

An Analysis of the Language Policy of One South African University and how it Affects Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT The major focus of this paper is to analyze the language policy of a South African university, investigating if it meets the needs of the students as well as the effects it has on their academic performance. It further seeks to find out if the views of the students find expression in the ways in which this policy has been developed and implemented. The paper therefore considers the nature of this policy and the ideologies thereof as well as its development as a result of the socio-historical and political factors that led to the creation of this policy. Hence the analysis of these different views would inform and improve the teaching and learning in the classroom at higher education level as the lecturers would be informed of the outcomes, thus leading to different strategic approaches that would be used in teaching and learning. The paper makes use of a qualitative research method and the findings of the study are examined using studies language policy and planning by Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) and Brumfit (2006).

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an analysis of the language policy of one South African university. It examines the policy and its effects on students' academic performance. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was specifically chosen because of the dominant role of English in the

institution. Furthermore, the language policy resulted from particular political ideologies which imposed a multilingual language policy at national, provincial and university level (to some extent). However, in line with the findings of similar studies, the actual practices with regards to language use at this university does not reflect the aims of the policy. The aims of this paper are therefore to analyse the language policy of the University of the Western Cape with focus on the academic performance of students.

SA is a multilingual country with an extraordinary diversity of races, groupings, languages and landscapes that characterises this country. It has the most diverse and accommodating language policy in the world (Bangbose 2003). Despite the large number of official languages, English is the dominant language in South Africa (Dyers 2008) and as a result, many parents do their best to ensure that their children are educated in English. It has eleven official languages, and a significant number of minority languages.

1.1 The University of the Western Cape

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was established by an Act of Parliament as an ethnic college for “coloured” students in 1959. It was opened as a University College (mainly aimed at training high school teachers) in 1960, raised to the status of a full university in 1970 and gained its autonomy in 1983 through the University of the Western Cape Act. In 1982, it began the process of transforming itself into an internationally recognised university with a reputation for excellence in teaching and research. Due to its experience in the liberation struggle, UWC is aware of a distinctive academic role in helping to build an equitable and dynamic society. Today it has a diverse student and staff population. The 2003 language policy at this university aims at “ensuring equity, social development and a respect for South Africa’s multilingual heritage” (UWC Language Policy 2003). The language policy “attempts to guide institutional language practice so that it furthers equality, social development, and a respect for our multilingual heritage” (Language Policy Preamble 2003). The policy outlines which languages will be used by the institution in terms of language of teaching and learning, assessment, access to academic and professional discourse, promoting multiculturalism, and language of internal and external communication. The main language used at the institution is English, followed by Afrikaans and isiXhosa. The choices of these languages were guided by the fact that these are also the official languages of the Western Cape Province. It is logical that tertiary institutions should promote the most used languages in their provinces.

It is worth noting that the policy makers worked from the premise that the university is multilingual and that there was a need for a common language which in this case is English. Given the multicultural nature of the university, lectures are delivered in English, the exception being the different language departments like the departments of Xhosa, Afrikaans and Nederlands and other foreign languages. However, lecturers of other departments who are competent users of Afrikaans and Xhosa are “encouraged to use the language in addition to English if it is going to ease understanding” (UWC Language Policy 2003). Students are also allowed to use the language in which they are most competent in discussions during tutorials but must give feedback in class only in English. As for assignments and tasks, students are expected to use only English apart from the departments of Afrikaans, Xhosa and other foreign languages. Therefore, English is the medium of instruction (MOI) at UWC and can be seen as the dominant language in class (lectures and tutorials).

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

There is a bilateral relationship between language ideologies and attitudes on the one hand, and language planning and policy on the other. Planning languages and writing language policies are strongly influenced by the prevailing language ideologies and possibly more personal attitudes of those who are directed by governments to do this kind of work (Abongdia 2013). At the same time, language planning and subsequent policies put in place can also influence people’s language ideologies and attitudes as well as their social practices.

Language planning is defined by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 3) as “a body of idea, laws, and regulations (language policy), change, rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities. To put it differently, language planning involves *deliberate*, although not always overt, *future oriented* change in systems of language code and/or speaking in a societal context”. According to Mühlausler (2000), languages are not isolated systems but interact with other systems outside linguistics such as culture, politics, and environment.

For planning to take place, Adegbija (1989) suggest five stages:

- The first stage is the ‘spadework phase’ that deals with fact finding and policy formation;

- The second phase deals with the mass mobilisation and enlightenment stage where the plan is advertised and citizens are educated on it and required to familiarise themselves with the plan;
- The third stage deals with the implementation of the policy;
- The fourth phase actually evaluates the policy by monitoring its effectiveness and problems based on the objectives of the policy;
- The final phase is the review stage where changes are made based on the evaluation stage.

