

Beyond The Policy Rhetoric: IsiZulu in a Dual-medium Postgraduate Language Teacher Programme

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on the opportunities and pitfalls (challenges) experienced by lecturers in a dual-medium Language Honours programme. The programme forms part of two-year pilot project which introduced a dual-medium instruction in postgraduate studies within the Languages and Arts school. In-depth interviews and classroom observation were used for data collection. Using the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) conceptual frameworks, together with language revitalisation theory, findings in this study highlighted how the use of isiZulu as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL) has the potential 1) to strengthen and elevate the language to the level where it can be used for research and academic discourse, 2) to improve the teaching of isiZulu as teachers taking the course are challenged to reflect on their own practice, and 3) to enhance students' academic performance since they have better epistemological access to learning content. The paper concludes by making recommendations that should be considered going forward to further propel the use and development of indigenous African languages as LoLT.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of democratic government following the 1994 elections in South Africa brought about widespread political, social and economic changes aimed at redressing the injustices of the past. The fledgling democracy called for a new constitution that would promote inclusion and multilingualism while simultaneously recognising the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of South African society. One consequence was that the constitution gave official status to the previously marginalised indigenous languages in addition to English and Afrikaans. Extensive debates on language planning and language policy issues in the education domain followed this development. With institutions of higher learning seen as having a crucial role in the drive to spread multilingualism within the education domain, the Department of Education in 2002 published its Language Policy in Higher Education (LPHE) (DoE 2002) which sought to accelerate multilingualism and transformation at universities.

The use of African languages as LoLT in universities has been advocated by language scholars such as Alexander (2005), Lafon et al. (2008) and Batibo (2009), who all seem to concur that their use at tertiary level will enhance learners' cognitive development while advancing the

development of the languages themselves as vehicles of research and scholarship. This goes hand in hand with a call for a transformed African educational system that draws on the cultural knowledge and lived experiences of the African child (Bunyi 1999). Perhaps the most important gain to expect from this language initiative is the positive impact it will have on access and success in higher education for a significant portion of the student body who have not mastered the exoglossic languages used in this domain.

Background: The Changing Linguistic Landscape of Higher Education

The post-apartheid Constitution of South Africa made all tertiary education a "national competence" (Act 108 of 1996), prompting the new government to embark on a transformation of the higher education system. According to Jansen (2004), there was a need to resolve the apartheid legacy through the creation of a single, coordinated system of higher education. Coupled with this central purpose, various additional reasons have also been noted for the changes that took place in the South African higher education system in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chief among these was the need to address the racialized inequalities that existed

between the institutions. A second motivation was to upgrade the South African higher education system to meet the demands of the fast-changing, technology-driven, information-based economies of a globalising world (Sehoole 2005). The 1996 *Framework for Transformation* policy document put out by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE 1996) advised the minister on the new 'size and shape' recommended for the higher education system. In 2001, a National Working Group appointed by the Minister of Education released a report on *Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa* which recommended a reduction in the number of higher institutions (universities and technikons) from 36 to 21, through various merger arrangements (Jansen 2004). Cabinet approval of the mergers subsequently led to radical changes that substantially altered the country's higher education landscape.

Prior to 1994, the South African universities were divided into three groups. The first one is the historically Afrikaans-medium universities. The second and third groups are the historically English-medium white universities and the black universities which were established as a direct effect of the separate university Education Bill of 1957. Although they were designed specifically for non-white students, none of the country's indigenous languages was ever included as medium of instruction at any of these institutions. The following institutions fell within this group: the University of Fort Hare, the University of the North and the University of Zululand.

The changes brought about by the mergers meant a change in the linguistic makeup for a number of universities. Webb (2012) notes furthermore a remarkable shift in student demographics at South African universities which began to manifest itself in the same period as the mergers. The new diversity of students accessing university created a student population with changing linguistic needs to which universities had to respond. The LPHE framework, mentioned above, required each education institution to determine and publish its own language policy.

