

Multilingual teaching and learning models at South African Universities: opportunities and challenges

by

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Abstract

This article seeks to outline the history of the teaching of African languages at South African universities, against the backdrop of multilingualism, transformation and language planning in the country. The notion of social cohesion and how it links to language usage at South African universities is unpacked. The idea of ‘identity vulnerability’ (Ting-Toomey, 1999), which some students experience is outlined in relation to language usage and social cohesion. Further to this, best practices at various South African universities are highlighted. Language programmes that speak best to policy issues are put forward as examples of what some universities have already achieved together with what lessons can be learned from these practices. The article concludes with a number of suggestions as to how the teaching of African languages and curriculum development within these languages, both from a first and second or additional language perspective, can be taken forward into the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Language evolution and the human spirit in the 21st century:

It is time to choose, and to choose now, either for or against the further evolution of the human and linguistic spirit. It is for us, in 2013 to apply whatever knowledge we have, in all humility but with due speed and to try and learn more as quickly as possible. It is for us, much more than any previous generation, to become serious about the human future, linguistically, environmentally and otherwise, and to make choices that will be weighed not in a decade or a century but in the balances of geological time. It is for us, with all our stumbling, and in the midst of our dreadful confusion, to try and disengage the tangled wing.

(Adapted from Konner, 1993:436)

An article heading in the South African *Sunday Times Newspaper* (Ash, 29 May 2011) read as follows: ‘SAVING THE RHINO – one bullet at a time’. Since then there have been many such articles. It is a known fact that there is a direct link between saving the environment and preserving natural, linguistic and cultural heritage. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) convey significant intellectual wealth (Cocks, 2011). Language should then be viewed as a natural resource, like the environment. It is the language we use that helps to protect the environment, to develop our cognitive and intellectual capacity and to describe what is important in our environment and how to preserve it. Cognition, including environmental understanding therefore takes place most effectively in the mother tongue (Alexander, 2002; Wolff, 2002; Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000). For this very reason, we should be saving our linguistic heritage, one language at a time. One wrong move and an entire species can be lost. The same can be said for languages.

Crystal (2000:ix) states that: ‘The plight of the world’s endangered languages should be at the top of any environmental linguistic agenda.’ It is presently estimated that by the end of this century only 3000 of the world’s 6000 languages will remain i.e. ‘...50% loss in the next 100 years...at least one language [will] die...every two weeks or so’ (Crystal, 2000:19). He continues to point out that:

In 500 years’ time, will it be the case that everyone will automatically be introduced to English as soon as they are born... if this is part of a rich multilingual experience for

our future newborns, this can only be a good thing. If it is by then the only language left to be learned, it will have been the greatest intellectual disaster that the planet has ever known (Crystal, 2003:235).

The aim of this article is to critically look at the status of language policy and planning at South African universities, and particularly Rhodes University, as well as to assess the extent of the implementation of policy. Furthermore, best practices will be highlighted and concrete steps suggested that universities can take in order to achieve implementation and contribute to transformation and social cohesion in South Africa where ‘language maintenance’ (Edwards, 2009:258) is ensured and enshrined in the Constitution.

Alexander (2005:30) sums up the challenge facing South African Universities as follows:

The basic idea is that a university or group of universities would be given the task of developing specific languages such as isiZulu, or isiXhosa, or Sesotho, or Setswana and over a period of 10 to 15 years...a step-by-step development and implementation plan should be formulated...such that...it will be clear when they will be able to be used as languages of tuition in specific disciplines. The decision, however, about when to begin using the languages for specific functions will be the prerogative of the relevant institutional community.

Each university must then formulate its own approach to change and transformation, language being I believe at the core of such transformation. Change cannot be simply imposed from outside, it needs to come from within and there must be buy-in from authorities and all stakeholders (Webb, 2006). Universities and specifically curricula should no longer be defined by imperialist and colonialist ideology, but by African values and philosophy, underpinned by African languages and IKS. Makgoba and Seepe (2004:18) initiated this debate as part of grappling ‘...with the meanings, the implications and consequences of what an African university is and ought to be.’ I believe that the first crucial step towards this is to create language equality and to intellectualise African languages (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2010).

Language Planning, Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in South Africa

Provincial language policies also take direction from the Constitution, most with three official

languages. It is with these Provincial Language Policies where South Africa's Language Policy can become a reality and universities should be taking their cue from these policies. However, not all universities actually have a Language Policy and Implementation Plan in place (Maseko, 2008; 2011). It would be necessary to have these in place before any university could move forward in terms of implementing multilingual models as these would need to be sanctioned by coordinated policies and implementation plans.

In 2003 the then Department of Education provided for this imperative through broad approved policy, the aim being to develop indigenous languages as languages of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Higher Education. It should be noted that language policy remains the ideal. However, an Implementation Plan is about getting things done and seeing multilingualism as a resource (Webb, 2002; Heugh, 2003). There is a difference between language planning and policy making and implementation plans. According to Weinstein, (cited in Alexander, 1992:143) 'Language planning is a government-authorized, long term sustained and conscious effort to alter a language itself or to change a language's functions in a society for the purposes of solving communication problems.'

