Language and Identity:
The Case of African Languages in
S.A. Higher Education

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Introduction

This article explores, among other things, the relationship between language and identity. It focuses particularly on the role of the indigenous African languages in higher education. The findings discussed here are based on an empirical study that investigated the status of isiZulu at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville campus. This paper explores the problem of the existing stigma attached to indigenous African languages by their own speakers, particularly the isiZulu and isiXhosa speakers. Firstly, an attempt is made to understand the reasons why these speakers look down upon their languages. Secondly, the article outlines how these speakers construct their identities through language usage. Finally, in view of the expected transformation in higher education and the draft language policy of the said institution, recommendations are made on ways to promote the use of the indigenous African languages in higher education.

Several scholars (e.g. Edwards 1985, Tabouret-Keller 1998, Thornborrow 1999, Kroskrit 2000 and Hermansson 2003) have explored the relationship between language and identity, each with his/her own definition of 'identity'. Kroskrit (2000:111-114) defines identity as the linguistic construct of membership in one or more social groups or categories. Although other non-linguistic criteria may also be significant, language is important and sometimes crucial to the way members define their group as well as the way the group defines them and most importantly, the way they define themselves. Identity is the set of characteristics that somebody

recognizes as belonging uniquely to him/herself and constituting his/her individual personality for life. Various categories constitute identity, namely, national, ethnic, cultural, social, linguistic, sexual and gender identity.

Theoretical Framework

One of the theories that guides the discussion in this article is Giles, Mulac, Bradac and Johnson's (1987) speech accommodation model, a model that was first proposed by Giles in 1973. According to these theorists, the key concepts in this model are convergence and divergence. Basically, convergence focuses on strategies that an individual may employ in order to adapt to other's communicative behaviour. Divergence, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which speakers accentuate speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and others. According to Giles and Coupland (1991:73) the degree of convergence that a speaker alludes to depends on his/her need for gaining another's social approval. They further state that acculturation is a product of the convergence process when one seeks the same economic and social rewards as others in the same group. Power is a key variable in this model.

Another influential concept that is relevant to this article is Antonio Gramsci's (1871) concept of hegemony. According to Gramsci (1871), cited by Pluddemann in Bourne and Reid (2003:283), hegemony is:

> The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci 1871:12).

Strinati (1995:165), while placing less emphasis on the historical component, explains hegemony as follows:

> ...Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the

working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus, which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups.

The concept of hegemony presupposes a consent given by the majority of a population to a certain direction suggested by those in power. This concept is exposed in many ways by Africans who do not want to have anything to do with African languages. The hegemony of English in education is a reality in South Africa and in former British colonies in Africa. According to Alexander (2004) people are suffering from what he describes as a 'static maintenance programme' where people think that their African languages cannot be further developed, citing historical and economic reasons, among others, for preferring English over an African language as a language of instruction. One of the reasons given was 'we do not want to go back to Bantu education'.

Barkhuizen (2001) has conducted research on the attitudes towards isiXhosa as a matric subject among home-language speakers in the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces. His findings reveal:

Respondents believe that it is important to study Xhosa as a school subject, but the reasons for its importance can be located in informal domains, such as community and culture, rather than in domains that are often associated with progress and success, such as further study and job opportunities (Barkhuizen 2001:12).

In his study of the status of isiZulu at former House of Delegates high schools in the greater Durban area, Pillay (2003:100) asked learners about the language they would like educators to use in the classroom. The findings reveal that the majority of isiZulu L1 speakers (80,2%) prefer their educators to communicate with them in English. A possible explanation that Pillay offers for this trend is that learners are influenced by instrumental motives based on the knowledge that English is seen as a passport to success in South African society. The learners' response is conditioned by two further factors: The first factor is that parents send children to Indian schools to enable them to become fluent in English (children reflect parents attitudes). The second factor is that Indian teachers would address African language speakers in

Fanakalo rather than isiZulu, a variety that is stigmatized and considered humiliating by Zulu L1 speakers.

Arguably, Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinate groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own. (Strinati 1995:165).

