

A PRAGMATIC OR PURIST APPROACH TO LANGUAGE STANDARDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION

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This article examines references to "standard language" in policy documents on language teaching and learning in South Africa, specifically the LLC outcomes document. It highlights how the notions of "standard", "appropriacy" and "correctness" are operative in the specification of outcomes of language learning. In considering how questions related to the notion of "standard language" in OBE may be confronted, various definitions of a standard language are discussed. A distinction is made between a purist approach and a pragmatic approach to language standards. Such a distinction seems pertinent, particularly in multicultural/multi-lingual settings with various primary languages and various dialects of the medium of education. The diversity of issues which confront the notion of a "standard" as outcome across different South African languages, is addressed. This will illustrate that in different South African languages different conceptions have developed of what the standard is, of how and where it is useful in communication. Thus, when the standard is given as an outcome of language learning, different language groups will have different expectations, and also different ideas of what is to be achieved in language learning. Naive views of students between ages 16 and 19 are presented in order to illustrate the kinds of expectations language learners have of the outcomes of their language learning efforts, and to assist in developing specific and sound practices in L1 and L2 teaching in South African schools.

Hierdie artikel ondersoek verwysings na "standaardtaal" in beleidstukke wat betrekking het op taalonderrig en taalaanleer in Suid Afrika. Daar word spesifiek aandag gegee aan hoe die stukke omgaan met die begrippe "standaard", "gepastheid" en "korrektheid" in die beskrywing van die uitkomst van taalaanleer. In die oorweging van hoe die begrip "standaardtaal" binne Uitkomsgebaseerde Onderrig verstaan en beliggaam moet word, bespreek ons verskeie definisies van dié begrip. 'n Onderskeid word getref tussen 'n puristiese benadering en 'n pragmatiese benadering tot taal en standaard. So 'n onderskeiding het besondere waarde in 'n multikulturele en veeltalige omgewing waar 'n verskeidenheid tale as eerste tale, en selfs verskeie dialekte van die tale van onderrig voorkom. Vrae wat verband hou met hoe verskillend die begrip "standaard" in verskillende Suid Afrikaanse tale ontwikkel het, word belig. Wat die standaard uitmaak, en hoe en waar dit vir mense waarde het, verskil vir verskillende taalgemeenskappe. Gevolglik sal daar, waar standaardtaal as uitkoms van taalaanleer aangegee word, by verskillende groepe uiteenlopende verwagtinge wees en uiteenlopende idees oor wat as mikpunt in taalaanleer gestel kan word. Aan die einde gee ons 'n opsomming van die relatief naiewe en tog insiggewende standpunte van 'n groep studente tussen die ouderdomme 16 en 19 jaar, oor die verkieslikheid van ontwikkeling en gebruik van standaardtaal of van nie-standaard variante in taalonderrig. Dit bied nie net insig in die verwagtinge van taalleerders nie, maar kan ook waardevol wees in die ontwikkeling van spesifieke en betroubare onderrigpraktyke in sowel eerste- as tweedetaal klaskamers.

INTRODUCTION

The question of standard variety of languages and education has been a topical issue for many years in language and education research. In South Africa the question of language, standards and education has also received considerable attention, specifically, but not exclusively with regard to English (see, for instance Ndebele, 1987; Wright, 1993).

Proposed educational changes in South Africa, most notably the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education and Training, make it necessary to examine the role of standard varieties (of all the official languages) in education. We would like to highlight certain pertinent questions and thus contribute to the debate on the relationship between standard and other varieties of the various languages used in education in South Africa, and on envisaged outcomes of language teaching and learning.

