USING XITSONGA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO (TURFLOOP CAMPUS)

D. Nkwashu*
e-mail: delinanjhwashu@gmail.com

R. N. Madadzhe*
e-mail: richard.madadzhe@ul.ac.za

S. J. Kubayi*
e-mail: joe.kubayi@ul.ac.za

*School of Languages and Communication Studies
University of Limpopo
Sovenga, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This article examines the acceptability of using Xitsonga as a medium of instruction for teaching and learning (MoIL) at the University of Limpopo (UL) (Turfloop Campus), Sovenga, South Africa. Currently, English dominates the higher education environment because almost all the universities in South Africa utilise it as an MoIL. In addition, English is extremely popular in higher education because it is viewed as the language of the corporate world as well as the language of science. In such a context, the article sets out to determine whether the introduction of Xitsonga as an MoIL would be tenable and desirable at the aforementioned university. The data collected indicated that the majority
of Xitsonga speakers at UL believe that Xitsonga should not be used as an MoIL in higher education. It is concluded, however, that mother tongue education enhances, rather than diminishes learning, including the learning of additional languages.

**Keywords:** teaching and learning, medium of instruction, mother tongue education, tertiary education, Xitsonga, higher education

**INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this article is to examine the acceptability of Xitsonga as a medium of instruction and learning (MoIL) as well as a means of general communication at the University of Limpopo (UL) (Turfloop Campus), Sovenga, South Africa. Currently, there is a debate raging in South Africa whether the introduction of African languages as MoIL, or what has been referred to as the complementary language use model (Madiba 2010), would be feasible (DoE 2002; Kembo 2006; Madadzhe and Sepota 2006; Moyo 2002; Nkuna 2010). A Ministerial Committee appointed by the Department of Education (DoE 2003) ‘to advise on the development of African (indigenous) languages as mediums of instruction in higher education’ recommended in 2005 that it was the opportune time to introduce African languages as MoIL in higher education in South Africa. One of the themes that runs throughout the various conferences of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN 1996) is the recommendation for the use of African languages for teaching and learning. On the other hand, there is a contrary view on this issue held by some parents as indicated by Jansen (in Cook 2013, 4) when he avers that ‘black parents make the correct calculation that virtually the entire economy is now organised on English terms and therefore the chances of success are much greater in the colonial language’.

It is against this backdrop that the article would like to determine, although on a smaller scale as it addresses one language only, whether the use of Xitsonga would be acceptable in a higher education institution (HEI) such as UL.

In order to achieve the aforementioned aim, the article used a questionnaire, which consisted of questions such as:

- How do you feel about Xitsonga as a medium of instruction at university level? In other words, would you like Xitsonga to replace English as a medium of instruction for academic purposes? Substantiate your answer.
- What are the advantages of using Xitsonga on campus?
- What are the disadvantages of using Xitsonga on campus?
The article used an exploratory research design within the qualitative framework, as this helped the writers to obtain a good grasp of the context in which UL finds itself in relation to the questions posed above. As far as data collection and sampling are concerned, stratified random sampling was used because of its precision (Strydom and Venter 2005, 205) and the fact that the population consisted of a small number (out of a university population of 18 000). The sample comprised the following: 20 Xitsonga speaking students (57.1%), five Xitsonga speaking academic staff (14.3%) and ten Xitsonga speaking general staff (28.6%). The responses of all these categories of respondents were grouped together. The study concentrated on the aforementioned participants because they were the ones directly affected by the matter at hand. Later, an in-depth study that includes more languages would have to be conducted to establish whether the idea of using African languages as MoIL at UL is acceptable.

BACKGROUND

UL is a South African university, which is cosmopolitan in nature, as it consists of both students and staff from various countries. It came into existence through the merger of the University of the North (now known as the Turfloop Campus) and the Medical University of Southern Africa (now called the MEDUNSA Campus) as part of the government’s restructuring of higher education that took place from 2002 to 2005. The languages that are spoken at the university include English, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho (Sepedi), Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, isiNdebele, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Xitsonga is one of the minority languages both in South Africa where it is spoken by only 4.5 per cent of the population (www.southafrica.info/about/people/census2012), and at UL where it is spoken by 16 per cent of the student population (UL 2014). It is important to mention that Xitsonga has been granted official status by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) alongside other languages (i.e., English, Afrikaans, Tshivenda, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi and isiNdebele). The recognition of Xitsonga and other indigenous languages as official languages constitutes ‘a logical part of the whole philosophy which underlies the constitution and its Bill of Rights, namely, national integration and pluralism (“unity within diversity”’ (Webb 1999, 351). The goal of the recognition was to redress the historical imbalances of linguistic iniquities and inequalities, and thus also to address the manifold challenges of a complex multilingual and culturally diverse society.

