# Language Policies of South African Accredited Journals in Humanities and Social Sciences: Are they Speaking the Language of Transformation?

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## Abstract
Within the context of the post-apartheid era in South Africa, the higher education sector (the main site of knowledge production), is undergoing transformation. The language factor, one of the central pillars of the apartheid days, ranks high on the transformation agenda. This agenda can, for example, be detected in key official documents such as the Constitution and the language policy for higher education. The language policy has been transformed from two official languages (English and Afrikaans) during the apartheid era to eleven official languages (English, Afrikaans, and nine previously marginalized African languages). In the higher education sector, there is now a strong call to convert African languages into languages of scholarship. It is against this background that the paper attempts to establish the extent to which South African accredited journals (as publishing outlets for knowledge producers) are pursuing the transformation agenda. To this end, the paper critically analyses language policies of selected South African accredited journals. The study is confined to journals that lie within humanities and social sciences disciplines. The study indicates that 70 % of the journals are monolingual (English), 20 % of the journals are bilingual and 10 % are multilingual. In addition, there is no accredited journal that is published exclusively in an African language.

**Keywords:** accredited journals, English, humanities, indigenous African languages, language policy, social sciences, South Africa

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## Introduction

The slogan 'publish or perish' is widely known and respected in the academic world. Academics strive and compete to publish in reputable peer reviewed journals and other outlets. As Adebowale (2001: 1) notes,

> academic publishing has gathered, sieved and engraved the work of researchers, disseminating their products to the corners of the globe, and thus assuring them a place in knowledge production in a more accentuated information-driven world.

The language question comes in immediately: Through which language(s) can knowledge producers (through their scholarly publications) reach the corners of the globe? English is the main lingua franca for scholarly publishing in the world (see Lee & Lee 2013; Lillis & Curry 2010; Altbach 2007; 2013; Ammon 2001). The majority of the high ranking journals are published in English, and naturally there is immense pressure on academics, especially those from non-English dominant backgrounds, to publish in English medium journals (see Curry & Lillis 2013). In some countries, such as Norway (see Brock-Utne 2007), financial rewards for those who publish in scholarly outlets in English are higher than those meant for academics who publish through the Norwegian language. Since publishing outlets do not operate in a linguistic vacuum, one cannot ignore language policies of publishing outlets as a critical element in present day South Africa where language features prominently in the country's post-apartheid transformation agenda.

South Africa, through its Department of Higher Education and Training, annually releases a list of accredited journals. These are peer reviewed journals that meet the department's set criteria. Publishing in these journals attracts government subsidy. The minimum criteria for a South African journal to qualify for government subsidy are as follows:

- The purpose of the journal must be to disseminate research results and the content must support high level learning, teaching and research in the relevant subject areas.

- Articles accepted for publication in the journal must be peer reviewed.

- The majority of contributions to the journal must be beyond a single institution.

- The journal must have an international standard serial number (ISSN).

- The journal must be published regularly.

- The journal must have an editorial board that includes members beyond a single institution and is reflective of expertise on the relevant area.

- The journal must be distributed beyond a single institution (Department of Higher Education and Training 2003).

Not all published items in an accredited journal attract government subsidy. The following items are not subsidized:

- Correspondence to the editors

- Abstracts or extended abstracts

- Obituaries

- Book reviews

- News articles

- Advertorials (Department of Higher Education and Training 2003).

Some of the journals are, for example, strictly monolingual whilst others are bi/multilingual. Monolingual journals are restricted in nature given that only those academics who are proficient in the stipulated language(s) have the opportunity to publish. Bi/multilingual journals, on the other hand, are more inclusive, and in the process promote academic freedom. It is important to stress that no journal operates without a language policy. The

language policy of an academic journal can come in either overt or covert manner. To this end, a *de jure* language policy refers to an explicitly outlined policy whereas a *de facto* language policy tends to be implicit. The absence of a written language policy does not mean that there is no policy at work. It is against this background that the current paper reports on an examination of language policies of South African accredited journals, and then proceeds to determine the extent to which the language policies promote transformation in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

The paper discusses the language factor in knowledge dissemination from the perspective of language policies of South African accredited journals. To what extent are the language policies in tune with South Africa's transformation agenda? What are the implications of the language policies for transformation? The current paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I provide the theoretical backbone of the paper. In the next section, I review the related literature. This is followed by a section on data and methods. In the next two sections, I provide findings and recommendations respectively. In the last section, I provide a summary and conclusions.

