

Hybrid discursive practices in a South African multilingual primary classroom: A case study

PINKY MAKOE

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

CAROLYN MCKINNEY

University of Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT: The data discussed in this paper is drawn from research conducted in a multilingual urban primary school in Johannesburg, South Africa, where the official language of instruction is English and the majority of learners are African language speakers, frequently with very limited English proficiency. The paper presents a case study of one child who uses her own multilingual resources in order to draw her peers into the routines and meaning-making processes of classroom life. It explores the extent to which this learner, despite being in year one of formal schooling, uses hybrid discursive practices to cross several boundaries: adult-child; teacher-learner; peer/friend-teacher; English-proficient-multilingual. It considers the opportunities for peer participation in classroom activities created through the case-study learner's hybridising of identity positions and examines the way in which this learner "reads" the classroom environment and positions herself in the classroom space. The paper argues that the case-study learner is using her bi\multilingual resources to induct other learners into ways of doing and being at school, and as such to construct a classroom community.

KEYWORDS: Hybrid identities, multilingual classroom, peer learning, English language learners, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of the apartheid education system and its continuing inequalities provide South African schooling with many challenges. The extent of these challenges is seen in the recent description of primary schooling in South Africa as "in crisis" (Fleisch, 2008), referring to the widespread failure of learners on both international and local systemic assessments of literacy. The role of English as a language of instruction in such a diverse context, and the complexity of urban multilingualism, are seen as important factors in this crisis (Fleisch, 2008; Makoni, 2003; Viljoen and Molefe, 2001). A number of researchers have written passionately about the importance of mother-tongue education in the early years (for example, Alexander, 2000; Bloch, 2002; Heugh, 2002) and of the need to embrace multilingualism. However, the reality is that the increasing hegemony of English in post-apartheid South Africa has put enormous pressures on parents to choose instruction in English for their children, and on schools to provide English language instruction (de Klerk, 2000, Kamwangamalu, 2003, Setati, 2008). Despite the acknowledged crisis and complexity of the challenges, there is relatively little classroom-based research being conducted in South African primary schools. We know little for example about what kinds of interaction take place in classrooms where English is the language of learning and

teaching (LOLT) and where many learners have a very limited grasp of the language and we know little about the linguistic (and other) resources that learners bring with them to school.

While a picture of crisis may suggest a homogenous schooling system in South Africa, we need to emphasise the heterogeneity within the system. There is undoubtedly a wide continuum from extremely poor schools in rural areas and urban townships (lacking basic facilities such as flush toilets, electricity and textbooks) to a small number of highly elite and resource-rich government and private schools in the suburbs. Yet even within the relatively well resourced suburban schools, there is also great variation. Since suburban schools receive the smallest subsidies from government (due to their location in relatively well resourced and wealthy areas), they rely heavily on charging school fees for income. In the formerly white school in which we carried out our research, most learners are now bussed in to the area and come from poor and working-class homes. Classes are large (commonly 45 learners) and the school runs a feeding scheme for children who come from homes where sufficient food cannot be provided. Such a school can be considered a hybrid space in which elements of privilege and disadvantage exist side by side. The white English-speaking learners who used to constitute the learner body have been replaced by black multilingual learners, many of whom are not proficient in English, the LOLT, on entry to the school.

This paper draws on data collected for a larger study on the relationship between language practices, identities and conditions for learning among children and youth attending four, desegregated suburban schools, three secondary and one primary in Johannesburg. Here our focus is on the primary school, where we explore the Grade One classroom as a discursive space and focus in particular on the practices of one accomplished multilingual learner. Early on in the fieldwork period, we noticed this learner's unusual behaviour in actualising the co-existence of multiple languages in the public space of a classroom where English was undoubtedly the most highly valued but simultaneously unequally distributed resource (Makoe, 2007, Makoe, 2009). We became interested in how this learner was able to use her multilingual proficiency in local languages as a valuable resource to facilitate the participation of her peers in classroom life and thus to construct a classroom community. We thus conducted an interpretive analysis of how this learner's use of hybrid, discursive practices has the potential to create discursive spaces that afford new opportunities for learning in a context where English is an unequally distributed resource.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We conceptualise the classroom as a complex, discursively and semiotically constructed social space where the teacher and students engage in a range of ambiguous and indeterminate human interactions. It is usually through the process of interaction that learners and the teacher constitute themselves as a group, or class, and continually create shared knowledge that guides them as to how to participate in the classroom as a social space, including how to negotiate favourable positions for themselves and with others. Following Bakhtin's (1981) notion of social heteroglossia, Gutierrez and Stone (2000) argue that classrooms are inherently multi-

voiced dialogical spaces, “regardless of the dominance of the official script” (2000, p. 157). Thus classrooms are sites of multiple and competing discourses.

