

# **Are Multilingual Education Policies Pipe Dreams? Identifying Prerequisites for Implementation**

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## **Abstract**

Fifteen years after the advent of democracy in SA, in the changeover from a bilingual to a purportedly multilingual dispensation, accompanied by the constitutional recognition of eleven languages, a balance can be drawn up of the extent to which this recognition has been reflected by the implementation of education policies. In spite of empirical research into various aspects of the role played by language in education in this country and proposals aimed at giving effect to the constitutional ideals, a tacit policy of monolingualism has been in evidence. In this article, it will be argued that a social Darwinist<sup>1</sup> approach has been followed in the handling of language matters in education at large, and that attitudinal factors accordingly play (and will play) a decisive role in effecting a paradigm shift, not only among educational policy makers, but within the minds of all role players. Such a paradigm shift, which is a prerequisite for generating the political will to effectively implement any proposals based on empirical research, can be shown to have taken root in the thinking of political policy makers at the parliamentary level. However, a recognition of the realities of language in education is still

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<sup>1</sup> Social Darwinism is a term that applies the linguistic framework of Darwin's biological theories to the realm of human social relations (Dafler 2005:1).

lacking at the level of implementation. By way of a limited case study, a proposal for such implementation at a tertiary institution is discussed.

**Keywords:** language policy implementation, higher education, multilingual education, attitudinal factors, pedagogy, multimodality, multiliteracies, linguistic Social Darwinism, vernacular, colonial language, language shift

## **Introduction**

Our point of departure is that language in education is one of the most sensitive indicators of the viability of a national policy of multilingualism. In this article, the role played by attitudinal factors in the implementation of a multilingual education policy will be investigated. The focus will be on a possible motivating force causing the resistance to vernacular language development and its effects on education, and certain changes in attitude which occurred in the course of the evolution of South Africa's fledgling democracy since 1994. The role players in this process will be identified and it will be shown how the changes in attitude became apparent through the tone and content of debates on the topic in an important policy making body. At the same time, factors which seem to have a positive influence on the acknowledgement of the value of a multilingual approach will be identified, leading to the proposal of a reality-based approach to be followed to create conditions for the implementation of a viable policy of multilingual education.

## **Background**

The political history of Africa, and in particular the process of emancipation from the status of colonies under the sovereignty of European nations to political independence, left its imprint in the form of rather similar language configurations in the ex-colonies. A common factor is namely that of both individual and societal multilingualism in African countries, in which a European language, such as English, Portuguese or French, plays a dominant role as the medium for higher functions. A second common factor, a

corollary of the first, is that of sociolinguistic inequality between the erstwhile colonial language and the indigenous languages of the African country concerned. This inequality is nowhere more clearly to be seen than in the role historically played by language in education, from the earliest introduction of formal schooling until today. By saying this, we do not deny the important role of language in other spheres of society. However, it is probably an axiom that language habits and perceptions are formed during the cognitive development of the rising generations, that is, in the process of education, and old habits tend to persist. Furthermore, it is these language habits and perceptions that form the basis of language attitudes, both towards the vernacular used as a home, or first language, and the erstwhile colonial language, which is used, almost without exception, as a language of learning in Africa.

## **Generalisations**

Let us leave aside for a moment the reasons for the sociolinguistic inequalities between the vernacular(s) (henceforth the V-language) and the relevant European language (henceforth the E-language), and focus on the nature of language in education policies. This is no simple matter when one compares various countries on the African continent with each other. However, the language situation in the field of education could possibly be generalised to two basic situations:

- An E-language is regarded as the most important medium for higher functions in society (and consequently for education), while indigenous languages fulfil a subordinate position and only play a role in basic education (if at all), as in the case of African countries in the French, Portuguese and (in the most cases) English spheres of influence.
- One or more indigenous languages (V-languages) are, in principle, developed as far as possible on a par with the E-language, or to a certain extent, and also used as medium of education, in various combinations (as in the case of Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa).

