

Ideologies Shaping Language Choices: Views of African Students on IsiZulu Modules in Higher Education at the University of Kwazulu-Natal

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ABSTRACT

The article presents reasons for African language students' choices of either taking or not taking isiZulu mother tongue modules at one Higher Education Institution (HEI). The research was prompted by a student's comment: "Who would like to be taught by a teacher taught in Zulu?" The study utilises the social identity theory as its theoretical framework and adopts Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) post-structuralist approach to understanding identities in exploring language choices in multilingual contexts. Focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducted to collect data from twenty five students enrolled in one HEI that offers three isiZulu Foundation Phase specialisation modules in a dual medium Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Foundation Phase (FP) programme, and first-year science students registered on the same campus. Findings revealed a perceptible resistance to mother tongue modules, fuelled by a fear of being unable to teach English as the language mostly used in education, and a lack of information about the role of the mother tongue in education. The students' sentiments towards isiZulu revealed negative mixed feelings and beliefs surrounding taking modules in their mother tongue, contrary to the perception of this validating their identity. Choices were not made in the light of the mother tongue as a crucial identifier of connectedness, rootedness and belonging and as a basis for literacy development. The study recommends that HEIs should prioritise the need to inform all stakeholders about the importance of using mother tongue as a gateway to accessing education through indigenous languages.

Keywords: *Assumed identity, negotiated identity, dual identity, mother tongue, higher education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Debates concerning the use of a mother tongue in education have been the subject of many authors in South Africa, such as Alexander (2000, 2001), Dalvit and de Klerk (2005), the Department of Education (DoE) (2005) Ministerial Committee, and Msila (2013a, b). The Department of Education (2005) Ministerial Committee Report on the development of indigenous African languages in higher education, which considered historical and legislative factors in nurturing language growth, warned that a crisis was looming in the country regarding the preservation,

maintenance and associated identity of our indigenous African languages. It attributed the anticipated crisis to the preference for English instead of African languages in formal communication in the private and public sectors and in general social practice. The report noted that the development of indigenous languages as the media of instruction in higher education required systemic underpinning by the entire schooling system and enhanced public and social use of these languages in the daily lives of South Africans. Back then, the Ministerial Committee reported that each HEI should be required to identify an indigenous African language of choice for initial development as a medium of instruction, and also that HEIs should adopt a regional approach by deciding collectively on areas of specialty to be targeted for teaching and learning in a specific indigenous African language (Department of Education, 2005). In May 2013, the announcement by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) to offer isiZulu as a compulsory module raised criticism from many sources including students and the general public. DeVos (2013) argues that “while the university sees it as a move to promote ‘nation-building’ and to bring ‘diverse languages together’ others have compared it to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools in 1976 (a move that led to the Soweto uprising), while some have argued that the move is unconstitutional” (DeVos, 2013).

These debates reflect the divergent opinions about the country’s indigenous languages. It is, therefore, necessary to look at the various ideologies that shape language choices, something that this study attempts to do. Choices are often associated with beliefs and attitudes. Attitudes towards languages are constructed in a context of deep and complex affective, cognitive and behavioural indices of evaluative reactions towards language varieties or their speakers, closely tied to emotions and beliefs, and are thus cognitive and affective (Dalvit and de Klerk, 2005: 2). There are also mental constructs, acquired through experience, which predispose and influence people to act in certain ways in response to certain objects, people, situations and issues. They are complex, consistent and deeply felt, but not immutable.

The article focuses on ideologies shaping language choices and views of African language students on isiZulu modules in higher education and analyses their reasons for choosing or not choosing isiZulu modules.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study utilises the social identity theory as its theoretical framework and adopts Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2004) poststructuralist approach to understanding identities in exploring language choices in multilingual contexts. According to Fearon (1999), ‘identity’ derives mainly from the work of psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s. Norton (cited by Rezaei, 2012), explains that identity generally refers to the ‘who am I’ question. It also refers to a sense of how we relate to the social world - it is dynamic and complex, having the

characterisations of being “lived, negotiated, on-going, changing constantly across time and space, social, multiple, it is also a learning process with its past and future incorporating the present” (Wenger, 1998: 163).

Identity and language are important forces that influence language choices. The notion of power and ideology can, to a great extent, shape language choices. Tajfel’s (1982) social identity theory and Bourdieu’s (1994) theory of power in discourse have all contributed to the development of a general poststructuralist and constructivist view of identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). Hogg, Terry and White (1995) analysed the social identity theory as being intended to be a social psychological theory of inter-group relations, group processes and the social self. The theory formally articulates two basic socio-cognitive processes of categorisation and self-enhancement with subjective belief structures. The latter refers to people’s beliefs about the nature of relations between their own group and relevant out-groups. The beliefs are not necessarily accurate reflections of reality because they can often be ideological constructs such as languages and status relations. Bourdieu (cited by Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004), viewed language practices as a form of symbolic capital, convertible into economic and social capital, and distributed unequally within any given speech community.

