Academic Literacy in the Mother Tongue: A Pre-requisite for Epistemological Access

Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu

Abstract

Freedom from apartheid oppression in South Africa offered opportunities for the reconsideration and eventual recognition and adoption of the languages that, during the colonial and apartheid eras, were seen as backward and irrelevant to the needs of the modern world. The granting of official status to these languages and providing learners an option to be taught in them within formal education after the demise of apartheid oppression is part of the decolonization and liberation processes. It is against this background that this paper argues that local languages could be enriched to convey the international body of knowledge and enable their speakers to be taught and learn in their first languages, something the English and Afrikaans speaking communities started enjoying since the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The paper uses isiZulu within the context of a Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and Northern Sotho within the context of a Faculty of Humanities at the University of Limpopo, two of the indigenous languages in South Africa, to advance the argument. The paper suggests ways in which an environment can be created where indigenous language teaching moves from mundane, structure-focused tuition to becoming more relevant and more engaged with the reality of the language as experienced by people on day-to-day basis, both within and outside the academy.

Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu

Introduction

Increasing rates of student exclusions and dropouts, accompanied by decreasing graduation rates, at undergraduate level at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (Report on Student Exclusions and Dropouts in Undergraduate Degrees, 2009) are becoming a matter of concern for students, parents, academics, the government and the executive of the University. What exacerbates this concern is the fact that the problem is not confined to undergraduates. There are an increasing number of postgraduate students who take longer than the allocated time to complete their studies. According to the *Report on Student Exclusions and Dropouts in Undergraduate Degrees 2006-2008* (2009:4):

> the number of students who were 'excluded and not readmitted' together with dropouts increased in 2008 to 2479 (11%) from 2074 (9%) in 2007, while the number that graduated from 3-4-year undergraduate degrees had decreased to 4306 (19%) from 4505 (20%) during this period. Most important, is the fact that, in terms of exclusion by race, overall exclusions were 'highest for African students at about 3% and lowest for White students at 1% (*Report on Student Exclusions and Dropouts in Undergraduate Degrees* 2009:6).

Scott *et al.* (2007: 2) point out in their report for the Council on Higher Education that 'of even greater concern is that student performance continues to be racially differentiated. Black students do worse than White students in most disciplinary fields and African students performed worst of all'.

It may be simplistic to associate the high dropout rate of African students only with the fact that the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) used at UKZN is not their mother tongue. It can be argued that there are other psychological, social and economic factors that could be responsible for this state of affairs, such as individual student's motivation to study, family and cultural backgrounds, both of which are intertwined with such issues as economic status and lack of opportunities for the enhancement of 'school literacies' in the home and community environments. However, as Prah (2002:1) suggests: 'It is in their languages that knowledge intended for the upliftment of the larger masses of African society can be effected'.

Learning and teaching in one's own language in a postcolonial context like SA, in other words, is a matter of social justice, in relation to the upliftment of the previously disenfranchised indigenous communities.

Within formal education, such upliftment is dependent on students' ability to produce discipline-specific and acceptable quality of written work, either as assignments or during the examination period. The assessment and acceptability of such written work at university level involves rather more than endorsing students' ability to regurgitate tutorial, lecture, or textbook material, but an evaluation of the extent to which students, regardless of linguistic, cultural, and even class backgrounds, can manipulate language academically. Boughey (2005:167) defines this as the ability to use 'prior knowledge to interpret a work; predicting a further outcome or a logical conclusion; identifying values in a [spoken and written] message'. Within the context of academic literacy-type and discipline specific modules taught and mediated in the language spoken by the majority of students as an additional language, as research (Mgqwashu 2009; 2007) has already indicated, such assessment goals often get frustrated. Both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels this means high failure, exclusion and dropout rates. In some cases it results in slow progress as students take longer than required to finish their studies.

