

## A Linguistic Analysis of Idiomatic Expressions in Town Bemba: A Systemic Functional Linguistics

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### Abstract:

In recent times, urban speakers of Town Bemba have developed idioms that reflect modern life associated with multilingual practices and their shared experiences. This study aims to examine the nature of Town Bemba idioms as spoken in the Copperbelt province in Zambia. The study is guided by aspects of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model and the concept of recontextualization in analyzing the linguistic nature of idiomatic expressions used in Town Bemba. The study collected idioms from 20 purposively selected speakers of Town Bemba for oral interviews. The data were descriptively examined to unpack the conveyed meanings and the nature and form of the idioms in Town Bemba. The findings suggest several linguistic processes that give rise to idiomatic expressions, including linguistic coining, blending, and recontextualization of meaning. In addition, the study demonstrates how multilingualism is used as a resource in forming non-traditional idiomatic expressions, incorporating linguistic features from different language sources. The study further shows how socio-cultural context and shared experiences of the speakers play a key role in determining the meaning associated with idioms.

**Keywords:** Blending, Coinage, Idioms, Idiomatic Expressions, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Town Bemba, Multilingualism, Recontextualisation

### 1. Introduction:

#### 1.1 Idioms and idiomatic expressions:

Idioms, as linguistic expressions, convey meanings that go beyond the literal interpretation of words. They are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts and are widely utilized by language speakers to effectively communicate specific messages. Traditionally, idioms are embedded in the culture and language of a speech community. Hence, they are passed down through generations. Some idiomatic expressions, however, emerge as a response to contemporary

events, especially in multilingual communities of urban areas like that of the Copperbelt province of Zambia where Bemba is widely spoken. Like other figures of speech found in language, idioms are widely used by speakers of Bemba. They are used to convey ideas which are not explicitly stated. Idioms also offer a social and cultural understanding of the speech community's background, beliefs, values and collective experiences. Idioms are generally considered static because they are passed down and are fixed in form. This may explain the difficulty an

individual may encounter in comprehending the figurative meaning if he or she has not been exposed to given idioms in a particular language and social context.

Idioms are 'prefabricated' multi-word units which derive their meaning from the context in which they are used. Alexander (1987:178) defines idioms as "multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatics rules of use." Multi-word units have one or more lexemes. An idiom's figurative meaning is achieved through metaphors, which provide mental pictures or descriptions which listeners can visualise. A metaphor is 'understanding one concept in terms of another and representing abstract concepts in terms of more fundamental physical and cultural experiences' (O'Grady, et al., 2011; Udosen et al., 2017).

## 1.2. Context of the study:

Bemba (M42) is predominantly spoken on the Copperbelt, Northern, Muchinga and Luapula provinces in Zambia and some parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The language is also known to be widely spoken across Zambia, particularly in urban areas. In all these provinces, the language manifests itself as a dialect with the most common one being Town Bemba (M40A) (Kashoki, 1977). Town Bemba is known to be a variety of Bemba spoken on the Copperbelt province of Zambia. It is a type of variety that is associated with urban life and keeps on evolving with changing times (Spultunik, 1998). This variety incorporates some forms of English and other local language forms especially from Nyanja, another commonly spoken language in some parts of Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, which essentially gives expression of the multilingual practices in Zambia. Over the years, scholars such as Kashoki (1977), and Spultunik (1998) have argued for dedicated studies on Town Bemba due to its unique and ever evolving form. It is this variety of Bemba that this study sought to focus on.

As will be shown in this paper, idioms in Town Bemba are innovations and coinages that reflect the lived experiences of the speakers of Bemba in the metropolitan spaces of the Copperbelt in general and PP Zambia of Chililabombwe District in particular (an informal township where the study was conducted from). Most of the experiences involve the young population in the informal sector of Copperbelt. The informal sector includes vending merchandise in streets, hawking, markets, and bus stations. Some youths are unemployed and spend their time loitering on the streets or patronizing places where alcohol and/or other illicit substances are traded. It is in these spaces of linguistic interactions among speakers of Bemba and other languages where non-traditional idiomatic expressions are born. Idiomatic expressions draw inspiration from various aspects of social life. Of interest, however, is how the idiomatic expressions innovated, although not traditional, are similar in form and function to the traditional ones that are handed down from generation to generation in a given culture. The ability to create new idioms is based on the existence of a semantic and syntactic framework that provides a linguistic environment for such ingenuity (Udosen, et al., 2017).

