NOT ON MY WATCH: DECOLONIAL (RE)CLAMATIONS OF MY TSHIMANDA, MY IDENTITY, MY LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The standardisation process of a language is always a polemic undertaking, and Tshivenḓa is no exception. This article explores the Tshivenḓa dialects and the standardisation process that this language went through. The importance of language as a primary resource for an individual, social identification, and also as a means of learning and communication, cannot be overemphasised. Moreover, when different language varieties come into contact, acculturation is inevitable, i.e., linguistic and cultural elements from both sides will diffuse and "contaminate" each other's languages and culture. However, this phenomenon is not fully researched, especially among the Tshivenḓa dialects. The lexicographers and terminographers, who are tasked with the development and maintenance of the Tshivenḓa language, seem to be "trapped" in the colonial and apartheid era, i.e., of selecting and elevating one dialect over others to represent a language. Since 1994, the year of the dawn of a democratic dispensation in South Africa, this process has proceeded at a snail's pace. In this study, a qualitative, ethnographic approach was adopted, and data were collected through telephonic interviews, where six participants were purposefully and conveniently sampled. The findings of this study may benefit speakers of Tshivenḓa,

lexicographers, terminographers, and all language practitioners, teachers, and learners. When people value their language and heritage, use it often without prejudice or hesitancy, and practice their culture and traditions, their identity, history, dignity, and heritage become preserved. Tshivenḓa, at the official level, may have many lexical items in its endeavour to carry out its function as an official language in different domains.

Keywords: language and identity, language extinction, dialect, Tshivenḓa, standardisation, communication, vitality

INTRODUCTION

The premise of this article is two-fold: (a) non-standard languages should be officially recognised as legitimate and essential in the standardisation and use of languages in South Africa, and (b) this recognition should harmonise with the decolonisation and subsequent Africanisation of epistemologies and pedagogies in the African university (Sebola and Mogoboya 2020; Zondi 2021). This premise is anchored, firstly, to the realisation that "there is undisputed evidence that the use of so-called non-standard varieties of language in South Africa is on the increase, and serve as an important communication bridge for a supra-nation that has many people of different ethnicities living side-by-side in different urban settings in the country" (Ditselê and Mann 2014, 159). The whole notion of dialects results largely, not only in the creation and perpetuation of ethnic divisions within the communities that share one "mother" language, but also in the perception of non-standard dialects (by language purists) as contaminators of the standard dialect, despite these dialects being mutually intelligible among the various speakers (Mulaudzi 1999; Takalani 2009; Heugh 2015; Dhlamini 2019; Majola, Ditselê, and Cekiso 2019; Rakgogo and Mandende 2022). Dialects are so important that they can yield poor academic performance among students who do not write "standard" language, an approach that Vygotsky's theoretical constructs do not support (Marginson and Dang 2017). These constructs purport that students' knowledge acquisition, construction, and production are determined by the very learners' socio-cultural environments. Thus, there is a connection between a language (dialect) and education, particularly because dialects are carriers of indigenous knowledge systems. Therefore, when one dialect is accorded prestige and an official status as a standard language at the expense of its other dialects, multifarious challenges arise, not only for the students but also society as a whole (Majola et al. 2019; Ramothwala et al. 2021; 2022; Rakgogo and Zungu 2021; Rakgogo and Mandende 2022). This is why this article considers the dialects of a given "mother" language as being vital in the development and preservation of that language.

Secondly, closely linked to the consideration of dialects as essential in the standardisation and harmonisation of "mother" languages is the notion of linguistic decolonisation (Sibanda

2019). This is because the interface between linguistic imperialism and education in the African context can never be overemphasised. Certainly, several factors contribute to the marginalisation of African (indigenous) languages and yet, the same factors ensure that colonial languages, i.e., French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, maintain their primacy and supremacy in the linguistic pyramids of African countries. Such factors include but are not limited to, globalisation, negative attitudes towards indigenous languages, economic factors, lack of will by state officials to promote indigenous languages (Maḓadzhe 2019); colonial language policies and linguistic neo-colonialism (Viriri 2003; Sibanda 2019). For this reason, the discourse on dialectology cannot be divorced from decolonisation, particularly within the sphere of basic and higher education in Africa. That colonisation, linguistic and otherwise, left indelible marks on the African psyche is also notable in how even among African languages (dialects), there are some shreds evidence of linguistic neo-colonialism and imperialism in that, a dialect emanating from a "mother" language, for instance, is still perceived as being more eligible for standardisation than others. As a result, the so-called non-standard, minority and "weak" languages or dialects are currently endangered and at risk of linguistic genocide (May 2006; Obwoge 2019). Considering that coloniality essentially manifests in a trifocal matrix, namely, "coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being" (Sibanda 2019, 2), it stands to reason that, the marginalisation and consequent death of a language/dialect equate with the erasure of its speakers' identity and culture. Therefore, this article foregrounds linguistic decolonisation as a second layer of its aim. Also, the impetus of the article derives from the realisation that occurrences of intra-linguistic colonisation and contestation have not been fully explored by researchers on sociolinguistics, particularly Tshivenḓa sociolinguists, with the exception of Mulaudzi (1999) and Takalani (2009). Therefore, the paucity of research in this field cannot be left unattended, especially when dialectical genocide persists, cases in point being Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Spain, and in the case of this article, South Africa (Ianos et al. 2015; Pearson 2016; Abdelhay, Makoni, and Makoni 2010).

