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## The Language of the City: Town Bemba as Urban Hybridity

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*This article describes the linguistic variety Town Bemba (Zambia) and considers its implications for the study of linguistic heteroglossia and the experience of modernity. I propose that Town Bemba be understood as a cover term for a set of Bemba-based multilingual practices that exemplify urbanity but need not be tied to urban locales. The structural, ideological, and sociocultural features of Town Bemba are examined using data from naturally occurring discourse collected in Zambia.*

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“I have constructed in my mind a model city from which all possible cities can be deduced,” Kublai said. “It contains everything corresponding to the norm. Since the cities that exist diverge in varying degree from the norm, I need only foresee the exceptions to the norm and calculate the most probable combinations.”

“I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all the others,” Marco answered. “It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions. If such a city is the most improbable, by reducing the number of abnormal elements, we increase the probability that the city really exists.” [Calvino 1974:69]

Throughout history, African cities have been major sites of cultural blending, innovation, fluidity, and multilingualism.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it could even be said that stretching from Casablanca to Cape Town, from Cairo to Kinshasa, from the Cameroonian grasslands to Great Zimbabwe, African cultures—*not just cities*—have been characterized more by cultural dynamism, invention, and hybridization than most conventional views of African cultures would admit (Guyer 1996). The standard model

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of “a culture” aligned with “a people, a place, and a language” is a model that has real significance in manifold ways—as it structures human experience, drives political battles over identity and representation, guides public policy campaigns, and orients research inquiries into the nature of culture. But it also hides the constructed and even messy nature of the relations between language, place, people, and culture, and it hides the possibility that these entities themselves are not as stable and as singular as they are often imagined to be.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, Calvino suggests that regardless of the starting point—making all inferences from the perspective of either the norm or the deviation—Marco Polo and Kublai Kahn end up seeing *the same city*. This implicit idea that “the city” is ultimately definable as an oscillation between a normative model and a jumble of incongruities, contradictions, and innovations is very much like the model of centripetal and centrifugal forces in language proposed by Bakhtin. Moreover, Calvino’s suggestion that the tensions between these two poles are often hidden from view resonates very strongly with Bakhtin’s more general observation that even the most ostensibly monolingual situations are heteroglossic:

[A]t any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present. [Bakhtin 1981:291]

In any given moment of language use, various heteroglossic elements—for example, the ideological tensions and archaeological layers within language—may be evident to a speaker, and may even be strategically mobilized to achieve a particular effect. The degree to which speakers are conscious of such linguistic heteroglossia, and what to make of this both socially and psychologically, has been an enduring interest of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics from their foundations up to the present.

Building on these concerns, this article examines a particular city language in Africa: Town Bemba, a variety of the Bemba language spoken in Zambia.<sup>3</sup> In Town Bemba, innovation and explicit heteroglossia are the norm. Town Bemba is in dynamic interaction with the varieties of English that exist in Zambia, it serves as a lingua franca for many urbanites of diverse language backgrounds, and it is also the first language of many Zambians. For these reasons, since it was first documented in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Town Bemba has been somewhat of a moving target.<sup>4</sup> It is not evident precisely what “it” is, and at the same time it is evident that there is a great deal of systematicity in Town Bemba, as “it” builds on a Bemba base. Following Richardson (1961), I use the phrase “Town Bemba” as a general cover term to encompass what are perhaps several closely related varieties and registers, but which paradoxically push the language of documentation to use singular nouns and pronouns to capture this plurality.

### Town Bemba as Moving Target

The case of Town Bemba is a curious story of a linguistic variety that has a name but no fixed identity. Town Bemba is spoken in all urban and some rural areas of Zambia, and has roughly 2 to 3 million speakers. To date, there has been no full-length treatment of the language. With the exception of a study by Kashoki (1972), it has been largely ignored by local researchers, dubious of its merit as a topic of serious scholarly inquiry. Fortunately, its linguistic and sociolinguistic complexity have been detailed by several pioneering studies from the late 1950s onward.<sup>5</sup> The present essay is part of a larger study that builds on this earlier work. My goals in the long-term research are to produce a linguistic description of Town Bemba and to develop a sociocultural analysis of the significance of the linguistic hybridity and innovation that it exemplifies.<sup>6</sup> The first results of this work are presented here.

At the most general level, I propose that Town Bemba be understood as a cover term for a set of Bemba-based multilingual practices that exemplify urbanity but need not be tied exclusively to urban locales. While the precise degree of difference varies across speaker and context, Town Bemba's phonology, morphology, and syntax are very close to those of standard Bemba (Kashoki 1972; Richardson 1963). In actual usage, roughly 60 to 90 percent of the forms in a given stretch of Town Bemba discourse are standard Bemba forms. But Town Bemba features, in contrast to standard and rural Bemba, a large number of English loans, a smaller set of words derived from Nyanja (another Zambian lingua franca) and the mining pidgin Fanagalo, a high degree of Bemba-based linguistic coinage, and what might be considered extensive Bemba-English codeswitching or mixing.

Culturally, Town Bemba is positioned in contrast to a more "pure," rural Bemba. As such, Town Bemba often carries the contradictory social values of being both a prestigious, cosmopolitan code *and* a corrupted, even devious code. Using Town Bemba can bring elements of both urban sophistication and the urban underbelly into play. In a much less glamorous sense, most of the time the use of Town Bemba is relatively *unmarked*: it is simply the normal "urban" and "modern"—and markedly "*not rural*" or "*not old-fashioned*"—variety. Thus, Town Bemba encompasses everything from the tough street language of *mishanga* boys (street vendors who sell individual cigarettes) to the playful language of upper-class university students, from the sophisticated language of businesspeople to the everyday language of many urban families. There are in a sense several registers of Town Bemba: a Street Town Bemba, an Elite Town Bemba, a Smooth Town Bemba, and a Common or Everyday Town Bemba. All of these varieties have strong connections with notions of "modern urban life" in contrast to "traditional rural life," but they also can have widely differing social connotations: a rough, economically harsh, and even criminal subculture; a trendy and playful youth subculture; a sophisticated, cosmopolitan lifestyle; or simply, the generic urban orientation.

Nearly 40 years ago Town Bemba was documented as a relatively unstable variety (Epstein 1959). In 1961, Richardson termed Town Bemba "an

ill-defined entity" (1961:36). Thus my claim that Town Bemba is not really one thing is not a particularly new or unique claim. But what is remarkable is that, given this stretch of time, Town Bemba is still a relatively diffused (versus focused) variety.<sup>7</sup> Why is this so? Bemba has been used as a dominant language in the urban copper mining areas of Zambia since the late 1920s. There are now third- and fourth-generation urbanites growing up in these areas, speaking an urban variety of Bemba as their first language. Under such conditions we might expect Town Bemba to become more focused and more well-defined from both an analytical and a native speaker perspective.

But I would venture that Town Bemba is to a great degree perceived and manifested as a fluid code, because "it" quintessentially is a language of "the city" and "the modern experience"—both of which depend on the ideas of flux, hybridity, newness, and experimentation in the Zambian cultural context. The heteroglossic nature of Town Bemba thus reflects the heterogeneous nature of urban life and the way that notions of modernity have taken root in Zambia. As such, Town Bemba exemplifies the Bakhtinian idea that "languages live a real life, [as] they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 1981:292). Moreover, Town Bemba gains its value in a broader political economy of languages in which other codes—such as English and rural Bemba—are viewed as more stabilized and focused, and as more aligned with values that contrast with the pulse of Zambian urban life.

While there are *regular patterns* to the linguistic innovation and code mixing in Town Bemba, in many senses Town Bemba's *fluidity* is more important at a sociocultural level than is its stability. In addition, it is clear that Town Bemba is not limited to towns. It is spoken in rural areas along with more standard varieties of Bemba. Significantly, one can be in a rural area and speak the language of the city. Moreover, the Zambian case strongly suggests that even "the city" and "the urban" are cultural concepts that may be partially (but not totally) detached from locale (Ferguson 1992; also see Low 1996). As such, they are deeply linked to the notions of cosmopolitanism, modernity, excitement, and social prestige that have characterized a dynamic Zambian culture since the early colonial period.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, Town Bemba—in all of its hybridity, creativity, elusiveness, and implicit humor—functions as an icon, index, and medium of a major component of modern life in contemporary Zambia.

