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Mother-tongue education or bilingual education for South Africa: theories, pedagogies and sustainability

A B S T R A C T Language rights, language development and the need for a multilingual literate population in South Africa have been issues debated not only in public, but also among academics and other stakeholders in education in South Africa. There remains a need for a population proficient at least in some indigenous languages, but also able to access languages that facilitate communication beyond the confines of the nation or region. In the recent past schools and universities have responded to national imperatives to develop this capacity. They have employed a range of policy and other types of incentives aimed at increasing access to the indigenous languages of South Africa and improving the quality of education received in those languages, where sufficiently large communities exist to support mother-tongue communication and use. This article provides a different account from those already mentioned, drawing instead on theoretical developments in linguistics to illustrate a number of points concerning the relationship between theory, approaches and contexts in language development in South Africa. The article addresses the educational imperatives in relation to theoretical, socio-geographic, and socio-economic contingencies that affect their sustainability.

Keywords: bilingualism, fossilisation, interference, interlanguage, multilingualism, semilingualism, sustainability

Much has been said about language rights, language development and the need for a multilingual literate population in South Africa, proficient at least in some indigenous languages, but also able to access languages that facilitate communication beyond the confines of the nation or region. In the recent past schools and universities have responded to national imperatives to

develop this capacity. They have employed a range of policy and other types of incentives aimed at increasing access to the indigenous languages of South Africa and improving the quality of education received in those languages, where sufficiently large communities exist to support mother-tongue communication and use. I will not survey policy development in South Africa here (Balfour, 2006), nor will I make a case for mother-tongue education as located within the different regions, whether more monolingual (as much of South Africa's rural hinterlands tend to be) or multilingual (as in the metropolitan centres) (Balfour, 1999). For a discussion of the implementation issues associated with mother-tongue-based bilingual education in South Africa, please consult Alexander (2005).

In this article I shall provide a different account from those already mentioned, drawing instead on certain theoretical developments in linguistics to illustrate a number of points concerning the relationship between theory, approaches and contexts in language development in South Africa. What I address here are the educational imperatives in relation to theoretical, socio-geographic, and socio-economic contingencies that affect their sustainability. I shall demonstrate that research which might illuminate decisions regarding mother-tongue education, its place and usefulness, is premised on assumptions about language teaching and acquisition. Furthermore, the understanding of the differences between data largely depends on the critical perspective with which the educator, policy maker or theorist chooses to engage. There are two reasons why it is not possible to consider a case study of mother-tongue education in South Africa without describing the limitations and contingencies that affect the relevance and sustainability of that case depending on socio-economic and socio-geographic variables. First, we cannot consider as real the possibility that children will have access to only one language in their early learning years. The tendency of people to move, the weakening of tribal and ethnic identities, the diaspora of cultures, colonisation and the consequences of decolonisation, and the onset of globalisation and the media technology revolution make references to mother-tongue education complex and often unsatisfactory. Second, as my title suggests, we need an understanding of mother-tongue education only insofar as it facilitates further development and understanding of bilingual education for a multilingual environment. This insight is not new and has been noted also in research on first-language acquisition in relation to the acquisition of a second language. Widdowson (2001: 10) states that "The influence of the L1 may have been reconceptualised in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research but this seems to have brought about no corresponding reconceptualisation in second language teaching". The need for renewed focus on language teaching makes this article relevant to implementation agencies, educators and linguists alike.

I intend to illustrate two arguments in relation to the points already mentioned. First, that although we may share an ideological base for the development and enhancement of mother-tongue education, there is no coherent research basis which supports a single view of how this might be optimally achieved. Second, that although there may not be a coherent research basis for such a perspective, the fact that competing positions offer a variety of data does assist us when making decisions concerning the development of language educators and the language learning child. One way in which this may be achieved is by considering bilingual education rather than mother-tongue education as a precondition for any meaningful engagement with multilingualism.