Adegbija (2007) argues that language practitioners should follow these stages as language is never isolated but is “a part of eco-linguistic structure impinged upon by other elements within the structure” (p. 217). To him, in every multilingual environment, language planning is imperative in areas like national language, official languages, language of intercultural/interethnic communication, language of international communication and most importantly, language of education. In the Nigerian context, the language of education has had a lot of attention as this area affects all other areas in society. However, an attempt to make Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo national languages has failed in its implementation. English here is the language of wider communication while major community languages are used for inter-ethnic communication although this is not clearly stated in the policy document. Note should be taken that in Nigeria, there is no language planning document *per se* (Adegbija (2007), and that the national policy on education covers all aspects of language policy in Nigeria. The policy notes that Nigeria is a multilingual society, and for this reason it includes the “mother tongue medium policy” (MTMP) as well as the “multilingual policy” (Bangbose 1991).

With regards to the above, a country’s language policy can be in the form of “a clause in a national constitution, a language law, a cabinet document, or an administrative regulation” (Spolsky and Shohamy 2000: 3). This policy reflects a government’s particular political agenda behind the proposed strategies and models of how the policy should be implemented. Language Policy is what a government does either officially through legislation, court decisions or policy to determine how languages should be used, which language skills are needed to meet national priorities or how to establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages.

Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) define language policy as “an effort by someone with or claiming authority to change the language practice (or ideology) of someone else”. Within the language policy, the policy maker has some level of authority over those expected to follow its requirements. They make reference to Ager (1996) who sees language policy as *obtaining* power rather than *distributing* it. When creating a language policy, the question to be answered is: for whom is this policy intended? And who are the policy makers? Spolsky and Shohamy think that if language policy aims at changing language practice, then there is a need to study not just policy making but the implementation and evaluation of the policy as well. For policy to be analysed, it becomes very important to evaluate its impacts. It is important to note that sometimes the statement of the policy can be more important than its effective implementation.

Brumfit (2006) in his contribution to language policy says that all humans are born with the ability or capacity to acquire a language(s) that they are exposed to. They have no genetic links to a particular language. He further notes that thresholds are found both between and within languages with liminality as a characteristic of contemporary language use. Liminality is a situation where people shift from (and eventually lose) their original identity, role and positions. This happens as the liminal person moves from one place to another dropping and acquiring new values (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004 and Turner 1982). Turner (1982) further says that languages are constructed just like identity depending on the political, individual or group needs/choices. The name of a language depends on the particular social group, thus it should be seen as a social act. Many of the world’s languages have the names of particular ethnic groups they are associated with, e.g. isiXhosa as the language of the Xhosa speech community in South Africa and Fulani as the language of the Fulani community in Cameroon. Current thinking, however, is that a one-to-one relationship need not necessarily be assumed between language and ethnicity (Harris and Rampton 2003:5), as patterns of human migration and urbanisation have led to many languages no longer being associated with some distant culture or heartland. African cities, in particular, are typified by tremendous linguistic diversity, with plenty of mixing and blending of different varieties or codes.

Brumfit (2006:36) in his research on language policy in Europe argues that “policy making is normally aspirational and symbolic”. What is significant about a policy is what is excluded

more than what is included, and what is considered desirable to the policy makers. Conversely, Brumfit thinks that a policy might run the risk of not being practical and not meeting the needs of the people. “People’s individual repertoires are modified, changed and widened because of language contact as a result of the permeability of language boundaries, and such extended repertoires frequently find no reflection in language policies” (Brumfit 2006: 37). The wish to extend these repertoires is based on rules put in place by those of the language(s) that one wishes to add to his/her repertoire. Such extended repertoires can be seen in people’s use of the many cross-border languages of Africa as well as the heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) so prevalent in its multilingual cities.

Brumfit (2006: 39) further sees multilingualism and multi-dialectalism as having always been the norm for most people, and views policy as a way of controlling or managing linguistic diversity. In this regard, he refers to English as the *default* language for international communication but acknowledges the need to provide support for minority languages. Brumfit is critical of monolingual, monocultural speakers of English, and argues that they should be made to see foreign languages as means of expanding their repertoires. Thus, language policy for him should help to “reduce the negative effects of people hiding behind a language if it acknowledges the permeability of languages in all directions” (Brumfit 2006: 40). Language is “the Epiphenomenon in power relations” that can easily be used to define group and individual identities (Brumfit 2006: 41), and he sees the naming of languages as political and not linguistic in nature, given that individuals speaking the same language use different lexicons, syntactic features, cultural codes, accent, as well as tone of voice. In addition, language rights are often promoted over individual rights.

However, while policies may ostensibly suggest that they are instruments of language rights, as it is the case in SA, individuals generally do not have the right to use the language they are most comfortable in (irrespective of its official status) but have dominant languages of power imposed on them. Given this reality, Brumfit (2006) concludes that policy makers should make it clear that language policies are political, rather than linguistic instruments. He further argues that it is not easy to convince people to accept a more open-ended view of their language capacities and repertoires.

