

**The nexus between
Community Engagement
and Academic Language Development**

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Abstract

Community engagement (CE) is now widely considered a core function of higher education worldwide. In South African higher education institutions (HEIs), there is an increasing focus on CE as a means of transforming the role of the university in society, though the forms and shapes of CE vary by institution. CE is positioned as part of the means of addressing the challenges within the South African education system, such as ensuring equity in academic access in the face of diversity and making sure higher education institutions are responsive to the needs of society. Community Engagement is increasingly being afforded the same status as teaching and learning and research in higher education. The idea that higher education should function as a public good is central to this.

This study reflects on how CE can be expansively viewed as places of learning for students to achieve epistemic access with epistemic justice, particularly in increasing diverse and changing contexts. Despite the growing research on CE in HEIs, there is comparatively limited focus on the intersection between CE and language use and potential linkages with identity and epistemic access and success.

Given that one of the major challenges in South African HEIs relate to difficulties experienced by students whose home language is not English, the experiences of students learning within CE contexts within those institutions warrants investigation. The main aim of this study was to explore second language English speaking students' experiences of language in the Engaged Citizen Programme, a Community Engagement programme at Rhodes University aimed at offering students the opportunity of enhanced learning, giving students the opportunity to evaluate the theories and ideas taught in the university against the realities of the South African context. The programme is also intended to offer students the opportunity to learn with and from communities and thereby enable personal growth (ECP Handbook: 2020; p.3). Using an in-depth phenomenological approach, this study explored diverse students' experiences of language use in both community engaged programmes and in the classroom as a basis for understanding the role language plays in such spaces and the impact of these programmes on epistemic access, justice and success for students in HEIs. The study explored the role that CE plays for second language English students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging in HEIs.

In CE activities, such as the Engaged Citizen Programme, unlike traditional classroom learning, English is often not the medium of instruction, as learning takes place in community sites, where multiple other languages are spoken. In the traditional classrooms, English is the dominant medium of instruction which can bring challenges for students whose home language is not English. Students are faced with various challenges including failure to communicate effectively and understand content knowledge. Significantly this study found that this often related to a sense of self-worth and belonging and constrained their participation and engagement in class.

It was evident from the students' reflections on their experiences in the Engaged Citizen Programme that CE provided a more flexible space generally more comfortable to these participants; a space that promotes engaged learning without rigid rules. The students' reflections affirmed the contribution of CE in promoting engagement of students outside the formal classes and enhancing the ways in which they use language freely. It was also evident from the students' reflections that CE provided a space in which students can identify who they are and have a sense of belonging. In the context of diversity, the majority of the students said they come to the university feeling a level of under preparedness and cannot identify with dominant groups. The reflections from the students' experiences therefore offer some insights into ways in which we can actively promote CE in supporting student access and addressing issues of epistemic justice in higher education. The findings suggest that many of the benefits of CE, such as higher levels of interaction and significant amounts of translanguaging, need to be brought into the formal classroom spaces because they enhanced student engagement. While CE was also seen to be challenging and there were calls for more support, the essence of the experience was as a space of personal development and awareness of social responsibility. The explicit normative value of CE was in contrast to the absence of such considerations in the formal HE curriculum and the student experiences suggest that much could be learned from this.

The use of English, both on campus and in CE activities, was found to be value-laden and politically charged. The participants, black students who spoke English as an additional language, all related experiences of English being positioned as a 'superior' language. The students who were highly fluent in English experienced being positioned as 'showing off' and seen to have 'forgotten their roots'. Students who were not highly fluent in English, on the

other hand, often constrained their participation in class because they experienced concern that their mispronunciations and accents may be mocked. The essence of the experience of language use in both formal classroom settings and in CE activities is that this is tightly bound to identity and is ideologically fraught. This requires more explicit conversation in all learning spaces.

Abstract

Kubahirana pamwe nenharaunda (KPN) (CE) iko zvino kwave kutariswa zvakananyanya sembiru yebasa redzidzo yepamusoro pasirese. MuSouth Africa muzvikoro zvedzidzo yepamusoro (ZZY) (HEIs), kune kuwedzera kwekupa nguva kuKPN kunyangwe mamiriro uye maumbirwo eKPN achisiyana zvichienderana nechikoro chacho. Nematambudziko ari mukati memunezvedzidzo muSouth Africa uye nekumwewo, sekuenzanisira mukuwanikwa kwedzidzo mukusiyana kwevanhu nemaitiro uye kuona kuti zvikoro zvepamusoro zvinoteerera zvinodiwa munharaunda, KPN yaakupihwa kukosha kumwechete nekudzidzisa nekudzidza uyewonetsvagiridzo mudzidzo yepamusoro nechinangwa chekushandura nzira idzo ruzivo rwunoshandurwa mukushanda kwedzidzo yepamusoro sechinhu chakanakira munhu wese (ona Bhagwan: 2017). Shanduko yemaonero ekugadzirwa kwezivo nebase remayunivhesiti mumagariro, kubva kunzira dzakare dzekuzvionera pamusoro kuenda kumayunivhesiti anobatikana nenharaunda zvinoonekwa senzira chaiyo yekuzadzisa chinangwa chekuti mayunivhesiti ave anodavira kune zvakaпотeredza, aine mutoro nazvo uye achiunza shanduko. Pamwongo wemakakatanwa anechekuita neKPN panenyaya yekuti KPN inogona kutariswa zvakananyanya sevanze dzekudzidza dzevadzidzi uye kuwana kupinda munezveruzivo nezvekururamisira, kunyanya mukuwedzera kwokusiyana nekushanduka kwemamiriro ezvinhu. Zvakadaro, kunyangwe paine kukura mukufarirwa kweKPN muZZY, kune kushomeka kwekutarisa panosangana KPN nekushandiswa kwemutauro uye hukama nezvekuti unozviti uri ani uye kuwana kupinda munezvezivo nekubudirira.

Muchiitiko chekudzidza kuburikidza nezviiwa zveKPN, zvichisiyana nekudzidza muimba yekudzidzira (kirasi) kwagara kuripo muZZY, Chirungu hachisiriicho nzira yekuraira nayo, sezvo kudzidza kuchiitika munzvimbo dzirimunharaunda. Mumakirasi ekudzidza kwagara kuripo, Chirungu ndomutauro unonyanyoshandiswa pakurairidza izvo zvinogona kuita kuti vadzidzi vanotaura mutauro usiri Chirungu kumba vatarisane nematambudziko anosanganisira kukundikana kutaura zvavarikuda, kuvenehukama nezvirikuitika chaizvo uye kunzwisisa ruzivo rwezinodzidzwa zvinogona kukanganisa kutora chikamu kwavo nokubahirana kwavo nezvinengezvichiitika mukirasi.

Nokuda kwokuti rimwe rematambudziko makuru muZZY zvemuSouth Africa rinechekuita nezvinetso zvinosangana nevadzidzi vane mutauro wekumba usiri Chirungu, panefanirwo

yekuoongorora zvinosanganikwa nazvo nevadzidzi mukati meKPN. Wongororo iyi idavidzo kumukaha uyu. Chinangwa chikuru chewongororo iyi chachiri chekuongorora zvinosanganikwa nazvo nevadzidzi vanotaura Chirungu semutauro wechipiri muEngaged Citizen Programme, chironzwa cheCommunity Engagement chine chinangwa chekupa vadzidzi mukana wekusimudzira madzidziro, kupa vadzidzi mukana wekuyera/kuongorora pfungwa dzirimukudzidza nemaonero munezvinodzidziswa muyunivhesiti zvichiyenziswa nezviri kuitika muSouth Africa pamwe nekupa vadzidzi mukana wekudzidza kubva kune nepamwe nenharaunda zvichitungamirira kukukura semunhu mumwe nemumwe (ECP Handbook: 2020; p.3) paRhodes University, inovayunivhesiti inoshandisaChirungu pakurairidza. Ichishandisa nemaitiro akadzama nzira yekuongorora inonzi phenomenological approach wongororo iyi yakatarisa zvinosanganikwa nazvo zvevadzidzi vakasiyana-siyana mukushandiswa kwemutauro muzvirongwa zvokubatirana pamwe nenharaunda uye mukirasi sehwaro hwekunzwisisa zvibereko zvezvirongwa izvi pakuwanikwa kwezvezivo, kururamisira uye kubudirira kwevadzidzi muZZY. Wongororo iyi yangayakanangawo zvakare kuongorora basa rinoitwa neKPN kuvadzidzi avo mutauro wechipiri urichiRungu pavanenge vachiedza kupindura mibvunzo yakaoma inechekuita nezvekuti ndivanaani uye nekuva kwavo chikamu chemuZZY.

Zvakava pachena kubva mukufungisisa kwevadzidzi pamusoro pekuvevangavarimuchirongwa Engaged Citizen Programme kuti KPN kwakavapa nzvimbo yakasununguka uye yakagadzikana, inosimudzira kudzidza kunobata pasina mitemo yakaoma/isingashandurwi. Kufungisisa kwevadzidzi kwakasimbisa zvinounzwa neKPN mukusimudzira kuvanechekuita kwevadzidzi munezvinoitika kunze kwemakirasi nekusimudzira nzira dzavanoshandisa mutauro nadzo vakasununguka. Zvaivawo pachena kubva mukufungisisa kwevadzidzi kuti CE yakapa nzvimbo yekuti vadzidzi vazive kuti ndivanaani uye kuti vanzwe kuti ndevepi. Mumamiriro ekusiyana kwezvinhu, vazhinji vevadzidzi vakati vanouya kuyunivhesiti vachinzwa vaine chiyero chekugadzirira chepasi uye vasingagoni kufambidzana nevemapoka aripamusoro/anemukundo. Zvakabuda mukufungisisa kwevadzidzi pamusoro pezvavakapinda mazviri/zvavakasangana nazvo zvinopa mamwe manzwisisiro atingashandisa enzira dzatingashingairira nadzo kusimudzira CE mukutsigira vadzidzi kuwana kupinda nekugadzirisa nyaya dzekururamisira munezvezivo mudzidzo yepamusoro.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT	III
ABSTRACT	VI
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	XII
LIST OF ACRONYMS	XIII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The research journey	1
1.2 Research problem	2
1.3 Brief overview of Community Engagement	3
1.4 The structure of the thesis	6
CHAPTER 2: THE 'LANGUAGE PROBLEM'	9
2.1 Historical background of language use in Higher Education Institutions	9
2.2 English language as Medium of Instruction (MOI)	13
2.3 Language and identity in Higher Education Institutions	18
2.4 Academic Literacy	21
2.5 Epistemological Access	26
2.6 The decolonial debate	28
2.7 Epistemic Justice	33
2.8 The role of Community Engagement in epistemological access and epistemic justice	36
2.9 Conclusion	37
CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	39
3.1 Introduction	39

3.2 Historical Background of Community Engagement	39
3.2 Community Engagement in the South African Higher Education Context	47
3.3 Community Engagement challenges within Higher Education Institutions	54
3.4 Community Engagement at Rhodes University	59
3.5 The Engaged Citizen Programme at Rhodes University	62
3.6 Conclusion	64
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	67
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Research Questions	67
4.3 Approach Selected	67
4.4 Phenomenology as a methodological framing	68
4.5 My Positionality: <i>Thou must 'epoche'</i>	72
4.5.1 Limitations of bracketing	76
4.6 Data Collection and storage	78
4.6.1 NVivo use	78
4.6.2 Phenomenological Interviews	78
4.6.3 Interview procedure	80
4.6.4 Informed Consent	80
4.6.5 Participants	81
4.6.6 Data explication	83
Step 1: Bracketing and phenomenological reduction	83
Step 2: Delineating units of meaning	85
Step 3: Clustering of units of meaning to form themes	86
Step 4: Summary of interview: extracting general and unique themes	88
4.7 Conclusion	89
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: LANGUAGE USE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	90
5.1 Introduction	90
5.2 Language as a resource for meaning making	91
5.3 Language as a tool for participation	93
5.4 Language as a tool for accessing information	97
5.5 Academic background and impact on language use and learning	101
5.6 Getting to the essence – Language use in HE	104
5.7 Conclusion	105

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS: LANGUAGE USE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	107
6.1 Introduction	107
6.2 Benefits of participating in Community Engagement activities	107
6.3 Language for planning voluntary work	112
6.4 Language course for enhancing communication	113
6.5 Shared language as a tool for building relationships in CE activities	115
6.6 Language for relationships with community members	117
6.7 Language and power	119
6.8 Connections between Community Engagement and learning in Higher Education courses	126
6.9 Not all Community Engagement experiences are positive	130
6.10 Getting to the essence - Language use in CE	133
6.11 Conclusion	134
CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN HEIS	135
7.1 Introduction	135
7.2 Language and identity	135
7.3 Language as a tool for forming relationships	137
7.4 Language, identity development and belonging in CE	145
7.5 Community Engagement as an identity development space	150
7.6 Getting to the Essence - Language and Identity	151
7.7 Conclusion	153
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	154
REFERENCES	159
APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM	183
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	185
APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA	188

List of Figures and Tables

FIGURE 2.1: DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES AMONGST THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION	12
TABLE 2.1: LANGUAGES USED AS MOI IN THE 26 SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES	14
FIGURE 3.1: THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM: ADAPTED FROM FURCO (1996, P.3)	42
TABLE 3.1: SOUTH AFRICA'S 26 UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS	49
FIGURE 3.2: ORGANOGRAM OF THE RHODES UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UNIT	61
TABLE 4.1: PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS	82
TABLE 4.2: SOME EXAMPLES OF PRESUPPOSITIONS THAT I NEEDED TO 'BRACKET' DURING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	83
TABLE 4.3: INITIAL CODING TO DELINEATE UNITS OF MEANING	86

