

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN ZAMBIA

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OVER VIEW

- The peopling of Zambia
- The Language situation in Zambia
- Language in education policy
- Colonial
- Developments after independence



Zambia: An introduction

- Location: South Central Africa, covering 752, 618 km²
- Population: in the 2010 National census, 11,126,922
17.9 million growing at 3.3%
Per annum.
- Zambia has a young population
With a median age of 17 years.
Urbanization is at 44%



Peopling of Zambia

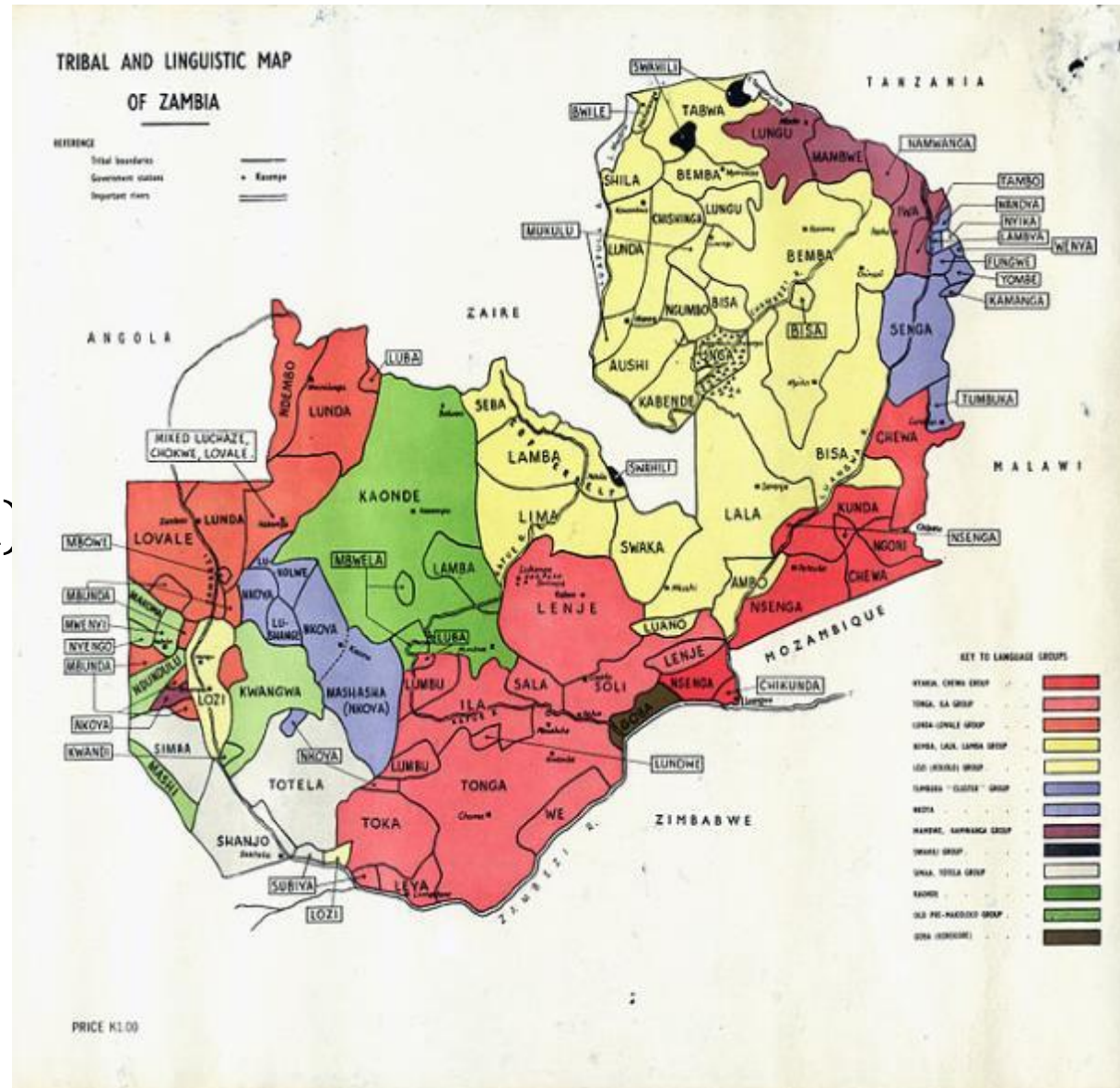
Joseph Greenberg's classification of African languages.