Research Methodology
Data for my study was collected using a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was used to determine the status of isiZulu and to assess students' views about the role of isiZulu as an African language in higher education. Fifty copies of a questionnaire were distributed to isiZulu L1 students enrolled for modules in the isiZulu programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville campus. The questionnaire was available in two languages, namely, English and isiZulu. Interviews were held with twenty students with the intention of probing further their views about the role of isiZulu in higher education. I have also provided a reflective and a critical exposé on transformation in South African higher education as well as on language policy.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953
The *Bantu* Education Act (No. 47) of 1953 decreed that blacks should be provided with separate educational facilities under the control of the Ministry of Native Affairs, rather than the Ministry of Education. The pupils in the schools would be taught their *Bantu* cultural heritage and, in the words of Hendrik F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, 'the black people were going to be trained in accordance with their opportunities in life', which were 'below the level of certain forms of labour'. Verwoerd stated that the aim of *Bantu* education was to prevent Africans from receiving an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they would not be allowed to hold in society (Sookrajh 1990:9). Instead Africans were to serve their own people in the homelands or perform manual labour work under whites. Black schools no longer studied the same syllabus as non-black schools, but followed a new *Bantu* Education syllabus based on officially recognized

Bantu languages. English, which had been the most common medium of instruction in mission schools, was discontinued in primary schools and only introduced as medium of instruction in grades 6 to 8 in secondary schools.

In 1948 there were less than 1000 black students in tertiary education institutions. The Bantu Education Act was followed by the Extension of University Act (Act 45 of 1959), the purpose of which was to extend its control over tertiary education (Sookrajh 1990:10). This act made provision for a number of tribal colleges for Blacks. As a result of this act, the University of the North was established for Sotho, Tswana and Venda speakers; the University of Durban-Westville for Indian students; the University of Zululand for isiZulu and siSwati speakers and the University of the Western Cape for those classified as 'coloured'. Fort Hare was turned into a tribal college for Xhosa speakers. Later, other similar Universities i.e. Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Vista were created according to the apartheid design.

Tertiary institutions were strictly segregated on ethno-linguistic bases, and controlled with Verwoedian philosophy. Prior to this time before Bantu education came to be the so-called, the Smuts Education Act of 1907 had been passed making the teaching of English obligatory and stipulating that every child had to learn English at school. Free English schools were established to promote the English language and culture. The thought of an African language becoming an official language was non-existent (Cele 2001:182). Since this thought has now become a reality, it is expected that the South African government would be fully engaged in the promotion and development of African languages. This, however, is not the case. The South African government has been sluggish in implementing its programmes to adequately develop the indigenous African languages.

One may summarize the situation on the ground by saying that African languages are enjoying political liberation without economic power. The effects of this situation are also being felt in education. Learners need to understand that educational liberation and empowerment is possible through language and that language is a necessity for sustainable human development. In the process of promoting African languages we need to think of sustainable human development that regenerates the intellectual and moral environment rather that which destroys it. It ought to empower people rather than marginalize them (Tyolwana 2003:178).

According to Marivate (1993:91) the mother-tongue principle in African education has always met with strong resistance from most sectors in the country, particularly from the African community. Even though the current multilingual language policy is in place, it does not necessarily address the problem of stigmatization of the African languages. The concern of graduating students at tertiary level, in particular African language-speaking students, is access to the work arena and the need to be financially independent. For those that study with African languages as media of instruction, the questions that arise are: will these students be employable upon completion of their studies, what jobs will they be able to access, will these positions enable them to become financially secure, etc.? It is clearly evident that language choices play an important role in the construction of one's identity. This is outlined in the next section.

Language and Identity in South Africa

During the apartheid era, proficiency in English was an emblem of educational and social status. It socially and economically positioned those with English proficiency on far better level than those with limited or no proficiency at all (Cele 2001:182). This situation continues to exist among African communities despite the fact that African languages have now achieved official status in South Africa. It is this social construction of English hegemony in the market place that has contributed to revising existing identities.

African language-speaking students at tertiary level may be divided into those who attended multiracial schools and those who attended government schools. Those that attended multiracial schools display a greater degree of fluency in English than those who attended previously disadvantaged schools. When enrolling at tertiary institutions, learners from multiracial schools tend to identify those who attended government schools as inferior to them. These learners prefer using English at the expense of their home language(s). They tend to discriminate against those who are not fluent in English thereby creating an unfriendly relationship. They look down upon students who choose to study African languages at tertiary level. Ramsay-Brijball (1999:170) states:

> ...the past and present economic and political climate of the country has caused Zulu L1 speakers [as well as other African language speakers] to also embrace English substantially. For many of these speakers, English still remains the language of power and the medium through which they hope to achieve upward social mobility.