Although the language policy at UL regards English as the university’s official MoIL, it also promotes the use of provincial African languages, such as Northern Sotho (Sepedi), Xitsonga and Tshivenda in academic programmes that specifically deal with these languages. Regarding Xitsonga, the foregoing policy stipulates that ‘Xitsonga will be used as a medium of instruction in Xitsonga courses. At postgraduate level, candidates have the right to use Xitsonga as a medium of instruction’ (UL
In spite of this, Xitsonga is still a marginalised language because it is hardly used on campus except in Xitsonga courses. This clearly indicates that the language policy in and of itself is inadequate (Webb 1999). English, a language associated with the colonial occupation of South Africa, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, a language linked to the oppression of black South Africans, enjoy high statuses at the expense of indigenous languages (Goodman and Goodman 2006; Pluddemann 1999). This, according to Foley (2004, 57), places South African higher education in a dilemma because these are ‘the only languages capable of functioning fully as languages of learning and teaching at higher education institutions [but] where most potential higher education students are not sufficiently fluent in [them] to be able to study effectively through these languages’. If this inequality is not addressed, it will entrench the dominance of English in the public life of the university as well as the public mind of both staff and students, with spill-over effects into civil society in general. In addition, the role of Xitsonga as one of the official languages will remain a token, amounting to paying lip-service to multilingualism (Pluddemann 1999).

An institutional climate survey conducted among students by the University of Cape Town (UCT) indicated that students have difficulty in using English for learning purposes (Madiba 2010, 328). The promotion of multilingualism in higher education is aimed not only at helping the students to cope with academic work, but also broadly at transformation, that is, changing the historical identity of the university. In the South African context, multilingual education relates to the use of more than one language as MoIL in a manner that promotes both academic and linguistic success.

Foley (2010) reports that the University of the Witwatersrand selected Sesotho, which is a first language to about 11 per cent of the student population at the institution, for a ten-year project of elaboration and development into a language of teaching and learning in a bilingual-medium of instruction with English. But Foley (2010, 10) argues that the choice of Sesotho is illogical and contradictory for the following reasons:

- It undermines the notion of equity and the promotion of multilingualism because its choice, and the subsequent overlooking of isiZulu, a language which is widely spoken on campus, means that the university will serve the interests of only 11 per cent of the student population. This, it is argued, will result in the promotion of ethnicity.
- The university’s language policy, requiring staff and students to be competent in both written and spoken English implies that once the latter have mastered English, nobody, first language speakers included, will be interested in using Sesotho as an MoIL in favour of the international academic language such as English. In a context where everybody could speak English, there would also be no need for code-switching. In addition, instead of promoting inclusivity, the policy will perpetrate a new more divisive system of linguistic discrimination.
● It would be difficult to develop Sesotho into an academic and scientific language because the standard form was selected from a rural dialect which sounds alien, unfamiliar and even irrelevant to most students from urban areas.

● Sesotho is an agglutinating language, making it difficult to distinguish one morpheme or word from the other, and a tonal language, implying indistinguishable homonyms.

● Finally, the introduction of bilingual education depends on huge funding for the production of teaching resources, costing and the setting up of timeframes, among other factors.

Clearly, if the use of Sesotho promotes ethnicity, so may the use of Xitsonga at UL. In general, if Sesotho cannot be used as an MoIL on the grounds advanced by Foley (2010), then it is likely that it will also be extremely difficult for other African languages to be used as MoIL in higher education. As a result, it can be expected that Xitsonga will remain a marginalised language.

