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Student perceptions of multilingualism and the culture of communication in journalism studies in higher education

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Background: The year 2020 will mark five years since the watershed #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa. This was a student-led series of protests, at campuses across the country, calling for higher education to be made accessible through free decolonised education for black people. In light of this, the time has come to ascertain how students perceive the developments in the sector following this demand, which, among other things, included a call for tertiary education to reflect the country's multilingual context.

Objective: This study explored how journalism students, at a university of technology in South Africa, perceive the multilingual teaching and learning strategies, and their influence on the culture of communication in this discipline.

Method: The study employed a mixed methods sequential design, beginning with an online survey, followed by focus group discussions. A semantic thematic analysis was undertaken using a 'top-down' approach based on themes identified through James Carey's theoretical framework of communication as culture.

Results: The findings are that even though students have been exposed to various multilingual teaching and learning strategies, they perceive the way language is used in this discipline as perpetuating a culture of communication that is still predominantly monolingual. They see the multilingual interventions as being inadequate in addressing the challenges created by this particular culture of communication. They expressed mixed views on the influence of multilingualism on their academic performance.

Conclusion: The culture of communication used in this discipline continues to make students feel out of place in lectures and higher education as a whole and perpetuates certain student-lecturer power dynamics. For journalism students in particular, this has further implications in how they perceive their professional prospects as aspiring communications practitioners.

Keywords: Multilingualism; journalism education; higher education; culture of communication theory; #FeesMustFall.

Introduction

The year 2020 will mark five years since the #FeesMustFall movement, which shook the higher education sector in South Africa and caused wholesale acknowledgement that the status quo at the time was not working, particularly for students whom the sector supposedly exists to serve. This was a student-led series of protests, at campuses across the country, calling for higher education to be made accessible through 'free decolonized education for black people' (SABC Digital News 2016). One of the demands made by students was for a change in the culture of higher education from one that esteems ideas from the global north while invalidating perspectives from the global south (Cherry & Knaus 2016). Linked to this was a demand for the languages used in higher education in South Africa to reflect the multilingual context of the country.

This study aims to explore how journalism students, at a university of technology in South Africa, perceive the multilingual teaching and learning strategies, and their influence on the culture of communication used in this discipline. The notion of the culture of communication refers to the ways in which language is used in communication to espouse certain attitudes, values and beliefs (Giri 2006). The argument being made is that students perceive the ways in which lecturers employ multilingual strategies as enacting a certain culture of communication. This culture of communication, as evidenced in how language is used, has implications for how students perceive their ability to perform academically, to have a sense of place and belonging as scholars in the

discipline of journalism, and to have a certain outlook on their prospects as future practitioners in this communications-based field.

The focus on journalism is because of the role of language in this particular discipline and profession. Pedagogically, language in journalism education does not serve simply to communicate knowledge about the field; it also functions epistemologically by signifying how journalists generate knowledge by using language as a tool, and which languages are esteemed when it comes to generating this journalistic knowledge. The decision to focus on a university of technology is driven by the way in how they teach journalism: these institutions 'incorporate aspects of other disciplines to ensure that students acquire a broad understanding of the socio-political environment within which journalism and media studies is situated' (De Beer, Pitcher & Jones 2017:183).

Literature review

Multilingualism can be defined as 'the fact of the existence of, or the ability to use, more than one language' (eds. Kaschula, Maseko & Wolff 2017:xiv). In articulating a demand for a multilingual tertiary education, the view taken by the #FeesMustFall protesters suggests that these students view multilingualism as a positive feature of a higher education system. In literature, however, the effects of multilingualism on language development, educational attainment, cognitive growth and intelligence is a highly contested notion (Reynold 1928; Saer 1963, both in Grosjean 1982). Scholars have discussed the notion based on empirical and theoretical research undertaken in a range of disciplines including law, health and the social sciences (Kaschula & Ralarala 2004; Maseko & Kaschula 2009; Madiba 2010). The issue has also been thoroughly debated from a broader language policy planning perspective, with the recognition that the intellectualisation that occurs when indigenous languages that have previously been sidelined are mainstreamed in teaching and learning in higher education has implications for the status and esteem of these languages and the cultures that produced them in society broadly (Heugh 2000; Madiba 2013; Turner & Wildsmith-Cromarty 2014).

