



A mother of a task that's crucial to protecting languages

On the eve of International Mother Language Day, we focus on projects that aim to ensure the survival of indigenous languages, writes **Kgomotso Moncho**

February 21 is International Mother Language Day. Let's reflect. The UN reported in 2018 that conservative estimates suggest that by the year 2100 more than half of the world's languages will be extinct. Less conservative estimates suggest that by the end of the century more than 90% will be lost forever.

These sobering projections motivated Monde Twala, senior vice-president and general manager of Paramount Africa, to spearhead the dubbing of popular animated series *SpongeBob SquarePants* into isiZulu for Nicktoons (DStv Channel 308). This move was preceded by the SABC's dubbing of another beloved kiddies' animation series, *Doc McStuffins*, into Sesotho in 2018. So there's hope for home-language promotion and the representation of black children in local children's television.

What's urgent is the critically endangered N|uu language. Ouma Katrina Esau, who is 90, is the last fluent speaker of the oldest, at approximately 25,000 years, San language. Nadine Angel Cloete's short film, *The Last Speaker: South Africa's Dying Language*, produced for Al Jazeera English, reveals the creation of a N|uu dictionary by Esau and her granddaughter, N|uu language researcher Claudia Snyman. The dictionary follows Esau's first N|uu children's book, *!Qhoi n/a Tjhoi*.

The dictionary carries messages and teachings for the language's preservation with a recording of about 5,000 words. But there are threats to its growth. Esau doesn't have new words for modern concepts. Snyman isn't a fluent speaker and she's aware of the pressure and time constraints due to Esau's age. But Snyman forges ahead anyway, teaching local children N|uu. Her determination to not have the language killed ensures its survival.



'SpongeBob SquarePants' has been dubbed into isiZulu. Picture: SUPPLIED

Translation sustains language and its evolution. The literary heritage of Sol Plaatje's translations, the existence of an online Setswana feminist dictionary by journalist Pontsho Pilane and social psychologist Lorato Palesa Modongo and the Repatriation of Letters project are notable examples.

The latter was born from talks about the growth and preservation of Setswana between profs Shole Shole and Recius Melato Malope, Dr Elinor Sisulu and author and Plaatje scholar Sabata-mpho Mokae.

"Repatriation of Letters brings South African books written in English by Setswana-speaking authors about Batswana-related matters in Setswana settings 'back home' and retells stories in the language they should have been written in in the first place," says author Tuelo Gabonewe. His book *Sarcophagus*, translated into *Tshika fa e ya Baneng*, is the first completed repatriation.

Other titles slated for translation include *Mhudi* by Plaatje, *Maru* by Bessie Head, *Call Me Woman* by Ellen Kuzwayo and the forthcoming *This Book Betrays My Brother*

(translated into *Masaikategang a Morwarre* by Lorato Trok) by Kagiso Lesego Molope. The project is supported by Geko Publishing, the Northern Cape department of sport, arts & culture and Sol Plaatje University.

Plaatje's translation of Shakespeare is at the heart of the pilot stage of another project, *Speak Me A Speech*, a collaboration between filmmaker Victor van Aswegen and Prof Chris Thurman of Wits University's Tsikinya-Chaka Centre (TCC) in Johannesburg.

TCC translates Shakespeare's plays into African languages to promote scholarship and performance that engages with the playwright as a multilingual phenomenon. *Speak Me A Speech* is set to be a filmic series of Shakespearean monologues in all South African languages, using new and existing translations, with a few screenings and festival events in the works.

Actor, writer and theatre maker Buhle Ngaba engages with the Setswana translation of *Julius Caesar*, which she encountered as her grandmother's well-worn copy of *Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliuse Kesara*

(published in 1937, five years after Plaatje's death). Working with director Nikki Pilkington and Sabata-mpho Mokae as translator, she takes on Portia's impassioned speech to Brutus from Act 2, scene 1.

"What struck me about encountering this work was that it existed. To discover it was life-changing. I've finished writing a play on Mme Charlotte Maxeke, whose adaptation recently ran in Cape Town. It was through writing that production and being in the archive, observing what South Africa was 100 years ago during the times of Mme Maxeke and Sol Plaatje, that I could recognise the ways in which we were also culturally robbed by apartheid. To be able to see ourselves within Sol Plaatje's translated text now has been special. It's our job as artists, performers and creators to excavate that history to have it told, and for us to respond to it," Ngaba says.

Unesco's 2023 message for International Mother Language Day is a focus on multilingual education. Award-winning South African EdTech start-up Ambani Africa, which focuses on interactive mother-tongue education, responds directly to this.

The company recently collaborated with Sho Majazi on her children's book, *Shoma and the Stars*. An augmented-reality app accompanies the book, enhancing the story and learning process with a voice glossary.

Ambani Africa founder Mukundi Lambani says: "One of the biggest revelations working in EdTech is the scarcity of digital learning resources in African languages. Our existence is timely. We've risen to the challenge of creating relevant, educational, accessible language-learning products. Our eight-book box set is our flagship product. When paired with our app, the learner has the opportunity of learning 14 languages." These are Tshivenda, Shona, Setswana, Sepedi, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Xitsonga, Yoruba, Kiswahili, English, French, Afrikaans, Mandarin and German.

