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## Preserving the Umbundu Language

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PRESERVING THE UMBUNDU LANGUAGE

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Ana Alexandra Silva <sup>a</sup> & Hermenegildo Pinto <sup>a</sup>

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The factors that have led to the decrease in Umbundu as a communication language among the inhabitants of Kuito and possible solutions to increase the use of the Umbundu language are also addressed.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**A**ngola, as well as most of the Sub-Saharan nations, is a group of nations with several ethnic groups in plurilingual coexistence. Due to historical reasons associated with a long period of colonial domination, most African countries use only one official language of European origin. That is the case in all Portuguese-speaking African countries, such as Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

The colonial powers occupied the various Angolan territories and grouped them, giving rise to new territorial configuration, different from the pre-colonial period. Portuguese people, encouraged by the outcomes of the Berlin conference, occupied<sup>2</sup> the

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<sup>2</sup> The occupational wars were called, according to Coelho (2015: 2), “(...) campaigns for pacification of «indigenous», «savage», «primitive» people of Angola.”

territories that they deemed to be theirs by right, by the secular contacts previously established, fighting and destroying the territories' socioeconomic and political structures (Coelho, 2015:2). The result of the land division did not consider the ethnolinguistic diversity of the people who inhabited the occupied territories. Angola is a plurilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic nation, a reality of great complexity at the linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and policies levels. This brings about the challenge of building national unity while, at the same time, preserving the respect and promotion of diversity (Leite, 2015:7).

The *Constitution of the Republic of Angola*, in its 19th article, defines the language policy of the Angolan State:

1. The official language of the Republic of Angola shall be Portuguese.
2. The State shall promote the study, teaching, and usage of Angolan national languages (...).

As to be expected, the adoption of Portuguese as the official language diminished the importance of the Angolan languages, which has led to a decrease in their usage. Since the formation of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola in 2010, not much has been done to honor the stated language policies. There is still no national language teaching policy that covers all regions of the country. In contrast, the Portuguese language seems to be gaining more and more speakers.

Despite the immense linguistic diversity, in terms of national languages and their dialects, most of the Angolan population, especially in urban areas, speaks Portuguese, the communication and education language. The 2014 general census conducted in Angola shows that 71% of the Angolan population speaks and uses Portuguese as an L1.

As the country is rejuvenating, there is a growing population of Portuguese-speaking individuals and a decrease in the number of Angolan national language speakers. If Angola was inhabited by 26 million people in 2014, that number today will be much higher (data from United Nations agencies show a very rapid population growth).

The annual report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the population state, released on April 2, 2019, and published on the "Observador"<sup>3</sup> website on April 4, 2019, indicates that the population in Angola has almost tripled in the last 15

<sup>3</sup> <https://observador.pt/2019/04/09>.



years, amounting to 31.8 million people, a figure that contrasts with 13.8 million in 1994 and less than half that number of 6.6 million in 1969.

Regarding Umbundu language, Angola's population census conducted in 2014 showed that about 23% of the Angolan population spoke Umbundu, making this the largest ethnolinguistic group in Angola. The following three most spoken national languages are Kikongo, Kimbundu and Cokwe<sup>4</sup>, in that order, and altogether do not exceed, in number, the speakers of Umbundu.

## II. SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHARACTERIZATION OF OVIMBUNDU

The origin of "Ovimbundu" (or Ovimbundo) has been subject of several studies by historians and linguists, such as Soares and Agostinho (2016), with the book *A coleção Ovimbundo do museu nacional, Angola 1929-1935*; Sebestyen (2015) in his book *A sociedade ovimbundo nos relatórios de viagens do húngaro László Magyar: sul de Angola, meados do século XIX*; Childs ([1949] (2020)), in his book *Umbundu Kinship and Character* and Davidson (1981), with the book *The Africans*, among others.

These scholars present various theories about the emergence of the Ovimbundu people in Angola. Their presence in Angola resulted from the movement of the militant Imbangala group that, after arriving in Libolo, established a collaboration that would last for many years with the Portuguese. Later migration and dispersion to the South towards the water springs of the Kwanza led to an ethnic merge, resulting in an association of the autochthonous populations with the Imbangalas. This association resulted in between twelve and twenty independent and autonomous kingdoms that were well-established up until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Soares, 2014:93).

According to Benvindo (2016:36), the term *Ovimbundu* derives from the semantic evolution of the term *muntu (munthu)*, which in various African linguistic expressions, takes on the meaning of "person". The author adds that the term *muntu* constitutes the root of the linguistic origin common to the Bantu people (*Bantu* or *Vantu*). A people who have linguistic similarities and share common traits, tracing their heritage not only to a common linguistic root but also to an ethnic origin, possibly closer than that of other African people.

