University of Pretoria etd – Naude, E C (2006)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PERSPECTIVE

AIM:
To introduce the problem addressed by this study, to provide the rationale for the research directed toward proposing a potential solution, to define key concepts and to outline the content and organisation of the study.

"Other time, I didn't say. But now, now I'm speaking. I'm very happy".
(EAL pre-schooler, 6 years old).

1.1 Orientation

A significant section of the scope of practice for speech-language therapists is devoted to families with young children, and their needs relating to language development and language disorders (Health Professions Council of South Africa [HPCSA] 2005a:9). Proponents of an ecological orientation advocate the inclusion of other individuals with whom the children interact regularly, such as pre-school teachers and day-care givers, in a truly family-centred approach to service delivery (Hammer, 1998:8).

In order to provide meaningful and accountable services to young children, their families and their day-care givers or pre-school teachers, therapists study normal language development and the way in which it provides a model for evaluation and intervention (Owens, 2001:xiii). They share this interest in language development with various other professions including linguists, developmental psychologists, and teachers. It is a vast field of study and one that has been constantly invigorated over many years by new insights from frequently shifting perspectives (Hoff, 2005:6).

The development of language is not an isolated process, but a component of the total process of change in which children are continually engaged while growing and developing (Herbert, 2003:100). It is equally true that language, once it has developed, plays an important part in the subsequent process of total development (Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000:17; Owens, 2001:67; Schick, De Villiers, De Villiers & Hoffmeister, 2002:7). The importance of language and communication skills for school readiness and future academic success is readily acknowledged by

early childhood practitioners (Wentzel, 1991; Catts, 1993; Catts, Fey, Zhang & Tomblin, 2001; Lockwood, 1994; Rossetti, 2001; Nelson, 1998). Early communication skills are recognised as the only developmental domain relating directly to later academic success (Capute, Palmer & Shapiro, 1987:60). Inevitably, children with language impairment are at a serious disadvantage as far as language-based classroom activities, particularly reading and writing, are concerned (Catts, 1993:948). The prevention of later academic failure, therefore, involves strengthening language and communication ability.

The process of language development in a child is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic variables. One of the main extrinsic variables is the language input from the child's environment (Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000:66). Increasingly, children receive input from multiple languages during the early years of their language development. It is now recognised that multilingualism is becoming the rule rather than the exception in most countries worldwide (Brown & Attardo, 2005:88). Many young children acquire two languages simultaneously and, in addition, often have to acquire yet another language sequentially when they enter school or pre-school. These young learners generally exhibit some linguistic characteristics not found in first language learners (Owens, 2001:432). As they become more adept at using the additional language, their language profile will gradually come to resemble the profile of a first language speaker, although it will likely retain some distinguishing characteristics (Peirce & Ridge, 1997; Heugh, 2002b; Owino, 2002). Amongst these learners, however, there may be some who will not in time succeed in modifying their language structures in the direction of the standard profile. These include the learners who may have an inherent language impairment, since children with specific language impairment continue to experience difficulty in the acquisition of language at every developmental stage (Catts, 2001:38). The sooner these learners can be identified and the earlier intervention can commence, the better their chances will be of avoiding academic failure.

In South Africa, multilingualism in urban areas has substantially increased since greater freedom of movement became possible under the new constitution (De Klerk, 2000a:1). Since 1994, when South Africa established a new political dispensation that

brought sweeping changes to both the political and the educational systems (Kamwangamalu, 1997:243), parents also have the right to place their children in the educational institution of their choice, so that many schools are enrolling learners from increasingly diverse backgrounds (Department of Education, 2000:4, 6). Multilingualism in schools and pre-schools has created challenges both for the teachers (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003) and the speech-language therapists who function as support personnel in the education context (Department of Education, 1997b:2).

Teachers and therapists need to be able to identify learners who are at risk for academic failure because of language impairment, so that preventative or ameliorative action may be taken (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 1991; Catts *et al.*, 2001). However, they often find it difficult to assess the language behaviour of young multilingual learners. The informal contextual assessment recommended in the literature for linguistically and culturally diverse populations (Evans & Miller, 1999:101; Beverly & Goodnoh, 2004:1) is not a viable option when the therapist and/or teacher are not proficient in the home language of the learner. This is often the case in South Africa's multilingual urban settings where many languages are represented in each classroom (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:126), and English is the language of mutual understanding. The assessment of language behaviour in English additional language (EAL) pre-schoolers is further impeded by the fact that formal language tests that are appropriate for use with young multilingual children are not currently available for South Africa (South African Speech Language and Hearing Association [SASLHA] 2003). In their publication on *Working with bilingual populations in speech-language pathology,* the ethics and standards committee of SASLHA recommend the following:

> In the case of children, the performance of the clinical case on an assessment procedure, should ideally be compared to that of an age-matched normally developing bilingual child. This matched child should be from a similar background with respect to combination of languages spoken, as well as the amount and type of exposure to each language (for example, a child from the same class or the same family)
> (SASLHA, 2003).

However, language data from multilingual pre-schools in a circumscribed urban area of the province of Gauteng in South Africa (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003) indicate that the extent of the language diversity in these pre-schools would make it difficult to find a child matched in language background to a specific learner, as recommended by SASLHA (2003), or even preclude such a possibility in many cases. The second stipulation (SASLHA, 2003), namely that the child should be from the same class, might be the only possibility for matching children.

In order to compare the performance of these children, the speech-language therapist and teacher would require not only a comprehensive impression of the language and communication behaviour of the child who is to be assessed, but also sufficient and relevant information concerning the typical language and communication behaviours of the matched child.

In the following section, the need for research concerning typical language behaviours of young children in South African pre-schools is discussed against the background of multilingualism in South African pre-schools, the speech-language therapist's role in supporting both the teachers and the families involved in multilingual South African pre-schools, and the implication of English as language of mutual understanding in South Africa's multilingual urban pre-schools.

1.2 Rationale based on review of the literature

Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes are designed to promote the development of the whole child, which includes the development of communication skills. It has long been recognised that best practice in early childhood development includes a specific focus on addressing the communication needs of children (see for example Gauthier & Madison, 1998:1). However, while all children need to develop language and other communication skills, the demands this process places on young children in the pre-school setting may vary considerably depending on the nature of the language input they receive (Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000:66).

In a multilingual setting, the language input is characterised by diversity. Research on language development in bi- and multilingual children has provided valuable insights

into both specific and universal characteristics found in the language and language-related behaviour of these young children (Leonard, 1992; Owens, 2001:426ff.; Hoff, 2005:338). The research reported in the literature has focused mostly on the reciprocal influence of European languages (notably English, Spanish, French, German and Dutch) and to a lesser extent on the influence of Asian languages on European languages, but relatively little research has been forthcoming on the influence of African languages in a multilingual language development context, although the specific characteristics of African American English have received considerable attention (for example Seymour & Seymour, 1981; Terrell & Terrell, 1993; Owens, 2001:416-423). There is limited information in the literature, therefore, to assist South African speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers in deciding on the relevant aspects to include in assessment of the language behaviours of multilingual pre-schoolers.

Research on language development in South Africa has, up to the present time, been a relatively neglected area. Linguists in South Africa generally tend to take less interest in language development in young children than in language in other contexts, notably language in education at secondary and tertiary level, as demonstrated by the papers delivered at the 2005 conference of the South African Applied Linguistics Association (SAALA) (proceedings forthcoming). The various issues relating to language in the education context have received considerable attention as a result of the changes in the South African socio-political arena (see for example Alexander, 1995; Bosman & Van der Merwe, 2000; De Klerk, 2002a & 2002b; Heugh, 2002a & 2002b, 2005; Kamwangamalu, 1999; Luckett, 1993), but language development in the pre-school has not been a particular focus. Consequently, speech-language therapists working in ECD have had to seek recourse to other means for obtaining locally relevant information on language development. South African research on *normal or typical language development* has, with a few exceptions (for example Vorster, 1983; Wolff, 2000), been conducted by speech-language therapists rather than linguists. Speech-language therapists require this information for their clinical practice, notably for distinguishing between typical and a-typical language development in young children.

Although multilingualism in schools, and the academic consequences of various language policies and practices, is a relevant and current topic for research, research concerning the influence of African languages on the language of multilingual speakers has been restricted mainly to adults (for example Van der Walt, 2001). Furthermore, researchers have concentrated on speech rather than language. This was demonstrated at the *Linguistics at the millennium in South Africa* Workshop on black South African English, presented by the Linguistics Society of Southern Africa in 2000 (see for example Smit & Wissing, 2000). The research that has been conducted on language in young multilingual children tends to originate from the collaboration between speech-language therapists and teachers in ECD programmes (for example Nxumalo, 1997; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003) or the foundation phase of school (Pollecutt, 1997). In South Africa, the issue of multi-language input and its influence on language development in early childhood development programmes is particularly challenging for the speech-language therapist-teacher team working in urban pre-schools.

1.2.1. Multilingualism in South African pre-schools

In urban areas in South Africa, and notably in the province of Gauteng, many languages, of which the majority are African languages, are likely to be represented in a pre-school classroom, and the same classroom is also likely to have many learners from multilingual homes (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:126).

The children and families served in early childhood development programmes reflect the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of a nation (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996). The children in early childhood development programmes in a specific geographical area will therefore reflect both the diversity and the unique needs of that geographically defined community. In the case of South African urban areas the diversity is greater than in the non-urban areas, and specifically in the Gauteng province the urban populations represent the linguistic diversity of the country as a whole, as illustrated by the statistics presented in *Statistics South Africa*, 1998, and *Census in Brief*, 1998. The distribution of languages (in percentages) for the Gauteng province of South Africa is presented in Table 1.1**.**

Table 1.1. Distribution of first language in Gauteng

Language	% speakers (rounded to integer values)
Zulu	22
Afrikaans	17
English	13
Sesotho	13
Sesotho sa Leboa (the Northern Sotho varieties)	10
Setswana	8
Xhosa	8
Xitsonga	5
IsiNdebele	2
Siswati	1
Tshivenda	1

Obtained from population census 1996, as reported in *Census in Brief*, 1998.

The eleven languages represented in Table 1.1 do not reflect the whole spectrum of language diversity that is to be found in all urban areas, as is evident in the language data for pre-schoolers in ECD in a specific Gauteng urban area (Sunnyside/Pretoria Central Business District [CBD]) which is presented in Table 1.2. The languages indicated refer to primary language of pre-school learners as recorded by teachers. A primary language is a language in which a child demonstrates native-like proficiency for both speaking and understanding, and is thus generally the child's first or home language (O'Connor, 2003:5; Advisory Panel on Language Policy, 2000:15). This data was obtained from the Kommunika project, a research project involving 32 multilingual classes in ECD centres in the Sunnyside/Pretoria CBD geographical area (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003).

Table 1.2. Language data from 32 pre-school classes in the Sunnyside/Pretoria CBD geographical area

Languages (n= 14+)	% speakers (n=489) (rounded to first decimal)
Official spoken languages of South Africa[1]	
Afrikaans	40.5
Sesotho	15.5
English	14.7
Setswana	10.2
Xhosa	4.1
Sesotho sa Leboa (the Northern Sotho varieties)	3.9
Zulu	3.5
Tshivenda	0.8
IsiNdebele	0.4
Siswati	0.4
Xitsonga	0.4
Other languages	
African languages from other African countries (for example Swahili)	2.5
French	0.6
Portuguese	0.4
Other languages (non-African)	2.1

Adapted from Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:126

It is clear from Table 1.2 that several other languages besides the eleven official languages of South Africa are represented in the language profile of these multilingual pre-schools. Although the percentage of speakers varies, each language appearing in the table represents the dilemma of a child in a multilingual learning environment. It also indicates the dilemma confronting the teachers who have to find ways of communicating equally effectively with all of the learners, and speech-language therapists who have to find ways of assessing the language behaviour of learners from such diverse language backgrounds.