Seeking to meet this requirement and advance the transformation agenda, the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2006 approved a bilingual language policy which explicitly defines the university's need to "preserve and promote respect for, and proficiency in, the languages referred to

in the Constitution, and other languages, including the heritage languages, that facilitate potentially valuable cultural, scientific and economic ties" (UKZN 2006: 4). The policy promotes the advancement of isiZulu, a historically marginalised language which is also a home language for the majority of the students. At the same time, the policy recognises the international scholarship value of the English language, and Afrikaans and languages of Indian origin are also acknowledged as important languages. The policy clearly stipulates that isiZulu will be developed as one of the institution's languages of instruction. In addition, there is a clear intention to develop isiZulu and English for academic and research purposes.

The university's active promotion of isiZulu is in line with the call by the Ministry of Higher Education for institutions of higher education to go beyond merely acknowledging African languages in their language policies and vigorously seek ways to develop and extend their use for research and scholarship (Nzimande 2012). Whereas the debate in the last decade focused on the need to include indigenous languages in higher education, it has now moved to how these could be made an important part of the academic discourse. The Ministry cautions that multilingualism and cultural diversity should be embraced and viewed as 'assets' to be cherished. They are important in affirming our identity and 'enable us to engage with the rest of humanity as equals in knowledge production and other areas of production' (Nzimande 2012). Kaschula (2013) emphasises the need to develop and promote African languages as a means to create an appropriate and effective multilingual, cognitive and intellectual environment. He speaks of the need to intellectualise African languages alongside English and to some extent Afrikaans. It is in this spirit that the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Education piloted a dual-medium Language Honours programme in 2012.

A Brief History of IsiZulu Teaching in Higher Education

Zulus make up one of the four major ethnic divisions among Black South Africans. According to the 2011 census, IsiZulu is spoken by 70 percent of the KwaZulu-Natal population. The KwaZulu-Natal provincial language policy recognises isiZulu, English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans

as the four official languages of the province. IsiZulu was first introduced in schools in the 19th century by missionaries (Lafon et al 2008), and its use was initially confined to the religious domain but was later extended for use in primary schools. By 1885, the use of IsiZulu as the medium of instruction was entrenched in the then Natal colony. Kros (2002) writes that the first people to study African languages at university level were white academics like Eiselen Westermann and Carl Meinhof. Meinhof is known as the founding father of isiZulu phonetics and orthography (Msomi et al. 1992). Wright (2002) claims that South African university syllabuses for the teaching of African languages are generally patterned on the linguistic work of scholars like Doke, well known for his seminal work on the isiZulu grammar. Over and above this legacy, the use of English as the medium of instruction in the teaching of African languages was, until the beginning of this decade the norm in South African institutions of higher learning except, in certain cases, in the teaching of literature (Kaschula 2013).

The period following 1994 was marked by falling numbers of students taking African languages, and isiZulu language was not immune to this trend. While the hegemony of English and the pull of globalisation could be partly responsible for the plummeting numbers, one cannot rule out the legacy of apartheid education which rendered indigenous African languages instrumentally valueless and therefore less attractive for a number of African learners. Kaschula (2013) partly attributes the falling numbers to what he calls the trivialisation of the teaching of

African languages in the schooling system. In 2006, the DoE introduced a bursary scheme known as Fundza Lushaka with the objective of attracting teacher trainees in scarce subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science. The teaching of indigenous languages was also included as one of the qualifying criteria for the bursary. This initiative has seen a steady increase in the number of student teachers taking African languages modules within the teaching programme. Table 1 gives the student enrolment statistics for isiZulu modules over a five year period (2009–2013) in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Generally, the trend has been an average increase of 25 percent in student numbers for the last five years, except for students taking Conversational isiZulu (non- mother tongue students taking the module for non- teaching purposes).

