



## Chapter 7

# Indigenous Language Use in Knowledge Dissemination in South Africa During the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Mmakwena Molala* 

### Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic the use of indigenous languages became very important for ensuring that health messages and information about regulations reached the public. The COVID-19 Command Task Team formed by the South African President became a national structure that had to work with task teams formed in provinces to ensure the dissemination of knowledge about the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that government implemented. Knowledge dissemination takes various formats, namely written, spoken, and sign language. It is very important for ensuring that the message reaches the intended audience, that it is well understood and correctly implemented. This chapter explores how indigenous languages were used to disseminate knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic, and if knowledge dissemination in various languages was adequate. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory was instrumental for this study. A document analysis method was used to explore the focus area and address the research questions. This chapter is of value, as the urgency of the pandemic meant that South African citizens needed to understand the message delivered by government. Learning the lessons from the COVID-19 experience might assist communicators with successfully communicating health messages in future.

## Introduction

Language was a contested issue at the dawn of the South African democracy. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, act 108 of 1996, hereafter referred to as the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996) (Chapter 1, Section 6) recognises twelve official languages, namely Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and South African Sign Language. The Constitution (South Africa, 1996:Section 3a) also states that national and provincial governments may use any particular official language for governance purposes, while taking the use, practicality, experience and regional circumstances into account and balancing these with the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned. However, national and provincial governments must use at least two official languages, while municipalities must take the language use and preferences of their residents into account.

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that started in Wuhan, China, was a global pandemic. COVID-19, an acute respiratory contagious disease to which all people seem to be susceptible, is caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus. The scale at which it spread across the world brought fear, anxiety and even panic. On 25 April 2020 the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, through legislation, declared a 21-day lockdown, with various measures to limit the spread of COVID-19. The pandemic brought a speedy response and publication of various legislation to ensure awareness, education and preventative measures. The government, public and private sector put in place a participatory and collective process that ensured that decisions were made about data that would be useful and life-serving. The Disaster Management Act number 57 of 2002, hereafter referred to as the Disaster Management Act (South Africa, 2002), was enforced through regulations, with various government departments through their ministries directing initiatives that fall within their legislative mandate. The Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister at the time, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, remarked on

22 March 2020 that the regulations "... enable us as government to focus on preventing a disaster and where applicable reduce the risk of disasters, they activate governments capacity emergency preparedness regime, which must be rapid and effective". The President's address to the nation set the tone and gave strategic guidance to ministers in defining and gazetted regulations within their various portfolios to ensure that knowledge was disseminated through various platforms.

Knowledge is defined as the process of organising and arranging information for certain objective (Faladesiani & Senen, 2024:184), within the study knowledge is defined as information that has meaning, and the data collected by the Department of Health in South Africa accordingly interpreted, refined and disseminated to the public. Davila et al. (2006) indicated that "knowledge may be disseminated but the degree to which it is transferred to other is largely dependent on the communication process used, since the acquisition of new knowledge is primarily a communication process". Knowledge dissemination involves infrastructure, process, systems, tools and technologies. In the South African context, the government has all of this at its disposal, and also has processes and systems in place. These include the Disaster Management Act, the Coronavirus Command Task Team, infrastructure in terms of the health facilities (hospitals, clinics, newly developed field hospitals), technologies in terms of media coverage, a website (<https://sacoronavirus.co.za>) and WhatsApp (COVID-19 updates). In this regard, Green et al. (2014:153) comment as follows: "dissemination is not an end in itself, but a distinct process from the implementation process of reinventing or adapting what has been disseminated and working through and around the polices, traditions, culture, and other constraints of the organisational context in which disseminated innovations or policies are to be implemented".

