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A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Shift and Maintenance Among Ovahimba-speaking Youth in Opuwo

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Abstract

The study investigates the language shift and maintenance from Otjihimba to English among Ovahimba-speaking youth in Opuwo, Namibia, focusing on sociolinguistic factors within the context of global urbanisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It investigates historical, colonial, and political influences contributing to this shift, given English's status as the official language post-independence. focus on exploring contributing factors, understanding the impact on lifestyle, and proposing strategies for language maintenance. The study's significance lies in informing policy, aiding language preservation efforts, contributing to sociolinguistics knowledge, and serving as a resource for scholars studying language transitions. The research uses a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach, that involves semi-structured interviews with 30 Ovahimba participants. Thematic analysis reveals three main themes: the role of formal education, media influence, and sociocultural factors. Provides a comprehensive overview of the study's participants, exploring three main themes related to language shift. The impact of the formal education system, media influence, and the interplay of social, cultural, and educational factors are examined. Synthesises challenges associated with language preservation, emphasise the need for comprehensive language programs, community support, overcoming barriers to proficiency, and collaborative efforts. Various sociolinguistic factors influence the language shift from Otjihimba to English, but the cultural significance of Otjihimba remains a motivator for preservation. Strategies for addressing the language shift include promoting bilingual education, community-led language initiatives, and raising awareness. These efforts are crucial for safeguarding Otjihimba and the rich cultural heritage of the Ovahimba community in Opuwo, Namibia.

Keywords

Language Shift, Language Maintenance, Ovahimba Youth, Sociolinguistic Factors, Otjihimba to English,
Cultural Preservation, Bilingual Education

1. Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR) and the rapid urbanisation occurring worldwide have brought about numerous advancements and increased productivity. These developments pose a significant threat to the indigenous cultures and languages of minority groups [1]. This shift towards urbanisation and Americanisation leads to changes in civilisation, which often result in acculturation and cultural transformations, including language shifts [2].

An instructive case in point is Namibia, where several events have contributed to linguistic transitions among minority tribes, including the Ovahimba. Namibia's colonial past and the social, cultural, and political structures that have moulded the country are the origins of the linguistic change in that country [2]. Communities place a high value on language, not just as a tool for communication but also as an essential component of identity and culture [2]. To foster unity and solidarity among the community, language contains customs, ideals, and rituals. A community's unique culture and identity must be preserved for it to survive. Sociolinguists contend that the fast industrialisation and Americanisation processes have contributed to the linguistic changes seen in numerous Bantu languages spoken throughout Southern Africa [2]. It is for this reason that this study investigates the language shift and maintenance from Otjihimba to English among Ovahimba-speaking youth in Opuwo, Namibia, focusing on sociolinguistic factors within the context of global urbanisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

1.1. Background of the Study

Namibia's history of colonisation and tribalism has had a profound impact on the language ecosystem. Namibia was occupied by the Germans as a colony of the German Empire from 1884 to 1915. Namibia was given to South Africa by the League of Nations after World War I, and subsequently to South Africa in 1920. English and Afrikaans were Namibia's official languages in 1920 with Afrikaans as the main language of instruction used in schools [3]. Due to the Bantu Education system, Afrikaans became even more of the dominant language when apartheid was introduced in 1948. However following Namibia's independence in 1990, a paradigm shift took place in the country's educational system, with English being designated as the official language and the medium of instruction [4]. With only 2.5 million inhabitants, Namibia has a remarkably diverse population in terms of language and culture, with over 49% of people speaking Oshiwambo [3].

The Ovahimba, recognised as the last nomadic people in Namibia, possess a distinct cultural identity that sets them apart from other tribes in the country. The pastoral and semi-nomadic people [4] live mostly in the Kunene Region, especially in the Kaokoveld region in northwest Namibia, near the Kunene River and Angola. There are about 2000 people in the Ovahimba community, and they speak Otjihimba, an Otjiherero dialect [5]. The Ovahimba community was scattered around the Kaokoveld as a result of German colonialism and tribal disputes between the Nama and Herero people. Modernisation and exposure to urban influences have caused linguistic modifications within their dialect, even though some aspects of their culture have been maintained [6].

Languages that speakers consider to be of higher status usually become more stable or widespread, often at the detriment of languages that are perceived to have a lower status

by their speakers [1]. The Otjihimba language's position has been threatened, especially by young people living in cities like Opuwo. The Otjihimba dialect is being negatively viewed by the youth, which is causing a decline in culture. Considering this, the researcher set out to look into the influencing elements that resulted in the youth of Opuwo switching to the Otjihimba dialect.

Modernity and globalisation have led to a significant impact on the language shift that young people are experiencing:

The growing interconnectedness of cultures due to technological improvements and media platform expansion exposes young people to a diverse range of major languages from around the globe. A variety of media, which have become ubiquitous components of modern youth culture, such as television, movies, music, social media, and the internet, are used to expose young people to this content [7].