The call for a multilingual tertiary education experience is not new. The issue of a multilingual approach to higher education has been central to the sector since South Africa became a democracy. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, not only recognises all 11 official languages, but goes as far as to state that when it comes to indigenous languages that were deliberately diminished in terms of status and use, measures must be taken to raise the esteem and promote the use of these languages in society (see *Discussion*). The Language Plan Task Group of 1996 (LANGTAG), whose principle mission was to advise government on 'the processes to be followed and the issues to be addressed in order to arrive at an acceptable language plan for the country' (Alexander 1997:82), and the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which exists to 'initiate studies and research aimed at promoting and creating

conditions for the development of all 11 official languages' (Department of Arts and Culture 2019) were also established in that same year.

In terms of higher education specifically, LANGTAG called for indigenous languages to 'be used in high-status functions such as parliamentary debates, languages of learning and teaching in all phases of education, from pre-school up to the universities and the technikons' (LANGTAG 1996:15). In doing this, it articulated the need to elevate the status of these indigenous languages. This then paved the way for the development of policies in the higher education sector that specifically address the apartheid regime's systematic marginalisation of the languages spoken by the majority of the people.

Despite the numerous legislative policy documents and frameworks, a 2015 report commissioned by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) found:

> Implementation plans around the teaching, learning and research in indigenous African languages does not seem to consider any indigenous languages as the language of teaching and learning. Consequently, English and Afrikaans and so, their speakers, continue to be privileged in [Higher Education] even in the current political dispensation. (p. 10)

This then means that speakers of indigenous languages, whose access to higher education is already compromised by factors such as poor primary and secondary schooling, socio-economic issues, and culturally alienating practices in higher education, are disadvantaged further because their mother tongue does not feature as part of their formal education experience at this level.

It was no wonder then that, as part of the #FeesMustFall student protests between 2015 and 2017, the issue of language policy at tertiary institutions was central to students' demands to de-Westernise the curriculum (Cherry & Knaus 2016). The issues raised by students, around the exclusionary ways in which language is used in higher education, were not new. They have been raised as part of debates dating back to the 1980s. Among the seminal African thinkers on this issue was Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1992) whose work on the use of language in African literature noted:

> In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art treasures from Africa to decorate their houses and museums; in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and cultures. Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its language and all its patriotic writers. (p. xii)

With specific reference to journalism, in a study based on a course called 'isiXhosa for journalism' introduced as part of the journalism curriculum in 2009 at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, Du Toit and Maseko (2017) note the limited research that has looked at language in general, and multilingualism in particular in journalism education in Africa. Du Toit and Maseko note the work of Abiodun Salawu as among the few studies that exist and make a compelling case for the expansion of research on language use in journalism

education, as well as the importance of multilingualism in journalism practice in the African context (Salawu 2007).

Research into multilingual education in this discipline notes that the predominant strategies used to teach multilingually have relied mainly on the introduction of courses on indigenous languages, such as isiXhosa and isiZulu (Du Toit & Maseko 2017; Maseko & Kaschula 2009). These courses are usually taught as stand-alone subjects to help students communicate better in them. They do not feed into other courses, and often students do not use the communication skills garnered from them when working on assignments in other subjects. This strategy has gone a long way towards demonstrating that indigenous languages can be used in the academy. However, indigenous languages are still not used in the core courses of the discipline. This thus has the potential to undermine the impact of having these language courses, because instead of mainstreaming indigenous languages, they could lead to them being marginalised.

Theoretical framework

This study hopes to add to the existing body of research on multilingualism in journalism tertiary education, by drawing on a theory that views the use of language in communication as more than just a process of transmitting ideas, but rather as an activity that constructs reality. James Carey's (2008) theory of communication as culture views communication as 'a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed' (p. 19). This theory is typically used in communications-based disciplines, like journalism, because it is aimed at theorising around how the use of language shapes views of reality. It is also used in the field of sociolinguistics.

The concept of culture is used to understand and explain how human beings relate to each other in societies. It is a highly contested concept that has proven to be difficult to define (Atkinson 2004). In terms of literature, the earliest and most widely recognised definition came from English anthropologist Edward Taylor who defined it as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor 1871, quoted in Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952:43). Carey's (2008) theory does not purport to say that communication *is* culture as per Taylor's definition where culture is 'that complex whole' that brings together many aspects of a society's way of life; rather it views communication *as* culture, something that points to the ways in which a particular society produces, maintains, repairs and transforms reality through the way it communicates. This theory hypothesises that in observing how words are used, we can get a sense of the attitudes, values and beliefs that are espoused in a certain context, and further we can use words to produce, maintain, repair and shape those attitudes values and beliefs.

