

CHAPTER 2

THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Oddly enough, for a function so basic to being human, research into exactly how language works, and how it is acquired, is full of theories, some more plausible than others, and very few facts indeed (Barter, 1994:35).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Worldwide the main objective of education in any democratic society is to provide each learner with a quality education that enables him or her to become a literate, productive member of society (RSA, 1997:11). However, in a country like South Africa where the current school population is both multicultural and multilingual, achieving this goal proves to be challenging.

Although English is the mother tongue (L1) of only 8.6% of the South African population (De Klerk, 2002a:3), and the larger part of the school population represents language backgrounds other than English, it nevertheless is becoming increasingly dominant in education (Lemmer, 1995:83). In many South African classrooms, English is the L1 of neither the learner nor the teacher (Bosman, 2000:221).

The poor proficiency in English of Black learners is an area of great concern to educators. Some believe that the learners' command of English is totally inadequate to deliver results and that Black learners often fail school examinations purely because of this (Bosman, 2000:225; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5). The learners' lack of English language skills

inhibits both their understanding and expression (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5; Sarinjeive, 1999:132). This results in poor academic achievement and learners not meeting national standards, from Grade One throughout all the important academic transitional phases, namely the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases, up to Grade Twelve (RSA, 2000:15). The learners' poor proficiency in English is generally viewed as one of the contributing factors to the current unsatisfactory matriculation results of South Africa's Black learners (Bosman, 2000:221).

Even on tertiary level, the students' academic performance is influenced by their poor command of English. Sarinjeive (1999) conducted a study on the popularity of English among students despite their poor academic performance in English. Alarming, results indicated that Black students at a South African university in their third year still struggled to master English and were unable to formulate even simple coherent sentences in English. Linguistic inadequacies, therefore, often limit the Black learners' opportunities to higher education. Since language is such a crucial means by which to gain access to higher levels of knowledge and skills (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:41), proficiency in English should already be addressed on preschool level and not be postponed until tertiary education centres have to intervene (Cele, 2001:189).

In White Paper 5 (RSA, 2001a), it is acknowledged that the early years of a child's life are critical for the acquisition of language. Preschool educators agree that the most important focus of the learners' early education, centres on language (Shuy, 1972:203). When learners enter preschool at the age of three, they have usually acquired the basic communication skills in their first language (Stobbart, 1992:22). During the preschool years learners learn to communicate informally and interpersonally about concrete objects (Renton, 1998:33). The informal tuition approach of the preschool, where learners learn through play, creates the ideal context in which to improve these communicative abilities (Nieman, 1995:266).

The acquisition of L1 skills usually proceeds smoothly for most learners in the preschool years (Jordaan, 1993:1). The optimal age for the acquisition of English as an additional language (EAL) is, however, a more controversial issue. Some researchers argue that young learners acquire an additional language (L2) slower than older learners, but tend to be more proficient than learners who have acquired an L2 after childhood (August & Hakuta, 1998:10). To prevent *double half-literacy or semilingualism*, researchers suggest that English as L2 should not be introduced before L1 has been well developed and mastered by the learner (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:125; Sarinjeive, 1999:130; Lemmer, 1995:91). Viljoen and Molefe (2001:125) share the opinion that learners who are proficient in L1 will acquire English as L2 more readily and be more proficient in English than learners with poor language skills in L1. Many researchers regard the preschool years as the optimal period for L2 acquisition (Jordaan, 1993:11), as it is easy to follow language in the highly contextualised situations of the preschool environment (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:10). However, preschool learners who are usually in the process of acquiring their L1 need support to continue to develop L1, while they acquire the L2 (Jordaan, 1993:18).

The informal preschool years of language acquisition are followed by the stage where language is used for learning (Owens, 2001:381, 197; Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:4). During this stage, primary school learners need to develop the academic language required for cognitive tasks and discussions and to grasp abstract concepts in class (Renton, 1998:33). According to Brice and Perkins (1997:13), a learner in the formal school situation is required to understand the exact meaning of long utterances by teachers, spoken over a short period of time, without many opportunities to ask for clarification or help during instruction. Primary school learners who are not in full command of the English language may not possess the necessary language skills for formal learning and may experience difficulties understanding the instructions. The current situation in South African schools is such that learners who are in the process of acquiring English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), increasingly attend English primary schools, where they have to think about ideas and solve problems in English. This may create academic and

emotional problems if the learners are not proficient in English (Diedricks, 1997:1).

All learners who come into contact with English for the first time in preschool may experience some degree of difficulty. To be able to support, understand, and accelerate the process of ELoLT acquisition by preschool learners, decision makers and role-players need to be informed about the process. This chapter aims to discuss certain aspects of the acquisition of ELoLT in South Africa, to provide a coherent framework of the South African context. It is important to review ELoLT acquisition in South Africa, as the discussion will provide relevant information as baseline for the current empirical investigation into the role of the speech-language therapist in ELoLT acquisition.

2.2 ENGLISH AS PREFERRED LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION

By promoting multilingualism, the current Government of South Africa has, by implication, committed the present and future generation of South Africans to the process of acquiring additional languages. The overall response of the majority of Black South Africans to multilingualism in the new South Africa is the acceptance of ELoLT and the rejection of L1 as medium of instruction (Mol) in schools. Black parents or caregivers usually make the decision on Mol for their children on preschool and primary school levels. During the later school years, teachers and learners are often included as additional decision makers. On tertiary level, however, students have to accept the language policy of ELoLT for higher education followed by the South African government.

Two studies, by De Klerk (2002a) and Sarinjeive (1999), illustrate that ELoLT strongly appeals to Black parents or caregivers and students alike, and are described forthwith.

De Klerk (2002a) investigated the reason why 194 Xhosa-speaking learners were sent to English schools in the Grahamstown area from their preschool

years. The reasons why parents or caregivers in the research project decided to send their children to ELoLT schools are summarised in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1: REASONS FOR PLACEMENT DECISION

REASON FOR PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM SCHOOL	EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Need for better education in more stable environment	More <i>meaningful</i> education free from problems in Black schools
English is the international language	Learners prepared for modern world with cultural awareness, tolerance, communication with other groups
Need to give learners a better chance in life	Learners able to be financially better off than parents/caregivers
English will open the door to more job opportunities	Equip learners with competitive edge and ability to speak the language of the workplace
English is vital for educational success in general	Learners able to understand other subjects and pass future exams in English
Prestige of English	Higher status of learners able to speak English
Social advantages of English	Learners will become assertive and confident
Want learners to be able to mix with English and L1 speakers	Learners must not be embarrassed when speaking English
Closer geographical proximity to an English school	Learners must assimilate into English-speaking Western culture

Source: De Klerk (2002a:6-7).

According to Table 2.1, the parents or caregivers desired the learners to master English. Many of these parents or caregivers could not speak English themselves, but expected the learners to become fluent in English. The parents or caregivers based their placement decision on the overwhelming approval by family members (42%) and teachers (24%) of their decision, as opposed to only 8% of the parents or caregivers who reported that people tried to persuade them from enrolling the learners in English-medium schools. The parents or caregivers were prepared to go to great expense to provide the learners with an English education. Although some of these parents or caregivers were economically advantaged, the financial cost of their decision was high, also taking into account the additional expenses needed to support the learners, such as buying extra books and paying for extra lessons (De Klerk, 2002a:7).

In the second study, Sarinjeive (1999) attempted to determine why English was so popular among Black students at the University of Vista, despite the students' poor academic performance in English. Ninety percent of the students preferred ELoLT, as opposed to only a small percentage who would have preferred L1 instruction. Although these students typically used their L1 outside the classroom, they wanted to be fluent in English in order to achieve future goals, such as economic empowerment (Sarinjeive, 1999:133). English was clearly regarded by these students as a prestigious language. It was evident that these students accepted ELoLT at tertiary level and supported the decision (often reached by parents or caregivers on their behalves as young learners) to choose English as Mol.

In contrast, Bosman (2000:226) advocates the need to educate the decision makers on the role of language in learning as the teachers, parents or caregivers, and students are not always well-informed, and their opinions on ELoLT, though important, are often based on emotional and political beliefs. One of Bosman's (2000:225) main concerns is that ELoLT is not delivering the desired results, and she regards the popularity of English to be the major obstacle to L1 instruction. She recommends that Black communities be informed about the benefits of L1 instruction and educated about the intrinsic and academic value of African languages. Black learners may still receive bilingual education, with ELoLT being introduced at some stage during pre-tertiary education (during the General Education and Training - GET- phase), but at no cost to L1 (Bosman, 2000:225).

