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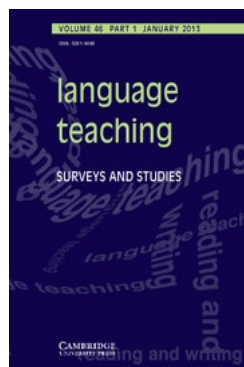
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The African languages in South African education 2009–2011

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The African languages in South African education 2009–2011

South African National Language Education policy (South Africa, DoE 2002) enshrines multilingualism (ML) as one of its major goals. The implementation of such a policy is a slow process, however, particularly in the educational domain, where parents, teachers and students favour the dominant, ex-colonial language (English) for both historic and instrumental reasons (Dalvit & de Klerk 2005). However, results of the National Benchmarking Test (NBMT Report 2009) conducted at selected South African universities show that most non-English speaking students in higher education have underdeveloped language and numeracy skills for study at this level, one of the main barriers to access being that of language (Council on Higher Education 2007: 2). Efforts have thus intensified in South African institutions to introduce the home languages of learners into the educational domain, either as learning support alongside the main medium of instruction or as alternative languages of instruction, working towards the development of a bilingual education model. This report documents developments in research in the promotion and use of the African languages in education in South Africa in recent years, particularly since the publication of the previous report (Wildsmith-Cromarty 2009), which discussed various initiatives in the teaching, development and use of the African languages in South African education during the period 2005–2008. This report considers further developments in the use of the African languages for academic purposes in the following areas: the learning and teaching of these languages as additional languages and for professional purposes in selected disciplines for specialist programmes, and their intellectualization, which includes their use as languages of instruction, in the translation of materials and other learning resources, and development of terminology.

The main focus of this paper is on the outcomes of a major research programme carried out in a number of South African universities under the auspices of the South African-Norwegian Tertiary Education Development programme (SANTED), the aims of which are to promote multilingualism in order to facilitate access and retention at tertiary level (SANTED 2008). The programme, initiated in 2001 to support the Department of Education's goals for the transformation of the higher education system, ran a second phase from 2006 to 2009, the consequences of which are ongoing. Projects running under the programme involve collaborative, inter-institutional research shared across institutions in the form of workshops. The key areas of focus for the programme are (a) short courses to promote multilingualism among staff, (b) multi-language acquisition for students in professional programmes such as those in health sciences, psychology and education, and (c) pilot projects in the use of the African languages as media of instruction in selected tutorials and student support programmes. This report describes research projects from participating universities which

have successfully addressed these issues for Zulu and Xhosa, thereby contributing to the intellectualization of these languages.

The first project initially involved a partnership between the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Participating disciplines included dental assisting, nursing, psychology and education at the Foundation Phase. This project was underpinned by a Sustainability Model (Wildsmith 2010), which was developed in terms of four key phases: (a) a language acquisition phase which involved offering short basic skills courses in the African language (Zulu) to non-native speaking staff and students, (b) an integration and apprenticeship phase in which language skills were further developed for specialist discourse according to the disciplines, and which also included translation of course materials into the African language for use in tutorials, (c) an extension phase which aimed to consolidate the language skills learned in the previous phases by means of home stays in Zulu-speaking communities and/or work experience and (d) a bilingual teaching phase in which whole disciplines are offered either bilingually or in the African language. The last phase would be the culmination of language development during the previous phases, the ultimate target being a bilingual degree.

In accordance with the above model, short courses in basic, communicative Zulu have been created and offered to both staff and students in the humanities, health sciences and education, some of which have been tailored to the specific needs of students in professional degrees such as nursing and psychology to facilitate their interaction with patients in the workplace (Engelbrecht & Wildsmith 2010; Ndimande-Hlongwa, Mazibuko & Gordon 2010). A parallel activity which is linked to these courses and which addresses the language intellectualization research objective of the project is that of terminology development in these disciplines. The approach is consultative and participatory, involving key stakeholders from senior students to members of national language bodies. Terminology lists are uploaded to websites for feedback and further consultation, for example in the nursing and midwifery disciplines (Engelbrecht et al. 2010). Terminology development has also taken place at other universities and has involved both traditional methods and electronic corpora. For example, Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape have been developing terminology lists for specialized discourses in Xhosa for disciplines such as mathematics and science, computer science, pharmacy, education and political philosophy (Dalvit 2010; Maseko 2011). Development processes and findings have also been shared at workshops involving the various institutions participating in SANTED programmes. In addition to these (mainly bilingual) lists, at the University of Cape Town corpus-based multilingual glossaries have also been developed for English as additional language students, to help them overcome conceptual difficulties in accessing discipline content (Madiba 2010). These glossaries have been used to support learning in first-year tutorials so that students have access to the terminology and the relevant definitions in their own languages.

