

Tracing the Origins, Development and Status of Lozi Language: A Socio- Linguistics And African Oral Literature Perspective

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5.1 Abstract

The study traces the origin of Lozi language of the Western Province and other areas where the language is and was spoken since its origin is oblique or obscure. This study reviews a number of studies by different scholars who have different interpretations about the origin of Lozi language. Some allude to the fact that the Lozi language is a dialect of Southern Sotho, the language of the conquerors under Sebitwane. The Lozi people themselves claim that they were the first inhabitants of the plains and that they have always been there. They also point their ancestry to the union between Nyambe and the female ancestress Mbuyu. Others trace the Lozi origin to the Mwata Yamvo dynasty of the old Lunda Kingdom in the Katanga area of the Congo. Today, the Lozi themselves say that there is practically no Lozi who is pure Luyi and so they point their ancestry to Nkoya, Kwangwa, Subiya, Totela, Mbunda, Kololo among other languages. This can be attributed to intermarriages and dominance over small languages which they later assimilate hence failing to trace their own source. Many have come with their assertions on the origin and development of the Lozi originally called the A-Luyi or Luyana people. Lozi is spoken in many parts of Zambia and even beyond borders and it enjoys its status as the economic language of Western Province and one of the seven official languages on radio and medium of instruction in schools. It has also developed orthographically. These are some of the developments shown in the origin of Lozi language. The origin of the language is traced even in Angola, Zimbabwe as observed by Jacottet and Coillard that there is link between Shona and Siluyana but disputed by Fortune who says that there is no link between Siluyana and Shona. Jacottet points to Angola and not Congo but also disputed by Lozi people who deny any ethnological connections and say they understand Mbunda and various Angolan languages because of geographical proximity only.

5.2 Introduction

This article is drawn from the study conducted about the origins, development and status of the Lozi Language following contentious claims among some tribal groups occupying the Western Province of Zambia.

5.3 The Origin and Development of the Lozi language

Lozi language is one of the languages widely spoken throughout Western Province of Zambia and is one of the seven national languages of the country. The population of its native is estimated at more than one million people but many speak and understand it as their second or third language. It is also spoken in the Portuguese territory of Angola, Namibia mainly Caprivi strip, Botswana, and parts of South Africa. The Western Province is divided into six administrative districts namely: Mongu, Senanga, Kaoma, Sesheke, Kalabo and Lukulu. As noted earlier, this language has an extra ordinary history and different scholars have advanced varying explanations on the origin of Lozi language. For instance, Mutumba (1973) claims thus:

The name Lozi (usually spelt Rotse by the missionaries, travellers and early administration and hence Barotse Province instead of Buluzi Province) is a collective name for several small tribes of similar cultural and linguistic character who comprised the Lozi Kingdom. The exact origin of this collective name is unknown although there are a number of traditions surrounding it. It is invariably said that the Ma-Lozi were the founders of the present ruling dynasty in Buluzi, and their name was passed on to cover the whole group of tribes which they absorbed into their state (Mutumba 1973:5).

There is the tendency among the people of Western Province to call the royal family and the aristocracy as 'Ma Lozi' as opposed to the common people. To better understand the origin of Lozi language, we look at the origin of the term Bantu. According to Wilhelm Heinrich Immanuel Bleek (1827-1875), the term Bantu is traced to South African languages other than the languages of the Bushmen and Hottentots, which means people. It is rendered 'abantu' in the Nguni dialects and bato in Tswana. Nowadays, Bantu refers to languages which have a common ancestry. This is due to the fact that language is dynamic and hence changes in time and space. It is worth noting that, although the term was coined to refer to a family of languages, it also applies to peoples speaking Bantu languages as 'mother tongues' and to anything thought to be characteristic of such peoples; hence such phrases as Bantu culture. According to Greenberg, the Bantu people and languages originated in and spread from the Cameroon-Nigeria border area. According to Guthrie, the Bantu people and languages originated in and spread from the Congo basin. Most scholars favour Greenberg's Theory (Bryant, 1965). What Guthrie says in essence is that Proto-Bantu was spoken somewhere in the Congo Basin. Fage and Oliver (1962), in their short History of Africa, expressed a view similar to Guthrie's Theory. They suggested that the earliest Bantu speaking people may have been hunters and fishermen and moved along the Congo and encountered and adopted the cultivated plants of their earliest traders and migrants from the South East Asia.