According to Baldauf and Kaplan (2006:8) language policy and planning occur in an environment circumscribed by language ideologies arising from “historical and material

situations; from socio-political and historical frameworks of power caused by discrimination and nation building”. They posit that language in education is one of the major areas where the language policy of a country is seen. Like Brumfit (2006), Baldauf and Kaplan think that there is a discrepancy between the language policies put in place and actual practices in reality. Instead they contend that most policies are “diametrically opposed to reality” (2006: 9), driven by political rather than linguistic forces. This is in line with Kamwangamalu (2000) who says that there is a mismatch between language policy and language practice in South Africa, where official policy promotes multilingualism, but practices are shifting towards English monolingualism in all higher domains of use.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study makes use of a qualitative research method with the language policy of the University of the Western Cape analysed within the context of the dominant ideologies in the country as a whole. The research population was third year students in the linguistic department at UWC.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through the use of open ended questionnaires completed by students and lecturers, as well as individual interviews conducted with purposefully selected lecturers, students and major stakeholders such as deans of faculties and administrators. In addition, a substantial amount of time was spent simply engaged in observation in the research site, while recording these observations in daily field notes. The data was analysed by the use of Critical Discourse Analysis CDA and Content Analysis (CA).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Data collected through open-ended questions

Three clear themes emerged from the written responses to the open-ended questions by the lecturers at UWC. I have included the first languages (L1) of the lecturers (as identified by them) here in order to determine whether different language backgrounds revealed different attitudes. However, it should be pointed out that most of these respondents were bilingual or multilingual, and that English was one of their home languages.

1. Ignorance about the contents of the language policy at UWC

Most of the lecturers were aware of the presence of a language policy at the university but had never seen nor read it. However, out of the 14 questionnaires received from the lecturers, 71.4% of the lecturers were aware of the existence of a language policy at this university but only three of them had seen and read the policy. The others said there was a language policy but they had never seen it. All they knew was that the MOI was English. Some of the responses were:

As far as I know, the policy declares English as the medium of instruction.

This obviously impacts on the performance of students who do not speak or write English competently. (Shona L1 male lecturer)

Yes, English is the language of teaching and learning.

Students who are proficient in English have an advantage over those – probably the majority – who speak one of the indigenous languages. The latter on the whole have difficulty in expressing themselves clearly in English and struggle to clearly understand their academic readings. (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer)

Yes, it is a multilingual university; other languages (Afrikaans L1 and isiXhosa) can also be used for the setting of tasks, tests, etc. where applicable according to faculty policy. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

Looking at the responses above, it can be seen that these lecturers were aware of the fact that English is the MOI in UWC. However, they all expressed concern about the use of English as a MOI given that many of the students were not English first language speakers. Although some of them held that English might be an advantage to the students for interaction with others in different institutions and the world, others acknowledged that many students struggled with both the academic reading and writing in English required at the university, which might result in underperformance. As research by Banda (2000), Dyers (2000) and others have shown, many of the students at UWC enter the university with an inadequate background in English, especially those who come from schools in poorly resourced areas.

As a follow up to the previous question, the lecturers were asked how they felt about the UWC language policy. As mentioned previously, not all the lecturers were familiar with the language policy of UWC and I attempted to explain to them what it was all about while others asked for a copy of it. Some of the responses were:

My concern is how many teaching staffs actually know about the language policy and whether they are aware that we are a multilingual institution of higher learning. (Shona L1 female lecturer)

The change in language policy from Afrikaans to English at UWC resulted in a drop of Afrikaans speakers as they preferred to attend Afrikaans speaking institutions such as the University of Stellenbosch instead of UWC. (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer)

The policy is brilliant as it is but the issue is its implementation. It appears that the policy is only on paper but its practice is yet to come or has been completely forgotten. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

According to the first and last responses above, one may say that the problem at UWC was not that of the policy put in place, but that of ignorance of its contents as well as a lack of implementation. Here, one is reminded of Brumfit's (2006) assertion that policy must be made known to the people concerned if one wants the policy to succeed. However, the question one is left to answer is if the tutors and lecturers should use the home languages as suggested by the first respondent above. As Hill (2010: 42) contends, there is a clear gap between the "stated objectives of formal language policy and actual language practice". I am not in any way justifying the lack of policy implementation at UWC but think that dominant ideologies here (as shown in the quantitative data as well as the linguistic landscape of UWC) may cause even the best implementation plans to fail.

It appeared as if individual language backgrounds played a role in the attitudes expressed by these lecturers. The second lecturer quoted above (Afrikaans L1) felt that the change from being a bilingual Afrikaans and English university to a university with English as its sole MOI has caused Afrikaans L1 students to move to other universities. While not overtly critical of the policy, one could sense some covert negativity towards this policy from his response. The third lecturer (isiXhosa L1) wanted to see more signage in isiXhosa as

evidence of the multilingual language policy. Her answer showed an awareness of how isiXhosa was relegated to a very minor position at UWC, behind English and Afrikaans – in other words, of the ideology of a hierarchy of languages (Weber and Horner 2012: 12).

