

**READING TEXTS, READING ONE'S SELF:  
EXPLORING YOUNG SOUTH AFRICANS' SENSE OF IDENTITY**

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## **Abstract**

The title of this research project is Reading Texts, Reading One'self: Exploring Young South African's Sense of Identity. The project entailed working with a group of young people in a reading group, using a text by Zakes Mda, *Melville* 67 in order to provoke discussion. In the process of reading the text, participants were encouraged to read or interpret their own lives in new ways. This study provides an in-depth understanding of a small group of Black African township youth. The study focuses on these young people's sense of self and identity in a post-democratic South Africa particularly with respect to language. It focuses specifically on English; a language globally recognised as powerful and central to academic and economic success and isiZulu; an African indigenous language which carries enormous cultural significance. In this study, the youth reveal their positions with respect to these languages, highlighting the complex language dynamics that are central to colonial and African languages. The analysis reveals a degree of ambivalence with respect to English and isiZulu where there is a sense of shifting boundaries and identities which assert the values of both languages. On the one hand, these young people celebrate their African pride and 'Zuluness' through the appreciation of isiZulu and resist the dominant position of English over isiZulu. On the other hand, they acknowledge English as a tool for economic and academic success and its potential for enriching cultural life through communication across racial and ethnic boundaries.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This project investigates how <sup>1</sup>Black youth from a township school define their sense of identity in the 'new' South Africa, particularly in relation to the use of language. The title of this research project is *Reading Texts, Reading One'self: Exploring Young South African's Sense of Identity*. The project entailed working with a group of young people in a reading group, using a text by Zakes Mda, *Melville 67* in order to provoke discussion. In the process of reading the text, participants were encouraged to read or interpret their own lives in new ways. One of the key problems facing democratising South Africa was how to deal constitutionally with multilingualism. Enshrining official constitutional rights for eleven languages was however only a first step. The country's colonial history and the global economic context mean that 'foreign' languages (particularly English) are dominant over indigenous languages (e.g. isiZulu) in a variety of ways. The study focuses particularly on how Black youth feel about English as a medium of communication and how this impacts on their sense of self. It also explores what speaking isiZulu (their mother tongue) means for them, in a society where proficiency in English has a positive correlation with job opportunities.

### **1.1. Identity**

According to Billington, Hockey and Strawbridge (1998) human life is best understood by taking into account the dynamics of the interaction between the individual self and the social world. This is to say that the individual and society should be understood in terms of one another rather than as separate entities. The society we live in has a constraining effect on how we act and represent ourselves, through the societal norms and expectations as well as the roles that members of societies take on. Language, as a crucial element of individual and group identity provides a critical focus for exploring these identities. Hall (1996) argues that "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply..." (p.17). This multiple and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Black' is used in a limited sense to refer to 'African Black'.

fragmented characteristic of identity allows for individuals to be open to different cultures and practices of other people aside from themselves and this exposure is increasing in the globalised world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

According to Woodward (1997) these representations of the self are determined and affected by the context we are in. Woodward (1997) similarly suggests that the social context can engage us in different meanings and situations where we might feel that we are the same person, when in actual fact we are positioned differently by social expectations and constraints. An illustration of this could be the different presentation of young people at home and in the classroom setting. In the classroom, learners' behaviours are restricted by school rules to which they are supposed to adhere, however, outside of the classroom environment, perhaps at home, these young people 'freely' express themselves in ways they would not in the school environment, since at home, they are in the presence of friends and family. This need not imply that the home environment does not have certain rules that the young person needs to adhere to, the young person has different identities whereby at school he/she is a scholar and at home he/she is a child. Giddens (1991) argues that it is not necessarily a fact that diverse settings bring about fragmented selves, rather the diverse contexts that we live in allow individuals to appropriate various elements of the contexts and integrate them, therefore creating an individual with a distinct self-identity. In essence, the individual acts differently in different contexts to suit the different needs and restricting expectations of society, and consequently constructs and reconstructs different selves.

This point is illustrated further by Holliday, Hyde and Kullman's (2004) narrative view of the self: "Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his/her biography" (p.68). Woodward (1997) puts forward an interesting point in relation to the nature of identities where different identities

may be antagonistic of one another. These tensions may reflect social shifts e.g. for people who experienced oppression and sufferings during the apartheid era, and who are now part of the 'new' South Africa where the concept of 'race' has been reconstructed. This individual's perception of her/himself and of others may have been influenced by the painful experiences that African people endured during the apartheid government. However, in the 'new' South Africa the concept of 'race' has undergone dramatic changes which are marked by the reconstruction of relationships between African and 'white' people. These different social and political contexts in South Africa highlight different contextual and relational factors that affect the identity of the same individual.

According to Hall (1996) identity is constructed or comes to play within the dynamics of power and in the process serves to exclude through its power to promote 'difference'. Hall further states that identities are constructed through 'difference', and not outside 'difference'. What is indicated here is that we are identified as who we are because of whom and what we are not. So in this way 'difference' is an integral part of defining one's identity. The identity of anything is made meaningful by relating it to the 'other', to what it is not and what it lacks. In this way, through difference, identity is constructed and understood. According to Woodward (1997) 'difference' can be interpreted negatively as excluding and marginalizing those people who are considered as 'outsider' and as the 'other'. Holliday et al (2004) highlight this process as "otherisation" which they describe as, "the process that we undertake in ascribing identity to the 'self' through the often negative attribution of characteristics to the 'other' "(p.159). Singh (1999) in addition associates 'otherisation' with negative labelling, e.g. in terms of people's racial or ethnic identity.

This can be illustrated in cases of xenophobia in South Africa where people from foreign countries, particularly East and West African countries are addressed as

*'makwere-kwere'*<sup>2</sup>. This difference between foreigners and South African citizens is characterised in factors such as language, 'accents', skin colour and tone. These differences are perceived to be significant and mark the non-South Africans as 'the other', hence they are marginalised and often stigmatised by the South African community. There is an existing generalisation among most South African citizens that foreigners are illegal immigrants who implement criminal practices in the country. While such cases exist, this generalisation implies that all foreigners are involved in corrupt practices when in actual fact there are legal immigrants from other African countries who are respectable members of society, especially in the academic arena, but who are still marginalised and negatively labelled. Holliday et al (2004) further puts forward that this process of otherisation dictates that these individuals who constitute 'the other' are passive agents in the formation of their identities. They argue that, "does not allow for the agency of other people to be a factor in their identity construction. It does not permit the negotiation of the identity between people, but imposes crude, often reductive identities on others" (Ibid. 159).

### **1.2. Language and identity**

The aspects of identity construction through 'difference' and the process of otherization are very evident in relation to language, which is the central focus of this project. Language is a significant part of identity both at and beyond the individual level. This point is highlighted by Wa Thiong'o (1986) who argues that, "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed, in relation to the universe" (p.25). According to Thornborrow (1999) language enables us to establish our identity and it plays a role in shaping other people's views of who we are. In other words, it is through the way we speak that we create a sense of ourselves and allow people to create perceptions of us. He further indicates that our dignity, worth and integrity is

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<sup>2</sup> Derogatory term for 'foreigner'



carried by the language in which we communicate. Spencer (1985) agrees and points out that language possesses a certain meaning and value for its speakers and for listeners. He argues that,

"We need to recognise that languages have a symbolic value, both for their speakers and for those who come into contact with them. It is true to say that a community's sense of integrity and identity is bound up with its language, the primary vehicle for its culture" (p. 392).

Dirven (1995) states that language is described as carrying various cultural meanings and values which enable intense communication and connections between members of the cultural community. In this way a sense of belongingness and warmth is created. Dirven suggests that language enables people to belong to a common world of meaning as illustrated in this way, "...the main function of language is to symbolise the experiences, the knowledge, wisdom, values and norms of a cultural community allowing communication as a continuous process of reference to this universe of thought" (p. 50). This statement indicates the great 'overlap' between language and culture, meaning that individuals' way of life and the way they present themselves in various settings is a dynamic interplay of the individuals' language as a marker of identity and the situation.

As indicated above, language is important in the development and 'preservation' of one's culture. Each and every word or phrase uttered in one's language is significant as a marker of one's heritage that will be carried from generation to generation. This preservation of experiences and language promotes a sense of community and 'belongingness' whereby unity and 'oneness' is celebrated. The above statement highlights that one's language allows one to live their culture and hence promote understanding of the 'sayings', idioms, myths and taboos that are associated with one's culture. The understanding of one's culture in this way, therefore leads to the understanding of one's self and one's collective cultural identity, which promotes a sense of belongingness in a specific cultural

community. Woodward (1997) indicates that 'difference' which is characteristic of identity and language can be viewed as positive and "...can be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity, where the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching" (p. 35). Again the South African context is an appropriate reflection of this point in which the eleven official languages possess a distinct richness and diversity that collectively contribute to South Africa being termed 'The Rainbow Nation'. Hall (1996) argues that this cultural and linguistic diversity creates a degree of cultural competence and allows individuals to be more accommodative of each other's cultural positions.

Singh (1999) further points out the positive aspect of 'difference' in linguistic terms especially in ethnic minorities, who could aim to preserve their mother-tongue through their participation in cultural and perhaps religious practices that promote 'oneness' in the community. However, these positive views of diversity do not take sufficient account of the power differentials expressed in diversity. Language is essential in the process of 'otherisation' and difference in the construction of identity. On the one hand, language promotes a sense of 'belongingness' with others who speak the same language as us while on the other hand, language is understood to promote a sense of division. This point is illustrated by Holliday et al (2004) in this way: "...language is a bridge between people, but it is also a wall that divides people. Perhaps as noticeable as the colour of one's skin, the noises one makes to communicate with other human beings is an obvious indicator of 'difference' "(p. 185).

