

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF XK RADIO IN STRENGTHENING !XUN AND KHWE LANGUAGES OF THE SAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: In addition to the history of oppression that Indigenous people all over the world share, there are other aspects regarding the lives of these communities that have not been given enough scholarly attention. These include their indigenous means of communication, cultural practices, indigenous land rights and their daily existence. As a result, their culture and languages are increasingly under threat. The goal of this study is to explore the efficacy of a local community radio station based in the Northern Cape, South Africa, in promoting the two San languages that it caters for. Documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with radio personnel, including the station manager and programme presenters, were conducted. The study is undergirded by the Multilingual and Multicultural Positioning Theory, which argues for deliberate and meaningful efforts to use languages that are under threat in private and public discourse in order to preserve them. This issue deserves attention because indigenous languages are slowly becoming extinct in Southern Africa. This exploratory study finds that the two languages were gravely endangered due to many years of acculturation, and radio was playing a significant role in trying to preserve them, confer status to them, and imbue a sense of pride in the language speakers.

Keywords: Khwe, Multilingual and Multicultural Positioning Theory, San people, XK-FM, !Xun, informal interviews

Introduction

“Indigenous peoples have rightful aspirations for their languages and cultures, supported under international conventions, jurisdictional treaties, laws, policies and enquiry recommendations. Additionally, the inclusion of Indigenous languages in education can impact positively on indigenous students’ learning, engagement, identity and well-being, and can increase involvement of their communities in education.”— (Angelo, et al, 2022, p.17)

Indigenous people all over the world share one thing in common, which is a history of oppression (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2001). Globally, there are approximately 476 million Indigenous Peoples, and through their connection to the land, they play an important role in biodiversity and conservation (World Bank study). As the World Bank study indicates

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“Despite their vital role in conservation, Indigenous Peoples experience disproportionately high levels of poverty. They make up only 6.2 per cent of the global population, yet account for 18.2 per cent of those living in extreme poverty worldwide. Indigenous Peoples’ life expectancy is up to 20 years lower than the rest of the population, and they face severe barriers to accessing basic services, education, infrastructure, and job opportunities.”

For example, a study by Motsaathebe(2022) focusing on the communities in Botswana finds that they suffer from abject poverty, constant dislocation due to forced removal and loss of their ancestral land and a threat to their languages and cultural heritage. It is clear that this picture is almost similar for many of the indigenous communities across the world, as further illustrated by a study done by Amnesty International (nd)

“Indigenous Peoples experience the same harsh realities the world over. Their human rights are routinely violated by state authorities, and they face high levels of marginalisation and discrimination. They face eviction from the ancestral lands they have inhabited for generations, as well as restricted access to education, health care and housing. Indigenous human rights defenders are intimidated, attacked, and sometimes even killed, often with the support of the state. Indigenous people are more likely to live in extreme poverty and suffer higher rates of landlessness, malnutrition and internal displacement than other groups”

Given this shared history of oppression, it is no wonder, therefore, that much of the existing research concerning these communities tends to focus on their plight. What is clear from the research literature is that their plight remains the same globally. However, other aspects of the lives of these communities have not received much scholarly attention. One of them is their indigenous means of communication. As Mundy and Lloyd-Laney (1992, p.12) correctly observed, "Indigenous communication is being replaced by external systems, and the survival of much valuable information, and of the local culture itself, is in danger." Indigenous communication encompasses the transmission of entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements, and various social exchanges (Mundy and Lloyd-Laney, 1992). It is the means by which cultures and the indigenous knowledge embedded in them are preserved, handed down, and shared. Research shows that community media have the potential to amplify indigenous voices on issues of interest to their communities and influence the preservation of different cultural attributes, including languages (see Chikaipa, 2023).

At the moment, there are other aspects regarding the lives of many indigenous communities that have not been given enough scholarly attention. These include their indigenous means of communication, cultural practices, indigenous land rights and their daily existence. Questions around how they live and some of the struggles they encounter, such as forced removal and lack of accommodation/ recognition

of their way of life, are yet to be fully explored. As a result, their culture and languages are increasingly under threat. In particular, the decline of the indigenous languages of these communities and how media platforms, such as radio, could be harnessed to preserve them warrants investigation. To address this threat, there is a need to intensify efforts to utilise local languages and cultures effectively as a means of preserving them.