Study Context: A Dual-medium Language Honours Programme at UKZN

In 2012, the School of Education piloted a dual-medium Language Honours programme that used English and isiZulu as the media of instruction in three of their language specialisation modules. This innovation is an interpretation of the university's multilingual policy, in line with its vision as the premier university of African scholarship. According to the project leader, when the language discipline within the School of Education went on a postgraduate recruitment drive, it became clear that undergraduate Bachelor of Education isiZulu majors felt

Table 1: Student enrolment for isiZulu modules over a five year period (2009–2013) in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Module code	IsiZulu modules	Credits	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	% Increase
EDZU110	Communication in isiZulu 110	16	310	310	457	588	711	23.1%
EDZU111	Conversational isiZulu 110	16	190	296	216	174	153	-5.3%
EDZU120	Communication in isiZulu 120	16	333	290	440	527	626	17.1%
EDZU121	Conversational isiZulu 120	16	144	248	177	112	83	-12.9%
EDZU201	isiZulu (mother tongue) Method 1	8	101	159	135	215	228	22.6%
EDZU210	isiZulu (mother tongue) 210	16	124	184	168	266	277	22.3%
EDZU220	isiZulu (mother tongue) 220	16	112	178	159	235	264	23.9%
EDZU301	isiZulu (mother tongue) Method 2	8	73	89	158	132	205	29.5%
EDZU310	isiZulu (mother tongue) 310	16	83	96	158	125	187	22.5%
EDZU320	isiZulu (mother tongue) 320	16	75	84	148	102	170	22.7%
EDZU401	isiZulu (mother tongue) Method 3	8	27	60	68	136	84	32.8%
EDZU410	isiZulu (mother tongue) 410	16	30	66	72	129	94	33.0%
EDZU420	isiZulu (mother tongue) 420	16	31	65	67	132	73	23.9%

hamstrung by the absence of isiZulu modules in the Honours programme. Although the programme was called the Language programme, it was biased towards English teaching and isiZulu teachers felt left out. Through funding from the University's Teaching and Learning office, the discipline embarked on a pilot project in which three Honours language modules were translated into isiZulu: 1) Critical Awareness in Language and Media Education; 2) Narratives in Education; 3) Multicultural Education. A series of meetings was held for the staff involved in the teaching of these modules in preparation for the project implementation.

Participant lecturers in the project were chosen on the strength of their expertise and scholarship in isiZulu Education teaching. Templates were developed and services were sought of experienced translators. The collection of information, academic articles and other relevant resources for the module proved to be a challenging task as there are very few academic articles, texts and thesis written in isiZulu.

The programme targeted top-performing isiZulu-major fourth-year students who had an average mark of 65 percent and above. For teachers, the requirement was a pass mark of 65 percent and above in their latest qualification; other requirements were that they should be currently involved in the teaching of isiZulu in their schools and have a minimum of five years teaching experience.

Theoretical Framework

The aim of this paper is to report on the use of isiZulu as the language of teaching and learning in a postgraduate context and to highlight the potential of this initiative to revitalise the language. The paper draws on the language shift reversal theoretical framework as proposed by Fishman (1991), who describes language shift itself as a consequence of colonisation whereby a language-speaking community gradually shifts its mother tongue from one language to another.

Borrowing from Fishman's theory (1991, 2001), Pohe (2012) identifies three significant events that lead to language shift. The process begins with the arrival of people who speak a different language and are often driven by motives such as trading and religion. Next comes the aborigines' loss of their spiritual base (their land), and the final stage is the setting up of schools that mandate the use of the settlers'

language as the language of instruction. Pohe's study aptly captures the way South Africa has gone through two of these stages, while Fishman's (1991, 2001) model attributes language shift in indigenous communities to the dislocating effects of colonisation and the on-going impacts of globalisation. Most of the literature (Hornberger 1998; Benton 1999) seems to concur on a need to constantly look for innovative ways to use and teach the language in order to achieve the ultimate goal of its revitalisation. Fishman (1991, 2001) likewise, proposes a number of steps for reversing language shift, but the specific focus of this paper is on just one such possibility, namely the introduction of IsiZulu as LoTL considered as a strategy for enhancing adult language learning. O'Laoire (2008) posits that adding new functions of the language by introducing the language into new domains that have been previously unused or were relatively underused is one of the defining hallmarks of language revitalisation. It can thus be argued that the use of isiZulu as LoTL in postgraduate education is a crucial process in the effort to revitalize indigenous languages in the South African linguistic context.