The Ovimbundu are a people who, until the Portuguese arrived in Benguela, lived on subsistence farming, hunting, and some cattle and small animal husbandry. Later, with the colonial impositions, began marketing agricultural products, mainly maize.

<sup>4</sup> The three groups represent 22.6% of national language speaker population.

From a social point of view, the Ovimbundu were always a homogeneous people, living in extensive villages and with a great capacity for mobility, so they spread out to various localities. They also had a humble and obedient character, which may have eased their colonial domination. They were taken to several provinces of Angola for forced labor. This integration of the Ovimbundu generated a particular cultural and linguistic "umbundization" in these areas/regions.

In terms of geographical location, the Ovimbundu people reside in territories bordered by other languages, such as:

(...) leste com a Língua Cokwe (província do Moxico); a Norte, encontramos a Língua Kimbundu, (província do Kwanza-Sul), a Sul, a Língua Nhyaneka - Humbi e o Oshihelo, (na Huíla) e ainda a sudoeste, encontramos a Língua Ngangela, na província do Kwando-Kubango. Segundo a geografia traçada, podemos verificar que o Umbundu se estende, precisamente, em três áreas principais que constituem as três províncias do Huambo, Bié e Benguela. (Costa, 2015: 13-14)<sup>5</sup>

Other people live in the Bié region, namely the Cokwe, the second largest linguistic community in the province.

Almost all national languages in Angola were in contact with Portuguese during the colonial period. In the case of Umbundu, there was contact in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Costa, 2015: 14) at the beginning of colonial rule in Angola. Through this contact, obviously, a whole process of mutual interference between the two languages in the national territory began. This interference is visible in the expansion and renewal of the lexicon (loans), phonetic modifications of words, and morphosyntactic structuring, among others.

About this, Costa (2015: 58) states:

Depois de vários séculos de convivência linguística, entre o Português e as línguas nacionais, hoje, o Português em Angola transformou-se numa "língua nova", com sotaque próprio, diferente do de Portugal e do Brasil; recorre constantemente a unidades lexicais e a expressões do Kimbundu e de outras Línguas angolanas, sobretudo quando quer expressar factos ou realidades socioculturais que o Português não possui e, às vezes, em determinados tipos de discursos, quando quer produzir efeitos estilísticos, dando ênfase a determinada expressão.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> (...) east with the Cokwe language (province of Moxico), to the north, we find the Kimbundu language, (province of Kwanza-Sul), to the South, the Nhyaneka language - Humbi and Oshihelo, (in Huila) and still to the Southwest, we find the Ngangela language, in the province of Kwando-Kubango. Following the traced geography, we can verify that Umbundu extends, precisely, in three main areas that constitute the three provinces of Huambo, Bié and Benguela. (Costa, 2015: 13-14)

<sup>6</sup> After several centuries of linguistic coexistence between Portuguese and the national languages, today, Portuguese in Angola has been transformed into a "new language", with a particular accent, different from that of Portugal and Brazil; it constantly resorts to lexical units and expressions from Kimbundu and other Angolan Languages, especially when it wants to express facts or sociocultural realities that



During the initial contact between Portuguese and Umbundu, the dominant idiom maintained an approximation to the standard of European Portuguese, in lexical, phonetic and morphosyntactic terms. Over time, an Umbundu Portuguese (PU) began to acquire characteristics that were increasingly distant from the European Portuguese. Thus, when the population census says that most of the Angolan population speaks and uses the Portuguese language as a means of communication, even in family relations, we must understand it as having its own variants as verified in "Kimbundizado" Portuguese (KP) – Portuguese spoken with solid traits of Kimbundu - , "Bakonguizado" Portuguese (BP) - Portuguese spoken with solid traits of Kikongo - , "Chokwizado" Portuguese (PC) - Portuguese spoken with solid characteristics of Chokwe, etc.

This reality happens not only among those who have Portuguese as their L2 but also among those who, without the solid influence of any AL in their daily life since birth, have Portuguese as the language of communication, distanced, however, from the standard of the EP.

However, it is a fact that the number of AL speakers has been decreasing over time. This increase in speakers of AP (Angolan Portuguese) and the consequent decrease in speakers of AL, contrary to what one might imagine, is a phenomenon that started during colonial times, as Costa (2015:63) confirms:

Já antes da independência, num estudo feito na época, verificou-se que, em Luanda, o número de falantes monolingues Kimbundu tinha diminuído, favorecendo assim a subida da percentagem de falantes bilingues kimbundu/português.<sup>7</sup>

This same fact is also pointed out by Manuel (2015:14) who, citing various sources, points to the growth of Portuguese as the language of a growing number of Angolans:

O facto de o Português se ter expandido durante este tempo fez com que o número de falantes que adquiriram esta língua como L1 e como L2 aumentasse. Pode ilustrar-se este facto apresentando os resultados de dois estudos. O de Endruschat (1990), que se centra no ano da independência (1975), estima que 1 a 2% da população tinha o português como L1 e 15 a 20% tinha-o como L2, apontando para uma tendência em que a maioria da população tem o português como L2.<sup>8</sup>

Portuguese does not possess and, sometimes, in certain types of discourses, when it wants to produce stylistic effects, emphasizing certain expressions.

