



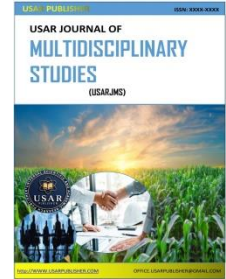
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## Multilingualism and the Informal Economy: A Case of Malela Market in Mufulira

BY

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the role of multilingualism in the informal economy with particular consideration of trade at Malela Market in Mufulira, Zambia. Being a mining town, the areas surrounding Malela Market comprise people of different ethnicities who have migrated in search of employment and business opportunities. The study is guided by two actionable objectives; to identify languages that are commonly used as languages of trade at Malela Market in Mufulira; and to establish the role of multilingualism in facilitating trade at Malela Market in Mufulira. The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) underpins this study. The interpretivist paradigm was taken and the qualitative approach underpinned this study. As a case study, data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews. A total of 25 respondents were interviewed and data was analyzed thematically. The findings show that multilingualism plays a critical role in trade. It has been established that the study area is a multilingual market flooded with not only local languages and the officially recognized language of instruction but, even some foreign languages such as Lingala and Swahili. The study also establishes that being multilingual as a trader is perceived as an advantage, and brings a sense of pride and belonging. On the part of the customers, the study establishes that when a trader speaks their language, they feel more welcome and gain trust in that person and this sense makes them want to buy from that particular person. It is further established that the language situation in the study area results in the rise of the phenomenon of translanguaging and code-switching. The study reveals that although there are multiple languages, they can be grouped based on frequency of use and the most frequently used such as Bemba and English can be translanguaged among others. Finally, the ability to communicate with people of various ethnicities influences the economic performance in the informal economic area.*

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, Translanguaging, Code-Switching, Malela Market, Informal Economy.

### 1. Introduction

This paper presents the role of multilingualism in the informal economy with particular consideration of trade at Malela Market in Mufulira district in Zambia. As a mining town, the

geographical location of Malela Market comprises people of different ethnicities who have migrated in search of employment and business opportunities. The study has two actionable objectives; to identify languages that are commonly used during

trade; and to establish the role of multilingualism in facilitating trade at Malela Market in Mufulira.

According to Li (2008), multilingualism refers to 'anyone who communicates in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading). The European Commission (2007) defines multilingualism as the abilities of societies, institutions, and groups of individuals to engage, regularly, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. These definitions of multilingualism are relevant for discussing some of its dimensions such as the individuals versus social dimensions, the proficiency versus use dimensions, and the bilingual versus multilingual dimensions. Multilingualism at the same time can refer to the use of languages in society. On the other hand, informal economy refers to economic activities that are not registered or regulated by the government, and therefore, are not accounted for in official statistics. It is a part of any economy that is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government (Schneider and Enste, 2000).

Therefore, multilingualism in conjunction with the informal economy refers to the ability of individuals or businesses to communicate and operate in multiple languages within the informal economy which includes language brokering where individuals act as intermediates between buyers and sellers because of speaking different languages. Multilingualism is a concept common at Malela Market in Mufulira District, especially with people from neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo among those who are not conversant with the *iciBemba* language. Most of the time, people find it difficult to sell their goods at the market if they do not have an intermediate person to help them in selling their goods to the *iciBemba* speakers of Mufulira. The researchers of the current study are cognizant of the fact that some of the traders are Lingala and or Swahili native speakers.

To facilitate trade, the traders engage in some activities such as code-switching. As a linguistic concept, Lasagabaster and Garcia (2014) as cited in Nyimbili (2021) describe code-switching as a situation where bilingual speakers use two languages as two separate monolingual codes. Code-switching

can also be said to refer to the practice of alternating between two or more languages, dialects, or varieties of speech in a single conversation or discourse. This linguistic phenomenon can occur at various levels, such as between sentences (inter-sentential code-switching), within a sentence (intra-sentential code-switching), or even within a word (tag-switching) (Gumperz, 1982). Code-switching is often context-dependent and can be influenced by factors such as the social environment, the relationship between speakers, and the subject matter of the conversation (Holmes, 2013).

