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The challenge of diversity:
The National Curriculum Statement and foreign languages

This is a translated, revised and extended version of a paper entitled *Le défi d'une éducation plurilingue: le National Curriculum Statement et le français langue étrangère,* written in French and published in French Studies in Southern Africa.

A B S T R A C T In this paper I will demonstrate that the South African vision of multiculturalism as it is expressed in the National Curriculum Statement is limited and that it is not preparing young South Africans for the twenty-first century. I will argue that to achieve a broader multiculturalism, the educational system needs to further foreign languages actively. Twelve years ago, education was faced with the challenge of designing a curriculum which affirmed the diversity of South African cultures, religions, ethnic and racial groups while unifying people within this diversity. Policy was thus underpinned very firmly by the principles of multiculturalism. However, South African multiculturalism is inward-looking, it does not prepare learners for the realities of a nation composed not only of a heterogeneous population of South Africans but which also comprises a growing number of non-South Africans. South African multiculturalism must be broadened to go beyond local cultural diversity to include world cultures. Education must open learners to the Other: to South Africans of different cultural groups, as well as people of other nationalities. I will argue that this discovery of the Other and of Otherness can best be made through the learning of foreign languages.

Keywords: curriculum, language policy, foreign languages

1. Introduction

One of the primary aims of public education, along with the transfer of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities, is the promotion of the values necessary for personal growth and for nation-building. The values a nation chooses to promote are dependent on the social context. The present educational policies of South Africa were formulated in the years

preceding and immediately following 1994, the year democracy was instituted for the first time after decades of apartheid and centuries of some form or other of racial rule which denied the humanity of the majority of the population. The national curriculum, the *National Curriculum Statement* (NCS) was therefore devised against the background of the need to create a democratic society, heal the divisions of the past and foster unity in diversity. It is within the context of cultural diversity and the need to promote tolerance and openness that the NCS committed itself to promoting multilingualism.

In this article I will show that the vision of multilingualism as it is expressed in the NCS is selective and that the status of foreign languages is insignificant. The NCS is centred on that which is South African and, I believe, does not adequately prepare learners for the post-modern realities of a nation composed not only of a heterogeneous population of South Africans, but also a growing number of immigrants. Twelve years into democracy, diversity no longer merely refers to the different races, ethnic groups, cultures and languages which are South African. The parameters of diversity are changing as the population is being made up increasingly of people coming from other countries and continents. Education must open learners to the Other who is a South African of a different cultural group, or a person from another country. I will argue that this discovery of the Other and of Otherness can best be made through the learning of foreign languages.

2. A limited multilingualism

2.1 The status of languages in the NCS

At the outset, and throughout the NCS there is a clear and unmitigated policy commitment to multilingualism. "(M)aking multilingualism happen" (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Overview,* 2002: 7) is cited as one of the strategies that finds expression in the curriculum. The policy statement regarding the number of languages to be learnt is clear:

> In a multilingual country like South Africa it is important that learners reach high levels of proficiency in at least two languages, and that they are able to communicate in other languages (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Overview,* 2002: 20).

This commitment is to be seen within the paradigm of multiculturalism and the promotion of cultural diversity as defined in the Department of National Education Language in Education Policy in terms of section 3(4)(m) of the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (Act 27 of 1996):

> In terms of the new *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,* the government, and thus the Department of Education, recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is tasked, amongst other things, to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language and the languages referred to in the South African Constitution (*Language in Education Policy,* 1997: 1).

The Language in Education Policy also supports and promotes the teaching and learning of all languages used by communities in South Africa, including those important for international trade and communication.

The main aims of the Ministry of Education's policy for language in education are:

[...]
3. to promote and develop all the official languages;
4. to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication (*Language in Education Policy,* 1997: 2).

Policy is therefore strongly in favour of a broad multilingualism which includes official and non-official languages, which include foreign languages. This policy commitment to multilingualism is expressed in the National Curriculum through its stated support of the eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Southern Sotho, Northern Sesotho (Sepedi), Tswana, Swati, Venda and Tsonga; of the heritage languages approved by PANSALB;[1] and of Sign Language and Augmentative and Alternative Communication. The Languages Learning Area of the NCS includes:

all the eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Sesotho sa Leboa (Sepedi), Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga;
and
languages approved by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) and the South African Certification Authority (SAFCERT) such as Braille and South African Sign Language (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 4).

The multilingual language policy is therefore clear: the nation through the Constitution, and the State through the Department of Education, commit themselves to the promotion of multilingualism. There is, however, a mismatch between the policy and the implementation strategy, in both the General Education and Training Band (GET) (Grades R-9) and in the Further Education and Training Band (FET) (Grades 10-12) curricula.

2.2 NCS GET band

Firstly, the NCS Grades R-9 curriculum does not stipulate clearly how, and to what extent, policy is to be put into practice. The implementation of policies is left to school governing bodies:

[The Department of Education's language-in-education] policy gives School Governing Bodies the responsibility of selecting school language policies that are appropriate for their circumstances and in line with the policy of additive multilingualism. The Languages Learning Area Statement provides a curriculum that is supportive of whatever decision a school makes (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 4).

