Archiving of Indigenous Languages with Specific Reference to IsiXhosa

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Abstract

It cannot be nullified that the advancement of isiXhosa will not be actualised without the employment of information science as a discipline and practice for the very reason that archiving is a significant component that can lead to visible solutions to the conundrum that has recurrently engulfed this language. Divorcing information science from isiXhosa, or vice versa, is a decaying and deliberate endeavour that delays the transformation of isiXhosa as an indigenous South African language. This conceptual article pivots on personal experiences through a qualitative research inquiry to underline some of the principal challenges that impede the archiving of indigenous South African languages with specific reference to isiXhosa. The objective is to sensitise regarding the preservation and protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the amaXhosa community for future generations and to guarantee its recognition and revitalisation. The study’s literature review, among other components, indicates that challenges concerning the archiving of indigenous South African languages, including isiXhosa, are advanced by languages whose stature is least known or unknown entirely. Ultimately, the principal argument underscores that language archiving through information science is an area of contention. The principal recommendation is that the advancement of the isiXhosa language requires a multi-collaborative effort in a bid to advance its intellectualisation. The closing remarks indicate the necessity to continue the discourse beyond the aims and objectives of this conceptual article.

Keywords: archives; challenges; indigenous languages; South African languages; isiXhosa
Introduction and Background to Context

When I was engaged with my master’s degree in African languages (isiXhosa as a specialisation), I encountered several challenges and setbacks in obtaining certain materials such as honoured and valuable books that are constructed and assembled in the isiXhosa language. One of the books that I faced difficulties obtaining is *Ucamngco* (Memoir) by Lennox Leslie Wongama Sebe (1980). As it stands, I remain confident that other scholars within the discipline of indigenous South African languages such as isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and so forth continue to experience similar challenges that I encountered. This is enough to underline that the intellectualisation and archiving of indigenous South African languages are still a bone of contention for several reasons. Among those reasons is the incapacity to successfully and efficiently archive materials that are produced in indigenous South African languages. This is the reason Chang (2023) argues that information science as a discipline and practice should not only focus on disseminating information but should further narrow its attention to the archiving of indigenous languages, particularly those that have been adversely affected by colonial forces.

It is important to note that such valuable material was not available in major libraries—research and academic libraries. As a result, I was compelled to approach different publishers in an attempt to make a special request. All these attempts were botched for reasons such as the materials being out of print. Another isiXhosa book that I currently struggle to obtain, as at the time of writing this article, is the original version of Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi’s *Ityala Lamawele* (The Lawsuit of the Twins) ([1914] 1981). In instances where I requested a special printout of the book, I have been advised that there was no manuscript at all or that the original manuscript was distorted. I have only been able to obtain the latest versions that do not have the complete contents compared to the original version that I once sighted from one of the senior professors of the isiXhosa language. Even then, one could observe how the prolific professor valued the book due to the reason that it is challenging to obtain it once it is lost.

As a result of this inability to obtain such crucial isiXhosa materials, I had two competing sentiments in mind. First, it was a deliberate and colonial attempt that such valuable isiXhosa books were aborted. In fact, Diko (2023b) argues that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid has led to the delay in archiving several isiXhosa books. This was mainly because of the idea that isiXhosa books such as *Ityala Lamawele* (The Lawsuit of the Twins) ([1914] 1981), for instance, were provoking political unrest in South Africa (Clark et al. 2023). Another challenge regarding the documentation and archiving of materials constructed and assembled in indigenous South African languages, such as isiXhosa, was the decaying information structures such as publishing houses and research libraries. This is against the backdrop where the publication of certain books in indigenous South African languages—such as isiXhosa—was once obviated (Simon and Mona 2023). Such books include *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (The Wrath of the Ancestors) by Archibald Campbel Jordan (1974) and *Kwazidenge* (Hill of
Fools) by Randall Langa Peteni (1976). This denotes that the obviation of publishing materials in indigenous South African languages entailed the exclusion and marginalisation of these languages from the realms of written communication, information science and dissemination of knowledge (Roche 2022). Fundamentally, it signifies a disregard for the cultural fertility and linguistic diversity of South Africa, potentially perpetuating a dominance of colonial languages and undermining the preservation of indigenous cultural pedigree. In the South African context, colonial languages are English and Afrikaans (Diko 2022). This rejection also hinders equitable access to information and resources for communities whose primary languages are marginalised.

