

## Contesting the monolingual practices of a bilingual to multilingual policy

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*ABSTRACT: English has always occupied the most privileged position in the South African economy, yet legislative and material provision emphasised bilingual or trilingual education prior to political change in 1994. Educational changes since this time have been accompanied by ambiguous stances towards languages other than English in the classroom. Whilst this is not detrimental to middle-class students, it offers a chimera of access to English as the language of socio-economic goods, but it cannot facilitate epistemological access to the curriculum for 85% of students. Delays in the implementation of multilingual education policy have led to inertia across the system. However, the principal of a poor, inner-city, linguistically diverse school has sought to reinstate the use of the languages best known and used by students in the classroom. They are included in teaching and in extra-curricular activities alongside English. The innovation has been accompanied by significant changes in student positions from initial resistance to linguistically inclusive teaching, to a clarification of language rights and thence to explicit student choice of a bilingual Xhosa-English teaching and learning process. Narratives show, however, the difficulty of ensuring that written texts accompany and support languages used alongside English in the classroom in the absence of system-wide implementation. They signal, therefore, the locus for further systematic support of multilingual classrooms and also the need for longitudinal observation and data-collection for nuanced understandings of shifting positions towards the linguistic ecology, as these affect learning*

*KEYWORDS: Bi/multilingual education, code-switching, code-mixing, linguistic diversity, inner-city schools, South Africa.*

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistic diversity is characteristic of South African education and society. English, as one thread within a matrix of multiple, discreetly conceptualised and hybridised linguistic systems, has a central, if contested, position in the education system. While English language use across the curriculum has been kept within a monolingual frame in middle-class suburban schools which were originally designed for white speakers of English, bilingual and multilingual practices have characterised classroom discourse in poor, rural, small-town and township schools for speakers of African languages and Afrikaans.<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-1970s, multilingual practices in the form of “code-switching” and “code-mixing” have become increasingly evident in schools whose students are entirely or mostly from African language backgrounds. These

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practices coincide with a change of language education policy from eight to four years of mother tongue education (MTE) followed by a switch to English medium after 1976, and a massification of secondary education for African students from the late 1970s.

The earlier switch to English medium from this point has posed difficulties for students and teachers, alike (cf. Macdonald, 1990; Heugh, 1999; Plüddemann, Braam, October & Wababa, 2004; Desai, 2006). Most teachers do not have sufficient English to manage this switch easily and most students do not live in environs where English is a functioning *de facto* language of wider communication. A linguistic compromise has been reached where teachers and students have developed code-switching and code-mixing strategies for pragmatic reasons in spoken classroom discourse (for example, Plüddemann *et al.*, 2004; Desai, 2006; Setati, 2008). The problem is that this process has been stigmatised by education authorities, teacher training institutions and, until the mid-1990s, also within departments of applied linguistics at most South African universities. A second limitation of the process is that because it has been limited to spoken discourse, there is a discontinuity between the hybridised spoken variety/ies and written texts (in standardised South African English) required for and of African students. A challenge for teachers, students and the education system is to find the key to overcoming the barrier presented in or by written texts. This is a concern of numerous studies which investigate the reasons for “poor” literacy and educational achievement in most South African schools (for example, Macdonald, 2002; DOE, 2005; Howie, Venter & Staden 2006; Heugh, 2007; Reeves *et al.*, 2008).

In contrast, alongside monolingual English- and Afrikaans-medium schools, there has been provision of bilingual (dual and parallel medium) Afrikaans-English schools as a validated characteristic of the system since the 1880s. Although originally provided in rural and working-class settings, there are several prestigious, dual-medium schools to which academics and professional parents send their children, particularly in the Western Cape Province. Students in these middle- and working-class schools have considerable advantages over the schools for speakers of African languages as described above. The Afrikaans-English bilingual schools are well resourced by teachers fluent in both languages and who are trained to teach bilingually. This means that teachers have been trained to use several strategies and systematic procedures for switching between languages and students are taught to read and write in both languages for academic purposes, as well as to use both languages in spoken contexts. A well-oiled publishing industry produces ample texts across every component of the formal curriculum in both languages and the national and provincial departments of education have, since 1910, administered bilingual assessments in Afrikaans (Dutch until the 1920s) and English. Therefore, there is no discontinuity between language-of-classroom discourse and written text in either the monolingual or bilingual use of these two languages.

Since 1994, increasing numbers of African-language-speaking students have entered the formerly privileged, middle-class suburban schools, aching for a better chance in life, and hoping that English-medium education offered by well-trained teachers proficient in English will facilitate a realisation of this aspiration (for example, de Klerk, 2002). It is these students and their parents who often express the most adamant positions towards a preference for a monolingual exposure to English-

medium education because, for most who manage to afford the school fees<sup>2</sup> and transportation costs, this is a major investment, and it is an investment in English. It is definitely not an investment in a code-mixed discourse available at almost no cost in the township or rural schools. Parents and students express a preference for teachers who are speakers of English and who are explicitly not speakers of African languages, in order to limit a default to mixing or switching codes. There are, of course, many suburban African students whose parents belong to the new black elite, are wealthy and who live in English-speaking communities, and who are therefore first-language speakers of English or who have high levels of proficiency in English. These students are often reluctant to, or do not, imagine themselves with identities which include African languages. Thus, the use of African languages in middle-class suburban schools is limited, and where it does occur, it is usually in restricted domains of “safe talk” (cf. Chick, 2001), initial greetings, and outside of classrooms. Research amongst students in these schools is often located within the orientation of critical and new literacies’ studies, where contested notions of identity, position and agency, in relation to language and culture, emerge amongst the middle-class youth (for example, McKinney, 2007). Other carefully nuanced studies draw a distinction between shifting positions which students take in relation to English as a commodification of cultural capital and social goods on the one hand and epistemological access to the curriculum in languages in addition to English on the other (cf. Setati, 2008).

