

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK ENGLISH TEACHING STAFF AT EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

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Since the official end of apartheid in South Africa, the English departments of some former whites-only secondary schools and universities have made attempts at transformation by employing both local and foreign black teaching staff. This paper qualitatively explores both secondary and tertiary students' perceptions of black teachers/lecturers of English at two secondary schools, an FET college and a university located in Johannesburg. It does so against the backdrop of South Africa's racial history, the high status the colonial language of English continues to have in the postcolonial country and now, its instruction by second-language speakers of English to multi-racial students. It is in this context that the paper investigates and comes to grips with how postcolonial identity constructs of the last century are today impacting the teaching-learning of English; how identity is being perceived, constructed and performed in some South African schools and higher education institutions. It concludes by recommending context-sensitive approaches that exploit the opportunities bi/multilingual identities offer, specifically to the teaching-learning of English and other languages generally.

Keywords: post-apartheid, South African transformation, black teachers, bi/multilingual identities, context-sensitive teaching approaches

INTRODUCTION

It is almost twenty years since the end of the segregatory system of apartheid in South Africa. During these years the country has imagined itself becoming a harmonious multilingual and multi-racial state, a 'Rainbow Nation'. The vision has witnessed many demographic changes. One such change has been an attempt to transform the racial composition of staff at South Africa's former all-white education institutions of learning. This has seen a number of both local and foreign African second-language speakers of English teaching English language and literature to multi-racial and bi/multilingual students. In light of South Africa's racist past and the endemic racial prejudice in the country's schools (Carrim, 1998; Vally & Dalamba, 1999) we sought to investigate some students' perceptions of African educators of English in a multilingual South African class/lecture room as evidence of their identity construction and some of the said educators' responses to them. To better appreciate the study, a brief overview of South Africa's infamous racial and education history in the context of Southern Africa is necessary.

Background

Since the advent of colonisation in South Africa, white settlers have had a negative perception of indigenous black people (Visser, 2004), to the extent that when the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, it instituted the racist policy of ‘apartheid’ or discriminatory separate development which ‘contributed to the formation of certain perceptions [...] and caused widespread misunderstanding and conflict’ (Meier, 2005:170). Motivated by this system, the apartheid government passed the Bantu Education Act in 1953. According to this piece of legislation, South African schools were to be segregated along racial lines and follow a different curriculum. This was because of the Nationalist Party’s belief that Africans could be no more than ‘carriers of water and hewers of wood’ (Gautango, 2007). As such, the Nationalist Party reasoned, Africans did not need to be as academically educated as whites. Subsequently, African schools were systematically under-funded and under-resourced as little of the national budget was allocated to them (Gautango, 2007). The apartheid system evidently ‘sought to create a multitude of black Africans who were less than human’ (Mavimbela, 2012:1). Over the years that followed, poorly educated and under qualified students graduated from African schools. Post apartheid, some of them have become the country’s African teachers of English. However, they do not constitute South Africa’s only L2 African teachers of English.

Ever since the establishment of the mining industry in South Africa, some Africans, mostly from the then Nyasaland (present-day Malawi), Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Mocambique (now Mozambique), have come to South Africa in search of work, or were contracted to do so in one capacity or another. More recently, as democratic South Africa has sought to transform and alleviate teacher shortages in its education sector, many African teachers, postgraduate students and lecturers, particularly from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, have immigrated to South Africa to teach or tutor while studying either full-time or part-time. Today, ‘more than 5,400 foreign teachers work in public schools’ (*News24*, July 26, 2011) where they mainly teach Mathematics and Science. To a very limited extent, others teach Humanities such as English in the departments of South Africa’s once former whites-only secondary schools and predominantly white universities. It is in view of this recent development, the persistent shadow cast by its racist past, and the high status the colonial language of English continues to have in the country, that this study investigated some multi-racial students’ perceptions of second-language English teaching staff from African countries beyond our borders at some education institutions in Johannesburg, South Africa and the African educators’ responses to them within the confines of a multilingual class/lecture room.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On one hand, the study sought to find what the perceptions of multi-racial students are of African educators of English in South Africa. From a postcolonial perspective, seen as that period ‘cover[ing] all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1989: 2), we wanted to know specifically how the research participants perceive, construct and perform identity in the presence of ‘otherness’ and, particularly, ‘foreignness’. On the other hand, what have been African educators’ responses, if any, to students’ perceptions of them and what constitutes