Idioms used on the Copperbelt Province are a combination of two types: traditional and non-traditional idioms. Traditional idioms are culturally embedded and inflexible, whereas the non-traditional ones are hybrid, recreated and remodelled. On the one hand, traditional idioms are from the standardised form of Bemba. They are understood by first language speakers of Bemba on the Copperbelt. On the other hand, non-traditional idioms are not embedded in the Bemba traditional culture. They are influenced by linguistic borrowings from other languages and other factors driven by modern ways of living, highly characterised by multilingual practices. Therefore, they are flexible, evolve and (re)created. These idioms are understood mainly by speakers of Town Bemba (M40A) on the Copperbelt.

This study will demonstrate that idioms can also emerge from contemporary situations of language use. The study seeks to identify and collect idioms as they emerge among contemporary speakers of Town Bemba on the Copperbelt province of Zambia. Most of these idioms are associated with the youth. Therefore, the study focuses on exploring the use of idiomatic expressions in Town Bemba by describing the nature and meaning of idioms that exist in metropolitan multilingual spaces of the Copperbelt. This exploration of idioms in Bemba will be examined within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics and recontextualisation.

## 2. Review of related literature:

The literature reviewed shows that there is hardly any study designed to explore the linguistic nature of idioms in Town Bemba, let alone the creative aspects or processes involved in the formation of idioms particularly at a time when the Copperbelt is inundated by new ways of speaking largely associated with youth language popularly known as 'kopala lingo'. We thus reviewed literature from other languages in order to obtain insights in the linguistic nature of idioms.

The review did not yield anything closer to the current study except for one by Akanmu (2015). However, a few studies have been carried out on idioms in various African languages outside Zambia. For example, Mafela (2021) focused on Tshivenda idioms that are rooted in culture. The study argued that these idioms serve as a unique way for speakers to perceive the world, as they are closely connected to the community's culture and way of life. Mafela's study shows the intricate relationship between culture and language and in particular the development of idioms among speakers of the language. This means that idioms in Tshivenda are embedded in the socio-cultural life of the speakers and can thus be used to understand the nature of their society.

Similarly, Alati (2015) analysed the influence of idiomatic expressions on the behaviour of speakers and listeners in the Olunyole language. Results showed that idioms have a regulatory role

in promoting norms and values in society and by implication these idioms have a socio-cultural dimension which links language to society and the experience of members of society. Additionally, Akanmu (2015) explored the creation of new Yoruba idioms in radio programmes, identifying strategies such as neologisms, compounding, and phonoeasthetic coinages. This particular study is the closest to the current one which sought to explore how idioms are created by younger speakers of Town Bemba. However, what is not known is how idioms come about in Town Bemba.

Overall, the above selected studies provide some insights for the current study in many ways. First, they offer lenses with which to appreciate how idioms emerge from socio-cultural experience of language speakers and how by the same lenses we are able to link culture to discourse as expressed in idioms. Second, the studies provide insights on actual linguistic processes which give rise to different kinds of idioms and their meanings. Ultimately, these studies provide a basis for understanding Bemba idiom innovation on the Copperbelt province's multilingual spaces. Therefore, the focus of study was to examine how idioms are (re)created and (re)modelled by speakers of Town Bemba on the Copperbelt Province.

## 3. Theoretical Framework:

### 3.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics:

This study is undergirded by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This is a theory developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s. The theory was created as a framework for understanding how language is used to create meaning in different socio-cultural contexts. In this approach, language is analyzed for its functional and social purposes. The theory argues that language use is tied to context and that context is key in providing meaning. The theory further considers language as a semiotic resource for meaning-making available to speakers of language(s). Halliday holds that language is a systemic language resource for expressing meaning in a given context. Halliday

(2013, p.194) views language as a semiotic system and 'a system that makes meanings': a semogenic system. People use language to exchange meanings, and language has semiotic potential in that its description involves choice. Language is determined by the context in which it is used and it is this context which gives meaning to language. Therefore, SFL provides a firm ground for understanding idioms as they emerge from different socio-cultural contexts.

