

African Languages, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and the Transformation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education

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Abstract

Historically, higher education in South Africa and Africa in general has relied on foreign languages; this has become a basis for social discrimination and inequality. This paper reviews the historical development and current status of African languages and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in higher education. It argues that, in recognition of the plural and multi-vocal nature of the knowledge domain, the project to develop IKS cannot be meaningfully pursued without taking cognisance of local languages, as it is in these languages that the cognitive, philosophical, and other frameworks of the local people are embedded. African languages and IKS are indispensable to the transformation of the higher education landscape. Using anti-colonial theory and hermeneutics as its theoretical frameworks, the paper discusses the progress that has been made in terms of implementing language policies in South African higher education institutions. It concludes with recommendations to firmly embed African languages and IKS in higher education systems.

Keywords: Higher Education, Teaching and Learning, Transformation, Multilingualism, Humanities and Social Sciences, Hermeneutics, Anti-colonial Theory, Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to assess the progress that has been made regarding the transformation of the humanities and social sciences in South African higher education, with particular reference to African languages and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Taking anti-colonial theory and hermeneutics as its theoretical departure points, the paper reviews the historical and current status of African languages and IKS in higher education. This incorporates an appraisal of the various legislative and policy frameworks, which guide South African higher education language practices. In view of the fact that language is a major vehicle of communication and inter-subjective understanding, it is argued that the transformation of the humanities and social sciences cannot be achieved without paying attention to language. Equally, indigenous knowledge systems that have been historically marginalised need to be foregrounded in order to explore their potential contribution to world knowledge. The paper begins with a brief discussion of the theoretical frameworks, followed by an explanation of the methodological approach. The position of African languages and IKS in the pre- and post-colonial educational eras is then discussed. A critical appraisal of the current legislative and policy frameworks to aid language and IKS curriculum transformation, as well as the various institutional responses, follow. The paper concludes with recommendations for embedding African languages and IKS in higher education.

Theoretical Frameworks

Anti-colonial theory and hermeneutics provide the theoretical anchors for this paper. As counter-oppositional knowledge, anti-colonial theory calls into question the nature of the traditionally accepted colonial experience as well as the consequences thereof (Dei 2012a; 2012b; Dei 2006; Wane 2008). Anti-colonial theory recognises that the encounter between the coloniser and the colonised was characterised by various forms of violence; this includes epistemological violence (Nyamnjoh 2012). The encounter led to the loss of land and mental colonisation through education in particular. The social and cultural fabric of the colonised was destabilised, and their ways of knowing and languages devalued (Wane 2008).

One of the aims of anti-colonial theory therefore, is to provide a criti-

cal analysis of the colonial and neo-colonial agendas that are embedded in social and cultural institutions, in order to make sense of the current lived realities of the colonised (Dei 2012a; Dei 2006). To this end, anti-colonial theory rejects the universalising tendencies of mainstream western knowledge traditions. This is not only to recognise that all knowledge systems are constituted socially and culturally, but to affirm the realisation that knowledge is never neutral. Knowledge serves certain interests (Wane 2008). Hence, anti-colonial theory critiques the social and power relations embedded in the production, organisation, validation and dissemination of knowledge (Dei 2006). Mindful of the historic devaluation of the knowledge systems and epistemologies of the colonised, anti-colonial theory calls for a radical transformation of the conceptual frameworks, syllabi, language policies, research methodologies, and other frames of reference, in use in the academy, in order to take into account the lived experiences of the colonised (Dei 2012a; 2012b).

The call to engage with indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and the past does not amount to reification nor does it mean a nostalgic, uncritical engagement with tradition. Hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975) is useful in elucidating this point. In general, hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation and understanding of texts. This includes written as well as non-written (oral) texts (Nabudere 2011). From a hermeneutic perspective, understanding is an inter-subjective process; it involves coming to terms with others' 'forms' of life or their horizons of understanding (Gadamer 1975). It is these prior, historical forms that make inter-subjective understanding possible (Foucault 1970). According to Gadamer (1975), interpretation should engage with the great thinking traditions that are embodied in historical texts. This requires the interpreter to enter into a hermeneutic circle. This means that in order to understand the whole, one needs to understand its constituent parts. Similarly, the constituent parts need to be understood with reference to the whole. Thus to interpret African languages and IKS with reference to foreign theoretical frameworks is to lose sight of this hermeneutic circle (Nabudere 2011).

