# Investigating the linguistic effectiveness of early reading schemes in isiXhosa:

A phonological and orthographical analysis of three isiXhosa Grade 1 graded reader series

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### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS**

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# ABSTRACT

Literacy in South Africa is in crisis. Inadequate learning and teaching materials, extensive curriculum changes, under-resourced schools and under-qualified teachers are all contributing factors to an alarming situation. Grade 1 African language reading schemes in South Africa are failing to provide young children with the necessary and appropriate practice required to facilitate home language literacy acquisition (NEEDU 2013). A detailed analysis of three isiXhosa Grade 1 graded reader series will show the short-comings of texts translated from English with no cognisance of isiXhosa phonic structures and little appreciation for the agglutinative nature of Nguni languages. Formulating a new, effective approach to the development of African language readers to facilitate reading literacy is urgent and of national importance. The innovative phonics-based methodology, as well as an appropriate instructional level used to develop the *Vula Bula* Grade 1 isiXhosa readers appears to be a viable blueprint for the development of early readers that can effectively help to ameliorate current deficient literacy levels in African languages. This research thus combines applied linguistics with literacy materials development.

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# PREFACE

Since 2004, I have worked for two prominent South African literacy non-governmental organisations as a professional materials developer of early grade reading materials in African languages. My current employer, the Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy, is nationally and internationally well known for its ground-breaking *Breakthrough to Literacy* programme, which was developed in all nine of South Africa's official African languages and subsequently adapted for use in numerous other African languages across the continent. The *Breakthrough* programme combined a child-centred, language-experience approach to literacy learning, whilst promoting a strong phonic approach to the development of reading skills.

The Molteno Project began as an experiment conducted in 1963 by Professor Len Lanham (then Head of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand). His aim was to give teachers the tools for the systematic teaching of English pronunciation and spelling; the thinking being that success in teaching the reading of English could be best achieved through the teaching of reading skills in the mother tongue. In 1975, Molteno Research Fellow Vic Rosset conducted classroom practice observation in several Soweto and Transkei schools. His key finding was that learners were equally poor in both mother tongue and English literacy; "Black children were failing to master English reading because they had failed to acquire basic reading skills in the mother tongue" (Kingwill 1998: 19).

My primary goal, as a linguist and professional materials developer, is to continue the sterling work of these educationists by improving African language literacy levels in South Africa. Once children have grasped, and mastered, the basics of reading and writing in their mother tongue, they will be able to transfer these skills to the learning of English, and be equipped with the potential to become knowledgeable, active participants in a global economy.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

Two decades after the advent of democracy, education in South Africa is still characterised by inequalities in the dissemination of resources, including a lack of sufficient and suitable school structures, qualified teachers, access to information and quality teaching. Classes are overcrowded: the national learner-educator ratio is set at a maximum of 40 learners in primary schools, however many teachers have classes of 50 learners or more (De Lannoy & Hall 2012). Anecdotal reports received from teacher-trainers who pay monitoring visits to Molteno project schools regularly confirm the existence of over-crowded classrooms. In addition to overcrowding in the classroom, there have also been many amendments to the curriculum that teachers are supposed to follow. The Outcomes-based Curriculum in 1997 was followed by the National Curriculum Statement in 2000, the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002, the Foundations for Learning Campaign in 2008, the revised Foundations for Learning Campaign in 2010, and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) in 2011. Teachers have been confused and discouraged by the frequent amendments made to the curriculum from 1997 to 2011, accompanied by limited institutional teacher training. In 2017, the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) reported that many of South Africa's teachers are (still) ill-prepared for teaching and do not receive enough support and training to equip them as competent educators. Despite governmental efforts, the pitiable literacy and numeracy performances of South African learners can also be attributed to the vast majority of the teaching cadre whose limited pedagogic and linguistic knowledge and skills bases serve as evidence of the legacy of Apartheid's iniquitous Bantu education policy.

Several studies have examined the broader socio-cultural perspective on South Africa's literacy problem (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009; Janks 2011) while others have investigated purely linguistic features of Bantu languages such as morphology and orthography (Prinsloo & De Schryver 2002; Banda 2003; Louwrens & Poulos 2006; Ziegler & Goswami 2006; Taljard & Bosch 2006). However the link between orthography and barriers to reading acquisition has been under-researched. Theoretical linguistic knowledge of African languages, phonological and morphological processing and how these link to the pshycholinguistics of reading fluency and automaticity, are areas of research that need to be prioritised at universities (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009:70). The scope of this research looks at the development of early grade reading materials for Grade 1 isiXhosa beginner readers.

### **1.1 Mother tongue literacy in South Africa**

The underlying principle of South Africa's current Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) is 'to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s)' (National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996; South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996). The policy advocates mother tongue instruction in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) with simultaneous instruction in the first additional language (FAL), usually English, in accordance with curriculum requirements. In the Eastern Cape, for example, the mother tongue is isiXhosa and the FAL is English in the majority of schools. Learners are then expected to make the switch to English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4 for subjects such as Maths, Natural Science, Life Orientation and Social Science; the mother tongue then assumes subject status.

Investigation by NEEDU discovered incongruence between the LoLT and the home language of learners in just under 30% of schools. In addition, a large number of former Department of Education and Training and homeland schools – mostly serving poor learners in townships and rural areas – provide English as the LoLT in the Foundation Phase because parents demand it. This choice of the LoLT can happen as, according to the South African Schools Act, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) have the power to determine the language policy of a school. Dialectilisation of languages is also a problem commonly experienced by schools which negatively impacts mother tongue language learning. "All languages continuously evolve, and are thus prone to dialectilisation. The major stabilizing and standardizing force is literature, and here African languages are in a particularly vulnerable position, since too few books of any kind exist in the country's nine official African languages" (NEEDU 2013:9).

Literacy in the home language lays a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages, and high failure rates can often be attributed to educating children in a language they do not speak, often using learning materials that the children cannot relate to in their everyday experiences and contexts. Too few years of home language instruction means that children receive insufficient linguistic, conceptual and cognitive grounding in their mother tongue, including vocabulary development, the learning of meta-language and reading strategies, and extended opportunities for writing practice in different genres. After just three years of FAL exposure, the above applies equally to English. Many academic commentators (Heugh 2013) recommend a considerably longer period of mother tongue instruction alongside

English FAL education, suggesting a minimum of six years (and preferable eight years) of learning in both the home language and the FAL before this shift to English is made.

The switch from mother tongue to English in Grade 4 as the medium of instruction means the need to enliterate children fast enough and sufficiently. Beginner readers need to have reading strategies, and extended opportunities for writing practice in different genres. After just three years of FAL exposure, the above applies equally to English.

For the young reader, the orthographic lexicon develops with increasing reading experience dependent on the availability of reading materials (Aro 2004). Stanovich's analogy of the Matthew effect of accumulated advantage (cited in Cunningham & Stanovich 1998) accurately describes the prevalent situation where the paucity of books in African languages, especially early readers, is a major contributing factor to low reading and literacy rates (CLING report 2012; National Reading Strategy 2008). Poor readers, less skilled at decoding and understanding texts, are less likely to read as much as their more skilled peers. They will therefore not have as much practice in reading, and the literacy competency gap widens (Heath 1982). The amount of text to which a child is exposed is a critical factor in vocabulary development and learning to read fluently, and can have profound cognitive consequences (Cunningham & Stanovich 2003: 34).

The section above discussed where South Africa currently stands on its policy towards home language education. Unfortunately, policy and practice are often two different things. The following sections outline how South African children have performed on an international benchmark assessment, revealing that some of the problems outlined above are contributing towards the literacy crisis in which the country finds itself. The language focused on in this research paper is isiXhosa. This is one of South Africa's official languages. It is the mother tongue of just over eight million South Africans – about 16% of the population, and according to the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) 2006 results, the worst language readers in the world.

# 1.2 South Africa's current literacy performance

One of the most exigent educational problems in South Africa is the state of Foundation Phase literacy, especially in African languages. South Africa's dismal performance in literacy is well-documented both nationally (Annual National Assessments) and internationally (PIRLS 2016; PIRLS 2006; SACMEQ III 2010; prePIRLS 2011), with African language learners achieving the very lowest scores, where the best performance (in Setswana) still lags over 100 points behind English. Almost half of all Grade 3 learners fail to achieve 50% in literacy and fewer than 20% of learners tested in African languages manage to attain basic reading skills and strategies (Howie *et al.* 2008; NEEDU 2013).



Figure 1 PIRLS 2006 Grade 5 results by test language

The PIRLS 2006 Summary Report analysed the results of this international systemic evaluation of the home language reading competence of Grade 4 and 5 learners. The outcome revealed that "more than 80% of learners tested in African languages have not attained basic reading skills and strategies" (Howie *et al.* 2008:27). This means effectively that South African learners are failing to achieve the required reading literacy levels *in the Foundation Phase*. In 2013, the National Education, Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) emphasised the long-term implications of this in their National Report:

"the Foundation Phase (FP), Grades 1-3 ... It is here that the base for all future learning is established, and if the rudiments of reading, writing and calculating are not firmly entrenched by the end of Grade 3, then both learning opportunities and the larger life chances of young citizens will be curtailed" (NEEDU 2013:4). The PIRLS 2006 results were particularly useful in comparing learners' results across all South Africa's 11 official languages (see Fig. 1). South African Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners performed the worst out of 40 education systems tested worldwide, almost 200 points below the international average of 500 points. Fifty points roughly translates into one year of schooling, which means that South African literacy education is about four years behind the international average. Within South Africa, Afrikaans and English learners fared the best, followed by Setswana learners. The worst performers were isiXhosa learners (Howie *et al.* 2008). It is interesting that isiZulu learners were able to outperform their isiXhosa counterparts by approximately 50 points, considering that both are Nguni languages sharing very similar orthographies.

Translation of the PIRLS reading comprehension tests also proved a challenge. "The translators completed one of the most difficult jobs in the study, translating 15 test instruments and questionnaires into all 11 languages under enormous time pressure resulting in 213 different versions of the instruments" (Howie *et al.* 2008: vi). Translation from English into African languages is notoriously difficult, partly due to a lack of standardisation in the written form of African languages, particularly those affected by dialectilisation. Translation and spelling of words can vary from one dictionary to another, such as *isosala / isosi* (saucer) and *inkukhu / inkuku* (chicken) in isiXhosa. The inclusion of words borrowed from English or Afrikaans exacerbates the problem where spelling can differ according to the pronunciation used by the translator. Even the Rainbow Workbooks, commissioned by the DBE in all nine African languages and disseminated to every learner in public schools in 2012, have had to undergo extensive editing and revision as a result of criticism received regarding the quality of the language used.

Academic knowledge of African languages, phonological and morphological processing and how these link to reading fluency and automaticity is an area of research that needs to be prioritised at universities, particularly in African Language departments (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009:70). Perhaps even more effective research results can be achieved if African Language Departments partner with Linguistics Departments and Primary Education Departments. According to Taljard & Bosch (2006), the South African Bantu languages are not yet fully standardised with regard to orthography, terminology and spelling rules and "compared to European languages, these languages cannot boast a wealth of linguistic resources. A limited number of grammar books and dictionaries is available for these languages ... In terms of natural language processing, the Bantu languages in general undoubtedly belong to the lesser-studied languages of the world." (Taljard & Bosch 2006: 429).

Vocabulary development is a contentious issue in African languages. Many words have been modified or 'borrowed' from English and Afrikaans and formally incorporated into each lexicon. For example, isiXhosa includes the words amakhandlela (candles), golide (gold), iavakhado (an avocado), iavini (an iron), ibhavisekile (a bicycle) and ikhompyutha (a computer) from English, and *ibhulukhwe* ('n broek [pants]), *iikawusi* (kouse [socks]) and *ivosi* (wors [sausage]) from Afrikaans. Code-switching to English or Afrikaans words even when words exist in the mother tongue is common practice, for example saying isoka (soccer) instead of the indigenous term *ibhola ekhatywayo*. The words for certain shapes (oval, cube, cylinder), colours (blue, turquoise, purple), sports (cricket, rugby, tennis) and animals (cheetah, hyena, shark, whale, chameleon) are not well-known, even to adults. Borrowed words are often preferred even if indigenous synonyms exist. A good example of this is the months of the year where Janyuwari, Febuwari, etc. are used more often than EyoMqungu, EyoMdumba, etc. ostensibly because the latter words are more difficult. PIRLS advocates rigorous quality assurance of its translation processes, however if a comprehension passage is based on a topic where the mother tongue vocabulary is not well known, the learners' ability to understand the passage and answer the comprehension questions will be limited. Poor results may therefore not be a true reflection of the learners' abilities but rather due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge in their mother tongue.

In light of the above, it may be hypothesised that the way in which the PIRLS testing instruments were translated could in all likelihood have posed an additional challenge for learners. Because of the lack of reading resources in African languages, much of what children read in the early grades is the text written on the chalkboard by their teacher. This is often text produced using the language experience approach (reflecting the children's everyday lives). The result of this is twofold. Firstly, the learners read the language as it is written by their teacher which implicates dialectal and spelling influences. Secondly, the scarcity of reading materials in African languages means that children are seldom exposed to the 'language of books' prevalent in literary texts, or to facts presented in informational texts in their mother tongue. If the aims of the PIRLS study are to test two reading purposes, namely reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information, then it is unsurprising that children tested in African languages fail horribly in both.

After the exceptionally poor results achieved in 2006, the design for PIRLS 2011 was changed. This time, Grade 4 learners were tested in prePIRLS in all eleven official languages. The prePIRLS test followed the same processes as PIRLS 2011 but was devised to be shorter, easier and at a lower cognitive level. Results showed that South African Grade 4 learners tested in Afrikaans or English performed above the international centre point but again all African language learners achieved very low scores, substantially below the international centre point (Van Staden & Bosker 2014).



#### **PrePIRLS 2011 bench mark performance by language**

Figure 2 prePIRLS 2011 benchmark performance by test language

Over the past 15 years, Foundation Phase teacher training in South Africa has focused on the delivery of the curriculum and on English language teaching. This may be due to a lack of accessible academic knowledge and reference material on African language pedagogy, especially pertaining to Early Childhood Development (ECD), and the Foundation Phase. Literacy norms, standards and benchmarks for African languages are not yet established, and the African languages curricula are versioned from English with concomitant problems (see examples (1) and (2) in §1.3).

## **1.3 Resources for learning to read in South Africa**

It is clear that reading competence is crucial to educational success, and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to support the National Reading Strategy in schools in terms of resources in the various home languages. This is done by providing Big Books, phonics programmes, workbooks or learner's books, teacher's guides, and fundamentally *graded reader series* which are all considered to be key learner and teacher support materials (LTSM) in Grades 1-3. The DBE's current Grade 1-3 National Catalogue and Addendum Catalogue contain graded reader titles and phonics programmes in all of South Africa's 11 official languages<sup>1</sup>. Whether these materials meet their mandate in supporting literacy and reading acquisition is a question that will be interrogated during this paper.

The University of Johannesburg's Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING) Project attests that in indigenous languages there is a shortage of readily accessible early literacy graded readers that introduce young children to texts that reflect their language experience and cultural milieu. Inevitably, this imbalance in provision is a major factor contributing to low reading and the literacy rates which are currently of great concern in South Africa (CLING report 2012).

Additional literacy problems arising from this lack of reading material include inadequate vocabulary knowledge and poor comprehension skills. Learners' (in)ability to answer analytical and inferential questions is especially highlighted in the 2012 ANA scores of over seven million primary-school learners whereby Grade 3 learners achieved an average of 52% for Home Language literacy (DBE 2012:22). It is clear from these results that learners are insufficiently prepared to enter the Intermediate Phase in Grade 4 when learning to read must transform to reading to learn.

It is not just the shortage of reading resources in African languages that is problematic; it is the manner in which these scanty resources are developed that is exacerbating the problem. South Africa's 2008 National Reading Strategy highlights this situation. It states that "books in African languages are scarce, so children do not have the opportunity to read in their home

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These are Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

language. Some classrooms have no books, and even those classes which do have sets of readers, often have them at the wrong level".

Publishers have not been hasty in reacting to this situation. Readers in African languages are usually only produced in rushed response to government tenders. Publishers should be given at least six months (not one month) to prepare suitable materials (South African Institute for Distance Education [Saide] 2011: viii). The result of this is that these readers are mostly translations of existing English texts, developed with no research and little planning.

There can be possibly harmful pedagogical implications of a translated text for children, as a 'word' in one language might be different to a word in a different language with a different orthography. Consider the following examples:

- The red fox and the big dog are in the hut.
  The sad rat and the fat pig sit in the sun.
- (2) Ingcuka ebomvu nenja enkulu zisendlini.
  Impuku elusizi nehagu etyebileyo zigcakamele ilanga.

The sentences in (1) above are an example of the kind of text one would find in an English basal reader for young children learning to read (§2.2.1). All the words are phonically regular with short (three letter) consonant-vowel-consonant or CVC words. The two words that are not phonically regular: 'the' and 'are', are both established English sight words (Dolch 1948; Fry 1996). The words in these two sentences have been carefully chosen for their ease in decoding in English. The direct translation of the English into isiXhosa is given in example (2) above. The deliberate selection of specific simple phonic structures immediately becomes lost in translation. There are two phonically regular (vowel)-consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel or (V)CVCV words in (2): *elusizi* (that is sad) and *nehagu* (and the pig). However, the rest of the words contain consonant digraphs and blends (in bold) that demand a far greater level of decoding ability from an isiXhosa child at the same stage of learning to read. It's a bit like giving a Grade 1 English child a phonically challenging sentence to read like 'A hungry hippopotamus and a friendly giraffe lived in the game reserve' in a first reader.

# **1.4 Current reading requirements for Grade 1 isiXhosa readers**

When educational materials are submitted for inclusion in the DBE's National Catalogue, these are assessed according to how well they meet the needs of the curriculum. The constant changes and revisions of the curriculum have complicated this evaluation process; furthermore the African languages curricula are in need of review in terms of educational accuracy and appropriateness. The following Table 1 compares examples of the kinds of words that isiXhosa Grade 1 learners versus English Grade 1 learners are expected to read term-by-term in the 'Reading and phonics' section of the Grade 1 Home Language Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

	ISIXHOSA	ENGLISH
TERM 1	s-u-l-a (sula); i-l-u-l-a (ilula) bala, cela, idada, fika, gula, ha <u>mb</u> a, jika, ileli, misa, nika, ipapa, iqa <u>nd</u> a, isisu bhabha, ibhola, chola, Chuma, dlala, dlula, imfama, imfene, imfuyo, ingoma, ingubo, ihlathi, ihlobo, iphupha, idyasi, inja, igusha,	c-a-t – cat c-at, m-at
TERM 2	irhafu, iimfuno, qumba, imfama, indalo ingca, inkcenkce, indlela, ingxolo, intsimbi, intlanzi, isitshixo, ingqondo, inkqayi iimfene, oosisi, sii! Yhoo! Aa!	-at, -et, -it, -ot, -ut, -ag, -eg, -ig, -og, -ug, -an, -en, -in, -un, -am h-en, p-en; t-in, p-in hot, hop, hob
TERM 3	um <b>ngcw</b> abo, ii <b>ndyw</b> ala, i <b>ngqw</b> angi, i <b>ntshw</b> ela, i <b>ntsh</b> entuli	bl-ack, fl-op, sl-ip sh-ip, ch-ip, th-ink
TERM 4	i <b>ngcw</b> aba, i <b>nkxw</b> aleko, i <b>ndlw</b> ane	sh-ip, ch-ip, th-in, fi-sh, mu-ch, wi-th sp-o-t, fr-o-g, dr-i-nk, st-i-ck

Table 1 CAPS HL policy Grade 1 example words per term

The chosen words for English are short and follow a simple CVC pattern. More complex consonant onsets like 'bl' are only introduced in the latter half of the year. Digraphs (one phoneme being represented by more than one grapheme) such as 'sh' [ʃ], are also only introduced later. The requirements for isiXhosa imply that learners need to be decoding consonant digraphs and blends at a far more rapid pace than their English counterparts. The early demand on isiXhosa children to be able to successfully decode significantly more complex phonic structures in much longer words seems unfair.

The African languages curricula are in most part translations of the English version and may therefore not be accurate in how language and literacy skills differ in their acquisition. For example, in the Grade 3 isiXhosa Home Language CAPS (DBE 2011a:105), the following appears below CONTENT/CONCEPTS/SKILLS:

• Ukuqonda izikhamiso ezihamba ngazibini abezifundiswe kwiBanga-2

(Back-translation into English: Recognises two vowels that go together as taught in Grade 2)

No example words are provided to illustrate this concept. In isiXhosa, the same vowel can be doubled in the plural form as in words like <u>oo</u>mama, <u>ii</u>nyoka and ngeemoto, but this is not what the CAPS describes above. In isiXhosa different vowels do not 'go together' as in English, e.g. ea (in beach), ai (in rain), oa (in coat), ar (in part), ir (in bird), ere (here/where). It is important to note that digraphs and the way phonemes are represented in a language are orthographic conventions that need to be learnt for each language. The way a phoneme is written does not necessarily related to its sound. The /i:/ phoneme in 'beach' is a simple sound represented by the digraph *ea*. On the other hand, the more complex diphthong /  $\widehat{a}$ / in 'rain' is also represented by a digraph *ai*. The /i:/ phoneme in English can be spelled out in various ways, for example beach, bee, evening, believe. IsiXhosa does not have this vowel complexity. Compared to English, isiXhosa has very few orthographic vowels: a, e, i, o, u, ee, ii, oo, with the double vowel usually indicating the plural form. The extract from the Grade 3 isiXhosa Home Language CAPS (DBE 2011a: 105) mentioned above is in fact direct translation from English to isiXhosa with no heed taken as to applicability; the meaning is therefore obscure for teachers or materials developers who use the curriculum as their frame of reference. With no standardised norms regarding readability levels in African languages, and dubious suggestions for phonics teaching included in certain African language curricula (Bikitsha 2013), literacy achievement is relegated to remain rudimentary.

## **1.5 Conclusions**

Little research is available on how to successfully develop effective early reading programmes in the different African languages. This paper will explore the way in which readers have been developed to date, and whether this may be a significant contributor to the low levels of literacy apparent in African language learners. The dearth of reading materials seems to be an obvious cause, but the materials that are available are evidently not improving literacy levels either. Could it be because these materials are translated from English source documents, rendering them ineffectual as early readers due to the linguistic complexity that translations bring to the readers? If so, is there an alternative method of developing appropriate readers in African languages?

First, I will undertake a phonic analysis of the words in all the isiXhosa graded reader titles available for Grade 1 on the DBE's National Catalogue in order to find out which development approach is being used by different publishers. Then, with a special focus on phonics, I will analyse the 20 texts of a translated-from-English Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme called *Izinga Eliphezulu*, the 20 texts in a second translated-from-English Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme called *Siyakhula*, and the first 20 texts in a third Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme called *Vula Bula*, developed originally in isiXhosa. These analyses will compare different approaches used to develop beginner readers in isiXhosa. It is hypothesised that using translation as a means of developing early graded readers is erroneous. It is further hypothesised that even if the readers originate from the target language, the phonic structures of the language must be taken into account for early literacy skills to be properly introduced, practised and learnt.

# **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Policy and practice are not always synonymous when examining how learning to read is taking place at grassroots level in South African classrooms. This section describes the reading process and different approaches to teaching reading: how reading is taught for English orthography and, most importantly for the South African context, how reading should be taught for isiXhosa orthography.

# 2.1 Different approaches to reading

The act of reading requires a combination of cognitive processes (Janks 2011; Wolf 2008). These skills include the ability to identify letters and whole words, to associate these letters with sounds, to blend the sounds together to make words, and finally and most importantly to understand the meaning of those words. A fluent reader is one who has mastered all of these skills to achieve automaticity. This means that the task of reading becomes so effortless that the reader is able to reflect on their own thoughts in relation to those of the writer's whose words are being read (Janks 2011). The poor results of comprehension-based tests such as PIRLS indicate that this level of fluent, 'effortless' reading is not being attained by the majority of children in the Foundation Phase, most especially those who speak African languages.

There is extensive research on how children learn to read in English. During several decades of debate, hundreds of different models of reading have been designed to represent disparate views on the key features of effective reading pedagogy. Reading instruction and reading research historically is molded by current political interests, theories of knowledge, and methodological approaches, which at one time or another have been postulated, adopted or rejected. The fight over best practice has been belligerent enough to be referred to as "the reading wars" (Pearson 2004). Recent trends reveal a growing consensus that a balanced approach to literacy and language teaching is optimal. Learning to read requires a sufficiently fluent combination of phonemic awareness, word recognition and decoding to enable comprehension.

### 2.1.1 A phonics/decoding approach (bottom-up reading model)

For many years, a phonics-based approach with the goal of honing decoding skills formed the basis of reading instruction. Phonics is a method of teaching reading by correlating sounds

(phonemes) with letters (graphemes) in an alphabetic writing system and learning to blend these sounds together to read words. Also known as a bottom-up reading approach, this model views the written or printed text as the starting point and focuses on the reader's ability to efficiently use their phonological and morphological knowledge to identify letters, to put letters together to form words, and to combine words into meaningful sentences and paragraphs, and so on. Reading is a perceptual, mechanical, sequential and linear process where cognitive processes are not prioritised.

The National Reading Panel (NRP), a United States government body, was formed with the stated aim of assessing the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. The panel completed its work in April 2002 with the issue of its report "Teaching Children to Read". NRP (2000) identified 1,373 studies published since 1970 that compared phonics instruction to other forms of instruction for their impact on reading ability. NRP research methodology criteria reduced these to 38 studies from which 66 treatment-control group comparisons were derived. This meta-analysis showed that systematic phonics instruction enhances children's success in learning to read and is significantly more effective than instruction that teaches little or no phonics. Most significantly, it was found that first graders who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell, *and they showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text*. These studies strongly support the argument that while it should not be the only approach to teaching reading in English, the development of phonological awareness and a knowledge of phonics is critical for children in providing them with the decoding and word attack skills necessary for fluent reading.

Broadly, phonics instruction may be systematic or incidental (NRP 2000). The hallmark of a systematic phonics approach or programme is that a sequential set of phonics elements is defined and then taught in a structured, scaffolded, progressive manner. Conversely, with incidental phonics instruction, the teacher does not follow a planned sequence of phonics but draws attention to particular elements opportunistically when they appear in text. The NRP report outlines five different instructional approaches to the teaching of phonics that are usually either systematic or incidental – analogy phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, phonics through spelling and synthetic phonics. The definitions given by the report will be used in this research. It is worth considering each approach in terms of its effectivemes in isiXhosa.

#### 2.1.1.1 Analogy phonics

Analogy phonics means teaching learners unfamiliar words by analogy to known words. In English, learners recognise that the rime segment of an unfamiliar word is identical to that of a familiar word, and then blend the known rime with the new word onset, such as reading the unknown word *brick* by recognising that *-ick* is contained in the known word *kick*, or reading the unknown word *stump* by analogy to *jump*. Although it is possible to find rhyming groups of words in isiXhosa (*bethu-wethu-zethu; bakhe-wakhe-zakhe; bala-sala-vala*), this is not an effective phonics approach as there are too few 'stand-alone' words, i.e. static root words unmodified by attached affixes.

#### 2.1.1.2 Analytic phonics

Analytic phonics means teaching learners to analyse letter sound relations in previously learned words. This is to avoid the pronunciation of sounds in isolation. Learners are first taught whole word units followed by systematic instruction linking the specific letters in the word with their respective sounds. This is an ineffective approach in isiXhosa as, unlike English, whole words are inconsistent in structure. Necessary concordial changes mean that root words appear with different combinations of affixes. Analytic phonics is also mostly used when employing a whole language approach (§2.1.2).

#### 2.1.1.3 Embedded phonics

Embedded phonics means teaching learners phonics skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading, a more implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning. This approach is more useful for learners with gaps in their decoding ability, where the teacher can support letter-sound recognition as it happens during the reading lesson. At this time, embedded phonics can play a small role, but certainly not at the outset. Only when learners grow more accustomed to the conjunctive structures of isiXhosa, can they be helped to recognise common affixes, and to practise their syllabification skills enough to enable some degree of fluency.

### 2.1.1.4 Phonics through spelling

Phonics through spelling means teaching learners to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes (i.e. teaching learners to spell words phonemically). Due to the shallow orthography of isiXhosa, this seems to be a logical approach, however once the

single alphabet sounds are learnt, this method would have to be adapted and extended to include teaching learners to segment words into syllables.

#### 2.1.1.5 Synthetic phonics

Synthetic phonics means teaching learners explicitly to convert letters into sounds (phonemes) and then to blend these sounds to form recognisable words. In synthetic phonics approaches, learners are taught to link an individual letter or letter combination with its appropriate sound and then blend the sounds to form words. This approach matches isiXhosa orthography well, especially as regards consonant blends. Here too the approach would need to be modified to include teaching learners to blend syllables together to form words.

### 2.1.2 A whole language approach (top-down reading model)

A top-down reading model offers a constructivist approach which values the contribution made to the reading process by the reader's own world knowledge, cultural background and beliefs. A top-down approach describes how the predictions, assumptions and meanings that the reader brings to the task work together to create a specific context and frame of understanding, within which the text is read. This approach therefore regards the reader as a cognitively active participant in the reading process, who uses his or her prior knowledge and previous lexical and syntactic experience as a basis upon which to guess the next word in a text. Decoding is a futile exercise if the reader doesn't understand the word afterwards, but meaning can be facilitated if the reader has a knowledge of the contextual framework within which the word is used.

The whole language method focuses on meaning rather than decoding, where "reading is characterized as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' bootstrapped by meaning" (Ziegler & Goswami 2006:432). This approach to the teaching of reading and writing in English emphasises the learning of whole words and phrases as they are encountered in meaningful contexts rather than by phonics exercises. The whole language approach to literacy teaching became particularly popular in English Second Language (ESL) teaching in English-speaking countries with the advent of the communicative approach to language teaching in the 1980s. This approach countered the earlier phonics approach to the teaching of reading and writing, which was considered outdated, artificial and a barrier to critical and creative thinking.

In recent years it has steadily been acknowledged that the whole language approach to literacy teaching fails in developing countries where English is not the mother tongue of the majority of the population.

Furthermore, more recent research in cognitive neuroscience suggests that poor children are unlikely to develop strong reading and writing literacy or strong second language learning skills within constructivist, outcomes-based curricula (Heugh 2013). Constructivist teaching and learning use experiential, project-based and task-based applications where children construct knowledge when they come into contact with existing knowledge and experience. This can only be successful for children who come from middle-class environments where "literacy events" involving the written language are the norm, such as the bedtime story, reading cereal boxes and interpreting instructions for games and toys (Heath 1982: 50). These children have extensive exposure to language and vocabulary, living in homes that are well-stocked with books and other print materials. This is clearly not the case in South Africa where fewer than 50% of the learners who participated in the PIRLS 2006 study have access to more than ten books at home (Howie *et al.* 2008). Middle-class children also have the added advantage of attending pre-school (including Grade R), where critical pre-reading and pre-writing skills are acquired.

Communicative language teaching is often mentioned in curriculum documentation; however teachers interpret this approach as meaning that the focus of language teaching is on spoken competence rather than on reading and writing, which makes large-class teaching more manageable but which results in insufficient extended and meaningful reading and writing tasks. When the constructivist methods of outcomes-based education (OBE) were introduced in South Africa in 1997 with Curriculum 2005, Foundation Phase teachers did not understand the teaching approach, and little guidance was provided. Bottom-up approaches, in the form of structured phonics programmes, were not mentioned as options for teaching reading in the early grades. Teachers abandoned more traditional, structured methods of teaching reading and writing, as these practices were no longer featured in official policy. This confusion was a significant contributing factor in hampering literacy acquisition in South Africa, the recognition of which resulted in the eventual scrapping of OBE in 2010 (Jansen 1998). Since then, language curricula and policies have included, and emphasized, the importance of teaching phonics and decoding in the Foundation Phase.

### 2.1.3 A combined approach

Marking the end of the reading wars was the common acknowledgement that an effective and efficient understanding of a written text relies on a combination of two different cognitive models of reading – the bottom-up approach which emphasises word recognition processes and the top-down approach which advocates comprehension processes. In recognising that this balanced language approach is optimal, successful literacy teachers understand the need for heterogeneous reading materials.

For a child reading in his or her mother tongue, both the bottom-up and top-down approaches to reading are used interactively and simultaneously to make sense of text. A skilled reader will automatically process text using a constant to-and-fro system that draws on both cognitive routes. An interesting study by Pelli & Tillman (2007) confirms the stance of pro-phonics educators who believe in the critical importance of equipping children with efficient decoding or 'word-attack' skills. In order to pinpoint the kind of reading skill being utilised by competent adult readers of English, they measured reading rates in three ways: scrambling the word order in texts, then alternating letter case, and lastly substituting similar letters for others. Their research found that words are not usually recognised as wholes – mechanistic letter decoding, or recognition by parts, accounts for the bulk (62%) of the adult reading rate, with holistic word recognition accounting for 16%, and guessing the word from the context of the sentence accounting for 22%, with a 6% individual variance (Pelli & Tillman 2007). The study further showed that these processes are additive – all three function at every level of reading and, because they do not work on the same words, they are equally as important.

