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Multilingual education in South African universities: policies, pedagogy and practicality

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Abstract
Universities in South Africa have over the last few years adopted multilingual language policies with a view to implementing multilingual education. The adoption of these language policies and the implementation of multilingual education accords with the new democratic constitution which recognizes 11 official languages at national level and the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE) adopted by government in 2002 to promote equity of access and success for all students in higher education. The aim of this article is to discuss the implementation of multilingual education in traditionally white English universities, and at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The argument of this article is that although multilingual education is not yet fully realized at UCT, the existing multilingual language policy has created agentive and implementational spaces for multilingual education in that university. The article draws insight from ethnographic theories and the multilingual education projects initiated at the university.

Keywords: Multilingual education, Multilingual pedagogy, Language planning, Language policy, Micro language planning

1. Introduction

South Africa’s population of approximately 50 million people is serviced by 23 universities. Since the democratic change of 1994 and the resultant increase of linguistic diversity at tertiary institutions, government has developed various multilingual language policy frameworks to ensure equity of access and success for all students. The first policy document that lays the foundation for the adoption of multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes at tertiary institutions is South Africa’s Constitution which recognizes 11 languages as official languages at national level. These languages are English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Swati, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho (Pedi), Tswana, Venda and Tsonga. To give effect to this constitutional provision, the government adopted the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE) in 2002 (Department of Education, 2002). This policy requires universities to develop multilingual language policies and to implement multilingualism in their institutional environment and in teaching and learning programmes. Consequently, most universities (87%) have already developed multilingual language policies. However, some of these language policies are still very symbolic and their implementation in teaching and learning programmes remains a challenge.

The aim of this article is to discuss the implementation of multilingual education at traditionally white English medium universities with special reference to the University of Cape Town (hereafter UCT). It is the contention of this article that although the multilingual language policy at this university has not yet been fully implemented, its adoption opens up ideological, implementational and agentive spaces for multilingual education at UCT. To support this argument, I will draw insight from ethnographic studies of scholars such as Horberger and Johnson (2007) and Johnson (2009). In fact, Hornberger (2002, p. 30) describes language policy as “essentially about opening up ideological and implementational space in the environment for as many languages as possible”. The advantage of an ethnographic approach is that unlike traditional or
neoclassical approaches to language policy implementation which lays much emphasis on the role of authoritative bodies such as government in language policy implementation, the ethnographic approach recognizes the role of individual agents in this regard (Heller, 2007; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). In contrast to traditional language planning where the power to implement a language policy rests with central authorities, the ethnographic approach consists in lecturers and students being seen as social actors who actively adjust, change, transform and deploy their valuable linguistic resources in their interactions with others. Thus, both teachers and learners are considered active agents in prying open the ideological and implementation spaces for multilingual education in South African universities.

The article begins by defining the term ‘multilingual education’ and then gives an overview of the existing language policy frameworks underlying the implementation of multilingual education in South African universities, and UCT in particular. This is followed by a discussion of theoretical and practical strategies adopted by UCT in implementing multilingual education.

2. The term ‘multilingual education’

The use of the term ‘multilingual education’ is fairly recent in language planning literature. UNESCO, for example, only adopted the term in 1992 as part of its General Conference Resolution no. 30/C. According to this resolution the term ‘multilingual education’ refers to “the use of at least three languages, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education.” (UNESCO, 2003). This definition is based on the view that the requirements of global and national participation and the specific needs of particular, culturally and linguistically distinct communities can only be addressed by multilingual education. Thus multilingual education seeks to strike a balance between the global and the local, that is, to maximize the benefits of internationalization while promoting the preservation of cultural identities and mobility and dialogue.

In South Africa, the term ‘multilingual education’ implies the use of at least two languages as media of instruction and the addition of “a second and even a third language to each pupil’s linguistic repertoire in ways which would best guarantee both academic and linguistic success” (Heugh, 1995, p. 6). Accordingly, within the context of UCT, multilingual education entails the use of English in complementarity with students’ first languages and the learning of another additional language, preferably Afrikaans or Xhosa. In other South African universities, the term ‘multilingual education’ is defined differently according to particular contexts in which the policies are implemented. It is difficult to define this term in a way which has general applicability for all universities. It would be better to think of definitions in terms of working models which may also change because of changing circumstances.

