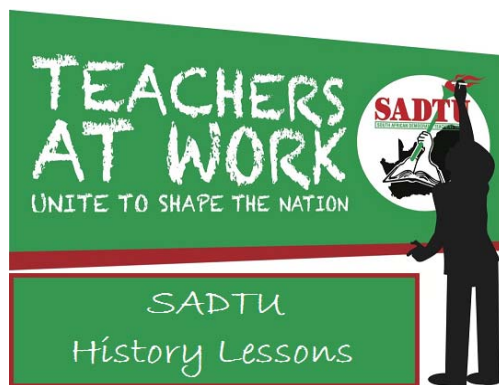


Lesson for Heritage Day

September 24th:

Languages

A resource-book for educators



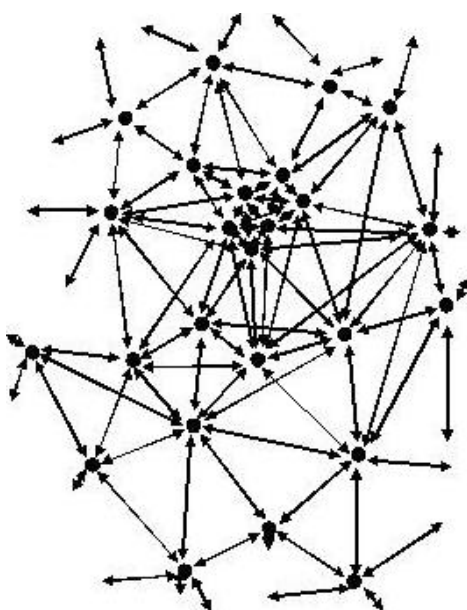
Lesson for Heritage Day: Languages

Introduction

Each language is a work of art, as priceless as any work of art that can be imagined. All languages are part of the general human heritage.

Languages are kept alive by the speakers and the writers of the language. Each language is a collaborative project of People’s Power. There is no centre and no hierarchy. Language authority rests with the ordinary speakers.

Each language is produced (and constantly reproduced) in a form of organisation that is nowadays called a “distributed network”. It can be imagined as a diagram:



Like this.



Or like this.

Creation of language happens in real life. The creation of the language and the use of the language are one and the same. The work is its own reward. The artefact that is produced – language – belongs to all.

The many languages of the world are open gateways. They are not barriers.

Languages that are spoken by large numbers of Africans, in different countries on our continent are: Kiswahili, French, English, Arabic and Portuguese. Of these, only Kiswahili is a purely African language. Across the continent, translation of an African language into another African language is often done via a European language; and this is a problem.

Because there is no central authority, a dictionary is only a collection and a record of words as they are used; but dictionaries – single-language dictionaries – make a language stronger.

In South Africa, there are eleven official languages. Most of them are not well served with dictionaries, or with the publication of written literature.

The upward mobility of people that has followed upon our South African democratic breakthrough has resulted in a flight to English in particular, as the most extensive language in the country, and in the world. This is a problem.

But it remains the case that all of our official languages are spoken, and all of them are the first, or home, language of significant numbers of South Africans.

The codification of language into dictionaries, and the creation of literature in the languages, makes the language of the people stronger.

African children, like children everywhere, need to be taught, in the first years of their schooling, in the language that they know from home. Later, they need to be taught their own language as a subject, like other subjects. South Africa has a programme to achieve these aims, gradually.

African languages, like all other languages, need writers to write them, and readers to read them. In our South African circumstances, these are revolutionary, nation-building tasks. We build our nation by giving life to our heritage.

South African Languages

The South African Constitution, Chapter 1, “Founding Provisions”, Clause 6, on Languages:

1. The official languages of the Republic are [Sepedi](#), [Sesotho](#), [Setswana](#), [siSwati](#), [Tshivenda](#), [Xitsonga](#), [Afrikaans](#), [English](#), [isiNdebele](#), [isiXhosa](#) and [isiZulu](#).
2. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
3. (a) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.
(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
4. The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
5. A [Pan South African Language Board](#) established by national legislation must
 - (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of -
 - (i) all official languages;
 - (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
 - (iii) sign language; and
 - (b) promote and ensure respect for -
 - (i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including [German](#), [Greek](#), [Gujarati](#), [Hindi](#), [Portuguese](#), [Tamil](#), [Telegu](#) and [Urdu](#); and
 - (ii) [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), [Sanskrit](#) and other [languages used for religious purposes](#) in South Africa.