We position our work within the growing body of language learning and sociolinguistic research which draws on a post-structuralist conception of identity and discourse in order to understand language learning processes as well as classroom processes (for example, McKinney & Norton, 2008, Norton, 2000, Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, Toohey, 2000). A poststructuralist definition of identity views language as central in constructing our selves and our subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Identity is seen as discursively constituted, multiple and in process, fluid, and often contradictory, rather than as fixed and unitary (Weedon, 1997). As Davies and Harré (1999) point out “An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate” (p. 35). We have found particularly useful the notion of positioning developed by Davies and Harré as a replacement for the more static and ritualistic concept of role. Positioning helps to draw attention to the “dynamic aspects of encounters” (1999, p. 32). As such, the concept of positioning foregrounds hybridity, and the manner in which each of us can take up multiple positions in interactions. While a learner might not be able to inhabit the formal “role” of the teacher, she could position herself as a teacher by successfully appropriating the discourse of a teacher. Davies and Harré distinguish between self-positioning, named “reflexive positioning”, and “interactive positioning”, where one is positioned by another’s words (1999, p. 37). Our focus in this paper is mainly on the reflexive positioning of the learner.

As mentioned at the outset, we characterise the school and the particular classroom in our study as a hybrid space. We hope to demonstrate the complex and sophisticated ways in which one learner employs what we are calling *hybrid discursive practices*. This notion draws on the idea of “hybrid language practices” as outlined in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez and Chiu, (1999) and Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Tajeda (1999). Gutiérrez and her colleagues use the notion of hybridity to underscore multiple cultural and linguistic codes as resources mediating/promoting literacy learning in diverse environments. For instance, focusing on a group of Latina/o students in an elementary-grade classroom in California, Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Tajeda (1999) show that hybrid language practices or “commingling of...different linguistic codes and registers” (p. 289) during classroom activities create learning opportunities for young English language learners:

hybrid literacy practices are not simply codeswitching as the alternation between two language codes. They are more a systematic, strategic, affiliative, and sense-making process among those who share the code, as they strive to achieve mutual understanding (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez and Chiu, 1999, p. 88).

In the descriptor *hybrid discursive practices*, we are expanding the notion of hybrid language practices to capture the strategic use of multiple linguistic codes *as well as* the different voices (cf Blommaert, 2005) and identity positions our focus learner successfully appropriates. We will argue that the ways in which this learner hybridises identity positions provides learning opportunities that potentially benefit the everyday life in a classroom where many learners are not fully proficient in the LOLT, English.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND IDENTITY IN EARLY SCHOOLING

In recent years, several North American studies have focused on identity and “second” language learning in early schooling, particularly on how institutional and instructional practices inhibit or promote children’s possibilities for learning English (Gebhard, 2005, Hawkins, 2005; Manyak, 2001; Toohey, 1998, 2000; Willett, 1995). This research highlights the complexity of language learning for English additional language learners in mainstream classrooms and has been particularly significant in shifting the focus away from the individual “good language learner” (cf Norton and Toohey, 2001) to issues of power and the social context of learning. Using the notion of “classroom micropolitics”, Willett (1995) demonstrates how the participation patterns of ESL children, particularly with regard to the politics of gender relations and identities, affected their learning of English in first-grade elementary classrooms in the North-Eastern United States. Toohey (1998, 2000) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of a group of young children from minority backgrounds learning English in a Canadian school, from kindergarten through to Grade 2. Her investigation of identity positionings in each of the three grades demonstrated how specific classroom evaluation and ranking practices affected children’s acquisition of English. Drawing on socio-cultural and post-structural theories of identity she concludes that

learners’ identities have definite and observable effects on what they can do in classrooms, what kinds of positions as legitimate peripheral participants in classrooms they can occupy, and therefore, how much they can “learn” (2000, p. 74).

Yet as Hawkins (2005) argues, the relationships between identity, power and “access to the language and practices of school” (p. 59) are complex, such that being powerfully positioned and inhabiting desirable identity positions within social networks does not necessarily lead to success in language learning.

Gebhard (2005) focuses on the hybrid roles of learners in a multi-grade, Hmong-English, third-sixth grade classroom in a US primary school. However, her concern is with the unequal effects of peer learning for different learners who hybridise the positions of teacher, student and friend. While her study shows advantages for younger and less English-proficient students, it also shows how older and more proficient students reached “a kind of literacy ceiling” and were positioned in “zones of current (as opposed to proximal) development vis-à-vis academic literacy” (2005, p. 205). Such positions tended to be taken up by female and bilingual learners. Tholander and Aronsson (2003) also highlight the finding that it is mostly female learners who take up “sub-teacher” positions.

