

**INVESTIGATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF
GRADE 4 PUPILS IN TWO CONTEXTS**

By

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The question of mother tongue education is being vigorously debated in academic circles in South Africa today. Researchers are of the opinion that, after socio-economic circumstances, insufficient mother tongue education is the reason why the majority of English second language (ESL) learners do not possess the necessary academic language proficiency to succeed in their scholastic endeavours (Pretorious & Cumin 2010, Lafon 2009, Dawn 2007, Webb 2002, Douglas et al 1995).

The constitution of South Africa promotes multilingualism and the use of all the eleven official languages. The current language-in-education policy also encourages multilingualism and recognises the benefits to be derived from mother tongue education. According to this policy, the governing body of each school must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching (Department of Education, 2008:8). The policy of course presupposes that every child will have access to school and a meaningful engagement to the school curriculum.

According to the 1996 language-in-education policy, pupils with an African language as mother tongue and attending schools mainly, but not only, in townships, should initially use the mother tongue as the mainstream language of learning and teaching. The learners should be introduced gradually to English until Grade 4 where it is assumed that they have reached a certain level of proficiency where they will be competent enough to use both the mother tongue and English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). In reality and in practice, the Mother Tongue (MT) is not used formally as a LoLT at all. The

learner is unfortunately required to carry out all his cognitive and academic development from Grade 4 only in English without sufficient MT education to support his learning.

In practice, learners in township schools generally receive Mother Tongue Education (MTE) only for the first three years of primary education. During these years, English is introduced slowly and informally from grade 1. English language is introduced as a subject from Grade 2 and at this stage the child may or may not have had oral English classes at preschool. From Grade 4 upwards English suddenly becomes the medium of instruction. How the transition from MT to English as medium of instruction is motivated and managed in Grade 4 forms the basis for this research.

In a bid to facilitate learning in schools where English is being learned and at the same time used as LoLT, teachers have resorted to Code-Switching(CS) as an academic resource (Barkhuizen et al, 1996:453-454). Very little can be achieved in terms of academic language proficiency when teachers are aware of the fact that they have to teach in English but spend most of the time CS:

At best we hear teachers code-switch; but more often than not they are code- mixing (using two languages within the same sentence). The language model they provide for their pupils is a code mixed model (Heugh 1993:30).

Heugh (1993) further stresses that it is a huge mistake to believe that academic language proficiency can be attained in township or rural schools where a majority of pupils are from African language speaking communities. Teaching and learning are processes where cognitive, affective, emotional, social, cultural and linguistic factors are deeply intertwined (Lave, 1988 cited in Vandeyar, 2009:04). Learners may fail to understand academic concepts through a language they are still learning because their teachers are incapable of assisting

them to do so (Crandall, 1998:18). Many educators lack the training, knowledge and tools to support learners with limited English proficiency. The status and popularity English enjoys in African schools are not matched by the quality of learning and teaching in English by teachers and their learners (Lemmer in Le Roux 1993:149). It would not be an overstatement to say that schools give learners a high regard for English without giving them full knowledge of English.

1.2 Problem Statement

Learners from township schools in South Africa often go through the school system without attaining the necessary level of English academic language proficiency to either ensure that they pass matric or to enable them to enter the tertiary education system. One of the factors contributing to this state of affairs is undeniably the question of MT instruction. The sudden switch from MT to English as the LoLT in Grade 4 has been shown to be the main reason why learners perform very poorly until grade 12 (Nel 2007, Le Roux 1993, Macdonald 1990). In this transitional class, the pupils are still adjusting to additional Learning Areas, have to face different educators for the various Learning Areas and are under pressure to work more independently. Learners in Grade 4 are faced therefore with two educational challenges: acquiring English as a Second Language (L2) and mastering (amongst other skills) new words in other subjects in a language which is not their MT.

From previous research done in the field of MTE in South Africa it is clear that Grade 4 learners in township schools are not yet sufficiently proficient in English to master new learning areas like Science and Social Sciences (Geography and History) amongst others, for instance - through the medium of English (Smith 2005, Heugh 1993). This study sets out to observe a group of Grade 4 pupils in a township school in two learning contexts – the English class and the Social Sciences classes. The researcher wants to examine the strategies teachers use to help learners to attain the necessary level of English proficiency on the one

hand and to help pupils to understand new academic content on the other hand. If, as is suspected, CS is one of these strategies, does this in fact enable the learners to master content in the new learning areas? In order to find out what the influence of, amongst other strategies, CS is on the understanding of academic contents, the research has focused on two specific academic fields. Social Sciences and English are selected for this purpose. Both these subjects are rich with new and unfamiliar vocabulary. In the English class, moreover, learners have to acquire sufficient skills in English to be able to understand the content of the Social Sciences classes.

1.3 Significance of the study

The significance of this research lies in its intention to highlight the teaching methods or strategies used by educators (of both English as a subject and of Social Sciences) in Grade 4 and to investigate if the skills and level of proficiency learners acquire in the English class enable them sufficiently to master the content of a subject like Social Sciences. As an outcome of this study the researcher has offered suggestions as to how educators can change their strategies in order to be more supportive to the learners.

1.4 Research questions

- What strategies/ methods do teachers of English as a subject in Grade 4 use to help learners support the dual educational challenges of mastering academic content and doing so in a language they are still acquiring?
- What is the function of CS on the side of teachers and learners alike in both these learning environments?

1.5 Research design

This study has adopted a qualitative research design to capture relevant information. Locke (1998:140) describes this process of qualitative, interpretative research as follows:

In this kind of study, the investigator builds an extensive collection of ‘thick description’ (detailed records concerning people, actions and the perceptions of participants) as the basis for inductive generation of explanatory theory. The purpose often is to understand the setting for social action from the perspective of the participant.

Social Science and English language lessons were observed in genuine Grade 4 classrooms. A “genuine classroom” as defined by Nunan (1991:92) is one which is constituted for the purpose of instruction as opposed to those that are constituted for the purpose of research and in which certain variables or phenomena are manipulated. For English as subject, the research was focused on an L2 classroom as characterized by Van Lier (1988:71). According to him, L2 classroom research does not only study the processes and circumstances of second language development, it also identifies the phenomena that promote or hamper learning in the classroom.

The research has made use of the case study approach. This method of study is used to narrow down a very broad field of research into an easily researchable topic. A case study research design has allowed the researcher to focus on a specific area or situation for an in depth analysis.

1.6 Methodological Framework

Research group

The Legora primary school situated in the eastern part of Mamelodi Township in Pretoria was selected for this research. Two Grade 4 classes at the Legora primary school were observed. The learners were between the ages of 9 to 10 years in a class of about 50 – 55 learners. The teachers of English and Social Sciences for Grade 4 also formed part of this research group.

Data collection

The researcher has used a combination of the following instruments to collect data:

Observation

Social Sciences and English language lessons were observed in two different Grade 4 classes for a period of two weeks. The research questions on the strategies/methods used by Grade 4 teachers to teach English as subject necessitate that English lessons should be observed firstly to capture classroom interactions during live lessons. Interpersonal communications that involved the efforts of both the learner and the teacher in the classroom to achieve learning were also observed. Secondly, the observations were done to record the methods/strategies used in teaching in order to facilitate the acquisition of a second language. Lastly, CS and the role it plays during the entire course of the English lessons were noted during the observations.

To answer the research question on the function of CS in explaining and understanding new words in Social Sciences, the researcher observed live Geography and History lessons. Instances of CS as a teaching method were noted. When and why the teacher code switched and the effect on the learners were observed. During these lessons, it was also vital to observe and note the verbal and non verbal reactions of both the learners and the teachers. The function of CS on the part of the learners was also noted.

For both English and Social Sciences lessons, the researcher sat at strategic positions in all the classes to be able to take down notes and at the same time observe both the learners and the teacher. The observation data was recorded as field notes with each note containing the date of observation, class observed, time used and the context of the setting. Observer comments were written on the field note to identify which teaching methods seem comprehensible to the learners and the learners' reaction to other methods during English and Social Sciences lessons.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to sample the opinions of the Grade 4 English and Social Sciences teachers. A random selection of Grade 4 learners from two Grade 4 classes was made for the interviews. Questions on the strategies the English teacher used were geared towards the teacher's teaching methods in teaching English as subject. Those for the learners were focused on which particular strategies they find easy to understand. The questions for the Social Sciences teacher were focused on her experiences in using English as medium of instruction and why she uses CS as a teaching strategy. Those for the learners investigated if they find difficulties understanding Geography and History being taught in English. While the teachers were interviewed individually, the learners were interviewed in a randomly selected group where they could respond to one another's comments as well as to the researcher's questions.