List of Acronyms

AL	academic literacy
AMP	GADRA and Access Music Project
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CBPR	Community Based Participatory Research
CDC	Centers for Disease and Control Prevention
CE	Community engagement
CHE	Council of Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
ECP	Engaged Citizens Programme
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HET	Higher Education Training
IJRIS	Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences
MOI	as the medium of Instruction
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
RU	Rhodes University
RUCE	Rhodes University Community Engagement
RUESC	Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
SA	South Africa
SAHA	South African History Archive
SAHECEF	South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum
SL	Student Leader
SVP	Student Volunteer Programme
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UNISA	University of South Africa

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The research journey

This study offers a consideration of how language use intersects with students' experiences of Community Engagement (CE) and their challenges in using English as the medium of instruction in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) context. Language proficiency in the medium of instruction has long been a concern in the literature on student retention and throughput (Boughey, 2002; Brock-Utne, 2007; Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van, 2015). Studying at university level entails significant intellectual engagement and coping with the complexities of transitioning from school (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Mudhovozi, 2012; Sharma, 2012), but students who study in a language which is not their home language battle a number of additional hurdles. While "academic language is no one's mother tongue" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and all students face strange new discipline-specific literacy practices when they enter university, grappling with these in a language that is not one's home language increases the challenges (Clarence & McKenna, 2017; Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Boughey, 2010)

I was particularly interested in exploring this issue as a second English language speaker who has faced some challenges in using the English language as a medium of instruction. Some of the challenges that I faced were understanding concepts whilst in class, deriving meaning in texts and also engaging in class activities. During my undergraduate academic journey, CE was a relatively new concept and had not been introduced in many HEIs in Zimbabwe where I studied, so I did not have an experience of language use in CE spaces and how such experiences could impact on learning even in formal HEI classrooms – an issue I became interested in when I moved to South Africa and began working in CE. The South African HEI context offers an interesting space as CE has been embraced in the sector, albeit to varying degrees in different institutions, and is considered a key pillar comparable to teaching and learning and research (Bidandi, 2021). Given this, I was interested in investigating the extent to which CE can provide spaces for promoting and enhancing learning, and in particular as a space in which language use can be mediated.

1.2 Research problem

In South African higher education, the student composition is rapidly changing from one where the divisions of apartheid meant that each institution had a relatively homogenous student body defined by race, ethnic group and geography. Since democracy, the student body has become far more heterogenous and includes diversity not only along the lines of race, ethnic group and geography, but also a far greater representation of first-generation students, often funded through the national student funding system, NSFAS. Concerns around the rapidly changing student body and what this means for teaching and learning resonate with experiences in Africa and beyond, including the USA, Canada, UK, Brazil and Australia where the massification (see Chapter 3) of education has resulted in major teaching and learning challenges (Badat, 2010; Fisher & Scott, 2011; Henard & Roseveare, 2012). In South Africa, the number of students has doubled in the last twenty years with significant implications for the system.

Trow (1973), in a seminal article, stated that massification of a higher education system occurs when participation becomes 15% or more of a country's population of 18 to 23 year olds being admitted into higher education; it is at this point that the system has moved from 'elite' to 'mass education'. As indicated in the literature (for example, Snowball & Boughey, 2012; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Msiza et al., 2020), massification is characterised by student diversity in terms of language, socioeconomic background, gender and context. Mohamedbhai (2014) argues further that massification is also characterised by a social justice agenda that seeks to deconstruct the notion of higher education as a reserve for the elite. The shift from elite to mass education may require shifts in the curriculum to accommodate the diverse student body. Boughey and McKenna (2021) suggest that these shifts may include "widening access to the knowledges of our universities in response to the ways in which the curricula emerge from exclusionary histories" (p. 96).

Among the implications of massification and a diversified student body is the issue of language and how to ensure equitable learning opportunities in a context where the student body has a range of home languages that differ from the medium of instruction (Desai, 2001; van Staden et al., 2016; du Plessis, 2020). Responses to such concerns in South Africa include the emergence of CE programmes, aimed at supporting students in learning outside university

spaces while ensuring that they take up the role of responsible and critical citizens as called for in the first White Paper on Higher Education post-apartheid (1997).

Examples of CE programmes include community service learning, community service, volunteerism, field education and internships, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Community Engagement has been understood in the context of the university reaching out to communities for the benefit of students, but research began to show that this is increasingly mutually beneficial (Albertyn & Daniels, 2009; HEQC, 2006; Bloland, 2005) in the sense that communities are gradually being involved in the engagement process. Despite this, the engagement of communities in knowledge creation processes has been noted to move at a slow pace due to the fact that in many instances academics tend to value research more than engaging with the communities (Kolawole; 2005, Vambe, 2005). However, despite the promise and value of such programmes in supporting teaching and learning in higher education, the various experiences of students participating in such programmes, especially given an increasingly diverse student population nationally, remains understudied and little understood (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). The role and purpose of CE within the university context, particularly in relation to the ways it supports students' language use, remains understudied. This study seeks to contribute to such understandings through exploring the experiences of students learning in a language that is not their home language. While the language of instruction constrains language use in many spaces on campus, there is little research on how language use in CE initiatives plays out or what effects this has on student identity formation and sense of belonging in HEIs. There is therefore a need to explore students' experiences in such initiatives with specific focus on language use.

This study considers CE as the 'third pillar' of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), alongside their research and teaching and learning responsibilities. CE programmes entail engagements between the university and various community groupings and can take a number of different forms.

1.3 Brief overview of Community Engagement

CE is largely framed as offering a space for students to apply their learning to a specified problem in a community environment or to engage in authentic learning through their work with community members. The emergence of CE as the third pillar in HEIs and framing of CE

as a potential public good and as an opportunity to deepen students' learning will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. However, it should be noted that despite a growing literature, there is very little on the role that CE might play in supporting students to navigate studying in English, a medium of instruction used across HEIs in South Africa, but which is not the home language of most students.

Community Engagement is now considered as a core function of higher education in South Africa (Lazarus et al, 2008; Hall.,2010; Bhagwan, 2017) and is widely argued to form a crucial part of the learning experience for university students. One useful definition of CE is:

... the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the wellbeing of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioural changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, p. 9)

There is a need to investigate the ways in which CE can be used to support learning in HEIs – a space beset with a host of challenges for students including the languages used as medium of instruction. The use of English as the medium of Instruction (MOI) in many HEIs has prompted debates on transformation given the linguistic diversity of the student body being admitted in the South African HEIs. The emerging transformation debates were highlighted in the 2015/16 #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa where students called for the decolonisation of the curriculum. Amongst a number of things that were called to be transformed was the language policies of universities which were seen as a representation of hegemonic cultures and epistemic injustices in HEIs (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). When language is viewed as such, it suggests that the language used in the academy can perpetuate Western ways of knowing whilst indigenous ways of knowing receive less credibility in the process of knowledge creation in HEIs. Given that one of the major challenges in South African HEIs today centres on the difficulties experienced by students whose home language is not English, attending English medium HEIs, the experiences of students learning within CE contexts within those institutions needs a detailed investigation.

Any examination of the transformative potential of higher education must consider the experiences of students (Ashwin & Case, 2018). It is thus unsurprising that an examination of

the experiences of students in HEIs is increasingly becoming an important focus for informing transformative teaching and learning for epistemic access (Brinkworth et al., 2009, Kandiko-Howson & Mawer, 2013; Demmans Epp & Ricardi, 2013). Epistemological access is defined by Morrow (2009) as access to the disciplinary ways of making knowledge and arguments are made for teaching in ways that make such disciplinary norms, values and practices explicit for students to take them on. Boughey and McKenna (2021, p.77) argue that enabling epistemological access entails “teaching students how to construct academic knowledge regardless of the level at which teaching takes place and regardless of the innovation in that teaching”. In this study, higher education access is understood to go beyond the conventional meaning of being afforded entry into the university, that is physical access, to include epistemic access to the goods (knowledge) distributed by the institution (Morrow, 1993). Epistemic access and success relate to how students are able to acquire and contribute to knowledge. In this study, and as I will discuss further in Chapter 2, I extend this focus on the need for epistemic access to consider how epistemic access is aligned to issues of epistemic justice whereby students can develop their sense of identity and belonging in the process of attaining epistemic access. Within this space, CE is expansively viewed as terrains of supporting student learning through the provision of spaces for developing identity, self-realisation and a sense of themselves as responsible citizens.

According to Harvey (2004, unpagged), “student experience is primarily the nature of the engagement of students with learning and teaching however it may also include other aspects that impinge on learning, some of which are the responsibility of higher education institutions’. Students have different experiences and expectations of higher education, and they bring with them different knowledges and languages. In other words, this study understands personal experiences as socially constructed, and as influenced by people’s history, prior experiences, and surroundings. It understands that students’ experiences have enormous consequences for their learning. Prior experiences can prepare students to a greater or lesser extent for university. Strong schooling foundations and coming from a middle-class home where many family members have attended university enable an easier transition to university (OECD, 2012). Prior experiences are then added to by students’ experiences in university which can ease or exacerbate issues of transition (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005).

An understanding of qualitative aspects of education such as students' experiences can provide better insights into the ways in which teaching takes place and also ways in which learning can be designed or enhanced for successful outcomes. It can also enhance our understanding of language as a resource for meaning making and knowledge construction. However, most of the literature on students' experiences of learning in a language that is not their home language is found in the Global North and there have been a number of calls for more extensive research on such issues in the Global South (Hengsadeekul et al 2010; Ashwin & Case, 2018). This study responds to such calls by focusing on students' experiences of learning within CE initiatives, with a focus on language use and its functional aspects such as communication and identity formation.

In learning through CE, unlike traditional classroom learning in HEIs, English is not necessarily the medium of instruction, as the learning takes place in community sites where a variety of other languages may be in use. This study offers an in-depth phenomenological approach to understanding students' experiences of language in higher education, both on campus and in CE initiatives. The findings could pave way for greater epistemological access, justice and success for students in HEIs.

The main research questions for the study were:

1. What are second language English speaking students' experiences of language in CE activities within an English medium university?
2. What role does CE play for second language English speaking students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging within HEIs?

1.4 The structure of the thesis

In **Chapter 1**, I have outlined my research interest in the experiences of second language English speaking students of learning in HEI. I then gave a brief introduction to CE and its significance in light of the diversifying student body and the challenges that the students' may encounter in their learning activities. Many of the concepts introduced here, such as language use and the nature of CE are unpacked in the two chapters that follow this one.

In **Chapter 2**, I offer a conceptual framework of language and literacies in HEIs. Language is a complex issue that goes beyond simple issues of fluency and competence. Language entails issues of identity and power. In South Africa in particular, language has long been a political

issue and used in universities as a means of exclusion. I discuss the 'language problem' in HEIs and how this impacts on academic language development and also how language challenges are perceived as a significant hindrance to students' epistemological access and success. The chapter concludes by discussing the different learning spaces available for students for language use for academic development.

In **Chapter 3**, I provide a contextual framework of CE as a concept and educational initiative and look at how it is implemented at the study site. I discuss the different definitions of CE and how CE emerged to be a third pillar in HEIs alongside research and teaching and learning. I also look at the challenges of having an activity such as CE in HEIs. In this chapter, I look at how CE is conceptualised in the South African context and how the 26 South African universities have included CE in their mission and vision statements. I then narrow my discussion to CE activities at Rhodes University (RU) where this study is based, including a focus on the Engaged Citizen Programme (ECP), an activity within CE at RU in which the study participants were volunteering. This chapter provides an overview of the growth of CE in many HEIs and how it is expected to enable better integration of HEIs and society, as well as an introduction to the context in which this study was undertaken.

In **Chapter 4**, I offer the research design in which I discuss phenomenology as a methodology. I discuss the relevance of phenomenology in research of this nature and the process of understanding the essence of a phenomenon through the stories of those who experienced it. I then discuss the steps I followed in collecting data, the challenges that I encountered and how I resolved these. The participants' demographics are also discussed in this chapter and the steps that I took in the data explication. I also discuss my positionality and how this might have impacted my interpretation of student experiences, a particular concern given the phenomenological approach I have taken.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings of the study. In Chapter 5, I present and discuss participants' reflections on language use within HEIs based on an analysis of the experiences of students. I provide evidence from the reflections of how language is viewed as a resource for meaning making, how language is used as a tool for participation, the ways in which language acts a tool for accessing information and how the participants' academic backgrounds had an impact on their learning in HEIs. The essence of the phenomenon that

was established in this chapter is how language competence is closely tied to issues of meaning making, access to information and participation in class.

In **Chapter 6**, I discuss language use in CE activities, including the variations in students' experiences of CE in relation to language use. This chapter gives a discussion of the reflections of the participants' experiences of language use in an English medium university. The participants gave their reflections on the benefits of participating in CE activities and the many functions of language, including language as vehicle for planning voluntary work. I also discuss the participants' reflections on how CE provided a space for use of shared languages which facilitated the building of relationships. Chapter 6 concludes with some take-home lessons from CE as a learning space.

In **Chapter 7**, I discuss the findings based on the links between language and identity in HEIs, focusing on the role of language in shaping the participants' identity, and how they relate to others in the CE space and in the formal academic spaces. Chapter 7 discusses the reflections of the students' experiences of the role of language use in the way they form their relationships, and develop and shape their identities and sense of belonging. Participants also reflected on how CE provided a space for participants to focus on who they are as people and who they want to become.

In **Chapter 8**, I discuss the implications of the findings, including the key contributions of the study and provide concluding thoughts and recommendations. This study brings together two major focus areas and endeavours to hold them both in consideration to make sense of the connections between them: the issue of language use and academic literacies on the one hand, and the issue of CE on the other. As indicated earlier, there is an increasing body of research in both of these areas but little that brings them together to make sense of students' experiences.

