

**English with or without g(u)ilt: A position paper on  
language in education policy for South Africa**

by

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presented at

The English Teachers Connect International Conference  
12 - 14 July 1997

at

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

**Introduction**

The writers of this paper are seven members of the division of Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. Together we have tried to understand the implications of current language-in-education policy formulations for our own work as English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals. What does it mean to be an English teacher and an educator of English teachers, in a country where the power of English has a colonial past but a global future? This is particularly difficult where the power of English is associated with, and partly responsible for, the systematic underdevelopment of African languages. Should we even continue to teach English? How do we make sense of parents' demands for their children to be taught in English and LANGTAG's<sup>1</sup> proposal for a national language campaign to counter such demands? What new relations are possible between the languages in South Africa as a result of their coming together in a single learning area, *Language, Literacy and Communication*, in *Curriculum 2005*?

**Writing this paper: the process**

Because all of us support the policy of multilingualism enshrined in the new Constitution, our agreed starting point meant that no one wanted to support the unproblematised teaching and promotion of English, to the exclusion of African languages. But at the beginning we also had many points of disagreement.

The following extracts from transcripts of our tapes show some of our (not unheated) disagreements.

Transcript 1

HJ: I heard you saying that it is irresponsible to do research in English ... where is this outrageous thought coming from? If there is too much happening in English why does this department even exist?

ER: The problem is the gap between the research that's done and the actual implementation of findings of research and doing things which move teachers from point A to point B ... so I would like specialists to sort of leave the

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<sup>1</sup> Readers are referred to Appendix A which is a glossary of terms used in language policy in South Africa. Some of these terms are controversial and we use the glossary to position ourselves in relation to them

research for a little while and get involved in training, in being learners themselves in a whole range of things which we have argued for very strongly in our different forums. So it's a research issue.

YR: I think the issue here is who the researchers are, because I think if we want to think about classroom research, there are many teachers who would benefit from just getting an understanding of how they can become researchers in their own contexts, and then use what they learn to improve practice in their settings.

#### Transcript 2

SG: I think it's actually immoral to talk about dehegemonising or disempowering English in terms of the incredible need for people to have English. ... It actually constructs disadvantage not to give people English. I think we really need a parallel thrust and that is why I like the idea of making African languages compulsory as subjects.

MM: Yes, it's good and fair for us to say OK ...we want to challenge the hegemony of English, but is it possible to do that at the economic level?

#### Transcript 3

MJ: English is the most well resourced language in the world. As ELT professionals we have an obligation to transfer these resources to marginalised languages.

YR: How can English teachers become a resource? How can that happen without there being a sort of patronising element to it ... so that the English teachers are not the top dogs ... sort of saying this is what is going on with you African language teachers.

#### Transcript 4

PW: Technology can solve the problem of the hegemony of English, because there is new software on the market that can make it possible for students to write their exams in any language they desire. For example, if you write something in English it can produce a transcript in Arabic and the same can be done with any language.

HJ: But what is the boot up language?

PW: English is the boot up language.

From the beginning we agreed to value divergent views within the group and not to force consensus. We wanted to produce a multi-voiced text that expressed the range of positions within the group. For instance, a dissonance surfaced early in the group centred on the term 'hegemony of English'. We had taken the unproblematic nature of our 'shared' use of this

term for granted, till one of our members expressed ‘uneasiness’ with it. The following meanings of ‘hegemony’ emerged.

- X For some of us it meant ‘the capacity of English to devalue/displace other languages’ (in our context, African languages).
- X This meaning was challenged as being ‘absolutist’, and scepticism was expressed about whether English ‘really controlled all aspects of the lives of African language speakers’. The sceptics claimed that African languages were used in family and private domains and that English had not really displaced home languages in intimate spheres.
- X For others, the term ‘hegemony of English’ was unacceptable because it seemed to imply a very negative view of English, when in reality, for many people, especially marginalised people, access to English is a highly desirable thing.
- X Some people’s view of the ‘right of access to English’ clashed with others’ criticism of this position because it would reinforce English’s hegemony.

Another dissonance arose in the use of the term ‘de-hegemonising English’.

- X Some people in the group thought that we had a responsibility to diminish the power of English.
- X Others in the group saw English as being so powerful that it is ‘impossible’ to diminish its power and status. The term suggested to them a defeatist agenda. It left English teachers paralysed with guilt (see Delpit, 1988). Instead they wanted English teachers to continue to ‘deliver English in the best possible way to the maximum number of people who want it’. In this way, they would avoid the paralysis implied in the term ‘hegemony of English’.

Our exploration of these early differences led to a much more complex understanding of the notion ‘hegemony of English’, which we will present later in this paper.

One of the interesting aspects of the process was that the more we talked to each other and tried to understand the points of disagreement, the more we realised that on many of the key issues our ideas were more similar than we had first thought possible. Because we tape-

recorded all of the group's discussions, we have been able to hold onto the richness of the multiplicity of dissenting voices for the formulation of our positions in this paper.