Bantu as a subgroup of Benue Congo which is a subgroup of Niger-Congo family



Number of languages in Zambia

Originally occupied by San groups (modern day Batwa) Zambian ethnic groups migrated from Luba-Lunda Kingdoms in DRC 16-17 th Centuries



Language situation in Zambia

- There are 73 ethnic groups (CSO, 2010)
- Ethnic group 'is the tribal group that one identifies himself/herself with. Ethnic group is a self-perceived conception of social group membership' (CSO, 2010).
- What promotes ethnic solidarity: history, clear leadership, territory, culture, language
- Colonialism created 'tribes' through system of indirect rule
- Language affinities cut across ethnic groups e.g. Guthrie's classification groups Zambian languages into four zones K, L, M, N (based on shared vocabulary/structures)

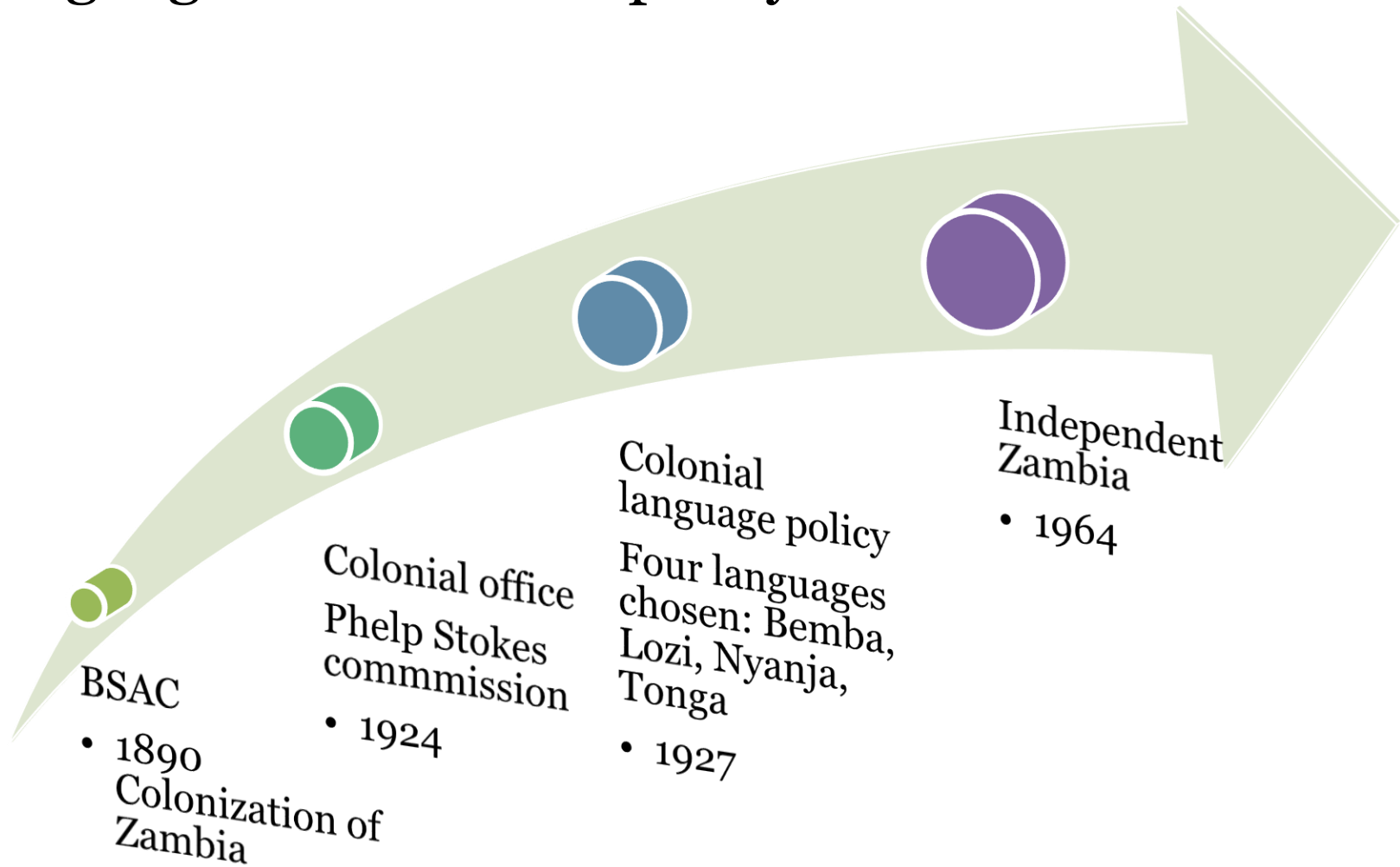
Language Situation

- Ohannessian and Kashoki (1978) used linguistic criteria to group Zambian languages and came up with:
 - 14 clusters of languages or groups
 - Some could be subdivided further into those closely related and those a bit distant but still mutually intelligible.
 - For example, group A is the Bemba cluster with around 20 dialects (each identified as a separate ethnic group)
- Group C was split into two with Lozi on its own and a related cluster of 14 dialects.
- Of interest here is group F Mambwe/Inamwanga languages. The former has one closely related dialect, Lungu while Inamwanga has three (Iwa, Tambo and Lambya)

Language situation

- In short there are roughly 14 language groups
- The official position is that there are seven language clusters: Bemba (33.5%), Kaonde (1.9%), Lozi (5.5%), Lunda (1.9), Luvale(1.5%), Nyanja (14.8%) and Tonga(11.4) (CSO, 2010)
- (English 1.7%)
- However, these are the languages selected for official purposes

Language in Education policy



Language in education policy

- 1890s to 1924 education was largely in Missionary hands: African languages were media of instruction
- The purpose of education was mainly evangelization; literacy, elementary math, crafts, hygiene offered.
- 1924 Northern Rhodesia came under the colonial office
- The colonial government used the recommendations of the Phelps Stokes Commission to teach African languages for cultural preservation and identity; European languages to give access to western learning



Language policy

- Three language policy:
- First two grades: a mother tongue
- Third to fifth grade: regional African language
- Fifth grade: A European language (English)
- 1927 Advisory Board of Native Education of northern Rhodesia adopted
- Four African regional languages: Bemba (Northern, Luapula, Copperbelt and parts of urban central province), Lozi (Western province and Livingstone), Nyanja(Eastern and Lusaka) and Tonga (Southern, rural Central)
- The above were, therefore, given a head start.
- These languages accounted for around 52 % of the languages spoken by ethnic groups; North Western province was totally unrepresented as well as other minority languages.

