

# INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE VITALITY IN SOME PARTS OF NORTH EASTERN BOTSWANA

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## Abstract

The main objective of this article is to investigate the level of language vitality in Botswana on the basis of patterns of language use, transgenerational language transmission, language attitudes and ethno-cultural identity. We specifically look at the patterns of language use amongst six communities in north eastern Botswana, namely, Lesoma, Nata, Kachikau, Kazungula, Pandamatenga and Gweta. Our analysis draws insights from Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and Lewis and Simons' (2009) Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS). Our results demonstrate language use preferences and how minority languages in Botswana are faring in relation to the national language (Setswana) and the *de jure* official language (English), and in relation to one another. In the main, our findings confirm previous impressionistic observations that Setswana dominates public, official and social domains while the ethno-linguistic vitality of community languages is very low because they have no official status, have limited intergenerational transmission and remain restricted to private domains like the home and cultural activities.

**Keywords:** language vitality, patterns of language use, minority languages, intergenerational language transmission, language policy, Botswana

## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this article is to empirically examine the state of language vitality in Botswana on the basis of patterns of language use, transgenerational transmission, attitudes and ethno-cultural identity. Botswana is a multilingual and multicultural country in which about 28 languages are spoken (Batibo, 2005, p. 138). The 28 languages are classified into three main groups, namely, Bantu, Khoesan and Indo-European (Anderson & Janson, 1997, p. 110). Some of the minority language communities have been more resilient than others because of the geographical conditions that provided barriers and protection against assimilation and loss of ethnicity and language (Barnard, 1988, p. 12). Such languages include Ikalanga, Nama, Naro, and Ju/'hoansi.

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The triglossic situation in Botswana, whereby English, Setswana and minority languages co-exist, has put minority language groups under the socio-economic and socio-cultural control of other groups. Although more than eleven minority languages, i.e. languages with relative demographic inferiority, limited public functions and lack of social status or prestige (Batibo 2005, p. 51), of Botswana, including Ikalanga, Nama, Naro, Otjiherero and Shekgalagari, have developed orthographies and literacy materials (see Mathangwane, 2014, p. 297), these languages as well as other minority languages in the country do not feature anywhere in the language policy of Botswana, which favours English and Setswana as languages for use in education and administration. The prestige that Setswana enjoys as the national language of Botswana gives the false impression that there is only one language (Setswana) spoken as a mother tongue in Botswana. The language policy of Botswana has kept the other languages, mainly minority languages, on the periphery of the socio-economic sphere (Mogara, 2011, p. 5). There have been a number of voices calling for official recognition and use of minority languages in education in the country (Republic of Botswana, 1993, 1994; Nyathi-Ramahobo, 1994, 2000; Youngman, 1997; WIMSA, 2000, 2004; Motshabi & Saugestad, 2004; United Nations, 2006; Vision, 2016).

Although the National Policy on Education, which was published in 1993, recommends that all the languages of Botswana be used as media of instruction in schools, twenty five years after its publication, Setswana remains the only indigenous language that enjoys official recognition. Also, although the recommendations of the Revised National Policy on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1994) did not recognize other indigenous languages for inclusion in the curriculum, the National Commission on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1993) acknowledged the disadvantaged position of learners from the marginalized groups, especially the speakers of minority languages (The terms 'marginalized' and 'minority' can be used interchangeably in this context, given that marginalized groups are also speakers of minority languages and vice versa). Since the attainment of political independence in 1966, the media of instruction in schools have been English and Setswana.

With the expanding hegemony of Setswana as the dominant and primary language of most Batswana, especially the youth, the use of the other languages and cultures is diminishing very drastically (Batibo, 2006, p. 67). The situation has made minority language users to use Setswana in most of the domains in favour of their languages. Previous studies such as Batibo (1997, 2005), Chebanne (2004), Chebanne and Nthapelelang (2000), among others, show that this is due to the fact that many young people speak Setswana and English as their primary languages.

This investigation presents an assessment of the most current language

situation in Botswana by showing the degree to which the various languages are endangered at their various levels. We determine the future trend, the rate of loss and the type of measures that could be adopted to arrest the situation so as to safeguard the multilingual and multicultural ecology of the country and the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of the nation. Grenoble and Whaley (2006, p. 3) note that “assessing and understanding language vitality is a complex enterprise... yet the degree of language vitality is the basic indicator used to determine the appropriate type of language revitalisation program”. It is hoped that our findings will inform the process of developing and implementing appropriate language vitalisation programmes in Botswana.

