

# Literate English for Epistemological Access: The Role of English Studies

**Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mqgwashu**

This paper discusses literature that concerns itself with the history of literary studies and the extent to which such history has influenced the broader field of English Studies in South Africa<sup>1</sup>. This discussion engages critically with debates about the institutional separation of English literature departments and English language departments, a common feature in most universities nationally and internationally. The main argument of this paper is that within the context of a society marked by decades of past racial (and present economic) inequalities, modules that focus on the development of linguistic and academic literacy skills offered in English departments need not maintain a pedagogic practice that is either based on grammatical rules or academic writing and criticism, without an attempt to integrate the two. If this pedagogic approach persists, I want to argue, and unless English departments in universities reclaim English language as part of their scholarly engagement, students' development in 'literate English' will be compromised<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> English Studies as a field includes more disciplinary tracks than just literature. It includes such disciplines as language, media (newspapers, film, advertising, popular culture), translation, oral texts. (For more details see Dimitriu 2002; Green 2001; Pope 1998; and Greenblatt & Gunn 1992.)

<sup>2</sup> Wallace (2003: 93) describes 'literate English' as 'language which is not spontaneous but planned. It is more elaborated than informal speech, makes explicit its grounds and provides useful bridge into expository written language'.

Writing about the study of English literature, Horn (1999) maintains that the knowledge sought for is 'knowledge about ourselves, about our ways of thinking and speaking, about individual existence which is also and always a social existence' (81). The centrality of language in the approach to, and the focus on, the study of literature (as Horn understands it) cannot be overemphasised. This centrality is in terms, first, of our understanding and critical engagement with this knowledge ('about ourselves, about our ways of thinking and speaking ...', as Horn, puts it), secondly, the construction of alternative knowledge(s) other than knowledge presented by mainstream cultures (through literary works) and, thirdly, thinking about ways in which such knowledge may be disseminated. Successful engagement with English literary texts, within this context, depends entirely on a certain level of competence in the language of instruction and, without such a level, it is unlikely that students will attain the kind of knowledge with which the study of English literature is concerned. The relevant level of competence in the language of instruction in order for students to engage with literary studies as expected in English departments can only be acquired if language is taught, and understood as, a medium that is able, as Halliday and Matthiesen (1999) put it:

to create meaning because ... it is related to our material being in three distinct ways. In the first place, it is a part of the material world .... In the second place, it is the theory about the material world .... In the third place, it is a metaphor for the material world ... (602).

The above assertion seems to suggest that given the fact that literary texts use language about physical space and time, language in literature needs to be understood as a theory about our physical existence and experiences, and is thus able to capture the natural and social processes in the environment. According to Green (2001), this understanding brings about the level of awareness with regard to the nature of language that the discipline of English literary studies attempts to inculcate into students' thinking. English literary studies does this through the analysis of ways in which language in literary, oral, and visual texts, as well as in media and popular culture, is used to construct meanings about individual and group identities. In the context of

my paper this is the basis upon which pedagogic practices in English departments can introduce innovative ways of teaching language akin to the broader field of English Studies:

- The relationship between purpose of a text and how such a purpose informs the author's grammatical stylistic choices;
- Our ways of thinking, writing, and speaking about individual existence as presented in literary texts and other forms of communicating experience, which is also, and always, a social existence;
- Distinction between knowledge *of* and *about* language, and knowledge *of* and *about* discourse communities;
- To transcend the particular and abstract from the physical and social context in order that the knowledge from literary texts, media, visual and written texts, may be transformed into something more generalisable;
- The ability to generalize, to grasp relationships such as cause and effect, to predict the consequences of events, to grasp the essential message of a speech, novel, a written text, and to evaluate situations through writing; and
- To examine ideological presences and pressures, typical writing practices in a given situation or discipline, and common or expected methods of inquiry.

Within the context of South Africa, literary studies have not pursued entirely all the concerns of the broader field of English Studies with language as outlined above. Instead, literary studies have followed theoretical developments in the United Kingdom (Balfour 2000). On the one hand, there were the advocates (F.D. Maurice & Charles Kingsley) of great literature, classical languages, maths, geography and rhetoric as a means of attaining equality for colonised people, whilst on the other hand, other scholars saw 'the teaching of English [as providing] the clearest case of how English Studies served colonial purposes by alienating students from their national language[s] and culture[s]' (Miller 1997: 282). Eagleton (1983) reminds us that,

Chris Baldick has pointed to the importance of the admission of English literature to the Civil Service examinations in the Victorian period: armed with this conveniently packaged version of their cultural treasures, the servants of British imperialism could sally forth overseas secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples (29).