Bearing the above views in mind, it is clear that the development of indigenous South African languages such as isiXhosa is far from complete. The unavailability, obviation and interruption of certain materials produced in these languages underline a deeply rooted challenge (Lee 2020). Explaining this challenge, Sands (2017) makes a macroscopic report that one of the major challenges that continue to face indigenous South African languages is the lack of documentation and archiving—a phenomenon with which this conceptual article is concerned. Therefore, a scholarly discourse that intends to engage and capture issues concerning indigenous South African languages’ archiving is an area that requires scholarly attention. In actuality, the reason for the lack of archiving of indigenous South African languages centres on the fact that these languages have been undervalued by colonial forces that sought to advance exclusion from controlling and semi-controlling domains, namely education, governance, law and legislation, economics and trade, and international systems of communications (Hellwig 2022).

By the same token, challenges pertaining to the deficit of archival materials constructed and assembled in indigenous South African languages are destructive for languages that are still marginalised. For example, languages such as isiNdebele, Xitsonga, Tshivenda and SiSwati still suffer a great deal of marginalisation (Mhlongo 2021). This conceptual article seeks to underline some of the subjugating challenges that relate to the archiving\(^1\) of local South African languages with specific reference to isiXhosa. It must further be noted that principal attention will be paid to the paradigm of information science and indigenous South African languages; in this case, isiXhosa is used as a case study. The reader must also bear in mind that this conceptual article has been extracted and elongated from an ongoing larger project. The project did not require ethical clearance as it is purely based on desktop research.

As mentioned earlier, the scholarly discourse concerning the archiving of indigenous languages problematises the shortcomings that pertain to the archiving of books that are constructed and assembled in isiXhosa as an indigenous language. Similarly, the term

\(^1\) The words “documentation” and “archiving” will be used interchangeably in this conceptual article for the very reason that they are concerned with the preservation of information that is constructed and assembled in isiXhosa.
“archiving” in this context refers to the process of collecting, organising, preserving and managing records, documents, artefacts or other valuable materials over time in a systematic and structured manner. Archival practices involve ensuring the long-term accessibility and usability of these items for research, historical documentation, cultural preservation and other purposes. Archival materials are typically stored in archives, which can be physical facilities or digital repositories dedicated to safeguarding and providing access to these valuable resources. In the same manner, the term “information science” herein refers to the systematic study and management of information and records with the goal of ensuring their organisation, accessibility, preservation and meaningful use over time (Roberts 1976). Information science in archival contexts involves the application of principles, techniques and technologies to collect, classify, store, retrieve and provide access to records, documents and other forms of information, often emphasising the importance of maintaining authenticity, context and provenance (DePaula 2023). The next section will focus on the rationale for this scholarly discourse in an attempt to demonstrate the necessity to contest the problematised phenomenon.

The Rationale for this Scholarly Discourse

Matters relating to isiXhosa as an indigenous language ought to be advanced at a scholarly level for various reasons. First, isiXhosa has, directly and indirectly, suffered subjugation under the colonial regime (Saule 1998). Second, whereas the South African government has developed several language policies under its democracy and Constitution (Beukes 2009; Ndebele 2022), there is a continued decay and delay in the visible promotion of isiXhosa. For example, certain language policies in respect of this language make provisions for the tuition (learning and teaching) methods in higher institutions to be carried out through isiXhosa (Ndebele 2022). In spite of these policies, this is not always viable (Kretzer and Kaschula 2021), owing to the fact that some materials in higher education institutions are predominantly available in hegemonic languages. In contrast, materials that were once produced through the use of isiXhosa remain overlooked in terms of archival strides. Third, despite the official end of colonialism and apartheid in 1994, certain colonial elements2 can still be witnessed—elements whose aim is to subjugate this language. For instance, in 2022, Charlize Theron made a contentious statement that caused a public uproar, denoting that the Afrikaans language is an endangered language with only 44 speakers that can speak the language in South Africa (Hikido 2023). Certainly, this was a problematic and provocative statement that can be viewed as an epithet to seriously endangered languages such as isiXhosa, among many more.

