Making the role of African languages in higher education a reality

E. Koch
Admissions and Placement Assessment Programme
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
Port Elizabeth, South Africa
e mail: elize.koch@nmmu.ac.za

B. Burkett
Language Education
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
Port Elizabeth, South Africa
e mail: beverley.burkett@nmmu.ac.za

Abstract

Institutions of Higher Education in South Africa are increasingly opting for education through the medium of English only. Teaching and learning through the medium of English in higher education is also prevalent in many countries in Africa, despite the fact that this is the second or third language of most of the learners on this continent. The arguments in favour of teaching and learning through the medium of only English, especially with regards to speakers of the African languages, rely heavily on issues of practicality and use the discourse of globalisation and empowerment as their main point of departure. In the South African context various authors have challenged the ‘myths’ around the so called problems related to bilingual and multilingual education, at school level and in higher education, and have debunked the arguments with regard to globalisation and empowerment at a conceptual level. However, it is important to come up with practical suggestions as to how such alternatives will work, especially in countries where intensive research into the development of the indigenous languages for science and commerce still needs to take place. The authors of this article suggest ways in which bi /multilingualism can be accommodated within higher education, and discuss a possible framework for implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE) (DoE 2002) was followed by The Ministerial Report for the Development of African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education in April 2005 (DoE 2005). In the report, a policy framework for the development of indigenous African languages as media of instruction in higher education is proposed. As a report in the public domain, it is open to debate, and language has become the focus of news items, of
parliamentary debate and of TV talk shows such as *Interface* and *Special Assignment* on SABC 3 and *Take 5* on SABC 1. The issue has also been the subject of much academic debate.

Reactions to the proposal will largely determine the way forward. It is thus appropriate to focus attention on some of the main tensions in the debate regarding languages in education. Many of these debates are not well known in general higher education literature, hence this attempt to highlight the differing viewpoints on these issues and to point out how unresolved tensions fuel rhetoric at the expense of action. It is important to develop a critical stance about these debates in order to break this impasse. In addition, a theoretical framework for the implementation of multilingualism in education, especially in the higher education context in South Africa, has received little attention up to now. A strong focus of this article is thus an attempt to move beyond the rhetoric and address this gap in the literature, by proposing a possible framework for implementation.

**MULTILINGUAL HIGHER EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN**

**Important distinctions**

In a discussion of bilingual education, Baker (2001, 192) states that the meaning of the term cannot be assumed to be ‘unambiguous and self-evident’. One way of developing some understanding of the complexity of the term is to consider the goals of different models of bi-/multilingual education. An early distinction that was made was that between TBE and MBE (Fishman 1976; Hornberger 1991). Even though these terms have been used predominantly with regard to schooling systems, the underlying principles apply just as much to HE.

Transitional bilingual education aims to move the learner from the home language to the dominant language, which is usually a majority language. (In South Africa, English is a minority language, yet its status as a language of power and widespread use makes it a dominant language). The goal of bilingual education, therefore, is not full biliteracy in the home language *and* the dominant language, but rather increasing competence in the dominant language, one of power and status such as English. The bilingual stage is therefore only a temporary measure on the path to English literacy. This has been the case within our school system, where the emphasis has been on improving students’ competence in English or Afrikaans in order to better equip them to cope academically within the current system. This, in turn, has led to the current state of affairs in HE where, until recently, English and, decreasingly, Afrikaans have been the only languages used as media of instruction, and resources have been directed into increasing access to these languages.

Maintenance bilingual education, as the name suggests, aims to prevent home language loss. It is further differentiated into static and developmental maintenance
bilingual education (Baker 2001). In terms of static maintenance, the aim is for students to maintain the level of home-language skills with which they enter the education system. The home language is supported and acknowledged, but it is not further developed, nor is full biliteracy achieved. Developmental maintenance (also referred to as an ‘enrichment’ model), on the other hand, consciously sets out to fully develop the student’s home language so that biliteracy is achieved. This involves the continued use of the home language as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT), in order to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1984). This form of bilingual education has as its theoretical underpinning the notion that well-developed literacy skills (including academic literacies) in a home language will transfer to an additional one, and that the home language is a resource that can be drawn on in order to understand and learn in the additional language.

