# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1    INTRODUCTION

Language is undoubtedly of vital importance in the lives of people because it is used, among other things, to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings.  Important as language may be, one realises that there are some Xitsonga speaking people who take their language for granted, and this leads to a great extent to its marginalisation.  However, the symbolic meaning of languages can also have some serious consequences that can cause the people to abandon their languages.  There are those who hold the notion that this precious and melodious language is inferior to other languages such as English and Afrikaans.  In this regard, some Vatsonga are not proud of their language as they believe that Xitsonga is on the verge of dying out.  It is, therefore, crucial to undertake a study in this area to find out other causes that contribute to the demise of Xitsonga and then suggest ways and means for its revitalisation.

## 1.2    BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The apartheid regime played a contributory role in the undermining of African languages and their speakers because it provided too few resources for the development of these languages. This is why some Vatsonga speaking people are shy to identify themselves as Vatsonga because their language is said to be inferior and not scientific.

Finnegan (1994:5) regards language as central to the transmission of culture and communication in general.  What one understands from this statement is that each language is unique in the sense that it must be treated with respect and be honoured because it serves its communicative purpose and mould the behavioural patterns of the people of different cultures.

The norms and standards of each culture are passed on from one generation to the other through language. Therefore, there is no need to discriminate against any language and try to promote some languages at the expense of others. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996) states that all languages are equal and have to be treated with respect and enjoy the same parity. And no one should be denied the opportunity to use the language that he or she knows and understands in all domains.

Kembo-Sure and Webb (2002:11) describe language as an identity marker in South Africa. The legacy of colonialism and apartheid brought along the emergence of a negative attitude towards African languages in general, and Xitsonga in particular. It comes as no surprise that some Xitsonga speaking people are unwilling to speak Xitsonga in public. The rapid endangerment and death of many minority languages across the world is a matter of widespread concern, not only among linguists and anthropologists, but among all those concerned with issues of cultural identity in an increasingly globalised culture. This is compounded, among other factors by the fact that Xitsonga is not given enough time in the media, such as on television, so that it can be realised as a language of importance. Important documents such as those from the South African Revenue Services, Application Forms for Identification Documents, and Birth Certificates are also not yet available in Xitsonga. These aspects contribute to the marginalisation of Xitsonga.

Basically, all languages have all what it takes to be a language. As long as people are able to communicate with one another and get answers to their questions or pass on information, it means that the language that they use is valid because they use rules of that particular language. As Xitsonga is threatened in many areas, such as in education, politics, and the economy, it requires to be revived. The *BBC English Dictionary* (1992:997) defines revitaliSation as follows:

> The revitalization of something is the act or process of making
> it more active, lively or successful.

Linguistically speaking, language death is a process that affects speech communities where the level of linguistic competence that speakers possess of a given language idiom is decreased. It is, therefore, imperative that damage control of some kind be undertaken to rescue the language in question from totally perishing. Language revitalisation needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. There is no doubt that language revitalisation is the solution. This is the only way that can restore life to that particular language.

## 1.3  AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the envisaged research study is to examine the causes of the marginalisation of Xitsonga, and also to explore the ways that can be invoked to bring about the revitalisation. In order to achieve this aim, the envisaged study must answer the following research questions:

- What are the causes of the marginalisation of Xitsonga?
- Which measures must be implemented to address the marginalisation of Xitsonga?

## 1.4  SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The envisaged study will be of great significance as it will endeavour to show how language works in a society. It is crucial as it will show how necessary it is for people to have a positive attitude towards their own language. Lastly, the envisaged study will be of relevance as it will show the importance of revitalising Xitsonga by using it in fields such as education and the economy.

## 1.5  OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the envisaged study are as follows:

- To highlight the strategies that can be used to promote Xitsonga as a means of communication;

- To make people realise that Xitsonga has got all the language rights, just like any other language; and

- To equip the Xitsonga speakers with vital points that will enable them to defend their language rights against any discrimination and unfair practices by anybody or any party.

## 1.6    RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This envisaged study is necessary as it will endeavour to stress the fact that all languages are capable of serving the needs of their speakers.  In addition, it will indicate that it is important to create conditions that are conducive for Xitsonga usage in all spheres in South Africa.

## 1.7    RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the socio-linguistic nature of the envisaged study, it compels the researcher to opt for the correct methodology that is in line with the envisaged research itself.  Therefore, the researcher must opt for the most feasible strategies to be employed for effective, credible, and critical discourse.  It is for this reason that the envisaged study will use the qualitative research method.

### 1.7.1   Collection of data

With regard to the problems surrounding the research on the revitalisation of Xitsonga, the researcher is compelled to gather as much information as possible, using all the techniques and skills at his or her disposal for a well-structured, balanced, and credible research.  This is why the envisaged study will use the following methods for data collection.

1.7.1.1   Primary sources

The envisaged research will be conducted through unstructured interviews in which thirty (30) respondents will be consulted.  The following sampled population is targeted.

1.7.1.1.1   Interviews

The following people will be interviewed:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | x | Xitsonga educators; |
| 10 | x | Members of  the Pan South African Language Board; |
| 05 | x | Members of the Xitsonga Language Research Development Centre; and |
| 05 | x | Xitsonga lecturers. |

1.7.1.2   **Secondary research**

The envisaged study will use the following secondary sources:  articles, library books, dissertations, and the Internet.

1.8   **LITERATURE  REVIEW**

There might be some other researchers who conducted research studies on the revitalisation of other languages at different points in time.  Therefore, their works will be useful to this envisaged study because they will serve as a point of departure for this research.  As far as the idea of language growth and revitalisation is concerned, they go hand in hand with the ideas of language death, language shift, language assimilation, language hegemony, linguistic expansionism, linguicide, linguicism, and language obsolescence. Languages, like all living organisms, can either grow or die, depending on the prevailing conditions. Language death, as both an idea and reality, is not far-fetched as one may think.  In the history of humankind, there have been many languages that have already become extinct. According to current estimates, there are about 6 000 languages in the world and, of these, it

is most likely that about half of them would cease to exist in the next 50 years (Crystal, 1999:1). Xitsonga is one practical example of the languages that face such a challenge.

The issue of language as a right has to be addressed seriously and precisely because, in the past, people's rights have been violated. Xitsonga as a language falls within this category. There is no doubt that the paradigm that needs to be followed in the revitalisation of Xitsonga is one that includes both the functional approach to language, which is inseparable from the view of language as a right and the view that all languages are resources.

The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica Volume 7* (1988:147) defines language as follows: "Language is a system of convectional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate."

From this statement, language is said to be an interwoven system of words that are used for speaking and sometimes are written down and can be read, and their meanings are well understood by that particular speech community. The *Children's Britannica Volume 10* (1988:265) points out that:

> Language is a system of sounds which human beings use to
> communicate with one another, it is really a collection of signs
> or symbols, in which the words stand for objects or for actions
> or feelings.

Be it as it may, language is life or life is language. The bottom line is that, when all these aspects are combined, they give a meaning, and the meaning of such is uttered through language. When we speak about language and its meaning, we often do so from the point of view of what it does or what we use it for, that is, its functions. One of the basic uses of language is to communicate information. This function is so basic that many people regard it as the only one. This use of language is called informative or sometimes the representational function. As a medium of communication, language can be used to affirm or refute propositions, to represent arguments, to make suggestions, and so on. It means that the language that is used should be user-friendly because it is supposed to be understood by everybody. John Lyons (1981) remarks that "Language is purely human and not an

instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols."

This statement also shows that language is purely for humans and there is no use of instinct whatsoever involved in the use of language. The speakers of any language have the ability to use their language to say anything, including things they have never heard anyone utter before. In other words, it is the property of language that enables native speakers to make and understand an indefinitely large numbers of sentences, some of which may not have ever been spoken before. The quotation furthermore shows that animals are excluded from the notion of speaking a comprehensible language, as animals use instincts. Although humans have the tendency of using signs and gestures to communicate some desires and feelings, this does not mean that those are also languages but they rather just gestures. Calhoun, Light and Keller (1995:204) propose that "Language is a system of verbal and, in many cases, written symbols with rules about how those symbols can be strung together to convey more complex meanings".

In this quotation, language is portrayed as a combination of symbols or verbal systems that are uttered for the purpose or reason of making people realise what one feels or thinks about a particular situation or point. Language is, therefore, of vital importance because sometimes the written symbols are difficult or hard to interpret, but once language is employed, everyone can understand what they stand for. This gives us an idea why we say language is important. As such, Fromkin and Rodman (1993:25) argue that:

> There is no primitive language – all languages are equally
> complex and equally capable of expressing any idea in the
> universe. The vocabulary of any language can be expanded
> to include new words for new concepts.

