USING CODE SWITCHING AS A STRATEGY FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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1.1. INTRODUCTION

South African society is highly diverse. The society is multilingual, multicultural, multireligious, and multilingual. Indeed this diversity is arguably nowhere manifested more clearly than in the case of language. In addition to Afrikaans and English, which during the apartheid era served as the country's official languages, nine indigenous languages are now officially recognised. Despite this high degree of linguistic diversity, which is of course far from being uncommon elsewhere in the 'developing' world, however, South Africa also shares a number of linguistic characteristics with the world's so-called 'developed' nations. The country's linguistic stock includes a language of wider communication, English, which is widely spoken throughout the country, and by at least some members of all the ethno linguistic groups.

To a considerable extent, African languages speakers experience reality as it has been conceptualised in English. The conceptual web that English weaves around African languages speakers leads to large-scale lexical influence. Code switching (CS), especially code mixing (CM), attest to particularly close integration of some English lexis into African languages (including Afrikaans).

1.2. DEFINING CODE SWITCHING IN RELATION TO BILINGUALISM

The name most often associated with the phenomenon of CS in Africa is Carol Meyers-Scotton (1992). CS, the use of two or more languages in everyday conversation, has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest over the past two decades. In African schools the use of CS may render the schooling process more familiar to the urban context of spoken language by using both the mother tongue of most learners and teachers and English as the target language of teaching and learning to facilitate learning. As cited in Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995:73), Heller (1988:4) defines CS as 'the use of more than one language in the course of a single communication episode'.

On the other hand, a strict definition of bilingualism suggests that a bilingual person has native-like control of two languages (Bloomfield, 1933). Discussions with multilingual people reveal that they make choices about language use that are affected by the setting and function of the particular interaction (Millar, 1983). People who function in two languages or more know that those who have equal and highly developed capacity in two languages or more are relatively rare and generally much admired.

In general, a person who code switches demonstrates linguistic creativity and sophistication. However, another type of CS, called 'regressive code switching' (Gonzalez & Maez, 1980), occurs in children who are losing their first language and leaning on their second language to supply missing elements. This kind of situation raises a pedagogical issue in African schools: Should teachers code switch in classrooms where their learners have not fully grasped their primary language or keep both the primary language and the second language (i.e. English) entirely separate? Experts generally agree that teachers should restrict CS to the intersential type. That is, teachers should switch languages only from sentence to sentence and not intrasententially, or within a sentence. They should, however, accept intrasentential CS by their learners (Ovando, 1985). There is some evidence, however, that complete separation of the two languages of instruction is beneficial to the development of both (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Children can be enriched by knowing more than one language as long as they are 'additive' rather than 'subtractive' bilinguals. An additive bilingual has learned a

second language in addition to the first, whereas a subtractive bilingual has gradually lost one language while acquiring a second. The distinction is significant from a pedagogical point of view because research indicates that children with high levels of proficiency in two languages show 'positive cognitive effects' (Cummins, 1981, p. 39). In effect, children who come to school speaking more than one language, or who learn a second language in school, will benefit academically as long as both languages are nurtured and developed to the fullest extent.

1.3. WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT LEARNING A LANGUAGE

According to Cummins (1981:24) the child requires between five and seven years to acquire sufficient Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) to perform well on academic tasks, on the other hand, the acquisition of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) takes about two years. Children enter school after having spent about five or six years in the process of acquiring their mother tongues. Current research indicates that at least twelve years are necessary to learn one's first language. From birth through age six, children require the basics of phonology and extensive amounts of vocabulary, grammar, semantics and pragmatics. By the age of five they generally have adult like pronunciation. Moreover they have an appreciation of words as sounds. In fact, adults are still learning aspects of language all their lives - vocabulary, the social aspects of language, decontextualised language, and pragmatic skills (Collier 1989 citing McLaughlin 1984).

Therefore in African schools, the amount of curriculum time invested in the mother tongue as LoLT is insufficient (i.e. mother tongue LoLT from Grade 1 to 3) and the learners are not yet ready to be introduced to English (i.e. from Grade 4 onwards) as their LoLT. Furthermore, the academic and cognitive support that is required cannot be guaranteed outside the school in order to complement the role of the school. Maintaining cultural identity while participating actively in the child's development are two basic and complementary elements for solving the main social and economic problems South Africa is faced with. Most educators agree that education transmits culture from one generation to the next. Yet, the present system of education largely denies any place for the heritage of the indigenous children's feelings of pride in their

cultural identity. African schools often impose only one educational model, founded on the dominant culture (i.e. English). Learners from different cultures are obliged to make a big effort to adapt to the dominant model; learning in another language; changing their values; using new communication rules; learning another history. The 'non-adaptation' to the dominant culture is an important factor for the learners' failure in their studies. English language cannot be a neutral vehicle, nor can it be a vehicle of the child's perception of the world.

