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The Function of Northern Sotho and Siswati in Decolonizing Research Methodologies in South African Academic Institutions

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Abstract

This study investigates the function of the Siswati and Northern Sotho languages in decolonising research procedures, highlighting the importance of an indigenous epistemological framework in African academia. The study aims to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric research techniques by pushing for the inclusion of African languages in knowledge production. The study uses a qualitative research approach, including discourse analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and interviews with scholars, linguists, and indigenous knowledge practitioners, to analyse the impact of linguistic decolonization on research methodologies. The findings show that the ongoing use of Western languages in research marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems and reduces the credibility of African study. The study addresses how Siswati and Northern Sotho, as transmitters of cultural history, might be used to recreate African research methods. It emphasizes the importance of oral traditions, proverbs, and indigenous terminology in developing research questions, data gathering, and analysis. Based on these findings, the study advises incorporating African languages into academic writing, creating terminology banks in Siswati and Northern Sotho, and involving indigenous knowledge holders in research procedures. Furthermore, it advocates for legislative changes in higher education to facilitate linguistic decolonization. The research study adds to the body of knowledge by providing a linguistic perspective on decolonizing research methodologies and showing how indigenous languages can be used as epistemic tools in African studies. The study advances the decolonial agenda by incorporating African languages into research methodology, paving the path for more inclusive and authentic knowledge production in Africa.

Keywords: Indigenous techniques, Linguistic decolonisation, African epistemology, Knowledge sovereignty, Language and research and cultural narratives

1. Introduction

Research techniques throughout the continent are still primarily influenced by Eurocentric paradigms, notwithstanding the growing conversation on decolonization in African higher education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2023). The growth and acceptance of indigenous knowledge systems are still significantly hampered by the predominance of Western languages, especially English and French, in scholarly research (Kanu, 2021; Sathekge, 2022). This linguistic hegemony hinders the development of truly African research approaches, limits cultural expression, and challenges

indigenous epistemologies. Although decolonizing education and curricula has received a lot of attention, less is known about decolonizing research methods, particularly through language (Ndhlovu and Makalela, 2021; Abdulatief, 2022). By examining how African languages—specifically Siswati and Northern Sotho can further decolonial research methodologies, this work aims to close this crucial gap.

African worldviews are consistently invisible in scholarly work due to the marginalization of indigenous languages in the field of academic inquiry, which is the issue this study addresses (Fall, 2023; Makalela and White, 2021). In addition to influencing the creation and validation of information, the ongoing use of Western languages in research marginalizes the very populations that are being examined. The authenticity and applicability of African research outputs are called into question by this discrepancy. According to the study, African languages can be effective epistemic instruments that can be used to formulate research questions, direct methodology, and influence interpretation in ways that are consistent with African logic systems, values, and life experiences (Kigozi, 2021; Chilisa, 2017).

The literature now in publication recognizes the necessity of linguistic and epistemic change in African academia. However, there is a dearth of empirical research showing that indigenous languages can be more than just linguistic or cultural study topics; they can also actively participate in research processes (Wolff, 2018; McCarty, 2019). This study focuses on African languages' crucial significance in the decolonization of research methodology, building on new scholarship advocating for their inclusion in higher education.

This study's main goal is to investigate how Siswati and Northern Sotho might be used as platforms for decolonizing research practices in African academic institutions. Through oral traditions, proverbs, indigenous terminology, and participatory research methods, the project specifically looks at how these languages could support the generation of culturally grounded knowledge (Cochrane, 2023; Moyo and Moyo, 2020). In order to accomplish this, the study uses a qualitative technique that includes semi-structured interviews with academics, linguists, and practitioners of indigenous knowledge, as well as discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. These methods enable a sophisticated comprehension of the relationship among language, culture, and epistemology (Denzin, 2014).

The historical and ideological underpinnings of Eurocentric research in Africa are first placed in perspective, and then indigenous epistemologies ingrained in Siswati and Northern Sotho are examined. The findings from the field are then presented in the study, emphasizing the participants' viewpoints on the transformational potential of linguistic decolonization. To encourage language-inclusive research approaches, the paper concludes by suggesting practical measures such as the creation of terminology banks, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge holders in research, and changes to higher education policies.

