

Counteracting the Threat of Language Death: The Case of Minority Languages in Botswana

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When Botswana gained independence from the British in 1966, a political decision was taken to designate English as an official language and Setswana, one of the indigenous languages, as a national language. This move disregarded the multilingual nature of Botswana society. Furthermore, although not explicitly stated, the use of other languages was, in effect, prohibited, especially in the school setting and other official arenas. Whereas the government undertook deliberate measures to promote the use of Setswana, no efforts were made by the government to cater for other languages spoken in Botswana. As a result, some of the latter languages have died out whilst others have survived. This paper examines some of the steps that members of the groups that speak these marginalised languages have taken in their quest to develop and maintain their languages. The discussion in this paper considers the six strategies proposed by David Crystal (2000) as some of the ways that speakers of endangered languages could ensure their survival. Deprived of any government support, the speakers of these languages initiated some processes that have seen some significant developments. These include the development of orthographies, the translation of the Bible into these languages and the publication of other written resources in these languages.

Overview of Botswana Language Situation

Botswana, like most other societies, is multilingual and multicultural in nature. Today, the name Botswana is used to denote a country that is situated in Southern Africa between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The use of the name Botswana often offers the impression that it is a monolingual country with a homogenous culture. The origins of the use of the labels Botswana, for the country, and Batswana, to refer to its citizens, is unclear. What is true, however, is that this name Botswana is part of its colonial legacy, as the people who lived there did not refer to themselves with such a name before the arrival of the Europeans. It was the latter who would subsequently call the people Bechuana and the land Bechuanaland.

The inhabitants of precolonial Botswana arrived in the country at different times and from different directions, with the Khoesan groups being seen as the earliest inhabitants of present-day Botswana. The Kalanga, from the North, which is present-day Zimbabwe, were also some of the earlier arrivals to the northern part of Botswana. Setswana-speaking people meanwhile entered the country from the South. Even today, there are still many people who speak Setswana in South Africa, as well as in some parts of Namibia. Other groups entered the country in the Western side and these included the Wayeyi who

were the first Bantu speakers to settle along the Okavango Delta where they found the Khoesan (Tlou, 1985).

One of the challenges that linguists encounter in studying issues pertaining to Botswana languages is the absence of definite figures with respect to the size of the population of the different ethnic groups. The absence of such information emanates from a deliberate census policy adopted in Botswana in which people in Botswana are not classified with regard to their ethnicity. The only census data which provides an ethnic breakdown was done in 1946 (Schapera, 1952). It is over a half a century since such data was provided, and a lot of changes have certainly taken place in terms of the compositions of the different ethnic groups. Consequently, such information cannot be applied to present-day Botswana. There is, nonetheless, a general consensus that Setswana is spoken by the majority of the population as a first and second language (Chebanne & Nyati-Ramahobo, 2003). The emergence of Setswana as a second language, spoken by an increasing number of people in Botswana, stems from its status as a national language and also its role as a medium of instruction at the early stages of primary education. According to Andersson and Janson (1997), there is also a general agreement that the Kalanga constitute a sizeable proportion of the population. Nyati-Ramahobo (2000: 254) meanwhile suggests that they are also the majority in the Central District, which is largely under the jurisdiction of the Setswana-speaking Bangwato. Nyati-Ramahobo (2000) also states that the Wayeyi constitute 40% of the population of the Ngamiland district, which is under the Batawana, another Setswana-speaking group.

In comparison with the other languages, Setswana has always enjoyed a privileged status. This commenced with the writing of Setswana grammar as well as the translation of the Bible into Setswana as early as the 1820s (Andersson & Janson, 1997; Smieja, 2003). Such developments influenced a gradual shift towards the use of Setswana especially in the schools and in other settings like the church. The translation of the New Testament into the Ikalanga language was undertaken in 1929 in present-day Zimbabwe (Nyati-Ramahobo & Chebanne, 2001), but still no comprehensive efforts were made to develop the orthography, particularly in relation to the Ikalanga spoken in Botswana.

