

FACILITATING ACCESS TO ENGLISH FOR XHOSA-SPEAKING PUPILS IN BLACK TOWNSHIP PRIMARY SCHOOLS AROUND CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Liesel Hibbert

The paper results from a research project completed by the author in 1994 on the quality of language-learning environments in the Cape Town area.

Xhosa is now constitutionally enshrined as one of the eleven official languages of South Africa, and is the dominant language in Western Cape black townships. This paper questions the fruitfulness of primary schools in black townships attempting to use English as the sole medium of instruction. The paper shows that in actual classroom situations the L1 (Xhosa) is used as an aid to L2 (English) medium instruction in the schools of Khayelitsha and Lagunya townships around Cape Town. The paper argues for the recognition and further extension of such bilingual practices in primary schools to work towards more successful use of the L2 as the medium of instruction. It assesses the implications of such bilingual policy for classroom interaction and materials development.

Hierdie artikel spruit uit 'n navorsingsprojek wat in 1994 deur die skrywer onderneem is in groter Kaapstad oor die kwaliteit van die omgewings waarbinne taal aangeleer word.

Xhosa is volgens die konstitusie een van die elf amptelike tale in Suid-Afrika en is die oorheersende taal in die swart woonbuurte van die Wes-Kaap. In hierdie artikel word die waarde bevraagteken van die poging wat in die primêre skole in die swart woonbuurte aangewend word om Engels as enigste medium van onderrig te gebruik. In die artikel word ook daarop gewys dat skole in Khayelitsha en Lagunya, twee swart woonbuurte naby Kaapstad, Xhosa (T1) gebruik as hulpmiddel by die onderrig deur medium van Engels (T2). Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie gebruik van tweetalige onderrig in primêre skole erkenning behoort te kry en verder uitgebrei behoort te word sodat daar gestreve kan word na 'n meer suksesvolle gebruik van die tweede taal as onderrigmedium. 'n Waardebepaling van die implikasies van so 'n tweetalige beleid vir klaskamerinteraksie en die ontwikkeling van lesmateriaal word ook gedoen.

INTRODUCTION

There was a ferment of debate and of high expectations about the future of education before South Africa's elections of April 1994, which brought its first popular democratic government to power. Much of this debate was summed up in the deliberations and publications of the National Educational Policy Investigation (NEPI).

Experts in the field of language policy placed a good deal of reliance on the work such as Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins (1988), done in multilingual contexts elsewhere in the world, and concluded that the answer to language problems in South Africa was "additive bilingualism". By this was meant setting up in the classroom those situations in which a second language would be acquired "without any loss or weakening of the first language" Makoni 1993).

Given the certainty that Xhosa would be one the official languages, there was much speculation in the Western Cape (where Afrikaans and English had previously dominated education) on the forms which language education might take after the elections. Educationists who resisted a privileged position for English saw Kathleen Heugh's "Entrenching Inequality: English in the Classroom" and Kathy Luckett's "Behind Bilingualism" as important theoretical papers. But there was also a strong call, most notably by Neville Alexander (1992) of the University of Cape Town, for the full recognition and deliberate extension of African languages at all levels of education.

Meanwhile in Namibia, faced with a similar diversity of national languages, English had been declared the official language of government business and education soon after its independence in 1990. This policy was taking time and trouble to implement. Would the New South Africa follow suit?

The question of the medium of instruction in black South African secondary schools has been a major bone of contention in apartheid education since the 1950s, and fuelled the Soweto rising in 1976.

The general consensus at present is that English should be the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels. But it is difficult to see how this can be achieved with equity when in the vast majority of cases English is not a language spoken at home among South Africans.

This paper argues that African languages will have to be accorded greater status at primary school level in the specific regions where they are majority languages to facilitate successful bilingualism at secondary and tertiary level. Systems already in place which exclude or inhibit the use of these languages must be radically reviewed.

My argument is based on the following premises:

First, English is here to stay as both a local and a global language for South Africa. Thus access to English is regarded as highly desirable by learners, teachers and parents — the so-called English = Education equation (Ndebele 1987).

Second, although English is the only medium of instruction officially recognised at Standards 3 to 5 (upper primary) at present in black township schools of the Western Cape, Xhosa is in fact used for concept development and for clarification purposes in the classroom.

