



Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

ISSN: 1607-3614 (Print) 1727-9461 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rall20>

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To cite this article: Mojalefa Koai & Brenton Grant Fredericks (2019) Sesotho is still a marginalised language, *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 37:4, 303-314, DOI: [10.2989/16073614.2019.1692677](https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2019.1692677)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2019.1692677>



Published online: 11 Dec 2019.



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Sesotho is still a marginalised language

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Abstract: This article reports on the progress (or lack thereof) regarding the use of Sesotho as an official medium of communication in selected government departments in the Free State Provincial Government (FSPG). In South Africa, provincial governments are required to implement language policies that promote multilingualism. The aim is to develop previously marginalised languages such as Sesotho, isiXhosa and isiZulu, among others, so that they have equal status to English and Afrikaans. A mixed-method design was used to guide the research process and purposive sampling to ensure that participants made a valuable contribution to this study. We are concerned that despite efforts being made to reduce the gap between official languages such as English and Afrikaans and the previously marginalised languages, there is no real progress in this regard. The results of this study reveal that Sesotho, as a previously marginalised language, is still underutilised in government departments. Evidence suggests that the results of this study be used as a guide for the formulation and implementation of language policies and procedures to address this problem.

Introduction

The Free State is a multilingual province with three official languages,¹ namely Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. This having been said, English, which constitutes 1.3% of first language speakers (L1 speakers), dominates as the language of access and power in all sectors of government at the expense of other official languages, especially Sesotho. This implies that most Free State citizens, who comprise 64% L1 speakers of Sesotho, do not have access to government services, knowledge and information in their language. This practice contravenes the requirement of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which specifies that provincial governments should implement language policies that promote multilingualism and further the development of previously marginalised languages.

The primary question raised in this article is: How frequently is Sesotho used as an official medium of communication in government departments in the Free State province as proposed in the draft Free State Provincial Government Language Policy? To answer this question, we formulated the following objectives:

- To establish the extent to which Sesotho is used in formal internal communication within departments of the FSPG; and
- To ascertain whether Sesotho is used equally with English in government documents for public consumption in the Free State province.

As a point of departure, we present an overview of the linguistic landscape of South Africa, a profile of Sesotho as well as principles of the draft Free State Provincial Government Language Policy (DFSPGLP).

Theoretical overview of the linguistic landscape of South Africa

Before the Republic of South Africa became a democratic country, South Africa had a bilingual policy in which only English and Afrikaans enjoyed equal status in the country's higher domains, namely the administrative, legislative and judiciary functions (Madiba 1999). Consequently, indigenous languages such as Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga were marginalised because they were not used in government departments (Bowerman

2000). Bowerman (2000) and Madiba (1999) contend that the marginalisation of indigenous African languages crippled their economic status. Msimang (cited in Bowerman 2000) points out that indigenous languages were used predominantly in traditional domains such as the home and immediate community, never in the public domain.

Since the inception of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996, every South African citizen has been afforded the right to use his or her own language in all spheres of government. Section 6(2) of the Constitution stipulates that

Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996: Section 6(2)).

This specification means that indigenous languages, as official languages, should also be used in the public sphere. Kamwangamalu (2001) and Probyn (2006) posit that indigenous languages are still used in very few schools and mostly in rural areas. Consequently, this practice has led to a belief that these languages have deficient corpora to cope with the communication demands in higher domains. For this reason, the South African government viewed translation as one of the necessary 'developmental tools' (Beukes 2006) to assist in elevating the status of and advancing the use of indigenous languages in the country's higher domains. This was demonstrated in 2003 when the government approved the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF). The NLPF charges all structures of government to promote the use of the eleven official languages equitably. This policy framework places emphasis on language facilitation methods such as translation and interpreting to achieve this obligation (Department of Arts and Culture [DAC] 2002).