**Why do we need ‘developmental maintenance multilingual’ higher education?**

Implicit within the rather broad categorisation of bilingual education are different types of aims – societal, educational and linguistic. In his typology of models of bilingual education, Baker (2001, 194) describes each model in terms of two categories of aims – (1) societal/educational, and (2) language outcome(s). An example of a societal aim in terms of transitional bilingual education (TBE) is ‘assimilation’. This means assimilation into the ways of talking, acting and thinking that are represented by the dominant language. With developmental maintenance bilingual education (MBE), the societal/educational aim is ‘language maintenance, pluralism and enrichment’. This represents a different kind of society and form of education – one in which diversity is acknowledged and valued. Aims in language outcomes for TBE are monolingualism or limited bilingualism; for developmental MBE they are bilingualism and biliteracy.

For the purposes of our article, we would like to further distinguish between societal and educational aims. At this stage in our country’s development, the societal goal of diversity, and therefore language maintenance, is critical. Neville Alexander, for example, points out that in the transforming South African context, language diversity ‘is one of the critical areas that have to be addressed’ (Alexander 2002, 86), not because diversity is an ideal, but because it is a reality, and because the real issue in a multilingual society is not that all the people have to speak ‘any one particular language (although this clearly can be very helpful) but that they should be able to communicate with each other’. He also regards language as of central importance for democracy in a multilingual society. In addition, the ministerial report on the development of indigenous African languages in higher education (DoE 2005) warns of the threat to society and the potentially destabilising effect of language divides across socio-economic groups.
Theorists such as Alexander and Brand (2004) have written extensively on these issues in the South African context, and interested readers are referred to their work in this regard.

In terms of educational aims, HE in South Africa is faced with the critical challenge of providing equity of access and improving throughput rates. A glance at any African university’s mission statement reveals the high ideal of nurturing high-achieving, well-rounded graduates who can contribute significantly to the country’s future and to sustainable development. This type of mission statement is likely to remain rhetoric on paper unless students are provided with the means to develop to their full potential. We contend that this can be done by drawing on their home languages as resources for cognitive development, for epistemological access, and for better access to English as a language of academic discourse. Real empowerment does not happen via education through the medium of English, but via bi-/multilingual education. For this to happen, MBE at all levels of schooling, including higher education, needs to be implemented effectively.

Reflections on the LPHE: tensions underlying the debates on multilingualism in higher education

We South Africans are incredibly good at writing policies, and we have an enabling policy framework for multilingualism. The ministerial report referred to earlier describes five pieces of legislation that give support to and promote additive multilingualism. Positive as that may be, we have yet to prove ourselves equally competent in the area of implementation. While it has to be acknowledged that policy documents and frameworks have to be flexible enough to allow for different forms of implementation, and institutions need to have a degree of autonomy to implement policies in ways suited to their own institutional context and values, it must be conceded that the resultant vagueness creates gaps. These gaps heighten the tension that already exists regarding language in education, and results in no real progress being made in terms of implementation. This tension arises from whether the emphasis in terms of language should be on multilingualism, as MBE, or on the development of the proficiency of learners in the current language(s) of instruction.

Critiques of the LPHE highlight and reflect these tensions. While the LPHE might be regarded as a clear directive regarding multilingualism and the use of indigenous African languages as LoLTs in Higher Education, Van der Walt (2004, 142) points out that it would be quite possible to interpret this directive as having a main focus on the continued development of the proficiency of learners in the current languages of instruction, while ‘research is done on the development of the other South African languages’. On the other hand, a second much broader interpretation can also be regarded as perfectly valid. This interpretation is one of additive multilingualism, or MBE ‘that includes the maintenance of Afrikaans and gradual incorporation of African languages as LoLTs, while gradually decreasing
academic support in English and Afrikaans’ (Van der Walt 2004, 142). Following her analysis of the policy, she suggests as to how a multilingual HE environment could be supported.