Multilingualism, understood here to be literacy, rather than communicative competence, in more than one language is also key to alleviating poverty and raising living standards in South Africa. Since access to languages must mean enhanced mobility, the link between multilingualism and multiliteracy needs to be strong. Checchi, drawing from an analysis of education spending worldwide, suggests that "The demand for education is higher when future expected gain is higher" (2007: 23). He posits that "income inequality reduces access to education and, as a consequence, [reduces] future income distribution" (2006: 47). In other words, for as long as those who are poor and unemployed remain a large percentage of the population in South Africa, the nation (as opposed to a particular class of people) will never prosper and upliftment will not occur. Education must not only be sensitive to this factor, but must seek to transform it. If education is central to the economic transformation of South Africa, then language education is central to social transformation. In relation to language teaching, which is a vehicle through which such transformation may occur, four points present themselves. First, socio-economic factors influencing the realisation of transformation ideals must be considered in light of the presuppositions and prerequisites of acquisition theories, the models derived from them and their ideological positioning. Second, these models tend, in turn, to generate language pedagogies, language assessment measures, language curriculum designs and language policies. Third, these constituent elements have been developed as highly theorised and complex subfields of linguistics and data yielded by research in these areas can appear contradictory. Finally, within these sub-fields, intense competition, political, ideological and economic, exists and has tangible consequences for the ways in which children learn from one decade to another and from one political dispensation to another. For the remainder of this article I would like to analyse the relationship between ideology, theory and research arising from the links between these three domains as we reconsider language learning, mother-tongue education in particular, and the revitalisation of indigenous languages towards the creation of a multilingual society.

Spolsky (1998) argues that we may consider bilingualism to be an achieved state with a defined set of characteristics. Widdowson (2001: 8) however suggests that we need also to consider that the journey towards bilingualism, or what he terms 'bilingualisation', is a process. Bilingualisation, if we are to accept the term as referring to the process by which the speaker of one language acquires proficiency or competence in another, has a long history of development as field of linguistics known as second-language acquisition. In 1974 Lambert distinguished between additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism; the definition of which has gained renewed currency with Luckett's (1993 & 1997) work on national additive bilingualism in South African language planning. With additive bilingualism learners maintain their own language, preferably acquired and reinforced from birth by mother-tongue speakers of that language, and later monitored, stimulated, and refined by the conscious learning of rules which make what was formerly implicit, explicit in the language learning process. Acquisition occurs naturally from birth and at a later stage, usually around the ages of nine or ten, the addition of a second language is facilitated through the same syntactic, semantic and sociolinguistic foundations already in place from the early learning years.

How those foundations are developed is a source of debate within linguistics. Researchers who draw from cognitive accounts of acquisition believe that the acquisition process is innate. Thus Chomsky (1965) and Pinker (1995), for example, suggest that the 'language acquisition device'

is hard-wired into the brain and that learning (expounded more fully by Krashen (1983) and others) serves merely to raise to consciousness what was previously unconscious. There is in linguistics a counterposition in which there is evidence to suggest that learning is always conscious, not innate, and that memory in general, rather than some hard-wired, but identifiable device, is responsible for learning. Thus scholars such as Baddeley (1986) and Sampson (1997) argue that the capacity for memorisation is key to understanding any process of learning, including language. In support of this, Baddeley, working with brain- damaged subjects, has shown that even when the ability to speak has been lost, another part of the brain will develop the capacity for speech formulation and recognition. Drawing on these strands of theorisation and research, other scholars have formulated models for how acquisition might occur.