Bowerman (2000) argues that for a language to acquire and maintain high status in a country, it should be used extensively in that country's higher domains such as government departments. He further asserts that indigenous languages can only be developed and promoted provided they are used together with English. A study conducted by the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG) in 1996 regarding the language practices in public institutions revealed that

- at provincial level, correspondence between provincial governments and central government is mainly conducted in English, and
- at local government level, city and town council meetings are held monolingually in English (LANGTAG 1996).

Thus, government departments are not using indigenous languages as media of communication in day-to-day activities. Thorpe (2002) states that government newsletters from the Department of Land Affairs are generally published exclusively in English despite the target audience being rural communities whose mother tongue is Sesotho. Moeketsi (2014) also avers that indigenous African languages are still being marginalised as official languages of learning and teaching, in the courts and parliament. He adds that English is considered a *lingua franca* at many government institutions, which negatively impacts the promotion and survival of Sesotho. These examples confirm Henrard's (2001: 88) observation that 'African languages are virtually never employed in public administration', which contravenes the language clause in the Constitution.

Against this background, the Free State Provincial Government formulated the draft Free State Provincial Government Language Policy to redress the past imbalances, and specifically, to develop the indigenous languages that were previously marginalised with a special focus on Sesotho in the Free State province.

Historical profile of Sesotho

Sesotho is a southern Bantu language that is spoken in southern Africa, particularly in the neighbouring countries of Lesotho and South Africa (Demuth 2007). According to Moeketsi (2014), Sesotho began as an oral language and was only introduced to writing in 1833 by Eugene Casalis (a French missionary) on his arrival in Lesotho, and who later compiled the first Sesotho grammar in 1841. Moeketsi (2014) further states that although Sesotho was not recognised under the apartheid dispensation in South Africa, it was nevertheless developed since it was used in education and

the media. Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2011) claim that Sesotho is spoken by 7.6 % of the population of South Africa (3 849 563 speakers) as a first language. The language is concentrated mainly in Gauteng and the Free State, with the former having 1 395 089 L1 speakers and the latter a slight majority with 1 717 881 L1 speakers (StatsSA 2011).

Moeketsi (2014) argues that despite the changes brought about by democracy in South Africa, the use of Sesotho has faded from the public service in post-democratic South Africa. He maintains that 'in the Free State province, where Sesotho is the dominant language, [the] politicians address the masses in English rather than in Sesotho' (Moeketsi 2014: 219). This goes against the principles of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the draft FSPG language policy, which advocate multilingualism, equity and the development of the indigenous African languages. The principles of the DFSPGLP are summarised in the next section.

Principles of the draft Free State Provincial Government Language Policy

This draft policy was envisioned to improve communication between the FSPG, which is informed by the language provision of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), and citizens of the Free State province. According to the DFSPGLP, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English are the designated official languages of the Free State province. Informed by the census figures of 2001, the DFSPGLP recognises that Sesotho is the numerical majority language in the Free State province, followed by Afrikaans. Although English also enjoys official status in the province, it only has 1.3 % or 31 246 L1 speakers. This draft policy also makes provision for three other languages spoken in the province, namely isiXhosa (9% or 246 192 speakers), Setswana (7% or 185 389 speaker) and isiZulu (5% or 138 091 speakers) as well as the communication needs of deaf and blind people (DFSPGLP n.d.: Section 1).

To realise the vision of the draft policy, section 2 stipulates, among others, the following aims that are pertinent to the current study:

- to promote the development of Sesotho in the Free State province because it was previously marginalised;
- to promote the equitable use of the three designated official languages of the FSPG, namely Sesotho, Afrikaans and English;
- to facilitate communication between the FSPG and the people of the Free State;
- to foster respect for and protect the language rights of the people of the Free State;
- to facilitate equitable access to Free State government services, knowledge and information for all the people of this province, including deaf and blind people; and
- to promote and encourage multilingualism in the Free State and raise language awareness (DFSPGLP n.d.: Section 2).

