Towards Promoting a Responsive and Inclusive Tertiary Education System in South Africa through Multilingualism

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ABSTRACT The language question in post-democratic South Africa continues to take centre stage in the field of education. A recent announcement by the University of Natal (UKZN) that it would be mandatory for all first year students in 2014 to study isiZulu indicates a vision that could gradually usher in a tertiary education system that is bilingual in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province in South Africa. A related development in the Ministry of Basic Education which makes it mandatory for all primary school children to study an African language as from 2014 is also supportive of bi/multilingual education. Notwithstanding the fact that in the South African context, English has greater currency than African languages, this paper makes a strong case for promoting regional bi/multilingualism in South African universities. Drawing on the Singaporean socio-linguistic situation, innovative national and international tertiary initiatives aimed at promoting 'epistemological access' through bi/multilingualism and the ecology of language metaphor, the paper argues that whereas language was used to create artificial divisions and boundaries in the apartheid era, it can be used to promote student success, economic prosperity, social cohesion and human rights in post- apartheid South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to popular belief, multilingualism is a global phenomenon. However, language planning policies in most post-colonial democracies in Africa reveal that English is the main medium of instruction for a diverse student population and is employed as a linking language/language of business and trade despite the fact that it is spoken by only 9,6% of the total population (Statistics SA 2011). Code-switching is employed to enhance teaching and learning and promote student engagement in the school system and in the higher education sector (Setati et al. 2002; Mashiyi 2011).

The South African government has promulgated language policies that are supportive of multilingualism and created space for schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliberate and deliver on multilingualism (Higher Education Act 1997; Language Policy for Higher Education 2002). However, patterns of language use in higher education remain relatively unchanged from what they were during the apartheid era in the higher education sector. This position paper argues that tertiary institutions can use their implementation space to deliver responsive and inclusive curricular through bi/multilingualism. The paper discusses the current South African language policy framework in higher education and employs the ecology of language metaphor as a conceptual framework to argue for the use of African languages as languages of teaching and learning (LOLT). It draws lessons from the Singaporean socio-linguistic situation, international and national language initiatives aimed at promoting 'epistemological access' through bi/multilingualism in the tertiary education sector. This is followed by recommendations and conclusions which are drawn from the literature and the comparison between the linguistic landscapes of the two countries.

Problem Statement

Statistics South Africa (2011) revealed that the dominant first language in each province in South Africa is as follows: KZN (isiZulu, 77.8%), Free State (Se Sotho, 64.2%), Eastern Cape (isi Xhosa, 77.8%), Western Cape (Afrikaans, 49.7%), Northern Cape (Afrikaans, 53.8%), Gauteng (isiZulu, 19.8%), North West (SeTswana, 63.4%), Limpopo (Se Pedi, 52.9%), Mpumalanga (SeSwati, 22.7%). However, language-use patterns in the South African tertiary education system are not reflective of the linguistic heterogeneity of the total population and English remains the main language of instruction at South African tertiary institutions. A few South African universities such as Cape Town, Walter Sisulu, Rhodes and Limpopo have initi-

ated bilingual language projects aimed at utilising languages other than English to promote 'epistemological access' and improve student success. Innovations like these have demonstrated that learners' home/first languages (African languages) have the capacity to enhance and promote student learning. This paper draws lessons from these local initiatives and international multilingual practices in tertiary institutions and the Singaporean sociolinguistic situation to argue for a responsive and inclusive South African tertiary education system that promotes student success, retention and human rights through multilingual proficiency.

Objectives

Learning African languages as subjects or, utilising them as scaffolding to assist students make sense of curricula at tertiary institutions in post-colonial democracies such as South Africa, is not enough to promote student access and success, economic development, linguistic human rights, social cohesion and social justice. South African universities can deliver world class education that is responsive and inclusive through bi/multilingualism by supporting and using African languages as fully-fledged media of instruction alongside English from the first grade to university. This would promote the, 'linguistic instrumentalism' of African languages, improve articulation between the school system and higher education and promote student retention and success.

