

# **CROSS-GENDER AND CROSS- GENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN SIYABUSWA**

BY

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Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:

**MAGISTER ARTIUM**

in

Applied Language Studies in the Department of Afrikaans at the

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA,  
PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA**

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November 2007



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## ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study is the difference in patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication across gender and generational groups, specifically between members of traditional and urban communities. These differences, it is argued, are linked to differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, views, etc., i.e. cultural differences, between the groups. Misunderstanding in such communicative interaction arises because people are unaware of the role of cultural differences in the construction and interpretation of texts/cases of language use, for example, the gender differences in the way men and women from different age groups and different habitats (rural vs. urban) can generate misunderstanding. In the Ndebele community, there is a marked diversity in communication patterns and practices by gender. These differences in communication patterns between men and women are socially constructed and are related to power. For example, women are not expected to maintain eye contact with their male counterparts in mutual conversation. Where they disregard these communicative norms, it would be regarded as socially unacceptable and such behaviour would be regarded as disrespectful by the traditional members of the society. Non-verbal behaviour may also impede effective communication because there are different systems of using and understanding gesture, posture, silence, touch and physical appearance in different gender, age and rural/urban communities.



## OPSOMMING

Die probleem wat in hierdie studie ondersoek is, is die verskil in verbale en nie-verbale kommunikasie tussen geslag- en leeftydsgroepe met spesifieke verwysing na lede van tradisionele en stedelike gemeenskappe. Die verskille, word geredeneer, is gekoppel aan verskille in waardes, houdings, geloof, sienings, ensovoorts, dit wil sê ten opsigte van kulturele verskille tussen die groepe. Misverstande binne sulke gevalle van kommunikatiewe interaksie ontstaan omdat mense onbewus is van die rol wat kulturele verskille in die konstruksie en interpretasie van tekste/sake in taalgebruik speel. Byvoorbeeld: geslagsverskille ten opsigte van die wyse waarop mans en vrouens van verskillende ouderdomsgroepe en verskillende omgewings (platteland teenoor stedelik) kommunikeer, kan misverstande tot gevolg hê. In die Ndebele-gemeenskap, byvoorbeeld, is daar 'n baie duidelike verskil in die kommunikasiepatroon en -gebruik van die verskillende geslagte. Die verskillende kommunikasiepatrone tussen mans en vrouens is sosiaal geskep en hou verband met mag. So word vrouens, byvoorbeeld, nie veronderstel om oogkontak met hulle manlike eweknieë te hê in 'n gesprek nie. Waar hierdie kommunikasienorme geïgnoreer word, word sulke gedrag as minagtend beskou deur die tradisionele lede van die gemeenskap. Nie-verbale gedrag kan ook effektiewe kommunikasie belemmer omdat daar verskillende wyses bestaan vir die gebruik en interpretasie van gebare, liggaamshouding, stilte, aanraking en fisiese voorkoms by die verskillende geslagte, leeftydsgroepe en plattelandse/stedelike gemeenskappe.



## **KEYWORDS**

Cross-gender  
Cross-generational communication  
Culture  
Cultural identity  
Cultural stereotypes  
Gender relations  
Miscommunication  
Non-verbal communication  
Role of culture  
Traditional community  
Urban community  
Verbal communication



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the beginning of this study I never thought I would make it, but the following people to whom I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude, made everything seem possible:

- Professor Vic Webb, my supervisor, for your patience, guidance, friendship and encouragement.
- Professor Hein Willimse, the head of Afrikaans department, for your patience and ever accommodating attitude.
- His Majesty King Ndzunza Mabhoko, tribal authority for granting me permission to do research within the Siyabuswa community.
- Mr Jimmy “Mopapa” Matjhiga for your assistance beyond your call of duty.
- Mahlatse my little daughter who used to prepare some refreshment for me and scratch my back while I was in the study room. Your company really kept me going “Baby girl”.
- Mr Abram Enos Dhladhla, rector of Ndebele College of Education, who is my boss, friend and confidante. You taught me to make a distinction between pleasure and business. You have been my source of inspiration when the days were dark.
- My friends and colleagues from Ndebele College of Education for their words of inspiration.
- My dearest mother for your love, encouragement, and for always being supportive, and believed in me whenever my spirit was down.
- My family, for their love, support, encouragement and understanding.



- Mr Aubrey Mabitsela, for words of encouragement, your inspirational daily prayers and generally lifting up my spirit.
- Mr Kodupo Japhtha Maphatane, my precious friend for your generosity and ever accommodative attitude.
- Above all, I would like to thank my Heavenly Father for His love and guidance without which, this dissertation would not have been possible.





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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

VCP: Verbal Communication Process

L2: Second language

LO: Life Orientation

DoE: Department of Education



DECLARATION

STUDENT NO: 21328910

I hereby declare that this is my own original work and that all sources and references have, to the best of my knowledge, been accurately acknowledged. This document has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any academic institution in order to obtain an academic qualification.

.....

SIGNATURE

.....

DATE



## CHAPTER ONE

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

#### 1.1 Background

The problem of ineffective communication between male and female members of traditional and urban communities in the Siyabuswa area warrants research because there are many examples of miscommunication between the members of these groups. Examples of inter-generational and inter-gender misunderstanding are:

- At a family function, a young boy was smoking in the presence of the elderly. His behaviour was viewed in a serious light as it displayed an element of disrespect, especially since smoking by young boys is strictly unacceptable, particularly if they have not yet gone through the initiation process.
- A young girl at a graveyard insisted on entering at the gate without observing the sequence that is strictly followed when mourners are entering the cemetery. Customarily, all males should enter before females.
- A local counsellor, who happened to be female and who was to preside as a programme director at a community gathering where the local headman was also invited, wanted to introduce the headman and thus intended to speak before him. The scene almost turned ugly and she was stopped when she wanted to begin talking.

Traditional society tends to resist change and has little tolerance for the behaviour of persons from modern society. Members of urban communities, on the other hand, do not want to adhere to the expectations of the elderly and the members of the rural community, who still preserve the traditional patterns of inter-action and communication.

Miscommunication between members of the same language community can lead to misunderstanding and division, and has the potential for conflict within the community. It is in the interest of community members to understand each other and to be able to communicate effectively with one another. In this study, I intend to look at ineffective communication between members of different generations and gender groups in the



Siyabuswa area, and in this way hope to contribute to bridging the gaps between these communities, so that the community can retain (or regain) its coherence and unity, their sense of togetherness. These communities have the right to exist meaningfully.

## **1.2 Analyzing the problem**

Given the framework for verbal communication developed by Webb (LCC 713, 2004), two of the factors that co-determine the construction and interpretation of a text are the psychological context (attitudes, expectations) and the socio-cultural context (stereotypes, beliefs, values, etc). These contexts contribute to the selection of linguistic forms, textual forms, rhetorical devices and non-and paralinguistic behaviour, as well as to the interpretation of these forms, devices, strategies and behavioural patterns.

Observations of verbal interaction between members of the groups to be studied in this mini-dissertation confirm, particularly, the role of the socio-cultural context: miscommunication occurs mainly between members of different gender and generation groups, and between persons from rural as opposed to urban groups. Cases in point are:

1. Women in the Ndebele-speaking community, for example, traditionally do not maintain eye contact with their male counterparts when engaged in a conversation (non-linguistic cues). It is socially unacceptable for females, also from the modernized group, not to obey these socially constructed norms, and the traditional members in the society will regard such behaviour as disrespectful. Such rules are socially created and are related to power, as Lakoff, 1981 (quoted in Cameron, 2002: 243) argued: “women are systematically denied access to power on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behaviour along with other aspects of their behaviour”.
2. The same applies to communication between different age groups: It will be perceived as rude and disrespectful to a traditional man who is greeted by a child who simply says “hi”.
3. The same phenomenon is apparent as regards linguistic choices such as the choice of address terms, rhetorical devices and paralinguistic and non-linguistic forms. For



example, *umakoti* (bride) is not expected to use her father-in-law's personal name. If her father-in-law's name is "Eyes", (*Amehlo*) she is expected to use the word "Amakhangelo" which is a *hlonipha* (respect term) name for "eyes", or she must substitute the name with something else with a similar meaning. The practice is even more complicated in the royal family because women are forbidden to mention the names of their husbands and their fathers-in-law.

Miscommunication is thus clearly linked to cultural features such as beliefs, values, attitudes and stereotypes. Social groups express their cultural identities differently. Modernized persons, traditional men and women, older and younger groups, etc., communicate most effectively when they understand the "invisible rules of each gender" (Norton: 2001: 2). Each group is a "culture" in itself. Men and women behave according to two separate sets of rules and they will interpret each other's behaviour according to these rules. As Kramarae (1981: 1) points out: the "speech of men is seen as powerful, authoritative and confident because it is full of instructions and commands", and they interrupt women more often during conversations. Males within the traditional group find it very uncomfortable to be addressed by a female in community gatherings.

Miscommunication is thus mainly linked to cultural differences between the groups, and how their members view life, and talk. If people are not familiar with the cultural rules and conventions of other groups, there is, potentially, misunderstanding.

The aim of the study is to get a better understanding of cross-gender and cross-generational patterns of communications and cultural differences amongst Ndebele speaking persons in Siyabuswa, and to identify possible reasons for miscommunication and possible solutions for it. The study will focus mainly on communication across the boundaries of age, gender, and habitat (rural as opposed to urban).



### **1.3 Research Setting**

The research was conducted in an area called Siyabuswa in the former KwaNdebele homeland. Siyabuswa is approximately 120 km north east of Pretoria. The community is characterised by the following elements:

- It is predominantly Ndebele-speaking
- It is semi-urban
- It is inhabited by different groups, namely N. Sotho-, Tswana-, Zulu-, and Tsonga-speaking people as compared to other areas in the former KwaNdebele homeland
- Ndebele-speaking people who still hold their culture and tradition in high esteem
- Young and upcoming Ndebele-speaking persons, i.e. from the age of 18 who have been exposed to different settings, through education, intermarriage and socialization which have had an influence on their culture and language. This widens the gap between the young and the old.

All these elements provide fertile ground for conflict between males and females, young and older amongst the Ndebele-speaking people.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The study will pose the following questions:

- What is the role of socio-cultural factors in verbal communication?
- What are the cultural differences between rural and urban, gender and age groups in the Ndebele community?
- To what degree and in what manner does miscommunication occur between members of the groups to be studied?
- How can these conflicts be managed and addressed?