The present paper focuses on a particular community radio station catering to two communities, namely the !Xun and Khwe communities, who were resettled in South Africa in the early 1990s. The !Xun are one of the San peoples who live mostly on the western edge of the Kalahari Desert, Ovamboland (northern Namibia and southern Angola), and Botswana. In the same breath, the Khwe are the Khoe subdivision of the Khoe-Kwadi family of Namibia, Angola, Botswana, South Africa, and parts of Zambia. Part of the group that came to South Africa was initially part of the Portuguese forces fighting in Angola, but became stranded when the war ended with Angola gaining independence from Portugal. At that time, they were recruited into the South African Defence Force (SADF) of the then apartheid government, which was involved in wars in South West Africa, particularly against the Namibian freedom fighters who were fighting for the independence of Namibia.

When the war ended in Namibia with the independence of Namibia in 1990, the two groups once again found themselves stranded and dislocated. Fearing reprisals, they were granted South African citizenship as the South African Defence Force, which employed them, was withdrawing from Namibia. They arrived in Schmidtsdrift, a military tent town on a farm outside Kimberley, in 1990. But in 2003, they were again moved to Platfontein, a farm that was bought on their behalf, also near Kimberley. However, a few of them refused to leave, saying they had family members buried there and could not just pack and leave. As to whether this chequered history has anything to do with their marginalisation is another issue that deserves a full study. What is clear, however, is that many of the social problems that these communities face as a result of their continuous dislocation, lack of resources and unemployment. Afrikaans is the common language for the two communities. According to the SABC, they were relocated to Platfontein. 56 per cent of the population speaks Xun, while 37 per cent speak Khwe.

The particular radio station that this paper focuses on is X-K FM, which is currently the only radio station catering for the !Xun and Khwe communities in South Africa. The paper focuses on this station to assess how it contributes to the preservation of the indigenous languages of its target audiences. The paper highlights the need of intensified efforts to preserve indigenous minoritised languages that are under threat. These languages have become low-resourced languages since they have been displaced

by dominant languages and continue to be marginalised in mainstream public platforms and research. As a result, they lack resources often available to dominant languages, which serve as lingua franca and languages of opportunities, reinforcing the hegemony of the dominant culture at the expense of indigenous languages and their cultural capital. Thus, this issue deserves attention because indigenous languages are slowly becoming extinct in Southern Africa. An example of this is the Seroa language, which used to be spoken in the Xhariep district in South Africa. There are various examples of such languages which have since become extinct.

Based on the above context, the paper explores the significance of XK FM, a local community radio station based in the Northern Cape, South Africa, in promoting the !Xun and Khwe languages (San languages) which are currently on the verge of extinction. The specific aim is: To determine, through informal interviews and documentary analysis, the significance and efficacy of X-K FM in promoting the !Xun and Khwe languages. Thus, the paper examines the significance of the local radio station in promoting and preserving the languages of these communities. This is crucial given the concerns that these communities still experience oppression and that their culture and languages are increasingly under threat due to assimilation into mainstream tribes.

Literature Review

Recent research on indigenous people focuses on the plight of indigenous communities and the politics of recognition. However, researchers have not explored the !Xun and Khwe Context in South Africa. The literature on the role of the media in promoting indigenous languages is also scanty. The plight of indigenous San communities has been captured in studies by scholars such as Mosaathebe (2022) and Van Wyk (2014). Mosaathebe's work, on one hand, examined the "rights" of indigenous communities under multiculturalism debates, focusing on the San communities in Botswana, paying attention to the tension between those communities and the Botswana government. He argued that their constant and forceful relocation by the government in the name of development was perpetuating dislocation and violence against those communities. Van Wyk's work, on the other hand, explores the early recruitment of the !Xun and Khwe into the Portuguese forces fighting in Angola during the Angolan War of Independence, long before they were recruited into the South African Defence Force during apartheid South Africa. This source explains that their militarisation was not started by apartheid South Africa but by the Portuguese who had colonised Angola. This shows that the two communities have a long history of suffering dislocation and coercion by dominant groups of some sort of authorities, as in the case of Portuguese security forces and apartheid South African security forces.