Once we had achieved some clarity on the range of positions in the group, we decided to review the positions already articulated in published material on language policy and on multilingual classroom practices (Heugh et al, 1995; Welch et al, 1996; LANGTAG, 1996; Lanham, 1995; Barkhuizen, 1996; LACSIG, 1996; Agnihotri, 1996; Ngugi, 1981; Delpit, 1988, 1995). Our discussion of the reading materials produced three areas for investigation:

- X the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT)
- X language as subject
- X the hegemony of English.

We found these areas enabled us to generate a wide range of ideas and a structure to contain them. The LANGTAG document provided the focus.

### **LANGTAG (Language Plan Task Group)**

In December 1995 the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology announced the establishment of a Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG) in order to identify South Africa's language-related needs and priorities. The Minister noted that it had become clear that 'a definite tendency to unilingualism' was emerging in the country despite the fact that multilingualism is 'indeed a sociolinguistic reality' in South Africa and despite the fact that 'the Constitution provides for the principle of multilingualism' (LANGTAG, 1996: i).

On the basis of this brief, LANGTAG set about powerfully articulating a multilingual policy for South Africa. Its strong proposals for the widespread use of African languages in all spheres assumes that such proposals will implicitly challenge the status and power of English. In the LANGTAG final report, *Towards a National Language Plan for South Africa*, this power, regularly referred to as 'the hegemony of English,' is constantly constructed as creating problems for language policy in South Africa and for speakers of South Africa's other languages. Explicit examples of this negative construction appear in the summary pertaining to each chapter and in every chapter of the report.

- X Chapter 1 on *Language equity* notes ‘the privileged status of English in South Africa in social and economic relations’ (p 46). For example, in Parliament and the Senate ‘the hegemony of English is overwhelming’ (p 47). Other examples include: cabinet ministers refusing to respond to documents unless they are in English; the blatant hegemony of English in the South African Broadcasting Corporation and Parliament’s failure to address this issue; business being conducted mainly in English at provincial and local government levels (p 47).
- X Chapter 2 on *Language Development in South Africa* cites one of the main ‘obstacles’ to solving development issues as the ‘fast growth in the English language, and its dominance in the domains of science and technology as well as in sport and music’ (p 69).
- X Chapter 3, concerned with *Language as an Economic Resource*, states that it is a problem that there is the view that English is enough. It argues that the imperatives created by the globalization of world economies have led to a demand that workers and management be multilingual ‘and that sustainable development will only be possible if education occurs via African languages together with English at all levels’ (p 99).
- X Chapter 4, on *Language in Education*, makes very little explicit reference to English. It does however recommend that ‘language attitude surveys’ be conducted, especially with regard to ‘parental preferences and knowledge about alternatives concerning languages of learning and teaching’ (p 126). The report downplays the widely known fact that many parents favour ‘straight for English’ as LOLT. It is also silent about the extensive resources needed to develop African languages as LOLT.
- X Chapter 5 on *Literacy* presents as a problem the fact that ‘the majority of existing [adult] literacy courses work on the assumption of a transition to English’ (p 29). It is also critical of ‘straight for English’ approaches (p 147) but concedes that the target language of these courses is ‘mostly English’ (p 128).
- X Chapter 6 on *Language in the Public Service* points to ‘the irony of the fact that ... the RDP [the national Reconstruction and Development Programme] is available only in English’ and that ‘the RDP itself does not even address the language question in South Africa’ (p 31). The Department of Land Affairs, for example, which works mainly with rural communities, produces an important newsletter in English only (p 161). Chapter 6 also problematises the fact that there is ‘a discernible trend towards unilingualism amongst the leadership of the political, business and educational elite’ (p 156).
- X Chapter 7, which deals with *Heritage and Sign Languages*, notes as a problem a ‘drift into English away from Heritage languages by third generation immigrants’ (p 33). The document states that ‘the multitude of languages in

South Africa results in the use of one language only (English) and that this creates the erroneous belief that everybody understands and prefers English' (p 182).

- X Chapter 8, which deals with *Equitable and Widespread Language Services*, documents the 'dominance of English' (p 194) in a wide range of public services. It highlights the huge gap between policy and practice by providing numerous examples from the media and other public services which are available in only English and Afrikaans.

It is clear that the document shows acute awareness of the problems associated with the hegemony of English as demonstrated by the extensive coverage given to this issue in all of the chapters in the report. LANGTAG clearly returns a verdict of 'guilty' for English. What is notable is that the report downplays *the right* of African language speakers to have access to English. We found only one direct acknowledgement of this right in the report: 'It is felt that there should be an equitable balance between access to English for those who want to use it and access to other languages to ensure that those who do not know English do not suffer in the process (p 49).

While the writers of this paper fully endorse LANGTAG's endeavour to expand and develop the use of African languages, we believe that the report does not give sufficient recognition to parents' perception that 'access to English' is what their children need, in order to succeed in our society. Delpit (1995) has taught us that it is inappropriate for legislators, policy makers and teachers to presume to know what is good for 'other peoples' children'.

### **How do we understand 'the hegemony of English'?**

There are many different ways of understanding what is meant by hegemony. At its simplest, we would argue that any social practice that achieves a dominance that begins to appear natural or inevitable is a hegemonic practice. If this practice looks like common sense, then most people support it with their consent. The more people who consent to the practice, the more natural it appears. If, for example, parents believe that English is the best language for education, then they will demand English for their children; they may even demand English as LOLT. This maintains the dominance of English over other languages and confirms its hegemonic position. Such a belief in the value of a language is what Bourdieu (1991) calls

‘symbolic power’, that is, the language is only powerful because people give it that symbolic status.