Of these two situations, the first represents the easiest route in terms of language planning, and in countries where the second situation applies, there

seems to be a tendency (for reasons that will be discussed below) to yield, in varying degrees, to the easiest route and diminish the role of the V-languages.

A crucial decision is what the role of the V-languages as medium of education should be in situations of multilingualism. The argument that the V-language should be the *only* medium is almost never an issue. A common practice is that the vernacular is used as a bridge to the adoption of the E-language (or dominant indigenous language, such as Swahili).

### **Motivating Force and End Results**

The reason(s) for the preference for a colonial language have been the subject of discussion for many years. In a recent publication, Stephen May (2001: Ch. 1 & 4) links this tendency to a combination of so-called linguistic social Darwinism and a resulting theory of modernity. He says:

The promotion of cultural and linguistic homogeneity at the collective/public level has come to be associated with, and expressed by, individual monolingualism. This amounts to a form of linguistic social Darwinism and also helps to explain why language shift, loss or decline has become so prominent.

This argument articulates an evolutionary discourse, assuming that socio-political change and language shift occur through the aggregation of individual rational choices and that individuals freely endorse new sets of values to participate in the 'modernisation' of society. In the process, a series of dichotomies is established, creating hierarchies of values and norms, in which traditional values become obsolete and/or suspiciously irrational: modernity is equated with progress – and modern, urban, universal values are lauded and confer prestige – whilst traditional, rural, parochial values are stigmatised (May 2001:141).

If this process is left unattended and allowed to run its course, linguistic and cultural death can become inevitable. One of the clearest symptoms is the phenomenon of language shift, which is described as follows:

[A] ‘majority’ language – that is, a language with greater political power, privilege and social prestige – comes to replace the range and functions of a ‘minority’ language. The inevitable result of this process is that speakers of the minority language ‘shift’ over time to speaking the majority language. The process of language shift described here usually involves three broad stages.

The first stage sees increasing pressure on minority language speakers to speak the majority language, particularly in formal language domains. This stage is often precipitated and facilitated by the introduction of education in the majority language. It leads to the eventual decrease in the functions of the minority language, with the public or official functions of that language being the first to be replaced by the majority language.

The second stage sees a period of bilingualism, in which both languages continue to be spoken concurrently. However, this stage is usually characterised by a decreasing number of minority language speakers, especially among the younger generation, along with a decrease in the fluency of speakers as the minority language is spoken less, and employed in fewer and fewer language domains.

The third and final stage – which may occur over the course of two or three generations, and sometimes less – sees the replacement of the minority language with the majority language. The minority language may be ‘remembered’ by a residual group of language speakers, but it is no longer spoken as a wider language of communication (May 2001:1).

There are many variations of this process, but it seems to be the most general symptom of linguistic social Darwinism on the African continent. Language planners, and particularly those involved in education, are often intuitively aware of this tide, and increasingly also informed about the results of research confirming the mindset of such language communities. If so, they are able to appeal to reason and influence the relevant role players.

## **Modernity and Language in Education: South Africa**

Let us now focus on the dynamics of a multilingual situation in an African

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country where changes have taken place as a result of large scale political and social transformation, and where language and education have been in the forefront of the quest for modernity, i.e. South Africa. With the adoption of eleven official languages in SA, the relative positions of all indigenous languages (including Afrikaans) changed completely. While English is the undisputed *de facto* language of preference in government (including the Department of Education), five of the V-languages (i.e. Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho and Setswana) have larger mother tongue communities than English (Van der Merwe & Van der Merwe 2006: 15) and are in principle sufficiently standardised to be used as media of instruction up to an advanced level of education, as are the remaining five, to varying extents. (The language provisions of the Constitution (SA Constitution, Section 6.5), the activities of PanSALB, and published language policies by the Department of Education are also in support of this objective.) However, conflict between language attitudes have led to an almost stalemate situation in promulgating legislation, which has been drafted and in existence for more than six years, to give effect to a general recognition of accepted principles of multilingualism and of the value of first language education (as medium) in empowering the youth of this country.