In the two chapters that follow, I therefore offer a consideration of the two major focus areas: language and literacies and then community engagement.

Chapter 2: The ‘Language problem’

2.1 Historical background of language use in Higher Education Institutions

This chapter has been entitled the ‘Language problem’ though literature in academic development circles show that this is an intensely contested term. According to Boughey (2000) and Boughey and McKenna (2016), the term ‘Language problem’ leads to a certain view among some practitioners in HEIs that a provision of remedial courses for English will solve the problems of under preparedness and the demands of HEIs that students have to deal with. Clarence (2010) also states that the problems that students face are more than those presented by language, but also stem from social, cultural and economic issues. Apart from that, students have to deal with several literacy practices from different disciplines and merely offering language courses does not help students to deal different discipline literacies. This chapter then seeks to highlight that there is still more to be done in terms of supporting students in HEIs because students are still experiencing the same challenges in their learning experiences regardless of the fact that research has been done and shows that there are a number of factors to be considered in students’ learning as this chapter will show.

This chapter presents some of the key debates about language use in HEIs that inform discussions around transformation and issues of access and success. The gap between the home language, defined by UNESCO as “the main language spoken in the home environment and acquired as a first language, also known as the ‘mother tongue’” and the language of instruction which is defined as “Language used to convey a specified curriculum in a formal or non-formal educational setting” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 13) has given rise to a number of challenges in South African HEIs. Though the focus of this study is South African HEIs, this does not mean other places and countries do not experience language problems in their HEIs. As this study investigates the link between CE and academic language development, it is imperative to unpack the language challenges that have been prevalent in HEIs as a basis for informing the discussions that follow.

The importance of language for epistemic access in higher education is now well documented globally, especially in increasingly diverse contexts (Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenberg, 2015) such as the South African higher education landscape (Jansen, 2004; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). There is a general acknowledgement that home languages are seldom represented in higher education domains (Alexander, 2007), such that student’s proficiency in the dominant

language of the higher education system can significantly condition their chances of accessing higher education spaces (Liu, 2019). This makes language central to issues of equity and access in debates around access to education.

In post-apartheid South Africa, language debates are at the heart of the transformation agenda. Epistemological transformation, that is, transformation in how knowledge is conceived, constructed and transmitted, is central to the higher education landscape debates (Hall, 2007). Since the transition to democracy in 1994, South African universities have critically engaged with the question of language use and its role in conceiving, constructing and transmitting knowledge, and the achievement of transformational goals in society. The quotation below is a reflection on the state of languages and a call to focus on the importance of language in working towards a successful nation.

The building blocks of this nation are all our languages working together, our unique idiomatic expressions that reveal the inner meanings of our experiences. These are the foundations on which our common dream of nationhood should be built...The nurturing of this reality depends on our willingness to learn the languages of others, so that we in practice accord all our languages the same respect. In sharing one's language with another, one does not lose possession of one's words, but agrees to share these words so as to enrich the lives of others. For it is when the borderline between one language and another is erased, when the social barriers between the speaker of one language and another are broken, that a bridge is built, connecting what were previously two separate sites into one big space for human interaction, and, out of this, a new world emerges and a new nation is born.

President Thabo Mbeki (27 August 1999) in (DoE, 2002)

As we strive towards building a successful nation through recognising the importance of our languages in general, many researchers have looked at the academic language used in HEIs and ways in which it impacts on students' learning (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). But it is important that we distinguish between basic competence in the medium of instruction, typically English, and academic language more specifically.

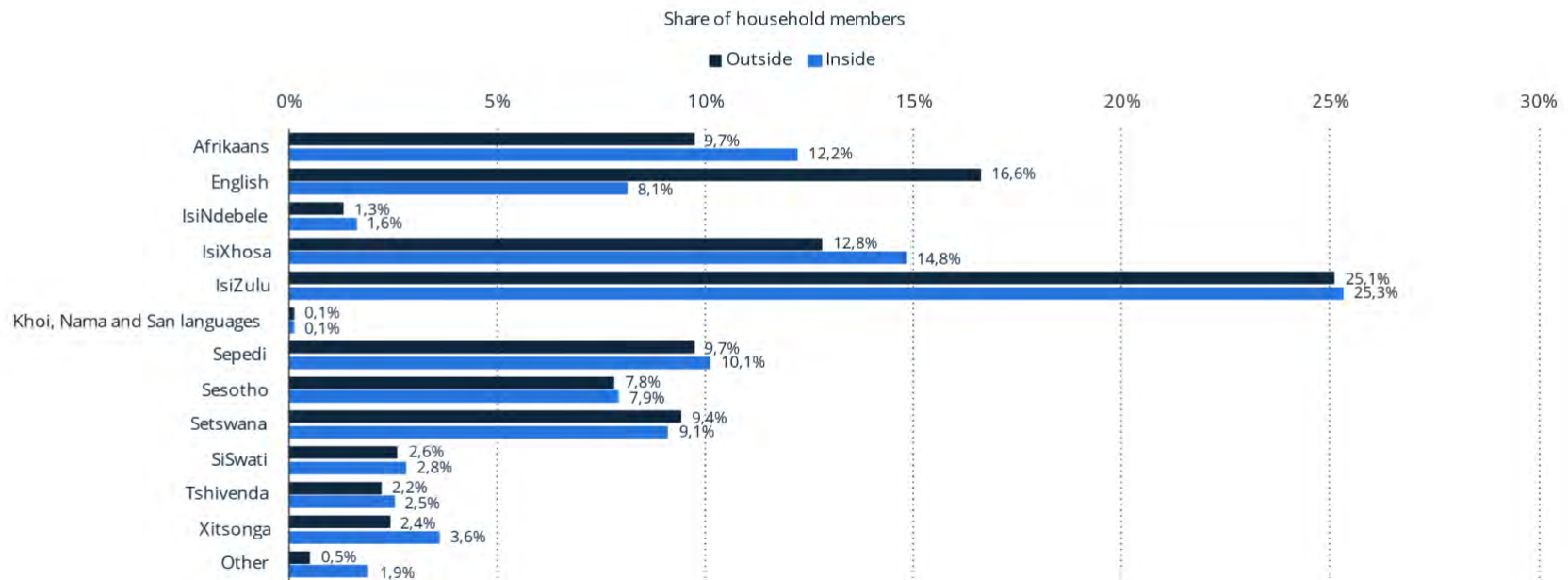
Academic language is the particular disciplinary language comprising both specialist terminology and literacy practices emerging from the discipline's norms and values. It is neither anyone's home language nor is it only related to the language of instruction. The idea of academic language as a set of disciplinary literacy practices is discussed in depth in this chapter but it is important to also look at the extent to which challenges are brought about

by having English as the medium of instruction in a multilingual country. I therefore start with a look at the use of English as the medium of instruction and then look at the related but distinct phenomenon of academic language as a set of discipline-specific literacy practices.

In South Africa, English is the *lingua franca* and is the main language of instruction despite it only being the home language of 8.1% of the population (Statista: South Africa, 2019). The following table adapted from Statistics South Africa (2019) shows the distribution of languages amongst the South African population.

Distribution of languages spoken by individuals inside and outside of households in South Africa 2018

Distribution of languages spoken inside and outside of households South Africa 2018



Note(s): South Africa; 2018

Further information regarding this statistic can be found on [page 8](#)

Source(s): Statistics South Africa; [ID 1114302](#)

2

statista

Figure 2.1: Distribution of Languages amongst the South African population

2.2 English language as Medium of Instruction (MOI)

Globally, the language of instruction in many institutions is English because it is considered as the global language of trade, it holds particular forms of status, and fluency in English is seen to bring economic benefits (Crystal, 2003; Nunan, 2003; Curry & Lillis, 2018, Altbach, 2016). In the South African university context, language use continues to be a contentious issue (Boughey, 2016; Nudelman, 2015; Nomlomo & Katiya, 2018). Given South Africa's apartheid history, language use is a contentious issue because it may be viewed as a way of maintaining some forms of oppression and also as a way of controlling access to certain spaces (Murray, 2002). It is also contentious because language use has been implicated in the low throughput rates of students (CHE, 2016). This section will highlight some of the reasons why English is the most widely used medium of instruction. The challenge of language in HEIs needs to be understood in the light of English and Afrikaans being the only languages recognised as the national official languages during apartheid whilst African languages remain marginalised in many social structures in South Africa, despite being included as official languages since the country transitioned to democracy (Ngcobo, 2007).

The marginalisation of African languages emerges in part as a result of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, a South African segregation law which legalised several aspects of education within the apartheid system. It emphasised the development of racially separated educational facilities (South African History Archive (SAHA), 1988). The apartheid system had the intention of subjugating and side-lining the African population through persuading them to adopt the ideology of white supremacy and abandoning indigenous values (Northrup, 2013). The Bantu Education Act placed African education under the control of the state and focused on preparing Africans for their 'place in society'. It also focused on advancing Afrikaans as the language for instruction (Henrad, 2002 Northrup, 2013). The level of competence in Afrikaans proved to be a stumbling block for effective learning for many African students (Kamwendo, 2006). For some, the English and Afrikaans languages were viewed differently during this period; Afrikaans was seen as the language of oppression and English was by some considered to be the language of liberation, freedom and independence (Mabule, 2011). But the use of both of these languages in the education system was a way of discriminating against those South Africans who did not speak these languages at home (Department of Education [DoE], 2002). This led to the student uprising of 1976 against the

use of Afrikaans in schools. There were no protestations made explicitly against the use of English as it was used by some anti-apartheid political leaders as a language of unity (Mesthrie, 2002). This meant that many used the English language, but this did not mean that there were no concerns about its use at this time.

English remains the most widely used language of instruction, including in universities that had primarily an Afrikaans medium of instruction and had resisted the use of English, such as Stellenbosch University, North West University and Pretoria University (Mayaba et al, 2018; Scott, 2015; Department of Education (DoE), 2016). Below is a table that shows the languages of learning and teaching used at the 26 South African universities. While many offer a course or two in a local language, this is minimal. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that South Africa has 11 official languages, there seems to be a slow pace in implementing and affording many of South African indigenous languages the status of MOI in the HEIs.

Table 2.1: Languages used as MOI in the 26 South African universities

UNIVERSITY	MOI
University of South Africa (UNISA)	English
University of Stellenbosch	Afrikaans and English
University of Limpopo	English
University Pretoria	English and Afrikaans
University of Cape Town	English
University of Witwatersrand	English
University of Venda	English
North-West University	English and Afrikaans
University of KwaZulu-Natal	English
Tshwane University of Technology	English
Rhodes University	English
Fort Hare University	English
Vaal University of Technology	English
University of Zululand	English and isiZulu
University Western Cape	English
Free State University	English and Afrikaans

University of Mpumalanga	English
University of Johannesburg	English
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University	English
Nelson Mandela University	English
Mangosuthu University	English
Durban University of Technology	English
Central University of Technology	English
Cape Peninsula University	English
Walter Sisulu University	English
Sol Plaatje University	English

There are many reasons for the dominance of English as the medium of instruction, such as it being the main language of the economy and considered by many as a language of status (Altbach, 2016; Menakapriya, 2016). In the South African context, Kaschula (2013) argues that one reason for its dominance is that the Language Policy of 2002 that was developed to promote the study of African languages had significant gaps. There was no plan of implementation, and no clear indication of who would be responsible for its funding and monitoring (Zikode, 2017).

The issues of language are not the only challenges in our educational system but rather there is what is termed by Graeme Bloch (2009) as the 'toxic mix' of the schooling system. Bloch refers to this mix as emerging from a number of factors, including historical and sociological strands laid by Bantu Education, government breakdowns and inefficiencies, poor implementation of policy, inadequate accountability and monitoring systems, over-optimism of many education stakeholders and 'hand wringing' (p. 88). Bloch indicates that this 'toxic mix' sustains inequalities in access and success in HEIs because it means that the schooling system accessed by most South Africans is of an extremely low standard.

According to Jansen (2009), 'the toxic mix' explains why South Africa spends more money on education than any other African country and still does not have results to show for such an investment. Even to present date, the effort that is put into developing ideas and allocating funds to the education sector does not tally with the results that we see. For instance, the

high number of dropouts and the continued vandalism on school properties only point to ills in the system as mentioned above and these require careful attention rather than ‘a quick fix’ that can be achieved through channelling money. The extent to which the continued poor schooling in South African schools, particularly quintile 1 and 2 schools¹, contributes to challenges in accessing and succeeding in higher education, should not be underestimated (Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

African languages have long been marginalised in schools and most school children were taught in languages (English and Afrikaans) in which the teachers did not have a high proficiency (Bloch, 2008). Teachers also often lack specialised knowledge of theories and methodologies required for effective home language and second language teaching (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014). It is worth noting that significant state funding was spent on developing Afrikaans as a language of education and business during the apartheid era, whereas African languages were consistently ignored or undermined in our education systems (Oliphant, 2000). This has resulted in enormous implications for these languages even to the present day. The fact that the African languages have not been specifically developed for educational purposes in the ways that Afrikaans was, has led many to argue that they cannot play a role as languages of communication within the government in public administration and the justice system (De Kadt, 2005; Moller, 2013). It also has implications for the extent to which these languages can act as symbols of national unity, social identity and social prestige (De Kadt, 2005). The effort that was invested in developing Afrikaans as a formal language was also seen in the trends in publications of all kinds during apartheid, including academic publications, literary publications and the public media. Afrikaans had enormous numbers of publications compared to any other languages (Oliphant, 2000).