Within psycholinguistics, models of acquisition account for first-language acquisition in similar ways to those concerning second language acquisition, with one important difference. Certain models assume mother-tongue competence to be necessary prior to the 'learning' of a second language; others assume that two or more languages can be acquired easily provided that the settings for acquisition are natural. Acquisition models tend to fall within two categories: functional and cognitive. To illustrate these categories I have selected two examples. These examples are not selected from among the most recent developments in psycholinguistic research precisely because my argument is in part historical. In order to demonstrate linkages between theory, policy and pedagogy I have had to select examples which illustrate those links substantively. It follows that the most recent scholarship is unlikely to have, as yet, become sufficiently established for those links to form. The Multidimensional Model developed by Clahsen, Meisel, and Pienemann (1983) relates the learning process to stages in the child's development. Drawing on cognitive (Chomsky) and psycholinguistic (Piaget) accounts of acquisition, and thus indebted to generative principles of universal grammar, this model proposes that the principles, process and stages for learning an L1 may be used to generate principles for the learning of the L2. Thus in the learning of the L1 Clahsen (1984) posits three strategies, namely: word order, initialisation and finalisation (where the subject's position in a sentence is typically modified by the introduction of a competing subject), and subordinate clause control, (where movement of an element in the main clause is possibly depending on how it is modified by the introduction of a subordinate clause). These strategies are linked to age groups and it is generally accepted that the optimal stage for acquisition is 0 to13 years. If this were to be considered a serious implication for South African classrooms, two key challenges would be how to provide a richly 'textured' environment for the learning of a second language, and how to sustain that learning throughout education.

In contrast, the Competition Model of McLaughlin and Harrington (1989) draws from analyses of performance-based data, rather than cognitive processes. This model demonstrates that L1 learners are influenced by L1 processes when learning an L2. Working with a sample of Japanese native speakers and English native speakers McLaughlin and Harrington were able to show that the Competition Model predicts, for example, that both language groups are able to identify agency in sentences depending on how animacy and inanimacy were processed by the language. Thus for English speakers this occurs typically by locating the subject (agent) of a sentence with its local verb and then determining whether there is competition for the verb with another subject (for example, 'we like the lecturer a lot'). For speakers of Japanese (or isiZulu for that

matter)1, word order of the sentences does not necessarily denote agency, rather the markedness of the verb was used to determine animacy (agency) of the subject from latency (object). Key implications of this model for South Africa include an awareness that the acquisition of the first language must be integrated into the learning of a second language. In South Africa at present children make a transition from mother-tongue education to English from Grade 3, and thereafter the links between early schooling and the mother tongue are severed. This break occurs too early and the subsequent absence of strong reinforcement of the mother tongue makes for conditions conducive to subtractive bilingualism.

What is also important about cognitive and functional models is that both derive from theories of reality and learning located either within the positivist tradition (functional, structural, outcomes-based), or the constructivist tradition (deconstruction, generative, process-based) and that these models in turn give rise, not only to supporting data, but also a number of approaches, each informed by the discourse of the relevant model and beyond that by the originating theory and ideology. Explanations of acquisition, using functional models, tend to refer to behaviour, stimulus, reinforcement, outcomes and performance, while acquisition in cognitive accounts is characterised by a focus on processes, differentiated cognitive stages and cognitive strategies. The distinctions are not always so neat, but it is useful to bear them in mind for related points I make later in the article.

Not only do models and the theories that inform them construct perspectives on learning, they also construct the learner and his/her language development. This again can be illustrated with reference to cognitive and functional accounts. For example, applied linguists such as Zobl (1980), operating within a functionalist perspective, have formulated concepts such as semilingualism. Zobl defines semilingualism as occurring when learners fail to develop full proficiency in either language. He suggests that in some contexts where learners of an L2 develop negative attitudes both towards their own culture and that of the target language, semilingualism can result. Other researchers such as Selinker (1972) consider language transfer, in other words the process whereby a learner will project the rules or strategies for acquiring one language onto the learning of another language, as responsible for the development of 'fossilisation'. He defines fossilisation as the stage at which learners fail to reach the target language. This occurs when due to inadequate exposure to and learning of the target language, the internalised rule system inhibits further acquisition. What arises from this state of retarded development is what linguists operating from within functional accounts have described as a set of phenomena: semilingualism, fossilation and mother tongue 'interference', which results in errors. Unsurprisingly, behaviourist-functional approaches (Skinner, 1957) to language learning, the most popular and most dominant of these being the audiolingual approach (Fries, 1964; Rivers, 1964 & 1981) used in innumerable foreign language schools, tend to regard such interference as counterproductive.