Regarding the use of official languages in the provincial government, the draft policy states that Sesotho, Afrikaans and English shall be used equally by the provincial government as follows:

Internal communication for FSPG departments (oral and written):

For oral communication 'all FSPG departments must determine their working official language or languages for internal oral communication...within the broad framework of the language policy' (DFSPGLP n.d.: Clause 5.1). For the purposes of written communication, the draft policy states that:

For mutual understanding, English is the working language of record, between and within departments, provided that no person may be prevented from using either Sesotho or Afrikaans when drafting official written communication which, with the help of translation, will then be rendered in English (DFSPGLP: Clause 5.2 (a)).

External communication for all FSPG departments (oral and written):

Regarding oral communication, the DFSPGLP pronounces that officials must communicate with the public in the public's language(s) of choice and in cases where it is not possible, they should acquire the services of interpreters (DFSPGLP, n.d.: Clause 5.3). With reference to external communication for public consumption, the draft policy decrees that official government publications must be issued in Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. These publications include, among others, budget vote speeches; all

Free State bills; information pamphlets; official notices and advertisements and all official forms to be completed by the public (DFSPGLP n.d.: Clause 5.4).

Now that the current study has been contextualised, the next section focuses on the research methodology used in this study followed by a presentation and discussion of the results, the recommendations and, finally the conclusion.

Research methodology

We used a mixed-method design to guide the research process. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) postulate that a mixed-method design refers to collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. We chose this methodology to enhance the validity and reliability of the study.

Participants

For the collection of quantitative data, the participants of this study included a purposeful sample of 23 communication and language practitioners employed in seven departments of the Free State Provincial Government. The sample was confined to communication and language practitioners because they work in the same environment. Another reason is that nonprobability sampling assures high participation rates and is easy to administer (McMillan and Schumacher 2006).

Communication practitioners were specifically chosen because their job entails producing and disseminating information for public consumption, and language practitioners were selected because they translate such information from English into other official languages of the Free State province including Sesotho. We deemed participants' expertise and daily activities in their work environment invaluable to answering the questions posed in the current study as well as meeting the two objectives of this study. Of the 23 participants, ten of them (43%) were L1 speakers of Sesotho, while four participants (17%) were L1 speakers of Afrikaans and only one participant (4%) identified as L1 speaker of English. The rest of the participants were speakers of other indigenous African languages that are spoken in the Free State, albeit, not official, namely five speakers of Setswana (23%) and three speakers of isiXhosa (13%). Most participants (87%) were communication practitioners in different departments in the FSPG, while 13% were language practitioners at the Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation (DSACR). Lastly, most participants (81%) indicated that they had between 6 and 10 years and 17+ years working experience in their respective fields, which places them in the best position to reveal the frequency with which Sesotho is used in formal communication in the FSPG. The participants for qualitative data included a senior language practitioner from the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and an assistant director from the language services at the DSACR, henceforth Respondent A and Respondent B. Both respondents were chosen because their mandate includes monitoring language policy implementation in the Free State.

Instruments

We used multiple instruments, including a self-administered questionnaire, electronic official government documents and semi-structured interviews to collect data in this study. The questionnaire was used because it saves time and can be completed without any direct assistance from the researchers (Salkind 2009). Moreover, we hoped participants would respond honestly due to the anonymity of questionnaires.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three sections. Section A contained biographical information such as participants' working experience, L1 and their occupation. This information was collected to compile a profile of the participants. Section B aimed to ascertain whether Sesotho is being used consistently with English in formal government communication in departments of the FSPG. We formulated the questions in this section in line with the stipulations of the use of official languages in the FSPG as decreed in the draft language policy. The first six questions (Q1–Q6) required the participants to indicate the frequency with which Sesotho is used in formal internal communication, and the other six (Q7–Q12) the frequency with which the language is used in formal external communication in each department. All twelve questions were structured on a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from ‘never’, ‘seldom’, ‘occasionally’, ‘usually’ to ‘always’. In addition, open-ended questions were posed to participants to provide examples of communication problems that they experience in their day-to-day activities, how such problems affect the quality of their work as well as how they address these problems. However, the results and discussion will be limited to findings regarding the frequency of the use of Sesotho in formal government communication in the FSPG as this is the aim of the current study.

