

# **An Analysis of the Vitality of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ngoni People of Tanzania: Lessons for other Ethnolinguistic Groups**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current article looks at the vitality of the intangible cultural heritage of the Ngoni ethnolinguistic group of southern Tanzania to show how a contact situation combined with internal dynamics in the community shape the future of intangible cultural heritage of the group. Using questionnaire, interview and observation methods the findings show that there is insufficient intergeneration transfer. The study does so by studying how intergeneration transfer of values such as language use, knowledge of stories, taboos, dances, sayings, and rituals among the youth is indicative of their level of vitality. Additionally, the ever-increasing contact between Ngoni and Swahili cultures affects the situation and makes the future blurred and hazy. Some aspects of the intangible cultural heritage have been more affected than others, which may suggest their eventual disappearance. In such a situation, documenting such traditional values seems to be the most plausible action before they finally perish altogether.

*Keywords:* intangible cultural heritage, Ngoni ethnolinguistic group, core values, cultural vitality, Tanzania.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The current study looks at the knowledge of the intangible cultural heritage (henceforth ICH) among the youth in the Ngoni ethnolinguistic group of southern Tanzania as a way of explaining the vitality of the ICH in a contact situation. Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills – including the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, and it is recognized as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003: 4). These aspects serve to identify one group from another, and are among the important values of a group. This is done in the context of ever increasing contact between the Ngoni ethnic group and Swahili which is nationally and transnationally predominant, both for unitary, nation-building and development facilitation purposes. There is also contact between Ngoni and other non-status ethnolinguistic groups, but whose impact on the ICH of the Ngoni may not be significant considering their relative appeal. The observation that the Ngoni conquered many people from different ethnic groups, especially around the region

where they are now, does not conclusively explain the Ngoni's sociolinguistic status and its linguistic make-up; there is a lot of influence from the languages around their current settlement. Ngonyani (2003:2) attests to this situation when he writes:

The name, Ngoni, was associated with the language of the aristocrats of Nguni descent. The incorporated people called themselves 'Ngoni' for security and prestige.

The Ngoni ethnic group is one of 150 groups in Tanzania situated in the central southern part of the country near the border with Mozambique, and the study was done in the three villages of Mgazini, Kilagano and Muungano-Zomba. According to the Languages of Tanzania (LOT) Project the Ngoni population is estimated at 258,218 people (LOT, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. The Ngoni originally moved to the present day Tanzania from South Africa, and belonged to the Nguni group of languages (Gulliver, 1955; Ebner, 1987; Ngonyani, 2003), but it is now a different language due to intensive contact with Swahili and other languages. Recent studies about this group have focused particularly on the Ngoni language, and they all suggest that the vitality of the Ngoni language, which is also an important element of culture, is frail (Ngonyani, 2003; Mapunda, 2013; Rosendal and Mapunda, 2014). This is attributed mostly to language contact, especially between Ngoni and Swahili.



**Figure 1.** Ngoni speaking area (Source: Rosendal and Mapunda, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> The number is much higher than that because the basis for this estimation is the 2002 national population census. However, the population has not remained static over the years. Additionally, pockets of Ngoni speaking people in regions where they emigrated due to paid employment in plantations were not included in the counting.

There have been arguments by some scholars that identity claims should be viewed mostly as dynamic and not always static (c.f. Duranti, 2003; Edwards, 2009). Edwards (2009: 19–20), for example, has argued that it is improper to view identity as being fixed traits that make one individual or group distinct. Instead, it makes more sense to view some individuals' and groups' identities as dynamic and shaped by immediate socioeconomic dynamics of the wider society in which the individuals or groups are situated. I would like to argue in support of this view, but considering the fact there are identity traits which are more fixed than others, and whose presence can serve as conventionally accepted, emblematic characteristics that allow to distinguish between individuals and their ethnic affiliation.

