

Language Related Rural-Urban Differences In South Africa

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Literature has traditionally portrayed urban and rural environments as separate entities, each with a range of distinctive social, economic and institutional characteristics. The question arises, however, whether modern technology and the associated interactive lifestyles have not already narrowed rural and urban physical distance to such an extent that social distances are also fading. The answer to this question in the new South Africa has specific implications for administrative systems and development needs in urban and rural areas respectively. The general objective of this paper is therefore to establish the nature and magnitude of rural urban convergence in South Africa. In the post-apartheid South Africa, language constitutes an appropriate measure of 'rural' and 'urban' ethnic character. Language is a significant marker of social structuring and should be recognized as such in addressing the development needs of urban and rural communities more effectively. The evidence presented in this paper shows that the western-oriented Afrikaans speakers experiencing an advanced technology and a modern lifestyle, have progressed much further along the continuum to rural-urban convergence than Zulu speakers, displaying a typically developing African profile. The preliminary results of this study have various academic and practical implications for Geography and public policy.

Keywords: Language groups, language distribution, language profiles, rural-urban convergence, South Africa.

Literature has traditionally portrayed urban and rural environments as separate entities, each with a range of distinctive social, economic and institutional characteristics. The question arises, however, whether modern technology and the associated interactive lifestyles have not already narrowed rural and urban physical distance to such an extent that social distances are also fading. The answer to this question in the new South Africa has specific implications for administrative systems and development needs in urban and rural areas respectively. According to the present government's proposed Urban and Rural Strategy (Republic of South Africa, 1995) '... today's urban growth puts into question the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural, between town and countryside. Many denser settlements are simultaneously urban and rural. Commuter townships established

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by apartheid planning are often on the outer edges of traditional cities. Circulatory migration blurs the distinction between urban and rural dwellers'. Further, it is the specific goal of this strategy to establish '... more diverse commercial and service sectors in country towns and the countryside, and greater integration between towns and the rural areas'. Geographic indicators play a significant role in this rural-urban issue.

The general objective of this paper is therefore to establish the nature and magnitude of rural-urban convergence in South Africa. Spatial and socio-demographic indicators are pivotal in measuring this distinction. During the apartheid era black-white ethnicity was the prevalent differential distinguishing rural and urban communities. In the post-apartheid South Africa, however, language constitutes a more appropriate measure of 'rural' and 'urban' ethnic character. Language is a significant marker of social structuring and should be recognized as such in addressing the development needs of urban and rural communities more effectively. Likewise, in the formulation of South Africa's future language policy, recognition of the diversity of ethno-cultural profiles and geolinguistic patterns are of critical importance. Within this context the analysis will focus specifically on the following four research issues:

- The *conceptual niche* within which rural-urban convergence and geolinguistic characteristics could be married;
- The *spatial identification* of rural and urban population distribution within a language framework;
- The *socio-demographic profiles* of ruralites and urbanites with different ethno-linguistic origins;
- The academic and practical *implications* of the observed rural-urban characteristics.

Before embarking on the empirical analysis of these issues in South Africa, the conceptual framework of the study should be defined more clearly.

THE CONCEPTUAL BASE

Two broad geographical concepts underpin the thrust of this paper: *rural-urban convergence* and *geolinguistic convergence*. Most definitions that distinguish between rural and urban settlements usually emphasize criteria such as differences in economic activity, management systems, lifestyle and values, form and density, to name just a few. Traditionally the population of a region is thus quantified dualistically. In 1995 the world population numbered approximately 5,800 million, of which 45% (2,600 million) lived in urban areas and 55% (3,200 million) in rural areas (United Nations, 1996).

Estimates of the proportion of the South African population living in rural and urban areas vary widely as no formally accepted definition of rural and urban exists. Previously, many areas in apartheid South Africa were incorrectly classified as 'rural'. These areas were essentially urban in nature, but without services, as

they had high concentrations of people living in an area in which the economic base was provided by some distant city where its inhabitants were employed. One could probably term such places rather as 'displaced urban' or 'peri-urban' areas. Rural-urban figures in South Africa are therefore not always reliable indicators of population levels (Republic of South Africa, 1995). The last population census in South Africa (1991) counted 31 million people of which 58% (18 million) lived in urban areas and 42% (13 million) in rural areas. South Africa's apartheid pattern of urbanization was traditionally structured along racial-ethnic lines. Whilst Whites have already attained a 92% level of urbanization, Coloreds and Asians are presently 87% urbanized, which is comparable with Western norms. In contrast to these tendencies, the relatively low overall level of 50% and high growth rate of urban Blacks indicate a phase of accelerated urbanization similar to that which is observed internationally in most Third World developing countries. In the future post-apartheid South Africa, language will be an appropriate substitute for the sensitive race measure of White-Black ethnic grouping.

