E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 6 Issue 13 Special Issue 2025 pp 68-80
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20256135

Wits Multilingual Landscape: Developing Language Use Guides For Inclusive Communication

Celimpilo Piety Dladla [1] & Soyiso Khetoa[1]
[1] University of Witswatersrand, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

South Africa has a rich linguistic diversity and progressive policies aimed at including indigenous languages; however, English continues to dominate academic discourse, while the university policy promotes multilingualism. As a means of interrogating this issue, this paper explores the role of digital language use guides in promoting multilingualism. Drawing on the Causality and Effect-Based Model and Communication Accommodation Theory, the study aims to demonstrate how these resources facilitate effective communication and address the linguistic imbalance prevalent in South African higher education. A qualitative desktop research approach was employed, involving a systematic analysis of the content and design of isiZulu and Sesotho language guides. Findings reveal that these guides, which are accessible online, provide essential linguistic and cultural knowledge, including forms of address, months of the year, and grammatical rules such as noun classes. The study discusses how these resources serve as transformative instruments that promote inclusivity and mitigate language degradation by integrating indigenous knowledge with standardised language use. It is recommended that more collaborative, digitally-focused initiatives be undertaken to revitalise and promote previously marginalised languages. This research contributes to scholarship by presenting a practical and innovative model for academic institutions to implement their language policies and foster a more equitable, culturally responsive academic environment.

Keywords: Higher Education, Language Use Guide, Language Learning, Multilingualism

Correspondence
Celimpilo Piety Dladla
Email: celimpilopiety.dladla@wits.ac.za

Publication History
Received: 18th May, 2025
Accepted: 5th November, 2025
Published online: 30th December, 2025

To Cite this Article:
Dladla, Celimpilo Piety, and Soyiso Khetoa." Wits Multilingual Landscape: Developing Language Use Guides For Inclusive Communication." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 13 (2025): 68 - 80, https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20256135.

INTRODUCTION

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is a multicultural and multilingual institution, reflecting the diverse linguistic landscape of South Africa. Within this linguistic diversity, English is the dominant language used in academic and administrative contexts, even though most students and staff are non-native English speakers of English. This linguistic practice has significant implications for both students and staff, and this manifests itself in limited access to academic resources, support services, and social activities, leading to impaired academic performance, decreased student retention, and inadequate representation of diverse perspectives and voices.

Despite significant policy advancements within the institution, progress towards achieving true multilingualism has encountered several challenges, which include limited implementation of language policies, insufficient resources for teaching African languages, and the hegemony of English in both academic and administrative contexts. In the context of South African universities, English remains the dominant language of instruction, with Afrikaans also playing a "somewhat" notable role. In light of the academic linguistic imbalance, a significant number of universities have made efforts to incorporate

terminology lists, offer courses in [1] previously marginalised languages (indigenous South African languages/African languages), and continue to explore translanguaging pedagogies as resources to promote inclusivity.

This paper discusses the role of dual-language use guides developed by the authors (of this paper) as an initiative to promote teaching and learning of isiZulu and Sesotho in their institution. These resources are accessible online through a free website, illustrating the researchers' commitment to ensuring that financial constraints do not pose a barrier to language development and language learning. It also demonstrates the potential of accessible online resources and the importance of personal agency in language acquisition through these guides, which support effective communication in a multilingual academic environment.

Multilingualism at Wits

Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub, is a vibrant tapestry of linguistic diversity with over fifty percent of provincial residents speaking more than one language.[2] The Gauteng province is the only province in South Africa where all the official languages of the country are represented. Out of all the languages that are represented in the province, isiZulu (23.1%) is the predominantly spoken language, followed by Sesotho (13.1%) and Sepedi (12.6%).[3] In the last ten years (2011 to 2022), the usage of these three languages in household settings has shown some growth. Nationally, isiZulu has moved from 22.7% to 24.4%, Sepedi from 9% to 10%, and Sesotho from 7.6% to 7.8%.[4] This indicates sustainable usage of indigenous languages in communication within societies. Despite Gauteng being a highly cosmopolitan province, citizens of the province still rely on their languages in completing various tasks. Speakers in the province are largely multilingual. This multilingualism presents both opportunities and challenges for effective communication. Communication, which is the foundation of human interaction, transcends mere verbal interchange. For diverse people to co-exist in a cohesively coordinated manner, effective communication must exist. One of the most crucial sets of abilities a person requires is the capacity to communicate successfully.[5] Akilandeswari et al. postulate that to communicate effectively, people must acknowledge that everyone has a unique perspective on the world and utilize this knowledge to inform their interactions with others.[6] The languages that people speak influence their worldviews because they convey their cosmological orientation.

