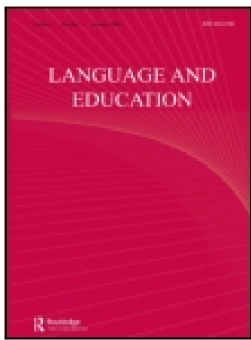

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Unlocking the grid: language-in-education policy realisation in post-apartheid South Africa

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This paper reflects on the state of educational language policy two decades into a post-Apartheid South Africa caught between official multilingualism and English. The focus is on the national language-in-education policy (LiEP) that advocates additive bi/multilingualism, and a provincial counterpart, the language transformation plan (LTP). Using Ricento and Hornberger's onion metaphor, the paper seeks to uncover the meanings of policy realisation in education at legislative, institutional, and interpersonal levels. The LiEP's non-realisation at institutional level is indexed by a 'gridlock of collusion' (Alexander, personal communication) between political elites and the majority of African-language speakers, who emulatively seek the goods that an English-medium education promises. To illustrate how teachers can become policy advocates, data are presented from a bilingual education in-service programme that supported the LTP. The paper argues that sociolinguistic insights into speakers' heteroglossic practices should be used to counter prevailing monoglossic policy discourses and school language practices, and that all languages should be used as learning resources. Strategic essentialism would recognise the schooling system's need to separately classify language subjects and to identify the languages most productively used for teaching across the curriculum. The paper concludes with a call for the revision of the LiEP.

Keywords: language policy; multilingualism; heteroglossia; education; teachers; South Africa

Introduction

It is safe to say that there is international consensus that the educational use of a child's mother tongue or home language (HL) is in most cases a necessary, if insufficient, condition for successful learning. This applies especially but not only to speakers of non-dominant languages (Benson 2013). It is self-evident that children should be taught in a language they understand if they are to develop a strong foundation. While careful to not overstate its case, a recent UNESCO (2014) report avers that 'a bilingual approach that ensures continued teaching in a child's mother tongue alongside the introduction of a second language − ideally throughout the primary grades − can improve performance in the second language as well as in other subjects' (UNESCO 2014, 283). What is less clear is what this might mean in contexts of high multilinguality.

The promotion of additive bi/multilingual education, also termed mother-tongue-based bilingual education in South Africa (Alexander 2010), has been a policy ideal in post-apartheid South Africa for two decades. Yet all the evidence suggests that this ideal

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has not been realised in practice, and that a ‘gridlock of collusion’ obtains between the political class and the African-language speaking majority in favour of an English-mainly approach (Alexander, personal communication, October 2002). This article seeks to explore the meanings of policy realisation in a context of high multilinguality dominated by a single language of aspiration and public discourse. How does a schooling system committed to additive multilingualism promote African mother tongues while providing access to the ‘glocal’ language, English? A discussion of the construct of language policy is followed by a brief detour through the history of South African language-in-education policy (LiEP). Using Ricento and Hornberger’s (1996) onion metaphor, the paper seeks to uncover the meanings of policy realisation at legislative, institutional, and interpersonal levels of the education system. Sociolinguistic insights into heteroglossic language practices are used to question the adequacy of official discourses on language policy and implementation. A concluding section takes stock of the realisation or otherwise of the LiEP, and identifies four immediate tasks for multilingual education (henceforth MLE).

Language policy

Language education policy, as Spolsky (2004) reminds us, is a task involving schools, which ‘take over from the family the task of socialization, a central feature of which is developing the language competence of young people’ (Spolsky 2004, 46). In contexts of social inequality indexed by languages of differential status, this is by no means a simple task. Amongst other things, it raises the question of what counts as language policy.

In terms of the New Language Policy Studies (NLPS; see McCarty, Collins and Hopson 2011, 335–339), language policy is seen less as an abstract noun and more as a verb. It ceases to be a static, reified construct; rather, it is dynamic, processual, and in motion; not monolithic, but a social practice and a situated sociocultural process. A narrow focus on language policy as text is rejected in favour of a focus on language ideological choices and power relations in contexts of inequality, and on actual language use in communities (McCarty, Collins, and Hopson 2011, 337). Such a perspective asks what counts as a language, what counts as proper language use, and what counts as a contribution to language policy – whether overt or covert (McCarty, Collins, and Hopson 2011, 336) – and, we might add, what counts as policy realisation. At an epistemological level, therefore, the NLPS is in keeping with what might be termed the ‘actioning’ turn in language and literacy studies. It seeks to know what people *do* with language policy, rather than what language policy *is*. It follows that the NLPS, applied to education, is interested in how power dynamics affecting language in society are indexed in schools and classrooms.

