




Language maintenance: Factors supporting the use and maintenance of isiZulu in Soshanguve



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This article aims at investigating how isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve report on the use of their ethnic language, isiZulu, and to use the outcomes to confirm how their language continues to be powerfully maintained in Soshanguve. Today in South Africa, there are numerous studies that have investigated the role of English as a dominant language. Other studies have investigated the awareness that there is an extensive shift from using native languages to English. The argument in this article is that in other communities, this shift is counterbalanced by a number of factors. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, and the data were solicited through questionnaires and semistructured interviews. The sample population in this study comprised 20 participants who were sampled purposively. A purposive sampling technique was used because it suggests that the sampled population should have certain characteristics, and it should be people who will provide information that will assist in achieving the objectives of this study. Language ecology theory and the ethnolinguistic vitality model were incorporated as lenses of analysis. Participants were confident that living in a neighbourhood with a majority of amaZulu provides social unity among them and contributes positively towards using and maintaining their language. The findings confirm that the use of the language in different domains, is the reason why isiZulu continues to be powerfully maintained in Soshanguve as a viable language despite living side by side with other dominant languages for centuries.

Contribution: This study contributes to research on language maintenance and shift by exploring the application of Haugen's theory of language ecology as well as Giles's model of ethnolinguistic vitality. It demonstrates how IsiZulu can be studied with the aid of these theories and how observing this language in its context could be regarded as an extension of this theoretical framework. It shows that the speakers of indigenous languages in Soshanguve, such as isiZulu, maintain language attitudes and exercise linguistic choices, similar to speakers of dominant languages. This article also demonstrates how language attitudes can play a decisive role in maintenance and shift outcomes.

Keywords: Language; language maintenance; language shift; language domain factors; bilingualism; multilingualism.

Introduction

Language has a powerful impact on who we are as people. Through language, people are recognised by other members of a specific community. According to Schumpeter (2006:39), the identity of our interlocutors is inferred from the behaviour and the language they speak. Grosjean (1982) underscores this view by asserting that:

A language is not only an instrument of communication; it is a symbol of social or group identity; an emblem of group membership and solidarity. This notion implies that through language, a group distinguishes itself from other groups, by using its language to transmit norms, values, customs and rituals. (p. 117)

There are some influences that support either maintenance or shift, which may also influence individual language adoptions. The reason for this is that a person may be part of a community of practice where one or two languages are powerfully preserved, but for individual and particular reasons, the use of language patterns and attitudes may vary from that of the dominant group. The personality of an individual may make the difference between conformity and retaining individuality.

The process of maintaining ethnic languages in South Africa is supported by various factors that one needs to bear in mind. The role that is played by a language in identifying people's

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cultural distinctiveness is one of the factors that is essential. This article focuses on a township called Soshanguve, a multilingual and multi-ethnic township that is located in Pretoria, the South African capital city found inside the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) (City of Tshwane Municipality Household Survey 2008:70). Soshanguve is a name that reveals its multilingual diversity, because it is a summarised acronym that represents the native African languages found in the neighbourhoods: So = Sotho (Northern Sotho, Setswana and Sesotho); Sha = Shangaan; Ngu = Nguni (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and siSwati); Ve = Venda. Presently, Soshanguve remains a multilingual as well as culturally diverse area, which is an aspect that has been reinforced by the arrival of numerous immigrants from other African countries (Mashigo 2015:52) and further regions such as India or Pakistan. IsiZulu is one of the languages that are accepted by this municipality as the language of communication, and it is spoken by 13.58% of the population (Language Policy of the City of Tshwane 2012:6). Thus, the aim is to investigate what isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve report with regard to using their ethnic language, isiZulu, and to confirm how their ethnic language is powerfully maintained in Soshanguve.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Prior literature, for instance Meho and Tibbo (2003), shows that literature research mainly exhumes views, concepts and findings in relation to a phenomenon. It finds related and background information that will assist with the problem of the study. This study focuses in particular on the current language situation in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, language domain factors and language maintenance.