Interviews are preferable to questionnaires in that face to face interaction with the interviewee offers the researcher opportunities for clarification. These semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher the freedom to probe further into responses if deemed necessary. In this way the interviewees did elaborate freely upon the issues raised. Responses to interview questions were recorded by means of a voice-recorder after seeking consent from the interviewees and their parents. Note was also taken of nonverbal communication where necessary during the interviews.

Text analysis

The learners' text books for English language and Social Sciences were examined to find out if the levels of English used in them could easily be understood by the learners. The hand books of the learners in the two subjects were used to capture any difficulties they had in understanding and copying notes from the black board. It was also important to look at the study material of the teachers. At the end of the two weeks observation, a written test was conducted by the teachers of Social Sciences and English to evaluate how well the learners understood the lessons. The scores from these class tests conducted by the teachers were used to infer logical conclusions on the learners' level of English language proficiency in English and Social Sciences.

Limitations of this research

Limitations of this research method relate to reliability and validity. Factors such as fatigue, excess emotions and the hour of the day might have affected the result of the interviews. Besides, the status of the researcher as friend, colleague and researcher, subordinate or superior in the different interview situations was as much as possible neutralized to avoid biased results. Some learners were not able to express themselves in a group in which case the researcher did arrange personal interviews for such learners. The presence of a researcher in the

classroom during an ongoing lesson might have affected the flow of the lesson or the learners' state of mind. The teacher perhaps found it difficult to be as natural as possible due the presence of an intruder. The presence of the researcher might have also inhibited some learners and prevented them from answering questions orally in class. These factors were all taken into account in writing the final research report.

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

2.1 Introduction

A second language according to Bernhardt (1998:2), refers to a language that is not spoken in the home, and yet, may be the language of wider communication. This definition is a true reflection of the South African situation whereby English is the LoLT but the majority of learners from township schools have very little exposure to English outside the classroom. Language is the central mediator of learners' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skill, as well as their social and psychological development (Webb, 2011:7). It therefore implies that if a language is used for learning and teaching that the learners do not master well enough, they will not develop cognitively, psychologically and socially according to their potential. In order to learn in an L2, it is necessary for learners to have an adequate level of proficiency in the L2.

2.1.1 Second language learning

Second language learning is a long and complex undertaking. The learner's whole person is affected as he/she struggles to reach beyond the confines of a first language and into a new language (Brown, 2000:1). Krashen (1981:99) suggests that L2 or FL (Foreign Language) learning needs to be more like the child's acquisition of its native language. Krashen differentiates between acquiring and learning a language. The former is characterized as a subconscious process which results in the knowledge of a language whereas the latter results only in 'knowing about' the language. Krashen further brings out five hypotheses that form the 'monitor model'. The first hypothesis, 'The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis' stipulates that there are two ways in which L2 competence

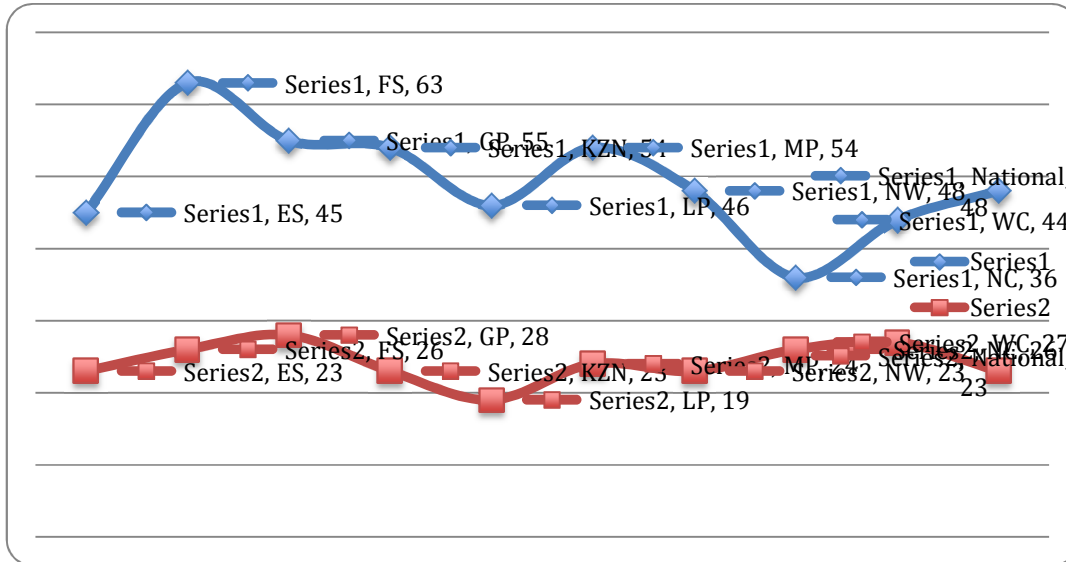
can be developed. Firstly, it is through language acquisition which is by using language for communication and secondly by language learning which involves formal learning of the target language.

2.2 The importance of language in learning

Language is without doubt the most important factor in the learning process, for the transfer of knowledge and skill is mediated through the spoken and or written word (Bamgbose (2000) cited in Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004:72). English Second Language (ESL) learners in African schools are formally introduced to English in Grade 2. According to Menyuk & Brisk (2005:80) children for whom English is a new language need to begin reading and writing English from the first grade to be able to function in school, both socially and academically.

Macdonald & Burrows (1991:15) point out that Grade 4 pupils require about 5000 words in English at this stage to be able to cope with the syllabuses but unfortunately they may only have about 800 words in English by the time they are in Grade 4. The Department of Education gives an illustration of how the LoLT influences the performance of learners in Mathematics.

Figure 1: Mathematics achievement by home language and province (DoE 2005: 78 as cited in Cuvelier 2007).



Key: Series 1: home language same as LOLT; Series 2: Home language different to LOLT

It is easier for learners who study mathematics in their mother-tongue to understand the language in which the complex nature of the subject is being taught than those who do so in English. The highest level of MT learners comes from very poor socio-economic backgrounds and this explains why the gap in achievement between mother tongue and English learners is least in the Northern and Western Capes. These statistics on students' performance confirm the notion that difficulties in dealing with mathematical word problems might be due to the difficulties in processing language (Menyuk & Brisk 2005:96).

2.3 Factors that affect learning in a second language

2.3.1 Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

Cummins (1994) cited in Schlebush & Thobedi (2004:37) distinguishes between BICS and CALP. While BICS refers to the skills that allow learners to speak and cope with English pronunciation and vocabulary in everyday life, CALP, on the other hand, enables the learner to become a competent academic communicator. The learner should be able to engage in cognitively demanding and problem solving tasks. Learners in South Africa are fluent enough to pass an admission test measuring general language ability, but lack the command of English needed to comprehend the various concepts, principles and techniques required to pass in different school learning areas (Schlebush, 2002:8). A lack of CALP puts learners from African schools at high risk. When these learners do not gain academic and cognitive skills in their MT and are not able to use academic English, they are at risk of delayed academic achievement and ultimately school failure (Le Roux, 1993:149).

Both the curriculum challenges and the need to work independently in Grade 4 lead to academic language proficiency being taxed (Nel, 2007:1). Cummins (1979) cited in (Le Roux, 1993:151) suggests that pupils with limited English proficiency can be assisted in their academic progress provided they have high levels of proficiency in their MT. Failure to reach adequate levels of proficiency in their MT will mean that the children will suffer the negative effects of semi-lingualism. Semi-lingualism will mean the loss of MT, which further impedes mastery of a L2.

