

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PRESENT SET-UP OF LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, language management in South Africa before the dawn of democracy in 1994 was discussed. In the preceding chapter, research on the reception of language management among the Xitsonga-speaking community was reported on. From both the research conducted and the literature reviewed it emerged that there was a need for the formation of a new language management body that would have no alliance with Apartheid and which would uphold democratic principles. Such a body would enjoy credibility in the eyes of the community it would serve.

The Language Plan Task Group was formed in December 1995. At the formation of the task group the Minister pointed out that LANGTAG was to be a policy advisory group to his Ministry (which is tasked with the Government's language matters). (LANGTAG: 1995)

Minister Ngubane (LANGTAG: 1995) emphasised that the National Language Plan would have to be a statement of South Africa's language-related needs and priorities and that such a plan should therefore set out to achieve at least the following goals:

- (i) All South Africans should have access to all spheres of South African society by developing and maintaining a level of spoken and written language which is appropriate for a range of contexts in the official language(s) of their choice.
- (ii) All South Africans should have access to the learning of languages other than their mother tongue.
- (iii) The African languages which had been marginalised by the policies of the past should be

elaborated and maintained.

(iv) Equitable and widespread language services should be established.

The final report was presented to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology on the 8th of August 1996. In the report, the Language Plan Task Group unveiled a plan for equal status for South Africa's 11 official languages.

The project - the first of its type to be undertaken on the continent of Africa was, in the words of its chairman, Dr. Neville Alexander (LANGTAG: 1996), a mountainous task:

*The problems are many but at the heart of the matter is how to undo fairly quickly the damage inflicted on the African languages by colonialism and apartheid for centuries. Resources, both financial and human, are also going to have a decisive impact on whether the government will be able to achieve its objective of language equity.*

The LANGTAG report was enthusiastically received by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

Among the report's proposals was that the nine African languages be used in "high-status functions such as parliamentary debates .... and for domestic business transactions." The report also identified the need to formulate guidelines for public servants to use languages other than English (and to some extent Afrikaans) in national, provincial and local government forums on a regular basis.

It called for the establishment of a nation-wide infrastructure of language services involving adequate numbers of well-trained translators, interpreters and terminologists as well as specialists, dictionaries and glossaries.

The plan called for an end to illiteracy and for the private sector to play a role in fostering multilingualism at the workplace.

Ngubane argued that helping foster multilingualism was pivotal to the country's scientific, economic and technological progress. Ngubane and the LANGTAG members debunked the popular myth that people cannot be trained in science or economics in African languages.

Besides the LANGTAG exercise, new language management structures were established.

In this chapter, the new structures that were established in order to manage language issues in democratic South Africa will be discussed.

The structures include the following:

- The Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB)
- The Provincial Language Committees
- Other structures

## **5.2 PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

The Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) was established under the Pan South African Language Board Act, 1995, mainly to provide for the recognition of multilingualism in the country, and to promote and develop the previously marginalised languages. (PANSALB: 1998)

### **5.2.2 Composition**

The first Pan South African Language Board was composed as follows:

Prof. N.C.P Golele: Chairperson  
Neville Alexander: Deputy Chairperson  
Ms. Z.K. Desai  
Prof. C.N. Marivate: Chief Executive Officer  
Dr. D.J. van Schalkwyk  
Ms. K. Mboweni-Marais  
Prof. M. Kunene  
Dr. L.T. du Plessis  
Ms. K. Heugh  
Ms. Q. Buthelezi  
Adv. P. Geldenhuys  
Mr. M.B. Kumalo  
Dr. A.M. Beukes

The Board was chosen after nominations were called from the public by a Senate Committee which was entrusted with the responsibility of forming this body. After receiving the nominations, the nominees were short-listed and interviewed (by the Senate Committee).

The chairperson was chosen by the Board members. The tenure of office for the Board is five years.