During the colonial era, Setswana received more attention than the other indigenous languages. It was used in the school system in the initial years alongside English. Ikalanga was, meanwhile, used during the first two years of primary education in those areas that were predominantly Ikalanga-speaking areas. It was, however, phased out of the education system around independence. Nyati-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2001) cite Winstanley (1965), who reports that during the first elections held in Botswana, election materials were prepared in five languages (Afrikaans, English, Ikalanga, Setswana and Otjiherero). This suggests that, however minimally, Ikalanga had been part of the official sphere, a situation which changed as soon as the country gained independence in 1966. The use of the five languages mentioned was a clear testimony of the multilingual nature of Botswana society. This more inclusive approach contrasts markedly with what prevailed after independence. The example cited here appears to be the only recorded instance of the use of

Ikalanga in the official sphere during the colonial era as available official records are written in either English or Setswana.

As the country gained sovereignty, no attempt was made to find a place for Ikalanga and other indigenous languages. The relegation of Ikalanga to the periphery was perhaps the most surprising given the fact that it was already minimally present in the education system. It was also in the official sphere, as reflected in its use during the first elections. We need, nonetheless, to appreciate that those in power at independence were concerned with promoting the agenda of assimilation and building what they perceived to be one united nation. There was little concern about investing in the promotion of the different languages spoken in Botswana. Their outlook was, perhaps, consonant with an analysis made by Baker (1993: 248):

... that perpetuating language minorities and language diversity may cause less integration, less cohesiveness, more antagonism and more conflict in society. The perceived complication of minority languages is to be solved by assimilation into the majority language. Such an argument holds that the majority language (e.g. English) unifies the diversity.

Critiques of the assimilation model point out that such an attitude ignores the value of unity in diversity. It is seen as an approach that fails to recognise that an inclusive outlook promotes the coexistence of different languages and that cultural diversity is an integral aspect of most societies. A good lesson for Botswana is perhaps their neighbours, South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa has developed language policies that are built on the concept of unity in diversity. The experiences of countries like Rwanda, which are almost monolingual, attest to the fact that monolingualism does not automatically guarantee national cohesion.

We need to note that the assimilation process adopted in Botswana was not a result of a deliberate language planning process. It was more of a reflection of the power relations that have been in play in the country for a number of years. As already pointed out, the inhabitants of present day Botswana settled in this country at different times. It is a historical fact that Setswana-speaking groups managed to rule over the other groups and this gradually led to the imposition of Setswana upon some of the subjugated groups. During the colonial period, the British colonial government also recognised chiefs that came from the Setswana-speaking groups and ignored other tribal leaders. This helped to entrench the supremacy of Setswana speakers. All these factors contributed to a shift towards the use of Setswana, the language of the ruling class. Consequently, it was not surprising that at independence Setswana was easily recognised as a national language.

Another important factor that could have influenced the choice of Setswana as a national language is purely economic. At independence the country was still very poor. Consequently, it was much more prudent to utilise the limited resources to address pressing development issues and the development of the different languages was not a priority area. Since Setswana was already well developed, and spoken by the majority of the citizens of the newly

independent state, it was in this respect economically justifiable to adopt it as a national language.

Given the picture painted in the preceding paragraphs, it is reasonable to claim that the present situation in Botswana threatens the existence of the different indigenous languages that exist in the country. The emphasis on English and Setswana is likely to result in the death of some of the indigenous languages. These are being systematically downgraded in favour of Setswana and English, with the former being given the status of the national language and the latter functioning as an official language. Within the educational sector, Setswana is used as a medium of instruction during the first two years of primary school education. Thereafter, English assumes this status. All the other languages are not accommodated in the education system, but they are freely used in the communities where they are spoken. There are nonetheless signs of the encroachment of Setswana and English even in those domains where some of these languages could be the sole ones being used. One such area is in the conduct of funerals. Whereas the funeral proceedings may be conducted orally in the local languages, often the funeral programmes are written in Setswana. For those languages that do not still have an orthography, this is the reason given for adopting Setswana. For those that have an orthography like Ikalanga, often the reason advanced is that not all people who would have come understand Ikalanga and hence it would be better to employ a language that is used by most people. This can be taken to be a reflection of the acceptance of Setswana as a national language.

