The Language Question and the Role of the University in South Africa Revisited

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Abstract
This article revisits the language question and interrogates the role of, among other stakeholders, the university in South Africa. It traces the evolution of the language question from the arrival of European settlers up to the present, showing how the question became a complicated one over about three centuries. The article underscores the enormous importance of the intellectualization of African languages, calling for a critical approach to the relevant tasks, bearing in mind their demanding nature. Similarly, a call is made for circumspection regarding the recently emerged concept of translanguaging in relation to African languages, given the African context that is different from Western contexts that started experimenting and theorizing on the concept. Overall, the paper calls for South African language activists, practitioners and scholars to view their work as a long-term selfless struggle that should liberate future generations.

Keywords: Language question, Linguistic imperialism, Language policy, Language planning, Intellectualization of African languages, Translanguaging.

1. Introduction
The United Nations General Assembly declared 2019 an International Year of Indigenous Languages. Consequently, governments, universities and organisations across the world organized fora and a variety of activities to celebrate and promote indigenous languages. The 3rd Biennial Language Research

Symposium of the University of KwaZulu-Natal convened by the University Language Planning and Development Office from 30 to 31 October 2019 was one example of such commemorative platforms. This paper is a revised version of a keynote address that was delivered at that symposium. It revisits the language question and interrogates the role of, among other stakeholders, the university in South Africa. Although this issue has been interrogated several times before (cf. Alexander 2003; 2007; 2012; 2013; Kaschula & Maseko 2014; Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014; Nkosi 2014; Prah 2017), it remains perennial in a manner that demonstrates its complexity and possibly the need for some rethinking within the academy. While this paper acknowledges the often-cited lack of political will and limited financial support, it ponders whether language practitioners and scholars have committed adequate effort to conceptualize and implement well-conceived long-term strategies to address a complex challenge that has evolved over nearly three centuries effectively. The paper implores language scholars and activists to approach the language question as a lifetime and selfless struggle through which they may establish a lasting legacy for future generations. In other words, it argues that there are no quick fixes to this question; otherwise oversimplifying it renders most projects and activities geared towards redressing the sociolinguistic legacy of colonialism and apartheid superficial, and indeed a mockery to the most democratic language policy and the struggles that made it possible. This position is inspired by the experiences of the transformation of European vernaculars into not only powerful but imperial languages such as English and French, as well as the revolutionary growth of Afrikaans. This, however, should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the imperialistic and racially discriminatory history associated with those languages.

This paper is divided into six sections, including this introduction and the conclusion. The next section (re)defines the language question in order to avoid any doubts regarding the subject matter of this discussion. This is followed by a historical contextualization of the language question in South Africa in Section 3. Section 4 then revisits the topic of intellectualization of African languages as a crucial endeavour in our quest to obliterate the legacy of (linguistic) imperialism. This is followed by a brief discussion of translanguaging, another concept that has recently emerged as an ideological counteraction to linguistic hegemony. Section 6 concludes the paper, emphasizing the inescapable political and ideological dimension of the language question.

2. The Language Question: What it Entails

In his book *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/ Azania*, Neville Alexander approaches the language question in a thoughtfully probing manner:

> WHAT IS 'THE LANGUAGE QUESTION'? Why should we want to write a book on this question? Surely, we have enough 'questions' or problems to worry about without adding another one to the long list? Why don't we first try to find answers to the racial question, the land question, the housing question, the wages question, the constitutional question and to all the other important questions in our country? Why is the language question so terribly important? (Alexander 1989: 4).

This question is reminiscent of the title of arguably the most important book in the field (*Can language be planned?*) by Rubin and Jernudd (1971), which understandably arose at the nascent stage of language planning as a field of inquiry. While Alexander (1989: 4) proceeds to assert that the answer to '[w]hy the language question is so terribly important … is extremely simple and straightforward', that the question remains topical today probably high-lights its complexity that has often been taken for granted especially by those with a 'make-or-break' influence on policy making and implementation. This complexity is alluded to by Alexander (1989) who notes that the language question is 'part and parcel of one overriding question', together with the urgent questions of race, land, wages, housing, etc., that overriding question being: '[H]ow do we abolish social inequality based on colour, class, religious beliefs, sex, language group or on any other basis?' (Alexander 1989: 4).

