

## Safeguarding Tanzania's Linguistic Heritage: Addressing The Impact of Global Integration on Natural Languages

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### Abstract

Global integration, characterized by business activities, intermarriage, migration, tourism, and digital media globalization, has significantly influenced language use in Tanzania. This paper investigates the diminishing space for natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe due to these global interactions. Using qualitative methods, the study examines the extent of linguistic genocide and proposes interventions to preserve and value natural languages. Findings underscore the urgent and immediate need for societal and familial actions to prevent the loss of linguistic heritage. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy and community initiatives to support language preservation.

**Keywords:** Global integration: Linguistic genocide, Natural languages

### INTRODUCTION

Global integration, a force characterized by business activities, intermarriage, migration, tourism, and digital media globalization, has significantly influenced language use in Tanzania. This impact is evident in various sectors, including education, media, and commerce. While these changes have spurred economic growth and cultural exchange, they have also contributed to the marginalization of natural languages Skutnabb-Kangas (2020), particularly in regions such as Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. These areas are home to a rich linguistic diversity, including languages such as Kibena, Kihehe, Kinyakyusa, Kipangwa, Kikisi, Kimalila, Kisafwa, Kisangu, Kindali, Kiwanji, Kinyiha, Kilambya, and Kirungwa. However, the pervasive influence of global languages, especially English and Swahili, has led to a decline in the use and transmission of these indigenous languages Sanga (2018).

Linguists and anthropologists have extensively studied the issue of language decline and death. Crystal (2000) discusses language death and its implications for cultural identity and diversity. Similarly, Batibo (2005) explores the causes and consequences of language decline in Africa, highlighting the role of globalization and modernization. Mufwene (2004) examines the processes of language birth and death, noting the impact of socio-economic factors. Nettle and Romaine (2000) emphasize the importance of linguistic diversity and the threats posed by global integration. These studies provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics of language use in Tanzania and the challenges natural languages face.

This study is grounded in the theory of linguistic relativity, which posits that language shapes thought and cultural identity (Whorf, 1956). The framework highlights the intrinsic link between language and culture, emphasising the need to preserve linguistic diversity to maintain cultural heritage. Additionally, the study draws on the theory of language ecology, which examines the interrelationships between languages and their socio-cultural environments (Haugen, 1972). This perspective underscores the impact of external factors, such as globalisation, on language vitality and sustainability.

Despite the growing body of literature on language decline, there is a paucity of research focusing specifically on the impact of global integration on natural languages in Tanzania. While studies have examined the broader implications of globalization for language use, few have investigated the localized effects on Indigenous languages in regions like Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to linguistic genocide in these areas and proposing actionable strategies for language preservation.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the impact of global integration on the use of natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. The study seeks to identify the factors driving language decline, assess the implications for cultural identity and language development, and propose interventions to support language preservation. By focusing on these specific regions, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by natural languages in Tanzania and contribute to the broader discourse on linguistic diversity and sustainability.

## **METHODS**

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of global integration on natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. Using a case study approach, the research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific linguistic dynamics within these regions. This design facilitated a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to linguistic genocide and the identification of effective strategies for language preservation.

Participants included diverse individuals from Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe, encompassing three community members, educators, linguists, and local government officials. The selection process employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants with relevant knowledge and experience were included in the study. This approach was critical in capturing various perspectives on language use and preservation.

Data collection involved several methods to gather rich, qualitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including community elders, language teachers, and local leaders. These semi-structured interviews focused on their experiences and perceptions regarding using natural languages and the impact of global integration. Additionally, focus group discussions were organized with different community groups, including youth, parents, and educators. These discussions provided a platform for participants to share their views and experiences collectively, fostering a deeper understanding of the communal aspects of language use. Participant observations were also conducted in various settings, such as schools, community centers, and households, to capture natural language use in everyday contexts. Observation checklists document the frequency and context of natural language use.

The data analysis process involved several steps to examine the collected data thoroughly. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The transcribed data were then analyzed using thematic coding. This involved identifying key themes and patterns related to language use, global integration's influence, and language preservation strategies. Initial codes were developed based on the research questions and refined through an iterative process. The themes were categorized into broader groups to understand the relationships between different factors affecting language use. This process helped identify overarching patterns and draw meaningful conclusions. The categorized data were interpreted to provide insights into the impact of global integration on natural languages in the study regions. The theoretical framework and relevant literature guided the interpretation to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

Several measures were implemented to enhance the study's validity and reliability. Triangulation was employed by collecting data from multiple sources and using various methods to cross-verify the findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate the interpretations and ensure their accuracy. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research by documenting personal reflections and potential biases in a reflexive journal.