identity within the confines of their multilingual and multicultural class/lecture rooms? This is given the fact that the multilingual society that is South Africa makes it possible for a teacher to use contrapuntal approaches to teaching a language. Are African English teachers unlocking such strategies in their teaching-learning of English in multilingual classrooms and with what responses from students?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study's research objectives locate it within discourses of postcolonial explorations of bi/multilingual settings and how, in them, 'language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views of their own and others' identities' (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004: 1). To our knowledge, this is the first such study of multi-racial students' perceptions of African educators of English in multilingual South Africa and the bi/multilingual teaching-learning possibilities this presents. A review of literature reveals the non-existence of any research that has been undertaken on African teachers plying their trade in South Africa, and specifically on those teaching English, their experiences of doing so and the attitudes of their charges.

Previous research that perhaps resonates with the current research, is that of Ashdown and Kiddo (2007) undertaken in the United States. In it, the two researchers sought 'to determine whether there were certain professors that students would or would not be willing to learn from due to the professors' personal background and particular course' (Ashdown & Kiddo, 2007: 37). Another is that of Chen and Cheng (2010), which documents the challenges faced by three South African teachers, two black and one white, who were teaching English in Taiwan.

In contrast, the current study chiefly contributes towards multi-racial students' perceptions of African English educators in the context of a multilingual post-apartheid South Africa. In this regard, some of the secondary school learners who comprised this study's population sample constitute the first batch of the country's 'born-free generation', children born post-apartheid and those students who were the last children born under segregatory rule. As such, the study is important insofar as it surveys how South Africa's youth perceive, construct and perform identity in the presence of 'otherness' and against the background of the country's past and expanding multilingual identity.

The arrival and integration in South Africa of both local and foreign Africans respectively, have expanded the country's ethnic, linguistic, cultural and skills base. This has turned the country into one of the most multiracial, multilingual and multicultural societies in the world. In spite of the potential that lies locked in this immense diversity, the country seems oblivious of it and instead, remains one of the most polarised in the world.

The current study is also particularly important in view of the crucial dominance and function that English continues to play across the curriculum in the majority of South Africa's secondary schools and '[i]n most higher education institutions in South Africa [where it] is used exclusively as a language of learning and teaching' (Van der Walt, 2004: 302). Thus, despite the preponderance of other languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Venda,

postcolonial South Africa continues to revere and ‘recognize English [as] the global *lingua franca* [...] and believes...] that a functional command of English provides all students with a language-based resource for entering into economic competition’ (Hanna, 2011:733).

Over the years, English has been used in many bi/multilingual environments to teach and assist students to learn and understand the systems of other languages. In South Africa (and elsewhere), however, apart from being taught separately as individual subjects, the country’s other official languages have largely been absent from the teaching and understanding of English itself. Indeed, while various books (e.g. Kleyn & Reyes, 2010) have been written on English language teaching in bi/multilingual schools, to our knowledge, the role of teachers from other African countries has not been included in this discussion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our theoretical assumptions were influenced by what is contained in the *Introduction* and *Background* above and their evocation of ethno linguistic identity (Giles & Byrne, 1982), acculturation (Berry, 1980) and interactional sociolinguistics. In this regard, we assumed that, given South Africa’s history, stereotypic perceptions and biases against otherness existed and were institutionalised. Secondly, that in light of the country’s ongoing socio-economic transformation and immigration, other modes of constructing and performing identity have emerged among students, especially given the presence of African foreigners. Thirdly, that in the context of their multilingual classes, African educators have responded to students’ perceptions of them and their multilingual identity. Lastly, that African educators’ bi/multilingual responses, if any, would elicit and influence students’ attitudes towards the teaching-learning of English.

