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African multilingual public sphere: a critical analysis of minority indigenous language(s) representation on Breeze FM talk radio in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

It is significant to note that the African public sphere has not been fully explored beyond Habermas or Mouffe's theoretical lens. Relying on what we call the African multilingual public sphere, this article analyses talk shows on commercial radio to ascertain the marginalisation of minority ethnolinguistic groups in Zimbabwe. The study uses an ethnographic observation technique and in-depth interviews with radio hosts, and presenters to analyse participants' interaction within an indigenous multilingual context of Breeze FM talk shows. The article argues that the dominance of major indigenous language speakers on talk radio reflects the dominance of such languages in the African polity. The findings of the study shows the dominance of major indigenous languages and a lack of participants in minority languages on Breeze FM talk shows. This article argues that the African multilingual public sphere should reflect participation by all ethnolinguistic groups in their indigenous languages. We argue that both majority language speakers and minority language speakers should be accommodated in the public sphere and multilingualism should occur without switching to the language of the majority.

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Introduction

Radio broadcasting has the capacity to overcome communication barriers such as illiteracy and lingual diversity, particularly in Africa where there are a variety of ethnolinguistic groups (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023; Mano, 2012). Talk radio, specifically, can reflect local culture through interactive talks. Several studies have shown how talk radio as a public sphere discursively enables participants to tune in (Motsaathebe & Tsware, 2021; Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013; Munoriyarwa, 2021; Philips & Smith, 2003) and participate via WhatsApp texts or voicenotes and call-ins. These talk shows, however, seem to be more professional, especially on commercial radio broadcasting. Although sustained by private funders, commercial radio reflects the aspirations of listeners and provides a significant amount of local content (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001).

The licensing of commercial radio between 2015 and 2021 in Zimbabwe prompted the objective of this study to investigate the significance of talk shows in indigenous

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languages. The aim of the study was to ascertain the socio-cultural exclusion or inclusion of minority ethnolinguistic groups in the African public sphere. Using Breeze FM (commercial radio) as a case study, this article explores the representation of ethnolinguistic groups through speech and music. Finding a niche, the article focuses less on the economic and political nature of discussions but on the linguistic participation of local people in minority indigenous languages. Due to restrictive media laws in Zimbabwe, radio broadcasting has not been vibrant in economic and political talk shows (besides those emerging through the internet evading media laws). Thus, unlike other studies that explore political discussions on talk radio (Bosch, 2010; Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997), this study takes a different approach by analysing language representation through a reflection on the African multilingual public sphere.

The article uses Habermas's definition of the public sphere as a point of departure to conceptualise what we call an African multilingual public sphere. We contextualise the term 'African' to denote indigenous languages and ethnolinguistic identities unique to Africa. Makoni and Pennycook (2007, p. 22) define multilingualism as the 'pluralisation of monolingualism' while Heller (1999) views it as a parallel of monolingualism. Monolingualism refers to autonomous dominant languages (Cormack & Hourigan, 2007). Habermas (1989, p. 73) defines the public sphere as 'the access of information by all citizens, who are guaranteed by freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly and the right to publish their own opinions without repression'. We extend this concept to signify the participation of minority and majority ethnolinguistic groups in an African multilingual context. By minority, we refer to the indigenous language spoken by a few while majority refers to a language spoken by many. There is scholarly consensus that the Shona-speaking are the majority followed by the Ndebele speaking in Zimbabwe while the rest of other languages such as Nambya, Tonga, Kalanga, Ndau, Koisan, Xhosa, Shangani, Venda, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, Chewa, Lozi, Dombe, Barwe, Doma and Chikunda are viewed minorities (Mabika & Salawu, 2014; Ndhlovu, 2007). From this standpoint, this article defines African multilingual public sphere as media space accessible by all ethnolinguistic groups (majority or minority) as citizens with rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Using Breeze FM as a case study, the article addresses the following questions: do Breeze FM talk shows reflect a multilingual community, how do participants interact or express themselves in indigenous languages and which indigenous languages are dominant? It further explores how the public sphere becomes limited without much participation by minority ethnolinguistic groups.

Breeze FM licensed in 2018 is a commercial radio station located in Victoria Falls under Hwange[1] district in Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe. We chose Breeze FM because it is the only commercial radio in Zimbabwe located in Victoria Falls, Hwange with more than 6 indigenous languages. Hwange district consists of several areas such as Victoria Falls tourism city and Jambezi rural areas. Breeze FM broadcasts within a 60–80 km radius covering Victoria Falls and some rural areas in Hwange. The ethnolinguistic demography in Hwange includes indigenous languages such as Nambya, Dombe, Tonga, Chewa, Nyanja, Ndebele and Lozi. In Zimbabwe, Nambya, Tonga or Dombe, Lozi and Nyanja are considered minority languages (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023; Ndhlovu, 2009). The geographical landscape shows that each area in Zimbabwe is indigenously occupied by locals peculiar to their sociocultural indigenous languages. However, there are no accurate statistics of indigenous language speakers in Zimbabwe. Hwange Rural District

