A Sociolinguistic Investigation of the Status of isiZulu at Former House of Delegates High Schools in Phoenix

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Introduction

This study examines the language policy of high schools in Phoenix. Since 1990 these schools have undergone transformation only in terms of learner demographics. There has been an influx of isiZulu L1 learners (isiZulu first language speakers) at these schools from surrounding townships such as KwaMashu, Ntuzuma and New Town as well as peri-urban areas such as Inanda, Amaoti and Bambayi.

Three democratic elections have come and gone yet the curriculum and especially that of the languages still reflect our country's past because English and Afrikaans are the only two languages that are offered as first and second languages respectively at many high schools in Phoenix. This adversely affects IsiZulu L1 learners because they are forced to learn English as a first language and Afrikaans as a second language. Furthermore, these languages are compulsory for promotion purposes. This anomaly goes against the spirit of the new constitution which grants equal status to eleven languages namely Afrikaans, English isiNdebele, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Siswati, Setswana, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. In fact 23,8% of South Africa's population speak isiZulu as a first language (Census 2001:16). IsiZulu is therefore the most widely spoken language in the country and in KwaZulu-Natal (80,9%). In spite of this, many learners are not given a chance to pursue isiZulu as a subject of study.

The Language-in-Education Policy

In July 1997, the National Department of Education unveiled its Language in

Education Policy, hereafter (LiEP). LiEP was intended to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than one's own would be encouraged. LiEP identifies the eleven official languages of the Constitution. The nine marginalised African languages now have the same status as Afrikaans and English. This language policy stipulates that all eleven languages should be equally promoted. It also states that people have the right to receive education in any of the official languages. The policy further states that there ought to be mother tongue and bilingual education in terms of an approach called additive bilingualism[11]. The justification for this approach is fundamental to learning theory.

LiEP attempts to address the linguistic inequalities of the past but there are limitations. It would appear that learners are under no obligation to choose a historically ignored language because the choices of languages at schools are voluntary. Under the present policy the choice of language medium rests with the individual parent or guardian in primary and secondary schools. In the current system of education, school governing bodies have to determine the language policy of their schools. It is worth noting however, that the status quo has remained because Afrikaans and English are still compulsory languages of study at many high schools in Phoenix.

According to the previous National Education Minister, Professor Kader Asmal (*Daily News* 8 May 2001:1), LiEP is theoretically sound but it has not really worked well on the ground. According to the Minister, mother tongue teaching and learning had worked for English L1 and Afrikaans L1 learners but not for African L1 learners. The Minister further stated that in some schools governing bodies together with their management staff coerced parents of African L1 learners to select the only language on offer namely English, thus compromising learners' cognitive development. Some school

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[1] Additive bilingualism is realised in an educational situation in which speakers of a language are introduced to a second language, in addition to the continued educational use of the first language as a language of learning. The second language is never intended to replace the first language. Rather, it is seen as complementary to the first language (Heugh 1995:vi).

governing bodies refuse to comply with all the provisions of LiEP perhaps because they are unfamiliar with the details of LiEP. A possible reason for this could be that governing bodies have not been work shopped on LiEP by the National and Provincial departments of education.

Although LiEP embraces mother tongue education it is not being implemented for isiZulu L1 learners at schools. LiEP appears to be excellent on paper and has been well received throughout the world but it has not been implemented effectively at most schools. There has been no paradigm shift with regard to the language of learning and teaching in isiZulu at many schools. Those affected by this bungling are the learners who are the future human resource of this country.

A major flaw of LiEP is that it errs on the side of allowing too much choice. The choice factor is exacerbated by the fact that people want to learn English because it is seen as an international language, which offers access to opportunities. However, if learners were acquiring English effectively, the problem would not be as great. Proficiency in English remains an unattainable goal for most learners (Desai 1999:46). According to Desai, this applies not only to English as a subject, but also as a language through which learners can access knowledge.

Language Planning Models

Like most African countries, South Africa does not have a history of successful language planning for African languages. Kamwangamalu (2000:59) argues vehemently that:

> Status planning for African languages seems to be at odds with the language practices in the country institution. He further contends that the lack of a bold political initiative to promote these languages together with vested interests and conflicting ideologies ensure that the African languages are associated only with their traditional role as vehicles for cultural heritage.

