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An intercultural approach to implementing multilingualism at Rhodes University, South Africa

Russell H. Kaschula, Pamela Maseko, Lorenzo Dalvit, Thandeka Mapi, Linda Nelani, Bulelwa Nosilela and Msindisi Sam
School of Languages (African Language Studies: isiXhosa), PO Box 94, Rhodes University, 6140 Grahamstown, South Africa
E-mail: r.kaschula@ru.ac.za

1. Introduction

The work of intercultural communication theorists such as Ting-Toomey (1999) and Gudykunst (2003) has informed curriculum design and teaching methodology of the courses developed for teaching isiXhosa for vocational purposes to second language (L2) learners. This seems to be an appropriate theoretical paradigm within multilingual South Africa, where intercultural communication is becoming a daily reality for a growing portion of the population. We make use of this theory to introduce and develop experiential understanding of multilingualism at Rhodes University in various departments and, more generally, on campus.

The interventions described in this article were developed within the South Africa – Norway Tertiary Education (SANTED) multilingualism programme at Rhodes University. The programme is a joint venture between the Norwegian government and the South African Department of Education. It is hosted by the African Language Studies Section in Rhodes University's School of Languages, within the Faculty of Humanities. Its aim is (i) to promote multilingualism through L2 teaching in the faculties of Pharmacy and Law, (ii) to develop bilingual material that will facilitate access to tertiary education for members of previously marginalised communities, and (iii) to promote scholarship and research on multilingualism in these contexts.

Section 3 of this article contains a brief discussion of the theoretical framework used to inform the work towards achieving the above-mentioned aims. Particular attention goes to issues of identity and language, as these seem to be pertinent to success not only in learning isiXhosa (see Norton's (2000) postulation of a strong link between social identity and L2 learning), but also in facilitating access to tertiary education. Section 4 gives contextual information on the linguistic dispensation in which Rhodes University operates, as well as insight into the SANTED programme introduced to foster multilingualism as a resource in this Eastern Cape community. Section 5 explains the implementation of various theoretical considerations in the promotion of intercultural communication within the SANTED multilingualism programme at Rhodes University. In conclusion, the legislative context in

which we frame our multilingual work is discussed briefly, our language intervention is summarised and the links between theory and practice are highlighted. Before setting out the theoretical framework, intercultural communication is defined in Section 2.

2. Defining intercultural communication

The interactions that take place in the isiXhosa learning context among speakers from various linguistic backgrounds at Rhodes University can be considered as intercultural. Scholars sometimes use the terms "cross-cultural" and "intercultural" interchangeably. However, we prefer to use them distinctively. Gudykunst (2003:159-160) makes the following distinction:

> Cross-cultural research involves comparing behavior in two or more cultures (e.g., comparing self disclosure in Japan, the United States, and Iran when individuals interact with members of their own culture). Intercultural research involves examining behavior when members of two or more cultures interact (e.g., examining self-disclosure when Japanese and Iranians communicate with each other). Intercultural behavior often is compared with intracultural behavior (e.g., behavior within a culture). To illustrate, Iranian self-disclosure when communicating with Japanese might be compared with Iranian communication with other Iranians.

Gudykunst (2003:163) continues by pointing out that intercultural communication generally is conceptualised as communication between people from different national cultures, comparing how different linguistic communities manage, for example, communication between members of different social classes, intergenerational communication, and interracial/interethnic communication. Investigation of this type of communication therefore unravels the communication process between members of two or more different cultural groups who are situated in a shared environment.

Ting-Toomey (1999:16) defines intercultural communication as "the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation". This definition introduces important concepts such as symbolic exchange, process, cultural community, negotiation of shared meanings and an interactive situation. Some of these will be addressed in Section 3.

3. An intercultural communication paradigm

A new type of communication seems to be emerging at Rhodes University, as in the rest of South African society. This involves the renegotiation of both new and old identities. With reference to this, Collier (1997:36-44) distinguishes between processes of avowal and ascription as follows:

> Avowal is the self an individual portrays (i.e., saying, "This is who I am"), whereas ascription is the process by which others attribute identities to an individual (e.g., through stereotypes). (Collier 1997:40)

For Collier, these processes acknowledge that identity is shaped by the views of ourselves, as given in self-articulation and in the communication of others. Importantly, identities are expressed not only (or primarily) in words, but also through core symbols, norms, and labels.

