Code-switching in Botswana History classrooms in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Education is an important vehicle for the achievement of overall sustainable development. Moreover, international organisations have encouraged governments around the world to work towards achieving education for all. The notion of inclusive education has been useful in ensuring that country-level educational policies and practices incorporate and serve the interests of learners coming from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Language facilitation has been earmarked by UNESCO (2005) as a necessary component of education for sustainable development. Despite global affirmation of the importance of language, the absence of language facilitation policies hampers the achievement of education for sustainable development at classroom level. This article explores language use in Botswana's History classrooms in the context of education for sustainable development. It is based on an exploratory study that was undertaken to investigate the use of code-switching in Botswana's History classrooms. The article begins with a discussion of the concept, origins and evolution of sustainable development, and how it links with education for sustainable development. The article goes on to link education for sustainable development with issues of equity and inclusiveness, and explores the role of language in the facilitation of an enabling and interactive teaching and learning environment.

Key words: Bilingualism, Botswana education, code-switching, education for sustainable development, History teaching, language facilitation, multilingualism, sustainable development

Introduction

There are more than 300 definitions of sustainable development. One of the best-known of these definitions is that of Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and current Director General of the World Health Organization, which refers to 'development which meets the needs of the past without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (2008, www.worldaware.org.uk/education/sustain.html).

The term 'sustainability' denotes long-term duration. Sustainable development arose out of a growing concern with the deterioration of environmental conditions that threaten human survival. In order to deal with these concerns, over the decades a number of international and global organisations have spearheaded efforts that are geared towards reviewing current human lifestyles and practices, especially with regard to climate change and its effect on world economies and human survival. While purely environmental conditions preoccupied world gatherings initially, it was gradually realised that environmental conditions are intimately linked to socioeconomic issues. Out of this reasoning, it came to be acknowledged that paying attention to these issues is a necessary precondition for forging sustainable ways of living. Thus, the link between socioeconomic imperatives and concerns about environmental issues led to the rise of the concept of 'sustainable development', which was first endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1987 (King 2008, 12).

Education for sustainable development owes its origins to worldwide deliberations on the concept of 'sustainable development'. The link between sustainable development and education can be traced back to the 1992 Earth Summit, and the document that was prepared following the summit. In particular, Agenda 21 of the Global Plan for Action recognised that sustainable development had a wider remit that went beyond purely environmental concerns, and embraced social and economic questions, such as interdependence, social justice, cultural diversity and equity. Education was, therefore, regarded as a crucial vehicle for translating the sustainable development objectives into action, and for realising its goals.

Education for sustainable development and language use

The theme of 'education for sustainable development' provides a good context for research into, and discussion of, the role and use of language in the curriculum. Wider questions of a socio-cultural nature can be used as a departure point to draw the link between education and language. Agenda 21 of the Global Plan for Action recognised that education is critical for the promotion of sustainable development, and for the improvement of the capacity of people to address environmental and developmental concerns. Tackling environmental concerns was predicated on a well-informed nation, and would be realised through the participation and engagement of all people. This gave rise to the notion of education and sustainable development. The convergence of global environmental and local concerns is reflected in various policies and programs at global and national levels of various countries. These issues have been discussed in global organisations – particularly in UN agencies and establishments – and have been translated into local development imperatives.

The World Summits of 1992 and 2002, the UN Decade for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) (henceforth UNDESD) and the World Education Forum (2000) highlighted

the importance of education as a key agent for change, and as a means for achieving sustainable development. In turn, these statements have given direction to the formulation of other statements which recognise the importance of education in attaining sustainable development. These are the World Council on Education for All (WCEFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA 1990). In particular, MDG 8 subscribes to a global partnership for education, and gives particular attention to equality of educational access, while in 2000 the EFA reaffirmed the need for education to respond to the needs and aspirations of individuals, and called for the incorporation of girls and minorities in schooling. It has since become evident that questions of access need to be balanced with those of quality, not only of the inputs to education, but also of the process and products of education. Hence, the drive towards the achievement of sustainable education requires not only increased access, but also relevant qualitative changes, such as language policies that facilitate good interaction in the teaching and learning environment.

UNESCO has taken up the issue through a call for the incorporation of the notion of special needs education, which emphasises the inclusion of all children from linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities, disabled and gifted, as well as those from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds (*The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of Special Needs Education*, paragraph 3, in UNESCO 2005, 7).

Education for sustainable development in Botswana

The global statements linked with education for sustainable development have influenced the formulation of complementary national policy statements in Botswana. For example, the MDG 8 principles, the EFA and the UNDESD statements align with the Botswana *Vision 2016* pillars on the importance of education, compassion, tolerance for diversity, the teaching of all the nation's languages, and the need for an educated and informed nation (Botswana Government 1997). Furthermore, the Presidential Task Group which formulated the Vision affirmed that 'no Motswana child would be discriminated against on the basis of language' (Botswana Government 1997, 3).

