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## Xhosalising English? Negotiating meaning and identity in Economics

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**Abstract:** As yet, very few South African studies have explored multilingual learning contexts in order to develop a better understanding of the role that students' diverse primary or hybrid languages play in meaning making in English medium universities. This paper will report on a project which set out to investigate code-switching practices in informal learning groups in the university and to distinguish the forms and functions of these code-switching practices. A particular focus has been to gain insights into the ways in which concepts transfer from one language to another in order to develop thinking on language and learning in multilingual contexts and extend theories of conceptual transfer. The particular focus of this paper is the pedagogic and social functions of this hybrid language and how its use might be tied to questions of identity. We look particularly at the way the tutor in the peer learning group used code-mixing to negotiate different identities in dealing with first a rural and then an urban group of students. We will also illustrate by means of our data ways in which English is being appropriated and Xhosalised, particularly by the urban group of students in order to negotiate meaning, identity and status on this campus and in the wider community.

### Introduction

At the University of Cape Town (UCT), a previously white English-speaking university, language practices among the student population are particularly complex and interesting. The medium of instruction is English and most of the staff are English speaking but, although 66.8% of students claim English as a first language, many of these are fluent in an African language. English has status on the UCT campus because, apart from being the medium of instruction and the language of assessment, it is seen as the language of material and symbolic power. However, as one moves around the campus and in the corridors and hallways of the university, one becomes aware of the vast variety of languages being spoken and particularly of hybrid languages. In seminars, workshops and laboratories as students work in small groups, one finds languages weaving together in a magical and colourful tapestry from which many English speaking lecturers (and students) are excluded. Therefore, while English would be regarded as the dominant language, multilingualism and multiculturalism is very much a mark of the UCT campus.

In a previous research project, code was studied to identify ways in which students often used their home language or a hybrid language when studying in peer learning groups (Paxton, 2007, 2009). The findings from this research project illustrate that students' learning of economic concepts is restricted by the sole use of English for teaching and learning. The translated data from the project indicated that some students did not have clear understandings of new concepts in English and that, without a discussion of concepts in their own codes, their unclear conceptions might remain undetected. In this situation, they would resort to rote learning because memorising was seen as the only way to acquire the information.

However, English translations of the data did not reveal the social functions of the students' use of this hybrid language. To explore these issues, Paxton subsequently collaborated with a Xhosa Communication Skills instructor (Tyam) to analyse the forms and functions of the raw data. This article will illustrate by means of excerpts from interviews and peer learning discussions the ways in which Ondile<sup>1</sup>, an Economics tutor, used code-switching to clarify the meaning of concepts while simultaneously negotiating different identities in dealing with urban and rural groups of students. The authors see the use of this hybrid language as allowing students to define a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1990) for identity in which their complex multilingual and multicultural working class identities can be expressed and recognised in ways that are not possible in the larger English-speaking community.

The article will first present a brief review of the literature on code-switching and the theoretical concepts used to inform the study, followed by a description of the research process and definitions of terms for code-switching. Data from the interviews are then used to provide some background which precedes a detailed linguistic analysis of excerpts from the code-switching data. Finally we draw some tentative conclusions about the role of code-switching in pedagogy and as an identity marker.

### Code-switching: A brief review of the literature

There is a vast literature on code-switching in different communities worldwide, but because

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code-switching is not a uniform phenomenon and the norms vary from group to group, it seems important that discussions of code-switching emerge from the data and are closely contextualised. In this article, the researchers are interested particularly in the social functions of code-switching in the local context of a South African university.

Slabbert and Finlayson (1999) provide some relevant historical background indicating that, during apartheid, code-switching became a means by which both individuals and groups in the townships expressed and identified themselves as being capable of breaking down the institutionalised ethnic barriers of apartheid. Code-switching developed because different language groups living in the townships of urban South Africa needed to get to know one another and to accommodate to one another and no single lingua franca or dominant language had developed (Slabbert & Finlayson, 1999). The development of these urban hybrid languages led to a growing dichotomy between the deep and urban varieties of African languages. 'Deep' refers to the older, rural and relatively 'pure' varieties of African languages which contrast with the more mixed urbanised forms.