This detailed methodology ensured a robust and comprehensive examination of the impact of global integration on natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe, providing valuable insights for language preservation efforts.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Decline in Natural Language Use***

The study reveals a significant decline in the use of natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. Thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions highlighted the pervasive influence of English and Swahili in education and media as primary factors contributing to this decline.

### **Education and Media Influence**

Participants across all regions consistently pointed out the dominance of English and Swahili in educational institutions and media outlets. A school teacher in Mbeya noted, "*In our schools, English is the medium of instruction, and Swahili is used for communication among students. There is little to no space for indigenous languages.*" This sentiment was echoed by a community leader in Njombe, who stated, "*Most television programs and radio shows are in Swahili or English. Our children are growing up without hearing or using their native languages.*"

### ***Impact of Intermarriage and Migration***

The study also found that intermarriage and migration have significantly diminished the use of natural languages. Many respondents shared experiences of family dynamics in which different native languages were spoken, leading to adopting a more dominant language for practical communication.

A young mother from Iringa explained, "*My husband is from a different ethnic group, and we communicate in Swahili at home because it is the common language we both understand well. Our children are growing up speaking Swahili more fluently than our native languages.*" Another respondent from Mbeya mentioned, "*Migration to urban areas has made it necessary for many people to learn and use Swahili or English, as these are the languages of trade and social interaction.*"

### ***Influence of Digital Media***

Digital media was a crucial factor influencing language use among the younger generation. Many young participants preferred using English or Swahili when interacting on social media platforms or consuming digital content. A high school student from Njombe commented, "*All the popular content on social media is in English or Swahili. If you want to be part of the global community, you have to use these languages.*" This preference for dominant languages over native tongues was widely observed among younger respondents, indicating a generational shift in language use.

### ***Lack of Institutional Support***

The study highlighted a significant lack of institutional support for natural language preservation. Participants noted that few initiatives were taken to promote or teach indigenous languages within their communities. An educator from Iringa lamented, "*There are no formal programs or resources dedicated to teaching our native languages. The government and educational institutions focus only on English and Swahili.*" Similarly, a local government official from Mbeya stated, "*We lack funding and institutional backing to support language preservation projects. There is a need for more comprehensive policies and resources to address this issue.*"

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the broader implications of linguistic genocide in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. The significant decline in the use of natural languages, as evidenced by the dominance of English and Swahili in education and media, points to a profound loss of cultural heritage and identity erosion among these communities. This aligns with Crystal's (2000) assertion that the death of a language often results in the loss of unique cultural perspectives and knowledge systems.

## **Loss of Cultural Heritage and Identity Erosion**

The study's findings underscore that the reduced use of natural languages is not merely a linguistic issue but a cultural crisis. Languages like Kibena, Kihehe, Kinyakyusa, and others are integral to the cultural identity of their speakers. As these languages diminish, so too does the cultural heritage they embody. Batibo (2005) and Biginagwa (2020) support this, arguing that language loss leads to a corresponding loss of cultural traditions, rituals, and histories transmitted through these languages.

## **Linguistic Diversity and Social Cohesion**

The preference for dominant languages among younger generations, driven by educational and media influences, raises concerns about the sustainability of linguistic diversity. Nettle and Romaine (2000) emphasize that linguistic diversity is crucial for the richness of human knowledge and the adaptability of societies. The findings from the study in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe illustrate how the erosion of natural languages can weaken social cohesion, as these languages often serve as the foundation for community bonds and intergenerational communication.

## **Influence of Global Integration**

The influence of global integration, as seen in the increased use of English and Swahili due to migration, intermarriage, and digital media, presents a significant challenge to language preservation. While global integration brings economic and social benefits, it also contributes to linguistic homogenization. Mufwene (2004) highlights that global economic and social forces often favor dominant languages at the expense of minority languages, leading to a decline in linguistic diversity.

## **Balancing Global Integration and Language Preservation**

The findings indicate a lack of institutional support for natural language preservation, highlighting the need for a multi-faceted approach involving families, communities, and policymakers Suharyanto, A., & Wiflihani, W. (2024). This is consistent with Haugen's (1972) language ecology theory, which suggests that language vitality depends on a supportive socio-cultural environment. Practical language preservation requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels, from integrating natural languages into the education system to promoting their use in media and everyday communication.

