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Articles

Bantu languages in education in South Africa: an overview. *Ongekho akekho*! – the absentee owner

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Abstract

The mai outh Africa
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socio ted. Were
the B e way, we
suggest better. We
accept, diately
impleme everal
research pen. These
include: ges; their
further d usage
development; the development and implementation of language-in-education policies

which address the basic educational and sociolinguistic realities; and the effective distribution of information to school governing bodies about the issues relevant to the selection of a medium of instruction. In our view, South Africa will not become a developed, effectively multilingual and nationally integrated country if linguistic equity and parity of esteem are not established in a meaningful way for all official languages, which includes provision for their use as media of instruction throughout.

Keywords:

Notes

1. Despite the post-1994 commitment to establish non-racism in South Africa, race is still a reality in most public domains, including education. In this contribution, black South Africans will be distinguished from coloured, Indian and white South Africans, and the term 'black schools' will be used for schools in which the learners are overwhelmingly black.

2. Written reply by the Minister of Education to a question in the National Assembly,
19 June

3. TIM … rticipant in
2007. Sc … 244/800.

4. Fift … nya,
Lesotho, … Swaziland,
Tanzan
http:

5. The … h case. The
Grade 1 … extended
essay w

6. In S … use of the
associat … hus referred
to as 'African languages'. Internationally, however, linguists use the term Bantu

languages. This practice will be followed in this contribution, since its reading audience is presumed to be the community of linguists.

7. For learners with a Bantu language as primary language, English is a second language in regions where English is part of their daily lives and where they are thus meaningfully exposed to it. But in environments where learners are not exposed to English except in classrooms, English needs to be regarded as a ‘third’ (or even foreign) language.

8. South African sociolinguists prefer to use the term ‘primary language’ or ‘home language’ in preference to ‘mother tongue’, which is problematical in South Africa. Besides its political connotation (having been a central concept in the philosophy of separate development – apartheid), it is often difficult to determine a person's ‘mother tongue’ since children in linguistically mixed homes and in similarly mixed communities spontaneously acquire different languages at the same time.

9. The views expressed in this article are based on the principles articulated in the South African Constitution (of 1996) and the Language-in-Education policy of the Department of Education (of 1997), and are supported by empirical data. We acknowledge, though, that alternative views and positions are possible.

10. First language speakers of English generally reside in urban areas.

11. Thi p. 1.

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acknowl schools into
categori socio-
econ tructure and
enviro

13. Res sembly, 20
Septemb

14. Res sembly on 9
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primary and secondary schools. African languages are supported only in the first three years of primary education.

15. LingbeT is a project of the Centre for Research in the Politics of Language (CentRePoL), University of Pretoria. It aims to describe the linguistic realities in black schools in South Africa. Six schools in the Tshwane Metropolitan region (three primary, three secondary) are involved in the project, led by Refilwe Ramagoshi (African Languages, University of Pretoria), assisted by Nthatisi Bulane (Llacan, CNRS).

16. Note in this regard the results for the English First Additional Language (Higher Grade) in the final 2006 November exam from schools involved in a Department of Education project on the usefulness of translated exam papers: the average mark for Paper 1 was 25.3% and for Paper 2 was 23.4% (Pare and Webb 2007). Note also the results of tests performed by Hough & Horne Consultants to determine the linguistic skills of the top 258 applicants for bursaries to study engineering: only 4% of them were literate at Grade 12 level (Rademeyer 2007).

17. This failure occurred after mother-tongue education was reduced from five to three years as a result of the Soweto protests against Bantu education. See Heugh (2002) on the serious educational consequences of that decision.

18. The Language, Effective Education and Economic Outcomes project. See Webb
and Grin

19. The ecent years
due to th ges.

20. It r ons by
South Af tion.

21. ted at
addr ne Language
Project. ses and
problem

22. A u efa, Ntake
and Har Currently,
there are other South

African national languages also have a Wiki' (http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Requests_for_new_languages/Wikipedia_Sepedi).

23. Further information on these organisations can be accessed through their websites: http://www.acalan.org/ and http://www.praesa.org.za/

Additional information

Notes on contributors

Vic Webb

Ongekho akekho is Zulu for Who is not there is not there, suggesting that one looses when one cannot claim one's right of possession in person.

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