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A Study On ' Soli ' Language As 'Endangered' Due To The Use Of Other Languages In Lusaka Province

Clenedy Mutoza
Name of the Guide- Dr Sumathi .K. Sripati
Dmi-St.Eugene University
Zambia

Abstract- Economic disparities lead to an increasing monetization of young people's relationships, driving them either into a fragile flux of multiple partners or out of intimate engagements altogether. Taking this 'dissonance' between sonic representations and social relations as a point of departure, in this work I explored the ways in which young Freetonians position themselves at the junction of desire and reality. I juxtaposed various life and love stories of youths with the fantasies they invest in love music. In so doing, I discussed the complex relationships between affect, exchange, deprivation and the strictures involved in attaining social adulthood. The proliferation of music in Sierra Leone is confined in youth's involvement in it. I argued that it is within the experiential gap between the consumption of a representation and the desire to live (up to) that representation that Freetown's youth rework their horizons of possibilities. A qualitative research tool was used to collect data, precisely an unstructured interview method, since the questions call for answers that the respondents must express their opinions. The research further highlighted the types of lyrics composed by these youth, types of listeners, educational status of artists and listeners, the challenges faced in the music industry, the transformation felt within the industry, contributions and perceptions on the new phenomenon. The general populace greatly benefits from industry. Youths use music to relieve tension and boredom, provide a creative outlet, help take control of their emotions or mood, form identity and as entertainment or distraction.

Keyword: Youth, Music, Song, Industry, Eastern Freetown, Involvement, Proliferation, Sociological Study.

I. Chapter One
Introduction

1.0 Introduction

According to Batibo ,2020 , 'A decrease in the number of languages spoken in the world has been reported in by various scholars' . Brezinger 2023 and Sommer 2018, attribute this decrease to language death. This Case Study will examine the effects of other languages on soli language. A case study of Manyika area in Chief Nkomesha Mukamambo 11 in Chongwe District.. This chapter presents the background of the study by looking at the problem statement, objectives, research questions and the significance of its scope. It also presented definitions of key terms that will be used in the study.

1.1 Background of the study

The Soli language of Zambia ,Manyika area under Chifteness Nkomesha Mukamamba 11 - a member of the Bantu Botatwe subgroup of Bantu—finds itself imperiled within Lusaka Province by the pervasive spread of dominant languages such as Bemba, Nyanja, and English. Globally, half of the world's roughly 7,000 languages are

projected to disappear within this century, victims of urbanization, state education systems, and media dominance as stated by, (Crystal, 2021; Nettle & Romaine, 2021). UNESCO's framework for assessing language vitality highlights nine factors—intergenerational transmission, speaker numbers, domains of use, and state support among them—that collectively measure a language's risk of extinction (UNESCO, 2025). Under these criteria, Soli exhibits shrinking intergenerational use, minimal presence in education and public life, and virtually no representation in print or digital media, placing it squarely in the "threatened" category.

In words of Batibo,2020, reveal that Soli once served as the primary vernacular of one of Lusaka's original ethnic communities, with speaker estimates around 34,000 in the early 2021s. Nonetheless, the language has never been officially recognized within Zambia's education policy, and even local radio programms , Soli is absent. Whereas neighboring Bantu Botatwe languages such as Tonga. and Lenje benefit from modest documentary efforts and some school-based Furthermore, Mufwene, 2019, stipulated that ' Soli has been largely neglected by both government institutions and academic researchers.'

This institutional vacuum accelerates language shift as younger generations perceive Soli to have limited utility and prestige.

Comparative global examples underscore how macro-level policies and socio-economic incentives precipitate language erosion. In the United States, fewer than 150 of the nation's pre-contact indigenous languages remain viable, with most confined to elders due to English-only schooling and media (Hinton & Hale, 2019). Australia's Aboriginal tongues have contracted dramatically under English dominance and historical assimilation policies, leaving only a handful of languages with any substantial speaker base (McConvell & Thieberger, 2019). Canada's Cree and Inuktitut communities struggle against English and French bilingualism, compounded by the legacy of residential schools that disrupted traditional transmission (Hinton & Hale, 2019). New Zealand's Māori narrowly escaped extinction through landmark revitalization measures—Te Kōhanga Reo immersion preschools, Māori-language broadcasting, and legal recognition—which reversed intergenerational breakdowns (King, 2019). In Norway, Sami languages endured centuries of Norwegianization before gaining limited institutional support; despite this, many Sami dialects remain moribund (Hasselbrink, 2017). India's tribal languages, lacking formal status and often unwritten, face marginalization as Hindi and English dominate education and employment sectors (Masica, 2020).

Within Africa, analogous dynamics play out in multiethnic nations where regional lingua francas eclipse minority tongues. Nigeria's dappled linguistic landscape sees smaller languages yield to Hausa, Yoruba, and English as urban dwellers pursue perceived economic advantages (Bamgbose, 2020). South Africa's Ndebele and remnant Khoisan languages have contracted in the face of English, Afrikaans, and Zulu's socio-political clout Mesthrie, 2020. languages find themselves squeezed between major languages leading younger speakers to abandon ancestral vernaculars (Osire, 2020). In the case of Kenya, policies have been put in place to save endangered local languages. In 1967, for that matter, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) started

producing books to be used in teaching mother tongue alongside English in primary schools. The mother tongues were to be used as languages of instruction in lower primary schools. However, very little if any has been achieved through education policies based on the fact that most Kenyans of the current generation treat foreign languages as languages of prestige - worth being used in daily communication at the expense of mother tongues (Ogone, 2020). Teaching of mother tongue in primary schools, as reported by Ogone (2020) and Wa Mberia (2025), has also been interfered with by introducing an accommodating kind of teaching where the indigenous national language is used in lower primary schools to take care of non-native learners in particular schools within a region. Introducing Cinyanja Language in lower primary schools in Lusaka province has a negative impact on the use of Soli Language .The language under study, is included among mother tongues whose survivals have been threatened by dominant indigenous or foreign languages (See Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger,nd ed. by UNESCO, 2020). As noted by Kembo – Sure ,2023 ,Soi language is spoken by the Basoli people whose native lands in Lusaka are: Manyika and Rufunsa'.

The Soli people are Bantu speaking people who came from West Africa with other bantu speaking languages. Soli has been classified as an endangered language as stipulated by , Mhando ,2023 . According to the UNESCO (Moseley, 2020), Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, Soli is one of the vulnerable indigenous languages in Africa. As previously discussed, this classification is based on the fact that the language is spoken in a certain restricted domain particularly in homes ,and few areas of Chongwe District. Globally ,many tongues endure without documentation under its French-English bilingual framework, foreshadowing loss (Echu, 2022). Senegal's rural Serer and Pulaar communities cede ground to urban Wolof, which dominates trade and popular culture (Diop, 2020).As noted by Kiango & Mbaabu,2019 , Zambia's national embrace of Nyanja has fostered unity but inadvertently sidelines other local languages lacking formal support.

Lusaka's rapid urban expansion over the past two decades has forged a linguistic ecology hostile to minority languages. Migrants from rural districts adopt dominant lingua francas—initially Bemba or Nyanja for marketplace communication, then English for formal education—which relegates Soli to private, home-only use among older speakers (Mwanza, 2025). The exclusive medium of instruction in Zambian schools is English, effectively erasing mother-tongue literacy and instilling the belief that educational and professional success hinge on English proficiency (Bradley, 2023). Compounding this, Soli has no presence in local broadcasting or online platforms, which deprives younger generations of exposure to their heritage language in domains they inhabit most—social media, music, and television.

Crucially, Soli's intergenerational transmission has weakened as parents choose languages they believe will afford their children broader social mobility. UNESCO's vitality assessment places Soli at a low score for "community attitudes" and "domain of use," indicators that often presage a shift from "threatened" to "shifting" or even "moribund" if unaddressed (UNESCO, 2025). The absence of government-backed mother-tongue education or official recognition further disincentives its use beyond familial contexts. This diminishment of functional utility accelerates identity

dissociation among youth, who increasingly distance themselves from Soli in favor of perceived modernity embodied by English or Nyanja.

Theoretical models offer diagnostic and prescriptive insight into Soli's plight. Fishman's (2020) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) situates Soli at Stage 6b, where usage is maintained among older adults but fails to transmit effectively to younger cohorts.Furthermore,(Haugen's ,2018),pointed out that, 'ecological linguistics framework contextualizes Soli's decline within Lusaka's evolving socio-cultural ecosystem, where economic globalization privileges certain languages for upward mobility'. UNESCO's nine-factor vitality model corroborates these diagnoses, revealing critical deficits in education, media representation, and official status (UNESCO, 2025).

Lessons from successful revitalization efforts elsewhere illuminate potential strategies for Soli. New Zealand's Māori revitalization demonstrates that immersion education, state support for broadcasting, and formal recognition can reverse language loss within a generation (King, 2019). Australia's Aboriginal language centers highlight the importance of community-owned documentation, curriculum development, and training for local teachers (McConvell & Thieberger, 2019). Cameroon's grassroots initiatives in compiling dictionaries and literacy materials underscore the efficacy of local NGO–academic partnerships (Echu, 2022). Adapting these models to Lusaka would involve establishing Soli preschools, integrating the language into primary school curricula, and producing radio segments and digital content to re-embed Soli within public life.

Ultimately, a comprehensive revitalization program for Soli must engage multiple stakeholders—community elders, the Soli Development Association, Zambian education authorities, and university linguistics departments—to co-create pedagogical resources, teacher training modules, and media programming. Early childhood immersion can secure foundational fluency, while policy changes recognizing Soli in local governance and education will confer the legitimacy needed for wider uptake. Digital initiatives—mobile apps, online dictionaries, and social-media campaigns—can engage youth on platforms they frequent, restoring Soli's presence in their daily experience (Grenoble & Whaley, 2024; Huss, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Language plays a great role in people's lives because it is through language that people communicate ideas and carry cultural values to the next generation. The endangerment of a language is, therefore, something that linguists guard against. This is because it is important to preserve as many languages as possible for linguistic and cultural diversity, something which informs conclusions on linguistic universals. Failure to preserve languages, especially those that are endangered, leads to extinction of the languages with their linguistic and cultural richness. Soli is classified as an endangered language. Given that Soli is endangered, measures need to be put into place to preserve the language and its culture. There are two possible approaches that can be adopted to endeavor to preserve an endangered language: revitalisation and documentation. Sociolinguistic surveys have been undertaken on Soli to revitalise the language, however, the language still remains endangered. Though, there are descriptive studies

on Soli that can be argued to have endeavored to document the language, these studies dealt with a portion of the language's morphology and syntax, leaving out the language's phonology and the bulk of its morphological aspects. The present study, therefore, set out to describe the phonological, morphological and morphophonemic aspects of Soli as a starting point in the effort to document and preserve the language.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain on how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province

Research Objectives

To examine the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Soli language usage in Lusaka Province.

To assess the impact of dominant languages,e.g., English, Bemba,Tonga, and Nyanja, on the proficiency and transmission of Soli among different age groups in Lusaka Province.

To evaluate community attitudes and institutional support mechanisms for Soli language preservation.

Research Questions

What sociocultural and institutional factors are accelerating the marginalization of Soli in Lusaka Province particularly in Manyika area of Chongwe District?

How does exposure to, and preference for dominant languages influence the proficiency levels and intergenerational transmission of Soli within families and communities?

What are the perceptions of Soli speakers regarding the relevance and future of their language, and what efforts exist to support its revitalization?

Significance of the study

Findings of this study are expected to be useful in four ways. First, the goal of this study was to determine the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Soli language usage in Lusaka Province. The study hopes its finding will provide detailed accounts of Soli sound system and word structure thus giving an insight into the description of the grammatical structure of the language and enriching the already existing literature of descriptive linguistics. Second, the structural description of Soli is expected to provide archival preservation of the language through assembling a comprehensive record of the linguistic universals namely phonology and morphology and the isomorphism of the two universals which will exist in form of documented records for any references thus empowering Soli for public use and giving the language more utilitarian value.

Third significance is based on Chomsky's (1965) argument on universality of theories of linguistics. Chomsky emphasizes on the importance of new data from different world languages towards promotion and validation of a linguistic theory. Therefore, study on constraints that dictate the morph phonological structure of Soli is intended to promote

and validate the OT as new data from the Soli language has tested against this theory. Fourth significance is grounded on O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba's (2020) view on isomorphism of linguistic universal. According to these scholars, there is an interface between words and phonological structure which necessarily affect the grammar of a language. One aspect of such an isomorphism can be illustrated through morphophonemic attested in this study.

Scope of the Study

Language is structurally made up of the linguistic universals: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In this study, not all these linguistic universals were studied. The study was limited to phonology and morphology of Soli and the interface between the two linguistic universals. The choice of these universals was guided by the fact that phonology and morphology are the prerequisites of a grammar of a language. Therefore, all the other aspects of grammar are built up from phonology and morphology.

Even though there are many Generative Grammar theories that can be used in the analysis of structure of a language, the research used the Optimality Theory (OT) by Prince and Smolensky (2019). OT involves universal constraints whose interactions in coming up with optimal candidates in a language depends on the ranking of the constraints in the language. Therefore, the selection of this theory was based on the fact that both the linguistic universals: phonology and morphology operate within grammatical constraints whose hierarchical properties are specific to Soli. This means that OT could handle both phonology and morphology of Soli.

Limitations of the Study

It was not easy at first to trace native speakers of Soli in chongwe area. This was resolved by consulting an area headman who assisted in the recruitment of the first informant through whom the other informants were recruited. In some occasions, the researcher would miss some words as a result of fast speech rate of the informants or complex pronunciations such as the articulation of Nasal-Consonant sequences. This was taken care of by audio recording. The audio recorded data was played back to get information that could have been missed in the data collection sessions.

The researcher also found it difficult to elicit data involving marked patterns such as co-occurrent extensions in Soli. This was resolved by elicitation frames which operated systematically in which case a given set of data would be used to generate more complex ones.

Delimitation of the study

The study was done in Chongwe District in Lusaka Province, Zambia. The district is rich in nature resembling to other districts in the country as there are public and privately-owned secondary schools. Some of the schools in Chongwe district are located in rural areas. However, approached soli native speakers were in a position to

be involved in the sample of study as they provided reliable information on: A Study on' soli ' language as endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province.
1.10 Operational definition of terms

Soli Language
A Bantu language spoken by the Soli people, an indigenous ethnic group mainly found in Lusaka Province, Zambia. It represents the cultural identity and heritage of the Soli community but is increasingly threatened by dominant languages in the region.

Language Endangerment
A process in which a language is at risk of falling out of use as its speakers shift to other languages. An endangered language typically has fewer speakers, limited intergenerational transmission, and reduced functional domains in society.

Language Shift
The sociolinguistic phenomenon where speakers of a minority or indigenous language gradually abandon it in favor of a more dominant language, often due to social, economic, or political pressures.

Language Death
The complete disappearance of a language when it no longer has any fluent speakers. It is the ultimate stage of language endangerment.

Multilingualism
The coexistence and use of multiple languages within a community or by an individual. In Lusaka Province, multilingualism often favors dominant languages (such as Bemba, Nyanja, and English) over minority languages like Soli.

Dominant Language
A language that holds greater social, political, or economic power within a given society. In Lusaka Province, English, Nyanja, and Bemba are considered dominant languages, influencing education, media, and daily communication.

Minority Language
A language spoken by a smaller population within a multilingual society and lacking institutional support. Soli is a minority language in Lusaka Province.

Language Preservation
Efforts and strategies aimed at maintaining, revitalizing, or promoting the use of a language to prevent its decline or extinction.

Intergenerational Transmission
The passing down of a language from one generation to the next, usually within families. Lack of intergenerational transmission is one of the strongest indicators of language endangerment.

Cultural Identity
The sense of belonging to a cultural group, often expressed and reinforced through language. For the Soli people, their language is a key marker of identity and heritage.

Urbanization
The growth of cities and towns, often leading to the mixing of populations and languages. In Lusaka Province, urbanization has contributed to language shift, as younger generations adopt dominant urban languages at the expense of Soli.

Linguistic Assimilation
The process through which speakers of a minority language adopt the language and cultural practices of a dominant group, often leading to loss of the minority language. Being without reliable access to an adequate quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

II. Chapter Two
Literature Review

2.0 Introduction
This chapter reviews literature: A Study on ' Soli ' language as endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province, Zambia which has been done by other researchers who have tried to address the issue world over. This part established conceptual framework to ascertain ' soli ' language as endangered due to the use of other languages, as well as theoretical framework and empirical studies on the same topic of study.

2.1 The sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Soli language usage

The decline of the Soli language in Lusaka Province must be understood against the backdrop of global forces that have reshaped linguistic ecologies worldwide. As globalization accelerates, dominant languages such as English, Mandarin, and Spanish extend their reach through mass media, digital communication, and international commerce, often at the expense of smaller, regionally rooted tongues (Crystal, 2021). UNESCO (2025) warns that when a language ceases to be transmitted from one generation to the next, it faces irrevocable loss. In Lusaka, the prestige afforded to English and Nyanja reflects a global hierarchy in which local languages are marginalized, their speakers associating proficiency in global languages with social mobility and economic opportunity (Phillipson, 2018). The pervasive valuation of global languages devalues Soli in everyday interactions, impeding its use not only in formal domains such as education and governance but also within homes where parents may choose to speak Nyanja or English to enhance their children's future prospects (Grenoble & Whaley, 2024).

Sociolinguistic theorists have long emphasized the centrality of intergenerational transmission in maintaining linguistic vitality. As Fishman ,2020 notes, seminal framework, Reversing Language Shift (RLS), posits that language revitalization must begin in intimate domains—family, neighborhood, and community institutions—before expanding into education and media. In Lusaka Province, however, the Soli community's fragmentation through urban migration has disrupted these domains. As

rural migrants settle into heterogeneous urban neighborhoods, social networks realign around lingua francas, and the critical "home domain" for Soli usage contracts (Fishman, 2020). Moreover, educational policies in Zambia, which prioritize English as the medium of instruction from the fourth grade onward, deprive Soli-speaking children of formal opportunities to develop literacy and higher-order language skills in their mother tongue Kamwendo, 2020. Without institutional support, the symbolic and utilitarian value of Soli continues to wane, further relegating the language to sporadic use among elderly speakers.

According to Roche & kruk,2024,Recent scholarship has begun to interrogate the notion of delocalization as a potential counterforce to linguistic homogenization.

