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Exploring the influence of the (in)ability to read and write in Setswana on the entholinguistic identity of a group of Batswana graduates working in Johannesburg.

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2011-04-28
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9622

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the impact of the ability or inability to read and write in Setswana on the ethnolinguistic identity of a group of Batswana graduates working in Johannesburg. A qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews was used to gain in-depth understanding of the impact of being able or unable to read and write in one's mother tongue on one's ethnolinguistic identity. Thematic content analysis was used to interpret the data collected, and meanings underlying themes were explored. A sample of ten participants was selected using the snowballing technique, and the participants were given an option to use Setswana during the interviews. Data that was used in Setswana was translated and back-translated to ensure validity. Although there seemed to be no particular advantage associated with Setswana speakers' ability to read and write in Setswana in the workplace, the results indicated that the inability to read and write in the mother tongue negatively affected the individual's ethnolinguistic identity. However, this effect seemed to stem from circumstances beyond just the workplace. The findings suggested that if one gets a solid foundation in mother tongue literacy, through learning the mother tongue as the first language until completion on high school, one tends to have a much more secure sense of ethnolinguistic identity, and is thus less affected by the non-use of the mother tongue in the workplace.