

The status of Xitsonga in South African Broadcasting Corporation television channels

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Abstract

Language use at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is regulated by the South African Broadcasting Corporation Language Broadcasting Policy (SABC LBP). The SABC LBP emphasizes multilingualism and multilingual service provision and it commits to treat all the official languages equitably and with equal respect. In view of the provisions of the SABC LBP, this article examines the status of Xitsonga in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels to see how it fares. Data was gathered through document analysis of the SABC LBP since it regulates language use at the SABC. The SABC LBP was analysed to examine the apparent adequacy (or lack thereof) of its provisions in as far as language use is concerned in the media. This was complemented by observations of the actual practice in as far as language use is concerned in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. Semi-structured interviews with Xitsonga speakers were also conducted to solicit information on the language use patterns in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. The findings of this study showed that the overt and covert provisions of the SABC LBP marginalise less widely spoken and understood languages and those which are not cognate languages since the SABC prioritises the dominant languages. It was noted that Xitsonga fares badly in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. As a result, Xitsonga speakers are denied access to information through edutainment in their mother tongue. This also means that the SABC marginalises other official languages on the basis of their smaller speaker numbers and that they are not widely spoken or understood or cognate languages. This constitutes a violation of the linguistic human

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rights of the Xitsonga speakers and their right of access to information. It was also noted that this also constrains the development of Xitsonga and Vatsonga.

Keywords: *Xitsonga, drama, television, South African Broadcasting Corporation, edutainment, information*

Introduction

The SABC LBP (2020) regulates language use on SABC television channels. It takes its cues from the Constitution and engenders as well as champions the constitutional ethos and culture of constitutionalism. It embraces the constitutional duty to treat all the official languages equitably and with equal respect on its television services (Section 6.1). It states that the SABC has a responsibility to broadcast programs that promote the development of national identity while supporting the development of the languages and cultures (Sections 6.1.3; 6.7.5). It acknowledges the challenge of bringing marginalised national languages, cultures and identities into the mainstream, so that they can develop and flourish, and become a core part of the nation-building project (Section 6.15).

The SABC LBP seeks to provide a range of distinctive, creative and top quality programs in all the eleven official languages across the radio and television portfolio, and it strives to reflect the needs of each language community in programming (Section 6.2.1). It also seeks to ensure that SABC television informs, educates and entertains South Africans in their home or preferred languages (Section 6.1.1; 6.3.1). It thus seeks to promote multilingualism and multilingual service provision in South Africa. This article therefore uses Xitsonga as a case study to examine the extent to which the SABC adheres to these provisions.

The policy further states that the SABC will dedicate a greater amount of program time to more widely spoken or shared languages, while committing itself to special projects for marginalised languages (Sections 6.7.1; 6.13.2.1; 6.13.2.8; 6.13.2.10; 6.13.2.12; 6.13.2.13; 6.1.5). In light of this provision, this article also examines whether there are any special programs so far in Xitsonga since it is not a more widely spoken or a shared language as indicated in the 2011 Census data (Statistics South Africa, 2011). In view of information programs to which drama also belongs, the SABC states that, given the constraints of channel air time, it will make use of cognate languages and widely understood and spoken languages on a rotational basis to meet this mandate (Sections 6.7.1; 6.13.2.1; 6.13.2.8; 6.13.2.10; 6.13.2.12; 6.13.2.13; 6.1.5). These provisions constitute the researchers' hypothetical conclusion that they are the major sources of the invisibility, marginalisation and exclusion of Xitsonga and other languages which are not cognate languages or widely understood and spoken languages. Our hypothesis is anchored on research which has shown that language policies which overtly and covertly accord other languages dominant language status can perpetuate and sustain systems of inequality, exclusion as well as promote the interests of dominant groups. (Abdelhay, Makoni, & Makoni, 2011; Johnson 2009; Scarino & Papademetre, 2001; Tollefson, 2006; Wickert, 2001).

The SABC LBP also states that the SABC actively encourages the production of meaningful multilingual programs as a means of attaining its language broadcasting objectives (Sections 6.13.2.3; 6.13.3.7; 6.13.4.3; 6.13.8.3). In view of this provision, the study poses the question: "How many programs are there involving Xitsonga? The SABC LBP also states that drama provides a unique means of telling our South African stories, and learning from and about one another. As such, the SABC commits to broadcast top quality South African television dramas that in combination include and reflect the South African languages and cultures (Section 6.13.8.1 – 3). In view of this commitment, the researchers pose the question, how many are in Xitsonga?

The SABC also commits to undertake to investigate innovative and creative ways of ensuring that dramas are accessible to as wide a range of audiences as possible through the use of unilingual, multilingual productions, subtitling and dubbing in order to reach its language goals (Sections 6.13.2.3; 6.13.3.7; 6.13.4.3; 6.13.8.3). Given this commitment, the researchers pose the question, how many are in Xitsonga or include Xitsonga? The SABC LBP further acknowledges that certain languages are recognised as being more marginalised than others (XiTsonga, TshiVenda, SiSwati and SiNdebele) and this places an additional responsibility on institutions such as the SABC to address this marginalisation (Sections 6.1.5; 6.13.1.4; 6.13.2.11). This accurate realisation and acknowledgement begs the question: “What affirmative actions have been put in place for these languages, and in particular Xitsonga?”