THE STANDARD AS A LEARNING OUTCOME

Language study falls under the broad rubric of the learning area "Language, Literacy and Communication", which is one of the seven learning areas within the outcomes-based curriculum proposed by state educational authorities. A flurry of documents of various degrees of detail and focus has been produced in this area. In these documents a set of common Learning Outcomes has been specified for all languages, with no distinction made between first and second language. The documents make few references to a standard, and there is no specific mention made of it among the seven Specific Outcomes for Language, Literature and Communication. However, under section 1 which represents the "Rationale" for language learning, the Department of Education 1997 document does state that to "use standard forms of language where appropriate" is one of many things that language learning empowers people to do. The inclusion of this point appears to have been in the "Rationale" section from an early stage of the debate in this area and was present in previous draft proposals (e.g. in the Western Cape Education Department Language Outcomes Documentation, August 1996). In at least one Western Cape Learning Area Committee meeting (attended by one of the authors), there was some debate about the necessity of the mention of standard at all. One suggestion was that this particular clause should simply more generally refer to the "appropriate use of varieties".

The inclusion of the statement in the policy documents is problematic. It has not been placed in a context, and there is no reference to the role of other varieties. There is no attempt to provide even a working definition of "standard". This explains our present interest, the title of this article and the need for continuing investigation.

In the document referred to above, there are oblique references to a standard, particularly under the assessment criteria. These points cluster into two categories listed under A and B below.

A.

Specific Outcome 2 of the Language, Learning and Communication learning area specifies that "Learners show critical awareness of language". The Assessment Criterion for this Outcome specifies:

"Awareness of the power relations between different languages and between varieties of the same language is demonstrated by suitable responses".

Assessment criterion 8 for the same Outcome specifies:

"Biased attitudes towards languages and language varieties are explained, challenged and responded to".

B.

Specific Outcome 5 specifies that "Learners understand, know and apply language structure and conventions in context". Attached to this Outcome, Assessment Criterion 2 specifies:

"Incorrect and/or inappropriate language usage by self and others is edited."

In terms of Specific Outcome 7, "learners are to use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations". Assessment Criterion 5 for this Outcome refers to students' demonstration of "appropriate use of language".

In addition, in the annexure to the June 1997 document reference is made to "register, idiom, expression, vocabulary, sentence construction and grammatical structure" as assessment criteria in the spoken and written domains.

There are other Specific Outcomes in which issues of "appropriateness" arise in a way that is more clearly directed to the standard issue. These will be addressed later in this article.

While the document does not explicitly specify the pedagogic approach to standard language, the points listed under A and B allude to different perceptions of the nature and function of a "standard language". References to "standard" in category A imply a critical orientation to the standard as a variety. Apparently as part of developing critical language awareness, students are required to recognise how different languages and language varieties function in establishing and perpetuating power relations in a multilingual community. The desired outcome would be students' appreciation of the intrinsic equality of all languages and varieties, and the ability to contest judgements or attitudes that stigmatise certain language varieties on socially constructed grounds. Category B, on the other hand, reveals a concern with appropriacy and correctness which are central issues in traditional pedagogical approaches to the standard. Here the standard form is contrasted with non-standard varieties of a language and the desired outcome is an improved ability to use the standard form in oral and written communication. There is an obvious, and possibly necessary tension between the concerns identified in these two categories, which will become clearer in the discussion that follows.

THE CONCEPT OF A STANDARD LANGUAGE

In considering which approach to the standard would be preferable in language education, one first needs to define what is meant by standard language. In the literature various characteristics of a standard language are suggested, some of the considerations as to how a variety can achieve the status of "standard" are suggested, and various uses of the standard are explained. In this article, the approaches taken to the standard are divided into two broad categories which represent (i) a purist approach and (ii) a pragmatic approach to language

standards.

Fromkin and Rodman (1992:261-263) refer to different concepts of a standard language, as follows:

The dominant or prestige dialect is often called the standard dialect ... - divergences from this norm are labelled "Philadelphia dialect", "Chicago dialect", "Black English", [or in local terms: "Black South African English", "Kaapse Afrikaans", and so on]. Deviations from this "standard" ... are seen by many as reflecting a "language crisis".

In language teaching, this approach would generally translate into a prescriptive attitude that does not accept a role for dialectal variation within formal education.

The second view of a standard language considered by Fromkin and Rodman is reflected in the following:

A standard dialect (or prestige dialect) may have social functions – to bind people together or to provide a common written form for multidialectal speakers.