Studies have shown that code-switching serves various communicative purposes, including signaling group membership, accommodating the audience, emphasizing a point, or providing a more precise or nuanced expression (Auer, 2013). It is not merely a result of linguistic deficiency but often reflects a speaker's cultural identity and social positioning (Rampton, 1995). Code-switching plays a critical role in facilitating transactions or communicating with customers. Many times the ability of a trader to code switch gives them a better chance at trading with other language speakers. In cases where traders fail to switch to another language in a single conversation, interaction, or transaction as may be observed in several bilingual settings is mostly because there may be a common language that is being used in that setting and the affected people are not conversant with it or find it difficult to speak. For a person to effectively communicate especially in business transactions, it is held that one needs to communicate using a language they are conversant with or their mother tongue or native language.

Another concept that is predominant in multilingualism and the informal economy is code-mixing. Code-mixing plays a significant role in informal trading, particularly in multilingual countries, by aligning with the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). According to Giles and Coupland (1991), CAT suggests that individuals adjust their communication styles to either converge with or diverge from their interlocutors, depending on social and contextual factors. It can be argued that in informal trade settings, traders and customers often engage in code-mixing as a strategy to accommodate linguistic diversity,

build rapport, and facilitate effective transactions. For instance, traders may mix local languages with a dominant lingua franca, such as English or Swahili, to ensure mutual understanding and create a sense of inclusivity (Myers-Scotton, 1993). This linguistic flexibility fosters a sense of solidarity and trust between traders and buyers, which is crucial for business success. Holmes (2013) emphasizes that such language choices reflect social identity and power dynamics, enabling traders to connect with diverse customers while maintaining their cultural identity.

Moreover, code-mixing enhances transactional efficiency by allowing traders to switch between languages based on the customer's linguistic background. According to Kim (2019), this adaptability aligns with the convergence aspect of CAT, where speakers adjust their language use to reduce social distance. Conversely, traders may also use code-mixing for divergence, maintaining their linguistic identity while subtly asserting their cultural uniqueness.

Therefore, effective cultural mediation in multilingualism can enhance communication and understanding. It can build trust, and rapport, and facilitate access to economic opportunities as well as support social cohesion and community building as it helps play a crucial role in enabling individuals to navigate linguistic and cultural diversity. It further enables people to build relationships, and facilitate economic activities. It can sometimes be a challenge, especially in an informal economy where language barriers and cultural differences may be significant, power dynamics and social inequalities may exist and even legal and regulatory frameworks may be unclear or inconsistent. Multilingualism can have a positive impact on economic growth by increasing market access, improving communication, enhancing competitiveness, and attracting foreign investment, among other benefits.

## **2. Literature Review**

The relationship between informal trading and multilingualism has been explored in various studies. Smith (2020) found that multilingualism is a valuable asset for informal traders, enabling them to navigate linguistic diversity and connect with customers

from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, Garcia (2019) noted that language is a key factor in facilitating communication and negotiation in informal trading.

As the use of languages plays a critical role in economic activities within the globalized countries' economies, there are growing perspectives and interests in the relationship between languages and the volume of trade among trading partners. According to Muindi and Isheloke (2020), various trading blocs such as the European Union (EU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the West African Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with some members of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)

Inter-governmental organizations such as South Africa and China have adopted multilingualism as a strategy for addressing the language factor in their bilateral trading matters. It has promoted multilingualism as a way of mitigating the impact of language barriers in international trade among members and beyond (Siame and Musonda, 2024). Muindi and Isheloke (2020) further state that in a highly globalized economy, states, corporations, or individuals, will find it easier to deal with trading partners who share a common language with them or understand their languages. Most trading blocs such as ECOWAS, COMESA, or EU, have strong advantages of language diversity among them through the adoption of multilingualism and this has made their trade engagement easier and also increased trade among member states.

Muindi and Isheloke (2020) explain that the trade between BRICS is highly complementary, as each of the member states is equally robust in the production and supply of commodities while having vibrant natural resources industries. A reflection of this context is China and India. These two countries have cheap costs of labor where China's domination is in manufacturing, while India's focus and dominance are in the pharmaceuticals and development of software. As such, some increasingly networked economies, member states of BRICS need to overcome glaring challenges to fully exploit and benefit from the wider market and trade opportunities at their disposal.