It is for this reason, as Balfour (2000) puts it, that: ‘other scholars argued for less access to European culture, on the basis that it de-valued indigenous cultural forms’ (78). Pennycook (1994) draws our attention to similar sentiments in India, where financial resources were spent on English education, ‘producing too many English-educated Indians to take up the limited number of jobs available in the colonial administration, and ... insufficient time and money being devoted to education in the vernacular’ (87). In contexts where the trend was reversed, that is, more support given to vernacular languages than English, however, the coloniser still benefited more than the colonised. Said’s (1989) *Orientalism* alerts us to the fact that the coloniser often succeeds in their enterprise by using education to construct the colonised ‘Other’, and this often manifests in education policies. In relation to this issue, Seng (1970) observes that:

much of the primitive Malay education that continued to be supplied by the British Government was in no small degree due to [its] attempt to preserve the Malay as a Malay, a son of the soil in the most literal sense possible ... these views led to the continued championing of Malay vernacular education ... and strong emphasis on a ‘vocational’ element in Malay education, including an almost fanatical devotion to basket-weaving (in Pennycook 1994:90).

This is education for the preservation of the *status quo*, ‘to prevent students from entertaining any ambitions above their humble stations in life, and to encourage them to feel thankful rather than resentful towards their colonisers’ (Pennycook 1994: 88). The few indigenous people’s access to English became a form of colonial patronage, and

an English-educated boy [drew] a far higher salary than a boy who only [knew] his only language, and [had] an opening for advancement which is closed to the other, the principal aims of education in Malaya were to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been (Maxwell 1997:2 in Pennycook 1994: 89).

It is on the basis of these sentiments that both Orientalism and Anglicism may be seen as complementary discourses of colonialism which, while they worked both to marginalise and to divide the colonised, functioned to 'domesticate' (or lull) indigenous peoples' resentment against invasion. Culler (2000) points out that English literature in the colonies of the British Empire, as a subject of instruction, 'was charged with giving the natives an appreciation of the greatness of England ... in a historic civilising enterprise' (36). Reddy (1995), a South African literary critic and educationist, has observed the following about the relationship between traditional approaches to English and Apartheid ideology:

In importing the metropolitan norm, especially the 'Great Tradition' to South Africa, its proponents assimilated it into the Apartheid system. The irony is that Leavis did not advocate academic traditionalism at the expense of social privilege. When his theories were implemented as part of the Apartheid curriculum, their importation into this country served the specific ideological purposes (despite protestations to the contrary by liberal-humanists of the time) of foisting a particular cultural heritage which ignored the cultural hybridity of the nation (6).

A number of assumptions about literature and literary studies in English are also associated with the canonical approach, an approach that emerged through Matthew Arnold (1876), I.A. Richards (1929), and F.R. Leavis (1948). According to Arnold (1876), an influential cultural historian and critic, literature was central to civilisation because,

great men of culture are those who have had a passion for ... carrying from one end to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of the time ... to humanise it (70).

This view influenced the choice of texts to be studied. Drawing from Arnold's view, the selection of texts for study in institutions of learning required an accompanying pedagogy emphasising the authority of the text and teacher. In the 1920s 'New Criticism' pioneered by I.A. Richards, invested the teacher with authority, thereby glossing over a definitive interpretation of the text. Young (1987) provides an insight into the actual practical implications of this view in classroom practice:

The teacher would become the explicator of the text's meanings or would offer a powerful role model to pupils ... learning the technique of unlocking textual meanings and internalising the canons of literary judgement and taste (in Cocoran & Evans 1979:11).

Leavis (1984) further developed Richard's (1929) notion of teacher and text by advocating that the critic and reader should achieve 'unmediated community with his text and with his presumed audience' (Mulhern 1979:166). For Mulhern, Leavis' legacy on English Studies can be described as having three elements:

A critical-historical canon defining the major traditions of English literature; a loosely formulated methodology of critical practice; and a cluster of ideas concerning the nature of literature and its place in social life (1979:328).

The Leavisite approach to reading and text was not without criticism. Arguing against Leavis, Moon (1990) points out the fact that 'traditional reading practices assume literary texts to be 'perfectly' complete and unified' (34). It was apparent to Moon and Mulhern (1981) that Arnold, Richards, and Leavis represented a continuum in English Studies because they all, in different respects, adhered to a notion of the text as a source of authority. Eagleton (1983), a British literary critic writing almost a century

later than Arnold, suggested that English Studies during this period:

was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence—what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the centre of most essential values were ... made the object of the most intensive scrutiny (31).

