Attitudes of isiXhosa-speaking students at the University of Fort Hare towards the use of isiXhosa as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

Lorenzo Dalvit[1]* and Vivian De Klerk

Department of English Language and Linguistics, Rhodes University, PO Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa

* Corresponding author; e-mail: g01d0010@campus.ru.ac.za

Abstract: This article presents and discusses the results of a survey of a sample of isiXhosa-speaking students at the University of Fort Hare regarding their attitudes towards the possible introduction of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction at this institution. The research takes into account, among other things, the students' attitudes towards English and isiXhosa and their opinions and beliefs about the introduction of dual-mediumship and its possible consequences. The survey was conducted with questionnaires and interviews and the results were first analysed as a whole, and then split into different categories according to gender, year of study, subject studied etc. This analysis indicates that, while English is recognised as the dominant language in South Africa and, more specifically, in the domain of education, some categories of respondents acknowledge the usefulness of isiXhosa as an additional medium of instruction. This survey clearly shows that it would make little sense to present isiXhosa-speaking students at Fort Hare with a rigid choice between the existing English-medium and a dual-medium (English and isiXhosa) policy and that more nuanced options would need to be offered. For example, respondents seem to consider the use of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction more appropriate in the first years of study, for selected subjects and in some domains within the academic context rather than others. This study can be fruitfully compared with similar research carried out at other South African

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[1] Lorenzo Dalvit's new address: Department of Education, Rhodes University, PO Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.

institutions. Moreover, the results of the present research can be used to inform future decisions regarding language policy at the University of Fort Hare.

Introduction

In the history of South Africa, language-in-education policy has always been a contentious issue (Alexander 2001:8). According to Heugh (1995; see also Luckett 1995 and Hartshorne 1995) Bantu Education, by coupling mother-tongue instruction with an impoverished curriculum and underfunding of "black" institutions (see Wright 1996), has had devastating effects on the education of the speakers of African languages, effects that persist today. Heugh (2000) argues that the English-mainly policy currently followed by the government perpetuates the exclusion from power of speakers of African languages. In fact, as noted by MacDonald (1990) and Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000), black students are disadvantaged by their lack of English proficiency. The Council on Higher Education (CHE 2001) emphasises the fact that this happens at all levels of education, including the tertiary level. Dlamini (2001) notes that most black students are not proficient in English when they get to university, and they have to work harder than white students because they have to grapple with the language of instruction as well as with the concepts taught. According to the CHE (2001), this might be one of the reasons for the poor performance of many speakers of African languages at university.

As far as speakers of an African language are concerned, after the recognition of 11 official languages in the new South African Constitution (Act nr. 108 of 1996), the challenge for the education system has been to strike a balance between the use of the formerly dominant languages (especially English) and the mother tongue as LOLT. In the ongoing debate on which LOLT is more appropriate for speakers of an African language, arguments have been put forward to support both an English-mainly or English-only policy (see Titlestad 1996) and a bilingual (English and mother tongue) approach (see Alexander 1995, Luckett 1995; Heugh 2000). The central role of the university in leading the transformation of the education system in the direction of a more extensive use of the African languages has been stressed by several authors (Alexander 2001; Sweetnam-Evans 2001) and South African universities have been encouraged by the CHE (2001) to revisit their language policies.

In the Eastern Cape Province, the University of Port Elizabeth (1997:3-8) expressed its formal commitment to the implementation of a trilingual English-Afrikaans-isiXhosa policy. Rhodes (2003; see also De Klerk 2001) has made official its intention to retain English as the main medium of instruction, while making provisions for speakers of African languages. To our knowledge, the University of Transkei and Vista University have not yet formulated a new language policy. In our opinion, the University of Fort Hare, which is currently developing its new language policy (Ruthnam 2001), stands out as the institution most likely, at least at the local level, to introduce an African language as a medium of instruction because of its location, its history and the composition of its student body.

Context

Because of Apartheid education policies, Afrikaans came to be generally identified by Africans as the language of oppression and English as the language of liberation, education and social improvement (Reagan 1986; Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000). Mother-tongue education, on the other hand, acquired negative connotations and was associated with segregation policies and backwardness (Luckett 1995; Heugh 1995; Smit 1996). Several authors (Edwards 1985:90; Baker 1992; Luckett 1995:73; LANGTAG 1996; Heugh 2000:4) stress the need for language-in-education policy to take into account the attitudes of students and their parents.

The call for research into language attitudes in education has encouraged a number of studies at all levels of the education system. Webb (1996) claims that most African parents prefer English as a medium of instruction for their children in primary school, especially for instrumental reasons. A study on isiXhosa-speaking parents who have chosen to send their children to English-medium schools in the Eastern Cape (De Klerk 2000), points out that among the main reasons were the poor conditions of Xhosa schools (a legacy of Apartheid) and the lack of real support for the Xhosa language in education. Heugh (2000:12-13), while agreeing that little has changed in classroom practice since the end of Apartheid, notes that parents appear to demand increased access to English

rather than substitution of the mother tongue with English as a medium of instruction. In the same period, Smit (1996) found positive attitudes among black students towards the use of other languages (isiXhosa and Afrikaans) alongside English as a medium of instruction.

A study carried out by Barkhuizen (2001) on learners of isiXhosa as a first language in Western and Eastern Cape secondary schools confirmed positive instrumental attitudes towards English and a tendency to consider isiXhosa more appropriate to lower-status domains, such as peer group, family and community life. In spite of this, the majority of the learners thought that it was important to study isiXhosa, mainly for integrative reasons. Barkhuizen (2001) notes that two factors may undermine the support for isiXhosa as a school subject: the way isiXhosa is taught as a subject and the difference between the variety studied in school ("deep" Xhosa) and the one students speak. Although English was preferred as a medium of instruction for almost all subjects, there was no clear orientation towards an English-only policy and space was left for the definition of a possible role for isiXhosa as an additional language of teaching.