The question which needs to be addressed, however, is to what extent the above mentioned traditional differentiation between purely rural and purely urban can be rigidly maintained in the future. Owing to better communications technology and mass media, as well as increased access to education, cultural networks and migration, closer links between rural and urban areas are shaping the course of future social and economic patterns. These variables influence behavior and values on both sides of the rural-urban divide and tend to soften the distinctions between them (United Nations, 1996). People, goods and information travel via the 'global village' networks at blistering speeds and in the process ideas, lifestyles, values and aspirations are also integrated more freely. The overall effect is the creation of a lesser divide than the rural-urban continuum traditionally suggested. Urbanization of rural areas (i.e. economic opportunities and services) and rural lifestyles in urban areas (i.e. urban agriculture) are merging the settlement system into a '*rurban*' entity (United Nations, 1996). One effect of this interaction has been a narrowed income gap between rural and urban communities (Jamal and Weeks, 1988; Potts, 1995). If this transformation process is correctly identified, future development strategies, population censuses and geographical research, to name but a few terrains, will have to be rethought and restructured. In the light of the possible convergence of urban and rural lifestyles in modern society we must ascertain whether the notion of the urban place as a distinctive object of analysis remains valid (Pacione, 1990). Therefore, the extent to which the rural-urban convergence has already taken place in South Africa should be assessed.

A simple dualistic comparison of a country's total population between rural and urban often subdues important differences among subgroups of the population. One way of understanding the process more accurately, is by structuring the rural-urban differentiation along ethnic-cultural lines. In the transformation of post-apartheid South Africa, language becomes a more acceptable indicator of

culture and ethnicity than racial criteria as language is a hallmark and symbol of cultural diversity, helping to distinguish diverse social groups. As urban and rural differences are, in concept, fundamentally a difference in social lifestyle and human behavior, ethnicity and language should be built into the analysis in order to fully comprehend the subtleties of the convergence process. One cannot fully understand the complexity of human society and rural-urban differentiations without giving geolinguistics its full due.

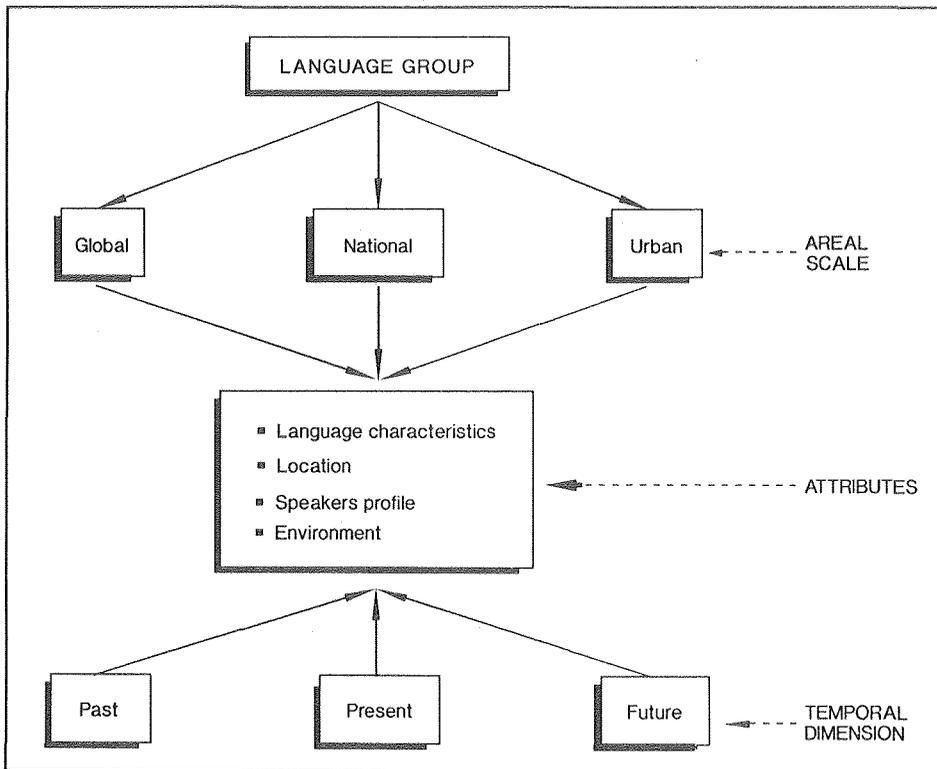
We have witnessed the emergence of the 'global city' which has liberated language from its traditional bounds of time and space in rural and urban areas. Through electronic communication media it is possible to interact multilingually within a holistic urban and rural system. Processes such as the migration of linguistic groups, language displacement, cultural shift and access to the media, have all contributed to the consequence that we can no longer define the internal linguistic communities in a country with the same confidence as in the past (Williams, 1992). The debate on the territorial convergence of language is not yet finalized. As a cultural-ethnic framework, within which rural-urban convergence or divergence can be identified, it has not been explored satisfactorily in Geography. In this respect the role of language in distinguishing diverse social groups is very important.