From the opinions reviewed above, the consensus appears to be that L1 education alone is not sufficient and that all South Africans need to have access to a language with broader communication functions, enabling interaction in all spheres of life - social, political, economic and educational. Exclusive L1 education may increase the social distance between the various groups of people in South Africa and may also provoke tension and conflict between the different language groups (Gumbo, 2001:241). Furthermore, South Africans cannot afford to isolate themselves globally as far as culture and technology are concerned. The electronic media, internet, arts, cinema,

and popular music expand and enrich the learners' world and offer limitless opportunities for personal growth. English has emerged as the most likely international *lingua franca* (Cunningham, 2001:201, 208; Smit, 1993:159) and holds tremendous potential for unity, freedom of movement, co-operation, travel, and economic development (Smit, 1993:159), the latter being of great importance to the future of South Africa. To reach long-term economic goals, South Africa needs foreign resources and intellectual capacities. Such international interdependency requires people to be able to communicate in English.

Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of L1 in South Africa, the *status quo* – with English as preferred LoLT – needs to be managed effectively. The commitment to ELoLT necessitates language planning in education to include language *acquisition* planning, especially the planning of the acquisition of ELoLT, which is addressed in the next section.

2.3 THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

Languages are powerful resources available to speaking individuals (Makin et al., 1995:xxiv). The following overview sheds light on the language acquisition process.

2.3.1 The acquisition of ELoLT

Since the 1950s, numerous research studies on learning and thinking have led to the development of many perspectives and theories, and dramatic changes in educational pedagogy. Outstanding examples are Ausubel's Cognitive Learning Theory, Piaget's Maturational Stages in Cognition, Roger's Humanistic Approach, and Vygotsky's theories on the connection between socialisation, language, and learning (Meyers, 1993:24). In the Communication Pathology discipline, models of language development have moved towards a holistic concept of language learning, and currently the perspectives of Owens (2001:67) are endorsed.

According to Owens (2001:67), the language learning skills of children are not isolated from the rest of their mental growth. Language, thought, and meaning are interrelated, and therefore the acquisition of language is crucial to ensure cognitive development in children (NAEYC, 1996:4; Makin, Campbell & Diaz, 1995:xxix). A child's ability to use language is a critical factor in the learning process, as language is viewed to be a tool for learning. A child needs language to describe, explain, and enquire about his or her environment (Owens, 2001:67). Young children learn through language by using meaningful social activities to interact with their environment (Makin et al., 1995: xxix). The holistic approach considers the child to be continually interactive with the environment. This interaction between the child and his or her environment is conceptualised as concentric circles and is visually presented in Figure 2.1.

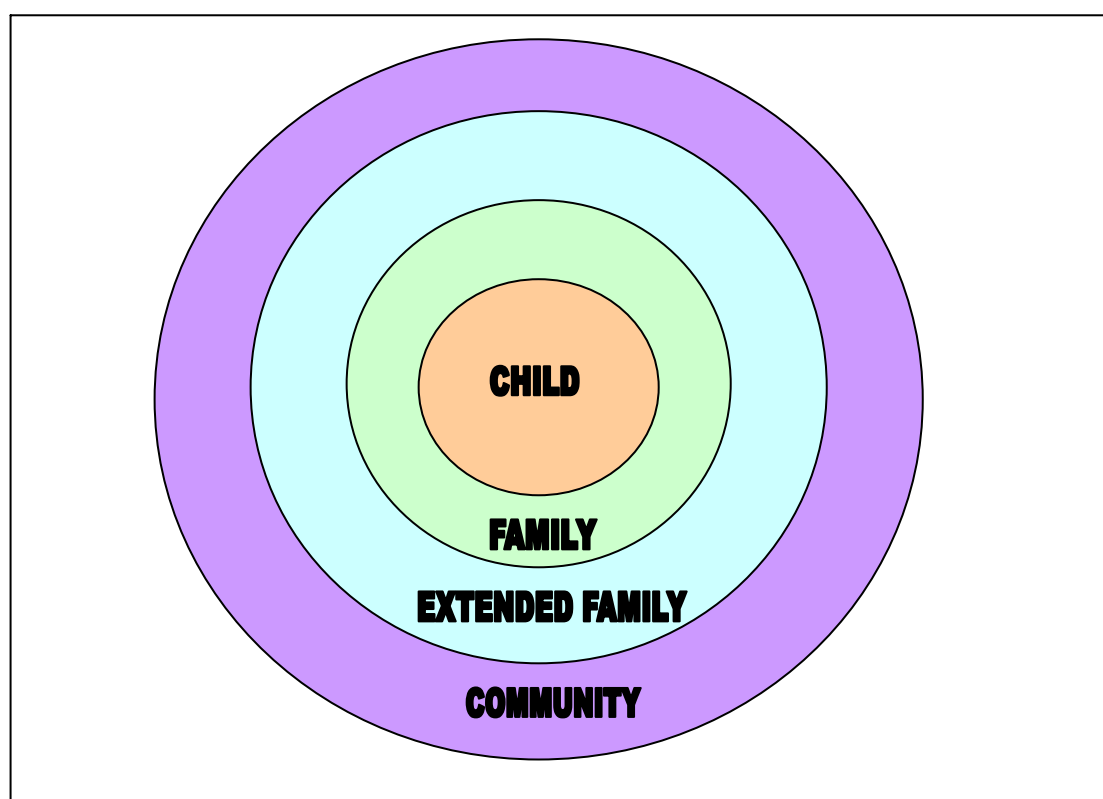


FIGURE 2.1: SOCIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILD AND ENVIRONMENT

Figure 2.1 illustrates that personal relationships form the matrix within which a child's language learning takes place. Adults become role-players in this

learning experience by verbalising the child's experiences and providing input in language acquisition activities (Makin et al., 1995:xxix). They do not actively teach language, but facilitate language acquisition through their behaviour (Owens, 2001:215). This naturalistic approach is currently followed by speech-language therapists.

L2 development follows the same naturalistic approach as described by Krashen in the 1980s, which is the most current approach to L2 acquisition (Meyers, 1993:24). Adults play an important role, not only in the child's acquisition of L1, but also in acquiring ELoLT by responding effectively to the language needs of children. Since language flourishes in a language-rich environment where there are ample opportunities for language development, the amount, as well as quality of exposure, at home and at school, is important. An adequate amount of time spent in both situations while being exposed to grammatically correct English may have a positive influence on the learner's acquisition of ELoLT (Green, 1997:150; Tabors, 1997:82; Makin et al., 1995:45). Families and educational institutions, therefore, need to co-operate in supporting the learners' acquisition of ELoLT.

Ideally, the acquisition of ELoLT needs to be an enriching experience for the preschool learners and educators, as well as the parents or caregivers. The involvement of educators and parents or caregivers implies that they have a responsibility to gain knowledge of the process of ELoLT acquisition, in order to support the learner. It is important that the acquisition of an L2 is a positive process for the preschool learner, as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 illustrates that L1 needs to be supported and given status. By supporting L1 while the learner is acquiring ELoLT, skills are added and the learner's life is enriched in the process. At the time that learners begin schooling in ELoLT, they might incorrectly perceive English as the only language valued by teachers (Makin et al., 1995:46). However, if teachers respect and promote L1, the learners feel supported and can relate more