From an educative point of view, drama contributes to education. In television drama and soap operas, the development of characters and their relationships with other characters can become immensely popular and in this manner draw an audience to that drama or soap opera, leading to an increased critical awareness of the issues raised. Drama is an influential medium for learning as well as for personal development. It creates a physical and emotional experience that helps one draw valuable and memorable life lessons related to the moral lessons of the drama. It can raise consciousness because it is a mode of communication that has a life of its own. As a form of skillfully contrived escapism, drama allows the viewers to take collective imaginative refuge in a more pleasurable realm of existence than their everyday one. It engages them in a dramatic fiction that has a connection to their everyday reality presented (McKay, 2009; Mda, 1993; Mhlanga, 2009; Ndlovu, 2015; Shore, 1980; Tarawalie, 2008; Wigston, 2001a; 2001b).

According to Ndlovu (2015), through identification with the characters, the viewer can experience a wide range of emotions that can effect positive behaviour change which can contribute to the effective realisation of developmental priorities. Various genres of drama enact and present a more desirable reality and the strategies for desirable achievement are explored, leaving the viewer wishing to live up to the desirable reality. They motivate the viewer who understands the language of the drama to participate in initiating or effecting and sustaining behaviour change. These dramas raise the viewers’ critical awareness and consciousness about critical challenges facing society. However, on most television channels, minority language speaking communities are in most cases not provided with drama for education and development in their home language. This inappropriate programming for minority language speakers denies them sources of art in their languages that can convey information in ways to which people easily relate. It also undermines the development of these languages and their speakers (Browne, 2005; Cormack, 2007a; 2007b; Lenglet, 1980; Moring, 2007; Ndlovu, 2015; O’Connell, 2007; Riggins, 1992).

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the status of Xitsonga on the various genres of drama on SABC television channels and to account for this status of Xitsonga, examine the implications of this status and proffer suggestions for improvement in the event that there are gaps.

Theoretical Framework

According to Mwaniki (2012), CDA is an essential theory in language planning, policy and management. It is also useful in examining how texts, discursive and socio-cultural practices integral to multilingual language planning, policy and implementation predict different kinds of actions and identities. In this study, CDA is not only used as a methodology, but also as an analytic and interpretive framework. Through textual and content analysis of the SABC LBP, the article examines the place of Xitsonga in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. It also examines implications of this status on the Vatsonga’s right of access to information and linguistic human rights and development of Xitsonga and Vatsonga. Leading researchers in

language policy studies such as Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2011), Lo Bianco (2009), Shohamy (2006) Tollefson (1991; 2002; 2006), Wodak (2007) observe that in language policies, power, politics, ideologies and status differentials are played out in texts, and public texts such as language policy documents, often carry agendas they conceal. Based on this observation, it can be argued that language policies are ideologically laden and clouded by political ideology and also reflect the ideologies of those who control them. Given such observations, this study seeks to ascertain whether this is also the case in the SABC LBP in view of Xitsonga.

It can, therefore, be argued that language policies do not stand alone, but they are connected to political, social and economic dimensions. They can be a form of imposition and manipulation of language used by those in authority to implement ideology or turn practice into ideology. As a result, it can be argued that language broadcasting policies, like all other language policies, can create, perpetuate and sustain systems of social and linguistic (in) equality, and policy makers usually promote their interests through such policies. Language policies are strategies meant, mostly consciously, to promote and entrench the interests of specific classes and other social groups (Abdelhay, Makoni & Makoni, 2011; Ferguson, 2006; Lo Bianco, 2009; Ndlovu, 2013; Novak-Lukanovič & Limon, 2012; Pelinka, 2007; Shameem, 2004; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2009; Tollefson, 2006; 2002; 1991).

Thus, a better understanding of language broadcasting policies, without an evaluation of the background from which they arise, is probably futile; if not simply trivial. According Wodak (2007), language expresses power and it is involved where there are power struggles and a challenge to power. Language is, therefore, a useful instrument for establishing, maintaining, perpetuating and entrenching power. It is also useful in challenging, subverting and altering distributions of power. It provides a finely articulated vehicle for difference in power in hierarchical social structures. Premised on these submissions, this article therefore uses CDA to ascertain the place of Xitsonga in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels.

To ensure a comprehensive study and understanding of the dilemmas bedeviling multilingual language broadcasting policy implementation at the SABC, the study also employed the variables of the ethnolinguistic vitality model propounded by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). This model was complemented by Webb's (2010) conditions and factors for the successful implementation of top-down and bottom-up policies. These conditions and factors overlap with some of the variables of the vitality model. The choice of these two approaches was meant to help to fully account for the status of Xitsonga from both the top and bottom levels in order to trace where the challenges are, if any. These two approaches proved very useful in explaining why Xitsonga fares badly on SABC television drama.