<sup>7</sup> Before independence, in a study done at that time, it was found that in Luanda, the number of monolingual Kimbundu speakers had decreased, thus favoring the rise in the percentage of bilingual Kimbundu/Portuguese speakers (Costa 2015: 63).

<sup>8</sup> The fact that Portuguese has expanded during this time has meant that the number of speakers who have acquired this language as L1 and as L2 has increased. Two studies illustrate these results. Endruschat (1990), which focuses on the year of independence (1975), estimates that 1 to 2% of the population had Portuguese as

In certain situations, it is advantageous to use Portuguese as a means of communication because its use will capture a much wider audience than when using only one AL. As Fonseca (2012: 5) points out, some leaders who passed through Angola expressed themselves in their national languages, but only when they went to regions where that language was spoken. If a leader's AL was, for example, Umbundu, he could not go to regions of Northern Angola using his AL, because he would be understood only by a small number of people, which could be interpreted as a lack of respect.

The studies made by Manuel (2015:14), citing several authors, show that in 2014, 42% of the population under nine years had Portuguese as L1. In the age group between 10 and 19 years percentage was 34%, which clearly shows the increasingly accentuated growth of Portuguese as the top language in communication among Angolans, with a consequent decrease in the use of AL.

From early on, the existence of an official language was understood as a factor of unity and cohesion among people. Adopting of a single language that unites different people within the same territory was a good strategy to achieve this goal. (Fonseca, 2012:4).

### III. L1 AND L2 OF KUITO'S INHABITANTS

The mother tongue (L1) of an individual is the language spoken at home by close relatives and in the surrounding community. It is not necessarily the parents', grandparents', or any other local language. In Angola it is not unusual that different national languages coexist in the same community, and that is the case of the city of Kuito.

For a language to be considered a speaker's L1, it must be part of the speaker's thought process, for it is in this language they think, talk, argue, or refute about the most diverse aspects of human life. A reasonable understanding of a particular language does not make it the L1 of a speaker.

Although, in the distant past, Umbundu was the language most spoken by the natives of Kuito, after independence, there was a reversal of this trend, aggravated by the Angolan government's decision to elect Portuguese as the official language. To speak Portuguese boosts citizens' integration into the formal realm of society, making it easier to gain employment and facilitate contact between people of different origins and ethnic groups.

The armed conflict that devastated the country for almost three decades had a strong influence concerning this issue, as there was an inevitable polarisation between the belligerent forces. To seek dividends, the people of the Ovimbundu region were, to

their L1 and 15 to 20% had it as their L2, pointing to a trend whereby most of the population has Portuguese as their L2. (Manuel, 2015: 14)



some extent, associated with the UNITA "rebels" since it was the region of origin of the majority of their leaders and where that political organization had always had the greatest influence. Thus, to speak Umbundu, in certain parts of Angola, had a negative connotation. People living in the government-controlled areas became accustomed to pejoratively calling any person from the South of the country "Bailundo"<sup>9</sup>. These were associated with being a soldier or militant of UNITA. This reality lasted for decades and there were even parents who did everything in their power so that their children would never learn any word in this language, a fact that also contributed to an inevitable weakening of this language's use.

One of the signs that indicate the decadence of a language is the decrease in the number of speakers, the lack of renewal of its demographic stratum or the undervaluation of such language in detriment of another overvalued one, raised as the privileged code in communication. This phenomenon is called substitution, as one linguistic code replaces the other.

This decline is evident in data collected by INE in the 2014 population census, which shows that 23% of the Angolan population used the Umbundu language as means of communication at home. These data, of

course, do not indicate the exclusive use of Umbundu, but rather, often, a parallel use.

We thus see the confirmation of bilingualism (with some cases of diglossia<sup>10</sup>), with the use of Portuguese filling most of the communicative space. This phenomenon, named linguistic alternation, occurs, in the words of Lopes (2011), in an asymmetric power relation, with a disadvantage to the minority language.