Third, although Xhosa is the dominant language in Western Cape black townships, and is recognised as one of the new official languages of South Africa, Xhosa-

speakers do not generally perceive Xhosa as a high status language at this stage. This perception among pupils, teachers and parents will shift significantly only if the language is given status by extensive (if not exclusive) use in education and the media.

Fourth, English is a language of communication with a pan-African future. Improved access to English is essential to ensure the right of school children in this country to share in this future.

Fifth, the development of improved bilingualism should go hand in hand with the development of a more inquiry-based educational ethos in black urban schools.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 1990 Carol MacDonald published a comprehensive report on the realities of language teaching and learning in primary schools under the DET — i.e. the apartheid government's Department of Education & Training for black people. This was followed in 1992 by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) reports, which were designed to give future policy-makers a picture of the realities facing them in South African schools.

The NEPI report on the medium of instruction responded to earlier DET assumptions that English was the sole medium favoured by black communities. NEPI created consultative forums so the views of all 'stake-holders' in education, including parents of school-going children, could be taken into account. Unlike previous DET 'research', the NEPI consultation attempted to spell out all the implications of different options in medium of instruction to members of the community.

In the spirit of the NEPI consultation, I conducted a survey in the DET higher primary schools in the Lagunya and Khayelitsha townships around Cape Town, where I had spent much time the previous six years supervising student teachers in the schools, to ascertain to what extent bilingualism existed or was feasible in these schools.

There are about 90 ex-DET primary schools in the Western Cape. Two-thirds of them are in greater Cape Town — 35 in Khayelitsha (including Lagunya), 3 in Langa, 6 in Nyanga, and 15 in Gugulethu. With the re-integration of education under one non-racial department, some pupils from these townships have left the ex-DET schools to enrol in ("Model C") former white state schools and in Afrikaans-medium "coloured" schools in nearby suburbs. But, despite increasing "multiculturalism" and "multilingualism" in the school system as a whole, conditions remain essentially similar for the majority of pupils who stay behind in black township primary schools.

My survey investigated learning conditions in the classrooms in order to identify which methods of teaching and learning were most effective, and to find out how these "best practices" could be replicated elsewhere (Hibbert 1994). My research methodology was essentially descriptive. The statistical base generated by the research consisted of correlations between data obtained from individual and group (workshop) questionnaire responses, interviews, and individual written responses, both monitored and unmonitored.

Responses were collected from roughly 120 teachers and 100 pupils in the area. I also obtained data from 102 students in teacher training at Good Hope College of Education in Khayelitsha.

Influenced by Widdowson (1993: 260) who argues: "Whatever proposals are made at the macro-level of educational policy depend for their effectiveness on the interpretation by teachers at a micro-level of pedagogic practice and their abilities to carry out the proposals", my aim was to strike a balance between exonormative and endonormative theorizing. In Widdowson's view, insiders become experts through self-reflection designed to develop their practices. I regarded the workshops I conducted as forums in which I, as the outsider, could draw on the expertise of insiders, as we reflected on issues together.

INADEQUATE ACCESS TO ENGLISH

The access that pupils in this context have to English was found to be very limited, both inside and outside the schools. Unlike in the multilingual Gauteng province around Johannesburg in the north, black children in the Western Cape are not socialized in a number of African languages simultaneously. Xhosa is the language of the social and public domain in Lagunya and Khayelitsha; English seems restricted almost exclusively to the domain of schooling. According to the Language Atlas, Xhosa is the language spoken by most people residing in Khayelitsha and Lagunya at present. I have observed that students from the Gauteng area entering tertiary institutions in the Western Cape are fluent in a number of languages, whereas their Western Cape counterparts are comfortable in Xhosa and English or Afrikaans only. This may change over the next few years, depending on how the policy of 11 official languages is applied and on population shifts which are unpredictable and difficult to measure.

There appear to be significant variations of competence in English from area to area within the black townships around Cape Town. For instance, primary pupils in Langa, an old established black suburb of the city, generally speak English more readily. The explanation for this seems to lie in the proximity of Langa to the city centre, which results in more frequent language contact with English-speakers. Economic conditions do not seem as depressed as in townships settled by more recent migrants from the countryside such as Khayelitsha Sites B and C. (Research should be done to test this observation.)