Furthermore, the effects of globalisation go beyond media consumption, claims [8]. International travel, migration, and cross-cultural interchange are all on the rise as a result of the forces of globalisation, which make it easier for people, ideas, and capital to move across national boundaries. Consequently, young people frequently find themselves in multicultural and multilingual settings, whether as a result of varied social networks, urbanisation, or educational institutions.

In certain settings, some languages start to be perceived as more beneficial from an economic or social mobility standpoint. Languages that are widely used, like Arabic, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and English, are frequently seen as doors to greater career chances, higher educational options, and higher social prestige. This impression is fuelled by the widespread conviction that knowing these languages provides a wealth of opportunities for business, communication, and access to international markets [9].

For revitalisation efforts to succeed, several key factors must be in place. Among these, the following propositions have been put forward by various authors:

1. *Language shift and maintenance* (struggles for linguistic recognition, the promotion of one language over another)
2. *Linguistic and Cultural Identity* (modernity and globalisation have led to a significant impact on the language shift that young people are experiencing).
3. *Attitudes and Perceptions* (Language choices made by people and societies are heavily influenced by attitudes and views in the context of language choices)
4. *Language Use and Exposure* (appreciate the patterns of language exposure and use among young people to understand language shift and maintenance).
5. *Social and Cultural Influences* (Language usage and customs within a society are greatly influenced by social and cultural variables).

It is important to remember that language shift dynamics vary depending on the area or community [10]. To preserve cultural diversity and encourage inclusivity, there are occa-

sionally initiatives to support bilingual or multilingual education and revive indigenous languages. These programmes acknowledge both the practical benefits of dominating languages and the importance of linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalised environment [11].

In the context of modernisation and globalisation, the language shift among young people is a complicated phenomenon driven by a number of factors [12]. The choice of dominant languages is influenced by several factors, including the need for cultural integration, the pursuit of professional and educational possibilities, the dominance of some languages in important fields, and the changing needs of a modernising society. This change underscores the difficulties experienced by indigenous or minority languages, but it also illustrates how crucial it is to strike a balance in a world that is changing quickly between cultural legacy and the advantages of global connectedness [13].

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The linguistic landscape and dynamics of any given language can be greatly impacted by the occurrence of numerous languages within a nation. The historical and sociological facets of the Ovahimba people's society play a significant role in the maintenance and transition of their language. Due to language diversity in Opuwo, young people can adopt code-switching behaviour to blend in with their peers. However, the survival of regional dialects like Otjihimba is threatened by this multilingualism as well as the fact that English has been Namibia's official language since Independence. The youth of Opuwo frequently view the Otjihimba dialect with a poor reputation, which presents a status challenge for the language. As a result, many elders in the area have expressed reservations about the language's standardisation.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Considering the ongoing shift from Otjihimba to English among Ovahimba-speaking youth, one would anticipate some level of language maintenance. In light of this, the current scenario of language transition necessitates an investigation into the following research objectives:

1. To investigate the contributing factors to the language shift and maintenance of the Otjihimba language among the youth in Opuwo;
2. To explore how language shift and maintenance affect the lifestyle of Ovahimba youth in Opuwo;
3. To evaluate the strategies that can be implemented to mitigate language shift and promote the maintenance of the Otjihimba language among youth in Opuwo.

Studying the factors and challenges contributing to language change in the youth of the Ovahimba people in Opuwo is crucial in order to provide meaningful information. Resultingly, the development of strategies for the Otjihimba language's preservation and integration into educational programs might benefit from this knowledge. By investigating the sociolinguistic dynamics of the Ovahimba community, the research may enhance our understanding of language transition processes and provide a valuable contribution to theoretical frameworks and sociolinguistic research methodologies. Eventually, the study's findings might be incorporated by the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (MoEAC) into the creation of policies, particularly those pertaining to the standardisation of languages in education.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Multilingualism in Namibia

With its diverse ethnic groups, Namibia is a nation known for its multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multi-ethnicity. Linguistic competition results from this competition may manifest in various forms, such as struggles for linguistic recognition, the promotion of one language over another, or debates regarding language policies [3]. The youth who belonged to a single-ethnic Ovahimba community demonstrated a declining desire to speak or preserve their native tongue. Concerns were expressed about this trend, especially from the elder generation, who believed that losing language would eventually lead to losing culture and identity [13].

Within a speech community, bilingual speakers undergo a process known as "language shift," in which they progressively stop using one of their two languages in favour of the other [14]. Language shift is a result of contact, wherein the minority language which had a lower social position became subordinate to the dominant language, or the language with a higher status in the community [2]. The phenomenon of language shift was common in colonial contexts, where variation in the timing and place of language transitions was observed. Language transitions in Indigenous communities were frequently brought about by deeply rooted discriminatory attitudes and actions that denigrated and rejected the language, the people, and traditional knowledge [11].

