




Policy and practice in South African courtrooms: A case study of Khelovedu language use and the perceptions of interpreters



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This article examines dialect use in South African courtrooms, focusing on Khelovedu, a non-standard variant of Sepedi spoken in Limpopo's Mopani District. Framed by social justice theory and South Africa's multilingual legal framework (*Constitution, sections 6 and 35(3)(k); Use of Official Languages Act*), this study explored the use of Khelovedu in court, interpreters' and magistrates' perceptions and associated challenges. Semi-structured interviews with interpreters from two regional courts were analysed through content analysis with member checking. Findings show that interpreters often used Khelovedu at the request of Balovedu participants to enhance comprehension, engagement and fair-trial rights. While this use improved inclusiveness and efficiency, systemic barriers such as a lack of orthography, a limited legal terminology, euphemisms and the absence of formal training undermined accuracy.

Contribution: These findings highlight a disconnect between policy and practice: although laws and policies support multilingualism, they largely overlook dialects, forcing frontline actors to improvise, which may pose forensic risks. We recommend recognising regionally important dialects in justice-sector policies, implementing dialect-sensitive training with accreditation and developing a collaborative Khelovedu–Sepedi–English legal glossary. Additional measures include pre-hearing terminology discussions, secure digital reference tools with expert support, and quality assurance mechanisms such as clarification events and appeals to strengthen interpretation accuracy.

Keywords: Khelovedu; courtroom interpreting; dialects; language policy; social justice; fairness; South Africa.

Introduction

This article explores the perceptions of interpreters on the use of the Khelovedu dialect in the courtroom. The purpose is to examine how linguistic variation, particularly non-standard dialects, shapes courtroom dynamics and impacts access to justice. Khelovedu, also known as '*Khelo khela kha maabane*', is a non-standard dialect spoken by the Balovedu people in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Khelovedu is not formally taught in schools and lacks a standardised orthography, which makes the use of Khelovedu in legal contexts especially complex. Given these complexities, examining interpreters' perceptions of non-standard dialects such as Khelovedu is crucial for understanding how linguistic diversity influences courtroom dynamics and the equitable delivery of justice.

There is a growing global interest in how dialects and linguistic variation affect courtroom dynamics, especially regarding fairness, credibility and access to justice. The use of dialects in the courtroom is perceived differently throughout the world. The use of dialects in the courtroom, to borrow a phrase from Ramothwala, Cekiso & Mandende (2025), can be described as a 'double-edged sword'. For example, accurate interpretation in a speaker's dialect can prevent misunderstandings that might potentially lead to wrongful convictions. On the other hand, interpreters who are unfamiliar with non-standard dialects can lead to errors in testimony.

A study by Eades (2008) in Australia has revealed that speakers of marginalised dialects were interrupted more and given fewer opportunities to express themselves in the courtroom. It can be argued that the above case does not constitute fairness. Eades' study highlights the challenges that speakers of non-standard dialects often face in the courtroom. Similarly, a study by Kibbee (2020) has shown that speakers of non-standard dialects are at a great disadvantage as far as

fairness and justice are concerned in the courtroom. The consequences of restricting or limiting the use of non-standard dialects in courtrooms are also reported in a study conducted by Hunter et al. (2022). This study revealed that individuals speaking regional dialects faced misunderstandings and prejudice in court, leading to misinterpretation of testimonies and reduced access to justice.

In a South African context, several studies have explored how language choice influences fairness and justice in the courtroom. These include studies by, but not limited to, Kaschula, Docrat, and De Vries (2020), and De Vries and Docrat (2022). These studies have indicated a monolingual bias when it comes to court language, often favouring English over other languages. This bias is typically based on the assumption that English is widely understood. However, such bias can be detrimental, as observed in the Senzo Meyiwa murder trial, a high-profile case involving the killing of the South African soccer star in 2014. Proceedings revealed significant linguistic challenges, with witnesses testifying in isiZulu and interpretation inconsistencies raising concerns about fairness and accuracy in the trial process. Kaschula et al. (2020) revealed that legal practitioners often ignore clients' home languages, even when clients share them, as a result of systemic norms. This practice is tantamount to monolingual bias, which marginalises other languages. The systemic norms need to be challenged because not every person can understand and/or fully express themselves in designated court languages, especially official languages. Furthermore, this bias undermines the *Constitution of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 1996), specifically Section 35(3), which stipulates that every accused person has the right to be tried in a language they fully understand; and, where that is not practicable, to have proceedings interpreted. In the context of Khelovedu, which is a non-standard dialect, having proceedings interpreted can prove to be challenging as the dialect is not standardised. As Khelovedu is not taught at school, as established by Ramothwala (2024), it can be argued that Khelovedu interpreters are therefore not trained to interpret in Khelovedu. Khelovedu speakers, and speakers of other dialects, will inevitably face challenges in the courtroom as a result of the limited training in interpretation and the lack of legal terminology in their dialect. The above prompted the researchers to explore the perceptions of magistrates and interpreters on the use of Khelovedu in the courtroom.