Theoretical background and framework of the research

Language ecology was chosen as an approach incorporated into the ethnolinguistic vitality model in order to enrich the study's arguments. The approach was chosen because it described language shift and maintenance from an ecological viewpoint by means of observing the influences which define the connections among languages and their environment. The rationale for choosing this approach was that it offers an outline for studying the context in which significant language ecological questions may be asked. According to Mora (2014:1), language ecology studies the dynamics of interaction and the co-existence of old and new languages in social contexts. As society becomes increasingly more mobile lesser-known or indigenous languages are replaced by the dominant languages. This approach enables the researcher to examine the underlying forces and matters of fairness and standards that recognise and protect human beings as the essential element in social language interchange.

Haugen (1972:325) delineates language ecology as 'the study of interactions between any given language and its environment'. He continues to explain that the setting of the language includes both psychological and sociological features. Psychological aspects refer to 'its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers', while sociological aspects refer to 'its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication'.

The ethnolinguistic vitality model was incorporated into the adopted theory in an effort to enrich the findings. Numerous typologies appeared to be expected for language use in order to examine the contexts of the the minority ethnic language systematically. In this regard, some of the research that is often recognised and alluded to are the works of Ferguson (1966), Haugen (1972), Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977), Haarmann (1986) and Edwards (1992). This model is proposed by Giles et al. (1977) as the outline for combining the roles played by the sociostructural variables, intercultural communication, second language learning, native language maintenance, language shift and loss in intergroup relations. They delineated this model as 'what makes the group to possibly act as a unique and dynamic combined unit in the situation of intergroup'. Furthermore, they explained that the ethnolinguistic group's vitality is made up of the combination of status, demographic, institutional support and control factors.

Literature review

The language situation within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality

An increasing number of studies have demonstrated the relationships between the formation of language and identity – particularly within complex environments. Linguistic and complicated identity politics and cultural complexity have also become fundamental features in the cities of South Africa (Beyer 2014:251). The present work explores the interaction between language, identity formation and communication in the Soshanguve township within the CTMM in Pretoria. This article focuses on the use and the factors that support the maintenance of isiZulu.

In Shosanguwe eight languages are used for communication, that is, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Setswana, English, isiZulu, Xitsonga, Tshivenda and isiNdebele (arranged in descending order of demographic numbers). Furthermore, English is recommended by this municipality for interdepartmental and intradepartmental communications, and also for operational efficiency purposes (Language Policy of the City of Tshwane 2012:6). According to the census, Sepedi (28.20%), Setswana (16.70%), Xitsonga (15.05%), isiZulu (13.58%) and other or nonapplicable (1.84%) languages that may point to non-South African languages (for example, languages spoken by immigrants from other African countries and South Asia) or to native speakers of the local mixed language, Sepitori, are the languages that are mostly spoken in Soshanguve households in terms of language distribution.

Language domain factors

Fishman (1964, 1991) suggests that a number of domains such as family, neighbours, education, religion and many more, which are allied with the speakers' choices and preferences, can serve in the maintenance of community languages. According to Baker (2011:14), *language target* is the regular use of community languages among family members, friends, neighbours and the local community. In these domains individual languages are not merely stimulated and preserved but they are also substantiated, providing balance in the case of any unanticipated shift. Based on submissions about language domains, the assumption is that using the minority language actively in a number of domains is a signal of unavoidable language maintenance. Contrariwise, limiting the use of the minority language in secluded domains such as family is an indication of a shift from the minority to the majority (Holmes 2013; Lee 2013).

Numerous studies investigating the influences that support language maintenance have been conducted. For instance, Dyers (2008) investigated language shifts or maintenance among some townships in South Africa, focusing on the influential factors concerning the use of Afrikaans. The study revealed that in South Africa, the shift was far more noticeable in the average families, the upwardly mobile, as well as the black and mixed-race families. About the working class and rural communities, it was revealed that the shift was directed by a number of factors. These factors include (1) the environment in which these people live; (2) a burdened and poorly functioning state education system in poorer rural and urban areas (Soudien 2007; Taylor 2007); (3) historically low levels of literacy; and (4) relatively low mobility of the poor and working class in postdemocratic South Africa.