It is fair to suggest that the causes of the marginalisation of Xitsonga also pertain to African languages in general. One of the major causes for this state of affairs can be located at community level, where people have negative attitudes towards African languages. In this regard, Murwamphida (2008, 1) states that ‘some Africans themselves are to blame for lack of use of African languages in South Africa as they still harbour a negative attitude towards African languages’. Pluddemann (1999) quotes reports of studies by Schlebusch (1994), Crawford (1995), Young et al. (1990) and Bloch (1998) carried out in Western Cape schools ‘confirm[ing] the drive for English and the shift to English-medium education at the expense of home languages’.

The reports conclude that parents have the same negative stereotypes towards the use of African languages. The problem is that ordinary black South Africans do not conceive of their languages as academic and scientific materials but as just home languages that are not properly equipped for deployment in high-status functions, but which are fit for the sole expression of self-identities and cultural orientation, and as instruments for personal communication, colloquial discourse, localised daily exchanges and for serving primary social functions (Biseth 2008; Foley 2004). In terms of this view, English is seen as a natural necessity for the purposes of advanced learning, among other functions. But clearly, if parents and learners do not show any active desire for the inculcation of mother-tongue education, such a policy will not be viable because these role players should also ensure that such education ‘leads to palpable benefits in such spheres as economic empowerment, social mobility and influence, and pathways to further academic opportunities’ (Foley 2010, 9).

But, according to Desai (2000 in Biseth 2008), practice, through the use of African languages in all societal domains such as education, can bring about positive attitudinal change towards African languages. Unsurprisingly, a study of students who use English as an additional language at the Faculty of Humanities at UCT
shows positive attitudes towards the use of first languages as MoIL (Bangeni 2001 in Madiba 2010). Unlike first language speakers, the students indicate their frustrations at their inability to write essays well and to hold more meaningful discussions in English, hence their yearning for academic activities in their home languages.

One reason for the reservations about the use of their mother tongue in education by minority communities such as Xitsonga speakers stems from

the suspicion that mother tongue is a ploy of those in power to keep them perpetually marginalized, or the belief that their language is a liability for them to progress, which is ingrained subliminally in their minds by the negative articulation of the value of their language by the dominant speakers (Annamalai 2006, 344).

What needs to be done therefore is for neutral players in education to provide evidence to the effect that their (minorities’) fears and beliefs are without empirical foundations. They need to realise that the acquisition of skills is not only the domain of dominant languages, such as English, and that the use of mother tongue actually aids it (Foley 2010). This kind of evidence may go a long way in reassuring and rekindling the support and involvement of both parents and students in the use of Xitsonga as an MoIL on the Turfloop Campus.

Resistance to mother tongue education goes beyond the community level. Politically, there are fears that mother tongue education, presumably, will threaten national unity, firstly, in the sense that it will hinder the assimilation of the minority with the majority; and secondly, it will lead to minorities making claims for the autonomy of their territories or the devolution of power (Annamalai 2006).

Makamu (2009, 152) observes that African languages are mainly associated with backwardness, poverty and inferiority. The strong preference in African countries for the ex-colonial languages is educationally detrimental; these languages have not been mastered well enough for the full development of knowledge and cognitive skills (Webb 1999). Thus, it does not come as a surprise to read Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1986, 11) viewpoint on the matter as it obtained in Kenya of the 1950s:

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment — three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks — or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY.

The reluctance towards mother tongue education at bureaucratic level (Annamalai 2006) emanates from misconceptions that African languages do not have adequate grammar, literature and technical terms for use in teaching subjects such as natural sciences and mathematics (Alexander 1989, 66). In other words, African languages are not able ‘to carry academic discourse effectively and therefore to function as fully-fledged languages of learning and teaching [because their] standard written forms remain in many ways archaic, limited and context-bound, and out of touch with the modern scientific world’ (Foley 2010, 2). This line of thinking, however,
misses the point entirely. Xitsonga, like other South African indigenous languages (Sesotho included), has undergone processes of standardisation and development to the extent that it is able to carry academic register at both primary and secondary school levels. The misconception also fails to unpack the semantics of the notion of language development, which is a natural outcome of the use of a language in education. Grammar, literature and terminology are mainly written down after the speakers have mastered both the content and the language itself through its use. Thus, the use of a language in education has the desired consequences of ever-increasing modernisation, regularisation, codification and elaboration of the language. It is axiomatic that English has reached its current level of development today after years of on-going similar processes.