Bourdieu argues that this consent is ideologically manufactured. We can see, for example, how the media contribute to the privileging of English. This is partly as a result of the United States of America’s international control over the film, music and television industries and its widespread distribution of the cultural products of these industries. However, we cannot blame America for the absence of African language newspapers and magazines in South Africa. Even union publications, such as *The NEHAWU Worker*, are written in English.

Perhaps the most helpful of Bourdieu’s insights is that the education system, responsible for the formal teaching of languages, teaches both knowledge of languages (communicative competence, grammar, literacy etc) and the different social values attached to the languages. He draws attention to the fact that while the education system fails to provide students from marginalised languages with *knowledge of* and *access to* the dominant language, it succeeds in teaching them *recognition of (that is, misrecognition of)* its status and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991:62 our emphasis).

In South Africa, what this has meant in concrete terms is that students have left school with a less than full competence in English (the language of power) and an inflated view of its importance and value. Schools have given students a high regard for English, without really giving them full knowledge of English. In addition schools have done little to bring about a revaluing of African languages for education. What is needed is a language-in-education policy that reverses this - that gives knowledge of the language of power and a more critical view of its importance and value; as well as an appreciation of the importance of students’ own languages for education.

This said, it would be a mistake to assume that parents are simply naive or misinformed in recognising the value and importance of English, as if its only power were symbolic power. South African parents believe correctly, however unfortunate this may be, that English also has material power. It provides entry to the middle class, to middle class jobs and to middle

class pay packets. We need to be cautious about denying people, particularly working class people, access to the language that will give them the most social mobility. The proposed national language awareness campaigns (LANGTAG, 1996: 21, 59) will need to address both the symbolic power (attitudes) and the material power (economic capital) attached to languages in South Africa, if they are to be successful.

We have considered the symbolic power of English. We now need to think about how English has come to be so materially powerful, both nationally and internationally. Janks (1995) uses Arthur's economic theory of increasing returns to explain how English has come to assume a dominant position globally (Arthur: 1988; 1989; 1990). Arthur's theory is simple. He gives examples which show how if a product gets ahead in the market place it can wipe out its competitors, even if it is an inferior product. It gets 'locked in' (Arthur: 1989). Before arguing that English is in a position of increasing returns we want to illustrate this idea with a different kind of product on the market - the typewriter keyboard.

Arthur uses the QWERTYUIOP keyboard as an example. The layout of the keys on this keyboard is now used everywhere. There is no other Roman alphabet keyboard. This is dominance that goes beyond hegemony - no other possibilities have survived. Originally there was a different keyboard that enabled typists to type more quickly. With the old fashioned typewriters, this caused the keys to jam. The existing keyboard was deliberately designed to slow typists down. That is, it was specifically designed to be less efficient. Singer manufactured new typewriters using this slower keyboard on a massive scale. By chance, this was the most available keyboard on the market at that particular time, so many people happened to be trained to use it. This put the inferior QWERTYUIOP keyboard into a position of increasing returns:

The more people who trained to use it, the more machines were manufactured; the more these machines were manufactured, the more people needed to be trained to use this specific machine. The more this happened, the more the keyboard maintained its dominant position in the market. This snowball effect leads to 'lock in' - one product taking over the market. Today, with computers, there are billions of people who use this keyboard.

The only thing likely to reverse the keyboard's position of increasing returns would be a dramatic shift in technology, such that a keyboard were no longer needed. This is not as impossible as it seems. Voice recognition software - whereby the computer types from voice without people lifting a finger - could create such a revolution.

To return to our argument. We believe that English has achieved global dominance by being in a position of increasing returns. This is not an accident. To begin with, British colonial domination spread the use of English from Europe to several continents. This was followed by an aggressive post-colonial policy of teaching English as a second language worldwide. English second language teaching is currently one of Britain's largest export industries.

English is used as an official or semi official language in over 60 countries, and has a prominent place in a further 20. It is either dominant or well established in all six continents. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising. Over two thirds of the world's mail is written in English. Of all the information in the world's electronic retrieval systems, 80% is stored in English. English radio programmes are received by over a 150 million in 120 countries. Over 50 million children study English at primary level; over 80 million study it at secondary level. (Crystal, 1987:358 quoted in Pennycook, 1994:8).

These figures are already ten years out of date and Britain is not the only major player. America's dominance of world markets has resulted in the further diffusion of English. The more the domains of English use increase, the more people need to learn it. The more people know English, the more the domains of its use can expand and the more profitable it is to produce resources in English. A cycle of increasing returns for English is thus perpetuated.

No wonder parents want access to English for their children! In fact it is possible to argue that, in global terms, South Africa is lucky that it was not colonised by the Portuguese, the Germans, the French or the Spanish, because it may still have had to provide access to English!