In South Africa, language matters even entail how some indigenous languages should or should not be named. For example, among the Bapedi of South Africa, there is no agreement on whether their language should be named Sepedi, Northern Sotho, or Sesotho sa Leboa. To further highlight the capability of language to cause contestations in society, speakers of other dialects related to Sepedi, argue that the name "Sepedi" does not represent their languages, cultures, and identities. The Balobedu claim to speak Khelobedu, and not Sepedi. The same applies to the Amabhaça of the Eastern Cape (South Africa) who also claim to speak isiBhaça, and not isiXhosa or isiZulu (Rakgogo and Van Huyssteen 2019; Majola et al. 2019; Rakgogo and Zungu 2021). Therefore, the issue of language and identity needs to be treated with caution

because it is an emotive matter, and manifests various layers of coloniality; hence, this article's engagement with dialectology from a decolonial perspective. Concurrently, these linguistic contestations bring to light the fact that, when the standard varieties of languages such as Sepedi and isiXhosa were chosen, there was no harmonisation process that took place. The issue around the standardisation of Sepedi in particular is a classic example of a failure of a standardisation process that disregards harmonisation. No other language in South Africa is called by three different nomenclatures except this language. A lesson could be learned from the Shona language in Zimbabwe, where all dialects are allowed to coexist, and emphasis is on consistency, i.e., a speaker should use the chosen dialect throughout (Mberi 2009; Mhute 2016). It seems as if the understanding of language-by-language planners in African, and in South Africa in particular, is limited to the official languages. Anything perceived as not being official is not a "language", despite there being evidence to the contrary. Hence, this article treats one of the Tshivenḓa dialects, Tshimanda, as a suitable example of how the marginalisation of a dialect ultimately becomes detrimental to the maintenance and development of the "mother" language itself, as well as the dignity, identity, and heritage of its speakers.

THE MARGINALISATION OF TSHIVENḒA DIALECTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the dialect that has been chosen as the standard and even "pure" Tshivenḓa is Tshiphani. Among other reasons, it was chosen mainly because it is spoken in the central Vhembe District and that it has little influence or contact with neighbouring varieties such as Shona and Kalanga, from Zimbabwe, in the North, Xitsonga from Vatsonga of South Africa and Mozambique, in the East, and Setlokwa and Khelobedu from the Southern and Western parts of the Vhembe District (Mulaudzi 1999; Mafela 2005; Takalani 2009; Muthivhi 2010). However, this choice and its attendant justifications are irrelevant in the modern Vhembe District. For instance, the Tshivhase and Mphaphuli areas have been attraction centres of economic activities since 1994, and considering that when there are contacts among different nations that speak different languages, possibilities abound that these languages may also influence each other linguistically. The impact of this contact may also affect the "cultural purity" of these speech communities, as language and culture are inextricably intertwined entities. In essence, language encapsulates how a society lives and when societies are juxtaposed, the diffusion of linguistic and cultural elements among such linguistic communities is inevitable. This diffusion may also occur among the dialects of the same "mother" language. However, diffusion does not necessarily erase the varying degrees of intelligibility intra-linguistically. For example, the noun "*vhagi*" (jacket), from Tshiilafuri (Tshivenḓa dialect), can be understood by speakers of other dialects such as Tshironga, Tshiphani, Tshimbedzi, or

Tshiṋia (Tshivenḓa dialects) without having to consult an interpreter for the meaning of the noun. However, Tshiilafuri lexical items such as, "*ṅwedzhi*" (bride), "*moṱholovhogo*" (a big hole), "*mukhodzi*" (a friend), and "*malidzwana*" (lizard), may be difficult for the Vhavenḓa who do not speak this dialect (Mulaudzi 1999). This is why on one level, this article advocates that the standardisation of Tshivenḓa language should not ignore its harmonisation with its dialects whilst on the other level, it views this harmonisation as having a significant bearing on the decoloniality of the speakers' being, knowledge and power.

Given that some Tshivenḓa dialects, including Tshimanda, are being ignored in spite of their significant role in identifying individuals in social settings among the in-groups, i.e., groups that identify themselves as speakers of the same language remains (Tajfel 1979; Stets and Burke 1996), it is imperative to consider the implications of neglecting dialects within the same "mother" language in favour of one. For example, students coming from areas where the chosen dialect is not spoken, still have a mountain to climb in South Africa, as they are expected to take two "L2s" (languages) at school, i.e., English and a "standard indigenous language", which is not their home language (non-standard variety), and leave out their L1 as it is, simply because it is, unfortunately, not regarded as a "standard" language. Yet, these students are still expected to perform at the same level as those learners whose dialects have been chosen and crowned as the "standard" language. This is a blatant violation of the principles of social justice and linguistic rights (Madonsela 2012; Charmaz 2013).

