‘English only’? Creating linguistic space for African indigenous knowledge systems in higher education

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Abstract

African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKSs) are historically linked to indigenous African languages. Yet efforts to spearhead the infiltration by AIKSs into the discursive domain of the South African (higher) education system are often based on the assumption that this can be achieved without challenging the dominance of colonial languages in the education sector. This assumption is indebted to an implicit conception of the nature of language and its relation to knowledge, culture and power. It presupposes that languages are neutral and interchangeable, and that form and content are strictly separable. These assumptions are challenged by drawing on academic debates in a variety of philosophical and related fields. It is argued that AIKS can only be successfully spearheaded in a predominantly Eurocentric higher education system, and be made relevant to society at large, via increased use of indigenous languages.

INTRODUCTION

African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKSs) are linked, as a matter of historical fact, to indigenous African languages. Yet efforts to spearhead the infiltration by AIKSs into the discursive domain of the African (higher) education system are often based on the assumption that this can be achieved without challenging the dominance of colonial languages in the (higher) education sector. This assumption is indebted to an implicit conception of the nature of language and its relation to the production, transmission, appropriation and application of knowledge, broader cultural patterns and processes, and social, political and economic power structures in the academy. More specifically, it presupposes (1) that language is culturally and epistemologically neutral, (2) that languages are equivalent, fully intertranslatable and therefore interchangeable, and hence (3) that cultural content and linguistic form can be clearly distinguished so that content can pass from one language to another without significant alteration.

Each of these assumptions has been the subject of intense reflection and considerable controversy in philosophical debates. The relations between language and knowledge, language and culture, language and politics, and language and education have been extensively debated in a variety of philosophical fields, including philosophy of language, philosophy of culture, political philosophy, epistemology and philosophy of science, and the philosophy of education.
In this article, I want to draw on the conceptual, argumentative and theoretical resources yielded by some of these discussions in philosophical and related fields in order to gain a clearer understanding of some of the complexities involved in efforts to introduce AIKS into a higher education system that is historically and structurally Eurocentric in predominant outlook and orientation. It is proposed that a serious consideration of the language-in-education problematic, both at a theoretical and practical level, can provide valuable insights and useful strategies in the quest to transform higher education in Africa, and unlock the potential of AIKS.

My main theses are that (1) AIKS can only come into their own in higher education to the extent that indigenous languages succeed in making inroads into this sector as languages of learning and teaching, research, publication, and academic debate, and (2) AIKS in higher education will only benefit society at large to the extent that it is transmitted via indigenous languages. From this, the inference can be drawn that acceptance of the present dominance of colonial languages in African higher education amounts to an acceptance of the Eurocentric orientation of higher education institutions, the continued de facto banishment of indigenous knowledge from such institutions, and the inaccessibility and irrelevance of academic research to large numbers of people, despite laudable efforts to reverse such trends. The theses and inference will be based on my findings that

- language is culturally and epistemologically ‘loaded’
- languages are non-equivalent, only partially translatable, and strongly non-interchangeable
- linguistic form cannot be completely separated from intellectual content.

It should be pointed out that my theses, and the arguments supporting them, do not rule out the usefulness of English or other non-African languages as complementary vehicles for the development and dissemination of AIKS; nor do they exclude the possibility that indigenous languages could serve as vehicles for the appropriation and integration of Western knowledge within African cultures. On the contrary, my understanding of the functions of African indigenous knowledge in higher education implies the need for both. My argument, then, is not with the continued use of colonial languages or the enduring relevance of Western knowledge as such, but with their exclusive dominance within our higher education system.

Before presenting my arguments, let me explain briefly why I believe it important to bring AIKS into higher education. After all, the cogency of my main theses depends to a significant extent on the persuasiveness of this basic understanding. My own view in this regard has been strongly influenced by the work of Sandra Harding.
PARTICULARITY AND UNIVERSALITY IN THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Harding (1997) draws on discussions in so-called social and cultural studies of science and technology (SCSST) in order to make a case for the potential universalisability of non-Western knowledge. First, she draws attention to the growing recognition in mainstream Western philosophy of science that ‘all sciences are local knowledge systems’ (pp. 50–51). This recognition is based on a number of important insights, namely,

- that ‘observations are inextricably theory-laden’
- that ‘our beliefs form a network such that none is in principle immune from revision’
- that ‘scientific theories are underdetermined not just by any collection of existing evidence for them, but by any possible collection of evidence’
- ‘that more than one scientific theory or model can be consistent with any given set of data’.

