



**Nurturing reading cultures and
literacies in post-pandemic
ecosystems**

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Decolonising reading practices through empowerment of indigenous African languages and transformation of the publishing industry

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DECOLONISING READING PRACTICES BY EMPOWERING AFRICAN LANGUAGES

AN IDEAL SOUTH AFRICA

- ❖ healthy culture of reading and writing within society
- ❖ informed, knowledgeable, and thus empowered people
- ❖ people with capacity to contribute actively towards solving their own and society's problems
- ❑ a large proportion of society, particularly speakers of indigenous African languages, does not read anything at all, and does not have anything to read either
- ❑ African languages largely serve as spoken (informal) but not written (formal) languages outside schools

PEOPLE AND (ARE) LANGUAGES

Elsewhere in his *'Long Walk to Freedom'*, former president, Nelson Mandela, says:

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, but if you speak to him in his language, that goes to his heart”.

TALKING TO PEOPLE'S "HEADS"

- Learning a foreign language through schooling – ‘school fees’
- Mastery dependent on level of schooling – primary, secondary, tertiary + practice (language exposure)
- Degree of mastery influences sense of superiority & inferiority – inequality within audience
- Multiple meanings dependent on language mastery
- Limited scope for ‘shared meanings’ within audience
- Addresses ‘heads’ but may not sink down to ‘hearts’

TALKING TO PEOPLE'S 'HEARTS'

- People **are** their languages – they embody language, give it life + voice
- Talking to people in their language – talking to their ancestors, their grandchildren, their community and their souls
- Speaker becomes one with the audience... is one of them
- Shared meanings – minimal gaps between what is **said** and what is **heard** – meaningful discussions possible
- Sense of equality – everyone understands everyone else
- Language as a critical thinking tool

THE AFRICAN COMMUNICATION TRAGEDY

- Shadow of colonialism – mainly Anglophone & Francophone
- But where are **Afro-phone** countries in Africa?
- English & French adopted as ‘Official languages’ (OL) in colonies
- **ALL government business** – speeches, documents, communication OL
- Media and all other channels of communication done in OL
- Local Afro-phone languages reduced to ‘informal’ and ‘non-written’ – cultural colonialism
- Two systems of communication – Formal (OL) & Afro-phone (NOL)
- Afro-phone languages used by masses, Euro-phone – elite
- Euro-phones can **NEVER** replace indigenous African languages

MEDIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

- When you think “**media**” in South Africa, (print, radio, TV, internet, social media) also think English.
- Media is dominated by broadsheet, tabloid-size and magazines of all kinds – mostly in English (some Afrikaans titles as well)
- One major radio stations for each of 9 Afro-phone ‘Official languages’
- No Afro-phone dailies, few weeklies, small publications that are perpetually on brink of collapse
- Its English here... English there... English everywhere!

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

UNESCO decade of indigenous languages – 2022-2032

- recognises injustices done to indigenous languages
- wants these languages recognised, respected, developed, used and promoted to address global issues
- The world needs MORE and not FEWER languages to address global matters such as the environment, gender-based violence, etc.
- Afro-phone languages, need to be drawn into the fold of the 'formal' and the 'written'
- When you marginalize a language, you marginalize **people** and **voices**

CONCLUSION

On the occasion of the Opening of the Debate in the National Assembly, on "Reconciliation and Nation Building, in Cape Town, 29 May 1998, among others, the then Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki, said this:

“...The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor.... It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation”.