Over the past decades, the phenomenon of multilingualism in African languages is making a serious impact on the lives of Africans, in particular, the urban areas of Africa. Thrown together from different corners of their respective countries, such as their neighbors, Africans are increasingly learning each other's languages, while it is not planned, nor is it in a conscientious manner but as a process of social symbiosis. There is hardly any African Urban Centre that is not experiencing this phenomenon. The process can be described as almost effortless. Because of the cross-border nature of African traders, the consequence is the creation of regional characters in most of these languages.

Therefore, the question then is how useful the multilingualism phenomenon is, if it can be put to greater service for African countries, and if it is a positive development or represents a hindrance to the development of the African nations. Kwesi (2010) argues that Africans are distinctly one of the most multilingual groups of people in the world. Kwesi adds that Africa's rich cultural diversity and linguistic profusion are hardly a disadvantage as it addresses the needs of our times where there is an increasing need for people to reach each other in different languages. The availability and access to the use of a multiplicity of languages stands out as an advantage through which the integration of Africans can be achieved. The present research goes over a similar ground adducting further evidence and references to substantiate these claims.

According to Bartholomew (2021), language speakers are availed of an opportunity when several languages come in contact with one another such as English, Yoruba, Pidgin, Igbo, and Hausa in the market transactions in Nigeria. Participants employ various bargaining and pragmatic strategies which include greetings, humor, cajoling, flattering, and pleading as well as code-switching and code-mixing. Based on Bartholomew's study, it can be argued that both buyers and sellers want to be at an advantage and use languages that accommodate the other party, despite their social, religious, cultural, or ethnic differences. To create a sense of belonging, some areas use pidgin in informal situations between buyers and sellers especially in the market as they communicate across

diverse groups, irrespective of their social status or educational level. Once two parties create room for accommodation as a persuasive strategy, they get a good bargain for what they want to buy or sell in their favor. The same thing happens in most bordering towns such as Mufulira where Malela Market is found as it is also characterized by multiple languages and cultures including that of the people from Mokambo a town within Congo country.

Banda (2008) observed that in the African multilingual environment, sociologically, the various languages "protect each other." The above ascension implies that the survival of many African languages today depends as much on their mother tongue speakers as non-mother-tongue speakers who these languages as second or third. In Africa today, clearly languages like iciBemba, Lingala, Lamba, kiSwahili, kiKaonde, Chewa, ciTonga, and many others are spoken more by non-mother tongue speakers than mother-tongue speakers. It is important to point out that this multilingualism under discussion pertains specifically to African languages. These languages are more used in marketplaces and business centers such as Malela market which is in Mufulira the border town next to the Democratic Republic of Congo. African languages cutter for everyone even those who are not educated or those who know Western languages.

Multilingualism plays a critical role in trade centers as it helps traders and customers to have a clearer conveyance message to increase not only customer turn-up and profit but also promote inclusion, participation, approval, ascertain social identity and understanding to make complete meaning (Namatama, 2020).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

One interesting thing humans have in common is that they tend to adjust the way they communicate to either fit in with or move away from those around them. This may be either verbal (such as speech) or non-verbal (such as gestures or body language). When this happens, it is known as the communication accommodation theory. This theory, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), is a theory of communication that was developed by Hawards Gile, and it is concerned with

the behavioral changes that people make to attune communication. It seeks to explain not only language use but also the social psychological processes underlying language use.

Each one of us is aware that our style of speech changes in a twinkling of an eye, as it were depending on a wide range of variables such as the setting, the topic of discourse, the person we are interacting with, the purpose of the interaction, and many other different things. This can be seen for instance in a scenario where we have a conversation with foreigners and we decide to use grammatically simple language normally used with babies or children who are not yet fully developed in their language capabilities. We tend to speak more slowly to accommodate them. By adjusting our communicational behavior to the requisite roles that participants are assigned in a given context, we accommodate others.

Giles (1970) argues that Communication Accommodation Theory refers to the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication with their partners or the extent to which people perceive their partners as appropriately attuning to them. This simply implies that we adjust our speech to accommodate the person we are addressing. This theory is one way to explain how people of different cultures are constantly adapting their communication styles either in converging, divergence, or even accommodating styles to people in multiple contexts. Communication accommodation theory (CAT) is currently the most encompassing theory of language use in social situations which is mainly concerned with the relation between language, context, and social identity. It is important in helping us to understand how and why we adapt speech and behavior in different social situations and with different people.

