5. SAVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN NAMIBIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN PRESERVING ENDANGERED KHOISAN LANGUAGES OF NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Khoisan languages with their click consonants are not only unique but among the oldest in the world. These languages are spoken mostly in southern Africa namely in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Decades ago, these languages were also spoken in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola and even Mozambique. However, due to a variety of factors, they are said to have gone extinct in those countries. Interestingly, their traces can still be found in local Bantu languages spoken in those countries. At approximately 260 000, Damara/Nama is the widely spoken Khoisan language and the only one with state recognition in Namibia and South Africa. The remaining "San" languages lack adequate recognition in many Southern African countries and face extinction if mechanisms are not devised to reverse language shift. Moreover, only a few San languages have been developed to be used in schools. Museums are one such mechanisms that can be used to promote and preserve language loss among the Khoi and San communities.

Language museums will not only serve to preserve all of Africa's indigenous languages but also contribute to economic development and social cohesion. It is a known fact that well marketed museums the world over attracts thousands of tourists. Namibia, already popular with overseas tourists will greatly benefit from this endeavour.

The paper aims to interrogate the causes of language endangerment in relation to San languages in Namibia and to a lesser extent in Botswana. This paper also aims to investigate the role that museums play in maintaining, promoting and protection of indigenous Khoisan languages as well as the economic benefits that can be derived thereto.

The study employed qualitative research method to this effect. Secondary Qualitative research methods in the form of Desktop and case study research approach were chosen for this particular study.

Keywords: Khoisan, Bantu, language shift, extinction, museum

Introduction

At slightly over three (3) million, Namibia is among the least populated countries on the African continent (National Census, 2023). Namibia's land surface exceeds 824 000 square kilometres.

However, despite its small population, Namibia is home to dozens of languages and dialects. According to Maho (1998), from a genetic-linguistic point of view, there are five language families present in Namibia. These are: Niger-Congo (represented by the Bantu languages), Northern Khoisan, Central Khoisan, Southern Khoisan (represented by Khoekhoegowab) and the so-called Bushman languages.

Maho (1998), while adopting a functional view, further posits that there are about thirteen languages in Namibia, namely, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rugciriku, Thimbukushu, Silozi, Setswana, Khoekhoegowab, Ju/'hoan, Afrikaans, German, and English. However, he acknowledges that these are the omnes that enjoy official status as national languages (with English as the official language) in administration, education and broadcasting. Sadly, most of Namibia's indigenous languages have been reduced to being used only as subjects in schools and for community communication. Few of them are used in broadcasting in mostly the regions where they predominate.

Other non-recognised or non-state supported languages and dialects in Namibia include Subia, Mbalangwe, Totela, Fwe in the Zambezi region, formerly the Caprivi region. Nyemba, Chokwe in the two Kavangos, as well as a variety of Oshiwambo languages to mention are also such examples.

With a lack of official recognition of some of these languages, there is a risk that many of them will face extinction. Already, a variety of San languages are, according to many linguists, going to disappear in the next 50 to 100 years. (Crystal, 2000). Interestingly, there have been increasing calls from speakers of these non-recognised languages (such as the Vanyembas of Kavango) for the government to accord them protection and allow them to be used in schools. (Muyamba,2022).

The Namibian government has invested quite notable amount of funds in heritage management as well as building museums across the country. However, many of these heritage centres and museums feature historical narratives and artefacts and no language at all. To forge national unity, it is imperative for the government to build heritage centres or museums specifically designed to promote and preserve the indigenous languages of the land. Language is a marker of identity, and much of human history, innovation and culture are embedded in language. A language lost is not only a loss to that community but to humanity.

Literature review

According to Ugwu (2019) linguistic diversity is one of the rich endowments of the African continent. Language has a lot of potential benefits to the world at large and, most especially, to the people who speak it. However, in the present globalised world, language endangerment has become a stark reality as many world languages threaten the survival of the weaker ones spoken by the numerous indigenous people.

The loss of a language constitutes more than the mere retirement of a communicative tool—it also represents the loss of history and culture. Therefore, it is important to prevent language death. Language revitalization is the process of rejuvenating a language's use in order to prevent its extinction (Crystal, 2000).

According to Batibo (2005), there are approximately 308 "highly endangered" African languages (12.32% of all extant languages on the continent) and at least 201 extinct African languages, to say nothing of the countless other less threatened but vulnerable ones. This highlights the fact that the state of language endangerment in sub-Saharan Africa is more serious than it is typically perceived to

be.

Language endangerment is both encouraged and forestalled by multilingualism. Multilingualism allows many languages to carve out their domains in the speech economy. At the same time, it allows the more widely spoken languages to invade those domains. Multilingualism is the order of the day in Africa. It is not unusual to find any African capable of speaking more than three languages or dialects. In fact, It has been said that "multilingualism is the African lingua franca" (Fardon & Furniss, 1994, p. 4).

In Southern Africa, three language families were previously grouped and known as Khoesan languages (Heine & Honken, 2010). Today, Khoesan languages are more accurately described as Ju, Khoe and Tuu languages, which is in accordance with the Comparative Method in linguistics (Güldemann, 2008, 123). According to Jones and Muftic (2020), all three of these language families are endangered and are associated with traditional hunter gatherers and pastoralists, also known as San and Khoe, respectively. At the time of their initial documentation, there were approximately 35 languages known to science from the Ju, Khoe and Tuu language families (Voβen, 2013). Jones (2019) further emphasizes that since then, several of these languages have gone extinct, with only 13 remaining, of which 6 are spoken in South Africa.