Education in the home language/mother tongue for the first years is strongly advised both internationally and by national educational authorities (Heugh, 2002a and b; Morris, 2002). However, despite the comprehensive and convincing evidence from both local and international literature, which demonstrates the linguistic, academic and social advantages of mother tongue education and bilingual schools (De Klerk, 2002b), parents in South Africa may prefer, and many do prefer, placement of their children in English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) educational settings. Many reasons for this phenomenon may be postulated – some political, some personal, and some purely practical. Whatever the reasons may be, large numbers of

[1] There were no instances of children with sign language as first language

pre-schoolers for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are placed in schools where English is the language of learning and teaching, despite the fact that they have had very little exposure to English (Pan South African Language Board [PANSALB], 2000). The consequence is often that these young learners do not have sufficient time to develop the English language skills they need for learning before they have to make the transition to primary school (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996: 7 - 8). A further consequence is that learners with innate language impairment may remain unidentified because of a lack of appropriate assessment instruments (Washington & Craig, 1999:75). Such learners then run the risk of later academic failure (Catts, 1997:86).

Educators face the challenge of how best to respond to the diverse developmental, cultural, linguistic, and educational needs of these learners and their families (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAYEC], 1996:4). The new educational system in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001:26) envisages a support system for educators. Although "therapists" are grouped generically and no mention is made of the specific personnel who are to act as support system (Department of Education, 2001; Department of Education, 2002c), the provisional report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training included sections on "effective collaborative working relationships between educators and various support personnel" (Department of Education, 1997b:60) in which speech-language therapists are seen as key members (Department of Education, 1997b:90, 101). Although no specific mention is made in official documents of the Department of Education to the speech-language therapist's role in providing support to learners in the reception grade/pre-school, their parents, and their teachers, this responsibility is implicit in the general statements regarding support personnel (Department of Education, 1997b:60, 90, 101; 2001:26).

1.2.2. The speech-language therapist's role in South African multilingual pre-schools

The speech-language therapist's general supportive role is described in international literature as including the dissemination of information concerning risk factors,

collaborative consultation with educators to identify learners at risk and to incorporate developmentally appropriate language enhancement activities into classroom curricula, and professional staff development through workshops dealing with the key elements of language and literacy enhancement (Roth & Baden, 2001:164). Speech-language therapists, by implication, are considered to be adequately trained to perform these functions.

The training of South African speech-language therapists as reflected in the various topics included in training curricula (see for instance Naudé & Groenewald, 2004) also uniquely equips them to support teachers in carrying out the recommendations listed in the position statement of the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996) for working with children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These recommendations include:

1. Maintaining and developing the language and culture of the child's home
2. Adopting an asset-based approach (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996:4)
3. Providing an appropriate learning environment to facilitate the development of the higher level language skills required for understanding and expressing academic content through reading and writing (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996:8).

These multi-level support functions of speech-language therapists in the educational setting are depicted schematically in Table 1.3 and Figure 1.1.

Table 1.3. Support functions of speech-language therapists in school settings

General supportive role (Roth & Baden, 2001:164)	**Working with children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (NAEYC, 1996:8)**
1. Dissemination of information concerning risk factors 2. Collaborative consultation with educators to identify learners at risk 3. Collaborative consultation with educators to incorporate developmentally appropriate language enhancement activities into classroom curricula 4. Professional staff development through workshops dealing with the key elements of language and literacy enhancement	1. Maintaining and developing the language and culture of the child's home 2. Adopting an asset-based approach. 3. Providing an appropriate learning environment to facilitate the development of the higher level language skills required for understanding and expressing academic content through reading and writing

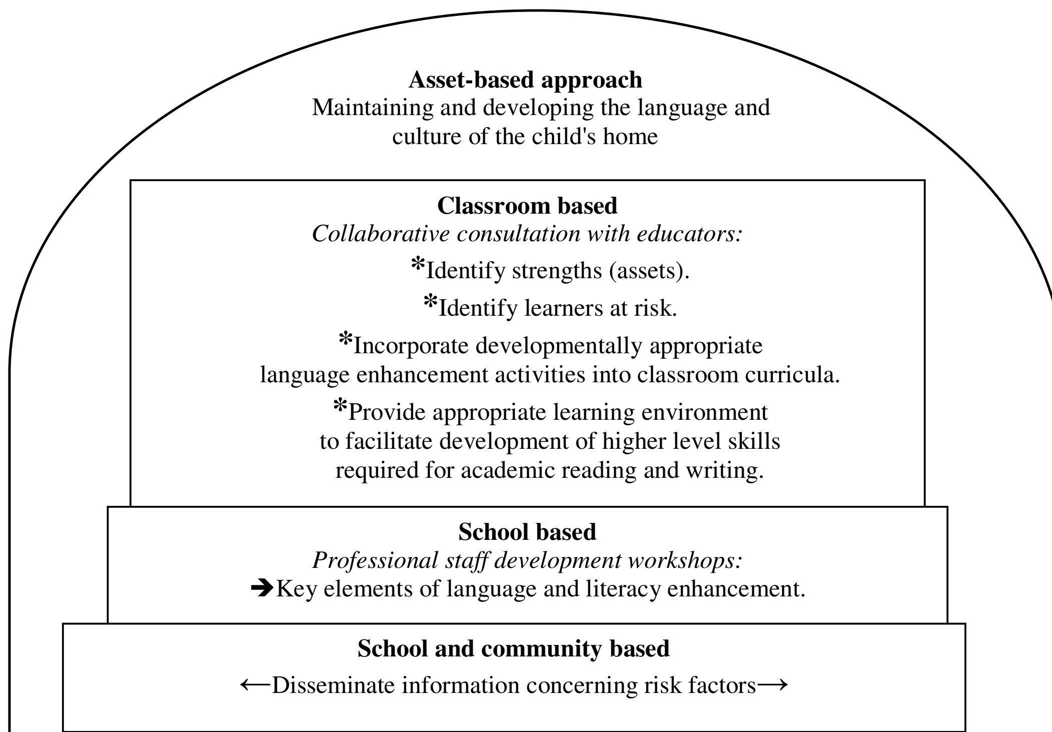

Figure 1.1 Schematic representation: Support functions of speech-language therapists in multilingual pre-schools (based on Table 1.3 - Roth & Baden, 2001:164; NAEYC, 1996:8)

The functions of *information dissemination*, *staff development* and *collaborative consultation to determine the strengths and risk factors* relating to individuals and groups of learners (Figure 1.1), all require of the speech-language therapist to uphold the general principles of collaboration, to develop effective skills and techniques, and to possess basic knowledge concerning both the processes involved and content to be communicated. In addition to knowledge of universal principles of language development, the speech-language therapist needs to obtain some knowledge concerning the languages featuring in the particular young child's daily life. This view is endorsed by SASLHA (2003). In most multilingual pre-schools in urban Gauteng, English is a language that features strongly as language of mutual understanding (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003).

Speech-language therapists working in multilingual and/or multicultural settings all over the world face the challenge of finding suitable ways of assessing the language

behaviour of young children (Conti-Ramsden & Crutchley, 1997; Washington & Craig, 1999; Craig, Connor & Washington, 2003). Very often, the therapist is not proficient in the primary language of the young client. This is also the case in South Africa, where the majority of practising therapists are currently English or Afrikaans speaking and may have only one of the other official languages of South Africa in their language repertoire (Uys & Hugo, 1997:23). Furthermore, in a setting where there may be up to 12 languages represented in a pre-school (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003), it is quite likely that the therapist will not have access to the primary language of a number of the pre-school learners.

Current practices in the assessment of language behaviour in EAL learners by speech-language therapist-teacher teams have been influenced especially by three convictions.

Firstly, it is considered the ideal that both languages of a bilingual client should be assessed (SASLHA, 2003). However, this may not be possible in all cases, and certainly often is not viable in multilingual pre-school contexts. If a number of different languages are represented in the pre-school, if teachers or therapists are not proficient in all of these languages, and if there is a lack of trained interpreters for the pre-school setting, it is improbable that effective assessment in both/all languages of a multilingual pre-schooler will take place

Secondly, there is no justification for accepting that developmental norms for the various dimensions and aspects of language can be transferred from one population to another. An awareness of this non-transferability has led to the concern of test developers that their norming population should include all possible sub-populations who may be assessed using the particular instrument (see for example Mantzikopoulos, 1997; Restrepo & Silverman, 2001). However, assessment instruments are very seldom normed from the outset for more than one country. South African speech-language therapists have long been aware that it is inappropriate to use British or American English language assessment instruments to evaluate the English language behaviours of children in South Africa (Pakendorf, 1998:2). SASLHA emphasises the current dearth of relevant bilingual tests for the paediatric population in South Africa (SASLHA, 2003).

Thirdly, during assessment language should neither be fragmented, nor should these fragments be viewed in isolation (Damico, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993). The methodology traditionally used in language assessment was one in which language was not viewed as holistic but treated as an autonomous cognitive ability divided into many components, and separated from environmental variables and contexts. Damico (1991b) is a strong proponent of the view that assessment tasks suitable for use in dynamic assessment, such as narration and conversation, are considered to be more appropriate than a series of language tests for assessing language behaviour in linguistically diverse children. Contextualised approaches such as the use of language sampling have therefore become the method of choice for many speech-language therapists (Evans & Miller, 1999:101; Beverly & Goodnoh, 2004:1). However, some form of normative information is still required to distinguish between children with typical development and children at risk (Hargett, 1998). Research has shown that a protocol could be derived empirically for a small sample of children from a circumscribed English language population, and this approach has been utilised successfully by clinicians (Schraeder, Quinn, Stockman, & Miller, 1999: 196). The main concern underlying these efforts has been the identification of those young children who need intervention because of language impairment.

The identification of pre-schoolers at risk for language learning disorders needs to be a joint effort between teachers and speech-language therapists (Roth & Baden, 2001). In the South African setting in particular, collaborative practice is essential (Du Plessis, Hugo & Soer, 2000), due to the fact that the limited number of speech-language practitioners cannot service the entire population even in urban areas (see for example Pickering, McAllister, Hagler, Whitehill, Penn, Robertson, & McCready, 1998). Furthermore, the educational context with its crowded classrooms and extreme multilingualism renders teacher support for facilitating the development of language skills in a group setting a necessity. The collaborative approach is widely adopted in settings where it has been proven to be an effective strategy for coping with the kinds of challenges also found in the South African context (Apel, 2001; Catts *et al*., 2001; Hadley, Simmerman, Long & Luna, 2000; Hugo, Du Plessis & Soer, 2000). The specific expertise in language assessment and intervention that a speech-language

therapist can bring to the collaborative process may contribute to the development of both first language and LoLT in pre-school learners.

1.2.3. English as language of mutual understanding in the multilingual pre-school

Although mother tongue education is advocated by the language policy of the Department of Education (Department of Education, 1997a), it is becoming increasingly obvious that this is not a practicable option in schools and pre-schools where both teachers and learners come from a variety of multilingual backgrounds (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003). In these schools, English is accepted as the language of mutual understanding between teachers, parents, learners, and support personnel (Department of Education, 2005).

The crucial importance of communication skills for school readiness and future academic success, which has been discussed by various local and international authors (Wentzel, 1991; Catts, 1993; Catts *et al*., 2001; Lockwood, 1994; Rossetti, 2001; Nelson, 1998), takes on an additional dimension in multilingual settings where English is the language of mutual understanding. In schools and pre-schools with English as LoLT, children need to manifest the verbal communication behaviour that is regarded as a highly sensitive indicator of potential for academic progress in English, and not in their home or primary language.

