

LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY

4.0. Introduction

Zambia is a country endowed with many languages. Officially, there are 72 ethnic groups in Zambia with each of them speaking a dialect of the seven language cluster groups. Though language is not invariably synonymous with tribe it is a fair assumption that the number of dialects of language clusters in the country is equal to the number of tribes.

There are seven languages or language clusters that are used in Zambia besides English for official purposes such as broadcasting (both on radio and television), literacy campaigns and the official dissemination of information. These are (in alphabetical order), Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga. They represent language clusters around which exist several dialects. Although these languages are taught in schools in specific provinces, the official language of instruction in schools is English. The 2000 Census of Population and Housing collected information on the predominant language of communication in the cluster spoken by an individual as well as the second language. The former referred to the language a person uses most frequently in their day-to-day communication. The second language is the next most frequently used language of communication. The matter of second language shows the phenomenon of trans-tribe character of some languages in that they are spoken by other tribes.

Languages presented in the tables are in five categories. The first set of languages are those most spoken in a given geographical location. Secondly, there are broad groups of languages which are mainly formed by combining languages which were mutually intelligible. For example Tonga, Ila, Lenje and Soli form one language group because they are not mutually unintelligible languages. Thirdly, there is a set of languages which are trans-tribe such as Bemba and njanya and have become increasing so. Fourthly, there are some languages that are slowly becoming extinct. Accordingly, when for example a person says they are Chishinga, Tabwa, they will say their mother tongue is Bemba. Fifthly, languages presented in the tables also deal with the category of gender. The chapter discuss the distribution of language in relation to the use by men and women. It has been necessary to make observations in this area to help in getting a clearer picture vis-à-vis language as for example in rural and urban areas.

It should be noted from the onset that children under the age of two years and persons with speech impairment did not report any language of communication. This directly implies that the population reported to speak a predominant language cluster hereafter referred to as language of communication is less than the total population of the country. The population speaking a second language of communication is therefore even smaller.

4.1. Predominant Language of Communication

4.1.1. National Distribution

Table 4.1 shows the 22 most spoken languages in the country. The predominant spoken language of communication in Zambia in the year 2000 was the Bemba cluster with 30.1 percent of the population using it for this purpose. The reasons for this position of Bemba in Zambia as the major trans-tribe language of communication are not difficult to find. They are: the early settlement by Bemba speakers in large numbers on the Copperbelt as mine labourers thus beginning urbanization; Bemba being the most widely written language according to the records of "Northern Rhodesian Publications Bureau Annual Reports" in the 1950's and in the early 1960's; the large numbers of the speakers of Bemba covering Luapula and Northern provinces which until 1965 were one province and covering the northern districts of Central Province which together with the entire Luapula and most portions of Northern provinces were under the tutelage of Bemba Kings such as Kopa in Bisa areas, Kankomba in Lala and Swaka areas to mention a few; the teaching of Bemba in one education curriculum of the Copperbelt, Central, Luapula and Northern provinces.

Table 4.1: Predominant Language of Communication by Residence, Zambia, 2000

Predominant Language of Communication	Zambia	Rural	Urban
Bemba	30.1	19.7	48.5
Lala	2.0	2.8	0.5
Bisa	1.0	1.5	0.2
Lamba	1.9	2.6	0.5
Tonga	10.6	14.1	4.3
Lenje	1.4	2.0	0.3
Ila	0.8	1.1	0.2
Luvale	1.7	2.2	0.8
Lunda (N/West)	2.2	2.9	0.9
Kaonde	2.0	2.5	1.2
Lozi	5.7	6.8	3.9
Chewa	4.9	6.7	1.8
Nsenga	3.4	4.4	1.7
Ngoni	1.2	1.3	1.0
Nyanja	10.7	4.4	21.8
Lungu	0.6	0.8	0.2
Mambwe	1.2	1.6	0.7
Namwanga	1.3	1.6	0.7
Tumbuka	2.5	3.4	0.9
Senga	0.6	0.9	0.2
English	1.7	0.3	4.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	8,702,932	5,551,338	3,151,594