2. *Attitudes towards the use of the indigenous languages as a MOI*

Another area investigated was the possible inclusion of the indigenous languages of South Africa at UWC. The South African respondents were asked if they would like to teach in their home languages and if they thought there were some home languages that could also be used as a MOI (non-South Africans could also add their views on the use of languages such as isiXhosa). Contrasting views emerged to this question. Firstly, one group of lecturers were firmly against the idea:

No, there is no adequate terminology in specialised fields, but a language like Afrikaans has been fully elaborated and standardised. (English L1 female lecturer)

I feel that they can limit students in terms of academic excellence since they're not being used formally. (Afrikaans female lecturer)

Afrikaans yes, but isiXhosa no as it is way behind in terms of standardisation (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer).

At UWC, it would be difficult because of the diverse population (Chewa L1 female lecturer)

While some of the lecturers felt that the home languages, with the exception of Afrikaans, lacked “adequate terminology in specialised fields”, others considered the very diverse student population as reason for using only one MOI. These lecturers seem to largely agree with Neethling’s (2010: 71) thinking that “this development (of Xhosa as MOI in higher education) is possible, but whether it would be worth the investment, time and energy in the current educational context in South Africa, is, of course, not easy to answer”. Neethling (2010: 72) also notes the lack of clear leadership from government circles and the reluctance to show “a changed attitude and a commitment” to such an enterprise. With the use of English, Neethling’s viewpoint aligns with Pennycook’s contention that English, despite being the global language, “has always been local” (Pennycook 2010: 86-7), given the many

years of exposure to English in many countries of the world, including Anglophone South Africa.

Nevertheless, there were a number of lecturers who either supported the idea or already used the indigenous languages under a range of circumstances:

Yes, Afrikaans can. It is a developed language and students that are first language speakers will perform better (English L1 female lecturer)

Standard versions of Afrikaans and Xhosa are definite possibilities as MOI if the staff are sufficiently able and willing. (English L1 female lecturer)

I speak isiXhosa to students when they come to my office for consultations and give examples in class as well (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

I am fortunate in being able to teach in English, my home language. Yes, certain indigenous languages could definitely be used to teach academic subjects, but the necessary resources would need to be in place. (English L1 female lecturer)

Partially, because they (Afrikaans and isiXhosa) are languages of wider communication and should be used for group discussions and consultation ONLY (English L1 male lecturer).

All languages are capable of being sufficiently developed into languages that have the concepts to communicate in advanced subjects such as science and mathematics (Shona L1 male lecturer)

The above lecturers expressed different degrees of interest in the use of the indigenous languages in assisting the students. While the first two lecturers in the above extracts favoured the full use of the indigenous languages as MOI at tertiary level, it was interesting to see that a majority of the others saw these languages as playing supporting roles to English, largely suitable for use in, as one of them put it, “*group discussions and consultations ONLY*”. The lack of resources in especially isiXhosa was a major point that kept occurring all through the research, but this could also have masked covert negative attitudes towards the use of languages other than English in the academic context. Here, one

is tempted to agree with the notion of 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson 1992) through which education in Africa is dominated by English and the idea of integrating and teaching in the African languages is dominated by criticisms on the weaknesses of using these languages (Banda 2009: 2).

It is important to bear in mind that UWC is a national and an international university, attracting students and lecturers from all over South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world. This offers some justification for the choice of English as the only MOI. While both isiXhosa and Afrikaans are standardized languages, Afrikaans, as a result of its history in South Africa, has been used as MOI at universities in South Africa for many years, while isiXhosa only gained official status after the country became a democracy in 1994. The use of these two languages as MOI at UWC could certainly be seen as problematic, leading to the exclusion of many students and even lecturers from discussions led in these two languages. In line with the UWC mission and vision, the use of English as MOI should be seen as a means of uniting diversity.

3. Challenges faced by students as a result of English as MOI

The lecturers were asked if the students were taught in their first official language and if they had problems studying in English. Here are some of the common responses:

English speakers are being taught in their language and thus have a significant advantage over other. But most students who enrol at UWC do not speak English as their first language. Probably all students are taught through the medium of English as English is the default language policy of the university. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

For some, yes, for others, no as their first official language is probably Xhosa or Afrikaans. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

Some yes and others no since we have 11 official languages and we have students from all kinds of walks and almost each one having its own official language (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

According to the above responses, only the English L1 students enjoyed the privilege of being taught in their L1 as English was the sole MOI (Kaschula and Antonnisen 1995). This certainly created some difficulties for those who spoke English as either their L2 or L3, and corresponds with the concerns expressed in sub-section (1) above about the difficulties experienced by such students.