Macdonald (1990:40) points out that many learners' writing skills are marked by a high level of grammatical error, the absence of cohesive ties and no notion of coherence. She further observes that the oral and listening skills of these

learners have not been adequately developed to permit a switch from mother tongue to English as medium of instruction. Standard three (Grade 5) pupils may not know what the words in a written passage mean, but they do know that they are the words which the teacher wants although no real understanding of the passage is possible.

Cummins (1991:70) has observed that when children begin the acquisition of an L2, whether in the home or at school, their cognitive resources clearly play a central role in the rapidity and ultimate success with which that language is acquired. Cummins (1991) further observes that one aspect of the cognitive resources that children bring to L2 acquisition is their First Language (L1) proficiency. The level of L1 proficiency in learners of Grade 4 in township schools is too far below expectation to guarantee any success in the acquisition of an L2.

According to Heugh (1995:47) an adequate proficiency in a L2 is estimated at the maintenance of the learner's L1 for more than 5 years under optimal conditions. Optimal conditions would imply excellent educators, a sound economic background, efficient educational resources and prolonged use of the first language in education (Rosel & Baker (1996) in Schlebush & Thobedi, 2004:38). This is currently not the case in township schools where MT is used only for the first three years of school. Language proficiency therefore leaves much to be desired.

2.3.2 An early switch from mother tongue to English as LoLT

Desai (2001:234) points out that children need to be taught in their MT until the end of the intermediate phase (4-6) in order to have a firmer foundation in the new subjects they learn. If this foundation is not there they become stymied for life. According to Lafon (2008:36) if learners do not have sufficient knowledge of the medium of instruction, they will constantly stumble in their learning, which does not necessarily mean regarding concepts or knowledge imparted but

regarding linguistic representations and expressions. Pupils learning a new language often experience difficulty with academic concepts and terminology because these terms and ideas are more abstract and not as easily understood and experienced as ideas and terms used in social interaction (Le Roux, 1993:152).

Arthur (1994:75) attests that poor educational experiences in Botswana after standard 5 are due to the switch from Setswana to English as medium of instruction. Trappes-Lomax (1990:90-95) argues that an appropriate medium of instruction is one that enables the society to educate its youth. He stresses that such a language should be accepted by all concerned: parents, teachers, pupils and the society. He further observes that the learners should be able to communicate freely in the language. It is most unfortunate that the acceptance by all concerned is difficult to find in Africa. There are very few cases, if any, in which there is universal acceptance of a single language of learning on the African continent (Mchazime, 2001:93).

Bamgbose (1993:28) brings out a true reflection on the question of LoLT when he points out that:

whenever everything possible has been done, there will be small languages which cannot feature in formal education. There will also be others which can support the use of initial literacy only in transition to the use of another language as medium of instruction. This is the reality in many African countries and no appeal to language rights or rhetoric can change the situation.

Webb (2002:38) confirms this assertion when he observes that the Department of Education needs to give very serious attention to the medium of instruction policy in South Africa. According to Webb (2002) the excessively powerful role of English is demonstrably an obstacle to national development, and it must be

curbed. Webb (2002:4) points out that insufficient MTE is the reason why the English language proficiency required for effective educational development is generally not present among black learners in South Africa. He further observes that the abandonment of MTE in Grade 4 distorts the cognitive development process in the learners and reduces the basic language knowledge and linguistic skills they need to build on for effective educational development. Webb (2002) concludes that the use of English as LoLT is probably one of the contributing factors in the high drop-out rate, high rate of repetition, low mean marks per subject and low pass-marks in South Africa.

2.3.2.1 The role of mother tongue education in cognitive development

Language experts are of the idea that neglecting MTE for English as medium of instruction is one of the primary causes of poor results, high dropout rates and the general level of underachievement in multilingual countries (Webb 2002, Nel 2007, Lafon 2008, Vandeyar 2009). The transition from MT to English as a medium of instruction causes many problems in the life of the black child (Rooyen (1990) cited in Le Roux, 1993:149). The switch from MT to English in Grade 4 disrupts the cognitive development of the learners and sets a stage for confusion in the learning process of the learner. These circumstances make it very difficult for ESL learners in African schools to acquire the desired competence in English that will enable them to perform well in their educational career.

According to Cummins (2000:37), there has been close to 150 empirical studies in the past 30 years that have shown the beneficial effects on students' linguistic, cognitive or academic growth when they have the opportunity to acquire initial literacy in their home language. Dawn (2007:30) brings out the importance of MT in the acquisition of a second language when he observes that:

Mastering of complex and abstract concepts in an inadequately known second language is a serious problem but once mastered in the first language, they transfer readily and are available for use in intellectually demanding contexts.

MTE in the first years of a child's years in school enhances continuity in the child's learning process and therefore maximizes his intellectual development (Emenanjo, 1990:64). In South Africa, learners from African schools who experience a sudden switch from MT to English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4 suffer a set-back in their intellectual development. At this stage where the learner is supposed to be expanding the knowledge already acquired in the MT the sudden switch naturally retards his cognitive maturation and the development of his intellectual capacity (Emenanjo 1990).

2.4 Factors that influence learning English as a second language

2.4.1 The receptive and productive skills

The receptive and passive skills are the basic skills necessary for the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). Receptive (listening and reading skills) involve receiving messages. Productive (active) skills are speaking and writing - they involve language production. According to the British Council (2010:02) in the process of learning a new language, learners begin with the receptive which is understanding of the new items taught and will later move to productive use of the new items. For adequate receptive skills, the habits of listening and reading are to be improved and these will in turn enable the productive skills of speaking and writing.

Harmer (1991:40) also stresses the difference between language input (receptive) and language output (productive). He argues that there will always be a time when the learner is receiving language. Language in some way is being

put into the learner. But it is not enough to only expose learners to the language. They must also be provided with opportunities to activate the knowledge they have received. According to Harmer (1991) language production allows learners to rehearse language use in classroom conditions whilst receiving feedback from teachers, other learners and from themselves.

Smith (1983:7) defines a productive system of education as that which allows the child to be regarded not as a mere recipient of the ideas of others, but as an agent capable of collecting, originating and producing most of the ideas which are necessary for its education. Smith further divides a learner's acquisition of a language into three stages. Firstly, the cognitive development, which is the learner's capacity to recognize, identify, discriminate and manipulate the features and processes around him. Secondly, the development of the capacity to discriminate and comprehend the speech he hears from others in his environment; and lastly, the development of the ability to produce speech sounds and sequences of speech correctly.

ESL learners can generally deal with a higher level of language receptively than productively. According to Harmer (1991), being able to understand a piece of text does not necessarily mean learners will be able to speak or write it correctly. Rather their job will be to interact with the text in order to understand the message, and this seems possible even when the text contains language which the students are not able to produce (Harmer, 1991:185). Activities geared at developing the receptive skills in learners should involve the learners in reading or listening where they are able to process the language sufficiently enough to extract meaning. Teachers should try to use texts that are simple, real and true to life instead of artificially prepared texts with isolated bits of language designed for the teaching of a particular lesson. The obvious reason for giving learners listening and reading material is to encourage them to be better readers and listeners. The more reading and listening practices they get (and at which they

succeed) the better they will become at reading and listening in English (Harmer, 1991:186).

At the output or productive stage of learning, the ESL teacher should differentiate between those activities which emphasize communication and those which are non-communicative. According to Harmer (1991:50) working on the productive skills has three stages: introducing new language, practice, and communication activities. Introducing new language usually involves controlled techniques because it is an activity that is basically non-communicative. The teacher can ask learners to repeat and perform drills that will help them to assimilate the new language and enable them to produce the new language for the first time. Practice activities allow the learners to work in pairs and groups and the working materials may determine what the learners do or say. Communication activities should give the learners the desire and purpose to communicate. These activities involve them in a varied use of language which is very vital in developing their productive skill. Harmer (1991) concludes that the object of practice is to enable the learner to focus on accuracy in what t he/she says or do but cautions the teacher that these activities should not be dull and manipulative. Instead, they should provide the learners with a satisfactory blend of confidence and enjoyment.