Wareing and Thomas (1999) focus on the relationship between power and language where power is demonstrated and achieved through language. Such power through language is demonstrated in both public and private domains. In the public sphere for instance, political power exists in language terms through debates, speeches, written laws, the conduction of debates and the rules of who may speak during such debates. In the private domain of the family context,

language used by parent to child and child to parent is illustrative of power dynamics that exist between the two, where the parent is often an authority figure and therefore 'powerful' in that sense. Power also exists among languages themselves where certain languages are more 'powerful' than others and hence dominant over less powerful languages. This concept is explained by Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) who put forward that the languages of African states are understood in the political and economic terms of their countries. Some languages are 'powerful' and are termed majority languages, which empower their speakers while others are 'powerless' and are termed minority languages, which dis-empower their speakers. They further state that the power of a language is dictated by its functional value (what functions it can perform) and the status and prestige of the language. In addition, Wareing and Thomas (1999) state that the elite of high social class for instance, politicians, lawyers, and other influential people in society, have most control over language and hence language in most cases serves in the interest of these dominant groups. They further state that the less dominant and less powerful people in society are 'oppressed' by being denied a 'voice' in which they can freely express themselves in ways that they choose to.

There is a no 'real' basis for these power differentials between languages. As Spencer (1985) argues, languages are naturally equal in terms of their grammatical and semantic value and the capabilities of enriching and empowering their communities. However, external factors such as the functional value and prestige of the language in relation to other issues of power, e.g. socioeconomics, have resulted in inequality of languages. This point is highlighted by Spencer (1985) below:

"...all languages are fully formed, highly delicate in their grammatical and semantic systems, and capable, given the opportunity, of handling every aspect of the experience and thought and culture of the community to which they belong. It seems as if they all have, intrinsically, and equal capacity to

expand their resources in order to accommodate to the developing communicative needs of their community. In this sense, then, from a structural point of view, all languages are equal, equal that is, intrinsically. The extrinsic factors are however, by no means equal" (p. 390).

As a result of these extrinsic factors that determine whether a language will constitute the majority or the minority, Spencer (1985) points to the fact that some languages will continue to grow in terms of their functionality while others will stay restricted and confined for domestic, local, traditional and interpersonal purposes. Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) state that as a result of the 'power' factor that is extrinsic in languages, people tend to learn only the languages that are socially and economically useful to them. This tendency has consequences for both powerful and less powerful languages.

Rudwick (2004) states that if a language possesses a low status in terms of economic and social factors, the speakers of the language are more likely to abandon it for another 'high' status variety. According to Thornborrow (1999) this can result in the loss of a language and hence the loss of an identity. Day (1985) puts forward the term 'linguistic genocide' which results from the replacement of indigenous languages by dominant languages, which he reports to result in the permanent death of the indigenous language if it lacks native speakers. He indicates however that the language can be preserved in the form of written records or it can be preserved through some religious or art forms which require the use of the indigenous language. Fishman (1991) suggests that these shifts in identity can be observed collectively across generations, resulting in "...speech communities whose native languages are threatened because their intergenerational continuity is proceeding negatively, within fewer and fewer users (speakers, readers, writers, and even understanders) or users of every generation " (p. 1).

Kamwangamalu (2003) cites a number of factors that are responsible for

language shift and maintenance which interact with one another and do not work independently, i.e. generation, the numerical strength of a group in relation to other minorities and majorities, language status, socio-economic value, education and institutional support as well as government policies. He illustrates this concept of language shift in relation to English, Afrikaans, Indian and African languages where there is a rapid increase in the use of English by members of these various South African speech communities. Perhaps this shift in the public spheres of education, economics and politics is well recognised. However Kamwangamalu further states that English is rapidly becoming the medium of communication in the family domain, which has been historically reserved for indigenous languages.

#### **1.2.1. The dominance of English**

English seems to be the most dominant language in South Africa although only a small population use it as their first language. This has been indicated by Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) who state that less than 10% of the South African population speak English as their first language, however, it is the most widely used by speech groups for whom it is not their first language. Rudwick (2004) in addition, notes that although English is a minority language in terms of people who speak it as their first language, it is still spoken by most people in Kwazulu-Natal and in most parts of South Africa. Malan and Walker (1995) indicate that although English has a history of colonialism, imperialism and elitism, it has been widely appropriated by speakers to whom it is not their first language in South Africa and in Africa. This, they report, has led to English being the most prestigious lingua franca.

South Africa was colonised by the Dutch from 1652 onwards, and by the British from 1806 onwards, which later joined forces in a Union of South Africa in 1910 and hence made both their languages official (Maphalala, 2000). South Africa then became a bilingual country where colonial languages English and Afrikaans

were the official languages and African languages had a limited role after South Africa was declared a Republic in 1961. There have been intense debates around the matter of colonisation and the effects of colonisation in South Africa and Africa, specifically on the fact that even though the era of colonialism has passed, colonial languages, and in particular English, are still dominating and have marginalised African indigenous languages. Colonialism and the use of colonial languages in African countries not only exist alongside indigenous languages but have also delayed the growth of indigenous languages and limited access for African languages to new domains (Spencer, 1999; Dirven, 1995). Spencer (1999) illustrates this point below,

"The introduction of the colonial languages into African societies, and their use as media of education and as communicative instruments for the modernising process, froze the opportunities for functional development of almost all the African languages" The association of foreign colonizing languages with socioeconomic and political power means that they "tended to be highly prized by the small elites, which colonialism produced and to whom power was passed...The majority of African languages thus remained boxed in, functionally restricted, with the cost of expanding their functions growing everyday more expensive" (p. 395).

Thus African elites have also appropriated the belief that African languages are non-functional in higher domains and hence advocate for the use of Western languages as official languages in their nations. Maphalala (2000) highlighted the fact that colonial languages, English included, have been the medium of instruction in schools from primary to tertiary level even after independence of African countries. This principle, according to Nigerian linguist Chinweizu (cited in Ramphela, 1995) is a sign of Africa's incomplete emancipation from colonial domination. The above views regarding colonialism and the effects that it has on African languages and its speakers puts into question whether African countries are linguistically and culturally independent. This point is indicated by Kembo-

Sure and Webb (2000) where they highlight that when taking a look at the Anglicization of everyday life, one would think that South Africa is still colonised linguistically and culturally. The participants in Rudwick's (2004) study on isiZulu and identity share the same view that linguistically, it is as though South Africa is still colonised as they are not educated in their mother tongue as revealed here,

"It is like we are still colonised, because every time in school we are told that we must always speak English, but in South Africa it is like we are not free. And even if I go and study I must always know English, so I need a dictionary. But we don't have money to buy dictionaries. Who said that English must be a communicative? Even Xhosa can be a communicative language. Because it is Xhosas who like Xhosa and Zulus like Zulu, English I think must go to England because it belongs to England" (p.166).

#### **1.2.1.1 English and upward mobility**

The English language has been associated with various social benefits as indicated by Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) who put forward that English has been associated with economic, educational benefits. Rudwick (2004) in addition states that in South Africa, one has to be proficient in English in order to succeed professionally and economically. In essence, English has been identified as the 'language of upward mobility' (Rudwick, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Dirven, 1995). Most employers maintain that their employees must have the ability to speak and be literate in 'standard' English at the work place. (Thomas and Wareing, 1999) Ager (2001) further states that most international policies and companies maintain that global transactions and corporations must be standardised in English.

Kamwangamalu (2003) illustrated that English dominates many arenas of life, e.g. where English is awarded more airtime in the medium of television and radio. Pandor (1995) in addition highlighted that a large percentage of speeches in parliament are conducted in English and only a small percentage in African

languages. In a study conducted by Ogle (1999) in the Limpopo Province<sup>3</sup> regarding the attitudes of people towards English, a participant depicted the significance of English and wealth in the following statement, "In this country, if you have no money and cannot speak English you are not a human being"(p.70). Another study conducted by de Klerk and Barkhuizen (2000) regarding attitudes towards language usage in South Africa highlighted the significance of English for occupational opportunities in this statement, "in the new South Africa you have to know English to get the job" (p.68). This further reinforces the point that English proficiency is essential in the workplace.

#### **1.2.1.2 The use of English in education**

English has also been associated with academic achievements. This point is illustrated by Rudwick (2004) where she argues that English has acquired its property of high status by the fact that it is a leading language in the world, the medium of global and international communication and the language of academic scholarship. Rudwick further states that English is still the medium of instruction in all secondary and tertiary institutions in South Africa. Virasamy (1997) reports that in a survey of a Durban high school pupils' attitude towards English, the participants perceived the English language as a language that promotes success for individuals who are proficient in it. The structure of education policies has been described to favour colonial languages as opposed to African languages. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1995) argue that there are little finances for education policies in African languages while educational programmes in colonial languages are highly aided. They indicate this point below:

"...the result was a linguistic concern with the learning of the official colonial language and neglect of the African mother tongues. A vast amount of the "aid" effort has gone into teacher education and curriculum development in and through the former colonial languages, and disproportionately little into

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<sup>3</sup> Limpopo is one among the nine provinces of South Africa.



other African languages" (p. 340).

Maphalala (2000) utilized the case of isiZulu to highlight the point that African languages are 'sidelined' as a medium of instruction in the education sector. In these statements below, Maphalala reflects five points that touch on the fact that English and Afrikaans are medium of instruction and also utilized in the administration of the school, yet isiZulu is an official language. These five points that are reflected below:

"...the position of isiZulu in Kwazulu-Natal has now become even weaker than before...firstly the question of introducing mother-tongue education, at least at primary level, has not yet been addressed...secondly correspondence with the head office of the schools is now only in English and Afrikaans...thirdly the procedures for the election of governing bodies are all in English and Afrikaans, none of the circulars is ever in isiZulu...fourthly, thousands of textbooks and other materials are mainly in English...fifthly, the so-called additive bilingualism policy is an indirect way of promoting pre-1994 bilingualism-meetings with school inspectors of education are conducted in English because a few English, Indian, Coloured and Afrikaans teachers do not understand isiZulu" (2000:154).

