

## **“A Metamorphosed Language”: Tracing Language Attitudes Towards Lubumbashi Swahili and French in the DRC**

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### **Abstract**

Language attitudes in Lubumbashi, and particularly towards Lubumbashi Swahili and French, are not only indicative of positive, negative, and ambivalent feelings towards vocabulary or syntax, but of larger socio-historical and current developments, too. These attitudes, however, have not been explicitly researched. This paper seeks to begin filling that void, examining three intertwined hypotheses grounded in the language attitudes seen across Sub-Saharan Africa: (1) languages have historically been regarded ambivalently, and will continue to be held in such regard, but also that; (2) Lubumbashi Swahili has become an indispensable tool for survival in the city and that; (3) French remains an important tool for social mobility. Building off the limited scholarship on historic attitudes, my fieldwork conducted in Lubumbashi in July 2022 confirms these hypotheses, giving a fuller indication of how locals and settlers felt and continue to feel about languages as they relate to the now modernised society of Lubumbashi.

*Keywords: language attitudes, Lubumbashi Swahili, Lubumbashi, Swahili Bora, French*

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1. The language situation and need for study**

Swahili is an East African language spoken by more than 200 million people worldwide, and by 100 million on the continent itself (UNESCO 2021). Its spread from the Eastern coast of Africa (between Somalia and Mozambique) began in the late 18th century. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (hereafter DRC), formerly Zaire, is one neighbouring country where the language has penetrated, and it has been developing there for nearly 150 years. The language arrived via Arab slave traders in the late 19th century and, through prolonged contact with local people in the south-eastern DRC, became a lingua franca used predominantly for business (Kapanga 1991: 100). Continually rivalling French as the dominant interethnic means of communication, four leading variations of Swahili emerged through the 20th century in the DRC: Kivu Swahili in North and South Kivu provinces; Kisangani Swahili in Tshopo province; Bunia Swahili in Ituri province; and Lubumbashi Swahili in Haut-Katanga province and peripheral areas (*Figure 1*). Lubumbashi Swahili (hereafter LS) is known simply as “Swahili” by the Lushois (the name claimed by Lubumbashi locals). This variety acts as Haut-Katanga’s lingua franca, and its rapid proliferation has prompted its focussed study.



Figure 1. Congo Swahili dialects and their approximate extension (Nassenstein and Shinagawa 2019: 14)

Despite LS's relative popularity in academia (see 2), no scholars or studies have focused expressly on Lushois language attitudes. The most recent related study is Woods's (1995) study of language use and attitudes in the neighbouring Republic of Congo (discussed further in 2). Indeed, the study of language attitudes is a relatively new field, only gaining real speed in the last 60 years (Dragojevic et al. 2021), but does not seem to have yet been fully recognised or prioritised in Sub-Saharan Africa. African urban languages tend to be further neglected in this domain "because they are considered unimportant or an unwelcome problem in the complex multilingual situations that characterize many Sub-Saharan African countries" (Githinji 2003: 1). Despite this stigmatisation, understanding a particular population's language attitudes can be a useful tool in policy making and in conflict resolution and mitigation (Adegbija 1994). In the context of Sheng, a popular urban language that mixes Swahili and English in Nairobi, Githinji (2003: 5) asserts that:

The significance of knowing people's attitudes is underscored by the fact that by exposing the attitudes, especially those of detrimental nature, the functions those attitudes serve can be identified and addressed. Addressing the underlying functions of negative attitudes that are of linguistic nature minimizes the cultural conflicts that result from biased perspectives and stereotypes.

With a gap in its academic representation, this dissertation will contribute to the study of language attitudes in Lubumbashi, focusing primarily on LS, shining a descriptive light on existing and emerging trends in the attitudes towards it and French. To substantiate my

claims, I conducted fieldwork in Lubumbashi in July 2022.<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork, consisting of 16 interviews<sup>2</sup>, revealed mixed feelings towards LS and French. When asked about languages used in the home, about half the interviewees would prefer to teach their children LS before French, whereas the other half preferred French or an ancestral language, most with varying first languages of their own that differ from French and LS. Though many informal interactions during my time in the city reinforced the ideas brought forward in the interviews, my field research brought up new questions and these attitudes certainly warrant further study. Nonetheless, my enquiry sought to interrogate the following hypotheses in the Lushois context: (1) languages have historically been regarded ambivalently (as vehicles of communication that elicit positive and negative responses simultaneously) and will continue to be regarded as such; (2) LS has become an indispensable tool for survival in the city; (3) that French remains an important tool for social mobility.

