

## CAN FORMAL LANGUAGE PLANNING LINK TO GRASSROOTS CULTURAL INITIATIVES?: AN INFORMAL INVESTIGATION

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*Formal language planning is inevitably a top-down, highly technical process. Success for such planning would seem to depend on engaging productively with existing or readily developed social motivation within the society. This article reports on an informal investigation into how ordinary language practitioners and cultural workers in South Africa view the possibilities of contributing to the country's emerging language dispensation, what they regard as their most useful possible contributions, and what they expect from the language planners and 'government' in support of South Africa's Language Policy and Plan.*

*'n Formele taalbeplanningproses is noodwendig hoogs tegnies met 'n bo-na-onderstruktuur. Dit lyk asof die sukses van hierdie soort beplanning afhanklik is van produktiewe deelnemende betrokkenheid by bestaande of nuutgevormde sosiale motivering binne die gemeenskap. Hierdie artikel doen verslag oor 'n informele ondersoek oor hoe gewone taalpraktisyns en kulturele werkers in Suid-Afrika hulle moontlike deelname aan Suid-Afrika se ontluikende taaldispensasie sien. Daar word ook berig oor wat hierdie groep mense as hulle nuttigste moontlike bydraes beskou en wat hulle van die taalbeplanners en die regering verwag ter ondersteuning van Suid-Afrika se Taalbeleid en -plan.*

Social leadership in matters of language development is of critical importance to the success of language planning initiatives. Such leadership may be placed in four categories, according to the primary area of intended social impact:

- 1) Policy development and legislative lobbying
- 2) Institutionalisation of technical support
- 3) Social institutionalisation
- 4) Grassroots social response.

Categories 1) and 2) are in effect (though possibly not in intention) minority undertakings. Leadership in these categories is the province, in practice, of professionals: political professionals and language professionals. Categories 3) and 4) should ideally be characterized by powerful social leadership and broad community response. Category 3) involves the struggle for dynamic uptake within institutions and the general public in order to implement the envisaged language dispensation. Category 4), the category central to the present investigation, involves efforts on the ground to link social aspirations among ordinary people to the thrust of the new language dispensation.

Needless to say, while 1) and 2) pose technical difficulties and profound issues of social and political judgment, policy and legislation can at best provide necessary but not sufficient

conditions for successful implementation. They are expensive but otherwise relatively simple to attempt, given a modicum of appropriately trained intellectual capital.

Categories 3) and 4) constitute the arena for judging the potential and the eventual success of 1) and 2). Success here depends on the scale and rigour of uptake, on highly motivated and widely dispersed leadership undertaking complex tasks with little direct support from policy makers and professionals. Broad-based response, however gradual or even faltering, constitutes success: apathy, desuetude or plain ignorance mean failure. Needless to say, failure in categories 3) and 4) entail failure in 1) and 2).

## **RATIONALE**

This exploratory project has grown from concern over the prospects for South Africa's Language Policy and Plan, and beyond that, for the long-term future of our indigenous languages, including Afrikaans. The whole emphasis of the country's new language dispensation is on nurturing and developing linguistic diversity, yet the trend in practice seems to be strongly in the opposite direction: towards increasing use of English.

Reasons for the dominance of English are too well known to need detailed elaboration here. Its status as a world language; its role as an alternative to Afrikaans during the apartheid struggles; the unrivalled knowledge resources it carries, both in depth and scope; its function as the international language of science; its interlocking range of specialist uses, for example, on the Internet, in international air-traffic control and in diplomacy; and its relative neutrality vis-a-vis ethnic tensions in the South African community, and so on, are among factors which influence the growing reliance on English.

Set against this powerful pull from English, we have in place (or soon will have in place) an ambitious Language Policy and Plan; a specialist body, the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), charged with implementing the policy; a technical support agency in the form of the National Language Service (of which PanSALB forms a part); and comprehensive national and provincial language bodies, duly appointed to facilitate the process of implementation. Whatever faults such institutions may evidence, we may say with some certainty that South Africa has recognized and responded to the need for leadership in categories 1) and 2).

Given this thoughtful provision for maintaining and developing the PMLs (Previously Marginalised Languages) surely the prospects for sustaining a transforming South African linguistic ecology for the long term should be encouraging? Regrettably, such a conclusion would be premature. We have to look more closely at categories 3) and 4).

## **CHALLENGES FACING SOUTH AFRICA'S LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLAN**

English has been described in hyperbolic terms as a 'killer language' (cf. Pakir 1991). The rhetoric is misleading if it insinuates the sense of English as a kind of autonomous, quasi-natural force wreaking havoc on vulnerable linguistic ecologies, analogous to a dangerous virus or some threatening climatic change. Language shift is always the result of human choice, however socially constrained or culturally ill-advised that choice may be. A tough choice is not 'no choice'. The ultimate point of influence on a language dispensation remains

the human agent. English is powerful because people, for whatever reasons – generally their subjective assessment, rightly or wrongly, of their own best interests – have made it so. The cumulative weight of these subjective assessments constitutes the social power of English.