According to SFL, language is a system that performs three main functions. These are the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. Each function is realized through different linguistic resources and choices, such as grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structures. The ideational function of language enables language users to share experiences, describe events, and convey information about their internal and physical world. The interpersonal function of language is concerned with interaction and relationships between speakers and how such interactions give rise to meaning. In contrast, the textual function deals with the use of language to create texts that are coherent and meaningful. It is both ideational and interpersonal, as it is the language itself. Through this interplay of language functions, speakers can convey their intended messages.

Within the framework of systemic functional linguistics, language use can be analysed from the following four levels or strata. These are context, semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology-graphology (Bowcher, 2017:393). Context refers to situations or aspects of language use. These could be situational or cultural contexts in which language is used. Situational context refers to actual use of language in a given space and time taking into account the topic (field) participants, the nature of their relationships (tenor) and the mode in which language is being used while cultural context refers to a collection of beliefs, values and practices of a people that inform how language is used in a particular context, be it situational or otherwise.

Semantics deals with the meaning of language. It deals with the meaning of individual words and the meanings created by combining words and structures. Semantics examines how language represents and construes experience. Semantics seems to be the interface between context and lexicogrammar, whereas grammar is a meaning-making resource. Lexicogrammar refers to the language's grammar and vocabulary. This level involves the analysis of sentence structures, grammatical relationships, and the organisation of words into meaningful units. In other words, it is an underlying component of the meaning-making system of a language (Halliday, 2013). Lexicogrammatical choices contribute to the realisation of meanings in language.

Phonology-graphology deals with the sound and writing systems of language. Phonology handles speech sounds and their patterns, while graphology deals with the visual aspects of written language, including spelling and punctuation. They contribute to the overall meaning and function of language.

When applying systemic functional analysis to idioms, we examine how idiomatic expressions function within the more extensive linguistic and social system. Context as a level of analysis is described within the conceptual framework of field, tenor and mode. Bowcher (2017:394) describes Halliday's contextual parameters as follows:

1. Field – what is happening; the nature of the social action in which language is an essential component.
2. Tenor – who is taking part; the nature of the participants, their social statuses and roles in relation to one another and the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue.
3. Mode – what part the language is playing; the symbolic organisation of the text, and its status and function in the situation, including the channel (for example spoken or written mode) and the rhetorical mode.



The above interpret the social context of a text in the environment in which meanings are exchanged (Halliday, 1985:12). They are also encapsulated systemically in the text's features. Further, they function interdependently but as a configuration (Halliday, 1985:10; Hassan 1995: 231).

### 3.2. Recontextualisation:

The analytical concept of recontextualisation is useful in analysing the nature of some Town Bemba idioms. This notion is associated with Basil Bernstein (1996). Bernstein sought to examine the processes of production and reproduction of what would constitute to be knowledge through pedagogy and how these would impact different social groups. In later years, critical discourse analysts, adapted the concept in order to capture strategies and processes involved in representing and adapting events, knowledge or components of social practices in different context (e.g. Fairclough, 2003, Richardson & Wodak, 2009, Calsamiglia & van Dijk, 2004).

For discourse analysts, recontextualisation as an analytical concept focuses on the nature of the discursive and intertextual relations between various discourses and texts (Fairclough, 2003). Recontextualisation is about shifting of meaning contained in one discourse or text to another. The process entails transfer of an element from its original discourse or text in-context and reuse it in a new discourse with new meaning. The new context provides new meaning of the element or totally transforms it. Therefore, the main function of recontextualisation is to transform meaning and this meaning cannot be attained without linking certain texts and discourses.

Linell (2008) provides a triad framework of recontextualization: intertextual level where contextualization takes place within the same text or discourse with anaphoric and cataphoric referencing; intertextual level, recontextualization occurs across different discourse or texts mixing up their different contexts; and interdiscursive level where recontextualization recontextualization cuts across different types of

discourse or genres in a way in which one type of discourse is recontextualized or embedded in a configuration of another discourse type. We found interdiscursive recontextualization appropriate in analyzing some of the data in this study.

### 4. Materials and methods:

The study employed the experimental design to collect data on the realities of idiomatic expressions used on the Copperbelt. This design was used to extract language data in a controlled way, allowing the researcher to target the desired linguistic knowledge from subjects through several prompted questions. The data analyzed were generated as part of a larger project aimed at investigating the acquisition of idiomatic expressions in Town Bemba. Therefore, the present study purposefully sampled 20 participants, 12 of whom were male and eight females, from the Canaan Community of PP Zambia in Chililabombwe town. The settlement initially began as a shanty compound where informal labourers, primarily from Zambia and Congo, resided. In recent years, it has seen the unemployed and self-employed reside there.

