Challenges of writing and publishing in indigenous languages and impact on rural development

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Abstract - **"Indigenous languages are heritage in danger" These are the words of the chairperson of the South African Heritage Council, advocate Sonwabile Mancotywa addressing structures of Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) on 03rd August 2012 at the Birchwood Hotel in Johannesburg. This is true as it is proven that even writing and publishing in Indigenous languages seem to be faced with many challenges. These challenges were orchestrated by the imposition of English and Afrikaans over the Indigenous Languages. This led to many decades of the undermining of the indigenous languages which saw very little material written in these languages. Indigenous languages even today are not seen as languages of economy. This therefore implies that speakers of these languages, more specially those in rural areas are deprived of socio-economic empowerment.**

Afrikaners fought the British around 1899-1902 pushing matters of the *Taal-Stryd*. Lord Alfred Miller, the High Commissioner of South Africa between 1897 and 1905 made sure that English is well placed above Afrikaans. The establishment of the *Volktaal* also looked at promoting Afrikaans language. At times, the indigenous languages were relegated only to the Bantustan (Homelands).

Afrikaans was given a huge boost by state and was developed into a second language of the country. The dawn of democracy saw indigenous languages accorded the official status. However, it is still difficult for the emerging publishers to publish material in these languages unless the material is prescribed for schools. If publishers get it hard to publish, then writers also get no encouragement for writing. The language barrier impacts negatively on rural development due to limited or no exposure of rural communities to economic activities.

This paper explains the necessary interventions to make sure the indigenous languages continue to be written and published, with recommendations directed to both government institutions and the private sector. The paper also indicates the negative impact on rural development caused by little or no material published in indigenous languages.

Key words: Indigenous languages, official languages, Imposition, rural development.

I. Introduction

As kwesi Kwaa Prah (2007) puts it, in scientific and anthropological usage, the notion of culture encompasses all that is the result of human fabrication. It includes both the tangible objects such as all material products of humanity and intangible creation of human genius like religion, language, tradition, history, identity, custom and every practice.

If culture is the main determinant of people's attitudes, tastes and mores, then language is the central feature of culture. It is through language that culture is transmitted, interpreted and configured. Language therefore assists in the registering of culture in people's minds. The trajectory of culture can be read in the language and the evolution of its lexical and morphological aspects.

There are eleven official languages in South Africa. They are IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Setswana, English, Sesotho, Xitsonga, Siswati, Tshivenda and isiNdebele. South African Sign Language is a distinct though incompletely emerged national standard language which also subsumes a cluster of semi-standardised dialects. The main language of government is English despite the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, calls for the languages to be treated and used with equal status. This constitutional mandate may be realised in few years to come, if not the coming decades. The debate is on to get other significant languages (currently seen as dialects) spoken in South Africa to the official status. These include Khilobedu, Setlokwa and Sephuthi.

The Limpopo Language Policy Framework (2011) indicates that all oral communication between government institutions and the public must be in the language of the target audience. This suggests that there must also room for the use of non-official languages and dialects. The non-official languages may be used in limited semi-official situations where it has been determined that these languages are prevalent. These languages have significant local functions in specific communities whose identity is tightly bound around the linguistic and cultural identity that these non-official South African languages have.

Although the African continent is the most linguistically diverse continent in the world, its different parts have been dominated by foreign languages which enjoyed a lot of literatures and publishing privileges. According to UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco)

2006, people in Africa speak more than 2000 different languages which is a third of the world's linguistic heritage.

On the other hand, there are a number of great authors in African communities but most of them had written and published in English and not their indigenous languages. There are many factors encouraging this and this paper aims to outline the difficulties of writing and publishing in indigenous languages and also point out how these challenges may be dealt with. If these challenges are not dealt with, they have potential of negative impact on rural development as there will be no material in the fields of economy, science, technology and others to empower rural community members.

II.   HISTORICAL FACTORS

The language question in South Africa has been the one characterised by undermining of the indigenous languages. The imposition of Afrikaans and English on the African Population in South Africa has also contributed to the underdevelopment of indigenous languages. The effect of this imposition still has a negative impact on these languages.