Research concerning media and indigenous languages Revitalisation efforts shows that using or promoting a language in public platforms such as the media confers status to such a language and speakers of that language community, and their sense of identity is also bolstered (Motsaathebe, 2018; Motsaathebe, 2023b; Motsaathebe, 2025). At the same time, that community's culture and participation in public affairs increase significantly, as well as their ability to articulate their struggles. This study is therefore expected to contribute to the literature on some of the languages under threat and how the media can become important vehicles to safeguard these languages and the culture of those language communities. Furthermore, the study is significant because the veracity of rural radio stations such as XK-FM is yet to be fully explored by scholars and educators.

Many of these communities have been evicted from their ancestral land due to discriminatory policies and laws that do not recognise their customary legal understanding. Many of them are subjected to violence of different forms when they speak out about their dehumanising existence (Motsaathebe 2023a). Furthermore, since the media such as radio, television and newspapers have become the most popular means of transmitting information, this study will examine the significance of XK-FM as the only radio station catering for the !Xun and Khoe languages.

With regard to the legal context and recognition of indigenous communities, studies show that South Africa made efforts to accommodate indigenous communities through legal instruments such as the country's constitution, which elevated 10 indigenous languages to official language status, alongside English and Afrikaans. This document provides for linguistic rights which must be enjoyed by all South Africans. There are also a number of other institutions, such as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSalb), that actively promote multilingualism in the country. In addition, the country adopted the Khoisan language expression in its National Motto – a symbolic step of inclusivity and recognition of the Khoisan language. There is also the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act 3 of 2019, which provides for the recognition of traditional and Khoi-San communities. However, this paper argues that these efforts remain extremely inadequate as they are not meaningful enough and have very little or no impact at all.

In terms of the research gap, from the literature review, it is clear that there is very limited research on the role of the media in promoting indigenous languages. This is especially concerning considering that certain media forms, such as radio in particular, are very popular with indigenous language communities based on the ratings (Motsaathebe, 2024). For example, in South Africa, the number one radio station that has a huge audience is an indigenous language radio, namely Ikhwezi FM. As indicated, in addition to the history of oppression that Indigenous people all over the world share, there are other aspects regarding the lives of these indigenous communities that have not been given enough scholarly

attention. These include their indigenous means of communication, cultural practices, indigenous land rights and their daily existence. This study is part of efforts to fill this gap by focusing on the languages of these communities and some of the possible revitalisation and positioning efforts.

Theoretical arguments

The paper relies on the Multicultural and Multilingual Positioning Theory, which fosters integration, focusing on the radical recognition of indigenous languages and their usage. Insights from this theory are used to argue that the perilous situation in South Africa not only limits the effective participation of indigenous language communities in national life but also restricts citizens' constitutional rights. Its core tenets posit that legal provisions to promote indigenous languages must be enacted and vigorously enforced to enable these languages to thrive and that the experiences and perspectives of such communities must be taken into consideration in any action involving them. Multilingual and Multicultural Positioning Theory (MMP) was first proposed by the author (2025) based on the idea that language must be used effectively in private and public discourse, otherwise it becomes endangered. MMP provides a framework to highlight the fundamentals of purposeful and meaningful language use in contexts where certain languages dominate due to their accrued lingua franca status over the years. Such languages have become languages of opportunity, as one must speak them to access certain services and benefits.

MMP is praxis-oriented as it attempts to address a complex situation that exists in multilingual and multicultural contexts, where the cultures and languages of minoritised communities are invisibilised by those of the dominant groups. It aims to promote and offer perspectives on how the minoritised languages can be used effectively to prevent their possible extinction. The theory argues that members of any language that is not used effectively in public discourse are axiomatically relegated to lower social categories. It argues that the marginal position of such communities is embedded in societal structures and attempts to *visibilise* their oppression and systemic inequalities and ultimately advocate for more liberalising ways to change their situation. The concept of positioning itself emanates from the realisation that language and culture operate simultaneously and that for the two to be meaningfully promoted, they must be allowed space to be practised. Thus, language is not only a major cultural heritage, but it is also a marker of social class. That is why many parents often encourage their children to use the language used more often in society as a way to distance themselves from the perceived lower class. People do not understand this. Within one or two generations of this occurrence, the language can easily be lost. There is, therefore, a need for deliberate action for a pragmatic context, and it is necessary to delineate and apply that context to its explication. MMP is unique in the sense that it is clearly distinct from other theories, such as language ecology, linguistic human rights, language revitalisation and

multiculturalism accommodation theory, which are merely concerned with declining languages without “achieving desired outcomes as Wiltshire, Bird, and Hardwick (2024) observed. Hence, Wiltshire et al, (2024: 3947) observed that “this plethora of options results from there being no clear optimal strategy, from limited understanding of how language revitalisation works, and a lack of consensus on how to evaluate programmes.” The MMP, on the other hand, is clear about how the ‘positioning’ should be undertaken and provides practical steps for its practicalisation. The theory is undergirded by the following key assumptions.