This understanding of the nature of English Studies shared a utilitarian view of learners as empty pitchers into which knowledge was to be poured, and this made the study of literature an intellectual exercise meant to produce knowledge as an end in itself.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the ‘universality of the dollar, the English language, and the Internet’ have brought about a major shift in the study of English literature as an academic (intellectual) discipline because ‘educators are faced with the challenge of continuing education for the advancement of skills to cope with technological developments’ (Sarinjeive & Balfour 2002: ix). This is not a suggestion, however, that English is the only language with potential, and perhaps better positioned than other languages, to bring about the advancement of skills to cope with technological advancements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Roy-Campbell (1998), for instance, draws on the works of Diop (1974; 1991) to point out that the achievements of Africans during the age of antiquity in mathematics, architecture, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine were accomplished in African languages<sup>3</sup>. It is important to point out that all these areas required technical vocabulary and conceptual frameworks, all of which was made possible in African languages. Brock-Utne (2000) asserts that:

Walter Rodney (1976) has described the process by which Europe underdeveloped Africa, technologically and scientifically deskilling Africans. The accounts of both Cheik Anta Diop and Walter Rodney are a statement to the vast capabilities of African peoples realised through the indigenous African languages. One of the forms of written language in the world—Ge’ez—was found in Africa, in the area currently known as Ethiopia. But European mythology about

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<sup>3</sup> Cheik Anta Diop (1974; 1991) has written extensively on the African past.

Africa, which came to be accepted as the early history of Africa, did not recognise the achievements of African societies in pre-colonial times. From the perspective of these Europeans, the activities worth recording began with their contact with this 'dark continent'. Africa was presented as comprising peoples speaking a multitude of tongues which did not have written forms. Roy-Campbell points to written African languages dating to 3000 BC that are still used today (143).

As part of the initiatives that wished to observe these profound research findings, Brock-Utne (2000) reminds us of the Phelps-Stokes Fund which set up the Education Commission for Africa. It is this fund that assisted in the establishment of a segregated educational system for Black Americans and 'had subsequently been requested by the British to organise a similar system for their colonies. Its 1922 Report makes a strong argument for the use of African languages as instructional languages in school' (Brock-Utne 2000:146). Despite attempts of this nature, African countries resisted attempts to implement ideas in the Report. Brock-Utne (2000) reports that:

The Africans felt ... that most of the colonial language policies suggesting that Africans use their vernaculars in school were inspired by racial prejudices regarding the supposedly intellectual inferiority of Africans, a factor making them incapable of benefiting from a Western education. The Africans suspected that the language policies were designed to keep them in their social ghettos in the same way black Americans had been disadvantaged by their education in separate institutions which were inferior to the ones the white children attended (146f).

This attitude is similar to sentiments referred to earlier with regard to the use of Malay in educating indigenous people of Malaysia. These same sentiments prevailed even after independence in most African countries where the languages of the colonisers remained the main languages of instruction in education. Wright (2002) associates the persistence of this attitude among younger speakers of indigenous languages with the drastic



decrease in students' enrolment in African languages departments in most universities of this country.

We are all familiar with the alarming decline in registrations at African languages departments in South African universities. The most astonishing figures are those published in relation to UNISA (South Africa's major distance-learning university) and reported in the *Sunday Times*: According to UNISA, the only institution that offers tuition in all African languages, the number of undergraduate students registered for these courses has dropped from 25 000 in 1997 to 3 000 this year [the year 2000]. The number of postgraduate students has also decreased, from 511 to 53 in the same period. Other institutions confirmed an annual decline of 50% (*Sunday Times* 4 March 2000, in Wright, 2000:4).

Among other things, this decrease means there is no guarantee for the availability of future expertise in indigenous languages for their development, codification, and standardisation. This is crucial if indigenous languages are to thrive and compete successfully in a country where capitalist ambitions and knowledge of English influence decisions in the most important spheres of society (Crystal 1998). It is partly because of these factors, furthermore, that, as Sarinjeive (2002) notes: 'courses such as English Language Studies, Reading and Interpretation, Knowledge and Production, Literary Studies and Cultural and Media Studies, to name a few innovations, began making an appearance in university curricula' (36). These new directions reflect, among other things, Eagleton's (1983) old questions about what constitutes literary studies, as he asks:

If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of. We can begin, then, by raising the question: what is literature? .... a distinction between fact and fiction seem unlikely to get us very far ... our own opposition between 'historical' and 'artistic' truth does not apply to the early Icelandic sagas. Novels and news reports were neither clearly factual nor clearly fictional...What about jokes,

football chants and slogans, newspaper headlines, advertisements, which are verbally flamboyant but not generally classified as literature (5f).

Most recently, Pope (1998), drawing from Evans (1992:184), points out that ‘the point about “English” as the name of a subject is that it is an adjective made to serve as a noun. So ‘English’ is always pointing towards an absence—the noun. Is the subject English literature, language, society, culture, people?’ (16). In writing about the study of English in the university, Green (2001) refers to ways in which the English Department within his context has observed, and in some senses transcended Eagleton and Pope’s observations above. Writing about the research interests of his colleagues in the English Department that is ‘still a defining characteristic of university as opposed to other forms of tertiary-level teaching’, Green (2001) notes that:

‘English’ in our context is not only a whole variety of literatures in a variety of englishes ... but also (to choose examples from our own teaching at the University of Natal) woman’s magazines, shopping malls, the beach, legal documents, medical texts, historical discourse, journalism, visual images, popular fiction, detective fiction, graphic fiction, oral performance, rap music, publishing, creative writing, or—to really test the fundamental definition of ‘English’ as an adjective—just about any of the above in translation (3).