### Thinking about Hybridity: Pidgin/Creole Connections and the History of an Error

In some corners, the case of Town Bemba is famous as one of the "African pidgins." Town Bemba exemplifies several processes common to pidginization, creolization, and koineization, and this bears further study. For example, there is some leveling of the Bemba tense system, a pattern of regularizing irregular verbs, and some reduction of tone and vowel length distinctions.<sup>9</sup> Town Bemba is a lingua franca and is spoken by nonnative Bemba speakers. But it is also a first language of many urbanites, many of

whom are ethnically Bemba. In both diachronic and synchronic terms, it is better understood not as a pidgin, but as a variety of Bemba.

Along with this classification as a pidgin language, Town Bemba has been mistakenly characterized as a reduced or simplified language. For example, Hancock writes that Town Bemba is one of the “simplified indigenous African languages” in use in Southern Africa (1971:519, also see Hancock 1981:642). While Town Bemba does exhibit *minor* morphological simplification in comparison to rural Bemba, there is no evidence that it was ever a minimal communication code. Town Bemba is very complex linguistically, even if there is some morphological reduction.

Most strikingly, Hancock’s classification (either knowingly or unknowingly) reproduces the stereotype that non-Western contact languages are reduced (and perhaps deficient) linguistic varieties. For example, while Hancock includes references to Richardson’s and Epstein’s work, his brief mention of Town Bemba disregards what these authors demonstrate about Town Bemba’s linguistic complexity. The classification error is then magnified when Crystal, using Hancock (1971) as a source, lists Town Bemba under the category of “Zambian Pidgins” (1987:339). This multileveled misreading of sources is itself a fascinating case, one which raises questions not only about the history of scholarship, but also about the stereotypes and misconceptions that inform Western thinking about both multilingualism in general and colonial and postcolonial speech communities in particular (see Irvine 1995).

It appears that the “Town Bemba as pidgin” error began and was then perpetuated via a grouping of Town Bemba with Fanagalo, another hybrid language, which interacted with varieties of Bemba on the Zambian Copperbelt between the 1920s and the 1950s (see Cole 1953; Epstein 1959). Fanagalo is a pidgin language used by nonnative speakers in mining contexts throughout Southern Africa; it builds primarily on Zulu, Afrikaans, and English. A more comprehensive investigation of Fanagalo is also needed, and evidence suggests that “it” is also just as multifaceted and “ill-defined” as Town Bemba (Cole 1953).

By now, the conventional model of the pidgin as a minimalist language has been roundly critiqued within pidgin and creole linguistics (Jourdan 1991). What has not been updated, however, is the classification of Town Bemba as a pidgin. Hancock’s label continues to live on in even the most recent expert compendia (e.g., Smith 1995:357). For reasons developed below, I propose that Town Bemba is better understood as a variety of Bemba or a hybrid language based on Bemba. But there is much to be gained by considering the case of Town Bemba within the purview of pidgin and creole linguistics. It is a language that was—and is—born out of languages in contact. Moreover, it has extensive similarities with many pidgin and creole varieties, in terms of its historical emergence, linguistic structure, modes of use, and ideological import.<sup>10</sup>

More generally, I believe the case of Town Bemba highlights the need for a rethinking of the nature of languages in contact (*lingua francas*, pidgins, and so on), in conjunction with a more developed model of the sociocultural and linguistic complexity of speech communities (see McWhorter 1996;

Mufwene 1996). Coupled with this need, it is critically important to attend to the role of language ideologies in the perception and analysis of such linguistic heteroglossia.<sup>11</sup> The perceptions of speaker and analyst are equally at issue and may not match. For example, several scholars have shown that in many cases of languages in contact, code boundaries that appear distinct at a *formal* linguistic level are not *experienced* or even functionally operating as such in contexts of use.<sup>12</sup> Other challenges include linguistic forms that have *simultaneous* membership in two codes—what Woolard (this issue) has termed “bivalency.” A related matter is the hybridity of forms that have arisen historically from the interaction of two languages, but that in contemporary use are not viewed as segmentable or bivalent by native speakers. Researchers such as Errington (1985), Gal (1987), and Hill and Hill (1986) have documented how, in such situations, people’s patterns of use and the functional valency of their uses are inflected with culturally specific language ideologies about, for example, social boundaries, social change, cultural politics, and language purity.

One very important new direction in this work is thus to investigate how such language ideologies play a role in processes of language change and stabilization. For example, how do language ideologies factor into situations where speakers perceive the forms of use that lie at the intersection of two codes as constituting an altogether distinct, third language? From an analytical standpoint, what is the status of these hybrid or creolized forms? Curiously, what is problematic for the linguist is not always (or perhaps even rarely) problematic for the speaker. Why is this so? Such dilemmas of segmentation pose important challenges for linguistic analysis, for speakers, and for speakers-as-analysts alike, and they foreground one of the most fundamental issues of linguistic research, namely, what counts as “a code”? These dilemmas of code identification and code boundaries also echo some of the current struggles over the troubled concept of culture in contemporary anthropology. At the risk of raising more questions here than answers, I believe this is the terrain where the study of Town Bemba must take place.

### The Meanings of Multilingualism in Zambia

Zambia has 73 different officially recognized ethnic groups within its borders. While nearly all of these ethnic groups claim to speak their own unique language, the most comprehensive studies suggest that there are between 15 and 20 distinct (non-mutually intelligible) “language groupings” in the country (Kashoki 1978a). Table 1 lists the eight most widely spoken languages: Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Luvale, Kaonde, Lunda, and English. These are also the eight languages officially sanctioned by the state for use in education, mass media, and government (Spitulnik 1998). English is the official national language, the primary medium of instruction in the school system from grade three onward, and the only language of higher education and the daily newspapers. It is also the primary language of economic advancement in the formal sector.

English, Bemba, and Nyanja have the greatest number of speakers nationwide, and they serve as the country’s major lingua francas. In the capital

**Table 1**  
**Language, ethnicity, and multilingualism in Zambia**  
**(Percent of national population)**

	Ethnic population	First language speakers	Speakers overall
Bemba	19%	31%	56%
Nyanja	16 <sup>a</sup>	16	42
Tonga	11	16	23
Lozi	6	9	17
Luvale	2	6	8
Kaonde	3	3	7
Lunda	3	3	5
English	—	—	26
Other	40	16	

*Source:* Compiled from Kashoki 1978a, which integrates the results of three surveys conducted between 1969 and 1973. Columns 1, 2, and 3 are drawn from Kashoki's tables 1:1, 1:10, and 1:11, respectively. The central column lists the overall percentage of respondents who claim to speak the language or a very closely related dialect as their first language. Figures are rounded off to whole numbers.

<sup>a</sup> In Zambia, Nyanja is the name of a language, not an ethnic group. The three major ethnic groups that speak varieties of Nyanja as a first language are Ngoni (6% of the national population), Nsenga (5%), and Chewa (5%).

city of Lusaka, an urban variety known as Town Nyanja is pervasive. It is quite analogous to Town Bemba, but little documented (see Serpell 1978). Extensive urban-urban migration, interethnic marriage, and a high degree of multilingualism have yielded a situation where over half of the national population currently speaks Bemba. This is illustrated in Tables 1–4, which report the findings of the most recent comprehensive sociolinguistic surveys in Zambia, conducted nearly 30 years ago. The lack of more recent data reflects the political volatility of doing these kinds of sociolinguistic censuses. To update the figures, we may consider that over the past 30 years, ethnic populations have remained relatively stable, English competence has increased dramatically, Town Bemba has spread even more, and overall multilingualism has also increased. Thus, the first two columns of Table 1 roughly mirror the present situation, but the corresponding numbers on multilingualism (Tables 2–4) would all be higher now.

**Table 2**  
**Mean number of languages spoken by region**

all Zambia	2.2
rural Zambia	1.9
urban Zambia	2.8

*Source:* Based on Kashoki 1978a, table 1:11.



**Table 3**  
**Speakers of Zambia's three major lingua francas**  
**(Percent of respondents claiming to speak the language in each region)**

	Bemba	Nyanja	English
all Zambia	56%	42%	26%
rural Zambia	46	37	19
urban Zambia	84	57	45

*Source:* Based on Kashoki 1978a, table 1:6.