Slabbert and Finlayson (1999) also point to important characteristics and social functions of code-switching in the South African context which we have identified in our data. For instance, they note that one of the most important social functions of code-switching which has become apparent among urban township residents in South Africa is that of accommodating to the addressee. Code-switching may take many forms to mirror the norms and demographics of the community. By using more than one variety a speaker can evoke the multiple identities associated with each code. They (Slabbert & Finlayson, 2002: 245) note, therefore, that code-switching is 'both a reactive choice as accommodation and a proactive choice as a presentation of one's multiple selves'.

Code-switching is a familiar practice in South African school classrooms but it is controversial because, as Gough (1996) indicates, there are two opposing perspectives: the purists who regard it as lowering the standards and the others who view it as a resource. Setati *et al.* (2002) indicate that using the main language as the language of learning and teaching has a bad name because the use of African languages is associated with the inferior educational legacy of apartheid. Many of the teachers that they interviewed believed that it was a mistake to speak in students' home languages. Yet, a number of studies in Southern African schools have shown that code-switching strategies allow teachers to clarify the meaning of difficult concepts (Adendorff, 1996; Cleghorn & Rollnick, 2002).

The framework developed in this paper for understanding the negotiation of identity in peer learning discussion groups combines aspects of social constructionist approaches as well as poststructuralist approaches. Therefore we see identity as located within particular discourses and ideologies of language, embedded within power relations and as multiple, fragmented and hybrid (Norton Pierce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). It is through language that individuals enact multiple subject positions; they activate different parts of their linguistic repertoire selectively in order to foreground particular aspects of their social identities and to downplay others in their social settings (Doran, 2004). We see identity as emerging through a process of negotiation among interlocutors, a kind of social practice through which people can position themselves in relation to their peers and to the dominant discourse in a variety of ways.

The article draws on Bhabha's (1990) notion of the 'third space' as a metaphor for understanding the dynamics of identity negotiation in minority communities. Bhabha (1990) indicates that minority populations, such as isiXhosa speakers at UCT, negotiate identity by creating an 'in between' space of culture in which hybrid identities can be expressed and affirmed. The students create such a space by crafting and taking ownership of cultural symbols such as those of spoken language which are made to convey meaning in new ways.

### **Research process**

In this section, a brief overview of the initial project is provided, followed by a more in-depth explanation of the current research project.

#### *Initial research project*

The data analysed in this article were collected as part of an earlier project to investigate peer learning and the ways in which commerce students at UCT code switch to build on their primary languages and make sense of new concepts which they are learning through the medium of English. In the first semester of the students' first year of study in the Commerce Faculty, Paxton ran a project with her students in the academic literacy adjunct module to first-year economics to probe the ways in which students explained new concepts when studying in peer learning groups.

Students in the Commerce Academic Development Programme were surveyed so as to get a broader understanding of language practices and attitudes. Then, as part of the project, Paxton

arranged additional informal discussion groups led by Ondile, an isiXhosa-speaking Economics tutor, for the isiXhosa-speaking students in her tutorial. Paxton did not attend the discussion groups. The tutor was asked to guide a discussion of some of the difficult economic concepts and it was agreed that he would use whichever language seemed most natural. He was responsible for capturing the discussion on an audio cassette recorder. For the discussions, the students divided themselves into two groups. There were 3 first year students in Group 1 and five in Group 2. The first group requested a follow-up meeting where more concepts were discussed. Therefore, in total, three discussion groups were recorded.

Subsequently, all eight students and the tutor were interviewed to find out more about their language and literacy backgrounds, their responses to the discussion groups, their learning practices and their attitudes to learning through the medium of English at UCT. The data were translated and transcribed and initial findings from the data were published (Paxton, 2007, 2009).

#### *Current research project*

The initial project was taken a stage further with Tyam collaborating with Paxton in the analysis of the forms and functions of the untranslated code-switching data. In addition, Tyam conducted a focus group interview with six of the eight students from the original discussion groups in order to gain further insights into the relationships between discourse, identity and social meanings.

In the analysis, particular terms for code-switching were used that may need clarification. The term 'code-switching' is often used interchangeably with code-mixing and borrowing. Myers-Scotton (1993b) argues that code-mixing and code-switching are so closely linked that they are often used by authors synonymously. However, the data in this study seem to fit the theorists' description of code-mixing so well that in our analysis of the data we have chosen to use this term. Wardhaugh (cited in Moodley, 2001) describes code-mixing as the deliberate mixing of linguistic units such as affixes, words, phrases and clauses from two or more languages within the same sentence without an associated change of topic. Code-mixing tends to be intrasentential, switching that occurs within a single sentence or even within the word, whereas code-switching is intersentential. The data of this study show no instances of intersentential switching and although we use code-switching as the umbrella term, we use code-mixing to describe our data.