Compared to most current languages, the Khoisan language is quite old. In 2012, a team from the University of Auckland in New Zealand estimated that Proto-Indo-European perhaps originated 8,000 to 9,500 years ago. Archaeological evidence also suggests that there were people who spoke Khoisan languages in Southern Africa about 60,000 years ago, implying that Khoisan languages may be the most ancient of all human tongues (Thompson, 2015).

Khoisan communities in Botswana are essentially in a colonial situation as their territoriality, culture, and language are subsumed under the hegemony of other groups (Chebanne, 2015). They do not qualify as an independent socio-cultural group with rights to live on land that could be designated as their tribal territory (Barume, 2000). They can only be allocated land that is under the authority and ownership of other recognised tribes (Saugestad, 2001).

Museums have been touted by many academics as mechanisms that may be pivotal in language preservation and revitalisation. In The Language of Museum Communication: A Diachronic Perspective, Lazzeretti (2016) investigates how museums' written communication has evolved since 1950. Using formal linguistic analysis on a corpus of museum press releases, Lazzaretti (2016) determines how the lexical choices and structure of these documents have evolved over time, particularly with the evolution from primarily print to mostly digital communication.

Lazzeretti (2016) views museum communication:

"As a combination of different, yet overlapping discourse types", namely art discourse, promotional discourse, and media discourse. The author describes the lexical changes in museum press releases over time, showing how the increase of the words culture and cultural, both strictly related to the content featured by exhibitions, suggests an intention to provide visitors with an in-depth exploration of an artist's work or artistic subject that embraces all of the relevant context and adds great educational value to the visit. (p.127)

Theoretical framework

Several theories underpin linguistic vitality as well as language preservation. For the purposes of this study, the author will focus on two, namely, sociology of language and Ethnolinguistic vitality.

a) Sociology of language

According to Janicki (1999), the Sociology of language, like any other concept, cannot be defined unambiguously. In other words, one should not expect a clear definition or explanation, of what precisely sociology of language is. Like most, if not all scientific and scholarly concepts, the sociology of language is understood by different researchers in different ways, and there is nothing unusual or wrong about this fact.

The sociology of language approach was introduced by Fishman (1964, 1965, 1972b), who posits that an overall picture of Language Maintenance and Language Shift (LMLS) can be obtained by investigating the domains of language use. According to Fishman (2000, p.94) a domain is defined as:

"[A] socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a culture, in such a way that individual behaviour and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other."

Therefore, Fishman (1972) defines sociology of language as an enterprise that:

Examines the interaction between these two aspects of human behaviour. Briefly put, the sociology of language focuses upon the entire gamut of topics related to the social organisation of language behaviour, including not only language usage per se, but also language attitudes and overt behaviours toward language and users.

San languages in Namibia lack the domain (s) to thrive. Of all the San languages, none is used on television or radio. There is only one San language Ju|'hoansi, with a developed orthography and as such, it is the only San language recognized as a language of instruction in Namibia. Interestingly, this language in Namibia's Omaheke region is used in one school only – Gqaina Primary School, and not as a language of instruction but as a subject only (Ninkova, 2022).

b) Ethnolinguistic vitality theory

Ethnolinguistic vitality theory is a social psychological approach to the relationship between language and identity. The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group is defined as "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in inter-group situations" (Giles et al., 1977). According to Giles et al. (1977), status, demographic, and institutional support factors combine to

make up the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group. A group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these domains could be assessed so as to provide a rough classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having low, medium, or high vitality.

Sadly, in the case of Khoisan languages, their numbers are very low due to being assimilated into larger Bantu language groups. There is no adequate support from the state to preserve their languages. Of the Khoisan languages, only Damara/Nama is among the state-sponsored languages. While Ju|'hoansi is the only San language with a developed orthography.

Methods

The author used a variety of methods gather the required data. These methods were secondary qualitative research method, ethnography research method and observational research methods.

Secondary Qualitative Research method. Secondary Qualitative Research methods using interviews is a crucial and established inquiry method in social sciences to ensure that the study outputs represent the researched people and area rather than those who are researching. However, first hand primary data collection is not always possible, often due to external circumstances. (Cheong et al, 2023).

Secondary data analysis refers to the analysis of such secondary data, which are pre-existing and is suitable for research of a question distinctly different from the original or primary study (Hinds et al., 1997). The analysis is often done by another researcher not related to the primary study using different analysis methods (Szabo & Strang, 1997). Secondary analysis in the context of quantitative data has been common for a while, but using secondary qualitative data has only really started in mid-1990s (Heaton, 2008).

Since language studies involve ethnic groups, the study adopted research methods that revolve around ethnography and observational research methods. Ethnography, emerging from anthropology, and adopted by sociologists, is a qualitative methodology that lends itself to the study of the beliefs, social interactions, and behaviours of small societies, involving participation and observation over a period, and the interpretation of the data collected (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008; Berry, 1991).

