



# The past and present of uses of **African Community Languages** in Edmonton London



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## Introduction

**Edmonton** is an area in north London, England within the London Borough of Enfield. The northern part of the town is known as Edmonton Green or Lower Edmonton, and the southern part as Upper Edmonton.

Unless otherwise stated, the “**Edmonton**” referred to in this report, is the parliamentary constituency, comprising the wards of Upper Edmonton, Lower Edmonton, Edmonton Green, Jubilee, Haselbury, Ponders End and Bush Hill Park. Edmonton also has a high proportion of Black Caribbeans (9%) and Black Africans (8%).

Since the 1960s, Edmonton has been transformed from a predominantly white, working class industrial suburb into a multicultural area by commonwealth immigration, asylum seekers and with the expansion of the European Union in May 2004.





As of June 2007, the Black population of London was 802,300, equivalent to 10.6% of the population of London; 4.3% of Londoners are Caribbean, 5.5% of Londoners are African and a further 0.8% are from other black backgrounds including American and Latin American. There are also 117,400 people who are mixed black and white. At the 2011 UK census, the total Black population of London stood at 1,088,640 or 13.3% of the population.

Since the turn of the century the black African community living in Britain has more than doubled, becoming one of the largest, and youngest, minorities currently in the UK. Migration for work-related reasons now greatly exceeds asylum migration and the economic circumstances of the African population is relatively favourable.

As of the 2011 Census, from the twenty largest non-English languages, Somali (native to Somalia) is the 14th largest language spoken in England and Wales. There are still a range of East and West African languages used by African families in Britain such as Amharic (Ethiopia), Tigrinya (Eritrea), and Nigerian languages like Yoruba and Igbo. These languages are also spoken by African people living in Edmonton.

Those aged 35+ are the largest group using an African language as their main language, with this decreasing with younger generations suggesting that as younger generations grow up in British society, they are losing a sense of connection with their heritage and developing a language barrier between themselves and the older generations.



Most young people in Britain whose native language is not English believe speaking a second language is an advantage in life. However only just over a third take a qualification in their mother tongue, according to a Guardian/ICM poll.

Despite the fact that almost one in five pupils in primary schools in England now has a first language other than English, the findings suggest that the linguistic capabilities of the majority of those students will go unrecognised by the exam system. And while a majority view their home language as a plus, almost four in 10 do not.

Community language learning has for many years been supported by Supplementary or Complementary schools. These are voluntary schools, organised by minority ethnic and linguistic groups to serve specific linguistic and/or religious and cultural groups, particularly through community language classes.

More recently teachers and schools have been encouraged to use and teach community languages within mainstream schools, and to develop better links with complementary schools.

There appears to be two reasons for this: firstly a recognition of the intrinsic value of language learning and maintenance and secondly a greater acceptance that first language development is supportive of second language development.

Community languages can be defined as all languages in use other than the 'modern languages' or dominant languages of the nation. Some of these languages have been used in Britain for hundreds of years, others are more recent.

This document is the result of the project that was funded by the Enfield Council/ National Heritage Fund (2023-2024). This document highlights the importance of **African community languages through Edmonton African people's experiences, beliefs and uses of these languages.**

By undertaking conversations through interviews, meetings and survey questionnaires with people of African heritage living in Edmonton, we have been able to compile roles and uses of African community languages in various sectors including in family settings, education, events, celebrations, arts and music, community cohesion, friendship, and family relationships, marriage and religion.



*The following statements from the people interviewed are related to*

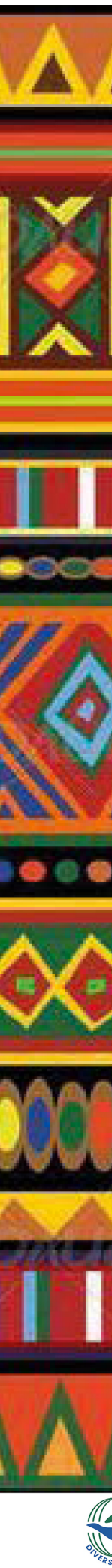
- **Stories/ narratives and accounts about the use and applications of African Languages in Edmonton Green.**
- **The history of how important have been and are African languages in promoting community cohesion and keeping African identity within Edmonton.**
- **What can be done to safeguard African community languages in Edmonton.**
- **What are the roles of the African languages in the social, cultural and economic life of African people living in Edmonton.**
- **In what circumstances the use of an African community language is absolutely required or helpful than using English language.**