A holistic way of conceptualising language policy as the interplay of language planning from above and from below is provided by Ricento and Hornberger (1996). Drawing on examples and research in contexts that include the political South, the authors develop the traditional concept of language policy and planning (LPP) as policy formulation, implementation and evaluation into the metaphor of the multilayered ‘onion’ in which each layer is subject to LPP processes and agency.

> In terms of LPP processes, at the outer layers of the onion are the broad language policy objectives articulated in legislation or high court rulings at the national level, which may then be operationalized in regulations and guidelines; these guidelines are then interpreted and implemented in institutional settings, which are composed of diverse, situated contexts (e.g. schools, businesses, government offices); in each of these contexts, individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and communities interact. At each layer (national, institutional, interpersonal), characteristic patterns of discourse, reflecting goals, values and

> institutional or personal identities, obtain... Within each layer, competing discourses create tensions and ambiguities in policy formation... As it moves from one layer to the next, the legislation, judicial decree or policy guideline is interpreted and modified. Legislation at one or other government level may not be funded...it may even be unenforceable. (Ricento and Hornberger 1996, 409)

The onion metaphor serves to suggest the inter-relatedness as well as the complexity of language policy processes. While national policy is usually formulated by or on behalf of government (the outer layer), a pronouncement of whether, or to what extent, a policy has been realised can only be answered with reference to what happens in practice within each layer.

The element of agency within structural constraints is usefully captured by the concept of a language regime, understood as the habits, legal provisions, and ideologies that inhibit language choices (Coulmas 2005, 7). Coulmas distinguishes between macro-choices and micro-choices. Macro-choices involve the status allocation of languages and varieties, the promotion of languages for education, and managing patterns of multilingualism (Coulmas 2005, 6). Micro-choices, on the other hand, concern the daily decisions about classroom language use, such as dealing with gendered speech, dialects, and code-switching. While macro-choices are normally associated with macro-players such as governments and supra-national agencies (Ricento and Hornberger 1996), the decentralisation of decision-making may mean that schools themselves are required to carry out some of these functions, such as choices about curricular language use (as a medium, as a subject).

Thus, policy is more than text; it is a process that carries an ideological load, and is subject to interpretation by competing interest groups in ways that reflect power relations between them. Policy is not a neutral, technical exercise, but a series of situated practices and events. Because policies by definition seek to effect change, they are bound to encounter resistance, and will depend for their realisation on negotiation and compromise amongst stakeholders, and on their appropriation by the end-users. What is implied in the literature on language policy, therefore, is that failure to take local contexts, language repertoires and language ideologies into account will in effect mean that policy texts are ignored or merely complied with superficially. In extreme cases, *practice* becomes de facto policy.

History

After three-and-a-half centuries of virtual exclusion from public discourse in South Africa, African languages are yet to emerge from their de facto status as minority languages, despite being spoken by the majority of people in the country. From the (Dutch) beginnings of the colonial-imperialist project in South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century and throughout the subsequent period of British conquest (and resistance), language policies have flowed from the imperialists' economic, political and cultural strategies (Alexander 1989, 12). As a rule this meant establishing the respective colonising power's language at the expense of indigenous languages in public domains, including education. In the process Southern Africa's long history of multilingualism that predated European contact was at best ignored, often suppressed (Crawhall 1993, 6). In the twentieth century, the privileging of one language (English) under British rule was extended to an official English/Dutch (later Afrikaans) bilingualism, to the exclusion of the indigenous African languages. Language policies for Africans in government-aided schools during the period 1910–1948 were cast in a neo-colonial mould. Following an initial period of mother-tongue education (MTE), learners were subjected to English-mainly teaching. However,

black learners were forced to also learn Afrikaans, an undisguisedly political move. Coupled with low funding, the policy ensured a poor quality of education for black people.