Looking back to the years 1899–1902, the years of the second Anglo-Boer War, one of the causes of the conflict was the issue of the language. The Afrikaners even called this war the *Taal-stryd.* (Prah, 2007).

The post-war policy of Lord Alfred Milner, High Commissioner for South Africa from 1897 to 1905 was also to lower down the Afrikaners language by requiring education to be in English only. Wanting to form a *Volkstaal*, Jan Hofmeyer and other Afrikaners from Cape revived the *Taalbond* in 1903. In 1908, DF Malan expressed the need for uplifting Afrikaans to the language of literature. This followed the establishment of the South African Academy for Language, Literature and Arts (De Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Lettere and Kuns) in 1909.

When the National Party Afrikaner elite came into power in 1948, they brought in collective memory of cultural rivalry against the English (Prah,2007). They rapidly worked tirelessly in all areas of social life to catch up with the social, economic and cultural gap between English and Afrikaans speaking people. They, however, never minded about development and usage of the indigenous languages. Instead, they started grouping people in the so-called homelands. These were Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, KaNgwane, Gazankulu, Qwaqwa and Lebowa.

There were a number of authors in each language group who contributed in writing in the indigenous languages. However, publishing and sales of their work relied more on titles prescribed in different academic years and levels.

The introduction of the Outcome Based Education (OBE) by the new government also dealt a blow on the works of these old authors such as Dr TN Maumela, Prof Marivate, Mr BJ Masebenza and Prof E'skia Mphahlele to name just a few as their work were declared not effective and relevant for the changed education system. Professor Nokaneng (2009) also indicates that both the literature and text books read today dilute African ideas, culture and history. This Nokaneng (2009) argues is partly caused by the selection criterion for literature in South Africa where the department prescribes how the book for certain genre needs to be limiting writers creativities.

However, English remained a powerful language to be superseded by Afrikaans. This led to the Soweto uprising in 1976 and this provided a boost to the English language. However, it remained evident that under apartheid the two languages of the white minority, namely Afrikaans and English, held sway over and above the indigenous African languages. Afrikaans on the other hand was systematically developed with enormous state resources and blessing into a second official language (Prah, 2007).

Usage of indigenous languages in formal and informal capacities was restricted to the Bantustan or homelands. The dramatic development of Afrikaans in just less than fifty years and the prosperity it brought to Afrikaners is a lesson we all have to take serious. Language is powerful in economic development.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, provides that everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice. This means that persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right to enjoy their culture, language etc. However, all these are done with respect to the rights of English and Afrikaans speakers. The Introduction of the Pan South African Language Board Act (PanSALB Act 59 of 1995 as amended) was to establish a statutory body for the development and promotion of the equal use of all the official languages.

III.   LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

Matters of languages are constantly discussed around the work. What seem to be common is the fight to get all languages accorded their status, be developed and used in a matter that benefits the owners in many ways including easy building and maintainance of their cultural and social activities. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights that took place on 6-9 June 1996 in Barcelona provided insight on different aspects of languages. According to the article 1 of this declaration, the term language proper to territory refers to the language of the community historically established in such a space. The declaration in article 3 considers the following to be inalienable personal rights which may be exercised in any situation:

- The right to be recognised as a member of a language community

- The right to the use of one's own language both in private and public

- The right to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin

Nokaneng(2009) points out that each of the indigenous languages in South Africa is rich in unwritten literature forms which is handed down from generation to the other by word of mouth. This can be argued that it contributes in lack of tangible material that can be used economically and also put the indigenous African languages to be exposed more to the risk of diminution with generations. Chances of using the language material for rural development as these languages and all their material are regarded less economic due to domination of English and Afrikaans in South Africa.

Article 5 of the declaration indicates that the rights of all language communities are equal and independent of legal or political status of their languages as official, regional or minority languages. Article 8 indicates that all language communities have the right to organise and manage their own resources so as to ensure the use of their language in all functions within the society. This includes developmental initiatives.