It will therefore be incorrect, and perhaps misleading, if I base the argument for the development of isiZulu as a LoLT in formal education solely on the fact that Holland, Finland, Japan, China, Germany, Norway, France, to name a few countries, have managed to implement their indigenous languages as mediums of instruction from primary to tertiary education. That would be insufficient for implementing indigenous languages as LoLT in a postcolonial context. None of the countries I have mentioned has gone through what Africa experienced in 1884, when the colonial powers during the Berlin Conference decided to subdivide Africa amongst themselves (Ngugi 1996). The colonial countries had established themselves as trading powers and imperial powers, and imposed their languages across the globe. The direct implications for Africa, as a consequence of such invasions, range from the political and economic to the social, cultural, and of course, educational spheres. The history of African education alone reveals that:

> Many African societies placed strong emphasis on traditional forms of education well before the arrival of Europeans. Adults in Khoisan and Bantu-speaking societies, for example, had extensive responsibilities for transmitting cultural values and skills within kinship-based groups and sometimes within larger organizations, villages, or districts. Education involved oral histories of the group, tales of heroism and treachery, and practice in the skills necessary for survival in a changing environment (Batibo 2001:9).

If things were to remain this way, that is, assuming there was no European imperialism whatsoever, it would probably be fair to compare Africa to the developed countries referred to above. Given the fact that this is not the case, such a comparison would be irresponsible, subjective and shortsighted. As early as the 17th century Africa's future (in every sense of the word) was in the hands of the colonial powers, and this is still the case, for instance, through financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This perhaps explains why Burundi, Botswana, Rwanda, and Somali deliberately decided to adopt English as the only official language and medium of instruction at all levels of education. It may be argued that these countries did not understand this decision as the betrayal of the indigenous languages and cultures, but as a policy decision that acknowledges the perceived irreversibility of the 1884 Berlin Conference resolutions concerning the future of the African continent.

Such perceptions are fuelled by 'one of the major lending institutions for educational development in the post-colonial world' (Roy-Campbell 2001:26), the World Bank. In its Sector Paper (1980: 20), it claims that 'the emphasis on local languages can diminish an individual's chances for further education and limit access of specific groups or countries to the international body of knowledge'. Oblivious to the fact that local languages could be enriched to convey this knowledge, Burundi, Botswana, Rwanda, and Somali chose not to make them LoLT, nor gave them an official status. Yet in these countries 75% of the population speak the same indigenous languages: Kirundi, Setswana, Kinyarwanda, and Somali, respectively. This is not surprising for, during the colonial period, 'mental control was effected through the colonial school system where there was a systematic assault on the African people's languages, literature, dances, names, history, skin colour, and

religions – the tools of their self-definition' (Ngugi 1986, in Roy-Campbell 2001: 26). Such an assault caused post independence political leadership to accept arguments in favour of European languages as 'common sense'.

This paper argues that isiZulu, one of the local languages in SA, could be developed to enable its speakers to 'internalize the knowledge through the medium of a [first] language then indicate how much they have retained [and contribute to new knowledge] using this same language' (Roy-Campbell (2001: 31). To develop this argument, I draw from two bodies of work. First, I draw from Thomson's (2008) study, part of which examined students' experiences of engaging with academic texts written in isiZulu in a Bachelor of Education Honours modules. Then I discuss the University of Limpopo's bilingual Bachelor of Arts in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies (BA CEMS) degree to illustrate ways in which an indigenous language can convey a body of international knowledge. I argue that enriching indigenous languages, and isiZulu in the context of this paper, will offer the majority of students opportunities for epistemological access and interventions.