As indicated in Table 1, the number of people who speak Bemba extends far beyond the Bemba ethnic population and the other groups who speak Bemba or closely related dialects as a first language. Table 3 illustrates the extremely high level of Bemba language competence in urban areas, as well as the pervasiveness of Zambia's other two lingua francas, Nyanja and English. Urban varieties of Bemba reflect this dynamic language situation where Bemba exists side-by-side with several other languages, most prominently English and Nyanja (Table 4). In addition, Table 4 shows the dramatic difference between first-language speakers of Bemba in urban areas and overall Bemba usage in urban areas. For example, nearly everyone in the Copperbelt cities speaks Bemba, but only half speak it as a first language.

What these numbers do not show is the prevalence of urban varieties of Bemba. The relative preponderance of urban and rural varieties has never been quantified by a sociolinguistic survey. I estimate that roughly two-thirds of the urbanites who self-report as speaking Bemba speak an urban variety of the language and may be considered speakers of Town Bemba. This translates as approximately 2.2 million speakers in 1998.<sup>13</sup>

The interactions and the ideological valencies of the many distinct varieties within Zambia's multilingual landscape are remarkably complex. For example, several different Englishes interact with different varieties of Bemba, Nyanja, and other Zambian languages. There are varieties of British English, American English, Zambian English, and English from neighboring

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of Zambia's three lingua francas in urban areas**  
**(Percent of respondents claiming to speak the language in each urban region)**

	Bemba		Nyanja		English	
	First language	Total	First language	Total	First language	Total
Copperbelt	47%	96%	10%	39%	—	47%
Kabwe	34	86	27	68	1	54
Lusaka	14	58	36	95	—	37
Livingstone	9	44	13	87	—	49

*Source:* Based on Kashoki 1978a, tables 1:8 and 1:10.

Zimbabwe and South Africa. In a study of codeswitching and code choice in urban Zambia, Siachitema writes that English is highly valued as “an appeal to a new order of things” (1991:489). Moreover, it “signifies status in the modern sense, which is not based on the central concept of age, but instead on education and material success” (1991:490). These valencies of English motivate not only code choice but certain English loans and mixes within Town Bemba, as shown below. But the position of English as a code is more nuanced than Siachitema indicates, mainly because several varieties of English are at issue here. Standard British English (Received Pronunciation [RP]) is the reference point for “correct” English in Zambia, but it is also stigmatized in many contexts of use because it is viewed as artificial and “un-Zambian” (Spitulnik 1996:174 ff.). More pervasive is a variety known as *Zambian English*, which itself has great internal variation and several corresponding social meanings ranging from “educated” and “sophisticated” to “naïve” and “inept.” *Zambian English* differs from RP primarily at a phonological level, and has virtually no lexical input from *Zambian languages*.<sup>14</sup>

As both Serpell (1982) and Moody (1985) have argued, the complicated story of multilingual speech patterns in Zambia must also take into account the fact that language proficiency in second and third languages is often partial. Many Zambians use English extensively, but are not full bilinguals. Thus, Moody writes, Zambia is moving away from a strict diglossic situation with coordinate bilinguals, to a situation where several languages are fused together within a single system that is part of a “distinctive *Zambian urban culture*” (1985:182 et passim; also see Serpell 1982).

### Standard Bemba and Town Bemba Beginnings

Because of the political importance of the Bemba kingdom and the extensive reach of the Bemba language in Northern Rhodesia (colonial Zambia),<sup>15</sup> Bemba was targeted as a major language for the production of religious and educational materials in the early 1900s. The White Fathers missionaries published the earliest written texts on and in Bemba, including the first Bemba grammar in 1907 and the first Bemba translation of the New Testament in 1923. Bemba was also selected by the colonial administration as one of the four main indigenous languages (along with Lozi, Nyanja, and Tonga) to be used in education and mass media.<sup>16</sup>

The notion of standard Bemba derives from rural Bemba, and in particular the Bemba language from the villages at the center of Bemba royal and ritual life, Chitimukulu and Chinsali, and from the neighboring town of Kasama. This variety of Bemba, termed “central Bemba,” has been the reference point for Bemba language standardization since the early colonial days. It is most prominently represented and upheld across the *Zambian nation* in the Bemba translation of the Bible, novels and school textbooks published in Bemba, government documents in Bemba, and the Bemba of radio newscasters. There is no specialized institutional body charged with Bemba language standardization or preservation. But the primary gatekeeper for a Bemba standard is the *Zambian Ministry of Education*. It has

issued guidelines for standardized orthography and its Curriculum Development Centre has a Bemba language task force that makes decisions about textbook revisions.

The Bemba language grouping encompasses roughly 20 varieties or dialects.<sup>17</sup> Many of these varieties have been in close interaction with each other for as many as 300 to 500 years, since the migration of their related ancestors into the northern Zambian region from central Africa. Exposure to the variety of central Bemba in particular was most likely quite high during the late precolonial period, due to the expansive Bemba political structure, tribute system, and army that operated throughout the region during the entire 19th century (Roberts 1976).

With the extensive migration of Bemba-speaking peoples to the mining areas of the Copperbelt from the late 1920s onward, the language's range expanded further. By the late 1940s, an urban variety of Bemba had become well-established as the lingua franca of the Copperbelt region. It was a shared language of communication for speakers of several linguistic backgrounds, including first language speakers of Tonga, Nyanja, and Lozi. The spread of Bemba in this multilingual context was facilitated by the numerical dominance of migrant laborers from Bemba-speaking regions, who constituted over 60 percent of the workforce. Two other contributing factors also appear to be involved in Bemba's tenacity and in Town Bemba's development, both of which are similar to contexts of koineization. First, the language indigenous to the Copperbelt region, Lamba, is very closely related to Bemba.<sup>18</sup> And second, the other Bantu languages which serve(d) as urbanites' first languages are closely related genetically. They have similar grammatical structures, some of the same inflectional morphemes, and high rates of cognates in their basic lexicons (Ohannessian and Kashoki 1978).

Urban varieties of Bemba have several names, including the following, which occurred in unprompted responses during research interviews: Town Bemba, Copperbelt Bemba, *IchiBemba cakuKopabelt* 'Bemba of the Copperbelt,' *ChiKopabeeluti* or *ChiKopabelti* (lit. 'language of the Copperbelt'), *citundu cakukalale* 'the language of town' or *ChiTauni* (lit. 'language of town'), *IchiBemba ca bashimaini* 'Bemba of the miners,' *Chilapalapa* (also a name for Fanagalo), *ChiLambwaza* (lit. 'the language of the lazy Lamba'<sup>19</sup>), and *ChiJoza* (lit. 'the language of Joes' [guys]). These last two names designate urban varieties characteristic of the urban youth and the urban criminal culture. More complete documentation is needed on these varieties and their degrees of overlap with the more unmarked varieties of Town Bemba.<sup>20</sup>

Following Richardson (1961), I use "Town Bemba" as the general cover term for these varieties. The less regionally specific term is preferable, because it de-focuses emphasis on the Copperbelt and can denote the urban varieties of Bemba that by now exist in all regions across Zambia, including the Northern Province capital of Kasama (estimated population 40,000); the Copperbelt cities of Mufulira, Kitwe, Luanshya, Chingola, Ndola, and Chililabombwe, with their combined population of roughly 1.6 million; Zambia's capital city Lusaka (estimated population 1.2 million); and the nation's southernmost city, Livingstone (estimated population 100,000).<sup>21</sup> The indigenous ethnic languages of the towns where Town Bemba is found include

Bemba, Lamba, Lenje, Soli, Tonga, Nyanja, and Lozi.<sup>22</sup> All are Bantu languages, but Lamba is the only one that belongs to the same language/dialect cluster as Bemba.

Town Bemba is marked most significantly, in contrast to rural Bemba or the standard Bemba of Bibles, textbooks, and radio newscasters, by a great number of English loanwords, a high degree of linguistic coinage within Bemba, and considerable Bemba-English codeswitching/mixing. In addition, Town Bemba exhibits an extremely high number of innovative linguistic adoptions from varieties of British English and American English, which enter the Zambian arena primarily through international business and imported media such as television programs and recorded music (Spitulnik 1996).

