

## NAMAMBE Interview

**Kashindi Ausiku & Ambrosius Mwetwadha Agapitus**

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### TOPIC

#### THE CREATION OF O(T)SHIWAMBO LANGUAGE FOR OMUSATI AND FURTHER (POSSIBLE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT)

I have known Mr. Ambrosius Mwetwadha Agapitus (79) for many years when he worked in the Ministry of Education. I was happy to receive his email in April 2022 expressing an interest in language matters. In his email he wants the captioned topic to be discussed because of some concerns raised on the subject matter. It is a lengthy interview but I want to give as much information as possible because spaces allows.

*“Dear Kashindi, as a former O(t)shiwambo specialist at NIED what do you make of the concerns of some teachers and community members about the disadvantage Omusati learners are reportedly experiencing as a result of being required to study either of the two dialects claiming to be languages/O(t)shiwambo.*

*My contention has always been that there is only one O(t)shiwambo, consisting of about 8 main dialects. There’s honestly a challenge for the people of Omusati, even for the traditional authorities in that Region. How on earth can such authorities function without an own “language”? Differently put, how can they function through a dialect of another traditional authority and still claim to be an independent traditional Authority and have equal standing? I have always dreamt of one O(t)shiwambo which will link up with other Abantu languages in Namibia to form one, while the Khoi and San do the same and the Germanic doing the same. Eventually there would only be 3 languages for posterity to content with in Namibia.”*

**My initial response was that the issue needs to be discussed with stakeholders namely the Ministry of Education, Traditional Authorities and Language experts.**

*His reaction was that he brought it up with me because he once read in the papers about teachers in the Omusati Region bringing it up and an older person also doing so on what they call “omaye koshigwana” which he prefer to call “omanyenyeto gotshigwana” because that’s what happens.*

*Both people quoted above have one thing in common, saying “Omusati learners are being disadvantaged”. As a teacher at Ongwediva Training Centre (current Unam H Pohamba Campus) from 1973 to 1975 I corrected those who marked these learners wrong for using words such as “onganda, eshisha etc” since they were claiming to teach O(t)shiwambo. Not-so-bright learners who were speakers of the Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga dialects out-paced bright learners from what is now Omusati Region.*

*Perhaps the teachers (trainee teachers at the time) who brought it up could be encourage to do what you have suggested. There was a harsh rebuttal to what the older person had said. That response came from an Oshindonga speaker claim they have done a lot to develop their dialects and therefore instead of the Omusati people complaining, they should develop theirs. He did not give reasons why their dialects are forced upon Omusati people, which is the issue at hand on top of them fragmenting the one O(t)shiwambo. As for me it’s **the one** O(t)shiwambo that must be created from its different dialects.*

**I prepared some questions for Mr Agapitus to share his views on the matter however before responding to those questions he prefers to first provide an introduction in order to contextualize the issue.**

## INTRODUCTION:

Before attempting to answer any of the questions provided to me, let me first make a few statements which, in a way, will give a clue to my view on the topic under discussion/consideration.

- Namibia is a **geographical space** we all (Namibians) call home (ours).
- The Namibians arrived at different times in Namibia, but **one group** is known to have arrived earlier than any other. For this reason, the group is referred to as, **“Ovakuru-ha”**.
- During centuries passed, **some Namibians started showing tendencies of wanting to dominate others**, with **colonialism epitomizing these tendencies**.
- This domination resulted in Namibians **being pushed into and confined to certain areas**, with the **stronger group taking a lion’s share of the land**. Namibia became, as it were, a George Orwell’s “Animal Farm”.
- Eventually **Namibians liberated themselves** from the yoke of colonialism, **declare a unitary state** and everyone was free to move freely and live wherever they liked **within the confines** of the laws they have established for themselves.
- Namibians were also empowered to practice their cultures **without domination by others** within the confines of the law.
- However, **damage was done during colonial rule**; those who helped to maintain colonial rule together with their masters developed concepts such as “South Africa is a Western country, or all Whites in Namibia belong to one Ethnic group, that is to say, White Afrikaners and Portuguese and Germans etc, belong to one group even though a German speaking person can only understand Portuguese if s/he has learned it, just as is the case with a Rukavango speaking person. It is not a given for a German speaking person to be able to speak Portuguese. While white Namibians were being united, their black compatriots were being ripped apart for easy control, e.g., speakers of Khoekhoegowab.
- In all these “activities,” **language was used as the distinctive character and claimed to be the single factor to create problems among the Black people when lumped together**.
- Black people who agreed with this “philosophy” **were richly rewarded**.