In addition to this *laissez-faire* attitude to implementation, the NCS GET curriculum is confusing with regard to descriptors and is vague in its requirements. This lack of clarity is particularly evident in the *Overview* to the GET where the Languages Learning Area is first introduced. The very first statement with regards to policy and requirements notes the importance of reaching "high levels of proficiency in at **least two languages**" and, of learners being able "to communicate **in other** languages" (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Overview,* 2002: 20, my emphasis). Despite this reference to "other languages", the phrase "other" languages is never

explained nor are "other" languages mentioned again in the *Overview*. The only reference to what could constitute an "other" language is the reference to the Second Additional Language. However, this reference is made only in relation to official languages:

> The Languages Learning Area Statement covers all official languages as:
> • Home Languages
> • First Additional Languages
> • Second Additional Languages (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Overview,* 2002: 20).

There is no mention of languages which are not official languages. Adding even further to the confusion is the definition of the policy of additive multilingualism which refers only to two languages, both of which are official languages.

> 1. All learners learn their home language and **at least** one additional official language.
> 2. Learners become competent in their additional language, while their home language is maintained and developed (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Overview,* 2002: 20, my emphasis).

The vague "at least" in the first point is not explained nor amplified, and there is no clarity as to what the role, function or place of the second additional language may be, while no mention is made at all of "other", non-official languages.

This imprecision is rectified to some extent in the Languages Learning Area statement which develops the description given in the *Overview*. The introduction to the Learning Area expands the above-quoted definition of additive multilingualism by adding a third point to the above two and by prescribing that a Second Additional Language be learnt.

> 3. All learners learn an African language for a minimum of three years by the end of the General Education and Training Band. **In some circumstances**, it may be learned as a second additional language (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 4, my emphasis).

However, this third point gives rise to further questions. Although it effectively allows learners the possibility of learning a third language, the Second Additional Language, the problem is that it is unclear why this might be a Second Additional Language only in "some circumstances". Furthermore, this third language, is obligatorily an African language for a minimum of three years. No mention is made of whether the African language could be learnt as a First Additional language or what the status of non-official languages is.

At this point in the Languages Learning Area statement, there is in fact no direction given regarding the place of non-official languages. It is only in the description of the categorisation of languages as Home Language, First Additional Languages and Second Additional Languages that the concept of a foreign language is introduced, but then only incidentally.

> The second additional language is intended for learners who wish to learn three languages. The third language may be an official language or a foreign language (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 4).

This categorisation of languages into Home Languages, First Additional Languages and Second Additional Languages attempts to define the status of the language for the learner and determines

the purpose for which the language is learnt. The categorisation also has implications for the manner in which the languages are approached by learners and teachers, and for the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards. A Home Language is an official language which a learner understands and speaks when first coming to school; the First Additional Language is an official language a learner may not know on entering school, while the Second Additional Language is "intended for learners wishing to learn three languages" (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages* 2002: 4). This third language may be an official or a non-official language, which includes foreign languages.

The minor status of "other languages" is evident, too, in that there is no learning area statement dedicated to them for Grades R-9. For each of the eleven official languages there are three different learning area statements, one for each category. For example there is a learning area statement for Siswati-Home Language, Siswati-First Additional Language, and Siswati-Second Additional Language, and so on, for all the other ten official languages. Yet, non-official or foreign languages, although supported by the NCS, and which can be taught and learnt as Second Additional Languages, do not, in this band, have a learning area statement dedicated to them. There are, therefore, no Learning Outcomes specific to, for example, French as a Second Additional Language nor Assessment Standards. A school governing body wishing to offer its learners a non-official language as a subject in the GET band, finds no guidance in any of the NCS documents as to the modalities of implementation of non-official language teaching. Furthermore, this lack of information gives educators of those languages a sense of exclusion.

The basic requirements for the implementation of the multilingual language-in-education policy, set out in the NCS GET band curriculum are, therefore, incomplete. The multilingualism it defines is also limited. The three-part definition (quoted above) of, and implementation requirements for additive multilingualism rest in fact on two imperatives: the recognition of the value of the home language which is an official language, and the early, sustained teaching and learning of another official language, which for a minimum of three years, has to be an indigenous African language. The emphasis is consequently on two official languages. The learning of a third language, the Second Additional Language, is not required and plays a minor role, while non-official languages, as shown above, have virtually no status whatsoever.

The emphasis on a home language[2] is a recognition of the cognitive benefits of learning through the home language and is to be lauded. The principle of mother-tongue instruction has strong pedagogical foundations[3]. Moreover, this policy of home language instruction is in line with the Constitution which provides for the promotion and creation of conditions for the development and use of all official languages and provides for every person to have the right to study in their own language.

