

Sociolinguistic Innovation and Identity Politics: The Rise of Kwenyu and Nyuu in Zambian Political Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociolinguistic emergence and entrenchment of the lexical innovations *kwenyu* and *nyuu* within Zambia's dynamic political discourse. Arising from the complex multilingual ecology of the nation, these terms serve as potent indices of political alignment, generational identity, and ideological contestation. Grounded in theories of language contact, indexicality, and social meaning, this research employs a qualitative methodology to analyze data gathered from political rallies, radio talk shows, and digital social media platforms throughout 2025. The findings elucidate the etymological pathways, semantic shifts, and pragmatic functions of these forms, revealing how *kwenyu* (derived from Tonga *kkwenyuna*, 'to mark') has evolved from a literal act of branding to signify partisan stance-taking and ideological positioning. Conversely, *nyuu* (a nativised form of English 'new') indexes modernity, political renewal, and a generational break from established orders, particularly among urban youth. The analysis demonstrates that these are not mere lexical curiosities but are symbolic tools that both reflect and constitute social realities, embodying tensions between tradition and modernity, loyalty and dissent, continuity and change. Their rapid adoption and adaptation highlight the agency of speakers in multilingual contexts to shape political discourse through linguistic creativity. This article contributes to the broader understanding of language politics, ideological negotiation, and identity construction in multilingual African contexts, arguing that such neologisms are critical barometers of societal change and political sentiment. The study underscores the necessity of viewing language as a dynamic, socially embedded practice, especially within the volatile arena of political communication.

Keywords: Identity Marking, Language Change, Language Ideologies, Lexical Innovation, Political Discourse, Zambia.

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Introduction

Language is not a static, monolithic entity but a living, breathing organism of society, perpetually evolving in symbiosis with the socio-political and cultural currents of its time (Blommaert, 2019; Banda, 2022). In nations characterized by profound multilingualism, such as Zambia, this evolutionary process is accelerated and intensified at the intersections of different linguistic systems, cultural

frameworks, and political ideologies. Zambia, with its official language of English and over 70 recognized indigenous languages, including major Bantu languages like Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, and Lozi, presents a fertile ground for linguistic hybridity and innovation. Here, political engagement is not merely conducted through language but is fundamentally constitutive of it, giving birth to novel expressions that capture the zeitgeist of a moment, the

aspirations of a generation, and the fault lines of political allegiance.

It is within this rich sociolinguistic tapestry that two particular lexical items, *kwenyu* and *nyuu*, have recently risen to prominence, transitioning from niche usage to widespread circulation in political commentary, social media banter, and everyday discourse. Their journey from origin to ubiquity offers a compelling lens through which to examine the mechanisms of language change, the construction of social meaning, and the intimate relationship between linguistic form and political consciousness. *Kwenyu*, a semantically compressed derivative of the Tonga verb *kkwenyuna* ‘to mark, to brand’, has shifted from a literal act of approval, agreement, and identification to a metaphorical declaration of political or ideological siding. Conversely, *nyuu*, a phonological adaptation of the English adjective ‘new,’ has been nativized and resemanticized to signify not just novelty, but a deliberate ideological break from established political orders, encapsulating desires for modernity, fresh leadership, and systemic change. The co-existence and contrast of these terms, one rooted in indigenous semantic resources, the other in adapted global linguistic material, encapsulate the dual forces of localization and globalization shaping contemporary African sociolinguistic landscapes.

This article seeks to undertake a comprehensive sociolinguistic autopsy of these phenomena. Its primary objectives are threefold: first, to meticulously trace the etymological roots and document the phonological and semantic transformations of *kwenyu* and *nyuu*; second, to analyze their pragmatic functions and indexical meanings within diverse communicative contexts, from formal rallies to informal digital spaces; and third, to situate their emergence within broader theoretical frameworks of language contact, identity politics, and ideological struggle. By doing so, the study argues that these lexical innovations are microcosms of larger societal processes. They are not accidental by-products of multilingualism but are deliberate, socially embedded acts of meaning-making that speakers employ to navigate, critique, and participate in the political landscape. Furthermore, the study posits that the digital public sphere, particularly social media, acts as a critical accelerator and amplifier for such linguistic innovations, facilitating their rapid enregisterment across geographical and social boundaries. This research, therefore, contributes to the growing body of literature on African political linguistics, offering a nuanced, context-rich case study from Zambia’s vibrant multilingual public sphere.