Botswana education policies are also guided by the principles of sustainable development, as espoused in the *Revised National Policy on Education* of 1994 (Botswana Government 1994) and the *National Development Plan 9* (Botswana Government 2003). However, the pronouncements made in *Vision 2016*, the *RNPE* and *NDP 9* are yet to be translated into policy. Thus, despite the multilingual and multiethnic situation in Botswana, the language-in-education policy only recognises English and Setswana as media of instruction, and does not provide for the use of other indigenous languages in the education system. English is the medium of instruction in the education system from term three of Standard 1, after which English takes over. The absence of a Botswana language policy presents another hurdle to the implementation of coordinated and enabling language practices in schools.

Historically, Setswana was the medium of instruction in many contexts in Botswana. During the colonial period, the lack of a coordinated language policy and practice provided an opportunity for the use of various forms of indigenous languages. During colonial rule, and in the period immediately following independence, English could be used in lower standards and for purposes of explaining difficult concepts (Correspondence from MTM Kgopo, Permanent Secretary, Mafeking, to the Assistant Education Officer, Francistown, BNA). This flexible approach to language use in the colonial classroom was not upheld, as increasingly restrictive post-independent language-in-education policies were adopted. Due to the sociopolitical hegemony of Setswana speakers, the language attained a favourable position in the sociopolitical discourse. At independence, Setswana was declared the national language, while English was made the official language (Andersson & Janson 1993; Mooko 2006).

In the post-independence period, Setswana served as the medium of instruction at lower primary school level, before giving way to English at higher primary school level and beyond. Thus, the status of English has been elevated over that of Setswana, while the status of Setswana has been elevated over that of the other languages spoken in Botswana, which are completely left out (Andersson & Janson 1993). The relative importance of English over Setswana, coupled with the complete absence of other indigenous languages in the curriculum, has potentially far-reaching ramifications for the teaching and learning context, and for learners from diverse and marginalised backgrounds. It means that many Batswana children exit their mother tongue even before they have to exit Setswana. This presents many educational challenges, because it creates barriers not only for their second language (Setswana) learning (L2), but for their L3 (English) as well. In other contexts, exiting the mother tongue early has been found to be subtractive rather than additive, pedagogically (Holmasdottir 2003). In this regard, Skuttnab-Kangas (2000) noted that in the early exit model, the mother tongue (L1) ends up being only of instrumental, rather than intrinsic value, as its use would only have to be confined to serving as the medium of instruction for the first few years of schooling before the L2 takes over. In Botswana, in a bid to avert the relegation of the language status, Setswana has been made a compulsory subject for Batswana children up to the seventh year of schooling. For many children Setswana is not only the medium of instruction in Standard 1 and a school subject throughout, but it is also the channel through which they are taught and learn English. This presents additional challenges to their learning generally, and to learning in specific subjects in particular. Thus, in spite of the policy pronouncement on English as the medium of instruction, the teaching and learning context is characterised by various linguistic strategies, which include code-switching, code-mixing and translation. These can either help or hinder learning, depending on the motives for their use, as well as the way in which they are used.

Language as a barrier or lubricant for learning

Language is an instrument of social and political power, because it overlaps with wider issues of a sociopolitical and economic nature (Hartshorne 1992; Batibo & Mosaka 2000). The close association between a people's language and their customs, traditions and histories, means that language barriers also act as barriers to the cultures and traditions of excluded language groups, which results in their exclusion from the sociopolitical discourse. This tends to invalidate them as citizens of their countries and denies them equal rights to participation in the sociopolitical milieu of their country. Moreover, the close link between language and people's identity would also lead to people's loss of dignity as a result of exclusion. In Botswana, this would also be in conflict with the essence of the 4Ds – democracy, development, dignity and discipline – which have become part and parcel of the country's development process since Ian Khama assumed the presidency on 1 April 2008.

Language can act as a barrier to learning generally, but if it is used properly, it can be the lubricant that is required to facilitate good classroom communication (Butzkamm 1998). The classroom situation generally plays out the wider sociopolitical discourse on language use, which has far-reaching implications for pedagogical practices in Botswana's schools. Generally, linguistic marginalisation overlaps with sociopolitical marginalisation, and the absence of the languages of marginalised groups mirrors their absence in the educational discourse as well. Thus, unless the language-in-education policy facilitates open classroom communication there would be no meaningful learning, as participation would be constrained. Research carried out in some contexts shows that learners are sometimes hindered from participating in classroom interaction 'if they feel that their responses may be evaluated or examined publicly, rather than accepted and appreciated as part of a joint conversation' (Van Lier 1996, 151). In Botswana, the mixed ability nature of classrooms is another critical factor in language use and classroom interaction, because it poses even more serious challenges for children with learning difficulties.

Language policies and practices that do not facilitate classroom interaction result in low participation, and compromised competency and performance in their school work. Furthermore, the extent to which classroom talk can add value to classroom interaction depends on the specific context of language use. It depends as much on what is said, as what language is employed in the process. Whether talk is geared towards content transmission or dialogue is determined by the linguistic discourse, which is, in turn, determined by both curriculum policy and teacher practices. This realisation, combined with language realities in most bilingual and multilingual contexts, creates the necessary condition for linguistic accommodation and facilitation in the classroom, often involving the use of code alteration strategies (Holmasdottir 2003, 25).