In Namibia's multilingual and multicultural setting, linguistic competition and the ensuing language shift have often resulted in a decline in Ovahimba youth's interest in maintaining or using their mother tongue. The older generation highlighted that this situation aroused concerns about the possible loss of identity and cultural legacy [15]. The dominance and status of languages within the community, which were frequently impacted by historical and colonial influences, drove the process of language shift [16]. Discrimination and undervaluing of Indigenous people, their languages, and their knowledge may have a direct impact on whether Indigenous languages survive or disappear in those places.

It is critical to acknowledge the wider effects of Namibia's linguistic change in addition to the worries about language extinction and cultural identity. Language serves as a medium for passing down cultural values, customs, and

knowledge from one generation to the next in addition to serving as a means of communication [17]. A language's marginalisation or replacement can have a significant impact on a community's social structure.

Like many other Indigenous tribes, the Ovahimba have a rich oral heritage that is deeply ingrained in their language. It is a storehouse of their beliefs, traditions, and history. There is a chance of losing this priceless legacy as the next generation moves away from their mother tongue [18]. The weakening of language links makes cultural practices, rituals, and collective memory more susceptible to damage [19].

Furthermore, language and individual and collective identities are strongly entwined. A major source of pride and an integral component of their self-expression for many people is their mother tongue. It strengthens ties to their ancestors and community and gives them a sense of belonging [20]. People may have a sense of disconnection and alienation when language shifts, which can weaken their sense of cultural identification [21].

Additionally, language loss may lead to negative effects on education and the economy from language loss. Language is essential for involvement in social and political arenas, career prospects, and education [22]. People who speak the minority language as their first language may find it more difficult to take advantage of these opportunities if the dominant language replaces the minority language. This has the potential to worsen inequality and isolate already marginalised groups.

The following levels of language endangerment:

1. Potentially endangered when youth begin to favour the dominant language and acquire the endangered language with imperfections.
2. Endangered when the youth speakers are young adults and there is a scarcity or absence of youth speakers.
3. Seriously endangered when the youth speakers are middle-aged or older.
4. Terminally endangered or moribund when only a few elderly speakers are remaining.
5. Extinct when there are no speakers left whatsoever [23].

A study conducted in Oberwart, a bilingual community in Austria with both German and Hungarian speakers, illustrates how the symbolic significance attributed to a language by its speakers can influence language choices and transitions [24]. The central concern regarding language shift is not merely whether industrialisation or other societal changes correlate with it, but rather the intermediary processes through which such changes impact the language's daily usage [24]. They further observe that in many instances of gradual language shift, the decision to abandon one language in favour of another is tied to the symbolic values, such as prestige or honour, assigned to the language by the minority speakers, which in turn are shaped by their position within the political-economic framework.

The argument presented in the preceding discussion emphasizes the importance of comprehending transmission practices to grasp language shift within a community and the reasons behind children's inability to acquire their parents' language.

Maintaining linguistic variety and protecting cultural heritage need concerted efforts to address language shift and support language revitalisation. Acknowledging the value of multilingualism and supporting the preservation and resuscitation of Indigenous languages can improve the well-being and sense of empowerment of impacted communities [25]. Activities for language revitalisation may involve policy interventions that support minority language usage and recognition, education activities, community language planning, and language documentation [26].

In Namibia and other multicultural countries, it is crucial to promote an atmosphere of inclusion and respect for linguistic and cultural variety. Societies may celebrate the diversity of their heritage and guarantee that different cultural manifestations will continue for upcoming generations by valuing and protecting Indigenous languages [11].

2.2. Demographic and Economic Factors of Ovahimba

2.2.1. Demographic Factors

The small group of Ovahimba youngsters has been experiencing language maintenance and shift regularly, which has the elder generation worried about their dialect disappearing. The large-scale human movement from one location to another is a factor in language shift. Because the Ovahimba are semi-nomadic people, their tendency to speak a different language to blend in with their community is a result of their constant travel [27]. The majority of young people have switched to English due to misconceptions about these tribes and a desire to blend in, demonstrating that demographic factors have played a role in the linguistic change from Otjihimba to English [1]. There are further societal and economic variables that may be responsible for the language transition among Ovahimba youngsters. The Ovahimba community is becoming more and more exposed to the outside world and outside influences as a result of technological improvements and improved connectedness. The younger generation is strongly motivated to prioritise learning languages like English as a result of this exposure, as well as their goals for upward social mobility and access to better educational and economic prospects [27].