Several language-planning models have been mooted which attempt to promote and uplift African languages. For instance van den Berghe

(1968:223) suggested that English should be recognised as the national language to be taught in all schools, and used in the central legislature and in official documents. At the same time the other four main languages i.e. isiZulu, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and SeSotho should also have official recognition as regional languages. Thus, in the Western Cape, Afrikaans would be the second language; in the Eastern Cape, isiXhosa; in the Free State and Gauteng, SeSotho; and in KwaZulu-Natal, isiZulu. In any given area, two languages (one of them being English) would be used in schools and in government offices. Alexander's (1989) model is also similar to that of van den Berghe's model, Alexander also advocates English as the official language but unlike van den Berghe, Alexander argues that all other languages must be given official status on a regional basis. Such language planning models place our society at the cutting edge of transformation because they embrace the previously marginalised African indigenous languages.

There are various problems that underlie the language planning models outlined above. The common problem is they do not indicate how bilingualism and multilingualism ought to be implemented at grassroots level. Kamwangamalu (1997:58) suggests that one way of altering African languages from their passive role as official languages is to engage in 'reverse covert planning'. By this, he means that African languages need to be seen as marketable. This entails the recognition of these languages as tools by means of which its users can meet their material needs (Kamwangamalu 2000:58). These ideas are consistent with Cooper's (1989) and Bourdieu's (1991) language planning models, which propose that language management, is really a marketing problem. According to these scholars, English and Afrikaans L1 speakers need to be convinced of the instrumentive as well as the integrative value of African languages. African speakers should also be educated about the instrumentive and integrative value of their languages. This can be achieved if they are educated about their language rights, which are enshrined in the Constitution.

Empirical Investigation

The overall aim of the study was to investigate the status of isiZulu at former House of Delegates high schools in Phoenix. The status of isiZulu was

examined from the perspective of English L1 and isiZulu L1 learners. Closed-ended and open-ended questions were used to collect data to determine the status of isiZulu at these schools.

The following are some of the important closed ended questions that were asked in this study:

o   What is your home language?
o   How proficient are you in speaking, reading, writing and understanding isiZulu?
o   Is isiZulu offered as a subject at your school?
o   Do you think that isiZulu should be taught to all learners?

The following open-ended questions were used for the study:
o   What is your attitude towards the study of isiZulu at your school?
o   What problems do isiZulu L1 learners experience at school?
o   What problems do English L1 learners experience at school?

Eight (8) high schools in Phoenix were selected for this research because this sample is representative of the high schools in this study. The following high schools were involved in the random sample: Northmead, Brookdale, Palmview, Grove-End, Earlington, Phoenix, Havenpark and Foresthaven. Copies of a questionnaire were given to six hundred (600) English L1 and isiZulu L1 learners at these schools.

Each school was given 75 copies of the questionnaire. 15 copies of the questionnaire were distributed randomly to isiZulu L1 and English L1 learners in grades eight, nine, ten, eleven and twelve. The questionnaire was presented in both English and isiZulu so that isiZulu L1 learners who did not understand English well could answer the isiZulu version of the questionnaire. Grade eight and grade nine learners were required to complete only thirteen closed ended questions by placing a cross in the appropriate box. Grade eleven and twelve learners were required to complete the same thirteen closed ended questions as well as five open ended questions.

Only seven out of eight schools in the sample returned their completed forms of the questionnaire. A total number of three hundred and seventy six copies (376) of the questionnaire were returned. Foresthaven Secondary did not return any copies of the questionnaire.

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The Findings

	Frequency	Percentage
English	232	62.0
IsiZulu	144	38.0
Total	376	100

Table 1: Home language of learners

Table1 indicates that 62% of learners indicated English as their home language whereas 38% of learners indicated isiZulu as their home language. The fact that the majority of learners use English as their home language is not surprising because they are in the majority at schools in the sample.