What I have done so far is to link not only theories of acquisition, functional and cognitive, to models and approaches, but also to indicate how the discourse of functional approaches positions the learner, pedagogy and educator within a particular framework. Some scholars have stigmatised functional approaches and theories as 'deficit' or 'behaviourist', but there is convincing evidence in the literature to support many of the theoretical assumptions, model hypotheses and pedagogy promoted by scholars in this broad area. I now turn to provide the same treatment for cognitive accounts of acquisition.

Selinker's (1972) research is seminal in this regard and suggests that learners will not only project internalised L1 rules onto the acquisition of an L2, but will also develop an interlanguage rule system which, though derived from the L1, contains facets of the target language. Cognitive theorists, drawing typically from accounts of universal grammar, refer to an interlanguage as a bridge between one language and another. This conceptualisation is certainly accurate, because an interlanguage is evidence of learning progress. Ellis (1994: 332) and Widdowson (2001: 8) suggest that there is growing evidence that L1 and development factors work together in determining the course of interlanguage. This selectivity, argues Ellis, is evident in a number of ways:

1) the effects of the L1 only become evident when the learner has reached a stage of development that makes transfer possible;
2) development may be retarded when a universal transitional structure arising naturally in early interlanguage corresponds to an L1 structure, and
3) development may be accelerated when an early transitional structure is not reinforced by the corresponding L2 structure. (332)

The terms "stage of development", "transfer", and "transitional structure" suggest a discourse that is dynamic and universal. The role of teaching is then to enable these processes of transition, transfer and development to occur. Drawing from cognitive accounts of acquisition, applied linguists such as Krashen and Terrell (1983) and Hymes (1971) have developed two approaches to teaching which have become almost orthodoxies in South African language curricula. The Communicative Approach to language teaching posits that language learning can only occur in authentic contexts, where authentic tasks are used. Acquisition is expedited as a result of a need to communicate, and educators must not instruct learners, but facilitate opportunities for natural communication and interaction. The Natural Approach, with which most readers will be familiar, suggests that learners acquire a language through exposure to it in the form of comprehensible input. If this input is of a sufficiently high quality and complex nature, learners will by means of listening and speaking the language acquire not only the means to use it, but also an awareness of the implicit syntactic and semantic systems of the target language. Krashen, widely known for the development of the input-output and monitor hypotheses in the 1980s, argues that the function of formal learning has been overstated, the reliance on the efficacy of grammar teaching overestimated, and the learners' ability to acquire language insufficiently recognised or utilised. Drawing on the Vygotskian (1962) notion of the zone of proximal development, Krashen (1988) argued that input should always be structured to be slightly beyond what the learner already understands, in order to accelerate learning and challenge the learner. Conscious learning could raise the affective filter, thereby diminishing confidence and motivation and making acquisition more difficult.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) also make the distinction between acquisition of a language and learning (or what they term monitoring). Using Chomsky's (1965) notion of universal grammar, Krashen (1988) understands acquisition of language, whether a first or second language, to be facilitated through contact, and that within authentic settings, such contact may be heightened and used to accelerate acquisition. Learning is thus a secondary aspect of acquisition, in that it follows, once the language as been acquired, that some formal learning will be necessary to enable the learner to make explicit decisions about syntactic or semantic choices when using

a second language. Within this approach the learner was typically seen as the centre of the educational process, the teacher as facilitator and the creation of authentic tasks and communicative abilities measurable by virtue of the successful (rather than grammatically correct) communicative act. Although there is less supporting empirical evidence for the efficacy of Communicative and Natural approaches, these have enjoyed popularity as progressive education gained ground in the 1980s and beyond. An example of this is evident in the form of the RNCS (2002) document in South Africa, in which learning is defined as the acquisition of skills and strategies rather than objective knowledge, and language development is perceived as a form of awareness to be enhanced through communicative learner-centred tasks. Within the complexities of theories and the approaches derived from them, certain phenomena come to the attention of researchers, educators and policy makers alike.