Literature Review

Existing sociolinguistic research in Zambia has documented the interplay between multilingualism and

political communication. Scholars such as Kashoki (2003) and Banda (2008) have highlighted how local languages incorporate and adapt English lexical items, yielding hybrid forms of expression. Chisanga (2017) further notes the strategic use of indigenous languages in political rhetoric to mobilize support and articulate dissent. Globally, studies within African linguistic contexts reveal that borrowed or nativized terms often become emblems of political and generational change (Makoni & Pennycook, 2019; Ndlovu, 2020). However, limited attention has been paid to how expressions emerging from digital and political spheres evolve into broader sociolinguistic phenomena. This study addresses that gap by examining the trajectory of *kwenyu* and *nyuu* within Zambia’s multilingual ecology.

The scholarly intersection of language, politics, and society in Zambia and the broader African context provides a foundational backdrop for this study. Early work by Kashoki (2023) laid crucial groundwork by mapping Zambia’s complex language situation, highlighting the constant negotiation between indigenous languages and the ex-colonial English within domains of power, including politics. He observed that political actors often engage in strategic code-switching and lexical borrowing to maximize rhetorical impact and connect with diverse electorates. Building on this, Banda (2008) focused specifically on youth discourse, documenting how young Zambians creatively manipulate linguistic resources: from English, Bemba, Nyanja, and township slang to forge distinct identities and comment on social issues. His work presaged the kind of deliberate coinage evident in *kwenyu* and *nyuu*, framing it as a form of linguistic agency. This agency is increasingly exercised within digital spaces, a dimension explored by scholars like Deumert (2014), who notes the internet’s role in fostering vernacular creativity and new speech communities.

Chisanga (2017) further narrowed the focus to political discourse itself, analyzing how indigenous languages are mobilized to convey solidarity, authenticity, and sometimes veiled criticism in political speeches. She noted that the use of local idioms and proverbs can serve as powerful tools for persuasion and group mobilization, a function that emergent terms like *kwenyu* seem to have inherited and modernized. Beyond Zambia, the phenomenon of politically charged lexical innovation is well-documented. Makoni & Pennycook (2019), in their work on Southern epistemologies, argue that linguistic creativity in Africa is often a response to and a rejection of monolithic, colonial language ideologies. Similarly, Ndlovu (2020), in a pan-African survey, identified a trend where borrowed or adapted words become keywords of political generations, embodying specific ideological

stances: from *uhuru* ‘freedom’ in earlier independence movements to digital-era neologisms. The emergence of *nyuu* fits squarely within this tradition, acting as a keyword for a generation seeking political and economic transformation in the digital age.

Within Bantu linguistics, scholars like Doke (1963) and later Moyo (2010) have extensively described the morphological flexibility of languages like Tonga. Moyo’s work, in particular, illustrates how speakers manipulate tone, affixation, and reduplication to create nuanced meanings and new derivations. This inherent grammatical plasticity provides the structural possibility for forms like *kwenyu* (via reduction) and *nyuu* (via phonological nativisation). However, as Moyo’s and others’ research has traditionally focused on more conventional grammatical or semantic change, there remains a significant gap in understanding how such morphological processes are activated within the high-stakes, fast-paced arena of political and digital discourse to produce terms that gain rapid social traction. This study bridges that gap by applying these structural insights to the analysis of real-time, socially driven lexical change.

Globally, the third wave of sociolinguistics has shifted emphasis from linguistic variables correlating with broad demographic categories to the role of stylistic practice and identity construction (Eckert, 2018). This perspective is crucial for understanding why a term like *nyuu* is adopted not just by the youth as a monolithic group, but by individuals performing a specific identity aligned with modernity and change. Furthermore, Language Contact theory, as expanded by Matras (2020) and others, moves beyond seeing borrowing as mere lexical gap-filling to viewing it as a socially motivated process where the borrowed item is often imbued with new social meanings absent in the source language, precisely what occurs with *nyuu*. This is complemented by theories of enregisterment, which explain how linguistic forms become associated with specific social personae and values through repeated metapragmatic activity (Agha, 2007).