From the above it is evident that understanding, from a hermeneutic point of view, is historical and perspectival. Using one particular worldview as their only point of departure, colonialism and neo-colonialism have sought to erase the contributions of the colonised to knowledge production, as well as their languages (Finch 1990). It is the task of an African hermeneutics

therefore, to reinsert African contributions to knowledge into the curriculum (Serequeberhan 1994). This also calls for the use of indigenous languages in knowledge production and dissemination. Far from a nostalgic return to the past, this is part of an ongoing, critical dialogue by means of which knowledge is constructed. Language is key to this process; it is through language, including living language or orality, ‘that humanity can dialogue with one another and come to a consensus about a new future’ (Nabudere 2011:90). This calls for the recognition and scientific development of African languages, which are the primary medium of communication for the majority in Africa (Nabudere 2011).

Methodology

Methodologically, this paper relies on a comprehensive review of language practices in higher education in the pre- and post-colonial eras. In particular, the documentary research method was employed (Mogalakwe 2006). This method refers to the analysis of documents containing information about the phenomena of interest to the researcher (Bailey 1994). Although this method is not common in the social sciences (Mogalakwe 2006), it provides useful tools to categorise, investigate, interpret and identify the limitations of physical sources, be they in the private or public domain (Payne & Payne 2004). For the purposes of this paper, various legislative and policy frameworks that guide language practices in higher education in South Africa were studied. Among the public documents that were consulted are: *The White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation* (DoE 1997), the *Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education* (DoE 2002), the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education* (DoE 2008), and the *Report Commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (DoHET 2011). Certain University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) internal documents, such as the *Transformation Charter* (2012) and the *College of Humanities Strategic Plan* (2012), were also consulted. These documents, buttressed by a critical review of the literature on language practices in Africa, provided a basis for the analysis of institutional progress with regards to the implementation of language policies, and hence transformation.

African Languages and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods

Prior to colonisation, education in African societies was holistic; it was part of the process to socialise youth to become competent and responsible members of society (Verhoef & Michel 1997). Education was meant to expose the youth to a range of social, cultural, economic, linguistic, medical, and other essential knowledge traditions. Linguistic competence was highly prized, as is evidenced by a number of specialisations that were available in the languages and the arts (Bâ 1981). Nabudere (2011) highlights the centrality of the word or speech (living language) in indigenous African thought, as does Bâ (1981), who argues that speech was considered to be of divine origin. As such, speech was ranked higher than other forms of discourse prior to colonisation, including the written word. In support of this, Gadamer (1975) argues that language is central to human understanding, as it is through speech that one can bridge the distance between differing horizons of understandings. Language and communication are therefore at the centre of human knowledge and understanding.

With the advent of colonialism and the slave trade, African indigenous knowledge systems and languages were systematically undermined in order to erase African contributions to history and knowledge production. African cultures and languages were considered to be ‘crude and heathen’ (Rwantabagu 2011). The practice of IKS, including the healing traditions of Africa, became a crime. As a result, these local practices went underground (Finch, 1990) and colonial governments imported religion and educational systems from their respective countries and imposed them on the colonies (Kamwendo 2010). Conversion to Christianity or another dominant colonial religion, a western-type education, as well as fluency in European languages, were considered to be the pinnacle of civilisation and enlightenment. Some of the natives who met these criteria went on to play a critical role in the administration of the colonies on their master’s behalf, thereby further ingraining the agenda of the colonisers.

Yet despite its association with civilisation and enlightenment, western-type education was not meant to harness the intelligence of the natives; it was not intended to equip them with the critical emancipatory tools needed to play a role similar to the one that had been played by the Enlightenment philosophers in Europe. Instead, colonial education was

geared towards inculcating the values and tastes of colonial societies into the local young people in order to train them to be of better service to the colonial powers (Wa Thiong'o 2005). Its primary function therefore was to assimilate and control; not to liberate (Kamwendo 2010; Rwantabagu 2011; Woodson 1933).

With few exceptions, education in Africa throughout the colonial period was carried out through the medium of European or foreign languages (Kamwendo 2010; Wa Thiong'o 2005). It is little wonder then that for the majority of indigenous Africans, education in Africa became not only a profoundly alienating experience, characterised by imitative as opposed to deep learning (Rwantabagu 2011; Woodson 1933); it was also a wasteful exercise as far as expenditure is concerned (Wolff 2010). This is borne out by the fact that, many decades after independence and despite the use of exoglossic languages, Africa remains the least educated continent (Zezeza 2002). Wa Thiong'o (2005) estimated the percentage of the population who are literate in the languages of the colonial legacy, such as French, English and Portuguese, to be less than 30%. This is partially accounted for by the general population's inability to master European languages well enough in order to use them effectively and competently for scientific and economic advancement (Kamwendo 2010; Wolff 2002). For many African learners, European languages constitute a major barrier to education; in some cases this also applies to the educators. Under these circumstances then, it is not surprising that many African learners exit the schooling system having acquired very little if any knowledge (Brock-Utne 2012; 2013; Qorro 2013). At this point it might be useful to explore the consequences of colonial education and language policies in Africa in more depth. We address this with respect to two particular points: *social stratification* and *marginalisation*.