South African students are said, generally, to perform poorly in their home language subjects in many South African schools (Majola et al. 2019; Ramothwala et al. 2021). Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) eloquently affirm this and report on the correlation between a home language and reading for comprehension, with the prevalence of language barriers being the main finding of their study. They further aver that many students in South Africa take "home" languages that are not their "home" languages. The students' poor academic performance in their home language should come as no surprise, considering that their dialects are not taken seriously in the education sector (Biltoo 2004). This shows that the current approach to the standardisation of a language in South Africa exacerbates the matter and seems unfair to many learners coming from "unofficialised" linguistic backgrounds. Disheartening is that 29 years into South Africa's democracy, the standardisation process continues to ignore this problem, and despite recurrent campaigns for human linguistic rights, not much has changed in the country's linguistic landscape (Madonsela 2012; Mabasa 2016). Unless South Africa's language planners in education realise and remove this impediment, it is unlikely that this problem will ever find a solution. For as long as those who speak non-standard dialects are viewed with contempt as "outsiders", and in some instances, frowned upon, consequently

suffering from linguistic disorientation and humiliation, not much will change. Our premise is that, because communicative competence is achieved among speakers of Tshivenḓa dialects because these dialects are regarded as mutually intelligible (Mulaudzi 1999), Tshimanda should be considered eligible for standardisation in South Africa, or at the very least harmonised orthographically and otherwise with Tshiphani.

Dialects play an important role in identifying people within the same "mother" speech community. The issue around dialect further manifests itself at the school level, where learners who speak a particular variety would always be reprimanded for using the non-standardised linguistic terms, albeit, they are the L1 speakers of the "mother" language. Furthermore, some people "frown" on and show negative attitudes towards people who speak a particular dialect that is not the same as theirs, as if they are not speakers of the same "mother" language, to the extent that learners who use the "non-standard" varieties are penalised (Mashamaite 2012; Majola et al. 2019; Ramothwala et al. 2021).

In a democratic country like South Africa, speakers of the same language, at the macro level (national level), notwithstanding that some speak different dialects at the micro level (local/regional level) should be made aware of the important issues around dialects. Thus, the article also aims to conscientise speakers of the same language, i.e., Tshivenḓa, to embrace the peculiarity of dialects within the same language. This will reveal that Tshivenḓa is essentially an amalgamated entity and that when people speaking different languages cohabit, it is inevitable that there will be a diffusion of linguistic forms from one language to another. This phenomenon of cohabitation is very common in South Africa, which is a multicultural, multilingual and multiracial country. The different dialects that constitute a language should be appreciated for their richness, and should not be viewed with resentment by linguistic purists. A good lesson regarding language and identity maintenance comes from the Burushos of Srinagar who managed to maintain their social identity among the Kashmiris after their 125 years of immigration to Kashmir in Jammu and Kashmir State of India (Ahmed 2016). Moreover, the article intends to explore the danger of marginalising languages that represent the micro-level. As language and culture are intertwined, if dialects are quashed, so will the culture(s) connected with them.

Obwoge (2019) sums up this view by positing that there should not be any dialect or language that is seen as superior to another because other dialects may decline in their usage and eventually die. She further says that the effect of this domination may be felt in education and other spheres of life, which may also affect access to socio-economic resources and politics. The consequences of dialect superiority are dire; they may "cause classification of people into social classes and stratification thus denying them a sense of equality" (Obwoge 2019, 15).

A LANGUAGE AND ITS FUNCTIONS

Scholars such as Yule (2017), Mhute (2016), Kaburise (2004, 2012); and, Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2011), to mention a few, have paid attention to the term language and its functions. Language is an element that makes human beings different from animals. Human beings use language to communicate their worldviews, and also to express their feelings and thoughts around issues. Yule (2017, 13) buttresses the issue about the functions of language by looking at the reflexivity of the language, and goes on to say, "The property of reflexivity (or reflexiveness) accounts for the fact that we can use language to think and talk about language itself, making it one of the distinguishing features of human language".

Language is used to apologise, greet, accuse, warn, command, to express an opinion, among other things (Kaburise 2004). In tandem with this view, Kaburise (2004, 5) postulates that "the main object of a language is to communicate the wishes of its users". In this regard, language is a means of communication between interlocutors. No language, no communication, be it verbally or non-verbally; hence, we have sign language. Regarding communication, Kaburise (2004, 5) unreservedly regards it as a process that, "involves a complex verbal behaviour where the participants have to accommodate a variety of interconnected factors before meaning can be generated". The meaning generated by a language is dependent on the form and sociocultural context of such an utterance. Therefore, this meaning, in this regard, is created by a language local people speak, which is called a dialect. Miller (2000) views language as a primary means with which people enact their social identities and display their membership in the cultural and linguistic group in society. This role, which is played by a language, applies to a dialect. Likewise, Madiba (2012) proposes the use of an indigenous African language or its variety as a complementary model in teaching and learning environments. From the above views, one realises the importance of a language from different angles, i.e., identity formation, communication, and teaching and learning, all of which should never be taken for granted.