From its beginnings, the linguistic makeup and sociolinguistic valency of Town Bemba has reflected and responded to the complex politics of African urbanization, identity formation, and colonial contact. For example, Epstein (1959) argues that Town Bemba emerged as a local language of resistance. He hypothesizes that it developed in direct opposition to the colonial pidgin language, Fanagalo, which was tied primarily to the mining workplace and other exploitative contexts of colonial labor.<sup>23</sup> In a different vein, Richardson writes that Town Bemba developed politically in opposition to the weight of traditional cultural authority. He states that

[Town Bemba] is a political symbol, a conscious reaction against the old way of life in which one is bound by irksome rules created by those in authority. In towns this authority is symbolically defied by abandoning traditional modes of speech and adopting a new intertribal language which. . . unites town Africans against all comers. [1964:190]

It is clear that Town Bemba did not develop primarily as a minimal code to facilitate communication across speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds (i.e., akin to a rudimentary pidgin lingua franca). It developed out of a *multiply articulated relationship* with the many codes that came into contact in the newly industrialized Copperbelt. In this political economy of languages, Town Bemba emerged in relation to the codes of the "modern" and "oppressive" English speakers, the "traditional" and "rural" Bemba speakers, the "local" Lamba language, the "deficient" and "degrading" pidgin Fanagalo, and the numerous other languages that migrant laborers brought into the urban milieu. As Town Bemba continued on this path of innovation, blending, and contrast into the postcolonial era, it retained and even amplified its connections with the connotations of "modern," "non-traditional," and "urban" life. These connections are shown below.

### Praise and Condemnation for Town Bemba

Zambians have their own stereotypes about what Town Bemba is and what it is not. Comments range from disparagement and dismay to admiration and emulation. Examples of the latter include the remarks of 32-year-old Charlie Nkosana, a lifetime urbanite who was working as a formal sector businessman in Lusaka when I interviewed him:

This guy is backward from the village. This guy in town is *on*. And he really wants to be *switched on*. In English, he wants to “*yeah, yeah*.” You know, that kind of thing. . . In Bemba, he really wants to, you know, be *on*.<sup>24</sup>

This evaluation is echoed in the more concise, but less dramatic observation by Joseph Kabwe, a 26-year-old office worker living in the small town of Kasama: “On the Copperbelt they speak jacked-up Bemba.” For both of these young men, Town Bemba is a prestigious cosmopolitan code, in synch with the electric excitement (both real and imagined) of the city.

Significantly, many commentators who talk about language mixing or language corruption use English along with Bemba. Some do not seem to notice this mixing, some do it jokingly, as a tongue-in-cheek illustration of their point, and still others catch themselves, laugh, and “correct” themselves in “pure” Bemba.<sup>25</sup> For example, Michael Tompwe, a 32-year-old resident of Chitimukulu village (the political center of the Bemba chieftainship), expressed his concern about language contamination in radio broadcasting:

*Pamo ngefyo baleelufyanya aba ku broadcasting, aba Bemba. Baleebikamo ne citundu cimbi. Eco basacita combine. Mixed. Ifilya nomba tacumfwika bwino ichi Bemba, iyo. Cilecepelako fye amaka.*<sup>26</sup>

Like what they are doing wrong, those in broadcasting, the Bembas. They add in another language. It's that they combine. Mixed. Nowadays it does not sound like good Bemba, no. It keeps on getting weakened [diluted].

As the eldest son of one of the two headmen in the Chitimukulu center, Mr. Tompwe is a strong Bemba purist, but he is also quite competent in English (having completed grade nine) and is fairly progressive. He works at the local health clinic and has spent most of his life in this rural area. Mr. Tompwe did not seem to view his own language mixing as a contradiction of the point he was making. Likewise, Charlie Nkosana, the lifetime urbanite who describes himself as *muBemba wa half* ‘half-Bemba,’<sup>27</sup> also made the same point with a hybrid expression: *Chilapalapa ciliba mixed* ‘Chilapalapa is mixed.’ Either of these assertions could easily be expressed in standard Bemba, using Bemba synonyms for “mix” and “combine.” For example, one of my hosts, Simon Nkamba, an ardent Bemba purist and educator as well as a frequent international traveler, explained, *Balesansha ne citundu cabo* ‘They mix their language.’

Most Zambians view Town Bemba as deficient or corrupted, even if they praise it and use it. For example, Joseph Kabwe, a creative Town Bemba user who lives in the fairly small and remote town of Kasama, described people who put English in their Bemba as *balilemana* ‘they are lame.’ Even Town Bemba enthusiast Charlie Nkosana lamented, *Twalionaika* ‘We [our ways of speaking] are completely collapsed, ruined.’ Another urbanite explained, “Copperbelt Bemba is corrupt, and people are always making up words and acting as if they had been around for a long time.” The ruined and artificial Town Bemba is contrasted with a Bemba which is viewed as “pure,” “deep,” “fluent,” and “perfect.” The most pervasive name for this rural reference point is *ichi Bemba nkonko* ‘pure (or deep) Bemba,’ which was

described in interviews as *ichiBemba icapwililika* ‘perfect Bemba,’<sup>28</sup> *icabulamo ukulufyanyamo* ‘without making mistakes,’ and *ichiBemba icapwililila icabula ukubikamo nangu kamo* ‘completely pure Bemba without adding anything.’

According to Mrs. Izenzi, a 25-year-old living in Chitimukulu village, *ichiBemba nkonko* is:

*Icakuti umuBemba uwaikala ku tauni teti acumfwe. Kano ipusha fye ati “Bushe ifim-walanda ifyi mwapilibula shani?” ChiBemba diipi. Icakuno ku Kasama, kuno kwine kwa Chitimukulu. Umwina tauni uwakulila pa Lusaka ifingi teti aleishiba bwino.*

[The language] that a Bemba who lives in town would not understand. Unless s/he asks, “What you’ve said, how do you translate it?” Deep Bemba. The one from Kasama, from right here at Chitimukulu village. A town person who grew up in Lusaka, there are a lot of things s/he would not know well.<sup>29</sup>

Like Michael Tompwe, Mrs. Izenzi has spent most of her life in rural areas. Yet she also has a high degree of education (grade nine) and a modest fluency in English. She unblinkingly uses the word *diipi* ‘deep’ to explain her point. While Charlie Nkosana and Mrs. Izenzi come from two different ends of the Bemba language and lifestyle spectrum, their opinions are actually not widely divergent. Mr. Nkosana maintains that the urbanite is excited and “switched on” while the rural person is “backward.” Yet in his lament about the collapse of Bemba, he indicates that he shares Mrs. Izenzi’s view that the rural areas have a great deal of cultural and linguistic knowledge that those in town lack.

### Excerpts of Bemba and Town Bemba Discourse Compared

To show exactly what kinds of innovations, combinations, “corruptions,” and “erosions” occur in Town Bemba, I shall briefly compare two different stretches of discourse. The excerpts derive from interviews that I conducted with radio listeners; they are particularly suitable for direct comparison since they are responses to similar interview questions. The first speaker is Michael Tompwe in Chitimukulu village; the second is Jackson Kunda at the Lusaka city market. Mr. Tompwe explains why he likes the Bemba radio program *Kabuusha Taakolelwe Boowa* ‘The inquirer was not poisoned by a mushroom’:

#### Excerpt 1

1. *Pantu ifyo natemenwa baKabuusha?*  
Why is it that I like Mr. Kabuusha?
2. *Tuleepushako amepusho ifilatwafya saana pamayanda.*  
We ask questions about what is bothering us a lot in [our] homes [domestic life].
3. *Limbi umukashi wandi aleencusha.*  
Maybe my wife is troubling me.

4. *Elyo nomba kanshi tuleepusha kuli baKabuusha pakuti batupandeko amano.*  
So now therefore we ask Mr. Kabuusha so that he can give us advice.
5. *Pakuti tuleekala bwino munanda no mukashi wandi uyu.*  
So that I am [we are] living well at home with my wife.
6. *Elyo baKabuusha balabweshwa amasuko ayasuma saana no kutufunda saana.*  
So Mr. Kabuusha replies with very good answers and counsels us a lot.
7. *Kanshi filya tuleekutika ku cilimba filya, no mukashi wandi aleekutika,*  
Thus when I (we) listen to the radio just like that, with my wife listening,
8. *alafundwa, tulafundilwa bonse pamo pene.*  
she gets counseled, we both are counseled together.
9. *Kanshi baKabuusha balabomba saana.*  
Therefore Mr. Kabuusha works well.