2.2.2. Economic Factors

Working abroad is getting easier due to the phenomena of globalisation, and many nations have implemented more liberal political and economic policies. Being multilingual is vital in today's world, as everyone knows different languages [28]. Urban-rural migration is a consequence of individuals moving from various cities throughout the world to rural areas in search of better employment prospects [29]. There-

fore, to improve their chances of landing a job, job seekers must be fluent in English. Because they can communicate effectively with diverse groups, multilingual people have an edge over those who exclusively speak their mother tongues in the labour market [30]. Working abroad has become easier because of the globalisation phenomenon, which has also encouraged many nations to embrace more liberal political and economic systems.

People in today's world are beginning to understand the value of multilingualism as a result [31]. Speaking and understanding many languages has become an important talent, especially considering the growing urbanisation and urban-rural migration that is taking place in many places across the world [32].

Increased population growth and competition for jobs are two effects of urbanisation. People are moving from rural to urban regions in pursuit of better work, and to improve their chances of finding employment, job seekers must be proficient in English. English has become a universal language for trade and communication, bridging linguistic divides between speakers of other languages [33].

People who speak more than one language have an edge in the employment market. Employers place a high priority on the capacity to navigate cultural differences and interact effectively with varied groups [30]. Multilingual people exhibit adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and a wider viewpoint when they engage with co-workers, clients, and consumers from many cultural backgrounds. Additionally, multilingualism creates pathways for global employment prospects. Employers with international operations frequently look for multilingual staff members to help in communication with partners, stakeholders, and clients throughout the globe. Additionally, multilingual people can operate as cultural bridges, closing gaps in knowledge and enabling smooth economic dealings in an international economy.

Speaking more than one language improves cognitive function in addition to being advantageous for career prospects. Studies indicate that those who are bilingual or multilingual typically have higher levels of cognitive flexibility, greater problem-solving abilities, and better memory retention [34]. A person's employability is further enhanced by the cognitive advantages of multilingualism, which leads to greater adaptability and the capacity to pick up new skills and circumstances quickly.

The significance of multilingualism in contemporary society has been underscored by the continuous globalisation process and the swift urbanisation trend. The ability to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds and cultures becomes increasingly important as job seekers negotiate a more competitive employment market. Speaking more than one language improves their chances of finding work, improves their cognitive function, and allows them to work abroad. Consequently, those who are bilingual have a clear edge over those who are monolingual in the employment market.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study of how societies evolve and grow is the primary focus of sociology. A group's approach to its languages is crucial to the preservation of its culture, norms, and values, and any language change is invariably the outcome of cultural deterioration, [35].

Fishman proposed the Sociology of Language Model, a theoretical framework that explains the roles and relationships of language in society as well as the domains and attitudes of the group around language use [36]. Studying different ways people talk, how they use language, and who they are as they talk together helps us understand how these things always affect and change each other in a group of people who communicate, this is how Fishman defines the field of sociolinguistics [36].

According to sociologists society is a living organism composed of various interconnected parts that work together to support the stability and solidarity of norms, values, cultures, and even language [37]. Social change is seen by structural functionalism as an adaptive reaction to a conflict within the social structure. An integrated social system experiences stress when one of its components changes; this tension is eventually alleviated by the other components adapting to the new configuration. Social change is seen by structural functionalism as an adaptive reaction to a conflict within the social structure. An integrated social system experiences stress when one of its components changes; this tension is eventually alleviated by the other components adapting to the new configuration.

According to the Sociology of Language model, social characteristics including age, gender, and socioeconomic status have an impact on language change or maintenance. Furthermore, language use and shifts are primarily impacted by societal shifts as well as the contexts in which they are employed, including the home, workplace, community, and educational settings. People might, for instance, link specific languages to specific subjects. For instance, a group of young, educated people in the Norwegian fishing community of Hemnesberget employed the local dialect, Ranamal when talking about local events [38]. They indicated this shift by speaking in Bokmal, the standard language when discussing national and nonlocal activities.

The educational system that many African nations acquired from their former colonial masters is to blame for the language change in those nations [39]. Minority languages were endangered by the educational system's employment of colonisers' languages, which led to the general public devaluing the status of native tongues. These days, speaking one's mother tongue is primarily reserved for communicating with the immediate family and among close friends. Furthermore, one of the main causes of the nation's linguistic shift and unfavourable language attitudes is the official language and medium of instruction in upper elementary, secondary, and higher education English, an imperialist language [40].

4. Methods and Procedures

This qualitative study was conducted in Opuwo which is in the Kunene Region. An exploratory case study design was deemed appropriate to comprehensively understand the current issue under investigation. The business premised where the study is conducted was purposefully selected over the other two places in the town because it is located in the residential area where Ovahimba is dominant. The reason for selecting this area was my supposition that if Otjihimba is showing a shift in an area where most of the population speaks it, there was no doubt that it is undergoing a shift.