The lecturers were also asked how they managed students whose first language was not English. Here are some of the key responses:

I don't treat students any differently. I try to be clear about requirements and speak clearly and slowly in all lectures. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

I always strive to treat all my students "equal", however, because I am aware of the language barrier for some of them, I either teach at a slower pace or use more practical and visual examples as I explain concepts, theory and content. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

I ensure that my lessons are carefully scaffolded, that they are interactive, with a large proportion of time spent on giving students the space to ask questions to their peers and myself, the lecturer - before they are asked to complete tasks on their own. In addition, all students need to come for consultation, with the lecturer or the tutor. Also, I am sensitive to my need to speak clearly, the speed at which the lecture progresses, and to check whether understanding has taken place. (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer)

Students who have my first language would come for consultation and request to speak in Afrikaans. The other speakers need more practical examples to comprehend certain concepts. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

It was clear from these responses that most lecturers tried to accommodate students with a limited command of English – some by simplifying their lecture notes and presentations, others by allowing for enough time for interaction in the classroom, and others by paying attention to their clarity of speech and examples. But there was also an awareness of how easy it was to exclude students who, as Banda (2009) argues, were never given the

opportunity to learn English properly seeing that experienced and trained teachers were removed from classes after the country became a democracy.

4.2 Data collected through Interviews

As was the case with the lecturers' data from Cameroon, some of the data from interviews with the UWC lecturers supported the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires. However, there were also a number of interesting contrasts, which are explored in the main themes to emerge from the interviews.

1. *Confusion and ignorance about the contents of the language policy at UWC*

Typical responses to my introductory question on whether the lecturers knew about the UWC language policy were:

Well I heard there is one but I have never seen nor read it. (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer)

I am not sure of what the language policy is.

*It states that we use English as the MOI and Afrikaans and Xhosa where appropriate?
(English L1 female lecturer)*

I have heard about it, but I haven't read it. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

Eehhh yah... I think the policy says that English is the language of education here although it recognises the other languages. (Chinyanja L1 male lecturer)

*Yes, I think there is a language policy and it upholds the language policy of this province where there are three official languages English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. According to the language policy, being in a new dispensation after the apartheid regime, an attempt was to give the indigenous languages a place and thus, room was given to Xhosa and Afrikaans.
(Shona L1 male lecturer)*

Of the above lecturers, only one (a Zimbabwean lecturer) was acquainted with the language policy. This highlights the fact that the policy is not brought to the attention of many

lecturers. Even finding it on the (English only) UWC website is a major undertaking. It is as if those who should promote the policy prefer as little interaction on it as possible. Neethling (2010) observes how universities appear to have tacitly ignored the SA government's 2002 recommendation on all HEIs promoting and facilitating the development of the indigenous languages. This seems particularly apt here regarding the lecturers' ignorance of the UWC language policy: "It seems to be a classic case of noble intentions of accepted recommendations simply not filtering down to the level where active steps should be taken towards eventual implementation" (Neethling 2010:67). Underlying this very basic requirement of at least familiarizing lecturers with the policy is undoubtedly the powerful ideology that English is the only suitable language for use in the academic environment of UWC.

2. Viewpoints on some visible attempts at implementation of the language policy

Once I had acquainted lecturers with the UWC language policy, they raised a number of possibilities but also challenges with regards to the possible implementation of it. A lot was said about the visibility of language policy in the actual practices of the university, particularly its attention to multilingual signage.

In the 90s when this policy started, they tried to implement the policy where they started translating some of the signage on campus, graduation programs translated, but since then, I don't think that there is any other thing that has ever been done. Even the qualities of the translations done are so poor that you just get very angry when you see them. They are done in any careless manner, they just get anyone to come and do them and nobody cares about the quality and everything. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

In graduation ceremonies, only the greetings are in all three languages. Signage wise, eehhhh, English dominates, but I think the problem is with the resources, you can have the policy but if you do not have the resources to implement the policy then you policy remains in the air.

Researcher: *To what extent then do you think that this policy meets the needs of the students?*

Well, it does really meet their needs, with English; I think everyone is trying to improve on their English but I think the students are really trying their best to improve their level of English as they need to be able to communicate with everyone. (Afrikaans L1 female lecturer)

I think there should be a lot more openings to multilingualism at UWC which I yet do not see happening here. Even the signage is very symbolic and it should be in the three official Western Cape languages but this is not the case it is mostly in English and Afrikaans and I think that could be improve and have some of the signage in Xhosa. This therefore does not show a multilingual environment as people should be able to speak across the different languages trying to negotiate or bridge the gaps between them. (English L1 female lecturer)

The representation of the three languages on the signage at UWC, as well as the lack of attention paid to accurate translations, indicated the status of particular languages and a definite lack of respect for isiXhosa. The first lecturer felt quite angry and at the same time powerless in respect of how her first language was being treated here. The second lecturer again raised the issue of resources without which the policy cannot be successfully implemented. She also felt that the students themselves were committed to improving their command of English as this was the MOI at UWC. As noted by Dyers (2000) the students regarded English as the key to success. In view of this, Banda (2000) explored a paradox whereby black and coloured parents increasingly demanded English as the MOI as a result of the attitudes and ideologies they held towards English. The third lecturer felt that everything done at UWC just paid “symbolic” attention to multilingualism. Thus there was a clear discrepancy, according to these lecturers, between policy and practice at this university (Kamwangamalu 2000; Spolsky and Shohamy 2000; Brumfit 2006; Baldauf and Kaplan 2006).