Legal provisions to promote indigenous languages must be enacted and vigorously enforced to enable these languages to thrive. It requires that the state crafts a mechanism and legal instruments that allows for cultural particularities in which the language is embedded. Examples: government policy and legislation should make provisions requiring schools to teach the languages, make it mandatory for people in context where language is in majority to use that language of discourse. Schools must be directed to teach these courses to PhD level, from primary school. Another example of this would be to make it mandatory for courts in areas where a particular language is predominant to speak that language, except under unique circumstances.

Using a language regularly confers status to that language and a sense of identity to that group and positions that language to evolve and thrive; lack of language positioning leads to language shifts, resulting in language apathy and acculturation.

Language positioning is progressive and empowering because it gives other languages the same status as dominant languages from a practical perspective and enables those languages to flourish outside the confines of the dominant languages that have continued to be reproduced through preponderous usage in public discourse and public platforms.

Language and culture cannot be separated because language embodies culture and enforces cultural identity. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki (2005) noted that more and more South African children are socialised in the English culture and adopting the English language at the expense of the indigenous South African languages. This is evidence of multicultural accommodation in peril. This requires a sharp language and cultural positioning framework based on problematisation in the foregoing.

MMP maintains that to preserve culture, the cultural community must effectively use their languages in public discourse and media mediation plays a key role in popularising the language and cultures and helping them germinate, remain operational and thrive. We have seen how attempts at multiculturalism accommodation led to integration and assimilation, resulting in language shift and acculturation of those

accommodated in the dominant language and culture. Based on the disastrous implications of the theory for the normative framework in multilingual contexts, the theory proposed in this article asserts that language and culture operate simultaneously and should not be considered separately.

Media mediation plays a key role in popularising the language and cultures and helping them germinate, remain operational and thrive. In that sense, it argues that minoritised language communities must effectively use their languages in public discourse, and media mediation plays a key role in popularising the language and cultures, thus helping them thrive. Hence, radio XK FM is viewed as an important catalyst in promoting and preserving the languages under study. Thus, the theory recognises that: using a language regularly confers status to that language and a sense of identity to that group and positions that language to evolve and thrive; Lack of language positioning leads to language shifts, resulting in language apathy and acculturation; Language positioning is progressive and empowering because it gives other languages the same status as dominant languages from a practical perspective, enabling those languages to flourish outside the confines of the dominant languages that have continued to be reproduced through usage in public discourse and platforms; MMP maintains that to preserve culture, the cultural community must effectively use their languages in public discourse.

As Outakoski et al. (2018) say, “Previous research has underscored that a central prerequisite for language revitalisation initiatives is that the language should be used in as many domains as possible.” Hence, the significance of the MML theory lies in advocating for effective and more robust language use in both private and public discourse. At the moment, this is not happening in multilingual contexts where certain languages are minoritised. The proposition of MML argues well with the observation by Outakoski et al. (2018) that “a threatened language has better odds of surviving when it is used in private as well as professional spheres, at home, at school, in the media, at public events and so on.”

Methodology

This preliminary study focused on X-K FM, based in Platfontein outside Kimberley, South Africa. This radio station is based in Platfontein outside Kimberley in the Northern Cape. The station was started in 2000 by community leaders who were concerned that the two languages would become extinct and wanted to use the station to preserve them. “Its mission is to preserve the !Xun and Khwe languages and cultures, uplifting, developing and informing the community.” This community radio is unique because it operates on the platform of the SABC, a public broadcaster, but it is managed partly by the local communities. Some people have actually argued that it is not a community radio station but an extension of the public broadcaster, the SABC (see Mhlanga, 2025). The station broadcasts to these two

different communities that have experienced serious ethnic dislocation. Two methods of data collection were used, namely interviews and documentary analysis.

