Implementing Multilingualism at the University of the Free State: The Key Initiatives, Progress and Challenges

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Abstract
The University of the Free State approved its multilingual language policy in 2016, recognizing five university languages, Sesotho, isiZulu, South African Sign Language, Afrikaans, and English. The adoption of African indigenous languages Sesotho and isiZulu in the 2016 language policy was viewed as a 'multilingual turn' and a historical revolution for the university after a long period of being an exclusive Afrikaans university (1950s–2002) and later a bilingual English-Afrikaans university (2003–2015). Underpinned by the Language Management Theory this paper reports on the key initiatives adopted by the university for the implementation of the multilingual language policy 2016 within the newly established Academy for Multilingualism. It also brings forth the challenges of implementing multilingualism at the University of the Free State and beyond.

Keywords: multilingualism, language policy, Academy for Multilingualism, African indigenous languages, Language Management Theory, terminology development

1 Introduction

The University of the Free State (UFS) (renamed in 2001) was established in 1904 as a tertiary section of the Grey College. In 1950 the university was fully declared as a whites-only independent Afrikaans medium university and the name was changed to the University of Orange Free State. The end of the apartheid era in South Africa in 1994 and the promulgation of the Constitution (1996) and Language Policy for Higher Education (1997) saw the university revising its Afrikaans monolingual policy into Afrikaans-English medium policy (2003). Even though the UFS policy (2003) was promulgated in the post-apartheid democratic

South Africa, and it claimed to be underpinned by linguistic diversity as stipulated in the Constitution, the policy did not recognize any African indigenous language for development and for instruction.

It was not until 2016 that the University of the Free State approved a language policy that recognizes five university languages, Sesotho, isiZulu, South African Sign Language, Afrikaans, and English. The adoption of African indigenous languages Sesotho and isiZulu, specifically, in the 2016 language policy was viewed as a 'multilingual turn' and a historical revolution for the university after a long period of being an exclusive Afrikaans university (1950s – 2002) and a bilingual Afrikaans-English medium (2003 – 2015). Underpinned by the principles of multilingualism, inclusivity, and social justice, the main objective of the 2016 language policy was to develop Sesotho and isiZulu as academic languages so that they can be utilized as tools for the promotion of multilingualism practices in the teaching and learning spaces and to promote epistemological access and success for the speakers.

Underpinned by the Language Management Theory this paper reports on the two key initiatives, Sesotho terminology development for various disciplines, and translanguaging tutorials, which were adopted by the university council in 2019 as some of the key drivers for the implementation of multilingualism aspirations of the policy in the teaching and learning spaces. The two key projects reported in this paper are in the process of implementation. At the writing of the paper, data from participants was not yet available to substantiate the impact of the initiatives. Following the introduction, the paper will discuss the theoretical framework. Later, the paper will explore the literature on the concept of multilingualism, and the implementation of multilingualism in South African higher education and globally. The 2016 Language Policy of the University of Free State is briefly analyzed to set the context for the initiatives discussed later in the paper. Finally, the paper looks at the challenges of implementing multilingualism at the UFS as well as in other contexts and it suggests a way forward as part of the conclusion.

2 The Language Management Theory

This paper is underpinned by language management theory (LMT) developed by Neustupny (1978) and later expanded by scholars such as Fishman (1987), Spolsky (2009), and Nekvapil and Sherman (2015). The theory is less concerned with the 'management' of language from a linguistic perspective, but it recognizes a language discourse within and across various cultural contexts as the root of language societal language problems as Fishman (1987) suggests:

> For me, language planning remains the authoritative allocation of resources to the attainment of language status and language corpus goals, whether in connection with new functions that are aspired to,

> or in connection with old functions that need to be discharged more adequately (p. 409).

Nekvapil and Sherman (2015) call for a language-planning approach to solve the language problems that emanate from the hierarchy in language, communication, and socio-economic management arising from the fact that language management is not adequate (Nekvapil, 2009). In their model of language-planning Neustupný and Nekvapil (2003) identified three language-planning processes that exist in a university context: identification of a language problem in individual discourse; adoption of measures by a particular language-planning institution; implementation of these measures in individual discourse (Neustupný, 1994). Neustupný (1994) formulates that:

> I shall claim that any act of language planning should start with the consideration of language problems as they appear in discourse, and the planning process should not be considered complete until the removal of the problems is implemented in discourse (1994, p. 50).

