The Use Of Mother Tongue Within And Outside The Lecture Halls Of Higher Institutions Of Learning: A Case Of A University In Limpopo Province

Dr. Wendy Chauke [1], Prof Mamalatswa Maruma [2] [*],
Dr. Amos Khosa [3]

[1] Department of Language Education University of Limpopo, RSA
Wendy.Chauke@ul.ac.za
[2] Department of Language Education University of Limpopo, RSA
kgetja.maruma@ul.ac.za
[3] Department of Language Education University of Limpopo, RSA
Mashangu.khosa@ul.ac.za

Abstract
This article is an ethnographic case study of the language attitudes and behaviours of Xitsonga students at the University of Limpopo. The researcher spent time with Xitsonga students in the School of Education and in the School of Languages and Communication Studies, where Xitsonga is offered as a module. The researcher also used her class in the School of Education and observed lectures in the School of Languages and Communication Studies to develop a case which can be used to enrich an understanding of other cases. The study was qualitative in nature within the interpretivism paradigm. Research instruments namely interviews, documentary review and observations were used for data collection. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and thick descriptions were used to analyse the data coded into themes to highlight the power play between English and the indigenous languages, with particular reference to Xitsonga. The results indicated that the environment at the University of Limpopo does not afford Xitsonga students the desire and motivation required to interrelate in Xitsonga. The researcher also observed that language is only recognized for greeting purposes and cultural activities. As such, most Vatsonga students do not contribute to the development of the language. The study therefore recommends that the institution language policy be revised and implemented accordingly to cater appropriate use of the SOVENGA languages.

Keywords: Language policy, Xitsonga, University of Limpopo, interrelate, language attitude, motivation

Introduction and Historical background

The world has always been multilingual. This state therefore prescribes that when developing language learning and teaching realization there is a need to consider the multilingual realities of the world into account. The use of language is a form of social interaction that occurs in various situations. Language patterns and language skills as well as language behaviours vary in the speech communities (Brenzinger, 2017). Language choice is usually observable as a result of the use of language in a bilingual or multilingual society (Marwa, 2014). In the selection of languages, committing a mistake in choosing a variety of language that fits with the relevant situation of communication cannot easily be avoided. The mistake can cause a loss for the participant of communication. Even people with advanced level of native and foreign language can experience difficulties in multicultural contexts (Derin, Nursafira, Yudar, Gowasa, & Hamuddin, 2020)

Additionally, language debates, challenges and conflicting attitudes analytic of the colonial after-effect have constantly baffled the minds of researchers across socio-linguistic and academic domains for years. Wa Thiong'o (1986), declared that the idea of English as a language of liberation was mainly used as a means of gaining supremacy by the then apartheid government in Africa. In light of this, foreign languages were imposed on African people in order to control their minds, as part of the process of entrenching the colonial system of imperialism. In addition, Wa Thiong'o (1986) said that it is not possible to decolonize African minds through the use of foreign languages. Thus, foreign languages cannot be languages used in the liberation of colonized people. This study is based on the argument that, although African languages are being standardized, little effort is being made to develop them as languages of teaching, learning and communication especially in institutions of higher learning.

South Africa boasts 11 official languages, but it is only English and Afrikaans that have stood the test of time as languages of instruction in higher education. In 2017, South African Sign Language (SASL) gained official status as the 12th official language in South Africa. Subsequent to this a Language Policy was revised at the University of Limpopo (UL) to guide the governance of languages to be used in teaching, learning research. The policy's main aim is to ensure parity between languages and to promote the equitable use of English, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda, as the main languages used at the University (University of Limpopo Language Policy, 2022).

At UL, Xitsonga is taught as a module in different programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Xitsonga is also taught to the native speakers of this language as a Home Language (HL), First and Second Additional subjects in most primary and high schools. This is in line with the Department of Basic Education's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011), which stresses that the language of learning in all grades, from Grades R-12, should include all 11 official languages in South Africa. Moreover, CAPS is in

line with the multilingual language awareness of the South African government. As a result, one cannot ignore the fact that it is through language that cultural diversity and social relations are communicated and raised. Furthermore, the CAPS document states that learning to use a language effectively can enable learners to think critically and construct knowledge in order to express their identity, feelings, ideas, and to interact with others, and to manage their world.