While the studies of Willett (1995), Toohey (1998, 2000), Hawkins (2005) and Gebhard (2005) among others have influenced our thinking, it is important to point out some significant differences between our own classroom context and the North American contexts discussed. In the North American studies, the focal children are usually of immigrant or non-dominant background and are learning English simultaneously with curriculum knowledge in mainstream classes. These children are in the minority, both numerically and frequently in power relations. By contrast, in South Africa, and in our study, it is typically the case that the numerical majority in the class are English-language learners who are exposed to English as a language of

learning and teaching, although it is a second, third and even fourth language to them. Although English is not dominant as the home language of learners in the class, it is nevertheless dominant within the classroom context through the teacher's use, school policy regarding English as LOLT and through its powerful social status. Thus, at Grade 1 level, particularly in an environment where many children do not experience pre-schooling (kindergarten)¹, it is the numerical minority who are proficient in English as the LOLT. Despite this, our focus is on one learner who is highly proficient in English and the work she does in bringing other children into the "classroom conversation". Ours is thus not so much an account of an English-language learner as much as of a child who, we argue, has already successfully "appropriated" the language (cf Bakhtin, 1981) and who seems to be using this knowledge to facilitate the learning of others.

RESEARCH SITE AND METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The research took place in the Grade 1 year of a desegregated primary school in a suburban area, east of Johannesburg, South Africa. The school is co-ed and highly diverse, with both teachers and learners from different linguistic backgrounds. The language of teaching and learning (LOLT) is English. However, the use of African languages was often encouraged in social activities such as singing, scripture reading, and drama activities which were mainly performed in the school hall. The school had 23 teachers excluding the school manager; and 650 learners, that is, from Grade R (Reception Year) to Grade 7. The learner composition was predominantly African, with an insignificant number of White, Indian and Coloured² children. Large proportions of the learners came from relatively poor or working-class backgrounds and were catered for by the school feeding system (funded by the provincial department of education). The fees were R200 (currently USD25) per month over 10 months and most parents struggled to meet the payments. At the time of the research, only 47% of learners were paying their fees and approximately 5% had official exemption granted by the department of education. Learners were bussed in every morning from different townships/suburbia near and around the area.

Fieldwork took place over a three-month period in the second half of the school year in 2005. This initially involved visits for two days a week, later increasing to four days a week depending on the teacher's availability. Data were collected using a qualitative case study approach, with the principal tool being non-participant observation, initially recorded in fieldnotes and later supplemented by video-recording of lessons using a single video recorder. It is important to note that most of the data discussed in this paper were drawn from fieldnotes with some additional data from the video-recording. The two, Grade One teachers as well as the deputy-principal and foundation-phase teaching assistant were also interviewed. Each of the Grade One classes was alternately followed through their school day including spaces outside of their classroom such as hall assemblies, visits to the media centre and

¹ Despite government policy making provision for one pre-school year, Grade R, this has not been made widely accessible with many primary schools unable to offer this.

² While unwittingly contributing to the construction of "race" along apartheid lines, we use the categories of "white", African, Indian and "coloured" (mixed "race") as they continue to have currency in post-apartheid South Africa. We use the term "black" inclusively.

music lessons. However, for the purposes of this paper we focus only on one classroom – Ms Mbuli’s Grade One classroom. Ms Mbuli’s class consisted of 46 learners, 27 boys and 19 girls. Apart from one white boy, all the learners were black. Ms Mbuli’s home language is Setswana, and languages spoken by the learners included Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi, isiZulu, Tshitsonga and isiXhosa.

DATA ANALYSIS

In presenting the data below we offer an interpretation of the discursive practices (both verbal and embodied) of one child named Tumi. The nature of the data, discourse captured in fieldnotes, precludes us from utilising more traditional classroom discourse analysis tools and takes us into an interpretive analysis. It also precludes us from making anything but tentative claims as to the impact of Tumi’s practices on both her own and others’ learning. Focusing on one accomplished learner makes visible to us her ability to read the classroom environment and has enabled us to see the relatively invisible work she is doing in positioning herself in specific activities and constituting herself as both a learner and knower in relation to others in this class. We further explore the extent to which this learner constructs hybrid identity positions in her blurring of the teacher/learner boundaries and the ways in which her multilingual skills are used as a resource in doing so.

Tumi was a small, slight and relatively soft-spoken, seven-year-old girl. She was always immaculately dressed, with her black school shoes shining, her hair neatly braided and the skirt of her uniform noticeably longer than that of other girls, most likely due to her small size. Despite participating actively in classroom activities and interactions, she was by no means dominant. It was through careful observation and the opportunities afforded by video data to re-observe, that Tumi’s somewhat unusual practices began to become highly visible to us. In addition to her home language, Setswana, Tumi is proficient in Sepedi and English. Her positioning by the teacher as an accomplished learner is evidenced through her awarding of certificates for Tumi’s abilities and performance in English, Spelling and Maths. She was also one of the three learners chosen by her teacher to represent the Grade 1s in a quiz competition organized by the school. Tumi sat in the front desk of one of the four rows of tables, right under the nose of the teacher and next to her good friend, Lerato, a Sepedi home-language speaker who is not very proficient in English, the official language of learning and teaching in the classroom. While our analysis focuses on Tumi, many of the extracts involve Tumi interacting with Lerato.

