

Xigaza Monday: Enhancing Xitsonga Language Preservation through Artistic Expression

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ABSTRACT

The preservation of indigenous languages remains a critical concern in multilingual societies, particularly in South Africa, where minority languages like Xitsonga face challenges including language shift, cultural assimilation, and limited representation in mainstream media. This study investigates the role of Xigaza Monday, a community-driven initiative that celebrates and promotes the Xitsonga language through artistic expression, focusing on music, dance, and community performances. The study employed qualitative research methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of performances and social media content. A total of thirty participants were interviewed, comprising 18 youth performers, 7 event organizers, and 5 cultural experts. Data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns in language use, cultural engagement, and participants' perceptions of the event. The findings indicate that Xigaza Monday fosters language pride, strengthens intergenerational transmission of Xitsonga, and provides an informal platform for linguistic creativity. Participants exhibited knowledge of Xitsonga vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs, while younger attendees demonstrated adaptive use of language in contemporary artistic forms. Challenges identified include limited outreach, infrastructural constraints, and the need for sustained community involvement. The study concludes that initiatives such as Xigaza Monday play a pivotal role in preserving the Xitsonga language, maintaining cultural continuity, and engaging youth. Recommendations include expanding digital presence, formal partnerships with educational institutions, and systematic documentation of performances for linguistic research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics examines the intersection of language and society, focusing on how social factors shape language use, change, and perception (Holmes, 2013; Hudson, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2006). Within multilingual contexts such as South Africa, indigenous languages are frequently endangered due to the dominance of global languages like English and Afrikaans, as well as socio-economic pressures favoring urban language practices. Xitsonga, a Bantu language predominantly spoken in the provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Gauteng, is particularly vulnerable to language shift among younger speakers, who increasingly use English and urban vernaculars in daily communication (Batubara, Zati, & Susanti, 2021).



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Xigaza Monday emerged as a community-led cultural initiative aiming to reverse this trend by creating spaces where Xitsonga language and cultural heritage are celebrated through music, dance, and public performance. The initiative targets youth engagement, acknowledging the critical role that young people play in intergenerational language transmission and cultural sustainability. Through interactive performances and social media amplification, Xigaza Monday not only fosters linguistic pride but also bridges traditional and contemporary forms of artistic expression (Mesthrie, 2010; Crystal, 2006).

Previous research on language preservation in South Africa highlights the efficacy of cultural events in promoting minority languages. Studies demonstrate that public engagement, combined with performative arts, enhances language visibility, encourages the adoption of culturally appropriate lexicon, and strengthens communal identity (Batubara et al., 2021; Meyerhoff, 2006; Walter, 1988). However, there remains limited empirical analysis of specific initiatives such as Xigaza Monday, particularly regarding their effectiveness in shaping youth perceptions and linguistic behavior.

The present study seeks to address this gap by exploring how Xigaza Monday functions as a medium for Xitsonga language preservation, examining patterns of language use, the role of artistic expression in promoting cultural identity, and the implications for sustaining minority languages in urban South African contexts. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do participants use the Xitsonga language during Xigaza Monday events?
2. In what ways does artistic expression facilitate language preservation and cultural transmission?
3. What challenges and opportunities emerge from organizing youth-focused language events?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to capture the complexity of linguistic, cultural, and social dynamics within the Xigaza Monday initiative. A case study design enables an in-depth understanding of localized phenomena and is well-suited to investigating the interplay among language, culture, and community engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

2.1. Research Design

The research followed a sequential qualitative design. Initial participant observation at Xigaza Monday events provided contextual understanding of performance dynamics, audience engagement, and language use in natural settings. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with event organizers, performers, and attendees to explore their individual experiences, perceptions, and motivations regarding the use of Xitsonga. Finally, content analysis of event recordings and social media coverage was conducted to document recurring linguistic patterns, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and artistic representations of Xitsonga (Sadigzade, 2025; Musaddaq et al., 2025; Samala et al., 2025; Ngo and To, 2025).

2.2. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Xigaza Monday events conducted in Gauteng Province, South Africa, over four months (January-April 2025). The scope emphasizes youth participation,

with attendees aged 15–30 as the primary demographic, and includes input from adult organizers and cultural experts to provide historical and cultural context.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were actively involved in Xigaza Monday events, including performers, organizers, and engaged attendees. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, comprising 18 youth performers, 7 event organizers, and 5 cultural experts. This sampling method ensured that data reflected the perspectives of key stakeholders with direct experience of the initiative (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

2.4. Study Setting

Xigaza Monday events were held at Palms (the Train station in Chiawelo) and in public spaces across Gauteng's urban areas. Observations also extended to online platforms where event recordings, promotional materials, and interactive discussions were shared. The urban context provides a relevant setting for examining the tensions between traditional Xitsonga practices and contemporary youth culture (Anderson, 1991).

2.5. Data Collection Method

Data collection involved three complementary methods:

- a. Participant Observation: The researcher attended events to document live interactions, linguistic practices, and performance structures. Field notes captured verbal and non-verbal communication, including the use of proverbs, idioms, and code-switching (Hymes, 1974).
- b. Semi-Structured Interviews: Guided interviews explored participants' motivations for engaging with Xigaza Monday, perceptions of Xitsonga language preservation, and experiences of cultural transmission through artistic expression. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- c. Content Analysis: Event videos and social media posts were analyzed to identify recurring linguistic patterns, the integration of Xitsonga in contemporary artistic forms, and audience engagement metrics (Wardhaugh, 1986).