The importance of socio-economic factors in the household is, however, disputed by Alan Kenyon from the Primary Science Project at the Ulunthu Centre in Gugulethu. He maintains that the ethos of teaching and learning in the school is much more important than any socio-economic advantage or disadvantage at home in producing competent bilingual pupils. He describes those schools where pupils have achieved bilingualism in the following way:

The children at these schools are tuned into learning and are fluent in English. The more democratic the tone of the school is and the more the teachers' body feels free to discuss things with the principal, the more learning takes place. The tone of the school dictates how free kids feel to take risks, to express their ideas and to make mistakes. Two schools right next to each other could be completely different, which means that socioeconomic factors are overruled by school-ethos in this matter. Most

pupils are streetwise but where curricula and real life knowledge don't match up children's learning processes are hampered. At authoritarian-type schools, pupils will wait to get answers from the board or from the teacher, rather than going into their own heads to find answers. Where apartheid education has done its work well, kids suffer. Where apartheid education has been overcome to some extent, principals and teachers work together. Principals value contributions from the staff and staff take responsibility for their own practice (quoted in Hibbert 1994: 39).

One should also bear in mind the "external intervention" of the many NGO and University-based development projects in the schools, which may even be more important than geographical location, socio-economic status and school-ethos in promoting bilingualism. The impact in the schools of the intervention of these "secular missionary" projects, and the rationale behind them, however, remains to be assessed and evaluated.

My survey showed that many teachers in the townships feel that they are not adequately trained to teach through the medium of English. This is hardly surprising because as recently as 1981 student-teachers were being admitted to training colleges with only a Standard 8 (junior secondary) certificate, qualifying as teachers after only two years of training. Here are some of the comments teachers made to me:

- Some of us are afraid of talking English. We feel uncomfortable because we don't want to be laughed at, as well as making mistakes.
- I have problems because I struggle myself to express in English what I want to do or say.

However, most primary teachers are now engaged in part-time further study to upgrade their qualifications. As they are studying through the medium of English, general competence in English amongst teachers may well be constantly improving — and this could positively affect the learning situation for their pupils.

My interviews showed that teachers are continuously grappling with the question of the appropriate medium of instruction, in both their formal teaching and informal situations with their pupils. Existing textbooks were seen as inadequate resources, because they do not reflect the life experience of the children and the linguistic realities of the lives the children live:

- Most story books are based on an English background (of Western civilization) which our children are not familiar with.
- Some authors write their books without considering the child's ability. How can the child grasp the lesson if the author uses (such) big words for a Standard 4 child?

My survey revealed the lengths to which pupils and teachers go to great lengths to avoid the use of spoken English in the classroom. Pupils are mainly set written work to do in class rather than spoken work. Teachers do not try to elicit oral responses, and try to preclude open discussions of topics. One student teacher told me:

- Traditional teachers tell us (students) how to teach the language with the purpose of destroying our modern approaches. How do we teach the pupils at their level of English? Pupils are not familiar (with) groupwork and this gives us problems. We give pupils an opportunity to communicate with each other in English. They can't.
- The greatest problem in teaching English is that pupils do not understand English. The reason for this is their teacher teaches them every subject in Xhosa. Even when they are doing 'reading', they read the story in English and tell it in Xhosa and ask questions in Xhosa, so pupils learn nothing.

Some correlation may be drawn between inadequate access to English in black township primary schools and the reasons for the generally high drop-out rate in standards 5-6 — bearing in mind a multitude of other variables.

Only five per cent of African children who enter the school system make it to matriculation (the certificate obtained on successful completion of the final year of high school). Sixty per cent do not complete primary school. Twenty-five per cent of all drop-outs are Grade 1 pupils (Bundy 1993: 8).

English as the only medium of instruction in Cape Town's black township schools does not seem feasible.

CREATING AN ETHOS OF ENQUIRY AND USING BILINGUAL APPROACHES

The two major classroom practices which were identified by participants in my research for improving pupil access to English were: (i) creating an ethos of enquiry in the classroom, and, (ii) using bilingual approaches to learning.

The term "ethos of enquiry" is used here to mean a culture of learning, in which the personal constructs of pupils and teachers are central, and where there is a balance between discourse consumption and discourse production. By a bilingual approach to learning, I mean that two languages rather than just one language be used as the media of instruction, because the cognitive and social development of young children is hampered severely if the only language used at school is an unfamiliar one:

The ethos of monolingualism implies the rejection of the experiences of the other language, meaning the exclusion of the child's most intense existential experience (Phillipson 1992:189).