According to Fillmore (2000:208), native language loss is caused by internal and external influences. The preferences of individuals to fit in, to feel comfortable, to be accepted and the need to communicate with the members of the dominant group are the internal forces. On the other hand, the external pressure comes from sociopolitical reasons in that the society opposes differences, divergence and aliens. It is also remarked that family has a role to play in maintaining the first language of children in the minority group:

Parents should be encouraged to find time to talk with their children, read to them (if this is a practice in the culture of the home), and teach them things that interest educated members of their group. Families that come from cultures with a rich oral tradition will have many stories and histories to share with the children. Teachers should encourage them to use these materials and to regard them as equal to written materials that other families might use with their children at home. (Fillmore 2000:209)

Abdelhadi (2017) conducted a study of factors in maintaining the Arabic language. It revealed that it is challenging to investigate the maintenance of community languages, because some of these languages exist under the cultural influence of the host country's language. Consequently, for the immigrants and their children who are under the

language and cultural influences of English, it has certainly not been easy to maintain their community languages. Furthermore, it showed that most community languages have been given less support, while English has been accepted and used in various domains.

Clyne (1982:28) elucidates the prominence of grandparents in the maintenance of the mother tongue. The home domain is one of the locations where community languages are used, because it is where most interaction with older relatives happens, as they are not able to speak the native language fluently. Weinreich (1974) remarks that:

[T]here is a relationship between ethnic languages and extra-linguistic factors like cultural, psychological, social and historical processes as well as non-linguistic factors like geographic areas, religion, race, sex, age, social status, occupation. (pp. 89–99)

This leads to constructing linguistic divisions between mother-tongue groups. Weinreich adds:

Some ethnic groups stick to their mother language, because of the emotional involvement with it, as one learns it in childhood or because of the role of language as a symbol of group integrity. (pp. 89–99)

Likewise, Dorian (1981:7) discusses numerous influences which lead to the maintenance of a language, and these include age and language used in specific domains. These factors have countless effects on the process of language maintenance and even in transmitting the language to the next generation.

Language maintenance

A situation in which a language is able to preserve its vitality, displaying a strong degree of resistance despite the pressure that comes from the dominant languages is referred to as language maintenance (Batibo 2005:102). The domains of the first language (L1) remain largely the same, and transmission of the language to the children is active in the situation of language maintenance. Additionally, the number of speakers remains comparatively unchanging, and they preserve a sturdy loyalty to their language.

For this article, the maintenance of the language speaks of the use of isiZulu continuously by the enormous population of isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve, despite the presence of the dominant and majority languages that surround their area. The term 'language maintenance' is defined by Ferguson and Heath (1981:592) as 'the preservation of the use of a language by a speech community under conditions where there is a possibility of a shift to another language'.

Research methodology

This section discusses approaches, the design, the population and sampling, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures employed in this work. This was carried out in order to achieve the objectives, which are to investigate how

speakers, residing in Soshanguve, report on the use of their ethnic language, isiZulu, and to use the outcomes to show how the language continues to be powerfully used and preserved in this community.

Research approach and design

The study employed mixed methods, in line with Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004:17–18) assertion that it is research in which qualitative and quantitative techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language are mixed or combined into a single study. Gathering of quantitative data was in the form of self-developed Likert-type scale belief statements in the questionnaire. On the other hand, the gathering of qualitative data was in three parts: firstly, the section in the survey questionnaire that comprised 'yes' or 'no' questions; secondly, the section in the survey questionnaire that comprised 'only', 'mostly' or 'both' questions; lastly, the semistructured individual face-to-face interviews.

The study employed a descriptive survey that used both questionnaires and face-to-face interviews to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. This research design was used in order to identify and obtain information on the issue of language maintenance and shift among isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve.

The participants were given personal invitations that enabled the researcher to provide a detailed explanation of voluntary participation of the participants in the study before taking part. The nature of the study and ethical considerations were explained by the researcher to the participants in order to ensure absolute confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, permission from the participants to use 30 min of their time in completing the questionnaire was asked for by the researcher. The participants were informed by the researcher about the interviews. They were informed about the opportunity for them to participate in the interviews and that they were going to be audio-recorded.

Research paradigm

Interpretivism was used for this work. Interpretivist researchers believe that there are multiple facts which are individually constructed (Creswell 2014; Grbich 2013; Guba & Lincoln 1994, 2008). Research found in this model, as pointed out by Grbich (2013:8), concentrates on examining how people's experiences are comprehended and understood in their worlds. It further focuses on how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have impacted constructed understanding.

