

**THE USE OF TSONGA AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**BY**

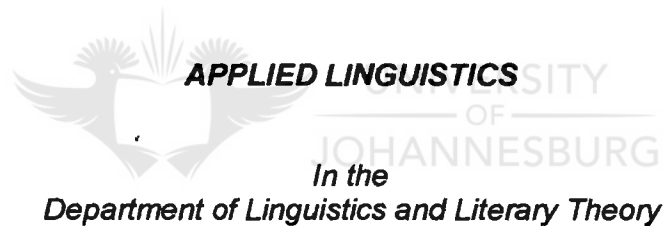
**RIRHANDZU LILLIAN NKONDO**

**MINI-DISSERTATION**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

*In*



**FACULTY OF ARTS**

*at the*

**RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY**

*Supervisor : Dr. Moyra Sweetnam Evans*

**NOVEMBER 1997**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*To my dear husband Godfrey, my children Musa and Tonia and my parents, thank you for your support and motivation. Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Evans for your tireless effort in guiding and advising me.*

*Many thanks to God, the source of all Wisdom.*



*[t]he disadvantage experienced by many language minority pupils in those countries (USA, Britain and Canada) illustrates how language proficiency in the dominant language or lack thereof shapes academic achievement. For instance, drop-out rates among culturally diverse school populations in the United States show that minority pupils with a limited proficiency in the medium of instruction, English, are the ones who are most at risk of school failure. (Ovando, cited in Le Roux, 1993:146)*

A similar situation is evident in the Hlanganani area (where this research has been conducted), where there is a high drop-out rate and high rate of illiteracy and unemployment. Hlanganani is situated in the Limpopo region in the Northern Province, (about 20km East of Louis Trichardt). The seriousness of the educational problems for which second language as the medium of instruction is one contributing factor in this area, is clearly indicated in the following quotation by the Northern Province MEC for education, Dr Motsoaledi:

*Deputy President Thabo Mbeki visited our schools earlier this year.*

*During that visit, he did the most unusual thing: he declared our*

*Province an education disaster area. Perhaps we are the only Province in the whole world where a president of country found it appropriate to declare an area as experienceng a disaster in education (1996:3).*

## 1.2 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study is to survey some of the relevant literature on the language used as a medium of instruction, to outline the advantages of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and to give some recommendations on how the mother tongue as the medium of instruction can be realised with special reference to Tsonga as a medium of instruction in Tsonga secondary schools.

## 1.3 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is the primary purpose of this study to attempt to provide information and insights on the values of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in Tsonga secondary schools.



Tsonga is one of the languages constituting the Tsonga group of the South-eastern Kintu zone, together with Xitshwa and Xironga spoken in Mozambique. It is spoken by some three million people, approximately 737 000 in the Northern Province in South Africa, 2 million in Mozambique and 50 000 in Zimbabwe (Junod, 1977:19). According to the central statistical services (1995), in South Africa, numerically Tsonga ranks eighth among the official language as the following table indicates:

### Population percentage

1. Zulu	22,4%
2. Xhosa	17,6%
3. Afrikaans	15,1%
4. Pedi	9,8%
5. English	9,1%
6. Tswana	7,2%
7. Sotho	6,9%
8. Tsonga	4,2%
9. Swati	2,6%
10. Venda	1,7%
11. Ndebele	1,6%



There are many Tsonga schools in the Northern Province. Out of 24 schools in the Hlanganani area of the Northern Province, 20 schools were selected for the study.

#### 1.4. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In chapter one of this study the aims are outlined.

The second chapter deals with a critical overview of the past and present language in education policies in South Africa. It provides an overview of the historical aspects of the

medium of instruction in South Africa in the light of the recent developments with regard to the education language policy. A critical analysis of the key points in education policies on language, as well as the key points on the use of languages in the present constitution is also given.

In chapter three a survey of literature on teaching through the mother tongue and through a second language is provided and a critical analysis of different views on the subject is given.

Chapter four focuses on the response received to the questionnaire, which was compiled with the intention of eliciting information on the language medium problems in Tsonga secondary schools. These responses are also analysed in this chapter.

Chapter five discusses the findings based on the information gathered in chapter four. It also makes recommendations on how mother-tongue medium of instruction in the Tsonga secondary schools can successfully be implemented. Different role models and stakeholders in education are identified and the way in which these different role models can make meaningful contributions towards the realisation of teaching through the mother tongue in the Tsonga schools is proposed. The problems that might be encountered with the implementation of Tsonga as the medium of instruction in Tsonga secondary schools are also identified and proposals given for how these problems might be addressed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The problems identified in the first chapter in relation to the medium of instruction can only be understood against the background of the previous language education policy for Blacks under the apartheid government.