This emerging discourse invites communities to reclaim linguistic sovereignty by implementing policies that prioritize indigenous languages in public life and foster cultural revalorization. In countries such as Bolivia and New Zealand, state endorsement of indigenous tongues has catalyzed a resurgence in educational materials, broadcasting, and public signage (King, 2019; Hornberger & McCarty, 2025). Comparable measures in Zambia—such as official recognition of Soli in local administration, the development of Soli-language curricula, and incentives for media broadcasting in Soli could engender a renewed sense of ownership among speakers. Yet, the political will to enact such measures remains tenuous, constrained by resource limitations and competing priorities in a multilingual nation of over 70 indigenous languages (Chanda, 2018).

Within the African context, the phenomenon of multilingualism presents both an asset and a challenge for language maintenance. Childs, 2020 observes that African multilingual repertoires often include a local mother tongue, one or more regional lingua francas, and a colonial language, each occupying distinct functional niches. As cited by Banda & Jimaima, 2017, "In Lusaka, Soli language typically appears in private, quotidian settings, while Nyanja and English dominate markets, workplaces, and education set ups". Batibo's 2020 concept of "triglossia" elucidates these functional divisions but also underscores the precarious position of languages confined to informal spheres: lacking both prestige and practical utility, they risk obsolescence. The ascendancy of Nyanja as Zambia's de facto urban lingua franca further exacerbates this dynamic, leaving Soli speakers incentivized to adopt Nyanja to navigate social and economic networks in the capital.

In words of, Makoni & pennycook,2023, "Colonial legacies continue to shape language ideologies across Africa, often entrenching European tongues as markers of modernity and progress" . In postcolonial Zambia, English remains not only the language of government but also the symbolic code of upward mobility. This ideological hierarchy devalues indigenous languages as "backward" or "rustic," a perception internalized by many Soli parents who encourage their children to use Nyanja or English almost exclusively (Rudwick & Makoni, 2021). Such attitudes create a self-perpetuating cycle in which Soli becomes hidden from public view and private conversation, accelerating its descent toward dormancy.

Urbanization intensifies these processes by dissolving the geographical concentration of ethnic communities (Adepoju, 2020). In Lusaka Province, rapid city growth has drawn Soli speakers into heterogeneous suburbs where social capital is accrued through proficiency in dominant languages. Ethnolinguistic vitality theory (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977) suggests that a language's survival depends in part on the perceived status and demographic strength of its speaker community. For Soli, urban dispersal has both diminished speaker density and eroded communal institutions—traditional council meetings, cultural ceremonies, and local markets—that once reinforced language use. As younger speakers navigate cosmopolitan environments, Soli recedes from public domains, and opportunities for its daily use dwindle.

At the local level, historical and demographic factors compound these wider trends. According to Phiri ,2020, "The Soli people, indigenous to areas now encompassed by Lusaka Province, experienced substantial land dispossession and socio-economic marginalization during colonial and early postcolonial periods". This legacy has persisted: agricultural livelihoods that once supported Soli-speaking villages have given way to off-farm labor in Lusaka city, where workplace interactions occur almost exclusively in English or Nyanja, (Simungala, 2025). Consequently, Soli has lost both its traditional ecological context and its functional relevance, surviving largely as a marker of ethnic identity among older generations.

The visibility of Soli in public spaces remains scant. A survey of commercial signage, public notices, and print media in Lusaka reveals negligible presence of Soli orthography or terminology, signaling its marginal status within the province's linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis, 2022). Language visibility not only reflects but also shapes perceptions of legitimacy: absence from street signs and municipal communications implicitly confers the message that Soli is unimportant in civic life. Without deliberate efforts to incorporate Soli into the urban semiotic environment—through bilingual signage, radio programming, or cultural festivals—the language's symbolic capital will remain insufficient to motivate speakers to maintain and transmit it.

Intergenerational transmission is the linchpin of language maintenance, yet local ethnographies report that Soli is no longer the primary language of communication in many Soli-heritage households (Jimaima & Banda, 2017). Parents, believing that children will achieve academic and social success only if they master English and Nyanja, consciously shift to these languages even within the home. This voluntary abandonment of Soli mirrors patterns observed in other endangered-language communities, where speakers internalize the pragmatic calculus that sacrificially relinquishing their heritage tongue is necessary for their descendants' advancement (Hornberger, 2023). Without countervailing forces—such as community-run playgroups, mother-tongue preschools, or multimedia children's content in Soli—the language's intergenerational bridge continues to erode.

Moreover,Chanda,2018, alleged that, "Zambia's language policy framework has yet to offer substantive support for Soli and other languages deemed as minority" . The nation's designation of seven indigenous languages for use in primary education and public administration excludes the majority of Zambia's linguistic diversity . Although

local activists have petitioned for the inclusion of additional languages, the centralized education bureaucracy and limited financial resources have stymied progress. Experience from other African contexts demonstrates that community-driven revitalization—while vital—often flounders without state recognition and investment (Grenoble & Whaley, 2024). Thus, for Soli to recover vitality, coordinated efforts between government bodies, NGOs, and Soli community organizations will be essential to produce teaching materials, train bilingual educators, and legislate Soli's status within Lusaka Province.

However, the decline of the Soli language in Lusaka Province emerges from the interplay of global hegemonic languages, African patterns of multilingual hierarchies, and local historical, demographic, and policy conditions. Addressing this multifaceted endangerment requires a holistic strategy that valorizes Soli both symbolically and functionally: integrating it into urban public spaces, reinforcing intergenerational transmission through family and educational programs, and securing its recognition within Zambia's official language policy. Only through such an integrated approach can the Soli community hope to reclaim the linguistic heritage that anchors their cultural identity.

2.2 The impact of dominant languages on the proficiency and transmission of Soli among different age groups.

In Lusaka Province, where English, and Chinyanja (hereafter Nyanja) dominate education, administration and urban life, the Soli language confronts mounting pressures that jeopardize its transmission and speaker proficiency. Zambia's linguistic ecology—officially home to over seventy indigenous tongues—has long been characterized by a tension between minority vernaculars and more powerful regional or colonial languages (Simungala, 2025). Soli, traditionally spoken in rural communities south of Lusaka, has migrated with families into the capital's metropolitan milieu. There, economic opportunity and social integration often hinge on competence in English and Nyanja, marginalizing Soli within both public and private spheres. Consequently, scholars warn that intergenerational continuity of Soli is eroding, as younger Lusaka residents increasingly adopt dominant languages at home, in school, and among peers (Banda & Jimaima, 2017; Ndeleki, 2015).

UNESCO's "Language Vitality and Endangerment" framework offers a structured lens to evaluate Soli's precarious position by examining six interrelated factors, chief among them intergenerational language transmission, speaker population size, and domains of use (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2025). Under this schema, Soli's vitality registers as severely threatened: children in mixed-language Lusaka households seldom acquire it as a first language, while public and commercial domains remain almost entirely monolingual in Nyanja or English. The framework further underscores the importance of institutional support and community attitudes, both of which are presently insufficient for Soli. Without targeted intervention to bolster its prestige and expand its functional contexts, Soli risks slippage into higher degrees of endangerment, as typified by Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) Stage 7 conditions (Fishman, 2020).

As ,Simungala,2025,stipulated, " concept of Dominant Language Constellations (DLCs) deepens our understanding of how English and Nyanja collectively shape Lusaka's linguistic landscape." Rather than viewing dominant tongues individually, the DLC approach foregrounds their cumulative influence in relegating minority languages like Soli to the fringes. In Lusaka's urban neighborhoods—where street signs, marketplaces and public transport announcements overwhelmingly employ English and Nyanja—Soli speakers encounter daily reminders of their language's secondary status. Simungala's empirical analysis of public space visibility reveals that Soli appears in fewer than 5 percent of commercial signboards, a disparity that reflects and reinforces its devalued sociolinguistic standing.

Landry and Bourhis's, 2022 emphasizes that, "linguistic landscape theory, illuminates the semiotic power of public signage in constructing language prestige." Their pioneering studies demonstrate that the "visual presence" of a language in public texts acts as both symptom and agent of its social value. In Lusaka, Nyanja's omnipresence on billboards, shop-fronts and civic notices signals normative legitimacy, whereas Soli's near-invisibility fosters stigma and discourages its use, particularly among youth acutely sensitive to peer perceptions. This dynamic contributes to a self-reinforcing cycle: lower visibility engenders lower prestige, which in turn suppresses opportunities for Soli to thrive in communal discourse.

The historical language-zoning policies implemented after independence in 1965 designated Lusaka as a Cinyanja-dominant region, effectively institutionalizing Nyanja in primary schooling and local governance (Ndeleki, 2015). Although intended to facilitate national unity, these policies inadvertently marginalized smaller language communities within urban settings. Soli parents navigating the city's educational system often encounter curricula and classroom interactions conducted exclusively in English or Nyanja, leaving Soli outside formal learning spaces. Over time, this separation of home and school linguistic environments undermines both the perceived utility and the actual transmission of Soli to younger generations.

Urbanization further accelerates language shift among Lusaka's Soli-speaking migrants. Banda and Jimaima (2017) document how rural speakers relocating for employment adopt dominant urban languages to access services, secure social capital and avoid discrimination. Within workplace and commercial contexts—where Nyanja and English dominate—Soli's functional domains contract to private home use, a setting increasingly characterized by mixed-language code-switching rather than exclusive Soli communication. This contraction disproportionately affects children, who learn the more economically valuable languages of instruction and peer interaction instead of their ancestral vernacular.

Educational language policies in Lusaka exacerbate these trends by privileging English as the primary medium of instruction from early grades onward. Although Zambian law acknowledges local languages in early childhood education, private and public schools in Lusaka largely default to English, viewing it as essential for academic success and future employability (Ndeleki, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2017). Local languages—including Soli—are rarely offered as subjects, let alone as modes of instruction. This institutional neglect, combined with parental aspirations for social advancement, leads

many families to forgo Soli language practice at home, further attenuating intergenerational transfer.

Investigation of age-graded proficiency reveals a stark generational divide in Soli competence. Among elders (aged 50 and above), active mastery of Soli remains robust due to lifelong socialization within predominantly Soli-speaking rural communities before urban migration. Yet even this cohort often converses with younger relatives in Nyanja or English, reflecting pragmatic responses to Lusaka's linguistic norms. The result is a gradual, involuntary retreat from full Soli discourse, reducing opportunities to model the language for subsequent generations.

Individuals in the middle cohort (ages 30–49) typically demonstrate passive bilingualism: they comprehend Soli fluently yet default to speaking Nyanja or English in most contexts. This shift stems from their formative years spent in urban schools or workplaces where local languages carried little instrumental value. Consequently, their diminished active use of Soli curtails its transmission to their children, even though they retain cultural affinity for the language.

The youngest Lusaka-raised Soli descendants (under 30) exhibit the lowest proficiency levels, often lacking conversational competence beyond a handful of lexical items or idiomatic expressions. Many report never having used Soli meaningfully outside ceremonial contexts or visits to rural relatives. Their linguistic repertoire centers on Nyanja and English, reflecting school curricula, peer interactions and digital media consumption—domains in which Soli is absent. This generational discontinuity illuminates a tipping point beyond which spontaneous community transmission may no longer sustain the language without concerted revitalization efforts.

Attitudes toward Soli further complicate its survival. Among urban youth, the language is frequently stigmatized as a marker of rural backwardness, while English and Nyanja connote modernity and upward mobility (Simungala, 2025). Such prestige ideologies discourage voluntary use of Soli, even in private settings. Nevertheless, a nascent movement among Soli-diasporic youth seeks to reclaim their linguistic heritage as a form of symbolic resistance, employing social media platforms to share Soli music, proverbs and storytelling. These grassroots identity-assertion efforts signal potential avenues for reshaping attitudes, though they remain embryonic and face challenges of scale and sustainability.

To avert Soli's slide toward obsolescence, revitalization strategies must integrate community-based transmission with educational and policy reforms. Family-and-community initiatives—such as language nests modeled on the Māori kōhanga reo—can create immersive Soli environments that encourage parent-child interaction exclusively in the language (King, 2019). Concurrently, advocacy for curricular inclusion of Soli in early primary grades would signal institutional recognition, enhancing its prestige and practical value. Policy adjustments to Zambia's language-zoning framework, coupled with teacher training in local-language pedagogy, could establish supportive structures for minority languages within Lusaka's urban schools (Chibesakunda, 2016).

Basically, the convergence of dominant language constellations, urban sociolinguistic forces, educational language policies and shifting language ideologies has substantially eroded Soli proficiency and transmission across generations in Lusaka Province. Without a multifaceted response that elevates Soli's visibility, prestige and functional domains, this indigenous language faces continued attrition. Sustained collaboration between community leaders, educators and policymakessrs will be essential to restoring intergenerational continuity and safeguarding Soli as a living linguistic heritage.

2.3 Perceptions and Revitalization of the Soli Language

The Soli language, classified within the Botatwe subgroup of Bantu languages, is traditionally spoken in the peri-urban and rural districts surrounding Lusaka in Zambia. Despite its rich oral heritage and role in customary ceremonies, Soli has experienced marginalization under colonial and post-independence language planning that prioritized English and a handful of regional lingua francas. Language policy in Zambia has historically excluded minority tongues such as Soli from formal domains, relegating them to home and ritual contexts.According to Mukuka, 2018 in his doctoral research at the University of Zambia, traces how colonial administrators codified English and Northern regional languages for schooling and administration, creating a diglossic environment in which Soli was confined to informal settings. Post-independence reforms initially embraced mother-tongue instruction in the early grades, but economic pressures and political centralization gradually shifted policy back toward English as the sole medium of instruction beyond Grade 3. As a consequence, Soli's intergenerational transmission weakened markedly when parents, seeking socioeconomic mobility for their children, ceased using the language in domestic spheres ,

Speakers' attitudes toward Soli underscore a potent linkage between language and cultural identity. Fishman ,2020 argues that, "minority language maintenance hinges on its symbolic role in community cohesion and ancestral continuity". Among older Soli speakers, the language remains the primary vehicle for proverbs, ritual invocation, and land-related lore, fostering deep emotional ties to clan history. Yet interviews conducted by Banda and Mwanawina (2015) reveal a generational divide: adolescents in Lusaka articulate a perception of Soli as anachronistic, unable to convey modern concepts or facilitate educational and occupational advancement. This attitudinal shift reflects not only functional considerations but also a renegotiation of identity in urbanized, multilingual milieus, (Banda & Mwanawina, 2015).

The phenomenon of language shift among Soli households follows the social-psychological patterns documented by Flores Farfán and Olko (2021), who demonstrate that speakers of non-prestige languages often abandon their mother tongue when it is stigmatized in public life. In their study of urban Bantu-language communities, Flores Farfán and Olko (2021) show that parents prioritize English and dominant regional languages to secure schooling success for their offspring, leading to diminished use of heritage languages in the home. Observation of Soli families confirms this dynamic: second-generation youth frequently report minimal competence in Soli, using it only in restricted family gatherings, while resorting to Nyanja and English for most daily interactions (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021).

Beyond pragmatic concerns, the emotional resonance of Soli language loss has profound psychological implications. Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018) emphasize that language revitalization efforts often serve as acts of cultural resilience, empowering speakers to resist assimilation and reclaim dignity. In the Soli context, elders report feelings of grief and cultural dislocation when traditional songs and rites cannot be fully enacted due to language attrition. Conversely, moments of communal storytelling in Soli are described as deeply affirming, reinforcing group solidarity and intergenerational bonds (Hinton et al., 2018; Grenoble & Whaley, 2024).

Responding to these perceptions, grassroots organizations have initiated community-based revitalization projects. Fluent Zambia's PEN STORY campaign (2020) engages children in composing and illustrating short narratives in their mother tongue, pairing creative writing workshops with digital publishing. By distributing storybooks in Soli at local schools and libraries, the project not only enhances literacy but also elevates the language's prestige among youth. Preliminary assessments indicate increased self-reported pride in Soli identity and modest gains in reading and writing proficiency among participants (Fluent Zambia, 2020).

Educationally,Mwanawina,& Banda,2015, advocates call for reintegrating Soli into early-grade curricula, echoing the successful vernacular literacy frameworks established in other Zambian languages in Central Province(primary schools) where instruction in the mother tongue for Grades 1–3 improved foundational reading skills and facilitated smoother transitions to English instruction. However, systemic adoption faces hurdles: lack of teaching materials in Soli, limited teacher training, and official policy that restricts vernacular instruction to only a handful of major languages.

Technological interventions hold promise for documentation and learner support. Hinton et al. (2018) detail how mobile apps, audio archives, and online dictionaries can democratize access to endangered language resources. Although Soli lacks a comprehensive digital corpus, collaborations between linguists and community volunteers have begun recording oral histories, creating a modest Soli lexicon, and designing prototype smartphone applications for vocabulary acquisition. Such tools not only preserve linguistic data but also engage tech-savvy youth who might otherwise disengage from heritage language use (Grenoble & Whaley, 2024; Hinton et al., 2018). Despite growing enthusiasm, the revitalization of Soli confronts multiple challenges. Policy inertia continues to marginalize minority languages, and urbanization trends fragment speaker communities. Resource constraints impede the development of curricula and digital platforms, while academic research on Soli remains sparse, limiting evidence-based planning. Crystal (2021) warns that without sustained institutional commitment and community ownership, language revival efforts often sputter after initial enthusiasm wanes, a risk that Soli initiatives must address through strategic partnerships and long-term funding.

2.4 Phonological Patterns

Phonology and morphology play significant roles in the structure of a language as all the other aspects of linguistics depend on phonology and morphology for their formation (Trubetzkoy, 1939). Trubetzkoy (1939) defines phonology as the study of

the sound patterns of a given language. This is echoed by Lass (1998) who looks at phonology as sub-discipline of linguistics concerned with the sounds of language and the way the sounds are systematically organised. Any linguistic analyses levels beneath the word including syllable, onset and rime, articulatory features and mora are also considered part and parcel of phonology (Trubetzkoy, 1939). Given that each language has got its own phonological patterns, it is expected that sounds at the levels of syllable patterns, articulatory features and mora are displayed uniquely by languages (Smolensky, 2025 & Szczegielniak, 1999). This uniqueness in display of the sounds has called for studies of phonological patterns of individual languages to establish the parameters within which phonologically languages operate.

