

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AS MEDIUMS OF INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE**

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# STUDY BACKGROUND

- African languages and speakers were severely disadvantaged under South African colonialism and apartheid due to a "Eurocentric" linguistic worldview
- Apart from English, Afrikaans was the sole language used as a medium of instruction across all disciplines in the country's higher education system.
- The Language Policy for Higher Education ordered in 2002 that indigenous African languages be developed and promoted as "Languages of Learning and Teaching" (LoLTs) at university level
- UKZN has taken the effort to cultivate, modernize, and elaborate isiZulu as a medium for knowledge production and dissemination through its language strategy and plan. (Language Policy of the UKZN 2014: 2).

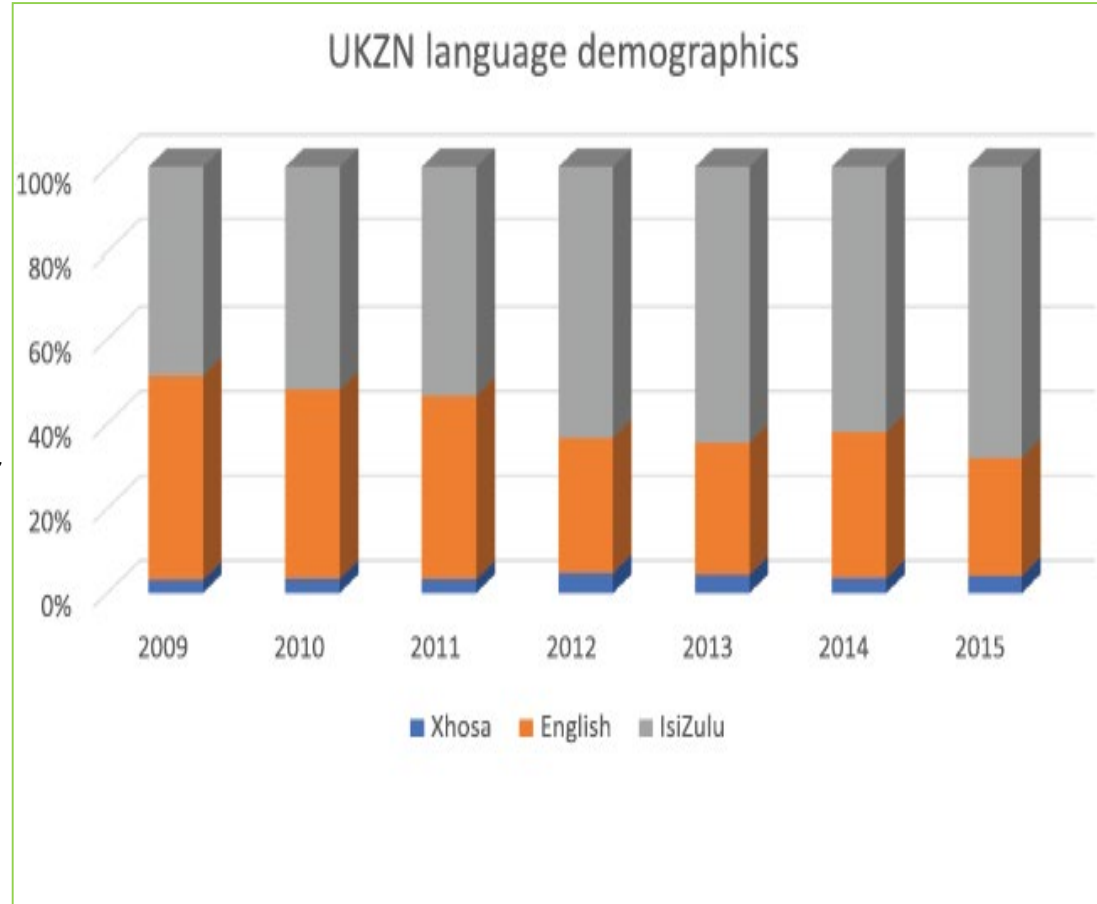
# THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL AND ITS LANGUAGE POLICY