## QUESTIONS:

### Question 1.

#### 1.1 Where do you currently live?

I live in Windhoek as a pensioner.

#### 1.2 What have you been doing since you retired in 2003?

Allow me first to correct the statement of being a “Director of Education for the Khomas Region”. I have not been in that position.

I was invited to the Ministry of Education... (MECYS) as Director of Education Programmes from 01/09/1990. In June 1994 I was requested to take over the responsibilities of what was known as Windhoek Education Region (in Khomas, Omaheke and Otjozondjupa political regions) till my retirement in April 2003.

In October of the same year (2003), I became Namibia’s Representative to **UNESCO, UNESCO’s Executive Board** in Paris, France. At about the same time, I was also appointed as a member of the **Immigration Tribunal** for the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration. While serving in this responsibility I was appointed chairperson of the **Advisory Council on Teacher Training and Education**.

In 2012 I was appointed chairperson of **NSFAF** to administer it in accordance with its founding legal instruments. Suffice to mention those few.

For most of the time I have been and still am working on my autobiography. Much of what I am sharing in answering these questions are excerpts from that document and are in the main, protected/privileged information. i.e., “copy-righted”.

### Question 2.

How many languages do you **speak/understand/can write**?

To be consistent in what I regard, this question wishes to achieve, I’ll first provide a definition for “**language**” as I conceive of it. In its simplest definition a language is a composition of several **dialects** spoken by several groups of people sharing several traditional and cultural norms and traits, especially tangible and intangible heritage.

**The main difference among the dialects is the intonations (singing) of the dialects.** If one attended a cultural event such as the totem (clan identification), it becomes clear that the differences in dialects was caused by the environment the groups lived in. One finds that the clan represented by a particular totem consists of members from many dialects, if not all dialects of the language.

Considering these observations, I am forced to conclude that **the sum total of the different dialects, is the language and must be kept intact.** The “How it could/must/should and why it must be done” is the subject of the heading: “**Should Omusati start creating an O(t)shiwambo that is inclusive of all its dialects and not follow the Oshikoto and Ohangwena road**”?

**Now to the question posted above.**

**2.1 Speak:**

- I am an **Otshiwambo-speaking** ( Otshikwambi dialect) **Namibian**; my ID confirms this.
- Otjiherero, (becoming vestigial though).
- Afrikaans, still fine.
- English, still fine.
- Deutsch, becoming seriously vestigial.

**2.2 Understand:** all the above, except Deutsch when spoken by native speakers;

**2.3 Can write:** all the above (5)

**Question/Request 3.**

**What are your views on the (current) status of Oshiwambo “languages?”**

***Introductory remarks:***

The Directorate Education Programmes consisted of four divisions each headed by a CEO:

These divisional heads (CEOs), under the guidance of their director, were responsible for supervision of proper implementation of the programmes in the Regions, at their level of responsibility.

3.1 Division: Pre-Primary and Primary Education;

3.2 Division: Secondary Education Programmes for both Junior and Seneior Secondary Programmes;

3.3 Division: Tertiary Education responsible for Teacher Training and Education;

3.4 Division: Technical and Vocational Education.

As we all know Curriculum Development happened at NIED, but **approval** was done by a high-level committee (**Technical Committee on Basic Education Reform**) in the MECYS Head Office consisting of senior officials in the Ministry, External Advisers to the Ministry and representatives of countries supporting our new government in Education. I was appointed in the position of chairperson.