Both the Pelli & Tillman study (2007) and the NRP meta-analysis focus on reading in English, a language notorious for its deep, opaque orthography, where learning a sound and spelling rule is accompanied by the simultaneous introduction of multiple exceptions to the rule, for example: the different sounds for 'gh' in the words *laugh*, *ghost*, *bought* and *hiccough*; the different sounds for 'oo' in the words *good*, *poor*, *floor* and *blood*; and the different spelling of the sound [ɔ] (/aw/) in paw, before, for, ball, brought, caught, door and four.

The limitations of using only a phonics approach for learning to read in English can easily be understood; these examples illustrate the need for a reading approach that combines phonics instruction with substantial look-and-say or sight word practice. It can also happen that the reader decodes successfully without engaging with the meaning, an activity described as "barking at print" (Smith 1994, cited in Land 2013). Comprehension is not possible without decoding, while decoding is necessary but not sufficient for comprehension (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009: 56). Nonetheless, if decoding is recognised as a critical contributor towards learning to read in an opaque orthography like English, then it can be surmised that it would be of even greater importance in learning to read in a transparent orthography.

It is important to understand that reading is a mapping from orthography to language to meaning. Reading has many cognitive benefits as well as socio-economic benefits, especially later on in life. The next section explores how South Africa is managing its responsibility to boost literacy in the country.

# 2.2 Teaching reading in English

The act of reading requires a combination of complex cognitive processes (Janks 2011; Wolf 2008), including the accurate mapping of orthographic to phonological representations (Snow, Griffin & Burns 2005: 13).

McDougall, Brunswick & de Mornay Davies (2010: 3) define orthography as "the accepted usage of a set of symbols to represent a given language in a written form". Aro (2004) hypothesises that the more phonetically transparent a language's orthography is, the easier the language will be to learn to read. English has many words that are not said as they are spelt and so is seen as non-transparent. In addition to phonology, English and African languages have a different morphology and syntax. The South African Department of Basic Education's "Teaching Reading in the Early Grades: A Teacher's Handbook" (2008) does not mention African languages and the different challenges the orthographies might pose. University student teachers are not properly trained to teach early reading skills and strategies in African home languages (National Reading Strategy 2008: 10; Akyeampong, Pryor, Westbrook & Lussier 2011, Janks 2011). It is postulated that teachers therefore transfer to the relevant African language the theory they learn about teaching reading in English (Saide 2009, cited in Welch 2012), just as worldwide, models of alphabetic literacy acquisition are typically based on research concerning the acquisition of English orthography (Aro 2004). Approaches are therefore being used for the teaching of reading in African languages that work successfully in

English – such as sight word (whole word) recognition – but which are not well suited to agglutinative languages, and especially not those with transparent, conjunctive orthographies.

Learner evaluations in less-developed countries indicate that few students meet desired outcomes when the whole language and communicative approaches dominate, and whole word reading methodologies are inefficient (Abadzi 2006). Wimmer & Landerl (1997, cited in Aro 2004) advise researchers and teachers working within consistent orthographies not to base their theories and instructional choices solely on English findings. Literacy in languages with transparent orthographies containing polysyllabic words rely equally on alphabetic processing which supports sequential decoding (Seymour, Aro & Erskine 2003) and syllabic segmentation as central to early reading and spelling instruction (Aro 2004: 14). Therefore, as phonemic knowledge is important across most orthographies, both phonic synthesis and syllabification should form the theoretical focus for developing African language early graded reader schemes.

### 2.2.1 Basal readers and graded readers

Basal readers are a series of organised texts following a planned sequence, written specifically for the purpose of developing explicit reading skills such as phonemic awareness, word attack skills, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. Basal readers are regarded as an effective starting point for the practice and acceleration of phonics acquisition and decoding. Once the ability to decode fluently and automatically is in place, learners can then access whole language via a greater number of texts in a variety of different genres. The carefully planned and structured quality of basal readers is of particular benefit to underqualified and inexperienced teachers, as specific skills can be easily taught and assessed. Another advantage is that learners from print-poor communities are not overwhelmed by an extensive, unknown vocabulary. Basals are not meant to be the only resource the child reads; they are just the starting point. Levelled readers like basals are important for reading instruction while authentic reading materials are needed to develop higher cognition. Basal readers have the key function of enabling children to make the connection between the sounds of the language they understand and speak, and the written representation of that language which they must now learn to read.





Dick is in the tree. Dora will not get in the big tree. She runs to get Jane. Dora will bring Jane. She will play with Jane.

18

Fluff will play with Nip. She will get the big ball. It is fun to play.



Big Dog, I can see you. I will take the ball and I will play with it.

19



Figure 3 Examples of pages from English basal readers: The Happy Venture Readers

Basal readers became popular in the 1960s. These readers used a restricted number of words repeated in different sequences in sentences. Stories were written using a limited vocabulary in a controlled fashion, from word lists which gradually escalated in difficulty. This encouraged sight word recognition or a 'look-and-say' methodology.

Figure 3 above shows sample pages from *The Happy Venture Readers* (Schonell & Serjeant 1960). In these texts, sentences are made up of repeated character names (*Jack, Jane, Dick, Dora, Nip, Fluff, Mother*), common nouns (*cat, dog, tree, kitten*), common verbs (*run, runs, stop, see, play, fell*) and adjectives (*little, big, fun, bad*) used in conjunction with high-frequency sight words (*the, can, will, not, this, it, is, in, am, to, for, her, with, and, on, a*). Other well-known examples of these reader series are *Kathy and Mark Basic Readers* (O'Donnell & Munro 1966) and *Janet and John* (O'Donnell, Munro & Warwick 1949) which were produced in England, and some eminent basal readers from South Africa include the *Beehive Scheme* (Lawerence & Okonski 1981), and the Afrikaans '*Die Lente-Reeks*' series (Du Toit & Opie 1970).

Basal readers have been decried for the very purpose they serve – focusing on teaching isolated skills, instead of encouraging an enjoyment and appreciation of reading. Another criticism is that the literary quality of the texts is poor because words need to be chosen so carefully that the natural, meaningful flow of language is compromised. As a result, children's interest in reading is not stimulated. Basal readers can therefore lack lexical abundance, and enough complex syntactic structures and literary, metaphorical features. The reading of storybooks is necessary in order for these linguistic blocks to be built.

Criticism of this restricted and repetitive methodology resulted in a return to more phonicsbased basal readers in the 1970s and 1980s, where letters sounds were introduced in a strict pre-determined sequence. The use of basal readers declined dramatically with the move to whole language in the late 1980s, where 'proper' storybooks were used. Since the mid-1990s language teaching focus has shifted yet again to skills acquisition, leading to a revival in the use of basal readers.

The descriptor 'graded readers' is wide-ranging depending if you are looking at literacy in the first or second language. Graded readers are usually described as being books of different genres containing simplified texts, including easy-to-read versions of higher-level literary

classics. These readers are typically graded according to vocabulary (lexis), complexity of grammar structures (syntax) and number of words to ensure accessibility to learners of the language. Lower level, shorter readers use more common, high frequency words. A high frequency headword count is usually undertaken for levelling purposes to ensure 'easy' reading. For example, the word *walk* would be counted as a head word but *walks, walking, walked, walker*, etc. would not. The purpose of this is to prevent the reader from encountering too many new and unknown words that would impede comprehension.

There are many graded reader series in English, and some in French, German, Italian, Spanish and even Japanese. What is important is that graded readers are more specifically created for and used in the teaching of *a second or foreign language*, especially for young adults (Bamford 1984). This means that graded readers should play an important role in providing practice in reading skills in what the curriculum refers to as the 'first additional language' (FAL), which in the majority of South African schools is English.

Decades ago, there was a clear distinction between the role of the basal reader and the role of the graded reader; nowadays when we refer to graded readers in early home language literacy, the definition is synonymous with basal readers – readers that target specific language features and have a strong phonic focus.

This section has looked at how reading is taught, particularly in English, and the methodologies that have yielded the most positive results. The consensus for English seems to be a balanced combination of phonics, sight words and the whole language approach. The remainder of this section looks at learning to read in an agglutinative Nguni language like isiXhosa and theorises what might be the best approach to teaching reading in a very different language orthography.

### 2.3 Reading in other orthographies

The Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory (PGST) of reading (Ziegler & Goswami 2006) describes how children make connections between phonological units or grains of language such as letter sounds, syllables and rimes, and the written representation of that language. The authors contend that small grain size teaching works well in a language with consistent letter-sound correspondences, but less well in English with its opaque orthography. Reading

progresses when children make the connection between the separate elements of their spoken language and the visual parts of their written language. Emphasising the acquisition of decoding skills in reading instruction in agglutinative languages should help the reader to syllabicate and divide words into semantically meaningful morphosyntactic chunks.

The Education for All (EFA) initiative by UNESCO states that it is easier to teach basic reading in local languages that have a transparent orthography (2006). Research shows that when students become fluent in simply spelled languages that they know, they can more easily learn to read the official languages (Abadzi 2006). Decoding the orthography of one's mother tongue (L1) in the early stages of reading lays a linguistic foundation for the acquisition of an additional language (L2). It can also accelerate the development of reading ability in the L2 (Krashen 2004, cited in Abadzi 2006). Children are able to transfer reading skills from the L1 to the L2, and the knowledge of the world that has been built through the L1 makes L2 texts easier to understand. Without this crucial grounding in their home language, children struggle to achieve language success in either their L1 or L2 by the end of the Foundation Phase.

The orthography of a language is accessed phonologically and morphologically, with the simultaneous use of visual processing skills and semantics (McDougall *et al.* 2010). The orthographic depth hypothesis (ODH; Frost, Katz & Bentin 1987; Katz & Frost 1992, cited in Ziegler & Goswami 2006: 433) proposes that readers rely more on the phonological or non-lexical route instead of the orthographic (whole word recognition) route because the mapping between letters and sounds is mostly explicit.

The speed at which children learn to read corresponds approximately to the orthographic complexity of the language that they speak (McDougall *et al.* 2010). In inconsistent orthographies, like English, reading instruction is usually a combination of sight-word training and phonics (Aro & Wimmer 2003: 622). In transparent orthographies, reading is typically taught using purely phonics-based approaches focusing on grapheme-phoneme correspondences (Aro & Wimmer 2003: 622).

In other languages where the syllable is a salient unit, studies have found that the syllable plays a significant role in reading acquisition. For example, in Portuguese, the syllable is a salient and clearly distinct phonological unit for beginner readers, and it has been found that both syllabic awareness and phoneme awareness significantly predict reading ability (Cardoso-Martins 1995). In Spanish, another syllable prominent language with clear syllable boundaries, syllabic awareness was also found to be an important predictor of reading ability (Carillo 1994; Jimenéz & Del Rosario Ortiz González 2000).

Different languages have different types of open and closed syllables types with different consonant blend constructions. It has been found that the grain unit size that reading instruction focuses on affects phonological awareness development (Goswami 2002). For example, Cardoso-Martins (2001) investigated the grain size Brazilian children use when learning to read Portuguese after receiving instruction through two different reading approaches: a phonics approach, and a whole word approach. She found that children learning to read via the phonics approach relied on a phonetic cue strategy from the beginning of learning to read, whereas children learning to read by the whole-word approach could not read any unfamiliar words or pseudo words after three months of reading instruction, and most reading errors were due to refusals to read the pseudo words. She concluded that children do not begin at the grapheme–phoneme level unless explicitly instructed at this level. Hence, children learning to read relatively transparent orthographies do not necessarily access and utilize phoneme–grapheme correspondence rules if the unit focused on during reading instruction does not match that level, and focuses on a different grain size.

Clearly, in the teaching of reading in other transparent languages, the orthography is taken into account, and prevalent features such as phoneme-grapheme mapping and syllable recognition are prioritised. The next section delves into the orthography of isiXhosa, and how existing graded readers in this language have been developed in congruence with the linguistic structures of the language.

# 2.4 Teaching reading in isiXhosa

National education policy stipulates that South African Foundation Phase learning is conducted in the learner's home language, with a switch to English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4.

We know from the PIRLS results that this model does not appear to be yielding positive literacy outcomes. We also know that the paucity of reading materials in African languages exacerbates

the problem. Furthermore, it is important to consider whether the reading resources that <u>are</u> currently available in these languages do indeed address the literacy needs of the young reader. Are the materials developed in a way that is appropriate for African language beginner readers? This section looks at the orthography of isiXhosa and identifies key metalinguistic strategies deserving attention.

### 2.4.1 Transparent orthography

IsiXhosa was first written down by missionaries using the same 26-letter Latin alphabet as English. Any orthography must take the phonology of the language into account and isiXhosa is well represented by the Latin alphabet; in fact most consonants represent the same sounds as in English – *b*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *j*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *s*, *t*, *v*, *w*, *y*, *z* and the letters *c*, *q* and *x* have been modified to denote the language's distinctive click sounds.

Though isiXhosa uses the same alphabetic script as English, in contrast it has a high degree of orthographic transparency. IsiXhosa has salient syllable boundaries and follows a strict open syllable consonant-vowel (CVCV) structure. The letter /m/ is permitted to appear in a coda position in a syllable, for example in the word *wam*. This is sometimes called 'stand-alone m'. The syllable is important in isiXhosa as syllables usually receive equal stress, and words are seldom monosyllabic. Decoding syllables is the most efficient reading strategy in orthographically transparent African languages. For example, the following words can be (laboriously) decoded into single letter sounds (phonic strategy) or preferably segmented using a more natural combined phonic-syllabic strategy, commonly known as (V)CVCV patterning:

	•	isiXhosa:	ufudo (tortoise)	= <i>u-fu-do</i> (phonic-syllabic)	or <i>u-f-u-d-o</i> (phonic)
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- isiZulu: ubisi (milk) = u-bi-si (phonic-syllabic) or u-b-i-s-i (phonic)
- Setswana: *jeresi* (jersey) = *je-re-si* (phonic-syllabic) or *j-e-r-e-s-i* (phonic)
- Tshivenda: namusi (today) = na-mu-si (phonic-syllabic) or n-a-m-u-s-i (phonic)

Literacy in languages with transparent orthographies containing polysyllabic words relies equally on alphabetic processing which supports sequential decoding, and syllabic segmentation, as central to early reading and spelling instruction (Seymour *et al.* 2003; Aro 2004: 14). Phonic synthesis and syllabification must therefore be the pivotal theoretical foundations for the development of early grade reading materials in African languages.

Like English, isiXhosa contains consonant letter blends, digraphs and trigraphs. A digraph is a single phoneme which is represented by two letters, for example p and h combine to form ph, which makes the [f] sound as in **<u>ph</u>**onics. A trigraph is a phoneme represented by three letters, for example in English: tch [tʃ] in ma**tch** or dge [dʒ] in ba**dge**. In isiXhosa a consonant digraph is hl as in **<u>hl</u>**ala and a trigraph is tsh as in wa**tsh**o. When two or more consonants appear together and you hear the sound each consonant makes, this is called a consonant blend, for example in English: pl in **<u>ph</u>um**, cr and st in **<u>cr</u>est</u>. In isiXhosa a consonant blend is nd in <u><b>nd**</u>im and kw in u**<u>kw</u>**azi.

Research has shown that the speed at which children learn to read corresponds approximately to the orthographic complexity of the language that they speak (McDougall *et al.* 2010). The English language contains 26 letters and 44 phonemes. Besides the direct letter-sound relationships of alphabet consonants ('d' for *dog* and 'm' for *mat*), there are several additional consonant phonemes that must be learnt, for example: *thin, this, cheese, sheep* and *sing*. What gives English its reputation as a phonetically opaque language is that many phonemes are spelled inconsistently, for example: the different orthographic representations of the 'sh' sound in words like *ship, station, chef* and *mission*. In addition, English vowel phonemes include the simple vowel sounds that we hear in the words *cat, red, pig, dog* and *hut*, but they also include the more complex vowel sounds that we hear in words like *play, buy, road, blue, cart, work, law, shout, boy, bear* and *here*. Furthermore, like the 'sh' example above, the majority of vowel sounds are spelled inconsistently, for example, the long 'i' sound [a1] appears in the following different forms: *fried, light, my, time* and *kind*. While phonic knowledge is necessary, it is clear that whole word sight recognition is also important when learning to read in English.

IsiXhosa contains 26 letters and over 80 phonemes – 55 consonants that can be blended in various combinations, and 10 vowels. The five vowel sounds are phonemically static but are affected by the prevalent high or low tone of the language, used in accordance with semantic intention and the grammatical structure of the sentence. For example: *ibala* pronounced with a high tone means 'colour', and pronounced with a low tone means 'playground'. Vowel sounds may be repeated in plural word forms such as <u>*iinyawo*</u>, <u>*oomalume*</u>, <u>*leendaba*</u> and in exclamations such as <u>*yhoo*</u>! and <u>*aa*</u>!, but complex vowel and vowel-consonant blends and digraphs do not feature. Where the vowel is doubled, the single vowel sound is just extended rather than altered.

A key difference between phonics instruction in English and phonics instruction in a language like isiXhosa, is the placement of the target sound. In English, a disjunctive orthography, texts can be created around the target sound at the beginning of a word, for example *cat*, *pen*, *frog*, *drip*, *shop*, *chin*, or at the end of a word, for example *sand*, *bell*, *rest*, *rich*, *wish*, *catch*. Due to the conjunctive nature of Xhosa orthography, it is unpredictable where the target sound will appear in a word once it is placed in a sentence in a longer text. Also, not many common words in isiXhosa contain just one consonant blend or digraph, making it difficult to isolate and focus on specific sounds.

When teaching English literacy, it is standard practice to introduce learners to all the individual letter sounds of the alphabet first, together with the most common high frequency sight words. It is possible to create many meaningful texts using simple CVC patterns plus sight words without needing to include any consonant or vowel blends or digraphs. For example (sight words are underlined): <u>The bug is on the mat. I sit in the hot sun. The big dog can run to the</u> red hen. Other sentences like this can be seen in the basal reader examples in §2.2.1 previously.

However, in isiXhosa, several individual alphabet letters are used very infrequently on their own, but rather form part of a consonant digraph or blend. For example, the letter *d* is used more often in the blends *dl*, *dw* and *nd* than on its own; *t* on its own is rare but very common in the *th* digraph and in *nt*, *tsh*, *ntl* and *nts*. This means a reduced need to spend copious time teaching word reading containing these single sounds. It makes far greater sense to move onto the blends and digraphs as quickly as possible. Hence the *ta*, *te*, *ti*, *to*, *tu* syllable pattern must progress rapidly to the *tha*, *the thi*, *tho*, *thu* syllable pattern. If isiXhosa used a syllabic alphabet, one might in fact teach the 'tha, *the*, *thi*, *tho*, *ndu*' pattern would be taught before the 'da, *de*, *di*, *do*, *du*' syllable pattern.

This is very similar to the way in which Nguni languages are historically known to be taught. Learners read and practise charts of syllables made up of each alphabet consonant plus the five different vowels (isiXhosa Home Language: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement: Foundation Phase Grades R-3: 15), for example:
b	с	d	k	I	m	s	v	w	x	у	z
ba	са	da	ka	la	ma	sa	va	wa	ха	ya	za
be	ce	de	ke	le	me	se	ve	we	xe	ye	ze
bi	ci	di	ki	li	mi	si	vi	wi	xi	yi	zi
bo	со	do	ko	lo	mo	SO	vo	wo	хо	уо	zo
bu	си	du	ku	lu	mu	su	vu	wu	xu	yu	zu

Table 2 IsiXhosa alphabetic syllabary

Once the alphabet letter sounds have been learnt, usually through rote chanting, the methodology is then extended to teaching syllables that begin with different consonant blends and digraphs, for example:

nd	ng	nc	bh	ch	kh	ph	th	mb	hl
nda	nga	nca	bha	cha	kha	pha	tha	mba	hla
nde	nge	nce	bhe	che	khe	phe	the	mbe	hle
ndi	ngi	nci	bhi	chi	khi	phi	thi	mbi	hli
ndo	ngo	nco	bho	cho	kho	pho	tho	mbo	hlo
ndu	ngu	ncu	bhu	chu	khu	phu	thu	mbu	hlu

Table 3 Example of isiXhosa consonant blend/digraph syllabary

The problem with this approach to teaching reading is the absence of meaning. Even though simple, basic decoding skills might be honed, this method will not give the learners the practice that is needed in connecting different syllables or morphemes to make real words and sentences that convey intelligible messages.

Consonant sounds are more difficult to master as they vary in representation from a single consonant to blends comprising a possible sequence of five consonants in one syllable, such as the word *intshwela* (meaning 'the crust left at the bottom of the pot after cooking').

2-letter consonant blends and digraphs	bh, ch, cw, dl, dw, dy, dz, gc, gq, gr, gw, gx, hl, kw, lw, kh, kr, mb, mf, mp, mv, nc, nd, ng, nj, nk, nq, nt, nw, nx, ny, nz, ph, qh, qw, rh, sh, sw, th, tr, ts, tw, ty, xh, xw, zw
3-letter consonant blends and trigraphs	chw, dlw, gcw, gqw, gxw, hlw, khw, krw, ncw, ndl, ndw, ngc, ngq, ngw, ngx, nkc, nkq, nkw, nkx, nqw, ntl, nts, ntw, nty, nxw, nyh, nzw, qhw, rhw, shw, thw, tsh, tsw, tyh, tyw, xhw
4-letter consonant blends	ndlw, ndyw, ngcw, ngqw, nkcw, nkxw, ntsh, ntyw, nyhw, tyhw

Table 4 Consonant combinations appearing in isiXhosa written text

These frequently occurring consonant blends can make decoding a challenge, even in a transparent language. In isiXhosa, consonants are used together to form more than 80 different combinations, for example *hl*, *bh*, *kh*, *mb*, *ny*, *ncw*, *ndl*, *tsw*, *tyhw*. Despite this, and unlike English with its opaque orthography evident in words like *one*, *here* and *yacht*, single letter and consonant digraph and blend sounds never change. It is this feature that makes mastering phonics easier in isiXhosa and other Nguni languages: once a consonant blend or digraph is practised properly and learnt, its sound will never change, and any syllable or word containing that blend or digraph can be broken down into its distinct phonic components and decoded.

An interesting phenomenon is that most of the words containing difficult 3- or 4-letter consonant blends in isiXhosa are themselves more semantically difficult, higher order vocabulary words that young children do not commonly use or encounter in the Foundation Phase. For example, *inyholi* (person with one eye), *chwechwa* (stand on tiptoe), *ihlwempu* (a poor person). In most instances there are only one or two common words that are spelt with certain 3- or 4-letter consonant blends, which children can learn as sight words. For example, *incwadi* (a book), *intyatyambo* (a flower), *intshontsho* (a baby chicken), *ibhulukhwe*, *ilokhwe* (trousers, a dress).

As with all alphabetic writing systems, mastering phonemic awareness marks future reading success. Even though the syllable is a natural feature of African language orthography, the ability to match phonemes with graphemes is a beneficial reading strategy in African languages. For example, each of the following words can be sounded out one letter at a time: Setswana: k-o-l-o-b-e (pig), isiZulu: ebusika = e-b-u-s-i-k-a (winter), isiXhosa: itafile = i-t-a-f-i-l-e (table), Sepedi: tapola = t-a-p-o-l-a (potato), Tshivenda: oveni = o-v-e-n-i (oven).

Numerous studies of Grade 1 children learning to read in languages with a transparent orthography such as German, Italian, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Turkish and Finnish show mastery of reading skills after one year of instruction (Aro 2004). It can therefore be conjectured that something beyond the phoneme-grapheme representations in the orthography is the reason why literacy levels are low in a transparent language like isiXhosa. IsiXhosa is also an agglutinative language, which means one must master the ability to decode very long words, and this kind of information density is known to act against a reader (Yan, Tian, Bai & Rayner 2006). This is discussed in the next section (§2.4.2).

Having transparent orthographies, one might think that letter-by-letter phonic decoding in African languages would be less demanding on the reader, but the agglutinative structure of the languages, moreover those with a conjoined orthography, result in words that are on average much longer than English words, and are composed of multiple morphemes that cohere in complex compound words (Land 2013). In addition, due to the multisyllabic nature of these languages with their open CVCV or VCVCV patterning, syllabification is a less laborious and more efficient strategy for readers to master in order to build decoding fluency, as in *u-fu-do*, *u-bi-si*, *je-re-si*, *na-mu-si*, *ko-lo-be*, *e-bu-si-ka*, *i-ta-fi-le*, *ta-po-la*, *o-ve-ni*. In a word/sentence like *ndingayifunda*, meaning can only be derived from the text by registering each of the morphemes *ndi-nga-yi-funda*, represented mostly by 1-, 2- or 3-letter affixes. In addition, spelling patterns feature a number of frequently recurring syllables in different combinations. For example, in isiXhosa, the syllable morpheme *ndi* (I/me) changes position in the following words: *<u>ndi</u>nguNomsa* ... *ndi-ngu-Nomsa* (I am Nomsa), *uya<u>ndi</u>bona ... u-ya-ndi-bona* (can you see me), *u<u>ndi</u>ncedisa ... u-ndi-nced-isa (s/he helps me), enda<u>ndi</u>yithungelwe ... e-nda-ndi-yi-thung-elwe (that was sewn for me).* 

#### 2.4.2 Agglutinative, conjunctive orthography

All of the Southern-Bantu languages are agglutinative. Necessary concordial agreement leads to the addition of affixes during word formation. Furthermore, the Nguni languages have a conjunctive orthography with phonological processing (in spoken language) occurring in both prefixes and suffixes. In isiZulu for example, there are patterns of vowel elision and coalescence in the prefixes, for example: nga+imoto=ngemoto and be+ufunda=bewufunda (Lourens & Poulos 2006). Visual processing, morphemic skills as well as phonology therefore map onto the orthography, making conjunctivism appropriate. In the disjunctive African languages, phonological processing only occurs in suffixes, which supports their disjunctive orthography (Lourens & Poulos 2006).

The Nguni languages takes agglutination one step further in that many of the meaningful words in the sentence are also 'glued' together. Words commonly contain multiple syllabic prefixes and suffixes, which denote the equivalent of short, grammatical function words in English, such as pronouns, tense indicators and prepositions. Where these words appear separately in English, one word can contain a number of morphosyntactic units in isiXhosa (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009). In a conjunctive system of writing, a whole sentence can be presented as a single word. For example, the English sentence 'I can read it' becomes *Ndingayifunda* in isiXhosa. The agglutinative nature of the language is why the question is posed whether all Nguni languages might be better suited to a syllabic representative orthography. This linguistic structural feature will be prioritised in my later analyses that examine viable and effective reading strategies in isiXhosa. Below are some examples of conjunctivism in both the prefix and suffix in isiXhosa, and in just the suffix in Sesotho:

IsiXhosa example 1: conjunctive:

<b>Ndi</b> zoba	<b>ngo</b> m	bala	<b>o</b> bomvu	encw	ad <b>ini</b> .
I draw	with the	colour	(of) red	in the	book
Ŵ		ĴĴ	Ŵ		Ĵ

<u>Sesotho</u> example 1: disjunctive:

Ке	taka	ka	mmala	o mofubedu	ka buk <b>eng</b> .
Ι	draw	with	the colour	(of) red	in the book
				L D	

IsiXhosa example 2: conjunctive:

<b>Ndisi</b> silwa	nyana	<b>sase</b> mhlab <b>eni</b> .		
I am an ai	nimal	of the	world/earth	
	57		57	

Sesotho example 2: disjunctive:

 Nna ke phoofolo ya lefatsheng.

 I am an animal of the world/earth

The definition of a word is consequently different in conjunctive and disjunctive orthographies. In spoken language a word should have "some sort of grammatical, semantic and phonological unity" (Lourens & Poulos 2006: 391) and the term 'word' should not be mistaken for a 'lexeme' (root form) in agglutinative languages. The standard for reporting norms for reading fluency has been to use words per minute (wpm) benchmarks; this has important implications when considering different orthographies. Research conducted on competent readers of English gives the span of word recognition as 3-4 characters left of the point of focus to 14-15 characters right of the point of focus (Van Rooy & Pretorius 2013; Rayner 2009 cited in Land 2013). In this case, one can surmise that wpm reading in a conjunctive orthography like isiXhosa will be much less than that in a disjunctive orthography like English or Sesotho, although as noted previously, whole sentences (*ndingayifunda*) and concepts (*ubuntu*) can be conveyed in just one word. Research into eye-tracking in isiZulu (Land 2013, Pretorius 2013) is helping to

establish wpm norms for competent readers of that language, and hopefully will inform reading competence in other African languages too.

By Grade 3, competent readers of English should manage a reading rate of 80-90 words per minute, and competent adult readers should be reading as many as 300 words per minute. Extensive eye-tracking studies in isiZulu to ascertain reading fluency norms have been conducted. The research showed that good readers in isiZulu have a 48-52 wpm reading rate – predictably much lower than English norms due to isiZulu's agglutinative, conjunctive orthography (Van Rooy & Pretorius 2013).

IsiXhosa's transparent orthography facilitates sequential left to right decoding strategies; however lexical processing remains a challenge due to its conjunctive nature, which impacts word length. The latter also places a demand on the young reader's visual attention span and short-term working memory (Yan *et al.* 2006). This mandatory reading stamina needs to be gradually developed and trained through sufficient practice in syllabification. Like isiXhosa, most Finnish words are polysyllabic: in initial reading materials, the syllables are explicitly marked in the texts, and syllabic segmentation is a central part of early reading and spelling instruction (Aro 2004: 14). The teaching of reading in similarly syllabic, conjunctive Nguni languages thus requires alternative reading strategies to those used for English, and perhaps even to those used for disjunctive African languages.

In South Africa, research is on the increase on how African language speakers acquire reading fluency in their mother tongue. Several studies have examined the broader socio-cultural perspective on South Africa's literacy problem (Janks 2011, Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009). Other studies describe linguistic features of Bantu languages such as morphology and orthography: Taljard & Bosch (2006) examined word class tagging in Northern Sotho and isiZulu (2006); Prinsloo & De Schryver (2002) looked at the extent of conjunctivism/disjunctivism in South Africa's 11 official languages. Van Rooy & Pretorius (2013) and Land (2013) are conducting on-going research in eye-tracking of isiZulu and Northern Sotho readers. All these studies converge in an attempt to better understand and thereby improve the levels of literacy in South Africa's indigenous languages. The analysis that follows in §5 of isiXhosa early readers attempts to further advance this crusade.

Judging by what we know about orthographies like Finnish, phonemic awareness and phonic decoding are recognised as critical skills for learning to read in a transparent orthography (Aro

2004). Like Finnish, isiXhosa has a transparent and agglutinative orthography; early graded readers therefore need to facilitate the acquisition of these skills. Equally important in a language like isiXhosa is the ability to syllabicate while reading in order to correctly break up words, and to gain fluency in reading lengthy words. The learning of *ba-be-bi-bo-bu*' etc. must eventually translate into simple meaningful words or short sentences otherwise there will not be a link between children's reading fluency and comprehension. It has been noted in §2.4.1 that syllables are also more natural units in isiXhosa than phonemes, and more easily pronouncable in isolation. However, it is still important to teach phoneme-grapheme awareness. The whole language approach is also inevitable in isiXhosa as often the forms of words depend on other words in the sentence. Lastly, there is a place for high frequency sight words, though this must be expanded to include common sight affixes (*ndi-, ngo-, uku-, ama-, -eni, -ile,* etc.) as readers are likely to encounter different combinations of these affixes on root words. This research investigates three different isiXhosa graded reader series in order to assess whether early reading in isiXhosa is being applied and practised as effectively as possible.

## 2.5 Conclusions

Although children employ similar processes in learning to read in all alphabetic languages, the emphasis on training teachers in English language teaching, instead of African language teaching, is cause for concern. Teachers are not trained to have an understanding of the linguistic features of their mother tongue so that they are better able to teach it. They are shown methods of teaching reading in an opaque, deep orthography instead of focusing on developing reading skills in the shallow, consistent orthographies of African languages. In addition, the conjunctive nature of Nguni languages (isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati) demands alternative approaches to teaching reading than that of disjunctive African languages like Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda.