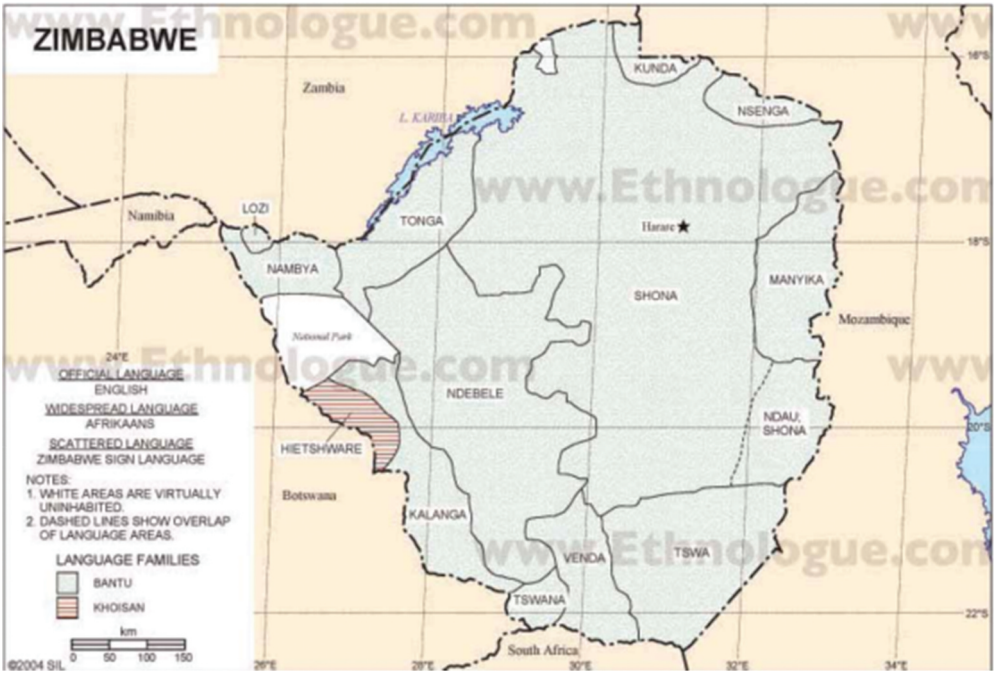


Figure 1. Geographical locations of ethnolinguistic groups in ZImbabwe. Source: Ethnologue (2008).

Council (HRDC) report shows that the Nambya, Dombe[2]/Tonga, Nyanja and Ndebele are locals of Hwange and Victoria Falls included as these have respective traditional chiefs (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023). Victoria Falls being the city in the district attracts all Zimbabwean nationalities and indigenous languages including Shona and Ndebele as majority national languages. This study, however, considers locals (Tonga/Dombe, Nambya, Nyanja, Lozi) as national minorities within the scope of Breeze FM broadcasting.

Though not a perfect overview of nationally recognised languages in Zimbabwe, Figure 1 shows the geographical locations of ethnolinguistic groups particularly of the Nambya, Tonga/Dombe and Lozi. Though Nyanja and Chewa are excluded in the map, their geographical location is also along the Zambezi valley domiciled by the Nambya and the Tonga or Dombe. The map, however, does not dismiss the mingling or the migration of major national indigenous language groups like Shona and Ndebele in the geographical areas of the Nambya and Tonga of the contemporary Hwange, particularly Victoria Falls.

Language policy and radio broadcasting in Zimbabwe

The language policy in Zimbabwe can be understood in four segments. Between 1890 and 1923, English was the official language though the colonial regime created a culture of white colonial officials who were proficient in Shona and Ndebele (Makoni, 1998; Makoni et al., 2008). From 1923 until 1980, the language policy altered significantly to Shona, Ndebele and English as recognised official languages. However, English remained

the main language of business and trade while Shona and Ndebele were adopted in the first grades of education. From the early 1980s to the late 1990s, Shona and Ndebele fiercely contested in the government polity, media and education. At the same time, pressure from minority language groups began to increase calling for recognition in education. Satisfactorily in 2013, the government of Zimbabwe finally listed officially recognised languages. These languages are English, Shona, Ndebele, Nambya, Tonga, Kalanga, Ndau, Koisan, Xhosa, Shangani, Venda, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Chewa (Moyo & Mathe, 2014; The Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2013). English, Shona and Ndebele, however, still remain widely spoken in the country (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023; Chiumbu, 2009; Mabika & Salawu, 2014; Masuku, 2011; Moyo, 2004; Tshabangu & Salawu, 2022).

The challenge is there is no clear language policy on a single legislation document to tackle the functions and utilisation of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe (Doke, 2005; Ndhlovu, 2009). Though the constitution of Zimbabwe outlined 16 officially recognised languages, there has been a lack of progress to enfranchise minority languages in education, media and government. The 2013 constitution of Zimbabwe also excluded some of the minority languages such as Lozi and other dialects like Dombe found in Hwange. Scholars like Ndhlovu (2009) argues that although acknowledging language pluralism and diversity for progressive language policy, what has been lacking is implementation. However, we do give some credit to the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) for licensing 14 community radio stations in 2022 and other commercial radio stations that broadcast in minority languages. On its website, BAZ refers to its licencing policies namely, to encourage broadcasting diversity and promote appropriate coverage of local significance.