Data collection to validate or challenge the theoretical assumptions above was both formal and informal. It fortuitously started in 2007 when one of the researchers began keeping a diary of his experiences of teaching English part-time at a private secondary school and tutoring at a university, both located in Johannesburg. The diary entries (spanning a period of five years), both researchers’ recollections, random observations, informal discussions and unstructured interviews with other African English educators about their experiences of teaching English at educational institutions in Johannesburg constituted part of this ethnographic descriptive survey of the populations of two secondary schools, a university and a Further Education and Training college (FET). Although FETs are mainly vocationally or occupationally directed, students’ education also entails an English component.

Data collection was formally expanded via students’ and educators’ questionnaires (Appendices 1 & 2) designed to gather each respondent’s characteristics, experiences and views. Unstructured participant and non-participant lesson/tutorial observations were done. Questionnaires were chosen over interviews mainly for the anonymity and expedience they afford.

PROCEDURE

At the two secondary schools, FET college and university, all necessary contextual ethical applications were observed. In the case of FET students below eighteen years and Grade 9 to

11 learners, their parents' consent was first obtained by means of permission slips and assurance of their children's voluntary participation. All students from the two FET levels and the three grades who had been permitted and were willing to participate in the sample were then included in the research. A total of 204 multi-racial male and female learners from Grades 9 to 11 and 60 multi-racial male and female FET students participated.

The university sample comprised a total of 176 multi-racial female and male students selected primarily on the basis of their being South African citizens of any race, ethnicity or creed and their willingness to participate in the survey. The sample included both undergraduate and postgraduate students. All students are doing or have done English at one time or another during the course of their studies. The population sample therefore consisted of a combined group of 440 secondary school, FET and university students. While it would have been desirable to have had racially and gender-balanced samples, the overall student demographics at the different research sites did not permit this. A comprehensive breakdown of the population sample's composition by study level and race is given below.

Table 1: Composition of population sample

	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Total</i>
Grade 9-11	86	46	25	64	204
FET	33	14	9	4	60
University	64	5	41	66	176

At all three research sites, teachers, tutors and lecturers were selected specifically on the basis of being African English educators who are either local or foreigners. Nine educators overall participated in the survey. Of these, three were South African citizens (two female and one male), three from Zimbabwe (two female and one male), two from Kenya (both female) and one male from Rwanda. Much as it would have been desirable to have had more local African English educators in the sample, the staff composition at the different research sites was not this diverse.

Once the population samples had been identified, both the students and educators' questionnaires (see Appendix 1) were administered by the researchers to the respective participants at the two secondary schools and the FET College. To minimise the impact of the Hawthorne Effect, a non-participant university student selected, administered and collected the responses of the university sample in the absence of both researchers. All participants were given a minimum of twenty minutes each to respond to the eleven questions in the questionnaire. The administered questionnaires were then collected for analysis.

During the lesson/tutorial observations, the researchers particularly focused on and noted the delivery by teachers, tutors/lecturers, their rapport with students, students' classroom participation, body language and identity performance. These were noted down. After each data collection, as many participants as possible were thanked for their participation and co-operation.

When sufficient and reliable data had been collected, it was assembled by the researchers for analysis, interpretation and discussion. Firstly, findings from all the students' questionnaires were combined and analysed. This entailed arriving at a coding system of different and similar connections in the data gathered. In view of the research design, the analysis was largely descriptive in nature and, where data permitted, statistical.

Once data analysis was complete, we deployed such techniques as contextualising, cross-referencing data gathering instruments, connecting our findings to personal experience, resorting to theory and other research sources to help us draw connections and interpret our analysed data. Findings from other research instruments were used to facilitate further discussion. What follows are, first, a presentation and then interpretation and discussion of pertinent and interesting findings.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Responses to items 5 to 11 in the students' questionnaire were of particular interest as they directly and indirectly reflected students' perceptions of African educators. With regard to item 5, 83% of the different students responded that they would want to be taught by an African whether South African or foreign. 8% decisively did not want this and 9% were undecided.