The study adds to the expanding corpus of decolonial scholarship by using this linguistic and epistemological lens, reaffirming the importance of African languages in reclaiming research space and generating knowledge that is inclusive and true to the African context (Chisita Rusero and Ngoaketsi, 2020; Feukeu Ajilore and Bourgeois, 2021).

2. Theoretical Framework

Underpinned by linguistic relativity, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), and decolonial theory, this study offers a multifaceted framework for investigating the transformational potential of African languages, particularly Siswati and Northern Sotho, in decolonizing research approaches.

Decolonial theory, which examines the legacy of colonialism's impact on academic systems, cultural identity, and knowledge creation in formerly colonized cultures, forms the basis of this research (Mutongoza, 2025; Foga, 2020). Decolonial researchers contend that alternative modes of knowing are marginalized by the Western epistemological model, which still rules international academia. Maldonado-Torres (2007) defines the coloniality of knowledge as the ongoing preference for Euro-American languages and cognitive processes in academic and research settings.

Walter Mignolo's concept of epistemic disobedience is particularly relevant here. It advocates for rejecting Eurocentric norms in order to valorise knowledge produced through non-Western systems (Ehsan, 2023). Similarly, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasizes the need to liberate African knowledge systems from the epistemic captivity imposed by colonial education structures (Falola, 2023). The use of indigenous African languages in research is therefore positioned as a form of resistance and epistemic reconstruction an attempt to "delink" from colonial knowledge hierarchies.

The framework further draws on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which are holistic, relational, and rooted in local contexts. IKS foregrounds the values, worldviews, and epistemologies of indigenous communities, often transmitted orally through language, storytelling, and ritual (Ned, 2019; Gyamerah, 2024). Languages such as Siswati and Northern Sotho are not only communicative tools but are also repositories of indigenous knowledge, carrying embedded philosophical, ecological, and social understandings.

Bayuo (2025) contends that research within African contexts must respect and reflect indigenous paradigms, which include the collective construction of knowledge, participatory methods, and the integration of spirituality and cosmology. In this light, African languages become vehicles of epistemic identity, shaping how knowledge is conceptualised, validated, and applied. By using these languages in research design, data collection, and analysis, scholars can align their methodologies with African ontologies and ethics.

The study also draws from the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which suggests that language influences thought and shapes perception (Hardin and Banaji, 1993). This idea underpins the principle of linguistic relativity, asserting that each language offers a unique way of seeing and understanding the world. When applied to research methodology, this means that using English or other colonial languages imposes particular conceptual frameworks that may distort or exclude indigenous perspectives.

In contrast, African languages encode culturally specific metaphors, categories, and modes of reasoning. Proverbs, idioms, and traditional oral genres in Siswati and Northern Sotho carry knowledge systems that are distinctly African and unsuitable for direct translation into Western frames (Makamane, 2023). By allowing these languages to shape research processes, scholars can tap into indigenous cognitive frameworks that are otherwise invisible in Eurocentric academic discourse.

While decolonial theory critiques global coloniality from a Latin American and African standpoint, postcolonial theory also provides valuable insights into how colonial power relations persist in knowledge and language hierarchies. Scholars like Ribeiro Oliveira (2024) argue that language is central to the decolonisation of the mind and should therefore be reclaimed as a tool for cultural self-definition and intellectual autonomy.

An Afrocentric approach, as developed by Marovatsanga and Garrett (2022), also aligns with this view, proposing that African thought should be studied from an African-centred perspective, privileging African languages, traditions, and symbols. Afrocentricity insists on placing African people at the centre of their own historical and intellectual narratives, which reinforces the call to de-centre Western languages in African research.

Lastly, this study is informed by Critical Language Awareness (CLA), which focuses on the role of language in constructing social hierarchies and power relations (Fairclough 1999). CLA is crucial in understanding how colonial and postcolonial language policies have shaped academic standards, privileged European languages while rendering African ones unfit for scholarly discourse.