The school site which is the focus of this article is Zonnebloem Nest Senior School, an inner-city Cape Town school, to which poor, working-class students go. They and their parents have selected this school because it is English medium, most teachers are proficient speakers of English, fees are low and there is no discrimination of students who cannot afford the minimal fees. The use of languages other than English, specifically Xhosa and Afrikaans, alongside English, however, is a matter of considerable interest in this school, because the school principal and teachers acknowledge that the majority of students do not fare well in a monolingual English medium context. Yet, it is this very context in which the students and their parents have vested interests. Narratives from this school will illustrate contested positions and school-initiated responses to contemporary challenges in which language education policy, curriculum and assessment practices are out of alignment. Data collected over a four-year period show how agency, position and investment change, and why it is worth following a longitudinal approach to data collection in order to understand the complexities of often contradictory and changing positions about language use, particularly in linguistically diverse educational settings. Immediately, these data show that while English has enormous currency, speakers of other languages do not give up their languages, demonstrate strong positions in regard to language rights of students who are positioned as less fortunate, and come to make explicit choices in favour of bilingual Xhosa-English teaching and learning. The data thus show that there are cogent reasons to explore the efficacy of education practices which include systematic approaches to linguistic diversity in multilingual settings.

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<sup>2</sup> Although government provided schools are not supposed to insist that parents pay fees, there are coercive mechanisms whereby parents are nevertheless expected to pay school fees. Students who cannot afford these are often afraid of being marked and are thus effectively excluded.

## SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Language education policy changed on paper, in 1997, from an “official Afrikaans-English bilingualism” to an “eleven spoken and one signed” language education policy. The former Afrikaans-English bilingual policy had in fact functioned within or alongside a *de facto* multilingual reality, where local and school communities used several languages for horizontal forms of daily communication. Although, during apartheid, languages were conceived of as having discreet boundaries, urbanised hybrid linguistic forms, such as *Tsotsitaal*<sup>3</sup> or *isiCamtho*, emerged and included combinations of African languages with lexical items from Afrikaans mainly and, to a much lesser extent, English. While political changes in the mid-1990s tacitly elevated nine African languages to equal status with Afrikaans and English, the use of African languages has not expanded towards high status functions, Afrikaans has lost considerable currency and English has been elevated to a status significantly more equal than the others (for example, Webb, 2002; du Plessis, 2003; Desai, 2006; Heugh, 2007). Antonio Gramsci (1971), Michel Foucault (1977), Pierre Bourdieu (1991) have shown – through discussion of hegemony and habitus – that changes of policy are seldom accompanied by corresponding changes in practice. However, the South African case demonstrates that although the explicit change in policy has not been effected, the role of English has become increasingly prominent for reasons which are linked to cultural and socio-economic capital associated with this language.

This is in a national context where approximately seven percent of school pupils have English, 13% have Afrikaans and the majority, 80%, have at least one of the nine African languages, as their home language/s. Although upwardly mobile students from African-language contexts understandably wish to enrol in the English-medium schools in middle-class suburban settings, supply does not meet demand. Even if all the middle-class English speakers were to vacate these schools, as many have already done, such schools would only be able to accommodate 10% of those who most would like to be there. Another 5% of African students have entered formerly Afrikaans-medium schools. This leaves 85% of African children in the township or rural schools where: resources remain poor, teachers are generally inadequately trained and access to high levels of English proficiency is limited. Fifteen years after apartheid, conditions have not changed for the majority of students, whereas children of the new, black elite are in independent (private) or suburban schools with high fees.

## LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN CLASSROOMS

As discussed above, the use of more than one language in classrooms dates back to the 1880s and the development of several models of bilingual, Afrikaans-English schools. Since 1976, English has increasingly become the language of education for African students and it is since this time that classroom discourse has exhibited significant degrees of code-mixing and code-switching between English and the local African language (Plüddemann *et al.*, 2004; Setati, 2008). While students and teachers would generally wish to communicate mainly in English, this is a practical impossibility for both parties, and hence two or more languages are used for spoken

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<sup>3</sup> Literally: *tsotsi*=gangster; *taal*=language (from Afrikaans). This language is used by gangsters and also urban youth who associate the language with the identities and images of being “cool”, modern, worldly-wise and in possession of the symbolic accoutrements of fast money.

purposes. Written communication is expected in English, and textbooks are published in English- or Afrikaans-only for students beyond the third grade. Code-switching has the advantage of facilitating understanding of concepts, but since students are expected to read and write about their subjects in English only, it is also problematic. A further difficulty is that code-switching has not been an officially sanctioned practice in African schools, and teachers and students are often unwilling to acknowledge the practice and perceive it as stigmatised.

