

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that approximately twenty languages around the world become extinct every year. And this, according to Prof Rusandre Hendrikse, Department of Linguistics at Unisa, (interview, 3 February 2004), is a conservative estimate if one takes into consideration the wide range of communication that takes place through dialects (see also Mail & Guardian, 14 August 2003).

In their work, Vanishing Voices, Nettle and Romaine (2002:111) use a poem, written in 1916, to illustrate how fast languages are disappearing:

Languages die like rivers. Words wrapped around your tongue today  
and broken to the shape of thought between your teeth and lips  
speaking now and today shall be faded hieroglyphics ten thousands  
years from now.

South Africa's indigenous languages are not immune to this phenomenon, they will soon no longer be heard if the speakers continue to expect the government and statutory bodies, like the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), to maintain and safeguard these languages.

The reasons for the extinction of languages, or language death, range from civil wars, self-genocide by a speech community, language shift, and the appeal of the so-called modern languages to younger speakers. However, the main cause of extinction can be found in globalisation and the pressure exercised on mother-tongue speakers of dominant languages, such as English. Increasing numbers of indigenous language speakers adopt the dominant language or employ code-switching every day.

The possible extinction of the indigenous languages of South Africa will mean the disappearance of a rich element of the country's indigenous culture. Our children's

children will not be able to communicate with their ancestors nor, for example, will they be able to follow the language of traditional healers during a consultation.

It is against this background that I seek to understand why a language with universal appeal, such as English, can be viewed as an impediment to the existence of less developed languages, especially in South Africa.

This study will examine the premise that the co-existence of English and the indigenous languages will hasten the disappearance of these languages. As matters stand at the moment, English dominates indigenous languages like Xitsonga. The fear remains that this dominance will continue until the indigenous languages are no longer spoken or written.

Masinge (1997) and Painter (2004) both believe that English, as the language of power in South Africa, is one of the main causes of stagnation of indigenous languages. The universality of a single language is undesirable, because if all people on earth were to only speak English or Chinese, for example, the richness of diversity would cease and the world would be the poorer for it.

## **1.2 LITERARY WORKS BY OTHER RESEARCHERS**

A thorough study of the relevant literature in sociolinguistics has also been undertaken, while interviews have provided the first-hand information. Sociolinguistic texts, dissertations, language journals and newspaper articles were used as secondary sources for the relevant background knowledge.

It should be acknowledged that although research in sociolinguistics has been undertaken, very few of these projects studied the impact of English supremacy over South African indigenous languages, particularly Xitsonga.

In this section, I shall briefly discuss the various literary works that stimulated my interest in this subject:

### **1.2.1 The Status of Xitsonga as a Language and its Position as a School Subject**

Reuben Masinge's informative MA dissertation (1997) determines the causes of the low status and position of Xitsonga. He points out that this low status reflects the way in which the language as a school subject is held in poor esteem. By paying attention to language planning, the status and attitudes of its speakers and Xitsonga as a school subject, the dissertation successfully investigates the reasons for the negative attitudes to Xitsonga by both teachers and pupils, and formulates suggestions to remedy the situation. The dissertation argues that the negative attitude towards Xitsonga by the mother tongue-speakers has a bearing on the performance of the learners in Xitsonga. The study formulates proposals for the more effective teaching of Xitsonga at schools and to establish ways and means to restore the love for Xitsonga as a language amongst its people in general.

Masinge is a retired education specialist, who has written on the status of Xitsonga in education. His involvement with language teaching goes back to 1966 when he was a newly employed teacher. He later became the principal of a school (1976), a schools' inspector (1980), an inspector of education and, later, a chief education specialist until his retirement in 2002.

### **1.2.2 The Language Policy of South Africa: What do People Say?**

In 2003 David Elias Mutasa took a hard look at the issue of the shaky relationship between indigenous languages and English, in his doctoral thesis, "Language Policy of South Africa, What do People Say?". The thesis highlights the perceptions and attitudes of indigenous language speakers towards the (newly) adopted eleven-official-language policy. He answered the question 'What do people say?' by gathering information from the general public and other stakeholders, who often cannot influence language issues on a national scale. Through this research study, Mutasa addresses the importance of tuition in the mother-tongue for Africans, and highlights possibilities in implementation of language policy and the use of indigenous languages in major domains like education, trade, business and government.

Mutasa is a fine linguist with a passion for languages and has been attached to the University of South Africa since 1989.

### **1.2.3 Language and Power**

Norman Fairclough's groundbreaking text, Language and Power (1989), shows how language affects the maintenance and changing of power relations in contemporary society. It focuses on the connections between language use and the unequal positions of power, particularly in modern Britain. This work highlights and helps correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relationships and power. The study succeeds in explaining the existing conventions as an outcome of power relations and power struggle.

Fairclough believes that language is important enough to merit the attention of every citizen; indeed no person who is interested in the relationship of power in modern society can afford to ignore language. Fairclough explains how the analysis of language can reveal the processes referred to above, how people can become more aware of them and suggests strategies to resist and change these processes. The book is accessible to readers with no previous exposure to this field.

Fairclough is an Emeritus Professorial Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Management and Social Science at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom.

### **1.2.4 Studies in the Theory of Ideology**

Thompson's seminal work, Studies in the Theory of Ideology (1984), is a collection of essays written between 1979 and 1984. This work assesses outstanding contemporary contributions, limitations and innovations in the study of ideology. These essays interrogate topics such as language functions, power, discourse and interpretations. On the whole, the work introduces the reader to a rich and varied field of research in sociolinguistic studies. In this work, Thompson discusses the link

between language and power, and shows that language can be used as a means of power production.

Thompson is a Cambridge University sociologist and author of several critical works in the field of human sciences.

### **1.2.5 Linguistic Imperialism**

Linguistic Imperialism (1992), by Robert Phillipson, a Professor of English in Copenhagen, Denmark, is designed to explore the English language as a contemporary phenomenon – a language with wide communication appeal. It analyses how and why English became dominant. Phillipson examines the spread of English from an historical viewpoint and how the language was used as an instrument of foreign policy by major English speaking countries.

He covers problems such as the stigmatisation of the African languages and argues that the English speaking countries of the West use English to suppress the people of the former colonies (including South Africa). Phillipson identifies complex hegemonic processes that, he asserts, continue to sustain the pre-eminence of English in the world today.

Phillipson discusses “linguicism”, a term coined to describe the processes by which endangered languages become extinct or lose their local eminence as a direct result of the rising and competing prominence of English linguicism in disparate global contexts.

Topics discussed in this work include the role English plays in the Third World countries, the reasons why other languages have not prospered, and the manner in which the position of English has been strengthened.

### **1.2.6 Overview of Literary Works by Other Researchers**

The abovementioned scholars, Masinge, Mutasa, Fairclough, Phillipson and Thompson, wrote extensively about the sociolinguistic discourse, albeit from different angles.

Masinge and Mutasa identified the English language as one of the major obstacles in the development and growth of indigenous languages. Yet they fail to point out the main reason for this. It is my premise that English is used by its speakers to suppress other languages – it is an instrument of power. If there were no English dominance, the obstacles experienced by those involved in the development of indigenous languages would be limited and relatively easy to overcome. A further shortcoming in Masinge and Mutasa's investigations of the language problem is the fact that they confined themselves to the fields of education and language policy respectively. This meant that they were forced to view their subject within certain parameters.

Fairclough, Thompson and Phillipson are international scholars and approached the problem from the political angle. They did not focus exclusively on South Africa's indigenous languages, but gave an overview of English as an instrument of oppression in colonised Africa. They, however, appear to have overlooked the fact that linguistic imperialism affects all facets of African socio-cultural life and is not simply confined to political injustices.

Nevertheless, these researchers' writings greatly inspired me and caused me to embark on my topic and write about the difficulties facing indigenous languages. I have therefore relied on their work. I used the discourses on language and power written by Fairclough, Thompson and Phillipson as the premise of my research and referenced Mutasa and Masinge to reinforce my arguments.

However, I aimed at a wider approach to the language problem in South Africa. Thus, reference will be made to English dominance, language policy, colonization, globalisation, and the attitudes of Africans towards English, among other aspects of the problems facing South African indigenous languages. It is my earnest hope that

this study will enable language planners and policy makers to take informed decisions in their efforts to solve the language problem.

### **1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

In this study, the problem will be localised by investigating the extent to which English is an essential element in power production in the economic, political and the social life of South Africans in general, and the black community in particular. The role of the English mother-tongue speakers in undermining the status of indigenous languages such as Xitsonga, as well as the co-existence of English and the indigenous languages will be examined. I intend to show that English is used to verbalise power.

This research project's aim is to examine the stumbling blocks on the road to the emancipation of the indigenous languages and to contribute to sociolinguistics by demonstrating the dominance of English.

The focus is also on finding ways to preserve, develop and promote indigenous languages. This researcher believes that English is a powerful, persuasive language that can directly render the maintenance and promotion of indigenous languages ineffectual. There are many pitfalls and shortcomings in the promotion of indigenous languages. As a result, the contribution of the research project will primarily be to indicate the problems, and to suggest ways to remedy them. For instance, it is fallacious to say Xitsonga is a "minority" language simply because the Xitsonga speakers are fewer than the IsiZulu speakers. A number should not be used as the sole criterion to determine the communicative status of a language, as it is not the numerical strength of speakers, but the eloquence of the language itself that is important. As long as the language is intelligible, it does not necessarily matter how many people actually speak that language.

#### **1.3.1 Research methodology**

The research method followed in this study is mainly qualitative, as it combines documentary exploration with intensive interviews.

The subjects interviewed were mainly Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers and language practitioners (language planners and policy makers, linguists, authors, university and high school teachers and students). Interviews with University of South Africa (Unisa) lecturers and students yielded data regarding why and how Xitsonga is taught in English to mother-tongue speakers, as it was important to discover if this is simply a strategy used to suppress Xitsonga, and force Xitsonga students to study English indirectly.

The research methodology is largely based on relevant literature in Sociolinguistics, which informed me and gave me direction for my study.

The above methodology, and in particular, the questions and responses from the interviewees gave me a deep insight and a thorough understand of the language situation in the country. It is because of the above responses, and the reading of relevant literature that enabled me to successfully launch this research project.

An original syllabus for teaching Xitsonga was acquired, to establish whether the method adopted by teachers imitates the English syllabus. I also investigated exactly what sort of knowledge Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers studying Xitsonga wish to acquire.

Instead of interviewing a number of people regarding one issue and comparing the results, as is customary in quantitative research, my interviewees were selected according to their in-depth knowledge of certain topics relating to this study. The response was tremendous. As well as granting me the interviews, many people wrote letters (included in the Appendix) allowing me to quote them verbatim.

Print media moguls and practitioners were also interviewed to discover whether there is a policy in place at the various newspapers to reach the readership of these indigenous languages. Newspaper articles have also been included in the Appendix to substantiate the discussion.

The infrastructure, in terms of human and financial resources that are intended to maintain and promote these languages, was also researched. PanSALB officials were useful sources of reliable information on the infrastructure.

Throughout the research project, I strove to establish the link between the use of English and power, and the extent thereof. In this way I was able to make an informed assessment of the obstacles that hinder progress in the maintenance and promotion of indigenous languages.

### **1.3.2 Schedule**

People knowledgeable in socio-linguistic matters were approached with the request that they agree to be interviewed for this research study. The interviews were conducted in an informal, unstructured manner using general questions. It must be noted that the questions were not standardised. Each individual was asked questions relevant to his/her knowledge and expertise.

The Banking Council of South Africa spokesman Mr Stuart Grobler, for instance, is not a trained linguist, but an economic and financial expert. So asking him the same questions that were asked a linguist, say, like Norman Fairclough, would not have been productive. Questions about finance were posed to Mr Grobler, and not to language per se. For instance, when asked if it is possible to issue a cheque in any of the indigenous languages now that these languages had been given official status. Mr Grobler did not hesitate – he responded unhesitatingly as he is an expert in banking matters.

Interviews were conducted telephonically, face-to-face and via e-mail. During the interviews notes were jotted down as future reference and as witness to the discussion. Many responses were in the form of e-mails as can be seen in the Appendix.

When specifically researching the case of Xitsonga, interviewees provided answers that became an example of what the majority of Xitsonga think about their language. For instance, the majority of Xitsonga speakers interviewed believe that to call Xitsonga a minority language is derogatory and part of the strategy by non-Xitsonga

speakers to undermine the language. This thought was clearly expressed by the former Departmental Head of African Languages at Unisa, DI Mathumba. The Chivirika Self-help Project leadership, who represent the feelings of the other project members and the Xitsonga community in general, explicitly elucidated the attitudes of Xitsonga speakers.

### **1.3.3 Sample and number of people interviewed**

Of the people interviewed, twenty are included in Personal Communication (see pages 111-112). Others appear in the list of references as authors of linguistic texts and other relevant documents. Four interviewees do not appear in the list of interviewees as I did not send them specific questions to answer, but simply discussed issues of language in general with them. For example, linguists such as Fairclough (1989), Webb (1999), Mutasa (2003) and communication experts such as Stefan Sonderling (1998) have offered inputs by way of discussion in the development of this study. Fairclough and I discussed his second revised edition of *Language and Power* (2001) and how to detect authoritative language in a speech. My discussion with Webb centred on language planning; while Mutasa informed me about language policy and ordinary people's perception of the eleven official languages. Sonderling gave insights into the effects of the media on the South African society and how one's communication is influenced by culture.

I am greatly indebted to all these interviewees for their willingness to assist me. During my research, I only experienced two incidents where people refused to answer questions posed to them or just decided not to cooperate. One was a lecturer at the University of the North in Limpopo and the other a retired educationist. But their decisions did not deter my quest to explore the indigenous language problem as this problem is larger than any individual.

As mentioned earlier, the individual experts I consulted in this study have specialized knowledge on various aspects of language. Their expertise is valuable, in that it validates, reinforces and emphasizes the claims made in the study. Above all, their specialized knowledge also helped to shed light on socio-linguistic matters. For greater understanding of the various discussions, I have included summarized

versions of the interviews in the Appendix: Questions and Answers. Please note that many of the responses have been included in the Appendix: Personal Correspondence in the form of e-mails, while others have been paraphrased within the text itself.

#### **1.4 OUTLINE OF THIS RESEARCH REPORT**

Chapter One is an introduction to the study, while Chapter Two offers the motivation behind the research study and gives some background regarding the language situation in South Africa.

Chapter Three deals with language as a major element in the establishment of power. This chapter also includes a brief history of colonisation and globalisation, with emphasis on language as a tool of disempowerment and highlights the relevance of this to Xitsonga.

Chapter Four reveals the dangers inherent in the Africans' positive language attitudes towards English, and also exposes the strategies and practical ways in which speakers of a dominant language, such as English, exercise power.

Chapter Five gives a critical assessment of the South African Language Policy and the way in which it is trying to readdress the language situation in the country, while the final chapter provides the analysis of the findings, some concluding remarks and suggestions for further study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE SITUATION**

#### **2.1 MOTIVATION**

This research project is motivated by simple human curiosity regarding the way people use language in their daily interaction with one another. It deals with the issue of language as an instrument of power, and aims to prove through examples, arguments and analysis that language is by far the most important medium of transmitting or communicating power. Although I am curious by nature, and always intrigued by various phenomena, curiosity alone is insufficient to motivate a scientific study. A number of other issues prompted me to embark on this study.

Whenever I think of language dominance, my prison experience in the early eighties comes to mind. While I was doing a four day stint in the Pretoria Maximum Prison for failing to produce, on demand by a police officer, a passbook (a kind of an identity document carried by Africans in those dark days), I witnessed a fellow inmate, known only as “Bra Joe”, subdue a cocky prisoner who had forced the whole cell of 200 strong pass offenders to speak isiZulu and sing isiZulu war-songs all day long. Soon after the fall of the “Zulu despot”, Joe requested inmates to communicate, sing and dance in Xitsonga as they had been delivered from the “Zulu Hitler”. Joe even went so far as to reward each fellow prisoner, who could speak and sing Xitsonga well, with a cigarette. A week after I was released, I met one of the warders who told me that Xitsonga was still the “official language” in my former cell. “Joe was a genius colonizer,” the warder remarked.

I was also motivated by the dominance of English in South African public life, as well as the implications this dominance has for the maintenance and promotion of indigenous languages. In this study, English is shown to be dominant over indigenous languages in the country. While this is true, I wish to go on record as stating that the

English language, in and of itself, cannot be held entirely responsible for the situation. I believe that, among other reasons, the English mother-tongue speakers, who may be viewed as the prime movers in the linguistic domination, are responsible. These English mother-tongue speakers have succeeded, amongst other things, in making Africans feel ashamed of and abhor their own indigenous languages.

I also received the impression that the English media often portray indigenous languages as being primitive, with the implication that they should be relegated to the annals of history. English, and English alone, should be known, spoken and written by the African masses. Some newspaper companies find that marketing an African language medium newspaper is not a viable option, and that indigenous languages have not yet developed to the standard where it will attract the eye of a seasoned reader.

Adegbija (1994:19) states that the dissemination of information, especially in print media, is almost exclusively in European languages, although the major indigenous languages are widely used in broadcasting. Only a few indigenous languages are used in the press. While Adegbija is referring to countries further to the north in Africa, particularly Nigeria, the situation is very similar here in South Africa.

According to the Finlayson et al (1998-2002:237), it is clear that western-type media provided another instrument by which languages of power are entrenched.

This was so because the mass circulation of information in the media could extend the influence of language to a broad geographical area. Through these media, the colonial languages and those African languages which were fortunate enough to be used in them were elevated to their prestige, popularity and status.

In post-apartheid South Africa, English speakers present their language as a skill that is rather difficult for an indigenous mother-tongue speaker to acquire. Generally, for an indigenous mother-tongue speaker to be considered fluent in English, he/she is required to have completed secondary school successfully, and may even have a tertiary qualification. This may be ascribed to the fact that English is taught theoretically in schools, and not practically by mother-tongue speakers. Having

acquired fluency in English after many years of study, he/she may go to the job market where the ability to speak English is presented as an additional skill.

Alexander (Sunday Times, 17 September 2003) points out that Africans who know the languages of the colonial conquerors (i.e. English) will, by whatever means they acquired this knowledge, benefit directly in terms of the best-paid jobs and high social status as a result of their proficiency.

In his article, entitled “Lift The Boom of Language”, Neville Alexander focused on the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by the dominance of colonial languages in Africa. Alexander expressed doubt about ever succeeding “in our goal of creating conditions to which the downtrodden common people of Africa will at last enjoy the freedom and democracy.” Language in post-colonial Africa and in post-apartheid South Africa is “fundamentally and essentially a class issue.” It is referred to as a “badge of nationality”, an “elite closure” and a “cultural capital” which in the “African context can be understood as proficiency in English, French or Portuguese. Proficiency determines the class location of an individual in the ex-colonial set up. That is, languages policies in modern Africa translate into a single fact, “those who know the languages of the colonial conquerors well, benefit directly by well-paid jobs and high social status as a result of their proficiency. Since South Africans have the linguistic expertise, he sees no reason why languages of the people (read indigenous languages) are used in all domains of life “to make participatory democracy a reality across the continent”.

In post-apartheid South Africa, in spite of spectacular advances at the constitutional, legislative and policy levels, “we continue to be plagued by the monolingual mode of life of the empowered black elite.” This disposition towards establishing and entrenching a monolingual public service – most notably in the Department of Justice – and promoting the English language at the expense of African languages, insulates the black middle class in what is in effect an economically and politically gated community, separated from the vast majority of the population by “the language of liberation” and “the language of national unity”.

The whole undertaking is reminiscent of the old system of Bantu Education, where Africans were taught English by under- and unqualified teachers. This created a dearth of English proficiency and effectively barred Africans from obtaining lucrative jobs. Myers-Scotton (quoted by Alexander, Sunday Times, 17 September 2003) calls it an “elite closure, which refers to the strategy by which elites maintain power by using language understandable only to them”.

As described above, English has been used to reserve higher status positions for a selected population. The native speakers of English, more especially those controlling the corporate world, promote the spread and use of English to perpetuate the decline of indigenous languages, as well as the loss of indigenous knowledge and skills. Marzui (2004:54) has this to say about the impediment indigenous linguistic progress through the use of English domination:

The European languages like English in which Africans are taught, therefore, are potential sources of intellectual control. They aid the World Bank’s attempt to expose Africans to get them to participate in the construction of knowledge that promotes the agenda of international capitalism. The hidden push for English, in particular, can be seen as part of a right-wing agenda intended to bring the world nearer to the ‘end of history’ and to ensure the final victory of capitalism on a global scale.

Taking the above into consideration, it seems that language not only expresses our feelings, thoughts, and makes sense of our life world, but also can be exploited as an instrument to achieve, maintain and promote power in all its manifestations.

## **2.2 FOCUS**

Although I shall refer to other South African indigenous languages as examples, I shall focus mainly on Xitsonga, a language spoken by 1,9 million people in South Africa (Census 2001).

According to Mathumba (1993:63-64), the Tsonga people originally moved from Zimbabwe and Zululand to converge in Mozambique where they occupied the area

from St Lucia in the south to the Save (Sabi) River in the north, and from the east coast to the west of Lebombo mountains in the west.

However, continual warfare and clashes with the Portuguese and Ngunis, forced many Tsonga people to flee to the Lebombo Mountains in the west into the Transvaal. While some settled in Bushbuckridge and Lydenburg in the south, other moved as far north as the Zoutpansberg where they were allotted tracts of land by the British vice-consul, Joao Albasini.

Today Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are found primarily in the north-eastern Limpopo province, from Pafuri and Limpopo confluence down to Mpumalanga, in what used to be the Gazankulu homeland. This homeland ceased to exist in 1994, with the advent of democracy in the Republic of South Africa. Like any other free South Africans, Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are now resident in nearly every province of the country (see Census 2001).

### **2.3 LANGUAGE SITUATION (SOCIO-CULTURAL AND POLITICAL)**

South Africa is a democratic country that achieved its independence from the aftermath of colonial rule exactly a decade ago. It has 44,8 million citizens of diverse ethnic groups (Census 2001), who communicate in eleven official languages, namely English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Setswana, Sesotho sa Leboa, Southern Sotho, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, SiSwati and isiNdebele. Apart from these languages listed above, other languages such as Khoi and San, modern European languages and various Indian dialects are spoken within their respective communities.

South Africa is, therefore, a multilingual country and the majority of South Africans can speak two or more languages. For instance, I am fluent in all South African official languages, save isiXhosa, isiNdebele and SiSwati.

### **2.3.1 The Position of English**

The historical background of English has been well documented by many other researchers and I shall not repeat it here. The origin of English in South Africa has been sketched in the chapter on colonisation.

However, the point that I would like to make here is that South Africa is gradually evolving linguistically into a situation where English may dominate the linguistic domain completely. Without doubt, the use of English as the current *de facto* language of communication will continue to prevail, as the post-apartheid rulers seem to have given this their tacit approval. The new South Africa is following a worldwide trend where English is the dominant international language, the language of business and of mass communication.

Nkadimeng (2001:48-50) points out that the post-colonial period was expected to bring an everlasting peace and restoration of indigenous languages to the formerly colonised people. This, however, has not occurred and indeed, English has become the language of the government. According to Nkadimeng, granting official status to indigenous languages is necessary for the promotion and advancement of the African national identity. He believes that English should continue to be used as a *lingua franca*, but should not be given official status. It should be noted that Nkadimeng is not referring to the South African language situation, but to that in Namibia, where English is the only official language of the government. He fears that indigenous languages will not survive in South Africa if the Republic emulates Namibia.

### **2.3.2 The Position of Afrikaans**

The future is also not bright for Afrikaans. Its status as a preferred language (along with English), a position it held during the Apartheid years, when indeed it was the dominant language, has been greatly diminished.

While the Afrikaners held political power, the fact that Afrikaans was, numerically, a minority language in the country was irrelevant and a working knowledge of the language was a prerequisite for almost any type of employment. On coming to power

in 1948, the National Party, under D.F. Malan's leadership, ruthlessly imposed their language on the nation. The National Party was determined that Afrikaans would be the country's lingua franca and relegated English to a second language status, despite the entrenchment of English as an official language. The Afrikaners' intention nearly succeeded politically but economically, English continued to dominate. Van Rensburg and Jordaan (1995:116) point out "The National Party not only uplifted the Afrikaners with respect to politics, but also in their economic life. Their backward position, compared with the English community, was improved." Despite the Nationalists' insistence on Afrikaans being used as a vernacular by all South Africans, English still reigned supreme, as Mesthrie (1995:171) maintains:

Since its arrival in the early 19th century, English has enjoyed the status of an international language, associated with major colonial power. It has consequently exerted an influence in public discourse that belies the minority status of its native speakers in South Africa; and unlike Dutch/Cape Dutch/Afrikaans it has not had crises of identity and change.

Today, however, Afrikaans is just one of the minority languages, and the government in power has indicated its preference for the use of English very clearly. The position of the Afrikaans language is slipping into a lesser position and it is inevitable that this trend will continue since its mother-tongue speakers have lost political power.

### **2.3.3 The Position of the African Languages**

Apart from English and Afrikaans, the country is characterised by various indigenous languages (including Xitsonga) reserved mainly for interactions amongst African people. Mother-tongue speakers refer to these languages collectively as the language of the African gods, as each is considered a medium for communicating with Africa's ancestors. In other words, the gods both understand and communicate with people using these languages. These indigenous languages contain unique registers that are not easily understood by non-indigenous language speakers.

Mother-tongue speakers make use of cultural elements embedded in the indigenous languages to talk to their gods and interpret the language of the divinely inspired

bone-thrower. For example, the bone-thrower will constantly monitor the position in which the bone of an anteater (aardvark) falls, in order to interpret the gods' message, as Junod (1927: 546) points out:

The astragalus of the ant-bear (mhandjela), which digs the holes in which porcupines live, has also many meanings: the ancestor-gods, because they dwell in the earth and never come out in the day-time; the power of death, because it digs the grave; the chief himself also puts it to his mouth when sacrificing.

To understand this interpretation, one needs to be able to access the African people's world view – their perception of the anteater and the way in which it relates to the people and their gods.

It is true that someone outside the African community say, a Chinese or a Brazilian, can learn to understand the symbolism involved here, but very few have taken the trouble to do so, thus making the knowledge almost exclusively indigenous.