Policy debate has generated provisions to protect language rights and encourage development of the PMLs. These are gradually being passed into legislation, but the mere existence of legislation is no guarantee of widespread social uptake, forced or unforced. The provisions conceptualist thinkers have fought for and established in South Africa to counter the power of English need to be weighed against their possible scope and impact on the ground.

The critical issue here is that these two 'forces' – the pull towards English and the probable impact of South African institutionalised language planning – are not of comparable weight and influence. Indeed, they are not of the same order. Joshua Fishman (1997: 67) puts the matter succinctly in regard to the problem of reversing language shift (RLS):

[W]hy is it, one may ask, that language shift often comes about without sustained planning, whereas RLS requires so much thought, effort and conviction? Perhaps it is because the very heart of mother tongue transmission (the usual but not the inescapable goal of RLS) involves precisely those natural collective processes (home, family, neighborhood) which are not easily accessible to or influenced by social planning. (1997: 67)

The power of English is not the result of language planning. No one has to worry about 'developing' English, because a critical mass of thinkers, writers and doers is already operating in the language for most ranges of human concern. When new expressions, terms, syntactic bridges or idiomatic turns of phrase are required, that very need itself calls them into being. Technical provision for English in South Africa (dictionaries, teaching methodologies for English as an Additional Language, translation facilities, and so forth) is buoyed up by a social dynamic that supplies the economic demand. The indigenisation of the language proceeds according to fairly usual socio-linguistic processes, largely untouched by academic debate or policy interventions.

In contrast, the thinking behind South Africa's Language Policy and Plan, and the institutions established to implement it, reflect issues of linguistic justice, a concern for language ecology, crucial matters of identity and social reconstruction, and a yearning for greater social equity. These are fundamental concerns with huge social implications, but they are not easily canvassed other than through highly intellectual means. They depend upon developing *in large numbers of people* a conceptual grasp of the movement of society and its impact on linguistic and cultural ecology, followed by a deep desire on their part to intervene appropriately and effectively on behalf of their own languages.

The kudos attached to English in South Africa today is seldom identified with or claimed by any particular South African grouping (South African first-language English speakers are not, on the whole, noted for much practical concern for the fate of their language – witness, for example, the small membership of an organisation such as the English Academy). Neither is it the result of legislative provision. Such intellectual support as English generates is largely non-linguistic and rooted in the pragmatic concerns of commercial competition and social aspiration. This is a global phenomenon which has taken off particularly strongly in South Africa first, because of the country's colonial history and educational legacy; second, because the industrial revolution itself had deep roots in the former colonial powers, and thirdly --

with rather less emphasis – because the South African leadership in exile, and even before exile, became strongly entrenched in its use of English for organisational and intellectual purposes.

In other words, the power of widespread uncalculated social motivation strongly favours English, whereas the drive towards linguistic equity that pervades South Africa's Language Policy and Plan, relies on informed, deliberate intervention to date hardly supported by spontaneous social pressure.

There is a second very specific sense in which English and the forces of linguistic reconstruction are unevenly matched, namely, in terms of economic resources available to implement important aspects of the Language Policy and Plan. I have argued, elsewhere, that the increasing dominance of English in South Africa's central economy has a definable, if not quantifiable, economic basis (cf. Wright 2002b). This dominance in the central economy has a powerful impact throughout the nation on linguistic choices and on the prospects for linguistic reconstruction. When those wielding political and social power – the elite – find themselves impelled to operate in English, because of prevailing practice and the evident cumbersomeness and inappropriateness of multilingualism given the linguistic diversity of those in power, they become cautious in their advocacy of multilingualism elsewhere. The result is lukewarm support among politicians and business people for South Africa's Language Policy and Plan (see Wright 2002b).

Evidence for this state of affairs can be deduced from the budgets proposed in the Strategic Plan put forward by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (2002). Out of a total budget for 2002/3 of R1 211 273 million, the National Language Service will receive R20 526 million. Of this R18 451 goes to PanSALB (the remainder being used for terminology and translation projects within the National Language Service). Responsibility for funding the National Dictionary Units has been transferred to PanSALB. At roughly R700 000 each per annum (assuming that the spending is spread evenly between 11 Dictionary Units) the dictionary exercise will cost the better part of R8 million. Add the running costs of the 11 National Language Bodies and the operating expenses of PanSALB and it seems doubtful whether there will be as much as R4000 000 available in 2002/3 for PanSALB to spend directly on the development of the *nine* PMLs. (This is a personal estimate, but I would be surprised to find that the unencumbered funding available to PanSALB for this purpose amounts to very much more.)

Set this paltry sum against the entrenched and growing globalised power of English and one can see that from an interventionist perspective the prospects for achieving top-down transformation of South Africa's linguistic ecology are slight. One might even be justified in concluding that South Africa's power elite remains unconvinced of the cogency and relevance of immediate support for practical language intervention.