From this, it follows that ‘scientific processes are not transparent; their culturally regional features contribute to and sometimes even constitute the conceptual frameworks for our descriptions and explanations of nature’s order’.

She further draws on analyses of modern science by certain non-Western scholars that give substance to these general claims about the nature of science by indicating in what ways ‘modern sciences are European ethnosciences’, namely, by identifying ‘aspects of conceptual frameworks, paradigms, and epistemes of European sciences and technologies’ that are ‘distinctively European’, yet are ‘so widely shared across diverse European subcultures that [they are] virtually invisible to Europeans’ (p. 51 ff.). Among these features are, for instance,

- the notion of ‘laws of nature’, which ‘drew on both Judeo-Christian religious beliefs and the increasing familiarity in early modern Europe with centralized royal authority’ (pp. 52–53)
- ‘the mutually powerful effects that European expansion had on the advance of modern science in Europe, and vice versa’, thereby ‘creating [distinctive] patterns of knowledge and ignorance’ (pp. 53–55)
- ‘the ways Northerners distribute and then account for the consequences of modern sciences’, that is, the ‘distinctively European or Northern . . . accounting practices [that] mask the actual distribution of sciences’ benefits and costs’ (pp. 55–56)
- the ‘distinctively European . . . claim to, and valuing of cultural neutrality’, which itself ‘expresses a culturally specific value’ (p. 56).

In short, Harding agrees with the dominant perspective in SCSST that modern, Western sciences, like all knowledge systems, ‘have been constituted by their practices and cultures, not just externally enabled by them in ways that leave no marks on their cognitive cores’ (p. 45). That is to say, the ‘cognitive core’ of a
knowledge system always bears the stamp of particular ‘natural environments, of natural conditions through populations, the interests of a culture and of its subgroups, their access and relation to discursive traditions, and their ways of organising scientific work’, all of which ‘are always shaped by political and economic as well as other social and cultural relations’ (p. 58).

Yet, interestingly, Harding maintains that this insight need not lead (as is often supposed) to ‘abandoning claims to universality, objectivity, and rationality for modern sciences’ (p. 45). On the contrary, she believes that ‘the local [can be] a resource for the growth of science’ (p. 56). After all, ‘the local provides different kinds of continuously renewed resources for understanding nature’ (p. 58). Precisely the success of modern, Western sciences in producing ‘universally valid claims’ (p. 60) – claims that have won assent beyond the confines of Western culture – proves that ‘local claims’ can be ‘universally valid’ (p. 59): ‘British, Japanese, French, Indian, Brazilian [and] Danish [scientists] . . . have been able to agree to scientific claims even though there might well be little else upon which they could agree. Of course it turns out that they have all been agreeing to scientific claims that were, in fact, distinctively European . . . So why could they not all also agree to scientific claims permeated by Confucian, Brazilian, or African “cultures and practices”?’ (p. 61).

The implications of Harding’s analysis can be illustrated with a passage from Susantha Goonatilake (1988, 229–230), which she also quotes (p. 63):

[I]f we were to picture physical reality as a large blackboard, and the branches and shoots of the knowledge tree as markings in white chalk on this blackboard, it becomes clear that the yet unmarked and unexplored parts occupy a considerably greater space than that covered by the chalk tracks. The socially structured knowledge tree has thus explored only certain partial aspects of physical reality, explorations that correspond to the particular historical unfoldings of the civilization within which the knowledge tree emerged.

Thus entirely different knowledge systems corresponding to different historical unfoldings in different civilisational settings become possible. This raises the possibility that in different historical situations and contexts sciences very different from the European tradition could emerge. Thus an entirely new set of ‘universal’ but socially determined natural science laws are possible.

