Ten Years of Democratic South Africa

transition Accomplished?

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Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IFAS / IFAS Working Paper Series is a series of occasional working papers, dedicated to disseminating research in the social and human sciences on Southern Africa.

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The text herein presented as well as back issues of *Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IFAS / IFAS Working Paper Series* are available on the IFAS website:
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Summary

For the past ten years, South Africa has been progressively coming out of the apartheid system. Although all ties with the former regime have been severed completely, managing the heavy structural legacy has made the transition a difficult as well as an ambivalent process - difficult because the expectations of the population contrast with the complexity of the stakes which have to be dealt with; and ambivalent because the transition is based on innovations as well as continuities.

The contributions gathered in this book will try to clarify the trajectory of that transition. Offered analyses share a critical look, without complacency nor contempt, on the transformations at work. Crossing disciplines and dealing with South Africa as an ordinary and standardised country that can no longer be qualified as being a "miracle" or an "exception", gives us an opportunity to address themes that are essential to understanding post-apartheid society: land reforms, immigration policies, educational reforms, AIDS…

This issue of IFAS Working Papers is the translation of a book published with Karthala publishers to celebrate 10 years of the Research section of the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) and to highlight its major contribution to constructing francophone knowledge on Southern Africa.

Résumé

Depuis dix ans, l'Afrique du Sud sort progressivement du système d'apartheid : si les ruptures avec l'ancien régime sont nettes, la gestion d'un héritage structurel lourd rend cette transition à la fois difficile et ambivalente. Difficile car les attentes de la population contrastent avec la complexité des enjeux à traiter. Ambivalente car cette transition est faite d'innovations et de continuités.

C'est cette trajectoire que les contributions réunies ici tentent d'éclairer. Les analyses proposées partagent un regard critique sans complaisance ni mépris sur les transformations à l'œuvre. Le croisement des disciplines et le traitement de l'Afrique du Sud comme un pays ordinaire, normalisé, sorti des paradigmes du « miracle » ou de l'« exception », donnent l'occasion d'aborder des thèmes essentiels à la compréhension de la société post-apartheid : réforme agraire, politique d'immigration, réformes éducatives, sida…

Ces Cahiers sont la traduction d'un ouvrage paru chez Karthala en 2004 à l'occasion des dix ans d'existence du pôle recherche de l'Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud (IFAS) afin de souligner sa contribution majeure à la construction des savoirs francophones sur l'Afrique australe.

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Abstract

Linguistic diversity was used as a factor of social and political division during the apartheid era, whereas the South African government now aims at promoting it as a tool of nationbuilding. Though the language policy is gaining momentum, for instance in the media and the schooling environment, institutional imbalances still exist in the disfavor of "indigenous" languages. In everyday life, these languages are nevertheless used in a highly flexible way and exemplify the multi-cultural model at work in South Africa.

Résumé

La diversité culturelle a été utilisée comme un facteur de division sociale et politique à l'époque de l'apartheid. A l'inverse, le gouvernement sud-africain actuel tente de la promouvoir comme un outil de construction nationale. Bien que la politique linguistique s'affirme de plus en plus, par exemple dans les médias et le milieu scolaire, les déséquilibres institutionnels qui défavorisent les langues « indigènes » existent toujours. Dans la vie quotidienne, ces langues sont cependant utilisées de manière très libre illustrant ainsi le modèle multiculturel à l'œuvre en Afrique du Sud.

As in other domains of public intervention, the language policy that the "new" South Africa would adopt was awaited with much impatience: what would be in stock for "indigenous" languages[1]? Would they, at long last, taking full advantage of the new

[1] I deviate here from a practice that has become currency in South Africa, to refer to African languages by their own "selfsame" names, viz, their names in the very language, such as isiZulu, sePedi, etc. I feel there is no justification to depart from the common practice to name languages as they normally are in the language of writing – thus, Zulu, Pedi, etc, as we would have French, Italian and not français, italiano, etc in an English text. This is granted by Government Gazette (Vol. 430 No. 22223, 20 April 2001), which concluded, on view of the possible misreadings that selfsame names might entail, that each language will be allowed to use the name of the languages according to its own orthography and system (reference amiably communicated by Rosalie Finlayson).

I maintain however seSotho for "Southern Sotho", to establish a distinction between the specific language, seSotho, and the whole subgroup, for which we reserve the term Sotho.

Moreover, daring yet another step away from political correctness, I do not shy away from the term Bantu, used here, needless

dispensation, emerge from the townships and former homelands to become the official media of Africa economic giant? Would Africans reap the linguistic benefits of a protracted and widely publicized liberation struggle? Would African languages make their way into new technologies? Would one hear with poetic delight straight-jacketed English-or Afrikaans-speaking businessmen[2] click approvingly on signing juicy contracts? Which language(s) would be in the school curriculum and what would be the role and place of Afrikaans in Azania?

These were, or might well have been, among the interrogations regarding language policy on the dawning of the new era. During the first decade, though, none of the envisaged, sometimes feared, drastic changes were effected. Language policy did not detract from other fields of public life: in spite of ambitious intentions and recurrent proclamations, government action followed an overwhelmingly cautious and non-directive course, which led to the previous dispensation being continued well into the transition, carrying with it its legacy of inequalities. The most conspicuous change, by all means quite predictable, was an increased dominance of English, as Afrikaans lost state support, to the extent that the country seemed on the verge of a de facto monolingualism as far as state communication was concerned.

However, this view, shared by many observers -including the present writer- might well have been prematurely pessimistic: as the political situation has settled, and the risk of any major political crisis seems remote, a move towards effecting transformation in that field using language as a catalyst is perceptible. Indeed, in the highly ideological context of BEE and African Renaissance, the language question has come to the fore of the public debate once again and public intervention is gathering momentum. Language has an inherent capacity of betraying attitudes. Whether this will result in changing the situation for good though remains yet to be seen. The linguistic dice may still rebound.

The following pages attempt to shed light on this multi-faced reality, searching past policies for a better understanding of the decade-long stalemate and the background to the new policy in the making.

The Legacy of the Past

No study of any aspect of South-African society can afford to leave aside its particular history, all the more so language policy, lest it present an over-simplified view, devoid of elements critical to understanding. I will try and sequence, briefly, the various moments which inform today's language scene.

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to say, in its initial linguistic sense of a family of languages sharing certain features. No other term has proved as convenient, as Khumalo 1984 rather reluctantly acknowledged.

[2] Or perhaps businesspersons, to be in line with gender correctness …

WILL A HISTORICALLY DIVISIVE FACTOR BECOME A HALLMARK FOR TRANSFORMATION?

THE BEGINNING

European settlements on the southern-most shores of what is now South Africa began in 1652 (Marquart 1955: 17) but it is only from the following century that Europeans colonists came in contact with Bantu speakers, during their gradual trek inland. This led to the first attempts at the identification, delimitation and instrumentalisation of the languages the settlers came in contact with. Much like elsewhere in the continent, missionaries played a major part in that process[3]. Initially motivated by their call to translate the Scripture, missionaries tirelessly set to study the languages and soon coined spelling systems, compiled lexicons and dictionaries, and elaborated grammars, not to mention Biblical translation[4].

The first publications of note on Southern-African native languages date back to the early 19th century; by the end of the century, an African-language literature and press was blooming, centred around the main missions stations[5]. The missions promoted the use of local varieties in "native" education, which constituted then one of their preserves.

A first generation of black intellectuals revolved around those centres as early as the 1920ies, among them writers in their own language[6], a situation with few equivalents on the continent, revealing a degree of appropriation of the medium (Ricard 2004: 117). The decade between 1920 & 1930 marked the heyday of this intellectual blossoming. By the beginning of the XXth century, some languages could boast an already significant literary tradition and enjoy a degree of prestige among the educated elite[7]. This explains the support given by such eminent figures as Albert Luthuli to their use as medium of instruction[8], as was the case already: as early as 1885 Zulu was taught in Natal schools and a vernacular language was made compulsory in primary education from 1922, in the whole of the Union (Bekker I. 199: 103). Language boards were established, whose main concerns were spelling and

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[3] Many studies document these early starts. We quote here mostly from Miti (2001: 18) and Ntuli D.B & Swanapoel C.F. (1993:20).