DIALECTOLOGY

Dialectology is the study of language variations or varieties, caused by some elements or features that appear in languages that make the language differ from each other, mostly, geographically. Some of these differences are brought about by language or human contact and/or cohabitation. Human or language contacts impact each other in the sense that some linguistic elements from one language "move" to or are adapted by the other language, and vice versa, through an acculturation process. According to Doucerain, Segalowitz, and Ryder (2017,

98), acculturation is, "the intra-individual change processes resulting from a person moving into a new cultural environment". Thus, acculturation is a process that happens through people's contact, resulting in a transmission of cultural elements, created by different factors, such as wars, economic development, politics and socio-psychological factors to both sides. As a result, people who are supposed to be speaking the same language, because of the presence of these "foreign elements" in their linguistic repertoire, are seen as speaking a "different" language from the one that is spoken by another group of people coming from a different location. No language is pure, because, for a language to grow, it has to adapt linguistic varieties from other languages or dialects through dialectical and cultural borrowing (Biltoo 2004).

Mafela (2010a; 2010b), in his analysis of Tshivenḓa dictionaries, succinctly avers that Tshivenḓa lexicographers are not keen on using words that show origins from the same South African indigenous languages despite the fact that speakers of Tshivenḓa have accepted those languages in their daily communicative experiences. He posits that Tshivenḓa lexicographers continue to disown these linguistic aspects that are being used by Tshivenḓa speakers, i.e., "*mungana*", which means a "friend", a noun from the Tshironga dialect, "*Muhalivho*", which means a "sister in-law", from the Tshiilafuri dialect (Mafela 2010a). Tshivenḓa lexicographers and terminographers seem indifferent to the empirical information about the uses of these varieties and how these varieties complement each other at a functional level. They rather rely on their intuitive knowledge of Tshivenḓa varieties, instead of being guided by a knowledge that is informed by the realities on the ground. If they did, they would have long realised that what they propose is not what the users are doing. Users of these different dialects communicate with ease among themselves, i.e., as a communicative tool from a pragmatic point of view, with no interpreting service needed (Kaburise 2004, 2012). Interestingly, if people speak about borrowing or adapting, South African indigenous languages were supposed to consider sister languages first, as Mafela (2010a) noted, but it seems that Tshivenḓa lexicographers, like other lexicographers and terminographers, for South African indigenous languages, prefer borrowing/adapting from Afrikaans and English. This approach to the standardisation of languages and the creation of vocabulary by linguists is indicative of their rigid following of the historical language standardisation approach done by the missionaries and the earlier linguists. This is a divisive approach, despite the collective agreement that Bantu languages belong to the same family, as they share some similarities linguistically.

A dialect is a linguistic element that is spoken by a group of people, who have a main "mother" language to which such a dialect belongs. Sometimes, when speech communities are in the minority, their languages may be reduced to a dialect. Interestingly, this attitude does not apply to the European languages in African colonies. A dialect is a language that is regarded as

non-standard variety because of certain features within it, “foreign linguistic elements” that are not shared by all speakers of the same “mother” language. A dialect contains linguistic elements that are unique to such a “language”. To support this view, Lane (2000, 352) avers that, “Dialectology has always been a study of people’s lives as expressed through local [micro-level] linguistic forms”. The local linguistic forms are the language forms that identify local people from other areas or localities. It is the local language that is used by people who live in such localities. Lane (2000, 352) further asserts that, “Dialectology focuses on language use in everyday situations. These situations are usually taken for granted, but in them, we negotiate our identities and these everyday moments that we actively balance our realities and experiences against our ideals and expectations.” Dialects become local languages, understood and used by local people; so, they are as important as the “mother” language. People’s heritages are reflected in their languages, thus, if their languages are disparaged, their heritages would disappear too (Mhute 2016).

Tshivenḓa is a language that is spoken mostly in the Vhembe district, Limpopo Province. Vhavenḓa, primary speakers of this language, are also found in other provinces such as Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Northwest, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal. This is as a result of various reasons, such as employment and business opportunities. Tshivenḓa is also spoken outside the borders of South Africa, such as Zimbabwe (Tlou 2018).

The South African Tshivenḓa, which is the focus of this article, has eight different dialects. They are Tshiphani, Tshironga, Tshimbedzi, Tshiṋia, Tshiṱavhatsindi, Tshiilafuri, Tshimanda and Tshilembetu. Tshiphani is a dialect from where a standard Tshivenḓa was derived because of the influence of the missionaries (Mafela 2005; Muthivhi 2010). At this juncture, one might, for comparative purposes, provide some examples of nouns and verbs from the afore-mentioned Tshivenḓa dialects. Such examples are: Tshimanda/Tshilaudzi, *khoomo* > *kholomo* (cattle), *muambo* > *mulambo* (a river), *muio* > *mulilo* (fire), *Muomo* > *mulomo* (mouth), *ia* > *lila* (cry), *aa* > *lala* (sleep). On the other hand, Tshimbedzi, Tshiṱavhatsindi, Tshilembetu, Tshiilafuri/Tshiluvhu/Tshuguvhu, Tshiṋia (spoken at Ṋiani, Hamakuya, Folovhoḓwe, Hamanezhe, Hamutele) is characterised by lexical terms such as *kana* instead of (std. *kwana)* (a child), *kanga*, instead of (std. *kwanga)* (mine). Tshironga (spoken at Hamasia, Hadavhana, Hatshikonelo, Hamuraga) has some Xitsonga lexemes, i.e., *mungana*/*mugana* (std. *khonani/ṱhama*), (a friend), *kamunḓina* (std. *inwi*) (you), *ka* [mutshelo “fruit”] (std. *fula*) (p\picking fruits) (Mulaudzi 1999; Takalani 2009). According to Mulaudzi (1999), scholars give different accounts regarding the Tshivenḓa dialects, because some dialects show minimal differences while in others, the degree of differences is huge.

