2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages

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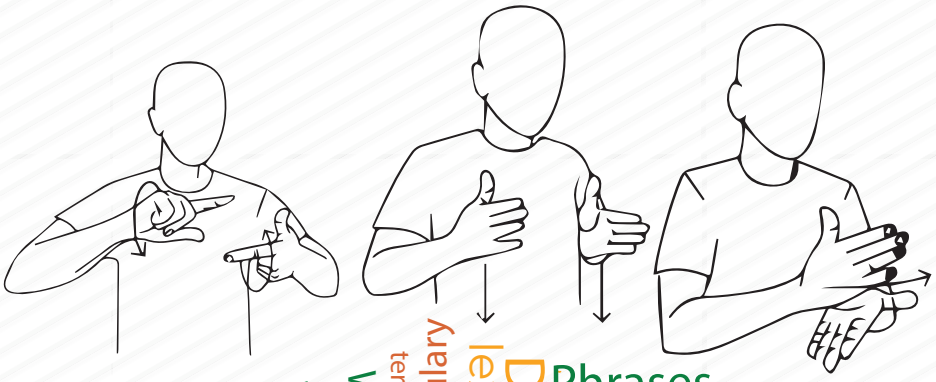
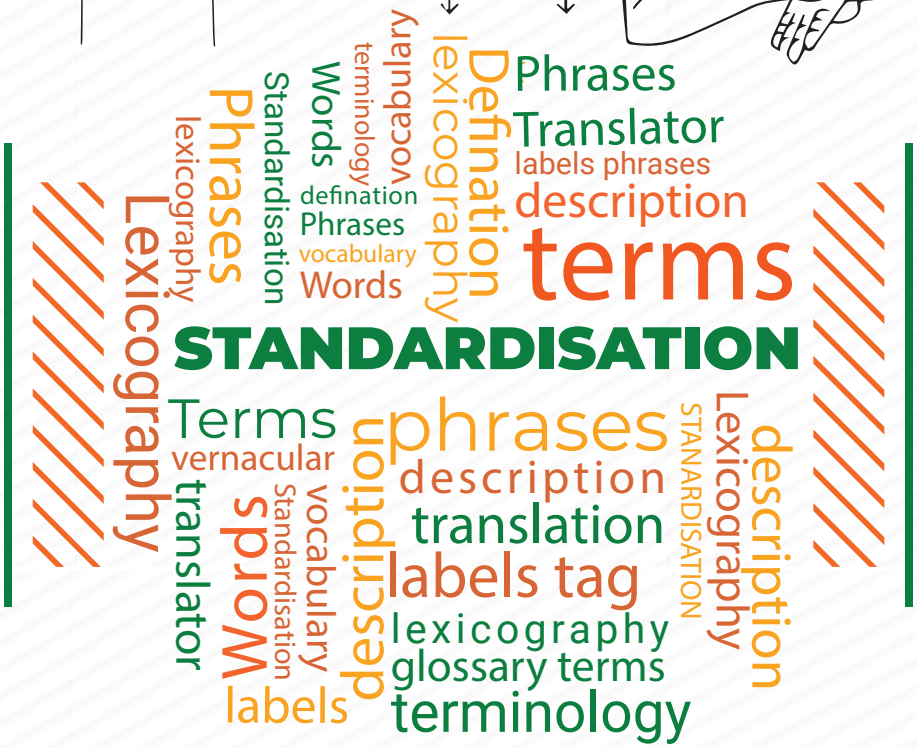
LITERATURE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC WORK RELATED TO LANGUAGE STANDARDISATION AND SASL FEBRUARY 2024





"One nation many languages"

Literature Review of Academic Work Related to Language Standardisation and SASL. Produced by the Pan South African Langauge Board (PanSALB) in preparation for the second PanSALB SASL Indaba, 1 & 2 February 2024, Kempton Park, Gauteng, South Africa.

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Date of publication: January 2024

ISBN: 978-0-7961-4641-0

In accordance with the recommendations of the report on the 2023 South African Sign Language (SASL) Indaba, this literature review was produced by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) in preparation for the second PanSALB SASL Indaba, to be held on 1 & 2 February 2024. The literature review investigates and clarifies for past and future attendees of PanSALB workshops on SASL lexical and grammatical standardisation, and PanSALB staff and Board, perspectives on standardisation and the typical process of standardisation. Further, it presents case studies on the standardisation of South African official languages and sign languages abroad and makes proposals on the way forward for SASL and standardisation. The research reveals that it is more democratic to perceive the standardisation process as creating a standard variety (not language) that is equal (not superior) to other varieties and that this variety should be used in formal, professional, and public domains, namely education (subject terminology), legislation and court matters, official governance, economics, and SASL interpreters in media. It should not be taught as the "correct" form of the language. It is further revealed that standardisation may be an inappropriate and marginalising process given its ties to the Global North, single-language states, and empire, and so it should not be implemented in a prescriptive manner. Through case studies of the standardisation processes of many languages, it is shown that a descriptive approach is more democratic and mitigates later risks of restandardisation demands, which are often justifiably based on the exclusion of marginalised groups from the original standardisation process. A descriptive approach entails first the extensive collection of all SASL signs in the form of a dictionary after which prescription may never take place or may never been enforced. Alternatively, the Dutch Sign Language method, presented as a case study, is an interesting consideration for future efforts of an inclusive selection process. However, the major finding of the review is that it is premature to initiate any formal standardisation processes for SASL. Rather, further research into SASL variation and the SASL corpus should be professionally conducted along with the collection of signs and lexicographic data to create a near-exhaustive SASL monolingual dictionary and thesaurus. In the medium term, an SASL National Lexicography Unit needs to be established while government departments and educational institutions identify commonly-used words in their fields of expertise that can be prioritised for dictionary-making, education, and interpreter training.

CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND 1

2. INTRODUCTION 1

3. DEFINING STANDARDISATION 2

3.1 Attitudes to standardisation 2

3.2 Generic standardisation processes 5

3.3 Destandardisation and restandardisation 7

4. CASE STUDIES OF STANDARDISATION PROCESSES FOR LOCAL WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGES 8

4.1 English 8

4.2 Afrikaans 10

4.3 Indigenous African languages 11

4.3.1 PanSALB authentication process 12

5. ISSUES AND PROCESSES FOR STANDARDISING SIGN LANGUAGES 13

5.1 Stance of the World Federation of the Deaf 13

5.2 Data collection processes 14

5.3 Dealing with variation 15

5.4 Lexicography in sign languages 16

5.5 Challenges for the standardisation of sign languages 16

5.6 SASL research 17

6. CONCLUSION 19

7. REFERENCES 19

1. BACKGROUND

The first workshop on South African Sign Language (SASL) lexical and grammatical standardisation (the "2023 SASL Indaba") was held on 9 and 10 March 2023. It aimed to discuss the standardisation of SASL and map a way forward. Academic experts from universities that offer SASL as a module or service, as well as principals/teachers from Deaf schools, the SASL National Language Body (NLB), independent SASL service providers, and government stakeholders of language were in attendance. Following the deliberations of the 2023 SASL Indaba, a detailed report was drafted, including various recommendations. The report can be found on the PanSALB website. One of the recommendations was the creation of a research report, or literature review, on existing academic writing about the standardisation of languages, including the standardisation of sign languages around the world.

2. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review is to assist attendees of the 2024 workshop on SASL lexical and grammatical standardisation to arrive with technical understandings of the scientific process of standardisation. The outcome of this literature review will hopefully be that attendees of the next workshop can give more attention to finding an equitable, inclusive, and sensitive solution for the use of SASL in educational, government, and business domains. SASL has not been formally standardised, although some natural standardisation has been observed. Therefore, the South African Deaf community and South African linguistic experts are presented with a unique opportunity to formulate a solution for an indigenous language using international models of best practice, while incorporating sensitivity to the local context, so that the final output is representative of the South African Deaf communities' needs and desires, and elevates the language so that it is accessible and implementable in basic and higher education, government, business, and other formal and national domains.

This literature review covers three broad topics:

- Defining standardisation
- Case studies of standardisation processes for local written and spoken languages
- Issues and processes for standardising sign languages, which includes:
    - Challenges for the standardisation of sign languages,
    - Data collection processes,
    - Dealing with variation,
    - Lexicography in sign languages, and
    - SASL research.

The literature review cannot cover the entirety of all research published on these topics as a literature review of such extent is unfeasible. Instead, a variety of authors, contexts, and views have purposefully been reviewed to allow readers a broad understanding and the formation of their own opinion regarding how the standardisation process should play out for SASL.

Upfront it is important to note that Odendal (1992) argues that **a language's development and survival are better when there is a standard variety**. A standard variety is **for use in the public domain**: it is used for communicating with **government** and within the **legal** system; it is a *lingua franca* for **high-level, professional** domains including **education**, **politics**, and **economics**; it serves as **medium of instruction and assessment** and creates a set of language norms for **schools** and **higher education**; it assists with the creation of **technology** and other **innovation**; and it is used by the **media** and by **interpreting services** (Odendaal, 2013). It is generally agreed that a standard variety has uniformity in its speaking and writing or signing through the suppression of variation (Straaijer, 2022). However, as the next section elaborates, there are various ways to perceive and create a standard variety.

3. DEFINING STANDARDISATION

3.1 Attitudes to standardisation

"Standardisation" is a linguistic term that broadly describes the process of creating a "standard language" (Straaijer, 2022) as a language planning activity (Odendaal, 2013). There are two different perspectives on what the term "standard language" means. Most relevant to the process of standardising SASL is the perspective of linguists. Linguists understand a standard language to be **one variety among other varieties of that language** (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023; Straaijer, 2022). In fact, more recent thought uses the term **"standard variety"** or "standard dialect" instead of "standard language" to prevent the rejection of other varieties/dialects (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023; Vogl, 2012). Linguists also understand that a standard language is more of an ideology (idea and ideal) than a reality: it is often based on varieties associated with the social elite; it is not necessarily enforceable; language is always subject to change, even in formal or academic domains; little can be done to influence the positive or negative associations with a standard variety; variation can still exist in a standard variety; and even users of standard forms have different accents and practices (Straaijer, 2022; Vogl, 2012). It is also interesting to point out here that many of the world's most-used languages can have multiple standard forms, such as English (which has American, British, Australian, and South African English to name a few!), French, Portuguese, and German (Clyne, 1992). Linguists therefore commonly approach standardisation with a sociolinguistic lens (which argues that society influences language) or sociology of language lens (which argues that language influences society) which understands that language is inseparable from culture, identity, and social norms (Straaijer, 2022).

The second perspective on what the term "standard language" means is held by many members of the public and arises out of observations related to the traditional implementation of a standard variety (Straaijer, 2022). This perspective leans into the idea that the standard variety aims to eradicate variation within the language (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023; Straaijer, 2022). The standard language is also perceived as superior to forms that do not conform to the standard, and these non-standard forms are called "varieties" or "dialects" in a derogatory way (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023; Straaijer, 2022). Standardisation is often tied to the concept of nation-building through a communal and uniform language (Straaijer, 2022). This perspective poses obvious issues to standardising SASL since the report on the 2023 SASL Indaba indicated a clear desire not to reduce the variety in SASL or promote the standard as superior. It seems more useful to

adopt a linguist's perspective in aiming to **establish a standard SASL *variety* that can be used in educational, business, and government domains, but that will co-exist with the already present, equally important varieties**. Further, it should be recognised that the creation of a standard variety is **not an attempt to nation-build as this happens through Deaf culture**.

It seems relevant to note here that, while two predominant perceptions regarding a standard language exist, some go so far as to suggest that there is no such thing as a standard language: as suggested by linguists, a standard variety in many senses is simply an ideal that cannot be fully achieved (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). However, sociolinguists present an important point that, despite this, there is a very real expectation by many that a fully standardised form can and does exist and that it can be fully useful in improving literacy and communication (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). In fact, research suggests that **once a standard has been established, its abolishment would worsen social disadvantages compared to if the standard was maintained** (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Therefore, implementers of a standard variety need to **establish a balance between the need for uniformity and the need for the individual and community to be recognised**. A work around in terms of mitigating the superiority and stringency that can be associated with a standard variety includes ensuring students are taught about varieties in relation to appropriateness rather than correctness; in other words, **students should be taught which variety is relevant to which domains rather than that the standard variety is correct and others are incorrect** (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006; see Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023). This would encourage speakers to use their community or local variety or dialect while also being accepted and understood in contexts that require the standard variety (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006; see Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023).

Currently multiple varieties are being encouraged in the classroom through the trend toward **code-switching, or translanguaging**, in schools (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023:29-30). However, it must be noted that **these strategies may still suggest that a standard variety is superior to other varieties because the standard variety is associated with formal, educational, and public domains whereas other varieties are not** (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023:29-30). To prevent this "systems of schooling must create inclusive spaces in which all language varieties are treated as equally valid for academic purposes" (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023:30), which **might negate the need for the creation of a standard variety entirely**. It would certainly require schools and teacher training institutions to make a massive ideological shift toward a preference for multilingualism and language diversity in the classroom (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023:30). Part of this shift would see standard varieties taught as a "type of content rather than simply a content delivery system" (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023:32).

It is also relevant to note that, historically, standard languages have been tied to nation-building, which is based on the idea of a single-language European country (McLelland, 2019), which differs for the language context of South Africa. Recent research on language standardisation has turned to considering the interplay between standardisation and a multilingual context.

McLelland (2019) notes ways in which multilingualism plays a role in language standardisation:

- **having multiple varieties within a single language that are used in different contexts is a form of multilingualism**;
- having multiple varieties (or multilingualism) is not equivalent to undoing standardisation – there can be multiple standard varieties in the same language;
- **the demand for standardisation and the creation of explicit language rules usually comes from new users of a language rather than native speakers**, and a **tension results between new speakers who want to be included** in the language (and **who may depend on it** for education, work, and services) and **native speakers who feel marginalised by a standard that does not adhere to their practices**; and
- **the demand for standardisation is based on a desire to be multilingual**, but the concept or **process of standardisation may be irrelevant or harmful** to non-European and/or marginalised languages and/or **multilingual contexts**.

As such, there are considerations that need to be made when attempting to implement a standard language in a multilingual context including:

- what the consequences are for other languages in the multilingual context (e.g., does the hierarchy among varieties also create hierarchies among the various languages?);
- that a standard may also reinforce separate bilingualism rather than flexible multilingualism and translanguaging, which disenfranchises students and teachers in multilingual classrooms; and
- that a standard may create disjunct between language practice and cultural identity (McLelland, 2019).

