

Translanguaging As An Intervention Strategy For Making Up For Barriers In Teaching Languages

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Abstract

The writing of this article is informed by our experience of teaching student educators in the School of Education, Language Education unit at the University of Limpopo. Our university subscribes to the ethic of care which is captured in the School of Education's conceptual framework. The School of Education's theoretical framework, through its metaphor of rebirth serves as the fundamental underpinning towards bringing in the ethos of care and regeneration in developing students educators who are compassionate towards critical reconstruction of our black communities. The usage of English First Additional Language as a language of teaching and learning in South African universities still poses some challenges to student-educators. This is due to the fact that English is an additional language to the majority of black people and is complex because of its vocabulary and language structure which are different from indigenous languages. What prompted us to embark on this study is our concern about the failure in the usage of English as a dominating language in teaching and learning, and this hinders students' communicative abilities in their respective modules. Student-educators resort to apply code-switching and code-mixing in their module interaction with their lecturers. They lack the communicative competence in English to actively participate in deliberations in varying activities in their modules. The inability to access information and communicate fluently through the English language warrants an intervention process or programme of teaching and learning. In this article, we strongly argue that translanguaging can be a transformative pedagogical approach towards empowering student-educators to express themselves freely and excel academically. An intervention practices, deduced from the above, are suggested as practical solutions for the problem. Participants for this study are the year 4 students training to be language educators (English, Xitsonga,

Tshivenda and Sepedi) from the School of Education. These students are at the exit level for the Bed SPF programme. They have been involved with Work Integrated Learning through teaching practice through which they are expected to have honed their competencies in Language teaching as stated in the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Education, 2011). Our study applied an interpretivist paradigm where social critical learning theory will be applied. Student-educators' writing skills are analysed through their written assignments. We also observed students' interaction with their peers and the module lecturers in the usage of the language. We recommend that translanguaging may serve as a vehicle through which the barriers for meaningful teaching and learning in previously disadvantaged underprepared students can be eased. Translanguaging may be used in cases where there is a breakdown in communication and understanding between lecturers and student-educators. Moreover, the process can also be transferred to interactions between learners and educators in schools.

Keywords: Code-mixing, Code-switching, English First Additional Language, Indigenous languages, Rebirth, Regeneration, Student educators, Translanguaging.

Introduction

The teaching and development of African languages in the 21st century is posing challenges to language educators and lecturers respectively. The Language in Education Policy (1997) has declared eleven languages in South Africa as official ones which can be used as languages of learning and teaching. The usage of these languages as official ones is enshrined in the South African Constitution (Makalela, 2015). The constitution of South Africa states the following as official languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, SiSwati, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, English and Afrikaans. On the same breath, the Language Policy Framework in Higher Education (2001) also argues for the adoption of African languages as languages of tuition. The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2010)' stand that multilingualism should be fostered at higher institutions of learning also support our thinking about the use of translanguaging in teaching. It is on this lense that we believe that translanguaging can serve as a means towards attaining multilingualism in our education sphere.

Literature

Language Policy in Higher Education (2002) envisage the role of all our languages as "working together" to build a common sense of nationhood. This is consistent with the values of "democracy, social justice and fundamental rights", which are enshrined in the Constitution. The

Constitution, in line with its founding provisions of non-racialism, non-sexism, human dignity and equity, not only accords equal status to all our languages, but recognises that given the marginalisation of indigenous languages in the past, the state “must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages” (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1999). For this, we argue that African languages should be utilised as vehicles to emancipate black people from the oppressive regime of the past. Black people should be empowered to express their own thinking using their own languages, even at institutions of higher learning (Alexander, 2003).

The challenge experienced in the usage of English as a language of learning and teaching is not only experienced in South Africa, but elsewhere in Africa. Mwindi and van der Walt (2015)’ study focussed on the challenges in the transition from the usage of the African language to the bilingual system in Namibia. We believe that the challenges experienced in Namibia may be avoided here in South if the African languages were developed at the same level as English. The same sentiments are shared by Ngcobo, Nadaba, Nyangiwe, Mpungose and Jamal (2016), who painstakingly state that African students do not enjoy the benefit of using their home languages for teaching and learning. This is due to the unjust system of the apartheid government.