LANGUAGES OF HIGH AND LOW STATUSES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

By the terms high and low statues of languages, we mean the languages that are used at national (official purposes) and local or regional levels, i.e., standard and non-standardised languages. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the Use of the Official Languages Act 12 of 2012 (Republic of South Africa 2012) acknowledge the nine previously disadvantaged South African indigenous languages, such as isiNdebele, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenḓa, and Xitsonga as high level languages (Rakgogo and Mandende 2022). However, there is a level that is neglected, that is, the micro-level. The micro-level represents the dimension where dialects are situated and are in operation. It is the low level (micro-level) that was supposed to have been addressed by the standardisation and harmonisation of languages, if linguists were to be fair to the speakers of these languages.

It is the belief of the authors that, until the micro-level strata of language are taken into consideration, the issue of social identity and learners' home language for academic performance cannot be adequately addressed. This is the level that one can call "the missing middle" as far as this phenomenon is concerned. Standardisation and harmonisation processes of the languages were supposed to be intended to address this issue, rather than stigmatising these languages and their speakers, as is currently the case. Sadly, the standardisation and harmonisation processes, if indeed done, remain based on the approach of the missionaries and earlier scholars.

The mindset of current lexicographers, terminographers, and language practitioners alike are still caged in this absolute old philosophical approach which is against the dictates of the modern realities regarding dialectology. Language is fluid, but the standardisation processes are ironically steadfast and rigid (Da Costa, Dyers, and Mhetha 2014; Ditsele and Mann 2014; Heugh 2015; Dhlamini 2019). Paradoxically, when issues around language and terminology development are attended to, it remains the matter of the pundits, who are deemed to have and carry the absolute custodian rights of these languages at a micro level, and totally disregard the same people who constantly utilise their varieties, as they use them to communicate their ideas and to reflect their identities and heritage at social levels. The language standardisation process seems to be approached from a "mechanical point of view", rather than a bottom-up approach, where data should be the main factors that inform the standardisation process; instead, the standardisation process is approached as if the goal is to teach people how to speak (their own language/varieties). Mberi (2009) suggests a pragmatic approach that was done to the standardisation and harmonisation of Shona, and reports that the process reflects an amalgamation of other varieties spoken in Zimbabwe. This approach does not alienate anyone;

on the contrary, it is a unification process that recognises the cohabitation of languages and their speakers.

STANDARDISATION AND HARMONISATION PROCESSES

Standardisation is viewed as a process in which linguistic terms are selected, coded, used and accepted by the speakers of a particular language. It entails the words that are used as points of reference when such a language is used for official purposes, and in some instances, only a particular dialect is selected to represent all other varieties of that language (Calteaux 1996; Mulaudzi 1999; Van Huyssteen 2003; Mafela 2010b). Although Van Huyssteen (2003) talks about the five stages of language standardisation, i.e., selection, graphitisation, codification, elaboration and acceptance, other scholars such as Da Costa et al. (2014) and Heugh (2015) reduced these stages into four, i.e., selection, codification, elaboration, and acceptance, having merged graphitisation and codification into one, i.e., codification.

Standardisation is part of language harmonisation for officialisation purposes to reach homogeneity (Heugh 2015; Dhlamini 2019). The standardisation process comes after a language has been officialised by the government. Linguists, particularly terminologists and lexicographers, are expected to come up with representative terms and concepts that are illustrative of dialects that constitute a language at a macro level that would be used in different domains (Mafela 2010a). This process is concluded when those terms and concepts are accepted by the language users as the terms and concepts that describe the situations and thoughts in a way that users understand them. This includes the orthography (codification) of those linguistic terms and concepts.

Accordingly, Calteaux (1996), Mafela (2010b), and Heugh (2015) posit that a standard language is a language that is used at schools and by the government, and has a standard written form. It is taught in schools and used in publications and on the radio. This assertion encapsulates the elements of ethnolinguistic vitality, such as institutional support and status (Giles et al. 1977). In many South African indigenous languages, it seems that the standardisation of languages was done, to a large extent, without taking into consideration the process of harmonisation. This occurred when language planners picked up a dialect and made it the best representative of the other dialects of the same language, disregarding harmonisation, which would have been a better approach. Had harmonisation been considered, this would have resulted in the amalgamation of linguistic elements from different dialects and the forging of unity among its speakers and thus eliminate any appearances of the stigmatisation of the speakers of other dialects. Moreover, making a standard language homogenous would have been a better inclusive approach reminiscent of linguistic and social justice.