According to Kembo-Sure and Webb (2001:112), it is important to note that there are always 'strong' languages and 'weak' languages. This means that, inspite of the initial assumption by policy makers that languages can coexist peacefully, this does not necessarily happen in multilingual societies. Instead, what often happens is a process of attribution that generally goes as follows: the economically and politically weaker language community becomes bilingual. In situations of language choice, there is an increasing preference for the stronger

language, so that the weaker language acquires a negative social meaning and becomes stigmatised. Once this happens, those who speak it becomes stigmatised. The speakers, therefore, lose faith in it, often regarding it as worthless and no good for significant functions. They conclude that it is pointless spending time and energy on the language. The language becomes functionally and stylistically reduced. The children who are born into these communities do not readily acquire their parents' language, with the result that inefficient intergenerational transfer or transmission of the language occurs. The language is now classed as endangered and something drastic needs to be done, otherwise the language dies out altogether. The *Wikipedia* (2008) points out that "In linguistics, language death is a process that affects speech communities where the level of linguistic competence that speakers possess of a given language is decreased."

According to the *Wikipedia* (2008), it is important to reflect that there are a number of instances that cause language death, depending on the circumstances and the manner in which it occurs. The total language death is when there are no longer speakers of a given language dialect remaining in a population where the dialect was previously used. Language death can sometimes be due to language shift, resulting in language loss. Language death occurs when a language ceases to have any speakers anywhere in the world. The language is assimilated into another speech community of numerical and/or technological superiority. Language death sometimes happens when the speakers of a particular language are wiped out by genocide or diseases. The devastating natural catastrophe, such as earthquakes, can also lead to language death.

According to Kembo-Sure and Webb (2001:114), it is important to reflect that a national legal system that encourages the suppression of a minority language and imposes the use of a majority language is considered to be promoting linguistic hegemony. This involves expanding the scope of one language at the expense of another, also called linguistic expansionism. When this leads to the loss of a minority language, we say that linguicide has been committed. It means that one language is responsible for the death of another language. Language hegemony also leads to discrimination. Those languages that have been discriminated against are said to have been subjected to linguicism, which is the linguistic equivalent of racism or tribalism.

The *Wikipedia* (2008) describes language revitalization as follows:

> Language revitalization is the attempt by interested parties, including individuals, cultural or community groups, government, or political authorities, to recover the spoken use of a language that is endangered, moribund or no longer spoken.

The idea behind this is that members of the community aim at returning the language that is dead, or is on the verge of dying out or endangered, to its normal use, and to be user-friendly for that matter. This language can progress only if its speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community and increase the wealth of the language in the education system. The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica Volume 10* (1991:9) proposes that "Revitalization is an organized attempt by some members of a society to contract a more satisfying culture."

The above quotation means that a purposeful means of damage control is undertaken to endeavour to restore life into the language so that the language can continue to serve its purpose in a more acceptable manner, be user friendly to a particular community and restore a conducive cultural climate to the society.

## 1.9    CONCLUSION

The envisaged research will investigate the possible remedy for the shortcoming of language marginalisation through the revitalisation of the language in question, with specific reference to Xitsonga.

## 1.10   ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

**Chapter One** deals with the background to the study, aim, and the methods of research.

**Chapter Two** presents the literature review pertaining to revitalisation and marginalisation of languages.  It treats topics such as language structures, language policies, and the definitions of language.

**Chapter Three** handles the significance of languages in the daily lives of people, for instance, issues such as the importance of language in the economic, educational, and social spheres, came under scrutiny.

**Chapter Four** examines the views of various respondents as far as the revitalisation  or marginalisation  of Xitsonga is concerned.

**Chapter Five** serves as the conclusion of the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present the literature review that pertains to the topic under scrutiny. The following crucial aspects are dealt with in detail, namely, the Pan South African Language Board, (its formation and its structures, its aims and objectives, its achievements, and its failures), the meaning of the concepts 'language', 'language death', 'language revitalisation', 'language policy' and 'the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa'.

### 2.2 THE PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD

The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was established in 1996 by an Act of Parliament, Act No. 59 of 1996. It has been established with the overriding aim of monitoring the language issues in the country. One of the aims of PanSALB is to promote multilingualism in South Africa.

PanSALB consists of three main structures, namely, the language units which are located in the government departments and the provinces, the National Language Forum and the South African Language Practitioners Council.

The function of the language units, amongst other aims, is to manage the implementation of multilingualism in all government departments. As a matter of urgency, the language unit is expected to close the gap which exists between the languages, by providing suitable conditions for translation and interpreting. On the other hand, the National Language Forum is acting as an advisory body to the Technical Committee and Ministers and members of the Executive Council (MECs), so that they can scrutinise and prioritise language projects as well as to drive the advocacy campaign as far as language issues are concerned.

The South African Language Practitioner Council is responsible, amongst other functions, for the managing and training, accreditation, and the registration of the language practitioners in South Africa. PanSALB, therefore, has an obligation to ensure that all languages in South Africa are respected and are given the support to develop to their full potential. A very important ideal that PanSALB has set for itself is to make sure that all official languages in South Africa are developed in all respects and that they are used equally and enjoy the same parity.

The rights of all the languages and their status need to be increased, especially those indigenous languages whose rights were restricted to certain regions at the commencement of the new dispensation in 1994. As a matter of fact, people are urged to make use of these languages appropriately in all circumstances. Furthermore, PanSALB has to ensure that the language resources of the Republic of South Africa must be utilised correctly and with great care. Language is a heritage, so, it must be preserved.

In spite of the noble intention of PanSALB, the indigenous languages, including Xitsonga, in South Africa face great challenges of which the most prominent are the dwindling numbers of students studying these languages as well as the tendency to use English in almost all official functions in the country.

## 2.3    LANGUAGE

Tollefson (1991:13) argues that:

> Language is one arena for struggle, as social groups seek to
> exercise power through their control of languages, and it is also
> a prize in this struggle, with dominant groups gaining control
> over languages.

As far as the quotation is concerned, it is clear that a language is an instrument or tool that can be used to either create or destroy. Moreover, it can be associated with a battle field or a boxing ring where the winners are identified. Language is particularly used in education where dominant and subordinate groups often engage themselves in a power struggle over recognition of the dominant diverse languages and cultures in the school curricula. Mention

must be made of the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools during the early seventies.  The Afrikaners used to show their aggressive behaviour in the fostering of their language.

If properly used, language can have good results but at times, language issues may bring about some uncalled for results.  The issue of genocide is used to eradicate some languages just for the sake of promoting other languages.  The people or the party that is in power have got the power to manipulate their language of choice to be the national or international language of their country.  This is in some way rude and a discrimination of some kind, because it does not take into account the value, norms, and standards of other languages.

According to the Asmara Declaration (17/01/2000), "Language and democracy are inextricably linked."  The declaration puts it to us that under no circumstance do we have to try and separate democracy from language, because the two issues are like twins.  The  fact of the matter is that when we talk about democracy, it has been achieved through the use of language, and language is used freely when there is democracy.  One can only articulate his or her point of view freely without any fear of victimisation when there is democracy.  The two aspects can be said to be married in community of property, in the absence of the other there is no healthy future.  When used in a democratic manner, language can have fruitful results.

Moreover, according to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996), Section 16(1), "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression."  This aspect of the constitution clarifies the fact that everyone is empowered by law to express his or her thoughts and ideas.  People are encouraged to ask questions or give inputs in the language that they know and understand.  No one is to be intimidated when using the medium of instruction that one understands.

Everyone is protected by law to express oneself freely without any fear or discrimination. All the eleven official languages of South Africa are protected by law.

The *Wikipedia* (2009/05/18) points out that:

> Language is a term most commonly used to refer to so-called, natural languages, the forms of communication considered peculiar to mankind there is no other animal in the whole universe that uses languages.

Hence it is said that language is 'peculiar' to mankind. This sense of belonging is dedicated to mankind. At times, it was argued by some scholars that animals have got languages too, but currently linguists argued strongly and proved it beyond reasonable doubt that language is only meant for human beings. All that we can say about animals is that they use instincts and certain signs and some different kinds of noises to communicate with one another. There is no animal in the whole universe that can use language just humans do. The use of language is not haphazard. Language is used following some rules and regulations which have been agreed upon by different stakeholders concerned. This is why each language has its own orthography.

Hence, Herbert (1993:4) argues that:

> Language indeed makes possible the interaction of human beings, their cooperation and competition, their quarrels and agreement.

People are, therefore, able to register their queries, dissatisfactions, feelings, points of view, and even the solutions to problems through the use of language. Language is regarded as a lubricant to problems.