The study used purposive random sampling to choose participants and an interpretive research methodology. The goal of the study, which was to investigate the factors that contributed to Otjihimba language switches and maintenance to English among Ovahimba-speaking teenagers in Opuwo, guided the selection of the sample. The informants were selected based on age, socioeconomic status, educational background, and gender as these are factors that correlate well to language shift and maintenance.

Young people who spoke Ovahimba and were fluent in Otjihimba and English made up the study's participants. People who could express themselves fluently in both languages were given preference during the selection process. Selecting people who were Otjihimba native speakers was essential. If the indicated adolescents were not present, other participants were chosen who could help with proposing appropriate substitutes for the absent individuals. A sample of 15 people was selected from a population of 30 to represent the population. A focus group typically contained 10 to 15 people fitting the description of the target sample group and specific questions were posed to them regarding the issues and subjects being researched. Consequently, the sample of the study comprised two major groups based on their understanding of those who spoke English and those who did not speak English to meet the objective of the study. Group 1 was made up of those who could speak both English and Otjihimba, while Group 2 consisted of those who could speak only Otjihimba, and from the age of 17-30 years.

The research employed a qualitative methodology to gather non-numerical data. The qualitative approach was tied to the constructivist paradigm since it makes it possible for the researcher to use words to properly express the issues under examination. The complexity of the individuals was also better understood thanks to the qualitative method. Unlike a planned survey, probing questions were utilised to examine individuals' perspectives, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations of the phenomenon, leading to insightful discussions regarding the study subject.

A questionnaire was distributed to Ovahimba youth who were living in Opuwo town. The questionnaire was available in two languages: English and Otjihimba. Most of the Ovahimba youth living in the Otuzemba location in Opuwo speak Otjihimba and English, but they mostly use English.

The questionnaire had three pages in English, and it was translated into Otjihimba for better understanding. It took about 15 minutes for the youth to answer all the questions. All ethical protocols for conducting research were observed.

5. Major Findings

5.1. Language Choice

One method for analysing language selection is through the concept of domains [39]. Fishman suggested that within certain institutional settings, referred to as domains, one language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another. Domains encompass various factors including location, subject matter, and participants [39, 40]. Research on language selection investigates individuals' motivations for altering their language choice in diverse social situations by examining their language usage patterns to factors such as domain, interlocutor, or topic. Changes in verbal behaviour are influenced by or occur alongside alterations in setting, participants, topic, and the purposes of the interaction. While each factor may independently influence the choice of one language over another, it is typically a combination of several factors that determines a specific language choice in a given context.

Domains are organised relative to one another through different methods, including hierarchical structures or degrees of formality. For instance, an informal domain, such as the family setting, typically involves family members engaging in conversations about personal and mundane matters within the privacy of their home.

5.2. Domain analysis

In the analysis that follows, the language preference data within each domain is organised based on the number of respondents who express a preference for a specific language either Otjihimba, English, or a combination of both. The decision not to include English as a separate choice stems from the historical context in which Otjihimba served solely as the local language for certain tribes in Kaokoland before independence.

5.2.1. Family domain

This category encompasses family members including parents, older and younger siblings, and children. In this study, participants, who were Ovahimba youth residing in Opuwo, were queried about their language preference when communicating with the relatives. Additionally, they were asked about their language choice for future communication with their children. Generally, Otjihimba was predominantly favoured within the family setting, particularly when addressing parents, and siblings of various ages (older siblings defined as aged 17 to 30), regardless of gender. However,

some respondents indicated a preference for English, citing its widespread usage as a reason, anticipating that everyone would be proficient in English over time.

While the frequency of Otjihimba/English codeswitching in communication with these family members is minimal, there is a noticeable inclination to use more English when addressing younger siblings.

In simpler terms, the most frequently spoken language at home is Otjihimba, regardless of the person being spoken to. However, there is a tendency for English to be used more often with younger siblings and males. This aligns with findings from other studies on how different languages are used in various settings [41]. While Otjihimba remains prevalent in interactions with neighbors, both English and Otjihimba are increasingly used in this context compared to within the family. When communicating with "sports colleagues," Otjihimba and English are the primary languages used, whereas English is preferred when speaking to more official figures, such as religious representatives. Each of these individuals plays a different social role, suggesting varying levels of formality in their interactions. This hierarchy of roles indicates that using Otjihimba with neighbours implies intimacy and a shared local context similar to that of the home environment while using both Otjihimba and English with sports colleagues suggests varying levels of intimacy and locality. Opting for English with a religious representative suggests a more formal or distant relationship, although English may be chosen due to the formal nature of events.

Although English holds a significant position in this context, particularly in more formal settings, the presence of Otjihimba remains substantial within the community.

