

The Role of Language through Media in Shaping the Political Outcome in South Africa: Review of 2024 Election Outcomes



Thabang Richard Motswaledi ¹  & Phemelo Olifile Marumo ² 

¹ Department of Political studies and International Relations, School of Government Studies, North West University, South Africa.

² School of Philosophy, North West University, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Language and media are part of the most important elements that have sought to shape politics across various states for ages. This was seen to be an important factor that led to the growth and decline of various political parties in the 2024 national, provincial and regional elections. Language was used as a tool of communication to manipulate culture and indigenous groups to sway their political support, and the media was the prone tool to carry forth the message. Parties such as the Mkhonto Wesizwe Party, Freedom Front Plus, Democratic Alliance and the Inkatha Freedom Party have used tribal alliance, language, culture and historical relations to garner for electoral support. In some instances, tribal remarks such as using language and culture were at the core of the party's development such as Isizulu as well as Afrikaans. Hence, through the qualitative research method, this desktop study sought to understand the role that language and media play in shaping the political outcomes in South Africa focusing on the 2024 elections outcomes. The findings of the study suggest that language through media is part of the fundamental factors shaping political outcomes in South Africa. The paper concludes that language and media are key in understanding the political developments of diverse states such as South Africa. The recommendation suggests that political parties should use this strategy to gain support ahead of the 2026 elections, particularly because there is no outright winner in the 2024 National Elections, and the same can be seen in the Local Government elections.

Correspondence

Phemelo Olifile

Marumo

Email:

Phemelo.marumo@nwu.ac.za

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INTRODUCTION

In South Africa's 2024 national elections, significant shifts occurred, with the traditional dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) waning as it entered a coalition-led government. This election, marking South Africa's seventh democratic process, has introduced a government of national unity, which involves multiple parties collaborating to form a governing body. This coalition reflects the ANC's decreased electoral support and the need for unity to maintain stability and drive governance forward. Key issues included economic development, service delivery, and the reduction of inequality, all areas where coalition-driven efforts may influence policies more diversely than in previous terms.

The role of indigenous languages also featured prominently in the 2024 election campaigns. Political parties increasingly use indigenous languages to communicate their platforms, particularly in

rural and underserved areas, where such language outreach can have a profound effect on voter engagement. Parties recognized that reaching out to indigenous languages not only respected cultural identities but also ensured inclusivity, allowing rural and indigenous populations to make more informed choices. The use of these languages aligns with a broader global trend toward empowering indigenous voices and supporting cultural preservation within governance and political engagement. Hence the paper examines the significance of language through media in the political activities of a country. To that extent, the paper examines the impact of language in the political election outcomes of South Africa especially in the 2024 national and provincial elections. The paper's importance is reflected mainly in its ability to depict the impact of language in capturing and attracting new voters to a political party. The political parties in question are the Mkhonto Wesizwe Party and Freedom Front Plus. These parties' momentum towards the election was language-oriented around Isizulu for the MK party, and Afrikaans for FF plus while other political parties relied on various languages to appeal to the masses.

Language, Media and Political Outcomes

The role of language has always had a huge impact on political outcomes in Africa, especially in states that are highly divided by a variety of factors. Media uses language as a means of conveying a particular message in society through a particular language. Thus, this depicts that media employs language as a tool to frame, educate, inform and entertain through news, features and analysis of various factors in society. Therefore, language carries an important aspect of laying out a particular message, which is why it is used to carry out a party manifesto during or prior to the elections. What has been evident is the rise in language by media to convey, convince and address issues in society. From a political point of view, parties are using language through media to lobby support and ensure that they capture as many voters as possible. For example, having 11 official languages in South Africa has opened the political landscape to resort to ethnic means of canvassing for support. Parties such as Freedom Front Plus (FFP+) and Mkhondo We Sizwe Party have resorted to their indigenous language to lobby for support. This can be seen through political rallies and the official publications of parties such as the policy or the manifesto. The publication of FF Plus manifesto was published in Afrikaans and MK party was using Isizulu during rallies to convey its political message.