- The university was opposed to racial segregation in higher education and felt that everyone who met the requirements to enroll as a student should be admitted without regard to race.
- UKZN's bilingual language policy includes the use of isiZulu in addition to English for teaching and learning. According to the policy, African kids who have been historically disadvantaged would be able to learn in their native languages
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal is determined to restructure the higher education system's institutional environment to overcome apartheid's fragmented disparities and inefficiencies
- This means that all new students must enrol in an IsiZulu course, as the university believes that students must demonstrate bilingualism to receive their degrees. While isiZulu as a medium of instruction is being developed, UKZN has dedicated itself to curriculum creation in both isiZulu and English



# WHY ISIZULU?

- Situated in KwaZulu-Natal province where isiZulu is the most widely spoken language,
- 80% of KwaZulu-Natal's population speaks isiZulu, (Language Policy for Higher Education, 2018).
- UKZN also has a high number of isiZulu speakers among its student cohort. (Ndebele & Zulu, 2017)



# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Sociolinguistics is strongly related to linguistic anthropology and has a lot of overlap with pragmatics. According to Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008), studies of how language varieties differ between groups separated by social variables (e.g., ethnicity, religion, status, gender, level of education, age, etc.)
- In sociolinguistics, **diglossia is a situation in which two distinct varieties of a language or unrelated languages are spoken within the same speech community**. Bilingual diglossia is a type of diglossia in which one language variety is used for different purposes.
- The categorization aspect of language is, the standard language is used for **“high”** functions such as giving a lecture, reading, writing, or broadcasting, while the home variety is reserved for **“low”** functions such as interacting with friends at home (Fishman, 1967, Grosjean, 2010 and Romaine, 2017).



# AFRICAN LANGUAGES AS MEDIUMS OF INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- African languages are often associated with backwardness, poverty and inferiority (Nkwashu, Madadzhe and Kubayi 2015: 13);
- African people themselves have developed negative attitudes to these languages (Makamu, 2009: 17);
- It is (falsely) perceived that African languages are grammatically inadequate for use in teaching subjects such as Natural Sciences and Mathematics (Alexander 1989: 66; Annamalai 2006; Wolff 2018).
- In other words, there is a belief that African languages are not able “to carry academic discourse effectively and therefore to function as fully-fledged languages of learning and teaching [because their] standard written forms remain in many ways archaic, limited and context-bound, and out of touch with the modern scientific world” (Foley 2001: 2);

# METHODOLOGY

- The study utilized Qualitative approach
- semi-structured interviews, and secondary data from books, journals, policy frameworks, and relevant internet sources
- N= 25
- Participants: UKZN staff and students
- The best strategy for eliminating sample bias in the participants' diverse areas of expertise was purposive sampling; the results provide a clear depiction of their perspectives and experiences about the UKZN language policy

# TOWARDS INTELLECTUALISATION OF ISIZULU: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

- It is fashionable of course to argue that African languages lack the requisite terminology to offer Science and Mathematics. This seems to be a delaying pretext or tactic. If such an argument were to be entertained, then African languages will never be developed to such an extent.
- UKZN has taken a stand against such views through the University Language Planning and Development Office's (ULPDO) initiative to intellectualize isiZulu so that it can eventually function on par with English in all high-function domains across the university
- Terminology creation, along with corpus building and computer-assisted language tools, has been identified by UKZN as a key component in accomplishing the goal of isiZulu intellectualisation (Khumalo, 2017b).
- The procedure necessitates the creation of discipline-specific vocabulary, which is frequently claimed as a reason for avoiding teaching and learning African languages, which has the effect of degrading these languages as superficial and inadequate (see Shizha, 2012).