Other researchers (e.g. Moyo 1996 and Zungu 1998) have also attempted to understand African language speakers' preference for English over their own home languages. In my opinion, the insistence on mother tongue education during the apartheid period created a suspicion that this was a strategy to delay access to English, a language still commonly viewed as the 'gateway to modernity' (Mahlalela-Thusi & Heugh 2002:244).

Nowadays, students discriminate against one another on the basis of varying levels of English proficiency with those having higher levels of proficiency not wanting to accommodate others who have lower levels of proficiency. Students from government schools feel inferior about their identity as African people. Students, who choose to speak their languages using the monolingual varieties and who prefer not to code-switch are assumed to be less proficient in English. An issue for interrogation is the relationship between language choice and identity construction. With respect to this relationship, Le Page and Tabouret Keller (1985:315) state that the language spoken by a person and his or her identity as a speaker of the language are inseparable. For these researchers 'language acts are acts of identity'.

In the same way that students discriminate against one another, academic staff in African language departments/programmes are looked down upon by those from other departments. This has had a negative bearing on their psyches to the point that some have decided to abandon advancing their qualifications and research in the African languages in favour of pursuing studies and research in other disciplines such as tourism and business administration, among others. Although not overtly stated, I believe that these staff members choose such alternatives to remove themselves from the stigma that is attached to African languages. In their opinions, such alternatives enable them access to domains that will guarantee them social and economic success.

The hegemony of English continues to perpetuate the low utilization

of African languages. Colonialism, among other things, has created a situation in African countries where the European languages (English, Portuguese and French) are valorized and therefore preside as the basic languages of communication among African language speakers. This has created a sense of moral and cultural inferiority among African people wittingly or unwittingly turning them against their own cultural identity and social development (Cele 2001:186).

Section two of the South African constitution clearly states that language is a basic human right and it is not any less important than any other right. Taking this into account, it is difficult to believe that tertiary students enrolled for isiZulu or isiXhosa are not respected by their fellow African peers. Students that matriculate at Model C schools are reluctant to choose an African language as a subject of study and question who will employ them once they graduate.

Ramsay-Brijball (2003) has studied Zulu-English code-switching among Zulu L1 speakers at the Westville campus. Her study indicates that many Zulu L1 students on the Westville campus resort to code-switching in place of using a monolingual variety of an African language to avoid the stigma of being considered 'old fashioned' by their peers. Given that speech is to be seen 'as an identity adjustment made to increase group status and favourability' (Edwards 1985:152), we could argue that speech divergence may be an important strategy for distinguishing oneself from members of other groups in situations where group membership has to be emphasized and supported.

According to Zungu (1998:45), speakers want to express a 'mixed identity' and therefore choose to use two or more languages concurrently. IsiZulu is often employed to mark ethnicity when the speaker is interacting with other linguistic and ethnic groups in the Southern African context. Students currently enrolled in the isiZulu programme find themselves in a difficult situation of being associated with the Inkatha Freedom Party, a political organization in South Africa, and particularly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This has created a scenario where students do not want any association with isiZulu and its development due to political reasons. This situation is a clear violation of human rights, and more especially language rights. For Giles and St. Clair (1979:147), language is a critical dimension of identity.

In the questionnaire a question was asked in relation to the love of the language and the willingness to use it as a language of teaching and learning. 90% of the students maintained that they love isiZulu as it is their mother tongue: they understand it best and express themselves better in it. Swain (1982) claims that the mother tongue medium enhances the importance of local languages and identity. According to Wolff (1999:39) 'we need an Africa that provides the environment for the promotion and preservation of an African identity as well as the cultivation of a proud and confident African personality to face the challenges of this century'.

IsiZulu L1 students responded that African languages as subjects of study at tertiary institutions in South Africa are not receiving adequate support. Escalating international initiatives by foreign universities to teach and research African languages outside of Africa bears testimony to the fact that there is inadequate support locally. For instance, at Wisconsin Madison University in the United States, there is a National African Language Resource Center (NALRC), funded by the US Department of Education and established in 1999 under the leadership of its first director, Dr. Folarin Schleicher (Bokamba 2002:31). The purpose of the Center is to improve the accessibility of African languages in the United States. The development of resources for the teaching, learning and research in African languages is a major activity of NALRC. It also develops curriculum activities for African language instructors nationally and internationally.