# Summary of what project participants said about past and present uses of African Community Languages in Edmonton, London

- 1 *Community Languages enrich British Society in many ways: education, community cohesion, preserving knowledge and practices, arts, social and economic links between UK and Africa, etc.*
- 2 *There are many things that we cannot say in English: our feelings, our music, our food, our celebrations, and our prayers, etc.*
- 3 *For the last 50 years, there has not been any investment in community languages to develop them or to enable the exchange of cultures between African people and non-African people.*
- 4 *If you don't speak your home country language, how are your children going to speak it? How are your children going to speak it?*
- 5 *Communicating in multiple languages makes people connect with others from different cultures more meaningfully. They can learn about different customs and traditions and better understand their world.*
- 6 *People who speak multiple languages often easily adapt to new cultures and environments.*
- 7 *Learning languages and recognising different cultures are also part of global citizenship. Multilingual people are more culturally aware, non-racist, and open-minded.*
- 8 *Language learning broadens one's worldview and promotes appreciation for diverse cultures.*
- 9 *Speaking multiple languages helps you connect with diverse people. Respect for various cultures and languages builds goodwill and partnerships.*



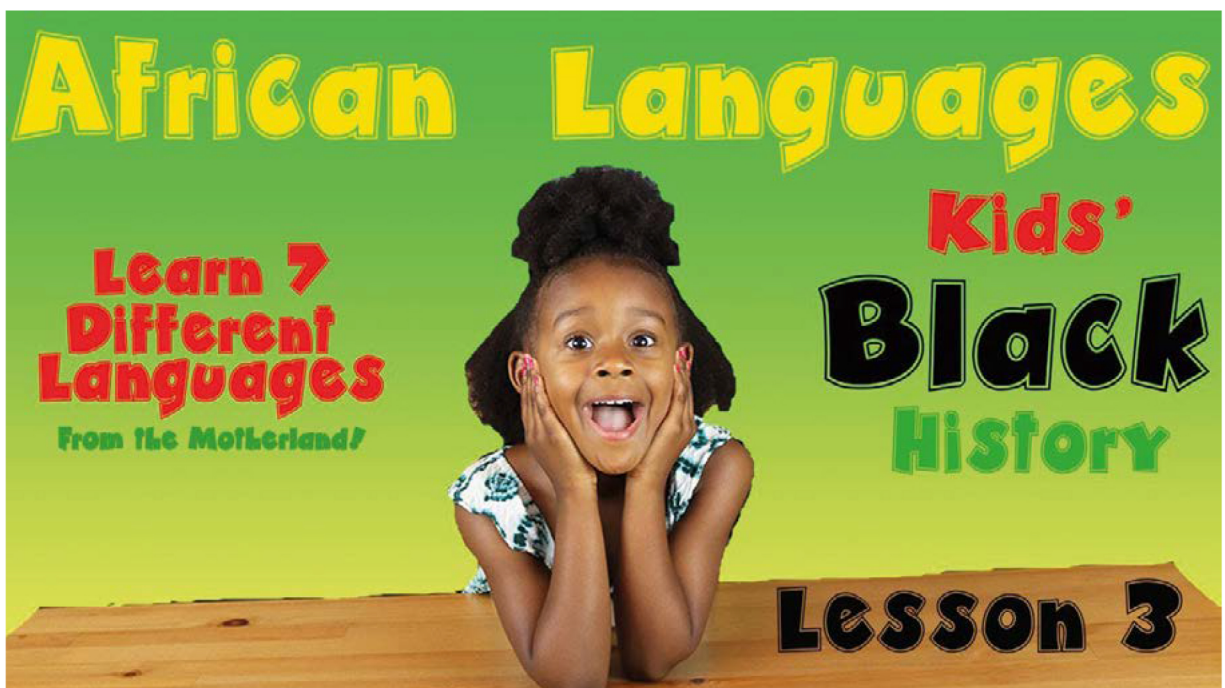
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- 10 *Multilingual people are better global communicators, which is essential for global citizenship.*
  - 11 *Speaking community languages helps to expand and make new friends for life from your country.*
  - 12 *It is easier to establish an interpersonal relationship and trust in your native language.*
  - 13 *My native language allow me to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others from my country living in Edmonton because sometimes these ideas, feelings and thoughts cannot be expressed in English.*
  - 14 *It is now easier for young people to learn a community language of their parents than it was 50 years ago because you can now find online dictionaries of most languages and online classes about these languages.*
  - 15 *50 years ago, it was unlikely to meet someone on the bus, the shops and streets of Edmonton who you can speak in your native language. Now we have multiple occasions to speak our native languages.*
  - 16 *My native language is the way by which we communicate with one another in Edmonton, the UK and Africa, build relationships, and create a sense of community.*
  - 17 *There's a sense of unfairness, discrimination, particularly non-taught languages are not being treated in the same way as languages that are more widely taught, such as French and Spanish.*
  - 18 *British and French colonisers forced us to learn their languages and to join their Christian religions, they developed them in Africa and marginalised our native languages and religions. This is what is happening now in Britain.*
  - 19 *Having more than one language in the UK and particularly Edmonton is something that should be celebrated, promoted and supported.*
  - 20 *To teach a new language to a child, you need to start with children at lower ages because speaking more than one language comes naturally to babies, whose brains are opened for all language.*