All these developments point to the extent to which English literary studies has evolved, and will continue to take new directions, as a discipline. Regardless of these developments, however, meaningful and successful engagement with content still depends entirely on a great deal of sophistication, first with the discourse characteristic of the discipline of literary studies and, secondly, the language of instruction through which knowledge and skills are constructed and transmitted. Throughout this paper I argue that successful access to both, that is, the discourse of the discipline of literary studies and the language of instruction, can be made easier when taught within the context of one module. For the purposes of the subject of

this paper, I would focus on two aspects in the field of English Studies: English language and English literature. This is because, unlike Modern Languages Studies such as Italian, Dutch (or even Afrikaans and isiZulu in South Africa), where both language and literature concerns have successfully co-existed in single academic departments, this has often not been the case for English Studies, both in national and international contexts.

The teaching of English language and English literature within one academic department at most universities remains, as Janks (1990) puts it: 'a contested terrain'. In most contexts English departments focus on cultural and literary texts, not language. As a rationale for this arrangement, Bateson (1971) presents 'language' and 'literature' as different specialisations in the field of English Studies. He describes the former as,

always headed towards total description—a detached, objective, universally available discipline ... 'language' ... has its ineradicable subjective core ... grammar, for one thing, is essentially logical in its linguistic presuppositions, and as such it is governed by the principles of non-contradiction; literary criticism, on the other hand, assumes in the verbal material criticised the presence of opposite and discordant qualities whose provisional balance and reconciliation the common reader will agree under certain circumstances to accept. Those circumstances, considered linguistically, can be summed up in the word 'style'—a term that includes the whole armoury of rhetorical devices, phonetic and semantic, with their larger structural extensions such as tragedy and comedy. The function of style is to unify ... literature's disparate parts. As such it is the exact opposite of grammar, whose function is not primarily to unite but to divide (57).

As a consequence of this logic, Titlestad (1998) observes that 'too many English departments at universities have for too long regarded themselves as mainly departments of English literature' (34). In his *Literature and Linguistics* (1971), Fowler points to the hostility between language and literature as something that has 'marred English Studies'. Such hostility manifests itself in the writings of literary critics such as Vendler (1966). Her main reservation against the formation of academic alliances between the study of English literature and English language is that '

linguistics has given us no critics comparable in literary subtlety to certain men like Richards, Spitzer, Burke, Blackmur, Empson, and others, whose sense of linguistic patterning is formidably acute (Fowler 1971: 43).

As a response to the criticism, Fowler (1971) points out that Vendler (1966) fails to acknowledge the fact that ‘the corpus of linguistic writings on literature is as yet minuscule and could hardly be expected to yield riches on this scale. Inevitably in the very first years of any new “movement” there will be uncertainty, infelicity, and changes of method’ (43).

Fowler’s (1971) response suggests that Vendler’s (1966) criticism is premature, ill-informed, and entirely inappropriate. Individual disciplines and various perspectives in relation to questions relating to the subject matter evolve over time, and are continually in a state of flux. English literary studies itself underwent similar instabilities and uncertainties at its initial stages but, because of constant inquiry and research, it has evolved until its current stage (Eagleton 1983). As one of the disciplines under the broader field of English Studies, literary studies’ scholars over the years have laboured to maintain the literary territory. Vendler’s (1966) charge against the discipline of English language (one of the disciplines within the field of English Studies) as presented above is typical of attempts by literary scholars to ‘preserve’ what they consider to be a literary territory. Fowler (1971) points out that:

The hostility in Mrs Vendler’s voice is depressingly familiar to those of us who have suffered from an unnecessary schism between ‘language’ and ‘literature’ which has so long marred English Studies. Her tone betrays the fear, common among teachers of literature, although less so among the great critics, that linguistics may invade and ravage precious literary territory (43).

Within this ‘literary territory’ it is important to understand what is studied, and what then is this ‘language’ that must be stopped from the act of ravaging the ‘literary’. Fowler (1971) asserts that,

Literary study comprises historical, stylistic or openly technical

investigation: genre description, stylistic test of authorship, metrical analysis, for example. For some reason 'interpretation' (an exceedingly difficult term) and 'evaluation' have come to be regarded as the only activities which are worth doing and which are actually done (46).