Nevertheless, due to both internal and external dynamics within communities, change is unstoppable. How quick the change is depends on how strong the change agents are. The Ngoni ethnolinguistic group is no exception to this axiom. The Ngoni have recently been exposed to intense contact with the rest the country particularly because of the improved transport network. Before the year 2000 the area was remote in the sense that it was not easily reachable by normal means of transport. Starting from the 1990s, and more so since the year 2000 roads have been better paved. Chinese motorbikes became available as alternative means of transport. Many more people have thus been visiting the area more recently, for different reasons. Socioeconomically, the Ngoni people rely mainly on subsistence farming. They are mostly small holder farmers and pastoralists. As such their situation is that of deprivation due to underdeveloped economic infrastructure. This situation of deprivation has led to uncertainty and bafflement, especially when interacting with people from other dispositions, be they religious, social, economic, or cultural.

Despite the socioeconomic situation of deprivation, it is possible to some extent to sustain the identity of a group if there are mechanisms in place for that purpose. One of the ways is to have in place mechanisms for intergeneration transmission of the ICH. The presence of such mechanisms assures the vitality of the ICH from one generation to the next. In this regard, the ICH provides that particular group with a sense of sticking to their roots. On the contrary, if contact with other groups subsumes and replaces their passion for their own identity, then identity of the Ngoni will in no way survive.

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2003 UNESCO approved a convention on safeguarding the ICH of the world (UNESCO 2003), and argued that the loss of the ICH of any group is a loss not only to that group, but to the whole world. And on the basis of this, the current study provides an assessment of the vitality of the ICH of the Ngoni people in the context of contact situation and other forces operating both within and outside the Ngoni community.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study is guided by the Smolicz's (1981) framework of core values and the cultural vitality framework proposed by Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006) in discussing the findings. On the one hand, Smolicz (1981: 75) has defined core values as the most fundamental components of a group's culture, and argues that it is through the core values that social groups can be identified as distinctive ethnic, religious, or other cultural communities. On cultural vitality framework, Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006: 4, 14) hold that culture can be regarded to have vitality if there is evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities, and if there are opportunities for cultural participation, participation itself, and support for cultural participation. If these conditions are met then there is cultural vitality, fostering the maintenance of ICH.

This study is mainly qualitative in nature, based on the philosophy of interpretivism, although features of positive essentialism are there due to the presence of quantitative indicators. This is important because interpreting qualitative data is informed by many social variables besides just the data that are presented. In view of this, the study uses both descriptive and quantitative data in its exposition. The data for this study were collected with a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, and observation. The questionnaire was administered to 300 pupils in four primary schools in three villages of Songea Rural District between August and September 2013. The primary schools are Lihanje, Mgazini, Kilagano and Muungano-Zomba. The pupils were in grades V, VI and VII, and their ages ranged between 11 and 13 years. The use of four schools was not for comparison purpose but rather for getting a big number of pupils because the schools have few pupils. Many of the classes had less than 30 pupils, and some of whom could not participate because they could not read or write. The questionnaire was administered to upper primary classes who would be able to explain knowledge of the Ngoni ICH in order to get quantitative data. The questionnaire probed into the pupils' knowledge of various elements of the ICH elements of the Ngoni. Additionally, the pupils were asked to exemplify what they claimed to know in order to iron out doubtful and impressionistic responses as a triangulation mechanism. The questionnaire data were analysed with SPSS (Version 15) in order to get frequencies which would guide the discussion and inferences. The impetus for administering the questionnaire was the hypothesis that if the youth have knowledge of their core values, then there is assurance of their vitality because they will know them and can pass them on to the next generation.

For triangulation purposes, a semi-structured interview which involved seven participants from three cultural troupes was carried out<sup>2</sup>. All the participants were aged 45–77 years. Five of them had primary education, and three had additional schooling: two had teacher training and one secondary education. All of them are small scale farmers. The focus of these interviews was to compare the current situation of the different core values of the Ngoni with how it was in the past. Additionally, the respondents were asked to provide an appraisal of the future of the ICH of the Ngoni. The second set of the semi-structured interview was administered to seven (7) adult members from three cultural troupes located in three locations in Songea Region: Muungano-Zomba, Peramiho and Lizaboni. Of these, six (6) were women and only one man. Data analysis of the semi-structured interview is based on the themes that emerged from the responses.