## Theoretical Orientation

Transformation of higher education, especially from a language perspective (Kamwendo 2013; Nzimande 2012); and Cobarrubias' (1984) language policy ideologies provide the theoretical backbone for the current paper. We start with transformation. The demise of apartheid in South Africa triggered an urgent need for a transformation process. Transformation goes beyond merely looking at gender and racial representations. In the context of our current discussion, we are interested in the transformation of the academic publishing arena. Language was one of the key cornerstones of the apartheid system, and in knowledge production, English and Afrikaans were the main languages. With the demise of apartheid, it has become very imperative that the language factor be included in the transformation agenda, and African languages are expected to play a more robust role in science and academia and knowledge production (Kamwendo 2013; Nzimande 2012). As Nzimande (2012:1) argues,

> the debate is no longer whether we should develop African languages
> as languages of scholarship in academia, but rather when and how

should these languages be part of our academic discourse beyond the mere symbolism that is currently at play at most of our universities.

In response to this call, it should follow naturally that African languages should penetrate into the scholarly publishing sector, and this is the main subject under discussion in the current paper.

Language policy for higher education in the present day South Africa is a product of the political changes that came with the end of apartheid in 1994. Following the first multi-racial and democratic elections of 1994, the language policy of the country transformed from two languages (English and Afrikaans) to include an additional nine previously marginalized African languages, thus giving South Africa eleven official languages. This constitutional provision represents what Cobarrubias (1983) calls linguistic pluralism. This is an attempt by the official policy to reflect the country's linguistic diversity. Education, as a sector, is expected to operate in accordance with the Constitutional stipulation about adopting multilingualism.

In terms of language policy for higher education, all institutions of higher education have to come up with language policies that are in line with the wishes of the Constitution. The language policies must address the past inequalities. In other words, the language policies are expected to lie within the domain of transformation. Actually, the higher education policy document warns that, for example, any continued use of Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction runs against the transformation of higher education (Department of Higher Education and Training 2002).

We now turn to language policy ideologies. Cobarrubias' (1983) language policy ideologies are relevant for the current paper. The first ideology, internationalisation, refers to a situation whereby a language of international communication (such as English) is given official status. The objective behind this type of language policy is to enable a country or institution to connect with the wider international community. English is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. The second ideology, linguistic pluralism, is evident in South Africa through the country's eleven official languages. Third, there is linguistic assimilation. This is a situation whereby there is a dominant language and efforts are taken to drive everyone (including linguistic minorities) to use the dominant language. The fourth ideology is what is called vernacularization. This refers to a situation under which an indigenous language is capacitated and promoted to enter official

domains. We shall return to these four ideologies later on in the paper.


## Review of Related Literature

Knowledge production is not the end of the journey for any knowledge producer. The next step is to devise ways of disseminating the knowledge, and this is no easy task in Africa and other parts of the developing world (see, for example Altbach & Teferra 1998; Chan & Costa 2005; Katebire 2010; Bello & Nwagwu 2010; Ngobeni 2010). With reference to South Africa (and Africa), we may wish to pose the question: Who do South African (and/or African) academics serve, or write for? As academics, they belong to both local and international communities of practice of academics. One would say that African academics write and publish for the local and wider community. In order to reach the international community, the use of languages such as English, French or Portuguese becomes inevitable media. In the globalized world, English is the dominant medium of international communication. African academics also have local audiences to write for. African academics also need to have a sense of social responsibility. That is, they need to respond to the needs of their societies. Their academic outputs have to be relevant to their societies. In order to fulfil this social responsibility, the use of African languages becomes handy. Ki-Zerbo (1994: 36) has lamented that

> all too often, African intellectuals write for a tiny in-group, and both their language and their jargon are more arcane than the language of old Africa's sorcerers and secret societies. This reflects the serious problem of the use of African languages in education and research.