Moller (2013) argues that South Africa’s indigenous languages are not standardised in part because the issue of language diversity has been supported politically since the end of apartheid but is not seen as an issue to be prioritised. Despite the policies that have been put in place by the government to develop indigenous languages, the implementation remains a

¹ Public schools in South Africa are categorised across five quintiles. The wealthiest schools, quintile 5, receive the least state subsidy but have the highest fees and can thus afford additional teachers and better infrastructure. These are often also referred to as ‘Model C’ schools, which used to be kept for white learners only during apartheid. Quintile 1 and 2 schools receive the highest state subsidy but do not charge fees and they have the highest pupil to teacher ratio and the worst infrastructure. They are also often in rural areas.

'pipe dream' (Manyike & Lemmer: 2014). It remains a 'pipe dream' because the government has a "lack-lustre approach to policy implementation, the hegemonic position of English and the negative attitudes regarding the functional use of African languages results in language matters taking a back seat in government's transformation agendas" (Moller, 2013).

The issue of language use continues to be grappled with in many South African schools, in part because of the legislated early switch to English as the MOI. This has been shown to be problematic (Kingwill, 1998). A basic level of proficiency is essential for learning in that language and taking on initial school practices is best done in the learner's home language. For those whom English is not their home language, studying in that language at a young age becomes harder. Visagie (2010) states that "it is more beneficial for a learner with a mother tongue other than English to switch to a programme of instruction in English at a later stage after their [competence in their] mother tongue has been fully developed" (unpaged). In 2017 studies (Steyn, 2017; Probyn, 2017), the researchers found out that some students in South African schools experience challenges because they were inadequately prepared for the sudden transition in language from home language to the English or Afrikaans medium of instruction, had insufficient exposure and lacked the vocabulary to cope with content instruction. Manyike and Lemmer (2014) reiterate that an early switch to English or Afrikaans as the medium of instruction deprives learners of being taught in their home language which "robs them of their self-identity and alienates them from their culture as it is through home language teaching that learners are empowered both academically and culturally to become lifelong learners and productive members of society" (p. 256). Despite the literature (Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2010) supporting the use of home languages as MOI for the early phases of schooling, pressure for the early switch to English stems in part from parents who stress their preference for their children to learn in English due to the perceived socio-economic advantages associated with English proficiency. The language challenges in South Africa's schooling system cannot be separated from the country's apartheid past and its inability to develop a functional schooling system in the more than two decades of democracy.

Language challenges are possibly even harder for students entering higher education because they need more than language proficiency: they have to master complex discipline-specific content which requires using language in new ways.

2.3 Language and identity in Higher Education Institutions

The relationship between language and identity may help us understand the challenges faced by students entering higher education and how these challenges can be addressed towards the goal of epistemic justice. As will be discussed in the following section it is important to acknowledge students' identities so that they can be recognised as knowledge agents, thereby achieving epistemic justice. Kröner (2007) states that identity is an abstract concept and refers to a person's identity as the inner self which is built cornerstone upon cornerstone. These cornerstones refer to an individual's culture, family, beliefs, and language. Moje and Luke (2009, p.2) conceptualise identity as "difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position". Thondhlana & Belluigi (2017) note that identity is a socially constructed concept which is dynamic, resulting in individuals belonging to different collectives in different ways at different times. This means that identity is not cast in stone; it is flexible so that people can assume different identities depending on their relevant commonalities such as gender, race, language, ethnicity, and social and economic backgrounds.

These understandings of identity as mentioned above are imperative for this study that deals with students' personal experiences. It is important because it gives us an inside perspective on how students make use of language in their interactions with one another as well as using language to access information in learning areas.

The exclusion of specific languages from large social structures such as higher education has enormous implications for the sense of worth of some students. The positioning of English as an emblem of education and social status is still prevalent to this day, despite the fact that in South Africa eleven languages have official status (Ndimande-Hlongwa: 2004). Leibowitz et al. (2005) explain that traditionally for many South Africans, identity has been associated with a speakers' home language. Attitudes towards the speakers of some languages is often influenced by the power associated with those languages. Languages that are marginalised where English is dominant become central to identity, hence spoken language or home language become markers of identity in some social groupings (Leibowitz et al., 2005). The effects of marginalising African languages from the educational spaces was highlighted in the Soweto riots of 1976 which resulted in the death of many students and emerged again much more recently in the #FeesMustFall movement where students expressed that the curriculum

was alienating, with particular concerns that it did not include both African experiences and languages but valorised the Western experience and the English language (Langa., 2017).

While Boughey and McKenna (2016, 3) state that “many of the difficulties experienced by students with regard to language can be seen to stem from the alien and alienating nature of the higher education context”, Wolff (2006: 50) argues that “language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education”. Godsell and Chikane (2016) also note that while there are many other challenges beyond language in the higher education space, language is central in the concerns that students have raised around the limits to their agency, the disregard of their identity and the alienating nature of such spaces. Drawing from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, as cited in John-Steiner and Mahn (1996, p. 28), which states that “human activities take place in cultural contexts that are mediated by language and other symbol systems”, the importance of one’s social and cultural background becomes evidently pertinent. A student’s delight at being admitted into a higher education institution is often quickly replaced by despair, anger and frustration as they realise that their outsider status and inability to change things or even to act remains unaltered (Godsell & Chikane, 2016).

According to Gee (1990), language and identity can also be linked by discourse in which discourse refers to the overarching cluster of features and proficiency in a language. Following Gee’s argument, language can be understood as a key component of identity if we understand that discourse is a way of using words in association with values and norms of a particular way of thinking and interacting with knowledge. To this effect, Dillabough (2000) states that identity relations are shaped by social and structural relations situated in language. As a result, students’ academic success at the university is influenced by discourses which are key features of individuals’ identity (Leibowitz, 2004; Boughey, 2005).

Leibowitz et al. (2005) argue that as an identity marker, language serves as a source of affiliation and shapes an individual’s personal life. Generally, language studies in higher education institutions have focused more on instrumental functions such as communication and instruction (van der Walt, 2016; Liu, 2019) rather than on personal functions such as expression of individuality (Edwards, 2013), interactional functions, such as social relationships (Agha, 2007), heuristic functions (use of language to find things out, wonder, or hypothesise) and representational functions (use of language to explain). Within a higher

education environment these aspects correspond to being able to make one's feelings public and interact with others; to participate in question and answer routines; participate in research dialogues and discussions and talk in groups; convey messages; tell about the real world and expressing a proposition; and many other linguistically-based activities (see, for more discussion, Halliday, 1973). All of these aspects of language are interlinked with identity. According to Bauman (2000, p. 1), "Individual identity is the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others." From this perspective, identity is conceptualised as a dynamic product of social interactions which can be claimed, (re)negotiated and contested in social, economic, historical and political settings of the individual's lived experiences (De Fina et al., 2006; Norris, 2007).

People's social identities are formed by being part (or not) of membership in certain groups in which they are born such as gender, race, religion, geography, income group, ethnic group and so on (Becares & Priest, 2015). Beyond these membership groups, people can also acquire their identity from group membership developed through participation in social institutions such as churches, stokvels², burial societies³ and universities. These institutions define the forms and shapes of groups people may join, pathways to joining such groups and role-relationships that can be established with others within the groups. Language is central in allowing individuals to make such personal connections within their social surroundings. Language is also central in allowing people to participate in their daily lives through connections in social relationships (Agha, 2007).

A family set-up can be used to illustrate this point and its relevance to the current discussion. A family can be organised around the roles of parents and children – and these roles define particular types of relationships such as father-daughter or mother-son relationships. In other words, roles can afford different family members access to certain activities and role-defined relationships within the organisational set-up. By extension, HEIs can be understood as

² Stokvels are informal savings clubs that happen across the country where groups of people pool their money together to save for big expenses such as school fees. Stokvel membership often includes attendance at various social events.

³ Burial societies are stokvels that gather money towards the cost of burying an immediate family member. The money is often invested in burial policies and the group membership is often (but not always) within a specific church community.

organisations with clearly defined roles (lecturer, student, and so on) and within these organisations there are sub-groups whose roles shape relationships between members. The preceding discussion demonstrates that membership in various groups, together with the values, beliefs and attitudes associated with them are central to the development of social identity because they can define the kinds of communicative activities and linguistic resources for realising them. According to Ochs (1996, p. 424), social identity encompasses participant roles, positions, relationships, reputations and other dimensions of social personae, which are conventionally linked to epistemic and affective stances. The languages used and the languages practices expected are crucially linked to the social identities enacted within each participant role.

More generally, the intersectionality of language and identity is non-linear but complex and at times ambiguous, and these issues are arguably more important and evident in contexts where, for the majority of students, the language used in teaching and learning, as in South Africa, is not their home language. Aziakpono and Bekker (2010) highlight the importance of the functions of language in symbolising identity and distinguishing societal groups. This means that as universities open their doors to such students, consistent with transformation imperatives, many non-traditional students might lack the command required for the language of learning and teaching in their respective institutions. Given this, supporting epistemic access using the functional and non-functional aspects of language remains a challenge for academics for the foreseeable future. Having reflected on the significant challenges to students' learning and sense of identity brought about by studying in a MOI that is not their home language, I now turn to the related yet distinct issue of academic literacies.

2.4 Academic Literacy

While the dominance of English in HEIs is problematic for the reasons given above, it is important to distinguish between basic language competence and the issue of academic literacy. Within academic settings, there are different disciplines and fields of study and students are expected to be familiar with language use that is discipline specific. Academic literacy can be defined as the ability to understand the norms and values of a discipline and how these emerge in very specific language forms (Boughey, 2016; Clarence & McKenna, 2017). It can also be understood in terms of it being a range of academic vocabulary in context, or the ability to know what counts as evidence for an argument, or making meaning beyond

the level of a sentence (Weideman, 2014). Academic literacy is described by McKenna (2010, p. 13) as “the ways in which students must read, write, speak, listen, even ‘be’, for success in the university. To be academically literate is to be proficient in the ways in which knowledge is constructed within the discipline”. McKenna (2010) further maintains that academic literacy is related to specific cultural contexts in use. The challenges arise when the underpinning norms and values of academic literacy practices are kept opaque and not made explicit because of the problematic assumption that students share the background knowledge, values and attitudes, or the assumption that they will naturally acquire these, as it were, ‘by osmosis’. That being so, such challenges for students may continue because background knowledge is important, and success in higher education is not simply a case of the teacher giving out information in the form of notes and lectures and the students’ job then being that of taking these in.

Neeley (2005) concurs with McKenna that academic literacy be defined as ways in which students must read, write, speak, listen to be successful in HEIs. He indicates that one can be said to be academically literate if one is familiar with the knowledge making and knowledge disseminating norms within the discipline. Academic literacy is thus more than just basic language proficiency, and it is also more than having the language of the target discipline through learning discipline-specific terminology; it is also about knowing the practices of the discipline such as its specific ways of doing, thinking and making (Gee, 2004).

For one to be academically literate, one has to master the academic practices, which is often challenging and is a process that occurs over time. Boughey (2000) states that literacy is not something which can be taught in an introductory series of lectures. Rather, people become literate through observing and interacting with members of the field until the ways of speaking, acting, thinking, feeling and valuing common to that field, become natural to them.

In order to have a better understanding of the role that academic literacy has on student success in HEIs we need to look at the link between language and academic literacy. Language and literacy are closely intertwined, such that if a student has challenges with the former, they will probably encounter challenges with the latter. Language and access issues are very complex and multi-faceted, therefore understanding these problems needs an integrated approach that draws on various conceptual ideas. The ability of a student to speak in English is not a guarantee that they have the ability to cope with academic tasks and conversely,

having poor English proficiency is not a clear predictor that the student will necessarily encounter challenges.

There is a difference between language proficiency and academic literacy proficiency which might help in understanding why some students may encounter challenges in coping with the demands of the academic discourse in HEIs where the medium of instruction is not the students' first language (Cummins, 1984). The challenge can be better explained by looking at some early language development initiatives which viewed language use as guided by Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS, which is a prerequisite of CALP, entails basic skills which are more easily acquired through exposure to the language. BICS is about the skills that enable learners to communicate in day-to-day activities. It should be noted that while it is a prerequisite, having a degree of fluency or accuracy in BICS does not always correlate to proficiency in academic literacy. CALP is the kind of language proficiency necessary for formal academic learning which encompasses thinking about subject area content material. As a result, language proficiency does not automatically translate into the academic literacy proficiency needed to handle disciplinary tasks in the classrooms (Kandagor & Rotumoi, 2018).

These two concepts enable practitioners to have an understanding that students' experiences with using language at tertiary level are not necessarily 'language problems' (many students have ample BICS but lack CALP in both their home and additional languages) (Cummins, 1979, p. 122). Bourdieu and Passeron note that "academic language is not anyone's native language" (1977). The difficulties with language use in the academy are not only about the medium of instruction. Sebolai (2016) refers to the complicated nature of the academic linguistic sphere that makes it difficult for students to cope with the demands of the academic discourse. He acknowledges that this is not only a matter of language competence, but also especially a challenge when the language of instruction is not one's mother tongue. This notion helps us to understand that academic literacy challenges are not only limited to challenges in language, but also systems that are embedded in the learning structures.

In this regard, a social theory of language can be used to understand the complex issues of language whilst taking note that in a social theory of language, students' identities are understood to be involved in taking on the language practices of the academy and that these practices go far beyond the simple adherence to the ordinary 'language rules' of English. Early

work on language viewed language as “an instrument of communication or vehicle of transmitting preformed ideas” (Christie, 1985). Street (1995) terms such understandings of language the ‘autonomous model’ which he argues is the dominant, though highly problematic, account and which sees “literacy practices as a set of cognitive, technical, neutral and universal skills which are devoid of context” (Street, 2005, p 418). Inasmuch as it tried to locate students’ experiences of language, early work on students’ language challenges in higher education is still said “to lack sophisticated understandings of how social history and social context impacted on language use”. (Boughey. 2009).