Cummins's (2000) BICS and CALP conceptual framework has been helpful in this study for an understanding of the proficiencies involved in language use. In the distinction Cummins makes between the two kinds of language proficiency, BICS, which stands for basic interpersonal communication skills, refers to the learners' surface level command of the language, such as mastery of basic vocabulary and grammar: the language skills that enable day to day communication. CALP stands for cognitive academic language proficiency and is linked to the more sophisticated command of the language that is necessary for academic success, where learners are able to use language to grasp concepts, establish relationships between concepts, analyse, synthesise and articulate information processed in oral or written form. Although Cummins's work relates to a school context, his framework is equally applicable to the university context.

METHODOLOGY

Three lecturers with varying lengths of teaching experience from the Language and Arts cluster participated in the study. The three participants represented the four lecturers that teach

in the programme under investigation. Their academic qualification also varied. Two have PhD degrees and the other a Masters. In order to protect the identity of the lecturers and the privacy of their views, they are identified as Y, S and Z. Lecturer Y taught the Narratives module, and his area of expertise is Language and Literary Theory. Lecturer S, (the project leader) who has experience in teaching the English version of the module shared the teaching of the Multicultural Education module with another colleague in the isiZulu department. Lecturer Z, a well experienced female Sociolinguistics specialist taught Critical Awareness of Language in Education and Media.

Data Collection Methods

An interpretive paradigm informs this research, and a case study design has been used to gain understanding of lecturers' lived experiences (Cohen et al. 2000) of their use of isiZulu as LoTL in the teaching of the given postgraduate (Honours) modules in language education. This qualitative study is an attempt into an in-depth analysis of a single phenomenon. Yin (2003) explains that a case study approach is descriptive and heuristic, which characteristics make it particularly useful as an in-depth analysis of a single phenomenon. Within the case study design, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used for data collection. The use of this type of interviews allowed for the writer to make follow up questions on the respondents' answers (Holstein et al. 1995). The researcher had observation sessions of authentic interactions in two classes. Due to time constraints, the researcher was able to organise only two classroom observation sessions. The researcher kept a journal where she made field notes of her observations.

The interviews were mainly conducted in isiZulu with code switching used to emphasize and clarify certain points. All interviews were audiotape recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English by the author. Individual interviews with each participant lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour. Interview transcriptions were given back to the participants for verification. This paper primarily draws on the lecturers' semi-structured interviews responses.

The interview questions put to the lecturers centred on their preparations for the module,

their selection of the teaching material and their reasons for doing so, challenges involved in the process, and experiences learnt. The shared experiences of these teachers can be summarised as opportunities and pitfalls.

Data Analysis

Both the interview data and observation notes were analysed using qualitative data analysis methods. Participants' responses were read through repeatedly so as to identify major themes. Six themes were identified and these were put under two categories; opportunities and pitfalls.

The visited classes were the Narratives in Education and the Critical Awareness in Language and Media Education. With the Narratives class, the topic under discussion was "The storyline in isiZulu folktales." There was a lively discussion and students' use of academic register was of acceptable standard. Students used lots of examples from their own experiences and were familiar with the jargon in this genre as they were all involved in the teaching of isiZulu literary texts in their schools. *"I felt that using themes from students' theses worked well for the students. It helped that there is quite a few selection of students from the School of Arts who have written theses on folktales using the isiZulu medium."* These words from the Narratives lecturer (Lecturer Y) clearly indicates that he felt students had benefited a lot from the wide selection of seminal work on this theme which is prescribed in the Narratives' module template. The selection included extracted theme related chapters from carefully identified PhD dissertations and Masters theses written in isiZulu by students and academics from UKZN and other universities.

