

**THE SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKER IN THE PRE-PRIMARY  
ENVIRONMENT.**

**A CASE STUDY OF ZULU-SPEAKERS AT A PREDOMINANTLY ENGLISH  
PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL IN 1995 AND 1996.**

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*I dedicate this work to my family especially John, Ryan and Bronwyn who make all journeys worthwhile and meaningful. Also to the children of New Germany Lutheran Pre-Primary School who inspire and add joy to my life.*

## **Declaration**

This work, except where specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is the original work of Beverley Amanda Clark.

## ***Abstract***

*In recent years, following the demise of Apartheid education policy, there has been a move away from exclusively mother tongue instruction in ex-Natal Education Department schools. Consequently, in many English speaking pre-primary schools, Zulu-speakers are being submerged into the English language environment. At the same time, there is growing interest amongst educators in an alternative process which allows for affirmation of the first language whilst providing multiple opportunities for second language acquisition by non-English speakers.*

*This report seeks to identify aspects of second language acquisition through lexical tests and analysis of "news" items by the Zulu-speakers at the pre-primary school in the study. Further, through observation of the social interaction of these eight children, it seeks to identify socialisation patterns and to comment on the role which language plays both in the choice of friends and on the child's emotional well-being in the second language environment.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION**

### **1. THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT WHICH PROVIDES THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND BACKDROP FOR THIS STUDY.**

Early exposure in an informal environment such as the pre-primary school, as opposed to exposure during formal schooling from grade one onwards, to a second language environment, is a subject of debate. There are arguments for and against this early acquisition.

Central to the concerns in this study are the issues concerning the child and language, education language policy and the language acquisition environment. As an introduction to this study, the status quo of the eight children who are the subject of this research will be contextualised.

There is a wide range of facilities for early childhood development, including pre-primary schools, day-care centres, playschools, playgroups and reception classes. The institution at the centre of this study is a KwaZulu-Natal Education Department pre-primary school,

one of the many which were supported, in part financially and with educational support, by the ex-Natal Education Department.

### 1.1 HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL.

The school is situated in the municipality of New Germany which is a residential as well as a business and light industrial area west of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. Adjacent to New Germany is the Township of Clermont.

The school was started in 1970 by the German Lutheran Church for their German speaking community. When the Natal Education Department (N.E.D.) offered its support to pre-primaries, this school accepted and control of the school moved from the Church to the Education Department in 1978. In 1970 the school had a total of 50 pupils enrolled, all of whom were German speaking. By 1996 the language composition of pupils at the school has changed dramatically. Out of a total of 92 pupils enrolled at the school, 14 have German as either their home language or as one of their home languages (the other being English) and have a German-speaking teacher for their family group. Eight have Zulu as their home language and the remaining 70 pupils are from English-speaking homes.

The Group Areas Act of 1949 introduced enforced residential segregation in South Africa with the result that New Germany has been an exclusively 'white' area and Clermont an exclusively 'black' area.<sup>(1)</sup> The lifting of this act in 1988 has allowed people of races other than 'white' to move into New Germany but the process of suburban integration

will, it appears, be a gradual one. Of the eight Zulu-speaking children at our school, three live in New Germany and five in Clermont.

Our school applies a strict first-come-first-served admission policy which means that our admission policy does not influence the ratio of 'black': 'white' enrolment at the school. Other factors, which include financial resources, proximity to the school and our inability to provide full day care, must be factors which influence our intake of pupils.

A pre-primary school such as the one in this study does not fit neatly into any of the State education models. It is neither a Private nor a State school. The pre-primary schools under the management of the ex-Natal Education Department are mostly subsidised in terms of salary only. For example, at our school the salaries of the principal and one teacher are paid for by the State. The rest of the staff's salaries as well as all other expenses for the running of the school are met through school fees and some fundraising. The traditional N.E.D. pre-primary is a school which caters for children from the age of 3 to 6 years. However, there is a move away from this towards reception classes which cater for the 5-6 year old only and there are presently several reception classes, attached to Junior Primary schools, in existence. The proposal by the State and Early Childhood stakeholders, to include a compulsory reception year as part of the 10 year compulsory education plan, will alter the pre-primary as it is described in this study.

However, one assumes that the commitment to meeting the needs of the whole child (physical, intellectual, emotional, social and mental) within a child-centred rather than subject-centred environment will continue to be fundamental to reception class didactics.



It is further hoped that there will be a commitment to establishing a manageable ratio of a maximum of 25 learners to 1 educator so that interaction between teacher (or facilitator or guide however he or she may be described ) will prevail.

Returning to the focus of this report, and in order to place this study in context, the current programme and ideology of the pre-primary school will be defined, briefly.

## 1.2 PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION.

The author, Robert Fulghum's, oft repeated insight into education at Kindergarten has relevance here because it defines the essence of the pre-primary school environment.

These are the things I learned:  
 Share everything. Play fair.  
 Don't hit people.  
 Put things back where you found them.  
 Clean up your own mess.  
 Don't take things that aren't yours.  
 Say you're sorry when you hurt someone.  
 Wash your hands before you eat.  
 Flush.  
 Warm cookies and milk are good for you.  
 Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play some.  
 Take a nap every afternoon.  
 When you go out into the world, watch out for the traffic, hold hands, and stick together.  
 Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.  
 Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup- they all die. So do we.

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you ever learned- the biggest word of all - LOOK.

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and  
love and basic sanitation  
Ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

(Fulghum, 1994. : 6,7)

The idealism expressed in Fulghum's quote is evident in pre-primary ethos. Through these ideals teachers hope to equip 'their children' for the real world. The school becomes an oasis, an environment specially created and nurtured for the child to explore through play.

### 1.3. PLAY

Arguably the most outstanding feature of the pre-primary school is that the children are engaged in play. Teachers regularly have to defend the children's right and need to play to those parents who feel that they should be doing something more "productive".

In order to put "play" into perspective I will define it briefly. However, due to limitations in the scope of this paper it will not be possible to do justice to the importance of play nor to the complexities of pre-primary education. At the most it will provide a contextual backdrop to the research.

It is generally agreed that children learn to walk and talk and play instinctively. Even with minimal resources they will manipulate these and play. Thus play is a natural part of childhood.

Just as children pass through stages in motor development and speech they do so in play. Piaget identifies three stages of play, namely sensorimotor, symbolic and playing games that have rules. (Ramsay and Bayless 1980 : 52 ). Play also develops socially from solitary, ( playing on one's own) to parallel play (playing alongside but not with someone) and later group play (playing together for a common goal.)

The value of play for the individual child includes:

- \* play promotes physical growth
- \* play provides children with a sense of power
- \* play nurtures problem solving
- \* play fosters emotional growth
- \* play provides an opportunity to acquire concepts
- \* play provides a means for playing out roles and encourages self expression

(ibid: 53,54 )

- \* play provides a means for social interaction and development.

#### 1.4. The Pre-primary School Programme.

Underpinning pre-primary education are the ideas of theorists such as Froebel, Piaget and Montessori as well as later innovations such as the High/Scope curriculum and Design and Technology ideas. For both the practical and educational functioning of the day an

integrated day programme has been devised which aims to meet the needs of the child for the security of routine and the freedom of self-discovery.

The programme has been designed to provide a balance between 'free choice of play' and 'organised periods' and forms the structure through which the ideals are implemented.

The organised periods make up three (or four, for the pre-schoolers) sessions lasting about a half an hour each. These comprise the greeting ring, the music (or dance, drama, functional movement, discussion) ring, and the story and language enrichment session at the end of the morning. Incorporated into story time is a toilet routine and in the mid-morning ring (music etc) is a toilet and snack routine. The pre-school children have an extra organised time in which they develop certain skills and explore concepts which will help prepare them for formal schooling while at the same time meeting their present needs and level of development.

The "free choice of play" sessions make up the remainder of the morning. It is at these times that the child and not the teacher, becomes director of his/her movement. She/he chooses where to play, with whom, how to play and for how long (within certain boundaries of civil behaviour and within the curriculum of High/Scope - which will be discussed later). The areas of choice include the outdoor area (sandplay, cycle track, climbing equipment, woodwork, etc), the Creative area (for activities like painting, drawing, box construction), the Cognitive area (for puzzles, educational games, construction toys and blockplay), the Fantasy area (dressing up, role play) and the Fringe area (sensopathic play with water, sensory media etc).

### 1.5. The Role of the Teacher.

The pre-primary teacher's role is multi-faceted. She (there are currently no male pre-primary teachers in Education Department schools in KwaZulu-Natal ) must be empathic care-giver and nurturer, as well as educational facilitator and sharer and stimulator of knowledge. She must be flexible in thinking and in practice and remain a learner herself.

Ramsay and Bayless describe the qualities of a kindergarten teacher (which would apply to a pre-primary teacher ). Some of these include:

- \* a caring, aware, patient, and warm person;
- \* a consistent, flexible, and secure person with genuine liking for children;
- \* a person acquainted with, accepting of and appreciative of the different cultures, customs, and languages children bring;
- \* a person with initiative and resourcefulness in working with children and adults in developing and adapting a program (sic) to meet individual needs and preferences;
- \* a creative person who enjoys the challenge of designing and developing materials to match each child;
- \* someone willing to spend the necessary time to work with parents and others through the critical kindergarten year;
- \* an energetic, physically fit person possessing a sense of humour and a positive attitude to life;
- \* a "growing" individual;
- \* a responsible role model.

(Ramsay and Bayless, 1980:14)

Joan Orr makes further suggestions for teaching in a multicultural, multilingual environment.

- \* ensuring that warm, responsive and articulate adults are involved with the child's everyday exploration of the environment;

- \* obtaining the services of someone who can initially interpret the happenings of the school to the child (i.e. if the teacher cannot speak the second language) in the first few weeks of school;
- \* ensuring that the adult speaks slowly and in a simple manner - at a level only slightly more advanced than that of the child;
- \* making an effort to understand the culture of the child and not to allow this to appear inferior to the dominant culture of the school. This will also involve encouraging the self esteem of the child.

(Orr - post 1991:21)

Teaching in any pre-primary environment demands a high level of commitment to the child as she/he is and for whom she/he will become. It is a role which carries with it enormous responsibility for the physical, emotional, intellectual and social well-being of the child.

This role cannot be underestimated.

A quote from "Young Children", January, 1994, by Hain Ginott reads as follows,

I have come to a frightening conclusion. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

While this is true in most aspects of our lives it is especially relevant to the role of the teacher. Whatever the educational goals and facilities, it is the individual teacher within the school, as well as the teacher as a member of a teaching team, who can create a welcoming, inviting, empathic climate in the school which is conducive to the development of the whole child, or not.

## **2. THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION.**

There are obviously teachers who are successfully creating the appropriate climate in pre-primary schools all over the world. Some research projects, such as the High/Scope programme in America, which was designed to compensate young urban children suffering from deprivation, have indicated that 'good' early childhood programmes may have a long-term beneficial effect.

New data from following up the participants, now 27 years old, continues to show they have less pregnancies, less police arrests, less call on welfare systems and better records of higher education than their peer group who did not benefit from High/Scope.

(Article in Child Education, July 1993.)

Thus intervention programmes in early childhood have the potential to improve the long-term prospects of pupils. In the light of this research then, pre-primary education may be seen as empowering.

In Kathy Sylva's article she says,

Although American studies cannot prove that all pre-school programmes will bring improvements, they demonstrate that early education can change the course of children's lives, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

(Sylva .1992:142)

### **3. LANGUAGE IN THE PRE-PRIMARY**

The High/Scope curriculum which is mentioned above has for several years been a part of the pre-primary programme in N.E.D. schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Part of this curriculum is a daily routine in which the child plans his/her activities for the day, carries out the activities during the course of the morning and later reviews, with the teacher, what she/he has done. Taking responsibility, organising one's day and focussing on these through interactive language with the teacher are some of the goals of this routine.

In Kathy Sylva's article she says:

The goal of the adult-child interaction is more than descriptive prose. It is a tutorial in using language to guide action; moreover children learn to be self-critical without shame, to set high goals while seeking objective feedback on their plans.

(ibid: 147, 148.)

The introduction of High/Scope has further enriched the pre-primary environment, notably, the language environment. However, the scope for language acquisition and for interactive language in the pre-primary is broad. Both in the wide variety of organised, teacher-directed periods, for example, music, functional movement, drama, discussion, stories, poetry, rhymes and school readiness activities there are numerous opportunities for language interaction or acquisition. Language is also used affectively, both to create a



rapport between teacher and child and to discuss the child's feelings. It is used functionally, socially and to facilitate learning, thinking and to foster a culture of learning. Free play activities, although they are essentially child-directed do involve the teacher. She is there to interact through language and to facilitate the child's learning through play.

As this thesis aims to focus on the experience of the second language speaker in this pre-primary environment, it will place the research in perspective to examine the language development of the first language speaker.

### 3.1. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THREE TO SIX YEAR OLD CHILD.

Language may be defined as:

...an expression of mental processes, of information coded, stored and selected. Selected from the existing 'total' vocabulary of the culture of the individual's own vocabulary is related to his interests and orientation to the material and social world in which he lives.

( Gammage, 1971: 65)

Thus language is as much a part of the inner child as it is the social child. Piaget's studies on child development and specifically on language, led him to the following conclusion.

"Piaget characterised pre-school speech as being of two types: egocentric or socialised."

(Papalia and Wendkos Olds. 1975: 298 )

He defined egocentric speech as consisting of words and syllables for pleasure, of monologues (talking to oneself) and of collective monologue (two or more children talking at each other, with no communication intended.)

Socialised speech on the other hand is meant for communication. Piaget (1955) divided it into four categories:

- \* adapted information (an exchange between speaker and listener )
- \* criticism
- \* commands, requests and threats
- \* questions and answers

(ibid : 299)

According to Piaget, true socialised speech is not realised before the age of seven .

(Vygotsky in Rieber and Carton, 1987: 67)

Piaget described the language used

...in the fundamental activity of the child - play - as one of gestures, movement and mimicry as much as of words. (ibid: 67 )

Egocentric speech is further defined, from a Piagetian perspective, as “speech for itself, for the sake of its own satisfaction.” (ibid: 69)

The egocentricism of the pre-school child’s speech is supported in part by research carried out in 1931 which indicated that in a study of a group of two and three years olds, the pronoun “I” or “me” appeared 2,543 times while “you” appeared 955 times.

(Gammage,1971 :65 )

Whilst this egocentrism is acknowledged, it must be noted that as the child matures, social speech becomes more developed and dominant and, according to Vygotsky,

egocentric speech later becomes inner speech as opposed to external speech. (Rieber and Carton, 1971: 75 )

A different perspective on speech, based on the language development of a child, Vicky, who was the subject of a longitudinal study in the United States of America, provides insight into the expressive speech of the pre-school child.

Vicky 's language progressed as follows:

\* Between 3 - 4 years she used telegraphic, three to four word sentences consisting of the essential words needed to convey the message. At this age she asked many questions and could give and follow simple commands. She was able to give names to familiar things, to use plurals and the past tense. She used "I", "me" and "you" correctly. She had a vocabulary of between 900 and 1200 words.

\* Between 4 and 5 years her vocabulary increased to between 1,500 and 2000 words. At this stage she used verbs more than nouns. Her sentences had increased to an average of between 4 and 5 words. She could "deal with" prepositions such as "over", "under," "in", "on", and "behind".

\* Between the ages of 5 and 6 her sentences increased to six to eight words. She was able to define simple words, and knew some opposites. Her speech consists of "more conjunctions, prepositions, and articles in her everyday speech". Her speech has become "fairly grammatical , although she still neglects the exceptions to rules." At this age her vocabulary has increased to between 2000 and 2500 words. Her language has become more socialised and less egocentric.

(Papalia and Wendkos Olds, 1975 : 297, 298 )

What is evident here is that Vicky's speech has both increased in vocabulary usage, gained in complexity through her use of grammatical structures and also shifted in focus

from egocentric to socialised. This same development may be evident in a second language speaker pre-schooler but perhaps with less impressive vocabulary use.

Children in any school, but particularly in a multilingual school, do not have identical communicative competence. It is likely that teachers and even peers will adjust, presumably automatically and subconsciously, their communication to that of the child. For example, a teacher is not likely to have a lengthy discussion with a child who obviously does not understand the language. Her language at this stage would tend to be circumstantial and personal.

At this point a distinction must be made between communicative abilities (or language use) and linguistic skills or (language usage). (Widdowson, 1978 : 3) Linguistic competence may be defined as the internalised knowledge of the grammar of the language, in other words, grammatical competence. Communicative competence on the other hand may be defined as “language in context rather than on a body of rules of the structural well-formedness of system sentences.” (Elliot, 1981 : 13 )

According to Widdowson, “communicative abilities embrace linguistic skills but not the reverse”, and, “the ultimate aim in language learning is to acquire communicative competence.” (Widdowson, 1978 : 67 )

In spite of Widdowson’s distinction between communicative abilities and linguistic skills, the boundary defining the difference between the two may be a matter of focus so that a theorist may mean both when referring to one or the other. For example, both linguistic

skills and communicative competence appear to be relevant in the following discussion of linguistic competence.

Cicognani and Zani have this to say about a child's linguistic competence and the response from teachers:

The child's linguistic competence variable proved to be of particular interest: children with poorer verbal production communicate for the most part through non verbal codes. They seem to play a more passive role in the interaction, intervening when called upon. This state of affairs induces the teacher to solicit linguistic production by using a greater number of proposals and by explicitly inviting the child to participate. Children with richer verbal production are more active in conversation, and this induces teachers to modify their language, adopting a style aimed at sustaining and encouraging the existing verbal production (by using, for example, more comments and empathic support.)”

(Cicognani and Zani, 1992: 1 )

Thus the teacher adapts her language to that of the child. Cicognani and Zani, however, caution against relying on a question and answer approach, suggesting instead that a discourse around the child's language should be created to give him the chance to function as an interactive partner. (ibid:11 ) This point should be linked with Joan Orr's recommendations, about the teacher's role, to provide a broader perspective on teacher - pupil language.

This further highlights the importance of the teacher's role within the multilingual pre-primary as a sensitive, empathic and diligent facilitator.

#### **4. CONCLUSION.**

The Language Policy for education, as a general policy for all schools, will be discussed

in the next chapter. I contend that the child-centred philosophy and programme of the pre-primary school is an ideal environment in which to implement the ideals of the constitution and of the language policy, but it is as yet a small part of the educational whole. At present, according to statistics in the “Interim Policy For Early Childhood Development, February 1996, “one in three White infants and children receive Early Childhood Development services compared with about one in eight Indian and Coloured children and one in sixteen African children.”

(Interim Policy for ECD. 1996: 3 )

Hopefully, with the State’s commitment to Early childhood education this will change within the foreseeable future to an equitable balance. The potential which the pre-primary school has to benefit young children, both in the short and long term, has been discussed. Its potential as a multilingual environment has yet to be fully explored. However, with its record of innovation and adaptation to changes in the past, perhaps this phase has the potential to adapt and make the best of the multilingual environment.

The effect that the introduction of a second language has on a group of children is examined in this study. The practice of admitting children to a second language environment has to be viewed critically to ascertain whether these children are in fact benefitting linguistically, to examine how they are functioning socially and to investigate whether the second language environment is affecting them adversely emotionally.