The contentious statement by Charlize Theron is further problematic in that the Afrikaans language was afforded and accorded prominent stature, attention and development during the colonial era3 in South Africa (Diko 2022). Therefore, the question that should be probed is, what is it that the Afrikaans language requires

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2 Colonial agents are elements of discrimination, racism and exclusion.

3 This is not to suggest that the language does not deserve attention in the contemporary era.
contemporarily at the expense of indigenous South African languages that are still in contention? Fourth and last, this scholarly discourse is significant given that challenges regarding the native South African languages as well as their archiving still persist (Diko 2023b). Thus, any attempts to renounce and dismiss engagements that endeavour to contest the conundrum should be viewed as a kind of colonial force that is characterised by neo-liberalist perceptions. Resultantly, this article should be viewed and accepted as one that provokes vital discourses within the arena of indigenous South African languages with specific reference to isiXhosa as well as information science—the archival domain. The next section will concentrate on the examination of notable literature in an attempt to acknowledge the strides that have been made by other scholars as well as to identify any possible gap.

Literature Review
This section is divided into two components. The first component reviews the existing literature concerning the phenomenon of interest. Such an enterprise is to locate an existing gap (if any) that requires scholarly attention herein and for future scholarly considerations. The last component seeks to conceptualise the relationship between the indigenous South African languages and the phenomenon of archiving within information science. What is additionally important to observe is that only relevant literature will be examined. This is because not every existing scholarly discourse may be relevant to the principal debates of this entry (Snihur et al. 2022). In fact, Boeynaems et al. (2017) support the idea that framing a literature review aids the research in a systemic, controlled and organised direction. Framed existing literature is presented below.

Framed Existing Literature
Sands (2017) concentrated on the challenges of archiving the least-known languages in Africa. The scholarly discourses reported that major attention—theoretical and practical—has often been awarded to the known endangered languages. This suggests that languages whose stature is unknown remain heavily endangered because nothing is known about them altogether. This may well be the case owing to the perception that in the South African context, major attention is often given to the official languages, while the unofficial languages and dialects are less investigated (Desai 2001). As a result of this disproportionate investigation of South African languages, the least known languages have not been archived or documented (Beukes 2009). This may further be challenging for South African dialects that are less investigated as it may suggest that much remains unknown about their status, development or subjugation as well as writing and archiving. This is the reason Diko (2023a) claims that research in South African higher education often concentrates on the standardised isiXhosa language, for example, and does not pay equal attention to the dialects such as isiMpondo, isiBhaca, isiXesibe and many more. On the grounds of this, the claims by Sands (2017) are veracious in that languages and dialects that are less known do not receive attention, and consequently their documentation and subsequent archiving are less often initiated.
In contrast, Rouvier (2017) indicates that the dearth of archiving of indigenous South African languages has contributed to the 46% (7000 in numerical form) of the world’s languages facing extinction. Rouvier (2017, 1) continues to argue that efforts to claim, revatilise and re-learn indigenous languages are not sufficient if information structures are not assimilated to archive and document these languages. This pronounces that indigenous South African languages should be written and spoken so as to induce archival attempts that would see them as archived languages for future use and consideration. Nevertheless, these attempts may only contribute a small portion towards advancing indigenous languages (Roy 2013), given that reliance on archiving is just a segment of multifaceted strides that can be made to ensure the advancement of these languages, including isiXhosa. Accordingly, there is a legitimate necessity to elicit other crucial components such as information science that can archive and preserve materials that are produced in local South African languages. This is particularly significant for the isiXhosa language as it has been underlined that certain materials remain at risk of being completely out of print, while others are indeed out of print (Sundani 2023). Having said that, Tyagi (2023) underscores that writing and speaking indigenous South African languages are not adequate. This suggests that more attempts ought to be made, hence this scholarly discourse advances the heightened preservation of these languages within the paradigm of information science and its systems such as research and academic libraries. In fact, Nakata (2023) affirms that the written materials must be documented, and the spoken lexicon ought to be recorded through modern archival systems. This then places a responsibility on information science, as a discipline and practice, to guarantee that different, yet complex attempts are made to archive indigenous South African languages, with more emphasis on isiXhosa.