Bekker (2002) reviews relevant past research on language attitudes at tertiary level, which seems to support a generally positive orientation towards English as a medium of instruction (see also Chick 1998 and Coetzee-Van Rooy 1998, (cited in Bekker 2002); Cahill & Kamper 1989 (cited in Webb 1992:38)).

De Klerk (1996) offers an overview of the use of and attitudes to English among speakers of other languages at Rhodes University. Attitudes towards English were generally positive and a desire to improve competence in English or a positive orientation to it (especially as an international language) were some of the reasons for students choosing Rhodes (together with some practical reasons such as availability of bursaries, residence in Grahamstown or non-existence of a university with their mother tongue as a medium of instruction). Among African students, isiXhosa speakers had a relatively less favourable orientation to English and were the only group using its own language more than English on campus. In spite of this, the majority of isiXhosa

speakers preferred to use English as the sole medium of instruction. De Klerk (1996) argues that levels of self-assessed English proficiency were worse for students who encountered English late in their study career and seemed to decrease as students moved through their university studies. This means that, while exposure to English before coming to university enhanced students' confidence, the reality of the linguistic standards required at university undermined it. However, this study reveals that low levels of self-assessed proficiency did not appear to affect students' positive attitudes towards English.

Dyers (1998) explored the attitudes of first and second year isiXhosa-speaking students attending the foundation course she lectured at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). isiXhosa speakers were the largest language group at UWC, and they used their language in most informal situations. This study indicates that Xhosa students identified strongly with their language, they thought it would help them get a job and they did not believe a complete language shift (presumably to English) would ever take place (in spite of the limited attention that they felt the government was paying to isiXhosa). Surprisingly, students preferred "purer" varieties and disliked code-mixing with other languages (especially isiZulu with which isiXhosa has a history of rivalry). They were also favourable to the development of the African languages for use at tertiary level. English was seen as the dominant language in education and the preferred medium of instruction. At the second year level, students' self-assessed English proficiency increased while positive attitudes towards English as the only medium of instruction at university decreased. Students felt that using their mother tongue (especially in tutorials) would help them, but it would create tensions and make speakers of other languages uncomfortable. Using English as a *lingua franca* was seen as the only "politically correct" option.

Methodology

In our research, 1500 questionnaires were distributed on the Alice Campus of the University of Fort Hare in September/ October 2002 and April/ May 2003. The questionnaire used was developed by reflecting on the relevant literature and by looking at questionnaires used in similar studies. In the process, some

particular themes (i.e. "standardisation of the African languages", "pedagogical implications of mother-tongue education" etc.) emerged, which have been used to organize the presentation of the findings. Some of the questions were borrowed from other surveys conducted both at tertiary (Dyers 1998; Bekker 2002) and secondary level (Barkhuizen 2001), in the hope that this would make direct comparison of some results more meaningful. Following the suggestion made by Frazer and Lawley (2000:93), respondents were provided with an isiXhosa translation of the questionnaire alongside the original English version.[1]

The final product of the development process was a 30-item questionnaire in two languages, which took approximately 20 minutes to fill in. Each copy contained both an English and an isiXhosa version, alternating with respect to which language came first. Each version contained a brief description of the purpose of the questionnaire, a space for the students to leave their details if they wanted to be contacted for an interview and a blank page for comments at the back (see Appendix A).

Including the pilot test, approximately 1500 questionnaires were distributed in the Student Centre, in the library and in the residences by volunteers and members of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and in class by lecturers. In both cases, students were invited to return the completed questionnaires to the SRC offices or post it into one of the appropriate boxes placed in strategic spots on campus.

Overall, 352 forms were returned in both rounds and the pilot test together. The overall response rate was about 23%. The sample represented approximately 10% of the 3400 isiXhosa-speaking students at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus (Gardner 2003). The data from the questionnaire were analysed statistically and all variables were considered as categorical variables (i.e. responses were put in different categories and were not measured numerically). In line with the generally accepted approach to the statistical analysis of categorical data (see Pagano 2001), the chi-square test was used to determine the dependence/independence of the responses to the independent variables (language of the version filled in, gender, year of study, subject studied and level of education at which English was introduced as a medium of

instruction). Following a "conservative" approach, the chi-square test was considered valid only for expected frequencies higher than five (Radloff 2003).

Each question was considered as a separate item and analysed independently. For the sake of clarity of reporting, items were eventually grouped into different categories referring to related topics, such as attitudes to and self-reported proficiencies in the two languages (English and isiXhosa); attitudes and beliefs concerning English as a medium of instruction in general; the question of the development of isiXhosa; attitudes to the issue of dual-mediumship at Fort Hare; possible scenarios for the practical implementation of a dual-medium policy and the future implications of such a choice. Results for each dimension were generally consistent, both when the sample as a whole was under consideration and when responses were sorted according to the independent variables.

Nine follow-up interviews, based on the results of the analysis of the data, were administered in May/ June 2003. Although the semi-structured interview model seemed more appropriate, an interview guide, consisting mainly of questions which were too complex to be dealt with in the questionnaire, was used as a reference. Some questions were asked only of a specific group of students (i.e. students in a particular faculty or year of study) who had responded in a unique way to the questionnaires.

The final interview guide included approximately 15 open-ended questions and a few additional questions for students in particular faculties or years of study. According to common practice in social sciences research (see Mishler 1986) the results from the interviews were coded and subsequently analysed qualitatively rather than statistically.