[4] Among the languages object of early attention: Xhosa, "reduced to writing" (as the saying goes) in 1836 by Benie, a Presbyterian missionary, Tswana in 1837 by his Wesleyan colleague Archbell, followed by the French Casalis, and Zulu, extensively studied and documented by the American missionary A.T. Bryant, whose first study was published in 1849.

Total or partial translations of the Bible were available in Zulu as early as 1848 (see in particular Masubelele 2004), in Tswana from 1857, in Xhosa in 1859, in Sesotho in 1881, in Pedi in 1904, in Tsonga in 1907. The Venda translation was only released in 1936, whereas the Swati and Ndebele versions, it is worth noting, awaited 1991.

[5] To facilitate their work, some missions installed printing works: the major ones were in Lesotho from 1841, where the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society had established itself at the request of king Moshoeshoe (as is documented at great length in Cousins's recent Murder in Morija), in Lovedale in present-day Eastern Cape, opened in 1867 by the Presbyterian church whereas the Catholic were to be found in Marianhill in Natal.

Besides religious and literary publications, these centres edited a vernacular press: the first issue of Leselinyana la Lesotho saw the light in 1863, Isigidimi Sama Xosa in 1876 (Switzer I. & Switzer D. 1979: 2-3) and John Dube's Ilanga LaseNatal in 1903.

[6] The names of Thomas Mofolo for Sesotho, Tiyo Soga & Mqhayi for Xhosa, Fuze & J.L. Dube for Zulu come to mind (Ntuli D.B & Swanapoel C.F. 1993, Ricard 2004). The existence of this literature constitutes in itself a tribute to the dedication of the early missionaries who did a sterling job which put Southern Africa languages on the map of written languages.

[7] There was sufficient material to enable the mission educated and first professor of Bantu languages at Forth Hare D.D.T. Jabavu to publish in 1921 a comparative study of written literature in Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu and Tswana (Ntuli D.B & Swanapoel C.F. 1993:1).

[8] Luthuli, a teacher himself, authored in 1934 a vigorous plea in support of the use of Zulu as subject and medium of instruction in primary schools (Rich P.B. 1995).

terminology for school purposes, in a perspective of standardization: there were two main unified boards, for Nguni on the one hand, and Sotho on the other.

This early start however was not without its drawback: on the one hand, the principles on which the various orthographies were based reflected the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the missionaries (English-, German- or French- speaking), to the extent that one and the same language could have several distinct ways of spelling, particularly so for Sotho-Tswana languages Furthermore, instrumentalisation gave prestige and status to varieties that were in contact with the main missions, placed at (then) strategic points, thus creating boundaries in an otherwise linguistic continuum, all the more so when it was compounded by petty competition: this trend contributed to invest the idioms with an ethnic dimension that they may not always have had[9].

THE 1953 BANTU EDUCATION ACT AND ITS IMPACT

This promising development was thwarted by the proclamation of apartheid, consolidated education-wise by the 1953 Bantu Education Act[10]: apart from making Afrikaans a compulsory subject, African pupils were meant to study through their own "ethnic" language and were shepherded towards practical subjects. This policy did not go down well with the majority of the African population but government had the upper hand. Furthermore, the state took over African education and missions schools were closed (Mesthrie 2002: 18), in spite of protests and legal challenges[11].

As has been extensively documented, languages were part and parcel of apartheid ideology: the alleged incontrovertible differences between linguistic varieties were a major pillar of ethnic segregation. Each Bantustand or Homeland that the apartheid regime was busy creating along ethnic lines had to be endowed with a language of its own, as an attribute of autonomy. Indeed, African languages were granted official status in the homelands in 1963 (Babazile Mahlalela & K. Heugh 2002: 13). The united Nguni and Sotho language boards were dissolved in 1961 and individual language boards established (Mulaudzi 2002: 268),

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[9] This phenomena has been described for Shona in Zimbabwe by T. Ranger (1983).

In recent years, blame has been generously apportioned to the missionaries, accused of having been party to the "divide and rule" colonial strategy. This view however is belied by the conditions at the time and the chronological sequence.. Early missionaries laboured often with scarce contacts with the outside world and their colleagues and had to solve problems on their own, with whatever intellectual and human resources were available to them. What was to happen afterwards is hardly their fault, even if - much to their dismay- premised on their work.

[10] If Apartheid became the official policy following the National Party electoral victory in 1948, the first segregationist measures date back to the very initial years of colonisation in the Cape.

[11] The state take over also meant an extension of education for Africans and a uniformization of the curriculum, which elicited some positive reactions: some missions schools were overstretched and in a chaotic state. For a detailed analysis of the conceptual framework behind BE, and the conditions and reactions at its inception, see several contributions in Kallaway ed. (2002).

that were meant to develop the various idioms along those lines[12]. Differences, sometimes minor, between languages were emphasized reinforcing or maintaining spelling discrepancies, and a narrow and biased view of culture and language was promoted[13]. South-Africans were henceforward trapped in largely language-based ethnic compartments, at a time when the world was awakening to the importance of mother-tongue education, claimed as a right of every child in a Unesco declaration[14].

From then on, and to a large extent, continuing into the present, the use of African languages as medium of instruction became the hall mark of the hated apartheid system, synonymous with second rate education and tribalism. It is no coincidence that the wind of change gathered strength around education issues, with the school mass protest in the 70ies stemming from a rejection of Bantu Education, particularly Afrikaans as a compulsory subject; this brought forth the 1976 Soweto uprisings and the crisis did not subside until the 1990 aggiornamento, as the amendments that government half-heartedly consented to, remained a far cry from people demands[15].

Part and parcel of apartheid legacy in language planning is the development of Afrikaans. The Afrikaans language stemmed initially from a cultural nationalist movement, and benefited from 1925 onwards from determined state support: Afrikaans was made official and sustained at all levels of administration and government, including primary and secondary education, not to forget its compulsory diffusion by means of the Bantu Education Act. If forceful imposition had obvious setbacks, the policy as a whole yielded impressive results in terms of language development, such as its use in prestige domains such as literature and Higher Education.

The linguistic situation at the dawn of the new era

South-Africa's particular history has resulted in a very specific linguistic scene, which is not accounted for by a mere listing and classification of the languages identified, even though this remains a necessary beginning. Without qualitative assessments, static surveys do not do justice to the language dynamics at play.

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[12] This late political development has led to a misinformed interpretation of the past, in which early missionaries take the blame for a move some missions did their utmost to resist. The unified Nguni and Sotho-Tswana language boards are sometimes even not mentioned (see for instance the report on the Development of Indigenous African Languages, etc, 2003: point 23).

[13] In the Zulu homeland, the dominant Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) also imposed a type of biased civic education called Ubunto-botho (Mdluli P. 1987).

[14] We regard the cognitive advantages of mother-tongue education well established and do not dwell further on that aspect.

[15] Even in its last version, this policy maintained a discrepancy between Africans and other "races" education-wise: whereas all had to learn English and Afrikaans, Black people, who were confined to the schools falling under Department of Education and Training, were obliged to pass an African language at matric exam.

WILL A HISTORICALLY DIVISIVE FACTOR BECOME A HALLMARK FOR TRANSFORMATION?

LANGUAGES INVENTORY AND DISTRIBUTION

In South-Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, one is struck at first glance by the apparent linguistic diversity, making up the African Babel as some put it.

The SA census include a number of questions relating to language: all surveys refer to the same eleven "home languages"[16], which are those which enjoyed a manner of official recognition at national level for English and Afrikaans, at regional or local ones, viz, within the homelands, for the African languages. They are, in alphabetical order, Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Pedi, Shangani, Sesotho, Swati, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu[17].

The geographical and demographic distribution of those languages reveal, among other things[18]:

- the overall demographic dominance of Zulu and Xhosa as home languages, each claimed by close to a quarter of the respondents, and the low position of English;

- the presence of minority African languages, such as Ndebele, Swati, Venda, Tsonga;

- the geographical density of all language communities with the exception of English;

- the spatial extension of Afrikaans, throughout both Eastern and Western Cape, but with a low population density; the Coloured constitute the main Afrikaans-speaking group.