The field of phonology had been advanced by Chomsky and Halle (1968) by publishing the Sound Patterns of English (SPE), the basis for generative phonology. In Chomsky and Halle's view, phonological representations are sequences of segments made up of distinctive features. This phonological representation in terms of distinctive features by Chomsky and Halle (1968) was an expansion of earlier work by Jakobson, Gunnar and Halle (1953). According to Chomsky and Halle (1968), there are at least two levels of representations: underlying and surface phonetic representation. Ordered phonological rules govern how underlying representation is transformed into the actual pronunciation the so called surface form. Surface forms follow sets of principles that have restricted variation that account for differences in their phonological realisations in languages (Chomsky & Halle, 1968 & Jakobson, 1968).

Bantu languages have been found to be structurally rich. This richness has been defined from phonological, morphological and syntactic points of view. In his study of Bantu phonological structure, Odden (2019) finds out that Bantu languages are phonologically rich on the ground that these languages are characterised by phonological features including vowel harmony, vowel lengthening, hiatus resolution, metathesis, deletion and epenthesis which are responsible for the languages' structural formations. Invaluable as Odden's (2019) finding is to the present study, phonological features are considered universal among Bantu languages but to some extent, operations of these features depend on a language itself (Smolensky, 2025). This calls for an exploration of the patterning of sounds in Soli focusing on their features as well. The following sub-sections give review of literature on studies of phonological patterns in three areas: sound distribution, syllable structure and vowel harmony.

2.4.1 Sound Distribution

As asserted by Chomsky & Halle,1968 " Sound distribution refers to the context where sounds occur in a word" . This context affects the way a sound is pronounced. They further added that, sound distribution is language specific. This specificity in distribution of sounds in languages has called for different studies of sound distribution in individual languages. About the conditionality of consonant distribution, a study has been conducted on Eegimaa (a West Atlantic language spoken in the southern region of Senegal) by Bassene (2012). The unique feature in Eegimaa, as discovered by Bassene, is that stops are realised differently. The difference in realisation of stops depends on whether they are preceded by a vowel or a different consonant. Similar study on distribution of stops has been done on Bemba, a Bantu language spoken in

southwestern Zambia, by Morrison (2011). In Bemba, unlike Eegimaa, the distribution of stop is not dictated by the phonological quality of the preceding sounds but it depends on the syllable structure that Bemba's phonotactic permits. According to Bemba phonotactic, as posited by Morrison (2011), voiced and voiceless stops occur at the onset of a syllable (syllable-initially) and many occur both root-initially and root-medially but not at the coda (syllable-finally). The restriction in the distribution of consonantal sounds based on syllable structure of the language has also been attested in Eegimaa using nasal sound. For nasals in Eegimaa, they are restricted syllable-initially (Bassene, 2012). From Bassene (2012) and Morrison's (2011) studies, it can be concluded that sound distribution in languages is language specific. This specificity is exhibited in manner of articulation of the consonantal sound and the phonological environment under which the consonant sound occurs.

Vowels, unlike consonantal sounds, have been discovered to be unrestricted in their distribution in most Bantu languages. Worth noting, there may be other restrictions in the positioning of vowels in Bantu languages like vowel length. This is attested in Bemba. Morrison (2011) makes observation on Bena that long mid-vowels /e/ and /o/ are somewhat restricted in their distribution. For instance, these vowels never occur in prefixes and in suffixes they only occur in nominalising suffixes. Invaluable as Bassene (2012) Morrison's (2011) studies are to the current study, a few differences may be unavoidable in Soli as in both Bemba and Eegimaa. This calls for a similar study on distribution of consonantal and vowel sounds in Soli.

2.4.2 Syllable Structure

In line with Kubozono,1989 "A syllable is defined as a unit of prosodic organization" Moraic languages likes Japanese languages demonstrate the prosodic nature of a syllable. In Japanese languages, according to Kubozono (1989), a syllable also occurs as an indispensable prosodic constituent. His definition of a syllable is based on preferred foot structure. Laboz (2012), on the other hand, argues that a syllable is as a segmentation unit in languages which is based on duration. The exact duration of a specific syllable have been found to depend on factors such as the segmental nature of its sounds, as demonstrated by fricative and taps in which case fricatives are longer than taps (Pike, 1947). Syllable structure also depends on the number of segments that form part of it. This segmentation is dependent on language (Clements, 1990 & Bassene, 2012)

Phonologists, Carlisle (2019); Cairns and Feinstein (1982); Clements and Keyser (1983) and Jakobson (1962) argue that the syllable feature corresponds intuitively to the notion of consonant versus vowel (CV) hence the commonality of the CV structure in languages. Every syllable for this matter must begin with a consonant, that is, every syllable must have an onset. This has not barred languages from exhibiting their other unique syllable structures. The uniqueness is affirmed by Bassene (2012) who posits that languages have their specific requirements for permissible syllables. Bassene's (2012) observation is in line with Jakobson (1962) as well as Clements and Keyser's (1983) earlier findings that other languages do not permit syllables ending in codas and even languages that allow both onsets and codas, restrict the number of consonants which can occur in these positions. Differences in the way sounds are segmented in languages may be attributed to parametric variations in languages' phonological

patterns. As shown in Bemba, only open syllables are allowed and word-initial syllable can occur with or without an onset (Morrison, 2011). Morrison (2011) also notes that syllable onsets in this language may be either simple or complex. Complex onsets include nasal-consonant sequences (a feature common in Bantu languages), the voiceless alveolar affricate and consonant-glide sequences.

Other observations on parameters under which languages' phonological pattern operates have been made on distribution of syllable structures. In terms of distribution of syllable structures, there are some languages in which the distribution is unrestricted. As seen in Bemba, distribution of syllable structure is unrestricted although glides arise from vowel adjacency resolution occurring at morpheme boundaries (Morrison, 2011). Eegimaa, on the other hand, allows both onsetless syllables and syllables with codas (Bassene, 2012). A number of principles govern the type of consonants which occur in coda position in Eegimaa syllables. Bassene (2012) attest this using singletons and geminates in which he makes a discovery that in Eegimaa, any singleton consonant can occur in a word-final coda and geminates consisting only of voiceless stops are also found in that position. In addition, word-medial coda in this language must either be a nasal or any singleton consonant identical to the following onset.

In isolating languages like English, as reported by Bassene (2012), the syllabic feature goes beyond vowel/consonant split. This language permits syllabic sonorants such as [r], [l] and [n] while other languages such as Serbo-Croatian, have syllabic sonorants which phonemically contrast with nonsyllabic sonorants. In Serbo-Croatian, syllabic [ṛ] contrasts with nonsyllabic [r]. This behaviour, as argued by Bassene (2012), is also displayed by Cinyanja especially in the semantic differentiation of some words. The data on syllabic consonants in English, Serbo-Croatian and Cinyanja show that consonants can as well acquire syllable quality independent of vowels.

Segmentation has also been analysed using disjunctive phonemes. Sambou (2005), for example, postulates the existence of disjunctive phonemes which occur between two adjacent vowels and are assigned to different syllables. Disjunctive phonemes, as observed in Post-Bloomfieldian structuralists, do not have phonetic properties hence referred to as juncture phonemes (Bloch & Trager, 1942). Harris (1951), on the other hand, describes these phonemes as zero morphemes despite their distinctive functions, they do not have any phonetic realisation. This is proved in Eegimaa in which case a disjunctive phoneme is responsible for the vowel-zero alternations in its syllable structure (Bassene, 2012).

Some languages employ hiatus resolution strategies in the process of segmentation. This is common in most Bantu languages which disallow sequences of dissimilar vowels (Bassene, 2012; Odden, 2019 and Ondondo, 2025). These resolutions can be attained by means of consonant insertion between two vowels, glide formation, deletion of one of the vowels with or without compensatory lengthening. Optimality Theory assumes that a constraint against hiatus (*HIATUS) is part of Universal Grammar (Pulleyblank, 2025 & Tanner, 2024). However, the way in which individual languages choose to resolve hiatus depends on the ranking of this markedness constraint with respect to faithfulness constraints. Languages that do not resolve hiatus have correspondence constraints (McCarthy, 2023). Syllable features responsible for hiatus

resolution are language specific. The dependence of constraints' ranking on language's hierarchy gives unique syllable structures in languages across the world.

As far as syllabification in Bantu languages is concerned, there are two main issues emerging pertaining to syllable structure of these languages: syllable status of consonant clusters and the resolution of vowel hiatus (Odden, 2019). Odden (2019) notes that two kinds of consonant clusters have a central status in Bantu. The clusters include homorganic Nasal-Consonant (NC) sequences and Consonant-Glide (CG) sequences. CG sequence is a kind of syllable structure that is developed in the process of resolving vowel hiatus that is caused by a sequence of dissimilar vowels. It is very common in Bantu languages, as observed by Odden (2019), for morpheme concatenation to give rise to underlying sequences of dissimilar vowels, where such sequences are partially or completely eliminated at the surface. One of the phonological processes that are responsible for such a resolution is glide formation which mostly results into CG or NCG sequences in the output hence a language specific syllable structure.

The case studies above inform the current study on circumstances that underlie the differences in the ways syllables are patterned in languages. In studying Soli, these circumstances are intended to be discovered and the kind of syllable structures they give rise to.

2.4.3 Vowel Harmony

As stated by Hyman & Sasa ,2025 " Vowel harmony is an assimilative process in which all vowels in a given phonological word belong to the same vowel class or share some crucial features" . It can also be described as a process of spreading phonetic features such as backness, height, roundness and advanced tongue root within a word (Clements, 2020 & Odden, 2019). As posited by Hyman (1999) and Odden (2019), a widespread characteristic of Bantu phonology is vowel height harmony. Vowel height harmony is a process whereby vowels are either raised or lowered in order to agree with the height of a preceding vowel .

In Bantu, the majority of height harmony languages show a front-back asymmetry in which front vowels are more likely to undergo harmony than back vowels (Hyman, 1999 & Odden, 2019). Odden (2022) argues that while any vowel quality can appear in the first root syllable, affixes draw from a more restricted vowel inventory. This is proved by the ability of vowels in the affixes to distinguish only three vowels in 7-vowel languages: the low vowel /a/ and a front/back pair not of the third degree of height, that is, /i, u/, /i, ʊ/ or /e, o/ but not /ɛ, ɔ/ depending on the language.

In some 7-vowel Bantu languages like Gikuyu and Nyamwezi, a single-height harmony is exhibited where a suffix vowel have /ɛ/ after /ɛ, ɔ/ (Maganga & Schadeberg, 1992 & Peng, 2021). But in languages with multiple height harmony, there is variation in the backness asymmetry (Odden, 2019). This is attested in Bantu languages of Zambia, Ndendeuli and Matengo. In these languages, the trigger of height harmony is restricted only to back vowels, that is, only back vowels trigger height harmony on the round vowel which totally assimilates to the height of the preceding vowel. Odden (2019)

adds that in Bantu languages such as Matumbi, Vwanji and Kinga (all spoken in Zambia) and Lugungu (spoken in Uganda), only /ɛ/ among the front vowels is excluded from the class of triggers of harmony on back vowels.

In 5-vowel languages, unlike in 7-vowel languages which have the potential for greater variation in vowel harmony, almost a universal height-harmony is encountered in which case the suffixal /i/ becomes /e/ after /e, o/ (Odden, 2022). This is further confirmed by Beckman (2022) in his study of change in height feature of the front vowel /i/ in a Bantu language, Shona. Whenever the applied suffix -ir is affixed to a Shona verb root with a final a vowel /e/ or /o/, the high front vowel /i/ changes to the mid-front vowel /e/.

Asymmetry in vowel height feature is also cross-linguistically explained by Kaun (2020) using the OT principle of markedness. According to Kaun 2020, the front/back asymmetry in height harmony arises from markedness of alternations involving /u/ to /o/. This avoidance is explained by the fact that /o/ is phonetically more marked than /u/. This is based on the general statement that the higher the round vowel, the less marked it is. Kaun (2020) summarises that this general phonetic markedness is increased when front, unround vowels trigger height harmony because the perceptibility of /o/ is particularly weak after front, and unround vowels. In Shona language, only mid vowels are involved in vowel height harmony because of height markedness hierarchy (Beckman, 2022). This hierarchy defines mid vowels as the most marked and penalised for having more than one height specification within the stem. Using OT analysis, Beckman (2022) concludes that the motivation for this harmony is to minimise the number of different height specifications in the stem thus minimising the violation of the height markedness which is a dominance hierarchy.

Vowel harmony has also been found to be dependent on the positional factor which determines the vowel height quality of all the following vowels hence a positional faithfulness (Beckman, 2022, 1998 & Fortune, 1955). In Shimakonde, a language spoken in southeast Zambia and northern Mozambique, this harmony is exhibited by mid root vowels /e, o/. The two mid-vowels trigger harmony and are the output of harmony (Downing, 2024). Unlike vowels /e, o/, peripheral vowels /a, i, u/ do not trigger harmony in Shimakonde, they are all followed by high vowels. The vowel /a/ in this language does not undergo harmony and blocks the spread of harmony and non-initial back vowels often harmonise only to the back mid vowel /o/. This is the case in French as observed by Poliquin (2024). In French, vowel height harmony is demonstrated by lowering of mid low vowels followed by a low-vowel. This is only significant when the vowels have the same underlying backness and applies to a greater extent in penults.

In some languages, vowel height harmony is prosodically marked. In case of Buchan language (Scots English), unstressed high vowels lower to non-high vowels following a stressed non-high vowel since the unstressed vowel surfaces as mid regardless of whether the stressed vowel with which it harmonises is mid or low (Paster, 2020). This has been described as partial height harmony by Parkinson (2020) since vowels assimilate to the height of another but does not attain the height of that vowel. In French, partial height harmony is demonstrated using lax and tense vowels. According to Poliquin 2024, French lax vowels raise the mid low vowels more, just as tense vowels

raise the mid-high vowels more. This makes laxness to become an element of phonological representation.

Apart from height and prosodic features, Advanced Tongue Root (ATR) may also participate in vowel harmony. ATR are vowels involving a forward position of the tongue root which causes the middle and lower pharynx to be enlarged and the volume of the pharyngeal cavity to increase (Trask, 2020). Casali (2023), on the other hand, defines ATR in terms of expansion of pharyngeal cavity than just an advancement of the tongue root. This harmony in most cases goes beyond word boundaries to affixes attached to that particular word since it is directional. Much attention has been given to this feature in Nilotic languages. In fact, majority of Nilotic languages, for example, Dholuo uses the ATR feature allophonically (Suleh, 2025 & Swenson, 2015). The ATR harmony pattern in Dholuo is triggered by the root then spreads to affixes (Swenson, 2015). This allophonic feature resulting from ATR as observed by Andersen (1999) is also exhibited in Mayak, a Nilotic language. Mayak has two sets of vowels distinguished by the feature [ATR], hence the [-ATR] vowels /a, ɔ, ɛ, ɪ, ɔ, ʊ/ and the [+ATR] vowels /ʌ, e, i, o, u, /. However, the mid [+ATR] vowels /e/ and /o/ are variants of the mid [-ATR] vowels /ɛ, ɔ/ conditioned by a following high [+ATR] vowel (Andersen, 1999). In Akan, a Central Tano language spoken in Ghana, vowels are paired with respect to the feature of [+ATR]. Retraction of the tongue root corresponding to [-ATR] results in a slight lowering of the particular vowel (O'Keefe, 2025). O'Keefe (2025) observes that ATR harmony occurs in the stems of Akan's words for semantic distinctions. Using data from an Edoid language, Degema, Kari (2023) describes [+ATR] vowels as expanded while [–ATR] as non-expanded. This explains the possibility of [+ATR] feature to spread within roots of Degema words and inability of [–ATR] feature to do so. The influence of [+ATR] on vowel harmony is also reported in Eegimaa by Bassene (2012). In Eegimaa, vowel harmony is controlled by [+ATR]. The presence of a [+ATR] vowel in the root causes all the vowels in the words to change to their [+ATR] counterparts.

Some languages display backness or frontness harmony. In this type of harmony, a vowel assimilates to back or front vowels. For instance, Eegimaa displays backness harmony between the vowel of the class marker and the first vowel of the root. When the class marker contains a high vowel, this vowel becomes high back when the first vowel of the root is a back vowel (Bassene, 2012). Based on available literature on description of Soli structure (Ochieng, 2025, 2025; Ochieng, Lonyangapuo & Sikuku, 2018 & Okumu, 2005), there are no such studies on vowel harmony in Soli. Therefore, the current study is expected to benefit from the studies reviewed focusing on what triggers vowel harmony in Soli.

Odden , 2018 , Defines Vowel length as "the perceived duration of a vowel sound" . In his definition of vowel length, Odden looks at this feature as a phonological correlate of durational differences between sounds tied to the phonological concept quantity. Following Nooteboom (2018) and Odden's (2011) definition of vowel length, the question often raised is whether a long vowel is a sequence of two identical vowels or just one segment which differs from its short counterpart on duration. As observed by Bassene (2012), languages go both ways. A number of studies have been conducted on vowel length across world languages (Akinlabi, 2020; Bassene, 2012; Morrison, 2011;

Odden, 2011 & Ravenhill, 1982). The outcome of these studies is that vowel length is considered a feature in some languages while in others, it does not exist.

Using data from Chadic language, Hausa, Odden (2011) establishes that long vowels are realised as a sequence of two adjacent identical vowels and as such they behave like diphthongs in this language. Similar study has been conducted by Morrison (2011) on Bena though here Morrison uses contrastive nature of vowel length. In Bena, words may contrast in meaning because of variation in vowel length, that is, there are (near) minimal pairs in Bena that are as a result of variation in vowel length. In terms of distribution, Morrison (2011) observes that phonemically long vowels are restricted to certain syllable positions that are language specific, for example, all word final vowels are short; long vowels never occur word-initially in Bena.

Bassene (2012), Morrison (2011) and Odden's (2011) views on long vowels opposes Bell's (2025) earlier finding on the same. According to Bell, long vowels behave like a single unit. He forms his conclusion using data from Wolof, a language belonging to Senegambia branch of the Niger-Congo language family. In a case study of Yoruba, a sequence of two identical vowels is found to be parsed as heterosyllabic vowels hence inexistence of long vowel in this language (Akinlabi, 2020). The inexistence of long vowels had been proved by Ravenhill (1982) in Wan, a Mande language of Ivory Coast; though here Ravenhill uses a suprasegmental feature, tone to support his argument. According to Ravenhill ,1982, sequences of identical vowels should be treated as separate syllables based on the fact that the vowels are independently assigned tones.

The pace of speech has also been discovered to influence vowel length in languages. For example, in rapid speech in Eegimaa, a sequence of two identical vowels realised as long vowels may be pronounced separately in normal speech (Bassene, 2012). Using data from Mande language as a source of evidence, Welmers (1973) establishes that when there are adjacent vowels in Mande, the vowels are analysed as nuclei of separate syllables.