According to Ochs (2005:79), "the relation of language to social identity is not direct but rather *mediated* by the interlocutors' understandings of conventions for doing particular social acts and stances". The isiXhosa L2 courses that are being developed and offered at Rhodes University follow this idea, in that they specifically take into account that students currently see the learning experience as an opportunity for new identity development. This search for a new identity is born out of the need for a support base, a need to reach out in the work place, which supersedes racial and cultural differences. Pharmacists, for example, need to reach out to their patients who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They are therefore required to learn not only the language of the people with whom they interact in their profession, but also pertinent cultural conventions of the isiXhosa first language (L1) community. The educational environment where initial isiXhosa learning takes place at Rhodes University is aimed at facilitating this process. According to Ting-Toomey (1999:26), it is common that individuals feel secure when communicating with people whom they view as supportive and where there is a high sense of familiarity. Conversely, they are likely to experience "identity vulnerability" when interacting with people who are unfamiliar to them. They mostly share a common set of values, norms and scripts with those similar to themselves. Thus, the theme of identity security or vulnerability is viewed as one that has an impact on many other facets of intercultural communication.

In the teaching of the Rhodes University isiXhosa courses, the aim is first to establish the notion of 'identity security' and 'familiarity' prior to easing the students into the communicative event. The teaching of culture-specific traits plays a crucial role with respect to this, especially in the vocation-specific language programmes, where cultural miscommunication between a service provider and a client can have adverse effects, such as inappropriate medicine-taking behaviour in the case of Pharmacy. Similarly, where Law is concerned, misunderstanding of cultural beliefs and practices can result in an unfair, even unjust, ruling.

Ting-Toomey (1999:10) states that

> Culture is like an iceberg: the deeper layers (e.g., traditions, beliefs, values) are hidden from our view; we only see and hear the uppermost layers of cultural artefacts (e.g., fashion, trends, pop music) and of verbal and nonverbal symbols.

She continues by pointing out that culture is "dynamic and changes with the people within the system" (Ting-Toomey 1999:14). On the one hand, this dynamism may be reflected in the "cultural artefact", the result of which is found within the interaction of, for example, Western and African healing systems. It is important to emphasise this in vocational-training disciplines such as Pharmacy and Law. On the other hand, shared features of South African culture emerge at the "uppermost layer" amongst the learners.

McLaren (1998:14) makes a similar point, identifying culture as a human phenomenon: it is "the way we are, both physically and mentally. It is both a state in which each of us exists and a process which changes constantly according to the individuals, the time and the place". Thus culture is a combined state and process that affects people as they respond to others, to events and to the environment.

McLaren continues by pointing out that culture moulds and makes an individual, but that this does not mean that individuals cannot vary from one another within a specific culture. Further, the notion of 'cultural relativism' is introduced to emphasise the point that though cultures may differ, they are equal in that the measures for "good" and "bad" are not fixed in one specific way of, for example, expressing grief or responding to disease. Therefore, individuals should respect both their own and others' values (McLaren 1998:16). The ethos expressed by McLaren here underpins all SANTED activities at Rhodes University. This can be summarised as a combination of respect for self and for others while at the same time allowing individuals from different cultures to grow closer in relation to one another. Ting-Toomey (1999:3) argues that in such situations the achievement of effective intercultural communication is dependent on people's ability "to manage differences flexibly and mindfully".

Cultural differences emanating from different social and racial backgrounds influence the way one understands one's reality and attempts to create meaning from social reality. Ethnocentricism, social identity concerns, stereotypes and cognitive biases create problems in communicative events where interactants are from such different backgrounds. Similarly, on a more psychological level, anxiety, uncertainty, feelings of injustice or prejudice can interfere and jeopardize communicative success in intercultural contact events (Stephan and Stephan 2003:122). Such extralinguistic factors need to be carefully considered in the L2 classroom and in the development of multilingual material.

In situations where intercultural communication takes place, speakers make use of various linguistic strategies in order to overcome differences and barriers. For example, code switching can function as a device to decrease linguistic distance between interlocutors. In the isiXhosa courses discussed in Section 5 below, code switching may be introduced strategically in order to create a point of connectedness between students. It is also suggested as a strategy to be used between students and the clients from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to whom they provide services. Differences in cultural and linguistic background can be used to create unity and connectedness. In the Rhodes University isiXhosa L2 courses, difficulties in pronouncing words which have click sounds, for example, are approached in such a manner that learners have fun attempting the correct pronunciation, which creates such connectedness. In keeping with suggestions from intercultural communication theory, the multilingual learning environment is designed not to be overly prescriptive. The primary aim is to build learners' confidence to creatively explore the new language in a non-threatening environment. The facilitators are encouraged to consciously create such an environment in order to decrease linguistic and cultural distance for the learner.