## **2. Data collection and analysis procedures**

The data discussed in this article were collected in June 2015 when members of the Department of African Languages and Literature at the University of Botswana went on a field trip to the Chobe and Nata areas. The data were collected from different respondents of different ages specifically in the communities of Kachikau, Pandamatenga, Lesoma, Kazungula, Nata and Gweta. Most of the respondents understood Setswana and English thus making the data collection process easy. The Snowball sampling method was employed in the collection of data in all the communities. This sampling method was found appropriate for the present study because the researchers needed to identify few informants within each community who would then be used to identify others members of the community that could provide the information needed by the researchers.

The data were calculated in simple percentages. To arrive at a particular percentage, the number of respondents who spoke a given language in a given community was divided by the total number of respondents who spoke the languages in a given domain and multiplied by one hundred. For example, if in a given community twenty-one respondents used Setswana, fifteen used Shuakhwe and nine used Serotsi for cultural events, then the percentage of respondents who used Setswana was calculated as  $21/45 \times 100 = 47\%$ , that of respondents who used Shuakhwe was calculated as  $15/45 \times 100 = 33\%$  and that of respondents who used Serotsi was calculated as  $9/45 \times 100 = 20\%$ . Thus in terms of percentage, Setswana ranks highest as the preferred language for cultural events.

The data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which consisted of questions eliciting responses in connection with patterns of language use, language attitudes, intergenerational language and cultural transmission and ethnonymic identity.

### 3. Theoretical framework

This section presents the analytical framework that informs the analysis of data in this article. The framework is largely based on the insights drawn from the report of the International Expert Meeting of the UNESCO programme on *Safeguarding of Endangered Languages* held in Paris-Fontenoy, 10-12 March 2003 (Colette et al., 2003). The Experts at this meeting noted that no single factor alone can be used to assess a language's vitality and its need for documentation. They suggested nine factors that must be taken into consideration when assessing the level of language endangerment and vitality, namely:

- Intergenerational language transmission  
The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to another (Fishman, 1991). Endangerment can, therefore, be ranked on a continuum from stability to extinction. In this study, we identified the language(s) which our respondents use to communicate with their children, the language(s) that the children use to communicate with their parents or guardians, the languages that their children learn at home before school and the ones they use at school in order to assess the level of the language(s) intergenerational transmission.
- Absolute numbers of speakers  
It is impossible to provide a valid interpretation of absolute numbers, but a small speech community is always at risk. A small population is much vulnerable to decimation than a large one. A small language group may also merge with a neighbouring group, losing its own language and culture.
- Proportion of speakers within the total population  
The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is a significant indicator of language vitality, where the group may refer to the ethnic, religious, regional or national group with which the community identifies.
- Loss of existing language domains  
When, with whom, and the range of topics for which a language is used directly affects whether or not it will be transmitted to the next generation.
- Response to new domains and media  
New areas of language use may emerge as a community's living conditions change. While some language communities do succeed in expanding their own language to cater for new domains, most do not. Schools, new work environments, new media, including broadcast, media and the internet, usually serve only to expand the scope and power of the dominant language at the expense of endangered languages. If communities do not meet the challenges of modernity

with their language, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatised.

- Materials for language education and literacy

Education in the language is essential for language vitality. While some communities maintain strong oral traditions and do not wish their language to be written, literacy is directly linked with social and economic development. Books and other teaching and learning materials on all topics for various ages and language abilities are needed.

- Official status and use: Government and institutional attitudes and policies

A government may have an explicit language use policy for its multiple languages. At one extreme, one language may be designated as the sole official language of the country, while all others are condemned.

- Community members' attitudes towards their own language

Members of a speech community are not usually neutral towards their own language. They may see it as essential to their community and identity and promote it; they may use it without promoting it; they may be ashamed of it and, therefore, not promote it, or they may see it as a nuisance and actively avoid it. Positive attitudes towards a language help in improving the language's vitality.

- Amount and quality of documentation

The type and quality of existing language materials can be an indicator of the vitality of a language. Of central importance are written texts, including transcribed, translated and annotated audio-visual recordings of natural speech.

