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## Indigenous languages and the media in South Africa

This article explores the status of South Africa's indigenous languages and how they are being used in the media. More specifically, the performance of these languages in the print media, the broadcasting media and the Internet, is outlined. This is done against the backdrop of the South African Constitution, Section 6, which entrenches eleven official languages. Contrary to the Constitution's provisions, it is found that the indigenous languages are achieving varying levels of success within the media. The reasons for this are outlined. Finally, the effects of globalisation on the indigenous languages within the media are assessed.

### Inheemse tale en die media in Suid-Afrika

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die stand van die inheemse Suid-Afrikaanse tale en hul gebruik in die media. In die besonder word die prestasie van hierdie tale in die gedrukte media, die uitsaaiwese en die internet in breë trekke weergegee. Hierdie ondersoek word gedoen teen die agtergrond van Artikel 6 van die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet wat elf amptelike tale verskans. In teenstelling met die verwagtinge van die Grondwet wat in hierdie artikel uiteengesit word, toon die ondersoek dat die verskillende tale nie almal ewe suksesvol in die media presteer nie. Redes vir hierdie ongelyke prestasie word aangedui. In die laaste instansie word bestek van die invloed van globalisering op die inheemse tale opgeneem.

**S**ection 6 (1) of the Constitution of South Africa states:

The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

Against the backdrop of the Constitution, in particular Section 6 (2), which calls for the elevation of the status of South Africa's indigenous languages, this article seeks to explore how those languages are used within the media. The print media (particularly newspapers), the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and the internet are explored. The role of indigenous languages in these media should be seen as vital for language development and enhancement.

In terms of methodology, this article will, as a point of departure, make use of statistics published by Kamwangamalu (2000). Contemporary media statistics from television viewing schedules will also be used. These statistics will be compared with those presented by Kamwangamalu. The language policy of the SABC will be analysed to assess to what extent it is being put into practice. As far as newspaper publications are concerned, a historical perspective will be presented in order to show the decline of the isiXhosa newspaper industry over time. For the internet, the Litnet site<sup>1</sup> will be used as an example to show the visibility of indigenous languages within this medium.

It is not unusual for languages other than English to be used in contemporary media such as the internet, radio and television. While English is the majority language on the internet, for example, it only constitutes 57.4% of the content. An estimated 96 million people make use of the Net to promote their own languages. 20% are Japanese; 14.6% German; 9.8% French; 4.5% Dutch and 5.9% Italian. These figures seem to vary in accordance with the reason for using the internet, with the Global Reach figures for business, rather than for personal language usage, being reflected as follows: English 35.8%; Chinese 14.1%; Japanese 9.6%; Spanish 9%; German 7.3%; Korean 4.1%; French 3.8%; Portuguese 3.5%; Italian 3.3%; Russian 2.5% and Dutch 1.8%.<sup>2</sup>

1 Cf <[www.LitNet.co.za](http://www.LitNet.co.za)>

2 Cf <[www.globalreach.biz/7](http://www.globalreach.biz/7)> Statistics: Global Reach, Amps, 1998.

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According to Warschauer (2000: 4), in terms of language, identity and the Internet, there is a present “shift from globalization to re-localization [...] as corporations seek to maximize their market share by shaping their products for local conditions”. He points out that “the initial wave of globalization” witnessed vertical control from Cable News Networks, but that this is changing due to re-localisation. This “re-localisation” will clearly have implications for language usage in media advertising in multilingual South Africa. This aspect will be explored later in this article, which will show that it is primarily radio and television that are being used to strengthen the indigenous languages, partly by means of advertising in them.

According to Warschauer (2000: 6), one of the most developed cases of the use of the internet to preserve and strengthen an indigenous language has occurred in Hawaii:

In 1994, Hawaiian educators established Leoki (Powerful Voice), a graphical bulletin board system with 100% Hawaiian language content, menus, and interface [...] throughout the immersion school system.