What enabled MTE to be instituted was that indigenous languages had been written down by the missionaries, who for the period 1800–1953 had effectively run most of the schooling for Africans, and in the process reared a tiny but influential elite proficient in English. The missionaries' reduction to print of indigenous language varieties provided people with access to literacy in their own languages, and opened the way for their subsequent use in education and as languages of literature. Yet the fact that the varieties chosen for this early form of standardisation were more or less arbitrarily carved out of a wide linguistic continuum and cast in a European mould was to have a long-lasting detrimental effect on their use-value, and on the language attitudes of their speakers (Makoni 2003; Makalela, 2014).

Under apartheid, African-language speakers had to bear the brunt of a language policy designed to actively affirm a minority at expense of a voiceless majority. From 1948 to 1994, Afrikaans and English were entrenched as the languages of power in society while MTE became a central pillar in the schooling system. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 placed education for Africans in the hands of the Apartheid state. The Act mandated MTE for the duration of primary schooling (eight years), followed by a non-MT-based form of dual-medium education in which half the high school subjects were to be taught in English and the other half in Afrikaans. While Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking 'whites' benefited hugely from MTE throughout schooling and beyond, for the African-language speaking majority MTE was stigmatised for its association with the divide-and-rule policies and the limited opportunities under apartheid, and was tolerated only as a transition to English. Matters came to a head in 1976/1977 with the Soweto revolt against the imposition of Afrikaans as the 'language of the oppressor'. MTE for Africans was subsequently reduced from eight to four (later three) years, whereafter schools could choose their own medium. For the majority of schools in the country this meant an early-exit transition to English, and the demotion of the HL to the status of language subject. It was a move for which the majority of African-language speaking learners and their teachers were catastrophically under-prepared, mainly because of limited exposure to, and proficiency in, English (Macdonald and Burroughs 1991; Webb, Lafon, Pare 2010). As Alexander (1989) and Heugh (2002), amongst others, have pointed out, it is one of the ironies of history that the pedagogically sound principle of MTE was barely tolerated by African-language speakers, because it was seen to be synonymous with Bantu Education and integral to apartheid's divide-and-rule strategy; and a second irony that one oppressive language, Afrikaans, was rejected in favour of another, English, the language of the British colonizers, which came to increasingly symbolise not only political liberation but also socio-economic aspiration.

Peeling the onion (1): legislation and official discourse

The language in education policy (DoE 1997)

The first post-apartheid LiEP (DoE 1997) was designed to transform inherited language attitudes and practices and to upgrade the status of the official African languages. The LiEP consciously aligns itself with the pro-multilingualism ethos of the Constitution (Ricento and Hornberger 1996) within a nation-building paradigm that also seeks to accommodate cultural diversity. For the LiEP, this translates into the pedagogic concept of 'additive multilingualism', of which 'the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional

language(s).' With regard to language(s) of learning and teaching (LoLT, formerly medium of instruction), the policy merely requires this (these) to be official. Parents have a degree of choice with regard to LoLT. Regarding language subjects, no particular language is compulsory, although learners have to take at least two languages as subjects from Grade 3 upwards, of which one has to be an official language and one of which has to be the (or a) LoLT. Overall responsibility for the school's language policy lies with the governing body, subject to the obligation to promote multilingualism and to relevant provincial or national laws.

Seen within the broader negotiated settlement in the early 1990s, the LiEP represents a compromise between contending political power blocs under the umbrella of 'additive multilingualism' (De Klerk 2002). The compromise finds its clearest expression in the concession to the powerful pro-Afrikaans lobby to allow single-medium schools, viewed as an important marker of cultural identity. Learners' apparent freedom of choice with regard to LoLT and language subjects is in keeping with the more recent voluntarist tradition of language-in-education policies, and raises the status of the official African languages to that of English and Afrikaans, at least on paper. Finally, the powers granted to school governing bodies with regard to language policy, coupled with the requirement that parents form the majority stakeholder group on the school governing body, increase local community control while simultaneously contributing to the deregulation of schooling (Tikly 1997).