Although a questionnaire was our primary instrument for data collection, we also utilised electronic official government documents to identify those written in Sesotho as well as to corroborate and support the findings of the questionnaire. Additionally, we conducted two face-to-face semi-structured interviews with PanSALB and the DSACR to collect qualitative data. The aim of the interviews was to ascertain whether these institutions are executing their mandate, that is, monitoring the use of Sesotho as decreed in the draft language policy, and to complement the quantitative findings.

Procedure

We delivered letters requesting permission to conduct research to nine different heads of departments in the Free State government. Seven departments granted us permission to continue. The printed questionnaires were hand-delivered and distributed in seven communication directorates, including the language service unit of the DSACR. Given the small size of these directorates, we printed a maximum of five copies per department. The participants completed self-administered questionnaires, at a time and in an environment convenient to them, without the assistance of the researchers. The completed questionnaires were collected from all directorates for capturing and analysing. Additionally, we emailed PanSALB and the DSACR to request permission to conduct interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in May 2019.

We examined electronic documents, namely internal newsletters, annual reports, official forms, public notices and informational pamphlets of different departments published online from 2015 to the present. These documents were selected with the purpose to determine whether they were written in Sesotho. However, we were not granted access to internal email communication and minutes of departmental meetings owing to their confidential nature.

Results: Questionnaire

This section presents findings regarding the extent to which Sesotho is being used in formal internal communication. The participants were requested to indicate how often Sesotho is used in formal internal communication in different departments of the FSPG. Table 1 illustrates the participants’ responses in percentages.

Table 1: Responses regarding the use of Sesotho in internal communication

Item	Never (%)	Seldom (%)	Occasionally (%)	Usually (%)	Always (%)
1 Minutes of departmental meetings are made available in Sesotho.	65%	30%	5%	0%	0%
2 Employees’ newsletters provide information in Sesotho.	43%	43%	0%	14%	0%
3 Employees send correspondence such as emails in Sesotho.	61%	26%	9%	4%	0%
4 Employees are given the opportunity to speak Sesotho during developmental workshops.	17%	22%	35%	22%	4%
5 Departmental notices are translated into Sesotho.	30%	30%	22%	18%	0%
6 Interdepartmental correspondence such as memos and letters are written in Sesotho.	70%	22%	8%	0%	0%

Availability of the minutes of departmental meetings in Sesotho

Thirty per cent of the respondents indicated that the minutes of departmental meetings are seldom made available in Sesotho, whereas 5% revealed that the minutes of departmental meetings are made available in Sesotho only about half of the time. A huge concern is that the majority of the respondents (65%) indicated that the minutes of departmental meetings are never made available in Sesotho. This finding confirms that Sesotho is rarely used for internal record-keeping purposes in the FSPG. Consequently, we argue that the low production of official Sesotho documentation hinders the promotion of its use in government departments.

Availability of internal newsletters in Sesotho

Forty-three per cent of the respondents indicated that Sesotho is never visible in internal newsletters. However, 57% of the respondents indicated that information in Sesotho is seldom available (43%) to usually available (14%) in employees' newsletters. Although the difference is not significant, this finding indicates a positive trend regarding the use of Sesotho in internal communication in the FSPG.

The use of Sesotho in email communication

Thirty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that Sesotho is used in email communication, while 61% indicated that Sesotho is never used as a medium of communication in emails. Overall, this finding proves that the use of Sesotho in email communication is not a common practice in the FSPG. We conclude that this practice is an impediment to the advancement of the use of Sesotho in formal internal communication.