It is important to note that in other parts of the world other terms such as ‘plurilingualism’ are used instead of the term ‘multilingual education’. In Europe, for example, the Council of Europe distinguishes between multilingualism and plurilingualism. The term ‘multilingualism’ is used to refer ‘exclusively to the presence of several languages in a given space, independently of those who use them’, whereas the term ‘plurilingualism’ is used to refer to an individual’s “ability to use languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes” (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 17). Notwithstanding these differences, the term ‘multilingualism’ is used in this study to refer to both meanings, that is, the use of three or more languages in one context and the individual’s ability to use different languages or their varieties. Thus, multilingual education implies that different languages can be used in a classroom situation catering for the linguistic needs of different students, or students who have repertoires of languages or language varieties that cut across each other.

A further complication with regard to the definition of the term ‘multilingual education’ is the construct of ‘language’ itself. There are two views in this regard. The first view regards languages as strictly separable, isolable or discreet entities. The second one regards languages as more permeable, more liquid-like, interpenetrating each other (Garcia, 2009). Recently, there has been a growing body of literature in support of the latter view. Accordingly, multilingual education may not necessarily involve discrete languages only, but also language varieties that cut across each other or intermingle with each other.

3. The language policy frameworks

3.1. The constitutional framework

The statutory provision that laid the foundation for the implementation of multilingualism in South African universities is the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) which recognizes 11 languages as official languages at national level. During the apartheid era, only English and Afrikaans were declared by law to be the only official languages that were permitted for the purpose of teaching and learning at tertiary institutions. Accordingly, universities in South Africa were divided in terms of language into English and Afrikaans medium universities. But under the new constitution, “everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable” (Section 29.2).
regard to lan...

The policy makes the following provisions with regard to the use of languages of learning and teaching in higher education:

- **First**, in Section 15.1 the policy acknowledges the current position of English and Afrikaans as the dominant languages of instruction in higher education and believes that in the light of practical and other considerations it will be necessary to work within the confines of the status quo until such time as other South African languages have been developed to a level where they may be used in all higher educational functions (Section 15.1).
- **Second**, the policy requires that "consideration should be given to the development of other South African languages for use in instruction, as part of a medium to long-term strategy to promote multilingualism. In this regard, the Ministry will give urgent attention to the establishment of a task team to advise on the development of an appropriate framework and implementation plan, including costing and time-frames."
- **Third**, the policy further acknowledges that "the promotion of South African languages for use in instruction in higher education will require, amongst others, the development of dictionaries and other teaching materials. The Ministry will work in close collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture in this regard" (Section 15.2.1).
- **Fourth**, the policy requires "all higher education institutions to develop strategies for promoting proficiency in the designated language(s) of tuition, including the provision of languages and academic literacy development programmes." (Department of Education, 2002)

Although this language policy has been criticized for various reasons (cf. Balfour, 2005a, 2005b; Madiba, 2010a; Van der Walt, 2004), it has certainly opened up ideological spaces for the adoption of multilingual language policies in most universities, particularly in traditionally white universities. The policy has led to the adoption of multilingual education policies in about 20 of the 23 universities. The following table shows the types of multilingual language policies developed so far by different universities (see Fig. 1).

This table shows that most universities have adopted multilingual language policies with a minimum of three languages as official languages of the institution. Only a few universities have adopted a bilingual language policy. The choice of languages at each university is determined by socio-historical circumstances and the language situation of the region in which the university is situated. This approach to language selection on the basis of regional linguistic demography is recommended by the Ministerial Committee’s Report to the Minister of Education entitled "The development of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education" (Department of Education, 2005). The report recommends that universities promote, besides English and Afrikaans, other main languages of the region. Thus universities such as UCT, which are situated in the Western Cape Province, should, in addition to English, adopt Xhosa and Afrikaans which are the main regional languages.

The table also shows that English is recognized as the primary or one of the primary media of instruction in all the South African universities. It is only in traditionally Afrikaans universities where Afrikaans is also used as the primary medium of instruction. It is also interesting to note that at this stage no university in South Africa makes use of an indigenous African language as a primary medium of instruction, except in language disciplines. An analysis of the various language policies clearly shows that the commitment of most universities to African languages only concerns their development or intellectualization with a view to using them as media of teaching, learning and research in the distant future. As Madiba (2010a) argues, this approach is theoretically flawed as languages develop through use. Thus it can be argued that for African languages to be effectively developed as media of instruction in higher education, they should be used in their current form as primary or auxiliary media of instruction.

