




# Language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca of Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal



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Umzimkhulu, previously Transkei, is a small KwaZulu-Natal town. AmaBhaca Umzimkhulu residents speak isiBhaca, a dialect of isiXhosa that is mutually intelligible with isiZulu and siSwati. IsiBhaca is not official in South Africa. Most Umzimkhulu residents are amaBhaca, although education, health, religious, and government institutions use isiZulu and isiXhosa. This article investigated Umzimkhulu amaBhaca language maintenance and shift. The possibility of maintaining isiBhaca or shifting to isiZulu or isiXhosa is examined. The article used a mixed-methods approach, and data were acquired from purposively selected participants who have been classified as isiBhaca speakers born and raised in Umzimkhulu. The findings showed that isiBhaca is closer to isiZulu than isiXhosa, despite being designated a dialect of isiXhosa. The 2006 categorization of Umzimkhulu under KZN caused this trend toward isiZulu. This article showed that the amaBhaca are abandoning their language since they must use dominant/standard languages as the official language. Thus, they had to prioritise knowledge of the two over L1 to survive. It was demonstrated that many value isiBhaca and want it promoted. Others prefer dominant languages like isiXhosa or isiZulu and are unconcerned about the extinction of isiBhaca.

**Contribution:** This research shows the importance of the revitalisation and preservation of minority languages and non-standard languages such as isiBhaca. This study is expected to impact sociolinguistics significantly in Southern Africa and other places with diverse languages and dialects.

**Keywords:** Language; identity and culture; language maintenance and shift; isiBhaca; dialectology; standardisation.

## Introduction and background

The researchers tackled a sensitive and political area that has been a talking point as Umzimkhulu was transferred to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) as part of the 12th Amendment of South Africa's Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 103[3]). Majola (2021) posits that many had expected that the language issue would also be addressed as citizens of Umzimkhulu previously used isiXhosa in all government departments, mainly because isiXhosa is regarded as the dominant language in the Eastern Cape (EC). Although there has been a shift towards isiZulu as isiZulu is a dominant language in KZN, the people of Umzimkhulu find themselves in a conundrum.

It is now 14 years since the South African Constitution's 12th amendment. Majola (2018) further posits that the speech communities of Umzimkhulu have been living with confusion about the existence and use of three languages (viz. isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa). He adds that the use of isiBhaca is mainly associated with informal and communicative purposes, while isiXhosa and isiZulu are official languages in health, education and other sectors. From a political point of view, one can claim that the sociolinguistic situation faced by Umzimkhulu citizens does not suit a democratic and multilingual country such as the Republic of South Africa. It is pivotal to indicate that the realm of this article is both linguistic and political as Rakgogo (2019) points out that language issues are regarded as political exercises in a South African context.

The researchers acknowledge all the studies conducted on isiBhaca, which were either based on the educational context or as an account of history; more recent studies have shown that Umzimkhulu citizens do not identify with both isiXhosa and isiZulu (Majola 2018, 2021; Majola, Ditsele & Cekiso 2019). Therefore, the researchers firmly observed that the views of Umzimkhulu citizens on the language practices in Umzimkhulu could not be ignored or undermined as they

are the ones using the language at the end of the day. Thus, they further advocate that the fact that isiBhaca was classified as a dialect under isiXhosa does not imply that amaBhaca identify with isiXhosa. Majola (2021) concludes that amaBhaca identify more with isiZulu as it is the dominant language of KZN. As such, they do not feel represented in isiXhosa.

The researchers, therefore, argue that this is one of the fundamental reasons why they focused on the context of standardisation and language planning to shed light on which language should be used in Umzimkhulu, mainly for official purposes. It is essential to mention that the controversy around the language practice of Umzimkhulu has always been a complex and debatable matter since the 12th amendment of the South African Constitution in 2005 contradicts what has already been stated. Even the few scholarly works that do exist in isiBhaca, such as Kubeka (1979), Msimang (1989), Nomlomo (1993), Majola (2018) and Majola et al. (2019), focus mainly on education but not the sociolinguistic aspect. Therefore, the central goal of this article is to resolve the language controversy in Umzimkhulu from a sociolinguistic approach.

A study of this nature is thus significant, particularly for the amaBhaca of Umzimkhulu. It is anticipated that the findings of this research study will significantly contribute to resolving the sociolinguistic controversy faced by Umzimkhulu citizens.

The focus of this article was to investigate isiBhaca language maintenance and shift within the Umzimkhulu community in KZN. The aim was to discover whether isiBhaca is being maintained or if a shift towards or from isiXhosa or isiZulu occurs. The idea was to identify the attitudes of amaBhaca towards isiBhaca, which is their mother tongue, not being regarded in the same way as other official languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa and the effects of using languages that they do not regard as their mother tongue. It is anticipated that the present study's findings will contribute to the field of sociolinguistics in Southern Africa and will be of interest to other regions with multiple languages and dialects in contact.

The researchers believe that authorities and other role players should closely examine this study to determine how it might benefit their missions related to Language Standardisation. National government departments responsible for 'language' and 'education' (namely, the Department of Sports Arts and Culture and the Department of Basic Education), academic institutions, research institutions, curriculum designers, language educators and the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) are among the relevant stakeholders.

## Aims and objectives

This article seeks to determine whether or not isiBhaca can be maintained. It also seeks to determine whether or not

there is a probable shift towards isiXhosa or isiZulu, as well as to elicit and establish the attitudes held by isiBhaca L1-speakers towards their L1 (first language) which is isiBhaca. Following from this, the objectives of this article were to:

- Investigate how people's perceptions of isiBhaca influence their language choice in Umzimkhulu.
- Establish possible signs of language shift of isiBhaca to either isiXhosa or isiZulu.
- Examine to what extent amaBhaca perceive isiZulu and/or isiXhosa as threats to the existence and maintenance of isiBhaca.