## 1.2. A brief history of Swahili in the DRC and the emergence of Lubumbashi

The study of language attitudes is multidisciplinary by nature, drawing insights not only from linguistics but also anthropology, and sociology, and thus necessitates a broad lens through which to perceive its arguments. Indeed Adegbija (1994: 68) rates the socio-historical context as the primary determining factor for the development of a multilingual context, as is the case in Lubumbashi. One must also be wary of where and how data was collected as well as its context and aims. In his socio-historical recount of the DRC's Lingála-Kiswahili border, Meeuwis (2006: 131) notes that linguistics cannot exist without sociolinguistics and an understanding of data collection's root proponents or aims.

With this in mind, Kapanga (2001) provides a thorough discussion on the sociological development of Swahili in the DRC and of LS in the city of Lubumbashi, while Fabian (1986) discusses its colonial appropriation from 1880-1938, and Ferrari (2012) continues this study, examining materials from 1938-1960.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the language arrived in the central African nation, King Leopold II claimed the area now known as the DRC as his personal property under the guise of the 'Congo Free State'. Until 1914, Leopold carted native Swahili speakers from Zanzibar into the former Katanga province to train its military against encroaching Arab aggressors (Mugane 2015: 196). A host of conflicts through the early 20th century between the Belgians and these East Coast traders would ultimately solidify Swahili's status in the country ahead of its independence in 1960. French, growing in status alongside Swahili, then found a stronger foothold when the DRC opted to make it the language of education.

Belgium's arrival in the DRC in the late 19th century coincided with the discovery of minerals in and around what is now known as Lubumbashi. The city, formed circa 1909-1910 first as Elisabethville, is the second largest city in the DRC and is in the south-eastern corner of the country in Haut-Katanga province (see *Figure 1*). It eventually headquartered the former 'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga' (UMHK, "The Mining Union of Upper-Katanga"), now 'La Générale des Carrières et des Mines' (GECAMINES, "The General

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks are given to my hosts, friends, and respondents in Lubumbashi, without whom this paper would not be possible.

<sup>2</sup> All interviews can be found here.

<sup>3</sup> I recognise how periodisation contributes to the problematic way in which scholars study the continent of Africa, shading these contributions, however it tends to be the best way to categorise large scale social change that occurs around these moments.

Quarry and Mine Company”). At its birth, the city housed no more than 2,000 people and the arriving population was almost evenly divided between French-speaking Europeans, locals speaking Luba, and Bemba-speaking Zambians loaned from the British South Africa Company (Polomé 1963). This, and the economic shift towards a mining economy in the quickly urbanising city, created the need for a common means of communication, and thus Swahili emerged (Fabian 1986, Kapanga 1991: 117).

Under Mobutu’s reign, the former Katanga province was renamed ‘Shaba’ in 1971, the Swahili word for copper, before reverting to its original name in 1997 (a constitutional amendment in 2015 was enacted and Katanga was broken down further into four provinces that exist today: Haut-Katanga, Tanganyika, Lualaba, Haut-Lomami). The rapid diffusion of the language around the urban centre of Lubumbashi was facilitated as well by Belgian missionaries, recognising its potential power as a tool for evangelisation. Further trade and travel between Lubumbashi and its surrounding areas to supply food and move minerals reinforced Swahili’s position as the region’s dominant language (Bostoen 1999: 74). The post-independence Katanga secessionist movement, led by Moïse Tshombe, used Swahili as the language of revolution, and though its efforts failed, the language remained popular in the region (Ferrari et al. 2014: 128). It can thus be said that the agents responsible for the language’s expansion through the early 20th century were UMHK, the Belgian colonial administration, and its missionaries (Kapanga 2001). I would add to this that the secessionist campaign in the former Katanga as well as the increased urbanisation toward Lubumbashi seem to be primary proponents of its expansion in the area during the late 1900s.

In a little over 100 years, Lubumbashi has become home to nearly three million people. Mining and Swahili formed a lasting bond during this time, evidenced by Mutambwa’s explanation of how Lushois citizens classify the days of the week in LS: “Monday was known as the first day of work, translated as «kazi moya» or more literally «work 1» [and so on]” (2021: 31-2, author’s translation). The Lushois claimed Swahili and its heritage, giving birth to LS, and paving the path for future generations to also claim it as their own. The city is prosperous, vibrant, and a veritable living being as Mudimbe-Boyi (2021: 7-8) puts it.