There is a link between political power and language. Both political and economic power may be directed, mediated or resisted through language. Throughout the history of South Africa, the language policy in education has been designed with the aim of supporting a particular ideology. The battle between English and Afrikaans was a struggle for political and economic power. Tollefson in NEPI (1992) maintains that the language in education policy may be influenced at least as much by political agendas and corporate interests as by a concern for the optimum academic and social development of the country's learners.

In South Africa, there has always been a relationship between the choice of the medium of instruction and a particular political ideology. The mechanism of 'linguicism' has been

applied in South Africa to see its political ideology through. Phillipson gives the following definition of 'linguicism':

*Linguicism is in operation if the centre or superior language is always used and peripheral languages are not accorded enough resources to develop so that the same functions could be performed in them (1992:55).*

The mechanism of linguicism relates to any situation in which one language dominates at the expense of others. Linguicism has affinities with the way racism is affirmed. It involves the dominant group or language presenting an idealised image of itself, stigmatizing the dominated group or language, and rationalizing the relationship between the two, always to the advantage of the dominant group or language. The ruling group uses the power of its language to suppress and downgrade the education of the minority group.

In South Africa there has been a long struggle over the choice of language for education. The language issue in South Africa can be seen in the context of the overall policy of the white minority government for the education of Black people. In order to maintain the power and privilege of White people, the South African government passed many laws which discriminated against Black people. These include the education act which was deliberately set out to ensure that Black children did not receive the same high standard of education which was provided for White children. The following quote from a Christian



National Education pamphlet of the early 1950s sums up the ideology behind the language policy imposed by the Bantu Education Act:

*We believe that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life and world view of whites, most especially those of the Boer nation as the senior white trustee of the native, and that the native must be led to a mutatis mutandis yet independent acceptance of the Christian and National principles in our teaching. We believe that the mother tongue must be the basis of native education and teaching but that the two official languages must be taught as subjects because they are the official languages ... we believe that it is the right and the task of the state ... to give and control native Education (Article 15, CNE pamphlet, cited in Rose and Tunmer, 1975:127-128).*

In the 1950s the South African education debate centred around whether education for Black children should be in English or in African languages. At that time the Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953) was introduced and pupils were taught in their mother tongues in all subjects. English and Afrikaans were taught as subjects, and not used as media of instruction and were the only official languages. Justifying the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in native education in the 1950s during the introduction of the Bantu Education Act, the then minister of native affairs, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd said:

introduction of the Bantu Education Act, the then minister of native affairs, Dr.H.F

Verwoerd said:

*The native must not be subject to a school system which draws him away from his own community, and misleads him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze ( cited in Rose and Tunmer, 1975:266).*

Given such comment from the government,it is not surprising that the mother tongue as the medium of instruction among South African Blacks had a bad image. Black people's memories of Bantu Education made them prefer English as the medium of instruction to their mother tongues.

During the 1970s the debate centred around whether education for Black children should be in English or Afrikaans In this phase the Afrikaner was in power and therefore Afrikaans obtained prominence in Black Education both as a subject and as the medium of instruction. Afrikaans was to be used as the medium of instruction on a 50-50 basis with English in Black secondary schools. The vernacular was to be used as the medium of instruction in the primary school and for subjects such as Religious Instruction, in the secondary schools. During this phase attempts were made by the government to put Afrikaans on an equal basis with English ...(Mawasha, 1982:9)

situation in Black Education. The failure was partly due to a lack of consultation between the government and the communities for which the education was intended.

As a result of the Sowetan uprisings of 1976, a number of commissions were appointed by the government to look into the causes of these uprisings, with the hope that it could finally come up with a sound decision on languages to be used as media of instruction in schools. In the end, the education and training act of 1979 was passed which stated that the universally accepted principle of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction should be observed throughout the lower primary school phase. In June 1991 an amendment was made to the above act, giving parents a right to decide on which language was to be used as the medium of instruction from the first year of schooling.

There were three options that were presented to the parents for the new language policy in schools (NEPI, 1992:29). The first option was for English, Afrikaans or an African language as the medium of instruction from the first year and throughout the whole period of schooling. The second option was for a sudden transfer from the mother tongue to a second language as the medium of instruction. The mother tongue would be used in this option as the medium of instruction for a specific period, and thereafter a second language would replace the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The third option was a gradual transfer from the mother tongue. The mother tongue would be used

as the medium of instruction for a specific period, and thereafter a second language would gradually be introduced, subject by subject until it replaced the mother tongue as the medium of instruction after a certain period.

The mistake that the government made was to amend the educational language policy in 1992 without providing either adequate information or appropriate resources to make the choice options effective.