Code-switching has not been a practice in the suburban, English-medium schools. Until the mid-1990s, these schools were reserved for white speakers of English whose teachers were proficient in English and possibly Afrikaans but rarely in an African language. Although student profiles have changed substantially since then, teacher profiles have changed less rapidly and most teachers in these schools cannot communicate in African languages. If they are able to use African languages, this is usually only for limited perfunctory greetings and casual conversation, rather than the teaching of concepts and new ideas.

## ZONNEBLOEM SCHOOL

While most poor schools are in urban areas on the metropolitan outskirts and in rural areas, there are also a number in “inner city” settings. In this article, a series of developments within one such school, Zonnebloem Nest Senior School, are traced through historiographic narrative accounts. The principal, impatient with the provincial and national education departments’ (non)implementation of the language policy for schools, took a decision in 2003 to engage with language-planning activities from the “chalk-face”. Data collected during a longitudinal case study from the beginning of this process (2003-2006), provide ethnographic accounts of dynamic and contested multilingual teaching, learning and assessment practices, particularly in English, within the school environment.<sup>4</sup> The majority of students come to this school from townships on the metropolitan periphery, and a minority are from the immediate neighbourhood. They come with an expectation that they will receive English-medium, secondary education and that while the school is relatively poor and has low fees, the teachers are likely to be competent speakers of English and better prepared for teaching than might be found in township schools.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I should like to acknowledge the support of Peter Plüddemann, Daryl Bram, Michele October and Zola Wababa from the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) in initial stages of the research at Zonnebloem School. This was followed by a National Research Foundation (NRF)-Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) (2004-2007) grant to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and Stockholm University for a project, *Representations and Practices of Multilingualism in a Transformative South Africa: Language, identity and change in a South African institution*, in which Kathleen Heugh and Christopher Stroud collaborated, along with research assistants, Elias Hlongwane (HSRC) and Nomxolisi Jantjies (University of the Western Cape). The school principal, Jonty Damsell, and teacher, Norodi Nkosi, are also acknowledged for their participation, as is the WCED research directorate for granting permission for research within the school.

<sup>5</sup> It is in such contexts and where students assume strong positions in relation to language and linguistic identity that the concepts of identity, agency and “linguistic citizenship” (Stroud, 2001; Stroud & Heugh, 2004; Jantjies, 2009) are being explored and dovetail with the discussion here.

The school principal of Zonnebloem School, in the absence of any coherent attempt from either the national or provincial education department, has set about trying to offer students equitable access to the curriculum by responding to students' linguistic diversity in teaching and assessment. While English remains the dominant language of teaching and learning, he includes Afrikaans and Xhosa in the teaching of history and geography at Grade 8 and in mathematics in Grade 11 and 12. English, Afrikaans and Xhosa are taught as subjects, and extra-curricular activities include informal teaching of Portuguese and an interest in Spanish via dance.

## ACCOMMODATING DIVERSITY

The school, established 150 years ago, is located on the side of Table Mountain where a multiethnic community of people with diverse languages (mainly Afrikaans, with some English, Xhosa, and Portuguese) and modest working-class families have lived for several generations. Since political changes in 1994, and as a result of conflict in several Central, West and East African countries, refugees and "illegal" immigrants have settled in urban settings in South Africa, including Cape Town. Zonnebloem School, with its contemporary accommodation of diversity, has become a site of educational preference for students from other diverse African settings. Its demographic profile has changed from predominantly "coloured" and Afrikaans-speaking, to predominantly African, mainly Xhosa-speaking students. The main language of education at the school is English. Most Xhosa-speaking students perceive the school to be English-medium, which they associate with "whiteness" as emerges in their narratives (see below) (see related discussions in McKinney, 2007).

In 2004, the linguistic profile of students was as follows: 64% Xhosa, 21% English, 7% Afrikaans, 2% (English-Afrikaans bilingual), 3% Zulu, 3.3% Sotho (Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi combined) with a few speakers of French and Portuguese (from other African countries). Teachers believed that many of those who positioned themselves as L1 speakers of English may have done so for aspirational reasons. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) identifies the school as English-medium, by default, in relation to the previous socio-political system. If the majority of students do not claim Afrikaans as the home language, then it is assumed that the school is English-medium. English at Zonnebloem is therefore taught *as if* it were the L1 of students, and Afrikaans and Xhosa are therefore taught *as if* they were students' additional languages. This constitutes a set of linguistic mismatches at the levels of languages as subjects and English as medium of instruction and assessment. The principal finds this problematic for reasons of (in)equity.

Fluent in English and Afrikaans, and having learnt Portuguese while teaching students in an Angolan refugee camp for two years, the principal is also a teacher of mathematics to upper secondary students. In preparing students for the school-exit examinations in Grade 12, he was concerned that mathematics in English posed particular challenges for speakers of Afrikaans and Xhosa. He was able to explain concepts in Afrikaans and enrolled in a three-year university programme in Xhosa in order to be able to use Xhosa in his classes. However, he was increasingly concerned that the Xhosa-speaking students enrolling in Grade 8 (entry to secondary school) were being educationally marginalised. A new, national assessment from 2003, the Common Tasks for Assessment (CTA), would measure student achievement at the

end of the second year of secondary schooling and this would be used as a yard-stick to determine which students would remain in school for a further three years of upper secondary education. The implications for those who did not pass the CTAs were somewhat ambiguous.