It is on the basis of such a vision of the potential value of African indigenous knowledge for the scientific and scholarly endeavour that I want to argue for the importance of using indigenous languages for purposes of learning, teaching, research, publication and debate in South Africa’s higher education system. I shall now proceed, therefore, with my analysis of the connection between indigenous knowledge and indigenous languages.
The quotation from Goonatilake about chalk marks on a blackboard, read in the light of Harding’s analysis of ‘universally valid but local knowledge claims’ (Harding 1997, 59), shows a striking resemblance with a statement by Benjamin Lee Whorf in a well-known discussion of the link between science and linguistics. According to Whorf 2000, 120:

One significant contribution to science from the linguistic point of view may be the greater development of our sense of perspective. We shall no longer be able to see a few recent dialects of the Indo-European family, and the rationalizing techniques elaborated from their patterns, as the apex of the evolution of the human mind, nor their present wide spread as due to any survival from fitness or to anything but a few events of history . . . They, and our own thought processes with them, can no longer be envisioned as spanning the gamut of reason and knowledge but only as one constellation in a galactic expanse. A fair realization of the incredible degree of diversity of linguistic system that ranges over the globe leaves one with an inescapable feeling that the human spirit is inconceivably old; that the few thousand years of history covered by our written records are no more than the thickness of a pencil mark on the scale that measures our past experience on this planet . . . that the race . . . has only played a little with a few of the linguistic formulations and views of nature bequeathed from an inexpressibly longer past.

We have seen that Harding does not view the imprint of ‘the local’ on science as an ‘unmitigated defect’. Similarly, Whorf does not see ‘the sense of precarious dependence of all we know upon linguistic tools which themselves are largely unknown’ as ‘discouraging to science’. Rather, in his view, this sense should ‘foster that humility which accompanies the true scientific spirit, and thus forbid that arrogance of the mind which hinders real scientific curiosity and detachment’ (pp. 120–121).

But in what sense is knowledge dependent on linguistic tools?

Whorf bases his argument, firstly, on the obvious fact that, ‘whenever agreement or assent is arrived at in human affairs . . . this agreement is reached by linguistic processes, or else it is not reached’ (p. 116). Secondly, he points out that the examination of ‘a large number of languages of widely different patterns’ by linguists has brought ‘a whole new order of significances . . . into their ken’. More specifically, ‘It was found that the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade’ (p. 117).

The main consideration that leads Whorf to this conclusion is, as he puts it, that ‘we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages . . . We cut nature
up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language’ (p. 117).

In taking this view, Whorf implicitly criticises a conception of language and its relation to concepts and reality that became influential in linguistics through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. According to de Saussure (2000), a language is a system of signs, where each sign consists of a ‘signifier’, that is a sound – and a ‘signified’, that is the concept with which the sound is associated. Thus the word horse (a sound) is a signifier that signifies the concept or idea of a horse (the signified). De Saussure regards the link between a word and a concept as arbitrary – that is to say, any sound may, in principle, signify any particular concept. The differences between different languages at any one moment lie, quite simply, in the fact that different sounds or words are used to signify the same concepts.

Whorf, by contrast, sees the arbitrariness of a linguistic system as lying at a much deeper level than that of the link between particular words and concepts. According to him, the concepts themselves are, in a certain sense, arbitrary. In his own words: ‘The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds’ (p. 117). Thus Whorf takes leave, not only of a naïve realism that sees our concepts as ‘cutting nature at the seams’ (Klee 1997), but also of the Kantian notion that our basic concepts are somehow natural or innate to human nature.

The conclusion that Whorf draws from this is ‘that no individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality but is constrained to certain modes of interpretation even while he thinks himself most free’. In this connection, he speaks of ‘a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated’ (p. 117). Whorf thus agrees with Edward Sapir (2000) that ‘human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society’. According to Sapir, ‘it is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same . . . reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached’ (p. 397).

This so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been much discussed and criticised.
Criticism is mostly aimed at what is perceived as a tendency towards determinism in this line of thinking. I do not believe that either Sapir or Whorf ever intended to suggest that what we think is exclusively and wholly determined by the language we use, nor does this follow from their arguments. Yet, whether or not my interpretation of Sapir and Whorf is correct, the claim that linguistic structures reflect conceptual frameworks and thus condition our thinking seems very hard to refute, as even critics of linguistic determinism concede.