Code-switching

Code-switching in the educational context

Code-switching is regarded as a specific linguistic phenomenon. According to Heller (1992, 4), code-switching is the use of two or more languages in everyday communication. Others define code-switching as the use of two languages simultaneously or interchangeably, which usually happens during conversations with other bilingual speakers (Valdes-Fallis 1977; Crystal 1987). It is generally held that code-switching serves important communicative and cognitive functions. The conditions under which it occurs, and the manner in which it is employed, determine the extent of its usefulness (Butzkamm 1998).

Despite the wide use of this language form, its communication integrity is still not acknowledged (Duran 1994). Consequently, code-switching is generally stigmatised and outlawed in many educational contexts. It would follow, therefore, that where there is stigma attached to the use of code-switching it would be difficult to integrate it as a normal part of classroom interaction. However, in spite of this, teachers typically 'smuggle' it into the classroom, leading to other problems which emanate from the lack of uniformity in the use of code-switching, as well as the absence of proper facilities and support for it, which results from a lack of official acceptability. Interestingly, other studies have found that even in contexts where code-switching is espoused in the politico-official rhetoric, it has fared no better (Holmasdottir 2003).

Research shows that while in some settings code-switching is the exception, in multilingual settings code-switching is widespread, and should be seen as the norm (Swigart 1992, Goyvaerts & Zembele 1992). In some of the contexts where code-switching is heavily stigmatised, it is used as a marker of the extent of one's level of Westernisation. In a study on language attitudes and code-switching between Cantonese and English in Hong Kong, Gibbons (1983) found that when Chinese speakers used English with one another, they gave an impression of status and Westernisation. When they used Cantonese it denoted Chinese humility and solidarity, whereas a mix of the two languages conjured up negative perceptions from a Cantonese point of view (Duran 1994).

Where it is the exception, code-switching is perceived as marked, purposeful, emphasis-oriented and strange, while it is perceived as fluid, unmarked and uneventful in settings where it is the norm. While it is regarded as an aberration in some settings, in others it serves as an important conversational lubricant which can facilitate classroom interaction (Butzkamm 1998). However, the extent of its usefulness depends on how and when it is employed, in relation to the educational objectives that are to be achieved. If it is not employed judiciously it can do more harm than good, for instance where it is used to fill gaps in the teacher's language competency, or is used by an unqualified teacher (Mati 2004, 22; Butzkamm 1998, 82).

There is general consensus about the widespread nature of teachers' use of code-switching, although teachers' experiences with code-switching differ. It is generally acknowledged that teachers code-switch from sentence to sentence, rather than intra-sentially, although they should accept intersential code-switching from their learners (Ovando & Collier 1985). Some authors believe that keeping (the) two languages entirely separate is beneficial, as long as the second language is learned additively rather than subtractively, to ensure that the first language is not lost in the process.

Code-switching in bilingual settings

Code-switching and related phenomena are linked to, and occur within, bilingual and multilingual settings. Bilingualism has several definitions, but the underlying understanding is that it involves the use or alternate use of two languages. Worldwide, bilingualism is regarded as being of additive value because it promotes cognitive, linguistic affective and social benefits (Cummins 2000; Skuttnab-Kangas 2000). The specific socio-linguistic context within which, and the stage at which, the L1 and L2 are introduced determines the extent to which the situation will either facilitate or hinder learning.

Holmasdottir (2003) explored the concept of additive versus subtractive bilingualism, where the additive denotes a situation where the timing and intensity of mother-tongue use in education is such that the learners benefit pedagogically. It is associated with the late exit model, where learners are immersed in mother-tongue education, while in the subtractive type, earlier introduction of the second language creates pedagogical problems which negatively affect performance.

Bilingual and multilingual educational settings tend to produce a variety of linguistic phenomena, which include code-switching, code-mixing and translation (Duran 1994). As an important feature of bilingual settings, translation is regarded as one of the coping strategies employed by teachers to deal with a wide range of challenges. For example, in South Africa, where indigenous languages were historically submerged by the dominant political ideology, studies have shown that many teachers battle with the use of English alongside their learners. In some schools, many of the teachers are products of the apartheid system, which denied their own languages a place in the curriculum. Moreover, the post-independence language policies look good on paper, but have not worked well in practice, partly because of the power that is often associated with English (Ncoko, Osman & Cockcroft 2000, 226). Consequently, some specific uses of English further negate the worth of indigenous languages in knowledge generation and legitimisation. Mati's (2004) study found that where English words were 'Xhosalised', the classroom interaction limited the learner's conceptual understanding of the content. In addition, in the learner's mind, the use of English terms in this indigenised way also negates the languages in question. In this manner, the mode of code-switching serves

to entrench the dominance of English in those settings, by creating an impression that English equates learning (Mati 2004, 16). Thus, although code-switching has the potential to enhance classroom discourse, if it is not undertaken judiciously, it can serve a subtractive rather than an additive purpose. A similar phenomenon is generated in situations where English is used in the classroom to anglicise indigenous place names and concepts related to the indigenous context and traditions, as it tends to legitimise knowledge as something that is expressed only in English.

It would appear that the official language policy and position on the use of code-switching go a long way in setting the context for the acceptance, rejection, systematic use or lack of use of code-switching. In Botswana, official policy has adopted a sanitised approach to language use in the curriculum, and only recognises one indigenous language. Because Botswana language policy seeks to elevate the status of both the official (English) and national (Setswana) languages, it does so by allocating them different positions and spaces within educational discourse, and completely disregards the other minority languages, even in places and districts where they are the dominant languages of discourse, such as Ikalanga in the Northeast district, and Shekgalaharhi in the Kgalagadi district.