2.4.2 Developing a reading culture in ESL learners in Primary school

Howie et al (2008:40) describe an early reader as a primary school learner who after some elementary but guided engagement with texts is able to recognize letters of the alphabet, write letters of the alphabet, read some words, write some words and read some sentences. An early reader is supposed to be fashioned and guided by his/her educator. This is not the case in most township schools because reading activities are given very little attention time wise, due to a general disregard for the active nurturing of reading skills (Pretorius, 2008:80). It is important to maintain a balance between "learning to read" and "reading to

learn". According to Howie et al (2008), should the process of learning to read be poorly conducted, the product (which is reading to learn) becomes questionable. Similarly, should not enough emphasis be placed on the value of reading to learn then learning to read becomes a tedious task.

Pretorius & Cumin (2010:68) observe that the difficulties learners face in reading are due to the transition from learning the L2 language to learning by means of the L2. According to Pretorius & Cumin (2010) primary school teachers consent that children find it difficult to read, but because the Intermediate and Senior phase teachers are overwhelmed by their content subject teaching loads, they do not feel they have the power to address the learners' reading difficulties. Besides, because reading is not promoted as an activity and as an integral skill to learning formally and informally, pupils do not consider individual reading for recreation as important.

According to Harmer (1991:190) reading is an exercise dominated by the eyes and the brain. The eyes receive messages and the brain then has to work out the significance of these messages. It is often difficult to convince ESL learners that a text in English can be understood even though it may contain vocabulary items and structures the learner has never seen before (Harmer 1991). It is therefore very vital that the ESL teacher trains the learners to be able to extract specific information from the text that will aid their ability to understand what is important in the text even though everything cannot be understood. The role of the teacher is to create expectations and enthusiasm for any text that is to be read in class or at home.

Heugh (2006:16-17) attests that the lack of a reading culture among primary school pupils in South African schools is due to the lack of access to books, in the classroom, at school and at home. Furthermore, teachers themselves do not utilize the access that they have to books. Most of these teachers do not belong to a community library and have fewer than ten books in their homes. Adeniji &

Omale (2010:15) emphasize the need for teachers to acknowledge the importance of reading skills and to plan an effective programme of reading instruction with focus on promoting a reading culture among pupils in their various schools.

Bloch (DVD, PRAESA: 2010) suggests that reading for enjoyment should be encouraged through story-telling, story-reading and story-writing. Listening to stories being told and read entices the imagination of learners, and once they realize that they are able to tell and read their own stories, their inquisitive and creative minds can also generate stories that they can share with their peers and parents. Adjeniji & Omale (2010) conclude that parents should encourage their children to read at home by buying books and providing a stimulating reading environment for them.

2.4.3 Poorly qualified teachers and uncondusive learning environments

According to Nel & Theron (2008:203) Grade 4 seems to be a particularly challenging class for both the learners and the teachers because the sudden switch from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction takes place at a time when the learners must work independently, adjust to additional learning areas and meet different educators for the various learning areas. The teacher on the other hand is supposed to adjust to this sudden change by introducing different teaching methods that will facilitate L2 acquisition and enhance the use of English as a medium of instruction for other subjects. Regrettably, many educators lack the training, knowledge, tools/time to support these learners (Nel & Theron 2008).

Teachers do not have the knowledge and skills to support English language learning and to teach literacy skills across the curriculum (Le Roux, 1993:150). According to Vandeyar (2009:3) most teachers completed their initial teacher training in the previously segregated education with the understanding that they

would be teaching in their home language to black learners. They now have to come to terms with teaching in English to learners who are not proficient in the language of instruction. This has a bearing on the quality of the learning processes and its outcome, including language learning and application. Hassanna et al (2006:9) argue that the use of unfamiliar languages forces teachers to use traditional and teacher-centered teaching methods which undermine teachers' efforts to teach and students' efforts to learn.

Mati (2003:9) confirms this when he points out that teachers in African schools in South Africa prefer to interchangeably use both the mother tongue of learners and English in the classroom because there is a lack of suitable textbooks, material for the specialized language needs of children and most importantly because they themselves are not well trained and qualified. At the end, the country is faced with high percentages of poor results, dropouts and the general level of academic underachievement. Language for academic purposes requires the understanding and use of classroom discourse which includes the educator's verbal instructions and lessons, as well as written text (Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009:271).

Besides incompetent educators, there are other factors which influence limited English proficiency in learners from township schools. An uncondusive environment is one of them. There is very little English spoken by learners outside the classroom, in their homes or in their community. Educators and their pupils in township schools feel more comfortable using their mother tongue in conversations outside the classroom (Schlebusch & Thobedi, 2004:44). Most ESL learners in Grade 4 are only been formally exposed to English in Grade 2 and lack essential support of parents who are themselves not proficient in English. Besides, English is not likely to be used in the ESL learner's immediate environment, which limits his/her exposure to and use of English (Nel, 2007:2). According to Le Roux (1993:155) parents may feel ill-equipped to assist with home work or may fail to understand the special educational needs that stem

from the child's limited language proficiency. Le Roux (1993) further argues that important written communications and homework may lose their effectiveness because parents themselves have difficulties in English.

2.5 Code-switching (CS) as a teaching strategy

Code-switching in the classroom at school is used mainly for the facilitation of learning in South Africa and this seems to be allowed. The assessment criteria and range statements for Grades 1 to 9, as described in a discussion document by the Department of Education (2008: 38) states that

For the outcome Learners use language for learning, one of the assessment criteria requires that, '[T]he ability to transfer terminology and concepts from one language to another is demonstrated.

Heller (1988:4) defines CS as "the use of more than one language in the course of a single communication episode". Much of the research into CS in South Africa has focused on its occurrence in the education environment. Adendorff's (1993) studies explore CS among isiZulu speaking teachers and their learners. He states that the function of CS is that of a contextualization cue. A contextualization cue essentially helps to delineate the context and guides the participants in the interpretation of meaning in discourse (Adendorff, 1993:4). After working with three different teachers in a high school who often code switched between English and isiZulu, (Adendorff, 1993) concludes that CS functions as a channeling and guiding mechanism for the participants. According to him, CS guides the interpretations in the participants' academic goals and their interpretation of social interaction in class.

Adendorff (1993:16) observed the school principal's morning assembly address and suggests that the principal used CS as a means to paraphrase his messages, and employed CS effectively as a conversational resource. The communicative function of paraphrasing is to clarify and reiterate the message. In

this way CS can also function as a reinforcement of the points the principal made. He concludes that CS is a communicative resource which aids teachers as well as pupils to achieve various social and educational objectives.

Butzkamm (1998:23) affirms that CS serves important communicative and cognitive functions but the conditions under which it occurs, and the manner in which it is employed, determines the extent of its usefulness. Through CS, communication between the teacher and the learners is ensured and this can enhance understanding during a lesson. CS can also be regarded as a diverse linguistic resource from which a learner can choose to draw in order to communicate effectively. In CS, teachers unconsciously make visible to the learners the functions and forms of language. At certain points, the learner will choose to engage in this ongoing linguistic enterprise, or the teacher will attempt to engage the learner at a point where he/she can manage (Painter 1984 cited in Mati, 2003:19).

Rose (2010:35) analyzed CS within the framework of Myers-Scotten's (1993) Markedness Model. According to Myers-Scotten's (1993:4) Markedness Model, CS relates to the choice of one linguistic variety over other possible varieties. He classifies CS into four different types which are marked, unmarked, sequential and exploratory. It is within these four types that Rose identified three functions of CS namely the clarification, expansion and translation functions. CS was found to function for meaning clarification when the teacher code switched during a lesson in order to translate a single word. This form usually occurs in language lessons. CS for expansion is often used in longer explanations where the teacher code switches whole sentences or concepts to further clarify meaning. CS for translation is used when the teacher or learner seeks some form of confirmation during a lesson. To make sure that the pupils have understood the lesson, the

teacher code switches and the pupil code switches to confirm that his/her choice of language is correctly used.

However, though CS has the potential to enhance classroom discourse, if it is not undertaken judiciously, it can serve a subtractive rather than an additive purpose. Mati's (2003) studies noted that where English words were 'Xhosalised', the classroom interaction limited the learner's conceptual understanding of the content. The use of the English terms in the indigenized way also negates the language in question in the learner's mind. The mode of CS in this case can create an impression that English equates learning (Mati, 2003:16).

