Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the use and Acceptability of 'Translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context

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Abstract

The paper explores translanguaging patterns within a South African setting in general, and within the Xitsonga classrooms at M.L Nkuna High School in particular. A qualitative approach was employed, and a case study design was adopted. The purpose of the research was to track translanguaging patterns within Xitsonga lessons in order to improve the performance of learners who use Xitsonga as a home language. It sought to clarify the impact of translanguaging in the process of teaching and learning of Xitsonga Home Language at the school in question, to explore how the concept of translanguaging served to improve or hinder the teaching and learning of Xitsonga at the school, and whether or not, teachers are effectively using translanguaging within the School (GET) classrooms. This, however, was carried out with the learners' linguistic background in mind. The study found that teachers are not familiar with translanguaging and they do not see translanguaging as a mechanism that can help in improving the performance of learners in Xitsonga. It was also discovered that translanguaging is not used effectively in classrooms despite the evidence that some learners are doing Xitsonga at school as home language, while at home a different language is spoken. Also, the occurrence of translanguaging patterns is poor. Therefore, translanguaging is not effectively used to enhance the teaching and learning of Xitsonga Home Language at M.L Nkuna High School.

Keywords— Translanguaging, Codeswitching, Xitsonga, Mkhuhlu, South Africa, High school

BACKGROUND

Translanguaging is a term that refers to the use of two or more languages by individuals who are bilingual or multilingual (Mokolo, 2014). definition Mokolo's proposes translanguaging is a practice to improve the process of teaching and learning. Moreover, it has been suggested that translanguaging, if used in classrooms, would facilitate teaching and learning process (Mokolo, 2014). The paper seeks to explore this notion as a case at M.L Nkuna High School Grade 8. The reason for this choice is that Xitsonga is considered as an official home language in the said school. The pass percentages of Xitsonga at the school remain below average. Furthermore, the school

admits learners from other language groups, and teachers are not linguistically limited to one place in terms of employment. This research is triggered by learners' performance and the understanding that the learners' populace emanates from diverse language backgrounds. The researcher maintains that translanguaging in multilingual classrooms can be applicable if the teacher accommodates the diverse language groups within the classroom environment.

There are several policies implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important to draw from these policies. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) outlines that children have

rights and one of those rights is access to quality education. Moreover, it outlines that every learner has a right to be taught in the language of their choice including their mother tongue. South African Schools Act (1997) reiterates the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, but vary in their provisions in the form of Acts and suggests that for a learner to be taught in his/her language of choice, they should qualify in quantity (in respect of teacher-learner ratio) in order to influence change in the school's language policy.

Recently. there has been systematic assessments conducted within foundation phases of South African schools which are termed the Annual National Assessments (ANA, 2011). A case in point is the one outlined by the Department of Basic Education (DoE) in ANA (2011) report that was set to measure the quality of learning outcomes in the education system of South Africa. ANA's focal point was on learners' levels of achievement in the early years of schooling (Grades 1-8) and Grade 9. ANA aimed to provide feedback to both teachers and parents on the achievements of learners in literacy and numeracy. As a result, ANA (2011) results demonstrated that learners obtained 28% and less in language and more than 30% in mathematics. The results displayed mediocrity of competencies which learners obtained, and this led to the realisation that indeed there are crisis in the impoverished schools of South Africa, mostly in the rural areas.

The findings for Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces show that learners within our classrooms fail to achieve a pass mark for benchmark in vocabulary development and have little exposure to reading and writing even in their Home Languages (HL). The ANA report (2011) suggested that comprehension skills were generally low to poor. In the case of M.L Nkuna high school, some learners almost have little or no exposure to Xitsonga at home, though they enroll for Xitsonga as a Home Language.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

M.L. Nkuna High School is located in Mkhuhlu area where the predominant languages are Xitsonga and Siswati. The language policy provides for Xitsonga as an official Home Language (HL), yet there are those who speak Siswati and other languages as their Home Languages. The problem in this school is the high failure rate of Xitsonga Home Language. This study is conducted to explore the patterns of translanguaging at M.L Nkuna High School. Garcia (2015) suggests that translanguaging can be used to enhance learners' learning experiences. Moreover, Garcia's statement clearly outlines importance of using translanguaging in the classroom to promote effective teaching and learning experiences. The ANA (2011) results demonstrate that the level of achievement for learners in languages is poor including their Home Language. The ANA findings may be practical to the situation of M.L Nkuna High School. The South African Language Policy (2011) stipulates that learners must be taught in their Home Language at early years of schooling, but the language to be used thereafter is English/Afrikaans in all content subjects. Factors such as lack of resources, background, and the multilingualism hinder the efficiency of translanguaging at schools in general (PanSALB, 1995).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature by scholars who embarked on research studies related to translanguaging within classrooms and the broader educational fraternity. The debate in the literary works of early researchers is recognised and closely examined and the related concepts like scaffolding, language attitude, language proficiency, language learning, language transfer, biliteracy and code-switching are paramount to this study, and worth exploring in relation to the translanguaging patterns at M.L. Nkuna High School.