The use of Sesotho during developmental workshops

This finding reveals that 17% of the respondents indicated that employees are never presented with the opportunity to speak Sesotho during developmental workshops. However, the rest of the respondents indicated that employees are afforded the opportunity to express themselves in Sesotho at workshops, although the frequency varies. Only 4% indicated always; 35% indicated about half of the time; 22% indicated seldom; and 22% indicated usually. Sesotho is thus used in official oral communication in the FSPG, albeit not to the extent that it is with English.

Departmental notices are translated into Sesotho

The finding shows that 30% of the respondents indicated that departmental notices are never translated into Sesotho. On the other hand, a marked majority of the respondents (70%) indicated that departmental notices are occasionally translated into Sesotho. Although the findings indicate a significant percentage in the translation of notices, these translations are not produced continuously.

Interdepartmental correspondence is written in Sesotho

The results show that only 30% of the respondents indicated that memos and letters are written in Sesotho, whereas the majority of the respondents (70%) indicated that memos and letters are never written in Sesotho. This finding is indicative of the marginalisation of the use of Sesotho in internal communication at the FSPG.

The next section focuses on the analysis of the use of Sesotho in external communication in the FSPG. The findings are depicted in Table 2, followed by an analysis.

Annual reports of the department are translated into Sesotho

The finding for this statement reveals that only 17% of the respondents indicated that departmental annual reports are sometimes translated into Sesotho, while the majority of 83% of the respondents agreed that they are never translated into Sesotho. This is a cause for concern because this finding could be interpreted as the FSPG's lack of commitment towards advancing the use of Sesotho in official external government publications.

Table 2: Responses regarding the use of Sesotho in external communication

Item	Never (%)	Seldom (%)	Occasionally (%)	Usually (%)	Always (%)
7 Annual reports of the department are translated into Sesotho.	83%	4%	4%	9%	0%
8 Advertisements for vacancies are published in Sesotho.	74%	17%	4%	5%	0%
9 Sesotho interpreters are present during employment interviews.	62%	29%	5%	4%	0%
10 Official forms are made available in Sesotho.	61%	26%	9%	0%	4%
11 Documents about services rendered by departments are published in Sesotho.	26%	26%	22%	17%	9%
12 Educational pamphlets are made available in Sesotho.	22%	17%	13%	26%	22%

Advertisements for vacancies are published in Sesotho

In this respect, the finding indicates that 26% of the respondents indicated that advertisements issued by the FSPG to the general public are rarely published in Sesotho. Conversely, 74% of the respondents indicated that advertisements for vacancies in their respective departments are never published in Sesotho. Overall, this finding signifies that Sesotho is hardly ever used in official advertisements.

Sesotho interpreters are present during employment interviews

The majority of the respondents (62%) indicated that employment interviews are never conducted with the assistance of a Sesotho interpreter. The remainder of the respondents conceded the following: 29% said that employment interviews are seldom conducted with the intervention of a Sesotho interpreter; 5% that employment interviews are conducted in the presence of a Sesotho interpreter about half of the time; and 4% that employment interviews are usually conducted in English with the assistance of Sesotho interpreters. We conclude that the lack of interpreting services not only continues to marginalise the role of Sesotho, but it also disenfranchises interviewees who are L1 speakers of Sesotho.

Official forms are made available in Sesotho

This finding indicates that 39% of the respondents conceded that all official forms are occasionally made available in Sesotho. On the contrary, the majority of the respondents (61%) indicated that official forms for public consumption are never made available in Sesotho. This finding does not affirm the role of Sesotho as an official medium of government communication.

Documents about services rendered by departments are published in Sesotho

This finding discloses that 26% of the respondents indicated that documents aimed at informing citizens about services rendered by governmental departments are never published in Sesotho. By contrast, the majority of the respondents (74%) indicated that such documents are generally made available in Sesotho. This finding is encouraging and we view it as a positive step towards enhancing the use of Sesotho as an official language of government in the FSPG.