According to Schmied (1991:108) teachers take refuge in African languages and sometimes venture upon a special English 'interlanguage' to bridge the gap between the subjects' language requirements and students' language competence. Mati (2003:9) adheres to this point when he stresses that the English utterances of children who have finished school is extensively characterised by MT interference due to the challenges of mastering academic content and doing so through a language which is not their first language. Mati further observes that some teachers in African schools code-switch because they lack suitable textbooks and materials for the specialized language needs of the pupils. Teachers' competency in English is also very limited - another reason for the extensive use of CS.

2.6 Possible models for bilingual education

When the home language is replaced by English as LoLT in Grade 4 in township schools, the pupils experience subtractive bilingualism. As Douglas et al (1995:18) put it:

If the initial period of learning the first language is motivated simply as an expedient means of transition into English, to the detriment of continued learning and use of the first language, it will be subtractive bilingualism which will result to serious reduced proficiency in both the mother tongue and English.

According to Heugh (1995:45) the subtractive/transitional English programmes currently used in South Africa are adaptations of English second language methodology established in Britain and the USA, where the majority of people speak English and the minority speak languages other than English. This process of assimilation has failed to provide a meaningful access to, and equity in education in Britain and the USA.

Heugh (1995) further argues that in South Africa subtractive/transitional programmes have failed because the knowledge and experience of children from backgrounds other than a western and English-speaking one are never affirmed in the school system. Secondly, the cognitive development of the child who speaks only an African language is abruptly disconnected because the natural cognitive development in the primary language ends when this language is taken out of the learning environment. Macdonald (1990:35) observes that many black pupils suffer the ill effects of subtractive bilingualism owing to the sudden changeover from a first to a second language medium of instruction in standard three. Macdonald further stresses that pupils cannot explain in English what they already know in their first languages; nor can they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge they had learnt through English.

Blouch (2009:186) suggests that in most African countries, 'subtractive' school language policies have serious implications for literacy learning. Young children are forced to either "sink or swim" as they start learning through English, French or Portuguese from the first day of school or at best they will have to switch to the ex-colonial language after 3 years of MTE. Ramirez (1991:655) argues that in

some subtractive bilingual programmes, children demonstrate a capacity to cope in the first three years (Grade1-3) because the linguistic demands upon them are limited to BICS. Longitudinal studies on bilingual education programmes have shown that children in subtractive/transitional programmes tend to fall behind their peers who are in primary language maintenance programmes otherwise known as **additive bilingualism**.

In an additive bilingual programme, both the L1 and L2 are established, developed and maintained in identity and used by a process known as linguistic interdependence. Teaching, learning and use of the L2 are achieved whilst nurturing and drawing on the L1 acquisition. Cognitive development is facilitated through a solid foundation in the L1 development in the learner (Douglas et al, 1995:18). In South Africa today, a limited version of additive bilingualism has been offered to Afrikaans and English –speaking children. For both groups, their L1 is retained throughout the schooling process whilst L2 is introduced as a subject (Douglas et al, 1995).

2.7 Summing up

In a multicultural developing country like South Africa where the question of MTE is still being vigorously debated and learners from township schools do not attain CALP, learning in a second language becomes very challenging. Both the factors that affect learning in an L2 and learning an L2 as discussed in this chapter are vital if learners are to attain CALP in their educational development. Effective teaching strategies/methods and a conducive learning environment at school and at home are also very important. Finally, English in township schools should be learnt as an additional language because a subtractive dominant language learning where English is learnt at the loss of of the MT works negatively towards the performance of the learners.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 Introduction

The Legora primary school from which the data for this study is obtained is situated in the eastern part of Mamelodi Township in Pretoria, Tshwane. The school serves a socio-economically disadvantaged community with most of its learners from desperately poor homes. From a personal encounter with some learners and educators, the researcher gathered that some of the pupils come from informal settlements and live in crowded and squalid conditions. The school has a feeding scheme where about 872 children are fed once a day. For many of these children, this may be the only warm meal they get a day.

Learners in this school speak different home languages at home. The school has tried to adapt to its surroundings by dividing the Foundation Phase classes into two streams. Sepedi or isiZulu are the LoLT from Grade 1 to Grade 3 and from Grade 4 the Sepedi and isiZulu learners are mixed in the same classes. English is introduced informally in Grade 1; from Grade 2 it becomes a subject. In Grade 4 it stays a subject and also becomes the LoLT. The home languages as well as English are studied as subjects until Grade 12. Each Grade 4 class has between 55-60 learners. The researcher observed English and Social Sciences classes for two weeks in two separate Grade 4 classes. Each of these classes was observed for 30 minutes at a time with notes taken down when necessary.

3.1.1 Curriculum requirements

The Government Gazette No. 30880 for English 2008 (Foundations for Learning Campaign) provides clear directives to the entire education system on minimum expectations at each level of the General Phase of schooling. It requires that by the end of the second term, Grade 4 learners should be able to read for

enjoyment, read independently, in pairs and in a group. They should be able to write for playful and creative purposes, give short descriptions of personal experiences and be able to spell words correctly and also identify verbs and adjectives from sentences. In the Social Sciences (History and Geography), the learners are expected to identify people, places and names. They should be able to link beliefs to natural features and know the oral histories and traditions associated with different mountains, rivers and other land marks. Learners should be able to demonstrate geographical and environmental knowledge and understanding by identifying different types of buildings and roads, differentiating between urban and rural settlements.

3.2 Transcribed interviews of the English and Social Sciences teachers of Grade 4.

The interviews took place during the month of June which is the 2nd month into the second term. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to sample the opinions of the Grade 4 English and Geography teachers. Questions on English as subject were geared towards the English teacher's teaching methods in teaching English as subject. The questions for the Geography teacher was focused on her experiences in using English as a medium of instruction and why she uses CS as a teaching strategy. While the teachers were interviewed individually, the learners were interviewed in a randomly selected group whereby they responded to one another's comments as well as to the researcher's questions.

3.2.1 The English Teacher

- For how many years have you been teaching English in Grade 4?

T: This is my first year of teaching Grade four English

- Is it important to you that your learners express themselves in correct English?

T: It will be my profound moment if I can get my learners to express themselves in correct English.

- Are there any particular teaching methods or strategies that you use to teach English?

T: First of all, I explain in English and then I repeat in the home language so that my learners will not forget.

- Why is it important for you to code switch to the home language while you teach?

T: It is important because the learners ought to know the meaning of a word or a passage first in their home language and then they will be able to use it in English.

- You have a mixed class of Sepedi and Zulu learners; which language do you use when you code switch?

T: Most of the time I use Sepedi which the majority of learners understand

- So far has CS been a successful teaching strategy for you?

T: Yes, because the learners are able to understand new words in the home language and 'No' because they are still not able to write or make sentences with the new words in English.

- Are there any challenges you face teaching learners who have been taught only in their home language for 3 years before switching to English in Grade 4?

T: There are so many challenges because the learners cannot read anything in English and some of my pupils can not identify all the letters of the alphabet.

- How do you manage the 30 minutes allocated for an English lesson in Grade 4?

T: The time is always too short so that a comprehension lesson of 3 short passages will be taught for 3 days because I need to read and explain every line in English and the home language for the learners to understand.

- Are teaching aids part of your lessons?

T: Yes, I use wall charts when I teach verbs for example. These charts are permanently on the wall to help learners remember their lessons all the time. Sometimes I use pictures.

- What is your impression of the switch from home language to English as medium of instruction in Grade 4?

T: It is not proper at all because the learners understand and speak very little English. It is a problem not only for the English teacher but for most teachers of Grade 4. Some of the learners are not able to write their names and do not know the difference between vowels and consonants.

- In which class would you recommend that English becomes the LoLT and why?

T: I think it will be better in Grade 1 so that the children can begin with the alphabet and some sounds in English early.

- What can be done to improve on the quality of learning and teaching of English in Grade 4?

T: The system must move away from the age issue where every learner at the age of 10 must be promoted to Grade 5 in spite of their performance.

- How much English do you speak with your learners outside the classroom?

T: Outside the classroom we communicate in the home language.

- Is it important for English teachers of Grade 4 to be trained on different teaching methods and strategies?

