

PARENTAL PREFERENCES
REGARDING MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NONGOMA
DISTRICT OF KWAZULU-NATAL

THESIS

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DEDICATION

Thanks to

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at what choice of medium of instruction (MOI) parents in a rural village in KwaZulu would make if they had the opportunity to choose. The background to this choice goes back to 1979, when Education and Training Act No. 90 established the mother tongue as MOI from Sub A to Std 2 in Department of Education and Training (DET) primary schools, followed by a sudden transition to English medium of instruction (EMI) in Std 3. Though by 1990 98% of the schools had opted for EMI, conditions were not favourable for a sudden transition and the policy led to high drop-out rates. The problems encountered by teachers and learners were researched and documented by Macdonald in the Threshold Project Reports (1990). Although the Minister initially ignored the Project's findings, in May 1991 he admitted that his department's language policy was leading to serious educational disadvantages. The explosive situation that culminated in the 1976 school uprisings led to the amendment of the Act.

There was concern among people involved in educational language policy that parents had not been given sufficient information to make informed educational choices. They feared that many parents would, largely out of ignorance, opt for straight-for-English, when in fact the conditions in the schools were not conducive to the success of that choice option. The widespread assumption about the parents choosing straight-for-English was based on anecdotal evidence. I decided to investigate this matter in the Nongoma area.

My findings pointed to very healthy attitudes towards the mother tongue and there was even a measure of understanding of the place of mother tongue instruction in the beginner classes. But even though the respondents wanted their language to be respected, they also wanted their children to acquire a good education in English, so as to be eligible for jobs in an economy that emphasises the importance of English.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The question this thesis attempts to answer is which medium of instruction (MOI) option parents in the Nongoma area would go for if they had a choice in the matter. Just a few years ago, such a question would not have arisen, but there has been a change in the thinking of the Department of Education and Training (DET) with regard to language policy in African education. For decades the government had, through whatever arm was responsible for African education - without consultation - made the decision about MOI, and handed it down to the people. But as a result of pressure that was increasingly difficult to ignore, the Education Act was amended so that the right to choose MOI was to be given to parents.

A discussion about MOI necessitates a look at language in education policy. Fishman sees language planning as comprising "government policy decision concerning which language should be assigned and recognised for which purposes within a country or region as well as the various implementation steps taken to support the policy..." (in King and van den Berg : 3). In this study we shall see how different South African governments (prior to the Union of South Africa to 1992) took language policy decisions that were, generally speaking, unacceptable to South Africans, but particularly to the African section of the community.

Looked at from the point of view of social theory, we see language policy as " ... the institutionalization of language as a basis for distinctions among social groups ... one mechanism for locating language within social structure so that language determines who has access to political power and economic resources ... one mechanism by which dominant groups establish hegemony in language use." (Tollefson 1991 : 16). In this country it was accordingly used to keep the different racial and tribal ('tribal used here without its unpleasant connotations, but simply to mean sub-groups that share a specific history) apart. The English used it to fight the Afrikaners and vice versa, and the Africans in the process became the proverbial grass on which the two elephants fight their battle. This thesis will

look specifically at the issue of medium of instruction in African schooling, at how in the years running from about 1900 to 1992 it was the cause of much conflict.

The thesis is organised in the following way:

Chapter 2 provides the background to language in education policy in South Africa.

The first section of the chapter gives an overview of the language policy in South Africa, focusing exclusively on African education from prior to the Union to 1992.

Section 2, still continuing the historical overview, looks specifically at the effect of change brought about by Act No. 90 of 1979, which legislated for mother tongue instruction from Sub A to Std 2, and then sudden transition to English medium of instruction (EMI). That act was amended in 1992, so that parents had the right to choose medium of instruction for their children, and Section 3 considers the options given to them. The rushed implementation time-table of the DET, which raised a loud outcry from educational circles in the country, is examined in Section 4. The last section looks at bilingualism in education.

In Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, I shall discuss my research methods, my interview subjects and their views on the three MOI options. The concluding section is my interpretation of my research findings.

CHAPTER 2: EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN AFRICAN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

This chapter contains the following sections:

- Section 1 Historical examination of language policy in African education
- Section 2 Impact of "deep end" MOI transition
- Section 3 Amended Act, The DET's options
- Section 4 Reaction of people in language education, comparison with sub-Saharan Africa
- Section 5 Bilingualism in education

SECTION 1: HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

In order to understand current choices of MOI, it is necessary to examine past MOI policies in the history of African education in South Africa.

1.1 Colonial education prior to the Union of South Africa

Segregated education and tensions around medium of instruction have, from the beginning of the history of schooling, characterized the education of African children in our country. Both missionary and government institutions ran separate schools for the different race groups. In so far as medium of instruction (MOI) was concerned, expediency dictated policy. For missionaries, who were the first to take a keen interest in the education of African children, enliteration was in the mother tongue (L1) and English as a subject (EAAS) was introduced early. Pastoral work demanded that standardised orthographies of the vernacular languages be developed, while state-funding demanded an early introduction of the second language, with the exception of Natal Colony where from 1855 onwards Zulu MOI was prescribed for Zulu children (Lockett 1992).

1.2 1910 - 1930

According to article 137 of the Union Constitution, both English and Dutch were declared official languages, a status that meant the two languages were to "enjoy equal freedom, rights and privileges" (Gough 1992:3). The language concerns of the great majority of the people of the future South Africa were not taken into consideration (Hartshorne 1992). What was considered to be important was the need to reconcile the conflicting language interests of the Dutch and the English. After Union, when education was decentralized and was therefore administered provincially, L1 instruction for African children, coupled with an early introduction of the L2, continued as before i.e. L1 MOI up to Std 2 (std 4 in Natal), thereafter one of the official languages was used for all subjects but religious and health education. Even in white education, though, the role of the two official languages had political overtones. The Hertzog-Smuts government saw dual medium instruction as a useful tool in forging a common "South Africanism" for the two white groups. But Afrikaner nationalist sentiments, which advocated exclusive Afrikaans mother tongue instruction in separate schools, enjoyed more support, and in 1948 gained the upper hand. Theological arguments were also used to build the case for mother tongue instruction: "God has willed it that there shall be separate nations, each with its own language, and that mother-tongue education is accordingly the will of God. The parent should accordingly have no choice in this case." (Malherbe in Hartshorne, 1992). The same compliance would, in thirty years' time, be demanded of African parents.

Although in the years following Union the issue of MOI in African schooling was not directly challenged, developments in white education - bilingual instruction vis-a-viz mother-tongue instruction - were preparing the ground for a new policy. The nationalists, desirous of promoting Afrikaans in public life and intent on having their children become fully-fledged young nationalists, wanted Afrikaans instruction, with English limited to being taught as a subject. Translated into African schooling, this would mean the removal of English MOI, and imposition of L1 instruction. It is important to note here that mother-tongue instruction was in fact internationally accepted as advantageous for the learning

process (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights). The problem with what was emerging as MOI policy in South Africa was the fact that it was not informed by children's educational needs. Instead, what was desired was to put English out of the picture, as it were.

Up until 1935 African schools in all four provinces had a mother-tongue (L1) policy, ranging from the first two to six years of school. Thereafter English was the MOI. But the rise of Afrikaner nationalism had implications for African education, especially in the Transvaal. From 1938, both English and Afrikaans became compulsory subjects, one to be introduced during a child's first year at school, and the other six months later, the choice of which one was first introduced depending on the language spoken by the majority of whites in a given region.

