

# **Role of Trade and the Media in Minority Language Maintenance: The Case of ciNsenga in Central Western Malawi**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Malawi has more than 14 languages but only a few of these, including ciCewa, ciYao and ciTumbuka, have a significant number of active speakers. This article examines the retention of ciNsenga, a minority indigenous language, which provides a different picture. Speakers of ciNsenga straddle the border between Central Western Malawi and Eastern Zambia. Although ciNsenga has a comparatively small number of speakers, the language is actively maintained. Within this paper, ethnolinguistic vitality, domain analysis and social network theories are applied to explore the factors fostering the retention of ciNsenga among the Ngoni, who settled within a predominantly ciCewa speaking area. This study finds that both the media and cross-border trade have greatly supported the retention of ciNsenga, despite years of prolonged contact with ciCewa. It is hoped the case of ciNsenga may illustrate a path that other Malawian languages could follow, in the interest of language preservation.

*Keywords:* language retention, minority language maintenance, national language, cross-border language, ethnolinguistic vitality.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the wake of globalisation most minority languages have found themselves regarded as inimical to development, and various institutions have opted for the international working languages that apparently promise enviable, profitable returns. Many minority languages continue to be overlooked and bypassed in the global scientific technological advancement that favours the use of majority languages for purposes of mutual intelligibility and wider application (Ehala 2009: 37). However, some indigenous minority languages have defied the odds and continue to be recognised and used, irrespective of the global world perception. A good case in point is ciNsenga, a minority language, spoken by the Mpezeni Ngoni amidst a predominantly ciCewa speaking population in

Mchinji (Central Western Malawi) and Chipata (Eastern Zambia).<sup>1</sup> This area is dominated by many ciCewa speakers, a majority language in Malawi. It is against this background that this study investigates the specific factors that have governed the retention of the ciNsenga language within this area, to the present time.

## 2. SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Drawing from the existing literature, ciNsenga is widely spoken by the Mpezeni Ngoni, who migrated to the area presently known as Mchinji from the Luangwa River Valley in Zambia more than a century ago (Barnes 1959, William 1974 and Isichei 1997). Studies by Read (1936), William (1974) and Kishindo (2003) also note that the Nsenga native speakers of ciNsenga, were absorbed into the conquering Mpezeni Ngoni ethnic group who settled in this central western region of Malawi under the latter's banner. A similar claim was made by Pachai (1973:31) who observed that the Ngoni migrants had few pure, bona fide members because they incorporated large numbers of indigenous tribes through conquests, marriages, and political over-lordship. Hence, the Nsenga ethnic group ceased to operate as a separate entity and realigned themselves with the Ngoni leadership. They became fully integrated into Ngoni society and some of the members were elected to important positions; for example, Chiwere Ndhlovu was appointed as a military leader in the Mpezeni Ngoni Kingdom (Barnes, 1959). Thus, according to Read (1936) and William (1974) several conquered tribes renounced their local origin, as either Nsenga or Cewa, and adopted the Ngoni identity for fear of political reprisals.

However, despite the Ngoni political strength in the region, linguistically it is observable that those who have settled in Mchinji use ciNsenga, the language of the people who were conquered, married and incorporated. This linguistic "misfortune" of the all-conquering Ngoni has also repeated among the Maseko Ngoni, who adopted the language of the Cewa, and among the Zwangendaba Ngoni, who adopted the language of the Tumbuka. It is noted by Pachai (1973) that the Ngoni ethnic group living in the traditional authorities (TAs) of Zulu and Mlonyeni, use ciNsenga and not ciCewa, the language of the surrounding majority. More recently, Miti (2001) and Kadenge and Simango (2014: 107) similarly observe that ciNsenga is spoken by the Ngoni people who occupy the territory surrounding the Zambia-Malawi border, around Chipata in Zambia and Mchinji in Malawi. These previous sociolinguistic studies have established that ciNgoni, if there is any, is restricted to a few ritual contexts and that many of those who consider themselves ethnically "Ngoni" are in fact linguistically

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<sup>1</sup> ciCewa is a Bantu language spoken by almost 60% of the Malawi population. It was at one point declared a national language until the dawn of democracy when it lost this status. However, it is still considered one of the most widely spoken languages with 75% of the population in Malawi able to understand it. (Scannell, K. 2011).

bilingual: they speak both ciCewa and ciNsenga. The understanding of this study is that linguistically the Ngoni in this area are known to be ciNsenga speakers, but they are culturally defined otherwise; thus, the Ngoni are identified with ciNsenga in their language use and as Ngoni in their cultural identity.