In other words, language management at the institutional level begins by understanding language problems as they occur through interactions at the individual level and the language planning process is not complete without addressing the ideological language issues (Neustupný & Nekvapil, 2003). Within the context of this paper, language issues stem from the colonial language ideologies in which only two languages, English and Afrikaans, were deemed fit to be used as a medium of instruction at the UFS while Sesotho, a regional indigenous language of the Free State province, and a language of the majority of students at the UFS, especially in the Bloemfontein campus, was dismally ignored and neglected.

This paper argues that the LMT remains relevant and applicable as a framework to draw from for the policy planning model in different higher education contexts. For the UFS context in particular, the theory can assist the language policymakers to, firstly, understand ideological language issues as they occur within their contexts, and, secondly, to put in place effective processes and interventions for addressing these language issues at the individual level and institutional level. Furthermore, within the context of this paper, the LMT is most relevant as it enables the policy planners to question the choice of policy language preferences and adoptions and their implications for the aspired promotion of multilingualism at an individual level as well as institutional level.

3 Literature Review

3.1 The Concept of Multilingualism

In today's global world of mobilities and migration, multilingualism is increasingly becoming a norm in the places of education, work, and so on. Traditionally, multilingualism is viewed as a collection of two or more languages controlled by individuals, groups, institutions, or nations (Makoni & Pennycook, 2023). This enumerative and classificatory view of multilingualism as bounded language entities controlled by an individual has been criticized by scholars such as Cenoz (2013). These scholars argue that the view of multilingualism as autonomous language codes is simply a pluralization of monolingualism. In fact, (Blommaert & Spotti, 2017) join these two scholars by asserting that the traditional view of multilingualism as language entities undermines the complex linguistic acts and interactions in multilingual settings. The traditional view of multilingualism also blocks any paradigm shifts in thinking about languages beyond the alternative use of languages or switching or mixing of codes possessed by an individual (Blommaert & Spotti, 2017).

The paradigm shift in the field of multilingualism theorizes multilingualism from the point of view of multilingual speakers. Multilinguals use their diverse languages as a resource that is available to the multilinguals at an individual level, a group, an institutional level, or at the level of a nation (Moller, 2008). According to Moller (2008), "these multilingual resources may be heterogeneous and diverse in nature, and they do not operate from the idea of separate languages but represent a dynamic and hybrid conglomerate of linguistic and discursive resources that afford the multilingual self-expression, communication, and identification in specific contexts" (p. 218). An understanding here is that the collective linguistic repertoires of multilinguals consist of what Jorgensen (2008) calls features rather than languages. Multilinguals, therefore, utilize any linguistic feature at their disposal to reach their communicative goal.

In all, the concept of multilingualism has recently evolved from a mere focus on the named distinct languages that a multilingual can speak to a linguistic resource consisting of a more fluid variety of repertoires enabling a multilingual to select whichever repertoire to use to achieve a communicative purpose in a specific context. This paradigm shift in multilingualism makes the concept of multilingualism a more complex and interesting phenomena. The next section looks at multilingualism practices in higher education.

3.2 Research on Multilingualism Practices

In the broader context of Africa, although drawing from Tanzania as a case in point, Brock-Utne (2017) conducted a study that questioned whether multilingualism in Africa produces marginalization or empowerment. Among the questions that Brock-Utne (2017) sought to answer were the reasons behind parents' choice of the language through which they wanted their children to be educated.

The study found that many parents opted for English because of its association with employment prospects in bigger companies in and outside the country. However, this choice was made despite that many parents admitted to the difficulty faced by their children when educated in English (Brock-Utne, 2017).

In the study that interrogated the role of English in multilingual societies, Mohanty (2017) used India as a case to demonstrate that English empowers a few while the masses are disempowered. This state of affairs is responsible for what Mohanty (2017) calls the double divide in multilingual societies where indigenous vernacular languages are divided from major state languages that are in turn divided from dominant languages. Indigenous languages, which are spoken by the majority, are at the bottom of the ladder followed by major state languages, and dominant languages spoken by the minority are at the top of the ladder.

In one study conducted in the South African context, Ntombela and Mpherwane (2024) examined the tapestry of languages in the education of an African student. They utilized autoethnography through which they traced and narrated the utility of multiple languages in higher education. They found resistance to utilizing African languages, which they explained as emanating from monolingual fallacy. The monolingual fallacy favors the dominance of English language which immediately pushes other languages into the periphery.

Ngcobo and Roya (2024) conducted a study where they traced the reading motivations of a cohort of multilingual university students. They found that students' motivation is enhanced when texts recognize their linguistic background to which they argue that mixing languages in texts will likely keep motivation high. When this is linked with Ntombela and Mpherwane's (2024) study, it shows that a monolingual approach that does not acknowledge multiple languages deprives students of the motivation to learn.