## Language Dominance Theory as a theoretical framework

The Language Dominance Theory was used to examine the status and use of isiBhaca in Umzimkhulu. Much work has been done on the non-standard and standard variations, demonstrating that both designations are contentious (Cowan 2013; Henriksen 2010). Phillipson (1996) introduced the term standard variety and asserts that standard variety means linguistic imperialism. According to Messele and Michael (2009), a standard language can be an official or national language used in government and business. A standard language is more significant, prestigious, impacts economic considerations, controls dialects or has a considerable influence over something or someone (UNESCO 2014). Similarly, Suarez (2002) states that a standard variety offers insight into social power relations, including the relationship between the social power, the majority languages and the minority language or group. Therefore, this article sought to establish language maintenance and shift of the isiBhaca and how it is dominated by isiXhosa or isiZulu in Umzimkhulu.

According to UNESCO (2014), language dominance occurs when a more powerful language overpowers a minority language in a society, even if that minority language is the L1 of citizens of that community. Thus a dominant language is a language used by the majority in a community, and in the case of schools, a dominant language is mostly used as a medium of instruction (MOI). Bokamba (2011) indicates that language dominance may dictate or impose power over other languages in a multilingual or bilingual community. The standard varieties in Umzimkhulu are the official languages of Umzimkhulu, which are isiXhosa and isiZulu (Majola 2018). As observed by scholars such as Messele and Michael (2009), interference of a second language, especially when it is also a dominant language, creates difficulties that persist through the accent of the first or minority language standard variety. A typical sound in a standard variety may not exist in a dialect. As a result, this article aims to explore the sociolinguistic aspect of the isiBhaca to determine the interference of isiXhosa or isiZulu on the language spoken by amaBhaca.

## What is language maintenance and shift?

According to Mesthrie et al. (2000:246), language maintenance refers to the ongoing use of language amid competition from regionally and socially more powerful language(s). Language shift is the opposite; it refers to the replacement of one language with another as the principal means of communication within a community. Clyne (2003) says that no all-inclusive hypothesis clarifies language support or move as shown by the different ways to deal with the field. Nevertheless, there is an understanding that interrelationships are vital to comprehending how and why individuals use language(s) in the way they do. Clyne (2003) adds that distinct components may incorporate age, sexual orientation, exogamy, financial portability and capability. In a prevailing language setting, individuals from a minority language do not go about in a confined manner but rather depend on one another. The consequence of language conduct relies on the network's aggregate activity.

In this article, the existence of isiBhaca is shown as a non-standard language among two powerful standard languages: isiXhosa and isiZulu. To a certain extent, isiBhaca has the potential of being completely replaced by isiZulu and/or isiXhosa. Previously, sociolinguists have researched broadly the issue of language contact and language maintenance and shift, some of whom are Fishman (1964), Weinreich (1953) and Clyne (1982). Fishman (1964) discusses the importance of language shift and maintenance to understand and analyse the consequences of multilingual language contact. Fishman (1964) asserts that:

the basic datum of the study of language maintenance and language shift is that two linguistically distinguishable populations are in contact and that there are demonstrable consequence of this contact with respect to habitual language use. (p. 33)

Weinreich (1953) highlights the relationship between dialects and languages, extra-linguistic elements such as cultural, psychological, social and historical processes and non-linguistic characteristics such as geographic location, religion, race and gender, age, social position and occupation. Furthermore, he suggests that this results in linguistic splits among mother tongue groups. He says that certain ethnic groups hold to their mother tongue because of emotional attachment, as they acquired it as children, or because language serves as a sign of community integrity.

Similarly, Clyne (1982) addresses various concerns related to language preservation, including variables such as age and the language used in a particular profession, which substantially impacts language maintenance and even its transmission to the next generation.

## Language, identity and culture

Crystal (2010) pointed out that languages are stores of their speech communities' culture, history, heritage and literature. Sheyholislami (2010) holds that language, identity and culture are intertwined to a certain extent. Particular languages usually point to a specific group of people. When one interacts with another language, one also interacts with the culture that speaks the language. It is sometimes difficult to understand a culture without accessing its language directly. Majola (2021) mentions that the influence of isiXhosa and isiZulu on isiBhaca often puts the latter under duress. This is because the government, PanSALB and society encourage using and developing indigenous languages. In this case, 'indigenous' means standard languages such as isiXhosa and isiZulu. Therefore, if one speaks a dialect, he/she is forced to adapt to the standard language closely related to his/her dialect, which means he/she leans towards and communicate in the culture of that language.

Sheyholislami (2010) posits that how individuals think about the world is impacted by the language individuals use to talk about it. Anthropologist-etymologist Edward Sapir (1921) expresses that language propensity for explicit gatherings of individuals assembled this present reality. Sheyholislami (2010) further states that no two dialects are comparative to one society. Edwards (2009) mentions that the universe of every public is unique, which implies that communicating in a language implies that the individual is expecting a culture. Knowing another culture, based on this, is knowing its specific language.

Given the above context, it can be deduced that although related, isiBhaca may be replaced by neither isiZulu nor isiXhosa, as each has distinct but related traditions. The amaBhaca have no choice but to view the world through other people's languages as theirs may not be used for anything other than in their homes or communities and not for official purposes in schools and government departments. Consequently, to some, isiBhaca is viewed as a language of less importance as it is not official, and its speakers may be discouraged and embarrassed about their language and cultural identity. They assume that they should adopt dominant languages if they want to be relevant in today's world.

## Methodology

This study employed an explanatory mixed-method approach, which meant that quantitative data were examined first, followed by qualitative data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:25), the combined qualitative and quantitative techniques complement each other and assist in constructing a fuller image of the research challenge. In this study, a survey research design was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:22), a survey research design entails the investigator selecting a sample of people and administering a questionnaire or conducting interviews

to collect data. They also claim that surveys describe attitudes, beliefs and other data types.