Ting-Toomey (1993:1-2) argues, as part of her "identity negotiation theory," that the more secure individuals' self identification is, the more they will be open to interacting with people from other cultures. Conversely, the more vulnerable they feel, the more anxiety they will experience in such interactions. The development of material in the mother tongue of members of marginalised communities is done with the aim of fostering a sense of acceptance and inclusion. The intention is that Rhodes University itself will create such a setting, i.e., a common space which breeds a sense of in-group communication, even though participants come from differing cultures.

Chen (2003:226) suggests developing strategies that will assist in increasing "social penetration", which is enabled by self-disclosure and sharing of the individual culture, as well as by the development of relationship intimacy. The multilingual courses at Rhodes University are designed to implement strategies suggested in received theoretical work, so that students and staff will be enabled to interact meaningfully despite their differences and the perceived stereotypes that may exist in society.

4. Introducing and fostering multilingualism at Rhodes

Traditionally, Rhodes University has always been a small university that prides itself in attending well to the three primary areas of research, teaching and community engagement, all of which respond to the national agenda and challenges of this era. The present Vice-Chancellor, Dr Saleem Badat, articulates this on the university website (http://www.ru.ac.za/about/): "Research, teaching and community engagement seek to be alive to the social and economic challenges of the local, national, African and international contexts."

4.1 Response to the language profile of the Eastern Cape

Geographically, Rhodes University is situated in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. According to the census of 2001, the Eastern Cape Province comprises 16% of South Africa's total population of about 47 million (Statistics South Africa 2003). The black population in the Province totals approximately 87%. About 83% of this number have isiXhosa as their home language. An important point to mention here is that 77% of all speakers of isiXhosa in South Africa live in the Eastern Cape. As indicated by these statistics, isiXhosa is the dominant language in the Province.

Historically, Rhodes University has largely operated as a monolingual institution and has made the use of English as a medium of instruction its trademark. This is in spite of the fact that it is situated at the heart of an isiXhosa-speaking community. In fact, 80% of the community of Grahamstown, where Rhodes University is located and where most of the students who have vocational training included in their study programmes carry out prescribed community engagement, speak isiXhosa as L1. The linguistic composition of the Rhodes University community is in stark contrast to that of the local Grahamstown community: 64% of the student population speak English as L1, whereas 15% speak isiXhosa as L1, and 2% speak Afrikaans as L1 (Rhodes University Data Management Unit 2007). The University has responded to such linguistic and cultural diversity within and outside of the institution, relating this to governmental policies that encourage universities to consider the linguistic and cultural diversity of the South African society in their strategic planning. Various university language policy documents acknowledge the role of universities in the implementation of language policies in education, and their role in using language to facilitate multilingualism as a resource. These documents also support endeavours to secure access and through-put of students drawn from local isiXhosa communities who until recently were not part of the usual pool of students coming to university. They also specifically task South African universities with the responsibility of developing indigenous African languages for use in the academic arena.

As stated in its language policy, Rhodes University now recognises the multilingual nature of the community in which it is situated, and the need to nurture a multilingual environment. It

also recognises the role it should play in the access and retention of historically disadvantaged students. It directly encourages multilingualism amongst both staff and students.

4.2 Rhodes University language policy

The Rhodes University language policy was approved by Council on 6 October 2005 (see www.ru.ac.za). This policy is in keeping with the sentiments expressed by the Minister of Education in 2002 regarding the promotion of multilingualism. The Ministry has suggested that universities actively promote multilingualism by "requiring proficiency in an African language as a requisite for a range of academic fields of study and offering short courses in African Languages as part of staff development strategies" (Ministry of Education Language Policy 2002).

The following explains the main objectives of the Rhodes language policy, which specifically support the above-mentioned broad directives. We also outline the responsibilities that are tasked to the School of Languages. The SANTED Programme under the African Languages Section of the School drives the major aspects of the implementation process. The policy objectives outlined below dovetail with the entire SANTED Programme, and demonstrate institutional support for multilingualism and intercultural debate within the University.

- The University language policy supports initiatives that will recognise and advance the academic viability and status of the three major languages of the Eastern Cape Province, namely isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English; promote multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage in such a way as to create and foster a supportive and inclusive, non-sexist and non-racist environment in which all members of the University can feel they belong.
- Regarding policy implementation, the language policy states that The Human Resources Division will devise strategies to encourage members of the University who do not speak isiXhosa to enrol for the short communicative courses in isiXhosa.
- Referring to all academic departments, the policy states, *inter alia,* that they will encourage constructive debate about bilingualism, multilingualism and the role of language in learning.