3. *Attitudes to English as the sole MOI at UWC*

The lecturers were also asked how they felt about the fact that English was the sole MOI at UWC. Their responses can be placed in different categories:

(i) Firstly, two Xhosa L1 lecturers in particular saw this as a great disadvantage to some students. It is important to point out that they were in a significant minority compared to the views of the other lecturers.

Students who do not speak English are seen as stupid but the reason is because they struggle with the language and have to learn it first before they come to the content and the people who teach them do not understand this and are not patient enough to take them along with the other students. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

There are very few students if any who have English as the mother tongue, so I am astonished by the fact that we have English at the university as the MOI... In fact the problem with our university is that most of our students do not speak English at home as their L1 and that makes it very difficult for them to grab the concepts in a foreign language. So there is a lot of pressure on them and that pressure doubles when they have to learn in a foreign language and grab all the concepts. (Xhosa L1 female lecturer)

These two lecturers, from two different departments, were quite vehement about the language policy at UWC and how it affected the students and their academic performances. It was possible that both of them also had negative past experiences as a result of struggling to cope with English. These experiences may have positioned them ideologically in favour of the greater use of isiXhosa in UWC. Their responses also points out the severe inequalities in education in South Africa, with those coming from predominantly black schools disadvantaged in terms of the quality of English teaching they received, despite all the educational changes that have taken place in post-apartheid South Africa. It can therefore be concluded that these two lecturers would be happy if the multilingual language policy was implemented. Despite the position held by the first lecturer, I was surprised to note that almost all the documents and posters in her office were in English despite the fact that she was a lecturer in the Xhosa department. Her passion for her language has clearly not affected the high visibility of English in her office, and probably sent out a very mixed message to her students.

(ii) A second class of response focused on the need to be fair to international students and lecturers.

Seeing that most of the students are not mother tongue English speakers, I think that the use of English is not very fair but again it is reasonable as there are a lot of foreign students at

this university who come from a different language background and may hard cope if a SA language is to be used as a MOI (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer).

Yah, Let's look at the other options, eeeh, if it is not English then it is Xhosa, and that will mean that for most foreign students they will first have to come here to learn the language before they start off their programmes. And you see there are other logistics; there is a lot of cost involved to see that Xhosa is brought up in such a way that you can teach in it. Consider subjects like physics, you cannot teach them in Xhosa the way Afrikaans is being taught. The reality is on the ground, however, that doesn't mean that Xhosa cannot be used as a MOI, it depends on the capacity. You cannot want multiculturalism and then you don't have the resources to use. (Chinyanja L1 male lecturer)

Eeeehhh I think English dominates and in tutorials, we find that foreign students tend to dominate as tutors so in as much as the policy allows the use of Afrikaans and isiXhosa in tutorials, I this is difficult because if the tutor does not speak the local languages, it is likely that he/she won't encourage these students to use the language in the tutorials even though the language policy provides for that. (Shona L1 male lecturer)

English was obviously the language used by the foreign lecturers as well as the post-graduate students who were often appointed as tutors in various departments of UWC. The choice of such students was as a result of a shortage of black South African post-graduate students to serve as tutors, as many of these students tended to enter the job market rather than continue with post-graduate studies upon graduation for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons could be their continuous weakness in English even after three to six years of undergraduate study, which made post-graduate study highly problematic, because this is an area that requires intensive further research and study in English. Thus the presence of English-speaking foreign tutors left the undergraduate students at UWC with no choice but to use English as the sole means of communication during tutorials. This meant that languages like isiXhosa and Afrikaans were seldom used for academic purposes in tutorials, and only served as means of informal interaction in these spaces. This also tended to make the other official Western Cape languages appear to be less valuable and of lower status than English. However, one may argue that the policy might have been better implemented if it was made available to the lecturers and students to enable them to know and of course use their linguistic human rights (Stroud 2004).

(iii) A third position was that English was the only rational choice as MOI at UWC.