Language: Tool for Communication

According to Lo Bianco, language holds the utmost significance as a means of human communication.¹ Similarly, Everett argues that language is a universal characteristic found in all cultural systems.² This implies that every culture possesses its own form of language or communication system.³ While languages may differ, they share numerous universal features.⁴ Duranti emphasizes that language is intricately intertwined with culture, history, and identity.⁵ However, Dalby points out that certain languages are at risk of extinction or have already vanished due to the politics of language, specifically the dynamics between minority and majority languages.⁶ Examining the meanings of language, Morreale et al. highlight the significance of context in shaping linguistic interpretations.⁷ Indigenous language refers to a language native to a specific territory and may encompass multiple dialects.⁸ A dialect is defined as the variety of a language spoken in a geographical area in which the words, phrases, and

¹ Joseph Lo Bianco, "Linguistic Interactions in Second Language Classrooms – Italian in Victorian Primary Schools," *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. Series S 4* (January 1, 1987): 172–96, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ara1ss.4.10lob>.

² Daniel L Everett, "Dark Matter of the Mind: The Culturally Articulated Unconscious," in *Dark Matter of the Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

³ Friederike Lüpke, "Multilingualism on the Ground," in *Repertoires and Choices in African Languages* (DE GRUYTER, 2013), 13–76, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614511946.13>.

⁴ Martin Haspelmath, "Argument Indexing: A Conceptual Framework for the Syntactic Status of Bound Person Forms," in *Languages Across Boundaries* (De Gruyter, 2013), 197–226, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110331127.197>.

⁵ Alessandro Duranti, "Anthropology and Linguistics," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Anthropology* (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012), 12–26, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446201077.n3>.

⁶ Andrew Dalby, *Language in Danger: The Loss of Linguistic Diversity and the Threat to Our Future* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁷ Sherwyn P. Morreale, Joseph M. Valenzano, and Janessa A. Bauer, "Why Communication Education Is Important: A Third Study on the Centrality of the Discipline's Content and Pedagogy," *Communication Education* 66, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 402–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1265136>.

⁸ Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "Challenges to the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in South Africa," *Review Commissioned by the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa*, 2006.

structures, as well as the sounds and meanings of the words, phrases, and structures, differ little from one another. Prah further asserts that language serves as a historical record of human experience, acting as a repository of knowledge and information.⁹ However, this aspect is often overlooked or underrepresented. Languages exist as cultural domains, embodying the memories and histories of their speakers. They serve as a record of a speech community's history, capturing its collective experiences and preserving the imprints and narratives of its users. Language, more than any other cultural aspect, reveals the past of its users.¹⁰

However, the idea of language as a historical record, according to Bucholtz and Hall, may oversimplify the complicated nature of language and its interaction with culture.¹¹ Language not only represents the past, but it also changes and adapts to the present. Furthermore, social, political, and economic variables impact language, making it a dynamic and diverse phenomenon.¹² Furthermore, power relations and ideologies may impact the depiction and preservation of language histories and narratives. Language legislation, media representation, and educational practices are often influenced by prevailing language ideologies that favour some languages over others.¹³ As seen by the dwindling prevalence of Indigenous language print media, this may contribute to the marginalization and endangerment of Indigenous languages.¹⁴

Language and Media In South Africa: Agenda Setters

While acknowledging the significance of language as a historical record and cultural domain, it is important to approach these perspectives critically, considering the complexities of language, culture, and power dynamics within society. This was seen through the political manifesto of FF Plus, DA and also the use of language by the MKP in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) prior to the 2024 national and provincial elections. Most of the rallies of the MK party were held in KZN such as the mini-rally that was held in Durban, and the MK Progressive Women: International Women's Celebration which was also held in Gugu Dlamini Park (Durban Central).

According to Nakayama and Halualani, language is more than just a tool or a medium; it symbolises a style of thinking, a mental structure setting an agenda.¹⁵ Furthermore, they claim that language is an institution, as strong as any religion, state, or educational system, capable of producing and recreating social realities that seem so tangible and 'natural'. According to Phaswana, only those whose languages are utilised (particularly by those in authority) are likely to grow empowered, and this is typically at the cost of those whose languages are not spoken, who get marginalised consequently.¹⁶

The languages of colonial dominance have not only maintained a hegemonic position of dominance across the African continent, but they have also grown in power and influence, owing to African elites' continued embrace of these languages.¹⁷ According to Maurais and Morris, "the linguistic policy of most African states remains today in the line defined in the colonial era by each dominant power."¹⁸ English is now largely accepted as a worldwide standard language. Because English speakers have immense power and authority in global communication, this fact provides them enormous power and forms a foundation for discrimination. Furthermore, the fact that English is widely assumed offers English-speaking nations and their citizens an advantage.¹⁹

The English language has also become a popular media language. This has come at a high cost for local communities since language is a method of communication as well as a source of power and

⁹ Prah, "Challenges to the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in South Africa."