To this end, Republic of South African government through structurers like the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the Pan South African Language board (PanSALB) through its Language Services (LS) has developed structures for the development of previously marginalized languages, Xitsonga being one of them. In respond to the government's initiative about multilingualism and the development of African languages campaign, the University of Limpopo has since revised its Language Policy (University of Limpopo Language Policy, 2022). The policy continues to seek to ensure parity between languages and to promote the equitable use of English, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda as the main languages used at the University. Although plans have put in place to make ends meet, little is done to attain the goal. Its implementation is that of a snail movement as no progress has been made thus far.

To a broad extent language practices in different countries makes each country unique. In view of this, World Bank (2021) alludes that Ethiopia appears to have the strongest model of Multilingual Education (MLE) to date, based on its language-in-education policy of 1994 calling for a full eight-year primary cycle of L1- based literacy and instruction, along with the teaching of national language (L2) Amharic beginning in Grades 3 or 5 (for the 73 per cent of students who do not have Amharic as L1) and international language (L3) English beginning in Grade 1. The policy is bilingual for L1 speakers of Amharic and trilingual for speakers of other languages (L1 + Amharic + English).

A Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) Multilingual Education Program has been implemented since 2019 in 40 schools in the Dungarpur district of Rajasthan in Western India. The emphasis is on the use of children's orality and developing Wagdi for higher order thinking, reasoning and oral expression through activities like interactive read aloud and conversations. During this period, strategies like Total Physical Response (TPR) are used to help children pick up about 200 words, phrases, and simple sentences. L1 is used extensively and strategically to scaffold L2 learning in the first two years; for example, L1 is used for new or difficult concepts and for higher order comprehension, while L2 is used for simple texts with recall-type comprehension. Teachers use and promote purposeful mixing of languages ("translanguaging"), to enable full comprehension and expression, Craig (2019).

Problem Statement

The University's Language Policy recognizes Xitsonga as medium of instruction (Medium of Instruction), yet there seems to be a

reluctance by students to use this language for teaching and learning. Nkhwashu (2011), as well as Nkhwashu, Madadzhe and Kubayi (2015) attested to this negative attitude. The unwillingness of Xitsonga students to use their home language freely places English in a more prestigious position, leading to subtractive bilingualism. Makamu (2009) points out that first language speakers of African languages in the Turfloop Campus of the University of Limpopo do not use their source languages. This occurs because these students hold negative attitudes towards their source languages. The idea for this study developed from the researcher's observation that some Xitsonga students from the Language Education department and the Department of Xitsonga have a negative attitude towards their own Xitsonga language. It may also be interesting to note that even postgraduate students in the Language Education department are compelled to use English in the writing of their research reports, dissertations and theses. In view of this, this researcher was eager to establish why this attitude and behaviour towards the Xitsonga language persists.

Aim of the Study

The study set out to investigate students' attitude on the use of Xitsonga as a language of teaching, learning and communication at the University of Limpopo.

Objectives of the study

To achieve the aim, the following objectives guided the study:

- Identify different motivations with which Xitsonga students at UL approach the study of Xitsonga.

- Describe what the linguistic landscape says about the university's language policy.

- Determine how the language of teaching and learning influences planning, policy development and policy implementation at the University of Limpopo.

