

# Review Report on isiXhosa translation of the Nal'ibali Supplements

By Xolisa Guzula

Translator and NGAP Lecturer & Doctoral Student; Multilingualism and Multiliteracies Education; School of Education; University of Cape Town

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## The brief

Below are the two extracts from the JET evaluation of the Supplement, which we are seeking to respond to in this review. The idea is to interrogate the feedback below by looking at the particular Supplements reviewed in the evaluation: Supplements 137 to 140 (inclusive) and providing

- a response to the evaluation feedback in terms of the language used in the stories as well as in other parts of the Supplements
- any other feedback on the use of isiXhosa in these Supplements, including anything related to making the Supplement language more easily accessible, if applicable.

### JET EVALUATION EXTRACTS

#### EXTRACT 1:

*Sepedi and isiXhosa FGD participants gave some negative feedback regarding translation from English to Sepedi and the isiXhosa vocabulary being confusing. However, it was noted that these concerns apply to reading materials in general. Similarly, it was noted there are various dialects of isiXhosa in use in different parts of the country and it is unlikely that a translation would suit everyone.*

#### EXTRACT 2:

*These questions were responded to by the following number of respondents: Afrikaans (25), isiXhosa (163), isiZulu (131), Sepedi (115), and Sesotho (36). Feedback on the language choices of Nal'ibali was almost entirely positive. Of the five languages polled, there were only three instances out of a total of 20 questions (four questions, five languages), when respondent disagreement was at, or above, 10%. These were:*

1. *Is the way isiXhosa used easy to understand? 12% negative (9% disagree, 3% strongly disagree).*

2. *Is the way isiXhosa used similar to the language I use every day? 14% negative (9% disagree, 5% strongly disagree).*

*It is worth noting that it not necessarily negative if the language used in fiction writing is different to the language which people use everyday.*

## **The review**

My general impression about the translation of supplements from English into isiXhosa is that, for the first time as an isiXhosa speaker and reader I felt proud of the translators and editors of Nal'ibali. I found isiXhosa used to be appropriate, rich and well written with no grammar errors that jump up. The translation is of high quality and standard and is exactly what isiXhosa readers deserve. For a long time, we have had issues with translated texts where it used to be believed that anyone who is isiXhosa speaking can be a translator and where translators were published unedited. I feel that great care has been taken to produce these supplements and we should commend the translators and editors who were commissioned to do this work.

In this report I review four supplements translated into isiXhosa. They are supplements 137-140. The review of the supplements led to 4 categories which I developed for the review, namely: 1) Translation into isiXhosa depends of the variety used in the English text as well as genre 2) Translation into isiXhosa depends on the purpose of the text 3) Translation into isiXhosa rests on language as is commonly used by the target audience 4) Issues with isiXhosa depend on the levels of literacy, culture of reading and access to a variety of resources in isiXhosa 5) Areas of potential improvement.

### **1. Translation into isiXhosa depends on the variety of the English text**

Translation into the target text relies on the variety of language used in the English source text. If the English supplement reads like a formal standard language text, it also influences the formal standard translation in isiXhosa. If the English text is colloquial then the isiXhosa text needs to be colloquial. We cannot expect an isiXhosa text to be colloquial when the target text is standard English text. There are power and status issues at stake here which are very observable in many billboards where English is beautifully edited while there are errors in the isiXhosa language. Therefore, from my reading, the supplements are superbly translated and meet the standard language requirements of isiXhosa. The way the supplements are currently written raises the

status of isiXhosa as a written language and puts isiXhosa on the same level as English. Thus, the translators and the editors have done their best to value and give power to the language. The supplements have been translated and edited with such care that if there are any complaints there must be other issues at stake rather than the way the supplements are written.