- 21** *A child who develops good use of their home language (sometimes also called their mother language) is more likely to develop good English.*
- 22** *As African parent, if you use English only in your family, children will not be able to learn their mother language, neither language will progress and the child may have problems in both languages.*
- 23** *The most important message you can give parents is to keep their home language alive and to transmit it to children. According to education experts, this can strengthen the learning of English and develop the ability to understand different concepts in different languages. It is a brain enhancer.*
- 24** *A culture or language that is not passed on from generation to generation will die sooner or later. Language is one of the ways to preserve your culture or heritage. Helping your child to understand your indigenous language helps them to get hold of their culture and then pass it down to the younger generation.*
- 25** ***London is the capital of the world because of many different languages that are spoken by different people.***
- 26** *Children are always interested in speaking about things in many languages. Therefore as a family of African background you need to focus on teaching your home language to your children. Also speak to schools about how they can help in this regard.*



- 27** *Community Languages make Edmonton a global area of Enfield. In fact most people believe that London is a global city because of different languages spoken in Greater London.*
- 28** *Since the last 50 years, British society has developed itself as culturally diverse country and this make it a global country because of British people's natural friendship instinct and acceptance of different cultures, religions and languages.*
- 29** *When children learn a new language, they are introduced to customs and values belonging to a different society. This encourages them to think from a new point of view, improving cultural sensitivity and embrace diversity and inclusion in their adult age. At a crucial time in their development, exposing children to new ways of seeing the world and appreciating where others come from can be character-defining.*



- 30** *Each language has its own style, idioms, cultural references and heritage. Children who are exposed to these features; the ideas they represent, the new vocabulary and the grammatical variation, are equipping themselves with the tools to understand the world in completely new ways.*

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- 31** *When our children speak the traditional languages of their families, when they are back to their countries they feel being at home as they will be able to connect with local people.*
- 32** *Diversity of languages can help with travel opportunities. As there are over 300 languages spoken in London, people of different cultures can travel to London and still be able to speak their languages, thus eliminating the need for a translator.*
- 33** *Multilingualism in Britain is narrow as it treats French, Spanish, German or Italian as modern languages and other languages are not. There is no modernity in languages. There is only how a language is important to people who speak it.*
- 34** *There are areas in the UK where you can meet in the bus someone who speaks your language, Edmonton is one of them.*
- 35** *My children will be able to apply for jobs in the UK and in my country because they will be fluent in our native language as well in addition English language.*
- 36** *When the native language is not maintained, important links to family and other community members may be lost.*
- 37** *By encouraging native language use, parents can prepare the child to interact with the native language community, both in the UK and Africa.*
- 38** *Not only will travel to your home country completely immerse your children in their native language, it will also help them learn about their culture and heritage.*
- 39** *Losing a language is losing knowledge and oral history records of your traditions, knowledge and practices. Protecting linguistic diversity allows us to keep that knowledge alive and strengthens our cultural oral records.*
- 40** *Most community languages are on the verge of extinction. With more people - and children especially - learning community languages we will be keeping them alive, and thus retaining the knowledge that they hold which may prove to be important or useful in the future.*
- 41** *There is an old saying, "when an Elder dies we lose an entire library", but when a language is lost, we lose just as much - if not more.*



