

# **'Your Chitumbuka is Shallow. It's not the Real Chitumbuka': Linguistic Purism Among Chitumbuka Speakers in Malawi**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses linguistic purism with reference to speakers of Chitumbuka in Malawi. Chitumbuka, along with other Malawian languages (except Chichewa/Chinyanja), was marginalised by the dictatorial regime of President Banda (1964-1994). One of the fruits of the post-Banda political dispensation has been the freedom to form language and cultural associations - and the Chitumbuka Language and Culture Association (CLACA) is one example. One of CLACA's self-given responsibilities is that of a language guardian. In keeping with this role, CLACA has made a number of pronouncements aimed at determining, for example, what the “real” Chitumbuka is; who the “genuine” speakers of Chitumbuka are; and what culturally corrosive issues should be excluded from Chitumbuka-medium textbooks; and so on. All these concerns boil down to the fear of loss of Chitumbuka's purity and/or the fear of Tumbuka cultural erosion. This paper points to the futility of attempts to keep language and culture pure.

*Keywords: culture, language academies, linguistic purism, linguistic prejudice, standardisation*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The work of a linguist is said to be that of describing the structure and uses of any language or dialect and not to attach evaluative expressions such as *good*, *shallow*, and so forth (see Milroy & Milroy 1985). So it is said that before the linguist, all languages and/or their dialects are equal. But the reality on the ground is that the non-linguist continues to evaluate speech varieties. In Malawi, for example, one often hears speakers of Chitumbuka praising someone for speaking *real* Chitumbuka. On the other hand, some speakers are accused of speaking *town or diluted* Chitumbuka. One is also likely to hear the highly charged claim that certain people were “spoiling” Chitumbuka, hence the need to “protect” the language from such undesirable influences. All this boils down to the existence of linguistic purism in people's minds. This paper documents evidence of the existence of linguistic purism among some speakers of Chitumbuka. The paper, first of all, defines the notion of linguistic purism, and then traces its historical development. Before discussing linguistic purism with reference to the Chitumbuka speakers of Malawi, a brief sociolinguistic picture

of the language is provided. Then follows a discussion guided by the following questions: Who champions linguistic purism, and why? What channels are used to express linguistic purism? Who are the culprits involved in the process of “diluting” Chitumbuka? What have the purists suggested as the means of purifying the language? Finally, to what extent is the task of keeping language(s) and culture(s) pure achievable?

## 2. LINGUISTIC PURISM: AN OVERVIEW

Linguistic purism is a type of evaluative attitude towards language. The attitude is that some speech forms are less pure than others; or that certain speech forms are superior to others. This amounts to linguistic prejudice. The goal of purism then becomes that of preserving language from corruption and foreign influences (Thomas 1991). These attitudes towards language fall within the interests of social psychologists, ethnographers of human communication and sociolinguists, just to mention but a few. This paper discusses linguistic purism from a sociolinguistic point of view. Whilst there have been a number of studies of linguistic purism, the most comprehensive and authoritative work on the subject so far is that of Thomas (1991). Thomas outlines the history and development of the study of linguistic purism, its methodologies, theoretical inadequacies, and cites numerous case studies of purism.

Thomas (1991: 19) defines purism as “an attitude to language which labels certain elements as pure (therefore desirable) and others as impure (therefore undesirable).” Crystal (1997) refers to linguistic purism as the desire to protect the supposed purity of a language and the attempt to remove “corrupt” or “contaminating elements” from the language. Wexler (1974) sees linguistic purism as the tendency to evaluate linguistic variants and give them evaluative labels such as correct, *incorrect*, *genuine*, *acceptable*, *bad*, *real* and so on. These labels arise, for instance, when a speech variety borrows elements of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics or lexicon from another variety. It is also possible to have purism that is “directed against elements coming from within such as geographical and social dialectalism, archaic elements or neologisms” (Wexler 1974: 1).