1.3 1948 - 1976

Following the landslide victory of the Nationalist Party in the 1948 elections, the new government proceeded to implement many of the purified nationalist policies. The concept of separate MOI schools thus became official policy. Although attempts were still made to promote mutual tolerance and respect between the Afrikaners and the English, for the Africans the situation deteriorated rapidly. In terms of the Bantu Education Act no. 47 of 1953, all education came under central state control. In Natal, mission schools that promoted English were either closed or brought under government control. There were to be separate schools for separate language groups. Mother-tongue instruction was to go up to and include Std 6. In secondary school half the subjects would be taught in Afrikaans, and the other half in English, the infamous 50-50 policy. The first official language was to be introduced in Sub A, and the second in Sub B. (The writer clearly remembers that linguistic burden: it was only in my third year of school that I began to figure out, for myself, which language a reader was written in. Even then, for quite a while it was only the word "het" that came to my rescue!) In no time Afrikaans became the dominant language in the administration of African education. That was quite in order, according to Prof. Nel, a Broederbond, for Afrikaans should have in fact been regarded as a "second language for black education ... as it had developed in Africa, and was therefore more relevant culturally" (Nel in Hartshorne 1992: 195).

The Eiselen Commission of 1955 played an important role in preparing the ground for the re-arrangement of African education. It endorsed the use of MOI throughout the school system, with each school serving a linguistically homogenous population group. Both English and Afrikaans were to be compulsory subjects throughout school, the first of these official languages to be introduced in the second year of school, and the other no later than the fourth year. It further recommended that the second official language be an optional subject in secondary school, but that both be studied at tertiary level. When it came to the implementation of the recommendations of that commission, wherever choice between the

two languages had been recommended, the government sought to promote Afrikaans. They feared that English would always be the African's choice, and Afrikaans would be relegated to the position of a third language. The Eiselen Commission itself had been appointed by a "volkskongres", and as such was part of the evolving narrow language policy for African education. Eiselen had a prestigious linguistics background which provided him with the theoretical justification for total linguistic and social segregation (Kros 1990). The commission had sat for two years, had given audience to a wide spectrum of society, including Africans, but when it reported, it completely disregarded African opinion, actually admitting:

We realize that in this connection we will have to face great difficulties and that public opinion, especially among the Bantu, is to a large extent still unenlightened, and that it would consequently possibly be hostile to any drastic change in the use of the medium of instruction. (Eiselen Report 1951, in Hartshorne 1992 : 196).

There was immediate opposition, and many teachers in the Cape resigned rather than implement the new language policy. The Transvaal Teachers' Association (TASA) argued that "English had not been found wanting as a medium of instruction...African languages were not sufficiently developed to meet the requirements of modern economic life...African medium would perpetuate tribalism" (in Kros 1990:9). Opposition also came from numerous community organizations such as the South African Council of Churches and the South African Institute of Race Relations. For many of these groupings the essence of opposition was summed up in the Spro Cas Report, which declared: "There is no support in the literature for the simultaneous introduction of 'foreign' languages for African pupils as subjects in the first years of the primary and, in particular, the sudden change to the use of both as media for instruction in the secondary schools" (quoted in Gough 1991 : 7).

For years after, this outcry was kept up by bodies closest to the Department of Bantu

Education (DBE) e.g. the Advisory Board for Bantu Education, the African Teachers' Association of South Africa (ATASA), and school boards. However, it was only in 1971 that there seems to have been some let up in the top-down approach of the department. In that year the Bantu Education Advisory Board, which seems to have had a fairly strong African-supporting lobby, instituted an investigation into the matter of MOI, sending out questionnaires to many bodies (Hartshorne, 1992). Its findings were that:

- (i) L1 instruction was accepted up to Std 4, and then English or Afrikaans would become MOI,
- (ii) English and Afrikaans be taught as subjects from Std 3
- (iii) Teacher trainees be taught in both languages, and
- (iv) The official language not being used as MOI should have its time allocation increased.

The Advisory Board scored a small victory here in that the DBE approved the recommendation that mother-tongue instruction be limited to Std 4, but at that stage the situation from Std 5 upwards remained unchanged. In 1972, when the Planning Division of the department looked at that issue, the minister gave approval for a choice from three alternatives:

- English throughout
- Afrikaans throughout
- the policy as it was i.e. 50-50.

The Advisory Board was not happy, so the DBE decided to seek the recommendations of the school boards, circuit inspectors and regional directors on these policy changes. This exercise was really a pretence at democracy as all these people were concerned about maintaining the status quo. All three - school boards, circuit inspectors and regional directors - had been warned that "The main factor to be taken into consideration will be the dominant language of the white community in the area where the school is situated"

(Circular No 2/1973 quoted in Hartshorne 1992:201). In terms of the responses obtained,

- 59,1% of the boards in Natal opted for English only
- 55,6% in the Cape chose English
- 61,0% in the Transvaal opted for English and Afrikaans
- 91,5% in the O.F.S. also chose English and Afrikaans.

In terms of the responses returned by the school boards, only 4,6% of the Transvaal schools chose Afrikaans only, 5,0% in the O.F.S., 1,0% in Natal, and 7,0% in the Cape and yet the regional directors proposed a 50:50 policy for the Transvaal, Orange Free State and most of the Cape. As per recommendation of the circular, many circuit inspectors influenced their school boards to maintain the status quo. Where the criterion of an English speaking white environment was found, English was recommended. The 50/50 policy was applied where Afrikaans was the dominant language. The Secretary of the department accordingly withdrew the options, and the dual medium policy at secondary school level stayed. The pupils' interests had once again been subjugated to political considerations, and the hopes of the African community were dashed to the ground. The seemingly immovable policy of 50:50 MOI was to lead to the 1976 Soweto uprisings. M.C. Botha, who in 1944-5 had threatened to call a strike of Afrikaner teachers if dual medium was enforced by the Smuts government in the Transvaal, was notably the Minister responsible for implementing that self-same policy in African education.

As from August 1974, increased inflexibility began to set in, especially in the Transvaal. There it became the two regional directors' responsibility to decide which subjects were to be taken in which official language. The school principals and subject heads, who would have been better informed about the language strengths and weaknesses of their teachers, lost the right to make this important decision. A decline in academic achievement was inevitable. Those teachers who attempted to implement the policy became the targets of angry and frustrated students who complained that they were left confused at the end of a lesson during which the teacher had attempted to teach in the most basic and faltering

Afrikaans. Six years earlier (1968) the department's annual report had shown that as a result of teachers' linguistic limitations, the 50:50 policy could only be implemented in 26% of the schools (Gough 1991 : 18). The department, however, would not budge and June 16, 1976 "happened", a reaction to the principle of the 50:50 system, the undemocratic manner in which it was adopted, and the obstacle it placed before Std 5 and secondary school students. (The Std 5 pupils had to write their primary school-leaving examinations in both English and Afrikaans, after using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for only one year. Once in Std 6 they would have to continue with Afrikaans instruction for half of their curriculum). But even at that point it was not obvious to the officials of the department that the language needs of the African community had been seriously compromised. Dr Andries Treurnicht, then Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, on June 17 told Parliament, "In the white areas of South Africa where the government provides the buildings, subsidies and pays the teachers, it is surely our right to decide what the language dispensation should be." (in Hartshorne 1992 : 203).

The pressure of the crisis, however, forced the ministry to reconsider its policy, and in July 1976 it agreed to a single medium from Std 5 upwards, to be decided by the schools themselves.

English medium of Instruction (EMI) only having been achieved for Std 5 upwards, the focus now shifted to the stage at which English medium should be introduced. The African community pressured the department to limit mother-tongue instruction to the first four years of school. In 1977 ATASA, in a meeting with the department, argued that it was:

unfair that the medium of instruction through which Std 5 candidates are examined, should be introduced during that (same) year and that, it would be "sound educational procedure if it were to commence at Std 3 level, so that by the time the students write external exams, they will have acquired the necessary vocabulary to carry them to the secondary level" (ATASA in Hartshorne 1992 : 204).

The following year the department published the first draft of the Bill to replace the 1953 Bantu Education Act, in which it stated its intention to retain L1 instruction up to and including Std 4. Pressure and criticism continued. The succeeding formal Bill published in 1979 did not state the cut-off point for L1 instruction, an omission that critics suspect pointed to the intention to "maintain the status quo through regulations based on the Act" (Hartshorne 1992 : 204). The Act itself, no. 90 of 1979, conceded

that the universally accepted principle of the use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction be observed: provided that this principle shall be applied at least up to and including Standard Two, provided that the wishes of the parents shall be taken into consideration in the application of the principle after Standard Two, and also in the choice of one of the official languages as the medium of instruction where the mother tongue cannot be used ... (in Hartshorne : 204).