Part of the answer to this issue concerns the cognitive and academic advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism in general. The most important research in this regard is that of Cummins and Swain (1986) and Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) who point out that, although it is important for the learners who study through a language which is not their first or home language to have maximum exposure to the language of education (in our case English), it is equally, if not more important, that they need to understand academic material.

1.4. LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION POLICY AND THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

South Africa is a multilingual country. The constitution adopted for post-apartheid South Africa in 1996 provides for certain human rights, amongst which are language rights. Multilingualism is now encouraged through the new constitution, and given educational substance in the South African schools Act. According to the new language in education policy:

Subject to any law dealing with language-in-education and the constitutional rights of learners, in determining the language policy of the school, the governing body must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching, and / or by offering additional languages as fully-fledged subjects, and / or applying special immersion of language maintenance programmes (Department of Education, 1997:8)

South African schools and their learners can now choose their language(s) of learning and teaching, the policy environment is favourable and very supportive to multilingual education and bilingual language practices including CS. Learners are now able to add new language(s) to their repertoires, as the policy advocates for an additive and not subtractive approach to language education. The new language policy in South Africa seeks to address the dominance of English and uplift the status and development of African languages. It is a historical fact that English has become both the language of power and the language of educational and socio-economic advancement, that is, a dominant symbolic resource in the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991), however, in South Africa English remains the language of the minority. Therefore the issue of the dominance of English in the corridors of power ramifies in complex ways into classroom practice.

The challenges for educational practice in South African classrooms, therefore, is to provide a sustained provision of bilingual education with appropriate learning and teaching resource materials. Teachers also need a pre-service (PRESET) and in-service (INSET) teacher education programme that will empower them to implement the programme efficiently and successfully.

In addition to language in education policy, educational transformation in post-apartheid South Africa includes the conceptualisation and development of a new school curriculum. Curriculum 2005 is a pedagogical orientation and process which seeks to promote collaborative and cooperative learning, problem-solving, and meaningful communication between learners and teachers and among learners themselves. All these require learners to interact with both the teacher and other learners.

These interactions are, however, not easy to initiate, sustain and develop in bi-/multilingual classroom settings, be they additional or foreign language learning environments. CS practices are not only inevitable but also necessary in schools where English is being learned at the same time as it is being used as the LoLT. CS is a language practice that could support classroom communication in general and the exploratory talk that is such a necessary part of learning.

An important aspect of bi-/ multilingualism, that which makes the bi-/ multilingual person an integrated whole, is CS. CS therefore, or switching from one language to another, can occur in bi-/ multilingual classroom communication. In bi-/ multilingual classrooms the movement from informal spoken language (exploratory talk) to formal written language (discourse-specific writing) is complicated by the fact that the learner's exploratory talk may be in a language that is not the learner's LoLT. Teachers in multilingual classroom contexts in South Africa are to embrace an additive model of bi-/ multilingual education, and at the same time deal with the popular demand for access to English. Teachers also need to enable exploratory talk, which invariably needs to take place in learner's main language(s), or in a combination of those languages and the LoLT, constituted by CS. At the same time they are to provide learners with access to subject-specific discourses. In particular, they need to assist learners to develop formal spoken and written content-subject knowledge as well as language competence in the language as a subject.

1.5. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

Language remained a highly controversial issue in South African education throughout the apartheid era, (Alexander 1990; Hartshorne 1987; Marivate 1993; Reagan 1984, 1986a, 1986b; Reagan and Ntshoe 1987). Somewhat ironically it was the Nationalist government, which supported mother tongue schooling for Africans, while Africans themselves, for the most part, opposed such schooling. It is this irony that provides, at least in part, a key to understanding the apartheid era (and, indeed, much of the post-apartheid) debate on language policy in South African education (Heugh 1995; Reagan 1986a, 1998). The apartheid regime consistently favoured mother tongue schooling for Africans (and, in fact, for almost all children in the country), but for arguably quite different reasons than those used to defend mother tongue instruction for white children (see Hartshorne 1987, 1992; Reagan 1998). Mother tongue schooling for Africans was employed from the passage of the 'Bantu education Act' of 1953 to the end of the apartheid era to support the social and educational goals of Verwoedian-style apartheid (Thompson 1985). The apartheid regime used such programmes to reinforce ethnic and tribal identity among African

school children, seeking to 'divide and conquer' by encouraging ethnolinguistic divisions within the African community (Harthsorne 1987, 1992; Heugh 1985).