Wenger (1998) characterised identity as,

... a work in progress shaped by efforts - both individual and collective - to create coherence through time that threads together successive of participation. In the definition of a person incorporating the past and the future in the experience of present negotiated with respect to paradigmatic trajectories invested in histories of practice and in generational politics (1998: 158).

She further argues that “identity is defined as something that is constantly renegotiated during the course of our lives”. A non-essentialist standpoint towards the negotiation of identities rejects the fixity of identity options operating within an individual, and identity is viewed as being in flux (Rezaei, 2012). Presenting a post-structural approach, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 21) proposed a framework of identity that differentiates between three types of identity: “*imposed identities*” (which are not negotiable in a particular time and place), “*assumed identities*” (which are accepted and not negotiated), and “*negotiable identities*” (which are contested by groups and individuals). All three categories acquire a particular status within unique socio-historical circumstances. Pavlenko and Blackledge, cited by Ramsay-Brijball (2004: 152), suggested that identities are multi-dimensional and are constructed at the intersection of the use of different languages. Factors such as linguistic repertoire, clime of bilingualism, cultural link, educational and social status, educational orientation and medium of instruction, language attitudes and the impact of a diglossic situation all have a bearing on how English and isiZulu are distributed and assigned by different speakers in different contexts. Students usually seek “*dual identity*” and “*negotiated identity*”. A negotiable identity enables isiZulu L1 speakers to

narrow the divide between academic and social lives in an informal campus setting and to protect other identities consciously or subconsciously when they revert to the use of either monolingual English or isiZulu as a medium of learning in the formal context (Ramsay-Brijball, 2004: 154).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to contextualise the study of language choices, this section will review some studies conducted in South Africa about language choices, especially between isiZulu and English, including studies about code-switching which predominantly engage language choices. Dalvit and de Klerk (2005) conducted a survey with questionnaires and interviews and took into account, among other things, students' attitudes towards English and isiXhosa and their opinions and beliefs about the introduction of dual-mediumship and its possible consequences at the University of Fort Hare. The results revealed that the use of isiXhosa was considered more appropriate to domains such as family and peer-group communications. In spite of this, evidence suggests that isiXhosa played a very important role in the academic context in supplementing explanations in English both in lectures and tutorials. This was supported by the views of Webb and Kembo cited by Dalvit and de Klerk (2005: 7), who concluded that many of their respondents agreed that African languages had been neglected in the past.

A larger survey of language attitudes conducted at the University of the Western Cape by Dyers (1998) found that there was widespread concern that using isiXhosa as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) would create tensions with some speakers of other African languages. The survey was part of a longitudinal study that dealt with attitudes towards all 11 official South African languages, as well as an exploration of some of the reasons given for these attitudes during follow-up interviews with a comparative group of students. English seemed to be considered as equally 'distant' for all African language speakers. Participants argued that no speaker of an African language should have an advantage over a speaker of a different African language. It seemed very strange that only speakers of English and Afrikaans could benefit from mother tongue education, but not African language speakers (Heugh, cited by Dyers, 1998). English seemed not to be associated with any particular culture, and was seen as the 'language of the real world', yet isiXhosa was associated with Xhosa culture.

A study by Ramsay-Brijball, (2004) conducted using multiple methods involving questionnaires and interviews with final year isiZulu students on the Westville campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal investigated isiZulu students' motivation for and attitudes towards isiZulu-English code-switching. Findings indicated that the greater incidence of a mixed variety of the use of either monolingual English or isiZulu bears testimony to a negotiable identity these speakers seek for themselves. Regarding cultural identity, the study showed that

the students used isiZulu code-switching to sanction their cultural backgrounds, while trying to adapt simultaneously to global demands. The findings revealed that isiZulu is the matrix language or dominant language (Myers-Scotton, 1993) in isiZulu-English code-switching (Ramsay-Brijball, 2004: 152). As students undergo their studies through the medium of English, the pressure to deliver academic material in the L2 weighs heavily upon them. Students use isiZulu extensively in informal situations while engaging in isiZulu-English code-switching in order to seek relief from the exclusive use of English in their formal interactions and assessments. Furthermore, these students acknowledge the importance of English in their education, but at the same time they also want to display their ethnic identity. The use of isiZulu-English code-switching mirrored the students' social identity. The use of this variety reflects one's educational status and 'elite closure'. Myers-Scotton (1993: 149) explained that elite closure is "a type of social mobilisation strategy by which those persons in power establish or maintain their power and privileges via linguistic choices". In Ramsay-Brijball's study, the students that participated in her study may be described as the education-based elite when compared to isiZulu L1 speakers who cannot afford the privilege of higher education (Ramsay-Brijball, 2004: 153). The impact of educational orientation and medium of instruction reveals that respondents offer various reasons for isiZulu-English code-switching and allows them 'dual identity' (Ramsay-Brijball, 2004: 154).