In the 90s people from the then academic development centre used to give lectures and they would have someone to translate the lectures in isiXhosa and the Xhosa students themselves were very offended by this, as they said they were good enough in English. They actually felt insulted by this! And of course those were very meaningful attempts but getting people to discuss academic work in isiXhosa and not English was not easy. The problem was that they could not match the English words to their L1 and this led to confusion as it could hardly improve their understanding as was intended. So I think at the end of the day I can perfectly understand why English is the MOI here. You can have lectures in Xhosa that is not the problem, the problem is when student have to go to the library, how many books do they have in Xhosa? If you go up to the Xhosa department, they also have Sociolinguistics lectures but they lecture in English. So you find a lot of English taking place even in the Xhosa department here. Afrikaans is different, Afrikaans has a long tradition and was seen as the language of power during the apartheid years and had a lot of books that has been translated. (English L1 female lecturer)

We definitely do not have all the resources and it would not be easy for us to research our values and goals so that all the students can understand us and it is obvious that in a lecture hall you cannot use all the official languages that we have in SA. It is very unfair for those who are not English first language speaker but then they are making an initiative to improve on and learn the language. Anyway, I won't say it completely disadvantages them because they are in a learning process. (Afrikaans L1 male lecturer)

I think it is a healthy situation, speaking from the practical aspect of it we all know that English is widely used as a lingua franca, it is an international language where people speak different languages, and this becomes a common ground for communication.... if you look at the indigenous languages as at now, they are not fully standardised, they are yet to undergo the standardisation process but if you look at English, it is a great literary heritage, it has been fully standardized, it has been highly standardized, if I should be more precise, speaking when people say they want to use indigenous languages as a medium of instruction, it is a good thing but it is only good if you raise the standard of these indigenous languages to that

of English. Without doing that, it does not make any sense, it is not practical. (Shona L1 male lecturer)

The above responses tied with the arguments of some lecturers in the questionnaires that UWC is an international university and should have a common language as students came from different linguistic backgrounds. The issue of a lack of resources in isiXhosa was raised again, and some lecturers did not even realize that it was a standardized language. The focus on English as the only rational choice did however not mean that lecturers should refuse to assist students in need if they shared the same language or were competent users of the students' L1. English as a MOI at UWC was meant to be complemented with Afrikaans and isiXhosa, and these two languages were not being fully used as indicated in the policy. Kamwangamalu (2002: 16), with reference to the national language policy of SA, argues that "the new language policy is not working for all languages in post-*apartheid* SA: and the tides seem to be turning increasingly in favour of English". This I argue is reflected at UWC, where English, instead of playing the role of the *main* academic and administrative language appeared in this study to be the *only* academic and administrative language. This is in line with Beuke's argument (2008: 28) that the status of the other nine SA languages is continuing to decline especially in the domain of language of teaching.

Many of the arguments above about the 'rational choice of English' reflect Rumsey's (1990) definition of language ideologies as being 'common-sense notions' about languages. We note arguments in favour of English because '*it is a great literary heritage, it has been fully standardized*', as opposed to a language like isiXhosa which always raises questions like '*how many books do they have in Xhosa?*' Even the Xhosa students, according to one of the lecturers above, reacted angrily to any attempts that were being made to translate some lectures for them in the 90s. They saw this as an insult to their intelligence and their ability to use the prestigious language, English, which may be another indication of Banda's (2009: 2) argument that Africans are culturally dominated through education in English.

4.3 OBSERVATIONS

As far as my observations are concerned, I focused on both my experiences as a student at this university as well as a researcher. It was noted that English was the main MOI as well as

the language of communication at UWC. Although most of the lecturers were South Africans and competent users of some of the SA languages, they mainly assisted the students in English even when they shared the same L1 with these students. In one situation, a student went to a Xhosa lecturer after her lectures and asked for some additional explanations as she did not understand everything that was presented in the lecture. The lecturer started explaining in English and the student asked her if she could use isiXhosa as she (the student) was struggling with English. Immediately the lecturer responded that UWC is an English institution and she could not use isiXhosa because the students were expected to answer questions in English.

This was also the case with many other lecturers and even the administrative staff who spoke the same language as the students but did not help them in that language. However, this happened because the lecturers and administrators were not aware of the language policy of the university. All they knew was the fact that English was the MOI and main administrative language. The fact that a Xhosa lecturer preferred to use English even in a one-on-one consultation with a Xhosa L1 student could be seen as a cause for concern, given that most of those who complained about English being the sole MOI at UWC were isiXhosa speakers (both lecturers and students). One may want to question why there was some resistance by isiXhosa-speaking lecturers to assist the students in their L1. Although this might have been as a result of lack of knowledge of the language policy, it might also have been that they were not confident about using their own language to explain academic concepts and arguments, possibly because they themselves had mainly been educated in English at university.

However, it was also observed that there were some lecturers who assisted the students in their L1 and this was mostly common among the Afrikaans speakers. It was interesting to find that the moment the students came for consultations with these lecturers, the language of communication became Afrikaans, blended with the occasional code-switching to English when the academic terms had no easy equivalent in Afrikaans. This met some of the demands of the language policy and assisted the students better in their understanding of the lessons and concepts. Of course, Afrikaans, unlike isiXhosa, is fully developed for use as an academic language as it is the MOI at a number of universities in SA. This might explain the relative ease with which these lecturers could communicate with their students, which contrasts to some of the reluctance observed among their Xhosa colleagues.