T: It is very important so that one can change from one method to another to help the learners understand.

3.2.2 The Social Sciences teacher

- For how many years have you been teaching Social Sciences in Grade 4?

T: For 6 years

- For these 6 years are there any particular teaching methods or strategies that you have been using to ensure that your learners understand Historical and Geographical concepts?

T: I use a variety of methods but am not sure which one works best. Sometimes I read from the text book and the learners read after me. Or I can give work for them to take back home and let their parents help them to understand the difficult words. Some other time I can give them notes and explain the difficult words in English and in the home language.

- What about teaching aids - do you make use of any during your lessons?

T: I usually make use of the pictures and illustrations from the teacher's textbook. Sometimes I also use pictures from other books.

- Do your learners experience difficulties understanding the content of History and Geography given the switch from home language to English in Grade 4?

T: This is just the beginning of the second term and the learners still find it very difficult because of the sudden switch. Most of the time you can give a task and explain in English as many times as possible.... Only about 4 learners out of 54 will understand. You must then explain in the home language.

- So CS helps the learners to understand the new words?

T: Yes, they will understand in the home language but will not be able to use the word to formulate a sentence and write it in English.

- Are there any forms of motivation that you use to encourage your learners to work harder?

T: After every task I reward the highest scorers with pens and pencils. In this way I think others will be motivated to work harder.

- So far what are your challenges?

T: If I had the powers I would change the system and English would be the medium of instruction from Grade 1 because in Grade 4 the learners are still as empty as Grade 1 pupils.

- How can you assess your learners at the end of the year before they move to Grade 5? Are they good enough in English and Social Sciences to be promoted?

T: By the time they are promoted to the next class they have learnt a few of the Geographical and Historical terms and have improved in English though they still perform very poorly.

- What do you think can be done to improve on the quality of learning and teaching in Grade 4?

T: If the number of learners in one class can be reduced it will help because the learners are so many that most of the time you are not sure if everybody understands the lesson.

- What do you think about continuous training on different teaching methods for teachers of Grade 4 in a Township school like this one where learners switch from home language to English as LoLT?

T: I think it is necessary for all Grade 4 teachers as it will improve our teaching methods. Sometimes we think what we doing what's right whereas we are on the wrong path and this leads to the very poor performance of our learners.

3.3 Learner Interview

Learners from all the Grade 4 classes were randomly selected and interviewed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions investigated the difficulties learners faced understanding English as LoLT.

-In which class are you?

L: In Grade 4

-In which class did you start learning English in school?

L: In Grade 1

-Do you know how to speak English?

L: Yes Mam

-Can somebody tell me something in English

L: Silence

- From Grade 1 to 3 in which language did your teachers teach you?

L: In the home language

- In which language are you studying now?

L: In English

- Do you find it difficult to understand the teachers when they teach in English?

L: No Mam

- You all understand very well when the teachers teach in English?

L: Yes Mam

- Can somebody tell me any new word or anything they have learnt in English?

L: I have learnt new spelling

- Which word have you learnt to spell?

L: When I was not understanding I must tell my mother to spell for me another word

- Which is the word you learnt how to spell

L: Abestos

- What is the meaning of 'abestos'?

L: Silence

- Can somebody make a sentence in English

L: My brother is driving a car

- In which language do you converse with your friends in class and at home?

L: In the home language

- In Social Sciences what do you study?

L: We learn about people who work another job and about maps

- What is a map?

L: We learn about countries and provinces

- In which subject do study maps and countries?

L: In History

- Is there any new word you have learnt in History or Geography?

L: Words

3.4 Observations

3.4.1 English classes

For two weeks English classes were observed. It was discovered that the reality of the level of English of the learners does not permit the teachers to follow the curriculum lay out of the Government Gazette (see paragraph 3.1) for grade 4. Due to the fact that very little was done in English in the Foundation Phase or at home, learners still struggle to identify the letters of the alphabet, the sounds of English and are completely unable to read anything written in English. Some learners are not able to write their names correctly in Grade 4. The English teacher is compelled to begin her English lessons in Grade 4 with letters and sounds and consequently runs behind time.

3.4.1.1 Learner proficiency in the English class

Most Grade 4 learners still experience writing problems in English. They get confused by the letters 'b' 'd' and 'p' and do not know where to place a full stop. Writing needs may involve careful attention to features of form and usage (Grabe 1996:173). The writing of the children was marked by the absence of the third person singular 's' on the verb, incorrect use of prepositions, the absence of the progressive marker in the present tense and a number of misspelled words even though they copied from their textbooks or from the blackboard. This is an

example of a sentence a learner copied from the blackboard and had to underline the correct word:

- The difference between those who eat mealie meal and those who eat pies is so more than pies.

In another learner's book he copied these sentences from the blackboard and had to fill in the underlined words:

- John spend five hours at school evryday He spend time watch T.V and doing his home work.

- Thre mans are walking down the roab on the evening and are talking hapily.

There was no obvious method or strategy the English teacher used to develop the reading skill of the learners. Reading is a powerful means of developing second language competence. According to Kim and Krashen (1997:27) those who read more have larger vocabularies, do better in grammar tests, write better and spell better. The class observations in English confirmed that learners find it almost impossible to read and understand so the teacher only reads and learners repeat after her. During reading comprehension lessons, the teacher reads every sentence and the learners are supposed to repeat and point at every word as they read. Learners repeated after the teacher while they pointed at different words, gazed outside or were fidgeting with their friends.

3.4.1.2 CS in the English class

After the interview with the teachers five lessons in English were observed in two different Grade 4 classes. During most of these lessons it was confirmed that the teachers made extensive use of CS as a teaching strategy. CS refers to a switch in language that takes place between sentences (see chapter 2). For example,

the English teacher code switches in a reading comprehension lesson when her learners do not understand her questions in English:

T: Who can tell me what is happening in this picture?

L: Silent

T: Ke mang a ka mpotšago gore go hlaga eng mo seswantshong

T: Can anybody try....tell me what is going on in this picture?

T: O gona yoo aka lekago go mpotša gore gohlagang mo seswantshong se

L: People do clothes (note must be taken here that there are no clothes on picture)

The teacher in the above example has used CS for expansion. She paraphrased all her sentences in order to clarify and reiterate her message (see 2.5).

At the end of the lesson an activity is done whereby the teacher writes questions from the passage on the board and the learners are expected to copy in their books and fill in the correct answers. When the exercise is corrected the following scores are recorded

Table 1

Mark scored	11	10	09	08	07	06	05	04	03	02	01	00
Number of learners	00	01	02	04	03	02	04	02	05	08	05	15

More than 70% of the class gets a below average mark as indicated on table 1. In another example, during a lesson on 'bar graphs' the teacher tries to communicate with her learners as follows:

T: This graph is divided into the number of people who ate eggs, pie and bread.

T: Tlarantlara yee e arotšwe ka lenaneo la batho bao bajeleng mae, senkgwa le senkgwa-nama

T: Look at the graph carefully

Lebelediša tlarantlara ka tšhetšo

(Learners pretend to study the graph)

T: How many people ate eggs?

Ke batho babakae bao bajago mae?

L: Silence

T: How many people ate pie?

Ke batho ba bakae bao ba jago senkgwa-nama?

L: Mealie meal

In the above example the teacher has used CS again for clarification of meaning but the learners still do not understand the question asked. Mealie meal is not presented as one of the foods that were eaten and the question asked for the number of people and not the name of the food.

Some learners were, however, able to understand simple words in the home language and say them in English. For example, they understood the word 'sorgho' in the home language and could say it in English 'mealie meal' and

'lesaka' which is 'sack' in English. In this case the teacher employed CS for translation which is used for confirmation (see 2.5). It was established that learners may understand when a passage or word is explained in the home language but lack the words or expressions to write or say the correct answers in English. CS can be used only in spoken language where it helps to build the receptive skill of listening in the learner but it is never allowed in written language. The learner therefore cannot use CS in a test or an examination where he is required to demonstrate his proficiency in the second language. The development of the productive skills of speaking and writing in English are not given due attention in Grade 4 in township schools.