According to Wilson (1982) the roots of ethnography were in anthropology and sociology. Wilson relates the tradition to two sets of hypotheses about human behaviour. These are the naturalistic ecological hypothesis and qualitative-phenomenological hypothesis. The naturalistic-ecological perspective has the belief that the context in which behaviour occurs has a significant influence on that behaviour. It means that if we want to find out about behaviour, we need to investigate it in the natural contexts in which it occurs, rather than in the experimental laboratory. Research conducted by Bellack, Hersen, and Turner (1978) found that subjects performed in a role-play situation vary differently from the way they performed in real-life social situation where the same behaviour observed. The qualitative-phenomenological hypothesis means that ethnographers believe that human behaviour cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perceptions and the belief systems of those involved in research, both as researchers and subjects. It implies that the traditional stance of the researcher as „objective" observer is inadequate, and the procedures of experimental method of framing hypotheses and operationalising constructs (psychological attributes such as intelligence, aptitude, or motivation which are created to account for

observable behaviour) before engaging in any data collection or analysis are at best inappropriate and at worst irrelevant.

In assessing the importance of museums in preserving languages, the author used observation method. Kumar (2005) defines observation studies as those that "involve the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting." My recommendations at the end of the paper were largely influenced by this particular method.

Results

Secondary sources mentioned in 4 were used to reach the findings of this study. There are a variety of factors that causes San language endangerment in Namibia and Botswana. The two countries with the largest population of San communities.

The study found that out of an estimated 10 San languages in Namibia, only one Ju|'hoansi has a developed orthography and is taught at a single school in Namibia's Omaheke region. This state of affairs if not addressed may lead to all San languages dying out in the near future.

As Hays (2011) also points out, while literacy, numeracy, and other indicators of schooling success are increasingly necessary and desired by San communities, the skills, and success in formal schools remain out of reach for many San children and adults. Reports from the years immediately following Namibia's independence describe commonalities that exist for San across borders. In particular these reports highlight the high dropout rate and low and inconsistent attendance of San children in schools compared to other groups. These factors, along with a high rate of academic failure, have been attributed to several factors – a very important one of which is the lack of mother-tongue education (others include cultural practices that prevent students from attending school, lack of full integration in the formal schooling arena, frequent abuse at the hands of school authorities and other peers, and the alienating experience of boarding schools, which are often located great distances from home villages and schools).(Hays, 2011).

According to Ninkova (2022) the Language Policy for Schools of Namibia of 1991 (and revised in 2003) recognizes that:

(1) language is an important means for the transmission of identity and culture;

(2) all national languages are equal regardless of their level of development and number of speakers; and

(3) learning in a mother tongue, particularly in the early years of schooling, constitutes a good pedagogical practice (MEC, 1993).

The pedagogical value of the inclusion of mother-tongue teaching and culturally appropriate materials in school is also recognized in the National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized Children (MBESC, 2001) and in the more recent Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (MoE, 2013). Currently, the National Curriculum for Basic Education recognizes fourteen African and European languages as mother-tongue-level languages that can be taught from pre-primary to grade 12.

Since independence, Namibia has invested considerable efforts and resources to develop several local dominant and non-dominant languages. The question of language dominance deserves further attention, as it relates to the status of the Ju|'hoan language and its use (or lack thereof) in school. English, which is the official language of instruction, does not have any historical presence in the country. At the same time, numerically small languages that are invisible on the national linguistic map can be dominant in certain areas. (Ninkova, 2022). The situation with Ju|'hoansi-speaking learners is such that in the areas where they reside, their language is never in a dominant position, even if they constitute the majority of learners in a school. As Benson (2013) has argued, the challenge for non-dominant language learners is that educators blame learners for their own failure, and not the system that creates the conditions for this failure. The use of terms such as 'language barrier' or 'the language problem' that educators often employ to describe the language situation of Ju|'hoan learners, are reflective of this attitude, and highlight the unequal power relation embedded in the politics of language use in school.

The study found that the main cause of the endangerment and subsequent deaths of San languages includes among other factors as forced assimilation by dominant groups, more so, the Bantus. According to Chebbane (2020) From the onset of contact with the southward immigrating Bantu population, the Khoisan, who were perceived as culturally inferior, have been assimilated. As Shillington (1995, p. 155) puts it:

"During the [socio-historical] process of expansion … the Khoisan-speaking hunter-gatherers and specialist pastoralists were gradually absorbed. The presence of the characteristic Khoisan 'clicks' sounds in the southern Nguni and southern Sotho languages is evidence of this process."

San languages are not the only marginalised languages in the country. There are several indigenous languages that lack government recognition in Namibia. More so, in the country's Zambezi and Kavango regions. In the Zambezi region Silozi language is the sole language of administration despite being spoken as a second language by the majority of that region's inhabitants. Local dialects spoken as first languages such as Subia, Fwe, Mbalangwe, Totela are marginalised by the state (Harris, 2018). While in Kavango West and Kavango East, speakers of the Nyemba language have long complained of being marginalised by both the local and central government. Nyembas are quiet a big population in the two Kavangos but their language is neither taught at schools nor used on local national radio station. After protests from its speakers, the government intervened and tasked the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology to find a solution to this. (Muronga, 2022).

Moreover, the study found that language specific museums or general museums can teach Namibians on:

(a) Minority language museums have an important role to play in preserving endangered languages in both spoken and written forms and ensuring they never fully disappear. (Language Museums: Celebrating the Culture of Words, 2025)

(b) Museums are seen as valuable community spaces for education, civic and social engagement, and political change because they represent cultures, ideas, and individuals through collection, exhibition, and interpretation. (Garibay &Yalowitz, 2015).