Whilst the puristic impulse can target any aspect of language structure and use, loans, calques, neologisms and dialect variations are usually seen as the main enemies (see Thomas 1991). The task of the purist is, therefore, that of removing impurities from a language. The purist cleanses a language. To this end, Thomas (1991) presents seven images of a language purist, namely: the purist as a miller, gardener, grinder, metallurgist, physician, genealogist/geneticist, and priest. The image of a language purist as a miller is taken from the act of separating husks from wheat, resulting in the purification of the wheat. The language purist is therefore seen to be performing the purification task that a miller does. In the second image, the purist as a gardener,

we see the gardener as someone who removes weeds from his/her garden and prunes the fruit-bearing trees to promote growth and fertility. The language purist too removes undesirable elements from his/her language in a similar way. The language purist as a grinder image compares the purist to a grinder who sharpens his/her tools. This image “makes no explicit reference to the removal of undesirable elements but rather to an improvement of what is already there” (Thomas 1991: 22). Another image of a language purist is that of a metallurgist. The metallurgist has to remove impurities from metal whereas the language purist has the task of removing impurities from a language. The purist is also compared to a physician. The physician heals a diseased human body and restores good health. A language purist, on the other hand, improves the well being of a language through the removal of undesirable elements such as foreign words. From the notion of genetic or genealogical purity, we get the image of the language purist as a genealogist or geneticist. Linguistic purism is seen as a kind of campaign against hybridisation of a language. The seventh image of a language purist is that of a priest. In religious circles, priests perform acts aimed at purifying the human soul. Holiness is a form of purity - a state of being free from sins. The language purist is also seen to be carrying out the same purification process on a language.

Linguistic purism and linguistic prescriptivism are undertakings that are sometimes reserved for some specialised institutions such as language academies. The Accademia della Crusca of Florence, which was founded in 1572, as the first of such bodies. Then came the French Academy, which was founded in 1634. Members of the French Academy were the arbiters of good linguistic taste. The third language academy to be established was Spain's Real Academia Espaniola. This was set up in 1713. The British and the Americans, on the other hand, have never had English language academies for reasons which are not of direct interest to the current paper (see Milroy & Milroy 1985; Crystal 1997). Powerful and/or influential individuals can also encourage and promote linguistic purism and linguistic prescriptivism (for Dr Banda's case in Malawi, see Kishindo 2001).

### 3. CHITUMBUKA'S MIXED FORTUNES

Chitumbuka has had a history of mixed fortunes in modern Malawi. First, the language received tremendous support from the pioneer Scottish missionaries of the Livingstonia Mission who arrived in the Northern Region of Malawi in the 1860s. However, during the first thirty years of Malawi's independence, Chitumbuka was marginalised by a political system that was run on the philosophy of one nation, one language. At the time of Malawi's attainment of political independence from Britain in 1964, English, in conjunction with two local languages - Chinyanja and Chitumbuka - were the official languages. In 1968, Chinyanja was declared the national language at a Malawi Congress Party

Convention. The name of the language was changed to Chichewa - the name of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dialect. The often-cited saying in linguistics that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy rings true here. President Banda, who rated himself as the highest authority on Chichewa in Malawi, made a directive towards the creation of the Chichewa Board whose functions were to provide orthography rules and to advise institutions and individuals on good usage of Chichewa (see Kishindo 2001). It is also important to mention that President Banda supported linguistic purism. On numerous occasions, he claimed that he spoke the *real Chichewa* since he was a native speaker from Kasungu. Banda's stance was nothing but linguacentrism.<sup>1</sup>

Following the declaration of Chichewa as the national language of Malawi in 1968, Chitumbuka lost its official status. Chitumbuka's relegation was noticeable in a number of ways. For example, Chitumbuka was removed from the school curriculum, the national radio and the print media. Publishing in the language also ceased, the exception being religious literature that was produced by the Roman Catholic Church, the Livingstonia Synod of the Church of the Central African Presbyterian (CCAP), the Bible Society of Malawi and other religious bodies. The view of the political leadership of that time was that the use of many local languages in official circles would weaken national cohesion and unity. One strong national language was seen as one of the building blocks of a united multilingual and multicultural nation. To this end, those who resented Chitumbuka's loss of official status were regarded as tribalists and enemies of national unity. The heavy-handed administration of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda crushed all attempts to restore Chitumbuka's lost status (see Kamwendo 2002).

The official marginalisation of Chitumbuka ended in 1994 when the Banda regime was voted out of office during the first post-independence multiparty general elections. The new government, led by the United Democratic Front (UDF), quickly reinstated Chitumbuka newscasts on the national radio. Today, the language still remains largely confined to newscasts as there are few full programmes in Chitumbuka. The volume of the use of Chitumbuka in the print media is also low. One also notes the non-use of the language as either a subject of study or a medium of instruction in schools. A 1996 government proposal to have grades 1 to 4 taught through mother tongues remains unimplemented up to now. Chitumbuka is earmarked for the piloting of the mother tongue instruction programme (Pfaffe 2000). In terms of corpus planning, Chitumbuka is yet to be standardised. The Chitumbuka orthography also remains unstandardised. The University of Malawi's Centre for Language Studies in collaboration with a selected committee of Chitumbuka mother tongue speakers formulated a draft standard orthography for the language (Centre for Language Studies 2001). The draft orthography was tabled and approved at a nation-wide language

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<sup>1</sup> Banda condemned Chichewa dialects spoken in Southern Malawi since they were said to have been influenced by Chiyao, Chilomwe and Christian missionaries. Such dialects of Chichewa were deemed unfit for use on the national radio.

symposium that was held in April, 2003. However, the launching of the orthography has not yet been done.