The literature review section explores language use as social action, contextualising language in knowledge dissemination, the composition of languages in South Africa and the implementation of language policy in South Africa. The theoretical framework adopted is the innovation of diffusion theory, which will be used to explore the language used in knowledge dissemination. The

research methodology adopted for the study reported on in this chapter is document analysis: various sources, including policies, journal articles, data from Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) and the Broadcast Research Council of South Africa (BRCSA), were consulted and analysed in relation to the study. Analysis is performed on the knowledge dissemination tools based on data from StatsSA and BRCSA in support of the composition of language and usage in the public domain. This includes the geographical distribution of the South African populations, the languages mostly spoken in South Africa, newspaper readers, and media landscape, including trend analysis for the viewers. The study provides recommendations as per the document analysed and how best in future indigenous language can be used as part of knowledge dissemination, in situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Bill of Rights, in Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996), states that “Everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of their choice ...” In a democratic state, language policy is crucial for the development of a democratic culture and tradition. The outbreak of COVID-19 emphasised the importance of using all South African languages in knowledge dissemination to ensure understanding and compliance by all citizens. The challenge remains whether the two languages used when the President and ministers make important announcements relating to the COVID-19 pandemic is enough. The chapter looks at the importance of using all indigenous languages or official languages in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that all citizens understand the information disseminated. Section 3a of the South African Constitution states that national and provincial governments may use any official language for governance purposes. In light of the acknowledgement of indigenous languages by the South African Constitution, the following questions are pertinent:

1. Did the information on COVID-19 reach its intended audience properly?
2. How effective was multilingual communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. How effective were communicative platforms as knowledge dissemination tools?

## Literature Review

The WHO's Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) provides guidelines to member states in terms of the COVID-19 outbreak on how to communicate effectively with their populations (WHO, 2020a). Failure to communicate leads to a loss of trust and reputation, economic impacts, and - in the worst cases - loss of lives. The WHO's RCCE (WHO, 2020a) outlines the following public communication guidelines:

- Identify spokespersons based on the trust they have with the population, the type of message that needs to be conveyed (e.g. about political commitment, technical expertise, health protection) and the severity of the situation.
- Make sure messages are consistent across sectors and levels.
- Share information regularly (ideally each day at the same time of day).
- Share leadership and response decision-making in messages to the public so that the reasoning behind difficult decisions is clear.
- Share stories, photos, and videos that illustrate key messages.
- Ensure that the public knows where to obtain up-to-date information regularly (e.g. on websites, during daily press briefings, through hotlines).
- Provide regular, transparent communication through the channels that the targeted audiences use.
- Use traditional media, the Internet and social media, hotlines, and text messages as appropriate.

To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, countries, including South Africa, adopted the above procedures in public communication. Flexibility was encouraged: each country had its own way of implementing the factors that would ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic was well-managed and contained. Language is not mentioned above, but clearly the guidelines addressed the process that can be used, leaving member states to adopt the method of knowledge dissemination that would be useful for their country.

### Language use as Social Action

Whether language conveys meaning remains an open question (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002:558). Glenberg and Kaschak (2002:558) remark: “the dominant approach is to treat language as a symbol manipulation system: language conveys meaning by using abstract, amodal and arbitrary symbols (i.e. words combined by syntactic rules)”. The use of language becomes a strong element when content and knowledge are disseminated. Martin and Dowson (2009) argue: “ongoing social interactions teach individuals about themselves and about what is needed to fit with a particular group”. They also acknowledge that “individuals develop beliefs, orientations, and values that are consistent with their relational environment”. The following components of language can be used as social actions:

- **Interpersonal action:** Interpersonal consequences of talk is about the role language use plays in how others perceive us, and we perceive them (personal perception) as well as the topic of impression management – the way we adjust our talk to active special results (Holtgraves, 2013:1), whereas Rusu (2023:220) noted that “interpersonal communication is an important area of human manifestation responsible for the effectiveness of adaptation of the world in which we live”. The use of the language in the COVID-19 pandemic messaging as knowledge dissemination plays an important role, as the authorities appealed to citizens’ concern for their own health and safety. The President’s addresses took the form of appeals to the inner person rather than merely delivering a message. Here, indigenous languages can also play a role if well used.
- **Contextualised action:** Holtgraves (2013) indicates that languages differ in the terms they provide, and personal perception may vary between cultures. Context is therefore crucial to understanding the message.
- **Coordinated action:** The entire operation by the state is a coordinated action to ensure that citizens are safe from an invisible enemy (COVID-19). Language forms a central part of the strategy. In this case English was used, as it is a language that many can understand.