The 1994 April elections saw the institution of a democratic government in South Africa. This government recognises the multilingual character of South African society and makes provision for this diversity in the constitution. Section 3 (i) of the constitution states that:

*Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, Sesotho sa Lebowa, Sesotho, siSwati  
Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, isiZulu shall be the official  
languages at national level, and conditions shall be created for their  
development and for the promotion of their equal use and enjoyment (1995 :9).*

Unlike the linguisticism that was practised during the apartheid government, the present government stresses that no language will be used for the purpose of exploitation, domination or division. Multilingualism is presented as a resource in education and in national life. The broad policy framework established by the interim constitution outlines a number of key issues among which are the equal treatment and use of the eleven official

languages, and measures to promote African languages to ensure redress of the historically discriminated against languages, the recognition of and respect for language diversity, language variety and language choice (Government gazette 1995:42). In order to support the issue of language choice, schools are also strongly encouraged to offer two or more languages of learning and instruction, where this is appropriate and immediately feasible.

In schools which have a single-language policy across the curriculum, but have a multilingual population of learners, it is likely that many learners will be disadvantaged. Since the government is committed to providing a sound basis for cognitive and affective development, such schools are strongly urged by the present government to adopt at least two languages of learning and instruction. It is suggested that at least one of these languages be the home language of a significant number of pupils in the school.

It is clear that the previous languages in education policies in South Africa promoted division rather than unity. These policies served the interests of those who were already economically and politically powerful and adversely affected black South Africans in particular. As the last part of the chapter indicates, the new proposals for the language in education policy are attempting to break with the worst aspects of the past policies, and to redress some of the imbalances. It is clear that language policy-making in South Africa reflects political and social circumstances and that it changes as they do.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE VALUE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Language is a crucial means of gaining access to knowledge and skills. It is the key to cognitive development and may promote or impede scholastic success.

Black South African students are required to study all their subjects through a language that is often a second or third language. Many of these children have not acquired the necessary academic language skills to cope with this situation. These children are faced with a dual challenge: mastery of academic content, and the ability to do this through the medium of a language other than their tongue.

UNESCO summarises the advantages of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction as follows:

*Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of*

*identification among the members of the community to which he belongs.*

*Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (1953:11).*

Thought and language go together, one is dependent on the other for its existence. The child thinks in the language through which he acquires the earliest experiences of life and this is naturally the mother tongue. According to Pattanayak,

*[i]t is generally accepted, on sound pedagogical grounds that the mother tongue is best suited as the medium of instruction. It is the natural language of thought for the child and eminently suited for concept formation. While any language may be the language of added comprehension, only the language with which one lives and grows is best suited in achieving originality in thought and expression (1981:137).*

The mother tongue is also important for the child's social development. It is a means by which the child adjusts to the life and culture of his social group. Duminy clearly indicates this relationship between a people's language and their culture with his comment that,

*[t]hrough their language people communicate their human experiences, feelings, thoughts and cultural development: in fact, it is a depository of the people's culture and traditions (1967:137).*

Meaningful teaching and learning cannot occur divorced from the national and cultural values of participants. Values, norms and morals all tend to impact on the act of teaching and learning and these are transmitted and internalised through the agency of the language of education; Therefore education through an adopted language cannot avoid a cultural bias in favour of the culture of the speakers of that language. The adoption of English as the medium of education for Black children, therefore, inevitably means forfeiting certain traditional and cultural values that are distinctly African, in favour of European and English-language ones.

This is evident in most of the communities where acculturation of Black students as a result of a second language medium is the order of the day. For example, in many South African townships there are students who now attend model C schools. This transition has not been without incident in the townships as they experience comical pitfalls (such as different accent, behaviour etc.) Such children become alienated from their society, Black cultural heritage and traditional upbringing, as they try to imitate their White fellow-students. Some parents complain that their children speak English to elderly people who do not understand the language. Cultural modification in itself is not an impediment, it is a



necessity and as such inevitable, but it is imperative to guard against the development of false consciousness and cultural marginalization. Mawasha comments that

*cultural modifications, as part of national development in the context of the needs of the times is not necessarily negative provided that*

*(a) such cultural modifications do not deteriorate into a cultural twilight in which one is neither this nor that*

*(b) it does not lead to a state in which the new culture overwhelms one's own culture to a point where one despises one's culture and one's own people (1987:113).*

Adopting a second language as the medium of education touches on the sensitive issue of self-image, that is on how one sees oneself in relation to others. The use of a different school language from the home language is often responsible for the development of a low self-image and lower educational achievement throughout a school career. By projecting one dominant language at the cost of other languages, a belief is built in the minds of people that languages are not equal. Reagan points to the disadvantage of projecting one dominant language at the cost of other languages, which he says,

*...is grounded in the belief that in a given society every person should function effectively in the dominant language, regardless of individual language background. This ideology also in practice, tends to encourage a belief in the superiority of the dominant language (in both conceptual and linguistic terms) (1991:4).*

In South Africa for example, Tsonga is associated with illiteracy, poverty and ignorance whereas proficiency in English is equated with intellectual competence. Some of the Tsonga people go to the extent of demanding the use of English as the medium of instruction for Tsonga as a subject at tertiary institutions. In her paper entitled **IN DEFENCE OF XITSONGA**, Prof. N.C.P. Golele (1989) points out that at the University of the North during the 1980s, the department of Tsonga came under criticism from unexpected quarters as far as the medium of instruction for Tsonga was concerned. Native speakers in position of influence felt that their language was being 'undermined' by being taught in the very language itself. The chief minister of Gazankulu, Prof. H.W.E Ntsan'wisi wrote to the then principal of the University of the North, to protest against the teaching of Tsonga through the medium of the Tsonga language.