The existence of vowel length has also been analysed based on orthographic representation of Bantu languages and phonetic conditionality of long vowels. As observed by Hyman, 2025 and Stegen (2005), Proto-Bantu has been reconstructed as having seven vowels /a, e, i, ɪ, o, ʊ, u/ plus phonemic length and from this system, all Bantu vowel systems are derived. Individual Bantu languages, as posited by Stegen ,2005, have not necessarily kept the original Proto-Bantu vowel system and a few have kept phonemic length to some extent. Stegen, 2005 insists that if a language has no phonemic length, then no orthographic representation of it will be necessary. This opened a ground for emergence of conventions on writing short and long vowels. These conventions, as reported by Stegen, 2005, are to write short vowels with a single letter and long vowels with double letters. Stegen (2005) warns that not all long vowels are underlyingly long; however, it is phonetically conditioned long vowels which have particularly difficult implications for orthography decisions.

For the purposes of the current study, vowel length as either a feature or not in Bantu languages was important because studying phonological patterns would mean focusing on Soli's vowel length too. No such studies exist on Soli hence the current study.

2.5 Morphological Patterns

In line with Wawru,2011 ,Morphology traces its origin from Darwin's Theory of Evolution . In 1899, under Darwinian Theory of evolution, Mark Muller delivered his lectures in oxford that the study of the evolution of words illuminated the evolution of language just as in Biology (Waweru, 2011). Darwin's specific claim was that the study of 400-500 basic roots of the Indo-European ancestors of many of the languages of Europe and Asia was the key to understanding the origin of human language. Katamba 2019 objects Darwin's claim by arguing that evolutionary pretensions were abandoned very early in the history of morphology. According to Katamba (2019), morphology is regarded as an essential synchronic discipline, a discipline focusing on the study of word structure at one stage in the life of a language rather than on the evolution of words. Synchronic approach to morphology gave rise to the current understanding of language morphology (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2020; Katamba & Stonham, 2024).

Within morphology, two branches namely derivational and inflectional morphology exist with the former focusing on the ways new words are formed and the latter dealing with the use of morphemes to designate grammatical relations (Bassene, 2012). The more the morphemes within the structure of a language the richer the language is morphologically. Bantu languages are understood to be rich morphologically because of their agglutinative nature. Soli, as a Bantu language, is perceived to have agglutinative characteristic. The agglutinative nature of Bantu languages has caused complexity in the morphology of these languages (Cocchi, 2009; Mchombo, 2019 & Waweru, 2011). Drawing on Cocchi (2009), Mchombo (2019) and Waweru's (2011) arguments, the grammar of Bantu languages is morphologically marked. This means that grammatical aspects such as person, number and tense are expressed through affixation of inflectional morphemes to host roots.

It is from the grammatical aspects of person, number, tense, negation and derivational suffixes that a language forms morphological patterns that have got some specificity. A morphological pattern is a set of associations and/or operations that build the various forms of a lexeme possibly by inflection, agglutinating, compounding or derivation (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2020 & Katamba & Stonham, 2024). Katamba and Stonham (2024) establish that morphological patterns are mostly displayed by words in languages hence the definition of words as basic units of morphological analysis. According to Aronoff and Fudeman (2020) as well as Katamba and Stonham (2024), words comprise smallest meaningful units called morphemes. Therefore, in the study of morphological patterns, morphologists rely on the morphemes whose patterning is language specific. The morphology of the English language, for example, licenses both inflectional and derivational morphemes which are marked by affixes giving a word to which they are attached a grammatical or a semantic meaning (Bauer, 1983, 1988; Booij, 2005; Haspelmath, 2024; Matthews, 1974 & Spencer, 2020). Inflectional morphemes in English are always suffixes attached to verbs or nouns to satisfy the grammatical demand of this language, for instance, the plural morpheme [-s]. This plural morpheme can be expressed by different but clearly related phonemic forms (allomorphs) dictated by the voicing state of the last consonant of the root. Bauer (1983) adds that English has derivational morphemes affixed to a root of a word hence a change in the meaning of a word or the word class. Bauer (1983) as well as Katamba and

Stonham (2024) observe that the addition of a suffix triggers a change in the final consonant of the root, for example, an alveolar consonant becomes palatal with the same voicing value.

Classification of words in a language has also been discovered to not only depend on semantics but also on morphology of the language. Matthews (1974), for that matter, observes that English words can be classified by their morphological properties: nouns can be identified as those words that can be inflected for plural while verbs can be inflected for third person singular present tense, past tense, past participle and progressive. Short adjectives and adverbs are words that can be inflected for comparative and superlative.

Morphological studies have also been done in languages to see how languages use their uniqueness to attain the linguistic universal, morphology. Using Hausa verbs Pawlak (2012) observes that in Hausa morphology, just as in English, word morphologies are conditioned by semantics. Pawlak (2012) posits that Hausa verbs take morphological exponents to mark the semantic features of the object and the grammatical features such as verbal plurality which is motivated by either syntactic or semantic agreement with the arguments. This is a development on Newman's (1990) argument on expressions of plurality in languages. According to Newman (1990), the use of pluractional stem often depends upon semantic relation between the verb and its patient argument.

To morphologically achieve intended semantics by languages, most languages use affixation process. As reported in Bantu languages by Gachomo (2020), tense, aspect and mood are morphologically marked on verbs through the process of affixation. The agglutinative nature of Bantu languages, as observed by Gachomo (2020) as well as Katamba and Stonham (2024), results into their display of a lot of inflectional and derivational morphemes within matrix of their verbs. Even though all the Bantu languages may have almost the same morphological patterns in the display of the two linguistic phenomena namely grammatical and semantic, the forms of these morphemes differ across the languages (Katamba, 1978).

The effect of affixation on the morphological shapes of words in languages has also been attested in other languages outside the family of Bantu, for example, in Maltese, a language of Semitic. In their study of morphological pattern of Maltese, Hoberman and Aronoff (2025) observe that Maltese contains relics of root and pattern morphology but its productive verbal morphology is affixal. This language has a class of vowel final-final stems which in languages like classical Arabic or other Semitic languages can result from the loss of weak final consonants /ʃ/ and /w/. Hoberman and Aronoff (2025) add that all verb finals are vowels, that is [-a] in the unsuffixed third person masculine singular, but in the suffixed gender, number and person forms, there are three types those with [-e], those with [-ie] and those with [-a]. From their discovery, it can be established that inflectional vowel suffix is a common characteristic among languages.

Focusing on inflectional morphemes, it has been claimed in a variety of Bantu languages that subject and object markers are incorporated pronouns (van der Spuy, 2019; Zerbian 2024 & Zeller, 2009). For example, in Lubukusu, a Bantu language

spoken in the western parts of Kenya, object markings are clitics that are capable of showing the properties of pronoun incorporation in many of instances (Diercks & Sikuku, 2025). Diercks and Sikuku (2025) also state that each noun is lexically specified as belonging to a particular noun class and therefore object markers can take a variety of morphological forms.

Some descriptive studies related to morphological pattern have been done on Soli by Ochieng (2025, 2025); Ochieng, Lonyangapuo and Sikuku (2018) and Okumu (2005) as well. According to Ochieng (2025) Soli heavily depends on morpheme affixation for morphosyntactic purposes in which case root and abstract morphemes are combined into larger syntactic objects. These morphemes undergo merger and movement when necessary following specific rules. Ochieng (2025) also observes that in the formation of a larger syntactic object in Soli, morphological structures of other word classes such as adjectives and verbs rely on the morphology of nouns that form part of the syntactic object. In their study of Soli DP structure, Ochieng, Lonyangapuo and Sikuku (2018) find out that several elements whose morphologies are driven by head nouns constitute a DP. These elements include demonstratives, possessives, quantifiers and determiners. Okumu (2005), on the other hand, looks at nominalisation process of Soli verbs, adjectives and adverbial nouns and its reverse process of denominalisation.

Derivational suffixes have been given a special attention in Bantu languages. This is based on the reason that they are productive in the languages both semantically and morphosyntactically. The common derivational suffix has been identified as verbal extension in these languages.

2.6 Research Gap

A study on Soli language as endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka Province must begin by situating Soli within the broader landscape of minority-language research in Zambia. Over the past decade, scholars have applied linguistic-landscape and sociolinguistic-vitality frameworks to languages such as Mambwe-Namwanga, exploring public signage, migrant speaker practices, and semiotic inclusion in urban spaces. Banda and Jimaima's (2017) analysis of rural and urban centres in Lusaka demonstrated how "out-of-place" languages manifest vitality through dispersed community signage, yet their study did not extend to Soli. More recently, Simungala (2024) examined Mambwe-Namwanga visibility in Bauleni township, underscoring the dynamic interplay of migrant repertoires and local languages. Despite these advances, Soli remains absent from such landscape-oriented inquiries, leaving a crucial gap in understanding how public space practices reflect—and potentially mitigate—the language's erosion.

Beyond public visibility, domain-based analyses are essential for pinpointing where and how Soli is used, yet existing domain studies have overlooked it. Chisenga, Mwale, and Tembo (2023) conducted an extensive domain analysis among Lusaka's indigenous communities, revealing domain-specific shifts toward English in education, formal commerce, and media. Their findings, however, aggregated smaller linguistic communities under broad categories, subsuming Soli speakers into generalized "minority" groups. This lack of disaggregated data obscures critical insights into Soli's

functional niches—whether in domestic settings, ritual gatherings, informal markets, or intergenerational storytelling—and inhibits precise mapping of its resilience or decline across sociocultural contexts.

Intergenerational transmission constitutes a linchpin of language maintenance, yet no sociolinguistic study has traced how parental language choices affect Soli's vitality among younger generations in Lusaka. Phiri (2021) demonstrated that the weakening of home-based transmission accelerates language shift in Cinyanja communities, with parents favoring English or Nyanja to secure perceived socioeconomic advantages for their children. In the case of Soli, urban migration and schooling patterns likely disrupt traditional Soli-speaking households, but without targeted inquiry, the extent to which such disruptions precipitate generational discontinuities remains speculative.

Speaker attitudes further shape language vitality, influencing both individual usage and community mobilization for maintenance efforts. Chibwe (2022) found that positive attitudes toward English and Bemba among Kaonde speakers in urban Zambia correlated with diminished use of their heritage language in public domains. Yet the attitudinal landscape of Soli speakers—how they perceive Soli's utility, prestige, and symbolic value within Lusaka's multilingual milieu—has not been empirically documented. Understanding whether Soli speakers internalize societal prejudices or retain linguistic pride is indispensable for designing responsive revitalisation strategies. The mechanisms through which dominant languages erode Soli also lack micro-level empirical scrutiny. Mwale and Tembo (2022) identified urbanization as a catalyst for linguistic erosion, highlighting how English dominates education and official discourse while Nyanja emerges as the de facto lingua franca in mixed-ethnicity neighbourhoods. Bemba's socioeconomically driven expansion adds further pressure. However, no study has isolated how these macro-pressures specifically intersect with Soli, for instance by examining code-switching practices in Soli households, competitive language acquisition among Soli-descended youth, or institutional language policies that inadvertently marginalize Soli.

Addressing these lacunae demands a targeted, mixed-methods investigation that integrates linguistic-landscape surveys, ethnographic interviews, and quantitative community surveys. Applying Simungala's (2024) refined signage documentation techniques can reveal Soli's presence—or absence—in public spaces. Ethnographic interviews modelled on Chibwe's (2022) attitudinal protocols can elicit nuanced speaker perspectives on identity and language value. Complementary quantitative instruments, as employed by Phiri (2021), can chart intergenerational transmission rates and domain usage patterns. Together, these methods would generate a multidimensional portrait of Soli's vitality, illuminate the socio-institutional and psychological drivers of its endangerment, and furnish evidence for tailored language-maintenance and policy interventions.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Dominance of other languages—particularly Bemba, Nyanja, and English—in urban and peri-Soli language, indigenous to Lusaka Province, faces increasing marginalization due to the urban contexts. This study will guided by Language Shift and Maintenance theory of Fishman (2020).

2.7.1 Language Shift and Maintenance (Fishman, 2020)

As articulated by Fishman ,2020 ,language shift and maintenance centers on the premise that the survival of a threatened language hinges first and foremost on its uninterrupted transmission within the family and community. Fishman contends that when intergenerational continuity is disrupted—when parents no longer speak the ancestral tongue to their children—the language enters a downward trajectory that becomes increasingly difficult to reverse. To measure and guide revitalization efforts, he proposed the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), which identifies eight stages of language vitality, ranging from use in all domains of life (Stage 1) to residual knowledge among only a few elders with no transmission (Stage 8). According to Fishman, interventions targeting the earliest stages of disruption—those that reinforce intimate, domestic, and community-based uses of the language—offer the greatest prospect of halting or reversing decline. Once a language descends lower on the scale, efforts must increasingly rely on institutional supports, such as education and media, which, without a solid community base, are unlikely to succeed in the long term (Fishman, 2020).

In the context of Lusaka Province, the Soli language exemplifies the very challenges Fishman warned about. Historically spoken by the Soli people in peri-urban and rural zones around Lusaka, Soli has suffered progressively diminished use amid the dominance of English as the medium of formal education and administration, and Nyanja and Bemba as regional lingua francas. Jimaima and Banda's (2017) analysis of linguistic landscapes in Bauleni township reveals that Soli appears only sporadically on informal signage and is absent from public service notices, schools, and local media, a pattern indicative of minimal institutional support and weak community transmission. Chitebeta's (2019) doctoral research further underscores how younger Soli speakers increasingly adopt Nyanja or English at home, relegating Soli to ceremonial contexts or interactions among elders. This shift reflects sociopolitical pressures—urban migration, intermarriage, and perceptions of economic mobility linked to dominant languages—that have collectively eroded domains of Soli use.

Applying Fishman's GIDS to the Soli situation situates the language perilously at Stage 6 or 7, where it survives only among older generations in constrained contexts and lacks active use by adolescents and children. In Bauleni, for instance, Soli is encountered primarily in traditional healers' spaces or occasional cultural gatherings, but is neither taught in local schools nor broadcast on community radio (Jimaima & Banda, 2017). The absence of Soli in civic, educational, and commercial domains signals a profound intergenerational disruption; without familial reinforcement, Soli's role becomes purely symbolic. According to Fishman (2020), languages at these stages require urgent, community-driven initiatives that recommence transmission in home and neighborhood settings before any top-down policy measures can take root.

Reversing the decline of Soli demands a holistic strategy grounded in Fishman's insistence on grassroots mobilization. First, community-based language nests and immersion playgroups could rekindle Soli use among pre-school children, restoring its presence as a mother tongue (Fishman, 2020). Second, systematic documentation—compiling Soli narratives, vocabularies, and grammatical structures—can support the development of primers and storybooks that integrate cultural content, thereby fostering

literacy and pride (Dorian, 1989). Third, cultural valorization through festivals, oral poetry competitions, and local theater can reframe Soli as a living heritage rather than an artifact, strengthening speakers' emotional and identity bonds to the language (Bradley, 2025). Finally, advocacy for the inclusion of Soli in Lusaka's community radio and curriculum can create the supplemental institutional scaffolding that Fishman deems necessary once family-based transmission is reestablished.

The Soli case underscores Fishman's core insight that language endangerment is fundamentally a social phenomenon tied to identity, power, and community-level practices (Fishman, 2020). Without the renewal of Soli use in everyday life—at kitchen tables, in children's first words, in neighborhood conversations—any external efforts at policy reform or media programming will lack the indispensable social substrate. For researchers and practitioners in Lusaka Province, Fishman's framework offers both diagnostic clarity and a roadmap for action: prioritize intergenerational continuity, leverage cultural strengths, and build institutional alliances only once a robust community foundation has been re-established.

2.7.2 Tenets of Optimality Theory

Optimality Theory is a theory used to formalise analyses in phonology (Prince & Smolensky, 2019). OT originally developed from a Generative Grammar (GG) theory known as Generative Phonology (Chomsky, 1962). Though originally developed from Generative Phonology theory, OT analyses have been extended to other areas of linguistics such as syntax and morphology that make up the grammar of languages (Grimshaw, 2022, Legendre, 2021 & Wunderlich, 2019). Optimality Theory, just as Generative Phonology, ensures well-formedness of a language (Prince & Smolensky, 2019). What marks the main difference between OT and Generative Phonology is the approach that the two theories use in the analysis of language structure. While Generative Phonology employs a set of rules in the derivation of language structure, OT applies a universal set of constraints that are strictly ranked depending on a language to ensure well-formedness (Prince & Smolensky, 2019).

In ensuring well-formedness of a language, OT operates on three main universal tenets also known as principles (Prince & Smolensky, 2019): the generator (GEN), the Harmony Evaluator (H-EVAL) and the Constraint (CON). As argued by Prince and Smolensky (2019), each of the three tenets has got a specific role in determining the structure of a language. GEN generates a list of possible outputs or candidates; CON provides criterion for strictly ordering violable constraints used to decide between the candidates while the principle H-EVAL chooses the optimal candidate based on the constraints. The tenet, constraint (CON) comes in two basic species faithfulness constraints and markedness constraints (Prince & Smolensky, 2019). The faithfulness constraints require that the observed surface forms (the outputs) match the underlying or lexical forms (the inputs) in some particular ways, that is, the faithfulness constraints require identity between input and output forms. Markedness constraints, on the other hand, evaluate output representation by imposing requirements on the structural well-formedness of the outputs and penalise the outputs for the presence of certain configurations. In summary, faithfulness constraints are meant to prevent realisation of every input as some unmarked form while markedness constraints motivate changes from underlying forms.

Markedness and faithfulness constraints are regarded by Prince and Smolensky (2019) as criteria of decisions which cooperate to select from among the various possible ways of realising underlying forms. The input-output relation is thus considered by Prince and Smolensky (2019) as an optimisation problem. To achieve optimisation, constraints must be satisfied in order of their ranking in hierarchies. Ranking of constraints is language dependent (McCarthy & Prince, 2019; Prince & Smolensky 2020). Selection of optimal candidates from a range of alternative outputs for an input is as a result of interaction of relevant constraints. Candidates that do not meet demands of the highly ranked constraints are disqualified (Prince & Smolensky, 2019). In addition, in the optimal output selected by H-EVAL, the violation of a lower ranked constraint will occur if and only if such violation is necessary to satisfy a higher ranked constraint. For most inputs, the constraints are highly conflicting and even contradict one another in the demands they place on well-formed representations (McCarthy & Prince, 2019; Prince & Smolensky 2020). These conflicts among constraints further explain the necessity of ranking in working out optimal output forms of the underlying forms.