Research Methodology

The study was grounded in constructivist theory and premised by Weber and Horner's (2012) language hierarchy. These authors argue that some languages are more privileged than others. It is common to see that privileged languages easily form varieties, given that most people prefer to speak a privileged language to distinguish themselves from others (Abongdia, 2013). Based on Webber and Horner's language hierarchy, power relations come to play, which motivates the use of critical discourse analysis (CDS) as an analytical tool used in the interpretation of results obtained in this study. The language hierarchy, which is constructivist in nature, provides a theme in which the data will be coded and interpreted. Thus, interpretivism is informed by the perspectives of the researcher and students, which gels with constructivism. As an ethnographer, the researcher is well versed in the participant's view, which provides a mirror for interpreting the data collected. Constructivist theory focuses on the negotiation and co-construction of knowledge. The

theory is embedded in the belief that the status of any language is a social construct. Thus, power relations are at the fore where life is about the survival of the fittest. Weber and Horner (2012) concluded that the fear of a linguistic heterogeneity, and of social conditions, are translated into practices, with social challenges for the entire community. In this case, the entire community comprises the Xitsonga students at the University of Limpopo.

Research Methodology

The study is framed within the interpretivism paradigm. Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) assert that Interpretivism is more concerned with in depth variables and factors related a context. It considers humans as different from physical phenomena as they create further depth in meanings with the assumption that human beings cannot be explored in a similar way to physical phenomena. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm enables researchers to treat the context of the research and its situation as unique considering the given circumstances associated as well as participants involved. The approach to data analysis was qualitative in nature approach because the researcher intended to collect data at an in-depth level and study the participants in their natural setting. Hence, the qualitative research approach is a process of naturalistic investigation that looks at an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting (Shamim et al, 2019). As such, it aims to explore and discover issues about certain phenomena in individuals and relies on the experiences of human beings (Mohajan, 2018; Shamim et al., 2019).

Research design

The research design is intended to provide an appropriate framework for a study. This investigation is an ethnographic case study of the language attitudes and behaviours of Xitsonga students at the University of Limpopo. The researcher spent time with Xitsonga students in the School of Education (SoE) and the School of Languages and Communication Studies (LANGCOM). The researcher used the class she teaches in the SoE and observed lecturers from the LANGCOM which, is referred to as the Mainstream by the UL community to present a case, which can be used to enrich an understanding of other cases.

Significance of the study

The study and its outcomes may be able to motivate the potential practice of multilingualism at the University of Limpopo. It is anticipated that the publication of the study will encourage Xitsonga speakers to become hands on with respect to the standardization of their language through the nurturing the variety of dialects that Xitsonga encompasses. This researcher, therefore, envisages that Xitsonga will be sustained and developed through these dialects. Again, the study may encourage Xitsonga authors and users of this language to embark on projects, such as neologism. Neologism is the creation and use of new words to enhance the development of a

language's generic and technical dictionaries, in this case, Xitsonga, through the Xitsonga National Lexicography Unit (XNLU).

The novelty of this study is to call the attention of policy makers to the perceptions and attitudes of indigenous African language users towards African languages with the aim of the actual realization of the University of Limpopo Language Policy. Needless to emphasize that the predominant use of English as over the SOVENGA languages is an aspiration of the University of Limpopo, as well as South Africa. If the attitudes of the users are well understood, there is a possibility that the linguistic landscape, as a whole, will change and that the institution's policy will be adhered to. Moreover, the study will make a contribution to national and international countries as lack of the use of multilingualism is a worldwide problem.

Data Analysis

In this section, three thematic headings were generated which are attitude towards the use of indigenous African languages, motivation for language learning and prestige enjoyed by English.

Attitude towards the use of Indigenous African languages

The data collected for this study indicated that prevailing attitudes towards indigenous African languages, Xitsonga in particular, among the majority of this research population is a major challenge that might affect their attitude towards learning the language and, ultimately, their ability to attain the required proficiency in Xitsonga. In turn, this attitude, particularly the negative attitude, may have been affected by the prevailing language ideologies around the University of Limpopo (Lehtovaara, 2001). In view of this, the researcher believes that such eminence of attitude towards the use of African languages in pedagogy is not a mere coincidence and, thus, will attempt to interpret the interpretation of the participants as a way of retelling their story (Kepe, 2017).