It is then within this paradigm that South African universities need to operate in reflecting and implementing their own language policies. Arguably the forked tongue of multilingualism allows for paper policy and little more in South Africa, thereby encouraging language death, unless we collectively take control over the implementation process, including government, the private sector, universities and citizens (Kaschula, 2004; Swanepoel, 2011). Swanepoel (ibid) further states that the Constitution provides for a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous society and that language is one of the markers of this heterogeneity, and it is reflected in multilingualism. It is argued in this article that effective multilingualism will aid South Africa in creating social cohesion (both cultural and linguistic), a national government initiative forming part of language planning. Languages should be seen as part of our environment and 'resource package' within an intercultural paradigm.

One of the main challenges in the development of African languages in Higher Education is at this policy level. While an admirable policy exists, which, at a glance, should ensure development of African languages and promotion of multilingualism, the policy often lacks a plan of implementation, as well as directives on who should lead or drive its implementation (at

both national and institutional level). The other factor related to implementation is monitoring. The *Language Policy on Higher Education (LPHE)* and the *Report on the Development of Indigenous Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education*, for example, state clearly what needs to be done by institutions in promoting the development of African languages. However, there is no monitoring of the extent of compliance with provisions of policy (at both national and institutional level). The simple example is that of the formulation of institutional policy and the institutions' submission to the Education Ministry of their 5-year plan regarding the development of African languages as mediums of instruction. The LPHE (2002) requires that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) formulate their policy with an implementation plan, and publish it. The LPHE (2002) also stipulates that HEIs should provide the Ministry of Education, every 5 years, with a report which provides the extent of the implementation of its plan. While 19 of the 23 HEIs have their policies published, none have provided the Ministry with a report on the progress of implementation of policy. The essence of the argument here, though, is that the policy could possibly be sufficient but lacks strategies and other means to monitor compliance.

We know that national policy is burdened with limitation clauses such as 'where possible', 'where practicable', 'may', and so on. Policy at institutional level seems to take its cue from national policy and, as such, institutions seem to be able to escape some of their responsibilities towards use and development of African languages.

The role of the University in responding to changing social needs

At South African universities we need intersection and not opposition. This will create 'mindfulness' and inclusivity (Langer, 1989:69; Ting-Toomy, 1999:3). It is not a case of increasing the visibility of other languages and decreasing that of English. It is about developing and promoting some languages in order to create an appropriate multilingual and effective cognitive and intellectual environment. Nadine Gordimer in interviews with her rightly refers to English as an 'adjunct African language', though a fully developed language, hence my emphasis on the intellectualisation of African languages alongside English and to some extent Afrikaans. There is presently a renegotiation of new and old identities, especially at Historically White Universities (HWU's), English and Afrikaans medium institutions such as the University of Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). In this context it is

important to create ‘familiarity’ rather than ‘identity vulnerability’. It is about ‘...negotiating shared meanings in an interactive situation’ (Ting-Toomey, 1999:1-2).

In this regard, strategies for increased ‘social penetration’ are also required (Chen, 2003:225) i.e. designing appropriate curricula in African languages, and making the languages visible through signage. Multilingual courses can create meaningful interaction despite perceived stereotyped cultural differences. Intercultural communication and increased social cohesion is then inevitable in this context. Therefore South African universities must play a significant role in implementing multilingualism in the educational milieu (Kaschula & Maseko, 2009).

Part of this deals with the notion of identity negotiation. The challenge at most South African universities is to negotiate an identity of belonging for students. Language and culture are important in this process. An individuals’ self-identification through language opens up interaction with other cultures. Developing mother tongue and second language vocation-specific courses is integral to fostering this sense of acceptance and inclusion (Maseko, 2008).

It is equally important to develop material in African languages to support the LoLT which is English in most HEIs (Wolff, 2002; Dalvit, Murray & Terzoli, 2009; Sam, 2010). The way we use and talk about languages at universities will influence campus ‘culture’. Language is the vehicle of culture (Lanham, 1980:11). In this regard, African languages are important in affirming an identity that has been undermined by dominant Eurocentric societal and institutional systems. In developing university programmes that promote multilingualism (as suggested by Minister Nzimande, 2011 and analysed by Turner, 2011) we should be informed by intercultural theorists such as Ting Toomey (1999), Gudykunst (2003) and Collier (1997). Ting-Toomey talks of ‘identity vulnerability’ where we communicate with unfamiliar people. Universities need then to create ‘identity security’ through multilingual/multicultural programmes. Both Ting-Toomey and McLaren (1998:16) highlight the fact that culture is a changing human phenomenon that should be respected, both in terms of one’s own culture and the values of others. Gudykunst (2003:163) points out that ‘Intercultural communication...is conceptualised as communication between people from different ... social classes, and interracial/interethnic communication...’ On the one hand culture is like an iceberg: the deeper layers, for example traditions, beliefs, and values are hidden from our view; we only see and hear the uppermost layers of cultural artefacts, fashion, trends, and pop music. On the other hand, culture is dynamic and changes with the

people within the system. This dynamism can be reflected in the cultural artefact, for example Western and African healing systems in pharmacy or medical courses. Shared features of South African 'culture' seem to emerge only at the uppermost levels and universities need to engage with this in creative ways in order to create a deeper meaning of social cohesion. Ting-Toomey (1999:3) states that '...the achievement of effective intercultural communication is dependent on people's ability to manage differences flexibly and mindfully.' University language courses should, in my opinion be underpinned by an ethos of respect for self and others. They are central to university transformation, representing a deeper, more difficult level of transformation than say for example visible multilingual signage, though this is also important.