3.4.2 Social Science classes

Geography as a subject does not exist on its own in Grade 4. It is combined with History in the Social Sciences learning area. The researcher found it necessary to observe both subjects for a better analysis. For two weeks five Geography and five History lessons were observed in two different Grade 4 classes.

3.4.2.1 CS in the Social Science classes

CS did not help the teacher to give a clear exposition of the new words in the mother tongue. The remoteness of the concepts from the pupils' experience made it very difficult for them to understand. During an introductory lesson in History, for example, the teacher tries to explain the meaning of a statement from the learners' text. After several attempts in English, she resorts to CS for clarification as in the following example:

T: (reads from the text book) 'On the 16th of June 1976, school children in Soweto were protesting against being taught in Afrikaans during the apartheid regime'

T: Ka letšatši la bo lesome-tshela kgweding ya boselela, ngwageng wa bo lesome-senyane masome sopa, bana ba sekolo ba Soweto babeba ipilaetsa gatlanong le go rutwa ka leleme la seboru nakong ya kgatelelo ya puso

T: School children were protesting...what is the meaning of protest?

L: Silence

T : Bana ba sekolo babeba ipilaetša, ke eng boipelaetšo

T: During the apartheid regime

T: Ka nako ya kgathello ya pušo

L: Silence

After the above explanation in Sepedi the learners just stare back at the teacher and are not able to answer any questions in English or in the home language. During a Geography lesson on the 'weather', the teacher asks for the meaning of 'climate' in English and gets no response from the learners. She translates the word into the home language but still gets no response in English from the learners. A few learners manage to say something in the home language but are unable to use the word in English. In both the History and Geography lessons, the teacher makes no effort to improve her teaching strategy in order to help the learners. No teaching aids or simple demonstrations in front of the class are used. She moves on to something different. It is evident from these examples that though CS has a potential to enhance classroom discourse, if it is not undertaken judiciously, it can serve a subtractive rather than an additive purpose (Mafela, 2009:63).

3.4.2.2 Learner proficiency in the Social sciences class

In Geography/History lessons, the teacher reads from the text book and the learners follow silently. She explains the meaning of a text in English and in the home language. For example, when the learners are confronted with a passage

from the History textbook which makes no sense at all to them, they remain quiet and pretend to follow as the teacher reads and explains. They do not understand the new words or understand the passage but they are able to know what words the teacher wants as answers according to the questions she may ask that follow a particular pattern from the passage. During a History lesson on the 'The story of Rondebosch and the Liesbeek River', the following passage was studied:

 Their teacher told them that a very long time ago there were forests where Rondebosch is today. The first people to live in the area were hunter-gatherers. These people hunted wild animals and gathered plants to eat..... Then, about three hundred and fifty years ago, people from Europe came to the Cape. These people worked for a Dutch trading company.....

Teacher: The first people to live in the area were?

Learners: Hunter-gatherers

Teacher: The people hunted what kind of animals?

Learners: Wild animals

Teacher: These people worked for....

Learners: Dutch trading company

It is very easy for the learners to answer in a chorus as in the above example. At the end of the lesson, the statistics on the performance of the learners after an activity confirms that they did not understand the lesson as shown on table 2.

Table 2

Mark scored	07	06	05	04	03	02	01	00
Number of students	00	01	02	06	09	08	10	17

It was clear after the observations that the learners had difficulties understanding 'WH' questions. They couldn't differentiate between when and where something happened, how it happened and who did it despite the fact that the answers were all in their textbooks. During a Geography lesson on the different types of settlements, the teacher asked her learners to find out the different types of activities people who live in a farm, city or rural area can do. The learners were unable to differentiate between an activity, where people live and who did what particular job.

3.5 Analysis and interpretation

3.5.1 General observation

The English teacher mentioned the insufficient time allocated for an English lesson during the interviews. The first ten minutes of an English lesson is supposed to be allocated to reading and reading for enjoyment. The class observations confirmed that this is usually not done because 30 minutes for an English lesson are not enough so the teacher just struggles to finish a part of the lesson. The Grade 4 learners are still struggling with the LoLT and therefore cannot read and understand or read for enjoyment as the curriculum demands.

Besides their inability to read, Grade 4 pupils cannot differentiate between the present continuous tense 'I am going to school now' and the simple present tense 'he goes to school every day'. The sound 'b' and 'p' is still a problem to many. For example many learners will spell 'Bar' as 'Par' and 'Pie' as 'Bie'. Writing for personal purposes like a short description of a personal experience or a description of a friend is not possible because learners are still learning to read, spell and construct sentences in English.

During the interviews there was no mention of using stories or any other strategy for teaching the listening skill by the English teacher. The observations confirmed that 30 minutes for an English lesson did not permit the teacher to use storytelling as a teaching method. Storytelling contributes to the general development of children and to language development in particular (Gauteng Department of Education, 2001:63). According to Wright (2002:5) through stories learners become aware of the general 'feel' and sound of a second language. This of course is not possible in Grade 4 where the learners' knowledge of English is very limited and the teacher has to translate every sentence from English in the home language.

In the Social Sciences class, the concepts are far from the learners' experience so they find it difficult to understand the teacher's explanation in English or in the home language. For example, learners find it difficult to differentiate between different types of roads and buildings in urban areas. Most of these Grade 4 pupils have never been to the inner city so they struggle with pictures in the text book to understand the teacher's explanation. Words like 'oppression and 'exploitation' are not easily understood (see paragraph 3.1) partly because the teacher does not use simple class demonstrations and visual aids as a teaching strategy and because the teacher cannot find the exact meaning of the word in the home language.

3.5.2 Teaching strategies/methods

The teachers of English and Social Sciences alike did not focus on the teaching of new vocabulary. No text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary (Laufer, 2000:20). They wrote the new words on the blackboard and explained them first by asking pupils what they thought the words meant and then went ahead to give the meaning of the word in English and in the home language. They did not use any strategies or techniques for introducing new vocabulary like language drills, pictures or demonstrations.

According to Cook (1991:20) a second language teacher can use CS by starting the lesson in the first language and moving into the second language and back. This approach allows the teacher to balance the use of languages within each lesson with the teacher allowed to switch at key points such as when important concepts are introduced or when the students get distracted (Cook, 1991). In the classes that were observed, a good number of pupils were able to answer questions correctly in the home language after the teacher's explanation in the home language with a few answering correctly in English. But the fact that everything the teacher says is repeated in the home language naturally slows down the lesson and the 30 minutes allocated for the lesson is not always sufficient. Besides, there is no guarantee that learners do understand the lesson and can respond or write in English.

Both the English and Social Sciences teacher code switched to Sepedi most of the time even though all the classes include isiZulu speaking learners. IsiZulu speaking learners are always neglected though few in number. The conditions under which CS occurs, the manner in which it is employed, determines the extent of its usefulness (Butzkam,1998:37). CS in this case is not useful to the Zulu speaking learners because they do not understand the language.

From the class observations it was discovered that teaching English and Social Sciences in Grade 4 was more content oriented instead of being student oriented. Developing the speaking skills in the second language is obviously a problem in the English class. No visual aids that could trigger communication from the learners and allow them to exercise functions other than responding were used. Richard and Rogers (1986:66) claim that communicative language teaching aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and to develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills. In the English and Social Sciences class, no group or peer discussion was organized to enable the learners to talk freely amongst themselves. If this were to be done at all then the discussions would probably be in the home language, the language the learners understand and can speak best.

3.5.3 Effects of CS on Grade 4 learners

Both the English and Geography teachers admitted they used CS while teaching because they want to ensure their learners' complete understanding of the lesson and because they want to make up for their deficiency in the appropriate vocabulary in English. On the other hand they also admitted that CS helps the learner to understand the content of the lesson in the home language but does not facilitate their ability to write or express themselves in English (Productive skills, see paragraph 3.4.1.b). At the end of the 2nd term a common examination for all Grade 4 classes in all the schools in Mamelodi East was written. Table 3 below shows the detailed performance of Legora Primary school Grade 4 pupils in Social Sciences. 152 learners wrote the exam which had a total of 50 marks.

Table 3

Level of performance	Level 1 (0-17marks)	Level 2 (18-24marks)	Level 3 (25-34marks)	Level 4 (35-50marks)
No. of learners	124	21	03	04

In the English language exam the results were no better. 152 learners wrote the exam which had a total of 50 marks. Table 4 shows the detailed performance.