We also make use of the term 'borrowing' in this analysis as we have found instances which match Gumperz's (1982) definition of borrowing as a 'loan word' or 'short frozen idiomatic word' that has become accepted as a normal part of the lexicon of another language. Once a word or phrase is used habitually it becomes integrated and accepted in the host language and can then be regarded as borrowing. Borrowing occurs to fill a lexical gap where a word or phrase in the original language will not serve. Our data indicate, for instance, that the word *ishota*, borrowed from the English word 'shortfall' is a word that has become a normal part of the lexicon of isiXhosa.

In code-switching, one language acts as a dominant or matrix language and the other as a subordinate or embedded language. Myers-Scotton's (1993a) Matrix Language Framing Model states that it is the basic word structure of the matrix language that determines what happens to the words in the embedded language. In the data from both groups of students, it was found that isiXhosa is the matrix language while it is English that is embedded.

#### **The context**

As indicated, 66.8% of students at UCT claim English as a home language, while the remaining 33.2% have home languages which include all of the official indigenous languages and many other languages. Black<sub>2</sub> students now constitute just over 50% of the university's student population, therefore large numbers of black students regard English as a first language, either because it is a home language (possibly one of many) or because they studied English as a first language at school. These figures reflect the fact that schooling backgrounds of black students can no longer be homogenised. An increasing number of 'African' and 'coloured' students are now being educated at relatively well resourced, middle class, formerly white, now racially mixed former Model C<sub>3</sub> schools. Others, for whom an African language or Afrikaans is a home language, have been educated in the old Department of Education and Training (DET) schools and the Department of Education and Culture (DEC) schools which are, by contrast, relatively ethnically homogeneous, working class and poorly resourced (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007).

Bangeni and Kapp's (2007) study of shifting language attitudes among 20 Humanities students points to the very different schooling experiences of these two groups. In the first year of university, those students who have been educated in racially-mixed schools are at ease in the environment and move quite comfortably across racial and linguistic boundaries, whereas those educated in working class, ethnically homogeneous schools enter the institution with a strong desire to preserve

their home language and home identities (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007).

Seven of the students in the initial project were drawn from working class backgrounds and had attended former DET schools; the eighth student had spent a few years in a former Model C school until his father lost his job and he had to go to a township school. All the students said that they regarded isiXhosa as a home language because one or both parents were isiXhosa speakers. For the discussion groups they divided themselves into two groups: Group 1 were all students from the rural Eastern Cape – Dutywa, Indwe and Queenstown; Group 2 were from township schools in and around Cape Town, Paarl and Beaufort West. Three of the students in Group 2 regularly study together in a peer learning group. Ondile, the tutor who conducted the group discussions, like the students in Group 1, is a student from a rural working class background. He attended a former DET school in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape.

The interviews with the students point to the conflicts they experience in relation to language on the university campus. Some said they found UCT a very alienating environment when they first arrived: *'Everything is basically in English ... even if one doesn't understand; it's hard to find someone to explain in home language'*. Ondile, the tutor, could identify with this. He described his sense of a loss of identity when he first arrived at UCT:

*When I came here and lectures began I felt that I was not the person I used to know myself to be, because I had to use English from point A to Z. That was a problem to me because my English wasn't good. I was frightened to speak to a lot of students because of not being able to communicate well in English.*

Students from rural and township schools also expressed surprise at the power of English at UCT. They described how they sometimes encountered students whom they knew to be isiXhosa speakers, refusing to speak isiXhosa. For instance, Ondile described isiXhosa-speaking acquaintances who chose to speak English to each other when they were on the UCT campus. A mature adult student described how, on his first visit to the campus, feeling very new and somewhat anxious, he had climbed on the shuttle bus to travel up the hill to Upper Campus for his first lecture. He sat down on the bus next to a younger isiXhosa-speaking student that he recognised and immediately greeted him and broke into conversation in isiXhosa, but the student replied in English, saying, *'On this campus we speak English'*.

Language is a difficult and complex terrain to negotiate and feelings of ambivalence are expressed by many of the interviewees. If one speaks too much English one is labelled as a 'black-white' or a 'coconut', whereas if you speak your home language, then you are 'conservative'. The students also understand the power of English. They know that fluency in English will get them jobs in the business world and allow them to be successful at university. One first-year student, Lwando, said: *'The world does not work in people's home language, it works in English'*; and another, Noluthando, said: *'... for me to be able to go out to the world, I need to know English well'*.