Since the focus of the study is on the assessment of the vitality of some indigenous languages of Botswana, we adopted Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and its expanded version by Lewis and Simons (2009). The main tenet of Fishman's (1991) model is a continuum of 8 stages for assessing language loss or disruption. This model is useful as the main objective of this paper is to investigate the level of language vitality on the basis of patterns of language use, transgenerational language transmission, language attitudes and ethno-cultural identity. Fishman (1991) presented the GIDS in such a way that Stage 8 indicates near total extinction while Stage 1 indicates least disruption, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Fishman's (1991) 8 stages for assessing language vitality (Obiero, 2010, p. 204)**

Grid level	Description
1	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.
2	The language is used for local and regional mass media and government services.
3	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.
4	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education.
5	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form throughout the community.
6	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.
7	The child bearing generation knows the language well-enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children.
8	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grand-parent generation.

Fishman (1991) noted that a transition from Stage 8 to Stage 1 was an important step in keeping any endangered language alive. Similarly, Obiero (2010, p. 204) observed that “in assessing the endangerment or vitality state of any given language, the descriptive levels postulated by Fishman are hoped to provide a basis”. Lewis and Simons (2009) suggested an Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) with 13 levels which are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. The EGIDS levels as presented by Lewis and Simons (Obiero, 2010, p.210)**

Level	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and government services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe

5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely Endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely Endangered
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically Endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of the heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

The GIDS and the EGIDS models that are outlined above are closely related to Giles, Bourhis and Taylor's (1977) ethnolinguistic vitality model which assumed that linguistic communities with high ethnolinguistic vitality were more likely to survive as viable, distinct and collective groups in intergroup contexts, and can initiate and sustain bottom-up language political change (Giles et al., 1977; Ndlovu, 2015). This study draws analytical insights from these models to assess the vitality of languages in the north eastern parts of Botswana.

#### 4. Data analysis

This section presents the findings of this study. We examine the levels of language vitality in six communities of north eastern Botswana, namely, Lesoma, Kachikau, Kazungula, Gweta, Pandamatenga and Nata.

#### 4.1 Lesoma

Our findings show that five languages are spoken in the Lesoma community: Shuakhwe, Hiechware, Serotsi, Setswana and English. The patterns of language use in this community demonstrate that these languages have different levels of ethnolinguistic vitality as demonstrated in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Patterns of language use in the Lesoma Community**

Language ⇒	Shuakhwe	Hiechware	Serotsi	Setswana	English
Domain ↓					
<b>Family</b>					
Rs with spouses*	77.4%	0%	14.3%	14.3%	0%
Rs with children	12.5%	0%	37.5%	50%	0%
Rs with parents	88.3%	16.7%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with siblings	83.3%	0%	16.7%	0%	0%
<b>Official</b>					
Gov. offices	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	66.7%	0%
Kgotla	28.6%	7.1%	21.4%	42.9%	0%
<b>Cultural activities</b>	44.4%	0%	22.2%	33.3%	0%
<b>Social</b>					
Church	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%	0%
Shop	11.1%	0%	44.4%	44.4%	0%
Shebeen	41.7%	0%	33.3%	25%	0%
Rs with friends	36.3%	0%	36.3%	27.3%	0%
<b>Literacy</b>	YES 0%		NO 100%		
<b>Frequency</b>	62.5%	12.5%	25%	0%	0%

\* In Table 3 and elsewhere, Rs = Respondents

From the patterns of language use in the Lesoma community, it is clear that in the family domain, Shuakhwe is the preferred language between spouses (77.4%). This pattern of language use may be attributable to two possibilities. First, in conservative societies the family is a closely knit unit. Second, spouses tend to have a closer relationship and more frequent contact with each other than with other members of the family. The use of a language by parents creates a conducive environment for the acquisition of the language by their children which ensures that intergenerational

transmission takes place. However, contrary to expectation, the use of Shuakhwe by respondents who are parents to communicate with their children is very minimal (12.5%). Respondents in the Lesoma community prefer to use Setswana (50%) rather than Shuakhwe to communicate with their children. It is evident that there is a gradual decline in the transmission of Shuakhwe to children by parents probably due to the influence of Setswana as the national language. In the light of the EGIDS' levels of vitality, Shuakhwe is in level 6b suggesting that it is vulnerable. It is vulnerable and threatened because the 'child-bearing' generation (parents) knows the language well but only some of those belonging to that generation are transmitting the language to their children. Other factors that demonstrate that Shuakhwe is endangered include its limited use at government offices (11.1%) and at the Kgotla (28.6%). Safe languages have a heavy presence in these sociolinguistic contexts. Shuakhwe is also of low sociolinguistic status as it is rarely used in social domains such as the church (0%), shops (11.1%) and with friends (36.3%).