OT analyses are formulated in tableaux. A tableau's top row shows the input (the underlying representation) and the output (surface representation) followed by the constraints in a ranked order from left to right. The first column shows the set of candidates one of which is chosen as the output indicated by a pointing finger (☞). The other columns show constraint violations each receiving an asterisk (*). The fatal violation which rules candidates out is indicated by an exclamation mark (!). The table below demonstrates how constraints interact in the selection of an optimal candidate.

Input ~ Output	CON1	CON2	CON3
☞a) Candidate			*
b) Candidate		*!	*
c) Candidate	*!	*	

Note: Constraints and candidates used in the table above are hypothetical.

As shown in the tableau above, the GEN produces a candidate set (a), (b) and (c) for the input. These candidates are passed to the H-EVAL consisting of a set of ordered constraints as shown in CON1 >> CON2 >> CON3. The three candidates are evaluated with regard to the ranking of CON with CON1 as the highest ranked and CON3 as the least ranked. The function of H-EVAL is language specific (McCarty, 2025). In this evaluation, candidate (a) ultimately wins the competition since it has the least violation of the constraints and it satisfies the highly ranked constraints. This candidate therefore, emerges as the output form generated from the underlying form (input). The other candidate (b) is ruled out as it violates the second ranked constraints, CON2. Candidate (c) fatally violates the highest ranked constraint, CON1 hence its disqualification. Shading of cells in the tableau is done after a serious violation as seen in candidates (b) and (c). It can also be used to show an ineffectiveness of a constraint on selection of the best candidate as seen in candidate (a). In case of equally ranked constraints, dotted lines separating columns are used.

2.7.2.1 Justification for Choosing Optimality Theory

Optimality Theory is developed in the context of specific empirical theses about the way phonological systems are organised (Prince & Smolensky, 2019). Prince and

Smolensky (2019) identify three of the empirical theses. First thesis is the intrinsic relation between change and conditions of change. Regular changes in representations take place under specifiable conditions, more subtly the nature of the change is closely related to the nature of the conditions that provoke it. Other rule-based GG theories like Generative Phonology on the other hand, aims to construct a predictive theory of natural language sound systems rooted in a finely detailed account of the principles or rules defining linguistic representations and the possible relations between them. The rule based GG theories, according to Prince and Smolensky (2019), establish little or no connection between structural description or environment of a rule and the structural change they impose. Given the fact that this study aimed at establishing phonological changes in Soli and conditions under which these changes occur. The OT was considered appropriate for this study.

The second thesis is based on universality and difference in language structures and patterns. Phonological grammars are strongly restricted in absolute terms: some structures and patterns must always be present, others can never arise – and relatively in that the presence of certain patterns implies the presence of others or that certain effects, if present can only occur under certain conditions, cross-linguistically limited. Because of this flexibility and universality of OT, the theory could easily handle any parameters within the phonology of Soli.

The third thesis is based on the role of output targets. Phonological representation may change from their lexical form to their surface or output forms. In a number of instances in Soli, underlying forms were found to be incorrespondence with surface forms under specific conditions. This was well taken care of by the third thesis hence the choice of OT over rule-based Generative Grammar theories.

In addition to the aforementioned three , it was found out that every rule-based GG theory is specifically meant for analysis of a particular linguistic universal yet this study needed a theory that could handle both phonology and morphology. The OT was, therefore, considered appropriate in this study since its principles are directly applicable to both phonological and morphological phenomena (Grimshaw, 2022, Legendre, 2021 & Wunderlich, 2019)

III. Chapter Three
Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of the procedures and methods that used to conduct this research on the study area. The chapter discussed how the respondents was selected, how data was collected and analyzed. The chapter also presented research design, population of study sample size, sampling technique, research instruments data sources. Reliability and validity, data gathering procedures, data analysis and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research design

The study followed a descriptive research design. Descriptive analytic research design describes a phenomenon as it exists and explains why and how the phenomenon displays a particular pattern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2025). The qualitative and quantitative

approaches were employed based on how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province. The quantitative technique was used to collect and analyze data on how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province. The qualitative approach was used to collect data and analyse data on how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province. This design was used because it brought out clearly the relationship between soli ' language and its endangered due to the use of other languages.

3.2 Study population

Study population is defined as a comprehensive group of individuals with common characteristics that a researcher is interested in (Creswell, 2009 & Mugenda & Mugenda, 2025). It is from the study population that samples for a study are drawn (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins, 2019). The study targeted the total population of 150 participants in Chongwe District of Lusaka province. The study population for this study was all native speakers of Soli. The native speakers were chosen on the ground that they have linguistic competence in Soli in which the study was interested.

3.3 Sample size

The sample size of the study consisted of 150 respondents of the target population. This is so because the nature of data to be generated required different techniques for better understanding of the research problem under investigation. Besides, the approach is also commonly known for achieving higher degree of validity and reliability as well as eliminating biases as per Amin (2020). To calculate sample size, the Yamane formula was used (Singh & Masuku, 2012). Using an estimated sample size calculation, the sample size came to 150 respondents.

The sample size was calculated using this formula as follows; n= N/1+N (0.05)2
Where;

n= represents the required sample size
N =represents total population
0.05 =represents the confidence interval (decimal of 5%)
n= N/(1+N(0.05)2)
n= 240/(1+240(0.05)2)
n= 240/(1+240(0.OO25))
n= 240/(1+0.6)
n= 240/(1.6)=150
n= 150 is the required sample size

Because the classes were not evenly distributed, to have an equal representation of each of the classes, proportionate sampling technique was used.

3.4 Sampling methods

The researcher used varieties of sampling which included: Purposive, random and stratified sampling. Purposive sampling involved selecting a number of Resident District Commissioners, city mayor and community leaders based on the community

participation in relation to service delivery. These was purposely selected because they head different sections of people within the community and thus have sufficient knowledge about how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province. This method was appropriate because the sample that was selected comprised of informed persons who can provide data that is comprehensive enough to gain better insight into the problem. Random sampling was used in selecting respondents from the population listing by chance. Teachers, pupils, and head of departments were randomly selected so as to get equal representation of the respondents. In that way, every member had an equal chance to be selected.

3.5 Data collection instruments

The researcher used the following instruments in this study, questionnaire and interview. The questionnaires were the main primary source of data collection. The identified sample served with the questionnaire directly by the researcher. To obtain quantitative data, one set of questionnaires was used for all respondents. Interviews was face to face interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviews held with those respondents identified purposely crucial to the provision of explanations to the topic under study.

3.6 Validity and reliability of the instrument

Validity of the instrument was ensured through expert judgment. The researcher consulted her supervisor for expert knowledge on questionnaire construction. After the assessment of the questionnaire, the necessary adjustments was made bearing in mind of the objectives of the study. Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials (Muganda & Mugenda, 2021). Reliability of the instrument was established through a test-retest technique. The researcher conducted a pre-test of the instrument on group of subjects and waited two weeks then administered the same test to the same subjects a second time.

3.7 Data analysis

The raw data that was obtained from questionnaires was cleaned, sorted and coded. The coded data was entered into the Computer, checked and statistically analyzed using the statistical package for social scientists (SPSS) software package to generate descriptive and inferential statistics Descriptive analysis will be applied to describe the primary variable and associated indicator items related to the study objectives. The Pearson product correlation Co-efficient analysis was used to test the relationship among the variables and regression coefficient models to determine the extent to which the independent variables impacts on the dependent variable. Qualitative data was collected using interview checklist during discussions with other authorized persons respondent category in meetings and documentary reviews using documentary checklist. Content analysis was used to edit the data and re-organize it into meaningful shorter sentences. The data was analyzed and organized based on patterns, repetitions and commonalities into themes based on the study variables. For quantitative data, the researcher used tables, charts and bar graphs. The data then was used to reinforce information that was got from questionnaires to draw conclusion and recommendations.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are cardinal in research world and should be observed fully when one is carrying out a research. Ethical issues in research are connected with beliefs and principles about what is right and what is wrong. In conducting this research, the researcher observed a number of ethical issues regarded in research. For example, before the commencement of the study, the researcher sought permission from responsible officers to allow him entry into their premises and conduct the study. When getting permission, the researcher also explained the kind of study he will be carrying and why he will pick on such places and not others.

The researcher also informed all the participants that the information that he is going to collect from them will be used for educational purposes and he maintained confidentiality at all times. This is evident in the manner the questionnaires will be designed. There was total anonymity as no names were required when filling in the questionnaires.

IV. Chapter Four
Presentation Of Findings

4.0 Introduction

Chapter four of this study presents the findings of the study under investigation. Data presented in this chapter was obtained using research instruments that included interviews and questionnaires. The data collected using these instruments and in line with the objectives of the study were presented in accordance with the generated theme(s), for data collected through interviews and in the form of charts and diagrams, for data collected through questionnaires. The chapter presents data both qualitatively and quantitatively. For qualitative data, the researcher has ensured that the actual words said by respondents (verbatim) are used while other words have been paraphrased. For quantitative, the researcher used numerical data in the form of tables, charts and bar graphs.

4.1 Demographic and Social Characteristics of Respondents

4.1.1 Sex of Respondents

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Gender	**Frequency (N)**	**Percent (%)**
Male	100	67
Female	50	33
Total	**150**	**100**

Source: Study Findings, (2025)

The table above shows that the majority of the respondents represented by (67%) were male and the females followed with (33%). This implies that the study was gender

sensitive and collected views from both males and females since both sexes have adequate information on how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province.

4.1.2 Age

Table 4.2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	**Frequency (N)**	**Percent (%)**
20-35	80	53
36-49	40	27
50 and above	30	20
Total	**150**	**100**

Source: Study Findings (2025)

The table above shows that the majority of the respondents represented by (53%) were in the age bracket of 20 — 35 years followed by those in the age bracket of 36 — 49 years with 27% and lastly those with 50 and above years with 20%, This implies that the study collected views from all mature respondents since the highest age bracket was 20 — 35 years.

4.1.3 Level of Education of Respondents

The question was posed to the respondents about the level of education. The table above shows that the majority of the respondents represented by (27%) had a diploma, 23% had a Degree, 20% had a Secondary and certificate level, 7% held a master's degree and lastly 3% were primary level holders. This implies that the study collected views from all qualifications of respondents and the highest qualification was Diploma level as illustrated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Level of Education of Respondents

Level of Education	Frequency (N	Percentage (%)
primary	5	3
secondary	30	20
Certificate level	30	20
Diploma	40	27
Degree	35	23

Master's degree	10	07
Total	150	100

Source: study findings, 2025.

4.1.4 Working Experience

The question was asked to staff members' respondents on their working experience. The findings revealed that 10 (22%) of respondents had an experience of 1- 5 years, 23 (51%) had a working experience of 6-10, 7(16%) have experience of 11-15 years and 5(11%) of respondents have above 15 years (see Table 6.4).

Table 4.4: Distribution of Respondents by Working Experience

Working Experience	**Frequency (N)**	**Percentage (%)**
1-5 years	30	20
6-10 years	60	40
11-15 years	20	13
Above 15 years	40	27
Total	**150**	**100**

The findings from Table 4.4 imply that the majority of respondents had a working experience of 6-10 years followed by 1-5 years. Experience makes a people to understand how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages. Most people with experience proved to perform better in this study because the employees understood the project well and the advantages of such form of project. The management of selected schools has a wealth of experience in the subsector. The average number of years of experience in the management is 25 years.

4.2 Sociolinguistic Factors Contributing to the Decline of Soli Language

The first objective sought to examine the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Soli language usage in Lusaka Province. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions with Soli speakers across different age groups. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: (1) Urbanization and Language Shift, (2) Prestige of Dominant Languages, (3) Intergenerational Transmission Gaps, (4) Lack of Institutional Support, and (5) Cultural and Identity Loss.

Theme 1: Urbanization and Language Shift

Respondent Narration (Soli, Elder 67 years):

"Muno mu Lusaka, antu sakamba ci Soli kwambiri. Bafuna kupunzitsa ana awo ci Nyanja na English pakuti bakankale bwino mumoyo wawo .ndiye calengesa kuti ci soli ciyambe kusoba

Translation: “Here in Lusaka, people rarely speak Soli. They prefer teaching their children Nyanja or English so that they can succeed in life. That is why Soli is slowly disappearing.”

Urbanization has reshaped the linguistic ecology of Lusaka. Elders attribute the decline of Soli to migration and exposure to dominant urban languages. This aligns with Fishman’s (2020) theory of language shift, which emphasizes how urban migration accelerates disruption of home-based transmission. It also echoes Banda & Jimaima ,2017 who show that Lusaka’s cosmopolitan neighborhoods force minority speakers to adopt lingua francas (Nyanja/Bemba) to integrate socially.

Theme 2: Prestige of Dominant Languages
Respondent Narration (Bemba, Parent 42 years):
“Ngati wakamba ci Soli, makolo amanvela nsoni. Bafu na ana awo azikamba cinyanja na cizungu,ndiye pamene ana acita bwino ku sikulu”
Translation: “When you speak Soli, some parents feel embarrassed. They want their children to speak good Nyanja and English because those languages help children succeed in school.”

Respondent Narration (Nyanja, Youth 21 years):
“Ku town, munthu akalankhula Soli, anzake amu seka ati ndiye munthu wa kumudzi. Nyanja na English ndi zimene zikuwoneka ngati za nthawi ino.”
Translation: “In town, if someone speaks Soli, friends laugh at them and say they are too rural. Nyanja and English are seen as modern.”
These narrations reveal prestige ideologies that devalue Soli. Speaking Soli is associated with “backwardness,” while English and Nyanja are equated with modernity and social mobility. This finding supports Rudwick & Makoni (2021), who show how African languages are stigmatized within postcolonial hierarchies. It also reflects Phillipson’s (2018) concept of linguistic imperialism, where dominant languages gain prestige while local ones are marginalized.

Theme 3: Decline of Intergenerational Transmission
Respondent Narration (Soli, Young Adult 25 years):
“Ine nsiniziba bwino kukamba ci Soli. Tiziba cabe mau yangono, ,bambuya ndiye baziba”
Translation: “I cannot speak Soli well. I only know a few words from my grandparents. Only the old people are fluent.”
This theme reveals a generational gap. Young adults possess only passive or partial competence in Soli, relying instead on Nyanja or English. This finding aligns with UNESCO’s (2025) language vitality framework, where a break in child acquisition is a key indicator of severe endangerment. It also resonates with Fishman’s GIDS scale (Stage 6–7), where the language is maintained by elders but no longer transmitted effectively to the young.

Theme 4: Lack of Institutional Support
Respondent Narration (Bemba, Teacher 38 years):
“Ku sukulu tapaba icisambililo ca mu Soli. Abana babafunda fye mu English, nangu pali local, Nyanja. Soli tefyo ifundwa.”

Translation: “In schools there are no subjects in Soli. Children are taught only in English, and sometimes in Nyanja. Soli is not taught at all.”

Teachers acknowledged that Soli lacks representation in the education system. This exclusion mirrors Kamwendo (2020), who observed that Zambian language policy privileges only seven major languages, sidelining minority tongues. The absence of Soli in curricula, media, and governance deprives it of institutional scaffolding necessary for revitalization (Grenoble & Whaley, 2024).

Theme 5: Cultural and Identity Loss
Respondent Narration (Soli, Elder woman 70 years):
“Nomba nga mwalanda ifya mu Soli, abakalamba balefwaya ukupela abana ifyebo, ama nama. Nomba abana tabaleumfwa bwino, balefwaya ku seka. Ifyo filatipailafye umutima.”
Translation: “When we speak Soli, we want to pass on proverbs and stories to the children. But they do not understand well, some even laugh at us. This breaks our hearts.”
This narration highlights the emotional and cultural cost of language loss. Soli is not only a communication tool but also a repository of proverbs, oral histories, and rituals. The inability of youth to understand these traditions signals cultural erosion. Hinton et al. (2018) stress that language loss creates cultural grief among elders, while revitalization can restore pride and resilience.

The thematic findings indicate that the decline of Soli is driven by a convergence of urbanization, prestige ideologies, weakening intergenerational transmission, lack of institutional support, and the resulting cultural disconnection. Narrations in Soli, Bemba, and Nyanja demonstrate how different generations and social groups perceive Soli—either as a disappearing heritage (elders), an embarrassing marker of backwardness (youth), or a non-functional language in education (teachers and parents).

Critically, these patterns confirm Fishman’s (2020) framework that intergenerational disruption is the root cause of endangerment, exacerbated by Zambia’s English-dominant education system and by Nyanja’s rise as Lusaka’s lingua franca. Unless deliberate measures are taken—such as mother-tongue education, cultural programming, and media representation—the Soli language risks further marginalization.

4.3 Language competence, proficiency and language use

The second objective was set to assess the impact of dominant languages (e.g., English, Bemba, Nyanja) on the proficiency and transmission of Soli among different age groups in Lusaka Province. Some observations made during several field trips to Lusaka district since May 2025 are summarized below: The current linguistic situation in Lusaka district is the result of informal and formal factors that have shaped it. Among other things, the informal factors include seasonal work in other places, migration, sale of surplus products, visits to relatives, etc. People’s mobility consolidates their L2 competence and proficiency, since those who stay outside Lusaka district for a short or

longer period are definitely exposed to a L2 speaking environment. Similarly, formal contacts, which were just referred to above, are also significant language-wise.

A local government official who visits Lusaka district certainly uses L2, which is the official medium of communication in administration. L2 competence and proficiency are especially spread by the formal education system which operates several primary schools where L2 is the medium of instruction (MoI) and an important subject. In addition, it is widely spoken outside the classroom in the school yard. In other institutions of the area a similar L2 profile is displayed. Accordingly, most formal contacts are carried out in L2, thus turning the Ward into a bilingual environment.

It can be taken for granted that in the Lusaka district, L2 is known by everybody. Even senior Soli males and females were found proficient in Nyanja. They informally learned L2 earlier from peers, while being outside the area as migrant worker and accompanying spouse, or were formally taught L2 in school. It may be that in more remote places up in the mountains few people do not master L2 well, but this would be an unconfirmed exception from the rule.