Item 6 sought students' reasons for their responses to item 5. Of those students who responded positively, some common reasons were that: 'it is interesting' to be taught by a 'different person from another country', as 'they teach well and give more information' that 'makes it fun learning English'. One student concluded: 'Many foreign teachers know'. Some reported that they are more comfortable with local African teachers as they 'can understand them when one is not very fluent in English'. As one respondent put it, 'You can understand by asking in your own language'. In the same vein, a number of respondents were of the opinion that it is easier to understand African educators' English as it is 'not as deep'. Quite a few of the younger respondents gave such politically correct responses such as: 'We are all African' and 'We have to welcome foreigners'. Some university students falling into this category felt 'race does not necessarily affect teaching/so long as an educator is adequately qualified, experienced, challenging and/ not so strongly accented as to be misunderstood'.

Of the undecided students, 6% were secondary and FET students. Among the reasons given by the undecided was the understanding that 'there is a shortage of teachers in South Africa' and so being taught by an African was 'not by choice'. Others felt it is better to have black and white teachers in a school as all teachers are the same and there is no difference between them. Of the 8% students who did not want to or wish to be taught by an African, 5% were university students and they pointedly 'did not like to be taught by a black teacher'. Among

their various reasons for this was that ‘because they don’t know English’ or ‘Their English is not so good.’

Item 7 implicitly sought to find out students’ views of what to them characterises an English educator. Table 2 below gives the students’ responses for each option.

Table 2: Students’ views of what English constitutes

<i>Item 7</i>	<i>Option (i)</i>	<i>Option (ii)</i>	<i>Option (iii)</i>
	English is about speaking English like a native-speaker of English	English is about knowing and understanding both the grammar and literature of English	English is about it being spoken and taught by a white speaker of English
% participants	7	85	8

Interestingly, students’ responses to item 7 differed from their responses to item 5 by only 2%. The near consistency of students’ responses would seem to suggest that the majority them construe language competence and not race and language performance as paramount to one being an English educator.

In view of the Bantu education and ethnic, class and foreign bi/multilingual backgrounds of their African educators, item 8 sought to find out how students perceived their own knowledge of English in comparison with their educators. Sixty-eight per cent of students were of the opinion that they do not immediately feel they know more about English than the educator if an educator is an African. While 22% were positive that they immediately felt they knew more, 10% were undecided.

In relation to South Africa’s multilingualism and multiculturalism, item 9 obliquely sought to see whether students stereotypically equate race and ethnicity with particular teaching areas. Notably, 64% of students chose English Language as an area they would like to be taught by an African educator, while 27% responded that they would rather be taught an African language by an African educator, and 9% would like to be taught African literature.

However, as clarified by findings to item 10, it would appear that students’ understanding of this question was variously nuanced. The most popular reason given by secondary and FET students who would rather be taught English Language by an African educator lay in their perceived importance of the English Language as a means to personal improvement and

advancement rather than in their perception of the educator. This was evident from such comments as: 'So as to have more knowledge about English' and 'The world around us uses English to communicate'. Other reasons for students preferring to be taught English Language by an African educator stemmed from the perception of an African language as harder to learn compared to the former.

Similarly, among those students who would rather be taught an African language by an African, the reason was because they wished to expand their knowledge of different languages. It appears their innocent preference for an African educator had nothing to do with the educator but rather with the students' personal value judgement of an African language. Also falling into this category were a minority who felt being taught African literature in itself would better help them understand English language. Those wishing to be taught African Literature just wanted to know more about African literature, its different traditions and cultures. There were others, however, who stereotypically perceived an African educator as best placed to teach an African language because: 'African people are good in African languages' and 'an African individual would be most fluent with this'.

