

BOARD NOTICES

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PANSALB'S POSITION ON THE PROMOTION OF MULTILINGUALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA: A DRAFT DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

PANSALB

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PANSALB's position on the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa:
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to explain PANSALB's understanding of multilingualism and language development in the context of language legislation embodied in the Constitution and other legal documents.

The Board's position on multilingualism is encapsulated in its mission statement below:

The mission of the Board is to promote multilingualism in South Africa by:

- creating the conditions for the development of and the equal use of all official languages
- fostering respect for and encouraging the use of other languages in the country and
- encouraging the best use of the country's linguistic resources in order to enable South Africans to free themselves from all forms of linguistic discrimination, domination and division; and to enable them to exercise appropriate linguistic choices for their own well being as well as for national development.

2. Guiding principles

The guiding principles for the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa are contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996, Clauses 6(1) - (5)) and the PANSALB Act (Act 59 of 1995).

The Constitution contains a Bill of Rights, which is mainly premised on the notion of individual rights. The language clauses should thus be understood from the orientation of language as a right. In addition, the frequency of terms such as "status.", "use", "usage" point clearly towards a paradigm which is also based on the functional or instrumental use of the languages of South Africa. The PANSALB Act, includes both these perspectives toward language, i.e. as both a right and a resource.

The purpose of the Bill of Rights is to ensure that South African society becomes one that is based on the firm democratic principle of equality. Hence, the purpose of the structures established in terms of the Constitution, is to assist in the democratisation of our society. PANSALB is one of these structures and thus its work will further democratic principles.

The Constitution identifies two agencies responsible for effecting these, namely government and PANSALB. Under the subsection on Languages Section 6 (1-5) of the Constitution unequivocally provide that:

"1. The official languages of the Republic of South Africa are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. 2.: recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indogenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and

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advance the use of these languages.

3. (a) The national and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purpose of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.

(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residences.

4. The national and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor the use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.

5. A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must

(a) promote, and create conditions for the development and use of.

- I. all official languages;
- II. the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
- III. sign language; and

(b) promote and ensure respect for

- I. all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and
- II. Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

It is clear from the above that government's responsibilities are identified in Section 6 (1-4), whereas PANSALB's responsibilities are spelt out in Section 6 (5).

3. Responsibilities of PANSALB

PANSALB's explicit role is to create the conditions for the development of and equal use of all official languages. This means that it must act in a manner which initiates, facilitates and empowers agencies both within state structures and civil society to contribute towards the development and use of all the official languages.

PANSALB must promote and create the positive environment for multilingualism in general, and includes, but is not limited to, the official languages. So whilst PANSALB needs to offer advice to government on language policy and planning for advancing the status and use of the official languages, this should not detract its attention from a broader focus of facilitating the receptive environment for the promotion of multilingualism. This includes the promotion of interlinguistic skills and development of the official languages as well as other languages used in South Africa.

It is generally accepted that the best way for language development to occur is for the language to be used. Obviously every South African language has been used, some more widely than others, and most unfortunately some have been discouraged from use and are in grave danger of extinction whilst others have, in effect, become extinct. For a language to survive, it must be used for a wide range of functions otherwise it begins to wither and die. Thus, were we to have allowed higher status functions to be limited to English and Afrikaans only, the other languages of the country eventually would begin to wither and die. We have seen this happen to many of the Khoi and San languages and their extinction is a loss not only to the communities, which used them, but it is a national disaster. We have heard very little about linguistic extinction in this country whereas we are familiar with notions about the danger of certain species of plants and animals becoming extinct. When a language dies, very often a whole body of knowledge dies with it. Thus the task at hand is to encourage the use of the official languages as well as all other languages used in South Africa, in a wider range of contexts and for an increasing range of purposes.

To put it plainly, we have to find the ways to ease channels of communication by insisting that our languages are used in public contexts for high level functions in order that their profiles increase and that they are heard to fulfill these functions successfully. Their use as lingua francas at local and even regional levels of economic activity needs to be publicly uncovered. Their usefulness in relation to indigenous knowledge must similarly be uncovered.