In the light of the foregoing, the language question is not a question of language *per se*. It is also a question of power, chief among them being economic power (cf. Bourdieu 1991; Kamwangamalu 2016). It is such power that, from the outset, inspired 'a multidisciplinary approach to language planning' (Rubin & Jernudd 1971: ix), resulting in the field being conceived from 'the vantage point of sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, political science, and economics' (Rubin & Jernudd 1971: xii). Linguistic choice(s) that are integral to language planning practice have never been haphazard. Hence, Bourdieu (1991) theorizes linguistic choices and production

in terms of economic concepts of capital and markets. This illustrates that language is value laden, such that in the context of linguistic hierarchies, speakers of particular languages hold specific advantages over others through language use. The advantages may be economic, political or even social, thereby giving rise to the notion of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991), the power that ascribes prestige to certain languages while rendering others less attractive. As Phillipson (1992) shows, this becomes the basis for linguistic imperialism.

In most of Europe, the language question is relatively less complex, particularly in those countries that adopted a simple nation-state geopolitical model, i.e. a neat one-nation, one-state and one-language fit. However, such a model is a social construction that culminated from the nationalistic establishment of modern European states whereby language was used as a rallying point (Nkomo 2018). Globalization and mass migration have, however, disrupted such superficial homogeneity, resulting in super-diverse populations that have turned those countries into linguistic and cultural mosaics (Creese & Blackledge 2015). Still, the choices to be made in such contexts are not as daunting as those of former colonies. In Africa, Kamwangamalu (2016: 1) reckons that the language question is a challenge that constitutes the following dilemmas, among others:

> … what they should do about the inherited languages inherited from their former colonial masters … French from France and Belgium, English from Britain, Portuguese from Portugal, and Spanish from Spain. Should these languages be replaced by African languages, and if so, at what cost […] If not, what policies should be introduced to bring African languages to parity with the inherited colonial languages?

Crucially important, those questions need to be considered and addressed by taking into account the implications of the previous and current practices on the past, present and futures of the concerned communities and also in terms of the other important questions raised by Alexander (1989). Thus, the language question pertains to the marginalization of indigenous African languages and the dominance of exoglossic languages in education and other prestigious domains. How that question is resolved is of paramount importance for the continent's quest for meaningful power.

3. The Evolution of the Language Question in South Africa

Bamgbose (1991) identifies fluctuation as one of the major characteristics of language policies in Africa. Not many countries typify this better than South Africa. '[F]or roughly two and a half centuries (1652–1948) the country was subjected to European influence and rule either under the Dutch or the British with each sovereignty seeking to impress its particular social and political character on the nation – often through education' (Le Roux 2016: 2). The end of apartheid in 1994 created a new political dispensation in which previously marginalized citizens had to participate in mapping the future of the country. Socio-political dynamics within and across different political regimes did not spare language. In fact, language was always a subject of political contestation, and yet a tool for political struggles. Language policy in South Africa has therefore always revolved 'around the relative politics, power and status of English, Afrikaans [Dutch earlier] and [lately] African languages' (Hartshorne 1995: 307).

This section seeks to trace the evolution of the language question in South Africa in order to contextualize the role of the university especially in the midst of current debates around transformation, Africanization and decolonization. Without committing to an in-depth engagement with those concepts, whose interpretation is contentious, the intention is to underscore that the language question, specifically the issues of intellectualization of African languages and translanguaging, cannot be interrogated meaningfully without understanding the past that disenfranchised indigenous languages. As Alexander (1989: 26) points out, 'the language question was never very far from the surface in all previous political strategizing and reappraisal'.