Located in Johannesburg, South Africa's economic hub, Wits is uniquely positioned to take advantage of the benefits of such linguistic diversity. All higher education institutions are required to incorporate "at least two official languages, other than the medium of instruction, for scholarly discourse and official communication."[7] At Wits, the linguistic landscape reflects broader societal multilingualism, with Mutasa identifying 76 languages spoken within the institution.[8] In response to a mandate from the Department of Higher Education (DHE), the institution developed a language policy in 2003, which was later updated in 2015. This policy designates English, Sesotho, South African Sign Language (offered official language status in 2023), and isiZulu as its official languages, ensuring that the diversity of languages is both recognized and celebrated while also addressing the practicalities of teaching and learning within the institution.

The Department of Higher Education framework further stipulates that institutions must develop language plans and strategies that enhance the development and promotion of indigenous African languages as vital components of research and scholarship.[9] Thus, Wits is actively implementing initiatives such as offering isiZulu and Sesotho language courses, fostering opportunities for research in

[1] These languages are: IsiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenḓa, and Xitsonga.
[2] Statistics South Africa, *Census, 2022* (https://census.statssa.gov.za/#/)
[3] Statistics South Africa, *Census, 2022* (https://census.statssa.gov.za/#/)
[4] Statistics South Africa, *Census, 2022* (https://census.statssa.gov.za/#/)
[5] V Akilandeswari et al., "Elements of Effective Communication," *New Media and Mass Communication* 37, no. 2019 (2015): 44–47.
[6] Akilandeswari et al., "Elements of Effective Communication."
[7] Department of Higher Education and Training, *Language Policy for Higher Education* (Pretoria, 2002).
[8] D. E. Mutasa, "Language Policy Implementation in South African Universities Vis-à-Vis the Speakers of Indigenous African Lang.uages' Perception," *A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam* (Per Linguam: Tydskrif vir Taalaanleer, 2015).
[9] Department of Higher Education and Training, *Language Policy for Higher Education*.

these languages, and encouraging translanguaging practices to empower students to draw upon their diverse linguistic assets in classroom settings.[10]

Language Use Guides

Language use guides serve as comprehensive resources for using specific languages effectively.[11] The content of these resources depends on the function that the compiler wishes to achieve. They can include a wide range of content from terminology, grammar, cultural information, glossary, and names of places, among other things. This content can be prescriptive or descriptive, as the compiler can purposefully add examples that they believe will benefit the user. The essence of language use guides is to serve as a bricolage for effective and sensible communication.[12]

These guides should not be confused with language style guides, which provide detailed information on language usage within institutions. For example, the style guide from the University of Oxford outlines the protocols for writing and formatting documents by university personnel, explicitly noting that it is not designed for public use and does not compete with the professional writing guide or dictionaries published by Oxford University Press.[13] A similar approach is observed at the University of Stellenbosch, which, in its 2014 English Style Guide, mentions a corresponding guide for Afrikaans that outlines the rules pertaining to that language. Similarly, the University of Johannesburg produced language style guides for Sesotho sa Leboa and isiZulu in 2017, Afrikaans in 2020 and English in 2024, tailored to their respective linguistic structures.[14] These resources are intended for internal use, ensuring linguistic consistency and discipline within the institutions.

Recognizing the commitment of Wits to a multilingual approach in education, there is a significant resource gap that requires the development of language use guides specifically for isiZulu and Sesotho, aimed at supporting students and staff engaged in learning these languages. Since language usage should align with the standards set by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), it is essential to compile information from various sources and create a universally applicable language use guide rather than a style guide limited to a manner of using language within Wits, because of the linguistic proficiency of potential users of these language guides.

It is important to note that style guides serve to ensure uniformity in common elements throughout documents produced by various authors, in different locations, and under diverse conditions.[15] Therefore, as many students taking language classes at Wits are beginner learners of African languages, style may not be much of interest at this level, but ensuring correctness of basic language use, as students would first need to learn the vocabulary before understanding the content and eventually get to the level of style. In addition, style guides are often written in the target language. In the case of South African schools, this proved problematic as students are gradually learning to read, let alone comprehend the in-depth content in the language. Therefore, a differentiated approach to language use guides was needed.

Multilingual literacies require strategies that consider existing knowledge of students and effectively align new information with their learning experiences. Dladla writes about language anxiety resulting from difficulties in understanding the language of instruction and its impact on academic performance, discussing constructivist alignment that emphasize the importance of establishing common ground for effective learning.[16] This is also the nature of translanguaging – meeting students at their linguistic level. This highlights the need for teaching and learning that begins from a foundation where students feel comfortable and knowledgeable, gently guiding them through unfamiliar territories.