On the other hand, the over-estimated use and reliance upon English as a lingua franca needs simultaneously to be reassessed. Whilst isiZulu functions as a lingua franca for 70% of the country's population, English can only, at present, be used efficiently by only 20% of the population. Thus, communication from government, for example, in English can only reach a minority of people who are likely to comprise the educated middle class urban dwellers.

The Board recognises that it will have to develop the most sensible strategy to recover and build on the existing functional use of African (including Afrikaans, Khoi and San and South African Sign) languages in this country. It also has to ensure that maximum advantage is taken of what English and possibly other international languages have to offer.

In regard to our indigenous languages, a three-pronged approach needs to be followed, which simultaneously:

- engages in the development or elaboration of these languages, and
- explores and builds on the ways in which the users of cognate languages apply their multilingual skills to communicate.
- creates the conditions for extending the use of these languages.

In other words, the Board will undertake development activities specific to some languages as well as initiate development strategies, which build up interlinguistic communicative skills (such as translation, interpreting, language learning programmes, etc.). Our goal is always that of maximising multilingual communicative competence rather than increasing language barriers amongst people.

While the Constitution has identified 11 languages for official status, we need to understand that this arose out of a historical situation which had previously selected ten African languages and given limited official recognition to these. The official status of nine languages was extended to national level, adding them to the two former official languages (Afrikaans and English). This technicality may for the foreseeable future draw anger and resentment from linguistic communities who identify strongly with a language they believe to be different from the languages which now have official status. The Board's position is that it recognises and supports the use and development of each language in South Africa because fundamentally each language and its community are resources of national importance which must be recognised, supported and harnessed. At the same time, the Board's role is to ensure that in the promotion of multilingualism, it is promoting co-operation and easing the channels the communication, not fostering linguistic competition, division or separatism.

1 Under the previous dispensation recognition was given to Northern and Southern Ndebele. Under the current constitution this distinction has not been made. Instead IsiNdebele has been given official status.

The Board will spell out how languages without official status should receive practical recognition and promotion. Our position is to highlight the functional use and value of each language in an interdependent relationship with others. To focus on a hierarchical configuration of languages or the "official" status of a language versus the "unofficial" status of a language will not in a practical way contribute towards an environment which nurtures multilingualism or democracy. Rather, the Board believes that in the promotion of all languages, their use and development, it will be able to support democracy and the language rights of each linguistic community. The Board notes that there is a clear constitutional obligation for government, at national and provincial level, to elevate the status and advance the use of the official languages, which were historically diminished. In order for this to happen, the state must provide the necessary resources.

PANSALB's intention is to foster the environment in which organs of state and civil society, with an interest in language development, use and service provision, are encouraged to coexist. The common purpose would be to ensure that both language rights will be protected and the resources of each language and its users can be harnessed at all levels of society. To this end, PANSALB does not see itself in a patriarchal relationship with other language bodies; neither does it intend to become a punitive structure seeking to draw power unto itself. Rather it will continue to honour its obligation to create conditions conducive for multilingualism to flourish.

4. Language policy orientations

The selection of multilingualism over monolingualism, together with the principle of equal status of 11 languages foregrounds the direction of language policy. Ruiz (1984 and 1988) offers a way of viewing language from

three different theoretical positions, viz. language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource. Language planning specialists in Africa frequently refer to these views of language. In particular, the views of language as a right and language as a resource have come under intense discussion in the Francophone and Anglophone countries of Africa. A common thread in the work of Akinasso, Bamgbose, Chumbow, Elube, Djite, Mateene, Prah and Tripathi, amongst others, is that the resources which African languages have to offer, need to be uncovered and developed in order that the people of this continent are able to take charge of their destinies.

4.1 Language as a problem

This orientation is present in societies where the ruling ideology is segregation and or assimilation. The response to de facto multilingualism is to promote a language policy based on monolingualism, i.e. the elevation of the language of the ruling class.

South Africa is just emerging from a lengthy period of segregation and language policy based on the view that languages other than Afrikaans and English are problems. With the emergence of the new ruling elite, language as a problem continues to prevail. However, it is manifested through assimilationist tendencies.

4.2 Language as a right

This orientation is consistent with those societies which place store on the principles of equality. Our Constitution obliges us to develop language policy and plans from within this view. The issue of language as a right is very important, and one which has to be addressed seriously in this country, precisely because in the past, people's rights have been violated. One way of ensuring that language rights can be guaranteed is to view language from both the perspectives of language as a right and language as a resource.