Viewed in these terms, the implication must be that South Africa's Language Policy and Plan is in trouble. How important, then, to look more closely at the other end of the equation, at the prospects for 'bottom-up' intervention drawing on social motivation rooted in the facts of South African multilingualism.

## AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

In order to assess informally the extent to which some ordinary South Africans, interested in language issues, were thinking about practical issues of language development, it was decided to hold discussion forums in which people would be encouraged to air their views and experiences.

The aim was to record some practical possibilities for grass-roots revitalisation and development of South Africa's PMLs, *as these were identified and motivated by the participants*. In particular, it was hoped that the issue of the kind of institutional base or arrangement that might be appropriate to link grass-roots activity to the parameters informing the National Language Policy and Plan could be explored in a preliminary way. It was recognised that some intermediary organisational structure might be necessary, but that the creation of such a structure *de novo* would in all probability prove both unsustainable and inappropriate. It would be inappropriate because the aim would be to attempt to link grass-roots concerns to national policy, and this could hardly be achieved by usurping genuine grass-roots organisation by artificial institutional constructs. Secondly, there is very little national funding available for such activity, and to absorb it in creating new organisations would be wasteful.

Instead, the project sought to explore possible linkages between existing grass-roots activity and *suitable intermediary organisations*. In this way it was hoped that national language resources and enterprises, for example, PanSALB projects or initiatives emanating from the National Language Service, might find an avenue that could be developed to secure routine access to grass-roots opinion and activity.

From earlier research experience it was determined that such intermediary organizations should have the following characteristics:

- They should have good contacts and relations with on-going community language activity
- They should have access to university expertise without being dominated by it
- Where possible they should have access to an appropriate National Dictionary Unit as well as national and provincial language bodies.

A major concern was to ensure that community initiative would not be swamped by top-down intellectual energies emanating from the academy.

As well as exploring possible institutional linkages, the investigation was geared towards assessing the strengths and weaknesses of focus groups as possible *ad hoc* incarnations of grass-roots language opinion and activity. The hope was that cooperation between grass-roots organisations and the intermediaries might eventually develop into an alternative version of what Fasold, following Haugen (1966) and Ray (1963), terms the 'linguistic lead', defined as that segment of the community which is 'considered worth imitating and whose usage is most likely to spread' (1984: 256). At the very least, such an association or structure could act as a South African version of what David Crystal calls a 'linguistic revitalization team' (2000: 154), devoted to realising a practical agenda appropriate to the skills and interests of the participants. (At present, the most influential 'linguistic lead' in South Africa is constituted by the elite preference for English in formal political and business domains.) Another question, therefore, underlying this probe into less formal language activity is whether such participants might be ready, in some measure, to supply an alternative linguistic lead, one

aimed at generating increasing communal pride in, and deliberate and concerted action in favour of, the PMLs.

## **PRIOR CONSULTATION**

The key concern was to discover what people on the ground felt they could contribute to language development, either individually or as members of civil society organisations. A secondary concern was to ascertain how they saw the relation between their own efforts and government-sponsored initiatives as articulated in the National Language Policy and Plan and set in motion by PanSALB and the National Language Service.

I have undertaken informal consultation with a wide range of people working in the field for the past three years or more. Insights have been gleaned through interaction with participants in the Secondary Schools' Language Project of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA) at Rhodes University. The province-wide activity of this project has brought the investigator into contact with a spectrum of people in the Eastern Cape who are either professionally involved or personally concerned with issues of language and culture. These include educators, community writers, Education Development Officers (EDOs), and regional officials of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture of the Eastern Province. Other standpoints have been articulated by word-artists and members of the public during *Wordfest*, the developmental festival of South African languages and literatures initiated by ISEA at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown over the past four years (1999-2002). Some useful discussion was also garnered following a paper given by the researcher on this topic at the 2001 SAALA conference (see Wright 2002a).

## **BACKGROUND PRESUPPOSITIONS**

The background to the investigation was informed by the researcher's knowledge of procedures adopted for the preservation and revitalisation of endangered languages elsewhere in the world (see, for example, Crystal 2000, Fishman 1997, Grinevald 1998, Haugen 1966, Kaplan 1997, Mühlhäusler 1996).

Strictly speaking, of course, none of South Africa's official languages could be described as officially endangered, in the sense of becoming moribund or extinct. More correctly, the previously marginalized languages (PMLs) are threatened in another sense, namely, with the possibility that they may fail to develop into viable media of communication for modern educational and professional needs. This is what the new Language Policy and Plan demands, or at least encourages. And forces promoting language shift, principally in directions favouring English, are at work in this society just as they are in many others.

The investigator needed to know something about the possible strategies employed elsewhere in the world to address comparable situations in order to estimate the level of information current in the focus groups (as it was decided the discussion forums should be named). However, it was not the intention in these meetings to put forward new approaches for consideration by the groups. This might come later once the assumptions current in such groups had been illuminated and described as a possible basis for future intervention.