Despite the progress made, significant challenges persist regarding the availability of standardized educational resources for students learning these languages. Currently, course packs and resources

[10] Celimpilo Dladla, "Assessing the Intersectionality of Language Anxiety and Outcomes for African Learners Writing Examinations in English," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, September 30, 2024, 1–15, https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245121.
[11] P. Peters, "Usage Guides and Usage Trends in Australian and British English," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 34,no.4 (2014): 581–98.
[12] Peters, "Usage Guides and Usage Trends in Australian and British English"; M. Law, "The Role of Editorial Intervention in Ongoing Language Variation and Change in South African and Australian English " (North-West University, 2019).
[13] University of Oxford, "University of Oxford's Style Guide," 2014, https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/University of Oxford Style Guide.pdf.
[14] University of Johannesburg, "University of Johannesburg Style Guides," 2024, https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/school-of-languages/multilingual-language-services-office/style-guides/.
[15] Law, "The Role of Editorial Intervention in Ongoing Language Variation and Change in South African and Australian English ."
[16] Dladla, "Assessing the Intersectionality of Language Anxiety and Outcomes for African Learners Writing Examinations in English."

provided by lecturers serve as essential study aids, and students can access libraries and the internet for further information. The challenge is that there is a lack of a cohesive, standardized educational resource that hinders the effective learning of these languages. Observations indicate that both native and non-native language speakers of isiZulu and Sesotho often engage in non-standardized language practices, which may lead to confusion among learners. For instance, new isiZulu speakers who may have learnt the importance of respect when engaging native speakers may grapple with selecting the appropriate forms of address for a woman, unsure whether to use *usisi/ausi* (sister), *udadewethu/kgaitsedi* (sister), *u-anti/rakgadi* (aunt), or *umama/mme* (mother) when interacting with females, as they should show respect in conversations because of cultural connotations linked to choices of words when referring to a woman in the language. Clarity and assistance in making such linguistic decisions are provided for in the Wits language use guides.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by multipronged theoretical approaches. The researchers firstly view effective communication from the lens of the Causality and Effect Based Model (CEBM), then the Communication Accommodation Theory. Sasse and Dorian explain that CEBM is founded on three types of phenomena that are pertinent to language shift and decline.[17] The first phenomenon, referred to as the external setting, encompasses a variety of linguistic factors, including culture, sociology, ethno-history, and economy.[18] External factors exert pressure on the speech community, ultimately leading to a decrease in the use of a language. External factors that influence the speech community result in unforeseen outcomes, causing language users to experience anxiety related to language use.

The researchers employed CEBM with the view that the hegemonic linguistic practices in South Africa have significantly affected certain knowledge in the structure of African languages, and this significantly affects the communication aspect among speakers of African languages. The University of the Witwatersrand, through its language policy, communicates its commitment towards multilingualism – promoting teaching, learning and use of standardised language in a multicultural and multilingual environment.[19] Against this background, the use of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is fit for purpose in this study because this theory will help provide insights into three important aspects: accommodation, divergence and convergence. [20] Elhami postulates that in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the primary emphasis revolves around three kinds of adjustments: convergence, divergence, and maintenance. These adjustments can be either automatic and unconscious or deliberate and conscious. This study contends that in order to fully realise the promise of multilingualism, students at a multicultural and multilingual institution such as Wits need to be equipped with the means to communicate effectively.

The quest for linguistic transformation at the institution is the direct consequence of social, cultural and political factors in the country. African languages experienced decades of marginalization, such that their development is insignificant compared to that of their counterparts, especially in the education sector. In a transforming society, language use guides promote the ability to communicate effectively and mitigate the potential of misinterpretation due to unfamiliarity with acceptable standards of communication between different cultures.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative desktop research approach, analyzing secondary data without any need to interact with research participants. Khetoa and Mokala explain that qualitative research is concerned with understanding how the world is constructed.[21] This approach emphasizes examining the underlying processes, interpretations, and perspectives that contribute to the construction of knowledge and social

[17] H. Sasse and N. C. Dorian, " Theory of Language Death," in *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Reference to East Africa*, ed. Matthias and Brezinger (New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1992).
[18] G. M. Muthoka, "Kikamba Language Shift and Endangerment in an Urban Upmarket Setting" (Nairobi: Kenyatta University, 2017).
[19] University of the Witwatersrand, "University of the Witwatersrand Language Policy (C2015/513)," 2015.
[20] Ali Elhami, "Communication Accommodation Theory: A Brief Review of the Literature," *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy* 4, no. 05 (2020): 192–200.
[21] S. G Khetoa and N. T Mokala, "The Functional Value of Unconventional Names in Contemporary Society: Social Safety and Security through Basotho Nicknames. ," *Nomina Africana* 36, no. 1 (n.d.): 59–70.