The remainder of this paper is an investigation to reveal whether current early Foundation Phase isiXhosa reading texts provide appropriate reading practice for beginner readers. Children in Grade 1 should be receiving literacy instruction using easily decodable texts at their instructional reading level (Fountas & Pinnell 1996). From a diagnostic perspective, a text in which a learner can read and comprehend 90% of the words easily is considered to be at that reader's instructional reading level; more difficult text is considered to be at the reader's 'frustration' level and will require additional teacher support (Clay 1991).

# **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

It is undeniable that South Africa faces an uphill climb in improving learners' literacy levels. Research into African language literacy practice at grassroots level is a critical need. We need to find out what is happening in reading pedagogy in the Foundation Phase, especially in Grade 1. Are teachers teaching reading literacy correctly in African languages? Are teachers well-trained in how to teach reading literacy in conjunctive African languages, which require different reading strategies from English and disjunctive African languages? This investigation will focus on whether publishers are using the most suitable approaches to produce educational learner and teacher support material (LTSM) that will provide the appropriate practice needed for children who are learning to read. My research will focus on the development of graded readers (key Foundation Phase LTSM), in particular readers developed for isiXhosa-speaking Grade 1 learners. My research will be framed by the following questions:

- 1. What salient orthographic and linguistic structures should be considered in the development of early graded readers in isiXhosa in order to effectively support literacy acquisition and reading achievement?
- 2. To what extent have Grade 1 isiXhosa early graded reading series been developed in terms of the following orthographic and linguistic features?
  - a) number of words
  - b) length of words (in terms of letters and syllables)
  - c) phonic difficulty (in terms of consonant digraphs, 2-letter and 3-letter blends).
- 3. How could the chosen approaches to structural features of the isiXhosa Grade 1 early graded reading series aid or affect text complexity?
- 4. What hypotheses and insights can be drawn concerning reading strategies and challenges in isiXhosa that can be used to provide linguistic recommendations particularly regarding number of words, length of words and phonemic difficulty for the development of literacy resources for early readers of Nguni languages?

# 4. METHODOLOGY

The research questions proposed in the last section will be answered using an analysis of three published isiXhosa graded reader series for Grade 1 children. A detailed analysis of each series will reveal whether these readers have been produced with specific language characteristics in mind, taking into account the complexities of an agglutinative language, as well as the phonological consistency of a transparent orthography. It has been suggested in the literature that a phonics-based approach to learning to read might be more effective for beginner readers of a transparent language (§2.2); but because isiXhosa is also agglutinative, syllables and word length are also key linguistic elements reviewed in this research paper.

## 4.1 Procedure

Overall, the number of words, number of sentences, number of words per sentence, number of letters per word, number of syllables per word and the number of consonant digraphs, trigraphs and blends were counted and analysed within three different reader series developed for Grade 1 isiXhosa children. From what we know about the orthography of isiXhosa, early grade readers should contain easy to decode words with single letter phonemes, and progress to more complex consonant groups such as digraphs, trigraphs, and blends (§2.4). The agglutinative nature of isiXhosa means that long words are to be expected, but this research measures to what degree in each reading series, and whether there is a 'gradedness' or progression present in the number of words or length of words. The transparency levels of texts were also analysed in terms of phonic regularity.

#### 4.1.1 Initial analysis of titles of graded readers from the National Catalogue

Before an in-depth analysis of the three chosen isiXhosa reader series was conducted, an initial phonics analysis of the <u>titles</u> of isiXhosa graded readers appearing on the Foundation Phase Grade 1 National LTSM Catalogue 'Graded readers' resource list for isiXhosa (2011) was undertaken. The aim of this analysis was to determine whether the phonic structures of the words in the titles could indicate the level of difficulty of the kind of phonic structures that might appear within the story text. This initial analysis showed that a large number of consonant digraphs and blends could already be found in the titles (see §4.1.1 for the full analysis).

The titles appearing on the catalogue are the approved books available to teachers to purchase using government funding. There are altogether 43 graded readers recommended for Grade 1 isiXhosa home language learners on the National Catalogue. If a school purchases every title then the learners will read approximately one book per week throughout the year. This is just over double the number recommended in the Grade 1 Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which is one new book every two weeks. If a child spends an entire week (or two) reading and re-reading one very short text, one could speculate that the child might well be able to 'read' the book by heart by then, and this would not accurately demonstrate the child's ability to decode the text. This limited exposure to texts could be why poor decoding skills have not yet been targeted as a critical stumbling block to developing reading fluency in African languages, as discussed in §1.3. The objective of this paper was to find an early graded reader series displaying phonic grading. An initial phonic analysis of the words in all the Grade 1 reader titles was undertaken, to give a sense of what is currently available for teachers to choose from:

Publisher: Oxford University Press
Series: <i>Siyakhula</i> Stage 1 (20 titles)
Usuku olu <b>kh</b> ulu lukaMusa
U <b>m</b> lilo
Ndiswele amaphiko
lintsuku zeveki
<b>Oo</b> nodoli bam
I <b>bh</b> ola ebo <b>mv</b> u
Isivuno esi <b>hl</b> e
l <b>th</b> ini na imi <b>nw</b> e?
Kusile!
Lu <b>m</b> kela i <b>ng</b> ozi
<b>M</b> na nosana
Nam <b>nd</b> iya <b>kw</b> azi ukubala
PACK 2 <sup>2</sup>
<b>M</b> na no <b>Sp</b> oti
UBonakele ne <b>nk</b> omo
Ubusuku
Umabonakude
Usuku <b>lw</b> am lokuza <b>lw</b> a
U <b>Th</b> a <b>nd</b> o
Uyafu <b>nd</b> a?
Ku <b>m</b> na <b>nd</b> i ko <b>nk</b> e
There are an additional 14 readers for Grade 2, and 7 readers for Grade 3

Series: Masiqhubele Phambili (8 titles) 1 Oonozisana 2 Uhlala Phi Wena? 3 Vuka Ngonyama 4 Sidlala Ibhola 5 Isitiya 6 Umdlalo Wezibalo 7 Imini Kathemba 8 Inja Elungileya Series: IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esikolweni 3 Intombi eqavileyo 4 USolam nabalingane
1 <b>Oo</b> nozisana 2 Uhlala Phi Wena? 3 Vuka <b>Ngony</b> ama 4 Sidlala Ibhola 5 Isitiya 6 Umdlalo Wezibalo 7 Imini Kathemba 8 Inja Elungileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esikolweni 3 Intombi eqavileyo 4 USolam nabalingane
2 Uhlala Phi Wena? 3 Vuka Ngonyama 4 Sidlala Ibhola 5 Isitiya 6 Umdlalo Wezibalo 7 Imini Kathemba 8 Inja Elungileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esikolweni 3 Intombi eqavileyo 4 USolam nabalingane
<ul> <li>3 Vuka Ngonyama</li> <li>4 Sidlala Ibhola</li> <li>5 Isitiya</li> <li>6 Umdlalo Wezibalo</li> <li>7 Imini Kathemba</li> <li>8 Inja Elungileya</li> <li>Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles)</li> <li>1 Silusapho ekhaya</li> <li>2 Siyaya esikolweni</li> <li>3 Intombi eqavileyo</li> <li>4 USolam nabalingane</li> </ul>
4 Si <b>dl</b> ala I <b>bh</b> ola 5 Isitiya 6 Um <b>d</b> lalo Wezibalo 7 Imini Ka <b>themb</b> a 8 I <b>nj</b> a Elu <b>ng</b> ileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
5 Isitiya 6 Um <b>dl</b> alo Wezibalo 7 Imini Ka <b>themb</b> a 8 I <b>nj</b> a Elu <b>ng</b> ileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
6 Um <b>dl</b> alo Wezibalo 7 Imini Ka <b>themb</b> a 8 I <b>nj</b> a Elu <b>ng</b> ileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusa <b>ph</b> o e <b>kh</b> aya 2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
<ul> <li>7 Imini Kathemba</li> <li>8 Inja Elungileya</li> <li>Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles)</li> <li>1 Silusapho ekhaya</li> <li>2 Siyaya esikolweni</li> <li>3 Intombi eqavileyo</li> <li>4 USolam nabalingane</li> </ul>
8 I <b>nj</b> a Elu <b>ng</b> ileya Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
Series: <i>IsiXhosa Ngumdiliya</i> (5 titles) 1 Silusapho ekhaya 2 Siyaya esikolweni 3 Intombi eqavileyo 4 USolam nabalingane
1 Silusa <b>ph</b> o e <b>kh</b> aya 2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
2 Siyaya esiko <b>lw</b> eni 3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
3 I <b>ntomb</b> i eqavileyo 4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
4 USolam nabali <b>ng</b> ane
5 Ama <b>sh</b> i <b>sh</b> ini ebume <b>lw</b> aneni
Series: Sichumile isiXhosa (5 titles)
1 ULiso nogogo
2 Usana lukamama
3 U <b>th</b> ando <b>lw</b> abazali
4 Uliso naba <b>hl</b> obo ba <b>kh</b> e
5 Ama <b>th</b> eko ayaso <b>nw</b> abisa

#### Publisher: Vivlia

Series: <b>African Print – IsiXhosa</b> (5 titles)
Sibuzisa <b>ng</b> omama
I-esile e <b>m</b> hadini
UZuzu <b>m</b> zi ne <b>bh</b> ayisekile
lsa <b>ndl</b> a
lsitiya sikamama

There are an additional 18 readers for Grade 2, and 18 readers for Grade 3

There are an additional 5 readers for Grade 2, and 5 readers for Grade 3.

Figure 4: Phonic analysis of titles from the DBE LTSM National Catalogue

There 43 'graded readers' listed on the National Catalogue are produced by three publishers: Oxford University Press, Shuter & Shooter and Vivlia. A phonic analysis was performed on the titles in order to give some clues as to the level of the texts. Figure 5 highlights (in bold type) the more complex phonic elements (consonant blends and diagraphs) found in each title.

If it can be assumed that the words in the title of a reader are linked to and usually repeated in the body of the text, then it appears that these readers are not systematically graded. In addition, the readers from Oxford University Press and Vivlia publishers above are not numbered, making it difficult to determine phonic progression or 'gradedness'. Even when the readers are numbered, such as in the Shuter & Shooter series listed above, it is still difficult to determine any progression, as there are complex phonics to decode throughout the list of titles. All the sets of readers have titles containing more complicated phonic decoding for the beginner reader (<u>oonozisana; olukhulu; ngomama</u>). Further issues arise when borrowing from other languages is applied in the stories, such as in the title *Mna no<u>Sp</u>oti*, containing the consonant blend *sp* which is borrowed from English.

Shuter & Shooter titles such as *Isitiya*, *ULiso nogogo* and *Usana lukamama* look promising as they all follow a simple (V)CVCV pattern, however other titles are phonically complex and lengthy enough to demand a developed reading stamina, for example *Amashishini ebumelwaneni*, *Uliso nabahlobo bakhe* and *Amatheko ayasonwabisa*. From these observations, it appears as if the readers across the various publishers were developed using a whole language approach with no evidence of a systematic phonics plan, and thus cannot really be termed 'graded'. IsiXhosa does offer simple (V)CVCV words, despite its extended word structures, and it should be possible to use phonically easier words instead in earlier readers.

For the purposes of this study, only Oxford's *Siyakhula* (overview of series §4.2.2; analysis §5.2) series from the catalogue was analysed. The other two published series selected for this study – *Izinga Eliphezulu* (§4.2.1; §5.1) and *Vula Bula* (§4.2.3; §5.3) – do not appear on the LSTM catalogue. This is because there were an insufficient number of titles available in the other series on the catalogue. For valid comparisons to be made, all three of the reader series had to contain at least 20 isiXhosa texts for analysis. This reflects the lack of graded reading series available to isiXhosa Grade 1 children in general.

The Vivlia series on the catalogue lists only 5 reader titles for Grade 1. Interestingly, the Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy reported that the *Vula Bula* series, which submitted 7 titles for Grade 1 in 2011, was rejected for having too few titles. This raises some prickly questions about the equity of the LTSM selection process.

#### 4.1.2 Conclusions

An initial review of the words in the titles of all the isiXhosa Grade 1 graded reader series listed on the DBE's National Catalogue was undertaken. Based on their titles, the readers in the catalogue do not seem to follow the synthetic phonics approach (§2.1.1.5) recommended for transparent orthographies like isiXhosa. The books do not appear to take cognisance of word length and complexity, and therefore do not indicate any progression or 'gradedness'. With evidence from the PIRLS study showing that isiXhosa children performed particularly poorly, this invites the question as to whether books being produced for children learning to read in isiXhosa are serving that purpose effectively. This research attempts to discover whether similar trends in phonic and orthographic structures found in the Catalogue reader titles (§4.1.1) can be ascertained relating to either the *Izinga Eliphezulu, Siyakhula* or *Vula Bula* approaches in the way in which reading is introduced.

# **4.2** Overview of the texts in the three selected isiXhosa graded reader series

Three Grade 1 isiXhosa early graded reader series were analysed in depth for phonological and orthographical features: total number of sentences and words per text, average number of words per sentence, average number of letters and syllables per word, and number of complex phonic structures – consonant blends and digraphs – per text. Two of the three series chosen for indepth analysis are *Izinga Eliphezulu* (READ Educational Trust 2006), and *Vula Bula* (Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy 2011). The third series *Siyakhula* (Oxford University Press 2009) is the only one of the three to appear in the National Catalogue. The *Izinga Eliphezulu* Grade 1 series contains 20 readers; the *Siyakhula* Grade 1 series contains 20 readers and the *Vula Bula* Grade 1 series contains 32 readers. However, only the first 20 readers from the latter series will be analysed, totaling 60 texts altogether. The next three sections give a brief overview of each of the series analysed for the current research.

#### 4.2.1 Izinga Eliphezulu

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme consists of 20 sixteen-page readers selected from the English New Heights Grade 1-3 reading series. The New Heights series was originally developed to target English first additional language learners. The name Izinga Eliphezulu is the isiXhosa translation of 'New Heights'. Twenty chosen texts were translated from English into isiXhosa to create the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers. The *Izinga Eliphezulu* programme has a specified language progression plan. Between three and six sight words are introduced in each reader, together with three new sounds. Phonic sequencing seems evident with single alphabet letters being introduced first, followed by 2-consonant digraphs and blends, then 3-consonant trigraphs and blends. Whole words, prefixes (followed by a hyphen) and suffixes (preceded by a hyphen) are included as sight words. For example, the first reader called Usapho (My family) targets the sight words lo and wam, and the prefix ngu-, as well as the single letter sounds Ll, Oo and Uu for explicit teaching. The upper and lower case of each letter are taught as both graphemes and phonemes, however closer examination of the materials reveals that the phonic focus is almost exclusively on recognition of the lowercase letter and corresponding sound. Each reader is used during a two-week learning cycle, after which it is replaced with the next reader in the series (Izinga Eliphezulu: Incwadi katitshala [Teacher's Book] 2006).

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers follow the approach of the original *New Heights* English readers in making use of repeated sentence frames in the texts. For example, the sentence frame:

'Lo ngu \_\_\_\_\_ wam.' (This is my \_\_\_\_\_.) in Reader 1 is used with the name of a different family member included on each page, like *mama* (mother), *tata* (father), etc. (see Figure 6).

*Figure 5 'Usapho' reader cover and back cover* 





*Figure 6 Example pages from the 'Usapho' reader* 

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers copied the same sentence frame approach used in the English readers, and the texts were translated from English, with some texts receiving an additional sentence. The publishers have therefore created the readers using a whole language approach (§2.1.2) with a repeated sentence frame pattern like '*Lo ngu\_\_\_\_ wam*', a text structure common in ESL readers. In second language learning, repeated sentence frames with picture clues are an excellent scaffold for the early reader. These mostly contain high-frequency sight words, with new vocabulary words inserted that learners can try to guess.

The first few *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers introduce a repeated sentence pattern with picture clues provided to help the learners guess new vocabulary words. In Table 5 below there are some example sentence frames in the isiXhosa readers appearing in the left-hand column, with the sentence frames in the original English readers appearing in the right-hand column<sup>3</sup>:

Original <i>New Heights</i> ENGLISH reader titles and sentence frames	<i>Izinga Eliphezulu</i> ISIXHOSA reader titles and sentence frames	Back translation to English of isiXhosa reader title and sentence frames
<b>1. My Family</b> This is my (fill in different family members)	<b>1. Usapho</b> Lo ngu wam.	<b>1. My Family</b> This is <u>(family member)</u> of mine.
2. Look at Me Look at my (fill in different body parts)	<b>2. Ibhola Yam</b> Jonga ibhola _ <sup>4</sup> am.	2. My ball Look at the ball <u>(preposition) (body</u> <u>part)</u> of mine.
3. We Use Colours I use (fill in different colours)	<b>3. Sizoba Ngemibala</b> Ndizoba ngombala	<b>3. We Paint with Colours</b> I paint with the colour
<b>4. Fruit for the Class</b> Here are (number) (fruit). (fill in different numbers of different kinds of fruit)	<b>4. Iziqhamo</b> Nantsi/Nanga/Nazi · mnandi!	<ul> <li><b>4. Fruit</b></li> <li>Here is/are (<i>fruit</i>) of (<i>number</i>).</li> <li>It is/They are delicious!</li> </ul>
<b>5. Look at the Animals</b> The (farm animal) says, '' (fill in names of different farm animals and the noise they make)	<ul> <li>5. Izilwanyana Zasekhaya</li> <li>yakhala _thi, ''</li> <li>funa amanzi.</li> </ul>	<b>5. Farm Animals</b> The <u>(animal)</u> says, ' <u>(animal noise)</u> .' The <u>(animal)</u> wants water.
<b>6. Where We Live</b> She/He lives near a (fill in different places in the environment)	<b>6. Amakhaya Ethu</b> UNomsa/UBongani uhlala kufutshane	<b>6. Our home</b> Nomsa/Bongani lives near a (place in the environment).
<ul> <li>6. Where We Live</li> <li>She/He lives near a</li> <li>(fill in different places in the environment)</li> <li>7. Time for School</li> <li>We put on our (colour)</li> <li>(clothing).</li> <li>(fill in different colours and items of clothing)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>6. Amakhaya Ethu</li> <li>UNomsa/UBongani uhlala kufutshane</li> <li>7. Ixesha Lesikolo</li> <li>Sinxiba ii ezi</li> <li> zethu ziyafana.</li> </ul>	6. Our home Nomsa/Bongani lives near a (place in the environment). 7. Time for School We put on our (item of clothing) of (colour). (The items of clothing) are the same.

Table 5 Sentence frames in Izinga Eliphezulu

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> These English reader titles and sentence frames are taken from the <u>original</u> English *New Heights* readers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> A short line \_ denotes a changing prefix depending on the class of the preceding noun.

Almost every word used in the English sentence frames above: *this, is, my, look, at, I, use, here, are, the, says, she, he, lives, near, a, we, put, on, our, in, it, wear* appears on well-known high-frequency word lists like Dolch and Fry's, and are learnt as sight words in Grade 1 (Dolch 1948, Fry 1996). As the isiXhosa is based on the English sentence structures, this raises questions over the appropriateness of the sentence frames and the sight words introduced in these readers.

#### 4.2.2 Siyakhula

The *Siyakhula* Grade 1 (Stage 1) isiXhosa readers, published by Oxford University Press, consists of 20 eight-page isiXhosa home language readers. Like the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers, which are translations of the original *New Heights* English series, the *Siyakhula* readers are translations of the original *We are Growing* English readers. The 20 readers are made up of Pack 1<sup>5</sup> which has 12 titles and Pack 2 which has eight titles. Like all the other reader series under investigation, the *Siyakhula* readers are A5 in size. Oddly, Pack 1 contains six titles published in portrait page orientation, and six published in landscape page orientation. All eight Pack 2 titles are in portrait page orientation. There are from one to three lines of text on each page, supported by a colour illustration, as shown below:



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The last 8 *Siyakhula* titles on the catalogue were listed under PACK 2, but there was no mention of a PACK 1. For ease of reference, I have grouped the first 12 titles together and named them PACK 1.





Figure 7 Example of pages from Siyakhula reader 'Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa'

Similarly to *Vula Bula* in the next section (§4.2.3), each of the 20 *Siyakhula* stories is followed by one or two text-based after-reading activities on the inside back cover:



#### Ingaba ufunde ngempumelelo? Umsebenzi 1

Phendula le mibuzo ilandelayo:

- a) Kutheni ilusuku olukhulu olu kuMusa?
- b) Yintoni awayenzayo uMusa ukuvuka kwakhe ngale mini?
- c) Kutheni uMusa ekhwele esitulweni nje?
- d) Kutheni kufuneka siwacoce rhoqo amazinyo wethu?
- e) Uhamba nabani uMusa ukuya ebhasini?

#### Umsebenzi 2

Tshatisa amagama aku-A nalawo aku-B.

Α	В
Ukunxiba	Ibhasi
Ukutya	Amazinyo
Ukulala	Itafile
Ukukhwela	Ibhedi
Ukuxukuxa	Impahla

Figure 8 Example of after reading activities in Siyakhula reader 'Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa'

#### 4.2.3 Vula Bula

The *Vula Bula* Grade 1 isiXhosa home language graded reader series consists of 32 eight-page readers. The name *Vula Bula* translates as follows: *Vula* means 'open' in isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Siswati and Tshivenda; it means 'speak' in Xitsonga. *Bula* means 'open' in Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana. In the *Vula Bula* programme, each reader supports literacy and language learning during a one-week cycle before it is replaced with the next reader in the series. Two new sounds are introduced with each new reader (with the exception of Reader 30 which introduces three new sounds). Altogether, the *Vula Bula* phonics programme claims to systematically introduce the 26 letters of the alphabet, 34 2-consonant digraphs and blends, and 5 3-consonant trigraphs and blends. For ease of comparison, the detailed analysis includes only the first 20 readers in the series, to match the total number of texts available in the other two selected series.

Within the South African classroom, two methods of reading practice in African languages appear to be favoured: the rote recitation of phonic syllable lists like '*ba-be-bi-bo-bu*', and the reading of meaning-rich yet phonically challenging texts produced by reading clubs such as *Nal'iBali*, and storybooks translated from English into African languages published by Jacana, Cambridge and others. The *Vula Bula* readers attempt to incorporate the positive elements of both by situating phonically regular, easily decodable text within the context of a meaningful story, supported by illustrations. The reading approach is clarified on the inside front cover of each reader. Here are examples from Reader 1 *Bala* (Count), Reader 8 *Mamela* (Listen) and Reader 10 *Umnikelo* (A donation):

Incwadana 1 BALA		Incwadana 8 MAMELA		Incwadana 10 UMNIKELO		
Isimaphambili Amagama abawabona njalo		Izimaphambili	Isima-mva	Izimaphambili	Igama abalibona njalo	
ue-	haui bo uam	ndi- ba- asi-	-ni	si- ma- ii- siya-	enkosi	
		Uginggo lwamalungu amagama		Uqingqo lwamalungu amagama		
ba-la ha-yi	ye-yam	ma-me-la ndi-fu-na a-ye-ke		um-ni-ke-lo ma-a-pi-le ii-pa-yi-na-pi-le si-ya-bu-le-la		
Izandi		ba-ye-ke ma-me-ia-ni a-si-iu-ni		Izandi		
Bb	Αq	Izandi		Рр	Rr	
Amagama asebalini ano-b bala, bo	Amagama asebalini ano-a b <b>ala</b> , hayi, yeyam	Mm <u>Amagama asebalini ano-m</u> mamela, mamelani	YY Amagama asebalini ano-y ayeke, bayeke	Amagama asebalini ano-p ma-apile, mapere, popo, pesika, iipauinapile	Igama elisebalini elino-r mapere	
Amanye amagama ano-b biza ubisi buza ubuso beka ibali	Amanye amagama ano-a lala umama idada utata ipapa usana	Amanye amagama ano-m imoto umama imali umoya imela umalume	Amanye amagama ano-y yima i-ayini yaba iyoyo yomile iyeza	Amanye amagama ano-p ipapa ipolisa ipali iparafini ipani unopopi	irula ilori irayisi igaraji ipere isikere	

Figure 9 Example of Vula Bula reading approach

The sections are divided into *Izimaphambili* (prefixes), *Amagama abawabona njalo* (sight words), *Izima-mva* (suffixes), *Uqingqo lwamalungu amagama* (syllabification), and *Izandi* (phonics). Each of these draws attention to salient agglutinative, conjunctive features of isiXhosa orthography. One aim of the readers is for learners to become aware of repeated, common prefixes and suffixes (e.g. *ye-*, *ndi-*, *ba-*, *asi-*, *-ni*). In addition to practising these 'sight' prefixes and suffixes, learners also practise reading sight words, which include common (high frequency) words, and words containing phonic structures that have not yet been taught. For example, Incwadana 1 BALA targets the sight prefix *ye-*, and the common words *hayi*, *bo* and *yam*, while Incwadana 10 UMNIKELO targets the sight prefixes *si-*, *ma-*, *ii-* and *siya-* and the word *enkosi* which contains the *nk* blend that has not yet been taught. Learners are also shown how to segment words into syllables to facilitate easy decoding (*ba-la*, *ha-yi*, *ye-yam*, *ma-me-la*, etc.). Lastly, phonic awareness can be achieved by focusing first on the words in the story containing the target sound (e.g. *Amagama asebalini: bala*, *bo* for 'b' and *bala*, *hayi*, *yeyam* for 'a') and then reading the additional lists provided of common words with the target sound (e.g. *Amanye amagama ano-b: biza*, *buza*, *beka*, *ubisi*, *ubuso*, *ibali*, etc.). To be

appropriate for learning to read, early stages of reading programmes should contain minimal consonant blends or digraphs/trigraphs (§2.1.1). The analysis in the next section explores the (V)CVCV structures in *Vula Bula* readers to evaluate the efficacy of this approach (§5.3).

## 4.3 Conclusions

For the main analysis of this research paper, three isiXhosa graded reader series were reviewed. Similarly to the reader title analysis in the previous section, a phonic analysis was undertaken to capture how many consonant digraphs and blends feature within each early grade reader in each of the three reader series. The analysis also considers when and to what extent the more complex phonics are introduced. Because the text of a story naturally lends itself to more linguistic features to consider than simply the story title, this analysis also includes the total number of sentences and words per text, average number of words per sentence, and average number of letters and syllables per word. These results will then be interpreted in order to determine whether the structural elements of the texts function optimally to achieve the intended literacy objectives. It is proposed that this analysis will provide evidence that a reading series providing systematic phonic-syllabic and morphosyntactic scaffolding will better support the acquisition of reading skills in isiXhosa and other Nguni languages, as well as reveal critical pedagogic theories that can be used to improve current literacy levels in African languages.

# **5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

Each series is first looked at as a whole, followed by a detailed phonological and orthographical analysis of the texts. The analysis of the 60 readers looked at the total number of sentences and words per text, average number of words per sentence, average number of letters and syllables per word, and all phonic structures. The consonant combinations counted were digraphs and trigraphs found in isiXhosa such as *ph, th, tsh,* etc., and consonant blends such as *nt, qw, ndl,* etc. as well as features like double vowels and the single consonant /m/ sound. The results of these analyses are then compared to see how effective each series might be in facilitating appropriate reading practice for the isiXhosa child learning to read in Grade 1.

# 5.1 Izinga Eliphezulu Grade 1 reader series analysis

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme consists of 20 sixteen-page readers selected from the English *New Heights* Grade 1-3 reading series. There is a proposed phonics progression, as well as the introduction of sight words and affixes, similar to the *Vula Bula* reading series analysed later in §5.3. Altogether, the *Izinga Eliphezulu* phonics programme states the introduction of the 26 letters of the alphabet, 29 consonant digraphs and 2-letter blends, and 5 trigraphs and 3-letter blends. It also introduces 75 sight words, and 29 sight prefixes and sight suffixes. It is odd that the verbs '-bumba' (IE-9) and '-thanda' (IE-10) are preceded by a hyphen in the 'sight words' list. They are not suffixes, but whole words which can -= in the imperative form, and which can also take on a prefix(es) and a suffix. A possible explanation might be that the hyphen was included in the front to indicate that, in each respective text, these verbs were used with various different prefixes attached.

Izinga Eliphezulu graded reader series: breakdown of phonics and sight words			
Reader titles 1-20	Phonics	Sight words	
1. Usapho My family	Ll, Oo, Uu	lo, ngu-, wam	
2. Ibhola Yam My ball	Aa, Jj, Zz	i-, kwe-, ko-, lam, yam, zam	
3. Sizoba Ngemibala We draw with colours	Bb, Ii, Mm	ndi-, ngo-, o-	
4. Iziqhamo Fruit	Ee, Nn, Pp	nantsi, nanga, nazi, ezi-, zi-	

5. Izilwanyana Zasekhaya Farm animals	Ff, Hh, Yy	ifuna, lifuna, sifuna
6. Amakhaya Ethu Where we live	Kk, Ss, Vv	u-, ne-, no, uhlala, bobabini
7. Ixesha Lesikolo <i>Time for school</i>	Ww, Xx, hl	si-, ii-, ziya-, zethu, yonke, yho
8. Amaxesha Onyaka Seasons	Tt, mb, sh	uya-, kuya-, aku-, kodwa, elona, xesha
9. Siyabumba We make	Dd, kh, th	oo-, siya, siba, mna, -bumba, zizilo
10. Abahlobo Friends	bh, nx, ny	aba-, uku-, yabo, zabo, lwabo, -thanda
11. Masilungiselele! Preparing	q, nd, ph	lwam, ama-, kanti, olu, usi-, -phi
12. Yho-o-o-o! Whoops!	Cc, lw, ty	wa-, zonke, bhaxa, yakhe, ezo, ngoku
13. Izilwanyana Zase-Afrika African animals	nk, nt, nz	qash qash, ndili-, ndiyi-, ndingu-, nje, kakhulu
14. Uyahlekisa Utatomkhulu Laughing at grandpa	Gg, ng, qh	azikho, hayi, ewe, nali, nanku, zakho
15. Usikhukukazi Obomvu The little red hen	nc, nj, nq	ngubani, na, siza, nonke, ndodwa, qha
16. Zincinci Impahla Zam My clothes are too small	mp, mv, tsh	jonga, ndiza, ntoni, le, nayo, nazo
17. Imini Yolutsha Youth Day	nw, tr, ntw	babe-, soku-, loku-, wonke, ngalo, benza
18. UTselane Wakudala A tale about Tselane	Rr, gc, ts	wena, kuthini, tyhini, kwakhona, wakhe, elo
19. Umtshato Kadadewethu My sister's wedding	dl, xh, zw	wethu, njani, -zange, ukuba, xa, kwazi
20. UKwenza waKwaZulu Kwenza from KwaZulu	ncw, ndl, ngw	ndim, emva, phambi, apho, ukuze, kunye

Table 6 Outline of Izinga Eliphezulu Grade 1 reader series: phonics and sight words programme

Looking at the words in the reader titles, it becomes immediately apparent that the decoding demands on the learners is greater than what the phonics programme is simultaneously introducing. The learners are being introduced to single alphabet letter sounds during the first six two-week cycles, yet they are expected to decode and read words containing consonant digraphs and blends from the very beginning: Reader 1 *Usapho* (*ph*), Reader 2 *Ibhola Yam* 

(*bh*), Reader 3 *Sizoba Ngemibala* (*ng*), Reader 4 *Iziqhamo* (*qh*), Reader 5 *Izilwanyana Zasekhaya* (*lw, ny, kh*), Reader 6 *Amakhaya Ethu* (*kh, th*), etc. This is similar to what was discovered in the analysis of the graded reader titles in the National Catalogue (§4.1.1), and will be investigated further in §5.1.4 to determine whether the texts themselves also contain consonant digraphs and blends. The following Table 7 breaks down several linguistic and orthographic features of the 20 *Izinga Eliphezulu* texts that are believed to be influential factors when children are learning to decode and read fluently in isiXhosa:

IZINGA ELIPHEZULU READERS 1-20							
Reader	Number of words	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Average number of letters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Number of 2-letter consonant digraphs and blends	Number of 3-letter consonant blends
IE-1	25	8	3.1	5.2	2.3	6	0
IE-2	36	8	4.5	5.4	2.3	10	2
IE-3	29	11	2.6	7.5	3.5	10	2
IE-4	38	18	2.1	7.0	3.4	12	3
IE-5	56	15	3.7	6.6	3.2	14	1
IE-6	52	13	4.0	7.8	3.8	13	2
IE-7	41	12	3.4	7.5	3.4	14	3
IE-8	34	10	3.4	8.3	3.6	14	4
IE-9	44	13	3.4	8.0	3.5	14	1
IE-10	58	16	3.6	6.8	3.3	15	2
IE-11	49	17	2.9	8.3	3.9	15	2
IE-12	102	32	3.2	6.8	3.1	17	4
IE-13	83	37	2.2	7.9	3.3	18	2
IE-14	114	20	5.7	6.7	3.2	15	7
IE-15	140	22	6.4	6.5	3.0	18	6
IE-16	135	28	4.8	6.2	2.8	21	2
IE-17	67	13	5.2	8.3	4.0	18	3
IE-18	180	33	5.5	7.1	3.3	15	7
IE-19	182	37	4.9	7.1	3.3	24	5
IE-20	278	44	6.3	7.2	3.4	27	10
Total	1743	407	80.9	142.2	65.6	310	68
Average	N/A	N/A	4.0	7.1	3.3	15.5	3.4

Table 7 Izinga Eliphezulu readers: breakdown of number of words, sentences, letters, syllables and consonant combinations

Total averages are not necessarily appropriate for some of the features above because of the progressiveness of the series; an average would not be a true reflection of the averages in the earlier readers compared to the averages in later readers.