To this effect, attention should also be given to:

- the objectives of standardisation, and whether they revolve around the promotion of an ideology or a functional reality;
- the degree of agreement on the standard and its relevant domains by native and non-native users;
- the possibility of achieving a full education without a standard variety;
- the various ways the standard variety agrees or conflicts with other ideologies (such as culture, religion, gender);
- and who the producer of the standard is and whether it reinforces or reduces existing power hierarchies (McLelland, 2019).

In the context of minority/marginalised languages, it is vital to note that non-native users of the language may have a disproportionate level of power over native users. It is in this context that calls for the “restandardisation” of Afrikaans have been made (Odendaal, 2014), as discussed later in this review.

3.2 Generic standardisation processes

The primary goal of standardisation is “to minimise variation in the selected variety, which can then be used to facilitate communication across regional and social dialects of a language” (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22). Standardisation typically targets a language’s spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and syntax as well as denotative meanings (dictionary definitions) (Ramlan, 2018; Johnston, 2003). As a process, standardisation can be achieved in numerous ways, and it should be understood as **an ongoing process since language is not static** (Johnston, 2003). Despite this, standardisation efforts still work against the “natural tendency for a language to morph over time, space, and social identities” in order to “limit change and variability within a language variety” (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22, 23) Typically, the process of creating a standard variety involves five stages: **selection (acceptance), diffusion, maintenance, codification, and prescription** (Milroy & Milroy, 1985 in Johnston, 2003; Ramlan, 2018; Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22).

While these stages are not necessarily linear, selection typically follows on the intentional or unplanned promotion of a particular variety, usually a variety used by those with social power (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22). Selection is a specific stage in the language planning process, and it is an official act of choosing one language or variety over another: "Selection is the term used to refer to the choice of a language or language variety to fulfil certain functions in a given society: for example, official language, medium of instruction, religious language and so on. Often this means that the most prestigious dialect or language is chosen" (Deumert, 2009: 375). As suggested above, selection can also manifest when individuals in a language community attempt to mimic the language-use of the community’s most wealthy or powerful individuals; this can be done in speaking and writing (Johnston, 2003; see Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22). This mimicry creates a preference for the use of that particular variety in official (legal, government, research, educational documents) or popular (social media, religious, fiction) texts and contexts, which leads to diffusion (Johnston, 2003). Diffusion and then maintenance happens by the slow and steady spread of this preference especially through written materials (Johnston, 2003). Codification then takes place through the creation of lexicographic resources and the drafting of explicit syntax and orthography rules, although they may at first be limited to “problem areas” for writers (Johnson 2003; Ramlan, 2018; Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 23). Prescription represents the most advanced stage of standardisation which includes labelling other varieties or accents as “incorrect” and inferior, marginalising users of non-standard varieties, and the creation of lexicographic materials that claim to be exhaustive and explain “correct use” (Johnston, 2003; Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 22-23). The establishment of an authoritative body that monitors and promotes the use of the standard variety can also aid maintenance, codification, and prescription (Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023: 23). It is important to note that this advanced **standardisation happens in communities where most are literate**, and that **written texts are the primary vehicle for standardisation** (Johnston, 2003; Ramlan, 2018).

The typical process of standardisation might not be comparable for signed languages due to the absence of written texts which are used to produce literacy (Johnston, 2003). However, this does not imply that standardisation is unachievable in signed languages or that written, especially lexicographic, material creates a

superior standard variety (Johnston, 2003). Lexicographic material is a necessity for the protection and preservation of a language as well as the promotion of literacy among users (Johnston, 2003; Ramlan, 2018). It is also not the only element that contributes to standardisation: the use of the language in education as a language of teaching and learning as well as social factors, such as preference for the variety used by the community's most powerful individuals, have key roles in standardisation (Johnston, 2003; see Curzan, Queen, VanEyk & Weissler, 2023).

However, it must be explained that in standardising signed languages, there are additional challenges including:

- the necessity of learning a separate language or developing a writing system in order to be able to read and write;
- the expectation that Deaf individuals use a spoken/written language to communicate with hearing individuals;
- the huge variance in signs and levels of competence among signing communities using the same signed language;
- a lack of preference for one, widely-spread particular variety; and
- the lack of signed languages (especially indigenous sign languages) as a language of teaching and learning in education (even in schools for the Deaf) (Johnston, 2003).

Johnston also indicated in this 2003 list that another challenge was the limited research on and documentation of sign languages, but this is not true anymore. While some sign languages still lack documentation and research, there are now **quite a number of sign language corpora and resources** (many of which are accessible on the CLARIN database[1]) as well as **a substantial body of sign language research**, including literature, linguistics and sociolinguistics (some of which is outlined in the latter sections of this report), which have been used in standardisation and lexicographic processes, among other activities. In relation to a lack of resources and research, keynote presenter at the 2023 Afrilex conference Professor Myriam Vermeerbergen of KU Leuven and Stellenbosch University interestingly noted that some of the most significant challenges she had encountered with sign language lexicography included **limited reference sources for inferring the meaning(s) and grammatical properties of signs**, and **difficulty in calculating the frequency of a sign's use**, which suggests the advancement of sign language research but also that there are still areas that remained un-investigated and undocumented. These unique challenges coupled with the usefulness of research, documentation, and lexicographic material, strongly suggest that **standardisation can only occur after the language has been researched and documented in the form of dictionaries and thesauruses that showcase the multiple varieties** of the national sign language (see Johnston, 2003; Ramlan, 2018).

As an alternative, **"natural standardisation"** is the process of developing unity in a language over a long period of time (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Natural standardisation still follows the same process of selection, diffusion, maintenance, codification, and prescription, however, **the selection, diffusion,**

[1] CLARIN database of Sign Language resources, available at: https://www.clarin.eu/resource-families/sign-language-resources#1-Sign-language-resources-in-the-CLARIN-infrastructure

maintenance, and codification may not be monitored and the prescription may not be extreme or successful (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). It follows that natural standardisation occurs when preference is given to a particular variety over time; this variety is still usually associated with the more powerful or wealthy individuals in a community, and/or centres of learning, and/or popular texts (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006).

3.3 Destandardisation and restandardisation

It is relevant to explain here that concepts such as "destandardisation" and "restandardisation" also exist. Odendaal (2013) indicates that these processes could happen to languages that have already been standardised. Destandardisation is a concept that linguists have been considering over the past few decades brought on by the observed rejection of old standards and norms, in language and in other matters (see Odendaal, 2013). The rejection of a standard would mean that it would lose its authority and that the language would broaden with dialectic diversity (Odendaal, 2013). Internal variation within a language would become more acceptable and the boundaries between different languages would become blurred (Odendaal, 2013). However, this does not mean that a single, global language would emerge or that all languages, varieties, and dialects would be accepted, but it does suggest that there would be more competition between languages, varieties, and dialects as multiple forms become acceptable in high-level and other public domains (Odendaal, 2013). Linguists are preoccupied with considering the question of "What would happen if there were no standards anymore?". Odendaal (2013) points out **that standard varieties provide stability** while the **rejection of norms is associated with transformation and innovation**: this interplay has led to calls for restandardisation.