## PROCEDURES

The present project was designed as an informed probe into local perceptions concerning the possibilities of grass-roots development activity in support of South Africa's Language Policy and Plan. The object of the project was to canvass insights emerging from people who work every day with language issues at a local level, and measure these against the views accumulated during the prior consultation process. In this way, it was hoped to contribute to a partial picture of the expectations and possibilities upheld by grass-roots language activists and language practitioners in relation to South Africa's emerging language policy. Obviously, any conclusions drawn from the process would be subject to its limitations, and certainly would not be generaliseable without further evidence.

It was recognised, from the prior consultation process, that there seemed to be a marked divergence in the sense of practical possibilities entertained by rural and urban South Africans. The decision was therefore taken to consult two sample focus groups, one from a predominantly urban environment, and the other predominantly rural. To enable round-table discussions to take place comfortably, it was decided to limit the numbers to between twenty and twenty-five persons.

Cape Town was selected as the urban locale, where the meeting was organised by the Centre for the Book. Alice was chosen as the rural venue, and the meeting there was organised by the Lovedale Press. The choice of these two sites was influenced by a desire to capture views regarding a continuity of languages. With differing emphases, Xhosa, Afrikaans and English are the most important languages for the areas chosen.

The facilitating agencies were selected because of their wide involvement in issues of language and culture within the relevant sectors of the communities concerned. In both cases, the organizations are well-connected academically without being overwhelmed by academic modes of intervention. In addition, the Lovedale Press is close-by the National Dictionary Unit for Xhosa at Fort Hare University. Alice itself, although best described as a rural centre, rather than a deep-rural one, is an important nexus for rural and modern influences in the region.

In arranging the meetings, emphasis was placed on attracting people actively working in the community and known to have a strong interest in matters of language and culture. The two focus groups were invited and assembled by third parties in the intermediary organisations, following guidelines supplied by the investigator. These were:

- a) That a wide range of participants should be invited
- b) That the group should be between twenty and twenty-five (to facilitate productive discussion)
- c) That participants should be actively engaged in some form of community language development or cultural work
- d) That the proportion of professional academics should be kept low.

The latter provision was insisted upon from past experience where the more educated participants tend to dominate discussion and intimidate more humble participants.<sup>1</sup>

In each case the focus groups, as it turned out, included representatives from organisations of civil society devoted to issues of language and culture. In the Eastern Cape, members of

*Sinebhongo ngesiXhosa* and *Sosizwe Bhala* (my organization) were present. In the Western Cape *Isiqhamo sikaPhalo* was represented. There was no representation from Afrikaans grassroots organizations (nor English organizations such as SACEE or the English Academy), though Afrikaans L1 speakers were present at both meetings. This was perhaps appropriate, though not designedly so, because the focus was on the future of the PMLs, in this case Xhosa, in contexts dominated by the formerly privileged languages, English and Afrikaans.

In order to encourage frank discussion, it was agreed in advance that the names of the participants would be kept anonymous for reporting purposes, so that participants would not feel constrained in any way. Discussion was predominantly in English, but where people felt the need to express themselves in Xhosa, translation ensured that non-Xhosa speakers caught the gist of the points being made. Afrikaans speakers used English to participate, though it was made clear at the outset of the meetings that people should feel at liberty to use the language of their choice for this context.

Care was taken not to infiltrate ready-made presuppositions or strategies into the investigative discussion from the researcher. This would have defeated the purpose of the investigation which was to discover what participants themselves had arrived at, given their present level of understanding of language development issues, as to the way forward for the languages with which they were most concerned.

## **CONDUCT OF THE MEETINGS**

The two meetings were introduced by a representative of the intermediary agencies, and chaired by me. Each commenced with a neutral statement from me regarding the stated aims of national language policy. From there guided discussion followed, typically covering what participants felt about the policy, its current feasibility, what needed to be done to make its implementation more effective, who was responsible for implementing the policy, how the policy impacted on the individual and the community of which participants were a part, and what they felt they could do to further the aims of national policy. An effort was made to include everyone in the discussion. There were several people at the Alice meeting who either did not want to join in discussion or did not feel sufficiently at ease to participate. (A discussion pursued wholly in Xhosa might have proved more telling for some of those present.) However, it was clear (from nods of assent and a generally supportive demeanor) that widely-held views were being articulated, in both Xhosa and English, on their behalf by others present.

Every effort was made to discover and record, not what I felt should be done to enhance the status and development of the PMLs, but what the people present in the focus groups saw as the way forward. Only through this emphasis could some sense be gained of the current level of understanding of language development, and some description of practical initiatives that might attract community support be recorded.

The aim of the meetings was to arrive at some understanding of how people interested in the future of the PMLs from a practical point of view see the way forward for their languages. In particular, the investigator was interested in:

1. What people understand by the notion of 'language development'



2. What steps they expect to see taken to further the cause of the PMLs
3. Whom they see as taking the steps they deem desirable
4. What specific strategies they believe could be adopted by people working at grassroots level to further the development of African languages.