Students who speak English and Afrikaans as first languages have been experiencing and enjoying epistemological access since primary education. Throughout their education they have used 'the language they know from their parents, from home' (Prah 2002:1). For speakers of isiZulu as a first language, who constitute the majority of students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, enriching isiZulu will mean not just access to theoretical concepts that are hard to comprehend when taught in an additional language, but also opportunities to acquire and apply epistemologies in their own language. Then, and only then, would we, as one of the institutions of higher learning, have contributed meaningfully to the implementation, first, of *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Chapter 2, Act 29 (2) 1996:11) and to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's bilingual Language Policy (2008). This paper, furthermore, is not about arguing whether or not mother tongue instruction should be an option for our country. Instead, it attempts to suggest ways in which we can create an environment where indigenous language teaching moves from mundane, structure-focused tuition, to becoming more relevant and more engaged with the reality of the language as experienced by people every day, both within and outside the academy. Within the context of formal education anywhere in the world, teaching and learning mediated

through the mother tongue of those receiving tuition is the precondition for access to the epistemologies and skills the curriculum and syllabus are designed to impart. If this attitude and approach from policy makers, unions, students' and parents' organisations, curriculum and syllabus developers, and classroom and lecture hall instructors is absent, then high failure, drop out and exclusion rates, and slow progress by the majority of students will be the natural consequence.

On Developing isiZulu Academic Discourse

Reading within the context of higher education requires more than just the ability to decode letters, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Additionally, and importantly, the reader's challenge includes using knowledge of other texts and of the world to question what is read. Not only does a reader require knowledge of these extra-textual details. They also need to make inferences and draw conclusions within the texts they read. The expectation, in other words, goes beyond just these skills, and includes students' ability to take a different position derived from values and attitudes related to what counts as knowledge, and how it can be known within various disciplinary discourses. In South Africa, a context where high value is still placed on the ex-colonial language over local, indigenous forms, the acquisition of these higher order thinking skills by students who speak the LoLT as an additional language is persistently compromised. This is the consequence of the fact that

> the indigenous languages have not been taken seriously as subjects of study, which means that the cognitive, affective, and social development of young people, which must necessarily occur through a language that is well known, cannot take place effectively (Kembo 2000:287).

A lack of concerted efforts to improve the teaching of indigenous languages as subjects of study, and their limited use as LoLT in higher education, seem to have implied that these languages cannot participate effectively in the world. Such linguistic suicidal tendencies manifest in curriculum and syllabus choices in most higher education institutions:

> Rather than focus on African languages as living cultural media, the academic study of African languages in South African universities has in general followed the international pattern of change in the field of general linguistics: briefly, grammatical studies on the lines established by CM Doke in the 30s, 40s and 50s were followed in the 60s by structuralism, pioneered in South Africa by E B van Wyk. The 70s saw work shaped by transformational-generative approach (LW Lanham, A Wilkes, DP Lombard, HP Pahl *et al.*). The African Linguists who now work in the field have generally stayed with this model of academic linguistic inquiry, seeking ever more accurate descriptive and analytical knowledge (Wright 2002:17).

The consequence of these tendencies is that there is still a lack of cutting-edge research into the study of indigenous languages as disciplines, which is necessary for such languages to be part of the economy. What this indicates, furthermore, is that the development of indigenous languages requires urgent attention so that they can carry all aspects of a modern technological society and become LoLT in formal education. This must necessarily involve creating an environment where indigenous language teaching moves to becoming more relevant and more engaged with the reality of the language as experienced by people on a day-to-day basis in the media, communities and, most crucially for this paper, within the academy. Meaningful and successful engagement with the development of, for example, isiZulu so that it becomes part of the academy, will depend entirely on implementing strategies to develop its academic discourse, that is, the secondary discourse after the primary discourse of the home. Lakshear (1997, in Thomson 2008: 242-243) reminds us that:

> Discourses, or forms of life, involve agreed upon combinations of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours, values, goals, beliefs, assumptions, and the like which social groups have evolved and which their members share. *The important point here is that the language component is inseparable from the other elements in these combinations.*

The fact that the language component is inseparable from non-linguistic behaviours, values, goals, beliefs, and assumptions which members of the discourse have evolved, developing academic discourse in indigenous languages in the 21st century will necessitate, in the first place, the re-discovery of 'the validity of indigenous people's culture and lifestyle' (Roy-Campbell, 2001: 23). As early as 1922, however, attempts towards such 're-discovery' met with resistance from the communities for whom it was designed. The Phelps-Stokes Fund report which set up the Education Commission for Africa made a strong argument for the use of African languages as instructional languages in school. Despite these recommendations, African countries resisted attempts to implement the idea:

> 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 separate institutions which were inferior to the ones the white children attended (Brock-Utne 2000:146).