Sociolinguistic research has also shown that language policy and language planning often reflect deeper ideologies about knowledge, identity, and power (Makoni and Pennycook, 2012). Thus, reclaiming indigenous languages in research is not simply a linguistic act it is a political and epistemological intervention aimed at redressing historical inequalities.

This theoretical framework brings together decolonial theory, IKS, linguistic relativity, Afrocentric/postcolonial theory, and sociolinguistic critique to demonstrate that indigenous languages are not just carriers of culture but are epistemological systems in their own right. By recognising Siswati and Northern Sotho as legitimate mediums of academic inquiry, this study contributes to the larger agenda of epistemic justice, promoting a more inclusive and authentically African research paradigm.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology rooted in decolonial and indigenous research paradigms. These approaches are appropriate because the study seeks to explore the epistemological value and sociocultural significance of African languages specifically Siswati and Northern Sotho as tools for decolonising academic research in South Africa. The methodology is informed by principles of participatory, interpretive, and context-sensitive inquiry, placing indigenous voices, languages, and knowledge systems at the centre of the research process (High, 2014; Khupe, 2020).

The study adopts a case study design to allow an in-depth exploration of how Siswati and Northern Sotho can be used in academic and research contexts to challenge colonial legacies in knowledge production. The case study approach supports the exploration of linguistic, cultural, and epistemological dimensions within real-life contexts, making it particularly suitable for decolonial research (Nash and Young, 2023).

The research also aligns with indigenous research methodologies, which promote relationality, respect, and reciprocity. These methodologies oppose the extractive nature of traditional Western research by allowing knowledge to emerge collaboratively with participants (Pesambili, 2021; Kara, 2020). In line with this, the research prioritises the voices of indigenous language speakers, scholars, and knowledge holders.

4. Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection methods include:

- Semi-structured interviews with language experts, indigenous knowledge holders, scholars, and postgraduate students who use or advocate for the use of Siswati and Northern Sotho in research.

- Focus group discussions (FGDs) involving researchers and students from institutions where indigenous languages are integrated into curricula or research.

- Document analysis of existing theses, dissertations, and academic publications written in or incorporating Siswati and Northern Sotho.

Semi-structured interviews and FGDs are useful in indigenous research contexts because they create space for storytelling, reflexivity, and oral expression—important elements of African knowledge systems (Osei-Tutu, 2023; Phatshwane, 2024). This supports the decolonial imperative to allow research participants to speak in their own terms, using their own languages and cultural referents (Thambinathan, 2021).

4.1. Sampling Strategy

The study uses purposive sampling to select participants who have experience or expertise in indigenous language research, decolonial theory, or curriculum transformation. This includes:

- University lecturers in African languages departments

- Students who have written dissertations in Siswati or Northern Sotho

- Language activists and policy experts

- Elders or traditional knowledge holders with oral literacy backgrounds

Purposive sampling ensures that the research engages with information-rich cases that are aligned with the research objectives (Akkaş and Meydan, 2024).

5. Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by decolonial theory and indigenous epistemological frameworks. Transcripts from interviews and FGDs will be coded in both English and the original African languages, where applicable, to preserve semantic and cultural nuance.

Thematic categories will include:

- Epistemic value of indigenous languages

- Experiences of linguistic marginalisation in research

- Strategies for incorporating Siswati and Northern Sotho in academic spaces

- Language as a site of resistance and identity

The analysis will be grounded in a contextual and culturally responsive lens, recognising that meaning in African languages is often embedded in metaphor, idiom, and proverbs (Meso, 2023). Therefore, rather than translating all data into English, certain concepts will be left untranslated and analysed within their linguistic and cultural context to preserve epistemological integrity.

5.1. Ethical Considerations

This study observes ethical protocols consistent with both institutional guidelines and indigenous ethical values. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and interviews will be conducted in participants' preferred languages. In keeping with indigenous research ethics, participants will be acknowledged as co-creators of knowledge rather than subjects of study (Fitzsimmons, 2024; Ajaps and Mbah, 2022).