Lexicographically, not much development has been achieved for Chitumbuka. The only dictionary is trilingual (Turner 1996), focussing on English, Chitonga and Chitumbuka. The Centre for Language Studies planned to compile a monolingual Chitumbuka dictionary in readiness for the use of Chitumbuka under the proposed mother tongue instruction programme. This dictionary project remains unimplemented due lack of funds. The Mzuzu University also had plans to compile a Chitumbuka dictionary. It was decided later that this should be turned into a joint project involving the Centre for Language Studies of the University of Malawi and the Mzuzu University, but as mentioned above, the project still remains on the drawing board due to lack of funding.

#### 4. CLACA AND LINGUISTIC PURISM

When the UDF government of President Bakili Muluzi reinstated Chitumbuka on the national radio in 1994, Chitumbuka speakers rejoiced on the return of the official status of the language. However, some quarters within the Chitumbuka speech community lamented that the radio's Chitumbuka was *bad*. It was described as town Chitumbuka that had been heavily influenced by Chichewa. The linguistic purism debate over Chitumbuka had come out into the open. Chitumbuka purists claimed that their language, having been sidelined by the Banda regime for twenty-six years (1968-1994), had been heavily subjected to what has been called the *Chichewasation* scheme. Under the *Chichewasation* scheme, the Banda regime elevated and supported only one local language (Chichewa) at the expense of the other languages. Furthermore, Banda proclaimed a Chewa cultural supremacy. This was Malawi's brand of the melting pot which assumed that all ethnolinguistic differences would melt into a sublime homogeneity, yielding a nation for which not only Chichewa but also the Chewa culture was the ideal and standard (see Vail & White 1989). Chitumbuka purists claim that the purity of their language was eroded by the hegemony of Chichewa during the Banda era.

There is a need at this stage to ask the question: Who are the *protectors* of Chitumbuka? In other words, who champions the language purity goal? Currently there is an organised form of a call to the return to the so-called *pure* or *real* Chitumbuka. A voluntary language and culture association known as the Chitumbuka Language and Culture Association (CLACA) can be said to be the main organised voice supporting Chitumbuka purism. At the launch of CLACA on 2nd July, 1994, it was noted with concern that there was “poor usage of the written and spoken Chitumbuka.” One of the clearest puristic tones of CLACA appears in the minutes of a meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1996 as follows:

“Members noted that the Tumbuka written and spoken today leaves a lot to be desired. This could be addressed by the use of the print and electronic media; persuade the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) to introduce Chitumbuka programmes reflecting traditional social settings like weddings, beer parties etc. People in Blantyre **should** be discouraged from being involved in such programmes since their Chitumbuka is not as good.”

At workshops that had been convened to revise the Chitumbuka orthography, some CLACA members digressed towards the linguistic purism debate and condemned the national radio for “spoiling” Chitumbuka. The commonest concern was with loan words from Chichewa. For example, minutes of another meeting of CLACA held on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2000, task the association “to monitor Chitumbuka spoken on the radio and make comments.” This monitoring of the radio has the goal of rooting out *bad* Chitumbuka.

Members of CLACA, who generally can be said to belong to the old generation, regard Chitumbuka, as it is spoken today, to be of lower standards. This confirms Wolff's (2000:309) observation that the “older people complain about the falling standards of the language competence of the young generation and often blame this on social institutions such as schools, broadcasting (radio and TV), public appearances of modern leaders.” From the CLACA minutes referred to above, we also note that it is in the villages and not in urban areas where *good* or *real* Chitumbuka is perceived to exist, hence the proposal that Blantyre-based Chitumbuka speakers should be banned from participating in radio programmes.<sup>2</sup> This is certainly an act of linguistic exclusion based on linguistic prejudice.