The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1998:147) states:

> Language is a system of convectional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group and participants in its culture communicates.

Language is said to be a dynamic system that is used by human beings only to communicate with one another.  It is dynamic in the sense that it can be either in a written or verbal form.  This takes place specifically to members of a particular social group.

Furthermore, the *Children's Britannica* (1988:265) indicates that:

> Language is a system of sound which human beings use to communicate with one another; it is really a collection of signs or symbols, in which the words stand for objects or for actions or feelings.

When one speaks of language and its meanings, one often does so from the point of view of what it does or what one uses it for, that is, its functions.  One of the basic fundamental functions of language is to communicate information.  Language is used to interpret symbols or signs and give the meaning of each verbally.  Language, therefore, can be used to affirm or refute the propositions to represent arguments, to make suggestions, which means that the feelings or actions of a particular person or party are put under the spotlight.  It thus means that the language that is used must be user-friendly.

Fromkin and Rodman (1993:25) argue that:

> There is no primitive language; all languages are equally complex and equally capable of expressing any idea in the universe.  The vocabulary of any language can be expanded to include new words for new concepts.

This quotation lets, can deduce that language is not static, but dynamic as languages grow and expand by incorporating new orthography and the coinage of new words for new things to be on par with technology.

Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:1) aver that "language is seldom thought of as a problem".  To understand how they portray language as a problem, one has to reflect on the issue of 'no go areas'.  The issue of zenophobia is alive and kicking in many parts of South Africa.  Some people are called Makwerekwere because of the languages that they speak.  We often read in the media or watch people hacked to death because of the languages that they use.  Some

benefit from people who are not citizens of South Africa by hiring them because they are cheap labourers.  This cause clashes between the citizens of South Africa and the non-citizens of the country.

## 2.4    XITSONGA LANGUAGE

Xitsonga language, like all African languages in Southern Africa, owes its written form to the European missionaries, who came to Southern Africa during the 19th century with the overriding aim of spreading Christianity amongst the 'benign souls' of the Africans. Therefore, the Bible had to be translated into various indigenous languages spoken by the different groups the missionaries came into close contact with.  Of course, this would enable their converts to read the Bible in their own languages.  A standard language had, therefore, to be developed just as *Martin Luther King* in the 15th century had to combine the various German dialects to develop a standard German orthography.

The Swiss Missionaries faced the same challenges when they had to reduce Xitsonga language to writing.  There were different dialects of Xitsonga.

## 2.5    THE ROLE OF THE SWISS MISSIONARIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARD XITSONGA LANGUAGE

The Swiss Free Church of the Contou de Voud which supplied workers to the Parish Society in Lesotho began an independent mission in the Transvaal in 1873.  The first two theological students, Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creaux, started working among the Tsonga at Valdeziah in 1875.  In 1882, a second station was founded at Waterval which they named Elim.  It was later to be the headquarters of their missionary enterprises.  In 1879 the first four of their Gwamba candidates were sent to Morija in Lesotho to train as teacher evangelists under the leadership of Adolph Mabille, the leader of the Development Department of the Parish Mission Society.  These were Jonas Maphophe, Calvin Maphophe, Samuel Malale, and Jacobus Mashau.

In 1886 a translation of a part of the first Xitsonga Bible was completed which comprised of the book of Genesis, the Proverbs, and the Gospel of St Mark called *Buku ya Tshikwembu*. The Bible was solely based on the Sotho orthography.

For example:

(a)     *Vanhu* was *banu*.

(b)     *Vona* was *bona*.

In the meantime, other works were also published such as school manuals:

(a)     *Šipele ša šigwamba*.

(b)     *Butibi..*

(c)     *Buku ya Bahlayi*.

While the Swiss missionaries made an invaluable contribution in reducing Xitsonga to a written language, and laying bare the *Dictionary of the Tsonga Grammar*, for which some of them received laurels such as Junod and TH Scheneider, they however, did not master the idiomatic expressions of the Xitsonga language.  They tried to express European thoughts and ideas in the Xitsonga language.  It was  with the emergence of Xitsonga writers that the standard language was given full expression.

In 1907 the translation of the whole Bible was completed, but it was still based on the Xigwamba dialect.  In 1929 a revised edition was completed which was considered to be in the then standard language now called Xitsonga, whose orthography includes Xinkuna of the Letaba Lowveld and the Xikhosa of Magudu of Mozambique.  This remained the standard Bible in the standard language until the latest translation in the new orthography in 1981 under the chairmanship of Schneider.

## 2.6    DIALECT VARIATIONS

The Xitsonga dialects which combined to form the standard language could be classified as follows according to the geographical distribution:

- The Xinkuna of Letaba Lowveld;
- The Xigwamba of Valdeziah and Elim;
- The Xihlengwe of Malamulele;
- The Xin'walungu of N'wa-Mitwa and Makhuva;
- The Xikuleke of Mhinga and its surrounding areas;
- The Xihlave of Giyani-Mavundza;
- The Xihlanganu of Mnisi (Bushbuckridge); and
- The Xichangana of Mpisana (Thulamahashe).

In later years, Xitsonga speakers themselves contributed towards the development of Xitsonga by writing books in different genres.  The examples in this regard as mentioned in Bill and Masunga (1983) are:

*Sasavona* (Marivate, 1938); and
*Murhandziwana* (Baloyi, 1940).

Later on, a plethora of writers followed.  During the apartheid regime, the Language Boards were responsible for coordinating language matters of various indigenous languages.  This is why the Xitsonga Language Board Committee came into existence.   Currently, this committee has been replaced by the Xitsonga National Language Body under the auspices of the Pan South African Language Board.

## 2.7    REVITALISATION OF LANGUAGES

There might be some other researchers who conducted their research studies on the revitalisation of other languages at different points in time.    Therefore, their works will be

useful to this study because they will serve as a point of departure for this research study. As far as the idea of language growth and revitalisation is concerned, it goes hand in hand with the ideas of language dearth, language shift, language assimilation, language hegemony, linguistic expansionism, linguicide, linguicism, and language obsolescence. Languages, like all living organisms, can either grow or die, depending on the prevailing conditions.

Language death, as both an idea and reality, is not far fetched as one may think. In the history of human kind, there have been many languages that have already become extinct. According to the current estimates, there are about 6000 languages in the world, and of these, it is most likely that about half would cease to exist in the next fifty years (Crystal, 1991:1). Xitsonga language is one practical example of these endangered species of languages of South Africa that face such a challenge.

## 2.8    LANGUAGE POLICY OF SOUTH AFRICA

The *National Language Policy Framework Draft* (13 and 14 February 2003) states without any reasonable doubt that its plan is to promote multilingualism in South Africa and to develop and promote all the indigenous official languages that are used in South Africa, especially the Khoe and San languages, and to ensure the equitable access to the education system and to quality learning and success for all learners. All the official languages will be used equitably and enjoy the same parity of esteem.

Section 9(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) propounds that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against any one on one or more grounds, including, among other things, language and birth. The home language that one uses must not be used as a yardstick to measure and determine one's future. People must receive the service that they need in the language that they know and understand. Furthermore, Section 29(2) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, states that each one has the right to receive education in the official language of his or her choice. It is also important to take a glimpse at the language policy of some other neighbouring countries. The language policy of Namibia, Kenya and Mozambique will be scrutinised.

### 2.8.1 **The Language Policy of Namibia**

After the independence of Namibia in 1990, English became the official language of the country, while German, Afrikaans, and other indigenous languages to Namibia were recognised for the purpose of education and other forms of communication. As a result of this, only the few Namibians who speak English and are also fluent indigenous will be in the position to serve in government and other official positions.

### 2.8.2 **The Language Policy of Kenya**

According to Kembo-Sure (2000:13), Kenya declared English as the only language of instruction after the first three years of school. It is also regarded as the language of officialdom together with Kiswahili. This policy has led to a dramatic increase in the preference for, and the use of English. English has thus become a threat to the indigenous languages of Kenya.

### 2.8.3 **The Language Policy of Mozambique**

Before 1907 teaching took place in the vernacular and Portuguese, but from 1907 it was stipulated that no one was to run a school without the permission of the district administrator. Teaching was to be strictly in the vernacular and Portuguese, which the Swiss missionaries were not proficient in. For the first three years of schooling, teaching activities were to be in Portuguese as the medium of instruction. The Tsonga language was not catered for. This made the Tsonga language to be endangered. To make matters worse, proficiency tests were conducted for those who wanted to teach in the province at school. Before a license could be awarded to those who wanted to operate private schools, one had to undergo a proficiency test in Portuguese. Any teacher who was employed was to serve under probation for a period of one year. After this, one had to sit for the proficiency test again. If one did not impress in the Portuguese language, ones contract was terminated. The Portuguese administrator threatened to withdraw the subsidies from all Protestant run schools.