Findings

The questionnaire (Appendix A) reports all the response rates for each question as a percentage of the 352 respondents. A rough comparison with the data provided by the Technical Support Centre (Gardner 2003) indicates that, while Arts and Agriculture students were probably overrepresented in the sample at the expense of students of Economics and of Social Sciences, the proportions

between genders and years of study[2] seemed to reflect those in the entire population (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that respondents showed a clear tendency to actively choose the English version. In fact, 80% of the 88 students who filled in the version at the back (thus actively "looking for it") filled in the English version. Since, as suggested by the pilot test, many students simply filled in the first version they encountered, more copies with isiXhosa in front were provided so that the number of versions in the two languages was roughly equal.

Table 1: Breakdown of the sample in terms of gender and subject studied (figures for the entire population in brackets).

	Agriculture		Arts		Economics		Law		Science		Social Sciences		Total	
Males	7%	(3%)	9%	(4%)	4%	(9%)	7%	(7%)	6%	(6%)	6%	(9%)	39%	(39%)
Females	5%	(3%)	13%	(6%)	8%	(14%)	4%	(4%)	10%	(11%)	16%	(24%)	58%	(61%)
Total	12%	(6%)	22%	(10%)	12%	(23%)	11%	(11%)	16%	(17%)	22%	(33%)	95%	(100%)

English as a language and as a medium of instruction

English plays a major role in South African society: it is the main language of intra-national and international communication and it works as a sort of "access key" to upward mobility (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000). The communicative and participatory functions of English were explicitly recognised by at least half of the subjects of the present survey. Fort Hare isiXhosa-speaking students, in fact, emphasised the importance of English in communicating with non-isiXhosa speakers at all levels: on campus, nation-wide and internationally. The participatory function of English was deeply intertwined with its communicative value: English was considered an important *lingua franca* and, as such, it was recognised as an important prerequisite for getting a good job.[3]

Evidence from the interviews suggests that English was considered a marker of status and an important component of the identity of university students, and that it was strongly associated with tertiary education (as recognised by at least one quarter of the respondents to the questionnaire). One of the interviewees

claimed that some students, coming home from university, insisted on speaking English even with family and friends.

Surprisingly, only a small minority (9%) of the 352 respondents recognised the symbolic value of English as the language of liberation and of the struggle against Apartheid, mentioned by Reagan (1986) and Webb (1996). Nevertheless, an equally small portion (7%) expressed negative attitudes towards English as a language of oppression and division (see Barkhuizen & Gough 1996:458). According to the NCHE (1996), such negative attitudes could be a consequence of the hegemony of English in education. The possibility of solving the problem by promoting the use of Black South African English (Gough 1996; De Klerk 2002), though interesting in its own right, was not relevant to the present study. Nevertheless, an interesting consideration with respect to the integrative function of this variety of English was that 50% of the students claimed to be proud of their Xhosa accent in English, as long as it did not hamper communication.

At least half of the students seemed to endorse the English-functional arguments (intrinsic, extrinsic and functional) described by Phillipson (1992). Unlike isiXhosa, which was clearly associated with the Xhosa culture and world view, English was not considered to be linked to any particular culture. This view of English as non-culturally-loaded contrasts with the constant reference to English as the language of the "real world" (the workplace and, presumably, the Western economic system) in both interviews and questionnaires. One of the interviewees noted that, for isiXhosa speakers, English is not the language of their cultural heritage and of intense personal feelings (a position expressed also by Annamalai, Jernudd and Rubin (1986:9).

Students seemed to value the resources English gives access to. The respondents acknowledged the dominant role of English in education in South Africa and most of them subscribed to the belief that English-medium schooling was of a better quality. This is confirmed by the fact that, according to 88% of the students, English should be introduced as a medium of instruction in pre-school or lower primary school. What Phillipson (1992) calls the immaterial resources that English gives access to (knowledge, know-how and practical

skills) were considered to be a strong argument in favour of an English-medium policy in education particularly in those academic fields, such as Economics and Science, in which the dominance of English and the importance of international research is more evident. The fact that most textbooks are in English and that teaching staff have been trained in English was not a crucial concern for the students, and only a small minority (3 out of 352, i.e. 1%) considered these as the main reasons to retain an English-only policy. The possible additional costs of a more extensive use of isiXhosa as LOLT were mentioned by 2% (7 out of 352) of the students as a reason to retain the *status quo.* Overall, only 9% of the respondents appeared to consider the practical problems connected with mother-tongue instruction a good reason to go on using only English.

The function of English as a *lingua franca*, already mentioned above, was probably the main argument (mentioned by at least 27% of the respondents) in favour of the use of English as a medium of instruction. At Fort Hare, English was considered crucial for communication with non-isiXhosa-speaking lecturers and students. As far as communication with lecturers was concerned, it is important to note that, as shown in both questionnaires and interviews, the introduction of dual-mediumship was opposed mainly by those students who had never been taught by isiXhosa speakers (such as students of Computer Science, for instance). The presence of a high percentage of non-isiXhosa-speaking and international students, as in the case of the Faculty of Agriculture (where approximately 130 out of the 322 students (40%) were not isiXhosa speakers), seemed to predict negative attitudes towards the use of isiXhosa as LOLT.

With respect to the pedagogical advantages of using English as LOLT, students appeared to endorse three commonly-held (mis)conceptions: 1) the sooner Xhosa children start using English as LOLT in school, the better; 2) mother-tongue instruction impedes the development of English proficiency and 3) knowledge acquired in one language cannot be transferred to another. Although these three assumptions contradict the findings of international (Cummins 1986; Baker & Jones 1997) and national (MacDonald 1990; Luckett 1995; Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000; Sweetnam-Evans 2001) research, it is

interesting to note that students seemed to take them as given facts, and hardly felt the need to express them in an explicit form. Thus, the instrumental value of English was mentioned by approximately one-tenth of the sample as an argument against mother-tongue instruction (see Table 2), seemingly implying that if students were taught in isiXhosa, they would not become proficient in English and their knowledge would be useless in an English-dominated workplace.

