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Language and decolonisation

The language question in
higher education:

*Transformations in our doing,
talking and thinking*

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Preview

- Theoretical lenses on the contextual dynamics that structure our doing, thinking and talking
 1. Social realism
 2. Cultural mismatch theory
 3. Process models
- Discourses of decolonisation in HE and implications for language and pedagogy, with reference to DHET policies
- Tools for changing our thinking, talking and doing:
 - Continua of 'decolonial awareness'
 - The process of transformative action

Theoretical lenses on the contextual dynamics that structure our doing, thinking and talking

1. Social realism (Archer 1995; 2000)

- Accounts for the personal and sociocultural factors that sustain harmful practices and could shape transformative practices
- Society is open, stratified and differentiated
- Three levels:
 - **The actual:** events resulting from social interaction and causal mechanisms, e.g. the curriculum
 - **The empirical:** a subset of the actual: individual experiences and observations of those events
 - **The real:** relatively enduring structures, such as class, gender and race; comprises of
 - **Structural systems:** institutions and roles that depend on access to material resources
 - **Cultural systems:** ideas, beliefs and ideologies (entrenched in particular languages and discourses), that depend on access to cultural resources)

- These systems "set up 'situational logics' configured through particular institutions and roles that set up differential power relations and access to material and structural resources" (Luckett 2016:417).
- Situational logics are always mediated by human agency and reflexivity
- Archer's three stages of social change:
 1. **Structural/cultural conditioning** occurs when structural properties objectively shape situations that agents confront involuntarily (e.g. a curriculum)
 2. **Social and socio-cultural interaction** occurs when people individually and collectively interact to achieve their subjectively defined concerns and projects; agents (lecturers and students) determine subjectively through reflexive deliberation how to act in relation to the enablements and constraints objectively defined by the situations (e.g. curricula)
 3. **The outcomes of social interaction** may involve structural and/or cultural reproduction or change (morphogenesis/morphostasis)

2. Cultural Mismatch Theory of Inequality

(Stephens & Townsend 2016; Devereux and Wilson 2018)

- **Cultural inequality:** cultural norms in mainstream institutions \neq the norms prevalent among underrepresented social groups
- Is enacted through
 - promoting mainstream, independent cultural norms, and excluding interdependent cultural norms (e.g. being connected to others, fitting in and being responsive to the needs of others)
 - thereby inadvertently fuelling inequality by creating barriers to the performance of underrepresented groups

Similar views

- Case (2015)

"two different classes of students in our universities – those who have learnt to enjoy the rights of being a citizen, and those whose subjected identities result from a family upbringing in the subjected margins of our society, those who have learnt through experience that rights are the domain of privileged others"

- Lockett (2016, who quotes Mamdani 1996)

Two types of student:

- subjects of political society
- citizens of civil society (the urban elites who enjoy the civil rights granted to 'citizens of civil society')

3. Process models

- [Chilisa \(2012\)](#): rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, action
- [Smith \(1999\)](#): deconstruction and reconstruction, self-determination and social justice, ethics, language, internationalisation of indigenous experiences, history, critique

Self-determination and social justice

- The struggle by those marginalised by the Western academy
- Seeking legitimacy for knowledge embedded in own histories

Ethics (epistemological redress)

- Formulation, legislation and dissemination of ethical issues related to the protection of IKS

Language

- Importance of teaching/learning in the indigenous languages

Internationalization

- Sharing/publicising indigenous experiences in global and local spaces

History

- The study of the past to recover the history, culture and languages of colonised people

Critique

- A critical appraisal of the empirical model of the academy that "continues to deny the colonised and historically marginalised other space to communicate from their own frames of reference" (Chilisa 2012)

How might this process-model be adapted?

Self-determination and social justice

Ethics

Language

History

Critique (critical decolonial awareness)

Action

Human beings have the powers of critical reflection upon their social context and of creatively redesigning their social environment, its institutional or ideational configurations, or both [...] It is possible for human beings to become agentially effective [...] in evaluating their social context, creatively envisaging alternatives, and collaborating with others in bringing about transformation (Archer 2000:308).

We must now make the move from reflection and criticism to creation (Hall & Tandon 2017:14).

Internationalization

Discourses of decolonisation in HE and how they impact on language

1. Discourses calling for the **decolonisation** of higher education
2. A discourse of **alienation**
3. A discourse of **epistemological access linked to ontological access**
4. A discourse of **powerful knowledge**
(Vorster & Quinn 2017)

1. Discourses calling for the decolonisation of HE

- Student protests (2015 and 2016): discourse of transformation replaced with stronger discourses of change = decolonisation
- Challenge: Disrupting the cultural and structural inertia in HE
"South African universities have been using a discourse of transformation while not engaging in significant structural and cultural changes beyond changing staff and student demographics" (Vorster & Quinn 2017)

Implications for language and pedagogy

- Irony: demand for English only as medium of instruction at certain HAUs.