A philosophical paper by Turner (2012: 34) showed that language attitudes determine, to a certain extent, language choices. According to Turner's (2012) literature survey, learners often state that they opt for Afrikaans over isiZulu because it offers wider opportunities in the global scenario than isiZulu does, as Afrikaans has a closer relationship with Germanic languages. Holmes (cited by Turner, 2012) explains that when language shifts occur, they almost always shift towards the most powerful group. The dominant language is often associated with status, prestige and social success and is used in many popular contexts such as fashion and people that young people admire. Therefore, it is not surprising that young people see the advantages of the dominant language and end up abandoning their own language. The irony, though, is that in South Africa African language speakers are not in the minority. In KwaZulu-Natal, isiZulu mother tongue speakers constitute 80% of the population (Turner, 2012). Turner (2012) stressed the point that attitudes to language reflect attitudes to the users and the uses of a language.

Mashiya's (2011) study conducted through using focus group interviews with 20 foundation phase teachers on how isiZulu and English were used in rural KwaZulu-Natal schools indicated that teachers feared failure and opted for English. The teachers did not adhere to what the stipulations of the curriculum and language in education policy because of the challenges they faced when teaching in an African language. The following factors were cited: prior learner knowledge, better opportunities for children, time constraints, inferiority complexes of teachers, failure of the system of education, teachers' lack of

proficiency in mother tongue, directly translated resources, lack of parental involvement in decision-making and an invisible school language policy.

Nkosi's (2014) study of Postgraduate students' experiences and attitudes towards isiZulu as a medium of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal found that students had positive experiences of being taught in isiZulu. Their attitudes were positive and helped to enhance their academic performance. This finding differed from other studies such as Moodley (2010) which had found that most school and university students preferred to be taught in English rather than in the mother tongue. Nkosi also found that most of the students who preferred to be taught in isiZulu declared that they had difficulty with the English language, which was the reason why they preferred to be taught in isiZulu. Further, the students were confident that their performance was not as a result of lower standards in isiZulu modules because the isiZulu modules were as challenging and credible as the English modules. Nkosi asserts that these students had positively experienced learning in isiZulu (Nkosi, 2014, p.255).

The studies examined in the literature review section on the use of isiZulu and isiXhosa in teaching and learning in modules in other tertiary contexts predominantly show that attitudes, among other factors, play an important role in students' decision making about whether or not to study indigenous languages. These arguments and premises for choosing a language for learning motivated the researcher to investigate the ideologies shaping students' choices in her own teaching context.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The two research questions stated below were used to guide the study.

1. What motivates Education and Science students' choices regarding choosing or not choosing modules taught in isiZulu at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
2. How do student identities shape the language choices of African language students regarding learning an African language?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Considering the focus on reasons for the students' language choices and identity, qualitative research methods were used to collect data from two student groups as well as individual students on one campus at one HEI. Babbie and Mouton (2001) assert that the best way to investigate the subjective experiences of the participants is through an in-depth qualitative approach. Qualitative research design allows for an enquiry into the experiences and views of participants and also allows for an in-depth process of data collection. The participants in the study were purposively selected and included two focus group interviews consisting of 13 Education and

12 first year Science students at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The total number of participants was 25. The purposively selected Education students' focus group interview consisted of PGCE FP students studying in a dual medium FP teacher trainee programme that offers three isiZulu FP specialisation modules in a dual medium Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) initial teacher education FP programme. The researcher was one of the isiZulu lecturers in the dual medium PGCE FP programme. Usually, PGCE students come to Education without much background and knowledge in studies in education as a discipline. The students originate from various faculties in and outside the university and therefore bring with them ideas that do not reflect prior engagement in the role of language in education. Education students' responses were compared with first year Science students at the same university. The Science students were chosen to balance the views of other students within the same institution. Focus group discussions enabled the researcher to interview participants in the context of a large group. Various responses were received from a number of participants, interviewed in three separate group discussions conducted by two assistant researchers and the author of this article.

