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**RETHINKING THE AFRICAN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM (WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO SISWATI): A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDY.**

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Declaration

I the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

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Date

Abstract

The hypothesis that the destiny of speech communities is to a significant degree linguistically and culturally determined, is one of the foundational assumptions of this study. Against an African background of socio-economic stagnation, political disarray and cultural ambivalence, this study seeks to illuminate the potential role of African languages in the continent's quest to become an integral part of a global society.

In an exploration of the multi-faceted crisis in Africa, literature on the topic revealed two broadly opposing viewpoints vis a vis a solution: Scholars advocating an 'African way' forward argue that modernisation can only take place within the African cultural paradigm. A significantly larger and more convincing body of scholars argues for an incisive cultural realignment, no less than a paradigm shift along liberal and democratic lines. The need for a paradigmatic shift articulates with the assumption mentioned above, i.e. that the outlook of a community is intimately linked with its linguistic and cultural habits.

A literature review on the trichotomy of language, culture and thought which clarified and strengthened the relevance of hypotheses postulated around the interdependence of the three constructs, laid the foundation for an exploration of the notion of literacy within the African context. The overview confirmed the close relationship between socio-cognitive development and literacy practices.

At this point my research changed focus by reviewing the history of South African language curriculum development in general, and SiSwati curriculum development in particular. This overview highlighted the (problematic) dominance of isiZulu scholars in the SiSwati curriculum process and the perpetuation of pedagogical principles from the apartheid era, albeit in an unconscious way. This was followed by an analysis of the SiSwati curriculum, revealing an official mindset that shaped a curriculum supportive of royal Swazi customs and tribal power systems. The inability (or lack of political will) to administer curriculum development, materials development and external examinations as

discrete processes add to the lack of general accountability that characterises policy and practice around the teaching of SiSwati.

The field study based on a questionnaire, classroom observation and a range of interviews with government officials and teachers confirmed a deeply negative attitude towards the way SiSwati is being taught, resulting in negative attitudes towards the language itself. Other findings pointed to a resistance to the cultural content of the curriculum as dictated by the power elite in Swaziland, the outdated emphasis on linguistics rather than sociolinguistics as an informing discipline and the absence of social and cognitive literacy skills embedded in subject content. The field study reflects an overall climate of despondency governing the teaching and learning context.

In order to alleviate these problems (in an endeavour to successfully deploy the AL curriculum in the holistic modernisation of the African continent) this study recommends that the teaching of languages such as SiSwati needs to be reformed in order to respond to the complex and sophisticated needs of societies wishing to engage with the global community. It puts forward a requirement to not only use the language curriculum to equip children with the much needed cultural capital, but to also create and develop in them the appropriate skills and mindsets and the concomitant vocabulary to engage with modernisation and participate in a world that is functioning in global terms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Description of the study and research orientation

This is a theoretical and empirical study. It explores the complex issue of African language curriculum development against the backdrop of post colonial Africa struggling to come to terms with the demands, effects and implications of globalisation. The investigation wrestles with the paradox of the perceived need for linguistic and cultural preservation on the one hand and the need for transformation on the other hand. It explores the tension in Swaziland, my country of birth, between traditional and modernising forces and its effect on SiSwati curriculum development.

As a language practitioner working within the African language context, my focus is on the potential inherent in language itself to equip children with the psycho-social and cognitive qualities that will allow them to successfully engage with a globalising world order. The theoretical cornerstone for this exploration is the assumption that there is an intimate link between people's linguistic and cultural habits on the one hand, and their socio-economic success on the other.

The intention then, is to investigate what would constitute appropriate literacy practices for the SiSwati curriculum (and by extension other African language curricula) within the context of the need to engage successfully with a globalising, connected world. The empirical dimension of the study critically evaluates the SiSwati curriculum development process and investigates teachers and learners' attitudes towards SiSwati as a subject in the Swaziland context. As SiSwati speakers straddle the border between South Africa and Swaziland, it is necessary to point out that this study is confined to the speech community within the borders of Swaziland. The data was collected between August and October 2000 in six Grade 11 SiSwati classrooms in Swaziland.

I further worked on the theoretical assumption that (1) the SiSwati language curriculum reflects and constructs the larger socio-political and economic order in which it functions and (2) that attitudes towards a language as a school subject are intimately connected to economic forces outside the classroom. In support of the view taken by Pennycook (1998), Kumaradivelu (1999) and Canagarajah (1999), I believe that it is vital to critique the African language curriculum within its postcolonial and post apartheid contexts.

The following were my research questions:

- What are the historical, socio-economic and political factors that shaped the SiSwati (and other African language) curricula?
- What are the critical literacy practices that need to inform SiSwati and other African language curricula for optimal human development in a modern world?

1.2 Background to the study

What influenced me to embark on this study were two factors: my emotional attachment to the Swazi language and culture and my involvement in SiSwati materials development. So, on the one hand the research was driven by a concern for the state in which I perceived SiSwati language education in Swaziland to be in and on the other hand a hunch of what is possible. As the SiSwati speech community can be described as a border-straddling community, with almost 50% of its speakers living in South Africa, children of the speech community as a whole experience the learning of the mother tongue very differently. While the progressive Curriculum 2005 is informing SiSwati language teaching in South Africa, the SiSwati curriculum for Swaziland is wholly conceived of within a paradigm shaped by a complex set of historical forces and the present political dispensation.

I grew up in a rural village in Swaziland called Lomahasha, which was very close to Mozambique and the Mpumalanga Province. I was brought up on a curious mix of African traditional values and moral constructs based on the Christian religion. As a girl I came to learn how to do house chores such as cooking, cleaning and washing, whilst my

brothers looked after cattle. Even though Lomahasha was largely a traditional village, my home was considered one of the modern ones as we had running water and electricity. My father, who was an accountant in Swaziland's capital town, Mbabane was also one of the first people to own a car in the village.

At the age of ten, my family moved to a semi-urban area called Siteki. I did not spend much time at home as I was sent to St Michael's High School, a prestigious Anglican boarding school for girls in Manzini. I soon realised that even though I came from a family which was considered quite sophisticated in Lomahasha, at St Michael's I felt rather inadequate as I did not use English as a preferred language. (I had been mainly taught through the medium of SiSwati).

At this early stage I already experienced the relentless erosion of my language with some concern. Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) presentation of a socio-economic framework of capital (cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital, where the latter type of capital ensures that the other capitals function in society) very much depicted the dynamics at St Michael's. One form of capital that he views as vital, is linguistic capital, where he acknowledges the functional advantages which certain languages have over others, and how these advantages have implications in classrooms in terms of cultural, educational and pedagogical preferences. Some of the issues pertaining to language instruction are:

- Choices of codes used as medium of instruction.
- Choices of available languages in subject language instruction.
- Choice of teaching materials in language classrooms.
- The ideologies and communicative patterns that are presented and the ways in which they are depicted.¹

The issues above largely informed the politics of language education in my school. I came to learn the omnipotent power of English. Not only was it the medium of

¹ As English is also in the most overt way the language of the political elite, the filter down effect of this dispensation in the education domain, is self-evident.

instruction at St Michael's, but we were also punished for speaking SiSwati during school hours. The message that was communicated to us was: if you want to be accepted by the teacher and other learners, you have to renounce any allegiance to your mother tongue. In every class there was a designated coin which would be passed on to anyone who spoke SiSwati. The recipients of the coin at the end of the day had to stay after school. The forms of punishment ranged from writing the sentence 'I will not speak SiSwati again', to cleaning toilets and corporal punishment. This frustrated us to the point where we sang our SiSwati conversations because we knew we could sing in our mother tongue. In retrospect, it is now evident to me that the school followed a cynical policy of cultural and linguistic obliteration. The silence that prevailed at this school in an endeavour to avoid being given the coin, perhaps best symbolises this policy of linguistic extinction. As I reflect on my experiences at St Michael's school, it becomes clear to me that the school implemented what Phillipson (1988) referred to as linguicism:

The *forms* that linguicism takes are many. For instance, structural linguicism may be *overt*, e.g. use of a given language is prohibited in institutional settings such as schools. ... The prevailing ideology may be *consciously* linguicist, e.g. teachers instruct pupils not to use their mother tongue, because they are under the delusion that a ban of this kind will help the learning of another language. Or it may be *unconsciously* linguicist, e.g. English, rather than a local language, is assumed to be the ideal language for education ... (1988:341).

The modest linguistic capital (as well as social and cultural) inherent in SiSwati *per se* will remain a constant concern and an important consideration in the way my research has been structured.

I completed high school and enrolled for a B. A. Degree in Humanities with majors in African languages and English at the University of Swaziland. In 1991 I qualified as a teacher of SiSwati and English. While the grammar-based curriculum for SiSwati, which was the norm in neighbouring South Africa as well, confirmed all the negative images I then harboured about my mother tongue, being a teacher of English only served to enhance my status as teacher.

Largely due to encouragement from my father, in 1996 I enrolled at the University of Cape Town for my Honours in Linguistics. My father was somewhat disappointed at the way I ‘deserted’ pursuing a career as an English teacher. I, however, was comfortable with this course, as it appeared to be a continuation of my extensive exposure at undergraduate level to syntax, morphology etc. In retrospect, I realise that the ‘scientific’ nature of linguistics represented a safe space and a comfort zone (unlike the ‘messy’ environment of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics).

In 1997 I registered for a Masters degree, with the intention of honing my skills for teaching the prestigious colonial language, English as a second language in the Swaziland context. Little did I know that the programme would alert me to major issues around the teaching of the mother tongue and its relationship to second language acquisition. Coming from a cultural background that uncritically glorified English to the detriment of the development of SiSwati, the body of literature to which I was exposed during my Masters degree inevitably placed me on a very different trajectory. An introduction to psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics sensitised me to critical issues in language education. It exposed me to a wholly different way of looking at language teaching and learning. I came to understand that language education was a powerful socialising agent used by those who either directed it to perpetuate the *status quo* or to radically change society. The legacy of colonialism and its impact on the status of African languages in general became central issues. This then led me to want to understand the impact of colonialism and apartheid on the prevalent ideologies driving the SiSwati language curriculum in Swaziland.

The conceptual difficulties I encountered whilst pursuing my Masters degree also highlighted my need to understand the nature of the literacies that I failed to acquire through the study of SiSwati. I had throughout my school years, been expected to internalise information in a pre-packed form, hence the requirement to ‘critique texts’, ‘state my opinion’ and ‘reflect on issues’ at tertiary level did not come naturally. I had never been required to challenge what was considered ‘absolute truths’ in books or information from teachers in my studies of SiSwati. Swazi culture and values as

portrayed in SiSwati textbooks and oral literature was 'my way of life' and showing an understanding of it, earned me A symbols, both at Cambridge and University levels. My critical faculties were never developed through the study of SiSwati. I only had to prove to the examiner that I understood intricacies of its phonological, morphological, syntactical structure, as well as an uncritical knowledge of the body of oral literature to achieve high grades.

A further profound influence on my life, was my 18-month sojourn at the University of Sheffield. Getting out of my secure environment, meeting new people, exploring new ideas and moving along unfamiliar pathways not only involved a lot of risk taking, but also allowed me to look at my culture in a more detached and objective way. As my critical faculties developed, I began to question Swazi customs, traditions, values and ideologies and wondered how they articulated with the phallocentric character of gender relationships and broader social issues such as the lack of a democratic government and the spread of HIV/Aids in the country. This became a very personal and emotional issue as I constantly wondered how my life would have been if I had been brought up in a different culture. The Sheffield period constituted what can be described as something of a watershed in my life.

In 1997 I was approached by educational publishers, Maskew Miller Longman to be involved in a project *Languages in Flight* (LIFT)² in which I was to write a series of SiSwati textbooks for the South African SiSwati speech community by transposing and translating English blueprints. Having looked through the blueprints, I immediately sensed that if I agreed, it meant that I would commit myself to the writing of SiSwati textbooks in a wholly new paradigm in that I would agree to advocating an ideological shift tantamount to a serious questioning of traditional Swazi values. Initially, the idea of writing from blueprints had a tinge of social and cultural engineering³, a sense that I was

² A University of Cape Town based research and writing project with Maskew Miller Longman as the publishing partner that involved the development of learners' textbooks in six South African African languages. It has subsequently developed textbook series in three Namibian languages. A similar process is at an embryonic stage for nine Angolan languages.

³ Blueprinting implies the use of 'master texts' in English that will feed into different AL learners' book series through a process of cultural and linguistic transposition.

looking at a top-down model. It seemed to me that African languages and its concomitant culture were yet again on the receiving end of a neo-colonial process. The metaphor 'His masters voice' at one stage kept on flashing through my head.

Unlike the books to which I was exposed both as a student and as a teacher in Swaziland, the blueprints seemed to depart from the traditional in many ways⁴. Having internalised pre-modern sentiments through SiSwati literature, the 'new wind' blowing through the blueprints came as a culture shock. In the blueprints there was no familiar private cultural context, while public (modern) culture essentially informed the dominant discourse of these manuscripts. I felt that translating these blueprints would mean that I would leave Swazi specific culture in the lurch. I wondered when and how children would learn idioms and proverbs, the grand 'canon' of Swazi culture.

In a nutshell, the blueprints implied a reconstruction of SiSwati reality as I knew it and the values underpinned by it.⁵. The philosophical approach was humanistic and liberal while the pedagogy was informed by a critical language awareness vision of language teaching. Universal rather than particularistic cultural constructs characterised the content of these manuscripts. Other aspects that were immediately evident were a strong anti-sexist agenda and an emphasis on cooperative learning. In essence, the LIFT project required of me to write textbooks that encapsulated the same critical stance as one would find in English first language learners' books written with an overt social agenda.

⁴ The traditional for me was epitomised by a poem by S. Magagula from a prescribed SiSwati poetry anthology. This poem epitomises traditional Swazi culture. The poet experiences nostalgia for traditional values of long ago. The poem clearly mocks a modern lifestyle that some Swazis are aspiring to. The poet is pleading with people to return to 'their roots', where young girls and boys wore traditional attire instead of pants, old men and women stuck to their traditional hairstyles instead of straightening their hair. There is also nostalgia for the old traditional games, instead of gambling, for traditional dances instead of modern dance, traditional food, and sour milk instead of cool drink, and traditional houses instead of western homes.

⁵ Underpinning the values espoused in the blueprints lay a new perception of family structures and family roles. These books promoted nuclear, democratically constructed families, instead of the typical, paternalistically oriented Swazi family. Children have personalised relationships with their parents, unlike SiSwati cultural relationships that are strictly informed by positional family structures, children are encouraged to be conscious and critical. In short, the language teaching philosophy of these blueprint texts were essentially along critical language awareness lines.

It is my involvement in writing the SiSwati series, *Sivula Emasango* that triggered my interest in curriculum reform.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The dilemmas and challenges surrounding the teaching and learning of SiSwati seem to bedevil the teaching and learning of African languages across the Sub-Saharan continent. It is therefore envisaged that this study will also shed light on other language teaching contexts in Africa.

Sub-Saharan African countries use the languages of the ex-colonial masters, English, Portuguese or French as languages of wider communication, with the domains of the African languages trimmed to serve the more intimate needs of society. McCormick (1986:288) writing about the status of English in South Africa for instance, highlighted the fact that it is a high status language associated with city life, a good education, good employment opportunities, a middle-class lifestyle and access to the world outside South Africa. However, a growing body of literature points to the fact that the expanding global hegemony of the English language and the marginalisation of local, national and regional languages has disastrous implications for the psycho-social and cognitive development of the speakers of these languages. This study will trace these theoretical constructs and subsequently attempt to demonstrate the link between informed language curricula and the developmental aspects mentioned above.

In Swaziland, where English is one of two official languages, the value placed on it is intimately connected to the economic and social sphere in which individuals of the society operate. Not only is it the medium of instruction in schools, but it also dominates the media. Amongst other factors, it is the impregnable position of English that has negatively affected SiSwati speakers' perception of their mother tongue⁶.

⁶ This has led to a situation where parents want their children to be taught English from the first day of school. In many schools, SiSwati is no longer offered as a school subject whilst in others learners can choose to do Afrikaans, French or Portuguese.

In the education sector, the status of SiSwati is also negatively influenced by what can be termed its historical proximity to isiZulu. The problem of the predominance of isiZulu literature (albeit in translated form) and the interventions by isiZulu scholars in the SiSwati curriculum will be explored.

Sound curriculum development practices adhere to a broad set of procedures that is based on generally accepted theoretical constructs. My personal observations as a teacher in Swaziland led to the belief that curriculum development practices around the teaching and learning of SiSwati need to be measured against generally accepted theory. The central problem, then, to be investigated is the perceived link between the declining status and popularity of SiSwati as a school subject, the legacy of colonialism and apartheid and the curriculum process that has informed and shaped the perceptions and understanding of the teaching and learning of SiSwati.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The aim of this study then is to critically analyse the historical, socio-political, cultural and linguistic factors that shape and determine the SiSwati language curriculum in Swaziland. My definition of curriculum is taken in its broadest sense to mean the dialectical interaction between the syllabus documents, classroom processes (including teaching and assessment) and the socio-political context in which syllabus design and classroom practice take place. My focus in this study therefore, is with both the actual practice of the teaching and learning of SiSwati (what happens in the classroom and the school) and the broader socio-political and economic matters which directly influence this practice (including language attitudes and language use).

My original intention was to limit the study to SiSwati curriculum policy documents, but the history and nature of curriculum development in this context necessitated the scrutiny of textbooks and examination papers, interviews with teachers and officials responsible for curriculum development and finally to explore the attitudes of learners towards the subject. An evaluation of this nature will not only attempt to determine the literacy

practices/competencies embedded in the SiSwati curriculum, but will also serve as an illumination of the ideologies and values reinforced by the curriculum.

The study will also explore the potential of SiSwati to create an intellectual climate that favours optimal child development. As Cope and Kalantzis (2000) have remarked, there are many pressure points that require curriculum developers to think about literacy in new ways. Some of these pressure points are technology, work, visual communication, diversity, social mobility and social progress. New information and communication technologies generate new text forms that traditional literacy pedagogies are often ill-equipped to address; facing multiple occupations throughout one's working life demands higher levels of literacy; visual literacy becomes necessary to interpret still and moving images; workplaces and economies are more globalised and there is an increasing diversity of culture and language. Personal aspirations also make it relevant to reconsider the content and methods used in SiSwati classrooms.

In this regard, I wish to find ways of helping SiSwati speaking learners gain the kind of literacy that is required for one to function optimally in a global world. Further, it is necessary to ensure that the next generation of curriculum developers and teachers has a sound and well-founded conception of literacy, and that their design of curriculum and teaching considers the pressure points listed above.

I will advance the argument that crucial psycho-social development should take place through SiSwati and that the full development of a second language can only take place if it is launched from an elaborated mother tongue literacy base⁷. *At this point it is necessary to state unambiguously that this study does not support an agenda of SiSwati*

⁷ I use the "elaborated" in the Bernsteinian sense of the word. Central to Bernstein's writings is the distinction between the restricted code and the elaborated code. Some of the differences between the two codes :

1. Syntax is more formally correct in the elaborated code, but looser in the restricted code.
2. There are more logical connectives like if and unless in the elaborated code, whereas the restricted code uses more of simple co-ordination like and and but.
3. There is more originality in the elaborated code; there are more clichés in the restricted code.
4. The elaborated code is used to convey facts and abstract ideas, the restricted code attitude and feeling.

becoming the media of instruction beyond the primary school phase. However, I do believe that an innovative developmental program for this language as a school subject would be crucial to the cognitive, psychosocial and economic empowerment of Swazi children.

Furthermore this study does not claim that a language curriculum reform programme represents a cure all for scholastic under-achievement. Language education should be regarded holistically as part of a wider programme of ongoing social, economic and political reform, aiming at the development of a progressive and democratic social dispensation.

The intention behind this study then is to add to a new vocabulary for a sustained conversation amongst SiSwati curriculum planners, educationists, educational publishers and teachers that will lead to a process of curriculum renewal. Although the focus of the study is Swaziland, I do believe that much of the theoretical constructs pertaining to the teaching and learning of SiSwati can be applied to Southern African languages. These speech communities have much in common and to some extent do share a common destiny. I envisage that the findings of the study will not only contribute to what is known and understood about the role and potential of the African language curriculum in the context of the linguistic, political, social and economic transformation of Southern Africa at the beginning of the 21st century, but that it will also shed some light on the way forward for traditional speech communities living in the twilight world between traditionalism and modernity.

1.5 The structure of the dissertation

This study commenced with a motivation for the study in which I spell out its aims, methodology and scope.

As a point of departure for a study on the teaching and learning of an African language, *Chapter 2* explores the historical, socio-economic and political framework against which

the teaching and learning of African languages takes place. I examine the concept of 'Afro-pessimism', which is increasingly used in discussions on the general state of the African continent and which I surmised would impact on perceptions and attitudes to African languages. Through a literature review, I look at the potential of language to address the prevailing mood of pessimism in African societies. This led to related questions: Could the state of neglect of African languages and the restrictedness in terms of their usage indeed be one of the underlying causes of the socio-economic quagmire Africa finds itself in? How does the self-referential worldview encapsulated in SiSwati and other African languages articulate with the highly evolved modern and global paradigm in which these children have to live and work?

It is established in this chapter that the African mindset that perpetuates traditionalism as a response to modernity has failed to address the fundamental issues which beset Africa. This inability to successfully articulate with modernity seemed to have caused the prevailing mood of afro-pessimism. It also suggests that the much-touted African renaissance, which implies macro-economic policies, trade liberalisation, democracy, and privatisation can only be realised by modern notions of statehood, individual rights and intellectual freedom. I argue that these qualities can only be realised when the mother tongue of children is sufficiently developed to act as the conveyer belt for these constructs.

Chapter 3 explores the relationships between language, culture and thought. Through a literature review, the notion that language and culture play a pivotal role in shaping the political, social and economic destiny of entire speech communities, is also explored and confirmed. It is argued in this chapter that the psychological tools (cultural artifacts) embedded in a culture are significant determiners of the performance of societies and that the way individuals think, act and experience their lives depends on their largely culturally determined mental constructs. Relevant literature points conclusively to the fact that psychological tools, outlooks, perceptions, interests and habits may be determined in the way a language is taught and learned.

Considering then the crucial function of language and culture in determining the destiny of speech communities, I conclude in this chapter that a response to Africa's problems that ignores the development of a paradigmatic shift from within the African languages themselves, may meet with limited success. The challenge then is to engineer a shift in terms of cultural values as expressed through language itself. This review pointed to the need to respond to African language teaching and learning from a strong sociolinguistic as well as a psycholinguistic perspective.

This led me to the all-important literature on literacy in the development of African speech communities in *Chapter 4*, a review which provides both an in-depth understanding of the notion of literacy as well as a conceptual framework for gauging literacy practices and needs in SiSwati. The review points conclusively to the fact that literacy programmes are never neutral, and that it is a social practice that is embedded in and working through particular cultural, historical, political and social contexts. Literacy is seen to be entangled with larger issues such as social and political history, economic development, educational priorities and even such questions as social equity and democracy.

Using the notion of literacy as a social practice explored in *Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5* looks at the historical, political, social and economic issues in which SiSwati literacies are embedded. It provides a critical overview of the history of curriculum development in SiSwati by looking at the intimate (albeit unequal) relationship between SiSwati and isiZulu. It explores the way in which SiSwati language development has been influenced by its geographical and linguistic proximity to its powerful sister language isiZulu. The indirect and unintended way in which Fundamental Pedagogics seeped into SiSwati language education, and the manner in which it ironically still functions as the pedagogical paradigm, a decade after its demise in the South African educational dispensation, is traced and explained.

Chapter 6 presents and reflects on the research methods used in generating data for this study. An empirical survey by way of a questionnaire, classroom observation and

interviews with teachers, language education officials and learners is done. I also engage in a critical documentary analysis of SiSwati curriculum documents, textbooks and external examination papers. The findings in this chapter present a depressing picture of the status of SiSwati as a language and subject at school.

The unhelpful influence of the isiZulu language and the lack of a transparent process guiding the development of the SiSwati language curriculum is explored in greater depth in *Chapter 7*, where I critically examine the present process of curriculum development in SiSwati. The lack of a comprehensive SiSwati curriculum policy document and the nature of the relationship between curriculum planners, the publishing company (which enjoys monopoly rights), textbook developers and examiners is closely scrutinised.

Chapter 8 encapsulates a critical analysis of the socio-cultural values reinforced by the SiSwati language curriculum materials. As has been pointed out by Alastair Pennycook (2001) in his recent book *Critical applied linguistics*, that classrooms are situated in political and ideological worlds and that classrooms are also interactional spheres for power relations of both macro (i.e. societal) and micro (local/classroom related) nature, I look at how SiSwati literacy practices reproduce their own brand of socio-political and cultural ideologies. SiSwati texts are examined against the conceptual framework of the value and uses of desirable literacies as identified in *Chapter 4*. The literature on the role of language and culture in shaping the destiny of speech communities reviewed in *Chapter 3* also informs this facet of the study as I look at the cultural values, ideologies and competencies reinforced by the literature aspect of the SiSwati curriculum. I conclude that pre-modern and traditional values in SiSwati texts are dominant and in the light of the pedagogical needs of children, are psycho-socially detrimental to learners as they contradict the accepted emancipatory and critical literacies identified in *Chapter 4*.

Chapter 9 deals with an empirical study of the attitudes of teachers and learners to the teaching and learning of SiSwati as a subject. I identify these attitudes and perceptions by looking at their views of SiSwati as both a language and a subject. Their generally

negative attitudes towards SiSwati and the shift in usage in critical domains point to a situation with far-reaching pedagogical consequences.

The final chapter encompasses findings, conclusions and recommendations and rounds off the study.

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Chapter 2

The rocky African road from traditionalism to modernity

A plausible explanation for this state of affairs is that education in Africa has been the number one victim of the political and economic tribulations that have afflicted the region, in the last two decades. The attainment of independence was expected to be followed by nation-building, but, this is yet to happen, as the process has been impeded by a combination of internal and external forces: political instability, various forms of unfavourable conditions of international trade, internal strife, demographic, environmental and economic problems (Obanya, 1999:19).

2.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with a quote by Obanya (1999) enumerating a host of issues pertaining to Africa's socio-political and economic woes. All of them sound familiar as historians, economists, politicians, sociologists and journalists with monotonous regularity cite some or all of these issues as reasons for Africa's failure to progress. It has indeed become a cliché to describe African socio-political and economic systems as a classic example of a deficit model. In the words of the French Africanist, Jean Francois Bayart, Africa is variously portrayed as '...doomed, crippled, and disenchanting, adrift, coveted, betrayed or strangled, always with someone to blame.' He goes on to describe a French cartoon where an African faces 'the lottery of death' with the wheel spinning around several stark choices: famine, civil war, drought, apartheid, the invasion of locusts, corruption, and the AIDS epidemic (cited in le Pere, 1998:3). The seemingly intractable problems of the continent have generated the metaphor *Afro-pessimism* that is devastating in its determinism. Nobody claims authorship of the term, but numerous scholars view it as a fitting description for the psychological state of the 'Dark Continent'. Even the normally restrained United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan saw it fitting to describe Sub-Saharan Africa as 'a cocktail of disasters' (Mail and Guardian, 10th May, 2002).

In this chapter I endeavour to frame the socio-political, cultural and economic factors which have shaped contemporary Africa, as well as the solutions that have been advanced as a way forward. As my hunch is that African language development and curriculum renewal are intricately bound up with these wider societal issues, an exploration of the former can hardly take place without an acknowledgement of the way macro conditions impact on these educational matters.

Literature exploring the general performance of African states in the post-colonial period presents a depressing picture of dysfunctional states mostly in a socio-economic and political downward spiral. On the economic front, scholars maintain that in spite of attempts at economic reform and adjustment programmes that stretched over many decades, nothing has really changed. Economic stagnation and the collapse of social infrastructures have resulted in a serious deterioration in human conditions. These trends have been fuelled by other conditions, i.e. endemic famine, recurrent drought and the HIV scourge. In a vicious circle of cause and effect, a catch 22 situation has arisen⁸.

In identifying the root of the deep malaise that Africa finds itself in, journalists, politicians, sociologists and economists responded differently. Broadly speaking analyses, irrespective of the discipline, tend to fall into two general categories. In the first category are those who would argue that Africa's woes can be traced back to centuries of economic, political, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic abuse inflicted on the continent by exploitative colonial and post-colonial powers.

The second category of analysts tend to trace the continent's problems to inherent weaknesses in governance, Africa's inability to compete globally, ineffective educational systems, cultural practices that mitigate against general progress and linguistic underdevelopment.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of some of the socio-political and economic factors impinging on African development see Chabal, 2002, Ayittey, 2002, Nicholas van de Walle, 2001, Chole and Ibrahim, 1995 amongst others.

In the section that follows, the arguments supporting these two opposing views will be traced and finally evaluated. Significantly, both these positions argue that the language factor is pivotal in Africa's progress (or the lack thereof).

2.2 Socio-economic and political factors impacting on development in Africa

President Mbeki (2000) at the first African Renaissance Conference on 28 September 1998 fore-grounded external conditions as instrumental in the shaping of contemporary Africa:

[A]n enormous challenge faces all of us to do everything we can to contribute to the recovery of African pride, the confidence in ourselves that we can succeed as well as any other in building a humane and prosperous society. None of us can estimate or measure with any certainty the impact that centuries of the denial of our humanity and contempt for the colour black by many around the world have on ourselves as Africans. But clearly it cannot be that successive periods of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism and the continuing marginalisation of our Continent could not have had an effect on our psyche and therefore our ability to take our destiny in our own hands (Mbeki, 1998).

In the quotation above, Mbeki highlighted what he regarded as some of the contributory factors to the African quagmire. He rightly points out that these factors have had an influence on the African psyche and African people's ability to contribute to the re-development of the continent. Using Ayittey's (2002) categories, Mbeki's diagnosis places him in the category of 'externalists', i.e. those who ascribe Africa's woes to factors beyond Africa's control: Mbeki's list of externally administered abusive practices includes: western colonialism and imperialism, the pernicious effects of the slave trade, clichéd perceptions of Africans, persistent exploitation by avaricious multinational corporations, a lopsided international economic system, inadequate flows of foreign aid, and deteriorating terms of trade.

Mbeki is not alone in placing the blame on factors beyond Africa's control. Another prominent advocate of the 'externalist' position is the influential African scholar and

historian, Ali Mazrui, who claimed that almost everything that has gone wrong in Africa can be traced back to Western colonialism and imperialism. His view is that colonialism 'harmed indigenous technological development' (1986:164) and caused the infrastructure (roads, railways, and utilities) to collapse⁹ (p. 202). Even, 'the political decay is partly a consequence of colonial institutions without cultural roots in Africa.' Therefore, according to this view, self-congratulatory western assertions of contributing to Africa's modernisation are hollow: 'The West has contributed far less to Africa than Africa has contributed to the industrial civilisation of the West,' he asserts. African socio-economic decay Mazrui interprets as 'the slow death of an alien civilisation' and Africa's rebellion 'against Westernisation masquerading as modernity.' Western institutions are doomed 'to grind to a standstill in Africa' or go into decay. Mazrui fails however to create a credible and viable alternative to the western model.

Walter Rodney in his book *'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa'* (1981) holds a set of views along the same line as Mazrui, although his arguments are less sweeping in nature. Four centuries of colonialism created a chronic state of dependency¹⁰ and underdevelopment as colonial rule created artificial dependencies and consequently a state of permanent trade imbalance. The gold for trinket trade is still very much in place, he argues, although the nature of the commodities traded might have changed unrecognisably. His central argument is that by disrupting pre-colonial systems that worked for African societies and by imposing alien models, colonialism sowed the seeds for the political and economic crises we witness today. By imposing national boundaries that suited the interests of colonial powers, the resulting ethnic and cultural

⁹ This Mazrui ascribes to the 'shallowness of Western institutions', 'the lopsided nature of colonial acculturation' and 'the moral contradictions of Western political tutelage.'

¹⁰ The globalisation of the economy has contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa in the sense that as the world becomes more interconnected, it also becomes more dependent. As countries come to rely on imports rather than domestic production, on communication systems that are based in other countries, on regional and international trade agreements, and on environmental accords that address international problems such as global warming, cooperation becomes an effective component of an effective system. On the economic front for instance, of the 100 largest economies, 51 are corporations; only 49 are countries. By controlling much of production and trade, these giant corporations can push down the value of raw materials and products produced in poor countries, thereby destroying local manufacturing and markets (Chabal, 2002).

fragmentation, on an unprecedented scale, set the scene for the endless wars witnessed in contemporary Africa (See Dutch, 2002).

Mamdani (1996:18-19) focuses on colonial subversion of traditional forms of governance. He argues that the creation of disharmonious forms of governance, power, and authority in Africa resulted in an explosive mix of direct and indirect rule, linked to rural/urban divides. In that way, a political disjuncture between citizenship and subjecthood evolved. Urban areas were directly ruled along modern lines, with civil society and citizenship governing the way in which politics functioned. Alongside direct rule, colonial authorities established patterns of indirect rule - also called 'association' among the French - which were applied to rural, tribal areas, usually with some form of 'customary law' in place and the notion of the subject as dominant (under a local 'tribal authority'). These are the two dominant forms of the incorporation of local populations into the arena of colonial power. The former in Mamdani's view is a form of centralised despotism and the latter a form of decentralised despotism, producing complementary ways of native control. In the process, civil society is racialised (predominantly an urban experience) and native authority is tribalised (predominantly a rural experience of the peasantry) (Mamdani, 1996:18-19).

Obanya (1999) echoes Mamdani's perceptions:

Whatever the colonial policy pursued, colonialism created a hiatus between the people and the government. This 'they' and 'we' divide has remained till this day, the implication being that the citizenry sees the government, not as part of the community but merely as 'those who rule the rest of us' Government and missionary institutions were often sited outside the confines of African villages, townships and locations. In keeping with this pattern, the colonial school was often located in the fringes of the village, already fenced round, and practices within the school (the language spoken, the modes of dressing, eating habits etc.) were expected to be different from what obtained in the surrounding community. Thus, while in every other society, the educated (or cultured) person is someone well versed in the culture of his or her community, in Africa, the educated have carried with them the burden of lack of cultural identity (1999:61).

The hegemony of the west has also been cited as a negative factor in the development of Africa. Antonio Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant and one concept of reality prevails throughout society. The dominant ideology permeates every facet of human existence – taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles. Since the 19th century, the west has defined human development and set the pace of change which others have followed. The west has imposed its will on the world both by force and by the sheer attractiveness of its civilisation and the belief in the desirability of material progress and prosperity. It is able to get people in other nations to desire what it desires and thereby manipulates their aspirations. This is the bedrock of imperialism, Gramsci argues. It is what enables the west to control and use the resources of underdeveloped nations in a manner advantageous to the developed nations and at the expense of the economies of underdeveloped countries.

Even though I find it difficult to give an objective balance sheet on colonialism, as those who contend that it made no positive impact are as dogmatic as those who present colonialism as the salvation of Africa, what is unequivocal is that it was an imposition of alien rule. Whatever may have been its pluses and minuses, colonialism was a dictatorial regime that denied peoples' rights of self-determination. It brought death, pain and humiliation to millions of its victims¹¹.

'Internalists', according to Ayittey's dichotomy are those critics who lay the blame largely at the door of the local systems of governance: on internal corruption, mal-administration and excessive state intervention. Significantly Ayittey singles out UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who at the July 2000 Organisation of African Unity Summit in Lome, blamed African leaders for most of the continent's problems. At a press conference in London, prior to the summit meeting, he charged that 'Billions of dollars of public funds continue to be stashed away by some African leaders – even while roads are crumbling, health systems have failed, school children have neither books nor desks nor

¹¹ For an analysis of some of the developments brought by colonialism, see Obadina's paper 'The Myth of Colonialism.'

teachers and phones do not work' (cited in Ayittey, 2002:4). 'Externalists' would argue that abuse over four centuries from outside Africa created malfunctioning societies, that Annan's criticism identified problems that are symptomatic of a much more deeper malaise and that neo-colonialist conditions perpetuate an already malfunctioning continent¹².

Balcomb's (1996:12-20) analysis of Africa's ills in terms of a cultural, political and economic hegemony, imposed by modernity, also touches on the point made by Mazrui. (1986) and Obadina later, which is in line with Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In Balcomb's view, the hegemony of modernity is still unfamiliar to African experiences, practices and philosophies. It leaves Africans with the query of whether or not Africa is 'on the adventure of modernity as a galley slave or a passenger who travels in hope'. Balcomb points to the lack of competencies and practices to engage successfully with modernity.

Anthropologists have identified old litanies of 'cultural obstacles to development'¹³, where they argue that the cause for people who produce cocoa, coffee, groundnuts, cotton or bananas to be poor, is their strong beliefs in traditional values which preclude them from slotting into a scientific mode of production. Some have bluntly stated that some traditional African values are anti-progressive, whilst others have blamed poor Africans for having too many children (Marc Ela, 1998:2).

For Chabal (2002), African governments may adopt a democratic constitution, while true power remains with neo-patrimonial forces inside and outside government.

¹² Presently African nations are described as in a phase of neo-colonialism (Alexander, 2001; Mbeki, 2000). The essence of neo-colonialism is that the states that is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. Throughout the period of direct colonial rule, Africa had been prevented from developing their own industries, making them almost totally dependent on imports of western consumer goods. At the same time, the African states relied on revenue from raw materials and agricultural exports to fund their domestic economies. The world markets which were dominated by the industrialised nations determined the prices of both imports and exports. As Alexander has stated, '... the dead hand of colonialism continues to have a stifling grip' (Alexander, 1999:5).

¹³ This concept will be explored further in the chapter on language, culture and thought.

... that, despite the formal political structures in place, power is exercised essentially through the informal sector. Or rather, it is in the interplay between the formal and the informal that the kernel of politics is to be found on the continent. This form of government rests on well understood, if unequal, forms of political reciprocity which links patrons with their clients along vertical social lines. The operation of political institutions is thus very largely influenced by the pressures applied upon them by the exercise of personalized power which characterizes Africa today. The logic of the political system, therefore, does not correspond to its Western guise (2002:450).

Chabal touches here on a phenomenon, popularly known as *clientilism*, which is characterised by the way an individual in bureaucratic systems becomes dependent on the favours of the person directly above him/her in the pecking order. In the process, linear dependencies effectively nullify due process, leaving the door wide open for endemic nepotism and corruption.

Chabal further argues that much of what is happening in contemporary Africa seems to reinforce the notion that the continent is moving “‘backward’ – that is ‘re-traditionalising.’” In his view what is seen in Africa ‘confounds expectations of modernisation,’ both in the ways in which Africans appear to define themselves and the manner in which they behave fail to conform to what social scientists expect of modernisation’ (ibid, p. 452)¹⁴.

An overview of the externalist and internalist points of view on Africa's retrogression

The ‘internalists’ argue that for a range of reasons, not necessarily due to European intervention through colonisation and subsequent post-colonial activities, Africa has failed to progress in post-colonial times for the following reasons:

¹⁴ In this instance Chabal cites the case of what is considered illegal, such as smuggling or the embezzlement of state funds, which in Africa is often seen as legitimate by those within the community who benefit from it. Neo-patrimonial political accountability allows for actions which in the West would be seen as corrupt and which, in the long run, make development less likely.

- ❑ African leaders are loathe to govern within the confines of constitutions as designed by democratic institutions. This tendency to rule autocratically (or like a tribal leader) extends to most levels of leadership and management in government.
- ❑ The custom of clientilism effectively waters down the principle of meritocratic governance and the notion that a country runs along the principle of the rule of law.
- ❑ The values and visions of modernity, with its roots in scientific thought, remain alien and threatening to African societies
- ❑ African culture and technology, with its emphasis on a rural, agrarian life style is ill equipped to build complex urban, industrial systems.

A combined 'charged sheet' of Mbeki, Mazrui, Mamdani, Rodney and Obanya's analyses suggest centuries of abuse and exploitation by colonial powers. They collectively maintain that colonialism:

- Brought a denial of 'our humanity'.
- Cultivated Western contempt for the colour black.
- Scarred the psyche of Africans.
- Suppressed the development of indigenous technological development.
- Introduced in post-colonial times an alien and unworkable form of governance, as well as ill-fitting economic and political structures.
- Created a hiatus between people and the government.
- Created a permanent dependence on Western technology.
- Coerced Africa into the production of raw materials for the benefit of European economies.
- Offered a form of education that denigrated African cultural identity and foregrounded Western cultural constructs.
- Eroded the status and curbed the development of African languages by the imposition of colonial languages onto the subdued populations.

What can be reasonably deduced from the literature reviewed are the following common themes which surface regularly:

- ❑ African cultural constructs mitigate against the embrace of modernity as a paradigm

- ❑ In the area of governance democratic principles are all too often undermined by a deep-seated tradition of *clientilism*
- ❑ Centuries of exploitative colonial practices have left deep scars on the African psyche.
- ❑ Exploitative commercial practices reduced Africa to the producer of raw materials and perpetuated dependence on western technology and finished products.
- ❑ The colonial legacy of the supremacy of the dictatorial governor created a non-democratic model that still seems to haunt African attempts at democratic governance
- ❑ The initial accent on European rather than African values and history re-enforced a sense of living in an inferior culture
- ❑ The denigration of African languages created unforeseen damage to the psychosocial and cognitive development of African school children.

How do these views inform the discourse around the main question in this study, i.e. a sensible and sensitive response to the need for a reconceptualised African language curriculum? And in what way can African language teaching and learning respond to these seemingly intractable problems? Before these questions can be responded to, it is necessary to survey the socio-linguistic effects of colonial language policies on the fate of African languages.

2.3 Effects of colonialism on African languages

Active and systematic colonisation through annexation was largely a 19th century phenomenon. That each colonial power imposed its own language as the official medium, to the exclusion of African languages is well documented. According to Phillipson (1988) the introduction of a western language was regarded as part of the ‘civilising’ process. ‘This implied the entrenchment of the colonial language as the official language and the concomitant relegation of African languages to the domains of home, street and church. And just as colonialism has been superseded by more sophisticated forms of exploitation,

the crudely biological racist ideology has been superseded by ethnicism ... and linguisticism',¹⁵ (1988:341).

In my readings on the effects of colonialism on language education I have found Alexander's (2001) analysis particularly useful as he has also taken cognisance of the effects of apartheid language education policy on the plight of African languages in Southern Africa. Alexander has argued that language policy and language practices, like all other aspects of social life in southern Africa, have been adversely affected by the experience of colonial and apartheid rule. Approaching issues of language policy from a macro-linguistic or sociology-of-language point of view, Alexander identifies three important phenomena. Firstly, the high status attached to former colonial languages, i.e. English, French and Afrikaans or Portuguese, as the languages of government, learning and the economic domain, has resulted in the entrenchment of these languages on the continent and concomitant marginalisation – and, in some cases, the actual extinction – of the indigenous languages of southern Africa (Alexander, 2001:9). Obanya (1999:247) has observed that one of the arguments which is given for the continued use of English, French and Portuguese in post colonial Africa is that over centuries these languages became perceived as the linguistic vehicle of the upwardly mobile. It would therefore be more profitable to reinforce competence and performance in these official languages, rather than in the African languages. Already in 1971, Pierre Alexandre (1972:86) had demonstrated how, in post-colonial Africa, one's degree of proficiency in the ex-colonial language has become a determinant of class location and even of class position. The African elites who took over from the colonialists, found it convenient to use the colonial language to cling to power. And thus contributed very little to the development of African languages. Alexander refers to the demise of African language due to the protected, privileged position of the colonial languages as a:

...Static Maintenance Syndrome (SMS). This means that the native speakers of the languages believe in and cherish the value of their

¹⁵ Ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988).

languages, i.e., the vitality of the languages is, within certain limits, not placed in doubt. However, they do not believe that these languages can ever attain the same power and status as, for example, English or French. ...The intelligentsia reinforce this static maintenance syndrome because their relative proficiency in the dominant ex-colonial languages allows them to enjoy what Bourdieu called the “profits of distinction” (Alexander, in press).

Secondly, after independence the initial convenience as well as the perceived need to continue using the ex-colonial language(s) as the official languages of the state and as the only effective language(s) of power came to be justified routinely in strategic terms. That is to say, the political leaders repeated the mantra that there was no generally acceptable indigenous language that had the necessary lexical and other technical resources to displace the ex-colonial language(s) in their high-status functions.

In this regard, Alexander (2001) has eloquently explained that in post-colonial African countries, it became inevitable that social policy would not call into question the fundamental economic structures of the colonial state. Very little substantive change could be initiated in any of the independent states. The relevance of this observation in the present context is that in the realm of language policy, unless there were special circumstances, there was no chance of any fundamental change. Indeed, the continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial state is arguably most visible in the language policy domain (2001:4).). It then became commonplace to classify the languages in African societies as mother tongues, community (area) languages, lingua-francas, second/foreign languages and official languages. The colonially inherited language is often the official one (Obanya, 1999).

Thirdly, Africa south of the Sahara which represents the broad focus of my research, is the largest geographical area where the home language of learners at all levels of education is not self-evidently used as the language of teaching in the school system. There seems to be no acknowledgement of the fact that mother-tongue education is a universal principle practised or aspired to by people throughout the world. ‘In spite of the consensus of informed pedagogical opinion that the best and most effective education

takes place through the medium of the child's home language, it is still true that for most African people in so-called Anglophone countries, 'real' and worthwhile education comes through the medium of English (Alexander, 2001:5). Numerous arguments are put forward for the non-use of African languages in the school context which range from the multiplicity of languages, the multi-ethnic character of urban areas and the low level of technical development¹⁶.

Sadly, the use of foreign languages in critical domains in the place of the languages known best and understood by the majority of the people in Africa has come at a price. In Alexander's (1995) words, the price has been that:

The vital processes by which innovation, creativity and dynamism are activated among Africans, therefore become short-circuited in these very critical domains (Alexander, 1999:5).

Phillipson has also advocated that 'The rapid spread of English is not without costs. Those who fail in the quest for the alchemy of English see their life chances reduced. Those who become proficient in the alien language may sacrifice the language of their parents and their own culture in the process. The dominant language partially displaces other languages, through exclusive use of that language in certain domains (for instance in the media, or in the modern sector of the economy) and may replace the other languages totally (1988:342).

Prah (1998) sees a strong link between democratic empowerment and the recognition of African languages:

... our use of European languages protects the cultural basis of a privileged and narrow class position. It is a linkage to our former colonial masters which culturally alienates us from the broad masses of Africa. ... Our argument has been that these issues of language and culture are of enormous relevance to the development of a society. If we want to culturally and educationally empower the masses of Africa, we have to take

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of some of the reasons given for the non-use of African languages beyond Grade 3, see Obanya, (1999).

knowledge to the masses in languages of their native historical experience and creativity. Unless we do this, there is no chance of advancement; until we do this, we will be forever culturally tied to the linguistic and cultural apron string of the former imperial masters of the world (1998:11).

Prah and Djite (cited in Alexander, 1995:5) reiterate the problem of achievement and creativity in a foreign language:

[For] there is no country in the world where the most important, most prestigious and the most powerful activities of the nation are conducted in what is – for most of the citizens – a foreign language. It is only on the African continent where the dead hand of colonialism continues to have a stifling grip on the way the elites construct or perceive reality that this simple fact remains visible (cited in Alexander, 1999:5).

Makgoba *et al* (cited in Bamgbose, 2002:2) pose the same worrying question:

... Can African people champion their renaissance through the medium of foreign languages? This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to African people. Language is culture and in language we carry our identity and culture. Through language we carry science and technology, education, political systems and economic developments. The majority of African people, about whom the rebirth or re-awakening is about (sic), live in their indigenous languages throughout their lives.

Arguing for the introduction of SiSwati or other African languages as the media of instruction beyond the primary school phase is beyond the scope of this study. However, a critical premise on which the study is based, is that an intellectualised¹⁷ innovative developmental program for SiSwati as a *school subject* is crucial to the cognitive, psychosocial and economic empowerment of Swazi children.

¹⁷ This term was first used in the context of upgrading the language functions of minority languages, which were historically neglected through unfair competition with a more influential language. There are many examples of languages that have been historically disadvantaged in Africa and all over the world. At times the languages can be described as being in a state of intellectual poverty because of educational neglect.

In the light of the socio-political and economic challenges that have impacted on the African continent, and adversely effected the educational dispensation as a whole, I would like to explore literature which has attempted to address the social, economic and political ills identified in this chapter.

2.4 Which way forward for Africa?

Arguments for the revitalisation of the African continent range from those who argue for a complete re-colonisation of the continent to those who support the need for a civil society that is equipped with cultural capital and a mindset that will uphold democracy, liberalisation, privatisation and entrepreneurship. More recently, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD¹⁸) declared that democracy and good governance are preconditions for development. On the face of it, the solution sounds simple, African countries must become democratic; democracy should reduce the scope for conflict and make good governance more likely. In turn, good governance should bring about the political stability, the institutional consolidation and the operation of the rule of law that are universally seen as the necessary framework for investment. Greater investment in turn should facilitate economic growth. Growth provides the foundation for development. What is embraced by NEPAD then, is a policy decision to adhere to principles conducive to the development of a modern state. Democracies, however, can only exist and can only be upheld by a citizenry schooled in the ideals and values encapsulated in the concept. The NEPAD initiative calls for the cultivation of a kind of citizen that is able to function and flourish in a state of modernity.

However, the motives driving the NEPAD initiative may be rightly questioned. Chabal (2002) has aptly remarked that some of the countries who have transcended to multi-party

¹⁸ The New Partnership for Africa's Development is an African [programme for African development that came into being as the result of the joining together of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA Plan at the request of the Organisation of African Unity. The New African initiative, which is now officially referred to as NEPAD, was approved by the Lusaka summit on 11 July 2001. The partnership is a commitment by African leaders to get rid of poverty and to place the African continent on a path of lasting growth and development. It is founded on African states practising good governance, democracy and human rights, while working to prevent and resolve situations of conflict and instability on the continent.

democracy have done so because they were instigated 'at the behest of the donor community which insisted that further aid would be forthcoming only if the new 'democratic' political conditionalities were met. Thus, democracy in the form of multiparty elections was generally seen by African rulers as the price to pay for continued financial assistance rather than as the political modality that would make development more likely. In such circumstances, the effect of the transitions that took place was competitive elections, remarked Chabal, but not ... necessarily to lead to the construction of a political system that delivered greater satisfaction to the bulk of the population' (2002:449).

Obadina (<http://www.afbis.com/analysis/crisis.html> 26th June 2000) cites Norman Stones in 'The Observer' newspaper, who cynically proposed a programme of 'enlightened re-imperialism' to redirect Africa. He saw conditions in Africa as still similar to what they were before European colonisation in the nineteenth century, warranting another version of the nineteenth century liberal international order to be re-imposed:

Empires do not have to be formal or tyrannical ... There are times when they do good, and the post-independence history of Africa indicates that this is one of them (cited in Obadina <http://www.afbis.com/analysis/crisis.html> 26th June 2000).

Although Stones' view may be considered outrageous or even racist, a weaker form of Stones' vision of a re-colonisation is already evident in Africa. International companies representing a wide spectrum of industries, e.g. educational publishing, mining, telecommunications, retail and banking have set up shop in a host of southern and central African countries. In the process, Africa enjoys a degree of exposure to modern technology and business practice that seemed completely out of their reach a mere decade ago.

NEPAD's vision is evidently diametrically opposed to those who argue for a 're-colonisation' of Africa, which in itself is an admission of the continent's ability to progress on its own.

Mbeki, as a prominent voice in NEPAD is quite cynical about initiatives from economically powerful countries:

We cannot win the struggle for Africa's development outside of the context and framework of globalisation ... the fact of the matter however, is that all these processes which originate from the developed countries of the North, reflect *imperatives* of the economies and the levels of development of these countries and therefore, naturally, serve the purposes of our rich global neighbours (President Thabo Mbeki's *speech to the Non-Aligned Movement, Durban, August 31, 1998*).

But in the same speech he significantly fully embraced the vocabulary of modernity:

...*Here in lies the solution to Africa's problems* – taking cognisance of international discourse which has phrases such as "globalisation, liberalisation, de-regularisation, and the information society or the information super-highway" (President Thabo Mbeki's *speech to the Non-Aligned Movement, Durban, August 31, 1998*) [emphasis added].

In contrast with Mbeki's rousing, visionary language, a more realistic Obadina is much more interested in *how* these changes can be achieved. He argues (<http://www.afbis.com/analysis/neo-colonialism.html> 26th June 2000) that development of a modern democratic state is exceedingly complex. He reminds Africans that since they are happy to make use of modern technology in the form of electricity, pipe borne water, cars, modern medicine, television, mobile phones etc., then it is necessary to understand what it requires to sustain this kind of life style. He argues that whilst colonialism was accompanied by numerous negative elements, its greatest weakness was not laying a foundation solid enough for it to be embraced by Africans. It gave people a taste of progress in material terms without the mental tools for them to engage meaningfully with it. Whilst Africans desired the advantages of modernity, they lacked the *cultural capital* to sustain it.

Sam Mwale echoes Obadina's sentiments regarding the right kind of cultural capital and the need for 'radical internal changes' by stating that economic development in Africa is taking place without a clear cultural and philosophical foundation:

The cultural foundations of virtually all African nations remains undefined - an unrefined mish-mash of traditional, colonial and neo-colonial cultures and identities ...Africa's post-colonial trauma results from institutions, governance and economic development models without any cultural underpinnings (1998:23).