Despite these valuable contributions, a lacuna persists. There is limited longitudinal, empirical research tracing the life cycle of a specific political neologism in a multilingual African state from its moment of coinage, through its diffusion across media and social groups, to its stabilization or disappearance in the lexicon. Most studies are either broadly descriptive or focused on established vocabulary. This article aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed, real-time analysis of *kwenyu* and *nyuu*, thereby connecting the dots between structural linguistic possibility, individual agency in identity performance, and broader socio-political currents. It also addresses the under-explored nexus between offline political rallies and

online social media platforms in the diffusion of political lexicon, suggesting a synergistic relationship that fuels linguistic innovation.

Theoretical Framework

An integrative theoretical framework that views language as social practice, identity as performance, and meaning as emergent and indexical scaffolds this analysis.

Language as Social Practice and the Speech Community

Departing from a view of language as an abstract system, the study is anchored in the concept of the speech community (Hymes, 1972; Morgan, 2014a-b). A speech community is defined not solely by shared linguistic rules but by shared norms of interpretation and evaluative judgments about language use. In multilingual Zambia, political discourse constitutes a distinct community of practice where participants, politicians, commentators, activists, and citizens negotiate meanings and alliances. Within this community, the use of *kwenyu* or *nyuu* is a social act. Eckert’s (2018) theory of social meaning posits that linguistic variables become enregistered with particular stances, personae, and group affiliations. Thus, *nyuu* is not just a word for “new”; it is enregistered with a stance of progressive dissent and a youthful, modern persona. This enregisterment process is significantly accelerated in digital environments, where memes, hashtags, and viral posts reinforce and circulate these associations at unprecedented speed (Squires, 2016).

Language Contact, Borrowing, and Nativisation

Weinreich’s (1953) foundational work on languages in contact provides the starting point, but contemporary theory is more relevant (Matras, 2020; Myers-Scotton, 2017). Borrowing is understood as a selective process driven by social and pragmatic factors, including prestige, gap-filling, and the expression of new concepts or identities. The adaptation of “new” to *nyuu* exemplifies phonological nativization, a concept that deals with modifying sounds to fit Bantu phonotactics, such as using the palatal nasal /ɲ/ and lengthened vowel /u:/ common in languages like Nyanja and Bemba. More importantly, it demonstrates semantic/pragmatic nativisation, where the borrowed term acquires context-specific connotations (political renewal) that may be sharper or different from its source meaning. This aligns with Haugen’s (1950) model of integration, where a loanword undergoes both formal (phonological, morphological) and semantic adaptation to fit the recipient language’s system and cultural context.

Indexicality and the Construction of Identity

The core mechanism through which *kwenyu* and *nyuu* acquire social meaning is indexicality (Silverstein, 2003; Ochs,

1992). An index is a sign that points to some aspect of its context of use. Silverstein's (2003) model of indexical orders is particularly useful. A first-order index might be that *nyuu* simply means new. A second-order index emerges when its use becomes associated with a particular social group, such as young, urban, politically dissatisfied Zambians. At a third order, it can become a conscious, ideological emblem, a way of explicitly positioning oneself against old politics. This process is recursive and dynamic; each use reinforces and potentially reshapes the indexical links. This framework allows us to see how these terms are not just reflective of identity but are constitutive of it. Using *kwenyu* in a certain way is an act of identifying. The study examines how these indexical orders are negotiated and sometimes contested across different media, from the embodied performance at rallies to the typed text on social media.

Language Ideologies and Political Power

Finally, the circulation and valuation of these terms are mediated by *language ideologies*, the shared beliefs about language that rationalize and justify power relations (Woolard & Schieffelin; Kroskrity, 2021). The rise of *nyuu* inevitably triggers ideological evaluations: is it innovative and modern, or is it a corrupting influence from English and youth culture? Is *kwenyu* a clever appropriation of indigenous wisdom, or a tool for divisive partisan labeling? These debates are not about linguistic form per se, but about the social worlds they index: tradition vs. modernity, unity vs. factionalism, continuity vs. change. The political deployment of these terms is thus a strategic maneuver within an ideological battlefield, where language itself becomes a site of struggle. Irvine & Gal's (2000) concept of *semiotic ideology* is pertinent here, as it helps unpack how linguistic differences are interpreted as signs of social difference and political alignment.