Based on the South African context, which was predominantly and adversely affected by colonial and apartheid forces, Roy (2013) asserts that the phenomenon of language documentation and archiving is an attempt to accelerate the decoloniality project. Indeed, this is vital given that the genesis of this article indicated that the unavailability and discontinuation of certain isiXhosa materials such as research and academic books, literary texts and many others, should be viewed as a premeditated venture that is characterised by colonial proclivities. This then corroborates and complements the principal aim of this article in that the information science and systems which overlook the importance of preserving isiXhosa prolong the measures of decolonising this language. Incontrovertibly, unavailable isiXhosa materials discredit the strides of isiXhosa critics that attempt to introduce the language within the arena of scientific inquiry. This then denotes that information science, as a discipline and practice, should be elicited as an instrumental component within the intellectualisation of isiXhosa. Adding to this view, Zeng and Li (2023) proclaim that information science provides a framework for documenting, organising and disseminating knowledge in these languages, contributing to the intellectual development and cultural fertility of indigenous communities. This involves creating digital archives, databases and resources in indigenous languages, allowing for the transmission of traditional knowledge, literature and cultural mores.
That being the case, there are competing views between scholars of language and archiving (information science respectively). The competing views point to the fact that there is an outstanding gap that requires South African scholarly examination, hence the initiation of this study. This gap discloses the following:

1) There is no research (to the best of the researcher’s knowledge) that explicitly used personal and reflective experiences to reflect on the challenges concerning the lack of archiving of indigenous South African languages with specific reference to isiXhosa.

2) There is no scholarly discourse that has situated indigenous South African languages within the paradigm of information science deliberating on the key features that this article employs.

3) Whereas certain studies have examined the importance of documentating and archiving indigenous South African languages, they have not been explicit on how and why indigenous South African languages should be archived through the use of information science.

**Indigenous South African Languages and Archiving**

Languages that are indigenous or native to a specific group of people are called indigenous languages (Diko 2022). In the South African context, indigenous languages are isiZulu, isiXhosa, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, Siswati and Setswana. These languages have their own dialects, which will not be detailed and discussed here as they do not form part of the principal aims of the article. Indigenous South African languages are characterised by a bitter sting of colonial history that sought to give eminence to colonial languages—English and Afrikaans. For this reason, a strong relationship between them (indigenous South African languages) and information science ought to be engineered. In particular, the subjugation of isiXhosa became alarming to such an extent that the language was excluded as a language of learning and teaching, for instance (Oyoo 2017). Adding to this view, Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) report that isiXhosa, among other local South African languages, was sidelined so much that its native speakers became strangers in their own land for the very reason that they were divorced from their ancestral language. The manner and extent to which indigenous South African habitats were separated from their languages led to colonial languages (Afrikaans and English) being romanticised.

Ultimately, Phakeng (2016) underlines that the oppression of indigenous South African languages cannot be confined within the parameters of general linguistics and literatures; instead, such confinement leads to the obstruction of learner education in subjects or disciplines such as mathematics. Thus, according to Phakeng (2016), the lack of documentation or archiving of indigenous South African languages amounts to a lack of documenting Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that may be instrumental in the learner’s level of knowledge acquisition, innovation and development. This is the reason the introductory remarks of this article underlined that the difficulties in
obtaining certain isiXhosa materials delay the ability of researchers in acquiring crucial information for theoretical or practical discourses (Clark et al. 2023).

As much as the phenomenon of indigenous South African languages remains important, the concept of archiving and documenting within the arena of information science is similarly significant. For the purposes of this study, archiving refers to an endeavour of preserving and protecting evidence-based information, as initially said. Such information can be from a primary source or a secondary source. For instance, I made an example earlier regarding certain isiXhosa books that were challenging to obtain. These books would act as a primary source of information, and generate inaugural, unorthodox and original knowledge. If they were preserved, then they would have served—and would continue to serve—as an archiving and documenting pursuit. To document and accelerate the development of native South African languages is to archive. This is the reason Diko (2023b) argues that the archiving of indigenous South African languages is an integral part of documentary linguistics that contains various types of materials, including audio and video language, corpus data from languages around the world, photographs, notes, experimental data and other pertinent information required to conserve and describe languages and how people use them, records of speech in everyday interactions in families and communities, naturalistic data from adult conversations from endangered and understudied languages, and linguistic phenomena. Thus, language archiving is a significant component of information science that hosts one of the largest collections of language materials (audio, video and texts) worldwide (Weber 2022).