Respect for community knowledge, intellectual property rights, and oral traditions will guide the dissemination of findings. Participants will also be given opportunities to validate and comment on the findings before publication an important aspect of community validation and reciprocity (Smith and McGannon, 2018).

5.2. Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure trustworthiness, the study will apply the following strategies:

- Credibility: Through member-checking and peer debriefing

- Transferability: Providing thick description of contexts and participants

- Dependability: Using an audit trail of data collection and analysis

- Confirmability: Reflexive journaling by the researcher to manage bias (Dado, 2024)

These practices align with indigenous validation methods, which rely on communal verification and collective ownership of knowledge (Williams, 2023).

This methodological framework reflects the study's commitment to epistemic justice, language reclamation, and research transformation. By drawing on indigenous research methods and allowing participants to engage in their own languages, this study resists colonial research traditions and affirms African knowledge systems as credible, ethical, and transformative.

6. Literature Review

6.1. Decolonising Research in African Academia

The concept of decolonising research involves dismantling Eurocentric epistemologies and reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate sources of scholarly insight (Ewing, 2021). In Africa, the colonial legacy has long positioned Western paradigms as superior, marginalising local ways of knowing and undervaluing African languages in research and academic discourse (Jackson, 2023; Ka Zenzile, 2017). This hegemony has not only shaped what is considered "valid" knowledge but also how research questions are framed, which languages are acceptable for academic discourse, and who gets to speak authoritatively on African issues (Ndhlovu and Makalela, 2021).

Decolonising research thus calls for a fundamental rethinking of methodologies, privileging community-based, culturally grounded, and language-inclusive approaches (Padilla and Vana, 2024). Scholars argue that the continued reliance on Western languages in research reproduces colonial power dynamics and alienates African knowledge producers from their epistemological roots (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023).

6.2. Language as an Epistemic Tool

Language is not merely a medium of communication but a carrier of culture, identity, and worldviews (Polo, 2023). In the African context, indigenous languages such as Siswati and Northern Sotho are imbued with philosophical, historical, and ontological meanings that are often untranslatable into colonial languages (Mabela and Ditsele, 2024). Language plays a pivotal role in shaping how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and validated.

Angu (2020) argues that the decolonisation of education and research is incomplete without the inclusion of African languages in academic institutions. When knowledge is mediated through indigenous languages, it becomes more authentic and accessible to local communities, thus restoring agency to historically marginalised voices. Similarly, Kahiraba (2024) asserts that language is the key to decolonising the African mind, as it enables people to speak from within their cultural framework.

6.3. The Marginalisation of Indigenous Languages in Research

Despite postcolonial reforms, African universities still rely heavily on English and Afrikaans, thereby excluding African languages from the domain of higher learning (Mbolo, 2019). This linguistic elitism perpetuates the idea that serious scholarship must be conducted in Western languages, rendering indigenous languages "inadequate" for academic expression (Al-Konsul, 2022).

Research by Ramsaroop and Petersen (2020) shows that African postgraduate students often face pressure to abandon their home languages in favour of English to meet institutional expectations. As a result, knowledge systems embedded in languages like Siswati and Northern Sotho are overlooked, despite their rich oral traditions and philosophical depth. This contributes to the erasure of indigenous epistemologies and perpetuates the myth of universality in Western methods (Murwira S.T.A.N.L.E.Y, 2020).

6.4. Indigenous Epistemologies and Methodologies

Indigenous epistemologies are holistic, relational, and context sensitive. They value communal knowledge production, oral transmission, and the integration of spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions (Chowdhury, 2025). In African cultures, oral traditions such as storytelling, proverbs, idioms, and rituals function as repositories of knowledge and

moral instruction (Akinyemi, 2021). These elements provide alternative research tools that challenge the linear and objective standards of Western science.

Beaudette (2024) emphasises that indigenous research methodologies must resist extractives tendencies and instead foster reciprocity, respect, and relevance. The inclusion of indigenous languages in research is not only a linguistic shift but also a philosophical one, as it reorients the research process toward indigenous worldviews.