In how language is used in higher education in South Africa, where proficiency in English is more esteemed that proficiency in indigenous languages, this theory can help us explain 'the symbolic process' that has gone into producing and maintaining this as reality. It gives a view that the reality of English being the most dominant language used in South Africa universities has been produced and maintained by the way in which it has been used in higher education spaces, not because the language is inherently more 'academic' than others. It can then be argued that the way of repairing this reality and transforming it also lies in how we use language to communicate, in this case through indigenous languages. Communication as culture recognises that using certain languages to communicate is not only about *what* languages are used to transmit information and share ideas, but also *how* the languages are used.

In this study, Carey's (2008) theory of communication as culture has been applied in as far as it will assist in understanding how pedagogical practices around language use in communications-based disciplines shape student perceptions of those academic disciplines and the professional fields they are likely to work in. Since communication is 'any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information' (Mehrabian in Velentzas & Broni 2014), it includes spoken and unspoken forms. Of particular interest to this study is language as an aspect of communication. Language is an important part of journalism and journalism studies because of the importance of words and their use within this discipline. As such, a view of communication that allows us to unpack the multiple levels at which language use influences the ways in which communication is perceived to shape reality will allow us to view communication as more than just 'the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs' (Carey 2008:15). In this view, then, the words used when communicating in any language are 'not the names of things but … things are the sign of words' (Carey 2008:20). Carey further argues that the use of words is central to the view of reality because 'reality is not given, not humanly existent, independent of language and towards which language stands as a pale refraction. Rather reality is brought into existence, is produced by communication'. (Carey 2008:20)

In journalism studies the use of words has implications on several levels. Firstly, there are implications for how students perceive their cognitive abilities based on the view that if they are not competent in English, they are not clever enough, even if they excel in other aspects of the course, such as in interviewing, editing and storytelling. For some, the language used in lectures makes it difficult to follow the content being taught, and this can lead to the view that just because they do not understand the language fully, they cannot understand the content presented (Taylor & Von Fintel 2016). On a second, deeper level, language use has implications for student perceptions on whether the ways in which communication occurs and is used in journalism studies includes or excludes them (Meier & Hartell 2009). On a third, even deeper level, being taught a communications-based discipline monolingually privileges a particular language,

and this creates an impression that to excel as a journalist in South Africa, one needs to communicate with proficiency in English (Fosu 2011). Carey's (2008) theory of communication as culture provides a useful lens through which to analyse these perceptions because it posits that the act of language use in teaching is not primarily about the transmission of 'intelligent information', but about the construction and maintenance of an 'ordered, meaningful cultural world that can act as a control and container for human action' (pp. 18–19), based on how language is used.

Methodology

Research design

This is an explorative study rooted in an interpretivist research orientation in so far as it seeks to understand how a particular group of journalism students have constructed their realities based on their situations and experiences (Hammersley 2013). The study employs a mixed methods sequential design, which begins with an online survey to quantify the extent to which the students sampled were exposed to multilingual teaching and learning strategies, followed by focus groups to explore their perceptions on these strategies and probe deeper into the findings that emanated from the survey.

Data collection

The online survey was distributed to all of the undergraduate journalism students enrolled at the university of technology concerned via the learner management system Blackboard in June 2019. This was deemed to be the most efficient way of reaching the students because they use the system on a daily basis and it allows for ease of data capturing and analysis (Evans & Mathur 2005).

In 2019, 70 students were registered for the programme. Of those, 30 responded to the survey. This means that the response rate was 43% of the population, which is higher than the average cited by Nulty's (2008) work on the general response rate when it comes to online surveys. Those who took part were students who commenced their journalism studies at the institution between 2011 and 2019. In this cohort were students who commenced their higher education prior to the #FeesMustFall period, those who commenced their studies at the height of the protests between 2015 and 2017, and those who started their studies a year or two after that watershed period.