Current Language Policy Framework for South African Universities

Following the promulgation of a multilingual language-in-education policy in 1997, the South African government has made commendable strides in promoting the use of African languages in education by developing a policy framework for higher education which is aimed at promoting African languages, for instance, the Higher Education Act of 1997 [Section 21 (2)] and the 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education (Ministry of Education 2002). The Higher Education Act of 1997 stipulates that the Minister of Education has the right to determine language policy for higher education in the country. "It provides that, subject to the development of policy by the Minister, the coun-

cils of public higher education institutions, with the concurrence of their senates, must determine the language policy of a higher education institution and must publish and make such policy available on request" (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012:3). The Language Policy for Higher Education (Ministry of Education 2002) seeks to promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practices. It provides for "the simultaneous development of a multilingual environment in which all languages are developed as academic and/or scientific languages while at the same time ensuring that the existing languages of instruction do not serve as a barrier to access and success" (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012: 3-4). The policy notes that "the role of language and access to language skills is critical to ensure the right of individuals to realise their full potential to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic and political life of South African society" (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012:4). The envisaged simultaneous development of multilingualism has not come to fruition as desired in higher education; instead, extended programmes in most South African universities have tended to focus on improving the English academic literacy skills of students who could not meet the entrance requirements of mainstream programmes, thus again promoting an English-only agenda. A brief discussion of pioneering work that some universities in South Africa are engaged in to enhance learning and promote the use of African languages in higher education is discussed later in the paper. A major flaw in the language policy framework for the South African Higher Education is that "it does not provide enough concrete proposals to steer implementation" (Van der Walt 2004: 140).

Although some universities in South Africa have crafted language policies that are supportive of multilingualism, the status quo in most South African universities remains unchanged and an English/Afrikaans-only language policy is still pursued. African languages are taught as subjects and are not employed as media of instruction as is the case with English and Afrikaans. Occasionally, code-switching is used in instances where the lecturer shares an L1 with the students and sees a need to clarify content and enhance learning (Mashiyi 2013: in press). In some universities, the teaching of African

languages is not seen as a priority and departments offering these languages have been disbanded.

The report of the ministerial committee appointed to investigate the development of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education (Ndebele Committee 2005), recommended that African languages be developed into languages of learning and teaching in tertiary institutions. It provided a framework through which institutional language policies could be developed, particularly African languages. In 2010, the Department of Higher Education and Training convened a roundtable discussion on the development of African languages. The aim of the meeting was to provide a space for focused discussion on the state of African languages in higher education, and in particular, to come up with a clear set of recommendations on how to strengthen African languages at universities. In 2012, a Ministerial Advisory Panel was set up to advise the Minister of Higher Education on the development of African languages as languages of scholarship at institutions of higher education (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). Clearly, there has been a lot of planning and discussions on the language question in higher education; what remains is for HEIs to focus their attention on implementation.

Local Bilingual Projects in the South African Higher Education Sector

The bilingual projects which have been implemented in a number of South African universities, illustrate that a bilingual/multilingual education system that is responsive and inclusive is achievable despite the challenges that multilingualism presents. A few South African universities have started creating an enabling environment for the use of African languages as media of instruction to support a multilingual and multicultural tertiary education system. The University of Limpopo applies the bilingual approach in programme development and offers some of the courses in the CEMS programme in two languages, SePedi and English. Northern Sotho is used as an LOLT, for communication in the classroom, developing reading materials and conducting assessments in the Contemporary English Language Studies (CELS) and Multilingual Studies (MUST)

undergraduate programmes (Ramani and Joseph 2002). Tlowane (2009) reported that pass rates in the CEMS programme which has now replaced the CELS and MUST, are above average.

The University of Cape Town makes use of bilingual tutors to enhance student learning and promote multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes (Madiba 2010; Paxton 2007). The Walter Sisulu University's (WSU) bilingual project which targets the Accounting Extended Curriculum programme, employs blended learning as a delivery mode, promotes cognitive development, and improves learner understanding and student achievement. IsiXhosa translations of difficult-to understand Accounting concepts are offered through the use of technology to enhance student understanding of content. The teaching-learning materials for the Accounting Extended programme tap into the learners' L1 by providing isiXhosa equivalents/translations for unfamiliar English words/Accounting register. The objective of the programme is to utilise the students' language capacities in both languages and produce students who can function multi-lingually in their professions (Senior 2012).

Similarly, TOTSA, the training programme in multilingual education for African educators illustrated the efficacy of employing multilingualism for curriculum delivery (Benson and Pluddemann 2010) and highlighted the transformative effects that the programme had on participants. At Rhodes University, isiXhosa for Pharmacy is offered to 4th year and Pharm D students to enable them to participate in the Community Experience Programme (CEP). The course is aimed at equipping them with basic communication skills and cultural awareness (Maseko and Mapi 2007). For professionals such as pharmacists, doctors, and engineers to be effective practitioners, they need to understand the common language used in the region in they which they have been placed. An official bilingualism approach which has its genesis in the formative years of schooling would entail studying African languages and English as subjects, and using them as the LoLT at school level and university.