¹⁰ Prah, "Challenges to the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in South Africa."

¹¹ Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach," *Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4–5 (October 1, 2005): 585–614, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407>.

¹² Jan Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511845307>.

¹³ S. Makoni and A. Pennycook, *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, vol. 62 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007).

¹⁴ Gilbert Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa," *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 9, no. 1 (2010): 96–109.

¹⁵ T. K. Nakayama and R. T. Halualani, *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁶ Nkhelebeni Phaswana, "Contradiction or Affirmation? The South African Language Policy and the South African National Government," in *Black Linguistics* (Routledge, 2005), 129–43.

¹⁷ Prah, "Challenges to the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in South Africa,"²⁹

¹⁸ J. Maurais and M. A. Morris, *Languages in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Nakayama and Halualani, *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*, 249–250.

identity. Lai Oso agrees that "the use of language and the type of language used have ideological implications and that they form part of the overarching structure of power and subordination in a particular society."²⁰ Oso's point of view is critical because it implies that the individuals who speak much of the time in any society become a dominant group whose culture, philosophy, and power become the standard. As a result, language becomes a hegemonic tool for the dominant group. In such a context, the consistent use of language in the media plays an important role in imparting status and establishing the identity of the group that speaks that language.²¹ The previous claim is consistent with language and culture literature, which asserts that using a language enhances a favourable perception of the linguistic group. A concrete example of language's transformative power can be observed in the case of Tshivenda in South Africa. According to Motsaathebe, the initially lesser-known Tshivenda gained popularity after the release of the television series *Muvhango* in 1997, which aimed to promote the language.²² As creator Duma Ndlovu envisioned, Tshivenda is no longer regarded as a second-rate language by most South Africans.²³ Hence, even politics plays an important role, especially in a state where there are vast divisions perpetuated by ethnic boundaries which spill into language.

Motsaathebe describes South Africa as a multilingual society with distinct ethnic and linguistic groupings.²⁴ However, these languages appear to be declining in terms of usage and consumption, particularly in public discourse and media platforms. While radio broadcasts in indigenous languages continue to attract a substantial following, print media outlets, excluding isiZulu publications, face a decline.²⁵ This is concerning, as the absence of alternative media forms leads to biased news distribution and news agendas that cater to specific language groups.²⁶ Notably, the amaZulu community stands out as the sole community in South Africa with a functional newspaper. The isiZulu daily, *Isolezwe*, has experienced significant growth since its launch in 2002.²⁷ However, despite radio's relative success in terms of listenership, there is growing concern about the distortion of indigenous languages in radio broadcasts, with many listeners expressing opposition to such practices.²⁸

Indigenous language media in South Africa tends to operate within geographical and linguistic groups, aligning with the concentration of the respective language communities. The colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa, spanning from 1652 to 1994, exploited the diversity of ethnic groups to divide and control the population.²⁹ Thus, languages not only serve as identifiers of origin and community membership but also carry the ethical values of ancestors and the indigenous knowledge systems that connect communities with their land, essential for their survival and collective aspirations especially those that are political in nature.³⁰

For instance, when the MKP was campaigning, the party focused most of its resources on the KZN province where the use of the IsiZulu language was most prevalent. This would also account for the region in terms of the geographical dominance of the MKP in the previous elections. Similarly, even the FF Plus and the DA focused most of their resources on a particular area such as those dominated by the English language or Afrikaans language. Based on the above, this paper is of the view that language and media have a massive impact on the electoral outcomes of South Africa. Although there are various

²⁰ Lai Oso, "A Political Economy of Indigenous Language Press in Nigeria," *Indigenous Language Media in Africa*, 2006, 176.

²¹ Gilbert Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa," *Journal of African Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 169–83, https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.10.2.169_1.

²² Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa."

²³ Gilbert Motsaathebe, "African Languages and Gender Identity in Marginal Films Made Outside the Mainstream Film Industry in South Africa," in *Indigenous African Language Media* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), 137–56, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-0305-4_9.

²⁴ Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa."

²⁵ Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa."

²⁶ Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa." K K Prah, *Nithini Ngolwimi Iwethu?: Challenges to the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in South Africa*, Centre for Advanced Studies of African Societies (Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), 2015), <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=4JJlnQAACAAJ>.

²⁷ Abiodun Salawu, "The Growth and Development of African Media Studies: Perspectives from Nigeria," *Journal of African Media Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.1.1.81/1>.