## FINDINGS

No claim is made for the generalisability of the observations that follow. All that can be asserted is that they fairly reflect the tenor and the concrete points put forward in these meetings by the participants.

The findings were as follows:

1. Language Development:
  - a) Very little real understanding of what might be involved in the process of language development was present in the focus groups, even among some of those who were professionally occupied as language practitioners. The creation of terminology tended to be seen as the only important technical prerequisite for language development. Even here, the difficulty of ensuring currency and uptake for terminological constructs was not recognised as a problem, or at least did not emerge naturally in discussion.
  - b) There was considerable emotional and ideological support for the development of the PMLs.
  - c) The responsibility for initiating this development was placed largely at the door of 'government' and/or PanSALB. The sense of language development as something that might be fostered by a 'linguistic lead' within a speech community, though present, was not particularly strong.
2. Steps the Groups expected to see being taken:

The following seemed to be regarded as symptomatic of successful development of the PMLs:

- a) More use of the PMLs in public by senior politicians and civil servants.
- b) Greater prominence of the PMLs in formal schooling and tertiary education.
- c) Greater prominence of the PMLs in print and broadcast media.
- d) More publishing in the PMLs.

### *Investigator's comment*

There was little sense of a distinction between the *process* of language development, and the *results* of language development. This probably means that, for both groups, little practical thought had been given to just how language development was to take place. There was a pervasive feeling that in general language development was something that should be done

by others, preferably 'government', and that only when this 'something' was done, could South African language policy take off.

This was particularly the case in the Cape Town meeting, which at times degenerated into a critical commentary on what was not being done by those in authority.

It was noticeable that points a), b) and c) (above) were emphasised most strongly, whereas only in relation to point d) did the participants tend to see possibilities for individuals and groups to make some contribution.

### 3. Who is to take the appropriate steps?:

As remarked above, it was clear in the Cape Town group that there was considerable dissatisfaction with the performance of PanSALB in regard to language development. However, as mentioned above, this was accompanied by very little insight into the nature and problems facing those charged with undertaking the task. There was also little sense of the enormity of the issue.

An exception to this was the view expressed by two or three of those present that it *was* up to individuals to insist on their language being used where it was deemed appropriate. These individuals seemed more politically aware, and broached the issue in an informed way as a matter of linguistic rights, and in terms of support for the South African Constitution. (The participants concerned had had fairly recent tertiary academic involvement.)

There were a number of people present at the Cape Town meeting with a background in librarianship, and they argued strongly that public libraries could be developed as important sites for language revitalisation, but that the institutions were at present under-funded and poorly administered by provincial authorities. They linked their arguments to the desperate need for more indigenous language publication, and multiple copies of popular books in the PMLs. Several people argued for the re-issuing of Xhosa classics in cases where suitable new work could not be identified.

The group that met in Alice was perhaps less critical and less politically informed regarding cultural politics. As a predominantly rural group, there was a sense that they did not have every high expectations of support from government. This seemed to be true even of the academics, a small minority of those present. The expectations in Cape Town were higher.

However, it was the group in Alice that most readily turned to a consideration of what they themselves could do collectively to further the cause of the major regional PML, in this case Xhosa.

### 4. Specific strategies

The *same three specific strategies* were put forward by the two focus groups as the most appropriate and appealing for local action. These were:

- a) Various writing and publishing activities.
- b) Translation of suitable reading material from other languages, either for school purposes, or for general reading (establishing a 'reading culture' in the target language was emphasized).

- c) Publicising language issues at a local level through newspapers and local radio stations.

In addition, the Alice group was keen to see the notion of 'language development' enlarged to include cultural lore and the non-linguistic 'language' of beads and traditional dress, for example. (It should be noted that many members of *Sinebhongo ngesiXhosa* and *Sosizwe Bhala* dressed in traditional wear for the occasion.) For these people, 'language' was much more than verbal or written expression. It was clear that for some of those present, the issue was not so much the development of language (in the sense of its modernisation) but the perpetuation of traditional culture and its promulgation in the 'Arts and Culture' area of Curriculum 2005. We must therefore add a further strategy:

- d) Inclusion of [Xhosa] culture and traditions as part of formal schooling.

In Alice, discussion centred on language as a sustainer of identity far more than was the case in Cape Town, where more emphasis was placed on equity and linguistic rights. A statement by one of the language practitioners present met with approval: 'We use English for survival but we are Xhosas: we do not want to live like Englishmen.'

*Investigator's comment:*

There was a well-developed sense in both groups that a vibrant and broadly-based literature in the language was critical to success. In both cases there was enthusiasm for *publication* as a way towards generating greater language awareness. Both groups volunteered concern over the lack of a reading culture among their particular communities. The Cape Town group, coming on the whole from a more consciously 'modernising' outlook, seemed to have a higher proportion of readers within it. The Alice group, while aware of the desirability of reading, admitted that its own practice in this regard was deficient.