The respondents also expressed African language-speaking learners in the primary and secondary level of education need to be encouraged to enroll for an African language at tertiary level. Some of the reasons they cited include: they are the languages of their ancestors; they are symbols of their identity; they are becoming languages of the economy; they are now creating employment opportunities in areas such as translation and interpreting. In interviews with the subjects, many remarked that they are not ashamed of their identity as isiZulu L1 speakers. However, they become concerned when isiZulu speakers who study courses in other faculties through the medium of English question them about their preference of isiZulu primarily on the basis that English is the preferred language when entering to job market.

During its university-wide curriculum restructuring, the university decided to offer a module called English Language Development to equip

African language speakers in particular with adequate proficiency in English to cope with English as the medium of instruction. Evaluation of the first-entry student's English proficiency occurred through the use of an English Language Placement Test. While this endeavor may be viewed positively as African language speakers become bilingually proficient, there is no corresponding system in place to promote the learning of African languages by other language groups at the university. Only recently, the Faculty of Humanities has approved that isiZulu be offered as a university-wide module at the university. This certainly is a step towards addressing the imbalances of the past, towards achieve equity and, in a way, to promoting multilingualism in KwaZulu-Natal.

In my opinion, there is still a need to augment the language requirements in the structure of the degrees offered at the university. This is a good opportunity to develop African languages and concomitantly, to promote additive bilingualism, whereby speakers of any language are introduced to a second language in addition to the continued educational use of the primary language as the language of learning. With additive bilingualism, the second language is never intended to replace the primary language but is rather seen as complementary to it (Heugh *et al* 1995:iv).

The Role of African Languages as Media of Instruction in Education

South Africa is a multilingual country with 11 official languages. IsiZulu speakers constitute the largest language group i.e. 24% of the national population, and 80% of the population in KwaZulu-Natal. According to the constitution all South Africans enjoy equal rights. The questions that arise are: (i)how many South Africans know their language rights? (ii) How many African language speakers have the courage to demand their mother tongue as a medium of instruction? (iii) Do our African languages humiliate us? (iv) Are our languages actually inferior or are we the ones who are making our African languages inferior? With respect to Kikuyu as an African language in Kenya, Ngugi (1986:28) states:

> I believe that my writing in Kikuyu language, a Kenyan language,
> an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist

> struggles of Kenyan people and African peoples. In schools and universities our Kenyan languages, that is the languages of many nationalities which make up Kenya, were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment.

Are we still associating the African languages with underdevelopment and humiliation and if yes, why is this so? In my opinion, our languages are a gateway to defining our African identity, to freedom, to empowerment and to a truly democratic South Africa. In view of this, Ngugi (1986:4) further states:

> 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 entire universe.

In South Africa, a situation exists where our children are deprived of a basic human right, that is, their right to receive education through their mother tongue. How can we, as a nation, call ourselves democratic and free when a basic human right, that is, one's language right, cannot be exercised? In view of this argument, 'empowering the nation' becomes a cliché to some extent.

Wolff (1999:129) argues that the problems of African languages can be defined as a complex set of interlocking problems which link patterns of language use with underdevelopment in general, and educational crises in Africa in particular. For example, in trying to develop isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, negative attitudes towards the language by L1 speakers as well as speakers of other languages impinge negatively on the use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction. Any discussion on the issue is based on the misguided assumption that the aim of developing isiZulu or any other African language is to abolish English. The ever-increasing role of English as an international language must be acknowledged and given its rightful place. However, this should not be at the expense of the indigenous African languages in South African education. Much caution needs to be exercised with the development of the indigenous African languages. There are those who dissuade African language speakers from using their languages on the

basis that they cannot be modernized or developed. Such statements fuel the problem of stigmatization of the African languages.

Language is a thorny issue, but we need to understand the centrality of language in human society. Mateene (1999:165) states:

> That nobody takes an attitude of neutrality or of abstention when the question of 'which language in education' is raised. The acquisition of language, which coincides with one's early childhood, makes the relationship between life and language very understandable. To silence somebody can mean killing him. And people would sacrifice their own life to defend their language.