Consequences of Colonial Language Policies: Social Stratification and Marginalisation

Alexander (1990; 2004; 2010) argues that racial, class, and gender aspects of language policy sustain and reinforce inherited social inequalities and national divisions in South Africa. For example, the use of Afrikaans and English as the primary mediums of instruction places White, Indian and

Coloured learners, who speak at least one of the two as their first language (mother tongue), in an advantageous position over Black (African) learners, the majority of whom speak the two as their second, third or even fourth languages. Denying African learners and educators the opportunity to learn or teach in indigenous African languages amounts to a violation of their Constitutional rights; it also impinges on their academic freedom (Zezeza 2006).

Further, the use of exoglossic languages creates elitism. The use of indigenous African languages is associated with inferiority and being 'uncivilised' while mastery of colonial languages is thought to be an indicator of superior intellect and civilisation *par excellence*. Wa Thiong'o (2005) notes how European nations imposed their languages on the conquered territories. In due course, European languages came to be considered the *sine qua non* of enlightenment and intelligence. In South Africa, the media alone provides ample evidence of how English-speaking Blacks take centre stage while people from the rural areas or townships, who may not have mastered English, are marginalised. It is not unusual to find black Africans ridiculing African sporting personalities who are not *au fait* with the English language, when they are interviewed on national television. On the other hand, an attempt by a person of European ancestry to speak an African language is generally met with applause and admiration, even if it is replete with errors. This example highlights how Africans have responded positively to their interpellation or recruitment as inferior subjects. By so doing, they participate actively in their own subjugation (Althusser 1971). Hopson (2003: 229) notes that 'language serves as a mechanism of social power'; it is a quintessential tool for cultural hegemony and social stratification. Gramsci (1971) defines hegemony as the processes and procedures by means of which dominant groups in society conceptualise, justify, and reward their way of life by ensuring that it is embedded in institutions of social and cultural life, such as the family and the school. This is nothing but an extension of colonialism by other means.

Wa Thiong'o (2005: 158) reflects critically on the British colonial mission in India (and other conquered territories). He refers to Lord Macauley, who championed the teaching of English in India in order to,

produce a class of natives, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect, who would stand as interpreters

between them and the people they governed – a buffer between the real owners of the empire and the vast masses of the owned.

Mamdani (cited in Zeleza 2006) has referred to this as the ‘linguistic curtain’. This refers to a situation whereby language separates academics and intellectuals in general, from the working people. According to Zeleza (2006: 21),

This might be one of the reasons why African academics have tended to be organic neither to civil society, whose languages they often ignore, nor to the state, whose policies they sometimes oppose.

Similarly, others (e.g. Wa Thiong’o 2005; Vilakazi 2002) have been critical of the elite who are devoid of a spiritual, intellectual or sympathetic relationship with the African peoples. It is in this vein that Vilakazi (2002), and Hlongwa and Mkhize (2013), amongst others, have called upon the African elite, the men and women of the village (organic intellectuals), together with like-minded intellectuals of all persuasions, to free themselves from the vestiges of colonialism. This will enable them to perform the revolutionary task that intellectuals of other nations have executed with their native languages, and that is to develop African languages for academic and scientific use.

The exclusive reliance on European languages means that ordinary citizens are largely cut off from the affairs of the state, even though they are proficient in their own languages, which are the languages of the majority. With the vast majority of the population unable to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives, democracy remains an elusive ideal, as does the notion of human rights. Zeleza (2006) argues that there cannot be a robust discourse on human rights when the vast majority of the population has been barred from participation because they are not fluent in European languages used by the state. This also means that ordinary men and women of the village cannot influence the discourse on human rights (Zeleza 2006). In general, only a small minority comprising the African elite are involved in the production and consumption of what is considered ‘legitimate’ knowledge in all realms of thought (Wa Thiong’o 2005; Zeleza 2006). On the other hand, the knowledge that is produced by men and women of the village is not only pre-fixed with linguistic markers (e.g. ethno-botany,

ethno-psychology, etc.) to indicate its ‘inferior’ and marginal, ‘non-scientific’ status; like African languages it is also excluded from mainstream school and university curricula. Wolff (2010) notes that approximately 80% of the daily social, cultural, economic, and intellectual activities of ordinary African citizens, go unnoticed. At the same time, close to 70% of the rural population is marginalised from participating in nation building. Illiterate in European languages, their ability to access the knowledge and information that has become available globally as a result of the revolution in information technology, is also compromised (Chumbow 2005). Thus, the use of African languages in education will democratise access as well as contribute to the development of the nation’s human resources (Chumbow 2005; Wolff 2010).