Some signs of language death have already been noted in Botswana. For example, some Khoesan languages are no longer in use. The supremacy of English and Setswana has also resulted in some speakers of the other indigenous languages developing a negative attitude towards their own languages. Nyati-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2001) also note the historical experience which has led to the decline in the use of Shiyeyi. They observed that those Wayeyi who sought refuge in Bangwato territory were welcomed by Kgosi Khama on the condition that they would speak Setswana. Furthermore: 'as a result of this, which was further compounded by their soft nature, many Wayeyi do not speak Shiyeyi. Consequently, it is not being passed to the children, hence an endangered language' (Nyati-Ramahobo & Chebanne, 2001: 13). Nyati-Ramahobo (2002: 21) points out that:

There has been a tremendous amount of language shift among the Wayeyi. Most Wayeyi cannot speak Shiyeyi and it is one of the endangered languages of the world. The Kalanga were ill treated by Bangwato and consequently, most Kalanga who live in Serowe cannot speak Ikalanga . . . Most minority groups have lost their traditions and customs and adopted those of the Tswana.

Monaka (2005) reports on some developments in Shekgalagarhi that point to aspects of language shift and language death of this language in some parts of Botswana. She notes that in some areas where this language is spoken, there are notable shifts towards Setswana. In those areas that are in close proximity to Setswana-speaking areas, this language is no longer spoken. Its speakers

have now adopted Setswana as their home language and their children speak it as a first language.

Such developments do not augur well for the retention of these languages and measures are needed that can be used to redress this situation. There is, however, still an urgent need to undertake detailed studies to determine the extent to which Setswana is becoming a first language even for those people who come from non-Setswana communities. Such studies would also need to explore the intergenerational use of some of these marginalised languages in order to determine any trends that could have emerged.

What is Language Death?

According to Crystal (2000: 1) 'a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore.' Grenoble and Whaley (1998: 22) posit that 'speakers abandon their native language in adaptation to an environment where use of that language is no longer advantageous to them.' Dorian meanwhile (1998: 3) puts forward the view that '... languages are seldom admired to death but are frequently despised to death.'

When one looks at the situation in Botswana, one can certainly see that some languages are despised, a practice which does not augur well for their retention. The problem of language death is a global one. A recent article in *The Economist* (December 2004) suggests that world languages disappear at the rate of one a fortnight. It is also reported in this article that increasingly, more and more children have stopped learning their first languages first, but are instead embracing dominant languages like English.

Application of David Crystal's Proposals

Having established the threat to some of the languages spoken in Botswana, an exploration of some of the strategies that some languages groups have employed in their endeavour to preserve and promote their languages and culture will be undertaken. In this paper it is proposed to use the strategies advanced by David Crystal (2000) as a framework to study these attempts. Crystal postulates six ways whereby an endangered language can be sustained or protected. These recommended interventions will be applied to the situation in Botswana with a view to ascertaining what is taking place and how the measures have been implemented in Botswana. This paper will focus essentially upon two language groups, the Kalanga and Wayeyi. The choice of these two groups is based on the premise that they consist of individuals and cultural groups which are well established, known nationally and have made significant strides in the development of written materials in these languages. In addition, the activities of these cultural groups are essentially a product of local initiatives within the groups themselves and not the result of external intervention.

The focus on local initiatives does not mean that there has not been any external intervention in this area. A good example where external intervention has borne positive results is that of the Naro language. This is a Khoesan language spoken in the Ghanzi area. This language was one of the endangered

Khoesan languages until Hessel and Coby Visser intervened (Visser, 2000). The language has been empowered through the creation of a practical orthographic system. It is also well documented in descriptive and reading materials. There are a lot of literacy activities for both the young and the adult members of the Naro community. This in turn has increased the speakers' prestige, confidence and positive attitudes. What is interesting in the Naro experience is that it reveals that, while language empowerment can be stimulated by the speakers themselves (as the Ikalanga and Shiyeyi cases will reveal), it can also be facilitated by external groups, such as non-governmental organisations, as is the case with the Naro. It should nonetheless be emphasised here that all these efforts are essentially working at the local level, as nationally all these languages are still not catered for in the educational system, which is monopolised by Setswana and English.

A common strand that runs through several of Crystal's proposals is the overall socioeconomic standing of the ethnic group in relation to the wider society or nation state. Another interesting dimension in Crystal's points is the fact that they advocate the involvement of communities and individuals, and the issue of preserving and promoting languages is not projected as the prerogative of the nation state.

