



PRESERVING LANGUAGE THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES: A PATH TO LINGUISTIC REVITALISATION AMONG THE CIGOGO COMMUNITY IN TANZANIA

James Tennyson Mwaipyanaⁱ

Institute of Accountancy Arusha,
Tanzania

Abstract:

This study assessed the preservation of language through cultural practices for linguistic revitalisation among the Cigogo community in Tanzania. The study was purely qualitative, whereby three major tools were used for data collection and analysis, including Coopers Accounting Scheme, in-depth interviews, and observation. Major themes were summarised into ngoma, lullabies, storytelling and riddles. The results revealed that cultural practices among the Cigogo community are instrumental in maintaining linguistic heritage by embedding language within storytelling and traditional arts, ensuring its transmission and vitality across generations. Therefore, the study recommends that to save Cigogo, it should champion the contexts that give it a soul, ensuring that the stories, songs, and sayings continue to be the discursive threads that weave the community together.

Keywords: language, cultural practices, linguistic revival

1. Introduction

Human language is a remarkable tool that connects people, fosters understanding, and enriches people's diverse cultures (Awal, 2024; Sheetal & Yad, 2025). There are approximately 7151 languages spoken globally. Whereas about 10% of these languages are subject to significant threats (Aalberse *et al.*, 2019; Park, 2023). About 50% of the world's 6,000 languages are in danger of disappearing, meaning there is one language dying within a span of every three months (UNESCO, 2021). UNESCO acknowledges indigenous language promotion, while acknowledging a steady increase in the rate at which these languages are endangered (Nzeaka & Ehondor, 2024). While the range of human languages is extensive, this diversity is increasingly at risk. Such threats are linked to modernisation through globalisation (Li, Chen, Wang, Sitaram & Xie, 2024). This is informed by the distinction and possible loss of culture, for which the identity of these communities may be difficult to maintain over time (Hutson, Ellsworth & Ellsworth, 2024). More, Xu, Zhou and Liu (2025) argue that language resource protection

ⁱ Correspondence: email james.mwaipyana@iaa.ac.tz

requires a dual approach: the precise recording of speech patterns and the preservation of living usage.

Tanzania has more than one hundred languages, whereas only Kiswahili and English are designated as official languages in the country (Kilangi, 2025). In Tanzania, language builds unity through social interaction (Ilonga, 2025; Kilangi, 2025). Ilonga (2025) writes that more than 50 million people in Tanzania from diverse linguistic origins are connected by Kiswahili, the country's official and national language. A major challenge for national unity is the equitable provision of linguistic rights in Tanzania's diverse linguistic situation, particularly for speakers of minority languages (Maganda, 2024). Many languages are stripped of their survival contexts, resulting in a forced monolingual environment dominated by Kiswahili (Masinde, 2024). This indicates that Kiswahili dominates in almost all domains of communication, while accompanied by a few foreign languages and several fragmented ethnic community languages. Therefore, the role of cultural practices in linguistic revitalisation is necessary for ensuring future multilingualism in Tanzania.

Empirical evidence posits that cultural practices are useful in preserving language. For instance, in South Africa, Ntwalana & Matiso (2024) found that storytelling among Xhosa is fast fading as a result of multimedia storytelling, which is attributed to a lack of professional development in cultural heritage. Thus, culturally literate persons should emulate storytelling sessions as a cultural practice for linguistic revitalisation. On the same note, in Nigeria, poetry is considered instrumental in linguistic revitalisation among Yoruba and Igbo speakers through adequate metamorphoses, augmented by a postcolonial tenor and relevance (Okoye & Okoye-Ugwu, 2021). Moreover, in Kenya, linguistic preservation among the Lunyole ethnic minority through shared cultural practices, including shared resources during initiations and marriage ceremonies, has enabled the community to learn about and embrace their linguistic heritage (Lidubwi & Ndavula, 2024). They further admit that Lunyore Facebook users have established dedicated groups, shared language resources, discussed language-related topics, and connected with other speakers online (Tibi, 2023). While the content exists, the absence of active conversation implies that the platform fails to create the community engagement necessary for true language revitalisation.

In Tanzania, cultural practices among the Cigogo-speaking community are extensive and may inform how such practices help in preserving the language. Just like other Bantu speakers, Cigogo natives are described in various forms of expression, including folklore, stories, epics, poetry, and legends (Kanyabuhinya & Athanas, 2021). Cultural practices within linguistic contexts, in this case, also denote narratives; words, signs, names, and symbols (Beletskiy, 2025). Engaging in these cultural practices has not only reinforced the use of their native tongue but also fosters a sense of identity and community cohesion (Habely & Taji, 2023). Moreover, Wagogo engage in festivals that celebrate their traditions by incorporating performances and discussions in the Gogo language. This study assessed how such cultural practices create opportunities for language transmission across generations and, eventually, linguistic revitalisation among the Gogo community in Tanzania.