In order to achieve the aims of the study, interpretivism was used to interpret and understand the views and opinions of the participants, as well as the values they attach to the phenomenon. This study made extensive use of the qualitative approach from an interpretive paradigm, as it allows people

to articulate the meanings of their common realities. The quantitative approach was incorporated to a limited extent where relevant, and it was approached from a postpositivist paradigm.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used as a method, because the selection of the study participants is based on the anticipation that each participant will offer exceptional and original information of value to the study. The sample size employed in this study is 20 participants, who were selected because they are isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve. Purposive sampling deliberately selects exact people, events or locations, as they can provide the information that is vital and can never be found quickly and sufficiently if other channels are used (Babbie 2016; Patton 2015; White 2015).

Data collection procedures

Zohrabi (2013:254) asserts that numerous techniques such as tests, questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, diaries and journals be used to collect data. Mixed methods research consists of closed-ended or open-ended questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations as instruments. These instruments could complement each other and henceforth improve the legitimacy and reliability of the data. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from all the study's participants in the form of self-developed Likert-type scale belief statements, in a survey questionnaire that was distributed to 20 participants. This study made use of personal collection of the questionnaires to ensure the anonymity of the participants. According to Forcese and Richer (1973:85) and Mahlangu (1987:96), a questionnaire can reach many respondents and is less time-consuming to complete. Moreover, with a questionnaire, the participants have sufficient time to reason carefully before they respond to questions, and they can be dispersed to numerous participants instantaneously. All interviews conducted, were audio-recorded and transcribed, and important notes were written down.

Data analysis procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse solicited data. Jaggi (2003) notes that:

Descriptive statistics give numerical and graphic procedures to summarise collected data in a clear and understandable way whereas inferential statistics provide procedures to draw inferences about a population from a sample. Descriptive statistics was chosen because it offers very simple summaries of the sample, and it appears as a suitable method to analyse the research study's quantitative data. (p. 1)

To analyse the qualitative data, the researcher coded the collected data; sorted the data into categories; made transcriptions of the interview data; and, lastly, interpreted the recorded data. Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1988:65–76) in Moodley (2010:92) assert that the method of

organising the obtained data from the questionnaire in order to simplify statistical analysis is called frequency distribution.

Findings and discussion

Language use in different domains

The data were collected from isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve. The data consist of responses to a questionnaire on their use of isiZulu in different domains, written responses on the factors that support the use of isiZulu, as well as the responses from the individual interviews.

Domains in which the language is used are particular official settings where one language, or variety of languages, is likely considered suitable compared to others. Fishman (1966, 1967 and 1972) conducted a major study on the domains of language use. The concern of the study was predominantly with the question: what language is spoken, when, by who and to whom? Domains are referred to as collections of factors such as location, topic and participants and include the domains of work, family, school and other educational institutions, circle of friends and wider communication. In accordance with circumstances changing, likewise the language choice, variety and register also change. The relationship between the speakers has a significant impact on both formal and informal domains where language is used (Dyers 2008).

Participants were required to tick a box to indicate the answer from the given options that best suited them. Tables 1 to 6: Domain of use. $N = 20$.

Tables 1 to 6 depict the questions which assessed the use of languages (isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages or Sepitori) by the participants. The tables contain data on the participants' language use in different domains. The participants were asked to rate their language use by ticking the possible responses of 'only isiZulu', 'mostly isiZulu', 'isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)', 'only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)' or 'mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)'. The findings clearly show that the participants rated the isiZulu language in most contexts, although to varying degrees. The participants also rated the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) in some of the contexts.

About the language that the participants use when they write their personal letters, the majority indicated that they mostly used isiZulu, and there were those who replied that they used both isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) (35% each). The lowest percentage was 15% each for those who indicated that they only used isiZulu and those who stated that they mostly used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) when writing their personal letters. This finding suggests that the participants do have the ability to write in isiZulu and the reason for this is the mere

TABLE 1: Response to question 1.

Question 1: What language do you use when you write personal letters?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	3	15
Mostly isiZulu	7	35
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	7	35
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	0	0
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

TABLE 2: Response to question 2.

Question 2: What language do you use when you speak with your neighbours?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	5	25
Mostly isiZulu	0	0
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	11	55
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	2	10
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	2	10
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

TABLE 3: Response to question 3.

Question 3: What language do you use with your parents and the elderly?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	5	25
Mostly isiZulu	9	45
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	0	0
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

TABLE 4: Response to question 4.