## **1.5 Research methodology**

To deal with the research questions, I will (a) consult the relevant literature; (b) make observations as a participant; and (c) and conduct interviews.

*NOTE: In order to undertake the research, permission had to be obtained from the Chief of the Ndebele. (Letter of application/permission added as an addendum.)*

### **(a) The literature survey**

The study involved extensive reading on the subject. Literature study provides an important basis for the study of patterns of communication across culture, gender and age. Webb (LCC 713, 2004), who provides the framework on the verbal communication process, forms an integral part of this study, and Tannen (1990), discusses men and women conversation styles, which also forms the basis of this study.

### **(b) Observations**

During the observation stage, key role players in the community, namely people known to be traditionalists and people who are proponents of change, especially youth, will be identified. These participants will be observed at selected community meetings and gatherings where cultural practices are performed, to gain first-hand information and experience. Possible meetings include: traditional wedding celebrations, and welcoming sessions for initiates. Notes will be made on patterns of communication and on cases of miscommunication throughout these observations.

### **(c) Structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with people known to be traditionalists as well as young males and females (both rural and urban) in the Siyabuswa area. Participants will be selected randomly. Information and examples of miscommunication will be collected. Where permission is granted, information will be tape-recorded. Predetermined questions will be posed. (See attached interview schedule).





Individual topical interviews with selected informants will also be undertaken, focusing on the following events:

- Situations in which men's speech is traditionally more acceptable, and in which it is strange or unconventional to see a woman speaking
- Situations in which women's speeches are disregarded by men
- Situations in which women's speeches are forbidden

Towards the end of the data collection stage, a random selection of focus group interviews will be held. This will be directed at rural and urban Ndebele youth from the age of 18 to 35. These interviews will be used in order to obtain opinions, attitudes and beliefs about intra-community verbal communication.

### **1.6 Structure of the mini-dissertation**

The research report will be organized as follows:

- **Chapter 2**

Literature review and the conceptual framework

- **Chapter 3**

Research methodology

- **Chapter 4**

Description and analysis of data

- **Chapter 5**

The findings of the research will be used to answer the research questions of the study and suggestions will be made for further research on these problems.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature on problems of gendered and inter-generational communication. This information will provide the conceptual framework for the research. The framework consists of a discussion of the concepts that are relevant to this study and with the question how culture co-determines verbal communication. I will therefore discuss the concepts *communication*, *verbal communication process*, *culture*, *cultural stereotype*, etc.

#### 2.2 Communication

According to Cleary and Harran (2005: 2), the term *communication* is derived from the Latin word *communicare*, which means ‘to make common’. When you communicate, you “create common understanding between yourself and other people”. Without communication, it would be impossible for people to relate to others. By using common symbols one is able to interact with other people and make oneself understood (Cleary and Harran, 2005: 2).

LeBaron (2003: 1) points out that “all communication is cultural (see Chapter One). We do not always communicate in the same way from day to day, since factors like context and individual personality interact with the variety of cultural influences we have internalized that influence our choices in life”. Communication is interactive, so an important influence on its effectiveness is our social and cultural relationship with others. Do they hear and understand what we are trying to say? Are they listening well? Are we listening well in



response? Do their responses show that they understand the words and the meanings behind the words we have chosen (LeBaron: 2001: 1)? For the purpose of this study, the answers to these questions will give some clues about communication within the Ndebele communities. Turney and Sitler (2002: 1) explore the process of communication with reference to the concept of “what we say and how we say it”, and they argue that “talking, like walking, is something we do without stopping to question how we are doing it. When we say something, we usually feel we are just talking naturally, but what we say and how we say it are chosen from a great range of possibilities” (Turney and Sitler, 2002: 6). Others react to our choices just as they react to the clothes we wear. “Clothes provide signs of whether or not the wearer regards the occasion as formal or casual. Everything that is said must be said in some way, in some tone of voice, at some rate of speed, and with some intonation and volume. We may consider what to say when speaking, but rarely do we consider how to say it unless the situation is very emotionally charged. The challenge is that even with all the good will at the exposure of people who are communicating, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators” (Turney and Sitler, 2002: 6).

In order to analyze and understand cross-gender and cross-generational communication and cases of miscommunication, it is necessary to consider the nature of the verbal communication process.



### 2.3 What is the Verbal Communication Process? (VPC)

According to Webb (2003: 6), the verbal communication process is an interactive, co-operative act involving the negotiation of meaning. Communication is co-determined by contextual factors such as:

- gender
- status and power
- age group
- cultural stereotypes and barriers

Participants in the verbal communication process, with and without power and positions in the communities of which they are members co-operate, and interact in the process of negotiating meaning. If they cannot negotiate meaning effectively, miscommunication will occur.

The understanding of the verbal communication process formulated by Fish (quoted in Webb, 2003: 7), points out that “reader of the text creates the text”. It means that the texts (or the messages) do not have one single ‘meaning’ or ‘interpretation’ and that there are possibilities of different interpretations when given different sets of contextual factors. The simple message model of communication between persons of different gender, and persons of different age groups assumes that the text contains:

- “all the information required by the hearer (reader) to understand the communicative intent of the speaker/writer,
- does not give explicit recognition of the essential role of the context in both the production and the interpretation of the text” (Webb, 2003: 7).

Within this context, the view of the verbal communication process has the following implications:



“Receivers (readers/hearers) are not passive recipients of ‘messages’ in a communicative event. On the contrary, they are as active as writers/speakers” (Webb, 2003: 7).

Ndoleriire (in Webb and Kembo-Sure, 2003: 275) points out that communication amongst people who differ culturally may result in a breakdown, as the differences function as ‘noise’. There are several socio-cultural practices that could contribute to ‘noise’, thus derailing the communication process. For instance, within the traditional Ndebele community, miscommunication can occur when children are greeting their elders while standing. Instead, they should kneel or sit down. In an interaction involving other ethnic groups, or modernized persons as in the case of the Siyabuswa area where some of these practices do not exist, part of the message could be lost because of the reaction and confusion arising from different modes of encounter and interaction (Ndoleriire in Webb and Kembo-Sure, 2000: 271).

#### **2.4 Factors which co-determine the verbal communication process**

The diagram below is an illustration for discussing the nine factors that determine the functioning of the verbal communication process (VCP) according to Webb (2003: 11). While Hymes (quoted in Wardhaugh 1988: 242) has proposed an ethnographic framework which takes into account the various factors that are involved in speaking with an acronym SPEAKING+T. I wanted to discuss the two frameworks together and indicate similarities in some areas.





sensitivity to and awareness of the nine factors outlined above. The diagram above only represents the first half of the verbal communication process, that is, the text- production phase. The verbal communication process will also include the text interpretation phase.

The factors in the above diagram are arranged in a hierarchical relationship. The framework also acknowledges that the outcome of the verbal communication process is unpredictable, since the process is determined by many variables” (Webb, 2003: 11). The above diagram’s logic is that the contextual factors, namely: the situation, psycho-context, socio-cultural context and the background knowledge co-determine the context of communication amongst the persons of different gender and persons of different age groups. This is also applicable to some of the factors Hymes’ SPEAKING+T mnemonic, which might contribute to a breakdown in communication.

### **2.4.1 Contextual variables**

There are four contextual variables which can provide fundamental contexts in the communication process as indicated below.

#### **2.4.1.1 The situation**

Webb (2003: 11) defines *situation* as “locality (physical place and physical organization of participants: in a classroom, at dinner), situation type (formal lecture, debate or topic of conversation (e.g. certain topics, such as sex, can be taboo in particular situations)”. While Hymes refers to *setting* as “the time and place, i.e. the concrete physical circumstances in which speech takes place”. In text construction, the situational factors can co-determine who says what, when, how and under what circumstances. For instance, some settings may require the participants to use specific language, e.g. ritual language at a funeral, in order to



serve a specific purpose. If the participants are in an environment which calls for them to speak softly or not to speak at all (Dlomo, 2003: 16), for example, at a funeral procession for Ndebele-speaking people, people are expected to speak in soft tones and not to raise their voices. Secondly, the situation may dictate when and in what circumstances specific non-verbal behaviour is required or not allowed. For instance, how far apart people should stand while talking, whom can be touched and where, when to look directly at others in a conversation and when to look away. In the traditional Ndebele culture, for example, a woman may not dish out food for her husband while standing; she is expected to kneel down.

#### **2.4.1.2 Psychological context**

Since the verbal communication process is an interactive, co-operative process, it is important to consider the identities of the participants as well as their attitudes, beliefs and expectations. According to Webb (2001: 15), the effectiveness of the VCP is often dependent on whether discourse participants have the same opinions with regard to the topic of the conversations and the measure of identification between addresser and addressee. In the Ndebele community, for instance, there are possibilities of failure in communication between traditional and urban communities. Communication breakdown between parents and children may occur because they do not share the same opinions with regard to the topic of the conversation, or an “emotional distance has developed between parents and children” (Webb, 2001: 15). Language can be used, as we know, to create distance between addressor and addressee, for example “*Bayede*” which is used by subordinates as an address term to the king.





### 2.4.1.3 Socio-cultural context

Webb (2003: 17) points out that “a group of people can constitute a cultural community. In such cases they are generally said to have a particular socio-cultural identity”. Individuals belong to a particular socio-cultural community, e.g. Ndebele communities may differ socio-culturally along the dimension of geographical origin, gender, habitat (rural and urban), origin and age. These groups may be distinguishable from each other by various patterns of behaviour, for example, modes of dress, presentation of each other, linguistic choices, behaviour and forms of address which are factors in miscommunication and misunderstanding. Hymes indicated that traditionally “speech has been described in terms of two participants, a speaker who transmits a message and a listener who receives it”. Hymes argues that there are at least four participant roles, namely, addressor, speaker, addressee and hearer and that while conversation may require only an addressor and an addressee, other speech acts require different configurations Hymes (quoted in Wardhaugh, 1998: 243). An urban woman, who may not know some of the practices of the traditional woman, may not bow her head or kneel down when greeting her rural father-in-law or someone senior in the community. The woman will be guided by norms within her own community about what is desirable behaviour. Such differences in cultural behavioural norms can then lead to miscommunication. Socio-cultural context justifies the opinion that ‘when people communicate they are not only busy exchanging information. They are at the same time interacting socially, as people with specific socio-cultural identities, and with specific points of view, beliefs, attitudes, norms and values’ (Webb, 1994).