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

Various factors counterbalance the apparent diversity and ensure communications. Among the more significant ones:

- Mutual intelligibility

As a whole, South-African Bantu languages belong to two main subgroups: the Nguni languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Swati & Ndebele, and the Sotho languages, a grouping of Sesotho, Pedi or Northen-Sotho, and Tswana[19]; languages within these subgroups are to a large degree mutually intelligible[20].

- Multilingualism beyond home-language (see table in fine)

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[16] "Home language", which has gained currency in SA, is more appropriate to the SA situation than "mother-tongue" or even first language, although both are also used.

[17] I do not question here the language inventory, indeed another legacy of apartheid. Some researchers claim the languages to be many more – Mbulungeni Madiba's estimates is between 24 and 30 (1999: 61), when Mda (2004: 178) gives a figure of "approximately 24", quoting Squelch 1993. Neither details further. One crucial question is the status of "dialects" within each of the officially recognized languages: should they be given full recognition, afforded a status as "variants", or remain subsumed under the "main" language? We come back to what can be termed social variants.

[18] The successive census conducted in 1991, 1996 & 2001 show only minute variations, apart from a population growth rate more pronounced for African people. Hence a slightly decreasing proportion of English and Afrikaans speakers.

[19] Nguni and Sotho include many other dialects or sub-dialects, some betraying extensive contacts across the two subgroups, like Phuthi.

[20] In an informed discussion of the 1991 census results, the authors, linguists themselves, systematically gave the total number of speakers of a given variety within a subgroup as the total number of speakers of any particular variety of that same subgroup (DACTS 2000).

A significant proportion of Black South-Africans have, to varying degrees, a command of at least two African languages, if not three or more[21], and are able to shift from one variety to another according to the situation, the topic, the other actors, etc. This is true especially in urban areas, with Gauteng townships a case in point, but also in rural areas where a minority-language is spoken, due to temporary emigration.

English and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans used as medium in education and endowed with high prestige, attain high levels of understanding as non-home languages: over one third of South-Africans claim a command of English, but the proportion drops to 15% for Afrikaans.

- Code-switching[22]

A consequence of the widespread diffusion of multilingualism is extensive code-switching, in verbal communication between African speakers, to the extent that code-switching itself may be considered, in some instances, as the very variety used (Slabbert S. & Finlayson R 2002; Ramsay-Brijball 2002).

- Language Demographics

A comparison between the 1991 & 2001 census shows that no language is suffering a reduction in absolute terms of its demographic base; Zulu, which benefits from a constant increase, is fast becoming the lingua franca in Gauteng.

- Neighbouring countries

With the exception of Xhosa, all African South-African languages are spoken in neighbouring countries as well, a fact which suggests a number of speakers larger than acknowledged, due to a growing regional immigration since 1996, not necessarily reflected in the census. Moreover, the language policy conducted in these countries may have an impact in South Africa[23].

- New varieties

This dynamics of extensive contact has led to internal changes in the language varieties, as well as the emergence of linguistic forms, such as urban slangs amongst which the most famous are Tsotsitaal and is(i)Camtho, based respectively on Afrikaans and Sotho, and English and Zulu (Makhudu 2002; Ntshangase 2002). In linguistically homogeneous areas, however, the medium is usually stable and predominantly African.

The main consequences of these combined facts, from the perspective of language planning, may be spelt as:

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[21] We refer here to the ability to understand languages beyond the intelligibility within subgroups, as described above.

[22] Code-switching can be loosely described as a constant shift from one variety to another, during a verbal intercourse.

[23] The elevation of Swati as an official language in Swaziland in 1968 has probably contributed to maintaining its status in South Africa, even after the political reintegration of KaNgwane homeland. The growing official use of Tswana in Botswana, of Sesotho in Lesotho, are other cases in point.

- wide command of a Nguni and Sotho variety across the African population: almost half of South-Africans indicate a Nguni language as their home language, and a quarter, one from the Sotho subgroup. If we add to these figures the high rate of multilingualism, we arrive at a figure of over 60% of the population with an understanding of a Nguni variety, of over 35% for a Sotho variety. Similar figures are more difficult to extrapolate for English & Afrikaans (see table in fine, col. 5 and its comments).
- growing discrepancy between registers or varieties within a language, as spoken forms drift apart from the norm, in a situation of extensive contacts.

These two features may appear somewhat contradictory. We return to this aspect later.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

Even if apartheid language policies had a negative impact on attitudes regarding the use of African languages in education, research conducted prior to apartheid, and even a number of works conducted during the period, also resulted in the development of the languages and of linguistic tools on an unrivalled scale on the continent[24]: these go far beyond spelling systems to include technical terminology, a lively literature, a press, as well as an educated and literate public. Moreover, the cognitive advantages of mother-tongue education, established world-wide, belittle the petty rationale behind its promotion by apartheid policies[25]. Apartheid legacy in terms of language development is not all negative[26] and the comparison with a large part of the continent where local languages were dismissed altogether is instructive in that regard.

South-Africa can further claim a vast experience in language planning, eminently successful for Afrikaans, which expanded in all domains (literature, sciences and techniques, higher education, etc); the language rapidly made up for its initial underdevelopment, and, at the time of the advent of democracy, was close to parity with English in many domains.

When compared to most countries in the continent, the relatively wide extension of the main languages, given mutual intelligibility and multilingualism combined with the economic strength of the country offer particularly favourable conditions for the promotion of African languages.

It is within these complex and sometimes conflicting parameters that the ANC leadership was to coin a language policy.

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[24] See Babazile Mahlalela & Kathleen Heugh (2002) for an assessment of the various technical publications of the language boards, prior and after the Bantu Education Act. After all, technical terminology need not reflect the ideological approach of the regime which had it coined.

[25] The East-African situation offers a degree of similarity with SA: in colonial times, the education system was racially divided, with education for Africans being conducted in Swahili; that resulted however in placing Swahili in an optimum position come Independence to be elevated as national language; Mhina who analyses language planning from a Tanzanian perspective gives ample credit to the policy options and research conducted under the successive colonial powers (1976).

[26] Reassessing the outcomes of Bantu Education, Kathleen Heugh is not shy to conclude that it led in real terms to an improvement in the standards of education for Blacks (2002: 14).

LINGUISTIC POLICY DURING THE TRANSITION

POLICY IN THE MAKING

Beyond ritual declarations in favour of a re-assessment of African languages and a rejection of apartheid policies, the ANC in exile never laid emphasis on the language question. The Freedom Charter itself remains vague and hardly committed to the language issue[27]; it merely states:

"All people shall have equal rights to use their own languages and to develop their own folk culture and customs"

The objective of correcting past imbalances and integrating the various populations, in particular previously excluded groups, was not translated in terms of the envisaged language policy. The implicit trend was in favour of declaring English the only official medium, in order to promote national unity, counteract linguistic parochialism that apartheid promoted and downgrade Afrikaans[28].

The language question, however, in the last few years before the transition, received a measure of attention in society at large, thanks to initiatives such as the National Language Project established in 1985 (Alexander 1989: 15), and a reflection on language in education led by the National Policy Education Investigation from 1990 (Bekker 1999: 108).

Issues around language in education were among the first to be addressed: as early as 1991 both Bantu Education and any type of language imposition were repelled in a consensual manner as the various segregated education departments started to be integrated. But the core question of the role of English – how to deal with its polyvalent status as it embodies the language of liberation, a language of colonisation as well as the language of an elite – was left undecided[29].

During the negotiations, it was in fact the National Party that kept the linguistic fire burning as it fought relentlessly to maintain the official status of Afrikaans: according to K. Heugh, the linguistic provisions in the 1993 Interim Constitution result from a last-minute compromise between the NP & the ANC (2002: 460). Beyond political pressure, some of the main factors within the linguistic field which explain the new policy may be tentatively summarized as follows:

- the absolute and determined rejection of any thing reminiscent of Bantu Education by the ANC leadership as well as its constituency, including any privileged position for Afrikaans:

- a definite aspiration for freedom of choice in all domains, after centuries of constraints and within the new culture of rights;

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[27] The Freedom Charter will remain ANC reference text until it came to power.

[28] A meeting held in Harare in 1990 on this issue was not successful in breaking away from the past, in spite of elaborated proposals (for example Cluver).