The question is how do we provide this access without this resulting in South Africa's other languages going the way of the early keyboards. The possibility of language death has to be

taken seriously. The threat English poses to other languages is what Day (in Pennycook, 1994:14) calls 'linguistic genocide'. Language diversity is crucially important for maintaining diverse cultural identities, knowledges and ways of reading the world, that are central to functioning with flexibility and innovativeness in the modern world. Any policy that guarantees parents access to the language of power for their children, has simultaneously to ensure the growth and development of all languages in a multilingual society.

Access to English for South Africans thus creates a problematic contradiction (Janks, 1995: 109). If you provide more people with access to the dominant language, you perpetuate a situation of increasing returns and you may thereby contribute to maintaining the language's dominance. If, on the other hand, you deny students access to the dominant language, you perpetuate their marginalisation in a society that continues to recognise the value and importance of this language. You also deny them access to the extensive resources which have developed as a result of the language's dominance. This is what Lodge (1997) has called the 'access paradox'.

There is no doubt that the widespread access to English increases its hegemony. However, it can also be argued that in many countries, including South Africa, English is a language of the educated middle classes and acts as an effective social and economic gatekeeper. If everyone had access to English, English would no longer be an elitist language. In this way English could come to be seen as a resource, not as a problem.

### **The effects of the hegemony of English on South Africa's other languages**

Afrikaans is the only language in South Africa to have flourished despite the hegemony of English. The powerful position of Afrikaans has resulted from the extensive political will of Afrikaners and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. The Anglo-Boer wars 1880 - 1881 and 1899 -1902 resulted (amongst other things) in English and Dutch becoming the official languages of South Africa. It was only in 1925 that Afrikaans succeeded in replacing Dutch as an official language.

By 1925, Afrikaans had already been developed as a written language. In the years following its establishment as an official language, extensive material resources were made available to develop its corpus so as to ensure its use in all public and educational domains. Its constitutional status guaranteed it equality with English, and Afrikaans became the fastest developing language in the world. In the South African context, Afrikaans managed to put some brake on English's position of increasing returns.

After the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, it imposed 'mother-tongue medium of instruction' (as it was then called) in black primary education and both Afrikaans and English as medium in black secondary education. The medium policy was a powerful political move for two reasons. Firstly, it stopped the widespread use of English as LOLT in the black mission schools. Secondly, it divided African people along apartheid lines of language and ethnicity. Rejection of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was the flashpoint for the 1976 Soweto uprising and the start of the decline of the power of Afrikaans. Concessions were made and black students were allowed to choose either English or Afrikaans as medium (most chose English) and they were no longer required to study Afrikaans as a subject. It is this history<sup>2</sup> which makes the LANGTAG proposals for the use of students' primary languages as LOLT for pedagogic (not political) reasons so hard to sell to black parents.

In addition, and this is also particularly significant, Afrikaans as a subject was a compulsory part of all education. After 1976, it remained compulsory for white education. What this meant is that students had to pass Afrikaans to matriculate. As a result of the prominence of Afrikaans in the school curriculum, the necessary resources, both human and material, were provided to ensure the success of this policy. Less money was spent on the development of teaching resources for English, as these were imported from colonial sources. What the story of Afrikaans teaches us is that a compulsory policy of teaching a language-as-subject for

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<sup>2</sup> This account of the history of language in education policy in South Africa is extremely reductionist, as it is not the purpose of the paper to do justice to the history but to draw salient points from it. We refer readers to Hartshorne (1992), Heugh et al (1995), Janks (1990) for more careful analyses of this history.

twelve years of schooling, even to students who are resistant to the compulsion, produces adequate levels of bilingual competence.

During the period of Nationalist Party rule, Afrikaans achieved a hegemony alongside English, which the non-diminution clause in the 1994 Interim Constitution attempted to maintain. The policy proposals in this paper, in seeking redress for African languages, do not address the needs of Afrikaners to maintain the position of Afrikaans. English's position in South Africa also impacted negatively on African languages and continues to do so, particularly in terms of its symbolic and material value.

It is impossible to quantify the extent of the harmful effects of the combined hegemony of English and Afrikaans on South Africa's African languages, although evidence of these effects is apparent everywhere. In terms of language development, Chapter 2 of the LANGTAG report spells out the corpus development that is still needed to enable African languages to be used across the full range of public and educational domains. In terms of resources, there is very little in the way of pedagogical practice or materials for teaching African languages. Work needs to be done to bring African language teaching up to date in terms of the extensive understanding that has resulted from Applied Linguistics and language-in-education research undertaken since the 1960s. In terms of research, little has been done on the simultaneous acquisition of many languages in multi-lingual contexts such as our own. Less has been done on how this can impact on classrooms. In human terms, generations of black students have grown up without any public affirmation of their own languages or recognition of their multilingual competencies. It is a bitter irony that the students who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' are the ones who often speak more than five languages. In symbolic terms, one of the consequences of all this is that students often have negative attitudes to studying their own languages and regard people who speak English fluently as educated. English is gilded, not African languages.