5.2.2. Education

In the realm of education, Otjihimba and Otjihimba/English were the primary languages used among peers at school and other youth gathering places, with English being utilised only sparingly. This pattern indicates that local familiarity and comfort associated with Otjihimba might be the decisive factor here. English, on the other hand, is predominantly employed in educational settings with teachers or instructors, regardless of their gender. Nonetheless, casual observations imply that the choice of language among these individuals is largely influenced by the dynamics of the interaction, a trend consistent with other contexts as well.

The teacher or instructor mentioned in this research was an English educator who taught at both the school and high institution levels. Therefore, it was anticipated that she would utilise English when communicating with learners or students in both educational settings.

5.2.3. Local Government

The focus of this category was on the interlocutors, topics, and settings related to the investigation of youth working in government offices. As a formal domain, it differs from education primarily due to the less frequent and more ritualised interactions characteristic of visits to offices. Regarding Ovahimba youth employed in government offices, half of the participants indicated that they use both Otjihimba and English equally. What is particularly noteworthy is the significant extent to which Otjihimba is utilised in this relatively formal setting. This deviates from the expected pattern for a language undergoing a shift, where formal domains are typically associated with the more formal language. This observation also supports the hypothesis that the relationship between interlocutors plays a crucial role in language selection.

5.3. Implied Implications

The findings here explored the extension of participants and implied implications [42]. It was revealed that there are discernible patterns in language selection. The participants were provided with specific identification quotes and were numbered sequentially. To clarify, the quote 'OYOE' signifies Ovahimba youth who speak both Otjihimba and English; 'OYLO' represents Ovahimba youth who speak less Otjihimba; 'OYE' represents Ovahimba youth who speak only English, and 'OYOEL' represents Ovahimba youth who speak both English and Otjihimba to a lesser extent. Table 1 offers basic demographic information for each participant. Identification quotes were to maintain participants' anonymity, gender, and occupation, and this information pertains to their occupation, gender, age (between 17 and 30), years of experience in speaking English, and residency in Opuwo town.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographics.

No	Participants	Age	Gender	Occupation	Years of experience in speaking English
1	OYOE	23	Male	Student	11+ years
2	OYOE	17	Female	Learner	9 years
3	OYOE	19	Male	Student	10 years
4	OYOE	22	Female	Student	11+ years
5	OYOE	27	Male	Police	11+ years

No	Participants	Age	Gender	Occupation	Years of experience in speaking English
6	OYOE	18	Male	Learner	10 years
7	OYOE	21	Female	Student	10 years
8	OYOE	19	Female	Student	10 years
9	OYOE	29	Male	Teacher	11+ years
10	OYOE	27	Male	Teacher	11+ years
11	OYOE	26	Male	Student	11+ years
12	OYOE	29	Male	Teacher	11+ years
13	OYOE	30	Female	Cleaner	11+ years
14	OYOE	24	Female	Student	11+ years
15	OYOE	23	Female	Student	11+ years
16	OYLO	30	Male	Nurse	11+ years
17	OYLO	28	Female	Pharmacist	11+ years
18	OYLO	30	Male	Nurse	11+ years
19	OYLO	29	Male	Instructor	11+ years
20	OYE	27	Female	Teacher	11+ years
21	OYE	18	Male	Learner	10 years
22	OYE	17	Female	Learner	9 years
23	OYOEL	28	Female	Cleaner	11+ years
24	OYOEL	30	Male	Chef	10 years
25	OYOEL	29	Female	Housekeeper	7 years
26	OYOEL	22	Male	Student	8 years
27	OYOEL	29	Female	Student	10 years
28	OYOEL	30	Male	Cleaner	7 years
29	OYOEL	26	Female	Cleaner	8 years
30	OYOEL	28	Male	Student	9 years

Participants: 11 = students from high institutions; 4 = learners from schools; 1 = instructors from the high institution; 4 = teachers from schools; 5 = cleaners from other institutions; 1= police officer from a police station; 1 = chef from another institution; 1= housekeepers from other institution; 2 = nurses from the hospital; 1 = Pharmacists from the hospital.

The table above depicts the gender and years of English-speaking experience of the respondents. In considering the gender of the participants, it is important to determine whether there are differences in Otjihimba's shift to English in education based on gender roles. The primary objective was to investigate if gender factors influence the perspective on Otjihimba's shift to English. The results presented indicate that out of the 30 participants who were interviewed, 14 were females and 16 were males. This distribution can be attributed to the observation that more males than females are involved in the technical language shift from Otjihimba to English, with males constituting 53% of the gender representation and females making up the remaining 47%.