Many school committees and principals immediately proceeded to apply the provisions of the Act, even though the government had not provided infrastructural support (Young 1990). It was only three years later that senior officials in the department issued regulations empowering the use of EMI from Std 3. It took them three years to give up trying to convince parents to retain mother-tongue instruction beyond Std 2. In fact, it appears that the department had hoped that the De Lange Commission - investigating the provision of education in the Republic of South Africa 1980-81 would find in favour of extended use of L1 instruction (Gough 1991 : 12). That commission in fact recommended a much more flexible language policy:

Either:

- mother-tongue instruction during an introductory stage, and thereafter gradual transition to English or Afrikaans; or
- mother-tongue instruction throughout or
- English or Afrikaans throughout; or

One cannot agree more with Hartshorne's observation that, "Acceptance in 1953 of a flexible approach of this kind, together with the recognition of the rights of parents to choose from the options available, would have avoided thirty years of frustration and the futility of trying to force on people what they do not wish to have" (Hartshorne 1987 : 76). It is important to note, however, that none of the De Lange Commission's recommendations were adopted by the DBE's successor (the Department of Education and Training - DET). By 1982 Std 3 seemed to be accepted as the time at which transition from L1 to EMI happened.

It is important to consider the fact that the DET had never faced up to the infrastructural conditions necessary for that new MOI policy - possibly because it had never accepted them. An assessment of the situation from 1982 - 1992 is made here:

1. The department was Afrikaner dominated, in keeping with the principles of the Afrikaner nationalist government, and as such it was not psychologically geared to giving the teaching of English in African schools the seriousness it required.
2. It was forced to accept Std 3 transition, and possibly never reconciled itself to it.
3. It did not accept or implement any of the De Lange recommendations, options that would have been acceptable to the users. Evidence showed that Afrikaans would have been by-passed (Hartshorne reports that only 1,25% of pupils from Std 5 upwards used Afrikaans, and even then it was used alongside English - 1992).
4. Although Std 3 transition became policy, the department did not take steps to provide for the success of the policy. It did not ensure:
 - (a) that teachers had the necessary capacity to teach in English, and to use it as a MOI

- (b) that the English curriculum for the junior primary was such that English could later be used as a vehicle for all training
- (c) that teachers already in service had their skills upgraded to meet the new demands of their jobs

SECTION 2: IMPACT OF SUDDEN TRANSITION TO ENGLISH IN STANDARD 3

The Threshold Project was set up, under the aegis of the Human Sciences Research Council (HRSC), to investigate the educational language policy instituted in 1979 and described in section 1.3 above. Although the project conducted its research in schools under the Bophuthatswana and DET departments, its findings were probably true of schools in other Homelands and self-governing territories, including the context of my own research, the then self-governing territory of KwaZulu.

The Project had its beginnings in a pilot programme whose findings showed that African children had considerable problems in their fifth year of school when they changed from mother tongue to English instruction. On a superficial level it seemed the difficulties could be attributed to ineffective language teaching methods, but a more in depth look revealed "a complex nexus of factors that required a closer look at different aspects of the total teaching - learning situation" (Prinsloo 1988: Preface). Of the six reports published at the end of the study, the third and the fourth were the most pertinent to my topic, particularly the fourth, which investigated the disparity between the English competence of the child in std 3 and that needed for her/him to read a content subject textbook with understanding.

By the end of Std 2 the children had had 365 hours of English as a subject. The change to English MOI at the beginning of Std 3 meant that these children would be taught all their subjects, except Afrikaans and mother tongue, in English. And yet there were all sorts of problems militating against the use of English.

2.1 Problems militating against success of EMI

2.1.1 Inability to understand simple English

The project found that the English proficiency of many of these children ranged from the ability to converse about common-place topics to inability to understand simple sentences, including being unable to respond to the question, "What is your name?" (Van Rooyen *ibid.*).

2.1.2 Vocabulary gap

The disparity between the vocabulary taught up to Std 2 and that used in the textbooks ranged between 55% and 38% of words which had not been taught (van Rooyen 1990).

2.1.3 Pupils' low competence forces the teacher to use mother tongue

In a typical std 3 classroom, the teacher is under pressure to teach in English, and yet she is fully aware of the low level of competence of her class (although this research was conducted seven years ago, the situation seems to me to remain pretty much the same, so that I think that the use of the present tense is not a misnomer). To counter this problem, she teaches in both the mother tongue and English.

2.1.4 Large numbers of untrained teachers

Most former homelands/self-governing territories have high proportions of unqualified teachers (NEPI, Teacher Education 1992:24). In the Nongoma circuit, for instance, it is not uncommon to have only two qualified teachers on a teaching staff: the principal and her/his vice. The unqualified teachers have low levels of competence in English. This is also true of many qualified teachers who are themselves products of an ineffective system of education.

Qualified or not, there is still a need for teachers to adapt their register to suit the low comprehension levels of the children, a skill that many of the teachers do not have. Furthermore, some concepts taught in subjects such as science, maths and geography do not have equivalents in many of the African languages, with the result that neither the children's background nor the mother tongue can be used to mediate the learning of such concepts.

2.1.5 Shortage of qualified teachers

The shortage of qualified teachers means that the teachers often find themselves teaching subjects that they are not trained to teach, and such teachers do not feel confident about their knowledge of and ability to teach these subjects.

2.1.6 Different types of text used in higher primary school

The difference in the texts used in the lower and higher primary phases also contributes to transition difficulties. In the lower primary phase all that pupils are exposed to, by way of text, is readers and workbooks that only give short directive sentences as to how to do given exercises. The readers normally carry folk tales, narratives and short paragraphs about familiar topics, so that the narrative is all that the children are exposed to. For the teacher the manual is all the help there is. Std 3 brings with it not only transition to English but also content subjects and text books. In most cases these are written by subject specialists who have no experience of primary teaching, and so no knowledge of the special content and language needs of African children. To further complicate matters, the textbooks contain expository text, when all the children have thus far been exposed to is narrative text.

Std 3 children thus face a formidable situation where they are faced with textbooks that are beyond them linguistically, and they contain unfamiliar content that they have to learn in a language they do not understand. Their teachers, themselves hardly coping, are unable to help.

SECTION 3: AMENDED ACT: THE DET's OPTIONS

In May 1991 the then Minister of Education and Training admitted that the DET language policy was leading to serious educational disadvantages. In June, Parliament passed legislation whereby section 3(b) of the Education and Training Act of 1979 was amended to facilitate a change in the language policy. The act stated

"... that the language or languages to be used as the medium of instruction at a school and the extent and duration of such use shall be determined by the Minister after consultation with parents of pupils enrolled at that school, which consultation shall take place in the manner prescribed." (DET, 1992:3)

At last the right to choose MOI was given to parents. The following were the language medium options:

- (a) Straight for the long-term language medium. An African language, English or Afrikaans could be chosen as the MOI from the beginning of Sub A right through to Std 10.
- (b) A sudden transfer from the mother tongue to a second medium as was the case previously.
- (c) A graduated transfer from L1 to L2 instruction, the staggered transition happening during the first four years of school.

In a policy document issued in June 1992 (The Amended Language Medium Policy), the DET discusses the implications of each option, identifying one as the best choice, and cautioning against another. Although an attempt had been made to abide by democratic principles, a great deal still needed to be put right, as the following section will show.

SECTION 4: REACTION OF PEOPLE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

People involved in language education, particularly the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), provided very useful critical responses to the DET 1991 language policy, and its plans for implementation. NEPI was promoted and sponsored by the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and Education Policy Units (EPUs) of the universities of The Witwatersrand (Wits) and Natal to conduct a research programme in order to produce a sector by sector study of educational policy. The DET's intention to implement its new MOI policy was legislated while NEPI was right in the middle of its investigation. Democratic as the DET had tried to be, it was nevertheless felt that it was top-down in its approach and prescriptive in the options it offered parents. Also, the implications of the options had not been adequately explained. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

4.1 The DET Procedure

Even though decisions about the MOI for African schooling had, for decades, been a site for struggle, the DET had not consulted widely prior to drawing up its proposals. In its policy document (*ibid.*), it stated that draft regulations around the implementation of the new policy had been referred to the Council for Education and Training and to the Forum of Recognised Teachers' Association (FORTA). But consultation with only what are termed "recognised teachers' associations" clearly points to the exclusion of other teacher and educational organisations, the bulk of stakeholders.