Language policy

- This policy continued to independence
- 1962 UNESCO conducted a study to assess the right time to introduce English in the primary school. There had been an insistent clamour for an early introduction of English in the African schools mainly from the settler community.
- UNESCO under the leadership of Dr Radford recommended that English should be taught from grade one based on the argument that the earlier children started learning English the better would be their spoken and written English. This recommendation was against what UNESCO had been preaching since 1953 on the importance of using mother tongues in the initial education of children.
- In 1966 the new Zambian government followed the UNESCO recommendation by making English the sole medium of instruction in school. The decision was, however, politically motivated as the new government feared ethnic conflicts if any of the Zambian languages was chosen to be the medium of instruction!

Developments after independence

- The Zambian government added north western province languages that had not been represented: Lunda, Luvale and Kaonde to bring the official regional languages to seven. (Lunda/Luvale are mutually intelligible)
- These were used in education, media, local courts
- However, in many schools Zambian languages were not being taught because they were not a requirement for selection to secondary schools
- Literacy levels plummeted after the introduction of the English medium leading to what Kelly (2000) referred to as a schooled but uneducated generation .

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Current situation

- Studies e.g. Williams (1994), SACMEQ (1995) etc ., showed Zambia was not fairing well in literacy and numeracy
- By 1996 changes were made to the policy: Zambian languages would be used in grade one for literacy and English would continue as media of instruction led to introduction of the NBTL .
- By 2013 change became necessary again because of no clear improvement in literacy levels



Current situation

- In the first four grades, Zambian languages are used as media of instruction
- English is introduced orally in grade two and literacy in grade three
- In grade five English is introduced as media of instruction
- We have come full circle to the colonial system!

Current situation

- Obstacles that remain:
- Teacher proficiency in Zambian languages (spoken/written)
- Poor teacher preparation
- Lack of reading materials in Zambian languages- no practice of decoding skills (e.g. EGRA (2014) assessment found weak comprehension/reading skills in Zambian languages)
- In contexts where regional languages are not familiar languages, children may be facing challenges in learning e.g. Nakonde where the language of the community is not the regional language
- In urban and peri-urban contexts language shift is /has occurred in minority language groups
- Need for change in attitudes to Zambian languages by teachers.