6. DATA COLLECTION

Interviews conducted by two student assistants and the author of this paper took place over two academic years in 2012 and 2013 respectively on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The focus group interviews with Education students varied as the students enrolled at different times during 2012 and 2013. Interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and were conducted in English. However, interviewees were free to respond in isiZulu given that some were already taking isiZulu modules in the PGCE FP programme. Data were transcribed and translated into English in instances where isiZulu was used during interviews. Data from interviews used in this study were reduced in order to retain data that mainly focused on the reasons for the students' choices. Other data which pointed out challenges of using isiZulu in the modules was not used in order to focus on the main purpose of the study. A limitation of the author being the researcher is noted in that she was known to the students as having taught one of the isiZulu modules.

6.1 ANALYSIS

In analysing the interview data, the researcher considered the participants' responses and attached meanings using the post-structural approach of identity chosen as the theoretical framework of the study in interpreting the motivations behind the students' choices and non-choices of isiZulu. The researcher also compared the responses to identify recurring themes. This method of analysis is

used to present data that are relevant to a particular issue or theme (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Cohen *et al.* warn that while it is economical to use this approach in handling, summarizing and presenting data, the research should be mindful of its strengths and weaknesses. The researcher must decide whether or not it is important to consider the whole set of responses of an individual, i.e. to decide whether the data analysis is driven by people/respondents or by the issues (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Related concepts and ideological constructs pertinent to the study were used in the interpretation of findings.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous languages that previously had no major economic and educational value face a number of obstacles in being accepted as languages of study in higher education. This study confirmed that beliefs, attitudes and identity play a major role in shaping students' language choices. Findings reflect students' mixed reactions to the prospect of studying isiZulu modules and studying through isiZulu in higher education.

7.1 STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO THE PROSPECT OF LEARNING MODULES IN ISIZULU

The prospect of studying modules in isiZulu in the Foundation Phase programme at the university generated mixed reactions, depicting feelings of happiness, fear, anxiety and total rejection of the idea by others. Those that expressed happiness indicated that it was because it was an opportunity to explore a new way of learning that was unfamiliar in their educational backgrounds. It was an opportunity for participants and the society to "take isiZulu seriously". One responded by saying "it was also an opportunity to use my language that I have never had before and because I love my language". Some respondents argued that in the past to use isiZulu was "not allowed". However, these students had not experienced the Bantu Education language policies leading to the Soweto uprising that were basically about fighting language oppression at that time. It is for that reason that one student said learning in isiZulu "was not allowed". It was something new for her. Therefore, she loved the idea because she always loved her language and stated that:

I believe that it is important that young children should have a good grounding in their mother tongue before learning additional languages.

Cummins' (1979) theory is very well cited in Curriculum and Language policy documents in South Africa to promote mother tongue education. According to Baker (1996: 147), the 'dual iceberg' theory also proposed by Cummins (1979)

argued that there is a common underlying proficiency which means that the thoughts that accompany talking, reading, writing and listening come from the same central engine, irrespective of the language in which a person is operating.

The students studying isiZulu modules also articulated that prior to joining classes where modules were taught in isiZulu, they were anxious because they had not done isiZulu in primary school. They had questions such as, “*What if I fail, drop out or find it hard to understand?*” Students were also not sure how learning theories and concepts could be taught in isiZulu since isiZulu has not been used as an academic language, only as a language for communication associated with traditional functions. In the South African context the dominant language in education has always been English. Students were thus sceptical about how this could be done in isiZulu. However, some of them were determined to take the risk of learning a university module in an African indigenous language. Reactions were repeatedly expressed in similar nouns and adjectives, which depicted fear of failure and anxiety. Participant 3 related that:

At first I was afraid because my whole degree of three years was in English. I wrote exams in English and books were in English. Even though I studied three Zulu modules in my first degree I was afraid as well because we did not have enough access to books. So it’s like lecturers were writing notes and we learnt from there. There were a few references from here and there but it was not as concrete as saying that this is the book for this module for this semester. It was just like these notes. But when I got to PGCE we started with three modules, all of them in isiZulu. I was afraid like how can I write an exam in isiZulu? It was like I never did any Zulu modules. First time it was like no, I’m go’na fail, I wouldn’t understand and what about these words? I remember in one assignment I was struggling with, “what is self-esteem” in isiZulu? What am I go’na say is “self-esteem in isiZulu?” But you know with time you get used to it and you discover **ukuthi** (that) it is doable. It was fine.

Baumeister (cited by Mashiya, 2011), proposes the escape and avoidance theory to explain how human motivation is determined. The theory clarifies the motivational drivers which make people choose the way they do things. Fear of failure and anxiety can perpetuate students to reject isiZulu and opt for English as seen by students’ comments that they were used to learning through English even though they did not always succeed. English becomes inescapable; as Alexander (2000) observed, English was unassailable but unattainable.

