

## **The Burden of Writing in African Languages**

Tebogo D Maahlamela

### **Abstract**

Peer review journals as well as conferences in South Africa are rapidly accepting articles written in all official African languages. Progressive as it may sound, the criterion dictates that every article in any of the African languages must be accompanied by an English translation of the abstract, if not an extended abstract. The burden of writing in African languages, therefore, is that in addition to being a researcher, one is expected to be a translator, as if translation is not a skill on its own. The challenge is that the researcher is equally held accountable for the accuracy of the translation, or lack thereof. This article argues that such language practice is problematic on three levels: (1) it makes an assumption that to know an African language is to know English; (2) that an African language alone is incomplete; and (3) that every researcher who writes in an African language is by default skilled in translation. The article ultimately submits that this practice is not only unconstitutional in terms of linguistic superiority, it also serves as an impetus for researchers to opt to writing in English for which one is measured only on the actual research findings, unlike in any of the African languages for which translational accuracy is also scrutinised. The conclusion is that this language practice perpetuates that against which it claims to fight, that is, exclusion of African languages.

**Keywords:** Linguistic inequality; Hegemony; Coloniality of Knowledge; Journals; Conferences