

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The definition of language proficiency has in recent years shifted toward the notion of communicative competence. This kind of competence embodies not only the grammatical aspects of language, but also the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts, and the ability to organise one's thoughts through language (Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1990: 7). Thus, the concept of being proficient in a language has expanded significantly, from a restrictive view to a perspective that is open to social context and interaction. Therefore, 'proficiency' refers to the ability to communicate in a range of contexts that are authentic and real, and performed in such a way that the interaction is meaningful to co-participants. This concept relates in a number of interesting ways to how language is currently viewed in South Africa, and, specifically, to how languages are taught here.

The current movement towards multilingualism and multiculturalism in South Africa has placed language at the centre of all educational activity. In terms of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government, and thus the Department of Education, has to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country. This shift is in line with the fact that multilingualism is the norm today, especially on the African continent. An important underlying principle is to maintain home language(s), while providing access to and opportunities for the effective acquisition of additional language(s). Educators are challenged to view multilingualism in education as a source of enrichment for an emerging core culture in South Africa (Heugh, Siegrühn & Plüddemann, 1995: v).

Agnihotri (1995: 6-7) observes that multilingualism is now widely recognised in the classroom and there is a need to move away from "monolingual norms and practices towards better education and social change". He argues, therefore, that teaching materials, methods of language teaching, and teacher training methods will inevitably undergo radical changes. With the implementation of the outcomes-based Curriculum 2005, the emphasis

is on appropriate learning support material, and the learning programmes are seen as guides that allow teachers to be innovative and creative in designing instructional and learning material. The syllabus is no longer viewed as rigid and non-negotiable. This development has relevance also for the teaching of additional languages in South African schools, and this study will focus primarily on the teaching of one such language, Afrikaans, in the context of a township school. Chapter 6 will deal with the implementation of the developed material for the intervention, while Chapter 8 will examine the significance of the syllabus and the newly implemented curriculum on the redesigned set of materials in the research.

1.2 FACTORS MOTIVATING AND INITIATING THIS RESEARCH

Afrikaans is currently being taught to Grade 12 learners at a school in the Soweto area in Gauteng as an additional language. During 2001 the Sub-Programme Group: Afrikaans of the Programme Group: Applied Communications at Technikon South Africa (TSA) embarked on a community outreach project in the form of support to this school. Lecturers reached out by presenting extra classes and supplying learners and teachers of Afrikaans with lesson material and additional resources such as dictionaries, magazines, newspapers, etc.

In the classes and teacher workshops conducted it became apparent that the learners and many of their teachers did not have a functional command of Afrikaans. The educators from TSA realised that the learners lack the necessary speaking, reading, writing and listening skills to understand their teacher (who also may not have a good command of Afrikaans). Furthermore, the learners experience difficulty in understanding the content of the subject. It was subsequently decided to undertake a research project with the emphasis on an intervention programme that will address the learners' shortcomings in Afrikaans language proficiency, rather than giving support as if learners already have the necessary functional literacy in the language.

Two TSA researchers thereupon applied and received funds from the National Research Foundation (NRF) for a research project entitled *Functional Afrikaans literacy as a*

prerequisite for performance in the subject: Afrikaans as an additional language. A case study. With this project the researchers hope to set the trend for similar language (English and African languages) research projects in future, in order to equip Grade 12 learners with a functional literacy in different languages. The intention is that this will be a contribution to prepare these learners for their tertiary studies or the workplace, as well as a contribution to the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism in South Africa.

The intervention was carried out at the aforementioned school in the Soweto area, involving a group of 86 Grade 12 learners as participants. The research comprised collaboration with members of the University of Pretoria's Unit for Language Skills Development, who were responsible for the assessment of the proficiency of the learners, and produced a diagnostic report. The pre-intervention test results were used to compile and implement an intervention programme focussing on the areas identified. The intervention programme was limited to ten sessions of one hour per week. The intervention took the form of an ongoing action research cycle as reflected in Chapter 6. The observation and reflection in Chapter 7 shed further light on the effectiveness of the intervention programme instituted, as well as the appropriateness of the materials being used. This reflective stance allowed identification of problem areas in the research, which resulted in a redesigned set of materials for Afrikaans as an additional language (Chapter 8). At the end of the intervention programme a post-test was conducted to ascertain how successful it was. These results and findings are captured in Chapters 6 and 7.

The envisaged intervention programme prompted a number of questions and has served as stimulus for this study. Why is Afrikaans one of the three compulsory language subjects at this school? How proficient are the learners in Afrikaans as an additional language? What remedies need to be instituted? How can the learners' functional Afrikaans literacy learning be enhanced during the intervention? Which remedial learning material will be used - syllabus and other appropriate material? What material is currently available? What are the criteria for developing materials? It is necessary to take a brief look at these questions in order to gain an understanding of the field of research within which this study is located.