# LANGUAGES IN AFRICA



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- 42 *Our community language helps us to communicate our desires, feelings and opinions to other people and this is why it is important that kids learn to speak their mother's tongue. It benefits the child in diverse ways.*
- 43 *Community Languages enrich British society. It make it global, unique, more friendly, more inclusive, diverse and open-minded.*
- 44 *My native language is a powerful tool for building connections and fostering friendships within my community in the UK and back to Africa.*
- 45 *We know that immigration is political hot issue. But the debate around it lacks the side views of using it to make Britain greater and diverse in terms of culture, food, language and arts.*
- 46 *Community languages not only identify our origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of our ancestors, our arts, understanding of the world, our thinking and a way of keeping our knowledge. Not everything from my heart can be said in English.*
- 47 *We are happy to see BBC World broadcasting in African languages and has been featuring the African proverb of the day on the their website. But more can be done by working with African Diaspora to increase the use of African Community Language.*

# Useful quotes and proverbs reported by African People living in Edmonton

## In more than one African country/Hausa Language

- **Ba a shan zuma sai an shah harbi** – Success comes after tears. *(This is all about telling people that nothing comes easy. If you want to achieve anything, you have to work hard).*
- **Barewa tayi gudu danta yayi rarrafe** – Like father like son.
- **Komai nisan jifa kasa zai fado** – Whatever goes up must come down.
- **Mai abu kan san barra** – A man with wealth will always get a servant.
- **Sai an kula kashi yake doyi (wari)** – Silent is the best answer to a fool.
- **Sai anbatta akan nemi mashiggi** – One only seeks a guide when one has lost the road.
- **Yau da shi ya sa allura ginin rijiya** – Doing a thing little by little this made it possible for the needle to dig a well. *(therefore, Perseverance wins out.)*
- **Mai hakuri ya kan dafa dutse ya sha romonsa** – A patient person will cook a stone and drink its broth. *(therefore, Patience is a virtue.)*
- **Kome ka yi,ka nemi abin kanka** – Whatever you do, look after your own needs. *(therefore, Depend on yourself, don't sponge off others.)*

## Republic Democratic of Congo / Lingala Language

- **Monoko ebomaka ndako na nokolo noko** – The mouth destroys a house within a day. *(words are very destructive or word destroy physical endeavours)*
- **Butu atako ewuneli suka tongo eko tana** – No matter how long the night is, morning will always come.
- **Mokonzi ya malamu aliyaka ngulu ya litoyi moko te** – A good leader does not eat a 'one-eared' pork. *(a good leader when judging will listen to both sides of the argument)*
- **Ndaku olalaka te okoyeba esika nayi etangaka te** – A house you don't live in, you won't know where the water drips.
- **Etumba ya ba nzoko matiti nde enyonkwanaka** – When elephants fight; it is the grass that suffers.





## Eritrea/ Tigrinya Language

- **Ana sabr heliko ask sabr abieni** – I'm still patient until patience gets tired of me.
- **Newih guzo bhade sgumti'yu zgm** – A long journey starts with the first step.
- **Nfue tezarabay nfue hasawi'yu** – A great talker is a great liar.
- **Kullu yihalif, fiqri yiterif** – Everything passes, love remains.
- **Ade zelato zbekisi nede zeybilu kebki** – Someone who has a mother and still cries makes someone without a mother cry.
- **Seb yinebr kem betu, aykownin kem gorebetu** – Live your own life, not your neighbours
- **Mistr hade tihti midri, mstr klite lieli mdri, mstr seleste zerie mdri** – A secret of one person remains a secret, between two it becomes shaky but between three people it becomes a seed spread in a farm.

## Ethiopia/Oromo Language

- **Akka biya wallun tyya** – The skin creaks according to the country.  
(Different countries, different customs)
- **Kan oggi dabe danagase bua** – He who has nothing to do, scatters and gathers.
- **Waqni arifattu lafa daqu nolu** – What God has sent does not fail to reach the earth.
- **Kan argatanirra kan abdatantu cala** – What one hopes for is better than what one finds.
- **Akka gara ofi harki marto nmuru** – The hand does not cut the pantaloons according to one's own belly. It is better to work for oneself and not rely upon strangers.