On the other hand, Street (2005) offers the ideological model, which views language “as a social practice, (not simply a technical and neutral skill) that is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2005. p. 418). In other words, the implications of a social theory of language are that students’ identities are involved in the language practices of the academy and the language practices are seen to emerge from far more than the grammar and spelling rules of the language of instruction. The ideological model views language as a “resource for making meanings which draws on social context in order to make the choices necessary for those meanings” (Halliday, 1973, 1978, 1985). Boughey and McKenna (2016) posit that “language use is a system of choices which are made on the basis of a user’s understanding of the context in which they are located”. To be successful in one’s language use in the academy thus entails understanding the context and making choices on the basis of these understandings, but these ‘choices’ are not always readily available to all within HEIs (McKenna, 2016, p. 3).

In this interpretation, students need to understand the context in a great variety of ways, for example, what counts as a suitable research problem in that field (and what does not), what counts as an appropriate way of researching the problem (and what does not), how an argument can be built in the field and what counts as suitable claims and as suitable evidence. All of these issues, and many more, vary significantly from field to field and go beyond language proficiency. In order to make choices, students need to understand the context and see what are deemed appropriate choices for that context. The extent to which the context is familiar and accessible will vary significantly from student to student as will the extent to which it echoes with their prior experiences and identity.

Hilleson (1996) argues that students may experience a language shock, which results in an anxiety that students “feel they cannot function properly within the community since they have been deprived of their real personality and are embarrassed to display a self that is fundamentally incompetent” (p. 250). This experience of alienation could be a result of the student’s social background such that the learner cannot participate to their fullest potential. They cannot make sense of what is being said because the disciplinary practices do not present them with a familiar context that encourages engagement.

The notion of language as a neutral vehicle for transmitting ideas, that is the autonomous model, has widely been critiqued because it views language merely as a tool which is therefore socially void (Fricker, 2007; Boughey & McKenna, 2016, 2021). On the other hand, the notion of language as ‘meaning making’, Street’s ideological model, has gained much traction in epistemic justice and access debates, since it highlights context as being central to knowledge generation (Muller, 2014, Kerfoot & Vandenberg, 2015). In other words, language is viewed as an aspect that is socially imbedded and hence imbued with contextual meaning. Thus, academic literacy is more about taking on the practices (values, norms and identities) of a particular discipline than it is about language as a medium of instruction (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). While taking on such practices requires effort from all students and may cause discomfort for all students, this is exacerbated when the medium of instruction is not the student’s home language.

Thus far in this chapter, I have argued that language use in HEIs is contentious and politically volatile but continues to add an additional educational burden for many students. This is especially because schools do not provide access to necessary levels of language proficiency in English and conversely that African languages have been insufficiently supported for academic use. In the previous section, I argued that language *per se* is an insufficient explanation of coming to acquire competence within a discipline. Academic literacy provides an explanation that language is not merely a tool of transmission, and the literary practices expected of students are deeply embedded in the norms and values of particular disciplines. In the next section, I will argue that we need to teach in ways that make such literacy practices overt. We need to provide opportunities for students to practice and acquire these practices – and to challenge them.

2.5 Epistemological Access

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, this term was coined by Morrow and it entails acquiring access to the knowledge of the academy. Morrow (2007) notes that there is need to distinguish between entitlement to formal classes and entitlement to epistemological access. This means that being afforded access into higher education does not automatically translate to the epistemological access needed for success in the academy. Epistemological access has to do with enabling students to acquire the values, norms and language of a specific discipline or, in other words, access to the knowledge of the academy. Morrow (2007) further notes that epistemological access is not a phenomenon that “one acquires through enrolling in an institution of higher learning, not something that can be done, supplied or delivered, automatically transferred to those who pay their fees or through attending classes and getting handouts” (p. 242). It therefore cannot be ‘given’ to a student, though it can be made more or less accessible through the pedagogical approach and curriculum structure (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Epistemic access calls for bridging the gap between students’ prior knowledge and the principled knowledge and related literacy practices of the academy.

South African HE has enjoyed a significant degree of success in widening formal access to HE but has not matched this with HE success rates which remain racially differentiated across all institutions and programmes (CHE, 2021). Epistemological access is about learning to be a successful participant in specific academic practices (Morrow, 2009). Hence, for one to be successful in specific disciplines, students need to be familiar with the ways of thinking and doing for those particular disciplines. Epistemological access is a phenomenon that is influenced by the past and the present in the South African higher education system. The concept of epistemological access was coined in response to the political need for higher education to democratise access to higher education institutions (Morrow, 2007).

The main political concern in higher education after apartheid ended in 1994 has been to have many students enjoying access to higher education, or in Morrow’s words ‘entitlement to formal classes’ but this is insufficient. Epistemological access is closely linked to academic literacy in that students have to gain access to the norms and values of a specific discipline or familiarise themselves with the practices of a discipline in such a way that they not only possess the knowledge but also understand how such knowledge was made (Boughey, 2008). Thus, language can mediate epistemic access, that is, access to knowledge that institutions of

higher learning distribute to students (Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenberg, 2015, p.177), making the study of language and epistemic access in an increasingly diverse student body an important subject of enquiry in thinking about equitable pathways to improving epistemic access and success.

Starting something new, such as higher education studies, is always a challenge as there are ways of doing things that have to be mastered. McKenna (2012) likens the process of epistemological access to that of joining a community. A student has to learn ways of doing and being in a specific discipline and for this to happen the student has to 'crack the code'. The student has to become accustomed to the literary practices of the community they are trying to join. Such notions give us an awareness that there is need to develop teaching practices that makes the literacy practices explicit, rather than treat them as normalised. We need to understand that the difficulties students experience could be related to the lack of access to covert rules of the academic literacy practices (Boughey, 2002).

One of the challenges of teaching towards epistemological access is that, for many academics, the knowledge of the field and the literacy practices through which this knowledge is built and disseminated can seem so familiar as to be opaque (Jacobs, 2013). As a result, academics do not always teach in ways that make these explicit to students, or give them opportunities to practice these literary practices, or give them feedback that makes these literary practices accessible. This means that they do not teach towards epistemological access.

Jacobs (2013) suggests that discipline-specific approaches should focus on what counts as knowledge in the discipline and making explicit for students the principles through which new knowledge is created. Jacobs further states that disciplinary norms and conventions make up the invisible 'rules of the game' and these should be made explicit to students. To this effect, this process involves a thorough examination of disciplinary discourses and genres before a consideration of how to make them explicit through the structure of the curriculum and the approach to teaching and learning. The structure of the target knowledges and their accompanying literacy practices may seem invisible to many academic experts in the field which may lead them to misinterpret students' challenges as simply being around technical language proficiency. Academics therefore often mis-identify problems students encounter as being issues of language proficiency, rather than having to do with epistemological access to the knowledge and its literacy practices (Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

It is evident through the students' protests such as the 2015/16 #FeesMustFall that were witnessed across South African universities, that there are still some barriers to access to higher education success, which include epistemological access and related literacy practices, and issues of language and identity. The 2015/2016 protests were student led and were foreshadowed by the #RhodesMustFall campaign that called for the decolonising of the University of Cape Town through the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, the twentieth-century imperialist. Amongst other demands, the students called for the decolonisation of the curriculum which they felt was too Western and focused on legitimatising Western ways of knowing and the erasure and misrecognition of African indigenous ways of knowing (Heleta, 2016; Zembylas, 2018; Hlatshwayo, 2018). The protests drew attention to ongoing debates about how to make higher education accessible to everyone. It is important to note that teaching in ways that make the discipline-specific literary practices explicit, not only enhances students' chances of epistemological access, which is a social justice issue, but it also paves a way for the norms and values to be challenged.

2.6 The decolonial debate

Debates on decolonisation and transformation of the curriculum are central in HEIs, given the nature of our educational and schooling system in South Africa. Decolonisation is defined by Stein and Andreotti (2016) as:

An umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonisation and racialisation, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being and relating that these processes seek to eradicate. (unpaged)

According to Bozalek and Zembylas (2019), decolonising the higher education space calls for transforming or disrupting the institutional cultures as they now exist. Whilst transformation of higher education means a way of bringing together a diversity of ideas, facilitating engagement and ensuring inclusivity, and building from what is there without losing it, disrupting the education takes a more radical approach. Vorster and Quinn (2017:p.37) state that "South African universities have been using a discourse of transformation while not engaging in significant structural and cultural changes beyond changing staff and student demographics".

Disrupting is different from transformation in that it breaks down what is already there with the intention of rebuilding, such as the approach taken with the #FeesMustFall movement. Bozalek and Zembylas (2019) further state that decolonisation is about exposing the dominance of Eurocentrism in curriculum and pedagogy. This can be achieved through focusing on the knowledge possibilities that have been denied relevance. The nature of the knowledge has been one of the major concerns in the calls for decolonisation of the curriculum which many students feel continues to elevate Eurocentric ways of being and thinking at the expense of African values, culture and knowledge. Such a curriculum arguably continues to favour an epistemological hierarchy which valorises Western ways and knowledge production over non-Western ways of knowledge and knowledge making (Bulhan, 2015; Higgs, 2016; Mamdani, 2016; Mangcu, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Morreira, 2017; Hlatshwayo: 2018). The challenges that continue to plague our educational system can be traced back to as early as 1966 in the work of Nkrumah and 1978 in the work of Said, both of which raised questions about the role of higher education in the colonial project. Given this background, Zembylas (2018) and Hlatshwayo (2018) note that the calls for transformation and decoloniality are not a new phenomenon in Africa.

The decolonial debate is also hinged on the call to find ways to address South Africa's failure to transform the impact of apartheid which left a "legacy of backlogs, structural poverty and inequalities" (Bloch, 2009, p. 89) into one that provides a route out of poverty (Ramphela, 2001). The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student protests of 2015/16 drew attention to the legacy of inequalities that continue to mar our education system, impacting on student access and success in HEIs. It can be noted that even though there have been efforts to improve on the current state of education in South Africa, there are some challenges that delay the process of decolonisation. These include the form of the language used, assessment and curriculum practices that are not in line with people's experiences and context, or when epistemic injustices take place as Western thought trivialises other forms of thought and systematically disadvantages non-Western or minority⁴ groups.

⁴ Minority groups refers to people whose practices, race, ethnicity or other characteristics are fewer in number than the dominant groups of classification. In South Africa, black South Africans are very much the majority group but their practices are arguably marginalised making them the demographic majority but the minority in ideological and linguistic ways.

Furthermore, some of the challenges of trying to transform the educational space stem from poor decisions that advance political interests rather than educational value (Bloch, 2009). It has been assumed that HEIs serve as a political battle ground for political parties to contest each other and advance their interests to gain popularity. For example, after the 2015/16 #FeesMustFall protests, former President Jacob Zuma announced free tertiary education for 90% of the students, which saw the Economic Freedom Party instructing students to walk in on any of the South African universities and demand to be registered for free (Jansen, 2018). Hlatshwayo (2018) argues that discussions and debates on transformation continue to be pertinent because of the lack of noticeable changes in the way formerly colonised people used to acquire knowledge, the content of the knowledge they acquire and how they position themselves in the knowledge that is offered to them. South African universities have been criticised for adopting and perpetuating Western models of academic organisation and excluding the knowledge of colonised people (Zembylas, 2018; Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016). Furthermore, many students who are entering the HEIs continue to face challenges because of the inequalities of schooling background, socio-economic class and other forms of 'othering' which could impact on the way they access forms of knowledge offered in HEIs (Heleta, 2016). The dominance of western beliefs in higher education have in part given rise to protests voicing the need to acknowledge African ways of knowledge production and acknowledge the Global South as equally capable of knowledge production, but it is a challenge to separate this out from other injustices such as uneven schooling and the differently resourced university sector.

African knowledge is understood to be holistic rather than based on the dualisms of Western knowledge and it emphasises the importance of experience in shaping our understanding of the world (Wane, 2005). Currently, the South African higher education system is arguably disconnected from African realities which include the lived experiences of the majority of black South Africans (Ramoupi, 2014). The higher education curriculum of most universities still relies on the 'European epistemic canon' that glorifies Western knowledge as the only legitimate form of knowing (Mbembe, 2016). Such hegemonic views continue to exacerbate students' feelings of alienation because they find the curriculum deficit of developing students' critical and analytical skills of understanding and moving Africa forward (CHE, 2017).

These feelings of alienation can in part be attributed to the aspect of not being able to relate to the main languages used as medium of instruction, given the ties between language and identity (De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003). The 2015/2016 demand for free and decolonised education was a result of anger, frustration, and feelings of alienation at the colonial nature of the university space in terms of its cultural climate and values (Manjra, 2016; Pilane, 2016). The language issue which is also central to the decolonial debate needs careful consideration, bearing in mind that language is a carrier of people's culture (Ngugi, 1986, 1993). A decolonised education entails ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions, histories and figures (Molefe, 2016, p. 32) and including South African, African perspectives, experiences and epistemologies as central tenets of the curriculum, teaching and research in the country (Shay, 2011). As discussed above, African epistemology refers to the means used to gain knowledge based on an African philosophy with a distinctive identity. It is a form of African philosophy with distinctive African epistemic identity produced and promoted by Africans within historical and geographical traditions (Higgs, 2010). The subject of decolonisation is in part an effort in trying to deal with feelings of alienation. According to Mignolo (2011), decolonisation is "definitive rejection of being told what we are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal humanitas and what we have to do to be recognised as such" (p. 161). Everatt (2016, p.1) draws our attention to other probabilities within the university space that may lead to students' alienation:

Let's also accept that for many students, much of the academy is an alienating, overwhelmingly white, Eurocentric space and experience. Students arrive and are expected to meet imported norms, seminar room sarcasm, unknown customs, foreign authors, hard marking and plain hard slog of tertiary education, while being young and going through their own life transitions, and doing so in 'othered' spaces, out of the vernacular, and so on.