The next most spoken languages in the country are Nyanja (10.7 percent) and Tonga (10.6 percent). Lozi is spoken by 5.7 percent of the population while 4.9 percent speak Chewa as their predominant language. In descending order of magnitude therefore, the first seven widely spoken languages in Zambia are, Bemba (30.1 percent), Nyanja (10.7 percent), Tonga (10.6 percent), Lozi (5.7 percent), Chewa (4.9 percent), Nsenga (3.4 percent) and Tumbuka (2.5 percent). These seven languages are spoken by 63.9 percent of the population as compared with 67.7 percent of the population speaking the same languages in 1990. The last three North-Western Province languages are collectively spoken by 5.4 percent of the population (1.7 percent (Luvale), 2.0 percent (Lunda-N/Western) and 1.8 percent (Kaonde). From the foregoing language statistics, it is absolutely necessary to exercise great caution in applying outdated assumptions behind the idea of seven official languages. These assumptions may not be in tandem with facts on the ground. The concern here is for accuracy in the vital national undertaking of census activities.

Table 4.2: Predominant Language of Communication by Province, Zambia, 2000

Predominant Language of Communication	Total	Central	Copperbelt	Eastern	Luapula	Lusaka	Northern	North-Western	Southern	Western
Bemba	30.1	25.4	69.4	1.1	56.6	14.5	55.3	2.0	2.8	0.4
Lala	2.0	17.1	0.8	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bisa B Bisa	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.1	0.1	6.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lamba	1.9	2.5	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0
Tonga	10.6	12.0	1.1	0.1	0.0	4.6	0.1	0.3	69.8	0.3
Lenje	1.4	11.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
Ila	0.8	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0
Luvale	1.7	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	19.3	0.6	4.4
Lunda (N/Western)	2.2	0.1	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	33.9	0.1	0.4
Kaonde	2.0	1.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	27.1	0.1	0.4
Lozi	5.7	1.0	0.7	0.1	0.0	1.8	0.1	0.7	5.0	60.0
Chewa	4.9	0.6	0.4	33.8	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.1
Nsenga	3.4	0.9	0.6	20.6	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.0
Ngoni	1.2	0.5	0.3	6.6	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0
Nyanja	10.7	8.6	1.1	9.6	0.1	52.8	0.2	0.3	5.5	0.4
Lungu	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mambwe	1.2	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.6	8.5	0.0	0.1	0.0
Namwanga	1.3	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.4	8.8	0.0	0.1	0.0
Tumbuka	2.5	0.3	0.7	14.8	0.0	0.9	2.4	0.0	0.2	0.0
Senga	0.6	0.1	0.1	4.6	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
English	1.7	0.9	2.5	0.2	0.1	6.6	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.2
Others	12.6	13.4	9.4	7.2	42.7	8.8	12.7	13.9	9.5	33.4
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	8,702,932	890,370	1,439,298	1,134,948	674,049	1,259,258	1,088,565	500,939	1,051,663	663,842

4.1.2. Provincial Distribution

The predominant language of communication in Copperbelt, Luapula and Northern provinces is Bemba with more than 50 percent of the population speaking it. It is worth noting here that historically, the indigenous languages in these provinces belong to the larger Bemba language group. In Central province a little more than a quarter of the population use Bemba as their predominant language of communication. After Bemba, Lamba is the second most significant language spoken by 8.4 percent of the population on the Copperbelt province. This is followed by English (2.5 percent). Lala, Lenje and Tonga are spoken by between 10 and 20 percent of the population in Central province besides Bemba. In the Eastern province, over 33 percent of the people use Chewa as their predominant language of communication while the same proportion of the population of North-Western Province speak Lunda (North-Western) for the same purpose. More than 90 percent of the people of Luapula Province speak Bemba or a language in the Bemba speaking group as the predominant language of communication. Each of the other languages are spoken by less than one percent of the population.