#### **1.2.1.3. English, struggle and liberation**

According to Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) the socio-political status of the other colonial language, Afrikaans, is ambivalent in the sense that it is a powerful symbol of ethnic identity in some sectors of the white community, hence becoming a significant factor in ethnic and socio-cultural mobilization and conflict. However, for many, Afrikaans is considered to be 'the language of the oppressor' and is still stigmatised in many communities for its connection with apartheid and the political ideology of the National party, which was supported mainly by Afrikaans-speaking whites and governed South Africa for nearly fifty years. During the apartheid era, Afrikaans was an important language of the workplace,

however, due to social changes and the loss of political power of the Afrikaner, this may be changing. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1995) indicate the prestige and pride that the Boers had during the apartheid government and a view that Afrikaans was equated with not only cultural but spiritual values, "in racially hierarchical South Africa the Boers saw themselves as a 'chosen race'. As God had selected them, then Afrikaans was logically the language of God" (p.337). In this context, English, although a colonial language, was often seen as the 'language of liberation' (Rudwick, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2003). This point is further established by Lucko (2003) who points out that English was utilised by the ANC members as a symbol of the struggle for liberation against apartheid. Liberation and freedom are an integral part of human integrity and can manifest in several forms, such as linguistically, culturally and academically. Liberation on a linguistic level is a powerful force for human empowerment. This concept is described by Freire and Macedo (1987) who put forward that literacy becomes a meaningful concept to the extent and degree that it empowers or disempowers people. This means that empowerment of the individual or speaker of a language should be the basis of communication and proficiency in a language and no language must be sidelined or marginalised.

According to Alexander (2003) every human being has the right to choose which language he or she is most comfortable in, to conduct their significant routines, (e.g., school and church) provided that these languages are prevalent in their country of residence. However, if the language is prejudiced or marginalised, it then serves to disempower the speaker. If people are unable to freely express themselves in any language, "...they are necessarily disempowered, unable to be part of the decision-making process of the society concerned and unable to make or to influence the concrete decisions that affect vital aspects of their lives" (p.9). Liberation can be described in cultural terms, whereby expression in one's own language creates cultural belongingness and self-worth, this is in line with the fact that one's language is symbolic of one's culture. Dirven (1995) in addition states that communication and expression in one's own language allows a

cultural community to have access to its own history. Freire and Macedo (1987) put forward that it is through their language that people will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture and, in this way, one's own voice is developed, leading to the development of a positive sense of self-worth.

There have been various debates in relation to indigenous African languages and their position as a medium of instruction in schools. This has been a sensitive issue particularly with the reference to the 'low' status associated with indigenous languages. Malan and Walker (1995) point out that African languages are termed to be 'inferior and tribal' and lack the scientific, educational and international status that English has, as claimed by Webb (1995). While in the past there was implementation of mother-tongue education in 1955 to 1975, the policy of mother tongue and bilingual education ceased in South Africa as indicated by Heugh and Mahlalela (2002). They further state that resistance to African languages as the medium of education was based largely on the argument that African languages lack uniformity in spelling and 'sufficient terminology'. Re-implementing of the use of mother tongue education has not happened in post-apartheid South Africa because it would involve high costs.

Heugh and Mahlalela (2002) report that several books and publications in African languages have been made and stored in South African libraries, departments of African languages as well neighbouring countries. They further indicate that textbooks and readers in seven South African languages were used throughout primary schooling in the Bantu Education schools between 1955 and 1975. These textbooks were financed at the time when lesser resources were allocated to Bantu education whereas more resources were allocated for English and Afrikaans- speaking pupils. Freire and Macedo (1987) advocate for mother-tongue education and highlight the significance of mother-tongue education as a tool for empowerment and liberation. They say that the primary language of the student should be given top priority because students learn to read faster and

with a better understanding when they are taught in their native language. They further state that it is important for subordinate students to learn in their own mother tongue because it promotes liberation and an awakening about the way they view themselves in the world. In this way a sense of empowerment is fulfilled and achieved when one communicates in one's mother tongue. Maphalala (2000) agrees with Freire and Macedo and argues that current South African educational policies indicate a reinforcement of sidelining African languages and hence a retardation of Black economic empowerment as indicated below,

"When Black children are receiving their education through "foreign languages", it is absurd to talk about equal opportunities. One could rather argue that the existing situation is the perpetuation of inequalities and alienation in education. It will lead neither to Black people's economic upliftment nor to the enhancement of their creativity, especially since the education is not based on African cultural values" (p.150).

A Black consciousness position has been adopted in the form of liberating African languages and African people from the negatives associated with apartheid and the marginalisation of African languages by the colonial languages. This position aims to promote the development of African languages so that they can serve as high-functioning languages in the education and public domain. According to Ramphela (1995) black consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life that involves the realisation that unity among Africans (Black people) can defeat oppression. Further indicated is that Black consciousness involves Black people creating their own schemes, forms and strategies they need to create an awareness keeping in mind the beliefs and values against oppression.

Kamwangamalu (2003) has adopted this position by saying that a certified knowledge of African languages must be a criterion for political participation, employment and access to civil service. In this way, African languages will be associated with high functions, which in turn will increase their status. This point

is also shared by Maphalala (2000) who states that all South Africans must be obliged to learn African languages as a way of preserving African languages. Alexander (2004) puts forward that intervention at many different levels is necessary for the preservation of African languages and their freedom from the domination by European languages. Freire and Macedo (1987) argue for new literary programs that promote emancipation of the previously 'oppressed' whereby they are able to participate in the social and cultural change of their society is necessary. There is also great responsibility placed on the African elite, that is, scholars and politicians, to assist in the development and promotion of African languages. Wa Thiong'o (1986) is of the opinion that writing in one's mother tongue as opposed to a colonial language preserves one's culture while allowing people to know their roots. Nonetheless Achebe (1975) has a different view of preserving culture and tradition, where he advocates that the African writer must reflect on African tradition and culture in the form of text written in English. In this way, the writer reflects about African experiences in a language that is well known and can connect with and communicate to a wider global community.

#### **1.2.1.4 The global context**

Globalisation has resulted in the rapid spread of the English language, the extension of a new kind of cultural imperialism and hence the marginalisation of African languages. Kamwangamalu (2003) puts forward the fact that English is and continues to be the most widely spread language in the world, even by people for whom it is not their first language. Alexander (2003) also points out that the rapid spread of English through the process of globalisation has had consequences for the language issue in South Africa. Kamwangamalu (2003) argues that,

"Since human beings are dependent on one another for the production of the means of subsistence, they necessarily co-operate in the labour process and in order to do so, they have to communicate with one another. In this process

of communication, language plays the most important role" (p.8).

Hannerz (1990) in addition is of the view that globalisation has led to a network of social relationships and hence a variety of understandings and meanings of the relationships around us, whereby people from different parts of the world have become more aware of each other's cultures and languages. This may also paradoxically lead to a strengthening of local indigenous cultures, as indicated below,

"The cultural homogeneity promoted by global marketing could lead to the detachment of identity from community and place. Alternatively, it could also lead to resistance, which could strengthen and reaffirm some national and local identities or lead to the emergence of new identity positions" (Hannerz, 1997:16).

According to Achebe (1975) the English language carries a history of racial arrogance and prejudice, however, he thinks we must acknowledge the positive qualities that are associated with it. To him although colonialism has resulted in segregation of certain ethnic groups, English and other colonial languages have facilitated communication among different ethnic groups. Achebe (1975) further contends that communication among people from African countries, where they are even able to talk amongst one another about political matters has been facilitated through colonial languages. His point is indicated below:

"Of course there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided up a single ethnic group among two or even three powers. But on the whole, it did bring together many people that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another....The only reason why we can even talk about African unity is that when we get together we can have a manageable number of languages to talk in- English, French, Arabic" (Achebe, 1975:31).

Achebe (1975) further states that English allows many different writers from different ethnic identities to connect through reading each other's work and thus learn more about their culture and tradition. He further argues that if authors write

in their mother tongue, other authors and readers who do not identify with their native language will not be able to read the works. Achebe illustrates this through his personal experience in two instances with two African writers where one used English in their work and the other used their mother tongue. Achebe puts forward this point below:

“The other day I had a visit from Joseph Kariuki of Kenya. Although I had read some of his poems and he had read my novels, we had not met before. But it didn’t seem to matter. In fact, I had met through his poems, especially through his love poem, ‘Come Away My Love’, in which he captures in so few words the trials and tensions of an African in love with a white girl in Britain ...By contrast, when in 1960 I was travelling in East Africa and went to the home of the late Shaman Robert, the Swahili poet of Tanganyika, things had been different. We spent some time talking about writing, but there was no real contact. I knew from all accounts that I was talking to an important writer, but if the nature of his work I had no idea. He gave me two books of his poems which I treasure but cannot read-until I have learnt Swahili” (1975:31).

### **1.3. IsiZulu and identity**

IsiZulu is the most commonly spoken indigenous language in South Africa as reported by Rudwick (2004) who documents that isiZulu serves as a lingua franca for 70% of the country’s population, while English can presently be used efficiently by 20% of the population. IsiZulu in this regard can be described to possess a unifying element among its speakers. Although isiZulu has low status in comparison to English, Rudwick concludes that isiZulu is dominant when measured against the other eight indigenous official South African languages. Wood (1995) disagrees with this statement and puts forward that although isiZulu serves as the *lingua franca* in the majority of the South African citizens, it excludes the rest of the South African population and it is therefore not likely to become a unifying force. Rudwick (2004) explored how Umlazi participants felt about isiZulu. The results indicated that the participants perceived the language

as central to their cultural identity as indicated below,

"I love Zulu me. Me, as a Zulu person it's right to me because I know my culture and I know my tradition and I'm proud of what I am. So, it's right to learn what I want, and its good to learn from the old people and the things that the old people have done and what they have told me to do from home. It's right to do those things because I believe in all those things" (p.164).

The mother-tongue, more especially in relation to Africans in South Africa is associated with a relaxed, familiar context, while English is associated with a 'rigid' environment such as the school context. IsiZulu is considered pivotal to home, family and culture as indicated here, "I will always speak Zulu at home ...we must not forget where we came from. Because if you can think of some people, they never go back to their culture" (Rudwick, 2004:164).