2.6. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed the identification of patterns, meanings, and cultural significance embedded in the performances. Transcriptions and observation notes were inductively coded, yielding categories related to language use, cultural practices, artistic expression, and youth engagement. Triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the validity of the findings and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the initiative's impact (Mesthrie & Swann, 2009).

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Language Use in Performances

Analysis of Xigaza Monday performances revealed a rich integration of Xitsonga vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs. Performers frequently employed linguistic devices such as repetition, metaphor, and rhetorical questioning to convey cultural narratives and moral lessons. Examples of commonly used expressions included proverbs emphasizing communal responsibility and respect for elders, reflecting the continuity of traditional values within youth performances. Younger performers adapted traditional expressions creatively, blending them with modern urban vernaculars to appeal

to diverse audiences (Batubara et al., 2021). The young performers call this new style of music "Xigaza xa ma 2k", which can be loosely translated as "music for the young ones, born after 2000.

3.2. Artistic Expression as a Medium for Language Preservation

Artistic forms such as music, dance, and spoken words were pivotal in reinforcing the Xitsonga language and cultural heritage. Music performances often incorporated call-and-response structures, allowing the audience to actively participate in linguistic practices. Dance routines were accompanied by verbal cues in Xitsonga, linking physical expression with language learning. Participants reported that engaging in artistic performances increased their confidence in using Xitsonga in everyday contexts and fostered a sense of pride in their linguistic identity (Crystal, 2006; Rahman, 2019).

3.3. Community and Intergenerational Engagement

Xigaza Monday events facilitated interactions between youth and elders, creating spaces for intergenerational language transmission. Elders provided guidance on pronunciation, meaning, and contextual use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions, while youth performers adapted these forms into contemporary formats. Interviews indicated that these interactions reinforced social cohesion and highlighted the role of community support in sustaining minority languages (Chaer & Agustina, 2004).

3.4. Challenges Identified

Several challenges emerged from the study:

- a. Limited Outreach: Events primarily attracted participants already familiar with Xitsonga, limiting exposure to broader audiences (Wardhaugh, 2006).
- b. Infrastructural Constraints: Venue availability and technical limitations affected the quality and consistency of performances (Holmes, 2013).
- c. Sustainability Concerns: Ongoing reliance on volunteers and limited funding posed risks to long-term continuity (Gellner, 1983).
- d. Digital Engagement: While social media amplified event visibility, inconsistent online documentation hindered systematic archiving for research and educational purposes (Wright, 2015).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Patterns of Language Use

Findings indicate that Xigaza Monday serves as a dynamic platform for both preserving traditional Xitsonga forms and encouraging creative linguistic adaptation. The integration of proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and vernacular forms aligns with Holmes' (2013) assertion that language is both a reflection of cultural identity and a tool for social interaction. Youth performers demonstrated linguistic agency by selectively adopting traditional forms and innovatively combining them with urban expressions, consistent with Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of cultural hybridity.

4.2. Effectiveness of Artistic Expression in Language Preservation

Artistic expressions proved effective in enhancing engagement and retention of linguistic knowledge. Music and dance functioned as multimodal channels for language transmission, supporting both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Participants reported increased confidence and a willingness to use Xitsonga in informal and formal

contexts, reflecting the role of immersive, performative methods in language acquisition (Luo, 2023; Salmanova, 2025; Sadigzade, 2025; Musaddaq et al., 2025; Samala et al., 2025; Ngo and To, 2025).

4.3. Youth Engagement and Cultural Identity

Youth participation emerged as a critical factor in sustaining the vitality of the Xitsonga language. Performers expressed pride in their linguistic heritage and viewed participation as a form of cultural empowerment. Xigaza Monday events enabled identity negotiation, allowing youth to reconcile traditional expectations with contemporary cultural practices. It mirrors findings from sociolinguistic research on minority language maintenance, which emphasizes the importance of youth agencies in language revitalization initiatives (Mesthrie, 2001; Meyerhoff, 2006).

4.4. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its successes, Xigaza Monday faces challenges typical of community-driven language initiatives. Limited outreach constrains impact, and reliance on volunteer labor threatens sustainability. Nevertheless, opportunities exist to expand digital engagement, formalize partnerships with educational institutions, and develop structured mentorship programs that link elders with youth performers (Fadieieva, 2023). Strategic implementation of these opportunities could enhance both linguistic preservation and cultural transmission, reinforcing the event's long-term relevance.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Xigaza Monday plays a significant role in promoting Xitsonga language preservation through artistic expression. Youth engagement, intergenerational participation, and creative adaptation of linguistic forms emerged as key mechanisms facilitating language maintenance. The initiative fosters cultural pride, encourages active use of Xitsonga in contemporary contexts, and provides a model for community-based language preservation.

Challenges identified, including limited outreach, infrastructural constraints, and sustainability concerns, underscore the need for targeted strategies to support ongoing impact. Recommendations include: 1) Expanding digital documentation and social media engagement to reach broader audiences. 2) Establishing partnerships with schools, universities, and cultural organizations to integrate Xitsonga into formal education and extracurricular activities. 3) Implementing mentorship programs to facilitate structured intergenerational knowledge transfer. 4) Securing sustainable funding sources to ensure continuity and growth of the initiative.

In conclusion, Xigaza Monday exemplifies how community-driven, culturally grounded initiatives can strengthen minority language preservation, foster youth empowerment, and reinforce collective identity in urban multilingual contexts.

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