In Lesoma, Setswana is the dominant language. As is the situation nationally, Setswana has the highest level of vitality among all the indigenous languages. It dominates government business and local politics (at the Kgotla). In government offices and at the Kgotla, Setswana, respectively, takes 66.7% and 42.9% of the functional space. The other 33.3% is shared equally between Serotsi, Hiechware and Shuakhwe. These observations suggest that Setswana is the safest of all the languages that are used in Lesoma. According to Lewis and Simons' (2009) levels of language vitality, Setswana is safe because it is used in education (Level 1) and is used for local media (Level 2). The fact that literacy in this language is transmitted through the educational system shows that it is safe (Level 3). Setswana is also safe because it is used vigorously orally and in written form by all generations and it is learned by children as a first language (Level 6a). It also has a heavy presence in social domains such as the church (71.4%) and entertainment places (25%). This is a reflection of the national sociolinguistic configuration where Setswana dominates in almost all spheres of life.

Table 3 above also shows that Serotsi and Shuakhwe are critically endangered since their use among families and in social domains is very limited. Although the preferred language used in cultural activities is Shuakhwe, Setswana was found to exert pressure on Shuakhwe by virtue of its status as the national language. In Lesoma, there is no literacy in minority indigenous languages. While the respondents indicated that they are not literate in all the languages spoken in their community, one would have expected them to have some appreciable level of literacy in Setswana since it is the main medium of instruction in all the primary schools in this community.

#### 4.2 Kachikau

In the Kachikau community, the languages that are spoken are Shiyeyi, Sesubiya (Chikuhane), Setawana, Setswana and English. We are aware of the fact that Setawana is a dialect of Setswana but the speakers interviewed insisted that they should be recognized as a distinct group from Setswana and this is the approach that we adopt in this article. Table 4 below illustrates the levels of vitality of each of these languages.

**Table 4. Patterns of language use in the Kachikau Community**

Language ⇒ Domain ↓	Shiyeyi	Sesubiya/ Chikuhane	Setawana	Setswana	English
<b>Family</b>					
Rs with spouses	22.2%	33.3%	11.1%	33.3%	0%
Rs with children	12.5%	25%	12.5%	50%	0%
Rs with parents	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	0%
Rs with siblings	33.3%	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	0%
<b>Official</b>					
Gov. offices	0%	0%	0%	63.6%	36.4%
Kgotla	0%	14.3%	0%	85.7%	0%
<b>Cultural activities</b>	14.3%	14.3%	0%	71.4%	0%
<b>Social</b>					
Church	0%	10%	0%	70%	20%
Shop	0%	36.4%	0%	63.6%	0%
Shebeen	0%	28.6%	0%	71.4%	0%
Rs with friends	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	42.8%	0%
<b>Literacy</b>	YES 40%		NO 60%		
<b>Frequency</b>	0%	25%	0%	75%	0%

From the patterns of language use in the Kachikau community, it is clear that in family, official, cultural and social domains, Setswana is the preferred language. Clearly, generational transmission and official and unofficial usage is high in Setswana. For example, Setswana is used between respondents and their children

50% of the time. This shows that the language is safe as it is used orally and in written form by all generations and is acquired as a first language by children. In government and local politics (at the Kgotla), Setswana is used at a rate of 63.6% and 85.7%, respectively. This shows that the language is very safe and far from endangerment. This is not surprising as the dominant status of Setswana is guaranteed officially by the constitution of the country.

There is a tie between Sesubiya and Setswana as preferred languages between spouses (33.3%). There is also a tie between Shiyeyi and Setswana as the preferred languages of use between respondents and their parents (37.5%) but it will only be a matter of time before Setswana takes over all the domains of the other indigenous languages spoken in the Kachikau community, given the status and influence of Setswana. This puts Shiyeyi and Sesubiya at risk. Intergenerational transmission is important for a language to improve and sustain a high level of vitality. Literacy in the indigenous languages is significantly low in Shiyeyi, Sesubiya and Setawana. This demonstrates that the languages are critically endangered. Production of literature, cultural products like novels, poems and official status can be used to rescue these languages from endangerment. Given the status of Setswana as a national language and the pressure it is exerting on the other indigenous languages, it is not surprising that it is used more frequently (75%) than the other languages spoken in the Kachikau community.

