

Kealeboga Aiseng (Ed.) The Sociolinguistics of South African Television: Language Ideologies in Selected Case Studies. Springer Nature. 2024. 268 Pages. ISBN 978-3031549175

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With *The Sociolinguistics of South African Television: Language Ideologies in Selected Case Studies*, Dr Kealeboga Aiseng presents critical perspectives on the sociolinguistics of South African television in the post-Apartheid era. He first places broadcasting, specifically television in a historical timeline of colonial and apartheid policies which in the main privileged English and Afrikaans, while marginalizing indigenous languages. Such demonstrates that the then government understood that one of the ways to maintain hegemony is through imposing a language or languages to the day to day political, communication and social diet of a nation. But as the book finds, not all languages are equal.

Similar studies have found that the then apartheid government ensured that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) used language to assert power and in the process excluding others. The corporation also acted as the propaganda mouthpiece for the white minority government before 1994. It is for that reason that when apartheid ended in 1994, South Africans from different language orientations expected the SABC to be a mirror which reflects the diverse nature of the country. Thematically, the book addresses the complex relationship and interplay between language, culture, and society within the context of South African television.

In the introductory chapter, Dr Aiseng writes that “*Language is a fundamental component of culture and society. It reflects the values, norms, and practices of a community. Thus, when we examine language ideologies, we are, in essence, exploring how individuals and communities perceive, uphold, or challenge cultural and societal norms.*” The statement underscores the power of language in carrying the values of its people from one generation to the next and that if languages do not enjoy attention in the national order, *they* are likely going to disappear at some point. The author then invites us to pay particular attention to the way in which language is used every day in the media for us to make sense of its power.

One of the issues that Dr Aiseng deals with is how television and media are used as sites of ideological contestation where language ideologies are both reinforced and challenged. For instance, he uses the case of *Muvhango*, a Tshivenda soap opera which was introduced to our screens in the late 1990s and was decommissioned in 2025. The author argues that the introduction of the programme provided Tshivenda speakers with an opportunity to not only showcase their culture, but as well demystify cultural stereotypes and have the ethnic group assert its presence in an environment where language can be used as a powerful tool for reinforcing and resisting sociocultural norms and power structures.

Even with the above having been said, Dr Aiseng is conscious to the fact that due to the dominance of some languages such as IsiZulu, minority languages are drowned even in cases where they are meant to flourish. Deploying the example of *Skeem Saam*, a soap opera initially conceptualized as a Sepedi language, which airs weekdays between 19:30-20:00, on SABC 1, he demonstrates how indigenous languages with less speakers are forced to co-exist with the ones spoken by majority people. In that regard, he questions the place of minoritised languages in the larger context of media representation in television. This is one of the highlights of the book in its focus on the hegemony presented by the SABC. Aiseng's argument in the context of that is that while post-apartheid language policy constitutionally promotes linguistic equality, but in practice, disparities persist. He also observes that isiZulu continues to dominate other smaller languages which could lead the marginalization of those languages.

Despite such critique of the situation, he presents his views well balanced by demonstrating, using literature, that this is not a uniquely South African challenge. This presents the reader with enough material and empowers them to contrast information that demands evaluation and judge on their own. With its analysis of language ideologies which are embedded in televised content and the counteracts employed to challenge these ideologies, this work contributes to our understanding of how language functions in the South African media landscape.

At the end, Aiseng invites us to reflect deeply on the dangers of sidelining minority languages. The author also makes a case of languages such as Khoi, Nama, and San languages which to date are still not recognized as official languages in the constitution. Reading through all the chapters in the book, language enthusiasts and researchers will see that there are many ways through which hegemony can be achieved and one of that is through the prioritisation of some languages over others. The findings reveal that some languages are powerful than others, and that others are believed to attract advertisers while others do not.

The book finds that the prioritisation of commercial benefits also undermines the need to have all languages enjoy fair representation. One of the participants details that profit is always a factor when it comes to television content and since isiZulu is the most spoken language in the country it always finds its way into television content. This means that languages which are believed to be minority and not attract a good viewership will be pushed to the peripheries.

This is a thought-provoking book which language enthusiast and researchers will find interesting. Aiseng has produced commendable work, and he writes lucidly about an issue that concern many South Africans even outside the academia. Beyond the indication of the inequality that exists among languages, the book also account for how far language ideologies in the country are deeply woven into our complex political and social fabric which the author believes it's a reflection of the enduring legacy of Apartheid and post-Apartheid transitions. Indeed, language is an integral part of our lives, and it enables people to communicate and express their identities and imply a sense of belonging to different social groups.