Education is a priority in many societies including South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) which is the ruling part in South Africa is contemplating classifying teaching as essential job. Just like those working in life threatening situations like medicine and state security, teachers are expected by the ANC not to be allowed to go for any type of protest.

This however is denied by labour unions representing teachers. Nokaneng (2009) indicates that the influence of language is closely connected with education problems as majority of black learners in South Africa experience difficulties in mastering new concepts through a foreign language medium because of insufficient stimulation, inadequate perceptual and language experience. This brings in the importance of mother tongue education to make sure communities proceed well in going to a level of understanding concepts in developmental arena. Indigenous languages are important not only in inter-group communication but as a tool to provide better understanding of developmental initiatives needed for rural development.

IV. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Language and cultural rights are central to all considerations of human rights in the contemporary world (Prah, 2007). Prah adds that the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity affirms that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Beyond the issues of rights, language is very crucial for social development. A society develops into modernity when its citizens are literate in the language of the masses. It proves to be impossible to reach modernity if languages of literacy and education are only within the intellectual ambit of a small minority.

The Municipal Systems Act, Act 32 of 2000, calls for public participation on matters of governance and that there should be effective communication of the by-laws between the municipalities and communities. This is also supported by the Municipal Structures Act, Act No 117 of 1998, which states that a municipal council must develop mechanisms to consult the community and local organizations in performing its functions and exercising its powers. This is possible if the language used is that of the masses where the masses get an opportunity to fully participate on developmental issues.

The White Paper on Local Government of 1998 emphasizes the need to rebuild relations between municipalities and the local communities they serve. Municipalities are expected to be sensitive to the needs of groups within the community who tend to be marginalized so that these groups also receive full service delivery and be given an opportunity to be addressed in their languages. This calls for the use of the non-official languages used in the concerned groups.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) also calls for the establishment of Developmental Local Government which is described as the local government that works with community members in the struggle to create better living conditions. This can be done in the languages the community members understand best as there has to be effort to persuade community members to be active participants on matters of governance and those of their development.

People should participate in matters of governance to become owners of their own developmental initiatives (Chambers, 2010). People are also empowered through participation in addition to them getting persuaded and gradually becoming active in finding solutions to their own challenges.

When this happens they move away from the characteristic dependency syndrome which comes in the form of being passive recipients instead of players in their own development (Bessette, 2004). Language plays a major role in encouraging community participation, hence development.

The preceding arguments find support from Chambers (2010) who believes that participation of people is crucial for community-driven development (CDD). Without effective communication, it is impossible for any government to achieve CDD. This approach to development empowers local communities through equipping them with a new set of powers, rights and obligations (Chambers 2010).

It is also worth highlighting that empowerment of the communities also comes in the form of access to resources and authority, improved accountability and development of capacity since people learn to work collectively towards a common goal (Chambers, 2010).

According to Chambers (2010), a critical ingredient of CDD is community-based planning which is designed to promote community action. This is an indication that there is a need for community participation in governance matters and this can be achieved if there is effective persuasive communication between the municipalities and the communities.

All these happen faster and effectively if people are communicated to through their indigenous language. However the challenge remains that few written material are in indigenous languages. This means the terminologies and strategies of development have to be read in English and then be translated to indigenous languages, which is a dangerous indigenous language growth strategy.

V. IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE USE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

This section of the paper aims at outlining impact of effective communication in rural development and how the use of indigenous languages can enhance development within rural-area based communities. The importance of effective communication in promoting successful implementation of developmental initiatives cannot be questioned. As lamented by Schramm (1997), the problem of underdeveloped regions across the globe is partly due to poor or lack of effective communication. Schramm (1997) laments the existence of a considerable communication gap between development agents and communities. In support, Dudley (1999) points out that there is a relationship between communication and economic growth. As Nokaneng(2009) argues, effective coomunicaion comes with understanding and mastering of concepts which needs sufficient stimulation and language experience hence the importance of indigenous languages.

Chambers (2010) describes Effective Communication for Rural Development as communication characterized by community participation where in community members are empowered with information and are part of the identification of their needs, challenges, intervention plans, implementation thereof, monitoring and evaluation in an environment conducive for them to take issues of their own development into their own hands by becoming active participants and owners of the whole process. This means that members of the community are persuaded to take matters of development into own hands.