1.2.1 Why is Afrikaans being taught as an additional language?

The question arises as to why Afrikaans is being taught at this school as an additional language, as it is not spoken on a regular basis in the local community. The fact that Afrikaans is being taught as one of three compulsory language subjects is primarily attributed to the enthusiasm and dedication of the principal of this school, in promoting Afrikaans as one of the eleven official languages in South Africa. Furthermore, according to the principal, the parents insist on Afrikaans being taught as one of the additional languages in the school, in the event that they should move to another suburb in Gauteng.

Another interesting explanation and answer to the question is embodied in the history of the school chosen for the study. The principal indicates that the school was founded to accommodate the children of personnel from the military base in that area (amongst them, people from Namibia). Therefore, Afrikaans and English, the only two official languages until 1994, originally were the two compulsory language subjects in the school. Subsequently, most of the children from the area surrounding the school started attending the school, and this resulted in Zulu and Sesotho being added as additional compulsory languages.

1.2.2 The learners' proficiency in Afrikaans

One of the goals of the research was to illuminate the nature of the additional language proficiency of Grade 12 learners at this school in Afrikaans. As indicated in section 1.2, a pre-intervention test to establish the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans was done by the University of Pretoria's Unit for Language Skills Development. The analysis of these results highlighted the remedies to be instituted and we turn briefly to these issues below. Chapter 5 reflects on the results of the pre-intervention assessment in more detail and some examples of the proficiency dilemma in the study are given in Chapter 6.

The diagnostic report of the pre-intervention test indicated that, although the learners were in Grade 12, their proficiency level in Afrikaans as additional language averaged that of Grade 4 learners. According to the diagnostic profile of the group of learners, their

functional Afrikaans literacy was poor, and the results suggested that they had received very little teaching that could have developed their language proficiency. This conclusion was confirmed by the principal of the school, who indicated that quite a number of learners from Soweto schools, where Afrikaans is not being taught, attend his school from Grade 8 onwards. It is not surprising, therefore, that these learners lack the necessary speaking, reading, writing and listening skills in Afrikaans.

1.2.3 Second or additional language acquisition and learning

Before addressing the theoretical discussions of perspectives on additional language teaching, there is a need to clarify the issue of whether to refer to Afrikaans teaching in this study as ‘second language’ or ‘additional language’ teaching.

One may start by defining the concept ‘second language’. Mitchell & Myles (1998: 1) define a second language as “any language other than the learner’s native language or mother tongue”. For them, it encompasses languages encountered within the local region or community (e.g. at the workplace, or in the media). Cohen’s (1998: 4) statement is even more relevant for the topic at hand: he observes that, although the term second language learning indicates that the language is spoken in the community in which it is being learned, the reality is that it sometimes is learned as a foreign language. This is due to the fact that the learners may have little or no direct contact with it outside the classroom, as in the case of this study. In this study the term ‘foreign language’ will, however, not be used to refer to Afrikaans. Rather, the terms ‘additional language’ and ‘second language’ will be used interchangeably.

In the literature, second language acquisition is sometimes contrasted with second language learning, and it is essential to clarify the distinction between these concepts. The term “acquisition” generally refers to “picking up a second language through exposure” and continued practices, whereas the term “learning” refers to the “conscious study” of a second language (Ellis, 1985: 6). Second language acquisition therefore refers to the “subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or a tutored setting” (Ellis, 1985: 6). Agnihotri (1995: 3) argues that

most children in multilingual societies learn several languages simultaneously, because “their focus is not on language but on the messages contained therein”. A factor to be considered in this study was whether the learner encounters the second or additional language on a regular basis outside the school setting.

1.2.4 Factors influencing the learning situation

There is a multiplicity of environmental and personal factors in the learning situation that can to some degree affect both the learning event and the speed of learning. Researchers (Ellis, 1985: 4; Mitchell & Myles, 1998: 2) indicate that second language acquisition is a complex process, involving many interrelated factors, and Ellis (1985: 4) observes that “different learners in different situations, learn a second language (L2) in different ways”.

Among the factors identified in the literature that may influence additional language learning are, for example, social, affective, cognitive, input and instructional variables. These factors are of significance to this investigation and therefore relevant information on the participants, in the form of a profile, needs to be gathered. The kind of information contained in such a profile might concern learners’ attitudes towards learning Afrikaans, the use of Afrikaans in society, and the overall relationship between these and other variables and the group of Grade 12 learners from the school in the study.