2. A discourse of **alienation** (McKenna 2004)

- Students' sense of separation from the socio-cultural life of the university, and in particular **academic culture**
- Alienating factors:
 - Specialised academic knowledge
 - New ways of reading and writing

Implications for language and pedagogy

- Induction in the essayist tradition of the academy?
- “Structured scaffolding” or greater autonomy?

3. Discourse of epistemological access linked to ontological access

- Epistemological access part of transformation discourse
- Whose knowledge: 'epistemic othering'; 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker 2007); 'epistemicide' (Hall & Tandon 2017)

Only if we view the decolonisation of knowledge as the collective processes by which disciplinary practices are successful in working against the inscribed epistemic injustices of all knowledge formation can we claim for ourselves a commitment toward epistemic justice (Keet 2014).

- **Knowledge democracy** (Hall & Tandon 2017)
 - **Weaker version** of Keet's '**epistemic justice**'
 - Recognise existence of **multiple epistemologies**
 - **Embrace multimodality**: knowledge is created and represented in various modes: text, image numbers, story, music, drama, poetry, ceremony
 - **Open access** for sharing knowledge (links to 'powerful knowledges')

- Link between epistemology and ontology
 - "Ontological turn" (epistemology shapes ontology): Knowledge is acquired to shape a student as a particular person (Barnett 2009)
 - Curricula and pedagogic processes should be aligned to *who students are as people* (which is often not the case)
 - "the contemporary student movement (#MustFall) is framed by what I understand to be *the contestation of visibilities*. I conceptualise the contestation of visibilities as *the desire to be recognised* and the *humanity of those framed as Other* in the pedagogical journey to be seen as legitimate. The contestation of visibilities denotes the *desire for ontological recognition*" (Khumalo 2018:3-4)

Implications for language and pedagogy

- "Broadening the referential world of African universities means competence in the languages which embody non-Western traditions" (Mamdani 2018)
- Is that a prerequisite for decolonisation?

Alignment with Government policies

The Report for the Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences (2011) Catalytic Project on *Concept Formation in Indigenous African languages*

The indigenous languages are on the periphery of the activities of higher education in SA.

Supporting arguments:

- For those speaking African languages, knowledge, lived experiences, and the process of T & L for different subjects in HE might be understood and represented in different ways from those suggested by 'common' pedagogic discourses.
- This Catalytic Project seeks to **explore ways in which indigenous African languages can be drawn on as resources** in the **learning, teaching and research practices** in South African higher education, more specifically, **in the process of concept formation**.
- The Catalytic Project proposes the exploration of '**other ways of knowing**', especially those that are embedded in IKS.

Report on the use of African languages in HE (2015)

- There is a growing body of research that points to the role of language in **student underperformance** at university. However,
 - this **research does not seem to influence teaching practices**.
 - **there is no pedagogy informing multi-language usage to support concept formation in students for whom English is an additional language.** (English monolingual staff do not often encourage or support this as a means to facilitate concept formation).

Draft Language Policy for HE (2017)

31. *Language of instruction*: The policy recognises the linguistic diversity of the student make-up of our higher education institutions and the value of language as a means of epistemic access. Universities must diversify the languages of instruction to include indigenous official languages.