For example, researchers concerned with language pedagogy, such as Delpit (1988) and Wong-Fillmore (1994), have shown that code-switching can lead to fossilisation. Fossilisation is particularly problematic in contexts where there is insufficient exposure to first-language speakers of the target language, or where the quality of teaching prevents adequate modelling or learning of the target language; a context familiar to the majority of South African learners located in rural or monolingual schools where English is not the language of the community. Wong-Fillmore (1994), suggests that code-switching can only be useful in environments where mother-tongue users have sufficient exposure to target-language use. If successful acquisition is determined by performance, according to Wong-Fillmore (1994), successful performance can only occur in reference to adequate modelling. However, depending on whether you draw from cognitive or functional accounts, your view of code-switching in the classroom will be different. Kamwangamalo (1998) and Ramsay-Brijlall (2004) argue, for example, that code-switching enables different forms of identity to merge and co-exist. As such it should not only be encouraged but also made a feature of pedagogy in areas as diverse as literature and language learning.

Despite these kinds of debates, the teaching of the second language, irrespective of whether the learning process is conceptualised on cognitive or functional grounds, has not been considered at nearly the same depth as the teaching of the first language. Widdowson (2001: 11) remarks that

> one of the most striking features of monolingual second language teaching is that it takes no principled account of a major factor in second language learning ... the acquisition of the first language ...

What is of importance to me here, however, is not the empirical bases upon which such contrasting observations are made, or the ideological strengths of one approach versus the weaknesses of another. Rather, the comparisons themselves suggest different perspectives on learning a language; perspectives which in the course of education history in South Africa have been assumed into differing ideological frameworks evident in curriculum statements and reports concerning language education.

Ideology has often been used explicitly to marginalise or empower particular groups. In the sense that the enactment of ideology is both language and behaviour, Bourdieu and Passeron's (2000) understanding of symbolic violence is apposite. In the next section of this article I deploy their theoretical understanding of this concept to point out how research sometimes becomes complicit in the maintenance of hegemony. Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) define 'symbolic

violence' as a process of which the ultimate aim is to bring one subordinated group to a state where it will accept as normal the hegemony of another group. In the mid-1990s I argued that the dominance of English as a *lingua franca*, if not balanced by the conscious use and valuing of indigenous languages in the regions of South Africa, would be damaging for those languages. Not long after that the Laerskool Mikro case was fought in the Supreme and Constitutional Courts, and the government finally had to concede that the prescription of English in Afrikaans-medium schools was not only problematic but also unconstitutional. The State deployed a discourse of transformation, while the school employed a discourse of constitutional rights (Balfour, 2002). In the press the latter was caricatured as 'resistance and reaction' while the former was caricatured as 'hegemonic and oppressive'. Since then another decade has passed and with RNCS (2002), and since the appearance of Chisholm's (2004) book on the transformation of South African education between 1995-2005, there has been a development of awareness concerning the transformation project and its sometimes ambivalent consequences. Despite innovation in terms of policy and change, there has not been an equivalent reconsideration of how language education is practised in HEIs and schools in South Africa. Widdowson (2001: 11) has argued that:

> As a result L2 teaching practices a kind of pretence that it is dealing with only one language, whereas it is obvious that as far as L2 learning is concerned there are (at least) two languages involved. While teachers are busy trying to focus attention on the L2 as distinct from the L1, thereby striving to replicate conditions of coordinate bilingualism, the learners are busy on their own agenda of bringing the two languages together in the process of compound bilingualisation.