Because the directive in the LPHE tends to be ambiguous, it also leaves many proponents of a mainly/only English approach with a feeling of frustration in that not enough emphasis is placed on what they regard as the real issue. This is the need to direct massive amounts of energy and expertise to improving proficiency in English ‘at all levels of the schooling system, so that by the time learners matriculate, they have sufficient ability in English to succeed’ (Foley 2004, 64). Should the development of English be undertaken effectively, a multilingual approach in HE would not be needed.

While Van der Walt’s (2004) critique offers an insightful account of the ambiguity in the LPHE and its failure to take a clear stand on multilingualism, her analysis is limited on two accounts. Firstly, she does not analyse the debates fueling the tension in the policy, and secondly, she leaves the reader with a sense that her suggestions for the creation of a multilingual environment display the same limitation than the LPHE in that they do not go far enough either; in other words, her suggestions do not really address the implementation of MBE. This article attempts to take the debate a step further, and address these two limitations.

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENTS REGARDING MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An analysis of reservations about multilingualism in education, at school or HE level, reveals that the people questioning multilingualism not only question the practicability of multilingualism, but more importantly, argue for monolingualism in principle. This is an approach that tends to sustain a binary divide between English as the dominant language and other languages, however much lip-service is paid to the importance of other languages and the value and importance of diversity. In other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa the languages may be French or Portuguese, but the arguments may follow the same trends. The themes can be classified into arguments at the level of principle, and those dealing with the practicability of multilingualism. We will discuss them briefly, in order to critically evaluate them.

Objections to MBE at the level of principle

One strong theme is the contention that the majority of ‘ordinary’ South African non-English speakers prefer English, and that education through the medium of English and English acculturation is not perceived as a threat (Foley 2004). As a result, apart from lobbying by Afrikaners, no intensive lobbying by the general population about the development and use of the indigenous languages for high-status functions has ever taken place. It is also claimed that the ANC accepted
English as the ‘necessary linking or common language of the country and, by extension, the national language’ (Foley 2004, 59). The political will to deliver in terms of multilingualism has been lacking.

Do these statements mean that we should not challenge the lack of will on the part of government (if it is true) and accept the inevitability of either monolingualism or TBE, which does not lead to biliteracy? And do these arguments convince us that the real and acknowledged practical challenges of MBE should not be addressed?

The argument that people choose English relies essentially on the liberal premise of individual freedom of choice which, in a liberal democratic state, should be protected at all costs (Painter and Baldwin 2003). While much has been said to problematise liberalism in general, we do not want to go into an in-depth discussion of it at this point, but simply want to question the evidence that the ‘English-only-is-what-ordinary-people-want’ argument is based on.

This argument does not take account of a number of studies indicating far more complexity in the attitudes of mother-tongue speakers of languages other than English in South Africa. Those studies indicate that many African-language speakers would, in fact, prefer their children to be educated in their own languages, provided that they receive quality education, and end up being proficient in English as well (De Klerk 2002; Heugh 2002; Markdata-Pansalb 2000). The preference for their own languages, with the understanding that they are able to use English competently as well, is a view that was also found to be prevalent among students in a study on attitudes towards isiXhosa as a LoLT at a previously disadvantaged SA university, and isiZulu adolescents in another study (Rudwick 2004; Valvit 2004). The fact that, for historical reasons, the African languages have not been used for high-status functions in the public domain, and the influence this has on Africans attitudes, is seldom highlighted or explored (De Klerk 2002; Rudwick 2004).

On the other hand, the view that the dominance of some languages is unproblematic and their use by speakers of other languages is merely instrumental, has led to the perception that English acculturation is not experienced as a threat (Foley 2004). Yet this view disregards the repeated expressions of concern about the disappearance of indigenous languages and the effect that this has on the practices of African culture and values (De Klerk 2002; DoE 2005; Langtag 1996).

When people do favour education through the medium of their own languages (Stellenbosch University 2005), this is often not seen as representing evidence of people expressing their linguistic rights and finding the dominance of another language as disempowering, but rather as representative of ethnic nationalism (Foley 2004). Because of the perception that English is the linking language, arguments in favour of multilingualism thus often tend to be seen as attempts to undermine national unity, and are linked to ethnicity, without any differentiation or
accommodation of nuances (Kriel 2004; see Painter 2004 for an analysis of discourses around the use of isiXhosa). Alexander (2005) calls this ‘the nationalist reflex’ – ‘nationalism’ becoming the simplest place to look for the answer.