Ethnolinguistic vitality refers to what makes an ethnolinguistic group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective group in intergroup situations (Bourhis, 2001; Cartwright; 2006; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Ndlovu, 2013; Paulston, 1988). According to Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977), ethnolinguistic minorities that have little or no group vitality eventually cease to exist as an active, collective and distinctive group in intergroup situations. On one hand, the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group has, the more likely it is to survive and thrive as an active, collective and distinctive group in intergroup contexts. The vitality model has three variables that are likely to influence the vitality of a group, namely: status, demography and institutional support variables. An ethnolinguistic group with high vitality has high social status, favourable institutional support and demography, heightened ethnolinguistic awareness, linguistic nationalism and ethnic nationalism, all of which guarantee successful top-down or bottom-up language political change.

Status variables relate to the ethnolinguistic group's social prestige, economic status, socio-historical status and language status; within and without. Demographic variables relate to the sheer number of group members in terms of absolute numbers, exogamy, immigration, emigration and marked bilingualism and their distribution in a particular nation in terms of proportion and concentration. Institutional support variables relate to the extent to which a language receives formal and informal representation in various institutions, ranging from the nation right to the community. These three variables are useful in determining an ethnolinguistic group's vitality and the success or failure of top-down and bottom-up initiatives involving the ethnolinguistic group (Bourhis, 2001; Cartwright; 2006; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Ndlovu, 2013; Paulston, 1988).

According to Webb (2010), there are five factors and conditions that need to be secured to enable the success of top-down and bottom-up language planning efforts. These factors and conditions closely relate to the structural variables of the ethnolinguistic vitality model. Webb argues that in order to understand the non-implementation dilemmas of top-down and bottom-up multilingual language planning efforts, it is necessary to consider the role of these factors and conditions that interact with these processes. Webb identifies five factors, namely: power, ethno-linguistic awareness and linguistic nationalism, the social and cultural character of the community, community support for language-political change and role of globalisation together with a market-driven economy. All these factors and conditions are equally important to determine the success or failure of top-down and bottom-up multilingual language planning efforts. The set of factors and conditions actually reflect the complementary nature of bottom-up and top-down approaches to multilingual language policy implementation.

Methodology

The data for this study was collected using a multi-method approach which also enabled triangulation in the analysis of the results. The study employed observations of language use in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels in order to identify how Xitsonga is faring. The researcher conducted observations of the actual practice in as far as language use is concerned in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. Semi-structured interviews with Xitsonga speakers were also conducted through social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, to solicit information on the language use patterns in the various genres of drama on SABC television channels. The researchers did not work with a predetermined number of participants, but were guided by representativeness and data saturation. A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the SABC's LBP constituted the basis for this study. This policy was analysed to examine the apparent adequacy (or lack thereof) of the provisions of this policy document in as far as language use is concerned in the media. CDA was used as a methodology to analyse texts in the SABC LBP to ascertain the place of Xitsonga in the various genres of dramas on SABC television channels. This was done to identify and indicate the discursive sources of power, dominance, exclusion, inclusion, (in) equality and bias and how these are initiated, sustained and reproduced (Abdelhay, Makoni & Makoni, 2011; Ferguson, 2006; Lo Bianco, 2009; Ndlovu, 2013; Novak-Lukanovič & Limon, 2012; Pelinka, 2007; Shameem, 2004; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2009; Tollefson, 2006; 2002; 1991; Williams, 1992; Wodak (2007).

Research shows that in texts, discursive differences are negotiated and they are governed by differences in power. It shows that texts are often used as sites for struggle and they often reflect traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance. Accordingly, CDA therefore becomes a useful tool in examining the structural relationships of dominance, hegemony, discrimination, exclusion, power and control as embedded and manifested in language. CDA helps in examining covert and overt ways of marginalising linguistic minorities and in investigating social and linguistic (in) equalities as they are expressed,

constituted and legitimised by language use and policies (Abdelhay, Makoni & Makoni, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Lo Bianco, 2009; Makoni, 2011; Ndlovu, 2011; 2013; Wodak, 2007). The study covered the period from the time the SABC LBP was adopted to 2021.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in two parts, namely, the first part which provides a critical discourse analysis of the SABC LBP to make clear the policy position regarding language use on SABC television channels. This data is corroborated by data from the researchers' observations of the language use practices on SABC television channels and interview data from the Vatsonga speakers. The last part attempts to explain why Xitsonga fares badly on SABC television channels using the variables of the Ethnolinguistic vitality model and Webb's (2010) conditions and factors for successful bottom-up and top-down language political change.