(c) Museums of living minority languages also serve a political function, often recovering languages that have been suppressed or forgotten due to cultural shifts or colonial and dictatorial regimes. Language museums can constitute direct forms of language activism by affirming the importance of minority languages and encouraging their use across multiple communities. (Language Museums: Celebrating the Culture of Words, 2025, ibid)

(d) Museums are some of the few places that can help bridge the gaps between cultural groups. Surveys show that racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to attend museums when specific museums or exhibits celebrate or relate to their culture, traditions, heritage, and history. Farell & Medvedeva, 2010).

Discussion

Africa is a linguistically diverse nation. About two quarters of an estimated 7000 languages on earth belong to Africa. As posited by Sands and Gunnick (2019), Africa is traditionally seen as hosting four large indigenous phyla, or language families, namely Niger-Congo, Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan. This four-way division is overly simplistic, and the true number of African language families likely surpasses 20, including several isolates and sign languages. There are estimated to be more than 2000 languages on the continent. In Africa, the endangerment and eventual disappearance of entire language families are imminent. According to Moseley (2010), the entire Khoisan phylum language family is presently endangered as most of them are now spoken only by small and marginalized former hunter-gatherer communities. Speakers of languages belonging to this family are shifting to the Maa language along with the pastoral way of life. Besides, the Kordofanian languages in Sudan and the Kuliak languages in Uganda are equally endangered (p. 24-25).

Table 1. **The Four Language Phyla of Africa: Member Languages and Number of Speakers**

Pylum	**No. of languages**	**Member Languages and Numbers of Speakers**
Khoisan	40–70	Nama (140K), Sandawe (70K), Kung (8–30K), !Xóõ (3–4K)
Nilo-Saharan	80	Kanuri (4), Luo (3.4), Dinka (all groups, 1.4), Maasai (883K), Nuer (840)
Afro-Asiatic (in Africa)	2–300	Arabic (all varieties, 180), Amharic (20), Hausa (22), Oromo (10), Somali (5–8), Songhai (2), Tachelhit Berber (3)
Niger-Congo	1,650	Bambara (3), Fula (13), Igbo (17), Mooré (11), Swahili (5), Yoruba (20), Zulu (9.1)

Source: Tucker Childs

Table 1 indicates how Khoisan languages are numerically inferior on the African continent. It should be noted that the majority of Khoisan languages are found in southern Africa, principally in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Although Bantu languages have contributed to the decimation of Khoi-San languages, there is ample evidence that the former was influenced by the latter.

The existence of Bantu click languages constitutes the most tangible linguistic evidence of the interaction between Bantu and non-Bantu speech communities in southern Africa. There is widespread agreement that the acquisition of clicks in these Bantu languages is the outcome of contact-induced change. Clicks only occur as phonemes in those Bantu languages which are spoken in the close vicinity of 'Khoisan' languages and can therefore not be reconstructed in Proto-Bantu (Maddieson 2003, Sands & Güldemann 2009, Voßen 1997).

a) Language as an intangible cultural heritage.

The term cultural heritage is often associated with materials that were traced from past cultural activities, which ranged from natural to manmade elements (Canizaro, 2007; Raj Isar, 2004). The entities of heritage are categorized into two which are tangible and intangible heritage. The tangible heritage is physical heritage in the natural and built environment. The intangible cultural heritage (ICH) constitutes past and continuing cultural practices, living ethnicities, knowledge and living experiences. (Abu Bakar, Osman, Bachok,2015).

Despite its central importance to culture and identities, language is rarely included in state-sponsored measures intended to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (ICH), (Braber, 2023). Language heritage plays a crucial role in individual and community identities, as well as in feelings of belonging and well-being, yet it lacks structured, systematic frameworks to ensure that it is safeguarded and revitalised for future generations (Braber, ibid).

However, the approach to heritage has been shifting in recent decades. The traditional focus on physical monuments such as architecture, monuments, and archaeological findings extends beyond tangible heritage and incorporates a wider range of cultural inheritances (Wedrychowska, 2023). This shift is reflected in the convention adopted by UNESCO in 2003, namely the *Intangible Heritage Convention*. This convention recognizes the cultural relevance as well as the increasing need for the preservation of elements such as oral tradition, performing arts, rituals, festive events, and other social practices. (Wedrychowska,2023, ibid).

b) Forms of intangible cultural heritage.

Forms of intangible cultural heritage can be derived from the definition of what 'Intangible cultural heritage' entails. ICH is defined by Article 2 CSICH as:

"the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity."

According to Lenzerini (2011) ICH consists of, inter alia,

'(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;

(b) performing arts;

(c) social practices, rituals and festive events;

(d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;

(e) traditional craftsmanship', on the condition that they are 'compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect

among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development'.

c) Who are the Khoisan people?

The two terms "Khoi" and "San" refer only to certain historical communities of southern Africa, as identified on the basis of their traditional economic cultures. The Khoi (also referred to as Khoikhoi or Khoekhoen) were mobile herders of the old Cape and the Gariep, while the San (sometimes referred to as "Bushmen") were smaller communities who subsisted almost exclusively through hunting and gathering. Small bands of the latter were reported in early accounts to be affiliated—not necessarily by choice—to individual clans of the nomadic Khoi (Du Plessis, 2019). When later explorers of the nineteenth century began to encounter other communities of hunter-gatherers in places such as the Kalahari and adjacent regions, they identified them in similarly generic terms as San (or Bushmen). (Du Plessis, ibid).

Table 2. Major languages spoken in Namibia.