In 1929 all the teaching activities in all schools were to be in Portuguese in all school subjects. This new set-up nullified the earlier policy which allowed for teaching for the first three years in Vernacular and Portuguese. Teaching in Portuguese became compulsory. The publication facilities were state run, therefore, there was no way in which reading materials and other documents for Tsonga, Ronga, and Xitshwa could be obtained. The use of Xipele and Vahlayi which were vernacular books was stopped.

All the Tsonga educated elite who wanted to write books such as Bernardo Hon'wana, had to switch from the vernacular to Portuguese. But after the independence in the Seventies (70s) things have changed, but not significantly. Portuguese as a language still enjoys the lime light. Portuguese is the medium of instruction in the majority of schools whereas English is used as a second language in some schools. The Xitshwa and Xirhonga languages are used sparingly in formal situations.

## 2.9    LANGUAGE DEATH

Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:122) propound that "There are strong and weak languages". This means that, inspite of the initial assumption by policy-makers that languages can coexist peacefully, this does not necessarily happen in mutual societies. Some members of the community tend to think that if they incorporate their neighbours into their speech communities, they can form a big or large, if not a huge clan or society of their own.

Linguistically speaking, the disappearance of anyone's language constitutes an irretrievable loss to the nation, therefore, something drastic should be done as a matter of urgency to respond to the outcry. This situation can be curbed by promoting, and when it comes to the push, and if possible, sponsoring programmes, and other relevant or possible measures to rescue the endangered or dying out language. Although the exact scope is not yet known as to how far it is speeding up, the extinction of languages is progressing rapidly in many parts of the world, especially  with Xitsonga. It is extremely important that the linguistic profession should realise that it has to set up its descriptive efforts.

The Xitsonga speech community is facing a stark reality.  Much of what it has at its disposal will not be available to the future generations unless something drastic about the language is done.  It looks as if the cultural heritage of many people is crumbling while we stand and look on, doing nothing about it.  If we do not want to shoulder the blame for having stood by and do nothing about it, we must revive the pride and status of the language.

Section 6(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa deals with the issue of developing and transforming the indigenous languages into languages of business and economic mobility.  The statistics show that a larger number of the languages of the world are disappearing into thin air.  There are different ways in which language death can manifest itself in a speech community.  The distinguished forms of language death are linguicide which encompasses the following forms:

- Sudden language death.
- Language death by genocide.
- Physical language death.
- Biological language death.

According to Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:113), "Language death occurs when a language ceases to have any speakers anywhere in the world."  As far as this is concerned, language and human beings are interrelated.  When we talk of a language of a particular speech community, we refer to the people of that society, who communicate together in the same home language.  Once there is no one to utter a word in that language, it means that the language cannot be used any longer or anymore.  In such an instance, the language is said to be dead and buried.  Of course, there are various forces which perpetrate language death.  Another example is that of the Native American language, whose speakers experienced genocide at the hands of the white immigrants.

An epidemic can be another example of a deadly contributory factor, when the whole community is wiped out, leaving no one behind to further the activities of a speech community.  The generations to come will not be able to speak that language.  Sometimes the

speakers are there, but they have just abandoned their language for another language with a higher status.

According to the *Wikipedia* (2008/07/30), "Total language death occurs when there are no speakers of a given language idiom remaining in a population where the idiom was previously used." In this instance, the speakers of a given language do not exist any longer. As a result of the catastrophe, the language is going to vanish into thin air. There is no one who can account for the language disappearance at any given point in time. Therefore, it is a disaster as far as that language is concerned. The language is dead and buried with the language users.

Understandably, language and culture are passed from one generation to another by the members of the same speech community, but when there is no one who speaks a particular language, there is no one who can pass the norms, values, and standards of a culture of a language idiom. Therefore, the end result is the death of a language. A few centuries down the line, the language of that speech community will be forgotten. The language will not be spoken any longer.

There are, of course, different causes of language death of which the most important one is linguistic assimilation. This happens when the speakers of a certain speech community are assimilated into another speech community. Therefore, the language of the latter will gradually loose its status. As a result, it will not be spoken as well as it used to be, until it collapses. Nothing of significance is attached to the language, be it in written or spoken form, the language becomes useless, such that the users do not see any reason to study, write or speak the language in public or for other business. Much emphasis is attached to the new language, because they find it to be more user-friendly than their own home language.

Moreover, Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:113) state that "Language loss, a situation in which members of a speech community experience language shift, begin to lose fluency in their native language." According to the quotation, language shift occurs when the speech community is too reluctant to use its own language, but instead sticks to another language, a foreign language for that matter. The speech community does not have any interest in its

home language, because it does not have so many things to boost about. As a result of this they adopt a second language as the one that is more superior than their own home language. The pride and prestige of their own language is trampled upon. All what is left in their home language is a skeleton without flesh. A few years down the line, the language will be gone and forgotten. The very same speech community will forget the orthography of its own language, not to mention the idioms, proverbs, folktales, and most importantly, to speak fluently without code switching. The end result of this unfortunate scenario is nothing else but language death.

Moreover, the *Wikipedia* (2009/05/09) states that "A language is often declared to be dead even before the last native speaker of the language has died." This scenario reflect a sad state of affairs, because long before the members of the speech community cease to exist, their language can be declared and certified to be dead. Sometimes the scenario can be illustrated as follows: if there are only a few senior citizens in a speech community who can no longer bear children when they finally all die, the language will be dead too. Therefore, under such conditions the language can be said to be living dangerously. It can be through natural death or other catastrophe, but the bottom line is that all will come to a standstill. This means that there will be no one to use that language for communication and other related activities, then the language is said to be facing an effective death. Once a language reaches such a devastating stage, it is considered to be completely dead.

## 2.10  LANGUAGE REVITALISATION

Research has shown that at times language death can be turned around, or the process can be reversed. But it all depends on the state of the damage caused to that particular language. Damage done sometimes is not easy to undo. But it is understood that the Hebrew language in Israel has been revived. However, such cases are rare. Therefore, the frequent use of a language by its speakers will make the language popular. The more popular the language, the more its prestige will be increased.

The *Wikipedia* (2008/07/30) points out that:

> Language revitalization is the attempt by interested
> parties, including individuals, cultural or community
> groups, government or political authorities, to recover
> the spoken use of a language that is endangered,
> moribund, or no longer spoken.

As far as the quotation is concerned, there are some people who are language conservationists who care about the well-being of languages. More so, are the linguists, the individuals who care about their future. This particular groups will try by all means to restore the pride of their languages. The death of one language is a loss to the whole universe. As a result of this death, there will be no means to pass the cultural heritage of that language from one generation to the next. That is why it is a serious concern. Therefore, something drastic needs to be done, to try and put back life into the language. The language has to be resuscitated so that it can start to live again.

Therefore, it is vital that when we see a sign that resembles the death of a language, we must act upon it immediately. We must use all that is at our disposal to revitalise our languages which are endangered. Consultations with language researchers can be of vital importance in trying to bring about new words and boost the terminology of a language. The orthography of a language can be started and all the stakeholders must be involved to help in the process. No language must just vanish into thin air, without any attempt to bring it back to life. There is no single language which is not important, such that it must be left to die out just like that.

The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1991:10) states that: "Revitalisation is an organised attempt by some members of a society to contract a more satisfying culture."

It is, therefore, necessary to take a close look at the relationship between language and culture. If it is realised that the future of a certain culture is bleak and uncertain, some concerned members do not just take it for granted. As a matter of concern they look for means and ways of getting a remedy to stop the carnage of a language. Language and culture are interrelated, because there is no way in which we can address the one without

mentioning the other. In upgrading our cultures we are also upgrading our languages because the two issues are dynamic, not static. The next chapters will discuss detailed steps that should be undertaken in order to revitalise the use of Xitsonga in South Africa.

## 2.11   CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed, amongst other things, a range of work by some scholars that have attempted to describe the different aspects of language, language death, the causes of language death, and the remedial works that can be done to overcome the problem of language. This chapter also identified aspects that deal with the language policy in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and also presented the language policies of Namibia, Kenya and Mozambique.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE IMPORTANCE OF XITSONGA IN DAILY DISCOURSE

### 3.1     AIM OF STUDY

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the importance of languages and also to indicate the possible threats to our languages with particular reference to Xitsonga language.

### 3.2     THE IMPORTANCE OF XITSONGA AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

There is no doubt that the Xitsonga language is a means through which Xitsonga speaking people are able to express themselves, be it in times of sorrow, crises, or happiness.  Ngugi (1981:4) propounds that:

> The choice of a language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to the entire universe.

