

CODE-SWITCHING BETWEEN TSONGA AND NORTHERN SOTHO  
IN TSHAMAHANSI SCHOOLS.

BY

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### OPSOMMING:-

In hierdie skripsie word 'n analise gemaak en 'n beskrywing gegee van die linguistiese realiteite in die Tshamahansi gebied. As gevolg van die tweetalige en diglossie situasie word skoliere (m.a.w. Tsonga-sprekers) en die groter gemeenskap op die een of ander wyse gedwing om van taalkode te verander wanneer hulle by die skool praat of skryf.

Hulle word aan druk onderwerp omdat hulle taal (Tsonga) 'n laer (L) funksie het as Noord Sotho wat as die prestige taal 'n hoer (H) funksie het. Die hoër prestige taal word by skole, in die regering, in amptelike dokumente en formele situasie, ens. gebruik.

Dit lei tot negatiewe sienswyse by die Tsonga-sprekers wat in die Tshamahansi area woon. Hierdie negatiewe houdings het 'n uitwerking op die skolastiese prestasies van die skoliere in Tshamahansi. In hierdie geval behoort 'n tweetalige en multikulturele opvoedingstelsel ingestel te word, waarby die gemeenskap in sy geheel sal baat.

Die kennis van meer as een taal, in 'n land soos Suid-Afrika, is 'n bate want dit help die individu om in verskillende situasies en buite die grense van 'n enkeltalige gemeenskap te kommunikeer.

(ii)

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## INTRODUCTION

It is an indisputable fact that man is a social being and does not live alone, but instead in a social, concrete world where he constantly uses language to interact with his fellow human beings. He uses languages as a means to express his social identity. Philosophers such as Herder maintain that:

[l]anguage is an imminent part of the development of individuals and groups that speak it and, as such it expresses the consciousness of groups and therefore constitutes the most important and precious possession of its speakers. More simply, language is the mirror of a nation (cited in Hoffman, 1991:203).

The fact that language expresses social identity is also stressed by Labov, when he says,

[l]anguage is a very important manifestation of group identity and solidarity. When a group believes itself to be discriminated against or otherwise vulnerable to pressures from outside, it may unconsciously or consciously choose to exaggerate the use of speech features which signal group identity (cited in Wolfson, 1989:226).

It seems indisputable that language and society go together, and are in some way interrelated. Sociolinguistics, which is a sub-discipline within linguistics, tries to investigate the relationship between language and society, hence it is referred to as:

...the study of language in relation to society (Hudson, 1980:4)

This simply means that one cannot study language without paying special attention to society. Firth, has this to say:

...speech has a social function, both as means of communication and also as a way of identifying social groups, and to study speech without reference to the society which uses it is to exclude the possibility of finding social explanations for the structures that are used (1950:196).

It is relevant to note that languages as means of expressing one's identity, will enable or empower an individual to manipulate and open new avenues such as trade, education, religion, politics, etc. With language, humans can gain access to knowledge and skills. In a multilingual society like South Africa, language can be used to promote or hinder the academic success of children.

The diversity of languages in South Africa makes for a situation in which some languages are dominant with concomitant negative attitudes towards other languages in situations involving factors such as code-switching.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND

It is a fact that language is a tangible, immediately noticeable indicator of group identity, and the survival of a nation's language can be equated with the continued existence of the nation itself. Those nations and groups which are politically superior to other groups or nations are often aggressive in the expression of their convictions and by so doing pose a threat to the survival of the language of minority groups or nations.

The area on which this dissertation focuses is the North-Western area of Potgietersrus called Tshamahansi. According to the verbal reports gathered in this study, the earliest inhabitants of the district were Tsonga-speaking immigrants from Giyani and Louis Trichardt, who arrived in the early 1930's in the village known as Tshamahansi. These people settled in one area, where they still live today.

They constitute a linguistic minority whose language (while an official one elsewhere), is a minority language in the province of which they are citizens. In other words, their ethnic homeland lies outside of the region in which they live.

In this chapter, the situation in Black Junior Primary Schools in this area will be described. These schools use Northern Sotho as language of instruction in the junior primary phase, i.e. from grades 1-4, even though most of the inhabitants in the area are Tsonga speakers.

Those pupils who use Northern Sotho as the medium of instruction at school and Tsonga at home, tend to underachieve at school. In 1983 a number of unsuccessful applications were made to the Lebowa Government asking for the introduction of Tsonga as the medium of instruction, especially in the junior primary schools. The refusal was based on the principle that those pupils who required instruction in Tsonga were free to leave the area and return to Giyani. The school principals and teachers were all Northern Sotho speakers.

After the 1994 Democratic general election, the possibility of introducing Tsonga as medium of instruction, once again came up. A committee named "The Tsonga committee" was established. The Committee found that teachers did not support them and some parents had the feeling that, as long as the teachers did not have the resources, they (the teachers) could not give the plan to use Tsonga as a medium of instruction the go-ahead.

Some parents also felt it would be expensive and unaffordable for them to send their children to far-away schools to continue with Tsonga after the completion of the primary phase. The settlement ultimately reached was that the use of Tsonga as medium of instruction would not be compulsory.

So, because of the continued use of Northern Sotho as the medium of instruction in the junior primary phase of the Tshamahansi schools, the Tsonga pupils tend to switch codes regularly in the bilingual situation in which they find themselves. At home they use Tsonga as their mother tongue and at school they use N. Sotho as the medium of instruction.

Some of the contributory factors towards the code-switching might be that language interference from the mother tongue i.e. Tsonga takes place. Peer group influence can be detected because they mix and play with children from the



neighbouring villages who speak Northern Sotho.

## 1.2. THE SCOPE OF THIS DISSERTATION

The aim of this dissertation is to determine the types, functions and causes of code-switching as well as group and individual attitudes towards Tsonga in the Tshamahansi area. In chapter two the concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism are examined. Chapter three discusses code-switching, and examines different types and functions of code-switching. Chapter four discusses the findings of a questionnaire sent to teachers in the Tshamahansi area and attempts to determine reasons for code-switching in this area. It elaborates on the educational implications of this research project, and makes recommendations for education in this area and in South African schools in general.

## 1.3. COLLECTION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

The collection of data includes informal conversations at schools, churches and playgrounds and a questionnaire for teachers set out to determine the causes of code-switching and the attitudes and reactions towards Tsonga at schools and at social gatherings.