### **5.2.3 Mission statement**

The purpose of the Board is to promote multilingualism in South Africa by:

- creating the conditions for the development of, and the equal use of all official languages;
- fostering respect for and encouraging the use of other languages in the country;
- encouraging the best use of the country's linguistic resources, in order to enable South Africans to free themselves from all forms of linguistic discrimination, domination and division; and to enable them to exercise appropriate linguistic choices for their own well being as well as for national development. (PANSALB:1998)



### 5.2.4 The vision of the Board

The vision of the Board is to provide for the recognition, implementation and furtherance of multilingualism in the Republic of South Africa through the development of previously marginalised languages. (PANSALB: 1998)

### 5.2.5 Functions of the Board

The following are the functions of the Pan South African Language Board:

- (a) the making of recommendations with regard to any proposed or existing legislation, practice and policy dealing directly with language matters at any level of Government, and with regard to any proposed amendments to, or repeal or replacement of such legislation, practice and policy;
- (b) the making of recommendations to organs of state at all levels of Government where it considers such action advisable for the adoption of measures aimed at the promotion of multilingualism within the framework of the Constitution;
- (c) the active promotion of the awareness of the principle of multilingualism as a national resource by developing, administering and monitoring access, information and implementation programmes;
- (d) the active promotion of the development of previously marginalised languages by:
  - (i) developing, administering and monitoring access, information and implementation programmes; and
  - (ii) undertaking such studies for reporting on or relating to language development as it considers advisable in the exercise of its powers and the performance of its functions. (PANSALB:1998)

In addition to the main functions mentioned here, the PANSALB may exercise at its own discretion the following functions:

- (a) request any organ of state to supply it with information on any legislative, executive or administrative measures adopted by it relating to language policy and language practice

- (b) advise any organ of state on the implementation of any proposed or existing legislation, policy and practice, dealing directly or indirectly with language matters
- (c) the monitoring of the observance of any advice given in terms of (a) above
- (d) the issue of directives and the monitoring of language facilitation services
- (e) the investigation on its own initiative or on receipt of a written complaint of violations of language rights, language policy or language in practice in terms of section 11 of the Act
- (f) the monitoring of the observance of the Constitutional provisions regarding the use of languages, the monitoring of the contents and observance of any existing or new legislation, practice and policy dealing directly with language matters at any level, assistance with or and the monitoring of the formulation of programmes and policies aimed at fostering the equal use of and respect for the official languages and the making available of funds for these activities
- (g) establish, compile and maintain database, including but not limited to, database of all legislative measures, including the provisions of the Constitution or organ of state dealing directly or indirectly with language matters.

Activities that relate to the promotion and development of South African languages are carried out by the following subcommittees of the Board:

- Provincial Language Committees and Language Bodies;
- Status Language Planning;
- Language in Education;
- Translation and interpreting;
- Development of Literature and Previously Marginalised languages;
- Lexicography, Terminology and Place Names;
- Language Rights and Mediation

(PANSALB: 1998)

The Pan South African Language Board aims at redressing the imbalances of the past.

According to Msimang (1999), the Pan South African Language Board is not a replacement of

former Language Boards. The main functions of the former Language Boards were:

- To develop specific languages
- To recommend literature books to be prescribed for school use.

PANSALB does overlap with the functions of the Language Boards.

PANSALB does not do the hands on functions. They are left to agencies like the Provincial Language Committees and the still to be established National Language Bodies.

The bodies that will do the hands on jobs will be initiated and funded by PANSALB.

However, there have been criticisms levelled against the Board just a few weeks after its inauguration. In a letter to the Editor of "The Sowetan"; Siboniso Edward Sambo made the following observation:

*A number of well-known and respected personalities were nominated to serve on the Board's main committee and each was assigned to head a subcommittee entrusted with a number of tasks. Various subcommittees have been conducting workshops in an attempt to achieve 'the widest possible representation of interests'. I attended a workshop of the subcommittee on the development of language at Unisa. After that workshop something became clearer to me: some of these workshops are merely 'face serving exercise' in the name of consultation.*

*Some of the people in charge seem to have their own hidden agendas which they try at all cost to push down other people's throats.*

*This became apparent during the plenary session, after a group discussion commission. On presenting the report of one of the commissions, the reporter for that particular commission reported on something that was not agreed on during the discussions.*



*When commission members expressed their dissent the commission's reporter vehemently defended his stance rather than acceding to what members felt was the true reflection of what transpired during the discussions. Such an action is not justifiable in an open and democratic society. The whole exercise made me realise that at times consultation does not necessarily guarantee that the sentiments of the people on the ground will be upheld. (The Sowetan: 12 May 1996)*

It has been established that the meeting referred to in this letter was a LANGTAG meeting, and not of PANSALB.