A range of other influential scholars argues that there is no place for the nurturing of traditionalism if Africa wants to join the global village. Mamdani (1996:21) has particularly strong views on what he terms the need for the detribalisation of power in Africa. He argues that modern practices such as democracy in Africa must 'entail the deracialisation of customary power - a movement against attempts to re-establish tribal authorities and practices.'

Obadina (<http://www.afbis.com/analysis/neo-colonialism.html> 26th June 2000) lays down a host of non-negotiable conditions for progress towards modernisation:

Nations that have made economic progress have irrespective of ideology, undergone similar processes. Development has involved capital accumulation, industrialisation, and the transformation of productive forces through machine technology and the introduction of factory systems of production. It entailed urbanisation; the *rationalisation* of thought and *changes* in social beliefs and institutions, including family life. Investment in physical and human capital has been indispensable. In most modern, developed countries, the economy was given primacy in the political system. Perhaps most importantly, modernity has been underpinned by certain values, including efficiency, hard work, precision, honesty, punctuality, thrift, obligation to one's duty and wealth creation. *All modernisation involved a move away from traditionalism* (<http://www.afbis.com/analysis/neo-colonialism.html> 26th June 2000) [emphasis added].

Masolo (1995) questions the relevance of harking back to Africa's past in a rapidly globalising world. He questions what he calls 'ethno-philosophy' as a meaningful approach to open a conversation regarding a way forward:

Philosophers who are seeking to revive and reinstate the traditional African philosophy as the appropriate philosophy for Africa today are doing disservice to Africa in trying to pretend that the philosophy is still

sufficient or useful or applicable to Africa's needs. i.e., that it is able to cope with the new and modern problems and issues facing Africa today as brought in with encroaching modernisation. And because this encroachment requires new methods of investigation and analysis, which must be diversified due to the complexity of the situation, ethno-philosophy just has no place in it (1995:225).¹⁹.

In the same vein Gyekye (1996) abhors the fact that ancestor worship continues to be of paramount importance in modern and traditional African life. He also recommends that for Africa to progress scientifically and technologically, 'science should be rescued from the morass of (traditional) African religious and mystical beliefs' (1996:174). Nevertheless, Gyekye insists that there are many 'cultural values and practices of traditional Africa (that) can be considered positive features of the culture and can be accommodated in the scheme of African modernity, even if they must undergo some refinement and pruning to become fully harmonious with the spirit of modern culture and to function ... satisfactorily within that culture' (ibid, p.174). However, he does not elaborate on how this marriage between traditional cultural values and global cultural practice will work in practice.

In summary then, in the on-going debate on conditions that will launch Africa on the road to modernity, there seems to be general consensus on the following issues:

- Economic growth and general social advancement depend on a democratic and enlightened form of governance
- Growth in Africa depends on a successful and sustained engagement with the global economy

¹⁹ Masolo's uncompromising description of what modernisation requires from Africa is in stark contrast with the efforts to deal with the scourge of AIDS for instance. Countries which are seeking to revive old customs such as *Umcwasho* (girls wearing woolen tassels over their heads) to combat the very real spread of AIDS can be cited as amongst those that demonstrate the frightening divide. If we were to apply Thairu's concept of regional exchanges, one wonders whether making other African girls copy the Swazi tradition of wearing woolen tassels over their heads would curb the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

- A pre-requisite for the successful engagement with modernity is the acquisition of the right kind of cultural capital and the honing of cognitive tools that will uphold modern social systems
- Modernity has been underpinned by certain values including efficiency, hard work, precision, honesty, punctuality, thrift, and obligation to one's duty and wealth creation.

2.5 Conclusion - in search of the 'right kind of cultural capital'

An overview of literature on chronic dysfunctionality in Africa points unambiguously towards the need for a movement away from traditionalism as a way of doing things, and a simultaneous embrace of the values and qualities that make it possible to engage with a modern and global world. Scholars from diverse disciplines as well as leading African political commentators show consensus regarding the way forward: African societies will have to shed anti-progressive cultural habits and in their place acquire the 'right kind of cultural capital'. It is significant that most scholars stress incisive *internal changes* in the way African societies *think* about the way things are done. That amounts to no less than a paradigm shift. From this literature survey it is evident that the envisaged internal changes hinge on an educational system which will re-examine these vital psycholinguistic and socio-cultural issues.

In the next chapter, I therefore intend to explore the nature of the intertwined interrelationships between a community's language, its psyche and how that community constructs its reality. I endeavour to answer the question: Is Africa's fate largely linguistically and culturally determined? And if so, how do we address the problem at a curriculum development level?

While engaging in this exercise, it will be crucial not to lose sight of the fact that in pre-colonial African societies African languages developed consistent with the social and cultural transformation of society. These idiom rich languages were filled with conventional wisdom and had a strong moral element to them. They were used and

Chapter 3

Linguistic and cultural determinism as factors in socio-economic progress

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I attempted to define and frame the socio-political and economic problems besetting the African continent and surveyed the solutions offered. In the literature explored the general consensus among scholars and political commentators across a broad spectrum of disciplines was that the root problem seemed to be a critical paradigmatic misalignment. African social and political structures, they concluded, still reflected adherence to values and ways of doing characteristic of pre-modern times, while at the same time attempting to engage with a virtually seamless globalised world. The result of this jarring marriage is chronic dysfunctionality that paralyses every aspect of society.

Economists, political scientists and sociologists will approach the problems of Africa from their own disciplinary perspective. For the language practitioner the need to engage with the problem of paradigm (and paradigm shift) requires a dual approach: a psycho-linguistic as well as socio-cultural approach. However, before one can define the possible role of language and what amounts to a behaviour modification exercise, it is important to come to an understanding of the dynamic relationship between a community's linguistic and cultural habits on the one hand, and the way it can shape its world view.

There is an expansive body of literature supporting the notion of a deterministic relationship between a people's language and their culture. From the ensuing overview it is clear that no scholar writing on this topic has attempted to disprove the perception that linguistic and cultural patterns silhouette people's views of reality, control their memory

and thinking processes and also contribute to their understanding and misunderstanding of other cultures. (Cole and Scribner, 1974:52).

3.2 An historical overview of the perceived relationship between language, culture and thought.

Arguments dating back to the 18th century (and before) suggested a symbiotic relation between language and thought. Johann Gottfried von Herder, an 18th century German philosopher, argued that because people come to know ideas through language, its characteristics help to shape experience for its speakers; thus, language is closely attached to a culture's character (Code, 1980). In other words, a language such as SiSwati forms the framework (and by implication the conceptual boundaries) for a most unique construction of speech communal reality.

Along the same lines the 18th and early 19th century German thinkers, such as Johann George Hamann and Wilhelm von Humbolt, also argued that language is not simply a vehicle for the expression of thought, instead, thought and language are co-dependent (Stam, 1980). On the influence of language on thought, von Humbolt critiqued a common perception of language as a mechanistic tool: the essence of language 'is not one of sounds and signs, but a diversity of the world-views themselves' (cited in Stam, 1980: 245). The Humboltian tradition was continued by anthropologists, most notably Franz Boas (Boas, 1911), and Sapir, who emphasised the social nature of language, (Sapir, 1935). If we relate the arguments of the Humboltian tradition to SiSwati for instance, the implication is that SiSwati goes beyond influencing the way speakers of this language think, but that all aspects of life are being programmed and monitored through linguistic constructs: politically, economically, socially, and environmentally.

However, it was Benjamin Lee Whorf who introduced the notion of linguistic relativity to the debate at that time. Like Boas and Sapir, Whorf maintained that language embodies a worldview (or *Weltanschauung*) shaped by individual cognition. But then he went further: language, he hypothesised, defines the way its speakers perceive external

developed consistent with the social and cultural reproduction of the society in areas of science, medicine and philosophy. Now, as the modernist perspective outlined above has suggested, the need for African societies to be reformed in line with the demands of modernity and globalisation points to an appropriate modernisation of African languages. It also suggests an urgent need not only to create the appropriate mindsets and the concomitant vocabulary in learners to engage with modernisation and participate in a world that is functioning in global terms.

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information and silhouettes their mental representations of the information. The Whorfian hypothesis seeks to prove a connection between linguistic patterns and mental representations. He wrote:

We dissect nature along the lines laid down by our native language. The world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds – and this means largely by linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organise it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, *but its terms are absolutely obligatory*, we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organisation and classification of data which the agreement decrees (Whorf, 1956:213-214) [emphasis added].

Because of such linguistic organisation of our perception of the environment, speakers of markedly different languages will come to represent physically similar information differently in their minds. Whorf's hypothesis can also be applied to speakers of the same language: users of markedly different varieties are pointed by their varieties toward different types of observations and different views of the world, hence they are not alike as observers and arrive at different worldviews.

Several researchers have tried to simplify Whorf's hypothesis by reducing it to a catch phrase or a metaphor. Carroll (1953) for example, in summarising Whorf's achievements, notes that it was the special merit of Whorf that he was able to regroup the ideas of his predecessors and teachers, especially Edward Sapir into the single phrase: 'language and culture'. Carroll, building on the Whorfian hypothesis believed that 'language is a lattice' or screen through which reality is filtered. The lattice of language acts without the speaker noticing it, like a screen on a window to emphasise certain features of reality and obscure others. Bolinger (1970) explains Whorf's perception of language and reality as a pair of glasses with more or less warped lenses through which we view our surroundings. As is the case with the lattice's work in Carroll's metaphor, the wearer remains oblivious of the distortion created by the lenses.

In another attempt to make the hypothesis more nuanced, Miller and McNeil (1969) advanced a weak and strong form of Whorf's hypothesis. The strong version of the hypothesis, they concluded, stated that the role of language was to develop categories of cognition. Davis (1970) labelled this the nominalistic or extreme view of language determinism: that language directly dictates what you think.

The weak version of the hypothesis, as proposed by Miller and McNeil (1969), rested on the premise that a speaker of a language, when confronted with a choice or decision, will follow guidelines suggested by the speaker's mother tongue. Whorf did not think that all thoughts are linguistically based. According to him, only the linguistic elements of thoughts are linguistically determined (see Whorf, 1956:66, footnote 2). Indeed, according to Sutherland (1992:30), not only does a person's mother tongue provide him or her with a series of categories, which form a framework for his or her perception of things, it also 'decodes what thoughts are possible to that person and the person cannot escape from it into any other way of perceiving the world'. Chaika, perhaps somewhat extremely, suggests that we are 'prisoners' of our particular language (1994:51) People who speak different languages perceive the world differently and this implies that people are prisoners of their languages. The limits of their languages are the limits of their worldviews. From this perspective, people are therefore at the mercy of the particular language, which has become the sole tool of mediating the world. They are more or less slaves of their mother tongue in their thinking and their way of comprehending the world. Chaika evidently advocates a strong version of language determinism. Davis *et al* (2000:15) also assert that 'our language-based habits of perception underpin our activities and creations'.

The hypothesis of linguistic relativity informs this study in a crucial way as it lies at the heart of the problem of clashing worldviews as explored in the previous chapter.²⁰

²⁰ The Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis becomes contentious when we consider the fact that all languages are mutually translatable. What can be said in the language can be said in another. Just because a language has no exact equivalences, or else, a single word for an entity, does not mean that given a similar experience, a people are not able to think about that entity in their language. Though languages have different lexical differences, this does not mean that since a language has separate terms for certain phenomena, the users of that language are unable to distinguish these phenomena from others. For instance, it does not mean that

For Franz Fanon (1967:13) a language, such as SiSwati, lies at the heart of the culture, and it is intra-relationally its most central element in as far as it measures and reflects a Swazi thought-world. It bears the record of history, traditions, beliefs, values and knowledge of the Swazi people, it helps them learn and relate to each other as social animals in a material world of production, reproduction, distribution and exchange. Speaking SiSwati means more than an exercise in the use of syntax and morphology, but it implies the support of a whole culture and civilisation as it embodies the testimonials, identity and pulse of Swazi people. The SiSwati language becomes a 'mental home' of the Swazi community and they use it to define the external world (cited in Prah, 1995:2).

Jean Piaget, can in many ways be seen as an opponent to Whorf and his associate thinkers. Piaget, too is interested in language and the perception of reality, yet his approach is a completely different one, and so is its result. Whereas Whorf concentrated on the system of language, Piaget focused on the subject. He investigated the emergence of intelligence in the child and how it manifested in language. What Piaget tried to describe was not the perception of reality but its construction by an active individual. In his view, the development of thought predominates over that of language. Language is a way of packaging thought rather than a model that shapes our thoughts. For Piaget, cognitive development and thought begin in the pre-linguistic period. He 'believed that the development of representational abilities at the end of the sensorimotor period makes possible the development of language, as well as other forms of representation such as drawing and mental imagery' (Siegler, 1991:83). In other words, language is a secondary product of thought.

Jean Piaget's explanation of the relationship between language and thought is evidently a much weaker version of the Whorfian hypothesis and differs from it in the sense that it suggests greater individual freedom in human development. However, it is important to

non-speakers of Inuit cannot see the differences between different kinds of snow. The different languages do not irredeemably limit their people's perceptive abilities. It is just in particular areas that their language is unable to assist them in the same ways as [Inuit] (Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995:19).

note that Piaget acknowledged the notion of a particular mindset that drives or shapes human destiny.

Vygotsky's focus on the interrelation between language and thought has also been useful in highlighting for me the relationship between language and thought. Contrary to both Whorf and Piaget, Vygotsky noted an important mutual influence between language and thought. It is mainly the concept of egocentric thought and speech which is rejected by Vygotsky. He wrote:

We have thus found that autistic thinking, in neither its genetical, structural, nor functional aspects, shows itself as a primeval force and basis for the development of thought (Vygotsky, 1986:25).

Unlike Piaget, who thought egocentric speech would die out as the child grew older, Vygotsky saw it as a precursor to inner speech, representing and structuring thought. 'It serves mental orientation, conscious understanding; it helps in overcoming difficulties' (Vygotsky, 1986:228). As a result, Vygotsky saw an important influence of language on thought:

Piaget argues that 'things do not shape a child's mind'. But we have seen that in real situations when the egocentric speech of a child is connected with his practical activity, things do shape his mind. Here, by 'things' we mean reality, neither as passively reflected in the child's perception nor as abstractly contemplated, but reality that a child encounters in his practical activity.' (Vygotsky, 1986:39).

The quotation above demonstrates that the influence Vygotsky attributes to language is different from Whorf since it still sees the child's activity as central to the process. For him, cognitive development takes place as a result of mutual interaction between the child and those people with whom he/she has regular social contact. Lewis (1963:47) emphasised this point when he wrote:

As a child adapts to his society, he transforms his own language in the direction of the mother tongue, and the mother tongue in the direction

of his own language. For their part, those who speak to him sometimes adopt his speech and sometimes adapt their speech to his. The child moves towards conformity with the usages of his society.

In the process of development and adaptation to the active environment, the child does not master only the items of cultural experience, but the habits and forms of cultural behaviour, and the cultural methods of reasoning (Van der Veer & Valsiner 1994:57). This is enforced through the means of socialising him into the environment. The child's speech whether egocentric or social depends on the surrounding conditions.

It is however important to note that neither Piaget nor Vygotsky deny the forming presence of the super structure of the language the child was born into. Both argue that the 'reality' of a particular language acts as an inescapable framework for the child's interaction with adults.

Other scholars in this field essentially confirm the language-thought dichotomy, albeit adding fresh insights, often based on empirical work, to the debate. Ole Petter Opsand (cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981: 2) supports a strong version of linguistic relativity:

Language has a function which goes far beyond the communication of verbal messages. The possession of language is a prerequisite to cognitive and conceptual development, and as a consequence to our constituting of reality which in turn constitutes the starting point for our everyday praxis (1976a:1).

In a similar vein, Skutnabb-Kangas whose views were decisively informed by her work in the field of cognitive psychology argues forcefully along the same lines: 'Language is our most important instrument for forming concepts. It is the tool the individual uses when she handles her surroundings, in order to be able to take the world to herself, to grasp it and comprehend it. The instrument must be well developed, both so that the greatest possible cognitive (intellectual) growth can take place and also to make it possible the analysis of the self, of the outside world, and of the relationship between the two. Thus we need language in order to achieve the degree of awareness which will make possible the changing of reality, of that upon which the instrument of analysis focuses' (1981:3). Skutnabb-Kangas's observation that 'we need language in order to achieve the

degree of awareness which will make possible the changing of reality' seems to represent an important perception that goes to the heart of this study.

From this brief overview of the literature on the relationship between language and thought there is reasonable consensus that:

- We construct our view of the exterior world (reality) through a complex utilisation of inner speech (i.e. thought formation) and the use of public speech (i.e. a utilisation of the mother tongue). Both processes rely heavily on the 'things' (as Vygotsky put it) that surround us and which engage our minds.
- Our worldviews (and the changing of that worldview) are based on linguistic constructions.

The next section will review the literature dealing with the intertwined relationship between a people's cultural and linguistic habits and their particular patterns of thought.

3.3 Culture and thought

Cultural-historical psychology uses as a point of departure the assumption that there is an intimate connection between the environment that human beings inhabit and their thought processes. From this it follows that people in different environments have different distinguishing qualities of human psychological processes. The special quality of each human environment is that it is imbued with the achievements and follies of prior generations²¹. John Dewey explained the constituting power of cultural constructs as follows:

We live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which is in large measure what it is *because* of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities. When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an

²¹ This notion can be traced back to at least Hegel and Marx (1845/1947 cited in Cole and Wertsch 1996) and is found in the writings of cultural-historical psychologists from many national traditions (Dewey 1938; Durkheim, 1912, Leontiev, 1932, Stern, 1926; Vygotsky, 1929).

individual's body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience (Dewey, 1938:39 cited in Cole and Wertsch 1996).

The fundamental argument of cultural-historical psychologists is that people who inhabit different cultural environments think differently because their thoughts were shaped and are controlled by both their surroundings and histories. Added to cultural differentiation are the differentiating experiences of geography, diet and climate. For instance, a person who lives in Africa experiences a vastly different exterior world from somebody living in Europe or Asia. As Nyasani has put it:

In the same way reference is made to the Greek or Roman civilisation, it is quite appropriate and legitimate to refer to a particular strand of mind that is quite peculiar to an African and which shapes the prevailing conditions or permits itself to adapt to those conditions ... there is a distinctive feature about the African mind which seems to support the claim that the mind in black Africa may not necessarily operate in the same strict pattern as minds elsewhere. It is the way people's minds function and operate under certain conditions that they are able to arrogate to themselves a peculiar status, social identification and geographical label (Nyasani, 1997:50-51).

Although Nyasani treads on dangerous ground by using a concept like 'the African mind', his point that geographical conditions offer a peculiar set of challenges is worth exploring. The danger though is that this kind of argument can lead to a mindset that supports 'an African way' of doing things, and opens the way for racial stereotyping from outside Africa.

The variations in worldviews and mindsets across cultures, eras, religions, climatic regions, and so on are so profound that a good deal of academic discourse over the past thirty years has rested on the premise that all knowledge is socially constructed (Davis et al, 2000:14-15). Davis *et al* in essence, argue that a Christian thinks differently about the same set of exterior challenges from say, a Muslim, that the thought patterns of a Swazi are dissimilar from those who speak a different language and that people who have lived in different eras think differently. I find the mention of the word 'era' quite significant.

My understanding of Davis' statement is that a person who inhabits a postmodern context, a modern context or a premodern context will respond differently to the same set of exterior stimuli²².

In their early writing on this subject, the Russian cultural-historical psychologists focused on the *cultural medium* with the assumption that *the special mental quality of human beings* is their need and ability to mediate their actions through artifacts and their transmission to subsequent generations. The argument here is that cultural worlds are continuously configured in practice through the use of cultural artifacts, or objects inscribed by the collective attribution of meaning²³. Artifacts are central to humans' abilities to modulate their own behaviour, cognition and emotion. In such practices, the reliance on artifacts as tools of self-management can become routine to the point that one resorts to them without awareness, automatically. In other words, frequent practices become 'fossilised'. From a Vygotskian perspective, through this process, humans achieve a modicum of control over their own behaviour.

Vygotsky also differentiated between higher and lower order mental functions, conceiving lower or elementary mental functions to be those functions that are generally inherited, our natural mental abilities. In contrast, he saw higher mental functions as developing through social interaction, being socially or culturally mediated (Cole and Wertsch, 1991:18). Behavioural functions are limited when functioning occurs at an

²² Footnote: I use these three concepts as distinct paradigms, describing three successive, predominant Western worldviews, spanning across approximately two millennia. Pre-modern (or traditional) societies are characterised by their teleological, pre-scientific approach to their environment. Modernity with its embrace of liberal democracy, a secular state and scientific thought as mode of enquiry, can be regarded as a reaction to traditionalism as a way of engaging with our environment. Post-modernity (also referred to as Late Modernity) represents a sober reaction to the worst excesses of Modernity: the notion of progress and wealth accumulation at all costs, the degradation of the environment, the numbing effect of mass production on the individual, extreme manifestations of secularisation of society, etc.)

²³ An artifact can assume a material aspect, a spoken word, a book etc) and/or an ideal or conceptual concept. Artefacts are social constructions or products of human activity, and they in turn become tools engaged in processes of cultural production. Significantly, a particular person may even, in practice, be collectively constructed as a social artefact. Individuals regularly get constructed as symbols of something such as beauty, intelligence etc. they can then be used to signify in the figured world. Their invocation, presence or absence can serve, by evoking a world of social action peopled by valued and devalued types, to discipline people. People constantly produce artefacts that may become important in refiguring cultural worlds, giving flesh to new identities, and so eventually transforming habitus (Holland, 2002:12-13).

elementary level. Without the learning that occurs as a result of social interaction, without self awareness or the use of signs and symbols that allow us to think in more complex ways, individuals would remain slaves to the situation, responding directly to the environment.

In contrast, higher mental functions allow individuals to move from impulsive behaviour to instrumental action. Human beings socialised within their cultures differ from primitive humans and other primates in that they do not react directly to the environment. Their psychology is mediated by cultural means. From infancy they learn through interaction with others. They are what they are because of others. In this regard McMurray has written:

[The human infant] cannot, even theoretically, live an isolated existence, ... he is not an independent individual. He lives a common life as one term in a personal relationship. Only in the process of development does he learn to achieve a relative independence, and that only by appropriating the technique of a rational social tradition (1961:57 in Lock et al, 1989).

It is psychological tools that enable us to bridge the gap between lower and higher mental functions. These psychological tools include:

Various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and technical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs, and so on (Vygotsky, 1982:137).

Of the psychological tools that mediate individual thoughts, feelings and behaviours, language is the most important.

The development of thought processes depends on the interweaving of the biological development of the human body and the *naming* of the cultural/material heritage which exists in the environment to coordinate people with each other and the physical world (See Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1991; for further discussion). In growing up within linguistically structured and sustained relationships 'the child begins to perceive the world

not only through its eyes but also through language' (Vygotsky, 1978:32 in Shotter, 1997).

Vygotsky's position is crucial to the central argument of this thesis. Firstly he re-introduces the importance of the cultural medium or language that is inherited by subsequent generations. He argues that the medium becomes crucial because it is used to name objects in one's environment. The belief is that what is named can be noticed; what is not named is unlikely to be seen. It is through language that individuals construct reality. With words individuals define, shape and experience. Without the words to think, communicate, experience or understand, individuals' lives would be very different from what they are. Words expand consciousness but can also limit individuals as they can only fully experience those things that they have the words for. Language provides the framework through which individuals perceive, experience, and act.

Secondly, he provides examples of psychological tools such as forms of writing, art and counting which to me are instances of literacy. His suggestion is that these tools are also crucial psychological media. In other words, what people learn will depend on the psychological tools available to them and which tools are available will depend upon the culture in which people live. Individual thoughts, actions and experiences are therefore culturally mediated.

Ratner (1991:4) offers a different perspective and broadens the role and definition of culture to include all endeavours of humankind when he argues that culture is more than shared concepts about the meanings of things, but that culture also consists in the way people raise children, educate the populace, produce goods and services and make and enforce social policies. It includes the distribution of rights, privileges, opportunities, obligations, and wealth among various groups of people. In addition, culture includes the division of labour which integrates or segregates various activities from each other (e.g. which integrates art and education with work, or which separates them into distinctive domains). These aspects of culture, in Ratner's (1991:4) view 'surely affect people's psychology'. In a study that aims to explore the potential role of language in the push for

redevelopment of the African continent, Ratner's conceptualisation of culture is of utmost significance. He extends our understanding of culture as a private entity into the public domain, where it includes governing countries, managing the economy and the design of social policies. Different communities encode and approach the above in various ways and these approaches to raising children, governing, educating the populace, rights, privileges surely influence the mentality of speech communities.²⁴.

Raymond Williams in his work *The Long Revolution* (1961) defined culture as a 'whole way of life', the property of all classes, not just an educated elite. In his 1958 essay '*Culture is Ordinary*', Williams cited the Marxist tenet that 'culture must finally be interpreted in relation to its underlying system of production and therefore be understood to be political.

Durkheim has also expressed this collective quality of social life as follows:

Society is not a mere sum of individuals, but a system formed by their association representing a *specific reality* which has its own proper characteristics. Without doubt, collective life cannot be produced if the individual consciousness is not given, but this necessary condition is not sufficient. It is necessary further that these consciousnesses be associated and combined in a definite manner; *it is from this combination that social life results* and, in consequence, it is this combination which explains it. By aggregating, interpenetrating, fusing, the individual minds give birth to a being psychic if you will, but which constitutes a psychic individuality of a new kind. (Durkheim 1938:103-104) [emphasis added].

²⁴ Some African governments which have made corruption part of the governmental and business environment or a way of life have contributed to the mental state of 'afro-pessimism'. In some African countries the everyday lives of most individuals are permeated by corruption: land use, road barriers, health care, credit, imports and exports, to name a few. All provide occasions for corrupt practices. From the highest levels, where substantial bribes and Swiss bank accounts are a way of life, to the lowest levels where obtaining simple documents requires a bribe. Such instances of corruption have not only had severe negative consequences for economic development, the environment, health and the political order in general but they have also conditioned people's thinking in certain ways. A society's mentality is formed as individuals engage in practical private and public activities using artefacts. These practical social activities include owning, producing, and distributing goods, establishing families, educating, playing, governing, investigating and understanding the world, producing art, treating disease, adjudicating disputes and constructing religion (Ratner 1991:4).

I wish to draw attention to the word ‘combination’ which Durkheim (1938) uses. He maintains that it is the way society *combines* its different ‘artefacts’ that affects its mentality. All societies are governed by certain norms or institutions, which are part of the culture. The institutions which govern home and private culture are dissimilar from those which govern public, work culture. It is these institutions that play a critical role in the political, social and economic outlook and performance of societies. Ratner’s and Durkheim’s assertions here are pivotal for this thesis as they introduce the decisive contribution of the notion of governing public and private socio-political and economic institutions in shaping the mindsets of individuals. Their argument is that the mentality of each society is profoundly shaped by the way it understands its socio-political and economic institutions. The suggestion is that communities which muddle up public and private institutions will have a frame of mind different from one where private institutions are strictly for practising private cultural activities and public institutions govern public cultural activities²⁵.

In terms of the bond between language, culture and thought, Wittgenstein offers another useful concept which helps us to better understand the relationships between the three complementing mental domains. He ties the notions of practical activity, culture and the medium. In Jost (1995), Wittgenstein argued that the meaning of a psychological concept depends upon its functional role in society, that these psychological concepts are defined in language games, however, language games are not purely semiotic, but they are grounded in life activity. As Wittgenstein is said to have written, "the term ‘language game’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact *that the speaking of language is part of an activity*, or of a form of life." Moreover Wittgenstein recognised that life activity is collective behaviour, thus socially organised activity is the impetus for language and psychological concepts [emphasis added].

²⁵ For instance, the mentality of an individual from a community where a substantial number of employees do not come to work, use ‘African time’ or do other work (or nothing at all) while there; where corruption and favouritism are not isolated instances but the corrosive norm, where pay scales in real terms have collapsed so much that low and middle-level employees cannot house their families on their official pay; where employees therefore seek other forms of compensation, including travel, study allowances, non-wage benefits as well as illicit payments for doing (or not doing) their public duties, will differ from one whose democratic community encourages hard work, promotion based on merit and transparency.

For Rorty (1995:100) all human beings carry about a set of words which they employ in life activities including the following: to justify their actions, beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which individuals formulate praise of their friends and contempt for their enemies, their long-term projects, their deepest self-doubts and their highest hopes, language for him is the ‘words that tell the story of our lives.’

Wittgenstein and Rorty’s notion of vocabularies that lock people into a particular mindset further advances our understanding of the relationship between language and external behaviour²⁶.

The scholars above introduce other activities that generate particular psychological processes. Suffice it to say that an absence of these activities in any society results in the lack of the kinds of thinking associated with them.

Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of the *habitus* also appears to align itself with the notion of private and public culture, where each culture is guided by a set of understandings, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, motives, needs and behaviour. In Bourdieu’s words, the *habitus* is socially structured and its dispositions are durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions associated with its culture (Bourdieu 1990). From this one can deduce that different societies and cultures have different *habitus* (*es*) which determine the freedoms, necessities, values and priorities of societies in certain ways. Again, the perception that *habitus* is not an absolute, but man-made (socially constructed) is important for the purpose of this study as it responds emphatically to the idea of an ‘Africa way’ of doing things.

From the literature overview on the relationship between thought and culture the dominant line of argument supports a strong version of cultural determinism. The central argument is that culture, as conveyed by language is conceptualised as not merely an

²⁶ SiSwati language games such as expressions like ‘*umntfwanenkhosi akadleli phasi*’ (a prince/ss must always be given the best) are indeed not merely syntactic structures, but they are grounded in practical activities as indeed Princes and Princesses in Swaziland sit on important commissions, draft the country’s Constitution and are appointed to ministerial posts because of their ‘royal blood’.

enterprise limiting its interests to fine arts, literature and philosophy, but the total manner in which a human society responds to an environment. Firstly, it includes the private: customs characterising a social group; social heredity of a particular community; meanings, religion, ritual, living habits etc. Culture, therefore, is a complex of factors that make a person what one is as an individual and as a member of a community. It is acquired after birth, and through it a person inserts oneself into the human universe. One becomes programmed, educated and indoctrinated into that way of life, of being a human person, whether one is a Swazi, Zulu, French or British.

Secondly, culture as a public entity has also been seen to be a closely organised system of practical activities and institutions forming the basis of social, educational, economic, or political philosophy and it can shape the way individuals or groups think, act and comprehend the world. The various activities of a society have been seen to contribute immensely to the psychological and cognitive patterns of speech communities. The foregoing section is very crucial for this thesis because it has helped me broaden the definition of culture. Initially my understanding was limited to customs, beliefs, language, tradition etc. These readings have enlightened me both to culture as a public and practical activity that influences the socio-politics, economics and psychology of speech communities.

One can also say a culture can be equated to an ideology of a certain community. Like culture, an ideology needs language to be infused and spread in the community. My aim in the next section is to review literature which explores the extent to which language and culture can spread certain ideologies and hegemony, which can sway the mentality of a society in a certain direction.

3.4 Language, culture, ideology and hegemony

Hall (1996:23) says an ideology may be defined as a 'system of representation', or any taken for granted system of logically coherent and widely applicable socio-political beliefs social members use to classify and make sense of their social, economic and political experience. Using ideology or 'meaning in the service of power' (Thompson, 1991:37) unequal social relations are made to appear natural and it is a way in which people legitimate in taken-for-granted ways their social relations of dominance or subordination. These meanings are not overtly imposed by a dominant group, but are the *lived* ways in which social members 'make sense' of or 'experience', the conditions of their existence (Hall 1996:24). Ideology then can be said to 'work' when individuals accept as *natural* the beliefs and identities which constitute the social practices to which they unconsciously subscribe (White 1992:164-166).

Gramsci (1971) in his concept of the role played by ideology accepted Marx's analysis of capitalism and argued that the struggle between ruling class and the subordinate working class was the driving force that moved society forward made a major contribution to modern thought. Often the term, ideology is seen as referring simply to a system of ideas and beliefs. However, it is closely tied to the concept of power and the definition given by Giddens (1997: 583) as 'shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups.' Its relationship to power is that it legitimises the differential power that groups hold and as such it distorts the real situation that people find themselves in. The traditional Marxist theory of power was a very one-sided one base on the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination. This was reinforced by Lenin whose influence was at its height after the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Gramsci felt that what was missing was an understanding of the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures. He identified two quite distinct forms of political control: domination, which referred to direct physical coercion by police and armed forces and hegemony, which referred to both ideological control and more crucially, consent. He assumed that no regime, regardless of how authoritarian it might be, could sustain itself primarily through

organised power and armed force. In the long run, it had to have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability.

By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the *status quo* in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling class comes to appear as the natural order of things (Boggs, 1976:39).

Althusser's view on ideology also becomes particularly useful in showing how meaning intersects with relations of power between different communities using different discourses. The useful core of the concept is mystification, which means a process whereby a particular meaning is made to appear as natural through its widespread use (Barrett 1991:167). When the concepts of a discourse become coterminous with a society's *common sense*, we can say that the discourse functions ideologically, and has been naturalised.

The manner in which the concept of ideology is described here shows that it clearly has a relationship with a society's culture because, like culture, an ideology becomes a way of life of a certain people and it is also conveyed by language. It becomes an identity in practice as Holland *et al* suggested earlier, where ideologies are used by individuals as social and cultural artifacts.

Ideology functions primarily in and through language, which is the primary means by which power is 'carried' in discourse (Hall 1982:69-70, Volosinov 1981:145). In this view, the meanings found in a discourse serve the interests of the community with which that discourse originates, and work ideologically to *naturalise* those meanings as common sense (Fiske 1987:15). By using a discourse, the ideology embedded in it is

reproduced and the 'terrain on which different social ideologies can contend is naturalised' (Hartley 1982:61-2).

The concept of hegemony according to Williams (1989:57) refers to a taken-for-granted assimilation of selective, dominant values, ideas and beliefs 'to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and commonsense.

The hegemony concept encapsulates and combines the concepts of ideology and culture. It includes ideology by assuming a system of common sense meanings that bind together a bloc of diverse social groups in an alliance of political domination (White 1992:167). Part of hegemony lies in the notion that resistance is inevitable to a society where power is unequally distributed. A major aspect of that power is the capacity to construct meanings which serve hegemony.

The view that culture is fundamentally a structure of meaning by which social members make sense of the world is built on the premise that nature is available to individuals only by being appropriated, or 'known', in a sign system, or language (Hall 1982:70-71). This close connection between language and knowledge suggests that culture may be more specifically defined as 'socially acquired knowledge' or common-sense knowledge learned from other people, whether it is factually correct or not (Hudson: 1980: 73-5). And one might add that the 'socially acquired knowledge' (through language) has an impact on the way individuals think and practice their political, social, and economic activities. The suggestion seems to be that a change in people's socio-political and economic circumstances can generate change in their language and culture, as they will name their world.

- The foregoing section on hegemony and ideology emphasises the relationships between language and culture. Its major contribution to this thesis is the way it

has made me conclude that language *is* a crucial vehicle and carrier of hegemony and ideology.

- Hegemony and ideology complement each other and they become part of a culture of a community, as they are the socially acceptable beliefs, values, assumptions, perceptions and background knowledge people use to understand the world. However, as some examples above have indicated, there are instances where these commonsense, widely accepted patterns of behaviour and institutions promoted through language, are detrimental and may in fact influence a society's frame of mind negatively. It is also possible for ideologies, hegemonies, attributes and values as encapsulated in language to profile people's thoughts positively. Certain languages, cultures, hegemonies and ideologies can equip communities' mentality for success whilst others equip them for failure, resulting in speakers of different languages acting and thinking dissimilarly.

In the next section I turn my focus to the probable function of language and culture in influencing the way communities think and practice their political, social and economic activities. As I write this section, I bear in mind the socio-political and economic dilemmas of Africa discussed in *Chapter 2*.

3.5 The impact of language and culture on communities

In my discussion of the influence of language and culture on the performance of speech communities I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mazarr (1996), whose work in this field is of particular relevance to the African situation.

It has been argued that culture plays a determining role in deciding the economic fates of nations, people, and individuals because some cultures underwrite success better than others. In '*Who Prospers: How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success*', Lawrence Harrison, a former U.S. Agency for International Development official, has attributed the success or failure of speech communities to cultural values and has gone as far as to say cultural attributes and values differentiate ethnic groups and are mainly

responsible for such trends as the economic instability of Latin America, Taiwan's and Korea's economic 'Miracles', and the achievements of the Japanese (Mazarr, 1996, 1). Using Harrison's analysis here in relation to the state that the African continent finds itself in, there seems to be a suggestion that African values and attitudes contribute to the socio-political and economic quagmire that Africa finds itself in. However, one should not lose sight of the effects of colonialism on the African continent as discussed in *Chapter 2*.

Thomas Sowell, in *Race and Culture: A World View*, argues along the same lines that 'Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences among peoples play a major role in the events of our times, because a particular people usually has its own particular set of skills for dealing with the economic and social necessities of life'. (p.1). Both authors advance many case studies in an effort to support their overall theses. Here are a few examples of cultural habits that they regard as working against the very people who support the practices: Harrison remarked that 'co-operatives don't work well in Thailand because Thais do not trust one another, and they know how to relate to one another only in a hierarchical way' (p.15). Sowell argues that 'A disdain for commerce and industry has ... been common for centuries among the Hispanic elite, both in Spain and Latin America' (p.25)²⁷.

Cultural perspectives and belief systems are also said to influence strongly the way in which national leaders view policy problems, both individually and collectively over time, and often determine the solutions they choose to deal with them. So again, culture is isolated as playing a major role in the decision-making processes of leaders and nations. It is argued that actors see issues and decisions through the lenses of distinct cultural perceptions. In this way, culture is said to serve as an important barrier to international understanding and negotiation, because various parties are bound to see any given decision or dispute in starkly different terms. Anand phrases it as follows: 'There can be no doubt that peoples or countries are affected by their cultural differences which reflect their values, outlooks, interests, habits and historical hopes and fears. Failure to

²⁷ One is tempted to list examples of African cultural habits that similarly tend to constrain economic development and commercial activity. The often cited habit of arriving and leaving according to 'African time' springs to mind.

appreciate these differences leads to misconceptions, misinterpretations, and erroneous judgments' (Anand 1981:15). The cultural prisms through which African leaders view issues, their beliefs, their responses to the challenges of a global economy are bound to directly influence the destiny of these nations.

Akira Iriye takes the notion of cultural determinism a step further when he equates 'cultural system' and 'nation': "A nation, in a word, is a 'cultural system', and international relations are interactions among cultural systems" (1979:115). In such relationships, according to Ole Elgestrom (1994), culture, 'impinges upon negotiations by conditioning one's perception of reality, blocking out information inconsistent with culturally based assumptions, projecting meaning on to the other party's words and actions, and leading a negotiator to an incorrect attribution of motive' (p. 290). Culture as defined by David Elkins and Richard Simeon (1979) 'does not determine precisely what will be done, [but] it *conditions* the range of issues to which attention will be devoted; it *influences* the way those issues will be defined; and it *limits* the range of options considered within a given issue domain' (p.143) [emphasis added].

Francis Fukuyama (1995) offers a somewhat different dimension of the influence of culture in international relations in his book *Trust*. He agrees that culture plays a dominant role in determining economic success, but he focuses on one cultural trait, sociability, or social trust. 'A nation's well being, as well as its ability to compete' he argues 'is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society' (P.7). He further concentrates on a single structural issue, the presence or absence of large, diverse multinational corporations (MNCs), which he sees as a symbol of social trust at work and as a precondition for success in the global economy. Fukuyama defines 'Familistic' societies as those in which the primary (and often only) avenue to sociability is family and broader forms of kinship, like clans or tribes (p.28). This category in which he places Chinese societies as well as France and Italy are 'low trust' because their sociability does not extend significantly beyond the family or clan. In contrast, societies with a high degree of generalised social trust and a resulting strong propensity for spontaneous sociability including the United States, Japan,

and Germany (p. 28-9) generate large, complex organisations capable of global reach. Fundamentally, Fukuyama is advancing the argument that culture determines the degree of social trust which influences the nature of corporate institutions which helps determine a country's economic success.

In this section the literature reviewed points conclusively to the role of cultural orientation. There is general agreement amongst scholars that cultural habits are likely to influence the ability of a community to build social systems, trust in business, sustained effort, long-term planning, individual and communal creativity levels and application, productivity, a competitive spirit etc. The point stressed by these scholars is that some cultural habits may not *per se* benefit the community that practices and perpetuates these habits.

Like all habits, cultural habits can be modified. This can be achieved through new discourse, or in Rortyan terms, a new vocabulary. In the following chapter on literacy, I shall explore literature which argues that cultural behaviour modification can indeed be achieved by bold and visionary curriculum development.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has explored the huge and complex relationship between our linguistic and cultural habits, and the way we perceive and think about the world. In summarised form then:

- Differences in languages do not merely lie in syntax, phonology and morphology, but they mostly hinge on the way speakers of different languages conceptualise the world. Individuals construct their views of the exterior world (reality) through a complex utilisation of inner speech (thought formation) and the use of public speech (i.e. the mother tongue). Both processes rely heavily on the artifacts that surround us and which engage our minds. As a consequence, language learning should happen within a broad-based sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic framework.

- ❑ Whilst culture has often been used to refer to customs, beliefs, dress etc, cultural-psychologists have emphasised both its broad definition to include the sociopolitical and economic practices of a society and their role in silhouetting the way individuals think.
- ❑ The crucial role of language in normalising ideologies and hegemonies in society also crystallised in this review and pointed towards a need to equip children with the necessary mindset to critically evaluate the impact of the commonsense ways of doing things in society. This necessitates a critical language awareness approach to the teaching and learning of language.
- ❑ The notion of winning and losing nations has been explored in its cultural context. Literature in this respect conclusively points to the fact that the performance of speech communities and nation states is inextricably linked to the cultural habits of the people.

In *Chapter 2* it was pointed out that in the redevelopment of Africa, renewal requires more than just political and economic reconstruction and that it refers to a profound paradigm shift in the way Africans construct reality. In this chapter the need for linguistic intervention in order to bring about the desired paradigm shift has been demonstrated and defined. The following chapter will explore the need for the development of a language curriculum that will go some way towards equipping African language speakers with the right kind of cultural and psychological capital for the desired socio-political and economic intervention.

Chapter 4

Reading the word, reading the world: The notion of literacy in the African context

4.1 Introduction and rationale

What does it mean to be literate in a continent where even the most basic forms of literacy are hardly in place? In my experiences as a learner as well as a teacher of an African language I can reflect that I naively understood literacy to mean the mastery of reading and writing skills. After all, the extensive body of literature on literacy and literacy programmes for developing and developed communities impressed upon me the idea that literacy in itself – autonomously had effects on other social and cognitive practices and that introducing literacy to poor, ‘illiterate’ people, villages, urban youth etc. would have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place. Historically these perceptions had after all provided the thrust for educational and developmental programmes. As a result the economic benefits of literacy, within this narrow definition of the concept, were subsequently factored into the structure of crucial international projects such as UNESCO Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) and mass education campaigns.

The basic view²⁸ of literacy described above somewhat shaped and distorted my own view of what it means to be literate. Furthermore, in my educational context we were conditioned to equate literacy with the ability to read, write and function in English and not necessarily my mother tongue SiSwati. Such a perception foregrounded the functional view of English as being critical in the world of work and education. In line

²⁸ The basic definition of literacy was a narrow one: literacy was based on a person’s ability to read, write and master basic numeric functions. But as the 20th century unravelled, it became clear that these basic operations are not enough for successful, everyday functioning in a sophisticated, modern world, a world that accumulates information, develops knowledge and defines new disciplines day by day.

with the UNESCO definition of functional literacy²⁹, I was made to believe that our Swazi society needed English to function effectively and each individual was going to continue to use it for their own and community development. It never crossed my mind that literacy is about skills that had to be developed in my first language – and not in a foreign language of wider communication. Only a rather belated reading programme brought about by my exposure to critical literacy as espoused by Freire and other critical theorists did I fully realise how the literacy programmes for Swaziland are being determined by political and hegemonic imperatives. The foregrounding of English, as a yardstick of what it means to be literate by the power wielding English speaking Swazi elite, forever shattered my somewhat naïve assumption that a literacy programme necessarily stems from an objective and neutral endeavour. Rassool's (1999:3) argument that 'National language policy provides one of the key means by which control is exercised over the types and forms of literacy that are legitimised in social policy' underscores the ideologically loaded nature of literacy programmes.

4.1.1. The status of African language literacy programmes

The teaching of African languages such as my mother tongue SiSwati, has been documented in literature which uniformly reflects a grim picture of the lack of direction, pointing to the tendency to teach structures rather than communicative competences (Gough, 1998; Mojapelo, 1975) Goslin, 1987, Swart, 1976; Young, 1995), poorly trained, unmotivated teachers using inappropriate teaching methods and materials for an African context (Heugh, 1993; Kembo, 2000) and teachers and learners doubting the validity of the exercise *per se* (Matseke, 1975: 28).

Research-based literature on the teaching of African languages also proved to be woefully inadequate. Those who address the topic typically plead for more African language teaching to non-African language speakers (Ntsukunyane, 1982). Numerous language-policy documents, including those from Departments of Arts, Culture, Science

²⁹ To be functionally literate, a person must be able to 'engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development. (UNESCO, 1978).

and Technology, created visions that amounted to little more than wish lists. (DACST, 1999). Most African languages have a relatively brief history of being taught as school subjects, compared to western languages such as English. Scholars in the didactics of African languages also agree that these languages should benefit from the experience of languages which have a longer history as teaching subject. However, what was significant for me is Lestrade's view, quoted in Kgware (1968: 17) that African languages are capable 'of expansion both by adaptation of elements imported from other languages and, what is more important, by increase of untapped resources from within themselves. The need to model African language curricula and literacy practices on those practised in modern western languages became an important *leitmotiv* in my approach to the whole matter.

Reading through the many lamentations, especially in the form of conference papers, it struck me how research in African languages tends to remain rather abstract, removed from the genuine needs of the children who speak an African language. Own agenda or interests, often coupled with stipulations attached to research funding, tend to dictate the content and direction of academic research. Embarking from the premise that 'literacy is good', personally reaping the benefits of being literate and being inundated, almost on a daily basis, by the media and 'the everyday discourses' about the intrinsic value of being literate in the modern world (Rassool, 1999:2) created a need for me to research this area in order to come to an understanding of progressive language and literacy practices with the assumption that best practice is applicable to *all* languages, including my own.

4.2 Conceptualisations of literacy

When one looks at the shift in definitions by influential education agencies such as UNESCO over the years, coupled with the critical developments that have taken place in the area of literacy studies in the last two decades, it becomes apparent that 'the idea that literacy cannot be regarded as an autonomous set of technical skills is gaining support' (Rassool, 1999:25). The issue of literacy, while incorporating cognitive (and psychological) approaches, now maintains a strong tradition emanating from socio-

cultural anthropology (Heath, 1983, Street, 1984), cultural psychology (Scribner and Cole, 1981), socio- and applied linguistics (Gee, 1990, Barton and Hamilton, 1998, Barton, 1994, Baynham, 1995), among other approaches. For example, by 1984, by integrating contemporary literacy research and adding his own ethnographic research on literacy practices in Iran, Brian Street for instance, initiated a paradigmatic shift in the conventional way of viewing literacy. He demonstrated that literacy had to be reconceived as embedded in and working through particular cultural, historical, political, and social contexts³⁰. One can safely say then that literacy subsequently became entangled with larger issues such as social and political history, economic development, educational priorities and even such questions as social equity. Analyses of literacy at the turn of the century ventured beyond the domain of basic education to include discussions of social ethics, the use and abuse of power, the nature of economic development and the nature of the communication process. This ongoing process of re-conceptualisation of notions of literacy becomes crucial for my research as I will use it to gauge the extent to which these notions have informed SiSwati (and other African language) literacy programmes.

With regard to the shift in the conceptualisation of literacy, Gee makes two important points. First, he alerts us to the fact that the term literacy is a 'socially contested term', and further argues that debate about literacy 'ultimately comes down to moral choices about what theories one wants to hold based on the sorts of social worlds these theories underwrite in the present or make possible in the future' (Gee, 1996:123). Second, he claims that arguing about what words (ought to) mean is not a trivial business – it is not 'mere words', 'hair splitting', or 'just semantics' – when these arguments are over socially contested terms. Such arguments are what lead to the adoption of social beliefs and the theories behind them, and these theories and beliefs lead to social action and the maintenance and creation of social worlds (ibid. 15-16).

³⁰ In developing his 'ideological model' so named in order to capture the negotiations of power involved in reading and writing. Street relied on two concepts: literacy events and literacy practices.

To summarise Gee's position then, and applying it to my own context: understanding literacy means that reading and writing in SiSwati should be understood in the context of the social, cultural, political, economic, historical practices to which they are integral. This view lies at the heart of what Gee (1996) calls the 'new' literacy studies, or socio-literacy studies. (For complementary positions also see Barton, 1994; Street, 1984, 1993, 1995). Any acceptable and illuminating socio-cultural definition of literacy has to make sense of reading, writing and meaning making as integral elements of social practices. Such a definition is provided by Gee (1996), who defines literacy in relation to *Discourses*. Discourse are socially recognised ways of using language (reading, writing, speaking, listening), gestures and other semiotics (images, sounds, graphics, signs, codes), as well as ways of thinking, believing feeling, valuing, acting/doing and interacting in relation to people and things, such that we can be identified and recognised as being a member of a socially meaningful group, or as playing a socially meaningful role (cf. Gee, 1991, 1996, 1998 a). To be in, or part of, a Discourse means that others can recognise us as being a 'this' or a 'that' (a pupil, mother, priest, footballer, mechanic), or a particular 'version' of a this or that (a reluctant pupil, a doting mother, a radical priest, a 'bush mechanic') by virtue of how we are using language, believing, feeling, acting, dressing, doing, and so on. Language is a dimension of Discourse, but only one dimension, and Gee uses discourse (with a 'd') to mark this relationship. As historical 'productions', Discourses change over time, but at any given point are sufficiently 'defined' for us to tell when we are in them.

From a socio-cultural perspective, literacy must, as Bill Green has put it, be seen in '3D', as having three interlocking dimensions – the operational³¹, the cultural³² and the

³¹ The operational dimension refers to what Green calls the 'means' of literacy (ibid, 160). It is in and through the medium of language that the literacy event happens. Control of the operational dimension involves 'competency with regard to the language system: when we speak of the operational dimension of literacy 'we point to the manner in which individuals use language in literacy tasks, in order to operate effectively in specific contexts. This is to emphasise 'the written language system and how adequately it is handled.' When we address literacy from this perspective, we focus on the ability of individuals 'to read and write in a range of contexts, in an appropriate and adequate manner', that is: to focus on the language aspect of literacy (see Green, 1998, 1997a, 1997b; see also Lankshear, Bigum et al. 1997).

³² The cultural dimension involves what Green calls the 'meaning aspect of literacy' and 'competency with regard to the meaning system' (Green, 1988:160). This is to recognise that besides being context specific,

critical³³ – which bring together language, meaning and context (Green, 1988:160-163). An integrated view of literacy in practice and in pedagogy addresses all three dimensions simultaneously; and none has any necessary priority over the others.

Rassool's (1999:25) assertion that literacy is 'multidimensional' and 'organic' confirms the fact '... that, conceptually, literacy is multifaceted and thus requires different *levels* of analysis within a broad and flexible framework that incorporates complexities. These include, *inter alia*, historical relations, social practices and institutions, locality as well as individual and group subjectivities, and the tension that exists between agency and specific state-sanctioned political and hegemonic projects.' Furthermore, 'literacy is perceived to be *organic* because it is seen as a cultural activity that involves people in conscious and reflective action within a variety of situations in everyday life' (ibid.).

Although I am aware of the danger of over-simplification, there is merit in the synthesis of the various views on facets of literacy into two broad categories: one that views literacy essentially as a cognitive skill and the other which observes literacy as social practice. As these two categories are quite broad and encompassing, I will attempt to frame them more accurately. I believe that a review of some of the major research in the field of literacy studies will explain some of the meanings of literacy in order to reveal its multi-dimensionality and its embeddedness in social, cultural and political contexts. This review will look at major works in sociolinguistics, ethnography, and anthropology and

literacy acts and events are also content specific. In other words, we are never simply 'literate' (in and of itself) but, rather, always literate with regard to something, some aspect of knowledge or experience' (ibid). The cultural aspect of literacy is a matter of understanding texts in relation to contexts - to appreciate their meaning; the meaning they need to make in order to be appropriate; and what it is about certain contexts of practice that makes for appropriateness of particular ways of reading and writing.

³³ The critical dimension of literacy has to do with the socially constructed nature of all human practices and meaning systems. In order to be able to participate effectively and productively in any social practice, humans must be socialised into it. But social practices and their meaning systems 'are always selective and sectional; they represent particular interpretations and classifications' (Green, 1988:162. If learners are not also given 'access to the grounds for selection and the principles of interpretation', we can say that they are 'merely socialised into the dominant meaning system and constrained from playing active parts in transforming it.' If the critical aspect of literacy is acknowledge, it ensures that participants are not confined merely to participating in established practices and making meanings within them, but that they can also in various ways, transform and actively produce it' (ibid). Freire's work in the field of critical literacy has acted as a springboard for other critical literacy theorists.

its apparent consequences necessitate examining how it is practised or used in many situations and contexts.

