

Language practices in Indigenous Language Public Service Radio in South Africa: A Case  
Study of Thobela FM

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of  
**Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies**

**By**

Matsobane Lehlogonolo Masuku

**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1329-9473>**

**Supervisors: Dr Jeanne du Toit and Mr Ryan Hancocks**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words fail to fully capture the depth of transformation and the multitude of events that marked this journey. Undertaking this study has been nothing short of life changing. I firmly believe that the credibility of scholarship must ultimately be measured by its applied value in society.

First and foremost, I must give thanks to God Almighty. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the daily strength, the breath in my lungs, and the grace that sustained me through this process. To my friends, family, and mentors thank you for the constant encouragement and for never letting me forget the question, "When will you finish the thesis?" Your persistence kept me going. To the Matjeakhotje family your hospitality during my data collection phase was a profound kindness. Thank you for opening your home and hearts to me. *Le se ke la kgaotsa go amogela baeti, ka le lengwe la matsatsi le tla amogela barongwa le sa tsebe.*

To the staff of Thobela FM thank you for your warm welcome and enthusiastic participation. Your insights were invaluable. To the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University I am humbled and honoured by your support and contributions. To the many others whose names may not appear here, know that your impact has not gone unnoticed.

A special and heartfelt thank you goes to my supervisors, Dr Jeanne Erica du Toit and Mr Ryan Hancocks. You are both outstanding human beings, mentors, and intellectual companions. Dr du Toit, I have never encountered someone as actively present and deeply engaged as you. Your attentiveness and drive have inspired me immensely.

Mr Hancocks, your guidance, patience, and your generosity in providing me with much needed funding has made this study possible. Thank you for your steady hand and belief in the value of this work.

I dedicate this work to the memory of the two unforgettable pathfinders

Hunadi Germinah Masuku and Magaty Piet Masuku.

Rest in Peace.

## **PLAGIARISM DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own, original work and that throughout this work I endeavoured to acknowledge sources of information where necessary. I also affirm that I have not previously submitted the whole or part of the dissertation for publication elsewhere. I acknowledge my transfer of authority to Rhodes University to reproduce and publish the content therein to the public for academic purposes.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study interrogates the continuing privileging of colonial languages in the South African broadcast landscape, despite the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s democratic commitment to foregrounding indigenous languages within the public sphere. It focuses on the implications for the way in which the history of South Africa's language politics has contributed to the continued marginalisation of indigenous languages. It deals with this subject matter by means of a case study of Thobela FM, one of the SABC's indigenous language stations which broadcasts in Sepedi. The study aims to gain insight into the experiences of staff at Thobela FM regarding changes in language practices at the station over time. It also explores how these experiences have been shaped by broader shifts in the history of language politics in South Africa. In order to establish a conceptual framework for this examination, the study draws on a review of literature dealing with history of the politics of language in South Africa. It does so by exploring debates that have formed part of that history and identifying key terms that have formed part of those debates. The study applies this framework to an exploration of the way staff at Thobela FM staff have experienced their own location within this broader history at different moments in time, drawing on biographic interviews with these individuals. Firstly, it examines the personal linguistic identities of the participants and the role of radio as a medium in their upbringings. Finally, it investigates their professional experience at Thobela FM. The analysis of the qualitative data was carried out through thematic analysis. The study concludes that the station has in fact made progress with the implementation of language practices that work against the marginalisation of Sepedi within South African broadcast landscape. Furthermore, it finds that multilingualism has always been a core tenet of the station, and that presenters, producers and programming staff have all played a part in the realisation of this vision.

**Keywords:** SABC, Multilingualism, Indigenous language public radio stations, Language practice, Thobela FM.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ABC – African Broadcasting Corporation

ALS - African Language Station

ANC – African National Congress

BCM – Black Conscious Movement

BEA- Bantu Education Act

CBCB – Commercial broadcasting and Community broadcasting.

CP – Communist Party

CPSA- Communism Party of South Africa

ICASA - Independent Communications Authority of South Africa

MTE – Mother-Tongue-Education

NEUM- Non-European Unity Movement

NP- National Party

NLP- National Language Project

PanSALB – Pan South African Language Board

PSB – Public Service Broadcasting

RSA – Republic of South Africa

SABC – South African Broadcasting Corporation

SABC-NP – South African Broadcasting Corporation National Party

SADC – Southern African Development Countries

SWAPO - Southwest Africa People's Organisation

UNISA – University of South Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

My approach to this study is informed by the recognition that radio is of particular significance as a medium of mass communication in multilingual societies like South Africa. In such language environments, it has the potential to include people from diverse linguistic backgrounds within a shared public sphere. At the same time, it can amplify the linguistic identity of groups that have historically been pushed to the periphery (Aiseng, 2024). I also begin from the observation that the South African Public Broadcaster (SABC) is committed to drawing on the affordances of radio as a medium to achieve these goals. However, despite this commitment, English is still given a privileged status within the South African broadcast landscape.

It is with this problem in mind that I set out to examine the role that indigenous language radio has played in South Africa in contributing to the presence of a diversity of indigenous language within this country's radio landscape. I do so by focusing on Thobela FM as a case study of an indigenous language station. I examine how staff at this station have experienced participating in language practices at this station at different moments in South African history. In this way, I aim to gain insight in how the station has located itself within the history of language politics as this has evolved in this country over time, from the years of apartheid to those of democracy.

I begin the study with a review of literature that maps out the history of language politics in this country from the colonial era onwards. I also consider the location of indigenous language radio within that history. Against this backdrop, I then conduct an empirical study of Thobela FM, a Sepedi-language public radio station based in Limpopo, as a case study of such an indigenous language station. The station was selected for reasons of convenience, as the researcher is a Sepedi speaker with cultural and linguistic knowledge relevant to the station and its context. I draw, as part of this study, on qualitative interviews with staff who have worked at this station since the apartheid era. Their description of working at Thobela FM provide me with rich insight into the way that this station, and the people who formed part of it, responded over time to developments in the politics of language in this country.

In Chapter One I establish contextual and conceptual terms of reference for this study through a review of the history of the politics of language in South Africa, from the era of colonial rule to the contemporary moment. In this chapter I explore debates that formed part of that history and identify key themes that formed part of these debates. These terms then serve as the conceptual framework for the study as a whole. In Chapter Two I apply this framework

to an exploration of the history of indigenous language public radio in order to demonstrate how it can be seen to be located within the broader history of language politics described in Chapter One. Importantly, this chapter draws on conceptual framing terms from historical debates, which serve as lenses for interpreting the findings. Chapter Three describes the research plan that I developed for my empirical study of Thobela FM and comments on the extent to which I succeeded in implementing this plan. Chapters Four and Five present the findings of this research project and offer a comprehensive analysis of the results of my study.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Introduction**

South Africa is considered a multilingual country due to the presence of a plurality of languages in its social environment (Beukes, 2004). However, commentators generally acknowledge that not all of these languages enjoy equal status (Kamwangamalu, 2000). In particular, English is accorded the most authority within domains of power such as education, governance, and commerce (Kamwangamalu, 2000). In contrast, South Africa's indigenous languages remain marginalised within these spaces. As such, languages in South Africa are not only carriers of meaning and culture but also exist within unequal power relationships. Beukes (2004) suggests that this situation results from a history of oppression, in which the official treatment of language became embedded within relations of power. This process can be traced back to colonial history and then after that to the apartheid era. During these periods, the authority of English as a European language and Afrikaans as a language of the Afrikaner elite became entrenched in South African society. At the same time, the power of other African languages was marginalised. These relations of power are still entrenched to this day in our social environment: they shape our language practices. This is despite the fact that we live in a country dominated by the black majority, whose home languages are African (Cakata & Segalo, 2017). Unequal relationships of power are, in other words, deeply entrenched in language due to this country's longstanding history of oppression (Cakata & Segalo, 2017).

In this chapter I set out to gain inside into the way that relations of power between different language groups have been renegotiated in this country over time. I focus, as part of this review, on changes that have taken place in language policy in South Africa. The discussion is organised around four moments in South Africa's history that are of particular significance to the shape of its linguistic landscape. Section One deals with the first three moments, which fall within the pre-democracy years. They include the colonial moment (the early history of Dutch and British rule), then the moment of the hegemony of apartheid and the moment of mass struggle and resistance that emerged towards the end of the apartheid era. Section Two deals with the decades after apartheid, in context of the establishment of the democratic order. It examines how policymakers in this country have articulated language policy designed for the purpose of democratic transformation. It then reviews the debate about the extent to which such policy has been successfully implemented in the first three decades of democracy.

## 1.1 Language and power in the colonial era

In historical literature it is pointed out that, by the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, two main linguistic groupings were present within the geographic space that is now known as South Africa. One was the so-called 'Khoisan', who are understood to be comprised of the Khoi and San tribes. Secondly, there were groupings referred to as the 'Bantu', who are Nguni-speaking (Beukes, 2004). It is this linguistic space that Europeans confronted when they first explored the African continent. The first European and Asian travelers reached the southern tip of Africa in the mid-1400s. However, the Dutch and British were responsible for colonisation in South Africa from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Dutch reign in this region spanned from the mid-1700s until the early 1800s and was then replaced by British rule, which continued until the early twentieth century (Kamwangamalu, 2003).

Both the Dutch and the British espoused an approach to colonisation that was geared towards breaking down pastoral ways of life amongst the indigenous people in this region and replacing them with the practices of colonial rule. This strategy was pursued in the context of violent power struggles and cultural appropriation (Muswede & Lubinga, 2018). It led to the loss of sovereignty of indigenous people and their subjugation within a system of Western modernity. Of particular significance for the purpose of this study was the implications of this history for the shaping of the South African linguistic landscape (Cakata & Segalo, 2017; Wa Thiongo, 1986).

Language dominance has been a matter of contestation ever since the arrival of the Dutch East India Company administrators in the Cape in 1652. The introduction of Dutch as the language of administration within the local environment eventually served to marginalise the Khoi and San languages spoken in the area at the time. This also applied to the languages of enslaved people brought mainly from the Malaysian peninsula. That was the beginning of the *Dutchification* policy, which in the context of South Africa refers to the influence of the Dutch language, culture, and customs on the country, particularly during the period of Dutch colonial rule in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kamwangamalu, 2003; Aiseng, 2024)

The dominance of the Dutch language was also wielded within the more specific context of the administration of trade and commerce. Here, it served as a catalyst for controlling access to resources and employment. Anyone who wished to be involved in commercial interaction with Dutch authorities had to attain a certain degree of linguistic competence in their language. Other minority languages stood no chance of acquiring authority within that economic space. As a result, they were either required to assume an interlanguage form or

inevitably pushed to the margins (Cakata & Segalo, 2017; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Wa Thiongo, 1986). Afrikaans finds its origins in this phase (Youssef, 2019).

Later, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were successive attempts by the British to overthrow the Dutch and become the sole colonial authority in the region, first in the Cape and then in Natal. In 1795, the Dutch finally ceded control of the Cape Colony to the British. With the territory now in their hands, the British put in motion an *Anglicisation* policy (Kamwangamalu, 2003). Anglicisation refers to the process of becoming more influenced by English culture, language, and customs. In the context of South Africa, it refers to the diffusion of English culture and language during this period of British colonial rule from the late seventeenth till the early twentieth centuries. The fundamental objective of this policy was to replace Dutch with English in all spheres of public engagement (Aiseng, 2024; Kamwangamalu, 2003). This policy played an important role in enabling the British to seize control of economic resources in the colony (Kamwangamalu, 2003). In this way, then, we can see how the establishment of dominance through language was core to the achievement of economic control.

At this time in history, the influence of English was on the rise globally because of the British Empire's ambitions to expand its international sphere of influence. The British were imposing their cultural identity on the spaces they occupied to mark their territory. Commentators describe this as a form of linguistic imperialism in which dominance is asserted and retained by establishing and reconstructing a relationship of dominance between English and other languages (Philipson, 1992). The role that English language played in the South African context was, in other words, representative of strategies that the British pursued in the context of the expansion of the British Empire as a whole.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the early stages of colonisation within the region that would come to be known as South Africa, the British expanded their occupation from the Cape to other parts of the land. They marked the territory that they lay claim to with English names and surnames, thus eroding the history of the indigenous people that had occupied these spaces (Cakata & Segalo, 2017). Labourers and enslaved people were also given European names and surnames. In this way, then, the imposition of language on people and places was fundamental to colonisation in this region (Wa Thiongo, 1986). It was during this era that language became used as a political tool to introduce and entrench colonial ideals upon conquered indigenous people and "inferiorise" their way of living (Wa Thiongo, 1986, Mignolo, 2011). The Dutch-speaking population, known as the Boers (farmers) were not spared from this dominance. As a result, they were also excluded from state affairs due to their poor knowledge of the English

language. The British were determined to make English the sole language of education and law, even in the Dutch-speaking communities (Giliomee, 2003). By that time, the British deliberately sidelined Dutch, for instance in education, Dutch children were taught in English rather than their mother tongue (Aiseng, 2024). The then governor of the Cape, Lord Charles Somerset, explicitly reiterated that it was his duty to anglicise the colonists. They were about thirty thousand in number, and it did not sit well with the colonial government that a group of this size could have the privilege of a language and culture that is not English. Such privilege had to be denied in a country that had become part of the Great Britain Empire (Kamwangamalu, 2003). Furthermore, state-funded schools used English as a medium of instruction; teachers were also instructed to force promote Afrikaner acceptance of British rule (Aiseng, 2024). This is one of many instances that mirror the long-standing rivalry between the two groups that exists to this day.

Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian missionaries would play an important role in consolidating the authority of the English language within South Africa as a cultural space. These missionaries studied vernacular languages for the purpose of communication with indigenous people in order to facilitate evangelism. They used this knowledge of vernacular languages for the purpose of scriptural translation and also to transform oral vernacular forms into writing. They also established missionary schools that introduced the Western education system to native people within the South African environment. These schools played an important role in promoting fluency in English amongst the indigenous population of South Africa (Saayman, 1991). Commentators suggest that the school system that was introduced to the local context in this way was deeply informed by Western cultural values, beliefs and assumptions. One such assumption was that civilisation is necessarily equated with Christianity and with European culture. Due to such assumptions, the mission schools played a pivotal role in aiding and assimilating indigenous people into Western culture while marginalising African culture (Lewis & Lemmer, 2004).

At the same time, the missionaries also engaged with some locally spoken languages, locating them as subjects that are worth studying within the schooling system. Certain languages, such as isiXhosa, were singled out for particular attention within this system. This was done because the missionaries found isiXhosa less intricate to assimilate compared to others. Also, the amaXhosa were located in closer proximity to the Cape colony, thus making it more convenient to target them. IsiXhosa was thus singled out to communicate religious ideas, to assimilate indigenous people into manual work and to immerse indigenous people into Western culture (Lewis & Lemmer, 2004). At the same time, Nama languages were either

neglected or discouraged due to their supposed insufficiency for religious translation work (Gilmour, 2007). It is noted, in this context, that Europeans found the Khoikhoi phonetics much harder to translate into written form (Alexander, 1989).

The focus on missionary education brought both advantages and disadvantages to the speakers of indigenous languages. On hand, such education formed part of the subjugation of indigenous people to the systems of colonial society. However, a positive impact of missionary education can also be traced in the emergence of a generation of African political leaders who were all educated in missionary schools. Through the serious and respectful study of indigenous languages, the missionaries also laid important foundations for inclusion of African languages in language policy, as part of processes of democratisation (Saayman, 1991).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the history of linguistic oppression took an interesting turn with the emergence of Afrikaans and dying out of Dutch. As time went by, the Dutch that was spoken in the cape colony became detached from its Europe ancestry and adapted as it interacted with other language groups within that linguistic ecology (Meeuwis, 2018). A new language emerged that became known as Afrikaans, and that was treated as a language in its own right. This linguistic transformation was informed by a group of so-called Afrikaners who at this time formed a cultural group, *the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* (Society of Real Afrikaners). They demanded that Afrikaans Dutch be standardised and not just remain a mere dialect under the powerful shadow of Dutch language (Meeuwis, 2018), in fact they wanted Dutch to be replaced with Afrikaans as the official language. This elevation of Afrikaans as a language was revisited in the first decade of the Twentieth century, after the Anglo-Boer war (1899- 1902) and the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The Act of 1909 which established the principles of this union explicitly declares English and Dutch as the only official languages and does not make any reference to Afrikaans. A new generation of Afrikaners revived the society and argued for the dignity of Afrikaans as a language in its own right. In 1914, when the *Nasionale Party* was founded, they further promoted the status of Afrikaans (Meeuwis, 2018). As a result of such promotion the language became a medium of instruction for Afrikaner children in the Cape, The Transvaal, and Orange Free State (du Plessis, 1986; Steyn, 1996 ). In 1918, a Reformed Church ended it's a long-standing hesitation to translate the bible to Afrikaans, the language that was considered to be improper for centuries, for rendering the word of God (du Plessis, 1986). All these developments led towards the re-interpretation of the Union Act of 1925, so that Afrikaans became acknowledged as an official language (Aiseng, 2024). Accordingly, Kamwangamalu (2003) describes

Afrikanerisation as a period in South Africa history where Afrikaans increased its power to take over the administration of the state.

The mid-1930s in South Africa was further characterised by the struggle by white Afrikaans speaking South Africans for their mother tongue to be respected within domains of power. This struggle formed part of the more general rise of Afrikaner Nationalism, a movement that was influenced by the return at this time to South Africa of intellectuals such as Hendrick Verwoerd from studies in Germany and Holland. The Afrikaner Nationalists were strongly opposed to any form of *samesmelting* (amalgamation) between English and Afrikaans political factions, as symbolised by the merger of Smuts' and Hertzog's parties into the newly created United Party. They worked for the establishment of an alternative political movement, framed by the identity of the Afrikaans speaking white South African. This movement became exemplified by the enormously successful 1938 Voortrekker Centenary celebrations, which affirmed a sense of solidarity and unity amongst Afrikaner Nationalists. Members of this movement laid claim to the divinely willed destiny of Afrikaners as God's chosen people (Dubow, 1992).

It is evident, from the discussion in this section, that struggles around the status of language was of central importance to the shaping of relations of power in the colonial era in South Africa. Through this history of struggle, one is able to trace the consolidation of the authority of a small, English-speaking white elite and the historical marginalisation of black African language groups who represented the majority of society. Nevertheless, even within this arrangement, it is possible to trace the emergence of an alternative system of power, represented by the rise of a black intellectual leadership. This group claimed missionary education as a power base from which to build resistance against colonial rule.

## **1.2 Language and power in the era of apartheid rule**

The apartheid era commenced in 1948 when the Nationalist Government of Dr D F Malan came into power. The Afrikaner National Party was guided by a commitment to maintaining power for Afrikaans-speaking whites in South African (Youssef, 2019). The emphasis was also on shoring up the position of Afrikaans speaking white people in this country on the assumption that this social grouping was racially superior to black people. One of the keystones of Afrikaner political policy was the enforced segregation of black and white people into different spatial areas (Christie & Collins, 1982). This policy was designed to fortify the exclusion of black people from social and economic development. It included restricting access to

employment and quality education and the curtailment of movement and social relations. This was, in fact, an extension of racial discrimination that already existed under the British colonialism. However, apartheid was unique in that the racist and separatist ideology on which it was based was openly acknowledged and lawfully sanctioned (Kamwangamalu, 2003: Christe & Collins, 1982). Within this we can see that language continued to be a gatekeeper of privilege and economic prosperity for black majority.

The government in power, in pursuance of apartheid policy, dismantled the existing system of missionary schools and replaced it with government schooling that served the purposes of the Apartheid state (Ravhudzulo & Runhare, 2014). Missionary schools were seen by the apartheid architects as a threat to the protected status of white people within the South African economic space. We saw, in the previous section, that to a limited extent missionary education provided indigenous people in South Africa with access to power. They were, in other words, at least to an extent designed to empower black people. For this reason, missionary schools were viewed with suspicion by the apartheid government (Ravhudzulo & Runhare, 2011; Christe & Collins, 1982). Government officials understood that learners who attended missionary schools benefited from the quality of the education offered by the missionaries, and that this had led to the emergence of an empowered class of educated black South Africans. They viewed the existence of this group as a challenge to the reproduction of white privilege within the local economic environment. For this reason, they looked for reasons to limit the missionary approach to education as an opportunity for black empowerment (Saayman, 1991; Christe & Collins, 1982).

In the place of missionary education, the apartheid government established a system of schooling known as Bantu Education. The objective of this schooling system was to provide a second-class education in which black South Africans would be prepared for servitude. Against this backdrop, the then Minister of Native affairs, Verwoerd made this clear:

I will reform education so that Natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them, racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives. They cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of a frustrated people who have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled<sup>1</sup>

Within this system of schooling, education in African languages became marginalised, while Afrikaans was enforced as a medium of instruction (Christie and Collins, 1982). Instruction in

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<sup>1</sup> House of Assembly Debates, September 17, 1953

Afrikaans was compulsory since it was associated with trade and employment opportunities. Knowledge of Afrikaans was a requirement for entrance into the civil service (Kamwangamalu, 2003). This inferior education was aimed at delegating a black child to a situation of disadvantage within a society that was organised around principles of apartheid. Black pupils were classified into language groups such as Nguni, Sotho, Tsonga, and Venda, while white pupils were separated along ethnolinguistic line into English and Afrikaans. Each group was offered a different education system, with its own learning outcomes (Reagan, 1987). Within this system, bilingualism and multilingualism were actively discouraged. Dr P.J Meyer, the head of the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement the *Broederbond* and the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation, described bilingualism as a social threat. He argued that teaching children to be at home in more than one language worked against the creation of a cultured and civilised world:

Bilingual children show backwardness in development as compared with monolingual children ... Bilingualism leads to moral relativism which reaches right into the religious life of the individual. It is definitely certain that Godlessness is more prevalent among bilingual people than among monolinguals

It should be noted that this was a period in which South Africa had become a republic in its own right. Within this society, access to Afrikaans became a key determinant of wealth, power and status (Youssef, 2019). Afrikaans was cementing its authority, and as part of this it was ensuring that the status of the Afrikaans language is greater than that of indigenous languages, as well as that of English (Kamwangamalu, 2000; Van Der Merwe, 2014; Mhlambi, 2022). At the same time, English also became increasingly viewed as a liberation language and its support grew within black majority opposing Afrikaans, apartheid language (Aiseng, 2024).

At the same time, African indigenous languages were starved of essential resources within South African social system as a whole. Such languages were restricted from use in settings that implied or demonstrated power (Alexander, 1997). The government gave the impression that it was making efforts to develop and modernise African languages while in fact it was deliberately under developing them (Alexander, 1997; Kamwangamalu, 2001). At the same time, the government invested heavily in the development of Afrikaans. It was often located as the primary language through which black South Africans could gain access to opportunities for education and employment. To enjoy participation and inclusion in these spaces, one had to learn Afrikaans (Ravhudzulo & Runhare, 2011; Kamwangamalu, 2003).

During the apartheid era, then, the history of struggle around the status of language underwent a transformation, which allowed Afrikaans to become established as a language of

power. It achieved such authority, in particular, within systems of government. At the same time, English held onto its authority, particularly within the context of South African industry. African languages were, at the same time, further divested of their authority, as part of the subjugation of black South Africans by the apartheid regime.