Conceptual Framework

The ecology of language metaphor is premised on a view that multilingualism is a re-

source, and has been utilised in this paper to argue for the implementation of bi/multilingualism in the South African higher education sector. Biliteracy is defined as "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in and around writing" (Hornberger 1990, cited in Hornberger 2003: 323). In this paper, the terms multilingualism and bilingualism are used interchangeably to refer to the ability of a speaker to use more than one language in a variety of domains.

The 'ecology of language' metaphor comprises three different but related ideological themes, namely, language endangerment, language evolution and language environment. Haugen (1972 in Hornberger 2003: 321) defined language ecology as "the study of interactions between any given language and its environment", where the environment includes psychological (its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi/multilingual speakers) and sociological aspects (its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication). Haugen (1972) argued that the ecology metaphor emphasises the reciprocity between language and the environment, and that languages grow, evolve, change, live and die in relation to other languages and in relation to the environment. Some languages become endangered, and the 'ecology movement' not only describes the losses but also tries to counter them. One of the ways of ensuring that a language does not die is to support its use for various purposes, including education. The ecology of language metaphor informs my argument for the use of African languages in high domain functions in that it emphasises the importance of avoiding language endangerment and promoting language evolution through use in a variety of contexts as well as creating opportunities for a language to grow through its interactions with other languages in the environment.

Linguistic Landscape and Language Policy Implementation in Singapore

The motivation for selecting Singapore as a country from which to draw insights on language policy implementation is that although South Africa has crafted multilingual policies for the school system and the higher education sector, the policies have not been implemented, except for a few small scale innovative bilingual

projects that have been undertaken in a few tertiary institutions in the country.

Secondly, Singapore, similar to South Africa, is a multilingual country. Both countries have had first-hand experience of colonisation and its effects and have traversed the path from imperialism to democracy. Singapore's linguistic choices and those of other South East Asian economic powerhouses such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei have been greatly influenced by the need to participate in a globalised economy. Wee (2003: 211) referred to Singapore's emphasis on the economic value of a language as "linguistic instrumentalism". Wee (2002: 1109) defined linguistic instrumentalism as a "view of language that justifies its existence in a community in terms of its usefulness in achieving utilitarian goals such as access to economic development or social mobility." A language is viewed non-instrumentally if it forms an integral part of one's cultural or ethnic identity and its symbolic value allows the community members to maintain a sense of identity. Wee (2003) contended that enforcing language in the school system can only go so far; a more viable option would be for the language to be exposed to the demands of globalisation and highlight its instrumentalist value so that the language becomes a language of economic import.

Singapore has three major ethnic groups, represented in the following proportions: Chinese 77%, Malays 14%, and Indians 13%, and on gaining independence from British rule in 1959, Singapore officially embraced multilingualism and selected English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil as official languages. English serves as a language of business, commerce and industry and as a link for inter-ethnic communication (Dixon 2005: 625). Legislated multilingualism which allowed parents to choose the LoLT from any of the four official languages was rejected by parents in Singapore (Yip et al. 1990) and this led to the adoption of a bilingual language-in-education policy. The 1966 bilingual policy is regarded as a cornerstone for Singapore's economic, political and national successes (Aman 2009). At present, all the subjects in Singapore are offered in English, but all learners are required to study and reach a second language level of proficiency in their 'official mother tongue (Dixon 2005).

The Singaporean government supports the development and use of minority languages.

However, it does not fund low-incidence languages or train teachers in these non-official languages (Kaur and On 2001). Indo-European languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu and Gujarati which are the home languages of some residents are offered as options for L1 study in "community-run week-end classes" (Saravanan 1999). Holmes (2008) stated that institutional support is important in maintaining ethnic or minority languages. (Ong 1999) argued that Asian modernity can be explained by a re-thinking of the place of endogenous cultural elements vis-à-vis Western modernity. This means that the economic prosperity of these countries cannot be ascribed solely to Western influences or standards only as 'ideological repositioning' and 'the framing of languages as forms of economic capital rather than repositories of cultural values' (Wee 2003: 213), have contributed to the unprecedented economic prosperity of Singapore.

Dixon (2005) identified the following language planning assumptions underlying Singapore's successful bilingual policy: language is a tool that should be used carefully for its utility and national interest; only standardised languages are appropriate for use in education; the government should encourage the use of high-status languages; each written language has a standard oral version.