The sample size in this piece is 205 people who were chosen purposively because they live in Umzimkhulu and identify as amaBhaca. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), purposive sampling is the process of discovering and selecting people or groups of people who are exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced with a topic of interest. Bernard (2002) emphasises the importance of readiness and willingness to interact and the ability to communicate experiences and points of view in an articulate, expressive and deliberate manner. Participants for this piece were strategic community leaders, strategic members and leaders of religious groups, language instructors from chosen schools and political, traditional and strategic leaders of social groupings in diverse localities.

The researchers contacted the amaBhaca in Umzimkhulu and explained the goals of the present study, as well as the protocols and methods that would be followed during the research. The identified speakers of isiBhaca were eager to engage in the current study because they regarded it as an opportunity to communicate how they felt about their language situation and how they believed the usage and recognition of isiZulu or isiXhosa affected them (Ferreira 2014; Rocca 2010). As a result, the researchers gathered information from the respondents by employing a survey questionnaire as a helpful instrument.

## Findings and discussions

### Quantitative and qualitative data (yes/no/motivate questions)

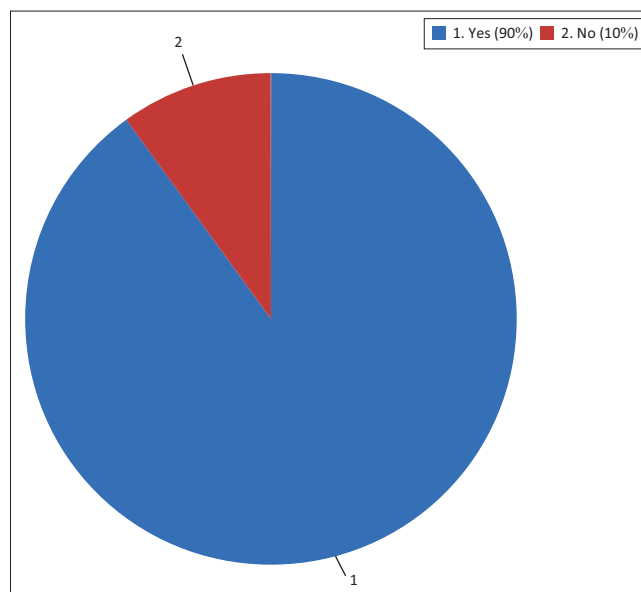
This article sought to go beyond establishing participants' attitudes towards isiBhaca; it sought to investigate the level of language maintenance and shift of isiBhaca and how this influences the identities of amaBhaca. Data analysed in this section were drawn from 205 participants who were asked to indicate YES or NO to the 10 questions (quantitative data) and then give reasons for their choices (qualitative data).

The 10 questions put to participants will be discussed thematically. Data have been presented as follows for all three categories:

- A pie chart comprising the percentages of YES and NO answers.
- Reasons are given for YES and NO answers, as well as direct quotes from certain participants.
- Synthesis of each category after presenting all questions under them.

### Category 1: Attitudes towards isiBhaca

Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5 were posed to participants under this category.



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIGURE 1: Negative towards isiBhaca.

Interview Question 2: Do you think some people have negative attitudes towards isiBhaca because of its status in society? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, an overwhelming majority (90%) said yes. Considering the open ended aspect of the question which is qualitative, the respondents who said yes mentioned that most people develop negative attitudes towards isiBhaca. The reason cited is that isiBhaca is not recognised as an official language. The majority of those who said yes indicated that the youth were primarily those with negative attitudes towards isiBhaca. They cited that youth have negative attitudes because of the language confusion in Umzimkhulu, adding that most non-official languages are not respected. In support of this, MRL2 mentioned:

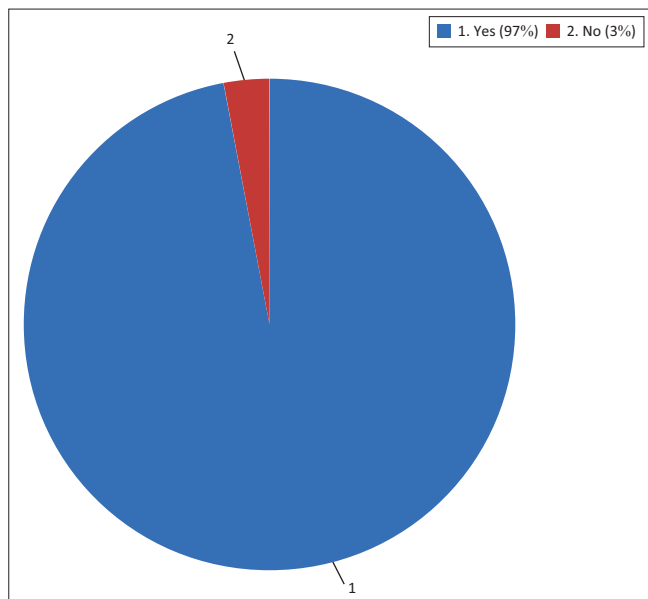
'Mostly the youth has negative attitudes towards isiBhaca because of the language confusion of Umzimkhulu, and generally, official languages are the only ones people respect, so speaking a language like isiBhaca causes you not to be taken seriously by speakers of other languages.' (Participant 2, Male, Religious Leader)

On the other hand, 10% said no (quantitative) and some of the reasons they cited that represent the qualitative data are the fact that amaBhaca do not have negative attitudes towards isiBhaca and that they love it despite it not being recognised as an official language. In support of this, FP1 mentioned:

'AmaBhaca are still proud of their language even though it is not known in the rest of the world, and people love isiBhaca even though it is not official.' (Participant 1, Female, Politician)

Interview Question 3: Do you think you would have performed better if you had the option of choosing isiBhaca as a home language in school? Elaborate.





Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

**FIGURE 2:** Choosing isiBhaca as a home language.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect of the question that is quantitative, an overwhelming majority (97%) said yes and gave reasons (qualitative aspect) that they indeed believe that if they were given a chance to choose isiBhaca during their schooling as a home language, their language proficiency would have improved. As part of their reasons, they also cited that their overall performance would have improved if they were taught in isiBhaca. They added that competing with amaXhosa (isiXhosa mother tongue speakers) is unfair because they use isiXhosa at home. In contrast, amaBhaca only use isiXhosa at school, which is a second language to them. In support of this, MTL3 mentioned:

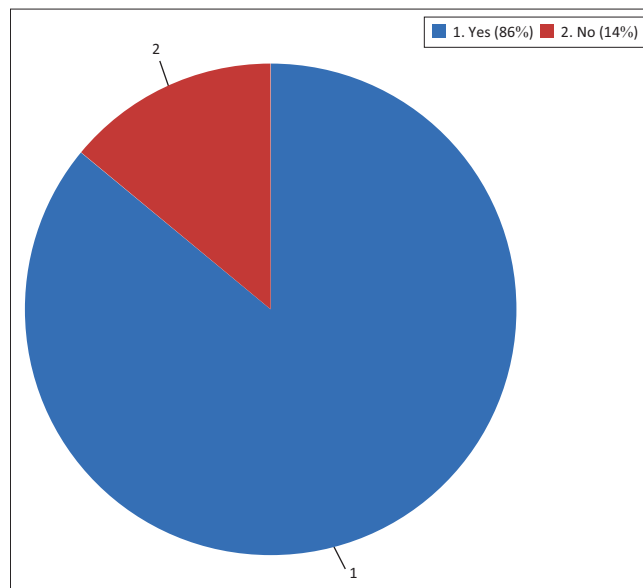
'IsiBhaca is my Home Language, and isiXhosa is not. I do not understand isiXhosa, so I struggle to do it as a Home Language. Therefore, I think doing isiBhaca would have improved my performance.' (Participant 3, Male, Traditional Leader)

3% said no (quantitative) as part of their response to the qualitative part of the question and mentioned that amaBhaca is used to the use of isiXhosa in education and that some of them perform well in isiXhosa and that their performance was never affected by the use of isiXhosa in their schooling. In support of this, FLT3 mentioned:

'We were used to isiXhosa, and we started learning in isiXhosa, and we ended up being used to it, and IsiBhaca is a language only spoken at home, not at school.' (Participant 3, Female, Language Teacher)

Interview Question 4: Do you think isiXhosa and isiZulu threaten the existence of IsiBhaca? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, the majority



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

**FIGURE 3:** The threat on isiBhaca.

(85.9%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative response part to the question, they indicated that isiBhaca is under severe threat as there was no way of developing or preserving it. Therefore, amaBhaca mentioned that they feel that isiBhaca is under threat and the shift towards isiZulu or isiXhosa has potential to affect their ethnicity. They added that most people in Umzimkhulu are already gravitating towards isiZulu as Umzimkhulu is now under KZN, the same way some gravitated towards isiXhosa when Umzimkhulu was under EC. In support of this, MLT2 mentioned:

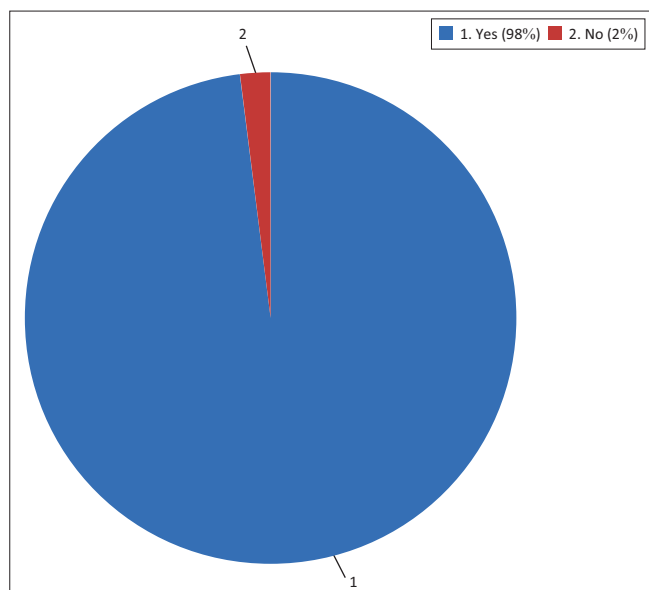
'IsiBhaca is only used in a spoken form unlike isiXhosa and isiZulu, which are also used for writing in schools and other sectors, so it is severely under threat.' (Participant 2, Male, Language Teacher)

The other 14% of the participants in responding to the quantitative part of the question said no. As part of the qualitative part of the question, the participants were of the opposite view that isiBhaca is not under threat, citing that more than one language in a place does not mean the death of one of them. They also argued that there are many places where more than one language is used, but those languages still have not died. In support of this, MP2 mentioned:

'It is possible to have more than one language used in one region; Johannesburg is an example.' (Participant 2, Male, Politician)

Interview Question 5: Do you think that isiBhaca should be officially recognised in areas where many people speak it, for example, in Umzimkhulu and Mouth Frere? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, an overwhelming majority (98%) of the participants said yes. As part of responding to the qualitative part of the question they



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FIGURE 4: The official recognition of isiBhaca.

responded that they believe that isiBhaca should be granted official status in South Africa because its speakers do not identify with any of the languages used for official purposes in Umzimkhulu. They added that it would not be possible for other people to respect them as amaBhaca and their traditions as long as their language is not recognised – that isiBhaca language and culture will not be maintained if it is not recognised. They further indicated that if a language is not official, it will not be developed and ultimately die. Unfortunately, to a certain extent, the language will die with the history and culture of its native speakers. In support of this, MCL5 mentioned:

'IsiBhaca is a language that we understand and is spoken in some areas in KZN and the EC, so it is fair to introduce it to those who understand and use it as a mother tongue. Every South African citizen's right to be allowed to use their mother tongue, not a language, which they do not know, so isiBhaca speakers also wish to use and be addressed in their language.' (Participant 5, Male, Community Leader)

The remaining 2% of the participants in response to the quantitative part of the question said no and as part of the qualitative part they indicated that the reason why it would not be easy for people to adapt to isiBhaca if it were to be recognised is because it is never easy for people to get used to using a new language, especially if they are already used to using a different language. In support of this, FSL2 mentioned:

'People will not enjoy using a new language like isiBhaca, and many people do not know isiBhaca, but they only know isiXhosa and isiZulu.' (Participant 2, Female, Social Leader)

### Synthesis of Category 1

From the four questions under this category, a conclusion was reached that participants overwhelmingly supported the idea of developing isiBhaca as a different language to

avoid shifting towards one of the dominant languages. Furthermore, participants demonstrated positive attitudes towards isiBhaca. They felt that isiXhosa or isiZulu has negatively influenced the development and existence of isiBhaca, particularly as it relates to the cultural identity of amaBhaca, as isiXhosa is mainly used across Umzimkhulu schools both as a MOI in lower grades and home language/ first additional language in the upper grades. They further indicated that should isiBhaca be granted official status in Umzimkhulu, it could improve people's attitudes towards it and improve learners' performance in school, and isiBhaca will therefore be maintained and not shift towards either isiXhosa or isiZulu.

### Category 2: Matching isiBhaca against isiXhosa and isiZulu

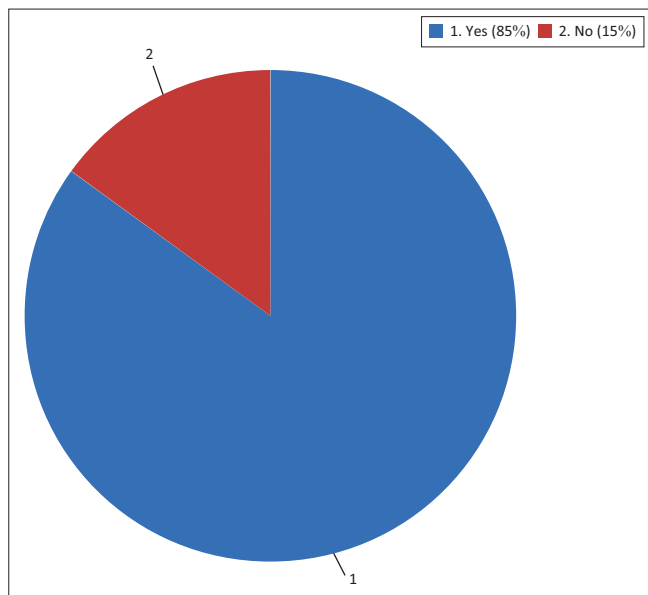
Questions 1, 6, 7 and 8 were posed to participants under this category.

Interview Question 1: Do you think IsiBhaca is a dialect of isiXhosa or isiZulu, or is it a distinct language from the two? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Firstly, concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, the majority (85%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative part of the question, they indicated that isiBhaca, according to them, is a language on its own. They cited that isiBhaca cannot be separated from the history and kinship of amaBhaca. Even the cultural practices of amaBhaca differ from those of amaZulu or amaXhosa. Secondly, amaBhaca is multilingual; thus, they feel that the mutual intelligibility between isiXhosa and isiZulu was not so different from the one between isiBhaca, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Standardisation is unfair if it elevates one dialect over others, and speakers of the non-favourable dialects are forced to ethnically belong to the dominant dialect, which is now elevated to official status. In support of this, FSL2 mentioned:

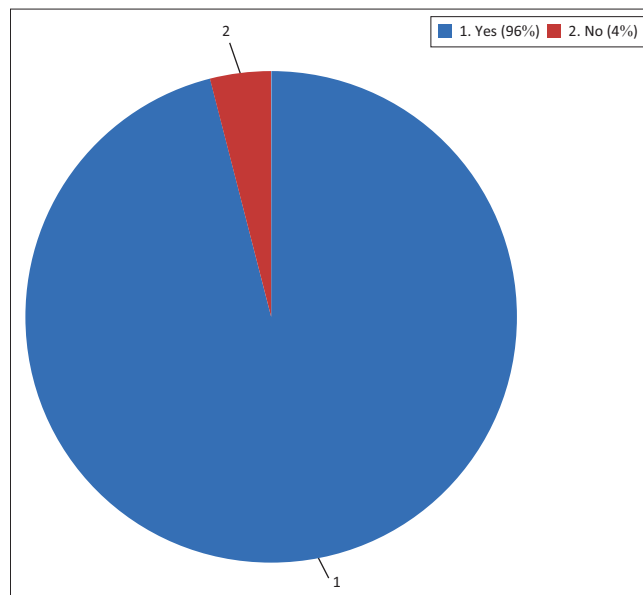
'IsiBhaca is a language on its own because it has its own culture and tradition, which differs from that of isiXhosa and isiZulu. Furthermore, even though it is mutually intelligible with isiXhosa and isiZulu, the way amaBhaca live and speak is different from how amaZulu or amaXhosa live and speak. Lastly, when we, as amaBhaca, speak isiZulu with Zulu people, they say we are Xhosa. When we speak isiXhosa with the Xhosa people, they say we are Zulu, so it is clear that isiBhaca is different but related to isiXhosa and isiZulu.' (Participant 2, Female, Social Leader)

The remaining 15% of the participants in responding to the quantitative part of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative part, they argued that isiBhaca is a dialect of both isiXhosa and isiZulu, while others from this group felt that isiBhaca now has shifted towards isiZulu and should be classified as a dialect of isiZulu and not of isiXhosa. In support of this, FSL6 mentioned:



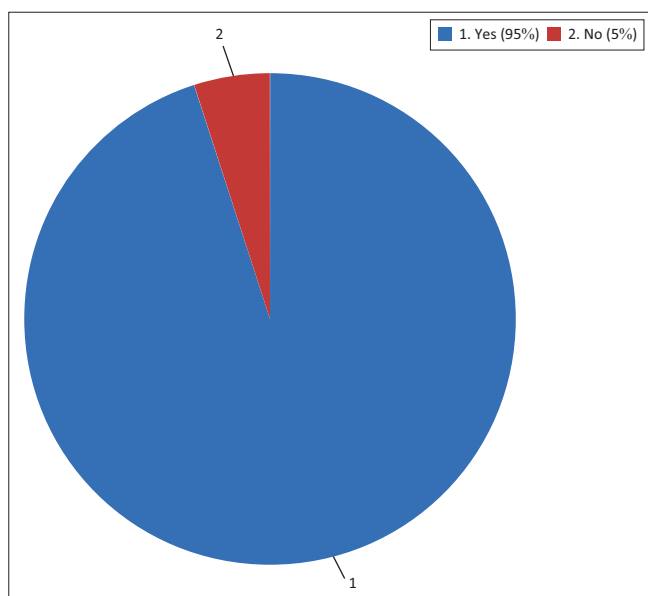
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FIGURE 5: The classification of isiBhaca.



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIGURE 7: Difference between isiZulu and isiBhaca.



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIGURE 6: The ethnicity of Umzimkhulu citizens.

'IsiBhaca is a dialect of both isiXhosa and isiZulu because amaBhaca and speakers of the two languages all understand each other.' (Participant 6, Female, Social Leader)

Interview Question 6: Ethnically speaking, do you consider yourself as *umZulu*, *umXhosa* or *iBhaca*? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that was quantitative, the majority (95%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative aspect of the question, they indicated that they consider themselves amaBhaca or iBhaca. They indicated that even though circumstances push them

to speak isiXhosa and isiZulu at times, they are neither Zulu nor Xhosa. To support this, some mentioned that both Zulu and Xhosa people do not consider the people of Umzimkhulu as part of them. Therefore, even if they use isiXhosa or isiZulu, they still do not fit within those ethnic groups. The secondary argument is that the way of living of amaBhaca is different from amaZulu and amaXhosa, which was reason enough to prove that these are three different ethnic groups with three different languages. In support of this, MP2 mentioned:

'I was born and bred in Umzimkhulu, and people of Umzimkhulu are known as amaBhaca, and I have my own culture and heritage which is different from that of Zulu's and Xhosa's, so I am 'iBhaca.' (Participant 2, Male, Politician)

The minority 5% of the participants in responding to the quantitative part of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative part, they indicated that they come from the Xhosa tribe, while others said they come from the Zulu tribe and stayed in Umzimkhulu because of work. In support of this, FP1 mentioned:

'I originate from the Zulu tribe. Hence my surname and culture and some people here in Umzimkhulu originate from the Xhosa tribe and stay here because of work.' (Participant 1, Female, Politician)

Interview Question 7: Do you think there is a difference between isiBhaca and isiZulu? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that was quantitative, most (96%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative aspect, they indicated that there is a difference between isiZulu and isiBhaca. Although most participants focused on the linguistic differences, some went further and referred to the differences in practices and

ethnicity. They indicated that they acknowledge the difference between the two languages and that isiBhaca is closer to isiZulu than isiXhosa. However, on whether it is the same with isiXhosa, they said it is not. In support of this, MCL4 mentioned:

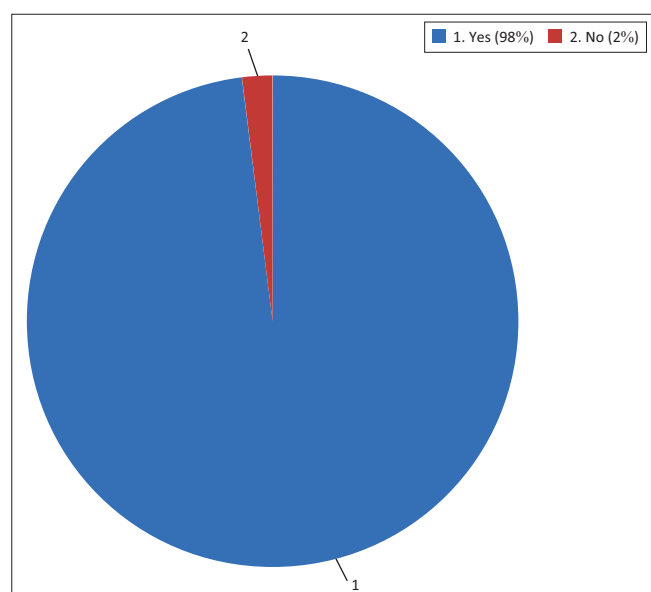
'I can confirm that amaBhaca are different from the Zulu people in many ways. I can count tradition and way of living as language. If isiBhaca was similar to isiZulu, then amaZulu would not refer to me as a Xhosa or a Mpondo as they do now. It is clear that they do not regard me as one of them.' (Participant 4, Male, Community Leader)

On the other hand, the remaining 5% of the participants in responding to the quantitative aspect of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative aspect, they mentioned that isiBhaca is a dialect of isiZulu and that there are few words of isiBhaca, which are different from isiZulu and such words were not formal they said. They further indicated that they believe that isiZulu and isiBhaca are similar but only to a certain extent. In support of this, FLT3 mentioned:

'IsiZulu and isiBhaca are the same somewhere, but not every word. The only difference is how amaBhaca pronounce words. They speak as though they are Xhosa.' (Participant 3, Female, Language Teacher)