The first proposal raises the issue of prestige. This is a very valid point as it addresses the fact that there are perceptions and attitudes that prevail in any given society, and these are attitudes towards one another that may eventually determine how the different ethnic groups relate and operate within the wider society. Those ethnic groups that are despised may find themselves being under pressure to identify with those groups that have a higher status. In the process they may compromise their own languages in favour of that of the dominant community. This is a very pertinent issue in multicultural societies like Botswana.

Crystal goes on to bring the economic status of the speakers into the picture. This reinforces the fact that there is an interplay of both social and economic factors in determining the survival of languages. Economically strong groups are more likely to be able to have a stronger voice than the less economically advantaged ones such as the Khoesan communities. The third issue that is brought to the fore is that of legitimate power. Legitimate power, particularly political power, enables those who wield it to implement policies that may impact on language planning and language practice. Consequently, it is useful to explore the extent to which the different groups have access to legitimate power in any given society. The educational factor raised by Crystal is also very important. Language plays a very important role in education, especially in instances where several languages exist and there needs to be a determination of the language that will feature in the educational sphere. Those languages that feature in the education sphere are likely to be even more attractive to speakers of other language because of their instrumental value. This may in the long run influence the speakers of the marginalised languages to shift to adopt the languages that are used in such domains.

One of the challenges linguists face in studying African languages is the absence of the written form of a lot of the languages spoken in this continent.

This invariably affects any efforts to develop literacy in such languages. Consequently, it is very important to deal with this problem. The last proposal that Crystal brings forward relates to the use of modern technology such as the Internet to promote language use and preservation. This is a more recent development, which is itself tied to the extent to which such technology is available to the speakers of the targeted language.

Strategy 1: An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community (p. 130)

Language, by its nature, is a mark of group identity. It is an integral part of their day-to-day life experiences. Consequently, members of a particular language community need to be actively involved in promoting the image of their language and culture. This includes endeavouring to boost the prestige of their language and culture.

David Crystal suggests here that:

prestige comes when people start to notice you. An endangered community therefore needs to make its presence felt within the wider community. It needs to raise its visibility, or profile. (p. 130)

Crystal goes on to suggest several strategies that language communities can employ to realise this goal including, amongst others, the use of the media. The radio is a useful medium for communication in Botswana. The government regulates both the radio and television in Botswana. Although there are presently two private stations, they both broadcast in Setswana and English. As Nyati-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2001: 5) point out, 'private stations are not permitted to operate for as long as they indicate the use of so-called minority languages.' The present situation, therefore, means that the use of radio as a medium for the promotion of these other languages is still a closed avenue for them. With respect to the print media, little has been made of them in relation to the promotion of the marginalised languages. Newspapers in Botswana are still principally publishing in English. Only one paper, *Mokgosi*, is published solely in the vernacular, Setswana. *Ikalanga* often appears in one of the papers in the form of a half a page article presented once a week. The predominance of English is not surprising, as it is an official language in the country and also the language of commerce.

Solway (2002: 720) has this to say about the status of the marginalised languages in Botswana:

Minorities are not prohibited from speaking their own languages or in engaging in their own cultural practises but the public sphere, while portrayed as neutral, clearly reflects the language, interests, everyday practices and dispositions of the majority. Minority languages and practices are thus relegated to the private sphere while the public is the preserve of Tswana.

Solway's analysis is an apt description of the disadvantaged position that marginalised languages in Botswana operate under. In response to this situation, several efforts have been undertaken by the speakers of the

marginalised languages which have made them more visible. One such effort has been the formation of associations geared towards the promotion and preservation of these languages. Such associations include the Society for the Promotion of Ikalanga Language (S.P.I.L.) and the Kamanakao Association. These associations have embarked upon diverse activities in their endeavours to promote and develop their languages. These activities include, amongst others, the hosting of annual cultural activities as well as the promotion of literacy in these languages. Some of the notable achievements of S.P.I.L. in this respect have been the publication of an Ikalanga orthography ('Ngatikwaleni Ikalanga – Manual for writing Kalanga,' published by The Botswana Society, Gaborone), and the translation of the New Testament of the Bible into Ikalanga. The Kamanakao Association has also made strides in the development of literacy materials for both adults and young learners. It has also published several materials written on Shiyeyi, some of which are available in local bookshops. A grammar book for Shiyeyi has been published, while an orthography has been accepted for publication by the Botswana Society. Portions of the Bible, a hymnbook and a transitional primer are in use for literacy. It is worth noting here that some of the key players in these activities are intellectuals from these communities who have teamed up with other members of their communities to promote their language and culture.