## **Turning of the Tide**

Let us briefly look at how attitudes have changed regarding language in education by noting the reports of meetings held by policy makers over a period of time. A drama of ten to eleven years unfolded in the committee rooms of Parliament, with the following *dramatis personae*:

- (a) the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education, consisting of members of various political parties, where proposed legislation and policy are analysed and debated before being submitted to Parliament as draft legislation;
- (b) the Minister;
- (c) executive officials of the Department of Education; and
- (d) PanSALB, the Pan South African Language Board, created by the SA Constitution to promote (SA Constitution, Section 6.5) and create

conditions for the development and use of all languages in the country.

As a run-up to the functioning of the Portfolio Committee, the Department of Education published two policy announcements in August 1997, i.e. the Language in Education Policy (in terms of the National Education Policy Act of 1996) and the Norms and Standards regarding Language Policy in terms of the SA Schools Act, also of 1996. This policy was based on the NEPI (National Education Policy Initiative) report, a well-researched investigation of 13 volumes into various aspects of education in South Africa published in 1992 (NEPI 1992). In the policy, the promotion of multilingualism was stated as a prime objective, together with strong support for either home language or dual-medium education. Although the right to choose the Language of learning and teaching (LoLT) lay with the individual, it was to be exercised against the obligation to promote multilingualism, and the LoLT had to be an official language (or languages)<sup>2</sup>.

After three and a half years, in February 2001, a meeting of the Education Portfolio Committee was held to discuss a PanSALB presentation and recommendations to the Minister & Department of Education on the implementation of the Language in Education Policy. It was noted by PanSALB that the policy had still not been implemented. In fact, a previous policy of switching to English after four years of home language education, already instituted in 1976 (the year of the Soweto uprisings), with disastrous results regarding the matric pass rate, had been continued as under the apartheid rule. This was despite intensive research into the effects of an abrupt switch to English undertaken by various research institutions. The arguments and detailed recommendations by PanSALB were swept off the table by the Committee, including the then Director General of Education, who maintained that language was only a small element influencing results, and that poor performance was a class issue, where schools with a lack of resources fared poorly. A question to the Director General about the importance of mother tongue education in performance was disallowed by the Chairperson (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2001:1).

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<sup>2</sup> The actual wording of the policy statements can be found in Appendix A.

In July 2006, a language colloquium was held in Cape Town, attended by the then Chairperson of PanSALB, the president of the Academy of Languages in Mali, parents of pupils and others, where the Minister confirmed the Department's intention to comply with the aims of the 1997 policy statement. An important statement made by the Minister was as follows:

The benefits that language diversity confers on any society far outstrip any advantages that monolingualism may offer. All recent research confirms this view.

Further:

It is also now conventional wisdom that a strong mother tongue foundation provides the best platform on which to base the learning of a second language; it makes it easier and faster.

Lastly:

There is also mounting evidence that a correlation exists between mother tongue loss and the educational difficulties experienced by many learners using another language for learning (Pandor 2006:2).

The 2006 colloquium in Cape Town, preceded by a change of political role players (although from the same parties) after a general election, led to a different approach and tone of debate in the Portfolio Committee.

From this point onwards, meetings by the Portfolio Committee took no issue with the right to be educated in the mother tongue whilst having access to a global language such as English, even though it countered the dominant view among teachers and parents that English should be the medium of education as early as possible. A summary of a meeting held in September of 2006 reads as follows:

.... the Committee agreed that advocacy was needed to convince parents, school governing bodies and teachers of the advantages of home language education.



The major problem to be addressed by the Committee was a matter of attitude, a general attitude of ‘you need to speak English and if you speak your mother tongue, it will slow down the development of your English’ (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2006: 2). The power to change this mind-set did not lie with the Committee, but with the schools, and these were not convinced. The question now was how this mind-set was to be changed.