### 5. Findings and discussions:

The study reveals an emergence of non-traditional idioms which represent the lived experiences of urban dwellers on the Copperbelt province of Zambia and this theme cuts across all the idioms to be discussed in this paper. One of such idioms is represented in example 1 below. You will note that the words in bold in the utterances are idiomatic expressions in Town Bemba which tells a story of survival, a shared experience of a typical Copperbelt urbanite.

- 1 *Naabuutuluka saana ine leelo ntantule.*  
1sg –get dusty- much myself –today  
Literal: 'I have been so dusty today.'  
Actual meaning: 'I have worked so hard today.'

In (1) above, *naabuutuluka* is derived from the verb *ukubuutuluka* 'to be dusty' or 'to become dusty'. The expression literally means being dusty, resulting from manual related labour involved in tilling the dry ground or mining

minerals underground. These are intense physical activities that require the use of much physical energy. In the process of breaking the ground, contact with dust is inevitable. Hence, the figurative meaning is 'working so hard.' In other words, the abstract concept of being dusty is mapped to the concrete idea of doing physical work requiring a lot of energy and resilience akin to the energy that one requires to work on the mines or in any related physical work.

For context within which this is used idiom arises: in most parts of urban cities in Zambia like the Copperbelt and Lusaka provinces, the labour market is dominated by the informal sector characterized by informal activities such as street vending, hawking, piecework or short term-based jobs. The life of urbanites, particularly those with low or no education at all is that of a struggle, a life where young people are ever hustling for bread and butter doing all sorts of menial work. It is from this context that such idioms, as in (1) emerge to illustrate the shared experiences of the youth, experiences of struggle and hard work. Therefore, *ukubutuluka* would further figuratively mean going through embarrassing moments in life in order to survive. It may also connote working so hard for nothing or for too little to survive or having a bad business day where sales are either low or there is nothing. In this regard, used as an idiom in combination with the verb *ntantule* 'the verb refers to the act of knocking off or taking leave from an activity, probably because it has not yielded the desired outcome or it has been a bad day. This meaning is reinforced by the verb *ukubutuluka* in the idiom. The meaning of this idiom can only be understood in context by people who have shared experiences.

### 5.1. Types of idiomatic expressions in Town Bemba:

The findings revealed four types of idiomatic expressions created and used on the Copperbelt Province in Town Bemba. As stated earlier, the expressions under discussion fall under non-traditional idioms. These are analyzed by examining language use in idioms in given social contexts using some aspects of the systemic

functional linguistics framework. The types of idioms identified are formed or recreated by blending lexemes, the recontextualization of meaning, coining expressions, and borrowing words or parts of words from other languages.

#### 5.1.1. Blending or mixing lexemes involving Bemba and English;

Some idiomatic expressions are a combination of words drawn from Town Bemba (with some of the words like *mudaala* originating from siZulu but now part of Town Bemba and Nyanja) and English, as shown in example (2):

2 *Mudaala ni my number zoona* (where *mudala* is from Town Bemba/siZulu; *ni* from either Bemba or Nyanja, *my number* from English and *zoona* taken from Nyanja to mean truly/frankly)

Lit: 'The big man is *my number* indeed.' Fig: 'I am quite close to the old man/the old man is a friend of mine.'

The insertion of the phrase 'my number' in example (2) neither affects the structure nor meaning of the sentence. This form of language use, where speakers use linguistic features drawn from different languages, is typical of multilingual discourses in urban setups (see Simachenya & Mambwe, 2023; Mambwe, 2014). Thus, the creation of idiomatic expressions with lexical items or linguistic features from different languages are multilingual ways of linguistic innovations inherent in urban languages like Town Bemba used in multilingual spaces.

In (3), a similar blend is seen, except in this particular one, only two languages are involved. These are Bemba and English.

Blending of words is a process of creating a new word by combining two or more words or linguistic features with different meanings or from different languages. Blends are a common linguistic feature of Copperbelt Bemba. Blended idiomatic expressions, as observed from language use in urban Bemba, are as follows:

3 A) *Bakaamba mwatubiikako muruler naifwe zoon*

Lit: 'Old man put us in the ruler indeed.'