The first data extract we present took place late in the morning during a literacy lesson late in the school year. The learners are working individually at their desks with their alphabet cards (ABC cards). The teacher is calling out different sound combinations, building these into three letter words, and the learners are expected to build the words she calls out on their desks with their letter cards, using the sounds as cues.

Extract 1

[1 1] Ms Mbuli: Dog. What is a dog?

[1 2] Tumi: *Ke mpšha mam* (in Sepedi)

- [It's a dog mam.]
 [1 3] Ms Mbuli: Lerato what is a dog?
 [1 4] Lerato: (No response)
 (Tumi quickly goes to the front of the class and explains what the teacher said in Sepedi.)
 [1 5] Tumi: Ba go botsisa gore mpšha ke eng. A kere maabane ko holong re bone mpšha. (in Sepedi)
 [The teacher is asking you what a dog is. Do you remember that we saw a dog yesterday at the hall?]
 (Note: The day before the school had visitors from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and learners were taught about the prevention of animal cruelty.)
 [1 6] Ms Mbuli: Thanks Tumi. What is a dog class?
 [1 7] Tsholo: It bites, mam
 [1 8] Ms Mbuli: Sound the word dog.
 [1 9] Learners: D, o, g. Dog
(fieldnotes 13.10.05 about 11.35am).

In this exchange, we see that Tumi uses Sepedi to answer the teacher's question, although the question is posed in English. In her use of Sepedi here, we argue that Tumi is carefully reading the contextual or framing cues of the classroom discourse. A few conversational turns before this, the teacher had specifically asked learners to answer a question in Zulu and she had gone on to explain the difference between the Zulu and Tswana words for the answer³. Thus the immediate context was one in which learners had answered the teacher using an African language. Apart from this, one might consider the difficulty for a Grade 1 learner of answering the question "what is a dog?" The easiest way for a multilingual learner to display knowledge here is to inform the teacher that one knows what a dog is by displaying the word in a different language. However, despite Tumi's answer in Sepedi, her friend Lerato is unable to answer the teacher's question and explain what a dog is using English (line 4). This is an illustration of Lerato's limited proficiency in English, despite being 10 months into the academic year. Reading Lerato's (as well as other learners') lack of understanding here, Tumi voluntarily stood up in the front of the class, a physical space traditionally the domain of the teacher, and explained to Lerato what was expected of her using Sepedi (line 5). The fact that she did this without any interruption from Ms Mbuli suggests that her take-up of the "sub-teacher" (Tholander & Aronsson, 2003) or mediator position is supported by the teacher. Indeed, the teacher affirms Tumi's response: "Thanks, Tumi" (line 6) before moving on to check the understanding of the whole class by repeating the question in English.

In Tumi's contribution here, she begins by explaining and translating the teacher's question through Sepedi ("the teacher is asking you..."), thus positioning herself as "language broker" (Hall & Sham, 2007). However, after this reporting of the teacher's voice through indirect "quotation" (Bakhtin, 1984), Tumi goes on to discursively position herself as the teacher by making a connection to relevant, shared background knowledge (what happened at school in assembly, referred to as "the [school] hall" – the day before) in order to scaffold the learners' understanding of the concept "dog". In the beginning, when the question was asked, very few learners had their hands up,

³ It should be noted that despite the teacher's knowledge of Zulu, Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho languages, she code-switched from English to African languages only rarely at this stage of the school year, which runs from January to December.

indicative of the fact that most did not understand the question or were unable to answer it. However, at the end of this episode it became clear that the learners could associate a dog with what they saw in the school hall the previous day, hence the response to Ms Mbuli's repeated question: "...what is a dog class? Tsholo: It bites, mam" (line 6-7). Although the response might be different from what the teacher expected, it is clear that the learner is making the right connection here with "it bites", and the teacher indicates her acceptance of this response by moving on from the question.

Tumi's combination of the use of Sepedi to answer the teacher's question with the bringing in of relevant background knowledge in this contextual space serves to enhance the educational outcomes. Although the language of teaching and learning is English, Tumi chose to use another of the languages in this linguistic contact zone that she perhaps considered more appropriate and accessible to decipher Ms Mbuli's instructions "Tumi: *Ba go botsisa gore mpšha ke eng...*The teacher is asking you what a dog is". This episode typifies the hybridity of the positions that Tumi takes up as she moves from the position of learner and peer (line 2), answering the teacher's question, to that of mediator and interpreter, or "language broker" for Lerato (line 5), and then to appropriating the voice of the teacher in reminding the whole class of the dog they saw at school the previous day (line 5). She uses hybrid discursive practices in her strategic choice of a different linguistic code from the English used by her teacher as well as in the different voices and thus identity positions she inhabits as learner, peer, language broker, and sub-teacher.

The second extract we present took place near the beginning of the school day. Here we again see Tumi using different discursive strategies to mediate the teacher's instructions to her friend Lerato:

Extract 2

[1 1] Ms Mbuli: Be honest, who did not do my homework? Tell me before I open your book.

[1 2] Tumi: Lerato did not mam.