### 3. CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE USE PATTERNS IN MCHINJI: AREA OF STUDY

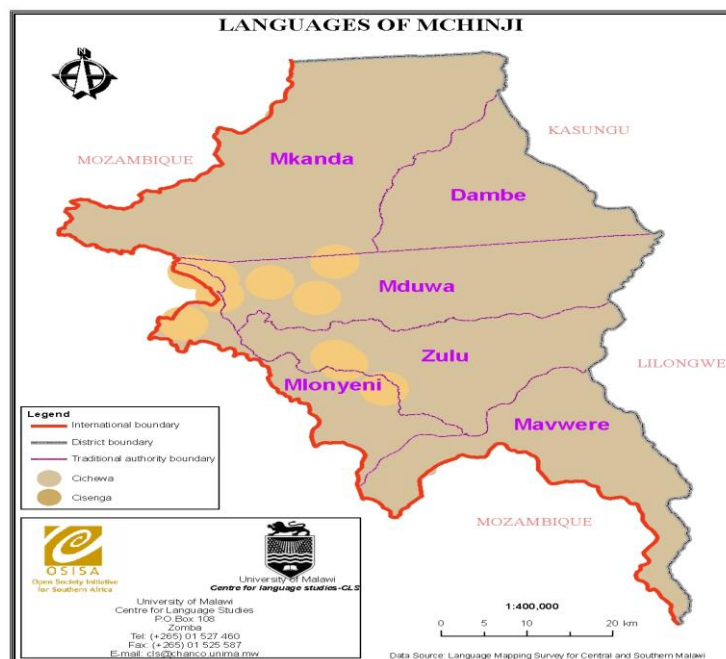
The Malawi language mapping report by the Centre for Language Studies (University of Malawi, 2006) shows a contemporary geographic distribution of languages in Mchinji, a district in Central Western Malawi that borders with Eastern Zambia. The map below illustrates that two predominant languages are utilized in the district, namely ciCewa and ciNsenga. The latter is spoken in some of the areas surrounding the borders of Malawi and Zambia, shown by the brighter circular areas on the map. It is important to note that the area of research is within the district of Mchinji, Malawi; however, this study also notes the Malawian respondents' reports of language use that include their neighbours and associates' language experiences, interactions, and broadcasting media around the border, and in Zambia.

Despite this contemporary mapping of language use patterns in Mchinji, there are no previous detailed studies on the current status of ciNsenga, among other languages, specifically in this central western region of Malawi. However, some scarce information on the status of languages spoken in this area is documented in the 1998 national population census report, which agrees that most of the population in Mchinji District use ciCewa as an everyday household language, compared to those who use ciNsenga for the same (MNSO, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This study uses the 1998 census report because the recent 2008 census report did not include data concerning the status of languages in all districts of Malawi.

**Figure 1.** *Language Mapping of Traditional Authorities (TAs) in Mchinji District.*



*Source: Centre for Language Studies, University of Malawi (2006).*

At national level ciNsenga is spoken by 0.2% of the total population, out of which a larger proportion (81.3% of the people) are from Mchinji (MNSO, 1998). In tandem with the census figures, the national language mapping survey conducted by the Centre for Language Studies, University of Malawi, shows that ciNsenga, alongside ciCewa, is largely spoken in Mchinji, with the former specifically used in the villages of Traditional Authority (TA), Mduwa, Zulu and Mlonyeni. However, the map and census report, by their nature, do not provide sociolinguistic explanations as to the reasons why ciNsenga, although a minority language, continues to flourish in an area dominated by ciCewa, the language of majority in Malawi. Thus, these two documents overlook the maintenance factors and the application of the ciNsenga language outside the home domain.

There is some literature on the status of minority languages in Malawi, as follows: Kayambazinthu (1989/90) and Matiki (1996) on Ellomwe in Southern Malawi; Kamanga (1999) and Kishindo (2003) on ciNgoni in various parts of Malawi; Matewere (1999) on Yao in Balaka, Southern Malawi; Zimpita (2003) on Asian language maintenance in Lilongwe; and also, Lora-Kayambazinthu (2011) on ciTumbuka in Dowa, Central Malawi. However, the findings of these studies cannot explain the current status and maintenance of ciNsenga. Therefore, this research article explores factors additional to home language use, and objectively focuses on the role of trade and the broadcast media, particularly community radio, in the maintenance of ciNsenga. Thus, this article presents an in-depth picture of the sociolinguistic situation in Mchinji and the surrounding border area.

As mentioned, the status of ciNsenga cannot be determined by the findings of the studies mentioned above because of the variation in their historical

background; this observation was also made by Lora-Kayambazinthu (2003: 146) in studies of other minority languages in Malawi. Differences in historical, cultural and natural backgrounds have resulted in the variable factors that perpetuate the maintenance of minority languages. Therefore, it is impossible to predict with absolute certainty the factors that will induce speakers to either maintain their language use, or shift to another language. However, based on insights from the above literature and from research fieldwork, this study explores how ciNsenga has been maintained by the Ngoni, and presents the findings.