However, with the Critical Language Awareness module it was a different case. While the researcher observed increased student interaction, there was lots of code switching going on. Also students seemed to struggle with the use of academic register in performing their learning task for the day. Two students were giving oral presentations on the articles they had read. One article was a discussion on how codes and signs are used to construct media texts, and the other was on entitled. "Student did not seem to have adequate CALPS to carry out this task efficiently. For instance, they referred to media as simply

‘newspapers’ (*abamaphephandaba*), whereas the discussion included all media products. “*Ngibona sengathi abafundi bazithole besenkingeni yokufunda ama-article abhalwe ngendlela abangayijwayele kanti futhi abhalwe nangesiNgisi. Bekunzima kubona ukulandela i-argument nokusekela ngendlela imibono yabo.*” (I think students found it a daunting task to engage academically with journal articles written in English. They displayed a lack of depth in their analysis.) This comment given by the Critical Awareness lecturer in the interview session aptly sums the writer’s observations. It was observed that during this session, students often seemed to miss some salient points in their discussion of the articles in question.

The CALP conceptual framework which advocates a high level of cognitive engagement with languages has been used as an analytic tool. It can be inferred that students lacked understanding of the logic of the argument in a text. Thus, they did not critically engage with the texts and therefore could not adequately discern the thesis of the argument. In addition, students could not always infer meaning from what had been read. When it comes to the use of concepts, it was observed that even though students had an idea of their meaning, they could not produce isiZulu equivalent words to define the difference in meaning in the following words: *a symbol, an icon and index*. These words explain different kinds of signs - (*izimpawu*). But the students tended to use just the word *izimpawu* for all three. The students’ lack of CALP proved to be a barrier in differentiating the terms. It can thus be concluded that the students’ knowledge and use of the linguistic concepts required in this course was at what Cummins refers to as the BICS’ level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Opportunities

(i) Epistemological Access

The interviews revealed that the use of isiZulu as LoTL in the Honours language programme broadened epistemological access in the mother tongue. Lecturers said that in-service teacher students who had not engaged in post-graduate studies in the last ten years did not feel alienated when they engaged in these mod-

ules as they felt the use of mother tongue as the language of learning enabled them to access the content in these modules. In particular, Lecturer S explained that one of the students who also happened to be his independent research student confessed that she was reluctant to register for an honours degree as she has not done any studies in the last twelve years. She had felt that her English was not “up to scratch for post graduate studies.” She said that doing the three modules in isiZulu language had been an enormous advantage for her as she had better understanding of the course content, unlike with her other modules that were taught in the English medium, *eeish...* she had found those very hard... writing those assignments had been really difficult. These findings confirm Madiba’s (2008) conclusions that the use of English as the sole medium of instruction creates a barrier to learning, particularly with black South African students.

(ii) Independent Research Project

One of the major assignments in the Honours programme is the Independent Research Project, which is a small-scale research project designed to foster intellectual independence and critical reflection (Language and Arts Independent Research Module Guide 2012). The Independent Research Project (2012) records show that all the students who had done the three honours module in isiZulu medium opted to do their independent research project in isiZulu. Although their lecturers conceded to there being some difficulties with this assignment, an in-depth interview with them confirmed that all were in agreement that “using isiZulu had contributed to the development of the language as a language of academia”. In other words, the use of isiZulu raised the language to what Cummins terms the CALP level. The project leader indicated that students were also forced to reflect on their practice in choosing their topics for investigation, which ranged from the teaching of reading to the teaching of critical literacy in media messages such as adverts. Lecturer Y stated that students were appreciative of the collaborative seminars in which the students working in isiZulu shared their work with their English student counterparts. They said these afforded them an initiation into communities of best practice. Accord-

ing to the Language and Arts cluster 2013 Master's students' register, all of this group are now doing their Masters in language education and have opted to write their theses in isiZulu. In my opinion, these theses will go a long way in addressing the research gap on issues pertaining to isiZulu learning and teaching, and in showcasing isiZulu scholarship, culture and language, thereby contributing to the revitalisation of the language.