Restandardisation is a trending concept in South Africa, especially in relation to Afrikaans and South African English (Odendaal, 2013; Basson, 2022). It has value for standardising a language for the first time as **it represents "hindsight" and a desire to improve the original process and decisions made regarding a language's standard**. Basson (2022), in his analysis of restandardisation proposals made between 1987 and 2020 (see Van den Heever, 1987; Van Rensburg, 1991, 1992; De Wet, 1997; Willemse, 2009; Hendricks, 2011, 2016, 2017; Le Cordeur, 2020; McLachlan, 2020; Van Coller and Steyn, 2020; Van Huyssteen, 2020), recognises Odendaal (2013) as a frontrunner in the discussion about Afrikaans restandardisation. Odendaal (2013) outlines a definition of the concept. Restandardisation would be a language planning process that entails standardising a language again (i.e., following the same steps), but on a new or different set of norms or functions (Odendaal, 2013). It would happen when the users of a language **find that the standard is no longer appropriate** (Odendaal, 2013); reasons why a standard may no longer be appropriate are sociopolitical (e.g., **social problems, social changes**), rather than practical (e.g., difficult to use, outdated). The process is therefore deliberate and attempts to change the lexicon, writing system, orthography, and/or grammar to mitigate social ills caused by the standard variety (Odendaal, 2013). This process should have a positive effect on the status and perceptions of non-standard varieties of a language (Odendaal, 2013).

Restandardisation also **assists in democratisation**: restandardisation rejects the ideological approach of traditional standardisation for a normative approach **which prioritises equality, democracy, empowerment,**

and freedom. In other words, restandardisation would **ensure that all users of the language, but especially those marginalised by the standard, are included in the process** so that the new standard does not create power imbalances between certain users (Odendaal, 2013; Basson, 2022). This participation would have to be democratic (Odendaal, 2013). Further, a part of this may include expanding the standard to include aspects of non-standard varieties, also called "harmonisation" or "unification" (Odendaal, 2013). The level to which this is done can be describe as "reformist" or "radical" (Odendaal, 2013). "Reformist restandardisation" adds to the standard from non-normative varieties, but not to the degree that non-normative varieties are fully incorporated in the standard; this can result in the elite still "owning" the standard and continued power imbalances (Odendaal, 2013). "Radical restandardisation" is led by non-standard variety speakers and includes the wider incorporation of varieties so that they form a new standard that is fully inclusive (Odendaal, 2013). However, it is noted that because people are resistant to change, especially extreme change, radical restandardisation may be unfeasible (Odendaal, 2013).

There are some practical pointers that are given regarding restandardisation that are relevant to standardising a language for the first time: (re)standardisation should **focus on describing actual use of a language rather than preferred use**, and that actual use would be used to create rules (Odendaal, 2013; Basson, 2022). This would mean **implementing a bottom-up and top-down approach as neither are typically successful and/or equitable on their own** (Odendaal, 2013). **Non-governmental organisations, teachers, and people at grass-roots level are important stakeholders in this process in addition to government and language planning institutions** (Odendaal, 2013; Basson, 2022). Further, **use should be planned for and documented on local, regional, and national levels as well as formal and informal settings** (Odendaal, 2013). Restandardisation should **include prestige planning** to mitigate negative power dynamics (Odendaal, 2013). **Data should be open for all stakeholders** (Odendaal, 2013).

4. CASE STUDIES OF STANDARDISATION PROCESSES FOR LOCAL WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGES

In this section, we consider how standardisation occurred in languages used in South Africa. This section presents case studies of South African languages chronologically in the order in which attempts to standardise the languages were made, rather than the chronology of the languages' existence.

4.1 English

English is a key example of natural standardisation. British English, as the original source of English and as the standard on which South African English is based, has developed over centuries (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). While Middle English had four dialects, one eventually become considered the standard and the marker of Early Modern English (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). This preferred variety, by chance, had strong use in the geographical area that housed Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the city of London, and the British government and monarchy (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Therefore,

it was the variety used in education, commerce, and governance and justice (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). It was also diffused by its use in popular texts, such as those by Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as the newly-translated English Bible, which were distributed among the population because of the invention of the printing press that meant books were now easily manufactured and purchasable (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006).

The codification of the language took place through the production of grammar reference works and English dictionaries, although these originally did not contain common words and only words that were considered difficult or unknown (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). A variety of individuals and groups produced these resources (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Later and over several decades, more detailed works were produced, still by several different individuals and groups (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). This is because an English Academy, to be the authority on English use, failed to be established and currently still does not exist (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). In this sense, the prescription stage of English has been relatively unsuccessful (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). English grammar resources today are still concerned with making sense of the same confusing grammar rules as the grammar resources produced in the 18th century (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Additionally, there is no fixed linguistic norm in English since new terms and trends arise dependent on context and as the language is spread globally (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). Further, the need for easy use, especially in education, has meant that former norms have been abandoned by teachers and students (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). The result is that British English has become a “focussed variety” that is used in formal contexts while other varieties and dialects continue to thrive in informal contexts (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006).

A lack of prescription is true also for South African English. South African English is a standard English variety indigenous to South Africa (DSAE, 2023) which incorporates “Afrikaans–”, “Black–”, “Cape Flats–”, “Indian–”, and “White South African English” dialects (De Klerk, 1996). British English arrived in South Africa along with explorers, traders and, later, colonialists that settled in South Africa and South African English was almost immediately born as Englishmen looked for words to describe new plants, people, animals, practices, and geography (DSAE, 2023). While some of these words did not last, others still exist and are used every day (DSAE, 2023). Most of these words were directly borrowed or inspired from local, African, or international languages, and some were created anew (DSAE, 2023). Apart from the use of specialised words, South African English also includes certain habits, such as using general English words in slightly irregular contexts (DSAE, 2023): famously, we stop at robots rather than traffic lights. The Dictionary of South African English (a National Lexicography Unit of PanSALB) is the leading documenter of this variety and its typical use (DSAE, 2023) while PanSALB’s English National Language Body does not produce orthography rules for English – meaning prescription of this standard variety is not enforced. Interestingly, there is a stronger prescription of British English (which is closely mimicked by White South African English) in South African schools which can result in the disappointing rejection of South African English in all its variety, and derogatory social attitudes toward certain South African English dialects (see Chetty, 2012; Bosch & De Klerk, 1996).

4.2 Afrikaans

Afrikaans has often been argued as a model of best practice for standardisation and language promotion. An exploration of its process reveals hidden histories and marginalisation and highlights the intricate ties among language, culture, and superiority. While mainly rooted in Dutch, the language was created in the 1700s through blending with languages such as Khoe, San, Indonesian, Malay, and Portuguese (Willemse, 2017). Thus, many Afrikaans speakers were not white; a trend that is maintained today with 60% of Afrikaans speakers being Black, Coloured, Asian, or Indian (Willemse, 2017). Because of the blending between ethnic and cultural groups, Afrikaans developed three varieties early on: Cape Afrikaans (Coloured Afrikaans, *Afrikaaps*), Orange River Afrikaans (Khoe Afrikaans), and Eastern Border Afrikaans (now considered Standard Afrikaans or "White Afrikaans") (Van Huyssteen, 2020). In the history of its standardisation, the variety of white Afrikaans speakers was given attention because the political and social environment of South Africa prioritised white people: By 1875, dictionaries and grammar references were being produced for Afrikaans by the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaanders* (meaning "Society of True Afrikaners", whose members were white) (Willemse, 2017). In 1909, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* (meaning the South African Academy for Science and Art) was founded, which aimed to promote the use and quality of Afrikaans (SAAWK, 2023). A subsidiary of the Academy was the *Taalkommissie* (meaning Language Commission), which became (and remains) the regulator of the Afrikaans language (SAAWK, 2023). These institutions featured white members only for many years. Despite these developments, Afrikaans remained inferior to Dutch until 1925 when it was recognised as a fully-formed language and replaced Dutch as an official language of the Union of South Africa (SAHO, 2014). In 1926, plans were made to create an authoritative Afrikaans dictionary which have manifested in the creation of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* and *Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal,* which are still in production (De Schryver, 2005). As South Africa adopted the apartheid regime, Afrikaans became even further entwined with racial segregation and domination through Afrikaner nationalism (Willemse, 2017) and Afrikaans was imposed as a language of teaching and learning on non-Afrikaans speakers in 1974 (Willemse, 2017). Webb (2008) notes that the tie to Afrikaner nationalism is obviously problematic, and the attempted replication of such pride and loyalty to a language along ethnic lines would logically lead to conflict, but the lessons to be learnt from the standardisation of Afrikaans include the realisation that language promotion (and standardisation) is predominantly a bottom-up process and that language promotion is most effective when linked with pride and loyalty, a public movement, and strong community leaders.

