

HCI in South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a multi-lingual country with a population of about 40.5 million people. South Africa has more official languages at a national level than any other country in the world. Over and above English and Afrikaans, the eleven official languages include the indigenous languages: Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele, Tsonga, and Venda (Pretorius & Bosch, 2003). Figure 1 depicts the breakdown of the South African official languages as mother tongues for South African citizens.

Although English ranks fifth (9%) as a mother tongue, there is a tendency among national leaders, politicians, business people, and officials to use English more frequently than any of the other languages. In a national survey on language use and language interaction conducted by the Pan South African Language Board (Language Use and Board Interaction in South Africa, 2000), only 22% of the respondents indicated that they fully understand speeches and statements made in English, while 19% indicated that they seldom understand information conveyed in English.

The rate of electrification in South African is 66.1%. The total number of people with access to

electricity is 28.3 million, and the total number of people without access to electricity is 14.5 million (International Energy Agency, 2002). Although the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” is narrowing, a significant portion of the South African population is still without the basic amenities of life.

This unique environment sets the tone for a creative research agenda for HCI researchers and practitioners in South Africa.

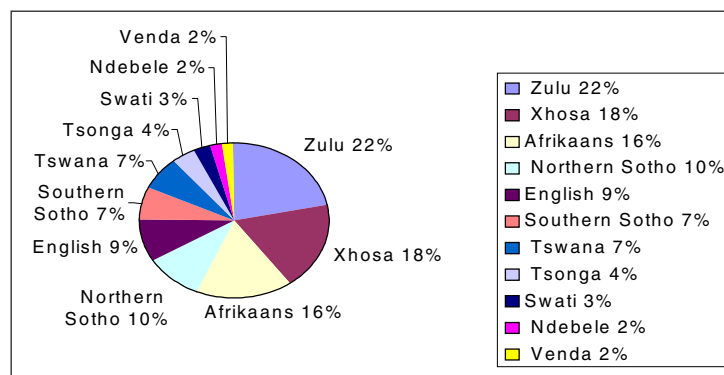
BACKGROUND

E-Activities in South Africa

SA has been active in the e-revolution. The South African Green Paper on Electronic Commerce (EC) (Central Government, 2000) is divided into four categories. Each category contains key issues or areas of concern that need serious consideration in EC policy formulation:

- the need for confidence in the security and privacy of transactions performed electronically;
- the need to enhance the information infrastructure for electronic commerce;

Figure 1. Mother-tongue division as per official language (n = 40.5 million speakers)



- the need to establish rules that will govern electronic commerce;
- the need to bring the opportunities of e-commerce to the entire population.

EC has not only affected government but has also actively moved into the mainstream South African's economy. Sectors of the economy that are using this technology are listed in Table 1, along with examples of companies using EC in each sector.

Electronic Communications and Transactions Bill

The Electronic Communications and Transactions Bill (2002) is an attempt by the Republic of South Africa to provide for the facilitation and regulation of electronic communications and transactions; to provide for the development of a national e-strategy for the Republic; to promote universal access to electronic communications and transactions and the use of electronic transactions by small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs); to provide for human resource development in electronic transactions; to prevent abuse of information systems; and to encourage the use of e-government services, and provide for matters connected therewith.

Some provisions of the bill are specifically directed at making policy and improving function in HCI-related areas. These are elucidated in the following bulleted items:

- To promote universal access primarily in under-served areas.
- To remove and prevent barriers to electronic communications and transactions in the Republic.
- To promote e-government services and electronic communications and transactions with public and private bodies, institutions, and citizens.
- To ensure that electronic transactions in the Republic conform to the highest international standards.
- To encourage investment and innovation in respect of electronic transactions in the Republic.
- To develop a safe, secure, and effective environment for the consumer, business and the government to conduct and use electronic transactions.
- To promote the development of electronic transaction services, which are responsive to the needs of users and consumers.
- To ensure that, in relation to the provision of electronic transactions services, the special needs of particular communities and areas, and the disabled are duly taken into account.
- To ensure compliance with accepted international technical standards in the provision and development of electronic communications and transactions.

Table 1. Sectors of the SA economy using EC, companies using EC within those sectors and their URLs

Sector	Company	URL
Banking-retail	ABSA	http://www.absa.co.za
Finance	SA Home Loans	http://www.sahomeloans.com/
Insurance	Liberty Life	MyLife.com
Media	Independent Newspapers Online	http://www.iol.co.za
Retail	Pick 'n Pay	http://www.pnp.co.za/
Travel	SAA	Kulula.com
Recruitment	Career Junction	http://www.careerjunction.co.za
Mining	Mincom	http://www.mincom.com
Automotive	Motoronline	http://www.motoronline.co.za
Data/telecomm	M-Web	http://www.mweb.co.za/
Health	Clickatell	http://www.clickatell.co.za

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