It is important to note that this commitment to multilingualism did not entail maintaining all public and private sector services in all 11 official languages, which would have been almost certain to prove cost prohibitive. Such a scenario would have assumed the past models of bilingualism would be superimposed on current realities- that is, that the absolute equality of Afrikaans and English sought by the apartheid regime (primarily as a component of Afrikaner political ideology) would be the model for the language policy to be pursued by the democratic government of South Africa with respect to all 11 official languages. This, of course, need to be the case, and in fact has quite clearly not been so in contemporary South Africa. Rather, the focus of the new constitution with respect to official languages and issues of language rights is intended to be as inclusive as possible, and supportive of multilingualism, but also pragmatically and economically feasible (see Constitutional Assembly 1997; Department of National education 1997).

The challenge that the new constitution attempts to meet to ensure individual language rights and to emphasise symbolically the multilingual and multicultural nature of the society, while at the same time allocating resources in an economically and politically responsible manner. Indeed, the government has made a significant commitment to the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa, and is engaged in a very uphill battle to do so in the context of the immense economic and social power of English (see Barkhuisen and Gough 1996; Chick and Wade 1997; Chisange and Kamwangamalu 1997; Heugh 1993).

The generic syllabus for the learning area Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) seems to be moving in the same direction. A study of assessment criteria and range statements for grades 1 to 9, as described in a discussion document by the Department of Education (1997) reveals that learners are actively encouraged to code switch, mainly, it seems, to facilitate learning:

- For the outcome *Learners show critical awareness of language usage* one of the assessment criteria requires that, '[A]wareness of power

relations between different languages and between varieties of the same language is demonstrated by suitable responses' (1997:30).

- For the outcome L*earners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context,* one of the assessment criteria requires that, '[C]ommon features and patterns of different languages are identified, explained and applied' 1997:36).
- For the outcome *Learners use language for learning,* one of the assessment criteria requires that, '[T]he ability to transfer terminology and concepts from one language to another is demonstrated' (1997:38).

Since the outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements are part of a *generic* language syllabus, the above mentioned requirements can be seen as attempts to put into practice the principle of multilingualism, as stated by the Department of Education (1997:22).

The advancement of multilingualism as a major resource for learning affords learners the opportunity to develop and value:

- their home languages, cultures and literacies;
- other languages, cultures and literacies in our multilingual country; and
- a shared understanding of a common South African culture.

These ideals must, however, be seen in their historical context, since the use of home languages in education has always been a sensitive political issue in South Africa.

1.6. THE SITUATION IN AFRICAN SCHOOLS REGARDING LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

In terms of the language policy unofficially adopted in practice by a number of primary schools, children are educated in their mother tongue as their LoLT in the

foundation phase i.e. from grade 1 (first year) to 3 (third year). It should be noted that this is not in agreement with the new LiEP. Learners are slowly and informally introduced to English from as early as grade 1 in some schools where there is a strong demand for English by the parents and by the school policy and from grade 2 onwards in the schools where this demand is not that strong. English language study is introduced as a subject in grade 2, at this stage the child may or may not have had oral English classes at grade 1, depending on the individual school's application of the language policy. From grade 3 or grade 4 upwards, there is a gradual shift from mainly mother tongue medium instruction to English medium instruction, and children are slowly introduced to English as the LoLT except for their mother tongue and Afrikaans, which are taught as subjects. From the fifth year of schooling, i.e. from grade 5 onwards, when English becomes the *de facto* official medium of learning and teaching, learners are assumed to have reached a level of competence that will enable them to cope with learning in the new medium in all subjects. Learners are expected to move from the mother tongue LoLT to English medium at the time they are not yet functionally literate in their mother tongue and when they will not have achieved the necessary English competence to cope with English medium teaching and learning.