Interviews

Informal interviews were used with the XK FM employees, including management and show hosts. Such interviewees were purposefully selected. The inclusion criteria for interviewees were that only those knowledgeable about the workings of the station and how it promotes the two languages. Informal Interviews proved to be advantageous for this study as an excellent research tool, as they allow conversations to flow naturally without imposing formal structure. Another reason for using informal interviews in this study is their flexibility, which allows the interviewer to adapt questions to probe the information presented by the interviewee in a less intimidating manner. Such an approach is very useful in a study such as this one; hence, Swain and King (2022: 14) correctly

“posit that informal interviews are a neglected innovation and a method that should become more widely employed [as they] create a greater ease of communication and often produce more naturalistic data.”

The initial point of contact was with the station manager when the author visited the station. The author had face-to-face discussions with the station manager, the radio’s communication manager, as well as two presenters. This sample was considered sufficient since the station is very small and also because in qualitative research, the sample size is not a priority since data is mined for its richness. As Dworkin (2012) puts it, qualitative research uses a small sample size compared to quantitative research, as qualitative research aims to get an in-depth viewpoint and understanding of the phenomenon, unlike focusing on numbers. The relatively small size also stems from the fact that the radio station itself is very small with a very small number of personnel. Field notes from this meeting also served as an additional source for the present study. To minimise bias, interviewees were informed about the objectives of the study and that it was merely meant to generate academic knowledge and not to evaluate the station. To further compensate for a small sample, although not a factor in qualitative research, the research made use of news reports (using documentary analysis) that capture the views of the audience regarding the significance of the radio station.

Documentary Analysis

Furthermore, documentary analysis of relevant material in the form of policy documents and news reports was used as a complementary data-gathering mechanism in this study. The criteria for inclusion in news reports were that the study was only interested in news reports that reported on X-K FM and

included views from community members and the station’s personnel. Documentary analysis was employed in this study due to its ability to systematically extract rich insights from documentary material. As Steward (2022) observed, with a clear plan and systematic approach, documentary analysis becomes a potent tool in the researcher's arsenal, allowing them to uncover profound insights from textual data. Documentary analysis was therefore deemed an important method of triangulation in this research to complement data from interviews. Bowen (2009: 28) is correct in noting that,

“The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods...By examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study.”

The following tables provide a snapshot of the data collection details, which include interviews and documentary analysis.

Table 1: A snapshot of the data collection details

Interviews		
Entity	Role	Size/number
X-K FM	Presenter	1
	Station Manager	1
	Programme Manager	1
Document Analysis		
Documents		Focus of data analysed
The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (1997)		Importance of indigenous languages in education and Promotion of multilingualism
National Language Policy Framework (2002)		Promotion of linguistic diversity, protection of language rights and use of languages
News reports		Role of X-K FM – Identifying discourse

Thus, the findings reported here are based on the interview discussions as well as documentary analysis.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, and the results reveal serious issues that are discussed under specific themes in the findings. As stated, the study investigated the research questions regarding the significance of the X-K FM in promoting and preserving the Xun and Khwe languages of the San communities.

Table 1: Characteristics of the radio studied

Name of Radio station	Location	Type	Broadcast languages	Date launched
X-K FM	Platfontein	Community Radio Station	!Xun	18 August 2000
Full name is: Xunxhuesa Dom Kxui FM	This settlement is 15 kilometres from the historical mining town of Kimberley in the Northern Cape, South Africa Managed partly by the community	Unique community model because it is housed on the platform of a public broadcaster, SABC	Afrikaans (bridging language)	

Based on the above context, the paper explores the significance of XK FM, a local community radio station based in the Northern Cape, South Africa, in promoting the !Xun and Khwe languages (San languages) which are currently on the verge of extinction. Based on the research question, the interviewees were radio X-K personnel, while the texts identified for documentary analysis were policy documents and news reports. The research was interested in pertinent information relating to the research question, such as how people feel about the station and the milestones it has achieved in promoting the Xun and Khwe languages, as well as any challenges that may have arisen. With regard to policy documents identified were the National Language Policy Framework and the Language in Education Policy were identified, because they make pronouncements on the use and promotion of South Africa's diverse languages. In terms of inclusion criteria, only policy documents that focus on indigenous languages were considered. The key consideration was language rights, support and utilisation of these languages. The method used to analyse data was thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis of data