**2. Translation into isiXhosa depends on the purpose of the text** (e.g to teach vocabulary)

In Supplement 137 and 138, isiXhosa names of the months have been used. EyeThupha-August and eyoMsintsi- September are used in supplement 137 while uCanzibe for May has been used instead of 'uMeyi' in Supplement 138. These names of the months have been used in the place of borrowed terms such as Agasti or Septemba. I argue that this depends on the purpose of translator. If the purpose of the translator is to enrich the reader's vocabulary, then the use of these names of the months is very appropriate because isiXhosa names carry more meaning than the borrowed names, for example eyeKhala, for July is the month of the aloe whereas May is the month of Canopus and December (eyoMnga) is the month of the Pine Tree. Reintroducing these months of the year in isiXhosa not only offers months of the year in the language but also teaches the children about the connection between the naming of the months and what happens in the environment or in the universe. Because coloniality, modernity and urbanisation always regard black people's ways of doing things as 'traditional' or 'backwards', the use of the original names for months has been discarded in favour of borrowed terms. The second purpose of using original months of the year by the translators could also be to give the reader access to the language formal texts, language of isiXhosa examination and to the language used at school as it differs from the varieties used at home.

However, the bilingual nature of the supplement makes learning of months of the year alongside English months easier. The use of months of the year in English should serve as a scaffold for the teaching these months in isiXhosa. Maybe this would have been a problem if the supplement was monolingual as the readers would have nowhere to check the translation against. Bilingual texts always make cross checking between languages possible and enhance learning of new vocabularies. In supplement 138 page 2, there is a list of activities diarised for May and the May month has therefore been repeated in such a way that it is impossible to not know what uCanzibe is.

### **3. Translation into isiXhosa depends on the use of language as is used in the community**

In addition to the point above, about the use of standard languages, it is also important to understand diversity of language use in communities. In the same way that there are varieties of English as in British, American and Australian Englishes, as well as local Englishes and local varieties of Afrikaans such as Namaqualand Afrikaans, the Afrikaans of the Karoo and Afrikaapse, there are many varieties of isiXhosa which include isiBhaca, isiHlubi, isiMpondo as well as urban varieties amongst others. There is no such thing as one variety of any of the named languages we speak. Therefore, the purpose of using borrowed terms on the other hand in the supplements is recognition and valuing of this diversity in the way languages are used. While some rural and some learned people use a variety closer to the standard language, it is also important to recognise, value and legitimise other isiXhosa varieties including urban varieties. I feel that in Supplement 137 there is a balance between standard language and urban varieties. For example, the use of months of the year in page 2 of supplement 137 in standard isiXhosa language and the use of urban varieties as in the words '*ngesitrato*' for street in page 15 and '*sijoyine*' for 'join us' in page 1 of the same page shows this balance. The word '*ukuwina*' for 'winning' and '*nge-tweet*' in page 3 of supplement 138 are also testament to this. There are more words like *iglu* for glu, *iikhrayoni* for cryons, *ivazi* for vase, *iiphazili*, for puzzles *ishiti* for sheet and *ishelufa eblowu* (page 15) for the blue shelf and *yirekhodi* for record in page 2 of supplement 139 and *kwabhetele* for better in page 14 of supplement 140 and these words also show relevance of the text to the current uses of languages. Some of the words have been used to accommodate urban varieties or modern technologies that did not exist in isiXhosa. Therefore, it is not easy to just write a text that will appeal equally to both rural and urban communities, but through the balance of both the standard and borrowed words as well as common uses of language we can teach people about diversity of language use and enrich the language with new words. That said, the standard language used in the supplements is not archaic. It is readable to those who value reading in isiXhosa. I appreciate this balance and there is no other way in which I could have written the supplements better than they are.

### **4. Issues with isiXhosa also depend on the levels of literacy and access to a variety of resources in isiXhosa**

Some people may not be avid readers, and many who do not have access to dictionaries might find standard isiXhosa challenging, especially those who are used

to urban varieties of isiXhosa. But this is not a reason to discourage writing in standard isiXhosa language but a reason to advocate for making dictionaries available to everyone and development of encyclopaedias in African languages. The second reason could be that people are not familiar with the words used depending on their context of language learning, for example rural versus urban contexts. Thirdly, in literacy we have strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words in order to assist with comprehension such rereading the text, asking for meaning of words from others, looking up words in the dictionary, thinking of familiar words and guessing of the meaning from context. Without being trained to use these strategies, it is very easy for people to blame the language for being difficult. In South Africa we have low levels of literacy. PIRLS has shown us that very few South African children are able to read for meaning. If meaning making is not the focus of lessons in classrooms, then this might be a contributing factor to the issues raised about isiXhosa in the evaluation of the materials. I also find that there more that one reads in the language, there more vocabulary one learns. Poor vocabulary in the language impedes comprehension and this might be one of the reasons people have against isiXhosa.