Fig: 'Old man connect us to someone so we too can have opportunities.'

The word in (3) *mwatubiikako* is a Bemba expression to 'put us in' to connote consideration. As can be noted, the verb extension 'mwatubiikako' is followed by the Bemba locative 'mu' and then the noun 'ruler' in English. The insertion of this English word does not affect the structure or meaning of the expression.

In (3), it can be noted that speakers of Town Bemba, like other speakers of Bantu languages, do not only use words from different languages but dependent linguistic features from the Bantu nominal class system such as class prefixes (in this case *mu-* locative class 18 prefix) which are then attached to English words without compromising the grammatical forms from both languages. The example attests to how speakers of Copperbelt Bemba, without difficulty, formulate expressions by combining a prefix from Bemba 'mu-' with a stem from English 'ruler' to form a word which, when used with other words that form that idiomatic expression, conveys the intended meaning to fulfil the linguistic needs of a speaker. The word *muruler* fits the structure of the locative for nouns in class 18 while transforming the actual meaning of the English word 'ruler' which, in this case, has been reconstituted as a resource in creating a new word with a different meaning, opportunities. Compare with (4) below:

4 *Ukusha mirror*

Literal: 'To leave a mirror'

Figurative: 'To do or say something without thinking.'

In the expression above (4), linguistic features drawn from Bemba 'ukusha' and 'mirror' to create an expression in Town Bemba whose meaning is 'doing or saying something without thinking'. These meanings would be dependent on the context of use. It fits the form and function of an idiomatic phrase of Standard Bemba. The first part is the to-infinitive, which literally means to

'leave' in Bemba, whereas the second lexeme of this expression is from English. A mirror is used to look at one's reflection and observe if their appearance is presentable to the world. Likewise, without a mirror, one cannot tell whether their appearance is appealing to the onlookers. This expression maps the idea of leaving the mirror on saying/doing something before ensuring that what is said reflects well on both the speaker and the hearer.

### 5.1.2. Recontextualization of meaning:

The study has found that in addition to Town Bemba, there are idioms that consist of phrases made from rural Bemba and English. There are also non-traditional idioms created from both rural Bemba and another Zambian language, particularly Nyanja (N31). When expressions are innovated in this way, there is a semantic change or shift through recontextualization. This process involves a shift in meaning from one discourse or text to another in different contexts of use. It is common for words or phrases to take on a new meaning that is completely different from the original discourse or text in the source language or in a different context of use. This phenomenon occurs naturally as languages cross linguistic and socio-cultural boundaries and adapt to communication needs (Mambwe, 2014; Mambwe & Jimaima, 2019; Mambwe & Fernando, 2016; Mambwe, Mangi & Njobvu, 2024)). This linguistic phenomenon is exemplified in (5) below:

5 *Ukujaila* (taken from Town Nyanja and adapted into Town Bemba)

Literal: 'To get used to'

Figurative: 'To be clever/ smart'

The above examples (5) demonstrate how words or meaning can be recontextualised through some idiomatic expressions in Town Bemba. In this case, the expressions in (5) have their source from Nyanja with some Bemba pronunciation and nominal augment *u-* associated with Bemba nouns and verbs attached to the prefix of class 12 in Nyanja to render the form *uku-*. Thus, the source

of the verb *kujaila*, 'to be used to,' is Nyanja, the primary lingua franca of Lusaka and Eastern provinces of Zambia. The idiomatic meanings of the recreated expressions are far in interpretation from the original word, as seen in the examples above. The word *kujaila* is derived from the Nyanja verb *kujaila*, 'to be used to' and belongs to the domain of habits or habit formation. However, when used in a different context as indicated by Bemba the interpretation is altered. The meaning is generated and communicated to the hearer in the new context in which the expression has been used. In the expression *ukujaila*, the semantic field is 'intelligence' and has no connection to habits. It is important to note that context affects the meaning of the expression. This expression is used ordinarily by language users on the Copperbelt among youths and adults. The expression could sometimes be used by interlocutors to express a sense of solidarity among peers or affirm solidarity to the group (see Mukonde et al, 2023). The phonology of the source language of the word is adopted.