More specifically, this study was motivated by an observation made by the primary researcher, in which he observed instances when Khelovedu was used in one of the courts in Tzaneen, Limpopo Province. It was important to elicit the perceptions of interpreters, to highlight challenges and the potential value of using Khelovedu in court proceedings. In addition, the researchers were also interested to learn whether the use of Khelovedu, as observed by the primary researcher, is a true reflection of the policy prescripts or whether the interpreters are smuggling the dialect into

the courtroom. This study was underpinned by the following research questions:

- What are the policy prescriptions regarding the use of dialects in the courtroom?
- What are the perceptions of interpreters regarding the use of Khelovedu in the courtroom?
- What are the challenges associated with using Khelovedu in the courtroom?

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is important as it provides a foundation for analysis, guides the interpretation of findings and ensures that the study is anchored in established scholarly perspectives. This study found relevance in adopting social justice theory, which emphasises fairness, equity, and the protection of marginalised voices, and is discussed in the following subsection.

Social justice

The study draws on Rawls' (1971) theory of justice, particularly his principle of equal basic liberties and fair equality of opportunity. Language and dialect can be understood as morally arbitrary characteristics; therefore, denying speakers the right to use their own dialects in legal proceedings undermines their ability to participate equally in the justice system. From a Rawlsian perspective, reasonable linguistic accommodations, including competent interpretation, are necessary to ensure fairness.

However, Rawls does not explicitly address language. To address this limitation, the study also engages with contemporary linguistic justice and sociolinguistic theory. Scholars such as Bourdieu (1991) demonstrate how dominant language varieties function as linguistic capital, granting authority to some speakers while delegitimising others. Van Parijs (2011) and Patten (2014) further argue that justice requires institutional recognition of linguistic diversity, as language remains a significant source of structural inequality.

Within the South African context, sociolinguistic research confirms that non-standard dialects are systematic and legitimate forms of communication, not linguistic deficiencies (Docrat & Kaschula 2024; Kaschula et al. 2020). Excluding dialects from courtroom discourse, therefore, constitutes structural injustice. Integrating Rawlsian principles with linguistic justice scholarship, this study argues for the inclusion of non-standard dialects such as Khelovedu in court proceedings. This approach aligns with Section 35(3)(k) of the Constitution of South Africa and supports the need for dialect-sensitive interpreting as a matter of social justice and legal fairness.

Literature review

This literature review situates the study within the broader legal and sociolinguistic context of language use in courtrooms. The review begins by examining the

South African legislative framework governing language use in judicial settings, with particular attention to whether the framework accommodates dialectal diversity. The review then explores global research on the use of dialects in legal systems, followed by South African scholarship on courtroom interpreting and language-related challenges in legal proceedings. The final section identifies gaps in the existing literature, which motivate the present study on the use of Xhosa in courtroom interpreting.

