

Editorial

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The Constitution of South Africa (1996) recognizes multilingualism as an important aspect of a democratic African society. More than fifteen years later this has become a point of controversy. There are critics who, although acknowledging the inclusive orientation of the Constitution, lament the lack of implementation of these principles by society at large. Research has shown that English is still the preferred language of instruction at both school and university level, in spite of evidence both in Africa and across the globe that the mother tongue is essential for true learning to occur at a deep level. Government bodies still tend to use English for official communication thereby making an indirect statement about the value of other languages.

Over the past few years, however, government bodies such as Pan South African Languages Board (PanSALB) have been more active in putting pressure on large state-aided institutions such as universities to put a firm language policy in place. Many of the tertiary institutions in the country responded by drafting an initial language policy with a subsequent plan for implementation. This has been the case with the University of KwaZulu-Natal for which a twenty-year plan was designed for the implementation of its language policy. This policy, although recognizing the status of all relevant languages, is concerned with a focus on the elevation of isiZulu to the status of an academic language and a language of instruction, as well as of general communication with the public. To facilitate this aim, members of staff from various Colleges in the University, together with other tertiary institutions in the province, collaborated in a joint research project in partnership with the South Africa-Norway Tertiary Development Programme (SANTED). The project was entitled *Multilingualism to Promote Access, Retention and Successful Professional Training*, the broad aims being to

promote multilingualism in higher education. This was to be done by providing short courses for students and staff to learn additional languages and to help students registered for professional degrees such as Nursing, Psychology, Education and Dental Assisting to learn the language of their clients in order to provide a more effective service to the public.

The medium to long term objectives of the SANTED project were to promote and develop higher levels of language proficiency in isiZulu; to produce graduates who have the capacity to interact professionally in both isiZulu and English; and to contribute to the development of a specialized discourse in isiZulu in selected disciplines by translating selected course materials into isiZulu and by using isiZulu as a language of instruction for tutorials. The duration of the project was three years (2007-2009). The various experiences of the process, the accompanying discourse and critical engagements with the project, and the results achieved by the different disciplines have been captured in the form of contributions to the present volume of *Alternation*. Due to its relevance, this issue also includes contributions from researchers in the field based at other tertiary South African institutions. As such, the articles in this volume all contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the implementation of multilingualism in South Africa.

There are nineteen articles in the issue. Three articles are on language policy. Seven focus on using an African language as a language of instruction, the teaching and learning of African languages as second languages for professional purposes and the incorporating of task-based, communicative techniques, and computer games in language teaching and learning. Another seven articles are on the intellectualization of the African languages through spoken and written corpora, translations and the promotion of these languages on the web. They also address issues related to terminology development, culturally-adapted translation in the Health disciplines, and attitudes towards language policies. The final two articles engage the status of other languages such as Afrikaans in education, legal interventions in language planning, and promoting social and racial integration through the requirement of a compulsory African language at Grade 12 respectively.

The order of appearance of the articles in this volume is deliberate – we begin with an appraisal of attempts at implementation of the language

policy, and end with a way forward – that of addressing the problem of implementation at school level. This volume is testimony to the fact that, whatever the critics have to say, language policy implementation is, indeed, happening at tertiary level, however small. This, we hope, is set to grow in the near future.

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