A framework of factors influencing additional language teaching and learning developed for this research will be used as a general guide in pursuit of a better understanding of additional language learning. The model encapsulates theoretical views on the overall relationship between contextual factors, individual learner differences, learning opportunities, and learning outcomes, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.2.5 Principles of current approaches to teaching a second language

In this study the focal point is on proficiency as the ability to communicate in a range of contexts that are authentic and real, and performed in such a way that the interaction is meaningful to co-participants. What kind of language teaching is necessary to achieve this?

The definition of language proficiency adopted for the purpose of this study, as outlined in section 1.1 above, has a direct bearing on the kind of teaching that is required to develop this proficiency.

Ryuko (1998: 396) indicates, correctly, that the communicative approach probably is the most widely known current second language pedagogy. This kind of language teaching is

... holistic and natural rather than discrete and controlled, contextualized rather than isolated, collaborative and interactive rather than transmission-oriented, student-centred rather than teacher-centred, attentive to meaning and fluency rather than exclusively to form and accuracy.

There are numerous references in the literature about the adoption of the term ‘approach’, rather than ‘method’ that is used to describe communicative teaching. According to Lewis (1999: 49), communicative language teaching cannot be called a method, but is rather a “broad approach which now embraces almost all the language teaching and learning that happens around the world”. The language that is taught should be “authentic, functional, and relevant to everyday life” and teachers are seen as facilitators rather than “authority figures who conduct direct learning”. Generally, the learners are guided through purposeful activities such as dialogue, discussion, and peer learning (Ryuko, 1998: 396).

In an article that has served as one of the foundational documents of this approach, Nunan (1991a: 279) indicates that communicative language teaching is characterised by five features: communication through interaction; introduction of authentic texts; focus on language as well as the learning process; inclusion of the learners’ own personal experiences, and, finally, linking classroom learning with language activities outside the classroom.

The success of language teaching, especially second language teaching, is determined by the effectiveness of teaching “communication” as well as by enabling the learners to become communicatively competent in the target language (Weideman, 2002a: 29). It follows, therefore, that in order to develop the learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language, the notion of communicative competence needs to be examined more closely. As part of this study, a literature review on communicative language teaching

(CLT) will be undertaken in Chapter 3 to gain deeper insight into its different directions and interpretations.

One prominent direction within CLT that will be examined is the use of authentic texts, to which Nunan's early (1991a) definition, referred to above, also refers. Authenticity, as a critical consideration for CLT and materials design, is particularly relevant to this study, as we shall note from the discussions in Chapter 6. According to Johnson (1982: 24) texts are seen as authentic if they are "genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specifically for language teaching purposes". Researchers suggest that the value of authentic texts lies therein that they provide opportunities for "real language" use (Johnson, 1982: 19-22; Nunan, 1991a: 279; Habte, 2001: 15-16; Weideman, 2002a: 29-32). However, it must be noted that although some researchers agree in principle with the teaching of "real language", they argue that it is important that authenticity should rather be defined as "the interaction between the learners, the material, and the context" (Habte, 2001: 16).

A feature that distinguishes communicative language teaching from traditional language teaching methods is its emphasis on comprehension of meaning (cf. Johnson, 1982: 151; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000: 197). According to Lynch (1991: 202) a "meaningless exchange of questions and answers" characterised interaction before the arrival of CLT. Conventional classes lack a meaningful exchange of information between communicants, therefore limiting comprehension. Since the teachers in conventional instructional settings know the answers to classroom questions, the learners are discouraged from formulating a new response. Thus no real communication takes place in a traditional language classroom. As Johnson (1982: 151) puts it, non-communicative teaching will "fail to capture the students' interest as they repeat the known to the knowers". Secondly, these classes fail because they "do not involve the processes by which interaction takes place". The distinct difference between my approach to teaching Afrikaans during the intervention and that of the regular Afrikaans teacher at the school in the study highlights the aforementioned aspects, and will be examined thoroughly in Chapter 7 (section 7.2.1).

1.2.6 Developing appropriate and relevant learning material

If appropriate and relevant learning material is to be used in this investigation, it follows that some consideration must be given to how such material should be developed. The ideal would be to develop an appropriate learning programme, based on the diagnostic report, for the optimal enhancement of learning. Hence, the focus of this study will be on the criteria for developing appropriate material to be used in the project to enhance the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans. This implies that once the diagnostic testing is done, questions on the learners' proficiency, as well as the remedies to be instituted, may be clarified to allow the establishment of criteria for the materials development. Chapter 5 will deal with the criteria for the design and development of materials.