Your Stars

By Linda Shaw



SHAINAL MITHAL
January 2 1992, Johannesburg, 11.10am

Sun sign: Capricorn

Moon sign: Sagittarius

Rising sign: Pisces

What an extraordinary combination of energies. You must drive yourself crazy with your endless indecision and mild dilliness. Part of you wants control and certainty while the other part wants wild adventure and chaos. The good news is that you've been through one of the most difficult cycles you'll encounter — and you've come out the other side. So if you've lost a lover or changed professions or created a completely new you, that's exactly as it should be. For the next few years your life will be a great deal easier. Even so, if you're not in the market for extra mouths to feed, take precautions. Pregnancy is one way of responding to current energies. But there are several alternatives. The fertility and abundance planets can be used to create magic or start a new business or discover a different wealth stream. This year, your career is taking off in wonderful new directions. The trick is to trust yourself — and to pay close attention to that extraordinary intuition.

● Want your chart read? Email asklindashaw@mweb.co.za



PISCES

Feb 19 - Mar 20

The sun swoops into your sign, brightening your day. By the time tomorrow's Pisces new moon joins the frame, you'll be dancing about with a smile on your face. Synchronicity is your new favourite word as your career planets push you forward, demanding meaning and purpose. Here's where you get to trust those fabulous instincts instead of canvassing a zillion opinions before each decision. And here's where you design your own life. Starting now.



ARIES

Mar 21 - April 19

Independence is wonderful, but selfishness is not quite the same thing. Now's your chance to learn the difference. Take care of your needs first, and then make space for theirs. You'll be amazed at how much more you can fit into your day. That aside, look out for new jobs. The market wants what you have. The money planets are waiting to scoop you up. You just need to pick a direction. It's time to find your passion — at last.



TAURUS

Apr 20 - May 21

An open mind is what's required. For though you usually do know what others need, most people like to make those decisions themselves. Your task is to separate your issues, and work on them. If family members are demanding too much, tell them. If clients and bosses are taking without giving, let them know. Your success is in your own hands. And tomorrow's fabulous new moon will point you in the right direction.



GEMINI

May 22 - Jun 20

Careful planning, as opposed to spontaneous lunacy, is your thought for the week. Not an exciting option in itself, but carrying a guaranteed excitement in its wake. And let's face it: orderly brilliance is far more impressive than a vague wash of ideas sloshed together with a spoon. Monday's deliciously creative new moon will send enough clues to get you going. From there, chat to everyone you meet. Take notes.



CANCER

June 21 - Jul 22

Yes, you're a tad uncomfortable with the unstoppable change of pace. And, sure, you're mildly distressed at the blizzard of verbiage, interminable meetings and endlessly ludicrous ideas spilling into your world. Even so. If you can stay sane through it all, you're about to gain something fabulous. And not just money either. Monday's wonderfully sensitive new moon opens up your creative faculties. You're about to unearth a completely new you. Yay.



LEO

Jul 23 - Aug 22

Stop pushing yourself so hard or you'll fall over. There's a chance for extra money, but if you charge in before you're ready, you're as likely to lose the lot. For best results, focus on mindless fun — as in, you've forgotten how to have some. Choose your playmates for their energy. Negative people make you forget how much you have to offer. Let tomorrow's new moon hoist you back on your well-deserved throne.



VIRGO

Aug 23 - Sep 22

Extraordinary flashes of inspiration feel like visitations from outer space — but are simply sparks of genius sneaking through the haze of distractions. And there's no-one to match you at distractions. But for now, not even you can stop the flow. And if you work with it, you may even discover a way to reinvent the wheel. Or something a tad more useful. Think of this as a week to get everything you want — for a change. You'll take care of the others later.



LIBRA

Sep 23 - Oct 22

There's a new enthusiasm that's been hiding under a cloud of endless responsibility for too long. Suddenly you're bursting with a confidence that can literally make dreams come true. The ideas are there. As long as you can resist that age-old compulsion to doubt their source, you'll find the courage to take that leap into the unknown. Grab a friend's hand and take that chance. On your marks ...



SCORPIO

Oct 23 - Nov 21

Who could fail to notice that inner glow of confidence and joy? Suddenly the world seems like a wonderful place. You're learning to like yourself more — and to understand the true value of intimacy. So, yes, there are risks. But the potential for reward is equally powerful. At work, launch new projects. Hire new staff. Get new equipment. Do whatever it takes to get yourself centre stage. Your efforts are finally being noticed.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov 22 - Dec 21

If you're ready for a new love, this is your week. Why not take a day off to make yourself gorgeous. Just make sure you know what you want and that your signals are clear. You're in for a wonderful — potentially long-term — experience. At work, meanwhile, show off. The folks out there want to know what you can do. Show them. Use tomorrow's delicious new moon to bring out your best. That wallflower routine doesn't impress anyone. It's time to shine.



CAPRICORN

Dec 22 - Jan 19

The frustrations are coming to an end. Not today, maybe, but soon after tomorrow's transformational new moon. That idiot at work is about to discover that no-one can do what you can do — and that we all have our own unique contribution. And that unresolved relationship will change or move on. And you? Well, you're looking for alternative ways to express yourself. Check every rainbow. There are pots of gold down there.



AQUARIUS

Jan 20 - Feb 18

The planets are huddled round your front door, begging for a hearing. As far as you're concerned, they can wait. You're powerful and you're not taking any garbage from anyone. Even so, there's no need to alienate yourself from the world. Your charm is contagious. A tiny effort is all you need to attract a team of helpful admirers. You can launch new ideas under tomorrow's fabulous new moon. Aquarians were never supposed to go it alone.