Translanguaging: Definition and Conceptual Exploration

Garcia (2015) defines translanguaging as a process which students and teachers can engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students. Garcia (2015) argues that this process occurs in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate appropriate knowledge and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality. Garcia's definition of translanguaging suggests that learning a new language does not happen separately from the language already learnt, which he calls old language, but explains that these languages should be used to enhance understanding from one to the other. Cummins (1979); Hornberger and Link (2012) back Garcia's view by outlining that the range or continuum of practice is possible translanguaging work including oral to written, receptive to expressive, and encouraging the movement of understanding of one language to inform understanding of another.

Baker (2014) maintains that translanguaging is a process of making meaning, shaping experiences. gaining understanding knowledge using two languages. From the above perspective, the creation of a clear meaning comes as the use of two languages (L1 and L2) in the concept formation. Cummins, Garcia, Honberger, Link and Baker use the term translanguaging as a technique that would help to build up learners' cognitive development using two languages, hence this research study is conducted to explore the translanguaging patterns at M.L Nkuna High School. Williams and Baker (2015) found that in schools where translanguaging was used, learners performed better in almost all subjects.

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to build up learners' cognitive development using two languages. Baker's sense and angle of exploration around the the term 'translanguaging' is in line with the present study and will assist greatly in fledging and giving direction in the unfolding of the study.

According to Garcia (2013), translanguaging is a multiple discursive practice that bilingual speakers use to understand the bilingual world in which they live. The term stresses the flexible and meaningful actions through which bilinguals select features in their linguistic order communicate repertoire in to appropriately. From this perspective, the language practices being learned by emergent bilinguals are in functional interrelationship with other language practices and form an integrated system. Translanguaging is more than code switching, which considers that the two languages are separate systems (or codes) that are switched for communicative purposes. For Garcia (2013), translanguaging is not a mere strategy. It comprises a bilingual theory of learning, especially for language-minoritised populations. In fact, translanguaging becomes framework for conceptualizing education of bilinguals, as a democratic endeavor for social justice.

Blackledge and Creese (2010) describes translanguaging as an emergent concept in the recent shift from traditional 'separate' bilingual education to a more 'flexible' pedagogy in bilingual education. Moreover, they maintain that translanguaging does not view the languages of bilinguals as separate linguistic systems. This view on translanguaging "offers new spaces to be exploited for innovative programs, curricular, and practices that recognize, value, and build on the multiple repertoires" mobile communicative (Hornberger and Link, 2012: 261). Given the focus of this review, it is reasonable to argue that the current study will benefit vastly in both focus and conceptual framing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory is a scientifically acceptable set of principles offered to explain a phenomenon.

Theories provide frameworks for interpreting environmental observations and serve as bridges between research and education (Copenhagen, 2013). Theory is important in a study because it serves as a lens of a study. The theory to guide this study is behaviourism by Skinner (1990) wherein, he believes that behaviour explains the speaker's verbal activity as an effect of environmental contingencies. According to him, reinforcement of appropriate grammar and language would therefore lead a child's acquisition of language and grammar. He further notes that a child acquires verbal relatively behaviour when unpatterned vocalisations, selectively reinforced gradually assume forms which produce appropriate consequences in a given verbal community.