The child who learns through the medium of a language other than his mother tongue is often not motivated to develop his or her own language. A child's mother tongue brings him no credit and is of no value at school. A child strives to enhance linguistic

competency in the second rather than the first language in order to perform better at school.

In South Africa there is a lack of English language proficiency and competence among non-English-speaking language teachers (NEPI, 1992). This frequently means pupils are also less than proficient in English. If the child is not competent in general English usage, he may find it difficult to utilise that language to advantage as a means of acquiring, processing, internalising, applying or disseminating learning material. This may also lead to underachievement or failure.

One of the causes of poor English language proficiency and competence among the Tsonga students in the Hlanganani area is that the children's use of English ends in the classroom, the rest of their communication is done in Tsonga. In other words, there is no sustaining environment for English outside the school. The majority of children are frequently not in touch with mother-tongue speakers of English because it is the first language of a very small proportion of the South African population. As Malefo points out,

*...in the Black community there's no English or Afrikaans environment to support the school language; no interaction with native speakers of these languages in early life hence the distance between them and these languages when they encounter them at school (1986:92).*

This leaves the students with two problems, namely, of more advanced conceptual difficulties in content subjects and studying the subjects in English.

Weakness of association is often indicated by the inappropriate use of words when a second language is the medium of communication. Sometimes the idea is definite and clear, but the word which should express it is unfamiliar, and then another word is very often used. Very often, the child cannot think of the right word to express his ideas.

A teacher in one of the Tsonga schools at Elim (Hlanganani area) said that, when marking certain scripts, he is often led to suspect that some of the students did not express exactly what they meant. These are Tsonga-speaking students who write through the medium of English. Most of the time when he questions them after returning their scripts, he discovers that they didn't have access to the most appropriate words and so have to express their thoughts in language which only more or less suggests the meaning.

It is evident that students think more quickly and easily and express themselves more easily in their mother tongues. In the case of Tsonga children, the use of the English language in education distorts their learning. Because the level of English that post-primary school children can control is low, they are far less capable of handling content subjects through English than through their mother tongues. The child has not yet

mastered the English vocabulary to express his thoughts clearly, and has to limit his expression to his limited vocabulary.

One consequence of the students' difficulties with English is that they develop a habit of meaningless memorizations and no real learning takes place. As Duminy points out,

*... when the Bantu child is now confronted with strange facts in a strange language, it is hardly surprising that downright memorisation very often without the least trace of insight, remains the only way out (1967:142).*

What also happens to these children is that their process of thinking is affected when learning through a second language because they have to pay special attention to language, and hence less to the subject matter. They constantly meet with language difficulties and have to attend to them very carefully until the difficulty is overcome, then they can resume their trains of thought. This delays their understanding of the content subjects because the more attention they give to the language forms, the less they are able to give to the subject matter. The attention has to "alternate" between the language and the subject matter instead of being focused mainly on the latter. In fact, they usually have to perceive or understand what is given and translate it into the language with which they are more familiar.

In a questionnaire sent to various teachers in the Hlanganani area who have had practical experience of bilingual education difficulties, the following question was asked: "Does the use of a second language medium affect interest and attention in pupils"?

In response to this question, one Physical science teacher wrote that, if he insists on the use of English, the children usually remain quiet; while if he allows them to express themselves in Tsonga using the English technical terms, they feel free to ask all sorts of relevant and interesting questions, such as:

Thicara, loko kuruku leswi mi swi vulaka hi "force of gravity" I ntiyiso, I ncini  
lexi endlaka leswaku aeroplane yi nga wi loko yi ri emoyeni?

(Sir, if what you are indicating to us about the force of gravity is true, what then keeps the aeroplane in the air without falling down?)

The majority of teachers in the Hlanganani area who answered the questionnaire agreed fully that interest and attention were more easily stimulated when the mother - tongue was used as the medium of instruction.

It is important that pupils are able to express their thoughts as clearly and as freely as possible. This does not only prevent misunderstanding. If the pupils are able to take part

freely in discussions, then ideas are suggested to them and by them and they take a genuine interest in classroom discussions and the topics being dealt with.