Arguably there is some support for the long-term benefits of early sequential bilingualism. This support is based on the belief that these children will eventually be fluent in both their first and second languages. In the paper, 'Tweedetaalaanbieding in die pre-primere skool'

Dr Nieman says,

Die geleentheid om tydens die kleuter se ontvanklike voorskoolse jare 'n basis te le vir die verwerwing van 'n ander taal, kan nie onbenut verby gaan nie. Die ideaal is beslis nie om ten volle tweetalige kleuters te skool nie, dit is slegs 'n eerste stappie ter bereiking van die einddoel, naamlik 'n volwassene wat danksy 'n vroegtydige, stewige basislegging daartoe in staat is om vir alledaagse, sosiale, studie-en-werksdoeleindes in 'n ander taal te kan kommunikeer."

(Nieman, post 1992:10)

In brief, what Dr Nieman is saying is that we cannot expect pre-schoolers to be fluent in the second language but that the long-term aim is for them as adults to be able to communicate in the second language in their daily lives and for social, study and work purposes, having been exposed to a solid foundation in early childhood.

Thus, full bilingual fluency in the pre-primary school child is not an expected goal. If the child is able to communicate his needs, interact socially, have a secure self-esteem and have enough language to grasp a concept and then examine it in his first language, perhaps one must accept this and acknowledge that this will provide an acceptable starting point to the ongoing process of language, in this case second language, acquisition.

## CHAPTER TWO. LANGUAGE POLICY.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of language policy in South Africa from 1910 shows differentiated policies for 'whites', 'blacks', 'coloureds' and 'Indians'. It also reveals different policies for the then four provinces, namely Natal, the Orange Free State, Transvaal and the Cape. However, in spite of the separate policies there are similarities which become apparent.

From 1910 the trend in each province was to offer instruction in the mother tongue (English or Dutch with Afrikaans replacing Dutch in the 1920s) in the primary phase of education. (Behr, 1988: 100)

Decades later, the Education Affairs Act ( House of Assembly (for whites) ) 1988, stated that pupils in public and state-aided schools must be instructed through their mother tongue (i.e English or Afrikaans) up to and including the ninth level (i.e. std. 7).

Thereafter the parents have the right to choose the medium of instruction of these children. (ibid: 101)

Further, the other official language must be taught at a stage deemed to be advisable on educational grounds and then continued throughout the pupil's schooling. (ibid: 102)

The medium of instruction for blacks was mother tongue until standard three and then, according to Behr,

The majority of blacks have chosen English or a black language as the medium of instruction from standard three onwards. In 1986 no less than 42,3% of primary schools under the control of the DET (Department of Education and Training (for blacks) ) chose English as the medium of instruction and the remainder the vernacular. A negligible number (15 out of 12,571 schools) chose Afrikaans. (ibid : 103)



In Coloured schools the medium of instruction was English or Afrikaans and in the Indian schools, English.

(ibid : 104)

Thus mother tongue as the medium of instruction prevailed in the early phases in the majority of schools across racial and provincial boundaries whilst later in the schooling English or Afrikaans became more prevalent .

In 1953 the Nationalist Party introduced the Bantu Education Act which although it led to mass education for blacks was seen as inferior education for a number of reasons. These included the limited funding of the schools and the ethos of separate development and white supremacy which formed the basis of the philosophy. The black community, particularly the youth, were incensed when, in 1975 ,

... The Minister of Bantu Education instructed that half of the subjects in Std 5 and Form 1 must be taught in the medium of Afrikaans.

(Christie, 1985 :238 )

A direct outcome of that decision, as well as the inferiority of the provision of Black education, was the mass demonstration by approximately 20 000 students through Soweto on the 16 June, 1976, with the unrest following the tragic outcomes of that incident continuing for several years.

(ibid: 238)

Taking away the student's right to choose the medium of instruction was the catalyst for a revolt which encompassed broader issues and anti-apartheid unrest. However, it highlights the importance of issues of language in education.

Although the language policy for education in South Africa has not, at the present time

been finalised and is still open to debate and negotiation, some points are entrenched in the Constitution and therefore fundamental to the Draft Language Policy which is based on political, educational and social ideals.

One of the main points of the Constitution is the decision to include eleven languages as the official languages of South Africa. This is an important attempt to right the hegemony of the past in which South Africa's two official languages, English and Afrikaans, were symbols and, it may be argued, vehicles of white supremacy and racism. Finally the new Government has made a stand to elevate the indigenous languages to the status they deserve.

## **2. PRACTICAL ISSUES.**

How this will be achieved is rather more complex in practice but hopefully each province will be able to work out a practical language policy which can be implemented in educational institutions, in the Law Courts and in public places. One concern is that language has been effectively used as a tool of Apartheid in the past and has contributed to dividing the people of South Africa - with eleven languages and no common language, how are South Africans to find a frame of reference so that they can communicate with each other in all aspects of their lives? The Namibian Language Policy after Independence in 1990 implemented English as the common language although all languages are regarded as equally important (Haacke, 1994:240) and it may be tempting to entertain thoughts of following their example. However, this is not an option, according to the principles both of the Constitution and the Draft Language Policy.

The Draft Language Policy of March 1996, which was presented for discussion to interested First Phase teachers at an Association for Professional Educators in KwaZulu-Natal (A.P.E.K.) workshop in Durban on the 5 June 1996, initiated animated discussion. Concerns for the practical implementation of the Language Policy were expressed. Fundamental to these concerns was the fact that many teachers are ill-equipped to meet the educational needs of pupils speaking different home languages.<sup>(1)</sup> Yet, some teachers expressed a reluctance to learn a new language. The reason given was generally that they were too old. In spite of some research, (to which I shall refer in chapter three), which does not recognise age as an intellectually inhibiting criterion in the learning of a second language, my experience shows that adults are reluctant to expose themselves to the vulnerable position of practising a new language.

However, it is not only English and Afrikaans speakers who will not be able to meet all the language demands of the Draft Language Policy for Education. How will a Zulu speaking teacher who is able to speak her home language, Xhosa and English meet the rights of a pupil who is Tswana speaking? The variables of language, the diversity of South African languages, pose a challenge to most educators.

This also brings into question the role of the teacher. As facilitator she or he needs to be confident in his or her ability to communicate with the learners, and must surely be able to communicate effectively with the learners. As Hudson says,

It is often said that every teacher is a teacher of the mother tongue... and there is a good deal of truth in this, if only because every teacher teaches technical terminology relating to his or her own subject.

(It may be argued that this is less of an issue in the pre-primary environment but it still has relevance.)

He adds,

However, it goes beyond this, because every teacher acts as a linguistic model for pupils and at least has the opportunity to comment on pupil's own linguistic efforts...

(Hudson, 1984 : 159-160.)

Thus the role of the teacher within the multilingual classroom changes from linguistic model to communicative and linguistic facilitator as far as it is possible for him or her to be. The introduction of additive multilingualism changes what may be called a traditional approach to teaching. Pre-service and in-service training will have to be altered to meet this challenge.

Yet this new approach is not a weakness, rather a strength, of the constitution and the draft language policy. The constitution and the draft language policy have to grant equal language status to all eleven languages on human rights grounds. However, the pragmatics and the potential difficulties cannot be ignored or underestimated. Educators will, it is hoped, use the time ahead to debate these issues with candour and with as much input from as many stakeholders as possible to assess what the pupils want, what parents want, what educators want and what is feasible to achieve with a motivated team of educators. The effective execution of this policy, once it has been finalised, is up to the creative initiative of the educators and the support of the community. One hopes that the State will address the needs of educators by establishing in-service courses which equip teachers with the know-how to meet these new circumstances and also to set up language courses, including correspondence, to which teachers should have access, (preferably at no charge), for a fixed period of time. Pre-service training will have to be radically

adapted and improved to meet these new needs.

Language policy for education, particularly a multilingual language policy, is not a simple issue. Rather, it impacts on every aspect of school life which in turn has implications for the society at large and the economy of the country. The ability to communicate both in the national and international market is also an economic issue .

### **3.THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF SOUTH AFRICA.**

Vic Webb's article on 'Language Policy and Planning in South Africa', (1994 ) defines the politicisation of the languages in South Africa, national problems associated with language, the language policy of South Africa at that time and the language policy proposals of both the African National Congress and the National Party.

These points give a historical point of departure as well as a useful comparison of the two major political stakeholders in South Africa and I shall refer, using Webb's article, to some of these issues.

#### **3.1 THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF SOUTH AFRICA UNDER NATIONAL PARTY RULE.**

The web of influence which the National Party's rule of South Africa spread between 1948 and 1994 was far-reaching. The policy of Separate Development, whilst it manipulated South African lives in the past, will continue to influence the lives of South Africans for years, perhaps generations, to come. The effects are felt in broad terms

including politically, socially, emotionally, economically, and demographically .

Language policy was a vehicle of National Party ideology through which it sought to uplift the Afrikaans language and to uphold the English language as a “European” language. Policies such as ‘mother-tongue instruction’, differentiated funding for separate education departments so that ‘white’ education was favoured, the enforcement of the learning of Afrikaans, were just some of the policies which influenced language use in schools and in South African society.

The effects of the National Party’s language policy as defined by Webb are referred to in an endnote. (2)

#### **4. LANGUAGE POLICY PROPOSALS.**

Prior to becoming a major stakeholder of the Interim Government in 1994, the ANC’s proposals on language included the following major points:

(1) No language must be constitutionally designated as an official language. However, one language may be designated through legislation as the language for government record purposes at the National level, this language will probably be English.

(In the Draft Language Policy of March 1996, no mention is made of this point.)

(2) Citizens may use any language in their communication with the state, subject however to language services being available.

(3) Education should be available in any language. Similarly, access to opportunities, rights, and privileges in all spheres of life should be possible through any South African language.

(4) All South African languages must be recognised, protected and developed.

(5) Multilingualism must be promoted and must become a springboard for development.

(6) A program (sic) of affirmative linguistic action must be drawn up so that the autochthonous languages have the opportunity to “develop” on a par with the present official languages.

(ibid:259)

The National Party view on Language Policy, presented not as a document but at Press conferences in 1992 and 1993, indicate the following:

1. The existing official languages, Afrikaans and English, must retain their statutory position.
2. The autochthonous languages must play a larger role in public life, possibly as official languages at the regional and the local levels of government.
3. The autochthonous languages must undergo corpus development, especially regarding terminology adaptation in fields such as health services.
4. The eleven major languages should be known as “languages of South Africa”.
5. Language rights and opportunities should expand rather than be reduced. This means that more languages than at present should gain official recognition.
6. Language rights are fundamental rights, and every citizen should be able to use his language in communication with the state.

(ibid : 259,260 )

Therefore, in spite of the ideological differences and the history of conflict between the National Party and the ANC, the essence of their policies on Language in South Africa has, on the surface, striking similarities. The noticeable difference is in the status of Afrikaans which the National Party hoped to retain as the second statutory language and

which the ANC has relegated, as with the other ten languages, to one of the official languages.

As mentioned earlier, no reference is made to a statutory language or 'linking' language in the Draft Language Policy. This is in line with the policy that no language will be given status over any other.

#### 4.1. THE DRAFT LANGUAGE POLICY.

In the preamble to this document, the racial and linguistic discrimination of South Africa's past is referred to and the policy of the future, which aims to eliminate racial and linguistic discrimination, is embraced. Further, the difference between policy and recommendations is explained so that policy means "the minimum requirements which must be implemented within schools in South Africa" and recommendations which identify areas for "urgent strategic intervention". Another important point is that the 'Language-in-Education Policy Document' should be seen as part of a process by which language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sections of society."

(Draft Policy 1996:1)

The ideals which are expressed in this document are in essence those that are expressed by the ANC 's Language Policy Document.



The following points are essential to the understanding of the aims of the policy:

1. No public school shall apply admission requirements which discriminate on the grounds of language.
2. A learner in a public school shall have the right to instruction in the language of his or her choice where this is reasonably practicable.
3. The governing body of a public school may determine the language policy of the school subject to :
  - (i) the national policy determined by the Minister under the National education policy act 1996; and
  - (ii) the provincial policy determined by the member of the Executive Council provided that no form of racial discrimination may be practised in exercising this policy.
4. Schools shall provide for more than one language of teaching where the need arises.”

(Draft Language Policy 1996:1)

Recommendations relating to languages of teaching/learning include the following:

It is recommended that the national and provincial education departments collaborate on the following:

- a) an investigation of all relevant forms of additive multilingualism to determine their appropriacy and feasibility in different circumstances and their implications for pre-service and inservice training, teacher deployment and materials development;
- b) special measures it may be difficult to adopt, if necessary across schools in a given district, in order to provide learners whose home languages differ from the languages of teaching of the school with evaluation for promotion and certification in their home languages and in terms of their learning potential;
- c) the identification and support of learners who are disadvantaged by the available languages of teaching in a school, with due care to avoid stigmatising such learners in any way.
- d) a campaign to increase public informedness on the wide range of language options available to schools and the feasibility and implications of them;
- e) the introduction of incentives for schools and higher education institutions to adopt multilingual policies;

f) the development and implementation of improved teaching methodologies, including the application of a whole-language approach for children between the ages of 0 to 9 and innovations in the area of literacy acquisition.”

(Draft Language Policy 1996:5,6)

Since my research project is based in early childhood development and more specifically pre-primary education, I will examine the implications of this draft policy on pre-primary education, based on my own perspective.

### Matters relating to Policy.

#### 1. Admission.

Following the practice of separate development and Apartheid education with the resulting inequitable provision of early childhood education, there are obvious differences in enrolment figures for the different racial groups as mentioned in chapter one.

However, to my knowledge, in KwaZulu-Natal, it is not customary to apply discriminatory admission criteria to pupils wishing to attend pre-primary school. The admission is on a first-come-first-served basis.

#### 2.”The right to choice of language of ‘instruction’.”

Presently, the language used for teaching and learning in the pre-primary school is the dominant language. For example, at an English pre-primary the child will be spoken to by the teacher in English, have stories, music, discussion and so on in that language. However, there are already schools which have Zulu language speakers working as teachers or teacher assistants in the schools to facilitate the learning of Zulu speakers as well as teaching English-speakers Zulu. Further, at some schools, second language speakers are encouraged to communicate in their own language whenever they

wish to do so.

There are also examples of schools which, in 1995, discouraged this practice. I refer to an earlier study which involved testing the lexical knowledge of Primary school children, specifically Zulu-speakers who were at different levels of competence in English (from poor to excellent) and were all in Std. One.(Grade Three)

At the school where I conducted the study (the school also has a pre-primary), the children at that time were not allowed to speak any language other than English during the school day and although this is contrary to the spirit of the draft policy, it appeared to have the result that these children acquired, according to the vocabulary test that I did, a remarkable vocabulary, with all the children whom I tested 'passing' the test. The result of that exercise was that I abandoned the project. <sup>(3)</sup>

Schools like the above which adopted a monolingual language policy, based on subtractive bilingualism, were in many cases responding to parent pressure to teach the children English. The new constitution entrenches the right of all South Africans to teaching and learning in the language of their choice, but if English as the language of instruction and learning is chosen by the parents of a school then this approach will probably continue in those schools.

3. "The right of the governing body to determine the language of the school...provided that no form of racial discrimination may be practised in exercising this policy."

This policy statement allows governing bodies to make decisions on language policy and as long as there is unanimous support there should not be any problems. However, there

are other scenarios which would require negotiation and initiative, for example, a small group of Sotho speakers at a Zulu/English school.

4. "Schools shall provide for more than one language when the need arises."

The phrase 'when the need arises' is problematic since the urgency of the need may be subjective and emotive. Unless all parties at a school approach the question practically I foresee problems of interpretation.

5. Incentives for multilingualism.

Resources, including materials as well as extra teachers, would be welcomed. With State support, particularly in this period of transformation, the additive multilingual approach has a greater capacity to be effective.

6. Improved teaching methodologies.

Presumably this will not be developed as a top-down exercise but rather at grassroots level with representatives from all levels of educators and across the cultural and linguistic spectrum, involved.

#### Further Perspective on Language Policy.

The issue of language in South Africa is more than merely a question of communication.

The issue of language is closely related to issues of culture, race and even class. In a study on multilingualism in the Soviet Union, the author writes,

The peoples of the Soviet Union do not display any of the racial prejudices which complicate linguistic problems in other national states, for instance South Africa.

(Glyn Lewis, 1972:50).

The author presumed that the peoples of the then Soviet Union did not display the racial prejudices which were blatantly apparent in Apartheid ideology. Yet with hindsight it appears that although this remark proved to be true for South Africa it was naive with respect to Russia which has, for example, seen evidence of ruthless ethnic cleansing in the nineties.

The linguistic policies of Russia, even from a historical perspective, are interesting. The 1970 census of Russia showed that there were 122 recognised nationalities. (ibid: 24).

These nationalities represent differing ethnic and language communities which makes our diversity in South Africa far less dazzling. In April, 1917, the Communist Party in Russia called for the abolition of a compulsory state language. However, twenty years later it was “decreed that Russian should be introduced in all schools.” (Ibid:198)

Glyn Lewis adds that,

So far as education is concerned it is to all intents and purposes a compulsory state language and is regarded as such.

(ibid:198).

The purpose of this reference to Russian language policy is to highlight the problems which Russia is exposed to through its diversity and to address the possibility of initiating a common language in South Africa. The broadness of the Russian language policy was eventually adapted to include a multilingual policy with a common national language.

A research project in the Eastern Cape in South Africa in 1995 used linguistic research methods to find out which language would be favoured as the official language of South Africa. The result showed that all respondents, Xhosa, English and Afrikaans, favoured English. <sup>(4)</sup> It seems that the English language, to the people who participated in that study, was synonymous with success (which may be interpreted as economic and social success), which suggests that English as an international and linking language should not be dismissed too easily.

Further to this then, an option in implementing the language policy while at the same time diminishing the vast potential for language variation is to encourage the learning of an international language (English) as well as the home language, possibly from Grade one. Where this becomes problematic though is with an Afrikaans speaker learning English as the second language and therefore not able to learn an autochthonous language until later in his/her school career. Another problem is whether English would be acceptable to all participants from a political, social and cultural point of view. I believe, though, that it warrants further research or discussion.

Points which strengthen the argument include that the English language would be compatible with our status as a Commonwealth country, would allow us a lingua franca and a means of communicating internationally.

In Namibia, from Grade 8, the medium of instruction at all schools is English.

(Haacke, 1994:242) While this is obviously moving away from the aims of the Draft

language policy and unacceptable as an option, a further possibility for South Africa would be to include English as one of the languages at secondary level, for all scholars.

A point made by Ken Hartshorne is ,

...In a multilingual society there are no perfect solutions to language issues, whether these arise in society, in government or in education. Language just because it has such a fundamental place in the feelings, experience, learning and the development of the individual in society, does not lend itself to social engineering; nor, as history should have taught us, do people take kindly to top-down fiat about what they should do or should not do about the languages they use or wish to use.

(Hartshorne, 1995:317)

Hartshorne also suggests that flexibility should be the keyword in language policy. This seems to be sound advice in a country which has a history of prescriptive language policies.

Katherine Heugh's perspective on the development of a national language plan for South Africa includes the recommendation that the plan should be based on three principles namely, "access, equity and economic growth. "

Further, there should be a deliberate shift in language planning from the paradigms of language as a problem and languages as a right to that of language as a functional resource.

