Department of African Languages

# Language and Communication Skills Acquisition in an African Language 1

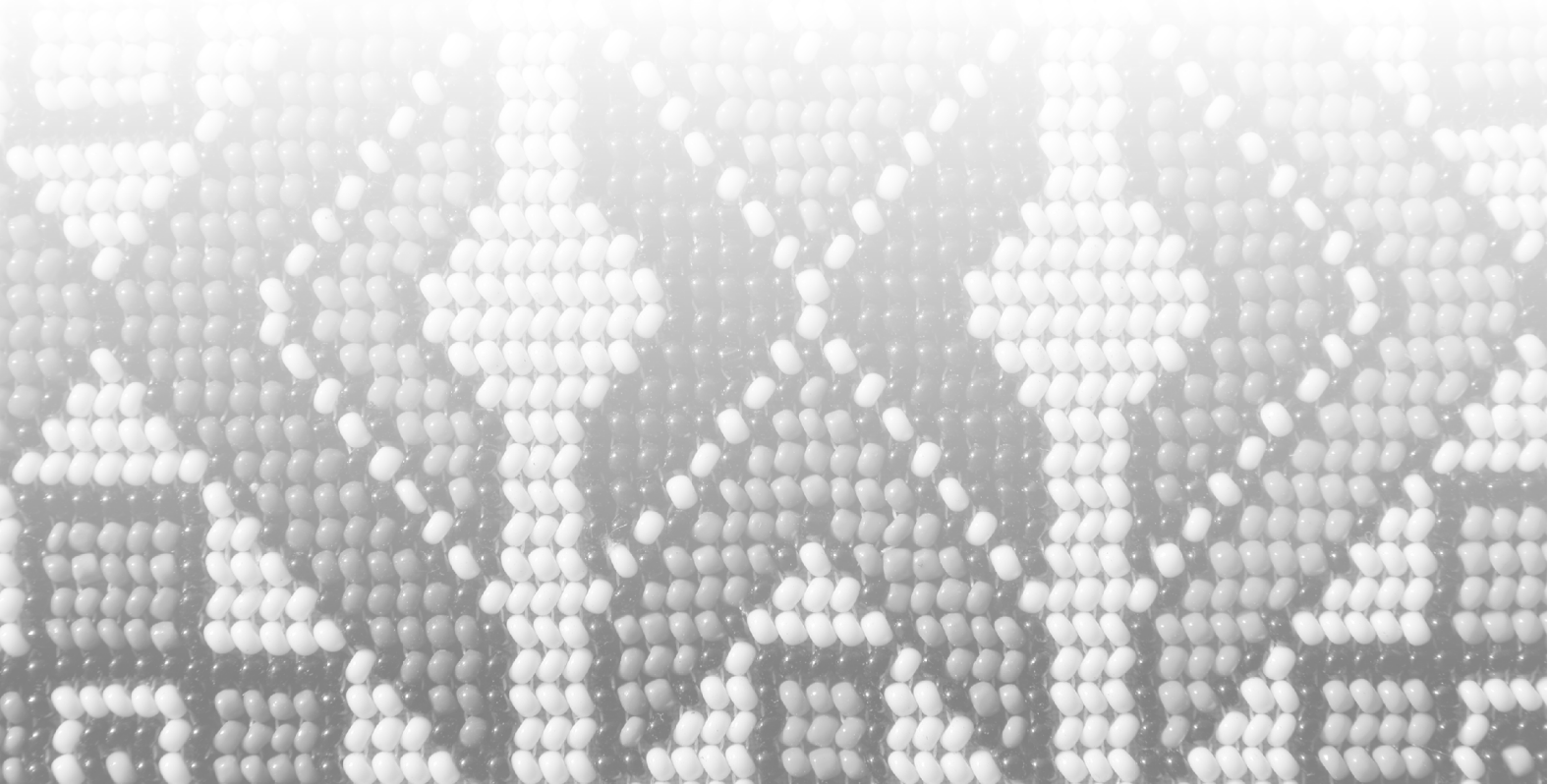## *Module for 7 African Languages*

Only study guide for

# AFL1503

**University of South Africa, Pretoria**

# Contents

# INTRODUCTION

We would like to extend a warm word of welcome to you in this module on language and communication skills acquisition in an African language. You will be introduced to one of seven African languages — it is up to you to choose the language that is most appropriate to your needs, or your everyday environment. It is our aim to facilitate the process of developing your speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.

Learning a new language provides a unique opportunity to stimulate intercultural communication. By learning to communicate in an African language and to be culturally sensitive to language nuances, you can participate in creating a communication climate that facilitates development, in marketing the country to the world; influences global news and allows us to tell our own stories of Africa.

In addition to this, you will be exposed to vocabulary and expressions within the context of communication in a variety of social and/or work contact situations. In the process you will also become culturally sensitive to language nuances on an elementary level. This is especially important for your day-to-day interaction with mother-tongue speakers of African languages.

This module introduces an overview of sound systems and grammars of African languages. These languages share some linguistic characteristics and linguistic behaviour; a corroboration for the argument that they belong to the same language family. Speech sounds of Nguni languages are similar to one another to a great extent, likewise some speech sounds belonging to Sotho languages are shared amongst this group of languages. In addition, there are Tsonga and Venḓa that tend to have more distinct sound systems. The same applies to the grammars of the different languages and language groups.

Remember that this study guide is an introduction, setting the scene so to say, for the CD-ROM which will guide you through the language specific study material. In other words, if you have chosen to acquire communication skills and learn about isiZulu, you should select isiZulu on the CD-ROM and there you will find all the applications for your selected language.

> **Note that the lessons provided in this printed guide will not be used directly for the final examination. This information is very important for you to be able to understand what is provided in the CD-ROM which contains the other materials for your study. Keep this information close by for reference while you are using the CD-ROM because it contains details for the language you will study. However, this information will also be useful for your continuous assessment assignment that counts for 10% of your final mark.**

## MODULE OUTCOMES

After the completion of this module you will be able to:

- converse in an African language using language structures and vocabulary in a variety of everyday contexts;
- create written responses relating to a variety of contexts using correct language structures and vocabulary;
- communicate in the target language with due observance of cultural nuances, using vocabulary, phrases and sentences in specific contexts.

# STUDY UNIT 1

# African languages in context

This study unit introduces you to the African language situation on the African continent. The African languages spoken in South Africa are explained within the context of a family of languages spoken as first language by 240 million people in 27 African countries. The communities speaking the languages that occur in South Africa tend to be geographically localised, and therefore the geographical distribution is visualised by means of maps in this study unit. Statistics of the number of speakers of every language are also discussed.

In this study unit we also familiarise you with the concepts ''dialect'' and ''standard language'' since some of the languages spoken in South Africa have different dialects. The standard language, which is the variety you will be studying in this module, is usually a particular dialect or form of a language that has been given either legal or quasi-legal status by means of recognised dictionaries and a standardised orthography.

You will finally be made aware of the two types of writing styles used in African languages, namely the conjunctive system typical of the Nguni languages and the disjunctive writing system characteristic of the Sotho languages.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this study unit you will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the African language situation in Africa;
- explain the geographical distribution of the official languages of South Africa;
- point out the difference between the concepts ''dialect'' and ''standard language'';
- show an awareness of the two different writing styles encountered in the African languages.

LESSON 1

# AFRICAN LANGUAGES — THE LANGUAGE FAMILY

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- demonstrate some knowledge about African language families;
- identify areas in Africa where Bantu languages are spoken;
- explain the classification of the South African Bantu language groups.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 1.1   INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this module you should acquire some background information about the language you are going to study. This will first of all assist you in your choice of language, and secondly give you a better understanding of the place and significance of the language you have chosen, not only within the greater multilingual South Africa, but also in relation to the language situation in Africa.

## 1.2   A FAMILY OF LANGUAGES

A language family is a group of languages which are genetically related, that is, which derive from a common original language or group of original languages. This means that a language family will have common sound (phonetic, phonological), structure (morphological) and sentence (syntactical) characteristics. They will also possess an extensive common vocabulary.

The concept ''African languages'' in this module refers to languages belonging to the Bantu language family, a family of languages spoken as first language by 240 million people in 27 African countries. In other words, nearly a third of all Africans speak a Bantu language as their mother-tongue. Bantu languages are spoken south of a line from Nigeria in the west, across the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Kenya, to southern Somalia in the east and the southern tip of Africa in the south (Nurse 2001).

Note that the term ''Bantu languages'' was introduced in language studies

during the middle of the 19th century by a German philologist, Dr WHI Bleek. Although the term has become stigmatised in the South African context, it is still used in the international field of linguistics.

The African languages of South Africa belong to the **south-eastern zone** of the Bantu language family and consist of four groups:

TABLE 1: The four African language groups spoken in South Africa

| Groups | Languages |
|---|---|
| **Nguni:** | * isiZulu (Zulu),<br>* isiXhosa (Xhosa),<br>  siSwati (Swati),<br>  isiNdebele (Southern Ndebele) |
| **Sotho:** | * Sesotho sa Leboa<br>  (Northern Sotho),<br>* Sesotho (Southern Sotho),<br>* Setswana (Tswana) |
| **Tsonga:** | * Xitsonga (Tsonga) |
| **Venda:** | * Tshivenḓa (Venda) |

* These languages are offered in this module, and depending on your personal preference or the area in which you live, you need to decide which language is best suited for your needs. We will be discussing the names of the languages a bit further on in this chapter.