## CHAPTER 2

### BILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM

South Africa is a country characterised by bilingualism and multilingualism. The word "bilingual" has different connotations for different people. From the sociolinguistic point of view, there is a thin demarcation line between bilingualism and multilingualism.

The difference separating the two concepts might be in the number of languages that an individual or a group of people can speak. In fact the term "bilingualism" is often used in place of term "multilingualism". As Adler points out:

...bilingualism has been used so often and so widely in the literature that one can extend it, ignoring the meaning of the Greek word "bi", to the knowledge and use of two or more languages (1977:2).

According to Ferguson and Heath, bilingualism is:

...an individual characteristic that may exist to degrees varying from minimal competency to complete mastery of more than one language (1981:470).

Thus, a bilingual speaker is one who is able to speak two or more languages with some degree of proficiency. Often this may be result of upbringing in a family in which two languages are used. Richards defines bilingualism as:

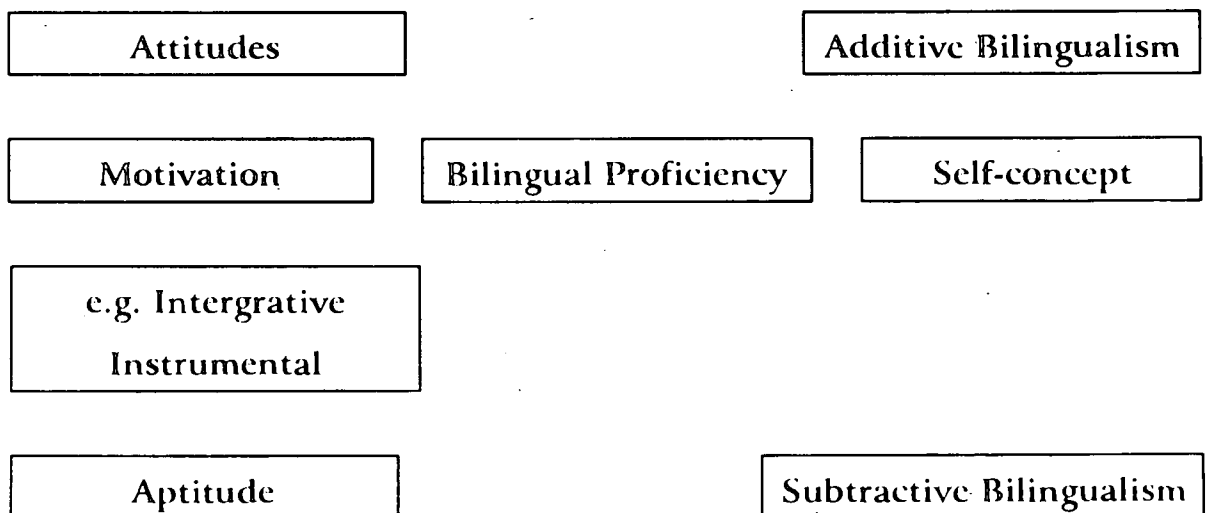
...the use of at least two languages either by individual

or by group of speakers, such as the inhabitants of a particular region or nation (1988:29).

Mackey (1968 : 555) considers bilingualism as simply the alternate use of two or more languages, and suggests that there are four areas which a description of bilingualism needs to address namely, **degree**, **function**, **alternation** and **interference**.

The question of **degree** concerns proficiency, i.e. how well does a bilingual know each of the languages? **Function** focuses on the uses to which a bilingual speaker puts the languages and the different roles they have in the individual's total repertoire. **Alternation** has to do with the extent to which the individual alternates between the languages while **interference** concerns the extent to which the individual manages to keep the languages separate or fused.

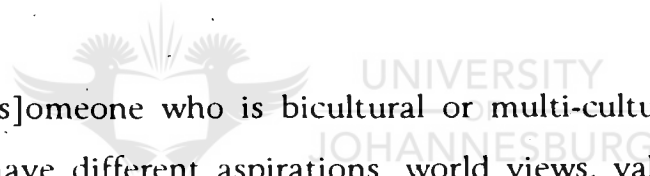
Lambert's (1974:125) model of bilingualism (reproduced below) illustrates both the individual and societal elements of bilingualism.



Lambert regards the individual's attitude and aptitude towards language as the two major and relatively separate causative factors in bilingualism. Skehan (cited in Baker, 1983) maintains that aptitude in learning an (L2) may be an important factor in second language learning as attitudes of a person towards a language. These factors are also important in maintaining the language.

Another constituent of Lambert's model is motivation, i.e. the readiness to engage in language learning or activity. This is followed by the individual's bilingual proficiency and later on by his/her self-concept.

According to Lambert, becoming bilingual has an effect on the self-esteem and the ego. Mastering a second language may change one's self-concept and self-esteem in a positive or negative way. Bilingualism normally involves acculturation. As Lambert comments:



[s]omeone who is bicultural or multi-cultural may have different aspirations, world views, values and beliefs because of being bilingual or multilingual (cited in Baker, 1993:95).

In Tshamahansi, Tsonga-speaking pupils speak and learn Northern Sotho. Very often the outcome of this is a tendency towards developing a negative attitude towards Northern Sotho. This negative attitude can (and does) affect their educational achievement at school.

In the last aspect of the model, Lambert distinguishes between **additive** and **subtractive bilingualism**. Additive bilingualism, as the name indicates, concerns a situation in which the person's first language is maintained while competence in another language is added. Both languages and cultures bring complementary

positive elements to the child's cognitive development.

In this situation a child derives maximum benefit from the bilingual experience. Additive bilingualism usually occurs when two languages are highly valued. In other words, when both the community and the family attribute positive values to the two languages. In such situations, the learning of an (L2) will in no way threaten to replace the mother tongue.

When the second language (L2) and culture are acquired with the pressure to replace or demote the first language (L1), a subtractive form of bilingualism may occur. This usually occurs when the mother tongue (L1) is devalued in a speech community.

The pupils in Tshamahansi junior primary schools habitually use two languages, Tsonga and Northern Sotho alternatively, i.e. the one at home and the other at school. They are in the unenviable position of having to use their mother tongue, i.e. Tsonga, as their second language (L2) at school. The educational policies of the apartheid regime were not concerned with the principles of additive bilingualism which would have allowed all children access to a medium of instruction based on student or parental choice.