The following subsections unpack Table 7 and examine the texts in detail in terms of the words and sentences, number of letters per word, number of syllables per word, and the kinds of phonics covered in each reader. Judging by the titles alone (Table 6), it is hypothesised that complex phonics structures will be found within the early readers.

#### 5.1.1 Number of words and sentences

Across the programme, there appears to be progression in terms of text length, but this is irregular and random. For this analysis, the 20 readers were divided into two groups IE-1 to IE-11, and IE-12 to IE-20, as there appeared to be a jump in text length from IE-12 onwards. The highest number of words in a text from IE-1 to IE-11 is 58 (in IE-10), and the highest number of sentences is 18 (in IE-4), while IE-12 contains 102 words and 32 sentences! Two sentences per page in a 16-page reader requires substantial concentration and reading stamina for the emergent reader. Overall, there is a significant leap in expected reading ability and endurance from the beginning to the end of the series: IE-1 contains 25 words and 8 sentences, while IE-20 contains 278 words and 44 sentences.

Izinga Eliphezulu readers	IE-1 to IE-11	IE-12 to IE-20
Average number of words per reader	42	142
Average number of words per sentence	3.3	4.8

Table 8 Average number of words per reader and per sentence in Izinga Eliphezulu

Across the 20 readers in the programme, there is an average of about four words per sentence. Compared to disjunctive languages like English and Sesotho, this is a low number and illustrates the conjunctive nature of isiXhosa (see §2.4.2 for more examples). There is evidence throughout of morphologically complex one-word sentences, for example: *Uyandibona*? (Can you see me?), *Siyizobile*! (We painted it!), *Ndiyingonyama* (I am a lion), *Ndiyindlovu* (I am an elephant), *Ndawunkcenkceshela* (I watered it) *Ndawuvuna* (I reaped it) *Ndawusila* (I ground it). There does not seem to be any clear, structured planning concerning sentence length.

Although the average number of words per sentence appears low, there are a few instances across the series where long sentences do appear. For example, in IE-15, there are in fact three very long sentences of 11, 11 and 12 words respectively that are inappropriate in length for a beginner reader: Ekupheleni kwehlobo usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa *ukuvuna umbona?* (At the end of summer, the hen asked, 'Who will help me reap the corn?'); Ebusika usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukupheka umqa wombona?' (In winter, the hen asked, 'Who will help me cook the porridge?'); and *Kwakuvuthwa ukutya*, usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukutya lo mga?' (When the food was ready, the hen asked, 'Who will help me eat this porridge?'). The IE-20 text contains a sentence of 18 words: Sakugqiba ukutya isidlo sethu sakusasa, udadewethu uSimile undincedisa ukuayina impahla zam zesikolo, ze ndivase, ndinxibe, ndilungele ukuya esikolweni. (When we have finished eating our breakfast, my sister Simile helps me to iron my school clothes, then I wash, get dressed and get ready to go to school.) These sentences are clearly lengthy for an agglutinative, conjunctive isiXhosa text at Grade 1 level, where simple sentences can easily be constructed using just one, two or three words. As the Izinga Eliphezulu series was translated from English, the question should be asked if all the original English texts were in fact appropriate for Grade 1.

#### 5.1.1.1 Punctuation

As a salient feature of written text, punctuation cannot be ignored. Punctuation is used formally from the outset in the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series. IE-1 contains capital letters at the beginning of sentences and full stops at the end. This links to the introduction of capital letters in the phonics section of the series, i.e. **LI**, **Oo** and **Uu**, and not just **I**, **o** and **u** (§5.1, Table 6). In the first five readers, children are also exposed to exclamation marks, hyphens, ellipsis, commas and speech marks. IE-6 adds capital letter usage for names of people and places, IE-9 adds capital letters for names of the days of the week (which appear on the root word, e.g. *NgoMvulo* – on Monday), and IE-17 adds capital letters for names of months (which also appears on the root word: *kuJuni* – of June). The direct translation from English first additional language texts to create isiXhosa home language texts means that all punctuation usage was copied, without cognisance of this being the learners' first exposure to the written language. These children would obviously need more time and scaffolding in recognising typographical devices. Coupled with long sentences, in a language where a whole sentence can be comprised of a single word, this series so far seems to reach beyond the level of a Grade 1 beginner reader.

#### 5.1.1.2 Use of repeated sentence frames

As previously described, the approach used in the earlier readers of this series is that of a repeated sentence frame with new vocabulary words added. Once the learners have heard the text read aloud and modelled for them, they are expected to use the pictures to guess the new vocabulary word in the sentence frame. For example, in IE-1, the repeated sentence frame *Lo ngu wam* (This is my \_\_\_\_) is used on almost every page, and each picture shows the girl with a different member of her family – mother, father, little brother, uncle, aunt, grandmother and grandfather (see Fig. 10 below for all the sentences in the IE-1 text). The learner's reading success is therefore a result of the predictability of the text rather than of their decoding prowess, and it is likely that they will learn to recite the text by heart. Interestingly, the seventh sentence in the reader *Lo ngumakhulu notatomkhulu* (This is granny and grandpa) does not include the word *wam*, meaning 'my' which had appeared in the previous five sentences. This is done respectfully for cultural reasons because in isiXhosa, a child cannot have possession over an elder, even grammatically. Similarly, the reader title 'My Family' is translated just as *Usapho* (Family), as culturally, a child cannot express ownership of the family.

# 1. Usapho



Funda wazi izandi. Ziqhelanise ukufunda wazi amagama owabona njalo. Funda ibali





Figure 10 Example of completed sentence frames for reader IE-1 extracted from Izinga Eliphezulu Learner Book

Izinga Biphezulu | Incwadi Yabafundi | IBanga | | Incwadi | © 2009 READ Educational Trust

Sentences frames continue throughout the first few readers (Table 5, §4.2.1) and, as with IE-1, learners can recite the sentence frame and use the pictures to guess the missing text rather than attempting to decode each word individually. Inclusion of more varied sentence structures, for example, the last sentence *Lulo lonke olu usapho lwasekhaya*, which does not repeat the *Lo ngu\_\_\_\_ wam* sentence frame, at least compels the learner to draw on decoding skills in order to read the text.

The translation of sentence frames may inadvertently produce varied versions in isiXhosa. The orthography of isiXhosa is completely different from English, and the agglutinative orthography does not allow for the same kind of repeated word effect from the sentence frame structure as found in English. The conjunctive nature of the language means that a verbal 'word' consists of a root in addition to a variety of affixes; isiXhosa sentence frames are therefore not useful because the affixes are meaningless without the root and require a higher degree of morphological attention than the equivalent English version. The constant shifting of affixes make the use of sentence frames inappropriate in isiXhosa. For example, in the sentence frame in IE-5: \_\_\_ (isilwanyana) \_funa amanzi (\_\_\_ [animal] wants water), the choice of animal affects the prefix added to the verb -funa. In the English equivalent, we would find the verbs 'wants' repeated in its exact form on every page, no matter which animal wanted water. However, in isiXhosa, because of the concordial agreement, we find: inkomo ifuna (the cow wants), ihashe lifuna (the horse wants) or isikhukukazi sifuna (the hen wants). This type of prefix insertion in sentence frames becomes clumsy and need not be taught explicitly to an isiXhosa-speaking child, as they would automatically ensure concordial agreement. Despite this, *ifuna*, *lifuna* and *sifuna* are introduced as sight words in IE-5. This researcher feels that it would have been more useful to introduce sight words for different animals or introduce -funa as a sight root word instead. On the other hand, it is debatable whether this verb and its different agreement forms needs to be read by sight at such an early stage, given the phonically regular (V)CVCV nature of the words *i-fu-na*, *li-fu-na*, *si-fu-na*.

The different affixes attaching to root words in isiXhosa require some level of morphological awareness, and in reading a Nguni language like isiXhosa, morphology might be important for helping to decode texts. In the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers, many words contain prefixes with consonant blends that perform morphological functions, for example in IE-13, the prefix *ndi*-(I): *ndi-yi-ndlovu* (I am an elephant), *ndi-yi-ngonyama* (I am a lion), *ndi-yi-ndlulamthi* (I am a giraffe), *ndi-li-qwarhashe* (I am a zebra), *ndi-ngu-mkhombe* (I am a rhino), etc.

In this case, the immediate recognition of prefixes becomes as important as phonic decoding, similar to the combined English reading approach of phonic knowledge and sight word recognition (§2.1.3). This might be the next stage in building decoding fluency in Nguni languages, where words are not mechanically segmented syllable-by-syllable, but rather morphologically, with a focus on meaning-making during reading.

A morphological analysis of each of the reading series is out of the scope of this paper, but it can be assumed that the translated sentence frames might be unsuitable for children learning to read because of their complexity. This paper looks specifically at the underlying phonological structures of the isiXhosa texts as a starting point instead. The remainder of the analysis of *Izinga Eliphezulu* will show that if texts are directly translated from the original language, and also have to match the artwork commissioned for the original language, then it is impossible for the same texts to follow a natural phonic progression at the appropriate reading level in the translated language. The phonics programme then becomes incidental rather than developmental (§2.1.1.3).

#### 5.1.2 Number of syllables per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 3.3 syllables per word. The lowest average number of syllables per word appears in the IE-1 and IE-2 texts at 2.3, and the highest average number of syllables per word appears in the IE-17 text at 4.0. It is noteworthy that 6-syllable words are included in IE-1 (*ngu-ma-lu-me-ka-zi* and *no-ta-to-m-khu-lu*), and 7-syllable words are included in IE-3 (*o-kwe-si-bha-ka-bha-ka*), in IE-6 (*e-zi-pha-ka-mi-le-yo*) and in IE-11 (*ma-si-lu-ngi-se-le-le* and *a-ma-lu-ngi-se-le-lo*). At sentence level, it appears that agglutinative languages like isiXhosa cannot avoid the inclusion of multisyllabic words. Some multisyllabic words even constitute as whole sentences or clauses, for example in IE-15 *Ndawunkcenkceshela* (I irrigated/watered it), in IE-17 *Wayemkelekile* (They were busy celebrating), and in IE-19 *endandiyithungelwe* (that was sewn for me). However, the earlier inclusion of words comprising many syllables were for nouns, not whole sentences, and the long words could have been avoided with a simpler choice of nouns: *ngumalumekazi*  $\rightarrow$  *umalumekazi* (aunt), *notatomkhulu*  $\rightarrow$  *utatomkhulu* (grandfather) in IE-1, and *okwesibhakabhaka*  $\rightarrow$  *isibhakabhaka* (sky) in IE-3. Again, if translators have to adhere to an existing text and illustrations, then these kinds of lengthy words are unavoidable.

#### 5.1.3 Number of letters per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 7.1 letters per word. IE-1 contains the lowest average number of letters at 5.2 and IE-8, IE-11 and IE-17 contain the highest average number of letters per word at 8.3. There is no progression of extended word length; although IE-1 and IE-2 contain an average of 5.2 and 5.4 letters per word respectively, all the texts thereafter contain words comprising an average of 6.2 to 8.3 letters per word. Interestingly, the average number of letters per word in IE-18 and IE-19 is 7.1, and the average number of syllables in both IE-18 and IE-19 is 3.3. This matches exactly with the overall series averages of approximately seven letters (7.1) and just over three syllables (3.3) per word. It is likely that the average number of letters per word in *Izinga Eliphezulu* relates directly to the phonic structures contained in the words in the reader texts. This is explored in the next section (§5.1.4.1).

#### **5.1.4** Phonics analysis

This section looks specifically at the single alphabet letter sounds, consonant blends, digraphs and trigraphs, single consonant -m- sound/syllable, and double vowels found in the *Izinga Eliphezulu* phonics programme.

#### 5.1.4.1 Single alphabet letter sounds, and consonant blends and digraphs

The phonics programme states that the first six reader texts each focus on the explicit teaching of three single alphabet letters/sounds. The first consonant digraph (*hl*) is taught in Reader 7:

Reader	Targeted phonics
1. Usapho	LI, Oo, Uu
2. Ibhola Yam	Aa, Jj, Zz
3. Sizoba Ngemibala	Bb, li, Mm
4. Iziqhamo	Ee, Nn, Pp
5. Izilwanyana Zasekhaya	Ff, Hh, Yy
6. Amakhaya Ethu	Kk, Ss, Vv
7. Ixesha Lesikolo	Ww, Xx, <b>hl</b>

Table 9 Targeted phonics in the first seven Izinga Eliphezulu readers

*Izinga Eliphezulu* attempts a combined reading approach (§2.1.3), with sight words and whole language sentences frames, and targeted phonics at the beginning of each reader. IE-1, for

example, lists lo, ngu- and wam as sight words and targets three simple, single sounds: l, o and **u**. However, upon analysis, the text also contains long words with six different consonant blends and digraphs (*nd*, *ng*, *kh*, *nk*, *ph*, *lw*), for example *ndim*, *ngumama*, *notatomkhulu*, *lonke* and *usapho*. There are also two words containing a consonant blend and a consonant digraph: ngumakhulu and lwasekhaya. According to the programme, these more complex phonic structures are targeted for explicit teaching only in later readers. The phonics approach taken is analytic (§2.1.1.2); /o/ for example, can be highlighted in the words usapho, lo, lulo, lonke, olu and notatomkhulu. However, with the inclusion of so many other words with different sounds, and the inclusion of phonics that are only supposed to be introduced later, it is unclear how teachers can draw learners' attention to the target sound only for explicit phonics instruction. Furthermore, when the targeted phonics in a reader do coincide with the consonant digraphs and blends found in the text, it is incidental and unplanned, as they are sometimes coupled with a different digraph or blend. For example, in IE-7, the digraph hl is targeted but three of the four **hl** words contained in IE-7 – ezimhlophe, izihlangu, kakuhle and impahla – contain another blend or digraph within the same word. This is not best practice in phonics instruction where the sound targeted for learning should be the only complex sound in the word, even in analytic phonics.

This trend continues throughout the programme. Firstly, the target sound is not isolated but often presented in a word with other consonant combinations, which is confusing for the early reader who is still attempting to 'crack the code' of the alphabetic principle. Secondly, although there is a proposed phonics programme, target sounds are introduced incidentally in earlier readers before their explicit, targeted introduction in a later reader. The phonics programme is therefore not a carefully structured or synthetic one; learners are expected to draw out targeted sounds from natural, whole language instead of focusing on specifically selected words. The whole language approach means that other sounds will be introduced simultaneously with the target sound, and a teacher will need to couple the (already many) approaches in these readers with an embedded phonics approach by laboriously coaching learners in decoding words.

There are instances where the targeted phonic blend or digraph has been elicited only because it happens to appear in the text, and not because it is a particularly useful opportunity to teach the sound. For example, the **nc** consonant blend is taught formally in IE-15, however, the three words in the text used to teach **nc** are poor examples: *kundincedisa, kukuncedisa* and *ukundincedisa*. Firstly, these words are long, made up of 5, 5 and 6 syllables respectively.

Secondly, the root word beginning with the target blend **nc** is *nceda* (help) and is preceded in each case by two prefixes (*ku-ndi-*, *ku-ku-* and *uku-ndi-*), which must be decoded before the learners can even reach the **nc** sound. The **nc** blend appeared previously in the series in the following words only: *encinci* (IE-6), *ezincinci* (IE-9), *uncumo* (IE-10), *ukumncedisa* (IE-11) and *uncede* (IE-12), raising the question whether the blend even needed to have been explicitly taught at this stage in the series; introducing the **nc** blend using shorter words like *encinci*, *uncumo* and *uncede* would in any case seem more sensible.

Lastly, the consonant blend **ts** is targeted for formal teaching in IE-18 yet appears only in the name *Tselane* in this text, and nowhere else in the series. This doesn't appear to be a useful phonics choice if children are not going to encounter many words with this sound at this stage in their reading journey. It seems unnecessary to devote phonics lessons to teaching sounds in Grade 1 that the learners will encounter in just two or three words during the year; phonics learning should rather concentrate on common, repeated sounds. All the examples in this section serve to highlight the randomness of the *Izinga Eliphezulu* phonics programme, with no evidence of tangible developmental phonic progression.

#### 5.1.4.2 The single consonant -m- sound/syllable

The single consonant -m- sound/syllable is introduced in words from the start of the series. It appears in IE-1 in *ngumninawa* and *notatomkhulu*, in IE-2 in *komnwe*, in IE-3 in *ngombala*, *omnyama* and *omhlophe*, in IE-4 in *imnandi*, *amnandi* and *zimnandi*, in IE-5 in *umlimi*, etc. Because this consonant appears before other single consonants, consonant blends and digraphs, and is also a stand-alone syllable, its inclusion in words at this stage complicates learners' early efforts at decoding using a simple (V)-CV-CV syllabification reading strategy. The -m-sound/syllable should therefore either be taught explicitly or alternately avoided in early reading texts.

#### 5.1.4.3 Double vowels

The double vowel sounds **ee**, **ii** and **oo** are a common feature of isiXhosa orthography. The double **ii** vowel sound, which usually denotes the plural prefix preceding a noun, appears in IE-4 in *ii-orenji*, *iibhanana*, *iipopo*, *iipesika*, *iinatshi* and *ii-apile*; in IE-7 in *iihempe*, *iibhulukhwe*, *iikawusi* and *iijezi*; in IE-8 in *iimpahla* and *iintyatyambo*; in IE-9 in *iinkawu*, *iindlulamthi*, *iingonyama* and *iindlovu*; in IE-10 in *iinwele* and *iimpumlo*; in IE-11 in *iindlela* 

and *kwiiholide*; in IE-12 in *iikawusi*; in IE-13 in *iimpondo*; in IE-19 in *iinyembezi*; and in IE-20 in *iinkomo*, *iincwadi* and *iikiriva*. The double **oo** vowel sound appears in IE-9 in *ookrebe*, and in *e-Zoo* (which is pronounced differently as it is borrowed from English). It also appears in IE-11 in *oonopopi*, in IE-14 and IE-19 in *loo*, in IE-17 in *noomama*, in IE-19 in *oonotaka*, and in IE-20 in *nootitshala*. The double **ee** vowel sound appears in IE-6 in *neevenkile* and *neendawo*, in IE-12 in *ngeekawusi*, in IE-19 in *neenaliti*, and in IE-20 in *ngeenkuni* and *ngeenyawo*. Based on the number of examples provided above, it is surprising that none of these double vowel sounds are targeted for explicit teaching in this programme.

#### 5.1.4.4 'Borrowed' phonics

In addition to the complexity of consonant digraphs and blends described in the phonics analysis above, learners are also introduced to words like *iflegi* in IE-3 and *Afrika* in IE-6 which contain the consonant blends **fl** and **fr** respectively, both borrowed from English. In IE-17, the **tr** consonant blend is formally introduced and taught using the words *esitratweni* (in the street) and *izitrato* (the streets). This inclusion is questionable as the **tr** blend is (likely) borrowed from Afrikaans or English, and does not appear in any of the other 19 *Izinga Eliphezulu* texts.

#### 5.1.5 Conclusions

The detailed analysis above illustrates that the phonics programme in *Izinga Eliphezulu* is incidental rather than graded and developmental. The phonics programme becomes confusing when learners are required to read words containing sounds that have not yet been taught and practised, and then have those same sounds introduced formally afterwards in later texts. This analysis shows that phonic development is not happening incrementally; learners are already expected (or assumed) to have a sophisticated knowledge of how to decode many complex consonant blends in order to read the texts. This is proof of an analytic phonics approach, where target sounds are selected ad hoc, and is the only option when texts are directly translated. It is daunting, and even overwhelming, for children to be expected to read texts like this when they are just beginning to grasp phoneme to grapheme connections. In terms of the phonics programme, it would make better sense to focus instruction on fewer, more frequently used digraphs, trigraphs, and consonant blends in shorter words, and to teach relevant vocabulary words containing uncommon blends when necessary, as they appear in the text.

The readers are graded in terms of text length, and they move away from the scaffolding of shorter sentence frames in the early readers to natural, whole language longer sentences in later readers. However, although sentence length increases, the length of words in terms of number of syllables and letters remains similar throughout the programme. The unrestricted occurrence of such lengthy words in this reader series shows that direct translation and an incidental phonics programme produce texts that are unduly challenging for young children learning to read at the beginning of Grade 1.

## 5.2 Siyakhula Grade 1 reader series analysis

The *Siyakhula* readers belong to the only series in this study that appears on the National Catalogue. It is unclear exactly which approach was used in the creation of these graded readers, or indeed if any was even used. In the previous section, *Izinga Eliphezulu* used a whole language approach but did attempt to scaffold texts with repeated sentence frames, and also offered a phonics programme, albeit an analytic one. While there is evidence of repeated words in *Siyakhula*, texts have a more natural, narrative flow instead. Besides decoding, learners can use their oral language knowledge and the illustrations to interpret some of the text. For example, S-1 describes what the character Musa did during his morning, depicted in each image. The sentences sometimes comprise just one word, as is possible in the agglutinative structures of isiXhosa (§2.4.2), for example *Wahlamba*. (He washed), *Watya*. (He ate), and *Wahlamba amazinyo*. (He brushed his teeth), and these appear below pictures of Musa washing, eating and brushing his teeth. This supports a whole language approach where word attack skills are secondary to meaning-making. It is worth noting that this story is written in the past tense; first readers are usually written in simple present tense.

Figure 11 Example pages from Siyakhula reader



The titles were analysed as part of the pilot study in §4.1.1 and it was clear from the first reader title that there were going to be difficult phonics elements (*Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa*). Like the previous *Izinga Eliphezulu* analysis, the following investigation will show that when texts are directly translated from a language with a markedly different orthography, and have to dovetail with pre-existing illustrations, then carefully graded phonic progression cannot occur. Phonics learning will always be incidental (analytic or embedded) rather than developmental (synthetic) when readers are translated. Unlike the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Vula Bula* series, the *Siyakhula* series does not offer a detailed phonics programme and does not follow a fixed, delineated sequence. The readers are numbered from S-1 to S-20 according to the order in which they are listed on the National LTSM Catalogue, not according to any prescribed order.

Siyakhula Stage 1 (assumed PACK 1 <sup>6</sup> )	Siyakhula Stage 1 PACK 2
Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa	Mna noSpoti
Musa's big day	Spotty and I
Umlilo	UBonakele nenkomo
Fire	Bonakele and the cow
Ndiswele amaphiko	Ubusuku
I need wings	Winter
lintsuku zeveki	Umabonakude
Days of the week	Television
Oonodoli bam	Usuku lwam lokuzalwa
My dolls	My birthday
lbhola ebomvu	UThando
The red ball	Thando
Isivuno esihle	Uyafunda
A good harvest	We are learning
Ithini na iminwe?	Kumnandi konke
What are the fingers (for)?	It's all fun
Kusile! Tomorrow!	
Lumkela ingozi Beware of the danger	
Mna nosana My baby	
Nam ndiyakwazi ukubala I know how to count too	

Figure 12 Titles in Siyakhula Grade 1 reader series

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See footnote 5 regarding PACK 1.

This section looks at the *Siyakhula* texts in detail and analyses them in terms of the number of words and sentences, number of letters and syllables per word, and the kinds of phonic structures included. It is presumed that the fewer syllables, consonant blends and digraphs, and overall number of words there are in a text, the easier it will be for a novice reader to decode.

SIYAKHULA READERS 1-20							
Reader	Number of words	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Average number of letters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Number of 2-letter consonant digraphs and blends	Number of 3-letter consonant blends
S-1	23	8	2.9	6.6	3.0	11	2
S-2	25	7	3.6	6.3	2.8	12	1
S-3	34	7	4.9	8.4	3.5	12	2
S-4	33	7	4.7	8.1	3.5	8	4
S-5	23	7	3.3	5.9	2.7	6	0
S-6	22	10	2.2	5.4	2.3	5	1
S-7	24	7	3.4	6.9	3.2	9	1
S-8	20	8	2.5	6.7	2.9	10	2
S-9	34	19	1.8	6.2	2.8	11 <sup>7</sup>	3
S-10	16	10	1.6	6.1	2.6	9	0
S-11	20	10	2.0	7.0	3.4	5	2
S-12	21	7	3.0	8.2	3.8	14	2
S-13	46	13	3.5	7.5	3.5	15	1
S-14	29	10	2.9	7.1	3.4	8	4
S-15	48	7	6.9	7.4	3.5	13	4
S-16	28	9	3.1	6.9	3.7	4	0
S-17	31	11	2.8	6.8	3.1	15	1
S-18	21	7	3.0	8.4	3.7	6	0
S-19	42	15	2.8	7.8	3.7	6	1
S-20	27	7	3.9	7.0	3.0	12	3
Total	567	186	64.8	140.7	64.1	191	34
Average	28.4	9.3	3.2	7.0	3.2	9.6	1.7

 Table 10 Siyakhula readers: breakdown of number of words, sentences, letters, syllables and consonant combinations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Reader S-9 includes one consonant blend (*tr*) and one consonant digraph (*-ng*) borrowed from English. Reader S-12 includes one consonant blend borrowed from English (*tr*) and one borrowed from Afrikaans (*kl*). Reader S-13 includes one consonant blend borrowed from English (*sp*).

Averages could be deemed more accurate for this series because there is no graded approach to the readers, unlike the *Vula Bula* and *Izinga Eliphezulu* series (§5.3 and §5.1).

#### 5.2.1 Number of words and sentences

There is no fixed order of books, other than the division of the titles into Pack One (12 readers, which I have numbered 1-12) and Pack Two (8 readers, which I have numbered 13-20). Texts range in length from 16 words in S-10 to 48 words in S-15, with an overall average of 28 words per reader. If I divide the readers into Pack One and Pack Two, then there is an average of 25 words per text for Readers 1-12 (ranging from 16-34 words), and a higher average of 34 words per text for Readers 13-20 (ranging from 21-48 words). This would indicate that the Pack One readers are shorter and therefore perhaps easier to read than those in Pack Two. However, in Pack One there are three longer texts of 34 words (S-3 and S-9) and 33 words (S-4), while in Pack Two there are four shorter texts of 29 words (S-14), 28 words (S-16), 21 words (S-18) and 27 words (S-20). This text length overlap could be intentional on the part of the authors, but it remains unclear whether the programme follows any kind of structured, planned progression in this regard.

Across the 20 readers in the *Siyakhula* series, there is an average of 3.2 words per sentence. The first 11 readers of the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series have an average of 3.3 words per sentence, before the sentence frames are replaced with lengthier, free-flowing narrative sentences. It appears as if the *Siyakhula* series attempts to offer short sentences, which is not difficult in an agglutinating language (see examples in Fig. 11, §5.2). There are instances of one-word sentences in this series, for example: *Wahlamba. Watya.* (He washed. He ate.), *Vuka! Kusile!* (Wake up! It's morning!), *Cinga. Usindile!* (Watch out. You were lucky!). The S-9 text includes many one-word exclamations: *Tri-ii-ing!* is repeated four times, and *Vuka!* is repeated five times, which is why the average number of words per sentence count is so low at 1.8. In S-10, the word '*Cinga'* stands alone as a whole sentence and is repeated four times. Most sentences in the series comprise 2-4 words, which is commensurate with the conjunctive nature of isiXhosa. At face value, it appears that the *Siyakhula* readers would be easier to read than the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers, in terms of text length and the Grade 1 child's reading stamina and confidence.

Izinga Eliphezulu readers	IE-1 to IE-11	IE-12 to IE-20	
Average number of words per reader	42	142	
Average number of words per sentence	3.3	4.8	

(Reminder from §5.1.1)

Siyakhula readers	Pack One (S-1 to S-12)	Pack Two (S-13 to S-20)
Average number of words per reader	25	34
Average number of words per sentence	3.0	3.6

Table 11 Average number of words per reader and per sentence in Siyakhula, divided into packs

Upon closer analysis, however, it becomes apparent that sentence length specifications were not strictly adhered to, especially in the later readers. For example, S-15 has the highest average number of words per sentence (6.9) with the most words (48) and the lowest number of sentences (7). As previously stated, for an agglutinative, conjunctive language where simple sentences can easily be constructed using just two or three words, these sentences are long for Grade 1-level reading. In fact, with four to nine words per sentence, this particular text contains more words per sentence on average than all the readers combined in the three reading series. For early readers, this demands a high level of decoding skill, reading stamina, prosodic ability and fluency. The lengthy sentences are evident, as shown in the extract from S-15 below (laid out as they appear on each page of the reader):

Title:	Ubusuku
<u>Page 2</u> :	Lixesha eloyikekayo ixesha lasebusuku.
<u>Page 3</u> :	Kuthi naxa inyanga, iinkwenkwezi nezibane zikhanyisa kodwa koyikeke.
Page 4:	Indalo nayo iyabazi ubusuku.
<u>Page 5</u> :	lzikhova nezinye izilwanyana zona azilali ebusuku ziyazingela.
<u>Page 6</u> :	Kule mihla kuyingozi ukuhamba ebusuku ngenxa yezigebenga.
<u>Page 7</u> :	Abazali bethu nabo abasivumeli sidlale ebusuku ngenxa yokoyikeka kobusuku.
<u>Page 8</u> :	Lakutshona ilanga abantwana bayagoduka kuba kuyingozi ukuba phandle ebusuku.

#### 5.2.1.1 Punctuation

Similarly to the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series, described previously in §5.1.1.1, punctuation is not introduced incrementally in this series. Within the first five readers, learners will encounter capital letters at the beginning of sentences, capital letters for names and for the days of the
week, full stops, a comma, an exclamation mark, a hyphen and a question mark. By S-9, a colon and speech marks are also introduced. This extent of punctuation usage is advanced for Grade 1, but can be expected when texts are randomly selected for translation, and are not adapted for children who are only just beginning to learn to read.

### 5.2.2 Number of syllables per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 3.2 syllables per word. The lowest average number of syllables per word is 2.3 in S-6, and the highest average number of syllables per word is 3.8 in S-12. All the texts contain words that range from 1 or 2 to 5 or 6 syllables, except for S-6 which contains shorter words of only 1-3 syllables, and S-10 and S-11 which contain words of 2-4 syllables. It is noteworthy that even in Pack One, 6-syllable words are included in S-3 (*no-ta-to-m-khu-lu, be-ndi-yi-nko-nja-ne, be-ndi-si-si-kho-va*), and in S-12 (*li-ka-nte-me-kwa-ne, e-si-khu-ku-ka-zi*). In Pack Two, every text except S-14, contains words with up to six syllables. As previously discussed with the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers (§5.1.2), agglutinating languages like isiXhosa cannot avoid the inclusion of multisyllabic words, even in very early readers. However, if a more synthetic approach was taken, it might be possible to adapt and alter the text to allow for shorter words to be used instead. It is also clear that even though there are just a few words per sentence, an average of 3.2 (Table 10, §5.2), these words are long in terms of syllable length, as discussed in this subsection.

### 5.2.3 Number of letters per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 7.0 letters per word, which is also exactly the same average number of letters per word in S-11 and S-20. There is no structured progression of increasing word quantity from one reader to the next. Although this makes it difficult to measure improvement in reading stamina, fluency and comprehension, it is beneficial for the child to have access to many texts at the same level for reading practice. S-1 contains the lowest average number of letters per word at 5.4, while S-3 and S-18 contain the highest average number of letters per word at 8.4. Significantly, the average number of 7.0 letters per word in *Siyakhula* mirrors the analysis of the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series, which showed an overall average of 7.1 letters per word. This similarity is likely because both series were translated from original English texts, resulting in longer words containing more complex phonic structures, as will be examined in the next section.

### **5.2.4** Phonics analysis

Unlike the other two series, the *Siyakhula* series does not offer a structured phonics programme. It is therefore not framed against phonics approaches like the analytic approach taken by *Izinga Eliphezulu* in the previous section §5.1.4. Even though it is clear that a whole language approach was adopted for these texts, this section still looks specifically at the consonant blends and digraphs, the single consonant -m- sound/syllable, and the double vowels contained in the *Siyakhula* reader texts.