Regarding public health emergencies, Africa needs to recognise that the particular needs of every marginalised / vulnerable group have to be addressed in order to surmount the barriers to the right to health (Adebisi et al., 2020:449). Adebisi et al. (2020:449) note that Africa's public health response has to be more inclusive and needs to be more strategic and proactive in reaching out to specific groups and identifying and addressing their needs. In Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic, indigenous songs were used to ensure proper knowledge dissemination. Thompson et al. (2021) indicate that "in Ghana apart from the updates from National Commission for Civil Education (NCCE), some musicians in the country took personal initiatives to compose songs in local languages to educate the public about the disease". In Cameroon, the local languages took centre stage in delivering messages during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the country's official languages being French and English. Delmon (2021:111) states: "COVID-19 has allowed the local languages of Cameroon to supplant the official languages, English and French in their daily use to fight against the pandemic or to prevent the population from the threat . . . to reach the people at the grassroots, local language have been used as a main channel". In Nigeria, the media used local languages to deliver COVID-19 information. Rudwick et al. (2021:2) state that "while Nigeria is divided along ethno-linguistic lines and it is therefore not advisable per any federal political leader to code switch in addressing the press or the media on the issue of COVID-19, there is evidence where media representatives use African languages while Ministers answer predominately in English and/or one of the major Nigerian languages (Hausa or Iqbo or Yoruba)". Language becomes one of the important elements of social action during the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgent situation required African countries to supplement their official languages and use predominantly local / indigenous languages to ensure that knowledge was disseminated and understood by their local audience.

### **Contextualising Language in Knowledge Dissemination**

The acknowledgement by the WHO that COVID-19 was spreading via a pandemic, propelled various governments to act quickly in

terms of preparing their health responses – not only in terms of preparing the health facilities but also ensuring that the message was delivered and understood by the public. In the fight of COVID-19, people’s response took centre stage. In contextualising the knowledge dissemination, various models and knowledge dissemination tools were put in place. Three models of knowledge dissemination were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Linear model:** Knowledge dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic mostly deployed the linear model, in which knowledge is seen as a product that is packaged and presented to the audience. During the COVID-19 pandemic information had to be disseminated urgently and in accordance with health guidelines. English was used for pragmatic reasons.
- **Relationship model:** To counter the pandemic, relationships become very important. The public needed to trust the government guidelines. Best and Holmes (2010:147) highlight the fact that “relationship models incorporate the linear model principles for dissemination and diffusion, and then focus on the interactions amongst people using the knowledge”. Lomas (2007) indicates that “the emphasis is on sharing knowledge, the development of partnership and the fostering of networks of stakeholders with common interest”. The South African government built relationships with all relevant stakeholders on the national and provincial levels. These included the Coronavirus Command Council, constituted by the ministers in various portfolios, the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC), which advised the Minister of Health on COVID-19 recommendations and other bodies constituted to combat the pandemic.
- **System model:** The system model recognises that the diffusion and dissemination process and relationships themselves are shaped, embedded and organised through structures that mediate the types of interactions that occur amongst multiple agents with unique worldviews, priorities, languages, means of communication and operations (Frenck, 1992). In the interactions amongst the stakeholders – the important stakeholders being the communities or public – there is a need to ensure that the message is received

and interpreted and understood accordingly. Fake news or knowledge dissemination is mitigated when recipients receive messages in the language they understand.

### **Composition of Languages in South Africa**

South Africa has eleven official languages. In addition, sign language, San languages and other languages are recognised. During the COVID-19 pandemic, English took centre stage as the official language, with sign language being used to ensure that the hearing-impaired community was catered for. Language usage in South Africa differs according to province, regions, districts and households.