#### 4.3 Kazungula

The languages that are spoken in the Kazungula community are Sesubiya, Setswana, English Serotsi and Ikalanga. While Serotsi and Ikalanga are mentioned as languages that are spoken in the Kazungula community, none of the respondents investigated in this study use them. The non-use of Serotsi and Ikalanga in the Kazungula community may be due to the dominance of Sesubiya, Setswana and English in the community.

**Table 5. Patterns of language use in the Kazungula community**

Language ⇒	Sesubiya	Setswana	English	Serotsi	Ikalanga
<b>Domain ↓</b>					
<b>Family</b>					
Rs with spouses	40%	60%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with children	33.3%	66.6%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with parents	85.7%	14.2%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with siblings	85.7%	14.2%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Official</b>					

Gov. offices	9%	54.5%	36.3%	0%	0%
Kgotla	20%	70%	10%	0%	0%
<b>Cultural activities</b>	71.4%	28.5%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Social</b>					
Church	9%	54.5%	27.2%	0%	0%
Shop	10%	60%	30%	0%	0%
Shebeen	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Rs with friends	40%	50%	10%	0%	0%
<b>Literacy</b>	YES 16.6%		NO 83.3%		
<b>Frequency</b>	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%

As shown in Table 5 above, Setswana dominates conversations between respondents and their spouses (60%) and between respondents and their children (66.6%) in the Kazungula community. This could be explained by the fact that spouses may have come from different language groups - so they opt for the common language - Setswana and, as a result, this is the language that is passed on to their children (intergenerational transmission). Setswana is used widely by all generations and is vigorously transmitted to future generations suggesting that it is far from being endangered. Sesubiya dominates conversations between respondents and their parents (85.7%) and siblings (85.7%).

However, the fact that Sesubiya has limited presence in official domains like government offices (9%) and the Kgotla (20%) shows that it is vulnerable and endangered. Languages that are safe from being endangered are those that are used for local and regional communication, used in the education system, written and vibrantly transmitted from one generation to another. Respondents and their siblings who speak Sesubiya converse in this language (85.7%) and with their parents too (85.7%). Sesubiya also dominates cultural activities (71.4%). The nuances of a culture are best communicated in the first language, since language is a carrier of culture.

That Setswana dominates official communication at government offices and at the Kgotla is not surprising since this is a mirror image of the national linguistic landscape where it dominates all spheres of life (see Letsholo, forthcoming, for a similar observation). Setswana dominates social activities such as the church

(54.5%), shops (60%), and communication between friends (50%) partly because it is a common language among people from different linguistic backgrounds - local and foreign.

#### 4.4 Gweta

The languages that are spoken in the Gweta community are Setswana, Danisi, Nambya, Ikalanga, Shuakhwe, English and Ndebele. Our findings show that Ndebele, Shuakhwe and Ikalanga have a limited presence in the Gweta community.

**Table 6. Patterns of language use in the Gweta community**

Language ⇒	Setswana	Danisi	Nambya	Ikalanga	Shuakhwe	English	Ndebele
<b>Domain</b> ↓							
<b>Family</b>							
Rs with spouses	28%	36%	28%	0%	4%	4%	0%
Rs with children	60%	16%	20%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with parents	13.6%	40.9%	40.9%	0%	4.5%	0%	0%
Rs with siblings	17.3%	43%	26%	9%	4.3%	0%	0%
<b>Official</b>							
Offices	84%	0%	0%	0%	0%	16%	0%
Kgotla	91%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0%
<b>Culture</b>	25%	37.5%	25%	4%	4%	4%	0%
<b>Social</b>							
Church	78%	0%	11.1%	5.5	0%	0%	5.5%
Shop	80%	0%	12%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Shebeen	46.4%	25%	28.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with friends	31.6%	21%	42%	0%	2.6%	2.6%	0%
<b>Literacy</b>	YES 23%			NO 77%			
<b>Frequency</b>	24%	36%	28%	8%	4%	0%	0%

Danisi appears to be the preferred language between respondents and their spouses. This language is used by respondents and their spouses (36%) more than Setswana (28%). However, between respondents and their children Setswana (60%) trumps Danisi. This scenario seems to suggest that there is more intergenerational transmission of Setswana than Danisi. The fact that respondents speak Danisi with their spouses more than they transmit it to their children suggests that the language is definitely endangered. Setswana features more in communication with the children although Danisi and Nambya also show up minimally. When respondents communicate with their parents, Danisi and Nambya are preferred to Setswana. In official and social domains, except with friends, Setswana is the preferred language; 84% in government offices and 91% at the Kgotla. As mentioned earlier, this could be explained by the fact that Setswana is the national official language in Botswana.