The introduction of another official language, the First Additional language, right from Grade 1, and continued until Grade 9, effectively means that learners are immersed in bilingual education at a very early age. This requirement has cognitive and emotional benefits which are well documented and are referred to specifically in the Language in Education Policy document:

> [...] drawing on comparative international experience [it has been demonstrated that], under appropriate conditions, most learners benefit cognitively and emotionally from the type of structured bilingual education found in dual-medium (also known as two-way immersion) programmes (*Language in Education Policy,* 1997: 2).

However, this policy of bilingualism only partially realises the goal of promoting multilingualism. In reality, the first additional language, for the vast majority of all those learners who are not mother-tongue speakers of English, is more than likely to be English because School Governing Bodies believe it is the best choice if upliftment is to be achieved.

According to census statistics (2001), the most-spoken language in South Africa is Zulu, with 23.8% of the population speaking Zulu as their home language[4]. Merely 8.2% of the population are English mother-tongue speakers. The number of mother-tongue English speakers is decreasing due to emigration and in the 25-34 age group only about 7% speak English (*Independent on Saturday,* 19 October 2002).

Despite the above facts and although all eleven official languages have equal status according to the Constitution, English is in effect the *lingua franca* of the country and the *de facto* language of state, politics, justice and broadcasting[5]. Furthermore, and more significantly with regard to education, English is perceived as the language of prestige, of power, and of financial and professional success. As Minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ncguka said at the launch of the Advancing Multilingualism in a Democratic South Africa conference in Durban in April 2004, there is a perception of a "lack of, or poor economic value attached to [...] indigenous languages" (*Daily News,* 1 April 2004).

The LANGTAG[6] language-in-education policy (1996: 124) states that the learner's home language should be used as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and the goal of language-in-education policy is, *inter alia,* to "promote the use of students' primary languages as languages of learning and teaching" (*Towards a National Language Plan for South Africa,* 1996: 124). The reality in schools, however, is that learners, and the care-givers who support them, want to be proficient in English, and choose English as the LOLT. Consequently, the first additional language for the vast majority of non-English speakers, is English.

According to Professor Vivian de Klerk of Rhodes University's Department of Linguistics, "English is fast overtaking indigenous languages as parents send their children to English-speaking schools at the expense of the indigenous languages" (*Daily News,* 1 April 2004). Professor Lydia McDermott of the Multilingual Studies Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, notes that in most schools in northern KwaZulu-Natal, where she trains teachers, the LOLT is, in practice, a mixture of English and Zulu, with learners writing the Grade 12 exam in English, a language they do not understand well and in which they have not learnt to conceptualise or formulate ideas (discussion with Professor Lydia McDermott, 21 May 2004).

So while the goal of policy is to promote multilingualism, and to encourage the acquisition of at least two South African languages, the loose requirements make for a situation where learners acquire one other official language apart from the home language, and for the majority, this first additional language is English. In this way, learning English is therefore not strictly promoting multilingualism, it is in fact reinforcing the hegemony of English and undermining the value of other languages. Today, the perception is that not being proficient in English will limit success in the workplace. However, learning in a language which is not the home language is cognitively indefensible.

With regard to the Second Additional Language, the requirement that all learners learn an African language for a minimum of three years is aimed at increasing learners' knowledge of

South African languages, and goes some way to opening the lines of communication and understanding between fellow citizens who have been separated for decades. However, learning a language for a mere three years with little timetable time allocated to it in schools cannot afford any real proficiency of use.

With regard to the stated role and function of languages in general and foreign languages in particular, the Languages Learning Area statement in the GET band curriculum statement supports the NCS policy commitment to multilingualism by making a clear and convincing case regarding the importance of language and languages. The intrinsic value of language learning is recognised as the means through which human beings shape their identity and knowledge of the world:

> Languages are central to our lives. We communicate and understand our world through language. Language thus shapes our identity and knowledge (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 5).

The statement goes on to present language as unique amongst all the eight learning areas as the means through which all other learning and teaching takes place. The uniqueness of languages as an integrative tool and as contributing to the curriculum is acknowledged in the following manner:

> It develops reading and writing, the foundation for other important literacies.
> It is the medium for much of the other learning in the curriculum, such as Mathematics and the Social Sciences.
> It encourages intercultural understanding, access to other views, and a critical understanding of the concept of culture.
> It stimulates imaginative and creative activity, and thus promotes the goals of arts and culture.
> It provides a way of communicating information, and promotes many of the goals of science, technology and environmental education.
> It develops the critical tools necessary to become responsible citizens (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 5-6).

The privileged position of languages is clear from its ranking position in the list of learning areas. The Languages Learning Area is one of the eight learning areas[7] and holds a honoured position in the NCS GET band curriculum. This importance is evident first in the nomenclature of the learning areas. "Languages" is systematically and repeatedly in all documentation the first on the list of the eight learning areas. This representational significance is then given credence in the statements regarding the role of language.

Languages serve a variety of purposes, which are reflected in the Languages Learning Area Statement. These are:

- Personal – to sustain, develop and transform identities; to sustain relationships in family and community; and for personal growth and pleasure.
- Communicative – to communicate appropriately and effectively in a variety of social contexts.
- Educational – to develop tools for thinking and reasoning, and to provide access to information.