In a keynote address given at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) 30th anniversary grand finale conference and celebrations, Wa Thiong'o (2005: 160) challenges African academics as follows: 'How many social scientists have ever written a single document in an African language?' The language factor in African academics' publishing outputs is also a matter of concern in the context of the African Renaissance. For example, in the introduction to the book *The African Renaissance: The new struggle*, it is lamented that:

> While most contibutors in this volume are Africans who speak one

African language or another, none has used an African language in their writing. We have all used the African idiom and borrowed English as a means of writing. Our nuances, impressions and interpretation of English language are rooted in our African languages, experiences and meanings. Can African people champion their Renaissance through the medium of foreign languages? This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to African people (Makgoba *et al.* 1999: xi).

A debate on the Organization of Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and the language question was initiated by Kihore (2005) in an article in which he highlights the inadequacies of the organization's use of English as the sole official language. Kihore (2005) is concerned with two groups of people, whom he believes, are negatively affected by OSSREA official language policy. First, he refers to

individuals or groups of individuals who are proficient in local African languages but whose trades or activities are touched or affected by some of OSSREA's research undertakings (Kihore 2005: 1).

These people may want to access OSSREA's research findings, but end up meeting a linguistic barrier. If research findings cannot reach the people who are supposed to benefit from them, can the African academics claim to have displayed social responsibility? Whilst academics do write for their peers (in scholarly journals and other outlets, using international languages), they also have a social responsibility to ensure that their research findings trickle down to the ordinary man and woman, who in many cases, does not speak or write English, French or Portuguese, or any of the other languages of international linkage.

## Data and Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods approach. To this end, the paper carries both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell 2012; Green 2007). The qualitative data are in the form of language policies of journals. The language policies have been employed for the categorization of journals as

follows: monolingual journals (journals that accept one language only), bilingual journals (journals that accept two languages only), and multilingual journals (journals that accept three or more journals). The quantitative data comprise the frequencies of journals per language category.

The population consisted of South African journals accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training as per the 2014 list of journals. From this list, I confined the study to journals that cater for disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences. This proved to be a challenge. One of the limitations was to determine which journals belonged to the Humanities and Social Sciences category. This challenge is not new. Previously, the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences had noted that,

> there is no uniformity in terms of which core disciplines or departments form part of a humanities or social sciences faculty. There is, furthermore, no uniformity or similarity across institutions in terms of what is meant by a Social Science, Arts, Education or Creative degree in the universities of technology (Department of Higher Education and Training 2011: 42).

Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain journals that catered for disciplines in Humanities and Social Sciences. Within this list, convenience sampling was applied i.e. going for journals for which language policy details could be accessed. In the end, a total of 110 journals were used in the study. All journals were kept anonymous, and were identified by number only. Borrowing from Englander and Uzuner-Smith (2013), I employed document analysis. To this end, I analysed relevant South African strategy and policy documents such the report on the charter for humanities and social sciences (Department of Higher Education and Training 2011), policy and procedures for measurement of research output of public education institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training 2003), and the language policy for higher education (Department of Higher Education and Training 2002).

For each journal, I identified statements that constituted the journal's language policy. This involved reading through the journal and locating what constituted the journal's language policy. Each journal had its own way of declaring its language policy. Some journals were direct whilst others were not so direct. For each journal, I had to establish the language policy through

this process. In the end, it was possible to have a language label (e.g. monolingual, bilingual, multilingual etc.) placed against each journal. The data were then quantified by establishing the frequency for each language policy category.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings and their discussion have been arranged as follows. We have categorized the language policies of accredited journals under the following sub-themes, namely: journals that publish exclusively in English (English monolingual journals), bilingual journals (English plus another language), multilingual journals (three or more languages) and exclusively African language journal.