Because the now defunct Lebowa Government regarded the Tsonga-speaking people as immigrants in the region, the Tsonga-speaking children had no alternative but to receive their school instruction in Northern Sotho and thus effectively to use Northern Sotho as an (L1) at school.

The ethnolinguistic minority in the speech community of Tshamahansi reject their known cultural values in favour of those of the economically and culturally more prestigious Northern Sotho speaking group.

In this situation of subtractive bilingualism the more prestigious second language, in this case Northern Sotho, will tend to replace the first language (Tsonga). Lambert (1977:19) maintains that subtraction will manifest itself at several levels and will influence intellectual development and personality. Furthermore, language competence which first developed through the mother tongue (L1) will be severely affected.

It is important to note that subtractive bilingualism may encompass a less positive self-concept, loss of cultural identity, and possible alienation and assimilation. This is true in Tshamahansi where most of the Tsonga have lost their cultural heritage and are often even ashamed of using their home language (Tsonga) in public gatherings.

Ferguson and Heath (1981:471-472) distinguish three types of bilingualism which are pertinent to the use of code-switching in Tshamahansi. Firstly, they mention **elitist bilingualism** which is said to be the hallmark of the intellectuals and the learned people in the society. As the name suggests, this type of bilingualism is common in the dominant social group within a speech community.

The second type is **institutional bilingualism** which is controlled by the state. Each citizen may be recognized as having the right to use the official language of his/her choice in dealing with the state and as a medium for working within the state administration. This is not the case with the speech community of Tshamahansi. Even though they are bilingual, they do not have the right to use their language, i.e. Tsonga, in government and in administration.

Ferguson and Heath's third type is **folk bilingualism** which emerges as a result of contact and competition between ethnic groups within a single state. In this case one of the groups becomes bilingual involuntarily in order to survive. As

Skutnabb-Kangas points out,

[s]urvival skills in multiple languages constitute folk bilingualism (1981:156).

Folk bilingualism is what is practised by Tsonga-speakers in Tshamahansi. They have been deprived of the basic right to use their first language in formal situations and at school and they have, therefore, been compelled to use Northern Sotho in order to survive in the mainstream society.

Since language diversity in South Africa has complicated the provision of education, proficiency in the language of the dominant group has tended to determine privilege, political power and economic prosperity. MacNamara 1966 (as cited in Herbert, 1992) observes that learning takes longer in a foreign language than in a mother-tongue.

The pupils in Junior Primary Schools in Tshamahansi underachieve educationally because, while they are still acquiring their mother tongue, the second language (L2) is introduced as the medium of instruction at schools. This often leads to both languages being poorly acquired. If not well implemented, bilingualism can cause cognitive confusion.

However, bilingualism can have many positive effects. Ferguson and Heath argue that bilingualism can benefit teachers by increasing their knowledge and relationships with individual pupils, by their being able to recognize pupil's families and communities as school resources, by increasing teacher's awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and by contributing to the multilingualism and multi-cultural ethos of the school.

The situation in Tshamahansi is complex. The two languages used, i.e. Tsonga and Northern Sotho, differ according to how they are used. The social positions and ethnic groups of the speakers are different and each language variety is assigned a definite social function or role. The situation in Tshamahansi might be classified as a diglossic one. Ferguson (1959) as cited in Wolfson, gives the following description of a diglossic situation:

[i]t is a stable sociolinguistic situation in which two languages are used in mutually exclusive domains by the same speech community (1989:262).

Diglossia according to Trudgill (1983) is defined as:

...a particular kind of language standardization where two distinct varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the speech community ... and each of the two varieties is assigned a definite social function (cited in Kaschula and Anthonissen 1995:70).

In a diglossic situation, the two languages usually do not occupy the same status or receive the same respect. In this situation the highly codified language (i.e. the language which is written and taken to be the standard form) is taken as a **High (H)** variety and is the form in which a large and respected body of literature exists, has a standardized writing system and is used in government and in education. It is more prestigious than the **Low (L)** variety.

As Northern Sotho in Tshamahansi is used in formal education, government, etc. it can be accorded the status of a High variety. Tsonga, the Low variety, is used in colloquial situations. In a diglossic situation it is usually the case that the Low



variety is the mother tongue of an entire speech community while the High variety is learned through formal education. This is the situation in Tshamahansi where Tsonga is the mother tongue of the speech community, but Northern Sotho is used in formal situations such as at schools.

Tsonga-speakers have, perforce, to learn the High variety (Northern Sotho) of the host region. Northern Sotho, the High variety in the speech community of Tshamahansi has an almost magical power. If an individual knows it well she/he is likely to be able to participate in the government, get a better job, etc. As the standard prestigious form, it provides empowerment to individuals. This situation compels Tsonga speakers to become bilinguals.



## CHAPTER 3

### CODE-SWITCHING

Competent bilinguals sometimes switch codes in conversation because code-switching is potentially an extremely creative aspect of bilingual speech. Harris defines code-switching as:

...the alternation between two languages within a single conversation. It is particularly characteristic of informal conversations where all participants are bilingual, in such circumstances a bilingual may switch between one language and the other several times within the same utterance (1983:233).

Alvarez offers the following definition:

Code-switching occurs when a bilingual introduces a completely unintegrated word or words from language A into a language B context. It is the use of either language with extended switches into the other at the phrase, clause, or sentence level throughout a conversation (1979:19).

She points out that

...code switches can occur in semantic, lexical, syntactic, morphological, and phonological aspects of language (1979:19).

She mentions, however that,

...switching is more common at the lexical level predominantly nouns and occurring less frequently in the adjectives, adverbs and verbs (1979:29).

A feature of the language performance of all bilingual speakers is the possibility of interference from one language in the use of the other. Code-switching entails frequent or continual interplay between languages in any speech event as speakers switch from one language to another.

While some linguists regard code-switching as a creative aspect of bilinguals, others such as Sonia (1978:2) are of the opinion that it is a sign of linguistic decay or impurity or laziness because the bilinguals cannot acquire two languages properly or are unable to keep them apart. At some of the primary schools in Tshamahansi visited during the course of this investigation, it was observed that the Tsonga speakers are generally not fluent in Northern Sotho and seem to have difficulty in keeping the two languages apart.