A serious challenge for HEIs is to develop bilingual pedagogies that do not replicate that pretence and treat learning in the L2 in the same way as acquisition of the L1. Simply put, and irrespective of whether isiZulu or English is the target language, we need to reconceive language pedagogy as 'languages pedagogies'. We must relate the acquisition of one language to the learning of another. The optimisation of learning requires special attention where the optimum conditions of acquisition for a second language are not possible (for example, in rural areas) – a point I shall return to later.

I wish to make three points concerning the relationship between research, ideology and sustainability in South Africa. First, that stakeholders in education need to reconsider perspectives concerning mother-tongue education. Second, that theories and approaches adopted for the learning of languages, as evident in curricula statements, might need to be reconsidered in light of the need for context-sensitivity, particularly for learners whose contexts are not resource-rich. Third, that the relationship between the DoE and HEIs (with particular reference to how research informs policy implementation) should be reconsidered in the processes of regional planning for the enhancement and enrichment of indigenous languages, making these more accessible to all learners in South Africa.

In relation to the first point: the language, discourse and conceptualisation of recent curriculum documents and learning plans for environments where ideal, or even adequate conditions for such acquisition do not yet exist, or are not sustainable, is informed by approaches and models for foreign language acquisition which assume these ideal conditions. Natural and Communicative

approaches to language acquisition, together with progressivist terminologies which place the learner at the centre of pedagogy, are derived from assumptions concerning context and cognition that probably do not apply in the majority of learning environments in South Africa. Communicative and Natural approach theorists assume a high level of literacy to be already in place. The ideology concerning the value of mother-tongue education (perceived to be closely aligned with belief concerning the need and right to indigenous language development) suggests that mother-tongue education will lay an adequate foundation for acquisition of another target language. Surveying research, Bialystok (2006: 577) has also pointed out that accounts of language acquisition and education "have essentially developed their models from the simplifying assumption that children have one mind, one conceptual system, and one language". In South Africa, given the multiplicity of languages that pervade everyday life in most urban areas, can this be true? Communicative and Natural approaches assume in their original design exposure to opportunities that exist for modelling and interaction with mother-tongue speakers of the target language. In South Africa the statistics regarding literacy over the last decade suggests that these assumptions cannot be supported, except in environments that are either suburban (and thus sufficiently multilingual), or middle class (and thus sufficiently supplied with resources, quality educators, and a high level of stimulus provided by the family and community at large). A crucial question to consider here is how we reconsider language education and language pedagogies in the rural areas where such conditions do not exist. Cummins (1996) has, for example, pointed out that strong support for the L1 throughout elementary education contributes to academic success.

In relation to the second point: despite the adherence to, and development of, sophisticated and complex curricular statements focussing on the child's development, the results from schools and within particular subjects remain a source of national concern. Hanushek (1995), in his survey of education spending worldwide, has pointed out that it remains puzzling that the constantly rising costs and "quality" of the inputs of schools appear to be unaccompanied by improvement in the performance of students. This observation is true in South Africa, where despite huge increases in the funding of education, performance and literacy levels have remained constant or have even declined, especially in terms of literacy. We might consider more attentively the experience of educators recorded in interviews and research, in which it is noted that *Curriculum 2005* has achieved a culture of assessment and performance-based outcomes that make even the most prescriptive of Victorian syllabuses seem tame. Rather than wishing to describe every possible outcome that the learning child might achieve, we have instead compiled a list of what ought to be achieved by means of observable outcomes, drawing on assumptions and perspectives not applicable or sustainable in many contexts. In many circumstances the human and physical resources, in conjunction with sociogeographic and socio-economic location of learners, do not correlate either with the intentions or outcomes of our education system and curricula. Research, drawing on cognitive accounts of acquisition, shows that processes are not stage-bound, that learning is not always demonstrable, and that where insufficient resources exist, the role of the teacher as authority and resource, rather than as facilitator/mentor, requires a re-estimation of teacher education for different environments. In short, our curriculum at present seems accessible only to an already privileged class, and denies the different sensibilities and content-sensitive variations that are perceived by the majority of educators and learners. Are we, as stakeholders in education, too close to a condition Bourdieu and Passeron (2000: 7) define as necessary for the imposition and maintenance of 'symbolic violence'?

