



# Report

## 2015



The contents of this report are the intellectual property of the authors. No part of this report may be circulated or reproduced without explicit permission from the authors, or from the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom.

# **Language choices of individuals and families**

Rebecca Jade Barton

Sonia Mills

Chad Whitaker

As there are people from all over the world living in Manchester, there are also bound to be an enormous number of multilingual speakers that use different languages for different purposes and this was the main reason that we chose the topic of language choices of individuals and families. At first, I was unsure which language community to target but eventually I decided to focus on the African community around the Rusholme and Longsight area, specifically the Zimbabwean community. I chose this because I live in Rusholme and so it was practical to do my research there as I lived in the area and so would not have to travel. I also chose this as there is not that much research on this community as opposed to the Asian community of Curry Mile and I had close contact with several Zimbabweans that had already told me quite a lot about their community. There were three main aims to this research:

- to find out which languages Zimbabweans speak at home, in the workplace, at school and in the streets and which is their preferred language and why.
- to gain an insight into how often Zimbabweans can use their language of choice.
- to find out which language Zimbabweans feel is most appropriate in each different domain.

The original methodology plan was to use questionnaires in order to collect some quantitative data that could be used for statistics. Additionally, interviews were going to be used so that more in-depth qualitative data could be gathered as well and a real insight could be gained into people's lives and routines. However, due to unfortunate circumstances with my group that left me having to continue the project alone, I had to make a couple of changes to the methodology. I decided to do one long and very detailed interview that would give me lots of qualitative information that would help me to carry out my research. I gained the written consent of a local barber based in Rusholme to conduct a recorded interview of around 25 minutes. I gained the consent by giving the participant a consent form from a template found in Bower (2008), which explained that the interview would be recorded and that explained that he could stop the interview at any time. I additionally made him aware of the fact that the study would be published and asked whether or not he wanted his name to be revealed. The participant agreed that his first name could be used. I chose not to use the questionnaire methodology as this would be very time-consuming and difficult for me to distribute and analyse alone. I also decided to do a participant observation for a total of 4 hours, which would allow me to observe how the participant from my interview interacts with his customers on a daily basis. I gained written consent for this from the barber as well.

Fortunately, I was able to gain written consent from two of the customers to conduct short, informal interviews. They did not want to be recorded once I told them that the study was to be published. However, I was able to make notes and so could make a record of their answers.

## **Results**

My results were extremely interesting. I found that the barber, Louis, from my interview, who speaks four languages (English, Shona, Ndebele and Zulu), generally tends to speak English the most, despite his Zimbabwean background. Since coming to the UK at the age of 14, he finds that he has started to think in English and will just use English naturally, even with family. He uses most English with his siblings as all came to England when they were young and grew up speaking it but also sometimes to his parents. His parents would usually speak to him in Shona and he automatically replies in English as he is so used to the language. At work, Louis usually speaks English as well, even to other Zimbabwean customers as he wants to use a language that, “everyone can speak and understand so we’re not rude”. He feels that it is not appropriate to use Zimbabwean languages such as Shona or Ndebele in the domain of the workplace.

Additionally, I found that in Zimbabwe, in English seen as quite a prestigious language as it is the language of business and education and people who speak English well there are often viewed as intelligent or well-educated. This attitude towards English seems to have been carried over to the UK as the barber quoted, “if I’m with some ghetto people that don’t study, we’ll speak in Shona”. This shows that even in England, instead of being seen as a language of solidarity, it is seen as a language of the less educated. Louis does not enjoy speaking a particular language more than another; it is more a matter of fluency. Since he has been here for over 15 years, he can speak English extremely well and just instinctively uses it in most situations. He would choose to speak English out of all four languages that he knows as he likes to travel, which shows that he identifies English as a lingua franca and a way of communicating with different people.

Furthermore, in Zimbabwe, there is a divide between Shona and Ndebele people “they’re completely two different people, you could say for example, like Indian people and Chinese people”. They seem to differ in culture such as manner, food and even clothing. They generally tend to keep to each other in Zimbabwe, however in the Rusholme community Shona and Ndebele people tend to mix more. However, according to the barber, some Zimbabwean people do not really like other Zimbabweans and tend not to associate with them. Louis himself, despite a growing Zimbabwean population in the Rusholme area would rather associate with people from different countries as he want to “get to learn their

culture and food and stuff like that". This indicates that once people come to the UK and see the vast linguistic and cultural diversity, it interests them and they try to learn more about other people's cultures and integrate themselves into a multilingual and multicultural society. He does not feel pressure to speak English, he just finds that it is becoming an instinct to speak it in all situations and he does not like to exclude people from other countries from his conversations. I also learned a bit about the life of the next generation as Louis has a child that goes to school in Manchester. He tries to speak to her in Shona as much as possible as it is important to him to keep the cultural connection to his background running in the family. His daughter therefore speaks some Shona that she also sometimes uses with her Zimbabwean friends.