An interesting example of a clearly non-deterministic account of the relation between language and thought that nevertheless grants this basic point is the one developed by Kwasi Wiredu (1998) in an article on cultural universals. Wiredu considers the characteristic procedure, in the English language, ‘of forming abstract nouns from “concrete” ones. Thus, for example, from “chair” we get “chairness”. Adjectives can also yield abstract nouns in a similar manner: “Red”, for example, gives us “redness”.’ According to Wiredu, the Akan language can express concepts such as ‘chairness’ or ‘redness’ only in a very cumbersome way, for instance with expressions such as ‘the circumstance of something being a chair’. Consequently, ‘the fact that in English and languages such as English in this respect, there is . . . the unitary abstract noun, is apt to incline some speakers to objectual deductions, whereas in languages like Akan there is a distinct disincentive to any such objectivisation’ (pp. 33–4). Thus even a philosopher such as Wiredu, who claims that there are ‘cultural universals’ and perhaps even universal concepts (pp. 34–5), concedes that ‘disparate grammars . . . do quite frequently result in differences in the structure and content of particular concepts’ (p. 33), and even ‘that differences in languages often reflect, and are reflected in, differences of worldview’ (p. 34).2

Vincent Brümmer (1993, sec. 1.3) points out that the concepts and categories employed by a group of people at any given time to interpret their observations and experiences tend to reflect their particular needs and interests. This links up with Harding’s thesis, discussed above, that the interests of a social group constitute one of the ‘local’ factors that leave their imprint on the ‘cognitive core’ of a science or knowledge system. As we have seen, Harding adds to this the influence of particular historical experiences and the unique features of a specific natural environment on the conceptual systems in terms of which knowledge is pursued in a given society.

However, apart from the conceptual frameworks or grids linked to specific (families of) languages, Harding (1997, 57–58) also points to other ways in which specifically linguistic ‘local’ factors impinge upon the structure of our thought, namely, through ‘distinctive discursive traditions’, that is, the ‘characteristic metaphors, models, and narratives of nature and social relations’ of particular cultures. Authors such as René Dirven (1994), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) have pursued, in some detail, the impact of certain dominant metaphors, via particular languages, on specific cultures, and Robin Horton (1993), among others, has established convincing links between differences in dominant metaphors or
models on the one hand, and divergent ‘patterns of thought’ between different cultures on the other. The same goes for the analysis of dominant cultural ‘myths’ in the work of Roland Barthes (1972) and others (see, e.g. Kelsey 1974).

Linked to this is the phenomenon of linguistic registers. A language is never a monolith, but consists of a variety of registers that are linked to specific functions or types of practices. Thus, in modern, Western languages, there are specialised registers or types of ‘secondary discourse’ for such functions as jurisprudence, journalism, administration and – important for our purposes – science and scholarship. It is often claimed that indigenous African languages do not possess the requisite registers for (Western) science and scholarship or other high status functions. However, as David Gough (1999) points out, the reverse is at least equally true: indigenous African languages possess many specialised registers that are not available to speakers of English and other non-African languages. As examples, he mentions ‘the rhetoric employed in various ceremonies like releasing the widow, opening a homestead, traditional legal discourse, in praise poetry or even a folktale’ (p. 171). Additional examples could be multiplied at will. We need only think, for instance, of the specialised registers associated with traditional healing practices or with the use of indigenous technologies.

Under Harding’s ‘discursive traditions’, we should also place the texts, whether oral or written, that are available in certain languages and not in others. This is a problem even between languages within the same cultural sphere and with longstanding historical interconnections – and thus all the more so between languages that have developed in relative isolation from one another over long periods of time. Anyone who has ever learned a new language will know the experience of suddenly gaining access, not only to novel ways of saying and seeing things, but also to valuable texts and the ideas they contain, which would otherwise have remained inaccessible. In this sense too, indigenous languages may be described as repositories of indigenous knowledge. Thus it is not only the grammatical structure of a language that leaves an imprint on the shape of our knowledge, but also the models, metaphors, registers and texts with which such a language is aligned.