A similar characterisation is presented by Holmes (1992:83):

A standard variety is generally one which is written, and which has undergone some degree of regularisation or codification (for example, in a grammar and in a dictionary); it is recognised as a prestigious variety or code by a community, and it is used for H functions alongside a diversity of L varieties.

In language teaching, this approach would generally translate into greater tolerance of dialectal variation, where different varieties are judged to be of equal value. Different dialects are not assigned more or less prestige, because of their use in different domains and for generating and maintaining different functions.

Trudgill (1983:160-161) provides a useful picture of the complex dynamics of a standard form. He refers to the process of standardisation as one involving the selection of a particular variety or a set of compromise forms for use in public or official communication. Such selection can be a relatively natural, unconscious process or a deliberate, planned process. Thus a standard can develop gradually through societal consensus, or it can be rapidly manipulated by government intervention. Whichever way, standardization takes place to facilitate communication in a multilingual or multidialectal community. It also serves to establish an agreed orthography, and to provide a uniform form for schoolbooks. This will not only determine the form taught in language classrooms to native as well as non-native speakers; it will also decide the language of learning generally. Trudgill (1983:17) characterises the standard as the variety spoken by educated people, the one used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. Importantly, he finds that the standard/non-standard distinction does not simply mark the difference between formal and colloquial language, nor does it distinguish "bad language" from "good language". Even if a non-standard form is used in limited contexts, it can be used both formally (e.g. in religious ceremonies) and colloquially. And the standard form can be "bad" when it is used to insult, as much as a non-standard form can be "good" when it is used in animated narration.

Trudgill's perspective can be characterised as pragmatic. His rejection of a purist conception of the standard is clear not only from his understanding of the functions of a standard form, but also from his refusal to endorse views that take deviations from the standard as evidence of ignorance. For him the process of standardisation is related to literacy – to the provision of opportunities to learn to read and write. This process provides the possibility for development and mastery of literacy skills which include access to social domains where these skills are valued and required.

Wardhaugh (1992:30ff) notes that standardisation makes it possible to teach a language in a deliberate manner. He indicates that the norm is likely to be idealised in that it represents the form people are required to use, rather than being a reflection of observed language behaviour. Choosing one vernacular to be the standard almost invariably diminishes the status of other varieties – then the standard form becomes associated with power and elitism. The process of standardisation simultaneously unifies and separates; it reflects and symbolises some kind of identity of a community, and sets its users apart from any neighbouring group.

Referring particularly to English, Wardhaugh explores the effect that the standard form has had on the status of all local varieties. Dialectal differences appear to become less pronounced in certain regions, and RP continues to be a measure in English speech communities as far apart as India, Australia and Jamaica. Standardisation essentially reduces or eliminates diversity and variety, yet, diversity and variety are natural to all languages. This is illustrated where Language Academies such as the official academy of "scholars" who determine what usages constitute the "official French language", or closer to home, the Taalkommissie (a committee of the Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns), which strive to preserve and elaborate the standard, find they have to accept changes that prescriptions of an earlier stage were unable to prevent. It is a paradox that the thrust to "fix" a specific point within the continuum of language variety is so strong. The processes of language development and language change which underlie the linguistic varieties prevalent in multilingual and multidialectal communities are natural. Nevertheless, the view that language may become "degenerate" and "corrupt" through the acceptance of newer forms because of a belief that a past form is more perfect than a later one, prevails.

Haugen (1990) makes the point that in addition to matters of form there are matters of function to be considered in standardisation. The functions of language will determine the particular variety to be used in courts, in education, in administration and in commerce. A distinction is drawn between the so-called H-functions and L-functions of languages. The H-functions are usually associated with the standard form of a language.

Clearly, then, a variety of features may constitute the concept of a standard language: the standard is written, regularised, codified, idealized; it is selected for public use, is the form used in learning and teaching, and is often dominant and prestigious. The standard functions in unifying a speech community, and in facilitating communication; it dignifies formal occasions and marks people as educated. These features and functions are not "given" in various languages – nothing is written in stone. These characteristics of the standard are socially constructed rather than linguistically determined. Nevertheless, they will have to be considered when decisions are taken on the particular oral and written forms or varieties that are to be acceptable outcomes of students' language learning. Such considerations will also

have an impact on assessment principles and practices.

