



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged

Editorial

Introduction

This special issue brings together a set of papers which discuss some of the implications of multilingualism for higher education in the Southern African context. There are few places in the world where the challenges posed by multilingualism are more salient than on the African continent. This collection of papers mostly concentrates on South Africa (one paper deals with Mozambique), a country which has undergone substantial transformations in the past twenty years, as it moved in the early 1990s from a white-dominated Apartheid regime to a rainbow democracy which has embraced diversity as one of its key organizing principles. The challenges which have accompanied this transformation in areas such as health, education, service provisions, democratic participation, and the economy are huge. To list just a few – although defined as a middle income country on the basis of averages, there is the persistent challenge of bridging immense gaps in basic income, in housing, and in service provisions. For instance, while entitlement to sufficient water is a constitutionally enshrined right, and today, after twenty years into the post-Apartheid period, access to improved water sources is guaranteed for about 90% of the population (70% piped onto the premises), in contrast, much less progress has been achieved on sanitation (improved facilities went up from 64% in 1990 to 74% in 2011).¹ There is the challenge of planning and directing the longer-term transformation of a mixed economic landscape – partly formal, corporate and international and partly informal, local and under-documented. This challenge includes the promotion of a decent work agenda, which, according to a recent ILO-document, remains a major problem at implementation: necessary information is lacking and South Africa, like most countries, has “limited experience of intervening in the informal economy in a holistic manner” (ILO 2009: 54).² Another country-wide challenge is that of combating the causes and effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 2011, 43% of mortality in South-Africa continued to be AIDS deaths, while the number of AIDS orphans was estimated at 2 million people.³ Closer to the central topic of this special issue are the multiple challenges posed to South Africa’s educational system, all of them aggravated by high levels of poverty in the potential student population. One area in which inroads are being made is that of enrolment and throughput. The post-apartheid period very quickly witnessed the need to deliver substantially bigger generations of skilled workers and university graduates, recruiting in particular from historically disadvantaged populations and backgrounds. In 2010, there were 893,024 students enrolled at academic institutions across South Africa, up from 473,000 in 1993⁴ (following a number of institutional mergers, South Africa currently has 11 traditional universities, 6 more vocationally-oriented universities of technology and 6 six comprehensive universities). Monitoring the balance between undergraduate enrolment (the much-needed increase in the number of people with university degrees) and postgraduate enrolment (the formation of scientists) has developed into a major point of attention for the universities. For none of the challenges mentioned so far have there been ready-made scenarios which perfectly fit the country’s contextual conditions. The latter also applies to the South-African sociolinguistic context of multilingualism, its impact on and the implications for higher education.

Language, literacy and multilingualism are key issues in the transformation of the spaces of South Africa’s higher education. Its linguistic legislation (since 1994) provided a promising starting point. Not only did the country move constitutionally from a country dominated by two public languages, Afrikaans and English, to the recognition of 11 official languages; it also wrote into its 1994-constitution additional clauses which foster the values of (i) encouraging the use of a range of additional

¹ Source: Country file of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, accessed 27 May 2013, [http://www.wssinfo.org/documents-links/documents/?tx_displaycontroller\[type\]=country_files](http://www.wssinfo.org/documents-links/documents/?tx_displaycontroller[type]=country_files).

² Source: International Labour Office, 2009, *The Informal Economy in Africa: Promoting Transition to Formality: Challenges and Strategies*, Geneva. See: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_policy/documents/publication/wcms.127814.pdf (accessed 27 May 2013).

³ Source: Mid-year population estimates 2011, Statistical Release P0302, Statistics South Africa. See: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022011.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2013).

⁴ Source: In leaps and bounds. Growing higher education in South Africa. See: http://www.ieasa.studysa.org/resources/Study_SA_11/In%20leaps%20and%20bounds%20Growing.pdf (accessed 1 August 2013).