This quotation thus states that the way we talk, dress, address others, the way we present ourselves before people, the common food we eat, and how we relate to others, depict our culture.   The language that we use depicts who we are.  Through the use of this language we can alert and make people aware of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.  It stands to reason that culture and language are interrelated.  The two aspects are inseparable; they are interwoven.

Moreover, Ngugi states that "language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the African of the 20<sup>th</sup> century".  Every society should be proud of the language that it has.  Therefore, the language needs to be taken care of.  Xitsonga language just like any other language, is inseparable both as a means of communication and as a carrier of the culture of those people to whom it is a home language.

Children must first, and foremost, know who they are, where they come from and where they are going.  It is wise, therefore, to instill in the children while they are still young the knowledge of their cultural background of their speech community.  It is also ideal to alert the children and make them aware of their home language.

## 3.3  XITSONGA AS A HOME LANGUAGE

Xitsonga language is glorified as one of the eleven official languages of South Africa together with Tshivenda, Tswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, siSwati, Sepedi, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English.  Xitsonga language is spoken at home, school, church, market place, and at social gatherings by children and adults as a means of communication, to transfer norms, values, and standards.  According to Calteaux (1994:108),

> A home language is understood to be a mixture of two or more
> languages used either simultaneously or interchangeably in a
> home situation.

Because of the willingness to communicate with each other, a speech community uses a language that it has agreed upon to exchange ideas, information, and communicate with each other and that is their home language because only members of that speech community understand how to use the language effectively and economically.  Xitsonga language is, therefore, used as a first language at home and at school from Grade R to Grade 12, and can be used at the higher levels of education in South Africa.

### 3.3.1  South Africa's Population

South Africa is a nation of over 47 million people of diverse origins, cultures, languages, and beliefs.  According to the mid 2007 estimates, the country's population stands at some 47,9 million while the census count of 2001 was 44,8 million.

### 3.3.2   South Africa's Population by Race

According to statistics, Africans are in the majority at just over 38 million, making up 79,6% of the total population.   The White population is estimated at 4,3 million (9,1%), the Coloured population at 4,2 million (8,9%), and the Indian and Asian population  at just less than  1,2 million (2,5%).

While more than three quarters of South Africa's population is Black Africans, this category is neither culturally nor linguistically homogenous.

### 3.3.3   South Africa's Population by Language

Nine of the country's eleven official languages are Africans. They are reflecting a variety of ethnic groupings which, nonetheless, have a great deal in common in terms of background, culture, and descent.   Africans include the Nguni people, comprising the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and Swazi, the Sotho-Tswana people comprising the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho (Tswana); the Tsonga, and the Venda.

### 3.3.4   The  Population  Groups in Percentage

The graph below displays the population groups in percentages.

**TABLE 3.3.4.1:**       SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION BY LANGUAGE

| Language | % |
|----------|------|
| Afrikaans | 13,3% |
| English | 8,2% |
| isiNdebele | 1,6% |
| isiXhosa | 17,6% |
| isiZulu | 23,8% |
| Sepedi | 9,4% |
| Sesotho | 7,9% |
| Setswana | 8,2% |
| siSwati | 2,7% |
| Tshivenda | 2,3% |
| Xitsonga | 4,4% |

Buwa (2000:1) stresses the fact that:

> Language is the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge; it is the most significant tool in education.  Mother-tongue instruction, especially in the early years of child education, has been proven to be more effective in the educational process than the use of some other languages as a medium of instruction.  African countries with the highest rates of literacy have invariably been those, like Lesotho and Tanzania, where African language occurs.

It is thus clear  that language is the most convenient means which people use to communicate their feelings, thoughts, and ideas.  In education too it is used to impart knowledge and to mould the child to become a responsible adult.  This is more convenient when the child is taught in the language that one knows and understands well.  That is the mother-tongue of the learner.  It has been tried and tested in Lesotho and Tanzania and the results are a hundred percent for mother-tongue instruction.

Furthermore, Buwa (2000:1) advocates the fact that:

> Language accelerates development and promotes productivity, by reaching directly to workers who understand instructions best when they are given in their own languages. Similarly workers respond that to training in their own languages.

According to the above quotation, the use of the mother-tongue in the workplace have proven to be successful because the workers do not need an interpreter. The workers readily understand what is expected of them. Productivity increases when workers are instructed in their mother-tongue. The same applies to training the workers. They show their skills and capabilities at an alarming rate.

## 3.4 THREATS TO XITSONGA LANGUAGE

This section discusses a few aspects that are deemed to be treats to African languages in general and Xitsonga in particular. Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:2) indicate that:

> The symbolic meaning of a language can also have serious consequences, as happens in ethnic killings when people are killed for speaking a certain language.

The current scenario which happened in Gauteng Province where people have been hacked to death for speaking languages which are said to be foreign, Xitsonga is one of these languages. These languages are not wanted. As a result, many Xitsonga speaking people are afraid to speak Xitsonga in public or even to be associated with it. If this negative development is not arrested, it means that many young people will end up abandoning Xitsonga as their home language. The end results will be the dwindling numbers of Xitsonga speaking people.

The dominance of English and other European languages is seen as a threat to the survival of African languages, including Xitsonga. This is why the Asmara Declaration (2000:1) articulates that:

Colonialism and neo-colonialist created some of the most serious obstacles against African languages and literatures. We noted with concern the fact that these obstacles still haunt Africa and continue to block the mind of the continent. We identified a profound incongruity in colonialism for the continent.  At the start of a new century and millennium, Africans must reject this incongruity and affirm a new beginning by returning to its language and heritage.

The days of  slavery have impacted so much on the blood of the Africans that even  to-date people are afraid to show their strength and true colours.  People still do acts of being busy bodies.  There is no confidence in the mind of Africans, because people still  believe that is only the White man who is creative and clever.  Africans are warned that in the new millennium people must reject to be led but must be leaders. Africans must take initiatives and lead the way.

The promotion of European languages at the expense of our indigenous languages has made so many Africans turn their backs against their heritage.  Hence *Ngugi wa Thiongo* (1986:11) points out that:

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school.  The culprit was given corporal punishment three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as 'I AM STUPID" or "I AM A DONKEY".

One can deduce that the classification of languages is often seen as a question of attitude. The Europeans had a negative attitude towards African indigenous languages, because they referred to African languages as vernaculars, a stigmatised term from the look of things, because it implied that these languages were somehow not proper languages and their speakers were not proper people because they were called by names.  Indigenous languages are also associated with poverty, backwardness, and inferiority.  This kind of scenario is still prevailing in some parts of South Africa.  A large number of African parents take their children to the so-called Model C schools because they believe that if their children are fluent in English, they are clever.

Another aspect that is seen as a threat to the African languages is known as language expansionism. Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:114) also state that:

> Language expansionism refers to the expanding of the scope of one language at the expense of another. It is also sometimes called linguistic hegemony. This can also lead to discrimination, and, when this happens, these discriminated against are said to have been subjected to linguicism, which is the linguistic equivalent of racism or tribalism.

Truly speaking, the quotation puts it to us that the social significance of languages, the social status and the roles that languages play in the societies are not taken into consideration by other giant languages or people who are in power. They do what suits them and forget about the members of the society whose rights are being infringed. Small languages are often swallowed by giant languages just as English is now doing to many languages in South Africa.

Another predicament in the issue of language is that called language attrition. Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:115) state that:

> Language attrition is experienced when the language becomes functionally and stylistically reduced, and begins to lose vocabulary. The next stage is language obsolescence, the language exists, but is used rarely or not at all. Once a language has reached this stage, its native speakers generally speak it only with hesitance, and tend to use a simplified form of it, as some of its rules have been lost.

This does not sound good at all. Ignorance is a dangerous weapon. The ignorance of the ethnolinguistic will put our languages in jeopardy. Ethnolinguistics is the study of language with specific reference to its cultural context and is related to socio-linguistics. Really, this is not good to our languages, we must guard against such tendencies, and avoid them as much as we can to preserve the heritage of our language. Once we forget the rules of our language we are dead and buried while we are still alive. In fact, it must be brought to the attention of the language users that the disappearance of a single language is a blow to the whole universe, because to revive a language is expensive.

Besides the afore-mentioned threats to languages, language assimilation is another great threat to the existence of some languages. Calhoun, Light and Keller (1994:250) describe assimilation as follows:

> The adoption of prevailing norms and values is part of the process of assimilating the incorporation of a minority group into the culture and social life of the dominant group so that the minority eventually disappears as a separate, identifiable unit.

This principle, therefore, does not respect the well-being of other languages. This process of assimilation leaves much to be desired, because minority languages of South Africa such as Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and siSwati are endangered. At any point in time these languages can be swallowed up the majority languages.