South African legislative landscape

South Africa's legal framework provides the constitutional and statutory basis for language use in the judicial system. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* is the primary legal instrument regulating language rights. Section 6 recognises 12 official languages and obliges the state to take 'practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of indigenous languages'. In addition, Section 35(3)(k) guarantees every accused person the right to a fair trial, including the right to be tried in a language they understand or to have the proceedings interpreted into that language. As Heugh (2015) observes, these provisions reflect the transformative intent of post-apartheid legislation aimed at redressing historical linguistic exclusion. However, other legislative instruments reveal limitations. The *Magistrates' Courts Act 32 of 1944* allows proceedings to be conducted in English or Afrikaans, with interpretation provided wherever necessary. Du Plessis (2017) argues that this Act was formulated during a period when only two official languages were recognised, making it poorly suited to South Africa's contemporary multilingual and dialect-rich context. Similarly, the *Use of Official Languages Act* seeks to operationalise Section 6 of the Constitution by requiring national departments, including the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, to adopt language policies promoting equitable language use. Despite this, Kamwangamalu (2018) notes that English continues to dominate judicial processes, and dialectal variation remains largely unaddressed in practice. Crucially, while the Constitution recognises languages, it does not explicitly address dialects or variation within languages. This omission creates practical challenges in courtroom settings where speakers may use regional or social dialects that differ from standardised forms. Scholars such as Moeketsi (1999) and Kaschula et al. (2020) argue that this constitutional silence increases the risk of misinterpretation and may undermine the fairness of trials. Thus, although South Africa's legislative framework promotes multilingualism, the framework does not adequately account for dialectal diversity in legal proceedings.

Global research on dialects in legal systems

International scholarship highlights both the benefits and the challenges of using speakers' own languages and dialects in judicial contexts. Studies conducted in various legal systems demonstrate that allowing individuals to communicate in their mother tongue enhances accuracy, trust and participation in legal processes (Agüero San Juan &

Villavicencio Miranda 2012; Nji, Ule Ule & Domche 2024). The right to language choice is frequently framed as integral to due process and equality before the law. At the same time, global research points to persistent challenges, particularly when legal systems rely on dominant or colonial languages. In the Philippines, for example, Martin (2018) shows how the English-only courtroom policy marginalises non-English speakers and restricts access to justice. Similar concerns are reported in other multilingual contexts, in which dialect speakers face misunderstanding, misinterpretation and reduced credibility in legal proceedings. These studies underscore the need for legal systems to recognise linguistic diversity beyond standardised language forms, especially for minority and indigenous communities.

South African research on courtroom interpreting

South African scholarship has extensively examined the relationship among language, justice and power in the courtroom. Docrat, Kaschula and Ralarala (2021) argue that language remains one of the most contested issues in the country's legal system, despite constitutional commitments to multilingualism. Research consistently shows that accused persons and witnesses communicate most effectively in their mother tongue, which can contribute to both procedural fairness and efficiency (De Vries & Docrat 2022). Mabilo, Rakgogo and Smith (2024) and Mabilo et al. (2025) study courtroom interpreting in Limpopo magistrates' courts. They explore how multilingualism affects communication and the role of interpreters.

Their work highlights challenges such as dialect variation, idioms and foreign-language testimony. The studies show that skilled interpreting is essential for fairness and access to justice. Similarly, De Vries and Docrat (2022) emphasise the central role of court interpreters in ensuring equal access to justice, while cautioning that inadequate training and limited dialectal competence can lead to serious misinterpretations.

One notable example involves a Sepedi-speaking accused, in which the interpreter's unfamiliarity with the specific dialect nearly resulted in a miscarriage of justice, avoided only through judicial intervention (De Vries & Docrat 2022). High-profile cases such as the Senzo Meyiwa trial further illustrate how linguistic difficulties can cause miscommunication and procedural delays. International cases, including the wrongful conviction of Jose Luis Mendez in the United States as a result of faulty interpretation, reinforce the severe consequences of inaccurate translation in legal contexts. Together, these studies demonstrate that interpretation challenges are not merely procedural issues but can directly compromise the fairness and outcomes of legal proceedings.

Identified gaps leading to the present study

While existing research highlights the importance of mother-tongue use, the risks of monolingual bias and the critical role of competent interpreting, limited attention has been paid to

non-standard dialects within South African courtrooms. Specifically, there is a lack of empirical research focusing on how interpreters manage dialects such as Khelovedu, which are not standardised and may lack established legal terminology. As a result, the practical challenges faced by interpreters working with such dialects remain underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the challenges encountered by court interpreters when Khelovedu is used during legal proceedings. By focusing on a non-standard dialect, the study contributes to broader discussions on linguistic equity, access to justice and the adequacy of current language policies in South Africa's legal system.