- Aesthetic – to create, interpret and play imaginatively with oral, visual and written texts.
- Cultural – to understand and appreciate languages and cultures, and the heritage they carry.
- Political – to assert oneself and challenge others; to persuade others of a particular point of view; to position oneself and others; and to sustain, develop and transform identities.
- Critical – to understand the relationships between language, power and identity, and to challenge uses of these where necessary; to understand the dynamic nature of culture; and to resist persuasion and positioning where necessary (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 5).

However, the learning area statement falls short in its description of the purpose of learning a Second Additional Language, particularly when this Second Additional Language is a non-official language. According to the NCS, the learning of a Second Additional Language has a practical purpose only; the aim is for the learner to be able to communicate with speakers of the language:

> The purpose of learning a second additional language is to be able to interact effectively with other South Africans. Part of being a good South African citizen is being multilingual (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 9).

In the case of a Second Additional Language which is a foreign language, over and above its function as a tool for communication, the added purpose is that the foreign language could prepare learners for a particular profession:

> Learners may also study a foreign language such as French [...] as their second additional language. This will enable them to communicate with people from other parts of Africa and the world. It can prepare them to work in tourism (*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9: Languages,* 2002: 9).

Taken at face value, this type of argument regarding communicative competence and the "usefulness" of Second Additional Languages as a tool for general communication and for the workplace is compelling, and it has often been used by supporters of foreign languages. For the general public, and particularly today when jobs are at a premium, the "relevance" of a subject in practical terms is very important. However, consideration of the realities of the classroom experience reveal that the stated aim "to prepare for the world of work" is not attainable even in the most ideal of circumstances.

First of all, too little time is allocated on the timetable to Second Additional Language learning for any kind of real communicative proficiency to be attained. Of the thirty-five hours formal teaching time per week, 25% is allocated to languages, that is 8.5 hours per week for all languages. This is divided amongst the two or perhaps three languages learnt, one of which is the LOLT, which could be an additional language, rather than a home language, and therefore needing special attention. Consequently, few learners complete Grade 9 with the foreign language skills required to prepare them to work competently using that language in a profession[8].

Thus to claim that the purpose of learning a foreign language is to enable learners to communicate in that language in their personal and professional lives is, at best, misleading and in the context

of a pluralistically cultural society such as the one in South Africa, short-sighted. To state simply that the purpose of learning a Second Additional Language is for general communication and employment only confuses practical use with educational intent. The value of learning a Second Additional Language, and particularly one which is not a South African language, goes beyond its practical usefulness.

2.3 NCS FET band

The NCS FET band, like the GET band curriculum, affords languages a privileged position. In the six clustered fields of learning[9] Languages are in first position in the list and language is defined in an all-encompassing manner:

> Language is a tool for thought and communication. It is through language that cultural diversity and social relations are expressed and constructed. Learning to use language effectively enables learners to think and acquire knowledge, to express their identity, feelings and ideas, to interact with others and to manage their world (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003: 9).

Furthermore, as in the GET band curriculum, the purpose of language learning is defined in broad, holistic terms. The purpose of language learning in these higher grades falls essentially under two desired outcomes – the fostering of cross-cultural communication and tolerance:

> In view of the linguistic and cultural diversity of South Africa, its citizens must be able to communicate across language barriers and foster cultural and linguistic tolerance and understanding (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003: 9).

and developing an all-encompassing literacy:

> [...] languages are the basis of all learning, not only in everyday life but also in the workplace... Language is a gateway subject ... Literacy is the basis for the completion of daily tasks and contributes to the life skills the learner needs to deal with the world. Language is a tool that can facilitate meaningful relationships (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003: 12).

A major difference between the GET band curriculum and the FET band curriculum is that in the FET band curriculum Home and First Additional Languages are grouped together in one learning field, while Second Additional Languages are in another learning field. In the GET band curriculum, all three categories of language are grouped under the Learning Area Languages. In the FET curriculum, Home and First Additional Languages are part of the Languages (Fundamentals) learning field while Second Additional Languages are in the learning field Human and Social Studies and Languages. This division effectively eliminates the lack of clarity characteristic of the GET curriculum with regard to the position of Second Additional Languages and allows for differentiation in the rules of combination[10].

However, although in the FET curriculum the importance of language, per se, is recognised and a distinction is made between Home and First Additional languages on the one hand and Second Additional languages on the other, the importance and relevance of non-official languages, which include foreign languages, is given even less place than in the GET band curriculum. The minor status of non-official languages in the FET band curriculum is evident in that no printed version of Subject statements for the 13 non-official languages[11] is available.

These subject statements are only available on the Department of Education's Website. Further, there are no specific Learning Programme guidelines or Subject Assessment guidelines. The English Second Additional Language Subject Assessment guidelines and Leaning Programme guidelines are applicable to all non-official languages.

They are only referred to twice in the Languages Learning Field description and on both occasions in a vague and indeterminate manner. The first time non-official languages are referred to is under the rubric *Purpose* where they are referred to as "further languages":

> Learners are obliged to include at least two official languages as Fundamental subjects and further languages may be taken as Core and/or Elective subjects (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003: 9).