African Universities in the Colonial and Apartheid Eras

The authors of this article have argued that education in Africa during the colonial era depended on exoglossic languages, but what about African universities? What role do they play in the production and dissemination of knowledge about the African continent, particularly from the perspective of the actors located in Africa itself? In an attempt to grapple with these issues it is important to note that the emergence of modern universities in Africa did not mirror the history of the development of universities in other parts of the world. Modern universities in Africa post-independence were not autochthonous; they were modeled on the West. Based on western ideological, philosophical and epistemological frameworks, universities in Africa were by and large assimilationist in character. To this day they continue to encourage various forms of dependences on the western world (Lebakeng, Phalane & Dalindjebo 2006; Zeleza 2006). For example, African universities continue to rely on foreign syllabi as well as European languages for the purposes of instruction and research (Kaschula 2013; Laird 2006). Kaschula (2013) notes that the early missionaries, intent on propagating the Christian faith, were the first linguists to teach African languages in South Africa. Later, during the apartheid era, white academics continued to be at the forefront of the teaching of African languages, with indigenous or native speakers of the language playing a subservient role. Zeleza (2006) points to a more profound influence by the missionaries and colonialism on African languages. He refers to how independent languages were formed from what were originally dialects of the same linguistic family (e.g. the separation of

the Nguni dialects such as isiXhosa and isiZulu) while other dialects were united, in line with the colonial and imperialist dictates of the time.

It is evident from the above discussion that colonialism has had a profound influence on African languages and identities. It stands to reason, therefore, that the intellectualisation of African languages and the transformation of the humanities and social sciences in general require an interdisciplinary intervention by linguists, identity scholars, and historians, to mention a few disciplines. The study of cross-border languages by scholars located in various countries in Africa is essential (Wa Thiong'o 2005). Indigenous scholars should be at the forefront of the study of indigenous languages and IKS. This will rupture the colonial idea that foreigners or outsiders understand the local peoples better than the locals can understand themselves (Dei 2002).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Higher Education

The impact of colonialism on African languages has been reflected upon at length. The humanities and social sciences in general, including indigenous knowledge systems, did not escape this influence. Reflecting on her experience of teaching Social Work at the University of Ghana, British academic, Siobhan Laird, notes how the library was overflowing with American and British textbooks, yet ironically, the social work challenges in Ghana are vastly different from those of North American and European nations. Of course, Ghana is but an example; it is not alone. The tendency to import textbooks from abroad is not limited to the Social Work profession; examples abound in psychology, classics, and philosophy, amongst other disciplines. Even history does not escape this European gaze. For example, prior to democracy, South African history textbooks began with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, in what was termed the Cape of Good Hope, in 1652. The history of great African kingdoms in Ghana, Mali, and Mapungubwe, to mention a few, were conveniently ignored, thereby effectively writing African peoples out of history, apart from the history of their encounters with and subjugation to colonial forces.

Laird (2003) and Lebakeng *et al.* (2006) reflect on an even greater danger as far as the African intellectual project is concerned. They refer to the subjugation of humanities and social science data, collected from local African communities, by imported theoretical frameworks and

epistemological paradigms. Conceptual and epistemological transformation requires African universities to disentangle themselves from European memory (Wa Thiong'o 2005) in order to develop conceptual and theoretical frameworks from the perspective of Africa. Notable examples are already in place. Ramose (1999) amongst others, illustrates how the concept of Ubuntu can be used to understand various African phenomena including ethics, medicine, ecology, and governance.

The failure to develop indigenous languages for the purposes of scientific and scholarly discourse means that universities in Africa are not well-equipped to harness indigenous or local knowledge systems, which are deeply embedded in communities' values, ethics, philosophies and ways of life in general (Dei 2002; Gandolfo 2009; Nabudere 2011; Zeleza 2002). Exclusion of IKS from the curriculum expedites the death of local knowledge (Gandolfo 2009). Ultimately, the scientific, technological, as well as medicinal potential of these knowledge systems remain untapped and cannot be used for the purposes of sustainable development (Chumbow 2005). Most often, it is left to foreign researchers to mine IKS, using locals as research assistants. Wa Thiong'o (2005) notes that, when IKS are studied and coded in European languages, local communities, the original experts, and custodians of these knowledge traditions, are disempowered. In the end, local communities have to learn about their own knowledge systems from foreign scholars. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that the original meaning of IKS is often distorted, if not altogether lost.

Curriculum transformation and the intellectualisation of African languages are essential if African universities are to play a critical, transformative and emancipatory role in society, commensurate with the idea of the African renaissance (Mangu 2006). Having said this, it is important to heed Mudimbe who cautions against

the construction of Africa through Eurocentric categories and conceptual systems ... which produced enduring dichotomies between Europe and Africa, investing the latter's societies, cultures, and bodies with the representational or even pathologies of alterity (Zeleza 2006:16).

