Afrikaans: Current Language Policies Of South Africa

This paper will discuss the past and current language policies of South Africa and how the influence of English is aiding the demise of indigenous languages; shown through various articles and research from South African and other world linguistics. Currently, South Africa has eleven official languages. An official language can be defined as a language or several languages that are given “explicit codified or legislated standing within a government system or organisation” (Thompson, 2014, p764). They are used for official documents, teaching, government, laws and so on (Thompson, 2014). With such a large number of languages, it isn’t surprising that English is an Official Language in South Africa. English is seen as a global language, used as a Lingua Franca between countries for communication, trade and other business-related means (Kamwangamalu, 2003). Slowly it has been arising as a Lingua Franca within minority elite groups in South Africa (Kamwangamalu, 2001). By analysing the history of South Africa, you can understand why the English language continues to rise in popularity.

South Africa has experienced a lot of controversy surrounding language throughout history and has been subject to varying amounts of language change. The first suppression of the indigenous languages began with the permanent arrival of the Dutch in 1652 (Alexander, 2013). During this period, Dutch quickly become the superior language, leaving speakers of indigenous languages to dramatically declined (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017). In 1806, Britain officially colonized South Africa (Brenzinger, 2017). Their main goal was to replace Dutch with English as the dominant language (Brenzinger, 2017). However, were more lenient than the Dutch (Kamwangamalu, 2003). In fact, several local languages were codified for both educational and religious purposes and primary-level teaching of indigenous African languages was allowed (Kamwangamalu, 2003). It is important to note that many members of the local population developed positive attitudes towards the English culture and language (Kamwangamalu, 2003). Though this seems like a turning point, this was at the expense of their own cultures and languages. In 1925, Afrikaans (a language derived from Dutch, Khoisan, Asian and African languages) became an official language of South Africa, alongside English (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017). However it should be noted, Afrikaans was regarded as a tool for segregation and was associated with the previous Dutch control (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was introduced by the government which was still under rule (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). The act encouraged learning of the African mother-tongue languages amongst indigenous children (Kamwangamalu, 2003). The public resisted the Bantu Education Act, as they perceived the teaching of languages other than English in school, as an attempt to further segregate them from the ‘superior Afrikaans or English speakers’ (Brenzinger, 2017). Young Indigenous pupils resisted, their considering the Act as a ploy by the government to stop them from pursuing well-paying jobs predominantly given to the higher class, more prestigious people (Kamwangamalu, 2003). African languages were rendered valueless economically, locally as well as internationally (Kamwangamalu, 2003). With no surprise two decades later the Bantu Act led to the Soweto uprisings in 1976 (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). The uprising resulted in an estimated 150 - 700 people being killed (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). Further creating a strain between the urban black communities and the government (Kamwangamalu, 2003). It leads them to perceive their language as more inferior in regards to education (Kamwangamalu, 2003). African mother-tongue language learning is still

heavily stigmatized today (Alexander, 2013); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). In 1993 South Africa become a democracy; after many political and social debates, nine more languages pertained to official status (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). The nine languages are as follows, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho Sa Leboa, Setswana, Tshivenda, Sesotho, Xitsonga, siSwati, and isiNdebele (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). These are indigenous languages found amongst communities throughout South Africa, isiZulu being the most widely spoken (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017). These nine languages alongside English and Afrikaans make up the official eleven languages of South Africa (Alexander, 2013); (Brenzinger, 2017); (Kamwangamalu, 2003). But passing language policies like this do come with risks like Language Shift.