In celebrating ten years of democracy in South Africa, our President, Thabo Mbeki, took his oath in six official languages, namely, siSwati, seSotho, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans. In so doing, he demonstrated the importance of our languages before the nation and the entire world. Repeated gestures such as this might help alter people's attitudes towards African languages. Sociohistorically, we have had time to deal with post-colonial traumas and with clashes of cultures and mixed identities. It is now time to focus on and develop the African languages.

Transformation in South African Higher Education

According to Cloete (2002:88) the 1994-1999 era was characterized by efforts to formulate a new policy and legislative framework higher education. The post-1999 phase was declared a period of implementation. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was formed in 1995 and submitted its first report in 1996. This report was then converted into a White Paper (1997) and became the new Higher Education Act of 1997. The new government policy is based on the following principles: equity and redress; democratization; effectiveness and efficiency; development; quality; academic freedom; institutional autonomy and public accountability. The NCHE report was strongly criticized by a group of black intellectuals who complained that it did not sufficiently locate higher education within an African context. In their opinion, higher education has not addressed equity and redress especially with regard to the development

and use of African languages as Languages of Tuition (LoT). The Council of Higher Education (CHE) bears testimony to this.

> ...Of the universities that returned the questionnaire on which the survey was based, hardly any can be said to be promoting the use of any African language as a Language of Tuition (except, in most cases, in the relevant language taught as subject). Only at five universities does there appear to be some informal use of an African language in a limited number of tutorials. As at the end of April 2000, not a single university was officially exploring the possibility of using African languages as language of tuition (CHE 2001:4).

Language Policy
On 23 August 2001 the Sociolinguistics team in the school of Languages and Literature at the Westville campus of the university hosted a workshop on language planning. The workshop was attended by representatives from all the tertiary institutions in KwaZulu-Natal including Technikons. The hegemony of English as the medium of instruction, assessment and administration was reported in all the participating institutions of higher education. Except for two disciplines, namely, isiZulu and Afrikaans, in which cases the selfsame languages are used as media of instruction in studying these languages, English is used as the designated medium in all other cases. Most institutions indicated a will to promote multilingualism and to set tangible goals towards ensuring implementation (Geyser, Narismulu & Ramsay-Brijball 2001).

On 18 September 2002 the Sociolinguistics team hosted the second language planning workshop. Its purpose was to examine the progress of multilingual development policies at tertiary institutions in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The key objective of this workshop was to map out practical strategies for promoting multilingualism in KZN with a specific focus on the education sector. As an outcome of the workshop, language awareness campaigns needed to be launched. In this regard, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Language Committee was tasked to secure funding from the Pan South African Language Board (panSALB). It is pleasing to note that panSALB has now started these campaigns in KwaZulu-Natal. They have

thus far visited the areas of Mpangeni, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone, educating the communities about language rights. Another outcome of the workshop was a suggestion that a letter be written to the Provincial Minister of Education questioning the implementation of the Language in Education Policy (LiEP). In order to implement the LiEP, a need to generate a greater production of isiZulu L1 and L2 teachers were identified. Other practical strategies for promoting multilingualism emerged from the workshop (cf. Ndimande, Desai and Ramsay-Brijball 2003). One of the strategies worth mentioning here was a basic isiZulu course for all non-Nguni speaking students. As mentioned earlier, this has come to fruition since 2004 on the Westville campus of the university as such a module is now compulsory for all non-Nguni language-speaking students in the Faculty of Humanities.

The newly established University of KwaZulu-Natal espouses to become a prominent centre of African scholarship in its mission statement. In a paper presented in absentia at a conference of the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) in August 2003, Mthembu (2003) questioned the concept of a so-called African University in the modern era:

> Is it about mere geographical location, or about a distinct belief, conceptual and intellectual system? Does it exist as a unique entity, with universal or non-universal elements? What are its foundations, philosophy, values, conceptual system and epistemology? How different are these from those of modern universities in Europe or Asia, for instance?

In his view, a university located in Africa should qualify to be called an African university on the basis of its attempt to conform to the following:

> Relevance, engagement and service to Africa's environment and socio-economic conditions and needs were to be its foundation. Knowledge, in all its manifestations of formation, content, structure, transmission and acquisition, posits a necessary and sufficient condition for uniqueness of a way of knowing as could be exemplified by the modern African University, if it exists as a distinct entity.

Mthembu (2003) has further mentioned that some universities could claim to be doing all of the above. However, they might not be holistic, coordinated and focused – structurally and programmatically. The University of KwaZulu-Natal must be vigilant in constructing its identity as the premier university of African scholarship. One positive step in establishing its new identity is the creation of a separate School of isiZulu Studies at the university.