Le Roux (2016) traces overt efforts of entrenching the Dutch language and culture to the late 1680s when the language was chosen instead of French for instructing the children of the French Huguenots. The fear of a French takeover was so strong that it resulted in the Netherlands bequeathing the Cape Colony to Britain in 1785. Ironically, this arrangement kick- started the Anglicization drive that gained traction during and after the Anglo-Boer war (1899–1902). While the Anglo-Boer conflict pertained to mineral resources and economic opportunities, as in her other colonies, the British Empire sought to impose her total supremacy by bringing 'British culture, values and the imperial language to Afrikaner children to prepare them to become citizens of the British Empire' (Le Roux 2016: 6). As Le Roux (2016: 5) states, it was a

'direct action to contain Afrikaner power'. Thus, while a truce was reached in 1902, leading to the 1909 Union Convention that yielded an official bilingual language policy in 1925 (Alexander 1989: 13), the principle of equality between English and Afrikaans was either an illusion or a fallacy. English remained the more powerful language as a 'prerequisite for state aid in education' (Hartshorne 1995: 308). Anglicization continued unabated, having gained momentum in the concentration camp schools during the Anglo-Boer War. Driven by teachers hired from UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and fuelled by the press, Anglicization expanded from concentration camp schools to farm and town schools in the aftermath of the war (Le Roux 2016). Afrikaans only made real inroads into the English-dominated spaces following the ascension of the National Party to power in 1948. This was in spite of the nationalistic political and cultural drive from the Afrikaans community, in particular the industrious commitment of its intellectual members to develop it as 'an African language' autonomous from Dutch and wean their community from the Netherlands. In its policy, the Institute for Christian National Education did not only underscore the mother tongue as 'the basis of native education and teaching' (Hartshorne 1995: 309); it also asserted that Afrikaans and English, 'the two official languages, must be taught as subjects because they are official languages' (Hartshorne 1995: 309-310). However, the apartheid government, as illustrated by the Transvaal Education Department (1938: 5) made concerted efforts to ensure that English did not prevail over Afrikaans, as detailed by Hartshorne (1995). Alexander (1989: 24) cites, for example, Dr Karel Prinsloo, the Director of the HSRC Institute for Linguistic and Cultural Research, who dismisses any 'reason to give preference to English rather than to Afrikaans in the function of lingua franca', arguing that 48% of South Africans understand the language. Overall, the apartheid language policy was an intensification of the 'British colonial policy but with the substitution of Afrikaans for English as the language of domination and social accommodation' (Alexander 1989: 19).

Therefore, it is clear, from the foregoing, that for most of the colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa, language policy contestations were between languages that were foreign for the majority of the indigenous population. In Alexander's (1981: 26) words, it was a 'struggle between Boer and Briton'. Indigenous African languages were on the periphery, with their speakers having to choose between English and Afrikaans. Mother-tongue education, propagated by the apartheid government as 'an inalienable right'

(Alexander 1989: 22), was 'the main instrument to promote separateness' (Alexander 1989: 19) and a mere ploy of de- Anglicisation and entrenchment of Afrikaans, as well as the life and world-view of Afrikaners as 'senior white trustees' (Hartshorne 1995: 309) of Africans.

Because Afrikaans and African languages, respectively, were the stick and carrot for Africans under Bantu education, mother tongue education as espoused in the apartheid language-in-education policy was fiercely resisted. In an article entitled 'The Language Question', Jordan (1958, as quoted by Alexander (1989: 35), states:

> As educationists, we cannot reject this principle. But as democrats we reject the idea of a 'Bantu community' or 'Coloured community', and if the given mother-tongue is in such a state that it cannot take the child beyond the confines of the supposed 'own community', then we must insist that while the child continues to receive training in the use of his own mother-tongue, he should as early as possible receive instruction through a language that will ensure him a place in a world community.