In analysing the data thematically, the study followed specific steps adopted from Motsaathebe (2009), which were: 1) familiarisation with the data, 2) creation of phrases that capture the ideas expressed, 3) generation of themes, 4) reviewing of the themes, 5) finalisation of themes and 6) finding evidence from the data to support what the themes articulate. In the first step, the researcher started by reviewing the

interview data and field notes to familiarise myself with the picture or important elements emerging from the data. From there, I identified and highlighted views in the text that appear to highlight relevant issues relating to the research questions, and the researcher labelled those expressions using short phrases. From these phrases, the researcher came up with conscience themes. The researcher then reviewed the themes before going through the data again meticulously to find evidence that supported what I articulated in each and every theme. The same process was followed for both interview data and documents pursued as part of documentary analysis. The following themes emerged from the data.

Theme 1: Gravely endangered languages

From the interview discussion, it was clear that the two languages were gravely endangered, and the radio was doing its bit to try to preserve the two languages. Interviewees voiced concerns regarding the language shift resulting from the domination of other languages at the expense of their local languages that are facing extinction. The following comment from one of the interviewees illustrates this.

“Our languages are dying because of the dominance of languages such as English and Afrikaans, since these languages are languages of opportunity. They are used at work and also at school as a means to acquire knowledge.”

This viewpoint highlights a vital point regarding the precarious situation faced by these two language communities. As this comment points out, the dominant languages, such as English and Afrikaans, are prioritised by employers since they are lingua franca. This means they are used for official business, leaving little room for interest in indigenous languages.

Thus, the young generation that is desperately looking for opportunities would end up seeing these languages as less important as they gravitate to the more popular languages that are also languages of status, because in that situation the more you are proficient in these dominant languages the more opportunities you are likely to get and the better you live would become as a result of such livelihood. This means that these languages would be gravely endangered. Thus, the marginalisation of these communities also compromises the use of their languages and the way these languages are viewed both by insiders and outsiders.

Theme 2: Radio is playing a pivotal role in promoting language use

It was clear that the radio was fulfilling a very important educational role through its language programmes. It was contributing by conferring status to the languages and imbuing a sense of pride in the language speakers. It was clear that the radio was very effective in preserving the two languages. As one of the interviewees puts it, “many of our listeners inform us that they are learning a lot about

their languages from listening to the way they are used on-air”. It is clear from the radio personnel that members of the community are engaging positively with the language through the content aired on the local radio.

“Radio helps a lot because the language is still with us. We record stories, traditional music, including traditional music instruments, and we play that to the community. We record it and play it to the community, and in this way, we keep it alive.”

Thus, radio provides a viable platform for such languages to be used and preserved. Communicating in their languages fosters a sense of identity and satisfaction from hearing their own languages on the airwaves, as one of the community members

“We are listening to our own languages and we are enjoying it.”

Other listeners put it this way,

“I am also very happy that through XK FM we can receive music, information and intertainment in our own languages. I am very happy to have our own community radio station. We are hearing our one language.”

“I am happy to hear my language on the radio. We are listening to it and we are enjoying it.”

The radio personnel also revealed that the station has motivated them to study further in order to offer a better service to the community they serve.

“I realised that I need to improve my education. I need to improve so that I can be in a much better position to serve the community and with the position that SABC has afforded me, I started going back to university to improve my studies through correspondence.”

The content encourages community members to use the language, learn about it, and ultimately also has a legitimising effect regarding those languages by virtue of their being used in such a media platform. This finding resonates with the Multicultural and Multilingual Positioning theory’s proposition that using a language regularly confers status to that language and a sense of identity to that group and positions that language to evolve and thrive. At the same time, media mediation plays a key role in popularising the language and cultures, helping them germinate, remain operational, and thrive.

Theme 3: A Trove of indigenous knowledge is being lost

Because the language was under threat and there were not many people in the community who could speak these languages effectively, it was feared that indigenous knowledge, which has for many years been transmitted through languages, was being lost. As one of the interviewees puts it,

“One of the reasons why I became part of this initiative [the radio project] was to try to promote our languages to ensure that they are not lost to the future generation, as the common language used in these two communities is Afrikaans instead of the local languages, which are becoming increasingly endangered”.