In other lessons learnt, Gerda Odendaal (2014) notes that calls for the restandardisation of Afrikaans started in the 1980s, predominantly because of its association with apartheid. However, other issues underly this standardisation process including its reliance on Dutch, the removal of English influence on the language and a denial of the contact between South African English and Afrikaans, and the disregard for other varieties, namely the Coloured and Khoe varieties, which further entrenches racism (Odendaal, 2014). Restandardisation would work against these issues by including lexical terms from all varieties of Afrikaans, recognising the grammatical differences between varieties, removing Dutch as the norm for Afrikaans, accepting English's influence on Afrikaans, and ensuring participation from all speakers of Afrikaans in the standardisation process (Odendaal, 2014). Basson (2022) also notes that these efforts would be assisted through the inclusion of the Cape varieties of Afrikaans in school textbooks. It is worth noting that this demand for restandardisation has

had some success as the leading text for Afrikaans grammar rules and lexicon (*Die Afrikaanse Woordelys en Spelreëls*), compiled by the *Taalkommissie*, started incorporating words from the Cape and Orange River varieties in 2017 (*Afrikaanse Woordelys en Spelreëls*, 2017).

4.3 Indigenous African languages

The indigenous African languages will be addressed in a single section since their standardisation processes have been largely the same. However, before the standardisation of South Africa's other nine spoken indigenous official languages can be discussed, it is important to note the historical treatment and origins of these languages since a lot of the literature related to the standardisation of African languages tackles the matter: several researchers, such as Orman (2008), Makoni (2003) and Alexander (1998), indicate that the languages of Southern Africa (sometimes termed "Bantu languages" as a means of classification, although the term has had racist connotations) are actually varieties or dialects of the same languages (Odendaal, 2013). Missionaries and colonisers on the continent attempted to exaggerate differences between the varieties and dialects and attach these geographically to reinforce marginalisation (Ranger, 1989 in Odendaal, 2013; Orman, 2008; Makoni, 2003; see Alexander, 1998). These varieties and dialects were also developed separately to force a particular reality, which was and is inaccurate, in attempts to segregate and disempower (Ranger, 29189 in Odendaal, 2013; Orman, 2008; Makoni, 2003; see Alexander, 1998). In choosing the country's official languages, this distinction has been carried over to the detriment of other varieties and dialects, which are now seen as inferior to the official languages (see Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022; Majola, Gumede & Mbatha, 2023; Orman, 2008; Makoni, 2003; see Alexander, 1998). It is in this context that harmonisation as a form of restandardisation has been proposed for the Nguni and Sotho languages (Odendaal, 2013; Alexander, 1998). This would entail an overarching standard for languages (varieties) with historical and linguistic similarities (Odendaal, 2013; see Msimang, 1998; Simango, 2002; Alexander, 1998).

In line with arguments about variety and harmony is Rakgogo & Zungu's (2022) point that language planning in South Africa, which includes standardisation, is political in nature and subject to those with socio-economic and political influence. This is based on the maintenance of particular varieties of some languages as the standard of the languages (for example, Sepedi is one of 26 varieties of Sesotho sa Leboa, yet it is specifically named in the Constitution and maintained as the standard for the language; also see above the case study of Afrikaans). This ongoing discrepancy elevates the users of those standards above users of other varieties of the languages (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). This manifests most evidently in education and easily produces the unwanted outcomes of stigmatisation and alienation for non-standard variety speakers (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). They find that language and politics cannot be separated (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022), suggesting that the standardisation of indigenous African languages also presents lessons learnt to keep in mind when planning standardisation.

The indigenous official languages of South Africa have all been standardised significantly (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022; Webb, 2008). Originally, missionaries and educators created "boards" to develop the written forms and orthographies for isiZulu and isiXhosa and later "Sotho-Tswana" (Webb, 2008; see Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). Incidentally, the orthography of some of these languages has been significantly influenced by the orthography

of European languages (Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). During apartheid, especially from the 1960s, the government promoted the selection of these languages as the official languages of the "independent homelands" while establishing a language board for each of them that was tasked with standardising the language (Webb, 2008; see Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022). Current standardisation efforts are facilitated by PanSALB's National Language Bodies and National Lexicography Units through the verification and authentication of terminology, creation of lexicographic material, and production of orthography rules. National Lexicography Units, which comprise editors and Boards of Directors, create lexicographic material, particularly comprehensive monolingual dictionaries (PanSALB, 2023). National Language Bodies comprise of language experts in standardisation, lexicography, terminology, literature, language in education, translation and interpreting, multilingualism, and media, among others, and are responsible for verifying and authenticating terminology and producing and/or reviewing the language's orthography rules every five years (PanSALB, 2023).

4.3.1 PanSALB authentication process

Pertinent to standardisation is the National Language Bodies authentication efforts, which constitute the official selection process of standardisation. The National Language Service in the Department of Arts and Culture (specifically the sections concerned with language planning, terminology, and human language technologies) as well as Language Research and Development Centres, higher education institutions, the Department of Education, and Umalusi, develop new terminology (Ramuedzisi, van Huyssteen & Mandende, 2019; Webb, 2008). These stakeholders may create new terms or harvest them, after which they request that the terms be verified and authenticated by the relevant National Language Body in line with legislation and policy (PanSALB, 2023; Ramuedzisi, Van Huyssteen & Mandende, 2019; Khumalo, 2017; Webb, 2008). The verification process entails the assessment of each term's compliance with existing norms and language rules as well as its use and meaning, in consultation with subject experts, such as academics (Khumalo, 2017). This is done by the National Language Body's technical committee for lexicography and standardisation and if the committee are satisfied with a term's assessment, it is verified (Khumalo, 2017). Thereafter, the verified terms are authenticated (approved and selected as the officially recognised term) by all the members of the relevant National Language Body (Khumalo, 2017). Verification and authentication require consensus regarding the term's appropriateness among the technical committee and National Language Body respectively (Khumalo, 2017).