[29] The language activist N. Crawhall says it most eloquently: "English has been a double-edged sword for the liberation movement (...) a powerful instrument of liberation (...) and a vehicle for a hegemony that may undermine participatory democracy" (in Bekker 1999: 108)

- a concern of the risk of fuelling conflicts in an already volatile situation, concerns which might have emerged from a language imposition or exclusion;
- the implicit recognition of the overall dominance of English;
- the realization of the complexity of the linguistic scene

The concern for appeasement and conciliation is illustrated in the common grounds principles that preside over language policy in schools, as promulgated by the Gauteng provincial government in 1994, among others (p 6):

Language policy should operate within a new paradigm of human rights. (…).

Language policy shall never again be used to exploit or dominate any individual or any language community

Language policy should creatively find strategies and mechanisms to redress the imbalances and injustices experienced (..) in the past, without negating the gains or diminishing the human rights of those language communities which have been historically favored.

The language provisions in the 1996 Constitution ; its instruments

The language provisions in the 1996 Constitution, reiterate, albeit in a less detailed fashion - some say edulcorated - the dispositions put in place in the interim Constitution. As has been extensively documented[30], eleven languages, the very same ones that had formerly enjoyed recognition, if at different levels, are elevated to official status on the same footing[31]. The text carefully refrains from the imposition of any particular language and promotes multilingualism and multiculturalism. All citizens and groups are guaranteed the use of any of the official languages in their dealings with government and public services; the Constitution makes explicit provision for the translations of official texts in all eleven languages and allows each province to designate "provincial" languages as long as they are more than one (Art. 6.4).

Linguistic rights, seen as human rights, are upheld by the Constitution.
A body, the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb), established in terms of the Constitution[32] and acting as a watchdog, is to ensure that linguistic rights are fully respected, at individual and community level[33]. It can advise on any piece of legislation that has bearing on the language issue and can adjudicate in claims regarding linguistic rights.

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[30] See, inter alia, Vernon Sullivan, Alexander 1989, Moyo 2002, K. Heugh 2002a, etc, among many other titles, some of which we refer to more specifically.

[31] Some commentators, disregarding this continuity, consider the mere recognition of the eleven languages as a progressive measure.

[32] The establishment of Pansalb by the Bill of Rights is no mean indication of the importance afforded to the language question.

[33] Pansalb is part of a chain of independent constitutional bodies, protecting individual rights vis-à-vis the state.

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

WILL A HISTORICALLY DIVISIVE FACTOR BECOME A HALLMARK FOR TRANSFORMATION?

One of its main tasks was to establish or overlook various bodies with competence in the language field:

- provincial language bodies, made of representatives of each language spoken in a given province, according to its demographic importance; these committees contribute to the province language policy;
- national language committees for each language, which work towards its maintenance and development;
- national lexicography units, specifically tasked to compile lexicographical tools.

Pansalb must also ensure that Khoesan languages, sign language as well as other minority languages, not included in the official eleven, are promoted and enjoy respect[34]. The National Language Service, located within the Department of Arts and Culture, is a new umbrella for transformed structures: it includes terminology services, revamped versions of the former National Terminology Services, the defunct State language Service, together with the new linguistic bodies established by Pansalb[35].

Language in education policy, spelt in two specific regulations issued in 1996 by the Ministry of Education, shows a similarly cautious approach[36]; the cornerstone is a decentralisation of the decision making process to the provinces and the educational institutions themselves; the choice of languages to be used in each school, as either subject or medium of instruction[37], now falls within the ambit of the newly established "school governing bodies". However, provincial dispositions apply, as long as they are in conformity with national policies in the matter (Brown 1998: 5). Each pupil is entitled to be taught in the language that he elects, and the school is compelled by law to organize the tuition in the requested language "where this is reasonably practical"[38]. For the national exams, two languages, selected among the official eleven, are compulsory, one being taken as a first language (L1)[39].

This framework is undoubtedly innovative, in spite of its partial continuity with the past, especially as it affords citizens an opportunity for an active participation and a latitude to select the language of their choice, in the various circumstances of their life. But it was clear even then that a mere framework would not suffice to correct unbalances: a more directive approach was required.

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[34] The explicit mention of sign language results probably from its downgrading during apartheid: official doctrine had it that it was not a language in its own right, therefore prohibiting its use for European children with hearing deficiency. The deaf community tends to consider itself as a linguistic minority (see Aarons D. & Akach P. 2002).

[35] It is striking that the institutional architecture put in place for the development of African languages is built on the mould that ensured the success of Afrikaans, which put a clear emphasis on terminology (Langtag 1996: 84).

[36] For a detailed overview of the regulations governing language in schools, see Th. Mda (2004).

[37] The difference between both functions tends to blur somehow, and the document refers simply to "language areas".

[38] This wording has recently been under criticism, as a hindrance to transformation (Report cit., 2003, point 37.4); see further.

[39] At primary level, German is added to the list – a concession to the significant German-speaking minority present in the country, and its strong tradition of maintaining German in education.

This prompted the then Minister of Culture, Ben Ngubane, to establish the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG), in December 1995, to make suggestions in order to redress the situation, to ensure that all South-Africans have equal access to all government and social services in the language of their choice, and to promote historically marginalized languages. The terms of reference take issue with the tendency to use only English and the lack of tolerance towards linguistic diversity. The appointment of Neville Alexander to its chair seemed to signal that government was eager to act. Alexander was a former Robben Island detainee and a committed sociolinguist. As director of the National Language Project (NLP) he had championed a "revolutionary" proposal for the harmonization of African languages (see below),. The Langtag report, Towards a National Language Plan for South-Africa, was handed to the government in August 1996. It makes practical and detailed recommendations, for the short and medium term; we extract the following (Langtag 1996: 2-5):

- promotion of African languages through their use in prestige situations, such as public interventions by opinion leaders, their use in the media, at University, and so on;
- stimulation for employers and employees to learn more languages, by eventually making such knowledge a condition of employment;
- in-depth study of language use and language distribution and committed support for development of languages and language planning;
- recruitment of linguistic officers within provincial administrations

The Langtag report however avoids any pronouncement on the issue of language standardization or harmonization, or on their standard forms[40].

Tentative assessment of transformation after the first decade

For all the sophistication and ambitions of the new legal instruments, transformation in the language scene remained, in the first decade, disappointing. The only province to try and implement the framework was the (then) NP-led Western-Cape, whose 1999 language Act proclaims English, Afrikaans and Xhosa as provincial languages[41]. This was not emulated by other provinces.

Language use on the ground has been extensively documented in a sociological survey commissioned in 2000 by Pansalb to the private institute Mark Data (Pansalb 2000). An array of questions relates language choice with the place (at home, in the neighbourhood, at school,

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[40] The report of the on-line subcommittee merely lists various attempts at standardization.

[41] The Act requires the regular observation of linguistic practices, from official as well as private stake-holders. Translation and interpretation services are put in place in the major public departments; linguistic training, including Xhosa classes, are offered to civil servants (see the WC website www.westerncape.gov.za). Even though this inclusive approach might have been initially prompted by a concern for Afrikaans, it seems to have been implemented rather fairly, thus benefiting Xhosa. In 2005, it was announced that the WC government was considering making Xhosa compulsory.

in public, and so forth), and diverse other variables (home language, gender, age, school level, etc)[42].

Four major findings deserve mention:

- only half of the South-African population understands English in a satisfactory manner[43]; as this figure includes English and Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers, it follows that less than half of the Black population have a reasonable command of formal English (op. cit. 139)[44]. Still, politicians are keen to express themselves in English[45]: during the parliamentary year 2002-2003, only twelve MP delivered their speeches in an African medium (Pansalb report 2002-2003: 11-12)[46].

- African languages fare especially poorly whenever writing is involved: in two thirds of police cases reported by Blacks in an African language, the report is worded in English or Afrikaans, a medium that the complainant may not be familiar with[47];

- about half of African-language speakers express a wish for more radio and TV programs in their languages (op. cit. 80 & 104), as well as its increased use on boards and other public signposts, whereas the figure is only 2% for English speakers (but 24% of Afrikaans speakers)[48];

- -regarding language in education, close to two thirds of the sample opt for inclusion of the mother-tongue in the syllabus, as opposed to only 12% for the use of English only (op. cit. 123)[49]. However, English and Afrikaans make up for 94% of medium of instruction, when Zulu, the first African language by the number of speakers, counts only for 6% (op. cit. 75). This paradoxical result is confirmed by a previous study carried out in KwaZuluNatal which shows a contradiction between parents' declared preferences for the use of Zulu as medium of instruction, and their attitudes, since, whenever they can, they send their children to English-speaking establishments (Brown 1998: 31).