#### a) Case Study

A survey was conducted to achieve a clearer perspective of the linguistic context of Kuito's inhabitants. The instrument was given to parents, guardians, teachers, and students residing in this municipality. The survey was sent via *Whatsapp* and *Messenger* to 30 parents/guardians of 37 children, aged between 5 and 10 years old; to 40 teachers from different primary and lower secondary schools, who teach a total of 875 students. The survey was also given to 135 college students of the Escola Superior Pedagógica do Bié. Only 17 parents (56.6%) responded to the survey, while the percentage of teachers who sent in response was slightly lower, at 52.5%, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Population and Sample*

Parents/Carers		Primary School Teachers		University Students	
Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
30	17	40	21	405	135
	56,6%		52,5%		33,3%

From the parents' survey, it was possible to find out that only four parents (23.4%) taught their children some words of Umbundu language. Despite this, no children use the Umbundu language as a communication tool. Regarding the data sent by the teachers, only one speaks fluent Umbundu (4.7%). The percentage of pupils who speak Umbundu is not significant, since only 51 of the 875 pupils communicate in this AL, which is equivalent to only 5.5%.

If we consider that there is a rapid rejuvenation of the Angolan population, one can assume that there is a slowdown in the use of Umbundu. The data produced by the population census (INE, 2016), show that the population of Bié, in the age group between 0 and 14 years, is approximately 51%, the second highest in the country, which has an average of 48%.

This demographic factor exerts a significant linguistic influence, since the older populations tend to retain more of the AL or, at most, the mastery of Portuguese and its AL, in contrast the younger ones dominate almost exclusively the Portuguese language.

As is known, one of the elements that threaten the weakening or disappearance of a language is the death of its speakers, acculturation, and the inhibiting linguistic policies of the dominant authorities. So, what to expect from a language without literature or bibliography worth mentioning? What can we expect from a language that is neglected as means of communication between parents and children? What will happen when a large part of the population that speaks it disappears through the dialectics of life? For the time being, we can point to its weakening because of its increasingly limited use. If this tendency continues, over time, AL may even disappear.

Teachers were asked the following questions:

1. How many students do you have in your class?
2. What is the age range of your students?
3. How many of them speak Umbundu and can keep a fluent conversation of at least 30 minutes, on any topic?

<sup>9</sup> Name of a municipality in Huambo province, therefore, found in the Ovimbundu region.

<sup>10</sup> According to Lopes (2011: 64-66) a community is diglossic when two varieties of a same language coexist within it, both not being too differentiated but also not so close.

The results of this survey are described in Table 2:

*Table 2:* Language reality of the 4th generation students

Respondents Teachers	Umbundu- speaking teachers	Pupils allocated to teachers	Umbundu- speaking students	Students who do not speak Umbundu	Percentage of pupils who do not speak Umbundu
21	1	875	51	824	97,6

The age range of the pupils taught by the teachers surveyed is between 6 and 25 years. Only 4.7% of the teachers speak Umbundu. The percentage of pupils who speak it is 2.4%, revealing a clear trend of decline in the use of this language.

Paradoxically, political discourses tend to defend the preservation of the Umbundu language, despite the controversies alluded by Benvindo (2016) regarding the necessary implementation of Angolan National Languages in the school system. Such a fact is positive. We fear, however, the different phenomena linked to linguistic contact, as pointed out by Gomes (2015:41):

Nos casos em que há abandono de uma das línguas, as forças sociais e políticas exercem grande pressão para o retorno ao monolingüismo. Esse tipo de contacto linguístico ocorre, muitas vezes, entre uma língua oficial e majoritária e línguas com um número relativamente baixo de falantes – línguas étnicas, línguas regionais, línguas de imigrantes, etc. Grande parte dessas línguas não possui tradição escrita e muitas ainda sequer foram descritas. Trata-se muitas vezes de populações marginalizadas, pertencentes a comunidades linguísticas frequentemente dispersas, cujas línguas possuem baixo prestígio social na sociedade mais ampla em que estão inseridas.<sup>11</sup>

Some elements mentioned by the author deserve attention, as they show the increasingly fragile reality of the Umbundu in Kuito. There is some pressure of the Portuguese language (in this case, the official and primary language) on the Umbundu language (regional and less used/secondary). The latter has a fragile written tradition, but thanks to the decisive intervention of Catholic and Protestant missions, its written form can still be found in Bibles translated for the region.

Gomes (2015: 43) quotes McMahon (1994) to refer to the death or extinction of a language. The process is not instantaneous; it takes time, as can be gauged:

<sup>11</sup> In cases where one of the languages is abandoned, social and political forces exert tremendous pressure for a return to monolingualism. This type of language contact often occurs between an official and majority language and languages with a relatively low number of speakers - ethnic languages, regional languages, immigrant languages, etc. These languages have no written tradition and many have not even been described. These are often marginalized populations, belonging to often-dispersed language communities, whose languages have low social prestige in the wider society in which they live. (Gomes, 2015: 41)