Item 11 inquired whether students' perceptions of African educators, either negative or positive, are theirs alone or are also influenced by their friends, classmates and family members. Thirty-four percent of students admitted to discussing African educators of English, 34% denied ever doing so, while another 32% responded that they sometimes discuss their English educators. This gave us the cue to turn our attention to an analysis of the educators' questionnaire.

An analysis of the educators' questionnaires revealed that all four secondary and FET Southern African educators sampled are L2 speakers of English. Seventy-five percent hold a degree and a teaching diploma, 25% possess only a certificate. All have been teaching English for 6 to 10 years, an average 1 to 5 years of which have been in South Africa.

In response to item 6, 50% described their teaching experiences as pleasant and 50% as bearable. Of the latter group, one participant in item 7 gave the reason that, 'some learners see you differently mainly because you are a foreigner and some have the tendency of thinking that black teachers do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach'. This perception was reinforced by another teacher whose 'experience has been such that at the beginning, learners would out of the blue ask me the meanings of certain words as their way of checking if I knew them'. Although the experience has been generally pleasant, another had experienced discipline issues with the learners. The last described his experience as pleasant and gave the reason that learners had appreciated the learning experience he offered.

A total of five university tutor/lecturers from East and Southern Africa participated in the survey; all of them are L2 speakers of English. Of these, 40% hold a Master's degree in English and a teaching diploma; the other 40% possess only Master's degrees in English and 20% hold a PhD degree and a teaching diploma in English. Eighty percent are working towards an English or English-related PhD. All of these university tutor/lecturers have taught English for more than ten years, 1 to 5 years of which have been in South Africa.

Among this group, 80% responded in item 6 that their experiences had been pleasant and 20% described it as bearable. The latter's reason for this in item 7 was 'students' disparate levels of interaction with English in their previous teaching experiences' which often resulted in students' 'varied language competencies'. Reasons of those who found teaching in South Africa a pleasant experience varied from the resources available to the positive reception they had received from students. In view of South Africa's multilingual context, a notable response was that the students provided 'exposure to various idiolects that expand my linguistic repertoire'.

Item 8 of the educators' questionnaire sought to find out whether there would be any correlation between students' earlier responses and that of their educators. Of the total of nine educators surveyed, 78% described their students' attitude as eager to learn and 11% as both indifferent and hyper-corrective, respectively. Of the educators who described their students as eager to learn, one highlighted, in item 9, that it was because they: 'thoroughly prepared and proved [themselves] so that students became eager to learn what [they] have to teach'. Another reported that 'some students realise that they are below the university standard so they strive to catch up'. The educator who found students indifferent blamed this on students' general unresponsiveness. Interestingly, the educator who found that learners were hyper-corrective derived this from their correction of her pronunciation of certain words, as '[t]hey are not aware of different accents of English and they relate that to a lack of English skills'.

In response to item 10, all participating educators expressed their preparedness to teach all races. Some reasons given for this in item 11 included the views that experience had shown that unless students had been adversely influenced, they tended to embrace diversity and were only judgmental and prejudiced if they were in group of only one race. University educators noted that the learning problems students have cut across race as some whites were from Afrikaans-only schools and struggled with English like all other students. Consequently, some of these educators felt that all students needed to learn English skills from anyone who is appropriately qualified and who could motivate them to learn.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate that the majority of students across the racial and language divide who participated in the survey have largely positive perceptions of African educators of English. Possible reasons for this are perhaps because of the African educators' high levels of experience and academic and professional English qualifications. The reason for this could partly be that the students are bi/multilingual themselves and are therefore not too fastidious about who they are taught by as long as they are competent in the content they deliver. This was corroborated by the consistency of students' responses to items 5 and 7. Yet another reason could be that the majority of participants have been raised in a more liberal, non-racial, multilingual post-apartheid society that is striving to go beyond issues of ethnicity. In this regard, students' positivity could also be the result of their desire to appear politically correct.

However, try as South Africa might at Rainbowism, as a few of the responses revealed, some students are still undecided about African educators, while remnants of past perceptions still linger for others. Indeed, observations of how some students never participate when called

upon, do so reluctantly, or are indifferent and hyper-corrective, are strong indicators that not all students perceive African educators of English positively.