According to Giles (1979). Communication accommodation theory can be said to have two main principles, and these are; the diverging and converging principles. In line with the Communication Accommodation Theory, converging refers to a situation where two or more things become more similar or come together. This means that in terms of communication, convergence describes a situation where people adapt their speech and behavior to become more similar to the other people in the conversation. This is a mostly common phenomenon,

especially in business places such as well as marketplaces where there are a lot of people of different languages. This is mostly done for easy communication. The border town areas are no exceptions as they present more complex multilingual situations where there could be languages from more than one country in use. Mufulira town is one such town in Zambia and it stands as the nearest town for some people from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

Converging also helps people to fit in with others which mostly occurs in places where there are different people of different languages such as Mufulira Town. Most often people from Mokamba town in the Democratic Republic of Congo try by all means to converge their language to iciBemba language is the most dominant language in Mufulira Town so that they can also fit in with the people of Mufulira especially where trade is concerned. By doing so, they enhance mutual understanding and foster relationships with clients from different linguistic backgrounds.

Converging also facilitates gaining societal approval and maintaining a positive image. This is one factor that can help in effective communication. People converge their languages to maintain a positive image and be part of that society. For instance, people use similar words such as by picking up slang words or phrases to match the ones others use. They may even try to match the pitch of the other person's voice in situations such as when someone is excited. This pitch change as matched by the listener portrays a similar feeling of excitement and increases mutual understanding.

The second principle of CAT is Divergence. This principle holds that in multilingual settings people would prefer to continue to use their languages. This could be for several reasons. However, this principle can create barriers to trade and commerce. This is because individuals or groups may struggle to communicate effectively. When perpetuated, this can create social distance between individuals or groups, making it challenging to build relationships or achieve mutual understanding. This type of communication can lead to social, economic, as well as psychological consequences, including social distance, misunderstandings, conflict, barriers to trade,



lost opportunities, anxiety, stress, and identity threats (Garcia, 2009). This may be attributed to the fact that individuals may not share a common language or communication style.

When the two principles are analyzed critically, unlike the divergence type of communication where speakers maintain their original communication style, convergence communication in CAT, stands for the adaptation of people's speech, accent, or speech patterns and behavior to become more similar to the other people in a conversation. Divergence explains how individuals intentionally emphasize differences in their communication style to distinguish themselves from others while convergence accounts for the opposite. Further, convergence stands for communication through shared understanding which may not create barriers to effective communication with potential customers who do not understand that language for the business to run smoothly.

The assumptions of CAT by Gile (1979), stand out as the most comprehensive as they apply to social situations which are concerned with the relationship between language, context, and social identity. It helps in the understanding of how and why we adapt speech and behavior in various social situations and with different people, especially at meeting places such as a marketplace. This theory was used in the present study to analyze how local and foreign traders navigate around the multilingual situation through mechanisms such as code-switching, code-mixing as well as translanguaging for effective communication.

#### **4. Methodology**

The qualitative approach was used, an approach which is ideal for exploring non-satistical data such as the deep meaning and significance of multilingualism in informal trading at Malela Market (Siame, 2019, 2022; Siame and Banda, 2021, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is well-suited for studies that seek to understand the complexities of social phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

This study engaged 25 participants from different language groups and nationalities. Among these interviewed 10 were Congolese (Lingala/Swahili speakers), 2 Tanzanians (Swahili speakers), and 13 Zambians (3 Kaonde and 10 Bemba speakers) to get the required information. Suffice it to mention that the most used language in this market is iciBemba while English plays the role of a neutral language and it is optional. The said participants were sampled purposively based on their experience and the different ethnic groups that were most represented in the study area.

Data was collected using interview guides. The aim of using the interview guide was to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication dynamics between traders and their customers in this informal economic setting. Ethical issues were also adhered to such as participation free of any coercion and consent, anonymity, and the importance of the study. The participants identified the challenges they face when they are at the market especially if the customer knows only the mother tongue and not the dominant language which is iciBemba in this case. Data were analyzed using thematically as data were coded and categorized into themes based on theme patterns arising from the in-depth interviews (Kapau et al, 2025; Kasozwe et al, 2025).