Skinner (1990) considers communication of knowledge or facts as just the process of making new response to the speaker. A basic assumption of this theory is that all language including private, internal discourse is a behaviour that developed in the same manner as other skills. He also believed that a sentence is merely part of a behaviour chain each element of which provides a conditional stimulus for the production of the succeeding element. The probability of verbal response was contingent on four things: reinforcement, stimulus control, deprivation and adverse stimulation. The interactions of these things in a child's environment would lead to particular associations, on the basis of all languages. Whether the speech was internal or dialogic, reinforced positively or negatively, all languages can be considered behaviour that is conditioned and learned

Nevertheless, Skinnerian position still holds credibility, as education depends on communication. It is accepted that a large part of classroom interactions is mediated through language. For the learner to receive and transmit knowledge coherently, a certain level of language is therefore essential (Mchanzime, 2001). Language is a crucial means of gaining access to important knowledge and skills. In fact, it is the key to cognitive development and can promote or impede scholastic success (Ovando & McClaren, 2010). The researcher

chose Skinner's theory because it is best to capture patterns of translanguaging as a behaviour within classrooms. The theory assists in shedding light on how the learners' poor performance in a language can be seen as failure in using language within a given classroom setting. Moreover, Skinner's theory is likely to guide this study since it explores language acquisition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to the ways of obtaining, organising and analysing data (Polit and Hungler (2015). Methodological decisions depend on the nature of the research question, and can be considered the theory of correct scientific decisions (Karfman, 2011). Burns and Grove (2009) define methodology as the inclusion of the design, setting, sample, methodological limitations and the data collection and analysis techniques in a study. The research methodology used in this paper is qualitative, that was used with explorative and transformative paradigms to explore the study. These paradigms are research frameworks that centers the experiences of marginalised communities, including the analysis of power differentials that have led to marginalisation, and it also links research findings to actions intended to mitigate disparities. The reason for this choice is that it involves examining and reflecting on the less tangible aspects of research participants. For example, values, attitudes and perceptions. It is a research grounded on words e.g. asking teachers how often they find challenges in translanguaging in some multilingual classrooms.

Qualitative study involves studying the meaning of people's lives under real world conditions (Yin, 2011). People perform in their everyday roles, or express themselves through their own diaries, journals, writing and even photography. Willis (2008) points out that the great strength of qualitative research is that it is naturalistic. It focuses on real people in real situations, and its central concern is to understand human beings as they act in the course of their daily lives. Furthermore, this

research approach enables the researcher to deeply investigate the object of the research, in this case, the presence of translanguaging as a pedagogic tool in the process of teaching and learning. Moreover, this research approach is able to represent the views and perspectives of participants in a study. Capturing participants' perspectives may be a major purpose of a qualitative study (Yin, 2011). In addition, qualitative research aims to provide an explicit account of the structure, order and broad patterns found among a group of participants engaged in specific activities including classrooms. The employed researcher qualitative method on this research to best explore this study.

Research design

Research design is a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with validity of the findings. However, the research design suitable for this research is a case study design because it possesses the relevant structure of qualitative approach. Thomas (2015) defines a case study as a set of analyses studied holistically by one or more methods. The case study can be done in social sciences and life sciences. Moreover, a case study is used to describe an entity that forms a single unit, such as a person, an organization or an institution. The researcher used this design to explore a range of solutions that may address the problem at M.L Nkuna High School. This design automatically formed an exploratory design (Walter, Cranz, Glennon & Bednarczyk-Krajewska, 2012).

Population and sampling

The proposed population for this research is learners (1403) and educators (54) of M.L. Nkuna High School. The grade with low performance in Xitsonga is grade 8 with 203 learners in four classes. Classroom observations were conducted in at least two classes and both Xitsonga educators from the classes were observed as they taught. Walter et al., (2012) refer to sampling as a group of

people or things chosen out of a larger number and is asked questions or tested in order to get information about the larger group. The population formed the sample for this research. The sampling strategy applicable in this study is non-probability sampling, and was used with purposive sampling. In Purposive sampling, the researcher chooses the participants as per his/her own judgment, keeping in mind the purpose of the study. It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind. This type of sampling is used in exploratory research or in In this research, 10% (21) field research. learners who perform below the average 40% formed the sample of this research and 2 teachers that teach grade 8 were part of observations during lessons track translanguaging patterns.

Data collection

Walter et al., (2012) explain data collection as the process of gathering and measuring information on targeted variables in an estimated systematic fashion, which then enables one to answer relevant questions and evaluate outcomes. In this research, data were collected using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions on teachers, learners and classroom observations. These tools are likely to satisfy the justification of the sampled group because they can best capture human beings' thoughts, beliefs, ideas, perspectives and it leaves room to justify their actions.

Data analysis

According to Turnbull et al., (2012), data analysis is the process of transforming raw data into usable information. It includes verifying, interpreting and organising data. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse data, which emphasizes identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. Moreover, it closely examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly and reviewing while defining and

naming themes. The themes used to analyze data were categorised under classroom observations, field notes and teacher/learner interviews.

