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Translating the geological record into isiXhosa

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Outreach and education work are commonly conducted in English¹, but people engage more and understand better when the conversation is in their native tongue²⁻⁴. In South Africa, English is a first language for under 10% of the population, yet it dominates scientific discourse, alienating huge sections of the population⁵. To improve public engagement outcomes in South Africa, we are creating a linguistic framework for talking about geological sciences in indigenous African languages, starting with isiXhosa. IsiXhosa is the mother tongue of over 8 million people, and is mutually intelligible with Zulu, Northern Ndebele and Southern Ndebele, meaning it is potentially accessible to 23 million people.

This project is challenging because many geological terms such as meteorite or magma have no direct equivalent in isiXhosa. Therefore, part of this project involves building an open access geological dictionary. This presents an exciting opportunity to generate new, more intuitive and accessible vocabulary. The geological dictionary could provide a tool to transform geology departments, museums and public outreach events. It could also support international geologists to better engage with communities in their field areas.

Using this new vocabulary, we have written short stories summarising the most compelling, relevant parts of South Africa's geological history. We have eschewed stuffy science writing in favour of compelling stories about our shared geological history that can spark conversation in social settings. The written form will be hosted on a website, and the stories will be recorded, with plans to broadcast them as a regular segment on a Xhosa radio station.

¹Hamid, MO, Nguyen, HTM and Baldauf, R (2013) Introduction. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 14(1).

²Benson, (2004) The importance of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, *The Quality Imperative*, UNESCO, Paris.

³King, K and Mackey, A (2007) *The bilingual edge: Why, when, and how to teach your child a second language*. New York: Collins.

⁴Salili, F and Tsui, A (2005) 'The effects of medium of instruction on students' motivation and learning', in Hoosain, R and Salili, F (eds) *Language in multicultural education (Series: Research in Multicultural Education and International Perspectives)* 135-156. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

⁵Nomlomo, Vuyokazi Sylvia. *Science teaching and learning through the medium of English and IsiXhosa: A comparative study in two primary schools in the Western Cape*. Diss. University of the Western Cape, 2007.