Of course, the university may be inclined to point out the cost of providing education in Xitsonga. Such cost, however, ignores the social cost, through educational failure and discrimination, for instance, of the reluctance of providing mother tongue education. However, as Foley (2010) warns, the quest to implement this policy should not be done under any illusion of the enormity of the undertaking, which requires both massive material and human resources. When Afrikaans was developed into a fully functional academic language, the following situation occurred (Foley 2004, 2010):

- It emerged from Dutch, which was already a fully functional scientific language.
- It was fuelled by an intensely nationalistic political will. But Foley (2004, 62) claims that at the moment ‘none of the African languages serves to amalgamate and animate the interests of any fiercely resolute cultural nationalism the way that Afrikaans did’.
- It was whole-heartedly supported by a community that sought exclusivity and autonomy from English.

It can, however, not be denied that African languages are already scientific languages, albeit far from the development status of English; they have already been standardised for use in basic education. In fact, they are also already being used in postgraduate dissertations and theses. A large chunk of the South African budget (Gordhan 2012) is allocated to education; this could be redistributed equitably to finance mother tongue education on the campus. It could then be redirected to the investment of human resources at the level of academia through, among others, the creation (and rationalisation) of (existing) centres of excellence, research and writing centres, and the development, training and retraining of academics and markers. On the latter score, the University of South Africa and the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University employ freelance markers whose sole responsibility is the marking of students’ scripts. The development of a more academic register for
use in academic discourse needs commitment by the entire intellectual community, to use the language in both the private and the public spheres, through, \textit{inter alia}, the production of scholarly or scientific works, including textbooks and manuals, as well as the presentation of (public) lectures at conferences. More importantly, this project does not simply require a few scholars working on their own, but also the involvement of the whole Xitsonga speaking community beyond the confines of the university.

Foley (2010, 3) puts it as follows:

It is only when co-ordinated and systematic linguistic research is able to draw on, and feed back into, an actual, developing discourse of practice in a mutually enhancing relationship, that a language can begin to evolve into a functioning mode of academic and scientific expression.

In addition, every faculty at UL has to attract and support quality education researchers who would work specifically in the field of African languages in education. The main role of these researchers would be to undertake research in the use of African languages. It is only when such research works are conducted in Xitsonga that more syntax, literature and terminology will naturally evolve for further use, resulting in the growth of academic discourse in the language. Hence, the rejection by both parents and students of the use of African languages as MoIL is a cause for concern.

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that African languages, including Xitsonga, lag far behind English and Afrikaans vis-à-vis the number of books published (Pluddemann 1999). It is a truism that the publication of academic works brings about and/or increases the status of a language. Another consequence of such endeavour is, as already observed, the expansion in the academic syntactical quality of the language. Statistics, for example, indicate that while 73.4 per cent of the South African population spoke an African language as their home language in 1991, only 15.8 per cent of all published books were written in African languages (Pluddermann 1999). Clearly, ‘the increasing dominance of English in a country in which it is the second language of 90\% of the inhabitants ... is an unequivocal denial of the Constitution and its underlying philosophy’, and indicates that the government’s policy of multilingualism and pluralism is moving in the wrong direction (Webb 1999, 355).

Not surprisingly, the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG 1996), with a view to countering the homogenising and dominant power of English, has long proposed a number of strategies designed to change people’s attitudes towards the use of African languages in education. One such strategy is to incentivise creative writing in African languages.

Economic factors also play a role in the stagnation of African languages. Many parents prefer that their children learn English as it enhances their employability, which is why Ogutu (2006, 51) highlights:
The parents of the school going children conclude that English is the language of educational and thereby social-economic advancement. It is therefore of more use to their children than the African language, which is only useful at home. English is seen as the key to economic empowerment and progress. Pupils and parents seem to believe that a basic education in English, rather than mother tongue, will give them the upper hand in schooling and thereafter a better hand in the job market.

Equally, Phillipson (2006, 14) warns:

> English opens some doors and closes others. It can be used for good or bad reasons, with good or bad effects, but in the modern world it cannot be ignored. Even if well over half of humanity, and speakers of most of the world’s languages, are blissfully unable to function in English (we should not be taken in by the rhetoric of English as ‘the world’s’ lingua franca), their fates are influenced by decisions made in that language. This is why its magic needs addressing.