When the mother tongue is used, it is much easier for the teacher to give relevant assistance to the child because the child can clearly put his thoughts into words, and is not afraid to say what he knows or does not know about the subject. The child is less reserved. In this medium children more freely disclose their difficulties, making assistance possible. But when a second language is made use of, the child remains silent for fear of making too many language mistakes. One History teacher pointed out that:

*[t]he children sometimes start asking me questions about the lesson in Tsonga; if I tell them to ask in English because they needed more practice in it, and will be examined through its medium, they immediately become quiet and they become altogether passive and irresponsive. In fact, the children prefer to say 'I don't know' ,when they do know , just because they are afraid to answer.*

The (Yoruba - medium ) Education projected in Nigeria seems relevant to what has been discussed above. This project was launched by the Institute of Education of the University of IFE in 1970 in co-operation with the federal government. The aim of the project was to find the most suitable language policy for teaching Yoruba speakers. The findings of the project confirmed that teaching in the mother tongue is the best option (Dekker and Van Schalkwyk, 1989:309-310)

The situation in most South African Black schools is a crucial one. The majority of teachers who teach English in South African Black schools are not first language speakers nor have they been specially trained to teach English well (NEPI:1992). These teachers are expected to conduct classes in English, while pupils are unable to comprehend English explanations. It is a burden to cope with new ideas, but the burden is doubled in the case where both the teacher and learner are limited in competence in the second language. The NEPI report indicates the consequences of such a situation:

*As an attempt to overcome the difficulties of teaching in a language in which they are neither confident nor competent, the teachers resort to using rigidly scripted lesson plans in order to reduce the demands of having to invent discourse. Consequently students are not involved in constructing instructional discourse and this leads to the L2 not being used as a language for learning, through which new concepts can be explored. The result has been that the translation and transfer of knowledge have become more important in the teaching-learning situation than the creation of knowledge (1992:51).*

From the above statement, it is clear that the use of English as a medium of instruction in Tsonga schools limits the creativity and learning of the majority of teachers and their students.



It might be appropriate at this stage to consider a few questions: Why is a second language preferred to the mother tongue as the medium of instruction? Is it because it improves or maintains the quality of education? Is it because the mother tongue as the medium of instruction does not have the ability to deal with the technological and modern scientific ideas and concepts that the second language is alleged to have? Is it to enhance the cognitive aspects in the child's learning process? Prof. Njabulo Ndebele's comment in his address to the English Academy conference may serve as an answer to some of the above questions. Although his reference was to English as the medium of instruction to second language speakers, the reference to English here can be replaced by references to other languages of instruction too. He observes that


*... it is necessary to make a distinction between the acquisition of knowledge and the acquisition of English. Education is not synonymous with the acquisition of English: the sphere of human knowledge is much wider than any one language can carry... (and) that English may be spoken universally, does not imply that it carries the sum total of the world's wisdom. Indigenous languages can fulfil the range of needs that English similar fulfils for its native speakers (1987:212).*

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND GATHERING OF DATA**

#### **1.1. QUESTIONNAIRE**

In the course of investigating the language medium problems in the Tsonga secondary schools, a questionnaire (see Addendum A) consisting of 19 questions was compiled and distributed to secondary school teachers. Sixty teachers participated in the survey. These teachers were representative of twenty secondary schools in the Hlanganani area.



The researcher distributed the questionnaire personally to avoid delay and loss through the mail. She also explained the purpose and significance of the study, clarified points, answered questions and motivated respondents to answer questions carefully and truthfully.

#### **1.2. DATA OBTAINED THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRES TO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (SEE APPENDIX A)**

What follows is the interpretation of the data collected by means of these questionnaires.

1.2.1. What is your mother tongue?

Responses: All respondents were Tsonga speaking teachers.

1.2.2. Which school standard do you teach?

Responses:    standard    6    7    8    9    10

---

10    10    20    10    30

Clearly most teachers teach more than one standard

1.2.3. What subject(s) do you teach?

Responses: All respondents teach content subjects.

1.2.4.- What medium of instruction do you use when teaching the above subject(s)?

Responses: In as far as the medium of instruction was concerned all schools used English as the medium of instruction in content subjects.

1.2.5. How many pupils in your class are first language speakers of the medium that you use?

Responses: There were no first language speakers of the medium of instruction. The language of instruction is thus not the mother tongue of any of the students.

1.2.6. How often do you think your pupils have contact with the first language speakers of the language that you use as a medium of instruction?

Responses: The majority of teachers (40) assumed that their students never have contact with English native speakers while 20 remarked that they sometimes have contact with the native speakers of the language of instruction, that is English.

1.2.7. Which language do pupils use when communicating among themselves on the school premises?

Responses: None of the respondents felt that pupils used any languages other than the mother tongue (Tsonga) when communicating among themselves on the school premises.