The approach to literary study and criticism that focuses simply on interpretation and evaluation to the exclusion of such aspects as genre description and its linguistic manifestation in literary works, for instance, arises from a very particular understanding of literature. Bateson's (1971) definition of literature illustrates this point:

A work of literature is successful linguistically, the best words in the best order, when appropriate stylistic devices co-operate to unify humane value-judgements, implicit or explicit, on some aspects of life as it is lived in the writer's own society. As for the reader of such a work, he will only be successful if he registers, consciously or at least semi-consciously, the unifying stylistic devices that enable him to respond to the human situation available to him in it. In a word, the role played by grammar in description is *comparable* to that of style in evaluation. But if comparable they are also mutually incompatible, because grammar is primarily analytic in its methods and premises, whereas style is essentially synthetic (58).

The need to shift the analysis of literature away from the language-free analysis of many of the New Critics, towards a more methodically and linguistically aware analysis is an idea that has been shared by Birch (1989), the notion that 'literature is language'. Writing about what he calls an Empsonian approach applied by Nowotny (1962) in her analysis of literary works, Birch (1989) notes that:

Her approach is Empsonian, using a close *explication de texte* method of reading that marks her out as someone who believed firmly that there needed to be recognition *within* intrinsic criticism that linguistic analysis of literary text was a necessary and not

simply an obstructivist aberration. Her theorising of language and style never moves beyond a concentration on the supremacy of words; she believes firmly that these words somehow ‘contain’ meanings, and she argues for maintaining a formalist distinction between poetic and non-poetic language as a means of defining literature. Style...is effectively language manipulated in ways that signal it as different from ‘ordinary’ language (100).

For Van Wyk-Smith (1990), this is precisely what defines the field of English Studies: its concerns with ways in which texts (written and spoken) use and manipulate language to represent instances of life as lived in different contexts. Birch’s (1989) representation of Nowotny’s concern as having to do with *how* literature works as opposed to approaching literature from an intrinsic critical tradition signals Nowotny ‘as someone on the language side of English Studies, rather than on the literature side—a powerful system of classification in the politics of university English departments’ (Birch 1989:100). This is the reason Van Wyk-Smith (1990) encourages a focus on language features in addition to studying literature in English departments:

unless language studies are centrally concerned to show why it is important to know how complex discourse works, and literary studies return to their linguistic base, we simply end up teaching two distinct subjects under one roof (9).

The reason for ‘teaching two subjects under one roof’, as Van Wyk-Smith (1990) puts it, is that whenever English departments attempt to teach ‘language’, such programmes focus either on grammar teaching or on academic development. Both attempts fail to draw from the field of English Studies’ concerns with the role of language in constructing and contesting different subject positions, identities, and knowledge as discussed above. This is because the artificial separation of language studies and literature studies in English departments usually results in pedagogic practices that leave students, either understanding texts and able to discuss them orally, or with the ability to regurgitate what they have copied during lectures and can

draw from memory. The consequence under these circumstances is that students are left with an inability to construct complex and persuasive arguments in writing and failure to engage critically with detail. Writing about the correlation between mastering conceptual and linguistic knowledge for students with English as an Additional Language, Clayton (1994) correctly points out that,

The problem of language proficiency in relation to academic achievement in second language students becomes even more acute if we realise that those same students may not reveal any language barriers in conversational settings and hence appear to be able to articulate their ideas adequately (30).

Clayton's (1994) observations above compare with a study (Mgqwashu 1999) conducted at the University of Natal where, according to one of the study's participants: 'students' verbal responses do not match their writing abilities' (66). Balfour's Foreword in the module pack for *An Integrated English Language Course* (2001), a module offered by the former University of Natal's English Department, represents attempts to respond to such challenges. It spells out clearly the undisputable dominance of the English language over the globe, and therefore an urgent need for the teaching and learning of it. As though to alert his readers about (and therefore prepare them for) one of the future inevitabilities with regard to this language, Balfour (2001) asserts that:

The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be characterized by the accelerated growth of already established 'global' languages. English is only one such language. Yet it is neither more nor less helpful in expressing meaning than any other language. English is not an inherently superior language. Nonetheless, it is true that the language occupies an anomalous position in South Africa. While English is the language of education, the media, the economy and politics, it is not the native language of the majority of South Africans. Though this is no accident, the educational opportunities to learn in and through English, for you the learner, are considerable (i).

Balfour's observations remind us of the priority that needs to be accorded to English language teaching by institutions of higher learning in South Africa. This, as the Foreword clarifies, is not a suggestion that other languages are inferior to English, or that universities should not pay attention to them. It is rather an attempt to point out that English is a global language, the language of wider communication, and already a dominant language in most institutions of higher learning and crucial employment institutions in South Africa. This is the reason why, although the Foreword is addressed to students, the corollary in it is that university practitioners are themselves challenged to take seriously, and put concerted efforts into, the teaching of English language if students' success in *and beyond university education* is to be a reality. Sarinjeive (2002) alludes to the fact that:

Given the inadequate preparation for tertiary education and language difficulties experienced by ... students to whom English is a second or third language, focussing on language skills, in the English Department, would appear to be the most practical and realistic way to begin to meet urgent needs (42).