The South African Constitution declares an intention, and gives an instruction, to restore the indigenous languages of our people, and to repair the damage done to them under apartheid.

The South African Constitution has not yet been obeyed in this regard.

The most common language spoken by South Africans at home is Zulu (23 percent speak Zulu at home), followed by Xhosa (16 percent), and Afrikaans (14 percent).

English is the fourth most common home language in the country (9.6%), but is understood in most urban areas and is the dominant language in government and the media. (Wikipedia)

The South African National Census of 2011 recorded the following distribution of home language speakers:^[1]

Language	Speakers	Percentage
Zulu	11,587,374	22.7%
Xhosa	8,154,258	16.0%
Afrikaans	6,855,082	13.5%
English	4,892,623	9.6%
Northern Sotho	4,618,576	9.1%
Tswana	4,067,248	8.0%
Sotho	3,849,563	7.6%
Tsonga	2,277,148	4.5%
Swati	1,297,046	2.5%
Venda	1,209,388	2.4%
Ndebele	1,090,223	2.1%
Sign language	234,655	0.5%
Other languages	828,258	1.6%
Total	50,961,443	100.0%



In the 30 years of its banning and exile (1960-1990), the ANC called this black, green and gold tricolor “The National Flag”

Language in Schools

The teaching of children in the mother-tongue that they have from home, when they enter school for the first time, may be a human right. If so, then it is a human right that is not yet being well observed in South Africa. Motivation for change in this regard comes not only from “human rights”, but also from the relatively poor rate of success, and waste of effort, in attempting to educate people in languages (such as English or Afrikaans) that they did not learn in the home and therefore do not, in the beginning, know.

Imposing, on children, the stress of attempting, at a very young age, to learn in a language that they do not understand and have not been taught, is a cruelty. And of course, it is not successful. Children who are presented with this hurdle generally do not advance as fast as children who are welcomed into the formal education system in their own language.

This situation reproduces the legacy of apartheid, and it will continue to do so until it is changed.

Incremental Introduction of African Languages

At the 10th Language and Development Conference held in Cape Town in mid-October, 2013, Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga announced that:

*“South Africa has embarked on an **Incremental Introduction of African languages (IIAL)** policy. The IIAL policy will be implemented incrementally commencing in Grade 1 in 2015 and will continue until 2026 when it will be implemented in Grade 12.”*

And that:

“In South Africa, from 2012, the phasing in of English in the curriculum starts in Grade 1, where English is offered as a subject at the First Additional Language whilst the Home Language is the language of learning and teaching in the first four years of schooling commencing from Grade R (reception year). In these early grades of schooling the focus is also on developing fluency and literacy in local languages to develop children’s sense of identity and self-worth.”

At the same event, Dr Jennifer Joshua, Director: Curriculum, Implementation & Quality Improvement (GET) said:

“The Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) policy intends to promote and develop the previously marginalised languages thereby increasing the use of African languages by all learners in the school system. The policy also aims to increase access to languages beyond English and Afrikaans by all learners, and promote social cohesion as a significant way of preserving heritage and culture.”

The above quoted words indicate that there is a large programme under way in South Africa, having to do with Language in Schools, pre-planned by the Department of Basic Education.

In our Introduction, we noted that Language is not a centralised phenomenon, but it is a thing generated, and constantly regenerated, by the people who speak, write and read the languages, including the children. Therefore, as important as the logic of the IIAL may be, it is the acceptance of it, or otherwise, by the masses, that will determine its success.



The Tower of Babel

PanSALB and Kha Ri Gude



PanSALB

The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), called for at the beginning of the South African Constitution, was established in 1995, so it is nearly twenty years old.

Its work is not visible in the country.

The sign of a developing language, or of a language which has a chance, at least, to survive, is what are described as monolingual explanatory dictionaries. A language which does not have such a single-language (not translation to and from another language) dictionary of its own is at best marking time, and at worst it is on a slide towards oblivion.

Most South African languages do not have such dictionaries. There are practical things that can be done to build our dictionaries by “crowd sourcing”, which is in fact the only way to build a dictionary.

PanSALB is not doing this.

After nearly two decades, PanSALB’s web site is still “Under Construction”.

PanSALB’s web site is not conforming with the rules on language that PanSALB, among other things, is supposed to police in terms of the Act and the Constitution. This is really a scandal.



Kha Ri Gude

Kha Ri Gude is managed by the Department of Basic Education. On its web site, it says:

“The Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign was launched in February 2008, with the intention of enabling 4,7 million adults above the age of 15 years to become literate and numerate in one of the eleven official languages. This would halve South Africa’s illiteracy rates by 2015.