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[42] The representativity of the sample seems questionable, due to the limited number of interviewed (2160). In respect of minority language groups in particular, the sample appears rather reduced (20 Ndebele speakers, 27 Venda), and the validity of the extrapolation of the responses becomes therefore somewhat dubious. Of note, the figures it gives for Afrikaans as home language is slightly higher than in other surveys (17% as opposed to 14%) (Pansalb 2000: 14).

[43] The question queries the understanding of political speeches. We combine the two categories of "understand fully" and "sufficiently ".

[44] An official commentary concludes on those figures that over 40% of the African population do not grasp communication in English (DAC 2002: 9). K. Heugh, using the same data, quotes 49% (2001: 106)

[45] Language attitudes among political leaders may follow party lines: the national TV coverage of the Bredell affair, where a group of under-privileged people attempted to settle on private land in 2001, showed ministers and ANC dignitaries, who did not condone the facts and wanted "squatters" to be removed, speaking in English while PAC leaders, who were generally supporting the "squatters", would speak in Sotho.

[46] Parliament enjoys a translation and interpretation system in all official languages; debates are broadcast, which means a MP can target his own constituency.

[47] The case of the judicial system, not covered by the survey, is even worse, since the majority of the judges do not speak any African language (Mutasa D. 1999: 93).

[48] This obviously indicates the degree of (dis)satisfaction of the population in that regard.

[49] More precisely, one third express a wish for mother-tongue education, and almost a majority, for a bilingual system, with English *and* mother-tongue (op. cit. 121).

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This survey, combined with immediate observations of the generally weak command of English in African children schooled in rural areas and townships, amply shows the limits of the policy followed from 1994 in order to do away with any language-based discrimination. In fact, discrimination continues, if in a more subdued manner, thus putting English-speaking children, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans-speaking ones, at a considerable advantage[50].

It comes as no surprise, given these premises, that speakers of European languages tend to be more satisfied with the language policy than African languages speakers (two thirds against one half)[51]. Still, Africans in general hardly claim their linguistic rights: the vast majority of complaints directed to Pansalb concerns Afrikaans, hardly any deal with African languages.

Literary productions in African language, which had flourished before 1992, dropped considerably, as the school market -the only market for African-language books due to financial, social and cultural reasons - shrank dramatically when the vast majority of schools turned to English. Apartheid policy had seemingly given it a death-kiss[52].

Past imbalances, viz, the dominance of a European language in all domains has not been addressed. Rather, English was fast becoming the de facto official language of government communication, in spite of its limited diffusion within the African population, creating a diglossic situation and putting into question the reality of democracy at root-level; African languages did not see their status enhanced, even less did their speech communities enjoy any privilege in reverse. Beyond the abolition of linguistic restrictions, inequalities based on language continued unabated[53], and the much-vaunted promotion of African languages remained a policy on paper only. In education, English became the medium of choice of parents and pupils alike, African languages fast disappearing from the scene, even as subjects, while Afrikaans kept a few strongholds.

South-Africa seemed bound to follow in the steps of many other countries on the continent where promotion of native languages does not detract from mere declarations, what Bamgbose stigmatizes as "declarations without implementation" (in Mutasa, 1999: 86).

Indeed, the LangTag recommendations remained largely un-implemented[54]. K. Heugh explains this lack of action by Ben Ngubane's departure from the Ministry of Culture (2002a: 463), whereas Th. Mda, calling a spade a spade, mentions "a lack of political will" (2004: 182).

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[50] Mda reports from a survey conducted amongst African learners recently integrated in English-speaking schools that "studying through English was frustrating, demoralising and even traumatic for many learners" (2004: 185). This rationale is behind present-day attempts to use African languages in higher education.

[51] The figures show further significant differences between the African communities, which would warrant investigation.

[52] As Swanapoel so aptly put it, it was both "censored and sponsored" (1997: 19).
See also Grobler (1995) for a problematization of African language literature in SA.

[53] The most disadvantaged group being, quite expectedly, rural African women (see Heugh 2001).

[54] This led Neville Alexander to withdraw from the vice-chairmanship of Pansalb.

However, the laissez-faire approach of the first decade did bring forth a crucial outcome that should not be discarded now that the context has changed: language issues did not fuel any major crisis, even less a language war. The few conflicts that emerged, and continue to, usually around the use of Afrikaans in education, remained limited in scope and under control.

The recent moves by government, premised on some of the findings listed above, suggest that one should be weary of jumping to conclusions: beyond personal preferences, it may also be that language issues were not deemed priorities in the first decade by a government facing a daunting combination of challenges. Transformation in the language arena, we contend, is still on the cards.

Revisiting the field: language policy since 2003

After a period characterized by a very cautious approach to change, reflecting probably a lack of clear policy and ideological conflicts, the issue of equality between languages (and their speakers) seems to have attracted, once again, state attention. It may well be that language is on its way to become an active instrument of transformation and this elicits a positive response within a population where linguistic pride is wide-spread[55]. This policy shift will have been pioneered by various initiatives from civil society, often with state support.

We begin by recalling some major hindrances to linguistic transformation that have started to be addressed.

Unrelenting Challenges

Much has been said on linguistic policy and language planning in African situations; diverse and sometimes contradictory proposals, ideas, programs, have flourished[56] and we are not intending to join the fray. We wish merely to mention, in relation to South-Africa, some specific difficulties that, in our view, need to be addressed. They reflect the fact that the language clause in the Constitution was a political response in a given situation; it was not a language planning decision. We shall approach them from three viewpoints, which subsume many others[57].

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[55] In a study of language attitude among residents of Mlazi, a Durban township, Rudwick established that language attitudes were played, at least, at two levels: even if most would acknowledge the importance of English for work and social position, they would also entertain pride in their own language, and were keen to maintain it, as they considered it part of their Zulu identity (2004).

[56] There is a vast literature on language planning in African countries and further a-field (see inter alia Bamgbose A. 1991; Alexander N. 1992)

[57] They have been object of an endless list of meetings and workshops, which, for a long time, yielded no concrete result and appeared all but vain; the debates however nurtured an awareness of the problems ahead and worked towards preparing the field for decisions.

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Language harmonization: the Nhlapo/Alexander proposal

Language harmonization is probably a condition for the efficient development of African languages in South-Africa.

It seems unrealistic to advocate a simultaneous modernisation of all official African languages taken individually, when their demographic bases are so different. On the other hand, the significant degree of mutual intelligibility and multilingualism make room for innovating strategies. This forms the basis of Nhlapo's proposal in the pre-war period, retrieved and revamped by Neville Alexander in the NLP as early as 1985[58]; if it fell into deaf ears for a long time, it seems to be gaining acceptance.

The core element is harmonization of the different spelling systems within the Nguni and Sotho groups: that would tremendously facilitate circulation of texts within both groups, whether they are written in any of the existing varieties or in a unified language (Nguni or Sotho). That would result in obvious economies of scale, for school manuals in particular, whose commercial costs can only be recouped by mass production and market. This does not raise insuperable technical difficulties, as has been demonstrated by numerous studies but does break away from habits born from colonial and apartheid legacy[59].

Alexander goes on to suggest additive teaching – introducing a Nguni language for Sotho-speaking learners, and a Sotho language for Nguni-speakers, in order to do away with the communitarianism that presides over education, give flesh to the additive bilingualism that the official instruction calls for[60], and take full advantage of the multilingual context of South-Africa.

Internal language variety and norm

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[58] The initial proposal advocated for the coining of a unified Nguni and a unified Sotho. It met initially with a determined opposition, many stake-holders in the language apparatus expressing repulsion towards any change that might affect their own habits. Alexander then backed down towards a more modest unification of spelling systems, a step that could only narrow the gap between the languages. The whole idea is grounded in the examples of countries, such as Zimbabwe, which have developed a standard language out of very close varieties through determined language planning dating back to colonial times (Moyo T. 2002).