#### 4. INTEGRATED THEORETICAL APPROACH

This study is informed by three theories: *ethnolinguistic vitality theory* (EV), which is the overarching approach in this study, developed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977); *domain analysis theory* (DA) by Fishman (1972); and *social network theory* (SN) by Milroy and Milroy (1997). These three theories have been identified to account for the conditions that promote the retention of the ciNsenga language because, individually, these theories do not have the capability to adequately or fully predict changes in language behaviour at times of contact and power imbalance. Kulbrandstad (2001) and Myers-Scotton (2006), among other scholars, have argued that where language is maintained, individual and group societal factors interact and work together to influence the process. Therefore, the scope of this study applies three theories in an integrated approach to address the shortcomings of ethnolinguistic vitality theory as a sole approach.

However, *ethnolinguistic vitality theory* does inform this study in terms of the significance of assessing socio-cultural linguistic variables in language retention. According to Rasinger (2004) and Myers-Scotton (2006) this theory states that an ethnic group's ability to overcome language change in contact situations with other ethnic groups, is determined by its strength in a catalogue of objective socio-cultural factors that include the following.

- *Demographic factors*: relates to the distribution pattern and number of ethnic members throughout a particular region or territory.
- *Status factors*: the status of the language in economic, social and historical aspects contributes greatly to the existence of the ethnolinguistic group as an entity (Yagmur and Akinci, 2003)
- *Institutional support factors*: comprise the direct or indirect, formal and informal, support which an ethnolinguistic group receives from various institutions, such as, the mass media, education, government, industry, religion, politics and cultural groups (Kulbrandstad, 2001).

The strengths and weaknesses of an ethnolinguistic group in each of these factors roughly determine the classification of a group as having a low, medium or high capacity for vernacular language retention among other groups in a contact situation (Yagmur and Akinci, 2003). Any ethnic group rating highly in all three socio-cultural factors will almost inevitably retain their language, whereas a group with low strengths in these factors will be susceptible to a language shift process and the prevalence of the dominant language.

This study also applies Milroy & Milroy's (1997) *social network theory* to address subjective explanations on the variables that concern individual relations, an area not covered by ethnolinguistic vitality theory. According to Hamers and Blanc (2000), social network theory focuses on the significance of assessing interpersonal linkage or network ties among individuals within society in order to establish the chances of language maintenance. This theory postulates that interpersonal interactions take place within domains of language use, such as family life, neighbourhoods, market places, and schools. Hence, this theory works on the understanding that different types of social contact establish linkage, which accounts for behaviour then exhibited by individuals (Gibbons and Ramirez, 2004). The implication is that, at community level the close-knit ties among members ensures solidarity, which underpins the retention of any vernacular that flourishes despite persistent contact with national and dominant languages (Kayambazinthu, 2000). Thus, social network theory assists in the analysis of the type of network ties that exist amongst the speakers of ciNsenga, and also with outside/other communities, in different domains.

Finally, this study employs Fishman's (1972) *domain analysis theory* to examine the formal and informal domains of language use in Mchinji. Garcia (2003) notes that both formality domains are important in a survey of language retention, constituting areas both of the intergenerational use and the transmission of ethnic languages. Domain analysis theory argues that language use in various domains is either instituted through policies and laws, or chosen randomly. Therefore, this study offers respondents the opportunity to report on ciNsenga language use, vitality and retention, in various institutions, formal and informal, and the resultant analysis of findings is achieved according to the domain analysis model.

Domain analysis theory complements ethnolinguistic vitality theory because, arguably, the latter concentrates on objective factors but disregards group members' perceptions of the vitality of the group (Kulbrandstand 2001). As a supplementary model, DA offers insight into group members' general, subjective beliefs regarding group vitality and also, information about the respondents' own desire to behave in certain ways with regard to key aspects of their group vitality. This utilization of both ethnolinguistic vitality and domain analysis theories, complemented by social network analysis, enables a thorough review of the study data concerning the current status of ciNsenga in Mchinji.

## 5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods in a ‘mixed method’ approach. (Cresswell, 1994). The study focus is on language attitudes, or behaviour, towards the retention of ciNsenga among ethnolinguistic group members. Using this approach, the researchers present the study within a single dominant approach (qualitative), but elements of the other approach (quantitative) are also adopted in order to answer certain questions (Cresswell, 1994).