LS has been referred to under several names through its scholarly life — Kingwana, Katanga Swahili, Congo Swahili, Shaba Swahili (hereafter ShS) — and by its locutors: mu biswahili bwao, Kiswahili ya Union Minière, Kiswahili ya Monpere, Swahili ya kwenu, and Swahili (Mugane 2015: 195-96). They are evidently associated with its historical development. These labels have changed over the years, and scholars have equally attempted to categorise LS as pidgin, creole, codeswitching, borrowing or language (see Mushingi 1989, Kapanga 1991, Gysels 1992, Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998, De Rooij 1996, Mutambwa 2021).

### **1.3. Differences between Lubumbashi Swahili and Swahili Bora**

Language classification is nuanced, but as this paper aims to centre Lushois voices, it will use the term Swahili Bora (hereafter SB) to refer to Standard Swahili since Nassenstein and Shinagawa (2019:14) find that SB is how DRC natives refer to Swahili of the East African Coast — a fact I also found to be true in my fieldwork. Based on the way the Lushois respondents spoke about SB, one could categorise it as an aspirational version of Swahili, often coming from Tanzania or Kenya (see Appendix 7, 0:34 - 1:10 for example). Nassenstein and Shinagawa stipulate that “specific communities, especially of Muslim faith,

use more standardized or more coastal-sounding Swahili, which is often classified as “Swahili bora” by their direct neighbours.” (2019:14). Further, Ferrari (2012: 77) likens SB to standard Swahili (generally emanating from Zanzibar), so I will adopt this view for simplicity’s sake, recognizing that this is an imperfect comparison, and that others (Rettova 2018: 5, for example) have refuted their similarities.

SB and LS share the same Bantu noun-class system and many vocabulary terms, but they also equally diverge from one another (for a comprehensive comparison of their noun classes and various lexical differences through time, see Mwela-Ubi 1979; Kapanga 1991; Ferrari et al. 2014; and Mutambwa 2021). From interactions during my field visit, the mixing of Swahili and French in Lubumbashi is apparent in the most basic of exchanges. In SB one might greet you with *Uko poa?* ‘are you ok?’, the equivalent in LS being *Uko bien?*. Ferrari et al. (2014: 118) estimate that up to 25% of spoken LS uses French terms. Further evidence of LS’s diversion from SB and convergence with French for identification and social reasons is summarised by Kapanga (1991: 138):

Ever since French was introduced in Zaire by the colonizers, it has been associated with political, social, and economic prestige. It is the language of socio-economic advancement. Lack of its knowledge makes communication with the establishment, the intellectuals or elite and any governmental agencies almost onerous. Because of this prestige, the speakers of ShS with a formal education see it as a prerogative to use features of French in their speech as a matter of social identity; thus, they have created a new variety which is typical of their social group.

#### **1.4. Conclusions**

The lack of language attitude data in Sub-Saharan Africa and specifically in Lubumbashi calls for further inquiry. LS was once a branching arm of SB and, having matured into an identity of its own, there is no better time to study it. Armed with the analysis of its evolution, as well as its functional differences with SB, the attitudes towards LS and French’s historical trajectory that are examined through the next chapter can be properly appreciated and understood.

## **2. Language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa and Lubumbashi**

This section begins with an overview of language studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, exploring existing trends and drawing on specific examples of a regional study of attitudes towards codeswitching in South Africa, attitudes towards Sheng, a mix of Swahili and English found in Nairobi, and a study of national language attitudes in the Republic of Congo. It then examines attitudes about LS from the scholarship available. Language status, cultural significance, religious connotations, and place in education are considered as themes shaping the narrative of attitudes towards LS.

### **2.1. Scholarship on language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa**

The study of language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa have been distilled into several broad themes by Adegbija (1994) that provide a useful starting point for other studies. They are: (1) a dominant force of the historical past of colonialism in attitude formation seems evident; (2) generally positive evaluations of European languages, especially in official domains, because of their instrumental roles and the socio-economic gains associated with their command; (3) positive evaluations of mother tongues and sometimes national languages

(Kiswahili in Tanzania) as symbols of ethnic, and national loyalty, or of nationhood and independence or sovereignty; (4) a further general attitude of ambivalence is sometimes evident with regard to European languages and indigenous languages; (5) ethnolinguistic minorities are sensitive to language issues and are often closely attached to their languages and cultures; (6) there is a growing acceptance of European languages in many parts of Africa, largely because of the perception that they serve unifying roles in largely multi-ethnic societies on the continent, and; (7) native varieties of European languages are developing and this may be contributing towards their increasing acceptance. As the most recent seminal work on the larger study of language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa, one must be apprehensive that nearly three decades have passed since Adegbija's publication and that it's possible these themes have shifted or changed.