Another source interviewed indicated that the indigenous knowledge of his community, which used to be transmitted through stories and oral history told in these languages, was increasingly under threat if these languages are not used. This source said that as part of his work, he often has to translate stories from other languages to ensure that information reaches his community in their own languages.

“Our language is not the written language, so we have to translate from Afrikaans to Khwedam or from Afrikaans to !Xû. Now people thought that that was easy, but we make sure that the news goes out so that the community can know what is happening in the world.”

Essentially, these views reiterated languages as the embodiment of culture and transmitter of the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) and ways of knowing. This finding also dovetails the MMP’s assumption that language and culture cannot be separated because language as an embodiment of culture is a conduit through which indigenous knowledge systems and mores are transmitted from generation to generation.

Theme 4: The damaging effects of assimilation and acculturation, and concern about the non-teaching of the language

As a result of many years of acculturation, compromised identity and what I refer to as ambivalent citizenship. This effect was highlighted by the use of Afrikaans as a common language in these two communities. It also emerged that the two languages were not taught at any school, and one of the problems was that there were no qualified people who could teach those languages. Interviewees voiced concerns regarding a lack of teaching of these languages. “Although the government built the school in the area, none of the languages are taught there,” said one interviewee.

Another one added: “The problem is that this situation has persisted for a long time, and at the moment, there are no qualified teachers to teach these languages.”

As the literature for this study indicates, the situation where languages are not used leads to language shifts, resulting in language apathy and acculturation. Thus, it is clear that the efforts made through the local radio station are bearing fruit in enabling those languages to flourish outside the confines of the dominant languages that have continued to be reproduced through usage in public discourse and platforms, as the MMP opines.

Further themes from documentary analysis could be categorised as follows: Recognition of indigenous languages, the importance of multilingualism, and efforts to incorporate indigenous languages in the Education system.

Theme 4: Recognition of Indigenous Languages

The findings reveal that different government policies, while not very successful, provide for the Recognition of Indigenous Languages, marking a significant shift from apartheid policies that favoured Afrikaans and English. They also agitate for multilingualism involving all South African languages, which ought to be supported and developed and used as official languages. For example, LiEP provides for the integration of indigenous languages into the education system to ensure linguistic diversity and bring about a true rainbow nation. However, despite these confident pronouncements, the indigenous language has not been meaningfully incorporated into the educational system. Even in the national discourse where they have been declared official languages, they have not been used sufficiently. As a result, in reality, these languages are only official languages in rhetoric and not in reality. Indigenous languages are still absent in functional domains of public life and as languages of public discourse, including in government communication, business, science and technology. The situation is even more dire for minoritised indigenous languages. Moreover, an analysis of news reports shows the need and significance of indigenous community radio stations such as X-K FM.

From these findings, it is clear that using languages effectively in public platforms, including media platforms as well as the teaching of these languages at school, needs to be prioritised to turn the tide and the fortunes of indigenous languages around.

Discussion and Implications

The themes used to frame the findings were: gravely endangered languages, pivotal role of radio in promoting language use, fears of indigenous knowledge being lost, the damaging effects of assimilation and acculturation, concern about the non-teaching of the language, recognition of indigenous languages, the importance of multilingualism, and efforts to incorporate indigenous languages in the Education system. The finding that the two languages were gravely endangered was not surprising considering

their marginalisation. However, it is hoped that current efforts will help change the situation. Furthermore, from the findings, it was pleasing to see that radio remains an effective mass medium in promoting and preserving !Xun and Khwe languages. This underscores MMP's assumption that media play an important role in conferring status to marginalised languages and speakers of those languages. It also became clear that the non-teaching of these languages negates their linguistic rights and cultural existence. This is because these languages are not taught at any of the schools in South Africa, including the school built for this community in the area.

The non-teaching of the !Xun and Khwe languages in South African schools is worrying as it has implications for the preservation of San culture and identity and social justice. The fact that there are no teachers who could teach these languages is a clear example. The lack of teaching of San languages reinforces social inequality. This means that the children in these communities would not be sufficiently proficient in their mother tongues. Moreover, this situation implies that the San languages would not be used in official discourse in future if it is not taught officially. Such a move would severely relegate these languages to the margins, leading to further inequalities and marginalisation. This will further exacerbate the status of these languages as low-resourced languages that will continue to be invisibilised in public discourse and fora, including digital media platforms. This point is underscored by Poupard (2024, p.425), who laments the underrepresentation of such indigenous languages in digital platforms, correctly pointing out that "this is an issue which will only become more critical in a future dominated by AI tools that multiply linguistic inequalities."