In designing materials, one must obviously be aware of what is currently known about the learning and acquisition of additional languages. Disagreements amongst second language acquisition (SLA) researchers are often found in the literature. However, Tomlinson (1998b: 7) indicates that SLA researchers have reached a sufficient consensus of opinion on some of the basic principles of second language acquisition relevant to the development of materials for the teaching of languages. This set of criteria proposed by several researchers will be used as a guideline and taken into account in developing the remedial materials to enhance learners' proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language.

In conjunction with the above criteria, Weideman (2002a: 35) emphasises that the communicative language teaching syllabus must relate to the real language needs of students, and therefore the emphasis is normally “not on structures that are learned and filled with ‘meaning’ only afterwards; the emphasis is on meaning from the start”. Similarly, in one of the source documents of CLT, Nunan (1991a: 281) states that, traditionally, curriculum designers and materials writers have based the selection of classroom activities on the question “What are the grammatical, phonological, and lexical items to be taught?” However, the design of communicative tasks has overturned this foundation. In his discussion, Nunan (1991a: 281-283) identifies two different routes a curriculum developer/materials writer can follow in initiating the design process. Firstly, the question arises “What is it that learners need to do with the target language?” and

secondly “What are the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying second language acquisition, and how can these be activated in the classroom?” We return briefly to those issues below (section 1.6.4), before considering the whole concept thoroughly in Chapter 5.

1.3 AIM

The aim of the study is to determine criteria for developing learning materials in order to develop the proficiency in Afrikaans of Grade 12 additional language learners. No doubt, there have been numerous other studies, done for other languages, from which this study can and will learn. The value of this research (see section 1.5 below), however, is that the empirical work done will allow one to achieve the following set of specific objectives below.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

- 1.4.1 To determine through diagnostic assessment the proficiency of a select group of learners in functional Afrikaans.
- 1.4.2 To establish what remedies need to be instituted in order to develop these learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language.
- 1.4.3 To determine through a literature survey the criteria for designing and developing materials for teaching an additional language.
- 1.4.4 To determine through a literature survey the appropriate teaching methods to facilitate the learning of an additional language in the classroom.
- 1.4.5 To determine through a literature survey the influence of affective variables in additional language teaching and learning.
- 1.4.6 To establish what learning and teaching materials are currently available for developing the selected group of learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans.
- 1.4.7 To develop appropriate materials in a scarce resource environment to enhance learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language.
- 1.4.8 To assess and to refine the effectiveness of the developed materials.
- 1.4.9 To evaluate and assess the effects of the intervention as a whole.

1.5 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

The value of the research will be that it will establish a set of criteria for the development of resources and materials for the teaching of Afrikaans in a scarce resource environment, a set that might be applicable to similar contexts. The emphasis is on developing materials in a scarce resource environment for two reasons: (a) as will become clear below, the provision of 'normal' language teaching materials is something that cannot be taken for granted in the context of this school; and (b) the only viable professional alternative for a language teacher in such an environment is to become competent in designing and producing learning materials herself.

1.6 DEFINING CONCEPTS

For the purpose of the study the following working definitions will apply:

1.6.1 Additional language

Afrikaans is being taught at the school in the study as one of three compulsory language subjects. The concept of additional language therefore refers to the learning of Afrikaans as an additional language for the group of Grade 12 learners involved. It must be noted that the terms 'second language' and 'additional language' will be used as equivalent terms. The concept 'second language' is thus not intended to contrast with 'additional language', as may be the case in some of the official Department of Education material now becoming available in South Africa. Chapter 8 (section 8.3) deals with this concept more closely.

'Second language' or 'additional language' learning stands in contrast to 'first language' learning. The distinction is that it is the study of how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their mother tongue (Ellis, 1985: 5). According to Mitchell & Myles (1998: 1) second language learning includes the learning of any language to any level, provided that the learning of the 'second language' or 'additional language' takes place later than the acquisition of the first language.

1.6.2 Proficiency

Ellis (1985: 302) defines proficiency as linguistic competence or communicative competence and indicates that second language proficiency is usually measured in relation to native speaker proficiency. Proficiency is also viewed as the learner's knowledge of the target language and can be considered synonymous with competence (Ellis, 1985: 302). In a similar vein, Agnihotri (1995: 6) states that language proficiency is "no longer conceptualised in terms of a set of skills, but in terms of an ability to articulate one's experiences in different domains of activity".

In this study the term 'proficiency' is viewed as the ability to communicate in such a way that the interaction is meaningful to co-participants in a range of contexts that are authentic and realistic.