## 3.5 LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION

A policy is a set of ideas or plans that are used as a basis for making decisions on the use of a language. Xitsonga as a language of communication, operates within some parameters which stipulate how it should be applied at schools. *Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* states that:

> Everyone has got the right to receive education in the official language of their own choice in the public educational institutions. Furthermore, it is said that all the official languages of South Africa are to be developed in all respects and that they are used equitably and must enjoy the same parity.

The ideal thing as far as the above quotation is concerned is that all the languages of South Africa must be treated equally, and must be used equally because they are all capable of serving the needs and wants of the people who use them. Therefore, they must all be given the honour that they deserve. The Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education and Training, Palesa Tyobeka, states that "learners choose the language of teaching upon application for admission". This statement supports the statement from the Constitution that states that everyone has got freedom of choice when it comes to language. Furthermore, it is

said that the school governing body is empowered to determine the school language policy. According to the language policy in education, there must be one approved official language in Grades 1 to 2. Then offer a language of learning and teaching and at least one approved additional language as a subject after completion of Grade 3.

From Grade 10 to 12, there has to be at least two languages of which one must be a home language, and the other language taken as a first additional language. Furthermore, the educational policy of the Republic of South Africa goes instructs that the contextual factors are a huge determinant in the uptake of the language in education policy, which encourages multilingualism as an extension of cultural diversity and an integral part of building a non-racial South Africa.

Section 9(3) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* alludes to the issue of protection against unfair discrimination on the grounds of language, while Sections 30 and 31(1) refer to the people's rights in terms of cultural, religious, and linguistic participation and enjoyment. No one is to be refused to attend a school of his or her choice because of the language that uses. The indigenous languages are seen as the basis for the future development and empowerment of the African people.

## 3.6  NORTHERN PROVINCE PROVINCIAL LANGUAGE POLICY (2001)

In August 1995 the provincial language policy was reviewed and it was announced in February 1997 and was introduced to schools in 1998. The provincial language policy is on par with the provision of language policy of the *Republic of South African Schools Act* (1996). The *Northern Province Schools Act* (1996) now known as *Limpopo Province Provincial Language Policy* (2001:7-8) reads as follows:

| Phase | Grade | Language Policy | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Foundation Phase | R | All the three learning programmes in a language chosen by the School Governing Body (SGB).<br><br>All 3 learning programmes in a language chosen by the SGB.<br><br>A second language ($L_2$) as encompassed in the literacy learning programme is optional as an additional programme. | Language should preferably be a mother-tongue.<br><br>Primary language ($L_1$) or one of the official languages.<br><br>A language of learning and teaching should preferably be mother-tongue. Primary language ($L_1$) the official languages or one of the official languages. |
| | 2 | All 3 learning programmes in the language of learning and teaching. A second language ($L_2$) as encompassed in the literacy learning programmes is compulsory as an additional programme. | |
| | 3 | All 3 learning programmes in language of learning and teaching.<br><br>A second language ($L_2$) as encompassed in the literacy learning programme is compulsory as an additional programme. | Learners face as exist of the phase being exposed to two languages. |

| Phase | Grade | Language Policy | Comments |
|-------|-------|-----------------|----------|
| | 4 | All 5 learning programmes in one of the languages offered in Grade R-3, may be a language of learning and teaching or second language ($L_2$) of the foundation phase.<br><br>A second language ($L_2$) encompassed in the language literacy and communication. Learning programme, language literacy and communicate as started in the foundation phase.<br><br>A third language (L3) encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning programme is optional as an additional programme. | Flexibility allows for a change in a language of learning and teaching. |
| | 5 | All 5 learning programmes in language of learning and teaching.<br><br>A second language ($L_2$) encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning programme as started in the foundation phase.<br><br>A third language as encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning rogramme is compulsory as an additional programme. | |

| Phase | Grade | Language Policy | Comments |
|-------|-------|-----------------|----------|
| | 6 | All 5 learning programmes in language learning and teaching.<br><br>A second language ($L_2$) encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning programme as started in the foundation phase.<br><br>A third language ($L_3$) as encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning programme is compulsory as an additional programme. | Learners exit the phase having been exposed to three languages. |
| Senior Phase | 7 | 8 Learning programmes in a language of learning and teaching as in the Intermediate phase.<br><br>Continue learning the languages ($L_2$) and ($L_3$) introduced in the intermediate phase. A fourth language ($L_4$) as encompassed in the language literacy and communication learning programmes is introduced as an additional/optional programme. | |
| | 8 | 8 Learning programmes in (LOLT) as in the Intermediate Phase. Continue learning the additional/optional programme, language ($L_4$) introduced in. | |

| Phase | Grade | Language Policy | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 9 | 8 Learning programmes in (LOLT) as in the intermediate phase. Continue learning the languages $(L_2)$ and $(L_3)$ introduced in the intermediate phase 7. Continue learning the additional/ optional language $(L_4)$. | Learners exit the phase having been exposed to 3 or 4 languages. |
| Further Education and Training | 10-12 | Unit standards to be offered in the language chosen by the learner. Unit standards can be offered in any of the 11 official languages. | |

It is interesting that in state schools where the majority of learners are speaking Xitsonga, the language Xitsonga is offered as a primary language, and English is offered as the first additional language and Afrikaans as a second additional language. Private schools that offer English as the primary language, offer Xitsonga as the first additional language and Afrikaans as the second additional language, whereas those who offer Afrikaans as primary language prefer to offer English as the first additional language. There are also schools that offer a third additional languages. Such schools take any of the official languages and their third additional language.

## 3.7    CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed various threats to the existence of languages in general and Xitsonga in particular. The most common threats are expansionism, symbolic meaning of a language, zenophobia, colonialism and neo-colonialism, language attrition, language obsolescence, and language assimilation.

In addition, the chapter also presented language policies that pertain to South Africa. For instance, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the language policy in education and the Northern Province (to-date) known as the Limpopo Province provincial policy, came under scrutiny. All the policies indicate that South Africans have the right to use languages of their choice in all respects.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1  INTRODUCTION

The aim of the chapter is to present and analyse the respondents' responses to various factors that play a role in the diminishing the status of the revitalisation  of Xitsonga.  In order to achieve this aim, the following topics will come under scrutiny, namely, the dominant role of English and the measures that can be invoked in revitalising Xitsonga.

### 4.2  THE ROLE OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS XITSONGA LANGUAGE

As far as the role of attitude is concerned regarding the status of Xitsonga, the researcher conducted interviews among the following respondents.  It is worthwhile that the causes of the attitude that the people have towards the Xitsonga language be examined.

The following table shows the number of  respondents and their responses to the questions as posed by the researcher.

**TABLE 4.2 (A)**

| Respondents | Number of respondents | Number of respondents whose responses were possible | Number of respondents whose responses were negative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educators | 10 | 9 | 1 |
| Lecturers | 5 | 5 | - |
| Pan South African Language Board | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Language Research and Development Council | 5 | 5 | - |

4.2.1  **Educators**

An interview was conducted with ten Xitsonga educators, and nine of the educators supported the fact that the negative attitude the people have towards the language is the main obstacle in researching the status of Xitsonga.  They pointed out that the reluctance by the language speakers to speak the language at home and in public, make the language lose value and too little meaning is attached to it.    What all these mean is that many Xitsonga speakers are not proud of their language and culture.

It is also said that Xitsonga language is a language of the minority, therefore, it is not worth listening to.  This language is also said to be an outcast.  The very same people who are the language users shun their language, and they look down upon themselves and their language.

Nine of the educators agreed on the fact that one of the contributory factors towards the marginalisation  of  Xitsonga language causes the dominance by the English language.  In the past, children were punished for speaking their mother-tongue at school, and were therefore, encouraged to speak English.  The result is that they tend to speak English also when they are at home.   This creates tension between children and their parents who are unable to communicate in English, and in the process the children lose their identity.   Children think that attending school in the former model C schools makes one a better and more advanced person.

Only one respondent on the educator's point of view did not see anything sinister with the way in which Xitsonga and other African language are treated in South Africa.

4.2.2  **Lecturers**

Other interviews were conducted with the Xitsonga lecturers.  Five interviewees were consulted and their responses were similar to the one given by the educators.  The lecturers stated that most of the educator trainees argue that they would not teach Xitsonga because it has got nothing that they can boost about.  Moreover, these teachers trainees were of the

opinion that Xitsonga has got a shallow vocabulary. There is nothing that one can be proud of in the teaching of the language. Many Xitsonga speakers do not show any respect for indigenous languages.