The orthography in the above table is according to the PanSALB web page (*http://www.pansalb.org.za*)

## 1.3   AFRICAN LANGUAGES ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT: GROUPING AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The indigenous languages that we offer in this module are found on the African continent. For this reason they are popularly referred to as **African** languages, although, more accurately, they are called **Bantu** languages, being a sub-group of the African languages.

Many of the original languages of Africa are related and they are grouped into four basic language families, namely the Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan and Niger-Congo language families.

In order to place the Bantu languages in context, we would like to refer you to the map below on which the geographical distribution of the mentioned four language families of Africa is indicated. The languages we are focusing on in this module belong to the Niger-Congo group:

**FIGURE 1:** Language families in Africa (cf. Bantu Languages, 2008)

## 1.4   THE NIGER-CONGO LANGUAGES

The Niger-Congo group forms the largest language family in sub-Saharan Africa. It is divided into two sub-families, which could be called Niger-Congo A and Niger-Congo B, according to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000:33). Niger-Congo B comprises the Bantu languages. These languages are spoken largely east and south of the present day nation of Nigeria, i.e. in the regions commonly known as central Africa, east Africa, and southern Africa.

It seems that available evidence points to the fact that there was first one single parent language of the Bantu languages. Linguists have given it the name Ur-Bantu or Proto-Bantu and it is said to have been located in the region of the Great Lakes in Central Africa (Cameroon area) about five centuries ago. From there the Bantu languages spread eastwards and southwards. Researchers are of the opinion that migrations occurred in a succession of waves rather than all at once. It appears that the great Sotho migrations preceded the Nguni migrations. It is assumed that the Kgalagadi were the first Sotho speaking people, and probably also the first Bantu speaking people to reach Southern Africa, around the 13th or 14th centuries. They settled in the present Botswana and interbred with the Bushmen.

You may ask: On what basis are the Bantu languages grouped together into one language family? A genetic classification would be the most scientific

one. However, there is still no well founded genetic classification, since its development is hampered by insufficient data. The most general classificatory approach is based on similarities in vocabulary items (i.e. words referring to the same objects sound similar) and structure (i.e. their words and sentences are formed in similar ways). Languages with similar features tend to share geographical areas. Malcolm Guthrie's system which makes use of letters of the alphabet and numbers (alphanumeric coding system) is mainly areal and is the most widely used system, e.g. A, B, C, D, etc. with sub-groupings (A10, A20, etc.). It divides the whole Bantu-speaking area into 16 zones.

One of the zones within the Niger-Congo B group (see Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2003:35), i.e. the **south-eastern zone**, is the one under which you will find the African languages of South Africa. In South Africa in particular this zone comprises the Sotho and Nguni groups, Tsonga and Venda. The areas indicated on the maps in the following lesson are only approximations, i.e. areas in which these languages dominate. One should bear in mind that the urban areas are extremely cosmopolitan and therefore a multiplicity of languages are spoken in such areas. Because of the mixing of and borrowing between languages and hybrid forms all of which are very prevalent in urban areas, languages are recognisable, but in many instances they are not in the standard form (see also 3.3).

## LESSON 2

# STATISTICS AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF SOUTH AFRICA

 **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- take part in a discussion on the statistics of the official languages of South Africa;
- explain why languages have different names in different contexts;
- point out the geographical distribution of languages that are spoken in South Africa.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 2.1    STATISTICS OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF SOUTH AFRICA

The 2006 mid-year population according to Phaahla (2006:54) is estimated at approximately 47,4 million. The 2001 census states that there are 44,8 million people living in South Africa and speak an estimated 25 languages. (The same census revealed that Afrikaans and English are widely spoken in all provinces. Although English is generally understood across the country, it ranks only fifth as a home language.)

The languages spoken in South Africa tend to be geographically localised, that is, South Africa is typified by languages of limited diffusion. A breakdown of numbers of speakers according to the census of 2001 is as follows:

- Zulu is first with 10,7 million first language (L1) speakers (i.e. 23,8% of the population).
- This was followed by Xhosa, spoken by 7,9 million (i.e. 17,6% of the population).
- Afrikaans was third with 6,0 million L1 speakers.
- Then came Northern Sotho, fourth with 9,4% of L1 speakers.
- The lowest number of L1 speakers was recorded for Ndebele, which was spoken by 712 000 (cf. Phaahla 2006:54).

The nine official indigenous African languages were spoken as home languages by 77,9% of the population at the time of Census 2001. Afrikaans and English together were spoken as home languages by 21,5% of the population in 2001. Almost a quarter of the total population reported Zulu as their home language (cf. Phaahla 2006:54–55). The above figures are reflected as home languages within population groups in % as follows in figure 2:
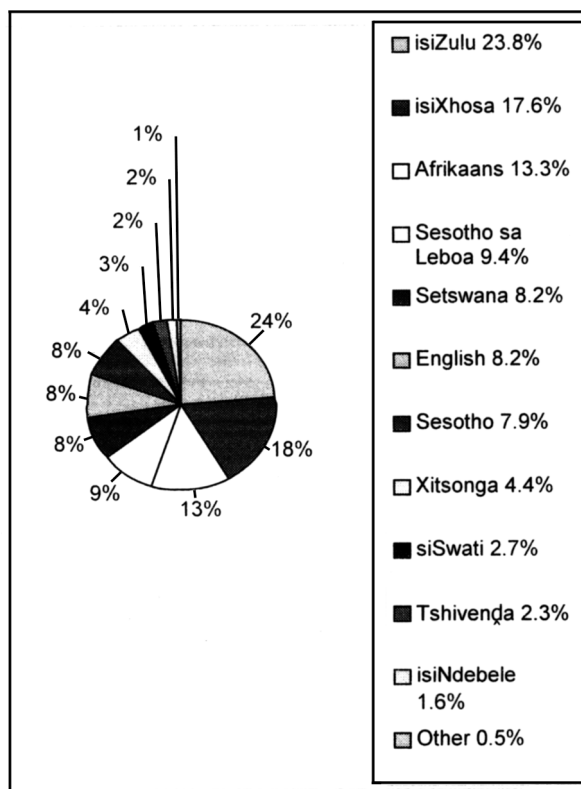


**FIGURE 2:** Home languages within population groups in %.

In Limpopo, while more than half the people (52,1%) speak Northern Sotho as their first/home language, a relatively large proportion speak Tsonga (22,4%) and Venda (15,9%) while in Gauteng first language speakers of Northern Sotho constitute 10,7% of the total population (cf. Phaahla 2006:54–55).

Of the indigenous African languages of South Africa the Nguni group is the largest with about 18 million speakers, followed by the Sotho group with a little over 10 million speakers, the Tsonga group with almost 2 million speakers, and the Venda with nearly a million speakers. Whites constitute 10,9%, Coloureds constitute 8,9% (these are people of mixed race); Asians (2%) and unspecified/other estimated at 0,9%. (The figures are derived from the *People of South Africa Population Census* report No. 03-02-11 2001 as cited by Phaahla 2006:54–55.)

## 2.2   LANGUAGE NAMES

You might have wondered why the language *Zulu* is sometimes referred to as *isiZulu*, and *Southern Sotho* as *Sesotho* and so. In the following table we firstly give you the names of the African languages in the context of English, and then the names of the languages as they are called in the language itself.

TABLE 2: Names of the African languages in different contexts

| Names of the African languages in the context of English | Names of the African languages in the respective languages themselves |
| --- | --- |
| Zulu | isiZulu |
| Xhosa | isiXhosa |
| Swati | siSwati |
| Southern Ndebele | isiNdebele |
| Northern Sotho | Sesotho sa Leboa |
| Southern Sotho | Sesotho |
| Tswana | Setswana |
| Tsonga | Xitsonga |
| Venda | Tshivenḓa |

The names of African languages in different contexts can be compared to language names such as *German* and *French* in an English context, which in the respective languages are known as *Deutsch* and *Français*.

**Examples:**

| | |
| --- | --- |
| English: | *I speak **Zulu**.* |
| Zulu: | *Ngikhuluma **isiZulu**.* |
| Northern Sotho: | *Ke bolela **Sezulu*** |
| | |
| English: | *I speak **Northern Sotho**.* |
| Northern Sotho: | *Ke bolela **Sesotho sa Leboa**.* |
| Zulu: | *Ngikhuluma **isiSuthu saLeboa**.* |

The country's Constitution (The Constitution, [sa]) guarantees equal status to 11 official languages in order to cater for the country's diverse peoples and their culture.

> **In the remainder of the study guide, we will use the names of the languages as they are called in the respective languages, so that you become acquainted with the name of the language you have chosen to learn.**

**2.3 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE OFFICIAL AFRICAN LANGUAGES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

- **The Sotho languages**

The Sotho languages (Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho and Setswana) are mainly spoken in the central, northern and north-western parts of South Africa.