Thus, in Botswana, the complex multilingual situation, coupled with the pattern of language conflict between Setswana and English, on the one hand, and Setswana and the minority languages on the other, has given rise to a number of linguistic phenomena such as the extensive use of code-switching practices (Batibo & Smieja 2000, xx). This situation results from historical processes which facilitated the development of unequal socio-linguistic relationships between the principal ethnic Batswana groups and other non-Tswana indigenous ethnic groups. These processes began during the colonial period, and were upheld in some ways through post-independence policies and curricula practices.

It would appear that in specific classroom situations, Botswana teachers and learners employ a variety of strategies for dealing with language issues that arise in the course of their daily classroom interaction. These phenomena are sometimes congruent – and at other times in conflict – with the given language-in-education policy, and manifest the challenges that emanate from Botswana's multilingual context. They comprise code-switching (inter-sential), code-mixing (intra-sential) and various forms of translation.

Code-switching in History classrooms

Around the world, there is a steady trickle of studies dealing with code-switching and related language phenomena in History classrooms, from which useful insights can be gained on the use of code-switching, as well as the challenges which it presents.

Butzkamm's (1998) in-depth analysis of one bilingual History lesson, taught in English as a foreign language in a German grammar school, highlighted the fact that brief episodes of switching to the mother tongue can function as a learning aid to enhance communication. Hence, even though the mother tongue (German) remained the working language, the teacher served as a bilingual dictionary, so that the mother tongue became an ally of the foreign language (Butzkamm 1998, 81).

Thuraisingam (2001) undertook a study which showed that classroom talk is central to the transmission of historical knowledge, particularly in view of the fact that teacher and learner engagement in the interpretation of historical facts is crucial to historical understanding. Moreover, he observed that while teachers do most of the talking, learner talk also constitutes a considerable amount of classroom talk. Thuraisingam also highlighted the fact that it is important to understand not only the frequency of verbal interchange, but also the nature of the language which teachers and learners normally exchange.

In South African History classrooms, studies have shown that code-switching is widespread. The studies also indicate that classrooms are characterised by communication challenges, where there is generally limited interaction between teachers and learners. Patel (1998) found that teaching and learning are hampered by a lack of competency in English. Moreover, when faced with these challenges, some teachers resort to direct translation.

Code-switching in Botswana classrooms

Few studies have been conducted on the general aspects of code-switching in Botswana, and even fewer on code-switching in classrooms. In particular, no work has been carried out on language use, and particularly code-switching in History classrooms. History is only one of the subjects in the Botswana curriculum. Over the years, it has lost its status as a core subject, and is faced with the ever-looming spectre of a possible takeover by Social Studies. Nonetheless, it has an important role to play in teaching valuable skills, knowledge and values. In Botswana's curriculum, History deals with a variety of issues relating to the country's development processes, the country's origins, as well as its interdependence with the region, the continent, and the rest of the world. Furthermore, as a subject that is taught across the curriculum, History plays an important additive role and enhances the education offered in Botswana's schools. By the same token, History teaching and learning contribute to education for sustainable development, where language plays a crucial role as a communication resource.

Due to the gradual recognition of History as an interpretive, interactive and dialogic subject, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the fact that historical thinking requires considerable verbal and written interaction between teacher and learner

(Coltham 1971; Thuraisingam 2001). Moreover, History has always been regarded as a 'language' subject, where the language use of the teacher has an effect on the language behaviour of the learners. Thus, the teacher needs to have a wider repertoire of skills in order to engage learners in historical thinking (Thurainsingam 2001, 5). This implies that language policy and practice need to be aligned with the learners' language needs, so as to make learning beneficial. Classroom-based research can go a long way in assisting curriculum developers to formulate language policies, and enabling environments that help learners to participate meaningfully in learning.

This article is based on an exploratory study designed to examine the various linguistic phenomena that prevail in Botswana's History classrooms. The research orientation was descriptive and impressionistic. The findings are indicative of what typically happens in History classrooms, and do not purport to be reflective of all History teaching contexts in Botswana – particularly in view of the limited size of the study.

Research design and methodology

The study is a survey design. It is based on the author's own general observations as a teacher educator, specific classroom observations, and specific discussions with teachers and learners in Botswana on the use of code-switching. The in-depth nature of the discussions makes up for the small number of informants, and enables a thorough appreciation of the analysis.

The study sought to find out the context and nature of language use, and how teachers generally cope with language challenges in light of the stipulated language-in-education policy. The research also sought to establish whether History teachers use various linguistic phenomena, such as code-switching, code-mixing, and translation in their classroom interaction, when and how they are practised by both teachers and learners, their views about it, as well as the challenges and benefits of these strategies.

The sample was conveniently selected, and was determined by the extent to which the teachers did not mind being observed. The study targeted Form 4 and 5 classrooms in each school, where History is taught as a separate subject.