Although all EAL learners who have their initial contact with English as language of learning and teaching in the pre-school will demonstrate some difficulties at first, those with a specific language impairment (influencing the first language/s as well as English) may continue to lag behind even after a period of two to three years of exposure to English (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996: 7 - 8). By this time, the child will have lost or been unable to profit from a great deal of input/information presented in the learning context, and will have fallen behind in developing Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The influence on the young learner's potential for academic success is compounded by emotional factors relating to failure in both interpersonal relationships in the school context and progress in learning tasks (Catts, 1997:86; Diedricks, 1997:31-43;

Strattman & Hodson, 2005:165). Learners who have a language learning disorder, therefore, may eventually develop psychological disorders as well (Margalit, 1991; Margalit, Mioduser, Al-Yagon & Neuberger, 1997). These children, their parents, and the community cannot afford to wait for three to four years to establish the presence of a disorder with such far-reaching consequences, which could have been prevented or controlled had timely measures been instigated (Catts *et al*., 2001:39).

It seems critical, therefore, to obtain some measure with which to determine whether a pre-schooler's communication skills are in accordance with those of his peers or differ in such a way as to indicate a risk for future academic difficulties. Such early identification then needs to be followed up by "broad-based language intervention programs that target literacy as well as oral language impairments" (Catts *et al*., 2001: 38). Speech-language therapists have the skills and knowledge required to support teachers and learners in the multilingual pre-school in this regard, but a culturally and linguistically relevant tool for early identification of multilingual learners at risk for language learning disorders is essential if the assessment is to be appropriate (Craig & Washington, 2000; Van der Walt, 2001).

1.3 Statement of problem and proposed solution

The importance of early identification of children who are at risk for language impairment has been a recurrent theme in this chapter. However, it is not a simple task to distinguish between typical language behaviours and language behaviours that could be indicative of language impairment in linguistically diverse children (Craig & Washington, 2000:366).

The current situation in multilingual pre-schools in the urban area of Pretoria, in the province of Gauteng in South Africa, appears to be the following:

Mother tongue education is often replaced by the use of English as language of mutual understanding, and since English is in many cases the only language of mutual understanding between speech-language therapists, their teacher colleagues, their pre-school clients, and parents, the assessment of language behaviours can only be conducted in English for these young learners.

In order to make any judgement relating to impairment, the speech-language therapist-teacher team requires a profile of typical EAL language behaviours with which to compare an individual learner's performance. The construction of an English language profile for pre-school EAL learners will provide speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers in collaborative practice with a means of distinguishing between typical and disordered language, and therefore also with a means of identifying those learners who are at risk for language impairment and subsequent language learning disorders. The profile will also provide guidelines for the development of an appropriate intervention programme to provide a more solid foundation for the acquisition of language-based literacy and learning skills (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996:8).

Figure 1.2 is a schematic summary of the problem statement and rationale.

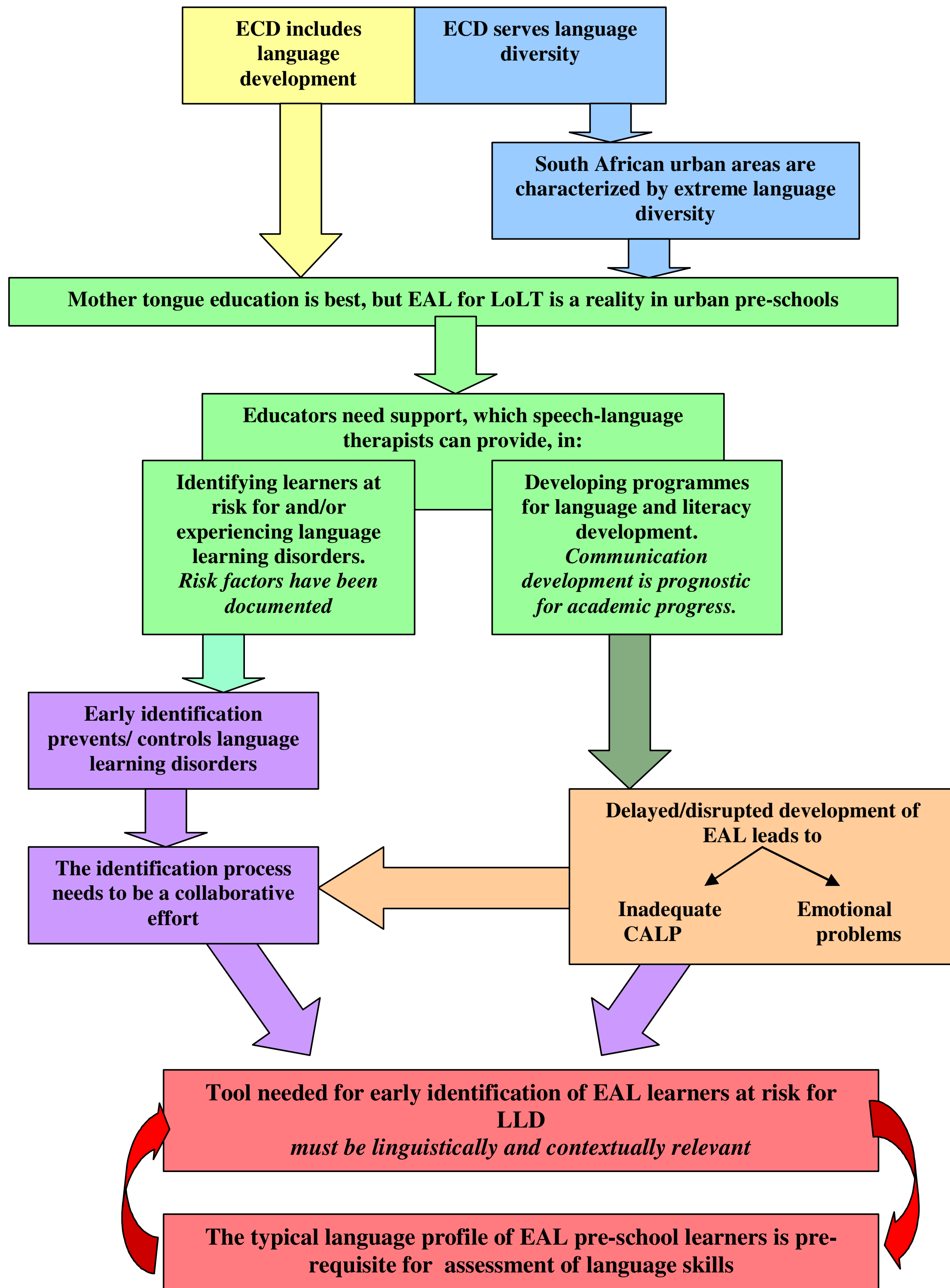

Figure 1.2. Summary of statement of problem and rationale

1.4 Research question

The statement of the problem and rationale lead to the formulation of the following research question**:**

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Can a typical language profile be identified for a small group of EAL pre-school learners in a circumscribed urban area, from which a set of boundaries may be construed for the profile of EAL pre-school learners with potential language learning disorders?

The present study proposes to answer this question.

1.5 Research approach

The active role of speech-language therapists in the early identification of language impairment and secondary prevention of possible language learning disabilities, including reading disabilities (Catts *et al*., 2001), places the focus of the study on the pre-school learner. The proposed research activity is therefore to describe, to make judgements about and to interpret language data from pre-schoolers and to deliver usable outcomes for the collaborative practice between clinician and educational practitioner. The research will be conducted from a clinical and constructivist perspective. Although a quantitative paradigm was selected, the data collection will not take place in a laboratory setting but through the process of typical interaction with participants in their natural setting. The research also moves into the domain of applied linguistics, which has been described recently as a broad range of activities which include solving language-related problems, a " means to help solve specific problems in society" (Tucker, 2005). The researcher will strive to propose an "imaginative solution" to a real language problem (Weideman, 1999:94). The profile of EAL to be constructed will specifically be aimed at distinguishing between difference and disorder.

1.6 Organisation of study

Table 1.4 provides an outline and brief description of the manner in which the research question is addressed.

Table 1.4. Organisation of study

Chapter	Brief description
One Introduction and perspective	The first chapter provides the background, the rationale for the research directed toward proposing a potential solution, the research question, definitions of key concepts and an outline of the chapter contents.
Two Language diversity in the multilingual South African pre-school context	This chapter provides a discussion of the extent of multilingualism in South African pre-schools, specifically those in the urban areas of the province of Gauteng, and highlights the problems associated with the concepts of mother tongue education and assessment in the primary language of the multilingual pre-schooler.
Three The role of speech-language therapists in multilingual pre-schools	This chapter provides an overview of the role and activities of speech-language therapists within the perspective of the pre-school setting in South Africa, and indicates the need for an instrument for language assessment as a resource for the teacher-therapist team.
Four A language profile for young EAL learners, to be used in collaborative practice	This chapter provides a detailed discussion of aspects of language to be included in a language profile for young learners with English as additional language (EAL) from three sources: universal characteristics of language development, language characteristics of SLI, and relevant language characteristics of EAL discussed in the South African literature.
Five Research design and method	This chapter provides details of the research design, selection of participants, collection and processing of data, and measures taken to ensure that the research results would be dependable.
Six Results and discussion: language form	This chapter, the first of the chapters devoted to the results of the research, provides a discussion of the aspects of language form that appeared in the language production of the three age groups, and evaluates the potential utility of this information by considering the results to be carried over to the *Profile.*
Seven Results and discussion: language content	This chapter provides a discussion of the aspects of language *content* that appeared *typically* in the language production of the three age groups, and evaluates the potential utility of this information by considering the results to be carried over to the *Profile.*
Eight Results and discussion: language use	This chapter provides a discussion of the aspects of language *use* (relating to intent or functions of communication, rules of conversation and narratives, and adapting to conversation partners or contexts) that appeared in the language production of the three age groups and evaluates the potential utility of this information by considering the results to be carried over to the *Profile.*
Nine Two versions of a language profile for EAL pre-school learners	This chapter provides the outcome of the analyses of language form, language content and language use elicited and observed in the interaction between the research fieldworker and the pre-school participants in the form of two products: a comprehensive language profile for the circumscribed group of EAL pre-schoolers, and a compact version of the language profile containing the most relevant information concerning typical language behaviours demonstrated by the EAL pre-schoolers.

Chapter	Brief description
Ten The profile of risk indicators	This chapter provides a discussion of the feasibility of constructing a *profile of risk indicators (PRI),* based on the aspects of language form, language content and language use identified as being typical of the three age groups of pre-school participants, as well as certain risk indicators listed in the literature.
Eleven Conclusion	This chapter presents the conclusions of the researcher regarding the contribution and the limitations of the study, with implications for clinical practice and for future research.
Appendices	Appendix A Kommunika project Appendix B Letters of informed consent to parents of participants Appendix C Ethics form & letter from Research and Ethics Committee, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria Appendix D Transcriptions Appendix E Method to determine inter- and intra-researcher agreement Appendix F Glossary of terms

1.7 Definition of terms

The following terms are defined according to their specific use in the study.

Early childhood development - ECD: Since 1994, Early Childhood Development in the South African context describes the phase from birth up to and including the first year of compulsory general education (Evans, 1996). This is in keeping with the international policy of Unicef for developing countries (Unicef, 2000).