Critical Discourse Analysis of the SABC LBP

The SABC LBP seeks to provide a range of distinctive, creative and top quality programs in all the eleven official languages across the radio and television portfolio, and strive to reflect the needs of each language community in programming (Sections 6.2.1; 6.2.2). It commits to treat all the official languages equitably on its television services (Sections 6.1; 6.2.3; 6.13.1; 6.13.1.1). It also seeks to ensure that SABC television informs, educates and entertains South Africans in their home languages (Section 6.3.1). It further seeks to promote multilingualism in South Africa (Sections 6.2.9; 6.3.4; 6.7.4; 6.13.1; 6.13.2.2; 6.13.3.7; 6.13.4.3; 6.13.8.3). However, a close observation of the practice reflects otherwise. Findings of this study show that Xitsonga fares badly in the various genres of television drama on SABC television channels since there very few productions which include Xitsonga.

Both observations and interviews showed that the SABC is not living up to the commitment and expectations stated in the SABC LBP. The needs of other official language communities such as the Xitsonga, isiNdebele, Tshivenda and siSwati are not reflected because these communities are not convincingly entertained, informed and educated through various genres of drama in their home languages. It emerged that English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho benefit the most on SABC television channels. It was noted that SABC's multilingual productions rarely involve Xitsonga and completely ignore isiNdebele. Undeniably, this constitutes a case of declaration without implementation.

According to the *SABC LBP* Sections 6.7.1 and 6.7.2, the SABC dedicates a greater amount of program time to more widely spoken or shared languages, while committing itself to special projects for marginalised languages. This provision constitutes the basis for the exclusion of Xitsonga and other languages which are not more widely spoken or shared languages as indicated in the 2011 Census data (Statistics South Africa, 2011). This provision overtly and covertly reproduces, maintains, perpetuates, entrenches and sustains the hegemony of the widely spoken or shared languages while marginalising the less spoken and unrelated varieties. In as much as the SABC commits itself to special projects for marginalised languages, the major question, is 'What special projects have been done for these languages, in particular Xitsonga?' Observations and interviews showed that very little, if anything, has been done for the marginalised languages and this manifests as a case of declaration without implementation. It was noted that there is only one predominantly Xitsonga drama, *Giyani: Land of Blood* and two soaps, *Ga re dumeli* and *Lithapo*, which feature Xitsonga characters.

The policy also states that the SABC actively encourages the production of meaningful multilingual and unilingual programs as a means of attaining its language broadcasting objectives

(Sections 6.3.4; 6.7.4; 6.13.2.2; 6.13.3.7; 6.13.8.3). The SABC also commits to undertake to investigate innovative and creative ways of ensuring that such dramas are accessible to as wide a range of audiences as possible through unilingual and multilingual productions, subtitling and dubbing to reach its language goals (SABC LBP, Sections 6.13.2.2, 6.13.3.7, 6.13.4.3 and 6.13.8.3). In view of this commitment, there is a concern on how many dramas are in Xitsonga or include Xitsonga. It was observed that there are relatively few multilingual productions involving Xitsonga, namely *Ga re dumeli*, *Lithapo* and *Giyani: Land of Blood*. Observations show that the majority of multilingual productions which employ subtitling and dubbing involve the dominant and hegemonic languages, namely English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho. The data shows that there is no Xitsonga unilingual drama and this constitutes a violation of Section 6.13.4.1, which states that the SABC has a duty to ensure that across its television portfolio, some content is dedicated to each official language.

Research is unequivocal about the positive role of television in giving prestige and visibility to the minority language and its culture in the eyes of the majority. Scholars argue that television plays a great part in prestige language planning efforts because it supports image construction and popularisation, which is required if a community is to develop its own representation. Television is an important means of language development, revitalisation, instrumentalisation, intellectualization and revalorisation. Using television for language revitalisation, instrumentalisation, intellectualisation and revalorisation entails using it for direct and indirect behavioural effects and attitudinal change or confirmation, especially in settings where other languages are more marginalised than others (Bamgbose, 2007; Batibo, 2001; Browne, 2005; Cormack, 2007a; 2007b; Crystal, 2000; May, 2001; Moring, 2007; Ndlovu, 2015; O'Connell, 2007; Riggins, 1992).

The SABC LBP rightfully acknowledges that certain languages are recognised as being more marginalised than others (Xitsonga, Tshivenda, siSwati and isiNdebele). This places an additional responsibility on the SABC to address this marginalisation (SABC LBP, Section 6.13.1.4), and this realisation and acknowledgement provokes the question of what affirmative actions have been put in place for these languages, and in particular Xitsonga, especially given the role of television in addressing this said challenge. It is worth noting that the SABC's observation is very accurate, but it has not done much for languages such as Xitsonga, Tshivenda, siSwati and isiNdebele. Observations and interviews showed that Tshivenda fares much better because it has a well-established weekly soapie *Muvhango*, while siSwati features prominently in a weekly soapie *Skeem Saam*. It was noted that it was only in 2019 that Xitsonga made its mark in SABC through the weekly telenovela, *Giyani: Land of Blood*. Observations and interviews showed that isiNdebele is invisible in SABC television drama, and there is a need for a dedicated study which examines its place in SABC television drama. These observations show that the SABC has not done much to address the marginalisation of languages which are recognised as being more marginalised than others.