The following discussion of the various African languages does not purport to be a thorough study of indigenous languages, but intends only to give an historical overview of indigenous languages for a reader who may not be familiar with these languages. It must also be noted that the history of indigenous languages is a wide field of study. Space does not allow for an exhaustive historical investigation of indigenous languages. For those interested in further reading, may look at the works of scholars like Mzamane (1962), Msimang (1989), and Mathumba (1993) as well as a host of other scholars who have done thorough research on indigenous languages and their first language speakers in the South Africa.

However, in order for us to understand both their past and present positions in the broad linguistic scope, an historical overview of each indigenous language and how these languages were affected when they came into contact with speakers of European languages will be given.

It must be noted that indigenous languages have always influenced one another. This was promoted by the proximity of various ethnic groups to one another and enhanced

by factors such as modern transport and communication systems,. Although they share many similarities, the indigenous languages of South Africa are divided into four main families, namely the Nguni, Sesotho, TshiVenda and Xitsonga.

### **2.3.3.1 The Nguni Family**

This is the largest group in that it includes languages such as IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, SiSwati and IsiNdebele. Originally, speakers of this language group inhabited the coastal belt stretching from Swaziland through KwaZulu-Natal to the Ciskei in the Eastern Cape. Today, however, speakers of the Nguni languages are scattered throughout the Republic.

Nguni languages are very similar, and are a prototypical example of what linguists call dialects of one language. No wonder that linguists who promote language harmonisation always point to the Nguni language family as an ideal.

#### **\* IsiZulu**

The most widely spoken language within the Nguni language family is IsiZulu. Msimang (1989:20) traces IsiZulu back to a dialect, which later became a main language. In Shaka's time the three groups, Zunda, Thefula and Tekela, were united into one, and spoke one language, Zulu, i.e. the Ntungwa dialect which was elevated to the status of official language. In a way then, all these peoples became Zulu or Ngunis.

Indeed, King Shaka Zulu conquered the other clans and built a Zulu empire as Roberts (174:55) describes below:

The traditions of the Zulu royal lineage became the traditions of the nation; the Zulu dialect became the language of the nation; and every inhabitant, whatever his origins, became a Zulu, and owing allegiance to Shaka.

In later years, IsiZulu became the most widely spoken language within the Nguni language family. According to the 2001 Census, 10 677 305 people are IsiZulu first language speakers (Census 2001:15).

Since it is used as a colloquial language in multilingual industrial centres of the country, this language has become a lingua franca, particularly amongst African language speakers. The Mfecane (crushing) caused a disruption and there was widespread migration that also spread the use of IsiZulu. Roberts (1974:55) points out that the effects of this tremendous upheaval, that disrupted the tightly knit pattern of African settlement, “were to be felt throughout the southern part of the continent, reaching as far north as Lake Tanganyika” in central Africa.

When a society is disturbed by natural or man-made disasters like the Mfecane, its languages are shaken as well. The scattering of neighbouring chiefdoms around Shaka’s empire by the Zulu army, the displacement of clans and their consequent flight northwards, attacking other tribes in their flight, has greatly contributed to the spread of IsiZulu. For instance, after the Mfecane, IsiZulu in the form of IsiNdebele was spoken for the first time in what used to be Transvaal, and it was also taken to Mozambique by Shaka’s former general, Soshangane and his followers, as they invaded that country and made their home there.

#### \* **IsiXhosa**

In terms of numerical strength and usage, IsiZulu is followed by IsiXhosa. According to the 2001 Census, 7 907 153 people speak IsiXhosa (Census 2001:15) and is the language of former president Nelson Mandela and many other national leaders.

According to their traditional history, the IsiXhosa people are not only the southernmost vanguard of the indigenous people but they were also the first of the Nguni tribes to reach the Cape Province (1962:1).

IsiXhosa is characterised by the number of dialects spoken by the many clans that form the Xhosa tribe. Mzamane (1962:126) holds that this language should be called Southern Nguni, as it is made up of a cluster that includes the Gcaleka, Bomvana, Thembu, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Bhaca, Hlubi, and Rharhabe dialects, as well as IsiXhosa:

...through the course of history and as result of its geographical position Xhosa has assumed a leading role over the other dialects because it was the first to be reduced to writing and was afterwards conveniently used in schools, churches and administration over the whole area in spite of the existence of local dialects. Notwithstanding the claims of Xhosa, the term Southern Nguni is arbitrarily chosen for scientific purposes based on geographical sequence and administrative grounds.

A unique feature of this language is the “click” sound made by mother-tongue speakers when they communicate. Unlike most indigenous languages, IsiXhosa has several clicks, probably derived from the Khoi and San languages when these tribes came into contact with the Xhosa people. IsiZulu also has clicks, but they are not as numerous and pervasive as the IsiXhosa clicks. Mzamane (1962:153) points out that perhaps the biggest contribution of Khoi and San people to Nguni and the Southern Nguni language in particular is that of the click sounds:

It is generally assumed that of the five click sounds which occur in Khoisan, Southern Nguni has acquired three, viz: the dental click, the palatal click and the lateral click. Absent from the language are the dull palato-alveolar click and the labial click respectively.

For many people who are familiar with IsiXhosa, the language is readily recognised by the Khoi and San legacy, the clicks.

## **\* SiSwati**

The numerical strength of the SiSwati speakers is 1,1 million. Of the four Nguni languages, SiSwati is the most closely related to IsiZulu. Before the codification of IsiSwazi, IsiZulu was used as a written language for the AmaSwazi tribes.

Msimang (1989:7) has identified some dialects in SiSwati, the Dlamini or central main dialects spoken around Mbabane and Ezulwini valley: the Northern dialects spoken outside Swaziland – in the Republic of South Africa. According to Msimang (1993:46) Swazi territory may be divided into three main regions:

The Swaziland Kingdom; the KaNgwane, which stretches from Nelspruit to White River and Nkomati in the Eastern Transvaal; while other Swazi first language speakers are found in an area encompassing Ermelo, Barberton, Lydenburg, Pilgrims' Rest, Rayton, Bethal, Schoonoord and Piet Retief.

The dialects mentioned above may only be dialects in a geographical sense in that there are no distinguishing names except to say that SiSwati is spoken within the Kingdom of Swaziland and the one spoken by those who live outside the kingdom. That is, there are no names that identify these dialects except by their geographical positions.

**\* IsiNdebele**

IsiNdebele is spoken by 711 821 people, according to the 2001 Census. Historically, the AmaNdebele were a group of people who fled northwards from King Shaka Zulu's rule. They were led by Mzilikazi of the Khumalo clan. IsiNdebele is essentially an offshoot of IsiZulu as the following extract from Roberts (1974:114) shows:

In his flight northwards, he laid waste to the country behind him and was joined by the remnants of the clans he defeated. By the time he settled, in what was to become the Transvaal, he had forged a new, formidable tribe known as Matabele. Originating from a nucleus of Zulu warriors, disciplined by Shaka, this tribe eventually become a powerful nation and its founder, Mzilikazi, was widely acknowledged as a great African conqueror.

Today the AmaNdebele are mainly found in what used to be the KwaNdebele homeland in Limpopo Province and as well as Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and

surrounding areas. As IsiNdebele is a minority language and was disadvantaged for a long time, Sesotho exerted an influence on the IsiNdebele speakers. Under the apartheid government, many Ndebele first language speakers in the northern part of the Limpopo Province were included into the former Lebowa homeland (intended for the Northern Sesotho people). However, despite the fact that IsiZulu was used as a medium of instruction in the AmaNdebele schools, their language remained Nguni.

#### **2.3.3.2 The Sesotho Family**

Sesotho is an all-embracing term for Sesotho sa Lebowa (Northern Sotho/Pedi 4 208 980) Setswana (Western Sotho 3 677 016) and Sesotho proper, (3 555 186).

Sesotho sa Lebowa is spoken mainly on the northern part of South Africa, that is, the greater part of the Limpopo Province from Bila-bila (Warmbaths) northwards and also in a large part of the Mpumalanga Province. The speakers of this language constitute the largest group of the Sesotho family. There is also a sub-group of Northern Sotho, the Lobedu, who are closely related to the Shona in Zimbabwe, but this group has been classified with the Northern Sotho because of linguistic similarities.

Setswana is spoken in the former BophuthaTswana homeland, western Gauteng, north-eastern Cape and parts of the Free State province. Setswana is a cluster of dialects such as the Rolong, Hurutshe, Kwena, Taung, Tlhaping and Tlounq. The Setswana speakers are also found in many urban areas throughout South Africa.

Sesotho proper is spoken in Lesotho and what used to be the Qwaqwa homeland, southern Gauteng and parts of KwaZulu-Natal. The Sesotho language family is another ideal case for language harmonisation.

### **2.3.3.3 The TshiVenda Family**

TshiVenda is a language spoken by 1 021 757 speaker who reside mainly around Makhado (Louis Trichardt), along the Zoutpansberg and eastwards through Thoho-ya-Ndou to the eastern border of the Limpopo Province. It is regarded as the smallest of the four principal language families. Unlike other languages, TshiVenda does not seem to have recorded dialects.

The Berlin Mission Society, whose main purpose was the propagation of Christian faith among the tribes forming this group, also codified TshiVenda. As a small language group, TshiVenda has been influenced by the Vatsonga in the east, Sesotho sa Lebowa in the south and by Shona in the north. However, the speakers have managed to retain language purity over the years.

### **2.3.3.4 The Xitsonga Family**

Xitsonga is one of the official national languages spoken in the north east of the Republic, in the former Gazankulu homeland (Hlanganani, Malmulele, Giyani, Ritavi and Mhala), Mpumalanga province and most parts of the Gauteng Province by 1 992 207 people. It is interesting to note that Xitsonga features as one of the most popular languages in the cities, having been taken there by migrant labourers working in the mining and other industries. From my own observation, one out of ten people are fluent in Xitsonga, as they are of Tsonga descent.

As mentioned elsewhere in the study, the early Vatsonga tribes had no sense of nationalism. They lived in small, independent villages numbering hundreds people of the same clan, each with its own leader. This is why the Vatsonga of the Maluleke clan speak Xiluleke, while the Chauke communicate in Xihlengwe (i.e. Hlengwe being their praise name).

According to Mathumba (1993:22-23), as these groups of clans were called amaThonga by the Nguni speakers, the term Tsonga has been use to refer to the totality of all the Tsonga dialects.

...the term 'Tsonga' is an umbrella word which has been imposed on the people to refer to them as a unified group and their language. It therefore represents an amalgam of dialects bearing an appellation which was non-existent before.

Xitsonga is related to the Mozambican dialects or languages, called Xironga, Xitswa, and Xinchangana. Its major dialects are the Xiluleke, Xin'walungu, Xidzonga, Xihlave, Xinkuna and Xihlangano (Junod, 1927). This should not be surprising as Xitsonga is originally a language spoken mainly in Mozambique.

The language is also spoken in the southern part of Zimbabwe as well as in Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. Xitsonga is often used interchangeably with Xinchangana (Shangaan), a name by which it is well known. Swiss missionaries codified the Xitsonga language and contributed greatly to the literary heritage of this language.

## **2.4 EFFECTS OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

The manner in which European languages affected the state of indigenous languages varies from the consequences of the drawing of international boundaries within the continent, the appearance of binary opposition to the birth of Fanakalo and Tsotsitaal. On the whole, the appearance of European languages on the linguistic scene in the various African countries also enriched the indigenous languages in terms of sharpened perceptions, inspirations, creativity and vocabularies.

### **2.4.1 International Boundaries**

The partitioning of the land, sometimes through villages and homesteads, without giving consideration to the social aspect of the making of these boundaries, resulted in the disempowerment of indigenous languages, including Xitsonga. Prescott (1987:99) is convinced that the European powers were primarily motivated by material wealth when they partitioned Africa for their own convenience.

They wanted sources of raw materials and markets for their manufactured goods, and more and more, as partition proceeded, they wanted prestige. Prescott (1987:99)

Prescott (1987:243) goes on to say that there is a general view amongst critics of European colonisation of Africa that international boundaries were drawn within a few years by career diplomats, whose greed for national wealth was matched only by their lack of knowledge about the nature of African geography, politics and society.

This was how Xitsonga and many other Southern African indigenous languages were disenfranchised by European powers without insight into the cultural consequences of their actions. The partitioning of Africa had a negative impact not only on Xitsonga and other indigenous languages, but also on the old tribal system with their traditions and customs. For instance, Xitsonga is spoken in southern Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa, but there is no common orthography and no cross-pollination of ideas as to how the orthography can be carried out, (see map on page 160). Thus, the language fragmented into a cluster of independent dialects that actually view themselves as languages.

This geographical partitioning of a linguistic people is reminiscent of the apartheid strategy of “divide and rule”, where for example, the Xhosa people were divided to form two separate homelands, Transkei and Ciskei, even though IsiXhosa was their common language. It may indeed be postulated that as a result of the ensuing duplication of governance, the already limited funds were quickly exhausted and the publishing of books and newspapers in indigenous languages was deemed unaffordable.

It is generally acknowledged by the Xitsonga speakers that geographical and political divisions have also exacerbated tribal hatred in the divided nation. Indeed, during the mass exodus of Mozambican refugees into Limpopo during the late 1980s, the refugees and their hosts referred to each other using highly defamatory and derogatory terms. Even today, the Xitsonga speakers from Mozambique are referred to as “Mazambiki” by their linguistic relatives in South Africa, and these “Mazambiki” in turn refer to the South African Xitsonga speakers as “Swipilongwane” (people of Groot Spelonken), a reference to the north-east part of the Limpopo province.

People of a common ethnic group, divided by international boundaries, are often xenophobic towards each other. They are enemies without realising that their antipathy has its roots in geographical partition, rather than being based on personal or ethical differences.

#### **2.4.2 Dualistic Division of Terms**

In their first contact with indigenous languages mother-tongue speakers, European language-speakers felt it necessary to distinguish themselves as being superior to the indigenous people in terms of military, wealth and social status. They opted for a dualistic division of terms that classifies people, things and concepts into two partitions.

A word of caution is needed here before continuing with this discussion. Many scholars tend to confuse dualistic division of words with binary oppositions. Dualistic division of words is a hierarchical ordering, that is, a vertical structuring of words to show who is in authority, this will become clear in the course of the discussion. Words such as *hero, nation, citizen, urban, modern, refined*, are matched with others such as *warrior, tribe, native, rural, primitive, unrefined, traditional, impoverished, coarse*, as a living testimony to undermine all that is not English. One cannot call dualistic division of words an opposition, as the words are not necessarily opposed to one another.

According to the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2003), the term “binary” means composed of, or involving two things. Binary oppositions are words that occur in every language and are not intended to harm other language speakers. Every language makes use of binary oppositions on a limited scale and primarily for good intentions. Oppositions like young and old, male and female, and day and night are prototypical examples of binary oppositions. These are terms that fall into an “either/or” category. That is, seeing things as a continuum of good or bad and black or white, and not allowing any opposition in between. Binary oppositions are also referred to as the ‘self and the othering’, and are presented to the masses as natural.

The confusion arises where many scholars use binary oppositions interchangeably with dualistic division of words as if they refer to the same thing. However, for our own sake, I shall refer to these words with their right term, dualistic division of words, to minimise confusion.

The constant use of this dualistic division of terms may appear to be normal and innocuous but, in fact, the opposite is true. English mother-tongue speakers use binary opposition intentionally or unknowingly to consolidate the power of English at the expense of other languages. Phillipson (1992:55) calls the use of binary oppositions 'linguicism'.

Linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion. The binary opposition language is characteristic of examples of linguistic discourse.

Here what Phillipson calls binary opposition language is what I refer to as dualistic division of words to indicate domination of one language by another. In the early stages of colonisation, ideals that Europeans found lacking in their societies were, at times, projected onto newly "discovered" people.

Hammond-Tooke (1993:23) holds that since classical times, this vast landmass that is Africa has been defined as a "dark continent", delineated by an enigmatic coastline and the epitome of the 'Other'. For people like Nicolaas Petros van Wyk Louw (the author of Raka), Africa's 'otherness' symbolised the dark underside of human psyche, the Jungian shadow. The pioneering psychologist, J.C. Jung, maintains that 'the other' is created by an individual, who projects all that the individual is not, onto another.

Johl (2001:6) believes that modern societies create order by constructing binary oppositions (dualistic division of terms), negotiating perceived differences between culture and nature, self and other, sameness and difference, order and chaos, good and bad. To the Western mind, chaos is represented by the "other", with the result that everything non-modern (traditional), non-civilised (barbaric), non-standard

(vernacular), etc., becomes part of the chaos that must be removed from well-ordered, rational, modern Western societies.

The apartheid government also exploited binary oppositions to its advantage by using it to distinguish between people who are not white from those that are white. Dualistic terms such as “nie-blankes/non-whites” and “blankes/whites” were an everyday sight on signage in the old South Africa.

As can be seen, the main purpose of dualistic division of terms is part of cultural domination by the native speakers of English to dominate indigenous languages. Speakers of English have exploited dualistic division of words by turning them into an instrument of cultural division. For example, in Xitsonga the leader of a village (or muganga) is called Hosi from Hosana (or King). However, English speakers refer to the village leader as a chief or a headman because calling him a king would give him the status they accord to the Queen of England. Now the tihosi (kings) are referred to as ‘traditional leaders’, implying that there are modern tihosi (kings). In the past tin’anga (doctors) were called witch-doctors to distinguish them from white medical doctors. Today, the tin’anga, are called traditional healers rather than doctors, despite practising medicine in the same way as those who are considered ‘genuine’ doctors. The speakers of English have become experts in coining these words to create dualistic division of terms that are also useful in determining one’s ethnicity.

### **2.4.3 Fanakalo/Fanagalo**

The contact between Europeans and indigenous people resulted in a specialised pidgin, called Fanakalo, to facilitate communication.

According to Lanham (1978:50) Fanakalo is a speech form that is known by many names, such as Isithathalapa (take here), IsiLolo (“lo” being frequently used to depict the article) or IsiKula (coolie language).

Cole (1964) suggests that Fanakalo originated in Natal where it was used by both Zulu speakers and Indians. However, the fact that Fanakalo contains elements of English, IsiZulu and to a lesser extent Afrikaans shows that it may have originated in

the mining industry, where it was used by both European and African workers. Lanham argues:

...but it is also possible that it originated in the diamond and gold mines among Zulu speaking whites. Fanakalo has to be learned by both white and black alike. The gold mines give instruction in it to black recruits and have, in the past, even used it in night schools.

When I was growing up in our village in the Lowveld, I often heard migrant labourers newly returned from the cities communicate with one another in Fanakalo. They made Fanakalo sound like an exclusive language – a language of some status in that they alone could communicate in it. However, since Fanakalo did not belong to any speech community, and was regarded by many Africans as an insult to their languages, Fanakalo is rapidly dying out. More and more miners communicate mainly in English these days.

#### **2.4.4 Tsotsi-Taal**

Another language, (if one may call an argot a language), which sprang into being as a result of the contact between white and black people is Tsotsi-taal.

Slabbert (1995:143) contends that Tsotsi-taal is “an umbrella name given for a continuum of varieties” ranging from greetings (Eita, my bra? – How are you, my brother?) to thrown-in words such as mnca (nice) and from a single sentence (Die man is blind – literally: “The man is blind”; metaphorically: The man is not street smart) to fully fledged conversations.

Tsotsi-taal’s place of origin is the townships and is spoken mainly by the African youth as a slick language that symbolises sophistication of city life as opposed to the rural one. It does not have a noticeable impact on Xitsonga, in that being a language of the township where ethnic groups are mixed, it is difficult to access whether it affects Xitsonga more than other indigenous languages.

Tsotsi-taal owes its existence to the contact between whites and blacks in that it is the language of the urban areas and is composed mainly of Afrikaans, English and Nguni

words. However, whites do not speak Tsoti-taal. This argot is often the language of choice of black youngsters in the townships.

#### **2.4.5 The Impact of English on Xitsonga**

Perhaps the most striking and positive influence of English on indigenous languages, particularly Xitsonga came in the form of western civilisation or the general culture of people from English-speaking countries.

Apart from the benefit of new religion (Christianity), science and technology, Xitsonga has been enriched by its contact with English in terms of sharpened perception, creative thinking and discovery of new concepts.

For instance, white people are not called Vanhu (people), but are referred to by a geographical name Valungu (those who are from up north) or Vadyi-va-tinhlampfi (the fish-eaters). This clearly implies that before the arrival of white people, the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers were not aware of the existence of people other than themselves.

Another example is Xihaha-mpfhuka (consumer of distances/fly machine). This type of addition to the language shows that new inventions (such as aeroplanes) have added new words to Xitsonga. Wilkes (1995:94) contends that:

Western civilisation has affected black life styles and cultures in many important ways, not least their languages. These black languages, rich as they are in vocabulary and flexible as they may be in the expression of ideas, could not define all the new things, all the new content of the white man's civilisation. New words were necessary to name new things, new forms of expression to convey new ideas. In this way English and Afrikaans words became incorporated in the lexicons of the various African languages.

The topic of borrowing, which is another example of how Xitsonga has been enriched, will be discussed in a later chapter.

Teachers initially trained by missionaries became the first mother-tongue speakers to spread the Christian faith and education amongst the Vatsonga. Through literacy

training, Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers were able to develop and advance their own literature. Books, including the Bible were translated into Xitsonga with the help of missionaries – thus launching a Mutsonga on the road of spiritual perfection. Mesthrie is of the opinion that:

The roots of African English (or South African Black English) lie in the missionary institutions.... Some of these institutions offered more contact between white and black students than has been possible for most of the twentieth century. A small number of African students were afforded a high level of competence in English language and the English cultural tradition.

However, social developments, such as apartheid, have destroyed most of the gains and advances Xitsonga derived from English. For instance, the Apartheid government restricted the missionary education that had provided excellent training to Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers and the language was relegated to serve only traditional functions, religious and cultural purposes.

In the post-colonial era, there is another threat to Xitsonga and other indigenous languages. This is globalisation, and is prevalent in the form of unplanned urbanisation.

#### **2.4.6 The Impact of Urbanisation**

Post-apartheid South Africa has been marked by rapid urbanisation, often accompanied by the mushrooming of shack settlements on the outskirts of towns and cities.

Rapid urbanization has had profound social consequences for the people living in these settlements. Because of the lack of a common history, there had been little sense of community in these areas. There has also been a pervasive uncertainty about the future, accompanied by the constant movement of people in search of scarce employment. Accompanying this massive population dislocation has been a breakdown in family and loss of traditional values, a growing anonymity and alienation of the individual. (Goldstone, quoted in Jeffrey, 1997)

As a result of the situation described above, people in the so-called informal settlements tend to lose their language, culture and religion. A mixture of indigenous languages becomes a safe haven through which they relate to one another and their environment.

It can be hypothesised that the emergence of such a language presages the gradual disappearance of individual indigenous languages. Presently, the problem of the development of indigenous languages has not been resolved. At the moment, only cultural activists, language practitioners and academics advocate the restoration and use of indigenous languages while the ordinary man in the street is simply making use of English “as the language for upward mobility” (Adegbija, 1994).

Language practitioners and scholars have welcomed the government’s recognition of indigenous languages as one way of preserving indigenous cultures, and as an innovative form of political correctness. The ordinary people, on the other hand, are preoccupied with the struggle for survival. For the man on the street in need of food, shelter and clothes, the preservation of his cultural identity or political correctness is merely an academic issue. The situation shows clearly that as long as indigenous languages do not have an economic role, English will be seen as the language of survival.

It is not surprising, therefore, that more and more African parents are sending their children to ex-Model C schools to learn English, as it is a language that guarantees them employment once they graduate from school. I believe that this is a consequence of low morale amongst both learners and teachers with regard to the standard of education and lack of security in black schools. The situation is going to worsen as more immigrants from countries around the world continue to flood into the country. The very small number of indigenous languages speakers will be forced to use English to ensure their survival.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

Having presented the research problem against a background of the research already undertaken and the methodology followed, this chapter has provided the motivation for the study. It has also considered the socio-cultural and political language situation in the country, including the position of Afrikaans and indigenous languages. Presenting the historical overview of the indigenous languages, gave this study a chance to show the effects and influence of the English mother tongue speakers in their first contact with the African people. The drawing of international boundaries, binary oppositions, the birth of both Fanakalo and Tsotis-taal have been discussed.

Finally, the need for Africans to validate languages like Xitsonga if they wish to improve the language situation in the country has been emphasised. Every Xitsonga mother-tongue speaker should be made aware that he/she has a responsibility to uphold his/her linguistic heritage by speaking, writing and reading the language.

The Xitsonga language and cultural practitioners should initiate cultural festivals where participants are encouraged to speak in their own language. In these festivals, there should be poetry reading, a book competition as well as a Xitsonga music competition. I should also mention that another motivation for undertaking this study is a desire to contribute to the growth and development of Xitsonga, the language of my forefathers.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND POWER**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains an in-depth discussion on how language relates to power production as well as the way in which the powerful elite manipulates and controls the masses through strategic use of language. Through the discussion of different topics such as colonisation, globalisation and language attitudes, the study will show that the dominance of English is an obstacle to the preservation and development of Xitsonga.

#### **3.2 DEFINITIONS**

There are many definitions and interpretations of what language is and what it is not. Among the many definitions, we find one that was written by St John in his Gospel, Chapter 1, verse 1:

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

This may be interpreted as indicating that language is the personification of God, and it is a divine gift to His people. Human beings are credited as the only animals that can utter mutually intelligible sounds, collectively called a language. Gordimer (2000:01) holds:

Over the centuries of human culture, the Word has taken on other meanings, secular as well as religious. To have the Word has come to be synonymous with ultimate authority, with secular prestige, with awesome, sometimes dangerous persuasion - to have "Prime Time", a TV talk show, to have the gift of the gab as well as that of speaking in tongues.

Language, also known as the hangman of the mouth according to the old saying, is endowed with the power to oppress people through ideologies and beliefs. Therefore, language may not necessarily inflict bodily harm on a human being, but socially, it is a deadly weapon of mass destruction. From the early days of people's existence on earth, language has been used to articulate thought, prestige, influence, and the weight of a person's authority over other people. Language has always been used to guide, mentor and control others.

Language has various functions such as the communicative (informative) function that is rendered by fields of study such as science, and expressive functions, derived from literary art such as poetry. Another function is the imperative, the manner in which commands and requests are conveyed.

However, this research project will focus mainly on language as a form of social behaviour. Social behaviour is often conducted verbally and members of a speech community use language to do things or to achieve certain aims. The actions of individuals in a given society would be meaningless if there is no language to articulate them and give them linguistic flesh.