English as additional language – EAL: In the multilingual South African context, the term “mother tongue” or “first language” is deemed inapplicable, because many children grow up in settings where no mother is present or where multiple languages are present (Sadiki, 2002), and therefore the term “second language” is not appropriate. For this reason the phrase *English as additional language (EAL)* is preferred to *English second language (ESL).* The term “English Additional Language” (EAL) is used in education settings to describe the language status of the learners relative to the language of mutual understanding or language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

Language: From the various definitions of language found in literature (for example Halliday, 1978; Bloom, 1988; Owens, 2001), it is obvious that there are many different perspectives from which language can be viewed. Nelson (1998:25) observes that language is “slippery to define”, despite the fact that most adult speakers appear to

have an intrinsic knowledge of what language is. Although linguists seem to agree that language consists of different subsystems, various divisions have been suggested, for example form, content and use (Bloom & Lahey, 1978); or morphosyntax, lexicon and pragmatics (Rollins, 1994:373); or phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic parameters (Committee on Language, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association 1983:44). Upon closer scrutiny, it appears that the classification by Bloom and Lahey (1978) could subsume the other classifications, as depicted in Figure 1.3. The all-encompassing dimension of language is *language use,* since both form and content only become relevant when language is used to some purpose.

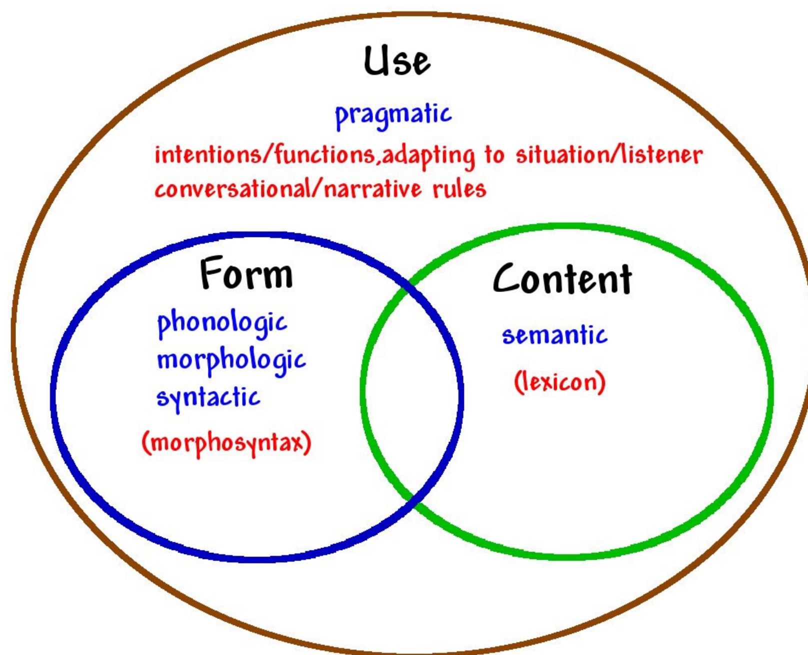

Figure 1.3 Dimensions and aspects of language.

Adapted from Bloom & Lahey (1978), Rollins (1994), Committee on Language, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (1983), and ASHA, 1990)

Language dimensions and aspects of dimensions: For the purpose of this study, the term *language dimensions* will refer to language form, language content, and language use. The various components of these dimensions or subsystems will be termed *aspects.* The subsystems of language may be described separately, but they never

function separately. They are as closely intertwined as the strands in a braid, forming one functional whole. In children with language disorders the braid may be unravelled, and it is this "coming undone" that often differentiates the language of children with language impairments from the language of children with intact language (Rollins, 1994:373).

A glossary of terms relating to language form, language content and language use is provided in Appendix F.

Language learning disorder: "Learning disability is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions … or with extrinsic influences … they are not the result of those conditions or influences" (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1991: 18). Included in the definition is a list of characteristics but, as Owens (1999) points out, most children will not have all of these characteristics. More than 75 percent of children who exhibit learning disorders, however, have difficulty learning and using symbols and these children are considered to have a *language learning disorder* (Owens, 1999: 29).

Main language and primary language: In multilingual populations, including pre-school populations, it is often difficult to establish which language is to be regarded as the mother tongue or first language (Sadiki, 2002). The term *main language* will therefore be used to refer to the language group indicated by the family name (last name). The term *primary language* will be used to refer to language in which a child demonstrates native-like proficiency for both speaking and understanding, and is thus generally the child's first or home language (O'Connor, 2003:5 The Advisory Panel on Language Policy, 2000:15).

Mother tongue: In cases in this study where "mother tongue" or "first language" is used, it is to be equated with *the language used most proficiently at home* (Heugh, 2002a).

Prevention: There are three categories of prevention: Primary prevention leads to the elimination or inhibition of the onset and development of an impairment. Secondary prevention results in early identification and treatment and can therefore limit the progressive development of an impairment. Tertiary prevention programmes aim at limiting the extent of an impairment by encouraging effective functioning (ASHA, 1991).

Specific language impairment: The term is usually employed to refer to children who exhibit significant language difficulties, including delays in the development of semantic, syntactic, phonological, and pragmatic abilities, that cannot be attributed to deficits in peripheral sensory and motor functions or cognitive development (Nelson, 1998: 97).

Support system/person/services: "*'Education Support Services'* include all human and other resources that provide support to individual learners and to all aspects of the system. Whilst these services attempt to minimise and remove barriers to learning and development, they also focus on the *prevention* of these barriers and on the development of a supportive learning environment for all learners" (Department of Education, Report of NCSNET/NCESS, 1997:2).

1.8 Conclusion

In South Africa, there is an increasing trend to place young children from diverse language backgrounds in schools where English is not only the language of learning and teaching, but also the language of mutual understanding between learners, teachers, and support service providers such as speech-language therapists.

The multilingual context of South African urban pre-schools has created a unique need for a collaborative effort between teachers and speech-language therapists to find a way of distinguishing between those learners who present with a typical EAL profile, and those whose language profiles indicate a risk for inherent language impairment. Early identification of these learners is essential in order to prevent the development of language learning disorder. At present, although language is recognised by education authorities as the most vital tool for both academic and social development, there is a

dearth of relevant local research concerning typical language behaviour in young multilingual pre-schoolers when they speak English..

The aim of this study is therefore to provide a set of empirical data in order to determine the feasibility of constructing a profile of typical English language behaviour for a specific group of young multilingual urban pre-schoolers in a South African context.

1.9 Summary

This introductory chapter showed how multilingualism in South African pre-schools, and the increasing preference of English as language of mutual understanding, leads to an urgent need for research concerning typical English language behaviour in EAL pre-schoolers in any particular context. It was argued that this information is needed by speech-language therapists and teachers who have to identify learners at risk for language impairment and subsequent language learning disorder. A research question was formulated, the answer to which proposes to address the stated problem. The chapter also provided an outline of the chapters to follow and a definition of terms used in these chapters.

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CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN THE MULTILINGUAL SOUTH AFRICAN PRE-SCHOOL CONTEXT

AIM:
To indicate the extent of multilingualism in South African pre-schools, specifically those in the urban areas of the province of Gauteng, and to problematise the concepts of mother tongue education and assessment in the primary language of the multilingual pre-schooler when language behaviour is the target of the assessment.

2.1 Introduction

Within the framework of the National Constitution of South Africa and the Bill of Human Rights (as cited by Thorpe, 2002), language has always been a major consideration and a subject of serious debate. Language is certainly very much a central issue in legislation and policy relating to education (Ngubane, 2002).

Two important issues appear recurrently in research reports and discussions about multilingualism and education in the South African context: the importance of the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), especially in the pre-school and foundation phase (see for example Morris, 2002), and the emergence of English as the language of choice for many settings despite the official language policy which supports the development of all the languages of South Africa (Peirce & Ridge, 1997; De Klerk, 2002a & b). These two aspects are closely related, and both impact significantly on the personal, social and academic development of pre-school children.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the implications of multilingualism and English as language of learning and teaching in urban pre-schools where teachers and speech-language therapists strive to identify those young EAL learners who present with innate language impairments as well as the effects of sequential bi/multilingualism.

2.2 Language in pre-school education

Young children up to the age of four are actively engaged in acquiring or learning language (Owens, 2001:90-102; Nelson, 1998: 82-83; Dore, 1986; Peters, 1983: 5). From this age onward, particularly in the educational setting, it becomes ever more obvious that they not only have to learn language but also are applying themselves to learning through language. When entering school implies entering into a new language environment, as it does for many young children in South African urban areas (cf. Jordaan, 1993:11; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003), the child's task load is manifestly increased (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996: 5).

2.2.1. Multilingualism as a global phenomenon in schools

In many countries all over the world, multilingualism in schools has become the accepted state of affairs. The situation in the USA, for example, where Latin, Asian and African languages exercise a significant influence on American English, is discussed extensively in texts concerning language development (for example Owens, 2001: 408 – 454; Nelson, 1998: 31-33; Jacobs & Coufal, 2001: 67). Bi- and multilingual learners are reported to form a growing proportion of schools in the United Kingdom (Crutchley, 1999: 201; Crutchley, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1997: 268). In Europe, too, the influx of immigrants and the general movement across borders bring about a high percentage of non-mother-tongue-speakers in classrooms (Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000: 89; Huizenga-Storm, 2001). In these countries, however, there is most often one official language and therefore one main language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In the USA, for example, a report from the Committee for Developing a Research Agenda on the Education of Limited-English-Proficient and Bilingual Students stated as contextual parameter for their report the assumption that "all children in the United States should be able to function fully in the English language" (August & Hakuta, 1998: 14). Other countries, such as those in the Southern African region, the Southern Indian Ocean Rim countries and as far afield as the republics of the Russian Federation,

experience true multilingualism with respect to indigenous languages and have made great efforts to reform and adapt their education policies to the best benefit of their multilingual learners. This has not been an easy process and still generates many dilemmas (Heugh, 2002a: vii). Some of these quandaries, especially those that arise in urban pre-schools, will be examined in the following discussion.

A brief historical perspective can provide the background to the present situation concerning LoLT in South African schools and pre-schools. Even though the focus of the overview is on language in the school and pre-school setting, this aspect of education is influenced by many other issues, especially values and beliefs, prejudice and discrimination relating to class, race and gender stereotypes (Fante, 2000: 36). Carey (1993), from an international perspective including experience in the South African context, points out that the issue of languages in education "is a particularly complex one due in part to the intense political, emotional, identity and religious factors that are associated with languages, ethnic identity and most importantly power and status" (Carey, 1993: 29). With specific reference to multilingual settings, Alexander (1995:38) observes: "the issue of language policy in the highly-contested sphere of education is a battlefield that is strewn with the corpses of theories and theses that have failed". It is certainly true that the language of learning and teaching has always been a source of controversy in southern Africa (Peirce & Ridge, 1997: 173).

Before 1994, learners received instruction in their home language from pre-school up to the end of grade four. For speakers of African languages, mother tongue instruction up to grade five was followed by abrupt substitution by English. This endorsement of English and the association between mother tongue instruction and the apartheid ideology, which placed emphasis on cultural and linguistic differences, may be the reason why mother tongue education is still viewed with deep suspicion by portions of the black population and researchers sometimes report considerable resistance against its implementation (Bosman & Van der Merwe, 2000: 224).

Some authors express very strong views on the subject of the earlier policy of mother tongue instruction. Luckett (1993) views it as proof of the apartheid system's "abuse of language groups to define 'national groups' for separate and unequal development", and posits that the imposition of African languages via Bantu Education effectually stigmatised these languages as symbols of ethnicity (Luckett, 1993: 39-40). Other authors (e.g. Calitz, 1993) point out that decisions on the language of instruction in multicultural settings are often taken from a political perspective, not from a linguistic or truly educational point of view. While in the pre-1976 era the policy regarding mother tongue education was disparaged as an attempt to expose black children to inferior education, the importance of mother tongue education has been central to the multicultural movement for more than a decade (see for example Calitz, 1993:107).