Curriculum and assessment policy

In a wide-ranging overview, Heugh (2013) maps the disjuncture between the LiEP (1997) and curriculum policy against the historical background of contending theoretical orientations. She shows how in the transition to a post-Apartheid order (1992–1995) the clash of segregationist (apartheid), assimilationist (to English) and integrationist (functional multilingual) language ideologies resulted in a Constitution founded on a view of multilingualism as parallel monolingualisms (Heugh 2013, 218), and that language in education policy and curriculum policy were developed along parallel, non-intersecting lines by proponents of functional multilingualism and English assimilationism, respectively.

The LiEP's non-articulation with curriculum policy relates both to language as medium (LoLT) and language as subject, and the interplay between them. With particular reference to African-language speaking children, the various instantiations of the national curriculum all make a presumption for English as LoLT via the early-exit route. Evidence for this, as Heugh (2013) points out, lies in the taken-for-granted assumption of the switch from MTE to English in Grade 4, and in the fact that additive bilingualism is discussed only in relation to languages as subjects. The most recent review of the curriculum confirms this trend. Instead of supporting the LiEP's mother-tongue emphasis, the review committee's main concern was with introducing English (as subject) earlier, from Grade 1, in preparation for 'the change to LOLT in Grade 4' (DBE 2009, 14). Its recommendation that a fourth subject, English first additional language, be added to the foundation phase curriculum was officially adopted in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

To a large extent, therefore, the LiEP has effectively been usurped by the CAPS recommendations as the country's LiEP. While the early introduction of English as subject has a certain logic, the endorsement of an early-exit model is troubling: it indexes an assimilationist, anglocentric agenda that serves to undermine MLE.

Incremental Implementation of African Languages (DBE 2013b)

Nothing illustrates better government's vacillation on the use of African languages in education than the Incremental Implementation of African Languages (IIAL) draft policy, dated September 2013 (DBE 2013b). On the face of it, the draft IIAL marks a shift in government thinking for seeking to strengthen the position of African languages as subjects across the schooling system. For the first time, it will be compulsory for all South African learners to offer an indigenous language as a subject. The IIAL has two key constituencies in mind. For non-speakers, the African language will be offered at first additional language (FAL, i.e. L2) level. In addition, mother-tongue speakers who currently have no exposure to their HL at school, and thereby risk losing their cultural heritage (i.e. mainly the children of the African-language speaking middle class enrolled in former 'white' and 'coloured' schools), will be required to take an indigenous language at least at L2 (FAL) level. Following a pilot phase featuring a small number of schools in each province in 2014, the intention is to phase in the IIAL over a 12-year period beginning with Grade 1 in 2015. The main challenges will be to appoint and/or train sufficient numbers of African-language specialist teachers, and to source cost-effective learning materials of sufficient quality (DBE 2013b).

Significantly, the September draft was preceded by a June 2013 draft (subsequently shelved) which contained an additional section on African languages as LoLTs. While the September draft limited its first aim to '[improving] proficiency in and utility of African languages at Home Language level, so that learners are able to use their home language proficiently' (DBE 2013c, 6), the earlier (June) version contained a noteworthy additional phrase: '. . .as the language of learning and teaching' (DBE 2013c, 9), as well as a paragraph on the LoLT: 'The premature change to learning through an additional language from Grade 4 takes place before learners can fully master the skills of reading, writing and counting. This has huge negative implications for their future academic performance' (DBE 2013c, 12). The June version also provided a rationale for the extended use of African languages as LoLTs beyond the foundation phase, citing major cross-national studies (e.g. the ADEA study culminating in Ouane and Glanz 2011) within an orientation of multilingualism as an educational resource. Damningly, however, the LoLT issue was quietly dropped from the subsequent (September) version; the sole focus on African languages as subjects was clearly the safer option.

It is evident, therefore, that the DBE's deep-seated ambivalence about the educational utility of African languages continues. While their valorisation as compulsory subjects is to be welcomed for promoting social cohesion, the dropping of the LoLT issue represents a missed opportunity to address the learning crisis in the majority of schools.