Similarly, Dei (2002) notes that Africa has not existed in complete isolation from the rest of the world; hence there is modernity inscribed in indigenous

knowledge systems and languages. This is an inevitable product of an exchange of ideas. Similarly, western knowledge systems in a range of disciplines including the arts, sciences, philosophy, religion, theology, and medicine, to mention a few, have borrowed liberally from IKS without acknowledging the source of this scholarship (Dei 2002; Finch, 1990). Thus, transformation in higher education also entails the interrogation and inclusion of the historic contributions of (African) IKS to civilisation and world knowledge in general, into the syllabi (Finch 1990).

The quest for integrating IKS in the transformation of the higher education sector by no means amounts to a rejection of other knowledge systems. Consistent with an inclusive indigenous epistemology as well as the hermeneutic and emergent nature of African knowledge traditions (Nabudere 2011), it is rather a quest for the recognition of the interpenetration of different knowledge traditions and their ongoing, dialogic relationship. By definition, indigenous African knowledge systems are dialogic, hermeneutic, fluid and emergent. Terms such as *ibandla*, *ingxoxo*, *lekgotla*, *inkundla*, *isigcawu*, *baraza*, to mention a few, all point towards a gathering of human beings in order to engage in a conversation to discover truth. Indigenous knowledge systems recognise the multiplicity of knowledges existing in all communities without imposing one knowledge tradition as superior to others, *a priori*. This has always been the preferred epistemological framework in most indigenous societies. Nabudere (2011) refers to the Kiganda proverb, *amagesi si gomu*, to support this. In its loose translation the proverb means, 'no one has a monopoly on knowledge'. Communication between different knowledge traditions can only be effected through language. As Nabudere (2011) opines, it is through language that one enters the life world of another; hence the development of African languages that are spoken by the majority of the population is essential in order to bring about true human understanding.

The Position of African Languages in the Post-Independence Era

The dominance of exoglossic languages has continued well into the post-colonial era (Kamwendo 2010; Zeleza 2006). This forces African children to express themselves in an idiom they are largely unfamiliar with (Prah 1998). This is despite several studies and research papers illustrating that children

learn better and develop faster cognitively and intellectually if they are taught in their mother or native language, especially in the early years of the child's education (Brock-Utne & Desai 2010; Chumbow 2005; Mkwizu 2002; 2003; Vuzo 2002a; 2002b). Proponents of the use of European languages in education have resorted to a number of arguments to justify this practice. We shall examine only a few of these since it is not possible to address all the arguments here. Chumbow (2005), Wa Thiong'o (2005) and Zeleza (2006) provide good summaries for the interested reader.

Inadequate Vocabulary to Express Scientific Concepts

Those who are against the use of indigenous African languages in education argue that African languages lack the technical vocabulary to handle the complexities of modern scientific and mathematical thought (Chumbow 2005; Wa Thiong'o, 2005). English is said to be the language of science and technology (Brock-Utne 2012, 2013). Anything short of the use of English or an established European language is associated with declining standards (Wolff 2010). Zeleza (2006: 16) posits that arguments of this nature reflect the 'construction of Africa through Eurocentric categories and conceptual systems'. This construction positions Africa as the antithesis of Europe. Thus, if European languages are developed and scientific, African languages must be under-developed and unscientific. It is important to note that all human languages are social constructions and hence no single language is naturally endowed with scientific and technical vocabulary. Brock-Utne (2012; 2013) calls upon African countries to learn from Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia. These countries have successfully used their indigenous languages to teach science and mathematics (Pitman *et al.* 2010). Similarly, countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, China, South Korea, and Thailand are developing on the strength of their own languages in a range of fields including information technology (Batibo 2010).

In Africa on the other hand, millions of children enter the schooling system with minimal or no command of the language of instruction and further schooling does not appear to lead to improved skill acquisition (Brock-Utne 2012). The learners are by and large inarticulate, passive and devoid of confidence (Batibo 2010). Wolff (2010) attributes this underperformance to the fact that, post-independence, African educational systems seek to emulate models of education that were imposed by their

former colonial masters. Inadequate or poorly implemented language policies, lack of political will, and ill-informed educational advice from expatriates and the World Bank, who share stereotyped views of Africa, propound the problem (Brock-Utne 2013; Chumbow 2005; Wolff 2010).