Research methods and design

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design to generate in-depth, contextually grounded insights into the use of Khelovedu in courtroom interpretation. Fieldwork was conducted in two regional courts in the Mopani District, Limpopo Province, selected purposively because they serve jurisdictions with a high concentration of Balovedu court users and make frequent use of interpreter-mediated proceedings. The term Balovedu refers to an ethnic group in Limpopo, who speak Khelovedu, a Northern Sotho dialect, and are historically ruled by the Rain Queen Modjadji. Focusing on two courts allowed for close examination of institutional practices, interpreter decision-making and recurring linguistic challenges within a shared sociolinguistic context. While the limited number of sites restricts statistical generalisation, the courts are typical of rural regional courts in Limpopo, thereby supporting analytic transferability to similar multilingual judicial settings. Purposive sampling was used to select four court interpreters, two from each court. This constituted the full complement of interpreters at the selected courts, which are small regional courts. All selected participants had direct experience of interpreting proceedings involving Khelovedu, making them information-rich cases for the purposes of this study. The study did not aim for representativeness but for information-rich cases capable of illuminating the complexities of interpreting a non-standard dialect in formal legal contexts. Data were collected through comprehensive, semi-structured interviews examining: (1) the frequency and contexts of Khelovedu use; (2) interpreters' normative and practical evaluations concerning fairness; efficiency and due-process implications; and (3) the linguistic and institutional limitations affecting accuracy (e.g. orthography, terminology deficiencies, euphemism and training). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a confidential setting, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim to ensure forensic accuracy and capture interactional cues relevant to conveying meaning.

An iterative, theory-driven content analysis was conducted. A preliminary coding framework was guided by social justice theory and research on court interpreting and language policy. The framework was refined through ongoing comparison to identify patterns across four areas: use, perceptions, policy interface and challenges.

Emerging categories were also incorporated into the analysis. Credibility and confirmability were strengthened through member checking (participants evaluated analytic summaries for accuracy), peer debriefing among the research team, and the maintenance of an audit trail that documented coding decisions and reflexive notes regarding positionality and linguistic ideology. Dependability was assured through a transparent approach to data collection and analysis, while a detailed description of the setting, participant roles and procedural context facilitated transferability. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymisation, secure data storage, and clear separation between research and legal advice.

Reliability was further supported through member checking, also called participant validation. Following the analysis, the researchers presented the findings to the participants to confirm whether the findings accurately reflected their statements. This process was intended to validate the findings and ensure that the interpretations truly represented their experiences.

Findings

The data are systematically categorised to clarify how Khelovedu operates within courtroom interpretation practices and the extent to which it aligns with or diverges from the policies and principles of procedural fairness.

Firstly, we present an analysis of usage patterns, explaining the circumstances and motivations behind interpreters' use of Khelovedu, as well as how demands from Balovedu participants influence language choices. Secondly, we analysed perceptions of value, capturing the assessments of interpreters and magistrates regarding Khelovedu's impact on understanding, engagement and effectiveness. Thirdly, we consolidate participants' views on the policy interface, emphasising how constitutional guarantees of language rights are used to support dialect usage in the absence of specific directives regarding non-standard varieties. Finally, we identify operational barriers, including accuracy issues, lexical and terminological inconsistencies, a lack of standardised orthography, culture-specific euphemisms, and inadequate training or accreditation, along with their implications for legal precision and due process. Collectively, these aspects outline a coherent practice-policy framework in which the goal of inclusiveness is clear but not sufficiently backed by institutional structures.

Use of Khelovedu

The study revealed that all four interpreters from the two selected courts use Khelovedu when called upon for interpreting during court proceedings. This incident happens typically when Balovedu are involved in a trial and request interpretations in their dialect. They cited various reasons for using Khelovedu, as revealed in the following excerpts:

'The reason is that we have offenders who only understand Khelovedu, and for them to really understand the questions

and court proceedings, they have to be interpreted in their native language'. (P1)

'Because Khelovedu is an indigenous language in this region [Boloovedu]. We must use the languages of the region. For example, if you visit Louis Trichardt, you will need to use Tshivenda because it is an indigenous language'. (P2)

'Because every person can ask to be tried in Khelovedu. It is their constitutional right'. (P3)

'Some people from Boloovedu do not understand Sepedi, so we have no choice but to use Khelovedu'. (P4)

The above responses demonstrate that Khelovedu is used in the courtroom, mainly to address linguistic barriers. In addition to offering practical solutions to communication challenges, the use of Khelovedu affirms constitutional rights. Furthermore, the use ensures legal processes are inclusive, regionally appropriate and respectful of linguistic diversity.