[59] This could be easily done for Nguni, as spelling systems are very similar and not controversial; indeed, Nguni standardization as advocated by Miti (2001) seems to boil down basically to the disappearance of two orthographic symbols specific to Swati. That reminds us that Swati was made official and endowed with a slightly different spelling system in the wake of the creation of the KaNgane homeland around 1980 (Miti op. cit. : 9); Zulu was used until then.

For Sotho languages however, whose spelling conventions are not only language specific but are divorced from the norm in African languages, it would entail a much wider reform, so they become on line with current views on African language orthography; however the recent standardisation of Silozi (a Sotho variety spoken in Zambia, now spelt conjunctively along the lines of other Zambian languages), may show the way to go.

Such orthographic updating would certainly contribute to reveal similarities with Nguni concealed to a considerable extend by the differing spelling principles. That might also facilitate written transcription of urban language styles, characterized by a constant mixture of varieties.

[60] This last idea, subtile though it may be, has never received due consideration. Among Alexander's other suggestions, some seem on the verge of been implemented: making compulsory an African language at school and a requirement to master at least one African language in order to qualify for any public position at national or provincial level.

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Another core issue revolves around internal language variety, the norm, and the school syllabus for African languages.

Languages change, and linguistic contacts, together with multilingualism are among the engines of change. South-African urban areas are a breeding ground for this phenomena[61]. In particular, Gauteng varieties have integrated not only words but also sounds, and even grammatical structures from languages and varieties with which they are in constant contact. Still, the standard and norms remain static, based as it is on rural varieties; recent changes are not acknowledged by language committees which, as a rule, entertain a purist notion of language. A dichotomy between the language norms and the speech varieties of the urbanized modern layers of society, allegedly opinions leaders, has developed (Slabbert & Finlayson 2002: 238)[62], which may be further complicated by political undertones, due to the centrality of language in the definition of one's identity[63]. Taking Pedi as an example, V. Webb & al. showed that the so-called standard was lacking some trappings of a standard language, viz., wide acceptance in the speech community, therefore making it unattractive for prestige purposes, including education and creative writing (2004).

Combined with an emphasis on rural, traditional culture in term of the school syllabus[64], this explains the avoidance of African languages in schools by African learners from urban areas, especially as subject for matric[65], and this negative choice continues in higher education[66]. This has led to a reduction in terms of literacy in African languages, and has affected the generation which entered school from the late seventies.

English vs African languages : a necessary complementarity

In terms of the Constitution, English is on equal footing with the other official languages. This does not hold water: whether one likes it or not, the role of English as a world language endows it with a special position and its extension in South-Africa is in fact a significant advantage for the dissemination of knowledge and techniques, notably through the internet[67]. African languages should not be seen as competing with English in all domains, especially in higher education, because there is no point to stage a lost battle. Even if the link between the

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[61] This has attracted the interest of socio-linguists.

[62] To some extend, this phenomena may be compared to the situation of Afrikaans, where the divergent Cape Dutch and Oranjerivier varieties, spoken mostly by the Coloured community, are marginalized (Carstens A. & Grebe H. 2001: 5).

[63] This is probably particularly so for Zulu, since the dichotomy rural vs urban language runs (or ran) largely parallel to the opposition IFP vs ANC.

[64] Many Zulu learners living in Gauteng remain convinced that the Zulu syllabus is primarily concerned with the various types of cattle horns and skin colours in the perspective of lobola (bride-price) …

[65] That seemed a rational option: in 2001, the L1 matric pass rate in Gauteng was over 95% for English and Afrikaans, whereas it was not superior to 55% for Zulu – according to figures communicated by the Gauteng Department of Education. If one considers that English and Afrikaans are taken by a larger number of non-mother tongue students than African languages, that does raise question on the respective level required in each group of languages. Indeed, deviations from the language norm, even when they have become the accepted forms in urban areas, are (at least, were, see below) usually considered faulty.

[66] African Language universities departments have suffered, in much the same way as Arts in general, of the priority afforded to sciences and international relations for what regards the allocation of scholarships. Numbers have dwindled dramatically since 1998, with some departments closing or retrenching.

[67] Mozambique concerted attempts to introduce and spread English proves the point further, if need be.

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presence of African languages at Universities and their gaining a positive image is obvious, it is difficult not to feel that the hype which presently surrounds will soon dissolve. As Th Moyo puts it, "the choice of media, particularly beyond secondary school level, is not dependent on a community's wishes but is rather dictated by global academic pursuits" (2002: 149). This is a time when even established languages such as the Nordic family, or Dutch, make way to English in Higher Education in their respective countries. It might be more to the point to redefine the respective domains of English on the one hand and the local languages on the other, in order to promote complementarity.

Government's cautious approach

After the return of Ben Ngubane at the helm of the Ministry of Culture in 1999, a Language Bill, accompanied by a detailed Implementation Plan, was put on the table. A first draft was circulated in 2000 (Ntshangase 2001: 8) but it is only in 2003 that it was officially introduced in a widely publicised gathering whose closure was graced by no lesser mortal than the (then) vice-president, Jacob Zuma, who addressed the guests in Zulu[68]; his presence was deemed to signal a new commitment of the state to look into the issue[69].

The Bill foreword acknowledges the limited effects that the existing legal instruments so far had on the promotion of African languages and on redressing inequalities. Besides promoting "the use of all native languages", the text states as its objectives encouraging their study and achieving multilingualism. It makes compulsory the issuing of all national government documents in the eleven languages, or at least in six of them, being one from the Nguni subgroup, one from the Sotho one, Venda, Tsonga, English and Afrikaans[70]. Local and provincial government may reduce this number, if sufficiently justified by local conditions, pending Pansalb statutory approval. The text also redefines the mandate of the various linguistic bodies, with an attempt to stimulate the establishment of the ministerial and provincial committees, whose state of advancement differed according to languages and provinces; they were to be created within 5 years from its passing into law[71]. Indeed, in a dramatic acceleration, by the end of 2003, all such committees were installed (Pansalb 2000, 2001: 31, 2003: 1).

The legal process remained protracted: the Bill, that was to be presented to Parliament before its adjournment at the end of 2003, was eventually withdrawn pending further

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[68] Jacob Zuma did not depart from his habit of using Zulu in his political appearances, when he commented his dismissal from government with a Zulu saying, "ngelusa ngaqhathwa", meaning, according to University of Johannesburg student Sipho Zulu, "when I was a herder I did stick fighting ", therefore, I am not to take it lying down.

[69] South African language Bill and Implementation Plan, April 2003. The Bill itself, together with the Plan, had been translated in the eleven languages by the NLS and all brochures were extensively circulated at the occasion.

[70] This is a clear vindication of the Nhlapo/ Alexander proposal (see above). Within a subgroup, languages should have a "tour of duty" (DAC 2002: 6).

[71] It is explicitly stipulated that only native speakers qualify for membership in the national language committees, which is a reminder that apartheid language boards included European "linguists"; that a measure of nationalism goes with language issues is granted. It is ironic though that it further specifies that these new members must be also knowledgeable on linguistic issues (DAC op. cit. 11), something that might not have required mention….

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consideration, possibly a "costing exercise", and its public discussion seems ever delayed[72]. In any case, the linguistic question was not a major item in the agendas of the parties vying for the 2004 Parliamentary election and the Bill was not represented for discussion to the new Parliament.

One should not surmise though that government desisted altogether: as became apparent, it chose to use existing laws as well as to act through other channels[73], gradually bringing transformation to the linguistic scene.

On the one hand, government made full use of non-written media. Since 2003, SABC the national broadcaster has increased time slots for African languages including news in all eleven languages, addingVenda, Swati and Tsonga for the first time (Moyo T. 2002: 151). Judging from the programs, there is also a dramatic increase in production (and possibly in quality) of African language serials[74], which are constantly replayed or extended due to popular demand (viz, Yizo Yizo, Gaz'lami, Isidingo, Bomsana, etc,[75]). In 2005, the phased launching of two African-language only channels was announced.

Department of Culture followed suite and, in 2005, opened a window for writers in African languages to submit manuscripts for consideration.

Education-wise, the new minister, Naledi Pandor, appointed in 2005, seemed committed not only to abide by the Constitution's obligations, but to fully achieve its objectives.