This observation was made very early in the operational stages of the Board. This letter should have sent a signal to the Board that:

- There are very high anticipations by the public
- Its activities would be closely monitored.

The Board's response to this observation is noted from the minutes of the portfolio committee on Arts, Culture, Language, Science and Technology of the 23 May 1996.

The Board agreed that it was important to keep the public informed about its activities; this especially in view of the dissatisfaction expressed through the press by members of the public with the constitution (and activities of the Board).

The highlights of the Board are that:

- The Board is playing a proactive and reactive role in promoting multilingualism as prescribed by the Act, in the process it is also doing its best to protect the language rights of individuals and groups. It already has a number of submissions from groups and individuals on alleged violation of language rights, such as the Committee for marginalised languages which represents the minority languages viz. Tshivenda,



Xitsonga, Siswati and siNdebele, and the concerned Indian citizen campaign. The Board is also investigating alleged violation of language rights against the SABC, the Free State Department of Education, the Free State Tender Board, the State Tender Board and the University of Cape Town.

- The Board has also made recommendations in connection with various Acts of Parliament among others the Act pertaining to the revision of legislation regarding the “Woordeboek van die Afrikaans Taal” and the “National Lexicography Units” Bill of 1996. A circular letter stressing that all legislation concerning language matters must be presented to the Board.
- The Board has approached the Constitutional court with regard to the apparent reduction of powers of the PANSLAB in terms of the New Constitution in comparison with the Interim Constitution.
- It mandated two members to attend a meeting of the Education Portfolio Committee of the Gauteng Legislature at which the language policy of that legislature was discussed.

### 5.2.6 Funding

The Board was constituted by an Act of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The Board is funded by the government.

The same Act provides some degree of autonomy to the Board by clauses 4 (2) and (3)

*"No organ of state and no member or employee of an organ of state or any other person shall interfere with the Board, any member thereof appointed under section 10 in the exercise, carrying out or performance of its, his or her powers, duties and functions. All organs of state shall afford the Board such assistance as may reasonably be required for the protection of the Board's independence, impartiality, dignity and effectiveness in the exercise,*

*carrying out and performance of the Board's powers, duties and functions."*

A concern was nonetheless raised by the Board whether the powers of PANSALB were not being wilted in the Constitution. In chapter 9 of the Constitution (under "State Institution supporting Constitutional Democracy") the Pan South African Language Board is not listed, and the Board wonders if some of its powers will not be taken over by some other bodies.

### **5.2.7 Evaluation of PANSALB's role in promoting Xitsonga**

The intent of the Pan South African Languages Board in promoting Xitsonga can be seen from its vision which is to promote and develop languages which were previously marginalised. Xitsonga is one of such languages. In order to promote and develop Xitsonga, the Pan South African Languages Board shall have to implement programmes that are biased in favour of such languages. The naming of streets, important residential places and events, etc., in such languages will have to be done.

However, it has to be pointed out that the Board has not yet directly impacted on the Xitsonga language. It has not yet established the National Language Bodies that will deal with specific language issues.

## **5.3 NORTHERN PROVINCE PROVINCIAL LANGUAGE COMMITTEE**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

The Provincial Language Council hereinafter referred to as the PLC was established in accordance with Act no. 59 of 1995: The Pan South African Language Board Act of 1995, Article 8(8) (a) and (b) The article stipulates that:

"(8) The Board shall in the manner prescribed by the Gazette and Provincial Gazette establish -

- (a) A Provincial Language Committee in each province to advise it on any language matter in or affecting any or any part thereof where no such provincial committee exists or where an existing provincial language committee has jurisdiction only with respect to the official languages of a particular province and such a committee is, in the view of the Board, sufficiently representative of the languages used in the province that the committee shall be deemed to have been established in terms of this subsection for as long as it remains so representative;
- (b) a language body to advise it on any particular language, sign language or augmentative and alternative communication if no such language body exists or if an existing language body does not serve its purpose: Provided that if such a body exists it shall be deemed to have been established in terms of this subsection."