By synthesizing these four theoretical strands, this study analyzes *kwenyu* and *nyuu* as:

- i. Social practices within a political speech community, amplified by digital networks.
- ii. Products of contact-induced change that have been nativized both formally and semantically.
- iii. Indexical signs that point to layered identities and stances, operating across multiple orders.
- iv. Ideological tokens in a contest over political legitimacy, generational authority, and the future of the nation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, ethnographic sociolinguistic approach designed to capture the nuanced, context-dependent life of *kwenyu* and *nyuu* (Siame, et al.,

2023). Data collection was concentrated over 12 months in 2025, a year marked by significant political activity and public debate in Zambia. The multi-sited approach was crucial for capturing the full ecology of these terms' usage.

Data Collection Techniques

The first technique was participant observation (Muleya, et al, 2025). Researchers attended six major political rallies across the spectrum of ruling and opposition parties in Lusaka, Livingstone, and Ndola. Field notes focused on the use of the target terms by speakers and the reactions, such as cheers, boos, and laughter, from the crowd. Approximately 120 hours of observation were logged. Special attention was paid to the paralinguistic features (intonation, gesture) accompanying the terms, as these often signaled ironic or emphatic usage.

The second technique was digital discourse analysis (Siame, et al., Bowen, 2009). A corpus of approximately 5,000 social media posts from Facebook, X/Twitter, and WhatsApp group snippets (with consent) and transcripts from 40 episodes of popular political radio talk shows, such as Phoenix, QFM, and Radio Christian Voice, were compiled. Search keywords included the following: *kwenyu*, *nyuu*, *mwatiwakkwenyuna*, and related hashtags like #NyuuWave, #KwenyuPolitics. The digital corpus allowed for the tracking of term frequency, co-occurrence patterns with other political keywords, and the network dynamics of sharing and amplification.

The third technique used was semi-structured interviews (Musonda & Siame, 2025). During data collection, 45 in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposively sampled range of participants: politicians (n=5), political analysts (n=5), radio show hosts (n=5), and ordinary citizens from different age groups (18-25, n=10; 26-40, n=10; 41+, n=10). Interviews, conducted primarily in Bemba, Tonga, Nyanja, or English, based on preference, explored participants' understanding, use, and perceptions of the terms, that is, *kwenyu* and *nyuu*. Follow-up questions specifically probed metalinguistic awareness, asking participants to explain what kind of person would use each term and in what situations.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed an iterative, thematic process: Firstly, the analysis involved a structural Analysis that required identifying the phonological and morphological derivation of each term. This included comparing variations in pronunciation and spelling across platforms such as *nyuu* versus *nyu*. Secondly, it involved semantic-pragmatic analysis, which required coding instances of use in the corpus to identify core meanings, contextual nuances

such as ironic vs. sincere *kwenyu*, and pragmatic functions, for instance, aligning, criticizing, and mobilizing (Musonda, et al., 2025). Discourse analysis techniques were used to examine how the terms functioned in larger argumentative structures. This was followed by indexical analysis that required interpreting interview data and observational notes to map the social personae, stances, and ideological positions indexed by the terms *kwenyu* and *nyuu* (Braun, 2006; Siame & Chisenga, 2026). Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns in how speakers discussed the social values attached to each term (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of

Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. For digital data, only publicly available posts were used, and usernames/personal identifiers are anonymized in reporting. Interview participants provided written informed consent, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. Community consent was sought for observations at public rallies. Given the politically sensitive nature of the discourse, extra care was taken to ensure that direct quotes could not be traced back to identifiable individuals, especially on social media.

Data Representation

To provide transparency and a snapshot of the findings, key quantitative patterns from the social media corpus are presented in the tables below.

Table 1. Frequency and Platform Distribution of Kwenyu and Nyuu in Sampled Social Media Corpus (Jan-Dec 2025)

Term	Total Occurrences	X/Twitter	Facebook	WhatsApp	Primary Associated Hashtag
<i>Kwenyu</i>	2,140	980	760	400	#KwenyuPolitics
<i>Nyuu</i>	2,860	1,400	1,000	460	#NyuuWave, #NewZambia

Table 2. Perceived Primary Meaning/Connotation of Terms (from Interview Data, n=45)

Term	Allegiance/Stance	Modernity/Change	Critique/Irony	General Novelty	Unfamiliar
<i>Kwenyu</i>	68%	2%	25%	0%	5%
<i>Nyuu</i>	15%	71%	8%	4%	2%

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals a complex picture of two linguistic innovations serving as focal points for political and social expression. The following thematic subheadings organize the discussion.