Political tensions heightened out of the enforcement of the apartheid language policy and its rejection, leading to the historic 1976 uprising in which the slogan of the day was 'Kill Afrikaans' (Alexander 1989: 37). While the uprising is celebrated as a catalytic moment towards the demise of apartheid, linguistic advocacy prior and after the uprising did not resolve the language question decisively. In retrospect, scholars recognise the irony of preference for English instead of not only Afrikaans but also African languages (Alexander 1989; 1999; 2005; 2012; 2013; Hartshorne 1995; Heugh 1995; Reagan 1995). Alexander (1989: 29) reports the Communist Party's bid to promote English through its night school and post-literacy reading programmes. The imperialistic pull of English is not unique to South Africa, as shown in Makoni and Mashiri's (2007) recollection regarding Zimbabwe (cf. Kadenge & Nkomo 2011). What makes the position of English problematic is that the conditions for its mastery have been unconducive; such that while it remains unassailable, the reality makes it unattainable for the majority of Africans (Alexander 2005). It is, therefore, unsurprising that while it has gone on to prevail over indigenous African languages following their elevation into official languages in the democratic constitution, English is South Africa's *de facto* official language. It is the medium of instruction for the better part of

basic education, even studied as a home language by non-mother-tongue speakers. English is the only language that may deny South Africans access to higher education. It is therefore unsurprising, even though regrettable, that instead of becoming multilingual universities, previously Afrikaans-medium universities look set to become English universities. Yet the #FeesMustFall protests highlight 'the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English' (Alexander 1989: 26), which has rendered meaningless the efforts of increasing physical access to higher education.

4. Intellectualization of Indigenous African Languages and the Role of the University

Intellectualization of African languages has generally been embraced as a major strategic imperative for South African universities (cf. Alexander 2003; 2007; 2012; Kaschula & Maseko 2014; Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014; Prah 2017) and the nation as a whole owing to the historical background outlined in the previous section. Besides the Constitution which promotes multilingualism and respect for indigenous African languages as a fundamental premise for achieving a democratic society, this imperative is also rooted in the *Language Policy for Higher Education* (Department of Education 2002) and further elaborated in the *Ministerial Report on the Development of Indigenous Languages for use as Mediums of Instruction* (Department of Education 2003). These policy documents oblige universities to formulate, adopt and implement institutional language policies through which every institution must identify, develop and use at least one specific indigenous language for academic and administrative purposes, together with the already intellectualized English and/or Afrikaans.

Before offering a critical appraisal of the progress and contributions of South African universities towards the intellectualization of African languages, it is vital to acknowledge the exponential growth of scholarship on different aspects of language intellectualization over the last two and a half decades. African languages now occupy the centre of linguistic research in South Africa. Linguistics departments whose curriculum previously focused on English linguistics have conscientiously been transforming and bringing African languages into the core of their theorization. Some have even changed their names to reflect their transformative academic projects. However, what is disappointing from most of the scholarship is a lack of engagement with the

notion of *language intellectualization*. Consequently, language activists, practitioners and scholars alike have been involved in practical projects and research whose overall impact has not been tangible, despite some of it attracting modest to handsome research funds. This is a major regret, given that funding for language work is generally limited.

The scholar who introduced the term *language intellectualization* was Bohuslav Havránek of the Prague School of Linguistics before its adoption and popularization by Philipino scholars, namely Bonifacio Sibayan and Andrew Gonzaléz (Sibayan 1991; Gonzalez 2002). In South Africa, Neville Alexander championed the intellectualization of African languages through his numerous works, including his posthumous publication (Alexander 2013). Following Alexander's works, and another important publication by Finlayson and Madiba (2002), *intellectualization of African languages* became a catch phrase.

In an article originally published in 1964, Havránek (2014: 30) defines intellectualization of a language as:

> … adaptation to the goal of making possible precise and rigorous, if necessary abstract, statements, capable of expressing the continuity and complexity of thought, that is, to reinforce the intellectual side of speech. This intellectualization culminates in scientific (theoretical) speech, determined by the attempt to be as precise in expression as possible, to make statements which reflect the rigor of objective (scientific) thinking in which the terms approximate concepts and the sentences approximate logical judgements.