Distrust of colonial authorities and lack of insight into the pedagogic and intellectual value of learning through and about one's own language, and the accompanying ideological hegemony of the colonial system, has robbed African countries for decades of the richness and capacity of the African languages. Roy-Campbell (1998) 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[1]. 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:

> Walter Rodney (1976) has described the process by which Europe underdeveloped Africa, technologically and scientifically deskilling

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[1] Cheik Anta Diop (1974, 1991) has written extensively on the African past.

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 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 (Brock-Utne 2000:143).

These technologically competent African languages were undermined by the colonizers, and this is partly the reason they have not developed to cope with the demands of specialised expression.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Higher Education

Since universities are institutions that offer formal education, one of their major tasks is to develop students' cognitive abilities. These abilities include 'memory, their 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 or a book, and to evaluate situations' (Kembo 2000:289). Formal education is also designed to develop learners' affective skills such as 'attitudes to work and study … tolerance for people who may differ from them … learners' social skills … their ability to work together with other people, to communicate with them, and to support those who need assistance' (Kembo 2000:289). The development of these cognitive and affective skills can successfully occur in ones first language, and Cummins (1984 in Kembo 2000:289) has already shown that 'optimal first language education provides a rich cognitive preparation for the acquisition of a second language, and that the literacy skills already acquired in the first language … provide easy transition to [the acquisition of a secondary discourse]'. It is in this context I argue that unless isiZulu language studies is centrally concerned to show

how complex discourse works, and isiZulu literary studies return to a linguistic base, we are simply alienating indigenous languages and their speakers from playing an effective role in the academy.

The reason this is a potential consequence is that whenever isiZulu departments in South Africa attempt to teach 'language', such programmes focus mainly on grammar teaching, separate from literature, and not at all on academic literacy development in isiZulu. This is contrary to English departments where, at almost all universities both nationally and internationally, they offer communication and/or academic reading and writing courses in English for all undergraduate students. In this way, English language within academia thrives as such initial offerings provide opportunities for first entry students to practice reading complex written and visual texts, and to write in ways that are valued within academia. After all, English is the LoLT and English disciplinary concerns influence much of what goes on these courses (Balfour 2000; Mgqwashu 2007; Mabunda 2009). On the contrary, the tendency in isiZulu departments is to use pedagogic strategies that fail to draw students' attention to the role of language in constructing and contesting different subject positions, identities, and knowledge. This is because the artificial separation of language studies, literature studies, and academic reading and writing in isiZulu 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. Under these circumstances the consequence is that students are left with an inability to construct complex and persuasive arguments in writing, and a failure to engage critically with detail in isiZulu texts.

In *Changing Words and Worlds?: A Phenomenological Study of the Acquisition of an Academic Literacy* Thomson (2008) illustrates the consequences of such omissions in a Bachelor of Education Honors academic literacy module. In this module, two key readings were translated from English into isiZulu, with the hope that students who spoke the latter will find the translations helpful. The name of the module was *Reading and Writing Academic Texts* (RWAT) and the two key texts that were translated into isiZulu were Hyland's *Genre Theory: Just Another Fad* (1992) and Johnson's *Language and Education in South Africa: The Value of a Genre-based Pedagogy for Access and Inclusion (*1994). The title of Hyland's

article was translated as *Ucwaningo lohlobo lombhalo: Kungabe isimanje esidlulayo?* and Johnson's was translated as *Ulimi nezemfundo eNingizimu Afrika: Ukubaluleka kohlelo lwemfundo olugxiliswe embhalwenni lokufinyelela kanye nokubandakanya uwonkewonke.*

At a first glance, as one of the participants in Thomson's (2008: 240-241) study points out, the isiZulu translation seemed different and alien to the speakers of the language:

> it's given me a hard time … it was time to constrain us … it was Zulu and Greek … in some text you have something written in Zulu, and when you relate it to English as you are a Zulu speaker, you find that you have a problem to understand what is going on; they were very difficult … the English versions made more sense to me; it's something else when you are reading in Zulu ….

