumbuka-speaking communities. The question of reconceptualisation, authentication and standardisation of these speech forms can thus not be overemphasised.

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