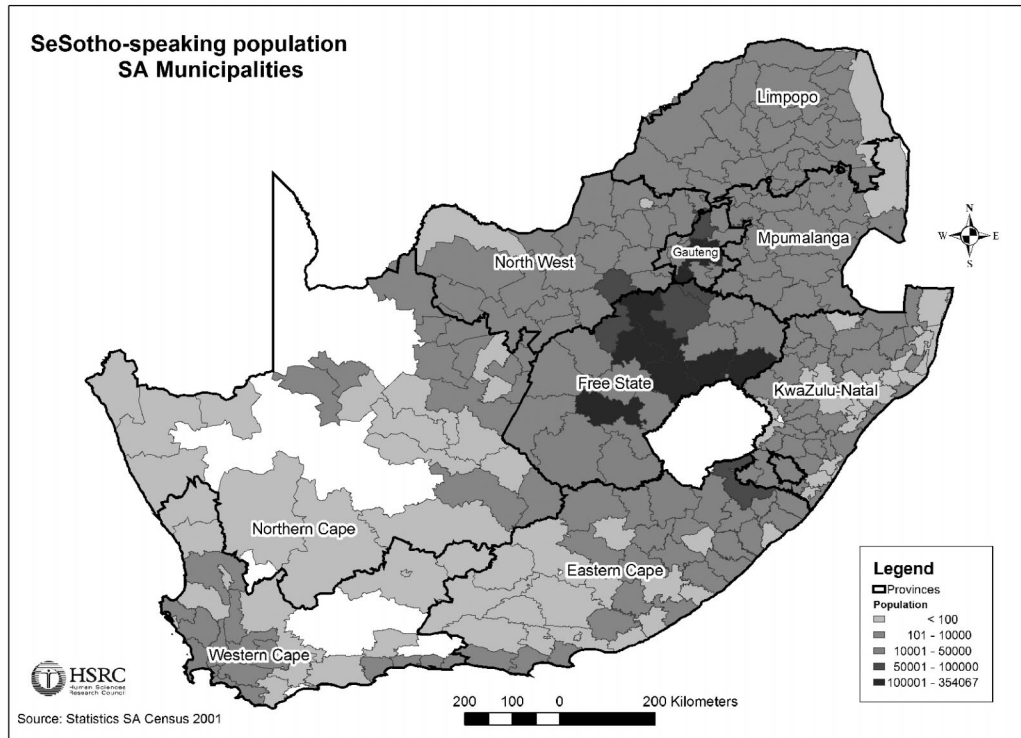**Sesotho sa Leboa**
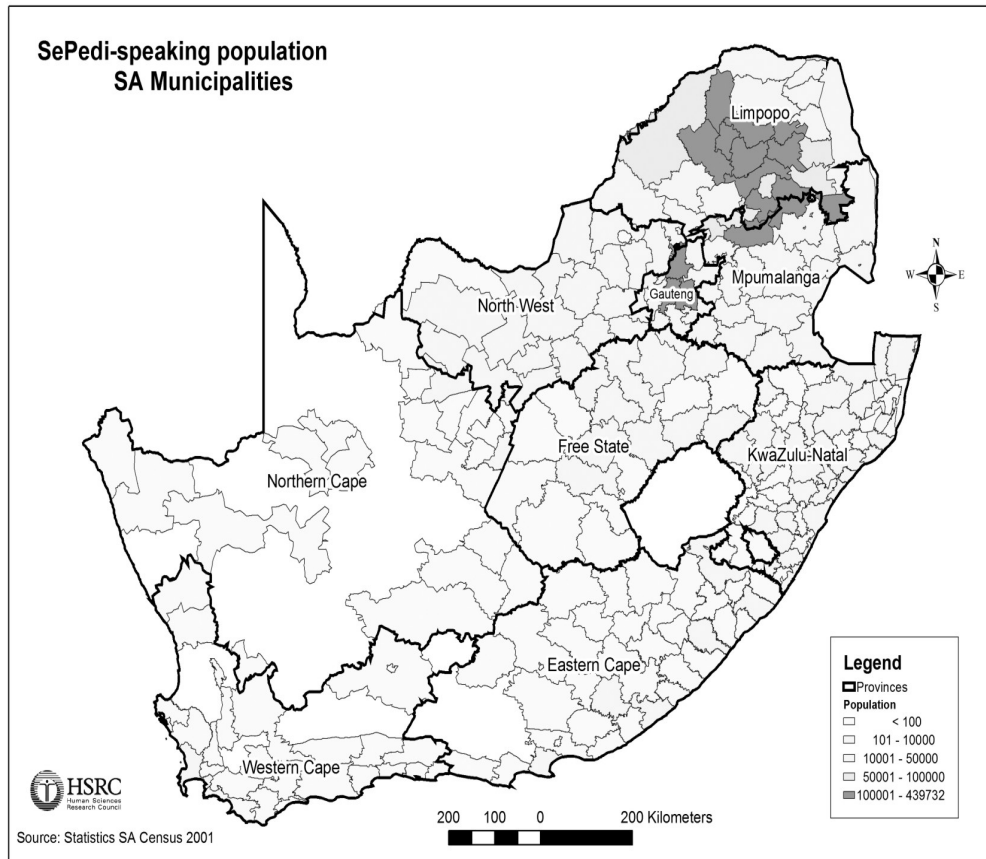


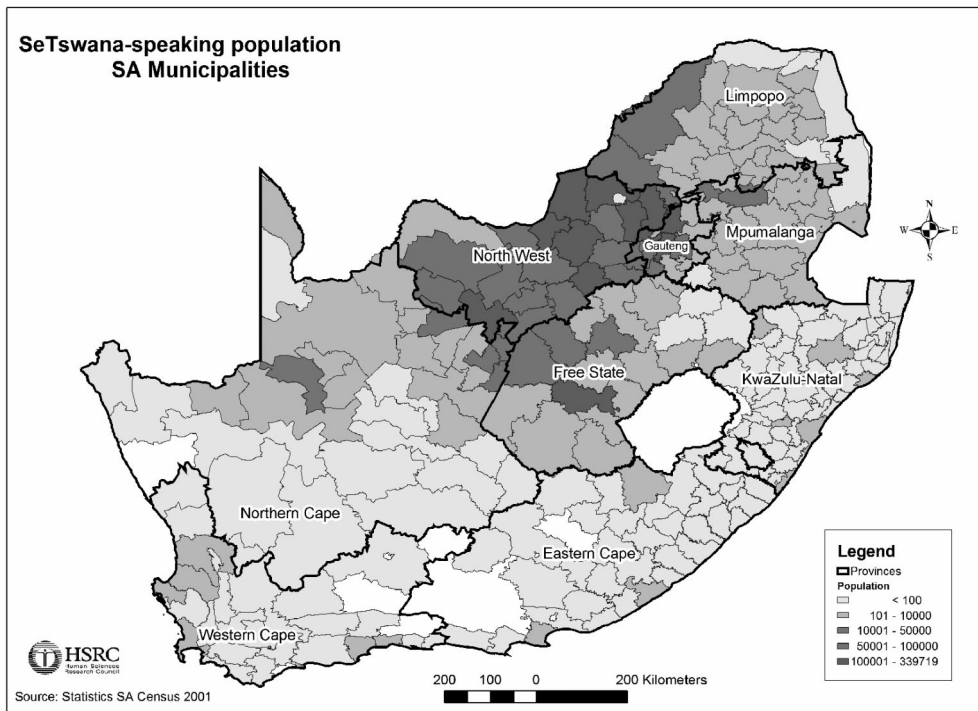**FIGURE 3:** Map of Sesotho sa Leboa speaking area

**Sesotho**



**FIGURE 4:** Map of Sesotho speaking area

In South Africa Sesotho is spoken in Qwaqwa and other parts of the Free State as far north as the East Rand in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal, the northern parts of the former Transkei and in Lesotho.

**Setswana**



**FIGURE 5:** Map of Setswana speaking area

Setswana is spoken largely in the North West province, parts of the Northern Cape, the western and northern Gauteng, the north western Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Namibia and Botswana as a whole. Setswana is often heard spoken in and around Pretoria. It comprises various dialects, which are grouped together into clusters according to regional distribution (see section on dialects).

● **The Nguni languages**

The Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele) are spoken over a large area in various regions.

**IsiZulu**
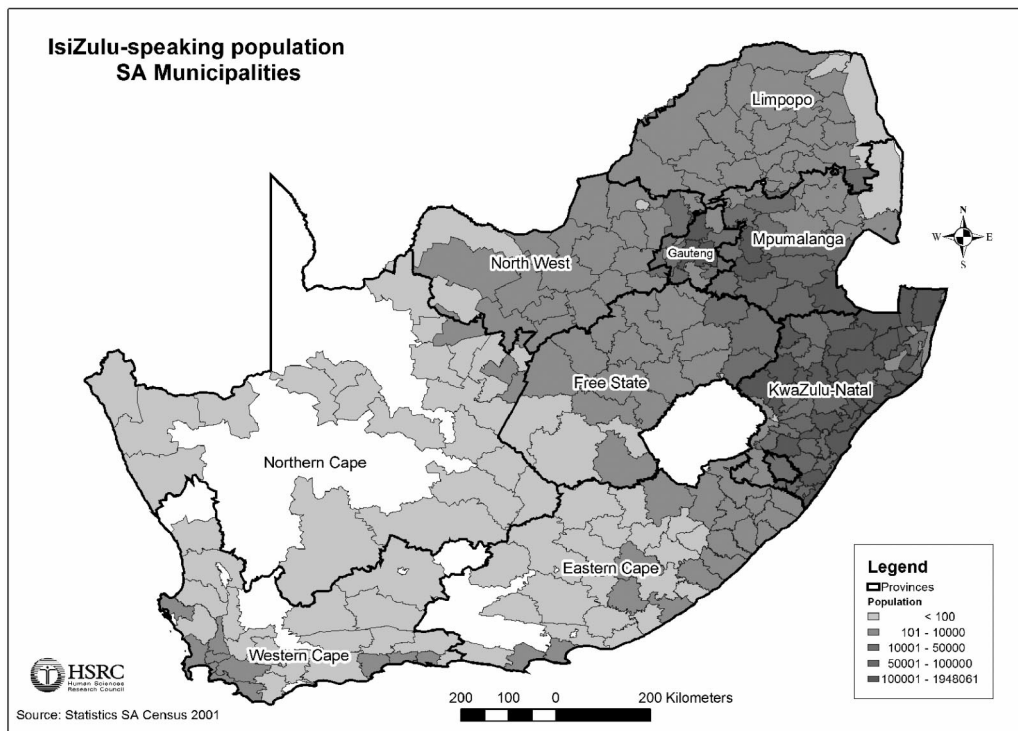


**FIGURE 6:** Map of isiZulu speaking area

In South Africa Zulu (isiZulu) is spoken in the whole of KwaZulu-Natal as well as in the northern Free State, in the south-eastern areas of Mpumalanga and south-eastern districts of Gauteng.