4.2.1 Literacy as cognitive skill - the oral and literate traditions

The view that literacy practices hone the mind by re-shaping human intellectual processes has been debated ever since the first written texts. Tributes to literacy as the route to increased intellectual power go back as early as Egyptian documents and have recurred throughout the subsequent history of literate civilisations. In the last half of the 20th century, these issues have generated an extensive and multidisciplinary field of scholarship and debate. The key impetus was provided by a cluster of writings in the 1960s and 1970s that, taken together, encapsulated claims for the cognitive consequences of literacy.

Proponents of the view that literacy has cognitive benefits, argue that written language *per se*, understood as a symbolic technology or representation and communication, has systematic and general cognitive implications that can be detached analytically from the effects of the content it is used to transmit and that help transform that content as well (see Goody and Watt, 1963, 1968; Ong, 1982; Goody, 1977; Havelock, 1982 and Olson, 1994). These scholars argue that what is most crucial about the formal qualities of written language is that information can be increasingly de-contextualised, that is, abstracted from the specific conditions of its generation and transmission, unlike oral speech which is bound to the time and place where it is uttered. Such de-contextualisation allows for more intellectual and emotional distance from the information involved and can foster a more critical and reflective attitude towards it. Written text has the added advantage that it can be engaged with on an ongoing basis by a series of interrogators who have the benefit of acting on and reacting to co-interrogators of the same text. So, as the interrogation of text is time and place independent, it allows for endless refinement through repeated takes on the same text. Furthermore, a written text allows the utterance to be analysed into its elements and systematically examined in a way that is more difficult for the flow of spoken language; this transforms individuals' experience of oral as well as written

communication (Olson, 1977). The emergence of an increasingly critical and reflective stance toward knowledge, promoted by the development and diffusion of literacy as well as by the increasing continuity and accumulation of critical inquiry helps account for historical origins of the systematic study of logic, philosophy, and science in general. The possibility of pitching one's wit against the very finest minds, irrespective of time and place, not only raises critical awareness, but also a kind of objectivity that is only made possible by the decontextualised nature of the written text. And as Linnell put it (<http://eserver-org/langs/linell/chapter03.html> July 13, 2000) with accumulated knowledge, the intention is not to make future generations merely reflect on it, but for them to build on and re-write it. Through written language, readers can distance themselves from texts and scrutinise them, which allows individuals in literate cultures not only to develop a critical stance but to also change attitudes towards reality and re-write their own histories. In this way then:

Some features of the down-traded picture of everyday reality can be questioned, alternatives can be considered and compared, and rationality, scepticism, logics and science developed – all of which is commonly associated with Western culture. Knowledge tends to be more abstract and general, and less tied to the contexts of everyday reality. The development of logic, for example, has to do with the relative freedom to manipulate the elements of written texts; the written medium allows us to separate words, which means that their internal ordering can be more easily manipulated, and that syllogistic reasonings can be developed. The use of tables makes it easier to construct classificatory systems with hierarchically organised categories and subcategories. Writing allows the user to work out and survey all of the theoretically possible alternatives Linnell. (<http://eserver-org/langs/linnell/chapter03.html> July 13, 2000)

Speech communication, on the other hand, is said to be firmly anchored in the immediate environment, the speech is embedded in the everyday culture, all of which exerts a strongly normalising pressure on both speaker and listener. The speaker and listener have to follow the established conventions of their culture, unless they deliberately accept confrontation with the ensuing negative reactions from the social environment and that way taking the risk of being expelled from the community in the long run. The written medium, however, greatly extends and enhances the user's chances of taking an

independent personal stand with respect both to the contents of messages and to his fellow human beings. This has several important consequences. While deviant opinions and attitudes are difficult to convey and maintain in a society where communication is based on direct face-to-face interaction, "the literate culture enhances individualism: heretics, freethinkers and philosophers are given a certain amount of elbowroom. Single historical individuals can now make their own original contributions to the development of knowledge and culture." (<http://eserver-org/langs/linell/chapter03.html> July 13, 2000). Writing implies that knowledge can be accumulated over a period of time³⁴. There is no longer any need for each generation to repeat the same process of trial and error over and over again, since one is no longer forced to rely only on the oral tradition and the memory, which are limited in scope. With the written word then, future generations are able to interrogate their history and rewrite it. This does not only result in societal renewal and cognitive development, but it has important consequences for the linguistic code itself³⁵.

Using Linnell's arguments here, one presumes that the written form of SiSwati, unlike its oral counterpart would encourage individuals to express deviant opinions and attitudes and become philosophers and freethinkers who will not reiterate the errors of previous generations, but rather build on these earlier endeavours. The fact that this is not the case reinforces the importance of a critical faculty built into literacy programmes.

Rorty (1989) has also commented on the expansion of the linguistic code and social change. He has written that radical change in society occurs not so much as a result of argument or an act of will, but when people modify their way of thinking and talking

³⁴ Writing this thesis is a case in point. The critical distance towards issues pertaining to the Swazi community seem to be crucially dependent on the written mode of interaction. A similar critical stance, at a speech communicative level, is simply inconceivable. The very lack of a rich written tradition in SiSwati specifically, and African languages generally underscores the importance of literacy as a precondition for a democratic forum and greater freedom of speech. It is significant to note that dissident voices in Swaziland (and neighbouring Zimbabwe) use the English medium press as a vehicle of protest and debate. The day-to-day battles at street level against hegemonic forces often slides into physical violence and government oppression as the average opposition movement fails to take the debate to the written medium.

³⁵ The written language is different from the spoken language not only as regards the medium of representation. Its grammar, particularly syntax, is much more constrained and prescriptively controlled, and its lexicon is greatly expanded. When written dictionaries and encyclopaedia are being developed and used, the size of the total vocabulary of the language involved is very much increased, and as a consequence the delicacy and precision of word meanings are also enhanced. Of course, these gains achieved through written language will also have important feedback effects on the spoken language too.

about things, when they lose ‘the habit of using certain words and gradually acquire the habit of using others’ (1989:9). According to Rorty, it is the human ‘talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, that is the chief instrument for cultural change’ (ibid. 7). Rorty’s notion of ‘speaking differently’ assumes a response, primarily, to a written code which allows for careful formulation and redefinition through a reorganisation of language as such. In the SiSwati context it would allude to a process that will allow individuals to re-describe things in new ways ‘until [they] have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of non-linguistic behaviour, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions’ (ibid. 7)³⁶.

Rorty’s views are very much in the Wittgensteinian tradition of language conceptualisation. Wittgenstein says sometimes you have to withdraw an expression from the language ‘to send it for cleaning – and then you can put it back into circulation’ (1998:44e). Again, the context for sending language to the cleaners is an important one, in which words can be looked at in an objective, aloof way.

Havelock (1986) stresses the intimate link between cognition and literacy by foregrounding man’s ability for abstraction as an important consequence of literacy. He has argued that the ability to think in abstract terms is a consequence of Greek alphabetic literacy. He writes that abstract thinking grew out of the newfound ability of Classic Greek literates to create concepts that were divorced from personifications required by the constraining nature of orality and its dependence on narrative:

Literacy wiped out, at least theoretically, the prime function of acoustically trained memory, and therefore the pressure to have storage language in a memorisable form. As the memory function subsided, psychic energies hitherto channelled for this purpose were released for other purposes. ... The removal of the pressure to memorise ... freed the composer to choose subjects for a discourse which were not necessarily agents, that is, persons. ... Once the reader found himself set free to compose a language of theory, with its

³⁶ Again, it is important to note that the distribution of re-organised language in the Rortyan sense requires an established literacy tradition.

abstract subject and conceptualised predicates, he also realised that he was employing new mental energies of a different quality from those exercised in oralism. ... One can say that the entire Athenian 'enlightenment' ... revolved around the discovery of intellectualism, and of the intellect as representing a new level of human consciousness (Havelock, 1986:100-101, 115).

Literate individuals in this view are those who move beyond merely memorising to acting upon texts, which then produce new or novel thoughts. It is a form of 'secondary socialisation' (Linnell <http://eserver-org/langs/linnell/chapter03.html> July 13, 2000) that enriches the psyche, enlarges and frees the human spirit, and is essential in realising 'fuller, interior human potential' (Ong, 1986:32). As a result an influential study by Vygotsky's collaborator, Luria (1976) found that schooled children and adults, are more likely to reason with abstract conceptual categories, whereas non-schooled ones are more likely to reason with context-bound functional categories. Saying very much the same thing in a different way is Greenfield (1972) who argued that individual literacy has uniform and general cognitive effects that restructure the whole of psychological life.

In summary then, scholars writing on the intimate relationship between literacy programmes and cognitive development, show a high degree of consensus on the following points:

- The opportunity to work with written text, as opposed to oral discourse, allows for a de-contextualised space, which creates the required intellectual and emotional distance from information for the interrogator to respond in a detached and calculated way. This in turn creates the opportunity for critical reflection without having the challenge of face-to-face discourse.
- Being literate creates a degree of ideological autonomy and a significant shift in power relations in society. The constant availability of knowledge independent of political power structures creates a uniform platform for discourse which is not available in oral interaction.

- Working within a literate tradition allows for a critical focus on a dominant discourse and the opportunity to re-describe a context that is framed by a prevailing vocabulary.
- Engaging with the written tradition of a language allows for a more abstract way of thinking about issues.

The view that the development of advanced cognitive skills is dependent on fully developed literacy practices has elicited vigorous challenges. However, it is important to state that those who have challenged this view do not necessarily reject its central thesis, but have generally argued that cognitive psychologists have been *unreceptive* in principle to the possibility that socio-cultural phenomena might have a deep impact on structures of thinking. Thus, they have not attacked the claims of this approach so much as ignore them. Instead, the debate has been joined by a set of scholars – in disciplines ranging from anthropology, sociology, and history to socio-cultural psychology and sociolinguistics – who generally accept the interplay between culture and cognition but who nevertheless have sharply questioned one or another of the tenets of the ‘cognitive skills’ view, and sometimes all of them together.

Although these alternative approaches differ from each other in various ways, the most significant of them are linked by an emphasis on the *context-specific* character of both literacy and its cognitive implications. That is, they challenge the view of literacy as a de-contextualised technology of representation generating uniform effects; instead, they argue that reading and writing should be treated as socially constituted practices entrenched in diverse and specific context. This theoretical starting point leads to an emphasis on the multiplicity of literate practices and the ways that their nature and significance depend on such factors as the cultural and ideological framework within which they are carried out, and the distribution of literacy – mediated practices across the different spheres of people’s activities.

Scholars of this persuasion have also stressed the necessity to study types and uses of literacy; such analyses require investigators to take account of the structural, political and

ideological features of the societies in which they occur. Rather than conceiving of literacy as the acquisition of universally applicable technical skills, it is better understood in terms of multiple literacies that are inextricably embedded in group- and context-specific discourse (Gee, 1990). These studies also emphasise the continuous interaction and interpretation between oral and literate modes in both individuals and societies, rather than a sharp division between literacy and orality. An in-depth understanding of the literacy as social practice view will be explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Literacy as social practice – New Literacy Studies

The split between the oral and written traditions and the assumptions surrounding the consequences of literacy contributed to what Scribner and Cole (1981) referred to as the 'great divide' theory. The 'great divide' theory postulates that literacy contributes to 'higher order' thinking and cognitive skills which automatically separate preliterate cultures and societies from literate ones.

Gee (1999) and Street (1995) are the prominent figures in the approach known as New Literacy Studies. Their social analysis of literacy is central to the approach to language teaching and learning in this study. They conceptualise literacy not simply as a set of neutral, technical skills learnt in formal education, but social practice 'implicated in power relations and embedded in cultural meanings and practices' (Street, 1995:1). Both writers provide numerous examples to illustrate that (a) there are many forms of literacy practices, that is, cultural ways of utilising written language and (b) that literacy practices are always embedded in ideological processes (see also Barton et al, 2000). Street (1995) makes the case for an 'ideological' model of literacy, which locates research and development of literacy programmes in local context, by stressing the effect of the socialisation process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants. He illustrates how literacy practices are encapsulated within internal and external structures of power and embedded in competing models and assumptions about reading and writing processes, which affect the manner in which new programmes are adopted or rejected.

Both Street and Gee debunk the ‘literacy myth’, which emphasises the oral-literate divide and assumes that reading and writing necessarily lead to higher order cognitive abilities and that greater levels of literacy acquisition will necessarily lead to empowerment and enhanced social standing for individuals and to economic growth and development for the society.

Amongst the scholars who are cited by Street and Gee who have argued on the context-specific character of literacy and its cognitive implications are Scribner and Cole (1986). Their work with the Vai people of Liberia, Scribner and Cole further reinforced the significance of understanding the socio-cultural and ideological frameworks within which literacies are carried out. They found three kinds of literacy practices³⁷ and each with its own ‘cognitive consequences.’ The importance of the Scribner and Cole study of the Vai is that it underlined the fact that cognitive consequences of literacy were more or less dissociated from the school setting and were found to be traceable to the practices of each of the literacies - *the consequences of literacy are not generalisable* and that language is context specific³⁸. Instead of looking at literacy as something that needs to be accomplished by everyone, literacy in their view is seen as something that is useful in *specific* contexts and for particular purposes and *constrained* by the socio-cultural forces surrounding the particular literacy practices. What is significant about the Scribner and Cole study for this study is the notion that whenever a group uses more than one language, the various languages will be used domain specific and the languages develop specific literacy requirements to successfully engage in the various domains.

Drawing on this research and their own, Gee (1990) and Street (1995) argue that the particular form of literacy that is associated with western schooling is generally conflated with literacy and as such it has become the yardstick by which society measures literacy, most visibly by measuring literacy levels by the number of years an individual attends

³⁷ Arabic literacy, used for reading the Koran; English language literacy, the language of official Liberian business and government, and Vai language literacy that involves the use of a unique syllabic writing system whose use is the province of adults, is learned in adulthood, and is used almost exclusively for personal correspondence and business transactions among the Vai themselves.

³⁸ This is a refutation of the developmental and neutral nature of literacy voiced by Havelock, Hirsch, Ong and Goody, who specifically focused on the written word

school. Like many theorists of educational inequality, such as Bourdieu (1991) and Bernstein (1990 and 1996), they show that schooling is not just about learning content knowledge, but also about cultural reproduction; learning the norms and values and behaviour patterns deemed appropriate by the dominant members of particular societies. Thus, through schooling, social identities and unequal power relations are produced and reproduced.

Elwert (2001) argues along the same lines, but his use of language is note-worthy. He asserts that the cognitive benefits of literacy result in individuals acquiring a 'literate mentality' to function in a 'literate society'. Such a society is one which has in place the infrastructure for the systematic, bureaucratic management of social affairs and a citizenry with both the awareness and willingness to use their literacy in those institutions as well as in their everyday lives. However, Elwert does recognise that literate societies can differ greatly. Medieval scholastic philosophers were highly literate, living in a literate society but one which was quite different from a modern one. Both their society and their literacy differed from the present in the ways that texts were read, understood, consulted, and composed. Modern bureaucratic societies involve yet another form of 'literate mentality' partly because institutions themselves have changed and partly because of altered conceptions of how to read, write and use written texts in specialised domains.

What Elwert (2001) is emphasising is that no sophisticated society can function with a citizenry that is illiterate. The success of a social organisation depends on a degree of mental literacy and relevant skills.

In this regard the New London Group has made a case for multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). The term multiliteracies is used to focus on the ways in which literacy education will continue to change in order to equip learners with the skills necessary to be active and informed citizens in present and future societies and to address the challenges posed by a changing world. Multiliteracies focus on the question of what constitutes appropriate teaching and learning in the context of the ever more critical

factors of local diversity and global connectedness. The central argument of the New London Group is that there are many pressure points for thinking about literacy in new ways which including some of the following:

- Technology – new information and communication technologies generate new text forms that traditional literacy pedagogies are often ill-equipped to address;
- Work – as well as facing multiple occupations throughout one's working life, higher levels of literacy are being demanded in the shift from more manual occupations to occupations involving knowledge management;
- Visual communication – visual literacy is necessary to interpret still and moving images which are screen rather than print based;
- Diversity – economies and workplaces are more globalised and there is an increasing diversity of culture and language;
- Global English and Multiple Englishes – standard and 'correct usage' are becoming redundant in a world where English has many internal variations; and
- Social mobility – with this lies the promise of democracy, equal opportunity, personal aspirations and social cohesion; the widening gap between those gaining fulfilment and those not, also makes this relevant.

Street cautions about the danger of creating a 'reified' list of literacies or of reproducing 'culture as a listed inventory' through adopting a multiliteracies approach (Street, 1995:34). What this does is to introduce new categories of depoliticised, static technologies to be learnt and reproduced.

Basing his definition of literacy on Krashen's distinction between 'acquisition' versus 'learning', James Gee (1991) has defined literacy as the ability to control the use of secondary discourses (e.g. school, work, profession etc.) rather than simply using the primary ones of home and community; thus Gee adds a metacognitive or metalanguage dimension to the definition of literacy. The use of metalanguage for teachers and students is also called for in an article by The New London Group (1996). The argument is that students and teachers need metalanguage – a language for talking about language,

images, texts, and meaning-making interactions. Judith Langer (1987:2) defines literacy from 'a socio-cognitive perspective that incorporates social practices, conceptions of reading and writing, and literacy as a way of thinking into the definition of literacy.' Langer sees literacy as 'an activity, a way of thinking, not a set of skills' and 'a purposeful activity' related to the use of reading and writing in many contexts and purposes in which it is practised.

All of these definitions above have added new dimensions, insights and directions for redefining literacy, especially in seeing it as a thinking activity.

Other theoretical approaches in literacy studies have evolved from the field of sociolinguistics and anthropology. Heath's (1983: 350.) definition of a 'literacy event' reverberates with the insights in sociolinguistics as 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants interactions and their interpretive processes.' Heath and other researchers have been influenced by the work of Hymes (1972), work which sheds light on the nature of speech communities and how members use oral and written language in different contexts and roles. Hymes (1972:54) states that a speech community has rules 'for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety'. Hymes notes that speech events are governed by rules and paralinguistic features associated with the speech event and the community.

In this regard, Rassool (1999:33) has written that literacy takes into consideration the communicative functions of 'text' including different language and cultural systems'. She quotes Stubbs who holds the view that in order:

to make sense of written material we need to know more than simply the 'linguistic' characteristics of the text: in addition to these characteristics we need to recognise that any writing system is deeply embedded in attitudinal, cultural, economic and technological constraints. ... People speak, listen, read and write in different social situations for different purposes (Stubbs, 1980 cited in Rassool, 1999:33).

4.2.3 Critical literacy

The need for a critical stance with respect to literacy has also been argued by researchers, such as Freire (1970, 1973, 1985, Wiether, 1989 and Lanksheer, 1993 amongst others. For instance, way back in the 1970s, the writings and teaching of Freire criticised the ‘totalitarian-vocation’ conceptualisations of literacy which informed the functional dimension of literacy. According to Rassool (1999):

Freire argued that literacy programmes serving the interests of economic expediency were ultimately oppressive. They constituted learners as passive subjects locked in a ‘culture of silence’, the silence of the oppressed. He advocated a critical pedagogy based on ‘conscientisation’ within which learners would be reconstituted as active participants engaged in a project of social critique as an integral part of their learning (1999:8)

In a similar vein, Withers has stated that:

We are long beyond the stage of accepting basic literacy – the ability to read and write one’s own name – as the norm for the general population. We have also passed beyond the stage of wanting functional literacy for all – a set of relatively simple abilities to comprehend and produce written text at home, in the streets and in the workplace. What we have come to realise is needed is ‘critical literacy’ ... the direction of those functional skills towards the ability to mount a personal critique of all those issues which surround us as we live, learn and work – help us understand, comment on and ultimately control the direction of our lives (1989:76).

It is true that in recent years, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, notions of critical literacy have emerged. However, what constitutes critical literacy varies within the literature. According to Knoblauch and Brannon (1993: 161), the ‘sources of critical literacy and pedagogy are to be found in an assortment of Marxist, feminist, and post-modern intellectual positions.’ Lanksheer (1994:4) does not see the sources as quite clear-cut. In fact, he states that the call for critical literacy comes from quite disparate theoretical positions; or, from no discernible theoretical position at all.

According to Donald (1993), the stance taken in terms of critical literacy depends on the kinds of questions that are asked. Comber (1993) takes a similar view and notes different orientations within the many forms that critical literacy can take. Each orientation has its own principles guiding the approach to critical literacy. These principles include repositioning learners as researchers of language, respecting minority culture literacy practices, and problematising classroom and public texts. Arguably, such principles do not account for all possibilities within critical literacy. Furthermore, there may be overlap among the three. For instance, it is possible to place learners in the position of language researchers by looking at available classroom texts with respect to how a particular minority group is represented. What becomes clear from the literature, therefore, is that critical literacy is a 'contested educational ideal' and that there is 'no formal orthodoxy of critical literacy' (Lankshear, 1994:4).

4.2.3.1 The two-sided nature of literacy

The two-sided nature of literacy is a notion inherent to critical literacy. Literacy can be seen as a double-edged sword in that it can be enlightening or liberating but also may be restrictive or dominating (Roberts, 1997 and Edelsky and Harman, 1991). In other words, there is a duality about literacy. Roberts says in almost *any* form of technology there exists the potential for both benefit and harm, it is vital therefore, that utmost importance be placed upon the way the school and literacy can limit learners. When textbooks are selected that portray a mainstream view of the world, and when traditional literacy practices, which often reduce literacy to copying and the completion of worksheets or assignment questions, are used, literacy is far from liberating. Instead, such curricula 'tend to maintain, rather than improve, the status of subordinate [sic] groups. Harman and Edelsky's examples of liberating literacies are those which occur in classrooms where centre stage is occupied by what language is *about* and what children *do* with it and *why*. In these classrooms, learners work with texts that have some function other than evaluation. The school day is spent using language rather than doing exercises with its

parts.³⁹ All these activities occur in a collaborative, democratic relationship between the student and the teacher, and between the student and the text. Literacy strives to demystify written and oral language, texts and learning. Students choose curricula areas to explore, negotiate activities with the teacher, collaborate with other students, take risks and chances with the structure and content of their projects, work with and create texts they control, and learn to value varied readings. In these classrooms, reading and writing serves to expand learners' personal horizons, for understanding how texts have the effects they have and where learners are actively constructing meaning all the time

The links between reading and writing are clearly evident in the literature. According to a number of researchers, including Freire (1983, 1985, Green, 1988 and Rivalland, 1989), the most effective way to develop critical readers is through writing. Such approaches to literacy offer potential for learners to understand how language works, the ways in which various individuals and groups use literacy to their own ends, and the reasons behind such use. Furthermore, educators have the potential to critically examine what counts as literacy, the way in which texts are used, and the literacy demands made on learners. In this way a critical approach to literacy has the potential for the student and for educators. However, whether or not such potential is realised depends on the complexities involved in the context in which literacy occurs.

Critical literacy also offers potential for literacy across subject areas. There is a growing body of literature in this area (see for instance Freeboy, 1989 and Elkins, 1989). Green's (1988:163) work is used to summarise the potential of a critical perspective in this respect:

A socially critical stance on subject-specific literacy means providing individuals, at any level of schooling, with the means to reflect critically on what is being learned and taught in classrooms and to take an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning. It involves giving individuals the capacity to recognise the socially

³⁹ E.g. weather reports, political speeches, comics, jokes, recipes, letters, directories, labels, notes, tickets, games, maps, memos, magazines newspapers, lists, reports, songs, journals, order forms, poems, menus and stories.

constructed and conventional nature of school knowledge, and to work collaboratively and constructively towards informed personal meanings.

Within the context of the classroom, critical literacy offers a critical approach to text, a language of critique or a critical discourse, and examination of literacy across content areas. However, before critical literacy can occur within the classroom, learners need the opportunity to engage in meaningful use of literacy, in other words, to use literacy in ways that relate to their interests and needs. Without the opportunity to write and read for a range of purposes, with access to a variety of texts, there is no basis upon which critical discussion of and reflection on literacy can occur. Such opportunities are essential if learners are to begin to examine the ways in which texts are constructed, and for what purposes. For as Luke (1992:19) has warned, being able to ‘construct and make meaning from text may appear empowering, but in fact may open one to multiple channels of misinformation and exploitation: You may just become literate enough to get yourself badly in debt, exploited and locked out’ (1992:19). Thus literacy is not necessarily liberating, and it may be exploitative.

4.2.3.2 Literacy and empowerment

Although with exposure to literacy may be potential for liberation and empowerment, whether or not this is realised depends on many factors. For example, ‘Freire believes that literacy empowers people only when it renders them active questioners of the social reality around them’ (Gee, 1989:161). However, whether or not being an active questioner is sufficient to gain power is questionable. Although taking a critical stance may unravel or expose the power base of the society, it does not necessarily provide access to it. Robinson (1989: 244-245) points out that ‘to achieve literacy does not necessarily earn one power, as we well know. But the powerful are usually themselves literate, or if not, they can purchase the service of those who are.’ Thus, although being literate, and in particular adopting a critical stance with respect to literacy, may be seen as liberating or empowering, it does not afford any guarantees. As Luke states:

Literacy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for participation and enfranchisement. While the human capital model doesn't work, literacy remains a significant gatekeeping factor in the everyday lives of Australians. In the current situation, not having credentialled levels of literate competence will increasingly lead to marginalisation. But having high levels of credentialled literacy doesn't necessarily lead to employment, power of wealth – for individuals or the nation. Literacy thus has become a kind of double bind: Having it doesn't guarantee anything, but not having it systematically excludes one from cultural and economic power (1993:21).

Gramsci (1971) has written about the hegemonic potential of literacy. He advocates that the state, requiring neither force nor violence, maintains itself by hegemonic control through schools, media, and other instruments for the production and dissemination of culture. Literacy is, in such circumstances, a tool of hegemony. Henry Giroux (1987), after Gramsci, argues that literacy is 'a double-edged sword' that can be 'wielded for the purpose of self and social empowerment or for the perpetuation of relations of repression and domination.

The structural, socio-political and ideological features of literacy are also captured well by Linnell (<http://eserver-org/langs/linell/chapter03.html> July 13, 2000) who draws our attention to the fact that literacy can be used for social control. Men in power can employ literacy to control secondary groups. By issuing written decrees and edicts, the desires and orders of a central power can be distributed to large groups of people living at different places. This he says presupposes and carries with it bureaucracy. The possibilities of governing and dominating people with the help of written messages are said to be particularly widespread in societies where literacy is restricted to a small minority, and this is precisely the manner in which almost all societies have been governed. Language then, in a literate society, or a society with varying degrees of literacy becomes what he calls 'a potent means of social stratification.'

In those circumstances, Paulo Freire has argued that the oppressed, the under-classes, have not equally shared or received the benefits of education and they should not expect it as a gift from the ruling class, but should educate themselves, developing a 'pedagogy

of the oppressed' (1970). Developing a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' requires the creation of learning processes that will really help individuals better themselves and create a better life through social transformation and empowerment, rather than conforming to dominant views and values. In his famous critique of 'banking' education, where he perceived that education is often a form of indoctrination, of enforcing conformity to dominant values, and of social reproduction in which one is tutored into submission and acceptance of an oppressed and subordinate status, he advocated that a pedagogy of the oppressed must oppose dominant conceptions of education and schooling and develop more critical and emancipatory pedagogies, aiming at radical social change.

For Freire, literacy should be the process of critically taking history into one's own hands, distilling from that history those things which make sense in light of the *current* situation, and writing the present as a way of shaping the future. It aims for 'transformative action' (Giroux, 1988:33)⁴⁰ or what Carr (1995:115) describes as emancipatory literacies, which are 'derived from a fundamental desire to be free from those constraints on human reason – constraints of authority, ignorance, custom and the like – which impede the freedom of individuals to determine their purposes and actions on the basis of their own rational reflections.' Literacy aims to make learners 'explode' societal myths and long for a *new* society (Giroux, 1984:38). This they will do by 'unlearning' the habits of institutional privilege that buttress them and sometimes prevent them from becoming questioning citizens (1993:369). Literate citizens do not simply echo and reflect on what other generations have done, but must be men and women who create, invent and discover the new (Jean Piaget cited in Van Til, 1974:417).

The nature of literacy discussed above, as I understand it, involves helping people to question (and not merely accept) the assumptions which underlie *customary and habitual ways of thinking and acting*. This process enables people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions and to participate in decision-making. It also empowers people personally by giving them the self-esteem and self-confidence to analyse

⁴⁰ Freire elaborates on this by saying individuals cannot really act in the world unless they can name it. His practice of teaching people to write the word and the world can be seen as an activity of teaching people to see new things.

situations politically and to mobilise for change. Freire posits that full literacy for the dis-empowered should enable them to become critical of the *status quo* and take up advocacy for true democracy. He has eloquently stated:

Acquiring literacy does not involve memorising sentences, words, or syllables – lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe – rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context (1973:43).

In instances when literacy is fragmented, students learn that literacy means 'not questioning the authority' of the teacher or society. They are merely taught *what* to know, not *how* to know. Such an approach to learning obviously presents barriers to pedagogical and curricular transformation because it also strips language teachers of using their own sound judgement during the learning event. The reality according to Freire (1972) is that this de-contextualised curriculum does not work or even enlighten students, and certainly does little to empower or give latitude to literacy. There is a wrong assumption that students will synthesise the discrete bits and pieces of phonetic information, and in doing so will become literate and informed about the knowing and doing of the world.

For Lankshear and Lawler too, literacy is a political act and for them politics pertains to the 'operation, exercise and distribution of structural power'⁴¹, and the way in which this shapes human life within society' (1987:27). To understand the politics of literacy then is to inquire into the *forms* reading and writing assume within the process of 'humans pursuing interests, goals, and aspirations under conditions of unequal power' (p.28). In their view, there are two senses in which the political nature of literacies might be revealed. First, attention can be paid to the efforts of subordinate groups who have

⁴¹ Giroux (1993:369) also advocates that literacy cannot be viewed as merely an epistemological or procedural issue, but must be defined primarily in political and ethical terms. It is political in that how we 'read' the world is always implicated in relations of power. Literacy is ethical in that people 'read' the world differently depending, for instance, on circumstances of class, gender, culture, race and politics. They also read the world in spaces and social relations constructed between themselves and others which demand actions based on judgements and choices about how one is to act in the face of ideologies, values, and the centre that constitute 'otherness'. It is these shifting relations of knowing and identity, which then frame people's 'different modes of response to the other'.

resisted, through critical modes of reading and writing, oppressive social structures and relations⁴². Second, scholars can investigate the extent to which, and ways in which, literacies add to the *reinforcement* of existing inequalities (across cultures, gender, ethnic, and other lines) and established patterns of structural power. Subordinate groups may, through the very forms of literacy they practice in every day life, and the competencies they are equipped with contribute to their own domination. Lankshear and Lawler's understanding of literacy highlights the fact that social literacy programmes may take learners on very different routes. Their notion of literacy, which is in line with that advanced by theorists such as Paulo Freire, and Giroux stand in sharp contrast to suppressive literacy programmes as reflected in undemocratic systems. The analysis in *Chapter 7* will reveal whether SiSwati literacies lead to critical or uncritical agents and the extent to which they reinforce existing inequalities and established pattern of power.

The preceding readings on the literacy as social practice perspective have been useful in helping me understand that:

- Literacy is a cultural activity that involves people in conscious and reflective action within a variety of situations in everyday life.
- Literacy has to be understood as embedded in and working through particular cultural, historical, political and social contexts.
- Literacy is entangled with larger issues such as social and political history, economic development, educational priorities and even such questions as social equity.
- Literacy is regarded as being multidimensional because it is seen as serving a variety of social, economic, ideological and political purposes.
- Cognitive and social literacy are not two mutually exclusive processes, but rather two sides of the same coin in the sense that cognitively enriching literacy practices create critical forms of literacy which create critically aware citizens whose critical and rational faculties are being honed through a heightened social awareness.

⁴² (The critical approach to both 'word' and 'world' fostered in Paulo Freire's adult literacy work in Brazil)

- An advanced, democratic society cannot come into being and cannot be sustained in the absence of a multiliterate, socially and culturally literate citizenry.
- In a bilingual or multilingual society, languages serve specific domains and these domains make different kinds of literacies possible.
- In societies that are not free and open, literacy programmes are often instruments of subtle oppression as these find their way into curricula and the agenda of textbooks.
- Literacy programmes may have a distinct socio-critical agenda. This form of literacy is anti-hegemonic in its agenda. Critical literacy, by its very nature, has a strong focus on developing a rational person.
- A balanced literacy programme seems to effectively juggle a three-tiered view of literacy. At a basic level, it works with elementary reading and writing skills. At a second level, it seeks to improve the quality of life of the learner and at a third level it strives to address the child's rights to critique the political and structural environment in which she lives.
- Literacy practices are never politically neutral. They are constrained by the principles, political values and systems that govern society. These determine the levels and forms of literacy knowledge made available within society
- Social literacy practices are geared towards the molding of a particular kind of citizen. In open societies, literacy programmes tend to advance the rights and duties of the future citizen. In closed, repressive societies however, literacy programmes tend to be an extension of the control mechanisms designed by the state. In the case of the latter, the final product tends to be socially illiterate in the sense that she is not able to engage with societal ills in an informed, rational and critical way.

4.2 Conclusion

The foregoing review of research and theory on literacy – particularly the notion of literacy as social practice has generated the following key points which will be employed in the analysis of the SiSwati language curriculum in *Chapter 7*:

- For progressive literacy programs, the ability to read and write is merely a foundation on which to build a critical and reflective attitude in individuals. Within this framework, individuals are allowed a de-contextualised space which creates the intellectual and emotional distance for them to tease texts in a detached and objective way.
- Literacy is a multidimensional endeavour which equips societal members with the necessary skills to address a variety of social, economic, ideological and political purposes in their everyday lives.
- Progressive literacy programmes embark from the premise that cognitive and social literacy are not mutually exclusive, but rather two sides of the same coin in the sense that cognitively enriching literacy practices create critical forms of literacy which then develop individuals' critical and rational faculties.
- A balanced literacy programme ultimately results in rational, multi-skilled and critically aware individuals who are capable of making a positive contribution towards the socio-political and economic development of their societies. For all these individuals, the ability to read and write forms a *basis* for critical and objective engagement with issues in their daily lives.

The next chapter provides a critical overview of the history of curriculum development in SiSwati with a view to understanding and evaluating the extent to which SiSwati literacies are informed by theoretical insights and criteria that have been seen to be applicable to *all* languages in this chapter.

Chapter 5

A critical overview of the history of curriculum development in SiSwati

5.1 Introduction

The close relationship between curriculum planning and what can be termed desirable literacy practices⁴³ informs this overview of curriculum development of SiSwati as a school subject.

In the previous chapter, a comprehensive body of literature pointed to the pivotal role of literacy theory and practice in the overall formulation of a given curriculum. Other relevant insights gleaned from the overview were:

- a confirmation of the interplay between sound pedagogical principles and informed literacy practices;
- a strong argument that there is a positive link between the nature of literacy practices and a community's potential for socio-economic and psychosocial development as well as the overall political direction of a given society;
- a demonstration of the overriding role of government policy in the shaping of literacy programmes; and
- the close link existing between socially literate students on the one hand, and stable, democratically constituted societies, on the other hand.

The history of the development of the SiSwati language curriculum and the concomitant learning material is to a large extent a reflection of the problematic relationship between isiZulu, the dominant neighbouring Nguni language and an isolated branch of the SiSwati

⁴³ The metaphor often used in describing this relationship between literacy practice and curriculum is the image of the rudder (literacy practice) and the ship (curriculum). I find it a useful image as it encapsulates the idea of the curriculum as superstructure and literacy practices as the mechanism that dictate the direction.

speech community.⁴⁴ When I started school in Swaziland in 1975 I found it curious that my learning to read experience was essentially a SiSwati experience, while my older brothers and sisters showed a preference for isiZulu novels such as *Inkinsela yaseMgungundlovu*, dramas such as *Mntanami Mntanami* and poetry anthologies like *Iqoqo Lezinkondlo*, I read *SiSwati Sesibayeni*, *SiSwati Sami* and *Insika yeSiSwati*. In retrospect, I realise that our divergent literacy experiences reflected a transitional process, and that their school language experience represented the end of an era, and mine, the beginning of another era.

The reasons for the growing resistance to the dominance of isiZulu authors and language practitioners in the teaching and learning of SiSwati were twofold: In the first place there was the existence of a South African SiSwati curriculum that had been developed independently from isiZulu. The realisation that SiSwati need not be taught with constant reference to isiZulu slowly filtered over the border. Secondly, increasingly preference was given to literature that was originally written in SiSwati, and not translations from isiZulu. This process, the phasing out of isiZulu as both a subject and a language of instruction, and the phasing in of SiSwati, was, and still is fraught with difficulties as vested interests and old practices tend to subvert voices advocating change.

In the chapter I will demonstrate how the isiZulu language curriculum with all its apartheid ideological baggage, inadvertently became the unasked for and unwanted model for the SiSwati language curriculum.

To what extent did the translation of the Bible in SiSwati in the 1970's speed up Swaziland's sense of an own identity? It is difficult to ascertain, but the divide between the older generation who preferred the isiZulu Bible and the younger generation who could hardly read the isiZulu Bible, became quite pronounced in my primary school

⁴⁴ The political border between Swaziland and South Africa, like so many borders in Africa, split the SiSwati speech community into two entities. This border-straddling linguistic situation lead to language curricula developed by two distinct educational dispensations. While the Swaziland speech community developed a paralysing dependency on the six million strong isiZulu speech community, the South African branch of the SiSwati speech community submitted to the centralised educational dispensation of the then apartheid government.

years. However, the fact that isiZulu had been traditionally associated with the ‘Word of God’ gave exceptional and lasting status to this powerful sister language.

In this chapter, I plan to reflect on my language and literacy experiences and those of my family, as I believe they represent a microcosm of a wider societal pattern. I wish to look back on why my siblings who were mother tongue speakers of SiSwati, were made to learn isiZulu at school, why my mother to this day remains loyal to her isiZulu Bible, despite the availability of a SiSwati Bible, and why I, later in my education, came to be exposed to texts such as *Butjoki* which contained stories set in Mlungundlovu in KwaZulu Natal, of all places, inundated with isiZulu vocabulary. I believe this understanding will be important for my thesis as it will sketch the developmental route of SiSwati both as a language and as a school subject, and further shed light on the present socio-political context in which SiSwati language development takes place.

5.2 Language and power: IsiZulu's historical advantage over SiSwati

In order to appreciate the subservient position of SiSwati with regard to isiZulu, it is important to look at the relationship between the two languages, which reflect distinctly unequal power relations.

5.2.1 SiSwati's dialectical relationship to isiZulu

Of the four Nguni⁴⁵ languages spoken in South Africa, SiSwati is erroneously regarded as one of the ‘youngest’ – simply because it was committed to writing later than the other languages. The official standardisation of the orthography of SiSwati has a relatively short history, even though the first written SiSwati was published as far back as 1846. The Swazi dependence on isiZulu created the impression that SiSwati developed as an offshoot of isiZulu and that the relationship is of a mother-daughter nature. Ngcongwane (1987) corrected this misconception when he warned that even though ‘to most people Swazi sounds like an underdeveloped Zulu language – some saying it sounds like baby

⁴⁵ The Nguni group of languages consists of isiZulu, Xhosa, SiSwati and Ndebele.

talk, it is not an offshoot from Zulu. If anything, it can be as old as Zulu' (1987:3). In this regard I can relate my own experiences as a SiSwati speaker. On numerous occasions isiZulu speaking people have asked me to speak my language because 'I sound like a Zulu child'⁴⁶. Ncongwane (1987) further explained the roots of some of the misconceptions by taking us back to the break-up in the Nguni language family. When Blacks came from Central Africa in search of pastures, the Nguni group settled in the present Swazi area first, and then subsequently in the Zulu area (Natal), and finally in the Xhosa area (Cape). When Shaka became king, there were still many loose units in the area now called Natal. They spoke related, but different varieties. Shaka united them militarily, and in the process, also linguistically. Shaka proved to be a classic language imperialist by forbidding the use of any other varieties in his presence. However, Shaka or any other Zulu ruler never subdued the Swazis militarily, so their version of the Nguni language escaped the unification process.

Following the split in the Nguni language group, these languages for geographical, historical and economic reasons received differential treatment. IsiZulu and isiXhosa underwent codification largely through the efforts of European missionaries and developed a written tradition whilst SiSwati lagged behind. Largely through the use of the isiZulu Bible and church liturgy at SiSwati mission stations, the perception that SiSwati can only be analysed, or talked about in terms of isiZulu took root. It is erroneous therefore to conceive of SiSwati as a variety of isiZulu as what transpired between these languages is a widespread sociolinguistic phenomenon, where some languages have been privileged through chance, and others not. It was a case of languages that were geographically closest to the British colonial economic activities receiving attention and by contrast, a geographically distant language being neglected. IsiZulu and isiXhosa, being close to sea ports and harbours and the hub of economic activities became developed earlier than SiSwati, whose speech community was relatively isolated.

⁴⁶ The relationship between Dutch and Afrikaans is another case in point. Even at this stage Dutch speakers regard Afrikaans as a quaint underdeveloped variety of Dutch. To them it sounds like 'kindertaal' (a child's language) (Personal communication between Jan Esterhuyse and Dr Jan Bouwhuis, former Rector of the International Baccalaureate School, Omme, Netherlands). It is a sociolinguistic maxim that more established varieties of a language invariably regard less developed varieties as immature and child-like in character.

5.2.2 The development of a border-straddling SiSwati speech community

SiSwati suffered yet another ‘misfortune’ when Swazis came into contact with the Boers in about 1846, who bought land from King Mswati, which eventually resulted in endless boundary disputes. This led to a split in the Swazi linguistic/ethnic community, with some falling under the jurisdiction of the old Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek whilst others became subjects of the then British crown in Swaziland⁴⁷. This led to the present situation where the political boundary also resulted in a linguistic split in the speech community. The Boers and the British both tried to gain influence over the Swazi as matters were arranged between the South African Republic and Great Britain through the Third Swaziland Convention of 1895. The South African Republic became the ‘protector’ of Swaziland. When the Boer Republic lost their independence in 1902, the British crown established its ‘protection’ over Swaziland, a political and legal situation that ended when Swaziland became independent in 1968.

British colonialism actively advanced the use of English, which became both a subject and the medium of instruction from the fourth grade. By neglecting the development of SiSwati, the advance of English among the ruling elite became a *fait accompli* as SiSwati’s domains shrank to only respond to discourse in the home, church and the informal sector.

5.2.3 Missionaries language policy - the development of the isiZulu umbilical cord

The arrival of missionaries in Swaziland in the 1800s did little to improve the disadvantaged state of SiSwati as opposed to isiZulu and English. Armed with an isiZulu Bible and taking advantage of the fact that SiSwati and isiZulu were mutually intelligible and that isiZulu was the language used in school and the churches in South Africa and Swaziland, the missionaries did not deem it necessary to have the Bible translated into

⁴⁷ This issue affected my father as my polygamous grandfather had built my grandmother a home in a location which later remained in Swaziland, whilst the other wives belonged to South Africa. Of course this has not caused any problems as we easily cross the fence as often as we wish to visit our relatives in Swaziland.

SiSwati and so the isiZulu Bible and hymn became institutionalised in SiSwati church services.

The dependence on the isiZulu church literature had a detrimental influence on the development of a SiSwati written tradition. Even though the Reverend James Alison who had a station at Mahamba produced the first written SiSwati document in 1846, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the translation of the Bible into SiSwati began. The St Mark's Gospel was the first Bible Book translated into SiSwati. It was published in 1976, and on 6 September 1976, the Independence Day, King Sobhuza II and the Queen Mother each received a specially bound copy of the booklet. 'The first imprint of this publication of 10, 000 was sold out within six months.' (Vilakati, 1986:37). On 6 September 1978, a further publication came out containing St Matthew, St Luke and the Acts. The full New Testament was printed in 1980. The Bible Society in South Africa and the Bible Society in Swaziland jointly published a complete translation of the entire Bible as recently as 1996. For the first time almost two million SiSwati speakers living in Swaziland and South Africa were able to read and hear the Bible in their own language.

If one scrutinises the role played by missionaries in the development of SiSwati, it becomes evident that they were also instrumental in perpetuating and strengthening Swazi dependence on isiZulu by postponing the translation of the Bible into SiSwati for more than a century. Swazis who embraced Christianity were compelled to learn isiZulu in order to access the Bible. However, what is significant is that the Bible became a text that acted as a unifying factor between the speech communities on both sides of the border. When the missionaries engaged in the project which became invaluable in SiSwati speaking communities, they treated the communities on both sides of the border as one. As a result, the recently published complete SiSwati Bible is a product of a joint

effort of Swazi speakers in South Africa and Swaziland. This has important implications for this border-straddling speech community.⁴⁸

5.2.4 The dominance of isiZulu in the education domain

The lack of a SiSwati written tradition also brought about the dominance of isiZulu in teacher training. Most Swazi teachers obtained their training in the then Union of South Africa, particularly in the Province of Natal ‘because of the language affinity’ (*Ministry of Education Report*, 1954:21). Local teacher training centres in Matapa (now Matsapha) and Bremersdorp (now Manzini) only trained teachers for the Lower Primary level⁴⁹ and ‘Elementary Vernacular’⁵⁰ respectively. There were no facilities in Swaziland for Higher Primary training and by arrangement with the Basutoland (now Lesotho) Education Department, students were sent to one of the two colleges in the Basutoland. Teachers for the secondary schools trained at the University College of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape Province. However, ‘due to growing demands from the Union’s own African peoples, entry to its schools and universities was restricted. The enrolment of students from neighbouring territories was discontinued’ (*Ministry of Education Report*, 1954:21). So, for one to qualify as a higher primary teacher, she had to master (sic) isiZulu as no ‘vernacular’ was offered at this level.

Teacher training centres followed syllabuses which were prescribed by the Department and based largely on those of the *Natal Fourth Class Teacher Training Course*⁵¹.

An examination of the syllabuses, followed from primary school through to teacher training, indicates that in the largely oral Swazi society, the introduction of basic literacy,

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the border-straddling Sotho speech community, spoken in Lesotho as well as South Africa actually developed two distinct orthographies, despite the fact that the spoken versions are quite similar. The impact of this unfortunate development on publications in the language speaks for itself.

⁴⁹ These teachers were trained to teach up to the fourth standard.

⁵⁰ I.e. those trained to teach up to the second standard.

⁵¹ Practical teaching played an important part in the training. Other subjects included Principles and Methods of Education, Organisation and Management of Schools, Arts and Crafts, Music and Blackboard Work. In addition, all students had to attend classes in English, Zulu, Arithmetic and Elementary Science (ibid. p. 5).

even though undoubtedly beneficial, also functioned as a negative agent. Whilst SiSwati was being systematically neglected, English and isiZulu by contrast, as the sole official languages, were imbued with linguistic, as well as economic and political power⁵². It is significant that SiSwati did not feature as a subject at Matric and Junior Certificate levels. IsiZulu continued to be taught at university and English was the media of learning for academic work and formal instruction. As high status languages, isiZulu and English played a decisive role in bread and butter issues, such as the kind of job one qualified and trained for and the level at which one could teach. IsiZulu further opened people's doors to careers in the field of education, SiSwati on the other hand, limited a student's option to that of becoming a lower primary teacher. Furthermore, the size of the speech community made it uneconomical to publish textbooks in SiSwati (*Ministry of Education Report*, 1954:10). The obvious economic benefits attached to publishing in isiZulu rather than SiSwati forced Swazi authors such as J.S.M Matsebula and a few others to write and publish in isiZulu (Simelane, 1974). Literacy practices in the Swaziland context tended to repress the mother tongue as the predominance of isiZulu necessitated a sound knowledge of that language

The use of isiZulu in the place of the mother tongue SiSwati also functioned as a negative agent for cultural survival. Simelane (1974) captured the psychosocial dilemma and educational disadvantages experienced by Swazi learners in the following manner:

Unfortunately for the Swazi child, his mother tongue was looked upon as a dialect of isiZulu. Whilst there was much oral SiSwati literature outside the classroom, there was nothing SiSwati within. Instead within the school walls, the child found himself confronted with two foreign media of instruction, namely isiZulu and English. ... The isiZulu books introduced a foreign vocabulary and idiom to the Swazi child. The fact that the learner's bends and trends had been moulded in a culture different from Zulu was forgotten. When the Swazi ghost manifested itself in Zuluised gaffes such as '*kumazima*' (instead of *Kunzima*); '*ngimkhande embili*' (instead of *ngimkhande phambili*) for instance, the learner was penalised by loss of marks. The child had to satisfy the

⁵²6 Muhlhausler (1996:19; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992) have argued for a link between teaching foreign languages to the detriment of the mother tongue with political and economic imperialism.

demands of the Zulu purist, who was often both the teacher and the examiner. It was therefore not surprising that many Swazi scholars scored distinctions in Zulu in public examinations but failed to contribute to Zulu literature (Simelane, 1974:17).

The complete disregard of the intricate relationships between language, culture and social development in the education of Swazi speaking learners is evident in the language policies and practices of the era.

5.3 The role of linguists and missionaries in SiSwati language development

The oldest known attempt to write SiSwati as mentioned earlier is the translation of the Wesleyan Catechism, by the Missionary James Allison who preached the Gospel to the Swazis in 1846. The second publication on SiSwati is found in Sir H.H. Jonston's *Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages, Group T*. Professor C.M. Doke in his *Phonetics of the Zulu Language* (Johannesburg: 1926) gave a few Swazi words. Professor A.J. Engelbrecht's *Swazi Texts* (1930) with Notes were the first texts written in SiSwati. Ziervogel's *Swazi Customs from Birth to Marriage* (1944) were texts taken down in SiSwati. A short analysis of SiSwati grammar was also given. P.A.W. Cook's *History and Izibongo of the Swazi Chiefs* remained peculiar in the sense that its praises and songs are 'Zuluised SiSwati'. In *African Studies VII* (1948) Ziervogel compared SiSwati noun classes with those of isiZulu and Ndebele in an article entitled '*Notes of the Noun Classes of Swati and Ndebele*'.

The process of developing SiSwati orthography, as the titles above indicate began in the late 19th century, but for the political, economic and sociolinguistic reasons stated earlier, SiSwati remained a spoken language.

After independence in 1968 the Swaziland government introduced the use of SiSwati in the primary school⁵³. The Swaziland Primary Curriculum Unit (PCU) now called the National Curriculum Centre (NCC) was tasked with preparing a SiSwati curriculum and

⁵³ In South Africa SiSwati was introduced as a school subject in 1977.

teaching materials for use in Swaziland primary schools. SiSwati was introduced as a subject in 1970 and the following books were used:

- (i) SiSwati Sami series by Miss T.T. Ginindza
 - (ii) Insika series by J.S.M. Matsebula
 - (iii) SiSwati Sesibayeni series by V.M.Simelane
 - (iv) Tisho TeSiSwati by H.M. Magagula
- (Dlamini, 1976:38)⁵⁴

In recent years, the National Curriculum Centre produced a primary school series in SiSwati. 'An agreement was signed between the Ministry of Education and Macmillan Publishers under which all materials and books developed under the auspices of the Ministry would be passed to Macmillan for production and publication' (National Curriculum Centre booklet, p. 19)⁵⁵. 1976 saw the introduction of SiSwati in the secondary school. The following syllabus was prepared:

Form I (Grade 8)

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. SiSwati Grammar
A general survey of the parts of speech
Libito and sabito selucobo (noun and pronoun)2. Traditional literature
Tisho TeSiSwati (Proverbs and Idioms)
Tiphicwaphicwano (Riddles)3. A SiSwati Novel
Hamba Kahle Mdikileni by M.A. Simelane |
|---|

⁵⁴ It is also important to note that the books listed above were also used in South African schools, a kind of co-operative arrangement not possible in SeSotho for example, as there exists two orthographies.

⁵⁵ This agreement lead to a situation which excluded other publishers from offering material. This situation is still in force at this stage. Another significant feature of this arrangement was the lack of free market forces in the development of the materials. The writers of these textbooks were in fact state officials.

4. Essay and letter

5. Comprehension

(Ministry of Education Report, 1976:10-11)

It is significant that the syllabus was orientated towards a formalistic treatment of language and a side focus on oral literature (see Dlamini, 2001). The lack of a communicative dimension was in keeping with the format in isiZulu.⁵⁶

5.3.1 Initial collaboration between Swaziland and South Africa

The first SiSwati grammar book to be published and therefore used in the teaching of secondary school SiSwati grammar in Swaziland and South Africa was Ziervogel and Mabuza's *A Grammar of Swazi* (1976 edition). In the Preface to the 1952 book, Ziervogel acknowledged and 'deeply appreciate[d] the kind efforts of Professor Doke towards the publication of his book' (1952:1). In fact he also mentioned that Professor Doke 'kindly suggested that [he] write a Swazi grammar on the lines set out in his [Doke's] *Outline of Grammar of Bantu*' first published in 1927' (Ziervogel, 1952:1). In the 1976 publication, Ziervogel and Mabuza pointed out that the examples that they quoted were to a very large extent those used in the 1952 work (Ziervogel and Mabuza, 1976: Preface) and they expressed the hope that it would serve children in South Africa and Swaziland:

We trust that the Swati language given here represents a language which is acceptable to both the Swati in the Republic of South Africa and in Swaziland (1976: preface).

