



Examining the Centrality of Indigenous Languages to Successful HIV/AIDS Communication in South Africa¹

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ABSTRACT This paper aims to examine the importance of the use of indigenous languages in HIV/AIDS Communication in South Africa. Research has established that any message targeted at behaviour change which is anchored outside the linguistic codes of target population is bound to affect the rate at which such messages are assimilated by intended audience. In South Africa, research has revealed that because of theatre's use of English/Afrikaans as well as adulterated vernacular in HIV communication, audiences in many communities whose proficiency in English and Afrikaans is poor and those whose indigenous languages are presented with a lot of adulterated words have failed to articulate the message about HIV/AIDS and behaviour change. Using a qualitative methodology, the paper examined the result of a three year research conducted in two provinces of South Africa by two prominent theatre groups in their HIV/AIDS campaigns. The findings indicate that because of the limited attention paid to the use of indigenous language of target population, not much success was achieved in disseminating HIV/AIDS messages to members of these communities¹. The paper argues that based on the results of this study, the minimal success achieved in the above campaigns can be credited mainly to theatre's failure to acknowledge the critical role the correct use of indigenous languages plays in HIV/AIDS communication.