*“The Campaign enables adult learners to read, write and calculate in their mother tongue in line with the Unit Standards for ABET level 1, **and also to learn spoken English.***

“The specifically designed Campaign materials teach reading, writing and numeracy and integrates themes and lifeskills such as health, gender, the environment and civic education.”

Kha Ri Gude is a large and expensive South African government programme. A major part of it, and the practical destination of it, is the teaching of English.

Kha Ri Gude teaches people literacy in their own language, and then it teaches them to speak English. It does not say that it puts these two parts of its programme together, so as to make people fully literate in English. It does not say so. But it is so. It cannot be otherwise.

Heritage of language is not about having government programmes for the extension of the English language.

The Constitutionally-decreed indigenous language programme (PanSALB) is not working, while another programme for the teaching of English, that does not teach indigenous languages (Kha Ri Gude), exists on a large scale. This is the way things are, today.

Wiktionary Projects for Schools



The compilation of dictionaries in South Africa’s indigenous languages is a collaborative project that schools can take part in.

The compilation of these dictionaries will be a major contribution to the recovery of South Africa’s cultural heritage. Our children can be directly involved in this work, as part of their education, through the multi-language, crowdsourcing dictionaries system called “Wiktionary”.

But first, a little about dictionaries, and about why these dictionaries are still lacking for the South African indigenous languages -

Dictionaries

Every living, written language needs to have its dictionary, and it needs to have a living literature in production, and readers of that literature.

The dictionary serves the literature. The dictionary we are referring to is the kind that PanSALB calls a “monolingual explanatory dictionary”, so as to distinguish it from bilingual dictionaries, which serve the purpose of translation from one language to another. Such translation dictionaries are invariably in two halves, e.g. Xhosa-English/English-Xhosa.

Translation is necessary. But the existence of translation dictionaries is a double-edged sword. On the one side it brings a language into cognisance of different language speakers, and so makes it accessible to more readers and speakers. But on the other side, bilingual dictionaries open the less-advantaged language up to

domination by the more powerful language. The consequence can be that the intellectuals of an African language-group, for example, can be drawn off into the pool of the other and in particular colonial language, such as English.

Further, the commonality of English as the other language in the bilingual dictionaries of the nine indigenous official languages puts the colonisers' languages in the position of mediating between the indigenous languages. The publication of, say, a Zulu-Venda/Venda-Zulu dictionary seems a long way away, but until such dictionaries are available, the literary relationship between those two languages will continue to be passed through the cultural filter of English, to the disadvantage of the both of the African languages.

PanSALB outsourced its central task

There has to be a dictionary of the language, in the language itself – i.e. one of PanSALB's "monolingual explanatory dictionaries".

PanSALB has outsourced the job of creating such dictionaries for the indigenous South African languages to nine "National Lexicography Units" (NLUs) located in academic institutions. These are "Section 29" not-for-profit companies.

But after nineteen years, there are still no monolingual dictionaries for the nine languages. This is not a surprise. The compilation of dictionaries cannot be a purely ivory-tower project. It must, of necessity, also be a mass-participation project.

Wiktionary?

Dictionaries are registers of words in use. The primary sources of words in use are the users, who are the speakers, writers and readers of the language.

It follows that the creation of a dictionary has to be a mass project, which cannot in practice be effected by little-known initiatives such as PanSALB's "NLUs". Nowadays, such a mass collaborative project is referred to as a "crowdsourcing" project.

[Wiktionary](#) is an existing Internet structure that is available, free, to anyone wanting to enter a mass, collaborative project to compile a dictionary in any language.