Teachers to whom I spoke identified groupwork and drama exercises in the classroom, and the provision of supplementary materials and a class library of appropriate books, as well as encouraging children to debate topics, as the most useful ways in which to create an ethos of enquiry inside the classroom. Pupils should also be encouraged to extend their use of English outside the school by using public libraries, and by listening to radio and television.

Many of the teachers who used bilingual approaches in their teaching were quite well aware of learning strategies used by their pupils. Pupils usually translated the teacher's questions

from English into Xhosa in their minds, then formulated answers in Xhosa and translated them into English. These stages of translation were very time-consuming, but were encouraged by teachers. Teachers recognised that pupils could and sometimes did engage in more spontaneous translation, but this was not encouraged — until the value of such spontaneity was pointed out and explained to participants in my research.

Many teachers were aware of cultural factors that might cause hindrances to learning. They said it was essential to make English "simpler" in the classroom, and to make it more "African" and to allow more errors. As one teacher wrote:

- English at present is Eurocentric. There's a need for the language to be Africanised so as to interest all.

Notions of "simplifying" and "Africanising" English to form a new standard South African English are, of course, very complex and highly contentious at present. Since it is not central to the argument of this paper, this matter will not be addressed here .

A FLEXIBLE MODEL OF ADDITIVE BILINGUALISM

My contention is that the policy of "English only" as the medium of instruction in black township schools actually impedes a culture of learning, since children in township schools operate on a very low level of bilingualism. They have, at best, age-appropriate competence in one language only and never in both. Pupils are even reduced to "semilingualism". Semilingualism is a term first used by Hansegard (1968 in Desai 1994: 44). It implies less than complete linguistic skills in either language — and is the result of subtractive bilingualism, taking away competence in L1 without adding competence in L2.

The English spoken by young black South Africans generally exhibits more extreme non-standard forms than their counterparts in neighbouring countries like Malawi, Botswana and Zimbabwe — where children have been exposed to more competent English teaching and more standard forms of English in their education. This might be partly due to the high rate of employment of foreign teachers from the English speaking world and perhaps partly due to well-designed policies. These are however personal observations which would be interesting to follow up. It seems to me that the quality of the linguistic models provided to teachers in their own education determines to some degree the expectations they have of their pupils.

There is a strong body of opinion amongst theorists (see Jim Cummins and Merrill Swain, for example) that "English-only" policies are pedagogically unsound, and that the use of L1 (Xhosa in this case) in the classroom would facilitate pupils' transition to English as well as enhancing their cognitive and learning skills. This case can be made even more strongly in situations where teachers as well as learners are not fully proficient and confident in their use of the L2 (English).

The question then is how the L1 is to be put to use to foster bilingualism. Skutnabb-Kangas (1984:90) offers a useful view of the ultimate goal:

A bilingual speaker is someone who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or bilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made of an individual's communicative and cognitive competence by these communities or by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able positively to identify with both (or all) language groups (and cultures) or parts of them.

However, for an understanding of the process by which this is achieved, it is necessary to turn to the distinction, made by Lambert (1975, 1977), between *additive* and *subtractive* bilingualism, and expounded upon by Luckett (1992:1):

Additive bilingualism refers to the gaining of competence in a second language while the first language is maintained and develops when both languages (and the cultures associated with them) are valued and reinforced, with positive and complementary cognitive and social effects on the learner's development. I understand subtractive bilingualism to mean that a second language is learned at the expense of the first language, which is not supported by the education system. This often occurs when the social conditions of learning devalue the learner's first language and its associated culture. If acquiring L1 is seen as nothing more than an aid to learning the L2, subtractive bilingualism may result. That means that the cognitive and social development of the learner suffers.

The impoverished view of the L1 as a mere aid to the L2 has been reinforced by the fact that most research elsewhere in the world deals with the enculturation of non-native speakers of English into contexts where only English is spoken. Furthermore, the success stories have more often than not been those of élite bilinguals. Elite bilinguals are those who are part of a privileged class and who have the opportunity of learning two languages in optimal conditions. This is not the case for the vast majority of South African school children, and particularly not for black urban youths in ex-DET primary schools.

Luckett (1992) and Heugh (1992) argue that if indigenous African languages are not assigned more status in the public sphere in Africa, as well as in education, it is ironically true that access to English is not truly being facilitated. Institutional and community attitudes have a significant effect on whether there is widespread access to the L2 or not.