(iii) *Metalanguage*

Lecturer Y concedes that even though in the Narratives module they made good use of isiZulu written Literature oriented sources, for added insight and richness into the field, these had to be supplemented with readings written in English. On asking the three lecturers how they dealt with the lack of corresponding essential core concepts in isiZulu, they all said that quite often they had to coin those concepts that were crucial for the understanding of the content. Mostly these would be descriptive phrases rather than 'academic concepts'.

The development of metalanguage in isiZulu was one of the plusses mentioned by all the lecturers involved. Both students and lecturers worked hard on the terminology issues and lecturers noted that some of the selected studies identified for use in the course were insightful both for them and for the students. One example cited was terminology developed for concepts in Critical Awareness of Language in Media and Education:

ideology	–	<i>umcabangomgudu</i>
assumptions	–	<i>izihlawumbiselo</i>
concept	–	<i>umqondomagama</i>
genre	–	<i>uhlobombhalo</i>
intertextuality	–	<i>ukwakhela kwamathekisthi kwa manye (descriptive phrase)</i>
primary and secondary message	–	<i>umyalezo oyisiseke lo nowelekayo</i>

Pitfalls

(i) *Lack of Seminal Work in the Language*

One of the challenges cited by the lecturers involved was the inability to find seminal work in the field written in isiZulu. This is to be expected however, as the language has been "de-

valuated and delegitimised" by colonial education (Bunyi 1999: 342). Lecturers said they had to resort to the use of translated materials. Although extreme caution was exercised in the appointment of translators, lecturer Y points out that they did stumble in their translations. Students themselves had to work twice as hard when preparing for seminars and assignment writing as they needed to translate the material from English into isiZulu. Being inexperienced in this task, they often missed important nuances in some of the reading texts that they were examining, according to Lecturer Y's observation. Lecturers also reported that a majority of students struggled to write in the expected academic register. As lecturer S put it, they 'lacked the academic discourse' required in the module. In other words, they found it an overwhelming challenge to shift from BICS to CALPS. Their difficulties demonstrated that their cognitive, affective and social development had hitherto not really occurred in the language, reflecting (in my opinion) the poor level of African languages teaching in schools. Not only were these students challenged by writing, their lecturers noted, but even comprehension of the densely-written texts in English that they were required to read proved to be a tough exercise. In seeking to empower the students, lecturers had to teach basic academic literacy skills such as observing coherence and identifying the main points of the argument in a text – further evidence that their undergraduate isiZulu education modules had failed to engage learners in academic tasks in the isiZulu language that would foster the development of academic language proficiency.

The leader of the project seemed to lament the fact that the institutional bureaucratic processes had hindered the isiZulu discipline from devising its own original templates in the indigenous language. The lecturers expressed the view that use of original isiZulu templates would, apart from drawing on students' cultural knowledge and experiences, also encourage students to tap into ideas from indigenous knowledge systems. Lecturer Z commented on how the use of English texts in teaching the Critical Awareness of Language in Media and Education module often drew on cultural and lived experiences that were foreign to the students in the module. For instance, the interpretation of signs and symbols in texts used during the semiotic exercises were culturally very different, she said. Similar

opinion has been expressed by Kirkpatrick who suggests that the implementation of bilingual policy in tertiary institutions will “help challenge the dominant and well established Anglo-Saxon paradigms” (2008: 12), and instead promote and preserve rich indigenous cultural traditions. On the other hand, lecturer Y also voiced concerns with the notion that the isiZulu-medium students were expected to engage with and make sense of texts in which most of the content and subject matter, key theories and concepts, were originally researched within a European context and conceptualised in a non-indigenous language. He said that in some instances the difference between the students’ world and the contextual backdrop in text was so marked that it needed the lecturer’s clarification.