### **Summary of our critique of the LANGTAG document**

Before moving on to our proposals for language-in-education policy in South Africa, it is necessary to remind readers of the critique of the LANGTAG document which we have made so far. To summarise then,

- 1 LANGTAG's downplays the right of access to English and this prevents a planned and effective policy of access to English competence.
- 2 LANGTAG's *implicit* view that the development and promotion of African languages will in itself diminish the hegemony of English does not offer a complete agenda to challenge this hegemony. As shown in the previous section, giving access to English both reinforces it and paradoxically challenges it. This is a far more complex view of the hegemony of English than the position taken by LANGTAG.
- 3 Though, on the whole, we agree with LANGTAG's main proposal for African languages as LOLT, we do not believe that this is feasible in the short and medium term. It is unlikely that people will readily accept an African language as LOLT. It is also not financially viable to think of the 9 African languages being developed as LOLTs as an immediate goal.

### **Recommendations for a language-in-education policy**

Because of the above critiques of LANGTAG, and in the light of our own beliefs and practices in English and African language pedagogy, we recommend a strong language-as-subject policy to accompany a language-of-choice policy for LOLT. We believe planning for multilingualism which includes the language of power (English in South Africa at present) will lead to a more realistic multilingual policy, whereas, planning multilingualism around silence (on the right of access to English) and guilt (about the hegemony of English), weakens both multilingualism and the delivery and development of English.

Our proposal is aimed at two levels of the educational system: school and university. Our paper will focus largely on recommendations for schools, because schools are the focus for policy change in the next five years. While we do recognise the urgency to address the needs of school based education, we cannot exclude universities. LANGTAG does mention policies across the educational spectrum, and includes some proposals for post-secondary education (p 129). We want to include tertiary education in our paper, for the following reasons:

i) We do not want universities to undermine the multilingual policy in schools. A multilingual policy in schools, without a corresponding change in the universities would have a negative backwash effect on school policy.

ii) The huge training needs of school teachers, faced with the new multilingual policies (and Outcomes Based Education), requires a transfer of resources from highly resourced centres to the resourced peripheries. English and Afrikaans language departments<sup>3</sup> in universities are already rich in language pedagogy to share with schools, as are these departments in some well-resourced schools. If in addition, universities develop multilingual policies and practices for themselves, they would then be able to share these, as well.

### **Recommendations for schools**

Our proposal has three central recommendations, all underpinned by a strong language-as-subject route to a multilingual policy. While we believe that students should be encouraged to learn three languages at school, the following recommendations only make one language compulsory. The recommendations are:

- 1 Students should have a right of access to the language of power, which at this moment in the history of South Africa is English.
- 2 All students must learn at least one African language as subject throughout the years of compulsory schooling. Already qualified teachers in schools should be enabled and encouraged to learn an African language. Newly qualifying teachers must obtain an African language endorsement for certification.
- 3 Students should have the right to choose any of the eleven official languages as LOLT.

We stress that we view these recommendations as equally important and completely interdependent. Each recommendation supports and enables the other. Any focus on one or two at the expense of the other/s would be a misrepresentation of our position.

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<sup>3</sup> In different universities language departments are variously named as English, Afrikaans Applied Linguistics, Language in education, Linguistics, Applied Language Studies departments.

### **Recommendation 1.**

**All school students should have the right of access to the language of power, which at this moment in the history of South Africa, is English. Planned and effective provision for its delivery must be made an explicit part of language policy.**

As we have said before, a powerful way to ‘de-hegemonise’ English is to make it widely available to a large number of people so that it is no longer seen to be an elitist language. However, access to a competent knowledge (proficiency) in English does not only have to be through LOLT, but can be effectively achieved through the English-as-subject route. This assumption is substantiated by the experience of students in historically white schools. Through having to learn English or Afrikaans as a compulsory subject, they achieved a measure of bilingual competence, partly because of the resources of the schools and the competence of the teachers. We believe that if extensive resources ( materials and in-service teacher development) are put into the delivery of English as a subject, parents will be more willing for their children to learn through another language. Our policy emphasises planned access to English as subject so that children will be guaranteed the effective acquisition of English. If students do acquire English by means of this subject policy, then English can be used as a library language (as in India and Mozambique) whereby students can use their reading knowledge of English to access a wide range of internationally published resources, particularly at the tertiary level. English as a library language can then support an African language as LOLT at all levels of education.

### **Recommendation 2**

**All students must learn at least one African language as subject throughout the years of compulsory schooling.**

We believe that the only practicable way to develop African languages in the *short and medium term* is through a strong language-as-subject route for the African languages. By a strong African language-as-subject route, we mean three things.

i) All South Africans should leave school with at least an adequate bilingual competence. This competence should include competence in at least one African language.

ii) The best possible resources (methodology, materials, teacher training, professionalisation of African language teachers) should be brought into the teaching and learning of African languages as both main and additional languages. African languages as subjects have already been developed as part of the school curriculum up to matriculation level. This gives a language-as-subject policy more economic feasibility than an African languages as LOLT policy. However, in the short term we do envisage a major (and resource demanding) transformation of the way these languages are taught. One learning area for the teaching of all languages in *Curriculum 2005* is a new development that will usher in a new phase of collaboration for language development that ends the historical separation of language teachers from one another. This will enable the sharing of good language pedagogy across the different languages.

iii) African languages as subject, taught as main languages should ensure both BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) for learners (Cummins, 1980). Taught as an additional language, learners need only acquire BICS, often referred to as communicative competence.