In addition to calls for harmonisation and considerations of the political nature of language planning, the standardisation process described above has practical challenges. Not uncommonly, this process faces a challenge of determining how to handle "rural" versus "urban" varieties of languages and how broad the base for standardisation should be (Webb, 2008). In general, some variation within the standard variety is allowed for to prevent the alienation of those that use non-standard varieties (Webb, 2008). The National Lexicography Units play a role in diffusion, codification, and prescription (PanSALB, 2023), yet a survey of their outputs show that some have not produced exhaustive resources that would allow for prescription. Ideally, the authenticated terminology should also be disseminated through the National Terminology Bank, for which the National Language Service in the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture is responsible (Khumalo, 2017). Despite this, it was noted at the 2023 PanSALB Multilingualism Conference, that challenges with the popularisation of these

languages lie in the comparatively limited amount of research being published in indigenous African languages, the lack of mother tongue education in these languages beyond foundation phase, and the inaccessibility of the National Term Bank (PanSALB, 2024). Additionally, Ramuedzisi, Van Huyssteen & Mandende (2019: 263) note that there has "thus far not been any legal, regulatory tool to manage such [terminology development] projects and there is no clear reporting line in terms of terminology development". These matters are being addressed through the implementation of the policy framework for language in higher education, roll-out of mother tongue-based bilingual education across the country, and improvement of the National Term Bank and National Terminology Policy, which are all currently underway (PanSALB, 2024). Where these challenges meant that these languages were previously not known as well as they should be, and diffusion was not pervasive (Webb, 2008), it is hoped that these undertakings will accelerate the promotion of these languages, the amount of research in tertiary institutions written in and on indigenous languages, and translanguaging/multilingual practices, all of which have seen an improvement over the last decade (PanSALB, 2024). Other improvements have been proposed to further standardisation efforts. These include the involvement of teachers in the creation of technical terms and the enforcement of the use of African official languages in public and formal arenas through governmental language policies and practice (Webb, 2008; PanSALB, 2024). The promotion of these languages among the relevant language communities would also breed positive attitudes toward them, countering negative perceptions and limited use of these languages, while diffusing them (Webb, 2008; PanSALB, 2024).

5. ISSUES AND PROCESSES FOR STANDARDISING SIGN LANGUAGES

Limited examples of strictly standardised sign languages exist, possibly because many sign languages have only been recognised as fully-fledged languages in the last few decades (Adam, 2015). Also, the challenges related to sign language standardisation (mentioned earlier) should be kept in mind. To contextualise the literature review, we provide an overview of the stance of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Then we provide some selected case studies of standardisation attempts of various national sign languages (Dutch, Australian, Japanese, and Korean as well as the Arab Sign Languages) under the themes of "challenges for the standardisation of sign languages", "data collection processes", "dealing with variation", "lexicography in sign languages", and "SASL research".

5.1 Stance of the World Federation of the Deaf

Before case studies of signed language standardisation can be explored, it is important to note upfront that the World Federation of the Deaf [2] (WFD) released a statement in 2014 on the standardisation of signed languages. In the statement, they express their concern about work being done on various sign languages without native-user consultation, including work done to standardise various sign languages (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014). They explain that a lack of consultation with the Deaf and native sign language users [3] is a contravention

[2] Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA) is a member association of WFD.
[3] A native sign language user includes hearing people who have a sign language as their mother tongue, such as Children of Deaf Adults (CODA).

of article 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014). They highlight that choosing one sign per concept in the standardisation process is wrong, as it does not reflect the natural variation that is common to all languages (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014). They explain that this practice will disenfranchise and alienate the language community (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014). They therefore argue that "any sign language work should reflect all the different signs used by a language community", and that dictionaries in particular should "always document all the different signs and their variations that deaf people in a community or area use" (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014). Thus, the WFD conclude by saying that they do not support any formal standardisation activities, but rather only accept appropriately qualified linguistic research into and documentation of sign languages (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014).

5.2 Data collection processes

Nederlandse Gebarentaal (NGT, Dutch Sign Language) has been an official language of The Netherlands since 2020. In order to be made an official language, the Dutch government demanded the standardisation of the language for use in schools (although this was highly unusual in comparison to the normal requirements for officialising a language) (Schermer, 2012). This led to the creation of the Standardisation of the Basic Lexicon (STABOL) project and a steering committee comprising of representatives from the Dutch Deaf Council, the organisation of parents of Deaf children (FODOK), all schools for Deaf pupils, the Dutch Sign Centre, and the University of Amsterdam (Schermer, 2012) which would create a standardised NGT variety, determine a basic grammar, and develop a NGT curriculum for primary Deaf education between 1999 and 2002 (Schermer, 2012). The first step in this process, which was coordinated by the Dutch Sign Centre on the condition that they had the support of the Dutch Deaf community and that variations in NGT would not be rejected (Schermer, 2012), was data collection. The Dutch Sign Centre worked with linguists, native deaf and hearing signers (including teachers), and the Deaf community to establish a network of Deaf signers from different regions (Schermer, 2012). The network was responsible for maintaining contact with the Deaf community whose input was requested and collected (Schermer, 2012). Attention was given to ensuring that every sign that was taught "in the first three levels of the national NGT course modules used to instruct parents and teachers of young deaf children" was recorded (Schermer, 2012). Further signs were added for educational subjects, and where signs were lacking, they were developed (Schermer, 2012). In this process, the team relied on the *Kommunikatieve Vaardigheden* ("Communicative Competence") (KOMVA) project of 1982-1990, that recorded all possible signs used by the Dutch Deaf community; it therefore included all regional variations (Schermer, 2012).

Data collection and diffusion for NGT is still ongoing. The Dutch Sign Centre was chosen as an independent but national, centralised coordinator and developer of NGT materials, a trainer of Deaf native signers as teachers and, as of 2004, the host of the NGT lexicon database (Schermer, 2012). This has largely assisted with the implementation of standard NGT: as of 2022, the database has 22 059 signs with context, regional variations, and grammatical information and their online dictionary has 17 250 signs and 3155 example sentences (Nederlands Gebarencentrum, 2023).

5.3 Dealing with variation

NGT also offers information on dealing with variation in the standardisation process. Once data had been collected, the KOMVA lexicon in particular was studied to identify signs that were used consistently across all five geographical regions of the Netherlands (labelled national or standard signs) and these signs were prioritised in the standard NGT variety (Schermer, 2012). Then, signs with the most variation were studied, and selections were made: regional variants were included as synonyms or, occasionally, assigned to concepts (Schermer, 2012). For example, “Horse in the Amsterdam region was used for both "horse" and "riding on horseback." In the Groningen region horse was used only for "horse" and not for "riding on horseback." In the standardisation process the Groningen sign became the standard sign horse, and the Amsterdam sign became the standard sign for riding-on-horseback. Thus, both regional variants were included” (Schermer, 2012). In other words, a sign would be the first entry if it had the same meaning and was identical in all five regions in the country, or if it had the same meaning and was identical in the majority of regions, or if only one region used the sign for a particular concept (Schermer, 2012). Apart from this, all regional variants were included (Schermer, 2012). A total of 5000 signs were included in the standard lexicon for education; of these, 60% were national signs, 25% were regional synonyms, and 15% were specifically selected (Schermer, 2012).

The importance of variation in the study and use of sign languages cannot be overstated. In general, there is a preference for documenting variants, whether phonological or lexical. Johnston (2003) explains that of the approximately 5500 entries in Signs of Australia 1500 are phonological variants and around 500 are lexical variants. *The Dictionary of Southern African Signs*, although flawed in some respects, also documents all variants for concepts (Penn *et al*., 1992). Rowley and Cormier (2021) find that “enormous value is placed on regional variation in British Sign Language, as this is deemed to contribute to the richness of British Sign Language as a language and puts it on equal footing to the surrounding majority language”. Research has also found that variety is hugely influenced by schooling. Like NGT, the five regional varieties of Flemish Sign Language “have developed in and around the different Flemish deaf schools” (Van Herreweghe & Vermeerbergen, 2006:5). Eichmann and Rosenstock (2014) also provide further evidence of variation in German Sign Language based on schools. It may be valuable to adapt the term “school-lects” (see Quinn, 2010) which is, in many cases the equivalent of regional variation in spoken language (i.e. a school for Deaf children is almost like a separate region, even when it is in close proximity to another Deaf school in the same geographical region). Given the fact that there are at least 40 schools for Deaf children in South Africa, the implications should be considered in terms of planning as well as documenting variation.