# Interview Reflections

- “IsiZulu in my view, lacks academic value as it stands because acquiring a qualification in isiZulu confines me to KZN only and I personally have not seen the academic purpose for doing my qualification in isiZulu”. (student)
- According to one Zulu lecturer, there is also "racial" animosity between him and certain "White" pupils who are unhappy about being forced into the course. "They [language policymakers] are casting dirt on my language," one Zulu lecturer declared firmly. (Staff)
- There is a lot of development that needs to take place; namely, getting literature that is written in isiZulu, training staff who are not proficient in isiZulu and developing isiZulu as a language. The UKZN language policy is good on paper but I have doubts about its practicality. (Staff)
- When it comes to choosing a language in which you pursue your career it also depends on the setting and the message you are trying to get across using that language. For instance, there are colleagues of mine who did their PhDs in China and they had to take a module in mandarin language, which is the main language in China, and their PhDs were written in Mandarin and not English (Student)

# LANGUAGE PREFERENCE

Table 1. Language preference on campus (students) N = 16

	English only	isiZulu only	Both languages
Socially	43%	17%	40%
Learning materials	90%	2%	8%
In Tutorials	80%	12%	8%
In Lectures	78%	10%	12%
Texting (letters, emails)	68%	24%	8%
Written work	80%	9%	11%
Meetings	44%	22%	34%

Source: Questionnaire responses compiled by first author

- The students and staff who took part in the study were asked a series of questions on their preference for isiZulu or English in a variety of situations, including social situations, learning materials, consultations, seminars, tutorials, lectures, texting, written work, and meetings
- It demonstrates that students' language preferences on campus are slightly at odds with the UKZN language policy's expectations. Their responses indicate that using only isiZulu as the LoLT is undesirable

# THE IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS OF CURRENT LANGUAGE POLICIES IN PRACTICE

- The mandatory Zulu language module is the policy's principal practical concern; interviews with Zulu language lecturers show that academics teaching the mandatory Zulu module face a number of practical issues, and that the majority of Zulu professors interviewed oppose the mandatory ruling
- According to various studies, some Zulu students do not always prefer to study in their own tongue (Nkosi, 2014; Parmegiani & Rudwick, 2014; Rudwick & Parmegiani, 2013). Students' reservations and mistrust must be weighed against the reality that they came from a high school system where English was the only official language of instruction

Table 2. Language preference on campus (staff) N = 9

	English only	isiZulu only	Both languages
Lectures	70 %	10 %	20 %
Tutorials	65%	20 %	15 %
Seminars	80%	12 %	8 %
Social	55%	30 %	15 %
Written work	80%	10 %	10 %
Learning materials	83%	9 %	8 %
Meetings	75%	12 %	13 %
Consultation	69%	15 %	16 %

Source: Questionnaire responses compiled by first author

# SUMMARY

- This article has acknowledged that the intellectualization of isiZulu plays a pivotal role in developing the language and making the move from policy more to practice successful
- African language promotion is also a valuable privilege in the post-apartheid educational realm from this standpoint
- Linguistic diversity should be viewed as a resource and a tool for innovation and nation building rather than a war in South African education
- The broad unhappiness among students and staff with the usage of isiZulu, particularly because the language is not perceived as providing any benefits to students who acquire their degrees in isiZulu. In South Africa, English competence is still related to earning potential (Casale & Posel, 2010).
- The reasons why some isiZulu speakers may not accept Zulu as a LoLT at the postsecondary level are complex and beyond the scope of this work; suffice it to say, isiZulu students' views and unwillingness to study in isiZulu must be taken into account in the language's growth. After all, once pupils have the opportunity to use isiZulu in a productive and creative way, views about the language may improve (Nkosi, 2014).

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be desirable to use both English and African languages in higher education as this would make students sought-after in the present economic context and pertinent to their communities.
- Our elites, politicians and celebrities should speak African languages most of the time to become exemplary to the rest of the country.
- Instead of presenting all academic programmes in African languages, institutions in South Africa should choose one or a few courses where African languages, together with English, can be used as languages of teaching and learning. For instance, a university may opt to teach History in both English and an African language of the students' choice.
- Zulu professors and other staff should be custodians of the policy.