### **5.3.2 Composition**

Five people were appointed to represent each of the six languages declared provincial languages i.e. Xitsonga, Tshivenda, English, Afrikaans, IsiNdebele and Sepedi. The main committee comprised 30 members. (The committee has since been down-sized to thirteen in terms of the PASALB Act). Members of the PLC were democratically elected in the province. Nominations were called for through the media and the ministry used these nominations to create the PLC.

The inauguration of the PLC was to have been on the 22 February 1997. Due to unforeseen circumstances it was postponed. During the said inauguration day the MEC for Education in the Northern Province would also have announced the chairperson and vice-chairperson to the committee. This supports the findings in the questionnaire that politicians at times become involved in language management matters even though there are people tasked to perform this function.



The five members that represented Xitsonga were the following:

Prof. N. C. P. Golele

Ms. S. Masunga

Mr. R. Masinge

Mr. G. S. Mayevu

Mr. N. Shiluvani

The committee, basing it on experiences with the previous Language Board where the chairperson and vice-chairperson were nominated by the respective governments disputed the idea. The committee then elected a chairperson (Prof. A. Mawasha, and the vice-chairperson: Prof. A. Milubi).

The secretary, as in the previous Language Board, was provided by the Department of Education. This is one decision that drew criticisms for the Language Board, where it was said that the Government acted as both referee and player in the running of the Language Board. This points to the vigilance of the present committees against government intervention in matters of the Language Board.

This Committee was inaugurated on the 31st May 1997.

The committee established language specific subcommittees. Nominations were invited through the media.

### **5.3.3 Duties and Functions**

In his inauguration speech the chairperson of the Northern Province Provincial Language Council highlighted the functions of the PLC as follows:



*Endeavour to promote growth, development and use of all the languages in the province and be guided by the stipulations contained in the constitution of the country and in the provisions of the Pan South African Language Board. To this end, the PLC will involve itself in all efforts aimed at status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning both nationally and provincially.*

The PLC will oversee and participate in such language related areas as:

- (a) liaising with writers association or guilds and publishing houses with a view to ensuring the highest possible standards in the production of literature and language materials in all the languages for use in our schools and colleges;
- (b) screening, evaluating and grading of manuscripts and prescribed books in all the languages and advising the relevant Division in the Ministry of Education accordingly;
- (c) initiating and encouraging the production of books and materials for such vital areas as ABET, EDUCARE, Braille and Sign language;
- (d) forging links with language committees in other provinces, research institutes in order to be up-to-date and in tune with language and language related activities in South Africa and elsewhere.

Work in close consultation with the Ministry of Education and the relevant national structures, the PLC will energise expertise in such highly specialised areas as legal terminology, translations, interpretations, terminology in the media (TV, radio and print media) and compilation of different types of dictionaries.

The PLC will work in close co-operation with the ministry of Education, and teacher's

organisations in language matters in the domain of education.

In order for the PLC to function effectively and to serve the province adequately, a budget is required. Urgent consultation with the Ministry of Education in this regard seems imperative.

As already indicated, members of the PLC were chosen democratically in the province. Nominations were called for through the media, and the Ministry used these nominations to create the PLC: Members are all experts in various areas of language and this criterion were used in the creation of the PLC. Most of the members are not employees of the Ministry of Education. This latter point makes the PLC an autonomous body which will be able to conduct research and advise the Ministry of Education and the province objectively and frankly.

In an advertisement calling for nominations of language specific committees that appeared in the "Sunday Times", Sunday 15th of September 1996, placed by the Northern Province Language Council one of the requirements listed was that nominees should have knowledge of, inter alia: "Orthography, spelling rules and literature analysis", etc.

And among the services these people will be recruited to render are:

.... "to monitor the proper use of literature...."

.... to be "able to analyse and evaluate literature."