The end results of this process, if not managed properly, may result in one language variety (dialect) accorded a high status over other dialects, which may further lead to the death of other varieties, and dialectical shifts to a dialect that has a high status within the same "mother" language. Similarly, Takalani (2009, 5) buttresses this point by saying that "a standardized variety can also be used to give prestige to speakers, marking off those who employ it from those who do not, that is those who continue to speak a non-standardized variety". A standardisation process that is seen as disparaging other varieties should, therefore, be discouraged. This is the focus of this article, where researchers aim to explore the reasons and causes of the death of the Tshimanda among its speakers. Language varieties that find themselves excluded from the standard varieties remain stigmatised or regarded as "inferior". Interestingly, Da Costa et al. (2014) argue against this approach and assert that these varieties are not inferior as they have the capacity to express people's thoughts. In accord, Mhute (2016) argues that if standardisation is not properly managed, it may be seen as a precursor of language shift and ultimately language death, precisely of those varieties that are not chosen and included in the standard language. Mhute (2016) further posits that the attitude towards language varieties may render the heritage language impure, and its speakers may shift to speak a language that is perceived as superior and relevant. Standardisation by means of choosing a variety to represent a language, has a tendency to wipe out other varieties, like the Ndau variety in Zimbabwe (Mhute 2016).

At this point, we should also applaud the role played by the missionaries in the standardisation of African languages. The role that the missionaries played in the development of African languages is immense. They are the pioneers in this regard and helped lay the foundation for the standardisation of these languages (Mafela 2005; Mberi 2009; Muthivhi 2010; Ranamane 2012; Mhute 2016).

THE OFFICIAL STATUS OF LANGUAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Tshivenḓa has maintained its national official status in South Africa since the adoption of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Before this period, Tshivenḓa was used as one of the official languages of the then Vendaland Bantustan, like many other South African indigenous languages such as, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Siswati and Xitsonga (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). These South African indigenous languages were given "official status" at their regional levels by the then Apartheid Regime (1949–1994).

As already stated, Tshivenḓa has about eight dialects. They are Tshironga, spoken in the South-Eastern parts of the Vhembe District, Tshiphani is predominately spoken in the central

Vhembe District, Tshiilafuri is spoken in the South-Western parts of the Vhembe District, Tshiṋia is spoken mostly in the North-Eastern parts of the Vhembe District, Tshilembetu is dominant in the North-Western areas of the Vhembe District, Tshimbedzi is spoken in the Eastern parts of the Vhembe District, and lastly, Tshimanda is spoken, mainly by the Vhaluadzi from Lwamondo, Tshisaulu, Gwamasenga, Hamutsha, Hamasia, and Tshimbupfe. The Tshimanda dialect is also referred to as Tshiluadzi (Mulaudzi 1999). It should be noted here that Tshiphani was accorded a higher linguistic status, was used for publication, education, and on the radio, to the exclusion of all other Tshivenḓa dialects. Put succinctly, Tshiphani was chosen as the so-called standard Tshivenḓa with little or no regard for inputs from other dialects (Calteaux 1996; Giles, Bourhis and Taylor 1997; Mafela 2005; Muthivhi 2010). No harmonisation processes were followed. One dialect was just made to represent all the dialects. Although one understands this linguistic injustice, it was done because the first pioneers of western education in Venḓa were missionaries, the Berlin Missionary Society (Mafela 2005), who happened to find a home where the Tshiphani dialect was dominantly spoken, the central Venḓa. Surprisingly, the lexicographers and terminographers of the modern South Africa, and for the Tshivenḓa in particular, are Tshivenḓa L1 speakers, but the approach remains the same as that of the pioneers of western education in Venḓa.

In the modern Vhembe District, particularly the Tshivhasa and Mphaphuli areas, have become areas of ethnic and dialectic attraction, due to being the economic hubs in the region. Noteworthy, Tshimanda is largely spoken in these areas. Therefore, in lieu of this, we thought it fit to reflect on the prospects of its preservation and promotion by way of standardisation in South Africa. Today, this central business district is fully occupied by the "elite", including academic and business people from different areas, and many of them are from other regions of South Africa, and some are from African content. Thus, credits should be granted to the University of Venḓa that has been established in this district since 1982 and attracted many academics, administrative staff, and student alike from different nationalities and ethnic groups. These academic and economic immigrants brought with them their linguistic varieties to this region.

Many of these dialects are growing and maintained by their speakers, who transfer them to their younger generations, but it does not seem to be the same with the Tshimanda dialect. The younger generation from the areas where this dialect is spoken do not know it or even of its existence. It is against this backdrop that the researchers deemed it necessary to explore the reasons and factors behind this matter, that is, prospects of Tshimanda extinction both in Venḓa and Tshivenḓa. Dialects are the backbone of the mainstream language, and thus the homogeneity of dialects should be vehemently encouraged. Among the speakers of the same

language, dialects play an important role in identifying people as an inner-group or intragroup identification. For this reason, it is important to understand why Tshimanda speakers seem to be shifting to speaking other dialects within their communities. Furthermore, it seems the younger generation does not want to associate themselves with this dialect, a language of their forefathers. Consequently, this attitude needs to be explored as it has the potential to "kill" the dialect. And, furthermore, if this dialect is not documented, future generations may not know the language of their forefathers, as is the case with some young generation currently.