²⁸ IOL, "Equal Use of #IndigenousLanguages a Human Right, Says Ramaphosa," 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/equal-use-of-indigenouslanguages-a-human-right-says-ramaphosa-20008355>.

²⁹ Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa."

³⁰ Motsaathebe, "Language, Afrikology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa."

political parties existing, the paper shall focus on a limited number of political parties namely FF plus, DA and the MK party, and this selection is mainly driven by their use of language during the campaigning and the media's role thereof. Furthermore, this is also dependent on their different regional dominance and the paper reveals how that reflects language use and the role of media as too through these various indigenous languages.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The research followed a qualitative method for an in-depth examination of the role of language through media in shaping the political outcome in South Africa: Review of 2024 Election Outcomes.³¹ Qualitative research helps understand experiences, attitudes, and opinions that can contribute to the knowledge of the role of language through media in shaping the political outcome in South Africa. The study employed a phenomenological study design in an attempt to explain the significant events and patterns during the elections. This is because the use of language becomes significant during elections and various political parties use language to attract support for their political parties. Figure 1 below shows that political parties rely on different languages to convey their message to the masses. Through posters, plug cards and other forms of advertising, these parties use different languages especially the indigenous ones to disseminate their messages.³²



Figure 1. Political parties using their language to lobby support (www.dailMarvrick.co.za)

Empirical Research Methods

The study used document reviews as the primary data source to explain the role of language through media in the political outcome of South Africa. Clarke refers to document review as a research technique that relies on various texts and sources the researcher replicates to create new and better content, ideas, or theories.³³ This process systematically provides rich insights into the role of language in the political sphere. This study dealt with qualitative and not numerical material. These materials are available from the North-West University library repository, Google Scholar, LibGenesis, Science Direct, the FF Plus website, and the MK party website.

Descriptive content analysis of the role of language in attracting electoral support and ensuring political support. A descriptive analysis focuses on the characteristics of phenomena. Hence, this study focused on a) the use of language b) the events that were significant and how politicians incorporated it

³¹ Pritha Bhandari, "What Is Qualitative Research? Methods & Examples," 2020.

³² Shepherd Mpofo, Trust Matsilele, and Tawanda Nyawasha, "Iconography of Persuasion," *Communicare: Journal for Communication Studies in Africa* 40, no. 1 (October 5, 2022): 67–88, <https://doi.org/10.36615/jesa.v40i1.1512>.

³³ Roger Clarke, "The Challenges Involved in Establishing a Research Technique," *Australasian Journal of Information Systems* 24 (2020).

to spread the message, and c) the nature of language and culture in socialization and how it affects political outcomes.

Population and Choice of Study Material

The purposive sampling of political parties that use language to draw out the attention and support of the electorate. Selecting FF plus, and MK party was due to their use of indigenous language in canvassing for votes during the 2024 general elections. These parties used English, Isizulu and Afrikaans to disseminate their message through their leaders but the paper focused on the use of this indigenous language as the bane of their message spread. The study took note that other parties have used other languages to address the masses, but their use of language was spread across multiple languages and the focus was not one, like the president of the ANC, Ramaphosa would use Isizulu, English, Tsonga, Sepedi or Sotho to address individuals depending on the geographic location. This would also explain the spread in voting relevance of the ANC while the MK party predominantly dominates in the KZN, Gauteng, and a bit in Mpumalanga regions due to the use of isizulu which is related to other Nguni languages. A document review process also does not present ethical concerns as it relies on public documents and reports. Figure 2 below depicts the different messages of various political parties in multiple languages was sourced from Google and is of public consumption with no conflict or permission needed to attain the material.



Figure 2. Political parties using their language to lobby support (www.polity.org)

Conceptualizing Languages and Culture

According to Onwubie, indigenous language is generally defined “as a system with which social groups co-operate and interact which helps in the formation thoughts and feelings”.³⁴ In addition, this means of communication should be original or originated from that particular designated place. This means that this language should not be forced upon the people to recognize it as an indigenous language or a medium of instruction. Reyhner further alludes that the loss of indigenous language causes culture distortion, hence students have to always be taught in their native languages.³⁵ Similarly, Reyhner further alludes

³⁴ Blessing Chioma Onwubie, “Indigenous Language and the Preservation of African Values; the Igbo Example,” *UNIZIK Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 8, no. 2 (2016): 230–38, 231.