The need to keep to a unitary pattern of codification is noteworthy. The trend set by Ziervogel and Mabuza's publication and the way in which the SiSwati Bible succeeded in

⁵⁶ This profoundly limited perspective on literacy practices has its origins in curriculum blueprints developed by the Department of Education and Training in the 1960's. The circumstances under which these curricula were taken over by the Swaziland curriculum planners will be dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter.

using a spelling tradition acceptable in both domains became very significant in the standardisation process⁵⁷.

Ziervogel and Mabuza did not only base their grammar book on the 1952 edition, but acknowledged that they were indebted to Mr. David Rycroft of SOAS who had placed some of his work on Swati at their disposal, especially that dealing with tone. As one could hardly write a grammar of a Bantu language without taking cognisance of grammars written in other Bantu languages, they acknowledged their indebtedness to A.C. Nkabinde's thesis '*A Revision of the word categories in Zulu*' (1975), A.S. Davey's M.A. dissertation '*The moods and tenses of the verb in Xhosa*' (1973) and C.S. Rooyen's '*Die Kosatief in Zoeloe*' (1973).

Ziervogel and Mabuza's acknowledgement of other authors of Bantu language grammar books underscores an important point in the development of African languages. In the codification of SiSwati, other works dealing with the structure of Nguni languages became an important frame of reference. Furthermore, what is significant about the role played by these linguists was the assumption that the Swazis on both sides of the border were in fact one speech community and that the SiSwati orthography used in South Africa and Swaziland should therefore be identical.

Luhlelo LweSiSwati, which was written by J.V. Dlamini and published by Shuter and Shooter in 1979, was the first grammar book to be written by a Swazi based in Swaziland. But even this grammar book was a translation of Nyembezi's *Uhlelo Lwesizulu*. The publication of this book brought about the replacement of all the prescribed grammar books used previously in the Swaziland context in particular. However, schools in the KaNgwane (now Mpumalanga) province also used *Luhlelo LweSiSwati* as both a prescribed and a reference text. After *Luhlelo LweSiSwati*, G.D. Dlamini's *Lulwimi LweSiSwati* and Mthembu et al's *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka*, published by

⁵⁷ The development of two spelling codes in seSotho demonstrates how easy it is for a speech community to become a divided one. Due to a lack of co-operation between government officials in South Africa and Lesotho, seSotho language textbooks use two different orthographies, thereby rendering the utilisation of textbooks across the political border impossibility.

Shuter and Shooter and Longman Publishers respectively were also prescribed for schools in both South Africa and Swaziland.

Besides the sharing of prescribed texts, SiSwati speakers on both sides of the border have been engaged in other projects to develop the language. For instance, in the past the Swaziland SiSwati Language Committee and the SiSwati Language Committee in the Republic of South Africa often met to discuss matters of common interest such as: SiSwati Orthography, SiSwati Terminology and SiSwati Syllabus (Dlamini, 1976:37). As a result of these meetings, the *Swazi Orthography, Terminology and Spelling Rules* was published in 1980 by the Government Printer in Pretoria under the auspices of the SiSwati Language Board. The Board consisted of delegates from the Ministry of Education in Swaziland, the KaNgwane Department of Education and Culture, the Department of Education and Training of the RSA, the SABC and the Universities (Dlamini, 1976:38). This meaningful phase of collaboration came to an end when practices in Swaziland made further co-operation along communal lines virtually impossible.

5.3.2 A split in Swazi linguistic community?

In 1996 Macmillan published the grammar book, *Sihlatiya SiSwati* written by E.S. Sibanda and E.T. Mthembu. Since ‘an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Education and Macmillan Publishers under which all materials and books developed under the auspices of the Ministry would be passed to Macmillan for production and publication’ (National Curriculum Centre booklet, P. 19), *Sihlatiya SiSwati* has now replaced *Luhlelo LweSiSwati* and *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka* as the core grammar book in Swaziland for both secondary and high schools. The Ministry of Education also stipulated that only books published by Macmillan may be prescribed. This ruling effectively barred schools in Swaziland from using the progressive learners’ books which came into being in response to the introduction of Curriculum 2005. These new series developed by Cambridge University Press, Heinemann, Oxford University Press and Longman constituted nothing less than a paradigm shift. These publications have been

informed by sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic insights that are pertinent to the development of the whole child and have incorporated critical social literacy practices. The development of this new language curriculum assumed that all eleven official South African languages will be informed by a strong critical language awareness component and that the teaching of language structures will be relegated to a minor subsection of a year's work.⁵⁸

5.3.3 The development of literature in Swaziland

As was the case with the development of grammar texts, in literature, SiSwati speakers grew up reading isiZulu literature in the period between 1950-1970. It was only in the late 70s that SiSwati novels, plays, poetry etc appeared in schools. Initially these works were essentially translations of isiZulu literary works. In this regard, I can reflect on the educational experiences of my elder siblings. They studied Sibusiso Nyembezi, D.B.Z Ntuli's stories, *Butjoki*, the anthology *Liqoqo letinkondlo*, the novels *Inkanankana* and *Hamba Kahle Mdikileni*. Most of these books were translated from isiZulu. I also read *Liqoqo Letinkondlo* and *Butjoki*. *Butjoki* for instance, contained stories set in the rural areas and portrayed relationships in the patriarchal tradition. The characters had isiZulu surnames such as Zungu, Cele, Shezi and Hlongwa, while the settings were reminiscent of KwaZulu-Natal landscapes. In fact *Butjoki* was the only prescribed storybook for O'Level in 2001.

The early 80s saw the publication of SiSwati novels, short stories, poetry and plays by Swazis in Swaziland and South Africa. In Swaziland, *Umdlndla weSiSwati*, The Swazi Writers Association spearheaded the development. Even though Simelane (1974:17) has stated that 'the playing of an inferior role by SiSwati scholars led to a silent revolt among them, and to a movement which aimed at developing SiSwati outside of the Zulu context' my perception is that even this 'silent revolt' has itself developed SiSwati literature *within* the isiZulu context. IsiZulu has continued its linguistic dominance and prescriptive

⁵⁸ See the introduction to the revised Curriculum 2005 publications for the eleven different languages, published in 2003 and 2004.

attitude in peculiar ways. Linguistic interference occurred in three ways. IsiZulu authors such as D.B.Z. Ntuli, E.S.Q. Vilakati and others continued to run workshops for members of the Swazi Writers Association, as the preface to *Ligabazi*, a poetry anthology illustrates:

Sitsandza kubonga kakhulu kuletimbongi letilapha nebakaMacmillan Boleswa ngelusito lwabo lolukhulu. Kubonga kwetfu lokuphindziwe kuya kuMnumzane N.F. Mbhele lowatsi uyasukuma uyagiya lena emhlanganweni-sikolo, esuka emaSwati agila tiga asavukwe bugabazi. (*We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all the poets present here and Macmillan Boleswa for their great help. However, our profound thanks go to Mr. N.F. Mbhele, who when he displayed his gift at the training workshop, Swazis then copied and displayed their gift*)

The extract above clearly shows one way in which isiZulu authors, in this case the Poet N. F. Mbhele, were involved in the development of SiSwati. In fact according to Thabile Mbatha:

‘Whenever a foreign author is called an editor in a Swazi text, he has in fact workshopped (sic) the authors who have written that book. The SiSwati Senior Inspector, Mrs. E.T. Mthembu is also written amongst the editors by virtue of her position and the role she played in co-coordinating the entire process of publishing the book. Other significant South Africans who have helped us write SiSwati books are C.T. Msimang, C.Marivate now at PANSALB, E.S.Q.Zulu the other editor of *Ligabazi* and D.B.Z. Ntuli. Scholars have mainly done this work from the Universities of South Africa, Natal and Zululand.’

Secondly, IsiZulu authors have also contributed in developing SiSwati by writing in this language and thirdly, seeing to it that their work gets translated into SiSwati. For example, in the storybook *Emagama Ekutjelwa*, Queen, H.E Ndosi contributed two stories, in the poetry anthology *Ligabazi*; N.F. Mbhele contributed the first poem, *Intfokoto*. IsiZulu story books such as D.B.Z Ntuli’s *Butjoki* was a translation of the isiZulu text *Imiqibisholo* into SiSwati, Nyembezi’s drama *Mntanami Mntanami* and *Hamba kahle Mdikileni* by M.A. Simelane were originally written in isiZulu.

A critical analysis of the process of developing SiSwati literature reveals the continued linguistic and economic dominance of isiZulu authors. Before the late 70s, SiSwati speakers in both South Africa and Swaziland studied isiZulu 'because it possessed one of the most developed Bantu literatures [and] books in this language [were] of interest to adults in both South Africa and Swaziland' (Ministry of Education Report, 1954:4). However, when one questions the logic behind the continued involvement of isiZulu authors and the translation of works from isiZulu, instead of translations from the vast choice in English,⁵⁹ it becomes clear that the study of literature in Swaziland appears to be but a continuation of the isiZulu influence over SiSwati. For instance, the storybook *Butjoki*, which I studied in 1985-86, was inundated with words I could not understand. I initially thought my SiSwati vocabulary was very limited until I was informed by my teacher that *Butjoki* was in fact translated from isiZulu (*Imiqibisholo*) and hence studied with isiZulu words.

The crucial role played by *Umdlundla WeSiSwati*, the Swazi Writers Association cannot be ignored. However, isiZulu authors continue to have a share in the lucrative prescribed market as they act as editors and receive royalties in this capacity (Personal conversation with Thabile Mbatha). The cover of the storybooks *Inkhundla* and *Idubukele* for instance, list the Senior SiSwati Inspector, E.T. Mthembu and the isiZulu authors C.T. Msimang, E.T. Mthembu and D.B.Z. Ntuli as the editors respectively. A scrutiny of the 2001 SiSwati syllabus also reveals that the isiZulu author, D.B.Z. Ntuli's storybook and the isiZulu poets E.S.Q Zulu and N.F. Mbhele poetry anthology are still being prescribed. As the Ministry of Education in Swaziland only prescribes textbooks that are published by Macmillan, teachers are not at liberty to make their own selection of SiSwati novels, short stories, dramas and poetry anthologies outside those listed in the syllabus document. The effect due to the lack of choice and diversity in SiSwati literature is self-evident.

⁵⁹ In fact, according to the Ministry of Education Report of 1954 there were thousands of English books, periodicals, newspapers and magazines donated by such bodies as the United Kingdom Information Office, the Victoria League and the British Council in Swaziland in 1953.

5.3.4 Obstacles in the way of autonomy

Several SiSwati writers have raised the legacy of isiZulu in the development of an autonomous SiSwati literary tradition. Shongwe (1987) for instance, wrote:

There are many problems encountered in writing the language at present. All the writers were taught Zulu. Now they have to make a distinction between what is Swati and what is Zulu, as they commit SiSwati to writing – and, believe, it is not an easy task. The present author in SiSwati has to face this challenge (1987:25-34).

Another poet in SiSwati, R.J. Zwane, in his book *Iminjunju Yemphefumulo*, expressed his inability to write fluent SiSwati as follows:

a...maSwati lamahle, ngicela kutsi bahlabi balencwajana, bayihlabe babuye nganeno ngobe ngisengumlobi losacatfula nelulwimi lwakhe (Zwane, 1984).

Loosely translated it says: Good Swazis, I beg that critics of this booklet should be aware that I am an author who is still a toddler in the language. It is painfully ironical that this apologetic man, who refers to himself as a toddler in the language, is in fact a first language speaker of SiSwati. A similar comment appeared in Mathunjwa's novelette, when she thanked a reader for correcting her use of SiSwati. The apologetic tone of the cited authors reflects the general feeling of inferiority towards the robust and relatively well-developed isiZulu language.

The reason for the problems encountered in writing SiSwati are not difficult to find 'since Zwane used Zulu as his mother tongue; the Zulu Radio⁶⁰ reached Swaziland and the so-called KaNgwane homeland. The present Swati Radio is a new phenomenon – [and it did] not broadcast all day long like Zulu Radio [and] since we have been subjected to Zulu at school, in church, in newspapers and on radio for quite a long time, it is no surprise that there should be disagreement as to what is pure Swati (if a pure language

⁶⁰ The Zulu radio station enjoyed a strong and clear signal, while Swaziland Radio had to make do with a highly unreliable MW signal.

exists) and so-called Zuluised Swazi.’ (Shongwe, 1987:27). Shongwe's statement is significant as it reflects the self-effacing and apologetic way SiSwati authors often think of their work in relation to isiZulu.

The low status of SiSwati and the isiZulu training background of entire generations of teachers have also been cited as some of the obstacles in developing SiSwati at school level. Even though ‘it [was] hope[d] (sic) that nothing would happen to stop the development of SiSwati until it ha[d] (sic) completely replaced Zulu’ (Ministry of Education Report, 1974:32), the influence of isiZulu [has] (sic) persisted in the Swaziland context. As late as 1981, teachers were still requesting workshops that would ‘serve to orientate them from teaching Zulu to the teaching of SiSwati’ because ‘all the teachers at present [had] a Zulu background. Furthermore, SiSwati [was] not yet accorded its rightful place as the official language of this country’ (Ministry of Education Report, 1981:31-34).

In 1976 the Senior Inspector of SiSwati reported some of the following hindrances to the development of a SiSwati curriculum:

- Prejudice against the language because of the ‘unfortunate close proximity of Swaziland and the Republic of South Africa. So many people [thought] by introducing SiSwati in our schools, we were implementing Bantu education. This suspicion [was] given weight as we often [met] with the SiSwati Language Committee from the Republic of South Africa’ (Dlamini, 1976:38).
- Many people, including teachers equated literacy with the ability to speak, read and write in English.
- Some individuals were of the opinion that learning SiSwati did not contribute to national development.
- There was lack of co-operation, as people who may have played a role in the development of SiSwati had difficulties meeting.
- The lack of funds.

(Dlamini, 1976:38)

It is the first point made by Dlamini that requires further scrutiny. The problem of SiSwati being tainted by association with Bantu Education seems to have partially led to the present divided state of the SiSwati speech community in terms of materials development as well as a common SiSwati curriculum. The privileged position of one educational publisher in Swaziland seems to be a further divisive factor as other publishing houses have no option but to publish for the South African market only. This leads to another problem, as the South African section of the SiSwati speech community is often regarded as too small to make publications profitable.

Added to the above was the fact that ‘the use of SiSwati (in Swaziland) within school premises [was] in some cases discouraged. Mention was made of the fact that punishment [was] sometimes inflicted on students for speaking SiSwati ... in some instances, teachers in other subject areas impressed upon students the insignificance of SiSwati with regard to future job opportunities’ (Ministry of Education Report, 1981:32)⁶¹. The legacy of the English first policy over more than a century is very much evident in this unfortunate case of self-inflicted mother tongue neglect.

In the section that follows I will examine in some detail isiZulu syllabuses to establish the extent to which the flaws and weaknesses of these syllabuses designed within the constraints of Bantu education may have found their way into the SiSwati curriculum. As the development of African language syllabuses took place within a broader historical context, it is necessary to explore the evolutionary process within the context of Bantu education.

⁶¹ I personally experienced this as at our school anyone who spoke the ‘vernacular’ was given a coin which she could pass on to the next ‘vernac’ speaker. All the ‘vernac’ speakers were then punished on Fridays. This frustrated us to the point where we opted to sing our conversations, as one was allowed to sing in SiSwati. In this boarding school we always looked forward to SiSwati periods and the weekend, as it was then that we could speak to each other freely in SiSwati.

5.4 The development of the English, Bantu⁶² and Afrikaans Language syllabuses in the 1970s and beyond

The tight control over the development of African language syllabi in the period 1970-1990 is evident in the way these documents reflect a tethering of African languages to visions of language education as expressed in Afrikaans syllabi of that time. This control of the production of discourse will be described and analysed in greater detail further on in this chapter. Foucault described this process of control as consisting of a set of procedures:

...in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault, 1979:93).

As a person who began school when SiSwati (and not isiZulu) was taught in schools, I have always considered myself more fortunate than my elder siblings who were, through the isiZulu language curriculum, exposed to what was then perceived as Bantu education. I have always been grateful that I was never exposed in any form to the education system widely derided for reducing the horizons of Africans and cramping them intellectually within the narrow bounds of tribal society (Troup, 1976). However, having established the extent to which the development of SiSwati has occurred in terms of, and with reference to isiZulu, I began to wonder about the possible extent to which the SiSwati I was taught at school may have in fact placed me in a position similar to that of my siblings. The exploration and discovery of the links between African language syllabi and Afrikaans syllabi made me realise that I may have also been exposed to the system of education widely labelled for producing a 'citizenry fundamentally unequipped and under-equipped to play a full and critical role in society' (van den Berg, 1994:34). It is this hunch that prompted me to have a critical look at the isiZulu curriculum of the time, and its possible influence on the development of the SiSwati curriculum.

⁶² The Bantu languages that the syllabus was designed for were: Zulu, Xhosa, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Tsonga and Venda (JMB, 1979)

5.4.1 Bantu Education syllabus' slipping through the backdoor into Swaziland

In this section of the chapter I intend to come to an understanding of the dynamics that shaped the isiZulu curriculum and the extent to which isiZulu perceptions about language and literacy development generally and curriculum development specifically, may have been mirrored in the SiSwati development process. Given the rather long and unequal relationship between isiZulu and SiSwati, an analysis of the SiSwati curriculum should logically begin with an exploration of its relationship to isiZulu. The intention then is to establish how the 1970s' isiZulu syllabus came into being and how the values and perceptions of language education underpinning it conceivably replicated themselves in the present SiSwati curriculum. I have also thought it necessary to compare and contrast the isiZulu syllabus and its English and Afrikaans counterparts as I surmise this scrutiny will confirm the growing perception that notions of literacy in the African languages and Afrikaans reflected apartheid ideological constructs. Accepting Bernstein's view (cited in Taylor, 1993:2) that 'how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control', one can argue that it was to be expected that school curricula in South Africa at the time would have been designed to operate in support of the dominant order and the ideology that underpins it⁶³. Furthermore, the fact that curricula are 'planned and have a purpose', and therefore not 'random occurrences and activities' (Hamm, 1989:60) raises further questions: What was the underlying agenda underpinning the isiZulu, English and Afrikaans syllabuses and what kinds of literacies underpinned these syllabuses?

Going along with Musgrove's (1969:6) perception of curriculum design, I would like to argue as a point of departure that the historical English, Afrikaans and Bantu language curricula were planned and had a purpose, that these were each an instrument for changing student behaviour; their objectives were statements of ways in which the

⁶³ Government ideology tends to be all pervasive and consistent. In the case of the apartheid ideology it is important to note that its socio-political structures of separation and domination very much reflected in the field of education and here more specifically language education. It may be assumed that the policy of subjugation would also manifest itself in the way Bantu language curricula were designed.

knowledge, cognitive abilities, skills, interests, values, and attitudes of students would change if the curricula were effective. Pertinent to my argument is his perception that curricula is not value neutral, but an artificial contrivance designed to accelerate change, promote change which would have occurred, and control the direction of change⁶⁴. In my endeavour to understand the isiZulu curriculum, an analysis of the purposes, knowledge, cognitive abilities and skills envisaged by it and its English and Afrikaans counterparts will be central. My intention is to establish, who was taught what, why and how much of the isiZulu and Afrikaans curriculum in particular, created the building blocks for the SiSwati curriculum? This process requires a revisitation of the building blocks that supported the education structures of the time.

5.4.1.1 *The apartheid policy of separatist development*

The accession of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948 brought about a qualitative change in every aspect of life in South Africa. In the education domain, segregated and heavily controlled schooling systems were legislated for Africans (1953), coloured (1963) and Indians (1965) providing an ideological cornerstone for the social segregation, economic and political hegemony over these groups, calibrated according to their location on the racially hierarchical social system (Nkomo, 1990:1). To achieve the grandiose aims of separate development, education was to be one of the principal instruments. What Kogila Adam had to say about university structures was equally valid for schooling generally:

For education to serve the purpose of domination, the institutions must of necessity, follow the model of the larger society. In this sense, the university is nothing more than a microscopic representation of Nationalist aspirations, ideals and values. Accordingly, there is a

⁶⁴ Inherent in this concept of curriculum – that is to say a course of study or a plan for what is to be taught to students in schools – is information about what (the knowledge content of the curriculum) is to be taught as well as to *whom*, *when* and *how* it should be taught (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990:179).

As a corollary, I would also like to argue that curricula may be designed to exactly the opposite, i.e. to stem change, or a flow of new ideas. Postman and Weingartner's (1971) paradoxical statement that politicians depend heavily on the continued irrelevance of most school curricula comes to mind when the African language syllabus for the 1970s is being put under the spotlight.

hierarchical arrangement of teaching staff *mirroring* societal designations. The quality of education, especially methods of instruction, reflect as well as *cements* the surrounding racial structure (1971:201) [emphasis added].

Adam's description of the purpose and structure of apartheid education is in accord with Verwoerd's statement during the parliamentary debate on the Bantu Education Bill in 1953, that 'education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live' (Troup, 1976). He went on to declare that there was no space for the African in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Education was thus determined by the character of South Africa's racial capitalism and reinforced the social relations of apartheid (Nkomo, 1990:294). It goes without saying that the limited socio-economic horizons envisaged by the Nationalist government and so brutally stated by Verwoerd (*vis-à-vis* black socio-economic prospects) would reflect in educational policy, and more specifically in our case, language educational policy.

5.4.1.2 *Curriculum design in terms of Christian National Education and pedagogically expressed in Fundamental Pedagogics*

Underlying the apartheid policy of separatist development was the principle of Christian National Education (CNE) whereby people of different ethnic and cultural groups had to have different education and schooling systems. It was summarised by Coetzee in 1948 in the following words:

We as Calvinist Afrikaners will have our CNE schools. Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Jews, Liberals and Atheists will have their own schools. (cited in Naicker, 2000:8)

Separate schools with mother tongue as the medium of instruction were justified on religious, psychological, pedagogical and cultural grounds. These motivations, however, served merely as a thinly veiled policy of Afrikaner domination. The fact that Coetzee did not take into consideration a schooling system envisaged for Blacks and Coloured

groups is indicative of the very low priority these sectors of society enjoyed in the overall scheme of things.

Writers under the Calvinist and CNE as cited by Gluckman (1981) had, amongst other issues, this to say about the learner (child):

- a) Viljoen (1970) 'The Child who is first an object, becomes a fellow subject in a meaningful world.'
- b) Landman and Gous (1969) 'He is 'not adult', not responsible, morally not independent.

This type of thinking required educators to adopt the view that it was the responsibility of the adult to lead the child to moral maturity. MacLeod (1995:68 cited in Naicker, 2000) referred to the Calvinist notion of the child as born in original sin and thus deficient. She argued that as a result of this Calvinist notion, the child is regarded as in need of guidance by an adult who has overcome such a state so that the child can also achieve 'normal' adulthood. This state of adulthood, namely independent, competent, wise, skilful, responsible and disciplined⁶⁵.

Although Afrikaners made up 60 per cent of the white population of South Africa, which in turn comprised about 16,9 per cent of the total population, the Afrikaans medium universities exerted a political influence out of all proportion to the population of Afrikaners (Enslin, 1990:79)

The 1969 Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the training of white teachers had this to say:

A national system of teacher training must be such as to produce teachers who are willing and able to achieve the aims of education that are pursued or should be pursued in our schools. The system of training must therefore be one that will produce teachers who are imbued with the ideal of teaching towards the development of

⁶⁵ This top-down, controlling, adult-centred understanding of education is a far cry from the (post) modern notion which sees education simply as one aspect that shapes the lives of children.

men and women of rectitude, efficient and loyal citizens of their country (Beard et al, 1981:9).

The dominant approach to education in the Afrikaans-language universities and colleges of education, and at the bilingual University of South Africa was Fundamental Pedagogics⁶⁶ (Enslin, 1990). Fundamental Pedagogics was an important way of asserting authority and controlling learners. The kind of educator and the texts which authorities provided, formed the unchallenged authority in the classroom. At the same time, the teacher had very little power and space to negotiate curriculum content and teaching strategies, as teachers were trained and tasked to only implement the narrow and often highly questionable curriculum goals of the apartheid system. The government sent inspectors to ensure that teachers were not straying and subject advisers to support them to implement the given curriculum.

Fundamental Pedagogics also dominated the approach to education at the ethnic or black universities established in accordance with the Extension of University Education Act (1953), as well as black colleges of education (Beard and Morrow, 1981 and Enslin, 1990). Enslin captured the insidious role of FP in the following manner:

These segregated black universities and colleges were dominated by Afrikaner academics, who comprised the overwhelming majority of the teaching corps within these institutions. Their courses in education theory were taught almost exclusively through FP. [As a result] most teachers in South Africa - and almost all black teachers - were educated within this approach (1990:80) [emphasis added].

Enslin's assertion above is a clear indication that through Fundamental Pedagogics, an approach which is considered by Beard and Morrow (1981) as a way of theorising that

⁶⁶ FP is a theory of education which presents itself as the science of education, and therefore not open to critical reflection and challenge (see Ashley, 1989). In contrast to learner-centred pedagogy, it presents children as people in their own right, but as deficient in comparison to adults; the educator's task is to lead the child to become an adult acceptable to society. The educator is expected to feel authoritative in the classroom, for after all, he is made to believe that he is teaching from a scientific base, not only scientifically derived knowledge, but also with scientifically derived pedagogy. This is in sharp contrast to the learner-centred approaches to education under which the roles required of teachers mean that they become collaborators in the learning process rather than authoritarian.

‘makes autocratic and monopolistic claims to being the only reliable, or authentic way of studying education’, large numbers of South African educators ‘were trained to maintain the *status quo* in an undemocratic system’ (Parker, 1981:26 cited in Naicker, 2000:7). Fundamental Pedagogics, ‘like class consciousness [was] (sic) rooted in the economic structure of the society [and] (sic) aimed at promoting intellectual underdevelopment, compulsory ignorance and acquiescence to the legitimacy of white minority rule in a society of minority population’ (Nkomo, 1990:294).

In line with Beard and Morrow (1981), Enslin (1990) has also described Fundamental Pedagogics as an authoritarian philosophy associated with CNE which provided little illumination of the present social and educational order, of possible alternatives to that order or how teachers might contribute to transformation:

By excluding the political as a legitimate dimension of theoretical discourse, FP offered neither a language of critique nor a language of possibility. It made politics forbidden speech. Its intention was to blunt competition with white workers and socialise black students to accept the supposed superiority of whites and their own inferiority (1990:78).

Arnott and Kubeka (1997:6) underline the illiberal, dehumanising qualities of Fundamental Pedagogics when they state that ‘it discouraged the very qualities regarded as essential for sustainable development and success such as: risk taking, a sense of adventure, curiosity, a critical and questioning attitude, self motivation and reflection, inventiveness and independence of mind; in a phrase creativity and innovation. It encouraged passiveness, rote learning, obedience to authority and discouraged intellectual risk taking, curiosity or independence of thought’ (cited in Khuzwayo, 1997:8).

Proponents of Fundamental Pedagogics also saw the role of the teacher as unashamedly authoritarian (Gunter, 1974:144 cited in Khuzwayo, 1997), one of the prime advocates of Fundamental Pedagogics noted for instance, that in Fundamental Pedagogics:

The educator is invested with authority and as such he has the right to prescribe to the *educand* what he must do, and how or what he must not do, while the *educand* has to respond to his being addressed by the educator by accepting what he says.

Teachers were trained in an authoritarian education which taught them and their learners not to question the information provided and the imposition of a hidden value system. Fundamental Pedagogics provided the apartheid government with the power needed to convince generations of South Africans that the apartheid *status quo* was a natural condition and that unfair laws and discrimination were somewhat justified. The monopolistic stance of Fundamental Pedagogics became evident as it effectively ‘silenced teachers’ (Enslin, 1990). “FP prohibited discussion between such teachers and people who were concerned about educational issues in South Africa. The initiated were only allowed to speak if they employed the highly jargonised ‘own language’ of the Fundamental Pedagogue. Among those who were not allowed to speak were: teachers not initiated into FP; parents; students; academics who partook in other discourses; trade unions; the oppositional churches, and the private sector. It was no coincidence that from all these quarters came calls for a new conception of education and a new educational order. All these groups recognised, in various ways, the essentially political nature of the educational crisis as part of the broader national crisis” (Enslin, 1990:88).

It is against this backdrop of authoritarianism and control that curriculum development took place. Given the tight control structures, it seems fair to hypothesise that syllabi would reflect the all-pervasive ideology of Christian National Education and Fundamental Pedagogics.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ As I begin to analyse the 1970 and 1980s language syllabus I would like to acknowledge the work done by Prinsloo which is documented in her paper entitled “Schooled inequalities – a comparison of the language syllabuses for English, Afrikaans and Zulu of the 1970s.”

5.5 An analysis of the 1970s and 1980s languages syllabuses

An analysis of the core syllabuses which informed isiZulu literacy practices during this period brought certain critical insights, particularly when contrasted with the Afrikaans syllabus. The decision to treat Bantu languages separately from Afrikaans in the process of curriculum design was driven by political documents (Prinsloo, 2001: 7) as 'general government policy also had to be echoed in the schools' (Duminy, 1967:4).

In the process of analysing the Bantu and Afrikaans syllabuses, it became clear that this particular pair of syllabuses revealed exceptional similarities in content and phrasing. It is also significant to mention that in spite of the similarities, the two syllabuses contain most telling differences as a result of the omission or inclusion of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. My analysis will begin with a comparison of the fields of study and approaches adopted in these syllabuses.

5.5.1 Fields of study and approach in Afrikaans and Bantu languages

In the process of analysing the two sets of syllabuses it was evident that this particular pair of syllabuses revealed remarkable similarities and telling differences.

The approach to language education for Afrikaans and African language speakers, as will be evident in the analysis, posited itself as 'scientific', as it was based on formal grammar (linguistics). It lacked a sociolinguistic orientation and a critical approach to literacy. It essentially stressed the knowledge of grammatical rules, the analysis of texts as well as a heavy emphasis on writing. Consider the following quotes from the two syllabuses which broadly outline the fields of study and the approach. The mission for Bantu languages reads:

This syllabus also assumes that a beginning has been made in the lower standards of the secondary school with a scientific approach to the two main fields of the mother tongue as a subject, namely linguistics and literature.

Under normal circumstances, scholars who have attained the matriculation level should not have difficulty with the pronunciation and writing of regular Afrikaans words/mother tongue (JMB, 1971 & 1973:144)

Emphasis was placed on 'knowledge', 'facts' and 'control' (Prinsloo, 2001:8). The amazing goal of correct pronunciation in a mother tongue underscored the mindset of curriculum designers, who were more concerned about standard language than the development of the speakers of the language, irrespective of the varieties spoken.

Differences in envisaged competencies between Afrikaans and Bantu language learners become evident where the Afrikaans syllabus stated that language usage 'is not the main objective of the mother tongue as a subject in the secondary school' and that 'correct attitude towards usage habits' will have been already established in the primary school. Contrary to that, in the Bantu languages syllabus no reference is made to usage as something that should already be established (Prinsloo, 2001). By this omission in African languages, a different, lower horizon had been envisaged by the authors of the syllabi.

The aims of the Afrikaans syllabus were explicitly stated as follows:

- 1.1. Inleiding in die kennis van en insig in die taalleer van Afrikaans, die struktuur van die taal en die funksionele middele wat daarby betrokke is.
- 1.2. Inleiding in die kennis van en insig in die Afrikaanse letterkunde, die openbaringsvorme daarvan, ook in hulle historiese ontwikkeling, en die middele wat die letterkunde gebruik.
- 1.3. Bevordering van die leerling se vermoë om die taal korrek te gebruik: praat, lees en skryf.

[The intention was that learners must come to know and understand the structure of the language, and functional tools, know and understand Afrikaans literature, genres, its historical development, and acquire the tools required to speak, read and write correctly].

A close scrutiny of these aims reveals the syllabus' insistence on the knowing and understanding of the formalistic aspects of subject matter. Yet again it is significant that structure, exterior aspects of linguistic description, genre identification, to the exclusion of human development, were being highlighted in these aims.

The Bantu language syllabus lacked clearly stated aims, but instead had explicit and rather ominous statements about the parameters of the syllabus. In addition to 'understanding linguistic and literary facts', the syllabus stated:

Because the Bantu languages differ so much from the European languages it is necessary that the Bantu child *should not view his mother tongue as if it were a European language*. He must therefore be taught that his mother tongue has its peculiar character, which cannot be derived from European languages. He is to be taught that his mother tongue is much more bound up with form, that in its system of writing it does not necessarily follow the European languages, that it has its own sound system, that its literature reflects both the traditional culture and the modern way of life. It is imperative that the scholar be taught from the outset the grammatical concepts which pertain to his language and he must be fully versed in the official orthography. To that should be added the idiomatic use of the language. Above all the scholar must be taught to respect his mother tongue (JMB, 1979) [italics added].

A scrutiny of the rather restricting objectives underlying the imperatives in the statement above reveals that the following had to be internalised by the Bantu-speaking learner about his mother tongue:

- That it is different from the European language
- It has peculiar qualities
- Is much more bound up with form
- Its system of writing does not follow European languages
- It has its own sound system
- Its literature reflects both its traditional culture and the modern way of life.

The clear emphasis on differences, rather than commonalities clearly reflected the separatist mindset of the time. The goals that African language learners had to aspire were limited and limiting. They were required to develop 'an adequate ability to control the language by thinking and reasoning in it' - all of this in spite of the fact that it would be not unreasonable to assume that formal education is not a prerequisite for any group to pronounce their mother tongue (Prinsloo, 2001). The syllabus aims of limiting the horizons of Africans were in line with those stated explicitly by Verwoerd in his 1953 speech cited earlier. Indeed [language] education had to train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live. He infamously went on to declare that there was no place for the African in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Bantu education then, aimed at restructuring the conditions of social reproduction of the black working class and created conditions for stabilising a black underclass of semi-skilled labourers. Bantu language education in particular ensured that the African child was trained and conditioned in Bantu culture by presenting texts that were ideologically censored, devoid of provocative ideas and only focused on rural stereotypes as the process of Black urbanisation was denied and countered on all fronts by the government of the time. This was achieved by making the Bantu child focus on the linguistic patterns of language to some rigid, artificial standard.

The aims of the 1984 revised Bantu languages syllabus continued to explicitly state the limiting and controlling nature of the syllabus. They were:

- To help the pupil to develop basic and general language skills and abilities which will enable him to communicate as effectively as possible
- To develop the pupils' abilities to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively by means of language
- To introduce the pupil to the linguistic, literary and cultural aspects of *his people in respect to the present, past and future*
- To enrich the pupils' minds, to stimulate their thinking (Snyman, 1986:128)[emphasis added].

What is significant is the complete absence of objectives that would enhance their understanding of themselves and the society in which they live.

The aims of the Lower Grade Syllabus for Bantu languages were even more pronounced in this regard. They were:

- To teach the scholar to read, speak and write the Bantu language.
- To encourage the scholar's interest in the languages and cultures of the Bantu in order to understand the Bantu *as a human being*.
- To make the scholar conversant with the basic language structure as a means to the correct use of the language.
- To introduce the scholar to the literature of the Bantu in order to gain in that way better understanding of his background and thought (JMB, 1979). [emphasis added].

In line with the policy of 'Own affairs' the syllabus for Bantu speakers encouraged a parochial, traditional way of life and discouraged the development of social and critical skills which would enable them to read the world in an empowered way.

The aim encapsulated by the bullet, i.e. that the child should understand herself 'as a human being' implies disdain for Black people that was in keeping with Afrikaner attitudes generally to people of colour. This is a typical example of harmful and oppressive literacy practices as described by scholars in *Chapter 4*.

5.5.3 Purpose of language beyond matriculation

Like the Afrikaans syllabus, the Bantu language syllabus remained tied to the transmission and teacher-centred approach that informed the approach to language education from the turn of the 20th century and further proposed an even lower set of cognitive skills than the equally conservative Afrikaans syllabus⁶⁹ (Prinsloo, 2001). Overtly, the 'scientific'

⁶⁹ The parallel between this situation and the general trend in language education in illiberal countries becomes evident as the thoughts and ideas of individuals in undemocratic countries are suppressed via a grammar-based curriculum cf. the case of East and West Germany (Personal conversation with Jan Esterhuyse).

approach assumed by both syllabuses was considered important only in its role to ensure appropriate entrance standards for university. The University of South Africa's linguist, Professor Snyman, explicitly stated this:

We at the universities are looking forward in anticipation that we will in the future be enrolling well-trained students displaying insight in the mother tongue because now for the first time do we have a syllabus that enables pupils to bridge the gap to the university [linguistics] syllabus (1986:134).

Not only does this statement underscore the *prescriptive* role played by linguists in the teaching of Afrikaans and Bantu languages, but Snyman's further statement that examples of old examination papers they set 'served an invaluable purpose as they gave an indication of the sequence of the subject matter, the type of questions that may be expected, the degree of emphasis put on certain aspects of the subject matter and the regularity at which questions would be expected' Snyman's remarks (1986:131) are proof of the voice of the linguistics master with regard to the teaching of Bantu languages. Language curriculum design was driven by academics in linguistics rather than language practitioners in the educational field who saw it the duty of schools to provide linguistically-schooled matriculants rather than literate young adults. The Afrikaans and African language curricula acted as a conveyor belt to deliver university students for the languages departments and in the process delivered socially, mentally and emotionally illiterate individuals to the labour market.

In summary, the aims and objectives for Bantu languages can perhaps best be described as a programme for the dumbing down of African language students. The design of these curricula resonated with other policy aspects like job reservation, separate amenities and separate schooling. The humanistic and liberal aims which informed the English language curriculum were completely absent in Afrikaans and Bantu languages. The pedagogical need to develop the cognitive, affective, psychosocial faculties through the mother tongue was not part of the education framework. Considering the broader '*ei e sake*' agenda of the state and the practice of excluding Africans from meaningful decision-making

processes in their own country (Meerkotter and van den Berg, 1994:8), one may argue that there was a hidden⁷⁰ curriculum underpinning the explicit one.

For the Afrikaans and Bantu learner, the excluded curriculum or that which was not taught became significant by virtue of its absence. In both syllabuses, authority lay with the teacher, with science and in the selected texts. This authoritarian approach gave no space for personal growth and insisted on a fact-based approach to language learning. However, the differences are more salient and they related to the politics of identity of the time.

Of all the apartheid procedures to socialise black students to accept social relations of apartheid as natural, the most significant with regard to language is what Foucault called 'prohibition', a procedure for mastery by exclusion. For Foucault, by the process of prohibition we come to know that 'we do not have the right to say everything ... that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatsoever' (ibid.).

Through the principle of Fundamental Pedagogics embedded in language education in South Africa, teachers were subjected to a theoretical discourse from which the political had been exorcised. They were required to perceive and treat children as helpless, incompetent and, as De Vries's (1986) observations on the nature of childhood show, in need of authority to save them from their own evil inclinations. After all, Fundamental Pedagogics is based on a philosophy that of disempowerment and subjugation.

⁷⁰ This includes that which is not taught, thus giving the message that these elements are not important in their educational experiences or in our society. Eisner (1985, 1993) first described and defined aspects of this curriculum thus: 'there is something of a paradox involved about a curriculum that does not exist. Yet, if we are concerned with the consequences of school programmes, then it seems to me that we are well advised to consider not only the explicit and the implicit curricula of schools but also what schools do not teach. It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. I argue this position because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation of problems (Eisner, 1993).

5.6 An analysis of the English Higher Grade syllabus

In an analysis of this syllabus it becomes evident that it was informed and responded to the debates on literacy practices in the United Kingdom in the late sixties and inscribed a Personal Growth approach.

5.6.1 Fields of study and approach in English

Although the syllabus of 30 years ago lacked the overt socio-critical orientation of the present English syllabus, it nevertheless had a distinct liberal character with a strong emphasis on individual freedom and a personal voice. It is significant that despite the all-powerful position of Afrikaner ideologues in the educational establishment, English syllabus developers still managed to retain a distinctly different agenda for this language. One is inclined to think that Afrikaans academics simply did not see their way clear to challenging a long and venerable Anglo-Saxon tradition of language teaching.

In contrast to the Afrikaans and Bantu Languages syllabuses which aimed at developing the fields of linguistics and literature at an essentially analytical level, in its introduction, the English syllabi states that it aims to ‘promote development’, clearly spelling out its concern with the development of the learner and his life skills, not with any subject or discipline:

We need to have brought to clear focus in our minds the way in which a child’s acquisition of his native language is inseparably intertwined with his developing consciousness of the world in which he is growing up, with his control of his inner fantasies and the feelings they give rise to, and with his possession of the values by which he will live his life in the civilisation he forms part of (Frank Whitehead: *The Disappearing Dais* (Chatto & Windus – 1966 cited in JMB, 1979)

The contrast with the Afrikaans and Bantu languages syllabuses could not be more striking. Concepts such as ‘developing consciousness’, ‘inner fantasies’ and ‘feelings’, ‘values’, ‘civilisation’ represent core concepts in classic liberal education with its

emphasis on the individual and her right to develop to her fullest potential, and the duty of educators to create the climate for such development. One cannot help to hear and feel the influence of the dominant educational philosopher of the time John Dewey - the leading exponent of progressivism in education and key formulator of experiential learning behind the Whitehead quotation. Education evidently had a very different role: It should “to contribute to a process that [began] in infancy and continued through life ... the teacher’s task [was] not to be thought of in terms of providing a series of classroom exercises, but of creating opportunities for the extension and enrichment of experience” (JMB, 1979).

The great divide between the liberal English curriculum and the conservative, confining curriculum for the other languages had profound consequences for the South African society. While English speakers evolved along liberal (and humanistic) lines, other speech communities became reigned in socially and cognitively by the pedagogy in which the teaching of the language was embedded and the ideology that underscored it.

5.6.2 The specific aims of the syllabus

That the English syllabus primarily aimed at promoting personal growth becomes even more remarkable when one compares its specific aims with those of Afrikaans and Bantu languages. The aims of the English syllabus were:

- To increase the pupils capacity to observe, to discriminate, to see relationships, and to order his thoughts coherently.
- To help the pupil to understand himself and his own emotional and moral responses, so that he may live more fully and consciously and responsibly.
- To extend, through increasing his capacity to communicate with others, the pupil’s mental and emotional world.
- To extend the pupil’s mental, emotional and cultural experience

(NED, 1973:1/2)

Contributing to the general aim of intellectual, emotional and social development, the specific aims pointed out that the learner needed particular cognitive capacities such as 'to observe', 'discriminate', 'see' relationships, and 'order'. 'These cognitive abilities then underpin the second specific aim of helping the learner to intelligently consider his or her own emotional and moral responses (Aim 2). In turn, to communicate these understandings, it is necessary to have and to develop communication skills (Aim 3)' (Prinsloo, 2001:5).

What was significant about the aims of the syllabus was the lack of mention of the development of any subject area. Its intention was to meet real human needs, and to give teachers licence to make children meet the needs arising from the circumstances of the local community. The concern was with the learner's competence at the complex business of making sense in real situations, not with measuring in how far the learner matched to some ideal and specified right answer. Less and less credit was awarded for what could be learned off by heart. Teachers and pupils had the opportunity of working on meaning and grammar for grammar's sake was frowned upon, except where its practical value could be shown (Ridge, 1986:106). However, this was not the case where English was taught as a second language (i.e. throughout the rural areas) – where the rigid English as a foreign language model was strictly enforced.

5.6.3. Purposes of language beyond matriculation

In contrast to Bantu and Afrikaans language syllabi, for the English learner, the syllabus did not mention any university entrance requirements, but that English was for equipping the learner with life skills. It was for personal convenience and enrichment: for practical purposes in circumstances here and around the world where English is the *lingua franca*, and for access to the amazing variety of literature, and full enjoyment of films and other entertainment in English. They needed it for social purposes, so they can move with ease in the company of others to whom they related socially in various ways. They needed it for educational purposes, for participation in classes, presentation of work, and informed use of the library. And they needed it for occupational purposes, because there are a few

occupations which did not involve some measure of contact with the public, and some ability to follow instructions in English (Ridge, 1986:101).

In an analysis of the aims and purposes of the English syllabus it becomes evident that this syllabus which harboured humanistic values and equipped learners with life skills did not in anyway influence the Bantu language syllabus which was underpinned by the scientism of Fundamental Pedagogics.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to critically examine the history of the codification of the SiSwati language against the backdrop of a speech community straddling the political border between South Africa and Swaziland, as well as a preliminary look at the development of a SiSwati school curriculum over the last thirty years. From this examination the following salient insights emanated:

- The development, as well as the retardation of SiSwati cannot be divorced from the influence, involvement and interference of the dominant neighbouring isiZulu language. The status of isiZulu was elevated by the fact that it underwent codification largely through the efforts of European missionaries and developed a strong written tradition due to economic and geographical reasons.
- A perception took root that SiSwati can only be analysed, or talked about in terms of isiZulu due to the use of the isiZulu Bible and church liturgy at Swazi mission stations.
- The teaching of isiZulu as a school subject and its use as the medium of instruction instead of SiSwati further delayed the development of SiSwati as there was no sense of urgency in codifying and publishing in a minor underdeveloped language which was not taught in schools. Subsequent efforts at developing SiSwati continued to hinge on isiZulu linguists from the Universities of Zululand, Natal and Unisa who erroneously treated it as younger language and a variety of isiZulu, therefore warranting its analysis with reference to and in terms of isiZulu. Even though the

SiSwati Writers Association in Swaziland has taken over the process of developing SiSwati, this process itself continues to be influenced by isiZulu authors and academics by conducting writers' workshops and prescribing the translation of isiZulu literary works into SiSwati. Commercial and financial interests in SiSwati materials development evidently drove this involvement.

- As isiZulu became the language of Christian devotion, the use of the isiZulu version of the Bible retarded the development of SiSwati in Swaziland and South Africa as the need for a SiSwati Bible became less acute. It further strengthened the general perception that SiSwati did not warrant the cost and effort needed to standardise and codify it as its speakers used the isiZulu Bible, as well as an assumption that SiSwati was merely a minor variety of isiZulu. The dominance of isiZulu in the religious domain elevated its status above that of SiSwati and brought about a familiarity with and an affection for it that tended to alienate people from their own language.
- In the development of SiSwati by key players such as the Bible Society, the SiSwati Language Board and academics in general, speakers of the SiSwati language residing in both South Africa and Swaziland were treated as one speech community with the result that one orthography was developed. This made it possible for textbooks, the Bible and literary works to be written for the community in South Africa as well as Swaziland.
- The monopoly on materials development by the educational publisher Macmillan seriously undermined the provision of competitive, quality driven textbooks in SiSwati.
- In the development of the isiZulu curriculum, the Afrikaans syllabus which is underpinned by the Fundamental Pedagogics paradigm and Christian National Education served as a blueprint. As the isiZulu curriculum, in turn, served as a blueprint for the siSwati curriculum, the latter inadvertently took on board a teaching philosophy which has left a legacy that is still part and parcel of the SiSwati language teaching methodology.
- It is ironic that the liberal, child-centred and humanistic English syllabus played no part in the development of either the Swaziland or South African SiSwati curricula.

This chapter then has explored the extraordinary way in which SiSwati language development has been detrimentally influenced by its proximity to isiZulu. It has also demonstrated the way in which Fundamental Pedagogics seeped into SiSwati education, generally, a situation which has resulted in the SiSwati curriculum being a mirror image of the Bantu education isiZulu syllabus. This issue will be explored in greater depth in the chapter on the development of the SiSwati curriculum.

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Chapter 6

Research design and methodology

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the methods used in accessing, capturing and processing data. The fieldwork that was done in Swaziland between August and October 2000, reflects the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodology. The rationale for this two-pronged approach will be offered as an introduction to the chapter. This should shed light on the process of selecting sampling sites, negotiating entry, capturing data and it will explain my method of data analysis.

6.2 Rationale for using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods

A researcher is 'merely a person who looks very carefully and then reports very carefully what has been seen so that others will believe it is a useful way of looking' (Lloyd-Jones, in Graham and Hudson-Ross, 1999: 65). In doing this research, I have taken comfort in the stories told by Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz and Shaughnessy (1979) about their experiences, struggles, insights and visions about coming to terms with the complex nature of naturalistic research. By becoming acquainted with this wide spectrum of case studies, I succeeded in grasping the complexities of this kind of 'untidy' research.

The need for a reservoir of quantifiable data emanated from a perceived need to control a host of variables in the field. But I was also aware of the lack of nuance and subtlety in only employing quantitative methodology as it often fails to take account of the unique characteristics of individual cases (Edwards, 1998:37).

A substantial body of literature caution against a naïve dependence on results from research based exclusively on quantitative methods. Fischer and Wertz label this kind of research as ‘incomplete’ and add that ‘efficient data production and statistical analysis, even where supportive of hypotheses ... (require an added) understanding of the particularly human character of social events – their rich, holistic, participative quality. We are becoming ready in many circumstances to forgo mathematical precision for a more complete, if always somewhat ambiguous, comprehension of non-laboratory life’ (1979: 135).

To complement (or in some cases replace) the ‘incomplete’ character of quantitative research, Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000:3) advocate an approach that acknowledges ‘a situated activity, locating the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.’ Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. In other words, the qualitative paradigm aims to understand the social world from the viewpoint of respondents, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behaviour (Wildemuth, 1993). In this paradigm, which rejects both a cause-and-effect construct and universal laws devoid of any socio-historical context, the separation between researcher and respondent is diminished (Munhall, 1989).

Other scholars like Kemmis (1980) and Benoliel (1984) argue along the same lines. Both highlight the need to respond to on-the-ground situations as people interpret an objective world, which means that their valued experiences are deeply contextualised. Unless the researcher understands the existence of multiple realities in her field of exploration, the findings will rest on a distorted perspective.

The methods of data collection and generation employed in qualitative research then are inherently different from those in quantitative research⁷¹ in that they rely on narratives to carry themes, impressions, ideas, concerns and attitudes from original context to that of the reflective researcher and later the reader of the study.

Qualitative research is at times referred to as 'naturalistic' because one is taking advantage as much as possible of the natural situation in which people live and operate – because that is their context. The assumption is that if you want to understand the way the world works, you have to go out into the world and try and see it as it is, rather than take some aspect of the world into the laboratory and subject it to some kind of controlled experiment. This is especially true of the education sphere. In particular, classroom-observation studies have been neglected in the field of second-language acquisition. (Ellis, 1990:64-92)

I am fully aware of the criticisms levelled against qualitative research, such as those by Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins, 1980, Sandelowski, 1986, who have highlighted the dangers inherent in the poor understanding of its complexity and the need for highly, multi-skilled researchers. These critics worry about the size of the samples, its representativity, the questioning and interpretative skills of the interviewer/researcher. (Hamel, Dufour and Fortin, 1993). However, it is quite ironic that the objections raised by these scholars are also applicable regarding quantitative research, albeit in a somewhat different way. Apart from the objections already raised regarding the exclusive use of quantitative research the problems around sample selection, questionnaire design and interpretation of data associated with this mode of research are at least as riddled with pitfalls as with qualitative research. While quantitative research is at least representative of the subjects involved, it should ideally be supplemented by qualitatively-oriented studies.

⁷¹ The approach of measuring and quantifying phenomena as distinct and analytically separate is at the heart of quantitative research and allows inferences to be drawn about the whole from the analysis of its parts. Reality is conceptualised as two-dimensional and explained by cause-and-effect relationships. This form of inquiry is deductive and emphasises observing truth as a singular objective reality.

The question, when research is valid, is hugely complex. It seems to revolve around a host of factors. But the way a researcher measures, weighs, concludes and recommends seems to depend on her level of understanding of the field, her credibility as a researcher and her ability to use her chosen measuring instruments.

My research strategy, i.e. participant observation in selected classrooms, the administration of a questionnaire and the conduct of a series of interviews evidently has to be tested against accepted practice in these research modes. For me it was important to capitalise on triangulation by corroborating one set of findings with another, and in so doing to look for an acceptable degree of ‘convergence’ of the three research avenues.

This view holds much weight in literature on triangulation. Flick (1998) views it as a reassuring research mode:

Triangulation ... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (Flick, 1998:231)

Knafl and Breitmayer argue that consistency in a multi-pronged research approach brings a sense of confidence in the end findings:

Investigators engaged in qualitative research will have increased confidence in the credibility of their results when multiple data collection methods yield consistent findings (Knafl and Breitmayer, 1989:238).

Denzil and Lincoln value the outcomes of ‘competing visions’ realised by triangulation:

Viewed as a crystalline form, as a montage, or as a creative performance around a central theme, triangulation as a form of, or alternative to, validity, thus can be extended. Triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously rather than the sequential or linear. Readers and audiences are then invited to explore competing visions of the context, to become

immersed in and merge with new realities to comprehend (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:6).

Although qualitative research is termed 'naturalistic', it would be simplistic to assume that employing qualitative research methods is entirely naturalistic. Reflecting on the interviews I conducted for instance, I cannot say they were entirely 'natural'. Even though I did not take teachers out of their everyday life to interview them, I stopped their life for a period of time and asked them to reflect and talk. Nonetheless, I maximised on the strengths of qualitative methods and adopted an approach which gave me the ability to make it as near as possible to a natural, everyday conversation.

