

## **55<sup>th</sup> KUASS (Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)**

**Date and Time:** 28 October 2016 (Fri) 13:30 – 15:00

**Venue:** #318, Inamori Memorial Foundation Building (3rd floor), Kyoto University

**Title:**

**Majority versus minority languages: A case of air slots allocation of South African Bantu Languages on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) channels**

**Speaker: Dr Madala Crous Hlungwani (University of Venda, South Africa & International Christian University, Japan)**

**Abstract:** The South African constitution accords the following eleven languages the official status: English, Afrikaans, Isizulu, Isixhosa, Sepedi/Northern Sotho, Setswana, Sesotho, Tshivenda, Siswati, Isindebele, and Xitsonga. The languages are therefore considered to be having the equal status before the law. In practice, however, this is not always true. For example, majority Bantu language groups such as Nguni and Sotho, which are constituted by more than one language, benefit from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) air slot allocation because the languages in each of these groups are mutually intelligible, whereas placing language groups that are constituted by only one language, such as Tshivenda and Xitsonga, in one single slot creates problems since they are not mutually intelligible.

From the onset, it has been clear that the SABC adopted a classification conducted by linguists in their allocation of air slots for majority Bantu Languages in its channels. This is commendable. However, a non-uniformed approach is adopted when the minority languages are allocated air slots. The guidance learned from the classification conducted by linguists is not followed. This policy might result from an avoidance of a situation where minority languages could be viewed as enjoying more advantaged position than the majority languages. If air slots allocations are purely done using linguistic classifications, each minority language would have its own air slot space.

Although placing two linguistically different languages into a single air slot space may seem to be a good idea when viewing it from the cost effectiveness's point of view, however, this policy does not reflect the linguistic equality proclaimed by the constitution. The current challenge for the speakers of Tshivenda and Xitsonga, languages that are mutually unintelligible, is that viewers either switch over to another channel or completely switch off the TV set when a slot of one or the other language is broadcasted. This suggests that linguistic consideration was not part of air slot allocation.

This talk explores two potential options that can ease the current situation; first, simply placing different languages that belong to the same language group into a single air slot, but placing languages that do not belong with others in their language groups such as Tshivenda

and Xitsonga into separate air slots each, second, create air slots that are fully devoted to each of the eleven official languages, as is the case with the SABC radio stations. The second option would be more desirable since it would contribute towards making the concept of equal status proclaimed in the constitution a reality.