He proceeds to flag the need to distinguish between folk and standard languages according to modes, situations, functions and styles. This means that the mere use of a language in professional or academic discipline does not necessarily mean that the language is already intellectualized. However, starting to use the language even before it has been sufficiently cultivated could be a useful point of departure. What is crucial is the development of appropriate registers in the process or prior to the use of a language. Sibayan (1991) elaborates on the term *intellectualization*, reiterating that it means much more than *modernization*, an important aspect of language planning. In this respect, he writes that '[a] language may be modern or modernized but not intellectualized' (Sibayan 1991: 72). The primary endeavour of modernization

is to develop a language and promote its use mainly in view of contemporariness, placing priority on the visibility of the language despite possible limitations in terms of modes, situations, functions and styles. According to Sibayan 1991: 72), intellectualized languages are used 'in the controlling domains' that 'dictate what language to learn and aspire for, because that language is the effective working language in the domain, namely those of government administration, legislation, the judiciary and law, business, commerce, industry, science and technology, the professions, media and education on all levels' (Sibayan (1991: 70). For example, South African students need no convincing that they must learn and pass English if they aspire to be lawyers (even though they may struggle to achieve that goal) than one would be prepared to invest in an African language in order to use it in social media. Thus, languages may be used on Twitter, Facebook and other television programmes without necessarily being intellectualized while Latin, an intellectualized language has now lagged behind when it comes to modernization.

While it is important for scholars and practitioners in South Africa and Africa generally to understand the above conceptualization, Kaschula and Maseko (2014) note that *language intellectualization* may be controversial with respect to African languages. They posit the question:

> Are not all languages equally intellectualised; underpinned by sophisticated, rule-governed and elaborate grammatical and sociolinguistic systems, regardless of whether they are used as languages of learning and teaching or whether they are used in high status domain areas such as politics or not? (Kaschula & Maseko 2014: 10).

Their answer, i.e. 'probably affirmative' may not be clear enough. Languages that are not used as languages of learning and teaching and other high status domains would not normally count as intellectualized at the time of assessment. Of course, this would not apply to Latin and Greek whose record is well known. However, for African languages one needs to clarify that their intellectualization does not necessarily imply that they are inherently devoid of intellectual potential, which would run counter to the linguistic property of productivity. Instead, the shifting of ontological and epistemological goals through missionary and colonial education was accompanied by the *de-*

intellectualization of African languages which had functioned effectively within traditional education systems that were anchored on indigenous knowledge systems (Kaschula & Nkomo 2019). One cannot question the intellectualization of languages that facilitated great African civilizations such as the building of Mapungugwe, Great Zimbabwe and Timbuktu. However, in the same way as English and other European languages fail to capture fundamental concepts that constitute indigenous knowledge systems and great African civilizations, African languages would not immediately fit within foreign ontologies and epistemologies that have not been transformed for local societal relevance. For that reason, African languages need to be *re-intellectualized*, as Kaschula and Nkomo (2019) argue, and to be aligned with the transformation and decolonization of curriculum at all educational levels. In response to the national legislation pertaining to higher education and the language question, a survey of South African universities would allow for the ticking of boxes in recognition of the following achievements:

o Almost all universities adopted institutional language policies a decade or so ago, the understandable exceptions being the recently established ones such as Sol Plaatje University.

o The adopted language policies express commitment towards multi-lingualism and the intellectualization of indigenous languages.

o Most of the language policies are regularly revised as per requirements governing all other institutional policies.

o As part of their governance structures, most universities have language committees which act as watchdogs on language policy implementation and/ or violations.

o Most universities have language policy operationalization entities such as language management offices and language centres.

o There has been notable re-invigoration of academic departments of African languages in some institutions in terms of staff recruitment and student enrolment. For example, over 700 students are currently registered for African languages at Rhodes University, compared to about 50 in 2007.

o There has been a notable development of transformation-oriented multilingual or African language courses and programmes. Examples include the compulsory isiZulu course for all non-isiZulu speaking students and academics at the UKZN, the compulsory IsiXhosa for

Journalism and Rhodes University, IsiXhosa for Medical and Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, as well as the Bilingual Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Limpopo.

o There is an increase in research (outputs) in African languages and post-graduate degrees.
o Multilingual support services, such as interpretation at public meetings and ceremonies of selected universities, are consistently provided.
o There is an increased visibility of African languages in the form of multilingual websites and signage across universities.