### 3.2. National language policy for higher education

To give substance to the constitutional provisions with regard to language in education in higher education, government promulgated the Language Policy for Higher Education on 6 November 2002. The policy makes the following provisions with regard to languages of learning and teaching in higher education:

- **First**, in Section 15.1 the policy acknowledges the current position of English and Afrikaans as the dominant languages of instruction in higher education and believes that in the light of practical and other considerations it will be necessary to work within the confines of the status quo until such time as other South African languages have been developed to a level where they may be used in all higher educational functions (Section 15.1).
- **Second**, the policy requires that "consideration should be given to the development of other South African languages for use in instruction, as part of a medium to long-term strategy to promote multilingualism. In this regard, the Ministry will give urgent attention to the establishment of a task team to advise on the development of an appropriate framework and implementation plan, including costing and time-frames."
- **Third**, the policy further acknowledges that "the promotion of South African languages for use in instruction in higher education will require, amongst others, the development of dictionaries and other teaching materials. The Ministry will work in close collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture in this regard" (Section 15.2.1).
- **Fourth**, the policy requires "all higher education institutions to develop strategies for promoting proficiency in the designated language(s) of tuition, including the provision of languages and academic literacy development programmes." (Department of Education, 2002)

### Table: South African universities’ language policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Language Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stellenbosch</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Southern Sotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwazulu-Natal</td>
<td>English, Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zululand</td>
<td>English, Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Hare</td>
<td>English, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unisa</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, All nine African Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Sisulu</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Peninsula</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Venda, Tsonga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUT</td>
<td>English, Zulu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. South African universities’ language policies.
However, although the multilingual language policies listed in the table above are not yet fully implemented, they open up ideological, implementational and agentive spaces for multilingual education in their respective universities. At UCT for example, the adoption of the multilingual language policy has created a space for faculties, departments and individual agents such as lecturers and students to pilot the implementation of multilingual education. These initiatives will be the focus of the next section which begins with a brief overview of UCT’s language policy.

4. UCT’s language policy

4.1. Background

UCT’s language policy was developed in 1999 and revised in 2003. This language policy marked a language ideological change from English-only to English-plus. Since its inception in 1829 and its emergence as a full-fledged university in 1918, UCT promoted an English-only language policy which, according to Hall (2006, p. 14), was designed to suit the needs of a "homogenous community (overwhelmingly white, predominantly male, English speaking, economically privileged)". The adoption of an English-plus language policy was adopted after the Pan South African Languages Board (hereafter PanSALB) rejected the English-only university which was contrary to the requirements of the LPHE. Against this backdrop, the new language policy recognizes English, Afrikaans and Xhosa as the official languages of the university. As evidenced by the following trilingual logo, UCT has adopted a firm policy to promote the use of its three languages in its institutional environment and to a lesser extent, for purposes of communication with the public at large. For example, the name of the University appears on the logo in the three official languages (see Fig. 2).

4.2. Provisions of the language policy with regard to multilingual education

In its preamble, UCT’s language policy emphasizes “the need to prepare students to participate fully in a multilingual society, where multilingual proficiency and awareness are essential” (University of Cape Town Language policy, 1999 (revised 2003), p. 1). The policy stresses the importance of developing English academic literacy on the one hand, and multilingual awareness and multilingual proficiency, on the other hand. Thus the policy recognizes English as the primary medium of teaching and examination, except in language and literature departments where another language is taught and may be used. To provide for the implementation of multilingualism, the policy makes the following recommendations:

To further the objective of the promotion of multilingual awareness and proficiency, all academic programme conveners and teachers will be required, to explore and implement ways in which these aims may be achieved through the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programme structures in accordance with the UCT Language Plan.