Several months after this interview, the advisor on the *Kabuusha* program, Mr. David Yumba, died. The topic of the late Yumba came up in a interview with Jackson Kunda, a Lusaka businessman who was in his midtwenties. Jackson, originally from the Bemba-speaking rural area of Mpika, had spent about half of his life in urban areas. He went to secondary school in Ndola (on the Copperbelt) and had been living in Lusaka for four years, working as a street vendor selling and polishing shoes. Here is Jackson's reflection on Yumba's possible successor:

Excerpt 2

10. *Ya so ifi, manje baYumba ifi bafwile, tuli no bulanda saana.*  
Yeah so that, now that Mr. Yumba has died, we are filled with great grief.
11. *So tuleefwaya shuwa ukuti ku broadcasting bakabikeko umuntu zoonu nga*  
So we surely want that at broadcasting they put on a person truly like
12. *filya fine fyali baYumba.*  
just the same as Mr. Yumba.
13. *Ukulaasuka na ama-ansa ya bantu filya fine.*  
Responding to people's questions in the same way.
14. *So twaliumfwa saana abansansa. Twaliumfwa saana abansansa.*  
So we really felt happiness [enjoyment]. We really felt happiness.
15. *Nomba pali shino nshiku tuleumfwa aba—*  
However, nowadays, we are feeling—
16. *Tuli ne cililo saana mulandu wakuti baYumba balifwa.*  
We are in deep mourning because Mr. Yumba has died.

17. *So nga cakuti umuntu uwo bengacita replace filya ifyali baYumba,*  
So if this person they might replace [him] with is like Mr. Yumba,
18. *kuti twatemwa saana.*  
then we would be very happy.
19. *Because twalitemwa saana ukulemba amakalata ku broadcast.*  
Because we really liked to write letters to broadcast.<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Tompwe's speech in excerpt 1 contains no Town Bemba elements. While he is a fairly conventional Bemba speaker, he sometimes also uses some Town Bemba, as illustrated in the earlier quote where he uses the English words *combine* and *mixed*. Notably, this remark occurred in the same interview that excerpt 1 derives from. Excerpt 1, however, is from the very beginning of our interview, when Tompwe is speaking a fairly formal Bemba. Jackson's speech in excerpt 2 is representative of his usual mode of speaking, which could be described as a kind of cool, but not too racy, version of Town Bemba that is fairly typical among young Zambians.

In grammatical and lexical terms, the similarities between these two excerpts are extensive. To give just a few brief illustrations of similarities, both speakers construct clauses with *-kuti* 'that' (4, 5, 11, 16, 17, 18); use the locative suffix *-ko* on verbs (2, 4, 11); and employ the expression *filya* or *filya fine* 'just like that' (7, 12, 13). Tompwe uses five different kinds of verbal tense morphemes; Jackson uses four of these, as well as four other Bemba tense markers that do not appear in Tompwe's text.

One of the most striking differences in these two excerpts is the different sets of discourse connectives used to develop the discussion. The overall organizational structures are quite close, but Tompwe uses the standard Bemba conjunctions *elyo nomba kanshi* (4), *elyo* (6), and *kanshi* (7, 9), while Jackson uses the English-derived *so* (10, 11, 14, 17) and the Fanagalo-derived *manje* 'now' (10). This latter form has been a distinctive element of Town Bemba since its beginnings. Similarly, the Town Bemba analog to Tompwe's opening rationale *pantu* 'why, because' is found in Jackson's closing statement, which begins with *because*.

A typical Town Bemba loaning process is illustrated in Jackson's *ama-ansa* (13). This word is derived from the English word *answer*, but in this context it means the inverse, "questions." The English noun is phonologically and morphologically assimilated into the Bemba noun class system with the plural prefix *ama-*. The standard Bemba equivalents *amepusho* 'questions' and *amasuko* 'answers' appear in Tompwe's lines (2) and (6). Similarly, Jackson's use of the English-derived word *broadcasting* (11) contrasts with Tompwe's more conventional choice of *cilimba* 'radio' (7). Other typical Town Bemba words that appear throughout Jackson's speech are emphatics and adverbs such as *ya* 'yeah,' *shuwa* 'sure,' *zoonu* 'truly' (Nyanja), and *so*. Both speakers, however, use the common Bemba adverb *saana* 'very,' which was loaned into the language from Swahili at least half a century ago.

The most dramatic linguistic deviation, from the standpoint of standard Bemba grammar, is Jackson's insertion of the verb *replace* in a position that



typically no Bemba verb would occupy. While some English verbs are morphologically and phonologically assimilated as Bemba verbs in Town Bemba (see below), the construction in (17) is a relatively new type of structure. Inflections are placed on the Bemba verb *-cit-* 'do' and an English verb follows in an unaltered form. In (17) this is parsed as *ba-inga-cit-a* (third-person plural subject—optative—verb root 'do'—final vowel) *replace* 'they might replace.' This type of morphosyntactic structure does not exist in standard Bemba.<sup>31</sup> There are compound verb constructions in standard Bemba, but in this case, the nearest equivalent expressions use a single verb. Two options are possible. One is from the perspective of the radio station: *bengamupyanika* 'they might appoint him as successor' (*ba-inga-mu-pyan-ik-a*, third-person plural subject—optative—third-person singular object—verb root 'succeed'—causative—final vowel). The other has the successor in the subject position: *engamupyana* 'he might replace or succeed him' (*a-inga-mu-pyan-a*, third-person singular subject—optative—third-person singular object—verb root 'succeed'—final vowel).

### Differences in the Registers of Town Bemba

Bemba has numerous phonologically and morphologically assimilated words from English which carry minimal or no social significance as "foreign."<sup>32</sup> Most of these are ordinary loanwords that are considered to be more or less part of the Bemba language, and their use has little or no association with urbanity. Their adoption into Bemba follows the widespread and well-known pattern of borrowing words that denote "material objects and/or concepts of the lending culture [which] have been accepted by and become widely familiar to the speakers of the language in the recipient culture" (Kashoki 1978b:87). These fully assimilated loans that are now part of standard Bemba include the words *tauni* 'town' (in Mrs. Izenzi's remark above) and *amakalata* 'letters' (*ama* [plural]—*ka* [diminutive]—*lata* 'letter'), used by Jackson in line 19. Other examples of such by now standard Bemba words are: *shuga* 'sugar,' *cibokoshi* 'box,' *impoto* 'pot,' *koloko* 'clock,' *kapu* 'cup,' *iteebulo* 'table,' *amatoloshi* 'trousers,' *numba* 'number,' *-cinja* 'change,' *-kopa* 'copy,' and *-lemanana* 'lame.'

But there are also numerous English-based words in Town Bemba that carry a strong social significance as "new" or "urban" and are assimilated to differing degrees, depending on context and the speakers' social and linguistic background.<sup>33</sup> As hybrid forms, their "code" status is frequently ambiguous within the actual contexts of use. They may be considered loans, mixes, or switches. But what is clear is that they are all elements of Town Bemba. They all carry an indexical value of being "urban" and "modern" (and "not-rural" or "not-backward"); many are also marked as somewhat "foreign" (or "not-local"). Table 5 illustrates some extremely common Town Bemba forms, and Table 6 lists some forms that are found mainly in the racier or more cosmopolitan registers of Town Bemba.