### **1.3 Language and power in the era of struggle**

The time of mass struggle at the end of the apartheid era is of particular significance as a period during which South Africans broke down hegemonic understandings of how society should be constituted. At this time, the established agreements about the status accorded to different languages in this country became fundamentally disrupted. Such agreement was instead replaced with the articulation of a set of debates that would become foundational to shared understandings regarding the role of language in society after democracy. New ideas about language and empowerment started to emerge in the 1970s, when the resistant movement rose up to challenge the government of oppression. As part of this, language activists began to dismantle dominant ideas about language that have existed for centuries during the colonial era and decades of apartheid rule in this country. They pointed out that language is not only a neutral social practice but also vehicle for political manipulation (Aiseng, 2024). They also argued that language was important to the attainment of political freedom because it amplifies the chances of being heard in a healthy democracy (Woodland, 1992).

The 1976 Soweto Uprising is an iconic moment in the history of the articulation of these ideas about language. Black students protested the prioritisation of Afrikaans within their own schooling system as part of the draconian policy of the Bantu education (1953). The enforcement of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction had been administered by the Minister of Bantu Education, M.C Botha and his deputies, Janson and Treurnicht who were prominent members of the Broederbond (Ndlovu, 2006). The aftermath of the Soweto Uprisings saw Afrikaans emerge as a language of oppression in the minds of black pupils and English as a tool of advancement and liberation against apartheid (Kamwangamalu, 2003). The youth increasingly understood the importance of education as a domain of access to economic power. The government was subsequently forced to amend its language in education policy in 1979, effectively reducing Mother Tongue Education (MTE) to four years and allowing students to switch to English as a medium only.

Similarly, the Communist Party (CP) was concerned with economic rights of the working class and understood the importance of access to language in the achievement of such

rights. For this reason, they prioritised adult education and reading circles and within this drive they gave serious attention to the elevation of indigenous languages (Alexander, 1989). They understood language to be a unifying power, contributing to the achievement of a national identity. At the same time, they were confronted with the complex socio-economic realities of South Africa, and the way this was interwoven with language as an indicator of social difference. They proposed that different language groups should be allowed to develop as they pleased while a larger, more embracing national consciousness should be encouraged by promoting a lingua franca. At the same time, they understood the necessity of focusing on multilingualism rather than valorising one dominant language for the nation. The discourse of nationalism aimed to unify groups within the colonial territory, both in order to fight against colonial oppression and in order to "guarantee" political stability in the newly independent country. However, in the context of South Africa, this approach was impossible to implement due to diverse cultural and language groups. Participants in these debates understood that it cannot only be an injustice when colonial languages dominate indigenous languages. It is also an injustice when one indigenous language can be promoted to dominate others (Aiseng, 2024).

The 1980s also saw the formation of the National Language Project (NLP), when language practitioners, activists, and policymakers coordinated and advocated the language planning process. The NLP was informed by the vision of a free, democratic, and united South Africa. A new democratic language policy was to be conceived that would necessarily bear features that accord with the cultural aspirations and political programmes of those working people who are the main agents of radical change in South Africa (Alexander, 1989). Academics such as Neville Alexander interrogated previous language policies in the era of oppression and made proposals about new approaches that should inform language policy in a democratic South Africa. They argued, in particular, for the promotion of a cultural of multilingualism, in which the co-existence of different languages was promoted and celebrated. However, according to some critics, the framework that emerged was flawed in that it continued to prioritise English to the detriment of indigenous languages. Such critics argued for a more profound transformation of the South African linguistic landscape, which would allow indigenous black languages to become recognised in domains of power. For example, in 1991, Nigel Crawhall (then Director) of the NLP discusses the process of "transformational intervention" thus:

We can attempt to promote the voices of the disempowered (marginalised, oppressed) sectors of the society while simultaneously constraining the use of the hegemonic codes by the ruling class. This could be done by the

conscious manipulation of the sociolinguistic rules in the society that would positively evaluate unempowered people's speech.

Within such statements one can observe the complexity of the task that these language activities faced, in navigating language rights in a social context in which language remains entrenched within relations of power. Scholars of language politics as it existed in the final years of apartheid generally point to the significant role that these relations were understood to play in constructing political and social identities (Wright, 2016; Cavanaugh, 2020).

#### **1.4 The role of language policy in South Africa's transition to democracy**

When South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994, the new government committed to implementing a language policy designed to ensure equal treatment of the diversity of languages spoken in this country. As we saw in the previous section, English and Afrikaans had historically been accorded hegemonic status within domains of power such as education, public communication, governance, law, and the economy (Kamwangamalu, 2001). The aim was now to ensure that a wide diversity of South African languages was utilised within these spaces in order to assist in achieving the country's transition to democracy.

In the early years of the transition to democracy, South Africans set in place a vision of multilingualism in the new democratic dispensation. They based this on some of the ideas that emerged from those debates that became articulated within the resistance movement in the final years of apartheid. Their vision involved a multilingual policy that would represent the rich heritage of the country's linguistic landscape. They argued, furthermore, for multilingualism as the best practicum for including previously marginalised languages, enabling all language groups to participate in important spheres of society (Aiseng, 2024; Mathe, 2024).

It was clear from these early debates about language in the new South African that it would not be easy to achieve these goals. Within debates about language policy, key questions were repeated. Could English and Afrikaans continue as the official languages in government and business administration? What was going to happen to indigenous African languages that had been marginalised for years? Everyone had their views, but the consensus was that things had to change (Prah, 2006:13).

The African National Congress (ANC) argued for a "laissez-faire" approach, in which actors were given the freedom to adopt a wide variety of approaches to language. Commentators suggested that this would result, over time, in the consolidation of current language practices. South Africa would see the emergence of a national language, and that it would probably be English. The Democratic Party (DP), a party who at that time essentially

represented English-speaking whites was more explicit in arguing for English as the sole official language. The National Party (NP), which had historically represented white Afrikaans-speaking communities, wanted Afrikaans to retain its official status alongside English. Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), based in KwaZulu Natal, supported a move to encourage the use of all African languages but favoured isiZulu over other languages. Parties such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) also supported the development of the African languages (Aiseng, 2021).

In the end, South Africa gave official status to nine previously marginalised languages, which included isiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. These languages were now accorded the same status as English and Afrikaans so that South Africa had eleven official languages. The South African Constitution, which was articulated at this time, provided ground rules for the realisation of this vision, stating that all eleven languages must be afforded equal status in all spheres of society. Furthermore, the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages. (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The government also set up structures to monitor the extent to which the official recognition of each of these languages would be put into practice. Of particular importance was the South African Language Board, a statutory body mandated to be the custodian of multilingualism (Kamwangamalu, 2001).

However, in the same constitution, there is a conflicting clause that breeds ambiguity, stipulating that the national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for government. They can do so by taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Commentators point out that these provisions in the constitution provide actors in South African society with legal arguments that can explain why they choose not to put language policy into place, due to the concerns about their practical realisability (Aiseng, 2024).

Since those early years of South African democracy, policymakers and language activists have laboured to ensure that this commitment to linguistic diversity is implemented. Some progress was made, which has seen African indigenous languages being used in government and public communication. However, in recent assessment of the implementation of these policies, commentators generally argue that more needs to be done to put them into practice. Three decades after the dawn of democracy, African indigenous languages still need to be more adequately used in domains of power such as business, education, and government (Prah, 2018). The former hegemonic languages (English and Afrikaans) still hold an advantage

over African indigenous languages, particularly in domains of power such as education and the economy. Commentators point out that actors in these institutional spaces still need to implement language policies (Cakata & Segalo, 2017; De Vos, 2008; Beukes, 2008; Prah, 2018).

Commentators propose that one reason for the slowness with which transformation has progressed is that language policies themselves need to provide more concrete guidance for their operationalization (Cakata & Segalo, 2017). Tollefson (1991) argues that those individuals responsible for the implementation of language policy face serious challenges in knowing how this can be done, given the complexities involved within multilingual settings in increasing social and economic opportunities for marginalized linguistic groups. It is also noted that the state needs to provide actors responsible for implementing the policies with adequate resources to make their implementation possible (Fourie, 2010). In other words, there is a need to articulate further strategies to ensure that indigenous languages gain authority within domains of institutional power (Kamwangamalu, 2002; Alexander, 1997).

Until this day, there is still more that needs to be done in terms of shifting entrenched legacies that hinder the full realisation of language policy in South Africa. It is recommended, in this context, that the current policies should be revised to reflect measures in their implementation (Cakata & Segalo, 2017). As part of such revision, it is crucial for language policy to provide concrete guidelines for their implementation.

## **Conclusion**

I have demonstrated in this chapter that the history of language politics in South Africa is deeply embedded in negotiations around broader systems of power. Within such negotiation, language has functioned as a site for reproducing and reinforcing unequal relations of power between different racial groups. Historical literature indicates that in the colonial era two European powers, the Dutch and the British, were central to this process. While the Dutch initially asserted dominance, their influence eventually waned, paving the way for English to assume unilateral linguistic and cultural dominance. English was further elevated through missionary activities framed as ‘God’s work,’ which contributed to the privileging of certain dialects and their integration into the colonial administrative infrastructure. This form of linguistic colonisation played a key role in undermining indigenous sovereignty and imposing Western systems of modernity. Under Dutch rule, the Dutch language became positioned as the primary language for trade and commerce.

However, when the Dutch ceded control of the Cape Colony and Natal to the British, a new era of Anglicisation followed further marginalizing indigenous languages, particularly as English was rising as a global language of power. Afrikaans, later institutionalised under apartheid, was met with fierce resistance from indigenous language speakers. This resistance culminated in pivotal political movements, especially those aligned with liberation struggles.

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 marked a watershed moment in South Africa's history, as students protested against the forced imposition of Afrikaans in schools, igniting broader resistance against the apartheid regime and its oppressive language policies. In the aftermath linguists, scholars, and language activists began advocating more strongly for the ideals of multilingualism as a form of both cultural justice and political solidarity. Language became not just a tool of oppression but also a means of resistance and subversion. The importance of political solidarity across ethnic and linguistic lines thus underscores why multilingualism remains such a critical concept in South Africa's ongoing transformation. Indeed, the discussion in this chapter identifies the final years of apartheid as a historical moment which enabled the articulation of an alternative vision of the relationship between language and power based on social justice.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the country's transition to democracy and the language reforms that accompanied it. The adoption of the 1996 Constitution was a major milestone, granting official status to nine previously marginalized indigenous languages, alongside English and Afrikaans. This was a progressive step toward linguistic equity. However, significant challenges remain in implementing language policy across all sectors of society, particularly in education, media, and public service delivery.

In conclusion, this chapter offers insight into the socio-political and economic forces that have shaped South Africa's complex linguistic landscape. It is argued that the legacy of colonisation, apartheid, and resistance to these systems of oppression continues to inform how language practices function today. This historical influence remains present both as a marker of identity and a mechanism of inclusion or exclusion within the socio-economic order. Importantly, language is recognized as a site of struggle, defined by relations of power, and as a crucial pathway of access to key domains of society such as education. At the same time, tension persists between viewing language as a unifying resource for nation-building and the need to recognize and protect diversity and difference. The principle of multilingualism emerges as a valuable means of mitigating this tension, offering a framework for balancing unity with plurality. Debates also continue around the relationship between language policy and the operationalisation of such policy in practice. Encouragingly, within national debates

about the kind of society South Africans should be striving for, strong support has emerged for the vision of a multilingual society grounded in social inclusion, where indigenous languages are affirmed as vital to public participation and the broader project of nation-building.

## **CHAPTER TWO: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND PUBLIC RADIO IN SOUTH AFRICA A HISTORICAL REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the role of public service radio in fostering a multilingual society in South Africa. It is organised around a discussion of the history of public radio in this country, focusing on how this can be seen to intersect with the history of language politics as discussed in Chapter One. Section One begins with a discussion of the colonial era, when radio first became established in South Africa as a communication apparatus. Section Two then examines the epoch of apartheid when radio was a tool of state control. Section Three looks at the era of resistance in the last years of apartheid, paying attention to the emergence of alternative media and the challenge that this posed to state-controlled radio. Section Four examines the transformation of radio in the post-apartheid era, positioning it as part of a broader project of transitional democracy. The discussion pays close attention to how the evolving history of indigenous language public service radio is interwoven with shifts that have taken place within the politics of language in this country. The discussion teases out the significance of the four historical moments in shaping the relationship between such radio and the South African linguistic landscape. Finally, Section Five introduces the case study of Thobela FM and its linguistic background, situated within the broader linguistic and broadcast history of South Africa. The station is examined through the lens of its evolution from the pre-democratic era, through the transition to democracy, and into its current form.

### **2.1 The colonial moment- the infancy years of radio in South Africa.**

Radio became established in South Africa at a relatively early stage when compared to other countries on the African continent (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2023). Indeed, the first radio broadcasts took place in this country almost simultaneously to the emergence of radio in Europe. Europeans were quick to bring technological expertise to the South African region so that the first radio broadcast took place in this country as early as 1923 (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2023). In a newspaper article, a “writer with an abbreviation H, L” describes his experience of listening to this broadcast in Johannesburg, which was transmitted from the headquarters of the South African Railways on the 18th of December (Mhlambi, 2015). A Johannesburg-based station was established soon after this, officially set up by the South African Railways on the

29th of December of that year (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2023). This station was not the only one to become established at this time; other ventures were also taking off, driven by an interest in the commercial potential of radio. The Cape and Peninsula Broadcasting Association had started a similar service in Cape Town eight months later, on the 15th of September 1924. In Durban, another organisation began broadcasting on the 10th of December 1924 (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2023). Within the next three years, these organisations reached a consensus to merge and form the African Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). A decade later, the ABC was transformed into a state-owned apparatus under the title of the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation, established by Act No.2 of 1936 (Mhlambi, 2015).

The approach to broadcasting that was adopted by the SABC was guided by the principles that Lord John Reith had articulated for the purpose of public service radio, for the purpose of the establishment of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Reith was the first Director General of the BBC and in this context had established a model for a publicly funded independent broadcaster that was foregrounded on a mission to educate, entertain and inform its audience. These principles were now applied in the South African context, but whereas the focus of the BBC as it existed in the United Kingdom was on serving the nation as a whole, the South African model was highly selective in its engagement with audience. The city of Johannesburg, for example, was made up of people of many different cultures and languages who flocked there to look for employment opportunities during the Witwatersrand gold rush. The SABC's Johannesburg-based station nevertheless understood itself to operate only in service of white English-speaking South Africans and therefore only broadcast in English. As such, it did not engage with the diversity of language groups that could be found within its broadcast footprint (Mhlambi, 2015; Aiseng, 2024).

In the 1930's, the SABC continued to focus on white South Africans as its primary audience but soon expanded its programming beyond English-speaking people to include white speakers of Afrikaans. It established a second station to make such an arrangement possible, offering its audience what was referred to as its "A service" (focusing on English-language radio) and its "B service" (consisting of Afrikaans language programming). The separation was thought to be necessary in order to provide white Afrikaans listeners with a programming space within its own linguistic integrity (Mhlambi, 2022). The establishment of the Afrikaans service was perceived as an embarrassment by the English-speaking political class. However, many white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans viewed it as a victory since it acknowledged the status of Afrikaans as an important medium of communication within the South African public domain. Indeed, the Afrikaans service proved particularly popular, substantially expanding the

SABC's audience figures (Mhlambi, 2015:55). As we saw in the previous chapter, the mid 1930s in South African was characterised by a struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans as a language to be respected within domains of power. The SABC's incorporation of the language helped to consolidate such recognition.

Within the conceptualisation of public broadcasting that emerged in this moment, black indigenous languages remained marginalised. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the SABC was primarily targeting audiences in urban settings, where there was no infrastructure to allow for FM broadcasting. The large majority of black South Africans, who were based in rural environments, were thus excluded from broadcasting. Commentators note that the assumption was that "non-whites" were "not ready" for broadcasting (Teer-Tomaselli, 2015). In this way, the SABC continued to reproduce the agenda of radio as it existed in colonial times, which was to educate, inform, and entertain white South Africans. Black indigenous populations were only addressed through methods that demarginalized African culture (Teer-Tomaselli, 2015).

By the 1940s, the SABC was nevertheless taking the initial steps in expanding its influence to include black South African audiences and it did so by beginning to incorporate a black South African language. On 23 December 1941, the journalist King Edward Masinga presented the first isiZulu language news service from the SABC Durban studios, which ran for about three minutes (Interview on radio Zulu: 16/01/1980 as referenced by Mhlambi, 2008:17). By September 1942, "native" news broadcasts officially started, afforded about thirty minutes of airtime per day each (Mhlambi, 2008:19). Broadcasts in Sesotho were transmitted from Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Kimberley; Zulu was broadcast from Durban and isiXhosa from Cape Town and Grahamstown.

It should be clear, from this discussion, that the history of radio as it became established in South Africa during the years of pre-democracy was embedded within the broader history of the politics of language in this country, as described in Chapter One. As we saw in that chapter, language politics in that era was strongly informed by a commitment to the exclusion of the black population from domains of power. This same exclusion can be observed in context of the approach to language within radio. However, by the end of this period, it is already possible to see that such exclusion would come to an end, and South African black languages would become assimilated within the SABC. As we will see in the next section, this process of assimilation was powerfully shaped by the political moment of the apartheid era.

## 2.2 The Apartheid moment – radio as a mouthpiece of authority

In 1948, the victorious National Party (NP) inherited the SABC and recognised in it an ideal channel of mass communication, and indeed a vehicle for conveying propaganda. This apparatus was soon employed for the purpose of engaging with black South Africans. In 1952, the SABC launched ethnically divided radio stations that broadcast government-censored material in different indigenous languages. These radio stations were collectively known as Radio Bantu (Fortein, 2023). In the years that followed, employment opportunities opened for Africans to work as journalists and producers inside the SABC (Mhlambi, 2022). However, they found themselves under close surveillance by station management, so that their ability to shape programming content remained tightly controlled.

The mechanisms of control of programming that came into existence at this time is described graphically by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2009), demonstrating the central role that language played within them. This is particularly noticeable in context of the process for compiling news, where bulletins were first written in English and Afrikaans, and then translated into black South African languages:

News bulletins were compiled and screened centrally in the highly contested space of the newsroom at the SABC headquarters in Johannesburg before being sent to the regional stations by fax or telegraph. Upon its arrival, written in either English or Afrikaans, the announcers had to translate and type them into Northern Sotho.

The process of translation was carefully monitored by white editors, who were chosen for their proficiency in black languages. Their task was clearly that of surveillance and censorship:

Carbon paper was used to produce a copy for the white controller, who sometimes ordered that the news be read to him before going on air. Only whites could be controllers, and their responsibility were to ensure black announcers' compliance with the regulations, guarding against possible subversion ... A controller would sit in the control box adjoining the studio from where he could monitor everything that the announcer was saying, noting any slippages in his report book. The announcers had little room to act autonomously.

In the early 1960s, the audiences of indigenous language stations grew dramatically, as radio was sold to the African market. This period also saw the expansion of the technological infrastructure of radio in South Africa, so that rural environments became included in the SABC's broadcast footprint (Lekgoathi, 2009). At this time four indigenous languages stations were established, each targeting a different black language group in South Africa. They

included Radio Zulu (Ukhozi FM since 1995), Radio Lebowa (now Thobela FM), Radio Xhosa (now Umhlobo Wenene), and Lesedi FM. The South African government maintained close surveillance of each of these stations through the appointment of editorial staff, and the establishment of systems for surveillance and censorship (Ngwenya, 2015). There were numerous legislative laws, including an Act that allowed government officials to veto any content. These laws had a direct implication to the extent that content that deemed by the state to be anti-government carried a prison sentence (Mhlambi, 2022).

By the early 1970s, the majority of SABC listeners were African, with new entrants and smaller linguistic groups such as Venda and Tsonga accorded their own channels (Mhlambi, 2022). It is within this period when respective stations were decentralised to their respective homelands. Within these stations, the focus remained on a closely controlled programming environment in which the production of news in particular was monitored and censored (Mhlambi, 2022). African speakers presented news and talk shows under the strict supervision of Europeans. Rigid control was still maintained through the appointment of whites who could speak African languages to supervise the black announcers (Lekgoathi, 2010).

However, scholars have also traced a history of resistance to such surveillance from within the SABC, with some black announcers broadcasting anti-government messaging (Tomaselli, 1989). To reinforce control, harsh media legislation (most notably Publications Act Number 42 of 1974) was passed to extinguish any form of freedom of expression. But despite the state's heavy-handed censorship of radio programmes, anti-apartheid messages somehow reached audiences. Within the SABC, black presenters made subversive use of idioms that enabled them to evade censorship. The aesthetics of African languages and the plurality of meanings that became possible in this context formed the basis of what Scott calls “hidden transcripts”. These consisted of speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public (Scott, 2008). It allowed broadcasters to express themselves in ways that even a white supervisor exposed to indigenous languages would not understand the message being conveyed. Presenters would for example report on struggle engagements using ambiguous forms of indigenous language expressions (Gqibitole, 2007).

Another form of resistance that these broadcasters employed could be observed in radio drama. One example cited in this context is the 1981 play *Apho Sikhala Khona Isakhatshwa* by Mandla Myeko, broadcast on Radio Xhosa. Myeko was an employee of the SABC during that period, and he understood the risks of open hostility. For this reason, he produced a signature theme tune for this drama that appeared to suggest that this was a story about love. In reality the story concealed a political theme, which involved a power struggle between the

apartheid system and struggle stakeholders. One of the main characters, *Uhlohlesakhe*, was understood by listeners to be the prime minister PW Botha, while another, *Maqhanqa*, was likened to Nelson Mandela (Gqibitole, 2007). The play was broadcast twice during weekdays in fifteen-minute episodes, for a span of two months, and was wildly popular (Gqibitole, 2007).

Poetry and music also served as a space for resistance within the programming of black language stations. However, the management of the SABC was conscious of the role that such content could play in the dissemination of subversive messaging and put in place systems of censorship aimed at suppressing this. International music from artists such as Bob Marley was for example considered subversive and inappropriate for consumption by Black audiences because of their revolutionary lyrics. The poet Sandile Dikeni explains that such censorship included the physical scratching of tracks on vinyl records so that they could not be played on air:

SABC actually had someone employed full-time to scratch songs on records that were banned. So, for years we didn't even know that many artists existed, except for what the SABC allowed us to know existed and mostly Afrikaans boere musiek, which by the way is very funny, was presented by a black presenter on Saturdays. (S. Dikeni, personal communication, August 30, 2003)

It is clear from this description of radio in the Apartheid years that the South African authorities of this time recognised the role that black language stations could play in retaining control of the dissemination of information to the public. Indeed, indigenous language radio became established at this time as an apparatus of surveillance and socialisation of the black population by the state. At the same time, we can see that resistance to these systems of control remained possible within stations because presenters were drawing on the rich resources of their own languages for subversive purposes.