When measuring cultural vitality one aspect that is measured is cultural participation, and it is measured by looking at various indicators. UNESCO (2009: 51) suggests how cultural participation is measured:

....we consider that measuring cultural participation means measuring and understanding quantitative and qualitative aspects of the participation in any activity that, for individuals, represents a way of increasing their own cultural and informational capacity and capital, which helps define their identity, and/or allows for personal expression.

This study specifically looks at participation by members of the Ngoni community in terms of both frequency and numbers of participants in ICH events in the villages in the Ngoni speaking area.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this section come from all the sources of data, and are discussed in detail. The first part presents and discussed findings from the questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on six aspects, namely language use, and knowledge of stories, proverbs, taboos, dances, and rituals, as well as evaluative data on the current and future situation of the ICH of the Ngoni people. The findings are presented and discussed as follows:

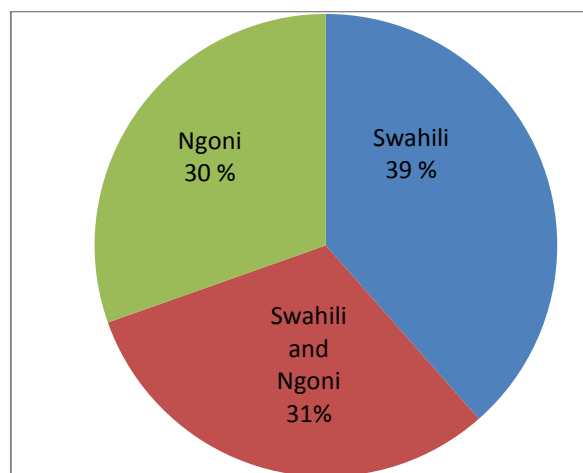
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<sup>2</sup> An anonymous reviewer suggested that interviewing cultural associations may not have been the most adequate option; instead, the students' parents should have been interviewed. However, earlier studies (e.g. Mapunda, 2003; Ngonyani, 2003) suggest that parents and adults in the area prefer Swahili over Ngoni. Therefore we relied on "cultural experts" when establishing the relevant cultural traits that would serve as indicators.

### 3.1 LANGUAGE USE AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

Pupils were asked to say which language they use in the community in general. The findings show that out of 296 respondents, 38.5% of those use Swahili only, 31.1% use Ngoni, and 30.4% use both Swahili and Ngoni. This situation is visualised in Figure 1.

Generally, there is more use of Swahili than Ngoni among the members of the fairly homogenous Ngoni community. There is also a lot of use of both languages, Ngoni and Swahili in the form of codeswitching, borrowing, mixing or alternating. Only 31% use Ngoni only<sup>3</sup>.



**Figure 2.** *General language use in the community.*

When asked what language they use at the school, but outside the classroom, Swahili was spoken by 74.1% while Ngoni only was spoken by 20.2%, and both Ngoni and Swahili by only 5.7%. Language use in the classroom was not inquired into because there is a policy guiding language use in the classroom, which might interfere with language use in relaxed settings.

### 3.2 KNOWLEDGE OF VARIOUS ICH VALUES

#### 3.2.1 Ngoni Stories

Four questions were asked regarding Ngoni stories<sup>4</sup>: whether they listen to Ngoni stories; and for those who do, how often they do so; whether they can tell Ngoni stories themselves; and who narrates the stories.

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<sup>3</sup> A recent study by Rosendal and Mapunda (2014:279) on code-switching in the Ngoni speaking area shows that there is more inclination to using Swahili among the younger generations than among the older generations, suggesting less intergeneration transmission.

<sup>4</sup> Because of the interwovenness of stories from different communities, Ngoni stories were all stories told in Ngoni. In which case, the language and not the motif was considered.