## **A Two-pronged Approach**

Positive factors are (1) that the Department’s own reference base (e.g. Plüddemann *et al.* 2004) and the Wits-EPU report of 2009, showed time and again that cognitive development and academic achievement were markedly superior in schools where the home language was used as medium of education, and (2) that the major role players who oversee education policy are in agreement, by and large, about the necessity to implement the policy principles, and about the need for advocacy so as to convince teachers and parents about the validity of these principles.

Negative factors are the following: (1) In addition to the mind-set conditioned by the element of linguistic social Darwinism, fewer and fewer prospective teachers specialise in indigenous languages or are simply not able to teach their subjects in the mother tongue, and (2) although a majority of teachers in particularly rural schools where English is the LoLT switch to the home language to make themselves clearly understood, exam papers still have to be in English. The idiotic situation exists that in many, if not most, instances the teacher and the class share the same home language, but the tuition has to be in a language in which none of the two parties is proficient. Even the accommodating gesture by the Department to translate some key examination papers into the mother tongues of candidates to provide more clarity to the learners was only partially effective, since the papers still had to be answered in English.

It seems to be clear from an analysis of the series of events over the last fifteen years and the pace of development towards the engaged recognition of the multilingual nature of education that a two-pronged approach is necessary: (a) A long-term process in which positive attitudes towards the vernacular and an acknowledgement of its formative and

economic value are inculcated; and (b) a short to medium-term approach which deals with the status quo at hand in the most appropriate way.

In support of the long-term approach is the following remark by Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000:7) regarding the results of non-mother tongue education in South African schools:

The decision of school authorities and parents to use English as the language of learning in schools (especially primary schools) has definitely contributed to the underdevelopment of the South African people. One of the tasks that language people in South Africa need to undertake is to persuade parents that the answer to their needs and those of the children lies in the language of learning that their children know well, together with high quality teaching of English as a subject.

While education policies addressing the needs of a multilingual society can be implemented at short notice at the primary and secondary school level (as has been the case with new policies in the SA context during the past decade), the end result can only be expected to filter through to the tertiary level after an extensive period of exposure to the new paradigm. A different approach is therefore needed to ensure that the maximum benefits of a multilingual policy are derived by universities in the short to medium term.

### **Current Paradigms Impacting on Language Policy**

Recent years have seen a shift from second language acquisition theories to one of cognitive and linguistic development embedded in social and discourse theory. The notion of additive and mother tongue based bilingualism has largely been replaced by that of simultaneous bi-literacy, namely what Gracia (2007) advocates as 'dynamic plurilingualism'. She defines this as a two-way polydirectional bilingual education. Her emphasis is on translingualing in the classroom. By this she means that the teacher and the learners move between two languages as a matter of routine. The aim of literacy development, regardless of language, is to empower communities and individuals linguistically in such a way that they can participate with a view to their own economic wellbeing, à la Bourdieu (Carrington & Luke 1997:96ff).

## **The Way to Go**

How should this be achieved? On one hand, an essential step is to utilise the political will, as evident from the discourse around language in education in the Portfolio Committee mentioned earlier, to effect infrastructure spending in order to create stability, security, employment, increased earnings, and enhanced sharing of resources. While these objectives can only be achieved by way of a more general language policy, a draft of which is purportedly under discussion at cabinet level, changes can already be initiated at institutional level by making use of the latent multilingual dynamics of the system. One example of this is the fact, as mentioned earlier, that teachers use vernacular languages in the classroom, despite English-only policies, something which also occurs, albeit to a lesser extent, at university level. This practice may be regarded, we believe, as a strength in the system, and probably the backbone on which new policy can be built. This ‘multilingualism on the ground’ needs to be mobilized into the institutional realm through implementation, not only officialisation. In terms of languages of learning and teaching in Higher Education in Africa, and specifically South Africa, the institutional ethos of institutions needs to be addressed before embarking on implementation of an inclusive framework for linguistic empowerment of students. The ethos is created through addressing diversity management and transformation, with the aim of community-building to address inclusivity and the often poor quality of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interaction. One step to take would be to acknowledge that some of the historically entrenched institutional racial, ethnic and linguistic divides are still intact. Some of these manifest themselves in old, established, strategically protected networks of power. Others are visible in what may be termed ‘ghettos’. The ‘ghettos’ are those pockets of employment and participation which are occupied by those cultural and linguistic groupings which remain persistently undervalued and economically marginal.