³⁵ Jon Reyhner, “Affirming Identity: The Role of Language and Culture in American Indian Education,” *Cogent Education* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2017):2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1340081>.

that the lack of indigenous language acculturation can lead to family disintegration and create a foreign culture dependency syndrome.

This is problematic as it marginalizes the minority groups who are often disregarded and language policy making. Similarly, this also creates division even in families over time as culture is uniform across generations. Hence, Biddle and Swee argued that the concepts of indigenous language and culture are very much interrelated.³⁶ This is on the basis that the culture in which one is born determines the language that they will be accultured into. From that understanding, Kavitha and Devi explain that culture can be understood as a set of ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society.³⁷

These ideas, customs and social behavior are used to govern that society with regards to attaining their social norm, values and having an indigenous language. Hence, Kavitha and Devi are of the view that culture is transferred from one generation to the next and this can be in the form of indigenous language or writings.³⁸ However, they are rarely passed down in the form of writing but by word of mouth. What can be noted about these writings is that they are informed by the language into which a person is born. Due to this lack of writing through the use of indigenous language then communities often need to come up with strategies to preserve their eradication of their indigenous language. By being able to combat this, they will also be able to preserve their culture as well as alluded to by Reyhner.³⁹

Scholars such as Barrett and Cocq have since attested to this by noting the language policy in states such as Sweden in which the government sought to preserve their indigenous language in a situation where the English language gets too powerful.⁴⁰ The counter policy of the government is in an effort to stop the spread of the English language in the country which may lead to the diminishing of the state's indigenous language, and this would see the end of their cultural practices as well due to this. Barrett and Cocq have further alluded to how states such as Sweden and Norway are employing digital or online media in an effort to preserve and revitalize their indigenous languages and as well as cultures.⁴¹ Similarly, in the case of South Africa, several newspapers are also adopted to ensure that indigenous culture is preserved. This can be seen as some of the indigenous norms are employed by newspapers to ensure cultural preservation.

The Role of Language and Media in South Africa

Previous research has looked at the history of African language media in South Africa.⁴² Indigenous language papers in Africa have a high mortality rate due to a combination of factors, including declining economic conditions and a poor clientele base, they have poor transport systems that affect distribution, they have skill and capital shortages, and high production costs.⁴³ However, according to Motsaathebe, the Afrikaans and Zulu languages have a considerable presence in the media at both the national and provincial levels, with the Zulu language being most prevalent in the KZN area.⁴⁴ The Afrikaans

³⁶ Nicholas Biddle and Hannah Swee, "The Relationship between Wellbeing and Indigenous Land, Language and Culture in Australia," *Australian Geographer* 43, no. 3 (September 2012): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2012.706201>.

³⁷ I.J. Kavitha and V. Uma Devi, "The Blend of Scottish Culture, Customs and Traditions in Liz Curtis Higgs' Select Novels," *Literary Herald* 2, no. 4 (2017), 672.

³⁸ Kavitha and Devi, "The Blend of Scottish Culture, Customs and Traditions in Liz Curtis Higgs' Select Novels," 673.

³⁹ Reyhner, "Affirming Identity: The Role of Language and Culture in American Indian Education," 2.

⁴⁰ James Barrett and Copp lie Cocq, "Indigenous Storytelling and Language Learning: Digital Media as a Vehicle for Cultural Transmission and Language Acquisition," in *Perspectives on Indigenous Writing and Literacies* (BRILL, 2019), 89–112, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004298507_006.

⁴¹ Barrett and Cocq, "Indigenous Storytelling and Language Learning: Digital Media as a Vehicle for Cultural Transmission and Language Acquisition," 89.

⁴² Motsaathebe, "Language, Afriology and the Tremor of the Political Moment: English as a Main Language of Discourse in Africa"; Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa"; Salawu, "The Growth and Development of African Media Studies: Perspectives from Nigeria." Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "African Renaissance or Warlordism," *African Renaissance*, 1999, 37–61.

⁴³ Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa"; Kevin Onyenankya, "Indigenous Language Newspapers and the Digital Media Conundrum in Africa," *Information Development* 38, no. 1 (March 25, 2022): 83–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666920983403>; A. Munoriyarwa, "In the Dead End: The Decline of the Indigenous Language Press in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe," in *In African Language Media* (Routledge, 2020), 55–73.

Abiodun Salawu, "Introduction: Towards the Development and Sustainability of African Language Media," in *African Language Media* (Routledge, 2020), 1–12.