In informal settings in which pupils were observed at play, it was evident that many of them could not differentiate between Tsonga words and Northern Sotho such as those in the list below:

1. **Homu ya tatana e na le namane.**

Homu ya tatana (Tsonga)

e na le namane (N. Sotho)

(My father's cow has a calf).

Tsonga	Northern Sotho	English
homu	kgomo	cow

2. Huku ya wena yi na matsuane yo tala.

Huku ya wena yi na (Tsonga)  
 matsuane (N.Sotho) yo tala (Tsonga)  
 (Your chicken has many chickens)

Tsonga	Northern Sotho	English
huku	kgogo	chicken

3. Mati ya le Manyeleti a a toka.

Mati ya le (Tsonga) Manyeleti  
 a a toka (N. Sotho)  
 (The water at Manyeleti sour).

Tsonga	Northern Sotho	English
mati	meetse	water

### 3.1 TYPES OF CODE-SWITCHING

One of the types of code-switching used in Tshamahansi, involves the **lexical and phonological** level. This type of switch involves a change in pronunciation and articulation of sounds. During a grade 3 Northern Sotho class in which an oral lesson was conducted, the following lexical switches were noticed.

- 1.(a) Instead of Northern Sotho sentence: **Skolo** sa geso se boktse, the pupil would say:

**Xikolo** xà hina se botse.

(our school is beautiful).

**Xikolo xa hina (Tsonga)**

se botse (N. Sotho)

In sentence 1.b, the pupil was using Tsonga and decided to switch Northern Sotho during the course of the conversation.

2. **Re swanetse go hlonipha mutswari o mongwe le o mongwe.**

Re swanetse go (N. Sotho)

hlonipha mutswari (Tsonga)

o mongwe le o mongwe (N. Sotho)

(instead of: Re swanetse go hlonipha motswadi o mongwe le o mongwe).

(We should respect every parent).

In sentence 2, the utterance was started / initiated in Northern Sotho and later switched to Tsonga and ended in Northern Sotho.

### Articulation of sounds

Speech sounds are often not properly articulated as a result of switching as in:

	<b>Tsonga</b>	<b>Northern Sotho</b>	<b>English</b>
1.	lekgodu (khamba)	[leho u]	thief
2.	mokgokgonope (nkuku)	[mo o onop'e]	cock

In 1. the voiceless fricative [h] is articulated as [kxh]= affricate.

From the above, it was noticed that the pronunciation switches are easily

transposed to the orthography particularly by those children who have been exposed to teaching and learning through the medium of Tsonga only. Their code-switching also involves the use of the class prefix such as, **mo-,me-,etc.**

For example, **Northern Sotho**

1. Monna wola hi **muaki** lonene.  
(That man is the best builder)

<b>Northern Sotho</b>	<b>Tsonga</b>	<b>English</b>
Noun class (1) Mo-		
<b>moagi</b>	<b>muaki</b>	<b>builder</b>

2. **Murisi** wa dikgomo o fambile  
(The cow's shepherd has gone).

<b>modisi</b>	<b>murisi</b>	<b>shepherd</b>
---------------	---------------	-----------------

3. **Mindhwaloleyi** e boima ngofu  
(This load is too heavy).

Noun class (4) Me-		
<b>merwalo</b>	<b>mindhwalo</b>	<b>load</b>

Various other categories of code-switching may be discerned. According to Gumperz (1976), the code-switching which takes place within a single conversational span, including within a single sentence, is **conversational code-switching**. This type of switching is also prevalent among the Tshamahansi school pupils. During the course of a Northern Sotho oral lesson in a Tshamahansi primary school, the following examples of conversational code-switching were recorded.

1. **Xikolo xa rena xi botse kudu.**  
(Our school is beautiful).

In the above example, the pupil whose mother tongue is Tsonga, uses the clause or phrase, **xikolo xa-** instead of the Northern Sotho phrase, **sekolo sa**, (our school). The pupil also uses the Tsonga, **xi botse-** instead of the Northern Sotho, **se botse** (beautiful)

2. **Morutiši o rhandza re dira ntiro wa hina siku na siku**  
Morutisi o re dira (N. Sotho)  
rhandza ntiro wa hina siku na siku (Tsonga)  
(Our teacher wants us to do our work every day)

Feerguson and Heath define code-switching as:

...changing from one language variety to another in the course of using language; usually determined by the particular function, participants, or setting and identify the speaker wishes to project (1981:527),

thus highlighting the fact that code-switching is often dependent on a particular situation or on a specific intention on the part of the producer.

It is a habitual tendency of both Tsonga and Northern Sotho pupils to switch codes when talking to one another for the purposes of emphasis. That is, a Tsonga pupils will switch to Northern Sotho and vice versa. This type of switching is called **metaphorical code-switching**. An informal conversation between pupils on their way home from school is recorded below:

"Mindzuku hi ya tsala **dipalo** e xikolweni"

(Tomorrow we are going to write mathematics at school).

In an otherwise Tsonga utterance, the Northern Sotho term for mathematics, **dipalo** is used; rather than the Tsonga term **tinhlayo**, in order to emphasize the subject of the examination.

The following words and phrases were used by the pupil in order to stress a certain point.

Tsonga	Northern Sotho	English
rhandza	nyaka	want(s)
ntirho wa hina	mosomo wa rena	our work
siku na siku	letsatsi ka letsatsi	every day

From the above examples, it appears that code-switching from Northern Sotho to Tsonga serves multiple purposes. It occurs when the speaker cannot find the right word, or remember the right expression in Northern Sotho to make a certain point. It also occurs with the purpose of emphasizing a certain point in a conversation. Pohl says:

...diglossia is vertical bilingualism, since the two varieties exist within the same speaker (cited in Hoffmann, 1991:166)

### 3.2 FUNCTIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING

In a diglossia situation such as in Tshamahansi, two languages are used but one language variety is held in high esteem. Northern Sotho in this case is the high



(H) and dominant variety, and is used in schools, literature, church, government offices, etc.

Gumperz (1976, cited in Hudson 1980) proposes that the term situational code-switching goes hand in hand with **diglossia** in which each point of switching corresponds to a change in situation. That is to say, the type of situation in which an individual finds himself or herself determines the type of language to be based. The Tsonga-speaking child tries to adjust to the situation she is confronted with at school.