The question then for South Africa is: How are our marginalised indigenous languages responding to the challenge posed by media such as the internet and by globalisation? Wasserman (2003: 15) concludes as follows:

Hoewel die internet dus in Suid-Afrika reeds potensiaal toon vir die bemagtiging van minderheidstale, die uitbou van veeltaligheid en die geskep van gemeenskaplike virtuele ruimtes, word hierdie potensiaal nog aan bande gelê deur materiële faktore.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, access to the internet is totally dependent on economic mobility and it remains out of the reach of many poor South Africans. This is also true of media such as radio, television and newspapers, though arguably to a lesser extent.

3 Although the Internet in South Africa thus already offers potential for the empowerment of minority languages, the development of multilingualism, and the creation of shared virtual spaces, this potential remains unrealised due to material constraints.

## 1. Language use and newspapers

In days gone by it was newspapers which allowed indigenous languages to come into their own in southern Africa. Newspapers made up the centre, the core of African language usage in the 1800s. The most developed language during this time was isiXhosa, as the Xhosa people were the first South African group to be exposed to the influence of missionaries, colonisation and the written word. Today, this centre no longer holds. It has shifted away from newspapers, primarily to radio, and to some extent to television. This is true of all South Africa's indigenous languages, with the exception of Afrikaans (as daily newspapers such as *Die Beeld* and the Sunday newspaper *Rapport* still flourish). Let us briefly consider the case of Xhosa usage in newspapers.

The first time Xhosa was printed was in 1823 when the Reverends John Ross and John Bennie from the Glasgow Missionary Society set up a small printing press in the Thyume valley. John Bennie had already reduced the language to writing. This era (1860-1910) is associated with the emergence of newspapers in Xhosa. Through this medium, newly-literate Xhosa writers, many of them converts of Ntsikana (for example Soga) were encouraged to submit poetry, much of it Christian in nature (cf Kaschula 2003: 7). According to Shepherd (1945: 3), Ross brought with him "a small Ruthven printing press, with a quantity of type, paper and ink". This marked the beginning of what is now the Lovedale Press.

Opland (1996: 113) relates that:

[b]etween 1837 and 1909, eight Xhosa newspapers or journals appeared, all but one of them ceasing publication in or before 1909. The first was *Umsbumayeli wendaba* (The Preacher of the News), published by the Wesleyans in Grahamstown: 15 issues appeared between July 1837 and April 1841. It was succeeded by *Isibuto samavo* (A Collection of Stories), also published by the Wesleyans, seven issues of which appeared from January 1843 to July 1844. Lovedale's first journal was the short-lived *Ikwezi*, named after the star known in English as Venus (four issues of which appeared between August 1844 and December 1845). It was followed briefly by the Wesleyans' Monthly Messenger, *Isitunywa senyanga* (five issues in 1850) and by Lovedale's more substantial *Indaba* (News), which ran to 31 issues between August 1862 and February 1865. In October 1870, Lovedale commenced publishing *Isigidimi samaXosa* (The Xhosa Express), which in time became the first journal controlled by a Xhosa editor; by the time it ceased publication in December 1888, 294 issues had appeared. During *Isigidimi's* run, in November 1884,

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*Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion) made its appearance in King William's Town, and *Imvo* in turn witnessed the emergence of its bitter rival *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People) in East London in November 1897.

*Izwi* closed down in April 1909. Thereafter only *Imvo Zabantsundu* remained, operating as a weekly publication from offices in King William's Town. During the 1970s the paper ran into financial difficulties and was taken over by the East London-based English newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*. It continued to be published until the 1980s, when it was discontinued. All that remains now of the isiXhosa newspaper industry is a number of community publications, as well as a weekly supplement to the *Daily Dispatch* entitled *Ndabazethu*. This paper publishes local news in English and Xhosa as well as letters in Xhosa, and also carries an advertising section. The case of Zulu, for example, is similar, with only one newspaper remaining, namely, *Ilanga laseNatal*.

The mainstream newspaper industry has thus almost ceased to exist as far as the indigenous languages are concerned. The major media impetus remains centred on radio and television, which will now be considered.

## 2. Language use and the SABC

Taking into account the requirements of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, the Broadcasting Act, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), as well as the Constitution, the policy of the SABC recognises the importance of languages in promoting democracy. It asserts that "...freedom of expression can only be recognised fully when every South African can inform and be informed in their language of choice". The document<sup>4</sup> further states that language will be instrumental in growing and developing our new democracy.