Table 1 shows the percentage of languages spoken by households per population group in 2018.

Table 1 presents a picture of how languages are used and play a significant role in knowledge dissemination and usage. IsiZulu is the most popular language nationally, reported to be used inside households by 25.3% of the population and outside by 25.1%. This is followed by isiXhosa (inside household use 14.8%; outside household use 12.8%). English was sixth (inside households 12.2%; outside households 9.7%). Despite this, English was the main language used during the COVID-19 pandemic for communication and knowledge dissemination to accommodate all South Africans. The understanding of the COVID-19-related messages communicated in English is therefore of concern in this case study. For example, if a household in a rural area of Gama Mashashane (Limpopo) or Mdubaduba (Mpumalanga) has no one competent in English, how can they understand the gazetted legislation on COVID-19 presented by the President and the various ministers?

### **Implementation of Language Policy in South Africa**

Ngcobo (2007) argues as follows: “although language planning in South Africa could be considered one of the best in the world, one may argue that language policy implementation is still the most problematic area of language planning in this country”.

**Table 1:** Percentage of languages spoken by households inside and outside the home by population group, 2018

	Black		Coloured		Indian/Asian		White		South Africa	
	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside
Afrikaans	0,9	1,0	77,4	68,8	1,3	1,5	61,2	37,2	12,2	9,7
English	1,6	8,6	20,1	28,3	92,1	95,8	36,3	61,0	8,1	16,6
isiNdebele	1,9	1,6	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,2	0,3	0,1	0,6	1,3
isiXhosa	18,2	15,6	1,1	1,3	0,4	0,0	0,1	0,1	14,8	12,8
isiZulu	31,1	30,8	0,3	0,3	0,9	1,0	0,5	0,5	25,3	25,1
Khoi, Nama and San	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,1
Sepedi	12,4	12,0	0,3	0,2	0,5	0,2	0,1	0,3	10,1	9,7
Sesotho	9,7	9,6	0,1	0,2	0,1	0,3	0,0	0,1	7,9	7,8
Setswana	11,1	11,5	0,7	0,8	0,2	0,2	0,4	0,4	9,1	9,4
Sign language	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
SiSwati	3,5	3,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,8	2,6
Tshivenda	3,1	2,7	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,5	2,2
Xitsonga	4,4	2,9	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0	3,6	2,4
Other	2,1	0,5	0,1	0,0	4,0	0,7	1,1	0,5	1,9	0,5
Total percentage	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Total (thousands)	46,307	46,135	4,961	4,930	1,430	1,426	4,442	4,420	57,143	56,914

Source: StatsSA (2018)

This problem certainly manifested itself during the COVID-19 pandemic: none of the other 10 official languages was used in the legislation or proclamations, except in situations where ministers themselves translated their speeches using the indigenous languages.

Post-1994, a statutory body, the Pan South African Languages Board (PanSAL), was established through the Pan South African Language Boards Act, number 59 of 1995, hereafter referred to as the Pan South African Language Boards Act (South Africa, 1995), to engage in language policies and planning aimed at promoting language equity, supporting diversity and developing the historically marginalised African languages. PanSal's programmes include the monitoring of equitability of language use and language promotion, which still pose a challenge at the national and provincial level. Most of the publications posted on national or provincial government websites are in English. The Constitution clearly indicates that national or provincial governments have a right to publish in the most preferred language within the country but made provision for the use of two more languages within each province that are spoken by the public.

PanSAL has the duty of ensuring the promotion and usage of the various languages of South Africa. The problem, though, is compliance with the equitability of language use and language promotion. The outbreak of COVID-19 brought forth this important constitutional matter of language and its usage in knowledge dissemination to ensure understanding and compliance. In most of her speeches on COVID-19 regulations, the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma used English. She also used some isiZulu, but the media cut most of the isiZulu speeches out. In his general opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 on 20 July 2020, the WHO Director Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus stated: "Although people of all walks of life are affected by COVID-19, the world's poorest and most vulnerable people are especially at risk". He went on to say that "Indigenous people have unique culture and languages, and deep relationships with the environment" (WHO, 2020b).