7.2 MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING ISIZULU MODULES

Despite the fear or failure as one of the challenges of choosing modules taught in isiZulu, some students were motivated to take isiZulu modules due to the way in which the idea was presented. The participants stated that they were motivated by at least four points identified as:

- Our lecturer, Dr....
- Need to have a balance of two languages
- To develop pride in my language
- To acquire the method of teaching the HL so that I am able to teach it

Sufficient briefing provided about the programme served as a motivation for some students. One attributed his/her motivation to the presentation by the lecturer concerned during the orientation programme. The briefing provided seemed to have broadened the students' understanding of why it is important to take isiZulu modules and was sufficient to make the decision. The students concurred with some ideas that the lecturer shared with them during orientation about learning one's own language. These ideas covered issues of identity and instilling a sense of pride in one's culture and language. The social identity theory depicts language as one of the variables that define one's identity. The students were concerned with maintaining their sense of pride and, through preserving their language, cited pride as a good motivation for learning their own language.

A further reason motivating students' choice of the isiZulu modules was the desire to acquire correct teaching methods for teaching isiZulu as a home language. The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Languages stipulates that a language shall be taught as a Home Language, a First Additional Language and a Second Additional Language. Adequate research currently exists about teaching English as a home language and additional languages. However, there is a scarcity of knowledge about teaching isiZulu as a home language. Teachers often complain that what is referred to as isiZulu teaching methodology is translated from English. They add that usually the translations are not sufficient to equip teachers with adequate and necessary knowledge for teaching isiZulu Literacy in Foundation Phase classrooms (Mbatha, 2012). Pavlenko (2003) argues that Cook's notion of multi-competence suggests that people who know more than one language have a distinct compound state of mind. However, some teachers, who say they have the skills to teach either language, are often inadequately trained, resulting in poor reading and writing skills in all the learners' languages.

7.3 SOME CONTENDING VOICES OF STUDENTS

The contending voice of students who did not choose isiZulu modules were considered very important. Anxiety, fear of failure and fear of the unknown seemed to weigh against choosing isiZulu modules for some students. Students imagined that it was going to be difficult. They decided that they would rather remain in the English class as they believed that they already ‘knew enough’ isiZulu. Knowing enough meant knowing enough isiZulu as a conversational language. The students perceived themselves as ‘knowing enough’ isiZulu because their understanding of knowing isiZulu was not associated with using it in the academic sense. They only associated isiZulu with the everyday spoken and non-academic use of the language. They therefore anticipated that it was going to be difficult to use isiZulu academically because in their academic lives they had only studied and accessed academic knowledge through English. Hence they perceived that it was going to be difficult. Contrary to popular belief, language is not static. It evolves and grows together with its speakers. Participant 8 replied to the question why she decided not to join the isiZulu class by saying:

Hallo, who would like to be taught in IsiZulu? Seriously, to me this whole Zulu thing is something that I don't think can work. How do I write assignments in Zulu? How many pages for a single essay? Let alone the exams.

The above response reveals the student's doubt on whether isiZulu could ever be used as a language of learning and assessment at university given students' perceived limitations in being able to correctly assess students' work during examinations. Nkosi (2014, p. 255) argues that some students at the university, particularly those who look at isiZulu at a distance feel that isiZulu courses are inferior in quality to courses taught in English. Nkosi argues that not all students feel that doing courses in isiZulu will be less challenging than modules taught in English. Students in the current study, like those described by Nkosi (2014) seemed to believe that fair assessment can only be done in English. As a result of using English in most of their academic lives, students seemed to have never written assignments in isiZulu apart from writing creative essays. However, in practice modules taught in isiZulu are assessed in isiZulu in an examination. This group of students already had developed an “assumed identity”. An assumed identity refers to a type of identity that is accepted and that is not negotiated. However, some options that are accepted and, therefore, not negotiated by some groups and individuals may be contested by another group, or even the same group at a different point in time. The responses indicated that the respondents were not interested in contesting their assumed language identities as English additional language speakers. This identity was most valued and legitimised by the dominant discourses. South Africans have been conscientised through the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) and the Language policy about the importance of their own languages even though African language

mother language identity is still very highly debated by others. The bottom line is that it was not resisted.