## English Monolingual Journals

Out of the 110 journals that were examined in the terms of their language policies, 77 (70%) were found to have a monolingual English policy. That is, only papers written in English are accepted in these journals. It has to be recalled that South Africa has eleven official languages. Our findings are very clear that English dominates in the journal publishing domain. Nearly twenty years after the fall of apartheid, and after the installation of an eleven language policy, and the insistency that African languages, English continues to dominate the publishing industry. The dominance of English in the journal publishing sector is consistent with the reality across the globe (see also Lee & Lee 2013; Lillis & Curry 2010; Altbach 2007 2013; Ammon 2001). The reasons why English dominates are well articulated in literature, and the main one being that authors, including non-native speakers of English, want to make themselves visible on the international scholarly scene. It is argued that publishing in languages of lesser international communication reduces a scholar's visibility. So, here we see the internationalization ideology of Cobarrubias (1983) taking the centre stage.

It is also worth mentioning that some journals do not simply prescribe English as the sole language of publication, they also prescribe the variety of English. For example, journal number 11 prescribes that 'manuscripts must be presented in UK English'. Journal number 17 instructs: 'use UK English'. Journal number 41 says 'manuscripts must be in English

(UK)'. Journal number 259 instructs authors as follows: 'use British punctuation and spelling, following the Oxford English dictionary'. The choice of UK English is not surprising in South Africa given British colonial influence in that country.

The dominance of English is also reflected in the fact that even in a journal in which languages other than English are allowed, English cannot be completely dismissed. For example, journal number 79 says that

> if an article is submitted in a language for which it is difficult to find suitable references, the author may be requested to submit a translated version in English for purposes of refereeing.

For journal number 236,'English shall be the general language but articles written in an African language should be followed by a summary of 1000 words in English'.

## Bilingual Journals

I now turn to the category of bilingual journals. Twenty three (23) (representing 20%) out of the 110 journals were categorized as bilingual. The language combination was English plus another language. The fact that English is part of the bilingual language policy further strengthens the dominance of English. One has to remember in the previous section, we noted that 70% of the journals have a monolingual English policy. English and Afrikaans is a common combination. This is not surprising given that both were previously the only two official languages (during the apartheid era) and the same languages are part of the eleven official languages package of the post-apartheid era. Whilst the use of English belongs to the internationalization ideology (Cobarrubias 1983), Afrikaans does not belong to the same category. The Afrikaans is largely confined to South African and Namibian academic circles. As such, Afrikaans does not offer wider visibility of journal articles published through the language. Actually, after the end of apartheid in 1994, the place of Afrikaans is on the decrease in South Africa. But why do some authors want write in Afrikaans? There are some who are passionate to keep Afrikaans alive as a language of scholarship, and this is also in keeping with the Constitution which recognizes Afrikaans as one of the eleven official languages. There exists a body of scholarly literature that

is written in Afrikaans, and some South African academics would like to contribute to that literature.

## Multilingual Journals

For the purpose of the current paper, I refer to multilingual journals as those with three or more languages in their publishing policy. Only 10 (10%) of the journals were in the multilingual category. The actual number of languages varied from journal to journal. For example, journal number 8 provided room for four languages: English, Dutch, German and Afrikaans. Some journals were extremely multilingual (in line with Cobarrabias' 1983 ideology of pluralism). For example, journal number 96 invited papers from all the country's eleven official languages plus international languages such as French, Japanese, German and Portuguese. But even in these linguistically inclusive journals, one still finds that English remains the dominant language.

## Exclusively African Language Journal

There is currently no accredited journal that is published exclusively in any of the nine (9) African languages that are part of the eleven official languages package. Publishing exclusively in an African language could have been designated as Cobarrubias (1983) ideology. In addition, this could have been a strong move on the path of transformation, in line the expectation in the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences that 'indigenous languages need to play a broader role in the construction of our policy. They must be extended into the discourses of scientific field … knowledge construction' (Department of Higher Education and Training 2011: 38) and further extend into the dissemination of knowledge. There is need to learn from experiences of Tanzania where Kiswahili has been significantly used in scholarly discourses, and there have been some journals published through Kiswahili (Mwansoko 2003). Whilst there is currently no South African accredited journal exclusively in an African language, it should be noted that there is a refereed journal (in isiZulu) that is going through the process of attaining accreditation from the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Whilst there are no exclusively African languages journals, one finds here and there traces of some acceptance of some papers in an African language. But this comes with some challenges. Publishing in an African

language is theoretically possible in some journals, but in reality it is an uphill task to actualize, even when dealing with journals that are specifically for language matters. For example, one journal editor advised authors about the need for an extended summary in English of between 500 to 1000 words – which would be placed at the end of the article – in addition to an English abstract (200 words or so) to accompany the conventional article abstract in an African language.