The need to raise the prestige of such language groups was made necessary because the process of marginalising these languages meant that inferiority complexes developed amongst some of the speakers of these neglected languages. This collective inferiority complex promoted a tendency amongst some of the younger generation to identify with the Setswana speakers, thereby shunning one's own language and culture in the process. This is an indicator of the imminent threat of language death. The activities of S.P.I.L. and the Kamanakao Association are thus geared towards uplifting the status of these languages as well as that of its speakers.

Strategy 2: An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase in their wealth relative to the dominant community (p. 132)

Crystal proposes that there is a link between the economic status of the speakers and the degree to which they can effectively preserve and promote their language. Botswana offers an interesting contrast in this respect. Whereas other groups like the Kalanga and Wayeyi are certainly making strides in this respect, the Khoesan groups, which are for the most part economically disadvantaged, continue to experience the disappearance of their languages. Whereas other groups have attained some economic and political power, this is not the case with them. The only time when Khoesan languages are publicly used is in official functions where Khoesan songs and dance are performed. Over the years, these songs have become popular to the extent that even school dance groups perform them. But the truth is that the dominant groups only see the Khoesan as a source of entertainment.

Despite having to learn in an alien language, some members of the Kalanga and Wayeyi groups have been able to make significant gains educationally and economically. Van Binsbergen (1994: 157) notes that:

... the Kalanga's relative educational and entrepreneurial success had led to a situation where a disproportionately large percentage of BDP politicians at all levels (including Cabinet Ministers and MPs) happened to be Kalanga, who as a condition of political eligibility and respectability played down their Kalanga identity and allowed Tswana ethnic and linguistic hegemony in the country to go unchallenged.

Werbner (2004) also notes the economic power of some of the Kalanga elites, some of whom own very successful national enterprises. Some are amongst the few millionaires who have emerged in Botswana. The Kalanga have also emerged as one of the most educated groups in the country, and they occupy most of the senior positions in government, and the private and parastatal sectors, as well as being the most dominant academics at the University of Botswana. Despite all these gains, affiliation to the ruling class has apparently blinded such educated and well-off Kalanga from realising the need to protect their own language and culture. Such attitudes put Setswana at an advantage. Fortunately, a new generation of well educated Kalanga emerged in the 1980s and it was this group of people that facilitated the formation of the S.P.I.L. Van Binsbergen (1994: 159) says about S.P.I.L.:

My reading of SPIL is that it primarily reflects a struggle, within the Kalanga middle-class community, between those whose acceptance of Tswana hegemony has paid off in terms of political and economic power – in other words has made them share in state power –, and those (typically younger, perhaps slightly better educated and perhaps with slightly stronger roots in their rural home communities and the latter's traditional leadership) whose access to political and economic power so far has been frustrated and who through insistence on a Kalanga ethnic idiom seek to either capture their own share of state power, or at least to discredit the state, proving it to be less universalist, and more ethnically particularistic, than its constitutional pronouncements would suggest.

Van Binsbergen's analysis suggests that the emergence of S.P.I.L. was symptomatic of an internal struggle within the Kalanga elite. In relation to David Crystal's (2000: 132) proposition that 'an endangered language will progress if its speakers increase in their wealth relative to the dominant community', we can note here that this may not always be true. The case just presented suggests that other agendas may creep in, so much that the language agenda becomes irrelevant for the economically and politically empowered elite. In certain respects, some of the elites seem to have adopted new identities that obviated the need to advance their cultural identity. Their identities may now be more biased towards their political and economic interests. David Crystal's proposition is nevertheless fully endorsed by the

concerted efforts of the younger elite of Ikalanga speakers who emerged in the 1980s.

Strategy 3: An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community (p. 133)

One of the contentious issues that have emerged in Botswana has been the existence of a constitutional clause that has marginalised some groups in Botswana. When Botswana gained independence in 1966, it adopted a multiparty democracy model in which elections are held every five years. The constitution also promotes equal rights and freedom of speech. Unfortunately, some sections of the constitution were not in tune with this outlook, particularly sections 77, 78 and 79 (Botswana Government, 1996). These sections only recognise representation in the House of Chiefs of eight ethnic groups: the Bakgatla, Bakwena, Bamalete, Bamangwato, Bangwaketse, Barolong, Batswana and the Batlokwa tribes. Other ethnic groups are subsumed under these eight ethnic groups. Following the Balopi Commission, which was set up to review these sections, the government has now committed itself to amending them in order to ensure that all the different groups in Botswana are recognised. It is hoped that once the intended amendments have been effected, the multicultural nature of Botswana will be fully reflected in the constitution.