Finally, I gained some fascinating results from the participant observation. During the four hours I spent at the barber shop, there were a total of 13 customers: seven Caucasians, two Nigerians and four Zimbabweans. I noted that Louis did not code-switch too much and mainly spoke in English, though he did speak in Shona to two of the customers for a total of around two minutes to each one and said a couple of greeting phrases to a customer in Ndebele. One Zimbabwean customer in particular seemed keen to continue speaking in Shona, however the barber simply started replying in English and the conversation changed completely to English. From my first short interview, I learned that the customer was a 22 year old student and had lived in Rusholme since he was 7. He speaks Shona and a regional dialect called Pidgin Bantu as his family is originally from a small town called Gwanda. This pidgin is also spoken in South Africa and as Gwanda is in the Southern part of Zimbabwe, the student thinks it spread from there. He prefers to speak Shona to other Zimbabweans as it makes him feel closer to his heritage and gives him a feel of belonging to a community. His parents do not speak much English so he speaks pidgin to them. He feels that he speaks mostly English as most of his friends are not Zimbabwean and would prefer to speak Shona all the time if he could. The second interview was with a 45 year old mechanic who has lived in Rusholme for 20 years. He speaks Ndebele and Shona and English and he also finds that he speaks mostly English in his day-to-day life. He speaks to his family in Ndebele and Shona to his wife and children as they do not speak Ndebele. He sometimes speaks to his children in English as they tend to speak more English to him. He enjoys speaking Shona and Ndebele as it reminds him of home, though he does not have much chance to speak Ndebele as most of his family are back in Zimbabwe. He always speaks in English at work as there are no other Zimbabweans in his workplace but has some Zimbabwean neighbours with whom he speaks Shona and is very close to. He feels that most Zimbabweans tend not to speak Shona to each other and feels that it is "a great shame".

## Discussion

The participants of this study broadly felt that English was the language that they used the most in daily life. This is clearly due to the fact that they are living in England and so need English to communicate with the majority of the people that they come into contact with. There also seems to be a consensus that Zimbabweans often speak English to each other instead of speaking Shona or other Zimbabwean languages. This indicates that there could be a lack of solidarity within the Zimbabwean community in Rusholme and that Zimbabweans do not feel the need nor want to strengthen their language networks. However, there was a moment during my observation at the barber shop that some solidarity was displayed between Louis and one of his customers when he used a couple of greeting phrases from Ndebele. Louis code-switched from using English or Shona to using the language that he speaks the least, which gives the impression that he has a close relationship with this particular customer. Fishman (2007) found something similar in his study of a government functionary in Brussels, when the functionary spoke to a particular colleague in Flemish rather than French, which he usually would use at work. This form of code-switching could also be used to show other speakers that they can speak a different language to them or to communicate things that they do not want other speakers hearing.

It is also quite apparent from my findings that English seems to be viewed a language of business and education, which therefore gives it a certain prestige and this could be why Louis chooses to use English even with other Zimbabweans and his family. He stated that Zimbabweans from the “ghetto that did not educate themselves” spoke in Shona and so possibly there is a stigma attached to speaking it whilst here in England. He mentioned that English is spoken by people from all over the world, thus portraying the fact that he is aware that English is now a lingua franca and a language that has the power to unite people and allow them to communicate. English is only one of Zimbabwe’s national languages and could also be used in order for people speaking various Zimbabwean languages to communicate as it is a language that they all have in common. House (2003) makes a distinction between languages being used for communication and languages being used for identification and I think that this can be applied here. Louis uses English in order to communicate, rather than to identify himself as English. He is clearly proud of his culture and wants to pass on his linguistic knowledge onto his daughter and so I do not believe that he wants to be identified as English but simply understands how vital English is for communication here in Manchester. To the other Zimbabweans that I interviewed seemed more important to speak Zimbabwean languages, especially in the case of the mechanic. This could be due to the fact that he has been in Manchester for a long time and misses

Zimbabwe and the culture so speaking Shona or Ndebele makes him feel closer to his homeland. The mechanic also expressed regret that Zimbabweans would choose English over their Zimbabwean languages, which indicates that he wishes that there was a stronger linguistic network.

Another interesting point that I have found is that Louis has undergone a process of language shift. As Namei (2008) stated that the process of language shift begins when a person starts using a majority language where they once would have used a minority language and this is what Louis and the other Zimbabweans I interviewed have started to do. For instance, where Louis would have once used Shona to communicate with his family, he now uses mostly English. There could be several reasons for this. Firstly, according to Tere (2009), a demographic factor plays a role in this as if a community moves to a new area where there is a different language spoken to their own, people will begin to converge in order to communicate with other people in that area. Another reason could also be due to economic motives associated with that language (Tere, 2009). As Louis explained in his interview, English is the language that is spoken everywhere and is one of the most commonly spoken languages in the world and this is why he speaks it at work even to other Zimbabweans. Namei (2008) found in her 1993 study that younger Iranian participants living in Sweden would use more Swedish than their parents. The findings from my study were also similar as two of the participants that I interviewed are quite young as they are only in their 20s. They both came to the UK as children and so started having to speak it at school.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I believe that my study was quite successful as I managed to collect a relatively large amount of rich and qualitative data, especially considering the unfortunate change in group circumstances. I managed to meet my aims of discovering which languages people from the Zimbabwean community use, why they use them and how often they use them. I can infer from my findings that overall Zimbabweans tend to gravitate towards English and speak most regularly as they live in England and need it to communicate effectively with others in their community. Regrettably, I could not collect more quantitative data to support this research as I understand the fact that my results are subjective. However, despite this, I feel as though I have gained some insight into the language choices of Zimbabweans living in the Rusholme area of Manchester.

## Bibliography

Bowern, C (2008) *Linguistic Fieldwork: a Practical Guide*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Fishman, J (2007) *Who Speaks What Language, to Whom and When?* London: Routledge

House, J (2003) English as a Lingua Franca: a Threat to Multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7/4, pp. 556-578

Namei, S (2008) *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development: Language Choice Among Iranians in Sweden*. Published online: 19 Dec 2008 by Routledge

Tere (2009) *Factors Contributing to Language Shift* [online]. Available: <http://tefltere.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/factors-contributing-to-language-shift.html> [08/05/2015].