There is no scientific evidence in support of the view that European languages are the only mediums by means of which scientific and mathematical concepts can be communicated (Wolff 2010). Cheik Anta Diop, who translated the theory of relativity into his native Wolof language long before the theory came to be known in most European states, has shown that no language has a cognitive monopoly on mathematical and scientific vocabulary. All languages are dynamic; they are capable of adapting to new realities. Research has established that no foreign language is as efficient as the mother tongue in transmitting knowledge (Chumbow 2005; Dakin 1968). The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Societies, under the leadership of Kwesi Kwaa Prah, has long advocated for the development of African languages for use in learning, including science. We touch briefly on some of these developments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the latter sections of this paper.

Multiplicity of African Languages

The argument that the multiplicity of African languages renders instruction in the mother tongue impracticable is equally dismissed, as is the view that the use of African languages is an obstacle to national unity. Wa Thiong'o (2005) argues that linguistic diversity is not a peculiarly African phenomenon. The argument ignores the role played by colonial administrators in the demarcation of African languages; a process that led to the creation of independent languages from what were originally dialects of one linguistic family (Makoni *et al.* 2007; Zeleza 2006). There is no reason for the colonial borders to be regarded as sacrosanct. Border communities that share the same language, history, and culture could be harnessed for the purposes of national and African unity (Wa Thiong'o 2005). Similarly, Chumbow (2005) argues that the use of zonal languages that are closely related to the language spoken by the learners, are better than the use of foreign languages that have no relation to the learners' language. Alexander (1990) and Chumbow (2005) support the view that multilingualism can be used as a resource for nation building and continental unity if it is harnessed accordingly. For example, the

teaching of Kiswahili, a language spoken across a number of states in Africa, could go a long way in addressing instances of xenophobia that have been witnessed over the past few years in South Africa. Interventions of this nature require political will and investment in human and other resources. The shortage of adequately trained African languages teachers also needs to be addressed (Chumbow 2005).

Having reviewed the background to the use of exoglossic languages for educational purposes in Africa, and the consequences thereof, the remainder of this paper is devoted to national developments regarding the use of indigenous languages in South African higher education. As an illustration of these developments some of the ongoing projects at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) will be touched upon.

Repositioning African Languages in Higher Education within the Transformation Agenda

Twenty years after the first democratic dispensation, South African higher education institutions need to assess their response to the transformation imperative, as outlined in *The White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education* (DoE 1997). The Council on Higher Education (CHE), established in 1999 to advise the Minister on the shape and size of the higher education sector, is equally committed to transformation. *The White Paper* (DoE 1997) and *The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (DoE 2008), note that language is at the heart of equality, access and success in higher education. Vilakazi (2002) states that students whose mother tongue is not the medium of instruction in higher education are at a disadvantage. This is borne out by the statistics that have been released by the CHE report of 2013, which show that access, success, and completion rates in higher education continue to be racially skewed in favour of white students. The report estimated that under 5% of African and Coloured youth are succeeding in any form of higher education. The repositioning of African languages in higher education, premised on the link between language and cognition (Alexander 2004; 2010; Maseko 2008; Prah 2009), is thus indispensable if the inequalities of the past, including barriers to learning, are to be addressed.

African Languages in Higher Education: Enabling Policies and Frameworks

African languages have assumed a national imperative: the South African Constitution and various government policies reflect this. Amongst these is *The Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education* (DoE 2002), *The Report on the Development of Indigenous Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education* (DoE 2003), *The Report on the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (DoE, 2008), the *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences* (DoE 2011), *The Green Paper on Post-Secondary School Education and Training* (DoHET 2012a), as well the *Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education* (DoHET 2012b). Some of these policies and developments will be briefly discussed with the primary objective of highlighting the fact that, whilst there are no shortages of policies and frameworks, the disjuncture between language planning and implementation plans, poses certain challenges (Kaschula 2013).

The Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education (LPHE) (DoE 2002) and *The Report on the Development of Indigenous Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education* (DoE 2003), spell out what is required of institutions in order to develop indigenous languages (Kaschula 2013). The *LPHE* (DoE 2002) requires academic institutions to provide the Ministry of Education with progress reports on the implementation of their language policies every five years. Similarly, *The Report on the Development of Indigenous Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education* (DoE 2003) probes the state of African languages in higher education. It recommends actions to be taken in order to promote the intellectualisation and development of African languages and in particular, their use as mediums of instruction in higher education. In accordance with the prevailing legislative framework, each institution of higher education is required to establish its own language policy, guided by the Constitution and the *Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education* (DoE 2002).