It is surprising, however, that English, which is minimally spoken in offices and at the Kgotla, does not feature in the church. In addition, Ndebele, Ikalanga and Shuakhwe, feature minimally in social domains and do not feature at all in official domains suggesting that they are severely endangered. A possible reason for this state of affairs may be that the local church is populated by locals only. Literacy in local languages is very low. It is surprising that in spite of the pervading influence of Setswana, Danisi has a higher frequency of usage than the other languages spoken in the Gweta community.

#### 4.5 Pandamatenga

In the Pandamatenga community six languages compete for functional space, namely, Setswana, Nambya, English, Serotsi, Ndebele and Sesubiya.

**Table 7. Patterns of language use in the Pandamatenga community**

Language ⇒	Setswana	Nambya	English	Serotsi	Ndebele	Sesubiya
<b>Domain ↓</b>						
<b>Family</b>						
Rs with spouses	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with children	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with parents	57.1%	42.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with siblings	57.1%	28.5	14.2%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Official</b>						
Offices	75%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Kgotla	75%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%

<b>Cultural activities</b>	66.6%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Social</b>						
Church	66.6%	0%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%
Shop	85.7%	0%	14.2%	0%	0%	0%
Shebeen	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rs with friends	75%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	0%	0%
<b>Literacy</b>	YES 33.3%			NO 66%		
<b>Frequency</b>	66.6%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

In the Pandamatenga community, the dominant language in almost all the areas of use is Setswana. The dominance of Setswana is seen in social, official and cultural domains. It has the highest rate of intergenerational transmission because it is the only one used between respondents and their spouses (100%) and between respondents and their children (100%). It also dominates communication between respondents and their siblings (57.1%). Nambya is used between respondents and their parents (42.8%) but less than Setswana. Surprisingly, English, Nambya, Serotsi, Ndebele and Sesubiya are not used by respondents when they communicate with their spouses and children. Ndebele and Sesubiya do not feature at all in any of the domains investigated, even though some respondents claimed that these languages are among those they use in the Pandamatenga community. This may be due to the dominance of Setswana, Nambya and English in the community. Equally surprising is the fact that none of the languages spoken by respondents in the Pandamatenga community is used at the shebeen, a place where people visit to have some liquor.

Setswana and English dominate official domains at 75% and 25%, respectively. However, it is interesting to know that Setswana is more prevalent than English at government offices. Setswana is used for cultural activities (66.6%) in an area where one would expect that Nambya would be preferred (33.3%). Literacy in the local languages is low (33.3%). Setswana has a higher usage frequency in this community. Clearly, all local languages spoken in Pandamatenga, except Setswana, are severely endangered.

#### 4.6 Nata

Languages that are spoken in the Nata community are Shuakhwe, Cirecire (Xaise), Thimbukushu, Ikalanga, Setswana, Serotsi and English.

**Table 8. Patterns of language use in the Nata community**

Language ⇒	Shuakhwe	Cirecire	Thimbukushu	Ikalanga	Setswana	Serotsi	English	
Domain ↓		/Xaise						
<b>Family</b>								
Rs with spouses	35.7%	21.4%	7.1%	0%	35.7%	0%	0%	
Rs with children	10.5%	10.5%	10.5%	0%	68.4%	0%	0%	
Rs with parents	47.1%	23.5%	5.9%	0%	23.5%	0%	0%	
Rs with siblings	33.3%	22.2%	5.6%	0%	38.9%	0%	0%	
<b>Official</b>								
Offices	0%	0%	0%	0%	93.7%	0%	6.3%	
Kgotla	5.9%	5.9%	0%	0%	82.3%	0%	5.9%	
<b>Cultural activities</b>	47.1%	23.5%	5.9%	0%	23.5%	0%	0%	
<b>Social</b>								
Church	12.5%	6.2%	0%	25%	56.3%	0%	0%	
Shop	0%	6.2%	0%	0%	87.5%	0%	6.3%	
Shebeen	5.9%	11.7%	6.2%	5.9%	70.6%	0%	0%	
Rs with friends	27.3%	13.6%	4.5%	0%	54.5%	0%	0%	
<b>Literacy</b>		Yes 0%	No 100%					
<b>Frequency</b>	33.3%	13.3%	6.7%	0%	46.7%	0%	0%	