Clearly, publication (or 'authorship') carries considerable prestige in these communities. There was vigorous discussion in Alice over the standards of commercial publication. These were felt to be too high to encourage budding writers.

It seemed to be taken for granted that textbook development or translation was largely a commercial undertaking to be tackled in partnership with major publishers. The idea of grassroots cultural activity contributing to this process was not raised, though at both meetings the historical vitality of the Afrikaans response to language development was contrasted with the general apathy that faces the PMLs at present. The scope for individual initiative, outside the area of writing, was scarcely touched upon in either group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The assumption behind the following recommendations is that an important, though not decisive, strength behind any intervention must be to tap into the existing cultural perceptions and energies within groups, rather than attempt to impose unfamiliar and more sophisticated approaches that might prove to be de-motivating. One of the keys to success in any community intervention is to encourage participants, at least initially, to act from their own standpoints, provided these are indeed in line with the overall thrust of policy. This approach allows participants to take ownership of the initiative from the start.

## *Publication*

Publication in the PMLs seems to be a priority acknowledged by most people. Whether the desire for publication is consciously linked to the promotion and development of a particular PML is probably irrelevant. The fact that the language is being used for purposes which I regard as important is sufficient – at least initially. Then comes the question of audience. Commercial publication in the PMLs is the first prize. However, there are many intermediate forms of publication that are invaluable for encouraging the development of a vigorous written culture. There would seem to be scope for limited forms of self-publication within local writers' groups as a means of encouraging circulation of the written language and critique of developing writers outside the school or further education systems. Circulation of work among members of the group itself, and then commercial distribution in the community, enhances the possibility of high-quality work emerging, and also raises the profile of intellectual activity through the medium of the PML. This builds the stature of the PML in the community.

A photocopying machine (even one sited in a commercial bureau, and used on a pay-per-copy basis) can produce a range of products for a writers' group, from limited numbers of copies of a handwritten manuscript to reasonable print-runs of fairly sophisticated desk-top publications. Add simple marketing strategies, and the basis for a small semi-commercial operation is laid. Its success will depend on the quality and appropriateness of the product.

Publication grants and subsidies to community-based publishing groups – provided the subsidy process is administered efficiently – are among the more effective interventions that can be made on behalf of the PMLs. The process has built-in controls. A grant is not made until a manuscript is complete. The length of the work and the print-run has to be specified. A sample product can readily be submitted for inspection, together with eventual sales and/or distribution figures. There is considerable scope for small-business training in this kind of undertaking.

To ensure the efficiency of the subsidy-granting process, an impartial administrative organisation in relatively close contact with community groups would seem to be essential. National bodies are rather remote to operate effectively at this level. The National Language Bodies are too amorphous to serve as administrative organs. Even provincial bodies, such as provincial Arts and Culture Councils, or provincial departments presiding over arts and culture, seem unable to provide the close-to-the-ground responsiveness that initiatives of this nature require.

Part of the recommendation, therefore, is that more use be made of intermediary organisations, such as the Centre for the Book (an urban example) or the Lovedale Press (a rural example) as agencies for channelling grants to community groups at the local level.

The rationale is as follows. 'Languages are not so much lost as a result of speakers' or planners' intentions, but as a result of the loss of their non-linguistic support system' (Mühlhäusler 1996: 322). Drawing out the implications of this comment, it may well be that development of the PMLs, particularly in rural areas, could benefit from financial subsidy of informal and formal publishing outlets of quite modest pretensions. For example, at Alice it emerged in discussion that the Lovedale Press is in the process of launching a local newspaper in Xhosa (to be called *Umhlali*). This may prove an invaluable outlet for Xhosa writers. While it may be inappropriate for bodies such as PanSALB, the National Arts

Council, or the Arts and Culture Trust of the President, to name only the most obvious examples, to subsidise the newspaper project itself, which must be a commercial venture in order to thrive, there could well be scope for using the press as an agency to administer modest publication grants to local writers' groups.

The Press itself has recently been saved from extinction through the creation of a cooperative of long-term employees who have used their pension payouts to purchase the printing machinery, rent a limited portion of the former premises of the company, and continue in business as a regional jobbing printer serving the local community, educational and religious publishing, and various entrepreneurial initiatives, of which the proposed local paper is one. The existence of such community papers constitutes an important avenue for achieving the third most popular or well-supported intervention put forward in the focus groups, namely, publicising language issues in local media. Community newspapers that carry columns and letters dealing with questions of language and culture could play an important part in raising the level of awareness within communities. They also provide an important outlet for community writers, and an avenue through which writers' groups can publicise their activities and achievements or advertise their products.

The impartiality of such intermediary organisations must be monitored through an appropriate reporting system. They cannot be allowed to favour one community grouping over another on inappropriate grounds.

In Cape Town, the Centre for the Book already runs a programme of support for small new publishers, called the Community Publishing Project (CPP), in partnership with NB Publishers. The programme administers grants and also supplies mentoring to community publishers. This is a model that deserves to be replicated in all the major centres, provided a suitable host organisation can be identified.