Interview Question 8: Do you think there is a difference between isiBhaca and isiXhosa? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that was quantitative, most (98%) of the participants said yes. As part of their qualitative response they indicated that there is a difference between isiXhosa and isiBhaca. Although most participants focused on the linguistic differences, some mentioned that isiXhosa had influenced isiBhaca



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIGURE 8: Differences between isiXhosa and isiBhaca.

because Umzimkhulu was once under Transkei and later EC before moving to KZN in 2006. They also acknowledged similarities as isiXhosa is used for teaching and learning in most schools in Umzimkhulu. In support of this, FLT2 mentioned:

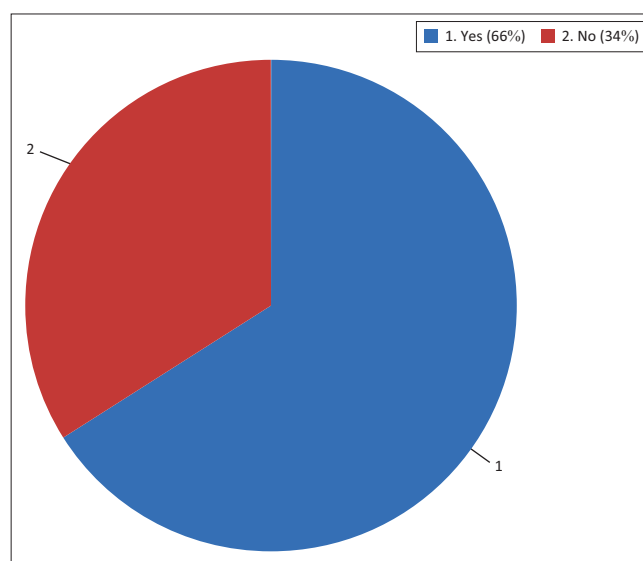
'What makes people think isiBhaca is similar to isiXhosa is because our children use isiXhosa in school. Therefore, they are influenced by isiXhosa, yet when they get home, they speak isiBhaca, but isiXhosa is different from isiBhaca. Secondly, even if we wanted to belong to the Xhosa group, they say we are Zulu''.' (Participant 2, Female, Language Teacher)

On the other hand, the minority 2% of the participants in responding to the quantitative aspect of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative part, they mentioned that they believe that isiBhaca is similar to isiXhosa as isiXhosa has been used in education for many years now in Umzimkhulu. In support of this, MLT4 mentioned:

'IsiBhaca has few words which are different from those of isiXhosa.' (Participant 4, Male, Language Teacher)

## Synthesis of Category 2

From the four questions under this category, a conclusion could be reached that participants overwhelmingly indicated differences among isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa. To show the differences, they gave many examples of lexical items different in isiBhaca compared with isiXhosa and isiZulu. Participants also indicated that isiBhaca is neither a dialect of isiZulu nor isiXhosa but a different language. They further indicated that because they have to use isiXhosa or isiZulu for official purposes, amaBhaca does not regard themselves as amaXhosa or amaZulu. However, they regard themselves as amaBhaca, and unfortunately, most people assume they are Zulu or Xhosa as they have to use one or both of these languages.



Source: Adapted from Majola, Y.L.P., 2021, 'Language, identity and culture: a study of language maintenance and shift among amaBhaca raised in UMzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal', Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIGURE 9: Code-switching from isiBhaca to isiXhosa/isiZulu.



### Category 3: Motivation for accommodation/code-switching

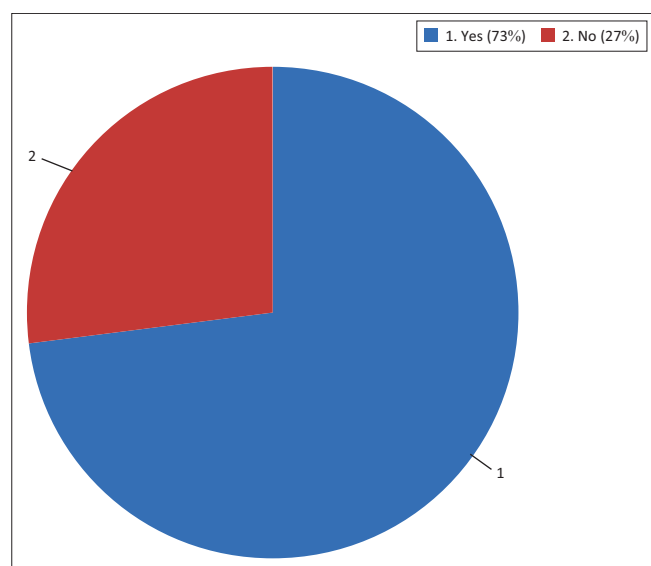
Questions 9 and 10 were posed to participants under this category.

Interview Question 9: Do you sometimes code-switch between isiBhaca and isiXhosa or isiZulu? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, the majority (66%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative part, they indicated that they code-switch among isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa. This is because, at school, isiXhosa is used as a home language. In contrast, at home and with friends, they use isiBhaca. The other group indicated that they work in government offices, and Umzimkhulu is under KZN. They had to use isiZulu to accommodate speakers of isiZulu, as isiZulu is the dominant language in the province. In support of this, MLT1 mentioned:

'Because at work they do not understand isiBhaca, I decide to speak isiZulu. At school, we had to choose isiXhosa as a Home Language even though I use isiBhaca at home and with my friends.' (Participant 1, Male, Language Teacher)

On the other hand, the remaining 34% in response to the quantitative aspect of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative aspect, they mentioned that they do not code-switch. They were, however, split into two groups. One group indicated that they do not code-switch because they did not see the need to code-switch to accommodate speakers of other languages when they never speak isiBhaca. As such, they never accommodate amaBhaca. The second group indicated that they do not switch because they speak isiXhosa or isiZulu only. In support of this, MRL2 mentioned:



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FIGURE 10: Code-switching because of the status of isiBhaca.