**3.5 My views on the current status of Oshiwambo “languages” in the northern part of Namibia:**

***Historical perspective:***

**3.5.1 Missionary work to create orthography for O(t)shiwambo:**

It's common knowledge that the first Missionaries settled in Ondonga. My exposition is not concerned with what faith they professed, neither with the evaluation of the benefit they brought to the

communities they served. I am concerned with the means of communication they employed to get across their message.

These individuals were concerned with evangelizing the immediate community they encountered. On top of that they were controlled by the kings who gave them permission to operate in their areas of jurisdiction. So, they learned and subsequently used the “language” of the king who had given them the right to operate in their area. As they travel far afield to spread their message in other jurisdiction, they discovered the close relationship between/among the “languages” and soon learned to know that the people call themselves Aawambo/Ovawambo and the language O(t)shiwambo. As they recognized that there was not much difference between/among the “language” they have learned and those spoken by people far a field in the area called Owambo, and that everyone was called Omuwambo. Consequently, the Lutheran Missionaries (the first group to arrive in the part under discussion), moved to other areas of Owambo, preaching the word of God without having to learn the “languages” of those groups.

When the Catholics arrived, they followed the example set by their forerunners and took what was already accomplished, including carpentry facilities to build churches, but as they were to operate in Uukwambi, they noticed that they needed to change the “l” to “r” and that the “h” is used differently in Oshindonga and Otshikwambi. Similarly, while Otshikwambi also has a “sh” it has a “tsh” sound. The Anglican Church which also arrived in Owambo in August 1924 followed the same rout as the Catholics who arrived in April 1924.

#### **FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS:**

It was the South African government which enticed the kings and chiefs in Owambo to create a semi-autonomous Owambostan. What followed was utter confusion in the Otshiwambo speaking people who have always lived harmoniously and cohesively in that part of Namibia. See below for additional information and exposition)

From 1990, we were guided by a document called “Change with Continuity, a Development Plan”. In short, the idea was/is that we change and develop the new education system while holding on, on some old stuff of education until we had the time and resources to develop our own relevant education system.

The Language Committee was a subcommittee of the Technical Committee on Basic Education Reform. I was an “advisor” to the chairperson and was very clear on what was happening in the country with respect to language development. Much of what was happening in this area I can’t fit in as it will fill tens of pages. Much of what I am alluding to happened during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I can just mention that in a meeting in the mid-sixties Otshikwambi was made of as a derivative of Oshindonga. It

must be discontinued in schools in the area. It was at the time the Catholic Church was **forced** to give up its schools as other denominations had done (willingly). The Catholic Church was advised to use Otshikwambi only for church services. It had the resources to do whatever it needed since it had its own printing works, the Angelus Printing at the Doepra Mission just outside Windhoek. Following on this action St Joseph’s Teacher Training College was forced to Oshindonga to Teacher trainees since that was the “language” of the envisaged Owambo.

It needs to be mentioned that Otshikwambi was also enforced in areas such as Ombalantu where names such as “Aluvilu” were written “Arudhiru” (Arudiru in the beginning). When schools (Catholic) were forced to use Oshindonga, Otshikwambi was no longer in use. In fact, these schools were later also taken over by the “system”. One can possibly change some words in a dialect but, changing names mid-stream is a crime. See my arguments below pt 6.2.

During the 1970s, the same threat was directed at Oshikwanyama when the speakers of Oshikwanyama demanded that their “language” be put on par with Oshindonga. Suffice to mention that the threat could not be withstood by those in “power” and the dialect got recognized.

