

New book expands Zulu language

When a middle-aged engineer recently set out to write a novel in Zulu he found himself hamstrung by a lack of words with which to describe modern life. Determined not to use English as a crutch, Phiwayinkosi Mbuyazi instead created 450 new Zulu words.

His book, *Amayiphendleya*, is an adventure tale about four teenage boys and the wonders of technology.

For the first time in Zulu they come across an *isilolongamoya* - a machine that controls the temperature of the air - known in English as an air conditioner.

They also come to terms with *umnukubalo* (pollution), and with *ubungqonela* (colonialism), both words derived from their function or sound.

Mbuyazi said Zulu has not kept up with developments in almost all major sectors of knowledge.

"It now lacks the terminology that would allow one to hold a conversation, let alone write a book," he said.

The 41-year-old is dismissive of traditionalists who would keep Zulu "pure".

"Many people speak proudly about preserving Zulu but the truth is, by keeping it unchanged, we are contributing to its death," Mbuyazi said.

"Languages evolve and Zulu need not be left behind, otherwise it will become irrelevant," he added.

Everyday use

He hopes that the new words will eventually become part of everyday vocabulary. But the author's own path shows how many hurdles exist.

He had to set up his own publishing company after several mainstream publishers turned him down, saying there was "no market for Zulu literature".

A recent survey showed that no Zulu books were published in 2011, except for religious or school books. By contrast, about 33 books were published in Afrikaans.

But Mbuyazi feels that little has been done to create a market for Zulu readers and the Oxford University graduate is trying

to change that. He compiles a crossword puzzle for the *Sunday Times Zulu* edition and wants to use his company, Mbuyazi Publishing, to get Zulu writers published.

So far the company has produced his three books.

Despite its shortcomings, Zulu has some major advantages compared with South Africa's eight other indigenous African languages.

It is the only South African language, besides English and Afrikaans, in which a major national newspaper is produced. The newspaper *Ilanga* (The Sun) was published in 1903 by founding ANC leader John Langalibalele Dube. It is still in existence.

Mbuyazi's work has caught the attention of academics, some of whom caution against words being created on the hop. Professor Nhlanhla Mathonsi, an African languages researcher at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, warned that "people must not make up words just for the sake of it".

"Creating new words takes a deep understanding of the language and its nuances. Words should not confuse people but enlighten them," he said.

Source: *The Times* via I-Net Bridge

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