[1 3] Ms Mbuli: How do you know Tumi? Were you with her at home?

[1 4] Tumi: She told me. (Tumi looks at Lerato with whom she shares the desk.)

O entse homework? (in Sepedi)

[Did you do your homework?]

[1 5] Lerato: (shakes her head moving left to right, indicating that she did not.)

(fieldnotes 13.10.05, about 9am).

In this extract, we can see Tumi hybridising identity positions in her interactions with the teacher and her friend, Lerato, who is sitting beside her. The teacher begins by addressing the whole class in English, asking learners to "own up" if they have not completed the homework she has set. Tumi is the first to respond by revealing that Lerato has not done the work, thus exposing or "telling on" her friend Lerato in the process. Tumi here positions herself as the "good girl" (or good learner) but seems to be interactively positioned by the teacher as a tell-tale. This interpretation is supported by Ms Mbuli's response to Tumi in the gentle reprimand "How do you know... were you [there]?", perhaps revealing another general practice in the social relations of the classroom: that we do not tell on our friends. Tumi responds to the gentle reprimand

in her teacher's question with a serious and genuine answer, "She told me." Tumi then turns to Lerato and, demonstrating her multilingual skills, addresses her by code-switching, using a mixture of Sepedi and English asking her directly, "Did you do your homework?" Here Tumi reveals her assumption that Lerato will not have understood the teacher's initial question (line 1 above) in English, and in fact will not have understood the exchange (line 2-4) in which she is the topic of conversation. Indeed, Lerato's lack of response during the exchange, and what we have seen regarding her limited proficiency in English in Extract 1, suggests that Tumi is correct in her assumption.

In her question to Lerato, we hear Tumi appropriating the teacher's voice; she does not say, "Mam wants to know if you did your homework" which would be closer to a translation, or "quotation" (Bakhtin, 1984), of the events, but rather asks the question directly herself ("*O entse* [Did you...]"). This supports our interpretation that Tumi is not merely a language broker translating from English into Sepedi in this moment. In taking on the voice of authority here, she is also attempting to teach Lerato some of the practices that are valued in the classroom: that one should answer the teacher honestly when she asks a direct question, and more significantly that doing one's homework is an expected practice of successful learners in this Grade 1 classroom. While exposing Lerato may position her friend negatively in the eyes of the teacher, Tumi takes her role of mediator and helper seriously, such that this does not seem to be her major concern in this moment. Thus, in the words "*O entse* homework", Tumi appropriates the discourse of teacher but might also be voicing the position of concerned friend.

We propose that Tumi's ability to perform these hybrid positions illustrated in Extracts 1 and 2 is dependent on two inter-related kinds of knowledge. Our first claim is a straightforward one: her multiple linguistic resources (good proficiency in English, Sepedi and Setswana) enable her to keep up with the teacher and to act as translator or "language broker" for Lerato and other peers. However, our second claim, as can be seen in our interpretation of the two data extracts above, is that Tumi is also accomplished in reading the classroom as both a learning and social environment with "rules" or commonly accepted discursive practices for both the formal and the informal domains. We aim to support this claim through further data analysis. An amusing example, which supports our assessment of Tumi's highly developed proficiency in English, as well as her knowledge of the social environment of the classroom, is seen in line 6-7 of the extract below. On this particular day, it was Lerato's birthday. There is great excitement about the fact that Lerato's mother has brought a cake for the class to share at the end of the day, and Ms Mbuli repeatedly refers to the idea of birthdays and specifically to the birthday cake to capture the children's attention at different moments during the lessons that day.

Extract 3

[1 1] Ms Mbuli: Whose birthday is it?

[1 2] Learners: (at the top of their voices) Neo's

[1 3] Ms Mbuli: No not Neo's. You did not check the calendar (pointing at the birthday calendar next to the door). It is Lerato's. Let's sing for her.

[1 4] Learners together with Ms Mbuli: Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you. How old are you now?

- [1 5] Lerato: (showing seven fingers)
 [1 6] Ms Mbuli: What happens if you are silly today?
 [1 7] Tumi: Kiss the birthday cake goodbye.
(fieldnotes 13.10.05, about 9.20am).

In line 7 of extract 3, Tumi again displays her knowledge of acceptable classroom practices; in this case, the necessity of producing “good” behaviour, in answering the question: if you want to eat the cake, you have to behave appropriately. She correctly reads the teacher’s question as a threat, recognising that teachers have the power to reward or punish. In doing so, she again takes up the position of the good learner or the good girl. However, while she might have replied simply with the words “no cake”, she uses the playful metaphor of “kissing the cake goodbye” to suggest that the children would not get any cake if they misbehave (“are silly”). This demonstrates a figurative use of English that is far beyond the proficiency of many of the other children in this classroom and, similar to the moment identified in the second extract, echoes an adult voice; one might imagine the teacher, or another adult voice of authority, telling children that they can kiss the cake goodbye if they misbehave. The echo of the adult voice in the child’s is an example of “double-voicing” where there is a noticeable tension between the child and adult’s voice (Bakhtin, 1984).