In most African schools in South Africa, even though they are less than a kilometre or even a few kilometres away from contact with English (L1) speakers in their nearby cities / towns or suburbs, English learning for them is almost entirely a classroom experience, there is very little English heard by these children at home and in their community. The old tendency for schools to teach in English from grade 3 upwards has been recognised, accepted and encouraged by most parents in African schools and is assumed to be an accepted language policy of the school, in spite of the new LiEP. More pressure is mounting on the teachers in the African schools to use English as early as in grade 1, because of the pressure from parents who are taking their children out of the African schools to the so-called English medium schools in formerly 'white' and 'coloured' schools using only English as their sole LoLT. The problem in African schools is compounded by a lack of suitable textbooks, materials for the specialised language needs of children and that a number of teachers are not well trained and qualified enough as teachers and that their competency in English as LoLT is severely limited. This is the reason why some

teachers in these schools mostly prefer to interchangeably use both the mother tongue of the learners and English as LoLT, rather than English only or mother tongue only. But this form of CS or CM takes place in a very unsystematic, uncoordinated and unplanned manner (as shown in the examples below). As a consequence of this, the competence and intelligibility of the English used by the learners fall to low levels. Similarly, if learners attain a very low level of proficiency in one or both of their languages, their interaction through these languages both in terms of input and output is likely to be impoverished (Cummins, 1981:38). Therefore as Cummins suggests, limited bilingualism produces negative cognitive consequences.

A common feature of almost all the African schools in Cape Town is that:

- mostly both learners and teachers in these schools have Xhosa as their home language.
- these schools are usually Xhosa medium for the first two or three years, with a switch to English medium at grade 3 or 4, continuing with Xhosa (as well as English and Afrikaans) also taught as subjects.

1.7. CODE SWITCHING AND THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH

In South Africa, Educated African languages speakers experience their world via English. This English experience takes on various forms. In the media, English forms the conceptual mould on radio and TV, in pop music, on film and video, in newspapers, magazines and books, in advertising, on menus, labels, posters and graffiti, in cyberspace (with respect to software, games and the internet). In formal education, African languages speakers come across English as the main medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning and in industrial, technical and in-service training, whereas a large and growing proportion of the speech community receives their primary and secondary education mainly in English. The world of commerce and industry, from the factory floor and the trade unions to the boardroom, is predominantly in English. The same applies to recreation; English predominates in

restaurants, music, sport etc. In politics, English is the most important language of the national, provincial and local governments hence also the predominant language of meetings and political documents. English is also the dominant or sole language of local religious movements and denominations, as well as charitable institutions and non-government organisations (NGOs).

The status and popularity enjoyed by English in African schools is unfortunately not matched by the quality of teaching and learning in English by the teachers and their learners. What this means in concrete terms is that learners are not fully competent in English when they finish schooling. Schools give learners a high regard for English, without giving them full knowledge of English. These learners are faced with two educational challenges at the same time: mastery of academic content, and the ability to do this through a language, which is not their mother tongue. It is for this reason that, utterances in English of these children present extensive mother-tongue interference which one may call code switching or code mixing or borrowing (whichever is applicable).

In Cape Town African primary schools for example, Xhosa is used as the main LoLT throughout schooling. This happens despite the schools' language policy of transition to English from grade 3 or 4. The current approach to the use of language as the medium of learning and teaching in the African schools prescribes exclusive use of L1 for the first 3 to 4 years before the introduction of L2 as the main medium of teaching and learning. According to PRAESA's[1] research involvement in a number of African schools in the Western Cape, experience has shown that this does not work, and that there are a number of possible formulae and combinations, which will work provided that the L1 literacy and content-area development are taken care of. The main point is that according to international research, the use of L1 to teach curriculum and content areas should continue throughout the schooling system, but in practice this does not happen in African schools. Not all learners are prepared for this transition from mother tongue to English and the teachers also feel the pressure of being expected to conduct their classes in English. The teacher's intuitions guide them with the knowledge that primary school learners have a rudimentary

[1] Cf Plüddemann, P, Mati, X and Mahlalela, B. (1998). Problems and possibilities in multilingual classrooms in the Western Cape. Unpublished report submitted to the president's Education Initiative.

understanding of English and therefore cannot be expected to perform exclusively in English without the support of their mother tongue. In the midst of such linguistic problems, the teacher also has some work to cover, as a result of this pressure teachers tend to become more content-oriented and less learner oriented in approach. Therefore, if linguistic and cognitive foundations are not adequately laid and properly developed in the primary school, there will be a mismatch between the learner's competence and the demands of English LoLT. As a result of this, the use of Xhosa as the learner's mother tongue is frequently spiced with English terms or words, a form of code switching or rather code mixing though clearly unstructured, as shown in the following examples:

EXAMPLE 1

In a Grade 1 English story reading lesson

The teacher reads a big story-book called 'Mangi's bike' sitting in front of the class and the learners listen and answer questions during and at the end of the story. The story is in English, the illustrations are big and clearly visible. The learners read the English sentences together with the teacher and are helped in Xhosa by the teacher with the support of the illustrations to interpret the English text. Learners read the text in English but discuss and interpret it with the help of the illustration responding in Xhosa to the teacher's questions based on the story. English is only used to read the story (which in any case, is in English), they use Xhosa to discuss the story or respond to the teacher's questions.

Teacher: *Ngubani onondixelela ukuba ititle yale ncwadi ithini?*
Who can tell me what the title of this book is?
Learners: *Ibhayisikile kaMangi.*
Mangi's bike.
Teacher: *Sine drawing apha, esithi xa siyichaza sithi yi-illustration. Umzobi sithi yintoni?* We have a drawing here, when we describe it we call it an illustration. What do we call the illustrator?
Learners: *Yi-illustrator.*
Illustrator.

Teacher: *Xa uhamba usiya edolophini usebenzisa ntoni?*
When you go to town what do you use?
Learners: *imoto, ibhaki, itreyini, ibhayisekile, etc.*
Car, bakkie, train, bike, etc.
Teacher: *Ezasemanzini: iship (isikhephe), inqanawe etc.*
In water: Ship, boat

As the story continues the learners read the story in English, with the support of the teacher and orally discuss it in Xhosa. Therefore, reading only takes place in English while the discussion is only in Xhosa. Because of the lack of learning materials and resources in Xhosa, learners use materials in English. Therefore this example suggests that, learners are mostly exposed on reading and writing in a second language (i.e. English) when they have not yet fully developed their reading and writing competency in their mother tongue (i.e. Xhosa). Most teachers I interviewed admit that they experience serious problems with teaching reading and writing in their learner's mother tongue (i.e. African languages), because they find it very difficult to find suitable reading materials in African languages.

EXAMPLE 2:

In a grade 3 life skills lesson:

Teacher: *Iimpukane ezithwala iigerms [iintsholongwane - in Xhosa]. Iimpukane ezithwala ntoni?*
Flies that carry germs. Flies that carry what?
Learners: (Chorus) *Iigerms.*
Germs
Teacher*:* *Iright [Ilungile - in Xhosa] into yokudlala …ngemela?*
Is it right to play with a knife?
Learners: No, Miss. [Hayi, Titshala - in Xhosa]
Teacher*:* *Kudubula igesi, andithi?*
It is a gas explosion, is that so?
Learners: (Chorus) *Yes, Miss. [Ewe, Titshala - in Xhosa]*

Teacher*:* *Kanene xa abantu behlala endlini enye, sithi yintoni?*
By the way what do we call people who stay in one house?
Learner: (some*)* *Yifemeli.*
It is a family.
Learners: (others) *Lusapho.*
It is a family.
Teacher: Good. *[Heke - in Xhosa]*
Teacher*:* *(Teacher pointing on the map) Inokuba kuphi apha?*
Kusetown [Kusedolophini] okanye ezilalini?
Where is this place? Is it in town or in rural areas?
Learners: *Kusetown*.(town)
Teacher: *Kaloku uyabelekwa wena ubelekwa ngusister[dade] wakho.*
By the way your sister carries you on her back.

In the above classroom interaction, as it happens in a number of other classrooms in African schools, English phrases, concepts or key words are used in Xhosa sentences even if there is a commonly used word or term that can be an acceptable Xhosa signifier - in the colloquial Xhosa language use - e.g. iigerms - iintsholongwane. There is a general tendency amongst both teachers and learners when communicating in Xhosa to mix their language by using some English or even Afrikaans words or phrases during oral classroom communication. I do not see this action to be a bad practice or behaviour. However, the real issue is that from a linguistic point of view, the child is disadvantaged in both these languages in that the child does not have access to the possibility of normal cognitive and academic development in either L1 or L2.

According to the language policy, most African schools should initially use the mother tongue as the mainstream language of learning and teaching be slowly introduced to English until the learners reach a certain level of proficiency where they can be competent enough to use both the mother tongue as well as English as their newly adopted LoLT. This model, as currently practised in the African schools unfortunately requires the learner to carry out all his cognitive and academic development only in English, without first developing his cognitive and academic

proficiency, first in the mother tongue. This is what is expected to happen, according to the new LiEP (i.e. at least in theory), but in practice this does not happen in many of the schools, as shown in the few examples above and also in the appendix.