Bowerman (2000) conducted a study of language use in urban Black communities in the Western Cape, the results indicated that the respondents use their African language in their interactions with older family members rather than English. Rudwick (2004) made a similar study on language and Umlazi learners, the results revealed that 84% of the participants speak only isiZulu with their parents, while 11% use a mixture of both isiZulu and English to communicate with their parents. 1.5% of the learners use English to communicate with their parents at home. Rudwick postulates that isiZulu is not only dominant in the home, but is still used as a medium of communication in schools, shops and other public places. She further states that it is still used greatly among manual workers in South Africa. The language also serves as a cultural identification beyond narrow ethnicity to connect people to a sense of 'Africanness' as indicated by a participant in Rudwick's study: "Mina ngiyaluthanda ulimi lwami futhi ngiyakuthanda kuba wuhlanga olumnyama ngoba vele ngimnyama [I love my language and I love to be of the Black nation because indeed I am Black (Rudwick, 2004:164).



The idea of a multilingual society promotes equality of all eleven official languages in South Africa. However, several authors have criticised the fact that African languages are not being promoted and developed in the context of the multilingual society and that the policies are still in the favour of English. Kamwangamalu (2003) puts forward that although the language policy in South Africa says that each provincial government must use at least two official languages, often in South Africa, the languages are English and another language and not any two languages aside from English. Therefore in this way, English still remains powerful. Rudwick (2004) agrees with Kamwangamalu (2003) where she reflects that the multilingual state of South Africa is not effective as English still continues to hold a powerful place in various domains such as mass media, the educational system and government services. This brings forward the conception that the delayed growth of the indigenous languages can be attributed to planning and language use of several structures at the political and individual level. In terms of the individual level, there is a conception that African people have themselves contributed to the low-functional value of African languages. Kamwangamalu (2003) illustrates this phenomenon with reference to the Bantu education Act which among other things exercised the extension of mother-tongue education from Grade 4 to Grade 8. This policy was not welcomed by the African pupils as they perceived "education in their mother-tongue as a barrier to more advanced learning and a lure to self-destruction" (Kamwangamalu, 2003:75).

Kamwangamalu (2003) further states that this resistance to the Bantu Education act and the apartheid government to implement the policy then led to the Soweto uprisings of June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1976. The 1976 Soweto uprisings are an event of great significance for the concepts of language and identity and the relationship between the two. The uprisings were a result of the Black youths' resistance towards instruction in Afrikaans which they saw as the language of oppression, preferring to be educated in the English language which they saw as the language of emancipation. Similarly, English was preferred over mother tongue

instruction, with African indigenous languages seen as inferior. Since language is an element of identity, this therefore means that the language one speaks is a crucial part of one's identity. According to Kamwangamalu, the resistance by African youth to the Bantu Education Act through the events of the Soweto uprisings reflected not only resistance to instruction in Afrikaans but also in the mother-tongue which was equated with 'inferior education'. This boosted the status of English over indigenous African languages as well as Afrikaans. Kamwangamalu (2003) further states that since then, mother-tongue education has been stigmatised. This is reflected by Rudwick (2004) who states that many parents today place their children in schools which use English as the medium of instruction. This point goes hand in hand with what Alexander (2004) puts forward that a large majority of African people do not believe that their languages can perform high functions and that they serve only domestic domains such as the family, the community and church. Kamwangamalu (2003) in addition indicates that African people feel that their languages cannot sustain them and that there has been a marked decrease in the numbers of students who register in African languages in universities which offer tuition in African languages.

The literature reviewed portrays a comprehensive picture of the history of languages, particularly English, Afrikaans and African indigenous languages in the South African context and the status of the respective languages in terms of their history, functional ability and credibility, which has been greatly influenced by significant political movements such as the 1976 Soweto uprisings. This overview of the literature, indicates the pivotal role played by language in relation to the history of education in South Africa and in relation to wider questions of the politics of identity. The literature offers a framework for exploring the ways Black youth define themselves and their identity in a post democratic South Africa. The dominance of English over Afrikaans and African indigenous languages in the economic and academic sectors is very evident but at the same time, English has also been criticised for limiting opportunities for development in African languages, such as isiZulu. The centrality of these indigenous languages in

relation to culture and identity is well documented in the literature and points to an ambivalence and fracturedness in identity with respect to language.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The research approach utilised qualitative methods to explore how youth from a township school in Durban define their identity post-apartheid, particularly in relation to language. This study is largely concerned with participants' own reflections on the world around them and sense of themselves. According to Stead and Struwig (2001) qualitative research acknowledges the individual's environment and how the individual and their environment interact dynamically with one another and therefore facilitates a holistic view.

According to Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994) qualitative research acknowledges the 'existing gap' between an 'object of study' and the way it is presented. They further state that the process of interpretation, which is not static and constantly changing, forms a bridge between these 'objects of study' and the way they are presented. This 'gap' provides an opportunity for the researcher to bring their own understanding to a situation in much the same way as a reader would to a text. The process of interpretation need not separate theory and empirical work, where the latter is used to 'test' theory, rather, qualitative work views theory and empirical work as intertwined throughout the research process (Bannister et al. 1994). Stead and Struwig (2001) in addition put forward that qualitative researchers begin the research process in an open and unstructured manner, using theories as the research progresses rather than using theory at the initial phases of the research. They report that this maximises the ability of sensitivity to unexpected events, which would probably be overlooked if one started the research process on a rigid theory-reliant approach.

Stead and Struwig (2001) report that qualitative researchers do not view reality as 'external' to them, in this way, the researcher is subjectively involved in the

research process and through this involvement, the process of change is facilitated. Sarantakos (1994) in addition reports that in qualitative research, reality is created through the process of interaction and interpretation, of which the researcher is an integral part. This interpretive process utilises relatively small sample sizes during the research process and avoids generalising their findings to represent the wider population, outside of their sample size (Bannister, 1994; Stead and Struwig, 2001).

## **2.2. Participants**

According to Stead and Struwig (2001) sampling in qualitative research need not involve random selection and generalisability as is the case in quantitative research. They further state that the primary focus of qualitative research is on the richness of the data, therefore qualitative researchers select their samples purposively as opposed to randomly. For the purpose of this research, learners from a township school were selected. Twenty-one grade ten learners from a township school in Durban voluntarily engaged in this research as participants. They were chosen as participants based on their age (14-16 years old) as this is typically an age of identity exploration and construction. Their level of education (Grade 10) was also a factor, allowing them to use both English and isiZulu in discussion and engage in a process of reflection and debate characteristic of focus groups. Gender was not a selection variable in this project and the focus groups consisted of an even number of male and female participants.

## **2.3. Data collection**

For purposes of this research project semi-structured focus groups were utilised as a form of data collection. In order to explore young people's views, a series of focus group discussions were held. In order to provide a trigger for these discussions, the participants read and discussed a text called by Zakes Mda (1997). This text is a story involving a young boy (who is about the same age as the subjects of the study) and his daily experiences with issues involving race, language and class, ethnicity, morality and independence in a newly democratic

Johannesburg. In reading this book with the participants, conversation about such themes was facilitated in a non-threatening way.

The sessions were structured around the particular themes, but were also open for the participants to redirect as they wished. This enabled an in-depth understanding of the participants' views as well as the context in which these views and opinions were generated. It also allowed for the participants to relax and feel comfortable enough to express their opinions in the company of their classmates and friends.

Focus groups were selected as the vehicle for the project based on various strengths that they possess. Sarantakos (1994) put forward that focus groups involve mutual stimulation that characterises group settings which enhances and maximises discussions around topical issues. Sarantakos further states that focus groups should allow spontaneous expression of the real and emotional views of the participants. According to Stead and Struwig (2001), focus groups facilitate a safe environment where participants are free from criticism and promote in-depth discussions of suitable topics for questionnaire construction. Sarantakos in addition states that focus groups emphasise on the process, attitudes and opinions of group members and the public in general.

The data were collected through two focus groups run by the author and a co-researcher. Language is central to this project and it is of significance to comment on the language dynamics during the sessions. The focus group facilitated by the author were run in English as the author is a non-isiZulu speaker, however, the focus group facilitated by the co-researcher allowed for communication in isiZulu since the co-researcher is an isiZulu speaker. For most sessions, the participants were grouped together into one focus group which was run by both facilitators. IsiZulu was used more often than English for those sessions. The focus groups were run once a week on Thursdays from 1pm to 3pm for ten sessions, over three months at the school premises in a township in

Durban. Each session was tape-recorded. Initially the book was read aloud chapter by chapter with the participants, however as the sessions progressed, certain sections of the book were used to trigger discussions among the participants. Such sections focused on the use of English, isiZulu, Afrikaans and other African languages as well as African and foreign 'accents' and the consequences this had for the speaker.

The learners did not work individually on the tasks, rather the whole group engaged in an open discussion that revolved around the sections of the book that focused on language. The participants were each given journals which were specifically for issues that are related to the project. The participants took these journals home with them and were requested to bring them every Thursday for the focus groups. The participants were asked to utilise these journals as notebooks, to note any issues or matters of relevance they experienced when reading the text outside of the focus groups.

They were urged to raise these issues for discussion on Thursdays when the focus groups were run, particularly during the 'open sessions'. Questions were not designed to test the participant's knowledge or reading approach to the text, they were not a measure of how well they knew the book. Questions were intended to get them to discuss the events in the book that are similar to their lives and get them to talk about them. For the purposes of this study, only the sessions that specifically focused on language were selected and transcribed for analysis, i.e. four out of the ten sessions that were used for the project as a whole.

Denzin (2001) states that 'thick description' focuses on ways in which all social categories emerge and intersect in people's conception of themselves and their world. Denzin describes the descriptive and interpretive thick description to involve interpretations that occur within the experience as it is lived. In this way this form of thick description illustrates how interpretations shape interaction and

experience. This principle of data collection was utilised in the project in that the individuals related the interpretations of their 'selves' and positions in society with both their lived experiences and interactions in the focus groups enabled increasingly rich descriptions and interpretations of these experiences to be jointly constructed.

#### **2.4. Data analysis**

According to Stead and Struwig (2001) qualitative data analysis enables the researcher to organise and bring meaning to large amounts of data. They further state that before attempting to analyse the data, the interview transcripts should be typed verbatim and not rephrased to be grammatically correct. For the purposes of this research, thematic analysis was used as a method of qualitative analysis. According to Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis is a process that involves encoding qualitative information, which requires an explicit 'code'. Boyatzis describes a three step process of thematic analysis to establish the 'pattern' from the transcripts which is followed by arranging and classifying the pattern, and finally an interpretation of the pattern.

