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## **African language publishing for children in South Africa: challenges for translators**

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The commitment to multilingualism embedded in the 1996 South African Constitution has wide ranging implications for many aspects of education. This paper focuses on the dearth of teaching and learning materials in African languages required to deliver effective bilingual education, and on the potential role of translation in offering solutions for this problem. Drawing on an analysis of currently available African language books for children and interviews with educators, writers, publishers, translators and organisations concerned with book promotion, it explores issues which have emerged as critical for both the quality and availability of translation. Attention is drawn to the ways in which translation can be perceived to either help or hinder the process of introducing children to reading materials in African languages. The challenges of working in the highly specialised field of children's literature with languages that have undergone varying degrees of standardisation are described. Finally, the tendency to translate mainly into the larger, more commercially viable languages is considered, together with suggestions for ways in which publishers might be persuaded to translate across *all* official languages.

**Keywords:** translation; children's books; African languages; South Africa; language policy; learning materials

### **Introduction**

In a radical departure from the apartheid era, the 1996 South African Constitution recognises nine official African languages<sup>1</sup> – isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga – in addition to English and Afrikaans. The new focus on multilingualism has wide ranging implications. In order to implement the language-in-education policies which flow logically from the constitution, there is an urgent need for new pedagogies, new approaches to teacher training and new materials.

This paper focuses, in particular, on the dearth of teaching and learning materials in African languages and the potential role of translation in offering solutions for this problem. Part of a larger study of African language publishing for children,<sup>2</sup> it draws on an analysis of African language books for children available at the time of writing and interviews with key players in the book value chain. It examines the complex interdependence between translators, publishers and the education sector and the current stalemate produced by the slow implementation of bilingual

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education. In particular, it explores issues which have emerged as critical for both the quality and availability of translation: Does translation help or hinder the process of introducing children to reading materials in African languages? What are the challenges of working in the highly specialised field of children's literature and with languages that have undergone varying degrees of standardisation? And how can publishers be persuaded to translate across *all* official African languages and not simply the larger, more commercially viable ones?

In order to explore these issues, it is important first to provide some background information on both language-in-education policy and the South African publishing industry.

### **Language-in-education policy in South Africa**

The radical approach to the realities of multilingualism adopted as part of the new political dispensation in post-apartheid South Africa was the result of a compromise between the National Party, which favoured the continuation of Afrikaans and English as co-official languages, and the African National Congress, which preferred English as the only official language. It is less cumbersome than it might at first appear: the distribution of the languages is such that most provinces need accommodate only three (Heugh 2007; Webb 2002).<sup>3</sup>

Various South African policies and legislative tools, including the 1996 Constitution, the 1996 South Africa Schools Act, the Language in Education Policy (Department of Education [DoE] 1997), the National Curriculum Statement (DoE 2001), the National Language Policy Framework (Department of Arts and Culture [DAC] 2003a) and the Implementation Plan (DAC 2003b), provide support for what Alexander (2005) terms mother-tongue-based bilingual education.

Growing criticism has been aimed, however, at the South African 'forked tongue' approach (Kaschula 2001), which promotes multilingualism at the level of rhetoric but offers little practical support for implementation. The current situation was summed up by Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education 2009) in the following terms:

Where African languages are used as languages of learning and teaching, they are used only in the Foundation Phase<sup>4</sup> in schools serving predominantly 'African' learners, after which English takes over as the medium of instruction. The transition to English as the language of learning and teaching in these schools often happens too abruptly and often before learners have fully developed the necessary cognitive skills in their home languages. It is against this background that the Language Colloquium, which was hosted by the then Minister of Education in 2006, recommended the use of mother tongue instruction up to grade six. In response to this recommendation, two provinces have initiated pilot projects to implement mother tongue instruction from grade one to six, namely, the Western Cape [sixteen (16) schools] and the Eastern Cape [one (1) school].

### **Publishing in South Africa**

Although the vast majority of books published in South Africa are in English and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans (DAC 2008), African language publishing is not a new development. Missionaries began producing teaching resources for African children in the early nineteenth century, and the Church continued to play an active role in education until a separate Bantu system was introduced in the apartheid era. It is

ironic that African language publishing received a boost during this period though, as Mpe (1999) comments, its 'abundance was characterised by intellectual, critical and imaginative mediocrity'.