### 5.2.4.1 Single letters, consonant blends and digraphs

There is no instruction within the readers to teach any phonics explicitly. It is assumed that children already know their single alphabet letters and how to decode in order to read these books. Because there is no designated order, the readers were again separated into the two packs to see if any perceptible phonic progression could be identified. The number of 2-letter consonant blends and digraphs, and 3-letter consonant blends and trigraphs included in each text was calculated and the averages worked out. The results show very little difference in the level of phonic difficulty, with the Pack 2 reader texts being only marginally more complex:

Siyakhula readers	Pack One: S-1 to S-12	Pack Two: S-13 to S-20				
Average number of 2-letter consonant blends/digraphs	9.0	9.8				
Average number of 3-letter consonant blends/trigraphs	1.7	1.8				

Table 12 Average number of consonant digraphs, trigraphs and blends in Siyakhula readers

S-1 introduces 11 different 2-letter consonant blends and diagraphs (*bh*, *hl*, *kh*, *mb*, *mp*, *nd*, *nw*, *nx*, *ny*, *th*, *ty*), and two 3-consonant blends (*khw*, *ngq*). Three words contain two 2-letter consonant blends or digraphs: *wahlamba*, *mpahla*, *ayithandayo*. S-2 introduces 12 different 2-letter consonant blends and diagraphs (*dw*, *hl*, *kh*, *mb*, *nc*, *ng*, *nw*, *ny*, *nz*, *ph*, *th*, *ty*), and one 3-letter consonant trigraph (*tsh*). Five words also contain two consonant blends or diagraphs/trigraphs: *sihluthe*, *sikhanyisa*, *kukhanye*, *siphunge*, *ungatshi*. These are clearly not phonically controlled texts, and similarly to *Izinga Eliphezulu* in the previous section, they follow a whole language approach as a result of direct translation from English. While consonant blends, digraphs and trigraphs are clearly an intrinsic feature of isiXhosa

orthography, the inclusion of so many complex phonic structures at this introductory stage of reading practice, with no incremental plan, may well cause the early reader to feel frustrated and incompetent.

### 5.2.4.2 The single consonant -m- sound/syllable

The single consonant -m- sound/syllable is introduced in words from the start of the series, and features in 14 of the 20 reader texts. It appears, for example, in S-2 in *mhle* and *lumka*, in S-4 in *ngoMvulo* and *ngoMgqibelo*, in S-5 in *mnye* and *ndiyamthanda*, in S-7 in *amnandi* and *umfino*. It occurs often in S-11 in *mna*, *umlomo*, *omncinci*, *omkhulu* and *ndimkhulu*, in S-14 in *imjoja*, *iyamhlaba*, *imleqa*, *bayamhleka* and *umxelela*, and in S-17 in *namhlanje*, *umntu*, *lingoMgqibelo*, *mntu*, *komnye* and *umhla*. As stated before in the *Izinga Eliphezulu* text analysis, because the -m- sound/syllable can be placed before other single consonants, consonant blends and digraphs, its inclusion in words at this early stage might complicate learners' efforts at breaking the simple (V)-CV-CV code (and later V-CCV-CCV code) as an early reading strategy. The -m- sound/syllable should perhaps either be taught explicitly, or possibly avoided in early reading texts.

### 5.2.4.3 Double vowels

Although single vowels are far more prevalent, double vowel sounds are a prominent feature of isiXhosa orthography, as previously stated. The double **ee** vowel sound appears in four readers: in S-2 in *wee*, in S-4 in *neenkwenkwezi*, in S-13 in *ngeemoto*, and in S-19 in *neencwadi*. The double **ii** vowel sound (usually a plural prefix marker) appears in eight readers: in S-3 in *iintsomi*, in S-4 in *iintsuku*, in S-6 in *jwi-ii*!, in S-7 in *iimbotyi*, in S-9 in *tri-ii-ing!*, in S-12 in *iinyawo* and *iikomityi*, in S-13 in *iimoto*, and in S-15 in *iinkwenkwezi*. The double **oo** vowel sound appears only in S-5 in *oonodoli* and in S-14 in *Yhoo*! The uncommon double **aa** vowel sound appears in S-9 in the word *ntaa*. Each of these is a new sound yet, as with the different complex consonant structures, there is no evidence of formal phonics instruction and teaching.

### 5.2.4.4 'Borrowed' phonics

In addition to the complex consonant digraphs and blends described in the phonics analysis above, learners are also asked to read words containing the following phonic structures borrowed from English and Afrikaans: **tr**, **kl**, **sp**, **fl** and the **-ing** suffix, which appear in *tri-ii-ing* in S-9, *eklasini* and *etreyini* in S-12, *uSpoti* in S-13 and S-16, and *yikholiflawa* in S-20.

The inclusion of the English sound word '*Tri-ii-ng*' in S-9 might be confusing for the learners. Firstly, there is no authentic **tr** consonant blend in isiXhosa orthography. Secondly, the **-ing** suffix ends with the English digraph **ng**, pronounced /ŋ/, whereas in isiXhosa, **ng** is a consonant blend pronounced /ŋg/ and is always followed by a vowel. Even though the word is used onomatopoeically to make the story more exciting, its inclusion in the text would encourage whole word memorisation strategies as opposed to the development of phonic and syllabic word attack skills. In S-13, the dog is named '*uSpoti*' and in S-16, a different dog is also named '*uSpoti*'<sup>8</sup>, despite not having spots (see Fig. 13). Using names spelled with English orthographic rules is problematic for children being introduced to isiXhosa texts for the first time. Although the spelling of the word has been changed from the English 'Spotty' to the isiXhosa '*uSpoti*', it is still a borrowed name containing the English consonant blend **sp**.



Figure 13 Example pages showing dogs in Siyakhula readers

# <image><image><caption>

S-16: page 6

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> During testing of Grade 1 learners in Mpumalanga in 2017, DBE researchers found that more children labelled a generic picture of a dog '*uSpoti*', instead of using the correct isiZulu word '*inja*'.

### 5.2.5 Conclusions

The above analysis illustrates that the *Siyakhula* texts use a whole language approach where authentic, natural language is prioritised and incremental phonic learning is not a consideration. While this approach ensures that the stories are genuine and relevant, learners are expected to know how to decode many different phonically complex words. In this case, one questions whether they are even able to access the meaning, and enjoyment, of the story.

Although the *Siyakhula* readers are isiXhosa translations (versions) of original English readers, there appears some effort on the part of the authors to create appropriate, simple early reading texts. This is evident in the usage of isiXhosa colloquial expressions such as *Sikhanyisa izibane, kukhanye wee* in S-2, *O*! in S-3, *Phosa! Jwi-ii! Yenyuka! Phezulu naphantsi* in S-6, *Inene!* in S-8, *Tri-ii-ing! Kusile! Ntaa Nwabu-nwabu, Cum* in S-9, *nyana! Gqibi!* in S-10, *Khawukhangele! Yhoo*! in S-14, and *Bantu bakwaTyani!* in S-17. In addition, the story texts are all short, with the longest comprising only 48 words, and many containing repeated words. There appears to be some attempt to keep words short, with the highest average number of syllables per word per reader at 3.8. Many words follow a (V)CVCV pattern, and consonant blends and digraphs are often introduced singly in words, meaning that just one digraph or one blend is the only complex phonic structure within the word. This would allow a teacher following an analytic phonics approach to extract a word with the target blend or digraph quite easily. However, it is not regulated exactly how many times that sound might reappear within the same text, or in other texts, for further practice.

To sum up, there are still high expectations of the inexperienced reader in that these early texts contain many words containing advanced consonant structures that necessitate a phonic knowledge which the Grade 1 learner has yet to acquire. When translators have to version texts to match artwork already created to illustrate stories in a different language, they will be limited and bound by the story context, and forced to use certain vocabulary. This is exacerbated when the texts in the original language have been written in accordance with a certain pedagogic approach (e.g. first additional languages readers), while the translated or versioned texts may endeavor to meet a different objective (e.g. home language readers). The alphabetic principle and how it functions in the orthography of the learner's mother-tongue must be the focus of teaching and learning in Grade 1. Once texts are translated as described above, developmental synthetic phonics acquisition cannot take place.

### 5.3 Vula Bula Grade 1 reader series analysis

The *Vula Bula* Grade 1 isiXhosa reading programme consists of 32 eight-page readers. The series was conceptualised as a home language graded reading programme for isiXhosa mother tongue speakers. For ease of comparison, the detailed analysis includes only the first 20 readers in the series, to match the total number of texts available in the other two selected series.

The first 20 *Vula Bula* readers introduce the 26 letters of the alphabet and 14 2-letter consonant blends and digraphs, as well as a number of sight words and affixes per reader. The analysis in the next section will show whether the *Vula Bula* texts follow a simple (V)CVCV pattern. As discussed before, an easy early reading programme in isiXhosa should contain very few consonant blends or digraphs/trigraphs. The previous analyses showed that the *Siyakhula* series (§5.2) did not introduce new phonics incrementally, while the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series (§5.1), despite having a sequenced phonics plan, used a whole language analytic approach whereby phonics were extracted to deliver the phonics programme.

Progression in the *Vula Bula* series appears more evident, with single alphabet letter sounds being introduced first, followed by 2-letter consonant digraphs and blends, then 3-letter consonant trigraphs and blends. The programme presents a sequential and structured introduction of phonics. This approach should work well because of the shallow orthography of isiXhosa and also because it is acknowledged as an educationally-sound approach to teaching early reading skills (§2.1.1). Instruction begins by giving the learners practice in reading words made up of single sounds, devoid of consonant digraphs, trigraphs or blends. Because isiXhosa words follow a (V)CVCV pattern, the easiest reading strategy for learners to acquire phoneme to grapheme association skills is likely by teaching them how to sound out phonically regular syllables.

In the *Vula Bula* series, simple texts support stories told mainly through the illustrations, demanding some degree of visual literacy skill from the reader. For example, in VB-12 *Sebeza* (Whisper), the illustrations are fundamental to understanding the story. The simple text on pages 2 and 3 means 'Can you see him? He is whispering.' (p.2) and 'Can you see them? They too are whispering.' (p.3) (see Fig. 14 below). The illustrations show the teacher's irritated facial expressions, what type of lesson she is teaching, and that the children are surreptitiously showing each other various baby presents that they have secretly brought for their teacher.



Figure 14 Example pages from Vula Bula reader 12 Sebeza

Table 13 below lists the first 20 *Vula Bula* titles together with the discrete elements of the reading programme that are introduced with each story, namely the target phonics and sight words and affixes. For interest sake, the phonics introduced in *Vula Bula* Readers 21-32 are included thereafter, but these will not be analysed for the purposes of this study.

Vula Bula		
Reader titles 1-20	<i>Izandi</i> (Phonics)	Izimaphambili (sight prefixes); Izima-mva (sight suffixes); Amagama abawabona njalo (sight words) <sup>9</sup>
<b>1. Bala</b> Count	b, a	ye-; hayi, bo, yam
2. Hayi No/Don't	h, i	ewe, nalo, ke
3. Vula vala Open close	v, u	yi-; yam
4. Coca Clean up	с, о	ku-, zi-, izi-; -ile

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Sight prefixes are followed by a hyphen and sight suffixes are preceded by a hyphen

5. Bal <b>ek</b> a <sub>Run</sub>	k, e	suku-; yima
<b>6. Lala</b> Sleep	l, n	kuse-; -ni
7. Zoba usike Draw and cut	s, z	nasi
8. Mamela Listen	m <i>,</i> y	ndi-, ba-, asi-; -ni
9. Jika <sup>Turn</sup>	g, j	uya-, yi-, mayi-, isa-, sisa-;  -ni, -isa;  kakhulu
<b>10. Umnikelo</b> A donation	p, r	si-, ma-, ii-, siya-; enkosi
<b>11. Utata usele nosana</b> <i>Dad looks after the baby</i>	d, t	no-, lu-, luya-, lusa-, luye-, uku-, uya-; -ela, -ile, -iwe
12. Sebeza Whisper	f <i>,</i> q	ba-, baya-, la-, uya-, uyam-, uyaba-, ndiya-, andisa-;  -i, -ile; nabo, nalo, naye, naba, hayi, bo, futhi, ihlebo
13. Lelikabani eli vili? Whose wheel is this?	w, x	le-, li-, lika-, lelika-, uya-, awu-, asilo-; -ile; eli, hayi, lam, yam, enkosi, sala, kakuhle
<b>14.</b> E <b>kh</b> aya Home	hl, kh	li-, lika-, ku-, ba-; eli, bani, labo, apha, bonke, lilizwe
15. Uha <b>mb</b> o A trip	mb, ng	ndi-, ndiya-, ndine-, si-, siya-, sinama-, sizaku-, o-, lo-, ngo-; -isa, -ile; siya, kakhulu, kude, ngomso
<b>16. Yoph</b> ukile ifestile The broken window	bh, ph	yo-, ye-, yi-, ka-, kuyi-, yeka-, asi-, ndi-, uya-, uyazi-, niya-; -ile; le, yam, sazi, hayi, ewe
17. Ncedani! Help!	nc, th	no-, ne-, oma-, we-, ku-, uku-, uyayi-, ubu-, usi-, ba-, siya-, awu-;  -ni, -ela, -ile, -kele;  le, uza, baza, hayi, bo, ukuze, wena, wemka, kuthi, ukhwela
18. Uphi uZinzi? Where is Zinzi?	nz, sh	ndingu-, ne-, ku-, uku-, ba-, aba-, ka-, baya-, wa-, beku-, ibi-, ngu-;  -iwe;  molo, igama, ndize, lam, yam, kakhulu, wade, bade, hayi, bo, shu, ibe, lo, uphi
<b>19. Sidlala undize</b> We play hide-and-seek	dl, nd	si-, sa-, sase-, sizaku-, yi-, li-, ii-, le-, ama-, ne-, esi-, kuse-, zoku-, niya-, ngu-, ndi-, ndini-, ndiya-, ndiye-, ndiyi-, ndiku-, ndizaku-, mandi-, awukandi-; -ni; lo, esi, iza, aba, owu, kuyo, mna, nina, nini, nonke, sonke, yho, lixesha
20. Sityiwe isonka The eaten bread	nk, ty	sa-, si-, ne-, no-, usi-, uya-, uyasi-, li-, akaka-, wa-, nase-, ku-, uku-, uzi-, ndi-, sendi-, uyali-;  -iwe, -eni, -ile, -isa, -ini; baza, kule, oko, nini, suka, wade, iza, soze, kona, owu, lam, sonke, kodwa, kakhulu, ndiphinde

Table 13 Outline of Vula Bula Grade 1 reading series 1-20: phonics and sight words programme

Reader titles 21-26	Phonics introduced	Reader titles 27-32	Phonics introduced
21. lzi <b>ny</b> o	lw, ny	27. Idabi lomoya nelanga	qh, tsh
22. Evenkileni ye <b>mp</b> ahla	mp, nj	28. Umvu <b>ndl</b> a nofudu	mv, ndl
23. Um <b>nq</b> athe omkhulukazi	nq, ts	29. Ingonyama nempuku	kr, nw
24. Ibali lobu <b>gq</b> i	gq, rh	30. Ukubhaka nomakhulu	dw, sw, ntl
25. Gcinela ngomso	gc, nt	31. Edolophini	ngq, nts
26. Usuphu yelitye	ch, kw	32. UMzantsi Afrika ngowethu	xh, zw

Looking at the titles of VB 1-20 above, it appears clear that the demands on the reader are commensurate with what the phonics programme simultaneously introduces. In most cases there is a direct correlation between the sounds in the words in the title and the pedagogic elements being introduced in the phonics programme (see bolded letters in reader titles in Table 13). For example: VB-1 **Bala** (*b*, *a*), VB-2 **Hayi** (*h*, *i*), VB-3 **Vu**la **v**ala (*v*, *u*), VB-4 **Coc**a (*c*, *o*), VB-5 Baleka (*k*, *e*) and VB-6 Lala (*l*). From VB-14 to VB-20, two new consonant digraphs or blends are introduced in each text, and the direct correlation between the words in the title and the pedagogic elements of the phonics programme continues. For example: VB-14 Ekhaya (*kh*), VB-15 Uhambo (*mb*), VB-16 Yophukile ifestile (*ph*), and VB-17 Ncedani (*nc*). The remainder of this section will investigate whether this trend of explicit phonics introduction continues within the main body of the texts.

As done for both the *Siyakhula* and *Izinga Eliphezulu* series previously, Table 14 below looks at the averages and total numbers of linguistic features within the *Vula Bula* texts that are believed to be the influential factors when children are learning to decode and read fluently.

VULA BULA READERS 1-20										
Reader	Number of words	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Average number of letters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Number of 2-letter consonant digraphs and blends	Number of 3-letter consonant blends			
VB-1	9	8	1.1	3.9	1.9	0	0			
VB-2	10	8	1.3	3.8	2.0	0	0			
VB-3	9	8	1.1	4.4	2.2	0	0			
VB-4	8	7	1.1	5.6	2.9	0	0			
VB-5	9	9	1.0	6.2	3.1	0	0			
VB-6	14	14	1.0	7.7	3.9	0	0			
VB-7	9	8	1.1	4.8	2.4	0	0			
VB-8	21	14	1.5	6.2	3.1	1	0			
VB-9	22	10	2.2	6.7	3.4	2	0			
<b>VB-10</b>	34	15	2.3	6.0	3.1	1	0			
<b>VB-11</b>	34	11	3.1	6.1	3.4	0	0			
VB-12	35	19	1.8	6.6	3.4	3	0			
VB-13	90	38	2.4	5.4	2.9	2	0			
VB-14	49	17	2.9	5.2	2.5	5	0			
VB-15	44	28	1.6	8.7	3.9	4	0			
VB-16	93	24	3.9	5.6	2.8	3	0			
<b>VB-17</b>	95	26	3.7	5.5	3.1	2	1			
<b>VB-18</b>	98	37	2.6	6.6	3.1	6	0			
VB-19	77	37	2.1	6.5	3.1	6	0			
VB-20	115	34	3.4	6.9	3.7	7	0			
Total	875	372	41.2	118.4	59.9	42	1			
Average	N/A	N/A	2.1	5.9	3.0	2.1	0.1			

Table 14 Vula Bula readers: breakdown of number of words, sentences, letters, syllables and consonant combinations

Averages were not appropriate for some of the features above because of the intended progressive, developmental nature of the reading scheme; deliberately shorter, earlier readers cannot be compared with the longer, later readers. What is immediately evident is the low number of consonant combinations in this series. A more detailed comparison of this feature in all three series will follow in §5.4.

The following subsections examine the *Vula Bula* texts in detail in terms of the words and sentences, number of letters per word, number of syllables per word, and the kinds of phonics covered in each reader. This analysis of salient features of isiXhosa orthography will theoretically gauge whether this would be an appropriate reader series for children learning to read in isiXhosa.

### **5.3.1** Number of words and sentences

In the first eight Vula Bula texts, almost no punctuation is used. One or two words are placed on each page, without any capital letters or full stops to identify the beginning and end of sentences. In such cases, a word or string of words on each individual page has been defined as a 'sentence'. Progression in terms of text length is not clearly delineated in the programme, so three sections of proposed difficulty levels were drawn from the in-depth text analysis. The texts in VB-1 to VB-7 contain from 8 to 14 words, and 7-14 sentences, which is an average of 1.1 words per sentence. We know this is possible due to the agglutinative and conjunctive nature of isiXhosa, where one word can structurally comprise a whole sentence. However, upon closer inspection, especially in the first few readers, the words are imperative forms of verbs and not full morphological sentences. This is not grammatically incorrect; it is the equivalent of giving a command, for example, Havi! (Don't!) or Coca! (Clean!). VB-8 to VB-15 contain from 21 to 49 words and 10-28 sentences, except for VB-13 which has 90 words and 38 sentences. This is an average of 2.2 words per sentence. It may be conjectured that the VB-13 text is particularly long because it consolidates and practises single alphabet sounds before the texts containing consonant blends and digraphs are introduced. It might also be due to the use of direct speech in the story, which automatically makes sentences longer. VB-16 to VB-20 contain from 93 to 115 words and 24-37 sentences, with an average of 3.1 words per sentence. Text length progression is therefore evident. These low averages or 1.1, 2.2 and 3.1 words per sentence clearly illustrate the agglutinating, conjunctive nature of isiXhosa orthography, but also that it is possible to monitor number of words and keep sentences short in beginner readers.

<i>Vula Bula</i> readers	VB-1 to VB-7	VB-8 to VB-15	VB-16 to VB-20
Total number of words per sentence	7.7	17.8	15.7
Average number of words per sentence	1.3	2.2	3.1

Table 15 Average number of words per sentence in Vula Bula

### 5.3.1.1 Punctuation

Punctuation usage is developmental but not evenly incremental. The texts in VB-1 to VB-8 contain no punctuation, except for one or two exclamation marks. Then from VB-9 onwards, capital letters (at the beginning of sentences, for names of people, and for emphasis), full stops, exclamation marks, hyphens, commas and ellipsis are all used. From VB-12 question marks are used, and from VB-17 speech marks are used. It is interesting that exclamation marks are used before full stops, but understandable given the grammatical structure of the verbs in the earlier readers, where the imperative form is repeatedly utilised, for example, *Hayi!* (Don't!) or *Coca!* (Clean!).

### 5.3.2 Number of syllables per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 3.0 syllables per word. The lowest average number of syllables appears in the VB-1 text at 1.9, and the highest average number of syllables appears in the VB-6 and VB-15 texts at 3.9. There is no clear progression of syllable building; although VB-1 contains only 1- and 2-syllable words, and VB-2 contains only 1-, 2- and 3-syllable words, in most texts there are words containing from one to five or six syllables. Across the 20 readers, only one 7-syllable word appears in VB-19 (*a-wu-ka-ndi-fu-ma-ni*).

Multisyllabic words are a natural feature of conjunctive orthographies, which makes it unsurprising that they appear in even the earliest readers, evidenced by the inclusion of a 3-syllable word in VB-2 (*i-ne-ne*), a 4-syllable word in VB-3 (*i-ka-wu-si*), and 4- and 5-syllable words in VB-4 (*i-zi-ko-lo, zi-va-li-we, ku-co-ke-ki-le*). It appears that at word and sentence level, meaningful writing in an agglutinative language like isiXhosa cannot avoid the inclusion of polysyllabic words. This is because whole sentences can be denoted by a single word, for example *kucokekile!* in VB-4 (it's all clean!) and *sukudubula!* (don't shoot!) in VB-5. In VB-9, the conjunctive nature of isiXhosa is clearly illustrated with the usage of different forms of the root imperative verb form *jika*: *jika* (turn), *ujikeleza* (the roundabout), *uyajika* (it is turning), *ndisajikeleza* (I am still turning), *isajikeleza* (it is still turning). Significantly, the imperative form is mainly used in Readers VB-1 to VB-8, for example *bala* (count) in VB-1, *vula* (open) and *vala* (close) in VB-3, *baleka* (run) and *yima* (stop) in VB-5, *lala/lalani* (go to sleep) and *vukani* (wake up) in VB-6, *zoba* (draw) and *sika* (cut) in VB-7, and *mamela/mamelani* (listen) in VB-8. It may be conjectured that this grammatical form is used because it precludes the addition of a prefix or multiple prefixes on the verb form, thereby avoiding lengthy conjunctive

verb structure in the earlier readers. Increasing syllable counts often suggest a gradual increase in morphological complexity in isiXhosa and this is avoided in the *Vula Bula* readers, in addition to being phonically simpler.

### **5.3.3** Number of letters per word

Across the 20 texts, there is an average number of 5.9 letters per word, whereas the other two series had an average of about 7 letters per word (see §5.1.3 and §5.2.3). VB-2 contains the lowest average number of letters at 3.8 and VB-15 contains the highest average number of letters per word at 8.7. After the first three readers, there is no clear progression of extended word length; in most texts, words comprise from 5.2 to 6.9 letters. It appears that early reading texts in isiXhosa, unlike disjunctive orthographies like English or Sesotho, will contain words averaging about six letters. As we saw in §5.1.4.1 and §5.2.4.1, the other two series used far more digraphs and blends in their earlier readers whereas *Vula Bula* attempts to avoid the inclusion of difficult phonics in the beginning. Orthographically, consonant combinations can be 2-5 letters long in isiXhosa, therefore avoiding such phonic structures may explain why the *Vula Bula* series has fewer letters per word on average.

### **5.3.4** Phonics analysis

This section looks specifically at the single alphabet letter sounds, the single consonant -m-sound/syllable, double vowels, consonant blends, digraphs and trigraphs found in the *Vula Bula* phonics programme.

### 5.3.4.1 Single alphabet letter sounds

According to the *Vula Bula* programme, learners are introduced to two new single alphabet letter sounds in each of the first 13 readers (and 13 one-week learning cycles). They are only expected to decode and read texts made up of words containing single letter sounds, i.e. no consonant blends or digraphs. The following letter sounds are taught and practised explicitly in the VB-1 to VB-13 texts (for the full overview of the phonic structures introduced in these readers, see Table 13, §5.3):

Vula Bula reader	Targeted phonics	Vula Bula reader	Targeted phonics
1. Bala	b, a	8. Mamela	m, y
2. Hayi	h, i	9. Jika	g, j
3. Vula vala	v, u	10. Umnikelo	p, r
4. Coca	с, о	11. Utata usele nosana	d, t
5. Baleka	k, e	12. Sebeza	f, q
6. Lala	l, n	13. Lelikabani eli vili?	w, x
7. Zoba usike	S. Z		

Table 16 Targeted phonics in the first 13 Vula Bula readers

From VB-1 to VB-7, all texts are made up entirely of words containing single alphabet letter sounds. Simple consonant-vowel (CV) patterned syllables are used to build words, for example *ba, la, ha, na, va, ka, ca, ma, ye, ke, le, se, me, yi, si, ki, zi, ni, lo, co, ko, zo, vu, ku, su, bu* and *fu*, in line with accepted pedagogic phonics instruction in Nguni languages (§2.4.1). It is notable that the VB-11 text, containing 11 sentences of 34 words (with an average of 3.4 syllables per word), comprises only words made up of single alphabet letter sounds that follow a regular (V)CVCV format. This proves that it is possible to construct a whole story text using words that do not contain consonant blends or digraphs. The absence of consonant blends and digraphs in early readers also directly contributes to the reduced number of letters per word.

### **5.3.4.2** Consonant blends and digraphs

Table 17 to follow summarises how consonant blends and digraphs have been used in the first 20 texts in the *Vula Bula* series. A similar table could not be created for the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series because, although it claims to introduce phonics in a structured programme, the whole language approach involves analytic phonics, which does not curtail the occurrence of the numerous complex consonant combinations which are apparent in all those reader texts. Table 17 for *Vula Bula* clearly shows the avoidance of complex consonant combinations in the early readers in the series, and then a clear incremental introduction thereafter:

Reader	Number of 2-letter consonant blends	Number of 3-letter consonant blends	Blends for targeted learning	New consonant blends	Revised consonant blends
VB-1	0	0	0	0	0
VB-2	0	0	0	0	0
VB-3	0	0	0	0	0
VB-4	0	0	0	0	0
VB-5	0	0	0	0	0
VB-6	0	0	0	0	0
VB-7	0	0	0	0	0
VB-8	1	0	0	1 (nd)	0
VB-9	2	0	0	2 (nd, kh)	0
VB-10	1	0	0	1 (nk)	0
VB-11	0	0	0	0	0
VB-12	3	0	0	3 (nd, hl, th)	0
VB-13	2	0	0	2 (nk, hl)	0
VB-14	5	0	2 (hl, kh)	3 (nk, ph, zw)	0
VB-15	4	0	2 (mb, ng)	1 (nd)	1 (kh)
VB-16	3	0	2 (bh, ph)	1 (nd)	0
VB-17	2	1	2 (nc, th)	1 (khw)	0
VB-18	6	0	2 (nz, sh)	1 (nd)	3 (kh, ng, ph)
VB-19	6	0	2 (dl, nd)	2 (nk, yh)	2 (ng, sh)
VB-20	7	0	2 (nk, ty)	1 (dw)	4 (kh, ng, ph, nd)

Table 17 Vula Bula breakdown of consonant blends and digraphs

One of the prominent features of the *Vula Bula* series is the clarity of its synthetic phonics programme. Where a story requires the inclusion of a word with a more complex phonics structure, this word is introduced and taught as a sight word, while maintaining a phonological decoding approach to all other words in the text.

An example of a consonant blend or digraph being taught as a sight prefix or sight word happens in VB-8, where the **nd** consonant blend appears in the word *ndifuna* (I want). In this case, *ndi*- (I) is introduced and taught as a sight prefix (*isimaphambili*), meaning that at this time the children learn to recognise the whole prefix by sight instead of trying to sound it out. In VB-9, the word *kakhulu* (very) containing the **kh** consonant digraph is introduced as a sight word (*amagama abawabona njalo*); in VB-10 and VB-13, the word *enkosi* (thank you), containing the **nk** blend, is taught as a sight word; in VB-12, the words *futhi* (again) and *ihlebo* (secret), containing the digraphs **th** and **hl**, are also taught as sight words. In this way, the learners are incidentally introduced to certain consonant blends and digraphs in these early readers through the rote learning of sight prefixes and sight words. These blends and digraphs are common to isiXhosa orthography and are explicitly introduced later in the organised phonics programme in VB-14 (**kh** and **hl**), VB-17 (**th**), VB-19 (**nd**) and VB-20 (**nk**).

From VB-14 to VB-20, two new consonant digraphs or blends are introduced in each text. The following blends and digraphs are taught and practised explicitly for decoding purposes:

Reader	Targeted phonics
14. Ekhaya	hl, kh
15. Uhambo	mb, ng
16. Yophukile ifestile	bh, ph
17. Ncedani!	nc, th
18. Uphi uZinzi?	nz, sh
19. Sidlala undize	dl, nd
20. Sityiwe isonka	nk, ty

Table 18 Targeted phonics in Vula Bula readers 14-20

Each text includes a number of words containing the targeted phonic structures. For example, VB-15 introduces and teaches the consonant blends **mb** and **ng**. Words containing each blend are used repeatedly in the text (*uhambo*, *ndiyahamba*, *lohambo*, *siyahamba*, *sihamba*, *ohambo*, *sizakuhamba*; *ngomso*, *ndiyalungisa*, *ngololiwe*, *ngomoya*). All other words are made up of single letter sounds, except for *kakhulu* (**kh**) and the sight prefixes *ndi-*, *ndiya-* and *ndine-* (**nd**), which the learners have encountered before. In keeping with the practice of the previous texts, these words are introduced again as sight words and sight prefixes, as the learners would not yet have been taught to decode these sounds phonically. Similarly, the 3-letter consonant blend

**khw** is introduced in VB-17 in the sight word *ukhwela* and significantly, this is the only time a 3-letter consonant blend is used in all 20 readers.

This patterning shows an incremental, systematic introduction to isiXhosa phonics. In VB-18, the learners are required to read the word *ndinguZinzi* (*nd*, *ng*, *nz*), containing three different blends. Words are starting to contain more and more syllables beginning with consonant blends and digraphs. This means that children learning to read in isiXhosa are expected to decode words containing multiple consonant blends and digraphs from early on, even if a synthetic approach is attempted when creating the phonics within the readers.

### 5.3.4.3 The single consonant -m- sound/syllable

Usually isiXhosa follows an open syllable structure of consonant-vowel (CV), however /m/ is permitted to appear in a coda position in a syllable, for example in the word *wam*. This is sometimes called 'stand-alone m'. The single consonant *-m-* sound in the code position/syllable is found for the first time in VB-12 in the word *uyambona*. It also appears in VB-15 in the word *ngomso*, in VB-18 in the word *ngumsebenzi*, in VB-19 in words like *ngumdlalo*, *omnandi* and *mna*, and in VB-20 in words like *umnumzana*, *sombhako*, *wemkala* and *ukummema*. Interestingly, the programme does not include this sound as a phonic structure that needs explicit instruction, yet it is the only consonant that does not always form a blend or digraph with the following consonant. Instead of introducing it in synthetic phonics, words with coda position *-m* are often introduced as sight words in the first few readers (Table 13, §5.3). This may be appropriate as these words tend to be high frequency, often function words as opposed to content words, for example *wam*, *lwam*, *lam*, *zam* (my).

### **5.3.4.4 Double vowels**

The VB-10 text introduces words containing double vowels: *aa* in *maapile* (apples) and *ii* in *iipayinapile* (pineapples). These are not new vowel sounds, rather the known short vowel sound /a/ or /i/ is extended to make a longer sound. Perhaps that is why the programme does not include the double vowel as a phonic structure needing overt instruction. In isiXhosa, the double vowels in the orthography are limited and mostly appear to indicate the plural forms of some noun classes and some connected text, for example <u>iipayinapile</u> or <u>neemvakalelo</u>. The phonics programme in *Izinga Eliphezulu* also did not mark double vowels for explicit targeted phonics (§5.1.4.3).