This advert raised a concern that was registered by Ms Khethiwe Marais, who is a member of the Pan South African Language Board. In a letter to the chairperson of PANSALB, she writes:

"The problem with the above stated issues is that these were specifically the problems that people had with the previous ethnic Language Boards established under the previous dispensation.

People felt that they were prescriptive with regard to orthographic rules, and

literature and that actually their power to prescribe literature opened itself to various abuses and corruption practices, where they would prescribe one another's books, and books that supported the status quo then.

There is also a perception that these Language Boards were too involved in policing the languages rather than facilitating their development. The concern at the moment with regard to this service that will be rendered by the specific Language Committees of PLC, is that of "Monitoring the proper usage" of the language. The question might also be asked as to what the "proper usage" of the language is and who prescribes this "proper usage" of the language."

The language specific Committees are not operational at the moment. This is so because the language specific Committees were not constituted according to the requirements and prescription of the PANSALB.

#### **5.4 The Xitsonga Language Committee**

The Xitsonga Language Committee was to have been formed under the auspices of the Northern Province Language Committee. The **Minutes of the Bosberaad of the Provincial Language Committee** (1996), show how planning for the formation of such a structure was done. The following decisions from the minutes were taken as part of the planning process:

*“...the designation Language Sub-Committee (be changed into)  
e.g. Xitsonga Language Committee...”*

According to the minutes mentioned here, the Xitsonga Language Committee was to comprise at most five members drawn from the Provincial Language Council. In order to be co-opted onto the Committee, a proven record in language matters in important domains such as writing, research, Bible translation, journalism, legal matters, medical or paramedical matters was a



requirement. Structuring the Xitsonga Language Committee in terms of needs and domains seemed the only way of ensuring coverage and viability in terms of expertise and service. (Minutes of the Provincial Language Committee: 1996).

Unfortunately, the Xitsonga Language Committee did not take off as it was not constituted in terms of the PANSLAB Act. A new Xitsonga Language Body is likely to be formed in future in terms of subsections 8(8) (a) and (b) of the Pan South African Language Board Act no. 59 which is quoted by PANSLAB (1998:7) as follows:

*“...a language body... ‘to advise on any particular language, sign language or augmentative and alternative communication if no such language body exists or if an existing language body does not serve its purpose.’”*

The tasks of the Xitsonga Language Body would be to advise on Xitsonga lexicography and orthography, recommend literary works to be used in schools etc. The tasks of the Xitsonga Language Body are likely to be similar to those that the pre-1994 Xitsonga Language Board performed. So there will be a link between the activities of the Xitsonga Language Board and the Xitsonga Language Body except that the chances of state interference in the new Body are minimal as per the Act of the PANSALB.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

This Chapter described the present set-up with regard to language management in South Africa. Bodies that are responsible for language management were discussed. It was shown in this Chapter that the central body responsible for language management is the Pan South African Language Board as has been formed through the PANSALB Act.

The fact that the PANSALB was formed through a Constitutional Act gives the Board legitimacy and clout. In addition, democratic processes were followed in the formation of the



Board (and for the first time the public participated in the process of forming a language management board). Also, the Act stipulates that no organ of the state should interfere with the Board or any member of the Board as he or she carries out the powers, duties and functions of the Board. This shows that unlike the previous Language Boards, the independence and impartiality of the Board is recognised. Unlike the pre-1994 language boards, the arrangements in place are such that chances of PANSALB being manipulated by the government are minimal. This makes the PANSALB more credible than the pre-1994 language boards.

PANSALB seems set to address the imbalance with regard to languages that has existed in South Africa for a long time. One of the aims of the Board is to promote and develop previously marginalised languages. Early signals of the intentions of the Board were the election of Prof. N.C.P Golele, a female person whose mother tongue is one of the marginalised and minority languages - Xitsonga. It is also worth noting that unlike with the pre-1994 Language Boards whose chairpersons were elected by the homeland governments, the chairperson of the PANSALB is elected by the Board itself.

The PANSALB has the opportunity to grow and realise its goals as it is acceptable in the eyes of the public. However, a lot of hard work has to be done. The task of addressing language imbalances that has existed for a long time in the past is huge.