Data were collected through focus groups, audio-taped and all the tape recorded sessions were transcribed<sup>4</sup>. Sections of the transcripts that focused on language or could be related to language either directly or indirectly were extracted. These marked sections were critically and carefully read over to identify evolving patterns, these patterns were then encoded and classified into coded themes which were then interpreted in the context in which they occurred. The anonymity of the participants is of crucial importance therefore in the presentation of the analysis, the names of the participants have been substituted. The four transcripts that were used for analysis were assigned numbers and dates when the session was tape-recorded, in that order.

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<sup>4</sup> Transcripts are available under separate cover.

Data analysis followed two approaches: Initially it focused a deductive approach and then progressed to an inductive approach. According to Diesing (1971) the deductive approach involves the application of a model to information or data to gain insight which will be utilised to test hypothesis or to search for inconsistencies and anomalies. Mason, (2002) in addition postulates that this approach follows a 'theory first' phenomenon whereby the theory is tested on or measured against data. Mason further states that this 'hypothetico-deductive method' is based on the principle that theoretical propositions or hypothesis are prepared in advance of the entire research process and then modified through falsification, which according to Popper (1972) is the logical process of trying to prove that a hypotheses is wrong. In essence, Mouton (1996) describes the deductive approach to involve the testing of existing theories and derivation of hypotheses from the theory to collect evidence which either supports or rejects the hypotheses.

According to Boyatzis (1998) the inductive approach involves the construction of data driven codes inductively from the raw data, whereby the researcher works directly with the raw information which in turn increases appreciation of the meanings of the participants themselves. He further put forward that this approach is highly sensitive to the context of the raw information, therefore validity is highly maximised. The inductive approach according to Mason (2002) follows a 'theory last' phenomenon whereby theory comes last and is developed from or through data generation and analysis. In this approach, the data analysis process is underway during the course of data generation. Mason further states that in the inductive approach, one scrutinises data to create explanations which appear to fit the data.

These two data analysis approaches were followed in the following way: Initially the main focus of the project and the point of discussion were centred on identity construction, assuming certain broad principles of identity construction. The starting point of the research process was conducted in close alliance with the



theory as suggested by the deductive reasoning approach. However, as the sessions progressed, language emerged as a central theme and hence the focus of the project shifted and was refined in response to the data. This is therefore in line with the inductive reasoning approach, during the data collection process, the author was also in the analysis phase which revealed a pertinent theme and therefore the research process was modified as guided by the emerging data.

According to Denzin (2001) thick description captures the meanings that certain actions have for the individuals through personal experience stories, self-stories, collecting slices of interaction and interviews. Denzin further states that the interpretation of thick description takes place on the surface (intended) level and the deep (unintended) level as an attempt to understand multiple meanings that are presented in the situational contexts. This approach was followed for this project, whereby the different opinions and views from the participants were understood in the context of where they occurred and the different interpretations of their experiences were utilised to 'build' patterns of understandings and meanings on both the surface and the deep level.

### **3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The use of the English language was understood in two contradictory ways by the participants, as both exploitative and beneficial. This ambivalent experience of the language is typical of (post)colonization and is clearly reflected in the literature, (e.g. Alexander, 2003; Kamwangamalu, 2003). The benefits of English relate to participation in a range of public institutions, e.g. educational, legislative and economic, and for global or international interaction (e.g. Ager, 2001; Webb, 1995; and Pandor, 1995). However, in the process of adopting this language, there is a sense of 'loss' in relation to culture, community and even, sense of self. This view is emphasized by authors such as Freire and Macedo (1987), Kamwangamalu (2003) and Heugh and Mahlalela (2002). These authors put forward the oppressive or exploitive nature of English in relation to African languages and hence advocate for the use of African languages in a range of social institutions, to empower speakers of these languages.

Spencer (1999) argues that the use of colonial languages such as English in African countries has led to delayed growth of indigenous languages and has also limited access of indigenous languages to new domains. One participant is against English as a medium of instruction in African schools and believes that Africans must be educated in African languages:

**Puleng (4B 5/5 page 10) "And why are you listening to other people when they teach you with an English language and you learn with an English language because you are black, you have to learn in black language."**

This point is not only reflective of what Spencer (1999) puts forward in relation to the contribution of English to the retarded growth of African languages, the participant also highlights that one should have a choice with regards to the language they prefer to be taught in. This point is also congruent with Alexander's (2003) view that every individual has the right to choose any

language to conduct significant routines and for school purposes, provided it is a politically accepted language nationwide.

However, Achebe (1975) adopts a contrary position to Spencer (1999) where he argues that although global moves such as colonialism have resulted in high levels of contact and interaction between diverse cultural and ethnic groups, English as a colonial language has benefited African communities by facilitating communication among African people. African people are even able to talk about political matters amongst themselves through the use of colonial languages. English in this sense serves as a unifying language, facilitating communication among African nations. One participant highlights the significance of English for communication across races and ethnic groups as indicated below:

**Lineo (7B 6/6 page 33) “Yebo, kubalulekile ukuthi uyikhulume iEnglish so that beside abelungu or that abazali bethu abayithandi iEnglish, kukhona abanye abantu abangasazi isiZulu hahle, kahle. Angithi siyi multicultural country. Kukhona abantu abangasazi isiZulu abazi ezinye izilimi beside iEnglish nesiZulu.” [Yes, it is important that you speak English so that besides whites, or that our parents do not like English, there are other people who do not know isiZulu properly, properly. Isn’t so, that we are a multicultural country. There are people who do not know isiZulu; they know other languages beside English and isiZulu.]**

This point is consistent with Achebe’s (1975) argument that English serves as the language of unification among African nations and cross-culturally, promoting efficient communication among population groups despite their different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Five themes were identified in the analysis: 1) English as beneficial; 2) Resistance to English; 3) Speaking isiZulu: culture & identity; 4) Globalization & languages of the future; 5) Multilingualism for all?

### **3.1. English as beneficial**

English has been associated with a lot of educational, economic and social benefits (Kembo-Sure and Webb, 2000; Thomas, 1999; Kamwangamalu, 2004; Achebe, 1975). The participants express a range of benefits of English in South African society. They emphasise the significance of proficiency in English in the work environment, whereby the ability to communicate in English is viewed to increase the likelihood of obtaining jobs as the majority of people in the work environment communicate in English. The ability to communicate in English is also reported to provide easier access to various services and resources, since English is used as a medium of communication by most private and government institutions. Proficiency in English is viewed to increase and provide better educational opportunities and finally, through communication in English, people from other national groups and even other nationalities are able to understand one another.

#### **3.1.1. The world of work**

English is the language of preference in the world of work since in most job descriptions in the work environment, proficiency in English is a prerequisite. Not only is English associated with higher earnings, economic progression and upward social mobility, but it is also the language preferred by international companies for global transactions. This has been reflected in literature (e.g. Kamwangamalu, 2003; Ager, 2001; Thomas, 1999). Several participants assert the view that English is imperative for access to the job market. The following participant perceives English to be significant in the work environment because through the English language, effective communication amongst individuals is facilitated and economic upliftment is promoted:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 19) “...but if it's English we must speak English so that we can know how to communicate with other people, so it's better for our career.”**

Race seems to be a pertinent factor in the job environment in the sense that the world of work is considered to be largely constituted by the white population, therefore for one to be employed, proficiency in English is crucial for effective communication. This is indicated below:

**Lineo (4B 5/5 page 14) “...some jobs there are many white people, so how can you find a job if you cannot speak English? How can you speak coz some English people do not understand Zulu? At least you must speak English so that you can get a job.”**

**Onalenna (7B 6/6 page 36) “Ngeke uthi uyosebenza lapha edrobheni nabelungu ufike ukhulume isiZulu kumele ukhulume isiNgisi, uzosebenza kanjani ngoba ngeke bakuzwe. Kufanele usifunde isiNgisi.” [It won't happen if you work here in town with whites that you go and speak isiZulu, you must speak English. How would you work because they won't hear you? It is a must that you learn English.]**

The reports from participants are in agreement with the literature (e.g. Rudwick, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2004) as there is a mutual emphasis on the significance of English for professional and economic success as well as the facilitation of effective communication.

### **3.1.2. Resources and services**

Language plays an important role in the administration and delivery of services, particularly in the South African context where there are eleven official languages and some individuals are familiar with one language and not the other. Language in a sense can be a barrier for accessing effective service delivery. As previously noted, English is a commonly used language in most companies and is also associated with effective communication. One participant puts forward the convenience of English proficiency particularly in health and safety emergency

situations. The participant reinforces that the work environment is constituted mostly by English speakers and a fraction of non-English speakers:

**Mphokoana (7B 6/6 page 39) “Ngithi mina kubalulekile futhi ukwazi iEnglish njengokuthi mhlambe uma kuwukuthi kune emergency ekhaya mhlambe kukhona ogulayo. Sekudingeke ukuthi ufonele iambulance sekuze waba nenhlanhla yokuthi mhlambe njalo uma uthi uyafona ufonela amaphoyisa or iambulance, utholane nomuntu okwazi ukukhuluma isiZulu ocingweni, so kubalulekile ukuthi sikwazi ukukhuluma iEnglish.” [I say, me that it is also important to know English just like maybe when there is an emergency at home maybe there is someone who is sick. And it is you are needed to phone the ambulance, maybe it is by luck that when you always phone the police or the ambulance that you get a person that knows how to speak isiZulu on the phone. So, it is important that we know how to speak English.]**

This point is consistent with what Achebe (1975) postulates about English and its role in promoting effective communication and goes even further to highlight the use of English proficiency in emergency situations.