4.2 Implementation time table

In May 1992 the DET announced its implementation time table. It was as follows:

- (a) Resolution by parent communities: As from July 1992

- (b) Decision by Minister: As from November 1992
- (c) Implementation: No matter which option is selected at the rate of one level per year, beginning with Sub Standard A (SSA) in 1993 (DET *ibid.*)

Thus parent communities only had a three-month consultation period, during which momentous decisions were to be made. In many areas, particularly rural areas, it would be difficult to achieve the required quorum at such short notice, and the Minister would end up making the decision, nullifying the whole idea of parental choice. Further, parents were not given the information necessary to make informed decisions, an omission that reduced the idea of choice to a token of democracy.

4.3 Bad timing

The DET was planning to implement these plans at a time when the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and other initiatives were collectively engaged in the process of drawing up a framework that would, among other things, put in place structures to formulate national language policy. Attempting to pre-empt all those endeavours was more in keeping with the spirit of the pre-amendment era.

4.4 The language medium options

McCormick, in a document preparing for discussion of alternative language policies, writes:

In order to make responsible decisions, people need to be able to digest and discuss information about what the policy means for learners and for teachers; about its pedagogical strengths and weaknesses; and about its wider social, cultural, economic and political implications. (NEPI, 1992:1)

A discussion of each of the options will show that none of the above conditions were met:

4.4.1 The straight-for-English option

This option the DET initially called the straight-for-long-term option, but "long-term" was soon replaced by "English" - perhaps in recognition of the fact that the bulk of the African community is thought to favour this option (ANC Language Policy, 1992; Southey 1987). The document cautioned against this policy, stating the disadvantages of initial enliteration in a second language. It, however, failed to avail parents of sufficient information about the disadvantages or about potential benefits in particular educational contexts.

The majority of the parents who do not speak English, see this inability as the reason for their poor station in life, and so tend to undervalue their own languages. The DET policy document failed to warn such unsuspecting parents that the Straight-for-English model is

"...likely to succeed only where children are already widely exposed to English and a literate culture outside of the classroom, only where teachers are fully bilingual and where there are adequate and complementary teaching materials, in both languages." (Luckett, 1992:5)

In the majority of DET, self-governing or homeland governments, the above conditions did not obtain. Implementation of this policy in conditions where these did not obtain would render the majority of pupils unable to achieve proficiency in English, and not in their mother tongues either. The model would have a fairly good chance of success in urban middle-class areas, but that would only widen the existing urban-rural divide. Furthermore, parents needed to be made aware of the fact that their choice of straight-for-English would mean continued dominance of English in South African public life.

4.4.2 Current low status of African languages reinforced

African language MOI was not explored in the Straight-for-the-long term medium option. Though the other options gave the pupils' first language room on the curriculum, it was

limited to the first four years. This indirectly said the pupils' and teachers' languages could not be used for serious study. It also implied that the state had no plans to enhance the low status of these languages by developing them for senior primary, high school and tertiary level.

The fact that, for historical and political reasons, mother tongue instruction is unpopular among Africans in this country, is another issue that the DET should have taken up with parents, and in a meaningful way. That a first language MOI is the most educationally sound option should have been adequately explained to parents, and possibly the advantages of this policy in white education brought into the picture. Preparedness to implement L1 instruction right through to Std 10, and the intention to take other steps necessary in enhancing the low status of African languages, would have been a more credible approach. The USSR was in a worse position than our country is when it set out to implement L1 instruction. There were 130 different languages spoken in that country, some without the written form. Each was given a written form, as well being standardised (Wardhaugh 1986). The DET could have considered that route, much as its predecessor did in the late 50's, when some sort of corpus planning was undertaken in order to implement the Bantu Education Act (at that time the right thing was done, only for the wrong reason).

4.5 Sudden transfer

One's criticism of the DET here would be that it offered parents this option at all considering that it was this very policy that had, over the years, led to the high failure and drop-out rate in Std 3. It failed to warn parents of its lack of success in, for example, Tanzania, where the transfer comes at the beginning of Std 7. In that country research has shown that 66% of Std 7 pupils cannot understand extended English text (Langhan, 1992). It failed to inform parents of the success of this policy only in situations where conditions for its success are met, such as in the state of Ife in Nigeria. There pupils had acquired considerable skill in the L1 before changing to EMI, and they had developed

central concepts in the L1 before they had to express them in English.

The DET further failed to warn parents of the stressful period children go through when listening, speaking, reading and writing in all subjects suddenly has to be done in a language which was previously only taught as a subject.

In fairness, though, it has to be stated that the DET had plans to upgrade teachers' skills (in-service training) so they could cope with the demands of the new policy, and to ensure the competence of PTD (Junior Primary Teachers' Diploma) student teachers to teach through the medium of English. The problem with these plans was the time factor, e.g.

- (a) Regional subject advisors were to implement the necessary in-service training as from November 1992;
- (b) The necessary text books and other resource materials would be available for SSA in January 1993.

It is impossible for one to believe that two months would have been sufficient to make these provisions.

4.6 Staggered transition

This is the option supported by the Threshold Project. Although introducing the L2 MOI would take place in "small doses", and over a fairly comfortable period of four years, research has yet to be undertaken to establish the order of subjects in which to introduce L2 instruction. The two languages also have to work in a complementary fashion, and the question of how exactly has still to be established.

These, and other needs, could not have possibly been provided for in a period of six months. NEPI's medium of instruction research group was unable to get information from Malawi about the success or otherwise of this policy, so that at the time the DET was

offering parents this option, they had had no way of gauging its effectiveness.

4.7 South Africa's multilingualism not provided for

As Lockett (1982) has pointed out, the DET proposals have failed to make provisions for the multilingual nature of South African society. In many regions there is more than one language spoken by tens of thousands of people, and yet the DET had plans for just one L1 in each school, a language that in some parts of the country cannot possibly be every pupil's first language. Also, the DET had not explored the bilingual model, where the child's L1 and the L2 could be used side by side.

Despite the moratorium requested by concerned educationists, some parent communities (those with children in DET schools) actually voted. The choices of the 67% that voted were as follows:

- Staight-for-English...22%
- Gradual transition.....54,0%
- Sudden transition.....13,4%
- Retain status quo.....7,5

(Heugh 1993)

The schools that voted straight-for-English faced the dilemma of how to implement their decision. The then Minister of Education and Training, Sam de Beer, said the DET had not undertaken the responsibility for implementing that particular choice, that the parents had merely been invited to make their choice noted!

The main point being made here is that the issue of language medium in education is extremely sensitive. There therefore needs to be wide discussion and consultation before implementation of a new policy. Again, for such a policy to be successful, it has to be implemented by an authority that the people affected accept and identify with. Although there was evidence that the DET had moved away from the dogmatic imposition of its predecessor's policies, its attempt at democracy was very untidy. Furthermore, it did not

enjoy credibility in the African community, and it did not show itself to have the political skill needed to implement policy democratically.

SECTION 5: BILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION

In situations where teachers educate children from their own communities, the decisions they have to make about the education of their charges are mostly about socio-pedagogical issues, the content of the curriculum and the appropriate methodology to be used to communicate the content (Baker 1993). The situation is very different for teachers whose classes are composed of children from different language backgrounds. The additional, and crucial, decision they have to make is one that is fraught with problems. That is the question of which language to teach in, and related issues.

In this section I shall look at these issues, the research that has been done internationally, and go on to consider its implications for my study. I shall first look at the terms commonly used.