4.3 Language as a resource

This orientation is consistent with the principle of interdependence, where different communities/languages are seen to coexist interdependantly. The value of each language and its speech community is acknowledged as part of the whole. Language as a resource includes the notion of language as a right. The view that each language is a resource to the nation carries with it the notion of the instrumental use of languages or functional multilingualism.

5. The paradigm

There is no doubt that the paradigm which needs to be followed in South Africa is one which includes both the functional approach to languages which is inseparable from the view of language as a right and the view that all languages are resources.

Language policy and planning informed by these two orientations of language as a right and as a resource:

- acknowledge that there are sources of knowledge and expertise which speakers of all languages possess;

- assume that effective measures will be taken to access and harness this knowledge for the maximum advantage of society;

- unlock the potential of existing patterns of local and regional multilingual communication systems;
- utilise international systems for communication across linguistic boundaries;
- build a flexible network of multilingual communication systems to suit the domestic and international requirements of a national plan for development.

5.1 A functional approach to multilingualism

PANSALB understands functional multilingualism from a democratic, non-discriminatory perspective. It is unacceptable in South Africa for social, democratic and economic reasons to limit the use of any language. PANSALB understands this term to mean that people use different languages in different parts of the country. Therefore, it makes functional sense to use the appropriate language/s when communicating. In other words, it means that government needs to identify the appropriate medium of communication, depending on who the audience happens to be. It does not mean that government should use all 11 languages each time it communicates with the public.

To illustrate the point in a concrete manner: if the Department of Health wants to run an Aids campaign, a functional multilingual approach would rule out the idea of using one language to convey information across the country. It should disseminate this information in each of the languages used as the primary language for communication in the country, but do so in a manner which identifies the appropriate target language/s in each community. Thus the Mier district in the Northern Cape should probably receive this information in Afrikaans and possibly Nama; whereas the Willowvale area of Eastern Cape should probably receive this information in is/Xhosa, and Northern KwaZulu-Natal should receive this in is/Zulu.

In terms of the broader society, if functional multilingualism were knitted into a national plan for (economic) development, it would identify when, where, which and how languages are currently used. It would evaluate the degree of efficiency of use of these languages in these contexts. It would indicate what further research is required to make better and more efficient use of languages and further it would identify which other languages could profitably facilitate this process.

Language use changes according to needs, perceived or otherwise. Consequently, the current status quo in terms of the functions of languages is unlikely to remain static even without coherent planning. However, appropriate language planning activities which are linked to national and economic development should increase the range of functions for many languages in a more systematic and ultimately beneficial manner. In so doing, it builds on the instrumental value of language, which is the best guarantee that the linguistic rights of communities are protected in an empowering manner.

An important component of functional multilingualism is that it requires responsible planning. The fear that it would automatically imply irrational multiplication of language services is based on a misunderstanding of the issue. Once the primary goal is identified, the stages and time frames along the path to reaching that goal have to be mapped out. The modernisation of those languages, which are presently prevented from functioning in domains such as international science and technology and regional and even national economies, should become an urgent priority. Language services and the publication of documents would

need to be rationalised so that these become available in the languages which are most relevant to the target audience. In other words, documents need to be written in concise and plain language, and translations or summarised translations should be provided when and where the need is clearly demonstrated.

6. Multilingualism

There are about 6000 languages used in about 200 countries which indicates that multilingualism is a global reality, although as David Crystal points out: The widespread impression that multilingualism is uncommon is promoted by government policies: less than a quarter of the world's nations give official recognition to two languages, ...and only six recognize three or more. (Crystal 1987:360) Ingrid Gogolin (1993) refers to the monolingual habitue in which the general, Western perception about language resides. The political, economic and military success of the West has resulted in a superimposing of the monolingual habitue upon the multilingual countries it subjugated. The multilingual reality which PANSALB is tasked with addressing needs to be understood against the overwhelming drive toward the monolingual habitue, and the dynamics of linguisticism (linguistic racism). (See Skutnabb-Kangas 1988)

South Africa is in a particularly unusual position in that it has more official languages at a national level than any other country. The Constitution obliges government to effect this official status and use and the Board to promote respect for other languages as well as to promote multilingualism and the development of languages in general. This obligation places South Africa at the cutting edge of international language policy development, which presents an exciting opportunity for breaking new ground internationally.