Data was collected using three techniques: survey, interview and participant observations. A questionnaire was the main data collection tool of the survey and targeted 150 respondents, a third from each of three villages, namely, Nyoka in TA Nyoka, Menyani in TA Mlonyeni and Kayesa in TA Zulu.<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire gathered data on issues including, demographic information; linguistic repertoires; patterns of language acquisition; domains of use; language identity; and language maintenance. There were more closed than open questions in order to avoid unnecessary variations on the status of the data for ciNsenga in the area. However, a few open questions were incorporated, and respondents expressed their views freely but without unnecessary variations.

In addition, a key informants interview schedule was utilized in order to ask general questions, and gather data, on themes of historical, economic and socio-cultural background, migration, and other issues related to the ciNsenga language and the Ngoni people. Specific questions on the study themes were then asked to the key informants, who included leaders of the villages – the chiefs’ elders, village headmen, business people – and the Mudziwathu Community Radio Station manager, that their opinions could be learned.

Apart from the questionnaire and interview, this study also relied on participant observations in order to gather data on certain behaviour patterns, and on the overall sociolinguistic situation. A writing pad and tape recorder were used to record some patterned forms of cultural behaviours and the overall sociolinguistic situation.

This study utilized Microsoft Excel in the analysis of the quantitative data to compute the tables and frequencies which depict the validity and reliability of the results on ciNsenga language retention. The qualitative data was categorised and patterns for interpreting language revitalisation were noted.

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional Authority. There were roughly 50 respondents from each village: 49 from Menyani, 51 from Kayesa and 50 from Nyoka.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

#### 6.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of ciNsenga Speakers

The survey questionnaire analysis began with the compilation and demographic summary of respondents' characteristics as these would directly impact upon the interpretation of results regarding language retention. General characteristics of age groups indicate whether the older generations have managed or failed to pass on the language to younger generations. Data on marital status determines the actual number of ciNsenga speakers who are either single or married to fellow ciNsenga speakers (endogamous marriages) and live together, with relevance to the languages taught to children at home and in terms of intergenerational switching<sup>4</sup>. Information about the place of birth of the respondent shows physical proximity to their original homes, and concentration of residential pattern. Table 1 below presents the detailed demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1.** *Demographic Summary of Respondents' Age, Marital Status and Birthplace.*

<b>Village Generation/Age</b>	<b>Menyani</b>		<b>Kayesa</b>		<b>Nyoka</b>		<b>Total Aggregate</b>	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
13–35 years	16	33	20	39	16	32	<b>52</b>	<b>35</b>
36–55 years	17	34	21	41	16	32	<b>54</b>	<b>36</b>
56+ years	16	33	10	20	18	36	<b>44</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>Total/Aggregate</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>
<b>Marital Status</b>								
Never Married	14	29	20	39	12	24	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>
Married	27	55	31	61	29	58	<b>87</b>	<b>58</b>
Separated	3	6			5	10	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
Divorced	1	2			1	2	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Widowed	4	8			3	6	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Total/Aggregate</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>
<b>Birthplace</b>								
Malawi	39	80	44	86	29	58	<b>112</b>	<b>75</b>
Zambia	10	20	7	14	21	42	<b>38</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Total/Aggregate</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>

The 150 study respondents are aged from 13 to 84 years. The highest proportion of respondents are in the age range 36–55 years (36%), closely followed by the

<sup>4</sup> Intergenerational switching is the successful transmission of language from one generation to the other, particularly from old to young.



13–35 years of age group (35%), and then those aged 56 years and older (29%). There are slightly more males than females, representing 52% (Number, N =78 and 48% (N=72) of the total respondents in the study respectively. The survey data further shows that the majority of respondents, 58% (N=87), are married, whereas 31% (N=46) have never been married; 5% (N=7) are widowed, 1% (N=2) divorced and 5% (N=8) separated. In the findings, the age range of 36–55 years has the most subjects because these respondents were readily available and the most active in the village during the time of study.

### 6.1.2 Linguistic Background of the Respondents

This study finds the linguistic backgrounds of the respondents to be of key interest; therefore, information regarding first, second and, where applicable, third language usage, has been obtained by questionnaire. Table 2 below presents a summary of this data.

**Table 2.** *Summary of Respondents’ Linguistic Backgrounds.*

Village Language	Category	Menyani		Kayesa		Nyoka		Aggregate	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
ciNsenga	1 <sup>st</sup> Lang.	49	100	49	96	50	100	<b>148</b>	<b>99</b>
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lang.			2	4			<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Lang.								
	<i>Total</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>
ciCewa	1 <sup>st</sup> Lang.			2	4			<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lang.	47	96	46	90	48	96	<b>141</b>	<b>94</b>
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Lang.	2	4	3	6	2	4	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>
English	Nonspeak	17	35	12	24	26	52	<b>55</b>	<b>37</b>
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lang.								
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Lang.	32	65	39	76	24	48	<b>95</b>	<b>63</b>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100%</i>	<b><i>150</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>

Table 2 shows that the vast majority of respondents, 99% (N=148), acquired ciNsenga as their first language against 1% (N=2) for ciCewa. Data further reveals that 94% (N=141) of respondents acquired ciCewa as their second language compared to 1% (N=2) for ciNsenga. The data also shows that 63% (N=93) of respondents regard English as their third language, whereas 37% (N=55) are non-speakers; and the great majority of respondents, 94% (N=141), are bilingual in ciNsenga and ciCewa.