In addition, the argument which is based on the notion of English as a lingua franca and thus having a unifying role, often acquires another slant, namely that English is the international language, and the language of globalisation and empowerment. The promotion or use of other languages in education is then seen as counter-productive, since English is all that one needs.

The argument based on the unifying role of English tends to ignore the vast number of people who remain and will remain marginalised and excluded from democratic processes, national and international, because they lack functional proficiency, or even basic fluency, in English (Alexander 2002; Pennycook 1998). No amount of ‘language development’ will ever effectively reach all of these people, while many people will remain unmotivated and unconvinced that it should be important to learn a foreign language in order to partake in democratic processes or economic activity in their own country. This argument also does not take cognisance of the many convincing arguments highlighting the great promise that multilingualism holds for the building of a national identity in SA in which all can participate, and not only the 50 per cent of the population who regard themselves as functionally proficient in English (Alexander 2002; Brand 2005; DoE 2005; Markdata-Pansalb 2000). It also ignores the current drive for multilingualism internationally (Alexander 2005), as well as a wealth of international literature challenging and problematising the discourses of globalisation and English as an international language (see for example, Pennycook 1998, and Phillipson’s 1999-review of David Crystal’s book, ‘English as a global language’).

**Objections to multilingual education based on practicability**

*The cost of multilingual education*

The cost of the implementation of multilingualism in HE involves, for example, terminological development in the African languages, translation, interpreting, and the production of materials. The argument is that this cost is prohibitive, and that it would be better to invest in the development of English language proficiency at school level than to invest in multilingualism.

The question whether it would be better to invest in the development of English proficiency than in multilingualism may be a regarded as a valid question, but only if one regards arguments such as the ones pointed out in the previous section as unproblematic. The cost implications of the implementation of multilingualism then seem to outweigh any arguments in favour of it. Yet on the other hand, the fact that similar amounts or more, would have to be spent on the development of English language proficiency, often with marginal effect, does not seem to be an issue. Research appears to indicate that language proficiency improves only
marginally even with intensive programmes of up to nine weeks or longer (Balfour 2002). It also needs to be acknowledged that there has been much investment in teacher training and English language programmes by numerous bodies over decades, but, despite some sterling work, with little overall effect if matric results are taken as a yardstick (Herald 2004).

To argue for English at the expense of multilingualism also means not taking into consideration the volume of existing research indicating the effectiveness of additive mother-tongue-based bilingual education, in allowing children to develop conceptually at the same time as they become proficient in a second language, especially in contexts typified by low literacy levels, as is the case in South Africa (Thomas and Collier 1997). Malherbe conducted seminal work in the South Africa context as early as 1938. Mother-tongue-based bilingual education is an educational approach that will only be available for the majority of children in South Africa if multilingualism at all levels of schooling is effectively implemented.

Heugh (2002), in an article dealing with objections against mother-tongue-based bilingual education at school level, points out that trends in international research indicate that, even with well-resourced mainly-English education, only about 40 per cent of South Africa second language students can be expected to achieve an average of 50 per cent or more. Other research conducted by the World Bank shows that there would be a ‘reasonable expectation of positive return on the investment made’ in the case of multilingual education (Heugh 2002, 192). She highlights that the provision of materials in multiple languages at school level will only lead to an effective 1 per cent increase in the education budget in South Africa.