In its statement of commitment, the SABC commits itself, among other things, to the following: providing top quality programmes in all eleven official languages across radio and television; maintaining distinct and separate radio services in all these languages; integrating South African Sign Language into broadcasting, and striving to include the Khoi, Nama and San languages.

4 Available at <[www.sabc.co.za](http://www.sabc.co.za)>

In terms of the SABC's operating principles, it is noted that languages are grouped so as to make "the most cost-effective use of scarce resources". This is especially important if one views these so-called "languages" as constructs of apartheid. Many of them are mutually intelligible. Alexander (2002: 93) clearly argues this point and calls for "harmonisation" of these "languages". However, in doing this, the SABC runs the risk of going against the Constitution, which recognises mutually intelligible dialects such as Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele and Swati as separate and individual languages, each with its own language rights.

The SABC also commits itself to the combined use of unilingual and multilingual programming, as well as to exploring the use of subtitles. Furthermore, the SABC commits itself to providing both radio and television news bulletins in all official languages. It recognises that Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Swati and Ndebele are the most marginalised languages.

## 2.1 Television

The policy espoused by the SABC seems to be a good one. However, what is happening in reality? Does the present scenario reflect the policy? In 1998, research by Kamwangamalu (2000: 54) found that not enough was being done by the SABC to facilitate language equality. With regard to television, and the time allotted to the various languages, Kamwangamalu (2000: 54) concluded as follows:

[T]he air time on South African television is strikingly uneven, with English taking up 20 855 (91,95%) minutes of the total weekly air time; Afrikaans 1285 (5,66%), and all the nine African languages a mere 520 (2,29%) minutes [...]. Some African languages such as Venda, Ndebele, Swati and Tsonga [...] received no air time at all in the week 10-16 May 1998.

Kamwangamalu points out that these four minority languages received fifteen minutes of airtime every alternate week. This scenario was indeed a bleak one. However, let us now turn to 2004, six years later, in the context of the SABC's new language policy.

Programming on the SABC's three television channels still seems to be overwhelmingly in English. Channel 3 is reserved for English programming only; channel 2 contains a fair amount of Afrikaans, while channel 1 contains more local content and news bulletins in indigenous languages. However, there has been one important change since 1998,

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namely, daily news bulletins in the languages which were previously only represented bi-weekly. Swati and Ndebele share a daily ten-minute news bulletin on channel 1, meaning that they receive five minutes each per day, amounting to thirty minutes per week. Tshivenda and Xitsonga share a thirty-minute daily news bulletin on channel 2, meaning that they now each receive a total of one hour and forty-five minutes programming time per week. Furthermore, a multilingual news bulletin has been added to the programming, providing two-and-a-half hours of multilingual viewing. Multilingual viewing is also provided for in the daily local soap operas, with subtitles, as well as in magazine programmes. Provision has also been made for sign language to be incorporated into the English news bulletins. In terms of the SABC's "grouping" of languages, Swati and Ndebele still remain the most marginalised. They share a ten-minute news bulletin, whereas their sister Nguni languages, Xhosa and Zulu, have their own thirty-minute news bulletins, though on alternate days.

Although the three channels may now contain more local material than they did in 1998, it is still almost exclusively presented in English. However, the growth of multilingualism is noticeable. Is it possible, as South Africa's languages begin to share spaces, vocabulary and syntax, that the SABC will move in this direction, ignoring the debates around standard language usage? According to the programme *Take Five*, on SABC 1 (24 September 2004), township lingo is now fast taking over as the language of advertising. *Isicantbo* is indeed emerging as a *lingua franca* and is becoming increasingly visible on SABC 1 and 2, especially in magazine programmes such as *Take Five*, *Selimathunzi*, and *Zola 7*, with mixing of languages in programmes such as *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Muvhango*. This is in line with the SABC's language policy, which states:

[The] SABC recognises that languages are dynamic, continually developing and adapting to circumstances; language in broadcasting should therefore take account of the evolution of languages.

However, at present this is limited to magazine programmes and soap operas. News bulletins are presented in the standard language.

Although SABC 3 remains exclusively English, the policy document does acknowledge that the equitable treatment of language is "achieved across the television portfolio as a whole, not on each individual channel".