In a nutshell, indigenous South African languages play a crucial role in information science, specifically for archival purposes, by preserving cultural ancestry and historical knowledge within their linguistic nuances. However, the studies that have been reviewed above do not clearly underline how native South African languages, and in particular isiXhosa, can be archived through the consideration of information science. This is the reason this particular section argues that these languages hold significant value in accurately representing indigenous perspectives, narratives and traditional knowledge systems within archival records. Blending these languages in information systems enhances accessibility, inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that indigenous communities can engage with and contribute to their own cultural preservation. Effective integration of these languages in archival practices fosters a more comprehensive and equitable representation of South Africa’s diverse cultural tapestry. By the same token, indigenous South African languages also facilitate greater community engagement and ownership in archival parades, empowering local populations to actively participate in the documentation, preservation and interpretation of their own histories, thus advancing a perception of cultural empowerment and self-determination (Simon and Mona 2023). To comprehensively address the notable gap, this article utilises a qualitative research methodology, as discussed in the following section.
Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative research methodology by drawing on personal views and direct experiences. Explaining this research technique, Diallo et al. (2022) argue that nowadays a qualitative research methodology is a major branch of inquiry in the social and human sciences, encompassing a wide range of phenomena. This indicates that qualitative studies share a naturalistic and situated concern as the basis of their inquiry. Using personal experiences, which is subsumed under a qualitative research methodology, intends to examine a phenomenon through a person’s perspective, paying attention to the context from which they emerge. Thus, personal experience is qualitative in nature in that it recognises the reality that the researcher knows something concerning the phenomenon of interest (Truman 2023). What the researcher knows requires an attempt that seeks to set out the meaning. In other words, and in respect of this article, major views will be solicited from the researcher’s experiences and be benchmarked against the located phenomenon—isiXhosa and information science with more emphasis on archiving. One cannot overlook the value of personal experiences in scholarly inquiry. Even in quantitative research discourses where interviews and questionnaires are used, the personal experiences of the participants form part of the foundational ideologies of the discourse (Ravn 2023).

While personal experiences remain important in qualitative research discourses, integrating a literature review with personal experiences during the course of discussions offers a multi-dimensional perspective that enhances the depth and context of the research. In that regard, this article uses personal experiences since they provide real-world examples that complement and illustrate the theoretical concepts and findings from the literature. For example, the notion that some isiXhosa materials are unavailable is linked to the confirmation that exists in the body of knowledge, as illustrated in the previous sections. Effectively, personal experiences that are blended with existing literature add a human element to the scholarly discourse, making it more relatable and engaging for readers (Hammine 2021). In addition, personal experiences in this article highlight gaps or limitations in existing literature, prompting new scholarly directions or suggesting areas where theoretical insights can be practically applied. This integration of personal experiences with existing literature also fosters reflexivity, permitting the researcher hereunder to critically scrutinise their own biases and assumptions in relation to the existing body of knowledge, enhancing the overall rigour and authenticity of the research. The research methodology, which has been explained above, proves to be functional to the findings and discussions below.

Findings and Discussions

This section is multifold. This means that findings and discussions will be advanced in a symbiotic and integrated relationship for the very reason that findings and discussions in a conceptual article cannot be divorced from each other.
Language Extinction

One of the major issues that continue to face the archiving of isiXhosa is globalisation and Westernisation (Shreeve 2020). Children, for instance, are often encouraged to attend schools where English is the principal medium of instruction (Diko 2022). In certain schools, children are compelled to use English for various reasons; for example, it is often proposed that they need to understand English as it is the language that can “open doors” or as it is a global language. In certain instances, the English language is viewed as a language of the economy and international trade. Thus, it denotes that materials within the fields of science, technology, commerce and law will be produced in the English language. In that situation, it may not be possible to document and archive knowledge that is assembled through isiXhosa. If one may compare the English material and isiXhosa material, the possibilities of the manuscripts being difficult to obtain are greater for the isiXhosa language. This indicates the disparities that exist between the hegemonic language and the isiXhosa language in respect of the notion of archiving. In support of this view, Hammine (2021) argues that worldwide colonisation, globalisation and Westernisation have encouraged people to speak English or other world and hegemonic languages. For this reason, it becomes difficult to use information science and its systems to archive languages that face extinction, isiXhosa in this instance. In contrast, language death or extinction discloses the failures of the information structures in revealing the urgency surrounding isiXhosa and other endangered languages.