realities.[22] Through this approach, the researchers, as developers of the language used guides, were better positioned to study linguistic realities of the official languages of Wits. To this end, the researchers discussed how language guides will support the Wits language policy, which aims to promote multilingual accommodation among students and staff.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method used in this study involved systematically evaluating the content of the Sesotho and isiZulu language use guides to gain a comprehensive understanding of their role in promoting multilingualism at Wits. The study employed a random sampling method for selecting samples from the guides to ensure that the analysed content is representative of the overall material. This method allowed for an in-depth examination of how language guides support multilingual practices within the institution.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section begins by presenting findings in a narrative form with a few samples, followed by a discussion of the findings in consideration of the theoretical foundations of this study. IsiZulu and Sesotho language guides discussed herein encompass a variety of essential topics, including forms of address, months of the year, and grammatical rules.

Forms of address

Addressing individuals varies significantly across cultures, influenced by factors such as age, status, and relational dynamics. According to Dickey, a person's social role plays a pivotal role in determining the form of address used by others.[23] For example, a teacher known as *Mrs. Smith* may be referred to by her first name, *Jane*, by those with whom she shares a close relationship, while being called *Mom* by her children, because cultural norms dictate different forms of address based on contextual considerations. The following table is a representation of forms of address:

Table 1: Forms of address

English	IsiZulu	Sesotho
Mister	Mnumzane	Mohlomphehi
Mistress	Nkosazane	Mofumahatsana
Pastor /Reverend	Mfundisi	Moruti
Doctor	Dokotela	Ngaka
Professor	Solwazi	Moprofesara

Equipping students with these forms of address will foster communication within and outside of the university, as they will be able to address correctly in both written and spoken language, as these forms are relevant to both forms of communication.

Months of the year

Acquiring proficiency in a new language necessitates that learners are equipped with essential vocabulary and content that enable them to express temporal concepts, such as telling the time of day, identifying the days of the week, recognizing months of the year, and understanding the seasons. Consequently, the language use guide aims to provide comprehensive content addressing these fundamental aspects of time, thereby enhancing the linguistic competence of learners in practical and meaningful ways.

These topics are included in the language guide; however, this paper only discusses months of the year because of the complexities and depth of African linguistic traditions illustrated in them. By presenting this information in dual formats, we not only enhance the vocabulary of learners but also foster

[22] Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (sage, 2011); J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* , 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2014).

[23] E. Dickey, "Forms of Address and Terms of Reference," *Journal of Linguistics* 33, no. 2 (1997): 255–74.

a greater appreciation for the cultural significance embedded within the language, equipping users with the tools necessary to navigate both interpersonal and communal interactions more effectively.

Table 2: Months of the year

English	IsiZulu	Sesotho
January	Januwari/uMasingana	Pherekgong/Janawari
February	Febhuwari/uNhlolanja	Hlakola/Febewari
March	Mashi/uNdasa	Hlakubele/Matjhe

This dual representation of months not only illustrates the influence of colonial languages on indigenous naming practices but also highlights the richness of African languages as they integrate traditional knowledge and historical context. By using a transliterated form as well as an ethnic one, we maintain a link to their cultural heritage while also adapting to contemporary linguistic influences. This interplay between indigenous and foreign names reflects broader themes of cultural resilience and adaptation found within African languages, inviting learners to engage with these nuances as they develop their language proficiency.

Grammar

Recognising the vital role of grammatical rules, this language use guide considered these standards, drawing from authoritative resources including *Uhlelo LwesiZulu*[24] *Learn Zulu*[25] and *Ukuvamisa Imithetho Yokubhala Nobhalomagama LwesiZulu*[26] for isiZulu, alongside Sesotho made easy (1998), The Grammar of Sesotho (1992), Sesotho: *A Linguistic Introduction* (1975), *Text of Southern Sotho Grammar*.[27] These resources are among the few that have successfully upheld standardised language use, counteracting the deterioration of linguistic standards that has been previously discussed in this examination. By establishing a solid grammatical foundation, this guide aspires to enhance learners' proficiency and confidence in both understanding and using the language effectively. Below are noun classes that are paramount in understanding Sesotho and isiZulu grammar.