(Heugh, 1995:346)

This is an important point for all but particularly educators who are facing paradigm shifts in education. Viewed as a functional resource rather than as problematic or as a right (which may have negative connotations for different language groups ), the ramifications of language are given a broader and more positive base.

## 5. CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, the spirit of the Constitution and the aims of the Draft Language Policy embrace the rights of all South Africans to express and develop their language. What has to remain a central issue for educators and educational planners, though, is that these languages are offered, not on a haphazard, “lets make do” scenario, but rather with the best resources and with the highest potential for excellence possible.

Further, consideration should be given to the possibility of a linking language, not as an official language which has higher status than any other (although I admit that this would be difficult to avoid ) but as a lingua franca to build some sort of cohesion between the diverse peoples of South Africa.

However, I do not argue for a lingua franca for Early Childhood Education. The research which I have attempted within my school reflects a linguistic challenge to which we need time to respond satisfactorily. In our school there are three languages. In my colleague’s reception class in Gauteng there are five namely Tswana, Sotho, Zulu, English and Afrikaans.

Our diversity through culture, religion, language and ethnicity are elements which make South Africa such an exciting and vibrant country, but within that diversity there are common needs and dreams. In the long-term we will need to have a language that allows us to share something of ourselves on a daily basis. Music, art and a common goal for democracy all help to merge our dreams. A common language could help us to share our lives as ordinary people engaged in our daily activities.



## **Chapter Three**

### **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

#### **1. Introduction.**

The acquisition of language in the 'mother tongue' is as natural for human beings as learning to walk. Yet the language spoken has broad implications socially, politically, culturally, and ethnically, affecting our lives in ways that may be regarded as artificial, both in the short and long-term. Which language is spoken, what dialect is used, affects how we are perceived socially, how we interact socially, influences where we live, attend school, our religious or spiritual affiliations, and generally influences our entire lives.

My own linguistic background interests me since my family's choice of language has contributed to the spread of English and the attrition, within our family, of French and German. My mother grew up in a French household but had to communicate in English when she attended an English school at the age of six. Although she is still able to speak French, English has become her language of thought, prayer and communication even with her brother and 'French' cousins. My father came from a German home but they too adopted English and apart from occasionally saying Grace at the table in German, we were, and are, English-speakers. The decision to choose English was probably never

discussed and it is likely that this decision was based on social, political, economic and practical reasons. English was the language of the provincial administration, the local school, the shops and the workplace, ( although in his work environment my father learnt to be fluent in Afrikaans, and having grown up on a farm, spoke Zulu and Xhosa fluently).

I have made attempts to learn German through a correspondence course and Zulu but am not fluent in either. The reason for my lack of fluency may be related to my linguistic capabilities (or lack of) but I suspect that they are more related to the language environment and to the length of time spent acquiring the language. As a multilingual society, South Africa affords great scope for learning new languages. However, it is not enough to want to learn a language, the resources and access for this exercise have to be available.

This spirit, to make languages available, is one of the aims of the draft language policy. In aiming to develop all the languages of South Africa and thereby preventing language attrition, this approach must be welcomed by all who value language as a part of one's heritage and culture. How this will be achieved in the education system has already been discussed in the previous chapter. How language in education relates to linguistic theories will be examined in this chapter.

## **2. Attitudes to language, languages and dialects.**

Linguistic theories do well in describing the learning of language or languages and alerting teachers, linguists and students to the process, the variables and dimensions in the acquisition of language. One aspect of language which perhaps does not receive enough attention though is attitude. This element underpins everyone's experience of language or languages and may be conscious or subconscious. Attitude is neither constant nor necessarily obvious but it colours our perceptions of each other, contributes to prejudice (both negatively and positively) and influences our predisposition to learning a language.

Attitude may be defined as a subconscious or conscious, positive or negative feeling towards something that influences our behaviour towards that something or someone.

Colin Baker in his book on "Attitudes and Language" talks about the three components of attitude, namely, cognitive, affective and readiness for action parts of attitudes. The cognitive component concerns thoughts and beliefs, the affective component concerns feelings towards the subject and the readiness for action refers to a way of behaving based on an attitude. (Baker, 1992 : 12,13.)

Thus attitude includes the emotional component, the thinking component and the course of action taken. The Zulu-speaking pupils at English pre-primaries are sent to these schools because of attitudes which their parents have towards the schools. It is therefore the parents' attitudes which place the children in these schools. What needs investigation

is the attitude of the pre-schoolers to the schools and to the language environment in which they find themselves.

Attitude then, together with motivational factors which are in themselves attitudinal, is integral in language acquisition and it must be taken into account in the implementation of any language policy or curriculum. Teachers' attitudes to a language (which may be positive, negative or somewhere in between) will influence their pupils. Just as significant, the pupils' attitudes to learning a language, or use of a language, will influence their learning.

Attitudes to diversity in accent occur in some societies with perceptions of class materialising from the way in which a person speaks and assumptions of their background being made from these speech sounds. For example, in South Africa, English-speakers do not all sound the same. There are accent differences as well as differences in inflections and in the use of some words which tend to emerge in demographic areas. On the basis of these variations in English accent it may be possible to guess at the home province of the speaker.

From the point of view of education, there are implications here for teachers.

Assumptions about class may be made from the child's use of language. These assumptions are also made by some linguists and I refer to a study on the "Structure and

development in Child Language “ by Potts et al in 1979 in which the experimental groups used were “middle-class white, lower class white and lower-class black”

(Potts et al, 1979 :129). Thus the researchers held expectations about the class related language development of these pre-school children. These expectations are likely to feature in schools with the danger of children’s potential being underestimated because of their spoken language or more specifically their deviation from the ‘standard language.’

Not only are languages subject to differences in accent but also to differences in language which then constitute dialects. The languages taught in schools usually conform to the standard form of the language. For example, the written English taught at English schools conforms to standard English (itself a dialect of educated speakers in southern England) and pupils read and write in the standard English. Just as standard English is perceived by many to be superior to the many English dialects, it is interesting to note that Zulu has a number of dialects and that some of these dialects are less acceptable than others.

(Kubeka, 1979 : 83)

In his thesis, Kubeka states,

At the same time it seems that the stamp of inferiority is gradually being branded onto local dialects in remote areas. As we went around in different areas we noticed that people who used local dialects suddenly switched to what they thought was ‘standard Zulu’ as soon as one began enquiring about interesting local features. Apparently the intention was to convince the field worker that local dialects were a thing of the past.

(ibid:83)

Thus the acquisition of our first language, how it is spoken and its status in society, contributes to our sense of self and to the image which we present to others. This implies

that even the acquisition of one's first language plays a major role in our lives without our, usually, being preoccupied with how that language was acquired or with the role which it plays in our existence and life experiences. Apart from being a tool of communication between human beings, language has become much more.

### **3.Theories of First Language Acquisition.**

I have looked briefly at attitudes to language, and hinted at the diversity within language through dialects and accents. The next objective is to examine theories of the acquisition of language.

Central to theories of language acquisition is the nature / nurture debate. Jean Aitchison explores this debate in "The Articulate Mammal" questioning whether the acquisition of language is a natural process, like barking in dogs, or whether it is something that humans have learned, as in learning to play a musical instrument? One obvious point is that children learn the language to which they are exposed but it is the why and how that is interesting.

According to Chomsky children are pre-programmed to speak and humans are genetically imprinted with knowledge about language. (Aitchison, 1989 : 20) Further, Chomsky claims that "the mind is constituted of mental organs just as specialized and differentiated as those of the body". (ibid:21)

In other words, humans are biologically predisposed to learning a language and the

language environment becomes the catalyst. Thus both nature and nurture are conditions which are needed in order for language to develop. Chomsky also suggests that children are endowed with a hypothesis making device, linguistic universals and an innate language acquisition device (LAD). He bases his theories on the assumption that :

anybody who acquires a language is not just learning an accumulation of random utterances but a set of 'rules ' or underlying principles for forming speech patterns.

(ibid : 92 )

This internalized set of rules enables the person to be linguistically creative, for example, creating different sentences rather than relying on a fixed range. (ibid : 92 ) Although there is a strong degree of uniformity in language use it is this ability within each individual to be creative that contributes to the colourfulness, variety and continual process of language growth within each language.

Another remarkable fact about language is that the emergence of language in the child is not a haphazard event. As Aitchison says, 'language emerges at about the same time in children all over the world.' (ibid : 66) This means that 'language may be set in motion by a biological time-clock.' (ibid:66) Just as other milestones are reached at ages which are universal, (with variations), so too with language acquisition. The acquisition is also not haphazard but follows a universal pattern so that stages of language acquisition may be defined according to phases. These phases are not prescriptive and are subject to some variation in terms of acquisition as well as variation in when these emerge. The

following table gives a general idea of the development of language in an English speaking child. (ibid : 75)

**TABLE 1.**

Language stage	Beginning Age
Crying	Birth
Cooing	6 weeks
Babbling	6 months
Intonation Patterns	8 months
1-word utterances	1 year
2-word utterances	18 months
Word inflections	2 years
Questions, negatives	2 1/4 years
Rare or complex constructions	5 years
Mature speech	10 years

(Ibid:75)

In order to assess language further, psycholinguists have used the mean length of utterance to define the extent of language development. Aitchison describes the mean length of utterance or 'MLU' as being "calculated in terms of grammatical items or 'morphemes': plural -s and past tense-d, for example, each count as one item and so do



ordinary words such as mummy and bath.” (ibid:79) Thus, subject to some reservations, the longer the MLU the more advanced the language. However, “the child with the longest utterances does not necessarily have the most grammatically correct utterances.”(ibid:80)

Whatever devices or measures are used to ascertain language development, it is clear that as the child grows, his or her language grows with him/her so that by the age of about ten years he/she is using ‘mature speech’.

### 3.1. Critical Period for the Acquisition of Language.

All is well when ‘normal’ children are exposed to language by the caregiver whether that is mother, father, or care-giver, from birth. The question arises as to what happens to children who are denied this exposure. Will they catch up with the development of their language no matter at what age this happens? Or, is there a critical period as there appears to be in birds like chaffinches or canaries? (ibid:84)

According to some theorists there is a critical period in which language must be acquired otherwise that ability diminished. Lenneberg’s theory of a critical period for the acquisition of language is centred in human biology which predisposes humans for language. One of these biological states is the lateralisation of the brain. Lateralisation

refers to the specialization of function by each side of the brain; e.g. the left side is responsible for analysis while the right side is responsible for spatial perception.

(Dulay et al.1982: 279)

Dax, as early as 1836, discovered that the left hemisphere is responsible for speech (as well as for controlling the right side of the body). (Aitchison, 1989:53) Lenneberg believed that lateralisation or localization of language in one half of the brain occurred gradually. He hypothesised that there is a critical period, before this lateralisation is completed, in which language should be acquired. (ibid:56)

To quote Lenneberg (1967) from Aitchison's discussion,

Between the ages of two and three years language emerges by an interaction of maturation and self-programmed learning. Between the ages of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition continues to be good; the individual appears to be most sensitive to stimuli at this time and to preserve some innate flexibility for the organisation of brain functions to carry out the complex integration of speech and language. After puberty, the ability for self-organisation and adjustment to the physiological demands of verbal behaviour quickly declines. The brain behaves as if it had become set in its ways and primary, basic skills not acquired by that time usually remain deficient for life.

(ibid:85)

This theory is partially supported by evidence from three children who were isolated from access to language input. Isabelle, pre-puberty, quickly acquired language whereas both Genie and Chelsea who were exposed to language input after puberty and therefore according to Lenneberg's theories post lateralisation, had problems with acquiring the structure of the language.

The first example mentioned above is that of Isabelle, the daughter of a deaf mute who was found "in Ohio in the 1930's at the age of 6 1/2." (ibid:85.) Isabelle, once she was found, quickly acquired language so that in two years she had learned what normally is

acquired in six. Also worth mentioning is that her speech was “not easily distinguishable from ordinary children of her age.” (ibid:85)

The second example, Genie, was found when she was thirteen years and seven months, having, from the age of twenty months, been confined to a small room, she was also subjected to punishment if she made a sound. (ibid:86) Rescued from this abuse, Genie was finally exposed to language but although her development of vocabulary was remarkable, her acquisition of the rules of grammar was retarded. However, Aitchison warns against generalising from Genie’s case of language acquisition after the critical stage, since there was evidence of some brain damage to the left hemisphere which meant that she may have been functioning with the half of her brain not usually associated with language.(ibid:86)

The last example is that of Chelsea who, as an adult with hearing problems only started learning language in her early thirties. She also developed a good vocabulary but had a poor grasp and use of syntax. Once again, like Genie, she had problems other than language problems so that, although the critical period seems to have support based on these cases, it is not necessarily so. (ibid: 87 )

In response to Lenneberg’s theory of a critical period for language learning, Aitchison says,

There is no evidence of a sudden onset, or final endpoint of the supposed critical period. Instead, we are dealing with a phenomenon well known in animals, the fact that young brains are more flexible than older ones.  
(ibid:89)

In conclusion, it seems that children who, for whatever reason, are not exposed to language from birth, should be able to acquire the first language even after puberty and that although there is, and has been, support for the 'fertile period,' this lacks neurological evidence and support from research. (Vorster, 1993: 229 ) Vorster refutes Lenneberg's theory referring to Krashen's research which showed that lateralisation of the brain is complete by the age of five (and not at puberty as Lenneberg had argued). Research referred to by Aitchison indicates that lateralisation may be present even earlier than this. Research by Kinsbourne and Brown indicates that lateralisation may be present at birth. (Aitchison, 1989:56 )

In spite of this rejection of Lenneberg's hypothesis, what has not been disputed is that the emergence of language is a 'biologically triggered behaviour'. ( ibid: 67) Exposed to a 'normal' linguistic environment, and with 'normal' development, the child will acquire and use language.

#### **4.Theories of Second Language Acquisition.**

Of more direct relevance to my research are the theories on second language acquisition. Central to this is again the critical period debate from which, in terms of second language acquisition, the question may be asked whether, if it is possible for a child to acquire the first language after puberty it is therefore beneficial for the child to first acquire the

‘mother tongue’ or first language and to achieve ‘mature speech’ before learning a second?

Further are the issues of age and time. Apart from the principles of the critical learning period and considering other variables, at what age will a child best learn a second language and how much time will be needed to learn that language? Also, what method should be used to provide the nurturing environment necessary for learning to take place? These are all current issues which have implications for education and language policy and which need further analysis in this research report.

I shall also discuss other variables as well as the influence of affective variables such as attitude in the acquisition of a second language.

Focussing on a critical question, Rivers asks, “Is the process of learning a second language similar to or even the same process as learning a first language?”

(Rivers, 1983: 157)

Having asked the question, Rivers is not able to provide us with a simple answer. In her discussion she refers to the differences between language acquisition and language learning, namely, that language acquisition is “through practice in its use in the normal functions of communication as do young children, rather than (as in language learning) through detailed explanations of the rule system.” (ibid: 158). This differentiation in the way in which languages are learned or acquired provides some indication that although the

general process of learning a language, both first and subsequent languages, has the same cognitive basis, the way in which these languages are learned, and the language environment, influences the process.

Reich supports the ambiguity expressed by Rivers on the question of whether the acquisition of the second language is the same as the first. He says that some observers argue that both processes are the same whereas others say they are different.

(Reich, 1986: 212.) He claims that the reason for this disparity is twofold. Children may have different strategies for acquiring the second language based on their personalities and secondly, that “different observers may have different thresholds for concluding that two acquisition sequences are different.” (ibid: 212). Therefore, the analyses made by the observers are based on subjective interpretation. However, his concluding remarks are that “the processes of learning the two languages seems to be more similar than different.” (ibid: 216)

The question must then be asked, if the processes are similar, can different languages be acquired concurrently at any age, and is there an optimum time? By examining the critical period, the role of age, time and the language environment, I hope to find support for the hypothesis that “younger acquirers do better in the long run.” (Krashen, 1983: 12)

#### 4.1. The Critical period

Since this has already been discussed with regards to first language acquisition, I shall limit discussion on the merits or demerits of Lenneberg's theory. I will in this section

look at other aspects which influence the acquisition of language such as the suggestion that adults learn a second language differently from children as well as the role of personality and age in second language acquisition.

Although it seems that there is not necessarily a fertile period or period of neural plasticity which is intrinsic and has to be exposed to certain stimuli within a certain time frame, learning a language at a certain age can be a different experience and have different results. In other words, the age at which a language is learned is a critical variable in language acquisition.

The lack of success which is evident in adult foreign (or second language) learning may be ascribed to the fundamental nature of language learning and the differences between the child's intrinsic learning system and the adults. One theory maintains that the child has ".....an innate Universal Grammar ; a system of knowledge of what a human language can be and innate domain-specific procedures for arriving at a grammar." (Bley-Vroman in Gass, S.M. and Schachter, J: 1989: 41)

According to Bley-Vroman the discrepancy between adult second language learning success and the child's can be attributed to the following:

One obvious possibility is that that the innate system that guides child acquisition no longer operates in adult foreign language learning (or, more weakly, that is it's operation is partial and imperfect.) (ibid: 41)

In other words the built-in universal grammar which children have is absent or diminished in the adult. He goes further to say that "normal children inevitably achieve perfect mastery of the language; adult foreign language learners do not." (ibid: 43)

Bley-Vroman gives further support to the theory that the process of language learning in adults is different to that of children by saying:

Frequent lack of success in adults, against uniform success in children, is a serious obstacle to the view that the same process underlies child and adult language acquisition.

(ibid : 44)

Thus, although he shows no support for the critical period hypothesis, Bley-Vroman recognises that the acquisition of a second language in adults is affected by an intrinsic natural phenomenon (the ‘universal grammar’) which is different in adults and children.

He also acknowledges that there are individual differences which influence the success or failure of any complex learning.

Not everyone with an opportunity to learn chess will become a world-class chess-player; not everyone who is exposed to geometry becomes skilled at geometry proofs; careful schooling and years of experience do not guarantee that one will be a competent auto-mechanic.

(ibid:44)

Personality, or, “the aggregate of traits characteristic of a particular individual,” is another significant factor in second language acquisition. (Dulay et al.1982 :75 ) Dulay et al refer to the findings of researchers in studying the influence of personality on L2 acquisition, that “lower anxiety levels and a tendency to be outgoing were connected with successful L2 acquisition.” (ibid:75 )

#### 4.2. Age and the acquisition of L2.

If the critical period hypothesis were true, then after puberty people would find the acquisition of a second language at least difficult and perhaps impossible. The response from some adults to the question of learning another language in middle age is often one of negativism which at first glance tends to give support to this theory.



In spite of this perception, when the teachers at our school had Zulu lessons once a week for a couple of months there was a genuine desire to learn to communicate in Zulu and we were positive about the prospects for progress. The result was, however, that we were only marginally successful. What helped, though, was learning some Zulu phrases which we had identified as what was needed for basic communication with the Zulu-speaking children at our school. We still use some phrases, successfully. However, these phrases are isolated from the rest of the Zulu language and we have not achieved fluency. This lack of fluency may be ascribed to a number of factors, including the fact that we only had one lesson a week for a short period of time.