Several of the normal, everyday Town Bemba words in the first set exhibit the highly productive pattern of incorporating English words with the generic plural prefix (*a*)*ma-*; for example, *amaflawas*, *amarulz*, *amagaiz*. These

Table 5

"Normal" Town Bemba		Standard Bemba
<i>amagaiz/amaguys</i>	'guys'	<i>abalumendo</i>
<i>amaeks/amaeggs</i>	'eggs'	<i>amaani</i>
<i>amaflawas</i>	'flowers'	<i>amaluba</i>
<i>amarulz</i>	'rules'	<i>amafunde</i>
<i>akagelo</i>	'girl'	<i>umukashana</i>
<i>akabebi</i>	'baby'	<i>umwana</i>
<i>ceya</i>	'chair'	<i>icipuna</i>
<i>-washa</i>	'wash'	<i>-capa, -samba</i>
<i>-kilina</i>	'clean'	<i>-pukuta, -wamyā</i>
<i>-shota</i>	'lack', 'have a shortage'	<i>-bula</i>

loans coexist with standard Bemba synonyms. The double plural formation with Bemba *ama-* and English *-s* has been documented since the 1960s. Its forms can be contrasted with other assimilated loanwords such as *amatoloshi* 'trousers,' *amakalashi* 'glasses,' and *amalampi* 'lamps,' which do not retain the English plural suffix. The latter are all standard Bemba words that entered the Bemba language several decades ago to fill lexical gaps. They do not carry the connotations of "foreign" or "urban." A kind of stratification of these borrowing processes is illustrated in the expression *Mwaciwasha amatoloshi?* 'Did you wash the trousers?' Here, the English verb is assimilated and morphologically inflected as a Bemba verb. The standard Bemba equivalent is *Mwacicapa amatoloshi?* What remains to be seen in these cases of coexisting synonyms is whether conventional forms like *-capa* and *amaluba* will eventually fall from use and be fully replaced by their more recent counterparts *-washa* and *amaflawas*.

While there is extensive borrowing of both nouns and verbs from English in different registers of Town Bemba, there are two key differences in the assimilation processes. First, as one moves from a fairly ordinary to a more prestigious version of Town Bemba, RP English language phonology tends to be preserved more, rather than undergoing a fuller assimilation to Bemba phonological patterns. Second, there are significant differences in the *semantic*

Table 6

"Cool" Town Bemba		Standard Bemba
<i>skopo</i>	'scope (mentality), thinking'	<i>amano</i> 'intellectual ability'
<i>jobu</i>	'job'	<i>ncito</i> 'job, work'
<i>boyi</i>	'my friend'	<i>mune</i> 'my friend'
<i>-checkinga</i>	'check, investigate'	<i>-lengula</i> 'investigate, find out'
<i>-shuta</i>	'shoot'	<i>-lasa</i> 'shoot'
<i>-lodwa</i>	'be loaded'	<i>wacuma</i> 'wealthy'
<i>-boyla</i>	'be very angry, boil'	<i>-kalipa</i> 'be very angry, hot'

domains and communication sources of English-based words across the registers. English-based words in ordinary Town Bemba are part of the everyday lexicon (e.g., *wash, baby, flower*) and the frequently heard English phrases are part of the discourse of public culture (e.g., *rules, council, tradition*). Most derive from state culture, primary school education, and the public service sector, where the main vehicle of communication is English. Utterances I recorded include the following:

## Set 1

<i>Baleepeela amarulz.</i>	'They are giving rules [instructions].'
<i>Bacibacita admit pa maten awas.</i>	'They admitted her [respect] at ten hours [today].'
<i>Baleecita encourage tradition.</i>	'They are encouraging tradition.'
<i>Anyway ukulingana fye na mafunde ya council.</i>	'Anyway, according to council regulations.'

The English-based words in the more prestigious and more cosmopolitan registers of Town Bemba, on the other hand, are about urban lifestyles, moods, and modes of interaction. This is consistent with what Epstein (1959) and Richardson (1963) have reported for the earlier phases of Town Bemba. As Richardson wrote in 1963, many of the divergences in Town Bemba from the norm of standard Bemba "are a result of a conscious attempt at linguistic innovation" (1963:129) to signal social status and the distinct experience of an urban lifestyle. Put in semiotic terms, the innovations and experimentations within Town Bemba are both iconic and indexical of "newness" and a flaunting of "tradition." This newness and deviation have symbolic value in contemporary Zambia, as part of the meaning of modernity. The main English source domain of these more stylish elements of Town Bemba tends to be popular culture, not state culture or formal education. Many derive from Zambian radio disc jockeys, pop music, and American movies (e.g., from English words such as *get, dig, beat, loaded, jazzed up, set up*). Recorded examples include the following:

## Set 2

<i>Muleensetinga.</i>	'You are setting me up.'
<i>Namugeta?</i>	'Do you get me/it?'
<i>Ku Radio 4 kulila fye beat the whole day.</i>	'On Radio 4 it's playing a beat the whole day.'
<i>Balilodwa.</i>	'They are loaded [wealthy].'
<i>Ndi fye spakajez.</i>	'I'm great!' 'I'm jammin' [spark -a-jazz]'

In this register, as well as in the more mundane versions of Town Bemba, English verbs are morphologically inflected like Bemba verbs. Thus *muleensetinga* 'you are setting me up' is composed of *mu-* (second-person plural subject), *-lee* (progressive), *-n* (first-person singular object), *-seting* (verb root), and *-a* (indicative).

Finally, besides these patterns of loaning and mixing, Town Bemba also has a great deal of linguistic innovation within Bemba itself. Set 3 illustrates this innovativeness:

Set 3

<i>Twashita, basesha.</i>	'We buy, they steal.' [lit. 'they move things']
<i>Iyi nsapato iswango.</i>	'This shoe is really awesome!' [lit. 'fierce']
<i>Naipipa.</i>	'I'm leaving.' [lit. 'I'm getting small.']
<i>Ndi na ifintu na bwangu.</i>	'I'm really busy.' [lit. 'I have things with speed.']

These innovations follow standard Bemba grammatical patterns. Many involve creative metaphorical extensions of existing words. For example, an adjective that is only applied to animals in standard Bemba (*-swango* 'fierce') becomes a praise word for commodities in Town Bemba. The idea of "becoming small" (*-ipipa*) is metaphorically extended to capture the way that one disappears as one leaves. Other innovations are Bemba coinages modeled (calqued) after English expressions, as in the recent expression *ifintu na bwangu* 'things to do' [lit. 'things with speed']. This expression, used commonly by what might be called Zambian yuppies, supplants the more mundane *ifintu fyakucita* 'things to do' by adding an element of speed consistent with the urban lifestyle.

### The Loan versus Switch Challenge

As several scholars have pointed out, our analytic vocabulary and techniques for dealing with the range of linguistic practices exhibited by multilinguals is sorely in need of revision. Terms such as *loan*, *codeswitching*, and *codemixing* are often not refined enough to capture what is frequently a very complicated nexus of relations between systemic linguistic boundaries, social boundaries, cognitive systems, speaker intent, indexical effects, and language history. The case of Town Bemba highlights some of these challenges, which I briefly discuss here.

The conventional definition of codeswitching is that it consists of alternations of linguistic varieties within the same speech event. Switching is considered to be a "meaningful juxtaposition . . . of two distinct grammatical systems," and it contrasts with borrowing, understood as the permanent assimilation of words and short idiomatic phrases from one variety into another, to the point where they are unmarked as "foreign" (Gumperz 1982:66). The Town Bemba evidence discussed above raises two problems for these definitions:

(1) The conventional definition of codeswitching assumes that it is evident what the distinct codes are. Usually this is possible from an etymological point of view, but etymological status does not always match up with the in-play values of linguistic forms.

(2) What is a borrowed word (i.e., unmarked and assimilated) for some speakers may be a mix or switch for others.

These problems have also been highlighted by several other researchers (e.g., Gardner-Chloros 1995; Heath 1989; Woolard this issue). For example, in his study of Moroccan Arabic, Heath writes, "It turns out that there are many instances of mixing which are difficult to categorize in terms of this binary opposition [codeswitching versus borrowing], either because we seem to have partial adaptation or because there is little difference between code-switched and borrowed forms" (1989:1). Analogous examples abound in the material provided above. For example, stock phrases in English appear in their full form in utterances such as *Ku Radio 4 kulila fye beat the whole day* 'On Radio 4 it's playing a beat the whole day' and *Baleecita encourage tradition* 'They are encouraging tradition.' In a sense, the English phrases are both loans (borrowed intact from a non-Bemba language) and switches (syntactic changes to another code, which may even be only partially known). The situation is even more perplexing with individual words and morphemes (e.g., with items such as *amarulz*, *amagaiz*, and *namugeta*, in Table 5 and Sets 1 and 2 above). Are these really loans for speakers who know the English sources? Can they be considered switches when they are so embedded phonologically and morphologically within the flow of discourse? Considerations of phonology, morphological assimilation, and perhaps frequency of usage may help to determine whether an expression involves codeswitching or borrowing, but even this is not always that straightforward or accurate, as many scholars have pointed out (Gardner-Chloros 1995; Heath 1989:23; Hill and Hill 1986:346 ff.).