4.3 Rhodes University language policy, the School of Languages and SANTED

As indicated earlier, the African Language Studies Section of the School of Languages is at the forefront of implementing aspects of the Rhodes University language policy. The policy explicitly states that the School of Languages will

- devise strategies to recruit students into courses in isiXhosa; and
- explore the feasibility of reintroducing a programme in isiXhosa at postgraduate level for mother tongue speakers by offering incentives, such as scholarships, to such students.

The activities of the SANTED Multilingualism Programme are aligned with the implementation of the language policy. Interventions range from L2 courses for staff and students in isiXhosa, to the development of support material for L1 speakers of the language. The objectives of the programme are to promote multilingualism amongst L1 speakers of all languages at Rhodes University, and to facilitate access and retention of isiXhosa L1 students here, particularly those from historically disadvantaged communities. The African Language Studies Section and the School of Languages envisage that there will be a direct correlation

between the project to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism at Rhodes University and its retention of postgraduate students.

5. An intercultural discipline related teaching model

The SANTED programme involves teaching and developing both general-purpose and discipline-specific L2 isiXhosa courses for Rhodes University. The teaching approach focuses on two crucial issues in intercultural communication that are in agreement with ones elaborated in intercultural theory and are referred to in Section 3 above. Firstly, we focus on creating a relaxed and supportive environment for learning. We hope that this will in turn encourage students to use the L2 competence which they are in the process of acquiring, as well as newly developed, culturally sensitive communicative skills, confidently. This should also contribute to the creation of a more comfortable environment for isiXhosa-speaking staff and students within the University. Secondly, particularly in discipline-specific courses, besides language learning, we also focus on cultural aspects central to the requirements of the particular discipline and its related professional environment. As noted by Ting-Toomey (1999), the latter arguably form the most crucial component of intercultural communication.

In the following section, we discuss the language intervention programmes and initiatives that were offered in 2007 specifically to promote the aims of multilingualism and intercultural communication articulated in the University policy, namely (i) the Rhodes University isiXhosa Staff Communication Skills Course, (ii) IsiXhosa for Pharmacy, (iii) IsiXhosa for Law, (iv) the programme for increasing isiXhosa L1 students' access to Rhodes University, (v) the programme for promoting postgraduate scholarship in African languages, (vi) Computer Science, (vii) Information Communication Technology support, (viii) computer assisted language learning, and (ix) development of the multimedia language learning facility. The following sub-sections will discuss each of these initiatives that implement the language policy of the University, separately.

5.1 Rhodes University staff isiXhosa communication skills course

All staff were encouraged from 2007 to put an effort into acquiring basic skills in isiXhosa. To facilitate this, the African Language Studies Section of the School of Languages developed and offered 3 courses, one in the first semester and two running concurrently in the second semester. Each course accommodated 30 participants.

This was a short course convened in collaboration with the University's Human Resources (HR) Division. In the language policy the HR Division is tasked with the responsibility of devising strategies to promote the acquisition of isiXhosa by staff who do not have proficiency in this language. The course is a beginner course and was designed such that those who acquire a reasonable level of competency on completion can acquire points allocated to the Unit standard, according to the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). This would enable those who successfully complete the course to go on to the intermediate level, as well as to earn points that would enable them to join the Level One academic course. The course is quality assured by the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office at the University.

The course content was designed around communication themes developed in consultation with the HR division. Each theme was accompanied by a pertinent cultural topic (see Maseko,

Kaschula, Mapi, Moneli, Ndumiso and Sam 2007). The excerpt in Text box 1, taken from the cultural awareness section of a lesson on "Being sick at work", is given illustratively. The lesson is a simulation of conversations that are likely to occur (i) between a consultant at the University health-care facility and a sick student, and (ii) between a lecturer and a student who has missed a class because of an illness. Examples of completed lessons (linguistic and cultural aspects) can be accessed via the following web-sites: www.elearning4africa.com and www.santed@ru.ac.za. We are aware that between the amaXhosa and their English or Afrikaans counterparts there are often differences in the understanding of illness; the aim here is to raise cultural awareness of such differences, also allowing for debate between "students" from various language and cultural orientations.

In 2007, 90 staff members, both academic and non-academic, and from different levels of employment within the University, participated as learners in the programme. Successful participants were able to continue with an intermediary isiXhosa course if they wished to do so in 2008. The primary objective of this activity was to make the university linguistically "friendly" to isiXhosa-speaking staff and students. This was also intended to enable increased use of isiXhosa in communication amongst staff, as well as between staff and students. The overall objective is consistent with Ting-Toomey's (1999:26) suggestion to introduce practices that encourage intercultural understanding and a "supportive learning environment".

