

Executive Summary

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Language policy and planning is an area of considerable importance for South Africa if the country is to realise its national potential and fulfil the generous language provisions of its Constitution. This was recognised in the LANGTAG report ten years ago, and in the establishment of PANSALB as a statutory body, with a range of national language bodies, national lexicography units, and provincial language committees. The papers in this collection are written by members of the English National Language Body, all of them deeply committed to the spirit of the Constitution and the development of a viable language dispensation for the country. Extensive experience of wrestling with the demands of policy and planning has led the writers to attempt to clarify the scope and challenges of language policy and planning in our multilingual society to help achieve national goals. They have explored four interrelated themes: the nature of policy and planning; the complex practices of using different languages in different domains; the particular demands of language use in education; and some implications of the rich realities of local multilingual practice. Inadequate assumptions about the nature of language and the challenges of multilingual practice get in the way of successful policy implementation. These papers are offered as contributions to what must be a rigorous and ongoing process of thinking, planning, implementation and reassessment on the part of all those involved with language issues in South Africa.

Language policy and planning: general constraints and pressures outlines the origins of language planning, describes different kinds of planning and their social implications, and spells out the factors which international experience has shown to be critical for success. These factors are:

- Harnessing prevailing social motivation

- Appropriate resource allocation, balancing the needs of the central economy and language ecology
- Dealing with the challenges of real public demand as against passive support for policy
- Recognising when language claims are surface markers of deeper political and economic discontents
- Establishing the relative importance of language issues within the full range of national concerns
- Recognising that language behaves in many respects like any economic “good” and is subject to laws of supply and demand
- Focusing on more readily regulated language environments, like schools, businesses or state departments
- Distinguishing between the demands of high-impact national interventions and ethically compelling but relatively low-impact cultural or academic initiatives
- Prioritising interventions most likely to succeed.

Domains of language use examines the ways in which multilingual individuals choose different languages (or varieties of languages) to use in particular types of situation. This has profound implications for our understanding of the realities which language planning must engage with. Individuals need different levels of ability in different languages to be effective in the range of domains in which they aspire to operate. They do not have to be equally proficient at every level in all domains. But social mobility requires high levels of proficiency in particular languages, and planning for transformation and empowerment in South Africa must face this fact if it is to be effective. The aim should be:

- To encourage all South Africans to use their own languages, not necessarily in all domains, but where these languages offer particular advantages
- To give all South Africans the opportunity to become sufficiently multilingual to gain confident entrance into those domains in which other languages happen to be more appropriate.

Mother tongue education in South Africa teases out some of the implications of a vexed question so that they can receive focused attention. The principle of mother tongue education, at least for the first 3-6 years of schooling, is widely accepted. However, it is no panacea. Its success depends on systematic work in language development, a process which reaches far beyond grammar and vocabulary to the kinds of sustained intellectual effort which forge the discourses for academic and professional activities. The disciplines concerned are simply not accessible in a language unless those discourses have been formed. Language development is an interactive process which goes hand in hand with equipping teachers linguistically and preparing curriculum material in the languages concerned. The paper teases out the implications of these insights to reveal the need for:

- Understanding the value and limitations of code-switching
- Revising the tertiary African Languages curricula so that the languages are learnt as effective carriers of academic discourse
- Making the entire teacher education curriculum available in all African languages
- Equipping large numbers of teachers (pre-service and in-service) to provide quality tuition through the African languages
- An ambitious research agenda
- A greatly increased budget
- Effective teaching of English to equip learners for academic and social challenges
- Honouring and building on individual choice in matters of language.

Towards a nuanced view of multilingualism explores the gap between the way multilingualism is practised “on the ground” and the understanding of it which lies behind much policy discussion. The focus is not on knowledge of languages but the ability to use them appropriately and effectively in a range of contexts. A language, then is not just its standard form, but potentially also its popular forms, including (in multilingual situations) fluently overlapping mixed forms. This can be seen from two perspectives:

- An empirical perspective which examines how people actually use languages with sophistication in multilingual situations. Speech-behaviour, particularly in urban settings, is increasingly marked by fluid movement between languages, interconnection, effective code-switching, and easy transcendence of conventional language boundaries. This is seen in TV soaps, and in the preference for urban mixed forms of African languages on the radio. Use of the languages in writing to discuss issues or make formal arrangements is generally more conventional and may often favour a language other than a person's mother tongue as a matter of domain choice.
- An historical perspective which sees the standardisation of African languages and the development of written forms by missionaries and then the apartheid language boards as impoverishing and unrealistic, given the fluid and flexible movement between varieties in a natural continuum in traditional practice. In any case, the limited, rural base of these exercises was inadequate to meet the challenges of urban living in a modern society. This has led to multilingual code-switching, with English an essential ingredient of stratified multilingualism, and the development of mixed urban codes like Tsotsitaal.

In either case, there are practical implications.

- The gap between spoken language practice and written idealisations needs to be bridged for all languages. From that perspective, a communicative approach in a dynamic classroom situation which makes rigorous demands on understanding may favour code-switching as a good option in the repertoire.
- Terminology in African languages needs to be reviewed. Terms developed on a purist notion which resorts to "deep" rural forms to avoid borrowing are often simply confusing. A corpus-based approach to language development seems called for.
- Official notions of multilingualism need to be expanded to deal with South Africa's social reality. The notion of multilingualism as applying to our 11 standardised official languages only is deceptive. It tends not only to exclude the languages like Shona (chiShona), Swahili (Kiswahili) and African forms of

French and Portuguese, which are increasingly spoken in South African cities, but also the many strong local varieties such as Pondo (isiPondo) and Bhaca (isiBhaca) which have considerable significance. The critical point for all the papers in this collection is that policy and planning have to be based on a clear sense of South African linguistic realities. Failure to take these realities seriously leads to injunctions based on idealised notions of language and multilingualism. These command lip service, but are effectively disregarded because they do not work.