

# WHY HAS !XÓÕ NOT FOLLOWED THE NORMAL PATTERN OF IDENTITY LOSS?

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## Abstract

Every ethnic group is usually identified by specific features. The most conspicuous features have been described as linguistic identity, cultural identity, autonymic identity and ethnonymic identity<sup>2</sup>. When an ethnic group is losing its identity because of pressure or attraction from a major or dominant ethnic group in a marked bilingualism situation (Batibo, 1992, 2005a), the loss is usually progressive, starting from linguistic identity and ending with ethnonymic identity. Although this pattern has been attested in a number of cases, there have been several exceptions. This paper is based on a study that was carried out in Zutshwa, in 2015, which investigated the patterns of ethnic identity loss in one of the few remaining southern Khoesan languages, namely !Xóõ. Data collection was based on a structured questionnaire aiming at extracting information of the patterns of language use, features of identity and the prevailing language attitudes towards language maintenance. The study showed that the ethnic identity loss model can be distorted, where there are factors that have strong impact on people's lives in terms of fundamental human needs. Strong external socio-cultural pressure, such as restrictions, assimilation or deep spiritual involvement, may distort both cultural and autonymic identities.

**Keywords:** Language shift, patterns of ethnic identity loss, Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

## 1. Introduction

Language shift takes place when speakers of a language abandon their language, willingly or under pressure, in favour of another language, which then takes over as their tool of communication and socialization (Crystal, 2000). Such occurrences are frequent in speech communities, given that languages often come into contact through people's movement, migration, expansion and integration into larger communities. Such contact may result in speech communities learning each other's language, as in cases of bilingualism and diglossia, mixing the two codes in a casual manner, as in the case of code-switching or mixing; integrating the two speeches, as in the case of pidgin, creole and hybrid; or one language dominating or marginalizing the other, hence causing language shift, and, as a result, the extinction of the language which has fallen in disuse. The last case is the most frequent, given that often the two speech communities will come into contact with unequal levels of cultural, socio-economic, demographic or political strengths.

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This situation will prompt the speaker of the weaker community to shift from their language and culture to that of the dominant or more prestigious group (Batibo, 2005a, p. 87). Such a situation would happen, especially if the weaker language community is unable to resist the dominance of the stronger language community or if it decides willingly to shift due to some socio-economic gains. Some ethnolinguistic groups tend to be more vulnerable than others when it comes to language domination. The Khoesan language communities, also known as Non-Bantu Click languages, are among the most vulnerable groups. This is mainly because most of them are hunter-gatherer communities whose livelihoods depend on land and the ecosystem around them. Hence, they tend to be scattered in small groups with no centralized authority. This makes them vulnerable to other ethnolinguistic groups, particularly the Bantu agriculturalists, who are often socio-politically organized, economically sustained and demographically more superior. Thus, the migration of the Bantu speaking communities in what is now Botswana, some 1,000 years ago, has caused progressive domination and language shift of the original Khoesan communities, leaving pockets of these groups in the present Central Kalahari Game Reserve and the Okavango area (Anderson and Janson, 1997).

This study investigates !Xóǀ (also known as /asi or !Xasi), a Khoesan or Non-Bantu Click language, which belongs to the TAA group of what is traditionally known as Southern Khoesan. According to Traill (1965), Southern Khoesan comprised TAA and !Kwi languages which used to be spoken extensively in southern Africa. However, most of the languages have now become extinct. !Xóǀ is still spoken in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. In Botswana, !Xóǀ territory stretches across an estimated area of 150, 000 square kilometres incorporating the Southern District, Kwenebg District, Kgalagadi District and Ghanzi District. The estimated number of !Xóǀ speakers ranges from 2,000 (Traill, 1985) to 4,000 (Hasselbring (2001). The !Xóǀ speech community is under pressure to shift to the more dominant languages, particularly Setswana and Shekgalagari. Earlier sociolinguistic studies by Hasselbring (2001), Batibo, Mathangwane and Tsonope (2003) revealed that !Xóǀ is presently used for family interactions, settlement or village communication and cultural activities.