Our experience aside, it seems that when exposed to learning something new, some adults underestimate their capabilities. It is this attitude and perhaps reluctance to place oneself in a vulnerable position as a learner or beginner which prevents many adults from learning new skills such as tennis or a new language. Dulay, Burt and Krashen, in their chapter on 'effects of personality and age' say,

It has been argued that the adult is more self-conscious than the child, is less able to identify with other groups, and is, in general, less able to achieve the open mental state necessary for language acquisition to take place. According to this view, a greater amount of affective filtering by adults explains children's ultimately superior performance: the adult tunes out various aspects of the language environment and ceases language efforts prematurely.

(Dulay et al. 1982 : 92)

According to this view, then, it is the resistance to the learning experience, whether subconsciously or consciously, which inhibits language success and the child's lack of a filter or barrier to "input" and experiment that contributes to language success. Krashen refers to the "affective filter hypothesis" whereby the second language acquirer needs to be 'open' to the input. (Krashen, 1985: 1) Most pre-primary schools are noted for their accepting, nurturing and encouraging ethos. This means, then, that the appropriate climate is created to encourage affective openness to the environment, including the acquisition of language.

Further, according to Cohen,

There is evidence that younger learners are less inhibited when they are exposed to learning a new language and that they are more receptive to the the most natural or 'quasi-natural' approach.

(Cohen in Celce-Murcia, 1985:171 )

Yet there is empirical evidence for learning a second language at a later age. Vorster in his paper, 'Is there life after Lenneberg?', repudiates the claims made by Lenneberg for a critical period in the acquisition of language citing research by Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle as supporting evidence. In a study which involved administering several language tests to second language speakers of Dutch in age groups ranging from pre-schoolers through to adults, the group which fared the worst was the 3-5 age group and the group who fared the best, the 12-15 age group. This suggests that it is not younger children who learn the second language better rather the early teenage group. (Vorster, 1993:227 ).

Thus the argument to introduce a second language as early as possible is clearly not valid when measured against some research. Yet, as with our Zulu lessons, one has to consider another variable, viz. the element of time. How long does it take for a child or an adult to learn a language? Surely the sooner one starts to learn a language the longer one has to achieve fluency .

#### 4.3. TIME

Time is obviously a factor in both language acquisition and language attrition. During the twelve years of schooling in what was initially a new language environment, my mother learnt to speak, read and write English fluently. In the years since her mother's death, she has ceased to use French at all unless specifically asked to translate a phrase .

Length of time and the language environment are the variables in a survey to which Dulay et al refer. This survey of college language majors was a study designed to show the superiority of the natural approach as opposed to formal language instruction. The results of this study demonstrated that studying in the target language environment was far more favourable than in formally structured environments. More importantly for the question of the role of time is that,

Carroll also found a strong correlation between the time spent in a host country environment and test performance.

(Dulay et al,1982:15 )

Namely, those who spent a year overseas fared best, those who spent a summer, or a tour, next best. (ibid:15 ) To clarify these results, the longer the time spent in the natural environment, the more successful the acquisition of the target language.

Reich quotes an example that “estimates the amount of exposure needed for a child to acquire competence at the six year old level is 9000 hours and for an adult (American English speaker) to attain near-native competence (in Vietnamese), 13000 hours.”

(Reich, 1986 : 303) If my calculation is correct, this means that it would take the child several years to learn a language to the competency of a six year age level.

Yet in his summary, Reich says, “When children who are in the midst of acquiring one language are thrust into a second language environment, they usually are able to become as fluent as their peers within one year.” (ibid : 227)

Perhaps the main point of the above comment is the phrase, “thrust into a second language environment”. The implication is that the students are submerged into a second language environment. At the private school to which I have referred previously, the children appear to achieve fluency quickly. They are not allowed to speak any language other than the language of the school and, influenced by those peers who are already fluent, appear to acquire a strong grasp of the language. Further, the school has developed a language programme which is aimed at enriching their target language in all aspects of language use. It is a typical example of a submersion language environment, (which approach will be discussed in the following section.).

With regards to language death or 'language forgetting', Reich's example of a Garo speaking child who stopped speaking Garo when he entered an area in which Garo was not spoken, shows that within six months he "was having trouble remembering the simplest and best learned Garo words, such as the name for body parts."

(Reich, 1986:214 )

Thus, time and the language environment in which the learner finds him or herself can contribute either to language growth or language attrition.

#### 4.4. THE LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

The quality of the language environment plays an important role in the acquisition of language, both in terms of the language which is heard and the 'style' of the environment, some of which are more conducive to language acquisition than others.

There are many examples of language learning in the classroom which allow for little, if any, conversational fluency. For example, I studied Latin at high school for five years yet have never been able to converse in that language. The focus of language instruction, based on the grammar translation method, was on grammatical rules and translations from Latin classical literature which meant that the language learned was divorced from the reality of my everyday experience.

The language environment should provide the nurturing atmosphere and conditions conducive to the acquisition of language. In the chapter on 'The Language Environment,' Dulay et al discuss the different factors which contribute to such an environment including the 'silent period', macro-environmental factors and micro-environmental factors. (Dulay et al, 1982: 14 - 43)

### The Silent Period

This period marks the initial stages in learning a language when the learner is listening to the new language without expressing it, i.e. during the receptive period. Although it seems that this occurs naturally, and the learner would not attempt to speak the language until he is ready, sometimes demands are made on the learner to talk, perhaps in a classroom situation. Dulay et al suggest that this silent period be observed and that demands are not made on the learner during the 'silent period'. (ibid:14) Apparently the average length of this period for children acquiring a second language is one to three months. (ibid:22)

Krashen talks about "the silent period, a phenomenon that is very noticeable in second-language acquisition." (Krashen, 1985:9 )

Thus, when a child is exposed to a second language environment there is a strong possibility that there will be a period of non-response. When this occurs in the pre-primary phase the child will still have opportunities to express him/herself through play activities and, in the immersion schools, through the mother tongue. However, in higher phases of education, this silent period is likely to create problems affecting his performance (both oral and written) in the formal classroom.

### Macro-Environmental Factors.

In terms of macro-environmental factors, Dulay et al refer to four features, namely, the naturalness of the language heard, the learner's role in communication, the availability of concrete referents to meaning and who the target models are. (ibid:14)

1. The naturalness of the environment refers to the degree to which the focus is on communication rather than formal language structures. Research shows that students who acquire a language in a natural style environment do better than those in a formal style (*as in the Latin example*) environment.

2. What role the student plays in the communication, and at what stage of the learning process, is important. For example, communication may proceed from one-way communication in which the learner listens to the speaker but does not respond, to restricted two-way communication in which the learner listens and responds either non-verbally or in a language other than the target language and thirdly, to full two way communication in which the learner responds in the target language.

3. Availability of concrete referents. This refers to conversation about the 'here and now' in which subjects and events which are talked about can be seen, heard or felt which ensures that the learner can relate to and understand what is being said. This becomes 'a critical aid to progress in acquiring new structures and vocabulary.'

4. Target Language Models, in other words, the speakers of the target language who become models of the language, could be teachers, peers, parents, members of own or other ethnic groups. Research has shown that learners prefer peers over teachers, peers over parents, and members of one's own ethnic group over non-members.

(ibid:42)

With reference to micro-environmental factors, these apparently have far less effect on second language learning. They include, salience ('degree of visual or auditory prominence of an item'), frequency ('the number of times a learner is exposed to a particular item or structure') and correction of linguistic responses. (ibid:43)

In other words, the macro learning environment, for example, whether it is formal or natural, has a much greater impact on the acquisition of a second language.

Entrenched in the macro and micro-environments is the teaching style or approach. Discussing this further, Reich refers to the traditional approach, and differences in immersionist and submersionist approaches. An approach which is currently still being used, particularly by adult learners, is the Audio-lingual. Krashen discusses the Natural Approach which will be described below as a fundamental principle in pre-primary education.

#### The Audio-Lingual Approach

This method concentrates on reading, grammar and vocabulary. During World War Two, the United States' troops found themselves in areas where they were ignorant of the native language. In order to teach the forces basic language skills in these languages, as quickly as possible, the audio-lingual approach was developed. (Reich, 1986 : 216)

This approach, as with the language laboratory, relies on drills in listening and speaking, with reading and writing being introduced later.

The disadvantage of this behaviourist approach is that it relies too much on passive listening and on an artificial language environment. This is not ideal for language acquisition but has proved to have some success.

At least the learner hears the target language frequently whereas in formal classroom learning, for example, the grammar-translation method of learning Latin, one hears very



little of the spoken language. The audio-lingual approach is still used in various situations and in South Africa these courses are advertised in magazines and newspapers. Some promise to teach one a Romance language like French in 24 hours of study.

### The Natural Approach.

Krashen and Terrell, in their book on the subject, advocate a 'natural approach' to language acquisition. The first principle of this is that understanding precedes production, and, secondly, that production is allowed to develop in stages, namely:

1. non-verbal communication
2. single word response
3. 2/3 word combinations
4. phrases
5. sentences
6. more complex discourse

Central to this approach is that :

- \* Students are not forced to talk before they are ready.
- \* Speech errors which do not interfere with communication are not corrected.
- \* The atmosphere created by the teacher and the school must be conducive to acquisition with a low anxiety level, good teacher - pupil rapport and friendly peer relations.

(Krashen, and Terrell, 1983: 9-21)

### Immersion.

An approach which is used in Canada is immersion. Reich distinguishes between total immersion, early partial immersion, delayed immersion, late immersion, mixed languages, alternate days approach and double immersion. All of these are degrees or variations of immersion and only total immersion will be discussed here.

In total immersion, "schooling is provided in a language not native to the children by a teacher who is a native speaker of the classroom language but is bilingual, so that she understands the children when they speak in their native language." (Reich, 1986 : 218)

The French immersion programme in Canada which he describes, begins in kindergarten. The children are allowed to speak in their first language, English, but are encouraged to speak the target language, French. In the second half of Grade one this changes and the children are expected to speak in French for all communication in the classroom. In the second grade English is introduced and gradually increased so that by the seventh grade English and French are each used for half of the time. (ibid:219)

This type of teaching was introduced in Canada in 1965 following English speaking parents' dissatisfaction with the school's ability to teach their children French in the French speaking Province of Quebec. In 1986 in Ottawa, 40% of English-speaking parents were sending their children to French immersion kindergartens. (ibid:219) There is a similar trend in South Africa at present with a growing number of African language speakers attending English schools. Unfortunately, the teachers at these schools are

generally not able to speak the African languages which means that our schools generally practise submersion rather than immersion.

### Submersion.

This method refers to the 'melting pot' experience. Pupils entering the school receive all their instruction in the target language from the point of entry. The teachers are usually not able to understand the child's first language so that, should the child resort to using his own language in order to try to communicate, the teacher would not comprehend and therefore would not be able to respond, possibly even non-verbally. Evidence from the U.S.A. cited by Reich is that the 'mother tongue is often deprecated.' In other words the message is given, either overtly or covertly, that the target language is desirable whereas the other language is not. This has major implications for the child's self esteem, particularly in a school where the child is in the minority as in the example given by Reich of the negative and emotionally damaging experience of a Chicano child in an English American school. Further, whereas in immersion programmes, the children are praised for using the target language, in submersion programmes their language use is subject to correction and therefore negative input.

(ibid: 223 )

This leads to the somewhat obvious observation that language cannot be seen as something separate from the child. It is as much a part of him as his/her culture and

contributes to defining to him/her, and to the outer world, who he/she is. As such it is to be respected as much as the child.

### Subtractive multilingualism and additive multilingualism.

These relatively new labels are referred to in the South African Draft Language policy of March 1996 .

These terms are described in the glossary as follows:

Multilingualism means, “competence in two or more languages.”

Subtractive multilingualism refers to “the replacement of the home language with a different language as the language of learning.”

Additive multilingualism refers to the maintenance of the home language as a supportive language of learning after the introduction of a different language of learning. The implication of this interpretation is that multi-lingual textbooks, examination papers and evaluation across the curriculum are provided to confirm the use of both languages of learning in the classroom.”

(Draft Language Policy: 1996: 12)

In other words with additive multilingualism the first language is not lost in the school system, rather, other languages are added whilst the first language remains the base. With subtractive multilingualism on the other hand, the first language is gradually (or rapidly depending on the circumstances) replaced by a new target language, or languages.

Under the Bantu Education system, African language speakers were subjected to discriminatory language policies which had wide ramifications for both scholars and

teachers. This practice of imposed language is refuted in the Draft Language Policy document allowing greater freedom of language choice for the individual within the framework of the school.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The issue of language in education is a crucial one. In South Africa the history of language in education, in government, in the public service, in fact all spheres of public life, is part of the history of Apartheid and racial, class, cultural and linguistic prejudice. As much as it would be easier to go forward in the democratic future with a clean slate, this is not possible. Measures which attempt to 'level the playing field' are necessary. The Draft Language Policy is one tool which seeks to do more than provide for the empowerment of all languages. Although fundamentally concerned with considerations of the child and his/her future, it goes beyond this to a short and long-term agenda of empowerment for those who were disadvantaged during colonial hegemony and Apartheid. Thus, language is loaded with values which are broader than communication, culture, heritage, and sense of self. It is a social, political and economic resource. What happens with language in education impacts on the present and future prospects of this country.

Thus, when examining theories of language acquisition in this chapter, it becomes more than an academic exercise. Issues like the language environment are as much to do with the political, social and economic climate of the school and the education system as with

the acquisition of a language. For example, resources such as funding will affect the quality of education which is provided. Further, which language or languages are learned (or acquired), the type of approach used (submersion or immersion) have to be assessed in terms of both the role of the teacher and the child against the broader picture of post-apartheid South Africa. If the importance of the child, both as an individual, as well as a member of a community and as part of the future can remain central to all issues, then policy and planning based on research and theory should contribute to a positive picture for language acquisition. These issues will be discussed further in the conclusion to this research report.

The theories discussed in this chapter include the question of nature or nurture, the implications of the critical period, both in first and second language acquisition, the role of variables such as age, time, personality and the question of the language environment.

This research report is primarily concerned with the language acquisition of L2 speakers in an English pre-primary school. In order to justify this early exposure of pre-schoolers to a second language environment it would have been fortuitous if the critical period had proved to be unopposed. Then we could have validated this practice from this theoretical and biological base. Since this is not so, the question must again be asked whether there is any theoretical support for pre-schoolers in a second language environment such as the school in this study.

Support comes from five main areas:

Firstly, the pre-primary environment conforms to the natural approach language environment. The focus is on communication and not on the form of the language; the school is child-centred which means that the child, as an individual, is the main point of reference; as to the availability of concrete referents, teachers in this phase recognise that children learn through their five senses and provision is made for this sensory learning in both the free play and organised periods. Thus language has a concrete base in all areas of the school environment. Further, research has shown that we learn best from our peers. Since socialisation is a dominant feature of the pre-primary environment opportunities to learn a language from their peers is optimal. Thus all features of the natural approach as quoted in Dulay et al are present.

Secondly, children are not pressurised to verbalise in the second language and the silent period is respected .

Thirdly, although our school may be described as following a submersion approach, efforts are, and have been made, for the teachers to learn Zulu and therefore follow an immersion approach. How this conforms with the Draft language Policy is another issue, but since the child is never discouraged from speaking his own language perhaps this approach would meet the criteria of additive multilingualism.

Fourthly, taking into account the element of time, early and continued exposure to a second language allows the child time to acquire the language over the long-term.

Finally, although Vorster is in favour of exposure to a second language later than early childhood, in support for fun English lessons he says, "...young children can not be driven to competence in a language, but... they must play their way to competence."

(Vorster, 1993:229 )

With regards to the pre-primary school environment, these words describe the essence of what happens at school and confirms for me that if a child is to learn a second language, the place which offers the most support for a natural, happy and successful acquisition is the pre-primary. The reality may, or may not, prove to be different. This will be discussed in the next chapter based on observations at the school.



## **CHAPTER FOUR.**

### **RESEARCH DETAILS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONGST THE ZULU-SPEAKING CHILDREN ENROLLED AT NEW GERMANY LUTHERAN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL IN 1995 AND 1996.**

#### **1. THE AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH.**

The current trend for Zulu-speaking pupils to attend English pre-primary and junior primary schools is the centre of concern of this study. Apart from the issue of the reality of the experience of these children in the pre-primary school is the concern for their future in junior primary schools. It is clear that one of the main reasons for Zulu-speaking parents to send their children to English pre-primaries is to prepare them for the English environment of the junior primaries. Thus the focus of the study is two-fold : how do these children function in a second language environment and how much English is actually acquired?

This study does not claim to be comprehensive. The intention is to highlight the experience of the children from a social, emotional and linguistic perspective and to indicate where there are gaps in the picture and which areas need further clarification so that further research can be initiated.

## **2. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

Mother tongue education, at least in the first phases of schooling, was entrenched in National Party ideology. The merits of this belief are debatable but the attitude of some parents to move away from mother tongue education, as in the Zulu-speakers in this study, reflects the desire for sequential bilingualism for their children, usually in an English school. The short-term motive, to prepare their children for English junior primary schools, is clear. The long term motives are less obvious but it was suggested by the research done in the Eastern Cape in 1995 on “Attitudes to Trilingualism in the new South Africa”, that English is seen as the language of success by the people who participated in the study and it is reasonable to believe that this image is shared by many parents who send their children to English schools. <sup>(1)</sup>

How much social, emotional and linguistic ‘success’ the young children experience in pre-primary schools is the focus of investigation of this study.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

In order to document the experience of the Zulu-speakers at our school I have used primarily qualitative research. Much of the research is based on observation of the child in the school environment. However, the lexical tests and the ‘news’ discourse will be examined.

The lexical tests provide an insight into the acquisition of vocabulary. The test items were judged to be items that children in a suburban pre-primary should know. (Appendix 1.) The data from these tests will be quantified.

Further, situational data has been collected within the reality of the day to day 'normal' functioning of the school, by the teachers, using the methods of observation which they normally employ as part of their teaching responsibilities. This procedure has limited the amount of interference in the school routine and therefore limited the amount of pressure placed on the children.

My principal function was as a participant observer and also as the tester, obviously known to the children, who administered the lexical tests and audio-taped and listened to their "news". On several occasions in 1996 I observed the social patterns of play, in other words with whom the children in the study were playing.

Also, I observed them during organised periods with their teachers. Questionnaires were given to each of the teachers to help supplement the picture of their social, emotional and linguistic experience and behaviour.

The major problems with my research include the subjectivity of the observation and analysis, the difficulty of distancing myself from my role as principal of the school and concentrating exclusively on the research. The children who were not part of the research

also needed my attention, as well as parents and staff which made it very difficult to concentrate on the subjects only. The teachers also found it difficult, in fact impossible, to observe and record conversations. The other children needed their attention with the result that the teachers were continually interrupted.

We eventually abandoned the teachers' roles as recorders of language interaction and relied on their usual methods of observation which are to record the child's participation in all aspects of the daily programme.

I devised a questionnaire for the teachers which would supplement my own observations. (Appendix 2 )

The pupils involved in the study, however, appeared to enjoy our time together. For the lexical tests in 1995 and 1996, I worked with each child individually. This was time consuming but worthwhile. For the news items I took the group of eight altogether and each had a turn to share their news. It sometimes proved to take a long time and the children who had to wait wanted to chat which interfered with the recordings. However, my intention was to simulate news time which is a part of the school routine so that the procedure did not seem too different.