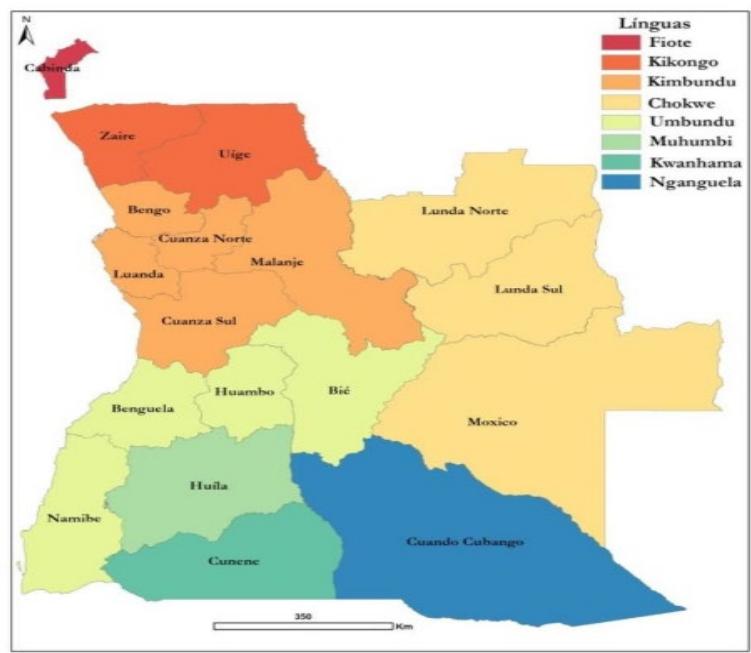
A “morte” de uma língua envolve essencialmente mudanças linguísticas “normais”, mas motivadas por razões sociolinguísticas particulares. Em geral, ocorre uma transferência de fidelidade de uma parte da população da língua nativa para uma língua introduzida mais recentemente, na qual os falantes se tornaram bilingues. Esta nova língua é em geral falada nativamente por falantes com maior poder econômico/político, prestígio e muitas vezes mais numerosos. A língua nova está frequentemente associada a novas tecnologias e a uma cultura que se apresenta como mais desenvolvida. Essa língua é então associada à riqueza e ao progresso o que faz com que os falantes abandonem gradativamente a língua nativa, que passa a ser usada em contextos cada vez mais reduzidos até ser totalmente substituída pela língua introduzida.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that despite having persisted for several centuries, AL and, in the case of this study, the Umbundu language, is not safe from the possibility of extinction, as evidenced by its gradual weakening due to the gradual reduction in the number of speakers. This reduction is due to either natural reasons<sup>13</sup> or the discredit caused by the lack of use in school or official contexts. Any measure to reverse this situation would involve increasing its prestige, which would imply its use in school contexts. Figure 1 accounts for the Ethnolinguistic map of Angola.



<sup>12</sup> The ‘death’ of a language essentially involves ‘normal’ linguistic change but are driven by sociolinguistic reasons. In general, a transfer of allegiance from part of the population of the native language happens to a more recently introduced language in which speakers have become bilingual. This new language is generally spoken natively by speakers with greater economic/political power and prestige. The new language is often associated with new technologies and a culture that presents itself as more developed. This language is then associated with wealth and progress, which causes speakers to gradually abandon their native language, which is used in increasingly reduced contexts until it is completely replaced by the new idiom. (Gomes, 2015: 43)

<sup>13</sup> Here we call natural reasons for the disappearance of the older population which is the centripetal force for the preservation of the language.

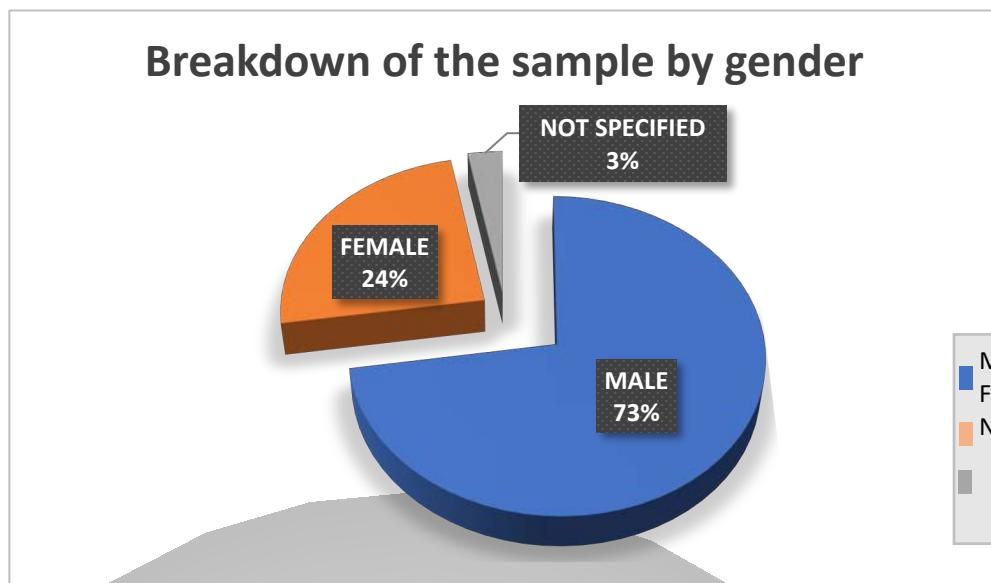


Source: INE 2014:51

*Fig. 1:* Etnolinguistic map of Angola.