As revealed by a multitude of responses from the collected data, participants seemed uncomfortable with the notion that language usage at the University of Limpopo disregards other indigenous languages whose speakers are students at the institution. This is revealed in the distribution of situations where these languages are used. The interviewed students complained of being forced to do Xitsonga at the expense of their home languages. The student HL is Sepedi but was forced to learn Xitsonga because Sepedi was not taught in his community and could not afford to travel to a village where his HL was offered. In this regard, one affected student had the following to say:

> *Ee. Swa tika mem. Xitsonga a hi ririmi ra mina, a ni boheka ku xi dyondza exikolweni hikwalaho ka ndhawu laha a ni tshama kona. (Yes mam, it's really hard. Xitsonga is not my HL. I was forced to study it because of situations beyond my control.)*

This negative attitude was also nuanced by other students who indicated that they did not apply to major in Xitsonga but because they obtained higher marks in Xitsonga which was then imposed on

them because they do not have a say in the process of them being selected for a particular stream. Most of the participants appeared to agree that, concerning indigenous languages, appraisal needs to be incorporated in order to attract custodians of these African languages.

Motivation for language learning

Students concurred that the medium of instruction during Xitsonga lectures is Xitsonga. However students, on the other hand, contended that they had challenges learning and studying the language as a module. Their major concern was the lack of study material in Xitsonga. Moreover, students said that, for most of their learning content, they rely on foreign language resources and apply them to the Xitsonga language which affects their language proficiency. One of the student respondents makes clear by saying the following:

> *I can say it is not really easy, because usually when I talk it is very rare that I can talk maybe five minutes without including English. So I think it is a problem somewhere somehow because we are used to English than our language. So I turn to mix with English. Even in presentation sometimes, it is better to present the whole presentation without including English although it is not a time to quote but I tend to include an English word.*

The argument is that they spend a lot of time translating resources, which, in most cases, is challenging because they end up with different meanings, known as semantic interference, based on their understanding of the language and the regional dialects they possess. To a certain extent, some students felt superior to others within the same language group. Foncha (2013) asserted that people attribute meanings to the spaces that they know as these spaces are filled with symbols and attributes, with these symbols carrying indexicalities with them. Foncha also indicated that language varieties used by the participants being studied does not only tell us where they come from but could also be indicative of their class.

From most responses, majority of students seem to prefer both languages that is Xitsonga and English for group discussion and consultations. To these students, English enhanced the Xitsonga language because they mostly relied on English in order to understand what they are learning or discussing. This was evident when most affirmed that they do not participate in class because they have limited Xitsonga vocabulary and it makes them include English where they do not know the Xitsonga versioning. To some the fright developed while they were still in high school.

Prestige enjoyed by English

Another area of interest that was deemed necessary to investigate is the position of English at UL. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 15) lamented that one of the most successful means of destroying or retarding the development of languages has been, and is, education. The educational curriculum decides the importance of a language. It must

be noted that an environment can define itself based on its linguistic landscape and the strategies that are used to disseminate information.

It is also necessary to consider that during the teaching and learning of Xitsonga, the participants attested to the fact that they sometimes code-switch and use English in order to express themselves and to understand different concepts. Surprisingly, the students also indicated that they used English with non-Xitsonga speakers whose home language is not English. The participants, in this regard, did not bother to converse in either of their indigenous African languages. English dominates in this regard. The responses also indicate that some students appeared to agree, to some degree, with the notion that they sometimes experience an inferiority complex when participating in class because of their language background.

Worth of note is the fact that English is acknowledged as a source language from which they can draw knowledge, as most resources are written in English. It can be acknowledged that participants were not happy with the state of affairs regarding the language usage on campus, and said that the government was to be blamed for how languages are being used in different domains. One of the interviewed lecturer pointed out that he felt intimidated while the other said the following:

> *We cannot do anything about it, but one can try to improve communication of Xitsonga and other African languages. Forget about English and try to promote Xitsonga as hard as possible*

This citation connotes the frustrating atmosphere brought about by the dominance of English within the educational domains. Such dominance occur at the expense of African languages at the institution' according to Gora (2014), languages should be viewed positively in language planning and policy, and in curriculum planning. This is mainly because different institutions draw the framework for their language policy from that of the government.