### **5. Results and Discussion**

#### **5.1 Languages in Use at Malela Market**

From the collected data, it was established that the most common languages used at Malela Market are iciBemba, kiiKaonde, Lingala, and Swahili reflecting the linguistic diversity of the market. Further, at least 80% of informal traders reported using iciBemba since it is the most dominant language in this area though it was characterized by translanguaging, code-switching, and borrowing in use. Three-quarters of the traders believed that multilingualism was essential for their business success and it was beneficial for both customers and traders. With this understanding, it was found that language is not just a means of communication but a powerful instrument that can be used to achieve specific goals such as building trust and rapport with customers.

Informal trading and multilingualism can be considered the most natural applied context for CAT, as the theory was first developed by studying interactions where multilingual people meet for communication. For example, Bourhis (1984) studied the strategies of convergence, divergence, and maintenance in Montreal by asking Francophone and Anglophone pedestrians about directions. The above example also applies at Malela Market where it was found that 80% of the people met at this place responded in *iciBemba* even if they could have been able to answer in Lingala or Swahili or even these other languages which are spoken in this town. The interplay of multilingualism and informal trading offers a rich environment to explore how individuals adapt their communication strategies to accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, aligning closely with the principles of Communication Accommodation Theory.

### **5.2 Multilingualism as a Competitive Advantage**

The study reveals that Multilingualism is a competitive advantage in the market in the sense that traders who speak multiple languages can communicate with a wider range of customers and build stronger relationships. Therefore, the Language barrier was a challenge only to those new traders especially those from Mokambo Town in Congo. This was only remedied by having someone who knew more languages to help them when selling their goods at the market.

Further, multilingualism stood out as an advantage to both traders and customers. This was so that if the trader and the customer could communicate and understand each other well trading would be much easier. Multilingualism in trade helps both traders and customers to establish cultural connections which can lead to stronger relationships and a greater sense of community.

On the part of the traders, there was a general belief that being multilingual gives them an edge or advantage in their business. This is due to the ability to communicate with customers, and suppliers and negotiate well since both parties can understand each other's language. The trade being multilingual also ignited a sense of pride as it further presents their businesses with a

consideration and a general advantage over other businesses which might stem from their ability to navigate complex linguistic situations, connect with people from diverse backgrounds, or even quickly overcome certain language barriers.

This finding relates to the findings of Smith (2020) who established that multilingualism is an asset to not only the traders but the customers too. As classified above, multilingualism gives a competitive advantage to the two parties involved in a trade. In light of CAT, the study established that while the divergence principle has challenges, it is applied together with the convergence principle in the multilingual Malela Market in Mufulira.

### **5.3 Multilingualism as Unifier**

Multilingualism was found to be one of the promoters of the sense of belonging to the people that are found at Malela Market. With special consideration given to the traders from other countries, it was found that the ability of foreign traders to engage in the use of local languages when communicating with others built a sense of unity and enabled them to participate in social and cultural events during the time they spend in the area. Ultimately, they stand out as fellow contributors to the local economy of Malela Market and Mufulira at large. Similarly, the local people who are the major customers feel more comfortable and trusting when interacting with the traders who can communicate effectively and understand using the local languages (*iciBemba* especially). This meant that their needs were more likely to be satisfied during their shopping experiences and this led to increased loyalty and higher customer retention.

Evidently, from the discussions conducted with the customers may experience greater satisfaction with their shopping at Malela Market due to the presence of multilingual traders, who can cater to their linguistic and cultural needs. Customers can access a wider range of products and services, as traders can explain and promote their products more effectively.

This finding is similar to the findings of Banda (2008) who observed that in a multilingual setting, languages tend to protect each other. Through mechanisms such as code-mixing, the various languages that exist in an area are protected from extinction. Further, given CAT, using convergence and divergence principles, the language users at Malela Market can foster unity in diversity.

### 5.4 Multilingualism as a Marketing Tool

Multilingualism at Malela Market is one of the tools that is used in marketing. In the field, the findings were that if customers find or hear a trader using a language that they know well, they immediately go to that trader and buy goods from there. Customers interviewed explained that they felt more welcome and trusted the person who was able to speak their language. To them, it meant they had found a relative or some sort of family while with the other traders who did not know their language, it became a challenge for the customers to buy goods from them. This inversely, affected the businesses of the traders who were unable to speak other languages.