The assertion by Greenberg and Guthrie could be true to some extent because of proximity between the Cameroon-Nigeria borders and Congo Basin where Bantu are believed to have originated from. It could be concluded that Lozi could have come from one of these areas. Another variant of tradition; however, says that the people known as 'Ma-Lozi today were originally known as 'A-Luyi' or 'Aluyana' until the 19th Century. In the middle of the 19th Century, the 'A-Luyi' or 'Aluyana' were conquered by the Makololo, a people of Sotho stock from the South, and it is alleged that the A-luyi were given the name of 'Ma-Lozi' by the Makololo. Both traditions seem feasible but the latter emerges more strongly when it is realised that the core of the Lozi Kingship which struggled to remain unchanged despite the Makololo influence and other external forces, uses as an official language at court a language known as 'Siluyana'. Moreover, there are numerous tribal groups in Buluzi who were there long before the Makololo invasion and whose dialects are very closely related to Siluyana. In this study both names, A-luyi (or Luyana) and Ma-Lozi, are used (Mutumba 1973).

The name Lozi is of comparatively recent origin. Formerly the people were known as Aluyi or Aluyana. The Lozi people, who are the dominant tribe in the region of North-Western Rhodesia usually called Barotseland live in a great flood plain since the Luyi liberated their country from the Kololo, but retained the Kololo language. Rotse has become Lozi, in accordance with regular phonetic changes of *r* to *l* and *s* to *z*. The surface similarity of Rotse with Hurutshe, the parent stock of the Tswana, and with Rozwi, the dominant 'shona' group has led some anthropologists to relate the Luyi to these peoples in the South. But the Lozi's own legends and the ethnological linguistic and ethnological evidence undoubtedly give them a northern origin, probably in a region

of great watershed plains cut by rivers, somewhere about Lake Dilolo (Colson and Gluckman 1968:1)

The Lozi themselves say they are kin to the Lunda. They do not claim descent from the great Lunda King Mwatayambo, but they say they and the Lunda descended from Mbuyawambwa, the daughter and wife of god Nyambe. According to Yukawa (1987), one main reason why Siluyana lost its vocabulary can be observed as follows;

The Luyana language of and some other languages were spoken around there, but there was no one which could be the common language of the area partly because of large linguistic or dialectal difference. The language of the conquerors' (Sikololo) came to be spoken not only between the conquerors and the conquered but also for the mutual communication among the latter... Although the period of Makololo government was less than forty years, Sikololo survived even after the upset was complete. One of the reasons for its survival must be that many Kololo women remained alive and became wives of chiefs or headmen who had led the struggle to expel the invaders. As is well known, linguistic influence upon infants is stronger from females than from males, and this tendency is much stronger in societies which practice polygamy. The central part of Luyana people took Sikololo, now known as Silozi, as their mother tongue, and a tribe called Lozi was formed (p.78).

The central dialect of Siluyana (Luyi), Sikwangwa and many more are still spoken by a considerable number of people as their mother tongue. According to the Silozi people, it is a dialect of Southern Sotho by nature but it suffered a great change with regard to its pronunciation and vocabulary, and the reason why is because those who received the foreign language were more numerous than those who brought it. The origin and development of Lozi seem to be oblique as stated earlier. They claim that they were the first in the plains and have always been there and that they were the result of a union between Nyambe and the female ancestress Mbuyu. According to Mutumba (1973) observes as follows:

White points out that the legend of divine and autonomous origin contrasts with long-established histories of the foundation of the Lozi state given by other chiefly dynasties such as the Kazembe Lunda of Luapula, and the Ndembu Lunda of the North-Western Province. According to those; the Lozi rulers belong to one of many Zambian dynasties whose origins are traced back to the Mwatayambo dynasty of the old Lunda Kingdom in the Katanga area of the Congo. Similar contradictions of Lozi claim for an autonomous origin.

Indeed there are lots of speculations on the origin of Lozi language and the Kaonde people. According to Colson and Gluckman (1968:4), one of the sections of the Kaonde claims to have been driven from the Barotse plain by the Luyi, but the Lozi do not have this story. They tell of related people who were 'produced' about the same time as themselves in the plain, where God made time as themselves in the plain, were God-made wives and begot the tribes. Some of them like the Lozi, were born to him by Mbuyawambwa, daughter of one of the wives by Him. These were the Kwangwa, Kwangwa, Kwandi, and Mbowe. Other people such as the Imilangu and Ndundulu were living in the West. These people peacefully accepted Lozi domination. Indeed, the tale is that it was they who showed the Lozi what a good thing chieftainship was by presenting part of the catch at a fishing battue to the sons of Mbuyawambwa. This is one of the claims the Lozi people have even today and from the reason why they subdued the Kwangwa, Kwandi and many other dialects and their origin is backed by one section of Kaonde.