The survey sought to ascertain the types of multilingual teaching and learning strategies the students had been exposed to, and the ways in which they perceived the efficacy of these strategies. The multilingual teaching and learning strategies that these students are exposed to include, but are not limited to:

- lectures that are delivered using multiple languages
- teaching and learning resources such as videos and readings that are in multiple languages

- the option to submit assignments such as essays, and projects using multiple languages
- assignment briefs and feedback given in multiple languages
- language courses such as English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa
- one-on-one consultations with lecturers that are conducted using multiple languages.

The students were required to indicate their year of study and the languages they spoke outside of the lecture room context. The survey also employed a multiple choice question to ascertain whether students had been exposed to specific multilingual strategies, and to what extent this exposure had happened. It also had multiple choice questions that were used to gauge their views on whether the multilingual strategies they had been exposed to had been adequate and effective. There were also long-form questions where students had to explain what they understood by the term multilingualism and how they perceived the advantages and disadvantages of a multilingual pedagogical approach in their education.

Based on the responses that emerged from the survey, questions were drawn up to conduct semi-structured focus group discussions. The focus group format of data collection was used because of the way that it can provide data on 'perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words' (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990:140). Two focus groups were held. The focus groups were audio recorded and the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were then analysed using a thematic textual analysis to ascertain the dominant themes that emerged from the views articulated by the students.

Data analysis

The analysis of the focus group discussion is a semantic thematic analysis, undertaken using a 'top-down' approach based on the research questions the study sought to answer (Braun & Clarke 2006). It employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework.

Results

The online survey was used to get an overall sense of the students' experiences of multilingualism. It emerged that all of those who participated in the survey spoke at least two languages, with most of those surveyed indicating that the languages spoken in their homes were isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans (See Figure 1).

Most of the surveyed students indicated that they had heard about the notion of multilingualism in the course of their studies (see Figure 2). The responses they gave when requested to explain what the term meant included 'being able to converse or communicate in more than one language', 'the use of multiple languages as a form of communication or instruction', and 'communicating in various languages so that everyone is able to understand'.
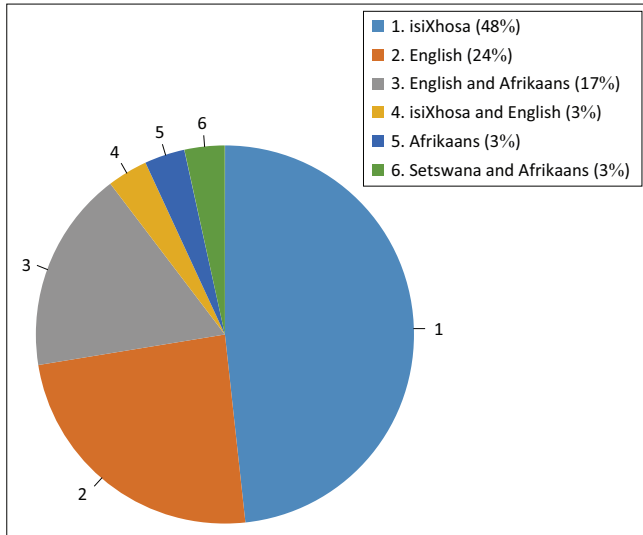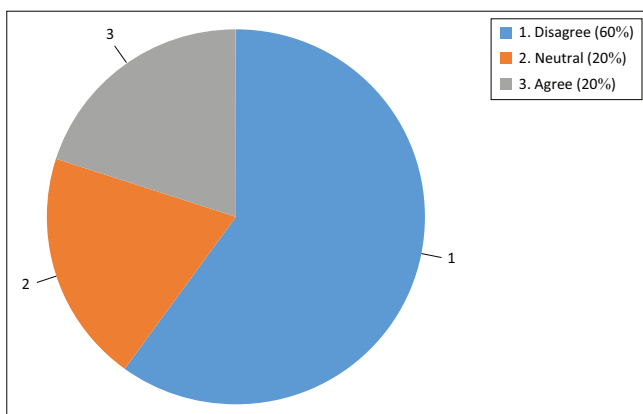
Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 1: Languages spoken at home (%).
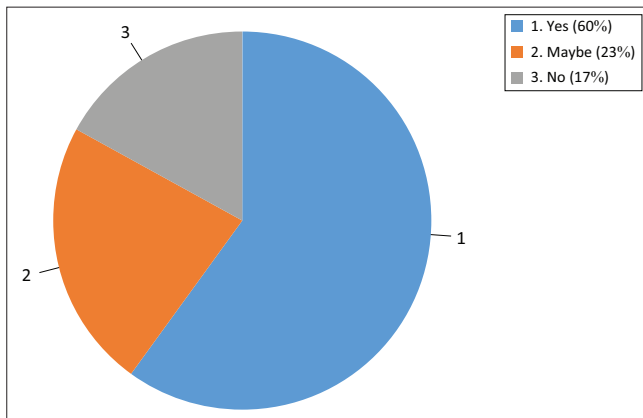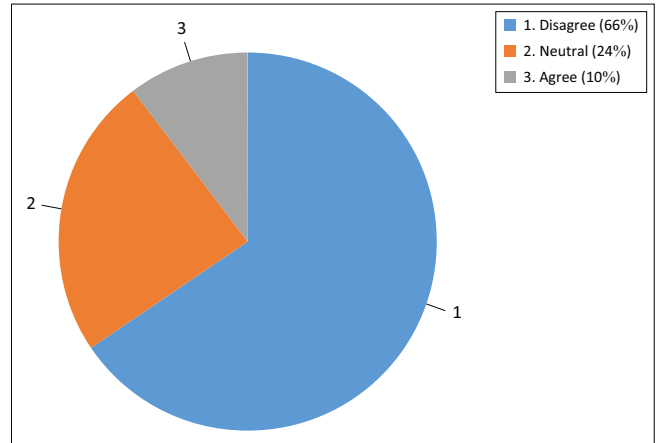

Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 2: Exposure to the notion of multilingualism in the course of studies: In the course of your studies in the journalism programme, do you recall being exposed to the term 'multilingualism' (%)?
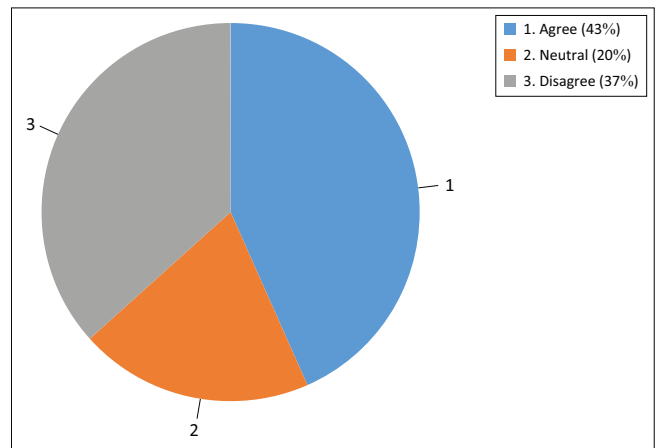

Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 3: Students' views on whether or not multilingualism is promoted in lectures: Multilingualism is promoted in the lecture setting of the courses you take (%)

Over half (60%) of those surveyed felt that multilingualism was not promoted in the courses they took (Figure 3), and the same percentage (60%) felt that the multilingual strategies they were exposed to were not adequate (Figure 4). The term

Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 4: Students' views on the adequacy of the multilingual strategies and interventions they have been exposed to: The multilingual teaching and learning strategies and interventions you have been exposed to are adequate (%)
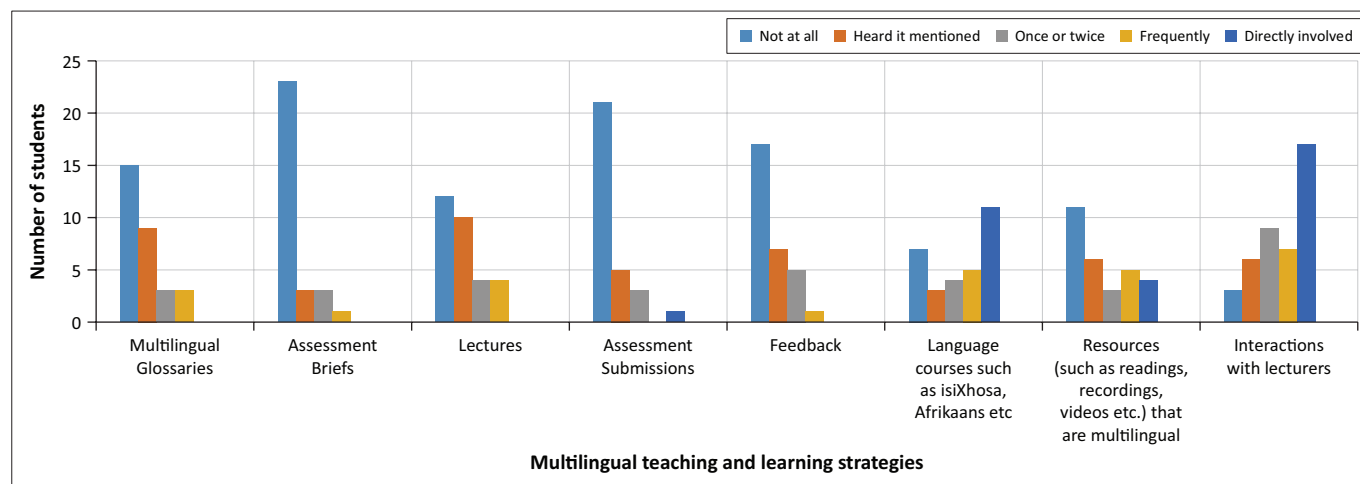

Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 5: Students' views on the efficacy of the multilingual strategies and interventions they have been exposed to: Do you think the current approach to multilingual education in the journalism programme is effective?

'adequate' was used to ascertain the quantity of multilingual strategies they had been exposed to. These results suggest that most felt that they had not been exposed to enough of these types of strategies.

When asked whether they perceived the multilingual strategies they had been exposed to as effective, there were almost as many students who felt that even though the strategies may not have been adequate, they were effective, and those who felt that the strategies were both inadequate and ineffective (Figure 5). The term 'effective' was used here to ascertain whether they felt that the strategies they had been exposed to had worked or not. Thus it seems that although they felt that they were not exposed to enough multilingual strategies, the ones they had been exposed to had worked.

The students were also asked questions about the use of multilingualism in specific teaching and learning aspects (Figure 6). Using a multiple choice question, they were asked whether or not, during the course of their journalism studies, they had been exposed to multilingual glossaries,

Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 6: Strategies where exposure to multilingualism has occurred.

multilingual assessment briefs, multilingual lectures, multilingual assessment submissions, multilingual assessment feedback, multilingual courses, multilingual resources, and multilingual interactions with lecturers. The options were 'not at all', for students who felt that they were not at all exposed to a particular strategy in the course of their studies, 'heard it mentioned', for students who had heard about a particular strategy, but not actually been exposed to it, 'once or twice', for students who had been exposed to a particular strategy in the course of their study, but only once or twice, 'frequently', for students who felt that they were exposed to a particular strategy many times in the course of their studies, and 'directly involved', for students who were directly involved in the creation of a particular strategy. The two aspects where the majority perceived multilingual interactions to have been most frequently used, and where they felt they had a direct input in these, were in their interactions with lecturers outside of the formal lecture venues and in having taken language courses, such as isiXhosa and Afrikaans, as subjects with credits.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis, four themes were identified based on the transcripts of the focus group discussions. These themes related to student perceptions on the use of language in the course of their journalism studies. The researcher chose these themes because they explore how language use in teaching and learning is not just about the transmission of information, but, as per Carey's (2008) communication as culture theory, is a way of creating particular realities.

The first theme relates to students' perceptions of how language affects their academic performance. The second relates to their perception of how language shapes their sense of place in the classroom contexts. The third relates to their perceptions of how language influences the student-lecturer power dynamics. The fourth relates to their perceptions of how language may impact their professional prospects as aspiring professional communicators.

Student perceptions of how language use influences their academic performance

The students who took part in the focus group had mixed views on the influence of language use on their academic performance. Some saw multilingualism as a practice that could help ensure that students understood the content that was being discussed. This was expressed in views such as:

'Sometimes you get to be put off by the fact that you don't understand things, the way that they are written or the way that they are taught. So I think for me it would encourage more students to love the career more when they understand.' (1st year student)

Another student who thinks multilingualism could positively influence academic performance noted:

'I think for me each and every student would perform better when they are being taught in a language that they grow up or they were born in than being introduced in a foreign language at a later stage in their lives.' (1st year student)

Other students noted that the way multilingualism is spoken about and enacted in their context discriminated against certain languages with an overemphasis on English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. One student stated:

'For me the disadvantage at the moment as I see it is the fact that we only have about English, Xhosa and Afrikaans, that we have as a language to communicate with as journalist students.' (1st year student)

Countering this view, though, was the perspective that if too many languages are used, this could create confusion and extra work for students. A student said:

'How do you teach those languages – cohesively? … How do you as an educator or even as a student, how do you prioritise which you focus on?' (1st year student)

There was also a sense among students that the lack of multilingualism in their primary and secondary schooling experiences will pose a disadvantage to trying to implement multilingualism at a tertiary level. In this sense, then, while the

literature and government policy advocate for the expansion of languages used in teaching and learning, students seemed to be of the view that an intervention at just one level, namely the tertiary education level, may be extremely limited in what it can achieve. A first-year student stated:

'Personally, I don't think that I would do better. Maybe 13 years ago, yes – if it started in Grade 1 all the way to where I am. Yes, it might have helped. And secondly, I don't understand English to its fullest or properly, but English is the only language I understand better from all the other languages in South Africa.' (1st year student)

Another student noted:

'I'm a third year journalism student but I struggle with speaking Xhosa, even in my everyday communication with people and that's because … I was sent to an English school at a very young age. And so those schools … black kids are encouraged to speak English, just to get them used to the language.' (3rd year student)

Student perceptions of how language use influences their sense of place and self within higher education

One of the views articulated very strongly by students who were part of this study was that the current monolingual culture of language use makes them feel out of place in lectures and in the higher education system as a whole. A student said:

'I came from the Eastern Cape and I was in a Xhosa school and all I spoke was Xhosa. So when I got here in 2016, I couldn't speak proper English, so I felt uncomfortable, like to even express myself with other people because I was like, ah they're going to judge me because I don't speak properly and they did, like because I failed my second year but in first year I feel like that was my biggest struggle.' (3rd year student)

Another student noted that: 'It will allow us to be able to express ourselves in our different languages. Because like what I say in English is not basically what I wanted to say in my language'. There was a view from the students who took part in the study of the link between language and culture. One student noted:

'With every language there's cultural meaning behind it. So I think [*if*] we are being taught in our language it also helps us to retain our culture and our morals and our – the values that come with that language.' (1st year student)

Student perceptions of how language use influences power dynamics in lectures

Several students were of the view that incorporating multilingualism could diffuse some of the power dynamics that are present in lecture contexts, and which currently cause students from previously disadvantaged background to feel excluded. These views seem to suggest that a lecturer's use of a language that students are familiar with causes three things happen.

Firstly, the content is communicated more clearly because terms and examples are those with which students are familiar. Secondly, their view of the lecturer changes from someone who is removed from their reality in terms of power into someone with whom they can relate, thus making them more open to the knowledge being communicated. This quote illustrates that view:

'I had a question in class and then I went to go speak to the lecturer afterwards and we spoke together in Xhosa, and while she was explaining and talking, it allowed me to see her as an individual, as a person. … So, what happens is, you start to see the lecturer as a person and as a teacher but you also start to get a respect for them as an adult and as an authority figure.' (1st year student)

Another student said:

'You see them clearly and you start to want to learn from them and you start to want to understand.' (1st year student)

Thirdly, it gives students a voice because they hear their language being used by someone in a powerful position, and they in turn feel empowered to speak up because hearing the lecturer use the language confers academic legitimacy to it, and they will thus not be seen as being academically inept for using an indigenous language in an academic context.

Some students perceived the multilingual interventions by lecturers as interventions that are being done reluctantly, rather than out of recognition of a real need for a multilingual approach. A student noted:

'Some lecturers are very accommodating in terms, of you can express yourself – especially when you are writing assessment assignments and so on. They get an interpreter who is going to interpret for them what you were saying here, so that they can understand. But, I think there are some that don't want to change anything.' (1st year student)

Student perception of how language use influences their professional prospects

Given that journalism is a communications-based profession, students view the largely monolingual approach to teaching and learning as a potential stumbling block in their careers.