Trying to observe the social patterns of all eight children proved difficult too since they move about so quickly. Another problem was that since I did not want them to know

that they were being observed, I could not stand too close and therefore missed opportunities to record social language.

In spite of all these problems a profile of each child can be developed with regards to social, emotional and linguistic experience at the school. I will highlight these with regards to each child and in five cases will show the change in lexical competence between May 1995 and March 1996. The same lexical test was used in May 1995 and in March 1996. The children were not told whether their answers were correct or not.

#### **4. PROFILES OF THE ZULU-SPEAKING CHILDREN IN THE STUDY.**

Pupils enrolled at the school in both 1995 and 1996 include child A, B, C, D and E. I will not use their names in order to protect their right to privacy.

Of these five only A lives, in a Zulu-speaking home, in the predominantly English-speaking suburb where our school is situated. The other four children live in the predominantly Zulu-speaking Township of Clermont which is adjacent to New Germany. The lexical tests, news transcripts and social / emotional aspects of each child's interaction at school will be discussed.

#### 4.1. LEXICAL TEST

1. Child A. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly English.

1996: second year at the school .

1995 Test.

When first tested in May 1995, she was four years old.

She responded to the first questions by giving her first name and surname and her age.

When asked where she lived, her reply was, “ New Germany. I also got a brother. She also got a name, ... She’s in a big school. She’s name go like that.”

There was no hesitation in A’s speech; she appeared to be relaxed and confident.

The errors in the above discourse include gender pronoun confusion in the use of “brother - she “ and in her use of the verb, “go” as well as in the possessive pronoun, “She’s” instead of “His”.

In answering the lexical items in 1995, she answered 54 out of 68 questions in Zulu, there were ten correct responses in English , one “I don’t know” and 3 incorrect responses in English.

These included,

“lambert” for sheep,

“indigo” for white,

“a gas” for a lamp (which is clearly interference from Zulu since “ugesi” is Zulu for electricity/ lamp )

She used “ a feet” for “leg” which was partly correct since the lower half of the leg , with the foot, was included in the picture.

### 1996 Test.

Her response as a five year old in March, 1996 showed a marked switch from Zulu to English. Of the 68 lexical items, A answered 66 correctly in English. Not only did she use the appropriate words but in most cases also the appropriate article. For example, she used “an aeroplane,” “ a” slide. ( She made an isolated error in using “a eggs “.) Her two lexical errors were “sink” instead of “plate” which was more a difference in perception of the picture than an error and “a talk” for light. ( I have no idea what the association was here.)

Her response to “Where do you live?, etc, did not elicit a chatty response this time. Instead she matter of factly gave the name of her road and suburb.

Thus Child A showed a significant development in her identification of lexical items.

### 2. Child B. Home language: Zulu. Residential Area predominantly Zulu.

1996: second year at the school

### 1995 Test.

When tested in May 1995, B. was also four years old. He knew his first name but not his surname. He gave no response when asked how old he was and where he lived.

He identified 49 lexical items in Zulu, 11 in English. He gave 6 incorrect responses in English and to two pictures gave no response.

The interference from Zulu was evident in “wash” for clock (the Zulu word for watch is “iwashi”).

#### 1996 Test.

There was some improvement when tested in March, 1996. He chose to give 8 responses in Zulu, 45 in English and 15 incorrect English responses.

The number of incorrect responses at first concerned me. I was concerned that he was confused because of the second language. However, I now believe that this means that he has enough confidence to attempt English words even though he is not sure of them and examination of the errors reflects that .

Some of the errors that he made were marginal. For example:

<u>Lexical Item</u>		<u>B's response.</u>
truck	-	car
comb	-	brush
slide	-	swing



red	-	blue
blue	-	green
yellow	-	blue
pink	-	green

(This confusion of colours suggests that he may be colour blind. This will be assessed.)

window	-	the wind
feet	-	foots
nose	-	colour (The association here seems to be because the nose was coloured pink )
light	-	gas (an example of interference from Zulu - ugesi = light/electricity)
soap	-	bread (a confusing picture?)

In the phonology of his response I noticed the use of “f” instead of “th” as in “barf” instead of “bath”.

B had also learned when to use ‘the’. He said, “the cup”, “the banana” and “the cow” but did not use an article before “green,” “blue” and so on.

This time when asked his name he used both his first and surname. When asked where he lived he said, “In Germany” (leaving out the “New”). He correctly gave his age as five.

3. Child C. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly Zulu.

1996: second year at the school.

1995. Test.

When asked his name in May, 1995, C (aged 4 ) answered, “ Mr ...” (His surname)

He gave the same reply when asked how old he was. He gave no verbal response (or body response) when asked where he lived.

Apart from 3 correct responses in English, C identified all lexical items in Zulu.

Interlanguage was present in “u-ice-cream” and “i-orange” for “orange balloon.”

1996 Test.

In April 1996, his score for correct English responses to the items was 31. He used 17 Zulu words correctly but made 20 “errors”. Some of these “errors” need further examination as his answer was often different because of a difference in interpretation.

For example:

<u>Lexical Item</u>		<u>C's interpretation</u>
soap	-	Sunlight (a soap brand name)
cow	-	animals

red	-	Mrs ...(teacher's name)... fundisi mena (When in the red group, Mrs R ...was his teacher - hence, " Mrs R..... teaches me ")
yellow	-	"This my colour." He is now in the yellow group.
truck	-	car
sheep	-	animals
table	-	game (all the teacher-directed educational games are played at the table)
bird	-	He correctly answered "inyoni" in Zulu but "flying" in English.
bicycle	-	scooter (We do not have bicycles at school only scooters and tricycles. The scooters are more popular as the children can travel faster! )
plate	-	water. (This picture was rather confusing and it could have looked like water.)

Thus C's replies tend to reflect more the creative use of language than a lack in vocabulary.

When asked his name, address and age he gave his full names (without the Mr ), he shrugged when asked where he lived but gave his age, 5, correctly.

4. Child D. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly Zulu.

1996:second year at the school.

1995 Test.

When asked his name, where he lived and his age, he told me only his first name. (He was four years old). There was no verbal response to the other questions.

He then answered 58 lexical items in Zulu. He answered 8 lexical items in English, including the words for the colours of red, blue, yellow, pink and green.

His two errors included “cof” for “cup” and “teddy by” for teddy bear.

There was evidence of combined interference from Zulu and English, in “I-Happy Birthday” for “cake.”

1996 Test.

When asked his name, he gave his first and surname. He did not tell me where he lived or his age.

His response to the lexical items showed a significant switch to English. He answered 45 items correctly in English, 12 in Zulu and gave 11 “incorrect” responses.

Some of these “ errors” included:

<u>Lexical item</u>	<u>D’s response</u>
soap	- cake (this picture was confusing )

cup	-	glass
cow	-	animals
teddy bear	-	dog
milk (carton with a picture of a cow) - animal		
truck	-	car
sheep	-	animal
horse	-	animal
eggs	-	cake and glass (the picture shows a fried egg and boiled egg in an egg cup)
mouth	-	(no response)
bread	-	I don't know

He also used the article “the” but pronounced it as “de” before many of the nouns such as “de duck”, “de book” and so on.

Thus there was a significant escalation in D’s English vocabulary.

5. Child E. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly Zulu.

1996: second year at the school.

1995 Test.

When initially tested in May 1995, she gave her first name but did not respond to questions about where she lived and her age. (She was four years old.)

Her response to the lexical items was 52 correct responses in Zulu, 16 correct in English and no incorrect responses.

Some of her responses which showed a different interpretation of the items (and which were treated as “incorrect” ) included:

<u>Lexical item</u>		<u>E's response</u>
table	-	Edwin ( a picture of a table is used as Edwin's symbol on his locker )
dog	-	Snoopy
clock	-	watch
yacht	-	Kyle (Kyle's symbol on his locker )
duck	-	Phendu (Phendu's symbol on her locker is a duck)
lamp	-	Caylee (Caylee's locker symbol is a lamp )

Evidence of interference is evident in her pronunciation of “wash”, which sounds similar to the Zulu word for watch.

She showed an interest in knowing the name of things by repeatedly asking “what this?” in a picture which we looked at after the test.

1996 Test

In the second test, E used no Zulu in her response and out of 68 questions knew the English for 60.

Some of the “errors” included :

<u>Lexical Item.</u>		<u>E's response.</u>
soap	-	Don't know. (I think the picture was unclear to her.)
cup	-	tea
cow	-	moo
bath	-	water
slide	-	don't know
knife	-	for cutting
eggs	-	plate and cup (confusing picture)
light	-	gas (Zulu interference)

Thus her use of English shows a significant increase.

She also was able to give her first name and surname, the suburb where she lives and her age.

#### 4.2. COMPARISON OF LEXICAL ITEMS.

SUBJECT	ENG. RESPONSE	ZULU RESPONSE.	INAPPROPR. RESPONSE.	YR.
A	10	54	4	1995
	66	0	2	1996
B	11	49	8	1995
	45	8	15	1996
C	3	65	0	1995
	31	17	20	1996
D	8	58	2	1995
	45	12	11	1996
E	16	52	0	1995
	60	0	8	1996

#### FURTHER INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE LEXICAL TESTS

The results of these tests show a general switch to using more English in answering questions, (which were asked in English), between the first and second years at the school. Further, the increase in the number of errors or rather, unexpected answers, is also a positive rather than negative sign in the use of language. Many of the errors showed creative use of language. They also showed that the children had acquired enough language to attempt its usage more, rather than to give a non-response. In examining the lexical responses in the test, I have made reference to words which show interference from the Zulu language, for example, "wash" for watch. At this point I will briefly refer to definitions of 'interference' and 'interlanguage'.



In the lexical test responses some words which were obviously taken from the Zulu language were used instead of the appropriate English word. An example of this is “gas” for “light”. “Ugesi” in Zulu means “electricity and light”, hence the interference.

The term “interference” is defined as:

a term used in sociolinguistics and foreign language learning to refer to the errors a speaker introduces into one language as a result of his contact with another language.

(Crystal, D. 1980: 188 )

Whether the interference of words such as “gas” for light will continue possibly depends on a combination of a number of factors including the amount of exposure to the target language, whether the error is actively corrected and how much of the first language continues to be used.

Selinker, in his discussion on second language learning says that:

the only observable data from meaningful performance situations we can establish as relevant to interlingual identifications are :

- i) utterances in the learner’s native language (NL) produced by the learner
- ii) interlanguage (IL) utterances produced by the learner
- iii) target language (TL) utterances produced by native speakers of the target language.

(Selinker, L. in Richards, J.C. 1974 : 35)

In other words in identifying the process of learning a second language there are three distinct variables, namely native language utterances, interlanguage utterances and target language utterances.

By testing the children’s responses to the lexical tests it was possible to see evidence of both NL and IL. In the news items the child’s attempts to use the TL were apparent as

was the incidence of interference from the native language. Evidence of the process of interlanguage is particularly apparent in the news item responses.

The five children whose lexical scores have been examined above are all in their second year at our school and were tested both in 1995 and in 1996. This has provided an opportunity to assess a sample of their development of English vocabulary and makes up the main focus of this study on the lexical acquisition of language.

The results of three children who started at our school in 1996 will be discussed not as a comparative study between one year and the next but rather as an anecdotal study, further highlighting the language usage amongst second language speakers.

6. Child F. Home language : Zulu. (some English is spoken.) Residential area predominantly English.

1996: first year at the school.

Tested in March, 1996.

Her results showed that she already had a fair English vocabulary. She scored 51 correct English responses, 17 incorrect English responses and did not attempt to use Zulu at all. When unsure she said, "I don't know it." (This happened 3 times.) Otherwise she made guesses or approximations in English.

Her response to, “What is your name?”, “Where do you live?” and “How old are you?” elicited the following response.

She gave both her first and surname, she replied, “at home” (quite correctly!) when asked where she lived and said that she was ‘two’ (she is four years old). When asked her teacher’s name she said, “Mommy.” (This could be due to a lack of understanding of the question or a slip of the tongue as teachers are often called “mommy” when a child first starts at school.)

Some of her errors included:

<u>Lexical item</u>		<u>F’s Response.</u>
sheep	-	cow
horse	-	cow
flower	-	tree
tree	-	flower
eggs	-	ice-cream
pig	-	cow
clock	-	ret (!)
boat	-	for the water
dress	-	for to put on here
light	-	for home
orange	-	apple
train	-	bus
towel	-	shirt

7. Child G. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly Zulu.

1996: first year at the school.

1996 Test.

G had attended an English playschool for one year before starting at our school. Her lexical test results showed that she answered 38 items correctly in English, 24 items were either incorrect or “I don’t know” and she answered 6 items in Zulu.

Some of the responses included:

Lexical item      G’s response.

truck            -      car

bicycle        -      car (These two responses suggest a generalisation of vehicle to mean “car”)

cup             -      tea

slide           -      chair

table          -      bed

Her response to “What is your name?”, “Where do you live?”, etc, elicited this response:

She knew both first and surname, replied “my home” to the second question and

answered “yes” when asked how old she was (she is three years old.)

8. Child H. Home language: Zulu. Residential area predominantly English.

1996: first year at the school.

1996 Test.

His results showed 65 correct, and three incorrect, lexical items in English. It is worth mentioning that he has attended an English creche since the age of ten months. He answered the questions of name, address, age (four years old ) concisely and clearly.

His errors included:

<u>Lexical item</u>		<u>H's Response</u>
orange	-	peach
bottom	-	feet
balloon	-	mouse, peach.

The children, F, G and H's response to their first test taken in the first quarter of their entry into the pre-primary shows that the environment outside the school and the language experience before entering the pre-primary obviously also plays a part in the development of second language acquisition depending on whether one is exposed to the second language or not.

#### 4.3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.

Sharing "news" is a daily occurrence in the Greeting ring of the pre-primary school.

Children in each group are invited and encouraged to talk about events in their lives (but

not forced! ). The news is based on concrete experience but since there are no concrete referents to which the child can refer when telling the news it becomes abstract. Language has to come from the child himself and therefore is based on an internal rather than external stimulus. The only point of reference is the child's experience and his linguistic expression of this experience. This technique therefore is able to provide some insight as to what language has been acquired.

I chose to use this technique in order to gain an overall picture of the child's second language acquisition. This would include non-verbal communication, single word response, 2/3 word combinations, phrases, sentences, and more complex discourse as in Krashen's stages. (Krashen and Terrell, 1983 : 9-21 )

The use of tense, gender pronouns, interference and the child's response and willingness to talk will also be examined.

An attempt will also be made to measure the mean length of utterance in morphemes based on Brown's rules in Reich. (Reich,1986: 75 ).

According to Brown's five stages, provision is only made for development up to the age of 54 months (ibid:74) which means that it has limited scope for this study in which some of the children are five years old. Another factor is that these stages are geared for first language development whereas this study focuses on a second language. Further, in their news items some of the children used long sentences whereas others merely gave

one word responses. For example, A's news story took the form of a long sentence of 59 morphemes which makes it immeasurable according to Brown's strategy.

I also wonder about the validity of this approach since short sentences could result in even adults with mature speech being graded at stage 3. It depends on the situational data used as to what the score will be. For example if the language used by someone who is engrossed in his work on the computer is recorded and analysed it could be something like this:

"Please bring me some coffee."

"Thanks."

"What's the time?"

"Where are you going?"

"See you later."

"Bye."

Analysis of this leads to 18 morphemes divided by 6 sentences which results in a mean length of 3 which is about stage three of Brown's stages!

Although the "news" may not offer an ideal utterance for analysis according to Brown's principles, it provides another perspective on the child's acquisition of language.

Counting the number of words (and morphemes) used is in itself useful since it indicates how much expressed language the child has used, inferring the level of competence acquired. For example, Child A speaks freely and uses over 100 words in one news session whereas child D, who is less expressive and confident than Child A, uses only 6. Totalling the number of words, morphemes and sentences and comparing the results with the child's performances on different occasions is also useful since it shows that the results from one session may be totally different on a different occasion. For example, child C used 8 words in the first news session but 145 in the second. The explanation for this discrepancy may simply be that he said what he had to say on each occasion.

#### 4.4. NEWS TIME.

For this part of the research the children joined me in a separate room after the morning greeting ring.

We proceeded just as they would in the classroom except that after the news session each child was provided with crayons and paper to draw their news if they so wished.

In order to build up a profile of each child's language I will refer to each child separately and then comment on the language used. Where my response as researcher has contributed to the language in any way I will include it but where it has not, or where it is merely general, I will not.



Child A. AGE: 5

News 1.

(clears her voice )

“Yesterday um on Sunday we went to the beach and... and... we went to the beach and then we swam.

And then there was a big shark and the shark couldn't bite me because it was too deep and it was starting to die. And when he died she started to be alive but didn't bite me.”

Grammar.

She has used complex sentences with a clear grasp of tense. She starts her sentence with “yesterday” and all the verbs she uses are in the past tense, namely, “went”, “swam”, “was”, “died” and so on. The correct form of the verb is used each time. She uses “big shark”, “too deep”, “starting to die” which are all complex language structures commensurate with first language speakers at this age. One area where her language background perhaps becomes evident is in her use of gender. She is not sure whether that shark is male or female as in “when he died she started to be alive.” Gender pronouns are often used inappropriately in pre-primary children who are Zulu speakers using English. For example, on another occasion child E said, “She was a server yesterday,” when talking about Stuart .

The active imagination is also a feature of this narration as A imagines the horror of being with a shark in deep water and the accompanying sense of panic which she solves by

getting the shark to “start to die”. She quickly (without taking a breath ) finds a better solution and lets the shark live without biting her.

Total number of words produced: 57

Total number of morphemes produced: 60

Total number of utterances: 3

Mean length of utterance: 20

News 2. (6 weeks later )

(Child E had just given news about a shark when A shared her news.)

A: Yesterday my mommy went to the Pavilion but she couldn't because she was too late.

Researcher: Oh, she wanted to go to the Pavilion?

A: No, no, my Dad went to the Pavilion, my Dad went to the Pavilion, but when he got there he saw something big like it was a shark but he saw something grow big horns. But he went to the beach and he saw far, far away and in my, and then he caught something and then he caught a net and then he took it off the head but it was only it wasn't a shark it was a whale playing in the sea.

Researcher: Do you like the sea, (child's name)?

A: (Nods)

Researcher: Do you swim there?

A: (Nods) With the dolphins.”

In this transcript her imagination is the most striking feature. This is where her focus lies. The language merely gives expression to that imagination. In this news item she started with a real-life occurrence but quickly changed to fantasy and to her fascination with sharks, whales and later dolphins.

Her accent is slightly American. Since her family is Zulu-speaking and the English she hears at school and in the community is South African English, it appears that her accent must have been acquired from another source, probably from watching American television programmes. The phrase, “he saw something big like it was a shark” is rather unusual for South African English. We would tend to say “like a shark” rather than “like it was a shark”. This also suggests an American influence on her language use as well as phonology.

Some points about this transcript include her effective use of the negative in, “No, no”. She also uses the gender pronoun “he” correctly throughout the narrative. The verb phrases are complex as in “when he got there”, “he saw something grow big horns”, “it was a whale playing in the sea.”