The founders of the present Lozi dynasty seem to have incorporated at least two distinct groups, one in the north and another in the South. Apparently, neither group posed a centralised hierarchical political structure before the rise or arrival of the present Lozi dynasty. All seem to have lived in groups under small autonomous chieftaincies which had to be conquered and incorporated individually into the Lozi state. In both the north and the south a number of these earlier tribes are still remembered and their descendants are still identifiable, and by the same names in most cases. In the north they include the Muenyi, Imilangu, Ndundulu, Mbowe, Liuwa, Simaa, Makoma and Nyengo. In the south were the Subiya, the Mbukushu, Toka, Totela, Shanjo and five among groups are still existing today. The two groups, northern and southern, appear to have been quite distinct from each other not only in geographical terms but also ethnically if the present division is anything to go by. The southerners, judging their language today were closely related to the Tonga groups in the present Southern Province (Mutumba, 1973).

Thus what I call the Barotse nation, as against the ruling Lozi tribe, has always consisted of many different tribes. These tribes have intermarried considerably and nowhere has this been more marked than among the Lozi themselves. Though the Lozi look down on 'Mang' etc' the foreigners, despite their chiefs' disapproval, the Wiko are the only people whom they were reluctant to marry. Members of all other tribes but chiefly children were in the old days brought to Loziland by the chiefs. They were called maketo (honoured by choice of the Mahapiwa (the seized). They were placed in various villages in the plain, where they grew up as Lozi and are today indistinguishable from them. Another category was people captured in war, Batanga (serfs) with whom also the Lozi intermarried. Today the Lozi themselves say that there is practically no Lozi who is pure Luyi. Almost all of them point without shame to Nkoya, Kwangwa, Subiya, Totela, Mbunda, Kololo and other blood in their ancestrey (Colson and Gluckman, 1968). This is an indication that the Lozi people fail to trace their origin and development but their origin and development as seen above is as a result of intermarriages, dominance over small languages which they later on assimilated hence failing to trace their own source. Many people have come up with their assertions on the origin and development of the Lozi people originally called the A-Luyi or Luyana people.

In view of the lack of a full survey of the languages of the Buluzi and the neighbouring areas in South –West Zambia and Eastern Angola, one can only pick up pointers here and there. At various times and by various people, a number of connections between Luyana and other languages have been suggested. The earliest suggestion was by the missionary Coillard who linked the Siluyana to the Shona languages. He claimed that the Lozi perfectly understand my little vocabulary of Sinyai (Shona), in fact, it is the same language as the Serotsi. It is difficult to see how Coillard arrived at this conclusion. The Lozi do not understand Shona, even at the court where Siluyana is spoken. This fact is corroborated further by the fact that Professor Fortune, a fluent Shona speaker, carried out a preliminary study of Siluyana in Buluzi in 1963 and he did not make any comment about similarities between Shona and Siluyana. It appears therefore that speculation of a linguistic link between the Lozi and the Shona, descendants of the Rozwi is as weak as the speculation of a physical link between the two groups. Much more suggestive is belief by E. Jacottet, who, after studying texts of Siluyana in 1896-1901 contradicted Coillard and pointed out that the Aluyi could not have come from Mashonaland because the language which they speak allows one to set them in same group as the tribes of the West. Jacottet, however, does not trace Siluyana to the Congo, but points to the South-west of Angola. He claims that Siluyana is closest of Gerero, Ndonga and Kimbundu and in most common with them possesses assimilation of vowels. If Jacottet is right, this suggests an Angolan link for the early Luyana groups (Mutumba,

1973). But Lozi people deny any ethnological connections and say they understand Mbunda and various Angolan languages because of geographical proximity only. Interestingly a similar conclusion was reached through a comparative study of Siluyana and the Mbunda language. Stirke and Thomas (1916) observes: “A casual glance through the Silui and Simbunda vocabularies will reveal many similarities which go to prove that the two tribes have been in conjunction both closely and for a long period while the even more numerous dissimilarities equally prove the two tribes to be of quite separate and distinct origin” p. 6.

