

Xitsonga in Language Shift: A Sociolinguistic Approach

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ABSTRACT The speakers of Xitsonga in Polokwane city are experiencing a language shift from Xitsonga to English and Northern Sotho. This paper reports result of surveys conducted with thirty people, which show that both internal and external factors are contributing to the language shift by the speakers of Xitsonga. This research reveals that language shift by individuals is either temporary or permanent and is caused by linguistic mobility. In a multilingual country such as South Africa, language treatment is not always the same. There are languages perceived to be of 'higher status' while others are perceived even by their own speakers to be of a 'lower status'. South Africa, with its eleven official languages however, the status of English in terms of rights, privileges, prestige, and power is more superior to the rest of the languages and this makes some speakers of other languages to shift from their languages to English, for the purposes of this study on Xitsonga speakers. Data for this research was collected through observation and personal interviews with the aim of understanding the factors influencing the speakers of Xitsonga to shift from their language to English and Northern Sotho.