These provisions are indicative that UCT has shifted from its English-only to an English-plus language ideology. This shift is in line with the new vision of the University to change its historical English identity to become an Afropolitan university which promotes the conceptual expansion of UCT as an established principle throughout Africa and the world at large. Although the policy still recognizes English as the primary tuition medium, by making provision for the learning and use of other languages at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, it wedged open the implementational and agentive spaces for multilingual education. Although some scholars such as Balfour (2005a,b) regard this decentralized approach as an indication of the universities’ lack of commitment to implementing multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes,
this approach allows for bottom-up processes that are essential for policy implementation at meso- and micro-levels. At meso-level, faculties and departments need to develop policies and plans that are conducive to the implementation of multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes. At the micro-level (i.e. classroom level) language policies need to be developed for a multilingual classroom (cf. Hélot & Laore, 2011). Where agency is shared, faculties, departments, individual lecturers and multilingual students themselves are pivotal to the successful implementation of multilingual education at meso- and micro-levels. Accordingly, there are several multilingual education projects that are being piloted at UCT. These projects will be discussed in detail in the following sections, but this discussion will be preceded by a discussion of the theoretical framework underpinning the implementation of UCT’s language policy in teaching and learning programmes.

4.3. Multilingual education at UCT: theoretical framework

The implementation of multilingual education needs to be based on well-researched theoretical pedagogical frameworks or models (Madiba, 2010a; Van der Walt, 2004). In the last few years UCT, like many other universities in South Africa, has developed creative and innovative strategies to implement its multilingual language policy in its institutional environment and in teaching and learning programmes. These strategies are informed by the language management philosophy which is based on the Language Management Theory espoused by scholars such as Jernudd (1991, 1993), Jernudd and Neustupny (1987) and Neustupny and Nekvapi (2003) (see Madiba, 2010a for a detailed discussion on this theory). The adoption and use of the theoretical framework referred to was led by the Multilingualism Education Project (MEP) launched in 2005. As the coordinator of MEP and language planning scholar, I am responsible for giving expert advice and guidance to the Language Policy Committee which has an oversight function to the implementation of the university language policy.

The advantage of the Language Management model is that it represents a shift from a traditional language planning model which is mainly top-down. Instead, this model focuses on the micro-level and it seeks to explain how language problems arise in the course of people’s use of language in micro-structural environments and how individuals or groups of people manage them (Jernudd, 1993, p. 134). Thus the model gives agency to individuals (e.g. lecturers and students) to manage language problems in their agentive spaces. The role of individual agency in language policy implementation is largely ignored by both traditional language planning or neoclassical and critical language planning scholars (cf. Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Whereas critical language planning studies on South African universities have focused mainly on the politics of language or language ideologies, very little attention has been given to pedagogy and the role of individual agency in language policy implementation. These critical language planning studies, albeit useful in raising critical language awareness, fail to recognize what Ramanathan (2005, pp. 98–99) regards as the “spaces of unplanned language planning” and “how varying local interpretations, implementations, negotiations, and perhaps resistance can pry open implementational and ideological spaces for multilingual education” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, p. 511). The advantage of the language management model is that it considers ideological factors that in most cases are the underlying causes of language problems in a teaching and learning situation.

The Language Management model seems to fit well into the culture of new managerialism which has become a sine qua non of South African university management. This model is more useful to UCT than the traditional language planning which is interventionist and too prescriptive. UCT has a highly devolved management system and tends to view government policies as encroaching on its institutional autonomy and academic freedom (cf. Madiba, 2010a). In traditionally white English universities such as UCT, the language management approach is useful in identifying spaces that can be opened up for the implementation of multilingual education. Jernudd (2002, pp. 299–307) identifies seven implementational spaces for bilingual education in a university context: (1) teaching acts between students and teachers; (2) study acts by students; (3) administrative acts between students, members of faculties and administrator representatives of university departments and administrative offices; (4) research acts; (5) writing and other presentation acts; (6) service acts performed by members of faculties in communication with many different audiences; and lastly (7) governance acts between representatives of the university and representatives of government offices and the public. Out of these seven categories, the following acts represented in a diagram are pivotal for the implementation of multilingual education (see Fig. 3). Although Jernudd’s framework is useful in identifying implementational spaces for multilingual education, it does not address the issue of pedagogy, that is, approaches and methods of using two or more languages in teaching and learning programmes. As Probyn (2009, p. 123) rightly observes, in South Africa “the potential to use two languages in the classroom in a structured and systematic way to support learning has not been generally recognized or developed”. Madiba (2004, 2010a) proposes the complementary language use model for the implementation of multilingual education in traditionally white English universities such as UCT. Another scholar who supports this approach to language use is Grosjean who proposed the complementarity principle which states that “bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people (2008, p. 23).