The results of the survey applied to university students also illustrate our concern. We will now detail the characteristics of the sample: of the 135 students, 98 are male (72.5%) and 33 are female (24.4%). Four

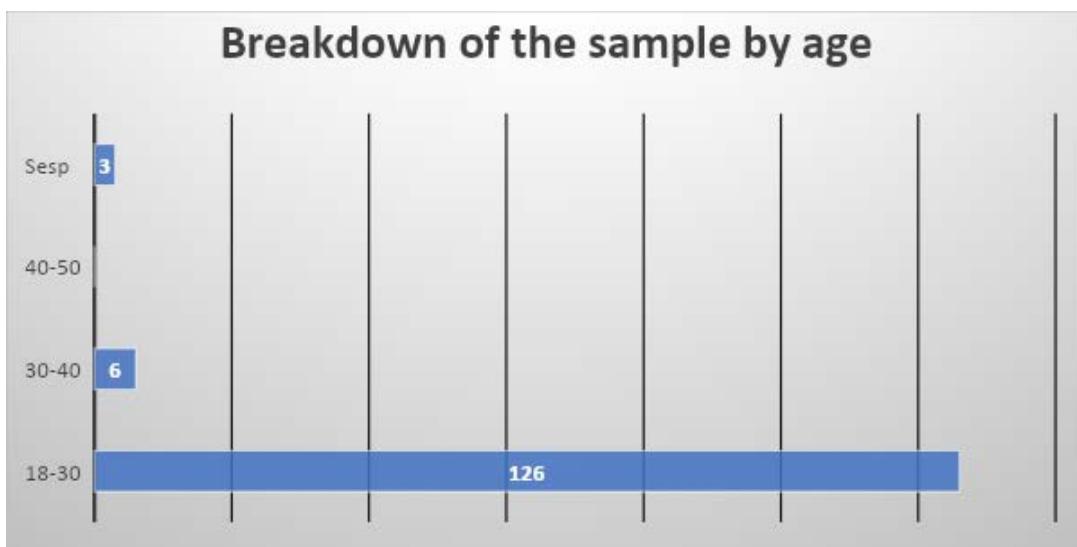
students did not specify their sex, so there is a percentage of 2.9%, which does not fall within any of the parameters described above. The information can be visualized in Figure 2.



*Figure 2:* Breakdown of the sample by gender

The age range of the sample members (Figure 3) was established based on the minimum age required for entry to higher education. The information has an interval character. Thus, the minimum age is 18, and the maximum is 50. The following frequencies are observed in the selected sample: 126 individuals (93.3 %) are between 18 and 30 years old; six students (4.4%) are

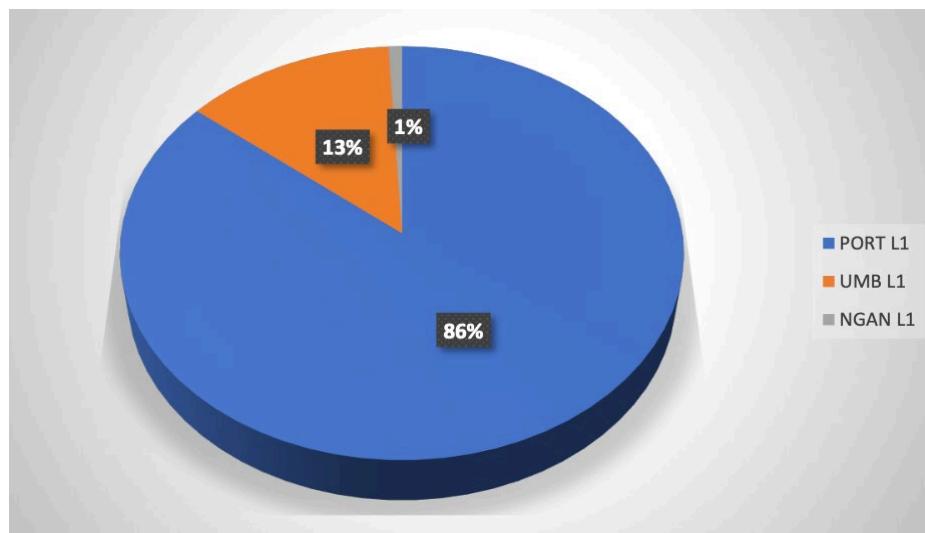
between 30 and 40 years old; no student is over 40 years old. Three people (2.2%) did not specify their age.