1.2.8. Do language teachers, particularly teachers of the language used as the medium of instruction, request students to communicate in the language of instruction on the school premises?

Responses: Most teachers do not request students to communicate in English on the school premises (44). Some teachers chose 'sometimes' as their response when asked this question, but the number was small (10). Only 6 respondents pointed out that the English language teachers do request pupils to communicate in English on the school premises.

1.2.9. How often do the students follow the instruction to use the language of instruction as a means of communication among themselves?

Responses: None of the respondents remarked that the students always follow the instruction to use the language of instruction as a means of communication. Most of them (44) perceived that they rarely do, while 16 of them remarked that the students do not follow the instruction at all.

1.2.10. Which language would you prefer to use as the medium of instruction when teaching content subjects?

Responses: Most of the respondents (45) would prefer to use Tsonga as the medium of instruction when teaching content subjects while only 15 would prefer to use English as the medium.

1.2.11. Why do you prefer the language you indicated above?

Responses: Out of those who remarked that they would prefer to use Tsonga as the medium of instruction in content subjects, 5 respondents gave no reasons and 40 cited reasons of comprehension. They stressed the fact that Tsonga is more understandable because it is the mother tongue of the students and that it is one of the official languages in South Africa. Four respondents pointed out that the indigenous languages should be promoted. Of those who would prefer to use English as the medium of instruction, 7 respondents gave no reasons and the majority of them cited international communication as their central reason for rejecting an increased use of the Tsonga language. English was described either as a language of international communication or trade by 10 of the respondents. Others pointed out that Tsonga is not sufficiently developed to take on an

increased load in the school system. The final reason cited can be described as the acceptance of the status quo, that it is too difficult or too late to implement large scale curriculum changes.

1.2.12. In what language do you think pupils feel most comfortable answering questions in the content subjects?

Responses: All the respondents remarked that the students feel most comfortable answering questions in their mother tongue, that is Tsonga.

1.2.13. How often do students need assistance when answering questions in a second language?

Responses: 26 Respondents indicated that the students 'frequently' need assistance when answering questions in a second language. 22 Perceived that the students 'rarely' need it, while 12 indicated that the students 'never' need assistance when answering questions in a second language.

1.2.14. Which medium do you find most effective in group work?

Responses: The majority of the respondents (49) found the mother tongue medium effective in group work. 11 of them found both the mother tongue and English effective, while none of them found only English effective in group work.

1.2.15. Does the use of a second language as the medium of instruction affect the interest and attention of pupils?

Responses: 32 of the respondents remarked that a second language medium affects the interest and attention of pupils very much. Others remarked that it affects them a little (26), and 6 of them indicated that it does not affect the students at all.

1.2.16 If your answer to the above question is 'very much' or 'a little', how does the second language hamper interest and attention in pupils?

Responses: Of those who answered 'very much' and 'a little', 9 respondents gave no explanations. 35 gave the following explanations:

-Speak English, and the student merely stares at you. Speak Tsonga and his eyes sparkle, he smiles and he sits upright. It is certain that they show more interest when the mother tongue is used.

-To take a subject like History through the medium of English is almost a hopeless task, students do not participate in the lesson for fear of making grammatical errors.

-In Physical Science if I insist on English, the children usually remain quiet; while if I allow them to express themselves in Tsonga using the English technical terms, they ask all sorts of questions and answer most freely.

-The students cannot follow the argument in the second language medium without great effort, so they give it up, and try to learn it off by heart, without thoroughly understanding it.

1.2.17. Are you satisfied with the std 10 results at your school?

Responses: 18 of the respondents were satisfied with the matric results at their schools while the majority of teachers (42) were not.

1.2.18. Do you think using a second language as the medium of instruction is one of the factors contributing to the quality of the matric results in your school?

Responses: 46 of the respondents perceived that using a second language as the medium of instruction was one of the factors which contributed to the quality of the matric results in their schools. 18 remarked that the second language medium of instruction was not a contributing factor to the quality of the matric results at their schools.

1.2.19. If your answer to the above question is yes, what do you think might be the solution to the above issue?

Responses: Of those who answered yes, 5 respondents gave no explanations and 41 gave the following viewpoints:

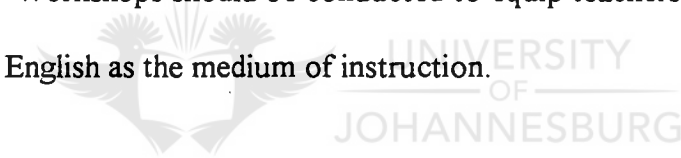


-There should be a shift from second language medium of instruction to mother tongue medium of instruction because students do not understand English and they resort to memorization without understanding the content.

-To improve the method of teaching English in order to equip students with the medium of instruction.

-To create the environment conducive to learn English as a medium of instruction in a meaningful way.