The pedagogic action which the power relations between groups or classes making up [the] social formation put into the dominant position ... is the one which most fully, though always indirectly, corresponds to the objective interests of the dominant groups or classes, both by its mode of imposition and by its delimitation of what and on whom, it imposes.

In other words, are we aware of the extent to which our teacher education programmes, with particular reference to language education, and our policy driven initiatives, result unintentionally in the continued disempowerment of learners and educators? Marsh, Hau and Kong (2000) point out, for example, that instruction in the medium of English can have negative effects in particular subject areas such as History, Geography and Science.

In relation to the third point: the right to mother-tongue education and the need to provide access to economic and social mobility need to be considered in relation to what research findings are available to us. As I have mentioned earlier, in 1995 the Laerskool Micro launched a series of successful and highly publicised legal appeals against the DoE's insistence on the introduction of English as parallel medium to Afrikaans in the school, owing to the applications made by a handful of parents seeking admission to the school. Might we not, together with the DoE, reassess both the approach and assumptions behind that insistence, and at least allow ourselves an opportunity to consult research before committing to a particular course of action as has been evident in Mpumalanga (Fourie, C: 2007/02/18: 10)? If the intention is to foster access to quality education, whilst also strengthening the enhancement of indigenous languages (in the Mpumalanga case Afrikaans and Sesotho) then of what value to learning is English as a medium of instruction? We know that the introduction of a second language in environments where the learners have no access to literacy-rich texts is problematic, since the conditions for tutor-enriched learning are not available. Perhaps we need to consider that an insistence on English unintentionally privileges a particular class in South Africa. Perhaps the Mpumalanga-Hoërskool Ermelo case presents an opportunity for the introduction of Sesotho as a second, rather than a parallel medium of instruction. An accommodation built on an alliance between two minority languages might be formed. Allow us also to consider the implications of that alliance, since universities have begun to develop language policies in which the development of indigenous languages as languages for teaching and learning in higher education is assumed. We know that this development is based on findings which show that children can acquire several languages simultaneously where conditions allow it. In communities where this is not possible, a different kind of environment might be created where not only mother-tongue education is enhanced throughout schooling, but a tutor-enriched programme for the learning of a second language is put in place. Learning through a second or third language cannot be sustained without the conditions necessary to support it, and might we not therefore consider policies that allow for a better utilisation of research and resources in light of transformation ideals? This may satisfy short-term needs regarding the accessibility of the curriculum in mother-tongue, improved performance and throughput, and also better support for the development of indigenous languages in institutions of higher education.

These three positions help to locate my theoretical analysis of two contrasting approaches to research, theorisation and pedagogy in the area of acquisition studies. I now wish to address the relationship between current thinking concerning the transition learners make from their mother-tongue as medium of instruction to English as the medium of instruction. My argument