The second time they are mentioned is under the rubric Language levels and the meaning of the statement is particularly unclear:

> The Subjects Statements for Home, First Additional and Second Additional Languages may be versioned for approved non-official languages, and these languages may be offered as Core or Elective Components of the Curriculum (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003: 11).

Thus, effectively, the NCS FET curriculum makes no case whatsoever for non-official languages. They are not defined, and their purpose, scope and relevance are not explained.

3. The value of learning a foreign language[12]

3.1 Overview

As asserted earlier, the value of learning languages other than official languages goes beyond practical usefulness. Firstly, learning a foreign language has educational value which is pertinent in any geographical or social context in that it provides an opportunity for personal growth. Secondly, learning languages other than our own official languages has implications for the shaping of values which are vital in a pluralistic cultural context such as South Africa.

At the most basic level, learning foreign languages is an experience which leads to personal growth. It is "broadening". Expressing and negotiating meaning in a language which is foreign conjure up questions and critical appraisals of both the familiar and the unfamiliar, thereby leading to a better knowledge of self, of others, and to an awareness of one's place in the greater scheme of things. Learning the language of an Other, on the one hand, widens the context of one's own life, geographically, intellectually and emotionally, and on the other, leads individuals to see themselves as a part of the larger whole, the parts of which are linked and interlinked.

This broadened view of the world is one of the fundamental aims of education. Much has been written about what it means to be an educated person. Jarvis (1980) argues that what characterises an uneducated person is a limited world view, one with little sense of being part of a wider context, of being part of a community of humankind. He goes on to say that for the "uneducated" person, life is limited to the immediate surroundings and there is little curiosity about what is not known and little tolerance of that which is unfamiliar. The educated person, he argues, has a broad view of the world, is responsive to the multiplicity of ways of seeing, perceives phenomena as complex, and is aware of the interrelated nature of all things.

While acquiring another language, learners embark on the road of becoming informed human beings, and along the way learn about other human beings, their similarities and their differences. They learn to understand themselves and others. Education is about personal growth and the development of the community. Foreign language learning fosters this growth and development through learning about different peoples and cultures.

At a deeper level, the study of languages serves to help us understand that which we as humans have in common. Language is an expression of our essential humanness, that is, what we share as human beings and makes us distinct from other forms of life. Different languages express the diversity of human action, of how socially, culturally and politically humankind interacts in diverse ways with the physical and metaphysical worlds. Learning languages, and particularly languages which are foreign to the cultures of the country we live in, is a valuable means to enable individuals to reflect on humankind, on difference, to learn to be tolerant of these differences, and more importantly, to understand them:

> In studying languages other than our own, we are seeking to understand (and, indeed, in at least a weak sense, to become) the Other – we are, in short, attempting to enter into realities that have, to some degree, been constructed by others and in which many of the fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge and society may be different from our own (Reagan & Osborn, 2002: 13).

But learning a foreign language also helps us understand the diversity that underlies, not only our languages, but also our way of constructing and organising knowledge and the many different, equally valid, realities in which we live and interact.

In the context of a pluralistic society this last benefit is perhaps the most important argument in favour of learning a foreign language. In order to speak another language competently, one is required not only to learn about the other, one is also required to restructure one's view of reality, and learn to see the world differently.

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Lyons, 1990) there is a correlation between language and perception. Although the debate regarding linguistic determinism is no longer as intensely discussed as it was thirty years ago and even though the more extreme hypothesis has fallen into disrepute, most linguists, psychologists, and philosophers would accept that language has a certain influence on perception and thought. Speakers of different languages may have the same conceptual framework as far as deep philosophical concepts of space and time are concerned, however, with regard to other less basic concepts the world views of different language speakers are different. Many of the concepts with which we operate are culture-bound. For example, the concepts of the French words *orgueil* (honour), *patrie* (fatherland), or *honneur* (honour), or even *cuisine* (cooking/food) depend for their understanding upon socially transmitted knowledge and cannot be simply described, but need to be explained within the context of specific social practices. Another oft-used example of culturally determined meaning is that of the pronouns of address. How to use *du* (you, in informal address) and *Sie* (you, in formal address) in German is a matter of socially acquired knowledge. It falls into the category of social know-how.

Learning the language of the Other requires knowledge of the patterns of living, acting, reacting, seeing and explaining the world of the target country. Knowledge of a foreign language encompasses much more than a passing acquaintance with the grammatical system of the language.

This aspect of foreign language learning is what makes it distinct from any other discipline:

> Languages are unlike any other subject taught in a classroom in that they involve the acquisition of skills and behaviour patterns which are characteristic of another community (Gardner,1985 cited in Reagan & Osborn, 2002: 64).

Communicating successfully in a foreign language entails expressing a culture, a world-view which might be distinct from that of the learner's. To speak Greek appropriately requires that learners assimilate and/or identify with Greek behaviour and establish a personal profile which functions appropriately in Greek communication events. Establishing such an identity in the target language requires the speaker to undergo a process of transformation in which a new culturally competent identity comes into being.