Unlike other provinces, Lusaka Province has the most diverse range of languages spoken within its confines because they are not all indigenous to the province. This is manifested by the fact that more than half of the population in the province speaks Nyanja (a lingua franca chiefly based on Chewa and Nsenga) as the predominant language with 15.5 percent speaking Bemba. Tonga is spoken by over 4.6 percent of the population in the province. In Southern Province, 69.8 percent of the population speak Tonga. In Western province 60 percent of the population speak Lozi while over 5.6 percent speak Luvale, Lunda (North-Western) and Kaonde.

4.2. Predominant Language Groups

More than 38 percent of all languages spoken in Zambia are in the Bemba language group. In addition, 31.7 percent of the rural and 50.5 percent of the urban population speak a language in this group. The next most widely spoken languages are in the Nyanja group (20.6 percent), Tonga group (13.9 percent) and North-Western (7.7 percent). More

than three quarters of the urban population speaks a language in the Bemba or Nyanja language groups while in the rural areas of the country these two language groups account for about half of the languages spoken. The Bemba and Nyanja language groups are more principally prevalent in urban than rural areas. The Tonga language group is at least three times more dominant in rural than in urban areas (18.9 percent versus 5.2 percent). With the exception of English, languages belonging to the other language groups of North-Western, Barotse, Mambwe and Tumbuka are more predominantly spoken in rural than in urban areas of Zambia.

4.3. Language Groups and Gender

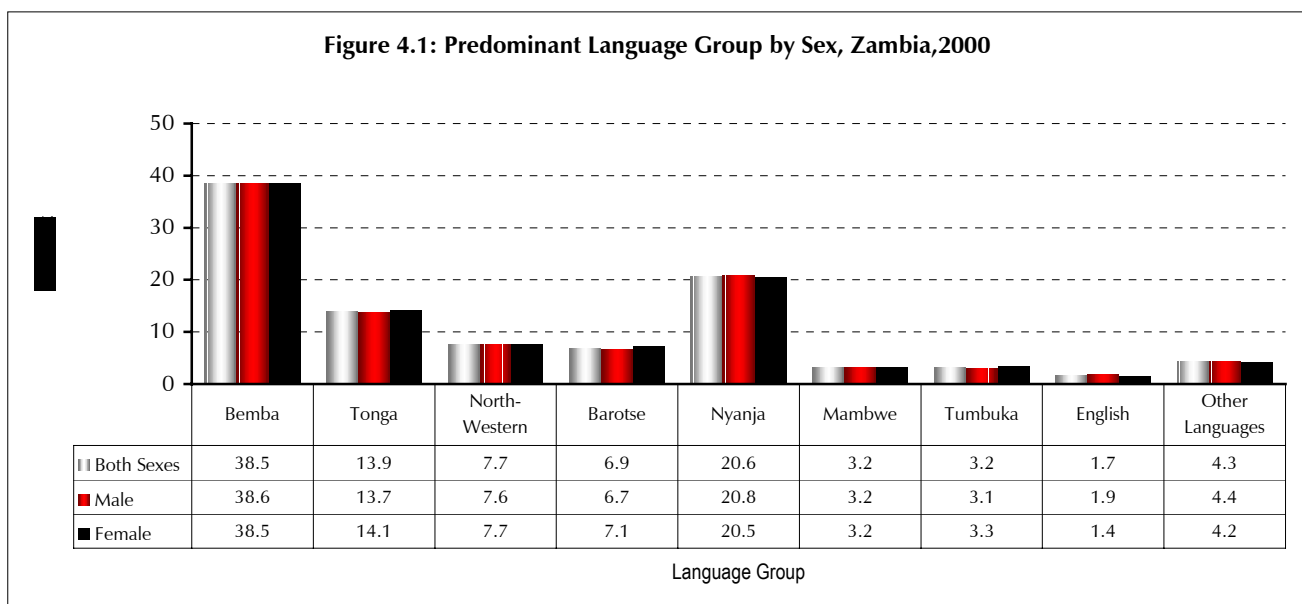
The chapter on language and ethnicity also covers the issue of gender. The following are analysed in detail in the rest of the chapter: the first is that of the relationship between predominant language groups gender and residence; the second one deals with the second language, which also covers the matter of residence; lastly the area of gender is discussed vis-à-vis ethnicity.