A few recent scholars focusing on Sub-Saharan African language attitudes in the 21st century have used these common threads to discuss their findings in relation to respective regional languages. Schilling (2013) finds higher social desirability for codeswitching between Xhosa and English, and lower desirability to codeswitch between Afrikaans and English. The findings cling to Adegbija's themes of: (1) general acknowledgment of colonialism in Afrikaans and English, and (4) ambivalence towards English. The findings also support a study Adegbija mentions from Namibia that yielded results showing preference for English over Afrikaans during the era of apartheid (1994: 51). On the other hand, Githiora (2018) discusses these themes in relation to Sheng in Nairobi. After participants listened to 10 'Kenyanese' ways of speaking including Sheng, English, and Kiswahili Sanifu (Standard Swahili), they judged the speaker's education, occupation, personal characteristics (such as honesty, intelligence, and self-confidence) and even physical attributes like height. Githiora's findings line up with themes: (2) of rating English positively, and (3) positively evaluating KS as a national language. Adegbija's language attitude themes prove a solid benchmark to refer to when pursuing language studies in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Woods's (1995) survey of use and attitudes towards French, national languages and mother tongues in the neighbouring Republic of Congo is perhaps the most relevant research to the current study. He finds that French is rated the most favourably of all languages present in the context, even to show anger amongst the middle-aged male sample (1995: 414), an expression usually reserved for a language one has mastered or a mother tongue (Holmes and Wilson 2017). Additionally, nearly half of the 253 respondents rated French as the most important language at the present day, and that it would hold that position in 30 years. The domain in which French is held in disregard is when respondents were asked what language the president should speak, to which they mostly chose a national language. Woods summarises the study by saying "French and the national languages are increasingly vital among younger and more urban subjects and the mother tongues, though still a vital source of identity, are shrinking in their range of utilisation and positive attitudes towards them are increasingly being shared with both French and the national languages" (1995: 414). One can clearly draw lines between his study and themes 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 from Adegbija's exposition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Woods compares his findings against few sources, perhaps because there were so few to draw from at the time, though his study is certainly substantial enough that it merits acknowledgment.

Language attitudes are influenced by the environment in which the evaluator finds themselves, and “[where] the linguistic arena is already saturated, emergence of forms that further complicate the already fluid situation is not usually treated with sympathy because it is seen as negating the national aspirations of the eradication of ignorance and promotion national cohesion” (Githinji 2003: 1-2). Further, Githiora finds that his “results in general show that indigenous African languages are poorly evaluated even when couched behind a Swahili façade; they are backward (*mshamba*) and unsuitable for high status activities. Their speakers are not attractive to young people, and the occupations linked to them are of low status and undesirable to the young people” (2018: 79, italics in original text). These presumptions, though not rooted in the exact same experience of a Lushois, reveal the influences and issues of multilingualism in urban culture, contributing to negative language evaluations.

## **2.2. Tracing historical attitudes from the scholarship on Lubumbashi Swahili and French**

There is a breadth of research available about LS, though mostly in descriptive capacities (see Polomé 1963, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1971a, 1971b, 1985; Heine 1970; Mwela-Ubi 1979; Schicho 1980; Fabian 1982, 1986; Fabian et al. 1990; Kapanga 1991, Kapanga 2001; Gysels 1992; De Rooij 1996, 2007; Bostoen 1999; Ferrari 2012; Ferrari et al. 2014; Rettová 2018; Nassenstein and Shinagawa 2019; and Mutambwa 2021). However, language attitudes have historically been disregarded in the field of linguistics. For this reason, the attitudes discussed below are drawn primarily from works that spotlight LS’s morphology, syntax, phonology, and lexical structure that introduce their topic with brief socio-historical backgrounds.

### **2.2.1. Hierarchies of status**

Language attitudes are said to be most strongly influenced by social and political factors (Holmes and Wilson 2017: 433). Ferrari (2012) references De Rop (1960: 22), a university professor in Kinshasa at the time of the publication, for his overt disdain and lack of faith in the future of Swahili as a language in the DRC. Pertinently written in the year of the country’s independence, De Rop’s claims were a product of political tensions, as Ferrari continues to explain, and are certainly a misconstrued version of broader attitudes towards the language.