#### 2.4.1.4 Background knowledge

Webb (2003: 21) points out that “background knowledge is, to a large extent, culturally determined.” Therefore, it is essential to understand the communicative intent of the speaker as the “interpretation is not primarily a linguistic act. The interpretation is a cognitive, psychological, social and cultural act” (Webb, 2003: 21). This implies that, the basic requirement of understanding text is not knowledge of the words, grammatical units, and grammatical rules. For example, the statement “*E wena msana hampa*” (you young boy just leave) by a father to his son appears to be highly confrontational and give someone pressure to keep quiet, on its own would hardly make sense to a young boy who does not have a background knowledge of his father temper. The statement carries a communicative intent, and one that is reliant on background knowledge. Effective communication is thus affected by the degree of a shared knowledge between addressor and addressee.

#### 2.4.2 Norms

*Norms* are practical guidelines for appropriate behaviour. Both Hymes (quoted in Wardhaugh 1998: 242) and Webb (2003: 11) agree that it is common that the ethnography of speaking will describe the normative structure of all the speech acts and events of a given speech community. Norms are associated with specific behaviours in speaking and how these may be viewed by someone who does not share them. For example, in the Ndebele community it might appear strange to an elderly person if a child receives a gift with one hand.

Norms are not always adhered to and each community has its own rules for interpreting rule-breaking (Saville-Troike, 1982: 154), as in the case of the Siyabuswa community. All



communities have an underlying set of non-linguistic rules which govern when, how and how often speech occurs. Thus in the Ndebele community it might appear unacceptable for a young boy to argue with an elderly person. Major problems can arise when participants assume that they share the same norms (see Chapter Four).

### **2.4.3 Textual resources**

Four types of resources with which texts are constructed can be identified, as indicated below.

#### **2.4.3.1 Linguistic resources**

Webb (2003: 24) states that “the notion *linguistic resources* refer to the languages available to an addressor, and the grammatical units a language user knows”. Hymes (quoted in Wardhaugh 1988: 243) describes instrumentalities as “the choice of oral, written and telegraphic or other mediums of transmission of speech”. This could be a dialect, code or register that is chosen. It is equally appropriate for the youth to use different styles or slang in their interaction. In the Ndebele community, another determiner in the choice of linguistic elements is commonly the role-relationship between the participants. For example, it would be perceived as inappropriate for a young boy to communicate with an elderly person in Tsotsitaal. Subject area or topic in most situations is the determinant of the choice of a language. For example, in the ritual practices of the Ndebele community, the choice of language is commonly isiNdebele. In the interpretation of a text, receivers (listeners, readers) interpret texts on the basis of their knowledge of the available linguistic resources. Subject area or topic in most situations is the determinant of the choice of a language.



### 2.4.3.2 Discourse resources, genre

According to Webb (2001: 25), *discourse resources* comprise the principles of discourse, discourse rules and discourse particles. Webb (2001) refers to the American philosopher of language, Grice, who identifies four maxims in his ‘principle of co-operation’, namely

- quality = the addressee assumes that the addressor provide the correct amount of information - not too much, not too little
- Quantity = the addressee assumes that the addressor speaks the truth
- Relevance = assumed that the information provided is relevant
- Manner = the assumption is that discourse participants want to co-operate with one another.

According to Webb (2003: 25), *genre* refers to “text forms, and implies that speakers select from different types of texts for conveying their communicative intentions”. In the Ndebele community certain genres are institutionalized, for example at a traditional wedding.

Hymes (quoted in Wardhaugh, 1988: 243) points out that language can be appropriate to a certain genre, for example sermons, riddles and praise songs. Some genres in the Ndebele community are performed for specific purposes in specific places with particular participants e.g. in a welcoming ceremony for the initiates. However, in a communicative act these principles are often transgressed. For example, it is expected that these discourse rules as mentioned above will be strictly adhered to within the traditional Ndebele community when the youth are interacting with the older members of the community unlike if the conversation is between the youth themselves. In some cases these rules are ignored on purpose.



### 2.4.3.3 Rhetorical resources

Webb (2001: 26) points out that the term *rhetorical resources* refer to the elements from which a speaker chooses in order to make her /his message more effective. These devices are divided into prosodic (pitch, tone, emphasis, volume and tempo), segmental elements (voice quality and sound length) and lexical elements (repetition, metaphor, etc.). Hymes refers to *key* as “the tone, manner, or spirit in which a particular message is conveyed: light-hearted, serious, precise, mocking and so on”. The key of an interaction may also be marked nonverbally by certain kinds of behaviour, e.g. gesture and posture.

### 2.4.3.4 Paralinguistic and non-linguistic resources

Paralinguistic features include intonation, stress, pace, volume and silence. For example, a pitched tone in the Ndebele culture is consistent with shouting at or scolding. Similarly, silence could mean different things to different people. Ndebele culture promotes silence especially when an elderly person is reprimanding or scolding a child. The child is not expected to talk back when she is being reprimanded. The raising of a voice by a child who is being reprimanded by a parent or an elderly person may cause upset, resulting in a breakdown in the communication process (see Chapter Four).

In the case of non-linguistic communication, information is imparted without using language. Examples include a smile, wink, gesture or posture.



## 2.5 Culture and cultural stereotypes

Goodenough (quoted in Clearly and Harran, 2005: 28) defines *culture* as “the particular knowledge and beliefs that members of a community have which enable them to operate in a manner acceptable to the group, and in any role that the group finds acceptable”. This implies that people of a particular culture have shared values and beliefs, shared rules of behaviour and a shared symbolic code, such as language. Culture influences all aspects of our lives as mentioned in paragraph 2.2. Each of us belongs to multiple cultures that give us messages about what is normal, appropriate, and expected. When others do not meet our expectations, it is often a cue that our cultural expectations are different. (Hoffa, 2006: 23). We use culture to explain similarities within and differences between groups of people. Culture is not a static entity, but is ever evolving; what we commonly know as “generation gap” is a cultural difference as it refers to different periods of time (LeBaron, 2003: 67).

Culture provides people with ways of thinking, seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even if they talk the ‘same’ language (Coates, 1993: 47). DuPraw (1996: 2) sees culture as a complex concept with many different ‘definitions’. It refers to “a community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender and race. It also includes groups we join or become part of, for example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly, we realize we all belong to many cultures at once” (DuPraw: 1996: 2). Sears et al (1991: 551) define gender stereotypes as “our generalized beliefs about typical personal attributes of



male and females. Stereotypes do not exist in a social vacuum. They often exert powerful effects on judgments and evaluations of the persons they are applied to”. Gender stereotypes are no exceptions in the Ndebele community. They influence the perceptions and behaviour of Ndebele-speaking people. According to the traditional gender stereotypes, women are believed to have expressive qualities, such as being nurturing and gentle. Men are believed to have instrumental qualities such as being independent and assertive.

Attempts to categorize cultural characteristics often end up in cultural stereotypes that are unfair and misleading. In a semi-urban area like Siyabuswa where there is an increasing equality of opportunities across gender, you will therefore have to deal not only with real cultural differences, but also with the perceived cultural differences. The following are a few examples of the qualities (some positive and negative) that people frequently associate with the “typical” traditional Ndebele:

- Males do not compromise their headship
- No assistance from the husband in domestic work
- Fathers cannot be given advice by a child
- Females should not be educated

## **2.6 Miscommunication**

When speakers who are involved in communication are unable to understand each other’s communicative intentions, miscommunication occurs. Miscommunication can be viewed as instances when the speaker fails to produce a text which conveys the intended message, and when the hearer cannot recognize what the speaker intended to communicate, or both



(Dlomo, 2003: 15). Ribbens (quoted in Dlomo 2003: 15) states that “when the listener in a conversation reacts in an unexpected manner to the speaker’s verbal or non-verbal cues, misinterpretation may have occurred in the listener”. It is also common in interaction between two people who in a particular domain do not share a common linguistic or cultural background, as illustrated as follows.

A white child stumbled over her feet and fell down. A black woman who was sitting nearby said ‘sorry’. In turn the white child said ‘why did she have to apologize, she is not responsible for this’ (Wardhaugh, 1992: 157).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the concepts that are relevant to this study, their impact in cross-gender and cross-generational communication as well as gender relations in the Ndebele community and some social rules or conventions governing verbal communication. In the next chapter I will discuss research methods.





## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3. Introduction

Research questions as indicated in Chapter One are the following:

- What is the role of socio-cultural factors in verbal communication?
- What are the cultural differences between rural and urban, gender and age groups in the Ndebele community?
- To what degree and in what manner does miscommunication occur between members of the groups to be studied?
- How can these conflicts be managed and addressed?

In order to obtain information, to answer questions, I need to collect information. I decided to collect information in the following way:

- Literature review
- Interviews
- Observation

#### 3.1 Type of research

In this study, I used a qualitative approach. Peshkin (quoted in Leedy and Ormrod, 2001: 148) describes a qualitative approach as an approach which “can reveal the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, or people”. It implies that qualitative researchers are usually interested in describing the culture of a group of people and observing what people do and say. Qualitative researchers also “learn what it is like to be a member of the group from the perspective of the members of the group” (Johnson and Christensen, 2000: 29).



A number of characteristics of qualitative research are applicable to this study, as indicated by Cresswell (1994: 9).

- It involves direct data collection. I committed myself to extensive time in the field trying to gain access, rapport, and an “insider” perspective. In this study, I interacted directly with the participants under study.
- It emphasizes the researcher’s role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an “expert” who passes judgment on participants. As I depended on the information provided by the participants, I was patient and tried to understand the participants and the people I was observing and interviewing from their viewpoint. Their feelings were also taken into account.
- It studies individuals in their natural settings. This implied and involved the researcher going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access, and gathering material. If participants are removed from their setting, it leads to contrived findings that are out of context. This was also the case in this study as I interacted with the participants in their own compounds and backyards.

It was therefore a useful approach to use in this study as the focus was to get a better understanding of cross-gender and cross-generational patterns of communications and cultural differences amongst Ndebele-speaking persons (see Chapter One).