Furthermore, it may be stated that no society can ever be referred to as such, without a language through which its members express emotions, thoughts, hopes, achievements and failures. Trudgill (1983:32) indeed identifies language as a social phenomenon that is closely tied to social structure and the value system of society.

A study of language without reference to its social context inevitably leads to the omission of some of the more complex and interesting aspects of language and to the loss of opportunities for further theoretical progress.

### **3.3 THE NATURE OF POWER**

The relationship between power and language is complex. Powerful people often use language as an instrument to suppress others. Power is essentially manipulative and oppressive. For this reason, those in power are always on guard to consolidate and maintain their status through language usage. Fairclough (1989) showed that one of

the best ways to maintain power is through the use of language, as power needs language to conduct and verbalise itself. Without language, power often becomes meaningless.

There are, of course, various definitions of power, for example, matimba, Xitsonga for might, a concept denoting prestige, influence, control and authority. The most explicit definition is found in the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002:916) where power is described as “a right or authority given or delegated to a person or body, the capacity to influence the behaviour, the emotions of others or the course of events”. For the purpose of this study, power can be seen as the capacity to influence the behaviour of others. Therefore, power is defined as the influence exerted by English by virtue of its status as a world language.

For many years English has become characterised by socio-economic and political power, thus automatically enabling it to also be seen as a technologically and scientifically advanced language.

A powerful language always positions itself as the most capable. Today English is used as the language of government, military, police, science, law, and technology because its mother-tongue speakers are the most powerful in the world. There is general consensus that it would have made no difference if English had not been selected as one of South Africa’s national official languages, because as it is the medium of communication used by the global community, it has worldwide socio-economic and political power, and it simply cannot be ignored. English is so dominant that it has the power to force indigenous mother-tongue speakers to commit linguistic suicide:

The omnipresence of English can be inconvenient and suffocating and induce a sense of disempowerment and exclusion. In a sense, all language rights are against English, which in the modern world is such a powerful language that it needs no protection at all. (Albie Sachs, 1994, as quoted by De Klerk, 1996:07).

The emphasis on language as a source of power here is not intended to create the impression that language alone is the agent of power because power manifests itself in

many aspects of life. Power exists “in various modalities including the concrete and unmistakable modality of violence”, to use Fairclough’s (1989:3) terminology. Language is, therefore, only one aspect in which power manifests itself. This research project, however, is entirely devoted to language as an expression and a reflection of power. Language is shown as an instrument in the production of power. The manner in which power is realised through language is also described.

### **3.4 COLONISATION**

Power, as a concept, cannot be readily understood without first examining issues such as colonisation and globalisation. Colonisation may be described as a system or process in which imperial powers, like Britain and France, exerted socio-political and economic control over the native peoples of their respective colonies throughout the world, and in Africa in particular. These indigenous people were forced to speak the colonisers’ language in order to understand and comply with the new laws put in place by these rulers. This process is very similar to what Edward Said (1978:205-8), calls “Orientalism”, a created body of theory and practice employed by the West to suppress all aspects of life of the oriental people.

However, in the linguistic domain, colonisation is known by what Phillipson (1992:47) refers to as “linguistic imperialism” asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstruction of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.

English linguistic imperialism is one example of linguisticism, which is defined as ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.

Here Phillipson succeeds in giving a picture of colonisation in sociolinguistics rather than as a general term covering all facets of activities in a society.

### **3.4.1 Imposition of language**

#### **3.4.1.1 Dominance**

The imperial powers, such as Britain, imposed their languages on indigenous mother-tongue speakers. Because of their military, economic and political might, the new rulers' language became dominant and was forced onto the local people.

Clarification of terminology is necessary here in order to neutralise the negative impression that might appear to prevail because of the constant use of the words “dominance” and “hegemony”. The use of these two terms may mislead readers to think that the writer is engaged in “English bashing” whereas the main aim is to show the flaws in the preservation, development and promotion of Xitsonga as well as seeking ways to correct these flaws.

The term “dominance” as a qualifier of English is used here in the sense of being overbearing, superior or influential. So in this case, the dominance of English means that its appeal to the vast majority of black South Africans is far greater than that of any other language (Alexander, 2004). In fact, it is common knowledge that English is the most widely used language in intercultural communication in the country. For this reason, the dominance of English as a language with a wide appeal in South Africa is a statistical fact that cannot be disputed, a reality that cannot be wished away. The post-apartheid government's use of English has no sinister intention. The government is simply being pragmatic and uses English for the common good of the nation.

#### **3.4.1.2 Hegemony**

Studies reveal, however, that English is rapidly assuming an almost hegemonic position in South Africa as the public language, as Pennycook (1998), Phillipson (1992), and Painter (2002) have pointed out in their research.

A very thin line divides dominance and hegemony. The main defining feature of hegemony is a negative term associated with Marxist ideology. According to a

leading Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) (cited by Chandler, D. 1998), the term “hegemony” denotes the predominance of one social class over others (e.g. bourgeois hegemony). This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world in such a manner that those who are subordinate accept this viewpoint as natural. It should be noted that this involves willing and active consent. However, the term hegemony has explicitly been explained by Granville et al (1998) in their paper entitled “English With or Without G(u)ilt”. These authors argue that:

There are many different ways of understanding what is meant by hegemony. At its simplest, we would argue that any social practice that achieves dominance that begins to appear natural or inevitable is a hegemonic practice. If this practice looks like common sense, then most people support it with their consent. The more people who consent to the practice, the more natural it appears. If, for example, parents believe that English is the best language for education, then they will demand English for their children, they may even demand English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). This maintains the dominance of English over other languages and confirms its hegemonic position.

Writing on the English language in the South African situation, Painter (2002:2) holds that:

The global importance of English resonates with the position this language is also assuming in South Africa, where despite an exemplary progressive language policy granting official status to 11 languages, English is rapidly becoming hegemonic in public domains. Not unlike the global situation, English in South Africa is also often made politically transparent.

The position of English in the South African linguistic domain, and its political dominance implies that Xitsonga and other indigenous languages have no real political power.

Pennycook (1998:190-191) points out that

... it is common in current liberal discourses on the role of English in the world to pronounce that it is no longer tied to its insular origins, it is no longer the property of Britain, or America, or Canada, or Australia; it is now the property of the world, owned by whoever

chooses to speak it, a language for all to use in global communication.  
But is it?

Non mother-tongue speakers are very aware of who “owns” English in terms of socio-political power and the domination of the world by Western capital, cultural and political interests. There can be no denial that English is still the language of power, whatever form that power takes politically, economically and militarily.

Whether or not English dominance over languages like Xitsonga has positive aspects is not relevant to this study. The main concern is that the use of English prevents Xitsonga from taking its proper place in the public domain. In general, Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers have developed a positive attitude towards English, as English is perceived as a gateway to social and economic advancement, and indeed, the teaching of English has become an industry in itself. This positive attitude towards English inherently brings with it the neglect of Xitsonga by its mother-tongue speakers, allowing English to dominate all aspects of language and literature.

#### 3.4.1.3 Pre-literate state

English was imposed on the indigenous speech community through the missionaries who both converted the indigenous people to Christianity and taught them in the schools they established. As Anne-Marie Beukes (1995:219), citing Reagan (1987) and Hartshorne (1987), points out:

The tradition of using non-vernacular language as medium of instruction in black education is generally attributed to the mission schools of the 19th century where, due to the initial inadequacies of the vernacular languages as media of instructions, English as medium of instruction as well as a concern for the teaching of English as a subject were prominent aspect of language policy.

The successful imposition of English and its subsequent domination was made possible by historical, cultural, economic and political factors. Alexander (2004:2) points out that the “pre-literate character of most sub-Saharan African societies at the time of European colonial conquest and the consequent disproportionate impact of the literacy practices of the Christian Missionaries, the manner in which the languages of

the oppressors captured and shaped, in fact subjugated, the minds of the colonised subjects” made it possible for the imposed language to root itself in the Xitsonga speech community.

Historically, Xitsonga was a speech community made up of various clans with no national unity in the true sense of the word. It was, therefore, relatively easy for English to penetrate the Xitsonga speech community. Since then English has continued to dominate the linguistic domain to the extent that the elected leaders communicate in English, thus continuing the domination of those fluent in English.

It is difficult to imagine how the present government would have been able to conduct its day-to-day business without the use of English as one of the main official languages. Communicating in the indigenous languages, especially Xitsonga, would have been nearly impossible as it is a regional language understood by very few within the government, let alone the larger South African society. There is actually no indigenous language that can be used as a national language. Alexander (2004:40) explains “as in other independent African states, the post-apartheid leadership professes that selecting any one or even two African languages would necessarily play into the hands of tribalists by sowing the poisoned seed of ethnic jealousy and social division.”

English is used as a default, and as a bulwark against the tribalism that may have followed the post-apartheid government had it chosen say, Xitsonga or isiZulu as its main official language. English is also embraced by the majority of black South Africans as the language of liberation that serves to unite South Africans in their diversity. English is, therefore, also easily accepted in the national identity.

#### 3.4.1.4 English as an Economic Resource

English is viewed by thousands of Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers as an economic resource and indeed, as the key to success. Judging by their attitudes to English, more Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers aspire to be fluent in English than in Xitsonga, because Xitsonga is seen as a language without currency or influence. In contrast,

English generates new ideas and gives the speaker a wider communication domain, in that a speaker is able to communicate with others all over the world.

Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers' attitude to English, in my view, leaves much to be desired. Many claim to prefer to learn English because Xitsonga is their mother tongue and they "know it anyway". But the fact of the matter is, most of them only have a rudimentary, conversational knowledge of their own language, as they have not studied the grammar or, indeed the literature, of Xitsonga.

### **3.5 THE ARRIVAL OF ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The colonisers' language features as a form of cultural imperialism that dominates the cultural life of the indigenous people. Over the years, South Africa became infamous for its innovative form of colonialism called Apartheid or Separate Development. This is a "home-made" colonialism that not only robbed indigenous people of their socio-political and economic freedom, but also relegated them to the status of sub-humans and disempowered their languages by giving official status to English and Afrikaans only.

Colonisation was instrumental to the rise and dominance of English not only in South Africa, but all over the world, as Nettle and Romaine (2002:30-31) reveal below:

The spread of English around the world was linked to the dominance of English speakers in the areas of science and technology, which in turn led to significant control of world economy. Those who control particular linguistic resources are in a position of power over others. Linguistic capital, like all other forms of capital, is unequally distributed in society. The higher the profit to be achieved through knowledge of a particular language, the more it will be viewed as worthy of acquisition.

The language of the global village or McWorld, as some have called it, is English. If you are not able or unwilling to speak English, it is to effectively risk being unable to reap the benefits of the global economy.

The first major wave of English mother-tongue speakers to South Africa were members of a military detachment who seized the Cape from the Dutch, starting a language invasion that was destined to spread English throughout the African continent. Mesthrie (1995:132) states:

English is a comparative latecomer on the Southern African linguistic scene. British imperialism brought English to the Cape from 1795 to 1803 but it is only with the second British occupation of the Cape in 1806 that a sizeable number of English speakers comprising several thousand officials and soldiers, and some traders and farmers were established.

Soon after the English had seized the Cape from the Dutch, English was enforced as the official language, taking the place that Dutch had previously occupied. The subjugation of Dutch and the indigenous languages opened the way for English to become the most influential language in the country, as the following extract by De Klerk (1996:07) indicates:

English has its early beginnings with the seizure of the Cape from the Dutch in 1806, but it truly began to take root after the migration of English-speaking people to the Eastern Cape in 1820, to Natal between 1848 and 1862 and to the Witwatersrand in the 1870s.

Since the arrival of the first group of English people in the country, the expansion of English was so meteoric that today even functionally illiterate Africans boast a reasonable English vocabulary and identify themselves with English. In its steady expansion, English has no doubt become a major source of new words that has enriched the vocabularies of most of South Africa's indigenous languages including Xitsonga. Words that have been incorporated into Xitsonga include purofesa (professor), dokodela (doctor), mupurisidente (president), puleti (plate), wachi (wrist watch), and baloni (balloon).

Mazrui (1998:5) contends that in the process, English has also distorted educational priorities, diverted resources from indigenous cultures, and diluted the esteem in which indigenous African languages were held. The psychological damage to the colonised Africans was immense. Most Africans not only apparently accepted that

their own languages were fundamentally inferior to English, but became convinced that it was not worth doing anything about it.

Mazrui (1998:5) argues that as the impetus of external conflict was lacking, as were statewide nationalism and loyalty to indigenous languages, it was easy for English to colonise and suppress indigenous languages on the African continent:

The fact that most African languages south of the Sahara were unwritten before the European colonization is one of the reasons for Africa's diluted commitment to their preservation. The national boundaries of most African states lack the underpinning of any national linguistic identity.

While the above is true, I would also like to suggest that because Africans had experienced shame and servitude for generations meant that there was no time for language patriotism and linguistic nationalism, if one may phrase it that way. Africans are constantly preoccupied with finding ways to break loose from the chains of bondage and, indeed, ways to survive, and they have no time to think about linguistic nationalism. They are also suspicious of those who advocate the separate advancement of the African languages.

### **3.6 GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

In the past, the use of English, the British education system and Christian religion were spread by conquest. However, soon after the fall of the iron curtain (as exemplified by the Berlin Wall) and the gradual decline of Communism in the late 1980s, an inflated kind of capitalism (or financial colonialism) later to be known as globalisation, came into being as the prime-mover in the spread of English through popular culture. There is a general consensus among scholars that globalisation is an extension of cultural imperialism, as Friedman (1994:195) argues below:

The discourse of cultural imperialism tended to set the scene for the initial reception of globalisation, casting the process as an aspect of the hierarchical nature of imperialism, that is an increasing hegemony of particular central cultures, the diffusion of American values, consumer goods and lifestyles. (Friedman, quoted by Mohammadi 1997:175)

Globalisation is the modern version of colonialism that is concerned with popular culture as encapsulated by the ubiquitous symbolic significance of Coca-Cola, Madonna and the news on CNN. This socio-economic system makes it difficult to talk about post-colonialism, if by post-colonialism one means the period after colonialism, because globalisation is basically the age-old system of colonialism by a different name. As a general system, it is not managed by a single person, but by the owners of large US trans-national companies. These are the people who are the major role players in globalisation, and appear to have the exclusive right to control the world economy.

According to Mohammadi (1997:170), globalisation refers to the rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individual people worldwide. It is a process that involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in the time taken to cross national boundaries and make the world seem smaller. It brings human beings closer to the relationships, both local and global, that govern their everyday lives.

Phillipson (1992:59) argues that English linguistic imperialism is often advanced by cultural activities such as film, videos and television. A Unisa Sociology tutorial letter on Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation (504/3/2003) states that through popular culture the pervasive spread of English throughout the world serves as some sort of “social glue” that binds people together and guides their thoughts and deeds by way of a common system of beliefs, traditional values, norms, language and prescribed practices.

Bamgbose (2003:12) contends that there is increasing emphasis on globalisation in today's world. As such emphasis has positive results in terms of information technology and contact with the international community, learning a global, if imported, language such as English is certainly to be encouraged. However, globalisation also promotes the tacit and undesirable effect of English hegemony. This translates into an attitude that accepts English dominance at the expense of other languages and language policies. A policy framework should be created as a countermeasure to the undesirable monolingual bias of globalisation.

Painter (2004:02) holds that globalisation creates and supports, with neo-liberal ideological justification, linguistic orders in which the local functions of “regional”, “indigenous”, “ethnic” or “minority” languages are threatened and displaced by languages with “global” or “international” status.

I have quoted extensively on this subject to show that language is increasingly becoming a significant element in people’s acceptance or rejection of world order. World leaders make use of language to impose a new order. Ironically, the same language is used to either accommodate or resist the new order.

According to Fairclough (1989:204), globalisation is an economic process, and its neo-liberal doctrine is centred upon international free trade. Fairclough further explains that this doctrine involves a shift in the relationship between the market and the state that has characterised capitalism for most of the twentieth century. This shift involves freeing the market from state controls and at the same time undermining the role of the state in providing social welfare, and converting the state into a local advocate and agent for the free market.

Globalisation is a new economic order, but it is not just economic: there is also a more general process of globalisation, including for instance politics and culture. .... the question of language and power is absolutely central in both the academic analysis of the new world order and in political struggles over it. Why? Because there is a significant and ongoing ‘turn to language’ in contemporary social life - language is becoming an increasingly important element of social life. (Fairclough, 1989:204)

Since the beginning of the nineties, as a result of political changes, South Africa has been able to enter the global market economy. While this has resulted in a boom in the country’s economy and placed the Republic in a position to compete with other world economies, this has, at the same time, been detrimental to the indigenous languages, as English is now being used exclusively as the language of business.

This has resulted in under-development and under-promotion of indigenous languages that actually contradicts the letter and spirit of the African Renaissance. For instance,

in theory, it is permissible to write a cheque in Tshivenda or in IsiSwati, but in practice, it is likely that such a cheque would not be honoured. The Banking Council's general manager, Stuart Grobler, has indicated that:

Issuing a cheque in languages other than English will open the way for fraud, in that the teller would not be readily competent in an African language and the computer system may not accept it. However, as a more general comment the development of indigenous languages, it is just not economically viable to develop the computer systems and staff competencies for every indigenous language, especially considering how much of the development of the systems is done in the western world. (Grobler, personal communication, 5 January 2004)

The above example clearly illustrates how globalisation affects indigenous languages. One has to communicate in the language of business (English), to ensure the business deal. Added to this, developers of indigenous languages face the mammoth task of entering indigenous language data into the computer systems, so that cheques may be issued in all the official languages.

### **3.7 THE EQUALITY OF LANGUAGES**

I believe that any language is capable of satisfying the communicative needs of a speech community. Despite this, South Africa's indigenous languages are found on the powerless end of the linguistic scale. As a so-called, oral and disadvantaged language, Xitsonga represents all that is traditional, while English epitomises modernity.

Xitsonga is one of the nine official languages and is spoken by about two million people (Census 2001, 2003:15) scattered all over the Republic, as well as millions of other speakers in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Despite being accorded national official status, Xitsonga is still seen as backward or primitive by non-Xitsonga speakers.

In its use of a dualistic approach, as discussed earlier, English denies the tenet that all languages are equal irrespective of whether they are spoken by a third world speech community or by the first world speakers.

Phillipson (1992:38) asserts that the basic terms used in analysis of language and imperialism are ideologically loaded. He distinguishes terms such as “tribe” and “dialect” as labels that form an essentially racist ideology. They reflect a European way of conceptualising the issues, and tend to reinforce Euro-centric myths and stereotypes.

.... many Euro-centric concepts conform to the pattern of how racism is affirmed, namely by means of self-exaltation on the part of the dominant group which creates idealistic image of itself, the devaluation of the dominated group, and the suppression and stagnation of its culture, institutions, life-styles and ideas, systematic rationalisation of the relationships between both groups, always favourable to the dominant group. (Phillipson, 1992:38)

Racism and self-exaltation should be viewed as obstacles of language equality. As long as these negative values are embraced, it will be difficult to make any progress towards language equality.

Crystal (1997:7) argues that all languages are equal in the sense that there is nothing intrinsically limiting, demeaning or handicapping about any of them. All languages meet the social and psychological needs of their speakers, are equally deserving of scientific study, and can provide us with valuable information about human nature and society. Although linguists are unable to measure the superiority of a language in terms of communicative effectiveness of its speakers, most people around the world still embrace the myth that their languages are superior to that of others. Languages such as Latin, Greek, German, classical Arabic and Hebrew, Sanskrit, Spanish and Portuguese, Italian, and to a large extent English, have at one point or other been regarded as superior. As far back as the 18th century, Macaulay lauded English as a language that:

stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West... It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages the world together. (quoted by Crystal, 1997:7)

“Oral” is another adjective tossed around by linguists in higher learning centres to qualify an indigenous language like Xitsonga because it puts more emphasis on verbal communication than on the written form. Nothing is further from the truth than this fallacious assertion. What criteria are used to judge the oral aspects of a language? Who decides this or that language is oral and, therefore, intrinsically primitive? When do people stop qualifying a language like Xitsonga as oral? Calling a language oral or primitive sounds more like a political assessment than a linguistic one, an instance of disempowering a language through a range of negative adjectives.

The relationship between English and indigenous languages is an uneasy marriage or one without love, as Mutasa (2000:38) has phrased it. This is not unexpected, as English, having spent its time in Africa suppressing other languages, would baulk at entertaining the idea of co-existing with indigenous languages, such as Xitsonga. The sad fact is even the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers accept the dualistic view of languages unquestioningly.

### **3.8 XITSONGA UNDERMINED BY SPEAKERS OF OTHER AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

The Xitsonga language has been undermined by English, as shown earlier, and added to this, other indigenous ethnic groups undermine Xitsonga, because these ethnic groups like to think they are more powerful than the Vatsonga people. However, if Xitsonga is to be regarded as an official language equal in status to other languages, then both the language and its speakers should be treated with respect. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case. There are a number of factors that contribute to Xitsonga being regarded as a minor language, but only a few will be discussed here.

The Vatsonga people are not a warlike people and traditionally had no sense of nationalism as they lived as a group of various clans scattered all over Mozambique. This made it easy for the Nguni invaders from the south to conquer and enslave them.

Mathumba (1993:23) cites Junod (1927a:14-16) as stating that the name Thonga was applied to the Tsonga people by the Nguni invaders who enslaved most of the clans between 1815 and 1830. The English-Zulu Dictionary (1958:299, also quoted by

Mathumba, 1993:23) gives the meaning of iThonga as “member of a subject race”. Thus, the Xitsonga language is seen as a language spoken by an ethnic group known as the amaThonga, or slaves.

Apart from scattered groups of the Vatsonga who were on the South African side of the border when international boundaries were drawn up, most resided in Mozambique. However, as a result of the various wars and civil strife in that country, a large number of the Vatsonga people fled into South Africa.

Mathumba (1993:47) points out that:

It was during this period (1838) that the first group of Tsonga fugitives left Mozambique for the Transvaal. The Nkunas fled to Vukhaha near Tzaneen. The Loyis headed for Modjadji, while the Mavundzas also trekked into the north-western Transvaal to settle between the Loyis and the Lebombo mountains.

Despite their long history in this country, the Vatsonga is still regarded as “outsiders” in South Africa. For this reason, their language is still disrespected by other ethnic groups.

In the SABC Editorial Policies (2004:34), the following claim is made: “Nguni and Sesotho languages are recognised as being cognate languages in that these languages are understood by members of other language communities for example Xitsonga and TshiVhenda”. On the surface it may sound as if the writers of the policies are giving credit to the Vatsonga’s linguistic talent, but in fact they are displaying tribalism. They want to bar Xitsonga from being screened because it is a language of a “minority” group. In fact, many Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers cannot speak nor understand isiZulu or Sesotho.

As a consequence of this marginalisation, some Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers have lost their self-esteem and have actually started identifying themselves as Sothos or Zulus, depending on the area in which they reside.

Despite all the above, Xitsonga is as articulate as any of the so-called “scientific languages” one can name. It has been a written language for the past hundred years or more, yet language manipulators still see it as an underdeveloped language. Indeed, the Buku ya Tsikwembu ni tinsimu ta Nhlengeletano (Bill, 1883) was successfully translated into Xitsonga in 1883, and this was followed by the translation of hymn books into Xitsonga. Xitsonga should, therefore, be respected like other languages rather than being treated as if it is still an oral language.

One of Southern Africa’s most famous ethnologists, Henri A Junod, published his writings and ideas about the life of the Vatsonga people in 1927. Xitsonga also boasts of several linguists, chief amongst them is the late H.W.E. Ntsan’wisi who worked tirelessly to develop the language into what it is today.

President Nelson Mandela could not find a meaningful word to denote to the dawn of the new era until Xitsonga came to his assistance. He then named the presidential palace Mahlamba-ndlopfu, a compound word that refers to the early hours of the morning when elephants splash their bodies with water in big rivers. Yet this creative and innovative language that is labelled disadvantaged, even by those who cannot speak it has provided the appropriate nomenclature.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

In this chapter the interpretation of language and power as inseparable entities was discussed. We have also seen how language can be used as an instrument of power and how power can be achieved through many factors of language. The imbalances between English and Xitsonga were clearly revealed through our discussion of colonisation and globalisation. This imbalance can only be resolved through genuine bilingualism as opposed to the one that exists on paper only.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA**

#### **4.1 THE ENGLISH COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

According to the Census 2001 (2003:15), English mother-tongue speakers total 3,6 million people out of a population of 44,8 million. It is quite evident that the English community constitutes a very small section of South Africa's community and is actually one of the minority groups in the country.

If speakers of other languages in South Africa outnumber the English mother-tongue speakers, how is English able to flourish as the most influential language in the country? What fuels its steady expansion? Is it the Africans' positive attitude towards English, their education, their colonial mind-set or their mere lack of linguistic direction?

I believe that the main reason for this lies in the cultural imperialism that epitomises the power and dominance enjoyed by English. The issue of cultural imperialism has been explored in the previous chapter; it suffices to say here that it is through imperial conquest, colonisation and globalisation that almost everyone in the country finds themselves communicating, or aspiring to communicate, in English.

#### **4.2 THE VATSONGA'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH**

For more than two centuries English mother-tongue speakers have been engaged in the suppressing of indigenous languages, and at the same time consolidating the power and dominance of their language. English is now enjoying the fruits of this labour.

The 1976 Soweto Uprising highlighted the leaning towards English by indigenous mother-tongue speakers. At that time, African students protested against the use of

Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools. The students favoured English, and it was adopted as the language of liberation. This may be seen as an example of clever manipulation, the waging of linguistic wars by proxy. As De V Cluver (1993:27) points out:

The high degree of acceptance of English by black South Africans is reflected in their active participation in the English language as exemplified by the numerous magazines and newspapers written in English for black by blacks. Further examples of the creative involvement of blacks with the English language include plays (resistance theatre), novels and poetry. The participation of blacks in the English churches is well known.

For most African people English has become the favourite language for communication with one another in public surroundings, such as workplaces. They do not value their country's multilingualism as they believe that English gives them status and access to power. It also links them to the international world, something that would have been impossible using Xitsonga. Many Africans are able to put bread on the table as a result of English, and as a perceived neutral language, English helps stem the tide of racial hatred and mistrust between people from different ethnic backgrounds. It actually serves as a unifying force amongst ethnically diverse people.