To the best of our knowledge, a costing of the implementation of multilingualism in HE in the sense of Van der Walt’s second interpretation has yet to be undertaken. However, one may ask why this has not happened. In investigations into the so-called ‘language problem’ at HE level, it has been found that the problem inevitably boils down to the difficulty that all students experience with the mastering of the language, including the terminology, and literacy practices of the disciplines (Koch and Kriel in press; Wyrley-Birch 2005). In addition, second-language students struggle with having to understand concepts and demonstrate mastery of literacy practices in languages they have not completely mastered. A report on the possible implementation of multilingualism at the University of Cape Town (UCT) points out that there is a 20 per cent discrepancy between the academic results of first- and second-language speakers at that university. This is regarded as an indication of the difficulty that second-language students experience with the language of instruction (UCT 2004). It can also be viewed as an indication of the cost of monolingualism, in terms of the effect it has on throughput rates.
**Linguistic challenges**

Other practical objections raised against multilingualism are those dealing with linguistic factors. One of the practical problems that has been acknowledged in the ministerial report about the development of African languages as LoLT (DoE 2005), is the linguistic diversity across and within language groups and the challenges this poses for corpus planning, as well as challenges generally related to terminology development.

These challenges need to be taken up, and will surely be addressed by the various Language Research and Development Centres that have been set up across the country, as well as by work undertaken by the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb). It is, however, important to take note of research into existing resources in terms of, for example, terminology development, before blanket statements about the lack of availability of terminology and its implication for materials development are made (Thusi and Heugh 2002). One should also take cognisance of innovative work in this regard at universities such as the University of Limpopo and others (Ramani and Joseph 2002).

**Concluding remarks**

Debates on issues are signs of a healthy democracy, and should be allowed to continue. However, they should not distract us from the actual work that needs to be done. It is important that ideologies do not play the decisive role in these debates, but rather the interests of the peoples of our country. At school level, much evidence about the effectiveness of bi-/multilingual education exists. It is incumbent on proponents of the English-only approach to provide systematic evidence about the effectiveness of education through the medium of an unfamiliar language in a context such as ours, evidence which is currently lacking. Matric results and results at university level seem to indicate otherwise, while international research leaves us with many reservations about the monolingual approach. Multilingual education at school level will be effectively implemented only if people can see the value of their languages also for higher education and beyond. Furthermore, it is important to demonstrate how languages will survive, and how the concerns of people about their languages and cultures will be addressed if only English is used for high-status functions. Socio-economic divisions along language lines also threaten social stability in SA, and serve to maintain the inequalities of the past. It is thus important to move beyond rhetoric towards the formulation of frameworks for the actual implementation of multilingualism in higher education. The next section describes one possible framework for implementation, taking MBE as its goal.
A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTING MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: GOING BEYOND THE RHETORIC

The framework is a set of interacting elements that need to be taken into account when implementing multilingualism. It provides a way of systematising the process and working from a theoretical base. The framework includes goals, focus areas, domains of application, and implementation stages. It is important to state at this point that one particular model of multilingualism will not fit all institutions. While the framework itself remains fixed, the form the elements within it take will be dependent on the context – on the variables operating within that context and the goal of MBE that the institution sets for itself.

Goals

A fundamental principle underlying this framework is that multilingualism cannot be implemented in a haphazard, laissez-faire way. It needs to be driven by a set of goals. This is what determines the form of bi-/multilingual education that will be developed. All decisions made, all strategies employed should be with the end goal in mind. This links with the discussion earlier in this article regarding the goals of the different models of bilingual education. We take as our end goal successful, confident, competent multilingual and biliterate graduates.

Focus areas for implementation

Once the goals have been set, a plan needs to be developed with short- and mid-term strategies in place. The next decision to be made is in terms of where to focus. An obvious starting point for an institution is an analysis of the student and staff demographics and of the spread of students, by home language, in different programmes, and of materials and resources available both within and beyond the institution. All of these factors will impact on where to start – where to focus energies and resources.

Each of the following focus areas has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. In some cases, the advantages of one approach represent the challenges of another. But in all cases the institutions will need to consider what best suits them, their linguistic, human and material resources and their students’ needs.

By subject, programme or discipline

One possibility is to focus resources and energy on a particular subject, programme or discipline. This may be determined by the number of students with a home language other than English, enrolled in a particular course or programme. It could also be determined by the nature of the course or programme itself, in that it requires competence in more than one language. In the document Towards a
Language Plan for the University of Cape Town (UCT 2004), examples are given of Pharmacy and Medicine, which already include credit-bearing courses in Afrikaans and isiXhosa. These are, however, language communication courses, not content courses taught through the medium of Afrikaans and isiXhosa.