### 5.3.5 Conclusions

The essence of the programme reveals a slow, sequential and structured introduction of phonics. This synthetic approach should work well because of the shallow orthography of isiXhosa and also because it is acknowledged as an educationally sound approach to teaching early reading skills (§2.1). Reading practice should begin with learners decoding words containing single sound (V)CVCV syllables only, without consonant digraphs or blends. Because isiXhosa words follow a (V)CVCV pattern, the easiest reading strategy for learners to acquire phoneme to grapheme association skills is likely by teaching them how to sound out phonically regular syllables.

Because a whole language approach was not taken, this series can also teach children how to reflect on individual words for their meaning, especially longer words. Morphology is not covered in the scope of this paper but perhaps the next step towards building fluency in the *Vula Bula* readers is to move away from breaking up words into syllables, to rather breaking up words into larger chunks. This means that in later readers, longer words can be broken up by keeping the root word intact, for example *u-ya-m-thanda* instead of *u-ya-m-tha-nda*, which will enable learners to focus more easily on meaning-making during reading.

# **5.4** Cross analysis of all three Grade 1 isiXhosa reader series

The following comparative analysis will show that if texts are directly translated from the original language (English), and also have to match the artwork commissioned for the original language, then it is unlikely that the newly translated texts will maintain the same natural phonics progression at the appropriate reading level, particularly if the two languages do not share the same orthographic features. In that case, phonic development will be incidental (analytic) rather than incremental and systematic (synthetic).

As in the previous three individual analyses, this cross analysis will compare the following features: 1) number of words per reader, 2) number of sentences per reader, 3) average number of words per sentence, 4) average number of letters per word, 5) average number of syllables per word, 6) number of 2-letter consonant blends per reader, and 7) number of 3-letter consonant blends per reader. Additional linguistic features such as the stand-alone -m-

sound/syllable, double vowels, and borrowed sounds are not compared in this section. This is because the focus is on the far more frequent occurrence of consonant digraphs and blends, and because none of the three series singles out these elements in its phonics programme, where one existed.

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
lzinga Eliphezulu	25	36	29	38	56	52	41	34	44	58	49	102	83	114	140	135	67	180	182	278
Siyakhula	23	25	34	33	23	22	24	20	34	16	20	21	46	29	48	28	31	21	42	27
Vula Bula	9	10	9	8	9	14	9	21	22	34	34	35	90	49	44	93	95	98	77	115

### 5.4.1 Comparison of number of words per reader per series

Table 19 Comparison of number of words per reader across series

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Vula Bula* series both show a clear increase in text length from Reader 1 to Reader 20. *Izinga Eliphezulu* progresses from 25 words in IE-1 to 278 words in IE-20. The *Izinga Eliphezulu* series contains more text as it has 16-page readers as opposed to the *Siyakhula* and *Vula Bula* series which have 8-page readers. *Vula Bula* progresses from 9 words in VB-1 to 115 words in VB-20. There are no established norms in South Africa for the optimal length of a Grade 1 level isiXhosa text; however, for children to make this leap in the space of just 20 short books is overly optimistic. From a pedagogical point of view, it is better for novice readers to have lots of practice with shorter texts, and then gradually build their reading stamina and confidence to manage more pages, more words and more sentences. The length of the *Siyakhula* reader texts is more realistic, although more structured progression should be considered, with clear levelling, and perhaps even longer texts towards the end. The salient point here is that 20 readers for the year is insufficient, as children would not have been exposed to enough text to become fluent readers. Grade 1 children should be given enough levelled texts for everyday independent reading practice; reading schemes with so few titles cannot provide this.

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
lzinga Eliphezulu	8	8	11	18	15	13	12	10	13	16	17	32	37	20	22	28	13	33	37	44
Siyakhula	8	7	7	7	7	10	7	8	19	10	10	7	13	10	7	9	11	7	15	7
Vula Bula	8	8	8	7	9	14	8	14	10	15	11	19	38	17	28	24	26	37	37	34

### 5.4.2 Comparison of number of sentences per reader per series

Table 20 Comparison of number of sentences per reader across series

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* reader texts range from 8 to 44 sentences. The *Vula Bula* reader texts range from 7 to 38 sentences. The *Siyakhula* reader texts range randomly from 7 to 19 sentences. As stated above, the *Siyakhula* readers are more consistent in terms of optimal text length, but systematic progression is important to build learner confidence, to hone reading skills, and to assess reading progress. It should be noted in this section and the previous section §5.4.1 that the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers contain more pages than the other two series (16 pages per reader versus 8 pages, respectively). Although some pages are dedicated to artwork, it is acknowledged that *Izinga Eliphezulu* comprises more words and sentences because it has more pages in which to do so. Again, it is debatable whether 16 pages is a suitable length for a first reader in Grade 1. The other two series, *Siyakhula* and *Vula Bula* seem to be more appropriate, but as noted, *Siyakhula* does not include progressive texts that can measure the learner's reading progress.

5.4.3.	Comparison of average number of words per sentence per 1	reader per
series		

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
lzinga Eliphezulu	3.1	4.5	2.6	2.1	3.7	4.0	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.6	2.9	3.2	2.2	5.7	6.4	4.8	5.2	5.5	4.9	6.3	4.0
Siyakhula	2.9	3.6	4.9	4.7	3.3	2.2	3.4	2.5	1.8	1.6	2.0	3.0	3.5	2.9	6.9	3.1	2.8	3.0	2.8	3.9	3.2
Vula Bula	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.5	2.2	2.3	3.1	1.8	2.4	2.9	1.6	3.9	3.7	2.6	2.1	3.4	2.1

Table 21 Comparison of average number of words per sentence per reader across series

If we add up the average number of words per sentence per reader for all 20 readers, and divide the total by 20, then the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers contain an average number of 4 words per sentence, the *Siyakhula* readers contain an average number of 3.2 words per sentence, and the

*Vula Bula* readers contain an average number of 2.1 words per sentence. The average number of words per sentence does increase in both the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Vula Bula* series, as these readers are levelled. However, the number of words selected per sentence still appears random: IE-13 averages 2.2 words per sentence, while IE-14 averages 5.7 words per sentence; VB-11 averages 3.1 words per sentence, while VB-12 averages 1.8 words per sentence. In the *Siyakhula* readers, the average number of words per sentence fluctuates from one title to the next in no apparent order. In conclusion, one might say that the *Siyakhula* readers are easier than the *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers because overall they contain shorter sentences with fewer words, and the *Vula Bula* readers are easier than the *Siyakhula* readers for the same reason. But knowing the agglutinative, conjunctive nature of isiXhosa orthography, we cannot say that this makes the texts more easily readable: one or two long words in a sentence might be far more challenging to read than four or five short words.

**5.4.4** Comparison of average number of syllables per word per reader per series

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
lzinga Eliphezulu	2.3	2.3	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.9	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.0	2.8	4.0	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.3
Siyakhula	3.0	2.8	3.5	3.5	2.7	2.3	3.2	2.9	2.8	2.6	3.4	3.8	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.7	3.1	3.7	3.7	3.0	3.2
Vula Bula	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.9	3.1	3.9	2.4	3.1	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.4	2.9	2.5	3.9	2.8	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.7	3.0

Table 22 Comparison of average number of syllables per word per reader across series

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers contain an average number of 3.3 syllables per word, the *Siyakhula* readers contain an average number of 3.2 syllables per word, and the *Vula Bula* readers contain an average number of 3.0 syllables per word. Although there are many oneand two-syllable words in all three series, the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Vula Bula* series also contain words of up to seven syllables, and the *Siyakhula* series contains words of up to six syllables. This is a significant finding. It means that, even in early readers, learners will have to decode words made up of about three syllables. This is commensurate with isiXhosa orthography, and proves that teaching children to read in isiXhosa requires targeted practice in the development of their syllabification skills. For materials developers, it also means that even the simplest of texts will mostly be made up of words containing at least three syllables.

**5.4.5.** Comparison of average number of letters per word per reader per series

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
lzinga Eliphezulu	5.2	5.4	7.5	7.0	6.6	7.8	7.5	8.3	8.0	6.8	8.3	6.8	7.9	6.7	6.5	6.2	8.3	7.1	7.1	7.2	7.1
Siyakhula	6.6	6.3	8.4	8.1	5.9	5.4	6.9	6.7	6.2	6.1	7.0	8.2	7.5	7.1	7.4	6.9	6.8	8.4	7.8	7.0	7.0
Vula Bula	3.9	3.8	4.4	5.6	6.2	7.7	4.8	6.2	6.7	6.0	6.1	6.6	5.4	5.2	8.7	5.6	5.5	6.6	6.5	6.9	5.9

Table 23 Comparison of average number of letters per word per reader across series

The *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers contain an average number of 7.1 letters per word, the *Siyakhula* readers contain an average number of 7.0 letters per word, and the *Vula Bula* readers contain an average number of 5.9 letters per word. It is interesting that *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* have such a similar average number of letters per word per reader. One might guess that this is because both series follow a whole language approach to reading. The *Vula Bula* readers, on the other hand, are conspicuously shorter, which might be as a result of the more careful, synthetic phonics-based, developmental approach to reading (§2.1.1.5). While 1-, 2- and 3-letter words can be found in all these series (e.g. *O!, lo, bo, olu, wam, lam, cum, ezi*), short words like these are infrequent, and are mostly exclamations or pronouns. This finding means that, even in very early readers, learners must be able to decode words made up of about 6-7 letters, which links to the previous finding of words averaging three syllables in length. Again, this is appropriate for isiXhosa orthography. These findings are summarised below:

SERIES	Total average number of letters per word	Total average number of syllables per word
Izinga Eliphezulu	7.1	3.3
Siyakhula	7.0	3.2
Vula Bula	5.9	3.0

Table 24 Total averages of number of letters and syllables per word across all three series

# **5.4.6** Comparison of number of 2-letter consonant blends used per reader per series

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
lzinga Eliphezulu	6	10	10	12	14	13	14	14	14	15	15	17	18	15	18	21	18	15	24	27	310
Siyakhula	11	12	12	8	6	5	9	10	9	9	5	12	14	8	13	4	15	6	6	12	186
Vula Bula	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	3	2	5	4	3	2	6	6	7	42

Table 25 Comparison of number of 2-letter consonant blends used per reader across series

As previously mentioned, the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* series are translations of original English texts, which means they follow a whole language approach (§2.1.2). Translations necessitate this kind of approach, as storyline and artwork constraints mean that little can be done to manipulate content words to better suit dissimilar orthographic structures. The *Vula Bula* series, on the other hand, was developed using a synthetic phonics-based approach, which levels texts according to decodable difficulty. Table 25 above shows the prevalence of 2-letter consonant blends and digraphs used in the three series. It is significant that every single *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* text contains consonant blends: IE-1 has the fewest with 6, and S-16 has the fewest with 4. *Vula Bula*, on the other hand, contains 8 texts with no consonant blends at all, and 7 other texts with fewer than 4 in each.

Making a valid comparison is unviable because the text length per reader in each series is uneven (§5.4.1). A better representative sample of matching text length could achieve a more accurate result by comparing *Siyakhula* readers 1-20 with a total of 567 words, *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers 1-12 with a total of 564 words, and *Vula Bula* readers 1-17 with a total of 585 words. Table 26 that follows clearly shows the result of the two different approaches; whole language versus phonics:

Series	Total number of words	Total number of 2-letter consonant blends and digraphs used
Izinga Eliphezulu readers 1-12	564	154
Siyakhula readers 1-20	567	186
Vula Bula readers 1-17	585	23

Table 26 Total number of 2-letter consonant blends and digraphs across the same number of words in different series

Of the 564 words in *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers 1-12, there are 154 instances of 2-letter consonant blends or digraphs: a prevalence of just over 27%. Of the 567 words in the 20 *Siyakhula* readers, there are 186 instances of 2-letter consonant blends or digraphs: a prevalence of 33%. Of the 585 words in *Vula Bula* readers 1-17, there are only 23 instances of 2-letter consonant blends or digraphs: a prevalence of below 4%. *Vula Bula's* synthetic phonics approach ensures phonically regular texts, where any consonant blends or digraphs are either taught explicitly, or are introduced in sight words or sight prefixes until the mechanics of decoding that particular blend or digraph has been mastered.

**5.4.7** Comparison of number of 3-letter consonant blends used per reader per series

SERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
lzinga Eliphezulu	0	2	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	2	4	2	7	6	2	3	7	5	10	68
Siyakhula	2	1	2	4	0	1	1	2	3	0	2	2	1	4	4	0	1	0	1	3	34
Vula Bula	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Table 27 Comparison of number of 3-letter consonant blends used per reader across series

Table 27 above again shows the considerable difference in phonic difficulty, this time in the incidence of 3-letter consonant blends used in the three series. In the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series, IE-1 is the only text that does not contain a 3-letter consonant blend. The *Siyakhula* readers fare better with four of the 20 texts containing no 3-letter consonant blends. In the *Vula Bula* series, only VB-17 contains a 3-letter consonant blend. Interestingly, the word *ukhwela* (climb) included in this text with the **khw** blend is key to the story, which is about various characters climbing a tree, and it is introduced as a sight word.

Series	Total number of words	Total number of 3-letter consonant combinations used
Izinga Eliphezulu readers 1-12	564	26
Siyakhula readers 1-20	567	34
Vula Bula readers 1-17	585	1

Table 28 Total number of trigraphs/blends across the same number of words in different series

The 564 words in *Izinga Eliphezulu* readers 1-12 contain 26 instances of 3-letter consonant blends: a prevalence of 4.6%. The 567 words in the 20 *Siyakhula* readers contain 34 instances of 3-letter consonant blends: a prevalence of 6%. The 585 words in *Vula Bula* readers 1-17 contain just one instance of a 3-letter consonant blend, which shows that when a synthetic phonics approach is used, rather than a whole language or analytic phonics approach, then more complicated consonant combinations can be avoided until they need to be explicitly taught.

Reflecting on the above, it is understandable why the words in the *Vula Bula* readers are on average about one letter shorter than the words in the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* readers. The frequent inclusion of 2- and 3-letter consonant combinations will naturally make words longer; likewise fewer blends mean shorter words in terms of orthographic letter length (not shorter syllable length).

### 5.5 Discussion and conclusions

For the purpose of this discussion section, below is an example of a reader text taken from each of the three reading schemes. These texts were chosen because they illustrate the main differences between texts appearing at about the same time in each reading scheme (IE-8, S-9 and VB-11), and also because they each contain the same number of words (34). The three texts alongside each other show how markedly different texts can look in isiXhosa when three different approaches are taken, namely no salient approach (*Siyakhula*), a whole language or analytic phonics approach (*Izinga Eliphezulu*) and a synthetic phonics approach (*Vula Bula*):

IE-8 Amaxesha Onyaka	S-9 Kusile!	VB-11 Utata usele nosana
Ndihlala eRhawutini. Ehlobo kushushu. Ehlobo ndinxiba iimpahla ezipholileyo. Ekwindla kukho umoya. Ekwindla umoya uyandityhiliza.	Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Khwaphululu, utata. Vuka! Vuka, Vilavotyo, vuka! Vuka, nantso iwotshi ikhala.	Utata usele nosana. Usana luyalila. Utata uyadanisa nosana. Usana lusalila. Utata uculela usana. Usana lusalila.
Ebusika kuyabanda. Ebusika ndinxiba iimpahla ezishushu ndifudumale. Entlakohlaza akubandi kodwa akushushu. Entlakohlaza ndithanda ukubukela iintyatyambo. Elona xesha ndilithanda kakhulu kusehlobo!	Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Ithi: "Kusile! Vuka! Vuka!" Ntaa amehlo, uVilavotyo. Nwabu-nwabu, ngoku, uVilavotyo. Cum, uVilavotyo. Kusile kwakhona	Utata unika usana ipere. Usana lusalila. Utata unika usana ubisi. Usana luyekile ukulila. Usana ludiniwe luyalala notata udiniwe uyalala!

Figure 15 Example of same level reader across series

IE-8 Amaxe <mark>sh</mark> a Onyaka	S-9 Kusile!	VB-11 Utata usele nosana
Ndihlala eRhawutini. Ehlobo kushushu. Ehlobo ndinxiba iimpahla ezipholileyo. Ekwindla kukho umoya. Ekwindla umoya uyandityhiliza. Ebusika kuyabanda. Ebusika kuyabanda. Ebusika ndinxiba iimpahla ezishushu ndifudumale. Entlakohlaza akubandi kodwa akushushu. Entlakohlaza ndithanda ukubukela iintyatyambo. Elona xesha ndilithanda kakhulu kusehlobo!	Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Khwaphululu, utata. Vuka! Vuka, Vilavotyo, vuka! Vuka, nantso iwotshi ikhala. Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Ithi: "Kusile! Vuka! Vuka!" Ntaa amehlo, uVilavotyo. Nwabu-nwabu, ngoku, uVilavotyo. Cum, uVilavotyo. Kusile kwakhona	Utata usele nosana. Usana luyalila. Utata uyadanisa nosana. Usana lusalila. Utata uculela usana. Usana lusalila. Utata unika usana ipere. Usana lusalila. Utata unika usana ubisi. Usana luyekile ukulila. Usana ludiniwe luyalala notata udiniwe uyalala!

Below are the same texts, with all the complex consonant combinations highlighted:

Figure 16 Example of same level reader across series (digraphs and blends highlighted)

Reader	Number of words	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Average number of letters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Number of 2-letter consonant combina- tions used	Number of 3-letter consonant combina- tions used
IE-8 Amaxesha Onyaka	34	10	3.4	8.3	3.6	14	4
S-9 Kusile!	34	19	1.8	6.2	2.8	9	3
VB-11 Utata usele nosana	34	11	3.1	6.1	3.4	0	0

Table 29 Comparison of linguistic and orthographic features across similar text length and level

IE-8 and VB-11 have a similar number of sentences, and a similar average of number of words per sentence. There are far more sentences in S-9 because many sentences comprise of just one word. This also accounts for the low average of 1.8 words per sentence. S-9 and VB-11 have almost the same average number of letters per word, while IE-8 has longer words with an average of 8.3 letters per word. The level of reading difficulty is greatest with the IE-8 text because of the number of 2- and 3-letter consonant combinations it contains. The S-9 text is easier as there is also a lot of repetition of words. However, there are still words that pose a challenge to young readers as they encounter unfamiliar blends. The VB-11 text is the easiest, simply because every word follows a (V)-CV-CV pattern. In other words, as long as children know their alphabet letter sounds, and have had some practice in *ba-be-bi-bo-bu* syllable patterning, they should be able to decode every word in this text. This is made possible when a text is carefully written to fit into a structured, synthetic phonics programme. Fig. 15 and 16 and Table 29 above show that there are some elements of the agglutinative isiXhosa language that are inescapable, such as the average number of syllables that make up words in isiXhosa (about 3 syllables per word on average), and these lengthy words may well be challenging for the early reader. However, the three text examples also show that there are other elements such as phonic structures that can be manipulated in a synthetic manner to make texts more easily decodable for the beginner reader.

One of the core orthographic features of isiXhosa written language is the use of agglutinating morphemes (§2.4.2). This means that long words need to be broken down into smaller, more meaningful units, especially in cases where one word contains the equivalent meaning of a whole complex sentence in English. We know that words are best decoded syllabically in African languages (§2.4.1), and that this is the most natural strategy of word segmentation

when reading. However, because isiXhosa uses an alphabetic script and not a syllabary, we also know that the graphemes in syllables are going to be important in the written form. In addition, the orthography of the language is shallow and transparent, hence phonics should be easier to grasp due to the unambiguous relationship between graphemes and phonemes. This is another reason why a phonemic approach may be necessary for teaching to read in a language like isiXhosa. Materials developers need to be aware from the outset that while early reader texts in isiXhosa will unavoidably contain multisyllabic words, phonic structures can be simplified to scaffold the development of reading skills in isiXhosa.

This analysis examined several salient orthographic and linguistic features in three Grade 1 isiXhosa early graded reader series. It is clear that elements such as one-word sentences or the polysyllabic structures of words are likely an undeviating standard of isiXhosa orthography. Based on all the analyses conducted, it would appear that the above features will manifest in isiXhosa readers developed for young children, despite whether a phonics, whole language or combined approach has been taken.

It is evident that the complexity of the phonic structures included in isiXhosa texts determines the level of reading effort required. We know that phonics can progress in terms of difficulty; it is accepted that single alphabet letters are easier to decode than consonant combinations such as 2-letter blends and digraphs, and that these in turn are easier to decode than 3-letter consonant blends and trigraphs. The Izinga Eliphezulu and Siyakhula series assume that Grade 1 early readers already possess alphabetic knowledge and a degree of reading stamina by infusing texts with a large number of complex consonant combinations. This demands a depth of phonic knowledge which learners have had insufficient time to master. Reading programmes such as Izinga Eliphezulu have value in developing vocabulary, but these readers might be more useful at a higher grade level once learners have mastered enough phonic decoding skills to achieve a fairly sophisticated level of reading. In Izinga Eliphezulu, where a more complex consonant blend is targeted, it often does not appear as the only complex phonic structure within the word. The Vula Bula series, on the other hand, tries to incorporate into each text as many words as possible containing just the two phonic blends or digraphs targeted for explicit learning, excluding other phonic blends, which demonstrates a synthetic phonics approach to developing basal readers.

As previously described, the *Izinga Eliphezulu* series attempts a combined whole language and phonics approach, where adherence to the translation of the original English texts necessitates a less systematic and more analytic or embedded introduction of complex consonant combinations. At this point, it is also worth noting that a phonics approach in isiXhosa, be it analytic or synthetic, is unlike the same approach in English. A key difference between phonics instruction in English and phonics instruction in a language like isiXhosa is the placement of the target sound. In English, a disjunctive orthography, learning can be focused on a target sound at the beginning of a word as in *cat*, *pen*, *frog*, *drip*, *shop*, *chin*, or at the end of a word as in *sand*, *bell*, *test*, *rich*, *rash*, *catch*. In addition, the teaching of onsets and rimes in rhyming word families such as *hop*, *mop*, *top* and *dish*, *fish*, *wish* is effective in a disjunctive orthography. Due to the agglutinative, conjunctive nature of isiXhosa orthography, however, it is unpredictable where the target sound will appear in a word once it is placed in a sentence and has affixes attached to it. Even the *Vula Bula* series, with its synthetic phonics approach, does not always place a targeted sound in the initial or second syllable.

Of the three reader series, the first 500 words in *Siyakhula* contain the greatest number of complex consonant structures that learners are expected to decode (Table 26, §5.4.6), clearly showing that the absence of a clear instructional approach is ineffective. It appears that a synthetic phonics approach works best for a transparent language like isiXhosa. The agglutinative nature of the language means that children will inescapably have to come to grips with reading long, polysyllabic words, and phonic regularity will enable them to focus on building decoding stamina. The more complex consonant structures of the language can then be incrementally introduced once syllabification skills have been practised and honed.

However, according to the CAPS (§1.4), the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* reader series would be considered appropriate because the isiXhosa curriculum stipulates that children are required to learn how to decode several complex consonant combinations as early on as Term 1 in Grade 1. This implies that neither the CAPS nor the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* reader series have deconstructed the phonic make-up of the language systematically, and have instead implemented a whole language approach resulting from direct translation from English source texts (even if the English was originally guided by a phonics approach).

From the analysis above, it is evident that when instructional early literacy materials are a direct translation from English and are not adapted to suit another language – especially one with

such a markedly different orthography as isiXhosa – then these texts will inevitably feature words that are significantly above the reading ability level of the novice reader. Research has suggested that in a language like isiXhosa, teaching digraphs and blends before basic alphabet sounds have been mastered can be more detrimental than beneficial in building children's reading confidence and decoding fluency (Saide 2011). Therefore, a structured phonics approach is required, even if it is not necessarily a strictly synthetic one.

# 6. CONCLUSION

Stanovich's analogy of the Biblical term 'Matthew effect' (cited in Cunningham & Stanovich 1998) accurately describes the reading status quo in South Africa's indigenous languages. Poor readers who are less-skilled at decoding and understanding texts, will not read as much as their more skilled peers, and the gap between skilled and poor readers inexorably widens. Many young children begin Grade 1 with limited pre-reading cognitive and perceptual skills. They therefore need extensive reading practice, using appropriate texts, in order to become literate. The home language CAPS suggests a minimum of 20 readers per year in Grade 1 – one reader every two weeks. This is not enough to provide the necessary practice in building the reading fluency and automaticity required for comprehension, and to enable the achievement of the required level of reading competency that leads to later success in all educational subjects.

Exacerbating the problem is the minimal amount of available reading material in African languages, particularly at the Foundation Phase level, where children must learn to be successful readers if they are to achieve academically. Below are the numbers of graded reader series listed for Grades 1-3 in the DBE's National Catalogue for 2011 (the catalogue has not been re-opened for new submissions since):

DBE National Catalo	gue: Foundation Phase graded reader series
Home Language	Number of Graded Reader Series
English	7
Afrikaans	4
IsiZulu	5
IsiXhosa	3
Sesotho	4
Setswana	3
Sepedi	1
Tshivenda	1
Xitsonga	1
IsiNdebele	3 (added to the Grade 1-3 Addendum Catalogue)
Siswati	4 (added to the Grade 1-3 Addendum Catalogue)

First Additional Language	Number of Graded Reader Series
English	7
Afrikaans	4
African languages	0 (no graded readers)

Figure 17 Number of graded reader series across languages in the National Catalogue

It is noteworthy that the languages with only one graded reader series, namely Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga, were amongst the worst performers in PIRLS (§1.2). Also noteworthy is that after the first call for the submission of graded reader series for the National Catalogue in 2011, insufficient reading material received in both Siswati and isiNdebele necessitated a later call for re-submissions in these languages. Two years later, newly developed Siswati and isiNdebele materials were added to the Addendum Catalogue. On closer examination, these readers are versions of the same stories listed in other languages by the same publishers. Evidently a rapid translation exercise transpired.

The striking aspect of this is that translation processes are usually undertaken without cognisance that short, common, easily decodable or high-frequency English words may transmute into considerably longer, multisyllabic words containing several affixes and complex consonant combinations, making a text considerably more challenging to read. The (in)effectiveness of the English-to-African-language translation methodology to produce early grade readers has been somewhat interrogated in this paper. It has been speculated that the way in which early reading materials for young learners in African languages have been developed to date is contributing significantly to the literacy crisis. Approaches are being used for the teaching of reading in African languages that may work successfully in English but which are not well suited to agglutinative languages, and especially not those with conjunctive orthographies.

A whole language approach over a phonics-based approach is not necessarily without merit when teaching children to read, as long as it is systematic. There is a critical need for publishers to produce many more storybooks in African languages to enable children to harness their existing knowledge of life and oral language in order to make meaning, rather than simply decoding the text (Edwards & Ngwaru 2012). Good translations of good stories will serve this purpose, and these do exist on the current National Catalogue booklists. However, if being able to decode text fluently using the reading strategies of phonic synthesis and syllabification is the most crucial literacy skill to learn in Grade 1 – especially in agglutinative, conjunctive African languages – it is proposed that these should form the theoretical basis for developing early graded reader series.

For languages with a transparent orthography, like isiXhosa, teaching reading should focus on instructing children systematically in letter-sound relationships, that is, a phonics approach. With over 80 common consonant blends, digraphs and trigraphs to recognise and decode fluently in isiXhosa, instruction and practice should be delivered in a planned, systematic way. As evidenced by the *Vula Bula* readers, this is a text feature that can be manipulated and controlled to allow the mechanics of reading to be introduced in an incremental, systematic way to ensure sustainable and lasting reading competence.

The agglutinative, conjunctive structure of a language like isiXhosa means that the inclusion of lengthy, multisyllabic words in texts is unavoidable, even in children's earliest readers. It has been shown that even the most thoughtfully planned texts will contain words with an average of three syllables. However, the unrestricted occurrence of lengthy words in the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* Grade 1 reader series proves that direct translation can render texts that are unreasonably demanding on the limited literacy abilities of the young child.

The text analyses in this study adopted a top-down approach, beginning at the sentence and whole word level (remembering that a sentence in isiXhosa can often be just one orthographic word), then moving to the salient structural features that make up a word in isiXhosa. The CVCV structure of isiXhosa meant that syllables were analysed, especially in terms of polysyllabic words. Though the syllable is clearly important for decoding, isiXhosa is written using an alphabetic script, meaning that syllables can be broken down further to the level of the phoneme. It was then analysed whether each series interrogated its texts at this fundamental level and attempted to include words with easier, single letter phonemes and exclude words with more complex consonant combinations in its earlier readers. It has been shown that the presence of many complex consonant combinations cause the number of letters per word to increase as digraphs, trigraphs and blends can comprise from 2-5 graphemes. Coupled with the polysyllabic and agglutinative structure of isiXhosa words, this is a decoding challenge, even at word level. When teaching reading in English, this level of demand is not placed on children in Grade 1, so it is questioned whether the three isiXhosa graded reader series analysed indeed acknowledged key features of the language when producing their story texts.

It is evident from the analyses of the *Izinga Eliphezulu* and *Siyakhula* reader series, and supported by evidence from the other reading series listed on the National Catalogue, that materials developers of beginner readers are not taking cognisance of the level of phonic difficulty of isiXhosa texts. This structural feature cannot continue to be ignored if literacy levels are to improve. The full support of government is needed, and the catalogue needs to be re-opened to allow schools to access newly developed materials that can facilitate greater success in learning to read. With its gradual and systematic introduction of synthetic phonics, combined with the skill of syllabification, the *Vula Bula* reader series appears to grasp what is required in order for children to learn to read in isiXhosa and other agglutinative, conjunctive African languages. The development and wide-spread distribution of readers such as these, together with teacher training in the innovative approach used, has the potential to remedy the literacy malaise that afflicts South Africa.

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# 8. APPENDIX

# **8.1 Detailed text analysis of the** *Izinga Eliphezulu* isiXhosa Grade 1 reader series

# IE-1: Usapho

Lo ndim. Lo ngumama wam. Lo ngutata wam. Lo ngumninawa wam. Lo ngumalume wam. Lo ngumalumekazi wam. Lo ngumakhulu notatomkhulu. Lulo lonke olu usapho lwasekhaya.

- 8 sentences
- 25 words (average of 3.1 words per sentence)
- 129 letters (average of 5.2 letters per word)
- 57 syllables (average of 2.3 syllables per word)
- 6 consonant blends/digraphs: *kh*, *lw*, *nd*, *ng*, *nk*, *ph*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant and consonant digraph: *ngumninawa*, *notatomkhulu*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: ngumakhulu, lwasekhaya
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables (e.g. *ngu-ma-lu-me-ka-zi*)
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops

# IE-2: Ibhola Yam

Jonga ibhola yam. Jonga ibhola ezandleni zam. Jonga ibhola phezu kwentloko yam. Jonga ibhola phambi konyawo lwam. Jonga ibhola phezu kwengalo yam. Jonga ibhola phezu kwedolo lam. Jonga ibhola phezu komnwe wam. Jonga sisonke sidlala ibhola!

- 8 sentences
- 36 words (average of 4.5 words per sentence)
- 196 letters (average of 5.4 letters per word)
- 82 syllables (average of 2.3 syllables per word)
- 10 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dl, kw, lw, mb, ng, nk, nw, ny, ph
- 2 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *ntl*
- Single *m* consonant before a consonant blend: *kom<u>nwe</u>*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *kwentloko*, *phambi*, *kwengalo*
- Words range in length from 1-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation mark

### IE-3: Sizoba Ngemibala

Sizoba ngemibala. Ndizoba ngombala obomvu. Ndizoba ngombala otyheli. Ndizoba ngombala omnyama. Ndizoba ngombala omhlophe. Ndizoba ngombala oluhlaza okwengca. Ndizoba ngombala oluhlaza okwesibhakabhaka. Hayi bo! Iflegi yelizwe lethu! Siyizobile!

### Imibala-bala!

- 11 sentences (including 3 exclamations)
- 29 words (average of 2.6 words per sentence)
- 218 letters (average of 7.5 letters per word)
- 102 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 10 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, hl, kw, mv, nd, ng, ny, ph, th, zw
- 2 consonant clusters: *ngc*, *tyh*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant/consonant blend/digraph: *ngombala*, *omnyama*, *omhlophe*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: omhlophe, okwengca
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: okwesibhakabhaka
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables (e.g. *o-kwe-si-bha-ka-bha-ka*).
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks, hyphen

### IE-4: Iziqhamo

Nantsi ipayinapile enye. Imnandi! Nanga amapere amabini. Amnandi! Nazi ii-orenji ezintathu. Zimnandi! Nazi iibhanana ezine. Zimnandi! Nazi iipopo ezintlanu. Zimnandi! Nazi iipesika ezintandathu. Zimnandi! Nazi iinatshi ezisixhenxe. Zimnandi! Nazi ii-apile ezisibhozo. Zimnandi! Iziqhamo zethu sonke. Mmm... zimnandi kakhulu!