In sum, the qualitative methods I employed were particularly useful in providing me with detailed and accurate data. I preferred to view them as part of a process of triangulation in which I was consciously weighing the degree of articulation between the qualitative and the quantitative methodology applied.

6.3 Initial considerations

Let me begin by mentioning the initial sceptical attitude towards my fieldwork amongst the targeted respondents. Closer scrutiny revealed that they evidently suffered from an overexposure to field researchers and had seen too many people with clipboards and questionnaires come and go with little tangible effect on their teaching and learning context. However, my perception was that the more personal character of participatory observation was more acceptable to them as it allowed for some interaction, as well as a more visible profile during the process.

As this research was initiated by me, I had to seek permission to conduct the study as opposed to being invited to do so. This was duly given. Furthermore, my familiarity with the context and many of the teachers placed me and the subjects observed on a personal footing – a situation that helped and hindered the process. I shall return to this aspect of the research in due course.

Qualitative researchers accept that the researcher enters the process with a personal and social history that will affect the choice of research topic, how questions are framed and what assumptions are made about the respondents. In addition, the researcher holds preconceptions derived from what Goodwin (cited in Blommaert, 1997) calls 'professional vision'. This refers to disciplinary ways of knowing and seeing – the lens which shapes the angle, depth and breath of our gaze. The choice of lens is, at least to some extent, affected by the knowledge that the picture that is developed is aesthetically pleasing to our peers. Thus professional vision is, as Goodwin points out, always selective (Blommaert, 1997). The researcher's epistemological and ideological assumptions shape choices of research design and method, and ultimately influence findings (see Cameron et al).

The lens of my own 'professional vision' has been profoundly shaped by my six years at the University of Cape Town, where I was submerged in an uncompromisingly modern and academic context. The changes in me, as I have mentioned in the opening chapter, constituted nothing less than a paradigm shift and touched every aspect of humanness. Apart from these deep personal shifts, I have developed sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives that transformed me into a researcher with a peculiar insider-outsider status in a place that I used to call home.

Added to these profound philosophical and academic shifts is my more recent involvement in the writing of textbooks for the South African SiSwati speaking market. In retrospect, I realised that all these factors influenced the shape and design of my research and the way I observed and interacted in classrooms. My exposure to literature in the field of language education and curriculum also created particular epistemological and ideological assumptions about language teaching and learning. For these reasons, I readily acknowledge that my familiarity with the Swaziland context, my educational background, my ideological assumptions and my professional vision must have informed the design, execution, processing and interpretation of the data, as well as the findings and recommendations of the study.

In other words, I approached the field as an 'interpretive bricoleur' (Lincoln, 1999), which means I appreciated the fact that research is an interactive process shaped by among other things, my history, gender, social class and educational background. In that sense no enquiry can be value free. The story I was going to tell after my research would be couched and framed within a specific paradigm. Therefore the assertion by Bateson (1972: 314) that the researcher is 'bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which – regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – become partially self-validating' held true for me, and my personal biography was crucial as it made me work from a particularly critical perspective.

In conducting this research I was also aware that there could have been dangers in remaining too detached and too much of an outsider. If relationships of trust did not develop between the participants and I, the participants may have behaved differently. It was unlikely that they would have talked openly about their experiences and views and I would not have developed a knowledge and understanding of the social meanings that underpin group interaction and the perspectives of subjects. It was important not to present a picture of the group which was based in large part on my own preconceptions. Conducting research in a familiar setting required that I balance the insider and outsider roles and combine the advantages of both; in other words, that I endeavour to manage a marginal position with regard to subjects. Being at one with the group and yet remaining apart, being a 'friend' yet remaining a 'stranger', became a difficult and sometimes stressful experience. But, as Hammersly and Atkinson (1983) emphasised, it is essential for good ethnographic research. The words of Gale Levine (cited in Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz 1991:54) aptly described the approach I had when I negotiated access to my research sites:

We will never be entirely free of own preferred ways of viewing situations and our own biases. We can, however, be more self-aware.

6.4 Gaining access to the research sites

Sapsford and Jupp (1996) have written that observational research often involves representative sampling of different types within the case that is being studied. It is rarely possible for the researcher to observe every subject, sub-setting, event, or instance of behaviour in which he or she is interested, and even if it were possible, it would not be necessary or desirable to do so. What observational researchers generally do is to select samples and base their analysis and conclusions on data from these samples. Observing a sample is obviously much less time-consuming and, as a result, it is possible to collect more detailed and accurate data. But there at the same time is a danger of error arising from unrepresentative sampling. If the subjects, settings, events or behaviour sampled and observed are unrepresentative of the general population of subjects, settings, events or behaviour with which the researcher is concerned, then it will not be legitimate to generalise from the sample.

Before I left Cape Town for Swaziland at the end of August, 2000, I had to make a decision about the sites in which I was to do my research. Considering then the fact that it would not be possible or even necessary to observe every SiSwati classroom in the Swaziland context, I selected samples from urban (Manzini and Matsapha), semi-urban (Big Bend and rural (Siteki) areas. In the urban area, I thought it would be useful to select schools, one in the centre of town and the other on the outskirts of Manzini. The school in the centre of Manzini (which will be referred to as school F) is a government school with an enrollment of about 520 learners and 26 teachers. There were 2 streams in each grade and each class had approximately 35 learners. Besides it being the biggest school in Manzini, I found it interesting to select it as a research site because it also attracted learners from many small areas in the Manzini region. So, learners at this school came from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The second school selected in the urban area (which is referred to as school E is the biggest school in the country. Historically, it was reserved for members of the royal family. School F had an enrollment of about 900 learners and about 50 teachers. My reason for selecting the school was because I had been advised that, despite its size, it

was one of the most organised schools in the country with a pass-rate of above 90 per cent. I deemed it convenient to visit a school that had a whole SiSwati Language Department as it meant that I could save time if I observed many classes and interviewed more than two teachers in one context. I deemed this would be a representative sample of the general SiSwati teaching and learning 'population' as it also reflected a fair representation of the socio-economic spectrum of the nation. Full representation also required the inclusion of two private schools. These were selected from the semi-urban area called Big Bend. The first school (which I will refer to as school D) was selected on the grounds that it was a multicultural school and the fact that it was, back then, one of the two most prestigious schools in the country where learners followed the A-Level syllabus as compared to the O-Level one followed in other schools. I was curious to find out if there was a SiSwati syllabus at that level and eliciting the responses of learners who were clearly considered 'the cream', regarding their attitudes towards SiSwati as a language and a subject. I wanted to find out which languages were selected by learners who were given a choice of four languages and their reasons for their language choice. Out of the approximately 60 learners in Grade 11 (out of an enrollment of about 300 in the school), only 15 had opted to do SiSwati and their reasons were most interesting (as it will be discussed in Chapter 9). Given the low number of learners taking SiSwati as a subject at this school, there was only one teacher who taught the subject in the entire school.

Not very far from one of the most prestigious schools in Swaziland (School D) is another school (which I will refer to as School C) which I can say is a fair resemblance of a typical semi-urban school. I thought it would be sensible to select this school as a research site given the unique features of School D in this context. About 600 learners had enrolled at this school and there were about 26 teachers. The Head of the SiSwati Department taught both Grade 11 streams which had about 60 learners. SiSwati and English were the only two languages on offer at this school, as compared to School D where learners could also choose to do Afrikaans and French.

Even though schools (A and B) in the rural area were selected on the grounds of convenience, they were also typical examples of rural schools in Swaziland. School A, even though based in a rural area, had some characteristics of School F in the Manzini region. It was a big government school with an enrollment of close to 600 learners and 30 teachers. It also attracted many learners from the smaller villages surrounding the main village, Siteki. When contrasted with School B, which is also in Siteki, one can say that School B which is a Mission school is more organised, more expensive and is known for turning away learners with low marks who would then be accommodated at School A, the government school. Given the fact that School B is the more expensive schools of the two, it did not come as a surprise that there were about 320 learners enrolled at School B.

I decided to focus on Grade 11 classes in order to get a clear picture of the depth of curriculum content close to the exit level. Being more mature students, I also expected to have more informed conversations at this level. (Grade 12 students were already into revision mode and therefore preoccupied with the final examinations.)

The SiSwati teachers for the identified classes were approached in order to get a teacher's perspective of the same teaching context. It was an added bonus that some of them were external examiners, markers and also teachers of English. Out of all the ten teachers interviewed and observed, only one teacher happened to be male, however I did not see that as a problematic variable.

The period between August and October was not only convenient for me, but it was three weeks into the last term of the year and I presumed that high school teachers would have already developed solid relationships with their learners⁷². The timing was important as both teachers and learners were equally important for this study. Seeing them in their context was very important and eliciting their responses (through the questionnaire and teacher interviews) was crucial.

⁷² It is often the case in Swaziland that high school teachers do not teach at Secondary school level. Secondary school level is normally taught by teachers with diplomas and the high school is reserved for those with first degrees.

The negotiation that precedes entry to the research sites is a critical part of the research as it pertains to issues of selection, the establishment of a relationship with the researched, and research ethics. As such, it constitutes an important part of the data and its explicit narration (as part of methodology) is, simultaneously an acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of the research and key to establishing validity and reliability.

According to Sapsford and Jupp (1996) what the researcher actually selects to observe may very much depend on the opportunities that arise, the role he or she takes within the group and the relationships that have been developed with subjects. Often observation depends on the co-operation of subjects or gatekeepers, and the researcher has to concentrate on those who are willing to co-operate.

In choosing schools in the rural areas I took advantage of relationships I have developed with subjects in the past as a former teacher and a member of the community. I asked myself questions such as: Is this a place where I can learn to fit in comfortably? Do I know anyone with connections to this place? It was important for me to find gatekeepers – those people who could provide the permission for me to conduct my research in particular settings. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz (1991:20) describe a gatekeeper in the following manner:

This is the person you need to persuade (1) that you are sympathetic to and understanding of the goals of the setting; (2) that you provide some safeguards for the setting and people in it; (3) that you will not disrupt the basic routine of the setting; and/or (4) that you can give useful feedback on the workings of the setting after your study is complete.

The first school, which I will refer to as school A was selected because it was a walking distance from my home. My brother also happened to be the principal of the school. I have to say that gaining access to the school did not present any problems as it was an issue that I negotiated at home. I am aware though that being related to the principal of the school could have worked to my disadvantage as teachers may have felt obliged to

co-operate with the 'principal's sister'. There was also the possibility that their responses might have been more guarded.

When I arrived at the school, I was introduced to the head of the languages department, a most co-operative and welcoming person. Later that day at an *ad hoc* meeting I was introduced to the language teachers and then asked to outline the purpose of my visit during the 45 minutes I spent with the teachers. I made it clear that I was not examining or evaluating their personal competence and that my presence in the classroom would be purely observational. After some deliberation two teachers, one fresh from university studies who was about 22 years old, and another more experienced, older person whom I estimated to be about 45 years, agreed to make themselves and their classes available. It was interesting that the former decried the fact that she was not an O'Level examiner, a remark that indicated to me that the exit examinations still dominated the teaching and learning process. The older woman showed some uneasiness about being observed and interviewed by someone younger than her. The fact that I was able to proceed with my studies (in contrast to her) also coloured our conversations. There was a common appreciation of the fact that advanced studies were crucial in enhancing one's career options.

The complex and problematic set of circumstances that surround the teaching of SiSwati at tertiary level became apparent in my conversation with the junior teacher. She remarked about the difficulty of having to teach SiSwati as she had 'learned' it in English at the University of Swaziland. For her, it was difficult to then remind herself for instance, what an adverb is in SiSwati. Teaching SiSwati was still 'a learning process' rather than a utilisation of a language. This teacher's comment on the conflict between studying SiSwati at the university and teaching it at school highlighted for me an important fact: That there was a mismatch between the media used for training and teaching.

Once the two teachers who would participate were decided upon, I sat down with them for a further 20 minutes and we discussed in detail the nature of my investigation. We

looked at the timetable together and we agreed on the best times for classroom observations. This preceded the formal 45-minute interviews with the teachers concerned.

I spent about two hours in total with all three SiSwati teachers. Prolonged interviews were conducted with the new teacher and one of the more experienced ones. I spent about 45 minutes with each one of them. In this regard, I support the view that a major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. I had not prepared separate questions for experienced and inexperienced teachers, but as soon as I realised these differences amongst the teachers' experiences, I adapted my interview questions accordingly. Each interview was semi-structured and although it was based on the same questions, it differed according to the responses of the teachers involved and their experiences set against the school setting. It was most revealing to interview teachers who had been trained to teach SiSwati in different media. The younger teacher had been trained in English, whilst the more experienced teacher had initially undergone the training of IsiZulu as a subject and later trained through the medium of English.

Classroom observations were conducted on the second day of my visit at this school. I specifically chose a day when the time-table allowed me sometime (at least an hour) between SiSwati lessons I had been given permission to observe. It was most fascinating to observe the variations in approach amongst the two teachers whose teaching years differed. Prior to each classroom observation, I arranged with each teacher to observe a thirty-minute lesson after which I requested to distribute the questionnaire and allow learners some time to respond to it. Conversations with learners regarding the teaching and learning of SiSwati took place towards the end of the lesson. All 120 learners responded to the questionnaire.

The second rural school which will be referred to as school B, which was also selected on the basis of proximity, also happened to be the school at which I taught before embarking on further studies. The need to create sufficient distance, as well as the necessary objectivity remained a constant worry. It was important therefore to have an attitude of curiosity and a heightened attention in order to attend to those very details that I may

have filtered out automatically in my day-to-day life as a SiSwati and English teacher in the past.

School B is a mission school with a very strict dress code and a moral code to match it. I remained on my guard not to violate any sentiments or sensitivities. In this regard, Sapsford and Jupp (1996) have remarked that researchers are also concerned to influence how gatekeepers see them as people. As a result, they use, consciously or unconsciously, many self-presentational techniques to convey an impression of themselves that will maximise their chances of gaining access. They dress and conduct themselves in ways that give the impression that they will 'fit in' and that their presence is unlikely to cause offence, disruption or harm to subjects and that they can be trusted. This became very true for me at school B. While as a teacher at this school I had uncritically adhered to the code of conduct and dress, I now found it mildly irritating that I was not expected to wear any jewellery whilst visiting the school.

Other curious rules and regulations around gender equality seeped into conversations. When I had a conversation with one of the teachers who happened to have recently lost her husband in a car accident, she informed me that she had been asked to vacate the school house because 'single' females were not allowed to live within the missionary compound. I felt so angry that I was tempted to confront the school principal and talk to him about the dangers of discriminating against women. She simply said 'Babazile, there is nothing I can do, it is the rules of the church. God will help me and my children find a safe place to stay.' It made me realise the violence and injustice that can be embedded in religious doctrine.

My former colleagues happily assisted me and it was easy to arrange with people I knew. The principal of the school casually walked with me to the staff room and informed the staff about the purpose of my visit. There were two high school SiSwati teachers, who I can say were both between 40-45 years old and both of them had much experience in the field. One had set the examination in 2000 and the other was an examiner. Both remarked that although my classroom observations and the questionnaire should be informative,

that it was also crucial to focus on what the authorities expected of teachers in schools. They were warning me that the situation was somewhat more complex than I may anticipate.

I had a lengthy informal interview with both of them which lasted about an hour, where I was given details of their experiences of marking and setting the examination and how invaluable this experience was in their classroom practice. The examination marker actually indicated that she could easily get a post at any school because she was aware that examination markers were sought after, as it was believed that they knew how to prepare learners for the final examinations. The rationale behind this argument created an early despondency in me. The notion of training children (like circus animals) still seemed to dominate the teaching and learning process. The status attached to the exit examination pointed to a subject content driven by linguistics, rather than the evaluation of more relevant cognitive and social skills. It also confirmed the heavy bias towards linguistics in the curriculum itself.

The degree to which the state controls the education system via syllabuses, the examination system and the allocation of teaching posts became evident in this context. At the same time I became aware that in conducting my research at this school, I would in a way be engaging with teachers who are considered ‘custodians’ of the SiSwati curriculum and examinations. I learned from these teachers that examiners and markers have an added responsibility of ‘training’ other teachers on how to prepare their learners for the external examinations. The power dynamics started to reveal themselves. These insights required a careful framing of the interview questions, a cautious crafting of the purposes of the research and strategically code-switching between English and SiSwati.

I then asked to be taken to the identified classrooms. Not surprisingly, most of the learners remembered me from the time I was an English and SiSwati teacher at the school. Some indicated that they were very proud of me and wanted to know ‘how I had gone so far’. On the second day of my visit at this school I spent about 40 minutes in each of the two classes during which I observed the lesson, distributed the questionnaire and

talked to learners. All 80 learners responded to the questionnaire. When I concluded my visit at this school in October 2000, the principal asked me to be a guest speaker at the Speech and Prize Giving Day of the school. He informed me that it was important for children from our area to know that it was possible for people from our small village to 'make it in life'. When I suggested to him that there were other 'role models', he was quick to mention that he wanted learners to know that it was possible for young women in particular to be successful. I accepted the invitation.

In retrospect, I know that my talk to the students represented a serious let down of myself. On the one hand, it was important for me to maintain a good relationship with my 'colleagues', but on the other hand, I wanted to inform learners about the 'doors' that open when one furthers her studies. Even though I would have preferred to make a speech on personal and emotional emancipation, the religious constraints of the context constrained me. In the end I delivered a bland speech that failed to challenge any of the school's values and assumptions. The language issue also became central as, without being asked to do so, I presented my speech in English – the language of the educated in Swaziland. This in a way contradicted my professional vision of raising the status of SiSwati, both as a subject and a language. I missed out on an opportunity to show parents and learners that being educated should not be equated to speaking English, and not your mother tongue.

In approaching a familiar context such as school B, I was also faced with one of the major problems faced by many researchers - balancing the insider and outsider aspects of their role: what has been termed 'managing marginality' (Sapsford and Jupp (1996). There were clear dangers in identifying too closely with subjects, as it ran the risk of allowing biased observations and interpretations, and thereby presenting a distorted picture. Over-rapport could also have led me to concentrate more on this particular school or setting which could have influenced my relationship with, and access to, other settings. However, I found it important to maintain my outsider position and it enabled me to see subjects' behaviour in a relatively detached way with the freshness of a stranger. In this way I was able to see things which participants take for granted and I

took a broader, more rounded view of the group. On a personal level, because of my past experiences and associations with this school, the setting became too loaded and it placed me in some emotional conflicts that became difficult to handle.

The criteria for selecting schools in the semi-urban areas which will be referred to as schools C and D was guided by accessibility and the availability of a time slot within the SiSwati teacher's timetable. I was also interested in them because they were the only private schools in the area. Even though Qorro (1999:16-17) has observed that there are instances when private and public schools have different syllabuses and curricula, this was not an issue in the Swaziland context as both public and private schools followed the same SiSwati syllabus (although the interpretation of the syllabus was perhaps a different matter). The teachers had all undergone similar training and hence generalising findings across the schools could possibly offer a fair expectation.

Even though I was not familiar with these schools, gaining access presented no obstacle. Both schools are located at Big Bend, a place where the Illovo Sugar Company is situated. Even though both schools cater for children of company employees, School D is the more prestigious school because of the entrance requirements and higher school fees. It is in fact one of the most prestigious schools in Swaziland, the school of choice for affluent Swazi parents as well as expatriates. Learners in this school can choose to do either SiSwati, Afrikaans or French and English is compulsory. There is only one 37-year old SiSwati teacher who teaches all the Grades. She has a few students (about 15 out of 60 in Grade 11) as many SiSwati speaking learners opt for French or Afrikaans. (This in itself was significant in terms of gauging the status and social currency of the various languages).

Given the dynamics at this school, I found it more important to start by soliciting learners' views about the teaching and learning of SiSwati and their attitudes towards it as a language and a school subject rather than observing a lesson. In order to get responses that were not tainted by the conversations we would have, I decided to distribute the questionnaires after the teacher had introduced me and explained the

purpose of my visit. Seeing the questionnaire also further clarified my visit as it made them more aware of the issues I was interested in. It was after the one-hour 'lesson' that I held a half an hour interview with the teacher.

The teacher for SiSwati revealed that due to the multicultural nature of the school, most of the learners limit their use of SiSwati to SiSwati lessons. The erosion of the crucial social domain of the language was quite evident and perhaps pointed to early signs of a migratory trend from SiSwati to English in this school. She cited her experience as an exam marker to be very useful in helping those who do SiSwati to get credits. I immediately sensed that eliciting learners' views on the teaching and learning of SiSwati would reveal interesting findings and again, the role of the external examination in shaping classroom practice was emphasised.

School C, which was also a private school was slightly different from school D. It was a relatively new school (about 3 years old at the time) and less prestigious with realistic school fees for a lower socioeconomic group. Learners who attended this school were mostly children of company employees who did not meet the entrance requirements of school D. Even though it was compulsory to speak English, the SiSwati teacher indicated that these learners were constantly being punished for 'speaking vernac' during school hours. As compared to the learners at school D, who used English voluntarily, learners in school C had to be coerced into speaking English. From a sociolinguistic point of view, this phenomenon is in keeping with trends in other speech communities where speakers in lower socioeconomic strata tend to be more resistant, than their upwardly mobile sisters and brothers, to the adoption of another language.

Coming across a former classmate at this school afforded new insights. Even though she was a teacher of English, our encounter was of much help as she introduced me to the SiSwati teacher whom I am going to refer to by the pseudonym, Mr. Hlatshwayo, who also happened to be the Head of the Languages Department. Mr. Hlatshwayo was about the same age as the teacher in School D and he was very willing to assist and he indicated to me that he understood the importance of co-operating with researchers. He was also

doing his masters with the University of South Africa. I find it important to mention that I found Mr. Hlathswayo the easiest teacher to deal with as his responses during both the formal and informal interviews, which each lasted about half an hour, showed that he was reading widely around language teaching and learning issues. His political affiliations with an underground political movement in Swaziland also came across during our interaction. Of all the teachers I interviewed, he was the only one who informed me that it was the content of SiSwati that was a 'put off'. He was very critical of the fact that revering traditional Swazi culture and romanticising the royal family were the bedrock of the curriculum. I also noticed during the classroom observation on the second day of my visit which lasted about 40 minutes that his students were freer to speak their minds and their responses to the questionnaire were of utmost importance. I suspected that a teacher of Mr. Hlathswayo's calibre would quickly lose his post at a school such as school B. His critical mind would have questioned the very core of the beliefs in school B.

The hour and a half spent at this school on the second day proved to be worthwhile as it gave me an insight about the similarities in learners' attitudes towards SiSwati from learners who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. All 60 learners responded to the questionnaire.

In the urban areas I selected two schools, one which was historically reserved for royal family members and a school in the centre of the town called Manzini. These schools will be referred to as school E and F respectively. The protocol at school F was daunting. I spent about 15 minutes being literally sent from pillar to post as the person I saw first at the school was the head of the languages department who did not seem very keen to assist me. When I asked if I could speak to the school principal, she went into the office first and spent quite a while there and I had to wait patiently outside the office. When I was eventually allowed into the office about 15 minutes later, I was struck by the seating arrangement. The head of department was also sitting behind the principal's desk and a chair was put for me on the opposite side. I found this very intimidating, but I went on to explain the purpose of my visit once I had introduced myself. The principal made it clear to me that he did not want me to disrupt the classes in any way and that I should not come

for more than two days. He argued that as I was a Swazi and a former teacher myself, he can assure me that nothing had changed since the last time I had taught. As a result of this sobering welcome I did not administer the questionnaire at this school. The teacher assigned to me also refused to be interviewed. However, the validity of the principal's assertion that 'nothing had changed' since the time I was a student and teacher in Swaziland needed to be tested.

As if to compensate for the problems I encountered at school F, school E became the most rewarding sampling site for me. The acting co-ordinator of SiSwati was also one of two deputies at this very big school and her enthusiasm to find out how people felt about the teaching and learning of SiSwati made it easy for me to conduct my research. She happily took me to the SiSwati department, introduced me and indicated to the teachers that she welcomed researchers like myself because she hoped they would help with the teaching of SiSwati and her dream to transform the curriculum in the near future. Her presence and influence at the school were most valued and I had the opportunity to observe and interview three teachers at this school. Even though the co-ordinator may have learned IsiZulu at school, the fact that she had completed her Masters Degree in Linguistics the previous year clearly had an influence in her thinking about language issues. Most of the other teachers in the department were less than 30 years old but they were confident of the guidance they received from the co-ordinator as she shared with them all the information regarding the teaching of SiSwati whenever she attended a meeting in this regard.

The atmosphere at this school was very positive. I visited this school about 5 times and each time, I was treated very well and teachers took turns to bring lunch for the entire period of my research. When I offered to bring refreshments on what was supposed to be my last day, the head of department pleaded with me to teach them computers instead as they had a lab full of unused computers. Because of the warm reception at this school and the willingness of the learners to partake in the research, I gladly agreed to teach them over one weekend. I did not find this unethical as researchers are at liberty to offer services in return for access and enter into bargains with gatekeepers. For example, a

number of researchers who have conducted ethnographic case studies in schools have taken on a part-time teaching load in part to facilitate access (see, for example, Burgess, 1983).

I spent about an hour and a half each day when I visited the school. I observed lessons, distributed the questionnaire and had very informative conversations with approximately 40 learners in each of the four classes. I then spent half an hour interviewing each of the four SiSwati teachers.

The fieldwork period was the most significant part of the research and the part in which I found I was investing most in the study, by way of time and personal involvement. I tried to avoid the open-ended period of data collection as I intended to include about six schools from the start. However, because this stage was arguably the most interesting and rewarding, it was tempting to visit more schools, although this was impossible because of time constraints. I can say each school visit lasted an hour and a half, which included the observation of a lesson, interviews with teachers, the completion of the questionnaire and talking to learners. In all these research sites I also offered to protect the interests of subjects by guaranteeing the confidentiality of data, using pseudonyms and/or stressing my commitment to established ethical principles.

6.5 Research strategies

6.5.1 Administering the questionnaire

A questionnaire is one of the most widely used techniques for obtaining information, and it is relatively economical, has standardised questions, it can ensure anonymity, and questions can be written for specific purposes (Macmillan and Schumacher, 1993: 238). Literature was consulted to guide the design of the questionnaire (Cohen and Manion, 1990; Anderson, 1990; Van Dalen, 1966; Babbie, 1973; Cohen, 1976).

In the design of the questionnaire, I paid particular attention to the following guiding principles:

- The question asked should be relevant to the research problem.
- Questions should be as short as possible.
- Instructions should be clear and concise.
- Vocabulary should be simple and easy to read.
- Avoid ambiguity, confusion and vagueness.
- Avoid prestige bias.
- Avoid double-barrelled questions.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Avoid asking questions that are beyond the respondents' capabilities.
- The length of the questionnaire should also be considered, such that the questionnaire can be completed within a 30-minute time limit.
- The printing of the questionnaire must be clear.

The aim in administering the questionnaire was to gather information about the perceptions and attitudes of SiSwati learners of the teaching and learning they experienced in SiSwati language classrooms. I also wanted to establish the respective domains of SiSwati and English in the broader social context and their implications for curriculum development, textbook content and evaluation of SiSwati at school level.

In my decision to administer the question, I made one critical assumption: that learners' attitudes towards SiSwati and the domains of English and SiSwati could be measured accurately by self-report. I admit that even though I had, to a large degree, rely totally on the honesty and accuracy of participants' responses, my experiences and familiarity with the Swaziland context proved useful in monitoring the responses.

I settled for both open and closed questions due to the nature of data I wished to elicit. This was done in order to facilitate a rapid and accurate summary of results, give respondents an opportunity to reveal their real motives and perhaps produce responses which would draw my attention to situations or aspects that may not have been

anticipated when the questionnaire was drawn up. I was aware of the fact that the use of open questions could run the risk of giving me complex answers that might be extremely difficult and time consuming to analyse and classify.

I then examined the questions for bias, sequence, clarity and face validity. However, because of time constraints and distance, I was unable to test the questionnaire by administering it to a small group to determine their clarity, usefulness and, perhaps, reliability.

The questionnaires were handed out personally and completed on my first day of classroom observations in each school. This was to ensure that learners' responses were not influenced by what might transpire during subsequent interviews and my engagement as a participant observer. It also gave me the opportunity to explain the purpose and significance of the study, clarify points, answer questions and motivate respondents to answer questions carefully and truthfully. Learners were told that they would remain anonymous, and their answers would be treated with confidentiality. Four hundred and fifteen (435) learners responded to the questionnaire, giving me a 100 per cent response rate of usable responses.

With regard to the teaching and learning of SiSwati, learners were asked to list their subjects in order of importance, enjoyment and status. In each of these categories they were required to justify their responses. They were further asked to describe some of the themes they were taught and also state which aspects of SiSwati they enjoyed more (or less) and why it was so.

With regard to the domains of SiSwati and English, learners responded to questions on how often they used SiSwati to speak, read and write in the home and school domains specifically. The domain of entertainment was also included and it helped me get a picture of their listening patterns.

The strength of using a questionnaire lay in its ability to elicit accurate data. However, I do acknowledge the fact that it could be of little value for examining some of the socio-cultural ideologies and values that impinge on the SiSwati curriculum. The strength of my questionnaire could also have been its weakness – although controlling accuracy, the questionnaire could not assure without further evidence that the sample represented a broader universe. My experiences in the context and the use of other research methods were critical to the accuracy of the study, its potential for generalisability and uncovering the values and ideologies that influenced the SiSwati curriculum (See Appendix A for a sample of the questionnaire).

6.5.2 Structuring the interviews

Anderson (1990:222) defines an interview as ‘a specialised form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter.’ For the purpose of this study, the definition of Cohen and Manion (1985:241) is used. They define an interview as ‘a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation.’

Interviews create opportunities to find out what is in the respondents’ minds – what they think or how they feel about something. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1993:385), ‘interviewing (i.e. the careful asking of relevant questions), is an important way for a researcher to check the accuracy of – to verify or refute – the impressions he or she has gained through observation.’

Fraenkel and Wallen (1993:385) classified interviews into four types, namely structured, semi-structured, informal and retrospective. All four types were used in this research and are therefore briefly described. ‘The structured and semi-structured interviews consist of a series of questions designed to elicit specific answers on the part of the respondents, to

obtain information that can later be compared and contrasted ... and are useful for obtaining information to test a specific hypothesis' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993:385).

Informal interviews, on the other hand, do not involve a specific sequence of questioning, and their primary intent is to find out what people think and how the views of one individual compare with those of another. In retrospective interviews, subjects are asked to provide thought processes to answers they earlier gave in a questionnaire.

The advantages of interviews include:

- a. They are flexible and adaptable, and they can be used with many different problems and types of persons.
- b. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour can be noted in face-to-face interviews.
- c. The respondent can be motivated by the interviewee.
- d. They result in a much higher response rate than the questionnaire.

(McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:20)

The disadvantages of interviews include:

- a. They have a potential for subjectivity and bias.
- b. They have high cost and are time consuming.
- c. The respondents may be uncomfortable with the interviewer and therefore unwilling to report their true feelings.

In conducting the interviews I followed the guidelines of Bodgen and Biklen (1992) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in developing an outline of main questions, secondary, probing questions, and strategies for eliciting more detailed informant responses. In the course of interviewing, I gained my informants' interpretations of happenings in the classrooms and how they felt about the status of SiSwati and its teaching and learning. Eight audio tapes which were a result of the approximately 10 hours of interviews with teachers and written records of formal interviews written in a journal were gathered. The

audio tapes were carefully annotated and referenced in the discussion of patterns and/or trends in the informants' thinking about the teaching and learning of SiSwati.

Considering the fact that most of the teachers were known to me (They were fellow students at university) I endeavoured not to create any social distance between them and myself. I also avoided a situation where the data obtained might be corrupted by inappropriate questioning, inadequate listening or more importantly, the absence of desirable interpersonal skills on my part. A majority of the interviewees were people who had not furthered their studies beyond the first degree, and some specifically asked how I had been able to get a scholarship to further my studies, therefore, it was of utmost importance that I avoided any sense of social or academic stratification.

A non-condemnatory and to a certain degree, empathic attitude was important as it provided me with a framework of trust. In that way I was able to lead the interviewees to confront, in a reflective and fundamental way, issues which were deep, personally frustrating and at times potentially painful.

With the interviews the intention was to obtain the respondents' views on the subject of teaching SiSwati. The interviews enabled me to gain explanations and information on practices, perceptions, attitudes and values - matters which would have been difficult to obtain by alternative methods. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989:83) described the kind of interview process employed as one 'which allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses. ...Some kind of balance between the interviewer and the interviewee can develop which can provide room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses.'

The interviews with all ten teachers were conducted with each teacher at the school after the first classroom observation which lasted approximately 45 minutes. Efforts were made to ensure the physical context was conducive to effective interviews (Burgess, 1988). I left it up to each teacher to choose the interview location. In three of the schools, these interviews took place in the staff room. In School D, the interview took place in the

lounge, whilst in School C, it was conducted in the teacher's office as he was the head of department. For those teachers who did not want their names to be revealed, I assured them of confidentiality.

These interviews proved most illuminating as I was able to get clarity (where necessary) on any aspect of learning and teaching. The interviews were conducted in SiSwati, however, teachers were informed that they were at liberty to switch between English and SiSwati.

As I was more or less aware of the qualifications of the teachers⁷³, questions pertaining to teachers *per se* focused on their work experience and whether they had the experience of marking the O'Level examination⁷⁴. In this regard, questions were based on teachers' years of experience, other subjects that they taught, the amount of time allocated for teaching SiSwati and the time of day, if SiSwati was compulsory or not, questions around the examination and training workshops. In three of these schools, the teachers were markers for the final examination, which suggests a certain level of experience and professional seniority. Other questions were based on the content of SiSwati, the methods used, the problems encountered by SiSwati teachers, their attitudes towards SiSwati and its status as a subject.

Most of the teachers indicated that they were aware that they were teaching a low status subject, the one teacher who was also the acting co-ordinator for SiSwati clearly stated that she welcomed researchers like myself as she had hope that they would 'help with this SiSwati'. The way she phrased her comment again reflected a feeling of exasperation and hopelessness. At issue in the interviews was the responsibility to clarify the factors influencing the interviewees. The teachers were clearly in a despondent position, and I somewhat thought it would be unethical for me not to engage with them. I felt I had an obligation to the interviewees to provide critical awareness through the research, thereby empowering them in a small way. My view was that this transformation should in fact be

⁷³ All High School teachers in Swaziland have a first degree.

⁷⁴ Teachers who mark this examination are considered more experienced as it is assumed that their exposure to marking enables them to teach better than those who have not marked the exams. This erroneous assumption has added prestige and weight to the content and orientation of the external examinations.

an outcome of my research, and while it may not occur during the process of data gathering, could be effected when feasible.

I also found it necessary to minimise interruptions when a participant was talking. Instead of using excessive verbalisation which could have distracted the interviewees, I provided supportive nods and, agreement and so on. Even though the process of interviewing teachers proved rather tedious, as they tended to confirm the same point of view, I found it useful to elicit views from the different individuals and their contexts so as to ensure that I gained a comprehensive picture. It also confirmed some of my hunches in an emphatic way.

As I interviewed one teacher a day, I ensured that I transcribed the data on the same day. The transcribed data was coded in terms of important recurring trends on my return to Cape Town. I subsequently classified both the quantitative and qualitative data into key thematic areas. As patterns and new themes emerged, the gathered data was distilled and reclassified until the most outstanding features emerged. I finally summarised my findings according to the most dominant themes.

Whilst I was in the process of sourcing SiSwati curriculum documents, I found myself playing the role of an investigative researcher. I had thought that a visit to the National Curriculum Centre would be helpful as it was the place where curricula were developed, but the somewhat inconclusive response from the Head of Languages left me puzzled about the process driving curriculum development in SiSwati. As I was not given the requested curriculum at the centre, I decided to go and see the SiSwati co-ordinator, after being advised by an English curriculum developer to do so. Once the co-ordinator gave me the available copies, which apparently came from the Examinations Council and informed me about the role played by authors in curriculum development, I deemed it important to hold interviews with three of the authors, two of which were curriculum designers, examination markers and SiSwati panel members. Two of the interviews were held with the authors at their places of work and one was held in Cape Town where one of the authors was studying at the time of the research. Each interview took about an hour

in which I avoided jotting down notes except for specific details such as important dates and names of certain role players.

I wish to point out that even though the interviewed officials co-operated very well in giving me the information, I required in order to come to an understanding of the processes involved in the development and evaluation of SiSwati, I took it upon myself to return to the officials to enquire whether I could mention their names in my research. All of them indicated that they wanted to remain anonymous. None of them thought the information should be censured.

6.5.3 Classroom observations

Observation has been characterised as ‘the fundamental base of all research methods’ in the social and behavioural sciences (Adler and Adler, 1994: 389). Even studies based on direct interviews employ observational techniques to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed. Compared to other research methods, classroom observation is said to be least likely to lead the researcher to impose her reality on the social world she seeks to understand.

Adler and Adler (1994) have in fact suggested that in future, observational research will be found as ‘part of a methodological spectrum,’ but that in that spectrum, it will serve as ‘the most powerful source of validation’ (p.389). Observation, they claim, rests on ‘something researchers can find constant,’ by which they mean ‘their own direct knowledge and their own judgment’ (p.389).

The 10 lessons observed gave me opportunities to directly observe SiSwati classrooms, record what was said, done, when and by whom. In that way I was able to discover SiSwati teachers and learners’ practices and attitudes. I had an ‘insider’s view’ and perspective on what actually took place and was therefore able to gain insights into the feelings and meanings of my subjects. Reliability and representativeness of this method was ensured by my use of other validating methods and the fact that I used more than one

sample. This became necessary as I was aware that the classroom is like an iceberg, of which I could see only a small part of issues related to the teaching and learning of SiSwati. The ‘unseen’, unobservable sides of the lessons such as the ideologies that influenced and shaped the SiSwati classroom were uncovered using other research methods.

In the classrooms, I engaged as a participant observer⁷⁵. Even though I am very familiar with the Swaziland educational landscape, I still deemed it necessary to observe classrooms. Considering the fact that I had not taught in the past five years, it became important for me to acknowledge that life is not fixed, but dynamic and changing. Therefore, if people’s lives are constantly changing, it was important for me to find out if there had been any changes in the teaching and learning of SiSwati. It became necessary to investigate and record teachers and learners’ experiences and their interpretations of them. In observing classrooms, I endeavoured to understand participants’ actions within the context of their setting as I believe people act and make sense of their world by taking meanings from their environment. I decided to become part of their environment as it was only then that I could understand the actions, behaviours and attitudes of SiSwati teachers and learners.

In engaging as a participant observer, my intention was to look, listen, generally experience and then write down. I paid particular attention to the following:

- Classroom layout, seating arrangement.
- What teachers taught and what learners learned in SiSwati language classrooms.
- The general content of SiSwati lessons.
- The approaches and methods employed by the teacher and the extent to which these were being informed by the examination.
- The reading and writing activities of the learners.
- Teachers and learners underlying attitudes towards SiSwati.

⁷⁵ Participant observation is the conventional name given to data collection that involved social interaction between the researcher and the informants in a naturalistic setting during which data are systematically collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I found classroom observations to be the most personally demanding and an analytically difficult method, as three pages of field notes for instance, often easily worked up into 25 pages of expanded accounts when the details were written up. This method also required that I take a lot of notes on what appeared to be everyday mundane happenings (e.g. people's body language and speech patterns, and their arrival and departures) and to spend a substantial amount of time analysing field-notes. This became one of the most rewarding methods which yielded fascinating insights into the world of SiSwati teachers and learners. I found these observations most informative as they helped me to pick up the general atmosphere in these language classes. In each of the classes I observed, learners were informed that I was collecting data for research. I informed the teachers that I would take down notes and interact with the learners during the lesson.

The immediate response from some of the teachers was 'perhaps you can help us with this SiSwati'. This cry from the heart characterised for me the feeling of desperation amongst teachers who had to teach a subject based on a curriculum they perceived as irrelevant to children's real lives, using prescribed textbooks that created uniform resistance to the content and ideology of what they perceived as outdated texts.

It was obviously impossible to record everything that happened in a particular situation. Selection therefore became inevitable and necessary. On the first day of my research in each school, an initial relatively wide focus was adopted and I tried to note down a broad, general outline of what was happening, and made more detailed records of incidents that seemed particularly interesting or revealing. Some of the behaviour at this stage was difficult to understand, but it became useful and understandable at a later stage. As I spent more time in each context, some theoretical ideas began to develop, I then started to focus more carefully and I made more detailed records of particular aspects of behaviour or situations.

In my classroom observations, I found it important to record as much detail as possible about what was said, both verbally and non-verbally. The actual language used also provided key information about teachers and learners' perspectives which I followed up

in interviews and conversations. I also recorded as much as possible about the physical, social and temporal context in which certain behaviour occurred.

In order to allow myself the time to jot down notes after each lesson observed, I ensured that there was, at least, a 1-hour interval between lessons. I felt that the longer this is left the more it would be forgotten and the greater the chances of inaccuracies and biases creeping in. In some contexts it was possible to make notes during the observation, although teachers and learners became curious about what I was writing and what I would do with the data, and I had to reassure them about confidentiality. On occasions, I gave them my notes to read, partly to reassure them, and partly to provide a check on the validity of my accounts.

Taking notes in the classroom seemed to be a legitimate activity, perhaps because the teachers felt that in this context they were more publicly accountable or because others engage in the same activity, most notably inspectors and tutors of student teachers. But the act of note-taking inevitably affected the teachers' perceptions of me. My conversations with them revealed that they saw me as more threatening, and as more of an evaluator and less of a person who understands their circumstances.

Often social norms in the setting do not permit note-taking. For instance, I felt it was inappropriate to take notes in the social area of the school staff room. In this case, I had to write up my observations in the evening. Sometimes researchers can take notes covertly. Hammersley (1990), for example, jotted brief notes down on his newspaper when observing in the staff room of the school he studied. I also decided that on occasions when note-taking during observation is not possible or appropriate, I would have to retreat to some private area of the field such as the head of department's office or any other private space.

Except for School D, the research sites selected for this study afforded me an opportunity to witness the typical and everyday experiences of SiSwati teachers and learners. Given the fact that the schools were selected from the different geographic areas with learners

coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds, I can safely say that, even though the sample was small, the results are generalisable of the teaching and learning of SiSwati in Swaziland

6.5.4 Document and text analysis

The process of evaluating SiSwati language education in its widest sense proved to be a complex and multi-tasked one. It required more than a critical examination of the curriculum documents themselves, but also an in-depth examination of some of the textbooks used. This was necessary as textbooks have a pivotal role in the teaching and learning of SiSwati. An examination of the final year examination papers was also undertaken in order to define the articulation between the curriculum, the textbooks and the requirements of the exit examinations.

As an analysis of all SiSwati books is beyond the scope of this study, a representative sample was decided upon. The Novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* (This is a Swazi proverb that can be loosely translated to mean ‘Don’t let the sun go down on you’) and the Drama *Tentile* (loosely translated: ‘It was your fault’) analysed in this study were chosen from those prescribed and approved by the Swaziland Examinations Council for 2001, the year in which the students I was observing would be writing the final examination as well as the fact that both texts were written by SiSwati authors (as opposed to texts translated from isiZulu).

Literature per se was selected because the various genres deal with social values, feelings and attitudes that may be reinforced in those who have to study the texts. Du Preez (1983:28) argues that literature embraces the past and the present and contains prophetic elements. Swanepoel (1994:35 cited in Mabuza 2001: 26) echoes the same sentiments when he states that literature does not originate in a vacuum; it is an expression of society. The other reason for my analysis of literature texts instead of other aspects of the SiSwati curriculum is that, a cursory look at some of these aspects such as composition and comprehension also reflected the very traditional treatment of language and culture.

They continue to follow the conservative pattern of language education which is well embedded in the literature aspect that was analysed.

6.5.5 Management and data recording

The relevant literature on the subject suggests that there are several approaches to analysis of data in the practice of qualitative research. Most develop a system for 'coding' or identifying categories or themes based upon patterns and ideas that emerge from the data in field notes, interviews and questionnaires. In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, my data analysis has entailed shifting between different methods of data collection; analysis, reformulation of research questions and re-examination of formed assumptions.

Throughout the data collection phase, I looked for patterns in words, phrases, behaviours, thoughts, and events recorded and I carefully noted/annotated those which repeated themselves and stood out. After labeling observed patterns, and sorting, comparing and contrasting, a system for classification emerged (Patton, 1990). Sorting the codes themselves and finding patterns among them was a challenge. Bodgan and Biklen's (1992) suggestion of listing families of codes became useful in this regard. I was able to classify codes into families such as: setting/context, definition of the situation codes, perspectives held by subjects, process codes and events codes.

The analysis of data was ongoing and it at times revealed patterns and information that necessitated altering the course of my inquiry and further probing. Drawing conclusions from the data involved counting instances, noting patterns or themes, seeing plausibility, subsuming particulars into the general and building a logical chain of evidence (Miles and Huberman, 1984). I also made it a point that I checked for representativeness, made contrasts and comparisons, looked for negative evidence and got feedback from informants. I compared lessons taught by the same teacher, lessons taught by different teachers, and compared what teachers said with their practices. I compared and contrasted teachers' thoughts about teaching SiSwati and the influence of the final examinations. I

also compared what students in the same class and different schools felt about the teaching and learning of SiSwati and the O'Level examination.

In order to illustrate the process whereby evidence was granted the status of data (Blommaert, 1997), in the chapter that follows where I analyse the data, I provide descriptions to conjure up specific scenes. Wherever I can, I quote participants' own words (Rampton, 1995) in order to widen the angle of vision and to render visible the basis of my analysis. As part of this process, and in the interests of research ethics, I committed myself to showing the draft to the research participants and to represent them with any comments they made in the final version.

The findings from my research were compared to findings from my literature review. The questionnaires and data collected from interviews and classroom observations during school visits were analysed and presented in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7

A critical appraisal of SiSwati curriculum development within the political context of Swaziland

'In Swaziland, textbooks are the curriculum, what the Examinations Council distributes is an examination syllabus which outlines the textbooks, it is not a curriculum. Teachers must teach the textbooks in detail because they are the curriculum.' (Personal Communication with SiSwati curriculum designer at the Swaziland National Curriculum Centre).

'There is a marriage between Government and our publishing company and the National Curriculum Centre is the honeymoon.' (Macmillan Publishing Company Official commenting at the opening of a new Macmillan warehouse in Matsapha – Personal communication with a SiSwati author – October 2000)⁷⁶

The statements above by one of the SiSwati curriculum developers, as well as the smug metaphor used by the MacMillan official neatly captures the extraordinary official view of what the relationship should be between curriculum development, textbook selection and procurement processes. The lack of due process, transparency and proper measures to ensure quality control in textbook production is self evident. It is also quite revealing to see how a respectable British publishing house exploits the problematic conditions surrounding curriculum development and textbook procurement.

The marriage metaphor used by the Macmillan official to describe their relationship with the government confirmed for me the degree of government collusion in awarding monopolistic commercial rights to one publishing company. In this chapter I will explore this situation and its implications for the teaching and learning of SiSwati.

⁷⁶ Further interviews with officials in the area of curriculum and materials developers confirmed the monopolistic arrangement between the publisher and the education department.

7.1 When 'textbooks are the curriculum'

As the main aim of this chapter is to analyse the data by way of examining the SiSwati language curriculum, the exercise naturally necessitated that I obtain copies of SiSwati curriculum policy documents. My starting point was the National Curriculum Centre (NCC), the government arm responsible for curriculum and textbook development for all the subjects in Swaziland. I arranged to meet with the Director of the Centre, who through her secretary advised me to speak to the Head of the Languages Department. When I requested copies of SiSwati curriculum policy documents from the departmental head, her response was:

'You are asking me for government documents. I don't think I have copies here. I can only advise you to go to the Ministry of Education in Mbabane. I don't just give away government documents.'

The unavailability of key public curriculum documents took me by surprise, as my understanding was that the NCC, and the languages department in particular, were instrumental in SiSwati curriculum development. The departmental head's response left me perplexed as to why access to the document should be limited.

An English curriculum developer in the same department then advised me to contact the acting co-ordinator for SiSwati in the absence of the SiSwati inspector. From the meeting with the co-ordinator, it transpired that there existed a curriculum policy document for SiSwati primary schools, however, for the Junior Certificate and O-Levels only documents outlining the structure and requirements for the final examinations were in existence.

'At the beginning of each year, the Examination Council distributes the J.C. and O-Level syllabuses, documents which outline the textbooks to be assessed and the structure of the external examinations. These documents are distributed to all schools so that we avoid the problem of teachers using the wrong textbooks. Did you read recently about the English case, where a teacher taught the wrong syllabus? Its those teachers who do not attend workshops.'

From the co-ordinator's statement I had to assume that it was the Examinations Council and not the National Curriculum Centre which was responsible for curriculum/syllabus development at secondary and high school levels. She then gave me copies of the Junior Certificate and O'Level SiSwati syllabus documents and referred me to the National Curriculum Centre for the primary school syllabus, 'as it was responsible for the Junior Primary Examination'. From my meeting with the co-ordinator, I established that officials responsible for curriculum development also acted as examiners. From a procedural point of view the arrangement whereby the examination body equates the content of one textbook with the curriculum seemed to be irregular, problematic and out of step with the clear separation of these administrative bodies in other countries.

A cursory look at the documents given me made me question the basis for textbook development at the National Curriculum Centre as they mirrored the format of final examinations. I deemed it necessary to interview the secondary school curriculum developer for SiSwati at the centre. When I asked her for the policy document on which she based the textbooks that she writes, the official also acknowledged the fact that there were no curriculum policy documents:

'The documents that we have are teaching syllabuses. When I write SiSwati textbooks I base them on my experience that children must learn 'from libito (*noun*) to sibabato (*interjective*). There was once an attempt to write a SiSwati curriculum in line with the Nine-Year Basic Syllabus in English, but because the process was driven by the then Senior Inspector for SiSwati, Mrs Mthembu, after her departure it was abandoned. I can attribute the lack of a comprehensive curriculum to the absence of an inspectorship for SiSwati. There has been one SiSwati inspector for the whole country who is also presently on study leave. However, a curriculum document for the primary phase is available and you can speak to either Miss Busi Nkomo or Mrs Dudu Simelane about it. They are the primary school curriculum designers.'

The official's role as both curriculum designer and textbook developer highlights the problems and irregularities in SiSwati curriculum design. According to her own testimony, she writes textbooks without a formal curriculum in place. Her vision of a language curriculum that children must simply learn from *libito* to *sibabato* reflects an

understanding of language education that would have fitted neatly in the old Bantu language education curriculum.

The author of *Sihlatiya SiSwati* (We analyse SiSwati), the Junior Certificate and O'Level grammar book confirmed the absence of proper procedure. He initially confirmed that the process of developing a SiSwati curriculum was abandoned because of Mrs Mthembu's departure, but then added that there was also a lack of commitment from the Ministry of Education in this regard⁷⁷. According to him, ministry of education officials do not seem to understand the necessity and urgency for a SiSwati curriculum, perhaps due to the low status of the subject. Furthermore, the key role players in attempts at SiSwati curriculum development were also not well versed in this area:

'Besides the fact that Ministry of Education officials always talk about zero-growth, there is presently a lack of expertise to drive the process of curriculum design. There are no education officials who know what curriculum design is, what language planning is and what language textbook development involves. I myself have used my experience as a linguist and further based my book on Doke's book, *Textbook of Zulu Grammar* and Ziervogel and Mabuza's *A Grammar of the Swati Language*.'

The author's frank response underlined two important matters. He mentioned the lack of political will in government circles to take the teaching of SiSwati seriously. More seriously, his involvement as a linguist in textbook writing points to the continuation of the Old Bantu education tradition, that linguists, rather than language practitioners write language textbooks.

On the secondary schools curriculum developer's recommendation, I arranged to meet with two SiSwati curriculum developers for the primary school in the same month of October 2000. During this meeting I was given a 19 - page copy of the SiSwati Syllabus for Grades I-VII. An examination of the syllabus document revealed that it was in essence a copy of the structure of the content pages of textbooks prescribed at primary school. Indeed in one of the curriculum developers words:

⁷⁷ SiSwati and English are the two official languages in Swaziland

‘In Swaziland, textbooks *are* the curriculum, what the Examination Council distributes is an examination syllabus which outlines the textbooks to be examined, it is not a curriculum, teachers must teach the textbooks in detail because they are the curriculum.’

An analysis of the policy documents that are intended as a guide to the teaching of SiSwati in Swaziland reveals that at the primary level it essentially boils down to the textbooks sanctioned by the National Curriculum Centre. The standard procedure in other countries where national curriculum development departments consult with schools and tertiary institutions resulting in policy documents which inform textbook development, is reversed in Swaziland. This set of procedure is further complicated by the arrangement that materials development, curriculum planning and setting the examination may at times be the responsibility of the same person. I was struck by the lack of accountability, peer review, and deliberations as well as the lack of separation of discreet educational processes.