While it is not difficult to acknowledge the above, it is vital to note that there is still a long way for the academy to move beyond ticking boxes. While the availability of institutional language policies championing multilingualism and indigenous languages deserve celebration, there is a risk of them being mere symbols of compliance and political correctness without commitment to implementation and application in the key institutional activities. Absence of clear implementation plans, coupled with limited financial, infrastructural and human resources directed at such work at South African universities has been identified as evidence of a lack of political will at institutional and national government levels. Consequently, some policies are revised repeatedly without any meaningful progress in terms of implementation. This has resulted in what Kaschula and Maseko (2014: 10) call policy fatigue.

The lack of political will is, however, not surprising, given how this critical issue of the language question emerged for South African higher education. Although the South African constitution had already affirmed the official status of nine indigenous languages, Alexander (2013) reveals that the National Commission for Higher Education had overlooked this issue until the eleventh hour of finalizing its report. Reflecting on the omission of the commission, Alexander (2013: 75-76) makes a two-fold observation that:

> Firstly, most academics, even today, simply take it for granted that English is and ought to be the language of tuition in tertiary education … Secondly, even when language policy clauses do appear in bulky and extremely high-sounding reports, they are usually there as an afterthought or an 'add-on' and not because of any understanding about the fundamental importance of language in education or, indeed, in any other social domain.

This observation is instructive if we are to comprehend the slow-motion progress, where it exists, around the language question and, in particular, why English remains, in the words of Bamgbose (2003), a recurring decimal. Resistance against indigenous languages remains strong, especially from the majority of academics, most likely for selfish security reasons, since the South African academia remains largely monolingual in English. Such monolingual academics can hardly fathom the idea of their courses being taught in a language other than English. Opening up of spaces to languages other than English threatens not only their autonomy as knowledge producers, it also threatens their monopoly within the knowledge communities.

However, it is also important to acknowledge and address resistance from students, including those who are mother-tongue speakers of African languages. The generally negative attitudes towards African languages are a common feature of a society that has morphed into an English habitus over a protracted period in its history. The uptake of vocation-specific language courses such as isiXhosa for Journalism or isiXhosa for Law will remain low as long as indigenous languages continue to play a secondary role to English. The languages need to be endowed with the needed capital that will enable their users to enter linguistic markets and get value for their capital (Bourdieu 1991). Kamwangamalu (2016) calls this prestige planning, or in much simpler but apt terms, 'opportunity planning' (Antia 2017). For this, South Africa needs political will beyond university powers.

Besides the missing political will at national government level, Alexander (2007: 38) prescribes some critical pre-requisites for a successful programme of intellectualizing indigenous languages by reminding us that 'we need people who have the vision, the courage and the energy to do it'. These requirements need to transcend the domain of advocacy, for which the South Africa's legislative framework is enabling. The vision of intellectualizing African languages needs to be long-term whereby African language scholars and practitioners are prepared to give every iota of their sweat and blood well-knowing that they may not enjoy the glory of their labour in their lifetime. Whereas musicians may find gratification in producing instant hits and becoming overnight celebrities, language planners, terminologists, translators and lexicographers should aspire to become timeless legends of the future. As Alexander (2007: 29) observes, 'general policy of promoting language equity in multilingual African societies and of developing ('modernising' or elaborating) African languages in the context of overall national development

policies will have to be followed systematically over a period of at least two generations'. Evidence abounds to support the need for coordinated and sustained commitment from the work of language academies that transformed European vernaculars, which served restricted functions under the dominance of Latin and Greek, into modern European languages (Nkomo 2018). Closer at home, Afrikaans is a classic example of the need for a clear vision and an enduring commitment to maximize sustainable rewards from favourable political conditions provided by politicians for language planning. Having been recognized as a distinct language only in 1925, more than a century after isiXhosa first appeared in print, Afrikaans was rapidly transformed from a 'kitchen language' into a language of power. What is remarkable is the rate of its intellectualization, but its use by the apartheid government should never be replicated as we try to build a more inclusive society.