The lecturers felt that the fact that there are languages that enjoy more privileges than the others cannot be disputed. The fact that the school governing body chose English as the language of learning and teaching has created a vacuum between the indigenous languages and English, and has made English more popular. Therefore, indigenous languages such as Xitsonga, play second fiddle to English. The lecturers were adamant that children should be encouraged to learn both English and mother-tongue at school. Instead of taking children from the rural areas to the former model C schools in the urban areas where English is dominant, learners should be encouraged to stay in schools where they would receive tuition in the Xitsonga language.

### 4.2.3 The Pan South African Language Board

Furthermore, interviews were conducted with members of the Pan South African Language Board. Ten members were interviewed and six responded that people sometimes show their ignorance by being reluctant to identify themselves as Xitsonga speakers. According to the members of the Board, children will only be competent in the global world when they have a bilingual foundation. Children's linguistic experience in the home is the foundation for their future. Provision must, therefore, be made that children build on this foundation rather than undermine it.

Children often display their ignorance when it comes to language issues because they do not participate in the language activities which concern their language future. This result in decisions being taken on their behalf. The PanSALB members further stated that the ignorance of the social significance of the languages varieties of the language is one aspect that proves that the Xitsonga speakers too have a negative attitude towards their own language.

The PanSALB members also stated that the fact that there is no time where the language users converge to consolidate the different opinions and ideas among their language in a speech community is proof that people have no interest in the well-being of their language. This is a display of a negative attitude towards Xitsonga. In addition, the fact that the traditional standards and norms of the language are no longer followed is a sign of the attitude that people have towards the Xitsonga language. The four members of PanSALB did not see anything wrong with the attitude displayed.

According to the members of PanSALB, the dominance of the English language is evident when people are engaged in a conversation. People often code-switch because they do not want to struggle to search for the correct words in the mother-tongue. They would rather opt for English as the solution.

PanSALB has established National Language Bodies (NLBs), Provincial Language Committees (PLCs), and National Lexicographic Units (NLUs). The NLBs, each official language in South Africa has a National Language Body whose main task is to develop and promote the language in terms of orthography, literature, literacy, to mention but a few. As many African languages in South Africa do not have adequate dictionaries, PanSALB created NLUs to compile a variety of dictionaries for this languages. Lastly, PanSALB works hand in hand with the provinces when it comes to language matters. In order to achieve this goal, all provinces in the country have established Provincial Language Committees that are responsible for the development and promotion of their respective official languages. For instance, the Limpopo Provincial Language Committee is tasked with the development of the following languages: Sepedi, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Isindebele, English and Afrikaans.

### 4.2.4  Language Research and Development Council

Lastly, five members of the Xitsonga Language Research and Development centre were interviewed. These members of the language research and development highlighted the fact that there were no village language committees to uplift and advise on the proper use of the Xitsonga language. This shows  that people do not care much about their languages.

The members of the Language Research and Development Council further highlighted the fact that the decline of the mother-tongue authors, both in literature and grammar, is proof that some people have developed a negative attitude towards Xitsonga.

Furthermore, the members of the Council stated that there is also the limited exposure of the Xitsonga language in the media such as on TV which is a mass media. This shows that the attitude that the authorities have towards Xitsonga is also negative. What is more disturbing, according to those members, is that even in interviews where all the participants are Xitsonga speakers for a Xitsonga related job, one find that English is still used as a means of communication.

The Language Research and Development Council members further mentioned that, the fact that not all the indigenous languages are used in the auto teller machines clearly shows that English is rated number one.

The views of the respondents on the role of attitude on the demuse or revitalisation of Xitsonga as discussed above may be summarised as follows:

**TABLE 4.2(B)**

| Respondents | No. of respondents | Negative attitude | Positive attitude | Negative attitude % | Positive attitude % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educators | 10 | 9 | 1 | 90% | 10% |
| Lecturers | 5 | 5 | 0 | 100% | 0% |
| PanSALB | 10 | 6 | 4 | 60% | 40% |
| Language Research and Development Council | 5 | 5 | 0 | 100% | 0% |

From this table, it is evident that a negative attitude towards Xitsonga still plays a major role in the diminishing status of Xitsonga.

## 4.3 MEASURES THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS THE MARGINALISATION OF THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE

In this section, the researcher is going to deal with the suggestions provided by the educators, lecturers, and the Pan South African Language Board, Language Research and Development Council members. The suggestions and/or the measures that can be implemented to address the issues of the marginalisation of the Xitsonga language will be categorised according to themes as most of the above mentioned respondents gave similar views on this issue.

### 4.3.1 Promotion of Home Language

In this section, the researcher scrutinised the factors that can be of significance in the eradication of the stumbling blocks in the use of the Xitsonga language and propose the use of those that can help to solve the problem of the marginalisation of the home language.

The education system in the country is biased against the indigenous languages. One can, however, exonerate this present system, because it inherited a discriminatory state that relegated all the indigenous knowledge in favour of English and Afrikaans. There was a stage where our home languages counted nothing, but now there is an attempt by educationists to put the home language on par with English and Afrikaans. Therefore, the state must play a leading role in shifting the patterns of treating all languages equally. It is not rare to find in an exclusively Xitsonga school, pupils conversing in the Sotho language as if it was an exclusively Sotho school. Therefore, politicians and bureaucrats should create policies, procedures and practices that will promote the home languages.

Furthermore, the development of pupils' skills in performing advanced language based cognitive tasks such as the reasoning, understanding, and the explaining of abstract concepts in Xitsonga can bring about a positive attitude towards Xitsonga. Authorities and parents should inculcate in the minds of the children the fact that the understanding and knowledge of the home language is a gateway to a larger world. The implication, therefore, is that ones language is a step towards knowing other languages and mastering the bigger world.

As a matter of fact, for the Xitsonga language to grow  the very first language speakers must play a leading role.  Among others, the Pan South African Language Board can be used as a vehicle to promote the Xitsonga language, because it has an obligation to promote all languages in the Republic of South Africa.

Another important aspect that can be of help in the promotion of Xitsonga, is the creation of translation and interpreting facilities.  If these facilities are provided, it will be possible to use Xitsonga in many public domains such as courts of law, Parliament, the Legislature, and wherever there is a need for it.

Translation will also help in eradicating the myth that Xitsonga cannot be used in the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics.  One is, therefore, appreciative of the fact that some publishers are engaged in the translation of study materials in Science and Mathematics from English to Xitsonga.

Moreover, institutions such as the post office, home affairs, hospitals, police stations, banks, including the auto teller machines must also have their documents ready in Xitsonga so that people will realise how worthwhile their language is.

The promotion of Xitsonga literary books can be achieved, among others methods, by using current themes rather than dwell on the themes that have been in use since the early 1900s.  In this regard new themes can be formulated on political parties, HIV/AIDS, global warming up.

In the past, many Xitsonga books concentrated on polygamy, Jim goes to Johannesburg, chieftainship and tendering for looking after domestic animals.  These themes are now outdated.

The training of workers in various industries must be done in Xitsonga as well so that those who are Xitsonga speakers can understand what is said or expected of them with ease.  Statistics show that production is very high where people are instructed in their mother-tongue so the managers must be shown the advantages of using mother-tongue or to be multilingual in general.

Furthermore, the Xitsonga language related meetings which are organised must be conducted in the home language. The minutes of the meetings must be written in the home language as far as meetings are concerned. Services pertaining to weddings, funerals, graduation parties, birthday parties and thanksgiving parties, must be conducted in Xitsonga. It is an anomaly for a group of Xitsonga language speakers to speak in English for communication whilst all of them have Xitsonga as their home language.

## 4.4    THE IMPACT OF THE MEDIA ON OUR DAILY LIVING

In this section the researcher dwells on how the media can be of importance in the fight against the marginalisation of the Xitsonga language.

It is, therefore, suggested that the excessive exposure of the language in the media such as Xitsonga newspapers and television through drama, songs, poetry and advertising can do much to redress the imbalances as far as the marginalisation of Xitsonga is concerned. Billboards can also be written in Xitsonga.

## 4.5    THE IMPACT OF XITSONGA NAMES

In as far as this section is concerned, the researcher indicates how the indigenous names can bring about changes in the perception that people have towards Xitsonga.

It is, therefore, significant that it is pointed out that the indigenous names have got symbolic meanings. As a result, the naming of roads, villages, and towns in indigenous names can attach more meaning to the language. In addition to the above-mentioned, giving ones new born baby a vernacular name can help to increase the status of the language.

## 4.6   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL CLOTHES

In this section the researcher deals with the impact that traditional clothes can do to revive the language.