The point can also be made in a more general way. If Harding is correct in saying that local cultures and practices affect the ‘cognitive core’ of a knowledge system, then it is important to realise that language as a means of communication, as a system of signs, is always embedded in the wider ‘webs of significance’ (Geertz 1975, 5) that constitute culture. No clear demarcating line can be drawn between verbal and non-verbal communication, or between linguistic and non-linguistic systems of signification. Verbal or linguistic signs are interwoven with all the diverse forms of symbolisation that make our worlds meaningful and intelligible to us. And as forms of action, verbal and written utterances can only be understood within the broader contexts of action that make up the practices of a culture.

This insight emerges clearly from the work of thinkers such as Bronislaw
Malinowski, Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin (see, e.g. Austin 1971; Malinowski 2000; Wittgenstein 1958). In an article on language use in education, Dolina Dowling demonstrates how, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, ‘using [a] language’ amounts to ‘participating in a form of life’. Dowling spells out the implication very clearly: ‘By insisting that English is the medium of instruction, the hegemony of this form of western culture remains supreme.’ It would indeed seem that language, culture and knowledge do not come in neatly separated packages. In the words of John Pobee (1979): ‘He who uses a language, assumes the weight of a culture.’ To which we might add: Those who wish to assume the weight of a culture, by taking up and carrying forward the knowledge it has produced, will have to use the languages that will enable them to do so.

**NON-EQUIVALENCE, NON-TRANSLATABILITY, NON-INTERCHANGEABILITY**

If language, knowledge and culture are so inextricably interwoven, it follows that what applies to the relation between different languages will also have implications for the relation between different culturally conditioned knowledge systems. We need, therefore, to consider those aspects of the relation between languages that are relevant to relations among cultures and knowledge systems.

We have already seen that languages are non-interchangeable in a number of respects, not least with regard to the conceptual frameworks they express. In this connection, we have looked at the arguments of, among others, Sapir, Whorf and Wiredu. Yet it may be that neither Wiredu nor Sapir and Whorf go far enough in establishing incommensurability between the conceptual frameworks linked to different grammars. All three authors seem to be of the opinion that certain basic concepts can, at least in principle, be ‘correlated’ (Wiredu 1998, 35) or ‘calibrated’ (Whorf 2000, 117) between languages. Their main reason for thinking so is that (as they see it) intercultural communication would be impossible unless this was the case. However, philosophers such as Donald Davidson (1996) and Jaap van Brakel (2003) deny that communication requires shared concepts or a ‘shared language’. In their view, communication rather involves a process of ‘mutual attuning’ whereby listeners continually ‘hypothesise’, and ‘test’ their ‘hypotheses’, about the intentions of speakers. This applies even between speakers of the ‘same’ language, none of whose concepts are either stable or consistent – that is to say, concepts have vague and fluid boundaries that can never be exactly specified or correlated (Van Brakel 1998). Van Brakel illustrates this in a discussion concerning efforts to correlate colour concepts between languages. Such efforts have proven spectacularly unfruitful to the extent that it seems doubtful whether the concept of ‘colour’ itself exists in all languages. What we take to be colour words in a particular language may resemble ‘our’ classifications of colour up to a point, but closer investigation often reveals that they function according to the classificatory logic of entirely different categories (pp. 20–39). The implication is that we have
no reason to assume, and much reason to doubt, that concepts in one language necessarily have exact equivalents in other languages.

From this, it follows that languages are not fully intertranslatable. W. V. Quine is famous for his argument to the effect that translation is, by its very nature, ‘indeterminate’. Quine bases his argument on a postulated situation of so-called radical translation, where a speaker of language A tries to write a ‘translation manual’ for a language B, of which he or she has no previous knowledge. According to Quine (1996, 446–455), two linguists from language A, working on the same language B, could, quite logically, come up with two very different ‘translation manuals’ for the same language, both of which render ‘correct’ translations, yet whose translations contradict one another in language A. Quine’s hypothetical situation of ‘radical translation’ resembles quite closely the real, historical ‘first contact’ situations discussed at length by Van Brakel (1998, 40–60). As we saw earlier, Van Brakel’s aim is to show that communication can and does take place without a shared language, namely, by means of ‘mutual attuning’. On Quine’s view, translation is of necessity also such a ‘trial and error’ process of ‘attuning’, which can never reach completion, that is, something is always, as the saying goes, ‘lost in translation’.