-Workshops should be conducted to equip teachers with skills in using English as the medium of instruction.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1.1. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The questionnaire explored the teacher's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, their language. The vast majority of teachers (85%) support the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, yet as parents and as teachers they share deeply entrenched attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the limitations of the language they love and are proud to be associated with.

In the responses of the subjects to the questionnaire, a lack of faith in their own language was reflected. Their perception of Tsonga as a 'lower language' comes to the surface when one looks at the role of languages and the language in education policy during the apartheid government. The fact is that the child's first language often operated at the bottom of the educational step-ladder. It was viewed as a stage on the way to gaining the mastery of the 'higher language' which had to serve more important national goals.

Another reason for the lack of faith in the Tsonga language might be the lack of understanding of the facts of human language on the part of the speakers. All languages are equally capable of expressing any idea in the universe. Language development and language use go hand in hand. A language is as good or as bad as its users make it. The case of Afrikaans in South Africa can be cited as an example. Afrikaans developed rapidly because of the speakers' concerted efforts. There is no reason why Tsonga cannot be used as the medium of instruction by developing technical terminology where necessary. It is the planning process that is costly and time - consuming but it can be accomplished depending on the commitment made to the effort, in the span of a few years.

The responses that all schools use English, that no first language speakers attend these schools and that students have no contact with native speakers of the language used as the medium of instruction, is an indication that the second language environment is insufficient to equip the learner to be able to learn effectively. The learner's cognitive skills are not developed adequately through the second language and the second skills also suffer in such an environment. This results in mediocrity.

The responses also reveal the fact that there is very little attempt by the learners to use the L2 to communicate. This shows that there is very little positive orientation towards the internalisation of second language skills.

The responses further indicate that, as a result of a lack of sufficient knowledge of the second language which is used as the medium of instruction, learning becomes very difficult and pupils tend to develop poor self images of themselves as learners.

## 1.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS


As has been noted in Chapter 3, most South African university and colleges of education graduates have received their professional training in English or Afrikaans.

Many concepts are expressed in the second language rather than in Tsonga which precludes the development of linguistic and analytical abilities in Tsonga. The teacher's English educational background affects the quality of Tsonga instruction. Teachers tend to code-switch when discussing ideas and concepts which they themselves learned in English and this gives the impression to the pupils that Tsonga has no vocabulary for certain concepts. This might be true to some extent, but the degree of truth can only be determined through research. By learning in English the Tsonga teachers have not had the opportunities for active academic use of their own language.

This is a real handicap which many teachers will experience if they endeavour to transfer this knowledge in the mother tongue. Consequently, lessons which could be lively, captivating and meaningful are likely to be formal and uninspiring because the teacher's own mind is occupied with translation instead of teaching.

The use of the mother tongue in subjects like methodology in the universities and colleges of education would greatly assist the teacher in this special difficulty. The use of Tsonga in tertiary institutions would lead to the production of competent teachers who are able to teach through the medium of Tsonga, particularly in the Northern Province where the majority of Tsonga speakers are found.

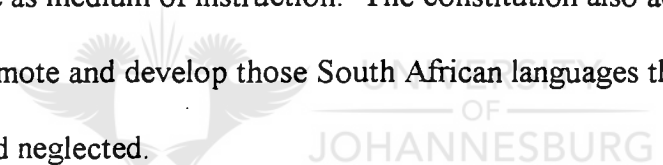
Teachers need suitable material to guide them in teaching through the medium of the mother tongue. Just as there is a need for special teachers' guides and handbooks to assist teachers in modern teaching methods, there is a similar need for the teacher in the mother tongue in the form of programmed courses and workshops. The universities and colleges of education should play a leading role in this area.



Parental involvement in the educational process is essential if the needs of pupils are to be met. If the language of school administration and of contact between school and home is inaccessible or alienating to parents, their willingness and ability to take an active interest in the school is severely jeopardized. Parents may be unable to read or understand notices because they are illiterate or because they do not know the language used for communication. They may also feel inadequate about their language competence and therefore be unwilling to speak to teachers or to participate in meetings or school events. Instead of marginalizing parents from the school by language, the school should involve the parents in all possible ways. If the mother tongue can be used as a language of

learning in the Tsonga schools, parents could act as teacher aids in language classes or as volunteers in language enrichment programmes. The school should give special guidance to all parents so that they could better support children's language learning at home.

With regard to the government's role in the implementation of Tsonga as the medium of instruction in the Tsonga secondary schools, the first steps have already been taken by the designation of the eleven official languages as the languages of learning. The new constitution prescribes a number of key issues with regard to language, among which are the equal treatment and use of eleven official languages, measures to promote and encourage the increased use of African languages as vehicles of instruction at all educational levels, and the right of the individual to choose what language or languages to study and to use as medium of instruction. The constitution also acknowledges the necessity to promote and develop those South African languages that were previously marginalized and neglected.