(ii) Insufficient Linguistic Resources

The use of isiZulu as LoTL made it clear that the language is still very underdeveloped. As cited in the in-depth interview held with the three lecturers, many terms had to be improvised in class in order to make sense of the content. “*Amagama amaningi esiNgisi awanawo amagama ashaya emhlohlweni esiZulwini, noma ekhonyana amanye aseqhamukile esiZulwini, kodwa awekho emthethweni*” (Many English words do not have an isiZulu equivalent, and some of the terms that were developed in isiZulu still need to go through a standardisation process) noted lecturer Z. “*Kusekubi nje kakhulu, awekho ama-dictionary abuyekeziwe esiZulu, futhi awekho –nje nawezifundo ezithile njen-goba kwenzeka esiNgisini, so umuntu ugcina esefunisela igama eliya ngakhona.*” (No up-to-date dictionaries exist for isiZulu and there are no subject dictionaries, quite often, in attempting to make sense of an academic concept one has to settle for a definition which is less than accurate) observed lecturers S and Y. Nonetheless, Dalvit et al. (2010) maintain that African languages are capable of expressing any concept, as evidenced by their use in pre-colonial times to express complex indigenous knowledge in areas such as astronomy, medicine and philosophy. I would therefore argue that the onus is on academics and students to generate new words and promote research that will fast-track the intellectualisation of indigenous languages.

(iii) Intellectual Isolation

One of the concerns raised by the lecturers was that even though students were doing commendable work in their research, writing in African languages might be counterproductive because limited opportunities for publication will mean that their work is likely to go unnoticed. On one hand, the hegemony of English in the academic world exacerbates the need to publish in that language since the “reward for publishing in approved journals is far greater than publishing in local languages” (Kirkpatrick 2011: 112). On the other hand, Kirkpatrick also points out that although publishing in international journals is often associated with an assurance of wide readership, this may not necessarily be the case. He claims that there are countless journals that go unread, whereas publishing in a local journal and in a local language can be assured of ‘a readership of thousands, and is also likely to have more impact’. Mgqwashu (2014) has noted that lack of cutting-edge research into the study of indigenous languages can be cited as one of the consequences of limited opportunities for showcasing research in local languages.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to highlight the experiences of using isiZulu as LoTL in a post-graduate programme. In keeping with the national Higher Education policy, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has put in place a language policy that promotes the use and advancement of isiZulu, the indigenous language of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This bold initiative should be commended, as many scholars have expressed concern that African countries and their institutions frequently draw up sound policies but fail to plan for their implementation.

The findings in this study reveal that the use of isiZulu as a LoLT in postgraduate courses has the potential to advance the status of the language to the scholarship level, thus ‘intellectualising’ the language in the process. This study illustrates that African languages have the capacity to be used beyond the primary school sector as media of instruction. Also, the idea of having dual-medium modules in a postgraduate language qualification is strategic, as the course

responds to the social and market needs of the people it serves within the province – in this case, the need for well-trained and competent isiZulu teachers.

To tackle the obstacle of inadequate academic vocabulary in bilingual programmes, this paper recommends that universities should develop corpus-based, discipline-specific multilingual glossaries. The University of Cape Town has already adopted this intervention strategy to aid conceptual understanding for English Additional Language students in different content areas, even though it has limitations. While multilingual glossaries or ‘word lists’ are important conditions they are not sufficient conditions for use of indigenous languages. The key term is “corpus-based”, where the use of contextual examples marks a distinction between corpus-based glossaries and traditional glossaries. Even if this approach may be less than ideal for a university context, collaboration with subject specialists from other disciplines could capacitate African languages departments to develop new words. For further insight, much can also be learnt from pilot projects of this nature undertaken by the Rhodes ICT department and the UKZN Psychology programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the recommendations for universities in South Africa would be to consider working collaboratively. For a multilingual country, establishing bilingual journals would be the way to go if the country is serious about promoting indigenous languages, local scholarship, and knowledge in local languages. Translations of such material into English should also be considered as it is likely to increase readership and showcase African languages and their rich culture.

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