It would seem that, generally speaking, the SABC has moved, and is moving in the right direction, though a great deal remains to be done.

The most recent and important development is the SABC's request, made by former CEO Peter Matlare, for two regional channels to be added. The organisation has requested ICASA to grant it permission to establish channels 4 and 5, with the primary aim of providing indigenous languages with more airtime. Channel 4 would cater for the North-Western part of the country, operating in Sotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and to some extent English and Afrikaans. Channel 5 would cater for the South-Eastern part of the country, providing airtime for the Nguni languages, with limited emphasis on English and Afrikaans (SABC 3 News, 7pm, 5 October 2004). If approved, this would greatly change the nature of television broadcasting in South Africa, restoring this medium as a centre for indigenous languages, in the same way as radio.

## 2.2 Radio

Radio far surpasses any other form of media, including television, when it comes to the equitable use of indigenous languages. Ironically, this is as a result of apartheid policies, which saw independent homelands creating their own radio stations. These operated in indigenous languages, for example, Radio Ciskei, Radio Transkei, as well as the Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Corporation. Indigenous languages and local programming became entrenched in the broadcasting scenario in South Africa from the early 1970s. Today, the SABC boasts a total of fifteen public radio stations, attracting 19,8 million listeners. The isiXhosa station, Umhlobo Wenene, the Sepedi station, Thobela FM, and the isiZulu station, Ukhozi FM, are highly successful. Ukhozi, for example, has 6 million listeners (SABC 3, News, 30 September 2004). The language policy document issued by the SABC acknowledges the

... crucial part radio plays in the lives of many South Africans, as it is often the only medium available to them in their home language, and in many instances the only medium available at all.

One of the most recent developments is the launch of two Khoisan stations operating from Smitsdrift. These radio stations, launched in 2003, cater to the Kwe and !Kung communities, and have about five thousand listeners.

Unlike television, which offers only news bulletins in all official languages, these radio stations provide more broad-based programming, including radio dramas, news bulletins and talk shows, as well as contemporary analysis of current affairs involving socio-economic and political issues. Presently, radio is perhaps the most successful medium insofar as the usage of indigenous languages is concerned. In addition, it is pertinent to note that advertising on these radio stations is also in the medium of indigenous languages rather than English. Even on television this is increasingly the case. One can easily understand why Pampers baby nappies are advertised on SABC TV 1 in an Nguni language, Xhosa, as many viewers would be proficient in an Nguni language. Furthermore, the Internet company Polka.co.za advertises its Internet connection in code-mixed Zulu and English, but plays on the Black South African use of the English word “serious”, pronounced “seriyasi”, in other words: You can’t be serious, is that all it costs? (my interpretation).

### 2.3 Children’s programmes

Both television and radio now make provision for multilingual children’s programmes. These are largely educational, for example, *Takalane Sesame* (SABC 1), sponsored by the National Department of Education and Sanlam, and *School TV* (SABC 2). These programmes make use of indigenous languages as well as English. Characters switch from one language to another, but they do not code-mix within the same sentence. Other programmes such as *Yo TV Land* make use of a single indigenous language, in the format of isiZulu story-telling, advocating social issues such as cleaning up the environment, taking charge of one’s body and looking after one’s possessions. Many of these programmes, for example *School TV*, also provide for sign language interpreting. These programmes are in line with the Broadcasting Act, which requires the SABC to

[...] meet children’s programming needs. Children require informative, educational and entertaining programmes of excellent quality, in their home language, aimed specifically at addressing their needs and instilling a sense of pride in their culture and language.

This is also in line with what the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, announced in 2004, namely that the first three years of education would be conducted in the mother tongue.

### 3. Language use and the internet

Globally, political and economic development in the twentieth century was largely conducted through the medium of English. This is still the case today. Likewise, modern technologies such as the internet owe their development to the English language, having been principally developed in America. Internet use has also spread most rapidly in the English-speaking world. According to an article published by Nunberg in the British news journal *The Editor* (14 April 2000: 14),

[i]n 1898, when Otto von Bismarck was an old man, a journalist asked him what he took to be the decisive factor in modern history. He answered: 'The fact that the North Americans speak English'.