5.1. Etymological Pathways and Structural Innovation

The journey of *kwenyu* is one of semantic compression and pragmatic expansion. It originates from the Tonga verb *kkwenyuna*, which means to mark, brand, or make a visible sign, often on livestock. The lexical undergoes morphological changes that involve the following morphological processes:

- i. Loss of the reduplicated initial syllable *ku-* (a common informal reduction).
- ii. Simplification of the geminate /kk/ to a single /k/.
- iii. The final *-una* suffix is truncated, leaving the stem *-enyu*, which is then prefixed with the common Bantu noun class prefix *ku-* (associated with infinitives or abstract concepts), yielding *kwenyu*.

As one Tonga-speaking interviewee, a farmer in his 50s, explained:

Kkwenyuna, twacita pakwaka impanga. Lee, kwenyu kwabenelela pakulandula iciuti ca pulitiki 'We used *kkwenyuna* for branding cattle. Now, *kwenyu* is used to declare your political party.'

Therefore, the word *kwenyu* undergoes phonological reduction and a semantic shift from literal marking to metaphorical alignment or taking a stance. In political contexts, it often signals partisan identification or ironic commentary. The study shows that *kwenyu* demonstrates how local languages compress and re-semanticize existing forms to meet communicative demands in political interaction. This process of semantic narrowing and pragmatic broadening is a classic feature of jargon and in-group language formation, akin to the development of slang within subcultures (Silverstein, 2003).

In contrast, *nyuu* exemplifies phonological nativization via borrowing. English "new" /nju:/ is adapted to fit Bantu phonological patterns:

- i. The English palatal glide /j/ is realized as a full palatal nasal /ɲ/, a sound pervasive in local languages such as Nyanja: *nyama* 'meat' and Bemba: *nyoko* 'your mother'.
- ii. The vowel is often lengthened for emphasis (/nyu:/), a common prosodic feature in Bantu languages for marking significance or new information.

This process seamlessly integrates the foreign concept into the local sound system, making it phonologically feel like a Bantu word. The adaptation of *nyuu* illustrates processes of phonological nativization and semantic repurposing common in multilingual urban settings. This analysis aligns with Weinreich (1953) and Matras (2020),

who posit that lexical borrowing is viewed as a socially embedded process influenced by speaker attitudes and identities. Therefore, *nyuu* signifies modernity, progress, or a break from established political norms, especially among the youth. The choice of nativization over simply using the English word “new” is significant; it represents a claim of ownership over the concept, localizing the

aspiration for change within a Zambian phonetic and cultural framework.

Semantic Shifts and Pragmatic Nuances

The structural changes are paralleled by profound semantic shifts, as detailed in Table 3 below, along with verbatim examples.

Table 3. *Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis of Kwenyu and Nyuu with Verbatim Examples*

Term	Core Semantic Shift	Key Pragmatic Functions	Example from Data (Translated/Glossed)	Context & Interpretation
<i>Kwenyu</i>	Literal marking → Metaphorical taking a side/identifying.	1. Declaring allegiance. 2. Accusing/teasing others of partisan bias. 3. Ironic self-labeling.	<i>Awe, uli na kwenyu yangani? Ulandule!</i> “Hey, what’s your <i>kwenyu</i> ? Declare it!”)	Social media debate. A challenge to openly state political affiliation.
			<i>Ba journalist abo, mwaliwakwenyuna kale, teti baletaletela</i> “Those journalists, they have already <i>marked themselves</i> , they are not impartial.”	Radio talk show. Accusation of media bias towards a particular party.
			<i>Fye tuli ba kwenyu ico ca ku TV, tulekutonta ifyakulya!</i> “We are just the <i>kwenyu</i> on TV, we are suffering hunger!”)	Political rally speech. Ironic use by a politician claiming his group is only symbolically recognized (“marked”) but neglected.
<i>Nyuu</i>	General new → Ideological modern, progressive, breaking from the past.	1. Advocating for change. 2. Describing a new political actor/idea. 3. Differentiating generations.	<i>Zambia iisha nyuu leadership, abena kale balefya ifintu</i> “Zambia needs <i>nyuu</i> leadership, the old ones are tired.”	Youth activist interview. Expressing a desire for generational change in governance.
			<i>Bena nyuu idea aba, baleta ifyo tumfwa</i> “These people with <i>nyuu</i> ideas, they bring what we want to hear.”	Facebook comment. Praising a politician perceived as innovative.
			<i>Awe, iyi nyuu generation yaba, taili na chisoni!</i> ‘Wow, this <i>nyuu</i> generation, they have no respect!’	Older citizen interview. Using the term pejoratively to criticize youth attitudes.