### **2.3 Radio in the resistance moment – a cry for change**

It should be noted at this point that there has in fact been a long alternative history of radio in Southern Africa that existed in parallel to state-controlled broadcasting. The presence of such radio can be traced back to the middle of the twentieth century, emerging during the apartheid era. This tradition of radio formed part of an international movement of stations established in African nations, often as part of local resistance movements. One such station was Radio Freedom, established in South Africa to challenge the government and liberate the oppressed. The station was founded in 1963, when Denis Goldberg, Ivan Schermbrucker, and Cyril Jones began transmission from the home of Archie Levetan in Parktown, a white suburb of

Johannesburg. They assembled a custom-built aluminium ariel, coated with black spray paint to avoid detection by the police surveillance (Davis, 2009). Goldberg connected the makeshift transmitter to a tape recorder, and pressed play to broadcast ‘‘ Radio Freedom’’. Soon after this, transmission began to take place on a regular basis from a farm North of Johannesburg, where members of the ANC had gone into hiding. The transmissions that followed built up an audience over time. They broadcast in a range of local languages, including English, Tswana, Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans. In this way, Radio Freedom soon attained the status of an alternative voice that could speak truth that stood in contrast to the propaganda of the SABC (Davis, 2009). With his organisation recently banned; ANC vice-president Walter Sisulu officially launched the station on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June in 1963 with these words:

I speak to you from somewhere in South Africa. I have not left the country. I do not plan to leave. Many of our leaders of the African National Congress have gone underground. This is to keep the organisation in action, preserve the leadership, and keep the fight going. Never has the country and our people needed leadership as they do now in this hour of crisis. Our house is on fire.

Shortly afterwards, police raided the hideout and seized the transmitter, thus providing a lesson in the dangers of operating from within a country's borders. The police raid saw the arrest of prominent leaders such as Goldberg, Sisulu, and Kathrada (Davis, 2009). According to Ntteni (1991), it took six years for Radio Freedom to get back on the air. When it reopened, it was as a piggy-back station on Radio Tanzania's external service. Ntteni explained the move thus:

The need arose that there should be some form of contact between the people inside the country and the ANC in exile. The idea of radio arose because that time, we had activists going in the country, and we needed to compliment this with some form of political mobilisation... we approached the Tanzanian government and the first Radio Freedom broadcasts in exile began.

The ANC was allocated 15 minutes of broadcast per day within this arrangement. In 1972, Radio Freedom was also given time on Radio Zambia, where it was on air for an hour a day for five weekdays (Davis, 2009). The identity of the station was obviously that of a political radio station and its primary objective was to mobilise the masses and challenge the apartheid regime. For this reason, presenters were singled out from camps scattered around the African continent, Russia, and Cuba by Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC. The historical scholarship narrates, that after the collapse of the Portuguese rule led by Marcello Caetano in Angola 1974, Radio Freedom was offered a broadcast space within Radio Luanda. Initially, the broadcasters were recruited from the Nova Katenga, an ANC camp in Angola that was later airstrike and destroyed by the South African Defence Force in 1979 (Mosia et al.,

1994). The station did not have any source of formal funding nor sophisticated broadcasting equipment, but it had limited human resources, because Nova Katenga was not only a military camp but a whole bush school of politics. It is where a first group graduates of post-Soweto uprising announcers emerged, as described by announcer Themba Ntshangase. However, the ANC was seeking donations from Communist countries, and off air would quietly complement these donations by accepting generous funding from foreign aid agencies and anti-apartheid organisations in Europe and North America. This saw the expansion of Radio Freedom, Western countries supported this initiative primarily of the fresh insensitivity to Cold-war era activities within their respective countries (Davis, 2009). Later, a Dutch Anti-apartheid Organisation *Omroep Voor Radio Freedom* (Broadcasters of freedom) did provide the ANC with sophisticated broadcasting equipment, including tape recorders, mixing boards, and microphones for Radio freedom. National Broadcasting Company (Radio Netherlands) flew personnel to their facilities for advance technical training (Davis, 2009).

In exile, Radio Freedom existed with other stations such as the SWAPO operated station, the Voice of Namibia, and the two stations that broadcast to pre-independence Zimbabwe, namely the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) station, Voice of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) station, voice of the Revolution (Mosia et al., 1994). Its programmes were being flighted by several stations in different states in the African continent, which meant it could be received in more than one frequency channel for listeners. Programmes were broadcasted in black indigenous languages as well as English and Afrikaans. As a station signature, the broadcasts would begin with a call-start of automatic gunfire. It was expected because announcers were handpicked the military camps, however it is not clear what the message of that was for. As it stands, we can assume the type of content on this station, it was generally a mixture of news, political commentary, music composed and recorded by the exiles (Mosia et al., 1994). The role of recorded audiotapes and the significance of political music is explained in detail later in this narration.

This station largely depended on BBC Africa service, as well as South African newspapers for information about political events in South Africa, and due to strict laws, it was clear that there were no formal correspondents (Mosia et al., 1994). We can assume that it was equally difficult to give feedback to the station, people, however, did send the station newspaper cuttings, what the press was writing about within the borders of the country. Again, hand-written transcripts of interviews and tape recordings of speeches, and they travelled through covert channels through Botswana and Swaziland to avoid South African censors. Everest Siyeka who produced the *Listeners letters* programme in Radio Zambia in Lusaka for

Radio Freedom notes, “ In a month we would receive something like two or three letters coming in...which did not give clear idea of exactly what was happening on the ground”. His fellow broadcaster Justice Maluleke affirmed that South African intelligence services would still intercept more letters of feedback from the South Africa’s audiences.

Interestingly there was a show called New Horizons in the station, and it was aimed at white South Africans, the ANC strategically wanted to unite the working class that was disproportionate by the racial lines. For that objective to come to realisation it needed to appeal to the white worker that the future lies in the democratic South Africa (Mosia et al., 1994; Tyali, 2020).

Even though it was banned in South Africa, it continued to capture the listener’s attention (Mhlambi, 2015). Activists on the ground made it known in the townships by word of mouth. Radio Freedom’s audiences listened “under the cover of darkness to avoid detection from the security forces and informers” (Lekgoathi, 2010). In turn, listeners would be exposed to broadcasts in other African languages that would not otherwise be heard on SABC, and in turn, they would become inspired to join the struggle.

Along those lines, a station used by SWAPO, the voice of Namibia was also nestled within the same studios that Radio Freedom was hosted in, they were piggy-backing host stations on the African continent. It becomes interesting because the historical literature locates Namibia as a sphere of control by the then minority white regime in South Africa. It was also an imperative for SWAPO to find an alternative version of reality to counter the agenda-setting attempts of the SABC. Specifically, Voice of Namibia served as a counter-propaganda role, consistently disputing information broadcasted by the South African West Broadcasting Corporation (SWABC), the controlled South African station in Namibia (Mosia et al., 1994).

During this time, listeners of these piggy-backing host stations would record programmes on audiotape and discuss them later. This was also true for Radio Freedom. The South African government could not intercept correspondence exchanged from outside and those inside the country, which made it possible to circulate content in this way (Mosia et al., 1994). It is in context of this tradition, in which recorded content was shared amongst members of the South African resistance movement, that the foundation was laid for the establishment of community radio in this country. The practice of circulating content via cassette was supported by the Cassette Education Trust (CASET) that produced and circulated tapes containing communication messages from banned activists, local music, and revolutionary poetry (Bosch, 2006). The project was established in 1989 to develop the usefulness of audio-cassette as a medium of communication in the struggle for a sustainable democracy. Because

broadcasting was State-controlled, CASET produced and distributed audio-cassette programmes, which in more open circumstances would be broadcast on radio.

CASET emerged at the height of this increased internal resistance and the defiance campaign against the apartheid regime. One of the founders of this project, Edric Gorfinkel, explained how the political context informed CASET's mission:

The initial work that we did involve recording what happened in the defiance campaign. We went to mass rallies, recorded toyi-toyis, and recorded some of the ANC-IDASA safaris, where people from inside South Africa were going to meet ANC people outside. And CASET recorded those conferences to be transcribed, and quite a few audio productions were made out of that as well and distributed through the democratic movement. (E. Gorfinkel, personal communication, August 28, 2002).

This taught CASET the value of debating public discourse and interrogating the factualness of the information the SABC was broadcasting (Mhlambi, 2015).

It should be noted that CASET was established in the final years of apartheid rule, when there was growing optimism about the possibility for change as negotiations for a transitional government began. During this period, voices advocating for alternative media grew louder, ultimately giving rise to community radio in the early 1990s. In August 1991, the *Jabulani Freedom of the Airwaves* conference was held in Netherlands, with a focus on community radio all over the world. A number of South Africans attended, including members of CASET. This was the first occasion at which the recommendation to conceptualize the system of broadcasting in South Africa along three levels, public, commercial and community - was formally stated, (Jabulani 1991:17). South African delegates who attended the *Jabulani* conference returned to South Africa, determined to implement those ideas in the local context. In January 1992 in Cape Town, at a conference entitled *Media in Transition*, they resolved to establish an operating space for community radio in South Africa within a broader system of broadcasting regulations (Ackman, 1992:10). Eventually, these progressive developments towards liberalising the airwaves would lead to the formation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). This body made provisions to make a radio a formal structure, which intended to give previously disadvantaged groups access to the airwaves (Bosch, 2006).

The early 1990s was also the period in which community radio became established in South Africa. At this time, CASET evolved into Bush Radio, and they claimed for themselves the identity of the first community radio station in South Africa. The station's members drafted a mission statement that gives expression to their commitment to provide ordinary people the

chance to access the airwaves. Within this statement, it is possible to observe a commitment to the inclusion of different cultures and languages:

Bush Radio's mission is to ensure that communities who have been denied access to resources, take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourage ages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect them lives, and to celebrate their own cultures. Through such radio, communities will affirm their own dignity and identity and promote social responsibility and critical thinking (Bush Radio).

In the early 1990s, Bush Radio's operated without a broadcast license, while the government allocated temporary licenses to Afrikaner supremacist groups. This was widely understood as an attempt by state officials to provide right wing Afrikaners within an advantage within the emerging domain of community broadcasting, just before the first democratic elections (Olorunnisola, 2002). In April 1993, in response to this situation, Bush Radio started broadcasting without a license. Within a matter of hours, their transmission equipment was confiscated by post office officials. However, by 1995, the newly established broadcast regulator was awarding licenses to many community radio stations across the country, including Bush Radio (Olorunnisola, 2002; Bosch, 2006). In this way, the long-standing tradition of alternative radio within the South African radio finally became officially recognised. These stations broadcast in many different languages, to cater for the linguistic needs of multilingual communities (Olorunnisola, 2002).

I have argued, in this section, it is possible to trace a line of continuity between alternative traditions of radio that emerged in the South African context alongside the SABC. This line of continuity can be found in the establishment of Radio Freedom in the 1960s, then in turn the establishment of CASET in the late 1980s and finally the founding of a community radio sector in the early 1990s. In each of these alternative traditions of radio, it is possible to observe an alternative vision regarding the social purpose of radio to that of the SABC. Instead of a focus on social control and the disempowerment of black people in South Africa, the emphasis is on their emancipation. The South African history of alternative radio also offers a different approach to language than the one that has operated in context of the SABC. Instead of serving the purpose of dividing social groups from each other, language becomes a vehicle for social cohesion and empowerment.

#### **2.4 Transitional democracy- public participation, pluralism, and public good**

During the transitional years between the era of apartheid and that of democracy, the ANC publicly committed itself to restructuring the SABC in a transparent manner that sought to

dismantle the apartheid government's tentacles of control. Their task was to transform the broadcaster so that it would move from preserving the status quo to serving the public good. To achieve this purpose the SABC had to become independent from the government. This meant that the legislation protecting the government's interests was abolished, replaced by a new policy that secured its editorial, administrative and financial independence from the political interference (Ngwenya, 2015).

Crucially for the purpose of this study, the Reith model with its emphasis on cultural homogeneity and the exclusive use of English was replaced with a multilingual editorial policy (Mhlambi, 2015). This policy foregrounded the need for equal treatment of all eleven of the official languages. With this goal in mind, language guidelines adopted by the SABC in 1995 provided separate radio services in each of these languages. Each station was required to commit itself to the production of content in one language, thus contributing to its promotion in the public domain (Du Plessis, 2006).

Since that time, SABC's editorial policy has focused on the promotion of multilingualism. These guidelines speak, for example, to the need for fair allocation of resources to ensure that the needs of all language services are met (Prah, 2012). The current editorial policy of the SABC, adopted in 2020, includes guidelines for the equitable treatment of language (SABC Editorial Policies, 2020). The focus is also on enabling languages that had been marginalized by the apartheid state to gain status and power within the public realm (Kamwangamalu, 2000).

However, even thirty years after the transition to democracy, these guidelines have not secured an authoritative role for indigenous languages in domains of power. Commentators note that usage of indigenous language remains unbalanced and inconsistent when compared to the linguistic diversity present in South African society (Aiseng, 2021). Editorial policy remains vague with regards to the requirements of ensuring an authoritative status for indigenous languages (Banda, 2009; Olivier 2004; Fourie 2003; Kruger & Kruger 2001; Du Plessis 2006; Aiseng, 2021). Several studies have shown that broadcast media in South Africa, particularly on public radio have failed to offer equal coverage in multiple indigenous languages (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023b).

We saw, in Chapter One, that commentators propose that one reason why the promotion and empowerment of indigenous languages has remained rhetoric because the operational guidelines for putting the policy into practice is not yet clear (Cakata and Segalo, 2017). It is pointed out that such guidelines do not adequately explain what must be done to ensure that previously marginalised languages would be adopted within domains of power such as

universities, courts, and business environments. For example, more needs to be done to clarify the financial investments that are required to ensure that implementation is a success (Fourie, 2010). It would appear that this argument also applies to the context of indigenous language public radio.

Within the SABC, failure to adequately implement language policy should certainly be understood in context of the broadcaster's financial circumstances, which has become increasingly precarious. In addition, the SABC has experienced an ongoing leadership crisis (Ngwenya, 2015). This has directly impacted smaller status language groups. For instance, the airwaves are cheaper for the SABC within the Gauteng region where most of its commercial stations are headquartered. At the same time, broadcasting for small-status indigenous languages based in peripheral provinces becomes expensive for the SABC.

An extreme example of this problem is represented by X-K FM, which targets Kwe and San communities in the Northern Cape and the Western Cape provinces. This language group was in fact not recognised by the South African constitution alongside the nine previously marginalised languages that became acknowledged by the state at the start of democracy. However, the South African government recognises the importance of these languages and established systems designed to support their promotion. It is as part of these strategies that the SABC established X-K FM. However, there have been numerous occasions when the SABC requested the station to cease broadcasting, due to problems with resources.

The allocation of resources to indigenous language stations is indeed a general challenge for the SABC. Commentators note that this situation exists despite the fact that African Language Stations (ALS) could potentially generate substantial advertising revenue. ALS have for long been productive spaces for the advertisement of low-order goods because they have the lion's share of the South African radio audience. However, to attract such advertising deals, the SABC has been prepared to mix indigenous languages with English, on the assumption that this allows advertisers to reach audiences more effectively (Aiseng, 2024). Even inside black indigenous language stations, then, English is again accorded special status as a language of power. ALS stations are also increasingly adopting programming identities that are more appropriate to commercial radio, with the emphasis on mainstream music and relaxed conversation rather than prioritising local content, information and education (Mhlambi, 2015). In this way, the social purpose of indigenous language radio as this was articulated in the early years of democracy is becoming increasingly diluted (Kamwangamalu, 2005; Alexander, 1997).

## 2.5 Contextualisation: the history of Thobela FM

Thobela FM is located in the South African province of Limpopo and broadcasts in Sepedi, which is one of the principal languages spoken in this region. The Limpopo province is in northern South Africa bordered by Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and Northwest provinces. In the apartheid era these provinces all formed part of what was then known as the Transvaal but after democracy this region was divided into distinct provinces. The Northern-, Eastern-, Western - and Southern Transvaal became known as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the Northwest and Gauteng. In Limpopo there are a number of groups whose languages are officially recognised by the South African constitution, which include the Bapedi-speaking Northern Sotho, Vhavenda-speaking Tshivenda and VaTsonga-speaking Xitsonga (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Within this linguistic landscape, the Northern Sotho dialect known as Sepedi has secured a high degree of authority and status.

The history of this language is intertwined with that of the Bopedi in the Sekhukhune lands where a powerful Bapedi (Marota) kingdom resides. When discussing the history of this Kingdom, Mokgokong (1966:9) explains that the Bapedi originally separated from the Kgatla tribe, which is one of the Batswana tribes. Historical records also state that this group was led by Thobela, who moved eastward with his followers. They eventually settled between the Lepelle (Olifants River) and the Steelpoort River, at a place called Ga-Ratau - Driekop (Mokgokong, 1966:9). They began calling themselves Bapedi and also changed their totem from Kgabo (Monkey) to Noko (Porcupine), which they began to venerate (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022).

Of equal importance is the role played by German missionaries who arrived in this region of Limpopo province, known as Sekhukhune in the mid-19th century. At this time a Lutheran German Missionary, Alexander Merensky of the Berlin Missionary Society, visited King Sekwati (father of King Sekhukhune and Mampuru). Merensky received a warm reception from the King and was even told to return to build a regional missionary station (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). Eventually, on 14 August 1860, he returned with his entourage to establish a mission station and missionary school at Ga-Bakopa, Bopedi, under Chief Boleu. A central purpose of both this school and others established by these missionaries in the region was to convert learners to Christianity and for this purpose the curriculum included engagement with the bible and other Christian texts. To facilitate such engagement, the missionaries developed an orthographic system that enabled them to translate these texts into Sepedi (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022).

In Chapter One we saw that missionaries conducted such studies on a number of African languages in the South African context. Through these studies, they contributed to the selective recognition of these particular dialects within systems of colonial government. In other words, they became treated by the government as languages with official status whereas other dialects were marginalised. This also occurred in the case of the missionaries' study of Sepedi, which gained particular status as a Northern Sotho dialect within the government's communication systems in Limpopo (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). For this reason, a century later, when the SABC expanded its indigenous language programmes, Sepedi was the language chosen for broadcast purposes.

We also saw earlier in the current chapter (in context of the discussion of the Apartheid moment) that the South African government established Thobela FM in 1960 as part of Radio Bantu alongside its four sister stations, Umhlobo Wenene (then Radio Xhosa), Ukhosi (Radio Zulu), and Lesedi FM. At that time the headquarters for Radio Bantu were Johannesburg, which broadcast nationally on one frequency in isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Southern Sotho languages (Lekgoathi, 2009). Northern Sotho was only allocated half an hour of broadcasting per day on that frequency. Then, in 1962, a fully-fledged station was established in Pretoria in order to broadcast in Sepedi and Setswana for twelve hours per day under the title Radio Bantu Northern Sotho (Lekgoathi, 2009).

It was also explained in that section that, in the 1970s, the apartheid government decentralised its indigenous language broadcasting, locating each station in a Bantustan or homeland in which its broadcast language was predominantly spoken. As part of this process, Radio Bantu Northern Sotho was moved in 1976 to Pietersburg (now Polokwane), broadcasting as part of the SABC's services to the homeland of Lebowa. At this time, the station's name changed to Radio Lebowa (Lekgoathi, 2009). This was in line with the apartheid policy of ethnic separatism, strengthening the association of each homeland with a particular ethnic and linguistic identity (Fortein, 2023; Kamwangamalu, 2001). In the case of Radio Lebowa, the purpose was to bolster the existence of Sepedi as a language associated with the ethnic identity of Bapedi. The station's programming was designed to promote the policies of the National Party described in Chapter Two, in which indigenous languages were understood to exist in separation from each other (Lekgoathi, 2009). As we also saw how indigenous language station played a role in ensuring that black audiences were cut off from the content of foreign broadcasters critical of the apartheid government. As part of this strategy, Radio Lebowa's audience were channelled to listen to carefully controlled content of relevance only to their immediate environment (Lekgoathi, 2009).

During this period, the announcers at Radio Lebowa were educated and trained at Botshabelo mission station of the Berlin Lutheran Society, near Middleburg, in what is now the province of Mpumalanga (Lekgoathi, 2009). As an operational procedure, the SABC board would single one ‘trusted’ announcer from this college to place in an editorial position at Radio Lebowa. The assumption was that the Christian values of obedience and moderation that formed the basis of the curriculum at the mission school meant that its graduates would be less likely to challenge the state (Lekgoathi, 2009). As we have seen above, the history of missionary education in Mpumalanga has always been strongly connected to the assimilation of the Bapedi into colonial society. It is, furthermore, connected to the elevation of Sepedi as an officially recognised language by the colonial government. Now, in the apartheid moment, we are again able to trace these connections between missionary education and the assimilation of the Sepedi language and social administration, by means of indigenous language broadcasting.

However, as has been observed in indigenous language stations in South Africa generally, Radio Lebowa also had a history of surreptitious resistance, in which presenters and producers sought to disrupt the purposes of the apartheid state. Much of this resistance found expression in context of the subtle manipulation of the Sepedi language within the station’s programming. Presenters used complex cultural and linguistic expressions that enabled them to avoid scrutiny by the white controllers who were in charge of programming. Lekgoathi (2009) draws on interviews with broadcasters based at the station at this time who describe this subversion in some detail. He notes, for example, that an announcer by the name of Jacob Legodi submitted a news bulletin script about a conflict in Nkrumah’s Ghana using the phrase “Kua Ghana, Go fula tlou le tshukudu”. The literal translation of this expression is “in Ghana an elephant and rhinoceros are grazing together”. But Bapedi listeners, who are culturally acquainted with this use of idiom, understood that the presenter was explaining that war was raging in Ghana. White controllers who were fluent in the Sepedi language still failed to grasp these nuances in the use of idiomatic expression because they lacked the cultural background. Presenters would also regularly use the phrase “Bana ba tsie kgalaka” to show affection to their audiences. In direct translation, this means “Children of the bitter grasshopper,” a reference to a specific alien invasive and inedible variety of locusts. This epigram resonated well with the audience and created a sense of belonging and unity. As another example, Justice Tshungu, one of the first pioneers of North Sotho Radio, recalls that announcers would often play a well-known Nguni liberation struggle song Hlanganani Mawethu (gather, brothers). This song called for unity among black South Africans, subversively defying the tenets of ethnic separatism

(Lekgoathi, 2009). In this way, then, broadcast practices at Radio Lebowa are demonstrative of those described in context of indigenous language stations generally, as described in this chapter.

In the mid-1990s, the arrival of democracy again brought changes to this station. In Chapter Two it was noted that the new government saw a key role for the SABC in the establishment of democracy in South Africa. Indigenous language stations could play an important role within this project because they could engage with their audiences in their own languages. However, in order to serve the purposes of democracy, these stations needed to be dissociated from their apartheid identities. For this purpose, the management of stations were transformed, so that they could be representative of the demographics of their audience. Furthermore, the names of stations were changed, and their programming policies were revised (Lekgoathi, 2009). As part of this process, Radio Lebowa now became Thobela FM. The name comes from a Sepedi phrase “Sako la hloka thobela ke mojanano”, which translates in English to “a community without a leader descends into chaos”. Thobela was the first Bapedi king to break away from Batswana; hence, this word is regularly used as a salutation by Bapedi. At this time Thobela FM also redesigned its programming in order to build a more engaged relationship with its audience. The station pursued this relationship by adopting new programming styles that combined information and entertainment. Presenters were encouraged to make use of more interactive formats such as call-ins which allowed listeners to actively participate by phoning into the station and engaging in live discussions (Masuku & Aiseng, 2025).