One of the defining characteristics of publishing across the continent is the heavy dependence on the education sector. South Africa, where 74% of all books are destined for the schools market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2008), is no exception. Delays in the implementation of bilingual education thus have far-reaching implications. Publishers are reluctant to invest without a market-spend large enough to make African language publishing viable. The absence of teaching materials, in turn, affects the willingness of teachers to use African languages as the medium of instruction.

Developments in pedagogy inevitably influence the kinds of reading material found in classrooms. Traditionally, literacy was seen as a set of discrete skills to be acquired and orchestrated; teachers offered practice in relevant skills through decontextualised exercises (Edwards 2009). The relatively recent move to a more holistic approach requires children to emulate the behaviour of real readers and writers in order to learn, read and produce meaningful texts. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia, these changes have resulted in a shift in balance in teaching from reading schemes or basal readers to 'real books' – well produced, attractive stories which avoid the weaknesses of earlier artificial texts, constructed to teach key vocabulary or particular sounds (Edwards 2009). The same principle applied to African contexts logically requires the use of local languages which allow children to harness their knowledge of life and language in order to draw meaning from, rather than simply decoding the text.

The use of real books is starting to become established in South African schools (Edwards 2008), assisted by national and provincial book promotion campaigns. Most books, however, are published in English. While there is a ready market for real books outside school in the North, most publishers in South Africa feel that expansion into the trade market with African language books is unrealistic, citing reasons such as the pervasiveness of oral culture, lack of disposable income and low levels of literacy. Edwards and Ngwaru (2010) argue that this interpretation is overly simplistic, pointing to evidence that Africans *do* read when the content is affordable, accessible and of interest.

## **Methods**

This study draws on both documentary and interview data. The document analysis is based on the main sources of information on African language publications for children – the 2007 Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) *Writing in Nine Tongues* catalogue and its 2008 and 2009 supplements, and the 2008 *Catalogue of South African Literature* published by the DAC.

The interview data focus on the opinions and experiences not only of translators but also of a broad range of other stakeholders in children's publishing, including authors, editors, educationalists, representatives of book promotion organisations and policy-makers. In some cases, the same individual undertakes several different roles: for instance, translators may also be authors and editors. Initial contact was made via an announcement distributed by email to members of the Publishers Association of South Africa. Key policy-makers were identified in conversation with publishers and non-government organisations (NGOs) and approached directly.

Additional participants were located through personal networks and approaches to exhibitors at the Cape Town International Book Fair. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken either on a one-to-one basis or with small groups from the same organisation or company.

As part of a wider study of African language publishing, the interviews covered issues well beyond translation and sometimes dealt with commercially sensitive issues. For this reason, participants were given assurances of confidentiality and, except where given explicit permission, are referred to by their role (e.g. editor, publisher), rather than by name. Some 20 hours of interviews were transcribed and analysed using HyperResearch, a cross-platform qualitative data analysis programme. The extracts coded under headings relating to translation are reported in this paper.

### **Problem or solution?**

In the words of Nelson Mandela: 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart'. The boom in translation in South Africa followed immediately on the end of the apartheid era in 1994 and, since that time, children's publishing has provided a regular flow of work for translators. By no means, all children's books, however, are translated across all the official languages. Of those which are, most originate in English. The demand for translation is related to the language; more titles are translated into widely spoken languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Sesotho than into smaller languages such as isiNdebele, Sepedi, SiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga (see also Kruger 2009).

While it is widely recognised that good quality materials in African languages are a prerequisite for the success of bilingual education, there is some disagreement within South Africa as to how this can best be achieved. The potential of translation to greatly increase output with minimal effort is clear. Neville Alexander, pioneer in the field of language policy and planning in South Africa, explained the approach taken by PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa), the NGO which he directs, as 'to use what's good wherever it is', 'to develop as quickly as possible a body of material that everyone can share' (Edwards 2008). Translation can also be justified as a form of cultural sharing which has shaped all societies across the centuries. Viewed as an act of re-creation – as art rather than science – it allows for sharing and reciprocal development between readers and writers of different languages. As Kelly (1979, 1) points out, Western Europe from the Roman Empire to what is now the European Union owes its civilisation to translators.