Foreign language acquisition, therefore, is the result of a fusion between the learner and that to-be-learned; the two cannot be separated. Foreign language acquisition entails an understanding, and a "becoming" to some extent like the Other. In "becoming" like the Other, one identifies with ways of being and of seeing the world, one understands differences. In this way, foreign language learning goes a long way towards promoting the values of tolerance and openness and preparing learners to live in a pluralistic society[13].

3.2 The value of foreign languages in South Africa and the concept of ubuntu

This brings us to the other function of learning languages other than one's own national languages, that of developing in learners values which exemplify the moral aspirations of the South African nation as laid down in the Constitution. The Working Group on Values, Education and Democracy, formed by the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, states in the introduction to its report that:

> [...] public education is one of the major vehicles by which the values of a people are acquired by the children and young adults who make up our schools' population (*Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy,* 2000: 2).

The Constitution expresses the values and moral aspirations of the nation and Gevisser and Morris (2002: 191) have identified therein ten fundamental values which have relevance for education: democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, an open society, accountability, the rule of law, respect, reconciliation, and *ubuntu*. It is this latter concept of *ubuntu* which is of particular relevance in the context of learning foreign languages as it is a concept the meaning of which dovetails admirably with the above discussion regarding the personal growth capacity of foreign language learning. The fostering of the spirit of *ubuntu* is inextricably linked to the educating role of foreign language learning.

The concept of *ubuntu* defies a word for word translation as it encompasses a complex, rich web of meanings. In Asmal and Wilmot's *Spirit of the Nation: Reflections on South Africa's Educational Ethos* (2002), the concept comes up as the subject of discussion on numerous occasions, and definitions are varied. Battersby (2002: 30) talks of *ubuntu* as an ethos of tolerance and generosity of spirit. Porteous (2002: 228) argues that while the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* places *ubuntu* within the broad framework of tolerance, her research in schools shows that learners, parents and teachers place the concept more in the realm of humanity, kindness and compassion. Gevisser and Morris (2002: 193) confirm this interpretation;

they note that *ubuntu* is an ethos deriving from African mores which means "I am human because you are human". O'Regan (2002: 165) also stresses the humanity aspect by understanding the concept to mean: "human beings are human beings because of other human beings". Indeed, at the centre of *ubuntu* is the idea, expressed in Zulu, that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* which Shutte (2001: 3) has translated as "persons depend on persons to be persons". This expression sums up the ethic of *ubuntu* which is based on the ethic of communalism, collectivity and solidarity:

> The idea of community is the heart of traditional African thinking about humanity. It is summed up in the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [...]. This means that a person depends on personal relations with others to exercise, develop and fulfil those capacities that make one a person. At the beginning of one's life one is only potentially a person. One's life, if all goes well, is a continual becoming more of a person through one's interactions with others. Personhood comes as a gift from other persons (Shutte, 2001: 12).

These various definitions have one compelling understanding in common: *ubuntu* encapsulates what it means to be human and, in existentialist terms, expresses the belief that for the self to realise its essence as a human, it needs to interact with others. Furthermore, its actions towards the Other need to consider the humanness of the Other. Actions must therefore be humane, expressing tolerance, generosity of spirit, compassion:

> [...] *ubuntu* [...] embodies the concept of mutual understanding and the active appreciation of the value of human difference. It requires you to know others if you are to know yourself, and if you are to understand your place – and others' – within a multicultural environment (Gevisser & Morris, 2002: 193).

Ubuntu therefore has a particular relevance in a society, like the South African one, made up of different ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic groups. *Ubuntu* also resonates strikingly with the above definition of what it means to be educated and the contribution that learning languages other than one's own brings to the process of personal growth. Learning the languages of the Other fosters the spirit of *ubuntu* in that learning about the Other, their ways of being, living and thinking, entails understanding the diversity of human action and how different cultures interact in different ways with the world. Arguably, the more the Other is "foreign", the greater the effort involved to bridge the gap between self and Other. This greater effort leads to greater possibilities of personal growth and greater fostering of the spirit of *ubuntu.*

South Africa is made up of diverse South African cultures and "unity in diversity", South Africa's national motto, needs to be encouraged in schools through the fostering of the values of tolerance, respect, and *ubuntu.* Paradoxically, twelve years into democracy, the need to develop the spirit of *ubuntu* is becoming an even greater imperative. This is not because racial tension among South Africans is necessarily on the increase, but because South African society is made up more and more of non-South Africans of foreign cultures who are not being accepted by the South African population. Xenophobia has become a fact of South African life.

Between 1994 and 2003 a total number of 49 382 immigrants entered South Africa of whom just over half came from African countries. For the same period, there was a nationwide total of 152 414 refugee applications and 885 081 illegal immigrants from African countries who have been repatriated over the period 1999 to 2003. One can safely assume that if just under

one million illegal immigrants were repatriated over five years, another million undocumented migrants[14] are still in the country.