Similarly, drawing from multilingualism as a strategy, Sebola's (2024) study forwards an argument on resituating African languages and indigenous knowledge systems. His main submission was that multilingualism is a tenable intervention towards the promotion of African languages in academia. His research agrees with Ngema-Msomi's (2024) study which advocates for multilingualism as a tool for research and the production of knowledge. Ngema-Msomi's research was contextualized in agricultural extension where research analysis was provided in isiZulu, which revealed that the incorporation of isiZulu enhanced the understanding of agricultural extension and improved the education of smallholder farmers.

3.3 The University of the Free State Language Policy

It has been said before in this paper that the UFS 2016 Language Policy is considered a multilingual policy. This recognizes not only English and Afrikaans (policy 2003) but it embraces five UFS languages: Sesotho, isiZulu, South African Sign Language, English, and Afrikaans. The policy is also underpinned by the principles of multilingualism, social justice, and inclusivity. The promotion of multilingualism through the development and intellectualization of the previous-

ly marginalized indigenous languages, Sesotho and isiZulu, is meant to increase access to knowledge and success for the speakers of these languages for whom English-only instruction often creates learning barriers.

Even though the 2016 Policy claims to promote multilingualism in all spheres of the university, it, however, operates on a monolingual framework by adopting English as the only language of instruction for undergraduate and postgraduate studies except in programs where languages (for example Sesotho, isiZulu, Afrikaans) are being studied. English also remains the language of administration. This dominance of English in the language policy, whether it is intentional or not, disrupts and undermines the multilingualism aspirations of the language policy. The 2016 Language Policy statement on the creation of a multilingual language-rich environment with attention to all four languages immediately creates an impression that all four languages are equally promoted in the academic, social, and administrative spaces at the UFS. However, this is not actually so.

Nevertheless, the 2016 policy puts forth the four drivers for the implementation of multilingualism at the UFS. The first one is the development and intellectualization of Sesotho and isiZulu as academic languages through initiatives such as Sesotho terminology development for various disciplines, publication of books written in African languages, translation of PhD abstracts into Sesotho, isiZulu, and Afrikaans, and through development SASL terminology for various disciplines. The second key driver is the implementation of multilingualism in teaching and learning through translanguaging tutorials. The third driver is to promote multilingualism as a social asset which is done through the celebration of language and cultural diversity to enhance social cohesion. The fourth, and last driver, is the development of students' academic literacies and English academic skills. All these key drivers are the main features of the language policy implementation plan, and they are still at the piloting stage following the establishment of the Academy for Multilingualism in 2022. Thus, the key projects reported in the following sections are all in the process of implementation. At the writing of the paper, data from participants were not yet available to substantiate the impact of the initiatives.

4. The Key Initiatives of the Policy Language and the Progress

4.1 The Establishment of the Academy for Multilingualism

The concept of the Academy for Multilingualism (AfM) emanated from the Senate (2018) recommendation for an establishment that will implement, monitor, and evaluate the multilingualism initiatives arising from the Language Policy (2016). The AfM reports on the progress and the impact of the language policy implementation to the Language Committee of the Senate and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic. Given its mandate and responsibilities, the Language Committee of the Senate then decided that the AfM should be positioned as an independent and neutral coordinator, facilitator, catalyst, champion, thought leader,

and communication hub that supports and integrates existing resources to drive the approved multilingualism intentions of the university (unpublished Report of Senate, 2019).

Even though the AfM was given a 'neutral' and 'independent' position, this was not intended to promote and encourage its independent and neutral critical perspectives on the intentional or unintentional ideologies of the language policy. That is, it must ensure that it does not question the ideologies of the policy but implements them as such. It must also ensure the alignment between the multilingualism imperatives of the university and its strategic vision. As a result, the AfM establishments in Bloemfontein campus and Qwaqwa campus display the following characteristics:

a. It is a neutral space where coordination between existing entities as well as opportunities for multilingual practices takes place.
b. Its location adheres to its neutrality: these structures are situated in proximity to existing language development entities (such as the CTL, the library, language departments, etc.) to enable a high level of synergy between the Academy and these existing entities.
c. These spaces are flexible and designed to convert easily into larger or smaller venues, depending on requirements.
d. Technology infuses the design and construction of the new structures, with a specific focus on developing a language laboratory for the Qwaqwa structure in order to develop language learning, if needed.