2. Methodology

This study involved a combination of reviewed literature, in-depth interviews, and field observation. Critically, Chamwino District, within Dodoma Region, was selected for this study because of its significant population of the Cigogo community (Dodoma Region Development Plan, 2024), where cultural practices play a critical role in language preservation amid growing linguistic pressures from dominant languages. The study was purely qualitative, whereby thematic analysis involved putting together similar content for the purpose of interpretation and discussion. In practice, the study obtained data from publicly available documents detailing cultural practices that shape linguistic context and may be responsible for the revitalisation of native languages. Thereafter, a purposive sampling strategy was employed, which helped in selecting participants for in-depth interviews. At the same time, observation was centred on culturally rich practices associated with linguistic preservation, especially those aligned with social gatherings.

2.1 Cooper's Accounting Scheme

Cooper's Accounting Scheme was applied in the linguistic analysis to systematically categorise and interpret textual data based on predefined thematic and semantic coding units. Cooper's accounting scheme consists of eight major questions, including: what actors attempt to influence what behaviours of which people for what ends under what conditions by what means through what decision-making process and with what effect (Xu *et al.*, 2025). Cooper's accounting scheme was applied in the study for analysis. Its adoption was useful in tracking discourse referents as well as their properties through a conversation. Therefore, it was possible to add new discourse and predict properties about the languages while maintaining accessibility relations between referents across utterance boundaries.

Cooper's accounting scheme for analysis was useful in this study by providing a viable toolbox for which description, prediction, explanation, as well as assessing language planning was ensured (Shi, 2020). Cooper's framework reduces risk by merging theories from innovation and decision-making into a single, cohesive system for analysing language planning. Therefore, it was useful in providing a framework to track how discourse referents and cultural concepts are maintained and transmitted across generations through traditional practices. The scheme modelled how specific cultural terminology, ritual language, and community narratives function as "information states" that are updated and preserved through ceremonial events, storytelling, and intergenerational communication, essentially treating language revitalisation as a process of maintaining and enriching a shared discourse repository. Finally, qualitative analysis and data visualisation revealed the fundamental motivations within the realm of language protection.

2.2 In-depth Interviews

An in-depth interview was considered for this study. According to Höglund and Hildingsson (2025), in-depth interviews provide a valuable opportunity to gather detailed personal narratives and insights from community members. Therefore, it allowed for a richer

understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and practices related to linguistic revitalisation. In this study, participants included community elders, cultural practitioners, youth, and language speakers from various villages within the Cigogo (Gogo) community in Tanzania's Dodoma region, selected purposively to ensure representation across age groups and levels of cultural engagement. The interview was conducted in both Cigogo and Swahili to explore participants' experiences with traditional ceremonies, storytelling, music, dance, and other cultural practices, and to examine how these activities facilitate language transmission and maintenance. The interview protocol probed questions about which cultural practices participants associate with language use, how linguistic knowledge is passed down through these practices, what challenges exist in maintaining both language and culture, and what strategies community members employ or suggest for revitalisation efforts. This approach allowed for the capture of rich, context-specific insights into the relationship between cultural engagement and linguistic vitality, documenting both the mechanisms through which culture preserves language and the lived experiences of community members navigating linguistic shift and revitalisation.

2.3 Observation

The study employed observation to collect data on language revitalisation through cultural practices. Observation facilitates the collection of real-time data on cultural practices, enabling researchers to witness how language is actively used and transmitted within the community (McCartan, King & Roberts, 2023). Observation enabled the witnessing of live interactions during traditional storytelling, music, and festivals, highlighting the dynamic relationship between cultural expression and language use. This method allowed for the identification of behavioural patterns in language transmission across generations, particularly how elders impart knowledge and vocabulary to younger community members. This supports Barrie's (2024) provision that observation helps enrich the data analysis by capturing the contextual significance of these practices, revealing how they foster a sense of identity and community cohesion. Thus, observation helped to substantiate qualitative findings, offering a deeper understanding of the Gogo community's commitment to linguistic preservation through cultural heritage. It was therefore instrumental in providing contextual insights essential for understanding linguistic revitalisation efforts.

3. Results

The results were presented based on major themes that were obtained from the study. A combination of the Coopers Accounting Scheme, in-depth interviews, and observation of cultural practices among Cigogo in language revitalisation was well captured herein. Translation of Cigogo content was enabled in order to harmonise information in the course of analysis.