4.3.1. The young generation

It goes without saying that the UNESCO factors above provide a thought-provoking framework for evaluating language loss. This material invites comparison with my own long experience in the field of identifying and describing endangered L1s in Zambia. It seems necessary to critically review these factors and to address more selectively the whole endangerment and maintenance issue. Elsewhere (Legère forthcoming) it is further argued that the UNESCO list needs prioritization in the sense that some factors have a greater impact on the linguistic situation than others. In particular, intergenerational L1 transmission and the language attitude problem need special attention and discussion.

Time and again research results on language endangerment have pointed out that language competence and proficiency in the young generation is particularly decisive for the future of a small language. This young generation also shapes language use. In the case of language choice its decision for or against L1 (often stimulated by external factors) could be a death blow or an important go ahead for a small L1. The vitality of Soli also heavily depends on a positive approach to L1 maintenance, as illustrated below.

Here is some evidence from a fact-finding survey that illustrates language competence, language use and language attitudes among Soli youth. This survey was carried out in the second half of 2025 in four schools of Lusaka district. In those days 532 learners in grade/standard 1, standard 5 and standard 7 were interviewed. In upper grades a questionnaire was distributed. With regard to language acquisition in early childhood all Soli interviewees stated that their mother tongue (MT) was Soli. This implies that the current parent generation mainly speaks to their children in L1 and that the latter enjoy a far-reaching exposure to L1 in the homestead. Children whose parents came from outside the area acquired Nyanja as MT at home (or came with that MT from other places to Lusaka district). The MT background is clear from Figure 1.

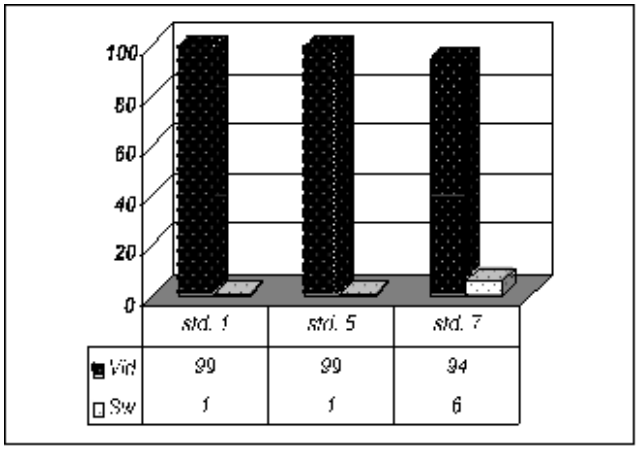

Figure 1. Mother tongue (in percent)

L1 continues to be very prominent in speaking to adult family members even when children grow older. Figure 2 below illustrates this language use, which is a sign of respect towards adults, and is also expected by adults. Figure 2 reflects data and observations by the author and colleagues who studied language competence and use in Zambia and elsewhere (see above and the bibliography). In fact, whenever L1 is loosing ground in formal and informal domains and threatened, the family is the last bastion where L1 is still widely used. As soon as L1 is no longer widely spoken by the parent generation, children lack the opportunity to acquire this L1.

This situation was observed among Soli people in the Lusaka district, where many children could not speak Soli any more, but had mostly acquired L2. The former language was understood as the result of the close affinity L1 – L2 and a partial, irregular exposure to Soli which was still used by grandparents and heard elsewhere, i.e. in traditional ceremonies, etc.

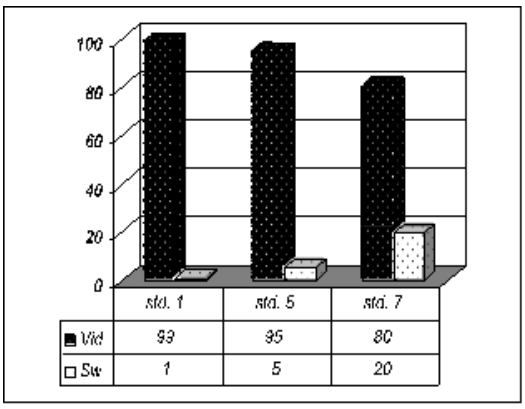

Figure 2. Language spoken with parents (in percent)

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For comparison, Figure 3 gives a summary of which language is spoken with peers.

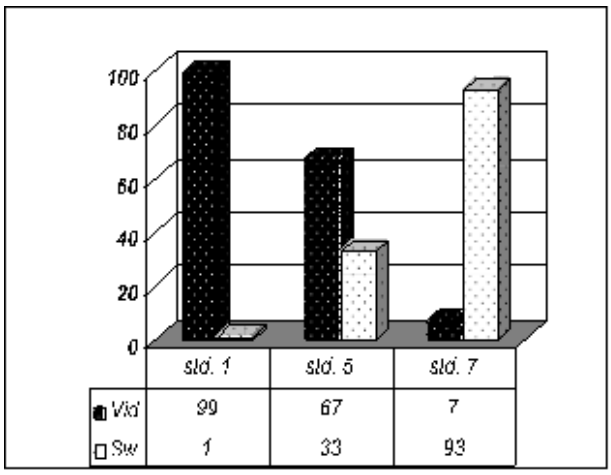

Figure 3. Language spoken with peers (in percent)

As portrayed in Figure 3 standard 1 children had no linguistic alternative, as they were almost all only L1 speaking. By standard 7 the situation has drastically changed: 93 percent declared that they communicate in L2 with peers, and only a small group claimed that they speak L1 to each other. The major factor that shapes language use among the children is the complete L2 immersion in school as the result of the language policy implementation in primary education. In government schools L2 is the sole MoI throughout grade one to grade seven (when the primary cycle ends). As a consequence, in the course of these seven years in school the language competence and proficiency of the learners gradually shifts from L1 to L2.

In other words, while in the Grade 1 learners often encounter problems in understanding the subject matter taught in L2, the situation subsequently changes in favor of Nyanja to the detriment of L1. In this way, L2 becomes an important, compulsory element in the life of the young generation which is not negotiable, as the Zambian government does not formally tolerate any other Zambian language in education and in other formal domains (although in practice in lower grades teachers who speak the same L1 as their learners facilitate the learning process by occasionally switching to this L1, which supports the grasp of the subject matter).

The consistent exposure to L2 both in and outside the classroom, paired with the marginalization and even sometimes stigmatization of L1, results in a situation whereby in standard seven the data on language use are diametrically opposed to those of standard one. Factually 100 percent of standard seven learners have a solid command of L2, which becomes the preferred medium of communication with peers (Figure 3). L1 is still spoken at home with adults (Figure 2), but L1 proficiency and command has been stagnating, since the L2 focus in school keeps children away from consolidating

L1 competence with regard to grammatical structures and vocabulary, which is at best sporadically expanded. It is probably also the desire of the young generation to become distinct language-wise from adults, which supports the wide-spread preference of L2. The learners' self-evaluation pertaining to the most frequently used language is illustrated in Figure 4.

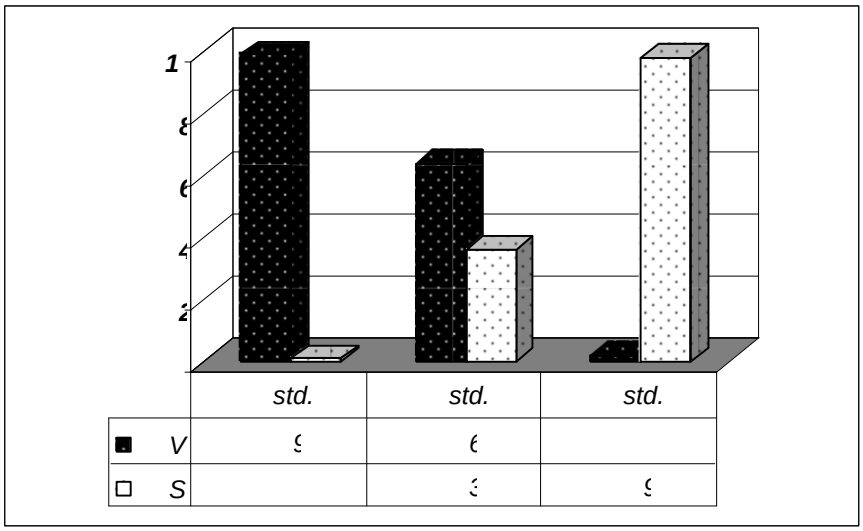

Figure 4. Language most frequently spoken (in percent)

4.3.2 The extent of L1 endangerment

The facts summarized above are instrumental for predicting the future of Soli. In a rather bilingual environment, the future parent generation (the current primary school learners) displays L2 competence and proficiency as well as L2 use that, by and large, exceed that of L1. The far-going L2 exposure affects their L1 skills. Coupled with strong formal and moral L2 support, the chances of L1 to be transmitted in the future to another young generation diminish drastically. It is not likely that present-day children will reinforce their L1 proficiency after leaving the formal education system.

Accordingly, the development observed and documented above is threatening. It already has a negative impact on the position of Soli in the sense that the total number of L1 speakers is decreasing. While these days inter-generational L1 transmission still takes place, L1 competence building is stagnating or eroding as the result of the L2 imposition in formal education. This substantial issue is not documented by, for example, the UNESCO expert team. In the case of Zambia and beyond (for example Sudan), UNESCO (2025b) ignores a factor that turns a whole generation away from L1 and into L2 speakers. In sum, the L2 impact in education is, to a large extent, responsible for language shift and L1 endangerment. The situation becomes further aggravating when other factors of the UNESCO Language Vitality List are evaluated.

It can be inferred from the foregoing discussion that the current Zambian language policy and its implementation in formal education is of central relevance for the L1's future. Hence, if this language policy were to stipulate that L1s should be used in school

in a sort of additive MoI approach, L1 learners would certainly become better skilled L1 speakers. This, in its turn, would enable them to use the L1 more widely...

After many years of official negligence and even discrediting L1s (as they were and occasionally still are perceived as potential sources of tribalism), in 2022 the Zambian government at least officially recognized the existence of L1s. The Cultural Policy document (Zambia 2022) pays attention to them using the term languages of communities. However, this policy lacks a clear vision, as it does not foresee any particular role for the L1s in Zambian society. Nor does it hold out prospects of supporting follow-up steps due to lack of funding. Officials who compiled the document just recognize the complex linguistic situation. They do not offer a solution which is supposed to address the future of more than 120 L1s.

As indicated earlier, Soli is neither used in any formal domain nor is it expected to be assigned to a particular formal domain, as this would be against government policy. For similar reasons, there is no material for L1 classes or literacy courses. The L1 documentation available so far is in its infancy. The texts also serve as an internet source for computer-assisted L1 analysis such as establishing frequency and alphabetic lists, etc.500 copies of the publication will be distributed among L1 speakers in Lusaka district as an attempt to stop L1 erosion and to keep alive, or to revitalize, L1 competence particularly among primary school learners.

The examples above referred to the young generation whose language attitudes are shaped by language policy and the latter's implementation in school. This holds true also when language attitudes of the adults are evaluated. It is logical that they mainly use L2 in formal speech acts. Even if they would prefer L1, the lack of L1 vocabulary and appropriate terms that are needed to cope with new concepts and objects prevents them from using Soli in those domains. What matters is that, to an increasing extent even in informal conversation at the village level, L2 makes progress as a medium of communication. This does not imply that adults develop a negative attitude towards their L1. This gradual shift in use just reflects a situation where Soli people feel that their marginalized, disempowered L1 can no longer adequately serve their communicative requirements. As a consequence, language attitudes and L2 choice are forced upon Soli people by outside factors. Villagers are not at liberty to stem the tide by attempting to use L1 in domains where both external and linguistic reasons mitigate them against doing so.

4.3.3 The degree of inter-relatedness between Soli and the other Bantu Botatwe languages namely, Ila, Lenje, Sala and Tonga.

The results/findings drawn from the analysis in Appendices 'A' and 'B' are presented and discussed below, and then the percentages of inter-relatedness were collapsed into a chart for Sala's inter-relatedness with other six languages studied inclusive of the Bantu Botatwe languages indicated in the above objective.

4.3.3.1. Sala

The degree of inter-relatedness between Sala and other languages under study was analyzed as shown below.

Sala vs. Tonga	80%
Sala vs. Soli	67%
Sala vs. Lenje	81.5%
Sala vs. Ila	78%
Sala vs. Kikaonde	39.5%
Sala vs. Nyanja	39.5%

The above data is collapsed in the following Figure 5:

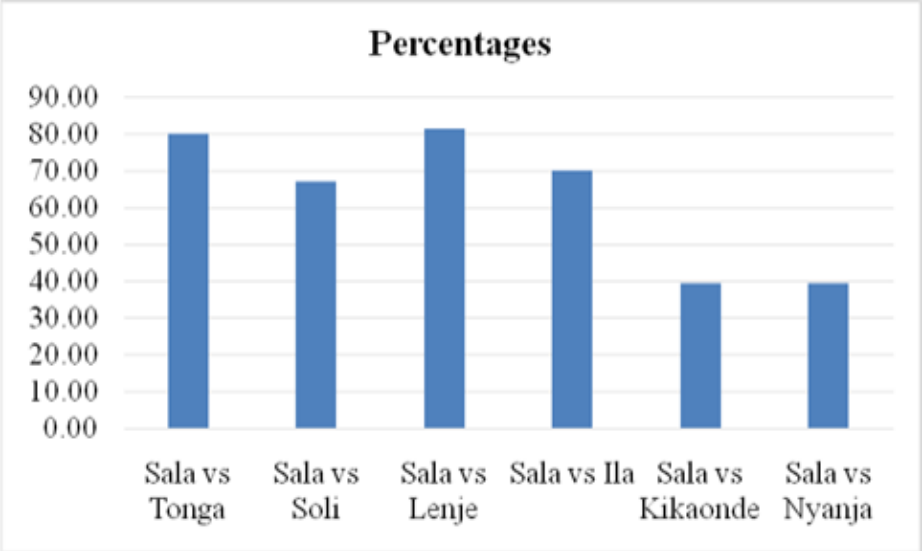

Figure 5: Sala's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages. (Source: Field work)
Figure 5 above is showing in graph form, the percentages of the degree of inter-relatedness between Sala and the other seven languages indicated in the graph. The highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Sala and Lenje at 81.5 percent, followed by Sala and Tonga at 80 percent while Sala and Ila are at 79 percent. The lowest percentage in the above analysis is between Sala and Kikaonde, which is at 39.5 percent as well as Sala and Nyanja at 39.5 percent.

From the above data, it is evident that the degree of inter-relatedness between Sala and other Bantu Botatwe languages under study, particularly Tonga, Ila, Lenje and Soli is high, as it is above 67 percent.

As was pointed out in the background to this study, Tonga is taught to Sala children in schools. The figure above has shown that the degree of inter-relatedness between Sala and Tonga is at 80 percent, which is relatively high. Therefore, Sala children may have no major difficulties in learning Tonga since the degree of inter-relatedness between these two languages is high. It is a familiar language.

Kikaonde's degree of inter-relatedness with Sala is slightly below 40 percent. Ila, being part of Bantu Botatwe Group has a higher percentage of inter-relatedness with Sala than Kaonde. The study has shown that Sala fits into the concept of Bantu Botatwe due to its high percentage of inter-relatedness between Sala and the following languages belonging to Bantu Botatwe group: Lenje 81.5 percent; Tonga 80 percent; Ila 79 percent and Soli 67 percent.

The data analysis has shown that among all the seven languages under study, Sala is more closely related to Lenje, having a degree of inter-relatedness of 81.5 percent. The lowest figures of inter-relatedness are between Sala and Kaonde at 39.5 percent; and between Sala and Nyanja, also at 39.5 percent. The data also provides evidence that Kikaonde has very little inter-relatedness with Sala, despite the fact that they share a geographical boundary.

4.3.3.2. Soli

The second objective was 'to ascertain how closely related is Soli to Nyanja.' Drawing from the analysis presented in Appendices A and B, the following are the percentages of inter-relatedness between Soli and Nyanja including the other languages examined in this study:

Soli vs. Nyanja	45%	
Soli vs. Ila		55%
Soli vs. Lenje	72%	
Soli vs. Kikaonde		36.5%
Soli vs. Sala		67%
Soli vs. Tonga	63%	

This data is collapsed in the following Figure 6:

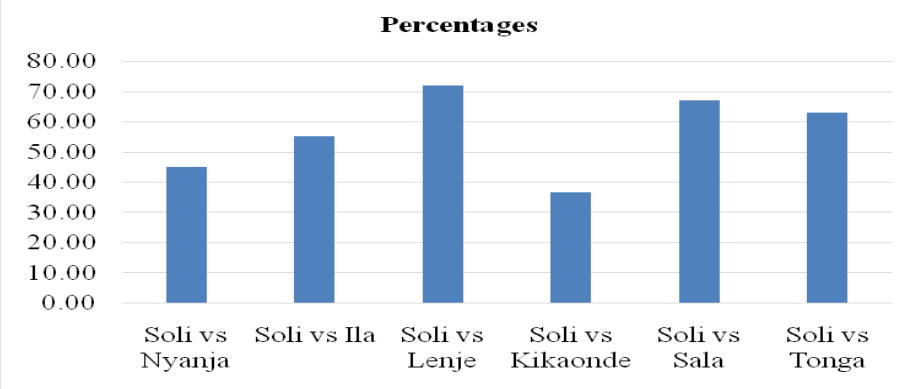

Figure 6: Soli's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages. (Source: Field work)

Figure 6 presents the degree of inter-relatedness between Soli and Nyanja, inclusive of the other languages investigated. While the degree of inter-relatedness between Soli and Nyanja is at 45 percent, the highest percentage of inter-relatedness in Figure 6 is between Soli and Lenje at 72 percent. It is followed by Soli and Sala at 67 percent. The third highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Soli and Tonga at 63 percent,

followed by Soli and Ila at 55 percent, The gap between the percentages of inter-relatedness for the Soli and Nyanja languages is too big to sustain the teaching of Nyanja as a school subject in Chongwe District. The Ministry of Education may wish to review the language policy following this revelation. The lowest percentage of the degree of inter-relatedness is between Soli and Kikaonde at 36.5.