Before I embark on an analysis of the prescribed textbooks which ‘are the curriculum in Swaziland’, I find it necessary to scrutinise the syllabus documents in order to find out the kind of literacy programme embedded in the syllabus. Given the fact that the teaching of SiSwati in Swaziland is essentially textbook driven, one is inclined to see the textbook as the primary document while the syllabus itself is being regarded as a document responding to it. I will begin with the primary school syllabus document.

7.2 The culture-bound SiSwati primary school syllabus

An analysis of the syllabus which informs primary school level SiSwati literacy practices brought about certain critical insights, especially when compared to the framework, the isiZulu syllabus to which it bears a revealing resemblance. It consists of three sections, first, an introductory section or commentary, then the aims of the syllabus, and finally the areas of language to be studied.

The following are stated as the aims of the syllabus:

1. To teach the SiSwati language.
2. To teach Swazi culture

The syllabus elaborates on the first aim when it states:

Bantwana kufanele baphumelele kahle badzimate babe nelwati
lolwanele lwekufundza nekubhala lulwimi, kulandzeliswa tinhlavu
talo kucalwa ngaletimaludlana kuye ngekutiyatiya etigabeni.

(Pupils must be able to successfully read and write in SiSwati, following its alphabets, starting with the easiest to the most difficult as learners progress).

It is noteworthy that these two skills or outcomes identified are only two of six outcomes in the South African SiSwati language curriculum. Children are also to be taught compositions, rhymes, poems and games, an exercise which is aimed at identifying those who may be potential writers. What is evident from this description of language teaching is the lack of broad sociolinguistic aims as well as a psychosocial understanding of the cognitive dimension of language education.

The second aim of the syllabus focuses on the importance of Swazi culture:

Kute sive siphumelele kahle ekufundziseni lulwimi lwaso kufanele
sicilike sifundzise imisimeto nemihambo yaso ngekunakekela
lokukhulu.

(For a nation to succeed it must teach its culture and way of life with great care).

Traditional SiSwati culture contains much that could be described as non-progressive traditional practices. Regarding the feasibility of the uncritical teaching of SiSwati culture, I will explore later in my thesis the problematic perspective on gender issues, the undemocratic values reinforced through lore and myths surrounding the Swazi king and the superstitious interpretation of everyday events. Furthermore cultural traditions tend to reinforce an uncritical mindset in children that allows the perpetuation of the undemocratic dispensation in the country. This is deeply contradictory to the values espoused in the emancipatory and beneficial literacies discussed in *Chapter 4*.

An elaboration on the aim above states that it should serve the following purposes:

1. To make learners know and better understand their culture and be proud of it.
2. To make them aware of the depth and richness of their language.
3. For them to be able to contribute to the development of SiSwati in the following ways:
 - a. Talking about history and stories that are told by adults at home about Swazi culture.
 - b. Tell each other stories in class or the teacher may tell stories.
 - c. Read and say their surnames, rhymes and lullabies in class.
 - d. Be able to write easy stories.

(Translated)

(See appendix 1 for a copy of the SiSwati primary syllabus)

Furthermore, it is stated that learners must be able to think and use SiSwati in their lives in the following ways:

- Develop love for reading in SiSwati by accessing information in books and newspapers written in SiSwati.
- To write clear SiSwati in letters, compositions, reports and telegrams.
- Be able to answer questions in SiSwati whenever necessary.

A programme designed to develop thinking skills does not back up the vague reference to 'an ability to think'. The thinking the curriculum designers had in mind seems to be of the kind required to explore linguistic patterns in SiSwati. It is also significant that they are required to develop the ability to answer questions, not pose questions.

Apart from the salutary aim of sourcing traditional stories, this part of the syllabus represents a haphazard collection of skills that are, yet again aimed at developing reading and writing skills. Like the isiZulu curriculum analysed in *Chapter 5*, the SiSwati curriculum tends to follow a pseudo-scientific approach based on linguistic patterning in the Afrikaans syllabus of the 1980s. The first aim of the syllabus locates it as a Grammar/Skills version of literacy. Language study, as in the Afrikaans and isiZulu

syllabuses assumes a structural and technical approach that occupies children's most of the time allocated to the subject.

The SiSwati Primary syllabus also shows traits of the self-referential character of the isiZulu syllabus. Swazi learners are supposed to know and understand only Swazi 'culture, stories, lullabies, and dances for cultural events. All this must be taught so that learners know it by heart from the beginning of grade one' (translation). The parrot-like engagement with language and culture is reminiscent of the old Afrikaans apartheid style curriculum. Unlike the Swaziland English syllabus which though recognising the importance of one's community, national life and customs but also emphasises the importance of understanding the world (Ministry of Education, 1979:11), the SiSwati syllabus does not envisage a learner ready to embrace a modern world.

Further resemblance to the isiZulu syllabus becomes evident as the SiSwati syllabus also limits the choice of textbooks to those written at the National Curriculum Centre. The detrimental impact of this ruling on quality control through competition is self-evident. The degree of control can be demonstrated by referring to the stipulation that teachers should stick to a rigid timetable to the point where all teachers should teach the same lesson on the same day, similar to the isiZulu syllabus which 'had a lesson for each period of the year type of textbook that aimed at taking the sting out of first language teaching for the inadequately trained teacher' (Snyman, 1986:132). This highly prescriptive way of dealing with the syllabus is in keeping with the rather authoritative spirit that characterises the document as a whole. As far as the structuring of knowledge is concerned then, the system offers a restricted space within which the schoolteacher may operate. The prescribed textbooks hold a central place in the system and any diversion from it is positively discouraged. As curriculum designers are also examiners, the teacher has no freedom to choose what to teach. She must complete the National Curriculum Centre prescribed syllabus with the help of the books they have prescribed as continuous assessment during the year and end of year examinations are squarely based on the textbook. This results in a watertight control over what shall be taught, when it shall be taught and what shall be examined.

Considering the fact that a majority of the staff at the National Curriculum Centre studied isiZulu in a highly structured way, and since the isiZulu curriculum has proved to be a verbatim translation of the Afrikaans curriculum, it is evident that the influence of the apartheid inspired Afrikaans syllabus still exerts itself in the Swaziland context through the teaching of SiSwati. This state of affairs is especially ironical given the fact that Afrikaans and the other South African languages have an opportunity to enjoy the creative energy made possible by the introduction of Curriculum 2005.

7.3 The SiSwati Junior Certificate syllabus - a mirror image of its isiZulu counterpart

This SiSwati syllabus⁷⁸ which is written in English is an almost verbatim repeat of the Bantu language syllabi implemented during the apartheid era.

Similar to the isiZulu framework which assumed that a beginning 'has been made in the lower standards with a scientific approach to the two main fields of the mother tongue, namely linguistics and literature' (JMB, 1987:145), the Junior Certificate (J.C.) (see appendix 2) .SiSwati syllabus continues this approach.

7.3.1 Grammar

An analysis of Section A of the present SiSwati Paper I points to the study of exactly the same language items set in Paper II of the apartheid inspired isiZulu syllabus. The highly technical character will be evident from the extracts below which indicate the similarities between the present SiSwati paper and a Bantu education isiZulu paper.

⁷⁸ The syllabus under discussion has been included as an addendum to this thesis.

Present SiSwati Paper I external examination:

The Noun – distribution of prefixes, contents of each class, denominative, diminutive, feminine, augmentative.

The Pronoun – absolute, demonstrative, qualificative, possessive

The Qualificative – the adjective, relative, the possessive, numeral and the quantificative

The Predicative – verbal radical, phonological structure of radical, extended radicals, predicative concords, verb tenses, the present, past and future, infinitive, imperative, indicative, subjective, potential, participial.

The Copulative – its formation from other parts of speech.

The Adverb – types, their formation, prefixal and suffixal morphemes

The Ideophone – its significance, forms and uses

Conjunctive – its significance, influencing and non-influencing conjunctives.

The Interjective - types

IsiZulu learners were also required to study the following topics for Paper II:

1. The noun – division into classes, the importance of class prefixes, the suffixes of the noun; diminutive, locative, augmentative and feminine forms and deverbatives.
2. The absolute pronoun
3. The demonstrative
4. The possessive
5. The adjective
6. The relative
7. The numeral
8. The verb – concord, derivatives, moods, tenses
9. The copulative – identification and description of.
10. The ideophone – its use
11. The interjective – its use

(JMB, 1979:184)

7.3.2 Comprehension and composition

Paper II of the present SiSwati syllabus comprises three sections, a Letter or Essay, a Comprehension and Aspects of Traditional Literature. Again the details suggest a restricted and a technicist approach. The lack of sociolinguistic insight, as well as the inability or a willingness to utilise language study for communicative competence is sadly evident.

7.3.3 Traditional literature

In preparation to answer questions on section C on *Aspects of Traditional Literature*, which fell under section B of the isiZulu examination, SiSwati candidates are encouraged to make a collection of the various types of literature, such as proverbs and idioms, folktales and riddles. Teachers and pupils are informed about the importance of recording these 'before they are lost to posterity [and] it is only by doing this that this valuable traditional heritage can be preserved'. The collection of the different aspects of oral literature is in itself a laudable project. However, the uncritical revisitation of these linguistic artefacts, which are by definition archaic in character, again demonstrates an uncritical look at customs and tradition. In no way are teachers and learners being encouraged to weigh up traditional (tribal) customs against progressive modern democratic values. This unreflective internalisation of older values points to a conservatism that does not serve the children subjected to this approach.

The main aim of the syllabus document seems to be to provide an outline of the Junior Certificate examination as it only spells out the language areas each paper will assess. Paper I consists of grammar and literature. In the field of grammar the aim is to teach learners the logical construction of their language. Stress is laid on studying the language as it appears and making the learner aware how adaptable the language is within its own structure. The syllabus proceeds to list the parts of speech that will be examined and states that questions will as far as possible, cover all sections of the syllabus and that they will be clearly formulated so as to elicit short and precise answers rather than long and

involved explanations. The study of the various parts of speech must be correlated with the pupil's reading so as to be able to identify them at all times.

Similar to the isiZulu syllabus which prescribed one textbook, SiSwati teachers are also informed that 'due to the absence of a better book, *Sihlatiya SiSwati* is approved for all levels'. How students and teachers can benefit from working through the same book year after year, remains an unanswered question. The fact that the prescribed text was written by a linguist based at the University of Swaziland who studied isiZulu as a subject, links the study of SiSwati with Fundamental Pedagogics as the ruling paradigm of the time. In fact, as with language education policymaking in South Africa, academics in Swaziland play a crucial role in shaping notions of literacy in SiSwati.

It is also important to mention that throughout the syllabus document, learners are referred to as candidates, clearly indicating the heavy emphasis on examinations, instead of the psychosocial and cognitive development of the child.

7.3.4 Modern literature

The literature section of the syllabus gives the following list of prescribed books:

Fikile by E.A.B. Mkhonta (novel)

Inkhundla by E.T. Mthembu and C.T. Msimang (editors) (one act plays)

Nalu Lubhambo Lwami by T. Mgabhi (novel)

Indlela Ilukhuni by S.M. Magagula (short stories)

Tentile by S.M. Magagula (Drama)

Ligabazi by N.F. Mbhele, E.T. Mthembu and E.S.Q. Zulu.

The significant point is that one publisher published all the listed books, and points to a monopoly engineered by this educational publisher to the obvious detriment of the learners. Here books were written to order with no peer review or other quality control system in place. It seems to point to a situation where commercial interests, rather than educational motives drive the procedure.

Further scrutiny of this syllabus also points to the influence isiZulu authors have in SiSwati. Works edited by isiZulu authors such as Mthembu, Msimang and Mbhele's plays *Inkhundla* and *Zulu*, Mthembu and Mbhele's Poetry anthology *Ligabazi* are being prescribed. Commercial interests also become evident when books such as those written by the then full time editor for Macmillan publishers, S.M. Magagula, feature prominently on the prescribed list.

7.4 The SiSwati O'Level syllabus

The patterns evident in the Junior Certificate syllabus continue in the senior syllabus. The literature section is divided into modern and traditional literature. Four books are prescribed for modern literature section:

Umjingi Udliwa yinhlitiyo by S.W. Nsibande (Drama)
Inhlava by E.T. Mthembu, N.F. Mbhele and Zulu (Poetry)
Butjoki by D.B.Z. Ntuli (short stories)
Ubolibamba Lingashoni by E.A.B. Mkhonta (Novel)

The predominance of Macmillan publications is again significant. The drama, novel and poetry books are published by Macmillan, whilst *Butjoki*, which is an isiZulu translation is published by Shuter and Shooter.

7.5 Textbook development in SiSwati

In this section I will interrogate the process of textbook development in SiSwati and the role that these publications play in the shaping of an informal curriculum. I will also look at the selection of authors, the role of publishing houses and the evaluation and selection procedure for textbooks.

Farrell and Heyneman (1988:39) have argued that in relatively open political systems, textbook content often represents delicate compromises among groups with different

ideological positions or different religious beliefs and practices or States, whilst in one-party states, textbook content is usually carefully shaped to reflect the prevailing ideology⁷⁹. This observation is particularly poignant when SiSwati textbook development is measured against it.

My enquiry will also be informed by Kumar's (1988:97) argument that education systems differ in the mode of production and dissemination of textbooks as well as in the expected function and the actual use of textbooks by schoolteachers. He remarked that a sharp contrast exists between countries where corporate interests are involved in the textbooks business, and others where the state has overwhelming or even monopoly rights to publish textbooks. How textbooks are supposed to be used is a matter of considerable difference between systems in which state officials merely recommend suitable textbooks or publish a list of approved texts, leaving schools free to select the ones they consider useful, and other systems where specific textbooks are prescribed and no deviation is expected.

In the matter of how textbooks are actually used, Kumar (1988) distinguishes between two types of education systems. In the first type, the teacher has the freedom to decide what materials to use for developing a lesson. She is trained and expected to prepare her own curricular plan and mode of assessment. She has authority over what happens in the classroom, in what order, at what pace, and with the help of what resources, printed or otherwise. The second type of education system ties the teacher to the prescribed textbook. She is given no choice in the organisation of curriculum, pacing, and the mode of final assessment. Textbooks are prescribed for each subject, and the teacher is expected to elucidate it lesson by lesson in the given order. She must ensure that children

⁷⁹ Developments in South Africa for instance, exemplify Farrell and Heyneman's view that in one party states, sudden political shifts or regime changes can render suddenly obsolete a large part of a nation's stock of textbooks, requiring massive and expensive rewriting and production. According to the Revised National Curriculum document, 'South Africa's 1994 elections marked a turning point for education and curriculum development. The values in the new Constitution were starting point for removing apartheid from schools and curricula.

- A platform for developing a new sense of national identity, based on dignity and respect for all people, rather than on racial, gender and class division' (Revised National Curriculum Document, 2001:4).

are able to write answers to questions based on any lesson in the textbooks without seeing it, for this is what they will have to do in the examination when they face one.

The education system in Swaziland aligns itself with Kumar's (1988) second type in an extreme way. In the past, a number of major publishers based outside Swaziland were taking care of the Swazi market fully. With the establishment of Macmillan Boleswa to publish all materials for schools, these outside publishers were left only to supply tertiary materials. Macmillan Boleswa is the only international publishing company that services the Swazi market.

Prior to the arrival of Macmillan Boleswa in Swaziland, publishing was undertaken on a very small scale by different organisations such as government ministries, non-governmental organisations, and parastatals. In 1979, Macmillan entered into a ten-year renewable contract with government. Initially, Macmillan was publishing only primary-school textbooks; at the renewal date, secondary school textbooks were included. The publisher works closely with the National Curriculum Centre, where the schools' material designers are based.

Prior to their publication, the materials are tested in pilot schools. After publication they are then distributed to schools throughout the country using the National Curriculum Centre's distribution network. The company also publishes material that does not necessarily emanate from the National Curriculum Centre, which included secondary school textbooks and literature, and anthologies in SiSwati and English. Macmillan draws such manuscripts from members of the Umdlendla Writers Association and sometimes commissions writers. Macmillan also acts as an adviser to the material designers and organises workshops to train writers.

Textbooks for the primary school level therefore, are written at the National Curriculum Centre and then 'handed over' to one publishing house which has monopoly rights to publish them. These are the only textbooks prescribed for the primary level. The National Curriculum Centre prescribes one book for each grade level.

At secondary school level, the pattern is extended as the grammar book *Sihlatiya SiSwati* is the only language book prescribed. That is also the case in the literature section where prescribed books are those written by members of *Umdlondla WeSiSwati*, the Swaziland Writers Association and the SiSwati panel and published by the same publishing house.

According to the O'Level SiSwati syllabus for 2001, in the grammar section for instance, the following work is prescribed:

Sibanda, E.S. & Mthembu, E.T. (1999) *Sihlatiya SiSwati*. Manzini: Macmillan Publishers.

Teachers are also advised to *consult* the following books:

Dlamini, J.V. (1979). *Luhlelo LweSiSwati*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.

Nyembezi, C.L.S (1956). *Uhlelo LwesiZulu*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.

Ziervogel, D. & Mabuza, E.J (1976). *A Grammar of the SiSwati Language*. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik.

Doke, C.M. (1961). *A Textbook of Zulu Grammar*. Cape Town.

Shongwe, J.P. (no date). *Tinkondlo Tayitolo Netalamuhla*. Centuur.

M.M. Magagula (no date). *Likhetselo Lemagama eSiSwati*. Pietermaritzburg; Shuter and Shooter.

Although the list of books suggested for consultation gives a semblance of openness and choice, the fact of the matter remains that the one book purchased by all children is not open to negotiation. From the list of grammar books given at O'Level for instance, one deduces that only one textbook is prescribed for grammar in Swaziland. *Sihlatiya SiSwati* is written by Eric Sibanda, the Head of the African Languages Department at the University of Swaziland and a member of the SiSwati panel and Thembi Mthembu, the former Senior Inspector of SiSwati. It is clearly emphasised in the syllabus document that *Sihlatiya SiSwati* 'must be studied *thoroughly*'.

According to the secondary school curriculum developer, before the publication of *Sihlatiya SiSwati*, the only prescribed grammar book was *Luhlelo LweSiSwati*, written by the then Senior Inspector for SiSwati, J.V. Dlamini. However, she explained:

‘In 1994 after a needs-assessment study it was said parents and other government officials indicated to the SiSwati Senior Inspector, Mrs Mthembu the need for a language course which would operate along the grammar book, *Luhlelo LweSiSwati*. Mrs Mthembu was tasked with the duty of finding a suitable person to guide writers in the process of developing a SiSwati language course and a publishing company. Due to the lack of SiSwati experts in this area, A Zimbabwean publisher for Longman by the name of Mr. Isaac Mpofu was appointed. The next step was to find suitable authors. Again this became a very difficult exercise as there were no suitable individuals well versed in the area of textbook writing and no one knew what criteria was to be used in selecting the authors. The search for suitable authors to write the SiSwati course was turned into a creative writing competition which itself was a failure because the essays written were not up to standard, so in the end SiSwati panel members were approached individually to write the course. I remember very well, Mrs Mthembu came to see me and she made it clear that because I was a panel member there was no way I could refuse to do this job.’

According to the curriculum developer, the Ministry of Education selected authors from the SiSwati panel⁸⁰, the series *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka* (SiSwati is Developing) was published by Longman and then it was evaluated by the same SiSwati panel. The lack of a review system or critical assessment is evident from the historical process:

In fact, the books were prescribed before they were published⁸¹, as the project was the Ministry of Education’s baby.’

The panel members who became authors for *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka* were:

⁸⁰ This is a panel that is responsible for the selection of books to be prescribed for schools. It is made up of lecturers from the university of Swaziland, colleges, and members of the SiSwati boards and the SiSwati teachers’ Association. Examiners are also selected from this panel.

⁸¹ Amongst those who became authors was Dotty Tsabedze, then a curriculum developer with the Emlalati Development Centre⁸¹, Thabile Mbatha, a SiSwati lecturer at the Ngwane Teacher Training College, Mrs Joyce Sukumane, then a lecturer in the University of Swaziland, Mrs Esther Dlamini, the wife of J.V. Dlamini author of *Luhlelo LweSiSwati* and a SiSwati teacher at Waterford Kamhlaba College and a member of the SiSwati Teachers’ Association, Ms Daphne Mkhathshwa, a lecturer in the education department of the university of Swaziland, Mrs Mthembu herself, by virtue of being senior inspector was listed as one of the editors with Mr Mpofu.

Miss Thabile Mbatha (Ngwane Teacher Training College)
Miss Dotty Tsabedze (Emlaladini Development Centre)
Mrs Esther Dlamini (Member of the SiSwati Teachers' Association)
Mrs Thembi Vilakati (William Pitcher College)
Miss Joyce Sukumane (University of Swaziland)
Miss Thabsile Mkhathshwa (University of Swaziland).

The lecturers and officials on this panel, who all studied isiZulu as a subject, yet again became key role-players in shaping learning materials. It came as no surprise to learn that these writers also took turns in setting the J.C. and O'Level SiSwati external examinations.

As the intention of commissioning the writing of *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka* was for it to replace the grammar book, *Luhlelo LweSiSwati*, I enquired from one of the authors about the possible differences between the series they wrote and the grammar book. In her description of *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka*, she mentioned that the book was different from the grammar book in the sense that it was not purely a grammar book, but included all aspects of the SiSwati syllabus: comprehension, composition writing, grammar and traditional literature:

'Mr. Isaac Mpofu had strongly advised us against including grammar in the series, but we, as panel members, using our knowledge of the centrality of grammar in teaching SiSwati, insisted on including it. This resulted in minimal grammar in the text which was questioned by teachers and resulted in the text being rejected in some quarters. Teachers felt *Siyatfutfuka SiSwati* did not prepare children well for the final examination in which grammar carries much weight. There was also a huge emphasis on traditional literature in *Siyatfutfuka SiSwati*. For instance, we did not merely write proverbs and their meanings but we also made it a point that we elaborated on them and explained their origin and usage. There was also an attempt to use the communicative approach in the texts.'

The author's comment again underlined the lack of direction and understanding in the absence of a comprehensive, progressive curriculum. The influence of the teachers in

deciding the degree of grammar teaching demonstrates the need for leadership through due process; i.e. the supremacy of the curriculum, as well as the autonomy of the examination and evaluation.

In 1998 the *SiSwati Siyatfufuka* series was removed from the list of prescribed books because, as one of the authors was informed:

‘Macmillan publishers had signed an agreement with the Government of Swaziland to be the only publishing company responsible for publishing textbooks written at the government’s National Curriculum Centre. The publication of *Siyatfufuka SiSwati* had been unique in the sense that it was not written by curriculum developers, but by panel members during their spare time. These authors also received royalties from Longman Publishers. During the writing and publication of *SiSwati Siyatfufuka* Macmillan publishers only concentrated on publishing primary school textbooks and it did not enjoy the monopoly it presently enjoys in the country.’

The lack of a system open to healthy competition became even more acute when the educational publisher, Macmillan secured sole rights for textbook publishing in Swaziland. This lack of due process to the acceptance of a new series took a new turn when in 1999 the *SiSwati Siyatfufuka* series was replaced by Inspector Mthembu and a panel member’s grammar book *Sihlatiya SiSwati* (We analyse SiSwati). The author was quite frank about Mrs Mthembu's role in the project:

‘Mrs Mthembu is not really an author because she did not contribute to the writing of the book, but because of her position she was a door-opener for me, she acted as a liaison between me, Macmillan and the Ministry of Education.’

When I asked the author why he felt that there would be a need for a liaison person, he responded:

‘I wanted to write a book because I saw a need for a grammar book in the schools. However, I did not have the money to publish my own book. Fortunately, at the time when I wanted to write this book, teachers had expressed the need for a grammar book. When I went to Mrs. Mthembu she told me that I was God-sent. Now we had to find a publisher. She then took it upon herself to approach Macmillan

publishers and because she assured them that the book would be prescribed for schools, they easily agreed to publish it. You see, Macmillan is a profit-making company, it cannot publish a book until it is certain that the Ministry will prescribe it and it will make money. So Mrs Mthembu's name appears on the cover because she helped me a lot and she gets royalties for that. The other advantage was that Busi Simelane, the Publishing Manager for Macmillan is also a member of the SiSwati panel.'

The alarming lack of expertise and understanding of what progressive language education is all about becomes clear in this excerpt from a review of *Sihlatiya SiSwati* in the Government Magazine, *Swaziland Today*:

This new SiSwati grammar book comes with an approach that answers a number of questions which the SiSwati teachers had when teaching grammar in schools. This book does not treat words in isolation but all the examples are used in sentences, which means that it gives the students the importance of having grammar lessons to improve day to day language usage. The new book also teaches phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax of the SiSwati language. This then bridges the gap that has been existing between what was taught at secondary/high school and what is taught at college and university level. Having used this book, those students who want to pursue linguistics at university level would have no problem. This, therefore, will encourage a number of students to enrol for linguistics at university level, hence increase the number of SiSwati teachers in the schools (www.swazil.com February 19, 2001).

Apart from the outdated approach by this author, it is also ironical that a language approach devoid of pedagogical understanding of children's needs should be offered as an incentive for Swazi children to study further in SiSwati. Furthermore, one cannot help but to hear echoes of Professor Snyman, who said the following concerning the teaching of isiZulu at Matric level in South Africa:

We at the universities are looking forward in anticipation that we will in the future be enrolling well-trained students displaying insight in the mother tongue because now for the first time do we have a syllabus that enables pupils to bridge the gap to the university linguistics syllabus (1987:134).

So, to recapitulate, the procedure for the selection of the only prescribed SiSwati grammar book in Swaziland reveals that the SiSwati syllabus prescribed the book written, approved and published by members of the SiSwati panel. Or to quote one of the curriculum developer's words, *Sihlatiya SiSwati*, was 'prescribed before it was published.' The author who is not an educationist, but a linguist is tasked with the writing project. A semblance of choice is suggested by allowing teachers to consult other books by Shuter and Shooter and Longman, with one provision, i.e. *Sihlatiya SiSwati* "must be studied thoroughly". Only one publishing house is allowed by the government of Swaziland to publish school textbooks. The agreement between this publishing house and the government clearly represents a retrogressive step as it stifles and reverses progress in the development of SiSwati as a series underpinned by the communicative language approach to language teaching and learning, *SiSwati Siyatfutfuka* (SiSwati is Developing) is replaced with a purely grammar book, *Sihlatiya SiSwati* (We Analyse SiSwati).

A scrutiny of the broad procedure for SiSwati textbook development indicates that the process is negatively influenced by the monopoly rights awarded to one publishing company and its privileged position with individuals in the system. At primary level the National Curriculum Centre is the government arm tasked with producing prescribed textbooks. These books are then 'handed over' to the publisher for publication. Similarly, literature books written by members of the SiSwati Writers Association and the SiSwati Panel and published by the same company are prescribed for the secondary and high school. The production and prescription of SiSwati textbooks therefore aligns the system of education in Swaziland with Kumar's (1988) second type of educational dispensation which ties the teacher only to the prescribed text, which she must elucidate lesson by lesson in preparation for the examination set and moderated by the very people who have written textbooks. It is a system that charts a single route for textbook production and use.

Furthermore, it is ironical that the monopolistic rights enjoyed by one educational publishing firm serve to perpetuate the teaching of SiSwati in the tradition of Bantu education curricula.

7.6 Conclusion

The examination of the development of the SiSwati curriculum and textbook development produced the following insights and conclusions:

- The study showed a complete absence of a set of legal procedures regarding the relationship between curriculum designers, educational publishers, textbook writers and examiners. The way curriculum development is driven by textbook writers writing in a monopolistic context is deeply flawed and anti-educational in terms of the product.
- The absence of a strong and informed curriculum desk allowed textbook writers to fill the vacuum. At primary school level, where an irregular relationship exists between Macmillan publishers and National Curriculum Centre textbook developers and examiners, the syllabus document represents a mirror image of the NCC/Macmillan textbooks.
- At secondary and high school levels, where the syllabus in fact copies the structure of the external examinations, SiSwati panel members in collaboration with Macmillan publishers are key players in textbook development and examinations.
- The lack of a publishing system open to healthy competition works to the detriment of SiSwati children as nepotism and favouritism results in the prescription of books that are not peer reviewed. These books are methodologically and pedagogically out of date and unsuitable for use in this day and age.
- Linguists and not educators tend to develop textbooks thereby perpetuating a pattern inherited from the apartheid era.
- The undue influence of isiZulu scholars in the textbook and prescribe book market reflects a profit-driven sentiment that adds to the lack of quality and relevance that characterises these books.

In the next chapter, I intend to critically analyse elements of the prevailing ideology, driving language education in Swaziland and the competencies required from learners who study the prescribed SiSwati literature texts. This exercise will limit itself to the O'Level, the exit point.

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Chapter 8

The SiSwati language curriculum: An analysis of the cultural content, values and ideologies

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I critically examined the irregular relationship between SiSwati curriculum development, textbook development, textbook procurement and selection, and the examination process. The study revealed a curious set of power relations and a lack of due process. It further transpired that instead of the process being informed and driven by the desk responsible for curriculum development, that the converse was in fact the case: Textbooks, written within a monopolistic context, and not evaluated in any way, are cynically used to construct the 'curriculum' as well as the format of the external examinations. The latter, ironically is subsequently used to justify the entire process. In this self referential set-up a British based educational publisher who enjoys a monopoly publication rights has not demonstrated any resolve to exercise control over the quality of books produced. It therefore came as no surprise that the content, methodology and ideological orientation of these books reflect a state of mind that shows an uncanny resemblance to old apartheid style language textbooks, while the content reinforces the grand narratives of the Swazi royal house. The final outcome of this strange alliance is that there is no space for innovative new language textbook series.

I started my investigation of the body of prescribed literature with the hunch that the selection process will be flawed for much the same reasons as identified in the previous chapter: a lack of due process and transparency, a heavy ideological bias towards books that espouse traditional values and the purchasing of books from authors who are from the inner circle.

My aim in this chapter is to critically analyse the cultural competencies, values and ideologies embedded in SiSwati literature books⁸² (as well as the process of selection and procurement.) A thematic analysis⁸³ will be the approach used. A close critical reading of the values, ideologies and mindsets reinforced by the literature aspect of the SiSwati curriculum will also be measured against the most salient notions of literacy as identified in *Chapter 4*. I must mention however, that my familiarity with the Swaziland context and my experiences as both a learner and teacher of SiSwati proved invaluable in my analysis.

Before I embarked on an analysis of the literature books, I thought it necessary to find out more about the process of prescribing literature books. In an interview with the acting SiSwati co-ordinator he explained the procedure as follows:

‘In the writing of SiSwati literature books, there is no selection of authors but what happens is that members of the Swaziland Writers Association, *Umdlndla WeSiSwati* or anyone who has a piece of writing submits it to the publisher and they publish it if they see it fit. From time to time the publisher conducts workshops for individuals interested in creative writing. These individuals then write according to the publisher’s criteria and the books are then recommended for schools.’

The striking thing about this information was that instead of using established literature which has been reviewed and evaluated independently, reading materials were being produced on order. The lack of quality control implicit in this irregular procedure is self-evident.

When asked about the credentials of the authors of books on the prescribed list she explained:

⁸² The reason for my analysis of literature texts instead of other aspects of the SiSwati curriculum is that, a cursory look at some of these aspects such as compositions and comprehensions also reflects the very traditional treatment of language and culture. They continue to follow the conservative pattern of language education which is well imbedded in the literature aspect that was analysed.

⁸³ Thematic analysis is the classification of explicit and implicit themes as they occur.

‘I can say most of these people are creative writers. In the past, learners read isiZulu literature books, such that the first few SiSwati literature books that were written were immediately prescribed, such as *Maphindisiganga* written by Elias Mkhonta⁸⁴. Mkhonta has gone on to write other SiSwati books. The editors of *Inhlava* are not Swazis as you can see, boZulu and Mbhele, but what you notice inside the anthology is that most poems are written by Swazis. *Tentile* was written by Modison Magagula, who is now an editor for Macmillan.’

From the co-ordinator’s statement I concluded that similar to the prescription of the grammar book *Sihlatiya SiSwati*, in the literature section there is also no selection process, no peer review or other quality control system in place. Books are written to order with Mr. Magagula not only the writer of a much prescribed text, but also the selector and editor of his own book. Needless to say we are dealing with a similar situation where one publisher does the selection as well as the publishing. The fact that only SiSwati speakers can evaluate the manuscripts adds to the lack of transparency and control.

In my analysis of the cultural competencies and ideologies reinforced by these literature books, the notion of looking at books through two lenses, as described by Giroux (1985) was illuminating. In his analysis there exists two lenses: the instrumental or the ideological. The former would have ‘schools merely as instructional sites’ (Giroux in Freire, 1985:xiv) ‘which prepare the youth for participation in the demands of capitalist rationality and the imperatives of the market economy’⁸⁵ (ibid. xi).

The latter regards schools as sites of struggle where meaning and power relations are either reproduced in the mould of the dominant culture or transformed according to the voice of the individual (ibid: xiii, xxi, xxiii)⁸⁶. School textbooks, and here I wish to include prescribed literature, take on a vastly different function seen in this light,

⁸⁴ Elias Mkhonta, a teacher by profession later worked as the King's Private secretary. Amongst his duties was writing speeches for the King. He later became the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Justice, a position he held until he met his death.

⁸⁵ The function of textbooks here is to enskill in a technical sense.

⁸⁶ Giroux writes within the American education context, hence his foregrounding of capitalist values. In the Swaziland context, the patrimonial values induced by the autocratic system would be served by an instrumental approach.

especially due to the fact that they are regarded as central to educational discourse. (Altabach, 1983:315; Westbury in Elliot and Woodward, 1990:17; Neumann, 1980:71). From this perspective, textbooks are regarded as ‘one element in a socially organised instructional system’ (Scribner in Cole and Sticht, 1981:6), which in turn, forms part of a ‘complex social system’. In other words, textbooks ‘are not produced in a vacuum’ (Altabach and Kelly, 1988:6). Rather they

are at once results of political, economic, and cultural activities and battles and compromises. They are conceived, designed and authored by real people with interests. They are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources, and power (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991:1-2).

It is reasonable to expect that the books written for the prescribed market in Swaziland will operate within the political and ideological constraints laid down by the government.

In my reading of these texts several overlapping themes revealed themselves. By exploring each theme it is my intention to work towards a coherent and comprehensive picture of the values embraced by these texts.

- **The lure of the traditional**

As a pre-eminent education institution, the school largely determines the pupil's philosophy and view of life. The available texts in the school become an important source for them to draw upon as they construct their perception of reality. More so, if one considers Hartshorne's (1992:92) observation that students often regard texts as true, it becomes important to scrutinise the ‘truth’ as it is captured by these texts.

What is clear at the first reading of the two selected prescribed for the O’Level final examination is the widespread nostalgia for rural and traditional values in this society. In the books under scrutiny, the ideal Swazi society is presented as essentially traditional and pre-modern. The drama *Tentile* (written by an editor at Mac Millan) is a case in point: It depicts the life of a rebellious girl living a traditional setting who refused to be married off. Women in this play are housewives, their main role is to brew traditional beer and

perform household chores. Their husbands move from home to home in search of traditional beer, none of them seems to be working. Women still smear the floor with cow dung and when they sweep the floor, dust engulfs them, unless they sprinkle it with water. This suffocating setting is glorified by the author thereby entrenching highly problematic gender relations and an economic system that is not conducive to progress and wealth creation. It confirms a life style that has turned its back on modernity. Clara Reeve in Msimang (1986:33) evidently uncritically enjoyed the reality as depicted in the drama:

A picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves ... (1986:33).

The same pattern is evident in the novel, *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* which documents the misfortunes of a girl called Tobhini who disobeys her parents. It is also set in a rural area. Tobhini and her friend Phumzile fetch water from the river and they have to go and find 'imbuya' (*amaranthus hybridus*) or 'umsobo' (night shade) so that they can cook at home. Hardworking boys such as Sakhile till the soil, and others look after their fathers' cattle. Social expectations have already carved out the future of these children. Boys must work hard and marry the girls and the girls are being trained to be good housewives. It is for this reason perhaps, that 'societal delinquents' such as Tobhini, who chooses to go and work and later marry a white man, become ill fated. It is as though learners are being warned to depart from 'bad conduct' such as that displayed by Tobhini, who is presented as continually aspiring to a western and modern lifestyle. At a deep level the sentiments in the novel express the racist and anti-progressive sentiments of the author.

With the books set in rural areas, the aim seems to be to affirm traditional values. The literature books carry a longing for a traditional lifestyle, which learners must come to know and attempt to restore. Ironically this focus on rural settings and rural values has the opposite effect. Zungu (1998:38) in her study of isiZulu in KwaZulu Natal found that urban children often rejected the prescribed reading material and the Standard isiZulu in which these books are written. 'They regard[ed] it as old-fashioned, rural and backward'

1998:40). So, the author's destruction of Tobhini in *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* who shows a liking for 'western habits' such as polishing nails may in fact have the opposite effect as intended, i.e. that children will sympathise and identify with her instead of frowning upon her ways. The fact that Tobhini is in the end destroyed by the author is supposed to carry an unambiguous message for the young reader - that straying from traditional Swazi values comes at a price⁸⁷. Davis et al (2000:161) aptly capture the pre-modern conception of an individual in these terms:

If a citizen of a pre-modern culture [is] asked for a self-description, the answer would likely be in terms of relations and responsibilities ... rather than personal qualities ... questions of who one [is], what one [knows] and what one does [are] rarely, if ever, separated (2000:161) [brackets added].

The pre-occupation with duties and responsibilities in traditional Swazi society flies in the face of the multiliteracies needed for survival in a modern society. In fact it can be detrimental as it clashes with modern conceptions where practices devoted to self-awareness; self-fulfilment, self-concept, self-esteem, self-actualisation and self-efficacy are encouraged. They are not in line with critical literacies, which encourage the scrutiny and inspection of various texts (oral, written and visual) from different cultures. Because of the focus on the traditional and rural Swaziland context, learners are not being encouraged to become what Giroux has called 'border crossers' as they are not exposed to diverse cultural zones. SiSwati learners, as per the features of uncritical literacies, are indeed doomed by this kind of book to 'simply reflect on what previous generations have done, without questioning customary and habitual ways of acting and thinking.' They are also not being equipped to be multiliterate in response to the needs of the world as framed by the New London Group in the previous chapter.

⁸⁷ This propagandist mode of writing is reminiscent of some apartheid era prescribed literature. One prominent Afrikaans novel that was prescribed *ad nauseum* was 'Swart Pelgrim' (Black Pilgrim) by F.A. Venter. It tells the story of a man from Transkei who went to Johannesburg where he drifted from job to job until he became involved in criminal activities, which landed him in jail. Then he realised that city life was not for him and returned to the Transkei. The story line was in keeping with Nationalist Party propaganda of the time, that wished to see Africans returning to the 'Homelands'.

Durkheim's (1956:64-5) maintained that overall societal values for its citizens in the end shape educational goals. The idea is comforting as long as societal values can be described as progressive and life affirming. However, in the Swazi society which cherish so much values that act against the very carriers of that culture, the need to challenge and question is absolutely critical. As these writers merely reflect the values espoused by a deeply conservative society they in fact act as a brake on educational progress. However, in terms of giving siSwati children the social skills to cope in the paradigm of modernity, these works fail their readers completely.

The silencing of critical voices

The SiSwati literature books scrutinised can also be said to encourage people to support a repressive social order. In most of the literature texts studied, the predominant theme is the royal family. The poems, stories, proverbs and idioms have as their topics the accomplishments of previous and current kings. Deeds from those of famous kings such as King Somhlolo, who had a dream about the coming of Missionaries, King Sobhuza II who led the country to independence in 1968, to those of the present king, are the main themes. Royal ceremonies such as Incwala 'first fruit festival', Umhlanga 'Reed dance' etc are constantly elucidated and referred to during the study of SiSwati generally. The uncritical treatment of the political dispensation means the discouragement of inquiry about cultural traditions. These texts represent an unambiguous celebration of the royal tradition. This flies in the face of emancipatory literacies which are derived from a fundamental desire to be free from those constraints on human reason – constraints of authority, ignorance, custom, tradition and the like – which in Carr's (1995:115) view impede the freedom of individuals to determine their purposes and actions on the basis of their own rational reflections.

The books' strong focus on Swazi rituals and traditional ceremonies also position the country in the pre-modern category of states⁸⁸. Because of the emphasis on the dominant culture and traditions, subordinate groups contribute to their own domination by reifying the *status quo*. The social skills reinforced, lack critical dimension as they merely contribute to the strengthening of existing inequalities and established patterns of structural power. The state, as Gramsci (1971) has so aptly remarked, does not need physical force to spread its hegemony, but simply harnesses the school system at its disposal. The use of these prescribed books to contain the youth of Swaziland demonstrates Gramsci's point in a poignant way.

Freire maintains that the oppressed internalise a myth of domination to the extent that they identify with the oppressors: 'the oppressed find the oppressor their model of manhood ... they are one and at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised.' (Freire, 1973:32,33). They are also 'fearful of freedom ... they suffer from duality, that is, without freedom they cannot exist authentically, but they fear it' (Freire 1972:32). People in a closed society become in Freire's words, part of a culture of silence as they come to accept their domination as right and justifiable. And nothing seems to drive grand narratives home as the literature of a community in bondage.

The maintenance of gender inequalities and patriarchal customs

Gender relations and representations in texts potentially affect students as language learners and users (Sunderland, 1992:86). When children are repeatedly exposed to messages which, for example, denigrate women, they are likely to develop negative attitudes towards women. Similarly if children's literature and textbooks exclude or under-represent women, readers may conclude that these groups and individuals in them are not important members of the society.

⁸⁸ Such states are said to view knowledge as closely aligned with prayer, celebration, ritual, sacrifice and other acts of reference in practices that serve to root collective and personal identities deeply in the earth (Davis et al 2000:160).

Weiner (1994:112) and Samuel (1993:12-13) have also argued that texts are central in the reproduction of patriarchal relations and construction of femininity. From pre-school through graduate school, literature is the main subject that presents gender images and provides concrete models of manhood and womanhood.

What can be observed in SiSwati literature texts is not only the reinforcement of inequality, but also the absence of counter-hegemonies. Subordinate groups such as women and children, through the very forms of literacies reinforced by literature books contribute to their own domination. For instance, learners are taught that a woman's place is in the home (see Mabuza, 2001). It is in this regard that Freire has argued that the oppressed need to create a pedagogy of the oppressed which will challenge the hegemony of the dominant group. Or in Richard Rorty's language: people constantly need a new vocabulary in order to redescribe reality.

The drama *Tentile* for example, illustrates societal expectations of women and girls. Grown-up girls are anticipated to marry and have children. It is the mother's task to counsel her daughter as we see in the dialogue between Nkhambule, Tentile's father and his wife, LaMatsebula. When the play opens not only is the husband holding his wife responsible for pretending not to see the 'wrong' deeds of their daughter Tentile, but also the nature of their relationship is criticised. Nkhambule clearly has authority and power over his wife and the woman's position of minding the home and children is emphasised. Nkhambule is troubled by the fact that his wife is 'irresponsible' because she is not doing anything about their daughter's bad behaviour: He blames LaMatsebula in this manner:

You say she is grown? So you do you realise that? Then what have you done about it when Tentile is still at home doing as she pleases?

The idea here is that if LaMatsebula realises that Tentile is ready to be married off then she is failing in her counselling duties as Tentile is still not married. Not only does this conversation draw attention to the predestined role of a traditional Swazi woman, but it also brings to prominence societal expectations of a 'grown-up' girl. Nkhambule has pulled Tentile out of school because she is 'ripe enough' to marry. The suggestion here is

that Swazi society expects a girl to marry, as a result single women are referred to as 'labagugela emashiceni' (those who get old in traditional beer chaff). Tentile's mother has a duty to ensure that her child becomes what the society anticipates of every female. Nkhambule wants his daughter to marry Simelane and he says to LaMatsebula:

Talk to her and tell her I, her father, have chosen a man who will look after her well for the rest of her life. She will live happily. Simelane loves her.

LaMatsebula, Tentile's mother also has good wishes for her daughter in line with societal norms and values. She says:

My wish is to see Tentile marry so that I confirm that giving birth to her was not a waste of time.

Tentile's mother takes it upon herself to convince her daughter about societal norms regarding marriage. When Tentile wants to know whether her father is choosing a man for her because she looks desperate, LaMatsebula says:

No, my daughter, hear me well. It is not that we think you are desperate. It is just that my girl a grown-up girl such as yourself must be married. Her happiness and well being only show when she is a wife. Society does not recognise happiness at home. People usually say you have bad luck or you are one of those girls who just want to change partners and not settle down.

LaMatsebula proceeds to inform her daughter that she definitely does not have bad luck but then she wants to know from her why she is not becoming a wife. She asks her:

Why then are you not becoming a wife?

It is obvious that Tentile's parents are pressurised by societal norms. Her mother goes as far as saying:

Tentile, you don't know how embarrassed we are about the fact that you are still at home, not married ... bringing you up has brought us great joy,

but the high point of our joy will only come when you find a man to marry you, because it is then that people will see the good quality product of our hands which has been liked by a certain family ... that is what your father is trying to do, we do not want you to go against the world, but to conform to the wishes of society and respect the world by settling down with a man.

Tentile, as a girl in Swazi society is also taught that it is an embarrassment to have a child out of wedlock. When she comes home to report that she is pregnant, her mother asks her:

Now what will you become my child? Will you be called one who has thrown her legs apart?

In the novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* we encounter a girl, Tobhini, also the only child in her family. Again, this girl has to leave school as, according to some 'wise' men in the community, educated people do not normally marry:

Mkhandlo, her father then pulled her out of school before she could write the exam. Her father pulls her out because he saw that she was now too educated. Other men had also warned him about the dangers of over-educating a girl. They had told him that an educated girl normally fails to marry and at times they keep changing partners, embarrassing their parents, under the pretext of modernity.

The extract above not only highlights the role of the girl child in Swazi culture, but it also gives some idea of the anti-progressive ideas and values reinforced by this book. A careful study of this extract shows that it is only men who make decisions, yet emancipatory literacy skills are about equipping all individuals, male and female with skills to deal rationally with decisions and choices. Mkhandlo pulls Tobhini out of school and it is other men who advise him about the dangers of educating a girl. Girls in Swazi culture seem to be associated with dowry. Consider how Mkhandlo feels after heeding to advice from other men:

Mkhandlo thought and came to the conclusion that he was indeed in danger of not getting any dowry if he continued to educate this girl, and then Tobhini was pulled out of school and she just sat at home.

Boys, on the other hand have been presented in the novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* as dropping out of school because of reasons beyond their control. Consider for instance the reasons for Sakhile's exit from school:

Sakhile dropped out of school early. He dropped out when his father died.

Sabelo, Sakhile's best friend never had the opportunity to go to school because no one was going to look after his father's cattle. Even though Sakhile has only gone up to Standard 4, he is presented as very productive. He becomes a successful farmer in his community. The old agricultural model worked for him.

SiSwati prescribed literature can also be said to reinforce existing gender inequalities and patterns of structural power because it teaches learners that Swazi culture places more value on boys than girls. This is reflected in the drama *Tentile*, where Tentile is the only child at home. Both her parents show some bitterness about the fact that they do not have a son. At one stage LaMatsebula says to Tentile:

As for only having a girl, just one girl! Its like you have given birth for some other woman. As for me, I gave birth for whites.

The stigmatisation of being the mother of a girl only is quite evident. The author also reinforces racial prejudice by creating a character who is uncompromisingly against liaisons across the colour line.

Tentile's mother clearly regrets the fact that she has one child and it saddens her that the child is a daughter. According to Swazi culture, girls are not very valuable because they are expected to leave home to go and live with their in-laws and husbands. LaMatsebula sees her case as slightly unique because her daughter now belongs to whites as she is working.

Nkhambule also feels the same about Tentile. He says:

Is it right now for her not to be married and live in town? I wasted my time by giving birth to her. I wish I had a son; I would probably be sitting with grandchildren. But with this one! Will she ever have children, where, with whom? Never. Nx!

Tobhini in the novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* also receives very little appreciation for the support she gives her parents. One can only imagine the negative self-image impressed on girls by this scene. It further strengthens the self-congratulatory attitude present in boys from traditional homes. When a neighbour congratulates Tobhini's father for having such a supportive child, Mkhando can only say:

You are right, but if it were a boy, my life would be even better. But having a girl is useless because they will leave home and marry.

The excessive value placed on a baby boy has other serious implications⁸⁹. Unlike the progressive goals of literacy, where learners are expected to speak to cultural issues from a deep sense of the politics of their own context, SiSwati literature lessons become sites where learners merely absorb obsolete and harmful cultural practices. They are not equipped to unlearn the habits of their society that buttress them and prevent them from becoming questioning citizens. In *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Cameron (1992:9) asks the question: Why is language a feminist issue? In response to her own question she argues forcefully that it is impossible for girls to think beyond the linguistic constructs in

⁸⁹ Consider the following stories extracted from *The Times of Swaziland* of 1 July 2002 entitled 'In search of that elusive baby boy':

Shewula – Phineas Mbatha's desire to have a boy in the family has earned him more problems after his wife, already a mother of seven children excluding two who have since died, gave birth to triplets all being girls. The poverty-stricken, sickly and famine ravaged family has got 10 children. The birth of the triplets left Mbatha with a R500 debt. In a Swazi set up, the absence of a boy in the family is viewed negatively. In some instances, the woman's in-laws encourage the husband to marry a second wife with the hope that she would produce a son and an heir to his father's estate. The woman's family could also move in and provide another woman to the husband, usually a younger sister or niece to the wife. It is also with the hope that the sister or niece to the woman would conceive and give birth to a boy. ... The Mbatha family, after each pregnancy, has been nursing hopes that lying in Maria's womb could be a boy but the birth of a boy in the family remained elusive.

which they dwell. She stresses that change cannot be brought about by merely speaking against harmful gender practices, but to speak outside the structure.

The consequences of the seemingly authoritarian and undemocratic nature of Swazi society as portrayed in these texts become evident as children are equipped with 'good behaviour' and 'good habits', which in the Swaziland context are children who are obedient and uncritical. The themes and situations cited all point to an underlying agenda of social control couched in the language of ritual and ceremony.

It is not surprising to find situations in these prescribed books that violate the rights of girls. One such incident is the depiction of the custom of 'kwendzisa', where a father, upon realising that his daughter is old enough, finds a 'suitable' man to marry her. The drama *Tentile* depicts an incident, where Nkhambule, Tentile's father says:

I am going to marry off Tentile. It is only becoming a wife that will fix her up and stop her from misbehaving. I think Simelane is a man, he is well off. His children are well fed. He has lots of cattle. My daughter will have married well, she will become a wife, bear children and that will make her straight.

The extract above highlights three aspects of Swazi culture that constitute violent acts against the girl child. Firstly, with regard to the issue of 'kwendzisa', Nkhambule clearly spells out that it will 'fix up' Tentile. Tentile is not at liberty to choose a man that she loves. In fact the issue of mutual attraction is not even mentioned in this extract. Tentile is also not free to be a child. There is much societal pressure on her to marry. Certain men have indicated their interests in her and her parents are putting her under tremendous pressure. Consider this extract from a dialogue between Nkhambule's neighbour and LaNdlela, where Tentile is being referred to as if she was some form of merchandise:

I do have cattle even now; it is just that I am too old. Otherwise I would have gone to take Tentile. If I had more sons, I was going to take Tentile for one of them.

Tentile has been forced to leave school, yet under normal circumstances, a child her age should still be at school, but her society now wants her to become an adult.

Secondly, in compliance with Swazi traditionalists, a suitable man is one who is well-off, one who has cattle and is able to look after his wives and many children. Dowry is very important in Swazi society. Ndvuna describes Simelane, the man chosen for Tentile, in the following manner:

How can this child refuse such luxury? Not when Simelane looks after his family so well! It is not an issue that Simelane has two wives, there is never any noise coming from his homestead. His wives love each other like sisters. What do these children want?

Children studying this text internalise the idea that polygamy is normal and desirable. It does not bother Nkhambule that his daughter will go into a polygamous marriage but what gives him pleasure is that Simelane, the man chosen for Tentile, will afford to pay dowry.

Thirdly, the purpose of marriage in Swazi culture appears to be solely for bearing children. A woman who does not bear children is given derogatory names, such as 'inyumba'⁹⁰. Even Tentile's prospective husband, Simelane, has shown interest in having Tentile bear children for her. According to Nkhambule:

Even yesterday I heard Simelane say he wants my flower
Tentile to come and bear more flowers in his homestead so that
he can get cattle out of them. Tentile can be his wife.

The dangerous perception that children constitute wealth is being perpetuated by the play. The play goes against the grain of progressive family planning policies. It encourages unbridled breeding, resulting in related social ills. The relation between large families and the high unemployment figures in Swaziland has been firmly established.

Tobhini in the novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* also has almost similar experiences to those of Tentile. She refuses to marry Sakhile because she does not love him. She then goes to

⁹⁰ And yet again, there is no equivalent name for a male who does not have children because, according to Swazi culture, it is always the woman's fault when there are no children from a marriage.

work on a farm and she falls in love with a German. When she comes home to introduce her fiancé, her father becomes very irate. He does not want her daughter to marry a German because they (Germans) killed his father in a world war. He tells Tobhini:

Now listen to me carefully my child. It is clear that you did this not knowing the truth. My father, your grandfather was killed by the Germans in a world war. It does not end there; the bloodthirsty Germans, whom you today say are your in-laws, killed many Swazis.