Johnson and Christensen (2000: 28) point out that researchers are interested in “documenting things like the attitudes, values, norms, practices, perspectives, meanings, interpretations and language of a group”. These elements of qualitative research applied to this study as the researcher observed the participants of different age, gender and cultural



groups in their interactive settings, such as community meetings and gatherings where cultural practices were performed.

### **3.2 Data collection**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, three main methods for collecting data were used, namely:

#### **3.2.1 Literature study**

The literature study involved extensive reading on the subject in order to obtain information on the relevant background on patterns of communication across culture, gender and age.

The following literature which contains useful information on the subject was consulted, analysed and incorporated into the main ideas of the study, as listed in the bibliography:

- Articles published on the internet
- Journal articles
- A variety of books on the subject

#### **3.2.2 Observation**

Gorman and Clayton (2005: 40) define *observation* studies as those that “involve the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting”.

Observation was an important technique that was used in this study. It provides information on who was being observed, by whom and where the observation took place. Observation fitted into the research design as one of the techniques for collecting data because the researcher was able to interact with the participants. For example, selected key role-players



in the community particularly people known to be traditionalist or proponents of change, especially the youth, were identified and observed in the following settings:

- at family functions
- at graveyards
- at community gatherings
- at traditional wedding celebrations, and
- at welcoming sessions for initiates.

The value of observation is that it allows researchers to study people in their native environment as mentioned in paragraph 3.2.2. As a result of this technique the researcher was able to:

- study the Ndebele-speaking people in their native environment in order to understand “things” from their perspective
- spend considerable time in the field with the possibility of adopting various roles in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the two communities, i.e. traditional and urban.

### **3.2.3 Focus group interview**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2), focus group interviews are appropriate for qualitative research as the emphasis is not on the number of responses or the number of people taking part in the study (see Chapter One). The key element is the involvement of the people where their disclosures are encouraged in a nurturing environment. I decided to use focus group interviews, as this allowed me to understand patterns of communications across gender and different cultural groups. A focus group interview deals with specific issues. This group was randomly selected and directed at rural and urban Ndebele youth from the



age of 18 to 35 as mentioned in Chapter One. Johnson and Christenson (2000: 145) indicate that it is called a focus group because the “interviewer directs the interaction and inquiry in a very structured manner and keeps the individuals in the group focused on the topic being discussed”. In this study, the focus was only on patterns of communication between members of traditional and urban communities as mentioned in Chapter One. According to Punch (2004: 46) the role of the researcher changes in a group interview, functioning more as a moderator or facilitator and less as an interviewer. The researcher facilitates group interaction. The focus group interviews were intended to get to know the participants by their personal names and allowed them the opportunity to get to know each other. At the opening of the session I welcomed everybody, made some introductions and thanked the participants. I explained the purpose of the research and the interview that to be conducted. I was sensitive to the personal circumstances of the participants. I treated information regarding their values, communities and different cultural backgrounds with the greatest respect.

The need for the researcher to make an audio recording as well as to take notes during the interviews was explained to them. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and to express their views about the topic. The participants were informed that everyone’s ideas were important and everyone was to have an opportunity to speak. I emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, and that even negative comments were useful in gaining insight into the topic under discussion. I used a guide which is referred to as Appendix “B” (attached) during the interview.



### 3.2.4 Personal interviews

The type of interview that was used was a semi-structured open-ended interview (see Chapter One). Personal interviews are designed to record the opinions and beliefs of a randomly selected representative of interviewees regarding several aspects of communication between the two communities. The questions were prepared before the interview and an interview schedule was used (see Appendix A). Looking at the nature of the study, and for the purpose of accommodating the participants, the uniqueness and willingness of each participant was considered, as indicated by Denzin (1989: 106). Each interview session, lasting not more than an hour, began with the following instructions:

- Please feel free to respond.
- There are no right or wrong answers, even negative comments are useful in gaining insight into the topic under discussion.
- All comments are confidential and only summarized information will be communicated.
- Sessions will be tape-recorded

Due to the comprehensive nature of the subject discussed and the ability to leave room for variation on the questions asked, open-ended questions were employed. Follow-up questions were used in cases where it was felt the subjects needed to elaborate on their answers.



### **3.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the research methods used by focusing on the design of the research and the techniques that were used. The use of the above techniques was meant to ascertain the values of the cultural groups of the two communities are being viewed as important. The interviews and observation were conducted according to cultural groups.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to provide the data that I collected with regard to the role of culture and cultural identity in communication between the two communities as described in Chapter Two. First, literature study and where relevant, I will provide information from the responses in the interviews and fieldwork. In addition to the fieldwork, I have collected information as discussed in Chapter Three from the Siyabuswa community as described below:

- Natural settings: for example, ritual celebrations, community gatherings and funerals
- Direct contact: As an active participant in the study by interacting directly with the participants.

I have also used observations and interview schedules (see addendum A) with people from different genders, age groups, demographic origin, urban and rural. I have conducted interviews individually with selected informants and a random selection of community members for focus interviews. Examples of miscommunication will be mainly pertain to non-linguistic devices but I will also give some examples of linguistic choices.

#### 4.2 The role of culture and cultural identity in communication

As described in Chapter Two, *communication* involves both verbal and non-verbal behaviour, and culture influences both. Arliss (quoted in Mulvaney, 1994: 2), argues that “communication is thought to be, at once, the process by which we learn to be male or





female, the product of our attempts to behave sexually appropriately”. In the Ndebele community too, from an early age, males and females acquire different communicative practices. Communicative behaviours that are acceptable for boys may be considered completely inappropriate for girls, e.g. it is inappropriate for males to discuss the menstrual cycle and even embarrassing to talk about it in the presence of females. It will be unacceptable for females to discuss issues related to “*ingoma*” (initiation school).

Women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: In the way they are taught to use language, that is, to be non-assertive and submissive to men, and in the way general language usage treats them. For example, women reflect their role in the social order by adopting linguistic practices such as using *hlonipha language* (language of respect) to appease males, that is, “women are not comfortable with mentioning certain parts of the body and certain natural functions by direct and often rude terms” (White, 2003: 4), which men, especially the youth use freely among themselves. Women will therefore invent innocent and euphemistic words which sometimes may in the long run come to be looked upon as the plain or blunt names, and therefore they again have to be avoided and replaced by more “decent” words as demonstrated with the following example:

Culturally, traditional Ndebele-speaking women will not directly name the private parts of a person. Euphemisms are used when referring to the private parts, e.g. for a man, “*umuzi kaBaba*” is used, which literally means father’s house. *Umakoti* (bride) is also not expected to use her father-in-law’s personal name. If her father-in-law’s personal name is “*Eyes*”, (Amehlo) she is expected to use the word “*Amakhangelo*” which is a *hlonipha* (respect)



name for “eyes”, or she must substitute the name with something else with a similar meaning, as mentioned in Chapter One. The practice is even more complicated in the royal family because women are forbidden to mention the names of their husbands and/or their father’s in-law. A study conducted by de Kadt (quoted in Dlomo 2003: 15) indicates that the Zulu culture dictates that a new bride uses “*hlonipha*” language (meaning the avoidance custom reflecting respect). This language use within the Ndebele culture is always accompanied by non-verbal behaviour like looking down when a new bride communicates with her in-laws and not raising her voice when speaking to her father-in-law. In terms of dressing code, the bride is also not expected to expose any part of her body when she is around her in-laws, especially her father-in-law. “*Hlonipha*” language has a different vocabulary from everyday language (Dlomo 2003: 15). So, in the case of modernized persons, especially the youth, the naming process may be misinterpreted if they are not familiar with the cultural issues, hence a potential conflict can occur.

Within the practices of non-verbal behaviour, Burgoon and Ruffner (1998: 51) point out that “non-verbal communication is often regarded as extremely culture bound. For instance, the extent to which feelings and emotions are expressed through facial expression is culture bound”. In other words, people from different cultures and age groups are unlikely to attribute the same meaning and importance to the same expression a particular expression communicates. For example, a young boy winking an eye while in conversation with his grandfather could be interpreted differently by the grand father and could also convey an element of disrespect. The same will apply to a child who is reprimanded by a parent, as mentioned in paragraph 2.4.3.4. The child is expected to look down because looking down



is considered a sign of respect unlike direct eye contact which is regarded as confrontational. In the Ndebele community, cultural factors also govern body movement, determining what moves, when the body moves, where the body moves, and what restrictions apply to movement. For example, a young girl may move hips freely in sports or dancing but not as part of some ritual ceremony. She could find herself classified as ‘loose’ and communicating loose morals within her culture.

### **4.3 The traditional African family**

According to Kayongo-Male & Onyango (1991: 5), the stereotypes of African family life include the following features: No public display of affection between spouses; strong parental authority; family care for the elderly; cooperation between relatives; no assistance from the husband in domestic work; and restricted communication between parents and children. These characteristics and traits are no exception in the Ndebele community, as demonstrated below:

Males use language as a tool of domination and discrimination against females. There is still a notion that language is solely a mans’ instrument for wielding power amongst Ndebele-speaking people. Males usually speak from authoritative position , and are more likely to engage in conflict (as Tannen 1996: 40 also points out), by arguing, issuing commands, taking opposing stands, whereas females are expected to be co-operative and avoid conflict, for example by agreeing, supporting, and making suggestions rather than giving commands. It is also clear that when males and females interact in meetings, social gatherings and family gatherings like marriages and burials, males tend to get, and



according to Tannen (1994: 23), to “keep the floor more often than females, talk more and longer, interrupt more, and make different kinds of contributions, using language strategies that create and maintain status distinctions. On the other hand, females tend to get and keep the floor less frequently and for less time, interrupt less, and use language strategies that are more supportive and that minimize status distinctions”. This pattern of communication amongst Ndebele-speaking people is also prevalent as discussed in the following settings: Data on different settings mentioned below was collected as follows:

- Observation as a participant in the community over many years
- Interview with selected informants.

The section below will discuss various settings which are key patterns of communication in traditional African family. These patterns of communication are also common in a traditional Ndebele community.