## **Theoretical Framework**

One important element of the COVID-19 pandemic was that older people and people with comorbidities or underlying illness were likely to perish. Many of these people were disadvantaged, uneducated, in rural communities, and competent only in their indigenous languages. According to Chick (1992:12), “the important challenge is the promotion of the notion of language ecology in which all languages are viewed as national resources needing to preserve and developed so that the talents of their native speakers may be optimally utilised for the good of all”. The Diffusion of Innovations theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study to better understand language usage in knowledge dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Diffusion of Innovations theory**

Green et al. (2014) argues that “diffusion theory represents a long history of attempts to understand the spread of ideas and actions within social systems” and describe the impact of language in public health policy and practice, focusing on the concepts of knowledge dissemination, understanding, utilisation and implementation. Language is of course fundamental to knowledge dissemination. During the COVID-19 pandemic new knowledge and information driven by reports was produced. Legislation and other government blueprints guided compliance with COVID-19 guidelines and measures.

## **Methodology**

A document analysis method was used to gain insight into the research topic and address the research questions. Bowen (2009:27) defines document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) materials.” The researcher used both printed and electronic materials: books, journals, articles, online data analyses and media surveys in terms of popularly used languages in the South Africa context. Data was also obtained from StatsSA and the BRC of South Africa to determine indigenous language usage in terms of knowledge

dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The data considered ranged from July 2017 to July 2020 and provided for population per province and the languages spoken in South Africa.

## Results

### Analysing the Knowledge Dissemination Tools

Knowledge dissemination uses three forms of communication: written material, electronic material and interpersonal communication activities or events. Written material includes articles, booklets, fact sheets, resource guides, newsletters editorials, press releases, posters, news bulletins, policy briefs, and synopses. Electronic material includes email alerts, the Internet, real-time reminders, web conferences and websites, mainstream and social media. Interpersonal communications occur in the form of arts-based performances and various communities of practice.

South Africans access information through different platforms: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Knowledge dissemination takes various forms: written, spoken and sign language. It plays an important role in ensuring the message reaches the intended audience, is well-understood and implemented.

### *Geographical Distribution of the South African Population*

Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of South Africa's population of 58.8 million (as at 2020) over the nine South African provinces.

**Table 2:** Population per province

Province	Jul 17 – Jun 18	Jan – Dec 18	Jul 18 – Jun 19	Jan – Dec 2019
	,000			
Gauteng	10,2	10,2	10,4	10,4
KwaZulu-Natal	7,7	7,7	7,8	7,8
Western Cape	4,9	4,9	5	5

Province	Jul 17 – Jun 18	Jan – Dec 18	Jul 18 – Jun 19	Jan – Dec 2019
	,000			
Eastern Cape	4,8	4,8	4,9	4,9
Limpopo	3,9	3,9	3,9	3,9
Mpumalanga	3	3	3	3
North West	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7
Free State	2	2	2	2,1
Northern Cape	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,9

Source: BRC (2020:22)

Table 2 shows that Gauteng province has the highest population. This is driven by economic activities and the migration of populations from the other eight provinces and other countries. It is built on the different cultures and languages of the African continent and beyond. The province is where the eleven official languages are relatively well-understood and spoken. However, the COVID-19 pandemic tested the communication methods used to address the population in the different provinces.

### Languages

South Africa has eleven official languages, with English being used as the main medium of communication by government in terms of disseminating information.

Table 3 presents the languages spoken in South Africa as first languages by percentage.

Table 3 shows that 25% of South Africans speak and understand isiZulu, while Ndebele was the least-spoken language during the period 2018 to 2019. Though English is perceived as the main medium of communication, the table shows that most people do not necessarily speak or understand English. This raises concerns in terms of the information communication flow to citizens by government.