- 18 sentences (including 9 exclamations)
- 38 words (average of 2.1 words per sentence)
- 266 letters (average of 7.0 letters per word)
- 128 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 12 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, kh, nd, ng, nj, nk, nt, nx, ny, qh, th, xh
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: ii
- 3 consonant clusters: *ntl, nts, tsh*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant: *imnandi*, *amnandi*, *zimnandi*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: ezintathu, ezisixhenxe
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ezintandathu*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables (e.g. *i-pa-yi-na-pi-le*).
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks, hyphens, ellipsis

### IE-5: Izilwanyana Zasekhaya

Nazi izilwanyana zasekhaya. Inkomo iyakhala ithi, 'Mhu-u-u. Mhu-u-u.' Inkomo ifuna amanzi. Ibhokhwe iyakhala ithi, 'Mhe-e-e-eh. Mhe-e-e-eh.' Ibhokhwe ifuna amanzi. Ihashe liyakhala lithi, 'Yi-hi-hi-hi. Yi-hi-hi-hi.' Ihashe lifuna amanzi. Ihagu iyakhala ithi, 'Hho-hho-hho i-i-i-i.' Ihagu ifuna amanzi. Isikhukukazi siyakhala sithi, 'Ke-ke-ke-eee, ke-ke.' Isikhukukazi sifuna amanzi. Inja iyakhonkotha ithi, 'Hawu-hawu-hawu.' Inja ifuna amanzi. Umlimi uphendula uthi, 'Shhh! Nanga amanzi!'

- 15 sentences (including 3 one-word animal sounds)
- 56 words (average of 3.7 words per sentence)
- 369 letters (average of 6.6 letters per word)
- 181 syllables (average of 3.2 syllables per word)
- 14 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *hh*, *kh*, *lw*, *mh*, *nd*, *ng*, *nj*, *nk*, *ny*, *nz*, *ph*, *sh*, *th*
- 1 consonant cluster: *khw*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant: *umlimi*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *izilwanyana, uphendula, ibhokhwe*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *iyakhonkotha*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables (e.g. *i-si-khu-ku-ka-zi*).
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and direct speech, full stops, exclamation mark, hyphens, commas, speech marks

#### IE-6: Amakhaya Ethu

Lo nguNomsa. UNomsa uneminyaka elithoba. Lo nguBongani. UBongani uneminyaka esibhozo. UNomsa uhlala esixekweni. UBongani uhlala ezilalini. UNomsa uhlala kufutshane neevenkile ezinkulu. UBongani uhlala kufutshane nevenkile encinci. UNomsa uhlala kufutshane nezakhiwo eziphakamileyo. UBongani uhlala kufutshane nemithi emikhulu. UNomsa uhlala kufutshane neendawo zokudlala oojingi. UBongani uhlala kufutshane nasemlanjeni. UNomsa noBongani bobabini bahlala eMzantsi Afrika.

- 13 sentences
- 52 words (average of 4.0 words per sentence)
- 407 letters (average of 7.8 letters per word)
- 197 syllables (average of 3.8 syllables per word)
- 13 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dl, hl, kh, kw, nc, nd, ng, nj, nk, ny, ph, th
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ee, oo*
- 2 consonant clusters: *nts, tsh*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant: *nguNomsa*, *nasemlanjeni*, *eMzantsi*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: nguBongani, encinci
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables (e.g. *e-zi-pha-ka-mi-le-yo*).
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, names of people and names of places, full stops

### IE-7: Ixesha Lesikolo

Sinxiba iihempe ezimhlophe. Iihempe zethu ziyafana. Sinxiba iibhulukhwe ezimfutshane ezingwevu. Iibhulukhwe zethu ziyafana. Sinxiba iikawusi ezimdaka ngebala. Iikawusi zethu

ziyafana. Sinxiba izihlangu ezimnyama. Izihlangu zethu ziyafana. Sinxiba iijezi ezibomvu. Yho! Sinxiba iijezi zethu kakuhle. Siyinxibile yonke impahla yesikolo. Lixesha lokuya esikolweni!

- 12 sentences (plus one exclamation word)
- 41 words (average of 3.4 words per sentence)
- 308 letters (average of 7.5 letters per word)
- 140 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 14 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, hl, lw, mf, mp, mv, ng, nk, nx, ny, ph, sh, th, yh
- 1 double (long) vowel sound:  $\mathbf{i}$
- 3 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ngw*, *tsh*
- Single *m* consonant before another consonant or consonant blend/digraph: *ezim<u>hl</u>ophe ezim<u>f</u>utshane, <i>ezim<u>d</u>aka, ezim<u>ny</u>ama*
- 5 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ezimhlophe*, *iibhulukhwe*, *ezimfutshane*, *izihlangu*, *impahla*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables (e.g. *e-zi-m-fu-tsha-ne*)
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks

#### IE-8: Amaxesha Onyaka

Ndihlala eRhawutini. Ehlobo kushushu. Ehlobo ndinxiba iimpahla ezipholileyo. Ekwindla kukho umoya. Ekwindla umoya uyandityhiliza. Ebusika kuyabanda. Ebusika ndinxiba iimpahla ezishushu ndifudumale. Entlakohlaza akubandi kodwa akushushu. Entlakohlaza ndithanda ukubukela iintyatyambo. Elona xesha ndilithanda kakhulu kusehlobo!

- 10 sentences
- 34 words (average of 3.4 words per sentence)
- 283 letters (average of 8.3 letters per word)
- 124 syllables (average of 3.6 syllables per word)
- 13 consonant blends/digraphs: *dw*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *mb*, *mp*, *nd*, *nx*, *ph*, *rh*, *sh*, *th*, *ty* (*and ny in the title*)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *ii*
- 4 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *ntl*, *nty*, *tyh*
- 9 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ndihlala, kushushu, ndinxiba, iimpahla, ekwindla, uyandityhiliza, ezishushu, entlakohlaza, akushushu*
- 3 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ndithanda*, *iintyatyambo*, *ndilithanda*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and names of places, full stops, exclamation mark

# IE-9: Siyabumba

Mna newele lam sibumba izilwanyana. NgoMvulo sibumba iinkawu. linkawu zizilwanyana ezincinci. NgoLwesibini sibumba iindlulamthi. lindlulamthi zizilo ezinentamo ezinde. NgoLwesithathu sibumba ookrebe. Ookrebe bade bayarhubuluza. NgoLwesine sibumba iingonyama. lingonyama zizilo ezinamandla. NgoLwesihlanu sibumba iindlovu. lindlovu zizilo ezinkulu kakhulu. NgoMgqibelo siya e-Zoo. Siba nemini emnandi kakhulu!

- 13 sentences
- 44 words (average of 3.4 words per sentence)
- 351 letters (average of 8.0 letters per word)
- 154 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 14 consonant blends/digraphs: gq, hl, kh, kr, lw, mb, nc, nd, ng, nk, nt, ny, rh, th
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ü*, *oo*
- 1 consonant cluster: *ndl*
- 8 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *izilwanyana*, *zizilwanyana*, *ezincinci*, *ngoLwesibini*, *iindlulamthi*, *ngoLwesine*, *iingonyama*, *ngoMgqibelo*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ngoLwesihlanu*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs: ngoLwesithathu
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, names of the days of the week and names of places, full stops, hyphen, exclamation mark

# IE-10: Abahlobo

U-Imaan no-Alex ngabahlobo. Iminyaka yabo isibhozo. Iinwele zabo azifani. Uncumo lwabo alufani. Izandla zabo azifani. Iimpumlo zabo azifane. Izinto abathanda ukuzenza azifani. U-Imaan uthanda ukuzoba. U-Alex uthanda ukufunda. U-Imaan uthanda ukutya ibhanana. U-Alex uthanda ukutya i-apile. U-Imaan uthanda ukusela isiselo. U-Alex uthanda ukusela ubisi. U-Imaan uthanda ukunxiba ilokhwe. U-Alex uthanda ukunxiba ibhulukhwe. U-Imaan no-Alex ngabahlobo abathandanayo, kodwa abafani!

- 16 sentences
- 58 words (average of 3.6 words per sentence)
- 392 letters (average of 6.8 letters per word)
- 193 syllables (average of 3.3 syllables per word)
- 15 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dw, hl, lw, mp, nc, nd, ng, nt, nw, nx, ny, nz, th, ty
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: ii
- 2 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ndl*
- 5 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ngabahlobo, abathanda, uthanda, ibhulukhwe, abathandanayo*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.

• Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and names of people, full stops, hyphens, comma, exclamation mark

### IE-11: Masilungiselele

Lusapho lwam olu. Usapho lwam lwenza amalungiselelo. Utatomkhulu usithengela umphako. Ndiyakuthanda ukuthenga. Umakhulu usibhakela amaqebengwana. Ndiyakuthanda ukubhaka. Utata usijongela indlela. Ndiyakuthanda ukujonga iindlela. Umama upakisha impahla. Ndiyakuthanda ukulinganisa impahla. Udadewethu ukhetha oonopopi. Ndiyakuthanda ukumncedisa ukukhetha. Umnakwethu uvasa imoto. Ndiyambonisa indlela yokuvasa imoto. Kanti siyaphi! Sithabatha uhambo! Siya kwiiholide zehlobo!

- 17 sentences
- 49 words (average of 2.9 words per sentence)
- 409 letters (average of 8.3 letters per word)
- 189 syllables (average of 3.9 syllables per word)
- 15 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, hl, kh, kw, lw, mb, mp, nc, nd, ng, nt, nz, ph, sh, th
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ü*, *oo*
- 2 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *ngw*
- 8 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: *lwenza*, *usithengela*, *ukuthenga*, *impahla*, *ukhetha*, *ukukhetha*, *umnakwethu*, *sithabatha*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndiyakuthanda*
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks

# IE-12: Yho-o-o-o!

Ngenye imini uVuyo wathengelwa impahla yesikolo. Wafumana ihempe entsha. Wafumana ijezi entsha. Wafumana ibhulukhwe emfutshane entsha. Wafumana iikawusi nezihlangu ezitsha. Wafumana neqhina elitsha. Wanxiba impahla yakhe yesikolo entsha uVuyo. Wayelungele ukuya esikolweni. Umama wathi, 'Baleka, Vuyo! Isikolo sizakungena.' Wabaleka kakhulu uVuyo. Wakhubeka wayokuwa bhaxa edakeni! Yho-o-o-o! Owu! 'Khulula zonke ezo mpahla zimdaka,' watsho umama. Waqala wakhulula izihlangu uVuyo. Walandelisa ngeekawusi. Wakhulula ijezi. Wakhulula ibhulukhwe. Wakhulula iqhina. Wakhulula ihempe. 'Nxiba nazi impahla ezicocekileyo, Vuyo,' watsho umama. 'Nxiba nantsi ibhulukhwe. Nxiba nantsi ibhatyi. Nxiba nazi nezihlangu. Inokuba singenile ngoku isikolo.' 'Baleka, Vuyo!' watsho umama. 'Uncede ulumke ungawi, Vuyo!' Wabaleka kwakhona uVuyo. Yho-o-o-o! Kwakhona! Owu-u-u!

- 27 sentences (plus 5 one-word exclamations)
- 102 words (average of 3.2 words per sentence)
- 696 letters (average of 6.8 letters per word)
- 318 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)

- 17 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *lw*, *mf*, *mp*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nk*, *nx*, *ny*, *qh*, *th*, *ty*, *yh*
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ee*, *ii*
- 4 consonant clusters: *khw*, *nts*, *tsh*, *ntsh*
- 9 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ngenye*, *impahla*, *ibhulukhwe*, *emfutshane*, *nezihlangu*, *mpahla*, *izihlangu*, *ibhatyi*, *kwakhona*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *wathengelwa*
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and direct speech and names of people, full stops, commas, speech marks, exclamation marks, hyphens

# IE-13: Izilwanyana Zase-Afrika

Qash qash ndiyi......? Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ndinamazinyo abukhali. Qash qash ndiyi......? Ndiyingonyama. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ndinomboko omde. Qash qash ndiyi.....? Ndiyindlovu. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ndimbi ndiyoyikeka. Qash qash ndingu.....? Ndingumkhombe. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ndibaleka kakhulu. Qash qash ndiyi......? Ndiyingwenkala. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ayinde nje intamo yam! Qash qash ndiyi.....? Ndiyindlulamthi. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine. Ndinemigca emnyama nemhlophe. Qash qash ndili.....? Ndiliqwarhashe. Ndisisilwanyana sase-Afrika. Ndinemilenze emine.

- 37 sentences
- 83 words (average of 2.2 words per sentence)
- 657 letters (average of 7.9 letters per word)
- 277 syllables (average of 3.3 syllables per word)
- 18 consonant blends/digraphs: *gc*, *hl*, *kh*, *lw*, *mb*, *mp*, *nd*, *ng*, *nj*, *nk*, *nt*, *ny*, *nz*, *ph*, *qw*, *rh*, *sh*, *th* (*and the borrowed fr blend in* "*Afrika*")
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *ii*
- 2 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *ngw*
- 7 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ndinemilenze*, *ndinamazinyo*, *ndiyindlovu*, *ndinemigca*, *nemhlophe*, *iimpondo*, *zilwanyana*
- 5 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ndisisilwanyana*, *ndiyingonyama*, *ndiyingwenkala*, *ndiyindlulamthi*, *ndiliqwarhashe*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs: *ndingumkhombe*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and names of places, full stops, questions marks, exclamation marks, hyphens, extended ellipsis

# IE-14: Uyahlekisa Utatomkhulu

UDumi, uZandi noLala bahleli notatomkhulu. 'Ungasifundela incwadi tatomkhulu?' wacela uZandi. 'Ewe, mntwan' omntwan' am. Ziphi igilasi zam zamehlo?' wavuma utatomkhulu. 'Azikho phezu kwetafile?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Hayi tatomkhulu, kodwa nali iqhina,' atsho uZandi. 'Azikho ngaphantsi kwesitulo?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Hayi tatomkhulu, kodwa nazi izinto zokudlala,' atsho uDumi. 'Azikho phakathi ekhabhathini?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Hayi tatomkhulu, kodwa nantsi iwulu kamakhulu,' atsho uDumi. 'Azikho ngaphantsi kwesitya sokuvasela izitya?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Hayi tatomkhulu, kodwa nanku umnqwazi,' atsho uDumi. 'Azikho phakathi ebhafini?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Hayi tatomkhulu, kodwa nantsi ilokhwe,' atsho uDumi. 'Azikho ngaphantsi kwebhedi?' abuze utatomkhulu. 'Makhe ndikhangele.' 'Jonga phezulu, tatomkhulu. Igilasi zakho zamehlo zikuwe entloko!' atsho uZandi. 'Oh bantwan' omntwan' am, injalo loo nto?' ahleke utatomkhulu. 'Ndinganifundela ke ngoku ibali.'

- 20 sentences
- 114 words (average of 5.7 words per sentence)
- 764 letters (average of 6.7 letters per word)
- 362 syllables (average of 3.2 syllables per word)
- 15 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dl, dw, hl, kh, kw, nd, ng, nj, nk, nt, ph, qh, th, ty
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *oo*
- 7 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ncw*, *nqw*, *ntl*, *nts*, *ntw*, *tsh*
- 2 words contain contractions: *mntwan' omntwan' am, bantwan' omntwan' am*
- 4 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: *ungasifundela*, *phakathi*, *kwesitya*, *kwebhedi*
- 4 words contains three consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ngaphantsi*, *ekhabhathini*, *ndikhangele*, *ndinganifundela*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and names of people, full stops, commas, questions marks, exclamation marks, hyphens, speech marks, apostrophes

# IE-15: Usikhukukazi Obomvu

Usikhukukazi obomvu wayengumfama. Wayehlala namavila ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Entlakohlaza usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukulima umbona?' 'Yhu hayi siyonqena!' batsho ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Ehlobo usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukunkcenkceshela umbona?' 'Yhu hayi siyonqena!' batsho ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Ekupheleni kwehlobo usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukuvuna umbona?' 'Yhu hayi siyonqena!' batsho ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Ekwindla usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukusila umbona?' 'Yhu hayi siyonqena!' batsho ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Ebusika usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukupheka umqa wombona?' 'Yhu hayi siyonqena!' batsho ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. Kwakuvuthwa ukutya, usikhukukazi wabuza, 'Azi ngubani na oza kundincedisa ukutya lo mqa?' 'Siza kukuncedisa,' batsho bonke ubhokhwe, unja nohagu. 'Kunjalo!' usikhukukazi wabuza. 'Nonke niyafuna ukundincedisa? Kodwa, ndiwutyale ndodwa nje lo mbona. Ndawunkcenkceshela. Ndawuvuna. Ndawusila. Ndawupheka ndodwa nalo mqa. Ke, ndiza kuwutya ndodwa qha lo mqa!'

- 22 sentences
- 140 words (average of 6.4 words per sentence)
- 907 letters (average of 6.5 letters per word)
- 414 syllables (average of 3.0 syllables per word)
- 18 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *dw*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *mb*, *mv*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nj*, *nk*, *nq*, *ph*, *qh*, *sh*, *ty*, *yh*
- 6 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ndl*, *nkc*, *ntl*, *thw*, *tsh*
- 10 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ubhokhwe, entlakohlaza, kundincedisa, kwehlobo, ekwindla, kwakuvuthwa, ukundincedisa, ndiwutyale, ndodwa, ndawupheka*
- 1 word contains three consonant digraphs/clusters: *ukunkcenkceshela*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ndawunkcenkceshela*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and direct speech, full stops, commas, questions marks, exclamation marks, speech marks

### IE-16: Zincinci Impahla Zam

'Mama, jonga zonke ezi mpahla zincinci. Ndiza kunxiba ntoni?' watsho uThandi. 'Linganisa ndibone, Thandi,' watsho umama. 'Jonga lo mbhinqo, uyandiqinisa,' atsho uThandi elinganisa. 'Unyanisile mncinci. Wunike uVuyiswa,' atsho umama. 'Jonga nje le bhulukhwe, ayingeni,' atsho uThandi elinganisa. 'Unyanisile incinci. Yinike uVuyiswa,' atsho umama. 'Jonga mama le hempe, nayo incinci,' atsho uThandi elinganisa. 'Unyanisile nayo incinci. Yinike uVuyiswa,' atsho umama. 'Jonga le jezi, mama, nayo incinci,' atsho uThandi elinganisa. 'Unyanisile incinci. Yinike uVuyiswa nayo,' atsho umama. 'Jonga idyasi yam yemvula incinci,' atsho uThandi elinganisa. 'Unyanisile nayo incinci. Yinike uVuyiswa,' atsho umama. 'Jonga ezi kawusi zincinci,' atsho uThandi ekhalaza. 'Unyanisile zincinci. Zinike uVuyiswa nazo,' atsho umama emthuthuzela. 'Jonga ezi zihlangu. Shu, ziyanditya!' atsho uThandi. 'Unyanisile nazo zincinci. Zinike uVuyiswa,' atsho umama. 'Unempahla ezininzi ngoku, Vuyiswa! Thatha zonke,' watsho uThandi. 'Kodwa zinkulu zonke nje ezi mpahla!' watsho uVuyiswa.

- 28 sentences
- 135 words (average of 4.8 words per sentence)
- 838 letters (average of 6.2 letters per word)
- 379 syllables (average of 2.8 syllables per word)

- 21 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *dw*, *dy*, *hl*, *kh*, *mp*, *mv*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nj*, *nk*, *nq*, *nt*, *nx*, *ny*, *nz*, *sh*, *sw*, *th*, *ty*
- 2 consonant clusters: *khw*, *tsh*
- 13 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *mpahla*, *zincinci*, *uThandi*, *mbhinqo*, *Thandi*, *mncinci*, *bhulukhwe*, *incinci*, *emthuthuzela*, *zihlangu*, *ziyanditya*, *unempahla*, *thatha*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, direct speech and names of people, full stops, commas, questions marks, exclamation marks, speech marks

# IE-17: Imini Yolutsha

Sinemini yolutsha, umhla we-16 kuJuni. Abantwana esikolweni babefuna ukubhiyoza esitratweni. Abantwana babeza kuxakeka kakhulu ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Abantwana baqokelela imali kubahlali ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Abantwana bacoca izitrato ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Abantwana bazoba iflegi entle ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Abantwana benza isaziso sokupapasha usuku lokubhiyoza. Abantwana noomama bapheka ukutya okumnandi ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Abantwana baqesha iqela lomculo ukulungiselela ukubhiyoza. Yafika imini yolutsha. Wonke umntu wayemkelekile! Babesitya, bethengisa, bencokola, becula, bedanisa. Babonwabe kakhulu ngalo mhla!

- 13 sentences
- 67 words (average of 5.2 words per sentence)
- 558 letters (average of 8.3 letters per word)
- 268 syllables (average of 4.0 syllables per word)
- 18 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *fl*, *hl*, *kh*, *lw*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nk*, *nt*, *nw*, *nz*, *ph*, *sh*, *th*, *tr*, *tw*, *ty*
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *oo*
- 3 consonant clusters: *ntl, ntw, tsh*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: esitratweni, bethengisa
- Words range in length from 2-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and names of months, full stops, commas, exclamation marks, hyphen

# IE-18: UTselane Wakudala

UTselane wayehlala nonina. Babenesitovu separafini esasibagcina befudumele ebusika. Ngenye imini yaphela iparafini. Kwakufuneka befumene enye iparafini ukuze bafudumale ngobo busika. Umama kaTselane wathi, 'Thengisa nantsi inkukhu, Tselane, ukuze sifumane iparafini.' Wayifaka inkukhu engobozini uTselane wayithwala entloko. Wehla ngendlela ehamba ecula... '*Wena mkhozi, ndithengisa ngenkukhu. Thatha mkhozi, ndifun' iparafini!*' Wadibana nonkosikazi Moyo uTselane. 'Ndinike inkukhu le Tselane, uthathe nantsi isepha,' watsho unkosikazi Moyo. Wayithwala entloko isepha uTselane. Wehla ngendlela ehamba ecula... 'Wena mkhozi, ndithengisa ngesepha. Thatha mkhozi, Ndifun' iparafini!' Wadibana nonkosikazi Tambo uTselane. 'Ndinike isepha le Tselane, uthathe nantsi iswekile,' watsho unkosikazi Tambo. Wayithwala entloko iswekile uTselane. Wehla ngendlela ehamba ecula... 'Wena mkhozi, ndithengisa ngeswekile. Thatha mkhozi, ndifun' iparafini!' Wadibana nonkosikazi Madiba uTselane. 'Ndinike iswekile le Tselane, uthathe nantsi inkukhu,' watsho unkosikazi Madiba. 'Inkukhu kwakhona? Ndiza kuthini ngoku!' wakhuza uTselane. Ngoko nangoko uTselane wabona umntu enyuka ngendlela. Yayingumhlobo wakhe uNomhle. Tyhini, kanti uNomhle unegqongo eligcwele iparafini! 'Ndinike inkukhu le Tselane, uthathe nantsi iparafini,' watsho uNomhle. UTselane wagoduka exolile evuya ecula ingoma... 'Ndithwel' iparafini. Ndiya kumam' ekhaya. Busika busika, siza kufudumala!' Elo gqongo leparafini laliya kubagcina befudumele bonke obo busika, uTselane nonina.

- 33 sentences
- 180 words (average of 5.5 words per sentence)
- 1272 letters (average of 7.1 letters per word)
- 587 syllables (average of 3.3 syllables per word)
- 15 consonant blends/digraphs: gc, gq, hl, kh, kw, mb, nd, ng, nk, nt, ny, ph, sw, th, ts
- 7 consonant clusters: *gcw, ndl, ntl, nts, thw, tsh, tyh*
- 13 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ngenye, thengisa, inkukhu, ngendlela, thatha, uthathe, ngesepha, ngeswekile, kwakhona, yayingumhlobo, unegqongo, ndithwel', gqongo*
- 2 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndithengisa*, *ngenkukhu*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, direct speech and names of people, full stops, commas, exclamation marks, speech marks, question mark, ellipses, apostrophes

# IE-19: Umtshato Kadadewethu

Udadewethu uNoxolo wayeza kutshata ngengomso. Mna ndandiza kuba ngumkhaphi aze umzala wethu yena, uNozipho, acule emtshatweni. Umama wandithungela ilokhwe entle endandiza kukhapha ngayo. UNozipho wafika ekhaya ngemini engaphambi komtshato. Ilizwi likaNozipho lalitshile! Wayeza kucula njani bethu emtshatweni? Umakazi wamnika iyeza lomqala ukuba alithambise. Walithambisa iyeza uNozipho. Alizange limncede nje tu elo yeza. Ilizwi lakhe lalingavulekanga. Wayesebeza xa ethetha! Umama yena wacebisa ukuba atye amaqanda angaphekwanga. Wawatya amaqanda uNozipho. Awazange amncede loo maqanda. Ilizwi lakhe lalingavulekanga. Wayesebeza xa ethetha! Umakhulu wamenzela iti yegaliki eshushu. Wayisela iti uNozipho. Ayizange imncede loo ti. Ilizwi lakhe lalingavulekanga. Wayesebeza xa ethetha! Babeza kuthini ngoku bethu? Zawa iinyembezi kuNozipho ... chiphi, chiphi! Wayekhathazekile ngelizwi lakhe uNozipho. Umama wamnika itshefu. Wahlala phantsi uNozipho esitulweni esula iinyembezi. Kwangoko seva ngesikhalo uNozipho exhuma esitulweni. Oonotaka neenaliti babemhlabe ezimpundu uNozipho. Wayekhala esithi, 'Yho-o-o-o kubuhlungu!' Lalibuye lonke ilizwi likaNozipho! Savuya kakhulu sonke kuba wayekwazi kwakhona ukucula. Wazama uNozipho ukucula esithi, 'La, la, la, laaaa!' Ngenene wayezakucula emtshatweni. UNoxolo wayemhle ngenene ngemini yomtshato. Nam ndandimhle ndinxibe ilokhwe etyheli endandiyithungelwe ngumama. Umzala uNozipho wacula ngelizwi elimyoli ngalo mini. Ndandizidla ngabo bobabini, udadewethu uNoxolo, nomzala wam uNozipho.

- 37 sentences
- 182 words (average of 4.9 words per sentence)
- 1296 letters (average of 7.1 letters per word)
- 602 syllables (average of 3.3 syllables per word)
- 24 consonant blends/digraphs: *ch*, *dl*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *lw*, *mb*, *mp*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nk*, *nj*, *nx*, *ny*, *nz*, *ph*, *sh*, *th*, *tw*, *ty*, *xh*, *yh*, *zw*
- 3 double (long) vowel sounds: *ee*, *ü*, *oo*
- 5 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ntl*, *nts*, *tsh*, *tyh*
- 21 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ngengomso*, *ndandiza*, *emtshatweni*, *endandiza*, *kukhapha*, *alithambise*, *walithambisa*, *lalingavulekanga*, *ethetha*, *eshushu*, *iinyembezi*, *chiphi*, *wayekhathazekile*, *ngelizwi*, *phantsi*, *kwangoko*, *ngesikhalo*, *ezimpundu*, *kubuhlungu*, *kwakhona*, *ndinxibe*
- 5 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *ngumkhaphi*, *wandithungela*, *engaphambi*, *ndandimhle*, *ndandizidla*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs: *angaphekwanga*
- 1 word contains five consonant blends/digraphs: *endandiyithungelwe*
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, direct speech and names of people, full stops, commas, exclamation marks, speech marks, question marks, hyphens, ellipsis

# IE-20: UKwenza waKwaZulu

Igama lam ndinguKwenza. Iminyaka yam isixhenxe. Ndim, nomnakwethu uThobelani, udadewethu uSimile, umama nomakhulu. Uyandibona? Ndim lo ndimi ecaleni kukamakhulu. Sihlala eNgwavuma KwaZulu. Asinawo umbane apho sihlala khona, singenawo namanzi afumaneka lula. Ukutya sikupheka ngomlilo esiwubasa ngeenkuni namalongwe. Sivuka ekuseni yonke imihla, sibilise amanzi okwenza iti sizifudumezele namanzi okuvasa. Sakugqiba ukutya isidlo sethu sakusasa, udadewethu uSimile undincedisa uku-ayina impahla zam zesikolo, ze ndivase, ndinxibe, ndilungele ukuya esikolweni. Phambi kokuba siye esikolweni, sivulela iinkomo ze endleleni eya esikolweni siziqhubele edlelweni. Xa sisiya esikolweni siye sidibane nabazala bethu. Isikolo sikude kakhulu. Thina nabazala

bam sihamba ngeenyawo. Sisikolo sam esi. Sisikolo samabanga aphantsi. Igama lesi sikolo yiMbalekelwa. Phambi kokuba singene isikolo, siyaqokelelana abantwana besikolo sonke kunye nootitshala, sicule senze nomthandazo wokuvula. Nali igumbi lam lokufundela. Ndifunda kwibanga lesibini. Igama likatitshala wam ngunkosazana Maphanga. Ndiyakuthanda ukufunda iincwadi. Sonke kweli banga siye sifumane ithuba lokumfundela unkosazana Maphanga. Ngexesha lokuphumla esikolweni, urhulumente wethu usipha ukutya. Namhlanje siye safumana umnggusho kwakunye nesuphu. Sakuphuma isikolo sidlala imidlalo efana nebhola ekhatywayo. Ndim lo ndidlala. Uyandibona? Sakugqiba ukudlala, mna nomnakwethu nodadewethu siyagoduka. Sakufika ekhaya siye sikhethe umbona owomileyo phezu kophahla lwendlu. Umbona siyawunggusha ukuze sifumane umngqusho. Mna noSimile singqusha ude ucolisiseke umbona. Umakhulu uza kuwupheka ngokuhlwa lo mngqusho. Phambi kokuba litshone ilanga sihamba siyokukha amanzi empompini. Sithanda ukudlala umagal' afike sibalekisa iikiriva zethu ukuya empompini. Ingumsebenzi onzima ukujija umqheba ukuze ivuleke impompi. Kufuneka sincedisane ukujija de ivuleke. Ngamanye amaxesha siyamncedisa umakhulu ukupheka. Umakhulu uyadinwa kuba usebenza egadini imini yonke. Nje xa liya kutshona ilanga, siqokelela iinkomo edlelweni. Sizifaka ebuhlanti apho zilala khona ukuze zisinde ukubiwa ngamasela. Emva kwesidlo sangokuhlwa sinxiba ezinye impahla silungiselela umthandazo. Siyacula, sithandaze sifunde nesahluko eBhayibhileni ze sakugqiba siyokulala. Ukuba ungaze undwendwele eNgwavuma, wamkelekile ekhayeni lam!

- 44 sentences
- 278 words (average of 6.3 words per sentence)
- 2011 letters (average of 7.2 letters per word)
- 940 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 27 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *dl*, *gq*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *lw*, *mb*, *mp*, *mv*, *nc*, *nd*, *ng*, *nk*, *nj*, *nx*, *nt*, *nw*, *ny*, *nz*, *ph*, *qh*, *rh*, *sh*, *th*, *ty*, *xh*
- 3 double (long) vowel sounds: *ee*, *ii*, *oo*
- 10 consonant clusters: *hlw, ncw, ndl, ndw, ngq, ngw, nts, ntw, tsh, tyw*
- 44 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: isixhenxe, nomnakwethu, ngeenkuni, okwenza, undincedisa, impahla, ndinxibe, ndilungele, phambi, edlelweni, ngeenyawo, aphantsi, yiMbalekelwa, nomthandazo, ndifunda, kwibanga, Maphanga, ngunkosazana, ngexesha, urhulumente, namhlanje, umngqusho, kwakunye, ndidlala, ekhatywayo, sikhethe, kophahla, lwendlu, siyawungqusha, singqusha, ngokuhlwa, mngqusho, empompini, sithanda, ingumsebenzi, impompi, ngamanye, ebuhlanti, kwesidlo, sangokuhlwa, umthandazo, sithandaze, eBhayibhileni, undwendwele
- 1 word contains three consonant blends: *ndiyakuthanda*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends: *ndinguKwenza*
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, names of people and names of places, full stops, commas, exclamation marks, question marks, hyphen, apostrophe

# **8.2 Detailed text analysis of the** *Siyakhula* isiXhosa Grade 1 reader series

# PACK ONE

# S-1: Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa

UMusa wavuka onwabile. Wahlamba. Wanxiba eyona mpahla ayithandayo. Watya. Wahlamba amazinyo. Wahamba baya kukhwela ibhasi. Lusuku olukhulu olu kuMusa. Uyaqala ngqa ukukhwela ibhasi.