Question 4: What language do you use at home with your brothers and sisters?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	1	5
Mostly isiZulu	7	35
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	6	30
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

TABLE 5: Response to question 5.

Question 5: What language do you use when you meet friends in the neighbourhood?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	1	5
Mostly isiZulu	3	15
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	14	70
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	1	5
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	1	5
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

fact that it is offered in most schools in Soshanguve. It is apparent that additional or language-specific educational support is given to the amaZulu because isiZulu is an official language in South Africa, and it is used as the language of teaching and learning in most schools in Soshanguve. Therefore, the participants' skills of writing and reading are

TABLE 6: Response to question 6.

Question 6: What language do you use when you meet friends at school, at university or at work?		
Responses	Frequencies	%
Only isiZulu	1	5
Mostly isiZulu	3	15
IsiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	12	60
Only Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	3	15
Mostly Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori)	1	5
No response	0	0
Total	20	100

not partial. This suggests that the inherited language from the parents and older people is transferred to the children in an oral format while the written format is also transferred to the children in schools.

The majority of the participants (55%) recounted that they used isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori), followed by those who indicated that they used only isiZulu (25%). The participants who replied that they only used Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) and those who stated that they mostly used Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) when speaking to their neighbours were 10% each. An overwhelming percentage (70%) of the participants pointed out that they used isiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori), followed by those who indicated that they mostly used isiZulu (15%) when they met friends in the neighbourhood. The respondents who answered that they only used isiZulu, only the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) and those who stated that they mostly used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) were 5% each. This could indicate that the interactions are not only taking place with people who only speak isiZulu but are also happening with people who speak other languages too. Therefore, this finding suggests that there is healthy bi- or multilingualism, because the participants are able to shift or mix languages when they are speaking to neighbours or friends. This finding is comparable to the findings of Posel and Zeller (2016), which indicated that the dominance of the English language among Africans was considerably increasing. On the other hand, using the official Bantu languages was also increasing. Their study concluded that the Bantu languages were not replaced by English, but there was a healthy bilingualism. With regard to the community and friends, it is obvious that the speakers use both isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages because both languages share an equal status in this area, as both are part of the languages accepted by the CTMM as languages of communication. Therefore, one can argue that they are both used as a medium for social participation with neighbours as well as with friends in the neighbourhood.

The majority of the participants (45%) shared that they mostly used isiZulu, followed by those who stated that they only used isiZulu (25%) with their parents and the elderly. The lowest percentage was 15% each for those who recounted that they used both isiZulu and the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori), as well as those who shared that they mostly used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) with their

parents and the elderly. The majority of the participants (35%) indicated that they mostly used isiZulu, followed by 30% who pointed out that they mostly used Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori). The participants who indicated that they used isiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) as well as those who revealed that they only used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) were 15% each. The lowest percentage was 5% for those who stated that they only used isiZulu at home with their brothers and sisters. These findings suggest that there is a common tendency among family members with regard to communicating with each other in isiZulu. The participants revealed that they mostly used isiZulu when speaking to their elders, as well as when they were at home speaking to their brothers and sisters. It seems that parents are willing and keen to transmit the language by teaching their children. The signal that is portrayed by this finding is that isiZulu intends to survive in the next generation. There is a consistency in this result with Fishman's (1991) assertion that implementing and encouraging the use of the ethnic language at home and in the community is a basic principle to ensure the maintenance of the language.

The majority of the participants (60%) indicated that they used isiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) when they met their friends at school, at university or at work. Those participants who indicated that they mostly used isiZulu and those who stated that they only used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) were 15% each. The lowest percentage was 5% each for those who indicated that they only used isiZulu and those who mostly used the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori). This finding suggests that the participants use the isiZulu and Sotho-Tswana languages to fulfil their social requirements, that is, to communicate effectively and to be better understood by Soshanguve residents. This finding could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, isiZulu speakers have been loyal in using their ethnic language. It has not been replaced by the Sotho-Tswana languages. Secondly, no changes have been discovered in the isiZulu identity. IsiZulu is prestigious and the community appreciates using it. The constant use of isiZulu by its speakers shows that they are part of the Soshanguve community.

As argued by Holmes (2013), the indigenous language can be maintained and preserved when it is used in multiple domains by its speakers. Therefore, it is argued that the isiZulu language speakers of Soshanguve were motivated to maintain isiZulu in numerous domains, for example, home, community and education. The motivation for this is that they had access to using isiZulu in domains like education, home and community, with friends and neighbours. Consequently, one can reason that the isiZulu language speakers did not give up their identity and their language.