#### **4.3.1 Father and child communication**

Within the Ndebele culture, there are some elements of traditional education. Any elderly person is regarded as a father or a mother of every child in the community. Communication with the child is minimal. The only time of interaction between the father and the child is when the child is given instructions. The social distance that has been created does not leave room to share ideas of common interest between the father and the child. In the Ndebele culture there is a common practice that “*ubaba akatjelwa ngo mntwana*” (there is nothing that the child can advise his/her father about). A typical example was: *A father is sitting under a tree with his young boy seated a few meters away from him. Suddenly the boy saw a snake descending from the tree going directly to his father. The boy could not warn his father about the snake until another man who was passing by noticed the snake and distracted its attention. When he asked the boy why he did not warn his father about the snake, the boy innocently responded by saying “ubaba akezwa ngomntwana”.* (the father does not hear from the child)



#### **4.3.2 Father to daughter communication**

There is no direct communication between the daughter and the father. The daughter can only communicate with the father through the mother. Even her daily experiences in life are reported by the mother to the father. In a typical traditional family, the father can only intervene after all other avenues of communication have been explored.

#### **4.3.3 Mother to daughter communication**

The concept of motherhood is very important indeed and one of the most important relationships is that of mother and daughter. The mother is duty-bound to know all about the stages of development of her daughter e.g. puberty, menstrual cycle etc. They enjoy cordial and healthy relationships.

#### **4.3.4 Son to father communication**

Restricted communication takes place between the father and the son. There is direct communication, for example on issues pertaining to morals and manhood. The father prepares the son according to his own way of life by indoctrination. The boy's stages of development are monitored by the father, for example to inform the boy when he is ready to go to the initiation school.

#### **4.3.5 Mother-in-law and son-in-law communication**

Ndebele culture does not leave room for son-in-law and mother-in-law to interact freely. The space between them is always maintained. Should an incident arise for them to engage in a conversation, an imaginary child interacting between them is created as demonstrated in the following example:

**Son in-law:** *“Thokozani, tjela ngogo bonyana ngibuyile esibhedlela”* (Thokozani, please tell grandmother I've just returned from the hospital)

**Mother-in-law:** *“Thokozani, tjela uyihlo bonyana sithokozile”* (Thokozani, kindly extend our sincere thanks to your mother).



#### 4.3.6 Husband and wife communication

Within the Ndebele family there is a strict hierarchy of authority, as Shorter (1997: 4.) points out: “males ruled, and held responsibility for the females. Brothers ruled their sisters and sons, even their mothers, when they come of age or succeeded to the inheritance. Women do not enjoy any ultimate authority or responsibility for the household”. Whitehead (1979: 12) also maintains that a “family-based household is a hierarchical structure marked by the dependency of wives and children on the husband, whose specific role in the household is marked by the bureaucratic definition of him as its head”. This practice is no exception in the traditional Ndebele community, where the husband is the head of the family and it is clear that his headship is not a joint headship (see Chapter Two). Relations between husbands and wives, as Whitehead (1979: 12) points out, are marked by the “behavioural components of inferiority, superiority and deference”. The traditional patterns still prevail in communication between men and women.

Females are not as free as males to say what they wish due to the socially constructed norms and values of the patriarchal society (see Chapter One) as illustrated in the following examples:

- Female speeches are devalued and disregarded, especially in gatherings. There is a perception that females are incapable of thinking. This helps to explain why it is so difficult to change traditional gender roles.
- Females are considered unsuitable for positions and jobs traditionally performed by males, For example, males meet regularly in community gatherings where females are not expected to attend, or their speech is forbidden. Community issues are



discussed to the exclusion of females. In such gatherings, male's speech is customary and more acceptable and females who speak on such occasions are often met with hostility. There is a common feeling amongst modern females that, as Eagleton (2000: 16) points out, "they feel gagged in certain situations if what they do say is unheard or misheard or undervalued". There is also an element of resistance by the youth who do not adhere to the expectations of the elderly who still wish to preserve the traditional patterns of communication. Traditional patterns of communication are perceived as an obstacle to equality in communication, and it might be a source for potential conflict across gender.

#### **4.4 Urban communities**

##### **4.4.1 How cultural changes affect verbal communication patterns**

According to Sears et al (1991: 455), traditional gender roles were organized around two basic principles. The first was that men and women should perform distinctive activities, that there should be a division of labour by gender. The second idea was that men should be the dominant sex, both at home and in society at large.

Within the urban Ndebele communities, there is much evidence and signs that the rigid view about what men are expected to be doing is breaking down. Changes are clearly occurring in the roles of men and women. As per the new constitution, policies in general defining women as second-class citizens are largely practices of the past. Within these communities, women have increasingly come to do things formerly considered "for men only" and this practice is decreasing men's exclusive



role as the family breadwinner. Today, the youth and upcoming generation is increasingly rejecting these traditional power norms as outdated and unfair.

Constraints on communication between parents and children are changing as more people become educated in westernised institutions, and the influence of other ethnic groups such as Pedi-, Zulu-, and Tsonga-speaking people within the community has impacted significantly on traditional gender roles. Educated parents tend to have a freer communication with their children than parents who are not educated. The modern situation reflects an increasing equality of opportunities between the genders, and consequently a considerable amount of tension between the rural and the urban. It could sound confusing to children, when in a family setup children are being encouraged to listen to adults and not to express their opinions, whereas the school environment encourages them to interact in a way that is unfamiliar or considered to be disrespectful at home. In reflecting upon these differences, it is clear that children have different expectations regarding home and school in terms of communication styles.

Another major area of difference between modern and traditional societies is resistance to change. The traditional society is built upon age-old patterns of behaviour that are resistant to change. Momen (1987: 9) argues that an individual in a modern society is used to continual and sometimes rapid changes in his individual life and his society. The change may be due to technological progress, changing work practices, or it may be the outcome of the individual's choice in moving to a new area. However, within the traditional Ndebele community to effect changes in





an individual's life style could lead to a heavy price in his/her freedom of choice, for with the gain of freedom goes what Momen (1987: 10) calls "the loss of the security that a traditional society gives. This could at a later stage lead to a greater degree of uncertainty and anxiety for the modern society". Traditional societies have inevitably been under a great deal of pressure to change through their contact with modern society. However, it is still a reality that a traditional society tends to resist change and has little tolerance towards the modern society. These elements are a recipe for conflict within these communities. DuPraw (1996: 1) states that "we all communicate with others all the time, in our homes, in the groups we belong to, and in the community". No matter how well we think we understand each other, miscommunication often occurs. Culture is often at the root of communication challenges as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Different cultural background is at the centre of conflict between traditional and urban communities in Siyabuswa. In an area as complex as Siyabuswa, each community is shaped by many factors, and culture is one of the powerful forces that acts on these communities as cultural values sometimes conflict. It seems when Ndebele females speak of being silenced, they do not (according to Eagleton, 2000: 16) mean that they are "incapable of adequately speaking a language, rather they are referring to social and cultural pressures which undermine their rights and make them hesitant about speaking". However in an area like Siyabuswa, expectations between the young and the old are different. The Siyabuswa community, as mentioned in Chapter One, consists of a mixed population. It is a semi-urban area which is inhabited by:



- Different ethnic groups, namely, N. Sotho-, Tswana-, Zulu-, Ndebele-, and Tsonga-speaking people as compared to other areas in the former KwaNdebele.
- Ndebele-speaking people who still hold their tradition in high esteem.
- Young and upcoming Ndebele-speaking persons, i.e. from the age of 18 who have been exposed to different settings, through education, intermarriage and socialization and have a “different cultural” background. This widens the gap between the young and the old.

All these elements provide a fertile ground for conflict between males and females, young and old amongst the Ndebele-speaking people.

#### **4.5 How cultural changes affect non-verbal communication patterns**

Non-verbal communication often causes conversational derailment. As a result of different cultural backgrounds, one culture may interpret nonverbal cues like eye contact, laughing, smiling, personal space, and touching in a certain way, while another culture may interpret them in totally different ways. For example, social hierarchy determines physical space amongst individuals. It may be inappropriate for a child to stand too close to an adult or a local induna in the verbal communication process, unless they are expressly allowed to do so.

In the Ndebele community different cultural norms for para-linguistic behaviour can lead to misunderstanding as demonstrated in the following examples:

##### **4.5.1 Ways of address**

- Difference in behaviour is noticed when people of the same age exchange greetings. The same will apply when children are greeting the elderly and



greetings between child and child, wife and husband, daughter and father, etc. It is not permissible for a wife to greet her husband or father-in-law while standing. She can either kneel down or sit before greeting. As a sign of respect there is also no direct facial contact.

- Children put their hands together when greeting their elders as well as strangers.
- Children cannot point fingers at an elderly person; the same is expected of a wife to her husband. The use of different gestures as well as sitting and standing patterns varies radically.
- The nature of the traditional greeting is demonstrated in the following example where a child is sent to a neighbour to collect some items. *After knocking at the door, the child greets and remains standing until s/he is invited to sit. If there is no chair s/he should kneel down until the end of the conversation. S/he could also not start directly talking about the purpose of her/his visit without being asked, for example, “Mnfazana/Msana singakusiza?” “Iye, bangithumile”* (‘Boy/girl, may we help you?’ ‘Yes I have been sent’). Then the details of the purpose of the visit. If such fundamentals of greetings and initiation of communication are not adhered to, the impression created would be that the child is disrespectful (*akanamikghwa*).



#### 4.5.2 Physical distance (Proxemics)

*Proxemics* refers to the way in which people structure and use physical and emotional space in their daily lives. The distance we maintain between ourselves and others and our reactions to inappropriate spacing have an impact on the communication process (Burgoon and Ruffner, 1998: 130).

A well-known example in the Siyabuswa community that illustrates the importance of proxemics comes from a newly arrived white priest at the local church. As was the custom in his community, the white priest, during the meeting with some members of the church council, moved up very close to one of the elderly persons in the church. This made the elderly person very uncomfortable, so he retreated a few feet. Not used to such a distance, the white priest moved in again, and again the elderly person retreated. The white priest's impression of the elderly church member was that he was cold and aloof (*uyasaba nofana unevalo*), whereas the elderly church member regarded the white priest as pushy (*uyadelela*). Clearly, each person had sent unintentional messages through his use of space.

The difficulty with space preferences is not that they exist, but the judgments that get attached to them. If people are accustomed to standing or sitting very close when they are talking with another person, they may see the other's attempt to create more space as evidence of coldness or lack of interest (Burgoon & Ruffner, 1998: 131). Those who are accustomed to more personal space may view attempts to get closer as disrespectful or aggressive (*ukungabi nehlonipho*) as in the case of the interaction between the white priest and the elderly church member.