Radio broadcasting on the other hand, has been struggling to accommodate all these languages listed in the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe. There is scholarly consensus that Shona and Ndebele dominate in the media although other scholars argue Shona enjoys more coverage than Ndebele, especially in the public media (Moyo, 2004; Tshabangu & Salawu, 2022). Public broadcasting services are anticipated to serve the citizens with transparency, accountability, and responsibility in their appropriate languages. Public service broadcasting should be at the service of the citizens (Teer-Tomaselli, 2005). Although what constitutes public broadcasting remains debatable, the common characteristic is that it should serve the public. In Zimbabwe, public media are viewed as state-controlled because the state has sole control over content, production and distribution (Mathe, 2020). The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperations (ZBC) exercises control over one television station (ZTV), now augmented by Zimpapers Television Network (ZTN Prime). The state also controls National FM, Khulumani FM, Power FM, Radio Zimbabwe, and Classic 263. Public radio stations such as National FM, formerly known as Radio 4 broadcast in 14 indigenous languages with Shona and Ndebele as dominant languages while other languages get limited time (Dube & Wozniak, 2021; Moyo, 2004). Radio Zimbabwe, formerly known as Radio 2 only broadcasts in Shona and Ndebele. Khulumani FM broadcasts in English, Ndebele, Xhosa, Kalanga, Sotho and Tonga with Ndebele and Shona being dominant (Dube & Wozniak, 2021).

In 2022, Zimbabwe had 14 community radio stations namely Radio Bukalanga, Matobo Community, Twasumpuka Radio, Ingqanga FM, Ntepe Manama Radio, Shashe Community Radio, Lyeja FM just to mention a few. BAZ perceived community radio licensing as the

only way to promote linguistic and cultural rejuvenation. Mathe & Motsaathebe (2023) argue that these community radio stations are still few to cater for all ethnolinguistic groups in Zimbabwe. Community radio broadcasting is essentially managed by the community as journalists, producers, managers and audience. The main characteristic of community radio broadcasting is that it is not intended for profit-making (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001). Community radio operates as the community's voice with independent programming. Leketanyane et al. (2021, p. 50) argue that 'community radio programming is designed to reflect the specific interests and needs of the community it serves' and this should be in their local languages. The challenge with community radio broadcasting is that it survives more on volunteers or unprofessional journalists, unlike commercial radio, which is more professional and with versatile talk shows (Mmusi, 2002). In this article, we chose to focus on commercial radio talk shows to analyse the linguistic variations of speakers in order to explore the veracity of the African public sphere.

Breeze FM and commercial radio broadcasting

Unlike community radio and public radio, commercial radio talk shows have proven to be more versatile and professional while catering for commercial motives and profit (Bosch, 2010). Perhaps the main characteristic of commercial radio broadcasting is that it is privately funded and intended for profit-making (Fourie, 2001). While catering for its commercial needs, commercial radio broadcasting normally reflects the culture, religion and aspirations of its target audience (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001). Local content mainly includes news, informational or educative talk shows that meet the highest standard of professional journalism. In other words, while broadcasting commercially through entertainment (music), attracting advertisements, commercial radio licence demands they inform the audience through news or talk shows. The programming has a horizontal schedule with frequent talk shows normally from Monday to Friday reflecting lifestyle according to audience demographics (Fourie, 2001). This means the talk shows also attract listenership while promoting commercial interests. Usually, audience statistics help commercial radio stations to show potential sponsors that purchasing an advertising slot on the program would attract a large number of people.

In December 2022, Zimbabwe had 11 commercial radio stations, namely Skyz Metro FM, Breeze FM, YAFM, Capitalk 100.4 FM, Hevoi FM, Diamond FM and Nyaminyami FM, 95.8 Central Radio, 98.4 Midlands, Star FM and ZiFM stereo. It is significant to note that some of these commercial radio stations broadcast in indigenous languages. Commercial radio stations such as 95.8 Central Radio, Star FM and Capitalk 100.4 FM owned by Zimpapers Limited are popular because they broadcast in majority indigenous languages, Shona and Ndebele. Skyz Metro owned by Fair Talk Communications based in Bulawayo broadcasts in English, Ndebele and Shona. YAFM based in Zvishavane and owned by Ray Hope broadcasts in English and Shona. Capitalk 100.4 FM based in Harare owned by Zimpapers Limited broadcasts in English, Ndebele and Shona. Hevoi FM a provincial commercial radio owned by AB Communications based in Masvingo broadcasts in English, Ndebele and Shona. Diamond FM based in Mutare and owned by Zimpapers Limited broadcasts in English and Shona (Manicaland dialects). Nyaminyami FM owned by Kingstons Enterprise based in Kariba broadcasts in Tonga, Shona (Mashonaland West dialects). Star FM owned by Zimpapers limited and based in Harare broadcasts in English,

Ndebele and Shona. Central Radio 95.8 is owned by ZBC broadcasting from Gweru, Midlands uses English, Ndebele and Shona. 98.4 Midlands broadcasts from Gweru owned by AB Communications, broadcasts in English, Ndebele and Shona. ZiFM stereo owned by AB Communications broadcasts from Harare in English, Ndebele and Shona. See Table 1.