Teaching African Languages at South African Universities: Past and Present

The teaching of African languages has always been a contested area in South Africa. The first linguists to work in this area were missionaries concerned only with creating orthographies for the purposes of publishing the Bible and converting people to Christianity (Kaschula, 2008:118-119). Then came the apartheid era, when African languages were largely taught by white academics, many of whom were not conversant with these languages and taught them as a-social 'dead' languages. At the same time, younger black scholars were being employed as teaching assistants. These included scholars such as Professor AC Jordan at the University of Cape Town and BEN Mahlasela at Rhodes University. Even though they were instrumental in developing literary studies (alongside the historical/pure linguistics offered by mainly white academics), they were never really recognised and failed to move beyond the level of teaching assistants. Jordan left for the United States, where he became professor of African Studies at the University of Wisconsin, a position he held until his death; while Mahlasela became headmaster of a school.

From the 1980s up to about 2000, there was a shift away from historical linguistics: emphasis was placed rather on the teaching of structural linguistics, influenced by American linguist and political writer Noam Chomsky's work. Mother tongue speakers emerged as scholars alongside white academics at historically white institutions. Professor Peter Mtuzi was the first black professor of African languages to be appointed at Rhodes, while Professor Sizwe Satyo was appointed at UCT. However, a tension existed around the fact that many of the whites could not speak the languages they were teaching with any measure of fluency, even although they were

experts in the field of transformational grammar, structural and comparative linguistics. There was also a move towards teaching African languages to second language speakers, that is, beginner's courses. Many of the white historical linguists left teaching and moved on from universities because they could not find a role in second-language teaching. Since 1994 there has been another shift in the sense that most African Language Departments have been taken over by mother tongue speakers. However, the teaching of apartheid-inherited pure linguistics courses continued, contributing to plummeting interest levels among students. The drop in student numbers has been part of a multifaceted process: the curriculum that is being taught and how it is being taught; the shift towards English as a global language; the attitude of students towards studying their mother tongue; and the trivialisation of the teaching of African languages in the schooling system, among other factors. Many of the mother tongue courses were in fact dropped as part of the rationalisation process at South African universities. For example, the teaching staff of the African Languages Department at the University of South Africa, the largest in the country, was halved. Mother-tongue courses at Rhodes were abandoned altogether in the late 1990s, leaving only two members of staff. Even today, many universities have few or no students studying African languages, especially at the postgraduate level. The teaching of African languages is in dire need of updating in order to bring the discipline into the 21st century in both the schooling and university system. This will be explored in the sections that follow. The reinvention of African languages is necessary in order to reach the populace in languages that they understand best (Seshoka, 2013). There can be no democracy, no effective service delivery, no effective policing, no effective education through the medium of languages that many do not speak - languages that were privileged under apartheid and that largely continue to be privileged today even though we have one of the worst literacy rates in the world.

There seems little point in stating the obvious, which is continually ignored: English remains one of the key barriers to educational success in South Africa (Alexander, 2002). It is time for English and African language scholars to innovate and help build our nation through effective communication. The teaching and learning of African languages must then be seen in context. Firstly, the missionary and colonial context; Secondly the apartheid context where African languages were taught initially from a historical linguistic point of view, then a transformational grammar and asocial structural approach. Previously teaching and learning of African languages

was dictated externally and not by mother tongue speakers themselves. The history of the development of African languages relates to ‘others’ learning about African languages rather than learning in the language, namely mother tongue course programmes. The development of African languages should be advanced, where the students ‘learn in, with, and from the language’ (Obanya, 2004). Diminished use and status of African languages remains one of the challenges affecting African languages in HEIs. This is so regardless of the need of HEIs, as supported by legislative policy, to transform and affirm indigenous languages. African Language Departments, as custodians of scholarship in African languages have been struggling to survive or adapt traditional courses and bring them into the 21st century. Only recently have mother tongue speakers been able to set an agenda of socio-economically responsive Applied Language Mother Tongue Studies and Vocation Specific Additional African Language Studies courses. While this new knowledge is emerging, the challenge is redefining theories from the West and providing a new intellectual ‘home’ for African languages.