Language	% of speakers
Oshiwambo	48.5%
Rukavango	9.7%
Otjiherero	7.9%
Silozi	5%
Setswana	0.3%
Khoekhoegowab (Khoekhoe)	11.5%
Other Khoesan languages	1.2%
English	1.9%
Afrikaans	11.4%
German	1.1%

Source: Cambridge University.

From table 2, one can observe that at 1.2 % San languages are numerically inferior to their Bantu and Germanic counterparts. Interestingly, none of Namibia's San languages are accorded the "national language status" nor used on national radio. This marginalisation, if not addressed, will lead to their extinction.

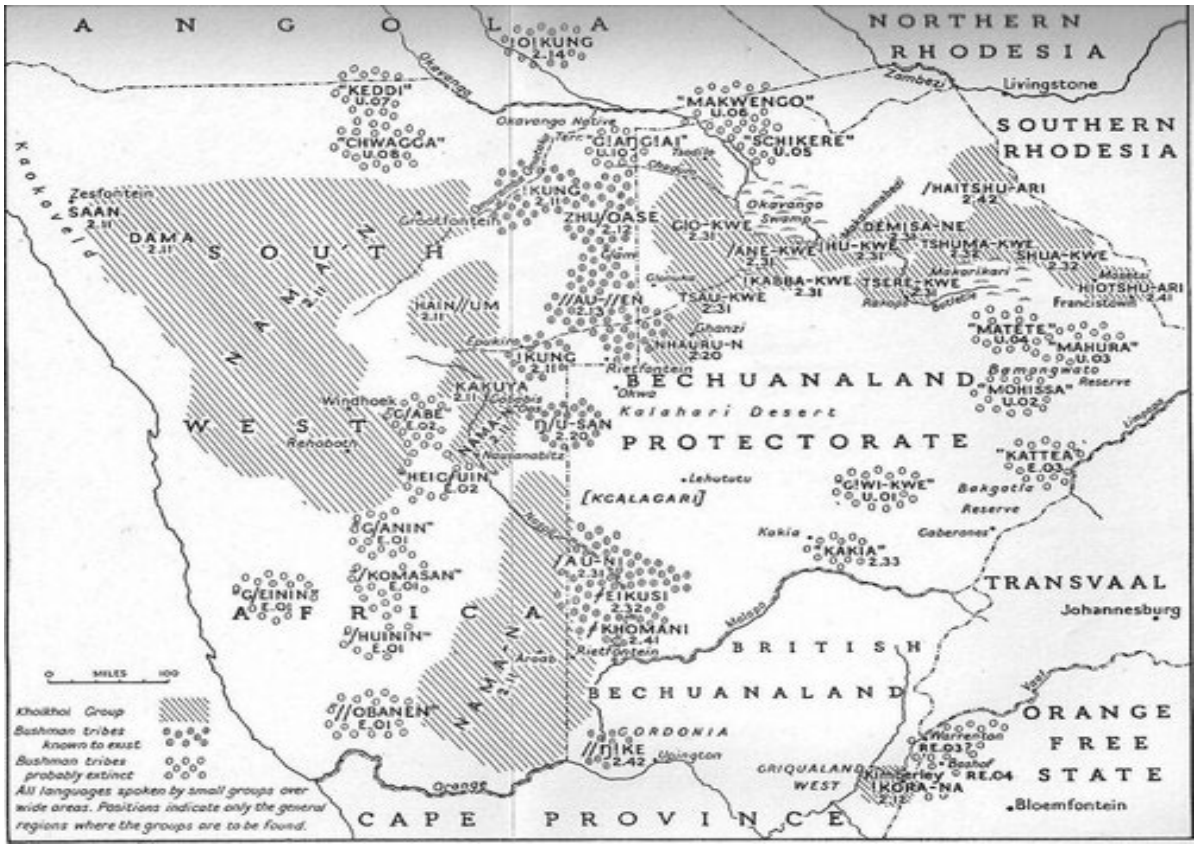
Before and post Namibia's independence in 1990, San people have been afflicted by landlessness, a lack of education, social stigmatisation, high mobility, extreme poverty, and dependency conspired to prevent San from breaking out of the self-reproducing cycle of marginalisation in which many feel they are trapped (Suzman, 2001). The per capita income of San is the lowest among all language groups in Namibia. The majority of San in Namibia lack access to any independent means of subsistence, and a sizeable proportion of them have no direct cash income. San consequently consider pensions, food aid and other forms of welfare as being vital for survival. In addition, they generally have to pursue a variety of economic strategies for income generation, as rarely is any single strategy sufficient for satisfying their basic needs over an entire year. (Suzman, 2001, ibid).

While in neighbouring Botswana, like other African countries has been going through undocumented

language-in-education policies that are implied. The Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) favour the dominant languages as well as the language of the colonisers. In this regard, most of the African language policies are characterised by the national languages and a foreign language. In Botswana, the national language is Setswana, while English is the official language. Ever since independence in 1966, these two languages have enjoyed recognition in the education system and only change positions in the education system depending on what the decision makers believe would help students (Mokibelo and Sello, 2024).

Compared to its neighbour, Namibia provides a favourable environment for the development of San language and educational efforts, largely due to the political will to promote mother-tongue education, transparent government structures and policies that favour marginalised groups, combined with several supportive NGOs involved with the San people (Le Roux, 1999)

Figure 1: The Non-Bantu Languages of Southern Africa.



Source: Ernst Westphal

Figure 1 shows the distribution of San groups prior to the arrival of Bantus and European colonisers. It is a well-known fact that the arrival of these two groups resulted in either forcibly assimilating the San or their decimation due to warfare and disease. The reduction in their population further contributed to the deaths of their languages.