Probably reacting to claim that the Chitumbuka used on the national radio is “not good,” the Chitumbuka section of the MBC had a meeting at the broadcasting house in Blantyre in September, 1996. The meeting proposed that MBC should have a special Chitumbuka language teaching programme called *Tisambizzane Chitumbuka*. (Let us teach each other Chitumbuka). Participants in the programme would be “genuine Tumbuka speakers.” These so-called “genuine” speakers of Chitumbuka would authoritatively discuss various aspects of Chitumbuka. Judging from the earlier statements from CLACA, these so called “genuine” speakers of Chitumbuka would exclude those based in urban areas. The programme would be similar to what was in place during the Banda era when the national radio used to run two Chichewa programmes. These programmes were *Chichewa cha kumudzi* (Chichewa of the village) and *Tiphunzitsane Chichewa* (Let us teach each other Chichewa). It should also be mentioned that even in the case of Chichewa during Dr Banda's era, it was also believed that it was in the villages, and not in towns, where “good” Chichewa was spoken; hence the title *Chichewa cha kumudzi* (Chichewa of the village) (see also Kishindo 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ribohn (2002) recounts that during her fieldwork in Malawi, she was constantly advised to go to the villages if she wanted to study Malawi's "real" culture.

During a recent sociolinguistic fieldwork in Northern Malawi (Kamwendo-forthcoming), the negative evaluation of the urbanised variants of Chitumbuka was further confirmed. For example, a Chitumbuka-speaking radio announcer from the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, said:

“Actually, you know, we have been too much into Chichewa-speaking. In primary school, Chichewa was like our national language. So most of us, we haven't actually lived in our home areas for so long. It is as if the Tumbuka we speak, those people in the villages, would actually criticise you as speaking very shallow Tumbuka.”<sup>3</sup>

The tone of the above informant is one of admission that her variant of Chitumbuka is not “the best.” In addition, a retired broadcaster of Chitumbuka newscasts (who was very popular in the 1960s) lamented that there was “no Chitumbuka” on the radio “these days.” He then went on to claim that in his days, “real” Chitumbuka used to be broadcast on the MBC. This is nothing but nostalgia for what he perceived as the golden past when standards of Chitumbuka broadcasting were high. The retired broadcaster's linguistic prejudice was demonstrated by the claim that during his time, the “best” Chitumbuka was broadcast on the radio. He did not hide his pride in having been part of those “good old days” of Chitumbuka broadcasts. This is what can be called positive linguistic prejudice.

According to Kamwendo (forthcoming), it is not only the urban variants of Chitumbuka that are devalued. There are certain rural varieties that are believed to be peripheral, and as such, they are deemed to lack purity. An example is any variant spoken by non-native speakers of Chitumbuka. For instance, during Kamwendo's interview with the retired radio announcer referred to above, the informant made reference to the African Bible College radio that broadcasts spiritual programmes targeted at Mzuzu city. The informant devalued the radio station's Chitumbuka, arguing that the radio's sole announcer was not a “real Chitumbuka speaker.”<sup>4</sup> When Kamwendo (forthcoming) interviewed the announcer in question, it transpired that he was not a native speaker of Chitumbuka. He was a native speaker of Chindali from Chitipa, and as such, he did not speak the “real” Chitumbuka.

Whilst Chitumbuka is yet to be standardised, and no decision has been made as to how the standard is to be arrived at, there is at least research evidence

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. A Xhosa-speaking nurse in South Africa, who acted as an interpreter between Xhosa-speaking patients and English-speaking doctors, referred to patients from the rural areas as “speaking that deep, deep Xhosa which we don't know because we are grown here” (Crawford 1999: 33). *Here* refers to urban areas, implying that it is speakers who have been raised in urban areas speak the so-called “shallow” Xhosa - a rather impure variety of Xhosa.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), previously regarded as the model of “good” or standard English, has been criticised for lowering the standards through “the employment of African correspondents with deeply local English features, and the reading of unedited letters from listeners that contain substandard features” (Simo Bobda 2004: 19).

(Centre for Language Studies 1999) pointing to a majority preference for the Rumphu variant. This variant was noted by the majority of the informants to be the "best" or the "purest." The Rumphu variety is positively described as *Chitumbuka chiwemi* (the real Chitumbuka) or *Chitumbuka cha pachanya* (top-notch Chitumbuka). Whilst Rumphu is generally regarded as "the home" of Chitumbuka (Centre for Language Studies 1999), the specific Rumphu variant which would serve as the standard Chitumbuka is something that has to be identified. For the linguist, the idea of the "best" or "purest" language variant does not have any scientific validity. However, when it comes to the politics of standardising a language, the evaluative labels that people attach to language variants become very important. Such labels suggest what people are prepared to accept as the standard variety of their language. Going against the wishes of the language speakers can sometimes attract resentment.