Apart from its symbolic value, the main function of language is to provide a mode of communication between individuals of a particular cultural or ethnic group. Within a multi-ethnic society language is frequently the means through which cultural groups seek to preserve their identity. In this process linguistic differences can enrich the cultural fabric of society. On the other hand, it is also true that language diversity can lead to friction and even conflict between subgroups. Ethno-linguistic groups are characterized by common descent and traditions, specific cultural traits and strong feelings of identity and togetherness, while they exist as subgroups in a host society different in many respects (Knox, 1987; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990; Li, 1993). A network of cultural institutions supports the language group's identity in a multi-ethnic urban society (Thraves, 1991). Geolinguistic concepts constitute the theoretical framework for the present article's empirical content. This constitutes the role of language in space and place, spatial contact and competition, regional expansion and dominance, segregation and assimilation, social ecology, migration and the institutional environment (Williams, 1988; Hughes, 1990; Breton, 1991; Van der Merwe, 1993). Socio-linguistic concepts play a complementary role to geolinguistic theory. Social construction, social networks, social interaction, communication, symbolism, language identity, speech community, post-modern society, ethnicity and ethnography are all concepts with great research scope (Edwards, 1985; Cook-Gumpez, 1986; Milroy, 1987; Fasold, 1990; Herbert, 1992; Simons and Billig, 1994; Romaine, 1994).

The study of language within a geolinguistic context is conceptualized in Figure 1. Language studies may be undertaken at three different *areal scales* (glo-

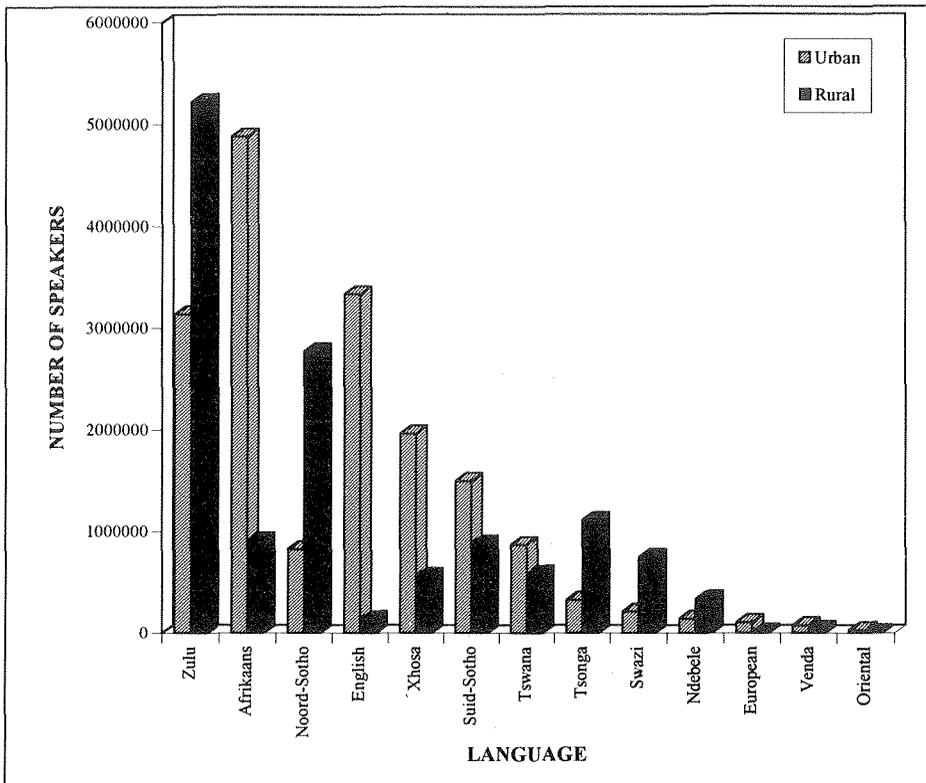
bal, national and urban); may focus on four *research attributes* (the language, its spatial patterns, the speakers' social profile and the institutional environment in which the language functions); while the *temporal dimension* embraces the present static form or the dynamic change of the language attributes (Van der Merwe, 1995). The present analysis is mainly based on two general geolinguistic concepts, i.e. the spatial outcome of language *location* and the speaker's *social profile*.

Figure 1: Simplified conceptual model for the study of language groups.



In the changing South Africa of the nineties, language patterns became a top priority on the national agenda of reform. South Africa's language policy, as defined in the new constitution, will accommodate eleven official languages with equal status. They are English, Afrikaans and nine Black languages, Xhosa, Zulu, Swati, Ndebele, Tsonga, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Tswana and Venda (Figure 2 summarizes their size and relative composition). Although the South African society is extremely diverse and multilingual, the two largest language groups are Zulu and Afrikaans, a local African and an European language respectively. Their specific distribution patterns and social profiles may help us in defining the rural-urban convergence process in the country more effectively.

Figure 2: Language composition of South Africa, 1991.



RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENTIATION IN PHYSICAL SPACE

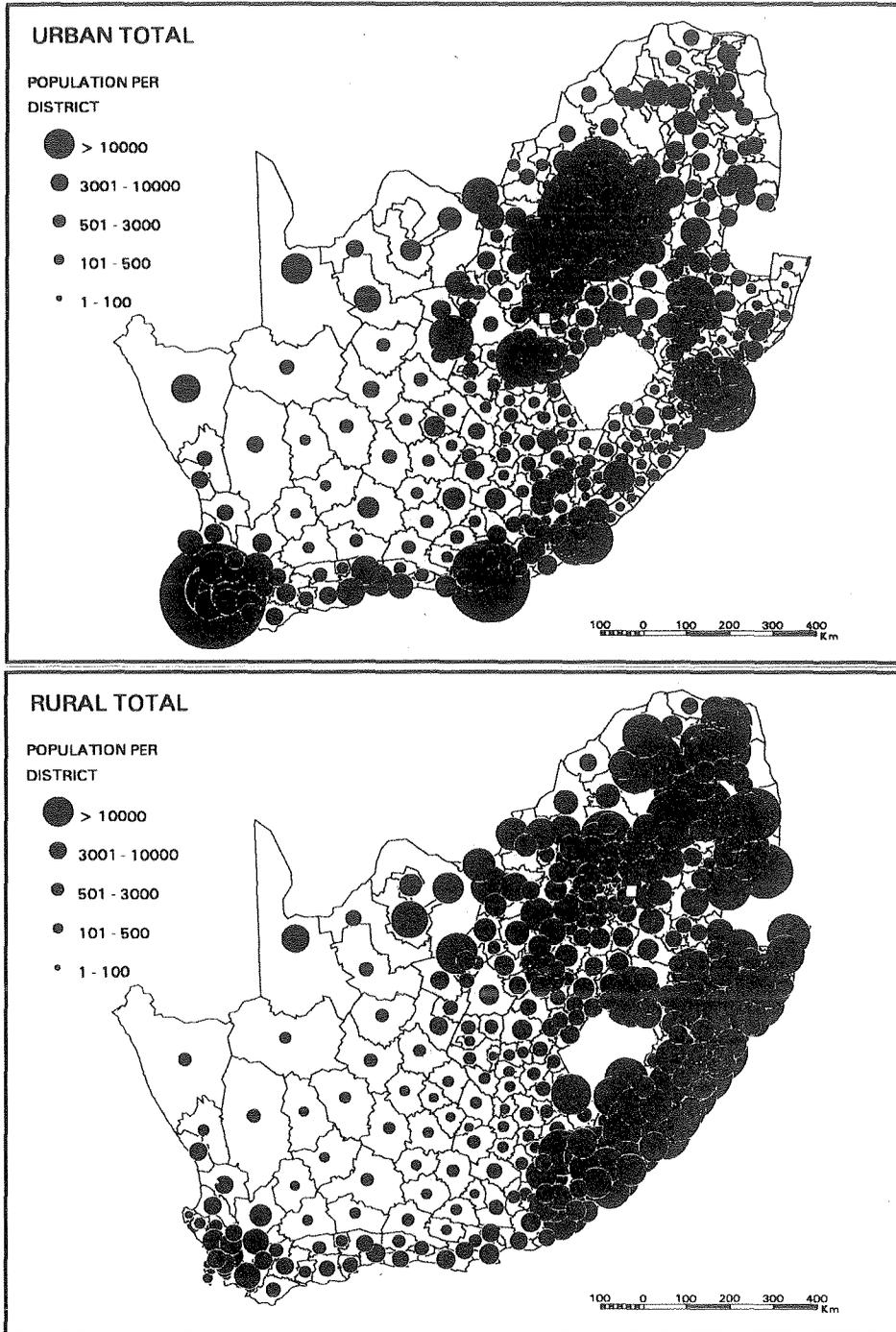
The empirical data for the analysis was derived from the official 1991 population census of the Republic of South Africa. The extraction of data from the computerized census records (31 million people) was based on the variables 'first home language' and 'settlement type', aggregated per statistical district. The census data was linked to the spatial overlay of 320 district units and nine provinces, utilizing the ARC/INFO Geographical Information System (ESRI 1990). The cartographic capabilities of this GIS technique have been complimented by an intensive SAS-application, producing statistical tables of the rural-urban profiles (SAS Institute, 1990).

One of the most striking characteristics of the South African population is its linguistic diversity. The national *linguistic composition*, consisting of eleven official languages as well as several European immigrant and Oriental languages, is depicted in Figure 2. In the rest of this analysis Zulu and Afrikaans, the two strongest linguistic groups, are compared, together with the total population of the country.

In 1991 the *total population* count of South Africa was 31 million, of which 58% lived in approximately 800 urban settlements and the other 42% on rural

farms and traditional villages.¹ The spatial distribution of these two categories is portrayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Total urban and rural population distribution in South Africa, 1991.



The urban distribution map demonstrates a relatively dense concentration along the coast as well as in the northern and eastern interior. In these areas urban settlements are not only located closer together, but are generally larger in size. In broad terms, this picture mirrors the historical settlement pattern and unequal resource base of the country. The metropolitan areas hold an unmistakably dominant position in the urban system—the Gauteng (Johannesburg/Pretoria) complex is the indisputable leader, followed on the second tier by Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth. During three-and-a-half centuries of Western occupation, South Africa has indeed experienced remarkable urbanization. It must be pointed out, however, that not all urban centers have shared equally in this urbanization, with the result that a strongly unbalanced urban pattern has evolved in time and space.