5.1 Definition of terms

5.1.1 Bilingualism

This term is used to describe the two languages of an individual. Skutnabb-Kangas(1981) distinguishes between three kinds of bilingualism:

5.1.2 Natural bilingualism

This is when someone has learned two languages during everyday life, without explicit , formal teaching, often at a very young age. This may happen within the family or outside the family, i.e. where the language of the family is different from that of the wider society within a multilingual society.

5.1.3 School bilingualism

This is the learning of an additional language at school through formal teaching. In the context of this study this is the language used in public life, the language of power that the child aspires to become competent in.

5.1.4 Cultural bilingualism

This is similar to school bilingualism in many respects, but it refers mainly to adults who learn a foreign language for reasons of travel etc., and is not really relevant to this study.

In the South African context there is a prevalence of both natural and school bilingualism. There is a high incidence of natural bilingualism in areas like the Gauteng region where there is a high concentration of different language groups, and children learn other people's languages in the course of everyday life.

5.2 Issues in bilingual education

5.2.1 Educational use of the mother tongue

I found Pattanayak's views (in Spolsky (ed.) 1986) very useful in looking at language

as a factor providing or withholding access to education, and therefore to human development, as a key to knowledge, information and communication, as an indicator of appropriateness of technology, as a major element in elite formation and alienation, as a barrier to or equaliser of social, political and economic opportunities.....(p3)

It is important to examine the question of the educational use of the mother tongue in this light so the tensions that exist between the languages children speak as their mother tongues and those valued by the societies the children live in are revealed.

Third World countries were formerly colonised by countries that legislated for the use of their languages in all spheres of public life. The indigenous languages, though in each case spoken by the great majority of the population, became the minority language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981), by virtue of their inferior position viz-a-viz the colonial language.

Education, the major key to gaining access to all the desirable things in life, was conducted in the "majority" language. That, together with other colonial educational policies and

inadequate educational provision, worked together to keep education out of the reach of the majority of the people. When the colonial era came to the end, colonial languages continued to enjoy their dominant positions, the consideration now being the need to prevent a different form of inequality. This new need was to ensure against promoting one of the indigenous languages at the expense of the others. This meant that the great majority of the people continued to be disadvantaged, as only a few could make it through the "formidable linguistic barriers to education, employment and political participation" (Tollefson 1991:5).

5.2.2 The mother tongue and identity

Pattanayak makes a strong argument for the mother tongue (L1) as "the primary identity of a human being" (p7). Through the L1 the child sees and comes to understand the world around her. Initial concept formation takes place in the L1 as does acclimatisation to her environment. Kinship with other children and adults is formed through the L1. She is socialised into a system of beliefs and practises through the L1. The myths transmitted from great-grandparents down to parents, the feasts and other cultural activities all anchor the child to her culture, and through the L1. The loss of the L1 therefore has serious implications for the rootedness of the child in the traditions of her speech community.

5.2.3 The L1 and teaching reading and writing

On the question of teaching reading and writing, Pattanayak considers it common sense that it should first be done in the L1, following the sound educational principles of step-incremental learning and progression from the known to the unknown. (This point will be picked up later in the discussion of Cummins' work).

5.2.4 The L1 and another language used as MOI

A study was carried out by Srivastana and Khatoon (1980) to determine the effects of using two languages - the L1 and another as MOI on mental ability, creativity and achievement in selected Indian schools. It was found that what had significant influence on the children was their socio-economic status, the school climate, the methods used by the teachers, the materials and the media of teaching. The L1 schools involved, compared with English medium schools were found to be invariably inferior in that the conditions of teaching were inferior, and the calibre of students was weaker. The investigation was carried further and it was demonstrated that when improved conditions of teaching were provided, L1 medium students did as well as English medium students. It was clear to the researchers that as long as conditions in L1 schools were not right, English medium schools would continue to attract better students, and students from families with greater achievement drives. Also, as long as the L1 is not known to help anyone achieve wealth and status in society, L1

instruction will always compare unfavourably with English medium instruction.

The Srivastana-Khatoon study (in Pattannayak in Spolsky) was a very important one because it demonstrated that if the right conditions obtain, education through the L1 can hold its own. In fact Pattannayak argues that this study shows "an edge for the L1 rather than the other languages as medium of instruction" (p12). For a for a number of reasons he sees it as essential, one that deserves corpus planning in all Third World countries:

- (a) It offers equal opportunities to the majority of the people in any country, thus enabling them to participate in national reconstruction and development.
- (b) It brings education within the reach of a greater number of people, in that way giving access to personal development greater numbers.
- (c) It enables the interaction of science with society, freeing knowledge from being the preserve of a few educated people.
- (d) It de-mystifies the contents of the media, so that information is not centralised in the hands of a small sector of society.
- (e) It enables more people to be involved in the politics of the country.
- (f) It promotes cognitive growth and creativity in children as the thought processes are not impeded by a language foreign to them.
- (g) It closes the gap between the educated and the uneducated, a situation that is the cause of much resentment.

The situation described in the Srivastana-Khatoon study is similar to the great majority of schools in the African community in this country. The inferior status endured by the African languages has yet to be changed. The high rate of failure at Std 3 that comes as a result of the change over to EMI is seen by many parents as a reason to start enliteration in English, in order for the children to have "adequate" exposure to English. English is, in any case, known to be the language of education, employment, the courts etc., so it is seen as the one valuable language. What I think is needed is to open up the language debate and implement policy that will enable African languages to gain sufficient status for people to have reason to learn in them up to tertiary level. In the meantime, children in this country and elsewhere are under pressure to become bilingual (and trilingual!) since their own languages have limited official status. Not only are they under external pressure but there is strong internal family pressure to become bilingual. (The parents usually want their children to learn the "majority" language well, especially to ensure that they have better educational and economic prospects than they themselves had (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981:79). Although parents are keen to have their children competent in their home languages, they are acutely aware of the consequences to be suffered if their children fail to become bilingual.

5.2.5 Consequences of failure

- (a) Most educational opportunities are closed to children who do not master the second language, that being English in the South African context.

- (b) Such children cannot compete in the labour market with young people from the "majority" group.
- (c) They cannot share in the life of the larger community and their chances of influencing it are severely limited.
- (d) They later find it impossible to improve their situation, and that of their group, to demand the rights of their group, as such demands have to be made in the "majority" language the they do not command.
- (e) The reverse is as problematic, where the children become dominant in the "major" language, and come to look down on their own languages. Such children lose contact with their parents, their origin and their culture. Alienation, rootlessness and identity crisis become very real, even though the young people in question may appear to function well (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981).

Gaganakis (1992) has researched this aspect locally, and her findings confirmed this last point. Her subjects were pupils in some of the schools in the greater Johannesburg area. Her findings showed that many of those young people considered themselves to be a class above their counterparts in township schools. Statements like, "They are just not our equals", "They're inferior to us" clearly point to this. A better education and the ability to speak fluent English were regarded as clear markers of their elite status. They saw the use of English as a means of effecting social distance from township peers, and this quite often entailed refusing to speak to them in the vernacular.

5.2.6 Psycholinguistic theory

Recent research has shown that bilingualism has positive cognitive effects. A good starting point in the discussion of these positive effects is the distinction Lambert (in Lockett, 1993) has made between additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism.

Additive bilingualism is the gaining of competence in a second language while maintaining the first. It develops when both languages are valued and reinforced, so that both languages have positive and complementary cognitive and social effects on the learner's development.

Subtractive bilingualism occurs when a second language is learned at the expense of the first, when the first is not supported by the education system. This happens when the social conditions of learning devalue the learner's L1 as well as its culture. There are always chances of subtractive bilingualism impeding cognitive and social development. Cummins (1976) has done considerable work that has provided psycholinguists with an explanation of how the one impedes the other. His theory is that there are two thresholds. There is a lower threshold of minimal linguistic skills in the L1, which a child must attain if the learning of the second language is not to have damaging effects on cognition. Then there is an upper threshold which represents a high level of linguistic skills in both languages, which accelerates cognition. According to this theory, a child who has not attained proficiency in the first language (i.e. is below the first threshold), the effects of bilingualism on cognitive development are negative. For the child in the upper threshold

(who is competent in both the first and second languages), bilingualism has positive effects. This has important implications for the sort of foundation laid in the L1.