The tendency, therefore, of putting on traditional regalia such as *xibelana* and *tinjovo* for some special occasions, can make people realise the talent and worthiness of the culture and beauty that is in that society. This can to a large extent change the perception that the people have towards Xitsonga speakers and the language itself. The Xitsonga speakers must therefore, display charismatic characters for the benefit of the language. The Xitsonga speech community must make the language to be viable and feasible.

## 4.7 THE IMPACT THAT THE LANGUAGE AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS CAN BRING ABOUT TO THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE

In this section the researcher deals specifically with the impact that the language awareness campaigns can have to revitalise the Xitsonga language.

It is, therefore, crucial to mention that the implementation by government and other stakeholders in language matters the issue of language awareness campaigns and roadshows can be of use. More importantly, the public servants should be encouraged to provide service to clients in their own mother tongues. The national language framework, therefore, deems it necessary that there must be a change in the culture of language use of the official languages in the government structures to make sure that the indigenous languages are increasingly engaged in a range of contexts.

## 4.8 THE IMPACT THAT THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN PROVIDE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE MARGINALISATION OF THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE

This section deals with the issue that the researcher feels it necessary to increase the status of Xitsonga in the teaching fraternity to combat the marginalisation of the Xitsonga language.

The prioritisation of the furthering of skills in the training in translation, editing, interpreting, lexicography, and terminology, will enhance the use of all languages in all spheres of life. As a matter of fact, the learning institutions must create and cater for appropriate education for the culturally and linguistically diverse children as the role of the children's mother tongue in their educational development is significant. Children should, therefore, be encouraged to learn both English and the mother tongue at school under the same auspices rather than taking children to the former model C schools to go and learn English. It has been researched, and the results show that children perform better at school when they are taught in their mother tongue. Therefore, children must be encouraged to only use code-switching and coinage as well as foreign expressions if all the measures have been exhausted to try and find the equivalent for a word or expression in the first language.

Therefore, as a matter of the back to school campaigns, government should make resources available to all schools mainly for the primary and secondary school education, to promote the previously marginalised languages.

4.9    **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the views of various respondents pertaining to the demise or revitalisation of Xitsonga. Most of the respondents concur that the negative attitude that Xitsonga speakers have towards the language plays a major role in the demise of it.

It has also been established that mother-tongue education is important as it gives one a firm foundation on literacy and cognitive skills. Lastly, the chapter has also presented the measures that can be implemented in order to revitalise Xitsonga. Amongst many other factors, Xitsonga could be promoted by offering it at schools, writing, also depicting interesting themes in Xitsonga books, and the use of Xitsonga in areas such as entertainment, media, and business industries.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION

### 5.1    INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to give a summary of the findings and the recommendations of the research study.

### 5.2    SUMMARY

**Chapter One** deals specifically with the aims of the research study, and research methods, and the causes of the marginalisation of  Xitsonga.

**Chapter Two** discusses the literature review,  the structure of Pan South African Language Board, the aims of the Board, its achievements, and the challenges to the Board, the significance of language, language policy of  South Africa and the neighbouring countries, and language death.  The chapter also discusses the role of the Swiss missionaries in the development of the standard Xitsonga language, dialect variations and lastly, language revitalisation.

**Chapter Three** explores the importance of the Xitsonga language as a means of communication, the threats that the language faces as a means of communication, the role of Xitsonga as a medium of teaching and learning, and the language policy in education.

**Chapter Four** analyses the threats that the Xitsonga language faces such as the dominance of Xitsonga by other languages, more particularly English, the negative attitude that people develop towards Xitsonga, and the measures that can be involved to revitalise the Xitsonga language.

**Chapter Five** serves as the conclusion of the study.

## 5.3   FINDINGS

♦   The research study discovered that English is still dominant in the school situation, the business and the government sectors.

♦   Most of the electronic devices make use of English and Afrikaans to communicate with customers.

♦   The diminishing status of Xitsonga is caused by the inferiority complex that some language speakers have towards the language.

♦   The marginalisation is caused by the limited exposure of the language in the media.

♦   There are no village language committees to advise on the proper language use.

♦   The poor translations hamper the development of Xitsonga.

♦   Code-switching has a negative impact on the use of Xitsonga.

♦   Many Xitsonga speakers still harbour a negative attitude towards Xitsonga by not speaking the language in public domains.

♦   Children perform better if they are taught in their mother-tongue.

## 5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations:

♦   The Xitsonga speaking people need to be positive, be united and pressurise the government to implement the language policy as it is stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).

♦ The negative attitude that people have towards Xitsonga can only be changed when and if the language speakers become aggressive and speak the language in all domains.

♦ The creation of translation and interpreting facilities can improve the use of Xitsonga in many public domains.

♦ Xitsonga speakers must come out and play a leading role in uplifting the status of the language by identifying themselves with the language.

♦ Parents and authorities should inculcate in the minds of children the fact that an understanding of the home language is a gateway to a larger world.

♦ The teaching of Mathematics and Science in the mother-tongue can bring about better results.

♦ The training of workers in factories in the mother-tongue can increase production.

♦ Politicians and bureaucrats should create policies, procedures, and practices that can promote the use of home language.

♦ The tendency of wearing traditional regalia such as *Xibelana* and *tinjoro* in public and during ceremonies can make people realise the talent and worth of the culture and beauty that is in a speech community, particularly Xitsonga.

♦ Excessive exposure of the language in the media, such as on television and in newspapers can change the negative attitude of the people.

♦ The naming of roads, villages, towns and newborn babies in indigenous names can increase the Xitsonga language.

♦ The promotion of Xitsonga literary books by using modern themes rather than dwell on themes that have been in use since the 1900s can lead to the increasing popularity of Xitsonga as a language.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

*African Language and Literature into the 21ˢᵗ Century and African Renaissance Initiative of the Native Club*, 2000.  Asmara Eritrea.

Bill, M.C., & Masunga, S.H. 1983.  *Mbilu ya Vutivi*.  Braamfontein:  Sasavona Publishers.

*BBC English Dictionary*, 1992.  Hammersmith:  Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd.

Buwa African Language and Literature into the 21ˢᵗ Century.  An African Renaissance Asmara Eritrea.

Calhoun,C., Light, D. & Keller, C.  1995.  *Understanding Sociology*.  New York: McGraw Hill.

Calteaux, K.V.  1994.  *A Sociolinguistic Analysis of a Multilingual Community*.  D.Litt et Phil. Thesis. Johannesburg:  Rand Afrikaans University.  (Unpublished).

*Census South Africa*, 2001.  15-16.  Pretoria:  Government Printers.

*Children's Britannica Volume 14*, 1988.  England:  Hazel Books.

Crystal, D.  1999.  *Language Death*.  www.e-mesh.com. [Accessed 2008/07/30].

*Encyclopaedia Britannica Volumes* 1, 3 and 9, 1994.  Helen Hemingway Benton Publishers.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 1998.  Hellen Hemingway Benton Publishers.

*Final Draft:  Language Policy and Planning for South Africa*, 6/11/2000.  Pretoria: Government Printers.

Finnegan, E. 1994. *Language: Its Structure and Use*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. 1993. *An Introduction to Language*. London: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

*Government Gazette*, Vol. 407, No. 2008, 28 May 1999. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Herbert, R.K. 1993. *Foundation in South African Languages*. Johannesburg: Wits Press.

Kembo-Sure & Webb, V. 2001. *African Voices: An Introduction to the Languages and Linguistics of Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

*Language Death. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia.* http://en. Wikipedia.org.wiki. language death, 7/22/2008 mhtml: File://E: [Accessed 2008/07/31].

*Language Death. Wikipedia.* http://assets.cambridge.org/97805210/12713/front matter/ 9780521012713 front matter.pd 1/23/2008 mhtml: File://E:Language Revitalisation. [Accessed 2008/07/30].

Lyons, J. 1981. *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Madadzhe, R.N. & Sepota, M.M. 2006. *The Status of African Languages in High Education in South Africa: Revitalisation or Stagnation in Education*. University of the North, Sovenga.

Mphahlele, M.C. 2002. *Transliteration Principles: Is this the Best Solution in Lexicography and African Language Terminology?* Pietersburg: University of the North. Sovenga.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981. *Decolonising the Mind*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

*Northern Province Provincial Language Policy*, 2002. Pretoria: Government Printers.

*Pan South African Language Board*, Act No. 59, 1996. Pretoria: Government Printers.

*Revised National Curriculum Statement Policy*, 2002. Pretoria: Government Printers.

*The Asmara Declaration*, 2000. An African Rennaissance Initiative of the Native Club, Asmara: Eritrea.

*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

*The South African Schools Act,* 1996. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Tollefson, J.W. 1991. *Planning Language in Inequality Language Policy in the Continuity.*

*Wikipedia.*