### 3.5.2 O(T)SHIWAMBO:

For me O(t)shiwambo has always been the language spoken by Ova-wa-mbo/Aawambo/Aahanawa-mbo as a name possibly given to them by their cousins, the Ovaherero, and occupying predominantly Northern Namibia where they settled centuries ago. and the area became known as Owambo. Their language O(t)shiwambo consists of 8 dialects with minor differences so that a speaker of one of the dialects may not easily distinguish between two dialects until s/he hears a characteristic sound letter in the speech. Up to date I also cannot easily distinguish between Otshingandjera, Otshikwaruudhi and Otshikoronkadhi. I am also aware of the fact that many speakers of the Oshikwanyama have the same problem.

With time I have developed a tendency to classify these dialects in two groups, mainly because either of the use of L/l or R/r or the exclusive use of the “sh” or a mixture of “sh” and “tsh”. The “tsh” give distinct meanings to words, especially to nouns as I will point out later. The “L/R” is considered the same letter/sound.

A teaser:

When we came to St Joseph’s in 1957, knowing very little Afrikaans and being speakers of the Otshikwambi dialect, this Afrikaans sentence was the trainer in the “l” and “r” sound. **“My pa se rooi klip kraal is klaar”**. It was more challenging because our Std 1 (Grade 3) teacher was an “Ombwiti”, originally from Onendongo, near Oshakati.

Below I present the dialects of O(t)shiwambo the way I perceive them:

#### **L,l group:**

Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Oshimbadja, Oshimbalantu(Oshimbaanhu);

#### **R,r group:**

Otshikwambi, Otshingandjera, Otshikwaruudhi, Otshikoronkadhi.

### **A brief history:**

The fact that dialects of Namibian African Languages are being considered as languages up to this point in our history, is ascribed to the lack of continued development of Namibia's African Languages in the Ministry of Education. What we have now is like what existed and developed by the Apartheid government. This was done with the assistance of Namibians who were contracted to the Taalbuuro. Instead of synthesizing an Oshiwambo, Rukavango etc, they assisted the enemy to divide Namibians into dialect speakers, not language speakers. I know one Afrikaner who worked at that institution, the Taalbuuro, who later became an inspector in Owambo. Together with his Oshiwambo speaking colleagues. I understand that he had a master's degree in Oshindonga. They used to compile the curriculum and syllabus for Oshindonga in Afrikaans. The "language" Oshindonga was called, "**Ndonga**". As a member of many ministerial committees, I argued for these "languages" to be "**Oshi**"ndonga, "**Oshi**"kwanyama and other "**Otji**"herero instead of Herero, "**Ru**"kwangali and not just **Kwangali** etc. From the little knowledge of languages that I have, I could see that all languages I knew, were expressed in an adjectival form. I have learned, without being a linguist that we simply say Afrikaans and not Afrika.

**I beg to be corrected with honesty by those who know this field better, because I want and wish us to get out of the current confusion.**

### **Question 4.**

#### **Should the learners in the Omusati Region continue with the status quo or what now?**

4.1 Namibians **must** strive **to move towards one another**, not move apart to form cocoons of our own. To that end Namibians must regard one another as equals. We should not use insignificant differences to go back to or keep Apartheid structures and formations in place.

As for Otshiwambo, the dialects must be considered mutually re-enforcing as has happen to European languages and others. From what I have come to know, it's the dominant Language not a dialect that could be considered the lingua franca in a country. In Namibia, Afrikaans is the language that comes closer to that criterion. However, we all know that it was pushed down our throats and at Independence, we refused it to become a lingua franca for Namibia.

4.2 There is no need to **develop orthographies** for all 8 dialects of the Otshiwambo language. I grant those who believe there are more than 8 dialects their opinion. They must only present their case as everyone is doing, all for the sake of an enriched Otshiwambo.

Work has already been done as I have discussed this matter above. What remains for us is to resolve the problem of the same sound expressed by letters "h" and "x" as well as that of "l" and "r" in Otshiwambo.