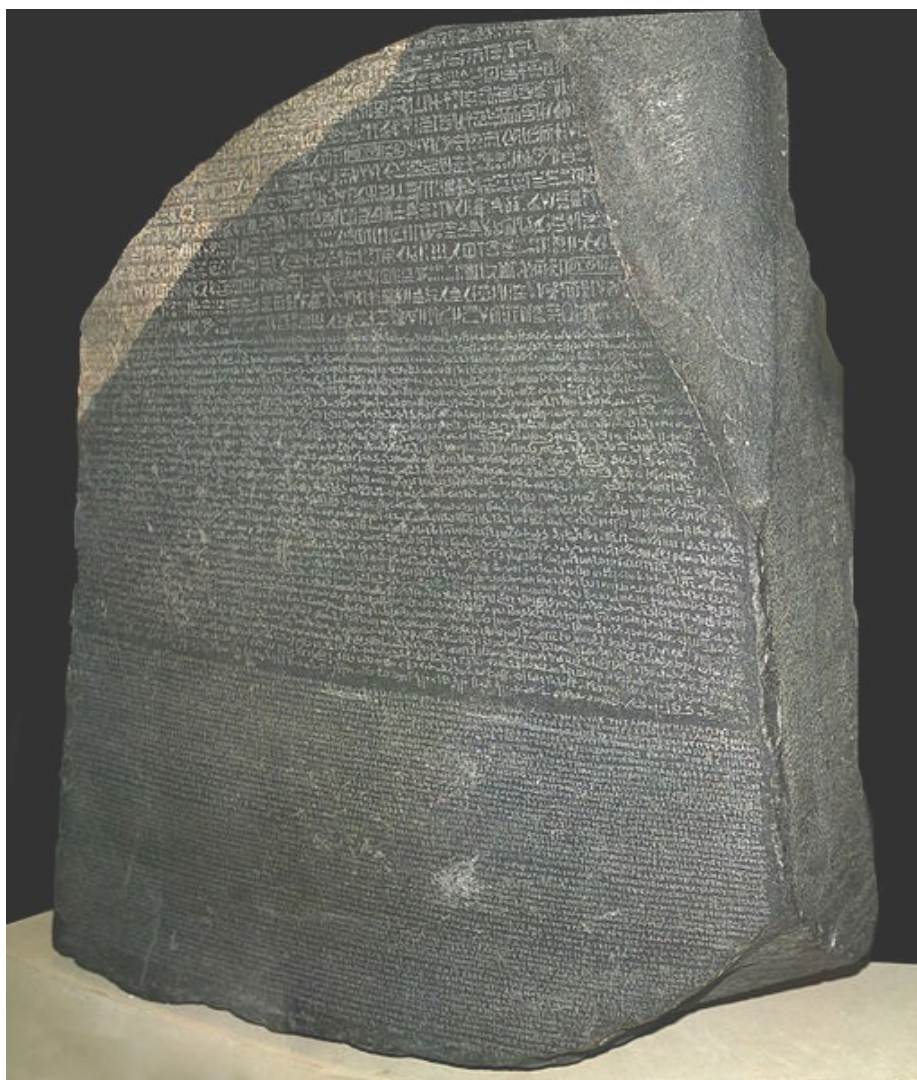
Wiktionary is a well-organised, Internet-based apparatus for the crowdsourcing of words. It is technical, but it is also natural. The [Wikipedia entry on crowdsourcing](#) shows that long before there was an Internet, dictionary-compilation was already the classical form of crowdsourcing. Wikipedia points out that:

"The Oxford English Dictionary may provide one of the earliest examples of crowdsourcing. In the mid-19th century, an open call for volunteers was made for contributions identifying all words in the English language and example quotations exemplifying their usages. They received over six million submissions over a period of 70 years."

[Wiktionaries](#) of most South African languages already exist. So why is PanSALB not promoting these Wiktionary projects? It is because PanSALB is limited to the form of funded academic monopoly, which by itself is inappropriate for dictionary-compilation. It needs to be assisted by mass popular crowdsourcing.

Wiktionary is part of the family of collaborative projects that includes Wikipedia, now one of the most-visited sites in the whole world. All of these “wiki” projects are created by, and maintained by, volunteers. Like languages themselves, they are distributed networks.

With a Wiktionary project, the dictionary is being published as it is being created. Users can have the benefit of the work long before it is ready for publication in hard-copy form – if that form is even considered necessary.



The Rosetta Stone, key to ancient African languages

Continental Languages of Africa

Kiswahili and others



Kiswahili in 11 countries

Kiswahili

What is so special about Kiswahili?

Kiswahili is unique. It deserves all of the attention that it gets. South Africans should take an interest in the Kiswahili language and its history. Kiswahili can show South African languages the way forward. Kiswahili is a success, and a cause for hope. Kiswahili is the one African language that is transnational in our continent.

The other continental languages – Arabic, Portuguese, French and English – all originated outside our continent. We will consider them below.

Kiswahili is spoken in more than 11 countries and has official status in 5 of them: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Union of the Comoros (where it is known as Comorian). Other countries with first-language Swahili-speaking populations include Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. In most of these countries there are also significant populations of *second-language* Kiswahili-speakers.