Table 2: Reasons given by students to support the *status quo*.
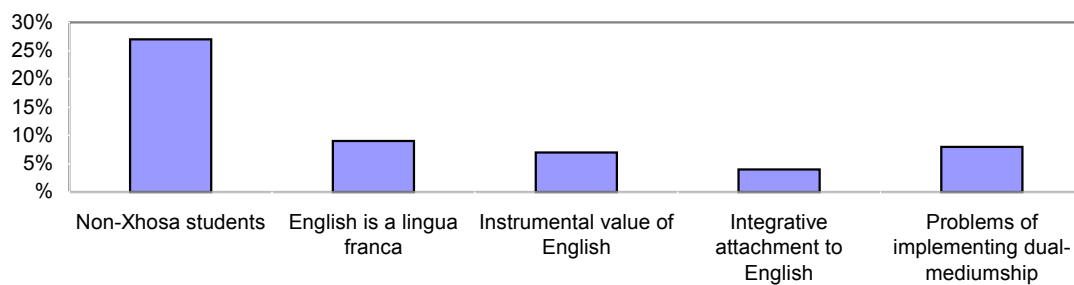
The role of isiXhosa

Respondents revealed very positive attitudes towards isiXhosa, they are proud of being Xhosa and eager to speak about their language and culture. Positive attitudes appeared to be stronger in the later years of study (e.g. support for the belief that isiXhosa was important for integrative reasons increased by 14% over the study career), suggesting that the university experience somehow reinforced the sense of *Xhosa-ness* in the students. An alternative explanation is that students in their early years of study were somehow more eager to distance themselves from the "traditional world" they formerly belonged to, with which isiXhosa was strongly associated. Females expressed a more integrative orientation towards isiXhosa (126 out of 203 (63%), as opposed to 68 out of 139 (49%) for males[4]), while the instrumental value of the language was recognised mainly by students in the Faculty of Arts, most of whom were students of isiXhosa as a first language and prospective language teachers. Consistent with modern sociolinguistic research (Milroy 1980), males claimed to speak a less prestigious variety than females, with widespread code-mixing with English and *Tsotsitaal*. Observation showed that, at Fort Hare, isiXhosa was by far the main

medium of informal communication on campus. Three of the interviewees reported that, possibly because of this, some non-isiXhosa speaking students had started learning the language for casual communication.

The interviews suggest that the use of isiXhosa was considered more appropriate to informal domains such as family and peer group communication. In spite of this, evidence suggests that isiXhosa played a very important role in the academic context in supplementing explanations in English both in lectures and tutorials. Although this topic was not covered in the questionnaire, the fact that both English and isiXhosa were commonly used was mentioned by five of the 352 respondents (approximately 1%), and five interviewees out of nine (all of those who had isiXhosa-speaking lecturers in their faculty) reported that code-switching and code-mixing were taking place in lectures and/or tutorials. These respondents all appeared to regard this practice as beneficial.

The development of isiXhosa and other African languages for academic purposes is considered a crucial issue in the academic debate on their use as LOLT at tertiary level (NCHE 1996; Alidou & Mazrui 1999; Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000). Most respondents (79%) agreed that African languages had been neglected in the past, confirming the view expressed by Luckett (1995) and Alexander (2001). At least half of the students seemed confident about the possibility of developing isiXhosa to be used as LOLT, while an additional 24% seemed to think that no development was needed. The University of Fort Hare, being situated in a traditionally Xhosa area, was mentioned by one of the interviewees and by half a dozen respondents to the questionnaire as the ideal place for such a task.

Table 3 reflects the view of students in each faculty. According to 16 (43%) of the 38 Agriculture students who filled in the questionnaire, no development was necessary to use isiXhosa as LOLT in their faculty. Support for the development of isiXhosa was particularly strong in the Faculty of Arts (63% of the 76 respondents) and, not surprisingly, it was weaker in more "Westernised" and "technical" faculties such as Economics and Science, where approximately one quarter of the students were openly against it. As students moved across years of study (and their self-assessed isiXhosa proficiency increased) their

confidence in the possibility of creating new technical terms in isiXhosa increased, while reliance on English borrowings was typical mainly of first year students. In informal communication and study groups, the borrowing and *isiXhosa-isation* of English technical terms to fit them into discussions in isiXhosa was common practice, as noted by some of the interviewees and confirmed by observation on campus.

Table 3: Development of isiXhosa for academic purposes according to subject studied.
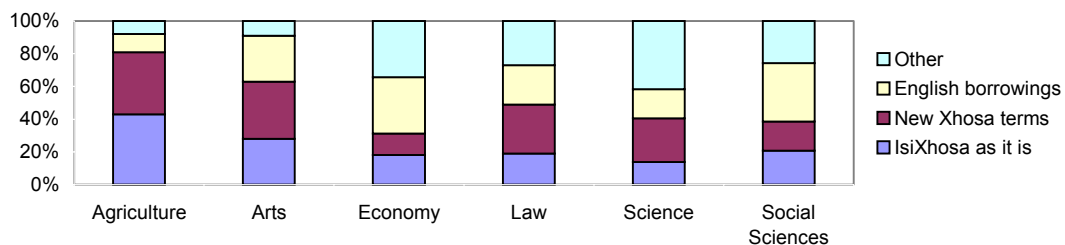
While Alexander (2001), Sweetnam-Evans (2001) and the CHE (2001) stress the crucial role of the university in leading the switch towards a more extensive use of African languages in education, 11 respondents out of 352 (approximately 3%) pointed out that it made no sense to use isiXhosa as LOLT at university while English was used at previous levels.