On the other hand, the benefits of using mother tongue education have already been mentioned by several scholars (see Biseth 2008; Moyo 2002; Ouane and Glanz 2010; wa Thiong’o 1986).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Having laid this foundation, the article will henceforth present an analysis of the responses provided by the participants mentioned in the foregoing sections.

**For what purpose do you use Xitsonga as an official language?**

The responses to this question are summarised as in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic purposes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social purposes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative purposes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other purposes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 clearly indicates that 80 per cent of the Xitsonga speaking respondents use Xitsonga as an official language for social purposes; 11 per cent for other purposes; 6 per cent for academic purposes; and only 3 per cent for communicative purposes. The main reason why there is a small percentage of Xitsonga usage for academic and communicative purposes is that English is still used as the MoIL at UL.
How do you feel about Xitsonga as a medium of instruction at university level? In other words, would you like Xitsonga to replace English as a medium of instruction for academic purposes? Substantiate your answer.

This question was in fact the crux of the study and the responses were as follows:

**Table 2:** Respondents’ feelings about Xitsonga as a medium of instruction at university level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support for Xitsonga as a medium of instruction</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed to use of Xitsonga as a medium of instruction</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 indicates that 69 per cent of Xitsonga respondents (lecturers, general staff members and students) are not keen to see Xitsonga being used as an MoIL at university level. When asked why they did not support the use of Xitsonga as an MoIL, the respondents answered that the use of Xitsonga as an MoIL at university level would have a negative impact on the students’ employability as most companies in South Africa prefer the use of English in the work environment. Some respondents divulged that such a system would be extremely expensive as each official language on campus would have to be catered for. For instance, if there are speakers of Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Setswana, isiNdebele, siSwati and isiZulu doing mathematics, the university would be compelled to employ six lecturers to teach the module. Financially, this may be untenable as the country already spends a large amount of money on education, that is, R207 billion (Gordhan 2012, 21). In addition, some respondents alluded to the fact that English is an international language whose status as a higher education language of teaching, learning and research cannot be disputed (Van der Walt 2004), and since people live in a globalised world, it would be beneficial to use English in education as they could work wherever their expertise is needed. All this suggests that much still needs to be done in order to educate people about the effectiveness of learning in their mother tongue in South Africa.

The views expressed by the majority of the respondents in the study are not completely surprising if the results of the 2011 Census are taken into account where several scholars such as Prof. Lesiba Rafapa, Prof. Nhlanhla Mathonsi and Dr Linda Kwatsha pointed out, as quoted by Khanyile (2012, 7), that English is associated with prestige, high education, intelligence and technological advancement. Of course, most tertiary students obtained their secondary school education in English and it is thus a natural progression that their university education would also be in English. Kwatsha’s observation in Khanyile (2012, 7) is revealing: ‘Our model C
kids don’t speak Xhosa, they just want English. Our role models, politicians and celebrities speak English almost all the time. If they were to speak in their home languages, many people, including kids, would follow.’ The challenge, therefore, is not only for the university and students, but also for the country as a whole to create the conditions for the promotion of the use of home languages at social, economic and political levels.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using Xitsonga on campus?

The data from the respondents indicated that although Xitsonga is a minority language, it is effective among the Xitsonga people for communicative and cultural purposes. What the data failed to do, however, is to point out the advantages of using the language for academic purposes. As Madiba (2010) observes, there is a strong correlation between language and conceptualisation. Xitsonga lecturers in particular pointed out that it was crucial to code-switch to mother tongue when they wanted to emphasise and clarify issues to students in the classroom. Such code-switching, they say, is usually preferable in the explanation of cultural concepts that cannot be fully comprehended in the target language. It is not difficult to unpack the implications of this argument: academics who teach African languages do so in English. One consequence of this approach is the further postponement of the development of these languages as languages of academic discourse in higher education, and worse, their relegation to the periphery, that is, even in contexts where they should be given priority.