Within the classroom, a number of writers suggest that the quality of formal instruction determines the rate and route of L2 acquisition. Ellis, van Lier, Selinker and Nemser (quoted in Ellis 1994) all address this question. Ellis (1994:161) lists the features of an "optimal classroom learning environment". These include high quality of input directed at the learner, and the learner's perception of a real need to communicate in the L2. The learner has to feel in control of the topic — the subject matter or theme, for instance a particular grammatical construct. The learning process has to make links with the learner's actual life — starting out from the "here and now" principle — and should embrace a wide range of speech acts (the use of different language functions) by both "native speaker/teacher" and learner. The learner needs exposure to a high quantity of directives "extending" utterances, i.e. opportunities for uninhibited practice which in turn provide opportunities for experimenting with and using "new" forms.

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Two basic criteria seem useful for judging the effectiveness of each L2 teaching context in higher primary schools. Firstly, to borrow Ellis' phrase, how far does the teaching context in question match up to the requirements of an optimal learning environment for L2? Secondly, how far does the teaching context allow for the maximisation of learner-based strategies for the acquisition of fluency in English and for the effective use of English by learners across the whole school curriculum?

The problem at heart is how can the gap be closed — by means of pupil-initiated tasks, fieldwork, and open-ended discussion — between the abstract matter "learned" in the classroom and the real life needs of fluency in English? As Barnes puts it: "School knowledge needs to be converted into action knowledge" (Wells 1985:265). Wells adds that this is particularly important for learners in what he calls "nonWestern cultures", where there is a limited degree of literacy in the home.

Learners in the black townships around Cape Town have a perceived need to learn to communicate in English in the wider world outside the classroom. So, in order to ensure continuous learner motivation and interest, teachers need to pay close attention to the authentic speech, turn of phrase, and general knowledge and interest of the learners, at any given developmental stage — especially at the initial stages of L2 aquisition. The world outside the classroom *must* be taken into account in curriculum content planning. A great deal more real life language needs to permeate the educational milieu in the teaching context of the townships.

The "here and now" principle in teaching a language ensures that the learner experiences some degree of control over each topic being learnt — so that the L2 will be perceived as something manageable and internalised within the learner, rather than something unmanageable and outside her control. As the L2 language, English is increasingly the key to grasping the meaning of studies in later years of schooling, and it must be given great attention in the early years to ensure the pupils' continued interest in schooling.

The role of the teacher in the L2 acquisition process in black primary schools has traditionally been that of passing knowledge piecemeal from teacher to pupil. There needs to be a radical shift in the teacher's role — from transmitting knowledge to supporting and organising pupils' language acquisition — to create an environment in which opportunities for uninhibited practice by the pupils can occur in a positively affective classroom climate.

Teachers should rather set up peer group support systems and interaction groups between pupils, to facilitate the emergence of an approximative interlingual system among their pupils. Pooling of the learners' linguistic resources together makes sense in an environment where there is a dearth of other resources.

My research shows that bilingual approaches to teaching are already widely practised. They need to be expanded and built upon. Teachers need to understand theories of additive bilingualism, and their teaching practice needs to be transformed in accordance with these theories.

The first step on the part of the educational authorities in encouraging bilingual approaches ought to be to drop the current English-only official rule in the classroom. The first step on the part of teachers should be to treat linguistic "errors" made by pupils — such as the ones caused by overgeneralisation of rules in L2 — as part of the developmental process of language acquisition, and as a means of hypothesis identification and testing. Such treatment of "errors" is more likely to result in the learner's using appropriate or near-appropriate forms of the L2.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1984: 90) suggests a number of criteria by which a person's degree of bilingualism can be measured. The majority of primary learners in the black township schools of the Western Cape appear to meet two of these criteria, i.e. having come into contact with the L2, and having some degree of knowledge and control of its grammatical structure. Whether they meet the third criterion of being able to complete meaningful utterances in the L2 is more open to question.

Only a small minority of primary learners can meet one or more of the criteria of higher levels of bilingual proficiency in English and Xhosa as put forward by Skutnabb-Kangas: that the learner has learnt both languages from the start in her family; that she used the two languages in parallel as means of communication from the start; that she has completely mastered the two languages; that she has native-speaker like control of the two languages; that she has equal mastery of the two languages; that she uses (or can use) the two languages in most situations in accordance with her own wishes and the demands of her community; that she actually identifies herself as bilingual in the two languages and conversant with both cultures; and that she is identified by others as being bilingual on the level of a native speaker of both languages.