**IsiXhosa**
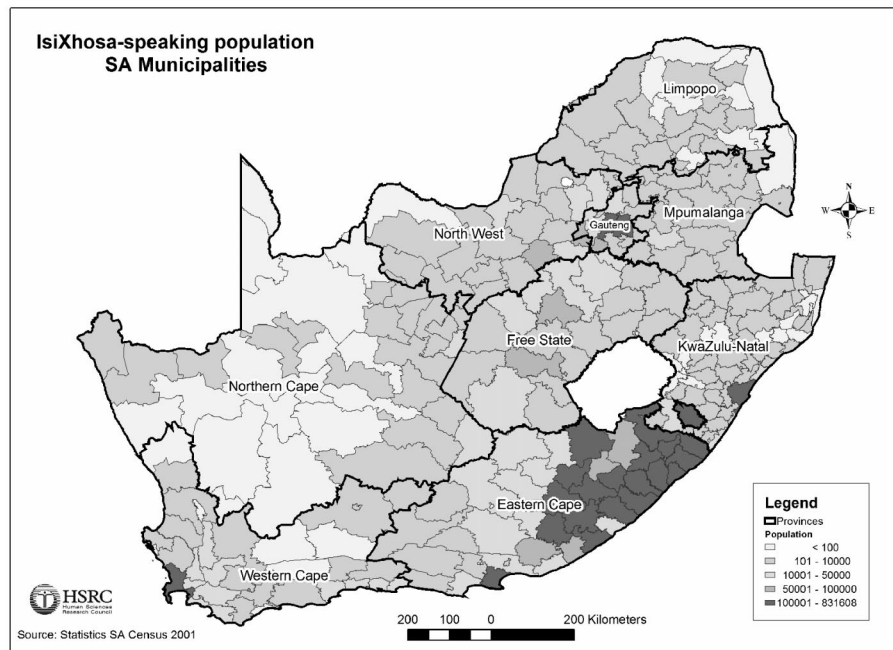


**FIGURE 7:** Map of isiXhosa speaking area

IsiXhosa is spoken in the erstwhile Transkei, Ciskei, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and the southerly region of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Northern Cape and the Free State provinces.

**SiSwati**
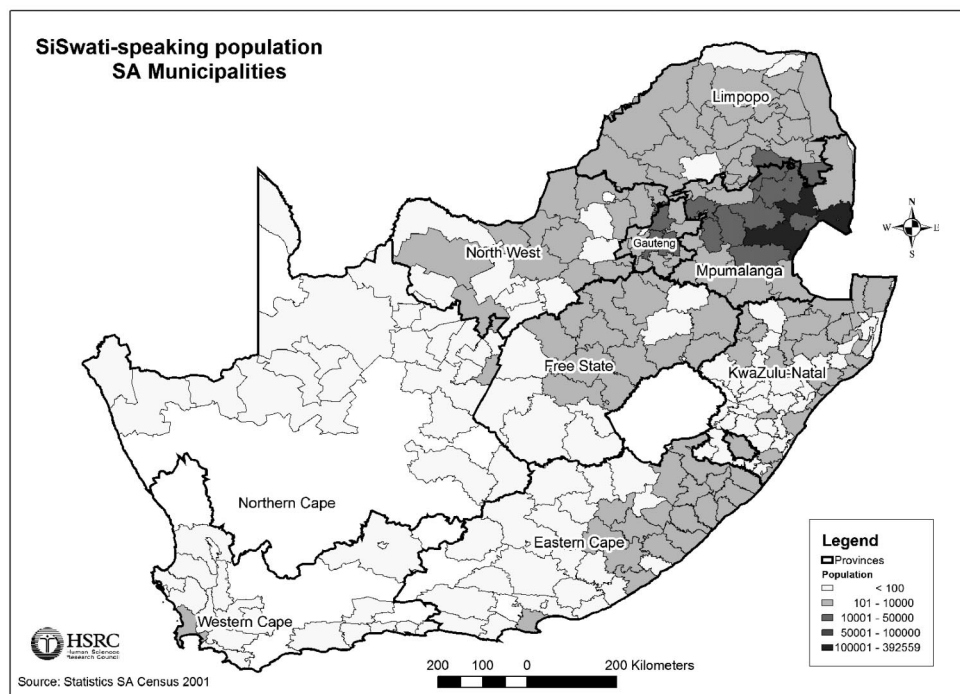


**FIGURE 8:** Map of siSwati speaking area

SiSwati is a dominant language in Swaziland and Mpumalanga.

## IsiNdebele
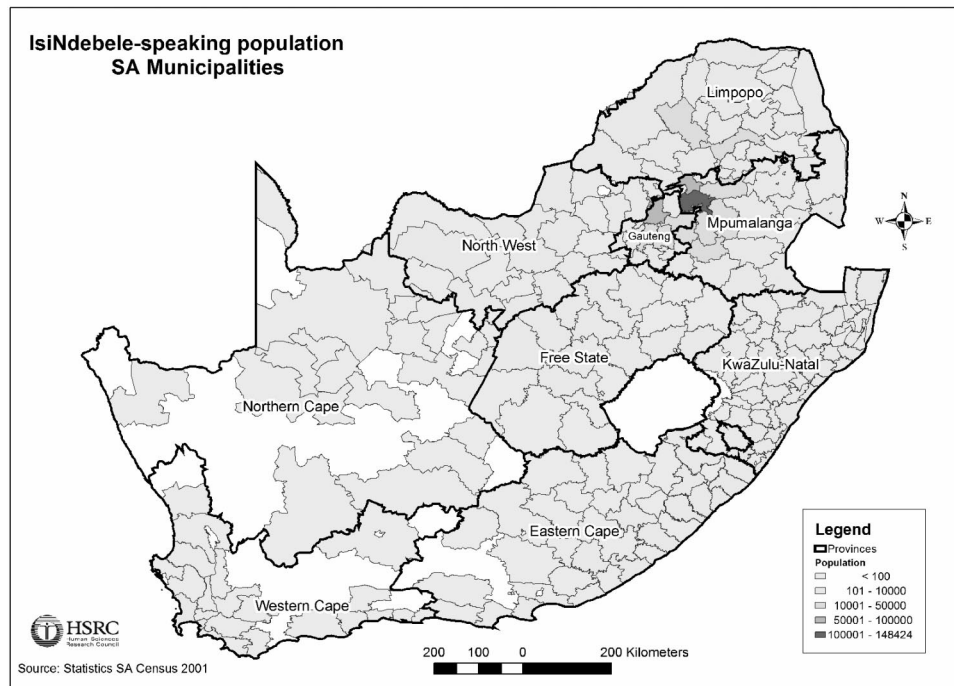


**FIGURE 9:** Map of isiNdebele speaking area

IsiNdebele is spoken in the Southern and Northern Limpopo. Zimbabwe Ndebele is spoken in Zimbabwe in the vicinity of Bulawayo. This Zimbabwian Ndebele is still almost pure IsiZulu.

## Xitsonga
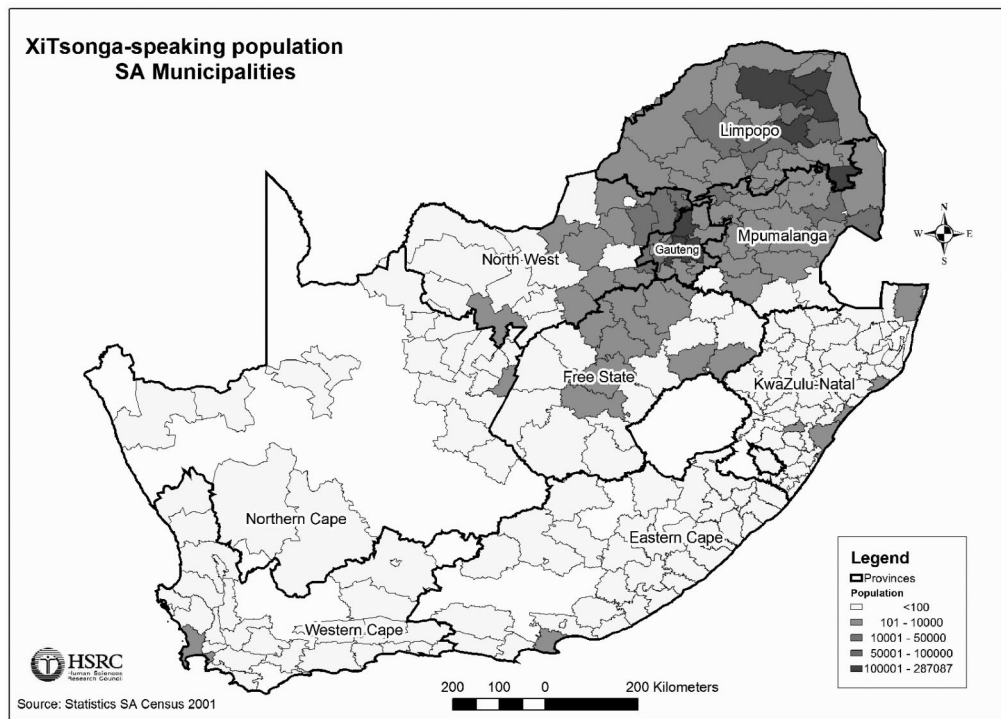


**FIGURE 10:** Map of Xitsonga speaking area

Xitsonga is spoken in the eastern and northern areas of the country (Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Gauteng) and also in Mozambique.