In view of curriculum development, little has been done to promote multilingualism in higher education. It is worth noting that the University of the North has established a BA degree in Contemporary English Language Studies (CELS) and Multilingual Studies (MUST). The Council of Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) have approved the latter programme use an African language (Sesotho sa Leboa, to start with) as the medium of instruction in one of the newly endorsed BA degrees being offered by the School of Languages and Communication Studies. This degree began in 2002. Its aim is to develop students into bilingual specialists who will be able to compete effectively for careers and jobs in South Africa's multilingual society. The University of the North has set a precedent that African languages can be developed and used as medium of instruction, assessment and examination at tertiary institutions. The School of IsiZulu Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal also needs to be recognized for its contribution. This School offers modules in translation, interpreting, lexicography, language planning and editing since 2000 and isiZulu is successfully used as the language of instruction.

These two universities are among four other universities that have been identified by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) for funding purposes. DAC has a bursary scheme for postgraduate students in African languages. This bursary scheme started in 2004 and is part of an implementation plan of the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF) that gives effect to the provisions on language as set out in section 6 of the 1996 Constitution (Act No 108 of 1996). In the phasing in of the language policy it is proposed that multilingual publications should be phased in over a period of three years according to department's publications programmes. For example in the first year 30%, in the second year 60% and in the third year 100% of their publications should be multilingual.

In the Western Cape there are three universities: Cape Town (UCT), Western Cape (UWC) and Stellenbosch (US). According to Bourne and Reid (2003:291), in these institutions African languages have never been used as languages of instruction, examination or administration. These institutions are, however, trying to change by virtue of their commitment to multilingualism at least on a rhetoric level. At UCT students are compelled to possess academic literacy in English. When it comes to admissions policy, first entry applicants must have achieved a pass of 40% or more for English on the higher grade at senior certificate level. In the Faculty of Humanities, students who have English as a second or third language, or as a first language with a matric result of E or lower, have to write the placement test in English for educational purposes. Those who do poorly in this test but are admitted to the institution, have to take the English for Academic Purposes course which is credit bearing (De Witte 1998:17).

At UWC, unlike UCT, prospective undergraduate students who meet the minimum entry requirements do not have to write a language proficiency test or a placement test. In terms of African languages, it appears that there was a working group on language policy that proposed a shift away from the bilingual policy (English & Afrikaans) towards multilingualism. Through this process other languages, such as isiXhosa, should be developed and used as a medium of teaching, learning and assessment. As is the case of UCT, not much progress has been made in promoting multilingualism at UWC. IsiXhosa, the prevalent African language in the Western Cape, is not used at all. There is no proposal to incorporate it in this institution in spite of the fact that the policy of Western Cape provincial administration promotes the use of three official languages, i.e., English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, Afrikaans remains the sole medium of instruction at UWC. De Witte (1998:21) confirmed that the 'proposed language policies in the three universities have not been implemented in practice' for reasons of weak internal communication, lack of interest in the debate on the part of African languages and literature departments, a lack of genuine commitment to promoting multilingualism, the absence of an active and central language debate, and possibly the historical hegemony of Afrikaans at US and UWC.

Monolingualism continues to prevail. Does it mean that 'the role of African languages in education' has not been given necessary attention in the recent discussions? Bamgbose (2000) argues that the strongest cases that can

be made for an African medium of instruction are those linked with development. I am not talking about any kind of development but development in which focus is on people rather than on physical structures. This development is stated very clearly in the UNESCO document. prepared for the International Conference on Education:

> Since human development is recognized as being the prime goal of all development, such development should be geared to increasing and enhancing human capabilities, affording people access not only to material benefits ...but to such intangible benefits as knowledge and the right to play full part in the life of the community ... UNESCO 1992b: 7)

Language development is part of human development, as it leads to knowledge. The human development paradigm is defined by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (1990:9-10) as a process of widening people's choices and the level of achieved well-being. UNDP identify two principal components of human development: the formation of human capabilities such as improved health or knowledge and the use that people make of their acquired capabilities, for work or leisure. This development flows from the notion that the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. UNDP's human development places emphasis on human beings as the ends of human development, not as means, and also as active participants in the development process, not as passive recipients (UNDP 1990:10). If students are to develop their human capabilities through education, this is more effectively achieved through the language they understand best, that is, their mother tongue. This concept should force us to promote African languages as media of instruction at all educational levels. Such a policy would eventually result in using them as languages of the economy.