**Table 3:** South African languages

%	Zulu	Xhosa	Afrikaans	English	Sesotho	Setswana	Sepedi	Tsonga	Swati	Venda	Ndebele
Jul-Jun 18	25	15	12	10	10	9	10	4	2	2	1
Jan-Dec 18	25	15	12	11	10	10	9	4	2	2	1
Jul 18 -Jun 19	25	15	11	11	10	9	9	4	2	2	1
Jan-Dec 19	25	15	11	11	9	9	9	4	2	2	1

Source: BRC (2020:22)

**Table 4:** Newspaper readers, population of 15 years +

	Jul 17 – Jun 18	Jan – Dec 18	Jul 18 – Jun 19	Jan – Dec 19
Newspaper readers (thousands)	15,7	15,5	15,6	15,3

Source: BRC (2020)

### Newspaper readers

Newspapers are one of the tools to disseminate information and knowledge, and Table 4 indicates how many people read newspapers. In the digital age news is no longer accessed principally in print form, but on cell phones, tablets and computers (laptops and desktops).

Table 4 illustrates the number of newspaper readers, where the reading population is 15 years or older.

Table 4 shows that out of a population of 58.8 million in South Africa (as at 2020), only 16.6 million read newspapers. Moreover, most newspapers publish in English. During the COVID-19 pandemic it was essential for South African citizens to understand the message delivered by government.

### Media landscape

The media landscape plays a significant role in communication and knowledge dissemination in South Africa and was most commonly used by government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5 shows the different platforms (in percentages) used by South Africans to access information.

**Table 5:** Media landscape

%	TV	Radio	Newspapers	Magazines	Internet
Jul 17-Jun 18	95	88	39	18	58
Jan-Dec 18	96	88	39	17	61
Jul 18-Jun 19	95	88	38	17	63
Jan-Dec 19	95	88	38	18	66

Source: BRC (2020)

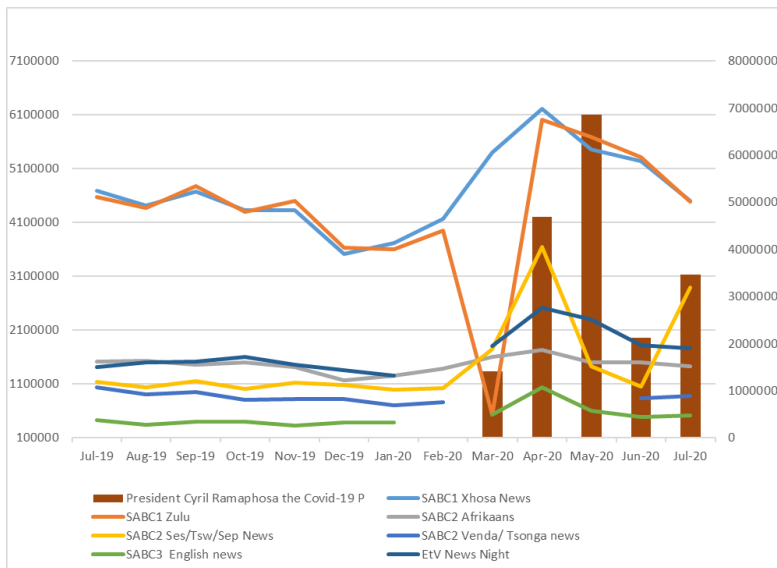
Table 5 shows that 95% of the population used television (TV) to access information and knowledge, followed by radio at 88% during the period 2017 to 2019. The assumption is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africans used TV and radio as the

most common sources of information. The popular language use in the public, commercial community is English.

**Trend analysis for viewers**

It can be observed in Table 5 that 95% of the population uses TV to access information and knowledge and this is also the main platform used by the government to disseminate information throughout the country. Therefore, this section analyses the news trends across the four free-to-air TV channels, SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3 and eTV, to determine the indigenous language usage in terms of knowledge dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2 shows news audience trends on SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3 and eTV during the period July 2019 to July 2020.