Sociolinguistic literature on standard language decisively favours the pragmatic perspective (see Edwards, 1995; Baker, 1993; Labov, 1994). It is important to remember that this perspective does not, as many seem to fear, simply promote slang. Nor does this perspective represent an attitude of "anything goes". The crucial distinction between a pragmatic approach and a purist approach lies in what motivates each to develop and propagate the standard. Whereas purist are concerned with the standard because there are more and less respectable forms of a language that attach to more and less respected speakers, pragmatists consider the standard to be a means of securing communicative success for a wide range of speakers in a wide range of contexts. Another important distinction lies in the attitude each approach has to non-standard varieties. The pragmatic approach is obviously less judgemental in confronting variety and diversity, i.e. it accepts non-standard forms of a language and does not raise false expectations that such forms may (or should) eventually become extinct. In the process of shaping and spreading the standard, it does not seek to replace other varieties of language used in a community though some degree of shift is inevitable. The pragmatic approach accepts that access to the standard form is advantageous, regardless of whether the form is developed through natural social and communicative processes or through deliberate institutional intervention.

The advantages that knowledge of the standard form holds are so vast that access to this variety of a person's primary language or chosen language of learning can be identified as a basic right. Such rights are explicitly or implicitly protected in most democratic constitutions that seek to ensure equal opportunities of development and advancement for all citizens. Language education is a powerful means of directly giving access to the standard, and thereby indirectly giving access to a host of other societal gains such as participation in the dominant discourse of schools, wide employment options, or identity with a particular recognised and valued group.

The question we are confronted with is how to challenge the discriminatory ethos within which prescriptive notions of correctness and appropriateness operate, and at the same time provide linguistic development which will empower students to participate meaningfully in a wide range of social contexts. Unless handled with great care, this dilemma may issue in a bald choice: are we to use language teaching and learning practices which enable more people to operate at a high level of competence in established domains of public discourse, or are we to critically examine established societal patterns, in order to challenge values popularly assigned to different languages and different dialects? That would be unfortunate.

The following section will take account of the extent to which conceptions of standard language vary in the contexts of different languages in South Africa.

STANDARD LANGUAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

As we pointed out earlier in this article, the learning area described as Language Learning and Communication specifies common outcomes for all languages, regardless of their present

socio-cultural status. The relevant documentation makes no distinction between first and second languages (for an early reference see ffolliot & Stear, 1995). Common principles of language teaching are obviously a desirable objective. However, given the divisions of the past, for some of the specified common outcomes the issue is possibly more. To bring the issues into focus, we will have to examine the complexity of institutionalisation of standards and attitudes to them. It cannot be ignored that each language in South Africa carries its own, sometimes not very happy cultural baggage. And such baggage is borne most obviously by the standard variety. This section will indicate how the issues relating to standard varieties vary quite considerably across the languages. The disparate backgrounds present disparate issues to confront in society in general and in educational contexts in particular. The interrelated issues, that will be considered here, flow from the previous overview of approaches to the standard. They include:

- the question of ownership
- the relative degree of institutionalisation of the standard variety
- the social function of the standard
- attitudes to the standard
- the domain of the standard

Standard varieties of South African languages reflect different histories and practices of standard formation: who decides what is standard and how is that decided? English in South Africa, for example, is not governed by a particular statutory body although there have been (seemingly endless) debates on whether to follow exonormative or endonormative models (see Wright, 1993). Standard varieties of African languages, on the other hand, have traditionally been under the control of language boards (established by the apartheid state) that historically, made somewhat arbitrary decisions concerning usage. Currently, as the sway of such boards becomes challenged, less rigid norms seem to apply in deciding what is standard and what is not. This is reflected, for instance, in challenges to contrived approaches which enforce an artificial standard in broadcasting and education. Here the issue of restandardisation, or creating standards afresh, to match the vigour the languages currently show as a result of rapidly changing demographic patterns, begins to arise. The standard as presently conceived may thus not as readily be definable or defensible in this context. Similarly, the question of standard in Afrikaans has been a site of struggle, due to the fact that the standard has historically been controlled by a group that is not representative of all speakers of the language.