The South African constitution, and the Reconstruction and Development programme, are providing a healthy framework in which people have to take part in the development of their different languages. It is up to the people themselves to make use of these facilities that have been provided for the benefit by their government.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Central Statistical Services". 1995. Pretoria

Dekker, E. & Van Schalkwyk, O.J. 1989. **Modern Education Systems.**

Pretoria Butterworths Ltd.

Dumminy, P.A. 1967. **Trends and challenges in the education of the South African Bantu.** Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik Ltd.

Golele, N.C.P. 1991. "In defence of Xitsonga". Paper read at ALASA Conference, University of Port Elizabeth.

Government Gazette, 1995. "Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa". Pretoria.



Junod, H.P. 1977. **Matimu ya Vatsonga.** (The history of the Vatsonga 1489-1650). Braamfontein: Sasavona Publishers.

Le Roux, J. 1993. **The Black child in crisis.** Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik.

Malefo, B.M. 1986. **Language in Black education. The environment outside the school.** Pretoria: HSRC

Mawasha A.L. 19982. **Language in Black education. The politics of language in a multi-lingual situation.** Pietersburg.

Motsoaledi, P.A .1996. (keynote address). "The penetration of new information technologies into developing countries: cultural hegemony or mutual exchange" UNESCO informatics conference Moscow (unpublished ).

**National education policy investigation.** 1992. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Ndebele, N. 1991 in Marivate CTD"s inaugural address for professorship. "Significance of the indigenous languages in post-apartheid South Africa". UNISA.

Pattanayak, D.P. 1981. **Multilingualism and mother-tongue education.** New Delhi:Oxford University Press. UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Phillipson, R. 1992. **Linguistic imperialism.** London: Oxford University Press.

Reagan, T.G. 1986. "Language Ideology ' in South African Journal of African Languages".

Rose , B & Tunmer, R. 1975. **Documents in South African education.** Johannesburg: A.D. Donker.

Sunday Times, March 17 1996. Johannesburg



UNESCO, 1953. "The use of vernacular languages in education" Monographs on Fundamental Education.

Young, D. 1986. **Language planning and medium in education.** Cape: University of Cape Town.



## APPENDIX A

### A QUESTIONNAIRE TO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

The main objective of this questionnaire is to examine the language medium problems in Tsonga secondary schools. Your contribution will be of great value in the outcome of the assessment, so please take your response seriously. Your support is highly appreciated.

#### Types of questions:

- (a) Open questions in which you have to express your opinion.
- (b) Questions in which you are requested to choose the correct statement among alternatives given.

1. What is your mother tongue? (First language acquired at home)

.....

2. Which school standard do you teach?

.....

3. Which subject(s) do you teach?

.....

4. What medium of instruction do you use when teaching the above subject(s)?

.....

5. How many pupils in your class are first language speakers of the medium that you use?  
e.g. children whose mother tongue is English if the medium of instruction is English.

.....

6. How often do you think your pupils have contact with the first language speakers of the language that you use as the medium of instruction?

Sometimes
Frequently
Never

7. Which language do pupils use when communicating among themselves on the school premises?

.....

8. Do language teachers, particularly teachers of the language used as the medium of instruction request students to communicate in the language of instruction on the school premises?

No
Yes
Sometimes

9. How often do the students follow the instruction to use the language of instruction as a means of communication among themselves?

Always
Rarely
Not at all

10. Which language would you prefer to use as the medium of instruction when teaching content subjects such as History, Biology, Physical Science, Geography etc?

11. Why do you prefer the language you indicated above?

.....

.....

.....

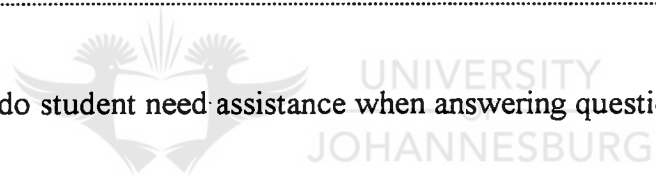
.....

.....

12. In what language do you think pupils feel most comfortable answering questions in the content subject(s).

.....

13. How often do student need assistance when answering questions in a second language?



Frequently
Rarely
Never

14. Which medium do you find most effective in group work?

English
Mother tongue
Both

15. Does the use of a second language as the medium of instruction affect the interest and attention of pupils?

Very much
A little
Not at all



16. If your answer to the above question is very much or a little, how does the second language hamper interest and attention in pupils?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

17. Are you satisfied with the std. 10 results at your school?

Yes
No

18. Do you think using a second language as the medium of instruction is one of the factors contributing to the quality of the matric results in your school?

Yes
No



19. If your answer to the above question is yes, what do you think might be the solution to the above issue?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....