*Figure 3:* Breakdown of the sample by age

As for the variable of L1 (Figure 4), the selected sample presents the following picture: 102 students (75.5%) have Portuguese as their L1.

Only two students (22.9%) have Umbundu as their L1. Only two students (1.48%) do not have either of the languages mentioned above (their L1 is Nganguela).



*Fig. 4:* L1 of the students

When we sought to know the L2 of the members of the selected sample, the bilingual context, familiar to a large part of the Angolan population, became evident. With regards to the ESPB students, 79 out of the 135 members of the sample (58.5%) have an L2: 71 students (52.59%) speak Umbundu; eight individuals (5.9%) have English as their L2<sup>14</sup>. The remaining 56 students (41.4 %) do not have an L2. Figure 5 illustrates these data:

<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon of the English Language being L2 is given to the fact that we have, in Angola, a high number of citizens that, due to war, have lived in the neighbor Republic of Zambia and are now back in the country.

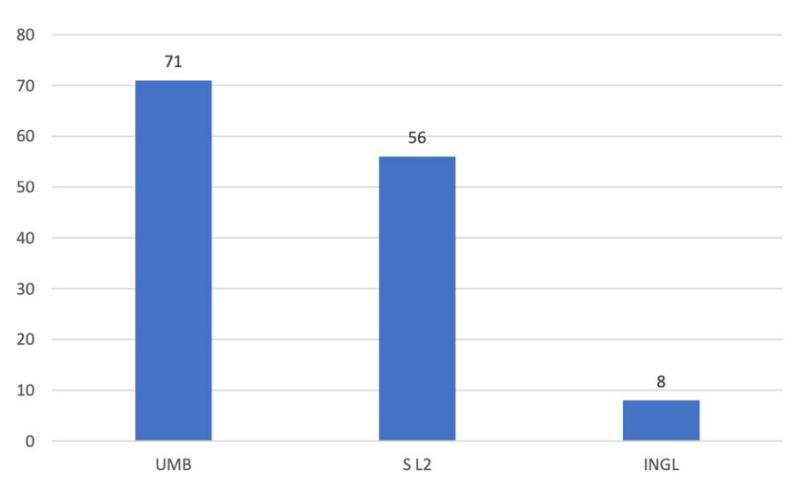


Fig. 5: L2 of the student

If we want to give a generational<sup>15</sup> treatment to the data collected from the survey applied to students at the ESPB (Graph 1), we would divide it in the following way: 1st generation (Grandparents) - over 60 years old; 2nd generation (parents) - between 30 and 60 years old; 3rd generation (children) - between 0 and 30 years old. Crossing the age of the respondents to the duration of

the generations show that 132 individuals belong to the 3rd generation. There are no 1<sup>st</sup> generation students in our sample. From the information gathered, one can deduce that the Umbundu language is in disuse, because each subsequent generation uses it less and less. Figure 6 below distributes the results obtained by age and the respective percentages:

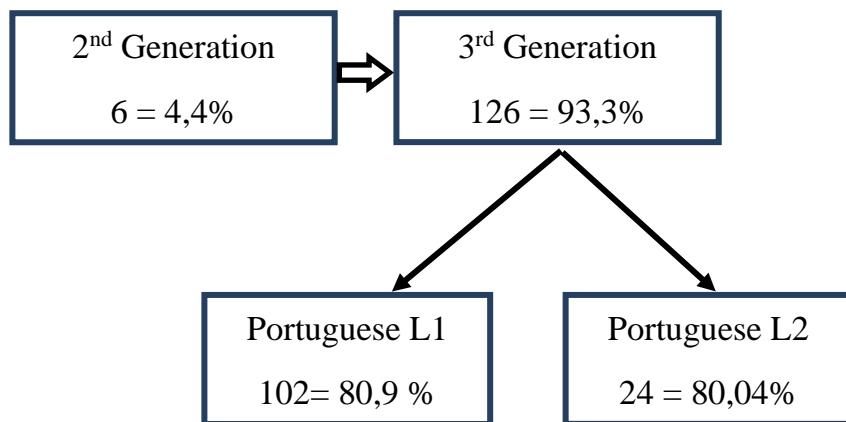


Fig. 6: Percentage of ESPB students by generation.

From the data above, one can foresee that in the transition from the 3rd to the 4th generation, there will be a further weakening of the Umbundu language, which will change from L1 to L0, ceasing to be a language of communication for the younger generations.

Table 3 gives details of the language status of the students surveyed. The abbreviations indicate the order of the languages, i.e., PU - indicates Portuguese as L1 and Umbundu as L2; UP - indicates Umbundu as L1 and Portuguese as L2; P - indicates that the speaker

only speaks Portuguese; OP - suggests that the speaker has another language as L1 and Portuguese is their L2.