Educational pamphlets are made available in Sesotho

This finding reveals that 22% of the respondents conceded that such pamphlets are never available in Sesotho. Conversely, put together, the majority of the respondents (78%) indicated that educational pamphlets for public consumption are normally made available in Sesotho. It is significant that

Respondent A echoed similar sentiments, stating that

language as a policy area is not highly regarded. Last year (2018), we conducted a survey about the implementation of the provincial language policy across all departments of the FSPG. Our findings revealed that most departments shift their responsibilities to the DSACR. They believe that the responsibility of implementing this language policy lies solely with the DSACR. This year (2019), we requested another meeting with all departments through the Office of the Premier and we are yet to receive a response. We can push, encourage and show them the way but, ultimately, the power is in their hands to implement the policy.

Respondent B also listed budgetary constraints as a hindrance. He remarked that

other departments say that they do not have staff who can execute this mandate. Additionally, they have no budgets to appoint language practitioners.

When asked about their plan of action to ensure that all departments comply with the requirements of the provincial language policy, the respondents gave the following remarks. Respondent A stated that

we are going to have public hearings where we will workshop all departments about the language policy and encourage them to implement the provincial language policy. However, as far as what measures will be taken if departments do not comply with the provincial language policy, I do not have a straight answer at the moment.

Respondent B addressed this question as follows:

We are only going to begin monitoring the implementation of the provincial language policy in all departments in the current financial year because previously our focus was on preparing all departments through our presentations. Firstly, we are going to establish interdepartmental language forums to facilitate the implementation process. Secondly, we are going to check whether all departments have appointed language practitioners or have charged one employee with the responsibility of dealing with language matters. Then, through the reports compiled by language practitioners, we are going to monitor whether the respective departments are complying with the provincial language policy, that is, they are translating policy documents, informational documents and official forms in at least three languages. However, this will be a step-by-step exercise. Lastly, our language unit will compile and submit quarterly reports about the language practices of various departments to the MEC [member of the executive council]. If the departments do not comply with the policy, the MEC will decide on the appropriate punitive measures because the DSACR is mandated to execute this language policy in all departments of the FSPG.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm previous research that despite the constitutional language provisions for multilingualism in the public service, the status and usage of English currently dominates over indigenous African languages in government communication. In earlier research, Phaswana (2000) concluded that the national government was moving towards a monolingual policy, with English serving as the only language of record in Parliament. His findings uncovered that virtually all internal correspondence such as memoranda, notices and minutes were in English, with only a few translations into Afrikaans (Phaswana 2000). We found a similar result in our study. Although the participants indicated that employees' newsletters sometimes provide information in Sesotho and that departmental notices are translated into Sesotho in departments of the FSPG, the findings from the official documents contradict this. We have discovered that internal newsletters from 2015 to date are written exclusively in English. Based on this finding, we deduce that Sesotho and English do not share parity in terms of usage and enjoyment in internal communication. We attribute this to a decision to make English the sole language of record for all internal written communication in departments of the FSPG. We argue that declaring English the only language of record for all internal written communication further strengthens the use and status of English and, conversely, continues to marginalise other official languages of the FSPG, especially Sesotho whose usage and status is currently diminished in official communication. Therefore, we advocate that Sesotho should be used

for internal record-keeping because this could advance its status in the public service and possibly in other spheres of public life.

Concerning external communication, Webb (2002) posits that good governance is based on the full exchange of information between government and its citizens. Furthermore, he maintains that the role of language as an instrument of access and equity should not be ignored in public service. This suggests that government should always endeavour to disseminate information for public consumption in languages other than English, especially indigenous African languages. However, a few studies have reported the trend towards an English-only policy in the public service (LANGTAG 1996; Phaswana 2000; Kamwangamalu 2001).