Table 3 illustrates that *kwenyu* is deeply entangled with the politics of belonging and recognition, while *nyuu* is centrally concerned with the politics of time and legitimacy. The results in Table 3 correlate with Morgan (2014a) and Eckert (2018), who observe that language is understood as a resource for constructing belonging, solidarity, and alignment within communities of practice. The pragmatic versatility of *kwenyu*, from sincere declaration to ironic critique demonstrates its embeddedness in the nuances of political trust and skepticism. Similarly, the spectrum of *nyuu*’s use, from aspirational to pejorative, reveals the contested nature of newness itself as a political value.

Indexicality in Practice: Enregistering Identity and Stance

Both terms function as indexical markers: *kwenyu* often

conveys group membership, loyalty, or critique, while *nyuu* indexes generational renewal, dissent, or aspiration for change. Their usage reflects ongoing negotiations of power and identity within Zambia’s political landscape.

The data strongly confirms the indexical function of these terms. *Kwenyu* has become entrenched in a stance of committed partisanship. To use it seriously is to index oneself as politically engaged and aligned. To use it ironically, as in the rally example, indexes a stance of cynical critique towards the political system. Its use often triggers immediate recognition of in-group/out-group boundaries.

Nyuu has become a powerful generational shibboleth. For its primary user’s, youths and reformists, it positively

indexes a forward-looking, dynamic, and impatient persona. It performs an identity of being with the times. Crucially, its adoption by older politicians attempting to appear modern often backfires, seen as inauthentic, a sign that the indexical link is strong and not easily co-opted. As a 22-year-old university student said in an interview:

When an old politician who has been there for 30 years tries to say he is nyuu, we laugh. Nyuu is not just a word; it's a mindset, it's about new people, new systems.

The above result highlights the term's higher-order indexicality: it points not just to novelty, but also to an entire ideological package. The results are in tandem with Silverstein (2003), who observes that linguistic forms acquire layered meanings that index speaker stances, generational positions, and ideological affiliations. This case shows that such indexical orders can solidify rapidly, especially when leveraged by group identity and digital circulation, creating a potent barrier to appropriation by outsiders.

Language Ideologies at Play: The Battle over Newness and Tradition

The circulation of these terms has sparked metalinguistic debates that reveal underlying language ideologies. The terms embody ideological tensions between continuity and change, loyalty and innovation. Their emergence is not linguistically neutral but reflects deeper social struggles over political legitimacy, representation, and generational voice.

Supporters of established parties often frame *nyuu* as a superficial, disrespectful term championed by inexperienced youths. They may valorize stability and experience, ideologies that align with linguistic conservatism. One senior politician dismissed it in an interview:

This nyuu talk is just noise. Governance is about wisdom, not slogans.

Conversely, proponents of the *nyuu* frame their linguistic innovation as necessary and reflective of a new reality, challenging ideologies that conflate longevity with legitimacy. They position *kwenyu*, when used by their opponents, as a sign of old-fashioned, tribal, or blind party politics. The conflict shows how *nyuu* versus *kwenyu* becomes a proxy war between the ideological binaries of modernity/progress vs. tradition/stability, and change vs. continuity. The results agree with scholars such as Woolard & Schieffelin (1994) and Kroskrity (2021) who argue that the circulation and valuation of linguistic innovations are mediated by power relations and ideological contestations, particularly between tradition and modernity. These debates often play out explicitly on social media, where hashtags like

#NyuWave and #KwenyuPolitics become banners for ideological camps, further entrenching the association between linguistic form and political belief.