⁴⁴ Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa."

language tends to exist in most white-dominated areas as the stronghold of most far-right political parties such as DA and FF Plus.

In addition, media outlets exist and disseminate news in different languages mainly due to cultural and linguistic diversity. Some media outlets serve specific languages to cater to the needs of specific communities and to cater to readers who prefer to read news in their native language. In some cases, political and economic factors also play a role. For instance, governments may fund newspapers in certain languages to promote their cultural and political agendas. This can also be the case in South African politics where language provides the followers with identity politics, hence the MKP was accused of being an ethnic party, representing mostly the views of Zulus and also having its stronghold being in KZN. Mpofo, for example, contends that the underdevelopment of Indigenous-language media in Zimbabwe is the result of colonial and post-independence language politics and ideology that preferred English over Indigenous languages.⁴⁵ Even when Indigenous-language publications exist, they are occasionally pressured to relinquish their own tongue in favour of English.

The history of Indigenous language media in Africa dates back to the late nineteenth century, with the publication of the first Indigenous language in South Africa. *Ilanga lase Natal* was a newspaper produced in isiZulu and targeted at the isiZulu-speaking population. Tshabangu and Salawu state that *Ilanga lase Natal* plays an important role in fostering the isiZulu language and culture.⁴⁶ Following the success of *Ilanga lase Natal*, Indigenous language media outlets in other African nations including Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Kenya were formed.

The effect of digital technology on the media environment is another development in the history of Indigenous language publications. The digital revolution, according to Onyenankeya, has altered the media environment, creating new possibilities and problems for indigenous language publications.⁴⁷ These publications may now reach a bigger readership and go beyond their local areas thanks to advances in digital technology. It has, however, introduced new issues, such as the necessity for digital literacy and access to technology. Despite favourable achievements in the history of Indigenous language newspapers, these publications confront several problems. One such issue is a lack of financial resources and long-term viability. According to Onyenankeya, Indigenous language newspapers often struggle to attract advertisers and subscribers, making it difficult for them to stay in business.⁴⁸ This is especially difficult in rural and isolated locations, where readership is low and delivery expenses are high.

Despite the problems that Indigenous language newspapers face, much progress has been made in promoting indigenous languages and cultures. The function of Indigenous language media in fostering multilingualism and linguistic diversity is one example of such achievement. Indigenous language newspapers, according to Motsaathebe, are a way of fostering multilingualism and encouraging the use of Indigenous languages alongside official languages.⁴⁹ This encourages linguistic variety and aids in the preservation of Indigenous languages and civilizations. Another achievement of Indigenous language newspapers is their contribution to community development and social fairness. Indigenous language newspapers, according to Motsaathebe, provide a forum for addressing problems affecting Indigenous communities, such as land rights, social justice, and environmental protection.⁵⁰ Indigenous language newspapers help community development by publicising these concerns.

It is the researcher's view that Languages like Sepedi seem to get less attention and use in community newspapers than popular Indigenous languages like Zulu and Xhosa. This discovery reveals a disparity in the representation and recognition of diverse Indigenous languages. While Zulu and Xhosa are often given primacy, Sepedi and other marginalized languages struggle to find a position in media channels. This disparity promotes a language imbalance and impedes the maintenance of multiple cultural

⁴⁵ Phillip Mpofo, "The Nollywood Cultural Effect in Zimbabwe: Manifestation of Nigerian Lingo in Everyday Discourses," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 245–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2021.1941064>.

⁴⁶ Thulani Tshabangu and Abiodun Salawu, "Technology Innovation and Digital Journalism Practice by Indigenous African-Language Newspapers: The Case of *UMthunywa* in Zimbabwe," *African Journalism Studies* 43, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 37–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2022.2049618>.

⁴⁷ Onyenankeya, "Indigenous Language Newspapers and the Digital Media Conundrum in Africa."

⁴⁸ Onyenankeya, "Indigenous Language Newspapers and the Digital Media Conundrum in Africa."

⁴⁹ Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa."

⁵⁰ Motsaathebe, "When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa."

identities. It is critical to recognize and address this gap by aggressively promoting and including Sepedi, as well as other underrepresented languages, in Indigenous language community publications. This inclusive approach would celebrate linguistic variety and foster a more equal portrayal of Indigenous cultures.