Not all, however, feel comfortable with the use of translation as a way of increasing the amount of reading material for children. Concern is expressed, for instance, about the cultural appropriateness of some of the books being translated into African languages. As one of the publishers we interviewed commented:

We realised that, more often than not, translations don't really reflect the aspirations and the concerns of the very target groups that we try to develop these materials for. So we would rather now go for original texts than translations.

Another worry is that translation is detrimental to the development of original literature in African languages, a view implicit, for instance, in the Ithuba Project,<sup>5</sup> which insists that materials are generated in the mother tongue.

It is very difficult to build an accurate picture of the role of translation in African language publishing for children (Kruger 2009). None of the sources of information on African language books for children (DAC 2008; Publishers Association of South Africa 2007, 2008, 2009) give information on the language of origination. Analysis needs therefore to be based on indirect evidence. Authors' names often give an indication: English and Afrikaans names are usually easily distinguished; it is also often possible to distinguish, for instance, between Nguni and Sotho<sup>6</sup> names, though finer differentiation is more difficult. A further complication is that many African authors write in English. Another method – albeit tedious – is to identify different versions of a book by looking at the jacket illustration in the catalogues; however, not all entries include jackets.

Two sample analyses, however, give an indication of the trends. The first (see Figure 1) is based on the 2007 *Writing in Nine Tongues* catalogue.<sup>7</sup> It shows that with the exception of Setswana, the number of original works exceeds the number of translations.

The second (see Figure 2) is based on an analysis by age of original and translated titles in the 2009 supplement to *Writing in Nine Tongues* and throws further light on what is happening.

A large proportion of the titles, then, in fact originated in African languages; the majority of translations are targeted at the early and middle childhood market. This would suggest that translation is being used as a cost-effective means of meeting the perceived need to provide books in African languages for younger children and most of the translations at these lower levels are 'readers' – series of books of increasing levels of difficulty written expressly for the purpose of teaching children to read. With older students, where the emphasis is more on literary value than on the development of reading skills and strategies, almost all titles originated in African languages. Translation, it would seem, is not currently a threat to original writing.

### Challenges for translators

The pool of people available to undertake the translation of books for children is small and complaints about the quality of translation are frequent. Ongoing challenges for translators include the high level of specialism required for working with children's literature and issues around standardisation.

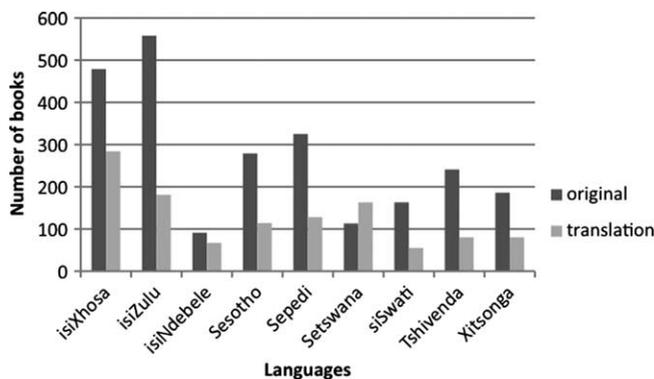


Figure 1. Numbers of original and translated books by language.

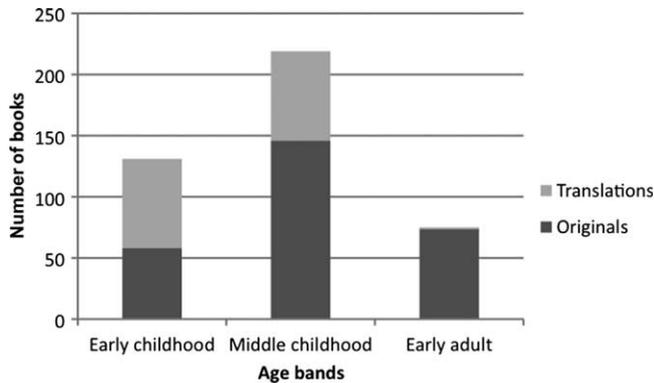


Figure 2. Numbers of originals and translations by age group in PASA 2009.

### *Specialist skills*

Children's books in English have been available since the seventeenth century (Hunt 1995). Although this tradition has a shorter history in the Afrikaner community, children's literature in Afrikaans has been thriving since the 1950s. In contrast, the emergence of 'real books' in other official languages is a very recent development. Very few African authors write in their first languages and manuscripts submitted to publishers are usually in English. The situation of African languages in South Africa, of course, is by no means unique. As Nikolayeva (2010) points out, many countries are just starting to develop their national children's literature and are filling gaps with translations.