In a letter to the WCED in December 2003, he pointed towards inequity and constitutional infringements:

The staff of this school objects as strongly as we can to the provision of country-wide CTA assessments this year in Grade 9 in only English and Afrikaans.

We are almost ten years into our new democracy, and .... All of the learners in this country have language rights.... it is extremely important that learners be afforded equal opportunity to succeed. Bilingual assessments, in the manner of matric exams, in say, English or Afrikaans and an indigenous language ... would go some way to help level the playing-field that is still heavily loaded in favour of English and Afrikaans-speakers (Damsell, 2003).

The explanation a month later from the provincial department of education, in reference to subjects other than languages, was:

The other 7 learning areas are only provided in English and Afrikaans. The reason ...is the fact that these are the only two languages of learning and teaching ... at present (WCED Official 2004).

The provincial official, however, was embarrassed, so she forwarded the letter to the national Minister of Education. Six months later (more than 10 years after apartheid), and with a new Minister of Education in office (the third since 1994), the Director General of Education, responded:

While we share your concerns regarding the fact that IsiXhosa-speaking (sic) learners in your school are being disadvantaged... the issue is broader and requires a holistic solution.

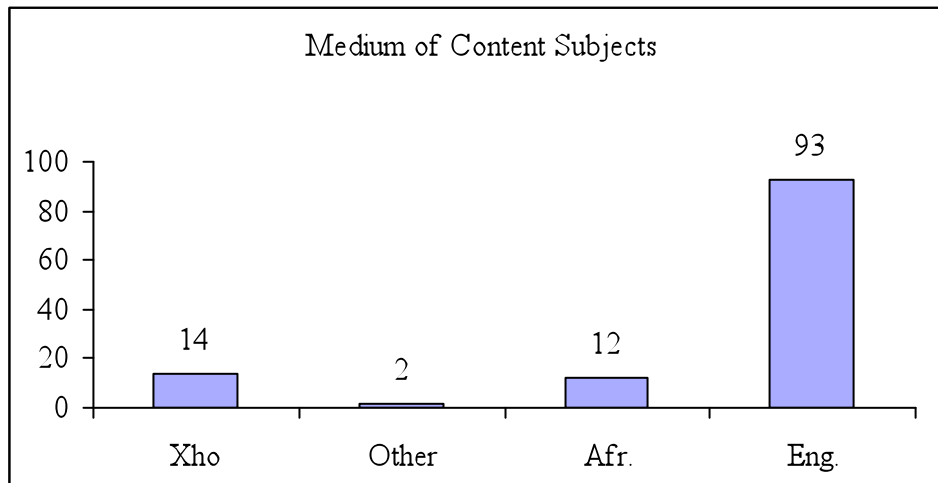
What faces the education system, and we have been grappling with this for some time now, is the implementation of our Language in Education Policy.... (Director-General of Education 2004).

## **USE OF LANGUAGES IN ADDITION TO ENGLISH**

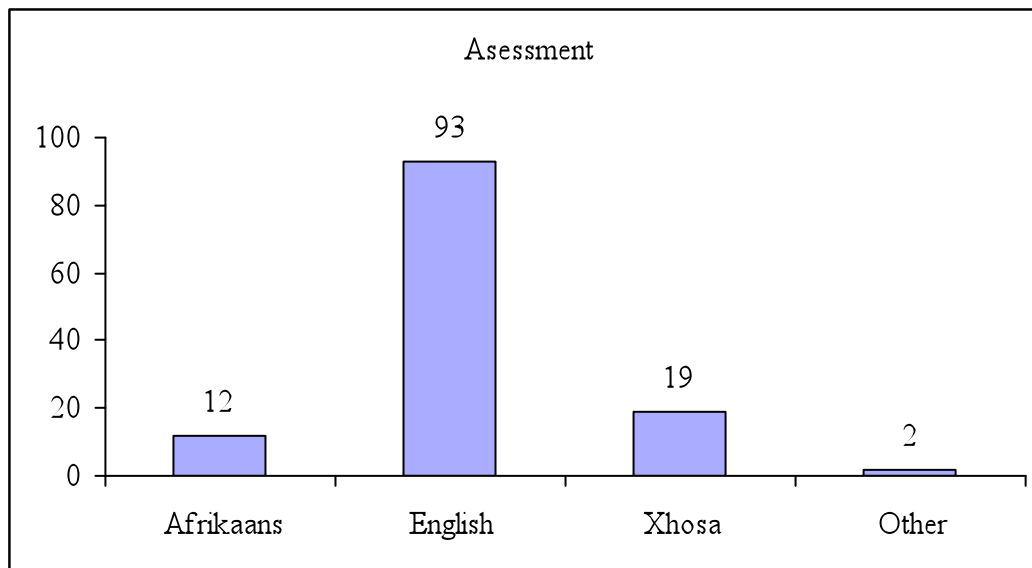
The school principal, realising that it was unlikely that immediate solutions would arise from within the education system, set about initiating school-based change. Advice from a University of Cape Town-based unit, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education (PRAESA) was sought. In consultation with his staff, it was decided to attempt the “systematic”, dual-medium, bilingual teaching of history and geography with the new Grade 8 intake of students from 2004 onwards and to find other ways to accommodate linguistic diversity in the school.