Perceptions on the use of Khelovedu

The findings revealed that the participants held positive perceptions towards using Khelovedu in the courtroom. They cited reasons such as the practicality, regional relevance and role of Khelovedu in facilitating smoother legal proceedings, as revealed in the following extracts:

'Khelovedu should be used not just in courts in Boloovedu but across the country. Boloovedu are one of the fastest growing people, and we are now in all provinces, and obviously, at times, we'll be on the wrong side of the law. Now, we need to be in a position to help with language services anywhere in SA, respectively'. (P1)

'In Boloovedu, most people speak Khelovedu and not Sepedi; therefore, it should be used. We call this a regional language'. (P2)

'When you use the language of those on trial, it facilitates proceedings quickly and smoothly, so in my experience, using Khelovedu has been useful. I think it should continue to be used'. (P3)

The participants unanimously expressed positive perceptions regarding the use of Khelovedu in courtrooms. They emphasised its practicality and necessity, especially given the growing presence of Boloovedu people across South Africa. P1 highlighted the importance of language services nationwide to support Boloovedu communities. P2 stressed that Khelovedu is the dominant language in Boloovedu and should be recognised as a regional language. P3 noted that using the language of the accused improves courtroom efficiency and fairness. Collectively, their views affirm that incorporating Khelovedu into legal proceedings is both beneficial and essential.

Policy prescriptions on the use of non-standard dialects

In their defence, the participants indicated that the South African Constitution permits them to use Khelovedu. This fact is revealed in the following extracts:

'We use Khelovedu because every South African citizen has a right to a fair trial, meaning that they have a right to express

themselves in their language or have an interpretation in their language. I remember one of my colleagues flying to another province because one of the persons involved in the case was a Moloovedu (a speaker of a non-standard dialect of Northern Sotho), and the proceedings were halted until a person who could interpret in Khelovedu was available'. (P1)

'We use Khelovedu because Section 35(k) provides rights for people to be tried in their language. Not only do South Africans have the right to be tried in their mother tongue, but also people from South Africa have the same right. For example, we had people who spoke Shona try to communicate in their own language, even though Shona is not an official language'. (P2)

'The Constitution does allow people to be tried in the language of their choice, whether official or not'. (P3)

The above responses indicate that the Constitution is widely interpreted by participants as supportive of linguistic inclusivity in legal proceedings. Specifically, Section 35(k) of the Constitution is cited as a foundation for the right of individuals to be tried in a language they understand. Participants affirm that this right extends beyond official languages to include indigenous and regional languages such as Khelovedu, and even non-official ones like Shona. This interpretation reflects a commitment to ensuring fair trials and meaningful participation in the justice system.

Challenges of using Khelovedu during court proceedings

The study's findings revealed that participants encountered several challenges when using Khelovedu during court proceedings. These challenges are revealed in the following excerpts:

'Khelovedu lacks legal terminology, which makes it a bit difficult to interpret'. (P1)

'We come across challenges when using Khelovedu because sometimes Boloovedu use euphemisms which are a bit difficult to interpret accurately. For example, '*o phaya theto*' (euphemism for rape in English)'. (P2)

'Interpreting in Khelovedu is challenging because there is no standard orthography; you just have to improvise since we did not receive training to interpret in Khelovedu'. (P3)

'Since Khelovedu is not in books, it is quite difficult to interpret, so we rely on approximate interpretation'. (P4)

The above responses affirm that court interpreting is a challenge when it comes to language issues, especially non-standard dialects like Khelovedu.

Discussion

The study's findings reveal a clear tension between practice and policy: interpreters in Mopani courts use Khelovedu to ensure understanding and engagement for Boloovedu defendants, witnesses and complainants, citing constitutional provisions for fair trial and language rights (Republic of South Africa 1996 section 35). However, interpreters face practical challenges, such as the lack of a standardised orthography, limited or nonexistent legal

terminology and euphemistic expressions. These findings speak directly to national debates on language standardisation and linguistic legitimacy, in which standard varieties are often treated as inherently more 'legal' or reliable than dialects, despite their limited reach in multilingual communities. Examined through a social justice framework (Rawls 1971), the interpreters' approach promotes participatory equality and due process by prioritising comprehensible language use, aligning with South Africa's multilingual policy goals. Nonetheless, the absence of institutional support shifts responsibility to individual interpreters, reinforcing existing language ideologies that normalise improvisation rather than systematic accommodation. This reliance increases the risk of semantic slippage and procedural inaccuracies, particularly where interpreters must approximate meaning without agreed terminology.