Dual-mediumship

The term dual-mediumship did not seem to be appropriate when discussing the attitudes of Fort Hare students towards the use of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction. As suggested by the research conducted by Barkhuizen (2001) at lower levels of education, students appeared to have in mind a more complex relationship between the roles of English and isiXhosa in education. The possible role of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction changed according to different domains, years of study and subjects studied. First of all, within the academic context, the use of isiXhosa seemed more appropriate in some domains than in others. While in informal study groups isiXhosa was widely

used, only some tutors used isiXhosa in their tutorials and, during lectures, isiXhosa was used only to supplement explanations in English. As mentioned above, those interviewees who had direct experience of this practice considered it helpful. The instrumental value of isiXhosa in the academic context, though, did not seem to challenge the dominance of English in the most formal aspects, such as exams.

It is quite clear that the use of isiXhosa as an additional LOLT was considered more appropriate for the first year than in following years of study. This appears to reflect the common practice of using code-switching in lectures and tutorials mainly with first year students, in order to facilitate the transition from secondary school to university. Together with levels of self-assessed isiXhosa proficiency, support for the belief that using their mother tongue as LOLT would help students understand things better was relatively stable at undergraduate level (approximately one-third of the respondents) and increased at postgraduate level (almost half). Support for the belief that using isiXhosa would improve academic performance, on the other hand, decreased by 15% during the study career (see Table 4). It is interesting to note that students were more likely to believe that using isiXhosa would improve their understanding (40%) rather than their marks (20%).

Table 4: Using isiXhosa as LOLT improves...
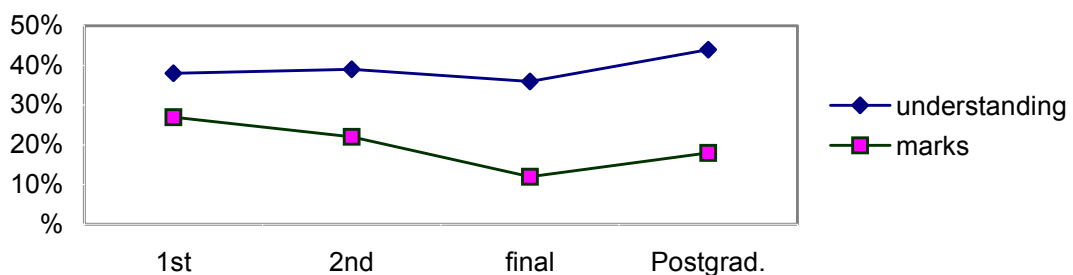
IsiXhosa was seen as more appropriate for teaching some subjects than for others. The Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences seemed to be those in which students felt that the use of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction should be implemented first. The reasons given in the interviews were that their graduates

would probably have more contact with the isiXhosa speaking community (think, for instance, about graduates in Social Work) and that it would be relatively easy to develop new isiXhosa terminology for the subjects taught in these two faculties. Almost half of Agriculture students seemed to think that isiXhosa could be readily used to teach their subject, but the presence of a high percentage of non-isiXhosa-speaking students made this issue particularly contentious. Evidence suggests that students of Economics and Science were those who opposed the use of isiXhosa as LOLT the most, both because of the difficulties connected to its underdevelopment and because of a generally more "international" orientation. For students of Science, an additional reason to be suspicious about the use of isiXhosa as LOLT was that, since they had hardly any isiXhosa-speaking lecturers, they had never enjoyed the advantages of code-switching experienced by other students.

Opinions about the possible long-term consequences of the use of isiXhosa as an additional medium of instruction highlighted the differences between various groups of students. Females, students of Economics and Science and respondents in later years of study appeared to emphasise negative consequences, such as a drop in the international status of the university and future difficulties in finding a job or continuing one's studies abroad (expressed by approximately one-third of the respondents each) (see Table 5). On the other hand, evidence suggests that males, Arts students and second year students believed that using isiXhosa would have positive effects such as allowing more Xhosa students to go to university and providing graduates with a better understanding of the subject studied.