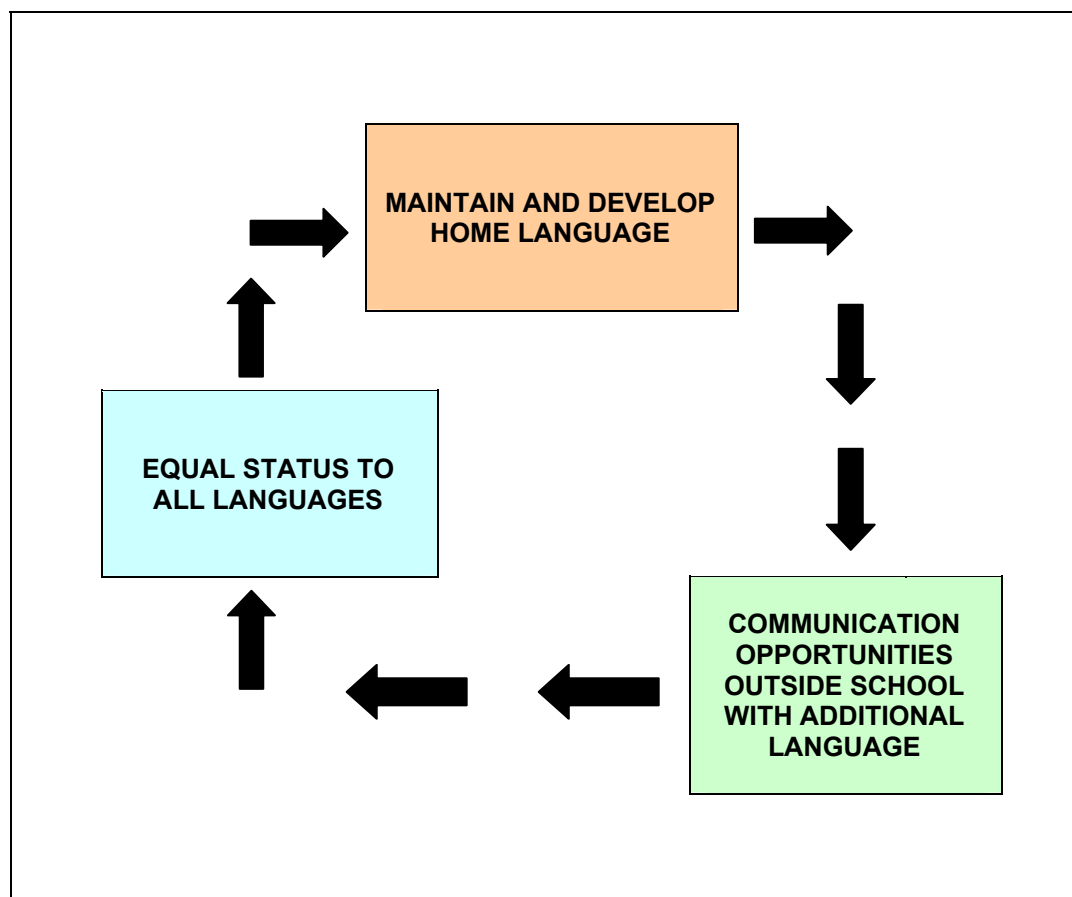


FIGURE 2.2: ACQUISITION OF ELoLT AS A POSITIVE PROCESS

Compiled from: Makin, Campbell and Diaz (1995:52).

easily to the home environment and the educational setting (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995:5).

Unfortunately, some teachers and parents or caregivers in South Africa appear to be unaware of the importance of L1 in cognitive development and the acquisition of additional languages (Lemmer, 1995:90). Teachers and other decision makers need to be empowered by providing them with information on the benefits of L1. To develop ELoLT in South Africa, L1 needs to be promoted, maintained, and developed to ensure that the acquisition of ELoLT is an additive rather than a subtractive process. In the next sections, additive versus subtractive multilingualism in L2 acquisition is discussed and the use of code-switching in additive multilingualism, as well as linguistic aspects guiding additional language acquisition, is explored.

2.3.2 Additive multilingualism

Additive multilingualism is the acquisition of, or gaining of competence in an L2 while maintaining L1. This implies that the appreciation and reinforcement of both L1 *and* ELoLT will have a complimentary effect on the learner's cognitive and social development (Lockett, 1993:38). In this regard, Cummin (as cited by Lemmer, 1995:91) suggested that, because of a common underlying proficiency (CUP), learners' proficiency in L1 is transferred to L2. By reinforcing learners' conceptual base in their L1, a foundation will be provided for long-term growth in English skills.

CUP has been successfully applied in the South African context. By employing the process of additive multilingualism in schools, native Afrikaans-speaking learners, as well as immigrant minority language learners (mostly of European descent), have reached relatively high levels of proficiency in English, and are comparatively successful in this medium at school and tertiary level (Lemmer, 1995:91). This outcome may be attributed to the fact that parents or caregivers and learners continued to use L1 at home, in addition to the fact that the learners reached high levels of proficiency and literacy in L1. The Afrikaans-speaking learners attended schools with Afrikaans as Mol, and English was added as a school subject. The immigrant learners acquired ELoLT by attending schools with English as Mol, while maintaining their L1 at home. In this way, English was added at no cost to L1. The same principle could be applied when Black learners acquire ELoLT. If the African languages (L1) are supported and developed and the learners are encouraged to become highly proficient in their L1, ELoLT may build on existing concepts in L1 resulting in both languages being developed.

As project leader of the Threshold Project, Macdonald (1991) propagated a similar approach to the acquisition of ELoLT by young Black learners in South Africa. This project addressed the nature of language and learning difficulties of young Black learners in South African primary schools. Her exploration through this exhaustive trial of the relationships between L1 and L2 literacy, between literacy and Mol, between language ability and cognitive skills, as

well as between teaching styles, classroom materials, and the learning process, is highly regarded and appreciated as the most significant research that has been conducted on language in education in South Africa over the past 50 years (Heugh, 2002:179). Since learners' thinking processes develop more easily in L1, Macdonald (1991:25, 31) recommended that learners be given a foundation for thinking skills by starting off in L1, and once mentally well-equipped, English may be added. Skills and knowledge developed in L1 will be transferred to ELoLT, as L2 will build on the underlying conceptual-linguistic foundation of L1 (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5). She concluded that success in ELoLT seems to be dependent on success in L1.

Macdonald's (1991) approach, however, has some limitations within the South African context. In the rural areas, the teachers are competent in African languages and learners are taught in L1 from preschool up to Grade Four. That means that L1 is developed both at home and at school, resulting in L1 literacy. However, as many teachers in the urban areas are not competent in African languages, learners have only home support of L1 and therefore many of them do not become literate in L1. In the latter case, a good foundation in L1 language skills may still be beneficial to learning skills in ELoLT, by building and adding to L1 skills.

Another noteworthy South African document that echoes the need for additive multilingualism is the *Final Report of the Language Plan Task Group* (LANGTAG, 1996). This task group, under the chairmanship of Alexander, consulted various experts nationally on language policy and language planning in South Africa. The final report presented a culmination of opinions and recommendations on, among others, the country's needs concerning language in education. In the report the promotion of additive multilingualism in South African schools and other educational centres is identified as an important goal (LANGTAG, 1996:26). It is recommended that additional languages be added without replacing L1. The report favoured an equitable balance between access to English and fairness to those who do not know English (LANGTAG, 1996:20). Therefore, to accommodate all learners, they need to be provided with education in the language of their choice. Currently,

L1 education is not the reality in South African education, as most Black learners choose to receive their education in English. In the absence of a realistic alternative, learners need to be encouraged to reach the highest levels of English proficiency in order to aid their academic performance. At the same time, learners need to maintain L1 in their communities and at home to attain the ideal of additive multilingualism.

The sentiments expressed in the LANGTAG report (1996) towards L1, also include recommendations for the development, promotion, and maintenance of L1 to create an awareness of the importance thereof when acquiring ELoLT. According to the LANGTAG report (1996), a climate of value for L1 needs to be created at school and at home, and teaching in L1 needs to be continued for as long as possible while ELoLT is being added. Acquisition planning, therefore, needs to be structured, with the clear goal in mind of transferring to English in Grade Four. Ideally, ELoLT needs to be introduced from as early as the preschool years, gradually increasing the learners' exposure to English as they are adding to their English repertoire and their understanding of ELoLT is growing. A transitional programme may be implemented until the learners' command of English is sufficient for them to be instructed in English. After the transfer to ELoLT in Grade Four, L1 needs to be taught as a school subject to ensure its maintenance and development.

In conclusion, two principles need to be born in mind when ELoLT acquisition in education is planned: the importance of ELoLT needs to be recognised and the retaining of L1 needs to be secured. This may be achieved through the process of additive multilingualism, as opposed to subtractive multilingualism that may occur if L1 is neglected or ignored.

2.3.3 Subtractive multilingualism

It is generally accepted that language loss may occur if the level of proficiency in L1 is not maintained while acquiring L2, that is L2 will gradually replace L1. This phenomenon is called subtractive multilingualism. Subtractive multilingualism implies that, as L2 is learned, skills and fluency in L1 are lost

(Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:513; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:4; August & Hakuta, 1998:13; Makin et al., 1995:5). In South Africa, LANGTAG (1996:31) voiced its concern that some African language groups like SiSwati, IsiNdebele, SeSotho, XiTsonga and TshiVenda are marginalised, not only by English, but also by the larger African language groups such as IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, SePedi and SeTswana. The danger exists that the former group might lose speakers, as these languages are not predominantly used for communication.