**Figure 2:** News audience trends on SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3 and eTV. Source: BRC(2020:22)

Figure 2 shows that during the first COVID-19-related lockdown from April to July 2020, people began to watch news on television more. This is perceived as a response to the pandemic and

the desire to know and understand the messages delivered by government. The increase in numbers of viewers show the fear, anxiety and panic brought by COVID-19 and also the desire to seek information on how to stay safe. Figure 2 shows that isiZulu and isiXhosa language news had the largest audience when compared with news in other languages. This is a positive relationship with Table 2, which indicated that isiZulu and isiXhosa are the most commonly spoken and understood languages in South Africa.

Figure 1 also shows that the largest audience (over six million) was observed during the President's address to the nation, regarding various measures through legislation and regulations to combat and limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These different channels assisted in disseminating information and knowledge and ensuring awareness and education for preventative measures in response to COVID-19.

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

South Africa is a diverse country with unique languages and cultures. The term 'rainbow nation' was adopted after the democratic dispensation to acknowledge this diversity. The discussion above allows certain conclusions and recommendations to be made in line with the South African Constitution and language policy. What is abundantly clear from the data presented above is that English was used overwhelmingly in government communications about COVID-19, despite relatively few South Africans being proficient in the language, and isiZulu and isiXhosa being much more widely used. The dominance of English in various domains has led to language shift and the potential erosion of indigenous language, particularly among younger generation (Madimaet al., 2024:11)

The study analysed the knowledge dissemination tools provided by the BRC. The BRC data provides insights into the languages used in the media. The fact that the South African Constitution advocates that national and provincial government should use at least two official languages is encouraging, and the fact that municipalities must consider the language preferences of their residents is important. Prah (2018) argues that "if culture is

the main determinant of our attitudes, tasks and more, language is the central feature of culture”. Culture in South Africa plays an important role in the way messages are delivered and interpreted. Kramsch and Steffensen (2008:20) state that “sociolinguists pointed out that a language is not just a mode of communication but a symbolic statement of social and cultural identity”.

The implementation of the language policy – specifically the raising of the indigenous languages to the level of English – is still a work in progress. Ngcobo (2007:2) indicated that “although language planning in South Africa could be considered one of the best in the world, one may argue that language policy implementation is still the most problematic area of language planning in this country”. The analysis of the BRC data conducted above reveals that even though English is not the most commonly used first language in the country it is still used as the lingua franca – and this was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to note that language advocacy is not well highlighted by the PanSal annual report in terms of usage on government communication platforms. Uplifting the indigenous languages will give them the status they deserve and encourage more usage. In its monitoring and evaluation of indigenous language use, PanSal should ensure that the various spheres of government make greater use of indigenous languages in their official documents.

## References

- Adebisi, Y.A., Ekpenyong, A., Ntacyabukura, B., Lowe, M., Jimoh, N.D., Abdulkareem, T.O. & Lucero-Prisno, D.E. 2020. COVID-19 highlights the need for inclusive responses to public health emergencies in Africa. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 104(2):449–452. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-1485>
- Best, A. & Holmes, B. 2010. Systems thinking, knowledge and action: Towards better models and methods. *Evidence & Policy*, 6(2):145–159. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426410X502284>