The complementary language use model proposed here is based on a heteroglossic ideology of multilingual education that does not proceed from the premises that languages are separable, isolable or discrete entities, but rather they are mutually permeable, tending to intermingle like liquids (Garcia, 2009). As Garcia indicates (2009), a heteroglossic approach to bilingualism or multilingualism is advantageous since it views existing students’ multilingual repertoires in a continuum of competence.

The adoption of a complementary language use model in education needs to take account of the complexity of speech variation across the different languages and their varieties which are always in a state of flux. Khubchandani (2003) notes that
any mother-tongue education or mother-tongue based bilingual education system, should take into account the imperative of plural societies, where a child’s earliest first-hand experience of native speech does not necessarily show any resemblance to the formal ‘school version’ of his/her mother tongue. In fact, if we consider that ‘academic language’ is itself is not anyone’s mother tongue, but a variety of language which students acquire from the teaching and learning situation, we can view multilingual education as a continuum of different language forms. Thus multilingual students or teachers shuttle between their first languages or language varieties and the language which is the primary medium of instruction. Canagarajah (2006) describes this kind of pedagogy as the ‘pedagogy of shuttling between languages’. In South Africa, scholars such as Balfour (2005a, 2005b) regard this type of pedagogy as ‘shifting pedagogy’. However, as Dua (1994) points out, the shift or complementarity between two or more languages or their varieties may range from 1% to 99% depending on linguistic, sociocultural and political factors (cf. Dua, 1994). Thus, contextual factors are also important in delimiting the functions of the various languages in different domains.

In South Africa, this pedagogy of shuttling between languages has been observed in several studies, particularly those carried out in urban schools (e.g. Plüddemann, 2011). Plüddemann (2011, p. 10) has the following to say in this regard:

"More recent developmental research in Xhosa-dominant peri-urban primary schools in Cape Town suggests that the monolingual teaching and learning of maths and natural science (and possibly even social sciences) is not feasible at present, given the extent to which English terms have filtered into everyday isiXhosa speech. In most urban contexts in South Africa today, a monolingual orientation that insists on a strict use of the prestige of standard variety would be almost as alienating to learners as an English-only approach."

At UCT, several studies have observed this phenomenon among students (Bangeni, 2001; Nodoba, 2010; Paxton, 2007, 2009). These studies clearly show the common use of codeswitching, code mixing and translanguaging utterances among students. Accordingly, several pilot projects were introduced in the university to explore the implementation of the pedagogy of shuttling between languages or translanguaging in the classroom (cf. Madiba, 2010b; Nkomo & Madiba, 2011; Paxton, 2007, 2009). The advantage of this pedagogy is that it gives students the right to use their primary languages or language varieties in which they have high proficiency in complementarity to English which is the main medium of education. The complementary language use model provides a better alternative pedagogical model to implement multilingual education at UCT. Thus on the one hand the complementary language use model empowers the use of indigenous languages or their varieties, but on the other hand, also provides a strategy to control, regulate and dilute the hegemony of English. As will be shown in the next section, the complementary language use model has been piloted at UCT on both curriculum and course levels.

4.4. Multilingual education at UCT: practical strategies

Since the adoption of its language policy and plan, UCT has adopted different strategies to implement multilingual education at curriculum level and course level.

4.4.1. Multilingual pedagogy at curriculum level

As noted, one of the objectives of UCT’s language policy is to develop multilingual awareness and multilingual proficiency among students and staff. The objective here is to ensure that students become multilingual by learning an additional language, especially an indigenous language, as part of their curriculum. This strategy has been piloted in the Faculty of Health Sciences where students are required to learn either Afrikaans or Xhosa as compulsory subject(s) to equip them with linguistic and cultural skills considered essential for their professional training and practice after their study. The teaching of these courses is based on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (cf. Marsh, 2006). Students studying medicine are required to complete at least six semesters of the language course. The teaching of the courses is done in both English and the target language. The learning support materials such as Clinical skills CD Roms allow students to use both languages.
As the main focus of the course is on mastering the discourse rather than the form of the target language, students often make use of codeswitching to master the discourse of the target discipline. Students interested in deep immersion are also afforded the opportunity to take the Student Support Module which allows them to stay with a family in the township for 2.5 weeks. This multilingual Health Sciences education programme is one of the leading and most innovative programmes in the country and was awarded the Pan South African Multilingualism award in 2011. Plans are underway to introduce this multilingual curriculum model to other professional disciplines such as law, social work, education and psychology. Already, a pilot course was run for Law students in 2011 and was very successful.