Unfortunately, the probable emergence of an international *lingua franca* has a limiting impact on global linguistic diversity. On all continents, English poses a decided threat to indigenous languages. According to Crystal (2000:19), worldwide one language on average disappears every two weeks. In Australia, the number of languages spoken at the time of colonisation has declined from 600 to approximately 250, with only 4,2% of the population currently speaking non-English languages (Cunningham, 2001:204; Romaine, 1996:580). More recently, the decreasing number of students and teachers of Russian and other indigenous languages of the former communist countries was attributed to the onslaught of English. South Africa has experienced the decline and near language loss of three unrelated groups of Khoesan languages, and currently there are only a few remaining speakers of the Khoi, Nama, and San languages. Another local example of language loss is the Indian languages that survived for decades, but are showing a gradual decline in most recent times. For example, the number of people in South Africa speaking Tamil has dropped from 120 181 in 1951 to 41 030 in 1991 (Peirce & Ridge, 1997:178). When considering that French, one of the major languages of the world, seems to be losing international status under the dominance of English (Cunningham, 2001:203), the threat that English poses for the decline of some South African languages is clear and may lead to South Africans becoming subtractive multilinguals, or even cause language loss.

Language loss seems to follow a classic pattern, where a monolingual community becomes multilingual, followed by a language shift towards

monolingualism in the new language. A full language shift may occur when a cultural group gradually changes its language preference to the dominant language of the community. This shift may take place intra-individually or even intergenerational (August & Hakuta, 1998:17), an example of the latter being the USA, where 53% of the population in 1940 used English as their L1, as opposed to the previous generation where only 25% considered English as their L1 (Romaine, 1996:58).

In South Africa, LANGTAG (1996:31) made a plea for the maintenance of all languages by displaying their importance and usefulness. As an antipode to language loss in South Africa, the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) was composed to head the promotion of language equity by creating favourable conditions for the development and use of all official languages, including the Khoi, Nama, and San languages, as well as sign language (LANGTAG, 1996:21, 223). A stipulation was included in the Constitution of South Africa that the state needs to develop and maintain these languages. In fact, all African languages need to be developed as they are underdeveloped and in need of modernisation (Cele, 2001:188; LANGTAG, 1996:26). Modernisation needs to include vocabulary elaboration, as well as the development of technical and academic vocabulary, to provide L1 speakers and learners and educators with functional languages (Jordaan, 2003; LANGTAG, 1996:21). Modernisation, including new terminology, is an ongoing process in all languages. In the South African context, it is important to modernise languages in order to retain the speakers of marginalised African languages.

PANSALB faces the challenge of changing people's perception that the African languages have no intrinsic value, economic worth, or academic prestige. To promote African languages, the development and promotion of Afrikaans may serve as an example of how a language was supported with great success in the South African context. Afrikaans, although branded *the language of the oppressor* by some South Africans at one time, has developed from an indigenous and subordinate language into an official language, and has since been recognised as a language of education and

science. It is now a fully developed modern language with important social standing, an established literature, widely circulated magazines and newspapers, and a community of speakers who use it as L2. In addition, it is recognised as a valuable national resource (Lockett, 1993:53). The promotion of Afrikaans continues, and it is of interest to note that there is currently an aggressive movement to defend and develop Afrikaans in order to ensure continued recognition under the new South African dispensation (Peirce & Ridge, 1997:179).

The task of PANSALB to address the development of African languages is of critical importance to Black learners in SA. Black learners are at risk of becoming subtractive multilinguals if sufficient opportunity for L1 usage is not provided after the transfer to ELoLT in Grade Four (Lemmer, 1995:89). In the event that schools do not support L1 skills, causing L1 to deteriorate, and ELoLT skills do not develop sufficiently, the result may be *double half-literacy* or *semilingualism*, and learners may wrongly appear to be slow (Romaine, 1996:595; Roseberry-McKibbin & Eicholtz, 1994:161). If learners are taught exclusively in English and it replaces L1 completely, negative consequences may be suffered, such as the loss of confidence, social isolation, as well as the potential loss of identity and the feeling of belonging to a community (Makin et al., 1995:51). The loss of L1 may even result in the disruption of family communication patterns and the loss of intergenerational wisdom, including cultural traditions, values, and attitudes as the values, beliefs, and needs of a community are reflected in its language (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995:15; Makin et al., 1995:101). Without language no transfer of culture between generations is possible, as parents or caregivers communicate to their children the cultural values that underlie language. In this way, L1 is tied to the learner's culture, and loss of L1 may lead to the loss of significant social relationships and cultural knowledge and information.

This section illustrated that L1 needs to be supported by the community, as well as the educational system, to prevent subtractive multilingualism. Parents or caregivers need to encourage L1 usage at home and educators need to *allow* and *encourage* L1 in informal discussions *inside* and *outside*

the classroom to support the maintenance of L1. At school, code-switching needs to be allowed as a positive force in maintaining multilingualism and preventing language loss.

2.3.4 Code-switching as teaching strategy in additional language (L2) acquisition

Educators have the responsibility to prepare learners for the future, and to be successful in their task, they have to incorporate certain teaching approaches and strategies, as well as modifications, in their presentations. One of the challenges that faces teachers in South Africa is to use language creatively in the multilingual classroom, and code-switching may be one method of experimenting with language.

Code-switching refers to the switching from one language to another over phrases or sentences (Lawrence, 1999:266; Zulu, 1996:105; Heugh et al., 1995:vii), as opposed to *code-mixing* that can be defined as switching for individual words from one language to another in one utterance (Owens, 2001:433; Lawrence, 1999:266; Zulu, 1996:105; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995:73). Romaine (1989:186) made a distinction between code-switching, where a certain level of language competence is needed, and code-mixing as it occurs in the early stages of language acquisition. She attributes the mixing of languages in the latter situation to language interference, transference, and universals. In the literature, both phenomena are often grouped under the term code-switching.

Historically, code-switching has been viewed as a sign of inadequacy or inefficacy on the part of the speaker owing to a lack of education, laziness, bad manners, and improper control of languages (Lawrence, 1999:265; Romaine, 1996:599; Zulu, 1996:104). In South Africa, code-switching has been disapproved of by certain multilinguals themselves, as well as by schools and education departments (Peires, 1994:15). Over the past decade, however, researchers have debated the use of code-switching internationally and nationally. Many researchers challenged the view that code-switching

lowers communication standards and highlighted its potential in the teaching and learning process. The literature increasingly reflects the view that code-switching is normal, useful, and widely used in the discourse of multilinguals. (Lawrence, 1999:266; Peirce & Ridge, 1997:174; Zulu, 1996:104; Peires, 1994:15).

Code-switching is progressively more prevalent in the public and social life of multilingual and multicultural South Africa. It is also reflected in the South African classrooms where many of the learners are from multilingual backgrounds (Zulu, 1996:108). PANSALB commissioned a survey to determine the incidence of language mixing in South Africa, in which 64% of the respondents denied that they used code-switching, whereas 36% admitted to the practice. Of this latter group, 45,3% code-switched to Afrikaans or English when using their L1, 47% mixed an African language with their L1, and 4% used more than one South African language with their L1 (MarkData – PANSALB, 2000). It is, therefore, particularly true in the South African context that code-switching is a phenomenon displayed by more than a third of the population.

Although both adults and children use code-switching, older multilinguals appear to have control over the amount of code-switching in their communication. Code-switching in adults appears to be influenced by contextual, situational, and personal factors, and is used more frequently in informal communication situations between people with shared interests (Zulu, 1996:108). Multilingual learners also mix languages for their own purposes. They will often code-switch between class and playground, or revert to L1 when they feel threatened (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:124), and even when they want to exclude adults from their conversations (Hoff, 2004:353; Heugh, 2002:189). According to Heugh (2002:188), children from Africa and India, who are usually multilingual, have a remarkable ability to negotiate their way around multilingual neighbourhoods, using code-switching and code-mixing in their communication. It appears that learners in multilingual situations draw on their language sources by code-switching to accommodate

each other. It may in fact be a strategy for effective communication (SASLHA, 2003:2).

In the ongoing debate on the use of code-switching as teaching strategy for ELoLT acquisition in South Africa, the one viewpoint that features prominently in the literature, is that code-switching may be used as a tool in learning (Lawrence, 1999:266; Peirce & Ridge, 1997:174; Zulu, 1996:104; Peires, 1994:15). Code-switching in the classroom may lead to better understanding and communication with ELoLT learners and prevent communication breakdowns between teachers and learners. However, if teachers are to employ code-switching in urban ELoLT classrooms in South Africa, they need to learn African languages. Bearing in mind that South Africa has 11 official languages, and that, theoretically, all of these languages may be represented in a single classroom, the language learning task of the teacher becomes overwhelming.