The Green Paper on Post-Secondary School Education and Training (DoHET 2012a), recommends the teaching of African languages across disciplines at universities. It moves beyond simply justifying the teaching of

African languages in higher education, in that it makes provisions for how the languages could be incorporated into various curricula (Maseko 2014). Amongst others, it proposes the following: (a) African language proficiency as a requirement for professional training; (b) teacher training that focuses on mother tongue training for African language teachers, in order to ensure that the Department of Basic Education's mother tongue policy is implemented properly at primary school level; and (c) that university students complete a course in an African language as an integral part of their curriculum. The Department of Education and Training constituted the *Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education* (DoHET 2012b) to advise the Minister on the development of African languages as languages of scholarship. The panel was required to assess existing national and institutional language policies, their implementation, and barriers that hinder the development of African languages in the higher education sector.

Kaschula (2013) notes, however, that despite these impressive policy and legislative frameworks, and while almost all South African universities do now have language policies in place, challenges exist at the level of implementation plans and monitoring. A further challenge arises from the fact that, in the past, African languages were taught from a purely linguistic perspective; this led to a loss of interest amongst students. As a result, very few students graduate with African language majors from South African universities and this is more so at the postgraduate level. It is thus important to revitalise interest in African languages, especially amongst native speakers, at both school and university levels. Incentives for studying and researching in African languages should be made available. Buy-in from all stakeholders, especially at the senior management level, is crucial.

It is also important to mention the *Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS)* (DoHET 2011). The *HSS Charter* was commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education to investigate the societal role that can be played by the humanities and social sciences in the post-apartheid era. One of the recommendations of the Charter was the development of six catalytic projects to foreground the role of the humanities and social sciences in society. Among these is a national multidisciplinary project on how indigenous South African languages could be developed in order to support concept formation and enrich social scientific thinking and pedagogy. Dr. P. Maseko and Prof. R. Kaschula of Rhodes University lead this collaborative project. It involves seven South African institutions of Higher Learning and

four African indigenous languages, spread across four provinces (Kaschula 2013). The Charter also recommended the establishment of regional doctoral schools and greater collaboration between African universities through what it termed the African Pathways Programme. It is envisaged that the African Pathways Programme will enable greater mobility of staff and students at the postgraduate level. The study of South African history pre- 1652 (prior to colonisation) is another major recommendation of the Charter. This is not surprising given the historical manipulation of African history for colonial purposes. In order to be truly emancipatory, the humanities should engage with African history from the perspective of the local actors, which will require cross-border collaborations. The Charter further recognises linguistics as critical to the study of the African humanities, as is the study of African classical civilisations.

Institutional Responses: The University of KwaZulu-Natal College of Humanities

South African universities have responded to indigenous knowledge systems and the African languages imperatives in varied ways. Best practices can be cited at Rhodes University, which houses the NRF SARCHI Chair in African languages, and at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), which hosts a Centre of Excellence in IKS. Furthermore, at UKZN, completion of an isiZulu module is compulsory for all undergraduate students as of 2014. Council approved the UKZN Language Policy in 2006 and the Implementation Plan is currently being revised. The UKZN Transformation Charter (2012) provides the justification for the use of isiZulu as an additional medium of instruction. Similarly, the Language Planning and Development Directorate has been mandated to advance the development of isiZulu as a language of teaching and learning. This includes terminology development.

The project entitled ‘Multilingualism to Promote Access, Retention and Successful Professional Training’ was part of the South African-Norway Tertiary Education Development Programme (SANTED) (Ndimande-Hlongwa, Balfour, Mkhize & Engelbrecht 2010). This project provided the University an opportunity to respond to issues pertaining to multilingualism in higher education. It is largely as a result of this project that the College of Humanities at UKZN has made strides in utilising isiZulu as a language of

teaching, learning, and research. As such, dual medium instruction in selected modules has been introduced. This is in line with the Strategic Plan of the College (2012-2016) to have 50% of the modules offered in the bilingual mode by 2016.

Apart from the taught degree programmes, which range from undergraduate degrees to doctoral degrees in the Schools of Arts and Education, a summary of which are provided in Kamwendo, Hlongwa and Mkhize (2013), the College of Humanities has sponsored a number of initiatives to support the development of African languages. Included in these are the following:

- **Towards a Pocket Dictionary of Zulu Linguistics:** The aim of this project, led by Dr. Langa Khumalo, is to publish a user-friendly, pocket size dictionary of linguistic terms in isiZulu and to create linguistic terms for use by language and linguistics scholars.
- **Igula Lolwazi:** Led by Ms Gugulethu Mkhize, this project seeks to produce a booklet and an online data base of isiZulu terminology, drawing from the culture and traditional beliefs of the Zulu people. The terminology will be used in the teaching of isiZulu undergraduate degree programmes.
- **Creation of Terminology Database for Translation and Interpreting, Lexicography, Terminology Development and Editing, Onomastics, Literature and Research:** The aim of this project is to produce isiZulu terminology for teaching terminology and editing, translation and interpreting, lexicography, literature, Onomastics and research. The project is led by Dr. Gugulethu Mazibuko.
- **English-isiZulu-Kiswahili Phrasebook:** This project, which was led by Dr. L. Rushubirwa, culminated in the production of a basic communicative phrasebook in three languages (English, isiZulu, and Kiswahili). The phrasebook was accompanied by CDs, also in English, isiZulu, and Kiswahili.
- **Manual and CD to Teach Basic isiZulu to all First Year Students:** This initiative was led by Prof. Noleen Turner and colleagues in

isiZulu Studies. It was developed as a response to the University Council's decision to make communicative competency in isiZulu a requirement in all undergraduate degree programmes.