Most !Xóǀ speakers live in small groups without much contact with each other, forming a dialect continuum. Most !Xóǀ are bilingual with the language with which they are in contact. These are /Gwi (north and east), Nama (southwest) and Shekgalagari in most parts. Setswana is also commonly used. Although !Xóǀ is generally used in all ages, the level of proficiency diminishes as one moves to the younger generations. The language has remained generally vibrant and dynamic in spite of occasional subjugation to the Shengologa variety of Shekgalagari, during the time of !Xóǀ conflict with Nama, giving rise to the *Balala* variety of Shekgalagari (Monaka and Lepekoane, 2008).

## 2. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate why !Xóǀ has not followed the normal pattern of language shift. According to Lamy (1979) and Pool (1979), when a speech community is in the process of shifting to another more dominant or prestigious community, it progressively loses its identity features, which include linguistic identity, cultural (including socio-economic) identity, autonymic<sup>3</sup> identity and ethnonymic identity. This happens as a result of pressure or attraction from the dominant or more prestigious language group in a marked bilingualism situation (Batibo, 2004). The Lamy-Pool model posits that the loss of identity is progressive, involving first, loss of linguistic identity, then cultural identity followed by autonomic identity. Then, finally, the loss of ethnonymic identity completes the absorption of the affected community into the dominant one (Lamy, 1979; Pool, 1979).

The validity of the Lamy-Pool Model has been attested in a number of studies, such as Batibo (1992, 2005b), Chebanne and Nthapelelang (2000), Moloji (2009), Molosiwa (2000), Mesthrie (2002), Rottland and Okombo (1992) and Smieja (1996). In all these studies, the linguistic identity was the first to be eroded, while the ethnonymic identity was the most resistant.

## 3. Source of data

This study is based on data collected in Zutshwa, a village located in the central part of Kgalagadi District, about 70 km west of Hukuntsi. It is the traditional habitat of the !Xóǀ ethnolinguistic group. However, over the years, other groups have come to settle in Zutshwa, particularly the Bantu speaking, Shekgalagari community, which is the dominant linguistic group in the Kgalagadi District.

On the one hand, Setswana is used in Zutshwa as the national language and country's lingua franca, particularly in public functions and *kgotla* (ward) meetings. On the other, English, which is the official language of Botswana, is only found in official documents and in communications in which foreigners are involved. Table 1 below shows the status hierarchy of the languages which are based in Zutshwa.

**Table 1: The language ecology of Zutshwa**

Level	Language status	Domain of use
1.	English	Formal, documents
2.	Setswana	Kgotla, inter-ethnic
3.	Setswana	Village, inter-intra-ethnic
4.	!Xóǀ	Family, intra-ethnic, cultural

<sup>3</sup> In this study, autonymic identity refers to identity based on personal names; while ethnonymic identity refers to identity based on common ethnic name.

The principal method used to collect the data was the interview strategy in which the author interrogated the respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information on the patterns of language use; transgenerational transmission of !Xóǀ; language attitudes; levels of cultural identity, autonymic identity and ethnonymic identity; and language empowerment measures. 59 people were interviewed, comprising 35 women and 24 men. The ages of respondents ranged between 22 and 76 years.

#### 4. Findings of the study

The findings of the study showed that !Xóǀ was still very actively used in the village by all ages, particularly in family interaction, village affairs and cultural matters. It was the language which was used most frequently in the village. Shekgalagari and Setswana were only used in inter-ethnic interaction or in public places, including offices, shops and churches. !Xóǀ was still actively transmitted to the children. In fact, it was sustained and constantly used in the lower domains, especially in the !Xóǀ ward. There were limited cases of code-switching with other languages at the higher level domains.

However, !Xóǀ cultural practices had been critically eroded, as they did not practice most of their customs and rituals. Only a few, mainly the older generation, remembered traditional songs, dances, proverbs or riddles. Also their knowledge of wild animals hunting and the ecosystem was not so extensive, especially among the younger generation.