Additionally, the demographic information of the participants reveals that they occupied various positions in alignment with the research objectives. This includes Ovahimba youth who spoke both Otjihimba and English, those who spoke less Otjihimba, those who spoke only English, and those who spoke both English and Otjihimba to a lesser extent. The majority of the participants, totalling 15 individuals were Ovahimba youth who could converse in both Otjihimba and English, representing 50% of the total sample. Other participants from various occupations were evenly distributed, each accounting for 13.33% of the total representation, with four participants from each occupation. Furthermore, another group of participants, each representing 10%, hailed

from their respective occupations, with three participants from each. There was also a group of participants with a 26.67% representation, totalling eight individuals from each occupation.

6. Discussion: Capturing Vitality: Sociology of Language

The findings show that participants frequently discussed the impact of the formal education system on their language choices. Many Ovahimba-speaking youth stated that English was the primary language of instruction in schools. As a result, they found themselves using English more often, both in educational settings and when interacting with peers. This supports the idea that in schools if learners are forced to use a language other than their mother tongue, there is a possibility that they can easily shift from one language to another [43]. This shift is often driven by the misconception held by most teachers that using a different language as the medium of instruction will facilitate the learners in acquiring another language. However, this approach may inadvertently undermine the learners' proficiency in their mother tongue. Research indicates that when learners use English as the medium of instruction for all subjects, they can easily transition from their mother tongues to English [44]. Additionally, some learners may develop a preference for English over their mother tongues, perceiving it as a superior language.

Participants indicated that English can serve various roles in the learning and teaching processes due to its significant potential for enhancing learner achievement and teacher learning. They pointed out that English plays a vital role in supporting face-to-face teaching and learning. This is achieved using language that enables learners to acquire knowledge, reduces the need for direct instructions, and provides teachers with the opportunity to assist learners with specific needs. Consequently, the community prefers to use English because they believe that without it, learners might face challenges in various aspects of life.

Based on the information presented above, the participants concur with the notion that the use of English in education enhances learner engagement and knowledge retention [45]. When English is easily incorporated into lessons, particularly in science and technology, learner tends to become more involved in their studies. This is because English offers diverse opportunities to make the learning process more enjoyable and engaging by presenting the same content in various ways. Consequently, this increased engagement is believed to lead to more effective and efficient knowledge retention.

Many participants expressed a strong desire to maintain their proficiency in both Otjihimba and English. They viewed bilingualism as a valuable asset, allowing them to navigate different contexts and bridge cultural gaps. This study utilised this criterion as a significant factor in examining the simultaneous use of both Otjihimba and English among Ovahimba youth in Opuwo, particularly within the education system where the shift to English primarily begins. This criterion assessed teachers' skills, knowledge, and abilities in using the Otjihimba language in their daily teaching, which depended on their level of Otjihimba literacy and the training they received. Additionally, the criterion explored teachers' readiness to embrace and incorporate Otjihimba as an indigenous language of teaching.

The overall feedback from respondents indicates that Ovahimba youth who speak both English and Otjihimba do not always associate with those who speak only English. Participants who are less proficient in both languages feel excluded, as those who are fluent in English or bilingual sometimes mock them for their less polished language skills. Some participants expressed a desire to be bilingual, emphasising the importance of maintaining their identity by not losing Otjihimba. Resultingly, they want to be proficient in both languages, recognising the significance of Otjihimba as their mother tongue, while also acknowledging the importance of English for communication, and economic activities, especially in marketing and trade, and understand that English serves as an official language in various contexts.

Otjihimba is revered by its Indegnous speakers as a sacred link to their ancestry and cultural heritage, serving as a living repository of communal knowledge and traditions. Active participation in Otjihimba not only preserves cultural legacy but also breathes life into enduring community stories. The language acts as a medium for cultural transmission, with every word carrying historical weight and reflecting the ideals that shape the community's identity. Through it, participants gained a wealth of information that guided them through modern life while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural ethos.

Participants recommended the implementation of language programmes within their communities and schools. These programs could offer Otjihimba classes and cultural activities to reinforce language skills. The research findings revealed that, without strong support for Otjihimba in both schools and homes, youths cannot be expected to overcome the language barriers preventing them from shifting from Otjihimba to English. Moreover, youths reflected on the absence of an Otjihimba curriculum content standard provided by the government. They mentioned that the government should have initiated training within two years to prepare for the implementation of the Otjihimba program. such as establishing training programmes and preparation measures. The lack of a recognised curriculum is seen as a significant barrier to effective language instruction, resulting in lower educational standards and variations in approaches among educational institutions.

The demand for government-initiated training within the allotted two years underscores the importance of preventive measures for the successful implementation of the Otjihimba program. The absence of a standardised framework not only affects teachers' readiness but also impacts learners' overall

competency in acquiring the language.

The lack of a uniform Otjihimba curriculum is viewed as a broader disadvantage, affecting the promotion and preservation of the language and culture. A structured curriculum is considered crucial for the systematic transfer of linguistic and cultural knowledge between generations. The absence of such a curriculum raises concerns about the long-term viability of Otjihimba as a living language.