4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis of UWC language policy

UWC is a multilingual and multicultural community and this of course has an effect on the language use as well as language ideologies. Being a multilingual society, it influences and shapes people's language attitudes and ideologies. We are engulfed in various and often powerful languages and adapt ourselves to these languages through interaction and negotiation with them.

English at UWC is the MOI and can be seen as the dominant language in class (lectures and tutorials). Other languages like Afrikaans and isiXhosa may be used in tutorial and consultations. However, given the multilingual nature of UWC, the languages may only be representative of a speaker's subjective ideology about specific languages (Abongdia 2013), for instance, Afrikaans seen as the language of the oppressors through the apartheid era as it was forced upon all South African. Like Dyers and Abongdia (2010) who argue that ideologies are constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group and rooted in the socio-economic power vested in the interest of the dominant group, it is important to note that individual ideologies are as well embedded in this dominant group (Abongdia 2013).

Coming back to the policy, the policy makers worked from the premise that the university is multilingual and there was a need for a common language and that is why the when for the English as the language of teaching and learning while Afrikaans and isiXhosa will be used if need be. There is a myth that Heugh (2003:23) feels must be laid to rest, that "English is the only language which has the capacity to deliver quality education to the majority: African languages do not/cannot". Heugh argues that English is only used in schools across the country as the medium of instruction, while in fact the reality is that most teachers do not have an adequate command of English in order to carry on lessons in that particular language. This, Abongdia (2013) posits that it obviously has dire consequences on the learners in terms of pass rate. Linguists such as Spolsky and PRAESA have conducted research on schools where learners were taught in English, but are not fluent in the language. The end result is that they do not perform academically well as they could have.

4.4.1 Needs of Students

Once again on the surface, the language policy at UWC meets the needs of the students' population as the three official languages of the province are recognised. Although upon close inspection, the policy mentions things like internal and external communication be provided in Afrikaans and isiXhosa if need be. This simply is not good enough as most signs on campus are in English as was seen in chapter four of this study with Afrikaans and

isiXhosa represented in an insignificant manner. However, I think that the university cannot say that there are not enough qualified translators at the university, especially given that there is the Xhosa and Afrikaans departments that could be of great help. One may safely say that the policy itself is highly ideological and far from practice. The worry one may express here is if the students actually have a clear grasp of the content of courses in English only without assistance in their first languages seeing that some students complained that they learned all through primary and high schools in Afrikaans and or Xhosa.

4.4.2 Policy implementation

According to Adebgbija (2007) a language policy has five stages to follow from when it is drawn right up to its implements phase. Therefore not having the implementation rules already opens doors for poor implementation that may result in some languages being favoured over others. Unlike other universities that have implementation plans with time frame for the implementation of the different phases, UWC does not have implementation plan, let alone a time frame. One therefore has to wonder about the planning process of the policy because the aims should have been highlighted, be it status planning or corpus planning. However, it is clear that the policy makers were in favour of status planning over corpus planning due to the prevalence of the English language in the policy. Furthermore as part of the planning process, strategies should have been put in place (or at least outlined) stating the estimated benefits of multilingualism as well as the allocation of resources for the implementation of the policy.

5. CONCLUSION

It is important to note that the language situation at UWC reveals a situation where policy is not well implemented. This of course ties with Makoni's (2007) observation that policy makers fail to take into consideration those in the grass roots or those at the lower position of power. They only focus on those in power neglecting the languages spoken by the majority of people as it is the case with the isiXhosa and Afrikaans in this context.

Another ideological view established is the notion to top-down language policy (Wodak 2001) as the policy is developed by those in the position of power and administration. This results in language policy failing as more attention is paid on human behaviours which is of course not easy to prescribe. It is to such effect that Canagarajah (2005: 195) cautions

against rationalist, top-down approach to language policy based on rational or positivistic tradition that “assumes that socially efficient policies can be formulated from objective assessments of the needs, processes, and outcomes of language relationships”. For this to be avoided at UWC; there is a great need for the bottom-top approach to language policy which “constructs policies from ground up, along micro social domains” (Canagaranjah 2005: 196).

If one follows the definition given to language policy by Schiffman (1997) as the “decisions” (rules, regulations, guidelines) about the status, use, domains and territories of language(s) and the “rights” of the speakers of the languages in question then one may have to say that there is no language policy in at this university (Abongdia 2013). This is justified by the fact that although the university is made up of a diverse population and again situated in a province with three official languages, only English is used as the medium of instruction. Hence there is a great need to revisit the policy and develop implementations rules to make it work. No policy can work if rules are not put in place to guide its implementation and or practice.

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