Code-switching seems to provide a neutral space, a social practice through which students can deal with these conflicts. This hybrid language belongs neither to the home, nor to the English environment of the university campus. This is *their* discourse, one in which they can define and express themselves on their own terms rather than being positioned by discourses such as the dominant one, English, or the home discourse and its culture. If students' mixed identities are not recognised in the larger English speaking community of UCT, then the existence of the peer group and its alternative language possibly has a particular symbolic value. It seems to provide a space in which particular aspects of the identities can be 'normal' and not subject to conventional judgements of hegemonic English.

For these students from former DET and DEC schools, code-switching is a familiar classroom language practice (Adendorff, 1996; Moodley, 2001; Setati *et al.*, 2002). In the group interview with Tyam, the first-year students claimed that *'to us code-switching comes naturally'*. In most of the rural and township schools, bilingual educators negotiate English as the official language of instruction by code-switching between English and the home languages of the learners in order to explain concepts. In his interview, Ondile described the issue of language in the teaching and learning situation in his school in Mthatha:

*The teachers wanted us to communicate in English but it was difficult for them because most students couldn't get a hang of this English so in order for us to understand more they had to explain in Xhosa... Most of the students couldn't ask questions because they were scared of asking in English. That made it difficult for the teachers to stretch [challenge or encourage] us in other subjects to use English. So they allowed people to ask in Xhosa and they answer in English.*

### Analysis

In the analysis of the group discussions we focus strongly on Ondile, because he takes centre

stage. He immediately assumes the role of tutor and leads the discussion. At the same time he sets the parameters of the different codes as he negotiates his multiple identities. The students, in turn, accommodate to the addressee which Slabbert and Finlayson (1999) note is typical of the process of accommodation – having an awareness of what the addressee's preference is and switching accordingly.

Despite the fact that both of Ondile's parents were uneducated and unemployed, he was very successful at UCT, winning the class medal for Statistics in his first year and becoming a popular tutor and mentor in both Statistics and Economics. He was one of six children and, following in the footsteps of his older brothers, who had supported him through his studies, he used the earnings from his tutoring and vacation work to pay for the education of his younger siblings. Ondile became popular as a mentor and a tutor both in Statistics and in Economics and his tutoring ability is evident in the transcripts of the economic concept discussions. He gained his experience during his school days when he and three other pupils decided to teach themselves higher grade Mathematics because there was no Mathematics teacher qualified to do this. Ondile described the way he learned his Mathematics in the last two years of schooling.

*I didn't have a Maths teacher in Standard 9 and 10. We used to work together as a group and the thing that helped me to understand Math more was helping others. I felt that when I was helping the others more I understood things I never knew because they ask you all sorts of questions and you have to think about it carefully to help. So they are the ones who helped as well because I used to be the kind of mentor at school.*

Because the hybrid forms of language in the two discussion groups contrast so markedly, we have presented data from each group separately. Group 1 is the group from the rural Eastern Cape while Group 2 is the group of urban students from the Cape Town region.

#### *Group 1 – limited code-mixing*

Ondile begins the tutorial with the students from rural Eastern Cape (former Transkei) by asking them to introduce themselves and to say where they come from so that he can identify which ethnic group they are from.

Ondile: *Usuka phi wena?*

[Where are you from?]

Xolani: *Ndisuka eEastern Cape, Endwe eQueenstown*

[I am from Eastern Cape, Endwe and Queenstown]

Ondile: *Okay so tell me ukubana mos emaXhoseni ukhe uve kuthethwa ngamaXhosa amaMpondo, amaMpondomise amaMfengu. Uyintoni wena*

[Okay so tell me, you know mos in Xhosa history you hear people talking about groups, like Xhosas, Pundos, Mpondomises Fingos. Which groups do you belong to?]

Xolani: *NdingumXhosa mna*

[Me I am a Xhosa]

Peter: *NdiliMpondomise*

[I am Mpondomise]

Xolani: *Ndingum Xhosa xho*

[I am a real Xhosa]

Zandi: *Ndingum Xhosa*

*Hayi ke ndiyiMfengu mna but most of the time sisebenzisa ilentoza isikhwama Wena Ondile ubungazutsho ukuba equity ngesiXhosa yitoni?*

[I am Xhosa]

*Okay then, myself I am Mfengu, but most of the time we use the thing called isikhwama*

Ondile, when are you going to tell me the meaning of equity in Xhosa?]