On the basis of an English language assessment at enrolment, Grade 8 students were divided into two classes, one of which would be taught through English only and the other through English for most subjects with dual medium Xhosa-English for

geography and history. The classes have been called the English-English (E-E) class, and the Xhosa-English (X-E) class. The nomenclature appeared unfortunate at first: the students in the X-E believed themselves to be stigmatised. The same teacher would teach both classes. A language survey to capture student attitudes was administered in January 2004 immediately after the student group had been divided, and it was repeated at the end of the academic year. Figures 1 and 2 below represent student responses to key questions in the survey.



**Figure 1. Responses to the question, “In which language would you like your content subjects to be taught?”<sup>6</sup>**



**Figure 2. Responses to the question, “In which language would you write your tests and exams for the content subjects?”**

The January 2004 data show an overwhelming identification of English as the most preferred language of teaching and learning, and the anticipated language of

<sup>6</sup> I should like to acknowledge the assistance of Daryl Braam and Michèle October in the analysis of the survey data.



assessment, despite only 21% claiming to have L1 English. This can be ascribed to a number of factors, including the investment which students had made, particularly those who were Xhosa-speaking, by travelling out of their township neighbourhoods and paying daily mini-bus taxi fares which strain family resources. In focus-group discussions with students prior to and after they completed the survey, it was clear that those who were assigned to the X-E class were unhappy about the decision and insisted that they were English-speakers.

The researchers observed the teacher's different language strategies in both the X-E and E-E classes and suggested that she participate in a multilingual educational programme offered by PRAESA during the second half of the year. This was difficult to sustain, as the school could not afford to support replacement staff for the intensive, five-week period of the programme. Some bilingual classroom strategies were workshopped with her, including the systematic use of both languages and encouraging the use of written texts (on the chalkboard and in teacher-constructed notes and exercises) to accompany spoken discourse. Largely, however, it was the teacher's own initiative. PRAESA tried to offer translation of materials into Xhosa, since it was the absence of written texts and practices in African languages beyond early primary that limited the efficacy of code-switching practices in rural and township schools. However, the teacher found limited use for the translations, indicating that the students did not like the conservative, "deep-Xhosa" of the texts. "Deep-Xhosa" is regarded as somewhat old-fashioned and used simultaneously by intellectuals and rural people. The register is sometimes inaccessible and carries little currency with upwardly mobile youth who prefer urban hybrid versions which range from colloquial and "township Xhosa" to the isiCamtho or Tsotsitaal of (would-be) gangsters.

...(W)ith the translations I gave them the notes but then would translate into the level of Xhosa they understand and...because my principal is very flexible...I did some of the things my own way....I would give them...the English word and even if I don't have the direct translations in Xhosa. I would explain it in Xhosa even if I can't give it a term in Xhosa (Teacher, 2006).<sup>7</sup>

Observations of spoken classroom discourse identified English-mainly practices with intermittent explanation in Xhosa, frequent code-mixing and pragmatic rather than systematic use of code-switching by the teacher. The necessary support mechanisms for the teacher were simply not in place and she had little option other than to draw on strategies she herself had experienced as a school pupil. Yet they were more than that; she had a heightened awareness of the simultaneous use of two languages and she made a concerted effort to use written Xhosa wherever possible. The difference between the code-switching and code-mixing in this school and that of township schools is that linguistic diversity was and is validated in the school ethos; students and teachers have no need to disguise its practice, and attempts are made to materialise written Xhosa.

Students, who had insisted on their English, home-language status at the beginning of the year, were observed using mainly Xhosa, or a Xhosa-English code-mixed variety in questions directed towards the teacher, and in paired or group discussions during

<sup>7</sup> Reflective interview conducted by Nomxolisi Jantjies, September 2006.

class time, as well as in between classes. Xola<sup>8</sup>, one of the students, had assumed an American rap-artist identity, which he maintained in discussions with peers in between class communication and in conversation with the researchers. However, he was observed slipping into fluent Xhosa in conversations with the teacher and peers during the history and geography lessons, while claiming not to understand Xhosa, thus assuming chameleon-like multiple identities.

Significantly, the initial resistance of most students to the idea of Xhosa being used in the X-E classroom dissipated within the first few weeks of 2004. Within a month, Xhosa-speaking students in the E-E class were also observed communicating with the teacher in Xhosa rather than English. When asked why they were doing this, they indicated it was because that they knew she could explain things in Xhosa.

