

The Standardisation of the Ndebele Language Through Dictionary-making

Samukele Hadebe

Should we think of the Ndebele language as the language spoken among the Zimbabwean Ndebele, or as a branch of Zulu?

Should the Zulu language be seen as the measuring rod of Ndebele, or should the Ndebele language stand on its own?

These were the issues confronting Ndebele lexicographers when they in 1997 started work on the first monolingual dictionary of Ndebele.

The Ndebele lexicographers had a corpus of spoken and written Ndebele to base the dictionary on. Basing the dictionary entirely on the corpus would mean excluding Zulu.

The possibility of abandoning Zulu posed two problems:

- Firstly, Zulu is prestigious among the Ndebele people. Would abandoning Zulu lead to rejection of the dictionary?
- Secondly, if Zulu is no longer setting the standard, then a new norm must be founded on the various regional varieties of Ndebele.

Samukele Hadebe's research into the standardisation process of the Ndebele language was motivated by the production of the first monolingual Ndebele dictionary *Isichazamazwi SesiNdebele* (2001), of which he was chief editor.

The thesis discusses the standardising role of the Ndebele dictionary in vocabulary, terminology and orthography. Editors had to decide on vocabulary selection, pronunciation, spelling and terminology, as well as how to deal with loanwords from different sources. In this book, Samukele Hadebe explores aspects of language planning, lexicography and corpus linguistics, and shows how these disciplines in different ways contributed to creating a path for the standardisation of the Ndebele language.

Published by
the **ALLEX Project**

the African Languages Research Institute, University of Zimbabwe
the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo.

ISBN 82-90954-29-8

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