University language policies

Frameworks for opening up implementational spaces

Adelia Carstens
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Two important foundations to support language policies in HE

Language is a right
Section 29.2 of the SA Constitution
"everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable".

Language is a resource
“Language communities and thus their systems of communication each have instrumental value and are interdependent rather than parallel, separate and fundamentally unequal” (Heugh 2003:47).
This orientation is not only functional, but also ideological, as it is aimed at “transforming the structured linguistic inequality […] to ensure high-level functional and flexible use of languages’ (Ibid.).
HE policies and frameworks that entrench these principles


- "15.1 The Ministry acknowledges the current position of English and Afrikaans as the dominant languages of instruction in higher education and believes that in the light of practical and other considerations it will be necessary to work within the confines of the status quo until such time as other South African languages have been developed to a level where they may be used in all higher education functions."
- "15.2 Consideration should be given to the development of the other South African languages for use in instruction, as part of a medium to long-term strategy to promote multilingualism."
The development of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education (2003)

• 48.6 Higher education institutions, government and the private sector should collaborate in identifying on a regional basis prioritised courses that could be progressively translated into an African language. The strategy should determine which language/s would be targeted in that specific region and who would take responsibility for producing the material, given the expertise in the region.

• 48.8 Each higher education institution should be required to identify an indigenous African language of its choice for initial development as a medium of instruction.

- Evidence of “unacceptable discrimination in the system”:
  - 6. Language practices that fail to affirm individuals as subjects of learning
D.2 A national multidisciplinary project on how indigenous languages in South Africa could support the process of concept formation in the HSS, and furthermore, what know-hows in these languages could enrich social scientific thinking or pedagogy (p. 30).

That is why recommendation D.2 is a priority: a national multidisciplinary project on the way indigenous languages in South Africa could help in the process of concept formation in the HSS. For example, does the fact that there are at least 23 ways of describing “poverty” in the Nguni oral lexicon offer a way of understanding agencies better? Does the grammatical structure of local languages demand a different logic from the Boolean or the Aristotelian? A project, if carefully designed, would move the discussion of language to the heart of HSS (p. 37).

Terms of reference:

The Panel must

• Undertake a literature review on the development of African languages in South Africa with particular focus on higher education institutions. This review must include proposals on African languages and other relevant parts contained in the draft Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences.

• Review the existing Language Policy for Higher Education, and its implementation, particularly in relation to the development of African languages at South African universities and recommend how it can be improved.

• Study the report of the Ministerial Steering Committee appointed to investigate the development of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education and advise where necessary.
Dr Blade Nzimande, in response to adv. Anton Alberts' question in parliament about mother tongue education (Felix Jason, Beeld, 21 August):

- "The framework that regulates language use at universities was compiled in 2002. We are in the process to review this policy to promote all African languages at universities".  
- It is not practical to use African languages alongside Afrikaans and English as main languages of teaching and learning.  
- "The Department of Higher Education is currently reviewing its language policy but during the interim period English remains the principal medium of instruction."  
- "The language policy is there to promote the African languages but this does not entail that universities have to provide tuition in a particular mother tongue. This would be contrary to the Constitution".
Have language policies for HE in SA failed us or has their implementation and monitoring failed?

- **Cummins (2015:273):** "A broad causal factor [...] involves the failure of policy-makers to articulate a coherent and empirically supported instructional approach to teaching in multilingual educational contexts".

- **Maseko (2014:34):** [with reference to the policies on the previous slide]: "It is a cause of concern though, that implementation of the policies, grand as they are, is not effectively monitored".

- **Stroud & Kerfoot (2013:397):** "Policy failure" has led to a need for "radical re-conceptualisation of the design of academic language and literacy programmes" [...] "in which all available languages and semiotic resources are used and promoted in pursuit of learning".
Options at the macro-level

**Stronger and weaker versions of language as a right and language as a resource orientations:**

- **Stronger** (institutional) – two or three monolingualisms: African languages as MOIs alongside English [and Afrikaans?] (Ramani *et al.* 2007; Makalela & McCabe 2013) Limpopo?

- **Weaker** (complementary): English as primary LOLT with African languages and Afrikaans as auxiliary languages - enabling students to participate in knowledge creation, dissemination and application (Grosjean 2008; Madiba 2013) UCT
At meso-levels considered, principled eclecticism (diagrams are a crude summary from Mwaniki 2004)

Traditional Language planning
- Top-down
  - Decision-making about language(s)
  - Emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency

Critical language planning
- Ideological
  - Emancipation
  - Social Justice

Language Management
- Bottom-up
  - Individual agency
  - Allows for local interpretations
  - Identifies spaces for implementation of multilingual education
  - Pries open such spaces
Language policies are essentially about "opening up ideological and implementational space in the environment for as many languages as possible" (Hornberger 2002:30)

Taking account of the complexity of speech variation across different languages and their varieties, which are always in a state of flux
What spaces?

• **Translanguaging**: opening up spaces in and out of class for students to use their strongest languages for conceptualisation, planning, social cohesion, identity confirmation; reflection

  "At least two languages are used in a **functionally integrated manner** to mediate **cognitive, social and affective** processes in **literacy and learning**" (Palmer, Martinez, Mateus & Henderson 2014:759)

• **Multilingual and multimodal writing centres**: consultation in the mother tongue/strongest language; drawing upon students' entire semiotic repertoires to empower them in the essayist literacies of the academy – English

• Sufficient space for faculties and departments to **experiment with different variations of auxiliary practices** (within the scope of the macro-policy, and upon approval by governance structures)
What resources and strategies?

Empowering students in the primary LOLT

• **Explicitly demystifying how academic language works in the various disciplines** (critical subject-specific genre approaches)

**Drawing upon students' and lecturers linguistic and wider semiotic repertoires**

• **“Code-scaffolding”:** Lecturer using the students’ mother tongue for classroom management, explanation of difficult concepts, explanation of grammatical rules and discursive conventions in ESAP

• **Interpreting** (optimally useful where students have no or little understanding of the medium of instruction) – utilise as resource for terminology development

• **Translated materials** (PowerPoint slides, core materials) available online and accessible via mobile devices; translation activities

• Provision of **multilingual glossaries** and **multimodal resources** such as concept maps – Expert-created but validated by users

• Availability of **tutors** (online?) who speak the mother tongues of the major language groups
Creating spaces for the L1 in an L2 target context

Lecturer-initiated

Communicating meaning
- Using the L1 to explain formal aspects of the L2: lexical, grammatical and discoursal

Organising the class
- Using the L1 for conveying conceptual content and checking understanding
- Using the L1 for organising tasks
- Establishing/maintaining contact with individual students

Providing scaffolding: tasks and materials
- Translations of key texts, multilingual glossaries, multimodal materials

Using the L1 within and outside the classroom
- Using the L1 within classroom activities: discussion, translation

Student-initiated
Ke a leboha
Ngiyabonga
Ngiyathokoza
Thank you
Siyabonga
Ndo livhuwa
Dankie
Enkosi
Inkomu
Ke a leboga
References