The research methods comprised the following:

- Classroom observations through the use of an observation schedule, and notes taken during the course of the lesson;
- Teacher interviews by means of a questionnaire;
- Informal discussions with teachers and focus group discussions with learners, through the use of an interview schedule.

The study was conducted at four schools: Naledi Secondary School in Gaborone, Selebi Phikwe Senior Secondary School in Selebi Phikwe, Molefi Senior Secondary School in Mochudi, and Gaborone Senior Secondary School in Gaborone.

Altogether five classroom observations of specific History lessons were conducted in Selebi Phikwe, while one was conducted in Mochudi, and two were conducted in Gaborone schools. Triangulation of responses was carried out. Classroom observations were corroborated with the issues explored, and the discussions held with learners and teachers. The discussions with the teachers were corroborated with the learner responses, and vice versa.

Learners' views were captured through the use of focus group discussions. The questions were structured in such a way as to capture the same issues as in the teachers' questionnaires. These included questions on the learners' perceptions of the use of the vernacular and the actual classroom practices relating to this, the teachers' position, and perceived benefits and challenges. In each school, there was an average of five learners per group.

Teachers' views were sought in order to gain insight into their approaches to language use in the classroom, and specifically the use of the vernacular; the benefits, as well as the challenges that teachers face in the process.

Presentation of the findings

The discussion of the findings will begin with an examination of the teachers' and learners' views on various aspects of code-switching. These include issues around why, when, and how code-switching is employed in History lessons, versus the stated official language-in-education policy. This discussion will also explore the usefulness of code-switching in facilitating classroom interaction, and the challenges associated with its use in History lessons.

- **Teachers' views on the use of code-switching**

Teachers' views were sought in order to establish the extent to which they used Setswana in teaching History topics, their perceptions of the use of the vernacular by their learners, and the problems and prospects of using Setswana. In analysing the teachers' views, an attempt was made to align particular teachers' views with the observation of their teaching. It would appear that sometimes the teachers' views aligned with their practice, as in the case of the teacher who stated:

> *History discipline requires less or no clarity or emphasis in the vernacular and as such use of Setswana in the study of History should be minimised to zero level. This is one area of*

> *study which requires somebody who is eloquent in the English language .... If possible, this subject could only be allocated to those who are at peace with the Queen's language ....*

This seems to suggest that the practice contradicts the professional stance. The statement was made by the same teacher who had stated (when referring to his own practice) that he sometimes uses the vernacular for specific reasons, for instance to explain terms and concepts. It would seem that the teacher was more concerned here with appearing to do the right thing. He wanted to emphasise his use of the prestige language, rather than concerning himself with the needs of the learners. This tells us that the use of English, being associated with prestige, negates the use of the vernacular, which is presumed to be befitting those in an ostensibly less prestigious category of teachers. Hence, the stigmatisation of the use of the vernacular occurs not only in (even though it may be because of) the absence of policy, but the also due to the negative perceptions of some teachers towards it.

Regarding the official requirement, another teacher stated: 'It is my policy and principle to use the prescribed language only.' Strangely, this particular teacher later admitted that the practical reality is at variance with the official and his own (stated) principles.

It would appear that the learners have their own expectations of teachers' use of language, which serves to put pressure on them to use the official medium of instruction. A remark made by one teacher put this assertion into perspective:

> *In History it is very important to avoid code-switching because the teacher who perpetually code-switches usually loses respect among his/her own students. Students always expect perfection from History teachers. Such a scenario binds the teacher to deliver in the English language and even research more to aid comprehension.*

Along the same lines, another teacher stated:

> *As a teacher and a leader in the classroom you serve as a role model. The students will always fall on your footsteps. The teacher cannot expect students to use English when s/he does not use the language.*

Some teachers' views showed that their insistence on the exclusive use of English derives from the practical realities that confront learners beyond the classroom. One teacher observed:

> *If Setswana is used more often, this will disadvantage the students since Setswana does not have the same opportunities as English when it comes to competing for jobs, or they will feel off place when they get into offices, and they cannot communicate in English.*

Hence, the external environment also has an indirect influence on classroom language use.

The context for the teachers' use of code-switching

On whether and when they use Setswana, the following was stated by a teacher who said he uses Setswana occasionally, when he deems it necessary:

> *I use it particularly in African History to create more effect or understanding, when I need to explain non-Setswana words such as* mafisa, dikgafela, bojale, bogwera … assegai, umkulunkulu-Zulu; masvikiro, suikiro-Shona. *Some of these vernacular words cannot be exactly exchanged for English words, otherwise they lose their meaning. I also use it to clarify a particular point on a matter which I think it could be better explained and understood in the vernacular.*

The following views in favour of the use of code-switching were noted from one teacher:

> *I sometimes use vernacular … usually when I sense that students are not following what I am talking about. In most cases I use it for clarification, because some students have difficulties in understanding the English language.*

The following statement by another teacher echoed the same sentiment:

> *I use Setswana when using some vernacular words which cannot be translated to English, like names of people, places, etc.*

Regarding the use of Setswana as an aid to understanding, one teacher lamented:

> *They always want me to use it (Setswana), saying it will make understanding easy. They see Setswana as a short-cut to understanding.*

While the teacher quoted above seemed indifferent about the use of Setswana, another teacher stipulated that when they used Setswana, the learners found it beneficial:

> *When I use Setswana, the learners' response is very positive. The discussion becomes very lively. There is more participation.*

Another teacher who favours the use of Setswana, stated:

> *The learners usually show interest when using Setswana and they become eager to comment in whatever we will be discussing. It is quite helpful because it gives me a picture of how far the students have grasped the concept.*

The facilitation of understanding concepts and terms comes up frequently in statements about the reasons why teachers use Setswana:

> *I sometimes use the vernacular in my teaching and I only use it to emphasise a point and clarifying some aspects of the content or directly translating certain terms into Setswana. For instance, when teaching about Governance, students ought to know certain terms in Setswana, [such as] the national principles of Unity, Self-reliance, Democracy, Development, and other Setswana sayings and proverbs associated with the principles and morals of the Batswana as a nation.*

The fact that Setswana is so widely used indicates that teachers have experienced problems with the use of English, which is the prescribed language at this level. Understanding this would partly explain why Setswana is used.

Problems associated with the exclusive use of English

Although some teachers expressed positive sentiments, the research indicated that the exclusive use of English also poses problems in the classroom. One teacher stated:

> *Sometimes it is very difficult to reach students and make them understand. Some students fail to answer some questions not because they do not know the answer, but because they cannot interpret the question.*

This statement implies that the exclusive use of English poses particular problems, because it is also the language of assessment, and lack of proficiency in it is linked to poor performance, which results from the inability to understand questions. A related view from another teacher is captured below:

> *Most pupils are not very comfortable when English is used throughout. Even when they write, you can see that their vocabulary is lacking.*

These findings highlight problems associated with learners' inability to bridge the gap between English and Setswana in this particular bilingual environment, which negatively affects various aspects of their learning.

Problems associated with the use of Setswana

Teachers generally held different opinions regarding the use of Setswana, and some of their misgivings related to the practical realities of the exclusive use of English in examinations, except in Setswana language examinations. Some stated specifically that Setswana should not be used:

> *The use of Setswana can pose problems if it is used excessively because it is not used for examining students. But if you used moderately and where applicable it can work well for learners.*

Along the same lines, another teacher observed:

> *The use of Setswana presents some challenges because the next time in a test, if I ask a question, they would prefer to use the examples used in Setswana and this is a problem because a lot of them have difficulties in writing English, and usually they would use direct translation leading to the answers losing meaning.*

Another teacher intimated:

> *It is a problem for students (to use Setswana) when they are to answer questions because they are expected to use English.*

It can be deduced that in this case the teachers felt that the (predominant) use of Setswana did not give learners enough practice for examinations, as they would not be able to formulate their answers properly. This view was also expressed by some of the learners. It is interesting to note that the problems experienced with the exclusive use of Setswana mirror those experienced with the exclusive use of English. As argued above, learners would appear not to be able to bridge the gap between Setswana and English, in order to be able to transfer knowledge between the two languages in a useful way.

- **Learners' views**

Five separate groups of learners were surveyed in each school. During the discussions, most learners made reference to the official policy on the use of English as medium of instruction.

Learners' views on the language-in-education policy

Learners displayed a general awareness of the official language-in-education policy. They also stated their belief in its worth, in terms of enabling them to improve their English proficiency. On this point, one group made the following observation:

> *English should be used throughout because even during the exam English will be the one used to ask questions and reason that we are in Senior School we should learn to use English all times to prepare for our tertiary level.*

This was further highlighted by the observation:

> *When present in classrooms we present in English, when we debate we debate in English so this helps us to build up vocabulary in such a way that we will be able to write essay at the end. Students should remember that 'practise makes perfect' so they have to try in order to master some time.*

Learners' views on the use of Setswana

Many learners indicated that they lack the confidence to speak or answer questions in class because of their linguistic handicap. On the question of whether they think it is necessary to use Setswana, one response indicated that the use of Setswana is regarded as beneficial because it eases communication.

> *Yes, it is necessary to do so because students learn more when given courage to express their emotions or ideas in Setswana so that they can be corrected or helped to work on their weaknesses.*

Another view underscores the importance of being able to express oneself in a language one is comfortable with, ostensibly because it improves the quality of participation:

> *Usually when our teachers ask us questions which need us to explain or elaborate further, a student might have an idea with which he/she does not know how to express in English.*

Another learner stated that their teacher disapproves of them using Setswana because it creates 'a lot of noise' when they do so. On closer examination, it would appear that the 'noise' might actually be 'good noise', because it may imply that the learners are actively participating, with potentially positive ramifications for their learning. However, one cannot be absolutely sure of this, since the 'noise' may mean that speaking in Setswana during the group work actually encourages learners to discuss issues that have nothing to do with the assignment given to them.