4.3.3.3. Kikaonde

The analysis in Appendices 'A' and 'B' revealed the following percentages of the degree of inter-relatedness between Kikaonde and Tonga, including the other languages studied:

Kikaonde vs. Tonga	33%	
Kikaonde vs. Ila	30%	
Kikaonde vs. Sala		39.5%
Kikaonde vs. Nyanja	32%	
Kikaonde vs. Lenje		41%
Kikaonde vs. Soli		36.5%

This data is collapsed in the following Figure 7:

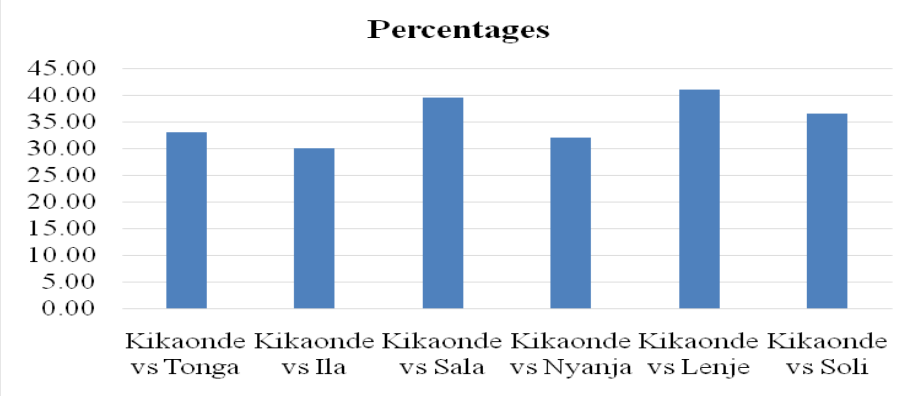

Figure 7: Kikaonde's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages.
(Source: Field work)

In Figure 7 the graph displays the degree of inter-relatedness involving Kikaonde and Tonga. The other languages investigated were also included. The data in the graph above is quite different from the data in the graphs that have been discussed above. While the percentage of the degree of inter-relatedness between Kikaonde and Tonga is at 33 percent, the highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Kikaonde and Lenje at 41 percent. The second highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Kikaonde and Sala at 39.5 percent, which is followed by Kikaonde and Soli at 36.5 percent. The second lowest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Kikaonde and Nyanja at 32 percent while the least percentage of inter-relatedness is between Kikaonde and Ila at 30 percent.

From the above analysis in Figure 7, the researcher observed that while the highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Kikaonde and Lenje, Tonga is taught as a subject in the Kaonde Speaking area. The gap between the percentages of inter-relatedness for the two languages (Kikaonde and Tonga) is too big to support the teaching of Tonga as a school subject. During the oral interviews held on 19th May 2025, with His Royal Highness, Chief Mumba, at his palace, the chief confirmed that there is a lot of confusion in terms of language. He said that Kaondes, Ilas and Tongas use Tonga as a language of literacy and a school subject. The chief pleaded that the language planners may consider Kaonde as a school subject in his chiefdom. And this concern is supported by the study in that it has revealed that the percentage of inter-relatedness between Tonga and Kaonde is at 33 percent. Such a low percentage might affect the performance of the Kaonde pupils in schools while Ilas may not have any challenges because the percentage of inter-relatedness between Tonga and Ila is at 76.5 percent. Hence the Ministry of Education may wish to instead introduce or use Kikaonde as the language of literacy and Zambian language subject in the Kaonde speaking area.

The study has also established that among the seven languages studied, Lenje and Tonga have the highest percentage of retention of Proto Bantu lexical items at 32 percent. The Proto Bantu lexical items retention may have contributed to the high percentage rate of inter-relatedness between Lenje and Tonga.

4.3.3.4 Tonga

The percentage of the degree of inter-relatedness between Tonga and the rest of the languages under study was analyzed and results are presented below.

Tonga vs. Ila	76.5%
Tonga vs. Lenje	84.5%
Tonga vs. Kikaonde	33%
Tonga vs. Sala	80%
Tonga vs. Soli	63%
Tonga vs. Nyanja	40.5%

The above data is illustrated in Figure 8 bellow:

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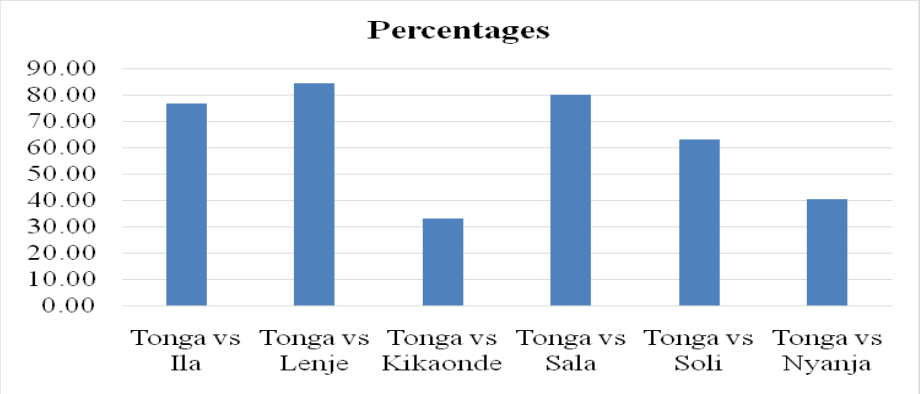

Figure 8: Tonga's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages.
(Source: Field work)

The above figure displays the degree of inter-relatedness between Tonga and the other languages investigated. The highest percentage of inter-relatedness in Figure 8 is between Tonga and Lenje at 84.5 percent followed by Tonga and Sala at 80 percent. The third highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Tonga and Ila at 76.5 percent, followed by Tonga and Soli at 63 percent, while Tonga and Nyanja is at 40.5 percent. The second lowest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Tonga and Kaonde Ila at 37.5 percent. The least degree of inter-relatedness is between Tonga and Kikaonde at 33 percent. Tonga is the Zambian language taught in the Lenje speaking area. From the analysis shown above, the percentage of inter-relatedness between Tonga and Lenje is relatively high. This means that Lenje learners do not have challenges in learning Tonga, because most of the basic vocabulary is similar in the two languages. The researcher supports the language policy makers for choosing Tonga as a school subject in the Lenje speaking area. It is a familiar language.

4.3.3.5. Ila

The study has established the percentages of inter-relatedness between Ila and the other seven languages examined as follows:

Ila vs. Sala	70%
Ila vs. Tonga	76.5%
Ila vs. Lenje	66.5%
Ila vs. Soli	55%
Ila vs. Nyanja	30%
Ila vs. Kikaonde	30%

These data are illustrated in Figure 9:

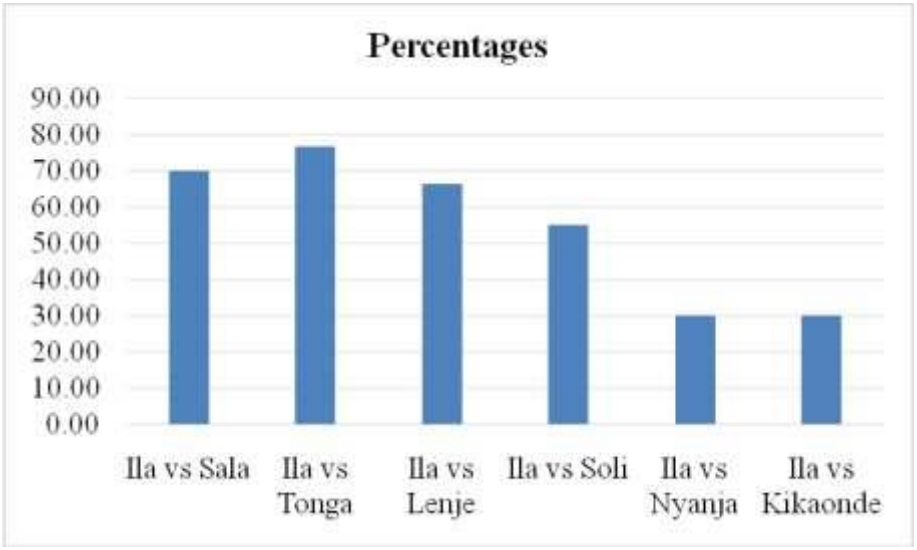

Figure 9: Ila's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages. (Source: Field work)

Figure 9 presents the degree of inter-relatedness between Ila and the other languages investigated. The highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Ila and Tonga at 76.5 percent, followed by Ila and Sala at 70 percent. The third highest percentage of interrelatedness is between Ila and Lenje at 66.5 percent, while that of Ila and Soli is at 55 percent. The lowest degree of inter-relatedness is between Ila and Kaonde at 30 percent, as well as Ila and Nyanja also at 30 percent.

4.3.3.6. Lenje

The following are the percentages of inter-relatedness between Lenje and the other languages investigated in this study:

Lenje vs. Tonga	84.5%
Lenje vs. Soli	72%
Lenje vs. Sala	81.5%
Lenje vs. Nyanja	40%
Lenje vs. Kikaonde	41%
Lenje vs. Ila	66.5%

This data is collapsed in the following Figure 10:

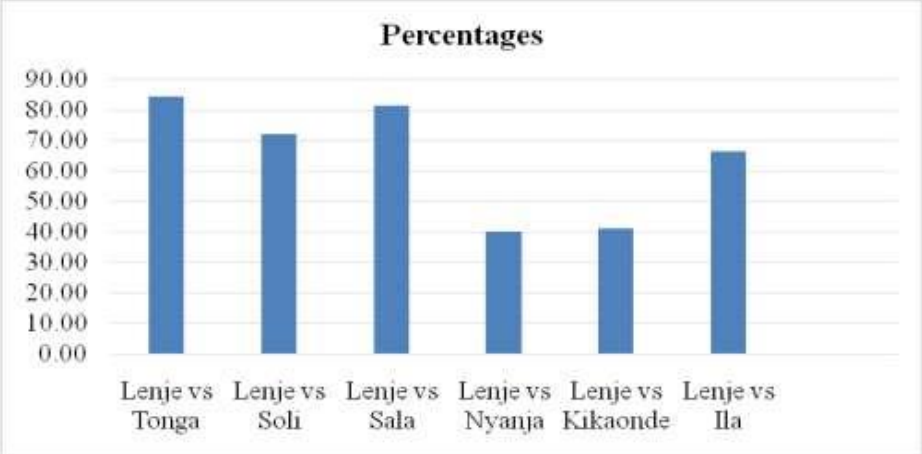

Figure 10: Lenje's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages. (Source: Field work) In Figure 10 the graph presents the degree of inter-relatedness between Lenje and the other languages investigated. The highest percentage of relatedness in Figure 10 is between Lenje and Tonga at 84.5 percent. This is followed by Lenje and Sala at 81.5 percent. The third highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Lenje and Soli at 72 percent, which is followed by Lenje and Ila at 66.5 percent while Lenje and Kaonde are at 41 percent. The sixth lowest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Lenje and Nyanja at 40 percent while the lowest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Lenje and Kaonde Ila at 39.5 percent.

4.3.3.7 Nyanja

The following are the percentages of the degree of inter-relatedness between Nyanja and other languages studied:

Nyanja vs. Sala	39.5%
Nyanja vs. Soli	45%
Nyanja vs. Ila	30%
Nyanja vs. Lenje	40%
Nyanja vs. Tonga	40.5%
Nyanja vs. Kaonde	32%

This data is collapsed in the Figure 11 below:

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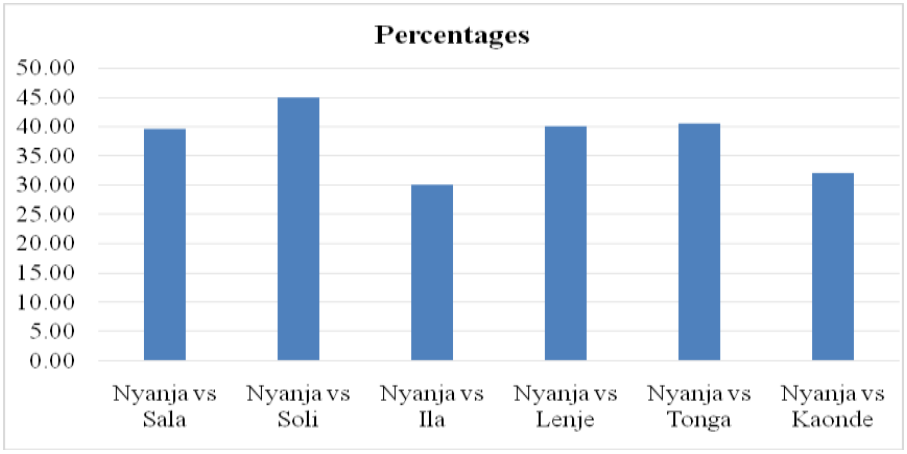

Figure 11: Nyanja's degree of inter-relatedness with other languages. (Source: Field work)

In Figure 11, the data displays the degree of inter-relatedness involving Nyanja and the other languages investigated. The graph above is quite different from the graphs that have been discussed before, because all the percentages of inter-relatedness are below 50. The highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Nyanja and Soli at 45 percent. This is followed by Nyanja and Tonga at 40.5 percent, followed by Nyanja and Lenje at 40 percent. The fourth highest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Nyanja and Sala at 39.5 percent, followed by Nyanja and Kikaonde at 32 percent. The lowest percentage of inter-relatedness is between Nyanja and Ila at 30 percent.

The data in Figure 11 shows that among all the seven languages under study, Nyanja has the lowest degree of inter-relatedness with the other languages, ranging from 30 and 45 percent. The highest degree of inter-relatedness in Figure 9 is between Nyanja and Soli at 45 percent and the lowest is between Nyanja and Ila, which is at 30 percent. Although Nyanja has the lowest degree of inter-relatedness to all the languages under study, it was rated number two in terms of predominant language of communication. According to the Census Report (2020:63) 14.8 percent of the population in the country spoke Nyanja as the language of communication. The report shows that Nyanja is spoken in all the nine provinces that existed in the year 2020. However, the highest percentage of speakers is found in Lusaka Province at 61.9 while the second highest is in Eastern Province at 17.4 percent. The third highest percentage of speakers of Nyanja is found in Central Province at 8.9. (Source: Census Report 2020:66.)

While Nyanja is used for literacy and a school subject in the Soli speaking area, the percentage of inter-relatedness between Nyanja and Soli is at 45 percent. This is a low percentage especially when one considers that Soli has a high percentage of interrelatedness between other languages within the Bantu Botatwe group. For example, the inter-relatedness between Soli and Lenje is at 72 percent; Soli and Sala are at 67 percent while Soli and Tonga is at 63 percent. This kind of discrepancy would cause challenges to learners who use Nyanja in the Soli speaking area as languages of initial literacy due to the low percentage of inter-relatedness. However, the researcher

examined the learners of Nyanja in Chongwe district to check their performance. The results are presented in chapter 5.

4.4 Community Attitudes and Institutional Support for Soli Language Preservation

The third objective examined how Soli community members perceive the value of their language and the extent to which institutions (schools, government, NGOs, and media) support its preservation. Thematic analysis generated four key themes: (1) Pride vs. Shame in Soli Identity, (2) Perceptions of Soli's Relevance in Modern Life, (3) Institutional Neglect and Policy Exclusion, and (4) Emerging Grassroots Efforts at Revitalization.

Theme 1: Pride vs. Shame in Soli Identity

Respondent Narration (Soli, Elder 64 years):
"Soli lyetu ni lya mutima wesu. Lyesu lyatupela umucinshi, lyesu lyatupela insambu sha ku bantu baleshiila panshita sha kale."
Translation: "Our Soli language is our heart. It gives us dignity and connects us to the wisdom of our ancestors."
Respondent Narration (Nyanja, Youth 19 years):
"Koma ngati munthu alankhula ku Soli mu town, anzake amuseka ati wakuda ku mudzi. Anthu ambiri akuganiza kuti Nyanja na English ndi za nthawi ino."
Translation: "But if someone speaks Soli in town, friends laugh at them saying they are too rural. Most people think Nyanja and English are the languages for this generation."
Attitudes toward Soli are ambivalent. Elders view it as a source of pride and cultural identity, while youth often associate it with rural backwardness. This tension reflects Giles et al.'s (1977) theory of ethnolinguistic vitality, where perceptions of prestige strongly affect a language's survival. The finding suggests that without reshaping youth attitudes, intergenerational transmission will continue to erode. It also underscores Hornberger's (2023) point that heritage languages must be reframed as markers of modern identity if they are to survive.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Soli's Relevance in Modern Life

Respondent Narration (Bemba, Middle-aged parent 45 years):
"Ifyo tumona na ukumfwa, Soli tayakwata icifulo mu ma ofeshi nangu mu masukulu. Nga ulefwaya ukusambilila bwino, nangu ukufola bwino mu mikoti, ulelandafye Nyanja na English."

Translation: "As we see it, Soli has no place in offices or in school. If you want good education or work in town, you must speak Nyanja and English."

Respondent Narration (Soli, Youth 23 years):
"Ndefwaya ukushilika Soli, lelo nshishibe bwino ifyo ningalande nangu pa social media. Ifyo filechita kuti nshishibe bwino ukufwila bwino ifyalanda fyesu."
Translation: "I want to keep my Soli language, but I don't know how to use it well on social media. That makes it hard for me to value my heritage fully."
Respondents perceive Soli as irrelevant to the modern economy, education, and digital platforms. For parents, Soli lacks utility in schools or workplaces, while for youth, its absence on social media limits its appeal. This reflects Makoni & Pennycook's (2023)

argument that postcolonial societies frame indigenous languages as unfit for modernity. However, the expressed desire by young people to preserve Soli shows that attitudes are not entirely negative. With proper interventions, such as developing Soli-based apps, online platforms, and social media presence, Soli can regain prestige in contemporary contexts.

Theme 3: Institutional Neglect and Policy Exclusion

Respondent Narration (Teacher, 39 years, Nyanja):

"Ku sukulu timafunditsa Nyanja na English. Soli siyinachite kuikidwa ngati local language. Chifukwa chake ana safuna kuyankhula Soli, safuna kuiona ngati ya ntchito."

Translation: "In schools we teach Nyanja and English. Soli has never been included as a local language. That is why children don't want to speak Soli; they see no use in it."

Respondent Narration (Soli, Elder 72 years):

"Pa radio tapaba Soli. Elyo ba boma tabalete inshila sha kutusekelela. Tulesha fye pantu tulefwaya ifyebo fyesu fipone."

Translation: "There is no Soli on the radio. And the government does not give us any support. We are just trying on our own to keep our language alive."

Institutional neglect emerged as a dominant theme. Teachers admitted that Soli is absent from schools, while elders lamented its absence in radio programming and policy frameworks. This reflects Chanda (2018), who noted that Zambia's language policy favors only seven major local languages, leaving smaller ones marginalized. Without institutional backing, languages like Soli depend entirely on community initiatives, which often lack funding or structure. According to UNESCO (2025), such neglect accelerates endangerment by reinforcing the perception that minority languages lack legitimacy.