These are complex and daunting objectives. However, there are two areas in which teachers can make an important beginning. Teachers need to tackle the problems of pupils trying to move into the upper level of bilingual proficiency, i.e. age-appropriate language competence in two or more languages. They need to see the pupils' first and second languages as not so much in opposition but as complementary in promoting the learning process — so that pupils can have the advantages of what is termed "additive bilingualism".

There can be no effective implementation of additive bilingualism in black primary schools without the full co-operation of the teachers. The learner's confidence in playing around and experimenting with the use of language originates from the teacher. The teacher who restricts this play, because of her own inhibitions and reluctance to expose her limited knowledge of English, sabotages pupils' efforts to learn English and to become competent in English across the curriculum.

At present, both learners and teachers spend much of their time in the classroom practising both *formal* and *functional* reductional strategies. Formal reduction refers to the use of strategies which involve avoidance of L2 rules of which one is not certain or to which one cannot gain access. Functional reduction means the avoidance of certain speech acts or discourse functions, the avoidance or abandoning or replacement of certain topics, and the avoidance of modality markers (Ellis 1985: 184).

Strategies such as word-coining and description and circumscription of concepts can only be developed in a classroom when the teacher understands the importance of these activities. She must allow time for the exposure of learners to, and the practising of a large quantity of utterances, to extend the learners' repertoire.

Strategies such as code-switching, foreignisation and literal translation depend on the active use of L1 in the L2 acquisition process. If these interlingual strategies are not used, the learner is deprived of useful and necessary scaffolding and bridging construction in L2 development. More co-operative strategies between learner and interlocutor, such as joint problem solving, need to be employed.

Teachers need to encourage direct appeals for help from their pupils (e.g. questions in class) and indirect appeals for help (e.g. gestures), exercising patience and tolerance. Learners need "thinking time" to retrieve information and to do mental translations of structures into the L2 before answering the teachers' questions. If these processes on the part of the learners are repeatedly frustrated by the teacher, the learners will give up trying to employ retrieval strategies and will employ reduction strategies instead. In other words, the learner will give up trying to achieve her communicative goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How is such a programme of raising teacher awareness and sensitivity to be achieved? Suggested schemes to improve the level of English in urban black primary schools usually involve intervention by outside agencies, such as itinerant English specialists moving from school to school — to supplement, replace or retrain existing teachers. I believe that a solution must be found which retains the use of existing teachers, and treats them with greater sensitivity and respect — helping to shift their teaching methods in a more subtle manner.

My main recommendations to the policy makers are the production and use of new bilingual textbooks, and the encouragement of bilingual classroom interaction. This would at least serve as an effective interim measure until such time as it is clear that the policy on the medium of instruction has been settled decisively. Both teachers and learners rely very heavily on the text in the textbooks used in black schools. The quality and nature of classroom interaction depends on the nature and quality of the textbooks.

Bilingual textbooks should be used for content subjects from Standards 1 to 5. By this I do not mean bland translations of existing densely packed texts, but a scheme of texts which complement each other and invite pupils to do activities in both languages. The textbooks should be task-based, and rich in examples drawn from contexts that the learners are familiar with. The texts need to demonstrate the connectedness of historical, scientific, social and political factors in content subjects, while focusing on ways of looking at knowledge rather than on ways of transmitting large volumes of information. Bilingual textbooks would also allow the teacher more autonomy in choice of medium. The teacher would be able to gauge when pupils are ready to move into the other language.

As for classroom materials other than those published outside the schools, the notion of using teacher-generated materials in urban black schools is both idealistic and impractical under

current socio-economic conditions. Teachers are highly stressed by these conditions already, and feel overburdened by their work, and are most unlikely to produce the quantity of text material which is required urgently.

My second set of recommendations is based on the distinction that Gough makes between languages of instruction as *formative* and *supportive* mediums:

The formative medium should be the medium through which fundamental concepts in a subject are consistently developed. The supportive medium should consistently not be used in such formative contexts, but rather be used for supportive and clarifying purposes — with the learners in mind (Gough 1994:11).

At present classroom interaction in black urban primary schools around Cape Town takes place predominantly in the Xhosa language, while examinations and tests are exclusively in the English language. Is this functional distinction between the two languages really practical or useful?

Gough (1994: 11) argues for the usefulness of a clear distinction between a formative and a supportive medium: 'If two media do not have such distinct roles it is hard to see how students can be expected to perform (in essays and examinations, for example) in one medium or the other, as would be required'.