An organisation called *The project for the Transfer of African Languages* (TALK) ran courses in the nine official African languages of South Africa, and reported a great deal of interest from teachers in these courses from 1994 to 1997, when South African schools became heterogeneous. Since 1997, however, the interest from teachers has unfortunately waned (Murray, 2002:115). One might speculate that this may be attributed, on the one hand, to the learning of so many diverse languages becoming too overwhelming, or, on the other hand, to teachers starting to cope in multilingual classrooms through the employment of successful teaching strategies.

Teachers who want to employ code-switching as teaching strategy in their classes, but cannot code-switch themselves, may employ peer-tutoring (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:83). Peer-tutoring is a promising coping strategy for teachers of Black learners in urban South African schools, by which individualised help may be provided to learners in a large group. Learners are involved to assist in conveying the teacher's instruction, or summarise the lesson in a structured manner, by code-switching to the L1 of fellow learners. Usually peer-tutoring is done on a one-to-one basis, but can also be

effectively employed in small groups (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:83; 84). A report that revealed how this form of code-switching may be used in the South African classroom to build upon the strength of L1, was published by Kamwangamalu and Virasamy in 1999. They described how teachers at a former *Indian* school in Durban used peer-tutoring as transitional strategy to communicate with IsiZulu-speaking learners. In this secondary school, learners with English as L1 and learners with ELoLT were placed in the same classroom. As the teachers could not code-switch to IsiZulu themselves, learners proficient in ELoLT and with IsiZulu as L1, assumed the role of surrogate teacher. They acted as intermediaries between the teacher and ELoLT learners by explaining the learning content in IsiZulu to the learners, as well as relaying answers in English to the teacher. The researchers observed how peer-tutoring motivated previously passive learners to communicate and participate in class activities (Kamwangamalu & Virasamy, 1999:64). These results prove that, through peer-tutoring, L1 may be a resource in an English-only environment where teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the learners' L1.

The exact developmental function of code-switching is unknown. It is, however, known that the behaviour is not random and does not reflect an underlying language deficit (Owens, 2001:433; 343). Code-switching by multilingual speakers is currently accepted and recognised as a teaching strategy in ELoLT classrooms. This presents a challenge to teachers as peer-tutoring has to be planned and incorporated in the classroom activities. Another challenge to teachers is to ensure that learners master Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), as well as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), both being required for authentic language proficiency, as discussed in the following section.

2.3.5 Linguistic aspects of additional language acquisition

It is now generally accepted that *proficiency in English* should be qualified as either language proficiency needed for interpersonal communication, or language proficiency required for academic tasks (Viljoen & Molefe,

2001:121; August & Hakuta, 1998:14). *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* (BICS) in ELoLT learners are estimated to take approximately two years to develop and allow learners to communicate through English in everyday situations. This type of language tends to be used in relation to personal matters, real objects, and present events, and includes the *visible* aspects of language like pronunciation, basic vocabulary and grammar, to converse fluently in undemanding situations. These skills are, however, not sufficient for academic success as they do not include the academic language needed for cognitive tasks (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:121; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5; Lemmer, 1995:90; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:43). Besides the social language skills provided by BICS, an ELoLT learner also needs to acquire academic language skills in English to succeed in a school environment with English as Mol.

According to Roseberry-McKibbin and Brice (2000:5), learners take approximately five to seven years to develop *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* (CALP), which is the required proficiency in any language to grasp academic concepts for learning and achieving at school. As this type of language is contextually reduced, learners require CALP to use English on a higher level of abstraction. It includes the ability to hypothesise, compare, contrast, and explain (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5; Lemmer, 1995:90; Makin et al., 1995:47; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:41).

In South Africa, some learners acquiring ELoLT face the challenge of developing BICS and CALP in English simultaneously within the school context. It is emotionally demanding for ELoLT learners to acquire CALP and to master academic content at the same pace as English L1 learners, and this may be the reason why some ELoLT learners lag behind their English-speaking peers.

Currently, many ELoLT learners in South Africa have acquired BICS in English and can communicate adequately in everyday conversation, but struggle with CALP when there is little context-embedded language to support them. This indicates that these learners have not yet reached the language

proficiency levels required to learn in English (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:121). It is often incorrectly assumed that these learners have language disabilities when, in fact, they are only displaying a BICS/CALP gap (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5-7). The number of years needed to acquire BICS and CALP is illustrated in Figure 2.3.

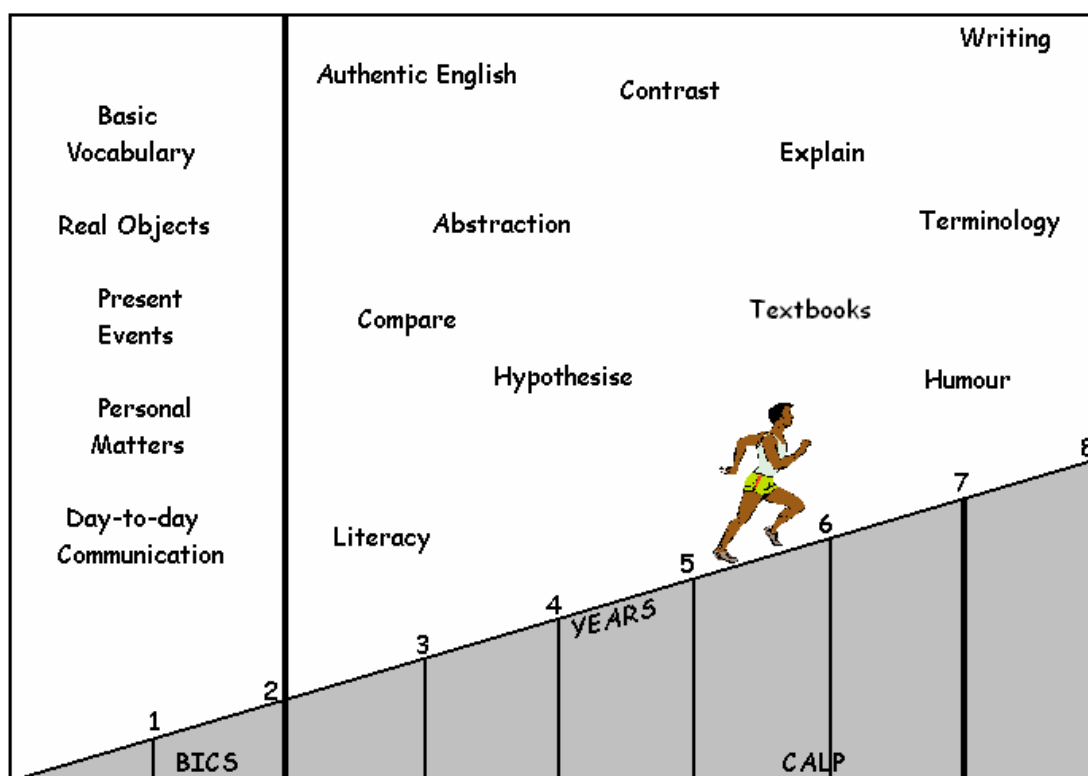


FIGURE 2.3: NUMBER OF YEARS REQUIRED TO REACH BICS AND CALP LEVELS

Source: Meyers (1993:15).

Figure 2.3 illustrates that the acquisition of English may present a challenge to learners acquiring ELoLT in South Africa, as the time available to gain CALP before the learners transfer to English in Grade Four is limited. CALP differs markedly from BICS used in everyday spoken interactions and is more difficult to master. In addition, it is even more challenging for ELoLT learners to transfer CALP to literacy skills, as literacy in the multicultural class implies the mastery of technical vocabulary, various genres of writing, the language of

textbooks, and comprehension and writing skills required for assessment (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:46).

One of the main concerns of Baker (1993:12) regarding the BICS and CALP classifications is that such terms label and stereotype learners. He is of the opinion that these terms over-simplify the reality, where language competence consists of a larger number of dimensions. He stresses that adults and learners gradually increase in language competence rather than in sudden achievements (Baker, 1993:12). The distinction between BICS and CALP (as illustrated in Figure 2.3) does, however, seem to fit the ELoLT learner in South Africa, where learners appear to be fluent in ELoLT but cannot cope with the curriculum in English. They may develop conversational English and be able to converse adequately on a social level, appearing to be fluent, but they struggle with CALP and have difficulties in subjects with little context to support the language being heard or read (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:42).

To assist ELoLT learners in developing BICS and adequate CALP before the transfer to English in Grade Four, teachers have to add ELoLT skills to L1 skills in the rural areas of South Africa, or to support ELoLT as well as L1 skills in the urban areas. The introduction of compulsory Grade R education, as envisaged by the Department of Education (DoE), would allow another year for the acquisition of BICS and CALP. Black parents' or caregivers' choice of ELoLT for their children from preschool years needs to be respected, and these additional years may be used to develop the language skills required for academic learning in the primary school.