They also are made to be accountable to existing developmental initiative. Developmental local government is described by the White paper on Local development (1998) as a local government that works with community members in the eandevour to develop their living conditions. Focussing on rural area-based communities, there will always be a need to communicate to these people through the languages they understand best as most of them are illiterate to best comprehend foreign languages such as English and Afrikaans. Also, to make sure community member become active participants in matters of governance and those of their development, there is a need to establish an effective communication model for rural development and enhancement of developmental local government. The model will yield positive results if communication activities are done in indigenous languages the people understand best. The diagram below provides the effective communication model for rural development. It is anticipated that the model will contribute positively in the realization of the following:

- Ushering effective communication for the development of rural community as it is based on the principles of persuasion, self-actualization and change of attitude.

- Create more understanding, belief, sense of togetherness between communicators (e.g. local government) and the recipient (e.g community members) as its most important focus is on community participation and is based on establishment of mutual understanding between the sender of the message and target recipient.

- Create sense of belonging with the spirit of **OURS** prevailing over the spirit of **US** and **THEIRS** between government and communities.

- Bring in high level of community-driven planning which will lead to true public participation in government activities.

- Provide community participation through involving community members and making them to participate and take responsibility for their own development initiative.

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                                              ┌──────────┐
                                              │3. Shared │
                                              │ message  │
                                              └──────────┘
┌──────────────┐    ⊂Sender⊃⊂Recipient⊃   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│1. (SENDER)   │                           │4. Both       │   │5. Message/   │
│Government has │                          │government and│   │goals well    │
│message to send│                         │communities   │   │received by   │
│(In indigenous │                         │have mutual   │   │involved      │
│language)     │                          │understanding │   │parties       │
└──────────────┘                          │and sense of  │   │(Government   │
                                          │working       │   │and           │
      ┌──────────────┐                    │together      │   │communities). │
      │2. Government │                     └──────────────┘   │They act      │
      │share         │                                        │together as a │
      │intended      │                                        │team with full│
      │message with  │                                        │understanding │
      │the specific  │                                        └──────────────┘
      │targeted      │          ┌──────────┐  ┌────────────┐
      │group in the  │          │(SENDER)  │  │(RECIPIENT) │   ┌──────────────┐
      │language they  │         │Government│  │Communities │   │6. (THE END)  │
      │understand best│         └──────────┘  └────────────┘   │Mutual        │
      │Indigenous    │                                         │understanding,│
      │language of the│                                        │trust,        │
      │target group to│                                        │tolerance,    │
      │enhance       │                                         │hope,         │
      │communication │                                         │collective    │
      └──────────────┘                                         │accountability│
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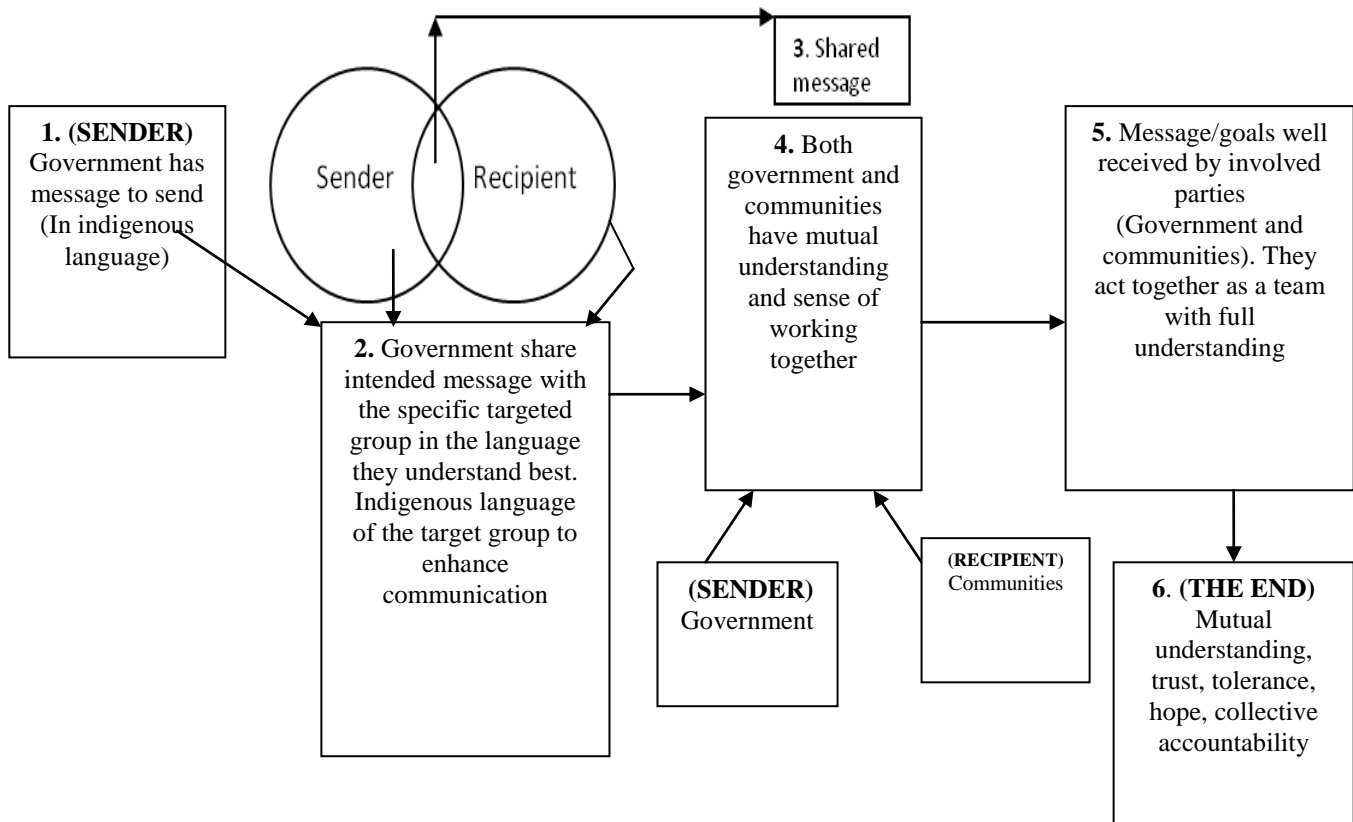
Figure 1.   Effective Communication Model for Rural Development