- 8 sentences
- 23 words (average of 2.9 words per sentence)
- 151 letters (average of 6.6 letters per word)
- 70 syllables (average of 3.0 syllables per word)
- 11 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *hl*, *kh*, *mb*, *mp*, *nd*, *nw*, *nx*, *ny*, *th*, *ty*
- 2 consonant clusters: *khw*, *ngq*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: wahlamba, mpahla, ayithandayo
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a person's name, full stops

# S-2: Umlilo

Mhle yaye uluncedo. Sipheka ngawo sitye sihluthe. Soja umbona sitye sihluthe. Sotha sifudumale sonwabe. Sikhanyisa izibane, kukhanye wee. Sibilisa amanzi siphunge iti. Kodwa lumka ungatshi.

- 7 sentences
- 25 words (average of 3.6 words per sentence)
- 157 letters (average of 6.3 letters per word)
- 70 syllables (average of 2.8 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *ee*
- 12 consonant blends/digraphs: dw, hl, kh, mb, nc, ng, nw, ny, nz, ph, th, ty
- 1 consonant trigraph: *tsh*
- 5 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/trigraphs: *sihluthe*, *sikhanyisa*, *kukhanye*, *siphunge*, *ungatshi*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, a comma

# S-3: Ndiswele amaphiko

Ndikhumbula umakhulu notatomkhulu. Akwaba bendilukhozi, ndibhabhe ngoku ndithethayo. Akwaba bendiyinkonjane, ndibabone ngoku ndithethayo. Akwaba bendilihobe, bandigone ngoku ndithethayo. Akwaba bendisisikhova, ndihleke nabo ngoku ndithethayo. Akwaba bendingukhetshe, ndimamele iintsomi zabo ngoku ndithethayo. O! Uloliwe uyacotha.

- 7 sentences
- 34 words (average of 4.9 words per sentence)
- 284 letters (average of 8.4 letters per word)
- 120 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound:  $\mathbf{i}\mathbf{i}$
- 12 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *hl*, *kh*, *kw*, *mb*, *nd*, *ng*, *nj*, *nk*, *th* (and *ph* and *sw* in the title)
- 2 consonant clusters/trigraphs: *nts, tsh*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: bendilukhozi, bendisisikhova, ndihleke
- 4 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndikhumbula*, *ndibhabhe*, *ndithethayo*, *bendiyinkonjane*
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs/trigraphs: *bendingukhetshe*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, commas, an exclamation mark

# S-4: lintsuku zeveki

NgoMvulo lusuku lokuqala esikolweni. NgoLwesibini sibala ngezibini. NgoLwesithathu siqhwaba izandla kathathu, sicule ingoma. NgoLwesine sibala izilo ezimanqina mane. NgoLwesihlanu sibambana ngezandla ngeminwe yethu emihlanu. NgoMgqibelo sihambela izihlobo zethu. NgeCawe sibuka ilanga, inyanga neenkwenkwezi.

- 7 sentences
- 33 words (average of 4.7 words per sentence)
- 267 letters (average of 8.1 letters per word)
- 117 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ee* (and *ii* in the title)
- 8 consonant blends/digraphs: *hl, lw, mb, ng, nq, nw, ny, th*
- 4 consonant clusters/trigraphs: *ndl*, *nkw*, *qhw* (and *nts* in the title)
- 8 words contain two consonant clusters: *NgoLwesibini, kathathu, NgoLwesine, ngezandla, ngeminwe, NgoMgqibelo, inyanga, neenkwenkwezi*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: NgoLwesihlanu
- 1 word contains four consonant blends/digraphs: NgoLwesithathu
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for names of the days of the week, full stops, commas

# S-5: Oonodoli bam

Mnye unodoli wam. Babini oonodoli bam. Bathathu oonodoli bam. Qashi-qashi bangaphi oonodoli bam? Apha, babini oonodoli bam. Mnye unodoli wam. Ndiyamthanda unodoli wam.

- 7 sentences
- 23 words (average of 3.3 words per sentence)
- 136 letters (average of 5.9 letters per word)
- 62 syllables (average of 2.7 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *oo*
- 6 consonant blends/digraphs: *nd*, *ng*, *ny*, *ph*, *sh*, *th*
- 2 words contain two consonant digraphs: *bathathu*, *bangaphi*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndiyamthanda*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, comma, hyphen, question mark

### S-6: Ibhola ebomvu

Ibhola ibomvu. Yeyam le bhola. Yeyam le bhola ibomvu. Phosa! Phosa! Jwi-ii! Yenyuka! Phezulu naphantsi. Phezulu naphantsi. Yeyam le bhola ibomvu wezi.

- 10 sentences
- 22 words (average of 2.2 words per sentence)
- 118 letters (average of 5.4 letters per word)
- 50 syllables (average of 2.3 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound:  $\mathbf{i}\mathbf{i}$
- 5 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh, jw, mv, ny, ph*
- 1 consonant cluster: *nts*
- 1 word contains two consonant digraphs/clusters: naphantsi
- Words range in length from 1-3 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks, hyphen

### S-7: Isivuno esihle

Sihle ngenene isivuno sethu. Jonga ubuhle bombona wethu. Amathanga amakhulu amnandi. Amazimba avumileyo amahle. Iimbotyi zintle kakhulu. Umfino nebhatala zityebe kakhulu. Sizakuhlutha kulo nyaka.

- 7 sentences
- 24 words (average of 3.4 words per sentence)
- 165 letters (average of 6.9 letters per word)

- 76 syllables (average of 3.2 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound:  $\mathbf{i}\mathbf{i}$
- 9 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *hl*, *kh*, *mb*, *nd*, *ng*, *ny*, *th*, *ty*
- 1 consonant cluster: *ntl*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: amathanga, iimbotyi, sizakuhlutha
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops

# S-8: Ithina na iminwe?

Kunye siyasebenza. Kunye sibamba nkqi. Kunye siyabulisa. Kunye sidlala imidlalo. Kunye sihlamba izandla. Kunye siyamkela. Inene! Kulunge sime kunye, bantakwethu!

- 8 sentences
- 20 words (average of 2.5 words per sentence)
- 133 letters (average of 6.7 letters per word)
- 58 syllables (average of 2.9 syllables per word)
- 10 consonant blends/digraphs: *dl*, *hl*, *kw*, *mb*, *ng*, *nt*, *ny*, *nz*, *th* (and *nw* in the title)
- 2 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *nkq*
- 1 word contains two consonant blends/digraphs: *sihlamba*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *bantakwethu*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, comma, question mark (in the title), exclamation marks

# S-9: Kusile!

Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Tri-ii-ing! Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Khwaphululu, utata. Vuka! Vuka, Vilavotyo, vuka! Vuka, nantso iwotshi ikhala. Vuka! Kusile, vuka! Ithi: "Kusile! Vuka! Vuka!" Ntaa amehlo, uVilavotyo. Nwabu-nwabu, ngoku, uVilavotyo. Cum, uVilavotyo. Kusile kwakhona.

- 19 sentences
- 34 words (average of 1.8 words per sentence)
- 210 letters (average of 6.2 letters per word)
- 94 syllables (average of 2.8 syllables per word)
- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *ii* and *aa*
- 9 consonant blends/digraphs: *hl, kh, kw, ng, nt, nw, ph, th, ty*
- 2 borrowed consonant blends/digraphs from English: *tr*, *ng* (*tri-ii-ing*)
- 3 consonant clusters: *khw*, *nts*, *tsh*
- 3 words contain two consonant clusters: tri-ii-ing, khwaphululu, kwakhona
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.

• Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a person's name, full stops, commas, exclamation marks, hyphens, colon, speech marks

# S-10: Lumkela ingozi

Cinga. Cinga. Jonga ekhohlo, nyana! Jonga ekunene. Jonga ekhohlo kwakho. Cinga. Cinga. Welela ngaphesheya. Gqibi! Usindile!

- 10 sentences
- 16 words (average of 1.6 words per sentence)
- 97 letters (average of 6.1 letters per word)
- 41 syllables (average of 2.6 syllables per word)
- 9 consonant blends/digraphs: gq, hl, kh, kw, nd, ng, ny, ph, sh
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: *ekhohlo*, *kwakho*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ngaphesheya*
- Words range in length from 2-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, comma, exclamation marks

### S-11: Mna nosana

Isandla esincinci. Isandla esikhulu. Intloko encinci. Intloko enkulu. Umlomo omncinci. Umlomo omkhulu. Unyawo oluncinci. Unyawo olukhulu. Usana luncinci. Mna ndimkhulu.

- 10 sentences
- 20 words (average of 2.0 words per sentence)
- 139 letters (average of 7.0 letters per word)
- 68 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 5 consonant blends/digraphs: *kh*, *nc*, *nd*, *nk*, *ny*
- 2 consonant clusters: *ndl*, *ntl*
- 6 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: *esincinci, encinci, omncinci, oluncinci, luncinci, ndimkhulu*
- Words range in length from 2-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops

### S-12: Nam ndiyakwazi ukubala

Linye izinyo likantemekwane. Zimbini iinyawo zikaBabini. Mathathu amakhwenkwe eklasini. Mine imilenze yetafile. Mahlanu amaqanda esikhukukazi. Zintandathu iikomityi etreyini. Isixhenxe imithi egadini.

- 7 sentences
- 21 words (average of 3.0 words per sentence)
- 173 letters (average of 8.2 letters per word)

- 79 syllables (average of 3.8 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound:  $\mathbf{i}\mathbf{i}$
- 12 consonant blends/digraphs: hl, kh, kw, mb, nd, nt, nx, ny, nz, th, ty, xh
- 2 borrowed consonant blends/digraphs from English: *kl* (*eklasini*), *tr* (*etreyini*)
- 2 consonant clusters: *khw*, *nkw*
- 2 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: mathathu, likantemekwane, isixhenxe
- 1 word contains two consonant clusters: amakhwenkwe
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: zintandathu
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a person's name, full stops

# PACK TWO

# S-13: Mna noSpoti

USpoti uyakuthanda ukuhamba nam. Undikhapha rhoqo xa ndisiya esikolweni. Ukuphuma kwesikolo ndifika endilindile ekhaya. Sidlala ngeemoto. USpoti uyazithanda iimoto ezibaleka kakhulu. USpoti uyakuthanda ukubaleka ecaleni kwam. Uyandileqa xa ndikhwele ibhayisekile. USpoti uyandikhusela. Akafuni ukuba ndenzakale. Xa ndisitya, uSpoti naye uyatya. Uyayithanda inyama. Ndiyamthanda uSpoti. Naye uyandithanda.

- 13 sentences
- 46 words (average of 3.5 words per sentence)
- 345 letters (average of 7.5 letters per word)
- 160 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 14 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dl, kh, kw, lw, mb, nd, ng, ny, nz, ph, rh, th, ty
- 1 borrowed consonant blend from English: *sp* (*uSpoti*)
- 2 long vowel sounds: *ii* and *ee*
- 1 consonant cluster: *khw*
- 8 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *uyakuthanda, endilindile, uyazithanda, uyandikhusela, ndenzakale, ndisitya, uyayithanda, ndikhwele*
- 3 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *undikhapha*, *ndiyamthanda*, *uyandithanda*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a dog's name, full stops, comma

# S-14 UBonakele nenkomo

UBonakele akayanga esikolweni. Khawukhangele! Nantso inkomo imjoja. Yhoo! Inkomo iyamhlaba. Nantso inkomo imleqa ngoku. Nanko ebaleka esiya ngqo esikolweni. Abantwana besikolo bayamhleka. Utitshala uthetha naye. Umxelela ukuba makahlale phantsi.

- 10 sentences
- 29 words (average of 2.9 words per sentence)
- 207 letters (average of 7.1 letters per word)
- 99 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 1 long vowel sound: *oo*
- 8 consonant blends/digraphs: *hl, kh, lw, ng, nk, ph, th, yh*
- 4 consonant trigraphs/clusters: *ngq*, *nts*, *ntw*, *tsh*
- 2 words contain two consonant digraphs/clusters: uthetha, phantsi
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *khawukhangele*
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a person's name, full stops, exclamation marks

### S-15: Ubusuku

Lixesha eloyikekayo ixesha lasebusuku. Kuthi naxa inyanga, iinkwenkwezi nezibane zikhanyisa kodwa koyikeke. Indalo nayo iyabazi ubusuku. Izikhova nezinye izilwanyana zona azilali ebusuku ziyazingela. Kule mihla kuyingozi ukuhamba ebusuku ngenxa yezigebenga. Abazali bethu nabo abasivumeli sidlale ebusuku ngenxa yokoyikeka kobusuku. Lakutshona ilanga abantwana bayagoduka kuba kuyingozi ukuba phandle ebusuku.

- 7 sentences
- 48 words (average of 6.9 words per sentence)
- 355 letters (average of 7.4 letters per word)
- 169 syllables (average of 3.5 syllables per word)
- 1 long vowel sound: *ii*
- 13 consonant blends/digraphs: dl, dw, hl, kh, lw, mb, nd, ng, nx, ny, ph, sh, th
- 4 consonant trigraphs/clusters: *ndl*, *nkw*, *ntw*, *tsh*
- 6 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *inyanga*, *zikhanyisa*, *izilwanyana*, *ngenxa*, *iinkwenkwezi*, *phandle*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, comma

### S-16: Umabonakude

Nanku umabonakude. Sicela umbeke apha. Utata ubukele umabonakude. Umama ubukele umabonakude. Usisi ubukele umabonakude. USpoti ubukele umabonakude. Sonke sibukele umabonakude. Utheni na uSpoti? Ubona inja efana naye kumabonakude.

- 9 sentences
- 28 words (average of 3.1 words per sentence)
- 193 letters (average of 6.9 letters per word)
- 104 syllables (average of 3.7 syllables per word)

- 4 consonant blends/digraphs: *nk*, *nj*, *ph*, *th*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a dog's name, full stops, question mark

# S-17: Usuku lwam lokuzalwa

Lusuku lwam lokuzalwa namhlanje. Kumenywe wonke umntu. Siyibhakile nekeyiki. Itheko lingoMgqibelo. Silinde sancama. Akukhange kufike mntu. Ndidane ngolona hlobo. Usisi uya ndithuthuzela. Bantu bakwaTyani! Sijonge komnye umhla. Itheko likule veki izayo.

- 11 sentences
- 31 words (average of 2.8 words per sentence)
- 211 letters (average of 6.8 letters per word)
- 97 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- 15 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, gq, hl, kh, kw, lw, nc, nd, ng, nj, nk, nt, ny, th, ty
- 1 consonant cluster: *nyw*
- 4 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *namhlanje*, *lingoMgqibelo*, *akukhange*, *bakwaTyani*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndithuthuzela*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, names of the days of the week and a person's name, full stops, exclamation mark

### S-18: UThando

NdinguNoluthando igama lam. Abazali bam bathi ndinguThando. Abazali bam bayandithanda. Ndiyabathanda abazali bam. Bandithumela esikolweni. Ndiyasithanda isikolo. Ndiyakuthanda ukubhala, ukufunda nokudlala.

- 7 sentences
- 21 words (average of 3.0 words per sentence)
- 177 letters (average of 8.4 letters per word)
- 77 syllables (average of 3.7 syllables per word)
- 6 consonant blends/digraphs: bh, dl, lw, nd, ng, th
- 1 word contains two consonant blends/digraphs: bandithumela
- 4 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *bayandithanda*, *ndiyabathanda*, *ndiyasithanda*, *ndiyakuthanda*
- 2 words contain four consonant blends/digraphs: *ndinguNoluthando*, *ndinguThando*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for people's names, full stops, a comma

# S-19: Uyafunda?

Ndiyafunda. Ndiyakuthanda ukufunda. Umama ufunda incwadi yokupheka. Uyakuthanda ukufunda. Utata ufunda iphephandaba. Uyakuthanda ukufunda. Ubhuti ufunda incwadi. Uyakuthanda ukufunda. Umakhulu ufunda incwadi. Uyakuthanda ukufunda incwadi. Utatomkhulu ebefunda incwadi. Uye wozela walala. Uyakuthanda ukufunda incwadi. Sonke siyakuthanda ukufunda. Kufuneka sibe neencwadi ukuze sifunde.

- 15 sentences
- 42 words (average of 2.8 words per sentence)
- 329 letters (average of 7.8 letters per word)
- 154 syllables (average of 3.7 syllables per word)
- 1 double (long) vowel sound: *ee*
- 6 consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *kh*, *nd*, *nk*, *ph*, *th*
- 1 consonant cluster: *ncw*
- 3 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs: *ndiyafunda, uyakuthanda, siyakuthanda*
- 2 words contain three consonant blends/digraphs: *ndiyakuthanda*, *iphephandaba*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, a question mark (in the title)

# S-20: Kumnandi konke

Sitya izityalo ezahlukeneyo. Sitya ingcambu sithi yiminqathe. Sitya udiza sithi lizele lweswekile. Sitya amagqabi sithi sisipinatshi. Sitya imbewu sithi ngumbona. Sitya intyatyambo sithi yikholiflawa. Zonke ziya esiswini.

- 7 sentences
- 27 words (average of 3.9 words per sentence)
- 188 letters (average of 7.0 letters per word)
- 81 syllables (average of 3.0 syllables per word)
- 12 consonant blends/digraphs: *gq, hl, kh, lw, mb, ng, nk, nq, sw, th, ty* (and *nd* in the title)
- 1 borrowed consonant blend from English: *fl* in a borrowed word (*yikholiflawa*)
- 3 consonant trigraphs/clusters: *ngc*, *nty*, *tsh*
- 5 words contain two consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *ingcambu*, *yiminqathe*, *lweswekile*, *ngumbona*, *yikholiflawa*
- 1 word contains three consonant blends/digraphs/clusters: *intyatyambo*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops

# **8.3 Detailed text analysis of the** *Vula Bula* isiXhosa Grade 1 reader series

# VB-1: Bala

bala / bala / bala / bala / bala / bala / hayi bo! / yeyam

- 8 sentences<sup>10</sup>
- 9 words (average of 1.1 words per sentence)
- 35 letters (average of 3.9 letters per word)
- 17 syllables (average of 1.9 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 1-2 syllables.
- Punctuation: one exclamation mark

# VB-2: Hayi

hayi / hayi / hayi / hayi / hayi / hayi / ewe / nalo ke inene

- 8 sentences
- 10 words (average of 1.3 words per sentence)
- 38 letters (average of 3.8 letters per word)
- 20 syllables (average of 2.0 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 1-3 syllables.
- No punctuation

### VB-3: Vula vala

vula / vala / vula / vala / vula / vala / yiyole! / ikawusi yam!

- 8 sentences
- 9 words (average of 1.1 words per sentence)
- 40 letters (average of 4.4 letters per word)
- 20 syllables (average of 2.2 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 1-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: two exclamation marks

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The first 8 *Vula Bula* texts contain almost no punctuation. One or two words are placed on each page, with no capital letters or full stops identifying the beginning and end of sentences. A 'sentence' is therefore defined here as the word(s) on each individual page. The slashes (/) indicate sentence breaks.

# VB-4: Coca

coca / coca / coca / coca / kucokekile! / izikolo zivaliwe!

- 7 sentences
- 8 words (average of 1.1 word per sentence)
- 45 letters (average of 5.6 letters per word)
- 23 syllables (average of 2.9 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: two exclamation marks

# VB-5: Baleka

baleka / yima! / sukudubula!

- 9 sentences
- 9 words (1.0 word per sentence)
- 56 letters (average of 6.2 letters per word)
- 28 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: two exclamation marks

### VB-6: Lala

kusebusuku / lala / kusebusuku / lala / kusebusuku / lalani / kusebusuku / lalani / kusebusuku / lalani / kusebusuku / lalani / kusebusuku / vukani!

- 14 sentences
- 14 words (1.0 word per sentence)
- 108 letters (average of 7.7 letters per word)
- 54 syllables (average of 3.9 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 2-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: one exclamation mark

### VB-7: Zoba usike

zoba / zoba / zoba / zoba / zoba / nasi isikere / sika / dibanisa!

- 8 sentences
- 9 words (average of 1.1 words per sentence)
- 43 letters (average of 4.8 letters per word)

- 22 syllables (average of 2.4 syllables per word)
- No consonant blends/digraphs/blends
- Words range in length from 2-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: one exclamation mark

# VB-8: Mamela

mamela / ndifuna ayeke / mamela / ndifuna ayeke / mamela / ndifuna bayeke / mamela / ndifuna ayeke / mamela / ndifuna ayeke / mamela / ndifuna ayeke / mamelani / asifuni bayeke!

- 14 sentences
- 21 words (average of 1.5 words per sentence)
- 130 letters (average of 6.2 letters per word)
- 65 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- 1 consonant blend: *nd*
- Words range in length from 3-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: one exclamation mark

# VB-9: Jika

Ujikeleza egadini. Uyajika-jika. Uyajika-jika kakhulu. Uyajika-jika kakhulu, kakhulu. Uyajika-jika kakhulu, kakhulu, kakhulu! Mayime. Misa! Yimise! Ndisajikeleza... Igadi isajikeleza!

- 10 sentences
- 22 words (average of 2.2 words per sentence)
- 147 letters (average of 6.7 letters per word)
- 74 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs: *kh*, *nd*
- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks, hyphens, commas, ellipsis

### VB-10: Umnikelo

Sizise la maapile. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise la mapere. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise ezi popo. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise ezi pesika. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise le vatala. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise iipayinapile. Sizisa umnikelo. Sizise lo mnikelo... Enkosi! Siyabulela!

- 15 sentences
- 34 words (average of 2.3 words per sentence)
- 204 letters (average of 6.0 letters per word)
- 104 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)

- 2 double (long) vowel sounds: *aa*, *ii*
- 1 consonant blend/digraph: *nk*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks, ellipsis

### VB-11: Utata usele nosana

Utata usele nosana. Usana luyalila. Utata uyadanisa nosana. Usana lusalila. Utata uculela usana. Usana lusalila. Utata unika usana ipere. Usana lusalila. Utata unika usana ubisi. Usana luyekile ukulila. Usana ludiniwe luyalala... notata udiniwe uyalala!

- 11 sentences
- 34 words (average of 3.1 words per sentence)
- 206 letters (average of 6.1 letters per word)
- 115 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- Words range in length from 3-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation mark, ellipsis

# VB-12: Sebeza

Uyambona? Uyasebeza. Uyababona? Nabo futhi, bayasebeza. Uyambona nalo futhi? Naye uyaqala uyasebeza. Uyababona? Naba nabo bayasebeza. Uyambona nalo futhi? Naye uyasebeza. Hayi bo! Uyababona? Nabo baqalile futhi, bayasebeza. O-o-o-h! Ndiyabona! Nalo! Lavela ihlebo! Ndiyabulela! Andisavuyi!

- 19 sentences
- 35 words (average of 1.8 words per sentence)
- 231 letters (average of 6.6 letters per word)
- 118 syllables (average of 3.4 syllables per word)
- 3 consonant blends/digraphs: *th*, *nd*, *hl*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, hyphens

# VB-13: Lelikabani eli vili

UKabelo ufumana ivili. Lelikabani? Molo, tata. Livili likabani eli? uyabuza uKabelo. Uxolo, asilolam. Sala kakuhle! Misa! Molo. Livili likabani eli? uyabuza uKabelo. Uxolo, asilolam. Sala kakuhle! Misa! Molo, sisi. Awulazi eli vili? Livili likabani eli? uyabuza uKabelo. Uxolo, asilolam. Sala kakuhle! Misa! Misa! Molo, mama. Livili likabani eli? Uyabuza uKabelo. Uxolo, asilolam. Sala kakuhle! Misa! Misa! Molo. Awulazi eli vili? Livili likabani eli? Uyabuza uKabelo. Uxolo, asilolam. Sala kakuhle! Misa! Misa! Molo. Awulazi eli vili? Livili likabani eli? Uyabuza

### uyabuza uKabelo. Hayi, asilolam... Lelam! Livili LAM eli! Livili lemoto yam eli! Enkosi!

- 38 sentences
- 90 words (average of 2.4 words per sentence)
- 488 letters (average of 5.4 letters per word)
- 261 syllables (average of 2.9 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs: *nk*, *hl*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, for names of people and for emphasis, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, ellipsis

# VB-14: Ekhaya

Likhaya likabani eli? Kuhlala bani apha? Bahlala apha. Likhaya labo eli. Likhaya likabani eli? Kuhlala bani apha? Bahlala apha. Likhaya labo eli. Likhaya likabani eli? Kuhlala bani apha? Bahlala apha. Likhaya labo eli. Likhaya likabani eli? Kuhlala bani apha? Bonke bahlala apha. Lilizwe labo eli. Likhaya labo bonke eli.

- 17 sentences
- 49 words (average of 2.9 words per sentence)
- 256 letters (average of 5.2 letters per word)
- 123 syllables (average of 2.5 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant digraphs in targeted learning: *hl, kh*
- 3 additional consonant blends/digraphs: *ph*, *nk*, *zw*
- Words range in length from 2-4 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks

# VB-15: Uhambo

Ndiyahamba ngomso. Ndiyalungisa. Ndinetikiti lohambo. Ndivuyile! Siyahamba. Sihamba ngololiwe ogolide! Sinamatikiti ohambo. Sivuyile! Siyahamba. Sizakuhamba ngomoya. Siya kude! Sivuye kakhulu!

- 28 sentences
- 44 words (average of 1.6 words per sentence)
- 381 letters (average of 8.7 letters per word)
- 170 syllables (average of 3.9 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends in targeted learning: *mb*, *ng*
- 2 additional consonant blends/digraphs: *nd*, *kh*

- Words range in length from 2-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, full stops, exclamation marks

### VB-16: Yophukile ifestile

Ifestile yam yophukile. Yekabani le bhola? uyazibuza umama uPhosa. Yophukile ifestile yam. Niyayazi le bhola? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Hayi mama, asiyazi. Ifestile yam yophukile. Yibhola kabani le? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Hayi mama, asiyazi. Ifestile yam yophukile. Yekabani le bhola? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Hayi mama, asiyazi. Yophukile ifestile yam. Niyayazi le bhola? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Hayi mama, asiyazi. Sazi le ibhola. Ifestile yam yophukile. Yibhola kabani le? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Hayi mama, asiyazi. Sazi le ibhola. Ifestile yam yophukile. Uyayazi le bhola, tata uBhele? uyabuza umama uPhosa. Ewe, yibhola yam. Ndicela uxolo. Ndiza kuyibhatala!

- 24 sentences
- 93 words (average of 3.9 words per sentence)
- 522 letters (average of 5.6 letters per word)
- 259 syllables (average of 2.8 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant digraphs in targeted learning: *bh*, *ph*
- 1 additional consonant blend: *nd*
- 1 borrowed consonant blend: *st*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for names of people, full stops, question marks, exclamation mark, commas

### VB-17: Ncedani

Ukati omafutha ubona incede encinci emthini. Ukati omafutha uyayibawela le ncede. Ukati omafutha ukhwela emthini. Ncedani! Ukati omafutha emthini. USara uza kunceda. USara ukhwela emthini. Ncedani! Ukati omafutha noSara emthini. UDon uza kunceda. UDon ukhwela emthini. Ncedani! Ukati omafutha, uSara noDon emthini. Umama uMina uza kunceda. Umama uMina ukhwela emthini. Ncedani! Ukati omafutha, uSara, uDon nomama uMina emthini. Umalume uSoli uza kunceda. Hayi bo! Wemka umalume uSoli... Baza kuthini? Umalume uSoli ubuya neleli ukuze ancede! USara, uDon nomama uMina bancumile. 'Malume Soli, siyabulela usincedile! Wena ncede encinci, uncedakele! Wena kati omafutha, awubuye ufumane uncedo kuthi!'

- 26 sentences
- 95 words (average of 3.7 words per sentence)
- 522 letters (average of 5.5 letters per word)
- 295 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs in targeted learning: *nc*, *th*
- 1 additional consonant blend: *khw*

- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for names of people, full stops, question mark, exclamation marks, commas, ellipsis, speech marks

#### VB-18: Uphi uZinzi?

Molo, sele. Igama lam ndinguZinzi. Ndize ne-emele yam. Kushushu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. Abasebenzi badiniwe. Basebenza kanzima. Kushushu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. 'Uphi uZinzi?' bayabuza. Molo, lovane. Igama lam ndinguZinzi. Ndize ne-emele yam. Kushushu kakhulu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. Abasebenzi badiniwe. Basebenza kanzima. Kushushu kakhulu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. 'Uphi uZinzi?' bayabuza. Molo, cikilishe. Igama lam ndinguZinzi. Ndize ne-emele yam. Kushushu kakhulu, kakhulu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. 'Uphi uZinzi?' bayabuza. Molo, cikilishe. Igama lam ndinguZinzi. Ndize ne-emele yam. Kushushu kakhulu, kakhulu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. Abasebenzi badiniwe. Basebenza kanzima. Kushushu kakhulu, kakhulu. Abasebenzi bafuna ukusela amanzi. 'UPHI UZINZI?' bayabuza. Wade wafika uZinzi! Bade bafumana amanzi! 'Shu! Bekushushu! Ne-emele ibinzima. Ibe ngumsebenzi onzima lo!' HAYI BO, ZINZI!

- 37 sentences
- 98 words (average of 2.6 words per sentence)
- 648 letters (average of 6.6 letters per word)
- 307 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs in targeted learning: *nz*, *sh*
- 4 additional consonant blends/digraphs: *nd*, *ng*, *kh*, *ph*
- Words range in length from 1-5 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, for names of people and for emphasis, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, speech marks

### VB-19: Sidlala undize

Yizani sidlale. Sizakudlala undize. Ndizakubala. Nina niyazimela. Mandiqale, ndiyabala. Balekani, funani iindawo zokuzimela... Ngumdlalo omnandi lo! Ndize? Ndize? Ndiyeza! Ndikufumene! Ndiyifumene nendawo ozimela kuyo. Iza, landela... Ngumdlalo omnandi lo! Ndize? Ndize? Ndiyeza! Ndikufumene! Ndiyifumene nendawo ozimela kuyo. Iza, landela... Ngumdlalo omnandi lo! Ndize? Ndize? Ndiyeza! Ndikufumene! Ndiyifumene nendawo ozimela kuyo. Nini aba. Ndinifumene! Owu, sayeka kusemnandi! Yizani, lixesha lesidlo sasemini. Mhmm... amaqanda nesoseji. Sisidlo esimnandi esi! Yho! Ibi ngumdlalo omnandi lo! Ndinifumene nonke! Hayi sonke! Mna awukandifumani!

- 37 sentences
- 77 words (average of 2.1 words per sentence)
- 504 letters (average of 6.5 letters per word)
- 241 syllables (average of 3.1 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs in targeted learning: *dl*, *nd*

- 4 additional consonant blends/digraphs: ng, sh, nk, yh
- Words range in length from 1-7 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for names of people, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, ellipsis

#### VB-20: Sityiwe isonka

Unkosazana uNkawu umeme umnumzana uNkawu. Baza kutya isonka sombhako, nesonka samasi. Unkosazana ubeka isonka efestileni. Ubeka nesonka samasi esityeni. Umnumzana uNkawu ufikile. Uyabukeka kule suti. Akakatyi oko kusile. 'Sitya nini?' uyabuza umnumzana. Uyalibazisa kodwa unkosazana. Umnumzana unukisa isonka. Unukisa isonka samasi. Umnumzana ufuna ukutya... Uyasitya isonka nesonka samasi! Unkosazana uyalibazisa! Uxakekile, uqabe nomlomo. Uzibuka nasesipilini. Ufuna ukubukeka kakhulu. 'Sitya nini?' uyabuza umnumzana. Unkosazana uyalibazisa suka! Umnumzana unukisa isonka. Unukisa isonka samasi. Umnumzana ufuna ukutya... Uyasitya isonka nesonka samasi! Wabuza umnumzana. Unkosazana uyalibazisa suka! Umnumzana unukisa isonka. Unukisa isonka samasi. Umnumzana ufuna ukutya... Uyasitya isonka nesonka samasi! Wade wavela unkosazana uyalibazisa! Umnumzana uyasitya isonka nesonka samasi! Wade wavela unkosazana. 'Iza sitye isonka sombhako,' unkosazana wamkela umnumzana. 'ISONKA! SENDITYILE!' Owu! Usitye sonke isonka nesonka samasi, umnumzana uNkawu! 'Icebo lam liwile!' uyalila unkosazana uNkawu. 'Ukummema kona? Soze ndiphinde!'

- 34 sentences
- 115 words (average of 3.4 words per sentence)
- 796 letters (average of 6.9 letters per word)
- 420 syllables (average of 3.7 syllables per word)
- 2 consonant blends/digraphs in targeted learning: *nk*, *ty*
- 5 additional consonant blends/digraphs: *bh*, *dw*, *kh*, *nd*, *ph*
- 1 borrowed consonant blend: *st*
- Words range in length from 1-6 syllables.
- Punctuation: capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for names, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, speech marks, ellipsis