Baker (1993: 251) suggests that 'language rights are often expressed at the grass roots level by protest and pressure groups, by local action and argument.' This is an apt description of what some of the language communities have done in Botswana. The pressure on the government to institute constitutional changes partly came from some of the marginalised language groups. It still remains to be seen, however, how these constitutional changes will benefit those language groups that have been marginalised before and after independence.

Strategy 4: An endangered language will progress if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system (p. 136)

Crystal highlights the important role played by both the home and the school in language promotion. Whilst acknowledging that the home cannot transfer full responsibility for language promotion to the school, he also notes further that: 'But if there is no presence in the school system at all, at primary and secondary levels, the future is likewise bleak' (Crystal, 2000: 136). Ignace (1998) notes that a shortcoming of some of the past language revitalisation programmes had to do with the fact that they tended to emphasise having the language taught in school instead of putting more premium on reviving the use of the language within the community. This underscores the point that whilst schools are instrumental in language revitalisation, the basic unit that can guarantee success in this process is the community.

Within the Botswana context, only one indigenous language, Setswana, is accepted in the education system. This is an official policy that has been in place since independence. Setswana is used as a medium of instruction during the first two years of learning at primary school level. In the subsequent years,

it serves as a school subject as English takes over as the medium of instruction. Other indigenous languages are not accommodated in the education system. This policy disregards the benefits of learning in a mother tongue. Unfortunately, there is little that the speakers of these languages can do unless the policy makers start to acknowledge and appreciate the value of incorporating other indigenous languages in the education system.

It is amazing, and in fact contradictory, that some of the speakers of the languages are highly recognised and accomplished authorities in linguistics as well as language teaching, but for the most, their expertise is tied to and recognised only as far as it deals with the two dominant languages, English and Setswana. In this respect, their conspicuous presence in the education system has not helped much in uplifting their own languages. This is primarily because of the current policy, which advocates for the use of English and Setswana in the education system. Expertise in the other languages is still not valued, except perhaps within the academic setting where these experts have been able to write about their languages. This academic discourse is of course aimed at the academic community and does not help in changing the patterns of language use of the communities.

The challenge that language activists in Botswana face is to encourage the communities to continue to value and use their languages even though they are not included in the school system. The strategy of holding cultural festivals seems to be geared towards this. The other valuable approach is certainly the fact that these intellectuals continue to speak their languages. This practice alone should help instil a sense of pride amongst the other speakers when they realise that these educated individuals do not shun their language, but freely identify with it.

Strategy 5: An endangered language will progress if its speakers can write their language down (p. 138)

Anonby (1999) posits that it has been established that most of the language revitalisation processes that succeeded are those that placed premium on literacy. Literacy projects are considered as one of the means of ensuring language permanence. Crystal (2000: 138) points out that the fact that a language is written down does not necessarily guarantee that it will survive, but '...once it passes the stage where it can be transmitted between generations as the first language of the home, its future is vastly more assured if it can be written down'.

The need to write down languages is more pronounced amongst the minority language groups, especially given the fact that the dominant groups might dismiss any suggestions of using such languages in official spheres as being unworkable, on the basis that they have no orthography. Consequently, the notion of integrating them in the education system, for example, is seen as impracticable. Rendering languages in a written form is also critical, particularly as communication in most of these languages is still confined to the spoken form.

Europeans, especially missionaries, played a critical role in introducing literacy in Southern Africa. Their efforts were affected by the power relations

that existed amongst the different ethnic groups, especially in the case of Botswana. Chebanne (2002: 50) states that:

The colonial imperialist powers preferred to deal with the most powerful indigenous ethnic communities, and the independent Botswana Government opted to deal with the powerful chiefs in order to anchor their political and constitutional power. The consequence of this situation was that the minority language speakers, their culture, and the communal organisations were annihilated through denial and neglect.