While English is the dominant language on the internet, perhaps generating up to 80% of traffic, it would seem that this directly correlates to people's internet access. Access is continually broadening to include speakers of languages other than English, consequently empowering these languages as well. Although internet hosts have increased by about 450% in the English-speaking world over the past five years, Japanese usage has increased by approximately 430%, French by 375%, and German by 250% (*The Editor* 2000: 14). This may still imply that English remains well placed to take over the world. Indeed one linguist, Ammon (2003: 34), has suggested that English be renamed "Globalese", or "Globalish", so as to imply that it no longer belongs to a single speech community. Even so, it has been noted that various "Englishes" are now emerging, some of which are no longer mutually intelligible (Crystal 2002: 140-89).

The director of a Russian internet provider has referred to the web as the "ultimate act of intellectual colonialism", thereby creating a certain amount of anxiety among speakers of other languages (*The Editor* 2000: 14). Given this scenario, do African languages stand a chance, and do they have any role in the future economic empowerment of Africa through what could be termed the technologised word? Mazrui (2003: 103) states:

The weakening and sometimes the collapse of the nation-state in Africa due to globalization [...] may enhance the position of African regional languages [...] which may [...] swallow-up 'smaller languages'.

One can deduce from this that certain African languages, alongside exoglossic languages such as English, will continue to expand, survive and even flourish, while others will not. This view is further supported by Brenzinger *et al* (1991: 40) who argue that “highly valued” African languages will replace minority languages.

Certainly, it is not just English-speakers who are making use of the web. There are many sites in non-English-speaking countries which use English on the web (Nunberg 2000: 14). This is especially true of countries such as Egypt, Latvia, Turkey and even South Africa, where English remains the language of status and prestige in industry and education. There is also the presumption that if you say something in English it can reach the international community. But it would be wrong to think that the use of English on the internet has to be at the expense of other languages. This is especially true when one analyses the socio-economic potential which the internet stands to unleash world-wide. The African continent may now be poised on the brink of what has been termed the African Renaissance, thereby catapulting it onto the information highway, at the same time by-passing the many stop and yield signs which other countries have experienced on the road to globalisation.

In order for this form of communication, or media, to succeed, the technology has to become an elementary cultural technique like reading or writing. This, of course, is contingent on literacy, as well as on economic mobility resulting in access to technology such as computers. Given the degree to which southern African people have come to grips with cell-phone technology, albeit perhaps in limited form, one could assume that visual literacy skills rather than the conventional literacy skills (which remain limited in southern Africa) may also be suitable to encouraging internet usage. It would be even more beneficial if these skills were provided in the mother tongue, the tongue of conceptualisation and cognition.

It is specifically in the realm of news that there has been a recent flourishing of the use of languages other than English. It is also true, though, that it is organisations such as CNN and the American News Network that have truly achieved genuine worldwide news distribution, primarily through the medium of English. However, the web is changing this. For example, French-speakers who now live in non-Francophone countries have online access to between twenty and thirty French-

language newspapers and to as many direct radio transmissions. This is true also of speakers of Afrikaans and Zulu in South Africa, who have on-line access to Afrikaans newspapers, and to an Zulu news site, from anywhere in the world: <[www.isolezwe.co.za](http://www.isolezwe.co.za)>. This Zulu site was launched in 2004, and it is the first indigenous language media site of the On-line Publishers Association. It is sponsored by the Mondi Paper Group. The internet also offers electronic versions of local newspapers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Colombia, Turkey, Qatar and about 80 other nations.

In order to enjoy access to this information, there is the presupposition, however, that everyone will have equal access to the internet. This may be a long time coming in many parts of the world, including Africa. There are, for example only ten telephones per 100 people in Latin America, and only two per 100 in India. However, in South Africa, there is wide use of mobile cell-phone technology, as well as Telkom, even in the most remote areas. In 2004 Motorola released cell-phones with menus in Zulu and Sotho, as well as English. ABSA bank ATM machines now operate in all eleven official languages. In other words, the client can choose which language he or she wants to make use of when performing a transaction. Cell C also allows clients to operate their cell-phones in Zulu, Sotho, English or Afrikaans. This is evidence of what was referred to by Warschauer (2000: 4) as “re-localisation” by means of modern, global technology.