Shuakhwe and Setswana are the preferred languages between spouses (35.7%). Cirecire and Thimbukushu are rarely used between spouses. Most respondents use Setswana (68.4%) with their children and rarely use their mother tongues. This is because of the social status associated with the language. Thus, the rapid shift to Setswana is intensely fast tracked by its prestigious status, expanding domains of use and its national role. This suggests that Setswana remains the only means of intergenerational language transmission in this community. Thus, the minority languages of this community are threatened, vulnerable and endangered. In terms

of the EGIDS, they are in levels 6b and 7. Shuakhwe is extensively used between respondents and their parents (47.1%) and between respondents and their siblings (33.3). This is an indication that the language is still vibrant in the home and in cultural activities. Respondents who speak Cirecire also use their language with siblings.

Respondents who speak Thimbukushu rarely use their language with their siblings (5.6%). The dominant languages used between respondents and their siblings are Shuakhwe (33.3%) and Setswana (38.9%). The dominant language used between respondents and their parents is Shuakhwe followed by Cirecire and Setswana. Respondents rarely used Thimbukushu with their parents. Shuakhwe, Cirecire, Thimbukushu and Ikalanga do not feature anywhere in government offices. The preferred language in government offices is Setswana followed by English. The dominant language used at the Kgotla meetings is Setswana. Consistent with its national status, Setswana is safe in this community in particular and nationally in general. Shuakhwe, Cirecire and English are rarely used. Ikalanga and Thimbukushu are not used in official domains at all. Shuakhwe is the dominant language used in cultural activities followed by Cirecire and Setswana and then Thimbukushu.

It is clear that the respondents preferred their mother tongues for cultural and identity reasons, but needed Setswana for socio-economic advancement, particularly to give them access to school, the wider world and paid jobs. The dominant language used in the church is Setswana followed by Ikalanga, Shuakhwe and Cirecire in that order. At the shops, the dominant language used is Setswana followed by Cirecire and English. Setswana is the dominant language used in shebeens followed by Cirecire, Thimbukushu, Shuakhwe and Ikalanga, which are the least used. The dominant language used between respondents and their friends is Setswana followed by Shuakhwe and then Cirecire. Thimbukushu is the least used. Setswana is frequently used in the Nata community followed by Shuakhwe and Cirecire. Thimbukushu is the least used. Serotsi is not used in the Nata community in any of the domains investigated, even though some respondents claimed that it is one of the languages they use with their family and friends. Surprisingly, literacy in minority languages is low in the Nata community.

## **5. Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, this article investigates the levels of ethnolinguistic vitality in six communities of north eastern Botswana, namely, Lesoma, Kachikau, Kazungula, Pandamatenda, Gweta and Nata. This is a linguistically rich area in Botswana. The languages spoken in these areas which we identified and investigated are English, Setswana, Shuakhwe, Hiechware, Serotsi, Shiyeyi, Sesubiya or Chikuhane, Ikalanga, Nambya, Danisi, Ndebele, Cirecire or Xaise and Thimbukushu. English

and Setswana are the only official and national languages respectively in Botswana while all the others are treated as minority languages that do not have official status.

Our findings indicate that English is not vibrantly used in the communities that we investigated. It should be noted that although English is not vibrantly used in the communities investigated this does not make it an endangered language, since it is protected by its official position. English is the main language of official communication, education, business, media, religion and sports. In terms of the EGIDS parameters, English is safe because it is the language of international, regional, and national communication and trade. Literacy in the language is transmitted through the educational system. Thus, English in Botswana satisfies the requirements of Levels 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the EGIDS.