Translating for children is widely considered to be more difficult than translating for adults because of the need to take into consideration the implied reader – the fluent child reader or the adult reading to the child. Picture books, where word and image work to produce an inseparable whole, are by far the largest category of children's books and create particular challenges. The text needs to 'talk' – or closely relate – to the pictures on the same page and translators need to be able to 'read' this relationship. In addition, the space available for the translation can be problematic when different languages require different amounts of text. Translators also need to deal with visual cultural differences such as the symbolism of colours or different attitudes towards animals. A further complication is that picture books are intended to be read aloud to children. Translators therefore need to take account of features that affect the rhythmic totality of performance, including sentence length, punctuation, page openings and turnings (Dollerup 2003; Oittinen 2003).

It is also the case that children's books are more likely to be *adapted* to the need of the target audience than to be translated, a process which can involve additions as well as deletions. There is very little consensus about what constitutes a 'good' translation of a children's book (Nikolayeva 2010; O'Connell 2006). Some translators emphasise truth to the text; others attach greater importance to being true to the reader, believing that change is sometimes essential if the translated text is to work for the target audience. Cultural differences also play a role, as witnessed by the move towards what Oittinen (2003, 132) calls 'domestication' in many South African books for children. One such example is the retelling of Pinocchio (Guzula et al. 2007) where the fairy godmother was transformed into an elder and the three

wise men trying to heal Pinocchio become a sangoma, a traditional healer and a modern doctor, in order to speak to the experience of African children.

Writing for children in African languages is very much a case of work in progress (Edwards and Ngwaru 2010). As an editor pointed out: 'You can't write the rules until you've done the work'. For the same reason, translators are also feeling their way. Typical comments included 'I am learning these things by doing it and looking at edited stuff, experienced writers and translators'. Translators operating in this field need not only be proficient linguists but also have an in-depth knowledge of books for children, and there is a serious shortage of people with the relevant breadth of experience. This situation is, of course, by no means limited to African languages. A similar scenario has been described, for instance, in relation to the problems experienced in producing Asian language translations of children's books in the United Kingdom (Edwards and Walker 1995).

Successful translations are often the result of teamwork and negotiation. Ottinen (2003, 129) talks of a 'multivoiced situation, where illustrators, authors, translators, publishers and different readers meet and influence each other'. Translation of children's books into African languages is further complicated by the need to show respect to elders. Two junior members of a translation team we interviewed described how they find themselves deferring at various points to the senior member:

She [the senior translator] certainly knows the language ... So sometimes she would say the word order is not right – this is maybe how we should be writing it. Whereas we came from the story side, we know the stories, we know how young children learn ...

Given the current stage of development, quality control is an important issue. Large publishers tend to send texts for translation to specialist agencies. Small publishers and NGOs sometimes handle translation in-house when working with a small number of familiar languages, but increasingly this work is outsourced. As explained by the director of a translation agency, one of the advantages of agency translation is the anonymity which it affords:

[In ideal circumstances] before it goes to quality control, it goes through three phases with us ... translation, editing and proof reading, by three different people working independently. They don't know each other, they work together in a forum, talking [virtually] to each other but not knowing it's Nick, or whoever ... The thing is, as soon as you do that, it could be all about 'She said Professor whatever ...', and you get the status thing ... So they work ... with each other without knowing who the other person is.

The professionalisation of translators with the relevant specialist skills, then, is an ongoing process. Neville Alexander describes the development over eight and more years of Xhosa colleagues in the PRAESA Early Literacy Unit. Through extensive experience of using good quality books with children in schools and reading clubs, they can now legitimately consider themselves experts in both isiXhosa and in children's literature, with a feel not only for whether the words are grammatically correct but also for the aesthetics of whether or not they work in isiXhosa. People such as these are laying a strong foundation on which others can build. He stresses the importance of a developmental perspective:

People are not willing to accept that this is a process of trial and error and it's going to take possibly generations – certainly a number of years – until we get to the point where in each of the language families or language groups, there is sufficient expertise that you don't require that process any more ... People somehow think it's an admission of

African inferiority when you insist on this sort of thing. And it's nonsense! Every other language has done that, [including] Afrikaans. We can shorten the process now because we have the technology – we've got the computers and translation programmes – but you can't evade it.