At the pre-school level, as may be deduced from the preceding paragraphs, mother tongue education whenever possible seems to have been an undisputed general practice over the years. An examination of the White Paper on Early Childhood Development (Department of Education, 2002a) reveals no mention of language of learning and teaching in the historical overview, the main issues being provision of and access to services. Children from urban and higher-income groups are reported to have more access, and access to services of much higher quality, than poor or rural children, while children with special needs in this age group generally have limited access to ECD services. Children from any particular language background are not listed as a historically disadvantaged group. However, multilingual urban pre-school settings have not escaped the general politicisation of the education arena (Calitz, 1993) and are likely to suffer the same consequences as other levels of education.

Despite these challenges there still seems to be much reason for optimism. This positive outlook is reflected in the writings of educators as well (see for example Fante, 2000:35). In South Africa, there has been a decisive movement away from colonial language models (Peirce & Ridge, 1997: 180). Multilingualism has been officially accepted as an asset despite the practical difficulties brought about by

having eleven official languages. Because of the pragmatic approach to putting the language policy into practice, exemplified by Sachs's (1994) discussion of language rights in the new South African constitution, there is reason to anticipate an eventual practical and practicable course of action.

In the meantime, however, teachers in multilingual pre-schools often find it difficult to meet the needs of all the learners with regard to language development and at the same time comply with the request of parents that their children be prepared for entering schools with English as LoLT (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003). Information that could help teachers to identify those children who require specialised services in order to achieve optimal language development would be a valuable resource. In a survey conducted in the Pretoria inner city area, teachers indicated a need for this kind of information (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:122), since the LoLT in the surveyed pre-schools is mother tongue/first language for less than 50% of the children (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:126).

2.2.2. Mother tongue education and additive bilingualism in South African schools

The linguistic, academic and social advantages of mother tongue education at all age levels, and of bilingual schools, have been pointed out in both local and international publications (Owens, 2004:435; UNESCO, 1953; Lind & Johnston, 1990: 126; Veloso, 2002: 80; Heugh, 2002a:vii). The new language policy (Department of Education, 1997a) ascribes legitimacy to a learner's home language, advocating that learners should be taught in their mother tongue for as long as possible and other languages should *be added to*, rather than *replace,* the mother tongue (Bosman & Van der Merwe, 2000: 224).

Authors in the field of education in South Africa have expressed themselves strongly in favour of mother tongue education as foundation for an additive bilingual approach, that is, acquisition of a second language whilst retaining the first language. This approach has even been described as the only viable option (De Klerk, 2002a: 16) and in some regions, such as the Western Cape, children

have for many years started off with education in their mother tongue (in this case Xhosa), switching to English in their fourth year at school (Morris, 2002:6).

In other regions, it has not been as easy to apply the additive bilingual approach, and English is often the language of learning and teaching from pre-school level for children who have other home languages (Naudé, Meyer, De Jongh & Du Plessis, 2000). This practice is a cause of concern for many stakeholders. Heugh (2002b) cites a long list of authors (including Baker, 1988; Cummins, 1984; Krashen, 1996; and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) who have provided evidence that children who are plunged too quickly into an English-only education without strong support in the school for their home language, will experience failure in school. This holds true in particular when the child's home language has a lower status in the community than English.

Education authorities in South Africa have attempted to address this issue while remaining fully aware of the reality of the multilingual situation and the availability of both schools and teachers. South Africa's Language in Education Policy (Department of Education Language in Education Policy, 1997a) advocates:

1. The maintenance of learners' home languages at the same time as they acquire additional languages (i.e. additive bilingualism)
2. Communication across the barriers of race, language and region
3. Respect for languages other than one's own.

Being multilingual, it is pointed out in the policy, should be a defining characteristic of being South African.

Although the national policy of a country officially endorses home language education and additional multilingualism, the policy statement does not necessarily bring about change in the language practices in schools and preschools – a reality long recognised in international literature (German, 1973: 77, quoted in Paulston, 1992; August & Hakuta, 1998: 17). Despite the undisputed advantages of mother tongue education and bilingual schools, where learners are ensured "equal access

not only to the school door but also to useful and meaningful engagement with the curriculum" (Heugh, 2001: 3), these conditions cannot always be achieved in reality.

In urban schools and pre-schools, where children with many different mother tongues are present in each class, three problems arise. Firstly, how to educate each child in his/her own mother tongue; secondly, how to select the second language if education is to be bilingual; and thirdly, how to respond to parents who wish to have their children educated in a non-mother-tongue (usually English). While the Final Draft of the South African Languages Bill (2000, quoted in De Klerk, 2002a: 2) states that "functional multilingualism" is to be actively promoted, it is not always clear how this is to be done. Learners, or in the case of young learners their parents, may choose the language of learning and teaching, although this is a qualified right (Department of Education, 1997a: 2). Schools are encouraged to adopt a language policy supportive of general conceptual growth among learners, and where learners are disadvantaged because the language of learning and teaching is not the same as their home language, schools are advised to provide support for them (Probyn, Murray, Botha, Botya, Brooks & Westphal, 2002: 30).

It is difficult to envisage the type of individual learner support required in truly multilingual settings. However, a common language factor seems to have evolved in South African schools, namely the use of English as preferred language. De Klerk, citing three references, points out that "there is increasing evidence, ironically, that English is growing in its tendency to monopolize many areas of public administration in South Africa, and in many other multilingual contexts such as…schools" (De Klerk, 2002a: 2). Pre-schools can be included in this list of multilingual contexts.

At present it appears to be an accepted fact that English will be one of the languages of the multilingual South African speaker (Heugh, 2005). De Klerk (2002a: 2) argues that South Africa needs a curriculum and language-in-education

policy that specifies early literacy and language development in the mother tongue, "while at the same time ensuring that everyone has equal access to English. …[B]y learning through the first language, learners will get the best chance to develop cognitively and to succeed academically" (De Klerk, 2002a: 2).

While access to English is often assured, the ideal of mother tongue education may not be achievable in all South African schools, the main reason being that different regions present different language profiles. Although South Africa has eleven official languages, there are 27 living languages listed for the country in the Ethnologue (Grimes, 1996). According to the Census 1996 figures (Census in brief, 1998), isiZulu is the mother tongue of 22,9% of the population, followed by isiXhosa (17,9%), Afrikaans (14,4%), Sepedi (9,2%), English (8,6%) and Setswana (8,2%). The rest of the languages each account for less than 8% of the South African population. These percentages, however, offer no indication of the diversity of geographical distribution of these languages.

Table 2.1 presents a strongly simplified picture of the widely differing language profiles of South Africa's nine provinces. The table lists the distribution of first languages by province (in percentages) as found in certain areas of the province (adapted from the language maps for South Africa provided by the UNESCO World language survey, UNESCO, 2000). This information differs from the percentages for each province as a whole (as reflected in Census in brief, 1998), but because each province is composed of geographical areas with widely differing population profiles, an overview of the language situation per province only would disregard much of the relevant indication of diversity.

Gauteng heads the list as the province representing the widest variety of languages with a more than 40% distribution among its residents, while three provinces (Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Limpopo Province) each harbour only one main language group and none with a 40 – 59% distribution. Languages with a lesser distribution per area are not included in Table 2, but it is important to bear in mind that the complete multilingual picture is far more complex than Table 2.1 might

seem to indicate. Especially in urban areas, many more of the 27 languages referred to earlier are present (Naudé, Meyer, De Jongh & Du Plessis, 2000) and some of these languages with minor status may play an important role in specific districts where there is a concentration of speakers of a specific language.

Table 2.1. Simplified language profiles of the nine provinces of South Africa as deduced from the 1996 census.

Province	Number of languages with more than 40% representation	Language/s with ≥ 80% representation in certain areas	Language/s with 60–79.9% representation in certain areas	Language/s with 40-59.9% representation in certain areas
Gauteng	6	None	***IsiZulu*** ***IsiNdebele*** ***Sesotho*** ***Afrikaans*** ***English*** (small area)	Setswana
Mpumalanga	4	***IsiZulu*** (in southern Mpumalanga)	***Isizulu*** ***Siswati*** ***Xitsonga***	Afrikaans
Northern Province	4	***Sepedi*** (in south and central Northern Province) ***Xitsonga*** (in east Northen Province)	***Setswana*** ***Tshivenda*** ***Sepedi***	
Free State	4	***SeSotho*** (in central Free State)	***Setswana*** ***Sesotho***	***IsiZulu*** ***Afrikaans***
Northern Cape	3	None	Afrikaans	***Setswana*** ***IsiXhosa***
KwaZulu Natal	2	isiZulu ***English*** (small area in southwest KwaZulu Natal)	English	
Eastern Cape	1	Xhosa		
Western Cape	1	Afrikaans		
Limpopo	1	***Setswana***		

Adaptation of data obtained from Census in brief, 1998 and UNESCO World language survey (UNESCO, 2000).

Scrutiny of Table 2.1 allows a prediction that pre-schools in Gauteng are more likely than not to be multilingual in character.

2.3 Language profiles of South African schools and pre-schools

The language profiles of the various geographical areas of South Africa are reflected to a certain degree in the language profiles of the schools and pre-schools. In 2000, 83% of pupils in South Africa were African-language speaking (SAIRR,

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2000: 127), and 28% of schools were described as "multi-racial" (South African Institute of Race Relations [SAIRR], 2000: 219). Heugh (2002b: 185) points out that this means that just over a quarter of the schools in the country have learners from more than one language group. However, since the number of learners in classrooms in rural and township schools is reported to be higher than in the urban schools and independent schools together, the percentage of African-language speaking learners in schools that are not multilingual may be greater than 70%. The percentage of unilingual schools is high in certain provinces (over 90% in both Limpopo/Northern Province and Eastern Cape, and over 80% in KwaZulu-Natal), while the more metropolitan and urban provinces (the Western Cape and Gauteng) have fewer unilingual schools (between 50% and 55%) (Heugh, 2002b). According to Heugh (2002b: 185), Gauteng has only 7,1% of the schools in the country, and the high incidence of truly multilingual school communities in this province cannot be regarded as indicative of the situation across the rest of the provinces, where the incidence of monocultural and linguistically homogenous schools is much greater.

However, as Wolhuter (2000: 156) points out, much of the education research in South Africa has been carried out in explicitly rural settings. There is no doubt about the relevance and value of such research. There are more rural than urban schools and they serve a much larger geographical area in the country. The majority of South African adult citizens, nonetheless, are city dwellers and their children therefore attend multilingual schools (Wolhuter, 2000:156). Furthermore, the children of poor urban communities are specifically mentioned in the Education White Paper on early childhood education (Department of Education, 2002a sections 1.2.3 and 1.4.6) as one of the groups that most urgently need investment in early childhood development. The challenges presented by these multilingual pre-school communities require keen investigation and careful deliberation, in order that meaningful suggestions for meeting those challenges may be put forward. The "hyper-multilingual" educational environment clearly places unique demands on learners, teachers, community and policy-makers alike.

Despite the clearly stated Language in education policy (Department of Education, 1997a), which advocates maintenance of learners' home languages at the same time as they acquire additional languages (i.e. additive multilingualism), many non-English parents still choose to place their children in pre-school settings where English is perceived to be the main language of learning and teaching, or at least where they surmise that their children will learn English together with their home language (Working Group on Values in Education, 2000). The reason for this choice is not always that they see the English schools as somehow "superior" in the form of education that they provide (Thorpe, 2002). As Heugh (2002a, b) and Bosman and Van der Merwe (2000: 224) explain, the point is that children need access to the formal written standard of English for academic and later economic reasons.