The interest in and over-valuation of English shown by many Africans is rather strange when seen from the premise that language is symbolic of one's identity. Paul (1979:55) asserts that indigenous ways are held up to scorn and ridicule:

Throughout the Third World, traditional culture has become a negative reference group, a group that all ambitious, go ahead people seek to escape and deny all connection with.

Marivate (1993:100) gives an insight into the attitudes of black Africans concerning Xitsonga as opposed to English as a means of survival. The mother-tongue principle in African education has always met with strong resistance from most sectors in the country, particularly from the African community as can be seen from the following interactions between teachers and students:

- \* But Sir... why do we have to study Xitsonga we know the language anyway?
- \* But Mam... what will Xitsonga help us in life or what will it do for us...it [language] won't even help us to become doctors or lawyers?
- \* You know these two periods ought to be allocated for Maths and Physics.

Marivate (1993:100), musing on her experience as an African language teacher, states “it became clear to me that it was not language per se that was at the back of several linguistic conflicts, but bread and butter issues.”

Adegbija (1994) has also written extensively about the Africans' attitudes towards English, and points out that these attitudes greatly contribute to the low status of indigenous languages.

The Chivirika Self-Help Project has more than 30 members, the majority of whom are parents of school-going children and share the views of the project's leadership. Several of these members, who are Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers, see the encouragement to speak one's language and uphold one's culture as part of the great betrayal and non-fulfilment of promises by those in power. There is a general perception amongst the project members that the government has dismally failed to deliver. They believe that encouraging people to concentrate on indigenous languages like Xitsonga is a ploy to distract them from learning English, the language that holds the promise of securing employment in the future. Ms Noria Mabasa and Ms Grace Mashaba, both unemployed teachers since completing their training five years ago, were encouraged to major in Xitsonga during their training as teachers. On graduation, they could not find employment because there is a surplus of Xitsonga teachers.

According to Ms Mabasa, the government expects her to send her children to a state school where an indigenous language is offered as a school subject so that they will be “miseducated” as she is. Yet the same government does not discourage black government officials from sending their children to ex-Model C schools where they learn English properly (Mabasa, interview, 16 October 2003).

Mabasa is at pains to show that the government is part of a conspiracy to promote the dominance of English, albeit indirectly. By creating a polarisation between a peasant schoolchild, who studies an indigenous language in a state school, and a rich man's child, who studies English at a private school, the government has revealed its lack of political will to maintain and promote indigenous languages.

Sharing the same sentiments, her colleague Ms Mashaba added that a decade or two ago, people were told to forget their culture, traditions and customs and send their children to school to learn the white man's ways. Scholars excelled in English and its literature then, and nobody thought it wrong to study a foreign language and its culture. Today people are asked to go back to their tribal roots to give flesh to the African Renaissance, while the African elite metamorphosize into "privileged whites" by virtue of their English knowledge (Mashaba, interview, 16 October 2003).

In 1994, the democratic government made a number of promises to the masses, including the creation of jobs with the intention of pushing away the frontiers of poverty. According to the project members, the government has failed to honour their promises. For this reason, they view anything said by the government with great caution. Most state schools, where indigenous languages are the medium of instruction, are characterised by the absence of a culture of learning, learners arriving late at school, and low morale among the educators. As a result, learners who graduate from this kind of school are not well-versed in any subject, even the indigenous languages.

Almost every person I interviewed felt betrayed. Vincent Sambo, a senior member of the Chivirika Self-help Project, (interview, 17 November 2003) said he could have been employed as a chauffeur, but was excluded as he lacked English. In his matriculation examination, Sambo achieved a B symbol in Xitsonga Higher Grade, but this symbol could not help him through a job interview. He, therefore, cannot see why he and his children should study Xitsonga.

However, the Vatsongas' attitude towards English can also be noted when parents prefer to send their children to ex-model C schools rather than to state schools. On the national level, Dagut (2000:90) gives a glimpse of how many Africans view English.

A Cape Town Xhosa-speaking parent, Patricia Njamalo insisted that her four year old daughter be prevented from speaking any language but English from her first day at pre-school. She argued that "all you should be teaching them is how to be successful in a white man's world because they already know how to be black".

The confusion about whether a person should speak his vernacular or study English revolves around the struggle for survival, and not because Africans are hostile to their mother-tongue.

Jonathan Hyslop (personal communication, 31 July 2003) contends that economic pressures are decisive in the choice of a language that people speak, and most of the desirable jobs in South Africa involve knowing English. People will opt to learn languages that will give them economic opportunities.

This does not, however, mean that the quest for fluency in English by speakers of an indigenous language is an excuse for them to throw away their mother-tongue. Africans may speak and write in English but they ought to be proud of their indigenous languages. In other words, the indigenous mother-tongue speakers may speak English in public, but still retain the love of their mother-tongue that they use to communicate with others within the borders of their speech community.

#### **4.3 THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FAVOURABLE ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH**

It is apparent from the preceding paragraphs that most Africans hold English in high esteem. However, Adegbija (1994:5) reveals that this situation has created problems in many areas including administration, national mass mobilisation, education and democratisation of knowledge.

Consequently, they [indigenous languages] have been denied the kind of growth and development that comes from use and their capabilities

are generally lowly rated both by policy planners and the African masses. Thus, attitudes towards them, especially in official domains, tend to be generally negative when compared to attitudes towards European or ex-colonial languages.

Mutasa (2003:33-34), maintains that the preservation, development and promotion of Xitsonga has become virtually impossible as Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers have themselves become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. Africans actually undermine their own languages, seeing them as being outdated, and thereby promoting English.

Writing in the City Press, Amanda Ngundle reveals that a culturally different kind of African has emerged in South Africa in recent years despite the fact that people have the African Renaissance as their guiding light.

The rise of black pride with democracy has brought back what fundis have explained as “the rebirth of our identity”.

Surprisingly, with the African renaissance at the forefront of people’s minds, there exists a different black known to many as the “coconut”.

Though “coconuts” might mix well with their black friends, their friends often feel awkward at their choice of words, eating habits and noise level preferences.

They’re called “coconuts” because they’re considered to be culturally white inside and brown on the outside.

They own the whole Star Trek series and think mogodu (tripe) smells horrible and masonja is “dirty food”. (City Press, 16 January 2005).

In this article, entitled “Distinctly African” Ngudle (2005}, points out the irony of a strange African heralded by the advent of democracy in South Africa. While South Africans wait to see a “true African” who will symbolise African-ness, they are confronted by the “coconut”. To prove her point, Ngudle interviewed two salient examples of Africans who aspire to be white (at least culturally). “I hardly ever take notice of such accusations...” is the reaction of one interviewee, and the other says, “just because everyone has his/her own language should I now try and speak 11 languages to prove I’m black.” Although they deny being “white in the inside,” their euro-centric lifestyles show otherwise.

Cultural experts such as Motshega Motshekga, support the message expressed in the article, saying that “coconut” are in fact “weaker souls who fails to realise the importance of their identity.”

The point I am trying to make here is best explained by the mysteries of the English culture and the way in which the mother-tongue speakers speak. Homi Bhabha (1994:85) refers to this as “the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal”.

The ambivalent nature of a once-colonised African is epitomised when he “pretends to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimicking men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new” (Naipaul, quoted by Bhabha 1994:85). Fanon (1968:41) has coined the term “underdeveloped bourgeoisie”, to describe a class of African leaders, consisting mainly of politicians who pose as the guardians of the African Renaissance while at the same time aspiring to speak better English than a native of the United Kingdom.

Xolela Mangcu (Business Day, 2004:12) uses Cornel West’s (1993:39) description of black political leaders in the post Civil Rights era in the USA, to contextualise contemporary black leadership in South Africa who aspire to be English:

The race-effacing group of leaders assimilate to white society and its values, the so-called Uncle Toms, coconuts or Oreos. They are embarrassed by their own blackness and see value only in whiteness, and bring their children up that way. Some even discourage their children from speaking their own native languages. This cultural self-immolation may be the biggest crisis facing black South Africa.

In this article, “A Racially Polarised Society could do with a ‘Race-sceptical’ Leader”, Mangcu (2004) uses West’s typology to identify black leaders in South Africa. The first type of leader is the “race-effacing leaders who assimilate to white society and its values,” examples are ‘Uncle Toms’, ‘coconuts’ and ‘Oreos’. The second type is represented by the “race-affirming leaders who act as the moral and political gatekeepers in the black community”. Muslim leader Louis Farakhan is the example of this type of leader. The third are the “race-transcendent leaders” who

attempt to build cross-cultural coalitions like Martin Luther King. However, the writer of this article is convinced that a racially polarised country like South Africa can be saved by the fourth type of leaders – “the race-sceptical leader” who favours a more open-ended sensibility.

It is not uncommon to hear a black champion athlete or a winning beauty queen struggling to express his/her thoughts in English, even though he/she can say it freely and fluently in his/her own indigenous language. Africans aspire to rediscover, liberate and heal the scars and wounds of colonial bondage through African Renaissance, yet choose to live a lie by emulating the English person’s way of life and the manner of their speech.

It is for this reason that, even in this era of African independence, black leaders who preach liberty, freedom and democracy, still do this in a language that is foreign to the masses. Some African academics and African politicians are not ashamed to travel hundreds of kilometres to the rural areas and there give hour-long speeches in English, a language that is barely intelligible in those parts. Kwesi Kwaa Prah, the Director of the Centre for the Study of African Society, maintains that African leaders who speak English to the elders in the country districts are actually colonial creatures. These self-promoting leaders believe that by delivering long-winded speeches in English, they appear more learned than they are. Prah calls these Africans, who indulge themselves by irritating the ear of the African masses with a foreign tongue, colonial creatures reproducing themselves long after colonialism has been defeated in Africa (Prah, interview, 13 October 2003).

In addition, Prof N Saule, Department of African Languages at Unisa, (interview, 31 October 2003) contends that African people who still think that English is better than other languages have swallowed poison, and suggests a rather graphic way to get rid of this type of poisonous thinking.

#### **4.4 MONO- OR MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY**

Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers may be fluent in their mother-tongue, but without English they cannot find employment. For this reason, it is important for them, at

least economically, to be bilingual in order to survive. Speech communities around the world have been forced to use the same strategy in that the spread of English is an international trend, and not just a Southern African one.

Nettle and Romaine (2002:191), indicate that many minority languages will survive as second languages in the future, but that is no small victory. These two authors contend that the restoration of full monolingualism, where it once may have existed, is not a realistic goal because modern life makes it impossible, and indeed undesirable, to be entirely independent of outside influences.

Bilingualism is not something mysterious, abnormal, or unpatriotic, but has been unremarkably necessary for most of humanity. In today's global village, however, increasing bilingualism in a metropolitan language, particularly English, is making the majority of world's languages in effect minority languages.

The ability to speak English does not necessarily mean that one has to discard one's mother-tongue. Rather, people should retain their mother-tongue because South Africa will benefit greatly if all South Africans were language practitioners who are not only bilingual, but multilingual. Therefore, the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers must strive to be bilingual, retaining Xitsonga and communicating in English where appropriate.

#### **4.5 XITSONGA IN EX-MODEL C SCHOOLS**

Upholding one's culture and language is both a birthright and a duty of everyone in a speech community. Allowing one's language to become extinct is tantamount to selling one's identity and one's worth as a human being.

Despite the change in government, the African Renaissance, democracy and all that it entails, most wealthy and middle-class leaders, the so-called cream of the African elite, send their children to ex-Model C schools. The result is culturally bastardised children, who cannot read or write their mother-tongue. English and other European languages exercise great control over African thinking and perceptions, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:17) points out:

The language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. Thought in him took the visible form of a foreign language... [The] colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition.

The English language not only destroys other languages by its impact, but also changes the manner in which the speakers of other languages perceive life and the way in which they relate to their environment. For instance, the traditional Vatsonga people survived for centuries without electricity, running water or supermarkets because they had adapted themselves to, and had a unique understanding of their environment. The gradual destruction of the language paralleled the change in the Vatsonga's way of life.

Nettle and Romaine (2002:16-17) hold that "the extinction of languages is part of the larger picture of worldwide near total ecosystem collapse. There are striking correlations between areas of biodiversity and areas of highest linguistic diversity." Therefore, the replacement of their utensils, tools, clothes and herbs with the Western version of similar equipment implies that they changed their life-styles to conform to the modern version of living and at the same time, they had to "borrow" foreign words to replace their own Xitsonga words.

Sending children to former Model C and private schools will accelerate the demise of indigenous languages, including Xitsonga. Departments of African Languages at universities that specialise in teachings these languages will also cease to exist because there will be no indigenous languages to teach. Fortunately, courses in African languages are being offered through the medium of those languages, rather than in English at universities such as Unisa and the University of the North. This should be encouraged, as the ultimate result is a student of Xitsonga who conceptualises in Xitsonga rather than in English.

According to Saule (interview, 31 October 2003), if Africans continue to send their children to English or Afrikaans medium schools, by the time the present generation of school-going children reach university level, there will be no students to teach at

the African Languages Departments of the various universities. Students will be studying the language they are most familiar with and that will be English, thus dealing a knock-out blow to their mother-tongue.

Saule (interview, 31 October 2004) argues that the apartheid government did a sterling job of promoting indigenous languages, although their motivation appeared to be “divide and rule”. The apartheid regime pumped money into projects responsible for African education and also encouraged indigenous language teachers to study these languages by increasing their salaries each time they passed a course. However, since the new government removed this incentive for teachers, the decline in the number of students registering for indigenous language courses at Unisa, in particular, has been devastating.

According to the registration statistics cited by Saule, the number of students studying Xitsonga decreased from 1 667 in 1997 to a mere 295 in 2001 (Saule, 2001, in a letter to Education Minister Kadel Asmal, see the Appendix, p 120). Up to 1998, Xitsonga and other indigenous languages at Unisa were taught in English to mostly mother-tongue speakers so that students actually acquired “anglicised” Xitsonga, a Xitsonga characterised by impurities and different from that spoken by the mother-tongue speakers. A student who has acquired the “anglicised” Xitsonga, understands the language within the confines of English, and sometimes actually sees Xitsonga as an extension of English. The impression I get from this is this teaching method was an indirect way of saying ‘Do not waste your time studying Xitsonga, but go straight to English’ as the whole syllabus was an imitation of the English language syllabus.

Mathumba, one of the prime movers in introducing the change in the tuition of African languages at Unisa, explained that during the apartheid era, the syllabi for all African languages was planned by mostly white lecturers (interview, 30 October 2003). African lecturers were mere nonentities, as their views were often disregarded. However, even at universities where mother-tongue speakers were taught in Xitsonga, the syllabus imitated that of English. The whole undertaking was Euro-centric, the syllabus focussed on the teaching of language purely from a linguistic and literary angle.

This resulted in a noted absence of the cultural and ideological elements that are important when one plans a syllabus on language, particularly at tertiary level. Language as part of a particular speech community's socio-cultural make-up was not addressed. The knowledge of a language implies the knowledge of all that defines a speech community, that is, its culture, social life, beliefs, and means for survival. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that as "cultural weapons", languages serve to reveal such minor but important functions as identity formation, national pride (patriotism) and the sense of belonging.

#### **4.6 LACK OF RELEVANCE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

PanSALB Chief Executive Officer Nkhensani Marivate (personal communication 28 July, 2005) is of the opinion that indigenous languages, and in particular Xitsonga, "will be functionally relevant and economically viable if the government has the political will to develop and promote the languages."

Nkatini has slightly different views about the economical and functional relevance of the Xitsonga language, (personal communication, 29 July 2005). He believes that Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers, who are supposed to champion the language, are not doing enough to develop or to promote it.

Nkatini maintains that to keep on blaming the government for lack of this or that is a symptom of 'ideas bankruptcy' on the part of people who think along this line. It would be futile for the government to simply hand out funds if the mother-tongue speakers have no plan or concept as to how they want their language to be developed and promoted. "We need a plan to approach our problem systematically, so that when the government offers financial assistance, we will be able to put it in good use."

Mathumba (interview, 30 October 2003) points out that the teaching of a language such as Xitsonga should have functionality and relevance, that is, the language itself should be empowered. Apart from being a communication medium, Xitsonga should be the language of commerce, politics and law in order to be more relevant than it is at present. Mathumba uses the Chinese language to emphasize his point, stating that if a person wishes to buy something from the Chinese, that person will have to speak,

read and write Chinese first in order to enter into a successful deal. So it is with Xitsonga, the language needs to be empowered so that non-Xitsonga speakers are motivated to study it.

The reasons for the decline in the number of students studying African languages can be found in the perceived lack of relevance of the languages and the actual lack of incentive for teachers to study these languages. Many students, who register to study African languages, do so in the hope of improving their qualifications, thus hopefully leading to promotion at work and better salaries. Very few study these languages simply as scholars. According to Mathumba this lack of relevance of Xitsonga can be seen as the uselessness, disempowerment and emptiness of the language. This, in turn, highlights the powerlessness of the mother-tongue speakers as a group. It is this lack of relevance that contributes to a language being sidelined or even put on the road to extinction.

In support of these views, an interviewee cited in Mutasa (2003:224) argues that a language policy represents the political aspirations of a government, whose aim it is to win votes from people of different linguistic background. As long as a language group owns nothing (in terms of business companies) their language cannot be official. If you own nothing, then your language is worth nothing at all. “For instance, if a Venda man owns a hotel, patrons tend to greet him in Tshivenda, his own language.”

The decline in the number of students studying indigenous languages at university level is so serious that lecturers in some universities are out-sourced, because the whole undertaking has become economically unviable.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

In this chapter the attitudes of Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers towards English were discussed. A picture of the dominance of English and the way it continues to disempower indigenous languages like Xitsonga was drawn.

I have also pointed out that for Xitsonga to survive, it needs to opt for bilingualism. Mother-tongue speakers should speak Xitsonga within their speech community and English outside the speech their community while doing business with non-Xitsonga speakers. An indigenous language needs to be relevant in terms of its functions as a national official language, and not simply as a regional official language. In other words, Xitsonga should not be confined only to the north-east of the country, but should be spoken nationally.

Of course this may sound unrealistic to some, but this is how it should be because Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are scattered all over the country, and would like to hear their language spoken wherever they are. In 2001 there were

- 1 180 611 Vatsonga in Limpopo,
- 117 921 in Mpumalanga,
- 505 380 in Gauteng,
- 8 960 in the Free State,
- 2 062 in the Western Cape,
- 3 269 in KwaZulu-Natal,
- 816 in the Eastern Cape,
- 172 768 in the North West, and
- 397 in the Northern Cape, (Census 2001, 2003:15).

Each province is represented by an enormous number of Vatsonga people whose right to have their language spoken in these province is in line with the dictate of the country's Constitution. This will help promote multilingualism, and allay a concern expressed by Hyslop during our interview. Hyslop (personal communication, 31 July 2003) pointed out that politically the danger lies in an excessive emphasis on a regional language that could inadvertently encourage tribalism and undermine national unity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **LANGUAGE PLANNING AND POLICY**

#### **5.1 LANGUAGE PLANNING**

In this chapter language policy in relation to language as one of the primary elements in the production and maintenance of power will be examined.

Language policy, in my opinion, is not an African concept insofar as ordinary Africans enjoy speaking their languages without having to bother about how to speak or which dialect to speak. I am convinced that language policy has been designed by those in power during the height of cultural imperialism to preserve the influence of dominant languages like Portuguese, French, English and Dutch in Africa. Language policy made it easy for speakers of these languages to exclude speakers of indigenous languages from government, the military and to a lesser extent the judiciary, as indigenous languages were viewed as primitive or underdeveloped. This exclusion also initiated the decline of the African people's customs and traditions because it is mainly through language that customs and traditions are verbalised and learnt. While it might be plausible for a language policy to guide a nation as to which main dialect of indigenous languages should be elevated to official status, indigenous languages still find it difficult to compete with English as the national official language.

Be that as it may, the government, as an overall manager of the country, needs a policy or a plan to guide it in managing languages spoken in the country. Chimhundu (1998:07) points out the necessity of a language policy in the lines below:

How can you guarantee democracy when the law of the country is not understood in the language of the people? How do you abide by what you do not know? How can you use information to which you only have limited access? How can you fully participate in anything, or compete, or learn effectively or be creative in a language [in which] you are not fully proficient or literate? Above all, how can a country develop its human resource base to full potential without languages of the people?

It is for this reason that the Section 6 (1-5) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) stipulates that:

- (1) The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.
- (2) Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
- (3) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages. Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
- (4) The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
- (5) A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must - promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of - all official languages; the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and sign language; and promote and ensure respect for - all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages.

The Constitution identified PanSALB as the statutory body to be responsible for the creation of the conditions for the development and equal use of all languages. PanSALB is also expected to promote and create a positive environment for multilingualism in general.

## **5.2 LANGUAGE POLICY**

The government has elevated the indigenous languages to national official status, yet it continues to use English as the language of its administration, an act that reinforces the belief that the government has no political intent to encourage the use of

indigenous languages. The status given to these languages is symbolic only. I believe that the granting of official status was not intended to be taken literally. A survey of language legislation in many African countries shows that most African governments have rejected the development of indigenous languages as the following lines reveal to us:

Even if states, international and regional organisations devote substantial human and financial resources to the sector, without doubt African leaders have not yet become sufficiently conscious of what is fundamentally at issue in the promotion of African languages and the importance of these in the general development of the country. (ELT Journal, 1996:161)

Firstly, let us examine what a language policy actually is. Language policy may be perceived as a general law guiding a nation as to which language to speak, how it should be spoken, where, and to whom. It regulates and improves existing languages (in our case, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, etc) or creates a national language through planning and standardisation. Language policy makers traditionally look at social, political, economic and cultural factors when formulating a language policy. In the following extract, Fishman (1974:222) explains his view of what language policy is:

Language policy involves a number of interrelated attitudes, biases, plans, activities, and idiosyncrasies of a people. It may be the expression of the aspirations of a people, and may also express the search for identity.

Language policy is linked to language planning, which, according to Weinstein (1983:37), is authorised by the government, and can be viewed as a long term sustained conscious effort to alter a language itself or to change language functions in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems. Kennedy (1983:1) sees language planning as a problem-solving activity concerned with deliberate language change for specific aims that may be social, political or educational. Language planning includes both status language planning and corpus language planning. The first is about the functions that a language is supposed to perform whereas the latter is mainly concerned with the linguistic features of a language.

A cursory reading of the above definitions, gives one an impression that as part of language planning, language policy may be perceived as a path-finder, guiding the nation as to which language to use and how it should be used. It is also interesting to note that this is not an undertaking by the ordinary person, but by the government. Language policy informs us when and how the government intends to control the linguistic behaviour of people. The official language is often a language or a dialect of a language that is then, through a process of standardisation, elevated to the status of official language.

### **5.3 STANDARDISATION**

Johl (2001) understands standardisation to be a technical process carried out by language specialists to make a language or a dialect more uniform and consequently more effective for communication. Language policy and standardisation are two sides of the same coin: language planning. While language policy is essentially a framework, standardisation is mainly about selecting a language or a dialect to use as a national or official language. Both language policy and standardisation are the prerogatives of those in power, as Johl (2001:4) reveals:

Critical linguistics maintains that there is a necessary link between the power of elite groups and language, especially standard language. It also emphasises that equilibrium and harmony are not the normal states of multilingual and multicultural societies.

Both Fairclough (1989) and Tollefson (1991) regard standard languages as inherently elitist, allowing the powerful groups to exercise and entrench their power. The domination of certain languages in multilingual societies extends over all the important social institutions – government, trade, industry, the media, advertising and serves to maintain the power and privileges of those who are fluent in the relevant language, while effectively excluding those who are not.

The above quotations on standardisation and language planning were cited, not to discuss these issues in detail, but to come to a clearer understanding of the nature of language policy. Since language policy is closely connected with language standardisation and language planning, one has to know what these terms entail.

However, their significance in this chapter is that they indicate the motivation behind a language policy, that is, a government plan to manage a country's languages.

The controversial relationship amongst languages is never more evident than in the history of English in South Africa (see De Klerk, 1996). English has often subjugated other languages throughout the world. Its power in South Africa was reinforced by previous governments' refusal to accord official status to indigenous languages. The plight of the indigenous languages was often ignored as these languages were relegated to what used to be the "reserves" or "homelands" in order to consolidate the policy of separate development. For almost a century, the role of English and Afrikaans dominated South African public life, particularly in the field of education. This has been revealed by Hartshorne (1987:84):

In South Africa language policies (in African Education) from 1910 onwards have reflected not only the relative positions and status of the languages concerned - English, Afrikaans (the two 'official' languages) and the eight African languages recognised for educational purposes - but, more importantly, the relative political and economic power of the sectors of South African society making primary use of one or other of the languages at issue (or wishing to use it for educational purposes).

The South African Language policy can be seen as a continuation of the previous policy in that it invests English with power and prestige, that is, as the language used mainly by the ruling clique. Bamgbose (2003:8) insists that the inherited colonial policy was continued into the post-independence period, either because African governments were reluctant to effect a change of policy or because they were persuaded that it was the best policy. Understandably, the educated elite, who are also in power, have benefited from the use of a European language as an official language and would not want to give up that advantage.

The placing of a global language like English alongside the so-called impoverished languages has enabled the dominant language to destroy the "lesser" languages, while their speakers watch helplessly. The presence of English in any speech community where the mother-tongue is not English, often makes the language spoken by that community a secondary language. During the course of time, such a language

gradually loses its relevance as its speakers succumb to the dominance of English. Bamgbose (2002:2) sees the dominance of English in economical terms when he argues that the effects of the marginalisation of African languages implies the exclusion of the majority of the population from active participation in industrial and technological activities, that are largely conducted in an imported language, which, in this case, is English.

English has been so strategically placed, that for people to secure employment or advancement in their careers, requires that they be fluent in English. For example, an African manager, whose work requires English, is likely to expect a recruit to be fluent in English. African managers and company directors, who studied at British or American universities, often judge the intelligence of a potential African employee in their company by their fluency in English and not by fluency in an African language. Sharing the same sentiments, Alexander (2003:04) maintains that the language issue in Africa is fundamentally and essentially a class issue:

In post-colonial Africa and also in post-apartheid South Africa, one of language's significant functions is that it is a badge of social class. One way of explaining the catastrophic gulf that divides the political and much of the cultural leadership of the continent from the people on the ground is what Carol Myers-Scotton defined as an "elite closure" which refers to the strategy by which elites maintain power by using language understandable only to them.