We hereby argue that translanguaging is the best vehicle through which students will be emancipated from the repressive cycle of miscommunication in the language classroom due to the overreliance on the English language. Our argument is that all the eleven official languages should be utilised for meaningful interaction between the teacher and learners (lecturers and students) (Makalela, 2016). Adding to the above, Tsuchiya (2015) views translanguaging as a vehicle towards recognising people’s language and emancipating them from the linguistic oppression (Freire, 1970). In agreement with Tsuchiya (2015), Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012) define translanguaging as the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages”. Kiramba (2016) agrees with the above notion in the sense that the usage of two languages is purely a linguistic repertoires of resources to meet their communicative goals in a given situation. This implies that we may use two languages in the classroom for negotiating meaning in instances where such would not have being achieved if only one language was used. Mazak and Donoso (2015) assert that translanguaging can be used as a means for attaining social justice in the classroom as it repairs communication breakdowns resulting from a monolingual classroom setting. We therefore argue for the adoption of translanguaging as a tool to be utilised in our classroom and higher institutions of learning.

Makalela (2016) argues that translanguaging offers an alternative to bridge the gap between the ideological thinking of Europe which viewed English as the only language for one nation. He argues that

multilingualism serves as translingual mechanism to bridge the language boundary in the classroom. The typical South African classroom interaction is characterised by a mix or switch from one language to the other. This is translanguaging as students interact in their group discussions and as teachers either code-switch or code-mix to explain different academic concepts (Makalela, 2016).

Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy has been exponentially studied elsewhere in the world as a discourse where linguistic input and output are alternated in different languages (Garcia 2009; 2011; Creese & Blackledge 2010; Garcia & Wei 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the critical theory. The critical theory is important because it aims at challenging the status quo and bringing about change in the approach and emancipate students from the bondage of the apartheid thinking. Fleming (2016) describes critical theory as “involving a kind of critical thinking that involves a disengagement from the tacit assumptions of discursive practices and power relations to exert more control over one’s life.” We believe that there is a need for transformation or disengagement from the oppressive language of teaching which inhibits full participation and understanding from our students. The English language used as the language of learning and teaching becomes a deterrent for students to gain access to content in various degree courses. The need for a new medium of instruction is therefore necessary for access to learning and teaching. We therefore recommend *Translanguaging* as the vehicle through which students can break the wall of oppressive thinking (Freire, 1972). It is through translanguaging that the frontiers of teaching and learning are transformed. Central to the transformative nature of translanguaging is the constructivist’ theory.

The Transformative Nature of Critical Theory in Language Teaching

Critical theory views the classroom as the microcosm of the social life. It is on the basis of this that we argue that translanguaging can be a good resource for making access for students’ learning possible. It is through the critical theory that the hardships and realities experienced during the apartheid era can be transformed. Critical theory, therefore, challenges the multiple hardships faced by teachers and learners during the apartheid system of education. By applying the critical theory, we believe that we will be affording students opportunities to redress the past imbalances brought by the usage of the oppressive language. The language of teaching and learning served as a barrier for students to express themselves freely and to constructive in their thinking. Translanguaging, therefore, has the transformative element needed for teachers to reflect on what they should be teaching and what learners should be learning. Teachers have opportunities to design material and influence the teaching and learning process, than the curriculum which

was prescriptive in nature during the past system of education (Higgs & Smith, 2008; Dell' Angelo, Seaton & Smith, 2014).

We strongly argue that the critical theory, through its transformative tenets, empowers students and educators to constructively change the curriculum, rather than to adopt the prescriptive curriculum which was oppressive (Leonardo, 2004). Jordaan (2011) explains that the problems students are faced with are due to the usage of English which is an additional language to the students' home language. It brings along its own intricacies which students are supposed to understand and master in addition to their home language. We believe that the usage of translanguaging in our teaching and learning can bring the solution to the problems expressed above.

Critical theory is therefore relevant in language teaching as it affords teachers to analyse the learning context and the learners, so that they can bring the necessary changes to the curriculum (Leonardo, 2004, p.2). We believe that through the application of the critical theory in the multilingual setting, the teacher becomes 'an agent of transformative intellectual and creative designer of curriculum, rather than simply serving as a gatekeeper or even worse, a script reader' (Leonardo, 2004 p. 2). Teachers serve as transformative agents because they operate from the emic (within the system) environment than from the etic one. They are able to bring the change they desire in the system because they are conversant with the system than some who operates from the etic (outside the system) point of view.

Dell' Angelo, Seaton and Smith (2014) argue that the critical theory tries to bring in new practices that promote consciousness and understanding of where and how one is located within a given social system. This means that teachers are able to analyse their teaching environment and bring change with regard to their approaches, the value systems and Ideologies (Dell' Angelo, Seaton & Smith, 2014). Meaningful change, in the context of multigrade teaching, can only be effected through multiple intersection between teachers at schools and in the classroom context. This interaction can be enforced by applying the two core elements of critical theory, which are; communication and collaboration (Brookfield, 2011; Dell' Angelo, Seaton & Smith 2014, p.4). It is through teachers' collaboration and communication that they are able to explicate issues which confront them in their classroom.