The advantage of a subject/programme approach is that it involves fewer staff members initially, and efforts can be channeled to develop materials, develop and utilise terminology and glossaries, and provide training and support to staff. All aspects of teaching and learning can be addressed, and strategies such as the use of bilingual student assistants for tutorials and interpreters in large classes can be used. This makes the implementation of multilingual education much more manageable, and the progress of students can be monitored.

The disadvantage of this approach is that only students in the particular discipline or subject area have the benefit of being able to access subject matter in more than one language. It also limits the model of multilingualism. It could appear to favour some, or could be perceived as an easy option for a few. It would depend on how the approach is handled and how it is put across to the staff and student body.

By level

In this scenario the focus would be on foundation and/or first-year courses. The aim would be to enable students to draw on their home language to develop academic literacy at entry level, to facilitate the transition to higher education, to induct students into the discourse of the disciplines, and to provide a secure foundation for university study. This model could remain limited to the lower undergraduate levels, or it could be a starting point with the intention of increasing the range of bilingual curriculum delivery over time to the senior undergraduate years and to postgraduate study.

The advantage of this approach is that there is an equal entry point, with no one group being advantaged or disadvantaged by language. It provides equity in terms of initial access. The challenge is that it requires effort on all parts of the system to get things into place for an across-the-board approach, and it involves the spreading of material and human resources over a wide base.

By specific area of application

A further option could be to focus on specific areas of application, called ‘domains’, and discussed in the next section of the framework. The focus area in this case could be on materials, such as lecture notes, or on assessment practices in all disciplines, as a means of providing support for learning and increasing access. It has been suggested (UCT, 2004) that students whose home language is not the language of instruction be allowed longer time in examinations, as it takes them longer to process the question paper and to formulate responses, and that they be allowed to use bilingual dictionaries. Having tests and exam papers available in
two or more languages is also not difficult to put into practice, and it is a relatively inexpensive strategy. It might involve some translation initially, but soon a bank of terms and phrases could be built up that would facilitate the quick translation or adaptation of exam questions into more than one language.

The advantage of this approach is that it is contained and manageable, and provides a focal point for energy and resources. The disadvantages are that

- if it is the only focus area, it does not lead to full additive multilingualism and biliteracy for all students – it is limited to those who have an African language as a home language.
- it also does not transform practice within higher education and does not lead to the full development of African languages as media of instruction.

By a combined approach

Any of the above can be combined in a strategic combination, suited to the context. For instance, it could be decided that entry-level courses in certain programmes would be the starting point for introducing an African language as a medium of instruction. Lecturers who are already bilingual could be appointed to those courses. At the same time, lecture notes and assessment practices in other programmes could be addressed.

By a comprehensive approach

A comprehensive approach would involve implementing bi-/multilingual education across all disciplines and in all aspects of teaching and learning in a phased-in way. This form of multilingualism education will take careful planning and will need to be introduced in stages, in order to maintain control and to ensure effective implementation. The main advantages of this approach are the uncompromising commitment:

- to equity and to raising standards of achievement and throughput rates.
- to the development of African languages as fully-fledged languages of academic discourse
- to the development of all students as biliterate and multilingual.

The main challenge is the resourcing it will require and the advocacy needed to have full support from staff at all levels of the system.

Domains of application

No matter what is chosen as a focus area, within each area there are domains of application for which strategies will need to be identified and implemented. These are practices and processes that are language-based, and behaviours that contribute
to an ethos and valuing of multilingualism. In each domain, strategies can be arranged on a continuum from weak forms to strong forms. These are exemplified in the chart in figure 1. Some are discussed briefly below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outline of lecture on OHT/PPT in more than one language</th>
<th>Development of dictionaries, glossaries</th>
<th>Teaching materials available in an African language as well as Eng/Afr</th>
<th>Interpreting provided by teaching assistant/aide</th>
<th>Lectures in an African language (study guides/lecture notes/text books in Eng)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak form</td>
<td>Strong form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: Teaching strategies**

**Learning practices**

This grouping includes practices that can be undertaken by students in developing an African language for academic purposes alongside a language such as English.