Now, thirty years later, Thobela FM is well established as an indigenous language PSB station in Limpopo, with a loyal following of listeners in the region. The station describes itself as having a bipartite target market of primary listeners of the ages of 24-49 and a secondary listenership of 18-32 years with a median of 32 years. Programming contains news bulletins and current affairs, exemplified by *Tabakgolo*, their daily current affairs flagship. In addition, there are talk shows, sport, educational shows and music programming. Traditional and contemporary music shares airplay, including local genres that resonate with audiences. Programming also includes a strong emphasis on cultural content, celebrating the Sepedi culture, traditions and language (SABC Radio Stations Reach, 2014).

The review of literature dealing with Thobela FM, as presented in this section, demonstrates how the history of this station is located within the broader history language politics in this region. We see that, in response to changes that took place within this broader history, the station was repeatedly required to reinvent its own identity and purpose. This

process of reinvention also led to changes in the role that the language of Sepedi played in the achievement of the station's purpose. It is possible to trace these changes in the station's identity and purpose in context of the colonial era, then again in the apartheid era and finally in context of the transition to democracy. In my own empirical study of the station, my aim was to gain deeper insight into the way that staff working at Thobela FM experienced these processes of adaptation. In the next chapter, I outline the plan for the empirical component of this study, which is presented in Chapter Three.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that the history of indigenous language radio, as this has unfolded from the apartheid era onwards, is embedded within the broader history of the history of language politics in this country. We have seen that in the apartheid years; indigenous language broadcasting first emerged as part of the South African government's establishment of apparatuses of social control. The broadcast tradition that became established in this context engaged with the majority of South Africans in their own languages, in order to ensure their assimilation within a communication space defined by government propaganda. Furthermore, the establishment of stations that served different ethnic and linguistic groups served to consolidate the apartheid attempt to manufacture division amongst the South African people. These stations required the employment of indigenous language speakers as the presenters of programming. As we have seen, stations were managed by white government officials, in order to scrutinise and control the broadcasting practices of such presenters. However, black staff who worked on these stations still found ways to work against the purpose of such officials by including subversive messaging within their broadcasts. They were often able to do so by drawing on the nuance and complexity of their own languages, in ways that the white officials could not monitor. It is clear from this history that broader struggles around language during the pre-democracy years in South Africa, as described in Chapter One, also found their expression within indigenous language radio. Here, too, we see the attempts by government to establish systems of social control that are designed to squash dissent, and again we see that resistance continued to resurface.

It was also proposed in this chapter that there is a second tradition of radio that has for long existed alongside that of the SABC, serving a very different purpose and drawing on language practices in very different ways. This tradition is closely associated with the history of the South African resistance movement, and with ideas about language that are associated

with this movement. It begins with the activist broadcaster Radio Freedom in the apartheid years and then re-emerges with the establishment of community radio in the early 1990s. Whereas language is used to create division between people in the SABC's indigenous language stations as these existed in the apartheid era, activist radio and community radio drew on multiple languages in service of social inclusion and empowerment.

Finally, the discussion of the democratic era, in this section, suggests that the early 1990s represented moment of optimism about the role that indigenous language radio could play in South Africa. The SABC drew, at this time, on ideals articulated in the final years of the resistance movement regarding the role that a culture of multilingualism should play in the new South African democracy. The vision for indigenous language radio that was established at that time foregrounded the contribution that it could make to the facilitation of social inclusion more generally, and the strengthening of a multicultural society more specifically. However, despite this optimism, significant challenges have plagued the SABC in putting this vision into practice. As noted above, the failure to fulfil the potential of indigenous language radio is often framed as resulting from limitations in resources. It should, however, be noted that this failure is not specific to the SABC. Rather, it forms part of the broader history of failure described in the previous chapter, in which institutions within South African society have struggled to implement this country's language policies.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH PLAN

### Introduction

The first two chapters of this dissertation presented a review of literature that provide contextual and conceptual terms of reference for this study. Chapter One achieves this purpose through a review of the history of language politics in South Africa, focusing on how this history has shaped the country's linguistic environment as it exists today. Against this backdrop, Chapter Two presents a review of the history of South African indigenous public radio, examining how it is embedded within the history of language politics. Both chapters examine how these histories are analysed in the available literature in order to identify critical terms of reference for the empirical component of this study. The remainder of this dissertation is dedicated to this empirical component, which focuses on Thobela FM as a case study of an indigenous language public radio station in South Africa. The aim is to explore how this station's history can be seen to be located within the broader history of language politics and indigenous language broadcasting, as captured in the previous two chapters.

This next chapter deals with the research plan for the study of Thobela FM. In this chapter I adopt the first person, which enables me to speak freely about my approach to the design and implementation of this plan. In Section One I describe the plan that I designed for my research at Thobela FM dealing in turn with decisions about methodology, method, fieldwork and analysis. Section Two describes how the implementation of this plan turned out in practice and comments on implications for the overall validity and reliability of the research.

### 3.1 The research plan for the study of Thobela FM

The discussion of my research plan, in this section, deals with each of the decisions that I made about the design of the study. It deals, in turn, with the decision to locate the study in a qualitative paradigm; the choice of a case study design; the focus on qualitative interviews and the approach to fieldwork and analysis.

#### 3.1.1 The choice of methodology: a qualitative and historical study

In making a decision about the methodological location of this study, I kept in mind that the purpose was to gain insight into the way that staff working at a radio station can bear witness to its location within the broader history of the politics of language. For this reason, it made sense to adopt a qualitative paradigm, which allows for an engagement with the subjective

experience of social context. In scholarship about research methodology, it is explained that qualitative research is particularly suitable for such a research goal because it can deal with the way individuals make subjective sense of their environment (Bless et al., 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). It becomes possible, in particular, to deal not only with information about that environment but also with the emotions, observations, and attitudes as valid aspects of research participants' experience of their social world (Babbie & Mouton, 2010).

I chose, in addition, to adopt a framework that engages with social experience as it evolves over time, in the form of a historical narrative. In scholarship about research, it is noted that a historical frame enables the researcher to construct narratives that enable a deeper understanding of the past and its connection to the contemporary moment (Kothari, 2004). I recognised such understanding to be of central importance to my study. I understood, furthermore, that I would need to pursue such understanding by examining the way that staff at Thobela FM participated in history. As part of this examination, it would be necessary to consider how their own individual biographies formed part of the history of the station itself.

### 3.1.2 A case study design

Case studies are understood in the literature to be empirical inquiry of a particular example of a phenomenon, paying close attention to the specifics of its context (Yin, 1994). The research considers multiple sources of evidence of relevance to that case study, in order to gain rich understanding of the particular instance that is being researched. Where possible, the researcher will then attempt to make generalised about the more general phenomenon, based on this example (Yin, 1994). In the case of my study Thobela FM represents the case under study, as an example of an indigenous language radio public radio station located in South Africa. My aim, in examining this case, was to attend closely to this one example in order to identify patterns and trends that may be of more general relevance to such stations as they exist in the South African context. I chose this station for reasons of convenience, because I am myself a speaker of the Sepedi language and have grown up listening to this station. Because I have cultural and linguistic knowledge of relevance to the station and its context, it represented an attractive choice for my case study.

### 3.1.3 The choice of method: qualitative biographical interviews

As noted above, the aim of my study was to gain insight into the way staff working at Thobela FM experienced changes that took place at the station, in context of its location within the

country's socio-political history, and with a particular focus on the politics of language. For this purpose, I decided to make use of semi structured in-depth interviews, conducted in Sepedi with such staff. Such interviews are understood to be of particular value when engaging with a small number of research participants in order to gain insight into their perspectives on a particular social context (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also understood that these interviews would need to be biographical in nature, so that the research participants could describe to me how their own life histories intersected with the history of Thobela FM and with the broader socio-political history in which the station is based. I opted to conduct such interviews face to face because I knew that this would enable me to make the most of the opportunity of capturing the life histories of the participants as expressed in their own words in rich and nuanced detail (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). This approach to interviewing is particularly relevant to an investigation such as my study, which requires the researcher to listen with sensitivity for the nuance and complexity that is inevitably involved in personal storytelling (Kothari, 2004).

#### 3.1.4 The choice of research participants

I aimed to focus, in my choice of interviews, on individuals who are currently employed at Thobela FM. I was interested, in particular, in the inclusion of staff who have worked as presenters, producers and programming staff at the station. We have seen, within the literature reviews included in this thesis, that such research participants bring valuable perspectives to the way that language practices form part of the history of radio stations. This was demonstrated in Chapter Two, in context of discussions in which such participants bore witness to the subversive practices adopted by presenters at indigenous language stations in the apartheid era. Further demonstration was offered in review of the history of Thobela FM, above, where we again saw the value of including descriptions by station staff of their experience of working there. Such description provides rich and detailed evidence of ways in which practices that formed part of the station's programming were shaped by social context and also, conversely operated as an intervention into that context.

I understood, furthermore, that it would be important to include participants who have been at the station for a long period of time, so that they are able to speak from personal experience about different moments in its evolution. I hoped, ideally, to be able include participants who could speak in this way about the apartheid era, the transition to democracy, and more recent years. My preliminary engagement with the station convinced me that I would be able to include an older generation of staff with extensive radio experience that can be traced

back to the years of apartheid. I would, at the same time, be able to secure interviews with a younger generation who can speak more specifically about the democratic era. I hoped to be able to secure interviews with at least six participants, to provide myself with enough research material to conduct a substantive study.

### 3.1.5 The design of the interview guide and approach to interviewing

In guidelines for qualitative and semi-structured interviewing it is noted that questions should be open-ended, which means that they should be worded so that respondents cannot simply answer yes or no but must expound on the topic. Furthermore, there is value in designing the interview guide so that there is an overall structure, but the researcher still has freedom to respond flexibly to the opportunities for conversation presented within the interview process (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). With these guidelines in mind, I designed an interview guide which I believed would allow the interview to flow naturally but also have internal coherence (see *Appendix 3*). The guide was organised into three sections. The first section captured the biographic information of the respondents. I included a focus on where they grew up, the languages they grew up speaking and radio as part of their lives. I also included questions dealing with turning points in their adult lives when choosing career paths after completing secondary education. The second section probed the respondent's experience from working at Thobela FM and the third section prompted the respondents to reflect on the contribution that they were able to make to the station through this work.

I understood that in context of the interview I should ideally establish a conversational register, in which the research participant was able to engage with me as naturally as possible. For this reason, I resolved that I would not be rigid about asking each question in the order included in the guide because the flow of the conversation might dictate otherwise (Kothari, 2004). I also understood that my role would need to be that of listening closely, so that I could pick up on nuances in the particularity of the expressions shared with me by the participants. I would need to strive to interpret what I am hearing, and seek clarity and a deeper understanding from the respondent throughout the interview (Deacon et al., 1999)

I decided to conduct the interviews at the premises of Thobela FM, for the sake of convenience. My aim was also to conduct all of the interviews over a period of one or two days, while I visited the station. This was of practical importance, since I am not a permanent resident of Polokwane City where Thobela FM is located and would be operating under a limited financial budget. I also planned to record the interviews, using a digital recorder and

also make field notes. I understood this strategy to be fundamental to a rigorous fieldwork process, which depends on the systematic documentation of interviews.

I also prepared myself to phrase the interview questions both in English and Sepedi so that I would be able to speak in the language that the research participant finds most comfortable. In this way I hoped to ensure that I could capture cultural and linguistic nuances as expressed by the interviewees. Commentors encourage this style of integrating languages within an interview to allow a better communication (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

### 3.1.6 Ethical Considerations

In planning this research, I followed Rhodes University guidelines for ethical research involving human subjects (Review Reference: 2024-8110-9100). I understood the need for a letter from the ethics committee that would seek permission from the SABC Polokwane regional commercial hub, to do this study. I received a letter of authorisation to conduct data collection from the SABC, which granted me permission to carry out the empirical work. I also needed an informed consent form from the participants to obtain their permission to participate. Although the participants granted the researcher a permission to disclose their identities, their names have nevertheless redacted in the findings section. I also made it clear to the interviewees that the recorded interviews will be stored in digital format on my computer and will only be utilised for the purposes of this study; for this reason, they won't be made available to anyone else at any given time. Lastly, I entered in a non-disclosure agreement contract with the SABC.

## 3.2 **How this plan worked in practice**

This section deals with implementing the research plan and how it worked in practice. Firstly, it provides the profile of the research participants that I was able to secure for the purposes of this study. Secondly, it describes my experience of conducting the fieldwork. Finally, it deals with the approach that I adopted to the analysis of the research material, and writing up my findings.

### 3.2.1 Securing the research participants

Once I had received a letter of authorisation (see *appendix 2*) from the SABC, I was able to set up a briefing meeting with Pontsho Tsoetsi who is training coordinator and respectively based at the main office of the SABC in Auckland Park and Rosetta Sebapu, who is a senior producer respectively based at Thobela FM and was identified as my coach for this empirical work.

They assured me that I would be able to set up interviews with any member of staff at the station. This was pleasing, since it indicated that I would have access to more people than I originally envisaged. In the end, I was able to secure eight participants. Below, I provide descriptions of each participant. In order to protect the identity of the research participants, I refer to them using their job titles only.

Senior Host (M) is a seasoned broadcaster with 36 years of experience at the time of this interview. He explains that he had worked on numerous programmes before focusing on *Tabakgolo* – the station’s flagship current affairs programme. Significantly, he holds an honorary doctorate in African languages. I had always hoped to interview him since I started planning this study because I knew that he would be able to speak to me about a substantial period of the station’s history, traced back to the apartheid era.

Station manager (F) is the station manager of Thobela FM. She joined the news department at the dawn of democracy after working at the corporate department at the SABC in Pretoria. She represents the older generation at the station and has worked in both programming and the news department. She brings insights into the operations of the station as well as the implementation strategies of the language policy of the station.

Senior Producer (A) is a senior producer and can speak from extensive experience, having worked at the station for 25 years. He has worked on numerous programmes but has specialised in particular on those dealing with science. Senior Producer (M) has a qualification in education, and he put that into practice since coming to the station. His education programmes have seen him representing the station at an international level in Washington DC, in the United States. Speaking to him, I knew I could rely on him to draw on his experience to provide a detailed engagement with the history of the station.

News Reader (S) is a news reader, with two decades of experience in working at the station. Like News Presenter (M) and Executive Senior Producer (I) he is the product of community radio. He has also worked on numerous programmes at Thobela FM and told me that in this context he has gained a depth of experience in audience building. He is known to be popular amongst listeners, loved for his unique deep voice. I understood that he would be able to speak both about the contemporary context and about the earlier years of democracy, going back to the turn of the century when the station was settling in after transitioning to democracy. News Reader (S) is the only participant from the news department, which remains a critical component of the station. I understand that during the apartheid era, news was heavily censored, I knew that his insights are relevant in shedding a light into the current operations in that department.

Senior Host (H) is a presenter. Like News Reader (S) he comes from a background in community radio, where he was based in the late 1990s. He joined Thobela FM in the mid-2000s and worked on numerous night programmes including *Moremogolo*. His long service with the station equipped him with so much radio experience that he even became the executive producer and later the station's programme manager. In March 2006, he was employed by SABC Current Affairs and worked for a year as a presenter/producer. In 2007, he terminated his contract with SABC Current Affairs to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Limpopo and re-joined Thobela FM as a presenter. Being a Motswana working at a Sepedi-broadcasting station was sufficient to convince me that he could speak from a perspective of language identity and multilingualism.

Senior Producer (B) is a senior producer at the station. I understood that her work requires of her to be hands on, ensuring that programming runs smoothly. She explained to me that her duties are to conduct research for the content that is to be included in programming and to ensure that this content is presented in simple language, so that it is accessible to the station's audience. She has been at the station in this capacity since 2007. For these reasons I understood her to be a suitable research participant, who could speak knowledgeably about this period in the station's history.

News Presenter (M) is a presenter at the station and represents the younger generation. She indicates that she gained experience in broadcasting as participant in community radio. Since then, she has been at the station in this capacity since 2007. I understood that news presenter was particularly well placed to speak to me about Thobela FM as it has existed in the more recent years of the democratic era.

At the age of 33 at the time of the interview, Executive Senior Producer (I) is the youngest of all of the research participants. Like News Presenter (M), he comes from the background in community radio. He is a senior producer and, despite his age, also holds the position of programming manager. I understood that he would, in a similar vein to News Presenter (M), be able to speak primarily about the contemporary perspective. His location as programming manager would, in addition, enable him to provide me with information about editorial policy on language at the station.

Initially, I had hoped to also interview the business manager, Mr Madikana Matjila, who is in charge of the SABC business complex in Limpopo, including Thobela FM for Northern Sotho, Munghana Lonene for Xitsonga, and Phala Phala FM for Venda language services. However, I realised that his position does not involve the day-to-day running of the stations. I was also motivated by his busy schedule to reconsider his participation.

It should be clear from my description of these research candidates that I had succeeded in securing involvement from some individuals who had been with the station for many decades, including the apartheid era. At the same time, the group includes candidates that joined the station much later, some at the beginning of the democratic era and others more recently. I understand these candidates to be of equal importance to those who have worked inside Thobela FM for much longer. It is apparent, from the discussion above, that a number of these younger participants gained their first experience in broadcasting from work in community radio. This was not possible for the older participants, because the community radio sector only became established in South Africa at the start of democracy. These participants bring a different perspective to the discussion of Thobela FM, based on their experience of community radio.

### 3.2.2 Conducting the interviews

My aim was to spend a week at the station from the 24<sup>th</sup> until the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2024 in order to interview the participants. In the end, the station staff were so helpful to me in organising interviews that I was able to schedule all of them over a period of two days, on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of October. Rosetta Sebapu introduced me to each participant before the interviews could begin. Before I could begin the interview, the participants were interested to hear a brief background of the study, and all of them were happy to make a contribution. They were happy to do so without the requirement of anonymity.

On the first day, Senior producer (B) allowed me to use her office for her interview, which had a full view of the studio. She multitasked as I explained what the study entailed, but eventually, all the attention was on me. After the successful interview with her, I was ushered to the fourth floor to meet Senior Host (M)e and found him in an open-plan office where each producer has a desk and desktop with access to the internet and internal network. Because it is an open plan office, the producers are always close to each other. The remaining interviews were conducted in the news department, where journalists and news readers share an open-plan office. News Reader (S) was due to give a brief broadcast on current affairs at midday. He invited me to come with him to the studio, which would be convenient, right after the broadcast. It was a fast-paced environment; I followed while he ran to the door and patiently waited for the clock for his broadcast. We had ample space and time for a lengthy interview. I did not feel like an interview but rather like a normal conversation because the News Reader (I) was deeply invested in the subject matter. He has a huge interest and passion for indigenous languages and

their use in the public domain. Finally, when I thought I was concluding my interviews in a day, the station manager, my last participant, was in a meeting, and my coach advised me to come early the following day. Of course, arrangements were made to secure an early; she is busy, and I was lucky to find her at the station.

On the following day, I arrived early and was ready to finish off, but at the agreed time, Station Manager (F) was in a virtual meeting. Eventually, she met me in her office, which was not an open plan, and had a receptionist at the entrance. I had to explain the background to my study. I was comfortable and felt warmly welcomed.

One minor mistake I made during this interview process was not to follow security protocol when moving from one participant to another without being ushered by the coach. The head of security came for a routine inspection and advised me to contact my coach. Visitors are supposed to always be in constant company with their host since the SABC is considered a key national area.

Another challenge emerged when I was interviewing participant News Presenter (M). We used the broadcast studio since she was also about to go on air. A dissonant sound came out of one of the speakers and created panic, and the Senior Producer (B), had to intervene to investigate what had gone wrong. Our interview was briefly paused, and my interviewee also helped in resolving the technical glitch.

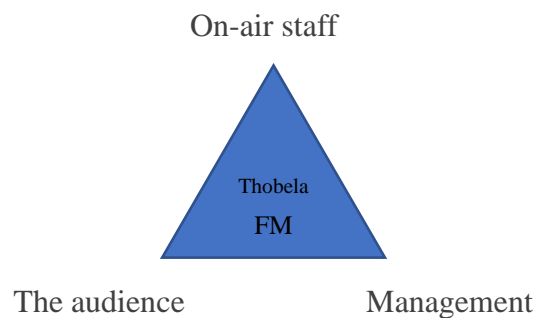
Nonetheless, the interviews were generally a success without any significant hindrance. I was overwhelmed by the willingness to engage and the availability of the participants.

### 3.3.3 Analysing the interviews and writing up the findings

As part of analysis of my fieldwork, I conducted a detailed review of the interview transcripts as well as my notes from the interview sessions. The interviews were bilingual in both Sepedi and English, and because I am equally acquainted with both languages, I found them easy to make sense of. I drew on two procedures proposed by social research methodology scholars, by first looking for recurring themes and concepts and then coding these themes (Rubin & Ruban, 2005; Doucet & Mouthner, 1998). In my coding style, I organised and re-organised data according to its class categories to easily identify similarities and relationships of certain components. Lastly, this has allowed me to capture key highlights of my fieldwork at Thobela FM. As part of this, I made connections to the contextual and theoretical discussions that were interrogated earlier in the study in context of my review of literature, as captured in Chapter One and Two of this dissertation.

Because I was required to present my dissertation in English, I had to translate the Sepedi transcripts into this target language. At the same time, since the interviews were part of the broader language story explored in this research, I understood that I have to include Sepedi texts to retain the original meaning of the text. Throughout my scrutiny of the transcripts, I employed a multi-modal approach involving manual listening and software-assisted transcribing. This is because the technology cannot as yet recognise Sepedi, like most indigenous African languages.

This process of analysis has allowed me to create two chapters, one focusing on the experiential personal journeys of the participants and the second while being the radio station's employees, including the contemporary landscape. Within the second chapter, I devised an illustrative diagram that helped me to explain the relationships that existed in the station between management, on-air staff and audience.



I was able to focus on ways in which these relationships changed over time, across different historical moments. I was also able to explain how changing language practices shaped these relationships.

## **Conclusion**

In my estimation, the design of this study as well as its implementation was successful. The initial plan was not far from what transpired in practice, even though I had to make adjustments where necessary. In this way, I was able to meet my primary research objectives. This chapter provided an overview of the practical steps in conducting empirical research. The next two chapters will provide a comprehensive discussion of the finding and interpretation of the collection data during the empirical fieldwork.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH FINDINGS I**

### **PATHWAYS TO THOBELA FM**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the early biographies of the research participants, tracing their life histories from childhood to the time that they first pursued employment at Thobela FM. My aim in tracing their biographies in this way is to demonstrate how the life experience of each individual has been shaped by their location within two broader historical narratives that are of relevance to this research. These narratives are represented, respectively, by the history of the politics of language and the history of radio respectively, as these can be traced in South Africa generally and in Limpopo more particularly. As part of this examination, I pay particular attention to the way that these histories may have shaped each individual's linguistic identity and impacted on their understanding of language politics. I also consider, in each case, how their exposure to radio has shaped their understanding of this medium. I argue, in this dissertation, that these aspects of their identity, knowledge and belief system are of crucial importance to the roles that they would later come to play at Thobela FM.