6.1 Multilingualism in South Africa

South Africa, like most countries, is multilingual, which means that many languages are used in the country in various contexts and for various purposes. Most people are able to use more than one language; many people are able to use several languages. Many myths and misconceptions have, however, developed about languages and people who use them in this country, and it will be one of PANSALB's tasks to recover the real value and use of many languages in our country. Most of those who are multilingual speak languages which are indigenous to this country at home and in their immediate community.

Language use across the entire continent of Africa has similarities with that in South Africa. People are motivated to learn other languages when they need to communicate for reasons, which relate to trade and economic activities. Languages used more widely or by larger speech communities tend to be used as link languages or lingua francas. There are many widely used lingua francas in Africa such as Arabic, Kiswahili, Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Kikongo, which cut across national boundaries and are used for purposes of regional trade and co-operation.

The official indigenous languages of South Africa are similarly used as lingua francas across Southern Africa. For example: isiNdebele, is widely used in Zimbabwe and the northern parts of South Africa, and is understood by speakers of other Nguni languages (isiQulu is probably used as a lingua franca in South Africa by 70% of the population although its home language speakers constitute only 22%). Setswana predominates in Botswana as well as being spoken widely in at least two provinces of South Africa. Xhosa is spoken in Mozambique as well as in South Africa. Afrikaans is de facto the lingua franca of Namibia and the Northern Cape, and it functions similarly

in several provinces of South Africa as well. In reality, each of South Africa's official languages is spoken or understood elsewhere in the Southern African region and hence functions as a regional /lingua franca.

6.2 Monolingualism Is disempowering

There is considerable movement of people using these languages across the Southern African borders for purposes of trade at local and regional levels of the economy. On the other hand, those who have been primarily engaged at the upper, national levels of economic activity, have tended to be speakers of English, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, in this country; or speakers of French and Portuguese in other African countries.

Colonisation brought with it various mechanisms to keep the conquered communities suppressed. One of the tools of power is language. People cannot share power if they do not have access to the language/s used by those in power. In Africa, the indigenous languages have seldom been used to challenge the colonial or neo-colonial power effectively. Along with colonisation, Western thinking, science and technology has become highly prized. The indigenous knowledge, science, medicine and local economies have, in the process, lost status and become hidden. They are hidden in the local languages, which were excluded from high-level functions by the colonial and neo-colonial rulers of the continent. Ironically, high status has been given to those who use an international language, even when they are monolingual, whereas multilingual speakers of African languages have received little recognition for their communicative gifts and considerable knowledge. The native speakers of the international languages in Africa have thus, in general, not understood the need to learn local languages.

6.3 The value of multilingualism

The Constitution offers us an opportunity to reclaim the value of linguistic pluralism in South Africa, and in so doing to rediscover a hidden store of knowledge. This process has numerous advantages for the South African society as a whole.

The assets of those people who have access to indigenous knowledge and language systems, including South African Sign Language, and who are multilingual, will be revalued.

The inverse situation which has valued only those who speak English, even when they are monolingual, or who are competent only in Western science and technology, will be brought into a more balanced perspective which recognises all knowledges and communicative abilities. The perception that people who are not proficient in English are somehow deficient must be dispelled if we are to move successfully towards a democratic society where diversity is embraced and the interdependence of communities and different knowledges is cherished.

The promotion of multilingualism, furthermore, gives us the opportunity of participating more fully in the international/global community, since the spin off would lead to learning languages of wider communication for purposes of trade and international communication. For example, it should lead toward the identification of Portuguese, French, Swahili, Arabic and Hausa for trade and co-operation in Africa.

Research conducted in this country in the 1930s and 1940s showed that bilingual people demonstrate greater social tolerance and are more likely to have academic success than monolingual people are. This research lay unnoticed for the more than half a century. It is now being supported by research conducted in other countries, such as in North America, Australia,

India and Scandinavia. Thus from both socially cohesive and educational perspectives, the promotion of multilingualism is likely to have important advantages for the entire South African society.