It is not only attitudes towards variants that are crucial when deciding on which variant to standardise, but also how widely or narrowly a variant is understood outside the area where its speakers are located. When a variant could not be understood, the common reaction on the part of those who failed to comprehend was to say that it was "not Chitumbuka" (see Kamwendo-forthcoming). There is no doubt that speakers evaluate their own dialects and/or languages as well as the dialects and/or languages of other people. The result is that some dialects or languages are rated higher or lower than others. The relevance of such evaluations for language planning can be summed up as follows: "Language planners must include such evaluations in the planning process if they propose to forecast successfully the outcomes of their efforts" (Rubin 1971: 307).

Another domain that has attracted CLACA's puristic tendencies is education, especially mother tongue instruction. In 1996, the Ministry of Education issued a directive to the effect that from then onwards, pupils in grades 1 to 4 would be taught through their mother tongues. Research has shown that the policy received its strongest support from the Chitumbuka-speaking Northern Malawi (see Centre for Language Studies 1999; Pfaffe 2000). In areas where Chitumbuka is not the dominant language such as in Chitipa, Karonga and Nkhata Bay, support for the use of Chitumbuka as a medium of instruction was lukewarm (Centre for Language Studies 1999). The puristic tone of CLACA came out in the open again in relation to the mother tongue programme's learning and teaching materials. The Teachers' Union of Malawi (TUM) had suggested that subject content books which were written in Chichewa should be translated into Chitumbuka and other relevant languages. This suggestion was rejected by CLACA "because Chichewa books had a culture which was different from Chitumbuka culture e.g. *gule wamkulu*." <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Minutes of CLACA meeting held on 17th May, 1996. Note that *gule wamkulu* (the big dance) is one of the core symbols of Chewa culture.

As a follow up to the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1996 meeting, CLACA wrote to the Ministry of Education, making clear its stand on the translation of books:

"All Tumbuka books should not be reprinted at random but after the approval of the Association for Tumbuka Language and Culture. We want the orthography, which is generally acceptable to appear in the readers today. These should not be literal translations of Chichewa teaching materials." <sup>6</sup>

Since a culture of language ownership exists among speakers of Chitumbuka, it was significant that the so-called "owners" of the language (i.e. native speakers) took part in the revision of the orthography. This exercise was guided by the expertise provided by the University of Malawi's Centre for Language Studies. Despite the involvement of some significant representatives of "the owners" of the language (most of whom were CLACA members) in the revision exercise, resistance to change or non-acceptance of the new orthography cannot be ruled out. Whilst some of the people may not have valid scientific grounds for rejecting the new orthography, the rejection may stem from the fact that the new orthography departs from a tradition they have been associated with for many years. Furthermore, orthographies are not simply technical - they are also part of the social-political and historical life of the people who use them. For some people, an orthography is a tool for creating boundaries and identities. For example, some of the participants at the workshops on the revision of the Chitumbuka orthography had complained that some users of Chitumbuka wrote the language with the use of the Chichewa orthography. This amounts to what Brunstad (2003) calls orthographic purism. An example is the name *Chibanja* that is sometimes spelt as *Chiwanja*. The version of the spelling that has a w is an example of the Chichewa orthography's intrusion into Chitumbuka. Chitumbuka purists argued that the use of b gives a Tumbuka identity.<sup>7</sup>

The Ministry of Education received another letter from CLACA recommending books for the proposed mother tongue instruction programme: "We know the ministry has a big task of finding proper and relevant books that would not contradict with the Tumbuka culture and it is in this regard that we want to recommend the types of books to be used." <sup>8</sup> So far, the Ministry of Education has not taken any action on the translations. (See section 5 for arguments that expose the weakness of CLACA's obsession with Tumbuka cultural purity).

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<sup>6</sup> CLACA's letter to Ministry of Education, dated 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be noted that when Malawi, under President Banda, adopted its own orthography of Chichewa (Chinyanja), the orthography became a national identity for Malawi. For example, to spell the name of a language as Chinyanja was a mark of a Malawian identity whilst the spelling Cinyanja was deemed to be a marker of a non-Malawian identity.