French is often found at the top of perceived language hierarchies in the former Katanga, and more broadly in the DRC (see Kapanga 1991: 134 and Mushingi 1989: 34, respectively). As scholars we should be wary of employing such a method to class language since a “hierarchical view of multilingualism...is more an echo of political wishes than of social realities” (Fabian 1982: 18). Still, it would still seem fair to say that French carried much prestige through 20th century DRC, as Samarin (1996: 391, italics in original text) evidences with this example of social membership:

...by the 1940s in both the Belgian and French Congos there had emerged Africans whom the whites called *evolués* (those who had 'evolved' or had become 'civilized'), a special class, membership in which was determined in part by one's ability to use the colonizers' language and in part by the work that one could do--based ultimately on literacy in French.

This said, the idea of language hierarchies is perhaps dissipating as Mudimbe-Boyi (2021: 7, italics in original text, author’s translation) suggests:

“Without a doubt [...] Swahiliphones of Lubumbashi have appropriated the language (*ya kwetu* = our’s), and have, in this sense, erased vertical relations and a hierarchy sometimes suggested to exist between standard high Swahili [SB] and local Katangan low Swahili [LS]”.

On the other hand, Swahili was seen as a useful language for basic communication in the region as was discussed in 1, but it was also seen as a means of control by the Belgian colonial administration (Fabian 1986: 137). The convergence of Swahili and French in the Lushois context seems invariably politically influenced. In his earlier work, Fabian (1982: 39) suggests that lexical borrowing of French terms into LS could be seen as a way of articulating this historical power dynamic, which would certainly draw mixed sentiments towards its use. Conversely, Sando Marteau, a famous Lushois artist, purposefully uses Swahili (though often SB) in his lyrics as a retort to the colonial imposition of French, and to connect to the people of his home city and the broader region (Rettová 2018). Its association as a sign of solidarity has been ongoing. Since as early as 1963, when Katanga attempted to secede from the DRC, it has acted as a symbol of regionalism (Ferrari et al. 2014: 107). It could then be placed higher up in a theoretical hierarchy than French, though this certainly depends on the locutors' social experiences.

### **2.2.2. Identity**

Gysels (1992) quotes Kabamba on the cultural significance of the language to its speakers: “Swahili carries prestige in completely different contexts [than French], since this is the medium in which one is able to express the collective experiences of urban culture, and in the final instance it carries the identity of the population” (1979: 223). This sentiment is echoed by Kapanga and De Rooij who respectively claim that “no one can claim full integration into the Shaban culture without knowing ShS” (1991: 135) and “Group membership and solidarity highlights Shaba Swahili use” (1996: 53).

### **2.2.3. Religion**

At the turn of the 20th century, Christian missionaries had a negative attitude towards Swahili due to its connotation with Islam, opting first to preach in Sanga (then the contemporary lingua franca), but would eventually adopt Swahili as their language of prayer (Fabian 1982: 19). Early forms of LS were then codified primarily by these missionaries to curb the influence of the language’s Muslim users (Kapanga 1991: 121). Its status grew in the church as it became the sermon language, and it was thought that by 1966, when Fabian conducted much of his fieldwork, that Swahili was usurping French as the dominant language of church (1982: 19). By comparison, Woods (1995) finds French often to be the common language of religion in the neighbouring Republic of Congo. From the Lushois point of view, the language of religion is LS (Ferrari et al. 2014: 133).

### **2.2.4. Education**

The multilingual nature of the DRC and the active institution of French as its official language and language of instruction (hereafter LOI) at independence inherently and subconsciously forced its locutors to create different attitudes about the languages they use (Kapanga 1991: 134). Mushingi (1989: 149) discusses the issue this raises for the case of Swahili as an LOI in the former Zaire:

It is not rare to hear the same student use a local variety of Swahili on the playground a few minutes after he/she has read a passage in ‘SWAHILI



BORA' with the teacher. The result is that in the Zairean community, different values will be associated to French and Swahili as used in the education system and outside

He continues by quoting Ferguson (1977) on choosing an LOI who asserts that attitudes towards this decision are much more important than whether the language has a complete vocabulary to work with or not, the latter being an argument against Swahili in classrooms.