Dalvit and de Klerk (2005: 3) state that attitudes to English among speakers of other languages at Rhodes University, South Africa, were generally positive and a desire to improve competence in English or a positive orientation to it (especially as an international language) were some of the reasons for students choosing Rhodes (together with some practical reasons, such as availability of bursaries, residence or non-existence of a university with their mother tongue as a medium of instruction). It has been very difficult to see a significant change in students' attitudes towards African indigenous languages, such as isiXhosa and isiZulu, to name but two of the South African indigenous languages. The identities of the said students were not affected as they claimed that their identity as Zulu persons was not going to change. However, they did not see themselves as multi-competent bilinguals. They were happy that at university they assumed a new identity as English speakers belonging to a group that did not want to be taught in isiZulu. This resembles the notion of "elite closure" proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993: 149) who explained that elite closure is "a type of social mobilisation strategy by which those persons in power establish or maintain their power and privileges via linguistic choices". In this case, students who had attended elite schools embodied a form of illegitimate importance over students that had studied in township and rural schools.

Some responses suggest that some participants were open to the idea of taking modules in isiZulu although their identity seemed to be in transit towards a "dual identity". Participant 6 indicated that:

... I think that it is a good idea but I think that it would work better if it is combined with English because it would end up being complicated when trying to translate certain English terms to another language. Explanation should be done in a language of choice but terms should remain in English.

The response was suggestive that the respondents were in transit towards seeking a "negotiable identity". Ramsay-Brijball (2004: 154) stated that "a negotiable identity enables IsiZulu L1 speakers to narrow the divide between academic and social lives in an informal campus setting and to project other identities consciously or subconsciously when they revert to the use of either monolingual English or IsiZulu as a medium of learning in the formal context."

To add another voice to the contending voices, a participant responded by saying that for many people the ability to speak English is a reality and not a myth. The reasons for arguing that it is a reality were advanced by Participant 13 as follows:

Where I come from it's a reality (township). Even school-wise, they say **wena ufunde ku township, mina ngifunde Edrobheni**. (you attended a township school, well I've attended a school in town). I'm better because **ekhaya** (in my home) they can afford. It's about status and power. **Mina ekhaya** (in my home) they can afford expensive schools...

The above response reveals how socio-economic status impacts on education. The question is about who can afford and who cannot afford the cost of studying in city schools and private schools. In South Africa, the unequal share of the economy is one of its biggest problems as many people are at the bottom of the economic ladder. Bourdieu's (1991) theory of 'linguistic capital' viewed language practices as a form of symbolic capital, convertible into economic and social capital, and distributed unequally within any given speech community. He argued that those who command the language are regarded as having capital over those that do not and maintained that certain goods that are accessible to speakers of language are not accessible to speakers of another language. IsiZulu seemed to be that language where economic goods are not accessible. This, therefore, reveals that education in South Africa is far from being equal. While policies stipulate that access to education is open to everybody, equitable education is still a dream to be realised. The theme discussed of whether speaking English is a myth or a reality should be addressed in the context of the economy. English is associated with economic gains and a high status, whilst isiZulu is associated with an inferior status and lack of economic goods. It is a common practice in South Africa for parents to pay a great deal of money for their children's education through private schooling and sending their children to former model "C" schools previously for whites that charge very high fees in order to 'purchase' good quality education that comes in a form that prizes English rather than African languages. This happens even at the expense of losing the cultural identity that language gives to an individual. The inability of African languages to acquire economic power in and out of school has reduced it to tokenism. African languages are regarded by some of its own speakers as inferior as they do not have the same economic or academic power as English does. The reasons for choosing English are, therefore, not for identity but they are for access to economic goods such as competing with home language speakers for the same resources in a classroom and in the workplace.

7.4 SCIENCE STUDENTS ADD ANOTHER SPANNER TO THE CONTENDING VOICES

Since this paper is mainly about Education students' views, Science students were chosen to balance the views of other students within the same institution. The Science students overruled the idea of using South African indigenous languages and choosing to study an isiZulu module as they stressed that it would be inappropriate for the following reasons:

- Loss of the English language
- Loss of value in education

- The production of narrow-minded people and incompetent graduates, who are not relevant in any part of the world
- It would lead to a lack of foreign trade

The fears for the loss of English and value in education suggest that English is under threat. However, English will continue to be taught as an international language. In a general sense, sound education refers to a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and ideas of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training and research. It takes place under guidance and it is any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. Language is necessary for the purpose of teaching and learning which can be performed through any language.