The Role of Media in Promoting Language and Culture vs Influencing Political Outcome

One of the significant mediums that has currently been prevalent for the conservation and promotion of the Indigenous language and culture of Africa is the digital community newspaper. The digital community newspapers have been found to play a significant role in the preservation of languages and cultures thereby enabling Indigenous people to have a chance in the utilisation of digital technology within the face of the globalization era. The digital community newspapers have also helped in the preservation of the Gikuyu language as well as the culture prevalent in Kenya. In addition, the people of Kikuyu have been able to generate numerous materials while also exchanging information and interacting with the community specifically due to the usage of social media and digital technology. The digital community newspapers according to Onyenankeya et al., have become one of the significant instruments for the conservation and promotion of the Yoruba language as well as their culture which is prevalent in Nigeria.⁵¹

Research studies have revealed that digital community newspapers have currently created it is for individuals who speak Yoruba for these emanating stories and news as well as events under their own language. These factors have encountered the overall usage of Indigenous language and culture preservation within the continent of Africa without any sort of criticism. One of the significant challenges includes the lack of extension from the context of digital community newspapers beyond the community of the Indigenous population. The community newspaper within the digital era might be restricted regarding the usage of numerous technologies that might not be available to the members of the community.

Research studies have revealed that traditional media in the current date have expanded the overall influence outside the boundaries of the community of Indigenous people thereby making it a useful tool for the maintenance and promotion of the language and culture of the Indigenous context. Digital community newspapers in the current date have become successful in the maintenance and promotion of Indigenous language and culture within Africa. However, conventional media like television and radio have also played critical roles. It is important to understand that televisions and radios for new marriage decades have been utilised for the protection and promotion of the traditions and languages as well as principles and values of the Indigenous culture.

However, digital community newspapers have currently evolved towards becoming one of the important instruments for the conservation of the culture of the indigenous people in Africa. This has enabled the people in the community to generate numerous materials and interact with other community members through the utilization of social media and digital technology platforms.⁵² These platform usages have also enabled the promotion of cultural exchange and understanding within the community people. However, some of the challenges regarding the usage involve sensitivity towards external levels of control and restricted reach. The overall role of the traditional media like television and radio towards the promotion and conservation of the language of indigenous context within the country of Africa also requires to be thoroughly explored.

The dynamic changes within media spaces have been vastly and swiftly changing over the past couple of years. Similarly, even the preservation of indigenous languages has been resting on the changes that come with media outlets. Many different local or home media houses invested more in the preservation of their local indigenous languages. Similarly, even at an international level states such as France and Sweden are still relying on their native languages to ensure that there is preservation of their language among their people. Sundberg has alluded that currently there are about five indigenous

⁵¹ Oluwayemisi Mary Onyenankeya, Kevin Onyenankeya, and Oluyinka Osunkunle, "Contradictions and Tensions Between Old and New: An Audience Perception of Indigenous Culture Representation in Soap Opera," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56, no. 7 (November 14, 2021): 1607–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620972444>.

⁵² Tshepang Molale and Phillip Mpofo, "(Dis) Continuities of African Language Radio on Social Media: The Case of South Africa's Motsweding FM and Radio Zimbabwe," in *African Language Media* (Routledge, 2023), 65–78.

languages being recognized in Sweden, and these are protected as the country seeks to have a more pragmatic means of multiculturalism.⁵³

While investigating indigenous languages in France, Wilson, Johnson, & Sallabank are of the view that due to globalization small indigenous nations across the world are facing a crisis of losing identity.⁵⁴ In addition, the scholars alluded that although these smaller nations are resisting the change and total takeover of their language which would see their heritage disappear, they are still at a risk of losing their language origins hence the need to preserve it.

Over and above, while investigating Indigenous language and the preservation of African values, Onwubie argued that language is not just a medium of instruction.⁵⁵ However, languages hold the power of communication between different people. Similarly, in the case of indigenous language, it holds the cultural values and norms that go beyond the understanding of the language as just a medium of understanding. Hence, when communities are often facing the dangers of language extinction, they often seek to find means which are going to assist them in preserving what is still left. Onwubie is of the view that for anything to be declared natural or indigenous, it has to not be imported nor foreign however it has to be naturally transferred from one generation to the next.⁵⁶ Hence, most communities are then placed with the responsibility to find means to preserve their indigenous language.