### **3.1.3. Education**

The role played by English in the educational field has been enormously acknowledged. Although the English language has been described to dominate indigenous languages (e.g. Kamwangamalu, 2004; Spencer, 1999; Dirven, 1995), it is still the medium of instruction in all secondary and tertiary institutions and is the language that most African and Afrikaans-speaking parents prefer their children to be educated in (e.g. Rudwick, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2004). The participants acknowledge that English facilitates the learning process in the classroom. One participant illustrates this point by contrasting sentence construction in isiZulu and English and concludes that it is much easier and faster to construct sentences in English than isiZulu, as illustrated below:

**Manti (4B 5/5 page 8) “...Think about it if everything was written in Zulu [pauses] Durban transport [pauses] umhambo wa se thekwini. Think about it everything is [pauses] in Zulu so I prefer English because it is much easier.”**

The following participant has reservations regarding education in English however, the participant illustrates the positive role of English in education and argues that some subjects are best understood when taught in English:

**Moleboheng (5B 11/5 page 25) “I am not saying that they shouldn’t learn our languages, but I am saying that it is wrong that all subjects must be taught in our language because, not all [pauses] not that we learn all languages, all subjects in their languages, like we don’t learn biology in Afrikaans, but we learn it in English so that we can understand it.”**

The participants reinforce what the literature (e.g Kamwangamalu, 2004; Spencer, 1999; Dirven, 1995) proposes regarding the role of English in the academic arena. While African languages are greatly respected in their own right, English is seen as easy to comprehend and understand and hence preferred for academic purposes, by these participants.

#### **3.1.4. Fashionable and cool accents**

The idea of the spread of English through globalization has had a marked bearing on various populations both linguistically and culturally. Hannerz, (1990) asserts that globalization has led to a great cultural awareness across cultures, which may result in a detachment from one’s culture and community or alternatively, it could result in the strengthening of cultural identity. One participant emphasises that she is at times most delighted when words are spoken in western accents rather than indigenous accents because of their ‘coolness’:

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 12) “Not all the time but sometimes other words when you speak them they are cool, but when you speak them with your own accents, you can’t hear them.”**

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 12) “Sometimes I prefer foreign accents because sometimes when I hear them talk other accents, they are kinda cool so sometimes I speak their accents.”**

This ‘coolness’ is also celebrated in the appreciation of contemporary African music and television programmes, which are described to be definitive of the ‘new’ generation as opposed to umaskandi<sup>5</sup>. The era in which one grows up in is considered to be a clear indicator of the type of music that one would identify with. The participants signify their preference for more contemporary forms of African music (Jazz and Kwaito) over umaskandi because the contemporary forms are definitive of the ‘new’ generation, a generation that redefines Africanness as including cross-over cultural forms:

**Nthabiseng (7B 6/6 page 14) “Amakwaito, amajazz nani nani, asikhulelanga kumaskandi. Ukuba sikhulele kumaskandi ngabe siyawuthanda, that is why singawuthandi.” [Kwaito music, jazz etc.etc, we did not grow up with umaskandi. Had we grown up with umaskandi we would love it that is why we do not love it.]**

**Nthabiseng (7B 6/6 page 14) “Ngicabanga mina ukuthi umaskandi sometimes uyadingeka sometimes awudingeki. Kodwa sikhulele lapho whereby sidlalelwa izinto oma hip hop.” [I think [pauses] that there are times when umaskandi is needed and not needed. But we grew up where, whereby we are played things like hip-hop.]**

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<sup>5</sup> Traditional Zulu music.



The redefinition of Africa identity also includes art and entertainment not in the mother tongue. One participant reflects a preference for television channels which are run in English because of their wide variety of comedies and English dramas as opposed to channels which are run in isiZulu which offer only a few comedies:

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 19) “We watch more of the western ones because they have more comedies, drama of English, there are some of Zulu comedies, but they are not more than English.”**

The statements by the participants are reflective of the literature (e.g. Hannerz, 1990) since foreign accents and television programmes, the products of globalization, are being appropriated by African communities, hence creating cultural assimilation to dominant western culture and at the same time promoting deviation and detachment from African culture. In essence, the ‘new’ generation is characterized by contemporary forms of African music. While the participants appreciate umaskandi music, they express an interest in more ‘modified’, ‘refined’ forms of African music (Kwaito and Jazz) as well as English accents and westernised forms of television programmes.

### **3.1.5. Access to other worlds**

As indicated above, English serves as a link between various cultures on a musical level, through hip-hop, which facilitates a diverse musical insight, which is characterized by the ‘new’ generation. English has been established to be a medium of global communication (e.g. Rudwick, 2004; Wareing and Thomas, 1999; Ager, 2001). The English language as a global language has been described to have facilitated social relationships and a deeper understanding of people’s cultures among people from the different ethnic groups as well people from different racial and cultural backgrounds (e.g. Hannerz). Participants refer to English as a ‘universal’ language which can provide access to information and

exchange beyond the immediate confines of their community, the following participant asserts this view:

**Thabang (7B 6/6 page 46) “I don’t read isiZulu ngoba ngiyasazi, isiNgisi it is universal language whereby ufanele usazi. All the way where you go uzosithola isiNgisi nakumaprograms kumaradio everywhere, uyasithola isiNgisi. IsiZulu usithola gqwa gqwa (is very seldom used). IsiZulu ungaze usithole kwicommunity yakini noma kini noma esikoleni.” [I do not read isiZulu because I know it; English is a universal language whereby you must know it. All the way where you go you will find English and in programmes, in radio and everywhere you find English. You seldom find isiZulu. You almost find isiZulu in your community, and at your home, or at school.]**

There is an interesting code-switching evident from the above participant’s comment and the context within which the focus groups were held. The author is a non-isiZulu speaker and the speaker asserts the strength of English to facilitate communication between people from different ethnic groups. This point is congruent with what Achebe (1975) contends that English allows people from different ethnic groups to communicate. The participants highlight the significance of English for communication purposes on an inter-cultural level where English is viewed as a communication bridge across different cultural groups:

**Manti (4B 5/5 page 7) “English is better because blacks understand it, Whites understand it, Indians, coloureds [pauses] Even foreigners, they know how to speak English.”**

The ability to communicate in English is found to be useful in instances where there is a low likelihood of the ability to communicate in indigenous languages, this is put forward by the following participant:

**Moleboheng (5B 11/5 page 18) "...but in cases, like libraries in town, I try to communicate in English, you find that there are white people who cannot understand Zulu, like the Sotho's and Venda, so I at least try to communicate in English so that we understand each other."**

The significance of English to facilitate communication among African people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds has been illustrated by Achebe, (1975). Interestingly, this point is evident in the discussion by participants where English is identified as an important means of communication with other African people in the South African community, therefore facilitating communication across the different ethnic identities in South Africa. This is indicated below:

**Manti (4B 5/5 page 8) "...it is for the good of everyone, some of us are here in Durban and we are not Zulu, we have Sotho people, we have Tswana, we have Amampondo is all here in Durban, so it is easier for them to understand."**

Different cultural and linguistic backgrounds need not hinder communication as indicated by the following participant:

**Onalenna (7B 6/6 page 38) "Mina ngithi it is important ukuthi wazi isiNgesi cause it is the main language esicommunicate ngaso lapha e South Africa, even if ungumXhosa, umSotho but if bazi iEnglish bobawu 2 ningacommunicata ngaso noma ungasazi iziXhosa." [Me, I say it is important that you know English because it is the main language that we communicate with here in South Africa, even if you are Xhosa, you are Sotho but if they both know English, they communicate with it even if you do not know Xhosa.]**

One participant enforces the importance of learning indigenous languages by all South Africans despite their proficiency in English so as to promote greater linguistic knowledge as indicated below:

**Lineo ( 4B 5/5 page 17) “Ehh [pauses] last year December, I heard a friend, she lived in East London and she was a Sotho girl, she speaks Sotho and Zulu, some words I don’t understand and some words [pauses] that she spoke, then we had to translate it to English so we can understand each other, but I do like her language, she told me that I must teach her my language and I told her that she must teach me her language too. ”**

The reports by the participants are consistent with literature (e.g. Rudwick, 2004; Wareing and Thomas, 1999; Ager, 2001) with regards to the role of English as a communication facilitator among people African people from different cultural backgrounds as well among people from different racial groups, which leads to a greater cultural and linguistic understanding, which is also indicated in literature (e.g. Hannerz).

### **3.1.6. English and human rights**

Another very interesting twist is reflected in the participants’ understandings that the language of domination can be subverted and used to challenge those in authority:

**Moleboheng (7B 6/6 page 36) “Mina ngithi ukukhuluma isiNgesi kubalulekile engikubonayo ngoba uma ngabe uhlangabezana nenkinga mhlambe endleleni whereby kufanele uhlangabezana nokuthi uxabane nomuntu or ushayisana nomuntu wesingisi ongumlungu, uyabo. Uma ushayisana naye umuntu wesilungu kufanele ukhulume naye isingisi, khona ezoku understand naye umuzwe ukuthi uthini. Angavane akuthuke, akuthuke nje**

**kanti kuyafana kuwena ukuthi uthela amanzi emhla wedada<sup>6</sup>.” [Me, I say that speaking English is important. What I see because if you were to have a problem maybe along the way whereby it is a must that you have an argument or a (physical) fight with an English person who is white, you see. If you fight with him/her, the white person you must English with him/her so that he/she can understand you.]**

The following participant reinforces the point that the failure to understand English can lead to exploitation in the work environment as indicated below:

**Onalenna (7B 6/6 page 37) “Noma futhi usuhola. Uma ezothi umlungu ngizokunikeza, wena uholu u R1000 uzokunika u R500 wena uyavuma ngoba awazi, yes bas, yes bas.” [And even when you are getting paid. When the white person says I will give you... (And) you get paid R1000 and he/she gives you R 500, you just agree because you do not know: yes boss, yes boss.]**

These views suggest an interesting reinterpretation of the Freirean argument that the mother tongue empowers people (Freire and Macedo (1987). Alexander (2003) in addition reports that individuals are empowered if they are able to communicate and participate in decisions that affect important parts of their lives.