<sup>8</sup> CLACA's letter to the Ministry of Education, dated 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1996.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Thomas (1991) has broken down linguistic purism into four categories, namely: archaic purism; ethnographic purism, elitist purism, reformist purism and xenophobic purism. All these categories of purism do apply to the case of Chitumbuka in Malawi as will be shown below. First, let us consider archaic purism, which refers to the tendency of speakers of a language to revere the past. This sociolinguistic behaviour may involve an attempt to resuscitate the linguistic material of the golden past. In addition to this, there might also exist an exaggerated respect for the past literary models and an excessive conservative attitude towards linguistic innovations. The second category, ethnographic purism, is the tendency to look to rural forms of a language. Rural speech forms are perceived to be purer than urban forms. This tendency can be exemplified by CLACA's suggestion that urban speakers of Chitumbuka should be barred from taking part in Chitumbuka radio programmes. The elitist category of purism is associated with the negative and proscriptive attitude towards non-standard usage. Reformist purism is associated with the desire to modernise, regenerate, renew or resuscitate a language, and CLACA's revision of the orthography belongs to this category. The revision of the orthography fits neatly into what language planning scholars call corpus planning. Xenophobic purism is the rejection of foreign influences. Loan words are the most visible target of xenophobic purism because they are the most recognisable element of foreign influence. In the case of Chitumbuka, the much-unwanted *foreign* influence is actually the national language, Chichewa, and not the official language English. The political history of Malawi has an explanation for this behaviour. To the Tumbuka purists, English is viewed positively as a language for socio-economic and political advancement whilst Chichewa is dressed in negative colours as the language which the Chewa-dominated Banda regime had promoted at the expense of Chitumbuka (see Vail & White 1989).

With reference to CLACA's concerns about cultural or linguistic purity, it is worthwhile to consider the following important questions posed by Felix Banda (Banda 2001: 198): "Is there anything like a pure (stable) language, or a pure (stable) culture? Isn't linguistic shift a natural and inevitable consequence of language contact"? Given that language change is inevitable, one therefore questions the usefulness of CLACA's attempts to arrest language change or language shift. CLACA's fear of the loss of Tumbuka cultural purity through the translation of books from Chichewa into Chitumbuka is unfounded. This is the case partly because the exact link between language and culture is yet to be established as noted by Titscher et al. (2000: 91):

"It is uncontested that language exists in a cultural context, but it remains open how the relationship is to be specified: does language function as the expression of culture and is it determined by the non-linguistic features of culture? Are linguistic and non-linguistic components of culture different in principle from one another? Or does language have a

determining influence on culture as an organisational principle of the material world (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis)? "

Critics of linguistic purism point to the futility of the whole exercise. It is argued that there is no wisdom in trying to act a language immigration officer, trying to check intrusions into the language. The entry of foreign elements into a language cannot be stopped entirely. All living languages are naturally borrowers to various degrees. Restraining a language from using loaned words means restricting the growth of the language and the flexibility of the language users. Another opposing view to purism is that language change is inevitable as long as there is human contact in this multilingual world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is important to bear in mind that the work of CLACA fits into the language planning paradigms of status planning and corpus planning. Language planning is an activity in which several actors are involved. These actors include government agencies, non-governmental organisations and interest groups as well as individuals. The linguistic purism advanced by CLACA is certainly a product of the Malawi's new political dispensation under which there are several types of freedoms and cultural/linguistic rights. Previously under Banda's one-party regime, the voice of CLACA's purism would have been brutally silenced. Kamwendo (2002: 149) has argued that the creation of CLACA in Malawi's new political dispensation is a welcome development because "democratically, no ethnolinguistic identity should be denied institutions that promote, develop and protect the language and culture associated with it." But he cautions that "the problem sets in when this freedom to form language associations is manipulated for ethnocentric or parochial interests" (Kamwendo 2002: 149).

This paper, as stated at the beginning, was largely focussed on CLACA as an association championing the purity of Chitumbuka. This paper does not in any way claim to be exhaustive. It is merely a preliminary investigation into the topic. As Thomas (1991), Dorian (1994), Brunstad (2003) and others have demonstrated, purism is a complex phenomenon. Purism can take various shapes and degrees, with different results in different contexts. Purism can be mild, moderate or extreme. Purism can take off from either a rational or non-rational basis. Those involved in purism may or may not be conscious of the activity they are engaged in. The futility of attempting to keep language(s) pure in this multilingual and multicultural world is clear in the following quote from Laforest (1999: 280): "Variation is at the centre of our concerns, and the resulting dynamic vision allows it to be shown that the concepts of deterioration and purity do not make sense." To this end, "pure" Chitumbuka is a sociolinguistic myth (a mental construct) rather than a reality.

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*Nordic Journal of African Studies*

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