Suffice to mention also that most of the traders who sell at this market (Malela) are permanent traders meaning some even have regular customers mainly attributed to their interaction with them as well as their ability to communicate using the same language. Because of this, it was noted that other traders who are not familiar with the dominant language (iciBemba) and or English faced serious challenges in their businesses corresponds to Siame and Musonda (2024) who opine that language choice and use have an impact in branding and business. Not only that, this also had a serious effect on the new informal traders when they tried to sell their goods in this market.

For example, the traders would use the following statements to market their products:

1) IciBemba: *Ifwe lyonse tukwatafye ifipya, namailo mukese.*

Lingala: *Yaka pe lobi toza nakabiloko ya malam.*

Swahili: *Mukuye nakesho wateja tuko nabiashara bizuri sana kabisa.*

English: We always have the latest goods, even tomorrow if you come, you

will find latest ones.

2) IciBemba: *Mwebantu nembasela tulebikapo, iseni mushite pano.*

Lingala: *Yaka kiliya nakuca litabili.*

Swahili: *Karibu, karibu wateja namatabishi mita ku ekeya takuwekeye*

*matabishi Karibu saana.*

English: We are even giving top-up if you come and buy from us.

3) IciBemba : *Ifwe tulesuminisha mwebene ukuisalila ico mutemenwe, umutengo*

*Umo wine tubikile fye.*

Lingala : *Biso to ndimi yomoko opona bilokonolingi prix kaka moko.*

Swahili : *Inarusiwa kuchakule weye mwenyewe kile unapenda beyi mimoya*

*tu.*

English: Here it is self-service, you can make your choice and the price is the

same.

Owing to the multilingual status of the market, examples 1 to 3 depict how traders use the four languages to market their products. The ability of a trader being able to say the same statement in three languages puts their business at an advantage when it comes to marketing.

Ultimately, multilingualism serves these functions, it allows traders to cater to a broader customer base, accommodating individuals who may not speak the dominant languages of the region as in this case, kiiKaondes, Swahilis, Lingala and many other languages which are in Mufulira District. This finding correlates with the observations of Namatama (2020) whose



study established that the multilingualism phenomenon plays an important role in businesses, especially in terms of customer base. The duo agree that multilingualism has an effect on customer base whereas found at Malela Market, the traders that were able to speak more than one language had a relatively larger customer base as compared to the ones that knew one language only.

### 5.5 Code-mixing / Code-switching / Translanguaging

The study found that in this area, if a trader does not understand their language, for instance, if a customer asks in iciBemba then a trader responds in the language a customer does not understand, most customers get annoyed and go to the next trader and buy what they want from elsewhere. This poses a challenge to the traders. Alternatively, one thing that helps traders who are not fully familiar with the local languages is code-mixing and code-switching. This in the context of the study is a situation where a trader trying to blend words from various languages to create new unique words just for the sake of communication. By doing this, customers, as well as other traders who are in this community (Mufulira Town), feel that the trader has accepted their language though they cannot understand every word a trader utters.

The following examples depict the concept of code-mixing as used among traders at Malela Market.

#### 4) Lingala and Swahili languages:

*Bakiliya bakiliya boya ebele ebele bakiliya mukuye bamingi karibu sana tunashusha beyi tukitisi prix, boye ebele, boye kosomba biloko nabiso yalamamu bintu byetu nibizuri sana tunashusha beyi tutamiweke matabishi mutaru diye nashiku ingine tena na shikwingile mutaforahi bokosepela nabiso bokosepela nabiloko totekaka boya ebele mukuye mukuye karibu sana* 'Our customer, our customer,

come one, come all, we have reduced the prices, and then we have nice goods, come one, come all when you buy our goods, you will be happy and you will come back again.'

#### 5) Lingala and Swahili languages:

*Bakiliya bakiliya mukuye mukuye bamingi mukuye tuko naujisha bintu bizuri tuzitoka biloko yalamamu biloko nabiso soki bosombi bokozola déçute bokosepela nango motoforahi yasana motaforahi sana nabintu tozo teka naujisha bintu yamuzuri bintu yakalite yabyabintu tukamiwekeye namatabishi karibu karibu sana* 'Customers come one come all, we have a lot of nice goods, when you buy our goods, you won't be disappointed, we will also give you some free of charge, come, come near.'

