

ZULU

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Zulu, known by native speakers as IsiZulu, is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa. It is a member of the Nguni language group (other Nguni languages are Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele). These languages are spoken by more than 20 million people. Despite the proliferation of languages in South Africa, Zulu remains the language with the largest number of speakers. It is spoken by approximately 8.3 million people in South Africa, as well as by populations in Malawi, southern Swaziland and Lesotho. In KwaZulu-Natal, which is the largest province in South Africa, Zulu is the dominant language. Zulu is also the most commonly spoken language in the southeastern parts of Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces, as well as in the northeastern part of the Orange Free State.

Zulus live in both rural and urban areas of southern Africa. Every year, they hold ceremonies, including Heritage Day and the Reed Dance Festival, that keep their culture and traditions vibrant and alive. One of the most distinguishing features of the Zulu people is their beadwork, which is known throughout the world for its beauty and intricacy. The beadwork encompasses a symbolic language that may include reprimands and warnings, messages of love and encouragement.

Another important facet of traditional Zulu culture is the belief in *sangomas*, the divine healers of the Zulu people. *Sangomas* are thought to have supernatural powers of communicating with the ancestral spirits on behalf of the people. This and other traditional beliefs continue to play a significant role in the lives of many Zulus.

STUDYING ZULU IN THE U.S.

Below is a list of some of the universities in the United States that currently offer Zulu. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site, located at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>

Boston University
Columbia University
Indiana University
Michigan State University
Ohio State University
University of California at Berkeley
University of California at Los Angeles
University of Georgia
University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign
University of Pennsylvania
Yale University



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ZULU WOMAN IN TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

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WHY STUDY ZULU?

There are many reasons for studying Zulu, including personal interest in southern African cultures, research interests and fulfillment of foreign language requirements. In addition, Zulu has great political, cultural, historical and social importance in southern Africa. Zulu spread throughout large areas of southern Africa; the language served as a tool for unifying the many ethnic groups found there. Another advantage of studying Zulu is that it forms the basis for understanding the other Nguni languages. If you can speak Zulu, you can invariably understand Swati, Ndebele and Xhosa.

Perhaps the most important reason to learn Zulu is, in a post-apartheid era, acquiring a global understanding of South Africa is of utmost importance. During the apartheid era, many international companies severed their ties with South Africa. The dissolution of apartheid in 1994 brought about the lifting of sanctions, which opened the country to international business. This resulted in a growing world-wide interest in the country, and today companies from all over the world invest millions of dollars in South Africa. Knowledge of Zulu would greatly benefit the many diplomats and foreign business people who live and work in South Africa. Students studying at South African universities, many of which are located in primarily Zulu-speaking areas, also have a need to learn Zulu. Others who have a strong need to learn Zulu are missionaries, international aid workers and Peace Corps Volunteers. It is very difficult for these people to do their jobs without speaking a local language. Even the most rudimentary knowledge of Zulu can lead to openness and acceptance on the part of many South Africans.

WHO SPEAKS ZULU?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

The Zulu people live in South Africa, primarily in KwaZulu-Natal (formerly known as Natal). The history of the Zulus can be traced back to the 19th century warrior, Shaka Zulu. After the death of his father, Senzangakhona, Shaka conquered many ethnic groups and consolidated them under his reign, creating a huge Zulu nation. During the wars (known as Mfecane or Difaqane) that Shaka instigated, many people fled KwaZulu-Natal and moved north, spreading the Zulu language along the way. In 1828, Dingaan, Shaka's brother, assassinated Shaka. After Dingaan's rule, his brother Cetshwayo became king. Cetshwayo led the Zulus to several military victories over the British. However, the British eventually defeated the Zulus, and in 1887 the British annexed KwaZulu-Natal, later incorporating it into a colony. Many of the cultures, customs and traditions of Shaka's time remain the cornerstones of Zulu culture. Today, the king of the Zulus is King Goodwill Zwelethini.

In 1948, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party succeeded in gaining control of Parliament and set about disenfranchising those people of color who still had the vote. The policy of separateness (apartheid) was continually reinforced and embellished with the Job Reservation Act, the Mixed Marriages Act, The Group Areas Act, The Immorality Act, the Pass Laws and many more. The Black nations were split into homelands, with the Zulu nation being separated into kwaZulu (place of the Zulu), comprising thirteen fragmented areas. In 1990, in the face of chronic internal resistance and international sanctions, the previous bans on black political parties were lifted, race laws were abolished and political prisoners were released.

In 1994, the first democratic elections were held, the homeland of kwaZulu was dissolved and the entire province of Natal was renamed KwaZulu-Natal.



Zulu students in class.



Men in traditional Zulu dress.



Zulu women washing clothing.