Quality Criteria

According to Turnbull, Lea, Parkinson, and Ashby (2010), quality criteria refers to the quality that somebody or something has that makes people believe or trust them. In this paper, credibility was employed as a quality criteria. Credibility holistically includes stability, equivalence, internal consistency, inter-judge reliability and intra-judge reliability. The researcher ensured credibility by citing correctly and using sources which are trusted and legitimate. The researcher, however, refrained from acting in a way that may have compromised the credibility of the study.

Significance of the Study

The study may be considered paramount to the multilingual communities surrounding M.L Nkuna High School, in Mpumalanga, South Africa and internationally. ANA (2011) states that language is a contributing factor to poor performance and comprehension of language content. If learners do not have a clear understanding of what they are taught due to language barrier, their literacy is likely be compromised too. The findings of this study may promote the use of translanguaging as a tool for teachers and learners during the process of teaching and learning at M.L Nkuna High School. Language is considered the foundation for all learning activities, the bridge between learning and teaching, and therefore,

there cannot be teaching and learning without putting language where it ought to be placed.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to the study: There was South Africa's limited literature precisely on translanguaging and instead, there was a myriad literature on code-switching. The fact that translanguaging seemed to be a new concept to both the teacher and learner participants. Moreover, misconceptions around translanguaging were evident. The threat posed by Corona Virus (COVID-19) in schools and the department of education was vivid. The researcher acknowledges time constrains posed by rotation system used in schools due to COVID-19. The findings of this research were collected in one school with a different geographical location and as such, it may not be applicable in other schools within the circuit, district, province and other nine provinces of South Africa in general.

Research Site

The setting of the school is paramount in understanding the nature and type of school the data was collected from. Research data was collected on the location of the school, which is located near the R536 to Paul Kruger Gate of Kruger National Park, between Sabie and Bega River. The area is called Jonela village in Mkhuhlu area. The community has a high average of unemployment furnished with high crime rate. The school is fairly resourced with 45 classes and an administration centre. It experiences high levels of undocumented learners from Mozambique and Swaziland respectively.



Figure 1: M.L Nkuna High School Site Map

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data gathered was analysed by means of data reduction or coding and arranged into themes. The data was gathered by the use of three different approaches which include classroom observations, teacher interviews and learner interviews. The data was transformed into information in the data analysis segment of this study and a conclusion was drawn on summary pertaining to the collected data.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The status of Xitsonga at M.L Nkuna High School

Research evidence indicates that Xitsonga is a dominant language at M.L. Nkuna High The interviews conducted with School teachers proved that both teachers speak Xitsonga as their home language. Moreover, they signaled that they were good Xitsonga writers. The researcher also found that the majority of the participants were those that speak Xitsonga as their Home language. In conversing with both teachers, it was revealed that Xitsonga is the prescribed home language at M.L Nkuna High School, and thus, a domineering language both in class and outside the classrooms. This was also supported by the fact that all learners have pointed out that Xitsonga lessons are conducted in Xitsonga

Home Language. Despite a good knowledge background of the concept of translanguaging, some learners indicated, however, that translanguaging occurs within the classroom space. All learners indicated that they at some point, with their classmates, converse in different languages, which predominantly are SiSwati/IsiZulu/Sepedi and English. This exposition gives rise to the anticipation that the introduction of translanguaging could, otherwise afford a more rewarding inclusive pedagogic environment for the betterment of the teaching and learning environment at the school in question.

Students' perceptions and knowledge on translanguaing

The researcher discovered that about a quarter participants of believed translanguaging can assist in improving performance in Xitsonga at M.L Nkuna High School. Learners' language backgrounds are not accommodated impartially, by Xitsonga teachers when translanguaging in Xitsonga classroom at M.L Nkuna High School. However, students indicated that they would rather prefer the use of other languages alongside their own languages as a way of getting to know and to appreciate other languages as well. The interviewed students also indicated that they would prefer to use

English despite their proficiency in Xitsonga – a home language. Among the respondents, it was also discovered that some interviewees expected their teachers to explain concepts in other languages to facilitate the comprehension of complex learning areas. Viewed this way, the accommodation of translanguaging technique as a teaching approach has to be taken in consideration with the sole aim of accommodating and engaging all learners at the school in question.

Teachers' Perceptions and sense of awareness upon translanguaging as a teaching methodology.