## **3.2. Resistance to English**

### **3.2.1. Racism**

Language and ‘race’ are closely intertwined in ways which determine the belongingness and non-belongingness that is established through difference as indicated in literature (e.g. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004; Woodward, 1997). The concept of ‘race’ in South Africa has had significant political and economic consequences for its citizens during the apartheid government, where African

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<sup>6</sup> A Zulu proverb, when directly translated means ‘pouring water on the duck’s back’. This is used to refer to situations which a person does not understand or cannot change!

people were oppressed (e.g. Achebe, 1975; Kembo-Sure and Webb, 2000; Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). Some participants perceive English as strongly linked to racism and exploitation, not simply historically but strongly continuing in their current experiences:

**Manti (4B 5/5 page 20) "...where can I get white friends because at the Pavillion, when we walk around the Pavillion the securities follow you around coz you're black and they think that maybe you're gonna steal something like those days before when you used to steal at the Pavillion, now they think that your gonna rob somebody or something [pauses] that's why."**

**Lineo (7B 6/6 page 31) "Abasifuni isingisi cause they hate white people." [They do not want English because they hate white people.]**

One learner emphasises the fact that although there have been great political changes in South Africa, some 'white' people still have attitudes that mirror the policy of the apartheid government, which exercised the oppression of African people. According to this participant, these attitudes are reflective of the point that these white people are resistant to the political changes that have resulted in equality among races, as indicated below:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 9) "...it's only that some of them haven't accepted the fact that we are now equal, we share the same values..."**

One learner attributes the resentment towards English to be strong in people of the older generation because of their painful experiences during the apartheid era. This is indicated below:

**Lineo (7B 6/6 page 31) "Abantu abaningi abamnyama they hate white people manje isingisi abasifuni especially abantu abadala." [Most black**

**people, they hate white people; now English, they do not want it especially older people.]**

**Moleboheng (7B 6/6 page 33) “Mina ugogo wami akathandi isingisi okwangempela ke sengikhuluma iqiniso, akasithandi isingisi ngoba waye involved kwi apartheid. Amabhunu uyabona, nje indaba ye English, kodwa ufundile, hayi isiqengqe.” [Me, my gogo does not like English for real, honestly speaking, she does not like English because she was involved in apartheid. It is the boers, you see, this English thing but she is educated, not a genius.]**

Another participant expresses dissatisfaction that only a few 'white' people are motivated to learn indigenous languages, hence the participant reports intense resentment towards communication in the English language by Africans, as reported below:

**Lineo (4B 5/5 page 8) “...why are we Africans like to [pauses] like to talk white's language? Why don't we be proud of our cultures, do whites speak our language? Most of the whites do not speak our language but most of Africans speak white's language. Why do we bother to speak white language?”**

Another participant expressed this resentment even more strongly, implying that there is no possibility of communication at all with white South Africans:

**Manti (4B 5/5 page 21) (forcefully) I won't have white friends, even how could I start a conversation with a white person?**

Some participants perceive the cultural and linguistic difference with positive outcomes centred on the promotion of cultural awareness. These participants show a strong inclination towards inter-cultural friendships as indicated below:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 7) “I think I would feel happy to know that there is someone who loves my culture and someone who find that Zulu things that we do are interesting and they wanna try it, coz we as black people do try white people’s things, so I feel happy.”**

The participants have highlighted the relationship between language and identity through ‘race’ and also indicated, is the construction of ‘difference’ through racial parameters. This is consistent with the literature (e.g. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004; Woodward, 1997) that emphasises the continuous process of identity construction through difference. The participants illustrated that cultural and racial difference can promote segregation or unity. This is reflected in literature (e.g. Woodward, 1997) where ‘difference’ can serve to ‘divide’ and ‘segregate’ or it could be celebrated and associated with diversity and heterogeneity.

### **3.2.2. Repositioning Afrikaans**

The status of Afrikaans has undergone a great deal of political evolution from being a significant language in the workplace during the apartheid government to being of equal status to the other ten official languages. According to Kembo-Sure and Webb, (2000) Afrikaans is often still understood as the language of the oppressor and is stigmatized by many communities because of its connection with the apartheid government. Given the significance of resistance to Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (and the strong preference for English) in the struggle as famously instantiated in the Soweto uprising that began on 16 June 1976, it is interesting to note the ways in which these participants perceive these two languages. Some participants express their resistance to Afrikaans while others were accommodative towards the language.

The political link of Afrikaans to the apartheid government and experiences is evident in the statements by some participants. The following participant



suggests that the imposition of indigenous languages on Afrikaans speakers as a strategy to elevate the status of African languages might lead to a reoccurrence of something similar to the 1976 Soweto uprisings, as indicated below:

**Moleboheng (5B 11/5 page 24) “Besides English there are other languages, Afrikaans, before we start learning every language in zulu, we must think, that, we must remember that in 1976, pupils were fighting because they did not want to learn every language... every subject in Afrikaans, so if white people who speak Afrikaans say they don’t wanna learn in zulu, they might wanna fight, like we did.”**

Two participants express a resistance to learning Afrikaans because Afrikaans speaking people showed no motivation to learning indigenous African languages:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 24) “I think we have been cheated because they don’t learn our language and we are learning our language and we find it interesting, but they don’t find our language interesting, I think they are cheating.”**

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 24) “if they don’t want to learn zulu, we don’t want to learn Afrikaans too because they don’t want to learn our language, we must not learn their language if they don’t wanna learn our language”**

However another participant shows no resistance to Afrikaans and even expresses an interest in learning the language, despite its political history and connection to the apartheid government as seen below:

**Lineo (4B 5/5 page 25) “I like speaking Afrikaans, but I don’t know how to speak it, I like the way that they talk...yah. And in our school, we don’t learn Afrikaans, I do love Afrikaans but they don’t teach us.”**

There were different perceptions of Afrikaans among the participants where some still resist the language because of its political history while others express a willingness to learn Afrikaans regardless of its history as the language of the oppressor. The participants' reflections are consistent with literature (Kembo-Sure and Webb, 2000) in relation to the resistance by some communities to Afrikaans. However some participants' perceptions regarding Afrikaans transcend political history, as they reflect an interest in the language regardless of its strong link to the apartheid government.

### **3.3. Speaking isiZulu: culture and identity**

#### **3.3.1. Articulating culture and language**

Expression in one's mother-tongue has been associated with intense cultural and personal growth, belongingness and sense of pride. The inability to engage in one's culture and tradition on a linguistic level has adverse implications for one's identity as postulated by some authors (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987; Billington, Hockey, and Strawbridge, 1998). The participants highlight that communication in one's mother-tongue celebrates pride and devotion to one's culture as evidenced below:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 16) "I think it is important to show that you are proud of your culture and that you are proud of your language...you must be proud of who you are, where you come from..."**

**'Mamabela (5B 11/5 page 16) "...I think it would make me proud because it shows love, that I love my mother tongue"**

The participants reflected confidence in their identity and self. They expressed ample satisfaction and pride in their Zuluness and Africanness and embraced all aspects that come with being an African and Zulu:

**Puleng (4B 5/5 page 5) "...because I was born who I am and I must be who I am"**

The participants put forward two significant points regarding identity and the self. The first being that individuals must be content with their identity and the second that identity is predetermined and stable, hence individuals must appreciate the uniqueness of their self's and carry pride in their distinctiveness from one another. The participants convey a significant emphasis on the importance of devotion to one's culture which is achieved through communication in one's mother tongue and the use of African accents. The participants highlight that Africans should remain true to their Africanness and celebrate it through expression in their African languages:

**'Mamabela (4B 5/5 page 4) "...you can't be the person that you can't be, but you can be yourself, he is he and her is her [pauses] it can't be him or her."**

**Lineo (4B 5/5 page 9) "And you too you must not change the way you are, you must be proud of where you come from."**

The participants emphasise loyalty to one's culture through an indication of the emotional effects that are involved when fellow Africans defy their culture, as seen below:

**Manti ( 4B 5/5 page 6) " I think it really hurts to see a black person trying to be white because a white person is always proud of who they are, why can't we proud of who we are?"**

The failure to embrace one's culture is reflective of a betrayal to one's sense of self and identity. African people who speak with English accents are perceived as betraying both their culture and their own sense of identity. The following participant illustrates this point and reinforces that the use of English accents by

African people is an indication of a denial of one's true cultural and ethnic identity:

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 4) "I feel sorry for those people who use English accents because they have to accept who they are."**

The following participant makes an interesting argument that some individuals conform as an attempt to escape rejection. The participant illustrates this point in that some individuals hide their true identities through the use of desirable accents in the fear of being ridiculed by popular or dominant groups of people. This is indicated below:

**Nthabiseng ( 4B 5/5 page 5) "There is a girl I know, I am with her in the same class, it's really irritating because when she talks, it is like she is afraid...it is like she doesn't want to be looked down, so she has to speak a certain language [pauses] a certain accent to fit in".**

The participants have pointed out the importance of loyalty and devotion to one's culture, ethnicity and Africanness through the celebration and embracing of one's mother-tongue. They have also highlighted the adverse consequences to one's sense of self and pride that occur when one's mother-tongue is not appreciated. This is reflected in literature (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987; Billington, Hockey, and Strawbridge, 1998) where the celebration of cultural identity through parameters such as language and tradition is defined to have a positive sense of being toward the individual. The inability to communicate in one's language is associated with a threat to one's sense of self.