#### 6) Lingala and Swahili:

*Bakiliya muchofe muchofe karibu tunashusha beyi tunashusha beyi, boya ebele bakiliya nabiso boya ebele tokitisi prix ebiloko boya kosomba bakiliya nabiso biliko nabiso yalamamu biloko yakitoko bokozala déçute bekocela nabino namatabisi boya mukuye bakiliya bamingi mukuye karibu sana* 'Our customer, our customer, come closer, we have reduced the prices of our goods, and once you buy, you won't be disappointed, we will even give you some for free, our customers.'

#### 7) Swahili and Bemba:

*Bakiliya karibu karibu sana kwetu mukuye muze bintu yetu muzuri tuleshitisha ifintu ifisuma saana ba customer iseni mushite twalamibikilapo nembasela mukuye mukuye mukucuye mukucuwe cakula muchakule biasharah yetu tutamiwekeya matabishi mutafurahi sana mutakuya tena karibu saana ba customer kalibu saana iseni mushite* ‘Come, come, customer, come and buy, we have nice goods after you buy goods from us, you will be happy and you will come back and from us again.’

8) Bemba and Swahili:

*Ba customer, ba customer iseni palamineni natukwatako ifintu ifisuma iseni mushite, mukuye muze wateja mukuye muze mukuye bamingi tuko nabintu bizuri tutamike namatabishi yamingi karibu sana kwetu* ‘Customer, customer come and buy from here, we have nice goods, come in numbers, and we will come and give you some free goods on top of what you will buy.’

Examples (4-8) above are a clear representation of how traders capitalize on every idea they have in the multiplicity of languages at Malela Market. As exemplified above, trades construct sentences that contain more than one language. It can be argued that multilingualism is a conscious move aimed at communicating with the customer even at the most minimal level. This concept relates to the findings of Auer (2013), Myers–Scotton (1993), Nyimbili (2021), and Holmes (2013) who agree that the concepts of code-mixing and or switching are very productive in multilingual settings. The importance of these mechanisms is in their function in facilitating communication between two parties as they build social identity among other aspects of the society. Kim’s (2020) work also adds that this concept falls under the CAT theory as also established in the current study. As traders at Malela Market

engage in code-switching and mixing, they tend to apply the theory of the CAT.

## 5.6 Multilingualism as a Negotiation Tool

Informal traders use multiple languages when they are selling goods to their customers. They try by all means to mingle with their customers even if they are not conversant with the language but translanguaging helps informal traders in this community to sell their goods to the customers. A mechanism like translanguage involves patience. For instance, when customers are asking for something to buy, informal traders pay particular attention to what a customer is asking through repeating words that a customer is using and also showing the customer that item or items then through that communication will take place.

Below are some examples of the conversation depicting what happens at Malela Market where traders and customers communication fails to take place and no middleman is available to mediate the trade. In a scenario where a customer wants to find out the price of the goods a trader is selling, then an informal trader is asking the customer to go closer so that they can negotiate:

9) IciBemba: *Muleshitisha shinga?*

Lingala: *Eza prix nini?*

Swahili: *Mukonaujisha ngapi?*

English: How much are you selling?

When informal traders want to negotiate with their customers, they would rather say:

10) IciBemba: *Izeni tulanshanye.*

Lingala: *Yaka tosolola.*

Swahili: *Mukuye tusumburiye.*

English: Come we negotiate.

11) IciBemba: *Natupisha pano fyapwila ubusuma.*

Lingala: *Tokitisi prix malamu boya kosomba.*

Swahili: *Tunashusha beyi tukonabyashara bizuri saana tunashishe beyi.*

English: Our goods are cheap and buy the nice goods here.

Using the kind of language as shown in examples 9, 10, and 11, for traders to persuade customers, which is helpful to them as regards selling their goods easily and at a faster rate compared to those who are not conversant with the language. Some traders use megaphones to call customers using different languages for them to accommodate everyone even those who are just entering the market. It is quite interesting to observe as well as listen to these traders at this market, especially those who try to speak IciBemba but fail to pronounce it correctly as long as they want to sell their goods fast, they do force themselves to speak the language which will suit the customers. Not only that, when traders are marketing their goods using these different languages, customers who can understand the language feel more well and part of this area hence they frequently buy from these traders who know their language for easier communication. From the examples, it is also clear that the language users at Malela Market employ the convergence and divergence principles as prescribed in the CAT. By using various languages in negotiations, the traders try to accommodate the customers by expressing themselves using the language that can be understood by the customer.