Table 3: Sesotho Noun Class Table

Class	Noun Class Prefix	Concord	Semantic context	Example	Translation
1	mo-	o-	human beings	motho	person
2	ba-	ba-	proper names, kinship, and terms personification	batho	people
1a	-	o-	regular plural of class 1	ntate	father
2a	bo-	ba-	regular plural of class 1a	bontate	fathers
3	mo-	o-	natural phenomena body parts, plants, and animals	moriana	medicine
4	me-	e-	regular plural of class 3	meriana	medicines
5	le-	le-	natural phenomena, animals, body parts, collective nouns, undesirable people, augmentatives, and derogatives	lejwe	stone

[24] C.L.S. Nyembezi, *Uhlelo LwesiZulu (Zulu Grammar)* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1956).
[25] Nyembezi, *Uhlelo LwesiZulu (Zulu Grammar)*.
[26] A.M Maphumulo, *Ukuvamisa Imithetho Yokubhala Nobhalomagama LwesiZulu Lonyaka Wezi-* (Durban, : University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. , 2021).
[27] C. M Doke and S. M Mofokeng, "Textbook of Southern Sotho Grammar," *Longman Southern Africa,* (Cape Town: Impression, 1974).

6	ma-	a-	regular plural of class 5, mass terms and liquids, time reference, and mannerisms	majwe	stones
7	se-	se-	body parts, tools, instruments and utensils animals and insects, languages, diseases, outstanding people, amelioratives, derogatives, diminutives, augmentatives, curtatives (shortness and stockiness), and mannerisms	sejana	vase
8	di-	di-	regular plural of class 7	dijana	vases
9	-	e-	animals people body parts tools, instruments and household effects, and natural phenomena	ntja	dog
10	di-	di-	regular plural of class 9	nintja	dogs
11	-	-		-	-
12	-	-		-	-
13	-	-		-	-
14	bo-	bo	abstracts, collectives, location, terms, and infinitives	bohobe	bread
15	ho-	ho	Infinitives	ho tsamaya	to walk
16	-	ho	location terms	fatshe	down
17	ho-	ho	location terms	hodimo	up
18	mo-	o	location terms	mose	broad

Sesotho nouns have singular and plural prefixes as indicated in noun classes 1 and 2 in the table above.

Table 4:IsiZulu Noun Class Table

Class	Noun Class Prefix	Concord	Semantic context	Example	Translation
1	umu-	u-	human beings	umuntu	person
2	aba-	ba-	proper names, kinship, and terms personification	abantu	people
1a	u-	u-	regular plural of class 1	ugogo	grandmother
2a	o-	ba-	regular plural of class 1a	ogogo	grandmothers
3	umu-	u-	natural phenomena, body parts, plants, and animals	umuthi	medicine

4	imi-	i-	regular plural of class 3	imithi	medicines
5	ili-	li-	natural phenomena, animals, body parts, collective nouns, undesirable people, augmentatives, and derogatives	ilitshe	stone
6	ama-	a-	regular plural of class 5, mass terms and liquids, time reference, and mannerisms	amatshe	stones
7	isi-	si-	body parts, tools, instruments and utensils animals and insects, languages, diseases, outstanding people, amelioratives, derogatives, diminutives, augmentatives, curtatives (shortness and stockiness), and mannerisms	isitsha	vase
8	isi-	zi-	regular plural of class 7	isitsha	vases
9	in-	i-	Animals, people, body parts, tools, instruments, and household effects, and natural phenomena	inja	dog
10	isin-	zi-	regular plural of class 9	izinja	dogs
11	ulu-	lu-	long, thin entities,languagesbody parts natural phenomena implement, utensils and other artefacts augmentatives	u(lu)bisi	milk
14	ubu-	bu-	infinitives	ubuso	face
15	uku-	ku-	location terms	ukudla	food

IsiZulu classes commence at class 1 and conclude at class 15, notably lacking the 12th and 13th classes that are present in other Bantu languages. The classification of noun classes is informed by the

works of Nyembezi[28] and Mohlala,[29] who offer a semantic framework that draws upon the discussions of Bantu noun classes by Hendrikse and Poulos.[30]

DISCUSSION

Language use guides are essential tools for implementing the language policies of South African universities. They play a crucial role in establishing linguistic standards, promoting inclusivity, and providing practical resources for learning. By using language use guides, educational institutions can strengthen their dedication to creating an environment where multilingualism thrives. This ensures that all students, regardless of their language background, can fully engage in their academic pursuits with confidence.

The resource developed for language teaching and learning aims to help users view learning a new language differently. It seeks to address the issue of information accessibility, especially when students do not have access to a teacher or peer for assistance, and calls for the development of online resources. Therefore, initiatives discussed in this paper provide a starting point for ongoing discussions about the significance of multilingual education and implementation of the language policy.