### **3.3.2. Communities of meaning**

Communication in one's mother-tongue allows for access to one's cultural community and history. This creates a sense of belongingness to a common world of meaning among speakers of the same language as indicated in

literature (e.g. Dirven, 1995). The participants reflect several views regarding the value of their mother-tongue in cultural terms. One participant asserts that isiZulu serves as a medium of communication between the world of the living and the ancestors. This creates an intimate and sacred spiritual connection which can only be achieved through expression in isiZulu, which strongly represents historical and cultural Zulu tradition. This is indicated below:

**Thabang (7B 6/6 page 45) “Mina ngithi isiZulu is important because uma ngabe uyokhuza amadlozi lapha ngeke uze uwakhuze ngesiNgisi amadlozi. [Me, I say that isiZulu is important because if you are going to speak to the ancestors here you cannot speak to them in English].”**

The ancestors hold a sacred position in the Zulu culture and the maintenance of a strong spiritual relationship with them is crucial for spiritual growth, as indicated by the participants. The following participant maintains that Zulu surnames are enriched with a long-lived valuable connection to the ancestors, which is crucial for spiritual growth and cultural identity:

**Manti (6B 21/6 page 25) “So, wena yena njengoba washona yena wayazi loku kwakini, hayi konke ubuzulu, kushoda ngesibongo sakho kuphela hayi ukumazi wonke, uyayibona leyonto.” [Your ancestor is used to the things that he/she left you doing before he/she died, everything about being Zulu, it is only about the surname but not knowing very well, do you understand that?]**

The participants regarded their surnames to possess an element of cultural identity and a reflection of their Zuluness and tradition, as indicated below:

**Manti (6B 21/6 page 21) “Isibongo siyasho ukuthi ungumZulu, indlela okhuliswe ngayo kuyasho ukuthi umZulu, uyayizwa leyonto, into oyikholwayo iyasho ukuthi ungumZulu, uyayizwa leyonto. [the surname**

**tells that you are Zulu, the way you were brought up tells that you are Zulu, you understand that, the thing that you believe in tells that you are a Zulu, you understand that?]**"

### **3.3.3. Connecting and shifting between worlds**

IsiZulu speakers express a strong sense of pride in their language and perceive it as possessing great cultural and African significance. IsiZulu is regarded to be the 'language of the home' and is considered to be pivotal to the home, family and culture as demonstrated in literature (e.g. Rudwick, 2004). The participants associate isiZulu with relaxed environments of a familiar nature such as the home environment while English is perceived as a language to be spoken in public places such as school. This is reflected below:

**Moleboheng (5B 11/5 page 18) "I speak my home language when I am at home and when I am at school with my friends..."**

The following participant emphasizes that in her conversations with other people, whether at school or at home, she speaks isiZulu more than English. A significant point of interest is that the participant's entire speech on this matter is in English. This can be attributed to the fact that the researcher is not an isiZulu speaker therefore English was most convenient during the sessions, thus highlighting the value of English for cross-ethnic communication somewhat ironically even to assert the value of the mother-tongue.

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 18) "I think I always speak Zulu, but if it is English, if the teacher is teaching, I answer him/her in English, but otherwise at school I speak Zulu, when I am going home I speak Zulu, when I am coming to school I speak Zulu, I feel that I speak Zulu more than English every time."**

The following participant puts forward an interesting point with regards to isiZulu and its ability to transcend beyond ethnicity to connect people and instil a sense of Africanness. The following statement highlights this point:

**Manti (5B 11/5 page 18) “I think, or should I say, I mostly speak Zulu because that’s what we mostly use, when we are learning English, biology, technical drawing, economics, that’s when we mostly use English but all those other times, we use Zulu, like in malls when we are walking in groups, we speak Zulu because we are all black, and there is no conversation where we have to use English.”**

The participants’ sense of pride in their mother-tongue (isiZulu) and the warmth and pleasure they get from communicating in it was highly evident. Their statements are in accordance with literature (Rudwick, 2004) with regards to their association of isiZulu as of intense cultural value. Most of them also reflect that they speak isiZulu in relaxed familiar environments such as the home context and English in public places such as in the school environment. These statements are also reflected in literature (e.g. Rudwick, 2004).

### **3.3.4 Reviving African languages**

African languages have been defined as low-function languages and marginalized by the high-function languages such as English. The empowerment of African languages and the promotion of the use of African languages in high function domains such as educational and public arenas is strongly advocated by several authors (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Ramphela, 1995). These authors adopt a Black consciousness position where they suggest that knowledge of African languages must be a criterion for political participation, employment and access to civil service in South Africa. One learner asserts a Black consciousness position, highlighting the significance and value of culture and Africanness as an empowerment tool for African people and

envisaging a future where the current power dynamics of language could be reversed:

**Puleng (4B 5/5 page 14) “Don’t you think the problem is that we want to learn English language but the white people, not all of them learn Zulu language, we blacks must have our own jobs and the white’s can come to us for jobs, don’t you think that it is possible?”**

The promotion of African languages is emphasized by one learner in the form of knowledge of isiZulu in schools that are predominately white, as indicated below:

**Lineo (5B 11/5 page 24) “I think that in white school, they must all learn Zulu, because we are all learning English.”**

A learner suggests that a compromise must be reached so that both English and isiZulu are promoted and utilized in the academic arena. This is indicated below:

**Nthabiseng (5B 5/5 page 23) “Maybe we should have teachers that teach biology, maybe he can mix, maybe English and explain in in Zulu, nje..yah”**

The participants adopt a ‘Black consciousness’ position through their reported pride in their Africanness, and their reports that favour the reviving and promotion of African languages to serve as high-function languages in the academic and civil sector. This is consistent with the literature (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Ramphela, 1995) that argues for the development of African people and African languages.



### **3.4. Globalization and languages of the future**

Globalization has impacted on the way of living of various cultures and nations both positively and negatively. As indicated in literature (e.g. Spencer, 1999; Kamwangamalu, 2004; Alexander, 2003; Hannerz, 1990) globalization has led to the strengthening and reaffirmation of cultural identity in some cultures on the one hand and on the other, it has led to a detachment from one's culture and tradition. The participants embrace the changes in society and associate them with the 'new' generation. They highlight that the new generation allows them the democratic right and freedom to choose what they chose to identify with. This is indicated below:

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 15) "I like to keep up with the new democracy and the new generation ..."**

**Lineo (4B 5/5 page 13) "I think this is the new democracy and a new generation, we must do what's in style."**

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 13) "Times change, you have to know things..."**

The participants indicate that the social change in communities is typical in both the rural and urban areas. They further state that the rural areas of today are modernized and less traditional. This is indicated below:

**'Mamabela (7B 6/6 page 20) "...Emakhaya ningalokothi nje nithi kudlalwa umgqashiyo nani nani, awakudala lawo; amafamu lawa awamanje. Asephucuzekile enza izinto ezenziwa lana" [...don't dare say that rural places of today only play umgqashiyo etc, etc, those are ancient rural places, rural places are of today now! They are developed/ civilised; they do things that are done here.]**

One participant proposes that as part of the 'new' generation, they embrace both the rural and western worlds, however, this generation is less inclined to traditional music. This is evidenced below:

**Thabang (7B 6/6 page 13) "Siyawuprefeya, ukuthi manje asisajulile nje ngezindaba zomaskandi nani sekuyi new democratic generation lena. Indaba zokudlala omaskandi neZingane zoma, hayi." [We do prefer it, it is just that we are no longer profound/deep/serious, we now belong to new democratic generation. The idea of playing umsakadi and 'Izingane zoma' no.]**

The participants emphasize the point that they belong to the new generation, which embraces both the rural and the westernized cultures. They further highlight that as a result of the rapid changes that are characteristic of our societies, one had to accommodate the changes and comply with them.

### **3.5. Multilingualism for all?**

The idea of Multilingualism aimed at promoting all official languages. The South African context is typical of a multilingual society with eleven official languages, however the aim of promoting all languages, in particular African languages to serve as high function languages has been criticized by various authors. These authors (e.g. Kamwangamalu, 2003; Rudwick, 2004) feel that language policies always favour English and hence the power of English is retained, while African languages remain retarded. The participants also advocate for multilingualism and it is evident from their reports that English is included as part of the official languages that they felt individuals should be proficient in, as indicated below:

**Nthabiseng (5B 11/5 page 22) " I think it should mix, English, Tswana, Xhosa and all that should mix so that we can all understand and know other languages."**

The following participant supports the idea of a multilingual society, and English once again is still among the languages that individuals should be proficient in. This is indicated below:

**Nthabiseng (4B 5/5 page 25) “I think that we must all learn Zulu, Afrikaans and English so that we must all understand each other what we are saying.”**

The participants are confident in multilingualism as a phenomenon that will promote the status of African languages in academic and civil arenas. This is inconsistent with literature (e.g. Kamwangamalu, 2003; Rudwick, 2004) which emphasizes the fact that multilingualism favours English and does little for the promotion of the African languages to serve as high-function languages.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

This study shows how youth from a township school define their identity in a post democratic South Africa in relation to language (specifically English and isiZulu) as an identity parameter. In relation to the participants' position with regards to English, the analysis demonstrates that the participants' views support the literature in terms of the conventional benefits of English for economic, social and educational upliftment. The participants further suggest that proficiency in English facilitates efficient service delivery and is associated with 'cool' fashionable accents.

In tension with these positive views, the analysis demonstrates that although the English language was linked to several economic and social benefits, it holds a powerful position in relation to other indigenous languages and plays a dominant role on African languages by delaying their access to high function domains such as the educational and political domains. In view of the domination of English on African languages, a Black consciousness position whereby Africans work together to empower themselves and promote the status of African languages is adopted.

The analysis illustrated that the Zulu culture, tradition and other factors intrinsic in the Zulu culture such as Zulu surnames and isiZulu language remains of great significance for these young people. Expression in isiZulu allows for an intimate cultural bond particularly in relation to elderly members of the community. This creates access to Zulu history which therefore enhances deep historical continuity. IsiZulu is also crucial for communication between the participants and the ancestors. The participants report that a meaningful and valuable relationship with the ancestors is crucial for spiritual growth and identity therefore isiZulu, allows for the maintenance of sacred spiritual connectedness to the ancestors and access to Zulu history which therefore enhances deep historical continuity. Expression in isiZulu is also associated with a strong feeling of pride and Africanness.

The analysis highlights an important point regarding the contradictory position the participants have in relation to English and isiZulu whereby on the one hand the benefits of English are acknowledged while on the other, they are aware of the oppressive impact that English has on isiZulu and other African languages. The participants are also clear on their pride in isiZulu language and the Zulu culture. They highlight that being part of the 'new' generation which exercises democracy enables them the flexibility to embrace both Zulu culture and western culture. This therefore means that they can embrace both English and isiZulu as both languages have significant contribution towards their educational and economic development as well as their cultural and individual growth. According to the participants, the 'new generation' should also entail that all South Africans be more receptive to other languages such as Afrikaans and African languages to promote equality of languages and more especially the growth of African languages.

The findings demonstrated in this study are focused on language as a central point among several identity parameters such as ethnicity, race, religion etc. There is a need for more studies on these other facets of identity to highlight how changes at the social level (constitutional and national changes) affect the conceptualisation of one's identity and the role of language at the individual level.

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