Now if the internet were to become widely available through the use of cell-phone technology, making use of indigenous languages, even in a limited way, this would drastically alter internet access in southern Africa. The internet can also have profound influences, for example, where people have not been served by the traditional media, perhaps due to geographical or political reasons. The Chinese are today effectively making use of it as a forum for political discussion. In South Africa today, one can access socio-political material in all the major language groups, namely Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans and English, on a site created by the SABC.<sup>5</sup> Arguably, though, languages such as Sepedi and Tshivenda still remain marginalised.

5 Accessible at <[SABCnews.co.za](http://SABCnews.co.za)>

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Some independent organisations are taking the lead in making indigenous language compatible with the information highway. The Zuza Software Foundation, for example, has recently released the Mozilla web browser in Xhosa, Zulu, Tshivenda, Sepedi, Swati and Setswana. It consists of the most standards-compliant web browser, a sophisticated email client, and an HTML editor. Some commercial office suites have already been developed in Afrikaans. This same organisation has now released Koffice 1.2 office suite in Xhosa, Zulu and Tshivenda.

### 4. Afrikaans: a case study

One of the few language issues hotly debated over the last few years in South Africa has been the perceived marginalisation of Afrikaans. What follows is an example of how indigenous languages can initiate debate, and evoke responses from the public, via the web. At the same time, it is an example of how the internet can be used to increase visibility and usage on the web, what Warschauer (2000: 10) refers to as “transmission”, or the will to preserve a language and to pass it on to future generations.

A group of Afrikaners decided to oppose what they perceived to be the demotion of Afrikaans in the public sector and the growing hegemony of English. They chose the internet to initiate this debate. As a result, *LitNet*'s letter pages were flooded with letters and petitions. The debate has since been taken up in the media, and still continues. The initial impetus came from Dan Roodt, who posted a petition on the *LitNet* site on 20 December 1999. A translated version follows:

20 December 1999

A PETITION FOR THE GREAT AFRIKAANS RESISTANCE

Dan Roodt

<<http://www.mweb.co.za/litnet/senet.asp?id=205>>

Language Petition

We, the undersigned South Africans, hereby take issue with the unfair handling of Afrikaans by the present government, more especially against the unequal status that Afrikaans holds *vis-à-vis* English. Not only does this favouring of English over and above Afrikaans (and the other languages) go against the constitution, but it also speaks of a chauvinism and previous British colonialism which has no place in an independent country like South Africa. We demand *immediate equalisation* of Afrikaans *vis-à-vis* English by all authorities.

We re-iterate that Afrikaans belongs to the entire South Africa, that it is unique to this country and that it possesses a specifically Afrikaans character, and therefore it deserves official recognition. We will not be colonised!

The following extracts from a sample of the responses to this petition represent the main crux of the debate:

15 February 2000 (Hein Willemse)

FIGHT, NO – DEBATE, YES...

English is perhaps the language of the Anglo-American colonists, but Afrikaans has just as much blood on its hands. English happens to be the language that South Africans can use to start bridging the gap between races. Afrikaans, because of the history of the past, simply has too much baggage. To make a political issue of the language shows that you are insensitive to the history of the country and the people who died in 1976 ...

In an open letter (5 February 2000) an Afrikaans writer stated:

To develop Afrikaans contributes to multilingualism. There is no contradiction between language development and multilingualism, except when it revolves around the development of one language, English, as is presently the case.

In yet another letter (3 February 2000) a writer referred to the thirty-something generation as being people who seem not to care about their language. The writer concluded:

Everyone will just have to accept this: language is a political issue in South Africa, especially Afrikaans and English — and wait until, for example, isiXhosa, seSotho and isiZulu patriots get going. And the signs are there that it is happening: the matric results of students who have to battle to learn and write exams in English speak for themselves.

In any event, the reaction to this petition was fierce, mainly debating the pros and cons of colonialism. By 30 April 2000, no less than 12% of all the letters on *LitNet* lobbied in favour of a pro-active struggle for Afrikaans. Of note were the 14% of letters that argued vehemently against a new “struggle” for a language that had already been tainted by its past. Those opposed to a new “struggle” were in the overwhelming majority of cases quite concerned for and about Afrikaans, but could not bring themselves to face a “language war” in a country where the need for peace and stability was paramount. But what is the importance of this mini “war of letters”, and of the site itself?