In African contexts (and ultimately African languages), numerous factors inform how individuals should be addressed. For instance, while *Mrs. Smith* might be comfortable with her daughter-in-law referring to her as *Jane* in a Western cultural framework, African customs dictate that she should be addressed as *Mama* in isiZulu or *Mme* in Sesotho, both of which translate to *Mother*. This norm reflects a deeper cultural significance, as referring to a woman as mother in the African culture symbolises respect and acknowledgment of status in society. Moreover, the expectation to address older women as *Mama* or *Mme* extends into various settings, including university environments and everyday social interactions. When encountering older individuals who appear to be of maternal age, it is customary within African cultures to greet them as *Mother* rather than using their personal names, as doing so may be perceived as disrespectful. Consequently, it is imperative that the teaching of African languages encompasses an understanding of cultural norms and knowledge systems. Such cultural education is essential for students, as it provides them with the tools to navigate and apply these practices universally in various social contexts.

Integrating cultural knowledge with language instruction enriches the learning experience and deepens students' appreciation for the complexities of interpersonal communication within African cultures. Wits is making progressive strides towards inclusivity and empowerment for all students. By acknowledging and celebrating linguistic diversity within academic settings, it lays the groundwork for a future where previously marginalized languages enrich the academic landscape.

Clearly, language use guides are not just administrative tools; they are transformative instruments that can change how languages are viewed and used in academic spaces. They provide cultural knowledge that is embedded in the languages. These languages encapsulate a wealth of indigenous knowledge systems, particularly evident in the naming conventions for the months of the year. Biyela, in exploring the etymology of the isiZulu name for February, notes that the name *Nhlolanja* is derived from circumstances associated with this month, emphasizing its cultural significance and connection to agricultural cycles.[31]

"The isiZulu name for February is *uNhlolanja*, which literally means 'to examine a dog'. This name originates from the sniffing of a bitch by a male dog checking if she is on heat. The male dogs begin sniffing the bitch when her hormones start to produce a scent that signals her readiness to breed. Biyela calls this period 'proestrus', caused by the maturation of a wave of follicles within her ovary and sudden rise in blood oestrogen level, a "stage of readiness for, and interest in mating."[32] According to Biyela, oestrus or the 'standing heat' is the second phase of the oestrous cycle during which a female mates with

[28] Nyembezi, *Uhlelo LwesiZulu (Zulu Grammar)*.
[29] L. Mohlala, "The Bantu Attribute Noun Class Prefixes and Their Suffixal Counterparts, with Special Reference to Zulu" (University of Pretoria, 2005).
[30] A.P Hendrikse and G Poulos, "A Continuum Interpretation of the Bantu Noun Class System," *African Linguistic Contributions* (Pretoria: Via Afrika Limited, 1990).
[31] N.G Biyela, "The Traditional 'Zulu Valentine," *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 13, no. 1 (2014): 1–10.
[32] Biyela, "The Traditional 'Zulu Valentine."

a male. Presumably, it was due to these oestrous cycle phases, during which extraordinary flirtation among dogs took place, that the traditional Zulu observers named February *uNhlolanja*."[33]

This explanation for the name of the month is evidence of the importance of indigenous knowledge that should be imparted to language learners. Relying solely on transliteration deprives them of the rich cultural insights and contextual understandings inherent in these languages. This omission risks diminishing their grasp of the language and its cultural significance, potentially removing opportunities to engage with African heritage in meaningful ways; and while transitional forms of language are integral to everyday speech and often recognized in reputable sources, it is imperative that indigenous terms and concepts are also preserved and taught. This requires a concerted effort to include indigenous vocabulary in educational materials and digital resources, ensuring these vital components of language and culture remain vibrant and accessible to all learners.

By integrating indigenous words alongside transliterated terms in educational curricula, we empower language learners to appreciate the depth and richness of African languages, fostering a deeper connection to cultural roots. In line with the CEBM, including indigenous months in language guides in both forms provides a smooth representation of language shifts while hindering the decline of these languages. Such an approach not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates an understanding of the worldviews and knowledge systems embedded within the language. Preserving this linguistic heritage through education and digital documentation is essential for keeping it alive for future generations. This includes providing resources that teach the correct grammatical use of languages.

One cannot effectively teach a language without incorporating its grammatical rules. Dalil and Harrizi elucidate grammar by differentiating its perception: for lay people, grammar consists of rules and methods for combining words into coherent sentences, while grammarians analyse it in terms of how various elements—such as word classes, clauses, and parts of speech—interact to create accurate and meaningful expressions.[34] Importantly, grammar is not uniform; it varies across languages and among speakers of the same language. Native speakers may perceive the grammar of their language as intuitive and manageable, while learners from different linguistic backgrounds often encounter complexities that make the grammar seem challenging. Such discrepancies contribute to the emergence of idiolects and dialects, as individuals from diverse regions may exhibit variations in language use.