4.3 The suggestion for Otshikwambi to be used in the Catholic Church services, is not helpful and educationally ill-conceived. Does this mean that even in Oshikoto and Ohangwena Regions Catholic church services should be conducted in Otshikwambi or does it mean that Catholicism must only be practice in Uukwambi? The latter is against the Nam Constitution and can't be entertained. Speakers of the Otshikwambi dialect are not all catholics. Catholic children like many other Otshiwambo speaking children attend government schools and here O(t)shiwambo (language) not dialects must be used.

**Just look at this scenario:**

During school time the Omusat Region Catholic child is subjected to Oshikwanyama/Oshindonga from Monday to Friday and suddenly on Sunday the Church service/Holy Mass is in Otshikwambi dialect (also in Ohangwena and Oshikoto?).

Therefore, the energy of all the Otshiwambo speaking Namibians must be utilized in the synthesis of an Otshiwambo for the majority of Otshiwambo speaking people who are mostly found in the far northern areas of the country. I bet you my cow, many town dwellers will opt for economically useful languages, whatever we think. Therefore, stop being proud of enforcing dialects as languages. We are busy losing out on enriching Otshiwambo as we dismiss words not used in “our dialects” (Oshikwanyama/Oshindonga). Such words are supposed to serve as synonyms, eg onganda, eshisha etc.

Advancing 2 dialects to representing Oshiwambo is disingenuous because those excluded were not invited to the decision-making process. This is the reason why 2 teacher trainees from Unam’s HP Campus had/have questions to ask. The meeting in the mid-1960s, I mentioned earlier, to which the Catholics were invited, was a done deal. They had no contribution to make, a decision had already been made.

***Changing with continuity: A development Plan.....***

The Language Committee decided for an interim arrangement because “we were changing educational programmes with continuity”. This meant that the committee had to make provisional arrangements for the interim period while officials in NIED pondered and develop an Otshiwambo in line with the provisions of the Namibian Constitution which protects the rights of all persons, not some.

The use of the “local language” is meant for an ethnic group or a language developed by a community from an own mix of different languages. Fanakalo in some SADC countries is such an example. Such language develop out of a need in the particular community as is common in mines and towns where the inhabitants are all exposed to the one language. This situation could also be applied to the official language or former official language. Note that I am not talking about former “glorified dialects” as was applied in the former Owambo Banustan. The latter arrangement is at best called “assimilation”, which is a form of the “survival of the fittest” (Charles Darwin) or George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” where some animals are more equal than others.

**5. What are most challenging aspects of teaching languages in Namibia?**

Let me start by saying the obvious. I am not a trained language teacher. I am a Natural Sciences/Maths teacher. However, during my teacher training, I was trained to achieve a certain level of competency in the use of English, Afrikaans and Deutsch as media of instruction in that order with a minimum of 60%, 50% and 50% respectively. Even though the “Language Policy...” speaks of both Mother Tongue or Home Language as MoL (medium of instruction), the latter was more fitting for the Namibian child on educational grounds. In my experience, I found many Namibians marrying across ethnic lines. For the white Namibians this did not present a problem since the Official Language(s) was/were European in origin. Black families in that category opted/opt for the adoption of the Official Language as Home Language for obvious reasons. Is **any** dialect of Oshiwambo, a “Home Language/dialect for speakers of **all** dialects of Oshiwambo? Yes/No? Please think seriously about it.

5.1 Teaching a dialect to its native speakers is relatively easy because the learners know much of it from home. The opposite is a different game. Firstly, this because of the intonation (music of the language/dialect) and secondly because of some words that are different.

5.2 If it's a dialect taught to learners of other dialects of the same language there is a natural resistance to such as there always exists a "bias," a negative perception of others.

5.3 The teaching of a dialect to others by speaker of it carries with it the perception of "you want to dominate us, you are imposing yourself on us".

5.4 Teaching any language can be rewarding if those taught have a natural affinity or liking towards or for it. In many cases we are taught languages and or dialects by people whose only aim is to lord it over us. This is not helpful to say the least.