### *Standardisation*

The translation of African language literature for children is further complicated by the varying stages of standardisation of the different languages. Two competing trends can be detected in African linguistics: diversification and homogenisation. At one extreme, it is estimated that in excess of 2000 languages are spoken in Africa; at the other extreme, some writers contend that 75–80% of all sub-Saharan Africans speak one of between 12 and 16 root languages (Prah 2009).

The situation in South Africa reflects the colonial propensity for diversification. The nine languages other than English and Afrikaans recognised in the South African constitution are the same languages that were used for educational and administrative purposes in the various Bantustans under apartheid. These, in turn, are the product of the pioneering work of Europeans to commit speech to writing (Gilmour 2007). Competition between missionaries resulted in the arbitrary fragmentation of the linguistic landscape. In reality, we are dealing with linguistic continua and not separate languages; speakers at adjacent points on a continuum are able to understand each other, those at the furthest points may experience difficulties. Thus, instead of having one Nguni language, South Africans today talk in terms of isiZulu, isiXhosa, SiSwati and isiNdebele as separate languages; instead of treating Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho as varieties of Sotho, they are considered distinct. The different orthographies developed by missionaries also have the effect of emphasizing diversity rather than commonalities.

This history has serious implications for African publishing today. On the one hand, there can be no doubt about the high levels of mutual intelligibility among different varieties. On some occasions, this closeness gives rise to practical problems. One publisher, for instance, talked about the confusion of warehouse staff in dealing with Sepedi and Setswana versions of a book on herding cattle where the titles were differentiated only by a diacritic on one of the letters.

On the other hand, even small differences are associated with particular identities. Missionaries who had invested considerable time and effort in developing orthographies were predictably anxious to defend their intellectual property. Language identification, of course, remains a highly political and sociocultural exercise; having made a personal investment in learning a particular orthography or variety, most people, including translators, demonstrate strong loyalty to that variety. Publishers were very aware of the resulting tensions:

If we develop materials in Setswana, you will find that people, say in Kimberley or areas outside the Hurutsi, look at those materials and say: 'Ah, this isn't proper Setswana, this isn't my Setswana, this is Hurutsi Setswana'. And it's true of all our languages – isiXhosa, isiZulu, whatever you would like to mention. There are in some instances quite significant variations that are considered unacceptable by other speakers of the same language.

The Zulu spoken in Gauteng . . . will not be regarded as the proper Zulu in the province of KwaZulu. So when we were doing our Life Skills in Grade 3 books . . . if the

translator happened to be a Zulu-speaking person from Gauteng, we would get somebody to double check it . . . from KwaZulu. They would often disagree. I mean – to put it mildly – they would have some flat out fights about what was the right language.

Differences of this kind also limit the opportunities for cross-border publishing in isiNdebele with Zimbabwe, SiSwati with Swaziland, Sesotho with Lesotho, Setswana with Botswana and Xitsonga with Mozambique.

South Africa boasts one of the most successful examples of the twentieth century of what can be achieved through language planning. Afrikaans was successfully transformed over a relatively short period of time from a low-status, largely spoken variety to the vehicle of education and administration in a struggle fuelled by grassroots activism and subsidised by private enterprise (Giliomee 2003). The post-1994 government, in an attempt to provide similar support for other African languages, established the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) with responsibility to develop the 11 official languages and promote multilingualism. PanSALB, in turn, has established lexicography units for each of the official languages. In addition, the DAC includes a section directorate charged with Terminology Coordination. Attitudes towards the ‘nine tongues’, however, are more complex than attitudes towards Afrikaans and many speakers attach more credence to English than to their mother tongues as the route to progress (Trudell 2010).

Much of the work in the development of terminology was in fact accomplished during the apartheid period and is still relevant today. The current challenge is therefore to update and maintain this work, a task which Heugh (2006, 145) considers can be achieved with relatively little investment, extrapolating from the US\$12,000 budget for the Sepedi translation of school leaving examinations in science in Northern Sotho. The fact that Sepedi is closely related to Sesotho and Setswana, she argues, will facilitate terminology development in these languages, which will therefore cost less:

Based on this, the estimated cost to develop sufficient terminology for use in nine South African languages and to cover: mathematics, science, biology, geography, history and economics to the end of secondary school would cost about US\$550,000. At least five South African languages are shared with neighbouring countries, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Thus investment in terminology which is very much affordable in South Africa could assist neighbouring countries and reduce the required investment by its neighbours.