Table 4.3: Predominant Language Groups by Sex and Residence, Zambia, 2000

Predominant Language of communication	Zambia			Rural			Urban		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Bemba	38.5	38.6	38.4	31.7	31.9	31.5	50.5	50.3	50.8
Tonga	13.9	13.7	14.1	18.9	18.7	19.0	5.2	5.0	5.4
North-Western	7.7	7.6	7.7	10.1	10.1	10.2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Barotse	6.9	6.7	7.1	8.6	8.3	8.8	4.0	3.9	4.0
Nyanja	20.6	20.8	20.5	17.4	17.5	17.3	26.4	26.5	26.3
Mambwe	3.2	3.2	3.2	4.1	4.1	4.1	1.6	1.6	1.6
Tumbuka	3.2	3.1	3.3	4.4	4.3	4.4	1.1	1.1	1.1
English	1.7	1.9	1.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	4.2	4.6	3.7
Other Languages	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.6	4.7	4.6	3.7	3.7	3.7
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	8,702,932	4,277,534	4,425,398	5,551,338	2,712,762	2,838,576	3,151,594	1,564,772	1,684,330

Source: CSO, 2000 Census of Population and Housing

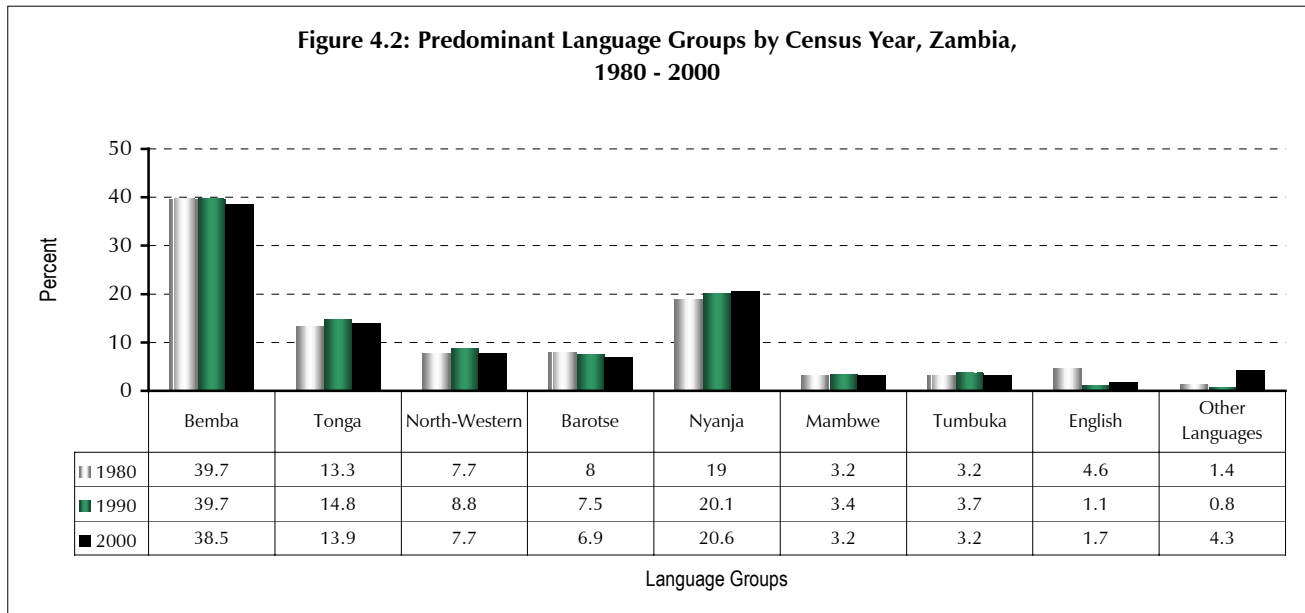
In urban areas, Bemba, Nyanja and English are spoken by more men than women. Figure 4.1 shows that there are more females who speak the languages in the Tonga, North-Western, Tumbuka and Barotse groups while the converse is true for the remainder of the language groups save for Mambwe for which the male-female distribution is equal.