5.5 In a case of assimilation such as in Omusati Region where two dialects of the Otshiwambo language are presenting themselves as the "predominant *spoken languages*", a falsehood is created and supported on the basis of the content of the Language Policy of ... , which was meant to be reviewed every now and then as the Ministry continued to change policies and curriculum content. Clearly some people considered and used such documents wittingly or unwittingly as the alpha and omega for the creation of a new education dispensation. ***In so doing they perpetuate the Bantustan Education system as was implemented in Owambo as from 1974 onward.***

**Question 6. Do you have any other idea(s) that you would like to share with our readers regarding education or language?**

#### **6.1 On Education:**

**Education is that informal or formal phenomenon and activity carried out by humans on their young to become more human, ie acting in such a way that they do not disturb the general social order of the community to which they are expected to positively contribute when they attain adulthood (my own definition).**

Having stated this somewhat obvious fact, let me hasten to make some comments on what I see happening/not happening:

6.1.1 There is a serious lack of informal education at home by parents! Many reasons are advanced, but as a regional director (9 yrs), I had found many reasons boarded on shifting the blame to others, usually the grandparents and the socio-economic problems. This has been true for a tiny minority of parents.

6.1.2 The education activity seems to be the one human activity everyone can do, however, only a few consider it noble. Many despise it as something for the dull and stupid members of the community who cannot perform given other tasks.

6.1.3 Teachers are no longer treated with respect. There are cases when teachers have been beaten up in classrooms in front of the learners etc. People claim many teachers no longer behave appropriately. Yet, most teachers behave as required by the community. Many teachers still do well compared to the parents who neglect their responsibilities. The teaching profession is being trampled upon by those they have helped to do well in life. Despite their cardinal responsibility, they resort under the lower classes when it

comes to their remuneration. Former German chancellor, Angela Merkel is one of those who know the value of a teacher and in such countries, teachers are the highest paid civil servant. She, was quoted as saying to other civil servant: **“I cannot pay you more than your teachers”**.

6.1.4 Education must serve to unite people and not to make some lord it over others (see arguments above).

6.1.5 Dialects are not languages, they contribute to a language by bringing in more words, making the language rich. Dialects were/are created by the new environment in which people find themselves and fending for their lives. Sometimes this happen because of nearness to a somewhat different but dominant tribe (“onganda” in Otshingandjera, etc, from Otjihimba ).

## 6.2 On Language/dialect:

Language is, in most cases, the “thing” (lack of proper word) that is used by those, who propagate/stress differences than unity between and among peoples. As president of the OTA (Ovamboland Teachers Association) and the rest of the Executive committee, we had countless arguments with white officials at the Education offices in Ondangwa, about this point. We started propagating the idea of introducing English as the medium of instruction in schools in Owambo in the mid-1970s. We were given absurd answers for reasons which I will not mention here.

At St Joseph’s we had always found that language is the best means of uniting different peoples, even when the Apartheid government was hell-bound on destroying unity among black people. As you read my answers, please note that I continue to stress directly or indirectly the importance of inclusiveness and recognition of the individual “dialect groups”. I am not a believer in “unity in diversity”, I believe in “one country, one people”. I do not know how “unity in diversity” works and can work in Namibia. All I see around is more and more creation of Traditional/Tribal Authorities country wide. We will very soon end up with what is known as “many chiefs, few Indians”. The last scenario is not what I wish to happen in Namibia. I find it regrettable that many callers to the “Omayele koshigwana”, do not seem to know the differences between culture and development, tradition and development and tradition and culture. Most defend **backwardness/lack of development** as “our culture and traditions and the like”.

In Omusati Region we find the most stupid actions as Oshindonga and of late, Oshikwanyama are introduced as “languages in schools and the whole government system”. Let me give a practical stupid example that affects me personally and thousands of others.