The failure to come with affirmative action measures is a cause for concern and manifests as a case of declaration without implementation. It was noted that the SABC does not specify how the plight of the languages which are recognised as being more marginalised than others will be addressed. Failure to spell out the implementation procedures and guidelines, stating how the SABC will implement the provisions, amounts to declaration without implementation. Without an implementation matrix, these provisions of the SABC LBP remain as a mere statement of intent. The SABC LBP is a case of declaration without implementation in as far as the use of languages which are recognised as being more marginalised than others because infractions do attract sanctions. Failure to establish and put in place sanctions to discourage non-compliance with policy stipulations and mandatory follow-ups and monitoring mechanisms devoted to progress in

implementation are useful indicators that these provisions have remained as mere statements of intent (Annamalai, 2004; Bamgbose, 1991; 2000; Batibo, 2005; Ndlovu, 2013; Tsui & Tollefson, 2004; Webb, 2002; 2004).

These findings confirm leading researchers' observations in language policy studies such as Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2011), Lo Bianco (2009), Shohamy (2006) Tollefson (1991; 2002; 2006) and Wodak (2007), that in language policies, power, politics, ideologies and status differentials are played out in texts, and public texts such as language policy documents, often carry agendas they conceal. It emerges that the SABC LBP conceals status differentials, creates, perpetuates and sustains systems of social and linguistic (in) equality, and promotes the interests of the dominant groups.

Some participants also indicated that the lack of enforcement, follow-ups and monitoring mechanisms through the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South African and the Pan South African Language Board and the Xitsonga Language Board reflect that these institutional support structures are ineffective in ensuring compliance the provisions of section 6 of the Constitution and the SABC LBP. They argued that the failure to enforce the provisions of the policy in as far the use of languages which are recognised as being more marginalised than others is concerned reflects lack of strong institutional support to enforce and monitor compliance with the provisions of the SABC LBP.

The SABC LBP Sections 6.13.8.1-3 also state that drama provides a unique means of telling South African stories, and learning from and about one another. Based on this, the SABC commits to broadcast top quality South African television dramas that in combination include and reflect South African languages and cultures. In view of this commitment, the researchers posed the question, "how many are in Xitsonga?" The data from the interviews and observations show that the SABC has not done enough in view of Xitsonga since to date they are only 3 genres of drama which feature Xitsonga, namely, *Ga re dumeli*, *Lithapo* and *Giyani: Land of Blood*. In view of information programs to which drama also belongs, the SABC LBP Sections 6.7.1 and 6.13.2.13 states that, given the constraints of channel airtime, it will make use of cognate languages, widely understood and spoken languages on a rotational basis, to meet this mandate. These overt and covert provisions of Sections 6.7.1 and 6.13.2.13 of the SABC LBP constitute the major source of the invisibility, marginalisation and exclusion of Xitsonga and other languages which are not cognate languages or widely understood and spoken languages.

These policy provisions clearly show that a language policy is a useful instrument for establishing, maintaining, perpetuating and entrenching power of the cognate or widely spoken and understood languages. These provision clearly reflects the discursive sources of power, dominance, exclusion, inclusion, inequality and bias and how they are initiated, sustained and reproduced on SABC television. It reflects the structural relationships of dominance, hegemony, discrimination, exclusion, power and control. It reveals the power, politics, ideologies and status differentials played out in the texts of the *SABC LBP*. These provisions privilege English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho which are cognate languages and widely understood and spoken languages because the SABC commits to prioritise cognate, shared and widely understood languages and allocate them a greater amount airtime. This has contributed to the marginalisation of Xitsonga, isiNdebele, siSwati and Tshivenda. Tshivenda and Xitsonga are not cognate languages or widely understood and spoken languages. IsiNdebele and siSwati are cognate languages, but they are not widely understood and spoken languages when compared to their sister dialects isiZulu and isiXhosa. Consequently, languages such as Xitsonga are marginalised because of low numbers of home language speakers, limited geographical spread and that they are not understood by other South Africans.

Data from observations and interviews indicate that very little has been done to ensure that South African television dramas reflect the entirety of South African languages and cultures, including the Xitsonga language and culture. It was noted that there was only one predominantly Xitsonga SABC 2 television drama, *Giyani: Land of Blood* which showcased the Xitsonga language and culture. Observations show that there is a strong bias towards the dominant and hegemonic languages, namely English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho because these dominant languages are prioritised and allocated a greater amount of airtime at the expense of those which are neither commonly understood nor widely spoken and have smaller numbers of speakers. A CDA of the *SABC LBP* shows that its covert and overt provisions present a weak case for official languages which fall in the minority languages category since the SABC commits to prioritise more widely spoken or shared languages and allocate them greater amount of airtime at the expense of the so-called minority languages.