In this regard one must consider the 2011 Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences as a very positive step. This has given rise to the Catalytic Project outlined below. This Catalytic Project is also discussed in relation to the 2012 Green Paper and Ministerial Advisory Panel. In a recent, and perhaps his final article, Alexander (2012:1) states in regard to the Charter that it ‘...promises exciting and forward-looking perspectives with regard to acknowledging and integrating in significant ways the foundational importance of language in general, and African languages in particular, to an appropriate, modern (South) African social science and humanities theory and practice.’

The Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Catalytic Project on Concept Formation in African languages (2012)

The project is one of the six catalytic projects proposed in the Report of the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences (2011). It acknowledges the centrality of language and of indigenous African languages in particular, in learning in South African HE and recommends that strategies for integration of languages be designed to influence humanities and social sciences practice and theory in South Africa. The project is described as:

A national multidisciplinary project on how indigenous languages in South Africa could support the process of concept formation in the HSS, and furthermore, what know-hows in these languages could enrich social scientific thinking or pedagogy. (Report on the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences, 2011:20)

The activities of the project were partly conceptualised in November 2012 under the Rhodes University's NRF SARChI Research Chair on the 'Intellectualisation of African Languages, Multilingualism and Education'. The project works in collaboration with 7 South African HEIs across four provinces and involves four indigenous African languages. Its purpose is to provide a theoretical framework and implementation strategies for use of indigenous languages in encouraging conceptualisation in various disciplines, with a focus on those in humanities and social sciences.

Furthermore, the *Green Paper on Post-Secondary School Education and Training* (2012, par 6.10) recognises the unfortunate position of African languages in South African HE, and consequently, in the Departments of African Languages, and acknowledges this as a threat to linguistic diversity in South Africa, as well as to the survival of African languages. The paper provides for African languages to be taught across disciplines at universities, and therefore, the following is proposed:

- a) Inclusion of African language proficiency as a requirement in professional training (the Department of Higher Education and Training acknowledges that this is already a practice in some faculties of some universities, and that the department will look at how this could be implemented across faculties in all universities),
- b) Universities should provide teacher-training that focuses on mother-tongue education for teachers of African languages in order to implement properly the Department of Basic Education's mother-tongue policy for primary school learners,
- c) Universities should encourage students to take a course in an African language as part of their curriculum (for proficiency as well as to elevate the status of African languages in the country).

The Green Paper, as with the Humanities and Social Sciences Catalytic Project on Concept Formation, makes bold and concrete recommendations on how indigenous African languages should be strengthened and developed in HE. It moves away from simply justifying the teaching of African languages in HE and instead provides possibilities for how they can be included in various curricula. It also acknowledges some good practices and commits the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) to explore how these can be replicated in other contexts. There is, however, focus on African languages being taught as additional languages in university courses and in teacher-training. While this is important in facilitating social cohesion and effective mother-tongue based education, first and foremost, the survival of African languages is based on these languages being taught at universities as first languages. Only then will their scientific status improve and they will be developed and taught as languages of learning and teaching (Mahlalela & Heugh, 2002).

A Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education (2011/2012) has also been created. Notice 103 of Government Gazette 35028 (10 February 2012) announced the establishment of a ministerial advisory panel on developing African languages as languages of scholarship at institutions of higher education. The panel was constituted by the DoHET to advise the Minister on the current status of teaching, learning and research of indigenous African languages in South African HE. Further, within this context and that of the present language policy in HE, the panel was required to identify hindrances to promotion of African languages in HE, as well as to provide the Minister with practical recommendations on the promotion and development of these languages. The panel is expected to report its findings and recommendations to the Minister in June 2013.

The above are just a few of the policies and promulgations that guide language use and practices in HE. It is a cause for concern, though, that implementation of the policies, grand as they are, is not effectively monitored. Bamgbose (1991:133) and other prominent language scholars (Alexander, 2003; Kaschula, 2004; Webb, 2001:182-3) have concurred that many African countries and institutions within them have sound language policies but nonetheless lack sound implementation plans. Kaschula went on to say that language policies in Africa are characterised by lack of 'political will to drive the process' and thus 'much lip service has been paid to the implementation processes' to little effect (Kaschula, 2004:11). As a consequence,

policies and recommendations on implementation are published without any monitor having assessed, through monitoring and evaluation, the non-implementation of previous policies. Having said that, the Catalytic Project (2011) and the Green Paper on Post-Secondary School Education (2012) seem to be more definite and provide concrete guidelines on scholarly work that needs to be undertaken to ensure implementation and the expansion of the role of indigenous African languages in particular, in higher education in South Africa.

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Lessons from Rhodes

As this particular university seeks to transform, students who are given access are increasingly linguistically more diverse. University policies and practices therefore need to be responsive to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the institution and the region. The question is: How does Rhodes or any university respond to this multilingualism on campus? Arguably, the university and its leadership should be responding to the type of student they are getting as well as being responsive to societal change to encourage being ‘in and of the university’ (Boughey, inaugural lecture, 2010). Rhodes has, over the years, taken pride in teaching, research and community engagement, without much reference to language issues, except as formal degree subjects such as Afrikaans, Dutch, German, French, IsiXhosa, Greek, Latin, Classics and Mandarin.