One of the consequences of the situation presented here is that it was the more dominant and powerful groups which benefited most in terms of having their languages written down, and the other groups were thus compelled by policy directions to adopt these languages. Whereas literacy in Setswana received attention during the colonial era, this was not the case with the other languages. Efforts to promote literacy in other languages did not receive the support of and was not promoted by the colonial government.

During the colonial period, only two local languages, Setswana and Ikalanga, featured in the school curriculum. Whereas Setswana enjoyed wider use in the schools, Ikalanga was confined to the then privately owned Tati Training Institute, which was located in the Ikalanga-speaking region in the North-eastern side of Botswana. The curriculum of the Tati Training Institute, which operated between 1932 and 1941, was delivered through two languages, English and Ikalanga. The distribution of teaching hours per week was nonetheless in favour of English, which had six hours, whilst Ikalanga only had half of that, three hours per week. Setswana was noticeably absent from the school curriculum. Using Ikalanga in the curriculum was justified by the fact that the institute was located in a predominantly Ikalanga-speaking area. The collapse of the Tati Training Institute from 1939 marked the gradual disappearance of the use of Ikalanga in the educational sphere (Mooko, 1987). Although Ikalanga continued to feature in schools located in Ikalanga-speaking areas, it was gradually phased out from such schools just before independence. This situation was facilitated by deliberate policy decisions which entrenched Setswana as the only local language accommodated in the school curriculum.

Meanwhile, an attempt to develop Shiyeyi language was quashed by the local authorities when a certain Moyeyi by the name of Seidisa was arrested and imprisoned for his attempts to undertake a project geared towards the development of Shiyeyi orthography (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999). Consequently, the development of the written form of Shiyeyi was abandoned until the Kamanakao Association came onto the scene.

More efforts are being undertaken to develop the orthographies of the different marginalised groups. One of the recent developments has been the establishment of RETENG, a multicultural association that brings together different ethnic groups in Botswana. One of its primary functions is the promotion and preservation of cultural diversity in Botswana. Through this body, several workshops have been organised aimed at the development of writing systems of some local languages such as Sebirwa, Sesubiya,

Setsiretsire, Setswapong and Shekgalagarhi. The activities of RETENG reflect a coordinated effort geared towards preserving the languages and cultures of the different marginalised groups. It also offers opportunities for the sharing of ideas and experiences amongst those who are interested in the preservation of the threatened languages. Reyhner (1999) bemoans the lack of sharing of information by the different communities with respect to which language revitalisation strategies and activities have worked for them. The establishment of RETENG can be seen as a positive step in Botswana towards addressing this weakness.

As already mentioned, the different language associations have embarked upon the process of developing orthographies for their languages as well as producing written materials in these languages. There still exists a major hurdle though, and this is that these languages have still to be accommodated into the school curriculum. Literacy is defined within the Botswana context as the ability to read and write in either Setswana or English or both (Botswana Government, 1993). This restricted understanding of literacy precludes literacy in other languages that are spoken in Botswana. Worthwhile literacy is, therefore, confined to English and Setswana. The prevailing practice, therefore, emasculates the value of developing literacy in the other languages, as their instrumental value has been seriously undermined.

In view of the prevailing circumstances, the acquisition of literacy in the different languages does not seem to be enough to promote their use. There is still a need for these languages to be accorded a wider platform in the education system as well as in the wider community. At the present moment language use in the different domains, especially education, commerce as well as in government documents, is predominantly restricted to English and Setswana. English, however, has gained more prominence, as it is the official language of the country. Consequently, the attainment of literacy in the different indigenous languages does not seem to be an effective vehicle for promoting the use of these languages, as they still do not feature in most of the domains. The functions of these languages are still very much limited to oral communication.

Any progress made in the areas of developing orthographies in the marginalised languages can be attributed to the expertise available amongst the marginalised groups and the input of some nongovernmental organisations. This trend is in full agreement with Ignace's (1998) suggestion that in order to effectively document and reconstruct threatened languages, there is a need to have individuals who are trained in linguistics. The major strides made by the S.P.I.L. and Kamanakao Association have been made possible by the active involvement of trained linguists who are indigenous speakers of Ikalanga and Shiyeyi. The experience of these groups thus suggests that, whilst Crystal's proposition seems tenable, the availability of expertise within the threatened language community is a particularly crucial factor in advancing the development of the written form of such languages. The availability of such expertise also needs to be accompanied by the desire and interest on the part of such individuals to devote their efforts towards the

development of their languages. This has certainly been the case in Botswana.