Finding reviewers who can combine competence in the subject matter as well as competence in the African language in which the paper has been written can be a tall order. The scarcity of such academics can slow down the pace at which journals are able to publish papers through African languages. One journal offers the following as a possible way out:

> If an article is submitted in a language for which it is difficult to find suitable referees, the author may be requested to submit a translated version of the article (in English) for the purpose of refereeing.

This, unfortunately, is not without its own problems. One would have liked to see an article being reviewed in its African language version, and then proceeding to be published in the same language.

An editor of a journal that accepts papers in African languages advises authors as follows:

> The publisher will contract an X language [African language] editor to do the copyediting of the article. That would be no problem. A word of caution though – articles not in English do not garner many (or any) citations. If you are agreeable, a footnote could be included on the first page that readers can correspond with the author in English.

Against this background, one still finds some South African academics who are determined to publish through African languages. They are not many, but they do exist. It may be worthwhile, in another study, to find out what motivates such academics.

## Recommendations
The fulfilment of the language transformation agenda in journal publishing in

post-apartheid South Africa and in other African countries can never be easy. This is so because with the ever rising power of globalization, the thirst for English is equally on the rise. To this end, South African academics, like others in non-English dominant countries, find themselves being caught up in a tug of war: to promote local languages but at the same time wanting to maintain presence and visibility on the international scene through publications in English.

There is need for the Department of Higher Education and Training not only to promote the use of African languages as media of teaching and learning in South African higher education, but to put in place incentives that can see African languages penetrate into the accredited journals. South Africa, as mentioned earlier, has an incentive system that funds universities for articles that are published in accredited journals, peer reviewed conference proceedings and books and book chapters. Authors and also journals could be given financial rewards for articles published through African languages. In addition, higher education institutions could be encouraged to honour and celebrate scholarly publications that come through African languages. In other words, special measures should be taken to improve the visibility and quality of scholarly publications that are in African languages.

## Summary and Conclusion

The study has identified three categories of journal language policies, namely monolingual journals, bilingual journals and multilingual journals. Table 1 summarizes the findings, and it is clear from the table that English monolingual journals dominate.

**Table 1: Summary of categories of journal language policies**

| Journal category | Frequency & Percentage |
|---|---|
| Monolingual journals | 77 (70%) |
| Bilingual journals | 23 (20%) |
| Multilingual journals | 10 (10%) |
| African language journals | 0 (0%) |

There is no doubt that the transformation agenda (through use of local lang-

uages in journal publishing) is in conflict with internationalization. There is a desire to promote African languages as languages of scholarship by publishing through them, and yet at the same time, publishing in English earns one more visibility in the global scholarly community. This language dilemma is not unique to South Africa. It is a challenge to all countries that are not predominantly English-speaking. As Altbach (2013: 326) has observed, 'the costs and benefits of language choices must be carefully assessed'. Whilst going for African languages is a right step on the road to transformation, it weakens international visibility and connectivity. As Katebire (2010: 9) has rightly remarked, 'the poor visibility of African scholarship, however, is not merely a factor of production; it is equally one of dissemination and access'.

An examination of South African journals' language policies shows that English is the most predominantly used language (with 70 % as monolingual English journals). The majority of the journals do not have space for indigenous African languages. This is despite the fact that the Constitution and the language policy for higher education create an environment in which such languages can thrive as languages of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. So far, South African journals are, if I may borrow Higher Education Minister Nzimande's words, failing to 'debunk the myth that African languages cannot be used for high level scientific research and philosophical thinking' (Nzimande 2012: 5). The dominance of English in the scholarly publishing sector is working against the transformation agenda. But this should not be surprising when one looks at the wider international scene where English plays the role of the dominant language of scholarly publishing.

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