Official discourse

An adequate consideration of language policy goes beyond legislation to include official and public discourses on language/s. We have seen the incongruities between the LiEP, on the one hand, and CAPS, on the other, with the IIAL positioned uncomfortably in between. What unites these three policy texts is an underlying assumption about the nature of languages as discrete, bounded, identifiable, countable and unchanging units – a form of essentialism. This essentialist view takes for granted the unity of the LoLT concept, i.e. that in a given classroom, teaching, learning and assessment occur through the 'same' linguistic code. While in CAPS some allowance is made for learner codeswitching, codeswitching is seen merely as a stepping stone to competence in the target language rather than as the mixed

code and a pedagogic resource (cf. Janks and Makalela 2013; DBE 2013a). The existence of separate language subjects, and of the unquestioned hierarchies of proficiency indexed by terms such as 'home language' and 'first additional language', are proof of this thinking. In short, there is no concession to the possibility that in learners' experience of multilinguality these separately identified 'languages' might not be so distinct, and that in certain mixed-code or multilingual contexts the language separation approach to dual-medium education, for instance, may be ludicrously inappropriate (Banda 2010).

Several scholars have criticised the official language policy texts for ignoring sociolinguistic realities. As Niedrig (2000) points out, the terminology used to refer to language(s) as well as the bilingual models mentioned in the LiEP assumes a strict language separation approach in which individual bilingualism is treated as double monolingualism. In this reading, the LiEP text as well as much of the discourse about the gap between policy intent and implementation subscribes to a monoglot view of languages that simplifies sociolinguistic complexity, ignores heteroglossic practices such as codeswitching (Makoe and McKinney 2014) and marginalises informal and non-standard varieties as non-legitimate (cf. Stroud 2003, 32). Using the fact of multilingualism as a starting point, Makoni (2003) has similarly criticised the multiple monolingual approach informing the Constitution and the LiEP for reproducing a view of African languages cast in European moulds, and has called for their 'disinvention' as a condition for restoring their legitimacy. He argues that the notion of the mother tongue itself is suspect, rendering the concept of MTE all but inoperable. Desai (2013) has gone to some lengths to rebut this notion, on philosophical as well as strategic grounds.

At this point a qualification is in order. Like all policy texts, the LiEP is a creature of its time. Written almost 20 years ago, it was informed by a keen understanding of the politics of language, and drew on the latest available local as well as international research to construct its case for additive bi/multilingualism. It would be anachronistic to expect the LiEP to reflect insights and discourses that only became available subsequently, such as the awareness of the Eurocentric moulding of African languages, the critique of the Constitution and its multiple monolingual approach, and the implications of the multilingual complexity of urban South Africa for education. Thus, the above criticisms, while not invalid, simply point to the need to revise and update the LiEP in accordance with the latest research insights and language ideologies. It is worth noting that such a process of revision was originally envisaged in recognition of the parallel tracks along which the curriculum and language-in-education policies had been developed. This point is taken up again in the conclusion, below.

Peeling the onion (2): institutional level

As already intimated, the gauge of language policy realisation is to be found at institutional and interpersonal levels. Viewed against the historical backdrop sketched above, the main indicator of language policy realisation in South Africa today is the degree of match between learner HL and the language LoLT. The litmus test is what happens in Grades 4–6, for this is where the education system begins to fail the majority of learners. Analysis of official figures (DBE 2010a) reveals a disproportionate aspiration for English. African-language speakers (i.e. those who have one of the country's nine official African languages as an HL) account for 83% of the total learner population of close to 12 million. While an average of more than 8 in 10 African-language speakers begin their schooling in a HL, this figure dwindles to 1 in 10 by Grade 4, by which stage almost 8 in 10 children have English as LoLT (up from fewer than 3 in 10 in Grade 3). Various explanations

have been offered for this discrepancy. A recent government report on literacy in the foundation phase (Grades 1–3) fingers parental choice as a key factor. ‘While the government advocates teaching African children in their home language, parents may, and increasingly do, opt for English or Afrikaans as the LOLT, rather than the majority home language of the student body at the school’ (DBE 2013a, 31). The report also identifies the dialectisation of African languages, and the problem of terminology in mathematics as obstacles to the realisation of MTE (DBE 2013a, 31). These are important riders that will be taken up again in the conclusion.

The non-realisation of the LiEP, indexed by the lack of fit between learner HL and LoLT, has been confirmed by provincial surveys undertaken in the Eastern Cape (ECDoE 2005), the Western Cape (cf. WCED 2002), and Limpopo (Madiba and Mabiletja 2008). It is clear, therefore, that on the basis of the ideal of a learner HL-LoLT match the LiEP as national legislative text cannot be said to have been realised at institutional level.