Although communicating in the vernacular can add value to participation, restricting the use of the vernacular would appear to have positive implications in another context. The following statement illustrates this view:

> *History is one of the subjects which involve a lot of expressions from students strictly in English, so teachers try by all means to make us get use to the system by using English frequently.*

Interestingly, some learners also indicated that their teachers do not mind if they use Setswana, but they encourage them to use English, 'since examinations are presented in English'. Another learner indicated:

> *He is fine with it, but does not encourage us to use it all the time.*

The discussions revealed that in spite of the official policy on language use, the learners have observed that there are times when their teachers resort to the use of Setswana. One learner elaborated as follows:

> *When stressing a point, that is, when we don't understand and he will try and elaborate in Setswana so that we can easily understand what he was trying to say.*

Along similar lines, another learner trivialised or made excuses for the teachers' use of Setswana:

> *Sometimes we don't understand English and in order for us to understand teachers will have to explain the points in Setswana. Sometimes it's just a slip of the tongue. You will find that teachers spoke Setswana accidentally.*

In other cases, the teachers seem to succumb and use Setswana due to the force of circumstances:

> *Sometimes there are terms we do not understand in English, so the teacher will be forced to explain the terms in Setswana.*

A related view stated:

> *The teacher encourages all the students to express themselves in Setswana if they are stuck with English and therefore correct them in English as to encourage confidence.*

The above view indicates that the teacher's use of Setswana is deliberate and systematic.

The perceived benefits of using Setswana

Some statements about the benefits of using the vernacular suggest that the lack of proficiency in English hampers classroom participation. The following statement underscores this view:

> *Usually when our teachers ask us questions which need us to explain or elaborate further, a student might have an idea with which he/she does not know how to express in English.*

The difficulty of expressing themselves in English has influenced some learners to feel that teachers should actually use Setswana in the classroom to address a variety of problems, as explained below:

> *It is important for teachers to use Setswana when explaining notes and difficult points written in English for instance there are some English terms used in our notes which are difficult to understand and new to our brains, so they are easy to understand when explained in our cultural language.*

Another reiterated this point, stating:

> *When the students are not able to understand because when it is said with Setswana they understand better than English.*

The following view also underscores the importance of the vernacular as a facilitator for understanding:

> *You understand better in your own language. It is also helpful to slow learners because they may find some English words or terms to be difficult to understand.*

Along the same lines, another learner observed:

> *When teachers use Setswana we are able to understand fully … we understand Setswana better than English.*

The learners' preference for the use of Setswana in the classroom is linked to the fact that they would be able to give examples that emanate from their own circumstances, which they would express in their own language:

> *The lesson itself is enjoyable and interesting as well as the teacher because he can use what is happening around us as examples. As for the students we are cooperative and we also listen attentively.*

Moreover, while the learners acknowledge the usefulness of English as a medium of instruction in some instances, their complaints are mainly directed at the rigidity of the policy implementation, which they feel militates against them benefiting educationally. For example, even though teachers generally do not allow code-switching, at least theoretically, it would appear that learners 'smuggle' Setswana into classroom talk:

> *We use Setswana during group discussions and when arguing with each other over a point or a question.*

Problems associated with the use of Setswana in the classroom

Some learners believe that even though the use of Setswana can be beneficial, there are times when it presents difficulties, and these are directly linked to the need to perform well in assessments. Three statements illustrate this point:

> *During tests or exams you are expected to write in English. Therefore it needs translation which might be complicated or difficult for learners.*

> *During examinations we would find questions difficult to understand because they are written in English.*

> *Because using Setswana does not take us further because during the final examination questions will be asked in English and as a result we need to practise using English for us to be able to answer questions easily during exams and for us to be able to use English everywhere, either at tertiary level or anywhere because English is a universal language.*

These views highlight the practical problem presented by the requirement to write examinations in English, which acts as a hindrance to the use of code alteration strategies in History classrooms. This has negative ramifications for many of the learners for whom English is a not a first language.

Discussion of the findings

The language-in-education situation in Botswana resonates with many others around the world, where code alteration strategies are more the norm than the exception, in spite of official language policies that dictate otherwise. As in many of these situations, the sociolinguistic context determines the nature of code alteration practices in place, and the way in which they are employed in the classroom (Mati 2004; Holmasdottir 2003).

In Botswana, most of the teachers in History classrooms are Setswana speaking, and English is at least their L2, as is the case with their learners. Botswana History teachers would seem to be generally aware of the language-in-education policy, and some of them even speak strongly against code-switching. In spite of this, however, the study found that code-switching is commonly practised in History classrooms in Botswana. This is in line with Holmasdottir's observation that when teachers are knowledgeable in the primary language of the learners, they are able to employ any one of the code alteration strategies, comprising code-switching, code-mixing, and full translations (2003, 25).

Learners in Botswana History classrooms are aware of, and believe in, the benefit of using English as a medium of instruction. However, they concede that the problems they experience in communicating in English compel them to resort to Setswana – sometimes with the consent of the teacher, and sometimes without. Some learners stated that they code-switch because they find it more comfortable to communicate and respond to the teachers' questions in Setswana. They also point out that where this is restricted by the teacher they feel intimidated, uncomfortable, and unable to interact freely. The learners code-switch more freely when they work in groups, even though they have to stop whenever the teacher approaches, in classrooms where the teacher is strict about code-switching. In the final analysis, even where learners are allowed some measure of code-switching, they are required to translate their thoughts into English before presenting them to the teacher. This shows that code-switching has the potential to add value to the quality of classroom talk, and enables content knowledge dialogue and transmission.