'IsiBhaca is my language, so if someone does not understand it, then they must learn it, so if I can accommodate Zulu/Xhosa people, they will think I am one of them, and they will continue to undermine my language.' (Participant 2, Male, Religious Leader)

Interview Question 10: Do you feel pressure to code-switch to other languages (viz. isiXhosa or isiZulu) because isiBhaca is not an official language in South Africa? Elaborate.

This question was both closed and open-ended. Concentrating on the closed ended aspect that is quantitative, the majority (73%) of the participants said yes. As part of their response to the qualitative part, they indicated that they indeed feel under much pressure, leading to code-switching. In most cases, the switching is from isiBhaca to isiXhosa or isiZulu. Many argue that being in a society that favours and elevates powerful languages and forgets about minor languages, one is bound to either switch between languages or abandon one's language for the language of the majority or a powerful language. They further indicated that belonging to a small ethnic group and speaking a language not known by many, such as isiBhaca, is not easy. After all, isiBhaca is not well known. In support of this, FP2 mentioned:

'IsiBhaca is only important to those who speak it; everyone else does not care about it, and everyone else is represented on the constitution of South Africa, but amaBhaca are left wanting, so I decide to speak isiXhosa or isiZulu. I struggle to assist my children with their homework, so I feel obliged to learn isiXhosa since it is the language they use at school.' (Participant 2, Female, Politician)

On the other hand, the remaining 27% of the participants in response to the quantitative aspect of the question said no. As part of their response to the qualitative aspect, they mentioned that they are not under pressure to code-switch because they see isiBhaca as a language equal to other languages. The non-official status of isiBhaca does not make them feel the pressure to speak recognised languages. They added that isiBhaca not being officially recognised does not make it less of a language, and as such, they will continue to use it because that is the only language they know. In support of this, MRL2 mentioned:

'Even if isiBhaca is not recognised as an official language, it is still my mother tongue; IsiBhaca represents our heritage, so I do not have a problem with its status.' (Participant 2, Male, Religious Leader)

### Synthesis of Category 3

From the two questions under this category, a conclusion could be reached that participants felt they mainly find themselves in a position where they should code-switch to accommodate speakers of isiXhosa and isiZulu. They further outlined that behind this code-switching and accommodation is the pressure of other people not knowing and respecting their language. Therefore, they have to accommodate others to be accepted in the society where these dominant languages are spoken.

## IsiBhaca as dialect

Information from the participants of this study showed that isiBhaca is closely related to isiZulu instead of isiXhosa. Participants strongly felt that isiBhaca is not a dialect of any language but a distinct language. From the literature used in this article, the issue of dialect is crucial and ambiguous, as noted by Britain (2009), who asserts that it depends on who defines it. Britain (2009) further posits that a dialect is undoubtedly no more than a local non-prestigious (powerless) variety of a natural language for some people. By contrast, scholars have difficulty deciding which term to use in certain situations.

## Mutual intelligibility among isiBhaca, isiXhosa and isiZulu

This article revealed mutual intelligibility among isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa. According to Sallabank (2010) and Sharndama and Magaji (2014), mutual intelligibility is about people who speak different languages yet understand each other. According to the findings of this article, there is a strong resemblance among isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa. This is because both isiXhosa and isiZulu are used in Umzimkhulu, but the similarity between isiXhosa and isiZulu is not different from that between isiBhaca and isiXhosa/isiZulu. Therefore, it can be concluded that in Umzimkhulu, people can communicate in isiBhaca, isiZulu and isiXhosa. This article also revealed that although isiBhaca is related to both isiXhosa and isiZulu, it is more closely related to isiZulu than isiXhosa. Umzimkhulu was transferred to KZN in 2006, and the regional language of KZN, isiZulu, has influenced isiBhaca, similar to how isiXhosa influenced isiBhaca prior to 2006.

## Shifts in domains of language use

This article demonstrated that amaBhaca is shifting away from their language as they were compelled to utilise the dominant/standard languages as the official national language. Therefore, they had to prioritise knowledge of the two to thrive out there at the expense of their L1. It also demonstrated that many individuals respected isiBhaca and hoped to see it promoted in the future. On the other hand, others do not worry if isiBhaca is lost as they prefer to use dominant languages like isiXhosa or isiZulu. These findings imply that some Umzimkhulu residents are unconcerned with isiBhaca as they have changed to adopting isiXhosa or isiZulu because of their dominance. According to studies by Batibo (2009), UNESCO (2014), Oshodi (2014) and Phillipson (1996), dominant languages wield socioeconomic and social influence that may push minority language speakers to renounce their language and utilise the minority languages in vital tasks.

## Conclusion

This article concerned itself with providing a sociolinguistic perspective on the language situation of Umzimkhulu,

particularly locating isiBhaca and its use in the area. The objective was to examine to what extent speakers of isiBhaca find isiBhaca threatened by the existence of isiXhosa or isiZulu in Umzimkhulu. This article's primary purpose was to determine whether isiBhaca is or can be preserved and whether there is a potential movement towards isiXhosa or isiZulu, as well as to determine the views of isiBhaca L1-speaking inhabitants of Umzimkhulu towards isiBhaca. A mixed-methods approach was used in this work.

AmaBhaca has indicated they fear the loss of their language (isiBhaca) at the expense of isiXhosa or isiZulu. The threat to isiBhaca has already been evident because there is a general assumption that the younger generation has lost interest in isiBhaca and further developed negative attitudes towards isiBhaca because they feel it is better to associate with more dominant languages, in this case, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Several participants suggested that isiBhaca might still be revived. However, the government and other key isiBhaca speakers should be lobbied to be part of the initiative to preserve isiBhaca and ensure that educators teach this generation for the next generation.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they do not have any financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

Y.L.P.M., Z.S.G. and N.T.M. contributed equally to this article.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand. The ethics number is: R14/49: H20/07/19.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the University of the Witwatersrand Digital Open Repository.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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