Heugh, on the other hand, argues against linguistic segregation:

There is a relation between segregation and the view that language is a problem; between assimilation and the view that language is a problem; between integration and the view that language is a right; and between multiculturalism or interculturalism and the view that language is a resource (Heugh 1995: 333).

My own argument is that because both languages are already being used in the classroom, they both need to be recognised as useful resources. My second set of recommendations is, therefore, as follows:

Xhosa should be recognized as the initial *formative medium* in the classroom (as it is in practice now), and English should be the initial *supportive medium* which is progressively increased in use until about Standard 5. From this point on, English should take over as the formative medium, with Xhosa continuing in the supportive function.

I am not wedded to English as a language. This proposal would apply equally to any other L2 that replaced English. But English is at present the medium of instruction in black high schools, as well as the medium of instruction at most tertiary institutions which these students are likely to enter. My model may be only a transitional one, to be followed until such time as new policies on medium of instruction have been put into practice. It is not impossible that a dominant regional African language might become the main language of learning in secondary and tertiary institutions in the future.

My conclusions can be summed up as follows: transfer and comparison of skills and knowledge in one language to another may be accommodated through retrieval of

information, literal translation, code-switching, spontaneous translation, word coinage, description and circumscription of concepts, through exploratory talk in pupil-teacher interaction and groups, and by focus on learner-text production in both languages.

I particularly recommend more focus on learner-text production in both languages used in black primary schools around Cape Town — to facilitate the spilling over of the language of the social sphere into the educational sphere and vice versa. This is one way in which the social becomes more educational and the educational more social. An educational context is created which makes better sense to the learner. This would greatly reduce the disjointedness between schooling and everyday life to which children are subjected, and would make the setting of realistic challenges and attainable goals more possible for them.

A huge proportion of a population's cultural capital is constituted in its language. If Xhosa and English are equally validated in the our schools, the learning processes will be underpinned with what is the pupils' own greatest existing resource — the language they know best.

REFERENCES

- BUNDY, C. 1993. At war with the future? Black South African youth in the 1990s. Cape Town: Education Department, University of Cape Town.
- DE KLERK, G. 1995. Language lessons from L.A. *Bua!* 9(4): 18-22.
- DESAI, Z. 1994. Acknowledging diversity: the need to promote African languages. *Per Linguaam*, 10(1): 41-49.
- ELLIS, R. 1985. *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ELLIS, R. 1994. *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- GOUGH, D. 1994. Myths of multilingualism: demography and democracy. *Bua!* 9(4): 9-11
- HEUGH, K. 1992. Entrenching inequality: English in the classroom In: *Proceedings of the English Academy of Southern Africa conference* (1-3 July), University of Cape Town.
- HEUGH, K. 1995. Language policy trends in South Africa. In Mestrie, R (Ed.), *Language and Social History- Studies in South African Sociolinguistics*. Cape Town: David Philip: 327-350.

- HIBBERT, L. 1994. Access to English for learners in DET higher primary schools in the Western Cape. Unpublished minor dissertation submitted for M Phil, Faculty of Education, University of Cape Town.
- LUCKETT, K. 1992. National additive bilingualism: Towards the formulation of a language plan for South African schools. In Boughey, J (Ed.) *Applied language studies in Southern Africa: Visions and Realities*. Cape Town: South African Applied Linguistics Association.
- MAKONI, S. 1993. Mother-tongue education: a literature review and proposed research design. *South African Journal of African Language*, 13 (3).
- MCDONALD, CA. 1991. *Crossing the threshold into Standard Three in black education: The Consolidated Main Report of the Threshold Project*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- MURRAY, S. 1991. Developing language competence of the student teacher. *Eltic Reporter*, Vol. 16(1).
- NDEBELE, N. 1987. The English language and social change in South Africa. *English Academy Review*, 4: 3-14.
- NEPI: *Framework report, language report and curriculum report*. 1992. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- PHILLIPSON, R. 1992. *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SKUTNABB-KANGAS, T. 1984. *Bilingualism or not - the education of minorities*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- SKUTNABB-KANGAS, T AND J CUMMINS (Ed.). 1988. *Minority Education: From shame to struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- WELLS, G. 1985. *Learning through interaction- the study of language development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WIDDOWSON, HG. 1993. Innovation in teacher development. In: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13: 260-275.