<sup>15</sup> Despite the debate around it and according to Comte (1998), Dilthey (1989) and Mannheim (1993), a generation can be understood as a group of people that is born in the same historical period that possess a shared identity, or people that succeed their parents. In this strict sense, a generation can be a period of 25 to 30 years (Comte, 1998). In this study we consider the first generation individuals between 50 and 75 years old, the second generation individuals between 25 and 50, and the third generation individuals between 0 and 25 years.

Table 3: ESPB students' linguistic situation, according to age group

18-30				30-40				40-50			
PU	UP	P	OP	PU	UP	P	OP	PU	UP	P	OP
77	11	36	2	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
57.0	8.1	26.6	1.4	3.7	2,8	0	0	0	0	0	0
3%	%	%	%	%	%						
126				6				0			

Data analysis shows that almost 80% of the speakers of Umbundu lose out to Portuguese. This means that nearly 80% of future parents will influence their children to speak Portuguese, as it is their L1.

b) *Ways to preserve Umbundu as the L2 of Kuito's population*

It makes sense to resort to the Universal Declaration of Collective Rights of People, approved in May 1990 in Barcelona, which states that all people have the right to express and develop their culture, their language, and their organizational rules through their own political, educational, communication and public administration structures. It is, therefore, necessary that political authorities preserve the languages spoken in Angola. Umbundu, and all other AL languages, confer a very particular identity to their users. The postulate above is supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which affirms the dignity and value of the human person, who is granted equal rights and all freedoms, without distinction of race, color, sex, language, religion, political, national or social origin, fortune, birth, or any other condition.

In the Angolan context Portuguese has been superimposed over national languages. Umbundu, previously considered L1 in the city of Kuito, has lost its position in favor of Portuguese, which has seen its protagonism rise with increasing intensity. It is expected that other municipalities in the province will also suffer the same phenomenon, albeit more slowly.

The faster disappearance of the Umbundu language in Kuito is due to three factors:

1. Great contact of the indigenous population with people of other cultures and languages, a reality of the cities, which does not happen so markedly in the interior regions;
2. The advance of schooling in Kuito, including the emergence of universities<sup>16</sup>, which requires students to have a higher mastery of the Portuguese language;
3. The decreasing use in informal and familiar environments of the Umbundu language, motivated by prejudice, and by the scarce use of it in the media and social networks, for example.

<sup>16</sup> At the present moment, there are two university public schools and two private ones, being predicted the inauguration of one more.

We argue that efforts should be made so that the Umbundu language is preserved as L2 of the Kuito inhabitants, thus safeguarding the values related to the cultural identity of this population. For such, we point out some ways:

1. Umbundu must become a language of scientific scope, having as a launching point available studies and publications. To this end, Umbundu should incorporate a range of new terms related to science, technology, philosophy, and the world of knowledge. Linguists and scholars of the Ovimbundu culture will play a relevant role in giving this language a scientific and academic scope.
2. On the other hand, the Angolan education authorities should, under Article 9º (3) of the *Constitution of the Republic of Angola*, confer on Umbundu the status of a language of instruction. Initially only for primary education, up to grade 6, but later extending it to the whole education system. The aim is not to study Umbundu as a subject within a curriculum but to study all subjects in this language.

The Angolan government has been testing measures for the incorporation/introduction of the national languages into the educational system, aiming at their preservation. These studies and trials have been going on for several decades, but there are still no concrete results. The reasons are many, but we can highlight the lack of adequately trained teachers, the lack of bibliographic materials, and the existence of several Angolan languages in the same province. These three factors constitute an obstacle to the insertion of national languages in the education system, as intended. Nevertheless, we advocate the possibility of doing so if there is a will and more accurate work.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Our approach demonstrates the sociolinguistic reality of Kuito, a reality that has been characterized and influenced by the coexistence and interactions between the Umbundu and Portuguese languages for over 500 years. The coexistence between the two codes, for over 500 years, and the influence that the languages exert over each other are determining factors in this sociolinguistic characterization of Kuito.



There is a real risk, which cannot be underestimated, of Umbundu disappearing. Such possibility derives from the increasingly less frequent use, the poor transmission of this language to younger generations, and the gradual aging and consequent disappearance of the generations that had it as L1. The postponement of its insertion in the education system is only one more risk factor for the disappearance of Umbundu, in the long term.

To reverse this situation, we recommend that a laboratory for the study of the Umbundu language must be created. After that it should be included in the education system, to enrich its lexical, semantic and morphosyntactic parameters, so that it becomes possible to use it as a language of schooling, thereby raising its prestige, and contributing to its preservation.

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