In the Ndebele community, social hierarchy determines time and space as mentioned in paragraph 4.5. According to Ndoleriire (in Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000: 277), it may not be appropriate for a child to be too close to an adult in a discussion, or maybe for a subordinate to be too close to a chief (*kosi namadoda webandla*). In the same manner, depending on interpersonal relationships, it may not be wise for a man to stand too close to a woman in a communication interaction. If this were to happen, it could lead to misunderstanding that could hamper the smooth running of the conversation.

### **4.5.3 Touch as communication**

In the context of communication, touch refers to handshakes, holding hands, kissing (cheek, lips, and hand), back slapping, shoulder patting, brushing arms, etc. Each of these sends nonverbal messages as to the touching person's intentions/feelings. Our senses of touch in the communication process also convey different interpretations. Touch can be an effective means of expressing understanding, sympathy, affection and interest. However, it cannot go without some reservations, for example: within the Ndebele culture, boys learn at an early age that holding hands is not masculine, especially among males. For girls, touching is more acceptable in some situations, for instance, a girl may hug her mother without disapproval. It is also permissible for girls to hold hands or put their arms around one another, but it would appear inappropriate for boys to do the same thing. In traditional communities, and in an environment like schools, boys are encouraged to sit the farthest apart from each other because touching would be inappropriate. However, in the modern situation where there is an increasing equality of education and intermarriages, there is a considerable tension between the old and young members of the community about touch. Modernized persons



emphasize touching as a way of breaking down communication barriers, but some elements of touch are still met with hostility by the traditionalist, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- Parents frequently avoid intimate contact in front of their children for fear of providing a ‘permissive’ model of interpersonal behaviour.
- One may not touch or shake hands with one’s father-in-law or mother-in-law. (In some situations one may not stay under the same roof as one’s parents-in-law).
- One does not offer anything to another with the left hand; using the left hand is a bad omen.
- A widow does not shake hands with any other person until the period of mourning (*ukuzila*) is complete. She may not be engaged to marry or be sexually involved while in the mourning (*uzilile*) period, and she does not sit on a chair but is expected to sit flat on the floor (*emsemeni*).

#### 4.5.4 Silence

According to Burgoon & Ruffner (1998: 142) “*silence* can communicate agreement, apathy, disagreement, embarrassment, obligation, regret, respect, sadness and any number of meanings”. The rules governing silence differ radically from society to society. For this study, as mentioned in paragraph 4.3, “we find women for the most part silent and in many cases silenced. It is not that women do not speak; they may actually be prevented from speaking whether by explicit taboos and restrictions or by socially constructed practices” (Tannen, 1994: 124). Silence for Ndebele women can also mean censoring yourself for fear



of being ridiculed, attacked or ignored by men, in particular by a hostile attitude that is experienced by women when they are speaking or addressing community gatherings.

#### **4.5.5 Eye-contact**

According to Burgoon and Ruffner (1998: 143) the study of the role of eyes in non-verbal communication is called oculusics. This includes the study of eye gaze and pupil dilation. Studies have found that people use their eyes to indicate their interest. This could be done through eye contact or lack thereof, for example, when a teacher is giving a lesson and the learners are reading a magazine or something else instead of looking at him/her and giving their full attention, this would indicate to the teacher that they are not interested in his/her lesson.

As regards eye contact, a traditional woman may not look directly at the face of a man, particularly one she is not very familiar with. If she does so, he may totally misinterpret her intentions. As in the case of the Ndebele-speaking people, maintaining eye contact is a mode of communication associated with intimacy. A woman who looks down should not be misinterpreted as a shy person. Similarly, a child may not look an adult in the face as mentioned in Chapter One. If this interactional norm is transgressed an adult may shout at the offending child, ordering him or her not to stare him in the face. If reprimanded in this way, a child should immediately look down (Ndoleriire in Webb & Sure, 2000: 277). In a semi-urban area like Siyabuswa, which is inhabited by different ethnic groups of young and upcoming Ndebele speaking persons, who have been exposed to different settings, this practice is likely to be met with resistance.



#### 4.5.6 Mode of dress

A person's dress is interpreted as a message about his or her life-style, values, personality, and attitudes towards others. In the Ndebele community, dress code is used for a variety of reasons, and various features of dress have some communication value in the community, for example:

- It can be used to identify the young boy/girl in his/her developmental stage
- To distinguish between married and unmarried persons
- To identify males and females in the pre-initiation stage
- To identify males and females fresh from initiation school
- To identify females in a mourning period
- To identify a newly wed female
- Married female's dresses are expected to be below their knees and should not expose any part of their body except their faces and feet.
- Females are expected to put on head cover all the time or at least cut off their hair.
- Traditionally, females are not allowed to put on trousers.
- As a sign of respect, sons-in-law are expected to wear a jacket.

Within the context and in accordance with dress codes, it becomes convenient for members of the community to know what to say, how to say it, when to speak and with whom.





#### **4.6 Observations and responses to the interviews**

This section deals with responses from the interviewees, observations and interviews as discussed in Chapter Three. The research questions are classified under different categories.

The interviews (see addendum A) had a variety of questions on the use of verbal and non-verbal cues in communication between people of different age, gender and origin (rural and urban communities). Interviews took place at different places and times for different groups.

The interviewees were classified under the following categories:

- Traditionalists: Six males and five females Modernised persons: Five males and seven females
- Youths: between the age of 18-35 ( both rural and urban)
- Focus groups between the age of 18-35 ( both rural and urban)

The questions were related to verbal communication, non-verbal signs, understanding gesture, posture, silence, eye contact, interruptions during speech, differences in values, attitudes, beliefs and the tone of voice that is used when talking between the groups. The interviews were conducted both in English and in isiNdebele. The participants responded verbally as described in addendum A and B. In terms of responses, there was a mixture of feelings and views on the questions asked.



#### 4.7 Analysis of the results

This section analyses the results that were obtained from the interviews and observations. I was interested in identifying elements of commonality and difference between the two groups. As I was not working quantitatively, no statistical analysis was done for the interviews and observations.

The first sets of questions that I discussed, dealt with non-verbal aspects to communication (gestures, eye-contact and silence) in the interaction between the modernized persons and the traditionalists. Here are some typical responses in English translation and my interpretations:

*'Being silent will mean I don't know what to say'* (urban youth)

*'Sometimes we are being forced to remain silent and that is unfair'* (urban youth)

*'There is nothing the child can tell the father'* (traditionalist)

*'Ubaba kumele ahlinitjwe'* (father should be given respect) (rural youth)

The views expressed by the modernised persons (particularly the urban youth) give a clear picture that being silent means a failure to understand what is being said. However, some of the rural youth felt that silence especially when you are talking to the elderly shows an element of respect. You are not expected to talk back if you are being reprimanded by the elderly person. Eighty percent of male and female traditionalists as indicated by their remarks are of the view that if a child talks back when being reprimanded, s/he is disrespectful, as mentioned in paragraph 2.4.3.4.



My analysis is that the rural youth and the traditionalists share a common view about the meaning of silence as echoed in their responses, but the urban youth portrayed a different view. In the modernized community silence is interpreted differently and urban youths do not have an understanding of the meaning that is attached to silence by the traditionalists and rural youths.

According to Burgoon and Ruffner (1998: 142) as mentioned in paragraph 4.5.4, the rules governing silence differ radically from society to society. Silence among the traditional Ndebele-speaking people is a way of showing respect for authority.

In the category of questions related to eye contact in communication, there appears to be a variety of views and responses. Some of the expressions used by the traditional females were as follows:

*'amadoda abukhali'* (men can be cruel)

*'Awunaamahloni ukuqala indoda ngmehlweni'* (you are not ashamed to maintain direct eye contact with men)

The common feeling among the traditional females is that women are not expected to maintain eye contact with their male counterparts in mutual conversation as indicated in paragraph 4.5.5. On the other hand, modernized persons, especially the urban youth, claim that it is important to maintain eye contact with the person you are communicating with as this will display an element of confidence and certainty when talking, as indicated below:

*'iindaba zise mehlweni'* (I believe in direct eye contact.)

Similarly, with the responses like *'ubaba u ya kwata'* (my father can be furious) , *'a ku se kuhle ukuqala ubaba ngemehlweni'* (you cannot maintain eye contact with your father)



gives a clear indication that the rural youth concurred with the traditionalists about the view that eye contact should be avoided when you communicate with the elders. If the communicative rules are disregarded, it would be considered as socially unacceptable and such behaviour would be regarded as disrespectful by the traditional members of the society as mentioned in Chapter One.

On the questions related to touch and physical distance, a variety of responses from the participants were displayed, for example. “*Ukudelela*” (this is arrogance) (traditionalist female), and “*Akahloniphi*” (no respect) (traditionalist female). My analysis of these responses is that there is a common understanding by the traditional females and males that a distance should be maintained when talking, especially when an elderly person is speaking to a child. It is equally even more important for a subordinate not to be too close to a chief (see paragraph 4.5.2). On the other hand, the youth expressions were as follows:

*“I will feel awful; this person will take it as if I’m scared of him”* (urban youth)

*“The person will definitely feel at home when I hug him”* (urban youth)

The sentiments echoed in these expressions portrayed a feeling that the modernized youth are of the view that standing or sitting very close when they are talking with another is an attempt to create an environment of acceptance and keen interest in the subject being discussed. One can therefore say that those who are accustomed to more personal space, in particular the traditionalists, may view attempts to get closer as disrespectful or aggressive as reflected in their expressions above. One can say that the modernized persons view distance as a way of breaking down communication barriers, while some elements of touch



are still met with hostility by the members of the traditional communities (see paragraph 4.5.3).

The next category of questions showed differences in the way both traditional and modernized persons understand interruptions during speech. There are mixed views about interruptions. Some of the expressions used by both the traditionalists and modernized persons were as follows:

*'I have got the right to speak anywhere'* (urban youth)

*'How do you expect me to respect someone who does not give us a chance to listen to our side of the story?'* (Urban youth)

*'These kids do not respect their parents'* (traditional male)

*'My child will not speak to me like that'* (traditional male)

According to these responses, it appears that modernized persons are not willing to accommodate interruptions when they are speaking because they associate that act with imposition and rudeness let alone disregard for their presence and freedom of expression.