While Kaschula and Maseko (2014) motivate for a research-based approach to the intellectualization of African languages, the prevailing context in South African higher education is susceptible to rewarding outputs in quantitative terms at the expense of impact. This may inadvertently pressure and trap African language scholars in the numbers game of celebrating increased student registrations, throughput rates and research outputs at the neglect of the future of those graduates and impact of those research outputs. It seems gratifying to eulogize postgraduate theses and dissertations written in indigenous languages while totally neglecting the research findings and their implications for linguistic scholarship and the broader society. Similarly, the Pan-South African Language Board (PanSALB) sees no issue in demanding that each of the understaffed and under-resourced National Lexicography Units publishes a dictionary per year to the detriment of the quality and utility value of those products. Comparatively, it is more plausible to embark on a long-term project of translating key academic texts from English to African languages, including for example, postgraduate theses and dissertations for the purpose of building corpora for African languages, as is being done at UKZN. Such corpora may then be used to support future work like terminology development, translation, lexicography, development of human language technologies, refining orthographies and textbook production in African languages. Otherwise, the risks are high for the important national mandate of intellectualizing African languages to be captured by the merchants of instant results, where passion for the work is overrated at the expense of capacity building, which is oversimplified.

5. Translanguaging for (South) African (Higher) Education

It would be remiss to revisit the language question in South African higher education and then overlook translanguaging in the process. Given South Africa's language question of English hegemony and the history from which it arises, the interest in translanguaging is justified from Wei's (2011: 1223) claim that:

> The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience.

In a way, the motivations for translanguaging concur with those of intellec-tualization of African languages described above as both seek to counteract the oppressive power of a colonial language over minoritized citizens who, however, constitute the majority. Its claimed goal is 'protecting minoritized communities, their languages, and their learners and schools' (Otheguy *et al.* 2015: 283). In spite of its currency, translanguaging is a relatively new research area in Africa. Its engagement in the present discussion is going to be brief due to space constraints. It suffices to note that, in light of Jaspers (2017) and Wolff (2018), Africa still needs to interrogate this concept more rigorously if it is to contribute meaningfully towards her language planning and educational needs.

Translanguaging is Colin Baker's translation (Baker 2001) of *trawsieithu* (Williams 1994), a Welsh term coined by Cen Williams to describe 'a pedagogical practice where students in bilingual Welsh/English classrooms are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use' (Garcia & Lin 2016: 2). This coordinated strategy was intended to revitalize Welsh, which was under the threat of English hegemony. According to Vogel and Garcia (2017: 9), the original Welsh translanguaging now represents 'a weak version of translanguaging' as it … 'upholds national languages'. As a pedagogical practice, it 'leverages the fluid languaging of learners in ways that deepen their engagement and comprehension of complex content and texts' (Vogel & Garcia 2017: 2). This concurs with Baker (2011: 289), who observes, 'To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to

write about it in another language, means that the subject matter has to be processed and "digested"'. The strong version is that of translanguaging as linguistic theory (Otheguy *et al.* 2015; Garcia & Lin 2016; Wei 2018), which debunks the existence of languages as named and countable entities, acknowledging them only as socio-political constructs. Its interest is in idiolects, i.e. 'language viewed from the internal perspective of the individual, language seen separately from the external perspective of the society that categorizes and classifies named national languages' (Otheguy *et al.* 2015: 286).

The notion of translanguaging has now transcended research into pedagogy to exploration of 'everyday social interaction, cross-modal and multimodal communication, linguistic landscape, visual arts, music, and transgender discourse' (Wei 2018) in linguistically diverse contexts. In the words of Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012a), it has moved from school to street and beyond, attracting along the way interest of diverse scholars with different backgrounds and interests (Lewis, Jones & Baker 2012b). In that process, its meaning drifted (Garcia & Lin 2016: 7), prompting Wei (2018: 11) to implore scholars:

> … to recognize that [translanguaging] practices can be of very diverse natures; for instance, the academic practices of knowledge production which include the purposes of the research articulated in specific socio-historical settings, language practices by the language users being studied, and professional practices such as language teaching.