#### 6 *Iceme*

Literal: 'Shepherd yourself'

Figurative: 'Behave yourself'

The expression mentioned in (6) originates from the noun 'umucemi', which means 'shepherd'. Typically, a shepherd is responsible for taking care of a flock of sheep. 'Shepherd yourself' can be interpreted to mean that one should take responsibility for their own well-being, much like a shepherd guides sheep to a safe haven without causing them any harm. In this context, it can be used as a warning or a reminder to be careful about one's words and actions to avoid offending others.

#### 7 *Ukunukuka*

Literal: 'to get uprooted'

Figurative: to die or take leave'

This phrase is taken from the act of uprooting a plant from the soil in order to destroy it, *-nukula* 'uproot'. The phrase has been recontextualized to connote death or forcefully removing someone

from their comfortable space or simply to refer to the act of leaving one place to another.

#### 8 *Ukupyamo*

Literal: 'to get burned inside'

Figurative: 'to leave'

This idiom can be found used in statements like *napyamo* 'I have left' or imperatives like *pyamo* 'you leave or go'.

The idiom is taken from the verbal root *-pya* 'burn' and with a clitic *-mo* to form the phrase *ukupyamo*. Thus the actual meaning has completely been recontextualized to mean something else other than refer to any act of burning.

### 5.1.3. Coined Expressions:

In addition to the idioms provided above, Town Bemba constitutes idiomatic phrases that are coined. Coinages are new inventions or creations of expressions that have never existed in a given language before, as seen in the idiomatic expressions below:

#### 9 *Ukuzanda*

Figurative: 'To be bad (of a situation)/ or infuriated (of a person)

Speakers of the variety of Bemba under discussion seem unable to give the literal meaning of the idiomatic expressions in (9) because their actual meanings do not relate to any existing word or words other than the fact that they take up some linguistic features from Bemba and Nyanja. These coinages become part of the everyday language where users learn to use them appropriately. The invented expressions have phonological features that are absent in Standard Bemba and some varieties of Bemba but are present in English and other Zambian languages. As observed in the example, the idiom (9) from urban Bemba has a voiced alveolar fricative [z]. However, it is essential to note that the coined expressions generally fit in the morphological structure of Bemba. For example, the use of the class 12 prefix *uku-*, the presence of a verbal root *-zanda* 'be bad/infuriated' whose primary source is Town



Nyanja. We could argue here that while the expression is a coinage, it still entertains the idea of blending linguistic features from other languages, such as Nyanja. It can further be argued that the phone [z] is taken from Town Nyanja, which exists in its sound system. Another coinage which in Copperbelt Bemba is shown (10) below:

10 *Ukudedesha*

*Figurative: 'to prepare a sumptuous meal.*

In the expression, *ukudedesha* (10), the use of voiced alveolar stop [d], which is not prenasalised, can be noted. This particular feature is present in Nyanja. Thus, the argument that the coinage exploits resources from another language. In Standard Bemba, a voiced alveolar stop is always prenasalised. The above examples demonstrate that new words or expressions emerge from combining features from various languages and sounds within multilingual environments. Thus, the mobility of languages across the linguistic divide (Mambwe, 2014). It is through the utilization of the available linguistic resources that speakers can form these novel words and expressions.

## 6. Conclusion:

The study reveals that individual words do not determine the interpretation of idioms. Their constituents contribute to the overall figurative meaning. Furthermore, idioms involve a shift in semantics, where words and phrases take on a new meaning in the context of use. In other words, metaphors are employed in Bemba idioms to convey abstract or nuanced meanings by likening one thing to another in a non-literal way. Although the structure of idiomatic expressions adheres to the language's syntactic rules, semantics, field (the topic for discussion), tenor (social roles and affiliation), and mode (context of use and cohesion) influence their interpretation in multilingual spaces under investigation (Myhill, 2018).

This study has explored the multilingual realities of language contact between English, Bemba, and other Zambian languages, particularly Nyanja, in

the urban areas of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. The analysis of idiomatic expressions has demonstrated the creativity of multilingual speakers and how idioms are constantly remodelled and recreated through the influence of multilingualism. The article has also highlighted how language users in urban linguistic spaces create expressions by blending, conflating, and converging multiple languages, such as English, Bemba, and Nyanja, which form their linguistic repertoires.

Like traditional idioms, non-traditional idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the meanings of their words. Therefore, the context in which they are used reveals the figurative and users 'intended meaning. Working out the meaning in any context hinges on the field, tenor, and mode.

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