On the other hand, expressions by the traditionalists are an indication that they feel very strongly about interruptions during speech especially as interruptions functions as a symbol of seniority and authority. It will sound rude and disrespectful for a child or woman to address any form of gathering without demonstrating an element of respect for seniority. For example, by observing traditional protocol at meetings where men are given preference to speak without any interruptions or allowing the chief to speak first. If a woman or a child disregards the abovementioned protocol, members of the traditional community will have no option but to interrupt the speech as mentioned in Chapter One. These different views



might be a fertile ground for conflict between the two groups because the traditionalists do not see interruptions of speech as a problem, especially the youth or women in any form of gathering. The modernized persons (especially the youth), on the other hand, take strong offence when they are being interrupted while on the floor.

The groups have different views about ways of address. My observations of traditional women indicate that they seem to have a problem in addressing either their husbands or in-laws by their personal names as mentioned in Chapter One. On the other hand, modernized persons view the observations of the traditional greetings as a violation of their freedom of speech as indicated in the following expressions:

*'Greetings remain greetings whether you kneel down or not'.*

*'My name will be Sbusiso whether I'm young or old'*

On the basis of the interaction with these groups, one can note that the use of different gestures, sitting and standing patterns are culturally determined. The groups have also displayed different views about the code of dress. Among modernized persons, there are some elements within these groups who still adhere to the strict code of dressing as echoed in the following sentiments:

*'It is not nice to be a spinster for the rest of your life'*

*'I feel fulfilled when I'm putting on this garment'*

There is a general observation of code of dress, especially during the special events and ceremonies in the community, there are still some elements of resistance from the female youth who still insist on wearing trousers and clothes exposing some part of their bodies.



On the questions related to attitudes, beliefs and values, direct questions were posed to the participants as outlined below:

- 1 How will you feel if a woman leads in the community/ a meeting is chaired by a woman?
- 2 Some people believe that there should be a clear division of labour by gender, i.e. men and women should perform distinctive activities. Your opinion?
- 3 It appears there are tensions between the youth and the old in terms of values, e.g. dress code, ways of greetings etc. Do you agree?
- 4 Women have been labelled as ‘second class’ citizens. What role could they play in Ndebele community?
- 5 What are your feelings about young people who reject traditional norms for communication? For example kneeling down when greeting an elderly person.
- 6 What is your attitude towards other ethnic groups who live in Siyabuswa?
- 7 Why are traditionalists not so eager to change from their past practices?
- 8 How often do you perform ritual ceremonies at home and what are your feelings about them?
- 9 How can the conflicts between the youth and the traditionalists be addressed and managed?

The first, second and fourth question are related to the way cultural background influences perception. There are mixed feelings and different expectations about the role of women in the Ndebele community as expressed in the following remarks by males and females in the community:



*'It is up to them whether they allowed themselves to be exploited by men'* (modernized female)

*'Women belong to the kitchen'* (traditional male)

*'A ba ye kupheka laba'* (let them go to cook) (traditional male)

*'Some women could be good leaders and exemplary in the community'* (modernised female)

There is a clear indication based on the remarks by the traditionalists that the status quo should be maintained, i.e. there should be a clear division of labour by gender, and men and women should perform distinctive activities e.g. households for women and men. If a setup is created where a woman had to speak at the community gathering or take a lead in discussions, it would be regarded by traditional men as compromising men's position and authority. On the other hand, eighty percent of upcoming youth and middle aged women felt that they are being denied the freedom of speech as the two communities have the right to co-exist meaningfully.

Questions 3, 5, 6 and 7 pertain to change from the traditional practice by old members of the community. In all my interaction with the two groups, I noted that change from the traditional practice by old members of the community is expressed as painful. The purpose of the questions was to establish how traditionalists and modernised persons get along with each other and the feeling of the traditionalists about the presence and influence of other ethnic groups like N. Sotho-, Tswana-, and Tsonga-speaking people in the community. In response to the question, the majority of the traditionalists felt that the value of cultural tolerance and respect was extremely important. The reasons forwarded for this were in the following remarks:





*'There are some bad elements from these N. Sotho kids'* (traditional female)

*'These children cannot just listen and respect'* (traditional male)

*'Some of the children are making a mockery on our culture and laughing at us especially these outsiders'* (traditional male)

The expressions above suggest that traditional society tends to resist change and has little tolerance towards modern society and other ethnic groups in Siyabuswa. In their interaction, there are possibilities of different interpretations of their actions and expressions. By carefully considering the responses of the informants I have come to the conclusion that there is a degree of cultural intolerance and disrespect shown and that this is an aspect that needs to be addressed for a meaningful co-existence of various groups in the community.

Question 8 focused on the behaviour patterns in modern society. The responses show mixed feelings about the way youth relate to the performance of ritual ceremonies. The overwhelming majority ( but not significantly more) of the youth felt that ritual practices are important as they value their culture, however as they regard these ceremonies as useful, the traditionalists should equally accommodate and recognise their (youth) contributions in the community as in some cases this forms the basis for conflict between the youth and elderly persons.

In the last question (9), the respondents were asked to suggest measures which could be put in place to improve the relationship between the two groups.

There were some negative feelings expressed by the members of the traditionalists on how to improve the relationship between the modernised and traditionalists groups. One member



of the traditionalists pointed out that ‘*It is quite impossible because they don’t respect*’ whereas the other member said ‘*these kids are bigheaded, some think they are educated*’. Another member of the traditionalists stated emphatically that ‘*I will never, this new generation is a disaster*’. The responses indicate that there are some elements of resistance and reluctance by members of the traditionalist group to accommodate change and to create an environment of togetherness and meaningful existence of all the groups.

I have also observed and witnessed examples of miscommunication within the community as illustrated below:

1. How the words “*mamazala*” (mother-in-law) and “*mkhwenyana*” (son-in-law), which are equivalent to social greetings, could be subjected to misinterpretation across gender and age. For example, I observed a scene where a colleague said “*mamazala*” to an old lady working as a support staff member who was passing by. In reply, she said “*mkhwenyana*”. The use of the two words *mamazala* and *mkhwenyana* in this context are subject to many interpretations.

- It could be a formal or informal greeting
- It could be a goodbye
- It could be a request for help
- It could be to attract attention.

In this scene my colleague wanted attention from the old lady whereas the old lady assumed that calling her “*mamazala*” was a normal greeting as some often do.

2. Proverbs are sometimes misinterpreted by the youth. A mother was discussing with her daughter that young ladies these days ‘*ba phuka idolo*’ at an early age (become pregnant at



an early age). Instead the daughter said *'how extensive is the injury on the leg? Who is taking them to the hospital?'* *Ukuphuka idolo* literally means breaking the leg. The young girl interpreted the phrase literally. In other words, she thought her mother was referring to a leg injury instead of pregnancy.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

For cross-gender and cross-generational communication to succeed, there should be an understanding and tolerance towards each other. The perception of viewing the other person negatively on the basis of cultural stereotypes as mentioned in Chapter Two might be a source for a potential conflict. This is an indication that culture plays an important role in the way people view others.

The study has also illustrated that within the Siyabuswa community, unhealthy relationships could be created if the two groups do not co-exist in a spirit of tolerance. Thus in the Siyabuswa, there are elements of miscommunication because the two communities have a little room to accommodate each other. The solution to these problems will be for members of the traditional and urban communities in the Siyabuswa area to learn from each other, and in this way it may be possible to bridge the gaps between these communities (see Chapter One).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5. Introduction

I will begin this chapter by proposing answers to the research questions (stated in Chapter One) by clarifying the problems of cross-gender and cross-generational communication between the two communities, establishing the reasons for these problems and suggesting possible ways to address them. I will briefly outline the limitations of the study and also make recommendations for further research.

#### 5.1 Research question one. What is the role of socio-cultural factors in verbal communication?

The socio-cultural context of Siyabuswa community has led to:

- The construction of two different cultural groups in the community, i.e. modernized and traditional groups.
- The development of different rules for conducting conversations, i.e. discourse or conversational rules.

As discourse rules are socio-culturally determined, (Webb, 2003: 17), the socio-cultural context co-determines verbal social interaction. The rules and conventions of speech and patterns of communication reflect the norms, values, social structures and patterns of behaviour of a community. The sociolinguistic rules of a community have to do with what one may say, with whom one may speak, how one may speak, why one speaks, where one speaks, when one may speak, and how such speech acts as greetings, apologies, invitations and compliments are to be given, interpreted and responded to



(Webb, 2003: 18). In the Siyabuswa context, discourse conventions and patterns of discourse between members of the two groups differ, hence there is a potential for conflict in their interactions.

## **5.2 Research question two: What are the cultural differences between rural and urban, gender and age groups in the Ndebele community?**

- Traditionalists view their own culture as being better as compared to others in terms of priority and worth. Although it is important that people value and are proud of their cultural heritage, they must guard against a tendency to see their culture as being superior to all other culture (Cleary and Harran, 2005: 3). When this happens between various groups in the community, as in the case of Siyabuswa, there is a tendency for all other cultural practices to be evaluated in relation to their own, and inevitably judged negatively. Feelings of “*this generation is a disaster*” as mentioned in paragraph 4.7. The notion “*we are right and they are wrong*” is experienced in every aspect of their cultural interaction ranging from forms of address, to values, and beliefs.
- Cultural stereotyping, where the assumption is made that all members of a particular culture are the same, results from a failure to recognize the individuality of people within a culture.
- Lack of knowledge by one group in the community about how the other cultural group uses the cultural cues when communicating, contributes to the failure of communication. This lack of knowledge leads to members of each



group forming incorrect opinions and judgments about members who belong to the other cultural group (see paragraph 4.2).

- Each culture has a different way of interpreting various utterances due to differences in socio-cultural backgrounds and communicative conventions, and members of different groups find it difficult to establish and maintain conversational cooperation.
- There are differences in gender roles between males and females, and many of these differences are due to the socialization process.
- Members of the modernized group use language differently from the traditional community, as indicated in paragraph 4.4. The youth form their own speech community with its own vocabulary and style of speaking. This difference widens the gap between members of the two groups, thus leading to miscommunication. Friction between the two groups often occurs as traditional members try to correct the youth's behaviour, with the youth resisting such correction (see paragraph 4.7).
- Non-verbal behaviour leads to miscommunication because people within the groups are unaware that non-verbal patterns are determined by culture and, that members from other cultural groups have different interpretations of these behaviours.