What this participant actually struggled with was not isiZulu *per se*, as much as the discourse used in the original, English version texts and *translated* into isiZulu. While the translation of English texts into isiZulu could be seen as one way to ensure epistemological access for the majority of students who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), it seems to me this may not work if the target students' exposure to the academic discourse of isiZulu is not already established. Therein lies the challenge for isiZulu advancement and knowledge contribution to academia: to draw from indigenous ontologies and develop epistemologies that are consonant.

> Our Eurocentric education system assumes western sensibilities, yet African learners bring a unique set of skills drawn from their natural, social and historical environments, such as skills of negotiation and problem solving learned in families with many siblings (Ntuli 1999: 196) or in the extended family … learning and teaching takes place through participation and performance, the antithesis of the passive classroom mode where opportunities to interact are typically highly structured and bounded (Ntuli 1999: 197; Asante 1988:62f). For Africans, knowledge is not a collection of dead facts but 'has a spirit and dwells in specific places' and [one] learns through direct experience … through doing and through immersion in the human

> situation. Moreover, knowledge is inseparable from ethics which informs application (Asante 1990:11; Van der Walt 2006: 210), and wisdom entails the ability to integrate knowledge, ethics, direct experience, social intelligence … (Haire & Matjila 2008: 160-161).

This partly explains the reason some isiZulu-speaking students find that translated English texts constrain rather than enable learning. The English language has over centuries developed within a very specific ontology and epistemology akin to its long established and shared cultural values and norms that are alien to isiZulu language and culture. Translating texts is thus limited to the visible linguistic, grammatical level, but leaves invisible English cultural discourses, which are fundamentally different to those of isiZulu, intact.

Thus, what the isiZulu speaking student above struggled with, in essence, was not isiZulu language, but the English academic cultural repertoire that got transposed into the isiZulu language in the process of translation, and the context-independent nature of written language, an aspect that languages with a persistent oral tradition, like isiZulu, have not fully developed. This is the reason, as Thomson's (2008: 242) work shows, that one of her participants felt that isiZulu is a 'very very long language' and 'short cuts' are an impossibility. 'The consequences of this for Folly were that, 'because we are translating it from isiZulu so it will take a long time before you can reach the point' (Thomson 2008: 242). The fact that Dick, one of the study participants in Thomson's (2008: 244) research, points out that he '"had a look at one or two paragraphs" but quickly said to himself that "no, I'm not going to be able to understand this if I'm making use of Zulu"'. This indicates that, as part of the process to introducing isiZulu as the LoLT, strategies designed to develop students' skills in both Basic Inter-personal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in isiZulu are a pre-requisite (Cummins 1984).

It may be argued that this is what, the University of Limpopo's School of Languages and Communication Studies attempted to achieve in 2003 when they launched a BA in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies (BA CEMS) degree. The structure of the degree seems to be offering speakers of Northern Sotho an indigenous language, and opportunities to develop their BICS and CALP in an indigenous language. The degree has

two majors: Contemporary English Language Studies (CELS) and Multilingual Studies (MUST), also known as *Thuto ya bolemente*. The former is taught in English and the latter, as would be expected, is taught in Northern Sotho. This means 'half the subjects in the BA CESM degree … are taught and assessed in Northern Sotho' (Keeple 2010:1).