The flip-side of Sarinjeive's postulation above is that the skills in critical engagement with, and analysis of, literary and cultural texts that English departments have traditionally attempted to develop in students may not necessarily be what most students need (at least in the earlier years of their university education). In the study she conducted at the Sebokeng campus of Vista University, Sarinjeive (2002) found out that 'most students wanted to learn English to speak, read and write well, be familiar with rules of grammar, think, analyse concepts, solve problems and increase vocabulary' (42f).

Introducing modules to address these needs, however, is the manifestation of an inherently common-sense idea that the difficulties experienced by students as they engage with tertiary study are attributable to issues related to 'language', and not to their failure to master a secondary (academic) discourse. Such initiatives reveal, furthermore, what Jacobs (2006) defines as,

an understanding of language as an instrument of communication



rather than as a means for making meaning ... a typical institutional response to language and content integration (182).

Jacob's (2006) understanding of strategies of this nature as part of attempts to address students' linguistic and/or academic literacy needs suggests that despite research findings in Sarinjeive's (2002) study, the issue of whether meeting these needs may be achieved through initiatives integrated within the disciplinary discourses or through modules outside mainstream offerings remains unresolved. Gee (1990) defines a discourse as,

... a socially accepted association among ways of using language, thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (143).

His definition of literacy is pertinent to this paper. For him, literacy means 'mastery or fluent control over a secondary discourse' (Gee 1990:153). Within this context, students' educational problems in an institution of higher learning, a university in the context of this paper, are rooted in their status as outsiders to academic discourses and in their lack of familiarity with the literacy or 'deep rules of [academic] culture' (Boughey 2005). An understanding that students are experiencing difficulties with academic literacy, and not with language (grammar) *per se*, calls into question many of the language intervention programmes which have been established on the assumption that what students need is tuition in the structures and vocabulary of English, the additional language which is the medium of instruction at many tertiary institutions. Balfour's (1995) study about one of the modules that adopted this line of thinking (students' difficulties are with academic literacy) in an English Department reveals that the new programme:

assumed (inaccurately) a degree of linguistic competence already in place. Teachers became aware that the new approach was evidently not compatible with the approach adopted in schools where language and literature continued to be taught separately (or language not at

all) (96).

The programme Balfour (1995) refers to was an attempt to socialise first-year students into the 'academic discourse' of literary studies by way of introducing a syllabus which 'used discourse analysis for the teaching and explication of texts, with a view to encouraging the acquisition of critical literary skills' (94). Jacobs (2006) argues that programmes of this nature are,

related to the framing of students, particularly second language speakers of English, in a deficit mode ... these discourses ... tended to reinforce notions of academic literacies as autonomous generic skills, which in turn led to ... add-on, generic academic literacy skills-based courses (184f).

While Balfour (1995) associates the failure of these programmes with students' lack of grammatical competence, Jacobs (2006) argues that the failure has more to do with the fact that lecturers got subjected to 'discourses [that] exonerated them from the need to reflect on how they were or *were not* making explicit for their students the rhetorical nature of their disciplines' (185).

Several studies (Balfour 1995; Clarence-Fincham 1998; Balfour 2000), which have attempted to investigate issues of language and learning in the context of the University of Natal (Howard College and Pietermaritzburg campuses) all regard English language proficiency as an enabling and/or disabling vehicle for tackling university education. Balfour's (1995) study, after identifying grammatical competence as a necessary prerequisite for studying literature, concluded that the teaching of grammar *ought to carry the same weight as discourse analysis in its literary form* in English Studies. On the other hand, Clarence-Fincham's (1998) study concerned itself with the theory of critical language awareness, arguing the need for modules that will teach students to be aware of power relations implicit in the language we use as an effective way of facilitating language acquisition. This is language teaching with a view to developing students' academic literacy rather than a narrow focus on grammatical competence. Balfour's (2000) recent work extends his earlier thesis by

suggesting that language teaching using literary material is an effective method, for it develops students' rhetorical features awareness as used within the context of literary works.