It seems that there is very interesting identity work going on here. Ondile's enquiries as to students' ethnic backgrounds could be interpreted as a way of establishing solidarity with them, showing them that he is truly one of them, because he is aware of different ethnic groupings and their traditional locations in eMpuma Koloni, the Eastern Cape. It may also be that he is establishing the norms for borrowing and code-switching by getting to know the details of the participants' backgrounds. Gumperz (1982) indicates that each communicating sub-group tends to establish its own conventions with respect to both borrowing and code-switching. Factors such as region of origin, local residence and social class are involved in defining the norms.

Bilinguals in fact ordinarily do not use code-switching styles in their contact with other bilinguals before they know something about the listener's background and attitudes. To do otherwise would be to risk serious misunderstanding (Gumperz, 1982: 69).

Perhaps another sign that Ondile is seeking to put the students at ease is his use of the Afrikaans word 'mos' in '*Okay so tell me, you know mos in Xhosa history...*'. The English translation of 'mos' is

'indeed' but it is often borrowed into English conversations with the purpose of indicating that the context of the conversation is an informal one. Ondile is bonding with the students by emphasising that he and they have a shared history and this borrowing is used to assist him in creating the right atmosphere.

Zandi comments that she is Xhosa but in terms of specific tribal groupings, she would regard herself as Mfengu. The Mfengu were known as nomads/wanderers, hence her metaphoric reference to carrying the '*isikhwama*' which is a type of travelling bag. However, Zandi cuts the pleasantries short as she is keen to get to the conceptual work as quickly as possible and she is still confused about the meaning of the concept 'equity' in isiXhosa. Most of the rest of the discussion focuses on just two economic concepts, 'equity' (fairness) and 'deficit' (shortfall). The extract below illustrates the complex debate about the meaning of the term 'deficit':

Xolisa: *Ndingayibeka ngoba ideficit ibuhle ilahleko nidza kuyibeka ngolo hlobo ngoba andifuni kuthi yilahleko ibuhle yona.*

[I can put it in this way, deficit is like loss, I am going to put it that way because I don't want to say it is loss but it is like it.]

Zandi: *Mna ndifuna ukuthi yilahleko ideficit, ilike ubushishina, kweli shishini ulindele ingeniso nelahleko. Ideficit yenzeka xa iindleko zakho zingaphezu kwengeniso which is ulahlekelwe xa siyisa esilungwini ngesi Xhosa yilahleko.*

[Me I want to say deficit is a loss, like you have a business and you are expecting a gain and a loss. Deficit happens when your expenses are more than gain, which means you have a loss when we transfer it to English and in Xhosa we call it a loss.]

Ondile: *Nithande ukuyilahla kancinci because okukuqala xa sithetha ngengeniso sithetha nge-income yabo then xa sithetha ngelahleko sithetha ngeloss yabo, so apha ke ngoku sithetha ngedeficit masenze umzekelo, ok, ubuza kuthini wena Phindile*

[You are losing the meaning a little because firstly, when we talk about gain we talk about income, do you understand, then when we talk about loss we are referring to loss do you understand, then? Here we are talking about deficit let us do an example, okay, what were you going to say Phindile?]

Both extracts from the Group 1 discussion exemplify the fairly limited mixing of codes that is typical of this group discussion. Ondile is clearly accommodating to the rural students by using a 'purer' or deeper form of isiXhosa and mixing less frequently. In the extract above the students use some of the English economic terms such as 'deficit', 'income' and 'loss'. They say there is no equivalent word in isiXhosa for 'deficit' and therefore they have no alternative but to use the English term. There are also further signs of hybridity in the use of English connecting words, such as 'like', 'which is', 'because', 'then', 'ok' and 'so', but this is fairly limited. There is no doubt here that isiXhosa is the matrix language with a few English words embedded.

### Group 2 – 'Xhosalising' English

The peer learning discussion with the urban group of students illustrates a much richer mixing of English and isiXhosa among this group of local township students. But what is particularly interesting is the way Ondile accommodates differently to this group of students. Instead of using the purer isiXhosa he used with the group from rural Transkei, he makes adaptations using more borrowings and more English with this group from urban and peri-urban Cape Town (Group 2). Slabbert and Finlayson (1999: 9) would describe this form of accommodation as 'making adaptations on the variety continuum of "deep" to urban'. Thus by using more than one variety of code-mixing, the tutor evokes the multiple identities associated with each code.