## Ghana/Akan Language

- **Obanyansoofo yebu no be, yennka no asem** – The wise is spoken to in proverbs, not plain language.
- **Anoma anntu a, obua da** – If a bird does not fly, it goes to bed hungry.
- **Wohu se wo yonko abodwese rehye a na wasa nsuo asi wo dee ho** – If you see your neighbour's beard burning, fetch water by yours. One is supposed to learn from the experiences and circumstances of others.
- **Dua a enya wo a ebewo w'ani no, yetu asee; yensensene ano** – One does not sharpen the stick that would like to pierce his eye. Instead, he uproots it.
- **Hwimhwim adee ko srosro** – What comes easily goes easily.
- **Efie biara mmanins3m w3 mu** – In every house, there are those who cause trouble.

## Kenya/Swahili Language

- **Mtaka cha uvunguni sharti ainame** – You have to do whatever is necessary in order to achieve a goal.
- **Mpende akupandaye** – Love only those who love you.
- **Subira huleta heri** – Patience brings happiness.
- **Akili ni mali** – Knowledge is wealth.
- **Mtu mmoja aliyejitolea ni bora kuliko wanaume kumi waliolazimishwa** – One volunteer is better than ten forced men.
- **Kuishi kwingi ni kuona mengi** – To live long is to see much.
- **Nyumba nzuri si mlango, fungua uingie ndani** – Don't judge a book by its cover.  
**Nyumba Nzuri Si Mlango, Fungua Uingie Ndani** – A good House Is Not A Door,  
Open It And Enter. A good house is not its door; open and go inside.
- **Matamshi Mazuri Ni Heri Kuliko Zawadi** – Kind Words Are Better Than Gifts.



## Kenya/Kikuyu Language

- **Aka eri ni nyungu igiri cia utugi** – Two wives are two pots full of poison.
- **Kanya gatuune ne mwamokanero** – Give and take.
- **Weega uumaga na mocie** – A good leader begins in his own homestead. *(Similar meaning to charity begins at home).*
- **Mae megotherera matietagerera mondo onyotie** – The flowing water of the river does not wait for a thirsty man. *(Similar meaning to the english saying “Time and tide wait for no man”).*
- **Murimi ndaunagwo guoko** – He who is working in the fields should be fed there.
- **Mburungo nyinyi iri muthiomeri irugite nene itari muthiomeri** – A trifle well presented becomes more precious than a thing of great value badly presented. It is not the value of a gift that matters but the intentions of the giver.
- **Menya wigerere ndukore** – Be not too proud lest you ruin yourself.
- **Mburungo nyinyi iri muthiomeri irugite nene itari muthiomeri** – A trifle well presented becomes more precious than a thing of great value badly presented.
- **Migambo ni miruki ya ngoro** – The words are the odour of the heart.
- **Miguguta iri ndiambagirio** – One cannot be in two places at once.

## Nigeria/Hausa Language

- **A yi, a gamma, ta fi takamma, gobe a koma** – To do, to finish, is better than don't care, come back tomorrow. *(Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today).*
- **Rashin Sani ya fi dare duhu** – Lack of knowledge is darker than night.
- **Hakuri Maganin Zaman duniya** – Patience is the secret of world living i.e patience pays
- **Tsare gaskiya ko da wuta aka saka ka** – Keep to the truth even if they put you in the fire or Embrace the truth even when it's hard.
- **Karin magana da ma'anarsu daga turanci zuwa hausa** – Love is blind.
- **Mugu shiyanan makoncin mugu** – A good name better than a good face.