Some respondents' view that African educators can be understood better as their English is 'not too deep', especially 'when one is not very fluent', can be best explicated in the context of South Africa's multilingual society and interactional sociolinguistics. Our observations have revealed that such bi/multilingual learners can express themselves better by reverting to a language choice that is understandable to a local African educator. As one respondent put it, 'Sometimes a [local] black teacher will repeat in Zulu while a foreigner always uses English'. This, therefore, speaks to the value of a bilingual or multilingual teacher in the context of the South African classroom. For this reason, local African educators are perceived as more accessible by bi/multilingual learners. Indeed, observations have shown some students and local African educators' ability to effortlessly manage their multilingual identities by negotiating identities in language choice and code switching.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004:2) note how, due to the close link between language and identity, 'languages function as markers of national or ethnic identities [...] a form of symbolic capital'. As both informal discussions and interviews affirmed, local African educators' ability to develop multiple identities in different contexts is such that bi/multilingual students initially perceive all African educators as able to speak at least one local language, until they realise that the educator is in essence a foreigner from the continent. Such encounters often leave the students with the perception that the foreign educator is a monolingual who speaks a language that is not even African English. Unknown to them, the educator is bi/multilingual, only not in local languages but in other African languages. In some cases, however, the encounter has aroused students' curiosity and attempts to learn a non-South African language.

Interestingly, it is during some of these encounters that African educators have discovered students' implicit awareness of multilingualism from their misconception that every educator from Zimbabwe speaks *chiShona* and all foreign African educators speak *Kiswahili*. For some students, their identification and confirmation that an African educator is a foreigner at times leads to expectations that they should 'sound like a Nigerian'. It seems that Nigerian films are influencing perceptions and constructions of Africanness. Consequently, some students are perplexed when an African educator does not 'sound Nigerian or African'. For that matter. Evidently, students still have a lot to learn about the multilingual identity of Africans on the continent.

The description of African educators' performance of the English language as 'not as deep' in item 6 also speaks to the perception that such respondents have of the educators' level of L2 proficiency in comparison to their L1 white educators. Consequently, as noted by Clement (1987), students who are members of this linguistic minority often identify with either the L1 or the L2 language community and rarely with both. In South Africa, we have observed that such students will often identify with the L2 language community whom they feel they can understand better and communicate with better. However, this, at times, is misconstrued as a 'fear of whites'.

The reason given by some students in item 6 for why an African educator of English would be acceptable was as long as ‘they do not have strong accents’. Interestingly, the issue of accents in postcolonial bi/multilingualism remains topical and resonates with Anderson and Rusanganwa (2011) and Chen and Cheng’s (2010) findings in different contexts. Kramsch (2009), writing in a different context, also points to ‘the high level of importance learners tend to assign to correct pronunciation of new symbolic forms and how a slight phonetic violation can harm self-perceived confidence in the target language’. This is because ‘pronunciation seems to be linked to the very important notions of pride and power, and how any disruptions in this area can cause embarrassment or anger’ (Hammer, 2011:769). Our observations also attest to this.

In South Africa it would appear that having a foreign accent somewhat downgrades African teachers, lecturers/tutors to learners of English rather than educators. It is not appreciated as a sign of a bi/multilingual identity in multilingual South Africa. Perhaps for this reason, 22% of students in response to item 8 felt they know more than their educators and 10% were undecided. As one educator commented during an unstructured interview, ‘some students do not know their foreign teachers’ inability to manage linguistic features uncommon to their L1’ and so are contemptuous of their ‘fossilised or multilingual accents’ (Cruz-Ferreira, 2011). To administrators, this means the appointment of staff with ‘native’ accents or at least ones students can linguistically relate to is required (Ashdown & Kiddo, 2007). As a result, some South African students never get to appreciate that, in a multilingual society, ‘[t]he accents we have, the ways in which we already use our vocal tracts, are assets to work with, not liabilities to work away from’ (Maggor, 2011; Hall, 2005) as they are a key component of multilingual identity and education.