As described in this section, parents or caregivers, as decision makers, and all other role-players in ELoLT acquisition need to be guided through the acquisition process to understand the importance of L1 maintenance, the value of code-switching as tool in ELoLT acquisition, the very important distinction between BICS and CALP, and the linguistic demands of academic learning. By being aware of these factors, role-players may be able to support the multilingual learner acquiring ELoLT more appropriately.

However, role-players, need to be aware that these are not the only important factors in ELoLT acquisition. In the following section, additional factors influencing the process are discussed.

2.4 INFLUENCES ON ELoLT ACQUISITION IN SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS

Jordaan (2003) stated that L1 acquisition is enviably consistent in comparison with the erratic and idiosyncratic variability in additional language acquisition. Why is there such a considerable variation in the rate at which learners acquire ELoLT, and why do some learners attain only a minimal level of BICS and CALP even after having attended English schools for a number of years? Certain factors appear to affect the acquisition process and influence the rate of acquisition. Researchers divide the factors that influence L2 acquisition into two main categories, namely individual influences and external influences (Jordaan, 2003; De Klerk, 2002b:20; August & Hakuta, 1998:14;15; Tabors, 1997:79-82; Makin et al., 1995:56; Jordaan, 1993:22-27; Cole, 1983:26). In the light of the current problematical situation in South Africa regarding critical levels of ELoLT needed for academic achievement, these two aspects are reviewed to gain insight into factors influencing the acquisition of ELoLT.

2.4.1 Individual influences

There are definite individual influences or characteristics of learners determining the rate at which they acquire ELoLT (Hoff, 2004:350). Tabors (1997:84) points out that individual influences on learners are contributing factors which will determine each learner's approach to the acquisition process. These individual influences or characteristics appear to be interrelated, although their importance varies for each individual learner. As the individual influences have been researched extensively and are well documented, a summarised overview of these influences is presented in Figure 2.4.

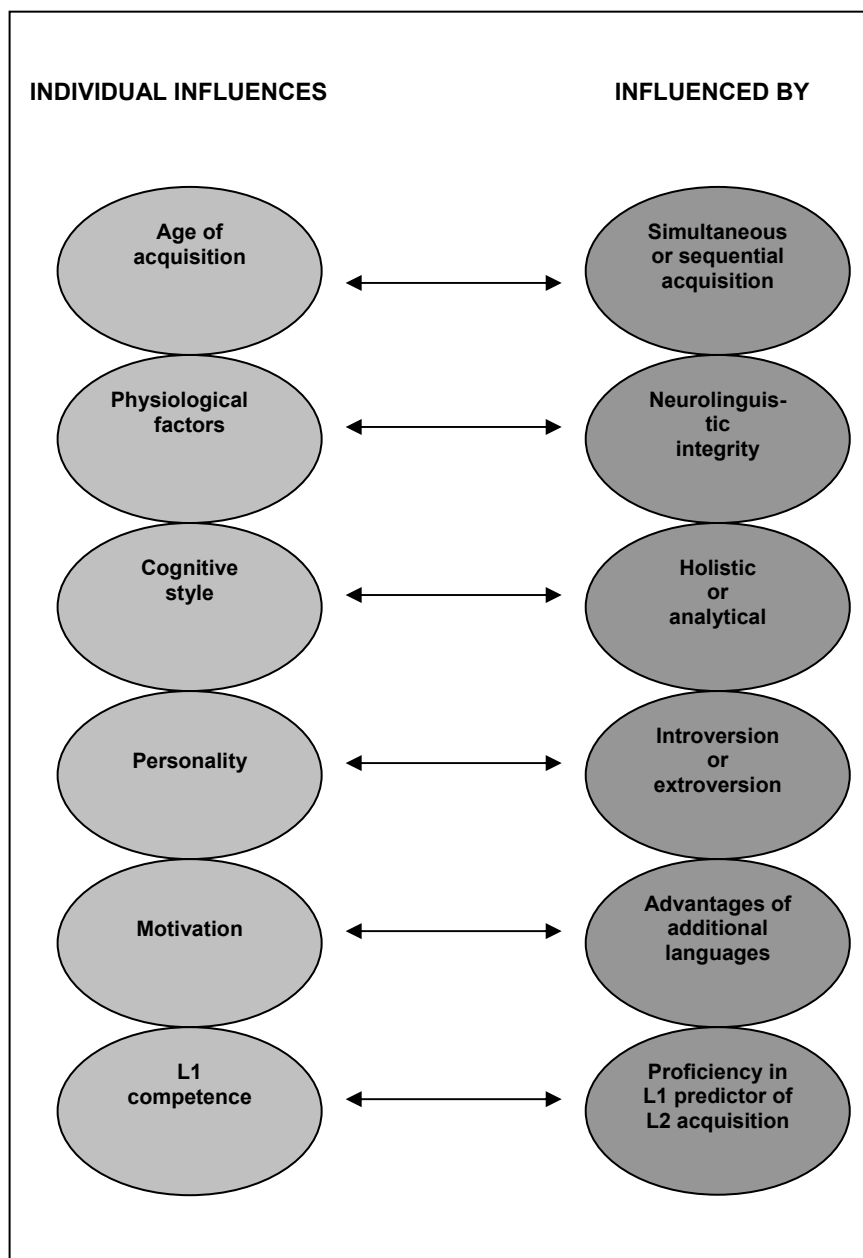


FIGURE 2.4: INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES ON L2 ACQUISITION

Sources: Jordaan (2003); De Klerk (2002b); August and Hakuta (1998); Tabors (1997); Makin, Campbell and Diaz (1995); Jordaan (1993); Cole (1983).

The individual influences depicted in Figure 2.4 are generally accepted as predictors of proficiency in L2 acquisition. These factors interact in complex ways to influence the rate of L2 acquisition. In the South African context, the optimal age for the acquisition of ELoLT is one of the important individual

influences identified, as most of the South African learners will be confronted with ELoLT during their school years.

The optimal age for L2 acquisition is a controversial issue. Many researchers support *the earlier the better* approach (De Klerk, 2002b:20; Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:10; Cole, 1983:26). The assumption is that, similar to L1 acquisition, the critical period hypothesis of learning a language before the age of twelve is also valid for L2 acquisition (August & Hakuta, 1998:15; Cole, 1983:26). There is, however, no consensus that younger learners acquire an L2 easier, and with a higher level of proficiency, than older learners. Tabors (1997:12, 83) argues that L2 acquisition can be undertaken at any age. He believes that the two important variables at any age are cognitive capacity and cognitive demand. Although the cognitive capacity of older learners is better developed for the cognitive challenge of L2 acquisition, the cognitive demand on them is much higher than on the preschool learner. Preschool learners are not required to use sophisticated language and their utterances are usually accepted without too much criticism of their language abilities, which means that the cognitive demand on preschool learners is lower. In the South African context, multilingual preschoolers may, therefore, appear to have sufficient English language skills for formal schooling in English, but in reality may not have the more sophisticated language proficiency needed for formal schooling.

However, when young learners acquire an L2 with more ease than older learners, it seems to be linked to the simultaneous development of L2 with L1 from birth. *Simultaneous acquisition* refers to the exposure of a child to more than one language from an early age - usually from birth (Tabors, 1997:9-10; Makin et al., 1995:39). As a result of the multilingualism of the South African environment, many families choose to expose their children to more than one language from birth. In this way, all the languages develop simultaneously. According to Sadiki (2002:10), it is commonly found in Black communities in South Africa that more than one language is spoken at home, and that all the spoken languages develop equally. It appears that children growing up in such multilingual environments have an impressive ability to interact

appropriately when communicating with individuals speaking diverse languages (Makin et al., 1995:44). Romaine (as cited by Makin et al., 1995:40-42) identified six types of multilingual situations that might occur in families. A summary of these multilingual situations is provided in Table 2.2.

All the situations depicted in Table 2.2 exist in the South African context and in some cases it is impossible to identify a dominant L1. In the South African research described earlier (MarkData - PANSALB, 2000), results indicated that 35,4% of the respondents use more than one language at home. Of this group, 91% of the respondents indicated the use of one L2, while 8% indicated the use of two or more L2s at home. It is suggested that some individuals in South Africa may have a set of languages, each used in a different context. Children who grow up in such multilingual environments may develop language proficiency in all the languages they are exposed to from birth. In the Black communities of South Africa, it is often the different African languages that develop simultaneously from birth. Although multilingualism is regarded as an asset in the South African multilingual environment, the simultaneous acquisition of more than one language needs to be monitored carefully. It appears that the rate of development of more than one language simultaneously may be the same as in the case of the monolingual child. Early exposure to more than one language may, however, lead to *double half-literacy* or *semilingualism*, in other words a failure to reach proficiency in any of the languages (Owens, 2001:431; 432). Role-players need to monitor the acquisition process to prevent the latter, as semilingualism may have a very negative impact on the learner's future.