The research discovered that both participants are conversant in English, Xitsonga and SiSwati. However, one of the participants believed that his proficiency in other languages cannot be a tool to enhance Xitsonga performance within the M.L Nkuna High School classrooms. On the other hand, the other teacher participant believed that other languages must be used to teach Xitsonga Home Language to improve the learning experiences of the learners. It can be concerded, however, that a closer analysis of both teachers' point of views could reveal the thinking that translanguaging can hinder academic excellence at the school. Worth noting is one of the participants' understanding that code-switching, which in some sense is closely related to translanguaging, may be an instrument to improve the quality of results within the broad spectrum of multi-lingual learners at M.L Nkuna High School. This revelation came out as the teachers reconsidered the teaching aspects enshrined in the XIPHOKHAMA (CAPS) guide which reiterates that languages must be taught in context. The teachers further noted and acknowledged that they are familiar with their school language policies. This, in some sense unveils how teachers take time to accept and accustom themselves to new challenges and approaches that may otherwise be of critical advantage to both their profession and the learning purposes of their students.

The Merits and Demerits of the Monolingual Dominance Approach

The interview results indicates that half of the learner participants indicated that they find themselves understanding certain aspects of Xitsonga lessons when other languages are used as an intervention strategy to clarify some concepts. Two third of the learner participants also indicated that they prefer the use of English to enhance their learning experiences of the Xitsonga home language. The findings of the interviews revealed how the teaching of Xitsonga in the medium of Xitsonga only was problematic to the learners. This is revealed in the way the student interviewees responded to some of the questions, giving light to the fact that the teaching and learning of languages using the translanguaging technique was key in hijacking a quicker mastery of target languages.

Lesson Observations and the Researcher' Discernments

The first lesson to be observed by the researchers unveiled several occurrences of translanguaging patterns exercised by both the teacher and the learners. However. unconsciously, it was noted with concern how in the process both parties would endeavour to correct the occurrence of translanguaging those patterns, as if to say the patterns where a divergent from the norm. in the second lesson, the occurrences of translanguaging were very limited compared to the first one. The researchers also noted that the majority of the participants were those that speak Xitsonga as their Home language.

The researchers also observed that translanguaging is not sufficiently used within the Xitsonga lessons at M.L. Nkuna High School in Grade 8 classrooms. The instances where translanguaging occurred were always in English, rather than the predominant languages that the diverse learners emanate from. The researcher concluded that the problem rests on the inability of teachers to explain concepts in other African Languages that the learners understand. This makes teachers fail to

effectively use translanguaging to enhance the learning experiences of multilingual classrooms in Xitsonga Home Language. It was noted that the teaching staff needed not only enough time to make informed decisions on whether adopting translanguaging or not but they also needed some kind of workshopping and even staff development of modern strategies and methodologies on effective pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

It has been found that teachers are not familiar with translanguaging and they do not see translanguaging as a mechanism that can help in improving performance of learners in Xitsonga at M.L Nkuna High School. It has also been found that translanguaging is not used effectively in classrooms despite the evidence that some learners are doing Xitsonga at school as home language, while at home a different language is spoken. The researcher also noted with concern that the occurrence of translanguaging patterns is poor. Therefore, translanguaging is not effectively used to enhance teaching and learning experience of Xitsonga Home Language learners at M.L. Nkuna High School. There is evidence that suggests that M.L Nkuna High School is located within the community that possesses the predominance of several languages. Based on the above findings, the study concludes that translanguaging is not sufficiently used within the Xitsonga lessons at M.L Nkuna High School grade 8 classrooms. Moreover, translanguaging patterns rarely occur within Xitsonga classrooms. The instances where translanguaging occurred were always in English, rather than the predominant languages that the diverse learners emanate from. The researcher concluded that the problem rests on the inability of teachers to explain concepts in other African Languages that learners understand. Teachers do not effectively use translanguaging to enhance the learning experiences of multilingual classrooms in Xitsonga Home Language. It has also been noted that Learners' language backgrounds are not accommodated by Xitsonga teachers when

translanguaging in Xitsonga classroom at M.L Nkuna High School. Based on empirical findings in this paper, the researcher recommends that Xitsonga teachers at M.L. Nkuna High School should be trained on translanguaging. M.L Nkuna High School should review their language policies to accommodate the growing need multilingualism around Mkhuhlu. Learners from different language backgrounds should get special lessons to assist them with vocabulary development for the sake of their educational performance.

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