Demuth and Sekhesa posit that Bantu languages like Sesotho are characterised by common properties such as noun classes, and that noun classes in Sesotho belong to a class that is identifiable by its prefix.[35] Part of the prefix is then used before the verb or adjective to bring about an agreement between the noun and the verb or adjective. A basic Sesotho sentence can take this format:

*M**o**sadi **o** rata motoho*	The mother likes soft porridge
***Ba**sadi **ba** rata motoho*	Women likes soft porridge

The sentences hereabove illustrate how the prefix of a noun class determines the corresponding concordial (o/ba) agreement between the noun (*basadi/mosadi*) and the verb (rata). Both Sesotho and isiZulu are categorized as Bantu languages, with corresponding examples provided in *Tables 3* and *Table 4* to substantiate these classifications. The tables are important for understanding which prefixes to use for each noun. For example, consider the sentence: "*Ubuso babo babumangalisa*" (their face was amazing). In this construction, the noun "*ubuso*" which belongs to noun class 14, correctly employs the pronoun "*babo*" (their), starting with "ba-," thereby indicating its association with noun class 14. Furthermore, the prefix "-bu-" in "*babumangalisa*" (was amazing) also signifies the noun class 14 association. A lack of familiarity with noun classes can lead to improper language usage, which, if left unaddressed, may result in language degradation over time.

For language learners, particularly those who do not possess a foundational understanding of the language, the concept of noun classes may be foreign and challenging to grasp. As a result, they may mistakenly combine different noun classes, leading to grammatical inconsistencies and ultimately resulting in incorrect sentences. This mixing of classes hinders effective communication and can

[33] Biyela, "The Traditional 'Zulu Valentine."1-2.
[34] Z. Dalil and M. Harrizi, "The Importance of Grammar in Second Language Teaching" (Morocco. : Universite Hassan II, Casablanca, 2013).
[35] K. Demuth and T. Sekhesa, *Basic Sesotho – An Oral Approach Supplementary Text* (Indiana University, 1978).

contribute to broader language deterioration, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive instruction that emphasises the importance of correct noun class usage.

Therefore, by promoting the value of previously marginalized languages, universities can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable education system that prepares students for success and empowers them to engage meaningfully in their communities and society. This can be possible through a joint effort that requires ongoing commitment, collaboration, and innovation. Therefore, the development of language guides reflects the commitment of the institution to fostering inclusivity, support for learning, and diversity in the institution; as they are envisioned to bridge linguistic gaps that exist in the country, promote inclusivity, and facilitate effective communication in academic and social settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that future research focus on the development of collaborative, digitally-enabled language resources. To revitalise and promote previously marginalised languages in a modern context, it is crucial to move beyond traditional academic materials and create innovative, accessible digital products. These resources should be developed through strategic partnerships between scholars, higher education institutions, and funding bodies. By pooling expertise and resources, this collaboration will ensure that new language guides and platforms are not only relevant to the learning needs of students but are also sustainable and widely accessible, thereby contributing to the long-term vitality and promotion of indigenous languages in both academic and everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The commitment of the University of the Witwatersrand to fostering multilingualism and inclusivity is aptly demonstrated through the strategic development of language use guides for isiZulu and Sesotho. These guides not only function as essential pedagogical resources aimed at promoting proficient language use among non-native speakers also play a critical role in bridging cultural divides by embedding indigenous knowledge and norms within the language instruction framework. Through the prioritization of both accessibility and cultural relevance, this institution of higher learning is actively reshaping the academic landscape to facilitate a more equitable educational experience that acknowledges and values diverse linguistic backgrounds. This initiative not only enhances academic engagement but also supports community empowerment, thereby highlighting the dedication of the university to cultivating a multilingual environment. Ultimately, this forward-thinking approach serves as a significant model for higher education institutions seeking to promote a more inclusive and culturally responsive academic ecosystem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to thank the University of the Witwatersrand for the funds received for developing the Language Use Guide for isiZulu and Sesotho. The assistance of Professor I.J. Mhlambi, Dr S.C. Msani, Dr A.S Motsei, Mr K. Qhala, and Ms N.N. Nzama in this project is duly acknowledged.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akilandeswari, V, A Dinesh Kumar, A Philomin Freeda, and S Niranchan Kumar. “Elements of Effective Communication.” *New Media and Mass Communication* 37, no. 2019 (2015): 44–47.