It is of relevance to this examination that all of the research participants have spent the majority of their lives in Limpopo. As such, they can speak from personal experience about their own location within the local linguistic landscape. They can, furthermore, speak about their experience of the local radio landscape. I argue in this chapter that insights that they have gained as a result of such experience would come to inform their understanding of the role that language should play within Thobela FM's relationship to its target audience.

Section One focuses on the participants' understanding of the way in which this history has shaped their linguistic identity. Section Two explores the role that radio has played in their lives and how this shaped their understanding of the medium. Section Three deals with their transition to adulthood and the world of work. Here the discussion focuses on the participants' explanation of the strategies they adopted in identifying a career path for themselves, and how this would eventually lead to their employment at Thobela FM.

It is important to note that all participants chose to be identified by their real names, which have been used in this study with their consent. However, care has been taken to omit any statement that might compromise their professional responsibilities. Interviews were conducted bilingually in Sepedi and English. Most participants preferred Sepedi, proudly expressing their linguistic identity and demonstrating their fluency, especially given their roles at a Sepedi-language public broadcaster. Where Sepedi was used in the interviews, I translated

the content into English. However, to preserve the original meaning and cultural nuance, I have included the original Sepedi text alongside the English translation where necessary.

#### **4.1 Childhood and the shaping of linguistic identity**

As noted already, all eight research participants grew up in Limpopo. However, because they fall into different age categories their experience of this region differs in important ways. I argue in this study that these differences have important implications for the kinds of knowledge and points of view about language that they would eventually bring to their work at Thobela FM.

##### 4.1.1 The older generation

At the time of this study, four of the research participants were older than forty-five years of age. This applies to the Senior Host (M), Station Manager (F), Senior Producer (M) and News Reader (S). They could therefore speak about the apartheid era from the perspective of people who grew up during this period. Each of them describes the apartheid years as a time that was characterised by systems of control that placed restrictions on their mobility and sense of agency. Furthermore, they are able to trace the connection between this experience and their linguistic identity.

The senior Host (M) was born in the early 1960s in Ga-Ramokgothoana, Senwabarwana. He grew up in a Sehananwa-speaking household (a dialect of Sesotho sa Leboa), in a rural environment. He attended a village school but was then expected as a teenager to seek employment as a farm worker. He explains that this was during a time when Afrikaans-speaking farmers dominated the region:

*Ke goletse lapeng la go bolela Sehananwa, Ga- Ramokgothoana moo re bego re dula ka dipolaseng tsa maburu [I grew up in a Sehananwa-speaking household on a rural farm in Ga-Ramokgothoana, where we lived side by side with the Boers]*

He explains that it was essential for him to learn Afrikaans in order to gain employment on farms in this area:

*Gore le kwane ka polelo le maburu kua polaseng, go be go swanetsi o bolele le bona ka Afrikaans [In order to facilitate ease of communication with the Boers, you had to speak Afrikaans].*

During our interview, he spoke about this period in his life with deep sadness, pointing out that struggles that he experienced then were typical of the suffering that people in rural

communities in Limpopo had to bear during the apartheid era. He paints a picture of a hostile environment that restricted black people's sense of agency and dignity. Employment within this space remained limited to work on farms:

*Go be sena seo o ka se dirang ntle le go bereka.* [I remember driving a tractor at the age of 14 because there were no other opportunities available to us]

He experienced this life as one in which his opportunities for a future other than that of a farm labourer living in rural Limpopo seemed out of reach:

*Background ye e nale go nnyamisa le go nkwatisa ke re banna, if go se ka be le motho a boneng potential a ntseya.* [This background saddens me, especially knowing that no one recognised my potential or made an effort to move me out of the village]

He notes, however, that an opportunity eventually became available to him when his cousin recognised his potential and took him to live with him in Bochum, a town about 90 km Northwest of the capital city. He describes this move as life changing since it afforded him the opportunity to attend school:

*Go fihlela ebile motswala wa mma, a tlo ntseya a yo ntsentsa sekolo. Ka nnete ba ile batla ba sepela le nna ba nkisha Bochum.* [My mother's cousin came and took me to Bochum, where I continued my education]

For him, Sepedi and Afrikaans were the only languages he was exposed to growing up, Sepedi as the language of habitual use, and Afrikaans as an oppressive legacy of Apartheid.

The Station Manager (F) was born in the mid-1960s, and she spent her childhood in Moletji, a rural area outside Polokwane. Like the Senior Host (M), she recalls a restrictive social environment shaped by the policies of the Apartheid state. When she went to primary school, she was introduced to Afrikaans and English as language of a higher status than black African languages. At the same time, it was impressed on her that her own identity was necessarily linked to that of Sepedi, rather than any other dialect or language. This was, she notes, because the homeland system prevented speakers of different indigenous language groups from integrating and mixing freely. This policy resulted in limited exposure within her community to languages beyond Sepedi:

I grew up in a Sepedi-speaking household, and you know that time we could not mix with other tribes, so I don't have an early exposure that other indigenous languages.

The Station Manager (F) explains that this system deepened social divisions between different language groups in her environment, reinforcing a sense of exclusion among communities that were systematically categorized and isolated from one another. She notes that such segregation

along supposed tribal lines left a lasting impact on how communities relate to each other. The way that this separation between language groups played in isolating and fracturing communities remains with her until today. The Station Manager (F) also speaks with concern about the negative impact of this language policy on the value attached to different language groups. During our interview she expressed concern about how Bapedi people now tend to embrace English while neglecting Sepedi.

The Senior producer (H) was born in the early 1970s, and, like Station Manager (F), he grew up in the Sepedi-speaking environment in Moletji, Ga-Mabitsela. He identifies the language spoken in this area as that of Sepedi *sa Moletji*, emphasizing the distinctiveness of this regional linguistic variation and its cultural significance in shaping his identity and sense of belonging. This was true even though the language had much in common with other variants of Northern Sotho:

*Go bolela nnete, re gotse re ntse re bolela sona (Sepedi) sa Moletji, eupsa ga se nape se fapana le Sesotho sa Lebowa. [Honestly speaking, I grew up speaking Sepedi from Moletji, however it does not differ much from Northern Sotho]*

He notes that this experience still shapes his current linguistic identity.

The News Reader (F) was born in the late 1970s, also in Moletji, where he completed both his primary and secondary education. However, his experience of growing up in this environment was very different from that of the Senior Producer (M) and Station Manager (F) because he was born to a so-called “coloured” mother and an African father. He explains that he now defines himself as “black African”, even though someone from his background would typically be labelled within the apartheid system as coloured.

I come from what is commonly referred to as a ‘coloured’ background. My mother is classified that way, although I personally do not subscribe to such colour-based classifications.

This background meant that he was fluent in at least three languages, thus escaping from the apartheid classifications that impacted on the three participants mentioned above. News Reader (S) explains that this exposure to multiple languages enriched his ability to navigate different cultural and linguistic spaces:

Growing up in that environment meant that I spoke Afrikaans at home, and I’m also fluent in Sepedi and English.

Nevertheless, according to apartheid regulation, children were supposed to grow up speaking one primary mother tongue, and News Reader (S)’s family lived in an area in which it was expected that this would be Sepedi. The local community accepted the idea that to be a “pure”

speaker of Sepedi was somehow superior. For this reason, he explains that he had experienced systematic discrimination from within the local community, who expressed disapproval of his multilingual identity. He often felt the need to prove himself as a speaker of Sepedi:

I studied Sepedi at school, and I excelled in it. I always felt the need to prove to others that I could do just as well if not better in what they regarded as their own language, and to show that it is also my language.

These discussions of early childhood as experienced by the Senior Host (M), Station Manager (F), Senior Producer (M) and the News Reader (S) provide glimpses into their home environments and their experiences of community life under apartheid. In each case, it is possible to trace factors that shaped their linguistic identities. We see, in particular, that apartheid-era segregation, and with this the enforcement of linguistic divisions, impacted in important ways on their sense of identity. Participants had limited exposure to other indigenous languages due to the enforced separation of homelands and were only permitted to learn Afrikaans as part of apartheid's strategy to impose an essentialist linguistic identity.

#### 4.1.2 The younger generation

The remainder of the research participants (Senior Host (H), Senior Producer (B), News Presenter (B) and Executive Senior Producer (I)) fall into a younger age category. Most of them were children during the apartheid era and young adults during South Africa's transition to democracy. Unlike the older research participants, they did not focus in their interviews on the constraints that were placed on their mobility and agency during the apartheid years. Instead, they spoke about their social context which often required of them to make life changing decisions as they struggled to secure opportunities for education and employment. They all note that this experience of change impacted on their linguistic identity.

Senior Host (H) is the only research participant from a Setswana-speaking background. Like Mahlo, he grew up in a multilingual household, in his case with a Mopedi father and a Motswana mother. He explains that this background exposed him to both Sepedi and Setswana from an early age:

My father, is a Mopedi, and my mother is a Motswana. I grew up exposed to both languages at home, although Setswana was more dominant due to the surrounding environment which spoke Setswana.

Senior Host (H)'s primary language was nevertheless Setswana. This was due to the fact that he was born in the late 1970s at Mamelodi, Pretoria, where Setswana is predominant. He was then raised in Hammanskraal, a Setswana-speaking homeland under Bophuthatswana, near the

Gauteng-Northwest border. He also received his formal education in Setswana up to Grade 6. In this way, his linguistic background differs from that of the other speakers of Sepedi, who were raised in Sepedi-dominated areas:

I partly grew up in the Northwest province, where Setswana is the predominant language, and I received my early elementary education in Setswana.

Later, his family relocated to Limpopo, because of his father's spiritual commitments at the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), situated just outside the provincial capital:

Our father wanted us to move with him to support him in his spiritual journey at the Zion Christian Church. He wanted us to live with him there, which is why my siblings, and I relocated to this side.

After moving to Limpopo, became more exposed to Sepedi. His education was now in Sepedi, and he was also exposed to the language beyond the classroom. This transition was not challenging for him, as the language is closely related to Setswana.

Senior producer (B) was born in Seshego, and she describes herself as a Sepedi speaker. She expressed a strong sense of pride in Sepedi during our interview, by for example emphasizing the importance of proper pronunciation. She explains that her father hails from Ga-Marishane in the Sekhukhune region (a Bopedi area), and she grew up speaking Sepedi both at home and in the neighbourhood. Like most of the other research participants, her linguistic identity is shaped by her background in a Sepedi-speaking environment:

I grew up speaking Sepedi at home and in the neighbourhood of Seshego, as both of my parents are Bapedi.

She completed her primary schooling at Makgoka, Boyne, and attended secondary school in Seshego.

News Presenter (B) was born in Ga-Matlala a Thaba in the early 1980s. Like most of the participants, she identifies her linguistic background with the Limpopo province, where Sepedi is predominantly spoken. However, unlike the previous speakers, her family and community spoke a different dialect of Sepedi, known as Sepedi sa Matlala a Thaba:

*Ka geso re bolela Sepedi sa semmotwana, ke Sepedi sa Ga-Matlala a Thaba.*  
[At home, we spoke a Sepedi variant that is predominant in Ga-Matlala].

She speaks with pride about her identity as a speaker of this dialect. At school, she was exposed to English and Afrikaans, but these languages were not of great significance to her identity at this time:

*Sekolong ne ke le exposed to English and Afrikaans eupsa ka nako ya tsona fela).* [I was only exposed to English and Afrikaans at school, and only during the periods allocated to those subjects].

The Executive Senior Producer (I) was born in Kgokong around Ga-Mamabolo in the early 1990s, where Sepedi is the dominant language. He notes that his grandfather was originally from Mpumalanga, and that he was Mopulana - a speaker of a Northern Sotho dialect predominantly found in that province. Later, when he moved to Limpopo, he settled in an area where Sepedi sa Mamabolo was predominantly spoken. For this reason, the younger generation in Mashila's family grew up immersed in this variety of Sepedi. In addition, like many of the previous speakers, he was also exposed to English within the educational setting:

As a result, we spoke the local variety of Sepedi, even at school, except during the occasional English period.

In speaking about their early memories, these four participants do not place as strong an emphasis as the older participants on the socio-economic conditions that they faced growing up. Also, again in contrast to the older participants, they are not preoccupied with the role that apartheid-era policies played in limiting their exposure to a diversity of dialects and languages. On the contrary, they speak about instability and mobility as factors that widened their experience of language. At various stages of their lives, migration afforded them exposure to other languages. It is possibly significant, in this context, that they describe their linguistic identity as being more fluid and diverse than was evident in the presentation of the older generation of participants. Nevertheless, they generally express consciousness of the way that the value that society attached to particular languages reproduced inequality between speakers.

#### **4.2 The role of radio in early identity formation**

Radio represented an important influence in the lives of all of the participants. In the case of the older generation this is not surprising, since radio was the only medium to which they had regular access in rural Limpopo. It is, nevertheless, striking that radio is of similar importance to the younger generation even though they grew up at a time in which access to multiple forms of media became more possible.

For the older generation of research participants, Thobela FM (or Radio Lebowa at that stage) remained the primary point of reference. Senior Host (M) recalls how, in his youth in the 1970s and 80s, he admired and regularly listened to various radio personalities:

I grew up listening to Max Mojapelo on Thobela FM, a figure who played a significant role in shaping my early exposure to radio.

Senior producer (B) similarly explains that at this time people in Moletji, where she grew up, did not have access to electricity but they could still listen to Radio Lebowa by making use of battery-powered radio sets. Such radio was, in fact, the only mass medium to which they had access, and it formed the soundtrack to their lives. She says that in her own home, the radio was always playing in the background:

I grew up in a rural area where my family had a deep love for radio. We listened to it regularly at home, and it became a constant presence in our daily lives.

For him as well radio was a constant presence in the background, similarly, News Reader S) also speaks about listening to Radio Lebowa while growing up.

The younger generation of participants speak in similar terms about the role of radio in their early lives. Senior Host (H), Senior Producer (B), News Presenter (B) and Executive Senior Producer (I) all speak about radio being an important aspect of life in their households, growing up. Executive Senior Producer (I) was no exception; he explains that his village had no electricity, and for this reason members of his community relied on radio for both information and entertainment. He remembers that his uncle, who was the breadwinner in their family, had bought a television. However, the lack of access to electricity in his village made it nearly impossible for television to become a regulator feature in their home:

There was nothing like television where I grew up, we lived in a village without electricity. To watch television, you need electricity, and unfortunately, there was none.

For this reason, he developed a close and loving relationship with the medium:

I had to fall in love with radio. It's like when you meet someone and spend a lot of time together, you naturally develop feelings. For me, the radio was just like that, playing 24 hours a day.

It is noticeable that, in speaking about the impact of the medium on their lives, some of these younger participants place more emphasis on the role that it played in shaping their future ambitions for work. Senior Host (H) explains in this respect that he always wanted to be a radio presenter. He notes, however, that although indigenous language radio had always been his primary point of reference, his ambition was to for an English language service:

I wanted to be a radio presenter, but I wasn't considering working for a Setswana station or even Thobela FM. I've always had a strong love for the English language, and I imagined myself working for an English-speaking radio station.

Senior Producer (B) also explains that radio was a constant presence in her household and that this set her on a pathway towards her future educational choices:

I grew up listening to radio drama, which inspired me to later enrolled in the Paul Rapetsoa Drama Academy to pursue my passion.

It is apparent from the participants' comments, as discussed in this section, that radio played an important role in their lives, so that they developed a strong personal connection to the medium and to the people involved in it. Importantly, some of the participants imagined themselves becoming involved with radio as presenters and producers.

### **4.3 Adulthood and the shaping of professional identity**

Each of the participants described the decisions that they made as young adults that would eventually lead to their employment at Thobela FM. They speak, in particular, about the role that their education would play in shaping their future career paths. They refer, in this respect, both to their own involvement in institutions of learning, and their choice, in many instances, to become educators themselves, often as teachers of languages. Their description of these educational journeys provide insight into the kind of knowledge, interests and values that they would eventually bring to their work at Thobela FM.

#### **4.3.1 The older generation**

Senior Host (M) explains that in the rural environment in which he grew up in the 1960s most black people were deprived of social and economic opportunities and young people were expected to find work as farm labourers. However, he imagined an alternative future for himself as a teacher and for this reason dedicated himself to his high school education. He became what he describes as the “first matriculant at home”. This enabled him to pursue qualification in teaching at tertiary level:

*Ke rile go tswelela go marematlou, ka sepela ka yo dira teacher's course at Mokopane college of education [After completing matric, I went to enrol for education qualification at the Mokopane college of education]*

By the mid-1980s, he had qualified as a teacher and then returned to his former school where he taught Sepedi. After two years, he was contacted by Mr Mokonyane, one of his lecturers from Mokopane college, who had left to find work at Radio Lebowa. He now encouraged him to apply for a work opportunity that had become available at the station. He recommended the Senior Host (M) to the station's management based on his observation of his abilities while still a student at the college:

While the station was looking, my former lecturer (Mokonyane) helped the process by pointing out that “during my tenure at Mokopane college, there

was this young man who was very active” and they looked and looked and found me teaching in Bochum.

It was 1989 when the Senior Host (M) arrived at Thobela FM for his job interview. He explains that he felt intimidated by the calibre of candidates that he was up against:

We were about 27 candidates, and I thought I couldn't compete with those people, they were many. Again, they all seemed well off, they came with their own cars and that time I came by bus.

He explains that he nevertheless left the interview with a sense of hope that he would be chosen:

Well, it was not official, and I went away *ke nale kgopolo ya gore* I may be hired. [ I knew that I stand a chance of being hired]

It would seem, from the Senior Host (M)'s story, that at this time Radio Lebowa's management saw value in employing a graduate from a teacher's college with experience in teaching Sepedi at high school level. His educational trajectory thus opened up a doorway for him into employment at the station so that he was able to replace his whiteboard chalk with a microphone. The story he tells in this respect resonates with the reference in the previous chapter to the relationship that existed between Radio Lebowa and the Botshabelo mission school, where they often found candidates for employment. It would appear that Mokopane College had a similar status, as is demonstrated by the employment of Mokonyane as his previous lecturer, and the role that Mokonyane then played in his recruitment.

Station Manager (F) also succeeded in matriculating and then followed a similar career path to that of the Senior Host (M), pursuing a teacher's qualification at the same college:

After completing my matric in 1985, I enrolled at a college of education in Mokopane in 1986 to train as a teacher.

She explains that she was passionate about becoming a teacher of the Sepedi language. For this reason, again like the Senior Host (M), she chose Sepedi as one of her teaching subjects. After graduating from college, her first teaching post was in a school in Bopedi. However, instead of being assigned to teach Sepedi she was allocated subjects she had no prior experience in (that of Afrikaans, Economics and Business Studies). For this reason, she began to have reservations about her future in the teaching profession:

I could sense a dark cloud hanging over the teaching profession. I always told myself that I wasn't going to die a teacher.

The area where she worked was a remote, mountainous rural region which was so isolated that even accessing a radio signal was difficult:

It was deep in the rural areas, where the radio signal was extremely poor. Yes, I am a rural person myself, but the conditions there were far worse than what I was used to. I knew then that I would eventually leave.

Station Manager (F) explains that at this time she began exploring the possibility of a new career path and for this reason enrolled for a Communications qualification at the University of South Africa:

I thought to myself, let me pursue something that would take me away from this teaching career, so I decided to register with UNISA.

As in the case of Senior Host (M), this educational trajectory would eventually lead to her employment at Radio Lebowa.

Senior Producer (M) completed his high school education at Makgabo Secondary School. His dream was to become a lawyer, and he knew that he would need to excel at school in order to enrol for this purpose in tertiary education. He knew that his matric results would not provide him with university exemption, and he therefore decided to repeat matric in another region of Limpopo:

Initially, I had aimed to achieve an exemption, and after falling short while studying in my village, I decided to relocate to Botlokwa to repeat my matric there.

Arriving in Botlokwa came with its own set of challenges. He was staying in a dilapidated building in a church yard, which offered little protection from the elements and no amenities:

The house had no proper foundation, and when it rained, I had to sleep on top of chairs because there was no bed.

Botlokwa was also a very different linguistic environment in which people spoke Setlokwa, a dialect that different significantly from his own. Senior Producer (M) was nevertheless able to communicate with people in the local community, because their languages were mutually intelligible:

*Bjale ge ke le Botlokwa, ge ke ntse ke bolela sa Moletji, bona baa pa Setlokwa sa bona mara ele gore re a kwana. [ While I was in Botlokwa, I continued to speak Sepedi sa Moletji, while they spoke Setlokwa, and yet we understood one another]*

This was during the 1980s, when the liberation struggle in South Africa was at its peak and political tensions were widespread. The Senior Producer (M) recalls that the atmosphere was charged with unrest, which often disrupted daily life. He was personally affected by the turmoil when his school was torched:

*Go tsogile dikgaruru, re tsene sekolo dikgwedi tse nne fela, sekolo sa fiswa.*  
[We attended school for about four months before political tensions escalated, and our school was eventually torched]

Despite these challenges, he ultimately achieved what he had set out to do in Botlokwa, which was to obtain his matric exemption. He then struggled to find access to tertiary education due to a lack of funding. He saved up enough money to be able to register at the University of Venda, but soon realised his savings were not enough to cover both tuition and living expenses at the university. In the end, he had opted for what he regarded as second best which was to register at a local college to complete a qualification in education. This allowed him to achieve authority as a teacher of language:

*Sekolong ke dirile Sesotho sa Lebowa. Le collegeng ke fihlile ka majora ka sona. Seo se ntswetxi mohola go tsebeng melao ya polelo* [I did Sesotho sa Lebowa in my schooling and I also majored in it at the college of education. This was instrumental for language competence]

However, on graduating, he found it difficult to find employment in teaching:

I entered the profession at a time when the country was facing a saturation of educators, and job opportunities were scarce

The Senior Producer (M) joined a teacher's union, which lobbied for employment opportunities for its members, and it was in context of this work that he first made contact with Radio Lebowa. As Secretary-General of the teacher's union, he was frequently invited to be a studio guest on the station, in order to provide updates about the organisation's activities. He explains that, in this way, radio discovered him before he even had the chance to practice as an educator:

*Ke be ke fela ke bitxwa go tla ka mo kgashong, ba bangwe ba baetapele ba kwa lentshu laka ebile ba kgahlwa le ke tsebo yaka*). I was repeatedly invited by the station, and the management was impressed by both my voice and my ability to articulate issues clearly.

The Senior Producer (M) explains that a relationship gradually developed between himself and the station, which proved important at the time, as he was unemployed and actively seeking job opportunities including possibilities within the station itself:

They assured me that they would contact me if any opportunities became available at the station. Eventually, the time came, and two positions were advertised, one for a presenter and another for a producer.

The Senior Producer (M) was appointed as a presenter which means that he never had the opportunity to formally pursue a career in education. Instead, his involvement in union politics provided him with access to employment at the station. Nonetheless, his educational background, particularly his training in teaching Sepedi contributed significantly to his

suitability for the presenting role, given his articulate command of the language. Notably, as with the Senior Host (M) and the Station Manager (F), who are also trained Sepedi educators, teacher training colleges seem to have served as key recruitment grounds for on-air talent.