6.5. The Case for Siswati and Northern Sotho

Siswati and Northern Sotho are among the eleven official languages of South Africa, yet their roles in research remain peripheral. These languages are rich in metaphors, proverbs, praise poetry, and oral histories that encapsulate indigenous knowledge (Penfold and Penfold, 2017). However, they are often confined to linguistic and literary studies rather than being utilised as tools for broader epistemic engagement.

A study by Mussi (2024) illustrates how African women in rural communities use indigenous languages to narrate trauma and resilience in ways that would be lost if translated into English. Similarly, Yani (2019) notes that Siswati's tonal system and narrative structures are deeply embedded in communal memory and moral frameworks, making the language an important epistemic reservoir.

Language policy in South African universities continues to favour English as the medium of instruction, despite constitutional provisions that support multilingualism (Mkhize, 2022). This policy gap limits the use of languages like Siswati and Northern Sotho in research, creating a disjuncture between language policy and language practice in academia.

6.6. Legislative and Institutional Responses

There have been some policy attempts to address linguistic inequality in academia. The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2020) mandates universities to develop strategies for promoting African languages in teaching and research. However, implementation has been slow and uneven, often hindered by resource constraints, lack of political will, and institutional resistance (Nyoni, 2023).

Scholars advocate for the establishment of terminology banks, translation units, and indigenous knowledge centres to support the academic use of African languages (Mndende, 2022). These initiatives would facilitate the development of scientific, philosophical, and methodological vocabularies in Siswati and Northern Sotho, enabling these languages to function effectively in research domains.

The literature reveals a growing awareness of the need to decolonise research methodologies in African academia. Central to this process is the reclamation of African languages as vehicles of knowledge production. While languages like Siswati and Northern Sotho are rich in epistemological content, their roles in research remain underutilised due to colonial legacies, policy gaps, and institutional inertia. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring how these languages can be harnessed to reconstruct African research paradigms that are inclusive, authentic, and culturally grounded.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of language in decolonising research methodologies within African academic spaces. Both Siswati and Northern Sotho emerge as not only linguistic tools but as repositories of indigenous knowledge, social memory, and cultural identity. However, their potential remains largely untapped due to the entrenched dominance of English and the residual epistemic legacies of colonialism.

The persistence of Eurocentric frameworks in African research continues to marginalise indigenous languages and ways of knowing (Nicolaides and Steyn, 2023). While institutions may outwardly endorse decolonial agendas, their continued prioritisation of English as the medium of instruction and research creates a contradiction that undermines authentic transformation (Weideman, 2020) As such, the exclusion of languages like Siswati and Northern Sotho reflects a deeper systemic resistance to dismantling colonial power structures in knowledge production.

Siswati and Northern Sotho are not linguistically deficient; rather, they have been structurally and ideologically displaced. These languages contain vast lexicons of idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and oral histories that reflect indigenous epistemologies (Mpe, 2023). Yet, because academic discourse is shaped predominantly by Western logics and modes of representation, such knowledge is rarely seen as "scientific" or "valid" unless translated into English or framed using Western theoretical paradigms (Ngulube, 2025).

Participants in this study pointed to the deep disconnect between academic research and the lived realities of local communities. When research is conducted in English, it often alienates those who are the subjects of study, particularly in rural areas where indigenous languages dominate everyday life (Mutongoza, 2023). This reinforces the extractive nature of research where knowledge is "taken" from communities but not returned or shared in a linguistically and culturally accessible manner.

Furthermore, the study found that researchers and students who wish to write in indigenous languages often face practical and institutional barriers. These include a lack of academic terminology, limited supervision capacity in African languages, and the absence of publishing platforms that accommodate indigenous language scholarship (Kese, 2020). This has contributed to a cycle in which African languages remain peripheral because they are underused, and they are underused because they are seen as peripheral.