Table 4

Level of performance	Level 1 (0-17marks)	Level 2 (18-24marks)	Level 3 (25-34marks)	Level 4 (35-50marks)
No. of learners	81	46	14	11

Teachers of both these subjects were very worried about the poor performance of their learners because according to them their learners were supposed to perform better than this. They claimed to have done enough revision on the possible question areas for the exam. During the exam they also made sure all the instructions and questions were explained orally in English and in the home language for all the learners to understand. It is quite clear from the above statistics that there is a serious problem with the quality of teaching and learning in township schools if the level of performance is to be taken as representative.

3.5.4 Problems of the learner

The responses from the learners during the interviews reflected exactly what happened in class during the observation of the lessons. Firstly, it confirms the

manner in which learners respond to teachers when they ask the usual 'do you understand' question. In a chorus the obvious answer is 'yes Mam' whether or not they understand. This kind of response is typical of a class where the teacher does almost all the talking. She only finds time at the end of the lesson to ask her learners if they understand. A large class and limited time will make it difficult for the teacher to talk to the learners individually or check their books to make sure they followed the lesson correctly. Educators believe that the quality of their teaching and interactions with learners decline with an increase in the size of the class (Van Wyk, 1999:83).

Secondly, the interviews with the learners revealed that Grade 4 learners are not able to differentiate between Geography and History in the Social Sciences Learning Area. They mix up the subject content of both subjects which might be because of their inability to understand some key concepts in the two subjects. The class observations proved that the switch from home language to English as medium of instruction in Grade 4 is problematic. Learners find it difficult to construct correct sentences in English, write well or read anything in English. Vermeulen (2001:27) attests that a learner's cognitive ability is determined in his mother tongue and the learning of a second language depends on the maturity of the first as foundation.

Learners from township schools are more comfortable using their home language in conversations with friends and teachers in and outside the classroom This can be one of the reasons why learners lack confidence to meaningfully participate in classroom activities (Schlebusch & Thobedi 2004:44).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction

The sudden change from MT to English as LoLT in Grade 4 in township schools has a negative effect on the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) of the learner. The cognitive development of a child who speaks only an African language is abruptly disconnected and the natural cognitive development in the primary language ends when this language is taken out of the learning environment (Heugh, 1995:45). It is evident from the data analyzed that learners from African language speaking backgrounds whose L2 proficiency is very limited find it very difficult to use English to master other subjects - especially in the crucial first transition year to English as LoLT. The relative remoteness of the concepts taught in their content subjects from the learners' experience and the difficulties the teachers are faced with to give clear expositions in English are contributing factors to the repeated underachievement of learners in content subjects.

4.2 Effects of an early switch from home language to English as LoLT

The inability of Grade 4 pupils to identify some letters of the alphabet or to differentiate between consonants and vowels is a clear indication that learners do not get enough MTE that can permit them to learn a L2. Since a learner's cognitive ability is developed in his MT, the learning of an L2 depends on the maturity of the L1 as foundation (Vermeulen, 2001, Roodt, 1993). The process of learning to read for example is easier if the materials reflect the language of the children (home language) and are therefore meaningful to them. When this is not the case, as observed during the lessons, the learners 'word call' rather than read. In later years memorization will develop as a coping strategy when the

learning materials are not meaningful. Collier (1990:49) attests that to acquire successful L2 literacy, L2 learners have to first master strategies for negotiating meaning in print in their L1. It can be concluded that learners from township schools are experiencing subtractive bilingualism (see 2.6).

4.3 Poor teaching strategies/methods

The research also revealed that the insufficient use of teaching strategies by teachers of Grade 4 contributes to the poor performance of the learners. Teachers do not master appropriate methods or strategies that can help learners attain academic language proficiency. There is a total absence of learning aids, class demonstrations or motivations to improve on their teaching strategy. Harmer (1991:3) suggests that the motivation that learners can receive in class is the biggest single factor affecting their success. Besides the absence of learning aids, the educators are themselves far from proficient in English. Heugh (1993: 30-40) confirms this when she observes that most teachers who teach in primary schools do not themselves have sufficient English to teach through medium of English. As a way out they resort to CS as a teaching strategy. (See 1.1)

4.3.1 Codeswitching as a teaching strategy

This study suggests that CS is an important element in teaching in township schools. When the teacher code-switches to a home language the learners can understand and a supportive language environment in the classroom is created. CS is used for pedagogical purposes and for establishing solidarity with students (Cook 2001, Goldstein 2003). The teachers of both English and Social Sciences used CS to transfer the necessary knowledge to the students for clarity (cf Rose 2010:35 and paragraph 2.5). In this way the learners were able to clarify any misunderstanding of certain words. CS for expansion was also used by both teachers in longer sentences or phrases to make sure that meaning was understood. In order to get confirmation from the learners, the teachers code

switched and the learners often code switched to make sure their choice of words in English were correct.

On the other hand it is clear from the study that CS does not increase language proficiency in learners from township schools. Grade 4 learners may make sense of the English class and the content of the Social Sciences class by referring to the MT, but lack the words to give adequate feedback in English in both these classes - either verbally or when writing. The clarification and confirmation the pupils get when the teacher code switches do not lead to improved proficiency in English. Consequently, the learners manifest poor academic performances in Grade 4 and indications are that this state of affairs will probably not improve in the years to come until Grade 12. The researcher believes CS can help ESL learners to attain BICS which can only be used for communications in informal everyday situations. BICS alone is not sufficient for academic success. When learners do not achieve CALP, they will not be competent enough in English to ensure academic success by the time they finish school.

4.4 Unconducive learning environment

It is evident from this study that the learning environment does not promote English language proficiency in the learners from this township school. At school, whether in class or outside, at home and in the neighborhood, learners communicate with friends, teachers and siblings in their home language.

Schlebusch & Thobedi (2004:44) suggest that this may be one of the reasons why learners lack confidence to meaningfully participate in classroom activities. Most parents cannot help their children at home in English which makes it even more difficult for the learners because parents need to play an important role in the support of the ESL learner who experiences barriers to learning because of inadequate English proficiency (Donald et al.2005: 75). L2 acquisition from a natural point of view begins with the ability of the learner to use the new

language in communication. Krashen & Tarrell (1983:17) point out that learners of an L2 in the beginning stages must be able to talk about themselves and their family in the new language. An environment which allows the speaking of home languages in and outside the classroom does not encourage the acquisition of a second language.

4.5 Recommendations

The researcher will recommend that an additive bilingual program be introduced in township schools whereby mother tongue education will be maintained for 6-8 years. In addition, English must be added to the curriculum. The quality of teaching in the English class must be of the highest standard possible. After 6-8 years of mother tongue education, the knowledge and skills already present in learners can easily develop into effective learning skills in the second language Webb (2006:5-7). Mastering of complex and abstract concepts in an inadequately known second language is a serious problem (as evidenced in the Social Sciences Learning Area) but once mastered in the first language, they transfer readily and are available for use in intellectually demanding contexts (Dawn 2007, Buhmann & Trudell 2008, Cummins 1991).

Secondly, in-service education and continuous training for teachers will enable them to stay abreast with teaching methods and strategies that will improve on the language proficiency of the learners. Learners in township schools should be encouraged to communicate with their teachers and friends in and outside the classroom in English and not in their home language. CS can be used as a teaching strategy but educators should not rely on it to ensure English language proficiency in their learners. The Department of Education should officially acknowledge CS and facilitate its use in township schools. In this way a standard on when and how much CS can be used during a lesson will be set out for the teachers.

The development of a culture of reading in primary school pupils is very important. The ability to read is one determiner of students' success or failure (Adeniji & Omale, 2010:1). With the help of teachers, story-telling and story-reading can help learners to enjoy reading and lay a strong foundation that can be of benefit to them throughout their academic pursuit. School authorities can introduce informal education on readiness for reading whereby a child's ability to respond to reading materials will be tested and observed. Parents should endeavour to provide their children with books and encourage them to read at home. A good reader has a better opportunity for greater achievement (Adeniji & Omale 2010).

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