Broadcasting from Victoria Falls, Breeze FM is privately owned by Fair Talk Communications. It broadcasts in Tonga, Nambya, Ndebele and English yet Hwange has other languages recognised in the 2013 Constitution such as Chewa / Nyanja. On its website Breeze FM describes itself as follows:

> The radio station that broadcasts to the wide and cosmopolitan audience within the 60–80 KM radius from Victoria Falls. The broadcasting radius covers the urban and rural areas that surround the Victoria Falls. Our radio station broadcasts in a variety of local languages which are Ndebele, English, Nambya and Tonga, which reflects Zambezi valley's cultural diversity. Breeze FM is driven by the ultimate conviction to Interact and Transform the communities that it operates in.

Exploring the political economy of indigenous language media, Mathe and Motsaathebe (2023) argue that the language of the media determines the size of its audience or listenership in Africa. Table 1 shows that major indigenous languages dominate the commercial media landscape. Ndlovu (2011) has shown that identity and language can be commercialised whereby media corporations support languages spoken by majorities. For example, in South Africa, the Zulu language is commercialised due to its cultural assertiveness, larger audiences, historical demography and growing income levels. Ndlovu (2011, p. 270) writes:

> Media corporations targeting Zulu media consumers . . . support Zulu because of the bigger numbers of Zulu speakers/media consumers, compared to other individual black ethnic groups. The Zulu group is also supported because of the size of its youth audience, its growing middle class and the urbanisation place in KZN.

Salawu (2021, p. 6) has also backed the perspective that media corporations tend to set up "new digital online media platforms among those groups that, despite globalisation and the persistent hegemony of English, still take strong historical, futuristic, political and cultural pride in their languages". Using the case of Breeze FM talk shows, we critique the hegemony of majority indigenous languages by showing how the African public sphere becomes flawed without voices in minority languages.

Table 1. Commercial radio stations in Zimbabwe.

Commercial Radio Station	Owner	Languages
Skyz Metro	Fair Talk Communications	English, Shona & Ndebele
Star FM	Zimpapers Limited (state-controlled)	English, Shona &Ndebele
Breeze FM 91.2	Fair Talk Communications	English, Ndebele, Nambya & Tonga
ZiFM stereo	AB Communications	English, Shona & Ndebele
Nyaminyami FM	Kingstones Enterprise	Tonga, Shona & English
YAFM	Ray Hope Broadcasts	English & Shona
Diamond FM	Zimpapers (state-controlled)	English & Shona
Hevoi FM	AB Communications	English, Shona & Ndebele
98.4 Midlands	AB Communications	English, Shona & Ndebele
95.8 Central Radio	ZBC (state-controlled)	English, Shona & Ndebele
Capitalk 100.4 FM	Zimpapers Limited (State-controlled)	English, Shona & Ndebele

Source: Authors.

The concept of the African public sphere

There is growing literature on the participation of citizens in the public sphere. Some studies have explored the representation of women and the working class in the public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000). Other studies have explored the possibility of a common African language to replace English as a dominant language in the African public sphere because of over-reliance on foreign languages which function as hegemonic devices to promote foreign cultures at the expense of African culture (Motsaathebe, 2010). Additionally, in the context of Africa, Stephen Ellis's (1989) concept of 'pavement radio' refer to the representation of street talks and local-oriented spheres. Exploring a case of citizens in Cameroon, Nyamnjoh (2005) mentions that pavement radio has been an interactive format for poor citizens. The power talk radio in Sierra Leone and the Talking Drum were utilised to enhance interactivity and discussions over genocides and promote reconciliation and national unity (Bosch, 2010; Kellow & Steeves, 1998). Boateng (2003) gives a context of Ghana showing that talk radio provided free space for government criticism by citizens. In South Africa, talk radio offers grassroots privileges to engage through community radio (Bosch, 2010; Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013; Munoriyarwa, 2021).

Talk radio has always been perceived as a sphere of discursive public deliberation and participation (Motsaathebe & Tsware, 2021; Bosch, 2010; Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Philips & Smith, 2003). Based on the concept of US talk radio practices, talk shows have been platforms for democratic political deliberation. Habermas (1989) views the public sphere as an arena of rational public discussions comprising of spaces such as coffee shops, parliament and other institution of public deliberation through which citizens engage. In other words, the public sphere theory lies within the perspective of unlimited opportunities for public deliberation (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1992). Habermasian's public sphere theory has been, however, criticised for defining public deliberations through the lens of the bourgeois and neglecting other non-bourgeois spheres (Kellner, 2000).

Opposing Habermas's perspective of rational debates, Mouffe (1999) notes that although making room for dissent voices, rationality is not always possible in public spheres. Mouffe (1999, p. 745) opines that:

> One of the main reasons that liberal democratic societies are not ill-prepared to confront the present challenge presented by disaffection with democratic institutions, is that the type of political theory currently in vogue is dominated by an individualistic, universalistic, and rationalistic framework. This erases the dimension of the political and impedes envisaging in an adequate manner the nature of a pluralistic democratic public sphere.