In other cases, especially in inner city areas where schools that cater for languages other than English for learning and teaching are scarce, parents probably do not in all cases deliberately choose English as language of learning and teaching for their children; in many cases, they may simply have opted for the nearest school because these schools happen to be most conveniently situated near to the family's residence or the caregivers' workplace (geographical considerations).

Parents' views on school language issues have not been ignored by researchers. A MarkData national sociolinguistic survey (commissioned in 1999 by PANSALB, cited in Heugh, 2001), reported that 88% of respondents favoured the maintenance of home language alongside the second language such as English. In a study carried out in Grahamstown (De Klerk, 2002a), Xhosa-speaking parents whose children attended schools with English as language of learning and teaching offered a wide range of reasons why they had chosen an English school for their child. Of these, the largest percentage (26%) mentioned the need for a better education and a more stable learning environment. The next most proffered reason (19%) was that they viewed English as an international language, necessary for progress in the modern world. Other reasons were more or less related to these two main reasons. A small percentage (1%) of the reasons given were more pragmatic,

such as closer geographical proximity to an English school (De Klerk, 2002a:7). In urban areas, these three reasons are probably combined.

As Heugh (2001:4, 2005) points out, and De Klerk (2002a: 3) agrees, alongside the mother tongue, English is the obvious additional language of choice in education. Demographic facts of language distribution in South Africa are that English has the widest and most general distribution of all languages, while indigenous languages are concentrated in particular geographical areas (De Klerk, 2002a: 3).

The maintenance of the home language alongside the second/additional language such as English may be achieved when English is the main language of the school, spoken by the majority of the learners, and parents and teachers exert themselves to maintain and develop the non-English home languages, as propagated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] (1996: 9). However, schools with English as language of learning and teaching are reporting a change in learner profile. Whether or not future cohorts of children will be able to acquire English in the school setting depends very largely on the extent to which English-medium schools are able to maintain the demographic balance in which English speakers significantly outnumber other speakers (De Klerk, 2002a: 10). In urban areas, this has most likely long ceased to be the case.

A further challenge related to English as language of learning and teaching (ELoLT) concerns the multilingual status of the teachers themselves. According to De Klerk (2002b: 25-26), the number of highly trained mother tongue English teachers in South Africa is declining. Where teachers themselves do not have English as their first language, there is a very real possibility that "those who profess use of English hardly speak the standard form targeted at school" (Owino, 2002: 198). Wolff (2000: 23), who in singularly strong terms pictures the dire consequences of depriving children of their mother tongue during education, also warns of the negative effect of "inadequate role models" of English as the preferred target language. When these two conditions (non-mother-tongue education and an inadequate model of the LoLT) are present at a pre-school level, the predicted

impact includes negative academic, emotional and socio-cultural consequences at school, eventually leading to destructive outcomes such as joblessness and juvenile delinquency (Wolff, 200:23).

Extreme multilingualism of both learners and teachers, the predominant use of English as language of learning and teaching, and limited exposure to English from peer models constitute the language challenge, and a potential barrier to academic learning and social development, for pre-school learners in many urban South African settings.

2.3.1. LoLT in pre-schools in Pretoria inner city area

Practical experience and observation indicates that young children in multi-lingual pre-schools in the Pretoria inner city area are not being taught a second or additional language, which in most cases is English, in any *formal* sense. They are mostly being encouraged to acquire the additional language in a "natural" way. According to national policy (Department of Education Language in Education Policy, 1997a), which advocates multilingualism at all levels, education in the pre-school years should be provided in the learners' first language while the additional language should be introduced in a natural and non-forceful way. The following factors make this composite ideal difficult to realize in some settings:

1. Where there are truly multiple languages represented as first languages within the same classroom, it seems unfeasible to provide education in the first language for all learners (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003).
2. Where children have not succeeded in developing a true first language, due to home or environmental factors, it is unlikely that an additional language will be acquired spontaneously when introduced in a natural way, because the ability to acquire a second language successively may be a function of the level of development in the first language (Owens, 2001:431).
3. Where there is such limited contact with the primary caregivers that the particulars regarding the child's home language/s are unknown, it may be difficult to establish these particulars from a very shy or reticent child.

4. Where the teachers are not proficient in the primary languages of the various learners in the pre-school classroom. It is an accepted fact in South Africa that some teachers in multilingual classes are unilingual or, at most, bilingual (Heugh, 2005).

All of these factors are encountered in the Pretoria inner city area (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003; Naudé, Meyer, De Jongh & Du Plessis, 2000). It is clear that teachers in this geographical area (as in many other urban areas in South Africa and other countries) are working in a non-ideal setting as far as language in education is concerned, but they are trying to follow the route of facilitating natural acquisition of the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In many cases, English is both the LoLT and the language of mutual understanding – the only language appearing in the language repertoire of both the teachers and the families represented in the pre-school class. In the case of many of the pre-school learners, however, their contact with English may have been limited to exposure to English television programmes.

2.4 Language development in multilingual children

Any study of language development reveals the well-known apparent paradox: "language is hopelessly complex but children acquire it with ease" (Sabbagh & Gelman, 2000: 715). However, when language acquisition does not proceed smoothly, this very complexity brings about a complex of consequences.

The importance of language for academic progress and social acceptance was considered in the previous chapter. DeThorne and Watkins (2001: 142) discuss research reports from several authors supporting the observation that the perceptions of family members, peers, teachers, and society at large influence how an individual child is treated and consequently how that child develops. As the child approaches school age, the perception of his or her language skills by the significant adults and peers becomes especially influential in shaping the child's social and academic development (August & Hakuta, 1998:32). At the same time, language skills also shape academic potential in a very fundamental manner

through the influence exerted on reading and writing (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 4). The importance of language development, then, can hardly be overemphasized.

Research in the field of child language is not monolithic, and the literature on child language development approaches this topic from various perspectives. Notably, there are differences of opinion between those who contend that children extract regularities from the language they hear with the aid of innate capacities that are not specific to language learning, and those who consider that genetically encoded linguistic information plays a serious role (Foster-Cohen, 1999; Sabbagh & Gelman, 2000). The practical approach generally adopted by speech-language therapists and others who have to deal with the outcomes of children's language development, or lack of development, is that both approaches provide insight and inspiration (e.g. Foster-Cohen, 1999). The language environment, the general propensities of the child and the child's specific ability to acquire language are certainly all implicated in the language development of every multilingual child.

Much has been written internationally about the language development of bilingual children (e.g. Grosjean, 1982; Baker, 1993; Owens, 2001; Hoff, 2005) but relatively little about language development in truly *multi*lingual children. In South Africa, as elsewhere in Africa and in India (Heugh, 2002b: 188), children are usually bilingual but also very often multilingual. Some authors even regard multilingualism as the norm rather than the exception for young children in South Africa (Wolff, 2000:18). While general information on the language development of young children who live with multiple languages is available in the literature, the term "multilingual" is usually equated with "bilingual" in the discussion of pertinent issues (e.g. Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000: 89ff).

As explained by Owens (2001: 431), a truly bilingual person possesses a dual language system simultaneously available during language processing. In addition, semantic input may be processed in each language regardless of the language of input. True multilingualism, then, implies that multiple systems are available and that semantic input can be processed in each of these systems when the input is

from any of the other languages. At the other end of the scale is semilingualism, where the individual is at most semi-proficient in both or all languages (Owens, 2001: 429). It is conceivable that severe semilingualism can lead to far-reaching language impairment persisting across the lifetime of the individual and causing significant difficulties in school, as described for specific language impairment (SLI) (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 3-4).

According to Owens (2001: 427), true balanced bilingualism, or equal proficiency in two languages, is rare. True multilingualism must then also occur rarely. Non-balanced bi- and multilingualism, in which an individual has obtained a higher level of proficiency in one of the languages, is more common. The language in which the individual is more proficient may not be the first language, but may be the language of learning and teaching, as reported for Xhosa (first language) and English (language of learning and teaching) by De Klerk (2002a).

It is generally accepted (Owens, 2001:430) that the effects of bilingualism/multilingualism on language development will differ with the age at which the additional language/s is/are presented, and also with the manner of language acquisition. Manner in this context refers to the distinction between simultaneous and successive bilingualism/multilingualism. *Simultaneous bilingual acquisition* refers to the development of two languages prior to age three (Owens, 2001: 430). Where the second language or additional language is introduced after the age of three and usually not in the home context, the term *successive bilingualism* or *successive multilingualism* is used.

Children attending pre-schools in the South African context are past the age of three years. Therefore, if the second or additional language is introduced at this stage, they can be described as developing successive bilingualism/ multilingualism. In cases where children have not yet acquired a basic first language at the time of entry into pre-school, they will be more likely to be at risk for semilingualism than to be true simultaneous bilingual or multilingual learners.

While the literature on the development of simultaneous bilingualism in young children (e.g. Owens, 2001: 430-431) deals with issues concerning lexicon and syntax, discussion of successive bilingualism in young children (e.g. Hamayan & Damico, 1991) centres more around social and psychological factors than linguistic factors such as vocabulary and morphosyntax.

The rate and manner of simultaneous bilingual language development appear to be the same as for monolingual development (Owens, 2001: 430). As development proceeds, environmental shifts will influence the dominance of either language, and the temporarily dominant language may then influence the other language. This influence will mainly affect vocabulary and idioms (Grosjean, 1982). If words from different languages are learnt in different contexts, each word will tend to remain tied to the context in which it was acquired. For syntax, however, the situation is somewhat different. Syntactic structures that occur in both or all languages are usually acquired first, and simple constructions are acquired before complex constructions. The implication is that if a specific sentence type has a more complex structure in a particular language, it will be acquired first in the language in which it is represented by a simpler structure (Owens, 2001:431).

In the South African context, many young children demonstrate both simultaneous bilingualism (as a result of multiple home languages) and successive language acquisition when they enter the pre-school after the age of three. They therefore have to cope with challenges relating to both the vocabulary and morphosyntax of the LoLT on the one hand, and the social and psychological factors related to functioning in a non-mother-tongue environment on the other hand.

Most children who have successfully acquired a first language are reported to acquire a second language rapidly, although the strategies children use will differ according to the child's age, the child's linguistic knowledge, and the nature of the two languages (Owens, 2001: 432; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996: 4).

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Successful progress in sequential language acquisition seems to depend on two motivating factors: a positive attitude toward the language to be acquired, the speakers of that language, and the culture they represent (Hoff, 2005:347); and the need to acquire the specific language for either social or academic purposes (Owens, 2001: 432). As in the case of simultaneous bilingualism, the acquisition of successive bilingualism outside the classroom, or in the pre-school where the additional language is not taught formally, is considered to take place in three stages. However, the nature of these stages is very different to the nature of those described for simultaneous bilingualism.

In the first stage, the child is primarily engaged in establishing social relations with peers and other speakers of the second language. Information exchange is secondary to social interaction and the child relies to a large extent on fixed verbal formulas learned as single units, such as *how are you, check this,* and *okay*. The learning strategy is to assume that what is being said is relevant to the situation or to what the speaker is experiencing. The language formulas are scanned for recurring linguistic patterns. The social strategy is for the child to act as if he or she knows what is being communicated and to use the known formulas to communicate.

