

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

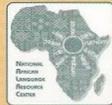
According to oral history, Dabanyika was the first Venda chief to have migrated from the Great Lakes region to settle in this area, now known as the Njelele valley, more than eight centuries ago. He made a home in what are now known as the Dzata 1 and Dzata 2 ruins. Dzata, literally "a good place", captures the idyllic concept of this new kingdom. The story goes that Dabanyika went off with his dog into a cave in the surrounding Soutpansberg where he was caught in a rock cave-in. Dabanyika's trustworthy dog was still outside the cave and apparently went to fetch his son and heir, Thoyandou, at their village. When Thoyandou reached where his father was trapped, he was still alive. It was impossible for Thoyandou to rescue his father and they had a discussion through the rocks. Dabanyika made Thoyandou promise that he would unify the different clans in the area and build a great nation. Thoyandou did this and was one of the greatest Venda leaders of all time. Thoyandou (or Thohoyandou), literally "head of the elephant," is an indication, in Venda tradition, of his strength, leadership and greatness. Today, this symbolism is remembered when important people are greeted with "ntla ndou" which can be translated a "good day elephant."

The sacred Lake Funduzi, situated in the Thathe Vondo forest, is the home of the mythical python and the white crocodile. The python is the god of fertility in the Venda tradition. Other myths of the Venda people include the white lion, the thunder and lightning bird called Ndadzi which, according to myth, flies on the wings of thunder, the waterfall spirits, the ivory traders, the copper people, the sacred Albasini treasures, the golden rhino, the rain queen, the holy baboons of Lwamondo, the blue beads of Egypt and the ancient ruins of Mukumhani.

Mapungubwe fills the geographical site of "the lost city" is where a highly developed African civilization grew and traded with Egypt, India and China between 1200 and 1270 AD. Archaeological evidence excavated artefacts such as the famous golden rhino and other evidence of a wealthy African kingdom. In contemporary times, Venda people live throughout South Africa and southwestern Zimbabwe with a concentration around the former Venda nation. The Venda language is widely used in education in contemporary South Africa, in the public media in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, and in the local communities. Radio broadcasts from Venda stations such as Phalaphala FM in South Africa and National FM in Zimbabwe demonstrate the growth and vibrancy of the language.

STUDYING NUER IN THE U.S.

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

701 Eigenmann Hall, 19DD East 10th Street
Bloomington, IN 47406 USA
Telephone: (812) 856 4199, Fax: 812 856 4189
Email: nalrc@indiana.edu
Website: <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>



VENDA WOMAN IN HER HOME

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY VENDA?

Venda, also known as Tshivenda or Luvenda by its native speakers, is a Bantu language.

It is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa and a regional language in Zimbabwe. Venda is a language of public communication in both countries. Spoken competence in Venda opens gateways to contemporary discourses in all areas of human interaction. Furthermore, the ability to speak Venda makes the historic communities of south western Zimbabwe and northern South Africa, the site of the ancient kingdom of Mapungubwe - a huge cultural and tourist attraction - more accessible and enjoyable.

The Limpopo Province, home to the majority of the Venda people in South Africa, is also a key tourist destination because of attractions such as the mythical Lake Funduzi, the historical city of Thoyandou, the picturesque town of Louis Trichardt and its numerous game reserves. Located in the Vendas-speaking community, the cultural richness of these places and sites is worth exploring.

Additionally the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape has been declared a World Heritage Site due to its biodiversity, great scenic beauty and cultural importance to both the Venda people and South Africans generally.

Scholars interested in various facets of pre and post apartheid South Africa will also find knowledge of this major language richly rewarding. Historians will be fascinated by the realization that Mapungubwe - "place of the stone of wisdom" - was South Africa's first kingdom, which developed into the subcontinent's largest realm, lasting for 400 years before it was abandoned in the 14th century. At their kingdom's peak, the Venda people traded gold and ivory with China, India and Egypt.

WHO SPEAKS VENDA? PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The majority of Venda speakers live in South Africa, but considerable numbers of speakers reside in Zimbabwe. Before South Africa became a democracy, the bastion of Venda was set up by the apartheid regime. Today, South Africa prides itself on its unity in diversity as epitomized by its eleven official languages, one of which is Venda.

In South Africa, well over a million people are native Venda speakers while several hundred thousands speak it in Zimbabwe. Like most Southern African people, the Venda are believed to have migrated from the great lakes of Central Africa. The Venda language (Tshivenda) is also mainly regarded as a language isolate in Southern Africa. The Venda people first settled in the Soutpansberg Mountains region. The first Venda capital at Dzata is still evident today.

Venda people (Vhavhenda) are culturally close to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. The language also shares certain features with Shona and Northern Sotho (Sesotho sa Lechwa). Over time, Venda has also shared words with Nguni languages like Zulu and Xhosa. Venda people live mainly from north to east of Makhado (Louis Trichardt) in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

Venda people are famous for, among other things, the Mapungubwe mythology of an ancient kingdom, hence the huge popularity of the Limpopo Province as a land of myths and legends. This history is still evident in the names of the two major towns in the area namely Louis Trichardt (Makhado), after a Voortrekker leader, and Thoyandou, after the historical chief of the VhaVenda nation. The VhaVenda nation has a rich history of myths and legends; some of which still influence their daily life today. These myths and legends have developed with the VhaVenda nation, and have been adapted over the centuries with their changing social and physical environment.



Venda performers in Harare.



Venda girl demonstrating cultural greeting.



Venda girl demonstrating greeting.



Venda women in full traditional regalia.