5.4. The Status of Lozi language

The status of Lozi language has steadily improved in many areas such as the areas of written dictionaries, prose, poetry, drama, newspapers books for pupils. After English, the government selected seven local languages (Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga) as regional official languages. These languages are officially in education, broadcasting, health communication, Literacy campaigns, government newspapers and films. They are taught in schools alongside other content subjects (Ohannesan and Kashoki, 1978; and Nkolola, 1997). This indicates how Lozi language has improved in its status alongside other languages. Lozi is not only spoken and taught in Western Province but also in Southern Province where it was once taught in Livingstone and Mambova Districts and spoken in Mazabuka.

Today, Lozi language represents Western Province as a language of broadcaster. Mostly, it comes twice nearly each and every day and takes a maximum of four hours on daily basis and on Monday it has six hours of broadcasting period. Again Lozi language enjoys its status as the language of the province spoken and even understood by all dialects in the province of Western. Transactions are easily done in Silozi hence the economic language of the Province. The language also enjoys the status in form of songs (poems) such as ballads of chiefs, panegyrics, language of social expression and political expression. Today, Lozi language enjoys its status in form of orthography after heated controversies about the right way to spell. In fact there are no right ways of spelling, there are merely different ways as observed even in other languages but there are accepted or conventional ways of spelling set up by committees under Ministry of Education. Although as already stated above, the committees set up to device standardized orthography officially approved for education, did not set out originally to reach agreement across all the languages involved. The achievements of these committees are remarkable in the broad range on which common ground was struck. Because of their significance and salience these are briefly discussed in this section by (Kashoki 1990:71).

5.5 Short and Long Vowel

In the past, of the 7 languages, only Tonga seemed to have observed in writing the distinction between short and long vowels with any consistency. As a result of these measures ten vowels (except Luvale) where vowel length does not apply will not be reflected in the orthography.

Vowel length in the stem of a word

<u>short</u>	<u>long</u>
Lozi: mata ‘run’	maata ‘strength’

Vowel length as a result of fusion

Lozi: saanda from sa + anda’

These are some of the few examples on how Lozi has improved its status. Although the orthography does not use any tone mark when writing Lozi words which neglects tonal figures, they can be underlined. Some writers have tried to improve in this area of tonal as example given such as: a consonant a vowel and a homorganic nasal are shown by C,V and N respectively. X stands for a string of phonemes of any length; V or X means that the vowel or all the vowels contained in X are high toned. V or X on the contrary, means that the vowel or high only immediately after a high toned vowel, we shall not put on it even if it is pronounced high (Yukawa, 1987).

From these few examples, Lozi use official orthography or conventional orthography accepted by all. This is how it has developed its status, among the dialects. It is almost impossible to achieve all the aims set out above with one kind of orthography having studied the structure of Zambian languages, we can see which kinds of orthography suits languages best hence Lozi enjoy the status of orthography based on Lozi words alone. The area where it has developed is through loan words from other tribes and English. The other status that Lozi language enjoys most is that it is not only a language of medium of instruction but it is also taught as a subject from Primary School to Secondary and High Schools. By doing so, the danger of clipping and destroying the pupils productive powers by forcing him/her to express him/herself in language foreign to himself and to the genius of his/her own race will be reduced hence Lozi enjoy status in this area.

But it is difficult to achieve this status of Lozi language as medium of instruction and a subject in class. In carrying out this task, language is seen as an important factor alone makes internal communication difficult and even only a number out of several languages is selected for limited communication and education purposes. The problem is not minimized; indeed in some respects it is made more complicated as when it introduces conflicts as to which should be included and which ones should be left out. Language in other words, is seen as one of the more important ties which bind people to their pre nation social cultural units. It is also seen as a factor for which, if left unmodified, can perpetuate and intensify sectional cleavages (Mwanakatwe, 1973).

5.6 Statement of the problem

Even if lozi has been one of the languages widely spoken amongst major tribal groups such as the Kwandi, Nkoya, Kwangwa, Totela, Shanjo, luyana, subiya, Nyengo, Mbunda, and Kaonde found in Western Provinces of Zambia, it has been unclear to who are the true owners of the language. Hence this has been a contentious issue among various tribal groups in Western Province of Zambia. It is the above scenario that prompted the conducting of the study to trace the origins and development of Lozi language.

5.7 The purpose of the study

The study was aimed at tracing the origins and development of lozi language among various tribal groups of Western Province of Zambia.