Regarding primary and secondary education, explicit declarations advocating for alteration to the School Act to allow government to impose language policies in national interest, have created turmoil (see Ministry of Education website and the press for details)[76]. The revised version of the new syllabus, Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS 2005), which took effect from 2004, acknowledges the language context and offers a bilingual model for non-English speaking communities[77], with mother-tongue as medium of instruction for the first three years of schooling[78], English being introduced in the third year, and generalized from the fourth year onwards[79]. A typically South-African paradox, this,

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[72] That coincided with the second departure of Ben Ngubane from the Ministry in February 2004.

[73] This surfaced in comments by NLS staff at question-time at the Alasa 2004 conference in Lesotho.

[74] Since 2004, SABC has accepted scripts submitted in African languages (statement of a SABC representative, Wiser conference Township now, June 2004).

[75] These series often portray realistically life in the cities or townships, where intercourse is characterized by constant code-switching and interferences. One can note also the increased amount of African language dialogues in the ever so popular soapy Generations, and the fact that even the private eTV now has African language serials (eg. Scandal).

[76] Visiting KZN in 2005, the Minister announced that Zulu would (or should?) be compulsory.

It is not yet clear however whether the Minister's declarations were already policies or suggestions and if all schools were concerned - it seemed the Minister had only "ex-model C schools" in mind. There might be a degree of retaliation against Afrikaans: see the highhanded intervention on WC Afrikaans-medium Laerskool Mikro in 2005

[77] The Revised Curriculum 2005 features among bilingual education models, even if a not-ambitious one in terms of use of home-language. K. Heugh with a touch of critical irony remarks that the previous version did not elaborate on the medium of instruction (2002a 467).

[78] That is, R (reception), grade 1 & 2.

[79] Some educationists are concerned that the shift is too early.

viewed by some as an innovation, is resented by other as a continuity, if not a retrogression[80]. Making provisions for learners to be able to write all matric papers in any of the official language is also been considered (see www.iol.co.za).

Further, it seems the Outcome Based Education (OBE) methodology, which underpins the new manuals which have been disseminated[81], has the potential to overcome at least partially the issue of internal language variety as well as culture: OBE has to draw from the knowledge of the learners, and therefore, has to take into account their linguistic proficiencies as well as their cultural environment[82].

Higher education is not left unscathed. A ministerial document, while acknowledging the overall dominance of English in that sector, does encourage research on, and the study of, "historically disadvantaged languages", in order to include them in the syllabuses, both in terms of subject and medium, "in the medium to long term"[83], in line with the recently publicised African Academy Language Plan of Action for Africa (Alexander 2003). Universities, some of which had done little so far in the matter, have now generally started defining language policies which make room for African languages: for instance, UNISA, as early as 1998, committed itself to use African languages as medium within five years (Bekker 1999: 100), the Senate of Witwatersrand University approved in 2003 a language policy that will have classes held indifferently in either English or Sotho as from 2010, and the recently merged UKZN is considering elevating Zulu as a language of teaching[84]. It remains however to be seen to what degree these declarations will be, and can be realistically implemented. Creating and delivering courses in African languages may seem at the present moment a luxury use of scarce resources, as a proper command of English is unavoidable for access to

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[80] In a significant number of township schools (or classes in those schools) in the first years of schooling the legacy of apartheid in terms of the ethnic composition of both learners and teachers ensured that no change occurred in the medium of instruction which remained the African language of the area (interviews with teachers from two Gauteng townships, Soshanguve and Soweto, February 2004). Teachers appear divided on the value of the new strategy.

Conversely, some schools, after an attempt to introduce English from R, have returned to the initial 3 years mother-tongue education, in reaction to the children not acquiring written fluency in their own language (viz., Thabisile Junior Primary School in Diepkloof Soweto, interview with Mrs Vilakazi, Principal, June 2005).

In February 2004, the Gauteng Department of Education did not seem to have reliable statistics on the languages used as medium of instruction in its schools (interview over the phone, Henri Mabasa, GDE). It seems such information were to be collected. I was not able to verify the position.

[81] Grade 12 should be reached by 2008 (Ministry of Education website, June 2005)

[82] Isisekelo solimi, a Zulu reading book for grade 10 released in 2005 is deliberately modern: it acknowledges idioms in their meaning in the social environment, not expecting learners to explain them in reference to their original context of use, in contrast to traditional Zulu teaching; further, it includes present-day issues, as it opens with a chapter on Aids (interview with the author, Sebenzile Khanyile, a former teacher and Soweto resident, May 2005).

More flexibility in adjudicating the matric exam is also being introduced, following recommendations by the moderating board. It remains however to make these changes widely known, both to learners and teachers.

[83] Conversely, institutions teaching only courses through Afrikaans, such as Stellenbosch, are gradually "convinced" to offer at least parallel courses in English.

[84] In 2005, Zulu is used as a medium in Zulu language and literature classes, as well as cosmology.

sources and dissemination of results[85]. But there is more to it than catch the eye: it also encompasses other strategies, such as promoting bilingualism (or multilingualism)[86].

CIVIL SOCIETY GETS MOVING

These policy changes would not have occurred were it not for an array of initiatives from within civil society that prepared the field, some benefiting from government funding, and other not, which show, if need be, that the call for language transformation is popular. We give here but a few examples.

◊ education

√ Some education NGOs have tried to offer practical responses to learners' language problems, among which Cape-Town based Praesa and the Home-language project in Gauteng. Praesa has developed bilingual education programs in primary and secondary schools classes in the province, using Xhosa as medium[87];

√ African languages once more make inroads into ex-model C schools and corporate training programs, showing renewed interest among the European population;

◊ command of an African language as a requirement in job offers[88].

◊ increase of societal messages delivered in African languages:

√ social: many NGOs distribute brochures in African languages, notably for Aids, water, etc[89].

√ commercial: cellular telephones are a case in point, with some phones including African languages as options in the language menu[90], network operators offering information in Zulu and Sotho (besides English and Afrikaans). Absa ATMs can now be operated in Sotho, ect;

√ TV & radio adds

◊ revival of African language literature, the signs of which begin to surface:

√ increase in Zulu manuscripts submissions in the recent years[91]; authors do not shy away from modern themes (Aids, sex, violence, politics, etc);

√ launching of Litnet, an internet journal of literary essays in all languages, including African[92]

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[85] At UNISA, the compilation of course notes in African languages has come to an almost complete stop as it was not popular with students.

[86] I thank Pr Vic Webb for having drawn my attention to that point.

[87] Praesa includes Neville Alexander among its patrons.

[88] This can however be but an indirect way of achieving Affirmative Action, with no real linguistic motivation, as the African language competence may not be relevant to the job itself.

[89] The Zulu version of the brochure elaborated by Soul City, active against Aids, is remarkable in its clarity and simplicity.

[90] In 2004, Sony Ericsson has been handing user manuals fully in three languages English, Sotho and Zulu in Gauteng at least. In June 2005, Nokia had commissioned a Xhosa translation, etc.

[91] Interview with Mr Ryder, chief editor at Shooter and Shuter, a major publisher in Zulu language (Pietermariztburg, July 2004)

[92] Litnet (www.litnet.co.za); English translations of African languages texts are also posted.

◊ presence of African languages on the internet; some sites allow navigation in Zulu or Sotho or Xhosa[93];

◊ growth in the digitalization of African languages (in lexicography, spell checkers[94], as well as CD-Rom for learning, etc)[95];

◊ attempts to harmonize language developments, though computer database and information technology[96];

◊ release in 2004 of the first movie in Zulu from beginning to end (except the title, Yesterday, which is a personal name)[97];

◊ renewed debate around the question of orthographic harmonization, which forms a significant proportion of papers at any linguistic conference in the region[98].

Ekupheleni or ekugcineni[99]

The language question in SA cannot be divorced from the rest of the political debate. In the first ten years, all laws and rules pertaining to apartheid racial policies have been rescinded, and a truly democratic system established. But this formal process, necessary though it may be, could never be sufficient to reverse inequalities so deeply rooted in society.