	English L1 learners		IsiZulu L1 learners	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Speaking				
Very well	10	5.2	110	81.5
Fairly well	34	17.9	15	11.1
Not at all	146	76.9	10	7.4
Total	**190**	**100**	**135**	**100**
Did not respond	42		9	
Total	**232**		**144**	
Reading and Writing				
Very well	10	5.9	73	59.3

Fairly well	34	20.3	44	35.8
Not at all	124	73.8	6	4.9
Total	**168**	**100**	**123**	**100**
Did not respond	64		21	
Total	**232**		**144**	
Understanding				
Very well	2	1.2	95	79.8
Fairly well	22	13.3	17	14.3
Not at all	141	85.5	7	15.9
Total	**165**	**100**	**119**	**100**
Did not respond	67		25	
Total	**232**		**144**	

Table2: Learners' proficiency in isiZulu

From the table it can be seen that a very large percentage (76.9%) of English L1 learners have no oral skills in isiZulu. However a significant percentage (17.9%) of these learners indicated that they speak isiZulu fairly well. My observations indicate that these learners speak Fanakalo[2] and are under the impression that they speak the language fairly well. Amongst English L1 learners, isiZulu has a low status because many of these learners did not have any formal exposure to isiZulu in the primary schools. This has adversely affected their reading and writing skills as well as their ability to understand isiZulu. Therefore, 73.8% of these learners have no reading or writing skills in isiZulu. Also, 85.5% of these learners have no understanding of isiZulu.

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[2] Fanakalo consists of English and isiZulu words that are used as a resource of communication between non-mother and mother tongue isiZulu speakers.

With regard to isiZulu L1 learners' proficiency in the language we observe that 81.5% of isiZulu learners speak isiZulu very well, 11.1% of these learners speak the language fairly well and 7.4% do not speak isiZulu well. That a high percentage of learners speak isiZulu very well is not surprising as it is their home language. However, it is surprising to note that a significant percentage of these learners do not have adequate oral skills in isiZulu. It could be that these learners have been to schools where the medium of instruction is in English.

However a significantly lower percentage of isiZulu L1 learners (59.3%) read and write isiZulu very well. A possible explanation for this situation could be that some of the isiZulu L1 learners started their education at former House of Delegates schools (so-called Indian schools) or former House of Assembly schools (so-called white schools) where isiZulu was not offered as a subject of study. This has negatively affected their ability to read and write isiZulu.

In view of comprehension skills, 79.8% of isiZulu L1 learners understand isiZulu very well. However, it is surprising to note that a significant percentage of isiZulu learners have a problem understanding isiZulu. It could be that these learners are exposed to the non-standard varieties of isiZulu that are seen to be fashionable and trendy in the townships.

	English L1 learners		IsiZulu L1 learners	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	*143*	*21.5*	*30*	*25.4*
No	*157*	*78.5*	*88*	*74.6*
Total	*200*	*100*	*118*	*100*
Did not respond	*32*		*26*	
Total	*232*		*144*	

Table 3: Learners' indication as to whether isiZulu is offered as a subject of study at school

From the above table it is abundantly clear that the majority of the English L1 learners (78.5%) and isiZulu L1 learners (74.6%) indicated that isiZulu is not offered. A small percentage of English L1 learners (21.5%) and isiZulu L1 learners (25.4%) indicated that isiZulu is offered at their schools. One would have expected a higher percentage of English L1 and isiZulu L1 learners to indicate that isiZulu is not offered at their schools. This is because isiZulu is offered at only two schools. At the remaining five schools the status quo has remained with regard to languages as subjects of study.

These schools are implementing National Department Of Education Language policy, which states that learners must be offered two languages, one as a first language and one as a second language. At Phoenix Secondary, English is offered as a first language and learners have the option of choosing between Afrikaans and isiZulu as a second language. At Haven Park Secondary, English is offered as a first language, Afrikaans as a second language and isiZulu as a third language. At the remaining five schools, English is offered as a first language and Afrikaans as a second language. IsiZulu is not offered as a subject of study at these schools. This means that isiZulu is not taken seriously at these schools.

A study conducted by Chick and McKay (2001) at two former House of Assembly high schools (so-called white schools), two former House of Delegates high schools and two primary schools (one House of Assembly and one House of Delegates) in the Durban area reiterates similar findings. Their findings indicate that there is little evidence that any effort is being made to encourage isiZulu L1 learners to develop literacy in their home language. Furthermore, English L1 learners are not being encouraged

	English L1 learners		IsiZulu L1 learners	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Yes	180	81.8	116	93.5
No	40	18.2	8	6.5
Total	220	100	124	100
Did not respond	12		20	
Total	232		144	

Table 4: Learners' preferences with regard to isiZulu as subject of study

to gain anything but a rudimentary level of proficiency in isiZulu. This illustrates that many so-called open schools are flouting the principle of language equity enshrined in our constitution.