6.4 The relationship between multilingualism and a national development plan

National language policy formulation and implementation needs to be knitted into the overall plan for national development. Scholars (see for example Tripathi 1990, Akinnaso 1991 and Siatchitema 1992) who have analysed policy and implementation processes on this continent point to the tensions which arise where, for instance, language-in-education policies do not match those of the national plan for development. What tends to happen is that the national (economic) plan usually subverts the language-in-education plan as has frequently happened in Africa, where the promotion of the use of African languages in education is undermined by the requirement of proficiency in the ex-colonial language for positions of national political and economic power.

Several scholars on the continent also point to the link between the failure of Africa "to develop" and the implementation of Western oriented language policies, which ignore the multilingual reality of the continent (see for example Djite 1993). They also point to the link between the allocation of development aid and monolingually impelled language-in-education policies. Other countries in Africa are particularly instructive for us because ideological and or symbolic value was attached to African languages, yet the language policies have succumbed to the monolingual temptations of western development models and aid packages. Had such countries been able to acknowledge and work with the intrinsically instrumental value of African languages, the functional status of their languages might have been different.

7. Taking stock

The PANSALB legislation is the most significant indicator that there is a commitment to articulate and monitor a language policy and plan broad enough to encompass every sector of society and it is this, which places us ahead of other countries. We have the added advantage of being able to learn from the paths chosen elsewhere on this continent. There are some basic steps, which need to be followed in articulating and implementing a feasible language policy and plan.

7.1 Language policy and planning procedures:

The following steps need to be followed for the effective implementation of a policy:

- spell out the guiding principles of a language policy as set out in the Constitution
- extrapolate and define a language policy based on these principles;
- select the language planning paradigm which is most likely to implement these principles;
- define the boundaries;
- draw up an implementation plan which includes the participation of government and civil society;
- ensure that the language policy and plan are knitted into the

national development plan;

- identify the principle obstacles along the way, and dealing with these expeditiously;
- identify target timeframes;
- adequately inform both government and civil society.

7.2 A division of responsibilities

The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) has already set in motion the process of defining the outline of a national language plan. At the time that this process was begun, the Constitution of 1996, and in particular the language clauses had not been settled upon. Thus, the clear division of responsibilities was not as apparent as they are now. It becomes imperative now that both PANSALB and DACST jointly negotiate these in order to prevent duplication of functions as well as to avoid an ad hoc division of responsibilities.

DACST has, in the meantime, initiated two essential activities, which fall squarely into government responsibility for giving effect to the equal status and use of 11 official languages:

- the mounting of an awareness campaign, scheduled for 1998-1999;
- the launching of a telephone interpreting service which would give access to people from each of the official languages, and other additional languages of priority, to emergency services.

Both of these are likely to assist government to fulfil its responsibilities and they are initiatives, which should be supported by PANSALB.

Whilst government establishes mechanisms to give effect to the equal status and use of the official languages, PANSALB's role is that of strengthening and initiating the establishment of civil society structures which support the development of interlinguistic/multilingual skills and unleashing and maximising the human resources of those who speak languages other than English. For example, PANSALB will encourage the development of:

- community and service based interpreting and translation;
- educational materials and literature in indigenous languages which include the nine official languages, South African Sign Language, and the Khoe and San languages;
- dictionaries which maximise access to languages within families of languages;
- the use of local and regional lingua francas and languages of trade with our neighbours in Africa;
- networks with neighbouring countries on language development activities with languages we share across borders;
- capacity training programmes amongst speakers/users of, especially, the indigenous languages, in language training, and development work;
- strategies and programmes which uncover indigenous knowledges of Southern Africa;

- strategies and programmes which build capacity amongst the indigenous language communities to use their languages and knowledge for their well-being.

At the end of the day, the language communities need to become empowered and need to recognise the social, educational and economic potential of their languages if multilingualism is to take root as a positive force in this country.

8. Conclusion

Ultimately, PANSALB wants to stimulate the empowerment of language communities to recognise both the sentimental and instrumental value of their languages. Multilingualism will take root as a positive force in this country when all our languages are valued in society at large.

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PANSALB position on multilingualism

Members of the public are requested to submit their comments on or before 30th June 1999 to the following address:

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