Despite the impression given from the extracts presented thus far, Tumi is not always quick to answer questions and does not visibly dominate in classroom interaction. Extract 4 below reveals how Tumi at times refrains from answering questions and displaying her knowledge, even when she knows the answer.

Extract 4

- [1 1] Ms Mbuli: My birthday is on the 10th of October and Tumi’s is five days later. When is Tumi’s birthday?
 [1 2] Thabo: (trying to get the teacher’s attention) Mam mam it’s 16
 [1 3] Ms Mbuli: Listen. My birthday is on the 10th of October. Remember? When is Tumi’s if it is five days later?
 [1 4] Learners: (No response.)
 [1 5] Ms Mbuli: My birthday is on the 10th of October and Lerato’s birthday is three days after mine. When is Lerato’s birthday? If you do not know, no birthday cake.
 [1 6] Tumi: Mam, mam, 13 October.
(fieldnotes 13.10.05 about 9.40am).

In the extract above, Ms Mbuli is capitalising on the birthday excitement as a theme for her numeracy lesson. However, the learners are not demonstrating success in understanding the story sums Ms Mbuli is making up for them which, from a mathematical perspective, involve simple addition, but linguistically are far more demanding, requiring far greater proficiency in English than the figures 10 + 5 (line 1 and 3) or 10 + 3 (line 5) written up on the board would. Tumi only enters the interaction in line 6, though her quick response implies that she would have known the answer to the previous question as well. It seems to be the threat from the teacher of “no birthday cake” after a string of incorrect answers or lack of response that provokes Tumi’s response. We can only speculate here on the reasons for Tumi’s delayed response. However, her quick response where she calls on the teacher insistently to make sure that she gets her attention, “Mam, Mam”, in line 6 shows how

she is able to play the classroom game of turn-taking, and to successfully read the playful threat of the teacher to withhold the cake. In this case, she positions herself as social mediator for her peers as her response is designed to benefit not only herself but also the classroom community. Her voice here contrasts with the adult voice in Extracts 2 and 3, clearly discursively constituting her as child rather than adult and again demonstrating the hybridity of Tumi's positions.

The final extract from this school day illustrates the close friendship between Tumi and Lerato as well as Tumi's general popularity with her classmates. As such it shows that her powerful position is clearly acknowledged and supported. But it also illustrates the active part Tumi plays in constructing a classroom community through her hybrid positioning. At the end of the day, the children are finally invited to share in Lerato's birthday celebration (and accompanying cake!). Ms Mbuli sets up a table on the mat in the front of the classroom and invites Lerato to choose ten friends to come and join her in front of the class:

Extract 5

[1 1] Ms Mbuli: Choose ten friends and come and sit in front.

[Lerato staring at Ms Mbuli as if she does not comprehend what was just said.]

[1 2] Tumi: Mam *a re o choos-e metswalle e ten e tle go nna le wena mo pele.* (in Sepedi) [Mam says you must choose ten friends to come and sit with you in front.]

(Lerato chose Tumi first and went around the class to choose 10 others. She chose 11 friends instead of ten. The birthday table was set up in front of the class where she sat with her friends. Lerato wore a crown on her head and everyone around the table wished her well.)

[1 3] Siphopho: Happy birthday, Lerato.

[1 4] Thato: Happy Birthday. We love you, Lerato.

[1 5] Tumi: I love you very much, Lerato. Happy Birthday.

(fieldnotes 13.10.05 12h30).

While Lerato, Tumi and friends sit around the birthday table in front of the class, Ms Mbuli leads the children in singing a happy birthday song to Lerato. The class begins singing in a fairly haphazard fashion. In her glances to the teacher (visible only in Tumi's quick eye movements away from her friends beside her to the teacher standing above her), Tumi notices the teacher's use of gesture signalling to the class to increase their volume. Tumi immediately turns to face the class imitating Ms Mbuli's gestures to them (with both hands palms upwards moving up and down) to increase the volume of their singing. While this gesture is extremely fast and invisible to the teacher, it has the desired effect and the teacher is visibly pleased with the children's improved singing efforts.

(Additional description from video recording 13.10.05).

It is indicative of their close bond that Lerato chose Tumi first before selecting other learners from the class; there thus seems to be no resentment towards Tumi for her reflexive positioning as "expert" and sub-teacher. Similarly to other moments discussed from this school day (for example, Extracts 1 and 2), we notice here that Lerato did not understand Ms Mbuli's instruction to "choose 10 friends and come sit in front". Again Tumi spontaneously "saves" the situation by translating and interpreting the teacher's instructions for Lerato. Lerato only responded to the

instructions after Tumi had translated them using Sepedi, confirming that she did not understand them in English. In this instance, Tumi's mediation has a definite social function rather than an overtly pedagogical one. Tumi's contribution here supports both our claim regarding her good proficiency in English and Sepedi as well as our claim of her well-developed knowledge of extra-curricular routines in the classroom, in this case, how the classroom birthday party works.