### **5.3 Research question three: How does miscommunication occur between members of the two groups?**

- Non-verbal behaviour may impede effective communication because there are different systems of using and understanding gesture, posture, silence, touch, eye-contact and physical distance in different gender, age and urban/rural communities. Differences which impede successful communication (as mentioned in paragraph 4.7) are linked to differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, views and so forth between members of the groups.
- Misunderstanding in communicative interaction between members of the two communities (i.e. traditionalists and modernized) arises because members of each group are unaware of the role of cultural differences in the construction and interpretation of texts. Gender differences in the way men and women from different age groups and different habitats (rural vs. urban) can therefore generate misunderstanding.
- Failure in communication occurs when members of these groups transfer the meaning their beliefs attached to a particular pattern of behaviour in their interaction.
- There indeed appear to be a gender-linked difference in the manner in which youth, men, and women tend to interact and speak.



## **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the above findings, the following are the recommendations of this study. Given that cultural differences between members of the two groups in the Siyabuswa community have the potential to cause failure in communication and even conflict, it is crucial to ask how these conflicts can be addressed and managed. A brief overview of this complex issue is provided below:

I will present two categories of recommendations in this section. All of the recommendations are based on the literature study and the empirical research. The first one focuses on the main role players, i.e. members of the two groups (traditionalists and urban communities) in the promotion of community coherence and unity. The second category deals with the researcher's recommendations to the Department of Education on the promotion of effective communication and community togetherness.

### **5.4.1 Recommendations to the members of the two groups (traditionalists and urban communities)**

- As Siyabuswa is a semi-urban area which is composed of four other ethnic groups, namely N. Sotho-, Zulu-, Tswana-, and Tsonga-speaking people (see Chapter One), intercultural communication awareness training in workshops is essential. This will help members of all groups to absorb the challenges of cross-gender and cross-generational communication.
- The issues on the awareness programme should include making the participants aware of the importance of their own cultural practices, tolerance and appreciation





of other's culture, listening skills and interpretation of non-verbal communication and to refrain from being judgmental towards other groups.

- One can further recommend that, for the importance of maintaining community togetherness and for the two communities to retain the coherence needed for co-existing meaningfully, emphasis should be put more on the similarities than noticing their differences in their interaction. However, it does not imply that members of each group should ignore the existence of differences, but they should acknowledge and develop ways of dealing with them positively.

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations to the Department of Education**

As the National Department of Education (DoE) is responsible for the curriculum that learners in schools study, I would make the following recommendations to the DoE:

##### **Multicultural education**

A multicultural education programme should be adopted through which learners of different cultures learn about living in one community and developing that community.

The importance of respect for the language and culture of other groups should be promoted in this programme and it should be incorporated into the Life Orientation (LO) syllabus. It is therefore recommended that a component in the LO and Second Additional Language (L2) syllabus should focus on the following:

##### *Cultural diversity and community relations programme*

A programme which outlines the responsibilities of the schools to provide teaching and learning that enables learners from all cultures and communities to



identify as a part of the Ndebele community. Schools to ensure inclusive teaching practices which recognize and value the backgrounds and culture of all learners and promote an open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, religions and world views.

### *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is a social ethic and a unifying value that is relevant to the members of the two communities. Ubuntu recognizes the worth and dignity of every human being and needs to be promoted between members of the two groups. At community level, Ubuntu signifies co-operation, collective responsibilities, and harmonious co-existence in a multicultural population.

### *Moral values*

The major purpose of providing moral education in schools is to enable the learners to cultivate good character for the sound progress of the Ndebele community. Morals are the “standards, values and forms which govern one’s day-to-day decisions, judgement and behaviour” (Singh, 2005: 196). Moral education values also focus on the thoughts, attitudes, motives, feelings and dispositions of people. Morals determine what is considered true, right, good, desirable and ethical, and they are a link between oneself and other people. It is through one’s morals that one creates involvement and acceptance amongst members in the family, peer group and the community at large.



### *Cultural tolerance and respect*

Since Siyabuswa is a community inhabited by various ethnic groups (see Chapter One), much can be achieved by the promotion of cultural tolerance and respect for others. Schools are the ideal sites in which this value can be promoted. Tolerance means that learners need to “develop a willingness to endure and to exist alongside other cultures without interference” (Singh, 2005: 196). Cultural tolerance is most effective when it is accompanied by the development of respect for other cultures. The inclusion of this programme in the syllabus will expose learners to the knowledge and skills required for their successful participation in a culturally and linguistically diverse community, as in the case of Siyabuswa.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study**

Ndebele-speaking people are sparsely populated throughout the country. This research was limited to Siyabuswa community (see Chapter One) and a small sample of participants. Qualitative research does not lend itself to working with large numbers of participants. It therefore means that the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this research should not be generalize too strongly to all Ndebele speaking communities.

### **5.6 Recommendations for further research**

The researcher’s overall conclusion was that despite the good work that the DoE is doing in reviewing the curriculum in schools, much more has to be done in order to promote harmonious interaction in a culturally and linguistically diverse society. I therefore recommend the following areas for future research.



The DoE ought to begin research into the direct incorporation of cultural diversity and a community relations programme in the Life Orientation syllabus. Such research will cover aspects such as culture diversity and community relations and cultural understanding.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

From this study it emerged that communication between members of the traditionalists and modernized groups is not effective because these groups do not share and understand each other's cultural orientations. There are cultural differences between people with rural and urban backgrounds, gender groups, origin and age. These differences are linked to differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, views. Misunderstandings occur between members of each group in their interaction, due to a great variation in cultural differences. Cultural differences stem from the group's differing perceptions which in turn determine how group members communicate with people of other cultures. Non-verbal behaviour also impedes effective communication because there are different systems of using and understanding gesture, posture, silence, touch and physical appearance in different gender, age and rural/urban communities.

One can conclude that the problems indicated in Chapter One are barriers to effective communication between members of the two groups, and are supported by the results of the study.



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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Date of Interview:** .....

**Category:** .....

**Position of the interviewee:** .....

**Venue:** .....

**Time:** .....

**Topic: Cross-gender and cross-generational communication in Siyabuswa**

The interviewees will be classified under the following categories:

- Traditionalist : Males and Females
- Modernised Persons: Males and Females
- Youths

#### **Traditionalist: Males and Females/ Modernised persons**

- As head of the family how often do you communicate with your wife/son /daughter/husband?
- What issues do you normally discuss with your son/wife/daughter/father, etc?
- What is your experience with the youth/old people these days in terms of their behaviour?
- Do you think the youth have lost respect for the elderly? If so, why?
- What are your expectations of the youth/old people (elderly)?
- What is your major concern about the youth today?
- Are there topics about which you don't normally agree with your son /daughter/father?
- If there is a communication gap between you and young people/older people, how can it be bridged?
- Do you establish eye contact when you speak to your husband/father-in-law/father?
- How do feel if you are told to sit down or kneel down when you greet an older person?
- Which mode of dress do you feel most comfortable with?
- Some people believe that there should be a clear division of labour by gender, i.e. men and women should perform distinctive activities. Your opinion?
- How do you feel if women do things formerly considered for men only, e.g. speaking at gatherings, community meetings
- How will you feel if a woman leads in the community/ a meeting is chaired by a woman?
- What are your feelings about young people reject traditional norms for communication?



- Do you think this behaviour has any impact/influence on traditional Ndebele norms/roles?
- Do you think the traditional societies have been under pressure to change because of their contact with urban society?
- What do you think are the elements/issues which widen the gap between the youth and the old in Siyabuswa?
- It appears there are tensions between the youth and the old in terms of values. Do you agree?
- What are the issues which normally lead to conflict between the youth and the old?
- Do females have any role in decision-making and authority in the family?
- What do you think is the role of women in Ndebele community?

## **Youth**

- What is your attitude towards people who would like to preserve their culture in the community?
- How often do you perform ritual ceremonies at home and what are your feelings about them?
- How often do you communicate with your father/mother?
- What issues do you normally discuss with your father/ mother?
- How open are you with your mother/father?
- How do you feel if you are ordered to kneel down when you are greeting someone?
- What expectations are placed on you by your parents to perform in cultural activities?
- How do you normally dress?
- How will you feel if a woman is a leader in the community/ a meeting is chaired by a female?
- What is your attitude towards other ethnic groups who live in Siyabuswa?
- Do you think they have any impact/influence on traditional Ndebele norms/roles?
- How do you find school environment and home in terms of expectations about your behaviour?
- Why are the traditionalists not so eager to change?
- It appears there are tensions between the youth and the old about values. Do you agree?



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Date of Interview:**.....

**Position of the interviewee:**.....

**Venue:**.....

**Time:** .....

- What is your attitude towards people who would like to preserve their culture in the community?
- How often do you perform ritual ceremonies at home and what are your feelings about it?
- How often do you communicate with your father/mother?
- Around what issues do you normally speak about with?
- How open are you with your mother/father?
- How do you feel if you are ordered to kneel down when you are greeting someone?
- What expectations are placed on you by your parents, peers to perform in cultural activities?
- How do you normally dress?
  
- How will you feel if a woman is a leader in the community/ a meeting is chaired by a female?
  
- What is your attitude towards other ethnic groups who live in Siyabuswa?
  
- Do you think they have any impact/influence on traditional Ndebele norms/roles?
  
- How do you find school environment and home in terms of expectations?
  
- Why are the traditionalists not so eager to change?
  
- It appears there are tensions between the youth and the old in terms of values. Do you agree?



## APPENDIX C

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### To whom it may concern

In partial fulfillment for my Masters degree in Applied Language Studies at the University of Pretoria, I am conducting a study on “**Cross-gender and cross-generational communication in Siyabuswa**”.

I would like to ask your help in responding to the attached questions in the form of an interview.

Upon acceptance of this request, an interview will be scheduled at your convenience. It will last approximately one and half hour.

Your confidentiality in this regard will be respected and your input will be appreciated. If you have any problem with regard to the attached questions and the study, please contact me at the cell phone number or e-mail above.

Thanking you in advance.  
Sincerely

Zebedius Ramakgoakgoa