Adding to the debate by science students, Moodley (2010) revealed that students and staff at UKZN did not prefer isiZulu to be used as a LoLT at the university because of negative attitudes towards isiZulu. She argued that attitudes towards language are the key factor in determining the success of the language policy or any other language policy. The question of narrow minded graduates is also subject to debate. A narrow-minded graduate is one that is either assimilated by or assimilates other people's cultures, language and ideas. Learning isiZulu cannot result in narrow-mindedness because it will be added to the language repertoire of an individual. Linguistic diversity should be promoted rather than being suppressed. Learning another language, especially one's own language and culture helps one to become broad-minded and competent in dealing with diversity. Divergent thinkers with multiple competencies in a number of languages, cultures and skills are necessary for trade and development in today's global village. According to Wenger (1998: 154), "identity is defined as something that we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives". Ramsay-Brijball (2004: 154) concluded that students usually seek "dual identity" and "negotiated identity". A negotiated identity enables isiZulu L1 speakers to narrow the divide between their academic and social lives in an informal campus setting and to protect other identities consciously or subconsciously when they revert to the use of either monolingual English or isiZulu as a medium of learning in the formal context.

7.5 STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES, ATTITUDES AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES

Sometimes a risk can be worth taking if success is worth the risk. Those who were courageous and took the risk reported that what seemed undoable was worth a try. After all, it was fun and the anxiety wore off after seeing how it worked. Participant 3 explained:

It was fun. You know learning in your own language is easier and its fun. **Into uyashesha nokuyigrebha** (it is quick to grab something). When the lecturer opens the book that we'll be using and she is reading to us and explaining. Automatically, you don't have reason and re-reason and re-arrange things in your head in order to understand it. You automatically say, "Oh, OK". Your mind moves faster when you learn in your own language.

The anxiety wore off. I didn't have anxiety anymore. I started enjoying class. Like the interaction was much better. It was fun. I know that people in the undergraduate class are afraid. They say, "When I go there I am just gonna do one module and just leave this thing" and then you find yourself at Level 3.

There were some positive experiences identified such as having a "good feeling of learning about your language" and the level of participation that it promotes during lessons. It also allows students to quickly grasp the concepts taught. The fear of the unknown was also eliminated, as was aptly stated by Respondent 3 that, "it wore off". This negotiated new identity was a result of a good experience that the participant had encountered during her studies. Some students soon discovered that using their mother tongue is not as problematic as portrayed by those who chose to rather avoid and escape it. Nkosi (2014, p. 251) writes that, although initially the students were hesitant to choose learning in the medium of isiZulu, there were some positive attitudes towards isiZulu as the LoLT once students had experienced such courses. Nkosi's research revealed that

after using isiZulu as LoLT the students enjoyed doing so because they gained confidence and improved their performance. They attested that it was not as a result of lower standards in the isiZulu medium modules, they felt that isiZulu modules were also challenging and credible as those taught in English (2014, p. 255).

The students revealed that before taking modules taught in isiZulu, they were anxious and uncertain about the impact this might have on their studies. However, they experienced a shift in their understanding of learning through isiZulu during the process. Respondent 1 admitted:

It has been like a big change, for example, in a class we are a mix of students including white students. But then if you want to say something there is a fear because you are not sure if you will say it in correct English. But if you can get off saying it in Zulu you can say it because it's a language you know well from home, you are able to communicate and participate actively because Zulu is your language.

Through studying modules in isiZulu, the respondent had developed sudden self-confidence. Previously, she feared speaking inappropriate English in a class comprising fluent native speakers of English. The students' "assumed identity" as

limited-English language speakers was a disadvantage to them. Assumed (or non-negotiated) identities are those that many - albeit not all - individuals are comfortable with and not interested in contesting. Often, these identities are the ones most valued and legitimised by the dominant discourses of identity (e.g. monolingual speakers of the majority language) (Pavlenko & Backledge, 2004). Ironically, in South Africa, the majority language is isiZulu, but the dominant discourses dictate English as the preferred language of the assumed identity. The FP students revealed that when they learnt modules in isiZulu, of which they had a good command, they were very satisfied and hence they developed a new and “negotiated identity” for themselves. Through a “negotiated identity” they chose to study modules in isiZulu. Pavlenko and Backledge (2004: 22) contend that identities are negotiated in a variety of sites, which include the family, the educational contexts such as schools and universities, workplace and public discourses on educational, language and immigration policies. Prior to taking PGCE modules in isiZulu, the students operated on an “imposed identity” of using English even though they were not confident which resulted in them feeling alienated by the LOLT used in studies prior to studying modules in isiZulu. It was through a “negotiated identity” that the student teachers discerned that school children who attend schools in town and who do not frequently use isiZulu seem to be impolite in as-far-as culture is concerned. Respondent 1 noted that:

Another thing I have seen is that children who attend schools in town do not speak much isiZulu anymore. I have also observed that even their level of respect has also dropped. When they go back to isiZulu I think that everything will change including their behaviour.