For the moment at least, PanSALB, the various lexicography units and the DAC Terminology Coordination Section Directorate do not seem to be keeping pace with the needs of the publishing industry. One of the publishers we interviewed had positive experience of consulting with both the isiXhosa and SiSwati lexicography units; others, however, complained that the time required for a response was impractical.

The work that remains to be done in the area of terminology has important implications for the economics of translation. As the director of an agency explained:

[In] European languages you can average roughly 2500 words per day. African languages, you cut it down to 1100 per day, so less than half . . . if there’s not a term, it needs to be described. There’s a lot more thinking going into developing the languages.

One positive step being taken by agencies in addressing issues of efficiency is the upgrading of the computer literacy skills of freelance African language translators in an industry which has become increasingly dependent on information technology.

### **How many language versions?**

The experience of co-publishing different language versions in Europe and Asia offers an obvious way forwards for publishers involved in multilingual publishing projects in South Africa (Edwards 2007; Pellowski 1980, 78). In colour printing, different layers of colour are added as the pages pass through the press. On the fourth run, black is added. By stopping the press to change the black plate for each new language, it is possible to achieve economies of scale by combining different languages in one large print run. Why, then, are South African publishers failing to fully exploit this approach as a means of rapidly increasing the volume of African language literature available for children through translation?

Small publishers tend to be committed in principle to publishing in all the official languages, but they have difficulty in raising the necessary funds. In one case, the cost of marketing made it unrealistic to consider producing books in languages other than those spoken in the region where it was based. In another, the company's ability to publish across all official languages was dependent on obtaining orders from NGOs, such as the book distribution charity, *Biblionef*.

Publishers' comments leave little doubt that decisions about which languages to translate are driven by potential sales. Most books are translated into isiXhosa, isiZulu and Afrikaans; smaller languages such as isiNdebele and Tshivenda are frequently overlooked. The same educational rationale for making languages available in the larger languages, however, applies to these smaller languages. One of the small companies that publish wherever possible in all official languages was highly critical of the evident reluctance to translate demonstrated by many larger companies:

If you're looking at a language like isiNdebele, you might only ever print 200 copies of that title, so it will never be in your interests or worthwhile to do it . . . To do them in all the 11 languages, I think is a moral responsibility.

While the publisher in question admits that her commitment to translation owes more to her personal passion than to income generation, this course of action has not entailed financial loss, particularly when titles are approved by education departments and orders begin to arrive:

We got some fabulous orders in from Gauteng last year on the smaller language groups. In Xitsonga we had an order of 900 books, which is unusual. The support is starting to come through. We've seen trickles of orders starting to come through in Setswana and Sesotho as well.

Publishers often explained their reluctance to expand across all the official languages in terms of their frustrations around the translation process, which was sometimes perceived to be as costly as originating materials in African languages. Others were critical of this viewpoint:

There are those who feel they have to have an authority who will tell them whether something is correct or incorrect: 'There's no established orthography, so it can't be done' . . . To me this is simply an excuse to get out of doing what you can right now. It becomes a way of explaining why you don't do something.

Two of the publishers we interviewed took a more strategic view. The Stories Across Africa<sup>8</sup> project, for instance, has already prepared 26 language versions of its *Little Hands* books in anticipation of future orders:

Why can't one get material to print ready stage, sitting there so that when you get orders you print? And then you can then piggyback the languages. The thing is to conceptualize material so that it works for various languages, and [other publishers] don't seem to be really doing that.

One multinational company operating in South Africa is already beginning to work along these lines:

Often now we do a translation, we get the books ready but we don't necessarily print in those languages. But we have the books ready so that we can submit promotional copies and then print when the orders come through.

The move towards a national book procurement process offers another possible way forwards. Book procurement in South Africa is complex, with responsibility at provincial level for the first 10 years of school, while texts for the last 3 years are selected from a national approval list. This situation is further complicated by the fact that different provinces operate different systems. Calls for submissions come at different times, making it difficult to respond; there are also cost implications for submissions to different provinces. The coordination of the approvals process and a centralised placement of orders would make it possible to include languages other than English and Afrikaans in the same print run, thus reducing the unit cost of some of the less widely spoken languages. This approach would serve as a powerful incentive for publishers to produce books in a wider range of languages.