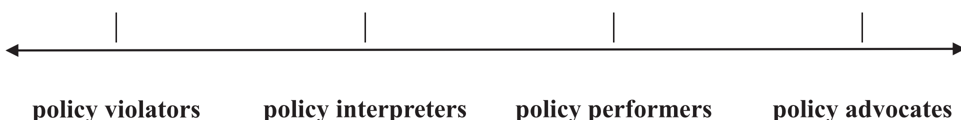
It has been left to small-scale qualitative research studies and projects to demonstrate that the LiEP can be realised in loco. At school level innovative recent examples are to be found in the Western Cape, such as the those associated with PRAESA (Braam 2004; Busch 2010) and with the LOITASA project (Nomlomo 2006; Desai 2013), all in urban contexts, and in the Eastern Cape with the ABLE project in a rural school (Koch et al. 2009). Despite differing approaches (MTE; dual-medium) these projects provide important attempts to actualise the LiEP. They also highlight the limits of isolated initiatives in the face of continued government ambivalence towards African languages in education.

Peeling the onion (3): interpersonal/classroom level

As Lo Bianco (2010) has pointed out, teachers have an important yet under-rated role to play as language policy actors. Following Coulmas (2005), teachers potentially occupy a range of positions vis-à-vis a language regime by virtue of the various sites of their activity – in the classroom, in the school, in the community, in workshops and lecture halls and as citizens – and their simultaneous *situatedness* in national and global language regimes.

This idea has been adapted by Plüddemann (2013) into a continuum of language policy realisation stations for teachers (See Figure 1). The first station is where teachers become *policy violators* who resist unworkable language policies, e.g. by codeswitching (Probyn 2009). Second, teachers are *policy interpreters* when they collectively try to make sense of policy directives, typically where these are issued without due consultation. The third station is where teachers are recognised as *policy performers* or active language policy agents by virtue of their classroom practice; they stand to contribute to ‘interactive, democratic’ language planning at school level (Lo Bianco 2010).

At the fourth station teachers become *policy advocates* who are a step ahead of prevailing policies and practices. These policy advocates anticipate the future; alternatively, they become the custodians of pilot programmes and even remind recalcitrant officials of their responsibilities (Plüddemann 2013). To illustrate this stage, previously unpublished data from a bilingual education certificate programme for in-service teachers are presented, below.



policy violators **policy interpreters** **policy performers** **policy advocates**

Figure 1. Continuum of language policy realisation positions for teachers.

The Advanced Certificate in Bilingual Education (ACE) for language teachers in the Western Cape provides evidence for teachers' roles as policy advocates. The programme was offered in 2007–2008 by the University of the Western Cape, and funded by the province. It was designed to support a provincial pilot project, the Language Transformation Plan, that was integral to the province's literacy and numeracy strategy and which drew explicitly on the LiEP. Mother-tongue-based bilingual education, a local variant of additive bilingualism, was adopted in recognition of the well-known benefits of MTE, and of the popular aspiration for an English-medium education (WCED 2007). The ACE programme followed a genre-based pedagogy and experimented with bilingual (isiXhosa/ English) teaching and assessment in some modules, though due to resourcing constraints it was unable to do so across the curriculum (for a fuller description, see Plüddemann, Nomlomo, and Jabe 2010; Kerfoot and Van Heerden 2014). Subsequent interviews with some of the ACE teachers revealed their sense of empowerment. The programme as a whole, and the bilingual (isiXhosa/English) action research module in particular, had given participants a sense of the educational value of the mother tongue, plus a metalanguage, the ability to cope with (English) texts, and a sense of emancipation for having had the choice to use isiXhosa both orally and for written assignments (Plüddemann, Nomlomo, and Jabe 2010, 81–87). Learning had been enhanced through such heteroglossic practices.

The ACE teachers as a group numbered 15. All were female, with an age range of 25 to 60 years. While many had extensive teaching experience, only four had a university degree (cf. Table 1). All taught in township schools that had isiXhosa as a LoLT (i.e. in the Foundation Phase), and/or that had predominantly Xhosa-speaking learners. Significantly, all the teachers were mother-tongue speakers of isiXhosa, with fluency in English. Thus, the teachers had been nominated by their schools to enrol for the ACE – a self-selected (convenience) sample.