Until the DRC's independence in 1960, Swahili was used as the LOI, a policy Mushingi states was "perceived as a way of keeping the indigenous people in an inferior position" (1989: 34). It was only after this that French, in what Fabian (1986) describes as a bout of anti-colonial sentiment, was adopted as the new language of education in schools go fight back against that perceived linguistic oppression. The new French-only policy was enforced so strongly that students were subjected to physical punishment if they were caught using Swahili. In this case, since French dominates the prospect of social mobility, it may have been regarded as more important than Swahili. French is "perceived as the language of education, regulation, and modernization in present day Zaire" (Kapanga 1991: 133). Bostoens sums up this conflicting sentiment pertinently: "Although speaking French is often seen as threatening the norms and the values of the local community, it continues to be considered as the key to success in school and further life" (1999: 48).

### 2.3. Conclusions

This section explored literature language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa, describing the lens through which academics and local people perceived LS and French. It then looked at language attitude studies in sub-Saharan Africa. Attitudes towards LS and French in the DRC's Copperbelt region were in flux through the 20th century, depending on who you spoke to. The attitudes towards LS and French as symbols of status remain somewhat ambiguous, though French seems to hold a higher status in this realm while LS gains speed behind it. Culturally, it seems that LS would never have been ranked lower than French due its interethnic neutrality and group identification. LS and French seem to both be present in religious proceedings through history and today, with a slight favour towards the former. Lastly, due to the country instituting French as the language of education at its independence in 1960, it appears that French dominated through the later 20th century and continues to do so today. As Bostoens states in his conclusion on the sociolinguistic context of LS and French: "It is obvious that these languages, due to their constant interaction, have always been influencing each other and will never stop to do so" (1999: 47). One would then expect attitudes towards these languages to continue in turn to change.

### 3. Methodology

This chapter recounts the methodology of the research, including my hypotheses, approach, and the limitations of the fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> In July 2022, I went to Lubumbashi to conduct field research. I prepared for the visit by poring over the existing academia about LS, and by speaking to scholars who had previously done work in the area, as well as local Lushois. My hosts' driver introduced me to his church community, and through this connection I

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<sup>5</sup> Though this venture was self-funded, and the interview transcriptions ended up being more laborious than expected, it is important to study a concept at its source. Any study that aims to centre local voices should consider this strongly. Further, as a predominantly spoken language, LS is ever-changing and thus warrants and requires continuous examination to keep an accurate account of its development.

built my sample of 16 respondents. Approximately half of the respondents were compensated with lunch and/or a drink, while the others were simply happy to be interviewed. One respondent was compensated monetarily. Upon starting my interviews, I was immediately reminded of Ferrari's experience: "I felt this devalorisation of LS in the field through the shock of a Lushois when I would say to them that I was conducting a study about Lubumbashi Swahili: they systematically responded with "ah! Simple Swahili" (2012: 76, author's translation).

### **3.1. Hypotheses**

Based on the existing research and descriptive nature of LS, I hypothesised in line with the sentiments that (1) languages have historically been regarded ambivalently (as vehicles of communication that elicit positive and negative responses simultaneously) and will continue to be held in such regard in Lubumbashi, but also that (2) LS has become an indispensable tool for survival in the city and, (3) that French remains an important tool for social mobility.

### **3.2. Semi-structured interviews**

Following in the tracks of previous scholars examining LS, I sought out respondents to interview. Referred to as 'Interviewer' (I) and 'Respondent x' (Rx), I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews about language in Lubumbashi, following a framework of questions provided by my dissertation supervisor with the aim of building rapport. The interviews eventually focused on LS and the person's attitudes towards it, and while some were less productive than others, all revealed unique aspects about the person and language in their city more broadly.

Between July 10 and 21, 2022, I spoke to seven women and nine men for a total of 16 respondents, their ages ranging from 22 to 60. The interviews lasted between five and 24 minutes, with the average interview spanning 10 minutes. The locations of the semi-structured interviews varied, including outside a church, at a restaurant, in the backyard of a building complex, at my place of residence, in various people's homes, and in a small shop. Each interview was preceded by a short verbal explanation of who I am, what the study was about, and consent, followed by obtaining verbal consent from the participant to use the semi-structured interview as data for the purpose of this dissertation (see beginning of each appendix). In most cases, to develop a familiarity with the respondents, I began with introductory questions. Some of the respondents were more frequent acquaintances, but most of the participants were friends of friends who were keen to contribute to the conversation about language attitudes. Though a variety of semi-structured interviews were conducted and several different points of inquiry were explored, it is essential to acknowledge the fieldwork's limitations so that it is not misconstrued.