The research showed that sometimes teachers use English as a medium of instruction, while at times others use the vernacular, even though they restrict their learners from doing so. It would appear, however, that the context for the use of the vernacular, and

the way in which it is done, reflect some interesting differences. For example, some teachers use Setswana when reprimanding their learners for their lack of participation, or the poor quality of their participation in class, or for giving incorrect responses to questions in order to set themselves apart as History teachers. These teachers also believe that History is associated with being proficient in English, whether that is true or not, and tend to be stricter about their own use of code-switching and that of their learners. This creates another barrier to the use of code-switching, particularly in view of the fact that some learners harbour negative perceptions about teachers' own use of code-switching.

Generally, even those teachers who profess not to enjoy code-switching, also use forms of translation to (help their learners to) break through communication hurdles when learners do not immediately respond to their questions. It was observed, however, that the translation across English and Setswana was not necessarily exact, and in some cases it was accompanied by some elaboration, thus serving two pedagogical functions. Some teachers code-switch in order to explain difficult concepts, while others translate new and unusual terms for their learners, and learners code-switch to fill in gaps when they are not sufficiently competent in English.

In relation to the situation observed in Botswana classrooms, research suggests that code-switching should not be employed to deal with either linguistic deficiencies in one of the communicative languages, or a lack of ability to teach or make up for the lack of a firm grasp of the subject matter (Mati 2004, 22). Consequently, code-switching needs to be well thought out and well structured. For this reason, teacher education programs need to prepare teachers adequately for it, such that it acts as a resource for teaching and learning. This implies that in order for code-switching to be beneficial to learners in Botswana History classrooms, it would have to be taught in a structured way and integrated into the in-service teacher training programmes.

The use of English in general assessment, and in examinations in particular, is another factor that is crucial in minimising the extent of code-switching in Botswana classrooms. Thus, the teachers and learners recognise that even though content knowledge could be successfully transmitted by code-switching, this is not sufficient to sustain its use in classroom interaction. They recognise that after all the teaching has been done, the assessment is carried out in English. This disadvantages those learners who might otherwise know the right answers, but are unable to provide them because they are unable to understand the question, which is expressed in English. For the learners there is also the recognition that English proficiency is crucial to successful job placement. Worldwide, the association of English with success in examinations and job interviews further elevates English as a means to higher education and employment (Kwamangamalu 1998; Ncoko, Osman & Cockcroft 2000). In Botswana, this phenomenon exacerbates the situation where English is already apportioned the highest place in educational discourse.

Thus, any policy changes in the direction of greater language facilitation would have to take this factor into account. Furthermore, language policy would have to be accompanied by the systematic provision of support services, including bilingual teachers and appropriate texts.

Conclusion

The government of Botswana subscribes to the principle of sustainable development, and incorporates it into its formulation of development goals in general and educational policies in particular. However, these policies are not translated into specific policy guidelines, which leads to serious problems in realising the principles espoused in both global and national objectives on sustainable development. Due to the close link between language and educational participation, the absence of language policy and practice that are geared towards facilitating inclusive and meaningful learning creates serious pedagogical challenges. Generally, a healthy classroom climate is based on a good, balanced mix of teacher and learner talk, and language is a crucial facilitator of this process. Accordingly, it is only when classroom talk is based on appropriate facilitation of teacher–learner interaction that language would serve meaningful pedagogical purposes. As a result of a lack of enabling language polices, there is (unofficial) use of a variety of linguistic phenomena by teachers and learners, as they try to cope with the challenges of classroom communication. These constitute various forms of code-mixing, code-switching, and uncoordinated translation.

As the article illustrated, in spite of official policy, and even the teachers' and learners' theoretical stance on the use of the vernacular in History classrooms, code-switching, code-mixing and translation are more widespread than they admit. Yet, this use of code-switching constitutes 'smuggling' because it is not officially permitted. Generally, it would appear that different teachers hold different views about linguistic interaction in the classroom, which then informs their respective approaches to it. Thus, it is important to note that there is a difference between policy and actual teacher and learner practice in their interaction, as teachers and learners attempt to deal with the linguistic challenges that arise in the classroom. In the case of History classrooms, there is acknowledgement by both the teachers and learners that the phenomena that are employed, assist in the teaching and learning of historical concepts.

Although code-switching, code-mixing and translation are found to be helpful in tiding teachers and learners over some linguistic hurdles related to content transmission, the manner in which they are employed creates other problems. There is no standard on which to determine how much code-switching and code-mixing should be done, due to the lack of official acknowledgement and facilitation. It would appear that where the intentions are good and the strategy is well thought out, and the teacher employs the vernacular systematically, code-switching, code-mixing and translation are important

tools for the facilitation of classroom talk. The problem lies in the lack of a recognised standard in terms of how and how much of these strategies should be employed. This results in the haphazard use of various strategies, so that in some cases they are used to reprimand, in a manner that does not focus on developing proficiency in English or in aiding subject-matter comprehension. Part of the problem is a lack of deliberation on this subject during initial teacher training. This conforms to findings elsewhere, which show that code-alteration strategies are neglected in teacher education, and lack legitimacy (Ferguson 2002; Holmasdottir 2003, 25).

The study provided insight into code-switching in Botswana's schools, and showed that if properly coordinated it could be an important facilitator of learning, and hence, it would contribute to the attainment of education for sustainable development.

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