On a more practical note it may be observed that the process of standardisation, of the emergence of new standard varieties, is at a particularly dynamic stage. In the past thirty years, different standard varieties have emerged, such as siSwati and, more recently, isiNdebele. So, until quite recently, if siSwati was used in written work it was judged as a "dialect" form of Zulu and so as incorrect. It is quite possible that more varieties, such as Northern Transvaal Ndebele, will be standardised in a similar way. In such a context where what used to be a non-standard variety becomes legitimated, a range of educational challenges arise from the issue of what exactly constitutes the variety to be taught. Similarly, the issue of standardising the Sotho and Nguni languages (Alexander, 1989), while receiving a somewhat hostile response since its re-emergence, still raises a few intriguing questions. Is it, for example, legitimate, empowering and unifying to teach standard Xhosa and standard Zulu, varieties that are largely mutually intelligible, as quite separate entities? Is it not possible to

encourage an educational perspective that views these as two standard varieties of the same language?

Standard languages vary considerably in the extent to which they have become entrenched, stabilised and recognised in communities. This is, to some extent, a reflection of their provenance and perceived function and utility. Standard English, for instance, is pragmatically a societally powerful variety – it is a form of economic capital and performs a gatekeeping function. Hence the issue of "empowerment" arises when discussing its status in education. Standard Xhosa is effectively a variety whose province is the classroom and the textbook, not that of upward mobility and economic empowerment. It is possibly these factors, as Gough (1995) notes, that explain common and superficially contradictory opinions expressed by urban students that they find it odd that they have to learn a language they already know, but that simultaneously they find it difficult. Given the restricted societal value of Xhosa, it is true to their experience that they indeed know Xhosa as a form learnt and used informally. The school language is difficult precisely because it exists largely as a school language and not tangibly as valuable in the larger society. This is different from English where the standard form is used as the print standard in publications throughout the world.

Yet another piece of the jigsaw is the common attitude amongst urban Africans that proper or good language is deep or pure language, generally the language of the rural areas (see Gough, 1995). The terms "deep" and "pure" reflect a perception of the variety, not as one of economic value but as one of sentimental, cultural value. There is a nostalgic sense of language as it is associated with traditional values "untainted" as it were by urban influences. Here clearly, teaching the standard means different things across different languages. One of the chief tensions is that between "what we should be doing because we have forgotten" (speaking "pure" Xhosa which keeps us in touch with our roots) and "what we should be doing because we need to forget" (speaking urban varieties and "standard" English which enable us to live and thrive in a common society).

Specific educational challenges are presented by the occurrence in limited contexts of artificially created standards of African languages, thus of varieties found only in textbooks. This seems in some educational contexts to have resulted in relatively weak perceptions of what is and what is not standard. Gough (1995) finds for instance, that Xhosa teachers often are not able to give standard forms for grammatical variants – a situation which reflects lack of confidence as to what constitutes the standard variety. Similarly, in multilingual areas Finlayson and Slabber (1999) have recorded that it is not uncommon for speakers to claim they speak a particular language as L1 and then to be unable to identify its standard variety correctly. Often such speakers confuse the standard of their own language with the standard variety of a related language. These complexities should be confronted in the shaping of policy and the practice of language education.

Finally, and more narrowly focused on education, more enlightened practices were introduced in adaptations made through the English interim core syllabuses in 1995. There have not been similar initiatives that respond to societal change and new educational insights for other languages.