We turn now to our reasons for recommending that an African language be a compulsory subject in the curriculum. We do not make this recommendation lightly, or in ignorance of the past imposition of languages, which our history has taught us can create conflict. We have several reasons for this strong recommendation.

i) Redress:

Making African languages compulsory will increase the status of these languages.

Competence in African languages can then be a requirement for entry into a range of jobs and professions. It will also facilitate their use in public domains.

ii) Development:

It will attract national resources for the linguistic development of these languages. In addition publishers will be willing to invest money in the development of teaching materials because they will have a guaranteed market.

ii) Reconciliation:

White South Africans have been cut off from their fellow black South Africans by their inability to speak an African language. This language-in-education policy will enable the next

generation of white South Africans to build bridges in languages in which they are not comfortably superior. It will serve as a tangible symbol of levelling the playing fields and is a policy initiative that will enable the building of a unified multilingual nation.

The LANGTAG document stops short of making an African language compulsory. It only ‘strongly recommends that where the students’ L1 is either Afrikaans or English, an African language should be the additional language’ (p 124). While we are sympathetic to the sensitivities that the LANGTAG document was obviously protecting, we feel that leaving the choice of an African language as optional, defeats the very agenda of developing African languages.

One obvious reason for some people objecting to the ‘imposition’ of an African language has been the prior history of the imposition of Afrikaans and English. Our response to this objection is that

there is a huge difference between a **dominant** language (such as Afrikaans) being imposed upon a **marginalised** community, and a marginalised language, such as an African language, being imposed on a dominant community. We cannot make a simple comparison between the two scenarios without considering i) the power and resource differences between the communities and the languages being compared and ii) the overriding benefits of the ‘imposition’ that we propose’ (Joseph and Ramani, 1996: p 10).

We think it ironic that African languages which once suffered underdevelopment through Afrikaans and English domination, should now suffer a second round of underdevelopment on the noble but mistaken sensitivities over perpetuating our legacy of ‘imposition’. In any case where is there freedom in education to *not learn* an additional language? In all parts of the world, but more so in multilingual countries, learners are compulsorily required to learn an additional language. We are arguing that, in South Africa, this additional language must be an African language, but with freedom to choose among any of the African languages.

A central part of our recommendation that African languages be taught as subject is that teachers should be enabled and encouraged to learn an African language and that an African language endorsement be required for new teachers wanting certification. As black South African teachers all speak African languages (and English or Afrikaans), this requirement is

only likely to affect white teachers. We think it is sufficient if teachers are able to acquire BICS in the African language. The Independent Examination Board level 1 could be a possible standard setter. Communicative competence in an African language will enable teachers to

- X understand the problems of their students
- X create a positive affective climate in which their students can communicate more comfortably with them
- X affirm the students' primary languages
- X provide a model for bilingual English/Afrikaans students
- X code-switch to provide students with explanations where necessary
- X understand students who code-switch in class.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Language of choice for LOLT<sup>4</sup>**

Current policy on LOLT as articulated in the LANGTAG document makes a strong recommendation that

Language policy in the education sector should promote the use of students' primary language as languages of learning and teaching in the context of an additive multilingual paradigm and with due regard to the wishes and attitudes of parents, teachers and students (p 124).

There can be no doubt of the theoretical soundness of this recommendation because it is clearly easier for students to learn through a medium in which they are completely at home, emotionally and cognitively. However, our history of apartheid language-in-education policy makes parents reluctant to accept this option now. We therefore strongly support this recommendation, though some members of the group doubt the immediate realisability of African languages as LOLTs. The economic costs of developing all of the official African

languages as LOLTs is enormous. We therefore see this as a long term goal, rather than an immediate one. Going for an African language as LOLT policy as though it were practicable now, could prove to be a recipe for its failure, and for the (unintended) continuation of the dominance of English as LOLT.

A further point about language of choice for LOLT is that we are not dealing here with free choice. Choices are structured in dominance and are determined by 'pragmatic necessity' (Ndebele, 1987:222). Parents are likely to succumb to social and economic pressures and to choose English as their 'language of choice' for LOLT, thus subverting the admirable aim of developing African languages as LOLTs. If however, a strong access to English-as-subject policy is in place, parents may be more willing to consider an African language for LOLT.

But even if parents are willing to choose an African language as LOLT, the danger exists of a pedagogically underdeveloped model of LOLT being foisted upon students. We do not as yet have powerful models of LOLT in African languages. Merely replacing English with an African language, especially given a history of transmission teaching and rote learning (Macdonald, 1990) is not going to yield the most effective form of LOLT.

Our argument is that an enriched language-as-subject route (for both English and African languages) is likely to yield, in embryonic form, the most manageable and realistic models of LOLT within the constraints of the existing system. This will develop out of enriched content for language-as-subject which, in our vision, draws from all the new Learning Areas in *Curriculum 2005*. This new outcomes based curriculum which sees problem-solving, real-life communication, critical thinking, etc as desired outcomes, is also likely to lead to the development of challenging and meaningful curricula for languages-as-subject. These can then be used as a basis for developing LOLT for African languages. English and Afrikaans as LOLT will also be improved.