Here are some of the participants' responses that were gathered through the individual interviews.

Interview question 1: Why do you normally use isiZulu when engaging in a conversation, feeling angry, happy, praying and invoking?

The majority of the participants (65%) agreed that they normally use isiZulu when engaging in a conversation, feeling angry or happy, when praying and invoking. Here are some of their responses:

'I normally use isiZulu because I express my emotions better using it.' (F1, 28–37 years; F4, 18–27 years; F6, 18–27 years; F9, 38–48 years; M2, 18–27 years)

'I use isiZulu because it is the right language to use when communicating with my ancestors.' (F2, 18–27 years; M4, 28–37 years; M9, 18–27 years; M10, 18–27 years)

'Most of the people in my neighbourhood communicate in isiZulu.' (M1, 28–37 years; M5, 28–37 years; M6, 38–48 years; M8, 28–37 years)

Only seven participants (35%) revealed that they did not normally use isiZulu, but said it depends on the situation. They mentioned that if they engage in a conversation with isiZulu nonspeakers, they use the Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori):

'I use Sotho-Tswana language when I am talking to non-speakers of isiZulu.' (F, 38–48 years; F5, 28–37 years; F7, 38–48 years; M7, 38–48 years)

'Sometimes I forget the right Zulu words to use and end up mixing languages.' (F8, 18–27 years; F10, 28–38 years; M3, 18–27 years)

Interview Question 2: Why do you think it is important for you to work on improving the use of isiZulu in all domains in order to preserve and transmit it on to the next generation?

The majority of the participants (80%) stated that they worked on improving the use of isiZulu in all domains. Here are some of their responses:

'I want the next generation to know the language and feel proud about it.' (F3, 38–48 years; F7, 38–48 years; M2, 18–27 years; M9, 18–27 years)

'I believe if we as the older people use the language in all domains, our children will look up to us and enjoy using it too.' (F5, 28–37 years; F6, 18–27 years; F9, 38–48 years; M1, 28–37 years; M10, 18–27 years)

'I think it will help the children understand who they are, and where they are coming from; that is, their heritage through their language.' (F1, 28–37 years; F2, 18–27 years; F4, 18–27 years; F8, 18–27 years; M3, 18–27 years; M4, 28–37 years)

'I use isiZulu to communicate with others, establish relationships and a sense of myself, and to express who I am because it is an important part of being human.' (F10, 28–37 years)

Only four participants (20%) revealed that they did not use isiZulu in all the domains. The following are some of their responses:

'I do not use isiZulu in all domains because the people I stay around with use other languages.' (M5, 28–37 years; M7, 38–48 years)

'The isiZulu language has many dialects that make it difficult to use in all domains.' (M6, 38–48years; M, 828–37years)

Factors that support the use and maintenance of isiZulu

The following is the presentation and report of the isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve on factors that are supporting the use and maintenance of isiZulu. The information presented in Table 7 represents the scalar units, score and attitudinal positional tendencies that were used to rate the answers. Table 8 represents the belief statements that were given to the participants, the mean and the tendency obtained per belief statement. Each belief statement was interpreted according to the whole sample (the total number of respondents was 20).

The interpretation of the data applies to each belief statement. The participants rated their answers according to the following options: 5 = *strongly agree* (SA); 4 = *agree* (A); 3 = *not sure* (NS); 2 = *disagree* (D) and 1 = *strongly disagree* (SD), (see Table 7).

Table 7 demonstrates the scalar units used to determine the attitudinal positional tendencies up to two decimal places.

Table 8 shows the relationships among belief statements. Belief statements 1 to 10 had a relationship with each other and therefore were merged together to draw out the factors that support the use of isiZulu by the participants.