Traditional ceremonies, including ngoma, lullaby songs, storytelling, music and saying/riddles, are examples of dominant cultural practices among the Cigogo community that

help preserve language vitality through transmission and maintenance. The first analysis involved Cooper's eight factors as presented below.

Table 1: Showing Results for Coopers Accounting Scheme

Factors	Analysis of Cigogo Content Using Cooper's Scheme	Synthesis & Strategic Recommendations for Revitalisation
Who are the adopters/promoters?	Primary Agents: Elders (grandparents, tradition-keepers), mothers (for lullabies), skilled storytellers (<i>wandimi</i>), musicians, and community elders in rural settings.	Ngoma to Notebook" Project: Systematically document the song lyrics and terminologies within different ngoma types. Use these as engaging texts for literacy classes.
	Potential Revitalisation Agents: Gogo cultural associations (e.g., Wagogo heritage trust), local radio personalities, and NGOs focused on cultural preservation.	
What is being spread/maintained (language/variety/skill)?	Core Element: The Cigogo language itself, its lexicon, phonology, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and narrative structures.	"Lullabies for Early Childhood" Program: Train preschool teachers and mothers in urban areas to use Cigogo lullabies, framing them as crucial for cognitive and emotional development
	Associated Elements: Ngoma: Complex rhythmic patterns, specific dance terminology, and praise poetry (<i>migugo</i>) embedded within performances. Lullaby Songs: Intimate, everyday vocabulary and gentle phonological patterns passed to infants. Storytelling: Narrative conventions, archaic vocabulary, moral philosophy, and historical consciousness. Riddles & Sayings: Figurative language, metaphor, wordplay, and condensed cultural wisdom.	
When is the intervention/tradition active?	Traditionally, Ngoma and storytelling are often tied to specific seasons (post-harvest), life-cycle events (initiations, weddings), and evening gatherings. Lullabies are for bedtime/calming. Riddles are for social interaction and teaching moments.	"Riddle of the Week" Media Campaign: Leverage local radio and WhatsApp groups to popularise Cigogo riddles, making language use playful and competitive.
	For Revitalisation: This presents a challenge and opportunity. Revitalisation efforts must create new "times": scheduled school culture clubs, weekly radio segments, annual festivals, or designated "storytime" in community centres.	
Where does it occur (domain/	Current Strongholds: Rural homesteads, village gathering spaces (<i>ludago</i>), and during specific	School-Based Storytelling Clubs: Create after-school clubs where

James Tennyson Mwaipya
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geography)?	rituals. The home is the primary domain for lullabies.	elders are invited to tell stories, followed by student activities (drawing, dramatisation) that use the key vocabulary.
	Threat: These domains are shrinking due to urban migration, Swahili/English dominance in schools/media, and religious shifts.	
	Revitalisation Targets: The critical battle is to expand into the school domain (as a subject/medium of cultural instruction), media domain (local radio, YouTube channels), and religious domain (inclusive church services/events).	
Why is it promoted or sustained (motivation)?	Traditional Motivation: Identity affirmation, communal bonding, intergenerational transmission of ethics and history, ritual necessity, and pure entertainment.	Festivalisation: Institute an annual Cigogo Cultural Festival in Dodoma that centrally features competitions in all these arts, raising their prestige and creating a market for their practice.
	Revitalisation Motivation: To combat the language shift to Swahili. The motivation is the inherent link between these cultural forms and the language; they are the most engaging and effectively powerful vehicles for language transmission. They embody Cigogo in a way that simple language lessons do not.	
How is it transmitted (methods, materials)?	Traditional Method: Oral-aural, face-to-face, participatory, and experiential (learning by doing in ngoma). It is informal, situated learning.	Continued social gathering example during harvesting and initiation ceremonies
	Revitalisation Methods Needed: <i>Documentation:</i> High-quality audio/video recordings of elders. <i>Codification:</i> Transcribing stories and songs with glosses. <i>Curriculum Development:</i> Creating school materials based on this content. <i>Staged Performances:</i> Organising festivals and competitions.	
Through what channels (media, institutions)?	Traditional Channels: Family, peer groups, and the ritual community.	Using available media channels to promote the Cigogo language
	Modern/Revitalisation Channels Required: <i>Mass Media:</i> Dedicated slots on local radio stations, community YouTube channels, and social media groups for sharing riddles. <i>Arts & performance:</i> Touring troupes, inclusion in national arts festivals.	
With what effect (outcome, measurement)?	Current Effect: These arts are keeping Cigogo alive in its heartland, but are insufficient to reverse the broad shift. They maintain passive	Activation of social groups and organising cultural festivities

	knowledge in urban migrants but often fail to activate active, daily use.	
	<i>Desired Effect (Measurement for Revitalisation):</i> <i>Output:</i> Number of recorded songs/stories; number of schoolchildren able to sing a Cigogo lullaby or explain a proverb. <i>Outcome:</i> Increased use of Cigogo among youth in playful contexts (e.g., using riddles); pride in linguistic identity. <i>Impact:</i> Arrested decline in child-language acquisition rates in Cigogo; Cigogo is seen as a language of culture and value, not just the home.	