In this diagram, government is an initiator and sender of the intended message (1). Government consults and mobilizes recipients (e.g. Community members) and interprets the message or theme together in languages of the recipients (2). Both parties share common views about the message at equal level of participation and communicating through the language of the recipient, indigenous languages(3). Both parties developed mutual understanding on what they need to share together in order to achieve target goals. Message is then well received by both parties as it now belongs to both (4). They act together for the realization of intended goals. When they succeed they rejoice together and when if they fail they strive for intervention together. There is no more suspicious views again as there is trust tolerance, hope and accountability by both parties (5). They work together for success and no one for example, will go on "strike" and no one will vandalize the little they have as they will be in a position to understand why the government managed to provide certain services and not others and they will join hands to come-up with interventions where necessary. In this way, community members then become custodians of state development initiatives and persuaded to be active participants in matters of governance(6).

VI.   CHALLENGES OF WRITING AND PUBLISHING IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Although the Constitution and other statutes make it clear that there is a need for the development and use of the official languages of South Africa, little is done to enforce this on indigenous languages. Matters of the language are regarded as add on and not key. Most of the documents are still written only in English if not also in Afrikaans.

Political speeches are still written and read in English even when delivered to people the majority of whom understand an indigenous language without the interpreting services. Most of the time, interpreting is very poor, distorts the information and is characterised by bad indigenous language usage. The majority of local municipalities publish their newsletters only in English even though the majority of target audience speak indigenous languages. This was confirmed during interviews with communicators from both the districts and the local municipalities during their forum meeting on the 9th November 2012 at Limpopo Guest Manor in Polokwane, South Africa.