In the untranslated excerpt below, English words and borrowings are underlined and the English translation is provided below.

Ondile: *Yabona bafethu idescription yayo ayikho based emalini. Imali isetyenziselwe ukumeasuresha i-amount yedeficit. Kodwa i-understanding yedeficit neloss idifferent uyabona. Umzekelo mandenze umzekelo webudget masenze nje in general. Itayma (father) liza kunika iR1 000 and ndiyacinga ukuba kufuneka ndithenge iteki kaPuma yi-799, incwadi yi-R300 and itracksuit yiR400 so uneeda iR1.500 so that means izinto ozifunayo zihigher kunemali onayo, so i-expenditure is higher than income so yideficit leyo, ideficit ivela kwibudget, whereby i-income minus costs kuvele ideficit. So eligama le deficiency xa silisa esiXhoseni ke ngoku, sithi siyashota (we say siyashota – we have a shortfall) instead of saying we have a deficit*

[You see, my brothers, its description is not based on money. Money is used to measure deficit. But in my understanding deficit and loss are different, do you understand? Let's make a general example, your father is going to give me R1 000 and I'm thinking I need to buy a Puma tackie and it is R799, a book is R300 and a tracksuit R400 so that means I need R1 500, that means things I need are more than the money I have, so expenditure is more than income, so I have a deficit, the deficit

comes from the budget whereby income minus costs create deficit. So this word when we transfer it in Xhosa, we use shortfall instead of deficit.]

Lwando: *Kuxa igoods ozifunayo zininzi kunemali onayo. Its like deficity iqulathe iprice, like ineprice tag kulonto uyithengayo.*

[It is when the goods you want are more than the money that you have. It is like the deficit carries price, like it has a price tag in what you are buying.]

Siyamo: *Ideficit yenzeka kwi-expectation, not a definite like for instance ibudget ayikho we are not sure itayma lize kusinika malini.*

[Deficit happens in expectations, it is not definite, like for instance there is no budget or we are not sure how much money father will give us.]

The tutor is using code-mixing to clarify the distinction between 'deficit' and 'loss' because, as with Group 1, some of these students thought deficit was synonymous with loss. He provides an example *Umzekelo mandenze umzekelo* ('let me give you an example') in money terms of what a deficit might be, so as to clarify the meaning and the context in which it would be used. Finally he suggests to them that the word that is used in isiXhosa for deficit is *siyashota* whereas loss is *ilahleko*. *Siyashota* (to be short) is itself a borrowing from the English word, 'shortfall' and has now been assimilated into the Xhosa language. This illustrates the way code-switching can facilitate the establishment of meaning by providing a linguistic and a cultural bridge to understanding.

In Ondile's explanation above, he clearly enacts the role of tutor. He repeatedly checks that the students have understood by asking the question *uyabona?* ('do you see?'). Sometimes he says *yabona bafethu* ('you see, my brother'). This gesture of calling the student 'brother' can be interpreted as his attempt to create a brotherhood and affirm solidarity with this group. By doing this he reinforces the bonds (language, race and class) between the group and himself. Referring to a student as 'my brother' may be an indication that he feels the need to establish solidarity in more transparent ways with this group of urban students from eKapa, the big city, than with the group from his home province. But it is really his strategy of 'accommodating', using the hybrid language differently with each group, that enables him to maintain solidarity with the group of urban speakers while at the same time bonding with the group from the Eastern Cape.

Despite the increased hybridity of the language used in Group 2, isiXhosa is still the matrix language. As Blommaert (1992: 57) indicates, 'the appearance of elements from another language in the flow of speech of one language is both linguistically and sociolinguistically consistent'. This is confirmed by Myers-Scotton's (1993a) Matrix Language Frame Model which indicates that in every mixed complement phrase, the matrix language provides the grammatical frame for mixed constituents into which items from the embedded language may be inserted. A complement phrase from the above extract illustrates this:

*Imali isetyenziselwe ukumeasuresha i-amount yedeficit*

[Money is used to measure deficit.]