In fact, the concept of language death does not occur in isolation. It occurs as a result of decaying multi-collaboration between different stakeholders, institutions, disciplines and governments. In this instance, information science is believed to be one among many contributing factors that fail to realise the archiving of isiXhosa. This is because matters relating to isiXhosa are universal (Diko 2023c). They are universal in the sense that every individual and every human and social activity can be successfully advanced through the use of this language, especially for its speakers. For example, the study of information science in itself may be meaningless without the aid and utilisation of isiXhosa as a language for its users, especially those from rural areas where this language is predominantly used. On account of this, it is catastrophic that isiXhosa continues to receive less attention from the paradigm of information science. This is against the backdrop that information science plays a central role in archiving the isiXhosa language by employing systematic methodologies to collect, organise, preserve and make accessible isiXhosa language materials for present and future generations. This involves digitising traditional texts, oral histories and contemporary writings in isiXhosa, ensuring their long-term preservation and accessibility. Over and above this, information science enables the creation of searchable databases and digital repositories, facilitating efficient retrieval and exploration of isiXhosa language resources.
**Documentary Linguistics**

Post-1994 in South Africa, and observing the history of isiXhosa, it became clear that isiXhosa language practitioners needed to turn their attention to the restoration of this language. This was necessitated by the country’s language policies, which compelled the recognition and appraisal of isiXhosa. As a result of this, isiXhosa language practitioners began to be sensitive to the fact that there is a crisis concerning the language (Turner 2023). These language practitioners perceived an unprecedented crisis in the field, and the conversation began towards finding solutions (Cele 2021). Some of the solutions included the translation of materials produced in the colonial languages into isiXhosa. In the same vein, an emphasis was placed on archiving the very same materials within the systems of information science such as public and research libraries. While such strides and attempts are acknowledged, the reality is that attempts by isiXhosa language practitioners may be shrouded and discredited, especially if the archival and documentation component is presided over only by linguists. That is the reason this article strongly advocates that information science and its systems must be elicited in the process of archiving isiXhosa.

It is an illogical pursuit that only isiXhosa linguists preside over the advancement and elevation of the stature of this language. Fundamentally, the presumption that indigenous South African languages can be preserved by linguists only is merely a hypothesis that has not been put into practice to test its validity. Thus, the implication of confining the archiving of isiXhosa only to general linguistics is that it leads to theoretical perspectives that may not effectively advance the practicalities that are required to archive the language. Bearing that in mind, documentary linguistics is important, but it requires multi-collaborative support from other disciplines of information such as archival disciplines.

**Digital Archiving of isiXhosa**

It is difficult to imagine the archiving of isiXhosa without the aid of technology. In the same fashion, it is agonising to visualise a contemporary practice of isiXhosa language documentation that does not consider among its top priorities the digital preservation of endangered language materials such as those that are not largely printed or nurtured. Consequently, this article problematises the fact that only the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) appears to archive and/or document isiXhosa. Their archive allows one to use their resources to carry out research. By working on their digital portals, one’s data is retained in their systems for future reference, verification or use. In contrast, other language bodies such as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and those that are housed within the institutions of higher education are not principal custodians of isiXhosa archives (Usua 2018). This proves that the archiving of isiXhosa remains problematic in South Africa. As problematic as it is, scholarly studies that iron out pertinent issues should be accepted and embraced with the hope that reasonable solutions will eventually emerge.
What further remains challenging in South Africa for the isiXhosa language is that everyone claims the discipline of isiXhosa and archiving as their own (Saule 1998). For instance, many deceitful publishers publish poorly constructed material in the isiXhosa language (Diko 2022). It then becomes problematic for digital information systems to document and archive what can be deemed as quality isiXhosa material. One should bear in mind that the notion of archiving encompasses a trustworthy repository created and maintained by an institution with a proven commitment to the development of isiXhosa. For this reason, the endeavour of archiving isiXhosa written materials requires institutions whose muscles can gather the body of documentary materials that have been produced by isiXhosa language speakers or those that are versed in the language. It must further be argued that digital resources provide an opportunity for improved preservation and access to isiXhosa materials, but also new challenges when it comes to who has access to this information, how the materials are categorised, used, and how to best safeguard indigenous rights associated with their content, including rights of privacy and dissemination (Blumler and Coleman 2021). With that in mind, it is clear then that issues surrounding the isiXhosa language and archiving require attention. The next section will set out how and why archiving the isiXhosa language is important.