4.4. Trends in language groups' distribution, 1980 - 2000

Figure 4.2 shows trends in the percentage share of each language group for the period 1980 to 2000. The Bemba group has remained the most dominant throughout the last 30 years followed by Nyanja and Tonga groups.

Of all the language groups, only English recorded an increase in usage as the predominant language with an increase of 0.6 percentage points between 1990 and 2000. The Bemba group though has shown the largest drop in usage with a magnitude of 1.2 percentage points followed by the North-Western group (1.1 percent).



Source: CSO, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Censuses of Population and Housing

The distribution of the languages spoken over the last three decades indicates a continued predominance of languages spoken belonging to the Barotse language group. During the same period, a constant rise has been recorded in the Nyanja group. The other language groups show irregular trends in the periods between the three censuses of population.

Table 4.4: Predominant Language Groups by Census year, Zambia, 1980 – 2000

Language group	Percentage of Total Population		
	1980	1990	2000
Bemba	39.7	39.7	38.5
Tonga	13.3	14.8	13.9
North-Western	7.7	8.8	7.7
Barotse	8.0	7.5	6.9
Nyanja	19.0	20.1	20.6
Mambwe	3.2	3.4	3.2
Tumbuka	3.2	3.7	3.2
English	4.6	1.1	1.7
Other	1.4	0.8	4.3
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	5,226,895	7,001,936	8,702,932

Source: CSO, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Censuses of Population and Housing

4.5. Second Language of Communication

For each respondent, the census collected information on not only the predominant language of communication but also their second language of communication. From Table 4.5 it is noted that only 34 percent or 3.19 million people in the country spoke a second language. Thus, a fairly large proportion of the people speak more than one language.

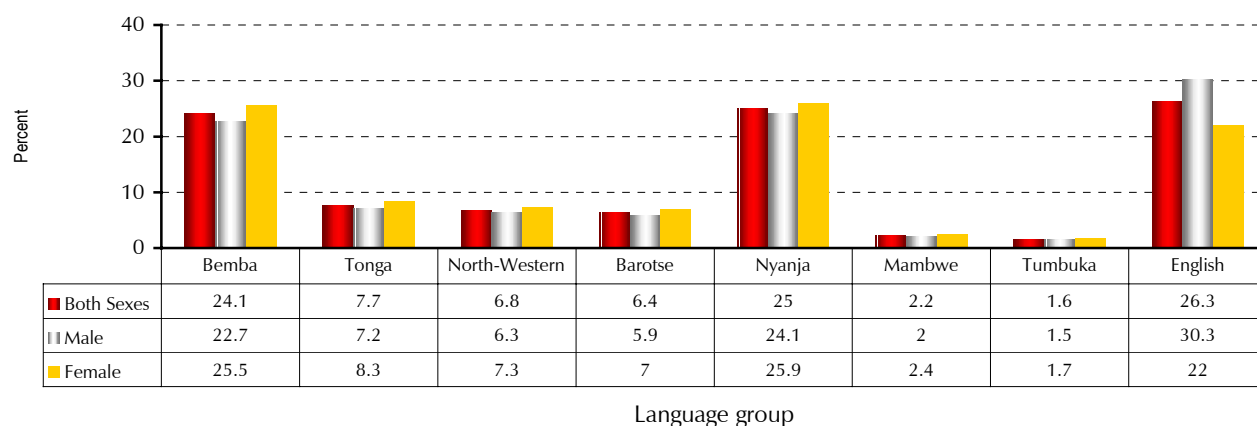
The distribution of the second language of communication is similar to that of predominant language of communication with the exception of the Nyanja speaking group. Most notable, however is the fact that the most spoken second language of communication is English with a percentage share of 26.3 percent. Other widely spoken second languages are Bemba (20.2 percent) and Nyanja (19.5 percent). This implies that two-thirds of the population in Zambia speaks English, Bemba and Nyanja as a second language.