Source: Field data (2025).

Information presented in Table 1 for the analysed content (ngoma, lullabies, storytelling, riddles) provides a list of traditions as well as the existing, modest infrastructure for Cigogo transmission. Cooper's scheme presented herewith indicates that linguistic revitalisation is about preserving Cigogo by adopting a strategy that focuses on shifting their domains and formalising their transmission by using the powerful “why” of culture to fuel the linguistic “what”.

Information from the interview regarding cultural practices for Cigogo language revitalisation was reported based on the respondents’ approach to questions that participants were subjected to.

3.1 Ngoma (Ceremonial Drumming/Dance)

Can you describe the last ngoma you participated in or saw? What was the occasion? Who was there?

A participant responded that:

“This year, August. One highlight was a performance by a group of young dancers who wore colourful clothing and incorporated traditional movements that told stories of our ancestors.”

Participant M5 interviewed on 12th September, 2025.

This statement suggests a possible shift in which traditional Cigogo ngoma is becoming a curated performance for spectators rather than a communal ritual for participants, potentially diluting its role as an authentic domain for the transmission of everyday language.

“Throughout the Ngoma, I was struck by the communal spirit and the way our local languages and cultural traditions were celebrated. It was not just a showcase of talent; it was a moving experience that reinforced our identities and connected us as a community. Participant F3, interviewed on 12th September, 2025.

The speaker highlights the successful integration of language and identity, indicating that when Cigogo is embedded within the ngoma performance, it transcends mere display to become a powerful, affective tool for community cohesion and cultural vitality.

3.2 Lullaby Songs (Wigono)

Do you think singing in Cigogo to a baby is important? Why or why not?

A participant respondent said that.

"Yes, I believe singing in Cigogo to a baby is very important for several reasons. First and foremost, it helps preserve our language and cultural heritage. By singing traditional lullabies in Cigogo, we instil a sense of identity and belonging in children from a young age." Participant K7, interviewed on 14th September, 2025.

This response denotes that singing has been shown to have numerous benefits for child development. It engages a baby's senses and can create a soothing atmosphere, which is crucial for their emotional development. The melodies and rhythms of Cigogo lullabies also contribute to cognitive development by introducing patterns and sounds unique to our culture.

Another interviewee volunteered.

"These songs often carry stories and values important to our community, teaching children about their heritage and fostering a connection to their roots (ooooh ooooh mwan yakulila nyamale). This early exposure can promote language acquisition and a greater appreciation for our cultural traditions." Participant H6, interviewed on 17th September, 2025.

The interviewee explicitly articulates a folk theory of language transmission, positioning Cigogo lullabies as an intentional, value-laden pedagogical tool for intergenerational language and cultural identity transfer. The elder may speak of comfort and ancestral connection. The parent may see it as "just a song." This contrast reveals a shift from language as identity to language as a tool. Moreover, recording the lullabies captures a unique, gentle, repetitive vocabulary that is foundational to early language development.

3.3 Storytelling (Hadithi)

What is the difference between a story for fun (hadithi) and one with a lesson (mwago)?

An interviewee said that:

"A hadithi is primarily meant for entertainment. These stories often feature whimsical characters, humorous plots, and engaging scenarios that delight listeners, especially children." Participant R3, interviewed on 15th September, 2025.

The above citation indicates that *hadithi* might involve clever animals getting into amusing situations, leaving the audience laughing and enjoying themselves without necessarily conveying a deeper moral or lesson.

Another participant said:

“A mwago serves a more instructive purpose. These stories are designed to impart wisdom, cultural values, or life lessons. For instance, a mwago might tell of a character facing challenges and making choices that highlight the importance of honesty, bravery, or respect for elders.”
Participant K7, interviewed on 14th September, 2025.

The moral of the story is usually more explicit and encourages listeners to reflect on their own lives and behaviours. Both types of stories play important roles in preserving our cultural heritage. While *hadithi* cultivates connection and enjoyment, *mwago* fosters personal growth and community values. This balance enriches our storytelling tradition, making it both engaging and educational.

3.4 Observation

Observation was useful in providing more insights into the information obtained from in-depth interviews.