Kiswahili: A modern language, with many dictionaries

The rise of Kiswahili has taken place in modern times. This rise has taken place in parallel with two other languages that have established themselves in the modern world: Modern Hebrew and Afrikaans. All of these three languages have ancient origins. But they became what they are today in a deliberate phase of modern development beginning in the 19th Century, and consolidating in the 20th Century.

Kiswahili first broke through the dictionary barrier in 1981, with the publication of the “Kamusi ya Kiswahili sanifu” (Standard Kiswahili Dictionary) in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. This dictionary has been revised and re-published at least 43 times to date, and is downloadable from the Internet.

The publication of “Kamusi ya Kiswahili sanifu” (KKS) was met with pride and joy by Kiswahili speakers everywhere. It has been followed by many more monolingual Kiswahili dictionaries, some of them derived from KKS, and others being substantially new projects. One publisher alone offers five different monolingual Kiswahili dictionaries (Oxford University Press East Africa).

Kiswahili has writers and readers

Kiswahili-language publications are abundant in all aspects of literature from school and university books, to newspapers and magazines, to poetry and novels and comics. Swahili language appears in drama and in song.

Because Kiswahili is a living language, with speakers, writers, readers and dictionaries, it is able to expand its vocabulary and its usages to accommodate modern life as it develops.

There are thousands of [indigenous languages spoken in Africa](#), but it is only with Kiswahili that the major problems appear to have been solved. In nearly all other cases it appears that the commanding heights of literature, politics and business are occupied by one of the four principal exogenous languages: Arabic, Portuguese, French and English.

Other indigenous African languages may decline unless they follow Kiswahili’s example. Kiswahili’s strength comes partly from the monolingual Kiswahili dictionaries, as well as upon the Kiswahili-language literary culture that is buttressed by these monolingual dictionaries.



Internet-sourced language map of Africa

Arabic, Portuguese, French, and English

The map above, taken from the Internet, was labelled “Business Languages in Africa”. None of the thousands of African languages are marked. All of the languages mentioned are exotic, except where Ethiopia’s languages are referred to – as “Other”. Even Kiswahili is ignored.

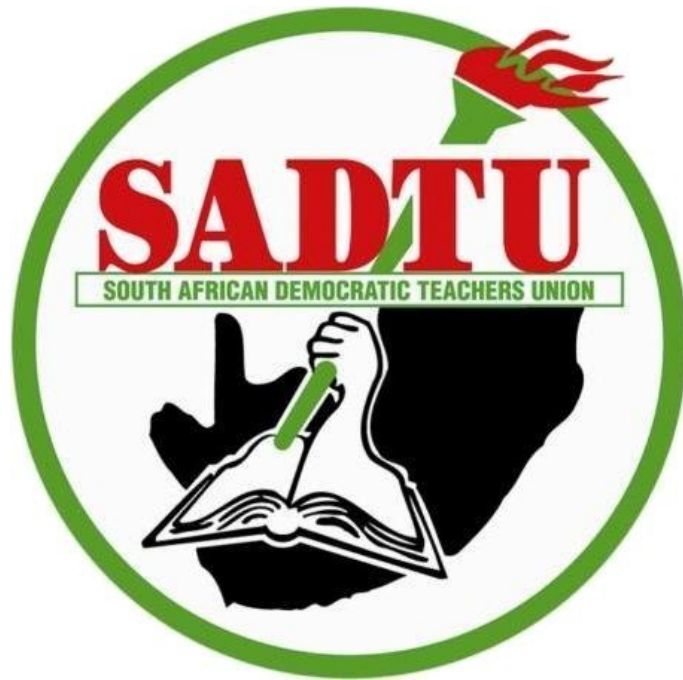
South Africa, if it is to have effective political, cultural and business relations with the rest of the continent, needs good translation from French, Arabic, Portuguese and Kiswahili.

Some of the translators need to be at work translating South African material into the other African languages, and publishing it. We need a continuous two-way flow of ideas and dialogue between our country and the rest of the continent.

Strategy

Next, we need to work down dominance of the languages of previous colonists, beginning at home. We must have monolingual dictionaries in all of our South African languages. Then, a superstructure of translation has to be created. The work will be labour-intensive. Output will be in direct proportion to human effort applied. Therefore there need to be plenty of linguists.

Modern language departments at SA universities need to grow. The number of language academics needs to multiply, as well as the numbers of language students. Africans need to own the language business of Africa. The map has to look different. The dominance of outside languages has to go.



For Heritage Day, 24 September