Table 5: Consequences of dual-mediumship for Fort Hare and its graduates according to
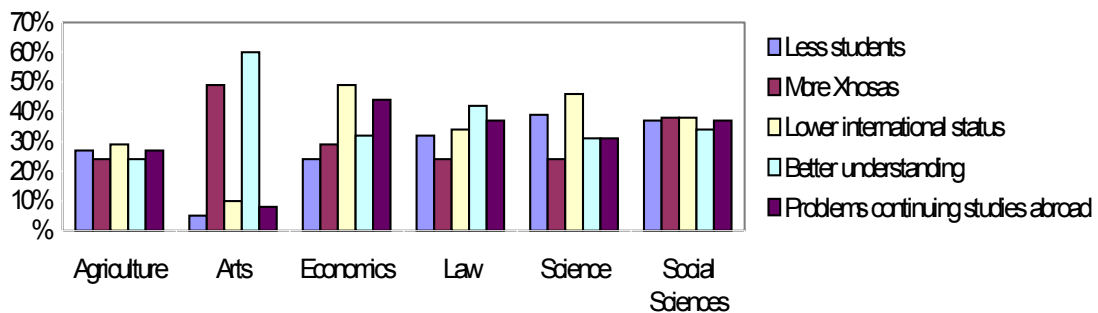
   (a) gender.
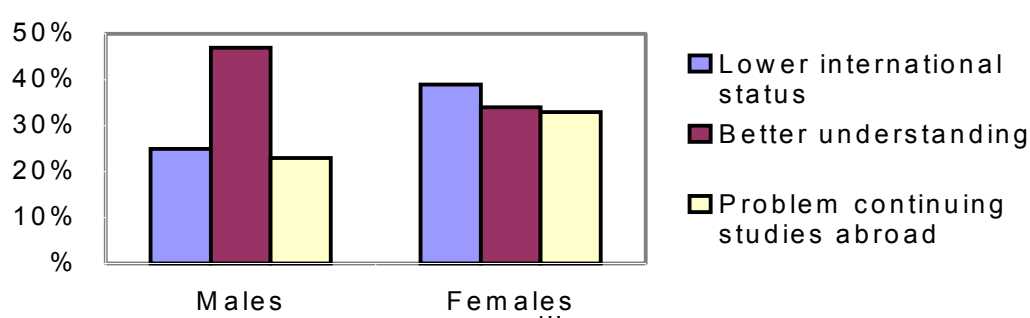
(b) year of study.
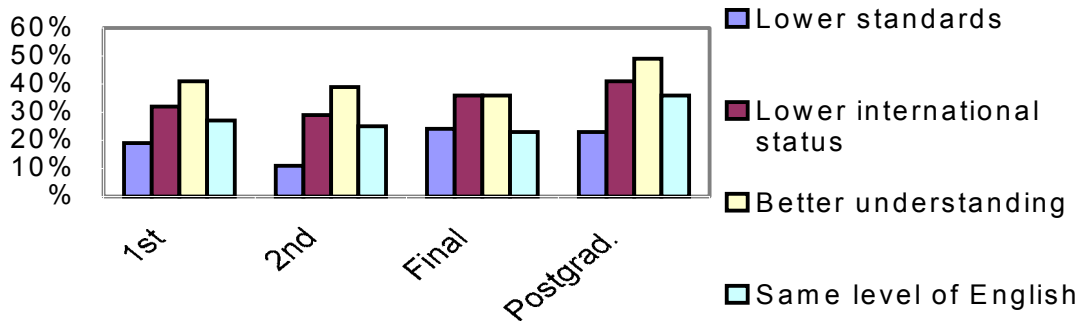
(c) subject studied.

Discussion

Respondents in the present study definitely acknowledged the role of English as the dominant language of South Africa, both in education and in other higher-status domains. In particular, students emphasised the role of English as a *lingua franca* and its importance for communication with speakers of other languages both nationally and internationally. Because of its communicative power, English was considered a "must have" in order to find a good job and, consistent with an observation by Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000), it was identified as a key to upward mobility. Students were therefore afraid of not achieving sufficient English proficiency, and this clearly influenced their attitudes towards the use of their mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

A second very important issue was the presence of non-isiXhosa speaking students at Fort Hare. In fact, as in the study conducted by Dyers (1998) on a

comparable group of students at UWC, at Fort Hare there was widespread concern that using isiXhosa as LOLT would create tensions with speakers of other African languages. In this sense, it seems that English was not considered "neutral" *per se*, but rather "equally distant" for all speakers of an African language. Although equality of treatment among languages is a sound principle, in practice this point of view seems to reiterate the inequalities of the past. In fact, it is interesting to note that, while no speaker of an African language is supposed to have an advantage over a speaker of a different African language, it is tacitly accepted that the only students who can benefit from mother tongue education up to university level are speakers of English or Afrikaans (Heugh 2000). It is interesting to note that while isiXhosa was strongly associated with the Xhosa culture, English was not associated with any particular culture, but simply referred to as the language of the "real world". With respect to this, Phillipson (1992) notes the contradiction between a view of English as non-ethnic, supported by Wardhaugh (1987, cited in Phillipson 1992:275), and its role as the language of Western civilisation and scientific knowledge.

Contrary to respondents in similar studies (see De Klerk 1996), very few Fort Hare students displayed an enthusiastic and integrative orientation towards English. English seemed something that students had to come to terms with, rather than a freely chosen and desirable option. In spite of this, English was strongly associated with tertiary education and was considered a marker of the respondents' identity as university students. There were clues that some students, coming home from university, might insist on speaking English even with family and friends. If true, this would support the claim, made by Alidou and Mazrui (1999), that the university experience contributes to the alienation of the African elite from their community. In our view, the strong integrative attachment to isiXhosa expressed by the students (which seems to increase during the study career), indicates that this is not the case and it is rather a way (mainly for first year students) to "mark the difference" from secondary school and enjoy the status attached to the use of English in their community.

IsiXhosa was considered a very important component of the Xhosa culture and of the students' identity. Consistent with research on language attitudes in

South Africa (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000; Barkhuizen 2001), the use of isiXhosa was considered more appropriate to informal domains. Although some of the respondents found the idea of using isiXhosa as a LOLT at university outrageous or at best amusing, there were strong indications that those who experienced code-switching between English and isiXhosa in class and tutorials found it beneficial. Thus, while they were averse to a rigid choice between English or isiXhosa as LOLT, respondents seemed to believe that isiXhosa had an important role to play in the academic context.

Although underdevelopment and lack of technical terms in the African languages are oft-cited arguments to exclude them from the academic context (Alidou & Mazrui 1999), comparatively few students thought that it would be impossible to use or at least develop isiXhosa for use as LOLT at university. Instead, the issue of the development of isiXhosa was most likely influenced by attitudes towards its use as LOLT in general, and therefore the question did not seem to be whether it *could*, but rather whether it *should* be developed. Not surprisingly, isiXhosa was considered more appropriate to subjects (such as Agriculture, for instance) somehow closer to the Xhosa traditional way of life rather than typically Westernised and technological subjects. In our view, this perpetuates the exclusion of isiXhosa from very empowering subjects, such as Economics and Information Technology for instance, which are likely to remain the exclusive domain of English.