The above data does not seek to negatively expose the particular teachers or learners in the selected schools, but rather provides a sample idea of how language is used in classroom interaction between the teacher and the learners. It also shows the dominant role played by the learners' submissive behaviour in accepting what the teachers says in the class as a gospel and therefore internalise it without questioning. The teachers tend to mostly ask closed questions as for an example in 'Iright into yokudlala ngemela' and learners tend to only provide brief responses usually in one word as in 'yifemeli' or 'lusapho'; the response is usually on the negative or in the positive as in 'yes, Miss' or 'no, Miss'. It is also notable that the learners almost generally all the time usually respond to the teachers questions only in Xhosa except when they respond by using exactly the same concept in English used by the teacher in the question as in 'igerms', or ifemeli' or an English concept which is commonly known to the learners like 'yes, Miss' or 'no, Miss' or a 'Xhosalised' concept like 'ziyi-five'.

The other aspect of this data provides the basis of my argument that the subtractive nature of the use of English in classroom interaction does not only limit the learners conceptual understanding of the learning content in his or her primary language i.e. Xhosa in this example. But that the use of English terms or concepts in a "Xhosalised" way - e.g. iigerms (iintsholongwane), iright (ilungile), iwrongo (ayilunganga), ifemeli (usapho), etown (edolophini), ziyi-five (zintlanu), aadisha (dibanisa), i-ansari (impendulo), etc., create a negative impression about African languages or Xhosa to be specific, to the young learners mind (particularly at primary school level) whose mother tongue is not sufficiently developed enough to know these concepts in their mother tongue. The message the learners seem to be getting at a very early age of their schooling life is the dominant role English plays over their mother tongue. Almost all the key concepts like 'iigerms', 'igesi', 'ifemeli', 'etown' etc. are in English and hence they form the primary focus of the learners' response to questions asked by the teacher. Therefore, from the very beginning of the learner's schooling an impression is created that English equals learning.

Sometimes there are Xhosa words that are used interchangeably with the English words, such as ‘ifemeli’, while some still use ‘usapho’ but the ‘Xhosalised’ concepts are usually preferred over the original ones in Xhosa. Hence other learners would prefer to use the word ‘ifemeli’ and others ‘usapho’. It is also strikingly important to note that the ‘new Xhosalised’ terms or concepts seem to be only taken from English and rarely created from Xhosa and thus become ‘anglicised’. As in ‘ithoyilethi’ (toilet), ‘iparafini’ (parafin), ‘isipirithi’ (spirit), ‘isepha’ (soap), ‘ijikhi’ (jik) etc. Therefore borrowing is usually or mostly from English to Xhosa and rarely the other way round (and of course Afrikaans is no exception, primarily because of the dominant role Afrikaans and English have played in South African community). This kind of a curriculum is not only subtractive, but also destructive, particularly when English is not widely spoken in the child’s immediate environment, but only used in the school as LoLT. Wallace Lambert describes cases where transformation of a situation from a subtractive bilingualism to an additive bilingualism had very positive effects on the children involved. An education system should play a role in eliminating subtractive bilingualism and in promoting additive bilingualism and thereby biliteracy.

Therefore, Every multilingual school setting has the potential to foster a form of bilingualism that is ‘additive’ rather than ‘subtractive’ in its social and academic effects for the learner (Lambert, 1981). When the second language (in this case, the LoLT) is learned at the expense of the first, the net results for the learner’s achievement in school has been shown to be negative (Delpit, 1988; Hewlett, 1995; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). The child’s mother tongue and the child’s response to the language of learning and teaching are part and parcel of who the child is, and reflect the child’s social origins. English second language speakers who are struggling to cope in class, may not be displaying intellectual inferiority, but limited language proficiency. On the contrary, they may be battling to come to terms with elements that are inherent in a language that contains a universe of meaning and action that is foreign to their personal experiences.

As some African parents who send their children to English medium schools often say, ‘We do not send our children to school to learn a language they already know.’ An educational system should not be judged on how those coming out of it speak

English, but rather how well they can contribute to the future productivity and development goals of the country. This is the message that the schools and parents in South Africa and the rest of the continent must clearly understand.