This course should not only enable administrative staff to begin in preliminary ways to communicate amongst each other and with students in isiXhosa, but should also encourage academic staff to begin to use isiXhosa in their teaching. According to assessments done at the end of 2007, Rhodes staff who completed these courses, overall felt better equipped linguistically and culturally to cope with an increasingly heterogeneous environment.

Some cultural facts on issues around *izifo, ukugula,* and treatment of sickness amongst amaXhosa

Responsibility of healing amongst amaXhosa previously lay with traditional healers, called *amagqirha*. When the missionaries came and introduced and solidified a western-orientated way of healing, little room was left for this cultural practice as a primary source of healing among amaXhosa.

The traditional way of healing itself, however, never died but existed alongside western ways of healing. In the present time, many amaXhosa still consult the western doctors while at the same time they visit *amagqirha* and they will "…swallow the western doctor's medicine without in any way giving up their beliefs in the powers of *amagqirha"* (Pereis 1989:60).

Amagqirha amongst amaXhosa were seen as important in that they were perceived to have the power to communicate with the ancestral spirits which amaXhosa revere and always look up to for relief when evil associated with illness occurs. AmaXhosa believe that an illness is often inflicted on you by someone and the role of an *igqirha* is then to attempt to communicate with your ancestors to diagnose the cause of your illness (often by sniffing out a person who might have inflicted the illness on you), then dispensing medicine (mixed from herbs and roots), and prescribing a cleansing ceremony, which often involved a sacrifice of an animal so that one may invoke one's ancestors. The belief is that, once a person does as instructed by an *igqirha* they would heal.

Amagqirha possess great experience and knowledge both concerning the treatment of many diseases on the one hand, and the medicinal properties of plants on the other hand. There is no doubt though that the practice has been infiltrated by many negative elements, for example, some using human parts for their "medicine", and some who use their power to harm others.

The following is a typical story of an umXhosa's experience with sickness and healing:

> I was 10 years old when something odd happened to me. It was in the morning, 35 years ago when I found out I could not get up from a traditional mat which I used to sleep on at the farm on which I grew. When I touched my head, my hair fell in heaps. As an umXhosa, illness was not taken for granted. My parents wanted to take me to a well known and respected *igqirha*, but the white owner of the farm decided to take me to Settler's Hospital to see a doctor there. On my return from the hospital, my parents still took me to an *igqirha*, who accused people close to my family for my illness. He gave me some herbal mixture for drinking. I used both the hospital's and the *igqirha*'s medicine, as prescribed by both. I recovered fully. Up to now, I do not know whether it was the doctor or *isangoma* who healed me (Maseko and Mapi 2007).

Text box 1.

5.2 IsiXhosa for Pharmacy

As indicated earlier, the IsiXhosa for Pharmacy programme was eventually designed and developed in close co-operation with the Pharmacy Administration and Practice (PAP) course that is part of the Pharmacy curriculum. Students in the final year in the Faculty are required to participate in the Community Experience Programme (CEP) which requires of them to interact with clients in the Grahamstown area who have been diagnosed with chronic conditions. Given the linguistic composition of the area, the large majority of the people who

use this service have isiXhosa as L1. The students are required to interact with clients to determine their socio-economic conditions and their medicine-taking behaviour, both of which are pertinent to treatment of their chronic conditions.

The IsiXhosa for Pharmacy programme is designed in such a way that it ties in with this aspect of the PAP programme. It is designed to equip the Pharmacy students with enough proficiency in isiXhosa to enable them to cope in interaction with clients where isiXhosa is the chosen medium of communication. In the same way as with the Staff isiXhosa Communication Skills course, IsiXhosa for Pharmacy is designed specifically to equip the Pharmacy students with linguistic skills as well as cultural knowledge that will facilitate communication in a typical health care professional-clients interaction. Therefore, students are alerted to common cultural practices of the amaXhosa that could affect the medicine-taking behaviour of clients from this community. Generally, the course provides students with an opportunity for applied language learning – they are equipped with linguistic and cultural knowledge of an indigenous language, which is also specific to pharmacy as a field of study.

The course content is structured around themes which refer to socio-economic factors affecting medicine-taking behaviour, instructions on taking medication, awareness of symptoms, and management of chronic conditions such as asthma, TB, diabetes, hypertension and epilepsy. Again, to illustrate the importance of cultural knowledge, the common practice of consulting *amagqirha* (traditional healers), and the common forms of treating illness among amaXhosa, are topicalised. The course informs participants on the widely observed practice among the amaXhosa of consulting traditional healers (Ngubane 1977; Du Pisani 1998; Maseko 2007a). The following excerpt (Text box 2) is from an introductory lesson on illness, treatment and healing amongst amaXhosa, used to illustrates how such cultural issues are dealt with in the course book.