Though there are many causes of students' feelings of alienation, such as those mentioned in the above quote, the issue of language is highlighted to show how it impacts on students' experiences in HEIs. Embroiled in concerns about language, the students protest of 2015/16 thus also called for the decolonisation of the curriculum because there was a general feeling that the curriculum continues to perpetuate the supremacy of white dominance and forms of knowledge, including through the use of English as the medium of instruction. Heleta (2016) argues that the curriculum continues to reinforce the notion that there is not much that can be learned from the African continent. It is also noted in a document by the Council on Higher

Education (CHE, 2016) that many academic disciplines such as Law, Psychology and Political Science in African universities often have a tenuous link to African cultures and realities.

English as a medium of instruction is then implicated in the deficiency of the curriculum as a vehicle that perpetuates these western values and forms of knowledge. The decolonial debate continues to dominate academic conversations as there are challenges in implementing changes, such as addressing the ills of apartheid which include structural poverty and inequalities within the education system as discussed earlier. Unless there are changes in the way the government runs, ensuring proper accountability and equity in schooling systems and so on, efforts to have a decolonised curriculum in institutions of higher learning will continue to be plagued by these inefficiencies. The current state of affairs may leave us trapped in the colonisers' perspectives, which Hlatshwayo (2018) terms "epistemic, epistemological and existential entrapment from which Africa has not been able to dismantle" (p. 32). Hlatshwayo alludes to the fact that our ways of teaching and learning are still shaped and guided to a great extent by colonial perspectives, but he also acknowledges that after two decades, many structural inequalities have been reinforced rather than dismantled. Thus, the decolonial debate is in part hinged on this inability to dismantle our ways of thinking and what constitutes knowledge in the Global South, from the colonisers (Mignolo, 2011).

As will be discussed in more detail later, this study aims to establish our understanding of the role of CE, if any, in the taking on of academic literacy practices in which the debates around the medium of instruction and issues of decoloniality are implicated. Literacy practices, according to Street (2003), refer 'to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts' (p.79). Taking a literacies lens to the decolonial debate entails an understanding that teaching has to be done in ways that make the discipline-specific literacy practices explicit, because that which is identified and made clear can be critiqued. If literacy practices remain obscure and simply assumed or normalised, then they are difficult to name and to challenge. They are simply 'the way things are done' and therefore almost above reproach (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Identifying the literacy practices and teaching towards them is a matter of epistemic justice not only because doing so makes epistemological access more likely, but because doing so enables critique of

these practices. This is essential if we are to create critical citizenry from the students that pass through HEIs.

On the other hand, it is important to note that teaching in ways that make the literacy practices of the discipline explicit is not simple. As indicated, these practices are often taken for granted by academics who may be unaware of the extent to which they act as gatekeepers for student success. Academics may also feel unprepared for inducting students into the literacy practices of their field, never mind opening such practices to critique and change. The discussion thus far on epistemological access (that is access to the ways of making knowledge), followed by the discussion on decolonisation (which questions the very nature of that knowledge), compels us to consider another important issue which is epistemic justice.

2.7 Epistemic Justice

The debates around education and language in HEIs contribute to broader issues of epistemic justice. Epistemic justice refers to the “proper use and allocation of power in relation to knowledge” (Geuskens, 2014, p. 3). The concept highlights the need for equitable access to knowledge by all and to the need to consider multiple knowledge sources. Epistemic justice can also be understood as a practice that is cooperative and thus requires reciprocity and fairness (Anderson, 2003). Zembylas (2018) notes that to talk of epistemic justice there is need to understand that knowledge production is not a process that resides exclusively in any geographical space. He asks us to be careful in framing knowledge as being from ‘the West’, for example. Understanding the intersections of geography and history in the emergence of current fields of study means that simplistic categories of colonial or decolonial knowledge need to be challenged. But this does not negate the calls for decoloniality already discussed. As De Oliveira Andreotti (2011, p. 392) indicates, to “recognise the mechanisms that privilege European epistemologies and ‘forget’, silence, repress or ‘damn’ ‘other’ epistemologies is a necessary and complex endeavour”. Amongst the forms of colonisation that Africa may experience is an epistemological colonisation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). African knowledge is assumed to be inadequate and has been thought of as ‘incomplete’, mutilated and unfinished (Mbembe, 2001). Keet (2014) states that when Western forms of knowledge are viewed as more important than African knowledge, it results in what he calls epistemic ‘othering’ whereby African knowledge is deemed as ‘unworthy of recognition’.

Zembylas (2018) further suggests that in order to achieve decolonisation in HEIs, we should recognise how epistemic injustice manifests itself in various pedagogical practices. When these epistemic injustices are made overt, then appropriate measures on how to support students will be employed. Walker (2020) sheds light on the epistemic injustices in HEIs when she posits that students may not be recognised as knowers (because of systemic racism and the undermining of certain social groups, because of the language that they use and because of a range of other issues) or have obstacles (such as English being the dominant medium of instruction) placed in their way resulting in their marginalisation from the many educational goods distributed by HEIs.

Drawing on Fricker's work (2007), a major part of epistemic injustice entails people being wronged in their capacity as knowers, not being accorded full participation in an epistemic setting or being rendered unable to bear knowledge as epistemic agents. Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice emerges as testimonial injustice, or hermeneutical injustice, or both.

Testimonial injustice is when people are harmed in their capacity as knowers because of who they are (such as their race and gender) and their backgrounds (such as their socio-economic positioning), such that their voices and knowledge receive less credibility from those in positions of power. Testimonial injustice can be understood in terms of people's claims not being afforded credibility, when people are not credited as knowers or epistemic agents. A person's identity could be another way in which one's epistemic agency can be delegitimised. The hearer robs the speaker of their capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Literature suggests that students in HEIs often feel that their identities make them less visible or perceived to be important (Soudien, 2015).

Hermeneutic injustice is caused by the lack of an interpretative framework that makes people unable to fully understand and/or articulate their own experiences and/or to understand other people's experiences (Fricker, 2007). He states that hermeneutical injustice is structural in nature. In HEIs, many students experience hermeneutical injustices mainly because of who they are, their backgrounds and that they are not fluent in the language of instruction to express certain elements of their experience in a socially intelligible fashion (Fricker, 2009). Again, the nature of the HEI landscape in terms of the way the curriculum continues to further Western ways of knowing and HEI structures, may continue to lead to hermeneutic injustices

to students. As a result of both types of injustices, students may be seen as not knowing and unable to contribute to meaningful debates and knowledge creation in HEIs in some instances. In contrast to hermeneutic injustice, the literature calls for epistemic access (Morrow, 2009) with epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), whereby students are enabled to access the powerful knowledge, skills and practices and to challenge them.

Glass and Newman (2015) state that HEIs need to be wary of injustices in epistemic practices, following the general assumption that HEIs are dedicated to truth seeking. Though there are continuous calls for universities to be inclusive of all people from different backgrounds, issues of identity prejudice still arise in the credibility judgements of the hearers (dominant group in terms of power and language) to devalue testimony and claims from those disadvantaged (Fricker, 2007). This may be the situation in HEIs where English is the dominant language of instruction and students whose home language is not English may experience forms of injustice when they automatically do not fit into the dominant English-speaking groups. This is as a result of the current state of affairs presenting English as a more powerful and dominant language, potentially rendering other languages less important, as discussed earlier.

Language is tied to our culture and experiences (Pollio et al., 1997). As a result, language is also connected to the different forms of knowledge. The notion that language is connected to different forms of knowledge calls for ways to acknowledge the diversity of knowledge and the equality of knowers (Fricker, 2009; Mignolo, 2008). Visvanathan (1999) discusses the ways in which Western ways of knowing and indigenous ways contrast with each other, which has led to the development of the concept of cognitive justice as a way acknowledging epistemic pluralism. The concept of cognitive justice is based on the recognition of the diversity of knowledge and expresses the right of the diverse forms of knowledge to co-exist (Visvanathan, 2006). Western knowledge is often valued more than other forms of knowledge such as indigenous knowledge, in part because of the language used to express these kinds of knowledge. The discussion points to the ways in which the English language is dominant over other languages in HEIs, such that the inability to use and interact in other languages shows which language counts – hence the result in epistemic injustice and compromises in issues of identity and belonging.

2.8 The role of Community Engagement in epistemological access and epistemic justice

In post-apartheid South Africa, CE activities aim to contribute to epistemic justice through the discourses constructing CE and the programmes implementing CE. CE is often viewed as a vehicle for redress in higher education, consistent with the country's broader socio-economic transformation (Heleta, 2016; Paphitis & Kelland, 2016). There is a recognition by CE advocates that there are different ways of knowing which include indigenous, experiential, scientific and practical (Visvanathan, 1999). CE initiatives often aim for the recognition of all these forms of knowledge without any of these being seen as necessarily more powerful than the other, but rather as seeing forms of knowledge as contextualised. Due to this overlap between cognitive justice and epistemic justice, CE potentially provides spaces where it is possible to consider a wide variety of knowledge sources as legitimate. CE thus potentially enables HEIs to engage with a variety of knowledges. The CE initiative could be taken cognisance of in HEIs and inform their decolonial processes. There is potential for CE to be a key facet of the bid to make HEI spaces where critical knowledge and assessment occurs, that more explicitly makes spaces for forms of knowledge excluded through our colonial heritage (Walker, 2018).

In light of this, CE is increasingly conceptualised as including programmes that are intended to support students to have adequate access to a wide range of knowledge within the university boundaries, including programmes related to language in learning activities. Paphitis and Kelland (2014, p. 202) state that CE:

allows us to bring in a kind of epistemic justice to the knowledge production process by allowing the voices which have previously been ignored, marginalised and disenfranchised in the knowledge production process to be taken seriously, and to play a role, not only in knowledge production, but knowledge dissemination.

Central to this is not only the inclusion of various communities, their languages and knowledge practices but also brings to the fore the importance of understanding the experiences of students as a basis for transforming epistemological access and success in HEIs. Consequently, to better inform epistemic access and justice debates and practice, we need to look at how language facilitates the forms of knowledge in HEIs and the varied ways in which CE can support epistemic access and justice, given the blurred boundaries between language as a medium of instruction and language as meaning making in the sense of varied

literacy practices. To achieve epistemological access, there is need to develop a curriculum structure and teaching approach that makes the literary practices of the discipline explicit. This process will help the students to crack the code and take on the literacy practices of the academy – or challenge them where necessary. CE may have a potential role in this regard.

The overlap between these issues may not be clear because most people work from the dominant autonomous model, they may be likely to assume that students' difficulties emerge only from language proficiency and fail to see the role played by the literacy norms expected of students. According to Street (1995), autonomous models of literacy are based on essay-text forms of literacy which are rooted in Western academic circles, representing a culturally specific model that masks claims of universalism. Street further argues that the autonomous model is disadvantageous in that it suppresses students under the ideology and social control of the teacher and does not lift those participating in it out of their socially embedded context thus depriving learners to critically analyse social and political issues. It is evident that those in positions of power continue to maintain superiority through marginalizing other forms of literate knowledge meaning that literacy is presented as a context-neutral skill. On the other hand, Street calls for an ideological model in which literacy is conceptualized as a social practice. In this model literacy is more than acquiring content. Street (2003), states that the ideological model is about knowledges and the ways in which people address reading and writing which are rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being. The concept of language and literacy in relation to epistemic access suggests that we need to provide educational experiences that allow for students to experiment with, challenge and take on the literacy practices of HEIs.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter considered the distinction between language competence and discipline-specific literacy practices, and the extent to which the latter is often assumed and not made explicit to students. Teaching in ways that make the required literacy practices explicit is seen to be key to scaffolding epistemological access, though it is admittedly not a simple task as academics may themselves be unaware of the required literacy practices or unsure as to how to make them explicit so that students can practise them.

Furthermore, teaching towards epistemological access can play an important role in achieving epistemic justice, in that only when practices are made explicit can they be challenged. Decolonial debates have called for all the taken-for-granted practices of higher education to be open to critique, and in particular for a reflection on the extent to which the knowledge valorised in the academy is Western and alternative forms of knowledge have been excluded. Teaching towards epistemological access with epistemic justice requires a careful, critical reflection on the nature of knowledge and its related practices in every field taught in the university. The use of English as the medium of instruction is also brought under the spotlight in such calls as students are seen to be alienated through the interplay of studying in a language that they may not be highly proficient in, and in doing so, to take on colonial assumptions and forms of knowledge. While these debates have been engaged with in the literature for some time, the relationship between such debates and community engagement has enjoyed less attention.

CE has been depicted in literature (Bandy, 2011; CHE, 2010) as a different kind of learning space to the formal classroom. CE initiatives are both within the university, with its ethos, history and disciplinary norms and practices, and yet simultaneously outside the university, through a range of projects and programmes with various community groups. This study is interested in how this relates to language and literacy practices. CE is arguably a space that is more flexible, allows for a range of language use and for various literacy practices that could be strongly aligned to those of the academy or could be very different to those of the academy and the various writing practices that are needed for students to succeed in their studies. The following chapter will look at CE in more detail, and discuss the various approaches in CE and how it provides a platform for learning within HEIs, in particular within the context in which this study is placed.