Strategy 6: An endangered language will progress if its speakers can make use of electronic technology (p. 141)

David Crystal (2000: 143) acknowledges that:

To some extent, this is a hypothetical postulate, as many parts of the world where languages are most seriously endangered have not yet come to benefit from electronic technology – or for that matter electricity. But in principle, information technology (IT) – and the Internet in particular – offers endangered languages which have been written down a fresh set of opportunities whose potential has hardly begun to be explored.

Warschauer (in press) states that sociolinguists have already pointed out that survival of languages depends very much on both transmission and will. In this regard, he says that the Internet is not being geared for transmission, as such a process is essentially undertaken through oral interaction. However, the use of the Internet is perceived to be a vehicle for the expression of the will of the speakers to promote their language and also an articulation of their identity. The use of this medium is, of course, limited in the sense that it will only be accessible to those who are literate and own personal computers or have access to them where they work. The potential of the Internet to effectively facilitate the promotion of endangered languages is still questionable. One of the crucial factors here could be the size of the population that speaks that language and their access to computer technology as well as computer literacy. Within the African context, access to such technology is still very much limited. Such technology is also most accessible to the affluent and educated members of the society, and not necessarily to the majority of the ordinary people who speak the endangered languages. The Internet is also still dominated by one language, English, and this is a crucial factor that can limit the extent to which endangered languages can be effectively promoted through this medium.

In Botswana, the use of the Internet is still not within reach, basically because of the prevailing conditions relating to information technology. Firstly, most people do not have access to such technology. Secondly, some of the language groups are still grappling with the basic task of first developing orthography in their language. At the present moment, both the Kamanakao Association and S.P.I.L. have websites, which they are currently using as instruments for advocacy, sensitising people about their activities and the plight of their languages and cultures. The challenge for these language groups is to extend the use of these websites to incorporate items such as their orthography and the description of their languages. Perhaps in the future they may also explore the prospect of using these websites to set up discussion groups in these languages. Such discussion forums would not only enable the speakers of the languages to interact, but would also promote the target language throughout the world. The

result could be to further collaborative research work by different individuals interested in language matters and issues.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has applied the six approaches proposed by Crystal as some of the probable measures for dealing with language death. The presentation, drawing from the situation in Botswana, has revealed that some of his proposals are relevant. The discussion, however, revealed some of the limitations of the strategies in the Botswana context and, perhaps, for other similar contexts in Africa. What is important is to note that the preservation of languages requires a multipronged approach, and Crystal's proposals do cater for this. The conditions that prevail in the different communities will continue to vary, but what matters most is to develop strategies that will take into account the prevailing conditions.

What is urgently needed in Botswana is the emergence of a political will that will foster the appreciation of the value of cultural diversity. Such a development would lead to the promulgation of appropriate language policies that will accommodate the different languages spoken in the country. If this does not happen, the efforts undertaken by members of the marginalised groups are unlikely to bear much fruit. Another possibility could be a change in political leadership. During election campaigns, opposition parties often project themselves as people who are concerned with the preservation of the different languages spoken in Botswana. Whether they have the capacity to translate this into reality is subject to debate.

When one looks at the situation in Botswana, it becomes apparent that there is a need to acknowledge the fact that guarantees of freedom of expression and association that are enshrined in the Botswana constitution can be seen to have provided the right environment for the revitalisation initiatives undertaken by the different language groups in Botswana. Different cultural groups are able to operate freely within the country without the interference of the government. This is perhaps another dimension that can be added to the proposals presented by Crystal. This is a crucial contributing factor, especially in the case of Botswana, where the government has still not made any efforts to promote and revitalise the marginalised languages.

Some writers who have addressed the issue of language revitalisation have emphasised the critical role played by the speakers of a language when it comes to its revitalisation (Hornberger, 2004; Ignace, 1998). The underlying point is that the role of revitalising the language cannot be delegated to the central government, but that the speakers need to be actively involved. This is what we see happening in Botswana with respect to the efforts of the cultural groups whose activities have been explored in this paper. The greatest challenge for these groups is to ensure that the communities see the need for these languages. For as much as intervention on the part of the government is highly desirable, the communities need to actively participate in the process of reviving and preserving their languages.

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