Theme 4: Emerging Grassroots Efforts at Revitalization

Respondent Narration (Soli, Community activist, 34 years):

"Twalepanga umulandu wa kutampa ukusambilila abana pa Soli mu kuta kwa mushi. Twafwaya abana bafwile balandilepo ifyebo fyesu, nga tefyo ifyo filapona."

Translation: "We are organizing small gatherings to teach children Soli in the village. We want them to speak our language, otherwise it will die."

Respondent Narration (Nyanja, Youth 22 years):

"Tikufuna mabuku a ku library kapena ma apps omwe ali mu Soli. Izi zingatithandize kuphunzira bwino ndipo zitipangitse kudzitamandira na chilankhulo chathu."

Translation: "We want books in the library or apps in Soli. That would help us learn it better and make us proud of our language."

Grassroots initiatives show potential for revitalization. Elders are teaching children informally in villages, while youth are calling for Soli books, apps, and libraries. This resonates with King (2019), who emphasized the role of community-driven immersion programs in revitalizing Māori. It also supports Hinton et al. (2018), who advocate for digital tools as effective strategies to engage youth in endangered language preservation. These findings indicate that, even without government involvement, community action can serve as a foundation for revitalization.

Objective Three revealed that community attitudes toward Soli are deeply divided. Elders view Soli as heritage, a source of dignity and cultural identity, while many urban youth perceive it as irrelevant or shameful. Parents prioritize Nyanja and English for their perceived economic and educational value, leading to further marginalization of

Soli. At the institutional level, Soli suffers from neglect: it is excluded from schools, radio, and national policy frameworks. Such exclusion reinforces negative attitudes and accelerates its decline.

Despite this, grassroots efforts and youthful interest in Soli-language resources point to opportunities for revitalization. The findings affirm Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Giles et al., 1977), which holds that both community pride and institutional support are critical for language survival. Without institutional reinforcement, community efforts may falter; however, with coordinated strategies that integrate Soli into education, digital spaces, and media, the language can regain its rightful place as a marker of identity and cultural continuity.

V. Chapter Five
Discussion Of Findings

5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the findings of the study on ‘understanding how ' soli ' language is endangered due to the use of other languages in Lusaka province of Zambia. This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the research findings based on the data collected, analysed and interpreted with the help of the objectives of the study. This is in relation to both the literature review and the findings of the study as presented in themes.

5.1 The sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Soli language usage in Lusaka Province

The decline of Soli in Lusaka Province reflects a complex interplay of sociolinguistic forces that together undermine its viability. At the core of this process lies urbanization, which relocates Soli speakers into environments dominated by Nyanja and English. As respondents noted, migration to Lusaka compels families to prioritize lingua francas that facilitate socioeconomic advancement; parents consciously teach their children Nyanja and English to ensure academic success and social integration. This dynamic exemplifies Fishman’s (2020) language-shift model, wherein rural–urban migration severs home-language transmission and accelerates adoption of majority tongues. Further, empirical work by Banda and Jimaima (2017) demonstrates that Lusaka’s cosmopolitan neighborhoods systematically disadvantage minority languages, as speakers adopt dominant codes to negotiate employment, education, and peer belonging. Thus, urbanization is more than a demographic phenomenon—it is a sociolinguistic catalyst that reorders linguistic hierarchies at both the familial and community levels.

Closely intertwined with urban-driven shift is the prestige afforded to Nyanja and English, which respondents explicitly linked to notions of modernity and upward mobility. Speaking Soli carries stigma; parents and youth alike describe it as “rural” or “backward,” a marker of the unsophisticated, while Nyanja and English symbolize education, progress, and cosmopolitan identity. This prestige hierarchy aligns with Phillipson’s (2018) theory of linguistic imperialism, which argues that dominant languages perpetuate colonial structures of power by monopolizing institutional domains and social prestige. Rudwick and Makoni (2021) further illustrate how

postcolonial language ideologies entrench hierarchies that devalue indigenous tongues, relegating them to the private sphere. In Lusaka, these ideologies manifest in everyday attitudes: Soli is not simply overlooked, it is actively downgraded, its speakers discouraged by ridicule from peers and self-stigma within families. Without intervention to shift these attitudes, Soli's social capital will continue to erode.

The breakdown of intergenerational transmission constitutes an especially dire dimension of Soli's endangerment. Young adults report only passive comprehension of Soli or recall of a few lexical items taught by elders, with full fluency confined almost exclusively to the elderly generation. According to UNESCO's (2025) vitality framework, cessation of child language acquisition is a primary indicator of severe endangerment; languages at this stage risk imminent dormancy. Fishman's (2020) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) locates Soli at stages 6–7, where elder-only competence persists without meaningful transmission to youth. Familial language socialization, once the bedrock of Soli continuity, has weakened under pressure from urban migration and prestige ideologies. The ensuing generational discontinuity not only reduces the number of active speakers but also diminishes opportunities for cultural transmission embedded in everyday speech and storytelling.
Institutional support—or rather, the lack thereof—further compounds Soli's vulnerability. Teachers across Lusaka report that Soli is entirely absent from school curricula and educational materials, which privilege English and, to a lesser extent, Nyanja. Kamwendo (2020) critiques Zambia's language-in-education policy for its narrow focus on seven major languages, effectively sidelining smaller tongues like Soli. Grenoble and Whaley (2024) emphasize that institutional scaffolding—through formal education, media representation, and governmental recognition—is indispensable for language maintenance and revitalization. Soli's invisibility in these domains sends a powerful message to speakers: the language lacks official legitimacy and practical utility. This institutional neglect not only limits domains of use but also reinforces the perception that Soli holds little value in national development or identity.

Beyond communicative functions, Soli embodies cultural memory and socia
l identity; its decline is thus experienced as cultural loss. Elders describe deep anguish when children fail to comprehend proverbs, oral histories, and ritual formulas transmitted in Soli. Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018) characterize this experience as cultural grief, wherein communities mourn the erosion of their symbolic heritage. Language is a vessel for worldview, collective memory, and communal cohesion; losing Soli severs these ties, leaving a void in the community's cultural fabric. The emotional testimony of elders underscores that language revitalization must address not only structural factors but also the intergenerational trauma and identity fragmentation wrought by linguistic decline.

Synthesizing these factors reveals a reinforcing cycle: urbanization disrupts home transmission, prestige ideologies discourage Soli use, institutional frameworks exclude it from formal domains, and cultural disconnection deepens communal grief. Addressing Soli's decline therefore demands a holistic approach. At the policy level, Zambia's language-in-education framework must be expanded to include Soli in early-grade instruction, curriculum development, and teacher training (May, 2012). Community-driven cultural programs—such as intergenerational storytelling circles

and Soli-language media productions—can rebuild pride and usage domains. Concurrently, public-awareness campaigns should challenge negative stereotypes by showcasing the cognitive, cultural, and social benefits of bilingualism and mother-tongue instruction (Boren, 2016). Without such coordinated efforts, Soli's marginalization will persist, imperiling both linguistic diversity and the cultural vitality of its speakers.

All in all, the decline of Soli in Lusaka Province is neither accidental nor inevitable but the outcome of identifiable sociolinguistic processes. By foregrounding the lived experiences of Soli speakers and situating them within established theoretical frameworks, this discussion highlights both the urgency of intervention and the pathways for revitalization. The survival of Soli hinges on reversing intergenerational disruption, contesting prestige hierarchies, mobilizing institutional support, and healing cultural grief. Such efforts not only serve the Soli community but also advance broader goals of linguistic justice and pluralism in Zambia.

5.2. The impact of dominant languages (e.g., English, Bemba, Nyanja) on the proficiency and transmission of Soli among different age groups in Lusaka Province.

The linguistic environment of Lusaka Province is characterized by the overwhelming presence of English, Bemba, and Nyanja across educational, administrative, and social domains. English, entrenched as the official language of instruction and formal communication since colonial times, functions as the primary medium in schools and government offices, reinforcing its high-status role in urban and peri-urban contexts (Bamgbose, 2020). Simultaneously, Bemba and Nyanja serve as regional lingua francas among diverse ethnic groups, facilitating daily commerce, interethnic dialogue, and mass media broadcasting (Batibo, 2020). Within this triad of dominant languages, Soli—a minority language indigenous to southern Lusaka—faces systemic marginalization. Its usage is largely confined to intra-ethnic interactions and traditional ceremonies, rendering it invisible in spheres where economic advancement, social mobility, and institutional recognition are negotiated (Mufwene, 2019).

Older Soli speakers (aged fifty and above) report childhoods in which Soli was ubiquitously spoken at home, in local markets, and during communal rituals. They recount that early schooling, though delivered in English, did not overtly discourage mother-tongue use; peer groups and neighborhood networks reinforced Soli competence throughout adolescence (Fishman, 2020). In contrast, respondents between eighteen and thirty-five years old describe a marked decline in domestic Soli exposure. Many attribute this to parental decisions to adopt Bemba or Nyanja at home, aiming to prepare children for a multilingual economy dominated by those languages (Batibo, 2020). Consequently, younger cohorts demonstrate receptive understanding of Soli but struggle with active production, especially in complex narrative forms such as traditional folklore and ceremonial discourse.

The prestige hierarchy among Lusaka's languages significantly influences individual and collective identity constructions. English embodies symbolic capital, as mastery of its lexicon and registers correlates with access to tertiary education, bureaucratic

employment, and global networks (Bourdieu, 2020). Bemba and Nyanja command regional prestige; fluency signals membership within broader social coalitions and enhances participation in interethnic markets (Schilling-Estes, 2024). By contrast, Soli is widely perceived as vestigial—valuable only for ancestral rites or local storytelling. This perception erodes its everyday relevance and weakens emotional attachment among youth, who often regard Soli fluency as incongruent with modern aspirations.
The intergenerational discontinuity of Soli illustrates a classic pattern of language attrition. While elder speakers retain full command of Soli's phonology, morphology, and idiomatic richness, younger individuals resort to code-mixing, interspersing Soli lexical items within predominantly Bemba or Nyanja syntax. Over time, this hybridization dilutes core grammatical structures and erases culturally salient proverbs and metaphors (Fishman, 2020). Without regular use in education or media, passive bilingualism among youth fails to prevent the erosion of Soli's functional domains, precipitating a shift from active competence to residual recall.

Respondents advocate multifaceted interventions to reverse Soli's decline. They emphasize community-based language nests—immersive caregiving environments where fluent elders engage toddlers in Soli storytelling and song—as effective mechanisms for early acquisition (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2025). Additionally, the integration of Soli into local school curricula as an optional subject could legitimize its use and foster literacy in both mother tongue and English (Batibo, 2020). Media initiatives, such as Soli-language radio dramas and digital storytelling platforms, are also recommended to elevate the language's visibility and prestige. Collectively, these strategies resonate with global best practices in language revitalization, underscoring that institutional support, intergenerational engagement, and enhanced symbolic capital are pivotal to preserving Soli for future generations (Fishman, 2020; UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2025).

5.3 Community attitudes and institutional support mechanisms for Soli language preservation.

The findings of Objective Three reveal that attitudes toward the Soli language are profoundly shaped by competing visions of identity, modernity, institutional legitimacy, and community agency. Across generations, Soli speakers negotiate a fragile ethnolinguistic identity in which pride in ancestral wisdom coexists uneasily with stigma rooted in colonial and urban hierarchies. Elders' description of Soli as "our heart" and the "dignity" that links them to ancestral knowledge speaks directly to Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, which posits that a group's subjective beliefs about its language's status, demography, and institutional support determine its survival prospects. Younger informants' accounts that speaking Soli in town provokes ridicule reflect an internalized language hierarchy wherein English and Nyanja are construed as the only valid symbols of modern success. This generational tension echoes Makoni and Pennycook's (2023) critique of postcolonial language ideologies that valorize former colonial languages as indispensable to socioeconomic advancement, thereby relegating indigenous tongues to the margins of public life. Unless these attitudes are critically reframed to valorize Soli as both a

heritage marker and a dynamic vehicle for contemporary expression, intergenerational transmission will continue to erode, further accelerating language shift.

Perceptions of Soli's relevance to education, employment, and digital engagement further compound the language's precarious status. Middle-aged parents' assertion that mastery of Nyanja and English is non-negotiable for academic and career success underscores the utilitarian logic that effectively excludes Soli from domains of instrumental value. At the same time, youth lament that Soli lacks social media visibility, which undermines their ability to integrate it into everyday digital vernaculars. Hornberger's (2023) continua of biliteracy model suggests that heritage languages must be woven into media, technology, and formal education to attain functional parity with dominant languages. In contexts where school curricula, workplace norms, and online platforms remain monolingual or highly selective, minority languages like Soli suffer a triple bind: they are neither taught nor rewarded in formal settings, nor afforded creative space in emerging digital communities. Yet the expressed desire among youth to access Soli-language apps and online resources points to a latent potential: by leveraging digital tools—such as crowdsourced translation platforms, interactive storytelling apps, and social-media campaigns—stakeholders can reconstruct Soli as a marker of both cultural authenticity and modern innovation (Hinton, Huss, & Roche, 2018).

Compounding these sociopsychological barriers is a striking absence of institutional support. Teachers' candid admissions that Soli is omitted from school programs and elders' reports of radio silence and governmental apathy align with Chanda's (2018) analysis of Zambia's language policy, which enshrines seven major local languages while neglecting smaller ones. This policy omission is not merely administrative oversight but a form of symbolic exclusion that conveys to Soli speakers—and the broader public—that their language lacks legitimacy. UNESCO (2025) warns that such policy neglect fosters a perception of minority languages as obsolete or ceremonial, eroding speakers' motivation to maintain their mother tongues. The absence of formal curricula, accredited teaching materials, and teacher-training modules for Soli constitutes a structural impediment to revitalization. Unless policymakers reconceptualize linguistic diversity as an asset—through inclusive legislation, budget allocations for language materials, and mandated airtime on public broadcasting—the institutional vacuum will persist, reinforcing negative attitudes and perpetuating language attrition.

Against this backdrop of ambivalence and neglect, grassroots initiatives emerge as a testament to community resilience. Informal village classes, organized by local activists, demonstrate a bottom-up approach to language transmission that resonates with King's (2019) findings on Māori immersion programs, where community-led pre-school initiatives catalyzed a broader revival of te reo Māori. Soli community members' calls for libraries stocked with Soli texts and for interactive language-learning apps mirror Hinton et al.'s (2018) advocacy for digital tools as bridges between tradition and youth culture. These initiatives underscore the capacity of local actors to reassert linguistic pride; by centering Soli in everyday spaces—village gatherings, peer-to-peer sessions, and online interest groups—speakers cultivate new domains of use that counteract the institutional void. Nonetheless, without strategic partnerships with

NGOs, academic institutions, and technology developers, these community efforts risk faltering under resource constraints and limited reach.

The interplay of community attitudes, perceived irrelevance, institutional barriers, and grassroots activism in the Soli context underscores the necessity of a multi-layered revitalization strategy. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Giles et al., 1977) and Hornberger's biliteracy continua (2023) both stress that sustainable language maintenance requires alignment across micro- (attitude), meso- (community), and macro- (policy) levels. Practically speaking, policymakers must revise language frameworks to include Soli in school syllabi and public media, thereby signaling its cultural legitimacy. Simultaneously, educational technologists and community groups should co-design Soli-language apps, digital storytelling platforms, and social-media campaigns that resonate with youth aspirations. Funding partnerships between government, NGOs, and international bodies such as UNESCO can underwrite the development of Soli curricula and teacher training, ensuring that grassroots momentum translates into enduring institutional change. By integrating Soli into formal education, digital spheres, and cultural policy, stakeholders can transform the language from a symbol of rural nostalgia into a living, evolving medium of contemporary expression, thus securing its vitality for future generations.

5.4 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the endangerment of the Soli language in Lusaka Province, with a particular focus on the sociolinguistic dynamics that have contributed to its decline. Anchored in three core objectives—(1) examining the sociolinguistic factors behind the diminishing use of Soli, (2) assessing the impact of dominant languages on its transmission and proficiency, and (3) evaluating community attitudes and institutional support—the research has revealed a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and policy-driven forces that collectively threaten the vitality of Soli.

The findings demonstrate that urbanization, migration, and the prestige associated with dominant languages such as English, Bemba, and Nyanja have significantly eroded the functional domains in which Soli is used. These sociolinguistic pressures have led to a generational rupture in language transmission, with younger speakers increasingly disengaged from Soli due to limited exposure, lack of formal instruction, and perceived socio-economic irrelevance. The dominance of English in education and administration, coupled with the widespread use of Bemba and Nyanja in informal urban settings, has marginalized Soli to ceremonial and domestic contexts, often restricted to elder speakers.

Furthermore, the study reveals a concerning absence of institutional mechanisms dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Soli. While community members express sentimental attachment and cultural pride, these attitudes are not matched by proactive efforts or policy frameworks that could support revitalization. The lack of curricular inclusion, media representation, and linguistic documentation has left Soli vulnerable to further erosion, particularly in peri-urban and urban zones of Lusaka Province. However, the study concludes that the Soli language is not merely endangered by linguistic competition, but by a broader sociocultural shift that privileges dominant languages at the expense of indigenous linguistic heritage. Addressing this

challenge requires a multifaceted approach that combines community mobilization, educational reform, and institutional commitment to linguistic diversity. Without deliberate and sustained intervention, Soli risks becoming a symbolic relic rather than a living language.

5.5 Recommendations

To mitigate the decline of Soli and foster its revitalization, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Introduce Soli language instruction in primary schools within Lusaka Province, especially in areas with significant Soli-speaking populations.eg Manyika area.
- Establish cultural associations and language clubs that promote Soli through storytelling, music, and traditional ceremonies.
- Encourage local radio stations and digital platforms to broadcast content in Soli, enhancing its prestige and accessibility.
- Advocate for inclusive language policies that recognize and protect minority languages like Soli within Zambia's linguistic landscape.
- Support linguistic research to document Soli grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions for future generations.

5.6 Recommendations for Further Research

To deepen understanding and inform sustainable interventions, future research should consider:

- Examine the status of other endangered Zambian languages to identify common patterns and scalable preservation strategies.
- Conduct longitudinal studies on language attitudes among Soli youth to track shifts in identity and linguistic preference.
- Evaluate existing or pilot language revitalization initiatives to determine best practices and impact metrics.
- Explore the role of mobile apps, AI, and digital media in promoting Soli literacy and engagement among tech-savvy populations
- Investigate family-based language transmission dynamics and the role of elders in sustaining linguistic heritage.

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