The use of isiXhosa was considered more appropriate to the first year of study, in order to help students adjust from secondary school (where code-switching is frequently used) to university. However, comparatively few students seemed to consider the possibility of studying some subjects entirely through their mother tongue. This suggests that, in the model most students had in mind, isiXhosa would be gradually "phased out" and the ultimate goal would still be the sole use of English in the final year. This appeared to be based on the fear, expressed mainly by students in their final year and highlighted by Dlamini (2001), that a prospective employer would be suspicious of someone who received part of his or her tertiary education in an African language.

English being the main language of assessment, the use of isiXhosa was believed to help students' understanding of the things they studied rather than improve overall academic performance. From a pedagogical point of view, there was general agreement that studying things in isiXhosa would help students with low levels of English proficiency, and only in a few cases did respondents complain that it would be confusing to start using isiXhosa at university while English is (officially) used at lower levels. The main concern of the students seemed to be the fear that using their mother tongue as LOLT would result in lower levels of English proficiency. Although contrary to international (Cummins 1986; Baker & Jones 1997) and South African (Sweetnam 2001) research, this fear might be based on the students' experience at lower levels of education. In fact, as noted by Heugh (2000), African languages are widely used in many rural and township schools to complement English explanations, and students might attribute the inadequacy in English most of them reportedly felt on entrance to university to this prior practice. In our view (see also De Klerk 2000), this might be a consequence of under-funding and difficult teaching conditions in such schools rather than a direct effect of code-switching. The point, raised by Dlamini (2001), that it is easier to learn English when it is also used as LOLT than when it is just studied as a language, though relevant in its own right, does not apply to the present situation. In fact, the possibility of using only isiXhosa as a medium of instruction for all subjects was not part of our study.

Conclusions

English is no doubt the dominant language in South Africa and plays a key role as a *lingua franca* both nationally and internationally. It is also a key to upward mobility and a prerequisite to get better jobs. This study indicates that Fort Hare isiXhosa-speaking students acknowledged these two important functions of English and this influenced their attitudes towards the use of their mother tongue as LOLT at university.

First of all, respondents feared that using isiXhosa would create tensions with speakers of other languages. This attitude, a legacy of the Apartheid divide-

and-rule policy, predicts that English will remain the only dominant language and that no African language can acquire status. Secondly, some of the respondents feared that using their mother tongue as LOLT would entail lower levels of English proficiency. Although openly expressed by only one-tenth of the respondents, it is reasonable to assume that this belief shaped the possible role that students attributed to isiXhosa within the academic context at Fort Hare.

Although code-switching between English and isiXhosa, whenever present, was considered beneficial, most students indicated clear limits for the use of their mother tongue as a medium of instruction. IsiXhosa was generally considered more suitable for the first year of study and for subjects in the faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and, to a lesser extent, Agriculture. On the other hand, English was considered more appropriate to "crucial" domains (such as exams) and to more "prestigious" and empowering subjects (such as Economics and Information Technology).

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Appendix A: English version of the questionnaire

(Response rates are provided for each question)

Please note: this questionnaire is aimed at mother-tongue speakers of isiXhosa. If isiXhosa is not your first language OR you have filled in this questionnaire before OR you are not going to fill it in, please redirect this form to a Xhosa student. **THERE IS A TRANSLATION INTO ISIXHOSA AT THE BACK**, please fill in **either** the English **or** the isiXhosa version. Thank you for your help!

INTRODUCTION

My name is Lorenzo Dalvit and I am doing my Master's in Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Rhodes University, in Grahamstown. This questionnaire is part of my research and I would be really grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete it.

The University of Fort Hare, like many other South African universities, is currently developing a new language policy. This questionnaire is aimed at finding out what Xhosa students think and how they feel about using isiXhosa, together with English, to learn and teach at University level. Filling in the form should take approximately 20 minutes. Your help is deeply appreciated!

Version filled in

	Front	Back
English	23%	20%
IsiXhosa	52%	5%

PART 1: Personal data

Gender: male 41%   female 59%

Year of study: 1st 22%   2nd 33%   final year 34%   post-graduates 11%

Which subject are you studying? Agriculture 12%   Arts 22%   Economics 12%   Law 11%   Science 16%   Social Sciences 22%

PART 2: Questions (rearranged to follow the order of presentation of the findings and sorted by theme)

Please note: the symbol "LS" attached to a question indicates that it is a Likert-scale type question. For this type of question the response categories are "SA" (strongly agree), "A" (agree), "DK" (don't know), "D" (disagree) and "SD" (strongly disagree). The symbol "SC" (single-choice) attached to a question indicates that the respondents could choose only one option (and therefore the total of all percentages is 100%) and "MC" (multiple-choice) indicates that the respondents could choose more than one option (therefore the total may exceed 100%).