Table 4.5: Percent Distribution of Population by Second Language and Residence, Zambia, 2000

Predominant Language of Communication	Zambia	Rural	Urban
Bemba	20.2	23.1	17.3
Lala	1.0	1.2	0.9
Bisa	0.4	0.5	0.2
Lamba	1.4	1.9	0.9
Tonga	4.4	4.8	3.9
Lenje	1.5	2.3	0.7
Ila	0.8	1.3	0.3
Luvale	1.9	3.0	0.8
Lunda (North-Western)	1.3	1.6	0.9
Kaonde	1.8	2.0	1.6
Lozi	5.2	7.9	2.4
Chewa	2.3	3.1	1.5
Nsenga	1.6	1.5	1.7
Ngoni	1.2	1.3	1.0
Nyanja	19.5	18.3	20.8
Lungu	0.4	0.5	0.2
Mambwe	0.9	0.9	0.9
Namwanga	0.8	0.7	1.0
Tumbuka	1.3	1.2	1.4
Senga	0.2	0.2	0.2
English	26.3	14.0	38.7
Other	5.6	8.7	2.5
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	3,385,745	1,699,863	1,685,882

The distribution of the second language groups and residence is further disaggregated by sex and is presented in Table 4.6. Disaggregated by sex and residence, the language groups present a picture much the same as that for predominant languages with the exception of the proportion of the population using English, which is significantly higher. This may be attributed to the fact that it is the nation's official language and as such many people who have had some years of schooling speak it.

Figure 4.3: Percent Distribution of Second Language of Communication by Sex, Zambia, 2000



The other language groups showing dominance in magnitude are Nyanja (25 percent) and Bemba (24.1 percent). These two language groups account for half of the population, speaking them as second languages (56.8 percent). It must be noted that English is spoken as the second language of communication by nearly two-fifths (38.7 percent) of the population in urban areas compared with less than one-fifth (14 percent) in rural areas. There is a significant difference between women in urban and rural areas who speak English. In rural areas, Bemba remains the most widely spoken language at 28 percent. Nyanja is the next most widely spoken second language at 24.5 percent closely followed by Lozi at 9.9 percent.

Table 4.6: Percent Distribution of Population by Second Language, Sex and Residence, Zambia, 2000

Language Group	Zambia			Rural			Urban		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Bemba	24.1	22.7	25.5	28.0	26.5	29.8	20.0	18.8	21.4
Tonga	7.7	7.2	8.3	9.9	9.4	10.6	5.5	5.0	6.0
North-Western	6.8	6.3	7.3	9.7	8.9	10.5	3.9	3.6	4.2
Barotse	6.4	5.9	7.0	10.1	9.2	11.2	2.6	2.5	2.8
Nyanja	25.0	24.1	25.9	24.5	24.2	24.9	25.4	24.1	26.8
Mambwe	2.2	2.0	2.4	2.2	1.9	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.4
Tumbuka	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7
English	26.3	30.3	22.0	14.0	18.5	9.0	38.7	42.5	34.7
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	3,385,745	1,753,113	1,632,632	1,699,863	888,398	811,465	1,685,882	864,715	821,167

In urban areas, the most widely spoken languages of communication are Bemba and Nyanja as opposed to Tonga, Lozi and Chewa which are mostly spoken in rural areas.