1.6.3 Learners

In line with the foregoing, the term 'learners' (with special reference to additional language learners), generally deals with learners who embark on the learning of an additional language some years after the acquisition of their first language (Mitchell & Myles, 1998: 17).

In this study the term 'learners' refers to the Grade 12 pupils at the school in the Soweto area who were involved in this research as additional language participants.

1.6.4 Criteria for the development of materials

There is considerable disagreement amongst researchers about some of the main issues relating to language teaching and learning. Therefore criteria or basic principles of second language learning relevant to the development of materials for additional language teaching must be taken into account. According to Tomlinson (1998b: 6) "a list of principles and procedures could provide a menu of potentially profitable options for materials developers".

For the purpose of this study, criteria can be seen as the principles taken into account, or used as guidelines, in the development of appropriate materials for enhancing the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language. Chapter 5 will focus on this aspect.

1.6.5 Materials

'Materials' refer to anything which is presented or used to inform the learners about the language being learned (Tomlinson, 1998a: xi). Thus, materials can be anything used to help teach the language learners and can be in the form of a textbook, workbook, audio-cassette, CD-Rom, video, photocopied handout, newspaper, a written paragraph, photocopied exercises, or dialogues and discussions between learners. For the purpose of this study, materials include anything which was deliberately used to facilitate the learning of Afrikaans in order to increase the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language. Chapters 6 and 8 give account of the various materials employed in the intervention programme.

1.6.6 Developing materials

'Developing materials' in this study refers to the designing of appropriate materials, or the changes made to existing materials in order to improve them or to make them more suitable for a particular type of learner (as discussed in Chapters 6 and 8). According to Tomlinson (1998a: xi) the adaptation of materials can include reducing, adding, omitting, modifying and supplementing - anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to promote language learning.

Developing materials comprises also the design of supplementary materials, used in addition to the core materials of a course. In this study 'developing materials' refers to materials which are designed around a series of authentic tasks to give the learners an opportunity to use Afrikaans in ways in which it is used in the "real world" outside the classroom. The aim of developing these materials is to maximise their value, in order to enhance the proficiency of additional language learners at the school involved in this research.

1.7 HYPOTHESES

- 1.7.1 Remedial intervention improves the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language.
- 1.7.2 The information gap principle in additional language learning is appropriate for developing learners' proficiency in Afrikaans.
- 1.7.3 Affective factors influence additional language teaching and learning.
- 1.7.4 The use of appropriate materials enhances the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans as an additional language.

1.8 CONSTRAINTS

In any research the researcher will experience limitations or constraints. It is therefore essential to take into consideration the two following constraints, which primarily influenced the teaching and learning setting negatively during the intervention.

1.8.1 Time constraints

Since, contrary to the initial plan, the intervention programme was limited to only ten sessions of one hour per week, valuable teaching time was lost, which may have influenced the outcome of the research.

1.8.2 Limited physical space available for instruction

The fact that the 86 learners were taught in a group in a small classroom may have influenced the outcome of the learners' proficiency in the additional language being learned. My ability to move between the learners to assist and pay individual attention, for example, was restricted in the crowded classroom.

1.9 FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY

This chapter has set out the contextual, theoretical and background considerations that affect this study. In Chapter 2, the methodology of the research will be explained. The appropriate application, evaluation and methodology of action research in this study will be discussed.

Chapter 3 will deal with a perspective on second language teaching. A literature study on the theoretical framework of the research area and the different approaches to teaching second language will be undertaken.

Chapter 4 will examine the influence of affective variables in second language teaching and learning. A framework of factors influencing additional language teaching and learning will be used as a general guide in pursuit of a better understanding of additional language learning. The factors influencing the learning situation and the learners' profiles will be discussed.

Chapter 5 will examine the design and development of materials in the study. The initial diagnostic assessment and the post-test results will be discussed. This chapter will focus on the learners' proficiency in Afrikaans, the problem areas identified, and the remedies that need to be instituted.

The developed materials and the success and effect of their implementation in the learning situation will be discussed in Chapter 6. Modifications tried out will be discussed, and all selected materials will be evaluated in terms of the theoretical criteria articulated earlier in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7 will review the intervention programme with reference to the approach and the materials used. Analysis of the learners' perceptions of the intervention programme will also be examined.

In Chapter 8 the focus will be on a redesigned set of materials for intensive use over a short period of teaching in a scarce resource and discipline-challenged teaching and learning environment.

Chapter 9 will deal with the interpretation and analysis of the research to ascertain the success of the project. The chapter will also contain conclusions and recommendations resulting from this research.