Vhalaudzi and people from the locations where the language originated may lose their identity if they are not made aware of their attitude towards abandoning the language of their forefathers. Again, during their ancestral ceremonies, if they do not communicate with them (ancestors) in the language that they (ancestors) understand, their requests and wishes might not be heard by their ancestors, as it is believed among many Africans that ancestors still play a big role in the lives of the living ones (Sagna and Bassène 2016). Furthermore, a language relates to its culture, therefore, the death of this dialect might also mean the death of the Tshimanda culture, thus impacting negatively on the culture of Tshivenḓa speakers as a whole. For Tshivenḓa to grow, after having been given an official status, it should manage its dialects effectively in such a way that none of its current dialects should be allowed to diminish. Language practitioners tasked with the standardisation of the terms and concepts to be used for official purposes should be made aware of the impact that the standardisation processes that disregards other dialects of a language in the process, will be regarded as not different from "butchers" of people's identities in the future (May 2006).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is undergirded by a Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT takes cognisance of a person's awareness of their belonging to a social group or entity (Hogg and Abrams 1988). A sense of shared identity entails a person's knowledge of who they are in relation to their group, and what characterises membership(s) (McLeod 2008). Similarly, Stets and Burke (1996) opine that in a communal identity, a cluster of individuals embrace or have a mutual sense of identification, or perceive of themselves as fellows of the same communal entity. Regarding people's identity and their individual sense of belonging, Tajfel (1979) underscores this by pointing out that groups to which people derive their sense of pride, self-regard, and belonging are vital sources of social selfhood and identity articulations. Muavha (2022) and Mudau (2022) emphasised the value of social identity formation through language in their respective studies. They found that if language is not maintained and preserved, people may lose their identities, as a disregard for people's language is perceived as a precursor of language shift and its death.

METHODS

A dialectical approach, from a sociocultural point of view, was used to gather data qualitatively through telephonic semi-structured interviews for this article, with the aid of an audio recorder. The reason being that the data was collected between 2020 and 2021, when the world was engulfed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Six (6) knowledgeable participants were purposefully selected to participate in this research. Moreover, some of the few surviving members who speak this dialect are the *Khadzi.* A *Khadzi* is a chief's sister who is crowned on the same day. The *Khadzi* would play a big role in selecting the chief's successor (Matshidze 2013). We selected two (2) females, aged 59 and above, one (1) traditional leader, and a male, aged between 65 and 75 years old from the Lwamondo local community to share their views about the phenomenon, dialectology, with particular reference to Tshimanda. Two (2) retired Grade 12 examiners, males above 65 years old, one (1) high school teacher, a male above 55, and one (1) member of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), a male above 50 years old, were also selected for participation in the interviews. The ethnographic qualitative approach, using telephonic interviews, gave the researchers an opportunity to probe further into the phenomenon under study. It was important to apply purposive techniques to get the best participants; hence, we targeted the most experienced citizens as the participants for this article to gather "rich" data.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study intended to explore the survival of Tshimanda as one of the Tshivenḓa dialects, spoken mainly at Lwamondo, Tshisaulu, Gwamasenga, Hamutsha, Hamasia, and Tshimbupfe. These are the areas that belong to the Vhalaudzi clan. There is anecdotal evidence that this dialect is no longer spoken compared to Tshironga, Tshiilafuri, Tshimbedzi, and Tshiṋia. The traces of the dialect ever existing remain in the library, and this is a hurtful scar for the Tshivenḓa language, which is struggling to compete with its sister languages in officialdom environments. The veracity of this anecdotal evidence needs to be further explored and documented. The disappearance of this dialect as a language has dire consequences for the Tshivenḓa language as this may be a precursor of its total erosion and extinction, if not properly addressed. The death of one dialect of a language that is regarded as a minority should be circumvented by the "powers-that-be", especially those tasked with language maintenance and development, such as lexicographers and terminographers, and language practitioners alike.

The recognition of dialects and dialectology as a field of study is pertinent in the current discourse on the decolonisation and Africanisation of curricula in South Africa's higher

education. This is because, embedded in dialects and dialectology are the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), which can never be ignored in the present "search of a decolonial turn" (Zondi 2021, 1). By AIKS, it is meant here a body of historically (and traditionally) organised knowledge that is indispensable in the long-term adaptation of a community or human groups to the biophysical environment, and the mode in which people have understood themselves in relation to their natural environment (Ejike 2020). Such an understanding of "self" encapsulates, among other things, experiences, skills, insights and innovations of people in their respective local communities, amassed over the years and applied to sustain or develop their livelihoods (Masoga and Kaya 2012). Therefore, AIKS represents a manifold accrual of local context-relevant knowledge that embraces the essence of ancestral knowing and the heritages of sundry histories and cultures (Akena 2012). This lends credence to the idea that AIKS cannot be severed from the social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic realities of the indigenous people (Ejike 2020), and the formulation of curricula in higher education. Dialects as embodiments of these systems comprise their speakers' sets of ideas, beliefs and practices, most of which have indigenised religious substructures that are linked to a specific locale and have been used by the people to interact with their environment and other people over a long period. Therefore, the marginalisation or death of dialects is accompanied by the marginalisation and subsequent death of these systems that are largely used to pronounce the ontological (aesthetic and ethical), spiritual, and social values of a society or community. These values, often transferred from one generation to another, include teachings about communal beliefs, practices associated with botany, human nutrition, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, food preparation and preservation, medicine, animal husbandry, and others (Mawere 2015). Thus, the whole project of linguistic decolonisation and Africanisation of epistemologies and pedagogies in the African university becomes unimaginable without the consideration of dialects as part of the indigenes' systematic *ways of knowing* (Akena 2012), which is why the discussion and findings of this article can shed light on the role of language in the decolonisation of African higher education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this article show that dialects should be maintained and preserved as they reflect the identity and heritage of their speakers. One of the participants indicated that if dialects are not developed and allowed to flourish, the identity and heritage of their speakers will disappear. This is supported by the chosen theoretical framework that buttresses that language plays a significant role in identity formation in a social setting (Tajfel 1979; Stets and Burke 1996; McLeod 2008). The same applies to the Tshimanda dialect. Language planners and language