Contrary to the experience discussed in Thomson's (2008) study above, while few key scholarly articles for the Multilingual Studies component of the BA CEMS degree are translated from English to Northern Sotho, the bulk of the cognitively challenging reading material is developed by Northern Sotho-speaking staff. This means students engage with academic texts that draw from Northern Sotho ontologies and epistemologies in ways that the translated readings discussed in relation to UKZN do not. These texts are originally written in an indigenous language and students' academic reading of the material and writing about it ensures epistemological access. It is because of this socially just, academically rigorous and pedagogically sound choice that 'the degree represents a model of additive bilingualism because it develops students' competence in English while simultaneously developing their knowledge and use of their home language for higher-order cognitive work' (Ramani in Keeple 2010: 2). This partly explains the increase in students' enrolments from 38 in 2003 to 192 in 2010, 'a pass rate of 92%, one of the highest in the university, and a third of graduates are pursuing postgraduate studies ...' (Keeple 2010: 3). These developments are a clear indication that learning in an indigenous language guarantees possession and/or access to new knowledge in ways that transcend geographical context. The challenge is observed in the case of isiZulu:

> Michelle surmised that because she is a Grade 12 isiZulu mother tongue teacher with a Bachelor of Arts degree in isiZulu, the isiZulu translations were not a problem for her. What did offend Michelle was other students' negative reactions to the translations …. Importantly, Michelle read the isiZulu texts *before* reading the English ones … and though in her view the isiZulu used in the translations was 'good', she recalled that some students had said that 'some of the words are not translated right'. She herself, however, 'did not have a problem when reading those things because I'm used to it' (Thomson 2008: 245).

Like the students who are pursuing postgraduate studies in a bilingual education program, what seems to be coming out of Michelle's observations is the fact that she seems to have had sufficient exposure to academic isiZulu (beyond communicative isiZulu) within her intellectual repertoire. She has, in other words, gone beyond Cummins' (1984) BICS to CALP in isiZulu, a prerequisite to engage successfully with the academic registers within formal education. Dick's reservations above, however, still require some attention because they suggest that even pursuing academically dense isiZulu texts could defeat the purpose of facilitating epistemological access for speakers of isiZulu themselves.

The fact that Dick, the study participant in Thomson's (2008: 244) research, 'resolved "not to look at what is written in Zulu because I knew that I'm going to write something which is very wrong"' indicates, as Thomson put it, that 'the translations were rendered unusable as an effective learning tool for them'. Dick's struggle with the isiZulu translations is rooted in his status as an 'outsider' to isiZulu academic discourse. Unlike Michelle, who is a Grade 12 teacher of isiZulu and holds a Bachelor's degree in isiZulu studies, Dick lacks familiarity with the literacy or 'deep rules' (Boughey 2005) of academic isiZulu. This understanding, that students who struggle with academic isiZulu may be experiencing difficulties with the academic discourse of the requisite levels, and not with language (grammar) per se, encourages us to research and develop ways in which isiZulu can be taught, learnt, developed and understood as an academic language.

These are the concerns, especially in a module designed to develop students' academic reading and writing skills so that they can successfully access epistemologies within an Honours degree. This is crucial because modules in this degree are taught in English, the language not spoken by the majority of students as their mother tongue. How then do we escape the situation where even the most progressive and democratic, constitutionally responsive and well meaning attempts by the *Reading and Writing Academic Texts* course developers to observe the Language in Education Policy (1996) of SA, benefits only a handful of the target group and the majority of people are still excluded epistemologically? So much needs to be done to develop

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' (Gee 1990: 43).

Indigenous Language Research Work in Progress

As a starting point the teaching of isiZulu as a subject from primary to tertiary levels needs to incorporate the teaching of skills and knowledge that would enhance the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency skills in the mother tongue. Students who major in isiZulu receive tuition in isiZulu at Honours, Masters and PhD levels in teacher education programmes. And, instead of translating the reading material, all the reading material needs to be written in isiZulu. In this regard the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Language, Literacies, Media and Drama Education, for example, has already graduated MEd and PhD students who wrote their theses in isiZulu. This means there is a growing body of work written in isiZulu academic discourse. Furthermore, the School has plans to pilot an Honours coursework degree, with a research component, to be taught in the medium of isiZulu. This program will enrol students who recently completed their four year undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree and those who are already teachers of isiZulu from primary to secondary schools. What follows is a description (one in isiZulu and the other in English) of the modules that will be piloted in this research project:

1. Two compulsory foundation modules (48 credits)	• Ukuqonda Ucwaningo (16) • Ukucwaninga Ngokuzimela (32)

2. The following compulsory core modules in Language and Media Education	• Ulwimi kanye Nemfundo (16) • Ukucwaningwa koLwimi kanye neMedia (16)

3. Three 16 credit modules	• Ukufunda Nokufundiswa koLwimi Emiphakathini Enamasiko Ahlukene (16) • Ukuxoxa Indaba Nokufunda (16) • Academic Literacy in isiZulu (16)

1. Two compulsory foundation modules (48 credits)	• Understanding Research (16) • Independent Research (32)

2. The following compulsory core modules in Language and Media Education	• Language and Education (16) • Critical Awareness of Language and Media (16)

3. Three 16 credit modules	• Language Learning and Teaching in Multicultural Socieites (16) • Narrative in Education (16) • Academic Literacy in isiZulu (16)

The development of the B.Ed Honours degree that uses isiZulu as the LoLT will increase the number of postgraduate students pursuing M.Ed and PhD studies in the development of isiZulu, which is in line with UKZN's Bilingual Language Policy.

As part of its postgraduate students' recruitment strategy, the School of Language, Literacies, Media and Drama Education invited all fourth year B.Ed students and their parents to a postgraduate recruitment and awards day. The School is concerned that very few graduating isiZulu major students choose to pursue postgraduate studies. Those who do either tend to drop out, take long to complete the degree, or struggle with writing assignments at the standard expected of postgraduate studies. After formal deliberations, and subsequently with students' representatives and the School Executive Committee, an agreement to design and pilot a B.Ed Honours degree in the medium of isiZulu was reached. Plans are in place to encourage the students to pursue an M.Ed either by research or by course work, where both the LoLT and the reading material will be in isiZulu. The motivation for this is that isiZulu teaching and learning needs to draw from the ontological and epistemological foundations of the community where the language evolves, and these need to be made explicit in understanding the academic discourse in isiZulu.

The School recently received funding to pilot an Honours program to be taught in the medium of isiZulu. The program will enrol students who

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Concluding Thoughts

The research agenda of the School in relation to teacher education is to examine ways in which isiZulu can be taught, learnt, developed and understood as an academic language. We recognise that a good grounding in the mother tongue is the precondition for epistemological access in all knowledge areas: 'Confidence [students in the University of Limpopo] exhibit in using both their own language and English is evidence of skills and strategy transfers across the two languages' (Kepple 2010: 4). This should be encouraging some academics and most parents who express ambivalence (Pretorius 2002) about mother tongue education. Writing about un-examined perceptions of equating knowledge of an 'international' language with 'success' within most African contexts, Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000:115-116) assert that:

> It is likely that many parents of school children will argue that they want their children to be taught in English (or French or Portuguese) precisely because it is in the interests of their children that this should happen. They feel that a school-leaver who is proficient in an 'international' language is far better prepared for life (particularly the economic or professional domains) than one who is not.

As the way forward, we need to engage with the teaching of indigenous languages as subjects which extend beyond grammar teaching and the superficial analysis of literary texts. One way to achieve this, e.g., in isiZulu, is by first acknowledging that 'isiZulu' as the name of a subject is an adjective made to serve as a noun. So 'isiZulu' is always pointing towards an absence – the noun. Is the subject literature, language, culture, or people? I argue that it is all of these.

Colleagues and students in isiZulu can tap into un-explored research areas regarding isiZulu Education and pedagogy. The project focuses,

amongst other things, on paying explicit attention to the ways in which language in isiZulu-medium literary, oral, and visual texts, as well as in media and popular culture, is used to construct contestable meanings about individual, group, community and societal identities. This is the basis upon which pedagogic practices in the teaching, learning and study of isiZulu can introduce innovations in the broader field of isiZulu Studies.

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Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu

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Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu
Head of School: School of Language, Literacies,
Media and Drama Education
Faculty of Education
mgqwashue@ukzn.ac.za