It is noteworthy that the main areas of rural population concentration are in the northern and eastern sectors of the country, being potential reservoirs for future urbanization. It follows that the two distribution patterns in Figure 3 must be interpreted complementarily in order to deduce what the physical distance between the rural and urban population distributions is. The two respective centers of gravity deviate conspicuously, with the rural point 320 kilometers north of its urban counterpart.

A comparison of the two largest *language groups*' rural-urban distribution patterns offers a more refined perspective than the former broad pattern. Afrikaans, being a Western language, should, in the light of the preceding conceptualization, experience a larger measure of rural-urban convergence than in the case of a developing local African language group such as Zulu. The 8.3 million Zulu speakers are divided into a 62:38 rural-urban ratio, while the 5.7 million Afrikaans speakers has a 16:84 rural-urban ratio. Their various distribution patterns are cartographically displayed in Figure 4 (Zulu) and Figure 5 (Afrikaans).

The maps clearly demonstrate that the rural Zulu population is regionally concentrated, predominating in KwaZulu-Natal, while their urban distribution penetrates spatially in the direction of Gauteng to the northwest. Zulu is not strongly represented in the rest of the country. Afrikaans speakers form a predominantly urban population group, well spread over the country's metropolises and smaller to medium sized towns. This language group's rural base is concentrated mainly in the Western and Northern Cape. Their rural and urban distribution patterns are less segmented than those shown by the two Zulu maps. This observation is statistically acknowledged by the distance between the rural and urban centers of gravity (Afrikaans is 170 kilometers from each other while Zulu is separated by 200 kilometers). The Pearson correlation coefficient between the urban and rural distributions is +0.24 for Afrikaans and +0.13 for Zulu. Although not statistically significant, the spatial convergence of the former language group is double that of the Zulu group.

Figure 4: Zulu urban and rural population distribution in South Africa, 1991.