International research (Eades 2008; Hunter et al. 2022; Kibbee 2020) demonstrates that dialectal mismatches can lead to interruptions, misinterpretations and credibility concerns, while local studies continue to document English-dominant courtroom norms and persistent gaps in interpreter capacity (De Vries & Docrat 2022; Kaschula et al. 2020). Critically, while interpreter improvisation enables access in the short term, it raises questions about whether accuracy can be consistently guaranteed in the absence of linguistic infrastructure, especially in legally sensitive domains such as sexual offence testimony. Research on court interpreting cautions that unmanaged lexical gaps and culturally bound euphemisms can influence evidentiary value and judicial outcomes, underscoring that access to one's dialect and interpretive accuracy must be treated as interdependent constitutional requirements rather than competing priorities.

Theoretically, the data illuminate how language ideology and institutional power operate within courts: a preference for 'standard' varieties – particularly English – persists despite the sociolinguistic realities of Limpopo, where Khelovedu is widely spoken. From a social justice perspective, formal recognition of language rights is insufficient if the actual linguistic practices of communities remain unsupported. The interpreters' positive orientation towards Khelovedu thus represents a form of micro-level resistance to monolingual and standard-language ideologies, even as their reported challenges reflect well-documented interpreter constraints, including lexical gaps, strategic approximation and cognitive strain in conveying culturally embedded meanings.

Situated within South Africa's legislative framework, the findings highlight a policy gap regarding dialects. Although constitutional and statutory instruments promote multilingualism, they remain largely silent on non-standard variants, compelling frontline practitioners to devise *ad hoc* solutions. The study, therefore, contributes to national debates by showing that dialect inclusion

without supporting linguistic infrastructure risks falling short of constitutional guarantees of accuracy, even as it advances access and participation.

Addressing this inequality requires systemic interventions: (1) formal recognition of regionally significant dialects in justice-sector language policies; (2) dialect-sensitive interpreter training and certification; (3) collaboratively developed legal glossaries and interpretive guidelines for Khelovedu; and (4) case-type-specific preparatory briefings to mitigate ambiguity arising from euphemistic language.

Overall, the study confirms that incorporating Khelovedu enhances access to justice in practice, but also demonstrates that linguistic inclusion must be institutionally supported to ensure that constitutional commitments to fairness and accuracy are fully realised.

Conclusion

Interpreters in Mopani courts consider using Khelovedu essential for understanding, participation and fair-trial rights, and they already use it practically when Balovedu speakers appear. However, accuracy and legal precision are compromised by structural gaps, such as the absence of a standard orthography, limited legal terminology, euphemistic expressions and a lack of formal training or accreditation in Khelovedu, which forces improvisation and risks semantic drift or procedural errors.

Embedded within South Africa's social justice and multilingual legal framework, the study reveals a policy-practice disconnect: while the law affirms linguistic inclusion, dialect use lacks institutional support, leaving frontline actors to bear the equity burden without consistent tools or guidance.

The study, therefore, recommends that the authorities officially recognise regionally important dialects (e.g. Khelovedu) in Department of Justice (DoJ) & Constitutional Development (CD) language policies and court State Official Practitioners (SOPs), with clear cues for when to use them, on-record notes of dialect choice, and magistrate guidance that explicitly encourages interpreter clarification when lexical gaps occur.

Authorities are also encouraged to build capacity through dialect-aware short courses and continuous professional development, which will provide additional accreditation for competence in Khelovedu.

Incorporate structured mentorship and peer review, alongside targeted case pairing or co-interpreting for complex or sensitive issues. Co-develop a living Khelovedu–Sepedi–English legal glossary and a practical style and orthography guide. Implement secure digital lookup tools and enable remote access to Khelovedu specialists, supported by reliable dual-channel recordings to assist with audits and appeals. Ultimately, it is recommended to institutionalise monitoring (e.g. frequency of dialect requests, clarification events, time

to disposition, appeal grounds citing interpretation) and expand research to other dialects and/or regions, refining policies and resources to ensure that inclusion is matched by safeguarded accuracy.

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Competing interests

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CRedit authorship contribution

Tsebo Ramothwala: Investigation, Writing – original draft. Thabo J. Mabilo: Formal analysis. Josephat Mutangadura: Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

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