The second strategy to promote multilingualism in students’ curriculum is the provision of Short non-credit bearing courses such as the Xhosa communication skills courses. The Xhosa communication skills courses are offered to students during lunch time and in students’ residences at night. In line with the language management philosophy, students participate in the course voluntarily. These adjunct courses differ from curriculum-integrated courses because they are focused on general communication. These courses have become very popular among staff and students and have attracted a considerable number of participants. Participants’ feedback on the course is most encouraging (cf. Madiba, 2010a).

### 4.4.2. Multilingual strategies at course level

At course level, there are two strategies to implement multilingual education. The first strategy is focused on English academic literacy. Most universities offer English academic literacy courses to students who are not mother tongue English speakers. UCT has a long history of offering English academic literacy courses (cf. Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2008). These courses were introduced in the early 1980s to support students who are not mother tongue English speakers. Students in this category numbered only 350 out of a total of about 12,500 at that stage. This approach changed in the late 1980s and the 1990s to academic development and higher education development. The Academic Development Programme (ADP) was then established to provide academic development courses to students who are not mother tongue English speakers. Although English academic literacy courses are essential in providing the much needed proficiency in English, their problem is that they tend to maintain the ascendency of English to the detriment of students’ first languages (other than English) in that such languages tend to be marginalized and the students concerned effectively tend to become alienated from their first languages. The exclusive use of English has serious negative pedagogical consequences for students who are not mother tongue speakers of English. A study carried out at UCT (CHED/IPD Throughput Research Project) by Henry and Scott (2003) to determine the throughput rates of a cohort of students who were admitted to the University in 1995 in the expectation that they would complete the three year graduate studies for which they were enrolled by 1998, revealed a difference in academic performance between white and black students (Henry & Scott, 2003). In most faculties, this difference in academic performance between black and white students is over 20% (UCT Language plan, 2003). Although this difference is attributable to a number of factors, language must assuredly be a critical consideration as black students who have limited proficiency in English, which is the primary medium of teaching and learning, are patently most affected.

The second strategy consists in adopting the multilingual approach. Since the development of UCT’s language policy plan there have been several initiatives, undertaken by individual lecturers and departments, to implement multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes. One of these projects is the Multilingual Concept Learning Literacy project initiated by the Multilingualism Education Project (MEP). The aim of this project is to use students’ first languages in complementarity to English in teaching key concepts in different disciplines, especially at first-year level. The term ‘concept literacy’ is relatively new and is used within the context of South Africa to refer to “reading, understanding and using the learning area-specific words, terms and related language forms which are an integral part of knowledge in […] learning areas” (Young et al., 2005). Concept literacy is essential for first-year students, English as Additional Language (EAL) students in particular, who generally experience difficulties in understanding scientific concepts in English. Thus the Multilingual Concept Learning Literacy project aims to address students’ difficulties at both conceptual and linguistic levels.

The Multilingual Concept Learning Literacy project has so far developed multilingual concept-literacy glossaries for three disciplines, namely, Economics, Statistics and Law (for a detailed discussion on these glossaries, see Madiba, 2010b; Nkomo & Madiba, 2011). Madiba (2010b) discusses four pedagogic theories that underpin the use of these glossaries at UCT to facilitate concept learning, namely, developmental theories, epistemological theories, threshold concept theories and L1 and L2 Interdependence theory. Multilingual concept-literacy glossaries are used to fast-track English as Additional Language (EAL) students’ concept learning and vocabulary development in the different content areas. As the glossaries are in English and all other ten official languages of South Africa, they cater for the linguistic needs of most South African students.

The glossaries are made accessible to students on the Online Learning Environment called Vula which has been created for various courses. This online learning environment allows uploading of multilingual concept literacy glossaries and other multilingual learning support material such as tutorials. The following is an example of the Economics Multilingual glossary on Vula Hypermedia (Fig. 4).

The figure above shows that terms or concepts can be entered in a space provided. The advantage of this approach is that other related concepts can be identified through this search. Students can also search for definitions in both the source and the target languages as shown in the following screenshot (Fig. 5).
Fig. 4. Vula screenshot of economics multilingual glossary.