This finding agrees with the findings of Garcia (2019) and Batholomew (2021) whose studies also confirmed that multilingualism is a useful negotiation tool in business. As established and reflected in the examples, the traders who know more than one language possess more negotiation strength as compared to the ones who are monolingual and bilingual.

### **5.7 Multilingualism and the Local Economy**

Multilingualism plays a vital role in trade by facilitating communication, market access, cultural understanding, negotiation, and economic growth. Despite all this, multilingualism can also have economic implications, some

studies have shown that businesses operating in multilingual contexts tend to perform better due to their ability to connect with various demographic groups. This advantage is significant in informal trading, where word-of-mouth and personal relationships are crucial for success.

However, the study reveals that multilingualism also presents challenges that traders must navigate to optimize their business practices. Multilingualism plays a vital role in informal trading by enhancing communication, expanding market reach, and fostering community ties. In addition, the ability of a trader to speak multiple languages opens up new markets and increases the customer base, allowing businesses to expand their global reach and competitiveness. This finding is related to the findings of Namatama (2020) whose study also highlights the impact of multilingualism on the local economy. With the phenomenon having an effect on the economy of the traders at Malela Market, there is a subsequent impact on the local economy.

### **5.8 Monolingual and Bilingual Traders in a Multilingual Market**

Several challenges arise from not being multilingual, especially as a trader at Malela Market. For example, traders continuously announce their products to attract customers and those who are multilingual can do so in the multiple languages they know. However, for those who are not able to speak other languages, it is a challenge and in some cases, they display their goods so that customers can see them. In another instance, when traders fail to communicate with customers because of not knowing the common language, poor language proficiency, cultural differences or cultural nuances, and different business practices, they find it difficult to sell their goods in this market unless there is a middleman.

Being a multilingual trade area, another challenge faced by Malela Market is that some traders can understand IciBemba and English, the most common languages. However, they are unable to speak or respond in these languages unless in their native languages such as Lingala and Swahili. This situation

brings the rise of code-switching as well as translanguaging which makes communication easier for both parties.

Furthermore, in code-switching for instance, if a customer speaks iciBemba then the trader doesn't understand it, the trader will try to interpret that in English if the word is not what it means in English then the trader will use another word until they reach a point of understanding. This implies a situation where the traders and customers can switch across three languages; iciBemba, English and kiiKaonde, or Lingala, iciBemba and kiiKaonde. This solely depends on the languages which the two parties use.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study has presented the interface between informal trading and multilingualism. Language plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication, negotiation, and transaction in informal markets as well as social interaction among diverse groups. The presence of multiple languages in informal trading environments allows individuals from different cultural backgrounds to engage in commerce, share knowledge, and build networks. Through this, linguistic diversity can lead to increased customer bases, improved negotiation outcomes, and the ability to navigate local markets as observed at Malela Market in Mufulira District. Moreover, multilingualism can serve as a bridge, enabling entrepreneurs to cater to a wider audience and adapt their products and services to meet the needs of various linguistic communities. It can be concluded that communication in informal trading and multilingualism are closely intertwined. Multilingualism is a valuable asset for informal traders, enabling them to navigate linguistic diversity and connect with customers from diverse backgrounds. Code-switching, translanguaging, and other language strategies are essential tools for informal traders to build trust, negotiate prices, and overcome language barriers. Creativity and resilience, where traders adapt and innovate language used to achieve their goals is also another factor. Language proficiency and multilingualism can significantly impact the success and sustainability of informal trading ventures, policymakers, and

support organizations should recognize the importance of language in informal trading and provide targeted language training and support to traders. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in business practices can lead to collaboration and greater trust within the informal economy. Therefore, embracing multilingualism in the informal economy not only enriches the trading experience but also contributes to the economic resilience and social cohesion of communities. As globalization continues to influence local markets such as Malela Market, recognizing and supporting multilingual practices is essential for sustainable economic growth and development in diverse. Therefore, the role of multilingualism in informal trading demonstrates that language is not only a tool for communication but also a key factor in economic empowerment and social inclusion.

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