**The Otshikuku Roman Catholic Mission Station, St Theresia gwokanona Jesus**, was established on 24 August 1924. I mentioned earlier that the Otshikwambi dialect orthography was developed fully about 1951 by missionaries, but work started very much earlier on the dialect. I **continue to stress that unless certain people wittingly try to promote segregation (and more equal than others mentality), there exist no basis to want to elevate a dialect to a recognized language. Otshiwambo tshAawambo consisting of 8 dialects (possibly more as some contend) is the language of that ethnic group.**

Because of what is said in the paragraph above, our Otshiwambo names were/are written in the Otshikwambi dialect since 1924, including that of the late and last King of Uukwambi, lipumbu Herman ya Tshirongo. Above, I have already mentioned what has happened to the Aambalantu/Aambaanhu names.

Our marriage certificate, written in English, bears a stamp date that reads “St Theresia RC Church, **Otshikuku**”. The dialect spoken around the Mission Station is **Otshikwambi**, but **the Constituency and the Town Council** established not so long ago, are **called Oshikuku**.

One of the villages whose name has been changed dramatically is Otshuungu (my roots are here). It is now baptized, **Oshuungu** (mopane caterpillars) which is not the meaning in Otshikwambi.

I am a proponent of the unification of the dialects into Otshiwambo language, which unification makes it cheaper to fund and develop it as a language spoken by a sizable number of Namibians. Only minor work needs to be accomplished by specialists in that field, the orthography already exists. I have the experience of being approached by so many non-Otshiwambo speaking individuals wanting to learn Otshiwambo. For obvious reason, I did not have any advice for them.

The creation of many “languages” by the elevation of dialects to language status, does not only create confusion and animosity (it has already done so), but it’s extremely expensive and will fail in the not-too-distant future. In the Omusati and the Oshana Regions the two dialects are being implemented with competition. This stems from the fact that the provisions of the Decentralisation Policy, whereby services are provided from the center to the fringes like a wave, are being ignored in some constituency of the Omusati Region. Instead of the devolution and decentralization of structures and functions being carried out from the Constituency capital to the outside where secondary centers are created to bring services closer to the people, the reverse has happened. Even though the Constituency capital is centrally situated, two secondary schools have been created north and south of it to provide for those perceived to be speakers of the Oshikwanyama “language” and Oshindonga “language”. Please be reminded that there are no Oshindonga “language” speakers in Omusati Region to warrant the creation of a secondary school. This purely done to prevent a clash over whose dialect to be considered official “language”. Children/learners (grade 10) are suffering because of this game play by educationists who know better and are called upon to protect and ensure a positive education result for them. A Secondary School with a hostel for the learners of the Constituency never materialized. Schools mentioned above have no hostel facilities. In that Constituency important services such as health and education are provided away from the Constituency Head Office. This has happened even though, already the Councillor’s Office, Inspector of Education offices and a home have been built, there is a large Police institution with holding cells, an agricultural extension office, a combined school and a township map done in 2005 indicating its first phase. The school was upgraded with MCA money since it was identified as structure in a growth point. Clearly, this was donor money gone wasted, to say the least. No wonder we are experiencing donor fatigue presently.

Let me say this. Namibian African languages are of little economic value at present, and we are squarely responsible for the mess. Otshiwambo has a good chance to overcome this hurdle if we create (one) Otshiwambo, because the numbers will make economic sense. What we are doing now, is simply political expediencies. Government cannot maintain a budget for these dialects if the money can be spent to fund economic activities for the livelihood of the population, especially the youth. Whether we like it or not, English, having an economic value, will continue to be our official language for many more years to come. Our support to dividing ourselves, is responsible for this mess and the sooner we realise this, the better. I am not saying we must through away our culture, tradition, language, and the lot, I am saying we must be smart in navigating the times we live in. We already see the move to English by many children, especially those of the well-to-do parents. They feel that their children do not get well versed in an

economically useful language when they are taught African languages or through African languages. For admission to university locally, they are required to obtain a **certain symbol in English**. Universities are universal institutions and cannot afford **not to be competitive world-wide**.