Finally, a third problem that emerges in the study of Town Bemba challenges the received wisdom about codeswitching at an even deeper level:

(3) Why assume that every time there is a switch, it signals a *change* in meaning or alignment? What appears as a switch to the linguist may not be a switch to the speaker. Furthermore, switching and mixing may be the unmarked norm.

Ultimately this is a question about what counts as a "meaningful juxtaposition," to return to Gumperz's words. Much of the literature on code-switching operates with the assumption that switching between codes or varieties achieves a distinct communicative effect, for example, rhetorical stress; constructing solidarity or difference; highlighting old versus new information; or social status alignment. The use of English words in the Town Bemba utterances below (Set 4), for example, does have the rhetorical effect of emphasis and drama. But this effect is not attributable to the English component by itself. Rather, it is interlinked with the intensity that is built up by the syntactic structures, intonational contours, and semantic meanings of the utterances as wholes.

#### Set 4

*Kuya fye straight kunanda.*

*Nomba, why can't you give it up?*

*Nalishibe nati one day ukepusha iyo question.*

'Just go straight home.'

'Now, why can't you give it up?'

'I knew that one day, you would ask that question.'

In morphosyntactic terms, these patterns are not problematic. They follow the same general principles that have been identified for codeswitching patterns found throughout the world (Myers-Scotton 1993; Slabbert and Myers-Scotton 1996). Bemba, the matrix language, provides the grammatical frame and supplies all active syntactic elements. English, the embedded language, provides content morphemes, but does not contribute syntactically active system morphemes. Other earlier examples include English-derived verbs inflected with Bemba affixes (Set 2) and English-derived nouns incorporated into the Bemba noun class system with noun prefixes and agreement makers (Table 5 and Set 1).

But this apparent codeswitching or mixing in Town Bemba—or what I believe is less problematically called “hybridity” in the foregoing examples—is actually *fairly mundane* for the urban Zambian context. It is expected and it is often relatively unnoticed. The most significant communicative effect of such hybrid language use in Town Bemba is thus not to signal a change in alignment, but to signal one’s urbanity (Kashoki 1978b:94). In this sense, linguistic innovation and hybridity are positively valued as they connect to the lexicon of a wider modern world and a transnational culture, and as they diverge from a rural reference point, however real or imagined, of homogeneity and tradition. Linguistic hybridity and ongoing fluidity (and their “modern” and “urban” associations) are essential for Town Bemba, and this is why it looks as if it is not stable.

The Town Bemba state of affairs is itself not particularly new or unique, however, from a comparative linguistic perspective. For example, Swigart (1994) makes an analogous argument for urban Wolof and French mixing in Senegal, as have numerous creolists, who point out that hybridized languages are emblematic of hybridized societies and distinctive urban or “de-ethnicized” identities (e.g., Gilman 1979; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Singler 1987). Similarly, the problem of codeswitching effects (problem 3 above) has also been extensively treated by Poplack (1988). She argues that in New York Spanish usage, the particular switch points themselves are less significant pragmatically than is the overall pattern of mixing that corresponds to speakers’ conceptions of their hybrid identities. What these examples mean for the notion of “a code” in such heteroglossic situations is that it always by necessity is somewhat of a moving target—for both speaker and analyst—as it exists in a constellation of multiple social-ideological forces and multiple systemic linguistic forces. Compounded with this, as evidenced particularly in the case of Town Bemba, what counts as “hybrid”—and “new” and “modern”—itself needs to be continually renewed. Novelty is necessary to ensure the ongoing dynamism and polyvalency of such hybrid varieties. And it also ensures that there will always be forms that occupy an intermediary position between “a switch” and “a loan.”

### Conclusions

I have argued here that the label “Town Bemba” is best understood as a cover term for a set of Bemba-based multilingual practices, which are iconic, indexical, and symbolic of “urbanity” and “modernity” in Zambia. These

practices speak of “the city,” but they do not always occur in urban locales. Town Bemba is a variety of Bemba, a case of codeswitching/mixing, and a case of a hybrid code in formation. It is also, as implied by Richardson, a countercode, articulated in relation to what are perceived as the other, more stabilized codes that define Zambia’s multilingual landscape. It is a product of numerous “socio-ideological contradictions” and tensions (Bakhtin 1981:291) and a code that oscillates between normativity and aberration. From a comparative and theoretical perspective, the case of Town Bemba leaves us with two sets of open questions. First, to what extent do these multiple statuses apply more generally to most emergent languages in contact situations? And second, to what extent is the hybridity and heteroglossia of urban languages any different from that of other languages? Is it just a question of the *degree* of heteroglossia? Or is it also a question of the *kind* of heteroglossia, for example, the *types of relations* between heteroglossic elements? On the one hand, if the hybrid languages that are born in multilingual contexts are products of more numerous and more intensified socio-ideological contradictions, then we could predict a corresponding intensification of the linguistic tensions between the heteroglossic elements that constitute them. On the other hand, if we move from a Bakhtinian idea of structuration involving the oscillation of centripetal and centrifugal forces, analogous to the opening dialogue of Polo and Kahn, we could predict that this intensification would similarly shade in and out of view, at times as a fairly unremarkable norm, and at times as the foregrounded deviation.

### Notes

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1. See, for example, Fabian 1986; Hannerz 1992; Mitchell 1956; Powdermaker 1962; Pred and Watts 1992; and Triulzi 1996.

2. See Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997; Silverstein 1996a, 1996b; Spitulnik 1998; Vail 1989; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994.

3. Bemba (or ChiBemba) is the language of the Bemba people (BaBemba). ChiBemba, like other Bantu languages, has an elaborate morphological system of noun prefixing (Spitulnik 1987, 1988; Spitulnik and Kashoki in press). The *chi-* prefix

means "language, culture, or customs." In this essay, I use the unprefix name "Bemba" to denote the language, as an analog to the label "Town Bemba."

4. Analogous cases of hybrid languages in Africa include Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho in South Africa (Slabbert and Myers-Scotton 1996), urban Wolof in Senegal (Swigart 1994), and Sheng in Kenya (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997).

5. To the best of my knowledge the only studies of Town Bemba are the following article-length contributions: Epstein 1959, Kashoki 1972, and Richardson 1961, 1963, 1964, 1967.

6. Data are drawn from several sources, including 18 months (1988–90) of ethnographic and linguistic research in Zambia; discourse analysis of naturally occurring conversations and Radio Zambia programs audiotaped during the primary research period; ongoing linguistic research with Bemba speakers in the United States; and consultation of other published sources on Town Bemba and Bemba. Sound files of the data excerpts in this article are located on the World Wide Web at <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/ANTHROPOLOGY/FACULTY/ANTIDS/Bemba>.

7. The gradient model of focused versus diffused (or unfocused) linguistic systems and practices derives from Le Page and Tabouret Keller's (1985) comparative study of creole-speaking communities. The basic idea is that linguistically heterogeneous situations exhibit a range of degrees to which there are predictable regularities of linguistic practices and a mutual identification among speakers of what is considered to be a shared code. On the high end of this scale (the focused end), one finds the prototypical speech community that is "tightly-knit and closely interactive" (1985:5 ff.). On the low end (diffused or unfocused), there is less consensus about what the shared code is and perhaps less code systematicity along with more linguistic innovation and experimentation.

8. See Epstein 1981; Ferguson 1992, in press; Mitchell 1956; Powdermaker 1962; Spitulnik 1996, in press.

9. These differences from standard Bemba are less prevalent in the Town Bemba of native Bemba speakers. For more discussion, see Kashoki 1972 and Richardson 1963.