Language endangerment

In essence, a language is considered to be endangered when it is not transmitted on to younger generations. Several factors may lead to a language's endangerment, but the chief cause is known to be language shift. In multilingual communities, if parents stop using their native language on a regular basis and shift instead to a dominant language (e.g., a national language), their children will become native speakers of that dominant language, and nonfluent speakers of their parents' native language. Their children will be even less proficient in the native language and their children's children even less so, so that the native language is gradually lost. When transmission is stopped within the whole community, the language becomes endangered in a few generations, until it completely disappears. At this stage, we have moved beyond endangerment to extinction (Guérin and Yourupi,2017).

Reasons for Khoisan's Endangerment

According to Sands (2018) Khoesan languages are among the most marginalized languages on the continent and changes in beliefs about the languages are important first steps in revitalisation. Sands (2018) further posits that some speakers and non-speakers of Khoesan languages believe that their language is not "real" languages since they can't be written because of their clicks.

The causes of individual Khoisan language endangerment vary, but some common factors are acknowledged by most scholars based on recent research. These variables are often intertwined:

1. Globalization, urbanization, and language competition. Globalization and urbanization often lead to language competition, which frequently results in speakers abandoning their native language for one with more prestige or economic opportunities. In some cases, abandonment may also be politically motivated (Batibo, 2009).

2. Colonization, ddiaspora, and language abandonment: Historically speaking, colonization has profoundly influenced local language distribution. The impact of colonization to local Khoisan groups in South Africa can largely be traced back to two major results of the 1885 Berlin Conference, in which Europeans, led by Great Britain and France, began competing for the territory of Africa. To maximize their own profits, colonizers arbitrarily divided the African continent with no regard for its extant ethnic and language distinctions and distributions. As a result, pre-existing ethnic groups were separated by the new territory borders. This separation of language speakers led to separate language development, causing the Khoisan language group to diverge into distinct branches (Ajala, 1983).

3. Bantu expansion into San territory**.** The colonization of the San began approximately 900 and 1000 AD with the large-scale arrival of farming and iron-working Bantu populations in southern Africa (Tlou & Campbell, 1997). The agro-pastoral immigrants amassed large portions of lands for agriculture and mining. Prosperity in these enterprises led to population explosion, and the settlers in turn occupied more and more land and became geographically more spread. With time, interactions between the more powerful farmers and the foragers led to considerable shrinking and disintegration of the indigenous San communities "due to the large-scale loss of territory and speakers on the part of non-Bantu languages" (Gueldemann, 2008, p. 96).

8Museums as protectors of endangered languages

Museums are increasingly seen by many scholars as conduits of language preservation. According to Burden (2004), Intangible culture or heritage can be presented in museums in two different capacities: firstly, it is almost impossible to exhibit and explain artefacts without the context of customs and other intangible culture that forms the environment in which these artefacts belong. This capacity has received much more attention in recent years than a few decades ago. Secondly, intangible heritage can and should in many cases be exhibited as such: as a song, a custom, a folk belief, folk dance or language. Burden (2004) thus believes that there are several reasons for the fact that this was seriously neglected in the past. The most important reason is certainly that of tradition, which can be traced back to the origin of museums. Another reason is the fact that it is much more difficult to display intangible heritage; it demands considerable imagination and maybe more technical aids than the display of material culture.

The history of museums in Namibia

Before one indulges in the history of museum in Namibia, it's important to define what a museum is. The English word "museum" comes from the Latin word and is pluralized as "museums" (or rarely, "musea"). It is originally from the Ancient Greek (Mouseion), which denotes a place or temple dedicated to the Muses (the patron divinities in Greek mythology of the arts), and hence a building set apart for study and the arts, especially the Museum (institute) for philosophy and research at Alexandria by Ptolemy I Soter about 280 BCE. The first museum/library is considered to be the one of Plato in Athens. (Museum, n.d).

Upon the advent of independence in 1990, the Namibian government embarked on a number of projects to research and preserve the country's history vis-à-vis heritage free from apartheid distortions. The National Museum of Namibia is arguably the oldest museum in the country and was established by the imperial German administration in 1907. It is a historical and zoological museum in Windhoek, the capital (National Museum, 2024).

At independence, Namibia had at least thirteen museums, with more in the planning stage, in addition to a number of art galleries and craft centres. The then state museum in Windhoek comprised the Alte Feste (Old Fort) for history and the Owela Museum for natural history and ethnography. (Schildkrout, 1995). Reeling from the legacy of apartheid, white tourists were guided primarily to the Old Fort, noted for its revivalist German architecture and its resonance of the European presence, while local people mainly blacks, and often in school groups, almost exclusively visited the Owela museum (Schildkrout, ibid).

In the five years since Namibia's independence in 1990, Namibians are still preoccupied with creating a national consciousness and a national image. This "enterprise" involves enhancing the notion of citizenship and engendering support for the state, all of which promotes foreign economic aid and investment, and tourism. The visual symbols that the state promoted then were in tourist literature, postcards, museums and in the national media include Namibia's unique desert landscape portrayed as "barren" but teeming with life, its wildlife, its European style hospitality, its developed infrastructure, the variety and richness of its fauna, complimented by stereotypical images of racial and ethnic types harmonised into a cultural mosaic. ((Schildkrout, ibid).

What is a language museum?