- Use of an African language in group discussion
- Use of an African language (where it is the home language) for notes, summaries and concept mapping
- Use of an African language for asking questions during lectures;
- Use of an African language for giving verbal or written feedback or answering questions posed by lecturers in classes.

Practices such as these are already in place in a number of institutions, but they are often limited to academic development courses, where the staff members have an understanding of the problems faced by speakers of languages other than English, and have specialised training to deal with this.

**Teaching practices**

This grouping includes practices that can be undertaken by lecturers in developing an African language for academic purposes alongside a language such as English, at the same time providing scaffolded learning opportunities.

- Multilingual outline of lectures on (OHT) or Power Point
- Bi-/multilingual lecture notes provided in hard copy, electronic format, or web-based
- Additional multilingual self-access materials made available
- Tutorials held in African languages
- Conversations/responses to questions in class done through the medium of an African language or through a two-language conversation. (This has often been
the case with English and Afrikaans, where people with a working knowledge of the language but who do not feel comfortable enough speaking it, reply in their first language to a question or comment that was put in the other language.)

- Provision of interpretation services for large classes, even if it is in the form of senior students acting as teaching assistants.
- Delivering of lectures in an African language

**Assessment**

Assessment and evaluation is a critical domain, and there are a number of bi-/multilingual practices that can enhance understanding and performance. At present, even though African languages do not yet have full status as media of instruction/languages of learning and teaching, students, when given a choice, opt for examinations and tests to be set in more than one language. Even though they may answer in English, having understood the questions in their home language increases their chances of answering correctly. Writing assignments and tests in an African language is not yet common practice in HE in South Africa. even though a number of universities have had a language policy which did not preclude this (the former UPE had a trilingual policy), and some institutions are experimenting with this.

Evaluation and feedback in an African language does constitute a challenge at present, given the lack of proficiency in African languages by many lecturers who are mother-tongue speakers of English or Afrikaans. In the longer term, lecturers may have a good enough working knowledge of the language to cope with the assessment themselves, but in the interim, bilingual teaching assistants can be trained to help.

**Curriculum and materials**

Bringing African languages into the curriculum needs to be part of a process of transforming curricula. As was stated earlier, a course in an African language of the region can be required for the service professions and for occupations where the context requires multilingual competence. For every South African, a working knowledge of an African language as well as English is likely to become a workplace necessity. Incorporating indigenous knowledge into the curricula and using language to construct this knowledge ought to become a research niche area for South Africa. Bi-/multilingualism itself ought to be an area in which we become world experts. In fact, SA has a strong history of successful bilingual education (Malherbe 1943; Ianco-Worrall 1972; Heugh 2002), but it is not being sufficiently drawn on or learned from in terms of current policy implementation.
**Administration**

Often the first contact with a university is through the admissions office. While most institutions have bilingual members of staff, able to answer questions in a number of languages, all the forms and procedures do not necessarily reflect this capability. In implementing a multilingual policy, attention should be paid to all areas of administration. This means considering letterheads, exam books, admission forms, and all forms of communication with students and the general public.

**Values and ethos**

Building an ethos of multilingualism and creating a climate in which linguistic diversity is valued is as important as the development and use of African languages for learning and teaching. Much has been written (Kapp, Leibowitz) about the role of language and identity, and the sense of alienation experienced by many black students in the higher education system. When students feel that their language is valued and respected, their self-esteem rises and they feel more confident, and are more likely to be successful in their studies.

Strategies that contribute to an ethos of multilingualism include representing the different languages and cultures in signage, in ceremonies, in meetings, in media releases, and in campus activities and events. It requires conscious effort to question long-held assumptions and critically re-examine messages, transmitted through language, that are implicit in forms of behaviour that exclude, denigrate or diminish others. Because who and what we are or are perceived to be is constructed through language, the use or non-use of a language can contribute both negatively or positively to that perception.