> The person amongst amaXhosa who is mostly consulted for treatment of disease or illness, besides a western-trained health care professional, is a traditional healer. A traditional healer can be seen before or after a doctor has been consulted. If consulted, their medicine is often taken alongside that of the western doctor. It is strongly argued by scholars of the indigenous knowledge systems that most of the medicine prescribed by the traditional healers has healing properties. Their medication is often made from roots, leaves and bark of special plants which is crushed and mixed with water, or dried leaves which can be used as incense, especially if an evil spirit is suspected. The most common ways of treatment in which these medicines can be used are: purgative (*ukugabha,* forced vomiting, and *ukucima,* enema), steam treatment (*ukufutha*), ritual body wash (*ukuhlamba ngeyeza*), and spraying (*ukutshiza*). The last treatment also involves spraying the inside and the outside of the home of the patient to chase away evil spirits. As a health care professional, one should be aware of this and should become aware during consultation if the client is taking traditional medicine and caution against those that can be detrimental to the condition of the client. For example, there are reports that during the steam treatment, which requires a client to stand over hot medicinal water, some patients with epilepsy experience an attack and fall, hurting themselves (Maseko and Mapi 2007).

Text box 2. Excerpt from introductory lesson on illness, treatment and healing amongst amaXhosa – for Pharmacy students

The Pharmacy course has also been quality assured and accredited by the Quality Assurance and Academic Planning Office of the University. Its abridged version was piloted in the second semester of 2007 with 56 third-year Pharmacy students who would be doing the CEP programme in 2008. The course was evaluated by the Academic Development Centre (ADC) of the University, and the students' feedback was highly affirmative. They indicated that taking the course had enabled them to learn another language as well as the culture embedded in it. They also commended the fact that the course was aligned to their future vocation, preparing them for real interactions with clients. One student commented that the course "contributes towards development of skills needed by professionals in the field", and another stated that it "breaks language barriers and helps in the patient-pharmacist interviews, to develop a good trusting relationship between the two". Some expressed strong views on the value of the generic language content of the course which, beyond the context of pharmacy, also enabled them to speak with amaXhosa generally (ADC Teaching and Course Feedback for IsiXhosa for Pharmacy Evaluation 2007). As from 2008, IsiXhosa for Pharmacy has been offered as a credit-bearing course to forth-year students.

5.3 IsiXhosa for Law

Similar to the requirements of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, students in the Law Faculty are obliged, as part of their practical training and community involvement, to provide services to clients who turn to Rhodes University's Legal Aid Clinic (LAC) for legal assistance. The African Language Studies Section, in close collaboration with the Law Faculty, developed and designed a course specific to the needs of a legal professional. The objectives of the course are to provide basic isiXhosa and communicative skills suitable for legal discourses. Specifically, the course intends to develop knowledge and skills that are essential for understanding and interpreting cultural issues embedded in isiXhosa communication, especially those specific to the legal context. Students are provided with a foundation in the language and culture of a community that represents almost 20% of the South African population, thus gaining knowledge that will enhance sensitivity to intercultural issues that are sure to arise once they become practising legal professionals.

Some of the linguistic knowledge and communication skills taught in the course are on themes around civil and criminal law, e.g. child maintenance and theft. The following excerpt (Text box 3) from the course book is used in language learning, but also illustrates how a suitable topic can simultaneously stimulate cultural awareness. The excerpt is from a lesson that refers to child maintenance amongst amaXhosa. The scenario is one where an unmarried woman brings a complaint to the Legal Aid Clinic requesting support in her claim for child maintenance. The father who is accused of not providing financial support for the child has responded as many men in these circumstances do, by saying *ndasihlawula isisu* (I "paid" for the pregnancy).

A child amongst amaXhosa normally is always sheltered, and the way of life of the society allows for the child to always be protected, provided for, and brought up in an environment where there is a caring guardian.

When an unmarried woman fell pregnant, her family would talk to the family of the man who impregnated her, to report the pregnancy, and to claim *intlawulo yesisu* (i.e. payment as acknowledgement of pregnancy). If the man accepts responsibility, he is required by custom to pay the girl's family for "damage" caused to the girl, in the form of cattle (nowadays it is usually in the form of money). This is the only formal contribution that the father makes towards the child.