### **3.3. Limitations**

Language itself is a limitation of my research. Kapanga (2001) comments on previous scholars collecting descriptive data about LS, saying that: "For the most part, the theory [explored] was speculative in nature, or it relied on non-native speakers of ShS". The interviews comprising my fieldwork were conducted in French, my second language and that of some respondents, limiting the depth of our semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3, 7:03). Further, I only have an elementary working knowledge of Swahili (SB no less), and thus was limited in who I could speak to (see Appendix 12 for example), effectively silencing a population that would certainly contribute unique viewpoints to the

discussion. I did however learn basic greetings in LS which helped break down the cultural barrier with participants. Because of language limitations, I only interviewed people within Lubumbashi who spoke French, and with LS expanding beyond the boundaries of the city, a future study would do well to include respondents beyond the urban. This was in part due to the limited time I allotted to collect my data. By spending a longer period in the city and its surrounding areas, the study could have yielded a larger and more representative sample size, ultimately resulting in a more rigorous excavation of Lushois language attitudes.

#### 4. Findings

Three notable themes appeared in the interviews I conducted. The first being the overt recognition of the distinction between LS and SB, with the former being perceived as a lesser version of the latter. Second, French continues to be evaluated positively, and English is emerging to be held in the same regard. The third theme is conflicting attitudes towards what language children should be brought up with, yielding several votes in favour of LS, and an equal amount of ambivalence or favour for French.

##### 4.1. Lubumbashi Swahili vs. Swahili Bora

Based on the respondents' answers, LS is not real Swahili, "Swahili facile", "bizarre", but on the other hand "transformée" and "métamorphosée". Through several interviews it became clear that SB is equated to that of its eastern neighbours. Respondent 4 summarises this sentiment:

*[Lubumbashi Swahili is] really very different than that of Tanzania and North-Kivu. You see, Swahili over there, is likened to the Swahili of Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi [...] but with our Swahili in Lubumbashi, I reckon it's our way of creating Swahili.* (Appendix 4, 1:28, author's translation).

Respondent 1 claims that SB is richer than LS. Despite the negative-leaning sentiments towards what is a primary language for most of the respondents, many of them expressed LS's importance for everyday life, supporting the notion of ambivalence, or simultaneous positive and negative evaluation, towards the language. Holmes and Wilson (2017:434-5) discuss the concepts of overt and covert prestige in language attitudes. The dichotomy clearly exists in Lubumbashi with SB and LS, though the former is not spoken very widely. Overt prestige, or express acknowledgement of the utility of a language because of its standardisation, can be associated with SB in this case. Covert prestige on the other hand — the acknowledgement of the utility of a non-standard variety of a language — can be seen in the attitudes towards LS. It seems many will not boast about their ability to use Swahili, yet it is an essential part of life in Lubumbashi.

##### 4.2. French and English proficiency

European languages carry great prestige in Lubumbashi. When asked why they placed their mother tongue<sup>6</sup>, Chokwe, lower in a theoretical language hierarchy than European languages (a line of questioning that emerged naturally), Respondent 11 said:

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to this study, as a linguistic researcher whose first language is English, I tended to prescribe desirability to mother tongues as they usually carry connotations of one's culture and means of deepest emotional expression. For this reason I chose to employ the term mother tongue in this line of questioning. The response from not only respondent 11, but others too, has helped me understand more fully the geographical implications and language attitudes towards mother tongues.

*[...] because I know it already. We rate what we don't know as better. Better, we're looking for that. [...] This is why we try - to be better. But to be better, we need to learn the languages of the places we want to go. For people to help you, you must speak their language. If not, they'll chuck you out because they don't understand you.* (Appendix 11, 21:07, author's translation)

French is the language of business, school, and by extension, vertical social mobility. Having spoken to several current and former students of the University of Lubumbashi, it is clear that French is perceived to be paramount for education and even though LS is the primary language of many of the respondents, they indicated how important French was: Respondent 15 said people would have difficulties if LS was the LOI; Respondent 4's parents spoke French to them at home to prepare them for school; whereas Respondent 2 said "French will get you by everywhere" (Appendix 2, 1:58, author's translation) whereas LS would not, and therefore it would naturally hold a higher stature than its counterpart. Respondent 13 was explicit in saying they preferred French to LS because French sounds better.