The News Reader (S) matriculated in the mid-1990s, much later than the other three participants who fall within the older generation of research participants. Unlike these participants he did not see a future for himself as a teacher and instead looked for qualifications in the sphere of communication. He enrolled at UNISA, first to complete a certificate in community journalism and later a more general qualification in communication. Over time, he also found an access point into learning practically about radio journalism. This is because News Reader (S) is the first of the research participants to become involved in community radio. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the community radio sector was established in South Africa in the early 1990s, in the years just prior to democracy. As such, none of the participants mentioned so far had the option of becoming involved in community radio in their formative years after leaving school. News Reader (S) falls into an age group for whom this would have been possible, but it was only in 2001 that he joined Radio Moletji, which had launched a few months earlier, broadcasting from his home village. News Reader (S) explains that he was part of the first cohort of volunteers to join the station. He had no expectation of payment because he understood that the purpose of the station was to serve the local community and he felt committed to this project. However, after five years of volunteering, he was recruited by Thobela FM. He explains that in South Africa community radio stations serve as important reservoirs of talent for public radio:

I joined Thobela FM in 2005 when the SABC was looking for a newsreader. Community radio stations had been established, in part, to serve as a talent pool for the public broadcaster.

The stories that Senior Host (M), Station Manager (F) and Senior Producer (M) share with regards to their pathways to work at Thobela FM are in many ways similar. As we have seen, they all found access points into employment at the station through their involvement with education. It would seem, based on their experience that the management of Radio Lebowa as it existed in the years before democracy saw value in the recruitment of individuals from this background. In each case, they chose to employ people who had received training in an educational college and had established the professional identity of a teacher. All three also expressed a particular commitment, as teachers, to the nurturing of the language of Sepedi. In contrast, News Reader (S)'s background was not that of an educational student or a teacher of Sepedi. He was chosen to work at Thobela FM, instead, because of his background in

community radio. In this sense he can be seen to represent the first of a new category of recruit that the station was beginning to prioritise. The station management now took seriously the knowledge, competencies and values that was emerging from the South African community radio sector.

#### 4.3.2 The younger generation

In speaking about their pathways to work at Thobela FM, Senior Host (F), Senior Producer (B), News Presenter (B) and Executive Senior Producer (I) all refer to the important role played by their involvement in community radio in preparing them for employment. At the same time, education and teaching also remained an important reference point in their life stories. Senior Host (H) explains that, at first, he was deeply committed to becoming a teacher. He explains that this his aspiration even before he left school:

I have a deep love for teaching. In fact, I had told myself that as soon as I finished matric, I would go to a college of education and train to become a teacher. At the time, it was something I genuinely loved and felt naturally drawn to.

However, like Senior Producer (M) , he faced financial challenges in pursuing further studies after matric. He too looked for part-time employment in order to earn an income while saving towards his education. During this time, he in fact ended up working as a teacher:

I didn't have the financial means to attend university, so I began teaching at an adult school. I taught there for three years while my father and I were still trying to figure out how he could raise enough money for me to further my studies .

He explains that in the 2000s he eventually got the opportunity to pursue his tertiary education at the University of Limpopo. However, he became involved with the campus-based community radio station, Radio Turf. He had applied for a position on the station, in response to an on-air announcement that the station was looking for new radio presenters. When his name was included in the announcement of the shortlisted candidates he was delighted:

As I listened, I heard the announcement being made: "Here are the names of those invited for interviews and auditions at this stage." I was filled with joy; I was happy to hear my name included.

'Senior Host (H) made a success of his involvement at the station, establishing a well-regarded radio show and an identity as a radio journalist. He explains that this experience in community journalism would come to serve as a stepping stone in launching his career at Thobela FM. He was approached by the Programming Manager at the station, who had previously worked at Radio Turf and offered a job:

He approached me and said, “Happiness, you’re a very popular talk show host here at the university. But tell me, can you speak Sepedi?”.

By 2006 the Senior Host (H) was a fully employed member of the station.

Senior Producer (B) completed a drama qualification at an art school founded by Mahumo Paul Rapetsoa. Rapetsoa was, in fact, one of the earliest pioneers of radio drama at Thobela FM. As such, Matlebjane was based at yet another educational institution that had a close working relationship with Thobela FM. Eventually, in 2007, an opportunity arose for her at the station. She explains that it was Rapetsoa who made this possible:

You know him he is legend; I become one of his students. Until Thobela FM advertised positions for presenters and those with a background in drama.

For the Senior Producer (B), it was the language articulation skills in Sepedi that she acquired at the School of Arts under Rapetsoa’s tuition that made stand out. She notes that this was a major factor in advancing her career in public radio:

Back in the day, recruitment often focused on the talent pool within the Arts school. This was because the drama was performed in Sepedi, and there was a strong emphasis on understanding the linguistic rules.

Here, then, is another example of a strong command of Sepedi, developed through drama school and further honed through involvement at a community radio station, both of which played a key role in preparing her for work at Thobela FM.

The News Presenter (B) explained that she did not initially envision a career in broadcasting. Instead, like the Senior Producer (M), she had aspirations of joining the legal fraternity:

*Gabotse botse nna ge ke gola Lehlogonolo neh, be ke sa nyaka go ba a radio personality, be ke nyaka go ba ramolao.* Growing up, I aspired to become a lawyer and never imagined myself pursuing a career in broadcasting.

She describes her initial involvement with radio as a hobby that she took up while volunteering at Soshanguve community radio. However, over time, she began to see a future for herself in broadcasting as a profession. She explained that she was inspired by the work of news readers:

I believe it was God's guidance that led me to radio, initially just as a hobby. I was inspired by news readers and often found myself emulating them.

In preparing herself for employment in broadcasting, the News Presenter (B) enrolled for a qualification in public relations at UNISA. But she notes that it was nevertheless her volunteer work at the community radio station served as the crucial stepping stone in launching her career in public radio. She describes this experience as humble beginnings that eventually evolved into a sustainable livelihood:

What started as a simple interest gradually developed into a fulfilling career that now provides me with a decent livelihood.

We also see, in the Senior Producer (B)'s example, how her involvement with a community radio station accelerated her career in public radio.

Finally, there is Executive Senior Producer (I), whose description of his pathway to employment at Thobela FM has many similarities to that of the other research participants. As in the case of many of the others, he faced some uncertainty after high school with regards to the opportunities for education and employment that he could pursue. He completed his matric and then found work as an intern as a Community Liaison Officer at the Polokwane Municipality, where he began gaining practical work experience. A year later, he secured a position with an electrical contractor, where he worked for eight months. During this period, he began to volunteer in his spare time at Radio Turf. He was then presented with an opportunity within the university's Marketing and Communications Department where, in 2014, he took on the role of university photographer:

If you look at the university's photo archives from 2014 to 2016, you'll find that I was responsible for capturing most of those images.

During this time, he was also completing a diploma in public relations management qualification at UNISA. Also, even as he moved from one employment opportunity to the next, he remained involved with this station for eight years. Executive Senior Producer (I) recalls the highlight of his career at the community radio station, which earned him significant recognition:

During the National Community Radio Awards, I was nominated multiple times and ended up being the most nominated individual. In fact, if you check my Twitter handle, it states that I am the most nominated Limpopian in the National Radio Awards. Ultimately, I won the award, which was a major highlight in my career.

The public attention generated by the event caught the eye of Thobela FM, which eventually invited him to join the station as a freelance presenter:

After that, Thobela FM became aware of me, and I even appeared on front pages. They then advertised a position in a way that allowed me to join the station.

It is possible to identify shared patterns in the accounts that Senior Host (H), Senior Producer (B), News Presenter (B) and the Executive Senior Producer (I). These accounts also resonate largely with the stories told by the older generation. All of them come from rural backgrounds, where they grew up surrounded by hardship. All of them found ways out of these environments

to pursue a tertiary education, often in preparation for a career in teaching. However, in contrast to the older generation, the stories that they tell of this experience has less to do with escape from the constraints of an apartheid system, and more with their ability to find opportunities within an unstable and quickly changing world.

## **Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates how the early biographies of the research participants was shaped by their location within the two broader historical narratives that are of relevance to this research. We see, firstly, the impact on their lives of the history of the politics of language. For the older participants, apartheid era segregation played a key role in informing their social experiences and opportunities. The formation of their language identity was central to this experience. Importantly, the education system played a pivotal role in entrenching English and Afrikaans as dominant languages. Nevertheless, their identity remained anchored in various dialects within the Sepedi language. Also, migration at various stages of their lives nevertheless provided some participants with exposure to different languages and dialects, and new ways of imagining their own future.

Secondly, we are able to observe the impact of the history of radio. All of the participants speak about the central role that radio played in their childhood years. This radio is represented by indigenous language public radio, and more specifically by Radio Lebowa / Thobela FM. However, only the younger generation of participants can speak about their exposure to community radio, since this sector only became established in South Africa in the mid-1990s. It is clear that such radio played a key role in the formation of their adult identities.

It is of interest to note that the accounts provided by the younger group of participants differ in crucial ways from those shared by the older group of participants. For example, the older generation explain that they managed to overcome hardships during their childhood and youth in order to finish high school and attend college. For many in this group, a career in education was often a result of limited choices rather than genuine passion. In contrast, the newer generation had a wider range of career options, and access to learning experience. Many of them found themselves volunteering at community radio stations because it aligned with their passions. Nevertheless, for both generations it was the knowledge and experience that they were able to accumulate in their years after schools that made them attractive candidates for employment at Thobela FM. For the older generation, this knowledge and experience was represented by their identity as educators and, more specifically, teachers of language. For the

younger generation, it was the experience and competence that they had gained in context of their involvement in community radio.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS II

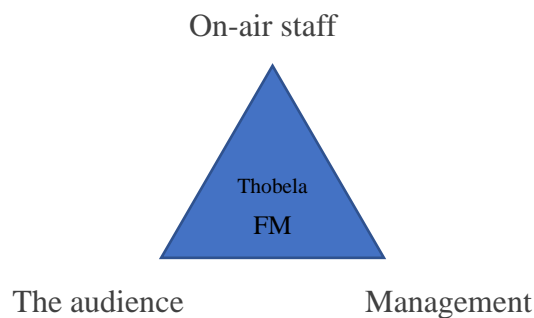
### WORKING AT THOBELA FM

#### Introduction

This chapter deals with the participants' experience of working at Thobela FM. Section One focuses on the description that each individual provides of their impression of the station when they first arrived. I demonstrate how the observations they make in this regard shows evidence of the institutional culture that existed within the station at that time, with a particular focus on the role that language practices played within this culture. Such language practice is understood to apply both to the way staff engage with each other and to their engagement with their target audience. The discussion trace shifts in these relationships of engagement over time and I argue that these shifts are expressive of the way the station responded to different moments in the broader politics of language as this was unfolding in South Africa.

Section Two deals with the participants' experience of navigating language practice within these relationships of engagement during the years that they have worked at Thobela FM. As part of this discussion, I explore the participants' beliefs with regards to the role that language practice should ideally play both inside the station and in its relationship to its audience. I also examine the participants' attempts, as part of their own work as presenters and editorial staff, to contribute to the realisation of more ideal versions of these relationships and language practices.

It is proposed, in this chapter, that the role that the participants play in contributing to changing language practices at Thobela FM can best be understood as being based in a triangle of relationships, as depicted in the illustration below. The three corners of the triangle are representative, respectively, of the station's management, the on-air staff (or the presenters and editorial staff), and the station's audience. The sides of the triangle depict three relationships - between the on-air staff and the station management: between the on-air staff and the station's audience and between the management and that audience.



It is demonstrated in this chapter that the composition of the group of people representing one corner of this triangle - that of station management – underwent fundamental change in the early years of democracy, in response to political change. This led, over time, to changes in the composition of the group of people at a second corner – that of the team of presenters, producers and editorial staff. Both of these processes of transformation impacted on the way the station engaged with the group of people at the third corner – that of listeners. It is proposed, in this chapter, that the changing composition of the first two groups led to a transformation of language practice as this formed part of all three relationships within the triangle. In other words, it changed the relationship of engagement through language between management and presenters, between presenters and audience and between management and audience.

I argue in this chapter that in contributing to such change, the participants drew on ideas about language and radio informed by their experience of growing up in Limpopo and also by the choices that they made as young adults in establishing their professional identity. We saw, in Chapter Four, that the knowledge and belief systems about both language and radio that they adopted in this context was shaped by the historical moments in which they were based. In the discussion in this next chapter, these historical moments are again of significance to their experience of work in Thobela FM. For this reason, both sections of this chapter are organised around three moments in South Africa's history that the participants were able to observe from their vantage point at Thobela FM. This includes the apartheid era, the years of early democracy and the era of democracy as it has become established since then.

## **5.1 Initial encounters with institutional culture and language practice**

This section captures each of the research participants' initial impression of Thobela FM when they first arrive at the station. It should be remembered that the participants start working at the station at different moments in time, from the late 1980s to the late 2010s. For this reason, these impressionistic snapshots, when considered together, provide evidence of changes that take place at the station over time in response to the three moments in history under discussion.

### **5.1.1 The apartheid era: Radio Lebowa in the 1980s**

The only person who is able to bear witness to Thobela FM (then Radio Lebowa) as it existed in the apartheid era is the Senior Host (M). He joined the station in 1989 at the age of 29 years. Initially, he was hired as a presenter and producer. As we saw in Chapter Four, he had been

recruited by Mr Mokonyane, his former lecturer at Mokopane college, who was then employed at Radio Lebowa.

The Senior Host (M) explains that at this time the station management was exclusively white while presenters were black. Both groups were fluent speakers of Sepedi. The white management upheld relationships of authoritarian control and segregation typical of the apartheid era. He notes that segregation was embodied in the way that the building was organised, with racial groups allocated to separate corridors:

*Ga ke tsebe gore o di boni di passage tsa mo? Go be go nale passage yengwe go tsamaya makgowa fela, go nale ya batho baso fela* [Have you seen the corridors of this building? Each race used a separate corridor]

Within the work environment of the station at that time, the management also introduced Afrikaner-Christian cultural practices that were designed to reinforce an apartheid ethos. This included, for example, the requirement for an opening prayer before meetings, which all staff were compelled to participate in:

*Ge be re kena ka di kopanong ne ele, "kom ons bid" then re rapele* [ During meeting it would be 'come let's pray' then we would pray]

The Senior Host(M) understood such rituals to be exemplary of master-subordinate relationships, in which black members of staff had to submit themselves to the cultural practices of their white leadership. He notes that the station management also required visible acknowledgement from black staff members of their superiority:

*Then ge makgowa a tsena ka meetining a hwetsa re dutse, re be re emelela re bafa tlhompho. Re tlhompha these guys, ke bona baetapele ba rena.* [When they (whites) arrived in meetings, we would stand up. We respected them, they were our superiors]

One way in which these racialised relations of power were reproduced in the station was through language. Black members of staff were required to speak Afrikaans in the working spaces of the station, even though Radio Lebowa presented its programming in Sepedi:

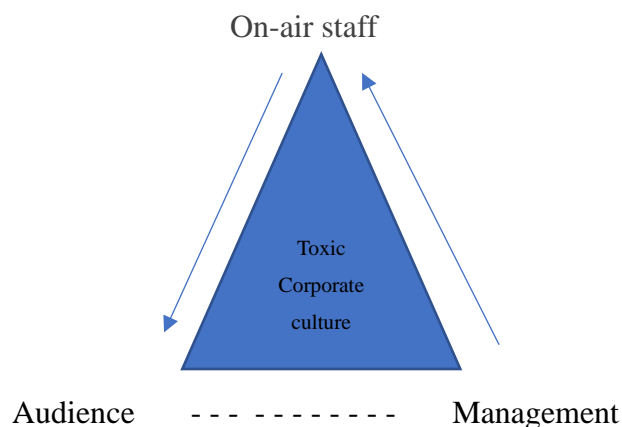
It went this way, when I arrived here, this place was managed by whites, and we were forced to speak Afrikaans with them.

According to Mashamaite this insistence on communication in Afrikaans within the workplace unsettled both himself and his black colleagues. They experienced such language practice as a form of oppression in which they had to adopt the religious and linguistic practices of management, whether they liked to or not:

There was this saying and it threatened a lot of guys, that when you speak to these guys, you must speak only Afrikaans.

It appears, based on Senior Host (M)'s description of Radio Lebowa as it existed in the late 1980s that the station was shaped by the context of apartheid in ways similar to indigenous language stations generally as discussed in Chapter Two. The institutional culture that he describes reflect patterns of inclusion and exclusion, rooted in systemic racial segregation. On the one hand, black staff were recruited and employed in the station because their racial and linguistic identity were key to the station's on-air character. The presenters' race and language were, presumably, understood to be of value to engagement with the station's audience. On the other hand, presenters such as the Senior Host (M) were required to leave much of this identity behind when they interacted with colleagues and management in the station. Furthermore, within the working relationships of the station, they were required to submit to separation from white management, based on assumptions of their inferiority and the management's superiority. It is also clear from the Senior Host (M)'s description that although black staff accepted this relationship of oppression and discrimination, it created tension and conflict within their work environment. It would seem that, at Thobela FM, language practices during this period were deeply intertwined with the abuse of power, serving as a means of asserting the identity and dominance of those in control of the station.

In this environment, the triangle of relationships that existed between management, programming staff and audience were fraught with conflict. On one hand, the relationship of engagement between presenters and listeners depended on their racial and linguistic identity. On the other hand, an authoritarian relationship existed between management and presenters, in which the linguistic identity of the presenters was denied and belittled. I would argue that this also meant that the relationship between the station management and audience was equally defined by authoritarianism and discrimination. In order to describe these relationships of engagement in the illustration below, I have included lines that are expressive of the role that power played within them.



I do so, in particular, by including arrows of influence that point from the management group to on-air staff and then from on-air staff to audience. The arrow between management and on-air staff indicate a one-way, authoritarian relationship, in which management control the processes of influence. The arrow between online staff and audience also describe a one-way relationship controlled by staff, because no mention is made, by participants, of engagement from listeners. This suggests a conceptualisation of audience that is largely passive. The broken line at the base of the triangle signals that there is very little authentic engagement between the station management and the station's audience.

### 5.1.2 The early years of democracy: Thobela FM in the mid-1990s

The next moment in the station's history that becomes visible to us through the observations shared by the research participants is situated is ten years later, in the mid-1990s. Station Manager (F) and the Senior Producer (A) both join the station during this period, in 1995 and 1999 respectively. As we have seen in the previous chapter, both of these individuals come from a background in education, including teaching about the language of Sepedi. It is my assumption that the station management recruited them because they placed value in the knowledge, values and beliefs that educators and language teachers could bring into the broadcast space.

This was just after the first democratic elections, when the SABC was undergoing a profound transformation with regards to ideological vision, and the realisation of this vision through staffing and programming. As part of such realisation, they needed to create a new editorial leadership for their indigenous language stations, representative of South African demographics with regards to gender, race and language. The Station Manager (F) was well placed to respond to this opportunity:

During the dawn of democracy, there were changes and they wanted to bring women into the SABC. I drafted my CV and came here, and they said ... Pretoria, Silverton was looking.

She applied for and was offered a position in the SABC news desk that served Thobela FM. She saw the post as a chance to contribute meaningfully to the strengthening of indigenous language radio in South Africa. She had come to realize that SABC's newsrooms were at the epicentre of content generation for indigenous language stations.

The Station Manager (F) notes that when she arrived at Thobela FM, the apartheid-era practices that the Senior Host (M) describes were in the process of being dismantled. Until quite recently, white management had still maintained strict surveillance over programming

and “apartheid news was monitored by them”. Now, however, black journalists and editorial staff were “no longer managed by whites” (Station Manager, 2024). She was also given substantial decision-making authority over the editorial concerns in the newsroom. She explains, however, that at this time the newsroom was still heavily reliant on the SABC’s English and Afrikaans news services for sources of content. News would, in other words be firstly reported in these two languages and then translated into African indigenous languages:

That time, news came in Afrikaans and had to be translated into English then lastly into Sepedi.

Station Manager (F) notes that such language practices reflected the lingering influence of apartheid-era reporting conventions, highlighting the slow and complex nature of the shift towards truly representative programming. One year into democracy, indigenous languages were still striving to find a place of status within the SABC’s language policy. This gradual transition reflected the broader challenge of redefining the politics of language in a changing South Africa.

Senior Producer (A) joined the station four years later, at the end of the 1990s. It will be remembered from the previous chapter that he was Secretary General of an unemployed teacher’s union and in this capacity had regularly been interviewed on Thobela FM. In this way he became visible to editorial staff at the station, who encouraged him to apply for a position as presenter and producer. He notes that his first impression of the station was that it was still firmly based in a broadcast legacy of previous decades. This was apparent, for example, in the analogue-based broadcast equipment that was still used on a day-to-day basis in editing suits and broadcast studios:

Our programmes were pre-recorded through reel to reel. We used Nagra device to achieve that process.

Like Station Manager (F) he was, nevertheless, able to observe signs that the station was undergoing a process of renewal. He saw this, in particular, in the changes that were taking place in the composition of station management:

*Bontshi bja ketapele e be ele batho ba baso* [The black leadership was emerging at the station]

Station Manager (F) notes that this shift was still mostly only visible at a leadership level, while positions of authority in programming and operations were still largely in the hands of white professionals:

*Boramachine ebe le batho ba bashweu* [Media specialists were still mostly white people].

Nevertheless, he was increasingly able to observe changes in the way that the station engaged with its audience members. Under the previous regime, the focus of station management had largely been on editorial control, and audiences had largely been silent, with little opportunity to contribute. Under the guidance of new station leadership, presenters were now actively encouraging listeners to participate in on-air discussion through phone-in programming, and they responded with lively debate. In this way a new culture of audience engagement began to take shape, reflecting a shift towards social inclusion (Senior Producer (A), 2024).

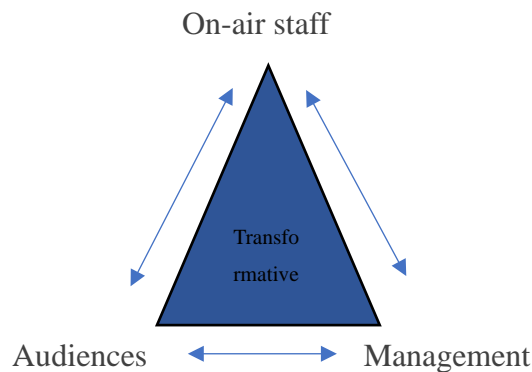
Senior Producer (A) observes that as part of this emerging culture, listeners were paying close attention to how the station used language. These listeners' on-air engagement reflected a deep sense of connection to the language of Sepedi. His impression was that for Thobela FM's audience, Sepedi was not just a means of communication but a powerful marker of identity and representation. He explains that they expressed a sense ownership and pride in the station, specifically based in the role that it played in creating a public space for communicating in Sepedi. They were quick to point out when broadly accepted language rules were not properly adhered to in this space:

*Re theeletsa ke batho bao o ka naganang gore gase ba theeletxe, ge o ka dira phosho o tla Makala o tsenela ke lengwalo le lengwe la nkokonono [We are listened to by a distinct audience, if you can make a language usage mistake while on air, you will be amazed when you receive a complaint letter]*

By the end of the 1990's, then, audiences were being offered a more active and engaged relationship with the station, in which they were able to assume more agency. It would seem, from the Senior Producer (A)'s description, that they used this agency to consolidate the authority of Sepedi as a language with a legitimate role to play within the public domain.