Identity thrives on constancy and difference and Giles and Byrne’s (1982) theory of ethno linguistic identity deems language to be pertinent marker of ethnic and group identity. In item 8 of their questionnaire, one educator described her students’ attitude towards her teaching of English as hyper-corrective and indicated that some of her students resort to hyper-correction. In informal interviews, other African teachers affirmed how, to some of their students, a foreign accent and pronunciation are an indicator and performance of foreignness which, in some cases, leads to hyper-correction from which students seem to derive a sense of pride. In some such cases, hyper-correction has been accompanied by students’ performance and emphasis on their South Africanness in comparison with the foreignness of the African teacher. A South African English accent and pronunciation thus becomes their means of constructing and performing their identity.

Indeed, it has been our experience that South African students have their own rules of concord or subject-verb agreement. The most glaring example of this is the use of ‘There is’ or ‘Where is’ when in fact one is referring to plural subjects or nouns. Regarding pronunciation, some diary entries and discussions with African educators from other parts of the continent confirm contention and contestation between some South African students and themselves over the pronunciation of the following words: ‘country’; ‘debt’; ‘development’; ‘innovative’; ‘film’; ‘education’; ‘suite’; ‘secret’; ‘poem’ and ‘violence’, to mention a few. Ironically, unknown to such students, South African English accent and pronunciation have been influenced by the multilingual character of the nation through contact with other national language groups, mother-tongue interference and class.

It was also noted that, judging by students' responses, the survey came to be more about foreign African teachers than about local ones. In this regard, inescapable to both researchers, was the reference by some students to a foreign African educator as 'a different person' on the basis of a dissimilarity that revolves around the identity-language link most South Africans seem to emphasise. Thus, in both classroom and tutorial settings, it has been observed how contestations over pronunciation and rules of concord became rallying points for multi-racial students' cohesion and assertion of their South African identity through such shouts of jargon as 'tell him *bra*, tell him *boeti*' which seek national and ethnic differentiation.

In the absence of a comprehensive and clear South African bi/multilingualism education policy and guidelines, the postcolonial dominance of English and Afrikaans as supranational languages, and what can arguably be described as 'the use of language as a means of social control of [...] immigrant populations' (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004:2), some African educators have resorted to bi/multilingual approaches to teaching-learning. Lesson observations revealed the most common strategy is code switching. Another is what one African educator terms 'Language Choice'. According to her, when teaching an important concept or lesson that she wants students to grasp, she has a learner from each language group represented in the class explain, summarise and answer questions on it in the language s/he is representing in the class. The educator is very confident of her multilingual strategy and the success it yields.

However, while bi/multilingualism in learning contexts is encouraged (Kleyn & Reyes, 2010; Tochon, 2009; Hanna, 2011) its use is not appreciated by all students. In an observed lesson, a teacher resorted to some vernacular and code switching to clarify a point. This solicited ambiguous glances from some learners and seemed to have dampened the mood of the lesson. Students' reaction to the use of bi/multilingualism in the postcolonial South African classroom needs to be understood against the background that, since the country's democracy, the use of vernacular languages has been a source of controversy in some racially integrated Johannesburg classrooms (Klu *et al.*, 2013). Among the reasons given for this has been the argument that L2 learners of English and Afrikaans need to be immersed in the target language. While this raises questions about equitable learning, so too does the use of vernacular in the context of other students who do not speak a word of it. The challenge for South Africa therefore is to find middle ground and suitable approaches, if learners are not to develop positive attitudes to bi/multilingual teaching-learning.