The movement of people across the borders of states is a feature of modern global societies. South Africa, as a modern society, is not immune to the growing phenomenon. However, in South Africa, the presence of migrants has led to xenophobic and racist reactions and these reactions have become a disturbing and increasingly prevalent feature of the society.

The University of Pennsylvania report (1998) on xenophobia details the findings of an investigation in 1996 and 1997 into the status of migrants in South Africa and notes widespread abuse. This abuse comes in many forms and is perpetrated by officials, employers, as well as those who feel threatened economically. Abuse is in the form of exploitation of labourers on farms and in mines; assault, bribery and theft by officials in the army and by police during the arrest process; the use of discriminatory, racist and unreliable identification means as a basis for deportation. People are arrested for being "too black", for having a foreign name, or for "walking like a Mozambican". In the detention centres living conditions have been found to be unhygienic and dangerous with several reports of physical abuse. The report states:

> In general, South Africa's public culture has become increasingly xenophobic, politicians make unsubstantiated and inflammatory statements that the 'deluge' of migrants is responsible for the current crime wave, rising unemployment, or even the spread of diseases. As the unfounded perception that migrants are responsible for a variety of social ills grows, migrants have increasingly become the target of abuse at the hands of South African citizens, as well as members of the police, the army, and the Department of Home Affairs. Refugees and asylum-seekers with distinctive features from far-away countries are especially targeted for abuse (University of Pennsylvania, 1998: 4).

The report goes on to detail how foreign traders are targets of intimidation and endure physical and verbal abuse from local traders while getting no protection from the police. These attacks and the attendant looting have been reported in areas in Gauteng province where gangs go about in a bid to "clean the township of foreigners".

Intolerant reactions to foreigners in South Africa have been explained within the context of poverty, unemployment and limited social mobility. With an unemployment rate of 41.8%,[15] and little real hope of improving one's living conditions, the poor and jobless do not want to share and are afraid of losing possible opportunities to non-South Africans. There is resentment, fear, anger and a sense of injustice. These considerations of economic survival are compelling arguments to explain the wave of xenophobia. Another compelling argument is related to questions of morality and values.

The South African Human Rights Commission at a consultative conference on xenophobia held in Braamfontein in 1998 acknowledged that "there is an increase in the level of xenophobia in the country" and adopted a Programme of Action which proposed, inter alia, the following:

> South Africans are urged to practise African cultural values like *ubuntu* ("hospitality and solidarity") in their relations with others in their midst (South African Human Rights Commission, 1998: 2).

There is indeed a need to develop the values of *ubuntu*, of tolerance and solidarity. The wave of immigration into South Africa is changing the parameters of diversity. Diversity no longer

refers only to the different cultural groups making up the South African nation. South African society is diverse in that it now includes a growing number of "Others" who are foreign. Since 1994 South Africans have lauded themselves thankfully, although somewhat bemusedly, for the "miracle" that has taken place. Despite years of racism and separation, there has generally been tolerance and goodwill amongst the South African races and cultures. These values and a "spirit of generosity" or *ubuntu,* are not being shown, however, to those peoples coming from foreign lands. Ordinary South Africans are not accommodating to the reality of continental mixing or global multiculturalism. The challenge of diversity is shifting. The issue now is how South African society and the institutions of society such as schools can foster the spirit of *ubuntu,* of tolerance of diversity in relation to that which is foreign. Individuals need to be prepared for life in a global society in which borders are fluid and the presence of foreigners is a fact of daily life. The values of *ubuntu* need to be garnered to bring about this tolerance of the Other which is not South African.

4. Conclusion

In relegating foreign languages to the sidelines by limiting their role, and by not supporting them actively, the NCS is promoting and implementing a selective multilingualism. This selective multilingualism, with the only hard and fast implementational stipulation being that learners are required to learn two official languages, confines the multilingual framework within which South African education has been conceived to a narrow "safrocentrism", that is, centred on that which is South African.

Cultural diversity and multilingualism are supported in the freedom of choice that the NCS allows, however, these principles are not promoted. The open-ended interpretations of language learning requirements that the NCS invites, allow the vast majority of learners who have an African language as their home language to get through the educational system having learnt their home language and one other language, which, as mentioned above, will in all likelihood be English.

Understanding the way of living of a foreign people is important to the survival of a world in which there are conflicting value systems and where borders which in the past isolated and protected people from foreigners and foreign ideas are crumbling as a result of the needs of the down-trodden in search for a better life. How is one to liberate one's ideas from the laager of ethnocentrism and xenophobia if not through the study of other cultures? It is crucial to recognise that in order to penetrate foreign cultures, knowledge of foreign languages is imperative.

I have attempted to show that the challenge for South Africa is to work towards a truly comprehensive multilingual perspective which takes into consideration the past, present, as well as the future reality of South African society. To entrench the citizenry in a limited South African multilingualism is to repeat the exclusiveness of the Afrikaner Nationalists in the time of apartheid.