The findings were as follows: out of the 296 participants who responded to this question, 227 (76.70%) listen to Ngoni stories while 69 (23.3%) do not. 64% of the participants listen to stories rarely, while only 36% listen often. Another issue was whether or not, the participants could tell the stories themselves. 62.6% of the respondents could tell stories, while the remaining 37.4% could not. However, the actual ability of these participants to tell stories was not measured within the design of the current study. Ngoni stories are narrated mostly by grandmothers, followed by grandfathers, then parents, siblings and aunts, and in this order.

Stories as a genre seem to be better known than many other values of the ICH among the Ngoni. What is more interesting is that many of the participants listen to Ngoni stories; but unfortunately, they do not listen often, and only about a third listens often. A cautionary note needs to be made here, that there is a difference between having interest in listening to stories and knowing the stories. What is apparent in the data is that many have interest in the stories, but their ability to tell them is low, as is the case with the other ICH values.

The fact that stories are narrated mostly by elderly people; mostly by elderly women, followed by elderly men, and that siblings rarely tell stories, suggests that stories as a genre may live as long as the elderly people are still alive. Of course, life styles have also changed, so households do not live as close together as they used to in the past; which might have also affected the survival of story telling as a genre. This may have a toll to claim on the future survival of the stories as a genre among the Ngoni community, since the death of the elderly people may suggest the death of Ngoni stories as such.

### 3.2.2 Knowledge of Ngoni Proverbs

Proverbs along with other cultural expressions of an ethnolinguistic group can be regarded as a kind of artistic expression of collected wisdom developed overtime through contact with their surrounding environment. Therefore proverbs reflect what the society regards as important instructions to members as a way of instructing them. Thus intergeneration transmission of proverbs is crucial. On the nature and usefulness of proverbs Crystal (1995:184) has this to say:

The effectiveness of a proverb lies largely in its brevity and directness. The syntax is simple, the images vivid, and thus easy to understand. Memorability is aided through the use of alliteration, ...

292 pupils responded to the question on their knowledge of Ngoni proverbs (not Swahili proverbs translated into Ngoni). It was found that 63% do not know Ngoni proverbs while only 37% knew them. Interestingly, even many of those who claimed to know Ngoni proverbs could not mention any of them when they were asked to do so, instead they mentioned Swahili proverbs, or Swahili proverbs translated into Ngoni or code-mixed when giving Swahili proverbs. Almost none

of the recorded proverbs could be traced unequivocally to an exclusive Ngoni origin. Table 1 provides examples of proverbs which were given by students:

**Table 1.** *Ngoni proverbs as provided by participants.*

<b>Ngoni proverb</b>	Iheka pangende kumtima lwitimba lungi <i>He laughs in the mouth, but in the heart something else goes on</i>
<b>Swahili proverbs</b>	Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu <i>A person who does not listen to an elder's advice gets their leg broken</i> Mtegemea cha nduguye hufa maskini, <i>A person who always depends on his relative's property will die poor.</i> Tembea uone <i>Travelling is seeing.</i>
<b>Translated or codeswitched Swahili proverb</b>	Ukota kupilika la mkuu udenyeka chigulu. <i>A person who does not listen to an elder's advice gets their leg broken</i> Ana chiwoko chifupi. <i>He/she has a short hand (a miser).</i> Kama upilika lepi ulola wamwene <i>If you don't listen to advice you will suffer the consequences.</i> Kama ubelili kujenga ukuta uziba ufa (for Usipoziba ufa utajenga ukuta). <i>If you do not fill up a crack, you will have to build a wall (or a stitch in time saves nine)</i>

Generally, it is possible to argue that proverbs, as a genre, may not be as commonly used even among adults, but this is not say that they are not there or are less important. In fact, one aspect of a language user's competence is their ability to employ proverbs. As can be seen from the data, 108 participants claimed knowledge of proverbs, but only seven proverbs or sayings were produced correctly by the participants. Many of them could not produce them, which may point to decreased mastery.