Additionally, the researcher selected some strands of the researcher's observation in the Xitsonga lecturer halls during teaching and learning. The researcher concentrated on the interpersonal relationship of participants during classroom interaction. The researcher observed that there was a gap between some students and lecturers during learning regarding their interpersonal values. Interpersonal values are the sort of human relationships that are considered important by the individual (Molero Jurado, Pérez Fuentes, Luque De La Rosa, Martos Martínez, Barragán Martín, Márquez & del Mar, 2016). Lecturers appeared to be confident and to care for the students so that the students may learn. Contrary to the above, the majority of the students seemed to be detached, forceful and getting others to like and approve of them.

Form the above, the majority of these students appeared to be detached from classroom interactions because they were convinced that they could only respond in English and not in Xitsonga. As a

637

result, lecturers force the students to give responses, even when they do not give an indication that they have something to say. This led to forceful learning, as learning should be learner-centred and, in this case, the students are learners in an academic environment. Moreover, some students enjoyed getting others to like and approve of them because, even though they knew the rules that the language of MOI was Xitsonga, they forcefully responded in English. Other students would applaud them for having done so, and said 'you are the boss'. When asked why did they did that, they lamented that English is an easy language in which to construct and learn concepts in. This kind of response, therefore, led to some students staying away from lecturers, failing assessments and, ultimately, failing the module (Pérez Fuentes et.al, 2016).

In addition, some Xitsonga students make efforts at the cultural level to showcase who they are. At a social level, some participants felt that English was concise and they understood it far better than their home language. A scene was created when some lamented that the programme directors, dwelt too much on their regional dialects in order to make the function as humorous and entertaining as they possibly could. Other than displaying their culture and language practices to demonstrate who they are, some students viewed this as time wasting and just playing games. Even in some of their utterances, those students demonstrated ignorance in using their own Xitsonga only by mixing Xitsonga and English when they spoke. This is evident in the following extract:

En then ku humelela yini? [And then what's happening?]

Twanani Xipilongwana lexi. Xi zama yini? [Listen to this Spilonkeng. What is he trying to say?]

U ta twa na xibuxwana xi khuluma na xona. The Bushbuckridge one will follow suit- (khuluma- represents Bushbuckridge dialect)]

Hey, a hi mi twi ku mi ri yini? Mi nga hi huhwisi. Hi lava ku ejoya ndhawu leyi. [Hey, we don't hear what you are saying? Don't play games with us. We are here to enjoy ourselves.]

Mi pfa mi thoka swi ta hatlisanyana. Go! A yi suke magents. [Mix with English so that you can be a bit fast. Go! Carry on gentlemen]

Those students cared less about the word structure in Xitsonga, as long as meaning in what they want to convey was attained. In the same vain, Gumede (1996) established a complex situation in which Model C school pupils were more positive towards indigenous African languages than their counterparts in schools in the rural areas. This is definitely contrary to the expectations of the majority of researchers, who make the whole question of attitude a complex phenomenon to deal with. Gumede's findings revealed that the rural pupils regard indigenous African languages as useless and hence, they should be done away with. It is ironic that pupils who use indigenous African languages often do not value their languages. The responses by those students confirm this, as they condemned their own languages.

Conclusion

This paper gave a critical appraisal of language tussles and conflicting perspectives obtaining at the University of Limpopo. It paper interrogated the perceptions, attitudes and language motivations or demotivation that came about as a result of the institution's language policy and planning. Language policy was discussed, along with planning and evaluation within the framework of responses to the broader continuum of communal multilingualism. Thus, the researcher considers that the relevance and values of research on language perceptions, communication and prevalent language ideologies should regularly be considered, particularly in relation to their influences on national, regional and institutional language policy and planning. The necessity for an understanding of language attitude in multilingual spaces, such as the case study in this paper, was revealed. A reflection of the major and reciprocal roles played by language policy and planning in the shaping of different perceptions towards particular languages is viewed as another key area future researches can look into.