**Tshivenḓa**
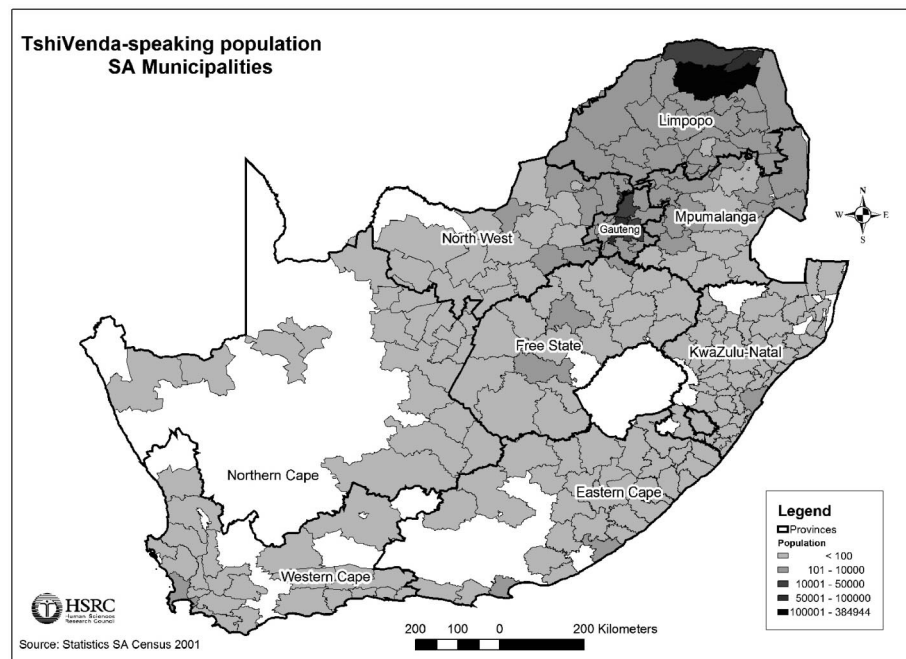


**FIGURE 11:** Map of Tshivenḓa **speaking area**

Tshivenḓa is spoken in the districts of Sibasa and Makhado in Limpopo. A large number of Tshivenḓa speaking people live in the Beit Bridge area of Zimbabwe, i.e. immediately north of the Limpopo river. These people have retained their language and customs to a very large extent.

See Language Maps (2006).

# LESSON 3

# DIALECTS AND THE STANDARD LANGUAGE

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- define the concept ''dialect'';
- define the concept ''standard language'';
- explain the difference between ''dialect'' and ''standard language''.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 3.1 DIALECTS

Some of the languages spoken in South Africa have different dialects. A dialect can be described as a variety of a language characteristic of a particular group of the language's speakers. The term is applied most often to regional speech patterns, but a dialect may also be defined by other factors, such as social class.

In popular usage, the word ''dialect'' is sometimes used to refer to a lesser-known language (most commonly a regional language), especially one that is unwritten or not standardised. This use of the word dialect is often taken as pejorative by the speakers of the languages referred to in that way since it is often accompanied by the erroneous belief that the minority language is lacking in vocabulary, grammar, or importance.

The number of speakers, and the geographical area covered by them, can be of arbitrary size, and a dialect might contain several sub-dialects. A dialect is a complete system of verbal communication with its own vocabulary and grammar.

A dialect is distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (phonology, including prosody). Where a distinction can be made only in terms of pronunciation, the term accent is appropriate, not *dialect* (although in common usage, ''dialect'' and ''accent'' are usually synonymous).

As for the languages spoken in South Africa you will find that when you use a particular word or pronounce a word in a specific way, a speaker will in some instances tell you that it is not the correct word or that you pronounce

it incorrectly. This can be because the speaker is from a different dialect group than the group that we take as standard. On the level that we teach you to communicate it will not make that big a difference.

As an example we can look at Setswana. (You will find information relevant to the specific language you have chosen to study on the CD-ROM.) The dialects of Setswana can roughly be divided into the following four groups according to their location and mutual solidarity:

- Dialects such as Hurutshe, Rolong and Ngwaketse, which are found mainly in the Zeerust district.
- Dialects such as Tlhaping and Tlhware which are found in the Huhudi and Taung districts.
- Dialects such as Kwena, Ngwato and Tawana, which are spoken in Botswana.
- Dialects such as Kgatla, Kwena and Tlokwa, which are spoken in the eastern parts of the Setswana speaking region like Tlhabane.

## 3.2   STANDARD LANGUAGE

What we teach you is more or less a standard language. A **standard language** (also **standard dialect** or **standardised dialect**) is a particular *variety* of a *language* that has been given either legal or quasi-legal status. It is usually the form promoted in schools and the media and is usually considered by speakers of the language to be more ''correct'' than other dialects.

Some of the features that identify a standard language include:

- A recognised *dictionary* or group of dictionaries which embody a standardised spelling and *vocabulary*;
- A recognised *grammar* which records the forms, rules and structures of the language, and which commends some forms and castigates others;
- A standard system of *pronunciation*, which is considered ''educated'' or ''proper'' speech by the speakers, and which is considered free from regional marking.

# LESSON 4

# WRITING SYSTEMS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- name the two types of writing styles used in African languages;
- differentiate between the two writing styles.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 4.1   BACKGROUND

African languages are generally agglutinative in their structural nature, that is to say, many of their words are constructed by 'glueing' their components/units/formatives together (one after the other) according to specific rules. As a result of this structural behaviour a word in African languages usually consists of more than one formative. However, there are few categories of words where the ratio between a word and its formatives is one-to-one. The main formative is the root of the word which may be preceded by one or more prefixes (some of them known as concords) and is followed by a suffix or suffixes.

There are two types of writing styles used in African languages, namely the conjunctive system typical of the Nguni languages and the disjunctive writing system characteristic of the Sotho languages. In a conjunctive system parts of one or more words are written together without spaces between them. It is therefore, not surprising that words in the Nguni languages can be quite lengthy as many formatives are joined together in a sequential structure in a word. On the other hand, the disjunctive system is one where constituent formatives of words tend to be written separately, as is the case in the Sotho languages. The following examples illustrate the writing systems discussed above:

## 4.2   CONJUNCTIVE WRITING STYLE

The isiXhosa (a Nguni language) word **abasesikolweni** *''Those who are at school''* has seven formatives representing the five words in the equivalent English sentence. The formatives written conjunctively are:

**a**: a qualifying formative equivalent to the words *those who* in the English sentence above

**ba**: a formative denoting plurality expressed by *are* in the English sentence

**s**: a formative that prevents the preceding vowel to be juxtaposed to the next vowel

**e**: the formative of place expressed with the use of *at* in English

**si**: a formative denoting the class of the noun

**kolw**: represents the root of this word — all the preceding formatives are prefixes

**eni**: the suffix denoting place supplementing the formative prefix **e** above

The isiZulu word **ngiyanibona** ''I see you'' consists of five components namely:

**ngi**: the first person formative in a singular form

**ya**: the present tense formative

**ni**: the formative representing the word *you* (plural)

**bon**: the root of the word relating to *see*

**a**: the suffix which completes the root and together with it forms the stem

## 4.3   DISJUNCTIVE WRITING SYSTEM

The Sesotho word **ke a le bona** ''I see you'' also consists of five components/formatives as in the isiZulu word above although it is written disjunctively. This word is uttered as a unit despite its style of writing.

**ke**: the first person formative in a singular form

**a**: the present tense formative

**le**: the formative representing the word *you* (plural)

**bon**: the root of the word relating to *see*

**a**: the suffix which completes the root and together with it forms the stem.

# STUDY UNIT 2

# Sounds, words and sentences of African languages

This study unit introduces an overview of sound systems and grammars of African languages. These languages have some linguistic characteristics and linguistic behaviour in common, a fact that supports the argument that they belong to the same language family. On the one hand, speech sounds of Nguni languages are very similar to one another, while on the other hand, speech sounds belonging to Sotho languages have a lot in common. In addition, the Xitsonga and Tshivenḓa languages tend to have more distinct sound systems.

In this study unit you will become familiar with words and their construction, as well as with words and their role in sentences. The most important words are nouns since they are organised into a class system. This class system has links, known as concords, throughout a sentence, paragraph or even discourse. Noun classes and concords are basic characteristics of the 7 African languages offered in this module.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- demonstrate an awareness of places of articulation for speech sounds of the African languages;
- recognise simple syllable structure;
- note how tone can be used to create different meanings;
- demonstrate an understanding of the noun class system and concordial agreement;
- know parts of speech or word categories;
- explain fluid word order in African languages.