## Nigeria/Yoruba Language

- **Ile oba t'o jo, ewa lo busi** – When a king's palace burns down, the re-built palace is more beautiful.
- **Ile la ti n ko eso re ode** – Charity begins at Home.
- **Díè díè nimú elédèé fi ń wogbà.** – Little by little is how the pig's nose enters the yard.
- **Ijo je o we yon i** – Eating together makes the exercise enjoyable. There is joy in cooperative effort.
- **Onen p' aoko s' oja oun oja p' aoko si** – He who sends a gift to the market, he it is that a market sends a gift to. Anyone who gives will receive.
- **Se s'ale oun e je Seike i** – He who leaves a good legacy behind will be fondly remembered for his generosity. Or Benevolence leaves a lasting impression.
- **Ubee eese l'use, onen yo gbe jake oun o se l'use i** – A good beginning is of no value unless one perseveres to the end. He who perseveres to the end will be rewarded.
- **Li t'onen e e h'oi osan da m'aipan** – One's relation cannot be on the top of a cherry tree and one eats an unripe one.
- **Esin e e da onen da ma ton gun** – The fact that the horse throws down the rider does not stop the rider from getting up and climbing it again. Meaning: Never give up.



## Somalia/Somali Language

- **Gar iyo geeri loo siman** – Death and justice affect all men equally.
- **Rag haween ayaa kala hor mariya** – It's the women who make some men succeed where others fail.
- **Nin rag ah haweentii ka adag, doqonna isga ka adag** – A good man may be controlled by his wife, while lesser man dominates his.
- **Guri ann hooyo lahayni waa lama degaan** – A home without a mother is like a desert - Mother makes home trustworthy, happier and lovable; without her, it's dark, fearful and very horrible to live in.
- **Nin ann dhul marini dhaayo maleh** – He who has not traveled has no understanding. Travel enhances one's experience and wisdom.
- **Raggu waa nin naag guursaday iyo nin "naa! naa!" kororsaday** – One man marries a woman, another man marries troubles.

## Sudan/Dinka Language

- **Ghana** – Akan language.
- **Obanyansoofo yebu no be, yennka no asem** – The wise is spoken to in proverbs, not plain language.
- **Anoma anntu a, obua da** – If a bird does not fly, it goes to bed hungry.
- **Wohu se wo yonko abodwese rehye a na wasa nsuo asi wo dee ho** – If you see your neighbour's beard burning, fetch water by yours/ One is supposed to learn from the experiences and circumstances of others.
- **Dua a enya wo a ebewo w'ani no, yetu asee; yensensene ano** – One does not sharpen the stick that would like to pierce his eye. Instead, he uproots it.
- **Hwimhwim adee ko srosro Literally** – What comes easily goes easily.
- **Efie biara mmanins3 m wc mu** – In every house, there are those who cause trouble.

## Zambia/ Bemba Language

- **Umulume wambwa, tankila mubiye** – Don't rely on your friends to provide for you; strive for the betterment of your own life.
- **Tako Tapi- Tonga. Lazy people don't achieve a lot in life – Umupama Pamo Watulile Ing'oma-Bemba** – Consistency enables one to achieve his/her goals.
- **Ako Usulile Ekapa Amano-Bemba** – Do not look down on an idea, it may be the best one in achieving your goal.
- **Mango tayipila pamukumo.** – Mangoes don't get ripe at the same time.



## Zimbabwe/Shona Language

- **Badza guru kupa murimi, kuripa simbe inovata naro** – Give a big hoe to a farmer; a lazy man will fall asleep with it. A tool becomes useful only in the hands of one who knows how to use it.
- **Anokuti rima ati udye** – He who tells you to work the land wants you to have food.
- **Sadza huritamburira, hapana angaridye akatambarara** – One has to work hard to secure food. No one should expect to eat while lying idle.

## South Africa /Zulu Language

- **Amanxiwa Kamili Mbuya** *Translation:* A rolling stone gathers no moss. Someone who does not settle in one place doing something does not accumulate any wealth.
- **Iso liwela umfula ugcwele** *Translation:* The eye crosses the full river. If you have a desire to do something, you cannot be stopped by anything.
- **Akunyoka yakhohlwa ngumgodi waya.** *Interpretation:* No snake forgets its home. The proverb has the same meaning as the English proverb: East or west home is best.
- **Inkosi yinkosi ngabantu** *Translation:* A king is a king because of the people. It is meant to convey the idea that leaders are only as powerful as the support they receive from their followers.
- **Ingwe Idla Ngamabala** – A leopard eats by means of its spots. Each person survives off his/her talent.



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**At my family we speak one language in the home and another in the community, or who speak more than one language at home.**

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## African Languages