Chapter 3: Community Engagement

3.1 Introduction

Community Engagement (CE) is an international concept found in HEIs around the world (Furco, 2010). Despite it becoming common across borders and HE systems, it assumes different definitions and takes place in different ways, and these multiple definitions and practices emerge from its intended purposes that vary from place to place. This chapter explores CE and the different forms it takes in HEIs. The role and purpose of CE in HEIs has been relatively well documented since its inception, but there remains a gap in our understanding of the extent to which CE supports language use or the relationship between CE and language use, identity and knowledge creation, to which this study seeks to contribute to. In order to contribute to the transformation debate and have solutions that are beneficial to student learning, there is need to look at the forms and functions of CE. This chapter begins with a brief history of CE and then moves on to look at the different forms that CE assumes, depending on the place. A description of the SA higher education context follows and a description of the challenges of CE is presented before I hone in to look at CE at Rhodes University, zooming in on a particular form of CE, the Engaged Citizen Programme at Rhodes University, which is the focus of this study.

3.2 Historical Background of Community Engagement

Bhagwan (2017) states that a clear definition for CE remains a challenge because different institutions have employed CE to serve different purposes within their universities. CE emerged in fairly different ways in different countries and therefore takes many forms. For example, the community partners can include groups, agencies, institutions or individuals; it can be categorised by the geographical place of the community or by a particular identity that community members claim (Sebola, 2017). In some cases, 'community' entails those inhabiting the area near the university, whereas in others it could be an organisation such as an NGO, NPO or even industry.

Higher Education Institutions have long been perceived as 'ivory towers' – creators of knowledge and educators of the elite, separate from society (Buckley, 2012). Historically, universities served the purpose of educating the elite for their role in society and so there was arguably an active separation between universities and much of society (Graham, 2013). This created a chasm between communities and universities and gave the impression that

universities were spaces untarnished by the inequalities of the outside world (Stockdill and Danico: 2012). This has changed rapidly as the nature of higher education has shifted.

To better understand how CE fits into HEI, there is a need to look at the broader role played by HEIs in different societies. The need to investigate the role played by HEIs stems from broader debates on whether universities are meant to prepare society's elite for their roles in society, to develop knowledge for a knowledge economy, to train the country's most skilled labour, to develop critical citizens, or to contribute to social cohesion or any of the other purposes that have been placed on higher education institutions. Universities have shifted in their roles considerably since their earliest versions. While many of the shifts have been gradual over hundreds of years, the speed of change in the mandate of universities increased considerably after WWII when massification became desired as part of the opening up of society and the rise in concern for social justice (Osborne, 2003).

As indicated in Chapter 1, Trow (1973) focused on the growth of HEIs and argued that there was a broad pattern of changes in higher education in every advanced society and these patterns manifested in three stages: namely *elite* higher education, where less than 15% of a country's 18 to 23-year-olds go to university, *mass* higher education where more than 15% participate in higher education, and a *universal* system where participation exceeds 50%. The character of HE changed as widening access shifted from it being a privilege of the few, in the elite phase, to increasingly being seen as a right, in the mass phase, and almost mandatory in the universal phase. These changes meant that universities were not just dealing with the children of the 'elite', but they widened access to young people across all social groups. This had enormous implications for the universities' purpose and practices.

Trow's account of elite, mass and universal phases of higher education and his framework has been critiqued for locking into common perceptions, but he has remained resolute to the universality of his claim on the change in the character of higher education and its trajectories (Marginson, 2006). Trow predicted that these changes would play out across the United Kingdom and to some extent American higher education. While Trow's classification of three phases may be open to debate, his arguments have "resonated as much outside the United States as within" (Marginson, 2006, p. 31) and have resonance within the South African HEI sector.

An elite university system is seen to provide society with a highly educated top strata who manage the government, industry, legislation and so on of society. With the massification of education, many people who had previously not been allowed admission into universities came to seek graduate qualifications. Massification brings diversity to the student body, therefore the university cannot assume a homogenous student body with shared experiences and expectations. At the same time, the university began to offer far more qualifications focused on the workplace and began to be positioned by national policies as playing a role in national economic development.

It is against this backdrop of a changing student body and changes in the role of the university that CE became a key imperative for HEI's processes and mandates (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2001; Gruber, 2017). Furco (2010) notes that HEIs have been criticised for the absence of societal value. Historically, the importance of the academy's work that the institutions envisaged for themselves was fulfilling their civic and public purposes through the instruction they offered and research they conducted. As the widening of access led to massification, the process of CE came to be increasingly central in HEIs around the world.

It is also imperative to note that massification led to not only changes in the student body and therefore the need to change approaches to teaching, but it also led to critiques of the very nature of higher education teaching. Transactional teaching, which is learning that happens through interactions with people and which sees the transmission of knowledge from one group to another, was increasingly critiqued and replaced with calls for transformative teaching, which allows students and educators to develop genuine relationships in which the educator makes a difference in the students' lives and feels the differences in their lives too (Cranton, 2006). These shifts have also dovetailed with the rise of CE. It is thus imperative that the ways in which teaching takes place equips students to function in societies or provides them with a platform for community engagement. Hence, the link between the massification of students and community engagement becomes the teaching which happens in HEIs.

The Carnegie Foundation (2018) has defined CE as the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national and global) for mutual beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources, in a context of partnership and

reciprocity”. Drawing from this definition, words like ‘collaboration’ and ‘mutual beneficial exchange’ usually foreground the reciprocal nature that CE is intended to take. According to Furco’s (1996) model, CE has different forms and shapes, including community service learning, community service, volunteerism, field education and internship. The figure below is a diagrammatic representation of the CE continuum.

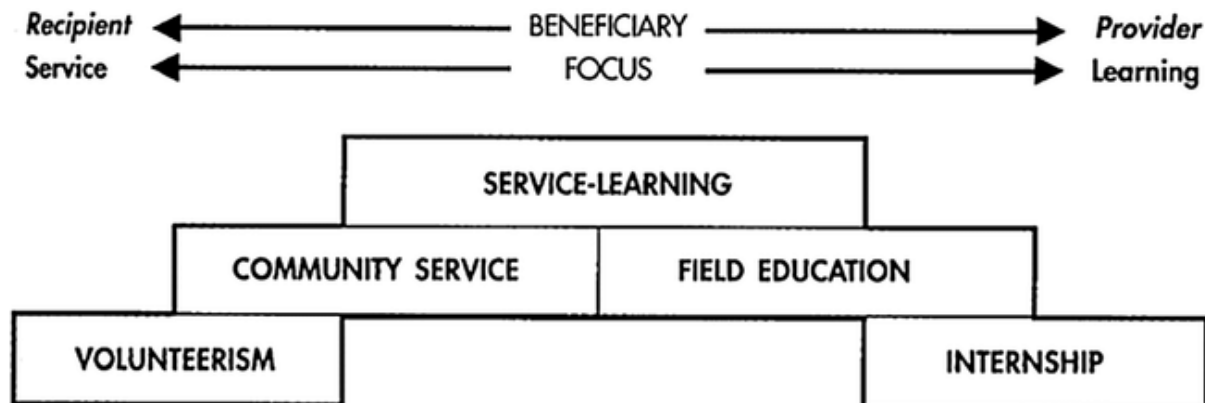


Figure 3.1: The community engagement continuum: Adapted from Furco (1996, p.3)

In the diagram above, Furco (1996) describes an educational experience that includes a service component which is the focus of the experience (service vs learning) and the beneficiary (recipient vs provider). Hence, depending on the degree of focus across the two dimensions, the service component of a course could be described as volunteerism, community outreach, service learning, co-operative education and internship. The intent is said to differ though they may include similar activities (LaVelle et al., 2020). Volunteerism is the engagement of students in activities in which the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is the service recipient (Furco, 1996). Volunteerism is not credit bearing but can enable a deeper appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Kogan & Kellaway, 2004).

In contrast to volunteerism, Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service learning as

a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

The emphasis in service learning is for students to be able to learn whilst applying the course content. Eyler and Giles (1999, unpagged) also define service learning as a

form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems, and at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding for themselves.

In this regard, service learning is conceptualised as a flexible pedagogy which can be used in a variety of classroom and community settings and its components are intertwined in the sense that it is connected to course content, it provides meaningful activities which address real community needs and also provides opportunities for critical reflection to the students (Bandy, 2011). Service learning provides deep learning which is the ability to transform factual knowledge to usable knowledge and enhances student learning and personal development (Bransford et al, 2000). Service learning can be distinguished from other forms of CE such as volunteerism, community service, internship and field education in that it emphasises equal focus on both learning and service goals. The equal focus is mutually reinforced through the academic context. However, service learning like any other pedagogical approach, offers both risks and rewards attended by numerous barriers and pitfalls (Speck, 2001).

There are still ongoing debates on the effectiveness of service learning and as such some scholars have noted that convincing evidence of the importance of service learning is still lacking (Giles & Eyler, 1998). But this does not mean that there is no research that supports the effectiveness of service learning. For instance, Eyler et al. (1997) report that service learning has an impact on student's learning, attitudes, values, skills and the way they think about social issues, even if it is undertaken over a short period of time. On the other hand, service learning has its shortfalls if there are no proper planning procedures. Koliba (1999) notes that students and members of the community may not feel as integral a part of the planning process and that could downplay their involvement. Neururer and Rhoads (1998) also noted that based on the results of their research, "community service as a panacea to bridge class differences and racial differences" community service fell apart upon close examination of their data.

A brief look at these advantages and disadvantages of service learning suggests the need more research to establish the best ways in which other activities and initiatives can best be

incorporated into service learning to make it an effective component of CE. These initiatives could look into the practice, experiences of the participants and how the desired outcomes in the mission statements are executed in a way that produces results.

Engaged scholarship refers to the application of academic scholarly work and professional expertise, with an intended public purpose and mutual benefit that demonstrates engagement with external (and non-academic) constituencies. It aims to generate new knowledge integration, the application of knowledge, or the dissemination of knowledge (Sandmann, 2008). Engagement involves partnership in a two-way exchange of information, ideas and expertise, and shared decision making. Scholarship is work that is public, peer reviewed and available in a platform that others may build on. Scholarship is also about contributing to a body of knowledge and these contributions could be in the form of the creation of new knowledge or dissemination of knowledge (Sandmann, 2007).

Engaged scholarship as an approach to CE has strengths which include an increased chance that research will be applied in practice, and an increased likelihood that research will advance knowledge for theory and practice, facilitating an understanding of real-world complex problems and suitable for interdisciplinary research (Van de Ven, 2007). On the other hand, it also has challenges which vary from the inability to create and manage effective engagement between researchers and stakeholders, inability to spend sufficient time interacting with the study, and an inability for one to be a sufficiently reflexive researcher (Shawcross & Ridgman, 2017). The higher education system is experiencing a number of challenges ranging from transformation to diversity and if the higher education sector implements and executes approaches such as engaged scholarship, they could maintain the synergy that arises between theory and practice (Chetty & Pather, 2015).

Engaged scholarship occurs at the intersection of community involvement, community benefit and scholarly advancement and it is important to note that engaged scholarship is not a one-way transfer of information, as with other forms of CE, it should be collaborative, transformative, responsive and beneficial, and here is where the universities should reflect whether the way it reaches to the communities still serves the purpose of higher education (Johnson, 2020). One form of engaged research is Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). According to the Irish Research Council (2017, p. 4)

engaged research describes a wide range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement with the community and aim to improve, understand or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, including societal challenges. Engaged research is advanced *with* community partners rather than for them.

In the USA, CE is mainly referred to as 'service' with the three pillars of HEIs being teaching and learning, research, and service. This 'service' is very widely defined (more so than CE in South Africa) and often includes workplace learning in industry. But two forms of service in the USA which are closely aligned to our understanding of CE are engaged scholarship and service learning (Sandmann, 2008). In the UK, CE is often referred to as civic engagement (Goddard & Vallance, 2011). According to Carpini (2000), civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organisational involvement to electoral participation. CE can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem, or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. In Latin America, CE is called *Solidaridad* which refers to the promotion of social justice (Rabin, 2014). In the South African context, CE is generally known as such and it manifests through examples such as volunteerism, service learning and engaged scholarship, varying from HEI to HEI (Johnson, 2020). However, with these different definitions of CE, it can be noted that the common mission or the intended purpose is for HEIs to extend themselves beyond their internal community to their external non-university communities in a variety of ways (Johnson, 2020).

Perhaps the definitional complexities have stemmed in part from different ideological conceptualisations of what 'community' and 'engagement' entail. Some scholars have defined community in terms of history, race, geography, repositioning statements, developed strengths and interest areas or regional challenges (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1997). However, it all depends on how the different universities conceptualise 'community', to the extent that a clear definition remains abstract. Some HEIs understand a community to mean those at the doorstep of the university in surrounding areas, or those further afield in the local government or province (Johnson, 2020). A community can be defined as groups of people who are brought together by location, interest and affiliation, or identity (CDC, 1997). The concept of community can be thought of in geographic terms, whilst also based on shared interests or characteristics as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or occupation (Glanz et al., 2015). Minkler et al. (2008) also defines community as "functional

spatial units meeting basic needs for sustenance, units of patterned social interaction or symbolic units of collective identity” (p290).

According to Bhagwan (2017), CE is characterised by two operational contexts - the community and the university - and the operationalisation of each context is based on different realities which are often in contrast to one another. Bhagwan (2017) further explains that the university exists in a physical environment with structures and ethos whilst communities are often characterised by a lack of structure, order, resources and direction. Communities are often identified by conditions of disadvantage and social isolation and those within the communities can view academics as part of the elite who produce and transmit knowledge. In the South African context, community is often used as a euphemism for ‘poor people’ living in disadvantaged situations (Kehler, 2001; The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank, 2018).