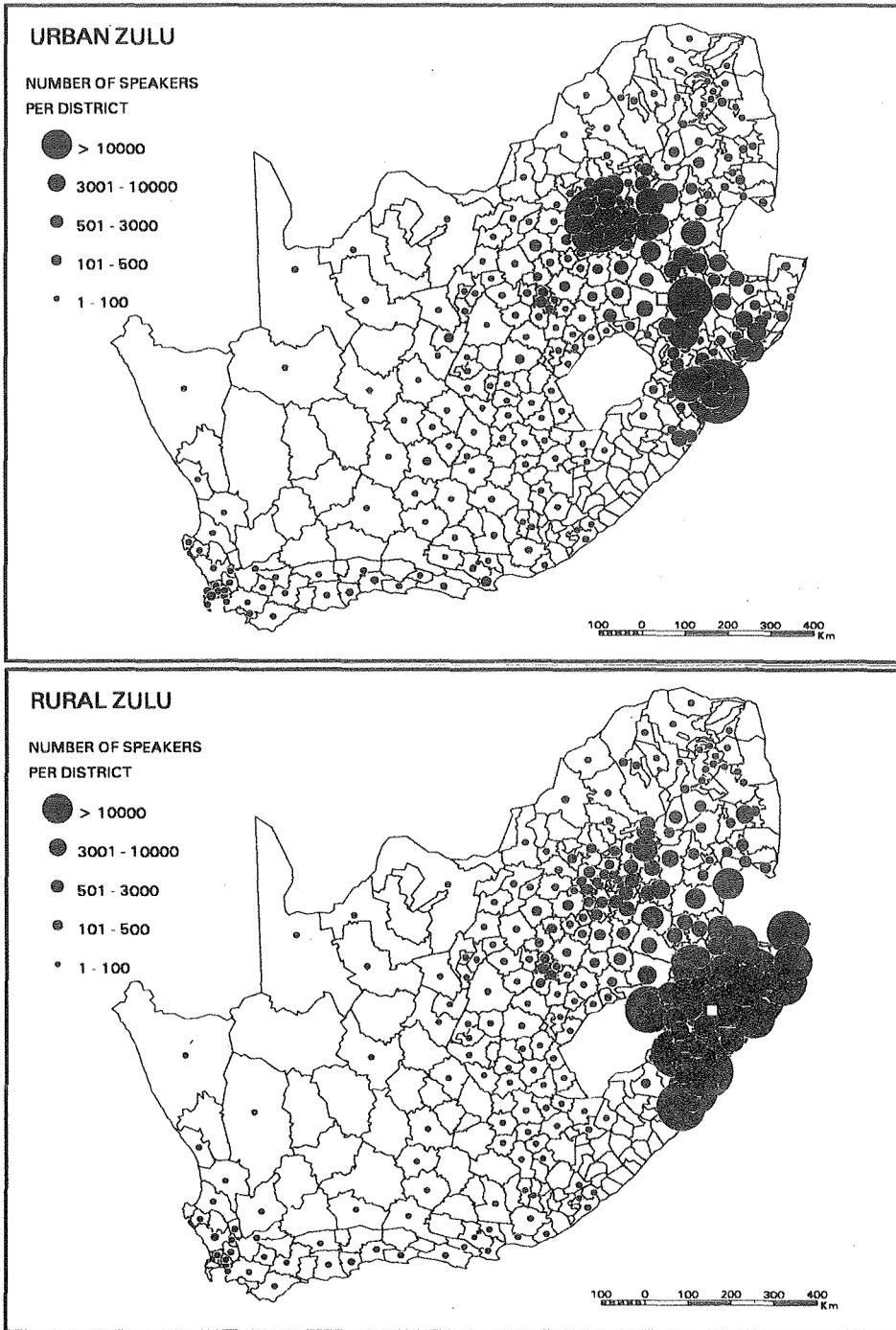
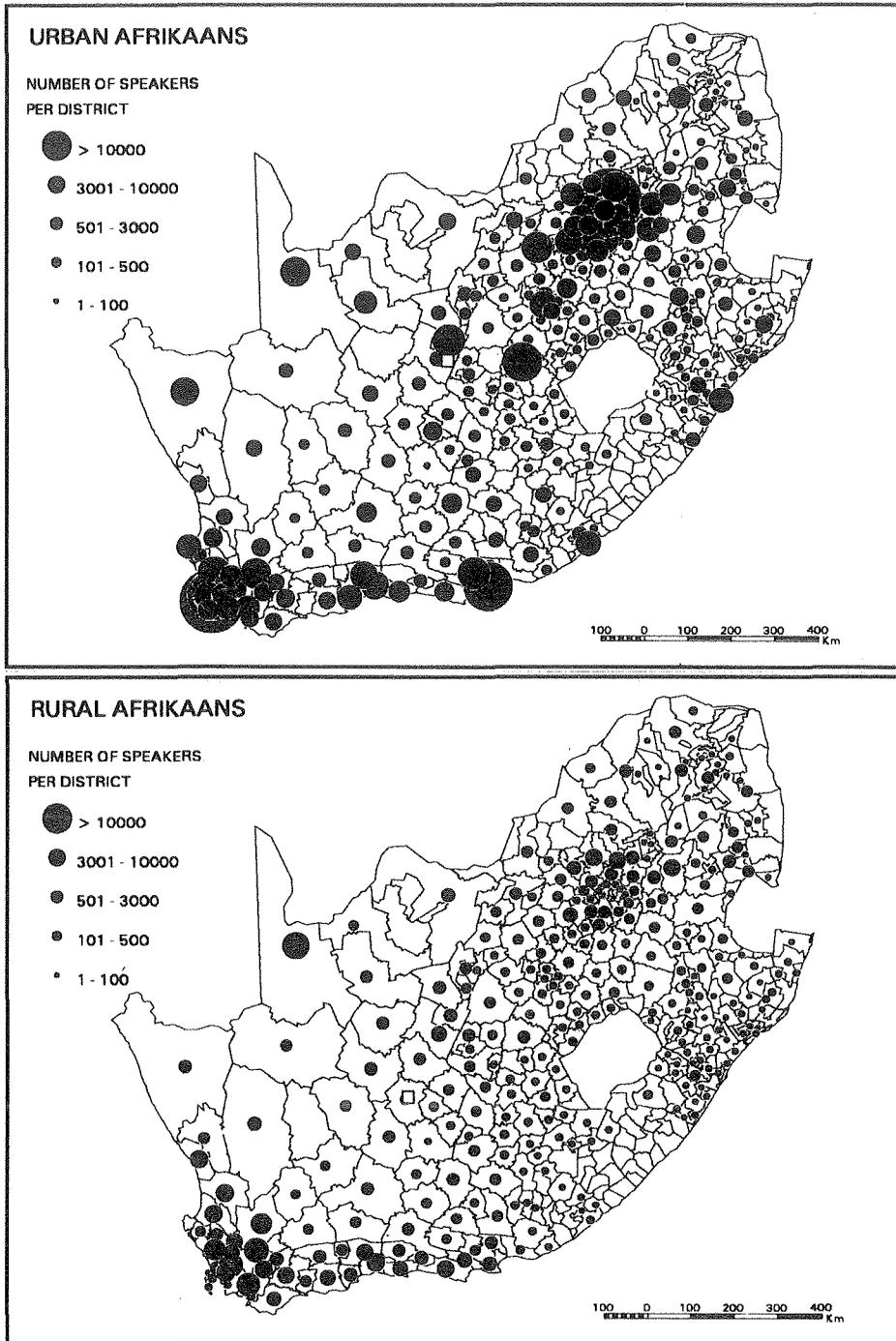


Figure 5: Afrikaans urban and rural population distribution in South Africa, 1991.



Viewed broadly, it would appear as if urban and rural Afrikaans speaking residents have already converged more closely in space than the Zulus. Taking into account the previous spatial patterns, a further question to be answered is to what degree these two ethnic group's rural and urban profiles also demonstrate signs of social convergence.

RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENTIATION IN SOCIAL SPACE

Demographic, cultural and economic characteristics of the population are significant indicators of rural-urban differentiation and correspondence. In typical urban ecological terms selected population census variables for 1991, expressed as aggregated rural and urban values for the total population and the two selected ethno-linguistic subgroups, are summarized in Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1: Rural-urban profile: South Africa in total.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Total Number</i>	58%	42%	31,000,000
<i>Race</i>			
% White	26.3	3.4	16.4
% Coloured	21.0	4.4	13.8
% Black	52.7	92.2	69.8
<i>Gender</i>			
% Male	50.8	48.9	50.0
<i>Marital status</i>			
% Married	33.6	21.5	28.3
% Widowed	6.5	3.9	5.4
<i>Age</i>			
Average (years)	28.8	23.2	26.4
% <10 years (children)	19.1	30.3	23.9
<i>Religion</i>			
% Christian	71.1	60.3	66.4
% No religion	24.4	39.4	30.9
<i>Length of stay</i>			
% > 10 years	33.1	43.9	37.8
<i>Level of education</i>			
% Std 10 and higher	18.3	4.8	12.4
<i>Literacy</i>			
% Read/Write	43.8	22.0	37.2
<i>Occupation</i>			
% Non-economically active	54.1	73.5	62.5
% White Collar*	35.3	12.5	28.3
<i>Economic sector</i>			
% Agriculture/Forestry*	1.4	31.1	10.5
% Industry*	15.5	4.8	12.2
% Commerce/Financial*	20.3	6.3	16.0
<i>Income</i>			
Per capita income	R18,200	R7,600	R15,100
% > R50,000	3.1	0.4	2.0
<i>Work status</i>			
% Employer*	7.4	6.0	6.8

*Calculated as % of economically active population.

The *racial* composition of South-Africa's total population (Table 1) is predominantly White and Coloured-oriented in urban areas and Black in the rural environment. The Zulu subgroup's proportional division between urban and rural, is equal (Table 2), while Afrikaans speakers have a strong white urban and rural focus (Table 3).

Table 2: Rural-urban profile: Zulu speakers.

VARIABLE	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL
<i>Total Number</i>	37.5%	62.5%	8,354,000
<i>Race</i>			
% White	0.1	0.0	0.0
% Coloured	0.2	0.1	0.1
% Black	99.8	99.9	99.9
<i>Gender</i>			
% Male	51.7	46.3	48.3
<i>Marital status</i>			
% Married	24.4	18.0	20.4
% Widowed	4.6	3.7	4.0
<i>Age</i>			
Average (years)	26.4	22.6	24.0
% <10 years (children)	21.3	31.4	27.6
<i>Religion</i>			
% Christian	77.5	22.2	68.6
% No religion	63.2	36.7	31.3
<i>Length of stay</i>			
% > 10 years	40.6	51.8	47.6
<i>Level of education</i>			
% Std 10 and higher	8.9	3.4	5.5
<i>Literacy</i>			
% Read/Write	35.8	21.8	26.7
<i>Occupation</i>			
% Non-economically active	53.8	77.6	68.7
% White Collar*	21.8	14.0	18.3
<i>Economic sector</i>			
% Agriculture/Forestry*	1.0	20.1	9.6
% Industry*	16.7	7.1	12.5
% Commerce/Financial*	14.9	7.8	11.8
<i>Income</i>			
Per capita income	R8,700	R5,700	R7,300
% >R50,000	0.3	0.1	0.2
<i>Work status</i>			
% Employer*	5.0	5.6	5.2

*Calculated as % of economically active population.

The *gender division* of the total population does not differ meaningfully. The two language subgroup's deviance is more prominent, with Zulu males and Afrikaans females more strongly represented in the urban areas. In the former case the imbalance could be ascribed to the traditional rural base, upheld by the

wives of urban male workers. The ascendancy of Afrikaans women is probably related to *marital status*, where the proportion of widows in cities is higher than in rural areas. The larger proportion of married people found in urban areas can be attributed to the *age* variable. While the average age for the total population and for Zulus are lower in rural areas (signifying more children), there is no clear rural-urban difference for the Afrikaans group.

Table 3: Rural-Urban profile: Afrikaans speakers.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Total Number</i>	84.3%	15.7%	5 751 000
<i>Race</i>			
% White	53.1	38.0	30.7
% Coloured	45.8	58.5	47.7
% Black	1.2	3.6	1.5
<i>Gender</i>			
% Male	48.7	52.9	49.4
<i>Marital status</i>			
% Married	37.9	34.9	37.4
% Widowed	7.3	3.9	6.7
<i>Age</i>			
Average (years)	29.1	28.6	29.0
% <10 years (children)	19.0	21.6	19.4
<i>Religion</i>			
% Christian	76.4	79.0	76.8
% No religion	21.5	20.8	21.4
<i>Length of stay</i>			
% > 10 years	28.7	28.4	28.7
<i>Level of education</i>			
% Std 10 and higher	24.1	16.4	22.9
<i>Literacy</i>			
% Read/Write	43.8	29.4	41.3
<i>Occupation</i>			
% Non-economically active	56.7	55.4	56.5
% White Collar*	45.0	15.0	40.2
<i>Economic sector</i>			
% Agriculture/Forestry*	2.5	58.9	11.6
% Industry*	16.6	3.8	14.5
% Commerce/Financial*	21.9	7.1	19.5
<i>Income</i>			
Per capita income	R22,700	R18,000	R22,000
% >R50,000	4.6	3.7	4.4
<i>Work status</i>			
% Employer*	7.0	14.8	8.2

*Calculated as % of economically active population.