In the table the factors are observed that support the use and maintenance of isiZulu. Ten belief statements were allied with the aim of investigating the factors. Respondents *agreed* with belief statement 1 that staying in a neighbourhood with many isiZulu speakers helps to maintain isiZulu. In belief statement 2, the respondents *agreed* that the degree of social unity between isiZulu speakers helps a good deal in maintaining the language. They *agreed* that internal marriage among the amaZulu tribal group helps them in preserving their language (belief statement 5). The respondents also *agreed* for the isiZulu language to be maintained, as family plays a significant role. The respondents were *not sure* about belief statement 3, whether the huge amaZulu populace in Pretoria and particularly in Soshanguve assists in maintaining isiZulu. This response contradicts the other responses given by the respondents. For example, belief statement 1 indicates that the respondents *agreed* that staying in a neighbourhood with more isiZulu speakers is helpful in the process of maintaining isiZulu. Another contradicting

TABLE 7: Scalar unit, scores and attitudinal positional tendencies.

Scalar units	Score	Attitudinal positional tendencies
4.50–5.00	5	Strongly agree
3.50–4.49	4	Agree
2.50–3.49	3	Not sure
1.50–2.49	2	Disagree
1.00–1.49	1	Strongly disagree

TABLE 8: Factors that support the use and maintenance of isiZulu.

Number	Belief statements	Mean	Tendency
1	Living in a neighbourhood with a majority of amaZulu helps to maintain the isiZulu language.	4.02	Agree
2	The degree of social unity among the amaZulu helps a lot to maintain the isiZulu language.	4.01	Agree
3	The large number of the amaZulu population in Pretoria and specifically in Soshanguve helps maintain the isiZulu language.	3.08	Not sure
4	The pride in the amaZulu ethnic origin helps maintain the ethnic language.	3.85	Agree
5	Internal marriage among the amaZulu ethnic group helps them to preserve their ethnic language.	4.01	Agree
6	The educational policy in South Africa promotes ethnic groups to learn the languages of their ancestors.	4.25	Agree
7	Strong family ties among the amaZulu ethnic group help to maintain the isiZulu language.	3.09	Not sure
8	Attending cultural activities in the isiZulu language such as rituals and marriages is helpful in maintaining the isiZulu language.	4.35	Agree
9	Family has a major role in maintaining the isiZulu language.	4.01	Agree
10	The presence of social clubs of amaZulu has a role in maintaining the isiZulu language.	3.07	Not sure

response was revealed in belief statement 7 in which the respondents were *not sure* whether family ties that are strong among the isiZulu speakers' group help in maintaining the language. This response contradicts belief statement 9 where respondents *agreed* that the role played by family in maintaining isiZulu is significant. Therefore, it is questionable why the respondents would state that they were not sure about belief statements 3 and 7 while on the other hand they indicated that they agree with the belief statements that are similar to them. There is clearly a need for further investigation of these contrasting findings. The respondents *agreed* with the majority of the belief statements, and this means that the general finding is that they were positive about the factors that support the use of isiZulu.

Among the factors that had an important role in maintaining isiZulu is social status, because as a tribe they showed high ethnic self-esteem with regard to social and cultural factors. They mentioned that the degree of social unity among themselves, the pride that they have towards the language and the attendance of the cultural ceremonies that are hosted in their languages such as marriages and rituals are helpful in maintaining isiZulu. With regard to linguistic nationalism, the participants showed an awareness that the language is promoted to be used as a language of teaching and learning at schools and in Soshanguve, respectively, by the educational policy in South Africa. Skutnabb-Kangas (2006:275) stresses that as soon as children from a minority language attend a school where the language of teaching and learning is the dominant language, usually the language cannot proliferate because the right to get an education in their mother tongue is never guaranteed. According to Ndlovu (2015:368), the watchfulness of the members of the ethnolinguistic group across a particular area significantly determines its vitality and capability to implement the mother-tongue education

policies successfully. The widespread minority groups are likely to have low ethnolinguistic vitality. When their numbers are considered too low, they cannot support mother-tongue education and therefore cannot successfully implement the mother-tongue education policy. In the case of isiZulu in Soshanguve, the language is taught at schools in this area, and it is accepted as a language of teaching and learning. Therefore, it could be argued that the ethnolinguistic group members (amaZulu) under study, control strength and capability to implement mother-tongue education policies because their number is high, and this suggests a high ethnolinguistic vitality.

Here are some of the participants' responses that were gathered through the individual interviews.

Interview question 3: Why do you think isiZulu is the language of your heritage and history?