Table 2: Showing Observation of Cigogo Cultural Practices for Linguistic Revitalisation

Cultural Form	What Interviews Say	What Observation Reveals (Key Data for Strategy)
Ngoma	It connects us to our identity.	Is it participatory or presentational? Are youth speaking/singing Cigogo or just moving to it? Strategy must move from performance to practice.
Lullabies	They are important for language.	What language is actually sung in the home? This identifies the true "acquisition bottleneck." Strategy must target parents/caregivers directly
Storytelling	We tell stories to teach.	Does it happen naturally, or is it extinct? This identifies if a complete infrastructure rebuild is needed.
Riddles	They teach clever thinking.	Are they used in children's play? This shows if Cigogo is a language of fun and social bonding for the young, or just of instruction.

Source: Field data (2025)

Table 2, as indicated herein, observational analysis of Cigogo cultural practices reveals a critical divergence between their perceived and actual roles in language transmission. Direct observation helped show that ngoma shifted from participatory, language-saturated rituals to presentational performances for external audiences, diluting everyday linguistic engagement. The lullaby domain proves most decisive, as observing caregivers defaulting to Swahili or English songs, even when knowing Cigogo ones, exposes the active breakdown of intergenerational mother-tongue acquisition at its most intimate point.

Storytelling frequently appears as a formal, institutionalised activity rather than a spontaneous oral tradition, indicating a loss of natural context. At the same time, the health of riddles and sayings is best measured by their presence in unsupervised children's play, where their absence signals that Cigogo is no longer a language of creativity and social bonding for the young.

4. Discussions

Cultural practices inform linguistic revitalisation. Such a provision is justified by empirical evidence obtained from Cigogo linguistic composition. The results have established that songs (ngoma) and riddles, lullabies, and storytelling dominate practices that bring life into the revitalisation of the linguistic future of the Cigogo community. The sentiments herein resonate with related studies by Xu *et al.* (2025) for Chinese speakers and linguistic vitality for continued cultural practices. Similarly, the results correspond to Hutson *et al.* (2024), who argue that the emergence of digitalisation has posed both opportunities and challenges for linguistic revitalisation. This echoes local provision by Maganda (2024), whose assertion explains the uncertainties of the future of the linguistic existence of indigenous languages.

Moreover, the results indicate that Cigogo cultural practices are not inscribed in textbooks but performed in the resonant pulse of the *ngoma* drum, whispered in the gentle cadence of a lullaby (*wigono*), and encoded in the clever metaphors of ancestral riddles (*migungu*). The foregoing sentiment is supported by Beletskiy (2025). In addition, Beckett (2022) adds that language revitalisation must move beyond treating local language as a discrete subject to be taught and instead recognise it as the indispensable medium of a living cultural ecosystem. This justifies Kilangi's (2025) argument that the performative arts of storytelling and music are not mere vessels for language. However, rather, they are the very *rituals of belonging* that make the language meaningful.

When a *ngoma* becomes a spectacle for outsiders rather than a communal rite, its lexicon of rhythm and poetry is hollowed into aesthetic display. In support of the empirical provision, Ntwalana and Matiso (2024) add that there is a severe intrinsic link between collective participation and linguistic fluency as an attribute of linguistic revitalisation. Similarly, the shift from Cigogo to Swahili lullabies in the domestic sphere represents a catastrophic discursive rupture, where the language of intimacy and primary socialisation is deemed incompatible with modern parenting, thereby ceding the foundational domain of identity formation (Beletskiy, 2025).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Preserving language through cultural practices is a path to linguistic revitalisation among communities whose languages are greatly influenced by other languages with large populations of speakers. In this case, the Cigogo community in Tanzania has been subjected to a qualitative study. Such a provision was to ascertain the foregoing statement. It emerges that major cultural practices, including ngoma, lullabies, storytelling and riddles, are major determining cultural aspects that inform linguistic revitalisation of languages, including Cigogo. It is imperative to conclude that the path to revitalisation demands the deliberate re-embedding of the aforementioned practices into the daily actions of community life, transforming curated performances back into participatory events. Thus, to save Cigogo is to champion the contexts that give it a soul, ensuring that the stories, songs, and sayings continue to be the discursive threads that weave the community together.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

I, James Tennyson Mwaipyaana, the author of this study, declare no conflict of interest.

About the Author(s)

James Tennyson is an Assistant Lecturer at the Institute of Accountancy Arusha (IAA) and a PhD candidate at the Open University of Tanzania. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Linguistics as well as a Bachelor's degree. His research interests center on language studies and communication skills, with a particular focus on their application within academic and professional contexts.

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