There is no universal definition of what constitutes a language museum. However, the closest definition is: a Language Museum caters for the preservation and promotion of language. Ravelli (1996) postulates that Language is regarded as "one of the primary tools available" to museums today. From a situation in which objects were displayed and labelled with minimal text, museums in the current era are text-rich environments (Ravelli, ibid).

In essence, language museums help us to understand how both language and culture change, granting us a deeper insight into how societies have adapted and evolved (Language museum, 2024). Many language museums explore the etymology of words and phrases, bringing older historical moments to life by showing how words developed from their ancient roots to their contemporary, popular usage (Language museum, 2024).

Ravelli (1996) sees the importance of text as emerging from a situation characterised by the following features: strong boundaries between categories of exhibits have given way to weaker, fuzzier boundaries which are intended to encourage cross-fertilisation across the entire museum; the demise of the role of labels/lists containing minimal and often expert categorisations and knowledge in favour of the growth of extended texts; and the recognition of the visitor as an active participant in the museum experience rather than a passive recipient of expert, displayed knowledge, and one who brings his/her own experiences and knowledge to the museum and uses them in the interpretation (p. 368).

In addition, it is crucial to mention that museums, whether it be natural history museums, science museums, children's museums and so on, are perhaps the informal learning spaces that have received the most attention in recent years. With their attractive displays and highly decorated exhibits, they are claimed to be ideal word learning environments for children (Henderson & Atencio, 2007; Kola-Olusanya, 2005; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011).

Kola-Olusanya (2005) posited that the additional resources that museums provide, such as the opportunity to handle 3D objects, interactive displays presenting multiple category exemplars, and knowledgeable museum staff on hand, have the potential to promote the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, the open-ended questions that are often displayed around museum exhibits promote conversation amongst visitors and provide language learning opportunities (Henderson & Atencio, 2007; Rowe et al., 2017).

According to Burden (2004) intangible culture or heritage can of course be presented in museums in two different capacities: firstly, it is impossible to exhibit and explain artefacts without the context of customs and other intangible culture that forms the environment in which these artefacts belong. This capacity has received much more attention in recent years than a few decades ago. Secondly, intangible heritage can and should in many cases be exhibited as such: as a song, a custom, folk belief, folk dance or language.

Case studies of language museums

If Namibia is to establish a language museum or incorporate language preservation in existing museum structures, it is imperative to study two relatively successful examples where this initiative worked.

One is the Afrikaans Museum in neighbouring South Africa, the other is Scottish Gaelic in Scotland.

Afrikaans Museum

Afrikaans language, West Germanic language of South Africa, developed from 17th-

century Dutch, sometimes called Netherlandic, by the descendants of European (Dutch, German, and French) colonists, indigenous Khoisan peoples, and African and Asian slaves in the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope. Afrikaans and English are the only Indo-European languages among the many official languages of South Africa. Although Afrikaans is very similar to Dutch, it is clearly a separate language, differing from Standard Dutch in its sound system and its loss of case and gender distinctions. (Brittanica, 2004). Afrikaans is a creole language that evolved during the 19th century under colonialism in southern Africa. This simplified, creolised language had its roots mainly in Dutch, mixed with seafarer variants of Malay, Portuguese, Indonesian and the indigenous Khoekhoe and San languages. It was spoken by peasants, the urban proletariat whatever their ethnic background and even the middle class of civil servants, traders and teachers. (Willemse, 2017).

In 1652, the VOC, or Dutch East India Company, established a supply station at the Cape of Good Hope. This station was designed with the sole objective of providing VOC sailors a place of refuge and refreshment along their extended sea voyages to Asia and back. In order to accomplish this, the company began granting African land to Dutch people willing to emigrate to Africa and farm provisions for the Company. Though the parcel of land was sizeable, contractual conditions were harsh, with the VOC preventing the farmers from using their land to harvest anything other than for personal consumption and setting fixed rates at which goods would be sold to the Company (Hunt, 2005, 13-15). Those who accepted this offer became the first Dutch people to settle in Southern Africa, and their language forms the Netherlandic basis of modern Afrikaans. (Solloway,2019).

Despite Afrikaans having been developed naturally in Africa, it still carries a baggage in both Namibia and South Africa. After Germany was defeated in World War I, South Africa invaded Namibia on behalf of the British in 1915, and on a mandate from the League of Nations, took over administration of the territory of Namibia in 1920. After South Africa pushed Germany out of Namibia, German lost its official status and Afrikaans and English became the official languages of Namibia. Afrikaans, however, was the language predominantly employed in the administration and in education (Pütz 1995). In 1948 the Nationalist Party assumed power in South Africa and the apartheid regime began in South Africa and Namibia. As the apartheid system became increasingly more oppressive, SWAPO (Southwest African People's Organization), the leading organization in Namibia's liberation movement, deemed it necessary to replace Afrikaans, the "language of the oppressors," and to establish a language policy in preparation for an independent Namibia. (Frydman, 2011).

Whereas in other post-colonial societies English has often been viewed as an interloper, imposed from outside and thus politically suspect, in South African society Afrikaans shielded English from this stigma in the period 1948–94. Afrikaans became known as "the language of the oppressor": apartheid

was enforced in Afrikaans, as it was the language of the bureaucracy and the police force. In contrast, English was chosen as language of communication by the ANC and the other liberation organizations during the 'freedom struggle', and "has typically been seen as the language of liberation and black unity" (Gough, 1996).