For all three villages of the study, the dominant first language in use is ciNsenga, with ciCewa being used as a second language in certain other domains. The respondents acknowledge that their knowledge of ciCewa may be due to influences such as education and occupation. Most respondents claim to

have learned sufficient ciCewa to communicate where needed, while avoiding other (non-education and non-work) forms of social interactions with the host Ngoni ethnic members. Interestingly, respondents report that their schooling was in the ciCewa and English languages while ciNsenga was spoken at home. Therefore, the study findings show bilingualism as a common feature of the respondents' linguistic background because not one respondent identifies as being monolingual in only ciNsenga.

The study's key informants highlight that ciNsenga is maintained as the first language in the area because it is part of them; part of their identity. This corroborates with Swilla's (2005: 3) argument that ethnic members are expected to acquire the native language when it is often closely linked to their ethnicity. Similarly, the Ngoni expect ethnic members living in these study areas to acquire ciNsenga as their first language. This also agrees with Smolicz (1981) that when language is regarded as a core cultural value, people are likely to maintain it for longer despite pressure from other majority groups. Therefore, the fact that the Ngoni are oriented to ciNsenga as their first language indicates that they live as a distinct cultural group, despite accommodating the language(s) of the host ciCewa oriented community.

## 6.2 FACTORS ENHANCING THE RETENTION OF CINSENGA

### 6.2.1 Cross-Border Trade

It is established by this study that long-term cross-border trade between residents of Malawi and Zambia has positively influenced the maintenance of ciNsenga, while respondents' occupations are also pertinent to language maintenance. Table 3 below shows the occupations of the survey respondents.

The survey data establishes that 41% (N= 62) of the respondents are subsistence farmers, followed by 31% (N=46), who are business entrepreneurs, and then 26% (N=39) are students. Of those who are business entrepreneurs, 24% (N= 11) have a Junior Secondary Certificate of Education (JSCE) and 28% (N= 13) have a Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC). The data also reveals that, regardless of achievement in formal education, most of the respondents' occupations were fairly homogenous as farmer or business entrepreneur, with the future occupations of the students being unknown.

This research has found that most residents in the study area earn their livelihoods through small-scale trade, mainly with the people of Zambia, across the border, who are also predominantly ciNsenga speakers. The researcher was informed that there is a lot of significant trading of goods, particularly agricultural commodities, between the residents of the two countries, via uncharted routes, which makes ciNsenga a cross-border language. Respondents reported that Mchinji's immediate neighbours and trading partners from Zambia are typical ciNsenga speakers, who were originally Ngoni but became somewhat

alienated from their Malawian counterparts (and relatives) due to national boundaries. As such, trading interactions have positively reinforced the retention of ciNsenga.

**Table 3.** *Summary of Respondents' Occupations in the Study Area.*

Qualification Occupation	None		PSLC		JSCE		Aggregate	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Student			21	54	18	46	<b>39</b>	<b>26</b>
Pastor			1	2	1	2	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Farmer	33	53	20	32	9	15	<b>62</b>	<b>41</b>
Business	22	48	13	28	11	24	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>
Retired					1	100	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aggregate</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Apart from the cross-border trade, open day market activities were also reported as taking place in Nyoka, Kaigwazanga and Mwami (all on the Malawi-Zambia border), where ciNsenga prevails as the dominant trade language, rather than ciCewa (in Malawi) or ciNyanja (in Eastern Zambia)<sup>5</sup>. Applying an understanding of ethnolinguistic vitality theory, ciNsenga has the highest trade value in this central western region of Malawi, so much so that this has greatly contributed to the retention and maintenance of this language. Regardless of other languages used within the border areas, this study establishes that a large number of those respondents working in small-scale businesses prefer to use ciNsenga: they belong to the Nsenga ethnic group and this language easily accommodates speakers of other varieties.