Content words come from either the embedded language (English) or the matrix language but the morphemes come from the matrix language. For example, the noun class prefixes *i-* and *ye-* for the English words 'amount' and 'deficit' and the verb prefix *uku-* for the infinitive 'to measure'. Ondile uses the correct isiXhosa sentence structure with the verb *isetyenziselwe* agreeing with the subject *imali*.

In Ondile's explanation above we find there are 45 embedded English words in a passage of 90 words. Because this is a peer learning discussion of economic concepts, a number of the English words are technical terms in economics (e.g. *yedeficit*, *webudget*, *neloss*, *i-expenditure*, *i-income*). Again the noun class morphemes of the matrix language can be noted. Adopting technical terms into isiXhosa could be interpreted as an act of control, a way of assimilating the concept and making it fit into the speaker's schema. However, it is not only the technical words that are borrowed in this way, Ondile also uses English clothing names that have become integrated and accepted into isiXhosa and thus would also be regarded as borrowings (e.g. '*i-tracksuit*' and trade names such as *i-teki KaPuma*). He also uses a number of other English nouns: *i-understanding*, *i-description*, *i-amount*. This is described colloquially as 'Xhosalising' the term. The isiXhosa prefixes and suffixes are added to the English stems and this use of the isiXhosa morphemes means that the speakers do not have to bother about whether they are using correct English. Although it is predominantly English nouns that are embedded, English verbs are also used (e.g. *ireferisha*, *kuspender*, *ukumeasuresha*). Most borrowed English words that end in -ing (present continuous tense) take the isiXhosa suffix *-sha*, for example *siyaspandisha* (we are spending).

## Conclusion

The analysis raises issues about code-switching, both in terms of its pedagogic and its social

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functions. The pedagogic code-mixing in the excerpts above is effective because it helps to clarify the meaning of the term 'deficit' for the students. The tutor mixes codes to provide a translation of the concept in the form of a borrowing, *siyashota* (we have a shortfall), and he illustrates the meaning by means of a number of different examples.

Code-switching presents a dilemma for teachers because despite its obvious pedagogic value, there are valid concerns that code-switching may hinder attempts to develop appropriate English language skills (Clark & Linder, 2006). For this reason, it seems important that Ondile's pedagogic practice is refined. Tutors need to see code-switching as a formative medium (Gough, 1996) through which concepts are consistently developed, but they then need to move to the next stage where the concepts are discussed in the appropriate English. In this way students will be given the opportunity to acquire the academic discourse in English.

In terms of the social functions of code-switching, the data show what a skilled and flexible language user Ondile is in the way he evokes multiple identities associated with each code as he accommodates to student groups from different contexts. We also suggest that the choice to mix codes is an act of identity indicating a symbolic alignment with the peer group (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). Such code-mixing allows the students access to an alternative social world in which they can feel at home in a way they don't when speaking the dominant language.

Heller (1992) points out that code-switching needs to be examined not as a unique phenomenon but as a part of a range of linguistic practices which people employ to achieve their goals and to challenge symbolic domination. Code-mixing is one element among several within these students' linguistic repertoires which include English, the language of the classroom, and isiXhosa, the language of 'home'. The excerpts illustrate how Ondile had learned to vary the linguistic code according to the context in order to perform different kinds of social identities. As Doran (2004) notes, speakers value flexibility in self presentation and this is tied strongly to the use of different kinds of language according to the situation. They recognise the value of leaving the hybrid language behind in some situations.

We also see how the renegotiation of shared social knowledge and norms of language use is under way at UCT and in South Africa today. The data show that this is not a case of isiXhosa being Anglicised, but rather that English is being Xhosalised. In Canagarajah's (1999: 76) words, English is being appropriated to 'dynamically negotiate meaning, identity and status in contextually suitable and socially strategic ways and in the process ... the communicative and linguistic rules of English [are modified]'.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The names of the tutor and the students in this study have been changed.

<sup>2</sup> Black refers to African, coloured and Indian students.

<sup>3</sup> In South Africa under apartheid there were 19 different education departments. Schools located in 'townships' designated for 'African' people were administered by the Department of Education and

Training (DET), and those designated for 'coloured' people were administered by the Department of Education and Culture (DEC). These departments were poorly resourced. In 1991, the State allowed formerly 'whites only' schools to choose among three models. 'Model C' was used to refer to those former 'white' schools which opted for a model which allowed for a 49% 'black' enrolment and semi-private status. However, since 1994, 'Model C' has become a generic term for all schools which were designated for 'whites'.

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