1.8. THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF CODE SWITCHING

It benefits African languages speakers a great deal that they have a complex verbal repertoire in which English is embedded both as a distinct, *integral* code and as an *integrated* code switching device.

As an *integral* code, English provides the predominantly bilingual African languages speech community with access to a rich and varied experience, both locally and internationally. The local presence of a vibrant community of English mother tongue users greatly enhances the penetration of English into South African society.

The lexical *integration* of English enriches not only a colloquial language but also the standard language. Therefore, by way of English influence, Xhosa stays abreast with the contemporary world. However, the complex English-Xhosa repertoire comes at considerable cost to Xhosa. It has grown dependent on English since Xhosa functions exclusively as a part of this repertoire in which English is not only present but also dominant.

As integral codes in the complex repertoire, the use of English and Xhosa conforms to a social division of labour, relating to the social tasks assigned to each of the codes. As has been indicated, English restricts the use of Xhosa across the board. In the higher domains of culture (reading, writing, commerce, science and technology) English is dominant as international cultural *lingua franca*. A powerful force in the spread of English as general cultural *lingua franca* in South Africa is its status as a medium of education at all levels; the great majority of South African learners are educated in English, irrespective of their mother tongue.

To a considerable extent, the study of mixed languages is based on reconstruction. Convergence with English is a linguistic change affecting African languages from

below (Labov, 1970), i.e. a change initiated in informal style and in the colloquial varieties. From the colloquial varieties, this change from below is bound to penetrate the standard language: the colloquial language of today is the standard language of tomorrow, as the adage goes. Change from below cannot be kept in check fully by change from above, especially not by the virulent anti-English purism that has kept standard Xhosa relatively free from radical influence of English.

The relations among codes in a complex repertoire are dynamic, and the relative ranking of codes may change over time. This process may result in language shift, entailing that a once peripheral code (such as English in this case) oust a central code (i.e. Xhosa). Xhosa speakers have been shifting to English since the middle of the 19th century, due to a number of factors such as urbanisation, economic and educational pressures and social networks. There is however another factor relating to language mixing. Widespread English influence (including CS) leads to loss of prestige of African languages relative to English: English functions independently from Xhosa, and local English is not by far influenced by Xhosa and vice versa. In their study of the far reaching influence of Spanish on Nahuatl in Mexico, Hill & Hill (1977:67) note: "…Nahuatl speakers (feel) that their 'revuelta', 'mezcalada' usage makes the language not worth saving."

It is a moot point how standard Xhosa is to continue bolstering the identity of Xhosa by keeping English influence at bay. Nevertheless, the democratisation of South Africa (especially a flexible policy on multilingualism) has opened exciting possibilities for African languages that were previously marginalized. It remains to be seen if African languages speakers are to avail themselves of these opportunities.

1.9. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CODE SWITCHING AND LEARNING

The ability to code switch is an important tool for the individual in the learning process within the context of a multilingual and multicultural society. This is most clearly seen in the developing language of the young child. The object of learning – what is learned – has to be understood to be semiotic in nature. Every

conversational interaction between the learner and the teacher reveals to the learner not only information about language/s (its structures and uses, which enable the child to construe its systems), but also information about the world in which this 'languaging' is occurring. In other words, all interactions take place within a 'context of situation' and a 'context of culture' (Omar 1992).

The imposition of one language on the exchange limits the range of communicative competence that young bilingual children can demonstrate. A unique feature of the bilingual learner's linguistic repertoire is the ability to draw on more than one language in interaction with others. It is possible to outline a generic pattern of two-language discourse based on a sequential analysis of CS at the level of turn-taking.

When discourse participants speak more than one language there is a richer range of discourse options available. CS can be regarded as a diverse linguistic resource from which an individual speaker can choose to draw in order to communicate effectively.

Thus, the learner is surrounded by sustained modelling of language in a variety of contexts. Teachers unconsciously make visible to the learners the functions and forms of language. At certain points, the learner will choose to engage in this ongoing linguistic enterprise, or the teacher will attempt to engage the learner at a level that s/he can manage (Painter 1984). The teachers, because they have shared the contexts of growth of the learner's meaning system and unconsciously tracked its progress, are able to gauge what the learner is capable of comprehending and, more importantly, what would constitute a reasonable challenge for the learner. The ability to switch language in order to cope with this challenge is an important asset in the learning process. In the course of an interaction, the teacher will employ in one or more languages such strategies as supplying the learner with appropriate words or 'chunks,' elaborating on these chunks, extending the learner's offering in various ways, prompting and guiding by asking questions, jointly reconstructing shared experiences. Because such modelling is usually based on the learner's attempt at meaning, the learner is more likely to be receptive to the teacher's intervention. Through this guided interaction, the learner is providing a 'scaffold' that will gradually

be withdrawn as the learner becomes more competent in that area (Bruner 1983, 1986).