Fig. 5. Vula screenshot of economics multilingual glossary showing definitions.
It is important to note that students can also give feedback on the translation equivalents or can even suggest new ones. The website further provides students with the opportunity to blog in English as well as their first language. The following is an example of multilingual blogs provided by economics students (Fig. 6).

As can be seen from this figure, other functions such as the Glossary Q and A, also enable multilingual education as students can use both English and their first languages in answering questions. Using this online learning environment, lecturers or tutors can encourage students to use their primary languages in complementarity to English to understand the meaning of scientific concepts.

Whereas these glossaries may be used by students as reference works for definitions and translation equivalents, the main aim is to use them for the teaching and learning of concepts or concept literacy. Since most lecturers have no multilingual and strategic competencies to facilitate multilingual teaching and learning (cf. Strategy & Tactics, 2004), UCT is piloting the use of multilingual tutors to implement multilingual education in tutorials. Accordingly, the multilingual glossaries discussed above are being used to pilot multilingual education in the first-year Economics course. In this pilot project, multilingual tutorials have been organized for first-year students selected from the enrolment for Economics course. Students are given selected economics concepts to discuss them in English as well as their primary languages with the help of multilingual tutors. Although the results of this pilot project are still being compiled, the preliminary findings show the positive effects of using multilingualism in tutorials. What is clear from these tutorials is that students employ translanguaging strategies such as codeswitching and borrowing in their discussion of the concepts. The following is an example of translanguaging used by one student in describing the concept of a ‘deficit’ in one of the Venda-English Economics tutorials:

Arali ri khou amba nga deficit thi ri na budget, ri do vha ri khou ri dzi-inflows dzashu ra vha na dzi-outflows dzashu, arali ri ri dzi-inflows ndi khulwane kha dzi-outflows, zwi amba uri ri vha ri ri deficit, mara arali kha accounting ri vha ri na dzi-income statements ra minus dzi-expenses, I vhidzwa u phi loss. A thi divhi uri zwo fhambana hani? Hothe ri vha ri khou vhona dzi-inflows ra minus dzi-outflows.

(If we talk about deficit with regard to budgeting, we will be talking about our inflows and outflows, if inflows are greater than the outflows, it means we have a deficit, but in accounting we speak of income statements minus expenses. This is referred to as loss. I don’t know how different are these two concepts. In both we observe inflows minus outflows).

Throughout the tutorial both students use Venda as the base language, and continue to switch to English especially when they mention the key concepts. In some instances these concepts are integrated into the Venda grammatical structure as in ‘dzi-inflows’ and ‘dzi-outflows’ where the Venda noun prefix is used to categorize the concepts in the Venda noun class system.
Apart from this pilot concept-literacy project in Economics, several other studies have been undertaken on the use of multilingual tutors to implement multilingual education in tutorials (cf. Bangeni, 2001; Paxton, 2007). The findings of these studies confirm the importance of multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show how language policy frameworks opened up ideological and implementational spaces for multilingual education in traditionally white English universities in South Africa. UCT was used as a case study to show how language policy frameworks can open implementational and ideological spaces for multilingual education. This case study is significant as the micro-structural environments of traditionally English universities in South Africa are markedly different from those of other universities (cf. Du Plessis, 2006). An attempt was made to show the extent to which the UCT new language policy has been implemented in teaching and learning programmes. The complementary language use model, which allows students to use English and their first languages as auxiliary media of learning is being piloted with a view to implementing multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes.

The concept literacy project clearly illustrates how the complementary language use model can be implemented at course level. English is used in complementarity to students primary languages to deepen students understanding of disciplinary concepts. Students also use multiple languages in their discussion of the different concepts.

The complementary language use model is supported by African language planning scholars such as Bamgbose (2000) and by the findings of done at other universities as well (Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; De Kadt, 2005). This model is more likely to succeed at UCT, and perhaps also in other traditionally English universities as it provides a balance between the need for high level proficiency in English which has become a dominant factor in university education throughout the world. As Robsonson (1996:180 cit. in Hameso, 1997, p. 1) points out: “The use of African languages in complementary and equitable fashion alongside other languages, will be part of the full development of Africa’s own genius and of the continent’s search for its own path of development.” Such complementary language use enables students to participate meaningfully in knowledge creation, dissemination and application.

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