It has also emerged in the current study that English prevails in the FSPG despite the draft language policy pronouncing that all official government publications must be issued in Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. The questionnaire findings indicated that annual reports are never translated into Sesotho (83%), public advertisements are never published in Sesotho (74%) and forms for public consumption are never available in Sesotho (61%). This finding is confirmed by the result of the official documents. Nevertheless, the findings show some visibility of the use of Sesotho in educational pamphlets and documents describing services offered by various departments. The result of the investigation of official documents also corroborated this finding. Regarding oral communication (employment interviews), 62% of the respondents indicated that employment interviews are conducted exclusively in English without interpreting services. The lack of translation facilities in departments suggests that most Free State citizens (who constitute 64% of Sesotho speakers) are denied access to government information in their own language. Therefore, we argue that the FSPG's failure to translate all official documents, and thus communication for public consumption, implies that citizens of the Free State province who are not proficient in English are excluded from public participation and may not be able to access services.

The findings of the interviews corroborate the marginalisation of Sesotho in departments of the FSPG despite the approval of the *Use of Free State Official Languages Bill*. The respondents submitted that senior government officials do not hold language policy in high regard. Consequently, we conclude that this practice infringes on the very principles declared in the draft language policy, especially 'to promote the equitable use of the three designated official languages of the FSPG, namely Sesotho, Afrikaans and English' (DFSPGLP n.d.: Section 2).

In the next section, we suggest strategies that could be used as a guide in the formulation and implementation of language policies that could enhance the use of Sesotho in departments of the FSPG.

Recommendations: Strategies for elevating the use of Sesotho

Considering the findings regarding the use of Sesotho in formal internal communication in departments of the FSPG, it has come to light that the adoption of English as the only working language of record for written communication is problematic. Therefore, we propose that this current practice (using English as the only working language of record for written communication) be revised. Sesotho should be used alongside English as the language of formal internal written communication to facilitate the flow of communication between staff and management and to reduce the existing gap between the two languages. This means that official correspondence such as minutes of all departmental meetings, employees' newsletters and departmental notices should also be made available in Sesotho.

The findings regarding the use of Sesotho in formal external communication reveal that most citizens in the Free State province do not always access government information in their own language, that is, Sesotho. Consequently, we call for all departments of the FSPG to appoint translators in all departments to ensure that departmental annual reports, public advertisements, official forms, brochures of departmental services and educational pamphlets for public consumption are always translated into Sesotho. Additionally, interpreters should be employed in all departments to facilitate oral communication between members of the public and government officials as well as among staff members from different language backgrounds.

Lastly, we recommend that the DSACR and PanSALB should continue to conduct workshops with senior management in all departments of the FSPG to conscientise them about the implementation of the language policy in their respective departments. Thereafter, they should establish language units in all departments to regularly monitor whether all official languages of the FSPG are used equally as proposed in the language policy. As a strategy to encourage multilingualism, the DSACR and PanSALB should devise punitive measures for non-compliance that could be implemented in cases of defiance in the departments of the FSPG.

Conclusion

In this study, we aimed to investigate the frequency with which Sesotho is used as an official medium of internal and external communication in government departments in the Free State province as proposed in the draft Free State Provincial Government Language Policy. The results indicate that Sesotho is virtually never used in written internal communication in the directorates of communication or in the language services in the FSPG. Furthermore, the general findings regarding the usage of Sesotho for purposes of external communication in the FSPG indicated that, at the time of the investigation, English prevailed at the expense of Sesotho. Given this position, we conclude that the study has clearly established the extent to which Sesotho is currently used in formal internal communication. This applies to formal external communication as can be gauged from the responses of the participants and official government documents. The practical implication of the study is that the findings can be used to formulate and implement future language policies that will benefit Free State citizens, particularly those who speak Sesotho as an L1. Future research might continue to investigate the attitudes of Sesotho speakers regarding the use of Sesotho as a medium of official government communication in the Mangaung Metro Municipality.

Endnotes

¹ Following the approval of the *Use of Free State Official Languages Bill* in 2017, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Setswana were designated official languages alongside Sesotho, Afrikaans and English in the Free State.

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