LESSON 1

# SPEECH SOUNDS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- understand what is meant by place of articulation;
- recognise syllable structures to understand the patterns of word structure;
- take note of tone in the distinction of meaning between certain words.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 1.1    INTRODUCTION

Although each African language represented in this study guide has its unique set of speech sounds that is characteristic of its sound system, there are common features relating to the manner of articulation. Depending on the channel of air stream release or air suctioning, speech sounds can either be classified as oral or nasal. The air stream is modified by a number of speech organs. The air may flow outward from the lungs through the oral cavity or nasal cavity or inward as in the production of click sounds. More speech sounds are articulated through the oral cavity than through the nasal cavity. The oral cavity stretches from the lips in the front to the uvula at the beginning of the throat.

## 1.2    PLACES OF ARTICULATION FOR CONSONANTS AND VOWELS

> **NOTE:** You will not be expected to learn the names of places of articulation for the purpose of assessment. They are mentioned only to equip you with the skill of using organs of speech when pronouncing the speech sounds of African languages. Your CD-ROM will provide you with the speech sounds of different languages separately and the voice that articulates them.

Some parts of the body play a very significant role in articulating speech

sounds in African languages and these are classified as active or passive articulators. The discussion of these articulators is based on the following diagram:
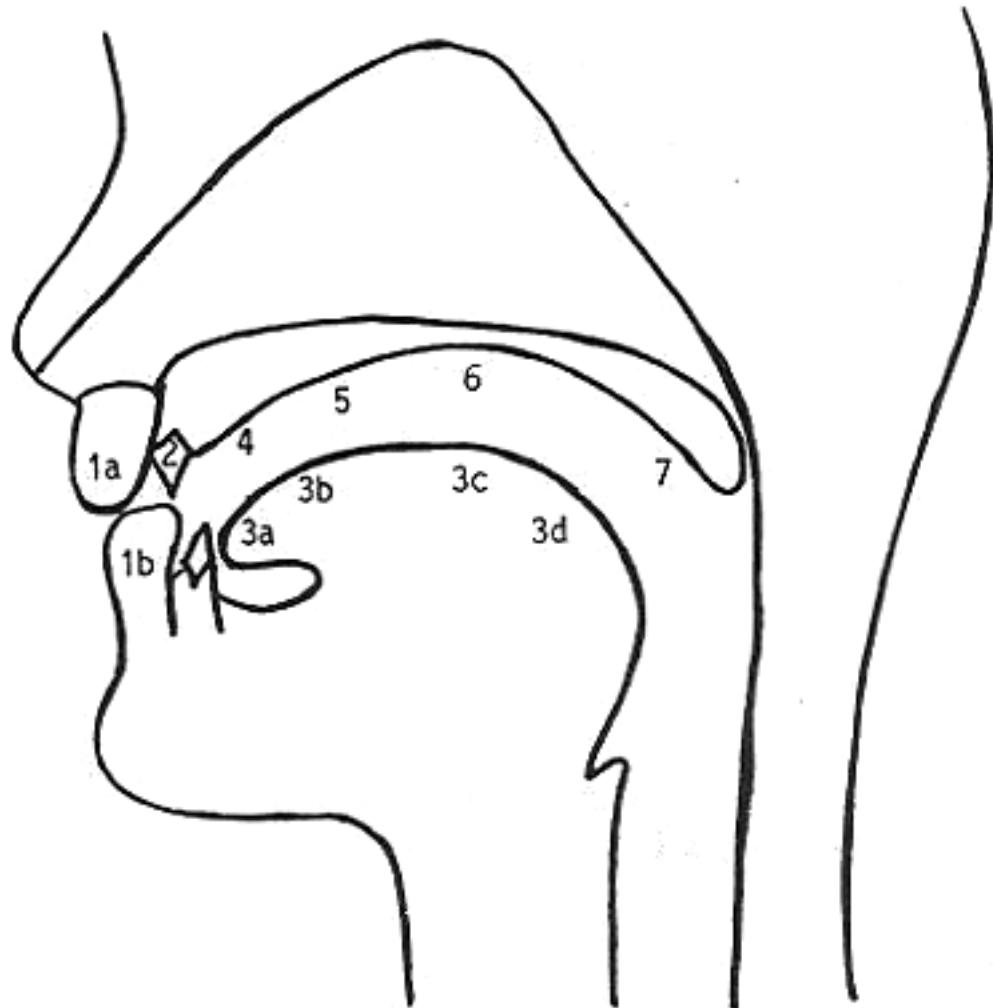


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | Upper lip | 1b | Lower lip |
| 2 | Upper front teeth | | |
| 3a | Tip of tongue | 3b | Blade of tongue |
| 3c | Middle part of tongue | 3d | Back of tongue |
| 4 | Teeth ridge/alveolar ridge | | |
| 5 | Hard palate | | |
| 6 | Soft palate | | |
| 7 | Uvula | | |

**FIGURE 12:** Organs of speech

### 1.2.1  Active articulators

The active articulators are agile during the speech process. The organs constituting active articulators are the lower lip and the tongue. They are housed in the lower jaw. The tongue has the most agility and for the purpose of the speech process it consists of:

● the front part which has a tip and a blade
● the middle part of the tongue and
● the back part of the tongue.

### 1.2.2  Passive articulators

Within the upper jaw, the upper part of the mouth consists of various organs of articulation known as passive articulators as they are not agile during the speech process, and they are:

● the upper lip
● the upper front teeth (incisors)
● the teeth/alveolar ridge (in front)
● the sides of the mouth (teeth ridge at the sides)
● the hard palate
● the soft palate (velum) and
● the uvula.

The parts of the tongue mentioned in the paragraph above are relevant only in so far as the articulation of consonants is concerned. A particular part of the tongue (as the active articulator) will move towards or touch a passive articulator (immovable part of the mouth) that is within its reach, for example, the back of the tongue will interact with the soft palate (velum) and not with the incisors.

Vowel articulation is described in terms of the tongue height as well as whether the highest point of the tongue is at the front or back of the mouth. When the tongue is at its highest level for the articulation of a vowel, it produces vowels such as **i** or **u**. The vowel **a** is produced when the tongue is at its lowest level, i.e. when it is resting on the floor of the mouth. On the other hand, vowels **e** and **o** are produced when the tongue is in the middle height. It should be noted that the tongue never goes as far as touching the passive articulators as the case is with consonants.

In terms of frontness, **i** and **e** are front vowels, whereas **o** and **u** are back vowels, while **a** is a central vowel depending on the position of the highest part of the tongue when the vowels are articulated.

## 1.3    SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

A syllable normally consists of a consonant followed by a vowel. It can also just consist of a vowel or a double vowel. Some consonants occur in clusters i.e. the consonant part of the syllable can have more than one consonant. The following are examples of syllables:

| Language | Syllable structure | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IsiZulu | *a* | *ma* | *hha* | *shi* | (horses) |
| IsiXhosa | *ii* | *ta* | *fi* | *le* | (table) |
| Sesotho sa Leboa | *di* | *kgo* | *mo* | | (cattle) |
| Setswana | *se* | *le* | *pe* | | (axe) |
| Tshivenḓa | *ma* | *ḓi* | | | (water) |
| Xitsonga | *swi* | *ko* | *xa* | | (old ladies) |
| Sesotho | *tha* | *ba* | | | (mountain) |

## 1.4  TONE

African languages are known as tonal languages because tone can distinguish meanings between certain words. Words that share the same structure but differ in meanings are known as homonyms. An example of homonymy in isiXhosa is the word *ithanga* with three meanings depending on how the tone on its syllables sounds like:

(1)  íthàngà ''pumpkin''
(2)  íthàngá ''thigh''
(3)  ithậnga ''cattlepost''

Each vowel in each syllable bears tone inherently and different tones can be either high ('), low (`), falling (ˇ) or rising (ˆ). Normally if tone is indicated markings are given for the first three tones. Generally, orthographies are not marked tonally, and tone is not marked in all dictionaries.

As you progress with your language and communication skills, be aware of homonyms in your selected language and write them down together with their respective meanings.

# LESSON 2

# PARTS OF SPEECH

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- explain what the overall aim of a classification of words into parts of speech is;
- note that there may be differences in the choice of terminology when parts of speech are described in different African language grammars;
- distinguish between different parts of speech such as nouns, pronouns, qualificatives, verbs, adverbs and ideophones;
- recognise the importance of the noun as that part of speech responsible for generating agreement morphemes which link parts of a sentence together.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 2.1  INTRODUCTION

When words are used in sentences they perform specific functions, and on the basis of these functions they are classified together as members of the same word category, also popularly called a 'part of speech' or 'word class'. Apart from their function, each part of speech also has a unique structure and meaning.

Not all languages necessarily have the same parts of speech and their definitions are not universal. Parts of speech have to be uniquely defined for a particular language or group of languages. You will be introduced to the main parts of speech in the tutorial matter of your target African language.

## 2.2  PARTS OF SPEECH IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

From the time when the first grammars were drafted for the African languages, scholars have not always used uniform terms to denote parts of speech. The framework for the classification of parts of speech for a particular African language, may not necessarily work equally well for all members of the Bantu language family. Sometimes the identification of parts of speech and the choice of terms may be the result of the personal preference and research findings of a particular scholar. Even for one and the same language, scholars may have different views on how best the parts

of speech should be grouped together and named. For Sesotho sa Leboa, for example, van Wyk (1961) distinguished *particles* as a part of speech. Not all Sesotho sa Leboa scholars, however, recognise *particles* as a part of speech. In a language like isiZulu the particle is inappropriate because the Nguni languages have different phonological and morphological features compared to languages of the Sotho group.