Importance of Archiving isiXhosa

The process of archiving isiXhosa materials includes metadata that is instrumental in the pursuit of contextual, technical and administrative documentation that helps to explain the data, including any keys (such as codes and orthographies) needed to understand, analyse and reuse the material (Cele 2021). DePaula (2023) refers to such a collection of primary data and the associated metadata as a corpus, and it includes indigenous language archiving as one of six criteria that establish the overall quality of a documentary corpus. This suggests that the central reasons to archive isiXhosa data are to ensure their longevity and accessibility. Digital repositories of isiXhosa offer options for replicability and protection against the hazards of fire, flood, loss, mould and insects that threaten the preservation of physical isiXhosa materials. The importance of archiving isiXhosa materials can further be observed in the fires that gutted the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2021 where precious and honourable materials in one of the valuable libraries were incinerated and could not be recovered. This is observable in Figure 1 below, which shows when the library at the University of Cape Town was caught in flames:
The entire UCT library was gutted in flames. It is further crucial to observe the end result of the reputable library in Figure 2 below:

The pictures above underscore that when the primary data are archived, those data can be reused for additional language documentation work, as well as other types of language scrutiny. Furthermore, archiving the primary and secondary data allows for the analytical output to be verifiable and reproducible. For researchers engaged in documentation projects, there are many advantages to this. These include simplified
format migration, personal organisation, accessibility, discoverability, graded access, rights management, collaboration, citability and long-term digital preservation (Ndebele 2022). In this respect, isiXhosa researchers who archive language materials in a digital repository never need to worry about format migration since it is part of the archival workflows that are overseen by the archive’s personnel.

In essence, archiving the isiXhosa language holds profound cultural, historical and academic significance. As one of South Africa’s major indigenous languages, isiXhosa encapsulates centuries of cultural wisdom, traditional knowledge and societal values. By meticulously preserving isiXhosa language materials, including oral histories, folklore, literature and contemporary discourse, one safeguards the essence of isiXhosa identity and heritage for future generations. These archives become a repository of collective memory, offering perspectives into the evolution of isiXhosa culture, language use and linguistic diversity, enabling both isiXhosa-speaking communities and researchers to delve into the intricate tapestry of their past. Over and above this, archiving the isiXhosa language is crucial for cultivating intergenerational continuity and revitalisation efforts. As globalisation and modernisation impact indigenous languages, the risk of language distortion and erosion of cultural identity becomes pronounced. Thus, by archiving isiXhosa language resources, one provides a foundation for language revitalisation initiatives, enabling language learners, educators and speakers to access authentic materials that can aid in language instruction and preservation. These archives serve as living tools to reconnect isiXhosa speakers with their linguistic roots, instill pride and promote the ongoing use and appreciation of the language in various domains of contemporary life.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

This article, as it has problematised the phenomenon of interest, views it appropriate to present the following recommendations for further consideration:

1) It would be prudent to engage isiXhosa-speaking communities directly in the archival process where practical measures may be brought to the fore. This denotes a collaboration with local elders, scholars and isiXhosa language experts to ensure accurate archiving of cultural nuances and linguistic intricacies. By involving the community, one can gather oral histories and colloquial expressions that might not be captured in formal written sources. This approach advances a sense of ownership, empowers the community to actively contribute to preservation efforts and ensures the archives mirror the lived experiences of isiXhosa speakers.

2) It would also be beneficial to utilise multimedia formats to capture the multifaceted nature of the isiXhosa language. Alongside written materials, audio recordings, videos and images to document pronunciation, intonation and cultural mores can be incorporated. In the process, intuitive digital platforms that facilitate effortless access to archived materials for both researchers and the broader community can be developed. This may enhance the engagement and
inclusivity of the archives, making them accessible to a wide range of users, including those with varying levels of literacy in isiXhosa.

In closing, by considering these recommendations, the archiving of the isiXhosa language can be a dynamic and culturally enriching endeavour that preserves linguistic heritage while fostering community engagement and revitalisation. Unlike this scholarly study, which has an ending, challenges pertaining to the archiving of isiXhosa within information science do not have an ending. Therefore, it would be reasonable to continue the discourse.

References