## **Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)**

As an example of an institutional multilingual implementation strategy, the next section will shortly refer to the broad outline of what is presently under consideration at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in

Port Elizabeth, where a trilingual language policy has been accepted, but not implemented as yet, since English is the *de facto* language of learning and teaching. It has to be stressed that the considerations discussed are peculiar to this university, although they might be extrapolated to similar situations elsewhere.

Firstly, for a meaningful change towards accommodating multilingualism, the institutional ethos has to be addressed, in line with the vision that the university is to be perceived by all as ‘a linguistically diverse community in transition’, so as to create positive identification and buy-in by all participants. The motivation behind such linguistic engineering should be to lend status to the language(s) that one is advocating. This strategy is geared towards ensuring the long-term psychological and economic well-being of its speakers.

While Xhosa-speaking students comprise the overwhelming majority in the institution, historically entrenched racial divides existing in the university do not allow the language to take its rightful place among the other languages. In addition, its status is compromised by the legacy of the power of Afrikaans in the system. The administration and top management professional networks still operate orally largely in Afrikaans, even though all the documentation is in English. Xhosa, despite being a generally accepted campus language, is not presently under consideration for any administrative or educational purposes.

Furthermore, creativity needs to be acknowledged as the globally recognized engine of social development. It is increasingly being recognized that identification with and ‘buy-in’ to new cultures, are effected through creative engagement, lateral thinking and affective factors. This can only be turned into a strategy through remediation design, which means ‘designing learning ecologies for collective activity’ (Guitierrez *et al.* 2009:234). This activity-theoretical approach which is advocated by Guitierrez *et al.* encourages critique as well as extension of knowledge through active text production, performance, interaction and cultural inclusivity. It follows that the institutional ethos, as well as the design for learning, needs to be remodelled and transformed to mediate something which is perceived and conceived as linguistically and affectively empowering.

Bilingual and multilingual, multimodal cultural identities would emerge if students were to be encouraged to be innovative in expressing

themselves. If students were to produce texts which could be regarded as style fusions, albeit within discipline-specific prescribed genres, they would be well on their way towards becoming agents of change. Style fusions refer to the kind of writing which consists of a mixture of the student's conversational voice and institutional academic conventions applied by the student. Although this might result in the student text not constituting what may be regarded as 'proper English', it lends the language educator the opportunity to point out the distance between the accepted disciplinary style conventions and the informal conversational style of the student writer. For students who are currently attending NMMU and who are from previously marginalised groups, this approach should be high on the agenda. As already outlined, the greatest challenge to the language development staff at NMMU at present is to put strategically designed provision in place which underline and encourage this approach. The provisions suggested appear in the next section.

The changes to be effected in order for an appropriate conceptual framework to be created, i.e. to transform the curriculum and the general ethos of a university (*in casu* the NMMU) from a traditional to a diversity compliant, inclusive model, can be presented in tabular form as below:

### **Traditional versus Diversity Compliant Inclusive Curriculum Models**

| <b>Traditional models of learning and teaching and curriculum design:</b>               | <b>Diversity compliant inclusive models of learning and teaching and curriculum design:</b>        |
|---|--|
| Focus on correctness and preferred knowledges, attitudes and beliefs                    | Focus on discourse as socially constituted and constituting, focus on classroom community-building |
| Focus on transmission of only 'vacuum-packed knowledge bites',<br>Text consumption only | Critical engagement,<br>active text production,<br>strong performance orientation                  |
| Unidirectional communication,<br>monologue  | Dialectical, interactive   |
| Discreet skills taught as a 'list' out of context                                       | Context-embedded critical enquiry  |
| Monomodal   | Multimodal   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Monoliterate, monolingual                      | Multiliterate, multilingual, cross-cultural competence |
| a monolingual classroom culture                | Taking account of the wider multilingual context       |
| dominant culture-focused learning and teaching | Diversity-focused classroom cultures                   |

Adapted from Liesel Hibbert (2009).

Strategies to create an ethos in terms of which the university is perceived by all to be ‘a linguistically diverse community in transition’ are outlined below. They are based on a suggested implementation strategy, coupled with a research agenda, based on a commissioned strategic planning document which responds to the NMMU HE audit report section on Multilingual policy and implementation in terms of learning and teaching (Hibbert & Batyi 2009). The strategies outlined in the next section are extracted from the report.

## **Practical Steps to be Taken**

In order to address the affective bond with the institution through stronger identification with the linguistic communities from which the various role-players hail and recognition of all three languages as ‘valid’ participant languages, the university website could be made accessible in all three locally used official languages (Xhosa, Afrikaans and English), giving the user a choice of own language interaction with the website.

Language awareness and meta-linguistic skills in at least two languages, one of which should be English, need to be acquired by all participants (staff and students). A new point of departure is that the identities of all participants are to be viewed as bi- or multilingual. This constitutes a departure from the accommodationist, ‘deficit’ models which perpetuate the notion of ‘disadvantage’ as inherent in all non-English first-language speakers.

Discussion forums on LoLT ought to be extended to include the mainstream academic teaching body. English language courses (for

communicative purposes) ought to become Faculty-based, -owned and -monitored in terms of content and cognitive skills, and should operate as content-linked blended models. This is to be done urgently through re-design of the curriculum in collaboration with first-year language development staff, the lecturers in the mainstream subject-based areas of study, and Faculty-based diversity management initiatives. Although English is the de facto language of learning, the expertise in English is very uneven, and in need to strategic support, among staff as well as students.

Thirdly, the two ‘minority’ African languages (Xhosa and Afrikaans) should be mobilised as languages of learning alongside English. This can be achieved by the introduction of the concept of simultaneous biliteracy in tutorials and small group learning, by utilising various languages to clarify and define terminology. For example, in tutorials, students would be encouraged to express themselves in English, Afrikaans or Xhosa (in the case of NMMU, which is located in the Eastern Cape, these three languages are the official languages of the province and the University).

Mobilizing Xhosa and Afrikaans as languages of learning should be coupled with an enhancement of the existing resource base. This could be done by introducing simultaneous biliteracy in tutorials and small group learning, by incorporating and encouraging the development of learning and language awareness strategies in Xhosa and Afrikaans (i.e. these include talking about the subject in multiple languages, clarifying, circumscribing terminology and refining reasoning procedures and argumentation through the use of all linguistic resources.). The strategies used here need to be researched to show which ones work, how they work and why. This would reveal how Xhosa and Afrikaans can be mobilized for learning.

Multimodal and multiliteracies-based structures for pedagogy (Kress, G. 2000) ought to be expanded on a large scale and ought to be incorporated into all learning programmes. This suggestion is motivated by the fact that Xhosa has not been codified to the extent that Afrikaans has been (by virtue of its previous status as one of only two official languages). Therefore, special measures are required to valorise this language. Re-training in cross-cultural dynamics should be done in order for all to recognise the linguistically hybrid identities of staff as well as students as the norm. Staff training would include code switching strategies for oral interaction in tutorials and lectures. In addition, strictly monitored self-access and e-

learning facilities should be mobilized for language development. Language-specific measures could include customised courses in Xhosa to non-speakers in order to develop sensitivity and affiliation to this major language of the province and, foreseeably, also the university. The ideal should be that in due course, newly appointed academics should be (or become) fully bilingual in at least two official languages, of which English would be one.