The Afrikaans Language Museum and Language Monument in Paarl celebrate the birth and continuing existence of Afrikaans. (The Afrikaans Language Monument, 2011). In 1942 the inhabitants of the town Paarl decided to erect a monument for the Afrikaans language, to establish a museum and to start a special study fund for students of Afrikaans. They started to collect funds for this monumental idea and in 1975 the Afrikaans Language Monument was inaugurated. (Burden,2004).

Scottish Gaelic Museum

Scottish Gaelic is a minority language of Scotland spoken by approximately 58,000 people, or 1% of the Scottish population. (Nance & Maolalaigh, n.d). In Gaelic, the language is referred to as Gàidhlig /kaˇlIc/. Gaelic is a Celtic language, closely related to Irish (MacAulay 1992, Ní Chasaide 1999, Gillies 2009).

Scottish Gaelic, along with English, is an official language of Scotland. It developed out of Old Irish in ca. 500 CE in the Kingdom of Dál Riata in the western part of Scotland and the northeastern corner of Ireland (Kessler). (Guðmundsdóttir, 2022). There it sprouted roots that lie deep in the nation's history. It is a language that flourished, and many of the nation's significant milestones were infused by the Scottish Gaelic language. Grand plans were made and explained, wars were fought, poems were written, and great history was made within the Scottish Gaelic language sphere. Today it is spoken by less than 60.000 people and is near extinct, according to UNESCO's Atlas of endangered languages. (Guðmundsdóttir, 2022).

National Museums Scotland is the overarching name for four national institutions: National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, National Museum of Flight in East Lothian, National Museum of Rural Life in East Kilbride, and National War Museum in Edinburgh. (McLaren, 2015).

One of the four aims guiding the Museum's priorities, programs, and activities are: to put people first, to value the collections, to increase reputation and outreach, and to ultimately transform the organization through new developments and ambitions. (Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022, 6). One of these new developments is the incorporation of Gaelic. The National Museums Scotland's Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022 is their second iteration, prepared under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005. In preparation for developing and implementing the second Plan, the Museum reached out to the public, staff, and volunteers from September to November 2016 to get feedback on their first Plan. The Museum announced the consultation in both English and Gaelic, and people had the ability to respond through email or through participation in an open, public meeting. (Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022, 6).

In light of the above case studies, one can deduce that museums can indeed help preserve endangered languages. As stated by Pine and Turin (2017) "In helping to create a distinct linguistic space, symbolic language use can align with the goals of language reclamation. Moreover, Turin and Schillo (2022) argue that "In so doing, it also helps to situate museums as productive spaces for language reclamation, as a dynamic site for symbolic language use." In this regard, Perley (2022) explains that

"Cultural institutions such as museums are also playing an important role in honouring Indigenous languages. Exhibitions offered in multiple languages can create experiential spaces where Indigenous worlds can be shared with a wide variety of visitors."

"Living Museums" as a mechanism to save San languages

To effectively save or revitalise endangered San languages, some scholars have proposed the establishment of language museums or living museums exhibiting the culture of minority ethnic groups.

Moreover, in their effort of preserving their culture vis a vis way of life, several San groups in Namibia have come up with so-called living museums. In the Namibian context, a Living Museum is an active and authentic way of presenting ancient traditional culture. A Living Museum is a cultural school for tradition and a communal Namibian tourism business at the same time. Tourists and visitors, but also students and people from the own community can visit a Living Museum and thus can actively contribute to the preservation of traditional culture and the fight against poverty in Namibia. (Living Museums Namibia, 2010).

In addition to incorporating San languages into the mainstream education system, living museums can also be used by the government, NGOs and San groups themselves to promote and preserve their languages.

Recommendations

How museums can preserve and promote indigenous languages

(a) By recording indigenous languages and preserving them via audios for future use.
(b) Develop orthographies for indigenous languages that are not yet written.
(c) Provide language immersion classes to children whose languages are facing extinction.
(d) Assist government agencies responsible for education in harmonising indigenous dialects.
(e) Hold regular workshops and awareness campaigns on the importance of language preservation and promotion.

How to achieve bilingualism in a museum in a multilingual country like Namibia

(a) All signs and notices in a particular museum should either be bilingual i.e the official language and the dominant language spoken in a given area.
(b) Certain sections of the museum should be dedicated to the linguistic history of a particular ethnic groups. This section may contain posters with common phrases and idioms of a particular indigenous ethnic groups.
(c) All announcements in a museum environment should be in both the official language and one or two indigenous languages spoken in a particular area.

Conclusion

There are over 6000 languages spoken on earth. About 50% of them may disappear in the next 50 to 100 years. In Namibia, San languages are the most endangered. The biggest threats to local San languages are their Bantu neighbours. Language is indeed a marker of cultural identity. It is thus necessary for the government to play its part in preserving all of Namibia's indigenous and museums can assist in this regard.

Language museums will not only preserve and promote indigenous languages, but they will also contribute to the economic development of the country. Museums in other parts of the world are a major tourist attraction and as a result of this influx of people many jobs have been created. The examples of the Afrikaans and Scottish Gaelic Museums are models that Namibia can employ in order to preserve its linguistic heritage, more so for San Languages.

To revitalise or preserve San languages, the state has an obligation to provide funding and source experts in linguistics. All San languages ought to be recorded and digitised. The introduction of Ju|'hoansi as the only San language taught at school is commendable. However, other San languages require this domain to thrive. Without proper domains for these languages to be used, their chances of survival are minimised.

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