It was noted that the provisions of Sections 6.7.1 and 6.13.2.13 of the *SABC LBP* entrench the hegemony of the more widely understood languages. These findings confirm what Kamwangamalu (2000) observed that the SABC has a bias toward the main Nguni languages, namely isiZulu, isiXhosa which are allocated a greater amount of airtime on SABC 1 and Sesotho main languages, which are allocated a greater amount of airtime on SABC 2 alongside Afrikaans. SABC 3 is a commercially oriented English channel. The provisions of Sections 6.7.1 and 6.13.2.13 of the *SABC LBP* define the status of widely spoken and understood languages in South Africa without explicitly using the word dominant. This acts as a preparatory statement for differences in the legal arrangements of languages. This suggests hierarchically structured relations of power between a group whose language is widely spoken and other groups whose languages are less widely spoken. The dominant distribution of the widely spoken languages is textually realised by the use of euphemism. The expressions widely spoken and understood are euphemisms for dominant.

According to Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2011), euphemism is used to make things appear more positive than they otherwise might be, because referring to a language as dominant in the discourse of linguistic human rights conjures images of other languages being abandoned and therefore facing extinction. Implicit in the widely spoken and understood euphemism is the subtle claim that these languages are common language and therefore a unifying factor which renders all other differences negligible or of secondary importance. These euphemisms accord the languages in question dominant language status or the status of languages of wider communication. As Williams (1992, p. 127) points out, euphemisms are a depoliticised way of referring to the languages in question as dominant languages. This constitutes an agency of ideological control which facilitates the domination of neither commonly spoken nor widely understood languages such as Xitsonga.

The euphemisms constitute what Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2011) refer to as the fiction of legal equality of status because there is a ranking order of languages already in existence: some languages are widely spoken and understood which suggests that they are not of equal importance, although in terms of textual meaning, they are official languages. The domination by the widely understood and spoken languages of neither commonly understood nor widely spoken official languages is textually disguised and reproduced by exploiting the lexical structure in the organisation of the *SABC LBP* statements. The rewording and emphasis of the status of the commonly understood and widely spoken languages point to a preoccupation with a particular aspect of the sociolinguistic order in the SABC.

Observations and interviews with Xitsonga speakers revealed that in SABC 2 there is *Ga re dumeli* a predominantly Sesotho drama which features a ridiculed Xitsonga character Tsutsuma. Observations and interviews also showed that in 2019 SABC 2 launched the very first predominantly Xitsonga television drama *Giyani: Land of Blood*, which unfortunately came to an end on the 26th of November 2019. Commenting on this production, the SABC 2 manager described it as a new ground-breaking drama and telenovela. First, the manager noted that the drama showcased a cast of Xitsonga actors, who for the better part of their career have had to perform in roles and languages other than their own in order to make a living. Second, the drama was for the first time going to afford Xitsonga viewers who have had to watch dramas in other languages, an opportunity to watch their own drama series in their language (SABC, 2019).

Interviews and observations showed that in both SABC and non-SABC television channels, the majority of non-Xitsonga drama present the Xitsonga people in bad light. It was noted through observations and from responses of the interviewed participants that the Vatsonga are always portrayed as objects for ridicule and they are stereotyped as somewhat backward people with some strong rural background. The following examples were given by the interviewed participants and confirmed through observations of the Xitsonga characters in question, namely Tsutsuma in *Ga re dumeli*, Dintle's uncle in *Scandal* and Mary in *Scandal*, especially when we compare her with her Zulu friend Lindiwe. It was observed that non-SABC commercial television channels, such as Mzansi Magic feature Xitsonga characters in dramas such as *Isibaya* and *Isithembiso*. However, the common trend in these channels is the negative and stereotypical portrayal of the Vatsonga people. They are presented in a way that mirrors the prevailing societal attitudes towards the Vatsonga. They are often ridiculed using the derogatory term *Machangana*, a term which offends the Vatsonga people who prefer to be called as the *Vatsonga* not *Machangana* (Mabaso, 2018; Mushwana & Chauke, 2015; Shivambu, 2013).

Our observations revealed that Xitsonga fares better than isiNdebele in SABC television channels. It was observed that there is no isiNdebele drama on SABC television channels and isiNdebele characters do not feature in SABC multilingual productions. The marginalisation of isiNdebele is partly because it is not widely spoken and understood when compared to its sister varieties, isiZulu and isiXhosa which are also dominant and whose speakers have high ethnolinguistic vitality. IsiZulu and isiXhosa are also the languages of South Africa's economic hubs. They have favourable status, demographic and institutional support variables than isiNdebele.

It was observed that over and above enjoying prominence in SABC television channels, English, Afrikaans, Nguni and Sotho varieties are allocated a greater amount of airtime in community television stations found in provinces where these languages are predominantly spoken. For example, these languages dominate airtime in stations, such as Gau tv, Tshwane tv, Bay tv, 1KZN, Cape town tv. Xitsonga and Tshivenda which are predominantly spoken in the Limpopo province do not feature in these stations. Limpopo is among the few provinces without a community television station. This goes to show how marginalised Xitsonga is on South African television channels.