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Not only does the internet provide an inexpensive way to allow people to air their views, as the case study regarding Afrikaans has indicated, it also allows young authors the opportunity to see their works published in the company of well-known writers, in a language other than English. *Die Rooi Roman* (1999), an Afrikaans novel now in print, was initially written on-line by a number of authors, some of them famous, and others not so well-known. A more recent example is that of a new book, *Bestaan God of nie? Die groot debat* (2004), which also emanates from thousands of letters sent to *LitNet*, debating the philosophical and epistemological issue of God's existence, as well as the notion of existentialism.

This is the type of interesting experiment in which African languages can now engage on the internet. The idea has been further developed with the launch of Young Writers: the 2004 *LitNet* Online Writers Conference for writers under the age of thirty-five. According to the *Cape Times* (Friday, 8 October 2004: 10) the conference "has the backing of former president Nelson Mandela. It consists of nearly fifty contributions in five languages, which will be presented over a two-month period". The conference is sponsored by the Arts and Culture Trust, Tafelberg Publishers, Human & Rousseau Publishers, Kwela Books and ABSA Bank.

This is in line with thoughts expressed by Etienne van Heerden (interview 25 August 2004), the well-known writer and director of *LitNet*:

Sponsors from the commercial sector are, to my mind, showing greater interest in multilingualism these days. There is a marked swing to a more realistic attitude in the marketplace re language diversity in our society. Shortly after 1994, it seemed as if only projects in English were to be supported, but this is changing now. A large group like Absa, for example, is showing great encouragement and respect for its clients of the different languages, and has now moved in as a *LitNet* sponsor.

It would appear that the private sector is now acknowledging that in the global arena, there is still a need to recognise locality, and that English may not be the only language in which to advertise and increase visibility.

One aspect that seems to emerge from the above case study of Afrikaans and the *LitNet* site is that whatever happens to indigenous languages, they should not be forced upon people, but rather nurtured,

marketed and pro-actively promoted in a manner which increases their visibility and status in every sector of South African society, including that of technology.

Within the realm of literacy we already have language learning multi-media CD-Rom programmes in Xhosa and Zulu, produced by a company called African Voices. This is in line with the national policy of promoting all our languages. Although these programmes are aimed at second-language speakers, there is also a challenge to create literacy among all our people, including technological literacy through both indigenous languages and English.

## 5. Conclusion

It is only by means of vibrant and constructive debate that language issues can be addressed in South Africa, indeed throughout the continent. The case of Afrikaans has highlighted this issue. Whether the other languages will follow the same path remains to be seen. Already, sites on *LitNet* such as Isikhundla Sababhali, an Xhosa site, as well as *Phezulu*, an Zulu site, are becoming increasingly well established. Arguably though, the use of indigenous languages on the internet in South Africa is still in its infancy.

As far as newspapers are concerned, this study has shown that indigenous languages are doing very badly, with virtually no mainstream English-medium newspaper industry is now firmly entrenched in South Africa.

It was observed that, broadly speaking, the SABC is working towards empowering indigenous languages by providing them with more airtime. However, this is a slow process and English remains well established in this arena. It is evident that the use of multilingual programmes on television is a growing phenomenon. It has been established that the medium in which the indigenous languages are performing best is radio, which is contributing significantly to language enhancement. All South Africa's official languages, including minority languages, and even some unofficial languages, have their own radio stations. There are now altogether fifteen public radio stations operating in the country.

## Kaschula/Indigenous languages and the media in South Africa

Finally, there will always be socio-economic and political undertones to language use within the media. As long as there is a demand for advertising in the indigenous languages, and as long as people need to be reached in their own languages, there will be expansion in various forms of media usage in these languages. It will be a market-driven process. The lack of demand for isiXhosa newspapers, for example, has led to their demise. If the demand for indigenous language usage is no longer there, then it is highly probable that Crystal's "intellectual disaster", with English being the only language left to learn, will come into being, with the world no longer experiencing the richness of multilingualism, but being taken over by English (Crystal 2003: 191).

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