The code-switching displayed by both pupils and teachers in Tshamahansi schools indicates that it is a multi-functional phenomenon. Different forms of code-switching illustrated different functions or purpose as indicated above and discussed below.

One reason why the interlocutors resorted to code-switching in the example discussed above is that they wanted to clarify or emphasise a certain point in their speech. For example, when pupils were engaged in informal conversation about a maths test the following day, a pupil talking Tsonga used the Northern Sotho word 'dipalo' to emphasise a particular point. Furthermore, in the sentence:

**Xikolo sa rena se botse,**

The pupil uses the Tsonga word 'Xikolo' in order to emphasise a point. Some pupils use code-switching as a **relief strategy** because they cannot easily find a proper word or expression in the language they are speaking as in the following sentence:

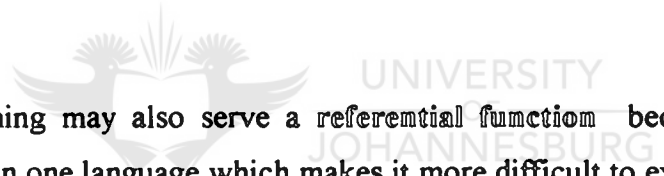
**Re swanetse go hlonipha mutswari o mongwe le o mongwe.**

The speaker could apparently not remember a suitable Northern Sotho word to express respect to every parent. The speaker thus used the Tsonga equivalent. Pupils also code-switch to mark solidarity. That is, to reinforce relationships. A child who wanted to persuade her parents to buy her a maths textbook said:

Vha teri mini rekela buku ya dipalo mindzuku

(They said you should buy me a maths book tomorrow).

The word 'mini' in the above sentence indicates that the relationship with the parents is intimate, otherwise the speaker would have used the word 'eni' which illustrates disrespect. The situation in which the child finds himself allows him to switch freely without any pressure or fear. The child is intimate with his parents, hence the switch.



Code-switching may also serve a referential function because of a lack of vocabulary in one language which makes it more difficult to express certain ideas in a language. Some people feel that certain subjects may be more appropriately discussed in one language and the introduction of such a subject can result in a switch to the appropriate language for the concept under discussion. Appel and Muysken (1987) point out that all topic - related switching serves a referential function in language and that most bilingual speakers, when asked why they code-switch, tend give the reason that they do not know the word for something in the language they are speaking or because the language switched to is more appropriate for talking about the subject under discussion.

Code-switching may also serve a referential function because of a lack of vocabulary in one language which also leads to lack of words for expressing

certain ideas in a language. Some people feel that certain subjects may be more appropriately discussed in one language and the introduction of such a subject can lead to a switch, or a specific word from one of the languages involved may be semantically appropriate for a concept under discussion. A religious instruction lesson for Std 1 pupils observed for the purposes of this discussion, pupils were taught to recite a passage from 1 Corinthians 13: (1-3).

**Le ge nka bolela ka marimi a vhanu le a barongwa.  
fela ke se na rirandzo gona ke tšhipi ye e llago, le  
ge ele moropa wo o dumago.**

In the extract quoted above, the teacher himself switched from Northern Sotho because he felt that the Tsonga words such as 'marimi', 'rirandzo' were more appropriate than the Northern Sotho equivalents, in order to help the pupils to understand more easily because those words are more appropriate for emphasizing a point to Tsonga speakers.

Another function of code-switching prevalent in Tshamahansi primary schools is the **directive function** where focus is on the hearer. The directive functions can work in two opposing ways, firstly by excluding certain people from a conversation and secondly by including a receiver by using his or her language. In the data collected for this study, the directive function was noticed during a religious instruction lesson.

A negative attitude toward the Tsonga pupils is apparent in the following comment made by a teacher:

**Bana ba ga kwesisi ke ditlacla.**

(These children do not understand, they are blockheads).

The language that was used in this interchange between two teachers was deliberately unclear to the pupils. The teacher wanted to exclude the pupils and did not apparently wish them to understand what was being communicated.

Code-switching is also used to **qualify an utterance**. A topic might be introduced in Tsonga and be taken further in Northern Sotho. In other words, the language with which the children are familiar is used first and then a qualification is added in Northern Sotho. A teacher was observed switching between two codes, i.e. Northern Sotho and Tsonga, perhaps in order to impress the pupils with a show of linguistic skill, perhaps out of anger because the pupils were unable to grasp what she was teaching them;

**Mi swi dlaela hi ku a mi twisisi, le ka se tswelele.**

**Mi swi dlaela hi ku a mi twisisi (Tsonga)**

**le ka se tswelele (N. Sotho)**

(You are blockheads because you do not understand, and you will not pass).

The teacher uses Tsonga as well as Northern Sotho to display her knowledge of both languages while at the same time, she is angry with the pupils, hence the use of the Tsonga phrase,

**Mi swi dlaela**

(You are blockheads/ stupid).

## CHAPTER 4

### COLLECTION OF DATA, ATTITUDES AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The collection of data took the form of visits to primary schools in Tshamahansi. The research was conducted in the primary phase, i.e. from SSA-Std 2 (now grades 1-4). The research was based on observation, listening to teachers imparting knowledge (teaching) and extensive interviews with teachers. Data was also collected in the form of a questionnaire which was filled in by teachers. (see the addendum for a copy of the questionnaire). The questions used in the questionnaire covered aspects such as bibliographical information of pupils and of respondents. Other aspects of the questionnaire dealt with the communicative competence and cognitive abilities of the Tsonga-speaking pupils. In this regard, most of the teachers (respondents) agreed in principle that Tsonga-speaking pupils have reading and writing problems and their communicative competence is not as good as that of Northern Sotho pupils. Hoffmann's comments underscore this experience in Tshamahansi schools:

...in the classroom the bilingual child may encounter problems in understanding whatever is being taught and this may in turn hold the development of the think tank and consequently lead to poor performance in tasks involving skills in both home and the school language (1991:120-130).

For questions such as "Do you think that the Tsonga-speaking pupils find it difficult to speak standard Northern Sotho, to express themselves in writing or to understand standard Northern Sotho?" the respondents mentioned limited

vocabular as their main problem. When pupils are asked questions or requested to perform certain tasks, they take some time to think and conceptualize.