The impact of other sociolinguistic factors on lexical variation should also be acknowledged (Lutzenberger *et al.*, 2023). This is especially important in the context of cultural and linguistic diversity in South Africa. It is important in this regard to highlight the uniqueness of SASL in the sense that South Africa is much more multicultural and multilingual than any of the other countries used in the case studies, and that we should therefore expect more variation in the lexicon. One should also carefully consider what exactly is meant with variation, what should eventually be standardised, and the context of a sign before selection. For example, it would not be appropriate to choose the sign for “ancestor” used in an African context over the sign used in a Western context, or vice versa. In this case, the variation is based on conceptual differences determined by

worldview which means that both variants must be included in any standardised form of SASL. Furthermore, there are instances where variation is the result of contextual factors (e.g., politeness) and these instances need to be researched properly (Vermeerbergen & Van Herreweghe, 2018).

5.4 Lexicography in sign languages

Australian Sign Language (Auslan) is a variety, grouped with the British and New Zealand Sign Language varieties, of BANZL (British-Australian-New Zealand Sign Language) (McKee and Kennedy, 2000). Although not formally standardised and not officialised in Australia, Auslan has been recorded in lexicographic materials. Dictionary-making for Auslan has been led largely by Trevor Johnston (2003; see Johnston & Schembri 2007). According to Johnston (2003) his primary focus in the creation of the dictionaries was to "accurately describe and document the lexicon" and some of the grammar of Auslan through literature review and participant observation, and analysis of signs' form and use. Johnston is a native user of Auslan, although not Deaf, and further received input from Deaf family members and deaf and hearing researchers, who were also native signers and/or specialised in linguistics, for the dictionaries (Johnston, 2003).

Johnston (2003) outlines the principles he applied in his creation of an Auslan dictionary, which could be applied to documenting other sign languages. His first criterion was "widespread and stable use in the community by native and heritage signers" (Johnston, 2003: 446). He explains that he attached greater value to signs used by those deeply embedded in their Deaf community and from historically Deaf families. He also typically prioritised recording signs in general use within the community because they were often used by the majority of signers; however, he maintained some flexibility in this when dealing with topics that could be more specialised, such as religion or sport (Johnston, 2003). Signs recorded were labelled according to its status/type of variation and variations were intentionally recorded too (Johnston, 2003). The only signs that were not recorded were those used by small groups of friends/family or created by individuals idiosyncratically (Johnston, 2003). The second criterion was lexicalisation (Johnston, 2003). In this sense recorded signs had to be lexicalised (a sign, that also had recognisable manual features) rather than non-lexicalised (for example, fingerspelled or having componential contextual meaning) to be included (Johnston, 2003). In organising his data into a dictionary, Johnston (2003) ordered signs via formational features, based first on handshape and then other relevant features, such as location, orientation, movement, and facial expression, which he calls "cheremic order".

5.5 Challenges for the standardisation of sign languages

Apart from the challenges noted previously in this report, case studies also provide examples of challenges and matters to avoid. Japanese Sign Language (JSL) provides an example of the hegemony of spoken language. In 1980, the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) established the Japanese Sign Language Research Group with the aim of developing JSL in line with modern Japanese and to standardise the language (Adam, 2015). The research group still exists and meets to discuss new signs, and annually publishes a book to diffuse the new signs to the community (Adam, 2015). Most notably, this process has also led to JSL grammar closely mimicking spoken Japanese (Adam, 2015), which is not desirable since the standard version does not necessarily reflect the real use of the sign language. For a long while, JFD resources were the only one available

for JSL and were thus used for interpreter training too (Adam, 2015). However, other private groups now also offer interpreter training and JSL resources, which are therefore not necessarily standardised and thus not necessarily influenced by spoken Japanese (Adam, 2015), which could signal the end of this kind of hegemony (Mori, 2011 in Adam, 2015). This would be despite a marked preference by older JSL users for JFD-trained interpreters and JFD resources (Adam, 2015), which perhaps also reflects a decreasing acceptance of the standardisation body or simply a greater acceptance of variation in language authority, lexicography, and interpreting practice by younger users.

Korean Sign Language (KSL) can perhaps also be pointed out as applying an "incorrect" form of standardisation that reflects hearing practices rather than addressing the needs of the Deaf community. As of 2015, KSL is one of two official languages of South Korea (Lee, 2022). Unfortunately, much of the research on their standardisation process in unavailable in English. Standardisation efforts began in 2000 through the National Institute of Korean Language, which is overseen by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Lee, 2022). The Ministry worked with the Korean Association of the Deaf to publish the KSL dictionary in 2005 (Lee, 2022). The dictionary has been criticised for its failure to develop organically, for representing intended rather than actual use of KSL, and for artificialism as it is seemingly based on the translation of spoken Korean, rather than KSL (Lee, 2022). Additionally, LGBTQIAPD+ activists have also noted that standard KSL signs related to their community are derogatory; as such, the community has worked to develop new signs despite them not being included in the standard form of KSL (Lee, 2022). Research has found that, while standardisation should improve access for the Deaf, many Deaf Koreans fail to understand KSL interpreting (Lee, 2022). A lack of a shared platform for new terms and ideas has also been noted (Lee, 2022).

The unification of Arab Sign Languages is yet another example of spoken language hegemony in the context of sign languages. In 2009, attempts were made to unify the sign languages used in the 22 countries of the League of Arab States (Adam, 2015). The artificial language was created through the publication of a dictionary by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs (CAMSA) within the League of Arab States (Adam, 2015). This was done although there was significant distinction between the countries signed languages and that spoken Arabic has multiple standard forms as well as community varieties (Adam, 2015). The result was largely rejected by the countries Deaf communities as well as the WFD, and resulted in a sign language that is used exclusively by the interpreters of the news channel, Al Jazeera (World Federation of the Deaf, 2014; Adam, 2015).

5.6 SASL research

This section briefly outlines some of the current research (since 2020) being conducted on SASL. In her MA dissertation Nyeleti Nkwinika (2016) examines the lexicon of SASL in the context of borrowing. She used the modified Swadesh list to compare signs from SASL to American Sign Language, British Sign Language, Irish Sign Language, Paget Gorman Sign System, & "English" signs (signs that are fingerspelled or initialised) (Nkwinika, 2016). Although she worked with limited data, her findings indicate that British Sign Language had the most significant impact on the lexicon of SASL (Nkwinika, 2016). Andries van Niekerk (2020) also investigated the SASL lexicon by using data from four schools for Deaf children. His findings indicate that most loan signs were from British Sign Language, followed by American Sign Language, and thirdly from Flemish

Sign Language (Van Niekerk, 2020). He also found that the majority of the schools showed a higher possible influence from Flemish Sign Language compared to American Sign Language (Van Niekerk, 2020).

Research on SASL dictionary-making was recently presented by National Institute for the Deaf (NID) Content Development Manager Mr Dirkie Ebersohn at the Afrilex Workshop in September 2023, under the title "Creating a bilingual Sign Language/English video glossary". As dictionary-making is a core process of standardisation, it is vital to note this research about the NID's SASL dictionary. In his presentation, Mr Ebersohn explained that dictionary compilation for SASL differs immensely from that of spoken languages, which is confirmed by the research presented earlier in this report. The *NID SASL Dictionary* was compiled through video recordings instead of written words because SASL is a visual language. Videos had to all be captured on an app to enable users to view, stop, pause and reverse the information, especially considering those who were still in the process of learning SASL. There were five phases in the creation of the NID SASL dictionary: data collection, categorisation, analysis, recording, and verification and authentication.