In the above discussion, the Station Manager (F) and Senior Producer (A)'s description of their first impression of Thobela FM, as it existed in the mid to late 1990's, shows evidence of an organisation undergoing significant transformation. The pictures they paint of the station are markedly different from the Senior Host (A)'s description of the mid-1980s. At that stage it still operated as an apparatus of the apartheid state, managed by a white leadership who policed the activities of black editorial staff and presenters. Now, instead, we see the emergence of an organisational environment shaped by a focus on employment equity, resulting in the rise of a new black Sepedi-speaking leadership that included the voices of women. In this context, the triangle of relationships between management, presenters and audience can be seen to undergo a transformation. I attempt to demonstrate this change, in the

illustration below, by describing these relationships by means of two-way arrows, with lines of influence flowing in both directions.



Within this moment, the relationship between management and staff was no longer one of authoritarian surveillance. Previously marginalised Sepedi-speaking members of the station’s on-air staff could now play a pivotal role in shaping the station’s editorial agenda. Equally, the relationship between presenter and audience – and with this the relationship between station management and audience – was transforming, as listeners who had been silenced began to find their voices. They used their voices to speak back to the station’s on-air, schooling them in what they understood to be the appropriate use of Sepedi as a language of broadcasting. Furthermore, there is no longer a broken line indicating the breakdown in engagement between the management of the station and its audience. Instead, this relationship of engagement is also described as interactive, with agency moving in two directions.

Based on the Senior Producer (A)’s comments about audience engagement, it would seem that this democratisation of the relationships of engagement between management, presenters and audience also impacted on language practice. In particular, it allowed the emergence of a broadcast culture in which pride in Sepedi as a language of significance within the public sphere could begin to take shape.

### 5.1.3 Thobela FM from the mid-2000s until now

The next group of voices – that of the News Reader (S), Senior Host (H), Senior Producer (B), News Presenter (B) and the Executive Senior Producer(I) - first begin to emerge ten years later, in the mid-2000s. We saw, in Chapter Four, that their experience before entering Thobela FM include exposure to the community radio sector. They brought this experience into Thobela FM, and it would shape their contribution to the station. In describing their introduction to the

station, they are less concerned than the previous research participants with speaking about signs of transformation in the station. Instead, they focus largely on the struggles that they encountered in proving themselves to be competent broadcasters, deserving of long-term employment.

As noted in the previous chapter, News Reader (S) had been working for five years as a community radio volunteer at Moletji FM. He first joined Thobela FM in 2005, working as a part-time freelancer in the news department, and was then offered a contract as a current affairs presenter on weekends. In this way, the station provided him with a temporary and uncertain opportunity, using this as a means to assess his capabilities before committing to longer term employment. He sought to prove himself to the station management and was eventually rewarded with a job as a current affairs anchor (News Reader, 2024).

It will be remembered that Senior Host (H) had also become well established as a news journalist and current affairs presenter at Radio Turf, a campus-based community radio station. He was recruited by Thobela FM in 2006, as a presenter and producer for a current affairs show. He is a native Setswana speaker, and he explains that he had applied for the position even though he knew that it would be challenge for him to operate in a Sepedi speaking environment. What made it possible was that these two languages were mutually intelligible:

When the opportunity came, I applied even though I am Setswana native speaker. The two languages are cognisant; they are sister languages. However, I knew it was going to be hard at first.

He convinced the station to give him an opportunity and a space to learn Sepedi:

During the interviews I told them that I can speak Sepedi if they can just give me a little bit of time to just acclimatize.

Senior Host (H) was given the job despite a degree of scepticism from the recruiting team, and he understood this to highlight the station's openness to talent from within community radio sector and its commitment to nurturing broadcasters from different linguistic backgrounds. Nevertheless, he notes that his experience of being inducted into the station differed from that of other participants who were native Sepedi speakers. Unlike them, he faced language challenges in an environment with a long history of native speakers of Sepedi as broadcasters. The station provided him with the space to acclimatise, believing that he would eventually adapt to broadcasting in Sepedi. To support his transition, he was entrusted with hosting a program:

It was in November 2006, and the station manager and the programs manager approached me. They said to me, we want you to take a programme called *Tabakgolo*- a current affairs show.

At the time, hosts were generally provided with ready-made scripts, which meant that he did not struggle with using Sepedi correctly. He was soon able to step confidently into his role as presenter (News Reader, 2024).

In 2007, a year later, the station welcomed Senior Producer (B) and News Presenter (B) as presenters. The Senior Producer (B) had gained experience in broadcasting at Lebowakgomo Community Radio while News Presenter (B) had volunteered at Soshanguve Community Radio. Both were entrusted with hosting their own shows on Thobela FM. They explain that they quickly became integrated into the working environment, taking on additional responsibilities beyond presenting, including production. (Senior Producer & News Presenter, 2024).

Finally, Executive Senior Producer (I) was headhunted to join the station in 2018 as a produce and presenter, based on an impressive performance as a volunteer at Radio Turf. His contributions caught the attention of Thobela FM, and he reflects on the events that led to his recruitment:

I joined the station in 2018 after winning a national community radio award. The station became aware of me through my recognition in the media, as I had been featured on the front pages of newspapers.

He was given some opportunities as a freelancer at Thobela FM, working on the weekend graveyard shift:

They gave me their reggae show. It was on every Saturday between 2:00am and 3:00am. It was painful because, you know, as a freelancer, if you're doing a single show, it means you get less money.

His show was a success, and as a result he was soon offered a more attractive opportunity:

I worked so hard to an extent that you know, I got another promotion for a position of being a radio producer for the breakfast show.

It is evident, from these descriptions, that Thobela FM's management recognised the value of these participants' experience of community radio and gave them the opportunity at the station to prove themselves as producers and presenters. However, the station management took their time in offering such staff full-time employment, first giving them opportunities to prove themselves in practice. Over time, all these participants were able to rise to the occasion, and to secure long-term positions for themselves within the station's programming team.

However, two of the participants also note that they experienced some culture shock in making the transition from community radio to that of indigenous language public radio. This applied, in particular, to the guidelines for language usage that they were now required to follow. Senior Producer (B) explains that she needed to unlearn the very easy-going ways of speaking that had been acceptable at Lebowakgomo Community Radio:

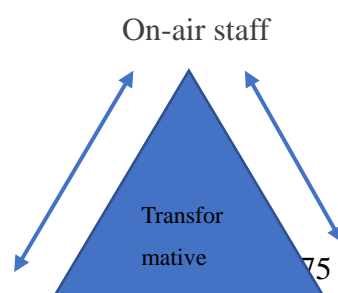
*Challenge ke gore ne ke tlwaetsi street language bjale Thobela FM go boletwa Sepedi seo se ngwetswego ka gare ga dipuku [I had to substitute the informal language with the formal Sepedi for broadcasting]*

For News Presenter (B), the challenge had to do with the dialect of Sepedi that had become foregrounded within Thobela FM's programming. As explained in Chapter Two, so-called standardised Sepedi originates from Sekhukhune region of Limpopo. News Presenter (B) notes that the station receives many calls from this particular region of the province, and these speakers would school him in what they regarded as the correct use of language:

*Re nale Bapedi ba Ga-Sekhukhune bona ebile ba ikwa ele Bapedi pedi ka gore re humana diphoshollo tse dintshi go tswa go bona [We have Bapedi ba Ga-Sekhukhune who considers themselves the native speakers hence the station gets corrections from audiences of that region]*

Both of these research participants found, in this way, that particular language practices had become embedded in Thobela FM's broadcast culture and they were expected, as presenters, to adopt these practices. This applied both to the station managements' s requirements regarding formal modes of speech and to listeners' insistence on the prioritisation of particular dialects.

The research participants' comments on their initial introduction to Thobela FM since the mid 2000's provides us with glimpses of ways in which the station continued to change over time in response to changes in its context. Participants did not experience the hostile corporate culture that Senior Host (M) observed in the apartheid era. Instead, they were offered constructive opportunities to prove themselves as professionals. These changes suggest an organisational environment that was becoming increasingly enabling. In the illustration below, I attempt to describe the implications of this shift for relationships of engagement by making the lines of the two-way arrows stronger and bolder:





The participants were all given opportunities within Thobela FM to develop and grow. This suggests the presence of an open-minded station management, ready to accommodate voices from within community radio that were new to public radio. The relationship between management and the on-air team can therefore be described as developmental and empowering, responsive to the potential of these new voices. The participants' description of the linguistic culture that they had to navigate in this space suggests the existence of a complex and vibrant language environment, in which multiple requirements and expectations were at play with each other. This suggests a responsive, more open relationship of engagement between the station and its broader linguistic environment. However, as Senior Producer (B) and News Presenter (B) explains, within this broadcast environment, station staff were still schooled with regards to the "correct" way of speaking Sepedi. Both the station management and certain elements within the station's audience contributed to such schooling. They seemed to have been in agreement about the need to maintain guidelines for standardised and formal Sepedi.

## **5.2 The participants' experience of shaping the station's language identity over time**

This section explores how each of the participants can be seen to have participated in facilitating change within the language practices that form part of Thobela FM's organisational culture. It should be noted that some of the participants become involved in new areas of work overtime, as they were promoted to new positions or took on different responsibilities. These changes allow them to gain multiple perspectives into the working operations at the station, which they are able to share in their description of their contributions to this space.

### **5.2.1 The apartheid era: Thobela FM in the 1980s**

We have seen, in the previous section, that when the Senior Host (M) first joined Radio Lebowa in the late 1980s he found himself in an institution defined by a culture of segregation and discrimination. He started to make interventions into this environment because he believed that change was necessary in order for the station's organisational culture to become more inclusive and empowering. He soon publicly expressed his resistance to a work culture defined by the division of amenities:

*Along the passages there were coffee machines for each race, nna ke gapeletsa goya kua makgoweng [...and I would insist on using the one for only whites]*

He notes that some of his black colleagues feared that the young Senior Host at that time might lose his employment as retribution for defying the culture of racial segregation:

*Bashomi mmogo ka nna ba fela ba re, 'Ba tla go koba' [Colleagues would warn about losing my job]*

He nevertheless believed that it was important to challenge discrimination inside the station. For this reason, he directly confronted station management's insistence on the use of Afrikaans as the official mode of communication at work when these managers were in fact fluent in Sepedi:

*Ke ya kua go bona (Makgowa) ke re, 'ka gore lena ba re le tseba Sepedi then why le dumela gore re bolele Afrikaans le lena?' [I went to the whites and I asked why they insisted on the usage of Afrikaans while they can speak and understand Sepedi]*

Some members of management were prepared to enter into dialogue with him about such criticism. The Senior Host describes a moment when he was confronted by one of these managers about his campaign for the use of Sepedi as a shared mode of communication at work:

*Go be go nale monna o mongwe re mmitisa mahomolele (not his real name) ge o mmotsisa diputiso a no homola. Go fihlela a ntlwaela, a fela a mpotsisa gore goreng ke rata leleme la geso. [I got approached by one of the white controllers who noticed my relentless efforts to use Sepedi even with them, he asked why I insist on using Sepedi so much]*

Senior Host's response is expressive of the importance of Sepedi as an aspect of his personal identity:

*This is the language ka re ge ke gola ka gae ka humana ba bolela yona. [This is the language I was born into]*

He explains that he was not alone in rebelling against established organisational culture at Thobela FM. Black staff routinely engaged in conversation with each other that was expressive of such rebellion. However, they tended to do so surreptitiously because the white management could understand Sepedi. For this reason, they resorted to the use of coded language, for example adopting pseudonyms for the white managers which enabled them to discuss their failings without drawing attention to such talk:

*Go be go nale monna o mongwe re mmitisa mahomolele (not his real name) ge o mmotsisa diputiso a no Homola. [There was this white manager whom we had given a name" the one who ignores"]*

By means of these anecdotes, he describes Radio Lebowa in the late 1980s as a space in which organisational culture was clearly problematic, because it was based in blatant discrimination against black staff. There seemed very little hope of changing this culture because existing relations of power and modes of practice were so entrenched. Nevertheless, he was able to find at least one opportunity for establishing his own authority within the station. This opportunity arose at the time that the Senior Host first joined Thobela FM because the station was replacing outdated analogue equipment with new digital technology, including a new mixing desk:

I remember that I had started on a Monday, and that Wednesday they dismantled the desk equipment we used for broadcasting. They installed a new desk, we were all learners.

His colleagues were not familiar with operational use of the new equipment. He immediately recognised this as an opportunity to cement his own value to the station:

It's a new technology! I looked at it, I asked one white manager for the operational manual of the desk. He then asked, what do you want to do? I replied, I want to read, and I made copies and returned the original copy.

Senior Host was the youngest employee of the station at that time and claimed for himself the identity of someone whose youth made him better able to adapt to the digital world. The station management acknowledged this strength:

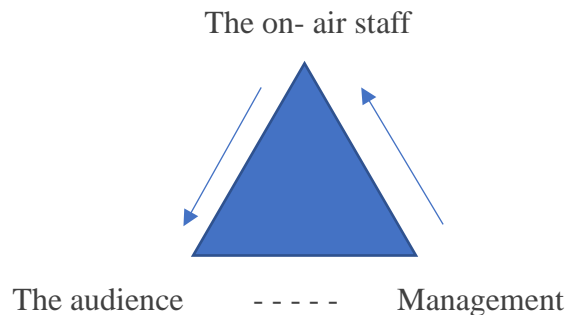
I read [the manual] overnight and I became proficient operating the machine, as a result managers of the station sent everyone to be trained by me.

Senior Host was thus able to create his own domain of authority in the space of technology, because it represented one sphere within the station in which change was taking place. He explains that expertise in broadcast technology has remained one of his areas of strength since that time.

The station also introduced new conventions in other areas of work, but these did not provide senior Host with the same opportunity for agency. One such area of innovation could be observed in context of programming and production. He explains that according to established work conventions presenters at Radio Lebowa were responsible for all aspects of content generation for their shows, without the support of producers. This meant that they necessarily had agency with regards to the kind of content that they would include in their shows. However, by the time that he joined the station, the station management was requiring of presenters to work with show scripts. Senior Host proposes that they introduced this convention because it enabled them to increase their capacity for surveillance and control of the content of broadcasts:

I was able to write the points on the paper, and we did not have producers.  
But it must be seen and approved by the management.

It would seem that the management of the station were actively strategizing around the introduction of new systems of surveillance that would enable them to guard against any challenges to the status quo. The illustration, below, which is also included in Section One of this chapter, is indicative of institutional culture at this time:



As noted in Section One, the triangle of relationships of engagement that existed during this moment between audience, on-air staff and management was defined by authoritarianism and discrimination. It would seem from Senior Host's comments about working at the station during this period that any attempt to challenge institutional culture was bound to fail because existing organisational practices were so deeply entrenched.

### 5.2.2 The early years of democracy: Thobela FM in the mid-1990s

We have seen, in Section One of this chapter, that Station Manager (F) and Senior Producer (A) both joined Thobela FM in the mid-1990s, just after the first democratic elections in South Africa. At this time, the station needed to transform its identity so that it could leave behind its role as an apparatus of the apartheid state and instead embrace the role that it could play within a new democracy. Station Manager (F) explains that soon after her arrival at the station she moved from news management to becoming the programming manager of the station. In this capacity, she was required to assist with the station's reinvention.

She notes that as part of this process the station needed to identify a new name and tagline for itself. We saw, in Chapter Two, that the station's first name (acquired in 1960) was Radio Lebowa, in acknowledgement of the homeland territory of Lebowa. In 1996, the station changes its name to Thobela FM. Thobela is a formal greeting in Sepedi which shows acknowledgement and respect, particularly to elders or when addressing a group. The term can also be used as a way of starting a conversation or expressing praise and veneration. As such,

it is a word that was expressive of the values that an indigenous language station would want to foreground as part of its identity at the start of democracy in South Africa. Sebola explains that the tagline that was chosen to accompany this name was “Sebata sa moyeng” which simply translates to “leader in broadcasting”. She notes that the station aimed to establish itself as an authority through the quality of its programming, both in the context of the provision of information and by means of entertainment (Station Manager, 2024).

As a member of the station’s editorial leadership, Station Manager (F) felt responsible for finding ways of putting this programming vision into practice. We saw, in Section One, that she came to believe that news should be at the heart of content production in any station. She explains that she came to this realisation because she was trying to encourage the station’s content producers to follow up on news events that featured in news bulletins:

I told them not to leave current or breaking stories, and that’s when I realised that the newsroom is the core.

Based on this insight, she continued to look for ways of creating a dynamic relationship between news and general programming. This was an unusual approach in a broadcast environment in which news traditionally existed in separation from talk radio. Sebola explains that she had to work hard to convince her colleagues of the importance of following up on news stories in order to link them to deeper social issues (Station Manager, 2024). It is apparent from this description that she was attempting to ensure that programming content was relevant to contemporary events, so that the station engaged meaningfully with its social context.

A second way in which Station Manager (F) sought to ensure the creation of content that engaged meaningfully with context was by paying attention to language practice. We saw, earlier in this chapter, that she was critical of the established convention within news production in the SABC in which news content was first generated in English and Afrikaans and then translated to indigenous black languages. She now lobbied for the establishment of production practices at Thobela FM in which the original language of reporting was Sepedi (Station Manager, 2024). In addition, she sought to create space in programming for the acknowledgements of the variety of dialects of Sepedi spoken by members of the station’s audience. Station Manager (F) explains that encouragement of this approach met resistance because it ran counter to the accepted conventions of programming. Station staff felt a commitment to the continued elevation of the standardised version of Sepedi because this had been ingrained in them through their own education:

Accommodating other dialects, it is challenging ... as a station we have decided to prioritise standardised Sepedi that we have learned from school.

She nevertheless continued to believe that the inclusion of other dialects of Sepedi was important. She explains that Thobela FM needed to acknowledge that its listenership come from communities that differ from each other with regards to their linguistic identity. She was able to convince her colleagues that such acknowledgement was possible within the station's programming because the linguistic variations of Sepedi are in fact mutually intelligible. Sebola thus succeeded in establishing language practices in programming that allowed for these variations to become audible:

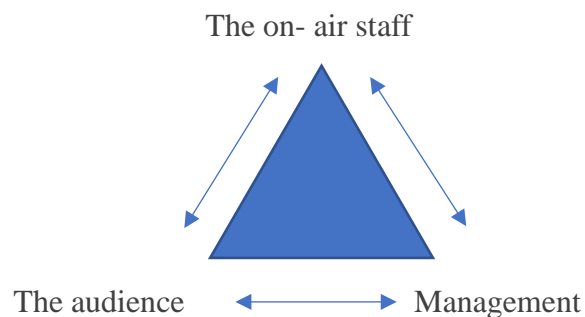
Sporadically we would include the likes of KheLobedu and other dialects, so that we should not confuse whoever that is interested in learning standardised Sepedi.

It is evident, from these descriptions by Station Manager (F) of her contributions to change at Thobela FM that she was successful in bringing transformation to the station's programming at multiple points within its content production cycle. This can be observed in her insistence that news stories would no longer simply be translated from English and Afrikaans into Sepedi and that they should instead be originally produced in Sepedi. It is also evident from her requirement that a more meaningful relationship of engagement be established between news and talk programming so that stories featured in news bulletins could be given further depth and context. Finally, by creating space for a wider variety of Sepedi dialects within the station's programming, she opened up the possibility of nuanced and authentic audience engagement with such content.

Senior Producer (A) also speaks of a contribution that he was able to make to the treatment of language at in Thobela FM. It will be remembered that, like Senior Host (M) and Station Manager (F), he was a Sepedi teacher by profession. He explains that his college-based education in language teaching provided him with an authoritative understanding of the correct, formal language that was prized by Thobela FM for broadcast purposes. He was now given an opportunity by the station management to draw on this expertise by launching a science programme, presented in Sepedi. He demonstrated that he could use Sepedi to engage with his audience and studio guests about complex scientific topics. The show gained prominence amongst listeners, attracting many call-ins. As a result of this he gained international recognition:

*Go ile gwa tswa di fellowships tsa goya America, ka ba wa ba bangwe ba bane ba goya America ka yo ithutela Science radio journalism. [My show gained prominence, and I was fortunate to be awarded an American fellowship to expand my knowledge by studying science radio journalism.*

It is apparent from both Station Manager (F) and Senior Producer (A)'s description of their experience of working at Thobela FM during the early years of democracy that they were provided with ample opportunities to contribute to change within the station's programming. This allowed them to make important contributions to the reinvention of the station identity and operation as an indigenous language public radio station. As a member of the station's editorial management, Station Manager (F) was empowered to make changes that opened up opportunities for the generation of authentic and relevant content that engaged meaningfully with the station's social content. She also had the power to establish new approaches to language practice that created space within programming for meaningful engagement with audience. Within this programming space, there was room for a variety of Sepedi dialects, thus acknowledging the linguistic diversity of the station's audience. At the same time, based on Senior Producer (A)'s description, it was an environment in which he could establish a science programming in Sepedi that showcased the authority and intellectual capacity of this language. It can be argued that these innovations were possible due to changes that had taken place in the triangle of relationships of engagement within the station. As in Section One of this chapter, I describe the implications of this approach by making the arrows in the illustration below point in two directions:



Strong support from station management allowed both editorial and on-air staff to enrich their approach to language practices. These practices enabled them to generate meaningful content and share such content in meaningful ways with their audience. For this reason, the relationship of engagement between presenters and audience, and indeed management audience, became enriched.

### 5.2.3 Thobela FM in the mid-2000s until now

By the time that interviews for this research were being conducted, Station Manager (I) was well established as station's manager, with Executive Senior Producer (I) as her deputy. In commenting on what has been achieved since the mid-1990s, Senior Producer (B) notes that the linguistic identity that she had helped to established for the station at that time has remained constant and she has been able to build on that achievement. Thobela FM is now known for the contribution that it makes to the preservation of Sepedi as an authoritative language that is rich in dialect. Indeed, many South Africans who are learning Sepedi turn to the station as a key educational resource:

There is a lot of people who learn Sepedi through radio. There is a particular listener who is Zulu Speaking from Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal and that time morning drive was hosted by Joe Mabotja and Mankoko and says he learned Sepedi that way.

Senior Producer (B) agrees that this educational imperative has become core to the station's purpose. As part of this, Thobela FM now plays a central role in the ensuring that young speakers of the Sepedi language continue to take learning about their own language seriously. The station has entered into partnerships with educational institutions to make this possible:

To our audience, particularly the youth, they should learn language. As broadcasters we are working hard to ensure that the youth learn language. We work with academics from different institutions and language organisations to get the outmost assistance.

News Presenter (B) agrees that this acknowledgement of diversity in language should be central to the station's purpose:

Let's embrace each other's languages, listeners can learn through radio about the importance of other dialects and other languages.