### *Translation*

This form of linguistic activity was consistently brought forward by Afrikaans first-language speakers present in the focus groups, but met with little practical uptake among other participants. The Afrikaans speakers mentioned the important role translation had played in fostering the rapid rise in status achieved by Afrikaans. The general feeling in the focus groups seemed to be that this was a specialist activity which no doubt ought to be done, but by somebody else.

From a specialist translator's point of view this is no doubt an accurate assessment. Translation, to be done properly, is a highly accomplished art. On the other hand, there is such useful work that can be undertaken by diligent amateurs in this field that it is a pity to find so little enthusiasm for it.

Again, there is some possibility that supervised translation grants to community practitioners may improve the situation. A system of mentoring from more experienced translators, while novices cut their teeth on short, straight-forward texts, and compare results with each other could in time establish genuine momentum for increasing the 'knowledge store' accessible through the PMLs. Such a move could also build a role and possibly a future career for the educated but unemployed, of whom there are so many. Eventually, with an acceptable system of refereeing, such activity may lead to the translation of school textbooks and other reading matter for commercial publication.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that such translation initiatives would depend heavily upon the identification of reliable, dedicated and skilled mentors, committed to building the PMLs.

### *Publicising language and culture debates*

This was widely accepted in the focus groups as a key role that language activists should play. Again, in Cape Town such activity was viewed more as a matter of language rights; in Alice more as a cultural duty. In both cases, an important unanswered question lingered in the air: why has so little been done to date by community organisations in response to South Africa's new language dispensation? There was general agreement in both groups that this was an unavoidable task if the PMLs were to find a healthy way forward.

### *Promotion of indigenous culture*

This issue was primarily a concern of the Alice group, though it had been implied in comments by some participants in Cape Town. The issue was seen as the marginalisation of, in this case, Xhosa culture in the Arts and Culture learning area of Curriculum 2005, particularly at private and former 'Model C' schools (i.e. many of the formerly white state schools). In these schools, it was asserted, the curriculum was being interpreted primarily in western or 'fusionist' terms, rather than as an opportunity for the transmission of traditional Xhosa culture, values and world view. It was widely insisted upon that the community wanted to see the 'cultural language' of the amaXhosa playing a much more important part in this area of education.

Such viewpoints raise important issues that I will touch upon in the conclusion to this article.

## **FURTHER POINTS**

In addition to the strategies directly espoused by members of the focus groups, there was, by implication, a further accepted need behind much that was being said, namely, an understanding that the development of a culture of reading was a pre-requisite for the development of the PMLs.

This was most apparent in the arguments of the library representatives at the Cape Town meeting. It was also there for both focus groups, tacitly, in the reliance on writing and publication as the most obvious way forward for the PMLs.

### *Investigator's Comment*

There is a marked convergence between the needs of South African educational renovation and language development in this regard. Many educators are convinced that the formation of sound reading habits, comprising both voluntary reading for enjoyment and required reading for information and intellectual development, is a major component in the formula for educational success. This is also a necessary basis for meaningful participation in language development activities.

Language maintenance and language revitalisation do not necessarily rely upon establishing a widespread reading culture: language development and modernisation almost invariably do. While it may be possible for oral performance, story-telling and oral community debate to establish or augment pride in a particular language in its current condition, only those with

some foothold in the requirements of modern society are in a position to help the development of that language to fit contemporary needs. (This is part of the reason why even highly modernized languages are often seen to be retreating within some specialized domains in favour of English: for instance, indigenous linguistic innovation simply cannot keep up with technical fields whose purview is mainly international.) It is virtually impossible to understand these developmental requirements without some acquaintance with the structures and procedures within the large-scale, dispersed and abstract social structures characteristic of modernity.

It follows that development of the PMLs coincides to some extent with the same needs that inform the push for improving school education: ready availability of good and appropriate books, and a supportive environment for their use. (As far as the school system itself is concerned, this supportive environment must include a systematic approach to the development of additive multilingualism. To date, this need has not been addressed. See Wright 2002.) I therefore feel justified in emphasising certain enabling conditions, that are genuinely the province of government, and which will greatly assist the strategies for language development identified by the focus groups:

- 1) Remove VAT from books.
- 2) Make renovation of the book procurement and delivery system for schools throughout the country a top priority.
- 3) Improve funding for school and public libraries, with some emphasis on enhancing and updating book stocks in the PMLs.
- 4) Meet with publishing groups, small and large, to hear their suggestions as to how the publishing world could best be assisted to meet the crying need for good, well-produced books in the PMLs.
- 5) Meet authors' and editors' associations to take advantage of their positive suggestions.

It will of course be argued that much of this is either in hand, or has already been implemented. If so, the response must be that to date the problems have not been solved adequately. We must keep going and demand higher standards of performance from all sectors of South African society, most particularly government. This country cannot succeed without a firmly established reading culture for the vast majority of its citizens.