Data in the form of raw recorded signs were collected from institutions such as different Deaf schools, universities, colleges, and the Deaf community. Different signs for the same concept were collected and none were discarded in the data collection or compilation processes. The year and place of data collection was also documented. The community from which the sign came and the year in which it was collected is vital information because languages evolve over time and in different places. The polished footage was analysed to identify any duplicate signs for the same concept. A database of all the signs and their corresponding concepts was created. With the assistance of Stellenbosch University and the University of the Witwatersrand, the raw footage was rerecorded and edited for uniformity in look and feel: a variety of mostly Deaf signers who were also representative in race, geographic origin, and sex recreated the original videos: the signs collected were signed in the exact same manner but the rerecording ensured that the background colour of the video was appropriate and the colour of shirt worn by each signer was according to their skin colour. These videos were uploaded onto the NID SASL dictionary app.

The NID chose to have the signs on their app verified and authenticated. The SASL National Language Body (NLB), which is a PanSALB advisory structure, conducted the verification and authentication of the signs. This was done through a meeting of the NLB's Terminology and Lexicography Technical Committee in which they surveyed all the recorded signs and selected the most used sign to become the verified sign. Following that, the entire SASL NLB gathered to authenticate the verified signs. Authentication entailed confirming the NLB's agreement that the verified sign would be the official sign for that concept. These signs are demarcated on the dictionary app, but all variants for the verified sign remain on the NID app too. According to a December 2023 newsletter, Professor Anne Baker is investigating changes in the SASL lexicon by comparing the entries in *The Dictionary of Southern African Signs* (Penn *et al*. 1992) and the current online NID dictionary.

While the NID's efforts warrant some of the first steps in creating a much-needed SASL dictionary, research emanating from the University of the Witwatersrand indicates that some signs, especially related to subject-specific terms in higher education, need to still be developed. Presenting at the same Afrilex conference,

presentations by Ms Naomi Janse van Vuuren and Ms Simphiwe Mkhize and Dr Michiko Kaneko indicated that there is a lack of signs for subject-specific terminology (for example, in the field of sociolinguistics and linguistics) which poses a great disadvantage for Deaf students because they struggle to understand fingerspelled concepts. For linguistics, a group of Deaf students who completed the SASL Linguistics course (NQF Level 7) at the university developed these terms in workshops facilitated by the SASL department at the university. For sociolinguistics, the subject terminology was developed by a Deaf-hearing academic team and will be finalised through consultation with students who have competed the course. Student-made signs for concepts were collected in both studies and analysed. The first study produced a glossary, and both studies, while the results need to be further delineated, promised insight into word/sign formation strategies, neologisms, and the lexicalisation process of compounds in SASL.

Modiegi Njeyiyana (2022) in her Doctoral thesis *Lexical variation and change in SASL: a case study of a Western Cape school-lect* studied the signs elicited by pictures when shown to four groups of signers from the Western Cape classified by age (8-10 years old, 16-18 years old, 23-29 years old, and 42-68 years old). She found that there was significant variation across and within groups, but that the group with the most intra-variation was the 16- to 18-year-olds, and that groups with the most inter-group variation was between the 8- to 10- year-olds and the two adult groups (Njeyiyana, 2022). The adult groups were also interviewed about their attitudes towards lexical variation and possible reasons for it (Njeyiyana, 2022). Among these answers were dominant perceptions that older signs were more appropriate and easier to use than new signs, and that the variation between the signs adults and children used caused communication and relationship breakdowns, because older adults did not wish to learn the new signs (Njeyiyana, 2022). Contrastively, younger adults were willing to learn new signs to communicate with others and switch variants depending on the community/context (Njeyiyana, 2022). Young adults felt that it was important to have an expansive knowledge of SASL varieties and variants (Njeyiyana, 2022). Participants also indicated that they thought the reason for variation and change was the influence of multiple schools for the Deaf within the province as well as the influence of the Deaf community outside of the schools, from which variants were brought into schools (Njeyiyana, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

While the intention of this report is to allow readers to formulate their own conclusions about way forward regarding SASL, some important points should be noted, as found in this report. They are:

- A standard variety is for use in public and high-level domains: government, the legal system, education (as medium of teaching, learning, and assessment), politics, economics, technology, media, and interpreting services. It is not for informal, community contexts in which community varieties should be used and encouraged.
- We should use the term “standard variety” when talking about creating a standard. It should be understood as one variety among other varieties of that language that will co-exist with the already present, equally important varieties.

- Having multiple varieties within a single language that are used in different contexts is a form of multilingualism, which should be promoted.
- Students should be taught which variety is relevant to which domains rather than that the standard variety is correct and others are incorrect.
- A language's development and survival are improved when there is a standard variety. However, there is no going back: once a standard has been established, its abolishment would worsen social disadvantages.
- Standardisation occurs through the interplay of social factors, written material, education, and lexicographic material; much of which cannot be controlled.
- A standard variety does not fulfil the function of nation building – this, in the case of SASL, should be done through training on, an appreciation of, and participation in Deaf culture.
- The demand for standardisation and the creation of explicit language rules usually comes from new users of a language rather than native speakers; the demand for standardisation is based on a desire or need to be multilingual.
- The concept or typical process of standardisation may be irrelevant or harmful to the South African context, which is multilingual, and in which SASL has been previously marginalised. **Further research into the status quo of SASL and the South African Deaf community is vital before any formal process is undertaken**.
- Considerations that need to be made when attempting to implement a standard language in a multilingual context include:
    - what the consequences are on other languages in the multilingual context;
    - that a standard may also reinforce separate bilingualism rather than flexible multilingualism and translanguaging; and
    - that a standard may create disjunct between language practice and cultural identity. This needs to be addressed in planning.
- Standardisation is an ongoing process since language is not static: standardisation creates stability, but the rejection of norms creates innovation.
- There is also the possibility of restandardisation, although this can be avoided by applying a democratic procedure the first time around.
- Restandardisation teaches us to prioritise equality, democracy, empowerment, and freedom in the standardisation process and to ensure that all users of the language, but especially those marginalised by the standard, are included in the process to prevent power imbalances among language users.
- **Standardisation can only occur after the language has been researched and documented in the form of dictionaries and thesauruses that showcase the multiple varieties.**
- **SASL research exists, but should be furthered.**
- Focus should be placed on describing actual use of a language rather than preferred use in standard materials.
- Natural selection, in which the selection, diffusion, maintenance, and codification of a language may not be monitored, and the prescription may not be extreme or successful, can be less invasive than prescribed standardisation.

- Implementing a bottom-up approach is needed and should include non-governmental organisations, teachers, language planning institutions, and government.
- It will be useful not to focus only on an SASL dictionary, but rather an SASL corpus, so that when data is collected on variation in the lexicon, it can also be used for other purposes (such as documentation of the syntax, morphology, and situational variation).
- Use should be planned for and documented on local, regional, and national levels as well as formal and informal settings. Prestige planning should be included. Data should be open for all stakeholders.
- The case studies of English, Afrikaans, indigenous spoken African languages, and Dutch Sign Language should be studied for lessons learnt.
- The vast variety in SASL must be considered including varieties' ties to provinces and schools.

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