STUDENT VIEWS AND EXPECTATIONS

On the question whether a purist or a pragmatic approach to language standards should be favoured in language classrooms, and how this should be reflected in the outcomes of language education, we think that student expectations may provide some useful pointers. Does the same standard apply when English is taught as an additional language as when it is taught on first language level? Should the same variety of Xhosa be taught when it is taken as a second or third language, as when it is taught to students with Xhosa as their first language? How are different varieties of Afrikaans accommodated in Afrikaans language classrooms? Introspective data obtained from students with different first languages in different educational settings will serve to illustrate the diversity of the role of the standard in their various learning experiences. The data we use here was collected in two different settings: (i) in a multilingual classroom of grade 11 (std 9) students, (ii) in a class of first year Linguistics students.

Responses from a multilingual classroom

A limited survey was conducted in a school where English is the medium of education (language of learning and teaching), where English and Afrikaans are taught on either first or second language level, and where Xhosa is taught on either second or third (foreign) language level. Other languages such as German and French are taught on third language level only. The 29 students interviewed gave the following information on their first languages:

English	-	9 students
Afrikaans	-	7 students
English and Afrikaans	-	7 students
Xhosa	-	4 students
German	-	2 students

After group discussion of language varieties, attitudes towards different varieties, and the concept of "standard language", students were asked to explain which kind of approach they would favour in first language education, and to give reasons for their choice. The written responses indicated that about 1/3 of the students preferred a relaxed approach which is tolerant of non-standard forms of the language, while 2/3 preferred development of the standard variety in the language classroom. Reasons given for preference of the standard language in language teaching and learning, were:

- the standard form enables communication across "dialect barriers" so that more groups can interact in a larger variety of contexts than would otherwise be the case; ("it would be practical if everyone spoke the same form");
- non-standard forms are often stigmatised, even if on the basis of unfair prejudice or false assumptions; knowledge of the standard is then a kind of insurance against discrimination ("those who do not know the standard form deserve the opportunity to learn it");
- the standard form is the product of a long process of language evaluation, adjustment

and change; the development of the form is seen as a qualitative improvement that should be appreciated and perpetuated;

- the standard is a more stable form than dialects are as it regularises and fixes patterns that vary across dialects; one cannot expect teachers or learners to "keep up" with ever-changing varieties. Very few (if any) people know the full range of dialects of a language well enough to teach and them all, or to assess the development of language skills in every possible variety. ("If all dialects are accepted, we would have as many different forms as we have speakers – imagine the chaos!");
- the standard is more valuable than non-standard forms are: "schools are places of education – we want to learn something of value".

Notably, the majority of students who expressed these views had English or Afrikaans (or both) as their L1. There was little consideration of the mental or emotional effort involved when non-standard speakers have to adjust to a form which is unfamiliar to them. Nor was there recognition of the high level of communicative success often found in cross-dialectal communication. Quite a number of the arguments for a purist approach to the standard did not show any appreciation of natural diversity – one respondent argued that it would be possible to develop a good standard "either throughout the country or even the whole world" by starting early – after 10 years of schooling all students will have mastered the required form, and soon the whole community would achieve the desired uniformity! The possibility that maintenance of variety (cf Baker's "garden-with-a-large-variety-of-plants" metaphor) may actually be desirable in a multilingual or multidialectal community, was rarely considered seriously. Nevertheless, there was appreciation for the challenges involved in teaching and assessing language skills, and in preparing students to use language effectively in a community where popular perceptions do not give equal value to all varieties.

Reasons given for preference of more tolerance toward non-standard varieties in language teaching and learning, were:

- we should appreciate the uniqueness of every form, and acknowledge every person's right to use a form s/he knows and prefers,
- we should not discriminate on relatively petty grounds such as accent,
- if the dialects that people speak are mutually intelligible, there is no communicative need for them to change "the way they speak",
- changing the way people speak, is no easy task: language is learnt "unconsciously" – how does one "unlearn" such content? Also, non-standard speakers may not want to replace their variety with the standard, or they may live in areas where there is no exposure to any other form than the one they know,
- the country is in a process of transformation – as part of this we can accept more variety than we have done up to now; even standard language speakers can "find new ways of expressing themselves",

- the majority of speakers do not use (or even know) the standard form; the standard form is not only relatively foreign to most students – it is in fact too difficult to learn properly!