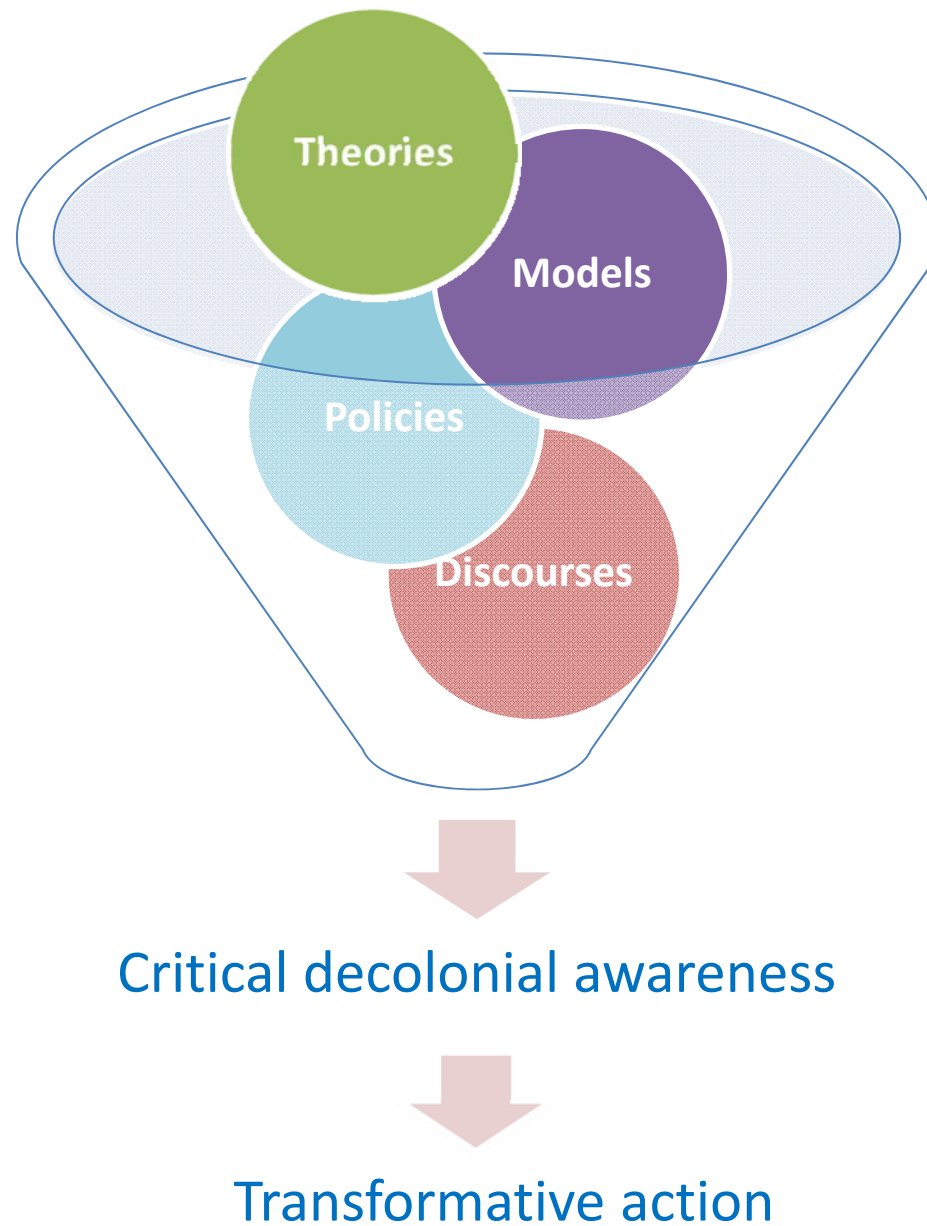
32. *Scholarship, Teaching and Learning*: In addition to English, all official languages must be pronounced in institutional language policies as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning. Continuous broad research must be undertaken by the sector, to explore and document strategies for intellectualising African languages for use in higher education.

4. A discourse of powerful knowledge

- This discourse centres around retaining or completely discarding canonical knowledge and knowledge systems
- It considers **the legitimacy of opening up powerful knowledge to all people** ("distributive justice")
 - Question: What justifies particular knowledge to be regarded as “powerful”?
 - What justifies particular styles, registers and genres to be regarded as “powerful”?

Tools for changing our thinking, talking and doing

26 August 2018



Awareness:
“interaction
between cultures
and a language-
learning
methodology in
which interactions
are consciously
analysed” (Roberts
et al. 1992:21)

Continua of "decolonial awareness"

(modelled on Hornberger & Link's "Continua of biliteracy" 2012)

To open ways of (re)-thinking the decolonisation of language in HE

Canonical <-> Decolonial

Content

contemporary <-----> historical

"powerful" epistemologies <-----> indigenous epistemologies

texts, authors from global North <-----> texts, authors from global South

expert generated <-----> peer generated

Pedagogy

lecturer-defined curriculum, genres <-----> student-defined curriculum, genres

monolingual <-----> bi(multi)lingual

L2 <-----> L1ⁿ

instruction <-----> reflection/critique

prescription <-----> autonomy

traditional media <-----> social media

unity/cohesion <-----> diversity

The process of transformative action

(Adapted from Geduld & Sathorar 2016)

- Assuming a transformative identity (NMMU: *abakwezeli* "fire stoker")
- Identifying all stakeholders (e.g. students, lecturers – all ranks, permanent and temporary, school principals, language teachers from schools)
- Taking cognisance of published research: theoretical and empirical
- Doing empirical research
 - Surveys
 - Capturing experiences: keeping reflective journals of all events related to the project
 - Listening to stakeholder voices: e.g. recording stories, and reflecting on them
 - Identifying salient themes

- **Engaging in courageous conversations**
 - **Stay engaged in the conversation** – morally, emotionally and intellectually
 - **Experience discomfort** – when examining your own core perceptions, beliefs, values and behaviours
 - **Speak your truth** – willingness to take risks and being absolutely honest about your thoughts (do not fear to sound angry, ignorant or offending)
 - **Expect and accept non-closure** – a solution often lies in the conversation itself
- **Biting the bullet** – take action to transform content and pedagogy
- **Remaining reflective practitioners** – revisit and re-evaluate changes to justify or discard them (Archer's "morphostasis"/"morphogenesis")



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