It is not only teachers, however, who employ a range of strategies in the language-learning process. The learner, too, will develop various strategies to facilitate learning, using the languages available. 'For the learner, the overall context is one of survival, and the learner develops semiotic strategies such that s/he can use this meaning potential as s/he is building it and build it as s/he is using it' (Halliday 1975:135).

1.10. CODE SWITCHING AS A RESOURCE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

The question of language mismatches which was mentioned earlier is also closely bound up with the levels at which languages are taught at the different schools. The levels of language used for the MoI were determined by both the competence of teachers and the competence of learners in the particular language. Teachers commented that, although they were using English or, in one case, Afrikaans as MoI, they could not claim to be using this language at first language level. As remarked by another teacher, 'I have to lower the level of the language to accommodate all learners…. trying not to make the English too easy for English first language learners and not too difficult for Afrikaans speaking learners'.

In many instances where the teacher understands the language/s of the learners or if there is a language aide in the classroom some teachers allow children to code-switch from English into Xhosa and back again in order to help each other. In this way some Xhosa finds its way into the curriculum, albeit informally. Some teachers have shown some recognition that schools had to change in order to accommodate Xhosa-speaking children.

Even though English is the home language of instruction, but some teachers and language aides sometimes do switch to Xhosa to explain, discuss meaning, improve the quality of information flow, regulate and control classroom activity. But

unfortunately, at the same tone, the schools worked strategically to build learners' skills only in English, which is seen as critical for working with texts, tests and examinations, and the learners' personal futures.

It is clear, then, that even in settings and dealing with topics where the use of one language (in this case, English) is actually *required* by school rules, code switching is a commonly used practice. Code switching is perceived to be an aide to the learning process to put on the other way round, code switching does help in learning.

Although it has no official status, code witching is firmly established in some 'African' schools where the learners share a common language and a second language (i.e. English) used as the medium of instruction. Increasingly, teachers have recognised the wish of the learners to use the mother tongue in the learning process: 'Can I answer in Xhosa?' is a common request and when this is allowed, it can be seen whether the concept taught has been understood or not: it is merely the fear of making a mistake in English which seems to show ignorance of the topic.

Discussing the subject matter in the language both learners and teachers feel comfortable with creates an enabling atmosphere for active engagement. But some teachers fear that this might lead to learners becoming dependent on the first language. According to teachers, learners find it difficult to provide good quality answers in English. The challenge is to strike a balance between strategic use of a first language as a scaffolding tool and allowing sufficient practice in an additional language. Excessive use of one at the expense of the other in these contexts could increase the possibility of miscommunication between the teacher and learners.

It is a widespread occurrence that most teachers in the African schools switch between African languages and English in classes officially meant to be carried out through the medium of English. There are, it seems, two opposing perspectives on this issue. On the one hand there are those who reject code switching as leading to lowering of standards. On the other hand, there is the perspective that views code switching as a resource. Adendorff (1993:23) finds for instance that 'switches are viewed as guiding the participants interpretation of academic goals and intentions as well as guiding their interpretation of social relationships in the class' and he

advocates that teachers be given instruction in the value of code switching in their training.

Outside the school situation (where there is no prescription on code switching) it is widely used by bilinguals who exploit its social utility; if it were, after all, not a useful tool it would not be as commonly used as it is.

However, if these teachers code switch as a result of having limited abilities in the medium of instruction – if the other language is used to fill in the teachers' gaps – then this may be a cause for concern.

1.11. CONCLUSION

The ability to use a language goes beyond the ability to manage its structural components. Communicative language competence includes the ability to use a language in appropriate ways in various social contexts. Communicative language competence in school includes Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), the ability to function in context-reduced settings, where situational clues are minimal.

There have been various definitions of bilingualism, with general agreement that bilingualism is related to the use of two languages. Bilinguals may code switch, alternating the use of two languages in the same sentence, or between sentences. This is generally systematic and indicates linguistic sophistication. CS among children who are learning a second language, however, may indicate first language loss. Recent research studies provide evidence that bilingualism enhances academic success when it is additive rather than subtractive in nature.

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