Tobhini says:

I will not part with this man because I love him. You can kill me if you want to.

Tobhini is advised by her father to part with the German and when she refuses, she like Tentile, is disowned. Her father, after being advised by a traditional healer, slaughters a goat, digs a hole and buries the goat, saying he is burying Tobhini.

To a large degree then, one can say Swazi society as depicted here discourages dynamism, yet social dynamism is a critical quality of any healthy social body and attempts to structure communities around narrow conceptions of normality, imposed rules, and assigned roles rarely give rise to long-lasting collectives (Davis et al, 2000:151). In contrast, the most stable (and winning) communities are said to be the ones that allow the most play among their members. Davis et al (2000:151) however, are quick to warn that all regimes and ideologies are fraught with their own particular inequalities and injustices but “the most generative, creative, and stable communities are the ones in which the members are able to pursue their individual interests”. Communities, such as those portrayed by the literature aspect of the SiSwati language curriculum are said to fail to sustain themselves because they have to be perpetually controlled.

Swazi women - implementers of man-made decisions

The school has been described by Mqotsi (1953: 9) as 'a mirror of the society' in the sense that the system of education that prevails reflects the social and economic relations, the attitudes, outlooks, ideologies and prejudices of the society. In a democratic society for instance, the school is said to reflect democratic values. By the same token, the undemocratic and patriarchal fabric of Swazi society is reflected in the literature and it prevents individual from freeing themselves from cultural constraints and the attainment of true and emancipatory competencies.

In this section I would like to demonstrate how the oppressed tend to perpetuate their own oppression.

The drama *Tentile* for instance, brings to the surface the patriarchal and autocratic nature of Swazi society. In this play, the father, Nkhambule is the one who has power and authority; no one is to go against his word. This we see when he first discusses his worries about Tentile, his daughter, with his wife. Nkhambule scolds his wife for failing to do something about the fact that Tentile is 'ripe'. He then decides, without consulting his wife, that he will give Tentile to Simelane. LaMatsebula and Tentile can only take orders from him, they are not to question Nkhambule. When Nkhambule tells LaMatsebula that he thinks Simelane would make a good husband for Tentile, LaMatsebula only says:

I understand you very well father, your idea is brilliant. I hope and wish Tentile would agree.

Nkhambule does not think Tentile has any right to reject his idea. He says:

Would she reject it? Not when I am her father, whom she must respect, especially because this concerns her future, I don't want her to become a wanderer.

LaMatsebula concurs by adding that it is also her wish to see Tentile married. Significantly, Nkhambule then asks LaMatsebula to relay the message to Tentile. At this point there is no communication between father and daughter, because the cultural assumption is that she will agree and show respect and obedience. When she shows signs of disobedience and going against her father's word, LaMatsebula says:

I have been asked to bring this news to you and return the reply to your father. From what you have said so far, I do not think you have given your father the answer he expects.

In other words the matter is not open to discussion. Tentile is expected to say 'yes' and when she does not, he responds:

What? What is so difficult about telling a child what I, her father have said?

Tentile was supposed to be *told* and when LaMatsebula says she has rejected what she is told, Nkhambule thinks she is disrespectful and he does not understand why she rejects what she has been told. He threatens to beat her and when LaMatsebula pleads for Tentile, she carries the blame for teaching her daughter to disrespect. Nkhambule says:

I have decided, I have decided it will be good for her as my child. She never chose anything whilst I brought her up, I used to do everything for her and it was fine. Now what is she saying today? She wants to choose?

Tentile, like her mother, will wait to carry orders and decisions about crucial issues in her life from her husband⁹¹.

Tobhini's mother, in the novel *Ubolibamba Lingashoni* also does not have a say in the affairs of her home. When Tobhini "disobeys" her father, there is not a single instance

⁹¹ The moral of the story is that the father knows best and, those girls who go against their fathers' wishes are on a path of self-destruction

where we hear her mother making a contribution in the whole saga. Her father, on his own, decides to disown her in a traditional fashion and Tobhini's mother can only weep and concur:

(Tobhini's mother weeping). I also do not blame you for the stance you are taking because you are protecting us from our ancestors. Pain we cannot avoid because your blood is your blood. But this child invited this curse.

The analysed texts confirm a social trend, i.e. that women in traditional households tend to uphold discriminatory practices, thereby perpetuating their own state of subservience.

8.2 Conclusion

- In conclusion then these texts were written within the paradigm of traditionalism. They perpetuate old tribal values that tend to be deeply discriminatory regarding the role of women in society. The values internalised are anti-progressive in the sense that large unplanned families are being encouraged, perpetuating the cycle of poverty that characterises present day Swazi society.
- The somewhat irrevocable commitment of a girl to marriage and having children, followed by the payment of the bride price to the girl's family as reflected in these texts, continues to instil in learners the mindset that a woman is nothing more than a tool to be owned and sold on. She is born to be a possession, living to carry out the role of a servant and surviving merely to perpetuate customary practices. The gender inequality promoted in SiSwati literature books reinforces the belief that women, when allowed freedom to choose their own destiny, will invariably follow a path of self-destruction. Thus allowing gender equality and female independence is not just threatening to the male ego, but actually threatening to the very fibre of traditional society.

Chapter 9

Teachers and learners' perceptions of SiSwati in the pedagogical context: Empirical findings

When a language dies, it does not simply fade away due to old age. Sometimes, death comes to a young language. In all cases, the extinction is due to the supplanting of the old by a new language with social and political prestige. ... In language murder, a socially prestigious language gets used in more and more circumstances, so that previously bilingual speakers have little opportunity to practise the old language. Younger speakers tend to forget its form and constructions, either omitting crucial endings, or utilising those that coincide with forms found in the new language. In brief, language death is a social phenomenon, and triggered by social needs. There is no evidence that there was anything wrong with the dead language itself: Its essential structure was no better and no worse than that of any other language. It faded away because it did not fulfil the social needs of the community who spoke it (Aitchinson, 1986:221).

9.1 Introduction

It is the last sentence of Aitchinson's comment above that struck a chord in me. And more recently, Skutnabb-Kangas' concept of 'linguistic genocide', where she advocates that the disappearance of languages can be blamed on formal education and mass media and the fact that English is a 'killer language', also came to mind and raised these questions for me: to what extent does the content of the SiSwati experienced at school fulfil the *social needs* of the children? To what extent is the way SiSwati is being taught instrumental in the evident demise of the language in almost all the important domains of usage? As this study progressed I increasingly felt that the educational dispensation, that should be responsible for the psychosocial development that normally takes place through the home language, was unwittingly in the process of committing linguistic genocide. It has also reminded me of the maxim that certain cultural habits and perceptions can harm the very people who uphold and practice these constructs.

In the previous chapters I critically examined both the historical and the current process of SiSwati curriculum development. The historical overview in *Chapter 5* highlighted both the detrimental effect of the unsevered and problematic umbilical cord between SiSwati and isiZulu and the role and legacy of Fundamental Pedagogics on present SiSwati literacy practices. It was established that as a result of the close proximity of SiSwati to isiZulu, as well as the educationally undesirable involvement of isiZulu academics in SiSwati at school level, the apartheid ideologically informed so-called “scientific approach” to language education which underpinned isiZulu literacy practices has unwittingly and indirectly been channeled into SiSwati language education practice.

An analysis of the process of textbook development in SiSwati highlighted the legacy of a grammar approach to language teaching introduced by isiZulu academics. Further hurdles pertaining to a transparent SiSwati curriculum development process were seen to be a direct result of the lack of a political will as well as a lack of a professional know-how in developing a comprehensive curriculum policy document. It transpired that a range of failures should be listed as contributing to the present dilemma. Primarily, though, it turned out that an irregular blending or overlapping of professional roles created a situation where responsibility for curriculum development, textbook development and external (exit) examinations as a matter of course would emanate from the same official desk. Added to this unconventional situation, was the arrangement with one educational publisher to exercise a monopoly in the publication of textbooks in SiSwati. This effectively closed the door on healthy competition amongst a range of publishers keen to enter the market. In interviews with the various role-players, it also transpired that a deeply conservative view of language education was driving the process. The in-depth analysis of SiSwati prescribed literature books in *Chapter 7* confirmed that in the teaching of SiSwati, traditional values, informed by political interests of the monarch and the power elite, as well as the all-encompassing patriarchal mindset that drives decision-making at government level influence the curriculum.

Having established the process of curriculum development in SiSwati, the lack of textbook choice and the outdated nature of literacy practices in this language, my hunch

was that this state of affairs in all likelihood had an adverse influence on the attitudes of teachers and learners towards SiSwati. In this chapter then, the aim is to empirically explore these attitudes and perceptions. I will look at views towards SiSwati both as a language and a school subject in Swaziland.

This chapter then presents and discusses the data generated from classroom observations, teacher interviews and learner responses to a questionnaire in Grade 11 classrooms of six high achieving high schools in Swaziland. As already set out in *Chapter 1*, the fieldwork was done in September to October 2000. Nine teachers were interviewed and 290 learners responded to the questionnaire 3 (see appendix for questionnaire).

9.2 Sources of negativity towards African languages and the possible causes

In order to frame my empirical work, I will look at some of the arguments that have been advanced for some of the negative attitudes towards African languages in general and hypothesise how they might manifest themselves in the Swaziland context. I would like to begin my exploration by looking at the work of Adegbija, a scholar whose research in this area revealed an all-pervasive feeling of inferiority towards ex-colonial languages.

In his book *Language Attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa: A socio-linguistic Overview* (Adegbija, 1994) attempts to provide reasons why there are disproportionate attitudes of superiority towards European languages in sub-Saharan Africa, while there are attitudes of low esteem and inferiority towards indigenous African languages. His explanation for this state of affairs is that European languages are generally accepted as the languages of the conquerors of Africa, and as such are accorded some aura of superiority. Moreover, the European masters always pursued very aggressive language policies in their colonies, which left no doubt in the minds of the conquered peoples that European cultures and languages were superior to those of Africa. The devastating effect of these aggressive policies is that in most sub-Saharan African countries, the indigenous languages have been either under-utilised or completely excluded from important spheres of public

communication, such as being used as official or national languages, in the mass media, or as media of instruction in schools.

In addition to the causes mentioned by Adegbija (1994) there is a widely held perception that negative attitudes towards African languages also stem from the fact that these languages are in a relatively underdeveloped state, that most have no literary tradition of note, and that little in the line of printed media appears. In the South African context the abuse of African languages within the framework of the apartheid system created a deep-seated love-hate relationship towards the mother tongue⁹².

However, my research in the history of SiSwati curriculum development suggested that the Swaziland specific context added another dimension to the abovementioned problems over and above those that are common to most African language educational contexts.

9.3 Attitudes towards SiSwati

In Swaziland, English and SiSwati are the official languages. English is the medium of instruction in schools and it also dominates in the media industry. There is only one SiSwati newspaper – *Tikhatsi TemaSwati* (The Times of Swaziland), which is published once a week. A low readership is cited for not publishing it as a daily newspaper. It is perceived as a paper read by the less sophisticated sector of society.

What is not clear, however, is whether the mundane tone, and its adherence to the official line, is not a factor in its low readership.

English does not only dominate the media, but also other spheres of Swazi society. Even though SiSwati is one of two official languages, government officials such as the police at times address the public in English. For many people it is preferable to speak 'broken English' than SiSwati. Code mixing English and SiSwati is also considered a sign of being 'literate'.

⁹² For a further analysis of the causes for negative attitudes towards African languages, see Mahlalela-Thusi (1999).

In the education sector which is the main focus of this study, Dlamini (2001:54-5) has also observed that the ministry of education itself contributes to the low status of SiSwati as a subject. Teachers of SiSwati are being held in low regard. There is also the perception that ‘anyone’ who speaks SiSwati can teach it.

The content and methods employed in teaching SiSwati, as it has been earlier discussed, also worsen the situation and with the introduction of languages such as Afrikaans, French and Portuguese in some schools in Swaziland, many learners are opting for these instead of SiSwati.

Dlamini (2001:55) also pointed out that as long as SiSwati is not a subject that has to be passed, like English or science, it would continue to be undervalued. Whilst I agree with her point, it is also true that the meagre and outdated content of the SiSwati syllabus, cannot earn it the status of a passing subject.

Pupils expressed their lack of respect for their own language in an emphatic way. In response to the question asking learners to rank SiSwati in terms of importance to them, 77% stated that they considered it the least important subject while only 23% of the respondents felt that it was a very important subject.

The most often cited reasons given by learners for their negative responses were the following (unedited):

- *I don't like SiSwati because I don't really use SiSwati these days. The thing we learn used to be used 20 years ago now it is simple SiSwati and we don't speak it that much at home and at school.*
- *I don't like SiSwati because in our school it is looked down upon.*
- *I don't understand grammar.*
- *I don't think SiSwati will anyway be useful to me in any way e.g. there is no job that requires SiSwati – so what's the use?*

- *In terms of importance I don't think it's important because I have never heard anybody say he was helped by doing SiSwati. I certainly never pass it.*
- *I don't enjoy speaking or using SiSwati as my means of communication. I even fail to read it fluently.*
- *I find it boring to study because it is my mother language. I am able to speak it and also able to write it.*
- *It's the topics we learn. There are more of those that do not need us to apply in life than those that help us.*
- *We study SiSwati only because we want credits and we want to pass.*

A scrutiny of teachers and learners' responses revealed the following about SiSwati:

SiSwati's low socio-economic currency

Learners felt it was not important for them to learn SiSwati because 'they can speak the language', and after all '[they] have never heard anybody say they were helped by doing SiSwati.' Other remarks echoed this feeling that it is quite superfluous to learn the language. Here are some remarks in similar vein: 'SiSwati does not teach us anything that we can use today', 'We hardly speak SiSwati at school and at home' and 'no career requires one to speak SiSwati.' It is hardly surprising that they seldom read, listen to music and radio in SiSwati as Figures 12 and 13 show. In school C, one learner asked the SiSwati teacher if there was any job that required SiSwati except for SiSwati teaching. The teacher could not answer the question. The student was visibly angry. The teacher turned to the me and said:

'Befika banjena-ke ka form 4, but don't worry they will come around. By the time they get to form five batabe basitsandza SiSwati.' (This is how they are when they come to Grade 11, but don't worry, they will come around. By the time they get to Grade 12, they will have fallen for SiSwati)

The extent to which their interest in Grade 12 is integrated or merely instrumental, i.e. to improve their grades, remains an open question.

The general perception amongst learners is that SiSwati is not important for their future, it is a stagnant language and it does not equip them with the necessary life skills. As these students have never been exposed to a syllabus and textbooks based on critical literacy skills, their sense that studying SiSwati has no validity, is quite reasonable. The grammar based curriculum created an atmosphere of apathy and loathing for the mother tongue. In contrast, they ranked Science subjects and English very highly as they were said to be important for their career prospects, after all, '[they] have never heard anybody say they were helped by doing SiSwati.' The legacy of the high status attributed to English and the general perception that the content of SiSwati is irrelevant, seem to drive their attitude towards their mother tongue.

The archaic and stagnant image of SiSwati

The impression that the language lacks dynamism and rejuvenating qualities shone through in most conversations with teachers. Besides the fact that learners say '[they] don't really use SiSwati these days', Mr. Hlatshwayo's perception that the language lessons perpetuate an archaic corpus of language used twenty years ago sums up a certain sense of desperation:

'I can call the problem stagnation, it seems the development of SiSwati is not clear, it is stagnant, so that is a problem as it conveys the culture. Culture, particularly Swazi culture does not encourage children to show initiative. It is the traditional things which are stagnant and people are quick to say 'this is un-Swazi, in Swazi culture this is what we do' and then children who are exposed to other cultures which encourage certain things, we then say it is un-Swazi. So instead of being helpful to a child, SiSwati language and culture become a hindrance. Swazi culture does not encourage child development, so that is problematic.'

Unlike the views of Adegbija cited earlier who put the blame for the negative attitudes towards African Languages squarely on European language intervention, Mr.

Hlatshwayo advocates that it is stagnant Swazi culture which should shoulder the blame. In his opinion, SiSwati as a subject is 'trying to say this is how education was in Swaziland in the past'. The proverbs, riddles and traditional stories, in his view, only help remind children of what life was in the past and it is not helpful at all. In his own words, 'it is all outdated now.' There is also an avoidance on the part of SiSwati on everything that proves to be un-Swazi. In other words, only what is pure SiSwati language and culture finds its way into the curriculum.

The fact that traditional Swazi culture is the bedrock of SiSwati curriculum values is directly linked to this sense of desperation. The curriculum then is regarded by this correspondent as an induction of children into the ways of life of a rigid Swazi society. This comment should be read against the general perception amongst cultural theorists that some cultural habits may in fact be bad for those who uphold and practise them. Even though some aspects of the Swazi way of life have been seen to be detrimental, they continue to influence SiSwati literacy practices. This to a certain degree, seems to suggest that a change towards a progressive language curriculum would mean changing Swazi culture and vice versa⁹³.

The introduction of archaic concepts by SiSwati teachers was aptly demonstrated when I asked the SiSwati teacher in one of the schools about the interconnectedness between SiSwati literature and culture, she responded by saying that she found it important for children to know about issues such as '*kwendzisa*', a situation where a father marries off his daughter as they still happen.

⁹³ For as Rorty (1989) has written, radical change in society occurs not so much as a result of argument or an act of will, but when people change their way of thinking and talking about things, when they lose "the habit of using certain words and gradually acquire the habit of using others" (1989:9). According to Rorty, it is the human "talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, that is the chief instrument for cultural change (ibid: 7). The idea behind Rorty's notion here is that with written language that has effects on the spoken medium, the intention is not so much to replace vocabulary, but to allow individuals to re-describe things in new ways "until [they] have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of non-linguistic behaviour, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions" (ibid:7). Rorty's assertions are very much in the Wittgensteinian tradition of language. Wittgenstein says sometimes you have to withdraw an expression from the language "to send it for cleaning – and then you can put it back into circulation" (1998:44e).

The statement by the teacher above confirmed the detrimental nature of traditional cultural practices, which however, continue to be internalised in schools, instead of being critiqued.

The extent to which learners have internalised old customs was evident in one school when I asked a group of learners to comment on the fate of Tentile in the prescribed drama of the same name⁹⁴. My question was whether Tentile deserved her fate, and the children in chorus fashion shouted 'YES'. The thought crossed my mind that they wanted to please me, but the response was simply too spontaneous. This to me reflected the general psychosis dominant in SiSwati classrooms and reinforced by archaic texts. It was not a curriculum aimed at societal renewal, but the maintenance of the *status quo*.

Kelly (1989:36) aptly explores this problematic approach to curriculum development. He advocates that basing the content of the curriculum on culture 'creates more problems than it resolves' (1986:36). Indeed, what one sees in the Swazi context is that children are taught about 'what life was like in the past' as Mr. Hlatshwayo stated. There seems to be little focus on the learners' present circumstances. Ms Mlotsa, a SiSwati teacher at school A, attempting to justify the rural settings of most SiSwati literature said:

'[The learner] reads and gains new knowledge so that if in future they are required to work in rural areas, then they will not experience any problems ... children learn that even if there could be nothing wrong with something in one context, it could be completely unacceptable in a different context.'

Ms Mlotsa's argument is based on the dangerous assumption that curriculum should reflect the values and perceptions of the most conservative section of the community. It also brings to prominence the generation gap as well as the cultural discrepancy evident in classrooms. It appears as though the present SiSwati curriculum is designed to cater only for problems that arise when modern children will be confronted with a traditional

⁹⁴ Tentile tells the story of a girl who apparently brought misfortunes upon herself by refusing to be married off.

setting. There is little concern of how the curriculum may fail the rural, traditional child who is confronted by a bewildering modern culture and environment.

Again Kelly's (1989:37) warning is applicable: that it is dangerous to base a curriculum on culture as 'in these modern times it is clear that no one pattern of life can be called the culture of that society.' Furthermore, 'most societies are far from static entities and this implies that one feature of their culture is that it is changing, evolving and developing' (ibid. 37). Indeed, in Mr. Hlatshwayo's view, basing the curriculum on existing cultural traditions, learning proverbs, riddles and traditional stories only helps remind children of what life was and what they intuitively want to get away from⁹⁵.

In an interview with a curriculum designer from the National Curriculum Centre, it transpired that the SiSwati panel, a body that evaluates and recommends SiSwati textbooks rejects books that do not promote Swazi culture. I was informed that

'Writing a textbook that ignores Swazi culture becomes a waste of effort ngoba ema members epanel avele ayibuyise kuwe atsi calela phasi.' (*Panel members throw it back at you and ask you to write it again*) (Personal communication with Patricia Lukhele – English Curriculum Developer for the Secondary schools).

It appears as though teaching SiSwati is equivalent to teaching culture. Indeed, Ms Mlotsa lamented the fact that Swazi children were deviating from their culture and it was the role of the SiSwati curriculum to teach it to them.

Basing the curriculum on culture and politics is not unique to Swaziland only. In South Africa, Bantu education, whose language component served as a framework for the SiSwati curriculum was a case in point. Kallaway (1984:8-9) aptly points out that the 'colonised

⁹⁵ According to him, children now need practical things, something they will see in real life in their environment. 'But proverbs and all the rest, there is really no time for that, children do not have time to quiz each other, they watch television and play computer games. These things are all outdated now, we need to replace them and move on.' In all fairness, teachers such as Mr Hlatshwayo are on the receiving end of a process that is designed without their input.

peoples of Southern Africa were not simply conquered in a military sense; did not only lose their political independence; were not just drawn into new systems of social and economic life as urban dwellers or wage labour. Though all these aspects of the process of colonisation have great importance, the key aspect to be noted is that it also entailed cultural and ideological transformation in which schools were major agents'. Kallaway (1984:175) then quotes the Eislen report which stated that '... Bantu practice must recognise that it has to deal with a Bantu child i.e. a child trained and conditioned in Bantu culture, endowed with a knowledge of a Bantu language and imbued with values, interests and behaviour patterns learned at the knee of a Bantu mother. These facts must dictate to a very large extent the content and methods of his early education.'

From the Eislen report one deduces the fact that African languages curricula developed within the constraints of Bantu education were ideologically censored, devoid of provocative ideas, intellectually and emotionally barren and only focused on rural stereotypes as the process of Black urbanisation was denied and countered on all fronts by the government of the time. The curriculum also focused on linguistic patterns to some rigid, artificial standard. For speakers the approach and content of African languages created frustration and resistance to their own languages. As it has been established in *Chapter 7*, the ghost of the Eislen ideology is still roaming through the SiSwati curriculum in Swaziland. Even though there has been a shift from teaching isiZulu to teaching SiSwati, there seems to be very little ideological transformation of the curriculum. During my fieldwork, I was shocked to learn that learners were still using the same textbooks I had as a student fifteen years ago.

Grammar as an end in itself

Both learners and teachers constantly mentioned the difficult and abstract nature of grammar. Ms Mlota confessed that even though she may want to teach some 'interesting things' in SiSwati, she found herself spending a substantial amount of her time concentrating on grammar, as it carries a lot of weight in the examination. Learners found '*kuhlahlela*' (dissecting the language) extremely difficult and boring and teachers

found it very hard to teach. A teacher in school C expressed the boredom of teaching the same thing over and over again. She indicated that she had been teaching her students from Form 1 up to Form 3 where they wrote the external examination. She was presently taking them at Form 4 and she had started teaching them the same content she taught earlier from scratch as the same textbook was prescribed. When teachers were asked the difference between the Junior Certificate SiSwati exam and the O'Level one, most of them said it was very similar, it was the same grammar and the same traditional literature. What differed were the literature books studied.

The same assertions were made by the teacher at school F. She remarked that at times she felt that the students hated her:

‘Phela vele bomngamu kufana nekutsi nenyanya mine because naningibona ngita lapha nivele ninxate, nitsi nango asatosenyanyisa.’
(Of course my friends, you now hate me because when you see me appear you all **sulk**).

I asked learners why they had such negative attitudes towards grammar and one sitting very close to me asked ‘*kwani?*’, meaning ‘what is it for?’ The whole class was arguing against the learning of grammar and the teacher tried to explain to them that ‘*phela bona bafundzile kunabogogo* so they must be able to understand the language better’ (*they were educated so they needed to know the language better than elders who never went to school*). One student emphasized her hatred of grammar when she stood up and said:

‘Ngiyayenyanya madam I-grammar.’
(Madam, I really hate grammar).

The teacher then turned to me and said:

‘Angati kutsi batawusitwa yini these people because I-grammar carries a lot of marks, nabenta njena kusho kutsi abayindzawo.’ (*I don't know what is going to help these people as grammar carries a lot of marks, when they do like this it means they are not going anywhere*).

This teacher's helpless retort was to remind them that a knowledge of grammar would influence their examination performance. The focus on the instrumental rather than the integrative aspects of education is sadly evident.

The induction into traditional Swazi culture: growing resistance

The traditional attributes within the language itself also proved to contribute to the negative attitudes of learners towards SiSwati. Learners, especially those from urban schools felt they were expected to recall step-by-step, traditional ceremonies that they did not experience first hand, such as the *Umhlanga* (reed dance), *Incwala* (First fruit festival), *Butimba* (the royal hunt) etc. Most learners said they were not exposed to these ceremonies and found it hard to memorise and regurgitate their procedures in the examination. Furthermore, the terminology linked to these occasions was unfamiliar to them as it was not part of their discourse. These perceptions are not very different from the findings of Zungu (1998) in KwaZulu Natal, where urban children were reported to reject the prescribed reading material and the standard isiZulu in which these books were written. They regarded it as old-fashioned, rural and backward. Indeed, one can say SiSwati has not developed in step with the needs of the speakers who live in urban areas. There seems to be resistance to the development of other varieties that deviate from the archaic, written standard.

Dlamini (2001:81) also made the following observations about the attitudes of learners towards traditional literature: 'learners seem not to enjoy the subject – they cited the traditional values enforced in this subject in relation to contemporary realities, the vulgarity of the language used in some genres, the obscurity of the figurative language especially in oral poetry and the informality of the lessons as some of the distractions that put learners off. Hence they looked bored, some angry and yet some with an I-do-not-care attitude ... some of the learners therefore believe this subject is useless, outdated and not related to modern life'. Dlamini's findings regarding traditional literature hold true for SiSwati teaching and learning in Swaziland.

The legacy of English.

The legacy of English in the Swaziland context also contributed substantially to the low status of SiSwati. But various studies point to the fact that this factor holds sway in most Sub-Saharan African countries.

English is indeed the most dominant language and operates as a common medium for international communication. In Swaziland it is one of two official languages. However, because it is the most dominant, English is also the “hegemonic” and ‘neocolonialist’ language, creating not only the structure of linguistic and communicative inequality and discrimination between speakers of English and speakers of other languages, *but also indirect rule over many aspects of their lives*. The indirect rule of English also manifests itself in the Swaziland context, as the concomitant culture has a supreme allure for African communities. In this regard Kachru (1986) has written that the linguistic power of English is an alchemy:

English is considered a symbol of modernization, a key to expanded functional roles, and an extra arm for success and mobility in culturally and linguistically complex and pluralistic societies ... [English] permits one to open the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science, and travel (1986:1)

In the first instance we could say English dominates as the ‘language of globalisation’⁹⁶. Indeed in the Swaziland context for instance, English permeates all facets of life, education, entertainment, etc. Pennycook (1994) also points out the interrelationship between the dominance of English and the structure of global relations as follows:

⁹⁶ (Tsuda: http://www.tsuda.org/conferences/langg_hon/papers_y_tsuda.html, 2000/11/09). Tsuda says While the dominance of English as neocolonialism occurs at the level of international interpersonal communication, the dominance of English as globalism operates at the level of international mass communication which involves the issues such as cultural and media imperialism, Americanisation of global culture, McDonaldisation and Dallasization of the society, the unequal flow of international news and information, the dominance of English operates as a means of promoting globalisation. The dominance of English doubtlessly serves to facilitate globalisation. Globalisation, in turn assumes and encourages the use and dominance of English. In other words, the dominance of English is a reflection of the structure of global relations.

Its widespread use threatens other languages; it has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress; its use in particular domains, especially professional, may exacerbate different power relations and may render these domains more inaccessible to many people; its position in the world gives it a role also as an international gatekeeper, regulating the international flow of people; it is closely linked to national and increasingly non-national forms of culture and knowledge that are dominant in the world; and it is also bound up with aspects of global relations, such as spread of capitalism, development aid and the dominance of North American media (1994:13).

The dominance and legacy of English are clearly visible in the Swaziland context. English is accorded a higher status because it is directly related to the upward mobility of individuals. Time and again, learners mentioned that they found SiSwati useless as it would not help them in their career prospects. English, on the other hand, is considered a high status language, associated with accessing information, city life, a good education, good career prospects and access to the world outside Swaziland.

A SiSwati teacher in school D in Swaziland said:

‘... because we now live in an integrated society I can say SiSwati is not useful because even in our homes it is very rare to find people living a Swazi lifestyle and speaking the language. If you want to strictly live a Swazi lifestyle and speak SiSwati then you will soon be isolated, even your neighbours will not live a Swazi lifestyle, they live the life of today. This SiSwati, we only want to know it so that we can say ‘I know this thing’ as to where you will use it is slightly problematic.’

According to this teacher, children now need practical things, something they will see in real life in their environment. ‘But proverbs and all the rest, there is really no time for that, children do not have time to quiz each other, they watch television and play computer games. These things are all outdated now, we need to replace them and move on.’ Teachers are evidently on the receiving end of a process that is designed without their input.

The SiSwati teacher in school C also mentioned in an interview that at some point last year she felt ‘this sudden passion to uplift the status of SiSwati in the school’, but she soon remembered that ‘*makenta loko utabe unyatsela siNgisi intfo leyingoti kakhulu* because *siNgisi* is a passing subject, *hhayi siSwati*’ (...if I were to do that I would be stamping on English, a very dangerous exercise as English, and not SiSwati, is a passing subject).

The students in school C also said they did not like SiSwati because it was held in low esteem in the school. The teacher went on to lecture them about how ‘we had all been brainwashed by English and western ideas.’ She herself used English and SiSwati during SiSwati lessons because as she put it ‘[she] wanted to help them, *ngiyani enricha* because *ngifuna nati lesiNgisi*’ (I am enriching you because I want you to know this English).

In this regard, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas remind the reader:

The rapid spread of English is not without costs. Those who fail in the quest for the alchemy of English see their life chances reduced. Those who become proficient in the alien language may sacrifice the language of their parents and their own culture in the process. The dominant language partially displaces other languages, through exclusive use of that language in certain domains (for instance in the media, or in the modern sector of the economy), and may replace the other languages totally (cited in Phillipson, 1988:342).

The overwhelming power of English and the negative attitudes towards SiSwati in all likelihood have an impact in the way the two official languages of the country are used. In order to establish the domains of SiSwati and English in the Swaziland context, I administered a questionnaire in which learners were asked how often they used the two languages in different domains, ranging from private domains such as the home and family to public domains which include communicating with government officials. In the next section I would like to explore the response of learners to the section of the questionnaire pertaining to the domains of English and SiSwati as these two languages appear to serve different, almost predictable domains.

9.4 The domains of SiSwati and English

The general perception in Swaziland is that SiSwati and English exist in a dynamic relationship towards each other. Using Appel and Muysken's (1987:23) observation that bilingual speakers tend to utilise two languages in different domains and harnessing Hudson's (1980) notion that two varieties of a linguistic system termed H (high) or formal, and a vernacular L (low) have different functions, my impression of the relationship between English and SiSwati is that they have similar functions to H and L varieties of the same language.

As I said earlier, I administered a questionnaire amongst 415 Grade 11 learners in order to establish the following: What are the respective domains of SiSwati and English in the broader social context and what are the implications for curriculum development, textbook content and evaluation of SiSwati at school level? This shaped the nature and content of the survey of learners' use of SiSwati and English. Learners were asked to indicate the frequency of SiSwati usage in the following 14 communicative contexts:

1. Speaking with friends
2. Speaking with older members of the family
3. Speaking with younger members of the family
4. Speaking with public officials
5. Speaking when shopping
6. Speaking with teachers
7. Reading books, magazines etc
8. Writing to friends
9. Writing to family
10. Writing assignments
11. Listening to radio programmes
12. Watching television
13. Listening to music
14. Worshipping in church.

The results for the six schools were kept separately in order to establish any possible differential patterns in their individual responses.

This arrangement proved valuable as learner responses indicated that the use or non-use of SiSwati in certain domains was to a certain degree influenced by learners' contexts, their backgrounds and the type of school they attended. I will return to these differences at a later stage in the report.

9.4.1. Responses to the fourteen questions

Respondents were asked to place their responses in one of four categories of frequency:

- All the time
- Most of the time
- Seldom
- Never

It was assumed that the contending language for space in the fourteen domains was English.

I will begin by analysing learners' responses to a question on how often they used SiSwati when speaking with friends.

Responses to question 1

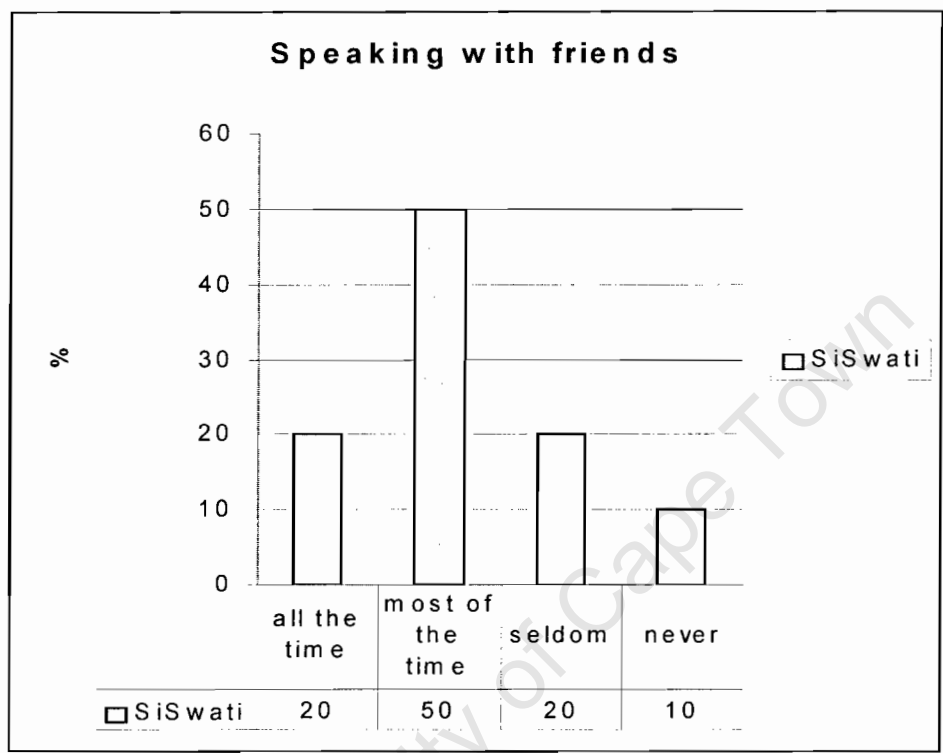


Table 9.1

Predictably SiSwati dominates this domain. The dominance of SiSwati in this domain was understandable as SiSwati is the mother tongue of respondents, but it is significant that respondents from the urban and prestigious private schools tended to avoid SiSwati even in this intimate social context. Respondents from private School A showed a significant preference for English. As most learners from this school came from middle class families and families of expatriates, the preference for English was significantly higher than in the other schools.

The responses of learners from private school B, which is also located in the same area as school A reflected a greater use of SiSwati. Learners enrolled at this school are mostly children of the company's employees. The learners from the government schools C, D, E

and F also indicated significantly less use of English in conversations amongst friends. It seems that socio-economic class is an important indicator of language preference.

Responses to question 2

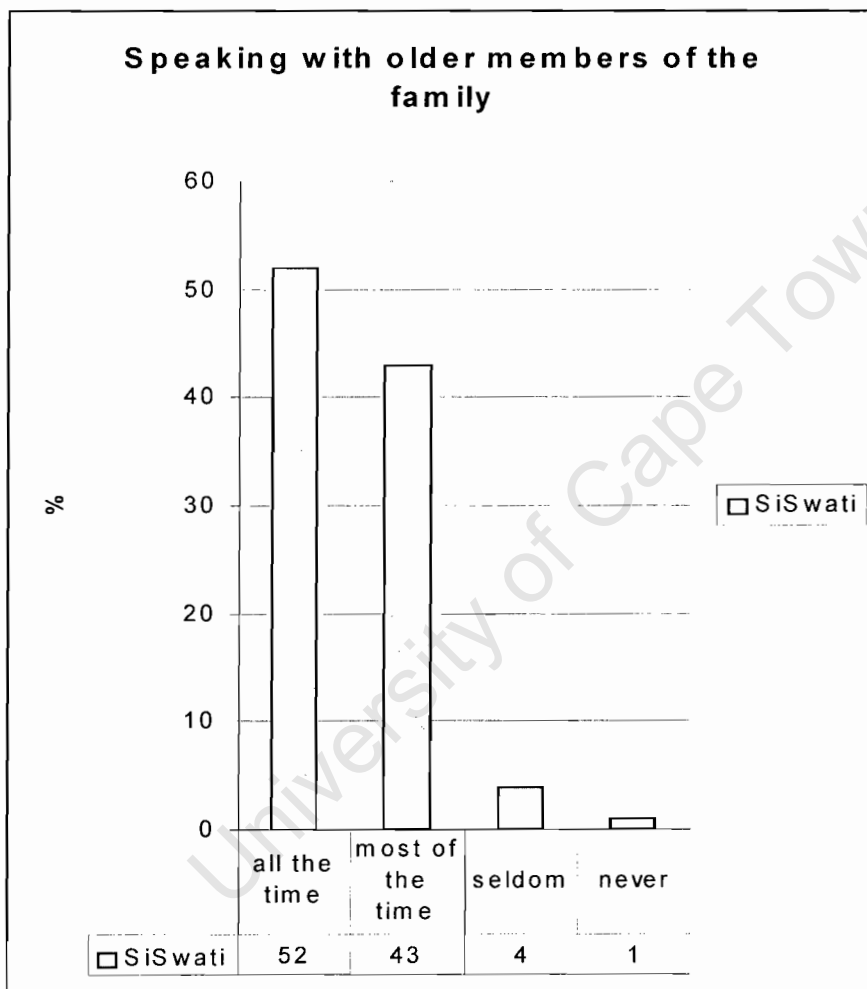


Table 9.2

Predictably, the use of SiSwati in traditional contexts remained strong. The use of English in the urban contexts increased marginally, reflecting the partly anglicised households in these areas.

Responses to question 3

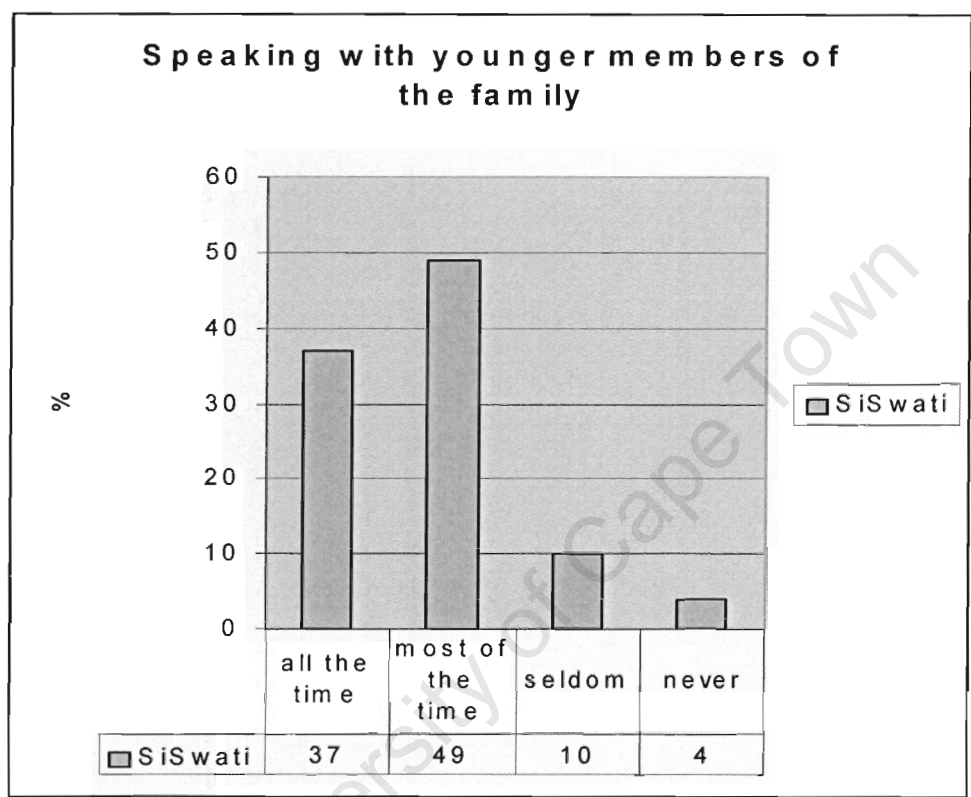


Table 9.3

In the interaction between siblings, SiSwati is still the dominant language. The fact that the seldom/never categories drew some 14% of the respondents reflects a growing trend amongst the younger generation to speak English at home.

Responses to question 4

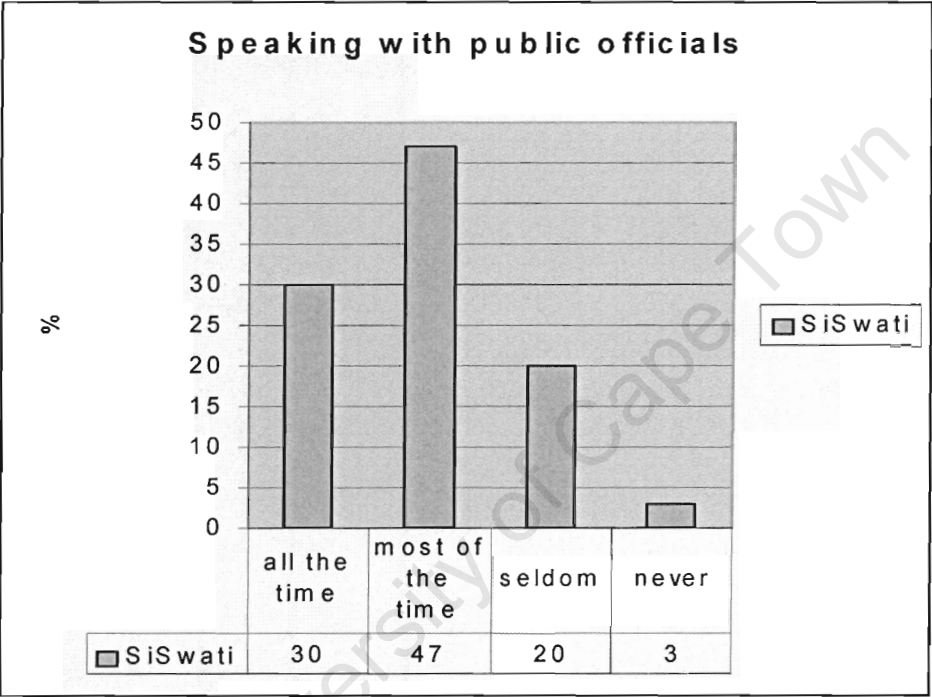


Table 9.4

As English and SiSwati are the official languages in Swaziland, officials such as the police and government officers usually address citizens in either of these languages. The language mostly used in this domain is SiSwati. But one also notices that almost one in four respondents seldom and never use SiSwati. English's growing power as the language of officialdom is most evident in these statistics.

Responses to question 5

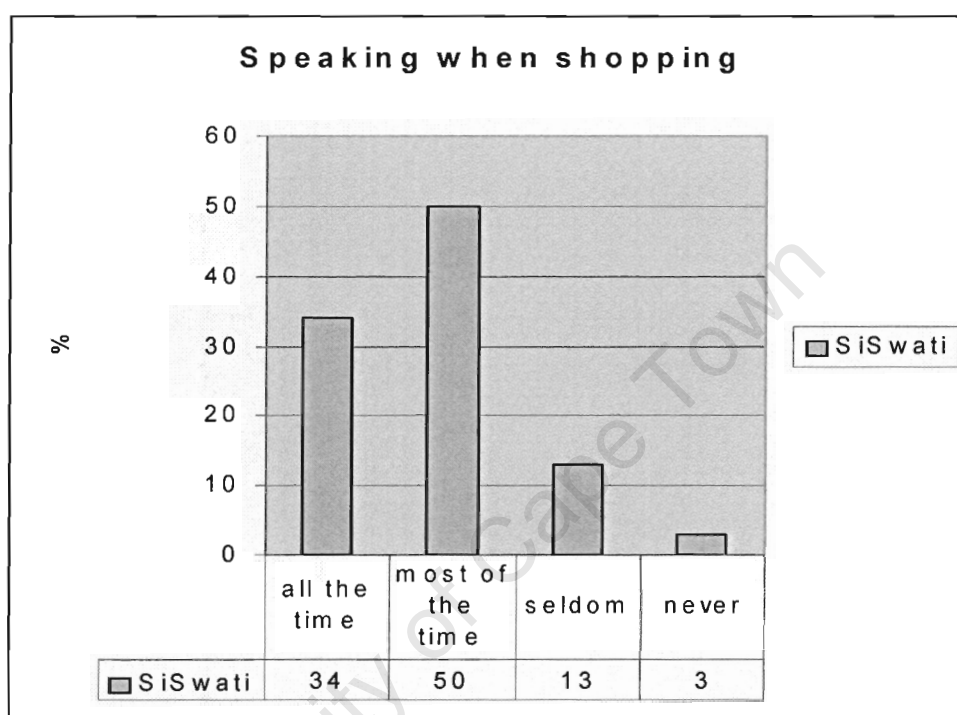


Table 9.5

Swazis still tend to shop in their mother tongue. 84% of learners say they use SiSwati whilst 16% seldom or never use it. Even though there is an influx of Indian and Taiwanese shop owners in Swaziland, the fact that they employ Swazis in their businesses explains the overwhelming use of SiSwati in this domain. As expected, respondents from prestigious schools indicated that they use English at times.

Responses to question 6

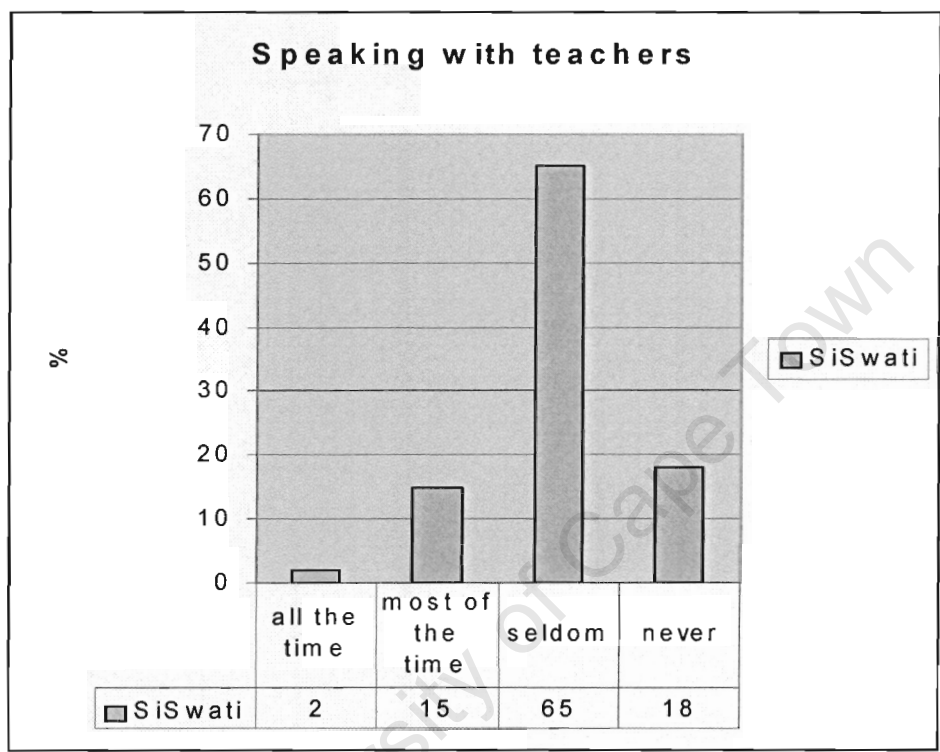


Table 9.6

The pattern in this domain is revealing. Only 17% of the learners use SiSwati, whilst 83% of them seldom and never use it. If one compares Table 6 to Tables 4 (shopping) and 5 (official business) for instance, it is evident that the educational context operates along a different set of rules. As English is the medium of instruction, it seems that the language has also become the language of informal communication between SiSwati speaking teachers and pupils. The strictly English-only policy in Swaziland classrooms, and the concomitant punishment for using SiSwati, to some extent explain this clear shift towards an English only classroom.

Responses to question 7

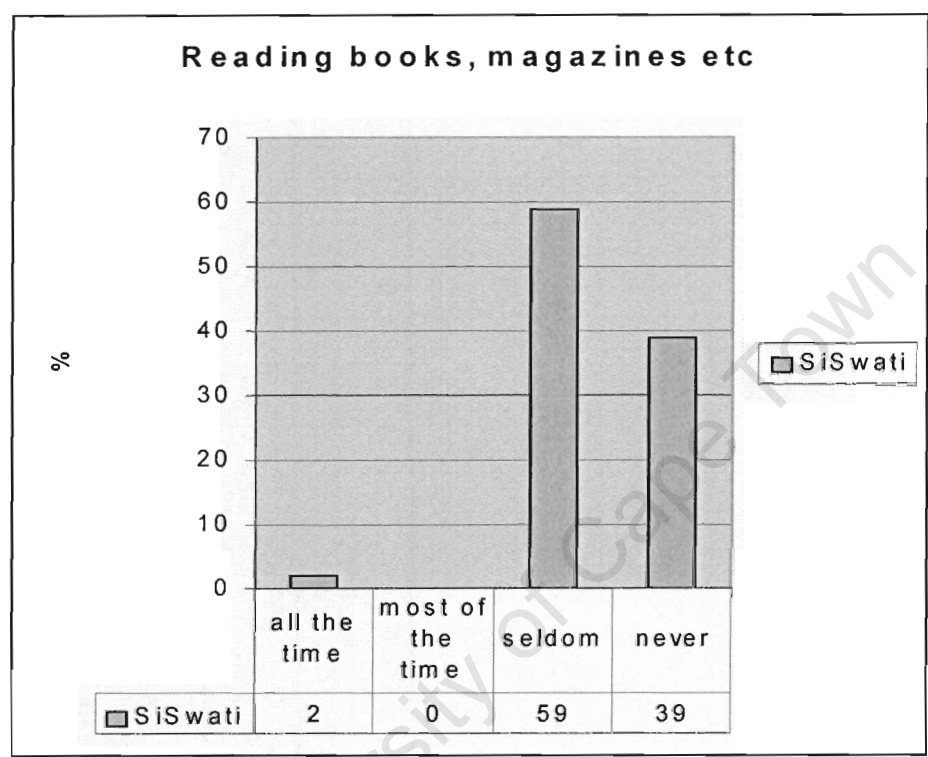


Table 9.7

These figures reflect a disturbing reading pattern. Three factors possibly played a role here: the paucity and quality of reading materials in SiSwati and relative availability of good English materials. It confirms the overall pattern that English tends to dominate amongst the more sophisticated sector of the speech community.

Responses to question 8

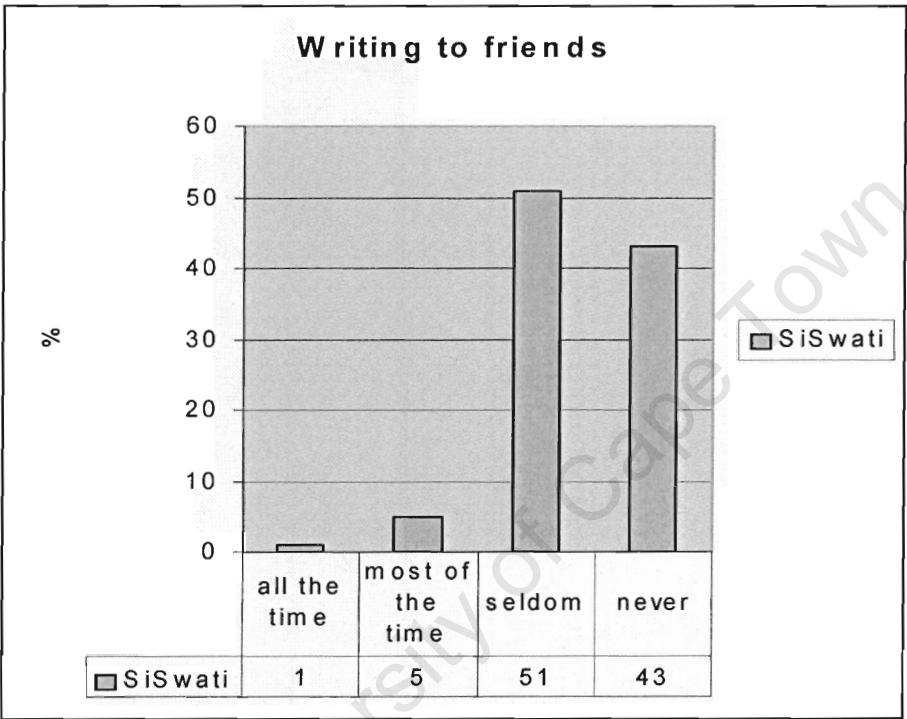


Table 9.8

The popularity of English as the language of written communication is being confirmed in an emphatic way as only one in ten children use their mother tongue as a written form of communication. Even though this domain can be considered an intimate one, it is evident that it is fashionable to communicate in English. In this regard, I can reflect on my personal experiences where we were encouraged to write letters to each other at school and pen pals from England and The United States for the sole purpose of ‘improving our English’. My experiences obviously departed from my mother's, who used to write in isiZulu, the prestigious language of that time.