The determination of parts of speech is based not on individual criteria, but rather on a number of principles, such as phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic considerations. The aim of the classification is to arrive at the lowest possible number of parts of speech, each with the largest possible members. There are different sub-groupings within the parts of speech and these also reflect subtle differences.

It is not our aim here to confront you with all the different groupings and sub-groupings of parts of speech. On the whole, there is a reasonable degree of similarity between the various African languages regarding the main parts of speech and general agreement regarding the purpose and use of the parts of speech in sentences.

## 2.3   WORD CATEGORIES OR PARTS OF SPEECH

Some of the parts of speech are briefly described below:

- The **noun** is that part of the sentence which signifies the name of something concrete or abstract. Structurally it can mostly be recognised by the two parts it consists of, namely a noun prefix and a noun stem. Nouns are grouped into various classes according to their prefixes. Most of the classes occur in pairs, of which one is the singular and the other the plural. The noun prefix is not always overtly marked, but the class to which the noun is assigned nevertheless determines the agreement morpheme which must be used in order to link it to other parts of the sentence. The noun class system and system of agreement is somewhat like grammatical genders in European languages.

  **Examples**: (noun, class 1)

  | Sesotho sa Leboa | *motho* | (prefix *mo-* + stem *-tho*)<br>''person, human being'' |
  |---|---|---|
  | IsiZulu | *umuntu* | (prefix *u-mu-* + stem *-ntu*) |
  | Tshivenḓa | *muthu* | (prefix *mu-* + stem *-thu*) |
  | Xitsonga | *munhu* | (prefix *mu-* + stem *-nhu*) |

- The **pronoun** is generally understood as a word which may replace a noun or noun phrase. However, in the African languages, there is another dimension to this part of speech, in that pronouns may not only act like nouns in a sentence (i.e. as subjects or objects), but they may also occur together with a noun or other pronouns for purposes of greater emphasis or contrast in a sentence. Morphologically pronouns may be analysed into various parts, but we shall not burden you with these details here.

Different types of pronouns are identified (e.g. absolute, quantitative, demonstrative), but once again, there may be differences of opinion among scholars.

**Examples** (absolute pronoun, class 2):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Setswana | *bone* | ''they'' |
| IsiZulu | *bone* | |
| Tshivenḓa | *vhone* | |
| Xitsonga | *vona* | |

- The **qualificative** is a term which is used to refer to any word or word group which qualifies or describes a noun or pronoun. Not all scholars agree that the qualificative should be recognised as a separate part of speech, the reason being that it encompasses a number of words and word groups which in turn represent a variety of parts of speech, e.g. pronouns, relatives, adjectives. Despite such differences grammarians are in agreement as far as the function of qualificatives is concerned, namely to describe a noun or pronoun with regard to certain qualities or features. Note that instead of preceding the noun it describes (as is the case in English, for example), the qualificative follows the noun in African languages.

  **Examples**: (adjective: noun prefix + adjectival stem)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sesotho | *monna e **motelele*** | ''a tall man'' |
| IsiZulu | *umese **omusha*** | ''a new knife'' |
| Tshivenḓa | *vhatukana **vhararu*** | ''three boys'' |
| Xitsonga | *vana **vakulu*** | ''big children'' |

  In certain grammars you will find that the term 'adnoun' is used instead of 'adjective'. This term is used because the words falling under this category all show morphological characteristics which are nominal, but they are no longer independent nouns themselves.

- The **verb** is a word which denotes a process, action or state. In the African languages a verb on its own can constitute a full sentence. Its meaning can be modified or expanded in a variety of ways by means of a number of prefixal and suffixal morphemes attached to the central part of the verb, namely a *root*. In order to make a proper sentence in an African language, the verb must contain a prefix, called the subject concord. The form of the subject concord is determined by the noun or pronoun with regard to which the action is expressed. The noun or pronoun may actually occur in the sentence or just be implied within a given context. In the case of commands, only the root plus at least one suffix are used (cf. Xitsonga below).

**Example:** (prefix(es) + root + suffix(es))

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sesotho sa Leboa | (*bohle*) *ba-a-**thuš**-an-a* | ''(all) they help each other'' |
| IsiZulu | (*thina*) *si-zi-**theng**-ile* | ''(we) we bought them'' |
| Tshivenḓa | (*musadzi*) *u-khou-ni-**shum**-el-a* | ''(the woman) is working for you'' |
| Xitsonga | ***famb**-a-ni!* | ''run!'' (you, plural) |

Verbs can appear in a variety of moods (e.g. statements, commands, conditions) and tenses (past, present, future).

- The **adverb** is a word which is used to modify the meaning of a verb. It adds more information regarding the nature of the action, state or process. There are basic adverbs and adverbs derived from other parts of speech such as nouns, adjectives, etc. Some of the types into which adverbs are commonly divided according to meaning are: adverbs of time, manner and place.

  **Examples:**

  | | | |
  |---|---|---|
  | Setswana | *Baloi ba tsamaya **bosigo*** | ''The thieves go about **at night**'' (time adverb) |
  | IsiZulu | *Ngidla **kaningi*** | ''I eat **often**'' (manner adverb) |
  | Tshivenḓa | *Vha khou ya **tshikoloni*** | ''They are going **to school**'' (place adverb) |
  | Xitsonga | *Va famba **hi milenge*** | ''They travel **on foot**'' (manner adverb) |

- The **ideophone** is the last part of speech which will be singled out for a brief discussion here, because it is so characteristic of the African languages and does not have a corresponding form in English. Ideophones are highly expressive words which denote various concepts, states or conditions in terms of colour, feeling, sound, smell or taste. They are able to describe situations vividly, and to evoke feelings and impressions concisely without using a verb. Their sound pattern is often 'abnormal'. Most of the actions could be expressed by normal verbs, but ideophones succeed in achieving a more dynamic and descriptive impact than ordinary words and phrases. Ideophones can appear as verbs on their own, but are usually used following some form of the verb ''say''.

  **Examples:**

  | | | |
  |---|---|---|
  | Sesotho sa Leboa | *tonyitonyi* | ''representing the idea of being very cold'' |
  | IsiZulu | *du* | ''dead quiet'' |
  | Tshivenḓa | *kho* | ''of biting'' |

# LESSON 3

# WORDS IN SENTENCES

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the basics of the noun class system;
- recognise noun classes;
- identify obvious grammatical agreement in a sentence.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 3.1   GRAMMATICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS IN A SENTENCE

The grammatical structure of all the African languages that we offer in this module, is based on two principles, namely

- the noun class system
- the system of concords

### 3.1.1  Noun class system

Each noun, whether it signifies a person, an animal, an object or thing be it concrete or abstract, is placed in a specific group or category. These groups are called classes. Look at the following words indicating persons, animals and things:

**IsiZulu:**

| Singular | Plural |
|----------|--------|
| umzali (a parent) | abazali (parents) |
| ikati (a cat) | amakati (cats) |
| isitsha (a dish) | izitsha (dishes) |

Do you recognise the first part of the word which differs in the singular and plural, and the part that remains the same in both instances? We repeat the examples again, but break them up:

**IsiZulu:**

| Singular | Plural |
|----------|--------|
| um-**zali** (a parent) | aba-**zali** (parents) |
| i-**kati** (a cat) | ama-**kati** (cats) |
| isi-**tsha** (a dish) | izi-**tsha** (dishes) |

Let us add a few more examples:

**IsiZulu:**

| Singular | Plural |
|----------|--------|
| um-**zali** (a parents)<br>um-**fana** (a boy) | aba-**zali** (parents)<br>aba-**fana** (boys) |
| i-**kati** (a cat)<br>i-**bhubesi** (a lion) | ama-**kati** (cats)<br>ama-**bhubesi** (lions) |
| isi-**tsha** (a dish)<br>isi-**cathulo** (a shoe) | izi-**tsha** (dishes)<br>izi-**cathulo** (shoes) |

What you have discovered now is that words are grouped together and that the singular of a specific group begins with a particular syllable or syllables, and that the plural of the same group begins with another syllable or syllables. The rest of the word remains the same.