In sum, our recommendations for schools echo what Ngugi (1981) said in *Decolonising the Mind* fifteen years ago. In relation to schools he argues that English should be decentred and

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<sup>4</sup> Readers are urged to consult the appendix for an explanation of the differences between

African languages should be put at the centre of the curriculum, both as subjects and languages of learning and teaching (LOLTS).

Equally important for our cultural renaissance is the teaching and study of African languages. We have already seen what any colonial system does: impose its tongue on the subject races, and then downgrade the vernacular tongues of the people. By so doing they make the acquisition of their tongue a status symbol; anyone who learns it begins to despise the peasant majority and their barbaric tongues ... That a study of our own languages is important for a meaningful self image is increasingly being realised (Ngugi, 1981: 72).

Although Ngugi is talking about the situation in his own country the above statement applies also to South Africa but the difference is that very few people see English as an imposition because of its economic and social benefits. But teachers and academics who are now calling for the development of multilingualism have come to understand the disadvantages of an English only approach. To counter the alienating effects of the hegemony of English they realise that African languages should be developed both as subjects and languages of learning and teaching.

## **Recommendations for universities**

### **Recommendation 1**

**Universities should develop multilingual language policies.**

Universities must develop multilingual policies, with specific recommendations for African languages as subject, and in the long term for African languages as LOLTs. An explicit multilingual policy must be seen as part of a transformation agenda for universities and should be addressed in their Mission statements.

### **Recommendation 2**

**All university lecturers should be enabled and encouraged to learn an African language.**

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the terms medium of instruction and LOLT (language/s of learning and teaching).

Such a policy will put pressure on universities to find the means and the resources for facilitating acquisition of African languages. These might include subsidising costs of tuition, creating time for staff to learn an African language during working hours, funding research on African language acquisition, linking multilingual competence with promotion, encouraging collaboration across language departments and so on. In the long term, university teachers will automatically have the ability to speak an African language as a result of the school policy that we are proposing.

These recommendations that we urge universities to make will enable departments to create multilingual policies at the departmental level. However, departments do not have to wait for institutional policy to change and can proactively introduce a range of multilingual practices. In our own division of Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand we have explicitly positioned ourselves as teachers of English in a multilingual context and have tried to ensure that this position underpins the practices in many of our courses and in much of the research undertaken by individual members of staff.

These practices include

- X getting students to investigate their own multilingual practices in a variety of domains
- X affirming students' multilingual capabilities
- X requiring students to study a range of literacies and to understand how different literacies contribute to the development of their multiple intelligences.
- X giving students access to academic literacy through our Foundation course
- X extensive work on critical language awareness which enables students to understand the relationship between language and power
- X transferring the resources of English to the teaching of African languages as exemplified in the pioneering African Language Group's (ALG's) research project in which staff in the department have collaborated with Zulu teachers to develop new approaches and materials for the teaching of Zulu as an additional language
- X developing classroom materials for the teaching of English in the South African context.

- X developing distance education materials for the inservice training of English teachers to enable them to give their own students access to English, often in poorly resourced rural communities
- X teaching language policy in such a way as to undermine the symbolic power of English while recognising its material power
- X collaborating with other university departments (African languages, Afrikaans, Translation) for the teaching of language policy.

One of the points of difference that remain unresolved in the group of writers is whether departments of English (including our own) need to raise the issue of the learning of an African language by its staff as a matter of departmental policy. Some of the writers of this paper feel that the credibility of the policies suggested in this paper are undermined if we do not ourselves seek to problematise our own implicit monolingualism. One of the writers in this group also pointed out that the multilingual practices advocated in courses taught by the department and implemented in some of these courses, do not have credibility with learners because they do not see staff developing their own multilingual competence.

### **Conclusion**

While supporting the use of students' main language/s for teaching and learning across the curriculum (LOLT), we propose a strong language-as-subject policy. We believe that the possibilities for transformation of a careful language-as-subject policy have not been made explicit in any of the most recent policy documents. These documents include *The Schools Education Bill* (Gauteng Provincial Gazette Extraordinary, 12 May 1995), *Towards a National Language Plan for South Africa* (LANGTAG, 1996), *The Government Gazette* (May 1997).

Sachs (1994:1), a constitutional court judge, is correct when he says that in South Africa 'all language rights are rights against English'. While we agree with the spirit behind this statement, we believe that it is only when the right of access to the language of power is guaranteed (and this may not always be English), that other rights can be achieved. Our language-in-education proposals are therefore designed to guarantee students the right of

access to the language of power (whatever it is), while at the same time ensuring redress for African languages. This redress will enable us to teach English as a subject without guilt and to help our students understand that all languages are valuable and are a national treasure. Gilt is not a property of the dominant language alone, all languages are distinctive. The real pot of gold at the end of the rainbow will only be reached when all South Africans are multilingual.

## **Appendix A: Glossary**

This glossary provides definitions/explanations of various terms used in the literature on language in education and language policy. These terms are problematic in multi-lingual societies and are highly contested in South Africa. The gloss on these terms captures some of the competing meanings and foregrounds our preferences. We are indebted to Reed (1996), which provided the basis for this glossary.

*LANGTAG* refers to the Language Task Action Group delegated by the Minister of Education, in 1995, to establish South Africa's language related needs and policies.