It is recommended that all students with no or limited proficiency in the language, attend a compulsory six-month course in Xhosa during the first year in order to develop sensitivity and affiliation to this major language of the province and the university. For this purpose, the teaching capacity in the Xhosa department needs to be expanded. All new lecturing and administrative staff should ideally attend basic Xhosa acquisition courses.

Since English, whose role as language of wider communication is beyond dispute, is a second or third language to most students (most students enter the university with rudimentary academic writing skills in English), lecturers should be exposed to a training course on how to teach English for Academic Purposes in their particular subject area, and to familiarize themselves with issues pertaining to LoLT in higher education.

An academic development unit/department should be set up in each faculty, which works in collaboration with language development practitioners and researchers, as well as general academic literacy development practitioners and researchers. A language development team ought to be set up in each Faculty and should be part of the faculty academic development unit/department. Language development lecturers of the Department of Applied Language Studies should be working closely with the main-stream as well as the academic development practitioners based in the faculties within which they work. Faculty-specific language development models and frameworks should emerge, which would steer away from the notion of free-standing, generic communication-related modules which do not comply with ecological models of linguistic development.

The above suggestions would become realities only through large-scale re-mediation (i.e. re-structuring and redesigning the tasks and procedures put in place for the provision of optimal learning opportunities). The suggested practical strategies are particularly pertinent to the re-mediation of first-year mainstream courses, albeit in partnership with language and diversity practitioners. A three year rolling plan, with built-in



incentives and deadlines, may move the theoretical paradigm shift into the practical realm. At that point, re-mediation and multilingual teaching experiments, those which were identified as successful, can be strengthened through institutional support. An example of such support would be bursaries and funding allocated to this kind of development.

## **Research**

Of course, no changes of this nature can be initiated without the continuous support of a research base, which should also form part of the agendas geared at institutional transformation. As in the case of the practical strategies suggested in the previous section, the research initiatives suggested below appear in the commissioned strategic planning document which responds to the NMMU HE audit report section on Multilingual policy and implementation in terms of learning and teaching (Hibbert & Batyi 2009). The strategies outlined in the next section are extracted from the report. Changes in institutional language policy and practice as the ones suggested above can only be initiated with the continuous support of a strong research base. This research base needs to constitute an integral part of an overall institutional research and equity-related transformation agenda. At present, the transformation agenda is strongly focused on racial equity. We suggest that linguistic empowerment through multilingual mobilization has the strongest contribution to make to empowering individuals, students and staff, in fact all participants, within institutional settings.

The major research topics suggested in a recent response to a request for implementation suggestions based on the NMMU Audit Report (Hibbert & Batyi 2009), are as follows:

- Studies are needed which address attitude changes towards linguistic diversity. These studies firstly need to highlight shortcomings in the current perception of the role of African languages in the development of Sub-Saharan Africa. A recent study at NMMU (Zauka 2009) is an example of a study which begins to address the attitude problems youth have towards their home language, Xhosa.