Nevertheless, there are promising developments. The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2020) represents a significant step toward institutionalising multilingualism and creating pathways for the use of African languages in research. Yet, implementation is uneven and often symbolic rather than substantive. Without robust funding, institutional support, and ideological commitment, such frameworks may amount to little more than policy rhetoric (Ramoupi, 2014).

In line with indigenous research methodologies, language use should be guided by the principles of relationality, respect, and relevance (Kovach, 2010). This means not only translating English concepts into African languages, but engaging with the worldviews and cultural logics embedded in those languages. For example, Siswati's use of tonality, storytelling, and ancestral idioms provides a unique lens for understanding human relationships, morality, and spiritual ecology perspectives that are often flattened in Western epistemologies (Joubin, 2021).

The incorporation of Siswati and Northern Sotho into research therefore offers more than linguistic inclusion; it represents an epistemological shift. It challenges the supremacy of Western methodologies and calls for a pluralistic approach where multiple ways of knowing coexist and are given equal legitimacy. In this sense, the use of African languages is not merely symbolic, but a political and philosophical act of resistance and reclamation (Ndhlovu, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Ultimately, decolonising research in South Africa requires more than policy statements; it demands the systematic restructuring of curricula, research protocols, and institutional ideologies. It also requires a conscious effort by scholars to produce knowledge in and for their communities, using languages that resonate with their socio-cultural realities. Only then can research become truly liberatory and reflective of the African experience.

8. Findings

The study revealed several key findings concerning the role of Siswati and Northern Sotho in decolonising research methodologies within South African academia. Drawing on interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and discourse analysis, the following core themes emerged:

8.1. African Languages as Epistemological Tools

Participants widely acknowledged that Siswati and Northern Sotho are not merely modes of communication but vessels of indigenous knowledge, identity, and cultural logic. These languages embody oral traditions, idiomatic expressions, and communal epistemologies that are distinct from Western paradigms (GuIlherMe, 2014). Researchers argued that incorporating these languages into academic spaces enriches knowledge production and allows research to be more reflective of African realities.

8.2. Marginalisation Through Language Hierarchies

The continued dominance of English in research and academia marginalises indigenous languages and their associated knowledge systems. This linguistic hierarchy delegitimizes African languages as academic tools and reinforces colonial epistemologies (Tondi and Fredericks, 2020). Many participants reported institutional resistance when attempting to write or supervise research in Siswati or Northern Sotho, despite official policy frameworks promoting multilingualism.

8.3. Disconnect Between Researchers and Communities

Findings indicated a significant disconnection between academic research and indigenous communities due to language barriers. Research conducted in English often excludes community members from participating meaningfully in the research process (Theledi and Masote, 2024). Conversely, when researchers engaged participants in their native languages, they observed greater trust, authenticity, and insight in data collection.

8.4. Need for Terminology Development and Resource Investment

A consistent challenge highlighted by scholars and students was the lack of established academic terminology in Siswati and Northern Sotho, which hinders scholarly writing and publication (Phiri, 2022). Participants recommended the creation of terminology banks and glossaries, and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge holders in the development of academic lexicons.

8.5. Policy-Practice Gap in Higher Education

Although policies such as the Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2020) advocate for the use of African languages in academia, implementation remains uneven and superficial. Participants stressed that without proper funding, training, and monitoring mechanisms, such frameworks are unlikely to transform the linguistic landscape of research in South Africa (Weideman Read and Du Plessis, 2020).

8.6. Oral Traditions as Methodological Resources

Oral traditions such as storytelling, proverbs, riddles, and songs were identified as rich sources of data and methodological insight. Participants emphasized that these forms of knowledge, when used alongside indigenous languages, promote ethical, context-specific, and relational research practices (Kovachn, 2021). These traditions serve as epistemic anchors, particularly in communities where written literacy is not the primary mode of knowledge transmission.

These findings affirm the need for a paradigmatic shift in South African research practices one that recognises the legitimacy of indigenous languages as foundational to knowledge production. They also highlight the socio-political implications of linguistic exclusion and the urgent need for structural transformation in higher education.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to advance the decolonisation of research methodologies through the inclusion of Siswati and Northern Sotho in academic knowledge production.