All participants (100%) said that indeed isiZulu is the language of their heritage and history. The following are some of their responses:

'IsiZulu is a symbol of my individual identity.' (F1, 28–37 years; F2, 18–27 years; F6, 18–27 years; F8, 18–27 years; F9, 38–48 years; M1, 28–37 years; M3, 18–27 years; M4, 28–37 years)

'IsiZulu is the one that makes me to be recognisable to other members of our community and represents my identity.' (F3, 38–48 years; F4, 18–27 years; M2, 18–27 years; M5, 28–37 years; M6, 38–48 years; M8, 28–37 years)

'IsiZulu is the language I can use to pass on my heritage and history to the next generation.' (F5, 28–37 years; M7, 38–48 years; M9, 18–27 years; M10, 18–27 years)

'IsiZulu is the language that guides me in order to determine my culture.' (F7, 38–48 years; F10, 28–37 years)

Interview question 4: Why do you believe that the family has a major role in maintaining the isiZulu language?

All the participants (100%) agreed that there is a substantial role played by the family in maintaining the isiZulu language. Some of the responses were:

'The role that is played by the family is important because they teach their children to embrace the language and use it all the time.' (F1, 28–37 years; F2, 18–27 years; F3, 38–48 years; F4, 18–27 years; F5, 28–37 years; F7, 38–48 years; F10, 28–37 years; M2, 18–27 years; M4, 28–37 years; M5, 28–37 years; M6, 38–48 years; M8, 28–37 years; M9, 18–27 years)

'The family teaches children the first language before they even go to school and that language is critical to their identity. Family is the one that teaches children about the value of their culture and heritage through language. Therefore, family have a huge responsibility in maintaining the language.' (F6, 18–27 years; F8, 18–27 years; F9, 38–48 years; M1, 28–37 years; M3, 18–27 years; M7, 38–48 years; M10, 18–27 years)

Conclusion

This article aimed to investigate how isiZulu speakers residing in Soshanguve report on their ethnic language use,

isiZulu, and to confirm how it is strongly maintained given their situation by using the outcomes.

Regarding the use of isiZulu, this study indicated that the participants used isiZulu in most domains. Therefore, this finding suggests that the use of isiZulu in most domains has contributed to the maintenance of isiZulu. It was also discovered that a number of factors supported the use of isiZulu in Soshanguve, such as ethnolinguistic variables, cultural influences, social connection and many more. However, there are two key factors which include (1) the role of isiZulu as an official language, the first language that is spoken by its speakers in Soshanguve and other parts of the country in key domains, and (2) the significant emotional attachment its speakers experience, as it represents uniqueness and group identification, as well as appreciation for the language.

In an attempt to understand what motivated the isiZulu language speakers of Soshanguve to maintain their ethnic language, it is suggested that sociopsychological factors, as well as ethnolinguistic vitality factors had a significant influence in predicting the language behaviour of this group. The findings therefore suggest that a high perception of isiZulu vitality exists among the participants. For many of them language is a mark of their identity, as it plays a significant role in preserving their culture and customs. These factors would probably explain the speakers' active use of isiZulu and their efforts in maintaining the language. This enabled them to maintain their identity and cultural continuity in spite of living side by side with dominant languages. The factors that explain the strong ethnolinguistic awareness and vitality of the amaZulu are status variables, because they exhibited high self-esteem with regard to sustaining and maintaining their language, as well as implementing the country's language policies, and institutional support factors, because the group has characterised and defended its ethnolinguistic vitality in numerous official and unofficial circles.

Generalisations were drawn from this study. Firstly, even in the presence of influential and dominant languages of wider communication in Soshanguve, which are Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori), isiZulu speakers can still identify strongly with their home language, particularly because it augments their individualities and is a representation of their ethnolinguistic uniqueness. The amaZulu showed a high ethnolinguistic vitality, and this was attributed to their high social status, heightened ethnolinguistic awareness, linguistic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. In conclusion, the choice of language to use in social domains elucidates why home languages endure strongly, despite the use of other languages in other domains. Demographic, cultural, linguistic and social factors all support the maintenance of isiZulu rather than shifting to the dominant languages, which are Sotho-Tswana languages (or Sepitori) in Soshanguve.

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

N.T.M. conducted the experiments, analysed the data and wrote the article. All three authors contributed to the manuscript revisions. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be held responsible for the content therein.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the University of Zululand Research Ethics Committee, and ethical approval was received on 15 October 2020 (ref. no. UZRE 171110-030 PGD 2020/48). Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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