Despite the fact that English and Afrikaans dominate the news content produced in South Africa in terms of quantity, the newspaper titles and radio and TV stations that have the largest audiences provide coverage in indigenous languages (Finlay 2019). Most of the communities that are reported on consist of indigenous language speakers. There thus appears to be recognition that being fluent in many languages is advantageous in this discipline. A student said:

'I also think it's important because in the field that we are currently in right now which is the Media and journalism Department. When we're doing interviews or when we're out reporting it's very seldom that you only speak to an English-speaking person. You will speak to someone that's maybe, in like the townships where they speak their different languages.' (1st year student)

Another student noted:

'I think in the industry of journalists being the educator of the society and community, they are supposed to be, you know, making it conducive for everyone to benefit equally. … As a watchdog of the community it's important that you get to cover every language and understand every people's culture.' (1st year student)

There appears to be recognition that changing the way language is used when it comes to teaching journalism has the potential to change the way language is used in the practice of journalism, and that in turn has the potential to change the way language is used in society. One student said:

'For me, I look at it at the point of the university or we're in the era of we're trying to decolonise the curriculum, so by adding other languages, I think, I think it's an effective thing because who best to start and initiate that, than us journalism students, who are going to be going into the industry and producing content for people to consume? So, I'd say in that area, it's beneficial.' (3rd year student)

Another student said:

'Understanding is key though, because it comes with understanding languages and also understand the cultures and views to what people hold. So if you don't understand the languages and you don't understand what's being taught and what's being spoken you won't understand how the message that you're going to be saying will be perceived.' (1st year student)

Discussion

From these findings, one can deduce that students have mixed views on whether multilingual interventions and strategies will improve their academic performance, with some feeling that hearing complex concepts explained in the languages they speak at home will allow the information communicated to make more sense. Others are of the view that since multilingualism is not applied holistically to their education experience, trying to incorporate it at a tertiary level could end up confusing them, and adding to an already heavy course load. This is important to note for tertiary educators because it suggests that in the quest towards a multilingual higher education sector, educators must bear in mind the fact that while multilingualism is largely appealing, there are certain perceptions from students that could pose as stumbling blocks. Thus, no matter how well intentioned the multilingual strategies and interventions by educators, if students perceive them as 'more work', they may not have the desired effect, highlighting the point that this needs to be started at a primary school level.

Another important deduction, both from the survey and the focus groups, is that the journalism students who took part think multilingual education is important, and that the strategies employed in teaching and learning in the journalism programme do not fully meet their needs. It would seem that for some students, these strategies are not being perceived as adequately addressing the barriers that exist due to a higher education experience that is rooted in a culture of monolingualism. These findings suggest that for some students, the view is that the inclusion of multilingualism

by academics in higher education is not primarily rooted in shifting the culture of language use in tertiary education, but is rather an endeavour for them to appear to be doing something, as stated by a student quoted above who said 'there are some that don't want to change anything'.

For Afrikaans-speaking students, there was minimal indication in the discussions that they had been disadvantaged in terms of writing and telling their stories, although this finding does not imply that is the case because, comparatively, there were fewer Afrikaans-speaking students who took part in the study (see Figure 1). For students who speak isiXhosa, there was an expressed view that not only had the inadequate multilingual strategies impacted their marks because of a struggle understanding the content, there was also a feeling of not belonging in the classroom context due to not being as articulate in the language used. This lack of a sense of belonging is particularly relevant in a discipline where language creates culture and creates an idea of who has what it takes and who does not.

Conclusion

The #FeesMustFall movement created a greater sense of urgency as students called for not only a multilingual higher education system, but a decolonised one, where different ways of knowing and being were recognised and validated in the academy. As part of those calls, students have demanded that the resources of teaching and learning move from being based on Western thinkers, and go on to esteem African scholarship.

The view of communication as culture posited by James Carey (2008) allows us a more sociological view of the use of language in teaching and learning in higher education. This view emphasises the use of language as a means of representing shared beliefs, rather than merely as something with which to impart information (Carey 2009:14). This view can help us better understand how the current multilingual strategies and interventions are being perceived by students because it looks at how language, as part of communication, is being used to produce, maintain, repair and transform reality in a given context (Carey 2009:8).

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Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

Author's contributions

Only one author contributed to this study and the writing of the article.

Ethical consideration

Cape Peninsular University of Technology's Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development, Office of Chair: Fundani Ched Research Ethics Committee (FREC:REF: 016/19). Participation in the online survey was done voluntarily, anonymously and with the students' consent. Further, those who participated in the focus group discussions gave consent for the discussion to be recorded and transcribed. Participation was voluntary.

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Data available on request from the author.

Disclaimer

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