The researchers were interested in how linguistic identities were playing themselves out in the school environment in order to understand the extent to which the Grade 8 students' initial antipathy towards the inclusion of Xhosa in the formal curriculum might be mirrored elsewhere. So they paid attention to patterns of communication beyond the classroom, between lessons and during extra-curricular activities. The school timetable had been structured in such a way that a generic period, designated "Export", allowed students from different grades to engage in multi-age groups with extra-curricular activities, once a week. Linguistic exchanges were monitored during this period and it was noticed that students from all grades used multilingual exchanges as their *lingua franca* (cf. Fardon and Furniss 1994) and manifestation of cultural capital in the school. This contradicted what would have been expected by the strongly pro-English position adopted by the students surveyed at the beginning of the year. This fluid, linguistic continuum was sufficiently elastic to include discourse features of informal varieties of Afrikaans, known as "Kaaps"; Xhosa; "Tsotsitaal" (Xhosa-Afrikaans variety); South African English and Xola's iterations of African-American rap. Students were observed demonstrating complex and shifting identities and, although at one level most students projected themselves as contemporary actors in the school's landscape, they accommodated what might have been an "otherness" elsewhere. A rural boy from Lesotho, resplendent in a Basuto blanket and carrying a long stick ("knobkierrie") for example, was accepted without derision, along with a tall fellow with an exceptionally impressive, but somewhat dated, Mohawk.

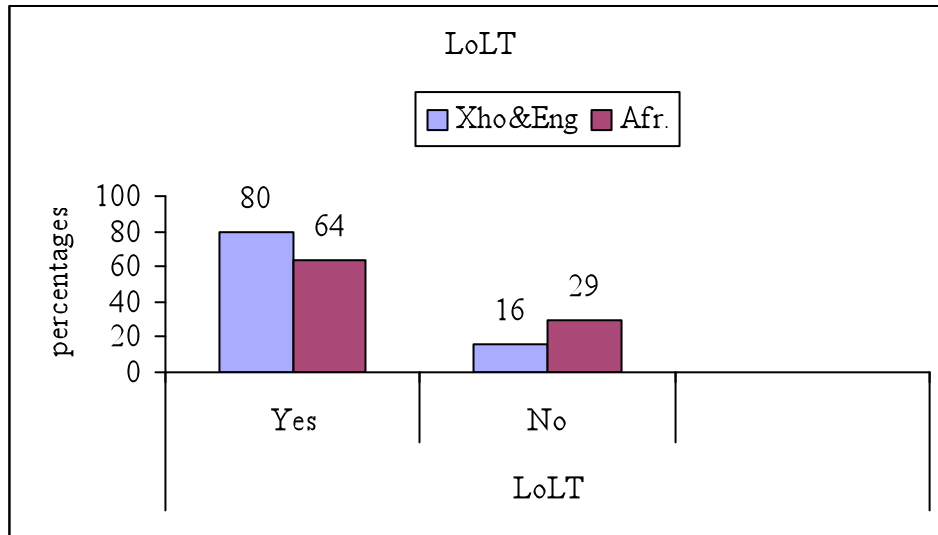
The Grade 8 students who had completed the language attitudinal survey in January participated in a follow-up questionnaire in November after they had finished writing the end-of-year-examinations. Significant changes of position between January and November were noted. Students from both Grade 8 classes completed the questionnaires, which explored attitudes towards the language/s of learning and teaching (LoLT) and language/s of assessment (figure 3).

Whereas 93% of students had expressed a preference for English as the sole language of learning and teaching in January, by November there was an overwhelming change of position towards a bilingual Xhosa-English medium of instruction. Additionally, 64% thought that Afrikaans should also be used in this capacity. This is particularly significant since there is a perception that speakers of African languages hold negative attitudes towards Afrikaans and only 7% of Grade 8 students claimed to have

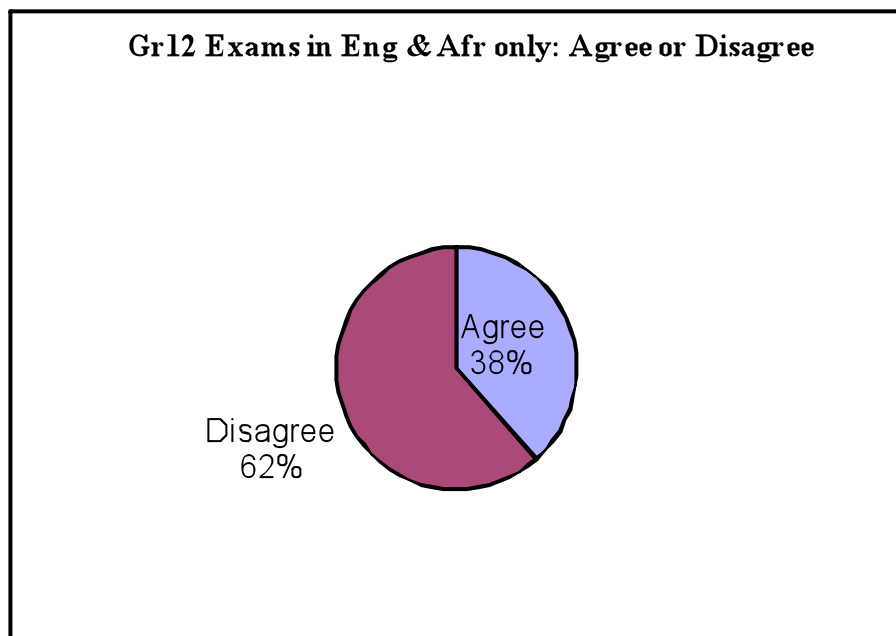
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<sup>8</sup> Names of students are pseudonyms.

Afrikaans as their home language. When asked whether school-leaving examinations should be written in English and Afrikaans only, the majority of students indicated that they believed that Xhosa or other languages should be included as languages of assessment. Again, this was a marked shift in position from January, when 93% had recorded that they anticipated assessment in English only.