All languages share the same official status and rights in theory, but this is far from ensuring their equal and balanced development, or giving their respective speakers fair chances and opportunities. However, all is not gloom and doom. The language policy followed since the transition was successful in not nurturing resentment and division over identity and cultural issues. If transformation progresses at a pace much slower than might have been hoped for, geo-politics and demography play in the hands, as it were, of African languages. The present focus around Nepad and African Renaissance cannot shy away from cultural and linguistic issues, all the more so with the renewed emphasis in the development discourse on tapping the cultural well of the targeted disadvantaged communities, for better, more appropriate delivery. This view is further fuelled by South-Africa focus on indigenous cultures and arts to trigger development, with an eye on tourism. In the medium to long term,

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[93] Google can now be searched in Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho (Mid 2005).

[94] This is developed, notably, at Unisa under S Bosch, and at the University of the North. A Zulu spellchecker was released in mid 2005.

[95] Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana CD-Roms are available; see www.Africanvoices.co.za

[96] These issues were addressed in several papers presented at the 2005 Alasa conference under the Special Interest Group for Human Language Technology.

[97] *Yesterday* may well be the first commercial movie in Zulu, but it was predated by documentaries; interestingly, the Zulu register used in Yesterday is as linguistically pure as the depiction of rural life is aesthetic … which may not be so helpful for language development. *Yesterday* has been selected to represent South-Africa in international festivals.

[98] For instance CASAS 2001 conference on harmonization of languages, or ALASA 2003, whose major theme was African languages and the Development of Africa.

Cape-Town based CASAS, an active publisher in the field of language development, has launched several dedicated books series. However, not all papers on linguistic harmonization in particular, recently released, are worth of note.

[99] Conclusion, in Zulu, reflecting yet a lack of standardization.

there seems to be no way that African languages, which enjoy such a predominant role in all manners of social and individual intercourses, and whose dynamism needs no illustration, remain unacknowledged in officialdom.

But lasting development is premised on an open-minded attitude, looking afresh at past policies to retrieve what may be valuable, thus overcoming the legacy of apartheid; new language forms should probably be given a degree of acceptance as it is crucial to woo the new generation -tomorrow's elite, whose linguistic preferences will determine in great part the future of the African languages[100]; and a realistic distribution of functions between the various languages should be aimed at, a case in point being Higher Education.

Thus a process is envisioned whereby the intelligentsia and the speech communities at large will be brought in, and the language policy, truly owned by its intended beneficiaries. This would allow for South-African languages to benefit fully of the potential offered by the country technical sophistication, and become emblematic of the country transformation.

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[100] This could be viewed in a language rights perspective: speakers with different life experience and language practice should be accommodated, much in the same way speakers of the standard forms of the eleven languages are. In other terms, the inclusive policy followed at national level should operate also within languages or language clusters.

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WILL A HISTORICALLY DIVISIVE FACTOR BECOME A HALLMARK FOR

TRANSFORMATION?

TABLE 1 - DISTRIBUTION OF SPEAKERS (L1 & L2) BY LANGUAGES AND
LANGUAGE SUBGROUPS

	1	2	3	4	5
Languages	L1 home language	% of country population		L2 speakers	% of speakers L1 and/or L2
Zulu	10 677 305	23,8		8%	
Xhosa	7 907 153	17,6		6%	
Swati	1 194 430	2,7		2%	
Ndebele	711 821	1,6		1%	
Nguni	**20 490 709**		**45,7**	**17%**	**62%**
Pedi	4 208 980	9,4		2%	
Sesotho	3 555 186	7,9		6%	
Tswana	3 677 016	8,2		3%	
Sotho	**11 441 182**		**25,5**	**11%**	**36%**
Tsonga	1 992 207	4,4		1%	4,4%
Venda	1 021 757	2,3		1%	3,2%
	3 013 964		6,7	2%	8,7%
Afrikaans	5 983 426	13,3		14%	28%
English	3 673 203	8,		29%	38%
European	**9 656 629**				
Total	**44 602 484**				

- Col 1, 2, 3: extrapolated from 2001 census
- Col 4: extrapolated from MarkData survey (2001: 176); it refers to languages other than home-language.

For African languages, we assume, as surveys provide no indication to the contrary, that it means command of a language by speakers of languages outside the home language subgroup: for instance, 8% of non-Nguni speakers claim an understanding of Zulu, whereas the proportion of non-Sotho speakers with a claimed command of Pedi would be 2%, etc. The assumption seems grounded in the fact that most Zulu speakers would automatically claim command of Xhosa, Ndebele, etc, and figures given would then be under-rated if closely related languages were included.
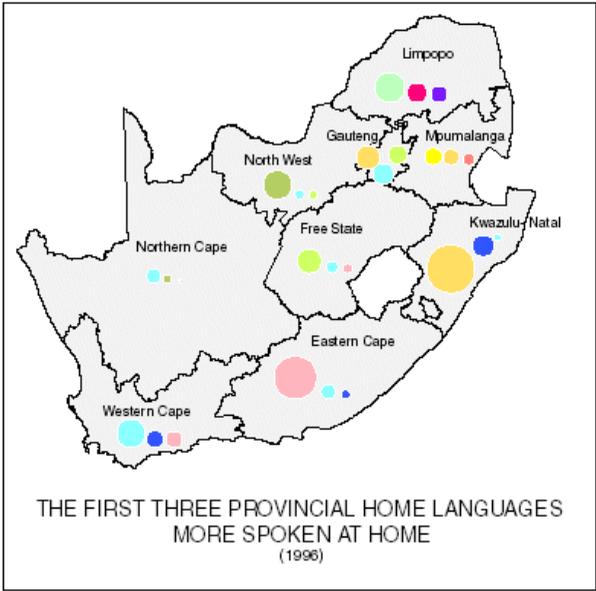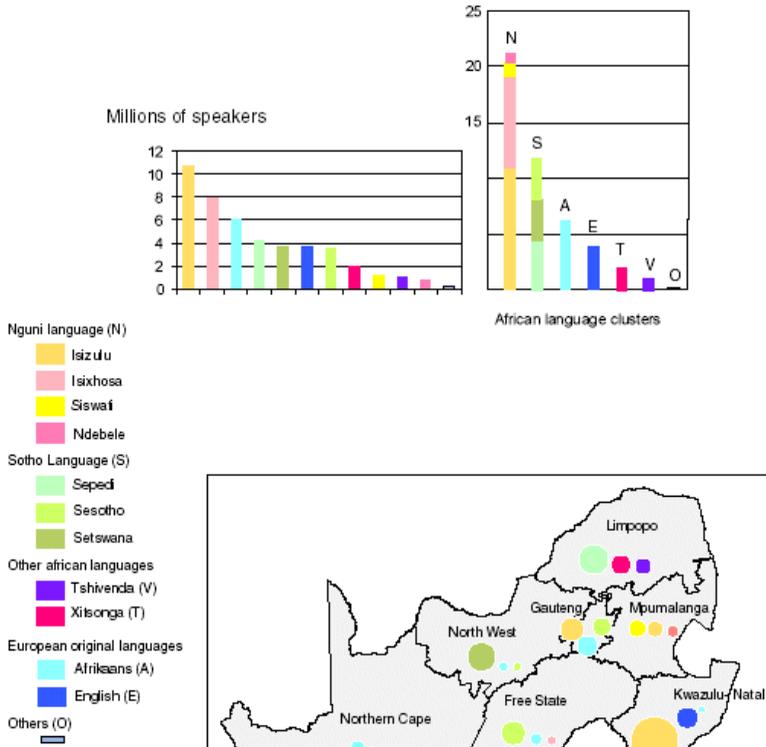
- Colum 5 sums up the proportion of speakers of a given African language, whether as L1, as next of kin or L2.

The same assumption is obviously not appropriate for European languages, as there is no mutual intelligibility between them; amongst the 14% non-Afrikaans speakers who claim command of the language, some English L1 speakers would be included; therefore, no figure can be given for knowledge of either European language.

WILL A HISTORICALLY DIVISIVE FACTOR BECOME A HALLMARK FOR

TRANSFORMATION?

FIRST HOME LANGUAGE
(Population Census 2001)

Millions of speakers

African language clusters

Nguni language (N)
- Isizulu
- Isixhosa
- Siswati
- Ndebele

Sotho Language (S)
- Sepedi
- Sesotho
- Setswana

Other african languages
- Tshivenda (V)
- Xitsonga (T)

European original languages
- Afrikaans (A)
- English (E)

Others (O)

THE FIRST THREE PROVINCIAL HOME LANGUAGES
MORE SPOKEN AT HOME
(1996)