Cummins further distinguishes between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). A language learner makes use of BICS in cognitively undemanding situations where language is context embedded. Where language is context reduced, is abstract and cognitively demanding, a higher level of linguistic competence is demanded of the learner. Cummins argues that for subtractive bilingualism to be avoided children need to first achieve CALP in their L1 before attempting to learn through a second language. Further, for the L2 to be used as a MOI the learner has to have achieved CALP competence in that language. The BICS level is not sufficient for that child to perform cognitive functions with proficiency.

All this has important implications for MOI, and for the teaching of pupils' mother tongues in our country.

5.2.7 The "Linguistic interdependence hypothesis"

Cummins is further associated with research (1984,1986) that attempts to show that first and second language academic skills are interdependent. In *Bilingualism and Special Education-Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*, 1984, he reports on research he conducted in Spanish-English bilingual classrooms. He found that

Spanish instruction that develops first language reading skills for Spanish-speaking students is not just developing Spanish skills, it is also developing a deep conceptual and linguistic proficiency that is strongly related to the development of English literacy and academic skills (p143).

Williams, also on Cummins' linguistic interdependence principle (in Hoffmann 1991), says

...although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive academic proficiency which is common across languages. This "common" underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive academic skills across languages... (41)

Cummins uses the example of a fifteen-year-old immigrant child who arrives in North America already having an understanding of the word "honesty" in his L1. All that this child has to do is "acquire" a new label in the L2 for an already existing concept. This he contrasts with a child who does not understand the meaning of this word in his L1, Such a child has the difficult task of having to acquire this concept in the L2.

Cummins' argument is that while surface fluency in the L1 can develop independently of surface fluency in the L2, context reduced and cognitively demanding communication in the two languages is interdependent. This means that cognitive skills required for success in the more intellectually demanding tasks are dependent on the relationship between the L1 and the L2, and if both languages are sufficiently established, learning takes place

unhindered. This supports the use of the child's L1 during the early stages of education, the L2 being added only when the higher-order cognitive and linguistic skills have been developed in the first. Cummins believes the ability to handle cognitively demanding tasks can be transferred from the L1 to the L2 successfully (Hoffman 1991)

5.3 Contradictory research findings

While the research findings cited above support bilingualism in education, there have also been contradictory findings.

Hoffman (1991) cites three immersion studies carried out in the seventies. Of these, the Mexico study, showed initial enliteration in a second language (Spanish in that case) to have had a detrimental effects on the Indian children's academic performance (Paulston 1992). In the other two studies initial enliteration in the L2 improved the children's academic performance. Hoffmann (1991) also cites studies conducted by Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas in North America and Scandinavia, in which it was found that children who used different languages at home and at school performed poorly at school, and that seemed to be as a result of having an inadequate command of the L1 and the L2.

5.4 Conclusion to discussion on biligualism in education

There are probably a whole lot of reasons as to why there have been contradictory findings, but it seems to me that context is an important factor. The status of the L1, the political and economic power of the users of the L1, their feelings about their language, classroom conditions, teaching resources and teacher training all have an important determining effect on the success or failure of bilingual education.

5.5 Local research

The HSRC's Threshold Project is one thoroughly researched and documented study that has been undertaken locally. As reported in chapter 2, the Project reported that it had found that at the time of transition from L1 to L2 instruction children have not learnt enough vocabulary and structures to be able to read textbooks, understand EMI or cope with the type of writing expected of them. They could not explain in their second language what they already knew in their first. Neither could they transfer into the L1 what they had learnt in their L2. In terms of Cummins theory they had failed to achieve CALP in either language.

Because the Project accepts Cummins' linguistic interdependence hypothesis, it proposes that skills be first established in the L1 before being established in the L2. For this reason it strongly recommends gradual transition from the L1 to the L2.

In this chapter I have shown how sudden transition EMI impacted on Std 3 pupils, the problems it entailed and how the DET was ill-equipped to deal with them. I have also shown how bilingual education should be implemented if it is to lead to additive bilingualism, and how a good L1 foundation benefits L2 MOI.

In the next chapter I describe the actual research, and relate the choices of my respondents to the theories discussed in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION

Section 1 Reason for my choice of research area

Section 2 Background information on Nongoma

Section 3 Methodology

Section 4 Interpretation

SECTION 1: REASON FOR MY CHOICE OF RESEARCH AREA

Generally speaking, the question of choice of medium of instruction in African education has not been well researched. The little bit that has been carried out (Southey,1987.) has been done informally and in urban settings. The findings of this informal research are that parents want their children taught in English right from the beginning of school. Thus when the ANC in 1992 wrote that parents wanted their children taught in English right from Sub A (ANC Language Policy, 1992), it had in mind urban parents.

At the time that the whole discussion about the DET proposals and parental choice of MOI was taking place, I was teaching at KwaGqikazi College of Education in Nongoma, a rural village in KwaZulu. To find out how parents in a rural setting would choose, I decided to undertake this research.

The actual research was undertaken in July 1993, a little more than a year after the DET had asked parents to make their choices.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON NONGOMA

Nongoma lies in the heart of what has traditionally been known as KwaZulu, that part of Natal where most Zulu kings had their palaces. It is the home of the present Zulu king, and the homes of three of his predecessors are within a radius of about 100 kilometres.

Even before the homeland policy was implemented, Nongoma was an economically depressed area that had no minerals to speak of, no agriculturally viable land, and only one perennial river that flows through predominantly Nguni cattle grazing lands. Subsistence farming occurs in fields running along intermittent river banks. The bulk of the population depends on money that migrant sons and husbands send from far away metropolitan cities.

Nongoma village itself started as a support system for King Solomon (who died in 1939), which in effect meant a magistrates's office, a post office and a shop or two. In time a German Catholic missionary started a hospital and a school. More schools followed, some of them being built by other Christian denominations. Even then, schools were few and far between.

Educationally, Nongoma is extremely disadvantaged. Its remote location, condition of the roads leading to it, very poor housing and lack of entertainment facilities are some of the reasons the area has great difficulty in attracting qualified teachers. (Nongoma circuit, together with four neighbouring circuits, has the highest rate of unqualified/underqualified teachers in all of KwaZulu-Natal). Educated locals are the first to seek employment in towns and cities far from their home ground. One example is the fairly new college of education that has a staff complement of sixty, and yet only one lecturer is a local person! The "migrant" lecturing staff spend a year or two at the college and move on. All educational and health institutions in the area enjoy a form of migrant labour: teachers, nurses and other qualified working people are in the area from Monday to Friday, and depart for their homes on Friday.

SECTION 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 The subjects

The study took the form of a survey. Cluster sampling was used to interview 51 subjects (51 rather than 50 as I wanted to work with three groups of equal size). Cluster sampling was chosen following the recommendations of Cohen and Manion (1980) for a population that is large and widely dispersed. That way I was able to avoid randomly selecting my subjects and so did not have to spend "an inordinate amount of time travelling about" in order to interview them (Cohen and Manion 1980:99). A possible disadvantage in selecting one's subjects in this fashion, however, might be that people who work together, who come from the same background and have a particular station in life as a result of their circumstances, share a similar view of life. The group in my study comprised the catering staff as well as the groundsmen at the teacher-training college, the catering staff in a neighbouring high school, and all the market vendors in the Nongoma Bus Rank Market Centre. By contrast, a cluster of principals of schools might, as a result of their exposure and experiences, have generally the same views on language policy. The findings of this research will be used to describe parental choices in the Nongoma area, and yet the cluster sample, constrained by the limitations described above, might not be wholly representative.

As indicated above, the subjects came from "two walks of life" i.e. employed and self-employed.

3.1.1 The employed parents

Roughly two thirds of these had had some sort of education, generally speaking. By Nongoma standards this meant at least having attained Std 5 level (the senior year in the higher primary school). This group consisted mainly of mothers and grandmothers, with a sprinkling of fathers.