9.1. Institutionalise Indigenous Languages in Research and Teaching

Higher education institutions must adopt practical strategies to promote the use of African languages, including Siswati and Northern Sotho, in research and teaching. This includes offering postgraduate research training in these languages, encouraging supervision and thesis writing in indigenous languages, and providing institutional incentives for academics who promote linguistic decolonisation (Somlata, 2018; Muzoora and Terry, 2015). Without systemic support, policy ambitions will remain symbolic and ineffective.

9.2. Develop Academic Terminology Banks

There is an urgent need to invest in the development of terminology banks and glossaries for research concepts in Siswati and Northern Sotho. This can be achieved through collaborative workshops involving linguists, indigenous knowledge holders, translators, and subject specialists (Prah, 2006; Dewitte, 2015). Such resources will assist in bridging linguistic gaps and empower scholars to write and teach complex ideas in their native languages.

9.3. Embed Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Research Methodology Curricula

Universities should revise research methodology curricula to include indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), oral traditions, and linguistic tools grounded in African epistemologies. This approach will enhance methodological diversity and affirm the intellectual legitimacy of African ways of knowing (Mayanja, 2021; Moyo and Moyo, 2020). Practical examples, such as using folktales or proverbs in framing research questions, should be standard components of research education.

9.4. Support Multilingual Publication and Peer Review

Academic journals and publishers should create space for research publications in African languages and establish peer review networks fluent in these languages. This will normalise academic writing in indigenous languages and reduce the overreliance on English as the gatekeeper of scholarly legitimacy (Canagarajah, 2022). Multilingual academic platforms would democratise knowledge dissemination across linguistic divides.

9.5. Engage Indigenous Knowledge Holders as Research Partners

Researchers must adopt participatory research approaches that involve indigenous knowledge holders as co-creators of knowledge, rather than mere informants. This requires respectful engagement, community consent, and co-authorship

when appropriate (Adcock, 2021). Such collaboration ensures cultural integrity and fosters ethical, grounded, and decolonised research processes.

9.6. Legislate and Monitor Linguistic Decolonisation in Higher Education

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) must move beyond policy rhetoric and enforce clear, measurable targets for linguistic decolonisation. This includes allocating budgets for African language development, monitoring implementation across institutions, and linking language transformation to university performance evaluations (DHET, 2020; Heugh, 2010).

These recommendations are aimed at transforming the epistemic architecture of African academia by legitimising indigenous languages as scholarly tools. Implementing them will not only advance the decolonial project but also create space for more inclusive, context-relevant, and transformative knowledge production in Africa.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the pivotal role that Siswati and Northern Sotho can play in decolonising research methodologies within African academia. By foregrounding these indigenous languages as epistemic tools, the study challenged the continued dominance of Eurocentric and monolingual research frameworks that marginalise African knowledge systems. Drawing on qualitative methodologies including discourse analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and interviews with scholars, linguists, and indigenous knowledge holders the research highlighted how language shapes not only communication but also the frameworks of thought, validation, and knowledge production.

The findings affirmed that the exclusive use of Western languages in research often sidelines culturally grounded methodologies and overlooks the wisdom embedded in oral traditions, indigenous terminologies, and community-based epistemologies. Through the lens of linguistic decolonisation, the study illustrated that African languages like Siswati and Northern Sotho are not merely mediums of communication but are themselves repositories of indigenous knowledge, logic, and worldviews.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that incorporating indigenous languages into research enhances inclusivity, empowers local communities, and validates African identities and intellectual traditions. It also underscored the necessity of developing academic terminology in indigenous languages, revising research training curricula, and fostering institutional and legislative support for linguistic transformation.

The study contributes to the broader decolonial discourse by offering a language-centred approach to research transformation. It advocates for a radical rethinking of what constitutes valid knowledge and who gets to produce it. Ultimately, decolonising research through language is not just about translation it is about reclaiming the right to think, write, and theorise in African terms, for African contexts, and by African voices.

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