While the study's findings align with many scholarly perspectives on the negative impacts of linguistic genocide, there are contrasting views on the inevitability of language loss. Some scholars, such as Edwards (2010), argue that language shift can be a natural process of linguistic evolution and adaptation to changing socioeconomic environments. However, the consensus in applied linguistics, as reflected in recent works by Fishman (2019) and Spolsky (2021), emphasizes the need for proactive measures to support minority languages and prevent their extinction.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that the decline in the use of natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe is a pressing issue that requires immediate and concerted efforts to address. The findings indicate that the pervasive influence of English and Swahili in education and media, combined with the impacts of intermarriage, migration, and digital media, has led to significant linguistic and cultural erosion. This aligns with scholarly perspectives highlighting the detrimental effects of global integration on linguistic diversity. Therefore, there is a critical need for interventions that promote the preservation and revitalisation of Indigenous languages in these regions.

Increasing awareness and appreciation of linguistic heritage is fundamental to reversing the trend of linguistic genocide. The study highlights the importance of natural languages as carriers of cultural knowledge and social cohesion. Community-driven initiatives, such as cultural festivals, language clubs, and storytelling sessions, can play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of pride and belonging among speakers of indigenous languages. Local and national governments should support these initiatives to ensure they have the necessary resources and institutional backing.

Integrating natural languages into the education system is another essential measure. The study's findings reveal a lack of institutional support for natural language preservation, suggesting that schools should incorporate bilingual education programs that include indigenous languages alongside Swahili and English. This approach enhances linguistic skills among young learners and ensures that Indigenous languages are passed on to future generations. Educational policies should mandate the inclusion of natural languages in the curriculum and provide teacher training to support this integration.

The role of media in language preservation cannot be understated. Increasing the representation of natural languages in local media, including television, radio, and digital platforms, is crucial for their survival. The study underscores the impact of media on language preferences, particularly among younger generations. Media content in indigenous languages can help normalize their use and raise their status within the community. Collaborative efforts between media houses, cultural organizations, and the government can create a vibrant linguistic environment that supports the growth and sustainability of Tanzania's linguistic heritage.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge to address the decline of natural languages in Mbeya, Iringa, and Njombe. Firstly, robust policy interventions are needed at both the national and regional levels. Governments should develop comprehensive language preservation policies that provide adequate funding and institutional support. Such policies must prioritize revitalizing Indigenous languages and ensure that resources are allocated to sustain these efforts over the long term.

Secondly, educational programs must play a central role in preserving natural languages. The incorporation of indigenous languages into school curricula is essential. Promoting bilingual education can enhance linguistic skills among young learners and ensure the transmission of natural languages to future generations. Educational policies should mandate the inclusion of natural languages and provide training for teachers to implement these programs effectively. Schools should serve as critical platforms for nurturing linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Thirdly, community-driven initiatives are crucial for fostering a sense of pride and belonging among speakers of indigenous languages. The study highlights the effectiveness of cultural festivals, language clubs, and storytelling sessions in promoting the use and appreciation of natural languages. Communities should be encouraged to take an active role in organizing and participating in such events. Local and national governments and non-governmental organizations should provide the necessary support and resources to facilitate these initiatives.

Fourthly, increasing the representation of natural languages in local media is vital. Television, radio, and digital platforms should feature more content in Indigenous languages to normalize their use and raise their status within the community. Media houses should collaborate with cultural organizations and the government to produce and broadcast programs celebrating and promoting natural languages. By leveraging the power of media, it is possible to influence language preferences, especially among younger generations, and create a vibrant linguistic environment.

Supporting research and documentation efforts is essential for the preservation of linguistic knowledge. Comprehensive documentation of natural languages, including their vocabulary, grammar, and usage contexts, is needed. Research on indigenous languages should be encouraged and funded to deepen our understanding of their significance and challenges. Academic institutions, linguists, and cultural organisations should work together to create accessible and enduring records of natural languages, ensuring that this invaluable cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.

These recommendations aim to create a multifaceted approach to language preservation involving policy, education, community engagement, media representation, and research. By implementing these strategies, Tanzania can safeguard its rich linguistic heritage and foster a more inclusive and culturally diverse society.

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