Data for this analysis have come from letters written by the ACE teachers, and which were collated by two of the lecturers (of which I was one). The letters were addressed to a senior departmental official who, in reporting on provincial literacy results, had publicly dismissed the value of MTE and the Language Transformation Plan. His remarks came despite the substantially improved literacy results for almost all the pilot schools, which had accompanied the switch from English to isiXhosa as the language of testing (cf. Dugmore 2008). The following extracts capture the frustrations but also the constructive spirit of the teachers.

(1) [The official's name]: support the LTP [Language Transformation Plan] and be part of it... Let the LoLT be isiXhosa for the first six years of schooling for Xhosa-speakers, as it is Afrikaans for most Afrikaans-speakers. LTSMs [learning and teaching support materials] should be in isiXhosa, as well as assessment. Teaching a child in his/her language will improve the results. The language of the community should be made the teaching language... Let's not make our children

Table 1. ACE teachers (2007/8) by teaching experience and qualifications.

Years teaching experience	*N*	Highest professional qualification	*N*
3–4 yrs	3	Degree plus teacher's diploma	4
5–15 yrs	6	Teachers diploma (prim only)	6
16–30 yrs	4	Teachers diplomas (prim & sec)	2
Not indicated	2	Not indicated	3

lose their identity; language is one of the key factors in keeping one's identity. Together we can solve a problem. (Teacher C)

(2) I would like our learners to be tested in isiXhosa, because I feel that their mother tongue is what they know, and understand. I was the victim of the Apartheid era. I managed to be where I am now because we were taught in isiXhosa for the first six (sic) years of schooling. Then in high school I was able to relate to what was being taught in English. I am confident that learners will pass. (Teacher F)

(3) Mother tongue learning will break through our black learners as they will learn with understanding which will boost their self-confidence that will lead them to be critical thinkers. Learners who are taught and assessed in their mother tongue will always do well in school. (Teacher G)

(4) Promote code-switching; it should be done in a structured manner, so that not only the educator uses it, but the learners benefit from it. (Teacher C)

The strength of argument in these quotes is as apparent as the depth of feeling. Teacher C (extract 1) exhorts the official to support rather than undermine the Language Transformation Plan, and to embrace rather than denigrate the African languages and their speakers. It is an extraordinary indictment of the Department that a senior official should have to be thus cajoled by teachers to implement rather than impede extant departmental plans. Her call embraces many of the features of a strong multilingual programme: a sense of social justice and a desire to be on the same social footing as speakers of Dominant languages; an MT base, and the implied value of the home – school link in using the community language; the same language to be used for teaching, textbooks and tests; and the value of an MT-based approach for maintaining cultural heritage and identity. These insights resonate powerfully with features of MLE programmes across the world, whether for majority-language populations as in post-colonial Africa (Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010; Ouane and Glanz 2011), or for ethnolinguistic minorities in Asia (Benson 2013).

Tellingly, two of the teachers mention the importance of the mother tongue for assessment purposes, while Teacher G provides a succinct summary of the rationale for MTE in the South African context. Teacher F draws on her own experience of MTE (she probably means eight, not six years) under Bantu Education in support of her appeal for MT assessment. Her reasoning suggests an awareness of theory she would have encountered in the course, particularly of Cummins' interdependence and threshold hypotheses, and of the transferability of acquired concepts and literacy skills from one language to the other (cf. Cummins 2008). Teacher C's exhortation (extract 4) to 'promote code-switching' is revealing as this implies its widespread albeit covert use. Her recognition of the value of CS for teaching and learning implies an openness to a more heteroglossic practice. In their collective exhortation, the teachers are in effect seeking to move the department towards a more pro-active, interventionist approach. In the process, the teachers are positioning themselves as language policy advocates.

The continuum allows teachers to move from one station to another, depending on changes in the configuration of the language regime. Some might find themselves able to move from being policy violators to becoming policy performers almost overnight. What has been foregrounded here is teachers' agency and voice in relation to language policy realisation.