Child A was keen to tell her news on both occasions and did not need any encouragement. She appeared confident and relaxed.

Her high score on the lexical items in 1996 is commensurate with her linguistic competence as reflected in her narrative.

Total number of words produced: 103

Total number of morphemes produced : 107

Total number of utterances: 4

Mean length of utterance: 26,7

## 2. Child B. Age: 5

### News 1.

“Played with my car.”

Total number of words produced: 4

Total number of morphemes produced: 5

Total number of utterances: 1

Mean length of utterance: 5

This short sentence constitutes his news. He uses the correct past tense form of the verb and the pronoun “with”, the possessive pronoun “my” and the noun but left out the subject “I”.

News 2 (1 week later )

“I saw the rain and the water. I saw a rainbow.

And my friend.”

This news constitutes simple sentences but all are correct syntactically.

Total number of words produced: 14

Total number of morphemes produced: 14

Total number of utterances: 3

Mean length of utterance: 4,6.

News 3. (5 weeks later )

On this occasion he seemed reluctant to tell his news and had to be coaxed into talking.

Researcher: (Child's name), what's your news?

B: Binking.

Researcher: You're thinking?

B: I played Superman.

Researcher: You played Superman?

B: (no response)

Researcher: Who was Superman?

B : Me!

Researcher: You were? Did you wear a Superman cloak?

B: Yes

Researcher: Have you got one at home?

B: Yes.

Researcher: What colour is it?

B: (No response so child E interjects, "Binking?" to child B. She had heard him saying "binking" at the beginning of the session and was obviously trying to help him.)

Researcher: Are you thinking? (To child B)

B: It was Batman.

Researcher: Batman - oh was it a black cloak?

B: Yes.

Researcher: Who did you play with?

B: (no response)

Researcher: Who were your friends ?

B: My friends?

Researcher: What are your friends names that you played with?

B: (Child's name).

R: Did you play it at school yesterday?

B: Yes."

It is clear that the dialogue in this session did not flow. He again used simple sentences as well as one word responses and was silent on a couple of occasions because he was as he said, “binking”. ( E’s use of “binking” is puzzling. Is “binking” used by them both or had child E picked up this word from child B’s speech? The answer to that is not clear. ) The dialogue between the researcher and the child is pedantic and relies on a question and answer style in which attempts were made to get a response.

Total number of words produced: 15

Total number of morphemes produced: 18

Total number of utterances: 10

Mean length of utterance: 1,8

### 3. Child C. Age:5 years

#### News 1. (April,1996)

“Me I’m with my truck there. Fire engine.”

The use of two subjects is notable here. It seems that he is using this to emphasise the importance of “me”.

(After the news session this little boy went to the construction toys and built a fire engine out of Mobilo. He then said, "Look, Mrs Clark. Fire engine! ")

Total number of words produced: 8

Total number of morphemes produced: 9

Total number of utterances: 1

Mean length of utterance: 9

News 2. (May,1996)

Child C: My Dad is got the car is fell on the bridge and then my dad he take a new car on the shop.

Researcher: Was your dad hurt when the car fell on the bridge?

Child C: Uhuh my mom and then is cryinp (crying). My Mom.

Researcher: Was there a river under the bridge?

Child C: Yes.

Researcher: And did the car go in the river and down the river?

C: Eheh. And he fell down.

Researcher: And were your Mom and Dad inside the car when the car fell down?

C: Yes and then the policeman is coming.

Researcher: Oh, good and did the policeman help them ?



C: Yes and the policeman say, Go jump new car - yellow car- the Cressida!

Researcher: Oh, smart car, (...child's name).

C: (No response)

Researcher: Do you have anything else to tell us?

C: And my baby sister crying - her very small my baby sister.

Researcher: Is your baby sister all right?

C: No. Is going to the doctor.

Researcher: And what did the doctor say?

C: He say.....*No car go on the bridge!*

Researcher: No cars go on the bridge. Okay.

(Pause)

Researcher: Have you finished?

C: No.

Researcher: All right.

C: And 'Pume is going to tell the policeman.

Researcher: Did he go and find him?

C: Yes and me I'm find it the policeman, come here my dad the car is fell down on the bridge.

Researcher: Shoo!

C: And then is coming the policeman.

And then one day it was a bridge and one day the policeman say, No go on the bridge because the car not get on the bridge! Yes.

Researcher: Thank you.

This rather lengthy narration of his experience, although dotted with grammatical errors, effectively tells the story. He is able to share the experience through the medium of his second language.

He has sufficient lexical knowledge to tell us the main points of the story, namely, “Dad”, “car”, “fell”, “bridge”, “crying”, “very small my baby sister” and so on.

He has not yet grasped the rules for the past tense and uses, “is got a new car”, “is fell on the bridge” etc.

There are also errors in his use of pronouns as in “he fell down” instead of “it fell down”.

Total number of words produced: 145

Total number of morphemes produced: 153

Total number of utterances: 16

Mean length of utterance: 9,5

Child C’s 1996 English lexical test score was 45%. This is also reflected in his narrative which although it cannot be scored shows gaps in his knowledge of English.

#### 4. Child D. Age: 5years

##### News 1.

He did not volunteer any news when asked .

Total number of words used : None

News 2. (one week later.)

Researcher: Okay, (child's name), come and tell me your news.

(No response.)

Researcher: What's your news?

(No response)

Researcher: Do you want to tell me in Zulu?

D: (Whispers) Tractor.

Researcher: Yes. What about the tractor?

D: (No response.)

Researcher: Have you got a tractor?

D: Ja.

Researcher: Where is your tractor?

D: It's in my home.

Researcher: At your home. Is it a big one? Show me how big?

D: (Indicates size with his arms).

Researcher: Whereabout at your home? Where is it at your home?

Child E interjects: He's hiding it.

Researcher: Did you get it for your birthday?

D : (nods).

Child D was reluctant to talk in spite of being in the second year at our school. What emerged was one word and short sentence answers.

Fortunately child D will have another year in the pre-primary environment before he goes to Grade one.

Total number of words produced: 6

Total number of morphemes produced: 7

Total number of utterances: 3

Mean length of utterance: 2,3.

### News 3. (one week later)

His next news session, although also made up of very short sentences and one word answers was an improvement as he was much more forthcoming.

Researcher: "D", have you got news for me?

D: I've got a balloon.

D: You've got a balloon? What colour?

D: Red.

Researcher: A red balloon. Is it a round balloon?

D: ( nods).

Researcher: And who gave you the balloon, "D"?

D: Mommy.

Researcher: "D", where is your balloon now?

D: Is home.

Researcher: It's at home? Will you do a painting of it?

D: ( nods).

When we had finished child D went to the Creative area where he painted a picture of his news - a beautiful blue balloon - which he showed me with a very satisfied expression on his face!

His narration of news conforms with his limited communication in English. According to his teacher, he seldom responds verbally in organised periods, never volunteers information and during free play speaks to his Zulu friends mostly in Zulu. He obviously feels most comfortable when speaking his home language.

However, this does not mean that he knows no English. He understood all the questions I asked him, and was able to answer them.

Total number of words used: 8

Total number of morphemes used: 9

Total number of utterances: 4

Mean length of utterance: 2,2

5. Child E. Age: 5 years

News 1. April 1996.

E: I saw four tractors. On the farm. I saw four piglets. It's got four tails.

Total number of words produced: 15

Total number of morphemes produced: 19

Total number of utterances: 4

Mean length of utterance: 4,7.

News 2. (1 week later)

E: I have four flower pots on my garden and my brother got four dollies. I have got four million dollies. Me.

In news one and two child E refers to numbers. Perhaps this is a new linguistic discovery with which she is now experimenting. Like child C she uses the "Me" for dramatic emphasis.

She has used a complex sentence. Her only error is in the use of the pronoun, "on" instead of "in".

Total number of words produced: 21

Total number of morphemes produced: 24

Total number of utterances produced: 3

Mean length of utterance: 8

News 3. (5 weeks later )

E: My mom saw a big shark.

Researcher: Your mom did? Did she see it swimming far out or close to the shore?

E: Closer to her.

Researcher: Close to her? So what did your Mom do?

E: Nothing.

Researcher: Nothing? Did she just stand there?

E: (nods)

Researcher: And then what happened?

E: She did look at the shark.

Although not elaborate, E has used competent language.

“My mom saw a big shark” has subject and object clearly defined. She has used the correct possessive pronoun “my”, the correct form of the past tense, “saw”, and an adjective to describe the shark.

From this example it is evident that child E is well on her way to grasping the structure of the English language.

Total number of words produced: 16

Total number of morphemes: 16

Total number of utterances: 4

Mean length of utterance: 4

6. Child F. Age: 4.

News 1. April 1996.

F: My Mom and Dad left me at school and she come back to school to fetch me at home.

She come back to lift me off here at school.

Researcher: They're coming back to fetch you. Where did your mom and dad go to?

F: They left me here.

Although child F. has used some unconventional language, she made her point. Her parents have left her at school but they'll be back to take her home!

Pronouns: "My mom and dad" is used correctly but "she" come back should have been "they". Also she has left out the verb, "will". The same applies to "She come back" (instead of "she will come back") in the second sentence.

Child F obviously still has to internalise this rule.

The use of "lift me off here" is her creative way of saying "get me out of here!"

Total number of words produced: 33



Total number of morphemes produced : 33

Total number of utterances produced: 3

Mean length of utterance: 11

News 2. (5 weeks later.)

Her news takes on the form of a dialogue between the researcher and herself. It was only later when I was transcribing the news that I realised that F had been talking about her sister, Pumilile, and not juice! from the beginning.

F: um, My news is..... My news is..... but I've been at the shop at home. At home there's Pum Pum. Pum Pum squich up my suitcase.

Researcher: What squirted out your suitcase?

F: Pum Pum squich up my suitcase.

Researcher: What's that, is it like juice?

F: Yes.

Researcher: Oh goodness. And then what happened?

F: Baby.

Researcher: What happened then?

F: Then my baby sit on home and I play with her and play with her.

Researcher: Was it fun playing with her?

F: Yes.

Researcher: Is your baby a girl or a boy?

F: A girl.

Researcher: And what's your baby's name?

F: Pumilile ...(Surname).

F: Who's going to hear the news?

Researcher: Who's going to hear the news?

F: Yes, ( Child's name.).

Researcher: Yes, D... 's going to tell his news.

Researcher: Are you finished now?

F: Yes.

Examination of this discourse shows that child F uses sentences quite comfortably, and creatively, in her speech.

Total number of words produced: 61

Total number of morphemes produced: 72

Total number of utterances: 13

Mean length of utterance: 5,5

### 7. Child G. Age: 3

#### News 1. April 1996.

Researcher: Who's going to start?

G: Me!

Researcher: Okay, G..., what's your news today?

G: Big shoes. In my home.

Researcher: You've got big shoes at your home. You're so lucky.

G: Green like this. (Points to her friend's blue jersey.)

Researcher: Blue like that. That's wonderful.

Total number of words produced: 9

Total number of morphemes: 9

Total number of utterances: 3

Mean length of utterance: 3

G's speech in this excerpt tends to be telegraphic or minimalist. She is using few words, in the form of phrases rather than sentences, to tell her story. Yet her confidence is evident in her eagerness to tell her news and this is very positive.

#### News 2. (5 weeks later )

G: I'm got a bicycle.

Researcher: Pardon?

G: I'm got a bicycle.

Researcher: You've got a bicycle? How many wheels?

G: (Indicates three wheels )

Researcher: Three wheels. Shoo, so it's a tricycle. You're so lucky. And where do you keep your tricycle or your bicycle?

G: In my home.

Researcher: At your home. Can Mabel ride it?

G: No. (Pause.....)

G: I'm going to Cathy's.

Researcher: You're going to Cathy's?

G: My home... big one... Cathy. My brother.

Researcher: Say that again?

G: Cathy my brother..

Researcher: Cathy's your brother. Alright. Okay.

G: Aunty Jenny she's got the aeroplane. Aunty Jenny.

Researcher: Aunty Jenny's got an aeroplane?

G: (Shakes her head.)

Researcher: Going on an aeroplane?

G: Uhuh. (negative)

Researcher: What?

G: There with paper.

Researcher: She made one? Out of paper? Aunty Jenny's clever. Can you ask her to show me?

G: Oh.... I can make it.

Researcher: You can make it?

G: By myself.

Researcher: You are so clever, G....

In this excerpt G has used two sentences but the rest of her speech is made up of phrases.

Total number of words produced: 45

Total number of morphemes produced: 51

Total number of utterances produced: 12

Mean length of utterance: 3,7.

#### 8. Child H. Age: 4

##### News 1.

My Mom bought me a Christmas present. It was a Ferarri.

There are no errors in either sentence.

Total number of words produced: 11

Total number of morphemes produced: 11

Total number of utterances: 2

Mean length of utterance: 5.5

News 2.

H: Last time when I was sleeping and sleeping and sleeping and sleeping I hear some voice calling me, he say, ...(child's name ), and I say phew, what's that? And I spin around spin around spin around spin around spin around spin around spin around spin around spin around till I get dizzy and then I just fall.

And actually my mom said, "What happened"?

Then I say, uh, somebody and then I started falling ..... pingk at me!

Researcher: H, and who was calling you, do you know?

H: Maybe it was Sasha and he, it's my brother's friend.

Researcher: Oh, and you say you were sleeping when you heard it? And did it wake you up?

H: Yes.

H's use of language is rich and colourful. He was able to create an image of dizziness through the repetition (9 times !) of "spin around". Also, the intonation of his speech emphasised the words and the action. For example, "And actually my mom said, "What happened?" The word 'happened' starts on a high pitch and descends to a low.

Although he is still making some errors regarding tense as in, "When I was sleeping..... I hear a voice" instead of "I heard" a voice, his use of language is effective and creative.

Total number of words produced : 87

Total number of morphemes: 99

Total number of utterances: 7

Mean length of utterance: 14

## **SUMMARY**

The individual personalities as well as linguistic and communicative competence are evident in each child's rendering of "news". As the expressive language comes from the child and from the child's experience, this "experiment" affords the researcher the opportunity to observe the child's willingness to share his experience through the medium of the second language, as well as his/her ability to do so. The positive aspects of language were evident as well as errors but it is worth mentioning that an important aspect of telling news is that the child is given a platform from which he can link home and school through this sharing of experience. For example, H's Ferrari and his 'spinning' experience; C's fire engine and incident on the bridge; D's balloon and his tractor; B's discovery that he was wearing a Batman cape and not a Superman cape; E's dolls, flower pots and her verbal picture of what she saw on the farm; F's problems with her younger sister and her assurance that her parents would fetch her from school, G's bicycle and confidence in her ability to make a paper aeroplane and A's imaginative stories of the sea were expressed and the experience shared. However expressed, these shared communications form a link between home and school, and for second language speakers, between first language and second.

I have made brief reference to the role which personality plays in the acquisition of and / or expression of language. While the purpose of this study is not to analyse personality, this aspect of the child cannot be ignored when discussing how she/he functions in the school as a second language speaker. To this end I have asked the teachers to comment on the child's overt behaviour at different times during the school morning, I also made observations during free play and organised periods with the intention to show the child as a whole person and not merely as an acquirer of language.

## **5. FURTHER ASPECTS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION WITHIN THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.**

### 5.1. PERSONALITY

Dulay et al define personality as “an aggregate of traits characteristic of a particular individual.” (Dulay et al, 1982: 75)

With reference to second language acquisition they add,

Although the construct itself is vaguely defined, the operation of personality factors in second language learning is quite evident. The personality traits researchers have so far studied in relation to language include self-confidence level, capacity to empathize, and the degree of logicity or tendency to analyze.

(ibid: 75 )

In terms of pre-primary children, the important aspects include self-confidence (and self-esteem), how sensitive the child is to “other's feelings or ideas” (ibid:76) and how “field-



dependent “the child is (which is the ability to “perceive all parts of the organized field as a total experience.”). (ibid:76)

Dulay et al quote Brown who says that “field dependence may be related to subconscious acquisition.” Brown notes that the field dependent person, “with his empathy and social outreach, will be a more effective and motivated communicator.”  
(ibid:77)

In the pre-primary school the child’s social and emotional development is monitored through regular observation and summed up in bi-annual reports to the parents. However, it seems that these aspects of the child’s personality, namely from an emotional point of view, (self-confidence and self esteem, self-assuredness ) as well as his social development, (namely his eagerness to socialise and his success in achieving this ) are not only important for his well-being but may also play a role in second language acquisition.

## 5.2. TEACHERS’ QUESTIONNAIRES. (Appendix 2.)

In answering the questionnaires given to them, the teachers made the following observations:

### CHILD : A

1. EMOTIONAL: described as : happy
2. SOCIAL

2.1. Interaction with peers: interacts well

2.2 Language interaction with peers during organised periods: chatty. Free play- chatty.

Only uses English and no Zulu.

3. NEWS

3.1 Frequency: tells news regularly

3.2 Language used: English.

### CHILD B.

1. EMOTIONAL: described as contented.

2. SOCIAL

2.1 Interaction with peers: interacts well with his close friends.

2.2. Language interaction with peers during organised times: communicates needs only.

2.3 Language interaction with peers during free play: communicates needs only in English but is chatty in Zulu.

3. NEWS:

3.1 Frequency: Never volunteers news but may answer when asked.

3.2 Language used: English.

### CHILD C .

1. EMOTIONAL.

Described as: happy.

2. SOCIAL

2.1 Interaction with peers: interacts well with his friends.

2.2 Language interaction with peers during organised times: chatty in both English and Zulu depending on the second person and on his inclination.

2.3 Language interaction with peers during teacher-directed times: chatty, particularly in Zulu but also in English. He sometimes talks to himself in Zulu, particularly at the snack table.

### 3. NEWS

3.1 Frequency: Sometimes tells his news as he is often late in arriving and misses this time.

3.2 Language used: English.

## CHILD D.

### 1. EMOTIONAL.

Described as: happy

### 2. SOCIAL.

2.1 Interaction with peers: He interacts well with his peers.

2.2 Language interaction with peers during organised times: communicates needs only.

2.3. Language interaction with peers during free play: communicates needs only in English but is chatty in Zulu.

### 3. NEWS

3.1 Frequency: Never tells news.

3.2 Language used: N/A.

### CHILD E.

#### 1. EMOTIONAL

Described as: contented.

#### 2. SOCIAL

2.1 Interaction with peers: Tends to be domineering.

2.2 Language interaction with peers during organised times: Chatty (both English and Zulu)

2.3 Language interaction with peers during free play: chatty (both English and Zulu)

#### 3. NEWS

3.1 Frequency: Sometimes (because she regularly arrives late and then misses out on news-time.)

3.2 Language used: English.

### CHILD F.

#### 1. EMOTIONAL

Described as: happy

#### 2. SOCIAL

2.1. Interaction with peers : Interacts very well with her peers.

2.2. Language interaction with peers during organised times: chatty (in English)

2.3. Language interaction with peers during free play: chatty (in English)

3. NEWS.

3.1. Frequency: Regularly tells news.

3.2. Language used: English.

### CHILD G.

1. EMOTIONAL.

Described as: happy.