The discovery of non-equivalence and the indeterminacy of translation between languages implies a rejection of the idea that all languages can, in the final analysis, be reduced to one, universal proto-language that underlies them all (for an additional argument to this effect, based on Tarskian semantics, see also Brand 2004). Much translation theory works with some such notion when it uses terms such as deep structure and surface structure. The aim of translation, according to such theories, is to replace one ‘surface structure’ with another without altering the ‘deep structure’. If Van Brakel, Quine and other, like-minded thinkers are correct, then such a procedure is impossible for the simple reason that the so-called ‘deep’ and ‘surface structures’ are, for better or for worse, inextricably interwoven: form and content cannot be separated.

LANGUAGE AND POWER

There is, however, yet another sense in which languages are non-interchangeable, namely, from a social and political perspective. Even if all languages had exactly the same underlying structure, gave access to exactly the same discursive traditions, registers and texts, were culturally and epistemologically neutral, and fully intertranslatable – even if, per impossibile, all these conditions applied, then it would still be the case that there exists in this world no language that is understood by everybody, nor a single person who understands all languages. The mere fact that a certain language is used in a particular domain immediately implies the exclusion of those who do not speak or understand that language. Even when someone has mastered a particular language late in life, it is only in rare cases that such a person can function in that language with the same ease and confidence as
those whose first language it is. A Dutch theologian once joked that, when his
country(wo)men write in English, the result is a performance comparable to that of
a pianist wearing oven gloves. (I can vouch for the fact that this is by no means
always the case!) We all know from experience what he means. Most of us have
known the frustration of struggling to express ourselves in an unfamiliar tongue.
Most of us can appreciate that understanding a language and speaking it are two
entirely different things. Most, if not all, of us know what it feels like to be among
people whose language we do not understand.

In South Africa, only about half of the total population – and a mere 22 per cent
of black South Africans – are ‘functionally proficient’ in English according to their
own estimation (PanSALB 2000). The numbers for Afrikaans are not much
different. Yet every tertiary institution in the country uses either English or
Afrikaans, or a combination of both, as languages of learning, teaching and
research. This means, quite simply, that the vast majority of those who could
potentially be at the forefront of bringing AIKS into higher education are
systematically excluded from institutions of higher learning. This process of
exclusion starts already at the school level, where ‘English only’ replaces use of
home languages as mediums of instruction after the third year of primary
education. Even those who do master English to a sufficient degree eventually to
enter higher education are, with rare exceptions, in no position to compete with
first language speakers in disseminating the knowledge produced by their cultures.

At this point in the history of South Africa, the privilege of education through
the medium of the mother tongue is reserved exclusively for Afrikaans and English
speakers. Those to whom the riches of AIKS belong by right, who should be able
to take pride in it and promote it in the academy, are not granted this most simple
of privileges. Indeed, it seems that, in the last resort, the non-interchangeability of
languages is most fundamentally linked to the non-interchangeability, that is, the
irreplaceability of real people of flesh and blood.

CONCLUSION

Having argued that languages are culturally and epistemologically ‘loaded’, that
they are non-equivalent, only partially translatable and strongly non-interchange-
able – as far as their internal structure and external historical links are concerned,
and in their political function – and that linguistic form and intellectual content are
therefore inseparable, I draw the conclusion that AIKS will only make inroads into
the (South) African higher education system to the extent that indigenous
languages are used, next to English and other colonial languages, as languages of
learning and teaching, research and publication. It follows that any serious attempt
to establish indigenous knowledge in higher education should coincide with efforts
to extend multilingualism in institutions of higher learning.
1 For instance, in the ‘Call for papers’ for the present conference it is stated, despite the thematic focus of the conference, that all proposals should be ‘in English only’; hence the title of this paper.

2 Clearly, then, the conditioning that occurs between language and worldview need not be taken as an unidirectional process from language to worldview only to appreciate the point made by Sapir and Whorf. Even if we understood the process as a two way one (as I think we should), with languages and worldviews mutually conditioning one another, it would remain true that worldviews are, precisely by virtue of that fact, partially constituted by linguistic means of expression.

REFERENCES

PanSALB see Pan South African Language Board.