### 3.2.3 Knowledge of Taboos

Taboos generally seem to be restrictions on dos and don'ts that members of a community are supposed to observe. Lambek (1995: 259) suggests that taboos should be understood as important identity markers of an ethnolinguistics group as they shape individuals to behave in socially acceptable ways. He argues that:

“... Rather than following prescriptive rules and automatically taking on or stepping into previously determined social positions, they (taboos) carve socially relevant space for themselves by establishing acceptable boundaries.”

In view also of the thinking that taboos are of no scientific value in general, the anthropologist Raum (1996:184) discusses also both of their indeterminateness



and usefulness among the Chaga of Tanzania. What he observes among the Chaga is also true of Ngoni taboos:

At first sight, these prohibitions are indeed confusing, and the consequences attendant upon their violation appear so arbitrary that it becomes intelligible why their true function has so far escaped elucidation ...but they form an educational system, producing definite attitudes between certain social groupings.

He also argues further that taboos reinforce the system of division of labour in the community (Raum, 1996:185).

We learn that Ngoni taboos have been there for many years. Talking about Ngoni taboo, Ebner (1987: 191, 197) says that in the old times, relatives of a high-ranking deceased old Ngoni aristocrat were not allowed to wander freely in the community among other people during the funeral period, which was usually long (Ebner 1987: 197). There was a prohibition of marriage between blood relatives and members of the same clan (exogamy) (Ebner, 1987: 191). Additionally, for intra-ethnic identity among the Ngoni themselves each clan held a specific taboo (Ebner, 1987: 202–218). Nyirenda (2006: 31) provides a discussion of taboos attached to different clans or clan names:

*Hinu ndava ya mkuwu uwo, mundu ikamula mzilo waki we wilongosana na chibongo chaki... Ngita mmonga idenya mzilo uwo ipata likoto na lukumbi lungi ihotola kulwala ama kufwa.*

Now according to that tradition, a person obeys a taboo associated with his/her clan name ... If one breaks that taboo he/she gets a misfortune and sometimes he/she may fall sick or die.

The question about Ngoni taboos was answered by 298 respondents. Ninety-eight of them knew taboos, while the remaining two hundred did not. In other words, only 32.9% of 298 knew Ngoni taboos and the remaining 67.1% did not know them.

However, when the respondents were asked to mention the taboos which they know, only few were produced, others were mere instructions on how to behave in the community, which are not taboos as such. All the taboos provided are listed in Table 2. In fact many of them are not taboos, but mild prohibitions and instructions for cherishing good manners in their community. Taboos are restrictions and instructions imposed on members of the society which must be observed, and whose violation is usually threatened to be punished by some supernatural power. However, looking at some of those so-called taboos provided are not of this nature because they are punished by human beings.

**Table 2.** *Some Ngoni taboos and their punishments or consequences.*

<b>Taboo</b>	<b>Punishment/Consequence</b>
Eating in a cooking pot	Loss of consciousness or not marrying ever
Passing firewood over someone in the kitchen	Suffering from fever
Spilling water when it is dark	Misfortunes will occur
Taking a cooking pot behind someone else's back	Not marrying ever
Boys or men not to eat in a cooking pot	Not getting a wife
Eating food remnants in a cooking pot or spoon	Not marrying ever
Falling down certain types of trees	Bad luck will befall the community
Taking a black cooking pot to the farm	Death or long term illness
Taking a winnowing plate to the farm	The harvest will be bad
Adding salt on food when a woman is menstruating	Eaters will suffer from pain in their legs
Sitting on a mortar	Becoming poor, short or developing boils on the bums
Whistling while harvesting sorghum	A big snake will appear
Cutting hair when it is dark	Witches will come
Drinking water while standing up	Evil spirits will come
Insulting parents	Becoming mad
Sweeping at night	Getting cursed or witches may come at night
Boys should not to sit near a fire in the kitchen	Not getting a wife

A few other things were mentioned by the participants as taboos but they did not carry with them any threat of punishment. Such have been regarded as ordinary societal instructions. They include a woman not to dominate at home, young people to respect elders, and not to wear tight clothing. The mentioning of only a small number of taboos, and mixing up of societal norms as taboos, may point to the general feeling that there is attrition in knowledge of the ICH by the community. While the argument that such knowledge may exist at the participants' subconscious level can be made, the suggestion that there is general attrition in various aspects of the Ngoni language and culture is also made by Rosendal and Mapunda (2014), and Ngonyani (2003).