This makes it imperative for scholars to be clear about the version of translanguaging that they advance or critique. South African scholars seem to be evoking the strong version of challenging primarily English as a colonial invention (Makoni & Pennycook 2007) in order to support multilingual pedagogies throughout the education system (Guzula, McKinney & Tyler 2016; Madiba 2014; Makalela 2016). They have largely echoed their Western counterparts on the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging. For example, Makalela (2016: 194) summarizes the findings of translanguaging research in South Africa as follows:

> Current research in South Africa on translanguaging … all point to the successful use of translanguaging strategies to improve traditional and academic literacy as well as to dispel myths that African languages are

> multiple and unintelligible. It has also shown the social literacy benefits of involving African languages in English classrooms where parents … are now able to interact with their children and contribute to knowledge construction.

Consequently, *translanguaging* has become the new catchword, just like *intellectualization of African languages* before it. For example, Rhodes University has explicitly endorsed translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in the institution's recently revised language policy (Rhodes University 2019: 2). Yet, apart from Wolff (2018), an Africanist perspective engaging the transformative limits (Jaspers 2017) is yet to emerge, even though Western scholars have acknowledged and attempted to address some of the controversial issues around translanguaging. Vogel and Garcia (2017: 11) concede that 'translanguaging pedagogy is not without controversy', with Garcia and Lin (2016: 11) positing that 'translanguaging in education sometimes contradicts the regulatory role of schools'. This is particularly the case regarding assessment. It would be important for African scholars to indicate how, if really necessary, basic or higher education can draw a clinical line in the quest of assessing linguistic competence, cultural competence and academic competence separately in order to depart from current practices where such competences are conflated to the detriment of speakers of minoritized languages. Should education systems prioritize certain competences over others in assessment, e.g. overlook linguistic competence when assessing specialized subject knowledge in higher education? Wolff (2018) cautions against the negative consequences of such contradictions for African learners and students who need to develop not only linguistic but also extra-linguistic and professional skills to compete globally. This leaves education practitioners with a challenge of determining the nature of translanguaging that would be appropriate in different contexts, from a weak scaffolding approach to a strong one of 'disinventing languages' (Makoni & Pennycook 2007) and language policies that provide for their development and use.

It is not difficult to concur with the proponents of translanguaging scholars regarding the regrettable consequences of the politics of standard languages, especially the imperialist languages like English. However, debunking and forgetting them can only be an academic exercise. The entrenched position of English and the impact of the new media, e.g. radio, television, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc., as communication make the

position of indigenous African languages more precarious for them to survive in the same translanguaging space with English. One can imagine that the only way to curb English hegemony would be the full intellectualization of African languages in terms of status planning, corpus planning, acquisition planning and prestige planning, even though English will remain, in most likelihood, unassailable for its international value. Some proponents of translanguaging will dismiss this as an ideological position, ironically forgetting that translanguaging itself is also 'a political act' (Flores 2014). While African scholars are justified to pursue strategies to solve educational problems, they should be mindful that the political act of translanguaging might not always be politically correct for African communities, especially if it counters, instead of complementing, the intellectualization of African languages.

6. Conclusion

This article was another instalment in the perennial discussion of the language in South Africa, focusing on higher education. Having (re)defined and contextualized the language question historically in terms of South African politics, the paper sought to emphasize that the language question is so complex that it may not be resolved easily without concerted efforts from all stakeholders. When tackling the popular topic of intellectualization of African languages, the paper went beyond decrying the lack of political will to argue that the complex task of language intellectualization requires language activists, language practitioners and language scholars to avoid the pitfall of oversimplifying matters in quest for instant results and personal glories. As the experience from languages such as English, French and Afrikaans show, more time and effort is required to fully intellectualize a language. It is also from this perspective that circumspection was implored regarding translanguaging, that rather than embracing it uncritically, relevant contextual factors affecting language planning and language in education should be considered, vis-à-vis the Western origins, developments and theorization of translanguaging. The intellectualization of indigenous African languages remains a tremendously important mandate and, as leaders in social transformation, universities should ensure that all aspects of language planning, namely status, corpus, acquisition and prestige or opportunity planning are judiciously addressed with respect to African languages that they have committed to develop into academic languages. Translanguaging may have a role in this, but it should not be the

new and only way. More than twenty-five years into democracy, all those with a role to play regarding the language question, including African language activists and scholars may find themselves on the wrong side of history and the future.

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