All the language policy implementation activities and projects within the AfM must be approved by the Language Committee of the Senate and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic. The AfM is not only responsible for the implementation of the language policy but also for reviewing or revising the policy when it reaches its five-year period of implementation or should the need arise before the five-year period.

The progress that has been made is that in 2022 the AfM employed a Director who is based in the Bloemfontein campus. In 2023 it attained a Deputy Director who is responsible for managing the Qwaqwa Campus. There is also a Chief Research Officer, a Researcher, a Project Coordinator, and two administrative assistants.

4.2 Sesotho Terminology Development for Various Disciplines

The intellectualization of Sesotho through terminology development began in 2023 as an initiative towards the development of Sesotho as an academic language. As a pilot project, a few disciplines (Psychology, Accounting, Law, Mathematics,

and Social Work) were approached and invited to participate in the Sesotho terminology development for their disciplines. The project of the intellectualization of Sesotho at the university is coordinated by the Academy for Multilingualism (AFM), which was established in 2019, to drive the implementation of the language policy at the university.

The processes, methods, and strategies of terminology development are beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to mention that the process of terminology development at the university was approached as a collaborative effort following suggestions from Batibo (2009) and Madiba (2001). Led by the Academy for Multilingualism, the institutional internal stakeholders of Sesotho terminology development in different disciplines include heads of departments who put together a team of field specialists, postgraduate students, and undergraduate students for the harvesting of terminology. Once the terminology has been thoroughly harvested, the Academy for Multilingualism coordinates the terminology development workshop which is normally a one-week (5 days) meeting of internal stakeholders and external stakeholders such as Sesotho linguists, indigenous and cultural language experts, terminologists, and lexicographers who all put their minds together to develop the new Sesotho terminology. During the Sesotho terminology development week all stakeholders engage in the terminology development processes of deriving, semantic expansion, compounding, blending, acronyms, coinage, loan translation, and borrowing (Batibo, 2009).

Once the terminology for a specific discipline has been developed, the Sesotho new terms go through the standardization process which is led by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and Sesotho National Language Board (SNLB) which are authorized bodies for the standardization of the new terms in Sesotho. Standardization is a crucial process of language intellectualization (Batibo, 2009). Standardization by the responsible bodies ensures the uniformity, conformity, and commonality of the newly developed terms (Madiba, 2001). To avoid duplication of Sesotho terminology development the PanSALB and SNLB collect all the standardized terms and become the sources of these terms for dissemination to the users, in this case of Sesotho terminology development in this university, the terminology is made available to students in printed forms or otherwise, for utilization in their learning. The university hopes that, over time, the project of Sesotho terminology development will have a positive impact on epistemological access and success for the speakers. The university, through the Academy for Multilingualism, is already embarking on longitudinal research to explore the impact.

The following table provides an example of Accounting Sesotho terminology development processes adopted by the university. The first column indicates an accounting term in English. The second column shows a new Sesotho equivalence of the term. The third column explains the term in English. It is important to note that this example of Accounting Sesotho terminology development was captured before the new Sesotho terminology underwent the critical and essential processes of standardization and verification by PANSALB.

Accounting English/Sesotho terminology (before the standardization process)

ENGLISH	SESOTHO	DEFINITION
Accountability (n.)	Boikarabello	Being responsible or answerable for something. (Example: An accountant is responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the financial statements of an entity).
Accountant (n.)	Akhaontente	A professional who performs accounting functions.
Accounting (n.)	Akhaonting	The process of keeping track of all financial transactions (Recording, classifying, and summarising of financial transactions) so that users of financial statements are provided with information that is useful.
Account (n.)	Akhaonto; Mokitlane	A record in an accounting system that tracks the financial activities of a specific asset, liability, equity, revenue or expense.
Accounting equation (n.)	Tekanyo ya akhaonting	The relationship between Assets, Equity and Liabilities (The foundation of the double-entry accounting system)
Accrued (adj.)	-sa lefuwang	To increase or accumulate over time.

4.3 Translanguaging Tutorials

The UFS Language Policy (2016, section 4.2) advocates that:

> Multilingualism is supported among other activities by an expanded tutorial system especially designed for first-year students. Tutorials take place in English, Afrikaans, and Sesotho in the same class on the Bloemfontein Campus and in English, Sesotho, and isiZulu on the Qwaqwa Campus (p.2).