here is that this does not encourage the development of bilingualism, but creates the conditions necessary for semilingualism. Although the current orthodoxy concerning mother-tongue education holds that it must occur primarily in the early learning years, there is nonetheless a body of research (see for example, Long, 1990a; Singleton, 1989) which demonstrates the critical importance of age in the acquisition process. It is true that this research is not conclusive but in that regard it is far from singular in the inexact science of linguistics. Carroll (1981) argues for the prominence of language aptitude as associated most strongly with children up to the age of 13. Other researchers, such as Long (1990), suggest that acquisition capacity, provided that it is regularly exercised and supported, will last far into adult life and that child and adult learners demonstrate the same patterns of acquisition, the difference being that with age further factors will tend to impede and not improve the adult's capacity to learn a language. While this research may be of academic interest, its relevance becomes clear within the context of the three points I made earlier about the relationship between research and ideology in South Africa. For example, given that we know that many teachers (and adults in general) are functionally illiterate in English, and given that we know that there is a high correlation between literacy in the mother tongue, numeracy and the ability to acquire a second language, why is it that we continue to hold to the belief that mother-tongue education in the early years will somehow enable learning of English in later years? The socio-economic context has not been considered in relation to the theory. According to Heugh (2005: 141), without adequately trained teachers of English as a second or foreign language, and without adequately trained Sesotho, Setswana, Afrikaans, English, isiZulu mother-tongue teachers, little effective acquisition of the mother tongue, let alone the target language can occur.

What seems to me to be required is a language plan in which the introduction of at least two languages in the early childhood and foundation phase is articulated and supported by a campaign to develop bilingual language teachers equipped for these years of development. Two points emerge here to contribute to the discussion: first, if it is true that languages are most easily and thoroughly acquired in the early years, in communities where acquisition at the school or home is possible (because of pervasive use of the languages), then bilingual education throughout schooling is worthwhile. Second, if it is true that effective acquisition of the mother tongue enables effective acquisition of the target language, then in communities where bilingual education is not possible, mother-tongue education should be allowed throughout schooling, and the creation of tutor-enriched learning of a second language should be supported.

I wish to end this article by focussing in more detail on the role of institutions of higher education in partnership with the State to develop the language resources necessary for the enhancement and promotion of access to indigenous languages. It is well known that indigenous and foreign language departments in institutions of higher education are under threat of closure. Checchi makes the point that "having attended school is by itself insufficient to attain competence in literacy ability" (2006: 18). If this is true, then literacy development is required beyond schooling, irrespective of whether the learner enters formal higher education or not. We need the DoE to acknowledge the special place of language departments in this regard, since declining student numbers in language departments (indigenous and foreign languages), and declining recruitment to the ranks of academia of linguists in all languages have caused departments to shrink, sometimes even close, under pressure from budget-orientated academic planning. This

is an international phenomenon and is symptomatic of an ever-increasing pressure on universities to address market needs in only the narrowest and least profitable sense. Research demonstrates that access to two languages enables greater cognitive development and enhanced cognitive skills. Economic mobility is dependent on access to worlds beyond one's immediate experience and language is the primary means through which we receive and convey such experience, whether we perceive it as knowledge or life-skills. A critical reconsideration of the sustainability of current perspectives in South African education, and in language education in particular, is necessary here. Which will sustain learning more: to be proficient and competent users of two languages other than English when entering higher education, or to be partially competent users of three languages (including English) at this stage? Access to the global economy is possible through access to indigenous languages (and indigenous in this sense must include awareness that English, for some communities, is the indigenous language, as is Afrikaans). In some ways a partnership initiative between the DoE and HEIs, concerning policy, research and implementation, might enable education stakeholders to establish a more satisfactory correlation between increasing education expenditure, academic performance and literacy levels. Mother-tongue education and bilingual education need to be considered as critical elements in the design and sustainability of that initiative.

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[1] Here is an example in isiZulu provided by Fikile Khuboni (SLLMDE): "Umfana uya esikoleni" meaning "The boy goes to school". Umfana in this sentence is the subject. Uya is a verb. Va is our verb stem and u- is a concord. One can also say: "Uya esikoleni", meaning "He goes to school". In this sentence you need not bring in the subject Umfana. If we take the same sentence but in the plural form, we would say: "Abafana baya esikoleni" (The boys are going to school). In this sentence the concord is ba, not u (as in the first sentence), because we have changed the subject to the plural form-abafana. You could also say: Baya esikoleni. meaning "They are going to school".