5.8 Methodology

This was a qualitative research utilising a descriptive survey design as the purpose was to get information in its natural setting. According to Kombo and Tromp (2009) the purpose of a descriptive survey is to give a detailed description of the state of affairs as it exists. A descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by either interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals Orodho, 2003 as cited in Kombo et al (2009). Therefore,

going by the above justification, employing the above design in tracing the origins and development of the Lozi was appropriate.

5.8.1 Sampling design / Sample

The sample design for the study was non-random purposeful sampling. Under non-random purposeful sampling the study utilized the purposive and snowball sampling. The sixteen elders drawn from eleven tribal groups took part in the study was identified using both purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is used by qualitative researchers to select individuals, groups and settings that maximize understanding of the phenomenon (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Hancock et al, 2009). In this study's context purposive sampling was best suited due to its advantages with the use of people knowledgeable and in a position to identify the required participants for the study. These included Kings' representatives drawn from four big districts namely Mongu, Senanga, Kalabo and Kaoma in Western Province of Zambia.

Snowball sampling was also suited for this study because it is appropriate in identifying population that are not easily identifiable or accessible to participate in an interview (Kombo Tromp, 2009; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). In this study snowball helped me to identify a hidden population of elders drawn from eleven tribal groups of Western Province.

5.9 Methods of Data Collection

This study only utilised qualitative methods. However it is worth mentioning that the study's utilization of qualitative methods was not an attempt to dismiss the relevance of quantitative methods of data collection. This is because the questions to be addressed in the study must guide the selection of the methods (Dawyer, 2001; Silverman, 2001; Kitchin and Tate, 2000). "Qualitative methodologies explore feelings, understandings and knowledge of others through various means. They also explore some of the complexities of everyday life in order to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping our social worlds. It is also a means of understanding people, enabling us to engage in depth with the lives and experiences of other" (Limb and Dwyer 2001; Hancock *et al*, 2009). It is the above justifications that prompted the study to utilize the qualitative methods as appropriate to the study. The study utilized the following qualitative methods of research: in-depth interviews and personal narratives. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and analysed thematically.

5.10 The findings of the Study

This study set out to trace the origins and development of the Lozi language. The study sought to address two pertinent questions. These were: Who were the true Lozis? In this study which was carried out, the primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and a personal narrative from 16 elders drawn from eleven tribal groups from four big districts of Western Province. Of the sixteen interviewed participants in the study that was carried out thirteen (13) said that lozi has been created from the Sikololo a Southern Sotho Language which occupied for a period of more than 25 years during the first half of the 19th Century. They further said that was Lozi developed after the overthrow of the Kololo reign under Sekeletu. Yet three participants said that there is no tribe called Lozi but it is just a lingua franca that borrowed heavily from Kololo and Luyana. Amongst the sixteen people interviewed eight said that no one can claim to be a true Lozi as the lozi language was more influenced by Kololo Vocabulary. Hence the person who can claim to be

a typical Lozi speaker is one who speaks Siluyana as it was the only language of Western province before the invasion of the Kololo people from South Africa.

5.11 Discussion of the findings

The study found that lozi has been created from the Sikololo a Southern Sotho Language which occupied for a period of more than 25 years during the first half of the 19th Century. The findings of the study that was carried out also established that there is no tribe called Lozi but it is just a lingua franca that borrowed heavily from Kololo and Luyana. The study further revealed that no one can claim to be a true Lozi as the lozi language was more influenced by Kololo Vocabulary. The findings in the study also indicates that the only people who can claim to be true Lozis are those who speak Kwangwa, Nyengo, Makoma, Imilangu, Mambowe, Kwandi and Masima. Lastly but not the least the study also established that the person who can claim to be a typical Lozi speaker is one who speaks Siluyana as it was the only language of Western province before the invasion of the Kololo people from South Africa.

5.12 Conclusion

This article based on the study that was carried out concludes that concerns the problem of the origins of the Luyana language. While it is possible to suppose that Siluyana was introduced by the new dynasty; the extent to which this language is spoken among the early groups, who seem to have had no other languages, makes such a positive less likely. It can be concluded that Lozi's origin remains oblique or in oblivion as researchers contradict each other. Lozi language is believed to have been distorted by their Makololo conquerors whose language Sikololo came to be spoken and it is alleged that the A-Luyi were given the name of Ma-Lozi by the Makololo. Therefore, the origins and development of lozi language can be traced from both the Luyana or Luyi and Sikololo as it borrowed from both languages.

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