I share Balfour's (1995; 2000) concluding remarks about the place of language teaching having to be accorded the same status as the study of literature in English departments, *albeit* with two fundamental differences. On the one hand, I am persuaded that language teaching by English departments needs to raise students' awareness of how complex discourse works within the discursive, cultural, and social critique. On the other hand, language used in literary texts is often a product of a 'slavish' observation of specific 'imposed' literary conventions alien to ways in which we use language under ordinary circumstances and/or when producing texts (spoken and written) within the scope of different academic genres valued within the university. The adoption of Balfour's approach, it may be argued, could lead to a situation where students may learn to string correct sentences and construct proper paragraphs, but not be developed in what Wallace (2002) calls literate English'. The attainment of this level of language competence requires more than just the teaching of, for instance, types of sentences, parts of speech and tenses as identified in a novel or a short story, and giving students exercises to either label such sentences in an extended text or writing short paragraphs using two or more types of sentences. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is through raising students' awareness and understanding of different genres relevant to the discipline of English literary studies' language conventions, and how grammatical choices are largely a result of discipline specific discourses, and the purpose for which texts are produced to make meaning. Stacey's *Exploring the Development of Voice in Student Writing in a Literature Course at Foundation Level* (2001) reveals that,

Students identified the following problems: in lectures and seminars they did not hear lecturers because they spoke too fast...the significance of examples or illustrations was often missed; there was lack of background knowledge and uncertainty about how to integrate lecture knowledge with reading or own knowledge. Some of the basic problems students had in studying and interpreting literature were their view of literature as narrative only, and their

difficulty in identifying literary techniques or how they worked. As a result of the difficulties students had with the amount of independent reading required many texts were unread or unfinished so much of the significance of what was discussed in class was lost (15).

Much of the lecture and seminar discussions that get lost are a consequence of students' unfamiliarity with the linguistic codes, what Stacey (2001) calls 'literary techniques [and] how they work'. It is what gets lost that becomes the criteria in terms of which students are assessed. Often what goes on in lecture halls exposes an assumption that students already possess the relevant disciplinary expertise and cognitive sophistication to grasp abstract meanings intrinsic in what Bateson (1971) calls 'style' in literary fiction. Balfour's (1996) reference to a response by one of his research participants in an English Department is a classical example of this assumption at work:

... students do not seem to see that interpretation is the process of questioning and weighing what they already have an innate awareness of. They also do not seem to realise that this is what we are rewarding (23)<sup>4</sup>.

As pointed out earlier, Fowler (1971) sees "interpretation" [as] an exceedingly difficult term' (46) owing to the nature of the activity itself (subjective, draws from different and sometimes contradictory discourses, and with which most students are not familiar). As a first year student, for example, I was not aware of what interpretation meant within the English literary study; and I did not know what the discipline was rewarding, and not rewarding. These aspects of the discipline were not made explicit to me along the lines presented by Bateson (1971) above. I relied entirely on my limited Bantu Education secondary school learning experiences. Lecturers, on the other hand, simply assumed that I knew these intricate disciplinary dynamics which are only accessible to individuals who have conscious

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<sup>4</sup> The title of the Report is *An Inquiry into Pedagogy and Syllabus Implementation in the Department of English at the University of Durban-Westville* (1996).

control over the deployment of the discourse of literary studies.

According to Reppen (1995), learning to have conscious control over the deployment of any discourse requires 'direct instruction in certain text features [in that discourse] such as text organisation [and] sentence structure' (35). While students experience a sense of loss of control over the deployment and organisation of the discourse of literary studies, lecturers still evaluate students 'by their control of these features' (35), as exemplified by Stacey's (2001) and Balfour's (1996) studies above. Reppen's main concern, as exemplified through Balfour's (1996) study in particular, is that students are expected to manipulate language academically, a skill which presupposes a constellation of acquired abilities. These abilities, it may be argued, can only be learned if interaction between students and lecturers is underpinned by principles of reflexive pedagogy, that is, an explicit teaching practice driven by a view that pedagogic communication needs to signal the discourse's constructedness (Bourdieu 1994). Reppen (1995) defines this as the teaching practice that 'brings forms and patterns of language use to conscious awareness:' (35). This is pertinent within pedagogical communication, as Ellsworth (1989) asserts:

[T]here is no communication without disturbing background effects, and this 'static' is likely to be greatest in the pedagogical communication between one who knows and one who is to learn...Communication can only be regarded as pedagogical when every effort is made to eliminate the faulty 'signals inherent in an incomplete knowledge of the code and to transmit the code in the most efficient way (89).

What Ellsworth asserts involves developing students' awareness of the fact that, as Pecheux (1985) puts it: 'meaning [is] a function, not of particular words or wordings, but rather of the discursive formation in which ... expressions occur' (in Montgomery *et al.* (1992:7). When language is in use (whether in writing or in speaking), the discursive formation functions as a set of regulative principles that underlie actual discourses. Within this context, meaning becomes an effect upon the human subject, but not a stable property of the subject (Bourdieu, 1994). This is the level of sophistication to which reflexive pedagogy can expose students.