### 3.2.4 Knowledge of Ngoni Dance

For the traditional Ngoni community, dance has been an important cultural element. Father Elzear Ebner, a German priest who lived in the Ngoni area, arrived in the area in 1930 and died in 1973 in Peramiho. He wrote on Ngoni language and culture. Attesting to the importance of dance, he writes: "Just like the Wangoni of today, the old Wangoni were fond of dancing" (Ebner, 1987: 194). This underscores the fact that dance was important among the Ngoni before and around the 1970s.

Regarding Ngoni dance, three questions were asked: whether they could dance any of the Ngoni dances; whether they could mention the dance(s); and how often

they danced. Two hundred and ninety-eight (298) responses were provided, and 53% could dance, and the remaining 47% could not. For those who could, the dances which they mentioned, and in their order of popularity, are *kioda*, *mganda*, *madogoli*, *lizombe* and *mkwajungoma*. However, *madogoli* and *mkwajungoma* are not Ngoni dances, but were introduced into the Ngoni community only during the late 1990s from Swahili speaking communities, although many of the young participants do not know this. The order of popularity is also surprising: *lizombe* which is the most typical and once most popular Ngoni dance might have been expected to come first, but is now ranked fourth among these young participants. *Kioda* which used to lag behind because of being a dance specific for women and not for every member of the community is now most popular among pupils. Obviously, the ICH of the Ngoni is fluid and undergoes reorganization. The fact that some pupils were not able to tell the difference between which dances are Ngoni and which ones are foreign, is indicative of a problem – knowledge attrition or integration of young Ngoni members of the community into Swahili culture. As to how often they participate in dances, 76% dance rarely, while only 24% dance often, which also points to reduced participation in this specific cultural activity.



**Figure 3.** Ngoni *lizombe* dance July, 2014.

Read (1938: 14) also talks about the importance and value of dance among the Ngoni even during precolonial days:

These were of the nature of inter-village dance competitions between 'teams' consisting of boys and girls from 15 to 25 years old. The dancing was serious, for the honour of both villages was at stake.

Ngoni dances have in the near past been an important identity of the Ngoni people due to their unrivalled dexterity in dancing, and also in singing. But what is apparent even in the photo is that almost all the participants are above 45 years old.

### 3.2.5 Knowledge of Ngoni Rituals

A total of 288 pupils responded to a question on their knowledge of Ngoni rituals. Forty one know the rituals while 247 do not know them. That is, only 14.2% as opposed to 85.8% know Ngoni rituals. Besides, when asked whether Ngoni rituals are still performed, 29.2% say that they still are while the remaining 70.8% said they are not. This situation is also indicative of the fact that, in a short time, rituals may no longer exist.

A follow-up question on rituals asked the participants to mention the rituals that they know. Most of them could not mention them because they do not know them. Instead, they mentioned offerings, spilling liquor on graves, brewing free liquors, cleanliness on the graves, spilling liquors at junctions of pathways, and brewing end-of-year liquors as rituals. Some participants mentioned the gadgets for performing the rituals, while others talked about the procedures. These would be the how-to-do-it part of rituals but not the rituals themselves. Only few of them were able to mention what would be considered as Ngoni rituals: asking for rain, exorcism, appeasing apparitions, interceding for barren women, and initiation particularly for girls, to mention but a few. Ebner (1987) also talks about burial rituals among the Ngoni community, thus underscoring their important position in the Ngoni community.