Furthermore, our description from the video recording shows that even during this social activity, Tumi keeps a close eye on both the teacher and her peers in front of her to ensure that her peers are meeting the teacher's expectations. In her reaction to the teacher's initial displeasure, she uses barely visible gestural movements to successfully communicate with her peers about how to improve their discursive performance. In this case, there is no risk that they will lose out on a piece of birthday cake, or suffer any other kind of punishment. Yet it seems that Tumi wants the children to please their teacher by performing as a successful classroom community. Tumi's eye movements show her successfully reading Ms Mbuli's behaviour and responding by encouraging the desired response from her peers. In doing so, she interactively positions her peers as part of a classroom community and their discursive choral performance in response to Tumi's gesture constitutes them as such. The hybridity of Tumi's reflexive positioning is striking here as she moves from the position of peer/friend enjoying the birthday celebration to that of sub-teacher, appropriating and reproducing the teacher's gestural instructions instantaneously.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In our interpretation of the data presented above, we have explored the "observable effects" (Toohey, 2000, p74) of our focus learner, Tumi's, hybrid discursive practices. Our analysis however has focused on how her multiple positioning shapes the manner in which some of her peers are given broader opportunities to learn rather than on her own learning. While Tumi is highly adept in her mastery of what Hawkins has termed "the grammars of the language of schooling" (Hawkins, 2005, p. 64), what is most interesting to us is the manner in which she attempts to bring her peers into the classroom conversation and ultimately to facilitate their learning of the "grammar" of this conversation. We have argued that she does this through her multiple reflexive identity positioning: she is interpreter and translator of the teacher's instructions (from English to Sepedi in Extracts 1, 2 and 5), thus positioning herself as a language broker; mediator of curriculum knowledge (Extract 1); mediator of social interaction (Extracts 3, 4 and 5); disciplinarian (Extract 2); as well as concerned friend (Extracts 2 and 5).

In some of these moments, Tumi is clearly playing a significant role in facilitating "peer learning" (Vine 2003, Gebhard, 2005) or, as what others have called, a sub-teacher (Tholander & Aronsson, 2003). However, there appears to be a spontaneity in the way she positions herself as the surrogate teacher and social mediator. She is never formally positioned as such by the teacher or her peers in any of the data extracts discussed. Such self-positioning contrasts with Gebhard's (2005) research, where the older learner is interactively positioned as teacher by a younger learner in a multigrade classroom. Furthermore, in contrast with Gebhard's research, there is no evidence to suggest that Tumi's practices are detrimental to her own learning. On the

contrary, one might point out that her hybrid discursive practices make her highly attentive to teacher discourse (both verbal and embodied) and thus have the potential to enhance her own learning.

We have argued that Tumi's ability to perform the particular identity positions that she does is informed by two inter-related kinds of knowledge or discursive resources: her multiple linguistic resources (in the powerful LOLT English, as well as the local languages Sepedi and Setswana) and her extensive knowledge of the discursive practices of the Grade 1 class. This knowledge informs her use of the hybrid discursive practices we have analysed. We would like to add a further claim to these: that Tumi seems to desire that both she and her peers perform appropriately as Grade 1 learners in Ms Mbuli's class and that she actively participates to construct this performance. This is certainly a plausible explanation for Tumi's gesture in improving her classmates' singing (Extract 5). The classroom context that Tumi is part of is greatly enhanced by her use of hybrid discursive practices (both in her use of different languages, for example, code-switching between English and Sepedi to facilitate understanding, and in her use of different voices, for example, appropriation of the teacher's voice). In such discursive practices, Tumi successfully crosses a number of seemingly discrete worlds/domains, that of:

- home (domain of African language use) and school (domain of English language use);
- child and adult; and
- learner/peer and teacher.

Tumi's boundary crossing enables her to begin to narrow the gap in understanding that often exists between the teacher and learners in this South African classroom.

While not the focus of our analysis, we cannot ignore the lack of knowledge both of the appropriate discursive practices and of the dominant language English that constrains several of her peers who are less able to position themselves as successful learners/knowers. For example, in the interactions between Tumi and Lerato, Lerato seems unable to take up the position of active participant without Tumi's mediation, even though she is positioned as such through the teacher's instructions and questions. In effect, then, Tumi's mediation often enables Lerato to exercise some agency in taking up the position of responsive learner. Tumi's ability to actualise the co-existence of multiple languages in the public space of the classroom is dependent on her proficiency in the language of power, English, as well as of local languages. Learners who have limited command of English are less able to position themselves as successful learners/knowers, despite their multilingual resources. As Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Tejeda (1999) argue, hybridity increases the possibilities of dialogue in sites of learning. In this paper we have examined how Tumi's hybrid discursive practices work to induct her peers into classroom discourse, and thus into ways of doing and being at school, arguing that she is facilitating the process whereby her peers become learners and potential insiders to classroom life.