TABLE 2.2: TYPES OF MULTILINGUAL SITUATIONS

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Type one: one person - one language	Parents/caregivers each speak a different L1 with some competence in each other's language. The dominant language of community is spoken by one parent/caregiver	Father L1: IsiZulu - IsiZulu to child Mother L1: IsiXhosa - IsiXhosa to child Community: IsiZulu
Type two: non-dominant home language with community support	Parents/caregivers each have a different L1 and one L1 is also the dominant language in community. Parents/caregivers both speak non-dominant language at home and child is exposed to dominant language at educational programme	Father L1: Afrikaans - Afrikaans to child Mother L1: English - Afrikaans to child Community: English - English at school
Type three: non-dominant home language without community support	Parents/caregivers have the same L1 which is not dominant in the community. Children do not attend any educational programme and have no exposure to community language	Father L1: German - German to child Mother L1: German - German to child Community: Afrikaans - No exposure to Afrikaans
Type four: double non-dominant home language without community support	Parents/caregivers each speak their own L1. None of these languages is dominant in the community. Children do not attend any educational programme and have no exposure to community language	Father L1: Italian - Italian to child Mother L1: Spanish - Spanish to child Community: English - No exposure to English
Type five: non-dominant home language with dominant-language parents	Parents/caregivers are both multilingual. One language is dominant in community. One parent/caregiver speaks dominant language and one parent/caregiver non-dominant language to children	Father L1: English - Portuguese to child Mother L1: English - English to child Community: English
Type six: mixed languages	The different languages spoken by the parents/caregivers and the multilingual community are both used. Parents/caregivers are multilingual and code-switching occurs	Father L1: Afrikaans - Afrikaans and English to child Mother L1: English - Afrikaans and English to child Community: Afrikaans and English

Source: Romaine (as cited by Makin, Campbell and Diaz 1995:40-42).

When English is added as an L2 subsequent to L1 development, it is referred to as sequential acquisition. *Sequential acquisition* is the process that is set in motion when all the basic components of L1 are in place, often when a learner is around five years old (August & Hakuta, 1998:12), or, alternatively, when a learner enters an educational or care centre (Makin et al., 1995:49). Not only Black families in South Africa, but also White families with an L1 other than English serve as examples of how English may be added

sequentially to L1. The current phenomenon in South Africa of parents preferring to place learners at preschool or primary school levels in English schools results in a sudden transfer to ELoLT. During this phase of sudden transfer to English, learners need as much support as possible from teaching staff (Macdonald, 1991:29).

In summary, individual influences affect the rate at which an L2 is acquired. While researchers fervently debate the optimal age for ELoLT acquisition, parents or caregivers in South Africa have to make a choice between simultaneous or sequential acquisition of languages for their children. However, as knowledge about L2 acquisition multiplied over the past 30 years, researchers, both internationally and locally, established that external factors also play an important role in acquiring an L2. A discussion of some of these external factors relevant to the South African context follows.

2.4.2 External influences

External influences, or the social environment that learners are exposed to, affect the acquisition of an L2 and need to be examined in the unique South African situation. Problems and issues facing South African learners acquiring ELoLT differ markedly from those in developed countries. A wide variety of socio-economic contexts exists within South Africa. White learners from middle-class backgrounds are often introduced to school-like experiences from early childhood, and their parents or caregivers are involved to enhance learning, as opposed to Black learners who may come from a variety of backgrounds - from middle-class families to illiterate homes, from elite suburbs to informal settlements (Lemmer, 1995:92). It is estimated that 40% of young learners in South Africa are subject to conditions of poverty and neglect (RSA, 2001a:5). In the lower socio-economic milieu, learners are often deprived of home support for learning.

Many learners come from poverty-stricken backgrounds and suffer from malnutrition (Harber, 1999:5). As a result of deprivation and poverty, learners from disadvantaged communities often already lag behind in L1 development

(Jordaan, 1993:23). These learners may not have the spoken-language skills in L1 that are required to develop reading and writing skills (Locke, Ginsberg & Peers, 2002:3). Some of these learners suffer from protein-deficient malnutrition, and such undernourishment may cause a lack of concentration, affecting the ability of the learner to engage appropriately in the learning process (RSA, 1997:13). Feeding schemes are often necessary for these learners to facilitate effective education (Harber, 1999:6). A further complication is the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, which may affect both parents or caregivers and learners. Many learners have to deal with chronic illnesses resulting from the disease, or with the loss of a family member. In addition, myths about HIV/AIDS and misconceptions associated with the disease have caused many learners to be excluded from attending schools (RSA, 1997:14; 15; RSA, 2000:10). The question arises whether L2 acquisition could progress sufficiently in such circumstances.

Learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may display general linguistic deprivation. They are often deprived of a critical level of home literacy necessary to support success in school (Hoff, 2004:401; Harris, 2003:81). If the parents or caregivers are illiterate and there are no books available at home, the early patterns of literacy which support the development of ELoLT are inconsistent and cannot support the school's input. This situation is of great concern, as limited literacy has a negative impact, not only on the learners' success in school, but also on their overall well-being and competitiveness in society (Hammer, Miccio & Wagstaff, 2003:21). To put South African literacy in perspective to the rest of the Southern African region, a literacy map of adult literacy in Southern Africa is presented in Figure 2.5. Although it is difficult to determine exact levels of literacy (as data are limited and definitions of literacy vary), an indication of literacy is provided in the map (Peirce & Ridge, 1997:176).

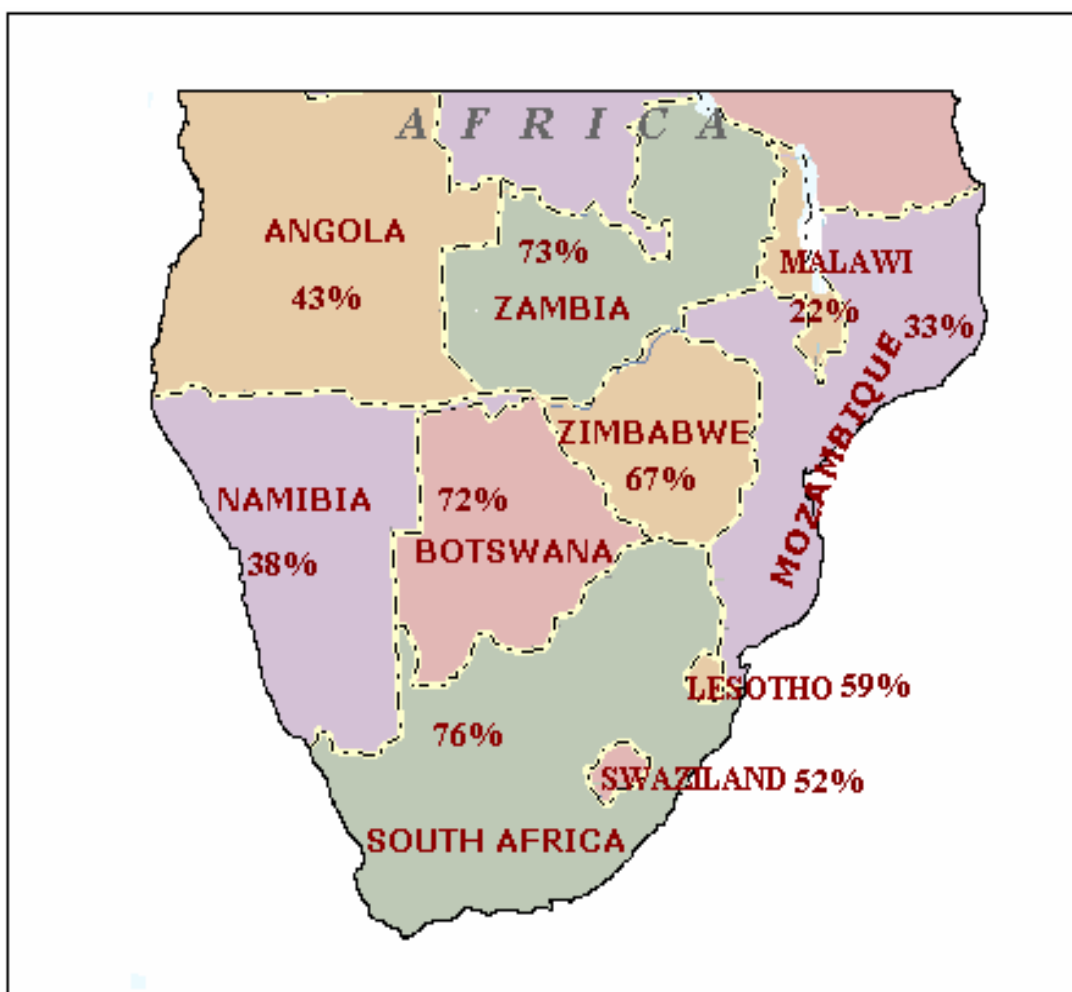


FIGURE 2.5: LITERACY MAP OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Source: Peirce and Ridge (1997:176).