Once a man has paid for the pregnancy, and if he does not ask for the girl's hand in marriage, the child born out of wedlock is then raised/adopted (*ukukhuliswa*) by his/her maternal family. S/he will assume his/her maternal family name, clan name and practise their customs even if her father is known. Even if the woman were to get married to someone else, the child would remain in this home, and is normally brought up by maternal grandparents. So amongst amaXhosa, traditionally, there is no "illegitimate" child.

The practise of *ukuhlawula isisu* has to be viewed alongside the present child maintenance laws in South Africa (Maseko 2007b).

Text box 3. Excerpt from a lesson that refers to child maintenance amongst amaXhosa – for Law students

The faculties of Law and Pharmacy were specifically selected as the first to offer discipline-specific L2 isiXhosa courses in 2007 as these are service-orientated disciplines. Furthermore, offering language courses to improve multilingualism across all faculties is eventually dependent on how multilingualism will be fostered at school level by the National Department of Education. This will inform the debate at tertiary level, and at least co-determine how much and which kind of language courses are required across the curriculum.

From 2009, an isiXhosa communication course has also been offered in the Faculty of Education at Rhodes University. In 2010, both a mother tongue isiXhosa course for Journalism students as well as an L2 course will be piloted. These courses will become compulsory for all Journalism students at Rhodes as from 2011, in the sense that no student will be permitted to graduate with a Journalism degree without having passed either the L1 or the L2 isiXhosa course.

5.4 Increasing access to Rhodes University for isiXhosa L1 students

Besides improving communicative competence by teaching staff, students and members of the community isiXhosa grammar on the language level and developing mutual understanding at the cultural level, one of the core activities of the programme is to facilitate access to tertiary education for members of previously disadvantaged communities. Since the Rhodes University environment could be considered foreign and, in some extreme cases, hostile to isiXhosa speakers, we try to support communication between students and the institution in two ways. First, African scholarship is promoted by supporting and facilitating African students' access to postgraduate studies. The participation of well prepared students from diverse African backgrounds will assure true intercultural communication and academic debate at this institution. Second, we attempt to increase access by supporting isiXhosa L1 speakers in their undergraduate study of content subjects.

5.5 Development of postgraduate skills

All the projects of the SANTED programme indicated thus far are undertaken by postgraduate students in the African Language Studies Section. These post-graduate students are engaged in terminology development, isiXhosa L2 curriculum design, teaching and research. Contributing to the activities of the SANTED programme is an integral part of their postgraduate studies.

Students are also involved in the development of teaching material and technical terminology in isiXhosa. The work of these students increases the status and capacity of the African Language Studies Section. Fostering this kind of research offers the opportunity to retain isiXhosa L1 speakers as young academics. In essence, the subject areas chosen for multilingual development can be extended over time; however, for the present, a pragmatic choice was made on where to start. Lessons learnt from developing and offering the courses outlined in sections 5.1 to 5.3 will assist in extending the development of such courses to other fields of academic work.

5.6 Computer science

In compliance with the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) requirements, isiXhosa teaching material and terminology is being developed so as to facilitate the introduction of isiXhosa L1 students into the field of Computer Science at Rhodes University. This intervention has resulted in new, supportive teaching material in the form of a glossary of computer terms translated, explained and exemplified in isiXhosa. The glossary is available as a booklet, and can also be accessed on-line both within and from outside the University (http://moodle.coe.ru.ac.za). This project is on-going as part of a broader research project (see Dalvit, Murray, Mini, Terzoli and Zhao 2005, 2006). As the project develops, the terminology will be subjected to a second process of strict quality control through PanSALB. Besides creating new terminology, metaphors and examples developed to explain computer terms have been drawn from the common experience of most isiXhosa speakers. The teaching material developed here is an important part of the endeavour to bridge the communication gap between traditional African culture and the new realm of technology.

There is a recognised need to promote the use of African Languages as additional medium of instruction for students that are not L1 speakers of English (see Alexander 2000). This could improve access of previously disadvantaged students to tertiary institutions, and assure their retention within this system. The underlying assumption is the following: Having the opportunity to rely on the language they know best (i.e., isiXhosa) combined with sufficient exposure to English will contribute to isiXhosa L1 students' understanding and will facilitate learning better than the current situation does (in which these students learn through the medium of L2 English only). Most importantly, using their mother tongue will create a sense of acceptance and respect for African culture and language. Research has indicated that the status of a language is closely linked to the status of its speakers (see Dalvit et al. 2006). Using African languages in higher education is conceived as a pragmatic way to increase the status of their speakers.