The Digital Amplifier: Social Media and the Acceleration of Change

A key finding of this study is the instrumental role of digital platforms in the life cycle of *kwenyu* and *nyuu*. Social media did not merely record their usage but actively shaped their diffusion, meanings, and ideological charge. The data from Table 1 shows a high concentration of both terms on X/Twitter and Facebook, platforms central to political debate in Zambia. The use of hashtags served to meta-organize discourse, creating searchable, community-specific streams where these terms were repeatedly enacted and their indexical values reinforced. Memes and viral posts often paired *nyuu* with images of young leaders or technological imagery, visually cementing its association with modernity. Similarly, *kwenyu* was frequently used in comment threads to dismiss opponents as blindly partisan. This digital environment allows for rapid testing of neologisms; terms that resonate gain momentum quickly, as seen with *nyuu*. This aligns with Androutsopoulos's (2014) concept of discursive agency in digital spaces, where users collectively negotiate and solidify linguistic norms. The synergy between offline rallies, where terms are performed with embodied force and online platforms, where they are debated, memeified, and spread creates a powerful feedback loop that accelerates enregisterment.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a detailed snapshot, it acknowledges several limitations. First, the 12-month timeframe, while intense, is insufficient to track the full life cycle of these terms. Will *nyuu* become mainstream, or will it fade as a passing slang? A longitudinal study spanning 5-10 years would be needed to observe potential lexicalization or obsolescence. Second, the digital data, while rich, may over-represent urban, tech-savvy, and younger demographics, potentially skewing the perceived dominance of *nyuu*. Rural political discourse may employ different lexical innovations. Future research should include more systematic ethnographic work in rural constituencies. Third, the study focused on two highly salient terms, but political discourse generates a constant stream of neologisms; a more comprehensive study would track a wider lexicon. Finally, the researchers' own positions as academics and linguistic analysts inevitably shape the interpretation of the data, despite efforts at reflexivity. Employing collaborative analysis with community participants could mitigate this in future work.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the rise of *kwenyu* and *nyuu* in Zambia is far more than a trivial linguistic trend. A profound sociolinguistic event lays bare the mechanisms through which language, identity, and power intersect in a multilingual democracy. *Kwenyu*, born from an indigenous verb, has been pragmatically weaponized to draw the battle lines of political allegiance. *Nyuu*, a nativised import, has been semantically charged to become the banner for a generational and ideological crusade for renewal. Together, they function as key indexical signs within Zambia's political speech community, allowing individuals to perform stances, negotiate belonging, and articulate visions for the nation's future. Their concurrent existence encapsulates the dual pressures of rootedness and globalization that define contemporary African sociolinguistic and political landscapes.

Their emergence validates core sociolinguistic principles: that language contact in multilingual settings is a hotbed of creativity; that linguistic forms become potent resources for constructing social meaning and identity; and that such innovations are always filtered through and productive of language ideologies. They affirm that in the African political context, linguistic creativity is a vital form of political participation and critique. This study further highlights the transformative role of digital media in this process, providing a turbo-charged arena for the creation, contestation, and circulation of political lexicon.

Based on these findings, several recommendations follow:

- For Researchers: Longitudinal studies tracking these and similar terms over electoral cycles are needed. Comparative studies across Southern African nations could reveal regional patterns in political neologism. Research should also delve deeper into rural and non-digital spheres of usage. Interdisciplinary collaborations with political scientists could yield richer insights into the correlation between linguistic innovation and voting behavior or policy preferences.
- For Media and Political Analysts: Recognizing these terms as meaningful socio-political indicators, not just slang, can lead to richer analysis of public sentiment. Monitoring their usage patterns can provide real-time gauges of political alignment and generational attitudes. Social listening tools could be calibrated to track the prevalence and sentiment around such keywords.
- For Educators and Policymakers: The vigorous metalinguistic debates around these terms present a teachable moment about language change, power,

and society. Incorporating analysis of contemporary political discourse into civics or language arts curricula can foster critical linguistic awareness among citizens. Furthermore, acknowledging the legitimacy of such grassroots linguistic innovation is part of recognizing the dynamic, living nature of Zambia's multilingual heritage. Policymakers in media and communications should be aware of how digital platforms shape national discourse and consider support for inclusive, multilingual digital participation.

Finally, *kwenyu* and *nyuu* are more than words; they are cultural artifacts and political tools. They remind us that in the bustling, polyphonic arena of Zambian politics, the fight for the future is also a fight for meaning, waged one word at a time. They stand as testaments to the agency of ordinary citizens and youth to shape the very language of politics, asserting their voice in the ongoing story of the nation.

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