Here the general assumption was that communication can be effective even if non-standard or "ungrammatical" forms are used. Respondents generally valued communicative effectivity above grammatical correctness. This judgement relies on an assumption that people have a natural ability to grasp the intended meaning of a speaker even if it is minimally articulated. The last argument listed above, that many speakers "do not know the standard", comes from two different contexts. English or Afrikaans L1 students rarely referred to this, though where they did use this argument it was in recognition of the fact that the standard is always idealised. On the other hand, many Xhosa L1 students used this as motivation for wider recognition of non-standard varieties, because in fact they have difficulty in understanding and learning the standard currently prescribed in education – as one respondent put it: "even I don't know it and it is my first language".

Several of the respondents who expressed preference for a relaxed approach to language standards, recognised that people are often judged on the basis of the form of language they use. In such circumstances they recognised the value of adding the standard variety to students' repertoire – particularly there was concern about how one is judged to be suitable or not for employment.

Responses from first year Linguistics students:

The data used here were obtained from essays in which students had to show their understanding of the various notions of standard language in explaining which form they would prefer in first language education in South Africa. Students were asked to substantiate their answers by giving reasons for their preference.

The majority of students in this course have Xhosa as their first language. Of them only a very limited number use what is regarded to be the standard in everyday communication – in fact none of these students indicated that they know the standard variety only, while a significant number indicated that they do not have sufficient mastery of standard Xhosa. Nevertheless, as with the group of secondary school respondents, there was marked preference for using and teaching the standard, the form they do not customarily use, in education. Considering how the standard has different functions in different speech communities in South Africa (see discussion above), this becomes understandable. The expression of a need for teaching and being taught the standard is not primarily a choice for "correctness" above "incorrectness". Rather it is a choice that indicates the way in which language is valued as a marker of identity and of the integrity of a culture.

Reasons the students gave for preferring the standard language in language teaching and learning, were:

- The school is an extension of the home in education. In the home an "informal" mode of language is used (this applies particularly to students from urban areas), thus if children are not taught the standard at school, they will not have access to it at all.

- In public domains such as legal and educational institutions, it is customary to speak the standard form. The school should equip students to operate in such domains by developing this form well.
- The standard language is seen as a more dignified form – this dignity has to be recognised and maintained.
- The standard signifies personal and group identity, and is valued for fulfilling this function.
- Without due consideration to the standard, the language may develop and change so boundlessly that varieties in different regions and domains may become mutually unintelligible; that it will hamper wider communication.
- The standard language is identified with a better standard of education in general.

Reasons the students gave for preferring more tolerance of non-standard varieties in language teaching and learning, were:

- One variety cannot be intrinsically more valuable than another: "we can be as proud of the dialect as we are of the standard".
- The goal of first language education should be to teach children communicative and life skills within their base communities, rather than a "correct" form of the language – thus development of communicative competence should be given preference over development of grammatical competence.
- Despite the variety found in everyday language use, people understand one another. Then teaching the standard is not only perceived to be unnecessary, but also perplexing.
- The standard form of the language is "boring", i.e. felt to be less expressive and less fashionable. Through language contact loan words and loan constructions enter the language – these give people more ways of interacting with a modern world.
- The standard is so difficult that students become discouraged. How is it, some asked, that Xhosa is my first language, and yet at school I failed it?
- The difficulty of the standard is perceived to be limiting in that communication is frustrated by people's lack of control of "deep Xhosa". The standard, one said, has "long sentences and unfamiliar words".

Students' answers to the question of which variety of the L1 is to be preferred in education, - yielded more and different information to what we had set out to elicit. As often happens in multilingual classrooms, words (or instructions) have different meanings for students from different backgrounds. (In fact, even in monolingual classrooms with limited background diversity one regularly finds varied interpretation of teacher input.) In the particular

assignment many students who indicated a preference for the standard, had interpreted the term "standard" to mean "dominant" or "lingua franca", i.e. they had argued for or against ENGLISH (as opposed to the vernaculars of students) as the medium of instruction in South African schools. They considered the crucial question to be whether the language of learning should be a community language or a language of wider communication.