### **Taking stock**

If South Africa is to succeed in implementing the policy of mother-tongue-based bilingual education to which it is committed in principle, there will be a pressing need to produce good quality reading materials for children in African languages. This process is already under way: growing numbers of books are available in all nine tongues. There is, however, a divergence of opinion about the best way to proceed. Some commentators express concern not only about the cultural appropriateness of the materials to be translated but also about the detrimental effect which translation may have on the development of original writing in African languages. However, given that a large proportion of books currently available – and nearly all those written for older children – originated in African languages, such concerns would seem to be ill founded. And while it is essential that the content is culturally appropriate, it is also important to remember that translation offers a potentially quick and cost-effective way of increasing the number and range of materials for children. This does not, of course, remove the need to develop original writing in African languages at all levels.

Various challenges remain. Translators of children's books need not only be linguistically proficient but also have an intimate knowledge of children's books. For as long as the pool of people with the appropriate experience remains limited, the quality of translation is likely to be variable. Cultural issues also need to be taken into consideration. While good translations are often the product of teamwork, the need to defer to the senior member of the team does not always result in the best end

product. As translation becomes increasingly professionalised, it is interesting to note that publishers are increasingly outsourcing work to agencies. This approach has the advantage of ensuring input from three sources – the translator, the editor and the proofreader – who, by working virtually and anonymously on the same project, are able to bypass status issues.

While problems of standardisation are very real, the current emphasis on the differences between the various official languages also has the effect of masking the commonalities within the Nguni and Sotho clusters. In the absence of greater levels of support from the PanSALB, the national lexicography units and the DAC, *de facto* responsibility resides with translators and standardisation will proceed at a much slower pace than would otherwise be the case.

In some cases, publishers use disagreements between speakers as an excuse for their reluctance to translate across all the official languages. This attitude overlooks the fact that both the standardisation of English and Afrikaans and the development of children's literature in these languages have taken place over long periods of time. In short, it fails to recognise that the emergence of children's literature in African languages is a work in progress and underestimates the advances which have already been achieved.

Equally pertinent, publishers are failing to recognise the implications for equality of opportunity when they provide translations in some languages and not others. The rationale for ensuring that children have a sound foundation in the mother tongue is that this policy is associated with better educational outcomes. It is therefore unacceptable to provide more learning materials for larger groups, such as the Zulu and Xhosa, than for smaller groups such as the Ndebele and Venda.

The difficulty in accessing the finance necessary to market books helps to explain the tendency of smaller publishers to focus on languages spoken in provinces close to their base. This constraint does not affect the larger publishers. Their reluctance to spread the costs of smaller languages across the project as a whole and focus instead on the larger markets is driven by commercial considerations, and symptomatic of the post-Fordian world in which children's books are marketed like soap. We would do well, however, to remind ourselves of the role of individuals in this process. As Coser (1984, cited in Taxel 2010, 484) reminds us:

It is essential that we always keep in mind that while people operate within the limits of a variety of constraints, the market being a major example of such constraints, there remains a domain of choices that involves the possibility of 'doing otherwise'.

## Notes

1. Some linguists also consider Afrikaans to be an African language. We exclude it from the present discussion not on linguistic grounds but because, unlike the other official African languages, original and translated works for children in Afrikaans are far more widely available in South Africa. The term 'nine tongues' is used to distinguish the other African languages from Afrikaans.
2. Interdisciplinary perspectives on African language materials for children, a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust 2008–2010.
3. We acknowledge that the situation is more complex than this description might suggest. In-migration from other African countries, for instance, adds new layers of linguistic diversity.
4. The Foundation phase cover grades R[ception] to 3.

5. A project sponsored by USAID in collaboration with the DoE, the University of Texas, Read Educational Trust and the Molteno Project to develop learning materials in all official languages.
6. Four of the official languages of South Africa (isiZulu, isXhosa, SiSwati and isiNdebele) belong to the Nguni family; three (Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho) belong to the Sotho family.
7. The data are extrapolated from an analysis undertaken by Clive Gillitt.
8. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/praesaelu.html>

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