- **Bilingualism in Anthropology Modules:** This project, led by Dr. M. Naidu, seeks to scaffold isiZulu material and isiZulu language teaching into selected Anthropology modules.
- **Integrating the use of isiZulu into the History Curriculum at UKZN:** Led by Dr. Marijke Du Toit, the aim of the project is to develop multilingual teaching resources and to introduce isiZulu as a medium of learning in History.
- **Cultural Heritage and Tourism-Innovative Initiatives that Support the Promotion and Intellectualisation of isiZulu Language:** This project led to the establishment of an interactive, completely bilingual (English/isiZulu) website, focusing on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and tourism in Inanda, north of Durban.
- The ninth project involves the **development of key terms and bilingual teaching materials for language and literacy.** The primary objective of this project, led by Drs. Mthembu, Funeka and Nkosi, is to develop bilingual terms to be used in the teaching of Academic Literacy in Education.

All of the above-mentioned projects are contributing to curriculum transformation at UKZN and the intellectualisation of isiZulu in general, but what is most evident is that the development of isiZulu is not confined solely to the language discipline of isiZulu; it permeates a number of disciplines. This is essential not only for the sustainability of the initiative but also to avoid the stereotyping that is typical of African languages (Kaschula 2013). It is vital, however, to ensure that the projects outlined above communicate with each other so as to avoid duplication of efforts. Opportunities to share findings and best practice currently take place at the annual Teaching and Learning Conference of the University. Greater buy-in from all staff is encouraged to ensure that activities are not a reflection of individual interest and commitment.

These initiatives alone, however, are not sufficient to sustain the larger project at hand. The authors of this article hereby recommend the following so as to firmly embed African languages and IKS in higher education:

- It is important to validate African languages and IKS at the highest levels of higher education institutions. Publication in local and regional journals that use indigenous African languages should be encouraged and rewarded. This will rupture the political economy of knowledge production that rewards knowledge systems differentially.
- To ensure that the terminology and vocabulary that is being developed is sustained and put to use, institutions of higher learning should encourage students to write their dissertations and theses in African languages in fields that fall outside the languages, such as agriculture, nursing, and psychology, to mention a few.
- Students should be able to elect to write their examinations (including oral examinations) in African languages.
- It is important to liaise with professional bodies to ensure that African languages are made a compulsory requirement to attain the qualification. This will ensure that the introduction of African languages as a requirement is not resented by teaching staff and students on the grounds that the curriculum is already full.
- Advocacy at primary and secondary school level is important to ensure that native speakers take African languages as their home language subject up until Grade 12. This will ensure a steady supply of students who are well-equipped to study these languages at a deeper level at university.
- Communities should be established as sites of teaching and learning in line with community engagement. This will enable the study of IKS by the custodians of these systems.
- Indigenous experts from the community should be appointed as honorary staff and be invited to give lectures and partake as joint

research supervisors in their areas of expertise.

- Comparative interdisciplinary projects cutting across countries should be initiated to study indigenous languages (e.g. linguistics) as well as IKS. Multidisciplinary degree programmes across departments and between African countries need to be facilitated.
- Lucrative scholarships, bursaries and postdoctoral fellowships should be made available to incentivise the study of African languages.

Conclusion

This paper has relied on anti-colonial theory and hermeneutics to review the position of African languages and IKS in South African higher education. The colonial and apartheid eras were characterised by the dominance of European languages. Indigenous knowledge systems were also marginalised. The use of foreign languages continued well into the post-colonial period, as did models of universities based on western ideological, epistemological and theoretical frameworks. The authors of this paper have argued that this situation was facilitated by the African intelligentsia, who inherited the post-colonial African state. Arguments against the use of African languages were considered, followed by a discussion of various policy and legislative frameworks that enable the usage and study of African languages in the South African higher education system. Institutional initiatives to implement language policies and the challenges involved were discussed. While most universities have developed language policies, challenges at the implementation and monitoring level remain. In most institutions, language and curriculum transformation to embed IKS are yet to receive institution-wide buy-in. The paper concludes with recommendations for permanently embedding African languages and IKS in higher education.

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