The Eastern Cape has 83% of its total population as speakers of isiXhosa (Statistics SA, 2003), with the other dominant languages being English and Afrikaans. Grahamstown is a microcosm of the Eastern Cape, i.e. isiXhosa speakers make up about 80% of the population, while the other dominant languages remain English and Afrikaans. A university needs to be firmly located within the community within which it operates. Change in the political context means that Rhodes, like any other university, has to continuously critically evaluate its historical narrative and practices as far as language is concerned. Institutional policy on language, especially regarding learning, teaching and research in African languages (Rhodes Language Policy, approved by Senate 2005) is informed by the national policy, more especially the Language Policy on Higher Education, 2002; and The Development of Indigenous Languages as Mediums of Instructions in Higher Education, 2003, as well as the 2012 Green Paper mentioned above.

The following are the language learning, teaching and research areas at Rhodes, as outlined in the abovementioned Language Policy that the university needs to respond to: Students need appropriate academic literacy in English which is the LoLT. IsiXhosa and Afrikaans are also

recognized as official languages; the university must encourage students and staff to speak an African language as an additional language, to prepare them to cope with the challenges presented by South Africa's multilingual society; the teaching of, and in isiXhosa, namely scholarship in African languages must be affirmed; support in languages other than the LoLT, and the development of indigenous African languages so they are able to meet the demands placed on them must be made a priority.

In 2011 Senate approved a Rhodes University Language Committee to review and oversee the implementation of the policy. Indeed the implementation of policy remains the main challenge at most universities. The vision of the university and of the African Language Studies Section in the School of Languages and the NRF SARChI Chair is to use African languages to promote national unity, linguistic and cultural diversity; and further intellectualise isiXhosa so that it can be used at various levels of education. The main objectives can be outlined as follows: To promote and advance scholarship in African languages; to promote multilingualism through mother tongue and second language acquisition programmes; to facilitate student access and retention, particularly of historically disadvantaged students; and to promote isiXhosa in controlling domains such as ICT, Pharmacy, Science, Law, Education, Politics, Journalism, Psychology and across campus.

Implementation was initially given impetus with the South African-Norway-Tertiary Education programme (SANTED) as well as the Department of Arts and Culture funding, and firm Executive support from the University. This was followed by the piloting and institutionalisation of first and second language isiXhosa courses. Initial programmes included the IsiXhosa Staff Communication Skills Course; IsiXhosa for Pharmacy, Law and Education as well as Journalism & Media Studies; and IsiXhosa for Psychology (pilot in 2013). Further to these programmes multilingual support was also provided for developing teaching material for the development of academic literacy, thereby assisting in cognition. There was development of support teaching material for isiXhosa L1 students in Computer Science, Geography and Politics, with Cell Biology to follow.

In terms of graduate research, this is multi-/cross-disciplinary in nature and presently relates mainly to applied language studies and literature. This is contributing to the intellectualisation of African languages, developing a scientific discourse for African languages in areas previously

dominated by English and Afrikaans through, for example, the development of glossary lists to support learning mediated in English; teaching isiXhosa in isiXhosa and thereby developing a meta-language for the mother tongue programmes.

As part of the repositioning of African languages a fully localized language learning facility named the SANTED-Peter Mtuze Multimedia Facility was launched in May 2007. This facility allows for the visibility of African languages, for example in ICT at a time when the world is dominated by technology. This facility has been used to further intellectualise isiXhosa and a number of translate@thons, where students create and feed terminology into a bank of computers, including the translation of Google into isiXhosa in 2010 have been held. In order to facilitate the intellectualisation process as already touched on, socially relevant and market-related mother tongue courses needed to be designed. There needs to be a move away from structural approaches to more fluid approaches (sociolinguistic and applied) which will appeal to students, and the market-place. Such courses include: Literature and Publishing, African Languages and Media Studies, Translation Studies, African Languages and Globalisation; Language Planning, Sociolinguistics, Lexicography and Terminology Development, Human Language Technology, Orthography and Writing Skills. Pure linguistics (morphology, syntax, phonology, semantics) can still be studied within these courses and offered as a stand-alone course. The writing skills courses are necessary as the schooling system continues to fail African language teaching. Many mother tongue students lack writing and reading skills in the mother tongue even though they are fluent speakers. The courses are constantly evaluated and what follows is a comment from a student in the mother tongue stream:

Mithathu iminyaka ndiseRhodes. Yonke loo minyaka bendisoloko ndiziva ngathi ndise-Oxford, indawo endingazange ndiye kuyo kodwa endiqondayo ukuba ndingaziva ndingamkelekanga. Ubuni bam ngoku buqinisekisiwe kule khampasi.

‘I have been at Rhodes for 3 years. I have always felt like I am in Oxford, a place I have never been to but I suspect I would feel very strange in. But now my identity has been affirmed on this campus.’