Talking about the Malawian Ngonis, Read (1938: 5) says that the Ngoni were supposed to behave at certain acceptable standards. Even though the Malawian Ngonis are now different, before colonialism these Ngonis had a common background. According to the traditions at the time when Read was writing (Read 1938: 5), failure to do so was treated with utmost care. This is plausibly what the Tanzanian Ngoni would do, that is, unacceptable behavior among the Ngoni was not allowed because for them their strong points before other ethnic groups were strength and victory in wars. So whoever went against the dictates of the community was treated with utmost sanctions and penalties. Additionally, rituals were used to link the community to their ancestors and the supernatural world. In view of any failure to attend to their standards which were overseen by the rulers and elders the strict punishments were effected. When asked why they strictly observed their rituals and patterns of behavior, they responded that they feared the spirits or they feared the Chief. Read (1938: 5–6)<sup>5</sup> also makes the remark that:

Behind the visible powers of the Chief was the unseen power of the spirits. The spirits of dead chiefs, whose help was needed in times of famine or pestilence or national danger, did not help those who were spoilers of the land. These sanctions to orderly living, whose power is still to some extent operative to-day, were formally universally accepted and respected among

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<sup>5</sup> An independent reviewer quotes Vail (1991) arguing that Read's account of the Ngoni was criticized as idealized. Going through the work by Vail and White (1991:188) it is easy to see that the criticism was based on hearsay that Margaret Read had been influenced by Rev. Chibambo not to write badly about the Ngoni. I want to believe that Read (1938) had observed scholarly ethics when she did her research.

the Ngoni and were in fact the main cohesive links in their nation-building...

This explains why any change in lifestyle is regretted and condemned particularly by the elderly people who grew up at a time when life was differently patterned.

**Table 3.** *Summary of the findings regarding knowledge of ICH.*

	Those who <b>know</b>		Those who <b>don't know</b>		Total	
		<b>%</b>		<b>%</b>	<i>n</i>	<b>%</b>
<b>Stories</b>	185	<b>62.5</b>	111	<b>37.5</b>	296	<b>100</b>
<b>Proverbs</b>	108	<b>37</b>	184	<b>63</b>	292	<b>100</b>
<b>Taboos</b>	98	<b>32.9</b>	200	<b>67.1</b>	298	<b>100</b>
<b>Dances</b>	158	<b>53</b>	140	<b>47</b>	298	<b>100</b>
<b>Rituals</b>	41	<b>14.2</b>	247	<b>85.8</b>	288	<b>100</b>

### 3.3 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ICH ACTIVITIES

In this part, findings from cultural troupes collected through semi-structured interviews are presented and discussed. Seven participants from three troupes participated; Upendo Troupe, Chomanga Troupe and Beta Troupe. They were asked when they started participating in ICH affairs. All of them started participating in ICH matters when they were in primary school. As for when the troupes were formed, the Beta troupe was formed in 1965, and is the oldest of all the three. The other two were begun relatively recently when multi-party political system ensued, and these troupes were launched as campaign troupes in the 1990s, and became more established during the 2005 general elections. In all the three troupes the youngest was 45 years old at the time of the interview, but most were in their late 50 and the oldest was 78.

From the age profiles of the participants, it is apparent that the youth do not participate actively at least in Ngoni dance. This is different from the situation in the past. At that time children participated in cultural affairs when they were young. Recently they started to participate in political campaigns, and particularly during multi-party electoral campaigns as this would create employment to them. As such the function of ICH has changed from entertainment to employment.

Another remark given by all the participants is that the youth regard these ICH affairs as outdated and good only for old people. One participant, pseudonamed

Chipwete, from the Chomanga Group located at Peramiho had this to say regarding the participation of the youth in ICH activities:

... if there are government functions, political leaders give us money as incentive. So in such events we invite girls, and they come. There are about six of them who would join us in such occasions.

When asked why no young people in the group, their leader had this to say:

... many young people join our troupe, but after a short while they leave. And this is the impact of modern Western music. They like discos and not traditional dances...