languages which are used in the communities (incl. the Khoi-San languages, Gujarati, Hindi, sign language, French, German and Chinese) and (ii) principles of practical workability and realistic planning – e.g. the principle that each of the nine Provinces can identify for itself a working set of minimally three languages. From a world perspective, the South African constitution is quite unique in this respect. The occurrence of linguistic legislative formulations which constitutionally encourage multilingualism and which are accompanied by needs-driven policy principles in addition to the stress on context-sensitive workability provides a marked contrast with the much older “one-nation/one-language”-type of legislative logic which is characteristic for quite a few Western European contexts. Belgium provides an example: most of the legislation appears to be about protecting language community territory (cf. skirmishes over linguistic borders), securing the ‘rights’ of majority populations (in some cases, despite sociolinguistic developments which go in the opposite direction), formulating a set of linguistic prohibitions for conduct in public life (instead of prioritizing inclusiveness and communicative efficiency), while further imposing personal adjustment to the majority group on those who come to the situation with a first language other than the one which is held to ‘define’ the region. Not surprisingly, the South African constitution has quite an appealing ring to the Western European sociolinguistic ear, but this is far from observing optimistically that after twenty years, its principles have been put into practice successfully or observing that the country is nearly there. As elsewhere, intended and planned societal transformation interacts with previous histories and specific societies demarcated by country borders do not function in isolation of the world around them. The case of South Africa is, therefore, like most other cases, complex and not free of paradoxes. It is complex to those who seek to understand it, and one aspect of it is that higher education in the new South Africa grapples with a number of issues:

- inherited histories of language dominance by English and Afrikaans in higher education and elsewhere (universities are having to re-orient themselves multilingually)
- a present-day context of accumulated educational deficits for large parts of the student populations which keeps pointing to a much-needed corresponding transformation in the other tiers of education that prepare for higher education (read: how does one connect higher education with the real trajectories of students from disadvantaged social backgrounds?)
- a more general, international academic climate in which English presents itself as a key ticket to scientific excellence and academic success (this interacts both with the popularly-expressed belief in English as a key to socio-economic success and the sobering realization that English language and literacy levels pose one of the biggest challenges in all tiers of education).
- a transformed international landscape of higher education (on neo-liberal principles, with rankings and performance indicators) in which South African universities compete internally with each other, and externally with the rest of the world.
- a corresponding regime of institutional governance (which will be familiar to most of the journal’s academic readership) in which universities are subjected to audits, quality control instruments and a model of closely monitoring targeted short-term and long-term objectives and goals.

The debates focusing on the multilingual backgrounds of students and the selection of media of instruction are both about socially-desirable (socio)linguistic outcomes with symbolic value for specific groups and about instrumentalities and strategic ways towards particular functional destinations. In this, the question that probably begs most attention pertains to the role of indigenous languages. On the one hand, there is the question of equity in status for each of the indigenous languages and expanding their use in the public domain (an “old” democratic right which originates in a logic of language communities and matches a view of multilingualism as separate monolingualisms). This question features alongside questions about tactical choices, including the strategic investment in indigenous languages in view of strengthening language users’ multilingual repertoires in ways which afford them the best possible chances of success across situations of language use with variable linguistic demands. For instance, how can one invest in a language in a way which reflects positively on the learning of another language as well as on the development of specific functional language and literacy proficiencies *per se*? In South Africa, for instance, the overwhelming majority of the population are second or additional language speakers of English or Afrikaans. Investment in both these languages as first languages has been substantial but is arguably far less urgent than either investment in them as additional languages or in the development of indigenous languages.

The latter debate is less about the ‘rights’ attached to a single language as it is about pragmatic and utilitarian aspirations and considerations which follow multilingual paths. Choices in this area (as discussed in three of the four papers in this volume) must be applicable to situations with internally-contradictory demands in terms of actual linguistic functioning and their relative success is to be measured in terms of desirable outcomes, given a student’s trajectory so far. Note in passing that the idea of strategically investing in multiple linguistic repertoires of students in a way which is sensitive to the user’s past trajectory and future functional destination(s) presupposes a societal context in which ‘full’ proficiency in one language is no longer used as a measurement of entitlement to community membership. Note also that the questions of strategic investment in multiple and complementary language proficiencies are not at all unique to the (South) African post-colonial context. These are also questions which face, say Western Europe’s or North America’s, educational responses to the presence of linguistic minorities in the wake of the immigration waves of recent decades. Of course, this is far from concluding that the questions play out in exactly the same way in each of these contexts.

Three of the papers in this collection originate in the South African context (a fourth one deals with Mozambique). One paper deals with a traditional, well-resourced, historically white, urban, English-dominant university, the University of Cape

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10315866>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10315866>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)