Now let us turn to the teaching of African languages as a second or additional language at Rhodes in order to assess a possible model for wider use. The course objectives include the

following: To equip students with basic language skills, specific to their vocation, to be able to cope during client interviews in contexts where isiXhosa is spoken. Furthermore, to provide students with knowledge and skills which will be necessary for them to understand and interpret cultural issues embedded in isiXhosa communication, especially those specific to vocational contexts. The courses are also designed to raise awareness of cultural issues among isiXhosa speaking people and how these influence various professional contexts of clients. Finally, the courses provide students with knowledge in order to add to their learning experience at Rhodes and which they can build on once they leave the university. This should link to service learning/community engagement. A student commented as follows regarding these courses in the evaluations: ‘Everything learnt in this course is beneficial, especially when I work with local people. It builds mutual trust and respect’ (Pharmacy Student). Arguably then all universities should be grappling with creating innovative ways of teaching African languages so as to increase interest and student enrollment.

Selected Best Practice Language Intervention Strategies in South Africa

According to Maseko (2008:70), ‘Indigenous African languages in South African tertiary institutions, historically, have never been used in various teaching acts, across disciplines, for example, as mediums of instruction, or as languages of assessment.’ This is so even though there is clear evidence that their use to support LoLT can improve cognition and improve social cohesion (Wolff, 2002; Dalvit, Murray & Terzoli 2009; Maseko, 2011).

Although many of the twenty three South African universities have a language policy which is favourable to the promotion of African languages, only a handful have implementation plans and are actively promoting African languages in their teaching acts. An example would be that of the UCT where since 2004 no medical student can graduate without passing courses in isiXhosa and Afrikaans through a process of on-site clinical examinations (OSCEs) where the student is evaluated by both linguists and clinical skills experts when examining a patient, the objective being to evaluate how well the candidate examines the patient in their mother tongue, in this case isiXhosa, Afrikaans or English. There is also the innovative work of the nearly formed Centre for African Language Diversity (CALDi) as well as the Centre for Higher Education (CHED) at UCT. The University of KwaZulu-Natal also has innovative language learning programmes in isiZulu for Nursing and Psychology (Hlongwa & Mazibuko, 2012). The University of Venda is

developing a BA in IKS as well as introducing other African languages including minority languages such as isiNdebele. A further example of best practice would be the isiXhosa glossaries that are being developed at the University of Stellenbosch. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University now offers short courses in translation studies and has opened a Translation and Interpretation Office as part of the Department of Applied Language Studies in the Faculty of Arts. The University of North-West has implemented a process of simultaneous translation within the lecturing system and text editing programmes for African languages. Perhaps one of the best initiatives is that being pursued at the University of Limpopo where there is now a Bachelor of Arts degree in multilingualism (BA Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies - BA CEMS) where some subjects are completed in sePedi and others in English (*BEEP Bulletin 1*, June 2011). This is a possible model that needs further exploration at our universities. Such a model was approved for implementation by the Institutional Planning Committee at Rhodes as recently as last month. There are individual courses at some institutions where mother tongue based bilingual education (MTBBE) models are followed, for example the *Ulwimi Nentlalo* (Language and Society) course for isiXhosa 1 at Rhodes, but there has been limited experimentation across universities with this approach. The Limpopo model speaks to MTBBE. It is perhaps the 'most complete response' to the 2002/3 DoE policy.

When it comes to the teaching of African languages as second languages, then generic first additional language or second language courses do have their place. However, there needs to be a more integrated social approach to the teaching of these languages. Furthermore, the development of vocation-specific courses is vital at this time in South Africa's socio-political history. There remains little evidence of a normalised, integrated, transformed, multilingual society, at least from a linguistic point of view. Instead what exists now is a 'linguistic fault-line' which divides the 'haves' and the have-nots' into a 3-tier economic system based on those citizens who are communicatively competent in English, those who have a partial knowledge of the language and those who speak no English at all (Alexander, 2002).

The repositioning of the teaching of African languages more generally

There are lessons from the repositioning of African languages at Rhodes which can be put forward for the rejuvenation of African language studies at other HEIs. By designing courses that respond to social/market needs of an African language graduate, this has made African languages

more attractive to students. African language courses appeal to students who have never had the opportunity to engage meaningfully with their home languages at school, again a sad indictment of the failure within the schooling system.

Providing bursary assistance also directly impacts on student growth in African languages. In 2012, 30 Honours students graduated in African Languages at Rhodes, the highest number in the Faculty of Humanities, and at the smallest university with only 7300 students in total. There are presently 20 MA students and 8 PhDs with around 500 students in undergraduate courses. Staff capacity and funding though still remain a challenge to the development and promotion of African languages. It is important to raise funds from programmes such as the SANTED programme in order to give impetus and visibility to African language usage on campuses. A further Department of Arts and Culture grant for postgraduate bursaries for African languages served to cement sustained growth in student numbers. This resulted in year-on-year growth in isiXhosa mother tongue undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers with new courses offered from 2008. External collaborations, which are vitally important today have included collaborating with the University of Fort Hare, UCT and UKZN as well as universities further afield such as Makerere in Uganda where a translate@thon was held to translate the web into Luganda. Translate.org, a leading software localisation organisation in Africa also collaborated in a translate@thon to translate the Rhodes email system into isiXhosa. An isiXhosa interface for Google was also created through a translate@thon held at Rhodes in 2010. There is still a need to drive regional collaboration for the development of isiXhosa and other African languages and hopefully this will be facilitated by the Catalytic Projects as well as the SARChI Chair in African languages.

