

NURTURING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES (PRESENTATION: NSTF DISCUSSION FORUM)

1. Introduction

- Reinventing the wheel (this discussion should avoid)
- Historical background

This has been and continues to be an ongoing debate

Various instruments and processes

- Mid 90s and 2000s: PanSALB work: NLPF developed and adopted:
participated in LPFHE
- Established: PLCs, NLBs, NLUs

1. INTRODUCTION (Cont.)

- Consultation process internally with various stakeholders in the language industry
- Study tour to learn and benchmark (professionalisation and regulation of the LP profession)
- SALB: later revived as UOLA 12 of 2012 (after some agitation)
- TISC later revived as SALPC Act (DAC, SP: SATI and yours truly)
- Various institutions of HE involved in different projects to promote ML through policies, encouraging taking of language, etc, but no coordination or standard approach to have national impact, eg KZN 1st years students, compulsory learning of Zulu
- UNISA: SLC
African languages in teaching and learning at Unisa

2. Challenges of the SLC project

- Capacity issues – Simply not enough qualified and experienced freelance African language practitioners to do justice to the demands, aims and nature of the project
- Not enough LP across all the indigenous languages
- Some LP not knowledgeable in different disciplines of the modules
- For some there was poor competency in both SL and TL
- Some LP with no translation/transference skills

2. Challenges of the SLC project (Cont...)

- No executive authority to speedily resolve project problems
- No interdisciplinary approach to the project
- Lack of buy-in by relevant stakeholders in the project
- Timelines
- Quality control issues – content
- Conceptual issues
- Underdeveloped terminology in the indigenous languages and lack of parallel discourses

3. Missing ingredients

- Political will
- Lack of leadership and vision
- Resources: investments
- Positive attitude towards IL/ML
- Development and availability of good and attractive linguistic resources (literature non-fiction, different disciplines, across all ages and genre)
- Language activism and activists* across different disciplines
- Hegemony of English monolingualism – approach not against Eng but monolingualism and that other langs should and can coexist alongside English
- Practical/industry or field-based training of LP

3.1 Recent examples of English hegemony

- Samuel Ouma Oyoo (2015): Wits University Science Education
 - ❖ Multilingualism is irrelevant in teaching Science as science should be taught in one language
 - ❖ Too few African language teachers
 - ❖ Research indicates that one language is good for effective learning of science
 - ❖ Science is practical and has its own language: teachers must explain what they are doing
 - ❖ All students and learners battle with language of science irrespective of gender, cultural or linguistic backgrounds
 - ❖ Many parents want their children to be taught and be proficient in English

3.2 Critique of English hegemony (Cont...)

- Originally a lot of academic information, be it science, mathematics, politics, etc was originally written in Latin, Greek and later on made available in German, French, English, and a host of other languages
 - ❖ Mammino (2010) asserts that education is based on mutual communication between the educator and the learner. That the acquisition of knowledge is based on this communication. The quality of communication determines the efficiency of the learning process. Learning involves internalisation, conceptualisation, analysis and interpretation by the learner...
 - ❖ If other cultures such as German, Japanese, Chinese, etc, they have been able to master scientific and other academic concepts, surely, English cannot be used as a standard that only it, can be used to teach and learn science and maths.

3.2 Critic of English hegemony (Cont...)

- ✓ There are too few African language teachers due to a number of factors, colleges of education were closed down, there has been an emphasis of science and technology at the expense of languages and humanities
- ✓ Science is practical but teachers still have to use language to explain what they are doing. Are all teachers only proficient in English and is it only English that can explain scientific concepts?

3.2 Critique of English hegemony (Cont...)

- ✓ All students and learners battle with language of science, but why do those students and learners whose mother tongue languages are not used in LOLT battle much harder than those whose language is used in teaching? (numeracy and literacy results indicate that)
- ✓ Many parents want their children to be taught and to be proficient in English as they want for themselves and their children to acquire competency and skills in English to access better opportunities in an English-oriented society. This is an instrumental and self-serving choices made by parents. It does not mean that English is naturally and inherently superior and African languages are inferior. This is a direct consequence of the policy decision made by the powerful elite of the society

4. Possibilities

- ✓ Strong political and linguistic activism
- ✓ Political will:
 - Private sector
 - Public sector

Example of United Arab Emirates (UAE):

- UEA Vice President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid has announced and declared a huge new language project. Translation of all English educational/science materials into Arabic, and videos of this to be made available for e-learning programmes.

4. Possibilities (Cont...)

- A call has been made to all translators, editors, teachers, scientists, mathematicians, technicians, researchers, video-makers, designers, printers, programers, experts in different fields of technology, etc to participate in this huge and ambitious project
- Can you imagine the professions, systems, industries that can be created with a project of this nature.
- Universities will immediately grow their students intake and resources to cope with such a need
- Potential students will see the value of studying languages, translation studies, mathematics, science and technology!
- Investors in different sectors and industries to support programme

5. Recommendations

- Subject specialists working with the language practitioners
- Provision of glossaries across all the subject fields of learning materials
- Short and focused (academic) training programmes/workshops for the language practitioners
- Specific terminology development in all the subject fields for all the official languages
- Need for internal quality control person
- Active involvement of Colleges/departments with translation process/product
- Use of translation software such as Autshumato, WordFast or SDL Trados to help with consistency and standardisation

THANK YOU – KHETHIWE MARAIS