

MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory: Words and Sentences short form for Traditional and Town Languages in Zambia

Our adapted MB-CDI for Bemba and Nyanja is a language acquisition assessment tool for ages 16-30 months to measure language development in the two most spoken Bantu languages in Zambia. It is inclusive of the hybridized “town” forms found in cities such as Lusaka, as well as the “deep” traditional forms in rural areas of Zambia.

Our adaptation was created as part of the Zambian Infant Cohort Study using mixed-methods. Two focus group discussions of caregivers were conducted, one in Nyanja (n=10) and one in Bemba (n=10). The goal of the FGDs was to generate a list of commonly heard words in early childhood. Facilitators then administered individual assessment surveys to primarily-Bemba speaking (n=76) and Nyanja speaking (n=110) caregivers to determine which words from the generated lists their children had acquired in productive speech. We fitted a 2-parameter item response theory model to our data to reflect 100 words, characterized by a range of difficulty and highest ability to effectively distinguish between different levels of language proficiency.

These tool aims accounts for the multilingual learning environments that characterize contemporary African cities. When assessing families, give credit if a parent confirms the child knows the word in any language. This ensures that the assessor is testing cognitive acquisition. The forms for both languages are available directly from the MB-CDI website. Correspondence concerning the forms should be addressed to Megan Genevieve Latoya, MS MA, HBNU Fogarty Fellow at Harvard University School of Public Health. Email: mbartrum@hsph.harvard.edu | meganlatoya.medanth@gmail.com

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