For example, a first year psychology course in statistics at UKZN used a bilingual course manual in English and Zulu in order to introduce the concepts of numbers, variables and distributions. This module had been developed organically the previous semester using multiple research and translation methods: consultation with senior students, academics and translators, and electronic corpora (for English) which contextualized various definitions and uses of the terms. Course materials for both pharmacy and political philosophy have also been

developed at Rhodes University (Maseko 2011). For these projects, the translated materials were also back-translated and then verified by members of the national language bodies for the different languages. The incorporation into this process of 'bottom-up' broad consultation, verification processes such as back-translation and evaluation by external bodies, and the mining of electronic corpora for terms and their various definitions is an improvement upon the development processes described in the previous article.

A further key area that is being developed bilingually is that of education. This is crucial: teachers need to be prepared for using the home language in schools as, to date, most have been trained through the medium of English and only use the home language as a complementary strategy for facilitating understanding of difficult concepts presented in English. This code-switching practice, although fairly widespread in South African schools, is not done in any systematic way. Furthermore, teachers themselves have difficulty understanding the concepts at a deep level, which makes it almost impossible to teach them effectively. This situation is compounded by the fact that not many African language method courses exist at teacher training institutions (Webb 2009). This means that there have been relatively few opportunities, to date, for teachers to be professionally trained to teach literacy and language in the African languages, either as home or additional languages. Commitment from such teachers needs to be encouraged if the use of the African languages at school level is to be effective. Such commitment can be achieved through using the African language itself as a medium of instruction at tertiary level. This, it is hoped, will create a wash-back effect to the school context.

The SANTED project has provided a much-needed impetus in this area, various projects having been initiated in the last few years, including Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE) at primary level. At UKZN a dual-medium approach is being implemented for Foundation Phase student teachers who are being trained in literacy and life skills in the mother tongue (Zulu) (Mbatha 2009). Webb (2009) further reports that at the University of the North-West, three programmes in the Faculty of Education are being taught in Tswana, and at Wits University a Zulu method course is offered. Finally, Pluddemann, Nomlomo & Jabe (2010) report on the use of Xhosa in an Action Research module, offered as part of a continuing teacher development programme. All these projects found an increased level of performance in their students when they were offered the opportunity to use their home languages for learning and assessment. However, what has also become evident is the need for greater attention to the use of the language in academic discourse. For example, Mashiya (2010) found that students tended to produce large amounts of writing in the home language which was not always subject to the constraints of academic discourse. Further research in this area could focus on the development of more concise writing and more precise use of terminology and rhetorical devices in the African languages.

A strong advocacy movement seems to have taken hold in the country, one which is especially visible at primary and tertiary levels of education. The Higher Education Act of 1997 (South Africa DoE 1997) authorized the various Ministers of Education to call for language policies and plans to be put in place at all educational institutions. This Act was recently referred to by the current Minister of Higher Education in his address to the African Languages Steering Committee. In his speech, he reaffirmed the expectation that all South African higher education institutions develop a language policy and language plan to

implement multilingualism, and various universities have been assigned the task of developing and promoting the language of their region.

Notwithstanding this increased attention to the development and promotion of the African languages, a number of challenges remain. There is still a need for a change in language attitudes, a commitment to the development of clear institutional language policies and investment in materials development in the African languages across the curriculum and at all levels of education. Added to this is the question of the standardization of the African languages. Lafon (2011) makes the point that learners' prior knowledge of their own languages often consists of local urban varieties of a number of other languages as well as the home language. The 'standard' variety selected for educational purposes, however, has been developed by Language Boards, resulting in a 'deep' variety that is unfamiliar to the learners or students. This poses a challenge for learning and teaching through the medium of an African language. Although students can read and understand this variety with the help of dictionaries, they struggle to write it in a formal academic context.

An attempt is being made to address these challenges through a joint research project funded by the National Research Foundation and involving the Human Sciences Research Council and the Universities of Pretoria and Limpopo. The project will run for three years (2011–2013) and will focus on teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase and at Grade 4 level in primary schools in urban, township and rural regions in two provinces. The research will examine the development of linguistic skills and literacy in the home languages and in English as a first additional language; the training and practice of Foundation Phase teachers; patterns of linguistic behaviour in classrooms and language-in-education policy development and practice (Prinsloo 2011). The proposed research addresses the most crucial stage in education: the Foundation Phase, which is where it all begins. Findings will hopefully provide ways of addressing the challenges that have so far been encountered by research at higher levels. If South African education can get the Foundation Phase right, especially the implementation of a MTBBE model, the results will filter through to higher levels. This, however, will take time.

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BAAL/CUP Seminar 2011

Multilingualism in education

Department of Modern Languages, University of Southampton, UK, 20–21 May 2011

1. Goals

The aim of this seminar was to promote dialogue between two research areas addressing educational multilingualism: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and community languages. In bringing together these two strands of research, the seminar