Pedagogic practice in most universities, however, does not lend itself to principles underpinning this kind of pedagogy. The latter is seen by most academics as too elementary, and is therefore rejected because it clashes with their pedagogical philosophy that students are favoured by lecturers' expertise. What this philosophy ignores is the fact that learning implies acquiring both knowledge itself, and the code of transmission used to convey a particular body of knowledge. One of the lecturers in Balfour's (1996) study insists that '... I expect students to have done prior reading and also to have at least considered the questions I posed to them at the end of the previous tutorial. I assume that my students learn from each other' (33). Assuming that students will understand the academic discourse as they read set works and secondary readings, without explicitly reflecting on these texts' constructedness, is to ignore the fact that language is not just a collection of words, but provides us with 'a system of transposable mental dispositions' (Bourdieu 1994:11). Given the demographic changes experienced by universities in particular, and changes our country has undergone, it would be inadvisable for English departments to maintain a teaching practice that is essentially content-centred, and relies on unverified assumptions about students' linguistic and/or academic literacy abilities.

Disciplines under the broader field of English Studies are supposed to teach students to be creative and critical in their engagement with broader societal changes and the accompanying challenges. For this to happen, the adoption of reflexive pedagogy as a teaching methodology so that we can be able to present our students with opportunities that will develop critical grounding in the fundamentals of their respective disciplines, that is, the disciplines' constructedness, is a necessity. In the case of teaching English literature, this entails making students aware, through pedagogical practices, that 'the study of literature [and other modes of communicating experience] is about our ways of thinking and speaking about individual existence, which is also, and always, a social existence' (Culler 2000:67). By choosing to mystify the language which includes academics as members of the disciplinary group, while ignoring the fact that they themselves are not 'authors' of such a language, (but are simply 'interpellated' (to use Althusser's term), by specific discursive formations), academics 'conceal the contradictory character of their discourses to both themselves and to

students' (Montgomery *et al.* 1992:5). Stacey's (2001) account of the nature of the essays produced by students in one of the English literature modules illustrates this point:

Vague and unsubstantiated discussion and minimal analysis in essays resulted from students' avoidance of any close examination of the language of the texts because ... [their] concerns about essays were all to do with content—understanding what they were required to discuss and finding enough to say ... concern with content (15).

Essays written under these circumstances often display poor mastery of language as students seek to reproduce the academic discourse. It is a common thing to hear lecturers making comments about students such as 'another problem with students ... is expression ... evident in the essays' (Balfour 1996:33). Ironically, while this is the kind of attitude most lecturers have toward students, the former still expect the latter to manipulate language academically. This expectation betrays a rather flawed image of students by institutions of higher learning. They are seen as a socially homogeneous group who differ only according to individual talent and merit. Because of this image, comprehension and manipulation of language in writing are the first points on which students' knowledge is judged. This is the reason Rose (2005) insists that:

Many of us are working on writing, but the function of writing at school and university courses is primarily to demonstrate what we have learnt from reading. So I'm going to suggest that if we wish to explicitly address the learning needs of our students, then we need to make a significant shift in our teaching practices at all levels of education (1).

Drawing on this theoretical understanding of the role of reading in the construction of knowledge, pedagogic practices in the field of English Studies will assist academics to identify, recognise, and deal with the factors that separate them from students. According to Delpit (1988), such

separation is a consequence of the fact that

members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-members. However, when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down (283).

The identification and critical engagement with these classroom dynamics lead to an acknowledgement of the centrality of students' knowledge of the nature of the code of communication, and the dependence of this knowledge on factors such as social origin and school background. Writing about strategies that could be deployed to make the code of communication accessible to all students, Delpit (1988) points out that for those who 'are not already participant[s] in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier' (282). In his *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), Bernstein (1971) points out that 'people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ' (178). He distinguishes between what he calls 'restricted code and elaborated code' (135). According to Bernstein (1971),

The restricted code works ... for situations in which there is a great deal of shared and taken-for-granted knowledge in the group of speakers. It is economical and rich, conveying a vast amount of meaning with a few words, each of which has a complex set of connotations and acts like an index, pointing the hearer to a lot more information which remains unsaid .... The elaborated code spells everything out, not because it is better, but because it is necessary so that everyone can understand it. It has to elaborate because the circumstances do not allow the speaker to condense (26).

The implications in terms of the use of an elaborated code are that its effectiveness can be experienced in situations where there is no prior or shared understanding and knowledge of academic discourses. Such circumstances require more thorough explanation for students' learning to be meaningful, for, academics introduce new concepts and ideas to individuals (students) they have never met before. It is thus through an explicit teaching



practice, with the use of elaborated code as a matter of principle, that students may develop in literate English and begin to cope with the study of literature, and be in a position to expand the boundaries of the discipline.

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*Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu*

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Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu  
Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus  
School of Language, Literacies, Media and Drama Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
mgqwashue@ukzn.ac.za