10. A parallel case is Shaba Swahili, which is spoken across the border from Town Bemba, on the Copperbelt of the Democratic Republic of Congo. De Rooij questions the standard classification of Shaba Swahili as a creole, and concludes that it is "a partially creolized language" that resulted from second-language learning strategies and the close genetic relatedness of the substrate languages (1995:190). In synchronic terms, Town Bemba and Shaba Swahili are very similar in their unique structural features and ideological values as hybrid urban languages. These two varieties emerged under quite different historical conditions, however, and they participate in very different linguistic political economies. Shaba Swahili developed primarily as a second language for nonnative Swahili speakers, as it was imposed as a work language in the mining industry from 1918 onward (De Rooij 1995; Fabian 1986). Town Bemba was never imposed as a lingua franca and it is spoken by native Bemba speakers. It remains in strong interaction with the rural and ethnicized reference point of standard Bemba.

11. See Hill 1985; Silverstein 1979, 1996a, 1996b; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994.

12. See, for example, Hary 1992; Hill and Hill 1986; Sankoff 1980; Urciuoli 1995; Woolard this issue.

13. This figure is calculated as follows: Two-thirds of 84 percent (the urban population that speaks Bemba [Table 3]) is 56 percent. Zambia's urban population ranges between 40 percent and 50 percent of the national population (Hansen 1997:5), which was estimated at 9.7 million in 1998. Using the low-range urban rate, the current urban population is thus roughly 3.9 million. If an estimated 56 percent of these



urbanites speak some variety of Town Bemba, then Town Bemba has approximately 2.2 million speakers.

14. Zambian English is also characterized by (1) certain non-RP uses of English prepositions and interrogatives, and (2) some verbs and nouns that have slightly different meanings than they do in American or British varieties. These distinctive patterns are modeled after the speakers' first language grammars. For more discussion, see Banda 1992; Moody 1985; and Serpell 1982.

15. British rule was established in Northern Rhodesia in 1924. Independent Zambia was formed in 1964.

16. See Mytton 1978 and Spitulnik 1998 for more detailed documentation of these institutional efforts in language standardization.

17. No detailed discussion of these dialect differences is available. Impressionistic accounts suggest that the Bemba-related varieties differ minimally, primarily in phonology and in a small percentage of the lexicon. For more information on the complex relations between languages, dialects, and language groupings in Zambia, see Ohannessian and Kashoki 1978 and Spitulnik 1998.

18. Lamba and Bemba have a high degree of mutual intelligibility, but their precise relation is undocumented. They can be classified either as dialects of each other or as separate languages. More research is also needed on their historical interactions. For example, to what extent are Town Bemba's differences from rural Bemba attributable to the influence of Lamba? Several issues related to processes of linguistic ideology and linguistic labeling also merit further research. For example, why did Town Bemba and not Town Lamba emerge as the name for the Copperbelt code? This seems directly connected with the numerical dominance of Bemba migrant laborers and the prestige of the Bemba ethnic group on the one hand, and the related stigmatization of Lamba people in the Copperbelt context on the other hand (see Siegel 1989).

19. *Lambwaza* is a hybrid noun formation that builds on Lamba (the name for the ethnic group indigenous to the Copperbelt region) and the French morpheme *ois-*, meaning "idle." The extensive Zambian Copperbelt shares a 100-mile border with the French-speaking Democratic Republic of Congo, so French influences have entered into some Copperbelt varieties. In French *ois-* is a root in *oiseux* 'idle, pointless, useless' and *oisif* 'idle, unemployed.' Literally, *lambwaza* means "Lamba-lazy." *ChiLambwaza* is a broad signifier, denoting the language of the lazy or idle urban lower class, urban youth, and/or criminals; it is not restricted to Lamba people. For more discussion of the "lazy Lamba" stereotype and the culture of urban idleness, see Ferguson in press; Powdermaker 1962; and Siegel 1989.

20. Again, the issue of labeling and its connection to what might be considered "a code" or a system of linguistic regularities in a structural sense is quite complex here and is in need of further research. An analogous case is found in urban South Africa, where numerous labels that exist to denote the urban varieties (e.g., Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho) "are not always the same across speakers. . . nor are the names consistent from a structural point of view" (Slabbert and Myers-Scotton 1996:326).

21. Figures are projections for 1998, applying a 2.8 percent growth rate to 1992 census figures. Town Bemba is also spoken in the towns along the line-of-rail that extends from the Copperbelt to Livingstone. These include Kabwe, Kapiri-Mposhi, and Zimba.

22. See Kashoki 1972 for an illustration of the areas where Town Bemba is spoken in relation to the indigenous surrounding languages.

23. In colonial Zambia, Fanagalo mainly functioned as a technical language in the mining workplace and as a white man's "command" language in mining and domestic service contexts (see Cole 1953). In the Zambian region it was also known as

ChiKabanga or Chilapalapa. After independence, the Zambian government outlawed the use of ChiKabanga in the mining industry because of its colonial connotations.

24. Interview data are presented in the original language. Italics in this excerpt indicate speaker's emphasis.

25. Swigart (1994) documents a similar type of variable awareness about mixing in urban Wolof usage.

26. Italics indicate Bemba (unless otherwise noted), plain text indicates English, underscored italics are Town Bemba elements, and underscored plain text indicates English switches incorporated in the context of Bemba speech. Transcription conventions for Bemba follow Zambia's official orthography. English translations are rendered as closely as possible to Bemba syntax and lexical items. There are five basic vowel sounds in Bemba, represented orthographically as *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. Vowels occur in both long and short forms; long vowels are represented with double vowel graphemes. Orthographic representations are equivalent to IPA symbols, with the following exceptions:

<i>b</i>	[β]	voiced bilabial fricative; occurs word initially and intervocally
<i>b</i>	[b]	voiced bilabial stop; occurs in all other contexts
<i>l</i>	[ɺ]	voiced lateral flap
<i>sh</i>	[ʃ]	voiceless alveopalatal fricative
<i>c</i>	[tʃ]	voiceless alveopalatal affricate
<i>ch</i>	[tʃ]	voiceless alveopalatal affricate; in proper nouns
<i>ŋ</i>	[ŋ]	velar nasal
<i>n</i>	[ŋ]	velar nasal; occurs before [k] and [g]
<i>n</i>	[n]	alveolar nasal; in all other contexts
<i>ny</i>	[ɲ]	palatal nasal

27. His father is Bemba, his mother is Chewa.

28. Literally, "Bemba that is completely perfect" or "Bemba that has been brought to perfection."

29. Third-person pronouns in Bemba are not gender-specific. I use the shorthand *s/he* (she or he) as a translation convention to reflect this.

30. The phrase *ku broadcast* is ambiguous in this context. It means "to the broadcasting station," "to be broadcast," "for broadcasting."

31. A structurally analogous compound verb phrase in standard Bemba would require the second verb to be inflected with an infinitive prefix and optionally inflected with other grammatical markers. This *-cit-* 'do' construction is also anomalous because *-cit-* is never used as an auxiliary verb in standard Bemba. There are several auxiliary verbs (a small set of verbs which occur as initial verbs in dual verb constructions) in Bemba. But unlike the Town Bemba auxiliary *-cit-*, which is relatively neutral semantically, these auxiliaries all have specific semantic values, for example, as emphatics, evidentials, subjunctives, or aspectual markers. Moreover, in these dual verb constructions the second verb can be inflected with grammatical markers, such as for tense and object.

32. For more detailed treatments of the sources of loanwords in Bemba and the phonological and morphological processes of assimilation see Kashoki 1972, 1975, 1990; Richardson 1963; and Spitulnik 1987.

33. Research on how sociological variables such as gender, age, and class pattern with Town Bemba usage is ongoing. Phonological variation is also one of the most complex and least documented aspects of Town Bemba. It has direct bearing, in many cases, on the relative markedness of loaned forms. It also presents problems for the orthographic representation of the loanwords. I attempt here to strike a com-

promise between English orthography and Bemba orthography, leaning toward the latter since it is usually closer to the actual phonology. For example, the Town Bemba form for “guys” can be represented as *amaguys*, but it is realized in speech as *amagaiz*, *amagais*, *amagaizi*, and *amagaisi*. All forms are considered “urban.” The first variant seems to be the most widely used, and the last variant is the most consistent with standard Bemba phonology. While the English source word ends in [z], this is not a sound in Bemba. Knowledge of English and/or other Zambian languages that have the [z] phoneme create a motivation for the alternates.

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