4.6. Ethnicity

In the 2000 Census of Population and Housing, seven broad ethnic groups were identified. These are: Bemba, Tonga, North-Western, Barotse, Nyanja or Eastern, Mambwe and the Tumbuka groups. The groups are such that all the tribes in Zambia belong to one of these broad tribal groupings. The Bemba group includes all tribes of Luapula province, some tribes in Central, Copperbelt and Northern provinces. The Tonga group consists of all the tribes of Southern province including Lenje in Central Province, Soli and Gowa tribes in Lusaka Province. The North-Western and Barotse groups consist of all the tribes of the North-Western and Western Provinces respectively. The Nyanja group (getting its name from the lingua franca from the languages spoken by the people in its group) consists of some tribes of the Eastern Province including the Chikunda of Lusaka Province. Lungu, Mambwe, Namwanga, Wina and Tambo

make up the Mambwe group while the Tumbuka group is made up of Tumbuka, Senga and the Yombe on the northern part of Eastern Province bordering the Northern Province.

The 25 most predominant ethnic groups in Zambia are shown in Table 4.7. In descending order, the 10 largest ethnic groups are Bemba (18.1 percent), Tonga (12.7 percent), Chewa (7.2 percent), Lozi (5.6 percent), Nsenga (5.5 percent), Tumbuka (4.2 percent), Ngoni (4.0 percent), Lala (3.3 percent) Kaonde (3.0 percent) and Lunda (North-Western) at 2.5 percent of the total population.

These groups, representing only five of the nation's nine provinces, account for two-thirds of the ethnic groups in the country. It is worth noting that four of the 10 largest ethnic groups are from the Eastern Province. These four ethnic groups are Chewa, Nsenga, Tumbuka and Ngoni accounting for 20.9 percent of all ethnic groups countrywide.

Bemba, Kaonde and Mambwe ethnic groups are more prevalent in urban areas. Similarly, Chewa, Nsenga, Tumbuka and Ngoni are more prevalent in urban than in rural areas of the country. There are twice as many Bemba people in urban (27 percent) than in rural areas (13.1 percent). Tribes such as the Tonga (Southern), Mbunda (Western), Lungu (Northern), Nsenga (Eastern) and the Chishinga (Luapula) are double their numbers in the rural than urban areas.

Table 4.7: Ethnic Groups by Residence, Zambia, 2000

Ethnic group	Zambia	Rural	Urban
Bemba	18.1	13.1	27.0
Lunda (Luapula)	1.4	1.5	1.3
Lala	3.3	3.3	3.2
Bisa	1.8	2.0	1.4
Ushi	2.4	2.4	2.2
Chishinga	0.9	1.1	0.4
Ng'umbo	0.9	1.0	0.7
Lamba	2.2	2.3	1.9
Tonga	12.7	15.5	7.7
Lenje	1.7	1.8	1.3
Ila	0.8	1.0	0.6
Luvale	2.1	2.2	1.9
Lunda (N/West)	2.8	3.1	2.1
Mbunda	1.4	1.9	0.6
Kaonde	3.0	2.9	3.1
Lozi	5.6	5.7	5.6
Chewa	7.2	7.7	6.3
Nsenga	5.5	4.8	6.7
Ngoni	4.0	3.1	5.4
Lungu	0.9	1.0	0.5
Mambwe	2.3	2.0	2.9
Namwanga	2.7	2.2	3.5
Tumbuka	4.2	3.8	5.0
Senga	0.8	1.0	0.5
African	1.9	2.1	1.6
Other Zambian	9.7	11.5	6.6
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	9,337,425	5,990,356	3,347,069

4.7. Broad Ethnic Groups

The distribution of broad ethnic groups by residence and sex is shown in Table 4.8. Tribes in the Bemba ethnic group account for more than two-thirds of all tribes in Zambia. Additionally, 30.5 percent and 39.1 percent of the people belonging to the Bemba tribal group reside in rural and urban areas, respectively. The distribution of the people of the Bemba group by sex shows very insignificant variations.