English as a language and as a medium of instruction

Perceptions of English

English is the language of[MC]:

international contact (70%)	tertiary education (24%)
division (7%)	corruption (4%)
public affairs (14%)	oppression (7%)
ambition (5%)	national unity (24%)
liberation (9%)	other (mainly communication) (7%)

Pronunciation in English

When I speak English to an English native speaker[SC]:

I try to sound like a mother-tongue speaker of English (23%)

I am proud of my Xhosa accent and I stick to it (50%)

I don't care about my accent (27%)

Introduction of English as LOLT

English should be introduced as the language of learning and teaching[(SC)]:

from the very beginning (67%)	in secondary school (2%)
during lower primary school (21%)	at university (1%)
during higher primary school (3%)	never: it should just be studied as a subject (7%)

English speakers in education

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
In education, mother-tongue English-speakers have an unfair advantage over African language speakers[(LS)]	26%	34%	13%	20%	7%

Self-assessed English academic proficiency

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
My English is good enough to cope with university studies[(LS)]	40%	31%	8%	14%	7%

The role of isiXhosa

Importance of isiXhosa

IsiXhosa is important[(MC)]:

As an official language (58%)	it is not important (8%)
because it will help me to get a job (9%)	other (mainly "for cultural reasons") (7%)
because it is the language of my people (57%)	

Oral and written proficiencies in isiXhosa

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
I speak isiXhosa well[(LS)]	73%	23%	2%	2%	-
I write isiXhosa well[(LS)]	71%	23%	3%	3%	1%
I read isiXhosa well[(LS)]	67%	26%	2%	4%	1%

Difference between spoken and written isiXhosa

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
Written isiXhosa is very different to the type of isiXhosa I speak[(LS)]	24%	49%	4%	16%	6%

Past neglect of African languages

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
IsiXhosa and other African languages have been neglected in the past[(LS)]	47%	32%	9%	9%	3%

Development of isiXhosa

If isiXhosa were used to learn and teach at Fort Hare[(SC)]:

isiXhosa can be used to express academic ideas (24%)

new technical terms in isiXhosa should be developed (27%)

English technical terms could be fitted in isiXhosa explanations (27%)

other (mainly opposing the development of isiXhosa for academic use) (22%)

Dual-mediumship

Dual-mediumship

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
Fort Hare should become a dual medium (English and isiXhosa) university[(LS)]	29%	30%	7%	20%	14%

Feasibility of dual-mediumship

I think that for Fort Hare to become a dual medium (English and isiXhosa) university is[SC]:

possible, and it should be done (49%)   impossible (20%)

possible, but it shouldn't be done

(31%)

Preferred role of isiXhosa

At Fort Hare, isiXhosa should be[MC]:

studied as a subject (54%)

used only to teach the language itself (38%)

used to teach some of the undergraduate courses (11%)

used to teach some of the postgraduate courses (6%)

other (mainly "as an optional subject" (3%); "only for translations " (1%) or "it has no place at all" (1%))

Faculties in which isiXhosa should be used as LOLT

At Fort Hare, isiXhosa should be used alongside English as a language of learning and teaching mainly in the Faculties of[MC]:

Agriculture (21%)	Education (36%)	Social Sciences (32%)
Arts (21%)	Law (18%)	None (24%)
Economics (14%)	Science (14%)	

Language of a course and relative exam

The language of a course, including the exam, should be[SC]:

the mother-tongue of the lecturer (9%)

the language of the majority of the students in the course (39%)

other (mainly "English" (30%); "a language that everybody understands" (17%) and "both English and isiXhosa" (5%))

Decision on the language of a course and relative exam

The language of a course, including exam, should be decided by$^{(SC)}$:

A meeting between the students and the lecturer at the beginning of each course (38%)

the university (50%)

other (mainly "government" and "industry") (12%)

Language problems at Fort Hare

The most important language problem at Fort Hare is$^{(SC)}$:

that most students don't speak English well enough (44%)

students are forced to study in English which, for most of them, is a second language (34%)

there is no language problem at Fort Hare (22%)

Effects of studying in isiXhosa

To study in isiXhosa$^{(MC)}$:

would make me feel more confident (31%)

would help me understand things better (36%)

would help me get higher marks (19%)

other (mainly "it would not help" (6%) and "it should not be done" (9%))

Use of isiXhosa in some courses and in exams

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
At university, I'd rather study some things in isiXhosa and learn how to translate my knowledge into English, than study everything in English$^{(LS)}$	17%	30%	5%	31%	16%
If either English or isiXhosa could be used in the exams, that would help students overcome their language problems$^{(LS)}$	32%	33%	13%	14%	8%

Standards of teaching of isiXhosa-speaking lecturers

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
IsiXhosa-speaking lecturers would be better lecturers if they could teach in isiXhosa[LS]	34%	28%	13%	17%	9%

Consequences of dual-mediumship for the university

If Fort Hare becomes a dual medium (English and isiXhosa) university[MC]:

the standard of teaching will decline (19%)

it will be harder to get funding (13%)

the number of students will decrease (26%)

more Xhosa students will be able to go to university (32%)

it will affect the international status of Fort Hare negatively (34%)

other (mainly favourable to the use of isiXhosa) (14%)

Consequences of dual-mediumship for the university

If Fort Hare becomes a dual medium university, its graduates[MC]:

will have a better understanding of the topics they have studied (38%)

will still speak English as well as they do now (26%)

will have more problems finding a job (24%)

will have more problems continuing their studies abroad (29%)

other (5%)

PART 3: Comments and contact details

Feel free to use the blank sheet at the end of the questionnaire if you have any additional comments or suggestions to add. Please leave your details <u>if you want to be contacted for an interview</u>.

Name: _____   Telephone nr: _____

e- mail: _____   Address in Alice: _____

Notes

[1] With respect to this, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Professor B. Mini, former Editor in Chief of the isiXhosa Dictionary Unit of the University of Fort Hare, for putting her own time and efforts into making sure that the translation into isiXhosa was of high quality.

[2] The data provided by the University for year of study were incomplete and this variable has not been included in Table 1. Anyway, whenever a comparison was possible it confirmed that the proportions in the sample reflected those in the entire population.

[3] Both beliefs are supported by the findings of recent research on the role of English in South Africa (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000).

[4] Please note that the number of males and females does not add up to the total number of students because 10 students did not reveal their gender.