It could be established from the above that by using less isiZulu children also lose the moral values inculcated through the isiZulu language. The student teachers believed that if students were to revert to learning isiZulu, their behaviour would also improve. By discarding isiZulu, the cultural elements embodied through the language are lost, and thus the student teachers were of the view that using isiZulu at school would benefit learners in instilling the culture of respect which is expressed in isiZulu.

7.6 STUDENTS WALKING THE WALK AND TALKING THE TALK ABOUT MOTHER TONGUE ISSUES

The student teachers revealed that they had since discovered the link between language, culture and identity. They revealed that they had experienced that when learning a language, they were learning about culture. One student mentioned that Africans were currently reclaiming their full identity and, therefore, using African languages in higher education is one way of recovering what belongs to them. She added that in order to fully participate in culture one must learn the language and in order to be fluent in a language one must learn the culture which that language

represents and conveys. Language is linked and intertwined with a particular culture and discourse style. Therefore, when a language is taught, a whole way of life is taught.

Furthermore, students' experiences revealed that studying in one's mother tongue teaches one to be open-minded and develop independence and be less reliant on textbooks, because there are not many books in isiZulu; it encourages students to become researchers and keen users of available resources in the quest for knowledge in their field and language of study. Respondent 3 advised students to be open-minded and to give it an honest try before saying it is not going to work because they are going to have fun:

When you write an assignment you are thinking you are going to google stuff and sometimes you can't find Zulu books. I think that the main issue sometimes you don't find Zulu books especially regarding the topic that you are looking for. But the thing is, even if you don't find you will finish the assignment and you will pass it without those Zulu books. You will google it and translate into Zulu.

Learning in isiZulu gave the students the opportunity to explore various possibilities of learning options, to think about what they were learning and to use the meta-language when they did their assignments. This is the kind of learning that does not encourage memorising notes, but it is about thinking and reasoning. These findings are consistent with Nkosi's views where she says,

It can therefore, be concluded that isiZulu is perceived as of less value by students who have not experienced it as the LoLT as it was being rejected by students not studying in the medium of isiZulu in Moodley's 2010 study. Nkosi suggests that students who actually have experienced learning in isiZulu have a much more positive view about learning through isiZulu which others do not share (Nkosi, 2014, p. 251).

This argument proves that it is easy to dismiss something that you have heard about or have not experienced whilst it is easy to accept something that you have gone through or experienced personally.

7.7 NEGOTIATED IDENTITIES OF TWO OPPOSITE SIDES

Two kinds of identity seemed prevalent among the students' responses. On one hand, some students developed an "assumed identity" and on the other hand, another group identified a "negotiated identity". Students that chose not to join modules taught in isiZulu had developed an assumed identity of English, whilst those that chose to take modules taught in isiZulu developed a "negotiated identity". Each form of identity reflected how they were motivated to choose the modules that they wanted. These identities are, however, not generalised for all students. They are only applicable to the sample in the focus group interviews.

The fears expressed by the participants exist in many multilingual contexts where certain languages are seen as superior to others, depending on their role and function. South Africa is still trying to establish a link between the notion of “medium of instruction” and the challenge to ensure the effectiveness of the educational experience, as well as contributing to the attainment of a vibrant, multilingual society. The Ministerial Report on Higher Education (Department of Education, 2005) expressed the notion of “medium of instruction” placed at the point where the public, private and civil society factors crucially intersect. Its multi-layered impact on South Africa’s ability to achieve a functioning and sustainable multilingual society is potentially enormous. South African higher education has to rise to the challenge. De Vos (2013) indicates that the role of the university is to lead the transformation of the education system in the direction of a more extensive use of African languages. The role of the university in implementing the dream of using the mother tongue in higher education requires careful planning and appropriate mechanisms. Students will want the reassurance that this will be done alongside English, allowing the system to evolve by providing a well-defined framework in which they can see the possibility of achieving academic literacy and mastering academic discourse (Thamaga-Chitja and Mbatha, 2012). During the interviews, one of the respondents quite correctly argued that the dilemma needs to be addressed by economists and educational policy makers.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the reasons why African students are either motivated or not motivated to choose isiZulu modules at one HEI that offered some modules taught in isiZulu. Reasons were disparate and seemed to point to the issue of language attitudes and identity of the students. Some students that preferred not to take isiZulu modules had an “assumed identity”, while those students that were prepared to take isiZulu modules had a “negotiated identity” (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). Negotiated identities reflect a post-structuralist view of identity determined by wider societal motives and the personal identity of the individual rooted in culture. In the context of multilingualism, identities should be negotiated and should not be imposed on people. The study recommends that HEIs should prioritise the need to inform all stakeholders, including teachers, so that they may understand the role and importance of the mother tongue in education as a gateway to literacy development. Other countries which are attempting to use their languages in education are faced with such dilemmas.

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