practitioners should be encouraged to allow speakers of this dialect to express themselves in their language without any fear of being victimised and stigmatised for speaking dialects that are not supported by media such as Radio and Television, under the pretext that their dialects are not standardised.

Another important positive finding from this article is that schools are allowing students to use their local languages when doing their Home Languages. One participant, a retired teacher of Tshivenḓa at the Further Education and Training (FET) band, who was an examiner of Tshivenḓa Home Language, reported that Grade 12 learners are allowed to use their local languages when they write their examinations and are not penalised for that. This finding shows that the Department of Basic Education is becoming flexible in allowing learners to express themselves in their local languages, as informed by Vygotsky's theory (Marginson and Dang 2017). A similar case was reported in Zimbabwe about the standardisation and harmonisation of Shona. Shona resulted from the amalgamation of different dialects spoken in Zimbabwe (Mberi 2009; Mhute 2016). This attitude by the Department of Basic Education could be interpreted as a positive sign toward the recognition of the local languages, such as dialects in education.

Another finding is that allowing varieties from other dialects will make the language grow and have many synonyms and help its speakers to be able to express themselves more clearly. Accordingly, one participant who is a male linguist avowed that the accommodation of various linguistic varieties can be used to forge unity between the speakers of these dialects because no dialect would be seen as superior to the other (Mafela 2010b; Heugh 2015; Dhlamini 2019).

The study further found that Tshivenḓa lexicographers and terminographers do not like borrowing from other African languages; instead, they prefer to borrow from Afrikaans and English. One participant gave examples of the noun "*Tshinkwa*" (bread) and the verb "*ṱhogomela*" (take care of). These words are rejected by Tshivenḓa language practitioners because they assume that their etymologies are in Xitsonga and Sepedi, respectively. This kind of attitude needs to be discouraged because it has the potential to fuel ethnic division among the speakers of these languages, i.e., Sepedi, Tshivenḓa, and Xitsonga. Language is an emotive issue, as such, it needs to be addressed with care.

The literature reviewed revealed that the uniqueness of the Tshimanda dialect is more on phonology and pronunciation. In this dialect, there are no sounds such as "l" and "w", as in *kholomo (*cattle) > "*Khoomo*"; "*kheluwa*" (deviate) > *khelua* are omitted. It should be noted that these pronunciation differences that are brought by the omission of the sound /l/ do not bring any differences in meaning, contrary to the findings by Takalani (2009). One of the participants underscored this point as evinced by the data. What we found is that, the pronunciations of the

words with these sounds might be perceived as odd, but one can nevertheless still get the same meaning, as in "*muambo*" (river), where one still understands that a speaker is talking about a river (std. *mulambo*).

Another finding was on the standardisation and harmonisation processes by PanSALB and composition. In this regard, one participant asserts that PanSALB should be composed of speakers from different speech communities, unlike the current arrangement, which was also succinctly buttressed by another participant, who asserts that membership to this board is based on experience, academic qualifications, and specialisation. Geographic location does not matter. Additionally, the data show that the decision about the authentication of terms rests on the mercy of the members. This is a fundamental flaw in the process of standardisation because a few individuals cannot be responsible for the different varieties that are spoken in different communities and assume that they know by themselves. Speech communities' linguistic rights that are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa are being grossly violated in this manner (Madonsela 2012; Mabasa 2016). This kind of arrangement has the potential to be exclusive, something which should be seriously discouraged.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the article shows that dialects carry people's identity and heritage, and that way, they should be maintained and preserved so that they do not become extinct, like what seems to have happened to Tshimanda, where the young generation does not know of it having ever been in existence (Takalani 2009). The data, evidently, illustrates that people express themselves much better in their languages. Furthermore, learners benefit more if they are allowed to use their language when writing. The decision by the Department of Basic Education not to penalise learners who write in their dialects is commendable. The article recommends that all Tshivenḓa dialects be accommodated in the standard Tshivenḓa. Lastly, membership to the standardisation and harmonisation processes needs to be inclusive, to avoid alienation of speakers of other varieties, and it should invite a representative of school governing bodies.

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