The Ethnolinguistic Vitality of the Vatsonga

In an effort to understand the dilemma of the Xitsonga language, Giles, Taylor and Bourhis' (1977) vitality model and Webb's (2010) conditions and factors that determine the failure or success of top-down or bottom-up language political change were employed. According to Ndlovu (2013), the ethnolinguistic vitality of a linguistic group is useful in explaining the non-implementation dilemmas that bedevil multilingual language policies.

Based on the ethnolinguistic vitality model, it can be argued that the Vatsonga and Xitsonga's low social prestige, low economic status, negative socio-historical status and low language status; within and without explains the plight of Xitsonga in SABC television channels. Interviews and observations show that the Vatsonga are lowly regarded in South Africa as reflected by the stereotypes associated with them. Economically, they are in the marginal less productive areas of the country where there is no huge influx of people. It was noted that the Vatsonga do not have control over their own economic destiny. It emerged that they emigrate to the economic hubs of South Africa where Xitsonga is not spoken and quickly assimilate and shift to the dominant languages in these areas. As a result, they exhibit marked bilingualism which usually leads to comfort with a second language, and results in a lack of a communicative need in the home language. This negatively affects their language loyalty and compromise their social and cultural character, ethnolinguistic awareness and linguistic nationalism.

Vatsonga's history of being defeated during the *mfecane* reduced them to a low position and this history is still ingrained in most of the Vatsonga's minds. It was revealed that the Vatsonga suffered historical legacies of domination by larger or dominant language groups and this cultivated a low estimation of their language and culture. It was discovered that the Vatsonga emigrate to isiZulu and isiXhosa speaking economic hubs and disguise themselves as Nguni speakers. It was noted that they lack self-esteem and readily abandon their language, culture and self-identity in favour of the more widely used languages which are spoken in the economic hubs of South Africa mainly for survival purposes. Their language often becomes a stigma as they are often referred to as *Machangana*. It was noted that they are commonly referred to as Mozambicans, and not South Africans.

These experiences culminated in language accommodation, language shifts, diglossia and low ethnolinguistic vitality and awareness among the Vatsonga. It was noted that these experiences left permanent legacies and syndromes of inferiority among the Vatsonga. It was reported that these legacies and syndromes of inferiority stuck to the minds of the Vatsonga to such an extent that they have become institutionised and canonised. It was highlighted that due to these experiences, the Vatsonga have developed low emotional, functional, intellectual and loyalty stake in their language and easily shift to dominant languages once they settle in the economic hubs of South Africa. This dilemma explains why there is very minimal activity in terms of bottom-up language political change to challenge and question the marginalisation of Xitsonga on SABC television channels. It appears for them, there is no communicative need to be fulfilled in terms of their 'inferior' Xitsonga.

Xitsonga as a language is lowly regarded when compared to isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho. The low social status, prestige and self-esteem of the Vatsonga is associated with negative language ideologies or attitudes and poor language loyalty. It was observed that this group's low self-esteem reflects that which is attributed to it by the outgroups. It was noted that there is no strong community support for the language and the Vatsonga do not have a strong social and cultural character to lobby for the use of their language because they exhibit marked bi/multilingualism which allows them to follow television programs in other dominant languages.

According Statistics South Africa (2011), the Vatsonga are a minority group in South Africa and they constitute 4.5% of the country's population. This demographic trend explains their marginalisation. The SABC LBP Sections 6.7.1; 6.13.2.13 and 6.13.2.8 - 12 state that given the constraints of channel air time, it will make use of cognate languages, on a rotational basis, and widely understood languages to meet this mandate. Since Xitsonga lacks the said qualities (that is, it is not a cognate language and widely spoken and understood), it therefore fares badly in SABC television largely because of its numerical inferiority.

It was observed that although Xitsonga has considerable institutional support in education, particularly in Limpopo, its invisibility in the media weakens the group's ethnolinguistic vitality. Observations of the researchers corroborated by interviews data showed that the invisibility of Xitsonga on SABC television channels is largely because the number of home language speakers of Xitsonga is low, the geographical spread of the language is also limited, Vatsonga understand other widely spoken and understood languages and Xitsonga is not understood by other South Africans and Vatsonga have low ethnolinguistic vitality and do not have the requisite conditions and factors for successful language political change.

Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) define informal institutional support as the extent to which a linguistic group has organised itself in terms of pressure groups to represent and safeguard its own ethnolinguistic interests. A group that has organised itself to lobby and advocate for the promotion, maintenance and safeguarding of its interests has more vitality. Observations and interviews revealed that this is one of the major challenges facing the Vatsonga. It was noted that they lack this representation and visibility in terms of pressure groups to represent and safeguard their own ethnolinguistic interests. It emerged that the Vatsonga have not engaged in sustained and organised attention-seeking to SABC in view of the exclusion of their language. It was noted that the plight of the Vatsonga is partly because of the lack of pressure and pertinent attention that is engineered by them to ensure the fair representation of their language on SABC television channels. The amount of pressure and pertinent attention that are engineered by this group to ensure a fair representation of Xitsonga are very minimal, if not non-existent.