Another observation from all the seven participants is that while they all dance the Ngoni way, and that the tune is typically Ngoni, most of the singing is done in Swahili. This may be attributed to the fact that the theme of almost all the singing in the troupes is political. These days they sing mostly for political campaigns and government functions, so they focus on their employers who are politicians just as the famous English proverb *money talks* says. Two reasons that they gave for the predominance of the Swahili language in their singing are that there are people who are not Ngoni in the group, some people in the audiences do not understand Ngoni.

The argument that there are people who are not Ngoni in the groups is not important because even those who are not Ngoni in the locale grew up in the villages and so understand the language well. Additionally, one does not have to be a speaker of a particular language to be able to sing in that particular language. However, considering the fact that these people perform mostly for money, it is now rare for them to have the freedom to do as they may wish.

Regarding ICH in general, all the seven participants acknowledge that there are many differences between now and the past. The following are the main differences observed:

- There is a lot of interference from religious denominations which have emerged recently. These include the Charismatic Catholic movement and protestant Pentecostal churches. These teach people that most of the traditional practices are sinful acts, and all those who practice them would go to hell.
- There are new dances from other places into the Ngoni community. These include *mkwajungoma* and *madogoli*. These are also attention diverting agents in the Ngoni community.

As to what they feel about the future of the ICH of the Ngoni people, opinions are divided. Some are of the view that the vitality of the ICH of the Ngoni is in jeopardy considering the fact that the youth cannot speak Ngoni well anymore; many ethnic groups have come to the Ngoni speaking areas, so there is interference; the cultural troupes had many members when they started, but the numbers are dwindling due to old age, deaths and there are no new members

joining them. There are those who join temporarily when they hear that there is money from politicians; and in the community there are no regular cultural events.

The most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. Unfortunately, when the Ngoni language is replaced with Swahili, much of its cultural elements disappear with the language.

Finally the participants were asked for their opinion as to whether or not the Ngoni are proud of their ICH values. Five (5) of the participants are of the opinion that the Ngoni are no longer as proud of their own identity as they used to be in the past, because they have now opted to be Swahili. They give reasons for their position which they base on the following observations: Many Ngoni do not want to speak their language before people from other ethnic groups because they feel shy, so everyone speaks Swahili; they no longer know their traditions because they think that those are outdated; they are not happy to be identified as Ngoni, because they would be looked down upon by people from other ethnic groups because they are poor, and so forth.

However two respondents think that the Ngoni are still proud of their ICH. The reasons which they provided are that Ngoni are famous people from long time ago and they have strong traditions; Ngoni dances are among the best and so they are proud of their being Ngoni; when at home Ngoni people still speak their language among themselves; and finally, the Ngoni are satisfied with traditional affairs and their ICH is their identity, and it is different from those of other ethnolinguistic groups.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION

The data have shown clearly that intergeneration transmission of the ICH of the Ngoni ethnolinguistic group is very shaky. Questionnaire data from school children have revealed that different ICH values been affected differently; some so much while some not as much. On the surface it is shown that Ngoni stories are the least affected while rituals are the most affected. However, when they were asked to mention some of the ICH elements which they have claimed to have knowledge of, the situation which was revealed was devastating. Interview data with ICH troupes also attested to the same situation, leaving aside the aged participants in the groups who perform mostly during political campaigns in order to be paid.

The fact that the dance troupes perform for money, means also that it is the payers' interests and not the community's, which dictate the performance. The fact that the language used in singing is Swahili because the campaigns are legally

supposed to be run in Swahili is further evidence of decline in the vitality of the ICH of the Ngoni.

Using the vitality framework of ICH, it can be concluded that the vitality of the ICH of the Ngoni people is very low since there is no clear pattern of participation in ICH activities. Neither the Government nor the local communities have put in place mechanisms for doing so. Additionally, the fact that the youngest member in the troupes was 45 years old makes the outlook for the future gloomy. As such the reduced participation in the ICH activities by younger generations suggests that the vitality is waning away and something needs to be done by the community, scholars or government agencies to either reinvigorate interest or document them for future reference.

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