As an outcome of the South African Constitution, reputedly among the best legal documents in the world, the new language policy is held in high esteem within linguistic circles. Bamgbose (2003:8), states that the South African Constitution "is unique in devoting an entire section to languages as well as additional references under other sections. As far as I know, no other Constitution of an African country has such extensive reference to language."

The government's recognition of the so-called "previously disadvantaged languages" in the Constitution was indeed a great leap towards the country's sociolinguistic maturity. The aim was a restoration of the linguistic heritage, a proclamation to the whole world that the colourful languages of Africa should take their place amongst world languages. Languages that had never before been accepted as viable in the old

South Africa were not only accorded official status but mechanisms were also put in place to promote and maintain them. For the first time mother-tongue speakers could do business in their own language, in the language that is understood by the gods.

The government's multilingual approach to the language issue has motivated several scholars to perceive it as being admirable, a job well done. Mutasa (2000:85) sees this act as the best solution for a society characterised by linguistic diversity, "an act in which the languages have been regarded as separate languages in their own right, each as the most distinguishing feature and symbol of a group which wants to continue to be regarded as such." Madiba (1999:60) understands multilingualism as a resource of nation building in the new South Africa.

If the new language policy ranks as one of the best in the world, (Bamgbose, 1996; and Alexander, 2004), why does the government find it difficult to implement? Why do middle class African mother-tongue speakers relegate their own language to second class status, and choose to speak in English instead? Why do languages such as Xitsonga, TshiVenda and isiNdebele continue to be marginalized even though they have been accorded official status? The rest of this chapter seeks to investigate these issues.

It is often easier to come up with a plan for something and then discover that the actual implementation is difficult to achieve. This is what happened with the South Africa language policy. The ground plan is attractive but it has remained essentially unworkable.

According to Bamgbose (2003:6), there is often a general feeling that language problems are not urgent and, therefore, solutions to them can wait. Language policies in African countries are characterised by one or more of the following problems: avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation. Bamgbose (2003:8) continues this line of argument by contending that policies do not amount to implementation and are often no more than statements of intent.

Neethling (personal communication, 20 May 2004) indicates that he was doubtful from the start, and now he is a confirmed sceptic. Language Policy, according to Neethling, is often not realistic, nor is it practical. For that very reason the authors of the constitution wrote in the clause (wisely, I think) that citizens have the right to speak their own languages “where practical”. In many contexts it simply is not pragmatic or practical to insist on language rights. It was a political decision at the time, one that had to be taken, but it was not a practical one. All languages may be “official”; but some are certainly more official than others.

It is 10 years down the line and very little has happened regarding policy. It is slowly developing now, but the implementation: that is the problem. I personally do not like coercion or force regarding language matters, people should be persuaded and convinced that a course is the desired one. And of course government must have the political will to see this through, but it is at this point where globalisation and other realities impact negatively on implementation. (Neethling, personal communication, 20 May 2004, see also p. 110)

Emmanuel Matsinhe (interview, 5 May 2003) argues that our language policy does not always reflect reality on the ground. For instance, South Africa is a country where many people speak more than three languages. The language planners should capitalise on this multilingual wealth, allowing people to speak freely, thus making the policy as realistic as possible. Consider the following lines uttered by the then deputy president Thabo Mbeki.

I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. My body has frozen in our frosts and in our latter day snows. It has thawed in the warmth of our sunshine and melted in the heat of the midday sun. The crack and the rumble of the summer thunders, lashed by startling lightening, have been a cause both of trembling and of hope. (Mbeki, 1996:01).

One does not need to be a literary expert to understand that the above lines exude poetry. And since it was written by the then Deputy President, who also feels strongly about language rights, the whole speech should have been translated into all indigenous languages to capitalise on our multilingual treasures and make more sense of the language policy. As things stand now, many ordinary Africans who are

supposed to know and be proud of their African-ness have no idea about the content of the speech. Now only the so-called educated section of the society understand and enjoy the sentiments expressed in these lines.

Quite a number of people interviewed by Mutasa (2003:221) see language policy as “lip service, pure window-dressing because it is impractical and cannot be effected, and as a farce.” One interviewee even went so far as to appeal to people to “stop deceiving the nation by saying that all languages are equal. They will never be!”

In a multilingual country such as South Africa, it will be hard for any language policy to satisfy people from different ethnic groups. Calling diverse languages national or official languages may pacify the fears of those who suffer from tribal mistrust, at least temporarily, but in the long run, a dominant language will finally gain recognition over the lesser languages. In our case, English mocks whatever language policy makers want people to call a new democratic language policy. For all its being accorded official status, a language such as Xitsonga cannot stand side by side with English for the simple reason that it does not have sufficient human and financial resources to compete with English, and it will need more than a century to develop into a fully-fledged language. Both English and Afrikaans have had more than three centuries to take root in African soil.

For this reason, the new South African language policy, regardless of all its good intentions, is largely a political gesture, and its chance for success is paper slim. Implementation should be understood as an ongoing process, but since it started out on the wrong foot, there is little hope of it ever succeeding. For instance, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in its Editorial Policies (2004:26-27) commits itself to:

provide a range of distinctive, creative and top quality programmes in all eleven official languages across the radio and television portfolio, and strive to reflect the needs of each language community in its programming.

Yet according to Console Tleane of the Freedom of Expression Institute (personal communication, 14 September 2003), Xitsonga and Tshivenda, face constant

marginalisation even after ten years into the new political dispensation that promised equal treatment of all eleven languages. Except for the drama “Muvhango” on SABC 2, Tshivenda and Xitsonga receive no ‘respectable’ airplay on television. Neither the news nor any other major programme is broadcast in these languages. This shows that there has been little or no attempt to develop them into languages used in sophisticated discussions. Other languages that have suffered a similar form of marginalisation are isiNdebele and SiSwati.

Simon Dagut (1999:18-19), a research fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand, sees the new language policy as a rather amusing excess of political correctness that does no more than disguise the domination of English. A successful political approach, therefore, will need to have its roots not in the heady enthusiasm of nationalism but in the detailed understanding of the linguistic composition and linguistic preferences of South African society.

A PanSALB director, Lesibana Rafapa (interview, 18 May 2004, see page 131), has another explanation why implementation of the language policy has not been successful. According to Rafapa, PanSALB does not have the human and financial resources to deal with implementation, because Government had not considered this when they budgeted for PanSALB. There is also no infrastructure in place to make our language policy a success, and the PanSALB staffing leaves much to be desired. He further states that the question of governance should be sorted out as to whether PanSALB as a constitutional body should report directly to Parliament, or should operate as part of a government department.

## **5.4 SUMMARY**

The arguments expressed above are quite pessimistic and paint a negative view about the probable success of the language policy. The idea of language equality is now even further from success because the South African economy has shifted away from a socialist inclination towards globalisation. English is now the language of government, military, business and education. As it was mentioned earlier in this study, the presence of English amongst other languages, diminishes the status of those languages. It also appears that the language policy in the country is not necessarily

meant to achieve anything other than unite diverse ethnic groups through the Constitution.

The most outstanding aspect of this research is the universal acceptance amongst South Africans that the National Language Framework Policy is one of the best in the world. This is true, because the policy covers almost all languages spoken in the country. However, the whole issue revolves around the difficulty of implementing the language policy. Although language planners have tried their best, implementation has proved difficult. Of course, implementation cannot be done in a week, month or a year. It takes considerable time before implementation can be completed.

Another impediment has been identified as the lack of human and financial resources on the part of organisations vested with the authority to implement the policy. Language practitioners and planners are finding it difficult to make policy implementation a reality because of the lack of both economic and human resources. The inclusion of English as one of the official languages, has led to the failure of the policy's intent because English has the power to marginalize other languages.

However, the fact that the draft new language policy framework involves all languages, resulted in the speakers of the various languages feeling a sense of belonging, feeling wanted and patriotic about South Africa, especially those who speak the minority languages. The language policy has the potential to change the negative attitudes of South Africans towards the indigenous languages and to encourage them to learn a second or third language. In this way, linguistic and cultural interaction between the ethnic groups will be increased, and people will come to respect and love one another for what they are.

Adegbija (1994:117) points out that a multilingual language policy "holds a greater promise for generating positive attitudes towards languages, language policies, and between speakers of languages, than monolingual policies which tend to reinforce inequality and prejudice in which one or a few dominant languages are revered, promoted and institutionalised as nonpareil."

It is therefore apparent that if the South African language policy can proceed through Parliament, become official and be successfully implemented, it will contribute greatly to fostering respect, diversity and peaceful co-existence amongst the South African people.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 ANALYSIS

From the outset, it was indicated that this study was concerned with the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages in general and Xitsonga in particular. The number of languages becoming extinct every year was stressed and speech communities were reminded that preservation is better than resuscitation.

This study also attempts to explore the imbalances and impediments that prevent Xitsonga from developing into a fully-fledged national language. It also gives a picture of the language situation in the country, pointed out that all languages can be developed if the mother tongue speakers have the will power to do so. Indigenous languages (Xitsonga included) have now been recognised by the government as national treasures. These previously disadvantaged languages have been codified, have a literature of their own, and are used as a medium of broadcast in the radio and to a lesser extent, on television. They are taught from primary up to tertiary level in many learning centres around the country. Alexander (2004:7) maintains that the post apartheid era, as opposed to the apartheid period, is conducive to the growth of indigenous languages.

Viewed superficially, we appear to be very well situated in post-apartheid South Africa, certainly when we compare our situation with that of any other African country. We have during the past 10 years or so been endowed with one of the most impressive constitutional and legislative foundations for the construction of a modern language infrastructure that would be capable of serving the needs of a complex language situation. In the period I am referring to, an ambitious and potentially effective institutional architecture has been set in place for the avowed purpose of promoting multilingualism and ensuring, in the words of the constitution, “parity of esteem” (equal status) for all official languages.

At the advent of the new dispensation, the preservation, development and promotion of Xitsonga was embraced by most mother tongue speakers. Nowadays the spirit of upholding Xitsonga has somewhat decreased. This is due to many factors, but the most harmful is the negative attitude of Xitsonga speakers towards their language, as they regard it as economically unviable.

The need by Xitsonga mother tongue speakers to fit into the wider South African community was also identified as another factor for the decline of enthusiasm. Consequently, the interest for the preservation and development of Xitsonga is fast becoming empty rhetoric – something one expresses without thinking about it. As a result, Xitsonga's position as an official language continues to be weakened. These negative attitudes have to change if speakers of Xitsonga want to see positive results in the development of their language.

As for Afrikaans, its influence as a national official language is on the wane. But this does not mean its disappearance from the linguistic scene, as Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers are passionate about its preservation, development and promotion. Fanakalo, that specialised pidgin spoken mainly in the mines in the past six or seven decades, may disappear. We are likely to witness the growth of Tsotsi-taal, and maybe the birth of another pidgin due to rapid urbanisation and influx of foreign nationals into our cities. Globalisation will ensure that English will continue to be dominant over other languages, and may in future tempt the government to declare it the sole official language as is the case in Namibia.

### **6.1.1 Ignorance about one's language**

After going through a maze of relevant literature and newspaper articles, conducting interviews and discussing the issue with some scholars, I was struck by the realisation that very few Xitsonga first language speakers really understand that their language as a significant element in their identity, culture and in their cognitive thinking. The majority of speakers do not seem to know or just did not care. For them, language is there for communication and nothing else.

The people who are most familiar with the value of Xitsonga are mainly academics. Yet this group of speakers will often lapse into English under the pretext of wanting to make their point more clearly during a discussion. Radio announcers for Xitsonga language tend to use a number of words from almost all eleven official languages during broadcasting. In his recommendation on the purity of Xitsonga, Mathumba (1993:211) argued that it should be borne in mind that the radio is a powerful medium as far as the use of a language is concerned:

It should therefore be seen as a priority that the language used in this medium is exemplary and in accordance with the guidelines of the codifying body, i.e. The Tsonga Language Board. A single unacceptable word used frequently on the radio may become so ingrained among the people, especially the young generation, that no amount of purgation can uproot it.

Even the Xitsonga traditional singers use a number of English words when they compose and sing their songs, perhaps as a mark of sophistication. This ignorance about use of one's language creates the impression that Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are negatively inclined towards their own language. It may be an exaggeration to say Xitsonga speakers hate their language, when many of these people are poor and more interested in survival than worrying about what Xitsonga means to him/her as a first language speaker. However, many well-to-do, learned Xitsonga first language speakers are also indifferent about their language.

Xitsonga people, like any other ethnic group in South Africa, have been colonised and oppressed by apartheid for so long that it is difficult for them to readily identify cultural values in their language. For this reason, it will take years before the wrongs of the past are put right. A language can also be a means of disempowerment that can leave a speech community poverty stricken in terms of money and in terms of culture and national or tribal pride.

The dawn of the new democracy caught most Xitsonga speakers off guard regarding the future of their language. They neither knew how to approach language empowerment, nor did they understand the implication of excessive borrowing of words from other languages, particularly English. One can liken them to a crow that lived in cage for many years, yet chose to remain inside when the cage was opened,

because it was not sure whether the cage was open or not. And while this confusion amongst the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers prevails, English continues to maintain its position as the language that vocalises and articulates socio-political and economic power in the country.

Needless to say, the ignorance about the value of one's language and the blind adoption of another, creates a huge problem in the preservation, development and promotion of Xitsonga. There are those who will argue that despite the fact that English is dominating or disempowering indigenous languages like Xitsonga, this dominance is not without benefits. English is seen as a gateway to social and economic status. English also allows access to scientific and technological research for indigenous languages speakers, and opens avenues for business and political opportunities for those who choose to follow these careers. They feel that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

While the above may be true, one can ask why is it not possible for Xitsonga to have the same advantages as English? Of course, it is possible but it may take decades to achieve such a dream. Perhaps the questions that need to be answered are, what does the future hold for Xitsonga – the sacred language of the gods? Does this ignorance on the part of Xitsonga first language speakers spell the death of their mother tongue? Will Xitsonga end up being a poor imitation of English? Are mother-tongue speakers going to be absorbed by the English speech community or by another indigenous speech community? Only the divine bone throwers or prophets can successfully predict the future of an indigenous language such as Xitsonga.

It is encouraging to recall that Xitsonga has survived the great threats posed to the language by colonisation and apartheid. The two oppressive systems did not officially threaten Xitsonga, although they made it difficult for Xitsonga to thrive in such an environment. Today Xitsonga is one of the national official languages of the Republic of South Africa. Its status implies that it may exist for many years to come, but this will depend on the behaviour of its speakers.

### **6.1.2 Language and Power**

Throughout the study, the issue of English and power as inseparable entities was discussed. The strong relationship between the two is such that English can be used as an instrument of power; and that power can be achieved through many factors of language. For instance, colonisation (that translates into dominance and hegemony), globalisation, the new South African Language Policy and Africans' negative attitudes towards their own languages have been identified as the major factors that facilitate the achievement of power. This dominance or power invested in English continues to disempower indigenous languages like Xitsonga.

Linguistic dominance as shown in this study, is a multi-faceted problem that permeates all sectors of indigenous life – social, economic and religious. Factors such as mass media, binary oppositions, borrowing of words and popular culture, to mention but a few, are seemingly designed to consolidate the power of English over indigenous languages. It will, therefore, be unwise for any language planner or practitioner, to think that the problems brought about by the dominance of English will disappear now that all languages have been recognised by the government. Instead, the problem will become greater now that South Africa is involving itself in globalisation.

The problem of linguistic dominance was first recognised and investigated by academics who studied it mainly within the field of education. These academics were well aware of linguistic imperialism but continued to investigate this phenomenon only as an impediment to education. To them, the new South African language policy becomes a problem only in as far as it hampers the teaching profession. This narrow approach leaves the many facets of the problem that fall outside the educational field quite elusive and difficult to tackle. Business, economic, social, political and cultural aspects of social life are affected by the dominance of English as much as the field of education. Therefore, an integrated approach is needed in order to confront this problem successfully.

### 6.1.3 Language Policy

In this study, I found Language Policy to be the most intriguing mechanism used to dominate indigenous languages. For instance, the language policy can be seen as a strategy for English to marginalise indigenous languages, simply because the inclusion of English as one of the eleven official languages makes implementation of the language policy impossible. Language practitioners and planners are finding it difficult to implement the language policy, precisely because it was intended to avoid disunity and violence, rather than to be a success in practice.

South Africa's language policy is reputed to be one of the best language policies in the world because it includes nearly every language spoken in the country. The Act itself is plausible in that it fosters diversity and respect for all languages, and makes each member of the eleven speech communities part of the government of the country. Yet the greatest handicap is the difficulty in implementing it, primarily because financial factors were overlooked when the policy was formulated. Is having a language policy that includes all the country's languages a boon or a gentle insult to the speakers these languages? If the government finally implements the language policy, is there any chance of success?

Questions like these have led scholars like Maseko (1995:66) to encourage the government to emulate Namibia, which opted for English as the only national official language rather than having to worry about implementing a multi-language policy.

If South Africa were to go for English as the only official language as Namibia, there would be more advantages than disadvantages. Firstly, unlike Namibia English is spoken by a fair number of mother-tongue speakers who would then be at hand to be trained as English teachers. Secondly, the role at which the citizens of South Africa are becoming urbanized is another positive factor for education... thirdly, there is no presence of lingua franca in South. English does not have to supersede any language for this position.

It remains to be seen if English will become the only official language. It is indeed, the *de facto* language of government, because while the government promotes the

idea of an eleven language policy, it stealthily uses English in its own administration, military and communication with the outside world.

#### **6.1.4 Necessity of English**

Something else that became apparent in this study is that the dominance of English cannot simply be cancelled with a stroke of a pen. Destroying the dominance of English in South African life as a way of developing indigenous languages will be similar to destroying the life of African people. For instance, Africans have positive feelings towards English as a language because they see it as a language of survival. Some are even prepared to sell their own linguistic rights as indigenous language speakers, as long as fluency in English promises better life. Africans will continue to be attracted to English as long as they perceive the possibility of living a better life through English.

What then is the solution to the language problem? There are many solutions but total destruction of another language is not one of them. Our new democracy dictates that people of all races will live side by side as patriotic South Africans, united in their socio-cultural and linguistic diversity. Perhaps the answer lies in multi-lingualism. South Africans need to share their linguistic heritage with one another to make the new democracy a true reality. Further possible solutions will be included in the section on Recommendations.

## **6.2 CONCLUSION**

### **6.2.1 English as a Uniting Force**

This study has shown that English was imposed on indigenous languages speakers. It is also true that, because of its world influence, English is dominant to the extent of being hegemonic over indigenous languages like Xitsonga. However, the irony is that English serves, and will continue to serve, as the main national official language of the country. It should be admitted that English has succeeded in uniting various ethnic groups in the country. Through the use of English, an IsiXhosa mother-tongue speaker can easily relate to a Xitsonga mother-tongue speaker. Despite all the negative aspects

of English dominance, English is extremely valuable as a medium of communication, the language of education, science and technology for all South Africans. Most importantly, it links fellow South Africans with people outside the country's borders, and builds and cements relationships with overseas organisations and foreign governments.

### **6.2.2 Preserving Xitsonga**

English as a communication asset, does not necessarily mean that speakers of Xitsonga should stop preserving, developing and promoting their own language. All indigenous language speakers should prevent their languages from being overrun by English.

The study has found that the language policy, though hailed by various scholars as one of the best language policies in the world, cannot be regarded as a solution at the moment, but as the first step towards the preservation, development and promotion of Xitsonga, as the implementation of the policy is still in an early stage. If successfully implemented, the language policy has the potential to preserve, develop and promote Xitsonga.

### **6.2.3 Globalisation**

The study has identified globalisation as one of the main stumbling blocks in the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages. A modern version of colonisation, globalisation embraces and enhances the power of English by using it as the main means of communication worldwide.

Speakers of Xitsonga can lessen the dominance of English by the revival of their old tribal system that upholds their culture, customs and traditions. In fact, preserving, developing and promoting Xitsonga is part of the whole – that of preservation of one's cultural heritage. This can be summed up by the new catch phrase so beloved by the media – local is lekker (local is good).

Many communities around the world buy local goods rather than imported and choose to support their own literature and language over a foreign language as a way to minimise global influence and the dominance of English.

#### **6.2.4 Bilingualism**

There is no easy way to overcome the many obstacles that lie in the way of preserving and developing Xitsonga. However, it would not be wrong for people to use bilingualism to remedy the situation. Imbalances between English and Xitsonga may be effectively addressed through bilingualism.

In a multilingual country such as South Africa, a great number of people of all colours and creeds are bilingual or even multilingual, which is, of course, a wonderful expression of cultural diversity and harmony. People use their native tongue when speaking to one another within their speech community and English when they communicate with a person outside their speech community. So the love of their mother-tongue and the hope that it will continue to exist is unquestionable, despite the dominance of English.

According to Nettle and Romaine (2002:191) monolingualism is not a realistic goal, because modern life makes it impossible and indeed undesirable to be entirely independent of outside influences. They believe that:

Bilingualism is not something mysterious, abnormal, or unpatriotic, but has been unremarkably necessary for most of humanity. In today's global village, however, increasing bilingualism in a metropolitan language, particularly English, is making the majority of the world's languages in effect minority languages.

What Nettle and Romaine are saying is that since globalisation has effectively shrunk the world into the so-called global village, it is increasingly difficult for speech communities to be monolingual. Instead speech communities have to contend with more than one language as a result of constant interaction among people from different speech communities. Thus, most members of a speech community find it necessary to speak at least one other language.

It has been pointed out in this study that for Xitsonga to survive, mother-tongue speakers should continue to speak Xitsonga within their speech community even though they speak English outside their speech community. On the other hand, an indigenous language needs to be relevant in terms of its functions as a national official language and not only as a regional official language. In other words, Xitsonga should not be confined only to the north-east of the country, but should be spoken nationally. Of course this may sound unrealistic but this is the ideal, because Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are found all over the country and would like to hear their language spoken wherever they are. A number of Vatsonga people live in every province of the Republic, and these people have the right to speak their language, in line with the dictate of the country's Constitution. This will help promote multilingualism, and allay the concern expressed by Hyslop that an excessive emphasis on a regional language could inadvertently promote tribalism.

However, bilingualism will not be successful if the indigenous people remain economically disadvantaged. It is imperative for the indigenous languages to be developed, and for that, economic resources are needed.

### **6.2.5 Borrowing of Words from Other Languages**

If Xitsonga and its indigenous sister languages are to grow to a point where they also become scientifically and technologically advanced like English, then they should consider borrowing words and phrases from other languages. Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers can borrow, adopt and adapt words for use where traditional words do not exist. For instance, fulamachini (fly-machine), puluhu (plough from ploeg in Afrikaans), xileyi (sleigh), ringi (ring), khomputa (computer) and thelevhixini (television) are derivations from English that enrich Xitsonga just like Latin, Greek and French enriched English.

All languages are dynamic – responding to the needs and uses of society. Speakers of English have freely borrowed and adapted words from other languages without being ashamed of doing so. There is therefore, no reason why Xitsonga cannot increase its resources through borrowing both from other African and European languages. There

is also no reason to apologise for such borrowing or to cultivate an attitude of unease concerning them, especially in cases where indigenous terminology is not available.

Borrowing can be a fruitful way to enrich Xitsonga, and help it develop vocabulary suited to our modern times. However, this does not mean that Xitsonga mother tongue speakers should stop creating words in their own language. For example, words like mbiluhata (to memorise) and hikahata (to punctuate) are not traditional Xitsonga words, but were created by suffixing the verb hata to mbilu (heart) and prefixing hika (full stop) to the verb hata, thus forming new words from the language itself. Coining new words from the language itself is a refreshing and creative way to develop Xitsonga. Rather than using direct translation of technical words from English (e.g. televhixini) one can use the term, xivona-kule (distance-seer). If taken seriously, creation of new words from the language itself can be quite a useful way for language practitioners to compile new terminologies.

## **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.3.1 Recommendations by Other Researchers**

Many researchers have suggested recommendations to overcome the problem inherent in the preservation and development of South African indigenous languages. Jokweni (2001:02) and Setoe (2001:001) have suggested the harmonisation of languages into three different groups the Nguni, Sesotho and Xitsonga language families as a solution.

Mutasa (2003:285-289) has made more than twenty recommendations to be implemented in order to promote all languages in general. Some of Mutasa's recommendations are:

- **The Bottom-up Approach**

This recommendation implies that language planners and policy makers should do some research on how people want linguistic freedom to be realised. They should invite people to give input to language issues affecting their lives. This kind of

approach will make people feel validated and valued, rather than resentful at having language policies imposed upon them.

However, the problem with this approach is that national leaders and scholars are not easily accessible to ordinary people. Leaders and scholars are paternalistic, seldom listen to the will of the people and believe that they know best what is good for the people. Leaders and scholars tend to think and act on behalf of the people – they seldom listen to what the people actually want or need. For this reason, whatever suggestions are put forward by “the man on the street” will not easily find acceptance from leaders and scholars.

- **Language awareness**

This is indeed the simplest and cheapest way to make people aware of the necessity of upholding their cultural and linguistic heritage. Posters carrying messages on linguistic rights of the people could be authored by language practitioners and policy makers with the support of the government and put up in strategic places (cf. the Language Beacon Project in Grahamstown). Both print and electronic media can play a significant role in conveying the message to a person on the street.

The preserving, developing and promoting of indigenous literature is also imperative for language awareness campaigns. However, the Van Schaik Book Publishers assistant publisher Mareli Esterhuysen (interview, 7 October 2004) indicated that like so many publishing companies in this country, Van Schaik is forced to publish mainly in English because of economic realities.

Though publishing companies would love to publish more in indigenous languages, they are often unable to do so. This is mainly due to not large enough budgets available to them, and because the readers prefer to read English books instead of their own indigenous languages. Often readers want to improve their command of the English language by doing this. Sadly, this causes English to become the main market that is to be catered for (personal communication, 14 December 2004, see p. 141).

Sasavona Publisher and Booksellers assistant manager, Justice Ndabane (personal communication, 14 December 2004, see p. 157) shares the same sentiments. He points out that Sasavona, (which publishes mostly Xitsonga literature) is “currently facing a very difficult time with regard to new books publishing” and lists the following as reasons for this state of affairs: lack of financial capital to rejuvenate the business, large quantities of unsold books, a dearth of Outcome Based Education (OBE) books published by Sasavona and the lack of readership.