English was mentioned several times throughout the interviews, seven out of 16 respondents expressing interest and a will to learn the language. Indeed, Bostoen (1999: 48), 23 years ago, gave a nod to the rise of English in the region. The language seems to be gaining ground, in my short experience in Lubumbashi. Though none of the respondents spoke English, through many of the interviews and through several informal interactions it became clear that the language is very much desired, but that the cost of lessons at private learning centres remains a barrier.

#### **4.3. Home language and parents' desires**

The most fascinating line of enquiry I latched onto was the respondents' actual and expected choice of first language for their child or children. The respondents were split between LS and French. Nearly half expressed that LS was generally the language spoken at home in Lubumbashi. Respondent 1 said they want to teach their children LS because it is the language of communication and Respondent 8 is worried their children will not be able to play with their friends if they do not know LS. The other half had mixed desires or wanted their children to learn French or their mother tongue (Luba or Chokwe for example). Though, as has been mentioned, the importance of French was massive around the time of the DRC's independence. Nkulu suggests that in the era of the 'évolués': "Forcing the children to use [French] at home among other things then became a commonplace habit" (1986: 171). It would seem that this sentiment has shifted in part. Mushingi (1989: 156) references research done in the 1970s showing that when the parents are taught in French they are more likely to prefer it, and teach it to their children first, though the research also finds that: "At the same time they do not want the same children to lose contact with the local community. So, some Swahili is desirable. This cycle continues from one generation to the next". It appears that this remains mostly true today.

#### **5. Discussion**

My hypotheses that (1) languages have historically been regarded ambivalently and continue to be held in such regard in Lubumbashi, but also that (2) LS has become an indispensable tool for survival in the city and, (3) that French remains an important tool for social mobility were confirmed in the interviews I conducted. The methodology of my approach could have been more direct in its line of questioning to elicit a more uniform data

set. The limitation of my positionality should also not be forgotten, including the issue of language and communication in conducting the fieldwork. Ultimately though, the three themes that can be gleaned from the interviews invite thoughtfulness about language use and attitudes towards LS and French in Lubumbashi. Comparison of LS and SB is almost inevitable in a conversation about languages with a Lushois. French has continued to entrench itself into local society, while English is making inroads. Lastly, the question of home language and parents' desired first language for the child yields mixed results, indicating a pull in both directions to LS and French. Future research on language attitudes in the area should seek a larger sample size of native speakers, across age, gender, and location to substantiate the claims made in my discussion. It might also benefit from researching the attitudes of SB speakers towards LS, as has been recognised as a point of interest in scholarship (Gysels 1992: 52). Examination of attitudes towards other locally relevant languages, such as Bemba, Luba, and Chokwe, would also yield important insights into its locutors' feelings about them in relation to LS and French, similar to Woods's (1995) study.

### **6. A way forward to investigating Lushois language attitudes**

Language attitudes in Lubumbashi, and particularly towards LS, are not only indicative of feelings towards vocabulary or syntax, but also of larger socio-historical developments. This paper has provided a thorough overview of the language situation in Lubumbashi, the capital of Haut-Katanga province, and the second largest city in the DRC. Through reviewing LS's classification as a language, as well as how it diverges from its parental SB, we can begin to analyse why certain attitudes are held about this unique branch of Swahili. Scholarship on historic attitudes is limited to when the language started gaining sociological meaning and began from scholarship produced in the 1960s. This gives us a rough indication of how locals and colonial settlers felt about the languages they used as they relate to symbols of status, the economy, culture, religion, and education. With a foundational knowledge of the situation cemented, I then explored the fieldwork I conducted in Lubumbashi in July 2022. The study, despite its admitted limits, yields fascinating results relating to perceptions and attitudes towards LS, SB, French, English, and what languages parents prefer to teach their children, confirming the hypotheses and introducing new potential lines of inquiry.

Respondent 4 was one of the keener participants, very interested in language use and attitudes. When discussing the elemental nature of language acquisition, they said: “[...] when a baby is born, well, the baby has no language, language will be thrust upon it and the baby will follow.” (Appendix 4, 10:20, author's translation). A child's environment, influenced by socio-politically inclined hierarchies, tensions, and ambitions, will surely influence their attitudes towards the languages they learn, too. For this reason, as well as its importance in policy making, more work can be done in the field of language attitudes as they relate to African linguistics to better comprehend societies' sentiments that are often rooted in larger sociological processes. In Lubumbashi, the voice of the Lushois will prove to be the best way to tell this story.

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