**Stages**

No one would be so naïve as to imagine that implementing a model of multilingualism can be done simply and easily. It needs to be planned carefully and carried out systematically, but always with the end goal in mind. At this point it may useful to take cognisance of a point made by Merrill Swain and quoted by Tucker (2005). She cautioned that, when considering forms of language education, what should be transferred or imported is a ‘cycle of discovery’ rather than a model that was successful in another socio-political, linguistic and economic context. This cycle is described as: ‘... the stages and processes of evaluation, theory building, generation of hypotheses, experimentation, and further evaluation in order to help ensure that the implementation of programs is appropriate for the unique sociocultural contexts in which they will operate. (Tucker 2005, 4)
Any institution implementing a model of multilingualism will need to follow a similar cycle with scheduled review dates. All of these approaches can be modified and adapted according to what is successful, and to cater for changing circumstances.

**Factors for consideration beyond the institution**

For the implementation of multilingualism to be successful, whatever form it takes, it needs to be goal-oriented and systematic. The institution as a whole needs to be committed to its success. It also requires looking beyond the institution for sustainability, and working towards coherence within the educational system. The following factors need to be taken into account:

- **Regional collaboration** is recommended with regard to terminology and materials development. Universities developing the same African language can work together to enable more effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources. Glossaries can be developed and exchanged, cutting down on the work done by any one institution.

- **Support for terminological and materials development** can also be sought from the language research and development centres (LRDCs) that have recently been set up, at different institutions round South Africa, for each of the indigenous African languages. Funding is already available through the Department of Arts and Culture for language development initiatives through these centres.

- **With regard to the education system as a whole**, a number of factors need to be noted. Policy support for multilingualism in HE comes from the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education 1997). But a lesson can be learned from this policy as well. Although there was talk of an implementation plan, this never reached the schools. With all the curriculum changes and concomitant training that was being carried out, the (LiEP) became simply another document on the shelf. While the policy advocates additive multilingualism, there were no guidelines as to what this might mean in practice. Recent studies regarding language use in schools indicate that there is little real understanding of what an additive bilingual model of education involves in terms of practice (De Klerk 2002; Probyn et al. 2002). Changes in teaching practice and curriculum delivery have been driven almost entirely by changing student demographics, and are more at the level of *ad hoc* coping strategies than at the level of planned, whole-school policy development and implementation.

- **Establishing a continuum of bilingual curriculum delivery** from the General Education and Training (GET) band, through the Further Education and Training (FET) band and into higher education, becomes a real possibility. If all learners in the school system learn an African language, this, too, will facilitate the implementation of multilingualism in HE. This highlights the need for
research to take place within the GET and FET bands, that will inform ongoing planning, and will enable HEs to build on what has been established at the lower levels.

CONCLUSION

While bi-/multilingual education involving the use of African Languages as LoLTs in schooling beyond Grade 4 and in HE has yet to become common practice in this country, there are some initial moves in that direction. At school level, as far as we are aware, these include the LoITASA (Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa) project at UWC, PRAESA (Project for Alternative Education in South Africa) at UCT, and the ABLE (Additive BiLingual Education) project in rural Eastern Cape, a research project of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). In universities it includes some science teaching at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the bilingual bachelor’s degree in language studies at the University of Limpopo. Most of the other initiatives in HE are supportive of mother tongues, but they do not go as far as medium of instruction.

For decades, resources have been channelled into developing English and Afrikaans academic language proficiency. By proposing a framework for the implementation of multilingualism we are not negating the positive benefits of this, or of what has been learned in the process. Nor are we adopting a simplistic view of the issues involved. What we DO recommend is being clear about goals and adopting a systematic approach in planning for implementation. In this article we have outlined the debates regarding the multilingualism in HE and have attempted to problematise the assumptions underlying them. We argue that while the debates go on, we need to take action: not short-sighted, impulsive action, but carefully considered and planned action. We need to embark on ‘cycles of discovery’ which may lead to a transformed HE domain with positive academic, economic and social outcomes.

REFERENCES


Valvit. 2004. Attitudes of isiXhosa speaking students at the University of Fort Hare towards the use of isiXhosa as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Master’s thesis, Rhodes University.