The Critical Theory's View on Social Justice.

Social Justice views the freedom of expression among teachers in their working environment as an important element towards bring change. Teachers have to understand antecedence of oppression and domination which existed in the past for them to be able to shape the direction of changes towards total social emancipation (Mthethwa-Sommer, 2014). Vita (2014) agrees with the above author by stating that one of the cornerstone of Social Justice is dialogue. He views dialogue as a discursive

solution to controversial moral questions in conformity with the universalization principle. Social Justice will then apply to the ethics as applied in Education and in the classroom situation. These ethics are referred to as “conceptual elements” that aim at bringing in intervention and transformation of the educational system (Vita, 2014, p.3). Education in multigrade teaching should be seen as vehicle of instilling “self-confidence” and “self-esteem” at a people to bring equality. Teachers should then be seen as agents of change (Vita, 2014, p.3; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). The interaction between teachers and learners should then be reciprocal in bringing about the change (Jordaan, 2011).

Mthethwa-Sommer (2014) views the conscientization as the “an awareness of how economic, social, cultural and political powers shape human relations and the way we see and understand the world”. The implication of the above statement is that teachers should be aware of power relations, values and ideologies and belief systems within the education sphere and interrogate them. The need to create critical classrooms, multigrade classroom, should reflect a conscientized knowledge of different values and ideologies and all teachers and learners should interrogate them and reflect on their being.

Critical theory should therefore be used to redress the imbalances of the past. It should encourage teachers to be thoughtful practitioners who will create an open and supportive environment and facilitate critical thought and consideration of alternative perspectives within a framework of open inquiry” (Dell’ Angelo, Seaton & Smith 2014, p.3).

Methodology-Translanguaging

The study affirmed its devotion in the interpretivist (Higgs & Smith, 2008)’s view of language learning where language teaching would be seen as a fundamental factor that is indispensable and pivotal as learning can hardly take place without it. The *South African Schools Act* (1996: B-32) states that “The language of learning and teaching in a public school must be an official language”. English in this regard is the language of learning and teaching which unfortunately serves as a deterrent for the majority of students in their learning.

Data Collection

Research data were collected on the location of UL, School of Education in the Department of Language Education, Social Sciences Education and Educational Management. All the data were collected through contact and interaction with the Bed SPF & FET year 4 students training to be language educators for English, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. These students are at the exit level and have been involved with Work Integrated Learning through teaching practice in their different home schools.

We adopted the interpretivists’ qualitative approach towards conducting this study where 12 (3 from each language offered) level 4 student-educators were purposefully sampled. We sampled the level 4 student

educators because of their experience on being taught either through the medium of English and also in their home languages. We used the following instruments in collecting data: documents (written assignments) and lecture halls/ classroom observations supported by field notes. To contextualize the data, it is important to describe the research site and the resources available at the institution.

Lecture Halls/ Classroom Observation

Collecting lecture halls/ classroom data involved sitting in lessons and taking field notes of whatever occurred during teaching and learning. During teaching and learning specific interaction on the blackboard and students' writing skill were captured. Ongoing lessons were observed to investigate the patterns of translanguaging. This means that the instances of translanguaging between lecturers and students were observed. The observation included aspects such as the kind of writing, speaking and reading activities conducted and the language/s that the activities take place.

Documents

In each of the four languages, we gave students assignments as one of the assessment instruments in their respective modules. Herein, their writing skill was to be assessed. Among other aspects of consideration was their language usage and comprehension in each task.

Findings

Observations: Home languages (Tshivenda, Sepedi & Xitsonga)

Students poses variety of regional dialects and for the chosen modules students use these languages interchangeable with English during teaching and learning. The language practices are revealed a lot on the language practices during class presentations and interaction during lessons. Students code-mix and code-switch very often throughout the lesson. Some would say they do not know how to express the subject matter at hand in their home language and find it easy to switch and mix with English. Translanguaging mostly took place in a form of transliteration in the sense that the English words are 'Sothonised', 'Vendalised' and 'Tsonganised'. It is not even clear that these uses of English words which have found their way in the Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga languages should be considered as instances of translanguaging because these words have been indigenized.

Garcia (2009) includes all instances of codemixing and code switching as examples of translanguaging, even though they do not include attempts by the lecturer to make his/her input understandable. The students' use of Sothonised, Vendalised and Tsonganised English terms shows that students are familiar with these home language terms and can follow the subject matter under discussion. This is in confirmation of the

emancipatory powers of translanguaging (Makalela, 2015, Fleming, 2016).