As with the choice between the standard and non-standard varieties of a language, these responses gave insight into popular perceptions of language and power in our society, and into expectations of how language education may provide access to a wider range of social and employment options than students' base communities do. It became clear that students experience a degree of conflict between on the one hand a need to learn a language that will improve access to powerful positions in society, and on the other hand a need to maintain the language which is an important marker of their primary culture, and thus of their personal and communal identity.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above has given some impression of the complex set of challenges involved if we are to develop standard, or appropriate, forms of language for use in oral and written communication in South Africa's eleven languages. There is a need for greater clarification of what is meant when we refer to "correctness" and "appropriacy" as outcomes of language learning. Considering that currently more than half of the secondary school students in the country receive schooling in a language or language variety that is not their first language, such clarification is pressing. We need to decide whether L1 learning outcomes should differ from L2 learning outcomes, and if so, to what extent? If the standard is the preferred variety for language education, who decides on the standard, how will it be taught effectively and with confidence, how will it be assessed? And perhaps more importantly, if the standard is preferred, what will the position of non-standard varieties be? In a context where the standard is preferred, how does one raise critical awareness of language variety in a multilingual community, without shaping and perpetuating prejudice against non-standard varieties and vernacular languages? In order not to close with more questions than we started out with, we offer the following pointers from the student responses set out above.

Given limited scholarly input, students showed marked preference for the standard. Their conception of the standard is indeed rather vague: they perceive it to be "better", "more valuable", "more useful" and a form that will give societal access. They assume that there is a norm, that it is possible to determine what is "right" and what is "wrong" in a language, that there are people who know right from wrong and who can transfer such knowledge unambiguously. Even if linguists and language practitioners have difficulty with the normative aspect of the standard, we cannot discard the notion or ignore the expressed need for some kind of standard in language education.

Students expect to achieve the following through their learning of the standard:

- to be able to communicate confidently across dialect differences in their community, and in all domains, formal and informal, learned and more naive;
- to be able to make a good impression where the audience has unenlightened linguistic

perceptions of standard language as the surest (or only) marker of education;

- to be able to use a wider range of language skills than those they learn informally in the home environment;
- to leave school with "added value", having learnt a form of language that will make learning in general more accessible;
- to have developed a form of language that sufficiently expresses their individual and group identity; this will not only serve to express who they are, but also what their roots are; this form is seen to be part of a good tradition that is worth being carried forward with pride and dignity.

Even students who preferred the standard were sensitive to the pervasiveness of non-standard dialects and of a variety of different first languages in the community. This suggests that language education could develop an understanding and appreciation of the whole range of South African languages and dialects. Where the standard is advocated in terms that marginalise or stigmatise non-standard varieties, this will have to be challenged. Critical awareness of the relativity of chosen standards and the processes of language change that continue regardless of standardisation, have to be actively cultivated. Appreciation of the value of different forms and recognition that people may be proud of whatever "linguistic currency" they start out with, has to be encouraged.

In the spirit of consultation and compromise required in a multilingual, multicultural community, we need to find ways in which choices for patterns that differ from the standard, can be accommodated. Rather than being judgmental of people who find the standard "difficult" or in some sense alien to their everyday experiences, we will have to explore ways in which to accommodate widely expressed needs for a form of language education that reflects recently developed communicative patterns. This applies to "alternative", non-standard forms of English and Afrikaans that have developed and become established through social and geographic distance between various groups speaking the same language. It also applies to the variety of forms of African languages that have developed in urban areas where language contact between unrelated forms such as Zulu, Sotho and Venda (e.g.) has given rise to "hybrid" forms, or where borrowing from English and Afrikaans has taken on significant dimensions. When Xhosa L1 learners find the standard so strange as to be barely intelligible, and so difficult as to demoralise the students, serious attention should be given to the question of "which standard?"/"whose standard?"

The various notions of standard language and the way these operate in different South African language communities considered in conjunction with these learner-indicated needs and expectations, should assist planners in becoming more specific as to intended outcomes, in refining suggestions for classroom practices, as well as in deciding on assessment procedures for language teaching and learning.

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