Biyela, N.G. “The Traditional ‘Zulu Valentine.” *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 13, no. 1 (2014): 1–10.

Creswell, J. W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* . 4th ed. SAGE Publications, 2014.

Dalil, Z., and M. Harrizi. “The Importance of Grammar in Second Language Teaching.” Morocco. : Universite Hassan II, Casablanca, 2013.

Demuth, K., and T. Sekhesa. *Basic Sesotho – An Oral Approach Supplementary Text*. Indiana University, 1978.

Denzin, Norman K, and Yvonna S Lincoln. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. sage, 2011.

Department of Higher Education and Training. *Language Policy for Higher Education*. Pretoria, 2002.

Dickey, E. “Forms of Address and Terms of Reference.” *Journal of Linguistics* 33, no.2 (1997): 255–74.

Dladla, Celimpilo. "Assessing the Intersectionality of Language Anxiety and Outcomes for African Learners Writing Examinations in English." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, September 30, 2024, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245121.

Doke, C. M, and S. M Mofokeng. "Textbook of Southern Sotho Grammar." *Longman Southern Africa, .* Cape Town: Impression, 1974.

Elhami, Ali. "Communication Accommodation Theory: A Brief Review of the Literature." *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy* 4, no. 05 (2020): 192–200.

Hendrikse, A.P, and G Poulos. "A Continuum Interpretation of the Bantu Noun Class System." *African Linguistic Contributions*. Pretoria: Via Afrika Limited, 1990.

Khetoa, S. G, and N. T Mokala. "The Functional Value of Unconventional Names in Contemporary Society: Social Safety and Security through Basotho Nicknames. ." *Nomina Africana* 36, no. 1 (n.d.): 59–70.

Law, M. "The Role of Editorial Intervention in Ongoing Language Variation and Change in South African and Australian English ." North-West University, 2019.

Maphumulo, A.M. *Ukuvamisa Imithetho Yokubhala Nobhalomagama LwesiZulu Lonyaka Wezi-*. Durban, : University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. , 2021.

Mohlala, L. "The Bantu Attribute Noun Class Prefixes and Their Suffixal Counterparts, with Special Reference to Zulu." University of Pretoria, 2005.

Mutasa, D E. "Language Policy Implementation in South African Universities Vis-à-Vis the Speakers of Indigenous African Languages' Perception." *A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam*. Per Linguam: Tydskrif vir Taalaanleer, 2015.

Muthoka, G. M. "Kikamba Language Shift and Endangerment in an Urban Upmarket Setting." Nairobi: Kenyatta University, 2017.

Nyembezi, C.L.S. *Uhlelo LwesiZulu (Zulu Grammar)*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1956.

Peters, P. "Usage Guides and Usage Trends in Australian and British English." *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 34, no. 4 (2014): 581–98.

Sasse, H., and N. C. Dorian. " Theory of Language Death." In *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Reference to East Africa*, edited by Matthias and Brezinger. New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1992.

Stats Sa. *Census, 2022*. Department of Statistics South Africa, 2022. https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf.

University of Johannesburg. "University of Johannesburg Style Guides," 2024. https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/school-of-languages/multilingual-language-services-office/style-guides/.

University of Oxford. "University of Oxford's Style Guide," 2014. https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/University of Oxford Style Guide.pdf.

University of the Witwatersrand. "University of the Witwatersrand Language Policy (C2015/513)," 2015.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr Celimpilo Piety Dladla is a lecturer in the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a seasoned language specialist working between English and isiZulu. Her undergraduate and postgraduate studies are in Language Practice; Management, Translation and Interpreting Studies; IsiZulu Studies; African Languages and Linguistics; and Teaching in Higher Education. Her postdoctoral research, published in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters, focuses on the language policy, translation, and interpreting practice. She is also the author of two novels: *The Pastor With A Criminal Mind* and *Ngumhlaba-ke lowo!*

Dr Soyiso Khetoa is the Head of the Department of African Languages at the University of the Witwatersrand. He serves on the Gauteng Provincial Language Committee as Convener of the Language-in-Education Subcommittee and is a founding editorial board member of the Journal of Linguistics, Literary and Communication Studies. His research explores sociolinguistics and language education by

focusing on language attitudes and ideologies in African language education, translanguaging and decolonial approaches to teaching, curriculum transformation and indigenous language integration, socio-onomastics and cultural hybridity, and African literature and oral traditions in contemporary contexts. Dr Khetoa has published widely in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes and has presented his work at national and international conferences. He has successfully supervised postgraduate students from honours to PhD and continues to mentor emerging scholars.