Students use translanguaging to assist them to learn with ease, but at the same time language development is static because terminology development is compromised even though teaching and learning takes place.

Observation: English Usage

English First Additional language student educators made mistakes in terms of tense. This can be seen in the following utterance by one student during presentations: *"It was knows..."*

- *Most of the student educators are not fluent in English and then resort to their Home Language for clarification of concepts. This happens both during presentations in class and during teaching practice sessions.*
- *Translanguaging is being applied to exemplify difficult concepts or words.*
- *Teaching in English, without code-switching to the learners' home language becomes a challenge as the interaction between learners and learners and the teacher is not communicative. Learners become apprehensive in expressing themselves in English. When translanguaging is applied, learners became free and engaged with each other.*

Student educators are not fluent in spelling in English. It becomes a challenge as they are supposed to serve as role models to their learners.

Written assessment activities

As students are expected to write their personal details and information relating to the module the task is meant for, for the home languages they provide this information haphazardly using both English and these languages. From the written assignments student often use English for responses that they forgot in these home languages and the indicate that by putting inverted commas, brackets or stroke. This might be that they have the latitude of defining some concepts in English then paraphrase and apply in their respective languages. To some extent they could write down a note to plead that the lecturer pardon them for the English language, but they wanted to display that they do know and understand the concept but could not easily relate in their languages.

1. *Tsalwandzungulo ra novhele wa hina ri ta va ri langutane na novhele leyi vulavulaka hi swa rirhandzu ku nga "love novels"*
2. *SGB- "loko ko hlawuriwa vadyondzi vo karhi leswaku ku va vona lava va phamaka swakudya na ku mudyondzisi wa tlilasi (class teacher) a va a ri kona loko va phaka swi nga hunguta ku va vana van'wana va*

muka vanga dyanga hi mhaka ya vadyondzikuloni. Swi nga hunguta na ku thyaka ka tlilasi"

3. *Mudyondzisi u fanele ku tiva leswaku ririmi ri na matirhiselo ya mune exikolweni.*

1. *Papila ro sungula: Ririmi*
2. *Papila ra vumbirhi: Matsalwa*
3. *Papila ra vunharhu: Tikhophosixini*
4. *Papila ra vumune: Tiorhali/Mbulavulo*

MAENDLELO EKA NDZAVISISO

Ndzi hlengeletile timhaka "data" ngopfu hi ku tirhisa maendlelo yo pima pima "survey" lawa ya kongomisiwaka eka vadyondzi va giredi ya 8 na vadyondzi va giredi ya 12 exikolweni xa Mark Shope. Maendlelo lama yo pima pima a ya katsa khume mune wa swivutiso swo kongoma swo fana na swivutiso swa ina/e-e na sivutiso swo andza hi ku hlawula 'multiple choice questions' leswi nga ndzi pfuna ku hlengeta ntsengo/nhlayo wa timhaka leti a ti laveka. "Quantitative data" hi ku ngetela, ndizi tirhisile na nhlayo yintsongo ya swivutiso swo nyika mavonelo emakumu k aka ku pima pima leswaku vadyondzi va kota ku nyika mavonelo ya vona va ntshuxekile. A ndzi endla hi minkarhi leyi vadyondi va nga ntshuxeka ku fana na hi minkarhi yo dya kumbe loko xikolo xi huma. Endzhaku ka loko ndzi kumile mbuyelo ndzi yi xopaxopile, yi lulamisiwa kutani ni yi kombisa hi ku tirhisa maendlelo yo yi hlamusela .

Data Analysis

The data presented above show instances of translanguaging both from English to the African language language and vice versa. The fact that African language students translanguaged from an African language to English and that those teaching English code-switched to an African language show the importance of translanguaging in both circumstances. The purpose of these instances of translanguaging was to ease the communication barrier (Makalela, 2016) which existed during the interaction. In Xitsonga, students were not sure as to the exact word to be used, hence the translanguaging to English. Concepts like *data*, *survey*, *multiple choice*, *quantitative survey* have been used in cases where there was a communication breakdown.

Again the fact that English student-educators codeswitched to Sepedi and Xitsonga during their presentation in class shows that translanguaging can serve as a tool to explicate difficult concepts in English where students lack the necessary terminology to do so.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude by recommending translanguaging as an emancipating vehicle for meaningful learning, both in high schools and

tertiary institutions. The implementation of the Language in Education Policy (1997) in public schools and the Language Policy for Higher Education (2002) at tertiary institutions will assist a lot in dealing with challenges faced by learners and students respectively.

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