2. SOCIAL

2.1. Interaction with peers: Interacts “very well, a little bossy.”

2.2. Language interaction with peers during organised times: chatty (in English and Zulu)

2.3. Language interaction with peers during free play: chatty (in English and Zulu)

3. NEWS

3.1 Frequency: Tells news regularly.

3.2 Language used: English.

### CHILD H.

1. EMOTIONAL

Described as: contented.

2. SOCIAL

2.1. Interaction with peers: “Very reserved. Tends to observe or play alongside. No special friends as yet.”

2.2. Language interaction with peers during organised times: communicates needs only.

2.3. Language interaction with peers during free play: communicates needs only.

(Communicates in English only at all times. He does not speak Zulu at school.)

3. NEWS.

3.1. Frequency: He regularly tells news.

3.2 Language used: English.

Further, I have selected 6 questions from the teachers’ responses in the questionnaires.

These will give a general idea of the teachers’ interpretations of the child’s functioning in the second language environment.

#### 1. Greeting on Arrival.

All children greet the teacher, in English, on arrival at school.

(A response like “Good morning. How are you?” appears to be easy for the child to learn.

Child C could say this when he enrolled at our school in 1995 even though he knew very little English.)

#### 2. News.

Two children never tell their news.

Two children sometimes tell their news (they arrive together and are often late.)

Four regularly tell their news.

3. Communication in Zulu to the group teacher.

Only one child communicates with his teacher in Zulu. The remaining seven only use English.

4. This question asks whether the teacher is able to understand all the child's communications in English.

The reply was positive for seven children and "not always" for one.

5. The next question asked was, "Do you feel that his/her English language ability in any way inhibits his/her :

Replies: no of children:

- |                             |       |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|
| a) interaction with peers   | 2 yes | 6 no  |
| b) response during music    | 2 yes | 6 no  |
| c) understanding of stories | 3 yes | 5 no. |

Thus, generally, the feeling is that second language speakers are not inhibited by language in socialisation and participation in music and story "rings".

6. Some English pre-primaries add to the normal programme by having a specific second language enrichment programme. I asked the teachers if they felt that this was necessary.

The general reply was that it is only necessary for children who appear to be unmotivated or who have specific language problems. Otherwise they felt that the pre-primary environment was sufficient for second language acquisition to “happen”. We will discuss, when planning new language enrichment strategies at our school, which children need specific intervention both as first language English speakers and from the second language speakers in this study.

Heila Jordaan’s research, titled, ” Language intervention strategies to facilitate the acquisition of English by Black pre-school children” revealed the following:

Results showed that language intervention strategies are successful in facilitating the acquisition of English in Black pre-school children, but that teachers also achieve good results if they provide extra input in English.

(Jordaan, 1992 :53 )

Even with specific problems, in order to avoid excluding the second language speakers from the mainstream of the school environment, it seems to be preferable to focus on the teacher’s potential to ‘provide extra input in English’ both for first and second language speakers as much as possible within the normal school day and environment. Experience



has led me to believe that speech therapy programmes are best administered out of school hours so that the child does not feel that she or he is different.

However, in devising strategies to do this teachers would benefit greatly from input and advice from speech therapists .

### **Summary.**

What emerges from these observations is that no particularly consistent pattern can be assumed or described. Although there are general behaviour patterns each child is an individual and adapts to the challenges of the environment with his or her unique personality.

A simple relationship between the child's social and emotional development and language acquisition cannot be drawn. There are numerous variables and factors influencing the child's second language acquisition. What can be said, though, is that if the child is outgoing, friendly, self-confident and relaxed enough to acquire the language subconsciously, these factors will be conducive to successful language acquisition.

However, just as personality influences acquisition, the child's language ability when entering a language environment such as the pre-primary school must also influence his self-esteem, confidence and feeling of well-being. How much this second language is encouraged in the home either through attitude (the language is rated highly by the

parents ) or in the use of the language in the home environment, such as having friends at home who are English speakers, is another factor which must be considered.

How the child responds to this environment, then, will be due to a number of factors, not least of which is his/her personality but it is only one aspect of numerous influential factors.

#### 5.4. SPECIFICALLY OBSERVED SOCIALISATION.

The purpose of this section is to show specific incidents of socialisation. These will augment the teachers' observations.

Year: 1996

A) 1 March, 9.00 - 9.30 a.m.

Child, G:

G started off in the garden watching the other children. She then moved to the climbing equipment where she played on her own.

Child E:

I found child E in the Creative area with child C. They were speaking Zulu to each other. They then left together to play with blocks in the block construction area.

Child C:

As with child E. (See above).

Child F:

She spent this time in the Fantasy area playing an imaginative game with six English speaking children (five girls and one boy.)

Child D:

He was in his favourite area, the garden, riding scooters with an English speaking boy from his group.

Later they both joined two boys (both English speakers) who were using boxes to build cars in the garden.

Child H:

He was found playing on his own, climbing the tyres on the wooden 'fort'.

Child A:

She sat with a girl (English speaker) at the dough table.

Child B:

I found him watching a group of the German speaking boys who were playing in the fantasy area dressed up as firemen. After a while he also dressed in the uniform. He made no verbal response and a German speaking boy approached him making noises.

Child B smiled in response but stayed on the fringes of the game watching the others and playing with firemen equipment for about 5 minutes. He then changed out of the uniform and went to play with the blocks. There was no verbal communication between B and these children during this time.

In the block area he joined child E and child C and they spoke to each other in Zulu.

B) 8 March. Time: 9.00 - 9.30 a.m.

Child C:

He was found building a car in the garden with an English speaking boy.

They spoke English to each other.

Child F:

She was playing in the garden with an English speaking girl..

Child A:

I found her playing with an English speaker, also in the garden.

Child B:

Initially he was on his own, building a car out of boxes and making convincing car noises. He was later joined by two boys, one English speaking and one Zulu..

Child D:

He was with his English speaking friend, a boy. At first they played on top of the 'fort' but later moved to the swings.

I was able to record some of their conversation on the fort as follows:

D: Hlahla nami! (Stay with me! )

Friend: Come here!

D: No! No!

Friend: Go under this, okay?

D: (to Christopher) Move!

Friend: Lions!! Over there playing in the boxes!

(They moved to the swings)

D: Mrs C! Push!

(A request to be pushed on the swing.)

His use of language here demonstrates that he still uses some Zulu to speak to his English friend.

In this example communication between the two of them is simple and direct but there is little evidence of comprehension and two-way language interaction. It seems that their actions are used more for effective communication than their words.

### 5.5. Further isolated observations of individual children.

#### 10.04.1996. Child E:

She played with an English speaking girl for fifteen minutes. They played imaginatively with plastic toy elephants and communicated in English.

Later E went to the creative area where she showed an interest in what the other children were doing and saying. Unfortunately, I could not record the response to her conversation so the example below shows only her contribution.

Part of her conversation included:

“What is that, (child’s name)? ”

“De pattern isn’t like dat!”

(E then pulled a tongue at a boy in the room for no apparent reason!.)

“I saw a dolfish.”

“What are you laughing of?”

“I know whose dat name.”

“Mrs T., please get a scissor for me?”

In the above examples, her use of language is competent although not without error. She is able to communicate her needs, express questions and her opinions to her peers.

Child C , (11.04.96)

His use of emphasis with “me” is evident in his language in free play too. At snack time when a girl said “I don’t like jam,” C replied rather happily, “Me, I’m like it!”

**Summary.**

From the social patterns observed in the teachers’ observations and in observations of the children during free play there is evidence that although some of the Zulu-speaking children play with their same language peers there is also evidence that Zulu-speakers play with English-speakers.

Of the three Zulu-speaking children who live in English-speaking communities, two play predominantly with English-speakers. The third neither plays with English or Zulu-speakers but at this stage prefers his own company. Of the five children who live in predominantly Zulu-speaking areas, four spend more time with Zulu-speakers than with English-speakers while the fifth plays with both English and Zulu-speakers. Further, throughout the morning, there are incidents in which children communicate with each other whether they are playing in a group or not. Thus, although they may choose to play with certain children this does not mean that this is the sole communication throughout free play.

During the organised periods there is further opportunity for language interaction and extension of the second language. Zulu-speakers may communicate with each other in Zulu during organised periods but there is ample opportunity to also communicate in

English (as in C's response to the statement about jam) and to hear English spoken by the teacher as well as their peers.

**6. TABLE OF EACH CHILD'S LINGUISTIC ACQUISITION AND SOCIAL / EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

NAME	LEXICAL SCORES PERCENTAGE	NO OF WORDS IN NEWS	EMOTIONAL	PREDOMINANT LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY PLAYMATES
A	1995 Eng: 14,7% 1996 Eng: 97%	a) 57 b) 103	happy	English
B	1995 Eng: 16,2% 1996 Eng: 66,1%	a) 4 b) 14 c) 15	contented	Zulu
C	1995 Eng: 0,04% 1996 Eng: 45,6%	a) 8 b) 145	happy	Zulu
D	1995 Eng: 11,8% 1996 Eng: 66,2%	a) 0 b) 6 c) 8	happy	English/Zulu
E	1995 Eng: 23,5% 1996 Eng: 88,2%	a) 15 b) 21 c) 16	contented	Zulu
F	1996 Eng: 75%	a) 33 b) 61 c) 72	happy	English
G	1996 Eng: 55,8%	a) 9 b) 45	happy	English/Zulu
H	1996 Eng: 95,6%	a) 11 b) 87	contented but reserved	n/a



On a previous page I referred to the relationship between the residential area of the child and the language spoken by friends at school. Since it appears from the scores above that a child who is relatively competent in English, such as child E, will not necessarily play with English-speaking children and a child like child D, who does not score particularly highly in English, will not only play with Zulu-speakers. (In fact his best friend at school is an English speaking child). These observations reduce the importance of the role which language plays in socialisation but do not exclude the role which it plays.

However, my observation at a school in Cape Town in 1992 that children choose friends on the basis of language homogeneity has proved to have limited support.

In Cape Town there was a marked grouping of English speakers playing with English-speakers (which also meant “white” children playing with “white”, and “black” children with “black”). What prompted my observation that friendship choice was made on the grounds of language rather than race was an incident which occurred at the school in that year. When an African child enrolled at the school later on during the school year the other African children initially gathered around him in a welcoming way. However, I noticed that they soon lost interest and it seemed that this was related to the discovery that he was English and not Xhosa-speaking. From then on he played predominantly with the English-speakers .

Following the research in New Germany it seems that although there is obviously a common bond through a common language and an ability to communicate both linguistically and culturally, it appears that social choices and interactions appear to be more complicated than merely language and culture. Personality differences and similarities, attitudes and the home environment also impact on the child's social interaction and experience.

The conclusion and implications of this research will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION.**

### **1. Introduction.**

This research has been an ongoing project since the beginning of 1995. It was prompted by concerns about the merits of submerging second language speakers into an English-speaking school environment. In the years that I have taught in a multicultural, multi-lingual environment I have never noticed a child who outwardly appears to be adversely affected by the environment. However, I have witnessed what I believe to be misguided attempts by non-teachers at a school to ensure that the child uses only the second language and not his/her home language. The motivation behind those actions was well-intentioned, obviously because the adult wanted the child to learn to speak English, but it prompted my concern and interest in the question of mother tongue and second language environments.

### **2. Chapters 1 - 4.**

In the first four chapters of this research report, the background to the research project, language policy, theories of language acquisition and the actual research into the second language acquisition of the eight Zulu-speaking children at our school in 1995 and 1996, were discussed.

From the description of the pre-primary ethos and programme (which applies generally as well as specifically to the ethos which is intrinsic to the school in the study), described in

chapter one, it is clear that the pre-primary operates essentially as an accepting, nurturing environment into which the natural approach of second language acquisition fits snugly. The role of the teacher in creating and maintaining the appropriate climate and learning environment is stressed. Further, positive results from research for the long-term benefits of early childhood education are discussed and the rapid and increasingly complex development of first language acquisition is tabled.

In chapter two, language policy, past and present, is reviewed. The striking feature of the Draft Language Policy of March, 1996, is the policy of multilingualism. It is an extension of the Constitution which seeks to grant equal status to the eleven official languages of South Africa. This policy impacts on all aspects of society including education. For the first time in South African history, all these languages will be affirmed and pupils will have the option of using their first language as a language of teaching and learning throughout their schooling. This has implications not only for the pupils but also for the teachers who will now have to acknowledge, affirm and give educational support for the languages of the pupils in the classroom.

The theories of language acquisition which were discussed in chapter three, do not offer clear support for either early or later acquisition. For every affirmation of early introduction of a second language there are counter arguments which argue for later acquisition. However, there is clear support for the way in which the second language is acquired with a move away from a traditional, grammar-based approach to a language environment which is more natural with the emphasis on communication rather than language rules.

Also mentioned in this chapter is the point made in the Draft Language Policy. I refer to the differentiation between subtractive and additive multilingualism. The latter, in which the first language is retained throughout the child's schooling and other languages are added to this, is favoured rather than the practice of the first language being lost to successive languages.

The fourth chapter focusses on the actual research which was carried out at New Germany Lutheran Pre-Primary School.

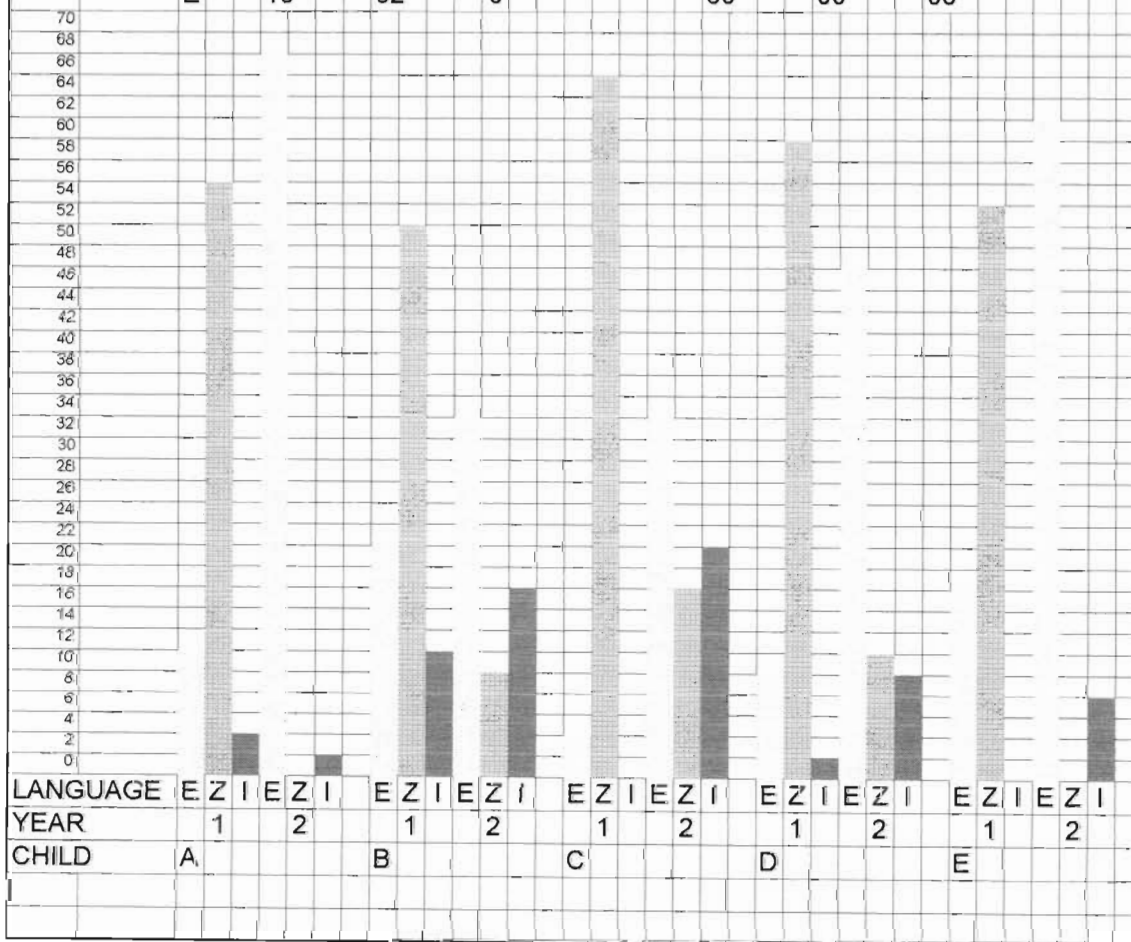
The aims of the research were to highlight the experience of the children from a social, emotional and linguistic perspective and to indicate where there were gaps in the picture and which areas needed further clarification.

From the lexical results, including the assessment of the errors which were made, it is possible to gain a picture of the child's vocabulary, to establish whether they are speaking Zulu or finding the words in English, to establish whether there is any interference from Zulu or English in those lexical items and to gain an insight into their association of ideas and creative use of language. In connection with the association of ideas I refer to child E's identification of a duck as "Phendu" since this picture was used as Phendu's symbol to identify her locker and hand-towel.

I believe that the aims of the research for the lexical items were met since it has given a good indication of how much Zulu the child still uses, how much English and *how* the languages are used. Further, the comparison between the lexical results on the same test administered in 1995 and 1996 to five of the children revealed interesting results. These results are reflected in the graph and statistics featured on the following page.

Statistical Analysis of lexical results showing the English results, the Zulu results and the inappropriate responses (in) from the lexical test results of 1995 and 1996 in subjects A,B,C,D and E.

	YEAR 1			YEAR 2		
	ENG	ZULU	IN	ENG	ZULU	IN
A	10	54	3	66	00	02
B	19	49	9	45	08	15
C	03	65	0	31	17	20
D	08	58	2	45	12	11
E	16	52	0	60	00	08



The statistical summary clearly shows the switch which the children made from responding predominantly in Zulu in the first test to predominantly in English in the second.

The graph also shows this switch clearly with the low English results and high Zulu results in 1995 followed by the reverse situation the following year when there is a clear switch to higher English results and lower Zulu responses in 1996.

The experiment on the news items was also revealing. The results showed that some children were beginning to grasp and internalise basic language structures such as tense, the use of pronouns, adjectives, plurals and syntax but that gender pronouns were still not clear to some of the children including child A (who was very expressive) and E, whereas child C (whose English language is less fluent) used the gender pronoun correctly in his discourse.

Although attempts were made to quantify the language used in the “news” these quantified results have little to offer in general terms since they, firstly, belong to a very small study. Secondly, assessments made in this research, such as the MLU, cannot be relied on for accuracy or for any generalised comparison. What is useful, though, is each child’s discourse itself since it can be used to ascertain at what stage the child is at the present time (such as from non-verbal to more complex discourse) and to use these transcripts as a measure for later assessment. The discourse also reveals which areas of language are problematic for each child and will prove useful to the teachers who can use this information as a basis for planning language enrichment strategies within the classroom.

The emotional state or development of the child was also included in this study. The intention was to see whether any of the children were experiencing emotional problems and if they were, to try to judge whether these were being caused by the language environment. I relied on my own observation and the teacher's observations and assessment of each child in the questionnaires to answer this question. It may be argued that these methods were too subjective and that some other measurement of emotional well-being should have been used. However, the overall findings were that no child appeared depressed and that in fact all the children appeared to be at least contented or happy in the school environment.