- Bowen, G.A. 2009. Document analyses as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2):27-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Broadcast Research Council of South Africa (BRC). 2020. *Establishment survey March 2020*. [online]. Available from: <https://brcsa.org.za/establishment-survey-full-year-release-march-2020-release/>
- Chick, J. 1992. *Language ideology and social structure*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Davila, T.M., Epstein, J. & Shelton, R. 2006. Making innovation work: How to manage it, measure it, and profit from it. Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA: Wharton School Publishing,
- Delmon, G.D. 2021. Local language dynamics during COVID -19 times in Cameroon. *Journal of Translation and languages*, 20(2):111 -119. <https://doi.org/10.52919/translang.v20i2.272>
- Faldesiani, R & Senen, S.H. 2024. Knowledge management systems in higher education: A comprehensive study through systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis (2019 - 2023). *The Eastasouth Management and Business*, 2(2):184 - 201. DOI:@ <https://doi.org/10.58812/esmb.v2i02.185>
- Frenck, J. 1992. Balancing relevance and excellence: Organisational responses to link research with decision-making. *Social Science and Medicine*, 35(11):1397-1404. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(92\)90043-p](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(92)90043-p)
- Green, L.W., Ottoson, J.M., García, C., Hiatt, R.A. & Roditis, M.L. 2014. Diffusion theory and knowledge dissemination, utilization and integration. *Front Public Health Serv Syst Res*, 3(1):3. PMID: 26251771
- Glenberg, A.M & Kaschak, M. 2002. Grounding language in action. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 9(3):558-65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3758/bf03196313>.
- Holtgraves, T.M. 2013. *Language as a social action: Social psychology and language use*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410601773>

## Chapter 7

- Kramsch, C & Steffensen, S.V. 2008. Ecological perspectives on second language acquisition and socialisation. In: N.H. Hornberger. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*. Boston, MA, USA: Springer. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3\\_194](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3_194)
- Lomas, J. 2007. Decision support: A new approach to making the best healthcare management and policy choices. *Healthcare Quarterly*, 10(3):16–8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12927/hcq..18918>.
- MacMahan, M; Stankiewicz, B & Kujers, B. 2006. *Walk the talk: Connecting language, knowledge and action in route instruction. NRL research option, coordinated terms of autonomous systems*. American Association for Artificial Intelligence. [online]. Available from: <https://cdn.aaai.org/AAAI/2006/AAAI06-232.pdf>.
- Madima, S.E; Babane, M.T & Klu, E.K. 2024. Language policy implementation challenges in postcolonial anglophone Africa: A case of Limpopo Provincial Legislature in South Africa. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 6(2):1164. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59400/fls.v6i2.1164>
- Martin, A.J & Dowson, M. 2009. Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1):327–365. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325583>
- Ngcobo, M. 2007. Language planning, policy and implementation in South Africa. University of South Africa. Available from: [http://ut.pr/biblioteca/Glossa2/Journal/jun2007/Language\\_Planning.pdf](http://ut.pr/biblioteca/Glossa2/Journal/jun2007/Language_Planning.pdf)
- Prah, K.K.2018. *The challenges of language in post-apartheid South Africa*. Review commissioned by the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa. The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, Cape Town. [online]. Available from: <https://www.litnet.co.za/challenge-language-post-apartheid-south-africa/>
- Rudwick, S., Sijadu, Z. & Turner, I. 2021. Politics of language in COVID-19: Multilingual perspectives from South Africa. *Politikon*, 48(2021):1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2021.1917206>

- Rusu, M. 2023. Aspects of interpersonal communication: the exchange of communicative intentions. *Review of Artistic Education*, 26(2023):220–228. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/rae-2023-0031>
- South Africa. 1995. *Pan South African Language Board Act 59 of 1995*. [online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/act59of1995.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/act59of1995.pdf)
- South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the republic of South Africa, number 108 of 1996*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf>
- South Africa. 2002. *Disaster Management Act, number 57 of 2002*. [online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/a57-020.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a57-020.pdf)
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). 2018. *Statistical release P0318: General household survey*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182018.pdf>
- Thompson, R.G.A., Nutor, J.J. & Johnson, J.K. 2021. Communicating awareness about COVID-19 through songs: An example from Ghana. *Frontiers of Public Health*, 8(2021):607830. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.607830>.
- World Health Organization (WHO). 2020a. *Risk communication and community engagement readiness and response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19): interim guidance, 19 March 2020*. [online]. Available from: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/331513/WHO-2019-nCoV-RCCE-2020.2-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- World Health Organization (WHO). 2020b. *COVID-19 virtual press conference (20 July 2020)*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/covid-19-virtual-press-conference---20-july.pdf>