Another aspect on the questionnaire dealt with attitudes displayed by teachers towards the use of more than one language in the classroom. All the respondents were against using a language which is not the medium of instruction, i.e. Tsonga, but they wanted it to be used on special occasions in order to embellish certain points so that they could help the pupils understand. The argument advanced by many teachers is that the use of Tsonga in the classroom might encourage incorrect language usage which would thus be detrimental to pupils' scholastic achievement.

The last aspect covered by the questionnaire was the question of whether mother tongue (L1) usage by students should be promoted or discouraged. The majority of the respondents felt that it should only be used if there were adequate resources such as teachers, textbooks, etc.

#### 4.1 TEACHER ATTITUDES AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

There are two opposing theories about the nature of attitudes towards language, viz. the mentalist theory and the behaviourist theory. According to the mentalist theory a person's attitude prepares him or her to react to a given stimulus in one way rather than in another. Williams (1974) defines attitude as follows:

Attitude is considered as an internal state aroused by stimulation of some type and which may mediate an organism's subsequent response (as cited in Fasold, 1984: 147)

The behaviourist theory on attitudes maintains that attitudes are found in responses people make to social situations. According to this theory, it is necessary to observe, tabulate and analyze overt behaviour. Investigators depend heavily on behavioral indexes of attitudes, e.g. on what people say, on how they respond to questionnaires, or on such physiological signs as changes in heart rate.

Attitudes are sometimes regarded as underlying predispositions, and opinions as their manifestations. Fishbein and Aizen, define attitude as:

...a predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner to a given object which may be a person, a group, a language variety (as cited in Deprez and Persoons, 1988:125).

Attitudes towards a language are often the reflection of attitudes towards members of various ethnic groups, as is the case in Tshamahansi schools, where the dominant group (Northern Sotho speakers) consider themselves superior to the Tsonga ethnic group. The study of attitudes shows clearly that different varieties of language evoke different perceptions.

Attitudes develop at an early age as indicated by Brown:

...attitudes develop early in childhood and are the result of parent's attitudes, contact with people who are different in a number of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experience. These attitudes form part of one's perception of self, of others and of the culture in which one is living (1980:120).

This is true of the children from neighbouring villages who regularly play with pupils at Tshamahansi schools. As they come from different villages, their language, culture and tradition differs from that of the Tsonga-speaking people. As such, they sometimes laugh at elderly Tsonga women who dress in their tradition clothes such as 'xibelani' and in some cases, when they speak Tsonga.

On the questionnaire which was distributed among the schools, teachers indicated their negative attitude toward the Tsonga language and code-switching. To the question of whether Tsonga language should be used as medium of instruction, their response was largely negative.

On the question of preference between Tsonga and Northern Sotho, the majority opted for Northern Sotho because they felt Northern Sotho would empower them to participate actively in the mainstream society, and create job opportunities for them in government.

Attitudes towards language usually imply some type of stereotyping towards a certain language. As Owens (1984:312) indicates, there is a stereotypic perception that a speaker of standard English is more competent than a non-standard speaker of English and that this lack of competence can result in the denial of education and job opportunities.

In the case where two language varieties occur, speakers of the higher status variety (such as Northern Sotho in Tshamahansi), may not be able to understand the speakers of the lower status variety (language) while speakers of the variety with lower status generally understand the dominant prestigious language (variety) in order to survive.

Teachers seem to want to maintain the status quo which promoted separate



development, even though the ANC Framework for Education Policy and Training states clearly that the provision of education should be based on equal opportunities for all, irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, geographical location, etc.

Another important point on teacher attitudes towards code-switching and language, particularly Tsonga, in Tshamahansi primary schools was observed when, at the beginning of the 1966 academic year, the Tsonga language was introduced in Grade 0. Teachers felt threatened that some of them would lose their job or be redeployed. This led to some altercation about the use of Tsonga in the lower grades. The teacher's resistance to change led to months of class disruption at the Makgubuketsa primary school.

There is some evidence that language attitudes may influence how teachers deal with pupils. Scott and Smitherman stress that

...teachers' attitudes play an important part in the shaping of expectations and perceptions that pupils have of themselves, as well as those that teachers have of the pupils (cited in De Villiers, 1992:36).

Negative attitudes towards the language of a child can harm the child's self-image as well as his/her motivation to learn the second language. This is the case with the pupils in the primary schools in Tshamahansi. They do not have the positive motivation to learn Northern Sotho.

Scott and Smitherman maintain that

...teachers react to speech cues such as pronunciation and length of sentences pupils. These speech cues will

serve as social identifiers or markers which in turn will bring about stereotypic reactions (cited in De Villiers, 1992:38).

Teachers as members of the society and trained professionals are the first people to react negatively when pupils use code-switching because they are trained to use a standard language all time in the teaching and learning situation. This is one reason perhaps that brings teachers to correct faulty, "sloppy speech", "bad" language usage and writing and this often leads to teachers developing negative attitudes towards students' work and sometimes towards the student themselves.

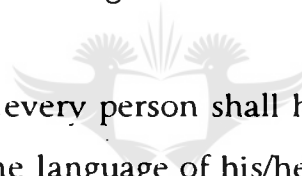


## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa has recently undergone a political transformation through which democracy has broadened to all the citizens for the first time in its history. This development has far-reaching implications for the education system, which was a contested area during the liberation struggle. The multilingual nature of South Africa society has a dramatic bearing on education. In terms of the new South African society interim constitution, eleven (11) languages are not only official languages, but with regard to education it is stated that



...every person shall have the right to instruction in the language of his/her choice where practical (ANC Education Policy, 1995:69)

It is clear that the pupils in Tshamahansi schools are being deprived of this right.

The following recommendations for Tshamahansi junior primary schools might serve to address some of the language problems.

(a) **preview-review approach** :- in this approach the introduction of a lesson is given in one language by a teacher who is the model for the Tsonga language. Then the review is provided either by dividing the pupils into dominant language groups, or by the

(b) **concurrent approach** :- in this approach, the two languages are used interchangeably while attempts are made to avoid direct translation. One teacher may teach a lesson using both languages, or two teachers can present the lesson each modelling a different language.