Learners indicated that it would embarrass them to write to their friends, especially to the opposite sex in SiSwati as they would leave the impression that they do not know English.

Responses to question 9

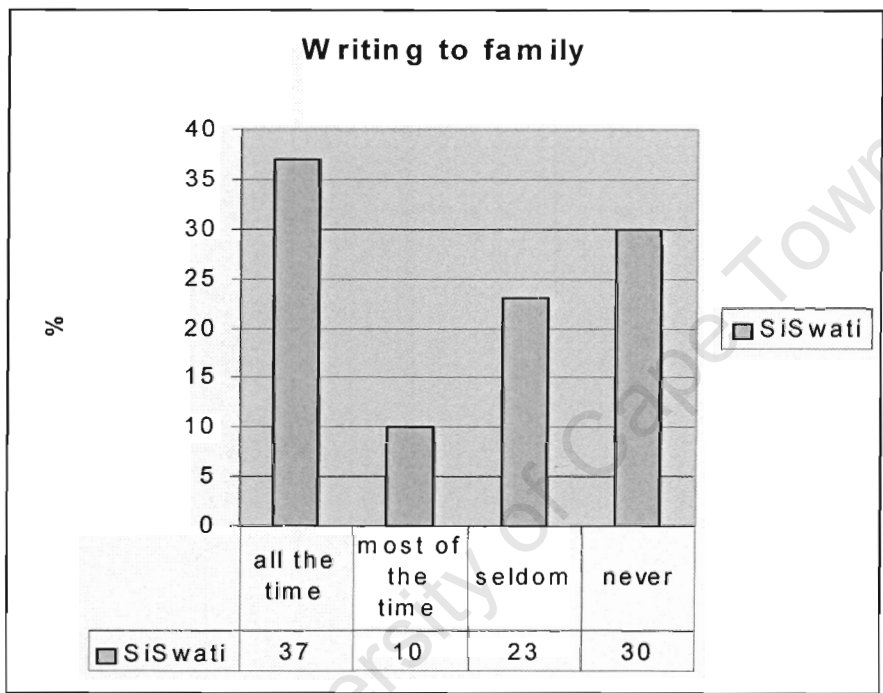


Table 9.9

In contrast to Table 8 (writing to friends), there is a sharp increase in the use of SiSwati when it comes to correspondence with family. 47% of learners preferred SiSwati when writing to family, whilst only 5% used SiSwati to write to friends. The differences in learner backgrounds and the type of school attended became a factor in this domain. Learners from middle-class homes indicated a preference for English when writing to family.

Responses to question 10

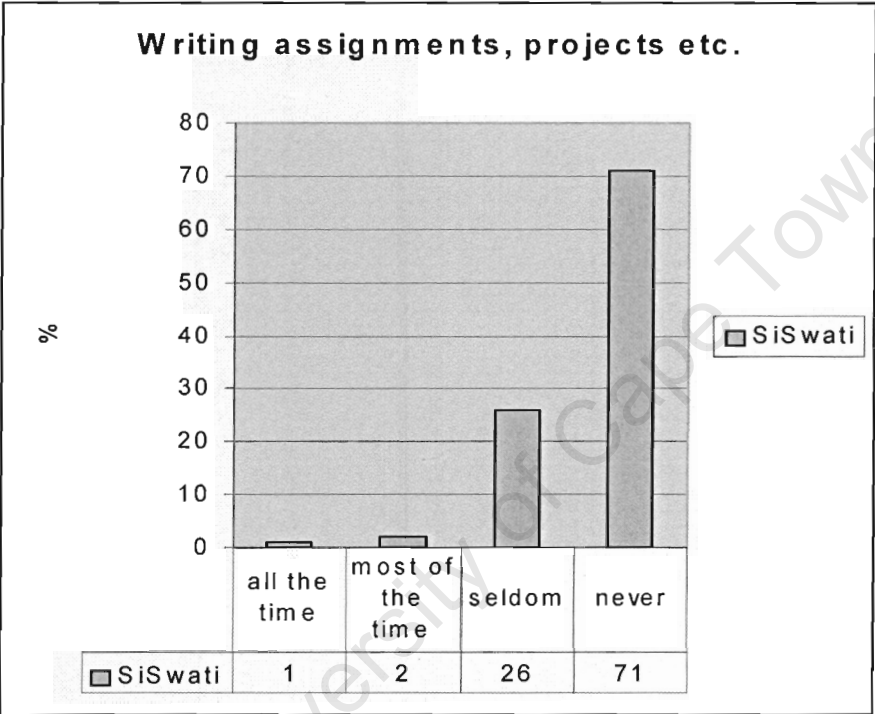


Table 9.10

As expected, 97% of learners seldom and never write in SiSwati in the school context. It is important to mention that in most of the schools I visited, writing in SiSwati was strictly reserved for the formal SiSwati timetabled lesson. Even though some of these schools had monthly magazines, learners were expected to only send in English contributions.

Responses to question 11

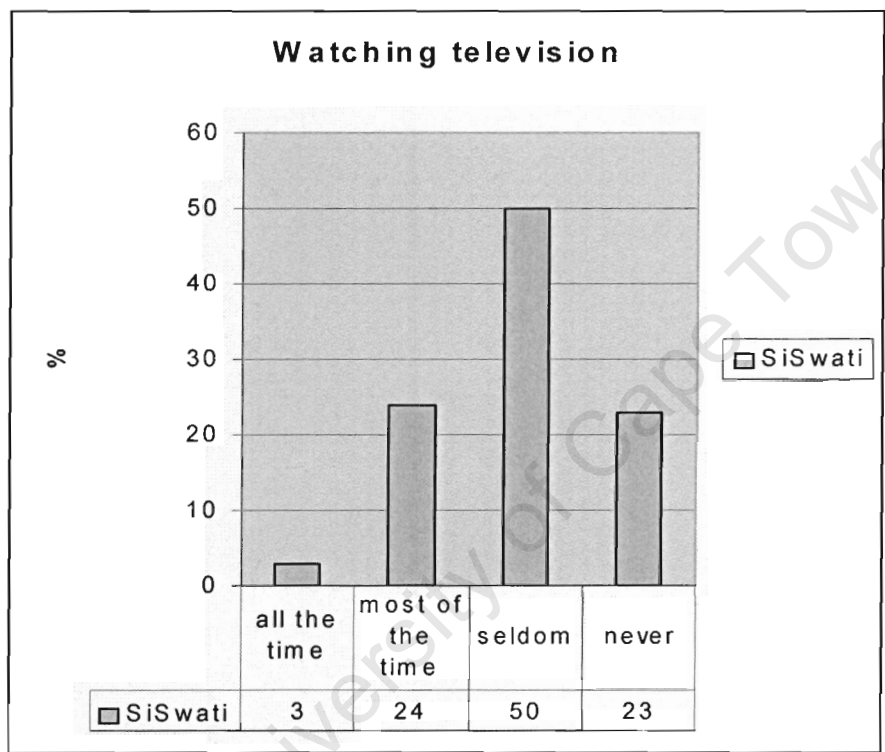


Table 9.11

The overwhelming majority of learners (73%) seldom or never watch programmes in SiSwati. It is important to mention in this regard that SiSwati speakers in Swaziland tune into South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television channels. Learners cited ‘the boring nature’ of Swazi television which they say has been turned into a propaganda instrument, mostly airing royal ceremonies and the king and his wives’ trips. An interesting trend was the interest shown in the other Nguni language programmes on SABC. This revealed that it is not a dislike of SiSwati *per se* that turned them away from watching, but the unstimulating character of the programmes.

Responses to question 12

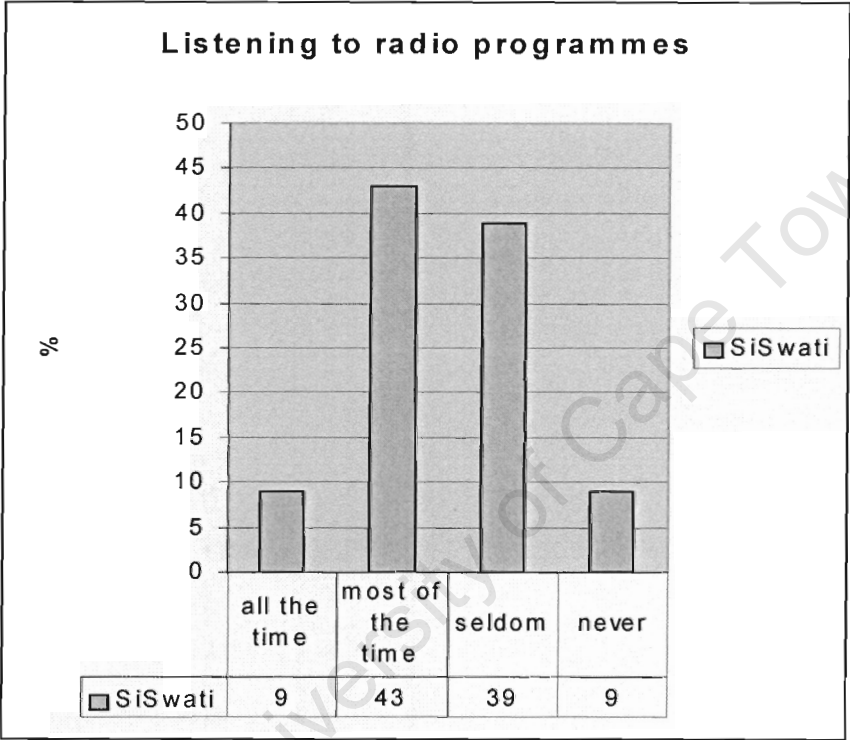


Table 9.12

The relative popularity of SiSwati radio programmes can be attributed to the fact that these respondents predominantly listened to South African radio programmes. Learners mentioned that because of the conservative and propagandist nature of the Swaziland radio station, they tuned into the South African SiSwati radio station, Ligwalagwala FM and other South African radio stations as they considered them progressive. They indicated that from these stations they learned about a wide range of political, social and economic issues. They found it fair that members of all political parties were free to use the stations, whilst in Swaziland representatives of trade unions were not allowed to even

call workers to a meeting. Again, this indicates the importance of the quality of service in gauging the relative popularity of SiSwati versus English.

Responses to question 13

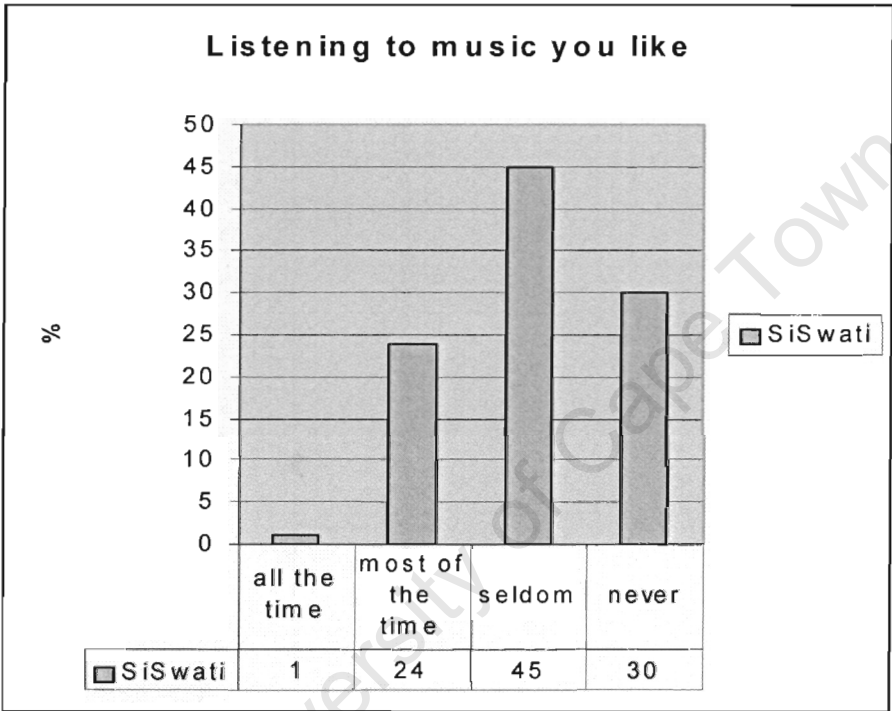


Table 9.13

The dominance of English songs is predictable as this largely mirrors the patterns in South Africa. While only 25% of learners listen to SiSwati music, the rest do so in English. The absence of a vibrant music industry in Swaziland can also be cited as a root cause in this regard. Other than the airing of Swazi gospel music and traditional songs, very little SiSwati music is played on the nation's radio station. There are also few music artists in the country who always complain about the lack of support from the government, the public and radio station. Whenever there are big occasions such as the Annual Trade Fair, the organisers invite South African artists. In order to appreciate a

variety of African music, the SiSwati speaker must rely on other languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu and English.

Responses to question 14

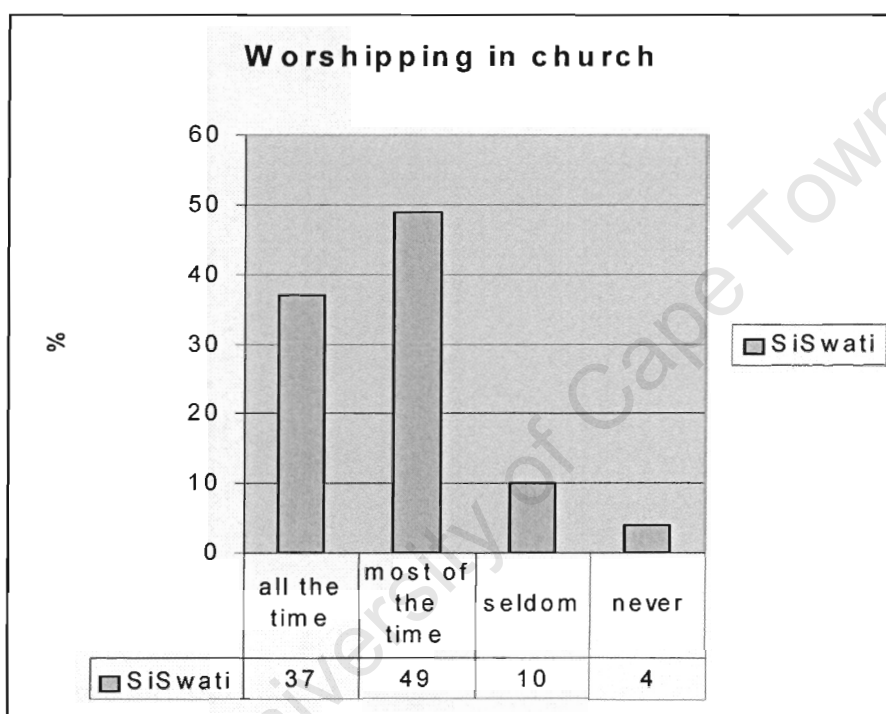


Table 9.14

SiSwati remains the language of religious practice. The recent proliferation of churches led by non-SiSwati speaking pastors however, has given English a foothold in this domain. There is also a growing number of churches led by Swazi priests where the medium is English (particularly in the urban areas).

9.5 Conclusion

The findings from the analysis of learners' responses to the questionnaire can be summarised as follows:

- The two official languages of Swaziland serve two different and almost predictable domains. SiSwati tends to be the language of the home and private domain, whilst English is used in the public domain. However, there are indications of a language shift from SiSwati to English in domains that traditionally had been the reserve of SiSwati particularly amongst urban dwellers.
- In the school context, where it seems to be a matter of policy to advance English at the cost of SiSwati, learners from urban, rural, private and public schools indicated an almost exclusive use of English in the classroom.
- The dominance of English in the media and the lack of progressive SiSwati radio and television programmes and music in Swaziland forces SiSwati speakers in Swaziland to rely on English and other Nguni languages for innovative music, radio and television programmes. The popularity of Nguni medium South African programmes indicates a dire need to be entertained and informed in their own language.
- The lack of interest in reading in SiSwati is rooted in the paucity of high quality written material in this language and their availability in English.
- The negative attitudes towards SiSwati and the erosion of critical domains of usage not only points to the beginnings of a language shift in the urbanised sector of Swazi society, but also a dire need to revitalise the language as a critical tool in psycho-social and cognitive development of SiSwati speakers.
- Respondents' positive response to stimulating South African SiSwati, isiXhosa and isiZulu radio and television programmes is an important finding of this study. It reveals a deep need amongst SiSwati speakers to be entertained and informed in an African language. The negative attitude towards SiSwati has its roots in the boring content presented in the printed and electronic media, as well as the archaic content of the SiSwati school curriculum.

Chapter 10

Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations

10.1 Summary and conclusions

When I embarked on this study, the original intention was to assess and contribute to what is known and understood about curriculum development in African languages and more specifically in my mother tongue SiSwati. At that early stage, I somewhat naively perceived curriculum development as an all educational matter. However, I soon concurred with scholars such as Mqotsi, who way back in the fifties acknowledged the messiness of this discipline:

Education is a mirror of society [and that] [t]he system of education that prevails in any given society reflects the social and economic relationships of individuals constituting that society and therefore their attitudes, outlook of life, the roles they are destined to play, their whims and prejudices, their follies and foibles - in a word, all that paraphernalia that constitutes the social fabric. In a society where personal slavery is institutionalised, education will reflect master-slave relations. In a colour-caste society, education will reflect colour-caste relations and values. In a democratic society it will reflect democratic relations (Mqotsi, 1953:9) [brackets added].

Having had the opportunity to study in South Africa from 1996, during a period of all-encompassing transition, I also had first hand experience of the way political changes pave the way for educational reform⁹⁷. It is also important to note that in the South African context, a constitution built on democratic and humanistic values preceded the process of curriculum development and change.

⁹⁷ It was significant that the wide-ranging curriculum changes only started once a democratically elected government had been in place for some five years. It pointed to the fact that political will invariably precedes curriculum change. Literature in the field of curriculum and social change also conclusively pointed to the fact that meaningful change only takes place in systems which are being supported by government at the school curriculum level.

Considering the closed and controlled political dispensation in my country, and the existing undemocratic mindset and concomitant power constructs in place, I have no illusions about the possible levels of resistance to and scorn for the recommendations encapsulated in this study. From the outset then, I was aware of the fact that the findings and recommendations may have a cold reception by those who wield power in the Swaziland educational system. At this stage I am tempted to add that in my country, where the king's power supercedes that of parliament, the educational system will reflect the profoundly undemocratic social system.

The socio-cultural forces that impinge on curriculum development in Africa

Having acknowledged the tight dichotomy between curriculum development and dominant larger socio-political and economic systems, my attempt to come to grips with the practice of curriculum reform for SiSwati required an understanding of the socio-political and economic forces that generally influence curriculum development. This necessitated the background study described in *Chapter 2*. The literature reviewed for this chapter painted a desolate picture of a continent in crisis. The description of the African continent by the French Africanist, Jean-Francois Bayart some two decades ago still has validity: [it is] "...doomed, crippled, and disenchanted, adrift, coveted, betrayed or strangled, always with someone to blame." He went on to describe a French cartoon where an African faces 'the lottery of death' with the wheel spinning around several stark choices: famine, civil war, drought, apartheid, the invasion of locusts, corruption, and the AIDS epidemic (cited in le Pere, 1998:3). The state of the continent as a whole has given birth to the metaphor of afro-pessimism that is paralysing in its determinism, and difficult to refute. None of the authors quoted in *Chapter 2* claimed authorship of the term *Afro-pessimism*, but a number of them seemed to find it a fitting description for the collective state of mind of the Dark Continent. Sub-Saharan Africa, which is probably in the worst position, was described by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan as 'a cocktail of disasters', a person who is usually known for his understated discourse (*Mail and Guardian*, 10th May 2002).

One of the main principles on which this thesis was built, was that progressive educational practices in general and invigorating African language educational practices in particular, may eventually reverse this slide into the abyss. However, bearing in mind the maxim that curriculum reform follows socio-political reform, the general state of mayhem offers an unpromising backdrop for educational change.

The literature on the general health of the continent, which was at times contradictory but mostly complementary pointed to the fact that the African crisis is a crisis of modernity and that Africa's problems are not due to an excess of modern influence, rather, they seem to be due to insufficient modernisation. A strong body of African as well as European scholars identified problematic African cultural values as among the root causes of the quagmire that the continent found itself in. The literature reviewed in this chapter also pointed to an urgent need for a paradigmatic shift in worldview and what Mamdani (1998) and Obadina (<http://www.afbls.com/analysis/neo-colonialism.html>, June 2000) described as a movement against attempts at re-establishing tribal authorities and practices and changes in social beliefs and institutions as they strongly determined the destiny of nation states. I juxtaposed the so-called 'African way' expounded by a handful of scholars, with those who argued for a more western style of modernisation.

The criticism of the back-to-our-roots lobby was an important guiding factor for me, as this dangerous sentiment neatly dovetailed with the SiSwati curriculum focus on traditional literature and the reinforcement of tribal cultural values. The glorification of the (pre-modern) past and the king as the *de facto* ruler underlined the crisis of modernity in government as a whole and in the SiSwati curriculum in particular. The most significant aspect of the review was the general consensus amongst scholars that the language and cultural habits of people played a pivotal role in their socio-political and economic destiny. It confirmed the notion that a new and progressive way of teaching and learning a language goes hand in hand with a supportive political mindset. Within the strategic framework of the study, the need for educational reform and socio-cultural reform became flip sides of the same coin. By the same token, attempts at curriculum reform in Swaziland could not take place outside the political and socio-cultural context.

Linguistic and cultural determinism in the destiny of communities

The findings and conclusions in *Chapter 2* which highlighted the need for socio-cultural reform as a prerequisite for political and economic advance changed the trajectory of the study. They raised the question: if cultural determinism is a crucial factor in the destiny of a speech community, how does it articulate with the language spoken by that community? The literature reviewed in *Chapter 3* pointed conclusively to the fact that language and culture play an intertwined role in shaping the political, social and economic destiny of entire speech communities. It clarified an important line of thought in the debate, i.e. the cultural artifacts embedded in the habits of people and often reinforced by aligned linguistic items, are significant determiners of the performance of societies and that the way individuals acted upon their thoughts and experienced their lives largely depended on their lingua-culturally determined mental constructs. This led to the exploration of the extensive body of literature on linguistic (and cultural) determinism. My own position in this on-going debate could be described as an alignment with a weak version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis.

Assuming then the role of language (and culture) in determining the fate and fortune of speech communities, I concluded in this chapter that the interplay between African languages and the concomitant cultural constructs can only be ignored at the peril of African communities, and that the envisaged African revival is only possible if there is a deep awareness of the crucial role these human constructs play. It would involve more than political and economic reconstruction, but also a profound paradigm shift in the African mentality in terms of cultural values as expressed through language itself. This review pointed to the need to respond to African language development from a strong sociolinguistic as well as psycholinguistic perspective. It came as no surprise to discover that progressive language curricula worldwide invariably reflects an elegant discursive relationship with sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic tenets. Bearing in mind the stubborn attitude amongst traditionalists that culture should be *protected/preserved* at all costs, these readings led to an important assumption in my research, i.e. that progressive

language teaching and learning cannot take place without an equally rigorous interrogation of the embedded culture.

Insights gleaned from the work of cultural-psychologists also deepened my understanding of the cultural imperative. Whilst the popular notion of culture has often been used to (narrowly) refer to visible and tangible customs, beliefs, dress etc, cultural-psychologists emphasised both its broad definition to include the socio-political and economic practices of a society and their role in silhouetting the way individuals thought. These scholars extended my somewhat limited understanding of culture as a private entity into the public domain, where it includes the way countries are governed, economic management and the design of progressive social policies. It pointed conclusively to the fact that any attempt at transforming the socio-political and economic performance of speech communities hinged on equipping learners with the appropriate cultural habits, to make it possible to cultivate new ways of thinking and doing.

I explored the notion of winning and losing nations in terms of the role culture plays in the economic destiny of people. Winning nations were described as those which were made up of individuals who were equipped with the cultural capital and the concomitant mindset to uphold democracy, trade liberalisation, intellectual curiosity, mutual trust and entrepreneurship, amongst others. Members of these societies have embedded in their cultures key values such as hard work, precision, honesty and obligation to one's duty. This embrace of the most salient tenets of modernity also implied a constant critique of traditional ways of doing things. Against this tough set of criteria for growth on all fronts, the cultural practices in Swaziland pointed out in the analysis of textbooks in *Chapter 7* evidently represented the anti-thesis of what is required in modern economies. Judging by the socio-political course taken, Swazi society lacked some of the key elements that a nation requires to set foot on the path towards modernisation. This set of cultural prerequisites for healthy growth informed my understanding of the values and principles that should underpin a synchronised language curriculum.

Having read the works of scholars who significantly advanced my understanding of the intimate connection between language, culture and thought (Cole and Scribner, 1986; Whorf, 1956; Miller and McNeil, 1969 and Vygotsky, 1986 amongst others) and their crucial role in the performance of speech communities, it was Rorty (1989) and Vygotsky (1982) in particular who alerted me to the potential for societal change through the adoption of new language habits. Rorty argued that radical change in society occurs not so much as a result of argument or an act of will, but when people modify their way of thinking and talking about things, when they lose 'the habit of using certain words and gradually acquire the habit of using others' (1989:9). It is the human 'talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, that is the chief instrument for cultural change' (ibid.: 7). Rorty's notion of 'speaking differently' assumes a response, primarily, to a written code which allows for careful formulation and redefinition through a re-organisation of language as such. In the African context it would allude to a process that will allow individuals to re-describe things in their mother tongue in new ways 'until [they] have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of non-linguistic behaviour, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions' (ibid: 7). This raised for me another question: how do people begin to speak differently? Rorty's notion of re-description was independently given another slant by Wittgenstein's⁹⁸ perception that sometimes you have to withdraw an expression from the language 'to send it for cleaning – and then you can put it back into circulation' (1998:44e). Both these scholars stress the interrogation of language in a particular way. In the Swaziland context, this clearly entailed a need to put in place a language curriculum that will give learners the opportunity to send SiSwati to "the cleaners", a curriculum that will enable children to critique the metaphors they have been born into. The understanding that social change is language dependent makes language education the spearhead in the reformation of society.

⁹⁸ The influence of Wittgenstein and Rorty, amongst others, can be seen in language pedagogical approaches like Critical Language Awareness and Whole Language.

This chapter highlighted the pre-eminence of linguistic and cultural determination in the destiny of nations. Juxtaposed against the bleak picture that emerged in the overview of the African continent in *Chapter 2*, the realisation that change was driven by a change in cultural and linguistic habits was liberating and exciting. But the question remained: How do we engender change through language education when a regime uses that very language as a tool for propagating the *status quo*.

The (dis)empowering potential of literacy programmes

The role that language and culture play in shaping the destiny and performance of speech communities as established in *Chapter 3*, led me to the question: What are the pre-requisite literacies embedded in a language curriculum that are necessary for the development of a well-rounded individual functioning optimally in a modern democratic state?

This required a coming to grips with the notion of what it means to be literate, which prompted me to delve into the well-researched and vast body of literature on the subject. It is in *Chapter 4* that I came to understand that the notion of what it means to be literate could mean different things to different people. Literacy could be applied in many ways and that literacy programmes are invariably politically and ideologically driven. It again underlined the close relationship between curriculum development and the ideological position of the power elite.

Whilst the popular notion of literacy refers to the ability to read and write, literature arguing for a positive link between a person's cognitive development and the acquisition of literacy was of particular importance for this study as it underlined a wholly new way of thinking about African language education.

The following salient considerations crystallised from the literature: Written text, as opposed to oral discourse, allows for a de-contextualised space, which creates the required intellectual and emotional distance from information for the interrogator to respond in a

detached and calculated way. Working within a literate tradition also allows for a critical focus on a dominant discourse and avails the interrogator the space to re-describe a context that is framed by a prevailing vocabulary and allows for a more abstract way of thinking about issues. Bernstein's notion of an elaborated code in evolved speech communities (as opposed to a restricted code in semi-literate speech communities) articulates neatly with this premise⁹⁹.

The literature on literacy as social practice was both exciting and disconcerting. Measuring the literacy programmes for SiSwati against the socially liberating practices as described by Harman 1991, Giroux, 1993 and Lankshear and Lawler, 1987 amongst others, I experienced a sense of the tragic waste of human potential, as well as an understanding of the controlling and dis-empowering effect these strictly functional programmes must have on children. As I reflected on the impoverished language texts I had been subjected to as a SiSwati learner, I came to realise the dumb-down effect these materials had on a generation of Swazi children. SiSwati literacy programmes fall well short of liberating literacies which were described by Harman (1991) as those which occur in classrooms where centre stage is occupied by what language is *about* and what children *do* with it and *why*. In these classrooms, learners are said to work with texts that have some function other than mechanistic mastery of language structures.

In these classrooms, reading and writing serve to expand learners' personal horizons, for understanding themselves and their world and where learners critically engage with issues that affect their daily lives. Whilst in open societies, literacy programmes tend to advance the rights and duties of the future citizen, in the closed, repressive Swazi society however, SiSwati literacy programmes with their strong focus on oral literature tended to be an extension of the control mechanisms that is part of the government structures.

⁹⁹ The corollary was also true: that literacy practices may in fact be instrumental in dumbing down an entire school population. Given the deeply traditional, patrimonial system governing the Swazi society, the notion of an intellectual and emotional distance for genuine interrogation, created by sound literacy practices seems to be a remote dream.

These readings allowed for some personal reflection on the way SiSwati notion of literacy produced socially illiterate and cognitively stunted children, only fit to sing the praises of the outdated, repressive social dispensation.

Sensitised by the literature on the cognitive and social benefits embedded in sound literacy practices, the next stage in the study (*Chapter 5*) focused on the historical development of the SiSwati curriculum and an evaluation of literacy programmes that informed these curricula. This necessitated some archival research in order to establish the historical process of curriculum development in SiSwati.

Curriculum development - the isiZulu factor

An analysis of SiSwati curriculum development revealed the unfortunate predicament of a language education programme skewed by the unhealthy influence of isiZulu language practitioners. The existence of a lopsided relationship between isiZulu and SiSwati proved to be the determining factor in the history of SiSwati curriculum development. The longstanding tradition of using isiZulu liturgical literature in Swazi churches seemed to have paved the way for a similar arrangement in language education. The alienation from the mother tongue, the lack of development of SiSwati at various levels, the sense of inferiority created in SiSwati children and the tendency to reject their language as a serious tool of communication, can be ascribed to this short sighted and damaging decision.

When I scrutinised the role played by missionaries in the development of SiSwati, it became evident that they were unwittingly instrumental in perpetuating and strengthening Swazi dependence on isiZulu by postponing the translation of the Bible into SiSwati until 1996.

An investigation into the role played by *Umdlondla WeSiSwati*, the Swazi Writers Association also revealed that isiZulu authors continued to dominate in the lucrative prescribed market where their works featured in translated form. The message to Swazi

children, parents, teachers and aspirant writers of SiSwati literature is a pernicious one as the prevailing culture of inferiority towards isiZulu was being perpetuated by this self-serving practice.

Predictably the SiSwati curriculum only focused on the structure of the language in the junior secondary school. The debilitating message to children, teachers and the speech community at large was that their mother tongue unlike English was not suitable for serious sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic study and not a proper vehicle for the interrogation of the self and society. This damaging policy towards SiSwati teaching and learning is exacerbated by the monopolistic arrangement with the educational publisher Macmillan. The barring of works not published by this publisher from being bought and used, further erodes the development of a competitive and vibrant SiSwati textbook market.

Bantu education slipping into Swaziland via the backdoor

Having explored the domination of isiZulu writers in the development of SiSwati materials, I proceeded to examine the isiZulu syllabuses which were developed prior to 1990, to establish the extent to which the flaws and weaknesses of these syllabuses conceived within the constraints of Bantu education may have found their way into the SiSwati curriculum. As the development of African language syllabuses in the period 1960-1985 was in the hands of Afrikaner academics and officials, my research necessitated a scrutiny of Afrikaans language curricula. My hunch was confirmed when I found that the Afrikaans syllabi, so heavily underpinned by the Fundamental Pedagogics paradigm and Christian National Education principles, were carefully copied as the blueprint for Bantu Language Syllabuses. The cynical almost literal translation of large parts of the Afrikaans syllabi revealed the degree of control at that time. It was also evident that the more liberal, child-centred and humanistic English syllabus failed to make any impact on the development of either the Swaziland or South African SiSwati curricula. As early as 1977 there was a clear ideological division between the child-centred liberal English syllabus and the deeply authoritarian teacher-centred Afrikaans

and African language syllabi. The two sets of ideologically opposed documents reflected two diametrically opposed views of what it meant to be literate. As English language educationists were largely sidelined in the development of school curricula, their vision of what it meant to be literate never benefited children of that generation.

These distressing findings informed my field study as I began to understand how the legacy of apartheid education influenced, and continues to influence the teaching of SiSwati.

Curriculum policy: steering curriculum by the SiSwati textbooks.

The six weeks period I spent doing empirical research in Swaziland was emotionally the most taxing period of this study. Conversations with senior officials in the ministry of education, teachers of SiSwati as well as pupils reflected a mood of capitulation and disinterest in the teaching and learning of SiSwati.

- The most disturbing finding was the absence of SiSwati curricula policy documents, a situation which resulted in the absurd scenario where textbooks were cynically referred to as the *de facto* curriculum.
- At primary school level, where an exclusive arrangement exists between Macmillan publishers and the National Curriculum Centre textbook developers and examiners, the syllabus document proved to be nothing more than a transcript of the lesson index as set out in the National Curriculum Centre/Macmillan textbooks.
- At secondary and high school levels, where the 'syllabus' mirrors the structure of the external examinations, SiSwati panel members in collaboration with Macmillan publishers cynically saw their way clear to assume responsibility for the writing of the textbooks, as well as setting examinations
- Perpetuating the tradition of employing linguists (instead of practitioners in language education) language textbooks revealed an overwhelming linguistics

bias, with no sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic awareness or vision evident. The result is a repetitive programme of grammar based exercises.

- The standard procedure in modern educational dispensations, where national curriculum development departments consult with schools and tertiary institutions resulting in policy documents which inform textbook development and the format of the examinations, is reversed in Swaziland, as textbooks absurdly inform the curriculum as well as the form and content of the examinations.
- This lack of proper procedure is further aggravated by the arrangement that materials development, curriculum planning and the setting of examinations were at times the responsibilities of the same person. This resulted in a lack of accountability, peer review, quality control, as well as the lack of what should be separation of discreet educational processes. This lack of a firm policy and procedure can to a large extent explain the paralysing condition in which the teaching and learning of SiSwati is finding itself. The commercially irregular and educationally irresponsible role played by the British educational publisher has been noted.
- My scrutiny of the broad policy and procedure (or to put it more accurately, the lack of procedure) for SiSwati textbook development highlighted the fact that the process is negatively influenced by the monopoly rights awarded to one publishing company and the privileged position of the publisher with government officials. At primary school level the National Curriculum Centre produces prescribed textbooks which are then “handed over” to the publisher for publication. The same one way system is in operation at the prescribed book level. Literature texts written by members of the SiSwati Writers Association and the SiSwati Panel are automatically published by the same company – with no review system in place – and summarily prescribed for the secondary and high school.
- Adding to the lack of procedure and quality control was the prescription of textbooks and literary works written by isiZulu academics, a scenario which perpetuated a pedagogical paradigm reminiscent of apartheid-induced notions of language teaching. Although it is fashionable to blame the all-powerful position

of English as a factor in the unpopularity of SiSwati at school level, my conclusion was that it was the lack of progressive child-centred texts, the absence of a sociolinguistically and psycholinguistically informed curriculum and finally the lack of an examination system that tested the mastery of relevant knowledge that largely contributed to this crisis.

Traditional Swazi culture – the bedrock of the SiSwati language curriculum.

In *Chapter 7* I analysed and defined the curious role of textbook writers in not only driving the haphazard curriculum process, but also in enforcing and perpetuating an archaic perception of literacy practice on SiSwati language education. These insights reinforced my hunch that the prescribed works came into being in the same irregular and partial manner. So, in *Chapter 8* I engaged in a critical analysis of the ideological orientation of two literary works that were prescribed at the time. The intention was to trace the ideologies and values embodied in the literature prescribed. The outcome of the analysis of these texts confirmed the authoritarian trends identified in language textbooks. The texts showed a pre-occupation with duties and responsibilities pertaining to traditional Swazi society and the re-enforcement of traditional cultural patterns which are at odds with the social and psychological skills needed for survival in a modern society. The values espoused in these texts were radically opposed to those cherished in democratic societies encapsulated in materials selected for their potential to develop a critical language awareness in children, which encourage the endless scrutiny and inspection of the self as well as society. Because of the focus on the traditional and pre-modern Swaziland context, these children from deeply rural contexts do not learn the skills to be ‘border crossers’ (as Giroux would describe these desired social and personal skills). SiSwati learners, as per the features of literacies in the tradition of praise-singing, are indeed equipped to simply reflect, endorse and perpetuate the social structure.

Predictably the focus is narratives around the royal Swazi family. Poems, stories, proverbs and idioms *ad nauseam* trumpet the accomplishments of previous kings as well as the perceived qualities of the present king. The adoration of the repressive and outdated

political dispensation reduces these works to little more than political propaganda with very little literary merit to speak of. These texts stand in complete opposition to the ideal of emancipatory literacies. It also confirmed the findings of a recent study that the uncritical treatment of certain cultural aspects of oral and traditional literature are in fact detrimental to the psycho-social and economic well-being of a community (see Dlamini, 2001).

What was observed in SiSwati literature texts is not only the reinforcement of social and political inequality, but also the absence of counter-hegemonies. Subordinate groups such as women and children, through the internalisation of these texts ironically contribute to their own domination and suppression.

A cry for help— teachers’ and learners’ voices.

A field study (*Chapter 9*) further confirmed the devastating effects of the condition surrounding SiSwati teaching and learning. The low morale amongst SiSwati language teachers and SiSwati’s low status amongst learners came as no surprise.

- The findings from the questionnaire gauging the perceptions and attitudes of SiSwati learners of the teaching and learning as experienced in SiSwati language classrooms painted a bleak picture of student and teacher apathy.
- It also endorsed another hunch, i.e. that SiSwati and English serve two different and almost predictable set of domains. SiSwati is the language of the home and the (shrinking) private domain, whilst English is increasingly used in the public domain as well as the private domain. There are indications of a language shift from SiSwati to English, particularly amongst the urban elite
- As I worked through learners’ responses regarding their attitudes towards SiSwati, I came to realise that some of the causes for the negative attitudes towards SiSwati as a subject, as formulated by the Inspector for SiSwati, J.V. Dlamini in 1976, were very similar to learners’ responses in this study. Back then the causes for negative attitudes were rooted in the suspicion that introducing

SiSwati was equivalent to introducing Bantu education in Swaziland. Dlamini's perception three decades ago still encapsulates children's feelings about their mother tongue. It is an indictment against the education system as a whole that children have to labour under the perception that SiSwati has nothing to contribute to their psycho-social and cognitive development.

- Learners in this study also highlighted the stagnant and archaic nature of the language studied and its focus on grammar as an end in itself, with strong echoes of the Bantu education Afrikaans blueprint of the 1980s.
- A significant finding in my discussion with learners was the popularity of the Nguni radio and television programmes in South Africa, which stood in stark contrast with their preference for English programmes in Swaziland. It confirmed my hunch that the negativity to SiSwati in Swaziland should be viewed against the backdrop of the socially irrelevant and controlling content of the printed and electronic media serving Swaziland.

Towards the end of my data analysis, I became troubled by Aitchinson's (1986) sobering assertion, as it suddenly struck me that *my* mother tongue exhibited most of the traits of a dying language:

When a language dies, it does not simply fade away due to old age. Sometimes, death comes to a young language. In all cases, the extinction is due to the supplanting of the old by a new language with social and political prestige. ... In language murder, a socially prestigious language gets used in more and more circumstances, so that previously bilingual speakers have little opportunity to practise the old language. Younger speakers tend to forget its form and constructions, either omitting crucial endings, or utilising those that coincide with forms found in the new language. In brief, language death is a social phenomenon, and triggered by social needs. There is no evidence that there was anything wrong with the dead language itself: Its essential structure was no better and no worse than that of any other language. It faded away because it did not fulfil the social needs of the community who spoke it. (Aitchinson, 1986:221).

Aitchinson's observation that the inability to fulfil the social needs of a society may cause a language to die, strikes me as identical to the problem identified as the crucial flaw in

the SiSwati curriculum, i.e. that it does not address the psycho-social needs of the young. This has resulted in younger speakers of the language such as the ones sampled in this study, “either omitting crucial endings, or utilising those that coincide with forms found in the new language” by means of code mixing, code switching and arguing that their mother tongue was of no use to them and it was not important for their future. This brings the realisation that SiSwati could die, not because of a deficiency in the language as such, but that it will fade away because it is not honed as a vibrant tool that is able to take care of the full spectrum of human needs.

The main findings of the study then can be summarised as follows:

1 Curriculum development does not take place independently of the power structures of the government.

My extended involvement with officials in curriculum development reflected a lack of political will to reform. It further confirmed the predominance of political reform over curriculum reform in non-democratic political dispensations. The importance of the political context, in matters pertaining to curriculum reform, is best exemplified by the recent South African history of curriculum innovation, where the introduction of a modern curriculum for African languages was only possible *after* political transformation. In short then: curriculum change should be viewed as a process that follows in the wake of political reform.

2 It is unrealistic to expect the launching of a programme of curriculum reform by officials who were molded and trained in a different educational paradigm.

As SiSwati language education officials were trained in an apartheid induced language education model, the shift towards a new model requires external assistance, ideally from South African language officials who have recently completed the overhaul of the language curriculum in South Africa.

3 Historically the development of a new SiSwati curriculum suffered due to the conservative influence of isiZulu authors and officials on SiSwati language education.

- The status and development of SiSwati has been negatively influenced by its historic proximity to the isiZulu curriculum model, which in turn internalised a language education model developed by apartheid officials in the 1970's.
- The prescription of textbooks and literary works, written by isiZulu academics and translated into SiSwati, also introduced a climate of linguistic and cultural inferiority towards isiZulu.
- The interference by isiZulu academics furthermore introduced and perpetuated another apartheid induced legacy, i.e. that linguists rather than educationists should be responsible for the development of language textbooks.

4 SiSwati language education, as a whole, suffers from the absence of clearly defined roles for senior officials working in this discipline.

A highly irregular blending of roles exists, where officials responsible for curriculum development, textbook development and external (exit) examinations often operate from the same departmental desk. This has created a situation where there is a paralysing lack of accountability, peer review and quality control. There is also a lack of understanding of the need to keep these educational processes discrete.

5 Educational publisher Macmillan's monopoly on the publication of SiSwati textbooks.

Attempts to improve the quality of SiSwati language textbooks are undermined by the monopoly rights awarded to this publisher. Exclusive materials writing contracts between the publisher and senior officials further thwart any prospect of improvement in quality and general textbook renewal. Writing contracts are being awarded on the basis of position of influence rather than merit.

6 The collapse of the joint South African and Swaziland SiSwati Language Board signalled the end of the potential for the development of a common SiSwati curriculum.

- The abandonment of collaborative language and curriculum development projects by the Joint South African and Swaziland SiSwati Language Board destroyed the mechanisms that were in place for co-operative projects.
- This led to the development of a new South African SiSwati curriculum which essentially paved the way for two very different language experiences for the two divided speech communities.
- Despite the fact that they share the same orthography, the potential for the development of two distinct speech communities must now be regarded as very real.

7 Morale amongst teachers of SiSwati is at an all time low.

The survey amongst teachers reflected:

- A general disinterest in the teaching (or learning) of SiSwati.
- A perception that SiSwati has little status in the school curriculum.
- A feeling that the prescribed books and language books are out of touch with the needs of children.

8 The vital psychosocial skills which children acquire by way of a challenging interaction with the mother tongue, are not being realised in the present curriculum.

An analysis of the curriculum revealed that:

- A restricted and outdated view of desirable literacy skills informed the teaching of SiSwati.
- The typical elements present in a curriculum designed for the enhancement of children's cognitive and psychosocial development, is largely absent.

- The focus on literature sourced from the oral literary tradition tended to reaffirm questionable pre-modern notions of social behaviour.

9 The traditional SiSwati curriculum contributes to a slow but steady language drift from SiSwati to English.

The survey amongst teachers and students indicated an alarming encroachment of English into traditional SiSwati domains of language usage. However, it should be noted that other unquantifiable sociolinguistic factors may also contribute to this shift.

10.2 Recommendations

A glance at the findings of my research on the state of SiSwati language education tells a rather grim story of neglect, incompetence, abuse of power and greed at an official level. Addressing the problem will require a broad-based plan which can realistically only be launched in a new political dispensation, reflecting the political will to tackle the following issues in an integrated way:

- A lack of political will at government level to effect educational reform
- A general tardiness to embrace values that clash with Swazi traditionalism
- A lack of skills in curriculum theory and curriculum reform amongst officials responsible
- A worrying, ongoing interference by isiZulu authors and academics whose involvement is essentially profit driven
- A debilitating blending of official roles in the area of materials writing, evaluation and curriculum
- The absence of healthy competition in the light of monopolistic and exclusive publishing arrangements
- General disinterest in the maintenance of a joint SiSwati Language Board
- Low morale amongst the teachers of SiSwati
- The reinforcement of questionable literacy skills

- Disenchantment amongst children with their mother tongue as a school subject, and
- A slow but steady language shift from SiSwati to English at high school level.

The way forward?

This summary of the findings of my research makes for rather depressing reading as there does not seem to be a way out of the logjam caused by the stubborn clinging to power by the power elite surrounding the royal house. Can a new SiSwati curriculum be developed independently of the power structures of the present regime? The range of factors that work against incisive curricular change are too all-encompassing to effect change from within. Furthermore, I could not detect any significant, influential voices calling for change, while the few voices of despair reflect a general lack of vision or a will to change.

10.3 Possible ways forward

1 Let us not re-invent the wheel

As a SiSwati speaker who is aware of the existence of progressive textbooks for the South African SiSwati speech community, written by authors within the constructs of a highly progressive language curriculum document, delivering a product in a fiercely competitive market with at least four major publishers vying for the same market, I find it ironical that only a political border prevents children in Swaziland from having access to a range of options with regard to SiSwati textbooks. School children in Swaziland are a stroke of a pen away from access to progressive textbooks.

However, such a recommendation is unrealistic in the light of the curriculum divide. One of the ironies which was highlighted by the study was the fact that across the border, the South African half of the SiSwati speech community approaches the study of their mother tongue in a liberal and humanistic paradigm. The existence of an already implemented curriculum based on progressive pedagogical principles, seems to point to a

solution that lies in cross border co-operation. The fact that a range of highly competitive new textbooks series, written in response to the new curriculum are already on the market adds to the cruel irony that characterises the situation.

As the expertise to develop a SiSwati curriculum is not available in the Swaziland Education Department, a bold and cost effective decision would be to adopt and adapt the progressive South African curriculum and textbooks for SiSwati. Such a decision would also address the worrying signs that the SiSwati speech community is in the process of developing separate identities.

2 The re-establishment of the SiSwati Language Board

In view of the fact that SiSwati speakers on both sides of the border have in the past successfully engaged in collaborative work with regard to language and curriculum development, an exercise in which both governments invested resources and personnel for language and curriculum development, the re-establishment of the collaborative SiSwati Language Board seems to be non-negotiable. I am aware of the fact that the ministry of education in Swaziland cited financial reasons for abandoning the project. A reconstituted SiSwati Language Board should include a balance of language experts from both countries to look after the well being of the language as a whole and after the educational trajectory as an aspect of its wellbeing.

3 The separation of the process of curriculum design, materials writing and examination

Should the South African SiSwati curriculum be adopted, it is imperative that an examination body that operates independently be set up. The South African model could be emulated in this respect. The adoption of the South African SiSwati curriculum will require a new generation of textbooks. The opening up of the market for textbooks should be regarded as part of the developmental process. The publishing monopoly enjoyed by the publisher Macmillan should be ended.

10.4 Limitations of the study

In engaging in this research I was not able to trace and establish the influence of the ideologies and values embedded in the SiSwati curriculum on the worldviews and mindsets of the learners who studied SiSwati as a subject. Finding out if learners actually absorbed or internalised the meanings constructed in the texts would have further substantiated the views elicited from their responses to the questionnaire.

This study did not set out as one of its aims to determine to what extent learners internalised the corpus of SiSwati material that land on their desks. In my report on the field study I have often noted learner resistance to the material and the lack of enthusiasm with which it is taught. A valid question then is: Can it readily be assumed that the values underpinning the language textbooks and prescribed material are being taken on board?

My response to this question is twofold: In the first place, as there are no alternative texts available for learners, it is difficult to see how the metaphors of these grand narratives can be challenged by unsophisticated rural children. As Deborah Cameron (1992,) reminded us: to change attitudes and behaviour we need to *speak* outside the structure, not *against* it. Children need another vocabulary – which simply does not exist in that context.

In the second place, we need to bear in mind that the textbooks and prescribed books actually mirror values and behaviour in this deeply flawed and troubled society. For the young mind these texts merely confirm what they already live and believe.

10.5 Recommendations for further research

- This study highlighted the plight of border-straddling speech communities. The divisive and destructive effects of political borders that cut in random fashion through speech communities are part of the linguistic landscape of Africa, and a bitter legacy of colonial times. Further research, which could culminate in a seminal international

conference on the phenomenon of border-straddling speech communities, is a matter of priority.

- An ethnographic study is necessary to establish how learners who study SiSwati as a subject engage with the constructed meanings in literature texts.
- The need for comparative regional studies in language curriculum issues, ideally lead by the Linguistics Association of SADC Universities (LASU), became apparent.
- The role of language (and culture) in determining the fate and fortune of speech communities and the paradoxical tension between African and global culture require further exploration into ways and means to harmoniously blend these forces in the language curriculum.
- The implementation of Curriculum 2005 in African languages and the use of new generation textbooks by teachers require ongoing monitoring. As a long-term project, it would be important to compare and contrast the literacies experienced by SiSwati learners in South Africa and Swaziland and how they shape their values and worldviews. This points to a need for a longitudinal, systematic and rigorous research programme. The exciting new Namibian language curriculum could be included in such a study.
- There is a need to compare and contrast the Cambridge O'Level SiSwati and English syllabuses and textbooks in Swaziland and interrogate the impact of these differences on the psychosocial development of Swazi children.
- Our understanding of the influence of African languages, their metaphors and culture in shaping the destiny of speech communities is at an embryonic stage. Sustained and focused research in this area should inform our understanding of the main tenets of progressive African language teaching and learning.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SISWATI SPEAKING PUPILS IN SWAZILAND

Thank you for taking part in our research around the SiSwati language. Your views are important to us. As views expressed in this questionnaire will be treated as confidential, you need not identify yourself by adding your name to the document.

Name of school:

Date:

Grade:

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLOWING QUESTIONS IN A FRANK AND OPEN MANNER:

2. HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE SISWATI WHEN:

a) Speaking with friends?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

b) Speaking with older members of your family?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

c) Speaking with younger members of your family?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

d) Speaking with public officials?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

e) Speaking when shopping?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

f) Speaking with teachers?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

g) Reading newspapers, magazines and books?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

h) Writing to friends?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

i) Writing to family?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

j) Writing assignments and projects?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

k) Watching television?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

l) Listening to the radio?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

m) Listening to music you like?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

n) Worshipping in church?

All the time [] most of the time [] seldom [] never []

2. (i) Please give examples of books, newspapers, magazines etc that you usually read in SiSwati.

ii Please give examples of books, newspapers, magazines etc that you read in English

3.(i) Please give examples of TV programmes you usually watch in SiSwati

(ii) Please give examples of TV programmes you usually watch in English

4 (i) Please give examples of radio programmes you usually listen to in SiSwati

(ii) Please give examples of radio programmes you usually listen to in English

5. List your school subjects in order of most important to least important

6. List your subjects in order of most enjoyable to least enjoyable

7. If you have ranked SiSwati amongst the bottom three in 5 and 6 above, please explain your answer.

8. How do you find SiSwati literature books (tick one)

very interesting ☐

moderately interesting ☐

not interesting ☐

9. Can you write five topics you have written in SiSwati compositions this year?

10 Which of the following do you find easiest in SiSwati? (please tick one)

grammar

literature

oral literature

narrative writing

none of the above.

11 Do you o projects in SiSwati?

12. Do you do projects in English?

13. Do you debate in SiSwati?

14. Do you work in groups in SiSwati?

15 Do you work in groups in English?

16 Would you do SiSwati if there was no examination/credit?

Please give reasons for your answer in (16)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. IT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED

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