The social aspects of the child's behaviour also formed an important part of this study. The intention was to determine the social patterns of the children in the study. The expected result was that Zulu-speakers would play with Zulu-speakers and that those Zulu first language children who spoke only English at school would play with English-speakers. The results did not confirm this although there were examples of this happening.

In observing the children's speech it was also noticeable that both socialised and egocentric speech were apparent. Child C's brief monologue at the snack table is an example of egocentric speech, but much of the time the children were socialising and using speech to communicate with their friends. One child, child H, who seemed to socialise very little is cause for concern. Any problems like these which have become apparent from the observations will be discussed with the teachers at the school and strategies developed to help the children concerned.



### **3. Gaps in the picture and areas needing clarification.**

As mentioned before in this study, no claims are made that it is comprehensive. The study takes certain aspects and attempts to define them within the parameters of the sample within the school environment.

With the lexical tests and news items I believe that there was a satisfactory measure of success. However, the original intention was to document language in all aspects of the school morning including organised periods, free play and social interaction. From this aspect the goals were not met in full. I had hoped to have many more samples of language. In the end I relied on the teacher's ongoing assessment and my own observations, to form some specific but also a generalised picture of the child's interaction during the normal school day whereas the audiotape was used to record news items in the 'test' sessions.

### **4. The implications of this research.**

#### 4.1. Short-term.

1. I have discussed how this research can be used to assist the staff at the school in devising strategies for language enrichment. Thus, in the next six months of the school year these children should benefit from a programme, within the normal school routine, which will help their English acquisition.

2. From a personal perspective, the uncertainty which I felt about the multilingual environment at our school and the concern that I have had about whether the children

were benefitting or being adversely affected in any way from this environment, have been answered positively. This means that my goals are more clear and I can take this clarity and use it positively when we work on the language strategies .

3. I also plan to test the children's lexical acquisition as well as audio-tape their news once more during the year to assess how much vocabulary and what changes there are in their language. This will firstly be used as an aid in evaluating our language strategy and secondly to augment the long-term research which I intend to do from 1997.

#### 4.2. Long-term Implications.

1. From 1997 I shall follow the progress of those children who will leave our school to go to Grade one .

My intention is to request their Junior Primary Schools to send me copies of their quarterly school reports so that I can determine their progress within the formal phase. This will provide feedback on their academic progress over the next three years. Our own reports and language assessments will be used as the point of reference so that we can compare our assessment with the child's progress. I shall also apply to visit the children in their Grade one classrooms for further observation of their progress.

#### **5. Some Recommendations for the Multilingual Pre-Primary School.**

Based on the readings, research, discussion with colleagues and observations, the following recommendations for inclusion in the pre-primary environment have emerged.

These include:

\*Whilst schools often use a submersion approach because this is what the parents of second language speakers want, research has shown that immersion is a more successful strategy and that whilst acquiring the second language, the child's first language is also affirmed and acknowledged. This means that three goals are being met. The child's first language is not deprecated, his self esteem is protected and he acquires the target language. It would seem that there is an urgent need to move away from the practice of submersion to that of immersion ( or additive multilingualism, depending on the recommendations of the parents). This means that as a matter of urgency educators need to evaluate the approach used by their school together with the parents and the school community. If they find that their school is practising submersion and there is consensus that this is unacceptable, they could then either motivate for the employment of someone who can speak the L2 speaker's first language and/or begin the process towards acquiring an autochthonous language themselves. Dictionaries and phrase books can assist in the process and can be used when planning organised times so that key words and phrases will be readily available when needed.

## **6. In Conclusion:**

\* There is a need for teachers to examine their language policies and programmes and to employ language strategies, with the aid of experts in the field of speech and language, to enrich the language of second (and first ) language speakers if this is not already in

practice.

- \* In a multicultural/multilingual environment (also in a homogeneous environment) there is a need for schools to have an anti-bias programme so that all languages/cultures/religions and races are affirmed within (and outside) the school community.
- \* Optimum use of music, art and drama as a universal language can be utilised to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries.
- \* As a matter of affirmation, identify in the school the guidelines of the Natural Approach in language acquisition in providing a natural and accepting environment for second (and first) language acquisition.

In recommending the above I acknowledge that a school may adopt policies and practices for reasons which are wellfounded for that school. I recognise that I am not an expert in this field and that my recommendations are made from my own limited experience and knowledge. However, I contend that although schools are oases and communities on their own, they belong to a greater community which has to be acknowledged. Children have to be educated not only for a short term goal such as being ready for formal schooling or moving from one grade to the next, but to function as 'whole' people in a challenging, changing world. This process of education may, in principle, be easy to reach for but it is less easy to define. For the pre-primary environment, if we continue to be child-centred and focus on the child as a developing individual who is seated in Piaget's pre-operational stage with all the significance of that stage and experience, we must surely be on the right path. The movement from mother

tongue to multi-lingualism, however, adds a new dimension to the journey, one which has to be accepted and used, not as a limiting factor but one which will broaden our horizons.

In South Africa, as in many countries in the world, we have a multilingual society. This multilingualism, with the demise of Apartheid and separate schools, has become a part of our schools. The result is that teachers are faced with challenges, particularly associated with the recommendations of the Draft Language Policy and the Constitution, which require major paradigm shifts and changes in teaching style and practice. Whilst this cannot be described as an easy situation, the alternative, to go backwards to monolingual, Apartheid schooling, is unthinkable.

The process of researching this paper has been a journey which has convinced me that educators and pupils in South Africa have vast opportunities for cultural and linguistic osmosis which can only enrich our society. I am also reminded of the personal space which people maintain around themselves. This same space is coloured with language and culture. If we as a nation want to reach out to each other we will have to spread our linguistic wings so that we can understand and communicate with each other.

The days in pre-history when it was perhaps exciting that man had acquired language and could now communicate with his fellow man have passed. We are now faced with a scenario which has been complicated by migration and the emergence of the global village. It is no longer, particularly in our South African society, enough to be mono-lingual or even bilingual. Perhaps it is idealistic to expect older people to attempt to learn a new

language but multilingualism, if language policy is effective, is where the future for the younger generation and subsequent generations, lies.

**Notes.****Chapter one.**

(1) It must be noted that racial categories and terms such as black, white, Coloured and Indian are used grudgingly. Up until 1994 in South Africa these terms and categories defined the existence of people's lives. Apartheid History continues to impact on the present and the future. Therefore, in order to give this report perspective, the use of racial terms has been unavoidable.

**Chapter two.**

(1). Since most of the teachers who attended the workshop on the Draft Language Policy were mono-lingual or bilingual in English and Afrikaans, the implications of this policy which provides for multilingual schooling, were overwhelming. With the best intentions to meet the needs of children whose home language is other than English (in the English schools) the question was raised as to how these teachers would be able to meet the languages rights and needs of these children in classrooms with learner : educator ratios of 35 or 40 : 1. At least one teacher expressed the concern that these teachers, many of whom have years of valuable experience, would then become redundant.

Education in South Africa during the Apartheid years favoured the two official languages. 'White', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' children were not exposed to indigenous languages and

the effects of this are now painfully obvious. Many teachers are not equipped for the 'new South Africa' and multilingual classrooms and unless they take the initiative and learn to speak the local indigenous language, will probably begin to feel marginalised.

(2). Webb describes the effects of the National Party's language policy as follows:

i) There is unevenness in the knowledge of the major languages as second languages:

Most black South Africans know five or six languages, including English and Afrikaans.

Their knowledge of these two latter languages is, however, quite poor, with less than 20 per cent having a reasonable competence in English. (Van Vuuren and De Beer, 1990)

White, colored (sic), and Asian South Africans generally know only Afrikaans and English.

ii) The major languages have differentiated sociopolitical meanings: Afrikaans is evaluated both positively and negatively- both situations giving rise to conflict: English is evaluated exceptionally highly (to the point of being detrimental to the speakers of other languages) and the autochthonous languages are evaluated exceptionally lowly (to the point of being detrimental to their own speakers).

iii) There exist strong feelings about the principle of mother tongue instruction.

iv) The threat to the country's cultural diversity is due to the cultural and linguistic domination by Afrikaans and English and the fact that ethnicity formed a crucial component in the perceived divide-and-rule strategy.

v) there is a skewed distribution of public functions over the country's languages: the languages of 50 per cent of the population have no meaningful public role, at most being "official languages" in the so-called national states and self-governing regions (the homelands of the apartheid policy), and media of instruction in the early years of primary school. The languages of legislation, civil administration and justice are Afrikaans and English.

vi) There is a skewed distribution of developmental resources, state funding for language technilization, and termonological and lexicographical work, all being mainly directed at Afrikaans (as one of the official languages).

vii) There is a high incidence of illiteracy and drop-outs; the literacy rate for Afrikaans is 45 per cent for persons older than 20 years, and the drop-out rate (for 1988) for the first year in African schools is 16.2 per cent. (South African Institute of Race relations 1990: 850, 828 respectively)



(Webb, V. 1994: 254...256)

(3). The project was to have shown how the use of an English vocabulary fun workbook could facilitate the learning of vocabulary but it seemed that these children did not need an aid which focussed at that level of English.

(4). This research project, with the provisional title of “Language Attitudes in the New South Africa: a trilingual survey”, was discussed at a Seminar at London University on the 14 May, 1996. The research was led by Professor Vivian De Klerk of Rhodes University.

#### **Chapter four.**

(1). Seminar at London University, 14 May, 1996. Refer to above note.

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Appendix one. Lexical test.

Zulu response. English response. Inappropriate response.

1.

soap

cup

banana

cow

teddy bear

red

bread

bath

slide

aeroplane

yellow

swings

milk

truck

brush

sheep

pink

cake

knife

horse

flower

comb

blue



red



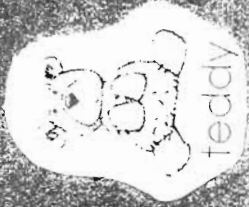
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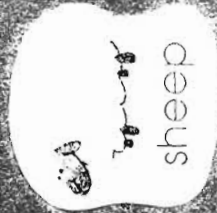
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blue



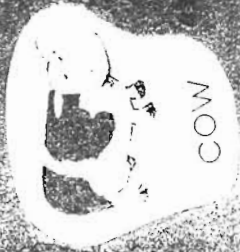
teddy



sheep



comb



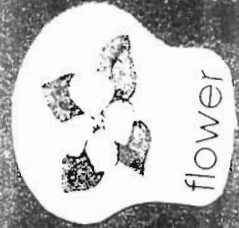
cow



aeroplane



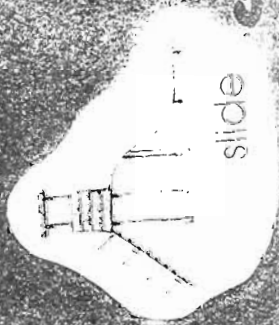
brush



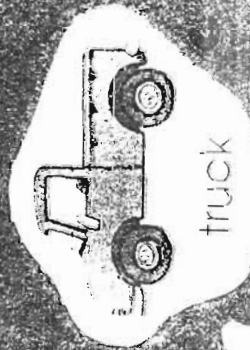
flower



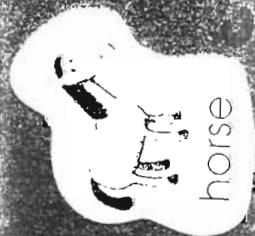
banana



slide



truck



horse



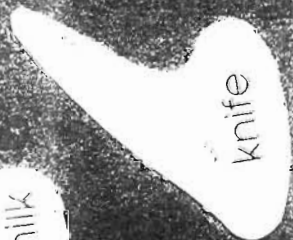
cup



bath



milk



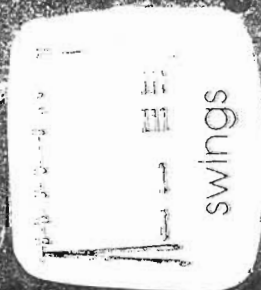
knife



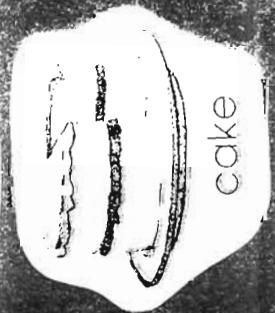
soap



bread



swings



cake

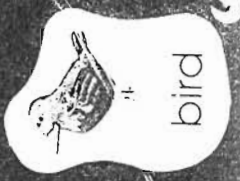
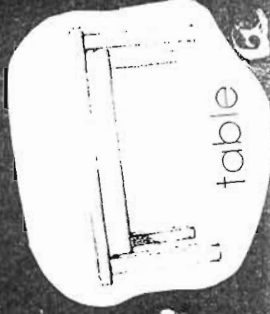
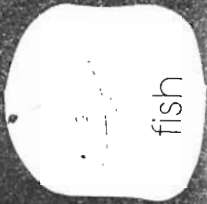
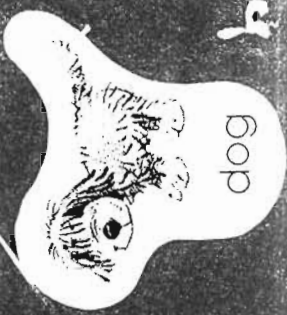
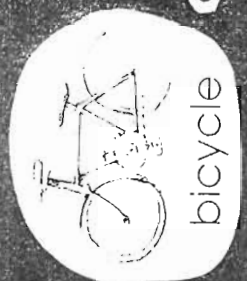
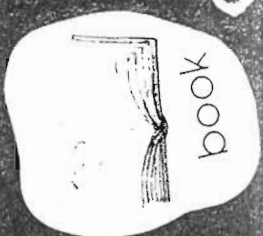
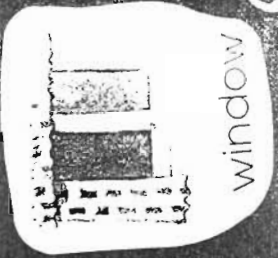
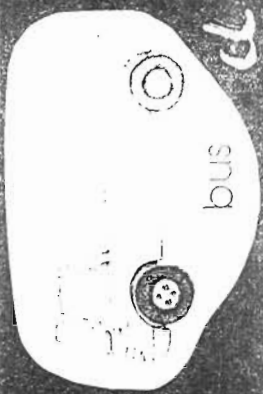
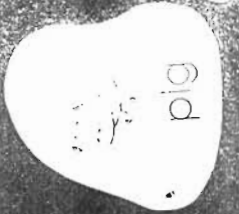
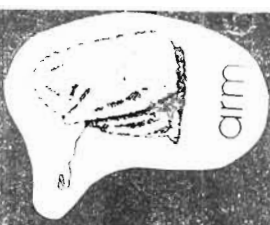
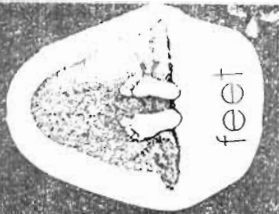
## Appendix one. (cont.) Lexical test.

2. Zulu Response. English response. Inappropriate response.

table  
tree  
window  
apple  
eggs  
eyes  
bird  
dog  
book  
bus

pig  
feet  
ice cream  
fish  
bicycle  
spoon  
clock  
nose  
boat  
toilet

fork  
arm



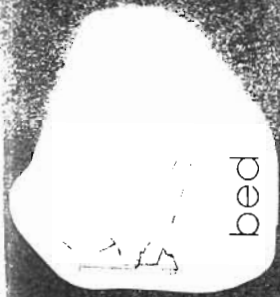
## Appendix one.(cont.) Lexical test.

3. Zulu response. English response. Inappropriate response.

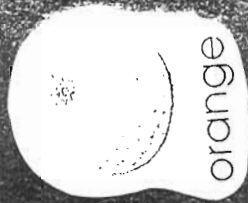
bed  
dress  
duck  
light  
leg  
white  
orange  
door  
hen  
car

bottom  
green  
three kittens  
train  
balloon  
towel  
hand  
black  
ball  
house

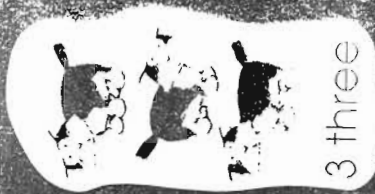
boots  
plate  
mouth



bed



orange



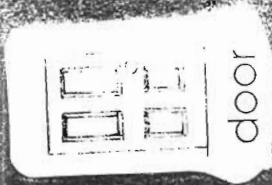
3 three



ball



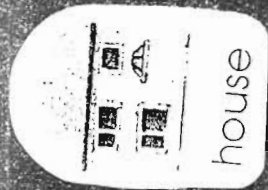
dress



door



train



house



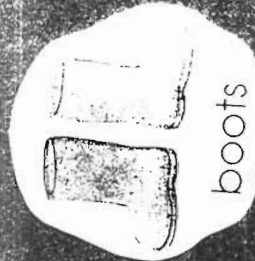
duck



hen



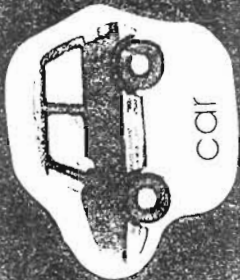
balloon



boots



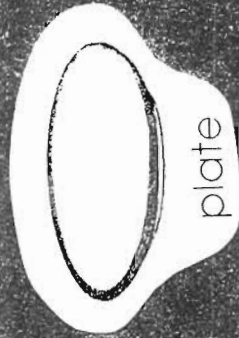
light



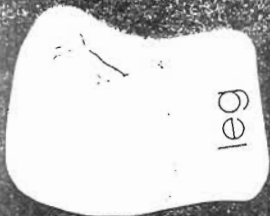
car



towel



plate



leg



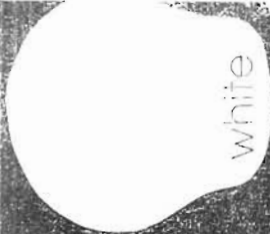
bottom



hand



mouth



white



green



black

## Appendix 2. Teacher's Questionnaire

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Child's name:

Age:

1. Social

1.1 How well does s/he interact with his/her peers?

Have you noticed a change in this ? If so what change?

1.2. During a two week period please make a note of seating patterns, that is who s/he sits next to at:

Greeting ring

Music ring

Snack time

Busy Bee

Story

1.3. How often does s/he chat to his /her peers during organised times- Would you say s/he is

silent                      communicates needs only                      chatty

2. PLAY INTERESTS

2.1. During free play which area does s/he frequent most?

2.2. How would you describe his/her interaction during free play -

English:    silent                      communicates needs/instructions

chatty

Zulu:            silent                      communicates needs/instructions

chatty

Any comments:

3. EMOTIONAL

3.1. How would you describe his/her emotional state -

depressed

contented

happy

4. GREETING

When s/he arrives at school how does s/he greet you?

5. LANGUAGE

5.1. NEWS

Does s/he tell news

regularly

seldom

never

5.2

Does s/he ever communicate in his/her language to you or to his/her peers during organised periods like greeting, music, story, snack, busy bee?

If so please indicate .

5.3.

Are you able to understand all his/her communications in English clearly?

5.4.

Do you feel that his/her English language ability in any way inhibits his/her

interaction with peers

response during music

understanding of stories

5.5 Do you feel that a formal English language intervention is needed in the pre-primary school for second language speakers?



6.

Please use this space to make any comments which you feel would be useful to this research into the acquisition of English by Zulu speaking children at a pre-primary school.

Thank you for your assistance and co-operation.