Sharing the same views, the Managing Director of the Juta Publishing Company, Solani Ngobeni, points out that publishing in indigenous languages has always been for educational purposes because there are no audience or readership for books in these languages beyond the school market, something that has remained unchanged. Previously, there was one National Department of Education, and the government bought books in indigenous languages for schools. Presently, there are nine Provincial Education Departments and these departments prescribe what schools in their provinces should read in indigenous languages (personal communication, 6 August 2005).

Publishing Xitsonga language and literature is not only important for a language awareness campaign, but it is one of the best ways to preserve our linguistic heritage. Unfortunately, as the above extracts by publishing managers show, this method does not seem financially viable for book publishers. Unless, the government subsidizes local book publishers, Xitsonga’s linguistic and literary wealth may be lost to future generations.

- **Transactions to be done in language of the client**

There is little that clients desire more or makes them feel prouder than speaking in their home language during a business transaction. But many businesses prefer speaking the language of business (which is English) rather than stooping to speak the client’s mother-tongue, especially if it is an indigenous language.

- **Universities to teach in indigenous languages**

Various scholars have reiterated this suggestion but only time will tell if this will become a reality. Even African scholars refrain from teaching in indigenous languages except in the African Languages departments. Adding insult to injury, it is maintained that the indigenous languages cannot be scientifically developed, meaning that they are not fit to be a medium of instruction in schools, let alone at tertiary institutions.

- **Establishment of newspapers for the cultivation of African languages**

This can indeed be a powerful way to validate indigenous languages. But media moguls are business people whose shareholders value profits more than preserving or promoting indigenous languages. At present, there are very few newspaper companies that publish in indigenous languages. Even those who do publish in the indigenous languages, do so on a regional scale. For instance, Ilanga, is a newspaper that is published for and aimed at KwaZulu-Natal readership.

As I have mentioned before, these recommendations could be conducive to the development and maintenance of indigenous languages. But we still have to implement them to see whether they can help solve the problem.

### **6.3.2 Additional Personal Recommendations**

Although these recommendations point in the right direction, there has been no agreement as yet on how they should be implemented. Commendable as the recommendation by other researchers are to the development and maintenance of indigenous languages, they have proved difficult to implement and as they have not yet been implemented, the possibility of their success or failure is uncertain.

As far as the recommendation labelled “harmonisation” (Jokweni, 2001; and Setoe, 2001) is concerned, I do not think that any ethnic group will agree to have its language “harmonised” with another to form a single language. This is tantamount to

selling one group's identity to another. For instance, Zulu people would never allow their language to be combined with isiXhosa, even though the two languages belong to the Nguni family.

The following suggestions are part of my quest to find a reliable and implementable solution to the indigenous language problem. I do not claim that these suggestions are better than those made by other researchers, however they are made with a different approach in mind. Emphasis is put on the need to change Africans' mindset – to encourage them to start doing things for themselves and also to believe in their own African-ness. The provision of financial resources by the government is integral to finding the solution to the language problem.

#### 6.3.2.1 Poetic Expressions

There is a novel way of making the language awareness dream a success. This is using the “mini busses” that transport people to and from work throughout the year. Thousands of these mini busses carry messages (mainly poetic expressions) in indigenous languages on rear windows to highlight the drivers' expressions and feelings about life in general. For instance:

- \* Nyakaza ndoda, uze wedwa eGoli (Get moving man, you came alone to Johannesburg).

This is IsiZulu expression used to a new arrival to the city of Johannesburg to stop being a country bumpkin or a plaas japie, as they say in Afrikaans.

- \* Xola mthakathi, isono sami angisazi (Please spare my life magician, because I do not know of any wrong I have done to you).

This is an IsiZulu lamentation by a victim of witchcraft.

- \* Umntu incwadi engafundeki (A person is like a book that cannot be read).

This is an IsiZulu expression regarding the diversity and unpredictability of human behaviour.

- \* Lidoda duvha (A day will come).

This is a TshiVenda expression for: “Be patient, your day will come/ perseverance is the mother of success.”

\* Ri khomeni ri nga peli (Hold the sun from setting down).

These Xitsonga words are often said by one person to another during a quarrel. This implies that if the sun sets, the antagonist will be bewitched during the course of the night.

This way of expressing a person’s feeling is quite powerful and popular and it is, like posters, accessible to everybody in the communities where the languages are spoken and understood. The drawback to this approach is that if the message is left there for a long period, people will ignore it. Nevertheless, familiarity will breed understanding.

#### 6.3.2.2 The Need to Learn from Others

Indigenous language speakers should also look to the history of other ethnic groups, such as the Jews and Afrikaners, who see their respective languages as central to their identities. According to Cedric Ginsberg (personal communication, 21 October 2004), one of the reasons why Hebrew survived throughout the ages, is that because there has always been a religious requirement for Jews to know Hebrew so that they can read the Bible and the other sacred texts.

Due to this obligation, more Jews were literate than people belonging to any other language group. This was true particularly in the first millennium and during the Middle Ages. Hebrew is an ancient language that evolved a script relatively early in development. The original text of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew. The Bible, and particularly the Pentateuch (The Five Books of Moses) together with other texts in Hebrew form the foundation in Judaism of a complex legal system known as the Halachah. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 gives an injunction that the laws of the Bible must be taken seriously and transmitted from generation to generation.

Take to heart these instructions which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and

when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.  
(Tanakh: Jewish Publication Society Translation, 1985)

The emergence of Afrikaans as a language is well documented in South African linguistic and history books, (cf. Steyn, 1995; and Van Rensburg & Jordaan, 1995). Since the inception of Afrikaans, its speakers have jealously defended it against invasion by powerful languages such as English and to a lesser extent, the various African languages.

It is apparent from the above, that Xitsonga can also be preserved, following the example set by Afrikaans and Hebrew. As a minority speech community, Xitsonga needs to emulate the Afrikaner community, who view their language as their heritage and identity. Hebrew is one of the oldest languages on earth, yet its speakers have ensured that it remains viable and vibrant. Xitsonga speakers can also do the same, using Xitsonga in religious ceremonies and in cultural gatherings, thus strengthening their unity as a speech community. Like Hebrew, Xitsonga needs to be preserved as an asset

#### 6.3.2.3 The African Renaissance

The proponents of the African Renaissance should stop confining this process to the corridors of higher places of learning. Many academics have seized upon the African Renaissance as an excuse to spend considerable time debating its merits and demerits. More than six years ago I pointed out the danger of the African Renaissance remaining “a mystery in the mind of the majority since the practical element is missing” (The Citizen, 13 May 1998).

In this article, titled “Mystery to Majority”, it was pointed out that the African Renaissance is essentially a re-awakening – a re-birth. However, there is a danger that “its meaning might be distorted or turned into a slogan” (Maluleke, 1998), simply because it has never been put into practice. Victims of social injustices across the continent do not understand it because “the practical element is missing.” To give African renaissance a meaning, “we can do this by finding a creative way of

protecting our people against crime, to create jobs, feed the hungry, house the houseless, and look after our aged and infirm” (Maluleke, 1998).

Since then, it seems that very little, if anything, has been done to educate the masses about the African Renaissance as a road to rediscovering oneself. The majority of the people still do not know what is meant by the term ‘African Renaissance’ because academics see it as a course to be studied instead of a way of life, as the quotation below shows:

Of late I have been overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to know what African Renaissance is all about and what the chances are of realising it. How does one translate a vision and revolutionary mission, a historical impulse, into plain language that the common or ordinary man can understand? (Shadrack Gutto, This Day, 15 June 2004)

In this article, “Creating a new African”, Gutto is embarrassed by the multitude who asked him the meaning of African Renaissance. “Of late I have been overwhelmed by the number of people who want to what the African Renaissance is all about...” (Gutto, 2004). His realisation comes six years after the African Renaissance was launched. It is true that a definition of this renaissance was given, and that the “chances of realising it” were rated, but the majority of the people on the ground do not seem to have understood it. For Gutto (2004), African Renaissance is an intellectual property outside the knowledge of the ordinary people. Indeed, Gutto asks, “how does one translate a vision and revolutionary mission, and historical impulse, into simple plain language that common or ordinary people can understand?” If an intellectual fails to explain his theory to ordinary people in plain language, then such a theory is a suspect. After giving a general picture of the African Renaissance, Gutto (2004) finally explains that “in essence the African Renaissance is a challenge and a call for us to re-learn and rediscover who we are in the global scheme of things. Beyond that, the African Renaissance should inspire us with a vision for a new and qualitatively better African and Africa.” Fair enough, but Gutto does not realise that the reason why people still pester him with questions about the African Renaissance is they do not want theorising, but instruction on how to attain the practical part of it. Rather than going to the people, Gutto chooses to talk about this national treasure in

the print media, which has a somewhat select audience as not all people can read and understand what is published in newspapers.

This demonstrates the danger of enshrining the African Renaissance as an ideal for academics and keeping it away from the masses. The African Renaissance should be seen as a form of public education that will enlighten Africans about who they are, where they come from and what they are heading towards. It should help them rediscover their heritage and understand their identity and worth as human beings. Above all, the African Renaissance should be used to change the mind-set of the masses to make them understand that, since they are free, it is up to them to preserve and promote their linguistic heritage. Africans should become genuinely proud of their linguistic heritage and use their mother-tongue whenever possible.

The African Renaissance should be taken forward through workshops, media, performing art (drama and poetry) and national emblems, such as the flag, to change the perceptions held about indigenous languages. These national treasures should also form the basis of national debate with a view to improving the cultural and linguistic worth of the African people. Politicians should be convinced that the African Renaissance cannot and should not be owned by a political party, however popular that party may be.

#### 6.3.2.4 The Xitsonga Speakers' Mindset

Until the Gazankulu homeland was established in the late 1960s, many people, particularly Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers, disliked communicating in Xitsonga especially in the urban areas because of tribal hatred. However, the Xitsonga speakers were inspired and touched by the nationalistic spirit, becoming proud of being the Vatsonga and of their language, customs and traditions. This pride may be largely attributed to the influence of the former Gazankulu Homeland Prime Minister, Professor H W E Tswan'wisi. He was a cultural giant, an activist, renowned linguist, master of rhetoric and a prolific writer who encouraged his fellow Vatsonga to strive for fluency in Xitsonga (Sonderling, 1999). Artists such as Paul Ndlovu, Wilson Makhubele, Thomas Chauke and Xinyori Sisters, George Maluleke and the Ban'wanati sisters also popularised the language with Xitsonga vocal music. Today it

is not uncommon for non-Xitsonga speakers to entertain themselves with what is commonly called Shangaan traditional music.

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers' attitude towards their language, especially from an economic perspective, has changed. Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers are no longer keen to learn to speak, write and read the language properly, preferring to strive for fluency in English since English is seen as necessary to prosperity.

The obvious solution to redress the language imbalance lies in instilling linguistic patriotism into the nation. However, the problem is people's attitude (especially the youth) towards indigenous languages. As long as people are not interested in developing their languages, all attempts by scholars and individuals to do so will fail.

It is not enough for mother-tongue speakers to glorify African languages without devoting their time, energy and talents to developing them. With a past of entrenched racial inequality, Africans tend to understand their nationalism in terms of tribe or race rather than through their indigenous languages. Africans should not only be nationalistic or proud of their race and tribe, but also of their language.

There is also a need to decolonise the perception of indigenous languages by changing one's mind-set and embracing with self-confidence and pride our African-ness (Thiong'o, 1986). Nkadimeng (2001:73) suggests that indigenous languages be introduced into predominantly white schools to prevent culture or language domination by any group.

Language, as a social asset, plays a pivotal role in the development and socialisation of the members of a society as it promotes the culture and the collective consciousness of a people. Above all, Africans need to be assertive in their approach, as ambitions cannot be achieved without determination.

Nkosi (1965:109) argues that before Africans can make a contribution to world civilisation, they must achieve self-confidence and self-respect, and this confidence can only be realised through economic and political power. A nation of paupers

cannot contribute anything of worth to the world and the safety of such a nation among powerful nations of the world is questionable.

As long as Africans feel intensively inferior as human beings and valourise other nations as superior to them, they would in turn, not have regard for their indigenous languages. (Nkosi, 1965:109)

Stereotypes and negative attitudes towards indigenous languages, such as Xitsonga should be eradicated to encourage equilibrium between the languages. Xitsonga-speaking children should be encouraged to speak their language and English equally and so combine tradition with modernity in the new millennium. Most importantly, Africans need to validate languages like Xitsonga if they wish to improve the language situation in the country. Each Xitsonga mother-tongue speaker should be made aware that he/she has a responsibility to uphold his/her linguistic heritage by speaking, writing and reading the language.

As mentioned earlier, I undertook this study as a contribution to the growth and development of Xitsonga, the language of my ancestors.

#### 6.3.2.5 Lack of Economic Resources

Lanham (1978:15) points out that the indigenous languages spoken by Africans have been in existence from the 5th century and some scholars believe that the task of developing them into fully-fledged modern languages will take as long a period as it took for them to develop from oral to written languages.

However, I believe that one of the main stumbling blocks to their development is the lack of economic resources. As long as the indigenous languages are not economically empowered, they will remain underdeveloped. That is, without financial resources, the ambition to maintain, promote and develop indigenous languages will come to naught. It is ridiculous to think that African languages can rise to the same level as English without the necessary economic backing. This economic imbalance has to be addressed before it is too late.

It is often said that building a nation needs the integrated efforts of both the government and the citizenry. This may also be true of preserving, developing and promoting our indigenous languages. However, the onus to provide economic resources rests mainly on the government. People, or rather the country's citizens, can only provide manpower to the whole undertaking.

At the moment, the perception exists that the government has neither the political nor economic will to accomplish this sociolinguistic project. In other words, the government is, at present, doing very little, if anything, to provide financial assistance to organisations mandated to develop indigenous languages. What we are witnessing is only lip service on the part of the government.

When the new government came to power in the middle of the last decade, it had little that would satisfy the African masses seething with expectation. It therefore pronounced itself a social democratic administration with several policies and projects to eradicate poverty, starvation and unemployment. Thus, the provision of shelter, food and job creation took priority.

These priorities were expressed in the now defunct Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The ANC regarded this document (1994:1) as:

...an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework. It seeks to mobilise all our people and our country's resources toward the final eradication of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future.

Of course, some will argue that the government is indeed providing for the development of indigenous languages as personified by the language bodies in each speech community, and the establishment of dictionary units. But many are of the opinion that the government is not committed enough to the development of African languages in terms of the provision of economic resources.

The government has shifted away from its socialist orientated economic policy (RDP) and is now embracing international capitalism. It is this kind of neo-liberal thinking which has turned the government into an unwilling partner in the development of

indigenous languages. Some may argue that the government has been forced into international capitalism because of national and international financial realities, and that by ignoring these realities the government will cause hardship. At the same time, however, neo-liberal ideology pushes its privatisation and non-involvement stance into the affairs of other organisations. In this way the government is able to relieve itself of the responsibility of providing financial assistance to those organisations that care about the under-developed languages.

Indigenous languages can only be developed if economic resources are made available for such a cause. In other words, if the government is unwilling to fund this project and make it a reality, the indigenous languages will not be preserved, let alone developed, and this will be a linguistic disaster of no mean proportion.

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## APPENDIX: NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Date: Mon, 29 Nov 2004 12:43:55 +0200

From: "Theo Eybers" theoe@citizen.co.za

To: jamesonm@citizen.co.za

Mail&Guardian

Language and the census

Date: 14 Aug 2003

Not to skewer the post-census numbers euphoria, but we have to face our linguistic selves in the morning mirror. The language landscape in South Africa is not pretty, in two very troubling ways: (a) we have virtually no idea who speaks what – this information has simply never been gathered; and (b) to a large extent, policymakers around the country are quite clearly not interested in who speaks what, in which case emerging policy based on census-type figures is potentially ill-begotten.

The Census 2001 has spoken (sort of): nearly 24% of South Africa speaks Zulu as a home language, with English at just over 8%. But are these figures helpful or reliable in any way? Other than the dimmest, most tantalising peek through the dark language glass, no, these figures are utterly unrevealing.

The mirror's refraction is so great as to render the numbers almost useless, because the census asked just this single language question: what is the language you most frequently use at home? This works just nicely in the most rural Transkei where you might find only isiXhosa esisulungekileyo, (pure Xhosa), and in the most suburban upper Claremont English Cape Town home, and certainly in the neo-retro suiwer Afrikaans tuisland of Orania. But these are exceptional scenarios, not the norm.

The much-vaunted South African multilingualism is far more fluid and extraordinary than these figures reveal. Specifically, the most heterogeneous chunk of the country, with the widest linguistic repertoire, is Gauteng, where nearly nine million people speak ... just about everything.

Because the census asks just this one question, the answer to which is unclear for any of the several million multilingual township residents in Soweto, Sebokeng, Alexandra, and so on, the data that emerges is South Africa appears to be neatly chopped up into 11 zones of monolingual speakers. The truth is radically removed from this. First, there are documentable, important subvarieties of several national languages: there are children (importantly, for the purposes of language transmission) speaking Mpondo, Bhaca, Cele and smaller Nguni languages, who are forced to declare themselves arbitrarily as Xhosa or Zulu, even where these are mutually unintelligible with the standard language.

Second, there are millions of households that are multilingual in English and Afrikaans, or in some combination of Zulu/Xhosa/Sotho/Tsonga/everything else, for whom it is a non-trivial matter to decide whether they feel they speak more Zulu or more Tsonga, more English or more Afrikaans, at home.

When asked by a form-wielding official, guess what? People usually answer with the name of a prestige language, such as Zulu or English.

Third, there are likely several million speakers whose repertoire includes different versions of the same language (rural Zulu versus Johannesburg Zulu), or general black English versus Model C English as either first or second language, massively raising the national English distribution to 40% or 60%? Wish we knew.

Fourth, large chunks of urban black speech communities command one or more parts of the messily fluid language continuum that could be called township Zulu or Zulu/Sotho or Tsotsitaal or Isicamtho. What are these speakers supposed to answer?

The census must beef up the tiny part of its budget that must deal with language information. What is currently hidden is the degree of English dispersion among

South Africans (largely as a second language), and the distribution of all other second language varieties. Who is winning the lingua franca English or Afrikaans?

The second trouble is on the order of an already identified but unaddressed national crisis: we revel in very infant-like symbolic multilingualism to everyone at a conference, or the odd gurgle from Parliament, in all 11 languages). And yet we have little understanding of the processes of language acquisition or shift in the country.

Instead, the national language watchdog and adviser to the departments of arts and culture, the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), struggles on with a tricky mandate, and patchy data, making annual symbolic gestures on Heritage Day at the triumphant national right to be multilingual.

Meanwhile, linguistic Rome burns: the fundamental message that multilingualism in a single house, nay, in a single family, is quite healthy for the rapid cognitive development of a child, is lost. And, typically, this healthy, if messy, multilingualism is of a fairly ill-defined urban code-mixed nature. But we can reach no judgement on this, because we have no data. Linguists (startlingly few sit on Pansalb, or are in any structural position to advise the department) are continuing to fail to get across this basic message: multilingualism is an incredible resource, if also an incredible kopseer which certainly will not recede by legislating everything 11 times over.

This headache must be faced head-on, and be drawn into legislative and educational practice. And black parents who suppress Zulu, or whichever African language (so that little Sipiwe will learn English), must be gently enlightened and strongly opposed in the education policy forum.

This does not mean that the home language of your choice -- English, in the case of Robert Kirby (flappy panic Low-pressure academic meditations, May 16,) will tumble into unregulated chaos. But Kirby has a point: there is a real role for (prescriptive) language standardisation. And without data on who speaks what, we are in no position to legislate standard languages.

What is called for, in the case of the census, is revolutionary data collection techniques (audio, video), and far more serious attention to language. If we go to the billion-rand trouble of locating all these census interviewees, we may as well actually check what they speak! The better to know our multilingual selves and to plan for our shared language future. Dr Simon Donnelly lectures linguistics at Wits University.

## **CITY PRESS**

### **DISTINCTLY AFRICAN**

by AMANDA NGUDLE

OUR country has 11 official languages and a score of cultures which were either suppressed or exploited by the old regime.

The rise of black pride with democracy has brought back what fundis have explained as “the rebirth of our identity”. Surprisingly, with the African renaissance at the forefront of people’s minds, there exists a different black known to many as the “coconut”.

Though “coconuts” might mix well with their black friends, their friends often feel awkward at their choice of words, eating habits and noise level preferences. They’re called “coconuts” because they’re considered to be culturally white inside and brown on the outside. They own the whole series and think mogodu (tripe) smells horrible and masonja is “dirty food”.

Some people consider TV presenter Carol Boucher to be a classical example of a “coconut”. The permanent fringe hairstyle, the unsavoury comment she once made on her show about mogodu and the way she speaks seTswana - with a white accent - are some of the characteristics that are said to qualify her for the “coconut” label.

Boucher is adamant that she is as black as they come. “I hardly ever take notice of such accusations and, for the record, I don’t have to account for the way I choose to wear my hair, my clothes and do things,” she says.

TV presenter Chichi Letsoalo was not taken aback at the suggestion, but denies being a “coconut”. People tend to call you that when you want to live a good life. Just because I dine in Sandton and speak English with perfection doesn’t make me a white woman,” she says. “I have to speak English often because most of the time I’m surrounded by white people, at work, and just because everyone has their own language should I now try and speak all 11 languages to prove I’m black.

Letsoalo is no stranger to this accusation. “Even when I was growing up, they called me a ‘coconut’, but that’s because I’m a perfectionist. I speak well and do everything with zest,” she says. “You’ll never get anywhere if you don’t polish up your communication skills.”

But when people don’t reflect their blackness in the way they dress, talk, wear their hair and behave in their social environment, the question comes to the fore: What makes you black?

Head of the Kara Heritage Institute, Professor Mathole Motshekga, calls this phenomenon, a new struggle. “African people’s identity is a composition of culture flowing from the invisible thread that connects every black person with his/her heritage.

This culture manifests itself in the way that people talk, dress, worship and sometimes think,” he says. “If you don’t reflect your African heritage in any of these ways, then you are simply a ‘coconut’.” Motshekga calls “coconuts”, weaker souls.

“The sad thing is that black people have been embracing other cultures to the point of sucking-up and if by now we still have people who fail to realise the importance of identity, we the observers should then help them deal with this new struggle. “We shouldn’t condemn them but help them understand that they are sufficient as Africans.”

Some say labelling blacks as “coconuts” is akin to taking us back to the past ideologies of segregating and classifying people. They also ask what criteria exactly are used to determine whether one is a “coconut”.

Who is to say what makes one person black and another too white for his or her black skin?

Should “coconuts” feel embarrassed about their achievements, which often tend to expose them to a Eurocentric lifestyle?

Bouwer says she feels privileged to have had the opportunity to travel, which has enriched her understanding of different cultures, and says she would encourage her child to widen her horizons and reach out to experience as many cultures as possible.

Singer Thandiswa Mazwai, whose image promotes African beauty and customs, thinks otherwise. She wants to take her child to a school that will not wipe out her African heritage.

I don't want to take my child to a school where she will be turned into a little white girl who sits with her legs crossed and a white table napkin on her lap at eight," she says. Mazwai adds that she wants a school where Malaika can learn Zulu dance lessons, Xhosa singing or Shangaan beadwork.

"In private schools there are so many activities that direct both black and white children towards being good Europeans but nothing for African children. If it means I have to take her to Mqanduli to make sure no one steals her culture from her, I'll do it."

Although she agrees that there are too many black people with white souls around, she refuses to take out the knives. "If you were made to feel rude for speaking your language but praised for speaking English, like a white person, and were teased about the size of your bum and ridiculed for your coarse hair since grade zero, you'd turn into a twanging 'coconut'," Mazwai says.

She says that if she loses weight to look thin and walks around in American designs and speak with a funny accent, so many kids will think that the image is cool. "That's why I'm taking the revolution forward and saying being African is the coolest thing

# The new struggle is about the rebirth of one's African identity

South Africa is known as the 'rainbow nation' and while many foreigners rave about our wealth of diverse indigenous cultures, 'coconuts' seem only too anxious to jump out of their black skins, writes AMANDA NGUDLE

City Press P.26

16-01-2005

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**DIFFERENT FOLKS** ... Carol Bouwer is happy with who she is. She does not understand why she is suddenly being labelled as a 'coconut', intimating though that this might have to do with the fact that she is in a mixed-race marriage. Bouwer is seen with her husband, Edward

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I'M A TOWNSHIP SISTER ... Chichi Letsoalo says her only sin is to want the good life

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THE STEVE BIKO MEMORIAL LECTURE by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Jameson



By Neville Alexander

# Lift the boom of language!

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who most powerfully drew our attention to the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by the dominance of the former colonial languages in the ranks of the post-colonial African middle-class elites

**A**VERAGE South African tertiary institutions produce about 1 200 graduates in the management and economic sciences faculties each year, and 10 800 graduates enter the labour market a year — this excludes graduates in biblical studies and African languages, who are hard to absorb into meaningful and gainful employment. (Mpho Makwana, Business Day August 6 2003, in his column Nation Building).

When we consider abysmal words such as these, we are inclined to ask ourselves whether we will ever succeed in our goal of creating the conditions in which the downtrodden "common people" of Africa will at last enjoy the freedom and democracy for which generations of men and women have sacrificed their lives. It is this kind of sycophantic gerontology to the icons of money and power that has led to the development of a blind spot among the potential and actual leadership cadres of the continent.

These words are a salutary reminder — if we needed any — of the fact that the language issue in Africa is fundamentally and essentially a class issue. Edward Freeman once called language a "badge of nationality" and at a superficial glance, it often has this significance.

In post-colonial Africa and also in post-apartheid South Africa, one of its significant functions is that it is a badge of social class. One way of explaining the catastrophic gulf that divides the political and social of the cultural leadership of the continent from the people on the ground is what Carol Myers-Scotton defined as elite closure, which refers to the strategy by which elites maintain power by using language understandable only to them.

There are other, even more radical, paradigms within which the language attitudes and the language practices of the African middle class are explained, notably that of Pierre Bourdieu. His concept of "cultural capital", which in the African context can be understood as proficiency in English, French or Portuguese, leads infallibly to the conclusion arrived at at the end of the 1960s already by Pierre Alexandre — that it is the degree of proficiency in the exocolonial language that determines the class location of the individual in the post-colonial set-up.