Influenced by Berry's (1980) paradigm of the theory of acculturation that seeks to explain language contact outcomes in a bi/multilingual context of different ethnic identities, we have tried as much as possible to be 'cultural brokers' (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983) and set aside at least a lesson during which learners engage in what we term a Language Exchange Lesson (LEL). This is where we pair/group learners from different ethnic backgrounds for them to 'exchange' each other's languages and cultures through such activities as oral and written translation of each others' languages, songs and music. By doing so, the overall objective is for learners to appreciate the richness, compare the grammatical rules, structural properties and expressive equality of their languages and music, while simultaneously enjoying themselves. It is our aim that, through such a strategy, students' perceptions of the linguistic oddity or superiority of their language can be ameliorated.

In addition to the two multilingual approaches above, Hammer (2011:771) mentions ‘the critical/reflexive approach and the creative/narrative approach’ and Kleyn and Reyes (2010) advise that ‘educators must consider the socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of all students [...by, for instance] offering strategies for balancing instructions in two languages and meeting the needs of all English Language learners (ELLs)’ (Babiy, 2011:767, 765). All such approaches can help ensure that students appreciate that all languages have systems and behaviours that have to be mastered and are therefore equally important.

Partly as a result of our LEL, observations have revealed how some white and Indian students who have Coloured and African friends have become fledgling ‘Xhosas and Zulus’. With this and bi/multilingual identity in mind, students’ responses to items 9 and 10 which implicitly sought to see whether students stereotypically conflate race to certain teaching areas, but which some students comprehended differently, would suggest that some students do aspire to be bi/multilingual. Noteworthy is that such students would like to be taught an African language and African literature by an African educator, not necessarily because of any ethnic stereotypes they harbour but simply to expand their knowledge of different African languages and cultures.

Almost twenty years into South Africa’s democracy, however, there are those students for whom an African educator should stereotypically teach African Literature or an African Language because they are most likely to be better at it. In this regard item 11 sought to find out whether students’ perceptions of African educators are theirs alone or are also influenced by their friends, classmates or family members. Students’ responses were almost even. It would be interesting to, amongst others, research whether any of the discussions around African educators have anything to do with African educators’ bi/multilingual teaching-learning approaches. On the educators’ part, there is consensus to teach all races; just how many of them would like to do so primarily because of the teaching-learning potential of the multilingual identity of their class/lecture room is anyone’s guess.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated both secondary and tertiary students’ perceptions of African educators of English and to what extent identity constructs of the last century are impacting them in the context of a post-apartheid, integrated multilingual class/lecture room. In the study we have illuminated how, despite remnants of the apartheid past influencing most students’ perceptions, their perceptions of L2 African English educators arguably are, positive. To the majority of Johannesburg’s students, to quote one student respondent, whether an English educator is African or white, ‘a teacher is a teacher.’ To the majority of them, the teaching-learning of English is not necessarily about educators’ skin colour or being a native speaker of English. Instead, it is specifically about an educator’s qualifications, coherence and teaching competency. However, in the absence of a national policy on multilingual education and the practice of language immersion, most students are yet to accept other languages and African educators with foreign accents and pronunciations. As such, it can be concluded that, while South Africa’s past has made students conscious of how they should view otherness, the country’s multilingual identity is yet to be fully appreciated and harnessed in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above conclusions, we are of the opinion that a national policy on multilingual education and its practice be instituted in South African schools and tertiary institutions. In this vein, therefore, pre-service teachers should as much as possible be prepared how to teach bi/multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Chisholm, 1994; Meier, 2005). Kramsch's (2009) observation, in a different context, 'that the majority of language learners are multilinguals and so there is already a strong linguistic potential to be used by language educators' is also worth remembering. Students should also be intentionally prepared to expect to be taught using multilingual methods by multicultural educators. In this regard, we agree with Ashdown and Kiddo's view 'that true understanding and knowledge take place only when everyone is participating, regardless of ethnicity or gender' (2007:40). It is only through such exposure that students can learn to understand and appreciate the multilingual character of South Africa. However, for this to happen, more of South Africa's private and former Model 'C' schools need greater linguistic and cultural diversity. So too do black-only township and village schools. The study has been confined to some cosmopolitan Johannesburg students' perceptions of African English educators only. Future research could consider other cities, towns and disciplines.

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