Using the term 'agonistic' public spheres, Mouffe (1999) argues that Habermas's public sphere theory excludes dissenting voices within contestations of democratic public spheres. Thus, agonistic public spheres give room to dissenting voices rather than individualistic dominance as rational (Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997).

While we accommodate Eurocentric perspectives of the public sphere, we note that language representations also matter in public spheres as it defines the cultural bedrock within the intercultural communication of multilingual communities. In this article, we argue that multiculturalism should contribute to a rational and agonistic African public sphere. In terms of the Habermasian freedom of association and public expression, we note the African public sphere lies within the ethnic accommodation

which indirectly reflects local representation. We thus question the extent to which ethnicity and language differences contribute to rational or agonistic public spheres. As aforementioned Habermas (1989) focuses on the rationality of public spheres while Mouffe (1999) imagines the agonistic public sphere. This article adds that the public sphere discourses should reflect ethnic or local contexts, especially in Africa where there are a variety of ethnolinguistic groups because the issue of language representation is fundamental.

Nyamnjoh (2005) uses the term 'pavement radio' to discuss grassroots and informal communication networks of the African public sphere. The concept of "pavement" radio details the African public sphere in terms of street or market rumours, bars and buses, hair salons and other informal communication networks of orality, unlike the bourgeois Habermasian public sphere. Using the French word 'trottoir' which he interpreted as 'pavement', Ellis (1989) argues that the radio pavement phenomenon can 'best understood in the context of the oral traditions and respect for oral culture, which modern Africa has inherited from its past' (Ellis, 1989, p. 321). Likening pavement radio to 'bush telegraph', Ellis (1989, p. 321) notes that

> The bush is no longer a place where gossip is really hot if ever it was . . . lies nowadays rather with the urban pavement, bar, market, living-room or taxi-park. It may be defined as the popular and unofficial discussion of current affairs in Africa, particularly in towns.

Contributing to the discourse of African public sphere, we argue that these oral traditions and cultural genres such as language are representative of an African public sphere. Taking it from Goodwin and Duranti's (1992) perspective that language is used to build the social and cultural worlds, we note that language is also used to represent ethnolinguistic groups. Thus, the public sphere is not only about rational or agonistic representation but also the representation of socio-cultural beliefs and traditions in the African context.

It is Hall (2013) who defined representation as an important part of the communication process in which language acts as a cultural representation by which meaning is conveyed amongst members of a group. Using the reflective approach, Hall (2013, p. 15) argue that 'language can be reflective of meanings out there in the world of objects, people and events'. He further notes that language functions like a mirror, in this case reflecting the participation of ethnolinguistic groups in the public sphere. Thus, we argue that participation by minority indigenous language groups promotes the visibility of their culture. For instance, in Zimbabwe minority groups have always been marginalised and excluded from the political and cultural public sphere with Ndebele and Shona being dominant. We argue that there is a need of inclusion to afford minoritised language speakers an opportunity to express themselves in their indigenous languages. Although scholars have shown that radio as a public sphere reflects some language clash and mix between linguists and publics (Heller, 1999; Jaworski, 2007; Milani, 2007), little do these studies show how minorities express themselves in their indigenous languages or become assimilated or dominated by major indigenous language speakers through the language mix. In this article, we thus argue that the language mix or clashes should not disadvantage the cultural visibility of minority language groups in the African public sphere.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative methodological triangulation based on ethnographic observation or participation and in-depth interviews. In traditional anthropology, a researcher can physically enter the fieldwork by means of participation or observation to understand the culture of a people under study. For this study, researchers had the ethnographic understanding of locality and local indigenous languages in Victoria Falls, Hwange. We tuned into Breeze FM 91.2 at different times, taking note of the language practices and language choices by radio hosts and their guests on the talk show. We streamed Breeze FM talk shows online (radiostream123.com) from 1 October 2022 to the 10th of November 2022. We listened and participated in all Breeze FM talk shows, namely the Breakfast show from 6 am to 9 am, the mid-morning Talk show from 9 am to midday, Tonga Talk show called Kkubamanzi (a cascade of water) from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm, Zambezi drive time from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm and the Listeners' Talk from 6 pm – 8 pm. These Talk shows happen from Monday to Friday. As aforementioned it took a month and a week to participate and study the dynamics of language by radio hosts and guests through the talk shows and music played. We tuned in 5 times weekly per each talk show to ascertain the consistency of diversity or lack of a variety of language representation in speech and music. As indigenous locals of Hwange district, we also participated as audience through Breeze FM WhatsApp + 263 73 201 6016 even though audience interaction was somehow less intensive. It was either 2 if not 3 listeners participating unevenly per talk show, hence this study does not feature audience perspectives but guests and radio hosts. The codeswitching or lingual exchanges in indigenous languages were transcribed for reference sake as shown in the findings. Since we used online streaming, it was easy to pause and transcribe in order to extract accurate linguistic codeswitching.