In the second stage, not just social interaction but effective communication becomes the goal. The child's communication strategies include using the linguistic units he or she understands and can produce for the purpose of communication, while not being over-concerned about details. A transitional system or interlanguage may develop at this stage. Each interlanguage has its own rules, some of which are derived from each of the languages the child is acquiring and some of which are the child's own unique creations. Interlanguage changes constantly until the differentiation between the languages being acquired has been completed. Various hypotheses regarding the process of language differentiation in bilingual development have been put forward, but no researcher has yet developed an unassailable theory in this regard (Hoff, 2005:339).

In the third stage, the child begins to concentrate on accurate vocabulary and correct language forms. Because the child has previous experience with acquiring and learning about a language, he or she is observed to be "more mature than the typical simultaneous bilingual learner and can apply general knowledge of language to an analysis of this particular language" (Owens, 2001: 432).

This process has not yet been researched in the multilingual urban South African context. Although the home environment of individual children may be bilingual or even monolingual, and although there may be only one LoLT, the school is always multilingual on the playground. It is possible that the drive to accept and be accepted by the main school culture will operate somewhat differently in a situation where most of the members of the school community (learners as well as teachers and other personnel) are from "diverse" language backgrounds.

Since certain language processes are basic, and since the child who has acquired a first language already has a perceptual system, a speech motor repertoire and a cognitive-semantic base (Owens, 2001: 433), it is an acceptable argument that a first language can form the foundation for a second or additional languages. Although it is possible that interference can occur, Owens (2001: 433) reports that errors, although similar, are more limited than in first language acquisition and that fewer than 5 percent of the errors in second language are traceable to this source. Whether this holds true in the case of multilingual speakers is unknown.

Notwithstanding the focus on social and personal factors in the development of successive bilingualism, some details have been documented concerning the form and content aspects of non-simultaneous second language acquisition. In general, it seems that second language learning by young children mirrors first language learning (Owens, 2001: 433; Krashen & Terrell, 1983:28- 29). Language acquisition in both cases begins with single words or short phrases, and proceeds to short sentences and morphological markers. Sentence transformations such as negative and question transformations also follow acquisition patterns similar to the patterns described for first language acquisition.

It is interesting that Krashen and Terrell (1983: 29) report research findings showing that subjects who speak different first languages demonstrate remarkably similar temporal patterns of acquisition for English morphemes. For both children and adults acquiring English as second or additional language, the average order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes is reported to be comparable to the order of acquisition for young children acquiring English as first language.

Although these basic developmental sequences have been demonstrated, recent research (Klein & Moses, 1999:11) reveals that there is some variation in the developmental sequences of language development in both languages and dialects. It has also been pointed out that both language and personality factors may be involved in the process of language acquisition (for example Owens, 2001: 432, National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] 1996: 4), and that there are certain dimensions that appear to contribute to successful acquisition or learning of an additional language (Obler, 1989:142). The National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] (1996: 4) proposes that professionals involved in the education of multilingual pre-schoolers adopt the following position:

> Just as children learn and develop at different rates, individual differences exist in how children whose home language is not English acquire English … Each child's way of learning a new language should be viewed as acceptable, logical, and part of the ongoing development and learning of any new language.

In supporting this proposition, however, professionals can never ignore the possibility that some young learners may experience difficulties that require special support. The influences of poverty and its associated health risks, overpopulated classes, illiteracy among parents, and non-child-centered child rearing practices in South Africa as a developing country lead to a particularly high risk for impairment in language development (Pickering, McAllister, Hagler, Whitehill, Penn, Robertson, & McCready,1998). In addition to these risk factors there is the possibility of SLI, which has an estimated incidence of between 5% and 20%

(Hoff, 2005:321). In order to identify those learners with language impairment it is essential that data be made available regarding the typical characteristics of any particular language community. In the South African inner city context, young multilingual children are usually exposed to one or more African languages at home, English as language of learning and teaching, and also local variants of English from various sources in the community, which may include parents and teachers. For this reason, the variant of English being developed by these children may be unique and should be described with particular regard to those aspects of form, content and use that are often associated with language impairment.

2.5 The difference between language disadvantage and language impairment

While South Africans are encouraged to celebrate diversity (De Klerk, 2002a: 2) and international literature on child development points out the advantages of bilingualism over monolingualism (Owens, 2001:435), there is an indisputable danger that the very diversity of languages in pre-school settings may mask the presence of true language disorders in some children.

2.5.1. Language difference and language disadvantage

Language difference is defined in the literature as a valid rule-governed linguistic system or language style that deviates in some way from the standard usage of the specific target language, such as dialects or the influence of a first language on a second (Paul, 1995: 152, in Jacobs & Coufal, 2001: 67; Owens, 1999: 102).

Pre-school children who demonstrate language difference because their mother tongue is not the same as the language of learning and teaching are not necessarily placed at a disadvantage by this circumstance. The ability of young bilingual children to catch up with their monolingual peers in the development of various basic communicative skills by the age of 10 has been well documented (Hoff, 2005:345-346), despite the fact that they are "aiming at a moving target" because their peers are also progressing in language development (Crutchley, 1999: 202).

Language disadvantage may begin to manifest, though, if a child has not had sufficient time to develop adequate proficiency in the language of learning and teaching when the formal academic programme (including understanding higher level academic content through reading and writing) commences. The development of such academic language proficiency may require four or more years (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] 1996: 8).

However, a language difference itself is not the only language-related factor to be taken into consideration for academic progress. A language disadvantage occurs when there is a communication mismatch between the child's experience and the expectations of the social environment (Jacobs & Coufal, 2001: 68). The well-known work of Heath (1986) concerning the influence of cultural difference on narrative discourse illustrates the negative judgements that teachers may make. The obvious conclusion is that language difference, when considered in conjunction with cultural difference, can lead to language disadvantage in an educational setting when the teacher expects certain communicative behaviour from the child, which is not forthcoming because a different set of expectations apply in the child's home setting.

In urban settings, and particularly in inner city communities, language difference does not always signify cultural difference, since an inner city community has a unique social ecology (Wolhuter, 2000: 156) and may develop its own unique culture. Language disadvantage in these settings is often caused by lack of adequate communication experience rather than anything else (Goorhuis & Schaerlaekens, 2000: 66; Locke, Ginsborg & Peers, 2002:3). This disadvantage may have negative consequences for academic and social progress, but is not in itself considered to constitute a language disorder leading to impairment (Owens, 1999: 4). In practice, however, especially at pre-school level, it is often unclear how typical ('language difference') phenomena are to be differentiated from atypical ('language disorder') phenomena (Crutchley, 1999: 203; Jacobs & Coufal, 2001: 67), because language production is affected in both cases. A further

relevant distinction presented in the literature, that between language disadvantage and language disorder, is discussed in the following section.

2.5.2. Language disadvantage and language disorder (including specific language impairment)

A language disorder is an "underlying inability to learn and process any language adequately" (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994: 81). A language disorder may lead to impairment in daily living, and this impairment will most likely persist across the lifetime of the individual. Research has indicated that children diagnosed with language impairment in the preschool years subsequently experience significant difficulties in school (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 3-4).

Language disorders leading to impairment may be caused by central processing factors including cognitive disorders, peripheral factors including deficient sensory and/or motor systems, and/or environmental and emotional factors (Nelson, 1998: 96-97). In the case of multilingual children, as in the case of unilingual children, these causative factors may be identified and addressed. In some instances, however, a relatively isolated impairment affects language development specifically. A general definition for specific language impairment (SLI) states that children with this diagnosis "exhibit significant limitations in language functioning that cannot be attributed to deficits in hearing, oral structure and function, or general intelligence" (Leonard, 1987: 1). The features described, therefore, are mainly exclusionary rather than inclusionary, but there are certain basic language abilities that have been shown by research to present problems for children with SLI. Problem areas for these children include lexical abilities, syntactic production and comprehension, narrative production and comprehension, and phonological awareness. Children with SLI also seem to be unable to profit from early exposure to print. Deficits in all of these areas are readily observable well before children with SLI enter school (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 4). The difficulties experienced by these children are observable in conversation, in narrative discourse and in the development of meta-language skills. As a result,

children with SLI exhibit academic problems with learning to read and write. Both reading and writing are processes that rely heavily on the abilities to understand, formulate, and think about language, and children with SLI have deficits in some or all of the basic language abilities closely associated with reading success (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 4). Researchers and theorists are currently debating whether SLI is characterised more by developmental delay, which has been noted for several language areas and is often greater for production than for comprehension, or by deviance as well (Hoff, 2005:321). An asynchrony in the development of the various components of language may explain both the observed delay and the perceived deviance (Hoff, 2005:322). Rollins (1994:373) uses the metaphor of a braid with the strands coming undone to illustrate this aspect of SLI.

Although authors agree that SLI leads to language learning disability, it is a hazardous practice to diagnose pre-schoolers with *learning* disability. Young children are notoriously difficult to test on normative tests because they are often influenced by both external factors (situation) as well as internal factors (mood). In addition, because these young children are still in the process of developing their language skills, and the pace of development is individual for each child, it may happen that some normally developing children will obtain low scores on language tests at the time of testing but score higher at a later stage (McFadden, 1996). In the USA, caution against hasty diagnosis has long been advised. In 1985, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities developed a position paper on 'Learning Disabilities and the Preschool Child', in which they warned (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1985: 1):

> Indiscriminate premature labeling of the preschool child as learning disabled is not warranted. Normal development is characterized by broad ranges of individual and group differences, as well as by variability in rates and patterns of maturation. During the preschool years, this variability is marked. For some children, marked discrepancies in abilities are temporary and are resolved during the course of development and within the context of experiential

> interaction. For other children, there is a persistence of marked discrepancies within and among one or more domains of function, necessitating the child's referral for systematic assessment and appropriate intervention.

Literature from the United Kingdom (Conti-Ramsden, Botting, Simkin & Knox, 2001: 207-219) reports that 58% of children who presented with language impairment in their first year of school could be said to meet criteria for specific language impairment leading to language learning disability in their final year of primary school.

In the South African context, children with English as additional language who demonstrate language difference in the pre-school may find their problems resolved at some stage during their school years, but those who do not, may have an undetected specific language impairment leading to language learning disability. The lack of locally normed, standardised tests in South African languages make it even more likely that language impairments will not be adequately identified.

Besides academic skills, children need social skills to succeed in school. Children with language impairments are often reported to demonstrate social and behavioural problems (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 5). Children with SLI are typically identified by their pre-school peers (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 6) as the least preferred playmates . Teachers, too, have been shown in several studies to express a negative assessment of the general capabilities of children with SLI and also of their background (Fey, Catts & Larrivee, 1995: 6).

Research by Gertner (1993, in *Fey et al*., 1995) showed that their peers did not perceive pre-school children who were learning English as a second language (ESL) as negatively as children with SLI. In fact, the ESL children were the group preferred second most as playmates, while the children with SLI were the least preferred. These findings indicate that poor communication skills and non-standard language use (language difference) are not to be equated.

However, since a child with a language difference may also exhibit a language disorder; it is the task of the speech-language therapist to separate natural language variations from atypical deviations in the child's linguistic rule system. The question has been phrased as follows: "Does the student have a language-learning disability or is she merely manifesting the normal process of acquiring a second language?" (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005). This challenge is faced by therapists and teachers in various countries.

2.6 Language difference and language disorders in multilingual children

If language disorders are generally difficult to pinpoint accurately in young children, the challenge becomes even more complex in a multilingual setting. Physical, psychological, and environmental causes of language disorder (Nelson 1998: 96) will influence multilingual children in the same way as they influence unilingual children. And, as in the case of unilingual children, there will be multilingual children who struggle to progress in language development despite the absence of such negative factors. Bilingual/multilingual children are no more or less likely than unilingual children to have language disorders, including specific language impairment. Bilingual learners with SLI have been studied and reports in the literature show that they mainly exhibit the same characteristics as unilingual children with SLI, but with some additional behavioural problems probably caused by the intensified frustration of inadequate communication (Crutchley, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1997).