Four tasks for multilingual education

This paper has used Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) onion metaphor to argue that an adequate understanding of language education policy realisation must consider

legislation, official discourses, institutional as well as classroom ideologies and practices, and the continuities and discontinuities between them. Two decades into the new South Africa, the LiEP does not have a good story to tell. At the level of legislation, government ambivalence concerning African languages has caused confusion as to what the real language policy is. At the level of discourse, a monoglot ideology of multiple monolingualisms effaces sociolinguistic diversity and underplays inherited problems with the standardised African languages. At institutional level, a gridlock of collusion obtains in which African-language-speaking school communities, with the tacit approval of provincial education departments, invest heavily in self-defeating English-seeking policies, inflicting on themselves a form of symbolic violence. At the interpersonal (classroom) level, resourceful teachers find themselves forced to violate unworkable policies, and only those exposed to alternative perspectives in pilot projects and innovative programmes become policy advocates. All this points to a failure of political leadership for defaulting to English instead of seeking to profile and resource the official African languages (alongside English). Yet, in a context of vast social inequality, pessimism is a luxury no-one can afford, least of all those on the social margins. So what is to be done?

Given the scenario sketched above, four immediate tasks suggest themselves for the realisation of MLE and the shift from a monolingual habitus (Gogolin 1997) towards a multilingual habitus (Benson 2013). The first would entail incorporating exciting ethnographic research that has begun to document the resourcefulness of children in multilingually diverse classrooms and playgrounds (cf. Kerfoot and Bellononjengele 2014; Makoe and McKinney 2014). A fuller picture is needed of children's linguistic repertoires, including multimodal and other multiple discursive or translanguaging practices that go beyond codeswitching (García 2009, 193). In a 'superdiverse' context such as the Gauteng province, the nascent three-language formula may well be inadequate, and new multilingual models will have to be developed (cf. Janks and Makalela 2013). These would have to broaden what counts as acceptable languaging practice, particularly in the content subjects, where conceptual knowledge (rather than linguistic accuracy) is paramount. Teachers who are empowered to be policy advocates could take the lead in this regard.

Second, it would mean rethinking concepts such as mother tongue and LoLT. Inadequate definitions of a unilingual mother tongue would have to make way for a broader understanding of mother tongue as a metaphoric construct that refers to one or more linguistic codes with which the child is comfortably familiar by the time s/he first goes to school. The findings cited above could therefore serve to explore the potential gap between the language of 'teaching' and that of 'learning', as suggested by the LoLT construct. While schooling systems have a self-evident need to publicly declare which languages are used for instruction, it does not therefore follow that official discourses should continue to treat LoLT as a unified concept and to describe it in monoglot terms, as is the case at present (cf. DBE 2010b). For unlike its more unidirectional predecessor 'medium of instruction', 'LoLT' introduces the possibility that the instructional code used by teachers and in textbooks may not be the same as the linguistic resources children bring to the learning process. The bureaucratic imperative to label the LoLT(s) should therefore be seen as no more than a form of strategic essentialism.

A third task would be to reconceptualise English (first additional language) as a service subject designed to support the content subjects at primary school level. It could do so by drawing its material from across the curriculum, and by providing epistemological access to the key schooling genres in each discipline. A premature focus on language as a rule-bound system in L2 teaching is often debilitating for the learner. While it must remain the task of the schooling system to add the 'standard' variety to learner's existing

repertoire, this could be done flexibly through genre-based pedagogies (see Kerfoot and Van Heerden 2014). Without undermining a mother-tongue-based multilingual approach, 'English' could initially be deployed to support learning in mathematics (cf. DBE 2013b), science, and history, for example. The teaching of English as a fully fledged FAL (L2) subject with its own literature could feasibly be postponed until the later primary years.

In the light of the above, a fourth task is to update the LiEP as policy text and to draft an implementation/realisation plan that should be given the broadest possible public airing before finalisation. The South African government's latest macro-economic framework, while predictably English-oriented, acknowledges African languages as being integral to education, science and technology (National Planning Commission 2011, 265). Together with the IIAL draft policy, it has created the proverbial window of opportunity that should not be missed. Although the fate of the LiEP ultimately lies outside of education and depends on African languages being given market value (Alexander 2009, 62), there is much that can and should be done within the education sector.

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