It is not enough to have legislation in place that accords recognition and equal status to all the official languages. Language policy is more than a language clause in the Constitution. It is important to note that unless the loophole inherent in the current LiEP is closed, efforts to promote the marginalised indigenous languages will not come to fruition.

An examination of the table 4 illustrates that an overwhelming majority of English L1 learners (81.8%) and isiZulu L1 learners (93.5%) stated that isiZulu should be taught to all learners. 18.2% of the English L1 learners and 6.5% of the isiZulu L1 learners stated that isiZulu should not be offered. That the majority of learners stated that isiZulu ought to be offered as a subject of study augurs well for the future development of the language. Although the above statement may be an overly optimistic view of the future of languages, it does convey the enthusiasm of the English L1 learners. It is also important to note that the isiZulu L1 learners are still passionate about their language and their culture.

The results that are presented below were obtained from the open-ended questions. An analysis of learners' responses to the question: What is your attitude towards the study of isiZulu at your school? revealed that the majority of English L1 learners (69%) and isiZulu L1 learners (87%) have positive attitudes towards isiZulu. It is therefore important that governing bodies carry out language surveys to determine the language preferences of learners before determining the language policy of schools. Perhaps, if the language is introduced in primary schools it may well prepare English L1 and IsiZulu L1 learners to study isiZulu at high schools.

The following are some of the positive views articulated by English L1 and isiZulu L1 learners towards the study of isiZulu. Note that the responses that are given below are taken as the learners themselves wrote them.

English L1 Learners' Views:
• 'I would like to learn the mother tongue of South Africa, as I am a South African citizen I feel IsiZulu is much more usable language than Afrikaans in South Africa. Many IsiZulu learners at my school speak

IsiZulu and I would like to do so too. Afrikaans is a language which I know will never be used in my life'.

- 'I feel that it might be a very good experience because when we finish school and studying we have to get a job and work with many different races and we have to know the languages. People are hired mostly if they know many languages'.

The above quotations by English L1 learners illustrate the instrumentive importance of isiZulu.

IsiZulu L1 Learners' Views:

- 'Ngigakujabulela ukufundwa kwesizulu esikoleni sami ngoba ulimi engilwaziyo futhi engifuna ukufunda okuningi ngalo IsiZulu. Siyasisiza thina ukufunda kahle'.
  'I am happy to learn isiZulu at my school because it is a language that I know and I want to learn more through it. It helps us well'.
- 'Ngisithatha njengento enhle kumina ngoba IsiZulu ulimi lwami engalucela kumama wami futhi, ngiyaziqhenya ngolimi lwami'.
  'I take it as something good to me because it is my mother tongue and I am proud of my language'.

The first quotation illustrates that isiZulu is the language that the learner is comfortable with and he or she has no problems learning isiZulu. These second quotation indicates that isiZulu is the learner's mother tongue and she is proud of her home language. The above quotations illustrate that there are isiZulu L1 learners who are proud of their language.

Not all learners expressed positive views towards the study of isiZulu. Some learners also expressed negative views towards the study of isiZulu. The following are some of their views:

English L1 Learner's View

- 'I don't think that IsiZulu should be taught at schools because it's really unnecessary. Most of us cannot speak our own mother tongue, so why should we learn someone else's mother tongue. Everyone should be taught to speak and understand English'.

IsiZulu L1 Learner's View

• 'I don't think it's a good idea for most of the children who don't like it or don't understand it'.

The above responses support English as the only lingua franca[3] of the country. The main reason for this stance rests on the international position that English enjoys. According to Du Preez (*Daily News* August 2001:10),

> English will always be the common language we use in the urban economy and to communicate with the outside world. People should be able to speak, read and write English. But if we achieve that at the expense of our, own precious languages, it is a price too high to pay. Then three hundred years of colonialism would have been completely successful.

Learners' Perceptions of Language Related Problems

English L1 learners' Perception of the Problems Experienced by isiZulu L1 Learners

There were several opinions given by English L1 learners with regard to problems experienced by isiZulu L1 learners. Here are some of their views. 76% indicate isiZulu L1 learners do not understand English, 11% state that they do not understand Afrikaans, 3% state they had no problem, 2% views were not clear/ could not understand what the learners were saying and 8% did not respond.