Multilingualism in the UFS Language Policy (2016) is described as:

> a linguistic capacity that extends across more than two languages. Multilingualism can be individual, i.e. a person who can use more than one but preferably more than two languages; and social multilingualism, that

> is the use of more than one but preferably more than two languages in social transactions in a given community. In the case of the UFS, multilingualism means the use of a combination of Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, and Sesotho for different purposes according to each campus' needs (Section 3, p.2).

Following the promulgation of the policy, the Language Committee of the Senate (2018) adopted 'translanguaging' as a pedagogical practice for the implementation of multilingualism in the tutorial system. Tutorials refer to the:

> process of teaching and learning that occurs among peers of similar age cohorts but differs in knowledge accumulated. During tutoring, tutors play the role of facilitating the discussions and maintain high levels of engagement while the students become the tutees" (Johns, 2019 cited in Motaung, 2021, p. 14).

In the context of the UFS, multilingual tutorials are designated meetings taking place in designated modules where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds utilize their diverse linguistic resources to engage with the learning materials and with their peers and tutors to gain a better understanding of the concepts.

Translanguaging, on the other hand, was adopted in the language policy plan as a pedagogical strategy to be implemented in the tutorials. According to Baker (2011), "translanguaging is the process of making meaning, shaping experience, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two or more languages." (p. 288). In other words, in the translanguaging tutorials, multilingual students draw from the tapestry of their linguistic repertoires to make meaning through asking questions, discussing, and debating the concepts until they gain understanding and acquire the knowledge (Ngubane, Ntombela & Govender, 2021).

Translanguaging tutorials are still at the piloting phase at the UFS since 2019. As such, not all modules in the faculties have translanguaging tutorials. The target modules for the pilot are mainly first-year modules which have a history of high failure rate or 'high risk' modules. Senior students who have excelled in their modules are appointed as tutors.

So far, the major challenges in the implementation of translanguaging tutorials at the UFS are associated with the hegemony of English both in the higher education language policies and the institutional language policy. Students' attitudes towards their African indigenous languages and their utilization for teaching and learning is also another challenge affecting the successful implementation of the translanguaging tutorials at the UFS (Motaung, 2021). Lack of resources includes insufficient budget for implementation, trained tutors, and lack of multilingual resources.

5. Challenges of Implementing Multilingualism

The biggest challenge of implementing multilingualism lies in its conception. Multilingualism should be conceived in terms of the equality of languages. The elevation of the nine African languages into equal official status with previously advantaged English and Afrikaans meant that all the official languages shared the parity of esteem. On the contrary, over-reliance on English as the only language for academic transactions cast doubts into whether there are any plans to promote African languages to the same level of operation as English. It might seem that the more the country progresses into democracy the more it moves away from promoting the utility of African languages as languages of learning and teaching. Although interventions like translanguaging tutorials are helpful, they only serve to scaffold students' epistemic access into English and not to make knowledge available for access in African languages. This explains why others, as reported by Mabena (2020), believe that African languages will never become media of instruction like English. Therefore, if true multilingualism is to be implemented, African languages must be used as languages of teaching and learning and not be treated as exotic languages only fit for the arts and cultural transactions.

6. Way Forward and Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt that the University of the Free State through its Academy for Multilingualism has made strides in the implementation of multilingualism. The language policy of the University of the Free State started monolingually with Afrikaans, then became bilingual with English and Afrikaans, and presently is multilingual with English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, and isiZulu. This is a progressive development in sync with the constitutional stance on multilingualism. The languages catered for in the UFS Language Policy represent the languages spoken by the community and the majority of the students where the university is located. This therefore safeguards the linguistic rights of the majority of students.

However, there are contradictions in the multilingual nature of the present policy in that only English is used as the medium of instruction, which is the same as when Afrikaans was the sole medium of instruction. When the policy was bilingual, there was a dual medium of instruction where lectures were conducted both in Afrikaans and in English, now that it is multilingual, only English is used as the medium of instruction. At the same time, there are initiatives done by the Academy for Multilingualism for the intellectualization of African languages but not for the future replacement of English as the medium of instruction. There is, therefore, a problem when languages that would benefit the majority are only recognized for support and not for the main transaction of knowledge (Ngubane & Khohliso, 2024).

Nonetheless, since the present policy is a result of the revision of the previous bilingual policy, future revisions must take into account the implementation strategy of multilingualism and the principle of parity of esteem. It is clear that En-

glish is systematically promoted as the dominant language at the expense of other languages. The relevance of other languages is compromised when they are simply regarded as support languages whilst they are capable of handling mainstream education. Multilingual strategies should therefore include ways in which other languages are given space as media of instruction for that will not only benefit the students but will further develop languages through continued use.

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