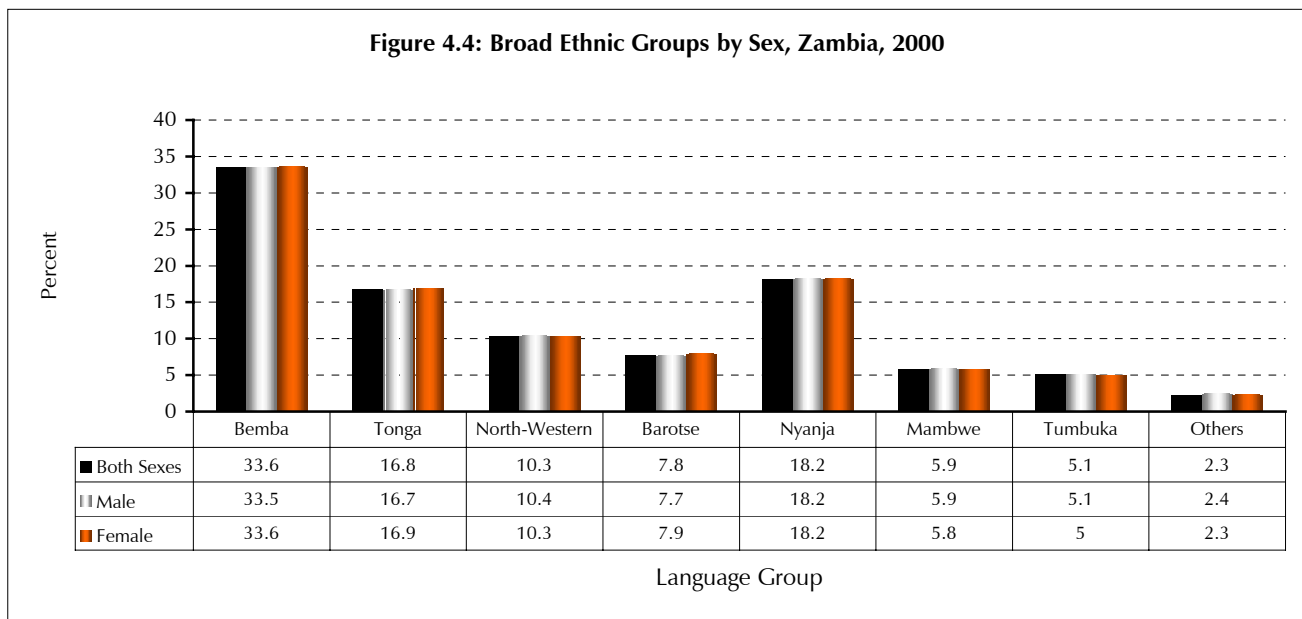


Figure 4.4 further reveals that in order of size, the Nyanja or Eastern Group is the next largest of the tribal groups (18.2 percent) of the whole population, followed by Tonga (16.8 percent). The others are North-Western group (10.3), Barotse (7.8) and Mambwe (5.9 percent) and Tumbuka (5.1 percent). Other categories, which include non-Zambian tribes/ethnic groups accounted for 2.3 percent.

Table 4.8: Broad Ethnic Groups by Sex and Residence, Zambia, 2000

Ethnicity	Zambia			Rural			Urban		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Bemba	33.6	33.5	33.6	30.5	30.5	30.5	39.1	38.8	39.3
Tonga	16.8	16.7	16.9	20.0	20.0	20.1	11.0	10.8	11.1
North-Western	10.3	10.4	10.3	11.3	11.4	11.3	8.6	8.7	8.4
Barotse Language	7.8	7.7	7.9	8.8	8.6	8.9	6.1	6.2	6.1
Eastern	18.2	18.2	18.2	16.9	16.9	16.9	20.5	20.4	20.5
Mambwe	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.3	5.4	5.3	7.0	7.0	6.9
Tumbuka	5.1	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.8	5.6	5.7	5.4
Others	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Population	9,337,425	4,594,290	4,743,135	5,990,356	2,931,551	3,058,805	3,347,069	1,662,739	1,684,330

At national level, more than half the population belongs to the Bemba tribal group. The second largest is the Eastern Province group and accounts for 18.2 percent. The Tonga ethnic group is the third with a population of 16.8 percent.