Education needs to prepare learners, the future full citizens of the country, for a borderless society, along with the demands this brings for tolerance, acceptance and inclusion. If South Africa is to be a truly democratic country not only for its own citizens but for all its inhabitants, education needs to play a role in the transformation of attitudes, in the development of values

– particularly the value of *ubuntu*. South African education needs to acknowledge in practice the reality of being one with the world, of joining a global society. Actively promoting *ubuntu*, by requiring the learning of foreign languages (the languages of the Other of a different country) can go a long way in preparing the population to live harmoniously and productively in the new open globalised reality.

I believe that education needs to go beyond the present multilingual educational policy to include non-South African languages and cultures. For the NCS's multiculturalism to be truly multicultural and to prepare learners for the realities of the future, it needs to promote the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

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Notes

[1] PANSALB, the Pan South African Language Board, was established in 1996 on the basis of a constitutional directive to manage language development and the protection of language rights. The Board reports to the Minister of Arts and Culture. With regard to foreign languages the Pansalb document states: "A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must: b) promote and ensure respect for: 1). all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil Telegu and Urdu [...] (PANSALB, 1998. *Pansalb's position on the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa.* 1998. Pretoria: Pansalb.)

[2] Home language refers to "the language most often spoken at home, which is not necessarily the person's mother tongue" (Statistics South Africa, 2003:vii) but which is the language learners understand and speak when first coming to school in Grade R. The home language is in the vast majority of cases is the mother tongue. A PANSALB survey undertaken in 2001 states that: "Contrary to many public assumptions about this, there are fewer South Africans who appear to make use of code mixing (i.e. mix other languages in with the dominant home language) on an individual basis in their homes. [...] The often-cited practice of multilingual communities mixing codes, appears to have been exaggerated" (PANSALB 2001).

[3] In the 2003 UNESCO Guidelines on Language and Education it is stated that: "UNESCO supports mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers." It goes on to state as its first principle that "[m]other tongue instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy and should be extended to as late a stage in education as possible: every pupil should begin her [or her] formal education in his [or her] mother tongue" (UNESCO, 2003:28).

[4] IsiXhosa is spoken by 17.6% of the population, Afrikaans by 13.3%, Sepedi by 9.4%, Setswana by 8.2%, English by 8.2%, Sesotho by 7.9%, Xitsonga by 4.4%, SiSwati by 2.7%, Tshivenda by 2.3%, isiNdebele by 1.6%, and other languages by 0.5% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2003).

[5] On this issue of the use of all official languages in broadcasting, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has clearly stated that the implementation of policy in this regard is mitigated by practical considerations: "The SABC has a mandate in terms of the broadcasting act to broadcast in all the official languages – but this cannot be taken to mean that all must get equal time on the SABC's TV channels. This would be impractical and unaffordable. What the SABC aims to give the language groups is a fair share of airtime. Broadcasting is not about upholding language rights, but about understandable communication with the audience in general" (*The Independent on Saturday,* September 19, 2002).

[6] LANGTAG was a Language Task Group, convened by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, to advise government on developing a policy and implementation plan based on the constitutional language provisions. The Task Group presented government with a comprehensive report, the LANGTAG Report, 1996, which provided a clear framework for the development of a language policy and plan.

[7] The eight Learning Areas are: Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, Economic and Management Sciences, and Technology.

[8] A survey of schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal showed that in Grades 8 and 9 learners received a maximum of five periods per week of instruction in French which amounted to approximately one hundred hours of instruction per year.

[9] The term Learning Area has been replaced in the NCS Grades 10-12 by the term Learning Field which groups subjects. These learning fields are formed with the GET learning areas and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) organising fields in mind. The six fields of learning are: Languages (Fundamentals); Arts and Culture; Business, Commerce, Management and Service Studies; Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology; Human and Social Studies and Languages; and Physical, Mathematical, Computer, Life and Agricultural Sciences.

[10] The rules of combination for the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) state that "Learners are obliged to include at least two official languages as Fundamental subjects and further languages may be taken as Core and /or Elective subjects" (*National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12: General,* 2003:9).

[11] The 13 non-official languages, which include foreign languages, are Arabic, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu.

[12] Many of the arguments pertaining to the value of learning a foreign language apply equally to the learning of any additional language, and hence also to the learning of second languages.

[13] The UNESCO International Conference on Education (2001) emphasised the importance of foreign language learning "as part of an intercultural education aiming at the promotion of understanding between communities and between nations" (UNESCO, 2003:26).

[14] Illegal aliens is a term that Human Rights Watch considers objectionable, and prefers the term "undocumented migrants".

[15] This is the unemployment rate at September 2003 provided by Statistics SA and cited in the Witness newspaper of 26 March 2004. The figure of 41.8% is the expanded definition of the unemployment rate which includes learners, students, home-makers, retirees, people disabled to the extent that they are unable to work and unemployed people who have not looked for work for a month. The rate of unemployment of the "officially unemployed" is at 28.2%. The officially unemployed are those who have not worked in the previous seven days, are available to start work in the following week and who have actively looked for work in the previous month.

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