- Consensus needs to be reached in term of the necessary paradigm shift and vision for the institution's enhanced policy of inclusivity. These studies may result in valuable exploration of linguistic mobilisation strategies for African languages within higher education, in this case Xhosa.
- Studies are needed which describe and analyse the psycholinguistic base of cognitive development and the transfer of knowledge and meta linguistic skills from the vernacular to English. This is particularly relevant for English and Afrikaans, as they are both Indo-European languages, and typologically different from other South African languages. More university-classroom-based projects should be set up by drawing on fully bilingual honours and Master's tutor/student research based in the Department of Applied Language Studies. The research base on the teaching of reading and writing practices and culturally-based framing inherent in Afrikaans and Xhosa bilingual literacies should be expanded. Furthermore, research which enhances the understanding and implementation of code switching practices to be instituted in tutorials needs to be expanded. This research needs to systematically uncover how, why, in what instances, and by whom, Afrikaans and Xhosa could be mobilized as additional languages of learning and teaching, and in what instances and to what extent these languages should be mobilized.
- Critique of the existing literature on this issue, as well as existing successful language development practices, nationally and at NMMU, should be collated into a full report with listed shortcomings and recommendations. An audit of recent cognitive psycholinguistics-based research which casts light on how knowledge and meta-linguistic skills are best transferred from the student's own languages to the LoLT, needs to accompany the report. This would highlight a point of departure as well as a strategy for NMMU to follow. The results of this report should be freely available to all participants of the university community.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing individual languages separately may be missing the point. The African languages need to be viewed as one of many which speakers practice in different situations and apply for specific effects and results. Therefore, a bi- or multilingual learning situation in which all discourses embedded in African languages and Afrikaans are mobilized for learning, is advocated. In this multiliteracies approach, supported by multimodal resources, languages are extended through pedagogy, within an intellectual activity realm. This process impacts on the change of perception that African languages are not suited for learning in Higher Education. It will also facilitate the inclusion of these languages in higher education. At present, 70% of the student intake is Xhosa-speaking. However, this may change in time with NMMU's increasing international and pan-African exposure, which means that in 10 or 20 years, other considerations may come into play. Ultimately, economically sustainable models of language in education are the only valid ones. The present symbolic power of African languages in the South African imagination cannot be disputed, which is why it is the ideal historic moment to mobilize them in South Africa.

Although research-based insights into the advantages of multilingual education run counter to the ingrained effects of linguistic Social Darwinism and the quest for modernity, the political climate seems to be transforming itself in favour of a multilingual social structure/ethos. A major stumbling block remains attitudes on the ground, which, in order for democracy to be seen to be practised, have to be accommodated as far as language choice is concerned, although they are difficult to reverse. However, once policy makers have realised the linguistic reasons for the failure of programmes to ensure unfettered access to knowledge, there is no shortage of strategies to change attitudes by means of valorising African vernaculars at both school and university levels, while simultaneously empowering the community of practice to obtain access to the language of wider communication through bi- or multicultural proficiencies and literacy programmes. Some of the implementation proposals tabled at NMMU, if backed by a research agenda to refine implementation strategies, may lead to a more inclusive ethos and enhanced student performance if their implementation plan is monitored and adjusted according to step-by-step research outcomes over a number of years.

We would like to conclude with the logo used by the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland:

*Monolingualism can be cured!*

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## **APPENDIX A**

Language in Education Policy in terms of

- (a) Section 3(4)(m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996), and
- (b) Section 6(1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996).
- According to (a), in the Preamble,

the government, and thus the Department of Education, is tasked ... to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country ....

The policy,

is meant to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and religion, while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than one's own would be encouraged.

This approach is in line with the fact that both societal and individual multilingualism are the global norm today, especially on the African continent. As such, it assumes that the learning of more than one language should be general practice and principle in our society.

A wide spectrum of opinions exists as to the locally viable approaches towards multilingual education, ranging from arguments in favour of the cognitive benefits and cost-effectiveness of teaching through one medium (home language) and learning additional language(s) as subjects, to those drawing on comparative international experience demonstrating that, under appropriate conditions, most learners benefit cognitively and emotionally from the type of structured bilingual education found in dual-medium (also known as two-way immersion) programmes. Whichever route is followed, the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s). Hence, the Department's position that an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the normal orientation of our language-in-education policy.

... Policy will progressively be guided by the results of comparative research, both locally and internationally.

The right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual. This right has, however, to be exercised within the overall framework of the obligation on the education system to promote multilingualism.

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The language(s) of learning and teaching in a public school must be (an) official language(s).

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