The characteristics of SLI found in pre-school children may be divided into the following categories: problems with requirements for language learning, general language characteristics, phonologic features, morphosyntactic features, pragmatic features, and semantic features. A summary of these features are provided in Table 2.2. The table also outlines those morphological indicators of SLI specific to English, as well as characteristics of specific language impairment observed in bilingual learners. This information will be important as a guideline when determining which aspects to include in the description of a typical language

profile of young EAL learners, which will be utilised to differentiate between children with and without language impairment.

Table 2.2. Characteristics of specific language impairment in young children

General characteristics of SLI
Problems with requirements for language learning: Poor ability to perceive sequenced acoustic events of short duration Poor ability to use symbols Poor ability to invent syntax from language of environment Inadequate mental energy Probably long-term memory storage problems *General language characteristics* Expressive as well as receptive difficulties Slow processing
Phonologic characteristics (language form) Phonologic simplification patterns typical of younger children
Morphosyntactic characteristics (language form) ⇨ Reduced use of questions Difficulty acquiring verb structures Co-occurrence of less mature and more mature syntactic and morphological forms Developmental order similar to that found in typically developing children
Pragmatic characteristics (language use) May act like younger typically developing children Difficulty adapting language to listener Difficulty repairing communication breakdowns Age-appropriate pragmatic functions but ineffectively expressed Less effective in securing conversational turn than peers Narratives less complete, more confusing than those of peers
Semantic characteristics (language content) Slow emergence and development of vocabulary Naming difficulties, possibly related to semantic storage (lack of richness and diversity) Under-utilization of available lexemes
Additional observations pertaining to bilingual learners with SLI Phonological problems not observed Emotional/behavioural problems (bilingualism seen as aggravating factor) Does not become proficient in L2 even after 2-3 years of exposure

Morphological indicators of SLI specific to English
Verb structures: General verb knowledge inadequate Prolonged acquisition period for regular past form Bare stem of verb produced for both regular and irregular past Percentage of correct irregular past forms comparable to younger MLU-matched children Tense marking (only indicative for 5+ years) Auxiliary verbs omitted, especially in more complex propositions Slope of increase in finite verb morphology as function of lexical diversity is less than for typically developing children *Noun phrase structures:* Noun morphology inadequate (only under 4 years) Function words (determiners, prepositions) omitted in obligatory contexts Pronoun usage comparable to that of younger MLU-matched children Over-use of one pronoun form rather than random errors

Abbreviation:
MLU = mean length of utterance

Sources:
Conti-Ramsden & Windfuhr, 2002; Crutchley, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1997; Grela & Leonard, 2000; Johnston, Miller, & Tallal, 2001; Leonard, Miller & Gerber, 1999; Nelson, 1998: 104; Owens, 1999:37 – 38; Rice, Wexler, Marquis, & Hershberger, 2000.

Identification of SLI usually depends on both exclusionary and identifying characteristics (Table 2.2). However, young sequentially multilingual children who are in the process of acquiring English may also exhibit some of these characteristics. In the literature from the USA, bilingual learners are described as experiencing problems in the areas of vocabulary and phonological awareness (Bland-Stewart & Fitzgerald, 2001; Hadley, Simmerman, Long, & Luna, 2000; Obler, 1989). Morphosyntax is not mentioned as a problem area, but it constitutes one of the main aspects of dialectal variants of American English, especially those referred to as "racial and ethnic dialects" (Owens, 2001: 416). Owens (2001: 408-437) discusses the major characteristics of various dialects of American English (African American English, Latino English, Asian English) and lists several characteristics of morphological use, which correspond with those found in children with SLI (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 indicates that children with SLI have inadequate general verb knowledge, and also inadequate noun morphology if they are under four years of age or are functioning at that age level. For this reason Table 2.3, *Selected morphological characteristics of some dialects of American English*, focuses on verb and noun phrase structures. Specific characteristics corresponding to those found in children with SLI are shaded in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Selected morphological characteristics of some dialects of American English

	African American English	Latino English	Asian English
Verb structures	Past tense inflection omitted **Yesterday he walk to school**	Regular past tense inflection nonobligatory	Past tense inflection omitted Irregular form over-regularised **I eated**
	Regular present 3rd person –s nonobligatory *He like hamburgers*	Regular present 3rd person –s nonobligatory	
			Auxiliary verbs omitted or uninflected **I going home**
Noun structures	Possessive –s nonbligatory **Get mother coat**	Possessive indicated by post noun modifier **Coat of mother**	
	Plural form nonobligatory with numerical quantifier **Ten dollar**	Plural form nonobligatory **The girl are playing**	Plural form omitted with numerical quantifier
Pronoun forms	Pronominal apposition (resumptive pronouns) **Mother she say…**	Pronoun omitted when subject has been identified in previous sentence	Case confusion **Him go**
Prepositions			Often omitted **We go bus**
Determiners	*A* for *an*	Often omitted **Going to store**	Often omitted

Adapted from: Owens 2001:419-429

The English language characteristics of multilingual children in South Africa with English as additional language are less well known. Nxumalo (1997) has identified certain English language characteristics of one group of these multilingual children, and once again there is a notable measure of overlap between the characteristics found in this group and those found in children with SLI (Table 2.4). Nxumalo's (1997) subjects were multilingual pre-schoolers in the Johannesburg urban area, who had all been exposed to at least one African language at home. Also included in Table 2.4 is English language data from adult multilingual African language speakers in the Northern Province/Limpopo, North West, and Gauteng, all with English as additional language. Data for these adults includes features judged to be grammatically acceptable by more than 50% of the participants in a research project (Van der Walt, 2001:1-11). If adults find these features acceptable, the chances are that they use them in their own production of English, and children who are exposed to these forms will adopt them. The correspondence between the two lists confirms this assumption.

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In Table 2.4, morphological characteristics corresponding to those found in children with SLI are shaded as in Table 2.3. In addition, the characteristics corresponding to those reported by Owens (2001: 419-427) for speakers of American English dialects are marked by an asterisk. It is interesting to note that, although many of the characteristics of American English dialects and especially African American English do not appear on this list, the number of characteristics noted in the English of these South African multilingual speakers that correspond to American English dialectal use (10) is more than the number of characteristics not noted for American English dialects (8). According to Owens (2001: 433), there are certain common differences to be noted in second or additional language learners. These include omission and overextension of morphological inflections, double marking, and the use of archiforms (use of one member of a word class to represent all members, for example *that* for all demonstratives) and free alternation (usage of the members of a word class without concern for the different meanings, for example indiscriminate use of the demonstratives *this, these, those)*. Most of these observations also seem to be borne out by the information in Table 2.4. However, there are sufficient examples of unique morphological structures to warrant a specific investigation into the English of multilingual, specifically EAL, South African pre-schoolers. Sufficient data in this regard is not yet available and the data that there is has not been described or presented in such a way that it can be utilised in a language profile.

Table 2.4. Morphological structures used by multilingual South African pre-schoolers and judged acceptable by multilingual adults

	Multilingual children	Multilingual adults
Verb structures	Past tense: * Inflection omitted, past indicated by "did" He did go to school last year Past indicated by present progressive Yesterday she is coming here *Irregular past tense over-regularised She eated	Past tense: *Inflection omitted, past indicated by "did" *Irregular past tense over-regularised
	Progressive tense: -ing nonobligatory When she was walk home… Extension of progressive aspect to stative verbs I am having a cold Extension of progressive aspect to habitual/repeated actions She making toast every morning	Progressive tense: Extension of progressive aspect to stative verbs
	Present tense: *Regular present 3rd singular –s nonobligatory He go there every day	Present tense: *Regular present 3rd singular –s nonobligatory
	Auxiliary verbs: *Auxiliary *be* omitted He drinking coffee	
Noun structures	Plural: *Plural inflection nonobligatory Two bucket Non count nouns marked with –s Lots of sands	Non count nouns marked with –s

	*Possessive 's omitted That father car	
Pronouns	*Pronominal apposition (resumptive pronouns) My mother she say…	*Pronominal apposition (resumptive pronouns)
	Gender nonspecified I see a girl, he eating	Gender nonspecified
Prepositions	Incorrect use of prepositions I go in home	Incorrect use of prepositions *Prepositions omitted He was his office
Determiners/quantifiers	*Overuse of the I want the lunch now	*Overuse of *the* *Determiner omitted We go to shop

Adapted from: Nxumalo, 1997; Van der Walt, 2001.

2.7 Conclusion

The South African pre-school population in inner city areas is likely to be multilingual, especially in Gauteng (Heugh, 2002b). Since English is the language of learning and teaching in most inner-city pre-schools, many of these pre-schoolers demonstrate language difference, and in some cases language disadvantage. Given the data on the general incidence of specific language impairment, which reveals that approximately 5 percent of children in the preschool population have SLI (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2001), and the observation that this percentage is likely to be even higher in developing countries such as South Africa (Pickering *et al.*, 1998), it is extremely likely that some of the youngsters will present with specific language impairment.

Indications from international literature are that specific language impairment demonstrates characteristics relating to all aspects of language (Conti-Ramsden &

Windfuhr, 2002; Grela & Leonard, 2000; Johnston, Miller, & Tallal, 2001; Leonard, Miller & Gerber, 1999; Nelson, 1998: 104; Owens, 1999:37 – 38; Rice, Wexler, Marquis, & Hershberger, 2000). Literature on language and cultural difference points out that this difference may affect certain aspects of pragmatic performance (Heath, 1986; Jacobs & Coufal, 2001) and semantic/vocabulary performance (Table 2.3). Literature from both the USA and South Africa reveals certain similarities in morphosyntax between children with specific language impairment and children with language difference (Table 2.4). Clinically oriented literature has often pointed out both the importance of distinguishing between these two groups and the practical difficulties encountered when attempting to do so (Craig & Washington, 2000: 366; Crutchley, 1999: 203; Crutchley, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1997: 267; Jacobs & Coufal, 2001: 67). A typical language profile of a particular subgroup will be a valuable resource for those professionals who need to be able to make this distinction.

Because research data from other countries cannot automatically be accepted as valid for South Africa, it is essential to begin collecting language data of different kinds that will assist speech-language therapists and teachers in differentiating between difference and disorder (Mattes & Omark, 1984: ix). This does not imply that the policy of mother tongue education with additive bilingualism is rejected. Important research needs to be conducted concerning effective pre-school programmes for the maintenance of mother tongue and development of bilingual skills for all language groups in South Africa. The present research project is to be seen as in juxtaposition to such endeavours, an essential adjunct if the complete spectrum of phenomena impacting on language development of South African children is to be described.

2.8 Summary

In order to understand why EAL children are taught in English even though the South African policy concerning language in education advocates mother tongue education and additive bilingualism, it is necessary to examine not only the

historical background of South African education, but even more importantly the present realities of education in an urban South African context. The implications of English as language of instruction for young EAL children emerge more clearly when the significance of language development for social and academic development is detailed. This chapter described how language development in multilingual children is influenced by both the age at which the various languages are introduced and the way in which these languages are introduced. Literature on the development of specifically English as additional language was discussed to provide evidence that there is some overlap between the characteristics of EAL and the language characteristics of young children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). There are indications that this holds true also for young South African EAL learners. The conclusion, therefore, was that a profile of the typical language characteristics of EAL pre-schoolers in a circumscribed geographical area will be an important resource for the teacher-therapist teams in that region who endeavour to assist young learners in achieving optimal language development for social and academic advancement.