3.1.2 The market vendors

These were mostly women, middle-aged and pensioned, and, judging by what was said in the interview, these were less literate than the catering staff. 19,3% of the subjects were grandparents of children attending lower primary schools. Nongoma is predominantly populated by children, women and pensioners, with grand-parents acting as guardians of many of the school-going children. The vendors were predominantly women who, if married, had husbands who were either unemployed or were away in the cities. They were either mothers or grandmothers responsible for the children under discussion.

3.2 Instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 1) was used as the instrument. While requiring specific and pre-determined questions, the semi-structured interview is more flexible than the structured, and therefore more suited to my study, as it permits "elaboration in the questions and answers" (Seliger and Shohamy 1989:167). I felt that it would be important for me to be free to explain the questions, provide background information, probe and do anything else required in an area where interviews are not common place, and the topic would most probably never have been discussed before.

The interview schedule itself comprised two sections, each with a set of questions.

3.2.1 Part I

This section was designed to establish whether or not the respondent had children in the lower primary school (Sub A to Std 2), how many they had, what classes they were doing and how they (the respondents) were related to the children.

3.2.2 Part II

This attempted to establish:

1. What language was being used as medium of instruction in the lower primary schools the children attended.
2. Whether they were happy with that language being used.
3. (In the case of parents who did not know what language was being used) What language they thought should be used.
4. The reason they favoured that particular language.
5. Whether the school should continue to use the language in 1 or 3 (above) as MOI throughout schooling.
6. Why language X (in 5) should be retained or not retained as MOI throughout their children's schooling lives.
7. Which of the DET's three media of instruction options they would take if they were offered the choice.
8. What status the other language would enjoy.

3.3 Responses

3.3.1. Current MOI

39 (76,4%) of the subjects were either mothers or fathers of children in lower primary school. 10 (19,3%) were grand-parents, and two, parents as well as grand-parents. The parents had between five and eight children in primary school. All of the children went to schools run by the Department of Education and Culture of the then KwaZulu Government.

Feeling about current MOI

48 (94,6%) were aware that Zulu was the medium of instruction in the lower primary school. Three were not. Two of those were illiterate groundsmen (during the interviews it emerged that they use the thumb print to sign for their salary cheques). As such they were not aware that one particular language was being used more extensively than another - they were just aware that Zulu, English and Afrikaans were being learned by their grandchildren. Evidently they were not aware of the fact that Afrikaans is only done in the higher primary school, so it was hardly surprising that they had no knowledge of matters of medium of instruction. The third respondent said he had never paid attention to this issue. When his own children were going to school, he was away in the mines, and so he was not sure in what language they had been taught when in Sub A.

3.3.2 Preferred MOI

The above three (not aware of the MOI being used in Sub A) felt English should be the MOI, and two reasons were given to back this up. One parent stated,

"Izingane uma sizithumela esikoleni sisuke sibheke ukuthi zifunde izinto ezintsha. Isizulu lesi ingane isuke isazi isikhipha ngamakhala, ngakho-ke asikho isidingo sokuba leyongane ibelokhu isina ndawonye".

(When we send children to school we expect them to acquire new knowledge. By school-going age a child is already a fluent speaker of Zulu [and in Zulu when someone is a fluent speaker of a language they are pictured as being able to speak that language through their nostrils i.e. even with their mouth shut], so there is no need for that child to dance on one spot [i.e. not move forward/ not make progress]. That child must learn English, and be taught in English).

The other two shared the view that learning in English would improve the children's opportunities of finding good jobs when they finished school.

"Mina ngilapha nje ngoba kwaleyonkeshezi yemfundo engayithola ayingihlomisanga ngesiNgisi esingangitholela umsenbenzi ongcono."

(The reason I am here i.e. doing the menial job of cutting grass and watering plants is because even the little bit of education I got was not delivered in a language that would enable me to get a better job than this.)

Zulu as MOI

15 parents (29.1%) were happy with Zulu being the MOI. These gave variations of two basic standpoints:

- (i) Learning in Zulu help cushion the new and alienating environment called school. One parent actually described it as "learning to learn in a strange language", something that even she at her age would hate to do. This particular parent went on to say, "As it is new knowledge is beaten into children," and asked how much worse that would be if the children had to cope with a new language as well.
- (ii) Being Zulu, it is proper that the children be first taught in their language. If they are taught in any other language they might forget who they are, begin to sound like

English or Afrikaans boys and girls, and yet no one can say they have heard little white girls and boys who spoke Zulu instead of their own languages.

A very interesting, and completely surprising response, was given by a meticulous old man who originally came from Mozambique. He goes to Mozambique once in while, and very often hosts family and friends from Mozambique. He reported having been shocked to discover that young Mozambicans do not speak their mother tongues. He felt strongly that S.A should not fall into the trap of being overly concerned about communication across tribal and racial lines, but should do everything to promote people's home languages from the very beginning of school.

33 (64.4%) were not happy with Zulu as MOI. A number of different reasons were given:

- (i) (9.8%) "Izingane ziqala isikole sezivele zisazi isiZulu, ngakho-ke zisuke sezilwanele ulimi olusha. Akumele-ke kube yingxaki kuzo ukufunda ngesiNngisi."

(By the time children start school they are fluent speakers of Zulu, so they are ready to learn in a new language. Learning in English should therefore not be a problem).

- (ii) (7.8%) "Ingxaki ingathi ilaphaya eNkosiyethu. Zithi kade ziza kahle izingane zifike zibhajwe laphaya eNkosiyethu. Kuyacaca ukuthi kufike kudume upotiyane laphaya. Engazathi indaba ikhona lapha esiNngisini."

(Though the different parents put this in different words, what they were saying was essentially that their children seemed to manage well at Layukona-a junior primary school-but they seemed to get stuck when they got to Nkosiyethu-a senior primary school. For some reason they suddenly seemed to be unable to understand any of the things that school was about. Could it be that English was a problem?)

This was, for me, an interesting response. Because these are two of the schools we used for Teaching Practice, I was well aware that both of them had hard-working teachers. The senior primary school in question was in fact the best in the area. On further probing it turned out that these parents were among those that helped or were able to help their children with school work.

(iii) (9.8%) "Uma ngabe eDinizulu kufundwa ngesiNgisi kuphela, zichithelelwani-ke isikhathi izingane zethu zibe zifundiswa ngesiZulu kanti phambili nendlela kuzofundwa ngesiNgisi kuphela?"

(If at Dinizulu all the teaching is done in English, then why waste our children's time teaching them in Zulu when further on in this educational journey they'll be taught in English only ?) Dinizulu is a neighbouring high school.

English as MOI

17 (33.3%) felt if children are taught in English right from the start they are assured of good jobs. Variations of this answer were:

(i) "Ulimi lomlungu yisiNgisi, okuyilona limi alukhululuma nezisebenzi zakhe. Kusizani-ke ukufunda ngesiZulu?"

(English is the white mans' language, the language he speaks to people who work for him. What then is the point of learning in Zulu?)

(ii) "Ngiphila ngokudayisa emakethe nje ngoba isingisi esincane engasifunda sasingeke singisize ukuthi ngithole umsebenzi ongcono

(I am a fruit/vegetable vendor simply because the little bit of English I learned couldn't have helped me find a better job.)

(iii) "Izingane kumele zisazi IsiZulu lesi, kodwa isiNgisi yilonalimi oluyozisiza ukuba zithole umsebenzi".

(Zulu should be kept alive in the childrens' lives, but English is more important for employment.)

Two (3.9%) people favoured English for a different reason, that "English is needed for unity in the country. The new South Africa will need to be united (Kulomhlaba omusha ozayo kuyofuneka sibe munye)

Seven (13,7%) of the parents answered that English should be the MOI throughout. (Interestingly, three of these, in response to Question 7, chose gradual transition, arguing that both languages are equally important). The rest answered that whatever language they had opted for in 3 above should not be used exclusively. Afrikaans, they felt, could also be used.

Eleven (2.6%) felt children should spend most of their time learning in English, but not at the very beginning.