Other research participants agree that the station has established a sustained presence as a vehicle for the acknowledgement and enhancement of Sepedi as a language of significance. They point out that, in doing so, the emphasis is on recognition of the language in all its diversity, acknowledging its many dialects. Senior Producer (B) explains that presenters are able, on one hand, to honour the status of standardised Sepedi, as a mode of communication that is intelligible to all speakers of the language:

You have to accommodate everyone by using the standardised Sepedi, so that audiences from communities speaking dialects such as Bolobedu, Botlokwa, and Ga-Sekhukhune would be able to receive the message with ease.

Senior Host (M) notes that within this space there is also encouragement from the station to allow non-Sepedi speaking listeners and studio guests to use English:

*Retlo tsentsha Sekgowa moo gore re nale a non-native language speaker, retlo mo dumelela go bolela ka Sekgowa eupsa ra interpreta gore o reng. [We would allow a non-native speaker to use English, and we will interpret the meaning in Sepedi]*

At the same time, acknowledgment of the wide variety of languages and dialects on air is always balanced by a return to the standardised version of Sepedi:

*Re nale diboledi go tsa malemeng a go fapana ebile ga re ganetsi gore ba ka bolela eupsa re somisa Sepedi seo gore ka moka batho ba kase kwesisa. [ We have speakers from distinct dialects, and it is allowed to casually speak in those but the station prefers Sepedi for the benefit of its audience]*

News Reader (S) explains that the station has established conventions with regards the moments in programming in which a diversity of dialects can emerge. He notes that news bulletins, in particular, must be presented in standard Sepedi while more diversity is allowed in the conversation that takes place on air in the studio both before and after the news. This is because more freedom is allowed in context of talk programming than news:

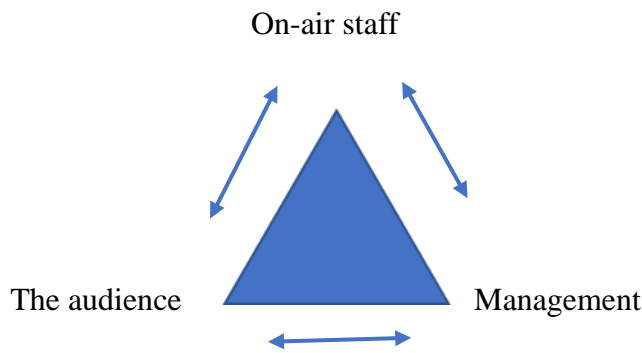
These departments are different; news is different from programming. We do not enjoy that freedom in news but there is too much creativity in programming than in news.

Senior Host (M) notes that staff members have formed a language committee which works in collaboration with PanSALB, and which develops shared guidelines for speaking Sepedi on air that are designed to increase the capacity and flexibility of the language. The committee takes responsibility, for example, for coining new words in Sepedi. It manages a WhatsApp group in which presenters and producers can consult each other:

[This is] for everyone who may experiences a challenge with the meaning of a certain word, they can be assisted in the WhatsApp group.

The participants' commentary suggests that Thobela FM has made significant progress since the advent of democracy, particularly in cultivating a corporate culture that supports professional growth among its staff. Notably, the station's leadership now under the stewardship of Station Manager (F) and Executive Senior Producer (I), has expanded its role beyond traditional broadcasting. The management envisions Thobela FM as a centre for community service, committed to effecting meaningful change in the lives of ordinary citizens.

Language identity remains a central pillar of the station's ethos. As part of this identity, the station embraces multiple Sepedi dialects, ensuring broader linguistic representation. The illustration below describes relationship of engagement at this station, with the strength of these relationships indicated through the use of two-way arrows in bold:



Within this scenario, Thobela FM is inclusive and empowering in its management style, welcoming individuals from outside the Sepedi linguistic group who are willing to learn and broadcast in Sepedi. The station has developed a mature and reciprocal relationship with its audience. Over the years, a solid professional bond has formed between management and presenters, many of whom come from community radio backgrounds. These community radio roots have proven to be a rich reservoir of talent for the station, reinforcing its role as a dynamic and inclusive indigenous language public broadcaster.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates how the research participants contributed to progressive social change within Thobela FM at various moments in its history. These shifts are proposed to reflect a transformation in the relationships of engagement among management, staff, and audience. Over time, these relationships became less authoritarian, allowing positions of agency to emerge not only at the level of management but also for on-air staff and, importantly, for the station's audience. Shifts in language practices can be observed within each of these relationships. Gradually, these changes reflect a movement away from the apartheid-era conception of a fixed and essential Sepedi identity. Instead, this is replaced by a more socially inclusive and dynamic understanding of Sepedi as a collection of dialects, each with its own integrity. The station that emerges from this historical trajectory is one where it becomes possible to affirm the authority and value of Sepedi as a language of status within the broader South African linguistic landscape.

## CLOSING COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this dissertation, I have examined how language practices have changed over time within an indigenous language public service radio in South Africa, in response to broader shifts in the politics of language. To provide the necessary contextual and conceptual terms of reference, Chapter One offered a review of the history of South African language politics. I pointed out that South Africa is often recognised for having one of the world's most progressive constitutions, particularly in its approach to language rights. And yet, in practice, indigenous languages remain marginalised in key domains of power, while English continues to hold a privileged position.

I argued that this contradiction can be better understood by considering how South Africa's contemporary linguistic landscape has been shaped by its socio-political history. Within this history, the linguistic landscape has long represented a site of struggle where relations of power between different social groups are constantly renegotiated. Both during the colonial era and under apartheid, these power relations were profoundly unequal and tightly controlled by the state. Government language policies and practices served to reproduce these inequalities. During colonial times, missionary education was used to assimilate indigenous languages into this unequal power structure; in the apartheid era, this role was continued through Bantu education.

However, education also became a space for indigenous language speakers to establish systems of resistance to their marginalisation. In the transition from mass resistance to democracy, education again served as a critical site of struggle, disrupting hegemonic assumptions about the status of different languages in South Africa. A key set of debates emerged during this time about the role that language should play in a multilingual democracy. The terms articulated in this debate provide the conceptual framework that guides the remainder of this study.

Of particular importance is the idea that language practices can both reproduce unequal power relations and subvert them. This is clearly demonstrated by struggles over language during both the colonial and apartheid eras. In the democratic period, it also becomes evident that language can promote social inclusion while recognising and affirming social diversity.

In Chapter Two, I examined the history of indigenous language public radio, showing how it is embedded in the broader narrative of language politics discussed in Chapter One. We saw that indigenous language radio was first established during apartheid as a state apparatus to consolidate social control and assimilate indigenous language communities into official

systems of communication. Language practices within this context served as instruments of control.

However, as with missionary schools, indigenous language broadcasting also became a site of subversive resistance. Alternative language practices developed that challenged the official purpose of these radio stations and contributed to South Africa's culture of mass resistance. By the time South Africa became a democracy, indigenous language radio carried both broadcast cultures: one of authoritarian control and the other of subversive resistance. These dual legacies continue to shape indigenous language radio in the democratic era.

Chapter Three outlined the research design for the empirical component of this study. I explained that my aim was to conduct a case study of Thobela FM, a South African indigenous language station, using qualitative interviews with staff. My goal was to explore their experiences working at the station, particularly their reflections on how language policies and practices had evolved from apartheid to democracy. I was inspired by existing research that draws on rich interview material with staff at indigenous language stations, illuminating their own language practices within these environments. In this way, I aimed to develop a deeper understanding of how Thobela FM has adapted to changes in its socio-political context through its language use.

Chapters Four and Five presented the findings from this empirical research. Chapter Four described how participants' values, knowledge, and competencies were shaped by their position within South Africa's language history. Chapter Five showed how they were able to draw on these resources to intervene in the station's language practices. These interventions contributed to transforming the station, from a space marked by abuse and exploitation to one of empowerment and pride in language.

As I noted in Chapter One, commentators are generally critical of South Africa's implementation of the language rights enshrined in its constitution. Progress in creating a multilingual language environment has been slow, especially in recognising the authority of multiple languages. Similarly, in Chapter Two, we saw that critics argue that the SABC has struggled to put its language policies into practice in managing indigenous language stations.

However, based on my study of Thobela FM, I argue that a closer examination of staff experiences reveals a more complex picture. Staff describe the emergence of empowering language practices that have reshaped engagement between management, staff, and audiences. These practices have helped foster a culture of multilingualism rooted in empowerment rather than control. Importantly, these developments have not resulted from top-down editorial

support from SABC leadership, but from traditions built locally by committed staff members drawing on their own knowledge and experiences.

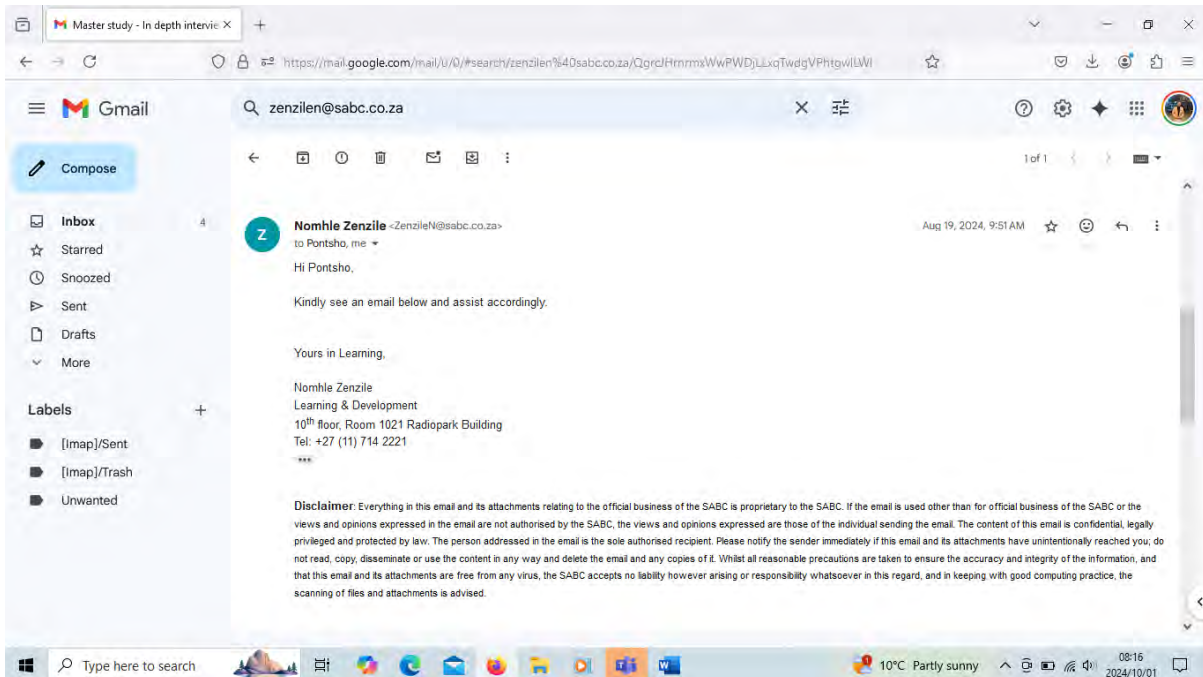
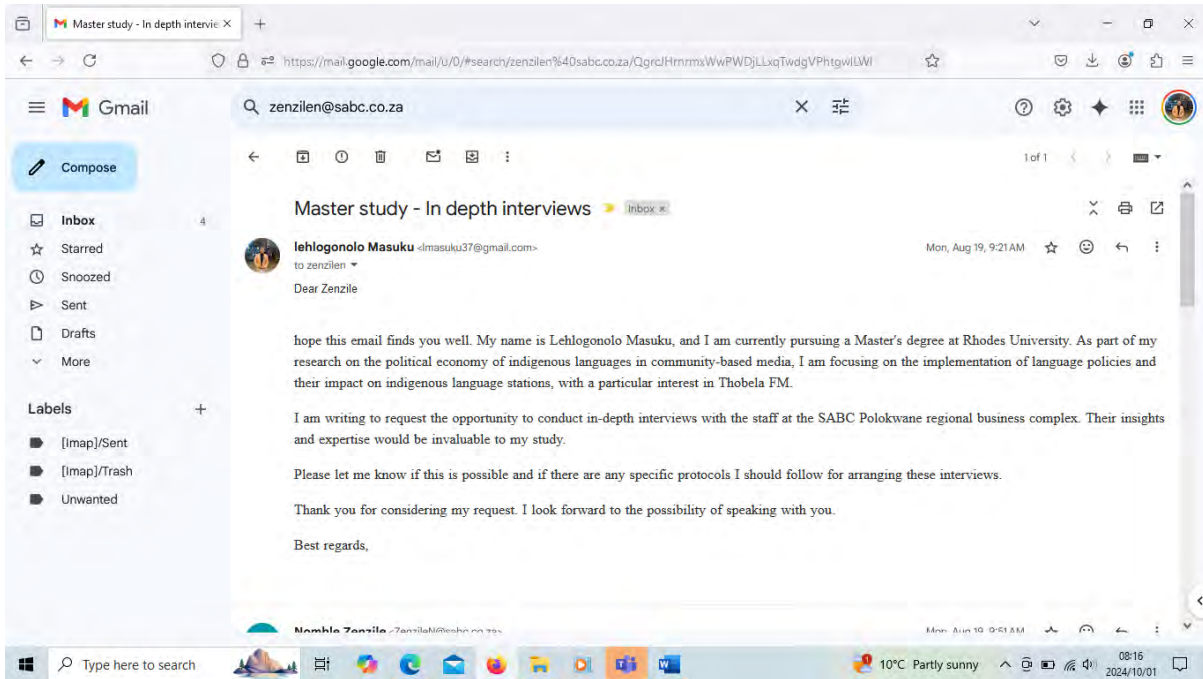
As argued in Chapter Two, language policy can only be effectively implemented if shared guidelines are developed for putting such policies into practice. I propose that the work done by Thobela FM's staff represents the articulation of such guidelines.

I see significant potential for further research that examines similar dynamics at other indigenous language stations within the SABC. It is possible that parallel histories of resistance and innovation have emerged in these spaces, with staff, management, and audiences collaboratively shaping empowering language practices. I also propose that future research should focus on the community radio sector in South Africa. As shown in this dissertation, this sector has served as a rich source of ideas, knowledge, and values that have influenced language practices at Thobela FM. Furthermore, the actionable implementation of language practices in indigenous public service broadcasting is recommended. This should be accompanied by strict and timely monitoring of the implementation plan, supported by research and inputs from industry practitioners and academics. Public forums can also serve as valuable spaces for guidance, where community members contribute insights on the state of affairs at their respective stations as listeners.

Finally, I suggest that the ideas, values, and competencies articulated by Thobela FM's staff before joining the station, particularly those gained through their identities as educators and their experiences in community radio, have played a crucial role in shaping the station's language practices. For this reason, further research into the language practices developed in community radio could help inform the SABC's implementation of its own language policies, first articulated over thirty years ago in the early days of South African democracy.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Emails



Master study - In depth interview x +

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/zenzilen%40sabc.co.za/QgrclHrmmxWwPWDjLLxqTwdgVPhtgwLWl

Gmail zenzilen@sabc.co.za

Compose

Inbox 4  
Starred  
Snoozed  
Sent  
Drafts  
More

Labels +  
[imap]/Sent  
[imap]/Trash  
Unwanted

Pontsho Tsotetsi <TstotetsiPC@sabc.co.za>  
to lmasuku37@gmail.com

Aug 20, 2024, 3:49 PM


Good Day

I hope the email finds you well

Would you kindly send us ethical clearance letter from the institution/ provide us with your letter of registration, that clearly states the research topic. The letter must be signed by your supervisory/ faculty head.

Regards

**Pontsho Tsotetsi**  
Training Coordinator: Learning and Development  
Human Resources  
T: 231 (11) 714 4827 | C: 227 (16) 1 99 3777  
E: tsotetsipc@sabc.co.za



\*\*\*

lehlogonolo Masuku <lmasuku37@gmail.com>  
to Pontsho

Aug 20, 2024, 4:37 PM

Thank you, I will

10°C Party sunny 08:16 2024/10/01

## Appendix 2: SABC: Gatekeeper Letter



HR: Learning & Development  
Radio Park Cnr Artillery and Henley Roads Auckland  
Park 2092, Private Bag X1 Auckland Park 2006  
Johannesburg Gauteng South Africa.

Date: 16 October 2024

Dear Mr Matsobane Lehlogonolo Masuku

### LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SABC

This letter serves as authorization for Matsobane Lehlogonolo Masuku to conduct the research project under the topic **“The implications of language policy for Economics Journalism in Indigenous Language Public radio in South Africa: A case of Thobela FM”** This research will take place at the SABC until end of March 2025.

Upon a review of the letter sent to us by your institution, we are glad to offer you an opportunity to conduct the same study in our organization. All interviews, filed surveys, observations around the site and the distribution of questionnaires are approved and will be duly supervised by the SABC Learning and Development division.

We hope that this research opportunity will be fully beneficial to your studies. If you have any concerns or require additional information, feel free to contact the division.

Many thanks.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elisa Molaba", is written over a horizontal line.

Ms Elisa Molaba

SABC Learning and Development Manager

+2711714 4487; +27820530240

[molabame@sabc.co.za](mailto:molabame@sabc.co.za)

South African Broadcasting Corporation **SOC Limited**; Registration Number: 2003/023915/30  
**Non-Executive Directors:** Mr K M Ramukumba (Chairperson); Ms N A Batyi (Deputy Chairperson); Dr R K C Horne; Ms P Kadi; Ms P P Magopeni;  
Mr D M Maimela; Ms A C Makhwanya; Mr D K Mohuba; Ms M Moonsamy; Ms R M S Motaung; Adv T S Thipanyane; Mr M Tsedu  
**Executive Directors:** Ms N N Wotshela (Acting Group Chief Executive Officer); Mr I C Plaatjes (Chief Operations Officer); Ms Y van Biljon (Chief  
Financial Officer); **Acting Company Secretary:** Mr S F Mdluli

## Appendix 3: Interview Guides

### Interview guide for staff at Thobela FM

#### Section 1: Biographic Information

*This section of the interview deals with the research participants' linguistic history and language identity. It also deals with their professional history with particular focus on their involvement in public service radio.*

1. Can you tell me a bit about your background, including where you grew up?
2. What languages did you speak, growing up, and how has this shaped your own sense of your linguistic identity? *(I prompt here for more detail, for example about what was spoken at home, at school, in the community)*
3. How did you first become involved in radio broadcasting, where did you start? Take me down to the memory lane. And what motivated you to pursue a career in indigenous language radio?
4. When did you become involved at Thobela FM, and in what capacity? How did your role at the station change over time?

#### Section 2: Experience of working at Thobela FM

*In this section the research participant is encouraged talk about the moments in the history of Thobela FM in which they participated. This may differ from one participant to the next, with some able to speak about the apartheid era and the era of mass resistance while others only join the conversation later. For each moment in time, the participants is asked to comment on the social purpose that the station played in South African society at that time, and how language formed part of this.*

1. What was your impression of the station at the time that you arrived? *(I will prompt the participant to mention a particular memory that has stayed with them that helps to explain what was happening at the station at that time)*
2. What did you understand the main social purpose of the station to be at that time? *Depending on the moment the participant is talking about, I will prompt them to comment on following:*
  - *The broad social purpose of the station at that time*
  - *The kind of relationship it had to its audience?*
  - *The role that language played within this?*
  - *What guidelines or policy was in place at that time with regards to language?*
  - *How were these guidelines implemented in practice?*
3. What role did you play in putting these guidelines into practice? What was your experience of doing so? *(Prompt them to speak about the principles and values that informed them in what they were trying to do, and also how they assessed their own ability in putting these principles into practice at the station)*

4. Can you describe the changes, if any, you observed in the role of Thobela FM and its programming in the years that followed and the role that you yourself played in this?  
*(I will again prompt on the themes listed under question 2. This question may require the identification of more than one moment in time)*
5. What is the current situation like at Thobela?

**Section 3: Reflecting on the significance of this experience**

1. Looking back now, what would you say have been some of the key challenges you've experienced or observed when implementing the SABC's language policy at Thobela FM?
2. In your opinion, how well does the current language policy reflect and promote the use of Sepedi and its sister dialects in your programming?
3. On a positive note, what improvements can be done to ensure that the language policy is well balanced and inclusive?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix 4: Participants Consent Form



### **PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION**

**(To be signed by research participant/s)**

Project Title: *The implications of language policy for Economics Journalism in Indigenous Language Public Service radio in South Africa: A case of Thobela FM*

*Matsobane Lehlogonolo Masuku* from the Department *Journalism and Media Studies*, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to *interrogate the implementation of language policy by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), in context of its indigenous language stations couple with in-depth interviews.*
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator ([ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za))
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards: *Scholarship and knowledge production, the findings of this research will provide proper guidance to implementation of the language policy*
4. I will participate in the project by *I will be leading the interviews and simultaneously recording and storing the data during the course of the data collection*
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I understand that I have the right to refuse to respond to any question that I would prefer not to answer.
7. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but any expenses (for example taxi fare or lunch money) will be reimbursed.
8. The following risks are associated with my participation: *Participants will be relaying personal journeys interwoven with their involvement in the radio; there is possibilities of emotional expressions during the interview process.*

*I will ensure that participants feel comfortable and safe during the interview. I will Begin by explaining the purpose of the research and emphasizing that their well-being is a priority. Let them know that they can stop or pause the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable.*

Ethics Coordinator, Rhodes University Research Office,  
Room 204, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139  
[ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za) t: +27 (0) 46 603 7314



Moreover, after the interview, I will engage in a debriefing session where participants can reflect on their experience. This can help them process any emotional responses they may have had

- 9. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form of dissertation that will be accessible to public through open access repositories of the Rhodes University library, and I recognise that as a public figure, my identity will inevitably become known, and I agree to accept the loss of anonymity.
- 10. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013) it remains my right to request the Researcher to provide me with a detailed explanation of exactly how confidentiality and anonymity of the data I provide will be achieved. I may also request to know exactly how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored.
- 11. I consent to data collected from me for this research project being used by the Researcher in a follow up study.

If any data collected from me for this research project is to be used by the Researcher for any further study, I am to be informed in writing and my written consent requested again. I need not give consent for the new research if it is incompatible with the initial purpose of the present study (POPIA, s15(3)). Equally, I can simply reject the request. In such cases, a formal request needs to be made to me by the researcher via the Ethics Coordinator ([ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)).

- 12. In terms of the POPI Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of *publication of the dissertation that will be made accessible to the public through open access repositories of the Rhodes University library*
- 13. Any further questions that I might have regarding the nature of the research and/or my participation in it will be answered by: *Matsobane Lehlogonolo Masuku ([maxmasuku37@gmail.com](mailto:maxmasuku37@gmail.com)); Dr Jeanne du Toit ([j.dutoit@ru.ac.za](mailto:j.dutoit@ru.ac.za))*
- 14. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record by the Researcher.
- 15. I *agree* to the Researcher's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views/responses. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of the interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded

I, ....., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I

Ethics Coordinator, Rhodes University Research Office,  
Room 204, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139  
[ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za) t: +27 (0) 46 603 7314



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*

understand, and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....  
**Participants signature**

.....  
**Witness**

.....  
**Date**

Ethics Coordinator, Rhodes University Research Office,  
Room 204, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139  
[ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za) t: +27 (0) 46 603 7314

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