*Curriculum 2005* refers to the 1997 outcomes based curriculum for Grades 1 to 9 to be implemented gradually from 1998 to 2005. In South Africa, this is the first curriculum that has been designed for an integrated school system. In addition, the focus on outcomes is also designed to feed a single national qualifications framework (NQF) for both formal and non-formal education and training.

*First language and native language and mother tongue and home language* are all terms used to describe the language that a child acquires from birth and in which he or she is most proficient (i.e. advanced in ability to use). However, the terms are problematic in a multilingual society for several reasons. Firstly, many children begin to acquire more than one language from their earliest childhood so that they do not have one first or native (in the sense of original) or home language. Secondly, for some people, the language(s) that they acquired first do not continue to be the languages in which they are most competent as adults or which they feel most comfortable using. Thirdly, the main language(s) of a family may be the language(s) of the father or the dominant language of the community in which the family lives rather than mother's language(s).

*Second language* is a term used to describe a language which an individual adds to a first language, often in a formal learning context. It differs from a foreign language (see definition

below) in that it describes a language which is widely used in the society in which some individuals are learning the second language as an additional language. This term is also problematic in a multilingual society in which children begin to acquire two or more languages from earliest childhood. The label 'English Second Language' for a school subject is misleading when it may be the third, fourth or fifth language of some learners and where it may be a foreign language for learners in contexts where they have little or no contact with it outside the classroom. In South Africa, 'second language' is sometimes associated with 'second rate' and has thus acquired pejorative overtones.

*Additional language* refers to any language which an individual adds to his or her first language or main/primary language(s). We use the term additional language rather than second language to avoid the pejorification and because we believe that this term complements the approach to multilingualism as additive, which we support.

*Main language and primary language* both refer to the language most often used by an individual, in which he or she becomes proficient. Some people who are fully bilingual or multilingual (see below) may use two or more languages on an approximately equal basis and thus have more than one main/primary language. These people may choose to use one of their main/primary languages in some contexts and another main/primary language in other contexts. We prefer to use these terms and to avoid 'first language' or 'mother tongue'.

*Target language* refers to any language which an individual aims to learn in addition to the language(s) acquired in early childhood.

*Language of choice* refers to the language (or variety of a language) which an individual selects for use in a particular context.

*Foreign language* refers to any language which learners are unlikely to hear or read outside the classroom in which they are learning it, because it is not in use in the wider community. European languages such as Russian and Spanish would be examples of foreign languages in South Africa. It has been argued that English is a foreign language for students in some parts of South Africa because they neither hear nor read the language outside the classroom.

*Dominant language* refers to a language (or languages) most widely used in a particular context or community. In South Africa, English and Afrikaans have been the dominant languages of schooling beyond the junior primary level. For example, these have been the languages in which textbooks and examination papers have been written. In local community contexts the dominant language is the one most widely used in that community.

*Monolingual/monolingualism* refers to advanced proficiency in only one language.

*Bilingual/bilingualism* refers to proficiency in two languages, but not necessarily equal proficiency. Prior to the eleven official language policy, enshrined in the 1994 South African Constitution, South Africa had only two official languages: English and Afrikaans. 'Bilingualism' was often used to refer to only Afrikaans/English bilingualism. We do not use the term in this way. One of the consequences of the two official languages policy is that monolingualism is rare in South Africa.

*Multilingual/multilingualism* refers to proficiency in more than two languages. Many South Africans, whose main language is neither English nor Afrikaans (the former official languages), speak five or more languages.

*Additive bilingualism* refers to a situation in which individuals add a language to their main language but at the same time continue to develop their main language.

*Subtractive bilingualism* refers to a situation in which individuals become unable to proficiently use their main language because this language has been replaced by an additional language which is dominant in school or workplace or local community or all of these. In other words, much of the ability to use the main language is subtracted or lost.

*Medium of instruction* is the term previously used in South Africa to refer to the language of instruction for subjects across the curriculum. Previous medium of instruction policy proscribed code-switching and required teachers to use the prescribed language inflexibly. Medium of instruction tends to focus on the language of teaching and to background the role that language plays in learning. Medium of instruction also refers to the language used in

textbooks, other classroom materials, and the language used for examination papers and examination answers across the curriculum.

*Language(s) of learning and teaching (LOLT)* refers to the language or languages used for both learning and teaching across the curriculum and gives equal importance to both learning and teaching. It is also used to refer to the language/s used in textbooks, other classroom materials and the language/s used for examination papers and answers across the curriculum. LOLT recognises that teachers and learners should use whatever languages are necessary to ensure that the students understand and recognises the importance of allowing students to use the full range of their linguistic codes and resources.

*Language as subject* refers to any language that is offered as one of the subjects that students may study at school. Curriculum 2005 places all languages as subject within the same Learning Area, *Language, Literacy and Communication*. Languages as subject will now be offered as either primary language or additional language. The old curriculum offered English and Afrikaans as either first or second languages and African languages as either first or third languages. In the new curriculum African languages have the same status as English and Afrikaans for the first time. Foreign languages are also offered as part of the language-as-subject curriculum. We believe that our argument that Language-as-subject has been neglected, in the new policy formulations, is confirmed by the fact that it has not yet acquired acronym status.

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