The Malawian subsistence farmers and business entrepreneurs, who comprise most of the respondents in this study, explicated that ciNsenga is the common and important language for interactions with fellow traders from Zambia. In consensus, key informants reported that ciNsenga has a strong bargaining power because it allows traders from both countries to understand one another easily. A notable experience of the researcher in Mchinji, was that each time a taxi arrived, the taxi tout or driver would greet potential customers in ciNsenga, for example asking, “*Muli tyani mweo, manje muyenda boda?*” (This translates as, ‘How are you...? Are you going to the border now?’). This language choice assumes customers’ knowledge of ciNsenga, and does not place significance on establishing a person’s possible ethnic background, or possible different language preference. Therefore, such ciNsenga welcome greetings, or remarks, also demonstrate the extent of this language’s bargaining power in the area, and provides a further example of its status value in trading activities.

<sup>5</sup> ciNyanja is spoken in Zambia’s Eastern Province and also in the capital, Lusaka. It is similar to the ciCewa that is spoken in Malawi.

Thus, despite a public perception that certain languages are better than others in the economic globalisation process, the language experience in this region of Malawi provides evidence that minority languages can still be retained and thrive if they are valuable for trade, amongst other key factors.

As previously mentioned, this study notes a high concentration of ciNsenga speakers in the research areas. They almost entirely outnumber the first language speakers of ciCewa, and reports indicate that this ethnolinguistic group are also the area's most enterprising, dominant and effective traders. Though higher overall speaker demographics are not necessarily a reliable marker for language maintenance, these factors do increase the opportunities for ciNsenga use amongst ethnic members in the different domains of interaction. Therefore, the speakers of ciNsenga find it feasible to use their own language in the activities that they dominate. In terms of SN theory, ciNsenga speakers are in a business social network, which they dominate, using their mother tongue. This has compelled native speakers of other languages to learn ciNsenga for the purposes of easy communication in various activities, including trade. Therefore, it is the perception of this study that the ethnic demographics and language status of ciNsenga in trade has effectively enhanced the retention of ciNsenga, while concurrently overshadowing the use of ciCewa, in certain domains of language use.

However, it is appropriate to acknowledge that the Ngoni ethnics are in some places a smaller community as compared to first language ciCewa speakers. This higher number of ciCewa speakers, however, has no great bearing, particularly in specific domains, such as trade and home, because of the respective distribution and significance attached to these languages. In addition, factors such as the intermarriage and socialisation of the Ngoni ethnics, have influenced the bilingual, or multilingual, status of the people in the Mchinji area; hence, they are able to switch their mother tongue language use, depending on the context. Nevertheless, the fact that ciNsenga is prioritised in trade aligns with EV theory that the economic status of a language contributes to the ongoing existence of an ethnic group. Thus, the use and retention of ciNsenga absolutely does not dispute the existence of a polyglottic situation in which the people of the area switch languages according to domain of use.

Other studies on different languages report similar findings. For instance, Whiteley (1974) found that Swahili, a national language, dominated the Kenyan market places, but its status gradually faded away in areas that were located along the border. Whiteley claims that the dominance of a Luo trading group at the Sondu border effectively influenced the retention of the Luo language over Swahili. Therefore, ciNsenga draws parallels with Luo: a higher ethnolinguistic trade status, coupled with the large demographic prevalence of Ngoni ethnic members along the border, promotes the retention of their language, and has resulted in the fading away of ciCewa in Mchinji and its environs.

This study, therefore, asserts that cross-border languages, which are in a minority state, can effectively be retained and promoted through trade activities,

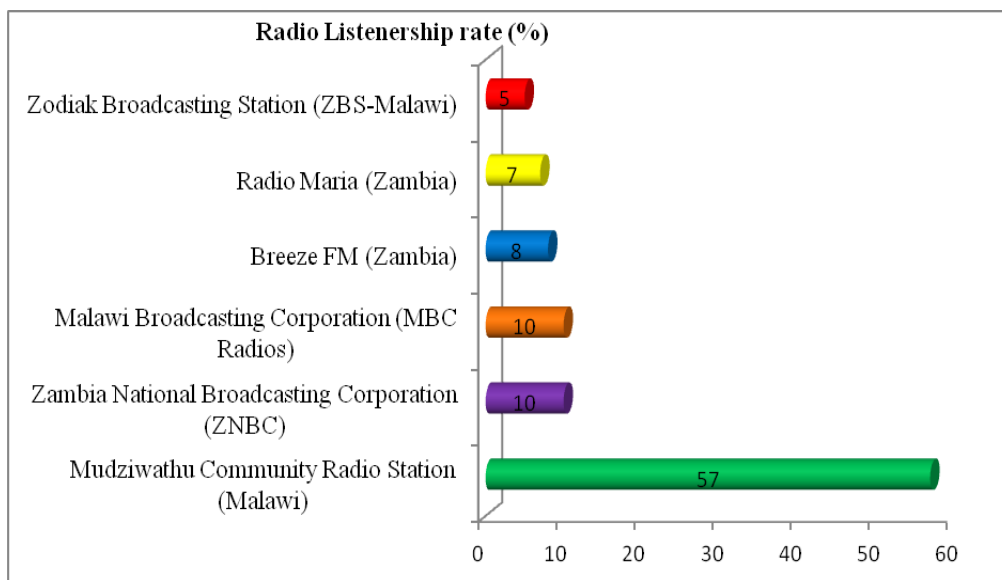
provided-mutually intelligible forms are in use, with ciNsenga being a case in point.