Most recent research findings on the role of language in cognitive development suggest that mother tongue medium of instruction in the initial years of schooling is best for children's cognitive development (see Freire, 1989:74). Research has shown that basic concepts, numeracy and literacy are more easily learnt through mother tongue instruction (ANC Education Policy, 1995:67). Paulo Freire maintains that:

...pupils learn to read with better comprehension  
when taught in their native tongue (1989:78)

He emphasizes that the immediate recognition of familiar words and experience enhances the development of positive self-concepts in children who are at times insecure about the status of their language and culture. As Ghandi (1920) proposes,

...real education is impossible through a foreign  
medium...the vernacular medium alone can stimulate  
originality in thought in the largest number of persons  
(cited in Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995).

Freire (1989) maintains that learning in a home language is a **sine quo non** for the healthy development of the child's personality and the development of a positive self-image of minority children will be harmed if, in the school, literacy in the minority language is not developed. This is the case with the Tsonga junior

primary pupils in Tshamahansi who do not receive their education through their mother tongue.

When minority children learn to read and write, the majority language must automatically be considered a second-rate means of communication and those who speak the minority language will be considered second-rate people, just as in the Tshamahansi area.

The mother tongue as the medium of instruction would also help prevent the forced linguistic and cultural assimilation of minority groups. Cultural pluralism is an enrichment of the society as a whole and there is less danger of a challenge to, or loss of, the child's sense of identity if the home language continues to be used at school and the speakers are drawn on and recognized in the school setting. At present this does not happen for most South African school children

It is imperative that the incorporation of the pupil's language as the primary language of instruction in literacy be given top priority. It is through their own language that pupils will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture (Freire: 1989:47). In other words the pupils' mother tongue is the only vehicle in which they can develop their own voices and be heard and it is a prerequisite for the development of a positive sense of self-worth.

The aims and findings of the (Yoruba-medium) Education Project in Nigeria seem relevant to the situation in South Africa and might be recommended for the South African education system, namely:

(a) using the vernacular as medium to bridge the gap between home and school. Parents assist the classes through their children by supplying information on folklore and festivities whenever requested by the teachers. Parents communicate

in a common language with regard to school education.

(b) there are usually more pupils who have to repeat a year or drop out among those who receive their primary education in a foreign language than among those who are taught in their mother tongue. (Because of a similar situation in Tshamahansi, illiteracy is high).

The Nigerian project confirms that teaching in the mother tongue is the best option. However, problems might arise in the South African situation because of the lack of teachers who are qualified to teach in the mother tongue. Contributing to this problem are some Universities which offer African languages through the medium of English or Afrikaans. This enhances the problem of the production of many teachers who lack communicative competence in these languages. This goes together with the erroneous opinion held by many that if someone can speak a language, the person is qualified to teach in that language.

Another problem is the lack of literature in the vernacular, which has a limiting influence on the use of some mother tongues as media of instruction. This problem clearly needs a great deal of attention, as indicated in the NEPI report which maintains that:

...none of the African languages could serve the function the current official languages serve because they are not developed. Nor could they be media of instruction at the post-primary level for the same reason (1992:3)

This kind of claim is often used as an excuse even in progressive circles, and suggests that people are not thinking about why the languages might be "undeveloped". There might be an implicit assumption that, linguistically, African

languages are not suitable for many of the functions of the modernized world. But no language is limited in this way. Any language can expand to serve the needs of its speakers, as has been shown this century with Afrikaans in South Africa and with Somali in Somalia. Clearly the term **undeveloped** should be carefully reconsidered by language planners since any language can be expanded to express any idea in the universe.

South Africa can learn from the Yoruba-medium Education Project in Nigeria. Because of its success, the experiment resulted in the development of an African language in that country. As pointed out Babs Fafunwa,

...we learn to use Yoruba effectively as the medium of instruction in science, Mathematics and Social and Cultural studies. We learn to coin, invent and borrow words judiciously, we learn how to train teachers in the effective use of language. We made books and published over 150 titles (Babs Fafunwa, 1978:8)

Much of the material in the Nigerian education model is relevant to African languages in South Africa. The criteria of the model have already been met for speakers of Afrikaans. For speakers of African languages the criteria could be met as speakers themselves change their attitudes towards these languages.

Parents and pupils who speak these African languages should be encouraged to realize that there will be no disadvantages in receiving secondary schooling in the home language. If the home language were to be given enough recognition in the Provinces and the country at large and were to be used in important transactions, this would help to create a more positive attitude towards African languages as media of instruction.

In addition, teachers should be given opportunities to strengthen their productive command of the language that they will need to use as the medium of instruction in their classrooms. Language courses and workshops should be conducted in order to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, technology such as computer programs needs to be developed to accommodate the orthographic needs of African languages. Another recommendation is that teachers in teacher-training colleges and universities, should take at least one course in applied linguistics, particularly, sociolinguistics. Knowledge of certain sociolinguistic concepts will help them to value all languages equally and will contribute greatly towards a change in negative attitude towards the languages of others.

Prejudice will also be reduced if all languages are treated similarly. Negative attitudes can often be changed by exposure to language encounters with actual persons from other cultures. In multilingual and multi-cultural classrooms, the teaching of drama can help to develop harmonious race relations. It will stimulate a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, different cultures as it will involve pupils working together, closely and intimately. The children will be more motivated and more confident and there will be greater eagerness to succeed in the target language and learners will enjoy the learning process because drama is fun.

Teachers with sociolinguistic knowledge will not demand that their pupils use standard forms in all situations but instead, will advise the pupils that phenomena such as code-switching might be used in informal situations only, while at the same time acknowledging the importance and need for such practices and for the use of so-called non-standard forms. As Edwards maintains,



...non-standard speech is seen as source of strength on which the teacher can build, not as something which is to be eliminated at all costs (1986:33).

A phenomenon such as code-switching is a reality and teachers need to be encouraged to accept pupils who use this phenomenon of language.

In the teaching-learning situation, teachers need to create an atmosphere of acceptance amongst pupils who use standard forms towards those who do not. They should also learn to accept speakers who use practices which are informal. It is also vital for the teacher to have some basic knowledge of the non-standard forms of language in order to avoid linguistic prejudice.