## CONCLUSION

Despite their provisional and informal nature, the findings presented here, the level of awareness depicted and the nature of the positive suggestions put forward by the participants, should give serious pause to unreconstructed enthusiasts for language engineering. Set to one side the potentially supportive framework provided for the PMLs by compulsory education (in itself a challenging site in which to promote language development – see Wright 2002): beyond this we need to ask where the broad social motivation and the grass-roots institutional support for revitalizing the PMLs is to be found. Remember that these meetings reflected the views of some cultural activists and language practitioners who chose to participate out of genuine interest. What of the broad public for whom language development is barely a notional concept?

For none of those who participated could it truly be said that language development had been accepted as a core task in their particular field of activity. It was mostly regarded as

something that should happen, not as something in which they could and should play a significant part.

Many of the more technical innovations in language development, requiring deliberate voluntary interventions over a long period by elements of civil society, would seem to be a 'big stretch' for many community organisations. However, clearly the place to start is with the strategies identified as important and viable by such organisations. It is not possible to attempt everything at once, and encouraging what people intuitively understand and are willing to support makes more sense than trying to co-opt support for more esoteric interventions.

It would seem highly desirable to create informal linkages between cultural groups in the community having a particular brief for one of the PMLs and some of the organs government is creating to support language development, for example, the National Dictionary Units, the National Language Bodies, the National Language Service or, indeed, PanSALB itself. By informal linkages I do not necessarily mean funding. The emphasis should instead fall on encouraging contact between language professionals and community groups. This would have to be of the most tactful and incisive kind<sup>1</sup>, but could indeed form a fruitful part of the effort to stimulate an active cultural awakening for speakers of the PMLs. The possible role of *intermediary organisations* in forming and sustaining these linkages as outlined above should be explored, albeit with caution.

There are two important provisos. The one is that rural cultural organisations are generally far more concerned with preserving and transmitting their own way of life, particularly their self-defined 'cultural heritage', than they are with engaging or challenging the changing conditions of modernity. Their general approach could be characterised as following a dialectic of resistance and adaptation: resistance to certain aspects of modernity, willing acceptance of others. This cross-grained complexity constitutes an important modernising response, but the cultural organisations that subsist within this milieu place their overt emphasis on establishing continuity with the past, with tradition, as a means of stabilising the present. Without informed and tactful external intellectual support, they may be seen as somewhat ambiguous partners in the enterprise of modernising their languages.

This leads me to the second caveat. Few language practitioners believe that languages can be artificially developed, if by this is meant abstract elaboration of vocabulary and idiom divorced from authentic social motivation and in an artificial context. Languages develop from real need, not in response to mere ideological desire. So it would seem important to acknowledge the validity of supporting all types of indigenous intellectual effort in the PMLs, even where this is not overtly geared to the business of developing languages. Evidence from all over Africa confirms that the issues of modernity are worked through in written literature. They may be argued orally as well, but it is in the written word that lasting arguments can be formulated, contradicted, supplanted, revisited, modified, reified and deconstructed. It may well be that the urge to place publication at the forefront of grassroots language development efforts, as recorded above, reflects this desire to move forward, to engage with the *realia* of experience in order to cope with or even transcend the inhibiting conditions which have for so long held back the development of the PMLs. This may be an invigorating intellectual quest, but few can pretend it is other than extremely challenging.

I come back to the point I have made on a number of occasions: that it will be the endogenous efforts of the PML speakers themselves that will prove the salvation of their



languages, together with the changing cultures they will create and describe in those languages. In seeking to support grass-roots efforts at language development, we are in fact searching for cultural leadership (Category 4 type leadership: 'Grassroots social response' – see above), something that, in relation to language development, is very much the happenstance of individual talent and predilection. There is therefore no claim here that this report is in any way representative of all that can be expected of grass-roots language development initiatives. The argument is simply that ways must be found to engage PML speakers in the promotion and development of their languages, and that some of these ways must be congruent with the energies already developing in community organisations. In the long run, all formal language planners can do is to provide legislative support and some of the technical provision. A major aspect of that technical provision is the sustaining of an increasingly literate society. For the rest, it is up to the PML speakers themselves, working together to support each other's efforts. This constitutes the real hope for success.

## END NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Academic and professional linguists may, indeed should, be invited to support the work of community language enthusiasts. The research literature is consistent, however, in insisting that the 'experts' should maintain a strictly auxiliary role, subordinate to the initiatives of the community grouping, which should in turn be guided by intimate personal knowledge of the present needs and capacities of the community. David Crystal cites two scholars in support of this view:

A linguist working on an endangered language [or a developing language] must submit to the authority of the community administrators. At every turn, the linguist will have to compromise long-range scholarly goals to meet the community's immediate needs.

(Gerds 1998: 21; square brackets mine)

And:

Bridging the gap between academic linguistics and community wants and efforts is surely one of the major challenges of the linguistic profession as it faces the situation of endangered languages at the turn of the new century.

(Grinevald 1998: 143)

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