## 6.2.2 Institutional Support from Broadcast Media

In Malawi nationally, minority languages have received very little or no formal recognition in terms of institutional support from schools, churches, workplaces and the media. The absence of working policies to allow the use of minority languages as a medium in such formal institutions has left these languages in an endangered position. However, the recent establishment of community radio stations, centred on local or community development, has created an opportunity for the promotion and survival of minority languages, as spoken by people in those local areas particular to the radio stations.

The Mchinji and surrounding areas have access to public, private and religious radio stations, from both Malawi and Zambia, which include: Mudziwathu (Our village) Community Radio Station; Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC); Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS); Breeze FM; Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) and Radio Maria. This study collected data on the frequency with which respondents tune in to these radio stations, and the reasons for their choices. Figure 2 below presents the respondents' radio listenership rates for the different stations.

**Figure 2.** *Radio Listenership Rate (%) in ciNsenga Speaking Areas.*



The above graph shows that there is a high listenership rate, amongst respondents, for Mudziwathu Radio (57%), as compared to the other stations; namely, ZNBC and MBC (10% each), Breeze FM (8%), Radio Maria (7%) and ZBS (5%). The feedback from those respondents who are also local radio listeners, is that, for example, they often tune in to Mudziwathu Community Radio Station because it is situated within the locality and integrates ciNsenga

into many of its cultural, entertainment and development programmes, which include, *Katani Kambwiri* (Take a hoe), *Muli tyani?* (How are you?), and *Mwachoma tyani?* (Good afternoon?). During the fieldwork, it was learned that listeners would freely articulate their views in ciNsenga through the radio phone-in programmes, such as *Katani Kambwiri*.

The study respondents reported that some of the actual names of the development and cultural programmes for Mudziwathu Radio were chosen from suggestions by local residents, after the community radio station requested also that listeners suggest which programmes they would prefer to listen to. Through various community gatherings, such as radio listening clubs and organisations affiliated to various non-governmental organisations, the local residents suggested programmes that had ciNsenga names, which is, arguably, emblematic of their identity and preferred language use. Some local inhabitants of the study areas have used ciNsenga in participatory development programmes on Mudziwathu Radio, for instance, during phone-in or round-table discussions – because their preference is to express themselves in their first language. Though Mudziwathu and other radio stations around the study area do not entirely broadcast in ciNsenga as the medium for their programmes, these stations have been applauded for embracing and using some of the local languages. Ultimately, this has improved people's participation and contribution towards the various radio development programmes on the community projects that take place in the area, and has also promoted the retention of the ciNsenga minority language.

With the advent of globalisation, it is quite unusual, in Malawi, for institutions to use minority languages at the expense of the recognised official languages, such as ciCewa and English. However, media institutions, especially the newly established community radio stations of different rural areas, are attracting large audiences when, and only when, the respective languages of these areas are acknowledged and used, as demonstrated by Mudziwathu Radio in Mchinji and its environs. The use of ciNsenga in some Mudziwathu Radio programmes, demonstrates the potential that community broadcast media, and other organisations, can contribute towards the revitalization of minority languages, thus helping to keep them from extinction. Furthermore, this study asserts that the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are based in rural areas and regularly work with minority language speakers on various development projects, should strive to encourage the use of such minority languages in order to contribute to their retention. This is because minority language use can simplify the understanding of information, and encourage the participation of speakers who may otherwise be excluded due to avoidable language difficulties. Hence, minority languages should be regarded as significant tools towards development in rural areas.

In consensus with Giles, Bourhis and Taylor's (1977) ethnolinguistic vitality theory, formal institutional support in Mchinji has revitalised and necessitated the retention of the minority language parallel to ciCewa, a predominant

language in Malawi. As shown in Figure 2, study respondents also prefer listening to national radio stations that include MBC and ZBS, where ciCewa is the official language of broadcast. The respondents justify this action as crucial because these stations keep them updated on what is happening within and outside of Malawi. They acknowledge their bilingual approach, but remain unworried as to the impact of these stations on their ciNsenga retention, since this language is their mother tongue: they prefer to use it in the home domain language, where they also tune in to Mudziwathu Radio Station. Partially, this pattern of language use and radio choices, particularly in the home domain, agrees with Fishman's (1972) domain analysis theory. Therefore, it is important to stress that Mudziwathu Radio is a new institutional factor in strengthening the retention of ciNsenga.