Although literacy in South Africa is the highest in the region (76%), according to Figure 2.5, a large section of the population is still illiterate (24%). As children of illiterate parents or caregivers may not be supplied with books, magazines, and newspapers at home, a poor culture of learning is sustained in many households (Bosman, 2000:221). This affects learners adversely, as those who do not make the breakthrough into literacy during the first two or three years of schooling are at an academic risk throughout their formal school years (Makin et al., 1995:169). Chang and Lia (as cited by Cheng, 1996:350) investigated the home interactions of Cantonese learners acquiring EAL in the USA. They found that parents or caregivers were so exhausted after work and occupied with their household chores, that they were unable to support their children through any literacy or linguistic enhancement of EAL.

Lemmer (1995:91) revealed that the same situation exists in South Africa, where the majority of Black parents or caregivers are, unfortunately, unable to support the acquisition of ELoLT after school. Teachers of learners from illiterate backgrounds have to find ways of presenting literacy as purposeful and meaningful to learners. The challenge is to provide all learners with optimal levels of literacy experiences that engage and motivate them. This may entail research to investigate the parents' or caregivers' options on how to enhance literacy at home, and to investigate improved practices in preschool programmes to provide the most advantageous learning environment in both settings. The latter is addressed in the current empirical investigation.

Not only the home, but also the community has an external influence on ELoLT development. It is commonly held that the quantity of exposure to English is important for improved proficiency. However, societal factors that influence the development of L2 include the quantity *and* quality of exposure to English. Unfortunately for Black South African learners, the neighbourhood and wider community may not provide them with many opportunities to hear or practise English (Lemmer, 1995:91). As many of the parents or caregivers and community members may not be proficient in English, or may have been taught by an L2 speaker of English themselves, the learners are often exposed to a less than ideal model of English (De Klerk, 2002b:21). In the rural areas of South Africa, the teachers, too, often do not have sufficient exposure to English and consequently may lack the necessary proficiency in English for effective teaching (Bosman, 2000:221; Diedricks, 1997:46; Lemmer, 1995:88). It is speculated that teachers may often revert to their L1 (African languages) during instruction because of their tentative command of English (and not to use code-switching as a tool in English acquisition). This limits the quality of ELoLT input.

Another external factor influencing the quality of exposure to English is the diverse forms of English used by teachers. Learners in urban areas may find it difficult to follow the English as spoken by native English-speaking teachers, not being used to the accents and nuances (Lemmer, 1995:91). South

African English as used by South African speakers, on the other hand, is largely undocumented. Sarinjeive (1999:131) observed (in his study on Black students at Vista previously discussed) that the written language of students is developing more towards their own language than towards Standard English. South African English appears to be developing its own vocabulary, and even grammatical adjustments are made to the Standard English form. Teachers are therefore often at a loss as to how to evaluate and correct errors made in written work (Lemmer, 1995:92). It is clear that exposure to diverse forms of English may affect language acquisition, and the interference of African languages in the production and understanding of English needs to be recognised, lest learners be incorrectly labelled as slow because of this external influence. New grammatical and lexical features of South African English have implications for the language assessment of learners. More empirical evidence on the stability of such features are, however, required as researchers have up till now compiled only tentative evidence of these features (Van der Walt, 2001:1; Nxumalo, 1997:16-30). The current study will attempt to contribute in this regard. In addition, there is a general absence of assessment material standardised on South African learners, and research to provide such assessment material suitable for South African multilingual learners is urgently needed.

The school environment itself may be an external influence on the acquisition of ELoLT. Resources in a number of schools in South Africa are comparable to those in developing countries where electricity, telephones, water, toilets, or even basic facilities, like desks and chairs, are lacking. Many local schools do not have electricity, and in six provinces many of the schools do not have access to a telephone (Harber, 1996:6). Approximately 25% of the schools in South Africa do not have running water (Harber, 1999:6). For schooling to be effective, features like a basic level of safety and resource provision are required, which is currently not always the case. The physical degradation in some rural schools distracts from the educational priorities, such as the acquisition of ELoLT.

Another problem in South African schools is overcrowding. Barkhuizen (1993) surveyed a multilingual, secondary school classroom during the first six weeks of an academic year. The consequences of crowding, lack of space, and interaction between teachers and learners were investigated. The lack of space and overcrowding caused instability in the classroom, and the crowding resulted in high social and sensory stimulation. The result was that the teacher was inhibited during her lessons and she could often not complete the language learning activities she planned. With complex problem-solving tasks, where a great deal of information had to be processed over a short period of time, crowding was found to decrease the learners' performances (Barkhuizen, 1993:33). It is known that language used to convey such processing typically places great demands on the auditory memory and the ability to process language in sequence (Nelson, 1978:299). In this context, for sufficient L1 and L2 learning to take place, inadequate classroom space and the accompanying noise levels need to be addressed.

External influences pose a variety of barriers to effective learning. To address these problems leading to learning breakdown, it is necessary to focus on the nature of these barriers. To formulate realistic goals for education in South Africa, the needs of both the learner *and* the society need to be recognised and addressed. In addition to goals, established phases and time frames for upliftment need to be adhered to, including the training of teachers, upgrading of all education facilities, and distribution of educational resources (LANGTAG, 1996:27). Only then may appropriate language curricula deliver results, and may language development eventually benefit, be it L1 or ELoLT.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Theories and solutions for the acquisition and improvement of ELoLT cannot be transferred from one context to another, but their practicality in different circumstances needs to be considered carefully. South Africa needs to find its own answers to illiteracy, malnutrition, overcrowding, and other problems, in order to improve school effectiveness. Educational goals need to be

context and culture specific, and based on local goals and desired outcomes (Harber, 1999:8).

Currently, one of the most serious problems facing South African education is the difficulties experienced with ELoLT. Despite the current Government's relatively high expenditure on education, the educational performance of Black learners at all levels is generally disappointing (Steyn, 2000:46). As sufficient ELoLT skills are required for higher education, the acquisition of ELoLT should be given a high priority in education to prepare South Africa's human resources for meaningful participation on the global stage. Surprisingly, ELoLT acquisition was not mentioned in the major strategic priorities of the DoE for the time frame from January 2000 to December 2004. Their priorities for this period included co-operative government issues, illiteracy, developing schools as centres of communities, improving physical conditions, developing teaching staff, outcome-based education, creating further education centres, building an education system answering professional challenges, and dealing with HIV/AIDS (RSA, 2000:8). One might speculate that ELoLT acquisition will be addressed in the following phases of educational development in the new South Africa.

Although the latter part of this chapter provides a bleak picture of the educational system, teachers remain important resources in education. As decision makers, they have a powerful influence on society as a whole. Teachers have developed strengths in response to the historical discrimination that learners, parents or caregivers, and educators have experienced (RSA, 2000:40), and they may again be instrumental in guiding the community towards an approach of additive multilingualism - an inclusive approach where all languages are recognised and promoted. This may be achieved by educating teachers about the acquisition process, as such knowledge may empower them and strengthen their opinions when advising parents.

This chapter on the acquisition of ELoLT in South Africa provides the relevant information to appreciate that, for the larger part of South Africa's Black

population, a good foundation in L1 remains the starting point. It is clear that ELoLT needs to be added gradually from the preschool years, building on the CUP of L1, through a process of additive multilingualism.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter described the process of ELoLT acquisition in the South African context. Additive versus subtractive multilingualism was discussed, and the use of code-switching as a tool in additional language acquisition was highlighted. The importance of BICS and CALP in ELoLT and the individual and societal influences affecting the acquisition of ELoLT were discussed. The aim of the discussion was to create a framework of the South African context as background to the current study.