Participants voiced concerns about the Otjihimba programme, primarily questioning the government's motives, suspecting political agendas, and populist characteristics. They fear that the initiative may serve political objectives rather than a genuine commitment to preserving the Otjihimba language. This scepticism arises from doubts about the programme being a mere token effort, lacking genuine dedication to success, and potentially driven by political optics rather than a sincere intent to safeguard linguistic diversity. In support of this, respondents argued that while Otjihimba is an Otjiherero dialect, there are variations in words based on geographical areas. Therefore, even Ovahimba children should be allowed to use those words in their writing, especially in school. Educators must agree with these terms; otherwise, many youths will be discouraged from using Otjihimba, potentially leading them to shift to English. Otjihimba is supposed to represent a deep form of Otjiherero, but most educators are not considering this.

Hence, it was evident in the study that social characteristics including age, gender, and socioeconomic status have an impact on language change or maintenance. Furthermore, according to the sociology of language approach, language use and shifts are primarily impacted by societal shifts as well as the contexts in which they are employed, including the home, workplace, community, and educational settings.

7. Conclusions

The paper found that the formal education system, which predominantly employs English as the language of instruction and uses English-language textbooks, significantly influences the language choices of Ovahimba youth. English is the medium through which they access knowledge, leading to a preference for using English in educational settings. Consequently, a shift from Otjihimba to English occurs as Ovahimba youth become more proficient in English due to their educational experiences. The dominance of English in schools plays a crucial role in this language shift.

This study concludes that the shift from Otjihimba to English among the youth is primarily attributed to the education system. The materials used in schools are predominantly in English, leading to the ineffectiveness of Otjihimba in schools. The lack of availability of Otjihimba in the public domain exacerbates this issue, making it difficult for learners and teachers to access the language. The study identified several factors contributing to this shift, including the preference for English by teachers due to its prevalence among youth and the fact that all documents are written in English. Insufficient training on Otjihimba language for teachers and unclear communication between language policy articulations and education goals further contribute to this ineffectiveness.

Additionally, the study concluded that the low level of preparedness of teachers or educators is a key factor in the slow pace of integration and implementation of Otjihimba. The absence of Otjihimba books, materials, and facilities in schools, as well as the lack of digitised e-contents in education, hinders the full attainment of a digital education system where Otjihimba can be available on the internet for youth to access independently.

Furthermore, the study found that the unsuccessful nature of Otjihimba as a language is linked to unclear trainers' incompetence in terms of skills development. This difficulty in developing uniform skills in trainees/learners poses a significant challenge to implementation. Weak interaction between language policy developers and education implementers contributes to a skills mismatch between the intended goals of the Otjihimba language and actual results.

The study also concluded that the lack of feasibility studies on the supply of Otjihimba language and facilities, coupled with the absence of continuous training for teachers, hinders their adaptation to the trends of Otjihimba language. The absence of Otjihimba books or materials in school delays Ovahimba youth from using Otjihimba in their education. The recognition of languages with more than two dialects in schools is suggested, as the research indicates that some youth desire to use their mother tongue, but dialect differences hinder this due to the lack of recognition as a registered language.

8. Recommendations

To address the impact of education on language shift, it is recommended that educational institutions in Opuwo consider implementing bilingual education programmes. These programmes should ensure that Otjihimba is integrated into the curriculum, allowing learners to develop proficiency in both languages. Bilingual education can help Ovahimba youth maintain their Otjihimba language skills while acquiring proficiency in English. Engaging the community, especially elders and community leaders, is vital for language preservation. Collaborative efforts between community members and educational institutions can lead to the development of Otjihimba language programmes and cultural activities. Community-led initiatives can help foster a sense of ownership and pride in the preservation of Otjihimba.

Raising awareness about the cultural significance of Otjihimba is essential. Awareness campaigns and cultural events should be organised to remind Ovahimba youth of the importance of their native language in preserving their heritage. These initiatives can highlight the unique aspects of Otjihimba and its role in connecting Ovahimba people to

their traditions.

The findings of this study have several implications for language preservation and education policies. By recognising the impact of the education system, global media, and social pressures on language choices, policymakers can work toward creating an educational environment that values and promotes bilingualism. Emphasising the cultural significance of Otjihimba in community and educational settings can instil a sense of pride and motivation among Ovahimba youth to maintain their native language. Further research can be conducted to deepen understanding of language preservation and education policies, especially in the context of the Otjihimba community.

Abbreviations

FIR	Fourth Industrial Revolution.
MoEAC	Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture
OYOE	Ovahimba youth Who Speak Both Otjihimba and English
OYLO	Ovahimba Youth Who Speak Less Otjihimba
OYEi9	Ovahimba Youth Who Speak Only English
OYOEL	Ovahimba Youth Who Speak Both English and Otjihimba

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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