DISCUSSION

Creating a Responsive and Inclusive African Education System through the Adoption of the Instrumentalist View of Language

The adoption of a bilingual policy in education and other high-function domains and the ideological positioning of local languages have led to 'linguistic instrumentalism', economic prosperity and a solid education system for Singapore (Wee 2002). Given the similarities between the two countries, the implementation of a bilingual policy could turn the tide in the South African education system and lead to a dynamic higher education system and economic prosperity for South Africa. Using African languages alongside English in education and other high-domain functions, such as media and advertising would accelerate economic growth and

meet the needs of a globalising economy, such as is the case with Singapore's English-Mandarin bilingualism.

South Africa has already crafted a bilingual policy and granted a number of indigenous languages official status. The imminent introduction of African languages in Grade 1 for all learners and the requirement that all first years at UKZN must study isiZulu (Meersman 2013: 20), signals that the South African government is intent on promoting 'linguistic instrumentalism,' social cohesion and repositioning African languages as 'forms of economic capital.' IsiZulu is the most widely spoken African language in South Africa (Alexander 1989; Statistics SA 2011) and its introduction at UKZN as a compulsory course is an indication that isiZulu is viewed instrumentally. The challenge that remains is to ensure that the remaining majority languages (for example, isiXhosa SeSotho, Setswana, SePedi) are treated in a similar fashion to ensure linguistic parity and language growth / evolution through use. Minority African languages could also be given government support through part-time classes run by the communities as is the case in Singapore. This would ensure that these languages are not marginalised or perceived as inferior and can be employed in high status functions.

Managing Language Policy Implementation Challenges

Challenges relating to the implementation of bilingualism include a lack of terminology for mathematical and scientific concepts (Banda 2000), the tendency for bilingualism to be one-sided, students perceiving enforced bilingualism as coercion, the perceived cost of bi/multilingualism, negative attitudes of parents, teachers and learners towards home/primary language of instruction (van de Walt and Brink 2005). However, schools that have adopted 'linguistically inclusive teaching' have succeeded in changing perceptions about other languages and enhanced student learning (Heugh 2009: 96). Pioneering research on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in South African universities could also contribute to the standardisation and development of scientific terminology in African languages. Whereas community involvement in the development of minority languages is often sought for in Singapore, in South Af-

rica, indigenous languages are majority languages, and therefore developing terminology, theoretically speaking, should not be much of a problem. Also, language borrowing and word coinage would counter the problem of lack of terminology.

Singapore has fewer official languages than South Africa; consequently, implementing a bilingual approach has not been too difficult a task, given the country's government support for bi/ multilingualism. As suggested, the number of official languages in South Africa could be reduced through harmonisation/consolidation of Nguni and Sotho cognate languages (Alexander 1989; Makalela 2005; Prah 2005). Minority languages could be supported through community-run week-end/part-time classes. This would ensure that all African learners acquire high levels of proficiency in their home languages and use them for concept development and knowledge generation, acquisition and discovery. Students whose L1 is not an African language would benefit from learning an African language as ' not understanding an African language quite simply excludes one from understanding most South Africans' (Meersman 2013) .

The suggestion that cognate African languages should be harmonised, for instance, isiZulu and isiXhosa, and language-learning materials shared to reduce the cost of producing them in the nine South African languages. Prah (2005), and Alexander (1989), resonates with the idea that language use can be managed as has been demonstrated in Singapore. This would necessitate that more African-language teachers be trained to meet market demands. Universities would have to admit students according to linguistic profiles of students and lecturers, for example, universities situated in the Eastern Cape where isiXhosa is spoken by 78.8% (Statistics SA 2011) of the population would offer placements mainly to LI isiXhosa speakers. The fact that there are very few African academics in the South African tertiary sector poses a serious implementation challenge and universities would have to mentor and develop promising post-graduate students for university teaching. Kaschula (2013: 44) argued that 'the practicalities of implementing the (bilingual) policy will be difficult but the benefits are enormous', and that implementing additive bilingualism and using local languages in the school system would reduce drop-out rates and

the high cost to the state that accompanies subsidising students who stay longer in the system than is expected. In multilingual universities such as Ottawa tenure for lecturers is tied to bilingualism and at committee meetings participants communicate in the language of their choice (Van der Walt and Brink 2005). This would necessitate that current South African higher education language policies focus more on implementation.