In grammatical terms, the initial syllables that change are called **class prefixes** of the noun. The part that remains the same is called the **noun stem**. These noun prefixes have, for ease of analysis, been divided into classes with numbers (by historical Bantu linguists) and represent an internationally accepted numbering system. In general, noun prefixes indicate number, with the uneven class numbers designating singular and the corresponding even class numbers designating plural. The following are examples of the numbering system of some of the noun class prefixes. You will be introduced to the full system in your language specific CD-ROM.
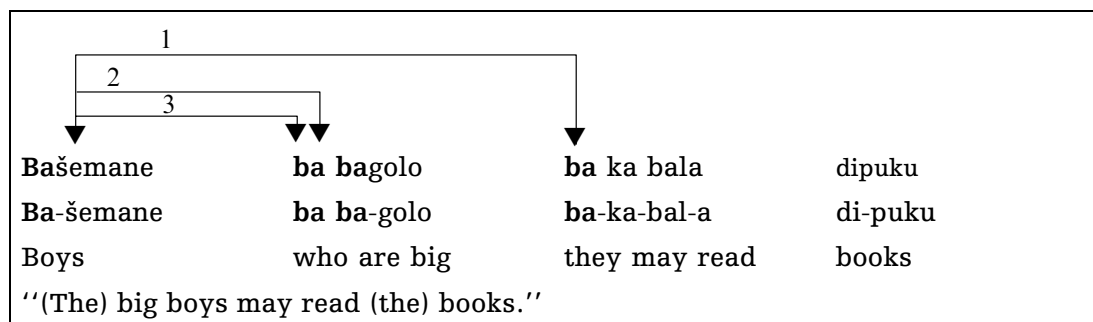
**TABLE 3:** Example of the noun class system in African languages

| Class # | Sesotho sa Leboa | | IsiZulu | |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Prefix | Example | Prefix | Example |
| 1 (sg) | mo- | motho ''person'' | umu- | umuntu ''person'' |
| 2 (pl) | ba- | batho ''persons'' | aba- | abantu ''persons'' |
| 1a(sg) | Ø- | makgolo ''grandmother'' | u- | udokotela ''doctor'' |
| 2b(pl) | bo- | bomakgolo ''grandmothers'' | o- | odokotela ''doctors'' |
| 3 (sg) | mo- | mohlare ''tree'' | umu- | umuthi ''tree'' |
| 4 (pl) | me- | mehlare ''trees'' | imi- | imithi ''trees'' |
| 7 (sg) | se- | setulo ''chair'' | isi- | isitsha ''dish'' |
| 8 (pl) | di- | ditulo ''chairs'' | izi- | izitsha ''dishes'' |
| 14 | bo- | botho ''humanity'' | ubu- | ubuntu ''humanity'' |

However, the correspondence between singular and plural classes is not perfectly regular. For example, some nouns in so-called plural classes do not have a singular form. We will tell you more about this in the language specific part of the module.
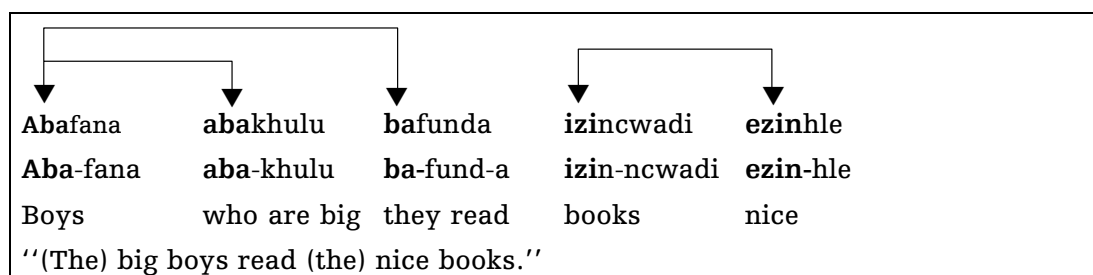
### 3.1.2 The system of concords

Class prefixes do not only indicate the classes to which nouns belong, but they also link the noun to other words in the sentence. This linking is brought about by a whole system of so-called concordial agreement, which is the backbone of any sentence in the African languages. In the following figures you will see that this system of linking (also called concordial agreement) links nouns to verbs, adjectives, possessives, pronouns and so forth. The concordial morphemes or concords for short, are derived from the noun prefixes and usually look and sound similar to the noun prefixes. This becomes clear in the following Sesotho sa Leboa example, as illustrated by the bold printed parts:



| **Bašemane** | **ba ba**golo | **ba** ka bala | dipuku |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ba**-šemane | **ba ba**-golo | **ba**-ka-bal-a | di-puku |
| Boys | who are big | they may read | books |
| ''(The) big boys may read (the) books.'' | | | |

**FIGURE 13:** Concordial agreement — Sesotho sa Leboa

In this sentence (1) shows the link between the class 2 noun *bašemane* ''boys'' and the subject concord *ba-* in the verb *ba ka bala* ''they may read'', (2) shows the link between the noun *bašemane* ''boys'' and the adjective *bagolo* ''big'', while (3) shows the link between the noun and the demonstrative pronoun *ba*, preceding the adjective (3).

In figure 14 we give an isiZulu example in which (1) shows the link between the noun *abafana* and the verb *bafunda*, (2) shows the link between the noun *abafana* and the qualificative *abakhulu*, while (3) demonstrates the link between the noun *izincwadi* (books) and the qualificative *ezinhle.*



| **Aba**fana | **aba**khulu | **ba**funda | **izin**cwadi | **ezin**hle |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Aba**-fana | **aba**-khulu | **ba**-fund-a | **izin**-ncwadi | **ezin**-hle |
| Boys | who are big | they read | books | nice |
| ''(The) big boys read (the) nice books.'' | | | | |

**FIGURE 14:** Concordial agreement — IsiZulu

In figures 13 and 14 you can clearly see that each word consists of more than one part or morpheme. This structure is typical of the African languages contained in this module, and will be explained to you in detail in the CD-ROMs.

# LESSON 4

# WORD ORDER IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- differentiate between the word order of English and African languages;
- explain the fluid word order in African languages.

This lesson is not meant for examination purposes.

## 4.1    INTRODUCTION

Speakers of non-African languages often find it difficult to make sense of a sentence in an African language as a result of the word order. In English, for instance, there is a very rigid word order in which the subject starts off the sentence, followed by the predicate and then the object if there happens to be one. The position in the African languages is much more fluid. The reason for this is the concord system. The concords not only link words in a sentence together but also refer to the nominal elements in the sentence. Because of this strict system of reference the nominal and verbal elements may stand virtually anywhere in the sentence without fear of being misinterpreted. This freedom of movement which words have within the sentence also serves another purpose. African languages are not stress languages like English and Afrikaans. In order to focus on a particular word, an African language does not place stress on it by saying it louder than the rest of the words in the sentence, as happens in European languages. Instead the word order possibilities are used to achieve the desired effect.

## 4.2    THE POSITION OF THE SUBJECT AND PREDICATE

Let us start with the positions of the subject and predicate. The examples provided are from isiZulu and Tshivenḓa:

(a)

| ɪsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| *Umfana uthanda inyama* | *Mutukana u funa ṋama* |
| "The boy likes meat" ||

Sentence (a) follows the basic sentence order of subject — verb — object, and does not involve any specific stress, but look at (b) now:

(b)

| IsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| *Uyayithanda inyama, umfana* | *U a i funa ṋama, mutukana* |
| He *likes* meat, the boy. ||
| ''The boy *likes* meat'' ||

In this sentence the verb *uyayithanda / u a i funa* has been fore-fronted in order to focus on the liking, and the subject *umfana / mutukana* is now of secondary importance.

## 4.3    THE POSITION OF THE OBJECT

Now let us consider the object of the sentence. We normally think of it as being the noun or pronoun standing immediately after the predicate. Let us again look at examples in isiZulu and Tshivenḓa where this is not the case.

(c)

| ɪsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| *Inyama, umfana uyayithanda* | *Ṋama, mutukana u a i funa* |
| *Meat*, the boy likes it. ||
| ''The boy likes *meat*'' ||

Here it is the object *inyama / ṋama* which starts off the sentence, indicating that *inyama / ṋama* ''meat'' carries the focus and is therefore presented to the listener as the most important piece of knowledge. Notice also that the predicate *uyayithanda / u a i funa* is at the very end of the sentence. It is the predicate for which *inyama / u a i funa* is the object.

## 4.4    THE POSITION OF THE QUALIFICATIVE

Qualificatives such as adjectives and possessives accompany the nouns they qualify and also usually follow them in word order. Look at the following examples:

(d)

| IsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| Umfana *omncane* uyakhala | Mutukana *muṱuku* u khou lila |
| The boy, (who is) little, he is crying. ||
| ''The *little* boy is crying'' ||

(e)

| IsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| Umfana *wami* uyakhala | Mutukana *wanga* u khou lila. |
| The boy, mine, he is crying. ||
| ''*My* boy is crying'' ||

## 4.5   THE POSITION OF THE ADVERB

The adverb in the African languages, as in most languages, indicates either time, place or manner. The term *adverb* is an indication that this word category goes hand in hand with verbs (or predicates). In most cases the adverb follows on the verb, as in these examples:

(f)

| IsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| Umfana udlala *kamnandi* | Mutukana u tamba *zwavhuḓi* |
| ''The boy is playing *pleasantly*'' ||

(g)

| ɪsiZulu | Tshivenḓa |
|---|---|
| Umfana udlala *ntambama* | Mutukana u tamba *nga masiari* |
| ''The boy is playing *in the afternoon*'' ||

We hope that this brief introduction to the word order of African languages, will have given you a better understanding of the way in which the languages are spoken and written. A fluid word order is of great help to a good writer who could make use of this facility to enhance his/her literary style. We therefore advise you to return to this section once you start writing your own sentences and paragraphs later in the module.

## CONCLUSION

In this study guide you were introduced to the African languages in context, that is the family relationships of the languages, the areas where the languages are spoken and some of the main differences and similarities between the languages. We also gave you a brief preview of sounds, word formation and sentence structures of the African languages. In this way, the scene has been set for the CD-ROM that will guide you through the acquisition of your language of choice. While dealing with the material on the CD-ROM, you might wish to refer back to this guide occasionally for general information.

We advise and encourage you to practise speaking the language you have chosen to study with its first language speakers in your social environments. That is the best way of learning communicative skills of a foreign language. Also keep journals where you can jot down new words and sentences that you have encountered and would like to re-check later. In

addition, read books that are used by children in their early years of academic life because they have a good background of the language you are learning.

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