A 'bi-dialectic' approach is important (see Trudgill, 1975:68). Such an approach respects the child's language whether is standard or non-standard. It is also tries to give the child competence in another variety. Teachers should be encouraged to maintain the child's mother tongue at all costs, in order to prevent a situation in which a pupil lacks strong languages skills in his/her mother tongue because he/she is denied the chance to use his/her mother tongue at school

Because of the strong bias among parents against the use of the mother tongues in schooling and the lack of knowledge among parents and teachers about the role of the mother tongue in cognitive development and in the acquisition of subsequent languages, teachers should encourage parents to maintain at home the mother tongue and teachers should encourage the use of mother tongue in informal conversation inside and outside the classroom. Proficiency in the mother tongue transfers to the second language since there is a common underling proficiency (Cummins, 1981:152). Pupils who have broad fluent mother tongue language skills make better progress in school than children who have not

developed their mother tongue at all regardless of the medium of instruction (Cummins, 1981:153).

There is also a need to create a healthy climate in the school for the mother tongue of all pupils to be valued, affirmed, and used where possible, irrespective of whether they are the media of instruction or not. Sadly, some parents who are acculturated into dominant languages and cultures such as Northern Sotho in Tshamahansi often take the lead in encouraging children to abandon the use of their mother tongues.

Since the new South African interim constitution gives eleven (11) languages official status, further recommendations are that the curriculum be changed towards a multi-cultural type of education system which will recognize the value of diversity. It will provide multiple learning environments which will match the needs of the students. As Baker (1983) observes, multi-cultural education is

...a process through which individuals become aware of themselves and their place in the world at large (cited in the Le Roux, 1991:184).

Communication across cultures is a pre-requisite for South Africa today and learning should be encouraged to take place within an atmosphere of tolerance. Banks and Lynch define multi-cultural education as

...a reform movement that attempts to change schools so that all students from all groups will have equal opportunities to learn (cited in Le Roux, 1991:184)

Multi-cultural education will benefit all children by providing equal educational

opportunities. It will also acknowledge the existence of all groups and develop positive cross-cultural attitudes. It will reduce racial and cultural prejudice and develop a just and democratic society.

If the curriculum is served, and a multi-cultural curriculum is adopted, teachers will need in-service training. They will also need to be "conscientised", so that they understand the cultural differences with which they are confronted every day and which are often present in the multi-cultural classes. Teachers need to become conscious individuals who accept that they live part of their lives within their educational spaces. In order to succeed they cannot work by themselves, but they have to work collaboratively in integrating the cultural backgrounds of their pupils in the educational process. They need to use their pupils' universes as points of departures, enabling the pupils to recognize themselves as possessing specific and important cultural identities.

The advantage of a multi-cultural curriculum is that it will include parents, the community and students or, in other terms, all the stakeholders. Multi-culturalism has a place in the South African education system because right now many students and pupils are not touch with their own cultures. They are alienated from their cultures and are often forced to learn a second culture. As Banks (1986:24) observes,

...an education system should not alienate children from their cultures, and all students require basic skills and abilities to function in the mainstream culture (cited in Le Roux, 1991:197).

Language and culture are the mediating forces of knowledge. Both teachers and students should be involved in language awareness programs which will equip

them with the necessary skills and knowledge so that they might know where and when to use the standard form of language. Language awareness programs will attempt to increase understanding, consciousness, of and sensitivity to, the mother tongue in everyday life. Such programs may inter alia include the following:

- (a) learning about the richness of language,
- (b) the value of language in everyday life,
- (c) awareness of differences between school and home or neighbourhood languages.

Such programs will be important for both the majority language speakers as well as for speakers of minority languages. Language awareness programs can be taken as a *sine qua non* for effective democratic citizenship since they train individuals to be effective citizens in a democratic society.



## 5.2 CONCLUSION

It seems clear that language is a very important manifestation of culture, group identity, and solidarity. Language is a marker which can be used to identify a person, his/her language, norms, etc. in a society. All languages are equally valid and there is no need for discrimination against speakers who use non-standard varieties, such as when they switch their codes in the process of communicating.

Edwards (1989:57, cited in De Villiers, 1992:57) advises teachers to follow a policy of addition to, rather than replacement of existing repertoires. This would mean that additive bilingualism should be taken into cognisance if we want to have a society which is free of linguistic prejudice. Edwards also stresses that pupils should not be made to feel that their language is worthless and inferior.

The most important advantage of a multilingual society is that the members of such a society have at their disposal a wider range of linguistic resources than those who live in monolingual communities. This helps them to communicate with others across cultures in a more flexible and diverse manner. Teachers need to make use of these resources in a positive manner.

Negative attitudes towards phenomena such as code-switching usually emerge from stereotypical behaviour. Teachers who have negative attitudes towards the use of Tsonga should try their best to dispel myths about other cultures and replace those myths with a realistic understanding of these cultures. By so doing, their learners will appreciate, value and understand other cultures. The training of teachers of language should concern itself with eliminating prejudice about language. Learners should be introduced to language awareness programs so that they may assume the roles of language change agents in this new dispensation. Because code-switching is regarded as potentially the most creative aspect of

bilingualism, it need to be encouraged or given enough room as it is a source of strength on which the teacher can build.

Another important point is that a minority group like the Tsonga speakers in Tshamahansi who feel that they are in one way or another disadvantaged, need to be given the assurance that their home language will be given a strong reading and writing base.

African languages need to be developed so that they may become useful in all societal settings. African languages such as Tsonga in the region of Tshamahansi need to be marked so that the people there may realize how their acquisition can empower them.



## QUESTIONNAIRE

N.B. Please answer all the question as well as you can. There is no wrong or right answer in this questionnaire; only your opinions are important.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Make a cross X were applicable; give reasons and comments where necessary.

1. Mother tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many students / pupils in your class are Tsonga-speaking? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many students / pupils in your class are Northern Sotho speaking?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How many students / pupils have other mother tongues? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you think Xitsonga should be taught / used as a medium of instruction in your school?

YES

NO

Give reasons/comments for your answer:

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6. Which language do you prefer? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How would you rate the performance of the Tsonga-speaking students/peoples in your class in Northern Sotho?

GOOD

POOR

If poor, give reasons for your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Do you think that the Tsonga-speaking students/pupils find it difficult to speak standard Northern Sotho to express themselves in writing or to understand standard Northern Sotho?

YES

NO

9. Why do you think Tsonga-speaking pupils/students switch from Northern Sotho to Tsonga? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What do you think causes this switching? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What is the reaction of teachers when students use more than one language when speaking? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you think that every child had the right to learn through his mother tongue?

YES

NO

If NO, give reason(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

N.B I would like to thank all who participated actively in this questionnaire.



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