Setswana is also far from endangerment because, like English, it is protected by its national/official status. Our findings show that it dominates government and Kgotla business in most of the communities that we examined in this study. It is safe partly because it is a cross-border language that is officially recognised in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Consequently, it has been promoted and developed in these neighbouring countries. It is well-studied and described, with large volumes of technical and creative literature written in and about it. Literacy in Setswana is transmitted through the education systems of both Botswana and South Africa. According to the EGIDS's levels of assessing levels of ethnolinguistic vitality, Setswana is safe. It satisfies the requirements of Levels 1, 3, 4 and 5. As mentioned earlier, it is a national language that is used in many domains and performs a range of functions.

Languages such as Shuakhwe, Hiechware, Serotsi, Shiyeyi, Sesubiya or Chikuhane, Ikalanga, Nambya, Danisi, Ndebele, Cirecire or Xaise and Thimbukushu are treated as minority languages in Botswana because they have limited presence in secondary domains, such as government offices and the Kgotla. They are not protected by the constitution of Botswana. As noted by Ndlovu (2015, p. 368), "groups which are reduced to minority groups risk exclusion and usually assimilate easily to the hegemonic groups, especially in contexts where divisions or amalgamations are engineered to come up with more convenient and governable administrative units or regions and to facilitate nationalism through hegemonic languages". The hegemony of Setswana has caused the low ethnolinguistic vitality of minority languages in Botswana. It is, however, noteworthy that Ikalanga, Nambya and Ndebele, including Tswana, are considered "officially recognized languages" of Zimbabwe (see Government of Zimbabwe, 2013, p. 17). While these languages are used orally and transmitted to future generations in Zimbabwe, they are not safe in Botswana because they are not officially recognised; they are not used in the educational system of the

country and lack research and publishing in and about them.

The dominance of Setswana in the areas where minority languages are spoken has resulted in large scale language shift from these minority languages to Setswana. This is a kind of internal colonialism where Setswana is acting as a ‘killer’ language. The hegemony of Setswana in relation to other indigenous languages has led to loss of affinity and loyalty towards minority languages. In sum, many socio-historical factors such as lack of official recognition, limited intergenerational transmission, lack of research and publishing in and about the languages and illiteracy in the languages militate against the maintenance or improvement of the ethnolinguistic vitality of these minority languages. Thus, our observations concerning the hegemony of Setswana in relation to other indigenous languages confirm Ndlovu’s (2009) argument that linguistic imperialism has very little to do with whether a language is foreign or indigenous. This is common in most postcolonial plurilingual African countries. The minority languages of Botswana fall in the Levels of 6b, 7, and 8b of the EGIDS, which suggests that they are vulnerable and critically endangered. Since these minority languages still have some speakers, we cannot classify them as dormant or extinct languages.

## 6. Conclusion

From the patterns of language use in the six communities investigated in this paper, the following conclusions can be made: The patterns of language use in the six communities studied can be taken as a mirror image of the linguistic situation in Botswana given the extraordinary influence of Setswana (cf. Arua and Magocha 2002). Except in the Kachikau, Kazungula and Pandamatenga communities, English plays a comparatively minor role in official and social domains, even though it is the *de jure* official language of Botswana. But even in the aforementioned communities, the status of English is still low in comparison to Setswana and some of the minority languages. This may be due to the fact that the communities are predominantly rural, removed from the capital or major cities where English is mostly used in official discourse. Loyalty of speakers to many of the minority languages in the different communities is on a steady decline in many domains, including primary domains such as the family and culture, as many minority language speakers are shifting to Setswana, the national language, mainly for socio-economic reasons (cf. Letsholo, 2009; Batibo & Smieja, 2000).

There is also a steady decline in the transgenerational transmission of the minority languages spoken in the six communities investigated, as Setswana appears to be the preferred medium of communication between parents and their children. This is a serious indicator that there is little hope of the survival of these minority languages in the distant future. Some of the minority languages, such as

Shuakhwe, Shiyeyi, Sesubiya, Danisi and Cirecire, are struggling to stay afloat in such primary domains as the family and culture, in the face of an influential and threatening language – Setswana. However, it will only be a matter of time before these smaller languages are overrun by Setswana unless some deliberate and drastic measures are taken by government and the speakers of these languages to halt their downward slide into extinction or oblivion. Essentially, our findings confirm previous impressionistic observations by scholars such as Batibo (2005), Batibo and Tsonope (2000) and Batibo and Smieja (2006) that Setswana dominates public, official and social domains while community languages remain restricted to private domains like the home and cultural activities.

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