One of the main spin-offs of the repositioning of African languages at any university would be scholarship and the development thereof, in other words providing a contemporary intellectual home for the discipline. Scholars of African languages need to re-engage with researching in relevant fields of study as mentioned earlier. The promotion of African language scholarship will boost the status of African languages, and more importantly, retain first language speakers as young academics, allowing for the further intellectualization of these languages from a mother tongue perspective. There could also then be increased collaboration between universities, further supporting transformation as envisaged by the Catalytic Project. The

intellectualisation of language issues at our universities should be a major research focus area. Rhodes has gone some way in doing this and this could be broadened to other departments and faculties. The challenge here again is to redefine existing theories developed in the West and to find space for new knowledge that has been developed for, and in the African context.

Intercultural vocation-specific language programmes such as those offered at Rhodes, UKZN and UCT are constructing a mutually inclusive environment. The constant juxtaposition of one language and culture against each other creates interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the two. This is an enormous contribution to the changing South African University environment and, by default, to the South African society at large. Language remains at the core of university transformation, both from a curriculum point of view as well as what one could term soft transformation, for example signage and visibility.

The challenge is to facilitate cognition and knowledge creation through languages that learners understand best, thereby creating a comfort zone (through English and other languages) rather than a sense of vulnerability and alienation. This is the responsibility of the university at large and not just a Department or a School of Languages as the case may be. There should be buy-in from all university players, including the administration and all departments. As a corollary to this, language use and how this links to performance rates needs further research.

It is also clear that a language fault-line exists in South Africa, related to class issues (as suggested by Alexander, 2002) and the education system – those who speak English well and those who do not. It also relates to those who have access to the economy and those who do not. How do universities bridge this fault-line to create greater access? How are students who have various ‘language levels’ assessed? Suggested solutions could include a lecturer responsible for ‘language issues’ in each department/faculty to work with language departments and academic development initiatives at our universities. Furthermore, universities need to explore the use of multilingual teaching aids. This should be done as part of experimenting with MTBBE where it is possible. There should also be a move to affirming multilingual language usage in tutorials and practical sessions, particularly in terms of group work. Languages must also be visible on campus through innovative signage which is long overdue. The further visibility of multilingual policy documents on campuses is important. The University of Johannesburg has for example put in place a Language Unit which is responsible for such publicity. A further idea would be to

develop Multilingualism Centres to provide translation and editing services across the university. Part of this endeavour could include developing and enhancing the ‘Publish and Thrive’ on-line model to assist student and staff researchers, where written material is submitted on-line, evaluated, edited, and feed-back given which includes advice on avenues for publishing the material. Universities could also assist student language societies to interact more with the university at large and between societies. Hosting an International Day/Week where languages and cultures can be show-cased and an international dinner with food stalls from language groups represented at the university could be encouraged. Each university should put in place some form of Language Committee which will meet on a regular basis to assess implementation of policy in relation to the LoLT as well as the promotion of African languages, including Afrikaans. Identity is no doubt related to a profound sense of belonging – language is integral in allowing students and staff at all South African universities that ‘sense of belonging’.

In the context of legislation and the arguments raised above for the use of African languages in HE, the following are some of the possible areas of research and teaching around which promotion and development of African languages can occur, areas that would encourage the strengthening of African languages in South African higher education:

- a) Language learning programmes in undergraduate and postgraduate studies
 - African languages as additional languages to speakers of other languages, to equip students with communicative competence (general and vocation-specific), with a focus on both linguistic and cultural competence,
 - African languages taught as subjects, in the medium of African languages, to mother-tongue speakers,
 - Other language-related subjects taught in African languages, initially those that can be offered in African languages departments, e.g. Sociolinguistics, Translation Studies, Lexicography, Terminology Development, Media Studies, and so on,
 - Certified short courses in communicative competence for staff in HE, focusing on both language proficiency and cultural awareness and sensitivity.

b) Support teaching material in African languages

Develop, through translation and other language development strategies, resources to support cognition for students to whom English (the common language of learning and teaching is a second/additional language, in different subjects. The following are some of the resources that can be developed:

- Bilingual/multilingual term lists,
- Bilingual/multilingual glossary lists,
- Monolingual/bilingual/multilingual dictionaries.

c) Piloting African languages as languages of learning and teaching

As indicated in the policy, focus should also be on piloting the use of African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education. In that regard, African languages departments, through collaboration with other subject specialists, can devise effective strategies to develop indigenous languages for use as LoLTs in various disciplines. Strategies adopted should take into consideration that African languages are developed in form but that they have not been developed to function in HE. Therefore, strategies need to be devised to capacitate them further in terms of function and form, so that they are able to capture the scientific discourse of HE (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2008).

d) Promotion of academic literacy

While English and Afrikaans are languages of academia in SA, students not having these languages as their mother-tongue should be supported to achieve academic proficiency in them. Such literacy should be grounded in the affirmation of the students' first language, where possible.

e) Aesthetics and general culture in HE

Signage, communication with the public and general institutional culture should reflect and embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity of these institutions as represented by the demographics of the university community and the institutional, provincial and national policy on language.