In the final analysis, all these attempts at explaining the anomaly of neo-colonial (and neo-apartheid) language policies in modern Africa translate into a single simple fact: those who know

the languages of the colonial conquerors well, by whatever means they acquired this knowledge, benefit directly in terms of the best-paid jobs and high social status as a result of their proficiency.

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who most powerfully drew our attention to the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by the dominance and even more by the hegemony of the former colonial languages in the ranks of the post-colonial African middle class elites.

His celebrated essay on The Language of African Literature remains the cultural political manifesto of language activists committed to a consistently democratic solution to the language question on the continent.

In post-apartheid South Africa, in spite of spectacular advances at the constitutional, legislative and policy levels, we continue to be plagued by the monolingual mode of life of the empowered black elite. This disposition towards establishing and entrenching a unilingual public service — most notably in the Department of Justice — and promoting the English language at the expense of African languages, insulates the black middle class in what is in effect an economically and politically gated community, which is separated from the vast majority of the population by "the language of liberation" and "the language of national unity".

Yet, I believe that it is from the vantage point of this new historical community where we are still contesting the character and the direction of the democratic transition that the signposts for "the African century" may be crafted.

It is a task that will be accomplished by those men and women who are committed to the total liberation of the hundreds of millions of African people living in peasant and working class communities.

We have at our disposal all the insights of the sociology of language and of applied language studies, we know statistically and analytically the depth of the divide between the rich and the poor, we have, fortunately, all the institutional and technical infrastructure with which to ensure that the languages of the people are used in all the powerful domains of life so that the much proclaimed participatory democracy can at last become a reality across the continent.

There is no reason to remain silent. Let us lift the boom!

*Business Day*

# A racially polarised society could do with a 'race-sceptical' leader

23/04/04



**XOLELA MANGCU**

THE brouhaha surrounding Tony Thatcher's statement got me thinking about a book that distinguished African American writer Cornel West wrote, titled *Race Matters*. West developed a typology of three kinds of black leaders in the US. First are "the race-effacing" leaders who assimilate to white society and its values, the so-called "Uncle Toms" or "coconuts" or "Oreos". West used the mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, as the prototype of such leadership. Second are the "race-affirming" leaders, who act as the moral and political gatekeepers in the black community. No one dare say anything about black life until these self-appointed apostles of the people have spoken. The prototype of such values would be someone like black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan.

Third are the "race-transcendent" leaders" who, while conscious of racial identity, are also always building cross-racial coalitions. The prototype would be people like Martin Luther King Jr and Chicago's Harold Washington (the subject of my doctoral dissertation).

It is a typology that I often find useful in analysing contemporary black politics in SA. Indeed, we have our fair share of "race-effacing" leaders — embarrassed by their blackness, who see value only in whiteness, and bring their children up that way. Some even discourage their children from speaking their own native languages. This cultural self-immolation may be the biggest identity crisis facing black SA. On the other extreme we have "race-affirming" leaders for whom everyday life is reducible and can be

interpreted only through the racial lens. For example, it's okay if a black guy calls you stupid, but not okay if a white guy calls you stupid. In the latter case the motivation cannot be anything but racism. I was reminded of this racial reductionism by my good friend Ronald Sureth Roberts's argument that the people who said President Thabo Mbeki was angry when he rebuked Trarha were racist. The only problem with that analysis is that it does not explain the motivation behind the black people who offer a similar interpretation.

This racial reductionism is just an illustration of what West calls "the pitfalls of racial reasoning". To be sure, the incidents of racism in this country fuel racial reductionism, and so do the disparities between black and white worlds, or what the president rightly calls "two nations".

By the way, I don't know why there is such a fuss about the president giving such a description of our country. It's exactly the same kind of description that the Kerner commission gave of the US in 1968, a description that

Americans used as a reminder of the need to rebuild the fabric of their society instead of wallowing in denial.

It should by now be clear I have a problem with both the "race-effacing" and the "race-affirming" models of black leadership. But I am not sure that the third concept of "race transcendence" is that helpful either.

Too often we deceive ourselves by asserting we live in a rainbow nation or using some other such metaphor. And yet SA remains a deeply racially polarised and unequal society.

Despite the continued reality of racism and inequality I fear that if we reduce all natural human behaviour to racism we will never see white people as humans capable of everyday emotions such as anger, neither will we ever be free from the world they would have thus constructed for us.

In the end we would all be political actors in a grand narrative of contention between racists and antiracists. Frankly I am increasingly finding it very tiring to read white people's minds. Imagine the toll it takes on you having to leave every encounter with

the question: was he being racist or was he just being human? So to West's typology I add that of the "race-sceptical" leader. The race-sceptical leader rejects the "coconut" aspiration to whiteness of the race-effacing leader, the race-affirming leader's ideological prison and the illusory assertion of a racial Nirvana of the race-transcendent leader. The race-sceptical leader rejects the ideological foreclosure of all these categories in favour of a more open-ended sensibility.

This sensibility is best illustrated by British philosopher Isaiah Berlin's metaphor of a heavy truck that comes to a risky bridge: no amount of prior engineering knowledge will help the driver decide whether to cross that bridge or not. The decision will be based on judgment or instinct.

The capacity to make instantaneous decisions about other people's behaviour will in large part depend on the maturation of that open-ended sensibility in our political culture.

■ Mangcu is a WEB Du Bois Fellow at Harvard University.

African renaissance

By Jameson Maluleke

# Mystery to majority

13.5.98

AFRICAN renaissance is fast becoming a buzzword among politicians and commentators but there is a danger that its meaning may become distorted.

There is also the danger that as we are gearing toward the second general election, artless politicians will turn it into a slogan to boost their fading popularity.

Historically, renaissance is the term given to the period following the Dark Ages in 14th Century Europe. It generally implies the dawn of the new era, or the age of restoration.

In South Africa, renaissance may be equated with the epoch after our own Dark Ages: Apartheid. It lends clothing to what deputy president Thabo Mbeki called "an African" in his famous "I am an African" speech. It is also meant to change our slave mentality and build our self-confidence.

## Missing

But because the practical element is missing, African renaissance will remain a mystery to the majority of the African masses.

The government is trying hard to improve and protect the lives of ordinary South Africans yet the victims and survivors of crime, the unemployed, the homeless and the pensioners find it hard to understand what is really meant by renaissance.

Elsewhere in Africa, the African masses are still groaning under the oppressive yoke of military rulers. Corpses and skulls of people caught in the crossfire of warring factions in the civil war are everywhere to be seen. Famished women with skeletal babies on their backs at refugee camps still jostle for food packages from United Nations' feeding schemes.

So for these people, or at least the survivors, African renaissance is but a pipedream.

If African renaissance is also meant to introduce white people to the orders of Africanism, thus preventing them from leaving the country, we must recall that whites have been in this country since the 17th Century. Besides, whites are undoubtedly the first people to engage in a systematic study of "an African and Africaness".

They have a thorough understanding of African renaissance. However, they may not readily embrace the African world view. The difference between the Democratic Party's and the African National Congress's perception of democracy may serve as a good example here.

However, African renaissance may still be useful for whites as a public relations tool and as a catch phrase for their com-

modities.

It is indeed a good idea to name a monument, a hospital or a street after our national heroes and heroines to restore our dignity and identity as Africans as some people suggest.

But no hero, dead or alive, will take pride in a hospital named after him if such an institution is riddled with maladministration, corruption and nepotism.

## Athens

Before we think of naming a mess-covered, potholed street after our heroine, let us build and consolidate our young democracy to rival that of the classical Athens.

We can do this by finding a creative way to protect our people against crime, to create jobs, feed the hungry, house the homeless and look after our aged and infirm.

Surely we can't afford to philosophise while our democracy is still learning to walk. Let us leave that to Socrates and his descendants. Our duty is to put our country on a firm democratic footing, to shape a paradise on the tip of Africa.

● Jameson Maluleke is a Citizen journalist.



Thijs de Vries



## SHADRACK GUTTO

### UNEMBEDDED

15/06/04

# Creating a new African

I have been overwhelmed by the number of people who want to know what "the African renaissance" is all about and what the chances are of realising it. How does one translate a vision and revolutionary mission, an historical impulse, into simple and plain language that common or ordinary people can understand? This is the challenge.

Simply put, the African renaissance is about changing Africans and the repositioning of Africans and Africa in a globalising world.

The fact that natural and people-made resources in Africa have been exploited and used over centuries for the benefit of the rest of the world and not for the benefit and progress of African people creates the necessity to fundamentally change the African and Africa. The condition of Africans and Africa is neither natural nor desirable.

It is the law of human progress that the mode

and means of production and reproduction — that is, the manner in which people engage with nature and one another in producing and distributing goods and services for use and exchange — gives rise to a complex set of beliefs, myths and social values that, in their turn, fuel the processes and systems of production and reproduction. By way of shorthand, these subjective factors — values, beliefs, myths — fall under a variety of labels, such as individual and collective world outlooks, mindsets and spiritual impulses.

Our collective experience of slavery, colonialism (including apartheid) and neo-colonialism bred a culture of subservience, dependency and lack of self-belief among many Africans, irrespective of race, colour and ethnic origin.

**The African renaissance** good as, if not better than, other human beings and deserve real equality with the rest of humanity in all spheres of life. Many of us

**and a call to us to relearn and rediscover** the miserable status of the African person in the world is natural and even predestined by some supernatural or metaphysical forces.

**who we are and where we are** The education system contributes a great deal to this constructed "reality".

**in the global scheme of things** Between the objective and the subjective lies the zone of interaction between the two. This is where we can locate the institutional framework, including those

of formal and informal governance. These too have contributed significantly to creating the African and Africa that the renaissance calls on all of us to change.

In essence the African renaissance is a challenge and a call to us to relearn and rediscover who we are and where we are in the global scheme of things. Beyond that, the African renaissance should inspire us with a vision for a new and qualitatively better African and Africa.

The transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) has seen the creation of a regional system that allows for the state and the masses to participate in issues of governance in Africa. The OAU was more of a forum for states. The AU has also expanded the mandate of the regional system from the mainly political to one that engages with politics, the economy, social affairs, and peace and security. These are institutional changes undertaken to facilitate the renaissance mission.

The other tool that could be developed and used to propel the African renaissance is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). Principles in Nepad that resonate with the idea and dream of African renaissance include: the call to Africans to refuse to be "conditioned by circumstance"; the declaration of our collective commitment to "determine our own destiny"; the promise of a "people-centred development" based on national and regional priorities and development plans that must be prepared through participatory processes involving the people"; and, most important, the recognition that the ideals of Nepad can only be successful if the whole initiative is "owned by the African peoples united in their diversity".

It should be understood that the vision and mission of the African renaissance is bigger than the AU and Nepad. But these two are important instruments with the potential to contribute to the renaissance.

There are many other initiatives by individuals, communities, governments and multilateral institutions that can contribute to the African renaissance.

In other words, the African renaissance is an historical project. It must become a force that drives us to a better future. The starting point is to shake off the historical baggage that has enslaved us for centuries. The African renaissance calls for a paradigm shift in the way we think and do things — it is revolutionary in its intent and expected outcome.

We must not only aspire to emulate "world class" standards set by others. We must set world standards for others to emulate.

■ *Shadrack Gutto is a legal scholar and director of the Centre for African Renaissance Studies at the University of South Africa*

## APPENDIX: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Ms Mareli Esterhuysen, Publishing assistant, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.  
Date of interview: 7 October 2004

Mr Justice Ndabane, Xitsonga first language speaker, Assistant Manager, Sasavona Booksellers and Publishers, Braamfontein. Date of interview: 14 December 2004

Mr Solani Ngobeni, Xitsonga first language speaker, Managing Director, Juta Publishers, Cape Town. Date of interview: 6 August 2005.

*Questions asked:* From the 60s up until the 90s, book publishing companies such as Sasavona, Van Schaik, Juta and a host of others, championed the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages like Xitsonga. What has gone wrong in the new Millennium? Why is indigenous literature (read Xitsonga) only a trickle from these companies nowadays?

*Summary of response:* Publishing in indigenous languages has always been for educational purposes because there are no audience or readership for books in these languages beyond the school market. The situation has not changed. In the past there was one National Department of Education, and the government could buy books in indigenous languages for schools, but today with the nine Provincial Education Departments and the situation is different. These Departments decide what learners in schools in the various Provinces should read in indigenous languages. The written responses of Ms Esterhuysen and Mr Ndabane appear in Appendix: Personal Correspondence. Mr Ngobeni's response appears under the sub-topic 6.4 Recommendations.

- Mr Cedric Ginsberg, Senior Lecturer, Department of Semitics, University of South Africa. Date of interview: 21 October, 2004.

*Questions asked:* The survival of Jewish language and culture serve as an inspiration to those with a passion to preserve develop and promote indigenous languages. Could you please, give an insight as to how Jewish language and culture have survived against all odds – against English language domination for instance? How is it that Hebrew and Yiddish have managed to survive and prosper despite the impact of a language like English, which is an international language of communication?

*Summary of response:* The answers to how Hebrew survived against the formidable impact of English are found in traditional, political and national forces within the Jewish communities. According to Mr Ginsberg, Hebrew is an ancient language that managed to survive throughout the ages because it is a language in which both the Tanakh (Jewish) and Christian Bibles were written. The main contributing factor was a religious requirement – every Jew had to know Hebrew so that he/she would be able to read the Tanakh. Hebrew also gained stature because it was adopted as the language of the future Jewish state by the Zionist movement and this was ratified when Israel was formed. Yiddish, the vernacular of the Jews in Eastern Europe, however, struggles to exist. It is estimated that approximately 80% of Yiddish speakers perished in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. (See also his letter in Appendix: Personal Correspondence.)

- Mr Stuart Grobler, South African Banking Council spokesman. Date of interview: 5 January 2004.

*Question asked:* Considering that South Africa is a new democracy with eleven (11) official languages, is it possible for banks to issue cheques in an African language, say, like Xitsonga? If not, why it is not possible?

*Summary of response:* Issuing a cheque in languages other than English will encourage fraud and is not economically viable. Mr Grobler gave reasons that are technical in nature. I see his response as a challenge to language planners and policy makers in that if they are serious about indigenous languages development, then, these languages should also be used technologically.

- Professor Rusandre. Hendrikse, Head of Department of Linguistics, University of South Africa. Date of interview: 3 February 2004

*Question asked:* The perception one gets within linguistic circles is that small languages are facing extinction and that worldwide every year a language or two die. How true is this statement?

*Summary of response:* The estimation is twenty languages become extinct every year. Apart from alarming me with his view on language death, Hendrikse also referred me to *The Vanishing Voices. The extinction of the world's languages* (2000). His full response appears in the introduction of the study on page 1.

- Professor Jonathan Hyslop, Sociologist, University of the Witwatersrand. Date of interview: 31 July 2004.

*Questions asked:* Do you think Africans' abhorrence of their own language is an indication that African nationalism, socialism or Marxism are on the wane? Is South Africa's embracing of globalisation accelerating the gradual disappearance of indigenous languages? What can indigenous mother-tongue speakers do to prevent the dominance of English in the country?

*Summary of response:* Hyslop posits that Africans may have a sense of linguistic identity, but economic pressures are decisive Africans have to be fluent in English for economic reasons. For the sake of national unity, political conferences and publications use English because the use of one indigenous language will imply prejudice against the other. Hyslop does not believe that globalisation is a threat to the survival of indigenous languages because many languages in (for example) Europe have remained intact and are widely used alongside the so-called global language, English. Africans should insist that their languages be used in business as well as in government. However, since English will be dominant for the foreseeable future, it is advisable for African children to be fluent in both their mother-tongue and English. Excessive emphasis on regional official languages might encourage

tribalism, thereby undermining national unity. For the full response, please see Appendix: Personal Correspondence.

- Professor I.D. Mathumba, former Head of the Department of African Languages, University of South Africa, Xitsonga first language speaker. Date of interview: 30 October 2003.

Professor Nkensani Marivate, Xitsonga first language speaker, PanSALB CEO. Date of interview: 28 July 2004.

Professor Ntlawini Livingstone Nkatini, Xitsonga first language speaker, Research Co-ordinator, University of Limpopo. Date of interview: 29 July 2004.

*Questions asked:* Although Xitsonga is one of the nine indigenous official languages of South Africa, it is still looked down upon by the majority of people as a so-called minority language. For instance, speakers from other ethnic groups refer to Xitsonga as Sechakana, Sekwapa, and words like Machangana wors, Machangana Mielie-Mielie are very common in the urban areas. This perception has had a negative impact on many students studying the language with the result that some have decided against furthering their studies of the language. What do you think should be done to correct the situation? Despite statutory bodies like PanSALB are devoting their energy and enormous financial resources to have indigenous languages such as Xitsonga developed and promoted, the Xitsonga mother-tongue speakers have developed a negative attitude towards their language. Many seem to agree that they should learn to speak English fluently rather than their own language. What do you think are the cause(s) of this negative attitude towards one's language? What measures would you recommend as best remedies to make Xitsonga a developed modern language? What should be done to make Xitsonga to be economically and politically functional – that is, to be on equal footing with languages like English?

*Summary of responses:* Their responses appear in more detail under the sub-topic: 4.6 Lack of Relevance of Indigenous Languages. Despite the difference in the way the three scholars express their thoughts, they all believe that for Xitsonga to be a genuine, national official language, it needs relevance. This language should be the language of business and government, and that Xitsonga first language speakers need

to change their mindset and start developing and promoting their own language. The government should also be seen to encourage the development of the language.

- Professor S.J. (Bertie) Neethling, Department of Xhosa Department, University of the Western Cape. Date of interview: 30 May 2004.

Prof Neethling was approached for the interview after I had read an article: “Mother tongues are dying in South Africa” in the Saturday Star of 8 November 2003.

*Questions asked:* What is the significance of preserving African Languages? What is the role/use of African Languages in a modern democracy like South Africa? Do you think African Languages are under siege? Would you say African Languages are heading to extinction? How can people go about saving them? What is the role of English in a multilingual South Africa? In your opinion, do you think that having 11 (eleven) official languages is realistic?

*Summary of response:* The South African Language Policy is neither realistic nor it is practical. Neethling believes that the Language Policy was a political decision on the part of the government. He also believes that all languages may be called “official”, but some are more official than the others. His full response appears in the Appendix: Personal Correspondence.

- Mr Lesibana Rafapa, PanSALB Focus Area Manager, Pretoria. Date of interview: 18 May 2004.

*Questions asked:* The South African Language Policy has been glorified as one of the best in the continent, yet it seems a bit difficult for organisations like PanSALB to implement it. Why is this so, is a lack of human and financial resources?

*Summary of response:* Rafapa pointed to the lack of both human and financial resources as the main handicap. He also indicated that PanSALB is too small to carry the mandate to preserve, develop and promote all South African languages. His full response appears in Appendix: Personal Correspondence.

- Professor Kwesi Kwaa Prah, Director of Centre for Advanced Study of African Societies (CASAS), Cape Town. Date of interview: 13 October 2003.

*Question asked:* As the Director of a Centre that specialises in the study of Africans, what are your views on Africans who prefer to communicate in English rather than in their mother-tongue?

*Summary of response:* Africans communicating in English rather than in their mother-tongue are colonial creatures reproducing themselves long after the demise of colonialism. His full response appears in sub-topic: 4.1.3 The Consequence of the favourable attitudes to English.

- Professor N Saule, Linguist and Senior Lecturer, Department of African Languages, University of South Africa. Date of interview: 31 October 2003.

Saule and I discussed the motivation for some African parents sending children to ex-model C schools as well as those parents who discourage their children from communicating in indigenous languages. Pertaining to the decline in the number of students studying indigenous languages, Saule referred me to the letter he addressed to the then Minister of Education Kadel Asmal. In this letter, Saule noted the drastic fall in registrations and blamed the government's withdrawal of incentives as the main cause of the problem. It should be noted that African Languages teachers formed the main group of students studying these languages. In his letter, Saule included some statistics to convince the Minister about the decline of the number of students at universities, particularly at Unisa. For a transcript of the letter, see Appendix.

- Mr Console Tleane, Head of Community Media Policy Research Unit, Braamfontein. Date of interview: 14 September 2004.

During my discussion with Tleane, he indicated that the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) policy on language is biased against the so-called minority

indigenous languages. Tleane wrote an opinion piece (see Appendix) in which he interrogates the SABC's unequal treatment of these indigenous languages. He expressed alarm at the SABC's editorial policy's limitations and contradictions where it addresses the issue of language despite its promise to turn the SABC into "a true public broadcaster".

The draft policy on language, according to Tleane, states that the SABC treats "all official languages equitably on all three television services", yet has it respect for indigenous languages, and in particular Xitsonga and Tshivenda, that "continue to suffer unparalleled marginalisation even nine years into a democratic political dispensation". Xitsonga and Tshivenda have "received a raw deal in terms of airtime", especially on television. He revealed that most languages that suffer the SABC's maltreatment are mainly the so-called minority languages. IsiNdebele and Isiswati have also suffered some form of marginalisation.

Turning to the radio stations, Tleane indicated that the SA FM reaches 95% of the potential audience because of resources allocated to it and the attention it gets from the SABC compared the African languages radio stations. It should be realised that the SA FM broadcast in English. To remedy the situation, Tleane suggests that there should be equitable treatment of all official languages, as well as redressing imbalances of the past.

- Ms Noria Mabasa and Ms Grace Mashaba, Chivirika Self-help Project leadership, Xitsonga first language speakers, Malamulele – Limpopo. Date of interview: 16 October 2003

Mr Vincent Sambo, Senior member Chivirika Self-help Project, Xitsonga first language speaker. Date of interview: 17 November 2003.

*Question asked:* Why is it that thousands of Xitsonga first language speakers are so keen to be fluent in English rather than in their mother tongue?

*Summary of response:* Sambo's interview is integrated in the text under sub-topic 4.1.2 The Vatsonga's attitudes towards English, while Mabasa and Mashaba's

interview appears in the Appendix. It was recorded in Xitsonga and I translated this to English. They believe that as long as Xitsonga does not assist in securing employment, there is no reason why anyone should study it. Their experience is that only English is useful when applying for jobs.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CHIVIRIKA SELF-HELP PROJECT MEMBERS.

Date: 27 December 2004

Venue: Mphanbo Village, Malamulele in Limpopo  
Positions of the interviewees:  
Ms Nuria Mabasa: Unemployed teacher  
Ms Grace Tsakani Mashaba: Unemployed teacher  
Mr Vincent Sambo: Security Officer

What follows below is a loose translation of an interview conducted in Xitsonga for the sociolinguistic research project.

We, the Chivirika Self-help project members, Nuria Mabasa, Grace Tsakani Mashaba and Vincent Sambo have met with Mr Jameson Maluleke for the second time concerning our attitudes towards both Xitsonga and English. We met with Mr Maluleke for the first time towards the end of last year (2003) to discuss the same issue. The views included in the study are our own and were expressed during the first interview.

The main question was and still is: Why is it that thousands of Xitsonga mother tongue speakers are so keen to be fluent in English rather than in their own language?

Our response: We reiterate our views that as long as Xitsonga fails to secure employment for all of us, there is no reason why we should study it. Xitsonga is our mother tongue, anyway. In today's world, only English can see you through in the job market.

Our own African government encourages people to speak, read and write in their vernacular, yet it conducts its business in English. Government officials (mostly Africans) send their children to private schools to learn very high standard of English so that when these children finish their schooling, they would not struggle to get employed.

We have not been employed since completing our teachers' training courses six or seven years ago. And the main contributing factors is, we had spent most of our time learning Xitsonga rather than English.

Thanks: Noris Mabasa  
Grace Tsakani Mashaba  
Viccent Sambo

MBURISANO NI SWIRHO  
SWA CHIVIRIKA  
SELF-HELP PROJECT

Mphawu: Mphambo village  
Siku: 27 Mwedya-mbala  
2014

- (a) Mwa Nona Mbaso
- (b) Mwa-Mashaba Grace  
Tsakani
- (c) Mku Vicent Simbo

Hina swirho swa  
projekiti ya Chivirika  
hi hlangothile na Mku  
Jambiro Maluleke natomb  
mayelano ni vuvaleka,  
bya hina ni xixini  
ba kitonga hamba xi  
xi na kinkhezi

Hi hlangele na oke  
Mabuleke so zungula  
hi leme sa 2003  
laha a hi vulaorisa  
ku mhalia ya vaxaka  
bya hixi, ne ti setzim,  
leti mbroru.

Mieheketo leyi beandiyisi  
weke eka buku ya  
ndzawiso i, ya hina  
naswona ya vaxakaleke  
eka hlangeletano lewo  
zungula.

Xivutiso okulu lesu  
na memuntlha ya ha xiku  
tano i kui. Hi kokwala  
ho ku yini vonyinzi  
bya vatsonga byi  
hisekela ho tye.

Zinghezi enatshurini  
ya Xi'bonga

Nhlamulo ya hina: fina  
hi engeta, hi vula  
leavaku loko Xi'bonga  
xi tshama ha ha  
tawile ka ku hi pfuna  
ku Buma ntisho, hi  
vona swinaga pfuna  
nchumu ku xi dyondza  
Ihandla kambi, hi  
Xi'bonga u, swinaga, si  
muvandzi. I zinghezi  
vbera xi nga ku kamisa  
ka ntisho eboni kutshi  
ya nmentha.

Mkomo wa vashu u  
lava lewaka hi dyondza  
hi tsala hi vukwaka

ni ku hlanya Kibungo  
kumbe wond wu mndu  
ni ku fupwisa mndu  
ya wond hi Xinghezi

Uantshela-mpumali va yise  
vona va vana exwile  
lwari laba ku dyondzisi  
waka Xinghezi xh vuphi  
lenyaka loko va heta  
xhoko va vya pfumali  
mnduho.

I ntsewa kumbe rhombu  
wa makumbi hi letile  
te dyondzisi vuthixana  
kumbe a hi se thon wa.  
Xin'wana xh swmelo  
shwisi i ku a hi tele  
rhastri lawo tala  
hi dyondzisi Kibungo  
4

## **APPENDIX: PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE**

### **1. Ms Mareli Esterhuysen (Publishing Assistant, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria)**

From: Mareli Esterhuysen  
Sent: 14 December 2004 04:12 PM  
To: 'jamesonm'  
Subject: RE: publishing

Dear Mr Maluleke

I think it would be better if you perhaps use the following quotation:

“Though publishing companies would love to publish more indigenous languages, they are often unable to do so. This is mainly due to not large enough budgets available to them, and because the readers prefer to read English books instead of their own indigenous languages. (Often readers want to improve their command of the English language by doing this.) Sadly, this causes English to become the main market that is to be catered for.”