Higher education institutions are targeted as stakeholders in the promotion of multilingualism. It is evident, however, that not all languages are instantly capable of dealing with concepts that are peculiar to different cultures. For example, English cannot deal with the large number of nouns used in isiZulu to describe the colour of cattle. A language may be fully

developed in one area but under-developed in another due to cultural reasons. Ideally, a developed language has a viable orthography and a substantial body of literature; it is used in domains such as education, broadcasting, the print media, administration and law. An 'underdeveloped' language shows deficiencies in one or more of the above-mentioned fields. It may lack vocabulary for specific phenomena (e.g., will a pigmy from the Equatorial Forest be able to talk about snow?) and/or there may be a total absence of reading materials. For African languages to be used in a wide range of domains, they may need to expand their vocabulary and to develop a rich and adequate literature. Development of a language will be limited if there is no need to use it in various contexts such as government, education, industry and in the private sector, among others. Furthermore, language use must be continuous and consistent. Without language use all implementation measures will fail (UNESCO 1997:13). The new fields of development must be dealt with at all levels of education.

Some people argue that African languages do not possess the relevant terminology and thus cannot be used as languages of instruction in, for example, subjects in the area of science. The answer evidently resides in the effort to develop such terminology by using the languages creatively. A proper knowledge of a given subject area should enable an intellectual/linguist to explain the concepts under study using any of the African languages. As long as we rely on foreign scientists to teach us science, our languages will never be fully developed. Rather than blaming the language, we should blame ourselves for not developing it. It is a shame that there are still people who teach African languages through English medium to speakers of African languages. These people justify their use of English to accommodate model C students who did not study an African language at school. However, they omit to consider the implications of their actions on the larger population of L1 African language speakers. The post-1994 education in South Africa has produced students who are illiterate in African languages because they did not learn them in model C schools. Mateene in Wolff (1999:143) argues that:

> Some people would justify interrupting the use of a language and replacing it by a new one, on the pretext that the first is not developed for secondary education. Ironically, it is such

interruption, which stops the scientific development of that language. It is indeed, the practice of a language in a classroom that makes it develop; and in this, both the teacher and the students become used to expressing scientific ideas in their own language.

We need to deal with people's attitudes toward African languages if we want to address the issue of development, and more especially, of African languages as a media of instruction in South African Higher Education. Our language is our identity. If our current generation is becoming illiterate in isiZulu, what hope do we have for the coming generation?

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is critical that all South African schools and tertiary institutions earnestly engage in the process of empowering African languages. This is the only legitimate response to the National Language-in-education Policy (1997). The first step is to remove the stigma often attached to the study of an African language. This can be achieved if teachers and lecturers are enthusiastic about their subject, and ingeniously inventive in their teaching methods and teaching aids. Furthermore, bilingual education should be exercised at all levels.

This proposal is supported by an empirical research by Martin (1996), where he investigated children's perceptions of being bilingual in Zulu and English throughout South Africa. The key findings of the research were that isiZulu as an African language is not given the necessary support to develop as a language of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Emphasis continues to be on English. Bantu education has had a huge impact on the minds of students. There is a tendency of looking down upon students who are studying African languages and this situation perpetuates inferiority complex.

The government is willing to develop African languages as media of instruction and to also promote multilingualism as this is the cornerstone of the national language policy. Bilingualism should then be seen as the catalyst to reach these goals. The Department of Arts and Culture is certainly being active in this process by providing bursary schemes for students to study African languages, especially in the areas of language planning,

interpreting, translation, lexicography and human language technology. The department of Education (DoE) must monitor and evaluate the process of language policy developments for tertiary institutions so that transformation could take place. The DoE must also provide job opportunities for teachers to teach African languages in multiracial schools, especially isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, a province where 80% of the population speaks isiZulu. The DoE must also fund institutions intending to develop teaching and learning resources for African languages. Language technology, i.e. the use of computers, must be incorporated into the university curricula of African languages with the intention of devising spellcheckers and other essential tools. It is imperative to have a spellchecker before engaging in computer-assisted translations. Finally, the African Renaissance will remain an impossible dream if African languages are not given their rightful place in society, in education and in Africa as a whole.

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