Nine (17.6%) thought children should start school in English, and later be taught Zulu as a subject.

The use of English and Zulu

Two (3.9%) felt both languages should be learned, English as MOI and Zulu as a subject.

Seven(13.7%) thought both languages should be used up to std 2 or 5, then English only thereafter.

Three (5.9%) felt it would be best to start school in Zulu, and English be used only at

some later stage (that later stage not clearly defined - just generally when children are "more mature" in terms of school life)

Two (3.9%) felt some subjects should be learned in Zulu, and others in English.

Three (5.9%) strongly felt that it should be necessary to teach Zulu only as a subject as by that level children would have learned to write it. These felt once the foundation for the mother tongue had been laid, it would not be detrimental to teach in English.

One (2%) felt the pupil him/herself should be free to decide on his/her MOI beyond Std 2.

All the parents who wished to see their children starting school in Zulu 15(24%) wanted them to switch to EMI at Std 3 or 6 level, but to retain Zulu as a subject. For these parents an important consideration was the fact that all books used in the senior primary school (std 3-5) are written in English. One of these recalled that when she was in std 4-5 all instruction was in Zulu, and all textbooks were in Zulu, but as the situation is different today it would not make sense to be taught in Zulu beyond std 3. (This particular parent was in senior primary school in the 1960's.)

For the parent who would leave it to the pupil to choose his/her MOI, it would help for the child to be first exposed to instruction in both English in Zulu, because then he/she would know which medium of instruction was easier for them. This parent complained that as far as the interview went, he was just being asked to play a guessing game.

For twenty parents (30%) both Zulu and English were important, but they felt it should be remembered that there would always have to be a bias towards Zulu. For one of these parents, being "educated" meant knowing more than just one's language, but that did not necessarily mean that "other people's languages should overtake" one's language (i.e. English being overweighted at the expense of Zulu.)

Ten of the parents (15%) felt it is proper for a school child to know both languages: Zulu as his/her mother tongue, and English for integration into the world. There was also concern about the children's inability to attain competence in English and the feeling was that only a limited number of years should be spent learning Zulu, and the bulk of the time be spent doing English.

"Uma kwenziwa njalo kungaba lula ukuthi izingane ziyofunda emaKhaſathini nase maNdiyeni, lapho imfundo ingcono kuneyethu".

(That way it would be easy for our children to later transfer to Coloured and Indian schools, where better education is offered.)

For one grand-mother, it would be tragic if her grand-children dropped Zulu early in their schooling lives as the chances of their forgetting it, and then not being able to communicate with her, would be increased. She quoted a rich neighbour whose grand-children attend schools in far-away towns and now sound like "abelungwana" (little white people). (This subject was referring to a local business man.)

For 18 of the respondents (35.3%) employment opportunities were an important deciding factor. One parent (and no other gave this response) suggested equal weighting of English and Afrikaans for employment opportunities. Yet another favoured English and Afrikaans because sizeable proportions of South Africa's people speak these two languages, and not knowing them would mean limited job opportunities.

The DET options

On the question of which of the DET's options parents favoured, thirty preferred the straight-for-English option and 21 preferred sudden transition, a rough 60:40 ratio.

SECTION 4: INTERPRETATION

The findings of this study are confusingly varied and apparently contradictory. Mparutsa *et al* (1992), however, offer a useful way of approaching contradiction in language attitudes. They argue that such contradictions point to larger ideological/cultural contradictions. They note:

most L1 indigenous language speakers find themselves in the position of preferring their first language for communicative purposes, yet functioning in an educational, social and economic system that emphasises the importance, even the hegemony, of English. (in Hughes 1993: 40)

While the respondents in my study recognised:

- the ease that accompanies initial enliteration in the L1
- that language is the primary identity of a human being, that their children would lose their "humanity" if they lost their language ("humanity" in 2.4.6 above is used to mean "sense of identity")

they nevertheless found themselves having to consider what appeared to be more expedient issues:

4.1 Employment

That English is the language of employment was considered by all the respondents to be a crucial matter. Much as learning in Zulu would make schooling easy, learning in it beyond Std 2 would be a hindrance because, observed, it would not give the children access to education and therefore to their development.

4.2 Language of higher education

The parents who pointed out that English was the language of the local high schools saw it as futile for their children to spend many primary school years learning in Zulu. They saw it as more sensible to spend maximum time on the language of higher education (including tertiary, presumably). Those of them that were aware of the children's poor performance in their first year of senior primary school would argue all the more that all the available time should be spent on the L2. The fact that good pedagogy values good grounding in and proper maintenance of the L1 is not known to those parents. If explained to them, they would probably be highly suspicious of explanations that have in the past been associated with apartheid policies. Until indigenous languages are developed fully and are seen as viable for tertiary education and employment, such parents will always second-rate their own languages.

4.3 Six-year-old fluent L1 speakers

Those of the respondents who saw their little six-year-olds as fluent speakers of the L1 saw no obstacle in the way of L2 enliteration right from Sub A. It was parents like these that local educationalists were concerned about when they asked the DET for a moratorium on parental choice of MOI. Such parents would make a choice not informed by educational needs, but by political and socio-economic considerations. Such theories as linguistic interdependence would pale alongside bread and butter issues in their children's future.

4.4 Zulu as a subject only

Zulu as MOI for a few years and then only as a subject was a fairly popular view. One possible problem with it is the criticism generally levelled against the teaching of African languages in this country. The charge is that discourse, for instance, is not as well taught in the mother tongues, so that when the time comes for the pupils to learn in the L2, there is

no transfer of this skill.

CONCLUSION

The respondents in this study all felt positive about their languages. Some were aware of the benefits of learning in the mother tongue. All felt, however, that it was of utmost importance that their children should be competent in English, the language of the economy. This is in line with Brudner's argument, when he says, "one can even argue that the most important factor influencing language choice of ethnic groups is economic, specifically one of access to jobs.(in Eastman 1992:99).

The question of when EMI should begin is one that requires careful consideration, wide consultation as well as careful planning. Educationists value initial mother tongue enliteration. The government has had valuable researched input (e.g. NEPI, the Threshold Project) Parental choice, in terms of the former DET plans, still obtains. As this study showed, there is a sizeable section of the community that want straight-for-English. Such parents are likely to regard with suspicion anybody who advises against such a choice. The history of the apartheid language in education policy is still fresh in people's minds. Also, scores of the "haves" continue to remove their children from township schools, and send them to EMI schools in the towns and suburbs.

The people promoting initial L1 enliteration are mainly (maybe entirely) L1 speakers of English. African language speaking educationists have not entered this debate (Young 1992). The void that creates further complicates the problem. The fact that the great majority of the latter, particularly teachers, have their children attending EMI schools, probably means their credibility in the African community is doubtful. While I think they should enter this aspect of the language debate, the fact that they would be promoting L1 initial enliteration for other people's children, while theirs start their education in English, is a criticism that would no doubt be made.

A gap between the views of parents and those of educationists/policy makers is a matter that requires very careful consideration. It calls for good policy, policy that is bottom up. Anything else will, ironically, present the country with an Eiselen/Bantu education type of scenario.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Part I

1. Name

.....

2. Residential Address

3. Do you have children in primary school? Yes/No

4. (a) If so, how many?

(b) In what class/es?

5. Relationship with the above, i.e. mother

father

other

Part II

1. In what language are your children being taught their subjects?

.....

2. (If parent is aware what language is being used.) Are you happy with that language being used?

.....

3. (If the parent is unaware.) What languages do you think should be used?

.....

4. Please give your reasons for saying language X (the language favoured) should be used.

.....

.....
.....

5. Should they learn in that language throughout school?

.....

6. Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....
.....

7. The government is considering allowing parents to choose one of three mediums of instruction

- (a) straight-for-English
- (b) sudden transition
- (c) gradual transition

to be used in their children's beginner classes. If that happened, which would you choose?

.....

8. What status do you think X (whichever language was not opted for) should enjoy in your child's schooling life and in life in general thereafter?

.....
.....
.....