It is clear from the above that the overwhelming majority (76%) of English L1 learners state that isiZulu L1 learners do not understand English. This indicates clearly that English L1 learners are aware of the immense communication problems that isiZulu L1 learners experience.

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[3] Lingua franca is a language, which is used habitually by people, whose mother tongues are different, in order to facilitate communication between them (UNESCO, 1953).

IsiZulu L1 Learner's Perceptions of the Problems Experienced by English L1 Learners

With regard to the problems encountered by English L1 learners, there was again a diversity of views. The following are some of the views expressed by IsiZulu L1 learners.32% indicate that they cannot communicate in isiZulu, 6% indicate that they do not understand Afrikaans, 13% state that they had no problems, 21% indicate that they did not understand isiZulu, 5% state that could not read and write isiZulu, 4% views were not clear and 18% did not respond probably because they found the answering of open ended questions long and tedious.

From the above paragraph, it is observed that 32% of English L1 learners cannot communicate in isiZulu. IsiZulu L1 learners are aware of the communication problems between them and their English L1 peers. This is because English L1 learners cannot speak isiZulu. From my experience of teaching at a school where the majority of the school population are isiZulu L1 learners I have noticed isiZulu L 1 learners communicate amongst themselves in isiZulu. This results in English L1 learners not understanding what their isiZulu peers are saying. From the analysis of the problems encountered by both isiZulu L1 and English L1 learners, it would appear that they are acutely aware of the communication problems that exist between them.

There is a correlation between the high percentage of isiZulu L1learners (93,5%) and English L1 learners (81,8%) who stated that isiZulu should be taught to all learners and the positive views expressed by isiZulu L1learners (81%) and English L1 learners (69%). Also, 76% of English L1 learners stated that isiZulu L1 learners do not understand English. A significant percentage of isiZulu L1 learners (32%) stated that English L1 learners cannot communicate in isiZulu. This illustrates that isiZulu L1 learners and English L1 learners are aware of the communication problems that exist between them.

The study examined the status of isiZulu at high schools in Phoenix. The study found that although isiZulu is an official language and most widely spoken language in the country, it has not been accorded its rightful place at many schools in this study.

The positive attitude expressed by the majority of isiZulu L1 and English L1 learners bodes well for the future of isiZulu at high schools in

Phoenix. If learners are given a chance to pursue isiZulu as a subject of study, it will elevate the status of isiZulu at primary and high schools in the province. In this regard further research is necessary.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, various recommendations are made. The government must enforce the implementation of the LiEP. The study has proven beyond doubt that the voluntary approach has failed to elevate the status of isiZulu at schools in this study. If isiZulu L1 learners receive instruction in their home language and if they are given a chance to study isiZulu as a first language and English as a second language, it will have immense instrumentive advantages for them. This will reduce the high failure rate amongst isiZulu L1 learners at schools in this study. On the other hand, if English L1 learners are given a chance to study isiZulu it will help them to integrate with their isiZulu L1 peers and improve race relations in general.

It is incumbent on the National Department of Education to be clear as to which official languages must be used in which province and for what purposes. The National government cannot afford to dither this time and they need to set aside funds to employ and train educators of African languages. This will ensure that transformation posts are created at schools in this study. It will also facilitate the transformation of the curriculum as well as of the staff at these schools.

The National Government must ensure that knowledge of African languages weighs heavily in the application for government jobs. This will ensure that African languages become marketable. This is a major problem with African languages at the moment. Kamwangamalu (2000:58) attests to this when he argues that the language consumer would not strive to acquire knowledge of African languages. This is because currently these languages are 'not marketable and have no cachet in the broader political and economic context'. If the National Government implements the strategy espoused by Kamwangamalu, it will demonstrate instumentive value to those who want to pursue careers in the public and private sectors.

South African writers, language academics and readers should make a concerted effort to work together to ensure the promotion of isiZulu as

defined by our Constitution is actually implemented to fast track the emancipation of isiZulu from its present status.

Conclusion
Since isiZulu is the most widely spoken language in this province, it is important that school governing bodies introduce the language as a subject of study. This will ensure that learner's language rights as enshrined in our constitution are actually respected. This will go a long way in enhancing language democracy in our schools, in the province and ultimately in our country. It is also vital that educators and learners learn the language in a multilingual society like ours because it would help build intercultural relationships.

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