Computer Science was chosen precisely because it is a field of study currently in high demand in the market place; a qualification in this, currently, English-dominated discipline carries prestige and the possibility of economic empowerment. Intervention in this domain by means of corpus development would conceivably improve the status of African languages

overall. The main goal of this intervention is to promote a sense of dignity and of language equality within the institution among speakers of isiXhosa, emphasising that their L1 is communicatively as well equipped as any other for use in domains of cutting edge academic and technological development. In facilitating the development of academic discourse in an indigenous South African language such as isiXhosa, this project is creating conditions for effective intercultural communication that are in line with principles set out by scholars such as Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst (see Sections 2 and 3 above).

The development of the material in this particular programme required extensive collaboration among academics from different disciplinary, educational and social backgrounds. Thus, the development process in itself constitutes an interesting example of intercultural communication. The policy decision to encourage intercultural communication at university level, i.e. communication in tertiary education not only between speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but also through the medium of more languages than English only, involves creating organised and innovative cross-faculty and cross-departmental relationships.

5.7 Information Communication Technology support

In South Africa, African languages are often associated with use in low-status and isolated, traditional domains. As with Computer Science, the professional domain of Information Communication Technology (ICT) carries relatively high status, and those trained in this area are in high demand. In order to succeed in the set goal of promoting effective communication across cultures, the status of isiXhosa has to be improved or, to use a popular phrase, the language needs to be "brought into the 21st century". Again, following the guidelines set out by leading theorists in intercultural communication, it is important to improve the status of languages that are largely used in limited personal domains. By introducing the use of isiXhosa in ICT, the language should become more attractive for use by L1 speakers themselves in such wider and more prestigious domains. This should also encourage more speakers of other languages to learn isiXhosa as an L2. At Rhodes University, the support of ICT services was co-opted in order to start developing this strategic vision.

5.8 Computer Assisted Language Learning

The staff course and the discipline-related courses described in sections 5.1 to 5.3 above have been digitalised. This is in line with new trends in language teaching and learning (Computer Assisted Language Learning - CALL) and specifically encourages independent learning. The digitalised course material is available on a flash drive. The SANTED teaching assistants who teach these courses play a key role in the digitalisation process. They assist with the recordings and with the general preparation of the material. This fosters a positive sense of ownership of the course among all members of the team, all of whom are isiXhosa L1 speakers.

5.9 Development of the Multimedia Language Learning Facility

In order to support the intercultural language learning programmes, it was necessary to upgrade the existing language laboratory into a Computer Facility which includes access to CD-Rom language learning programmes. This is now a multi-educational, multi-media e-learning facility with a specific emphasis on the learning of language skills.

The Multimedia Language Learning Facility is an essential tool to support the language learning activities in the three subject focus areas. The Facility is not only used by students in the African Language Studies Section, but by all students in the School of Languages, i.e., Classical Studies, French Studies, German Studies, Afrikaans and Dutch. This contributes to student success in the area of language learning in general.

The facility is the first fully localised computer facility of its kind in South Africa. This means that speakers of any of the official South African languages, including indigenous African languages, can operate computers almost entirely in their mother tongue. This has the potential to change the way African students view technology and the way they interact with state-of-the art technology. This answers to the policy directive of transforming the University in a manner that will assure that isiXhosa-speaking students feel their language and culture is fully accepted and supported. This should contribute to creating a welcoming environment where respect for different cultures grows, and the contribution of all local languages is seen as an asset. As noted by Ting-Toomey (1999), this is a precondition for effective intercultural communication.

6. Conclusion

The intercultural L2 isiXhosa courses set about creating a platform which is, arguably, mutually inclusive, where the other becomes part of oneself. There is the constant juxtaposition of one culture and language against the other. Thereafter emerges the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the two, a process supported by changes in society and in the social environment. This can, in turn, contribute to change towards more inclusion of all language communities in the South African university environment. There may of course also be traumatic clashes of culture prior to the emergence of a comfortable space accommodating both sets of beliefs. Varonis and Gass (1985:327) make this point as follows:

> The less interlocutors know about each other, the more likely they are to misunderstand each other on a linguistic, social, or cultural level. Since misunderstandings are particularly pronounced between native and nonnative speakers of a language, they may have radically different customs, modes of interacting, notions of appropriateness, and, of course, linguistic systems.

Nevertheless, even though success in intercultural communication is often hard won, South African universities have to take control of the multilingual debates surrounding language implementation as emanating from Section 6 of the South African Constitution. These institutions should be at the forefront of intellectual debates concerning language and learning. Partly, this involves implementing viable language policies that contribute positively to the tertiary learning environment. There is an onus on universities to create a learning context that will benefit South Africa's developing economy and democracy. The issue of language remains central in this endeavour.

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