**Figure 3. Responses to two questions: 1. “Do you think it is useful to use both Xhosa and English in the HSS classroom?”; 2. “Do you think it is useful to use Afrikaans as a language of learning?”**



**Figure 4. Response to the question, “Do you agree or disagree with the matric exams being written in Afrikaans and English only?”**

## STUDENT NARRATIVES

Although questionnaires with multiple-choice items have their limitations, constructed response items elicited nuanced views on language preference and considerations of language rights (see African Language-Speaking Students AL 4, AL 5 and AL 6, below). Some students continued to believe that the *status quo* for assessment was consistent with economic realities beyond the school, or that they had pragmatic reasons to learn Afrikaans in addition to English (see AL 1, AL 2 and AL 7 below). Other students demonstrated implicit notions of identity, such as AL 3, who, although being a home language speaker of Xhosa, referred to students in “Black” schools, meaning “township” or rural schools, as if she were not herself Xhosa-speaking and as if Zonnebloom was not a *de facto* black school. Curiously, some of the most articulate supporters of the use of languages other than English (or Afrikaans) for learning, teaching and assessment were students in the E-E class and who were themselves speakers of English and/or Afrikaans (see E-A 1).

*Q1: The national Grade 9 Common Tasks for Assessment (CTA) exams are in English and Afrikaans only. Do you agree with this or would you like to make suggestions to the <sup>9</sup>Minister of Education. Explain. The Matric exams are also in Afrikaans and English only. Please explain why you agree or disagree with this practice.*

AL 1: I agree these languages are the only languages that can help you get a better job.

AL 2: I want to learn Afrikaans and it's fine by me.

AL 3: Some matriculants are from Black schools and they are taught in Xhosa and when they write their paper they understand nothing and there comes failing.

AL 4: It's alright because everyone have got their rights to write in their own languages.

AL 5: I disagree, because in some school there no English educators.

AL 6: It is unfair why is in only on English & Afrikaan.

English-Afrikaans speaker (E-A 1): Add Xhosa to It is mainly a Xhosa government and it's like you don't care about your own people you just follow in america's Footsteps. Democracy. What? There's no such thing in this country it's just a sham just by looking at the exams you can see they DON'T CARE!!!

*The same pupil answers the following question:*

*Q2. At the beginning of 2004 what were your opinions about using Xhosa as a language of learning at secondary school?*

E-A 1: To tell the truth my mind was a blank I was completely neutral I didn't care as long as I could learn a bit of Xhosa.

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<sup>9</sup> Spelling, punctuation, and so on is per students' responses.

Q3. *Have you changed your mind since then?*

E-A 1: Hello, my mind was neutral!!! [plus artistic expressions of annoyance at question]

African students recognise, however, that despite surface-level political changes, access to the formal economy continues to be through both Afrikaans and English, and they demonstrated significant tolerance of the continued privileging of Afrikaans alongside English, for example in the following:

Q4. *If there are benefits in using two languages for learning and teaching can you explain what they are?*

AL 7: because when you want job the don't understand xhosa.

The responses of Grade 8 students from both the X-E and E-E classes elicited marked changes of position from a predominantly English-mainly emphasis towards significant empathy for bi/multilingual options for language/s of learning, teaching and assessment. Students in the E-E class offered some of the most tolerant views on multilingual options in November, suggesting that the school's position and ethos towards diversity had been embraced, or that the January data elicited only surface-level responses and what the students imagined to be appropriate responses at that stage.

The apparent contradictions or shifting positions are significant for research on language attitudes in the South African context. All too often senior education officials cite anecdotal evidence to support the English-mainly education system currently in place (see also critiques of similar research across sub-Saharan Africa in Alidou *et al.*, 2006). The country's first sociolinguistic survey of the country conducted by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB, 2000) demonstrated then that such anecdotal evidence does not tally with more penetrating research. The PANSALB data recorded that 88% of people over the age of 15 selected home language plus English (that is, bilingual education) provided both were taught well (see also Heugh 2007).

By 2006 multilingualism in the school extended outside the formal mainly English curriculum. Portuguese, the official language of two neighbouring countries, Angola and Mozambique, and an official language of the Southern Africa Development Community and the African Union, is currently ignored in the provincial and national departments of education. The principal however, recognising that Portuguese was used in the local community, and tapping into his own linguistic resources, offered this language as an optional activity during "Export". A new music and art teacher, also a professional Spanish dancer, simultaneously offered Spanish Dancing. Students have responded enthusiastically to both, recognising cultural capital in languages beyond English:

Student learning Portuguese: (W)e have dreams like to go in other countries so that can help us. So Portuguese is related to French so we can go to France and then speak our Portuguese then we can be able to communicate with those people in French....