The Mutale local municipality, for example, is dominated by Tshivenda speakers but publishes newsletters in English. Pay-slips for accounts of community members are still in English only. Most of the adverts on billboards, even in deep rural areas are written in English. Thulamela local municipality recently put a number of rubbish bins around the Thohoyandou town and some adjacent villages but messages written on them are only in English. The municipality has Xitsonga and Tshivenda speaking communities in majority.

Years of the imposition of English and Afrikaans still has a lot of negative legacy over the use of the indigenous languages. Currently, very few publishers are comfortable in publishing material in indigenous languages unless such material is prescribed for academic usage. This is mainly because:

- Many years of suppression of indigenous languages created a reading vacuum amongst the indigenous language speakers.

- Indigenous language speakers who are literate were made to read for examination and were tested in English or Afrikaans hence developing less desire to read in their own languages.

- Indigenous languages speakers in South Africa turn to think the intelligence of a person is measured by how fluent people are in English language.

- Indigenous languages are not regarded as languages of economy. People see using English as bringing people closer to economic activities.

- Other than teaching, jobs in indigenous languages such as interpreting, translating, journalism, film acting, poetry, analysing, etc have been limited or are non-existent.

- There are few or virtually no newspapers, magazines, journals, comics, or any others information or entertainment publications in indigenous languages. Only Kwazulu Natal prides itself with newspapers in IsiZulu such as the titles Ilanga and Isolezwe. (The Media, October 2012)

- Traditional leaders, who are described as custodians of culture, have abandoned languages they are custodians of and rely on foreign languages for their own communication needs. This is mainly because their own languages are not economic oriented.

- The teaching of these languages in schools has weakened to the point where many teachers in schools (and lecturers in Universities) struggle to communicate well in their own languages.

- Language contests through reading, dictation, oral debates, essays, poetry (recitations), songs, riddles, story-telling, idioms, proverbs, etc have disappeared.

- Reading material such as the folklore should consider cultural activities when they get translated

from English to the indigenous languages and from indigenous languages to English.

- Language regulating bodies such as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) lack binding powers to make sure there is redress when language matters are flouted.

- Lack of indigenous language active museum and archives for indigenous languages.

- Statutory bodies such as the Provincial Language Committees not able to create conducive working condition with the language custodians such as the traditional leaderships. This is in many cases attributed to lack of resources.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be argued that there are challenges in publishing in Indigenous languages. Publishing is a business and it needs to make economic sense to publish a book or other material. If their work is not published, writers will also not find any encouragement. Unless this factor is corrected, indigenous languages are diminishing and this will compromise level of rural development.

Emerging publishers of African languages literature also experience financial challenges due to these challenges of publishing indigenous material. Community members also struggle to get into economic sector due to lack of guiding material in their languages. Health, economic, social and security material for example, still lack in these languages.

The following recommendations are made to respond to the challenges that may lead to the collapse of the indigenous languages:

- Government should make financial resources available to assist up and coming publishers in publishing material in indigenous languages just like how Afrikaans was developed.

- Important government documents should use languages of the communities.

- The implementation of National Language Policy and Act should be monitored and evaluated regularly.

- It needs to be emphasised that contravening the Constitutional mandate on language usage is against the law and redress thereof is monitored and evaluated.

- All government departments should have language desks and resources to monitor implementation of language matters as per the Constitution and other laws.

- All institutions interacting with community members such as the banks should also be encouraged or obliged to implement the language policy and make sure indigenous languages are playing a role in socio-economic development.

- Authors of indigenous languages should then be encouraged to publish factual materials that play a role in human development.

- Education system should make it compulsory for learners to learn their languages at both the primary and secondary schools.

- Economic opportunities in indigenous languages should be exposed to the communities.

- No National Language Bill should escape and get approved without including the South African Sign Language and brail.

- Language practitioners should move from preserving the indigenous languages to the development of languages through development of field terms including terms needed in science, health and other economic fields.

- Speakers of indigenous language should not be sympathetic to those who seem to have forgotten proper words (e.g. Month of the year) in their languages and start recommending usage of borrowed words and ignore the original ones.

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