From 10 November 2022 until 30 November 2022, we conducted follow up in-depth interviews with radio hosts and guest speakers to back up our data collected from ethnographic observation and participation. A semi-structured interview guide was guided by the ethnographic observation and participation experience (see Appendix A). Through in-depth interviews, we interviewed 5 radio hosts from all 5 weekly talkshows and 7 guests who participated as guest speakers in the talk shows. We would like to acknowledge that as researchers of local proximity, we had social interaction with some of the interviewed participants and have an understanding of their mother languages. Thus, this article reflects the nature of talk shows in indigenous languages and features radio hosts' and guest speakers' perspectives to get an inside opinion. The research findings are presented thematically through thematic data analysis. For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, this study does not reveal the identities of radio hosts and guest speakers.

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study based on themes, the dominance of major indigenous languages and lack of participants in minority languages. The section intends to answer the research questions of this study: do Breeze FM talk shows reflect a multilingual community; how do participants interact or express themselves in indigenous languages and which indigenous languages are dominant? Theoretically, we explore

Table 2. Linguistic profile of radio hosts and guests.

Talkshow (Monday-Friday	Language of Host	Language of Guests	Dominant Languages
Breakfast Talkshow (6 am – 9 am)	Ndebele	Ndebele, English	Ndebele & English
Mid-day Talkshow (9 am-12 pm)	Ndebele & English	Ndebele, Shona, Tonga/ Dombe, Nambya	Ndebele & English
Kkubamanzi Talkshow (12pm-5pm)	Tonga (though multilingual)	Ndebele, English, Shona	Ndebele, Shona & English
Zambezi Drive Time (3 pm –4 pm)	Ndebele & English (Multilingual in Sotho and Kalanga which are not on the language coverage of Breeze FM)	Ndebele & Shona, English	Ndebele, Shona, English
Listeners's Talk (6 pm – 8 pm)	Tonga (Multilingual in Ndebele, Nambya, Shona &English)	Tonga, Nambya, Ndebele, English	Ndebele, Shona & English

how the African public sphere becomes limited without embracing minority ethnolinguistic groups.

As shown in the methodology, Breeze FM has 5 shows daily from Monday to Friday in indigenous languages. Table 1 gives a linguistic profile of radio hosts and guests' indigenous languages as reflected by their speech on the shows. Through in-depth interviews, the we also verified the mother languages of radio hosts and participants (guests). The methodology section also confirms that as researchers, we had an ethnographic understanding of some of the participants' local languages.

The findings of the study show that Breeze FM attempts to broadcast multilingual talk shows through multilingual radio hosts, especially the Kkubamanzi and Listeners' Talk. Table 2 displays that the radio hosts of the Kkubamanzi and Listeners' talk shows are multilingual in minority indigenous languages (Tonga/Dombe and Nambya) and majority indigenous languages (Ndebele and Shona). However, an ethnographic observation, shows that the talk shows by multilingual radio hosts became dominantly Ndebele or Shona at the availability of Ndebele or Shona speakers. Literature has shown that Ndebele and Shona enjoy more coverage in the Zimbabwean media (Chiumbu, 2009; Mabika & Salawu, 2014; Masuku, 2011; Tshabangu & Salawu, 2022) and this article notes that the same indigenous languages remain dominant in a multilingual talk shows participated by Ndebele and Shona speakers at the disadvantage of minority language speakers.

The dominance of major indigenous languages

The findings of the study show that major indigenous languages, Ndebele and Shona dominate the talk shows. Ndebele in particular has more dominance in Matabeleland North as reflected in the Breeze FM talk shows. English remains the prevailing language more than Ndebele and Shona. For instance, in the Mid-day talk show, the radio host regularly introduced the show in Ndebele and maintained the entire talk in Ndebele while switching to English. The Mid-day talk shows were often dominated by English and Ndebele as guests switched between these two languages. One of the selected mid-day talk had two participants, one being English and another Tonga but the English speaker maintained English while the Tonga speaker used Ndebele and English. Participants communicated in English discussing over-development and how Victoria Falls city could be kept as a Heritage site. A follow-up interview with the host revealed that one

of the guests was English and could not speak Ndebele or Shona while the other was Tonga but used Ndebele as it is a majority language in Matabeleland. This article argues that participants in minority languages such as Tonga are somehow instinctively compelled to accommodate major language speakers.

Responding through a telephonic interview, the presenter of the mid-day talk shows noted that English, Ndebele or Shona are often adopted by guests to avoid communication challenges with other non-multilingual guests. The host of the mid-day talk show argued that the show was not strictly English but the Tonga guest chose to use English to accommodate another guest who cannot understand or communicate in Tonga. Yet ethnographically, we observed that the host confidently spoke in Ndebele while the Tonga guest switched to English at the courtesy of another English guest. Through an interview probe, the presenter of the show noted that 'one participant spoke in English because he is not fluent in Ndebele or Shona while another being Tonga is but fluent in many languages and is multilingual which is why he chose English'. This shows that minority language speakers either switch to English or a major indigenous language to accommodate non-multilingual speakers.