Spanish Dancing Student: I think what's interesting when you are doing the dance you have to know the language because most of the dances are named in that

language so you have to understand what the word means, so ja, it is interesting and when those people when they come and they dance you have to communicate with them....<sup>10</sup>

In June 2006, the Western Cape Department of Education administered a trial trilingual assessment of Grade 8 students' language and mathematic skills, including for the first time Xhosa alongside English and Afrikaans within a system-wide assessment. This is significant as it demonstrated that an African language can be used alongside English and Afrikaans, and students at Zonnebloem were permitted to select the language/s in which they wished to be assessed. The Grade 8 students at Zonnebloem were subsequently interviewed in relation to their attitudes towards language/s of learning and the linguistic choices they made in terms of the assessment instrument (that is, English only, Afrikaans only, or bilingual Xhosa-English).<sup>11</sup> These narratives, nearly three years after the experiment at Zonnebloem began, demonstrate that the accommodation of linguistic diversity appears to be not only accepted practice, but students appear to welcome it and acknowledge that it offers educational scaffolding. They take this further, positioning themselves as active participants in the choice of bilingual Xhosa-English teaching and high-status external assessment. The following excerpts are taken from focus group interviews with students.<sup>12</sup>

Interviewer (I): *You guys chose to write the X-E (Xhosa-English) paper, why did you make that choice?*

AL 8...Then we made that choice because we understand Xhosa, you see? And we understand Xhosa and English and ... more than Afrikaans...and when we're writing Xhosa and English we're going to be better and we're going to understand more than English and English because there are words we won't understand....

AL 9: (T)here are people, even the blacks, *nhe*, but they understand only English, they only read ...they can't read Xhosa but they only read English so that's why I'm saying everyone have to choose and everyone has the choice to choose what they want.

I: *You're all in the X-E class, right? If you could change now, which one would you choose? ...Would you remain with X-E or would you choose E-E?*

AL 10: I think I would remain with the X-E.

I: *Why?*

AL 10: Because there at E-E I couldn't, *e ndiqine ulwimi* (hey, my tongue is tied)

I: *Theta nge siXhosa.* (Speak Xhosa).

AL 10: Okay, *ngoba* like *andinofuna nam ukuyitshintsha* because like *iright iX-E* because *uyayiva na xa kufundiswa uyayiva nge-negisXhosa nange English amanye*

<sup>10</sup> Interviews conducted by Nomxolisi Jantjies, September 2006.

<sup>11</sup> The Western Cape Education Department assessment was co-ordinated by this author and chief investigating researcher at the Zonnebloem site. Developments at Zonnebloem school had influenced the design of the instrument (see Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Interviews conducted, transcribed and translated by Nomxolisi Jantjies.

*amagama ongawaziyo.* (I also would not want to change because in X-E you can understand when they are teaching, you can understand Xhosa and other words you do not understand in English).

*I: Now, do you think that when your teacher uses Xhosa to explain parts of the lesson, does this help you?...Do you feel comfortable with this?...When the teacher switches between Xhosa and English?*

AL 11: I do because it's the time that I feel the most happiest because I know the word it's going to be explained in Xhosa and then I can understand it.

In an interview with as English-speaking student:

*I: Does it matter to you whether there are translations or not?*

E 1: It does matter ...there's ah, people can't understand English sometimes can't communicate with the words so they look into their own languages like Xhosa and Afrikaans – they seem to find the real question.

## TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Understanding English in the classroom in South Africa requires a peeling away of layers of past, present, perceived and masked practices. A perception that English is the language of greatest preference and aspiration is certainly present in the close-to-surface public layer/s or where positions are taken in relation to the socio-economic goods and cultural capital which English represents. In reality, however, it remains elusive for most students, even in urban contexts where they have greatest access to the language in print and technology. The challenge is how to include and validate the linguistic repertoires of students alongside English in the classroom beyond spoken code-mixing/switching which, after decades of practice, has rendered minimal access to engagement with written texts and epistemologies. It is how to deliver more systematic bilingual use of the linguistic repertoire in both written and spoken form.

School-based responses, inclusive of multiple linguistic and cultural and identities and which grow out of the immediate environment provide illustrations to inform system-wide innovation. However, these need to be considered cautiously. In the case of Zonnebloem, students reposition themselves, identify language rights' infringements and make assertive choices, which include African languages alongside English in teaching and learning, corroborating findings of the PANSALB Survey of 2000. They demonstrate that an English-only/mainly system for poor students is a chimera requiring further interventions based on longitudinal studies which trace changing positions and the receptivity of flexible language practices in schools. Yet, school-initiated responses, in the absence of coherent material support (for example, the training of teachers in the systematic use of two or more languages, the production of learning materials in African languages, and so on) have their limitations. The syntax of student narratives show that they require more systematic support in both languages in order to produce the kinds of texts which will give them real access, not only to the curriculum, but also to higher education and/or the formal economy once they leave school. Educators and linguists need to recognise the difference between alluring sociolinguistic practices, landscapes and identities, and the kind of access to,

engagement with and production of epistemologically demanding texts which would ensure equity in a linguistically diverse and residually unequal society.

Thirty-five years of code-switching in South African schools, mirrored in most other African countries, have not opened the doors to higher education or the formal economy for most. Until we find other convincing solutions, the systematic provision of bilingual education – that is, development of strong academic literacy in both a language widely used in the community and in the international language of widest currency – remains the only process-cum-model which has demonstrated positive, valid research data in African contexts (Alidou *et al.*, 2006). It nevertheless requires ongoing revision and localised contextualisation in order to accommodate changing linguistic repertoires, registers and varieties, and this in turn has implications for teacher education as well as textbook production.

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