As for the autonymic identity, the !Xóǀ in Zutshwa used mainly Setswana and Shekgalagari names, not only to call themselves, but also to call their localities. Only a few were able to give !Xóǀ names. But even such names were not often used. However, ethnonymic identity was still very strong, as most of them did not hesitate to state that their ethnic origin was “*mosarwa*” (Khoesan). From the foregoing findings, it was possible to summarise the pattern of identity loss as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: The pattern of ethnic identity loss of !Xóǀ in Zutshwa**

	Type of identity	Level of loss
1.	Linguistic identity	Relatively strong
2.	Cultural identity	Highly eroded
3.	Autonymic identity	Almost lost
4.	Ethnonymic identity	Considerably strong

From Table 2 above, it can be observed that cultural and autonymic identities have been extensively lost in favour of those of Setswana and Shekgalagari; while linguistic and ethnonymic identities are relatively strong and considerably strong

respectively. The Lamy-Pool Ethnic Identity Loss Model is therefore not adhered to in the case of !Xóǀ, where the linguistic identity has remained 'relatively strong'.

### 5. Explaining the distortion of the ethnic identity model in !Xóǀ

As mentioned by Batibo (2015), the Lamy-Pool Ethnic Identity Loss model may not be adhered to in cases where specific circumstances prevail, particularly those affecting the livelihood of an ethnic group. !Xóǀ is a Khoesan or Non-Bantu Click language. Such language communities are traditionally known as hunter-gather communities. They are able to sustain their livelihood through the ecosystem around them, being scattered in small groups so as to sustainably exploit their environment. Their livelihood is based on hunting and strapping wild animals as well as gathering fruits and roots. The Botswana government's removal and re-settlement of these groups from certain parts of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve has critically affected them socio-economically, since they see themselves as losing a basic necessity of livelihood in their physical life (Saugestad, 2001). This in turn, has triggered a sense of insecurity, hopelessness and despair in the !Xóǀ speech community, as espounded in Maslow's theory of human motivation. According to Maslow's (1943, 1954) theory of human motivation, the hierarchy of human needs can be presented as in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954)**

	Type of needs	Items involved
1.	Physiological needs (basic)	They include: air, food, water, sleep, excretion, etc.
2.	Safety	They include security of body, livelihood, morality, health etc.
3.	Love/ belonging	They include friendship, family sexual intimacy, etc.
4.	Esteem	They include: self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect etc
5.	Self-actualization	They include: creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts etc.

Based on Table 3 above, it is observable that !Xóǀ is fast losing its cultural and autonymic identities, in favour of those of Shekgalagari and Setswana, as a strategy to assimilate into the areally and nationally dominant groups. These features of identity were central elements in social integration. Such a process was prompted by their physiological and safety needs, which were crucial for their survival.

However, !Xóǀ has maintained the linguistic identity for family interaction, group socialization and intra-ethnic communication. This situation could be explained by their proficiency resistance. According to the Proficiency Resistance model, expounded by Auburger (1990, p.180), there are some key factors which

help to sustain proficiency and use of language, even in a state of group integration. These factors include strong emotional attachment to the language, strict diglossic demarcation of language use between minority and dominant languages, and a successful process of transgenerational transmission of the minority language with sustainable level of proficiency.

This situation has been experienced in other parts of Africa, where indigenous groups have been restricted in their free movements (Chebanne and Nthapelelang, 200; Batibo, 2015; Lusekelo, 2015). In some cases, where groups have been removed or re-settled from their traditional lands, this has caused a lot of frustration and despair, as it is the case of the aboriginals in Australia, whose re-settlement into new locations and modern ways of life has resulted in their idleness, violence and alcohol abuse (Siasoco, 2016).

## 6. Conclusion

The study was concerned with the distortion which can happen during the Lamy-Pool Ethnic Identity Loss process. Usually, the pattern of identity loss involves the progressive loss of linguistic, cultural, autonymic and ethnonymic identities. This study has noted that there are circumstances, which can distort this pattern, especially where critical human needs are involved. Out of the five Maslow's key human needs, two of them are critical to human sustenance, namely physiological (basic) and safety needs. Ethnolinguistic groups are ready to abandon their cultural and autonymic identities in order to be assimilated to the communities which could provide these critical physiological and safety needs. In this case, the Lamy-Pool Ethnic Identity Loss model would be distorted.

In fact, in modern living, other socio-cultural factors have been found to also affect the model. Some of these needs are education and access to new ways of life. According to Kopi and Batibo (This Volume), the iKalanga speech community, also found in Botswana, has preserved most of its ethnic identity features, except their autonymic identity. Many iKalanga speaking children have adopted Setswana names, as a strategy to have access to modern education through integration into mainstream Botswana communities. In this way, one can regard education as a basic need in modern societies.

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