The language evolution and endangerment themes are premised on the view that no language is an island, languages grow through use and in relation to other languages. English has grown to become a 'world language' by borrowing from other languages and coining new terms and phrases. Language endangerment in the case of African languages is no threat since these are majority languages in South Africa and are used extensively for local business and trade, communication and religious purposes. It is in the field of education where these languages need to be employed extensively as fully-fledged media of instruction. The fact that South Africa has been ranked last by the World Economic Forum in Mathematics and Science (Gernetzky 2012), could be solved to some degree by the use of English and African languages as LOLT. A responsive curriculum must take learners' needs into account, as language is at the heart of students' academic success. Studies on student academic achievement has identified the language issue as a contributory factor in the school system and in higher education (Alexander 1989; Howie 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that the cognitive benefits of multilingualism can be tapped into in the South African higher education system by using more than one LoLT.

Code-switching as a Strategy for Enhancing Teaching and Learning

The pervasive use of code-switching and translation by teachers to enhance learning in many African classrooms (Brock-Utne et al. 2003; Brock-Utne 2005; Chick and MacKay 2001; Holmarsdottir 2006; Setati et al. 2002; Probyn 2001, 2009) gives credence to the argument that African languages have the capability to serve as media of instruction throughout the school system and university. Tertiary educators who share an L1 with their students also

employ this strategy to enhance teaching and learning (Mashiyi 2013: in press). Such practices project lecturers as change agents who adapt language policy to suit their circumstances.

Some scholars have argued that studies on multilingual higher education students could lead to a better understanding of the potential to generalise the cognitive benefits of multilingualism across contexts and make it possible for scholars to understand human cognition and development (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2001: 312). Coetzee-van Rooy further stressed that "we should engage seriously with the roles played by ALL the languages brought to higher education by multilingual students, including the African languages, if we want to understand the interactions between language proficiency and cognitive benefits of individual multilingual students in South Africa better". In the same vein, Hibbert (2011) proposed a shift towards learning ecologies that embrace linguistic diversity in order to counter the deepening impact of inequities in the South African education landscape.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion highlights possible spin-offs of a linguistic landscape that affirms and embraces African languages in the South African higher education context, namely, quality teaching and learning, improved throughputs, achievement of language parity, maintenance of linguistic rights, social cohesion, economic prosperity and effective cross-cultural communication. It attempts to address the perceptions that African languages have very little global import and argues for bi/multilingual education.

South African higher education institutions can take the debate on multilingual education further by examining how multilingualism can improve the quality of teaching and learning. Further research on multilingualism in the tertiary sector is necessary in order to open up ideological and implementation spaces for tertiary educators and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has outlined the linguistic landscape and language policy framework in both countries and what follows are suggestions on how, in the South African higher education landscape, the balance between linguistic rights and 'linguistic instrumentalism' can be struck.

In the South African tertiary education sector, regional bilingualism could be adopted, with the most commonly spoken languages in each province being used alongside English as media of instruction. This could be achieved in two ways by:
- Making it compulsory for all students to study an African language as a subject and language of communication at tertiary institutions. Students would have to make a choice between studying some courses in an African language and studying an African language as a subject.
- Re-configuring the universities according to the most dominant languages spoken in the province, for example, Western Cape universities and the soon to be established university in the Northern Cape could offer tuition in Afrikaans and English because of the similar demographic linguistic profiles.

In provinces such as Gauteng where there are several LIs that are spoken, several languages could be employed as LOLT. On reaching university, White students would have achieved near-native proficiency in an African language and can study some of the courses in *isi Xhosa* (one of the dominant African languages).

The fact that African languages and English are non-cognate languages would not be an obstacle because white students would have been in an immersion situation as most of the people around them would be LI speakers of African languages. Consequently, they would acquire the language informally and learn the 'new language' in order to serve a diverse population. An approach such as the one outlined above would strike a balance between language rights and 'linguistic instrumentalism.' The different languages would get an equal opportunity to grow and be used in a variety of contexts. These are pragmatic choices for promoting the use of African languages for teaching and learning, strengthening social cohesion, addressing development imperatives, satisfying local economic development needs and the demands of globalisation.

Some of the subjects could, for a start, be taught in African languages and others in En-

glish, given the economic power that the latter has achieved. Exposing black students to African languages for an extended period and ensuring that these languages are used as the LoLT would improve student proficiency in the L1 and create opportunities for transferring their L1 literacy skills to an L2 language learning environment.

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