Apart from Mudziwathu and other Malawian radio stations, community radio stations from neighbouring Zambia reportedly broadcast some programmes in both ciNsenga and ciNyanja. As reflected in Figure 2, some respondents prefer to listen to Zambian radio stations, such as Radio Maria (Zambia) and Breeze FM radio station. The study respondents choose to listen to these private and faith-based community stations because most of them broadcast in ciNsenga and ciNyanja (similar to ciCewa), while Mchinji receives a readily available, powerful radio signal from Eastern Zambia. Similarly, people in this area watch the Muvi Television Station from Zambia because it integrates ciNsenga into some of its programmes. Therefore, this study notes that Mudziwathu and other media institutions that use ciNsenga in their programmes, have effectively and positively impacted upon the use and retention of ciNsenga through the introduction of cultural, musical and development programmes, in Central Western Malawi, and in Mchinji in particular.

These findings corroborate Peterson's (1997) observations of the KTNN Radio Station in America, which helps to keep the Navajo minority language alive in many domains with news, sports and public broadcasting. From a theoretical perspective, Giles et al.'s (1977) ethno-linguistic vitality approach may be considered to confirm that both official and unofficial decisions to use a particular language, in an institutional setting, greatly impacts upon language retention in certain communities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have shown the complete spectrum of ciNsenga maintenance in Mchinji District. This language has received much support from the surrounding media institutions, mainly through the integration of ciNsenga in the presentation of radio programmes. The use and retention of this language, in some domains, particularly home and trade, has greatly enhanced its status. Though, it is not normally expected for such minority languages to receive much

support from institutions, the Ngoni ethnics have been privileged with the Mudziwathu Community Radio Station, which focuses on development related activities taking place in the area. This radio station, others in the surrounding area, and also Muvi television, have together greatly contributed to the retention of ciNsenga, partly due to this language being used for disseminating information about development activities taking place within the study area. Therefore, the use of respective existing languages in the areas where the community radio operates, as observed in Mchinji, has increased people's participation in programmes, resulting in a large audience.

The study findings have also demonstrated the vital role that cross-border trade plays in the retention of the ciNsenga language. Respondents claim that cross-border trade between the people of Malawi and Zambia is the overarching factor in language maintenance because it recognizes ciNsenga as the mutual trade language. Thus, it is the prominent language used to get maximum returns, and this status has necessitated its maintenance amongst speakers and neighbours. This study has found that cross-border trade and the integration of ciNsenga in the broadcasting media, have necessitated the use of ciNsenga. Thus, with regard to the main objective of this study, the conclusion drawn is that the retention of ciNsenga is the result of an interplay of varied factors; however, trade and media play a great role. This study also acknowledges the role of home and intergenerational interactions for the successful transmission of the language to the younger generation.

The findings of this study have potentially profound implications for the practice of language retention, particularly for minority languages. The fact that minority languages are, comparatively, spoken by a smaller number of people poses a great challenge for their maintenance. However, this study on ciNsenga has several implications for other languages of the same category. The significant implication is that contemporary language planners should avoid viewing minority languages as unfavourable in terms of development. These languages should rather be considered as a resource for development, trade and community-based development in their respective areas of use.

In practical terms, indigenous minority languages should be maintained because they are tools for development or social transformation in the areas in which they are spoken. NGOs and other institutions, that have activities occurring in rural areas that involve speakers of minority languages, can yield positive results where these languages are used. Similarly, under circumstances where the economy continues to be, or becomes, more integrated along the borders, a common tongue clearly promotes commerce; therefore, minority languages should not be downplayed where they may be useful for trade.

This study would also strongly suggest that media language policies need to consider the maximum use of minority languages in order to enhance their maintenance. In fact, recently there are several non-governmental community radio stations that have been established to disseminate developmental



information within Malawi.<sup>6</sup> These include: Dzimwe (in Mangochi, a Yao speaking district); Mzimba Community Radio (in Mzimba, a Tumbuka speaking district); Nkhotakota Community Radio (in Nkhotakota, a Yao and ciCewa speaking district); Usisya Community Radio (in Nkhatabay, a Tonga speaking district); and, Karonga Diocese, Tuntufye FM (in Karonga, a Tumbuka speaking district). Since these stations are situated in localities known to use different indigenous languages, it is important that these are adopted as working and broadcasting languages. Finally, it is important that government, together with NGOs, should consider implementing policies in favour of the retention, and increased usage, of indigenous languages, with more time allocated for this purpose.

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<sup>6</sup> Examples are from a list of public, community, private, and religious radio stations, available from the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) website (MACRA, 2014).

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