**7. If we are serious about our culture and traditions, we must choose unifying our dialects of Otshiwambo over segregation or assimilation. This is what I am suggesting being carried out in Omusati Region for a start, i.e., pushing the dialects together and teach O(t)shiwambo as spoken in Omusati. A committee of linguists and others in Omusati, who are currently used as Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga teachers, must guide the process.** The aim is to eventually unite the dialects into a language that can be considered ours and can contribute to Namibian unity which many crave for.

Just look at an Omusati Region child going to school and to be told that the plural form of “ongombe” is “oongombe”. If one knows Otjiherero, one recognizes that Oshindonga dialect has inherited and uses the Otjiherero “plural form”. This is only O(t)shiwambo dialect that does so. For example: Ongombe (singular form) becomes ozongombe (plural form) in Otjiherero, and in the Oshindonga dialect ongombe becomes o(z)ongombe (oongombe). For this class of nouns in all other dialects of Otshiwambo, the plural form is “ee- “ (eengo(m)be.

According to this way of thinking above, the Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga dialects will be “worked” into the initial product created for Omusati Region’ to complete the picture. No one should in any way think that this will be completed tomorrow, but if we are to prevent the scenario pictured above, we must start today and keep on going. They say “Rome was not built in one day” or “Oha ka yara norwoozi rumwe”. This action involves changing perceptions, which arguably, is difficult with the current generation. Some of it finds it difficult to transit from the old dispensation to the new united Namibia. Many still speak of “Otandi hi kOwambo” and the like. **I keep on stressing that the language policy quoted by many people was transitional and not final.**

It therefore needs to be stressed that the main differences among our dialects are in the singing(intonation/music) of the dialects, but this has already been resolved through history. Even those of us who practically grew up in Uutshimba, at school, many a time going home on holiday only after 3 solid years, never having met an Otshikwaruudhi speaker before that, ..have no need for an interpreter when we encounter someone speaking that dialect (my experience at the Ongwediva Education Centre). No Otshiwambo speaking person ever needed translation into his/her dialect. What has been achieved orthographically for Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga and Otshikwambi is equally relevant to other dialects. There is no need to re-invent the wheel.

#### **8. Response to the two articles in the media:**

My unedited email of Friday, 22 April 2022 to Mr Kashindi Ausiku remains valid in the main, and in line with my answers to the questions I have been requested to respond to/give my view about. The writers of both articles believe in **many Oshiwambo languages**. They only differ seemingly on which to be recognition. The group view them as not home languages in Omusati Region. The other group argues they are not forced upon the people of Omusati.

What I am saying about this issue is contained in these pages, above and below. I will cherish responses in terms of critique, not criticism which is not helpful.

The bottom-line is: **WE NEED O(T)SHIWAMBO AS A LANGUAGE, NOT DIALECTS OF O(T)SHIWAMBO ELEVATED TO LANGUAGE STATUS.** WE DO NOT WANT TO FOLLOW WHAT MISSIONARIES AND COLONIALISTS DID TO US TO SERVE THEIR OWN AIMS AND FOR THEIR COMFORT. WE THANK THEM THOUGH, FOR TEACHING US TO PUT OUR LANGUAGES TO SCRIPT.

AT THE PRESENT TIME, WE ARE STRIVING FOR ONE NAMIBIA, ONE PEOPLE; NOT GEORGE ORWELL'S 'ANIMAL FARM' WHERE SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS. WE MUST MOVE FROM MANY DIALECTS TO A FEW LANGUAGES WHICH WILL BE AFFORDABLE FOR OUR GOVERNMENT. WHO KNOWS, PERHAPS WE WILL EVENTUALLY ONLY HAVE ONE BANTU LANGUAGE, ONE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE AND ONE KHOISAN LANGUAGE.

Regards to all who will read my views on this issue and God bless you all!

BY: Ambrosius M Agapitus

Windhoek (July 2022)

**NB:**

**Dear readers please feel free to send your comments or input to [kashindi@gmail.com](mailto:kashindi@gmail.com) or whatsApp to +264 85 2000 100**