We call for further research on South African classrooms where most learners are not proficient in English, yet this language remains the LOLT. As a consequence, most schools tend to overvalue English and undervalue the use of African languages as teaching and learning resources. We need research to examine and understand ways in

which learners use their linguistic resources to mediate knowledge, and to create opportunities for learning, in bi/multilingual classroom situations. In particular, to what extent are the hybrid discursive practices evidenced in this case study prevalent in school classrooms; how do such practices impact on individual learners and the classroom community as a whole? Moreover, attention needs to be given to ways and means that learners' resources may be utilised to enhance teaching and learning in multilingual contexts. Canagarajah (2006, p. 587) has argued that "the classroom is a powerful site of policy negotiation. The pedagogies practised and texts produced in the classroom can reconstruct policies from the ground up." In the absence of school language policies which view learners' proficiency in African languages as a resource, one child is showing policy makers the value of embracing the classroom as a linguistic contact zone.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, N. (2000). English unassailable but unattainable: The dilemma of language policy in South African education. *PRAESA Occasional Papers No 3*. Cape Town: PRAESA.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holoquist, Trans.)(pp.259-422). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (C. Emerson, trans.) Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bloch, C. (2002). A case study of Xhosa and English biliteracy in the foundation phase versus English as a "medium of destruction". *Perspectives in Education*, 20(1), 65-78.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canagarajah, A. (2006). The place of World Englishes in composition: Pluralisation continued. *College Composition and Communication*, 57(4), 586-619.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 32-52). Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- De Klerk, V. (2000). To be Xhosa or not to be Xhosa...That is the Question. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 21(3), 198-215.
- Fleisch, B. (2008). *Primary education in crisis: Why South African schoolchildren underachieve in reading and mathematics*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Gebhard, M. (2005). School reform, hybrid discourse and second language literacies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(2), 187-210.
- Gutiérrez, K., Baquedano-López, P., & Tejada, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 6, 286-303.
- Gutiérrez, K., Baquedano-López, P., Alvarez, H., & Chiu, M. (1999). Building a culture of collaboration through hybrid language practices. *Theory into Practice*, 38(2), 87-93.
- Gutiérrez, K., & Stone, L. (2000). Synchronic and diachronic dimensions of social practice: An emerging methodology for cultural-historical perspectives on literacy learning. In C. Lee & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry* (pp. 150-164). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Hall, N., & Sham, S. (2007). Language brokering as young people's work: evidence from Chinese adolescents in England. *Language and Education*, 21(1), 16-30.
- Hawkins, M. (2005). Becoming a student: Identity work and academic literacies in early schooling. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(1), 59-82.
- Heugh, K. (2002). The Case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa: Laying bare the myths. *Perspectives in Education (Many Languages in Education: Special Issue)*, 20(1), 171-196.
- Kamwangamalu, N. (2003). Social change and language shift: South Africa. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 23, 225-242.
- Makoe, P. (2007). Language discourses and identity construction in a multilingual South African primary school. *English Academy Review*, 24(2), 55-70.
- Makoe, P. (2009) *Black children in a white school: Language ideologies and identity in a desegregated SA Primary School*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Institute of Education, University of London
- Makoni, S. (2003). "From misinvention to disinvention of language: Multilingualism and the South African Constitution". In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. Ball, & A. Spears (Eds.), *Black linguistics. Language, society, and politics in Africa and the Americas* (pp. 132-152). New York and London: Routledge.
- Manyak, P. (2001). Participation, hybridity, and carnival: A situated analysis of a dynamic literacy practice in a primary-grade English immersion class. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 33(3), 423-465.
- McKinney, C., & Norton, B. (2008) Identity in language and literacy education. In F. Hult, & B. Spolsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of educational linguistics* (pp. 192-205). Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives on good language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(2), 307-322.
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004) Introduction: New theoretical approaches to the study of negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp.1-33). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Setati, M. (2008). Access to mathematics versus access to the language of power: The struggle in multilingual mathematics classrooms. *South African Journal of Education*, 28, 103-116.
- Tholander, M., & Aronsson, K. (2003). Doing subteaching in school group work: Positioning, resistance and participation frameworks. *Language and Education*, 17(3), 208-234.
- Toohey, K. (1998). Breaking them up, taking them away: ESL students in Grade 1. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(1), 61-84.
- Toohey, K. (2000). *Learning English at school. Identity, social relations and classroom practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Viljoen, C., & Molefe, R. (2001). Language related problems of limited English proficiency learners in Grade 1. *South African Journal of Education*, 21(2), 121-127.
- Vine, E. (2003). "My partner": A five-year-old Samoan boy learns how to participate in class through interactions with his English-speaking peers. *Linguistics and Education*, 14(1), 99-121.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). London: Basil Blackwell.

Willett, J. (1995). Becoming first graders in an L2: An ethnographic study of L2 socialization. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 473-503.

Manuscript received: May 5, 2009

Revision received: August 19, 2009

Accepted: September 8, 2009