Hornberger (1987 in Webb 1999) notes a number of demonstrable educational advantages of using indigenous languages in education, namely: the development of the vernacular; the production of written material in indigenous languages; the promotion of cultural integration; the overcoming of cultural discrimination; and the better use of educational opportunities. A multilingual approach to teaching also supports ‘the goals of equity, access and improved throughput’ (Van der Walt 2004, 143). It ensures additive bilingualism where both languages are supported, developed and maintained (Biseth 2008). Mother tongue education is crucial and even ‘indispensable for the harmonious and full development of individuals and society’ (Ouane and Glanz 2010, 3). The use of African languages in higher education will lead to ‘greater access to higher education, the formal economy, and civil society’ (Pluddemann 1996, 337).

It is, therefore, expected that the promotion of multilingualism through the concurrent use of English should, rather than perpetuate the marginalisation of indigenous languages, foster the creation of a new order of social power and social relations that enables the growth of the African languages and cultural renaissance (Madiba 2010).
The disadvantages mentioned here are that the use of Xitsonga would serve as a communication barrier to other ethnic groups and would promote tribalism, which was an effective instrument for the divide-and-rule strategy and the oppression of Africans during the apartheid era in South Africa (1949−1994). Surprisingly, no one raises an argument of tribalism about the continued use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction by white South Africans in education. In addition, respondents felt that students would find it extremely difficult to find employment in the current epoch where English is dominant in the economic and political spheres. This reasoning, however, does not take into cognisance, as argued here, that mother tongue education enhances, rather than diminishes performance in other subjects, including the learning of other languages, resulting in more meaningful participation in the broader society.

FINDINGS

It has been seen that 69 per cent of Xitsonga speakers at UL reject the use of Xitsonga on a complementary basis along with English as an MoIL. It appears that Xitsonga speakers do not view their language as having the required linguistic repertoire in terms of phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic complexity for deployment in high status functions. Equally, it appears that the speakers do not want to be seen to be given preferential treatment in as far as their language is concerned in a context where Sepedi is a dominant language of general communication. Sepedi is spoken by 64 per cent of the student population as a first language (UL 2014). It may well be that speakers of siSwati, Setswana and Tshivenda and other minority languages on the campus may be thought to share similar sentiments.

It should be borne in mind that Xitsonga is a minority language both on the campus and in the broader South African society. In addition, there appears to be a feeling that the choice of Xitsonga as an MoIL would be detrimental to the users both in the short and in the long term in terms of their respective academic and future professional activities. English is viewed as an international and global language that must be mastered at all costs for an individual to remain functionally relevant in the modern world. Xitsonga speakers on the campus look up to English as the magic language (Phillipson 2006), which will open doors for them to enter into the workplace, and, therefore, that which must be attained for succeeding in the corporate world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that there is a largely negative attitude towards the use of Xitsonga as an MoIL at UL. This begs the question: What is to be done? If Xitsonga speakers do not believe in the power of their language, can the implementation of Xitsonga as an MoIL be implemented unilaterally by the university? Do the speakers of the
other official indigenous languages feel the same? In response to these and other questions, the following recommendations are presented:

- Xitsonga speaking students must be encouraged to love their language because without it they may lose their identity.
- More research work should be conducted to determine the acceptability of Sepedi, Tshivenda, Setswana, siSwati and isiNdebele as languages of education on the campus. Such studies will hopefully determine the general understanding of the value attached to African languages by the first language speakers themselves. They will also act as guidelines for new language policy directives with respect to the role of African languages in higher education both on the campus at UL and in the rest of the universities in South Africa.
- It is after the outcomes of the research initiatives suggested above that more informed decisions can be made about the future of the indigenous official languages, Xitsonga included, spoken on the campus at UL. It is, however, important that Xitsonga speakers should actively use their language to reduce the negative attitudes towards the language. One way of doing this is for its speakers to engage themselves in the writing of more academic works, including textbooks, literary works, articles and dictionaries. There is also a need for increased workshops and cultural activities to promote Xitsonga as a language and as a culture. This will ensure the enhancement of the status of the language on the campus and in higher education in general.

CONCLUSION

It has been noted that the majority of Xitsonga speakers at UL reject the use of Xitsonga as an MoIL. The major reasons for this state of affairs are economic in nature: it is English that promotes employability and provides access to the international and globalised world. Unless Xitsonga and other African languages acquire the requisite capacity to empower students to gain employment and be relevant to the current social and political context in the world, it will be a tall order to use them as MoIL in higher education in South Africa.

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