

Who killed the copywriter? The death of the English language in advertising

By [Manqoba Zondi](#)

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The answer, definitely and resoundingly, is "the art director". But is this true? Is it because of the whole "a picture speaks a thousand words" malarkey?



Image credit: Jason Leung on Unsplash.

To be honest, it's not only art directors, but it's also the advertising industry as a whole.



There's a reason they say a picture is worth a thousand words

Damon Stapleton 28 Nov 2018



Who else is to blame?

The "death of English" sounds a little melodramatic, but the emotion is overwhelmingly justified. In the wake of emoticons, word abbreviations and social media, conventional English has lived out its glory days and has been replaced with eggplant emojis, *totes* (meaning totally) and 280 characters.

Why is this so? The truth is that a language, no matter how widely spoken, dies soon after the dominant culture that speaks it, evolves. That generation is known as the "Tik Tok" aka Generation Z and millennials.

From out of nowhere, they descended upon us with their unusual lingo, senseless entitlement and 'tree-hugging'. What's happened is that we as copywriters had to adjust – learn an entirely new way of writing, seemingly, overnight. The market today is so powerful that, as marketers and ad people, we are tripping over ourselves to appease this fickle audience.



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Tinashe Zvakasikwa 10 Jul 2019



Is there an opportunity for new languages?

In South Africa, English is the most spoken language in the country – which is strange considering that people of colour make up 90% of the population – and, with that, they bring their beautiful native languages.

So, what's stopping us from incorporating vernac in our ads? Why aren't we talking to these people – especially in their own language?



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Llewellyn Allen 3 Nov 2017



With this, we can entice, nurture and grow a new breed of copywriter. This is pivotal! Especially for creatives in the ad industry.

Whether it's seeing a famous brand communicate to you in Zulu or hearing a radio spot in Venda from an emerging brand. The possibilities are tantalising.

“ Nelson Mandela said: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” ”

So is English getting boring, especially when so many people speak other languages outside of English? Gen Z and millennials included. As a species, we thrive on languages.

“ .@CyrilRamaphosa never stop evaluating "isphithiphithi" #CabinetAnnouncement pic.twitter.com/LxSxbzAOYq— NandosSA (@NandosSA) [May 29, 2019](#) ”

We're meant to speak many tongues, our evolutionary journey is proof of that – we've come a long way from grunting and screaming. So, copywriters must evolve (be 'woke') if they want to stay relevant – but agencies must create opportunities for the writers to flourish.

Communicating in more than one language is highly beneficial to your progression as a writer, or you run the risk of becoming obsolete. Or worse, “killed”.

ABOUT MANQOBA ZONDI

Manqoba Zondi (aka Que) is a Senior Copywriter at Jupiter Drawing Room. Previously, Que worked as a Mid-weight writer for Ninety9cents communication. Que is an avid collector of bow-ties - if he's not "feeling" his way through fabrics for his next piece. He can be found looking for his next source of creative inspiration on festivals dancefloors or on stage at storytelling events.

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