Regards,

Máreli Esterhuysen

### **2. Norman Fairclough (Internationally renowned linguist)**

Date: Sat, 4 Dec 2004 09:25:15 -0000  
From: “Fairclough, Norman” <eianlf@exchange.lancs.ac.uk>  
To: “jamesonm” <jamesonm@mail.citizen.co.za>  
Subject: RE: language and power

Dear Jameson Maluleke

I am sending what I have available electronically - the Preface to the second edition of 2001, plus the new chapter in that edition. You asked for a shortened CV too - attached. Do keep in touch.

Best wishes for your work.

Norman Fairclough

**3. Cedric Ginsberg (Unisa Lecturer, Department of Semitics)**

Date: Thu, 21 Oct 2004 13:33:27 +0200

From: "C J Ginsberg" <GINSBCJ@unisa.ac.za>

To: <jamesonm@citizen.co.za>

Subject: Hebrew and Yiddish

Dear Jameson

As I understand it, the question you ask is: "How is it that Hebrew and Yiddish have managed to survive and prosper despite the impact of a language like English, which gained the status of an international language of communication?"

There is no easy answer to this question. Let us first have a look at the two languages separately.

Hebrew is an ancient language. It is a language that evolved a script relatively early in its development. The original text of the Bible is written in Hebrew. The Bible, and particularly the Pentateuch (The Five Books of Moses) together with other texts in Hebrew form the foundation in Judaism of a complex legal system known as the Halachah. In Deut. 6:6-7, there is the injunction that the laws of the Bible must be taken seriously and transmitted from generation to generation.

“Take to heart these instructions which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up”. (Tanakh: Jewish Publication Society Translation, 1985).

Thus there has always been a religious requirement for Jews to know Hebrew so that they can read the Bible and the other texts all of which are regarded as sacred. Because of this obligation of Jews to study the Bible, larger numbers of Jews were literate (in Hebrew) than many peoples. This was true particularly in Europe in the first millennium and during the Middle Ages.

Yiddish is believed to be about 1000 years old. The basic structure of Yiddish is similar to “mitteldeutsch”, a medieval dialect of German spoken in southern Germany. The theory is that Jews from western Europe migrated over several hundreds of years towards eastern Europe. They reinforced the use of this language in Eastern Europe, until it became the vernacular used by the Jews of Eastern Europe. by the 17th century Eastern Europe became the largest concentration of Jews in Europe. Yiddish was used as the vernacular for interpersonal communication. Hebrew was used as the language of religious communication - when rabbis wrote responsa to one another to answer questions on Halachic matters (matters of Jewish law). The Hebrew alphabet was used (naturally) for Hebrew but it was also used as the script for Yiddish.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries - there was a further development. The Zionist movement adopted Hebrew as the language of the future Jewish state. Yiddish was adopted by the secular movement called the “Bund”. This was a movement that believed that the future of the Jews of Eastern Europe was to be found in Eastern Europe (unlike the Zionist movement which said the future of the Jews was in Israel). The Bund was a “people’s” movement, and adopted Socialism as its political credo. It was very much concerned with the Workers in general and Jewish Workers in particular. This political dimension became a powerful force in the 20th century.

The second wave of immigration to Israel 1905-1914, had as one of its fundamental goals, the introduction of Hebrew as a modern spoken language of the Jews in

Palestine. There was a fierce polemic that emerged between those who supported Hebrew and those who supported Yiddish. Hebrew won out.

Of course 80% of the 11 million Yiddish speakers of Eastern Europe perished in the Hitler's death camps in Poland. So the language struggles to survive. There are today only small pockets of people who still use the language. The interest in Yiddish is mainly academic - people studying the history of Eastern European Jewry who need to access material written in that language. There is a vast corpus of material written in Yiddish, historical documents, newspapers, cultural journals, sociological and historical studies, an extensive literature, prose and poetry.

So, the question of how do Hebrew and Yiddish survive despite the formidable impact of English - the reason is perhaps to be found in political and national forces - as well as a long tradition of deep concern with the written word.

I hope that this has been of use to you. Should you wish to have clarification on any aspect - please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards

Cedric Ginsberg

#### **4. Stuart Grobler (Banking Council Spokesman)**

Date: Tue, 23 Nov 2004 11:42:20 +0200

From: "Stuart Grobler" <stuartg@banking.org.za>

To: <jamesonm@mail.citizen.co.za>

Subject: Re: issuing a check in African Languages

Issuing a cheque in languages other than English will open the way for fraud, in that the teller would not be readily competent in an African language and the computer system may not accept it, Grobler, (personal communication 05/01/04)

However, as a more general comment the development of indigenous languages, it is just not economically viable to develop the computer systems and staff competencies for every indigenous language, especially considering how much of the development of the systems is done in the western world.

**5. Professor Jonathon Hyslop (Wiser, Witwatersrand University Johannesburg)**

Date: 31 July 2003

From: "Jonathan Hyslop" <hyslopj@wiser.wits.ac.za

To: "jamesonm" <jameson@mail.citizen.co.za

Subject: Re: sociolinguistics

Jameson

answers given below

two books which you might find interesting are

Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities

and

Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism

Best Wishes

Jon Hyslop

>\* do you think africans' abhorance of their own indigenous languages is a miniature example that african nationalism, socialism or marxism are on the wane?

My view is that economic pressures are decisive. Most desirable jobs in SA involve knowing English. People will tend to opt to learn languages that will get them work and economic opportunities. The cultural influence may of the media also plays a role. I think African-American cultural influence may be important because it does represent a strong black identity, but also an English speaking culture, which means that people don't necessarily feel they have to choose between English and a sense of 'blackness'. It is thus quite possible that people might have a strong sense of racial identity while still adopting the use of English to a greater extent than before. African nationalism in SA has not historically put all that much influence on language questions; political conferences and publications tend to be in English. This may be because of fears that using one African language would imply prejudice against other African languages. (compare the case of Tanzania,; Swahili was convenient as a national language because it was used as a second language by a wide range of ethnic groups but was not identified strongly with any ethnic politics; however this an unusual situation) Marxism and Socialism in fact have not historically been very strong on the preservation of indigenous languages. Although Marxists have sometimes supported the rights of indigenous languages, there is also the side of Marxism which has stressed the breaking down of international languages such as Esperanto. In the Communist Manifesto Marx sees the creation of a 'world literature' as positive.

>\* do you think that SA's embracing of globalisation will accelerate the gradual disappearance of indigenous languages?

not necessarily. there are a plenty of examples of languages remaining robust and widely used alongside a more widespread language of commerce etc. In the Netherlands for example, one finds that because it is small country with a lot of foreign trade a very large number of people speak English, French or German in their business activities but still are firmly committed to Dutch for domestic purposes. In South America some native American languages have survived although Spanish is dominant etc. I would think that the smaller the number of speakers of a language, the more at risk it is from outside pressures.

>\* what can indigenous mother tongue speakers do to prevent the dominance of English in the country?

Basically by utilising the constitutional protection of the 11 languages to insist on their use in government offices and state media. The constitution provides these rights but can only be enforced if people take case of infringement of their rights to court, and also place demands on political leaders to take note of these rights in their practical policies. However in my view pursuit of this objective needs to be tempered by practical and political considerations. English is going to be dominant in the world economy for the foreseeable future, so school children will need to learn English as well as their language if they are not to be disadvantaged in the job market. Also politically there is a danger that an excessive emphasis on a regional language could inadvertently encourage and undermine national unity.

**6. Prof D.I. Mathumba (former Head of African Languages Department, Unisa).**

Date: Wed, 17 Nov 2004 06:54:44 +0200

From: "Mathumba" <mawewe@mweb.co.za>

To: "jamesonm" <jamesonm@mail.citizen.co.za>

Subject: Re: xitsalwana

Mr Maluleke

Permission is hereby granted for you to use or quote my ideas in your dissertation.

Prof DI Mathumba

**7. Mr Justice Ndabane (Sasavona Publishers and Booksellers assistant manager)**

Sasavona Publishers and Booksellers assistant manager Justice Ndabane pointed out that Sasavona, (which publishes mostly Xitsonga literature) is currently facing a very difficult time with regard to new books publishing as a result of lack of financial capital to rejuvenate the business, large quantities of unsaleable books, lack of Outcome Based Education (OBE) books published by Sasavona and lack of readership.

## **8. Prof. S.J. (Bertie) Neethling (Xhosa Department, UWC)**

Dear Jameson

My apologies for the delay in my response: I was under extreme pressure with many things. Kindly note that I respond in my personal capacity. Of course my opinion is informed by my experience, exposure and knowledge of the African languages context in SA for roughly 35years.

Significance of preserving African languages:

Well, any language is a cultural heritage and as such a treasure. That is really not negotiable and does not need an argument.

Use/role of African languages:

People may differ on this. The question is: should they be used for all the higher functions in language? I have my doubts. Is it, for example, necessary to develop say Xhosa as an academic language? I don't think so. One would be isolated in the academic world. It is, however, important for the citizens of SA to be served in their own languages by government departments that render a service, as well as private concerns, like banks, that deal with the public. At that level, it makes sense to develop the African languages and to train people to use them in service delivery contexts. This is a form of empowerment.

African languages under siege:

There are many reasons: one is certainly the turmoil in the teaching profession. Students of African languages used to see that as an attractive career, but with retrenchments and deployment it no longer is. Coupled with that is the government's preferential treatment regarding studies in the natural sciences, mathematics, engineering, technology, etc. A strong signal is going out from government that we need graduates and trained people in those fields, not in the Social Sciences. Students get the message.

Going to extinction:

No, I don't think so. There are too many speakers of those languages (not including Venda and Tsonga who are relatively small). They will always remain a medium of communication if then only in certain contexts. As long as people speak the language, it will not die out. But one needs to be wary all the same.

Saving them?

Well, no easy answers here. The aspect of multilingualism should be encouraged everywhere, recognising the fact that one reaches out to others by learning his/her language. The role of language practitioners should be emphasised and departments of African languages should think innovatively about marketing their languages and courses. One should look at the role of language in the media, translation, interpreting, etc and set up courses like that opening up employment opportunities beyond teaching. I do believe that the need for qualified teachers will soon manifest itself again, and that might turn the tide.

Role of English:

Let it be said loud and clear that English can do what no other language can in this country, and the sooner everybody realises that, the better. It hangs together with the next point: the world has become a small place, the so-called 'global village', and SA

is part of that and needs to be part of that, or else we will not survive. And our gateway to that global village is English, whether we like it or not. And the more affluent society becomes, the more attractive English becomes. And of course this impacts negatively on the African languages, and will continue to do so. There is rightly or wrongly (and I believe rightly) more prestige and status connected with English than with the other languages.

#### 11 language policy:

I was a sceptic from the start, and now I am a confirmed sceptic: it is not realistic, nor is it practicable. For that very reason the authors of the constitution wrote in the clause (wisely, I think) that citizens have the right to speak their own languages 'where practicable'. In many contexts it simply is not pragmatic or practicable to insist on language rights. It was a political decision at the time, and had to be taken, but it was not a practicable one. They may all be called 'official' but some are certainly more official than others. And this covers your next question: it is all well and good to hail the policy 'as the best in Africa', but the implementation is far more difficult than merely deciding on a policy. It is 10 years down the line and very little has happened regarding policy. It is slowly developing now, but the implementation: that is the problem. I personally do not like coercion or force regarding language matters: people should be persuaded and convinced that a course is the desired one. And of course government must have the political will to see this through, but it is at this point where globalisation and other realities impact negatively on implementation.

One can talk about these issues for days, and not everybody agrees. My own feeling is that English should be retained and encouraged as the 'global language' enabling SA citizens to interact with the world. At the same time the 'ordinary' people should be empowered by developing their languages to such an extent that they can live a meaningful life using it as a means of communication, and their interests should be served in the language of their choice.

I hope this helps to set you thinking. All the best regarding your studies.

Bertie Neethling

Prof. SJ (Bertie) Neethling  
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UWC  
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Tel.(021)959-2358(w)  
(021)903-3218(h)  
Fax(021) 959-1251  
e-mail : BNeethling@uwc.ac.za

**9. Mr Lesibana Rafapa (PanSALB Focus Area Manager).**

Sent: Tuesday, November 16, 2004 2:26 PM

To: Lesibana Rafapa

Subject: policy implementation

November 16/2004

From: "Lesibana Rafapa" <Lesibana@pansalb.org.za>

To: "jamesonm" <jamesonm@mail.citizen.co.za>

Subject: RE: policy implementation All headers

All attachments

RE: policy implementation

Below is my amended version of your paragraph.

PanSALB Focus Area Manager, Lesibana Rafapa (personal communication 18 May 2004), has other views as to why implementation has not been successful. According to Rafapa of PanSALB, it is because PanSALB does not have the human and financial resources to deal with implementation. According to him Government had not considered the immensity of PanSALB mandate when they budgeted for resources.

Also there is no infrastructure in place to make our language policy a success; and that the PanSALB staff structure is defective, and is too small to deliver on the huge national mandate it faces. Furthermore the question of governance should be sorted out as to whether PanSALB as a constitutional body should report directly to Parliament, or be dwarfed to the lower level of operating through a Government Department.

**10. Prof N. Saule (Dept of African Languages, Unisa).**

Date: Wed, 17 Nov 2004 13:48:47 +0200

From: "N Saule" <SAULEN@unisa.ac.za>

To: <jamesonm@citizen.co.za>

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

You are hereby notified that Jameson Maluleke is granted permission to quote or refer to my letter to the then Minister of Education - Kader Asmal in 2001.

The Department of African Languages has a copy of that letter in its records.

Thanks

NS

**11. Mr Console Tleane (Head of the Community Media Policy Research Unit)**

Hi Jameson!

Here is the article as promised. You might consider buying the book that is mentioned at the end of the article. It addresses the issue of language within SABC extensively. If interested call Khosi at (011) 403-8403.

SABC'S DRAFT LANGUAGE POLICY

The South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) draft editorial policies are full of promises that, if fulfilled, might assist in turning the SABC into a true public broadcaster. However, upon closer scrutiny, one discovers serious limitations and contradictions. One of these policies addresses the question of language.

The suggested policy on language has to be examined against the background of the SABC's recent practice of cost recovery (implemented in the name of stabilisation) and the treatment which some African languages have been receiving at the hands of the broadcaster.

The draft policy on language states that '(the SABC) treat(s) all official languages equitably on (all three) television services.' This policy intention would ordinarily be welcomed if the situation within the SABC was characterised by some form of respect for all languages. Currently, two of the country's eleven official languages, Tshivenda and Xitsonga, continue to suffer unparalleled marginalisation even nine years into a new political dispensation whose Constitution is premised on, among other things, equal treatment of all eleven languages.

Except for the drama *Muvhango* on SABC2, Tshivenda and Xitsonga receive no 'respectable' airplay on television. Neither enjoys news broadcasts, or any major programme broadcast, which means that there has not been an attempt to develop them into languages for 'sophisticated' discussions. Hopefully, the recent announcement that the two languages will soon be used for news will serve as a first step to address this anomaly.

Other languages that have suffered some form of marginalisation are IsiNdebele and Siswati. It is only recently that we have news in these two languages. And it ends there, except for continuity presenters' sound bites in-between programmes.

It must however be pointed out that even other African languages do not receive the same treatment as does English. Besides the fact that English is currently the

dominant languages in all of the SABC's three free-to air television channels there is also evidence of this dominance when it comes to radio.

A comparison of the English channel SA FM's programmes and the resources that are allocated to it, and its spectrum, with that of other channels, particularly African language situations, reveals huge disparities. Not only does SA FM reach 95% of potential radio listeners, which is a demonstration of resources allocated to it and the attention that it receives from the SABC hierarchy, SA FM's facilities and infrastructure place it in a more advantageous position to produce better quality programming than other stations. For instance, SA FM has got more current affairs shows than other stations. Those in the field of radio broadcasting would know that current affairs programmes are more expensive than other formats. Shockingly, the Afrikaans Radio Sonder Grense occupies the second spot in terms of coverage. It stands at 87% reach of all potential listeners.

It is therefore disturbing that Africa language stations do not receive adequate funds whereas their English and Afrikaans language counterparts receive adequate resources to effectively make them full-spectrum stations within the SABC stable.

The second major point that can be raised against the intended policies is the subtle, yet dangerous implication to uphold 'cultural and linguistic purism'. The policy states that 'the SABC strives to ensure that they (official languages) are all spoken correctly'. The policy further states that 'more formal language would be used in news programmes, whereas more conversational, colloquial or everyday language would be used in drama'.

Some caution needs to be sounded here. There must be every attempt made to avoid cultural purism whereby failure to 'pronounce properly' can amount to a presenter being seen as not upholding the purity of the language. Lessons must be learnt from the case of former news presenter, Augustine Masilela-Chuene, who resigned (or was she dismissed?) after allegedly failing to improve her pronunciation of IsiZulu

Whereas denying that Masilela-Chuene was dismissed at the insistence of King Goodwill Zwelithini the SABC did admit that 'complaints were received regarding

the newsreader's pronunciation of the Zulu language ... over the past 12 months (of 2002)' (SABC media statement, 14 October 2002).

Such acts and approach to language, which reduce communication to some form of 'cultural', and worse still 'ethnic', purifying exercise are not only dangerous but can only serve to perpetuate the tribalistic idiosyncrasies and chauvinism developed and chauvinism developed and inculcated by apartheid.

But perhaps the most contentious issue is reference to equitable treatment to languages. At face value some may think that this is a taste of good things to come. However, a critical assessment of the obtaining situation, plus an understanding of how the concept of equitability is used in South Africa, suggest a totally different picture. As the policy states 'the term equitable means just, fair, and reasonable, not necessarily equal treatment'. This, for us, is placing the cart before the horse. If we take the examples of the two repeatedly cited languages in this article, that is, Tshivenda and Xitsonga, we will agree that these languages have received a raw deal in terms of airtime, especially on television.

We do know that there can be a suggestion that statistically the speakers of these languages constitute part of the minority linguistic groups in the country. An equitable treatment will mean that these languages will receive treatment according to, we think, the number of their speakers. For us this is mechanistic, a historical approach to a problem that requires a totally different solution.

It is our considered opinion that before applying equitability the SABC needs to redress the past and current imbalances. This would mean that for sometime the broadcaster will have to consciously and deliberately privilege marginalised languages until there is evidence of the playing fields having been levelled. It is only after this, when it can be argued that all languages are on the same platform to 'compete', that there can be consideration for equitable treatment. Otherwise, how else does the SABC explain the continuing privilege that English (and Afrikaans) enjoys at the expense of other languages even though it is not the most spoken language in the country?

A more prudent approach will be for equitability to be preceded by redress, meaning that the imbalances of the past, which continue to exist, are addressed before there can be any claim to equality. Redress should be the overriding principle that must inform the language policy and all other policies. We believe that once this has been established as a principle the operational mechanisms will be much easier to actualise.

Finally, it means that the SABC will have to privilege marginalised languages on television and African language stations, particularly those that broadcast through the medium of the marginalised languages. Language equity can only be achieved once there has been the levelling of the 'playing fields'. Perhaps this will assist the SABC in its endeavours to receive funding from the government's position which is to avoid funding for social services such as public broadcasting.

(Console Tleane is the Head of the Community Media Policy Research Unit, a joint initiative between the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and the National Community Radio Forum. He is the co-author of a recently published book titled Public Broadcasting in the era of cost recovery: A critique of the SABC's crisis of accountability. The article from this book and the submission in response to draft policies that he prepared for the FXI )



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- Lack of OBE (Outcome Based Education) books published by Sasavona. Most of our current stocks need to be improved and revised in order to meet the OBE criteria
- Lack of readership

Hoping that the above information will be helpful in your research work.

Yours sincerely

  
**JS NDABANE (Mr)**  
ASSISTANT MANAGER

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The Minister of Education  
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Dear Mr Minister

First of all, I wish to thank you that despite your crowded schedule, you have taken time off to read this letter

I am writing on behalf of the APSA (Academic and Professional Staff Association) members in the Department of African Languages to communicate to you their concerns about the plight of African Languages in the department. Whilst it is important to mention that UNISA is the only university with a department that accommodates all African languages spoken in South Africa, it is equally significant to note that the fact that these languages exist under one department is of strategic relevance not only to the university but also to the country as a whole. On a number of occasions the Honourable Minister has mentioned that it is in the interest of his Department that these languages should develop so that they can enjoy equal status with the developed languages of the world. However, new developments militating against African languages threaten to decimate such thoughts and impressions, and that is our concern. This comes at a time when all and sundry have realised that the heart of the South African dream, the African Renaissance is in African languages.

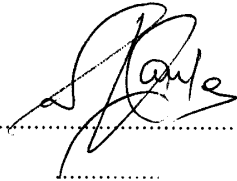
Some problems facing African Languages have been identified and are being addressed by the department, however, there are external factors which can only be addressed with the help of the Department of Education and with the intervention of Your Honour. One such problem has to do with the decreasing number of students registering for African Languages at UNISA. The following statistics show how our numbers suddenly took a nose dive since 1998.

|              | 1997          | 1998          | 1999          | 2000         | 2001         |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| N.SOTHO      | 6 841         | 6 450         | 4 033         | 1 797        | 967          |
| S.SOTHO      | 1 059         | 897           | 462           | 278          | 127          |
| SHONA        | 224           | 250           | 105           | 108          | 49           |
| SWATI        | 985           | 670           | 303           | 130          | 50           |
| TSONGA       | 1 667         | 1 617         | 978           | 331          | 295          |
| TSWANA       | 1 922         | 1 630         | 954           | 545          | 325          |
| VENDA        | 1 564         | 1 047         | 553           | 187          | 108          |
| XHOSA        | 3 773         | 3 615         | 1 970         | 856          | 338          |
| ZULU         | 7 426         | 5 279         | 2 705         | 1 303        | 772          |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>25 461</b> | <b>21 437</b> | <b>12 063</b> | <b>5 535</b> | <b>3 031</b> |

It is apparent that the downward trend is an abnormal one, yet there is a growing need for these languages to be developed and the role of UNISA in this terrain cannot be overemphasised. The root cause for this decrease has been identified as the removal of the government incentive for teachers especially, that for every four courses a teacher passed, his/her salary increased by a notch. Since a large pool of our students comes from the teaching fraternity, the withdrawal of such an incentive discourages them to register. It should be mentioned that the incentive had an overarching impact of not only improving the qualifications of teachers and empowering them academically, but also influenced the standard of tuition.

It is our firm belief that the intervention of Your Honour by reinstating the government incentive would assist in bringing back the numbers. Your Honour will agree with us that South Africa needs an educated public. Needless to say that this is one of the objectives of your Department and it is fully supported by the Department of African Languages at UNISA.

The undersigned Members of the Steering Committee wish to pledge their support for such a move by your Department and would like to thank you once again for considering this request.

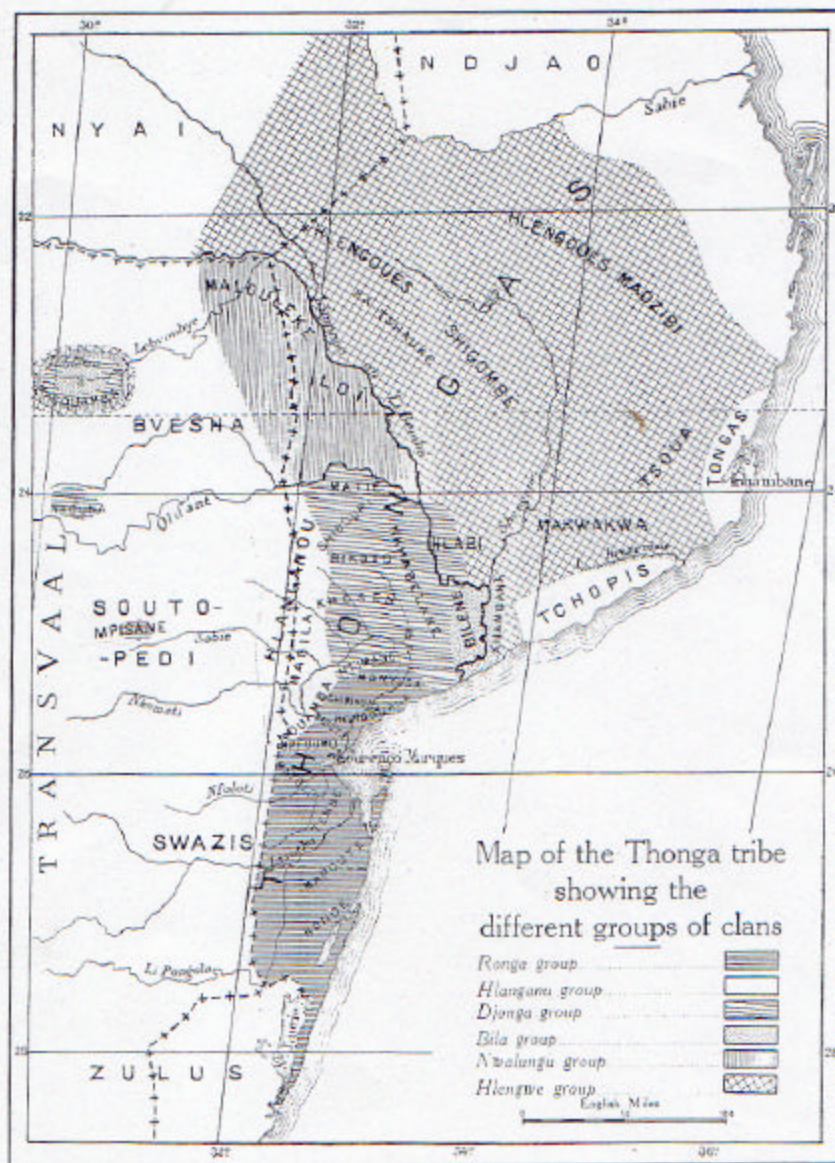


I have given  
J. Maluleke permission  
to use this letter  
in his research.



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## APPENDIX: MAP



This map (see page 16) shows the distribution of the Thonga population thirty years ago. Since then a considerable emigration into the Transvaal has taken place (p. 19), and the Low Country of the Leydenburg and Zoutpansberg districts, which is almost entirely white on the map, ought to show many coloured spots representing Thonga villages.

Source: Junod, H.A. 1927. The Life of a South African Tribe