The findings of the study show that minority language speakers pride in being multilingual. Although being multilingual, minorities always have to accommodate dominant languages, Shona and Ndebele speakers. Through in-depth interviews, one of the Tonga-speaking guests noted that he had no choice but to accommodate non-multilingual guests for the sake of communication. Some of the comments extracted from the in-depth interview are as shown below:

> I express myself in any available language for purposes of clarity.
>
> I just use the relevant languages as lam conversant and proficient in more than six local languages. I take language as a medium of communication especially when targeting a certain constituency of people.
>
> For the record, I do more than 4 different programmes with Breeze FM and in each programme, I communicate in the best-expected language for the target group.

While minority ethnolinguistic groups take pride in their multilingualism, literature has shown that commercial media conglomerates go for major indigenous languages with a large number of speakers and audience (Ndlovu, 2011; Salawu, 2021). Thus, minority language speakers speaking in major indigenous languages (Shona and Ndebele) enhance the statistics of major languages speakers rendering their own minoritised languages less attractive.

This article argues that switching to Ndebele or Shona disadvantages minority participation in the African public sphere. While minority ethnolinguistic groups switch to major indigenous languages, the African public sphere like talk radio becomes less reflective of their culture as they are dominated by major ethnolinguistic groups. Using Hall (2013) concept of cultural representation, we argue that the dominance of major ethnic groups including the English language weakens the relevance of minority indigenous languages in the African public sphere. Although other studies reflect on codeswitching of languages in multilingual contexts (Heller, 1999; Jaworski, 2007; Milani, 2007), do not amplify the disadvantage of switching to major indigenous languages by minorities.Purported to be exclusively in Tonga, the Kkubamanzi talk show becomes largely Ndebele, Shona and

English whenever attended by non-multilingual or non-Tonga speakers. Even if the host did some introductions in Tonga during the interlude while mixing with Nambya and Tonga songs, he further switched to English, Ndebele and sometimes Shona. Featuring different topics such as the importance of local artists, sports and gender issues, the Tonga talk show materialised into Ndebele, English and Shona in courtesy of Shona and Ndebele guests.

Another talk show analysed had two Ndebele-speaking guests discussing the footsyle sport. Through an interview with the host and participants, we established that the guests were indeed Ndebele speaking. The findings show that the Ndebele speaking often maintained Ndebele and seldomly used English. The radio host addressed the audience in Tonga and diverted to English while maintaining Ndebele to engage Ndebele guests. Below are some of the language illustrations of how Ndebele and English dominated the talk show. We arranged Ndebele terms into brackets and less of Tonga in Italics:

> Footstyle was successful [e]Mosi-Oa_Tunya [mhlaka] 29 October.
>
> It is a development *njitili kweta muchisi*, [Siyabonga kakhulu hlalani lisenza njalo] also tell us [ukuthi] you guys are operating under which office? How far, have you gone with the registration [ukuthi sibekwazi]?
>
> [i]Footstyle is under ZIFA, [lama] licence [nxa sebuya ayabe ebhaliwe ukuthi] under ZIFA.

On another event of the Kkubamanzi talkshow were again the Ndebele guests with the host discussing water conservation. Though the introductions of the talk show were done in Tonga, again the presenter switched to Ndebele and English to accommodate guests. Ndebele words are as highlighted in brackets and English in non-brackets:

> [amagreese ama oil ayacitheka] where are these things going. We have to take to be responsible. Where are all these chemicals going when we do not have the good sewage drainage system.
>
> Pouring chemicals everywhere compromises clean borehole water or underground water so we will end up needing chlorine to clean water.

Hosted by a multilingual host, the Listener's Digest reflects Victoria Falls multilingual community. The host introduces his show in Tonga, Ndebele and English. Just like the Kkubamanzi talk show, the host, however, switches to Ndebele, Shona and English to accommodate non-multilingual guests. When engaging a Shona guest, the presenter switches to Shona and English and the show becomes Shona and English. This means guests determine the central indigenous language for the show. At another event, the host and guest majored in English and Shona as they further discussed the issues of climate change. Engaging a Shona guest, the host used English, Shona, Ndebele and less of Tonga. Like the Kkubamanzi show, the host spoke a little of Tonga especially when doing sum-up introductions. This article notes that Breeze FM is dominated by Ndebele and Shona guests with a lesser number of Tonga and Nambya guests.

Lack of participants (guests) in minority languages

The major finding of this article is that there was less participation by minority indigenous language speakers namely Tonga and Nambya. Limited participation by

the Nambya and Tonga/Dombe minority ethnolinguistic groups in their own indigenous environment reflects the dominance of major indigenous languages in the polity. Habermas (1989) has shown that the public sphere should be accessed by all. We argue that lack of adequate local participation in minority languages stifles the quality of the local public sphere. For instance, the Breakfast show between 6 and 9 am and the Zambezi Drive between 3 and 6 pm were also dominated by Ndebele language and seldomly mixed with English, Sotho and Kalanga languages. Although Sotho and Kalanga languages are not in the language coverage of Breeze FM, the host of the Breakfast show could pride in Kalanga and Sotho language mix. The Breakfast Show and Zambezi Drive played a lot of music and the speech was dominantly in Ndebele with South African music. The featuring of South African music with a mix of Shona and Ndebele songs was dominant. This article also argues that speaking in minority languages like Sotho and Kalanga was somehow irrelevant to the local context of Breeze FM broadcasting coverage.