The study of African languages at university has been a challenge since the 1990s and therefore African language departments have trained very few scholars to sustain scholarship in African languages at university and to teach in schools. Very few students have been trained in conventional language areas such as linguistics, literature, morphology, phonology, or in applied language studies such as translation studies, interpreting, sociolinguistics, and others (Kaschula, 2011). This presents threats to sustained scholarship in African languages in a number of ways:

- a) Low interest in postgraduate studies, including teacher training, in African languages. An informal survey conducted links this low interest to lack of funding, which has been named as an ‘enabler’.
- b) The state’s funding grid for languages places languages towards the bottom in terms of state subsidy. This needs to be reviewed such that all state policy provides synergy for development of African language for use in universities.
- c) Frequently, institutional priorities do not include development of African languages.
- d) The poor state of the teaching of African languages at schools means that universities inherit students who do not possess the expected competency for further study of these languages at university.

All the above have an impact on the kind and quality of research that emerges from African Languages Departments and universities.

The challenges listed above need to be understood and weighed up against the opportunities and prospects that favour development of African languages in higher education. A general national interest in African languages exists in higher education. Also, initiatives supported by institutional executives, or by individual within institutions, have been implemented. Research shows a growing consciousness from scholars in other disciplines who have an interest in the link between language and effective learning and promotion of social cohesion in acquisition of additional languages in professional/vocation-specific disciplines. All these initiatives will be possible if the study of African languages is made more easily available to students. Contrary to popular belief, students want to study African languages but funding remains a challenge.

Universities will need to carefully articulate exactly what is required in order to negotiate the forked tongue of multilingualism while at the same time forging ahead with using language in a way that facilitates changing identity and transformation at universities as well as ensuring socio-

economic growth in the country and the continent. Effective multilingualism equates transformation and the corollary to this would be social cohesion. English alone is an impoverished path of least resistance which does not take into account that multilingualism is a rich resource. An English-only approach will, like the Rhino, allow Africa's rich linguistic heritage to be decimated in the name of ignorance, contributing to higher failure rates, and increased social and economic tensions. The tangled wing will remain tangled, and never free to fly. Academics and society in general needs to take responsibility for Africa's linguistic heritage.

In response to the Asmara declaration, January 2000, Ali Mazrui (2001:172) notes that 'Language is one of the seven pillars of the African Renaissance.' In relation to South Africa '...we have yet to spell out what that recognition is in practice...all over Africa new language policies are needed.' Point 7 of the declaration reads as follows: 'The effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages and modern technology must be used for the development of African languages.'

Concluding remarks

There have been some positive developments regarding the potential implementation process when it comes to universities. Minister Nzimande's sentiments (5 April 2011; analysed by Turner 2011) suggests that the DoHET has a clear mandate in place regarding the intellectualisation of African languages and the use of these languages as medium of instruction. Furthermore, there is also institutional support that is required both nationally and continentally: All university departments and management need to take ownership of institutional language policies. It is not only the responsibility of a School of Languages or any single language department, but also the executive leadership of such institutions. The passing of the South African National Language Act 12 October, 2012 (i.t.o. the Lourens *versus* President of the RSA et al judgement of March 2010) may be a 'crucial instrument' for 'executing constitutional language provisions' (Swanepoel 2011:24).

The final point of the Asmara declaration states that: 'African languages are essential for the decolonizing of African minds and for African Renaissance.' It is a shame that one can study more African languages at the School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and Madison-Wisconsin, than at any South African university. Kiswahili is for example only offered at UKZN. What does this say about our place in Africa? Arguably, African languages need to be

used in high status domains such as parliament, in science and technology, following the examples of Afrikaans and Kiswahili.

As a way forward it would be necessary to create African Language Academies of Excellence; Centres for Multilingualism or Research Chairs and Catalytic Projects (as lauded by Alexander) which have the sole purpose of developing African languages in terms of teaching, providing language services integrated with community engagement, scholarship, and coordinating language teaching initiatives between universities. Universities would be better placed to work with the DoHET in order to develop and coordinate language teaching through professorial Chairs that work together across the country. Crystal (2000:166) concludes that:

We know that intervention can be successful. Revitalization schemes can work. But time is running out. It is already too late for many languages, but we hold the future of many others in our hands. The linguists in the front line, who are actually doing the fieldwork, therefore need as much support as we can mobilize.

Academics need to be language activists in order to ensure that we continue to champion a quiet language revolution, creating spaces for all languages at South African universities, and African languages in particular. The road to multilingualism is indeed a forked one – it is vitally important that the appropriate fork in the road be taken in order to truly transform the continent to educationally serve all of its peoples.

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