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of indigenous languages also has implications for social justice, as it exacerbates inequalities, considering that it delegitimises other language speakers' rights to access and opportunities. The findings for this study also have implications for the decolonisation efforts because decolonisation must essentially start with prioritising the languages that have been marginalised as a result of many years of colonialism and subsequent acculturation and assimilation. Until then, decolonisation will just remain a nice thing to say without any tangible results. This is crucial because a language embodies many things, including culture, history, and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), which are passed down through languages. This means that IKS is under threat in such contexts.

Conclusion

This study utilised the perspectives of radio personnel together with documentary analysis to enhance our understanding of the significance and effectiveness of community radio in promoting and preserving endangered languages. The paper concludes that radio is a crucial medium in promoting and preserving indigenous languages. It finds that radio confers status and a sense of identity and belonging

for the two language communities. Thus, X-K FM radio needs to be supported to continue its revitalisation efforts. The study also concludes that there is an urgent need for indigenous languages to be taught in schools. It reiterated that the radical actions encapsulated in the MMP theory, which is action-oriented, disruptive and divergent because it intervenes by reordering the prioritisation of the less dominant languages. However, this paper's limitation lies in the fact that it is a preliminary study, and suggestions for future studies are provided in the recommendation section that follows. Moreover, this qualitative study primarily focused on a small community radio station catering for a small but diverse and minorised community and therefore may be limited in scope. The sample size was therefore relatively small, which although not a factor in qualitative study, could be enlarged in subsequent studies for wider perspectives. Subsequent studies could also triangulate with more specific empirical audience data, although this is often difficult in this type of study due to language and cultural barriers. Nonetheless, the paper was significant as it serves as a springboard for action on issues of marginalised and minoritised languages, making recommendations to guide the positioning of marginalised languages in multilingual contexts.

Recommendations

As part of 'positioning' to ensure !Xun and Khwe minority language use and preservation, this paper proposes: 1) a meaningful legal framework and policies which will make it possible for these languages to be prioritised in certain relevant contexts. Lack of such policies and legal frameworks makes it possible for these languages to be overlooked in favour of the dominant languages, even when such consideration is unjustifiable. 2) Indigenous languages should be taught as compulsory subjects from primary to doctoral levels in line with the preposition of the MMP theory that advocates for the teaching and usage of minorised languages in public platforms. Currently, most indigenous languages, including the two languages under study, are not taught at any school in South Africa. It is recommended that the government prioritise this exigency as a matter of urgency to provide for schools to start teaching these languages.

3) There is also a need for effective language bodies for planning and mainstreaming purposes, which would ensure the training and intellectualisation of marginalised languages. 4) The preponderance of public services and information in Indigenous languages needs to be prioritised because, at the moment, services and public knowledge are imparted through the colonial languages at the expense of Indigenous languages. This means that members of indigenous communities who cannot speak the dominant languages are excluded. 5) Mediatisation of these languages must be prioritised as a matter of urgency, including increased digitalisation of these languages. This again resonates with the assumption of the MMP theory which states that media confer status and use of language on the media imbue a sense of

pride, identity and belonging amongst language speakers. 6) There is also a need for meaningful involvement of indigenous language communities' representatives/Dikgosi as custodians of such languages when decisions about these languages are made, so that they themselves could articulate their needs and aspirations. Oftentimes, decisions about their lives are made and imposed on them without any meaningful prior consultation.

7) Finally, more funding and resources should be provided for 'positioning' initiatives to ensure that any effort to preserve and promote such languages is sustainable and impactful. This is crucial as these languages are inherently under-resourced, hence their status as low-resourced languages. 8) As this is a preliminary study, future studies could broaden the scope to include broader ethnographic studies, large samples involving audiences, content analysis of programming, and comparative studies with other indigenous media. Such studies would be more insightful, contributing more significantly to practical implementation and academic scholarship in this area. There is also a need for more research on how radios in general compete with social media platforms.

Acknowledgements

The initial part of this paper was partly supported by the North-West University's Faculty of Humanities through its Small Grant Research.

Declaration of Interest Statement

There is no competing interest of any sort or conflict of interest relating to this paper.

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