Bibliography

1. Alharahsheh, H.H. and Pius, A., 2020. A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(3), 39-43.
2. Abongdia, J. A. 2013. Language Ideologies in Africa: Comparative Perspectives from Cameroon and South Africa. Unpublished PhD thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
3. Anderson, L. and Jason, T. 1997. Languages in Botswana: Language Ecology in Southern Africa. Gaborone: Longman.
4. Brenzinger, M. 2017. Language contact and language displacement. The handbook of sociolinguistics. Wiley: Blackwell: 271-284.
5. Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (Eds.). 1994. Research methods in education (4th Ed.). London: Longman.
6. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. 1996. Cape Town: Constitutional Assembly. Republic of South Africa.
7. Craig, A.B., 2019. Transforming teaching and learning through indigenous strengths and ways of knowing. On Indian Ground: The Northwest, 79.
8. Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2010. The Status of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in South African Public Schools. Government Printers: Pretoria.
9. Derin, T., Nursafira, M. S., Yudar, R. S., Gowasa, N. S., & Hamuddin, B. (2020). Persuasive Communication: What Do Existing Literature Tells Us About Persuasive Communication Among Students? Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education, 2(1), 12-18.
10. Gora R. B, 2014 Perception and Attitude towards the study of African languages in Zimbabwean high schools: Implications for Human Resources Development and Management. DPhil thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
11. English, C.A., 2018. The Impact of Multilingualism on Global Education and Language Learning. Cambridge Assessment: 6-9.
12. Kepe, M.H. 2018. English Scholarship Beyond Borders. Teaching English as a Social Practice: A Practical Guide. English Scholars Beyond Borders, 4(1): 122-137.
13. Lehtovaara, J. 2001. 'What is it – (FL) Teaching? 'In Kohonen, V., Jaatinen, R., Kaikkonen, P. and Lehtovaara, J. (eds.) Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education. Harlow: Longman.

14. Lo Bianco, J. and Slaughter, Y. 2009. Second Languages and Australian Schooling. ACER Press: Cambervell.
15. Makamu, T. A. 2009. Students' attitudes towards the use of source languages in the Turfloop campus, University of Limpopo: a case study. MA thesis, Unpublished: University Limpopo.
16. Marwa, M. (2014). Reasons for Students' Code-Switching Between Informal Indonesian and English in ELT Contexts.ELT-Lectura,1(1) .
17. Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People, 7(1), 23-48.
18. Molero Jurado, M.D.M., Pérez Fuentes, M.D.C., Luque De La Rosa, A., Martos Martínez, Á., Barragán Martín, A.B., Márquez, S. and del Mar, M., 2016. Interpersonal values and academic performance related to delinquent behaviors. Frontiers in psychology, 7, p.1480.
19. Nkhwashu, D. 2011. The use of Xitsonga at the University of Limpopo Turfloop Campus: A Sociolinguistic Analysis. MA Unpublished. University of Limpopo.
20. Nkhwashu, D., Madadzhe, R. N. and Kubayi, S. J. 2015. Using Xitsonga at the University of Limpopo Turfloop Campus. SA Journal of Higher Education. 29(3); 8-22.
21. Shamim, S., Zeng, J., Shariq, S. M., & Khan, Z. (2019). Role of big data management in enhancing big data decision-making capability and quality among Chinese firms: A dynamic capabilities view. Information & Management, 56(6), 103135.
22. Sileyew, K.J., 2019. Research design and methodology. Rijeka: IntechOpen: 1-12.
23. Wa Thiong'o, N. 1986. The Language of African Literature. In Decolonizing the mind: 4-7. London: James Currey/ Heinemann.
24. Walliman, N. 2016. Social Research Methods. The Essentials. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
25. Weber, J. and Horner, K. 2012. Introducing Multilingualism: A Social Approach. London: Routledge.
26. University of Limpopo. 2022. Language Policy. Online
27. http://www.ul.ac.za/downloads/ul.ac.za/about/policies/languagepolicy. Retrieved 10 November 2022