Kamwangamalu further cemented the above-mentioned statement by arguing that for African education to be meaningful to Africa-based students, it has to be fully decolonized, and this includes language changes as this is a barrier.⁵⁷ Language can be a barrier to students understanding the content of a particular subject. Henceforth, the decoloniality of the education sector not only promotes a better understanding for student, but it will also provide the community with the opportunity to preserve their languages. Kamwangamalu has alluded that colonization has deprived African children of their cultural heritage and this includes a better understanding of languages as well as the preservation of indigenous languages.⁵⁸ This is on the basis that students were being forced to learn in the language of their colonial masters hence there are vast differences among African regions with Anglophones, Francophones, and Lusophones among others. The legacy of these classifications still lies with the language as it is a barrier even in contemporary terms.

On another note, South Africa is another state that requires special attention with regard to indigenous language preservation. Especially because in the case of South Africa, first there was an element of colonization then later Apartheid, this is very important to understand the dynamics of language preservation in South Africa and the contemporary educational system.⁵⁹ Similarly, even the motivation arising in the effort to preserve most South African based indigenous languages can allude to the changes or dynamics which have shaped the state over the years. The July uprising of 1970 can be alluded to be one of the dynamics that depicted that indigenous language in South Africa is very important and needs preservation. Not only did the youth rally behind the ANC and the SACP in a quest to fight to be taught in their language but it also gave awareness politically about the power of language in political dialogue. The demonstration by student of that particular time was raising their discrepancies over the language of the medium of instruction which was being enforced by the Apartheid government. Not only was this policy oppressive due to being able to understand the language. However, it further perpetuated the loss of South African language preservation as these were lost. From that view, local newspapers such as Soweto Sunrise newspaper were established to preserve the threatened indigenous languages in the society, particularly the Sepedi language.

⁵³ Gunlög Sundberg, "Language Policy and Multilingual Identity in Sweden Through the Lens of Generation Y," *Scandinavian Studies* 85, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 212, <https://doi.org/10.5406/scanstud.85.2.0205>.

⁵⁴ Gary N. Wilson, Henry Johnson, and Julia Sallabank, "'I'm Not Dead yet': A Comparative Study of Indigenous Language Revitalization in the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2014.972535>.

⁵⁵ Onwubie, "Indigenous Language and the Preservation of African Values; the Igbo Example," 230.

⁵⁶ Onwubie, "Indigenous Language and the Preservation of African Values; the Igbo Example," 231.

⁵⁷ Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, "Vernacularization, Globalization, and Language Economics in Non-English-Speaking Countries in Africa," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 34, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.34.1.01kam>.

⁵⁸ Kamwangamalu, "Vernacularization, Globalization, and Language Economics in Non-English-Speaking Countries in Africa," 3.

⁵⁹ Obed Mfum-Mensah, "The Impact of Colonial and Postcolonial Ghanaian Language Policies on Vernacular Use in Schools in Two Northern Ghanaian Communities," *Comparative Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 71–85.

CONCLUSION

The approach to using indigenous languages reflects an understanding that language can be a powerful tool in shaping political outcomes and bridging the divide between urban and rural voters. It also highlights an evolving respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterizes South Africa's electorate. Indigenous languages played a crucial role in election campaigning, reflecting a growing recognition of South Africa's linguistic diversity. Political parties increasingly used languages like isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, and others to communicate their platforms, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. This strategy was more than symbolic; it demonstrated an understanding of the importance of inclusivity and cultural respect in a multilingual democracy. Campaigning in indigenous languages enhanced voter engagement and accessibility, enabling broader participation and ensuring that key messages resonated with local populations. The use of indigenous languages aligns with global and national efforts to affirm the rights of indigenous peoples, as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and South Africa's Constitution. Such practices strengthen democratic processes by fostering inclusivity and respecting cultural identity, which are essential in addressing historical marginalization. Although the research understands the limitations of the research as parties did not only rely on indigenous languages for political support, the paper holds the view that the use of these languages held a strong effect on the electoral outcome for 2024.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Thabang Motswaledi is a temp lecturer at the Department of Political Studies and International Relations at North West University. He graduated his MA in political studies with cum laude in 2023, where he investigated the responses of SOE's to the energy crisis in South Africa and Nigeria through a comparative study. Henceforth, he is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in political studies, specializing in human security, energy poverty, and the political economy of energy in South Africa as well as the African continent.

Prof. Phemelo Olifile Marumo is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director in the Faculty of Humanities, School of Philosophy, at Northwest University. He primarily focuses on the philosophical perspectives in teaching and learning. He is an active member of various academic committees and has worked with NWU's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Prof. Marumo's research area of interest is African Philosophy and its attributes. He has contributed to several book chapters and has published in different accredited local and international journals.