Webb (2010) identifies five factors and conditions that need to be secured to enable the successful implementation of multilingual language broadcasting policies, namely: power, ethnolinguistic awareness and linguistic nationalism, the social and cultural character of the community, community support for language-political change and role of globalisation together with a market-driven economy. These factors and conditions closely relate to the structural variables of the ethnolinguistic vitality model. These factors are also useful in explaining the place of Xitsonga in various genres of drama on SABC television channels. The power factor closely relates to informal and formal institutional support and control factors as well as economic and social status of the vitality model. Interviews and observations show that the Vatsonga do not possess power in its various forms; that is political and economic power. They lack a significant degree of community support to initiate 'unplanned' language planning or influence top-down policies. They lack the requisite political backing from the central government and elite for their language. Them as a community and the bodies that act on their behalf, seem to not have the required political and economic power to influence or secure political will and elite closure in view of the use of Xitsonga.

The data collected and analysed in this study show that the Xitsonga lack a strong ethno-linguistic awareness and linguistic and ethnic nationalism. It was noted that they do not compare with the Zulus, Xhosas and Afrikaners who exhibit a strong sense of ethno-linguistic awareness and heightened linguistic and ethnic nationalism. The Zulus, Xhosas and Afrikaans appear to be more language-centred and their ethnic languages are among their core values. For the Vatsonga, the value of their first language seems not to transcend any instrumental consideration and seem not to represent strive to self-fulfillment that makes language a symbol of survival. Ethno-linguistic awareness and linguistic and ethnic nationalism serve as a rallying point for the speech community to mobilise community support and establish legitimacy and authority of community representatives and the language problem. However, these key factors and conditions were found missing among the Vatsonga.

Observations show that there is lack of strong and sustained community support for language-political change among the Vatsonga. There is no community ownership and indigenisation of the language planning decisions. There is no strong or visible community support to resist and challenge the marginalisation of Xitsonga in the SABC. This was attributed to unfavourable status, demographic and institutional variables characterising the Vatsonga. It was also noted that these are further compounded by the negative social and cultural character of the Vatsonga, lack of power, low ethnolinguistic awareness and low linguistic nationalism.

It was observed and confirmed through interviews that the role of globalisation and the largely English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho driven economy and arts industry in the South African context explains the plight of the Xitsonga language and the Vatsonga. It was noted that the low degree of control that the Vatsonga have over the economic life of the nation, region or community works to their disadvantage. It emerged that the Vatsonga occupy economically weak areas and are less likely to succeed in their bottom-up language political change initiatives. They are not able fund their own initiatives. It was noted that globalisation and the English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, Sesotho and isiXhosa market-driven economy and arts industry in South Africa pose serious challenges to bottom-up and top-down initiatives aimed to develop languages such as Xitsonga which are not languages of wider communication. It was noted that Xitsonga is not widely spoken and is not used in the economic hubs of South Africa. Languages such as English, isiZulu, Sesotho, isiXhosa and Afrikaans which are used in the economic hubs of South Africa enjoy prominence on television because they have wider viewership to support and sustain programming in them.

Conclusion

This study found that the SABC is not in compliance with the expectations and provisions of the SABC LBP in as far as the use of all the official languages is concerned. The findings show that the covert and overt provisions of the SABC LBP present a weak case for languages, such as Xitsonga. It emerged from the analysis that the widely understood and spoken languages, cognate languages and politically, economically and numerically superior language groups are dominant on SABC television drama. The study also found that the SABC has limited visibility of more marginalised languages. Additionally, there seems to be limited or no concrete affirmative action for the more marginalised languages. It also emerged that there are prevailing negative stereotypes towards the Vatsonga projected on television dramas, which to a greater extent reflect the general societal attitudes towards the Vatsonga by other language groups. The findings of this study point to the dire need for the SABC to conduct periodical research with the aim of assessing language use in its various television channels in order to assess policy implementation progress and identify practical measures to redress the marginalisation and exclusion of other official languages.

It also emerged that the low ethnolinguistic vitality of the Vatsonga also explains why their language is faring badly on SABC television channels. The absence of Webb's (2010) conditions and factors for the successful implementation of multilingual language broadcasting policies among the Vatsonga also account for the low status and invisibility of Xitsonga on SABC television channels. A CDA of the SABC LBP shows that it does not present a strong case for official languages which are also classified as minority languages, namely Xitsonga, isiNdebele and Tshivenda. The covert and overt provisions of the policy constitute the basis of the marginalisation of these languages. The SABC shows a very strong bias towards the more widely understood and spoken languages and cognate languages. Xitsonga lacks all these attributes and this explains its marginalisation on SABC television channels

The research findings show that the major factors which explain the invisibility of Xitsonga on SABC television channels lie squarely with the macro and the micro levels. They reflect that shortcomings at both levels significantly contribute to the invisibility of Xitsonga. It was also noted that the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South African, the Pan South African Language Board and the Xitsonga Language Board are also not effectively monitoring language use at SABC to pick these imbalances and failure by the SABC to honour the provisions of the SABC LBP.

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