Regarding *religion*, it is striking that for the total population Christianity is more strongly established in the urban areas, whilst the no religious affinity category is more prominent in rural areas. With respect to the Zulu group both religion variables are more strongly represented in cities, while Afrikaans speakers do not demonstrate a large difference between the two settlement types. *Length of stay* at the present address indicates the stability of a community's living environment. It is illuminating that whilst the total population and the Zulus show greater stability in rural areas, Afrikaans speakers show practically no difference between urban and rural environments.

In terms of socio-economic status, *education levels* are measured using matriculation as a criteria of evaluation. Higher qualifications are achieved by the urban population of all three groups. The same urban bias is also found with respect to *literacy* levels. This sharp rural-urban difference is extended to *occupation* where white-collar jobs are more prominent in urban areas for the total population and for the two language subgroups. However, although the non-economically active proportion is more strongly represented in the rural settlements for the Zulus, for Afrikaans speakers there is no significant difference. As expected, the *economic sector* also has strong rural-urban differences on all the tables, with agriculture and forestry concentrated in rural regions, against the secondary and tertiary industries that are urban bound. Concerning *work status* the proportion of employers are relatively similar amongst the total population and Zulus, but for Afrikaans speakers the rural settlements have proportionally more employers as a result of the relatively large number of farmers owing their own land. The rural-urban *income* gap for the total population has not yet narrowed dramatically, since the urban per capita income is more than double that of the rural. For the two language subgroups the income difference is much smaller. Urban Zulus and Afrikaans speakers respectively earn 50 % and 26 % more than their rural counterparts.

In summary, it would appear from the respective social profiles that the *total population* (Table 1) does not yet demonstrate significant signs of rural-urban convergence. Only gender and the work status show strong similarities between urban and rural areas. The ethno-linguistic breakdown suggests an interesting correction to this generalized view. In supplementing the mapped tendencies towards spatial convergence, the tables suggest that social convergence is much more strongly developed with regard to Afrikaans speakers (Table 3) than is the case for the Zulu group (Table 2). Social characteristics of the *Afrikaans* speaking population that show strong similarity between rural and urban profiles are gender composition, age, marital status, religious affiliation, length of stay, non-economically active population and income. On the other hand, substantial differences exist for race, education level, literacy, white collar occupations and economic sector. The *Zulu* social profile generally demonstrates relatively stronger rural-urban differences for most of the variables except for race, widowed, highest income category and work status.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOGRAPHY AND POLICY

The evidence presented in this paper shows that the process of rural-urban convergence in South Africa should not only be evaluated on a generalized macro scale of the total population. The physical and social space within which ethno-linguistic subgroups function reveal a more articulated perspective of rural-urban differences and similarities. Western-oriented Afrikaans speakers, experiencing an advanced technology and a modern lifestyle, have progressed much further along the continuum to rural-urban convergence than Zulu speakers, displaying a typically developing African profile. What is demonstrated in this paper regarding Zulus and Afrikaans language groups, is reflected by the other nine official languages on a national and regional level within the nine provinces of the country.

The preliminary results of this study have various academic and practical implications for Geography and public policy:

- The effects of South Africa's integration into the 'global village' concept and its technology is becoming a visible reality in our rural-urban patterns;
- It will be increasingly difficult to distinguish between rural and urban communities and lifestyles in future. Transitional categories will have to be created, especially in Third World environments such as South Africa. In the research of geographers, traditional rural and urban differentiations will therefore have to be reconsidered;
- National population censuses, of which South Africa holds one in October this year, will have to expand its traditional dualistic differentiation of 'rural' and 'urban' to make provision for in-between categories in the system of human habitation;
- Planning for and development of the diverse South African communities within the country's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) must account for the fact that spatial and social profiles vary ethno-linguistically in their needs and lifestyles between urban and rural settlements. Therefore, the new strategy for urban and rural development makes provision for stronger integration of the two components (Republic of South Africa, 1995). Closer links between rural and urban environments, integrating the respective settlements and communities, would make sustainable development in a transforming post-apartheid South Africa much easier;

Having said this, I must admit that the complex rural-urban debate in South Africa has just started. Many unanswered questions need to be explored. In this venture we need international and interdisciplinary co-operation. In the meantime let us stop thinking along rigid dualistic urban-rural lines and recognize human settlements as a holistic integrated system with interactive behavioral patterns.

NOTE

1. Most estimates calculate the South Africa total population in 1995 are 41 million, of which the rural-urban ratio is approximately 40:60 (Haldenwang and Boshoff, 1996). A new national census will be conducted in October 1996.

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