The findings of the study show that there were only two main talk shows on Breeze FM in Tonga with a mix of other minority languages partly Nambya and Dombe. However, there was no talk show exclusively in Nambya besides a 2 pm Nambya news bulletin. Similarly, the music in Tonga and Nambya got little coverage on Kkubamanzi talk show while Ndebele and Shona enjoyed the time slot. In a follow-up interview, the host of the Kkubamanzi Talk Show noted that music is normally requested by listeners, thus lack of requests from minority ethnolinguistic groups affects the choice of music. The last observed talk show of the Kkubamanzi had at least a Tonga guest who indeed maintained the Tonga language while mixing with English. We noted that the guest had no Shona or Ndebele guest to accommodate in the show. Thus, the host and the guest all maintained the Tonga language while mixing with the colonial English language reflecting a nature of 'pavement' as shown by Ellis (1989) that oral traditions have an element of local culture. In this case, we argue that the visibility of minority indigenous languages reflects local culture of the very environment in which the media operates. This means minority language speakers should enjoy their own public sphere without the need to accommodate Shona and Ndebele speaking. If there is a need to accommodate major Shona and Ndebele then multilingualism should occur without switching to majority languages.

Another follow-up interview with the host revealed that it was a challenge to find available Nambya and Tonga guests for the show, meaning there is less participation by minority indigenous groups compared with major indigenous language speakers. While lamenting the lack of Tonga guests on the show, the presenter noted that minority ethnolinguistic groups must not be crybabies but should also get involved in the public sphere. He added:

> If a Tonga comes I will for sure maintain Tonga. I cannot force other participants to speak in Tonga because they do not know Tonga.
>
> Although I switch to their language, what is important is content. If a French person who does not understand local languages comes to my show, I will switch to his language.
>
> I need to embrace the community service they are doing without them speaking my language. For me to complete part of my job I need to embrace everyone regardless of language.

The submissions, however, reflect the host's lack of understanding of language significance or representation. The need to run a show without regarding sociolinguistics somehow undermines BAZ's objective of appropriate coverage of local significance.

The findings of the study also show that there was no exclusive talk show in Nambya language (only a news bulletin cast at 2 pm) yet Nambya language is the popular minority indigenous language in Victoria Falls just like Tonga. Again, we note that the lack of an exclusive Nambya show undermines BAZ's policies of appropriate coverage of local significance and diversity. It also perpetuates the hegemony of major indigenous languages. Through a follow-up interview, a Shona guest noted that 'how can we learn and be multilingual in Tonga or Nambya when these minority language speakers switch to our language'. A radio host reverberated that:

Advise the Nambya to stand up for what is theirs. Do I have to tell them to be active?

Borrowing from Mouffe's (1999), this article argues that the influx of local participants or guests from minority indigenous languages would improve the Breeze FM talk radio shows into an agonistic public sphere. By agonistic, we mean minorities can bring in new local perspectives that reflect socio-economic challenges affecting locality. In other words, minorities can bring in context-specific discourses.

Conclusion

This article reflects on a number of key issues that affect the African public sphere. Firstly, we argued that the African public sphere is multilingual, meaning it has diverse social identities or ethnolinguistic groups. Using the case study of Breeze FM, the article denotes that the African public sphere is affected by the dominance of major indigenous languages and lack of participation in minority indigenous languages. Explaining these key issues, we note that the participation of minorities is often obscured by their switching to major indigenous languages. In the African public sphere, minority ethnolinguistic groups get assimilated by major indigenous languages through multilingual accommodation to the advantage of major indigenous language speakers.

Perspectives from radio hosts or guest in minority indigenous languages somehow reflect their tolerance and lack of understanding of how switching to major indigenous languages affect their local significance. We conclude that minority language speakers should enjoy their own public sphere without the need to accommodate dominant language speakers. The article further argues that if there would be a need to accommodate major indigenous language speakers, multilingualism should be fair without switching to majoirty languages, thereby devaluing minority indigenous languages.

Having said the above, the article contributes to the theoretical tenets of the African public sphere in the context of talk radio. We note that major indigenous languages in Africa do not only enjoy the dominance in the media but also in the African polity giving little room to minority indigenous languages. The case of the Breeze FM talk is only a reflection of the dominance of major ethnic groups and the assimilation of minorities in the African public sphere. Fair participation in the public sphere should contribute towards progressive socio-cultural representation. There is, therefore, a need for fair media representation of ethnolinguistic groups in their indigenous languages.

Notes

1. Victoria Falls City is in Hwange district. Hwange covers Victoria Falls. This means ethnolinguistic groups in Hwange are original indigenous languages of Victoria Falls.
2. We use Dombe and Tonga synonymously because of dialectical similarities.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

(a) Why do you switch to Ndebele or Shona languages when guests are Shona and Ndebele?
(b) Why did you maintain English language when you are Tonga?
(c) Do you think Ndebele, Shona and English languages are dominant and why?
(d) Do you sometimes have Nambya or Tonga guests?
(e) How come there is no exclusive Nambya show?