The complexities of defining CE also stem in part from the different understandings of the meaning of the word ‘engagement’. Firstly, there have to be two parties for engagement to take place, with mutual understanding of both parties involved (Simpson, 2000). This means that universities have to involve and ask communities to engage with them so that they don’t impose themselves on the communities. This understanding is at times lacking but if this is implemented it can ensure that research processes and programmes are aligned with community priorities, needs and interests (Walker, 2000). For meaningful engagement, a shared understanding between parties is needed with a clearly defined partnership, set objectives on what has to be achieved, and a shared end goal for the partnership spelt out (CDC,1997). Thus, there should be an agreement on what universities intend to achieve through the partnership as well what the community also aims to achieve. In other words, engagement speaks to connectedness and collaboration between people. With this in mind, CE can thus be defined as coming to create a shared vision among the university and its community partners (local, provincial, national government, NGOs and donors) (CHE, 2007). CE could also mean people working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realise bold visions for their common future or to address issues affecting the well-being of the members in that community (CDC, 1997). This also entails working with communities in collaboration and as co-creators of new knowledge, instead of working on and in communities.

The gap between universities and communities has led to challenges to deal with academic, socio-political and economic problems, hence CE was fostered to ensure that universities become more explicitly engaged with the communities around them (Bhagwan, 2007). The communities provided the human resources necessary for the HEI to carry out their purpose and the universities had the role of producing students who would be well-equipped citizens who would give back to their societies through their skilled work, thereby creating development in their societies (Jacobs et al., 2015). Beyond reaching out to the communities, universities also realised the need to acknowledge other forms of knowledge, moving away from a view that knowledge belongs in the academy distributed from experts in universities, to an understanding of knowledge as emerging from a two-way collaboration (Johnson, 2020). In other words, CE could be seen to include any activities between universities and communities that are mutually beneficial in exchange of knowledge and resources (Gruber: 2017).

3.2 Community Engagement in the South African Higher Education Context

In South Africa (SA), the process of massification of higher education took place alongside the dismantling of apartheid. The White Paper of 1997 articulated very clearly the need for extensive change in the inequal higher education sector and also specified the social cohesion role to be played by the higher education sector. Whilst the process of CE continues to grow in universities internationally, it has taken a particular form in the SA context as a result of this process. CE was seen to be a key means of ensuring that higher education moves from its divisive type based on race and ethnic grouping, to a coherent sector collectively engaged in producing critical citizens.

Because CE was seen in part to being a vehicle for the formation of a reformed HE landscape that would serve the massified student body and assist in the creation of a new and fair South Africa, it was rapidly taken up by universities that had not had any forms of CE prior to 1994 and was formalised and extended within those universities which had already had various kinds of CE.

Since the 1997 White Paper, various other national documents have reinforced the expectation that every public university will have CE and that this will form one of every university's core activities alongside research and teaching and learning. For example, the

first round of institutional audits conducted by the Council on Higher Education between 2004 and 2009 included the auditing of each university's CE structures and processes. This included:

Where community engagement is discharged through a range of activities, including service learning, quality considerations for institutional engagement with the local and broader community should be formalised within an institution's quality management policies and procedures. These arrangements should be linked to teaching and learning and research, where possible, and given effect through the allocation of adequate resources and institutional recognition. (CHE, 2004, p. 19)

It was thus expected that every university have clear indications as to the valuing of CE and the resources to offer and evaluate their CE programmes and projects. While the specific focus on CE might be found in any number of institutional documents, it is useful to look at the current institutional visions and missions to get a sense of how central CE is to South African universities. I therefore now turn to provide an overview of how South Africa's universities have embraced and incorporated CE as a core function as evidenced in their vision and mission statements, while acknowledging the ways of implementation. How CE is carried out varies from HEI to HEI, depending on a number of issues varying from location, commitment to CE, to availability of funding. The table below lists the 26 South African public universities and highlights where they state CE in their mission and vision statements.

I begin with Rhodes University as that is the institution in which this study is placed.

Table 3.1: South Africa's 26 universities and their mission and vision statements

University	Extracts from mission and vision statements
Rhodes University	In pursuit of its vision, the University will strive to produce outstanding graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with a life-long love of learning; and to strive, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa.
University of Pretoria	In pursuing recognition and excellence in its core functions of research, teaching and learning, and integrating engagement with society and communities into these, the University of Pretoria will use quality, relevance, diversity and sustainability as its navigational markers.
University of KwaZulu- Natal	To foster meaningful interactions with local, national and international communities for mutual benefit. Its engagement agenda should enrich the institution's teaching, learning and research activities, and deepen its contribution to wider society. To this end, UKZN aims to contribute – through knowledge – to the prosperity and sustainability of KwaZulu-Natal and to nation building by connecting with and committing itself to the stakeholder communities UKZN serves.
North-West University	Exists to nurture and manage partnerships with communities, the intention being to facilitate cooperation between various communities and the university, as well as to provide the means whereby both parties can actively discover knowledge, teach and learn from one another in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial manner.
University of Cape Town	UCT is an inclusive and engaged research-intensive African university... advancing a more equitable and sustainable social order and influencing the global higher education landscape... underpinned by values of engaged citizenship and social justice

University of Western Cape	Exists to enhance and promote the scholarship of engagement through equitable partnerships and citizenry to promote sustainable communities' and its values are centered on scholarship of engagement, partnerships, critical citizenship and civic responsibilities, social justice, equity and lifelong learning
Durban University of Technology	The DUT's Mission is to serve the needs of developing societies within a dynamic global context and the enable quality teaching, learning, research and community engagement by providing quality, career-focused education; Promoting a values-driven ethos; Sustainable partnerships with industry, community and society
Vaal University of Technology	To remain at the forefront of producing highly dedicated and qualified cohorts of graduate students that will provide exceptional service and become entrepreneurs through innovative, teaching and learning, research and community engagement.
University of Venda	The University of Venda, anchored on the pillars of excellence in teaching, learning, research and community engagement, produces graduates imbued with knowledge, skills and qualifications which are locally relevant and globally competitive.
University of Witwatersrand	The mission of the University of the Witwatersrand is to grow its global stature as a leading research-intensive university, and to be a gateway to research engagement and intellectual achievement in Africa.
University of South Africa	Unisa is a comprehensive, open distance learning institution that produces excellent scholarship and research, provides quality tuition and fosters active community engagement
University of Limpopo	A University which responds actively: ... To the development needs of its students, staff and communities, Through relevant and higher quality education and training, research and community engagement...
University of Mpumalanga	To offer high quality educational and training opportunities that foster the holistic development of students through teaching and learning, research and scholarship and engagement in collaboration with strategic partners.
University of Johannesburg	Inspiring its community to transform and serve humanity through innovation and the collaborative pursuit of knowledge.

University of Fort Hare	The attainment of the highest professional and ethical standards in teaching, learning, research, community engagement and corporate governance.
Tshwane University of Technology	Our mission directs us towards solving pressing societal problems and ensuring that our graduates are productive and active citizens.
Stellenbosch University	We lead by facilitating transformative, life-long learning; creating, sharing and translating knowledge that enhances health and health equity; and co-creating value with and for the communities we serve.
Sefako Makgatho Health and Science University	Deploy educational approaches that include evidence-based methods for curriculum development and delivery that are rooted in the community... Produce a cadre of health professionals with the transformative leadership capacity to identify, analyse and address the health needs of the individual, the family, the community and the population... Create an environment that supports innovation and harnesses the power of new technologies to address the health needs of the community.
Nelson Mandela University	We engage and form partnerships, interact with stakeholders and reach out and contribute towards the sustainable development of the communities we serve. These actions are directed at making the Nelson Mandela University a transparent and user-friendly institution which extends itself effectively to those who seek access to its knowledge resources, products and expertise.
Mangosuthu University of Technology	The vision of Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) is to be a pre-eminent higher education institution of technology that fosters socio-economic advancement through the scholarships of teaching and learning, applied research, technology development and transfer and community engagement.
Central University of Technology	Commitment to nurturing a vibrant academic community conducive for the study, creation and dissemination of knowledge through research, training and service...engage in research and innovation to improve the quality of our community's life

Walter Sisulu	Through its core business, WSU responds to societal needs in ethical, scholarly, sustainable, and entrepreneurial ways, and delivers future-ready graduates.
Sol Plaatje University	To become an institution of higher learning uniquely positioned to: graduate citizens competent and capable of realising the aspirations of society, produce new knowledge impacting on key challenges of the region and engage critically with communities of discourse and communities of people in order to search out pathways to equitable development.

University of Zululand, University of Free State and Cape Peninsula University of Technology had no explicit mention of community engagement in their mission and vision statements, though this does not mean it is absent in these universities because all three have CE units.

It was evident from this look across the public higher education sector in South Africa that CE is understood to be a core function of the university along with teaching and learning and research. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), has defined CE as “the initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community” (HEQC, 2004, p. 26).

It is without doubt that CE has been recognised as fundamental to South African higher education (CHE, 2016; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Bender (2008) notes that CE has shifted from being conceptualised as a silo of HEIs separately from teaching and learning and research, to a status of being viewed as an integral part of HEIs enriching teaching and learning and research with a sense of context, relevance and application. Unpacking some of the reasons why CE is beginning to gain acknowledgment in HEIs gives us more understanding of why research of the nature of this study is significant.

After the apartheid regime, there was general consensus on the need for change in South African institutions. For an understanding of how CE fits into the South African higher education policy, I looked at the White Paper of 1997 which informed the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1997). Transformation was high on the agenda for higher education in South Africa. As part of this process, CE was explicitly stated as one of the pillars of higher education, along with teaching and learning and research. One of the key objectives set out for CE was to “promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst student of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes” (DoE, 1997, p.10). The status of CE was reaffirmed in the Ministry of Education National Plan for Higher Education three years later, when it was stated that through CE, higher education would enhance “responsiveness to regional and national needs, for academic programmes, research and community service” (MoE, 2001).

The concept of CE was further developed in the White Paper of 2007 through the DoE urging HEIs to transform their landscape by becoming more socially responsive and democratising

knowledge production. This cemented the notion that universities now had three important functions: teaching and learning, research and community engagement (DoE, 2007).

Having been repeatedly stated in policy as a key feature in South African higher education, CE began to be seen in a variety of institutional and national structures. Most universities had staff dedicated to overseeing the development and implementation of CE initiatives. And in 2009 the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) was formed as an important forum to facilitate discussions on CE at a national level, within institutions and between institutions. The membership of SAHECEF developed a mandate for themselves to develop knowledge about practices of CE in institutions and also to ensure that all the universities embraced CE and fostered it as a significant activity as much as teaching and research (Watson et al., 2011). The mandate included a bid to make the university space more accessible to its surrounding areas, for the purposes of achieving social justice and to try to change the way the universities can be perceived as sites of oppression and inequalities, to fostering relationships between communities and HEIs (Jacobs et al., 2015).

Community Engagement in South Africa was also framed as a means of broadening the students' understanding of contemporary South African issues through global service learning and volunteering programmes. CE is thus conceptualised as the identity and purpose of the university firmly located within the nexus between research and teaching. CE in SA "created an opportunity to transform pedagogy, and usher in a more dramatic and socially just higher education system that would refocus higher education towards a public good" (Bhagwan, 2017, p. 171). The extent to which CE is explicitly referred to in the different universities visions and missions described above, is just one indication that CE has been embraced as a core function of the sector. This does not mean, however, that it is without ongoing hurdles and challenges, which at times, threaten its sustainability.

3.3 Community Engagement challenges within Higher Education Institutions

As CE gained momentum in different HEIs in South Africa and worldwide, there was a need to interrogate whether the communities or HEIs benefited from the 'services' that CE supposedly offered to both parties. Questions have been raised (for example, Kliever et al, 2010) about how reciprocal CE really is, particularly where 'engaged research' is seen to be less 'engaged' and rather take the form of 'data extraction' and service-learning is seen to

largely be a matter of students' developing specific skills needed for future employment or as a means of obtaining credits for practical work.

It has also been noted that universities are not the only places of knowledge creation or the only places where knowledge exists. The communities around the universities already have various forms of knowledge and they have the potential to create and contribute to other already existing forms of knowledge. Bearing in mind that communities already have their knowledge sources, CE could function both as an initiative that encourages knowledge creation in communities and as an important initiative to enhance teaching and learning and research in HEIs, but only if the CE initiatives are steeped in a culture of reciprocity and respect. CE has been and still is in the process of changing the notion that it only serves as a mechanism for young elite or the privileged to work in poor communities as a way of 'empowering them' (Bawa, 2014). Despite the prevalence of CE in SA universities, little is known if CE indeed achieves what it purports to stand for or whether it may inadvertently at times replicate lines of power and privilege.

Despite the evidence shared above in the form of reference to national policy and extracts from institutional visions and mission statements, some academics have noted with concern that CE continues to be treated as something outside the core of the university, a 'nice to have' activity but not essential to the functioning of the institution (Bawa, 2014, p. 154). Some have argued that CE has not been fully integrated into the workings of the university because research and teaching and learning have been prioritised whilst CE has remained in the peripherals (Kearney, 2015). It is certainly the case that while CE is repeatedly mentioned in key national policies as fundamental to a quality higher education and integral to the formation of a socially just higher education, it is not financially much supported at a national level. The national funding formula is based on a complex formula pertaining to research outputs (publications and postgraduate graduations) and teaching inputs and outputs (enrolments and graduations). It does not include funding specifically for CE. Because the funding formula is one of the key drivers of transformation in higher education, this is a significant concern.

The peripheral existence of CE in some HEIs has resulted in it at times being undervalued, poorly supported and funded and not seen as adding value to research and teaching and learning (Cuthill, 2008; Moore & Ward, 2010). On this, Kearney (2015) notes that such

challenges are because of the lack of a well-articulated purpose of CE within HEIs which sets a clearly articulated underpinning philosophy of mutual benefit and respect. There are many misconceptions that manifest as challenges for CE, whereby communities do not fully trust the intended purpose of HEIs reaching out to them. They may have a misconception that HEIs only reach out to them to further their own interests at the expense of the communities, hence the partnerships are marred with distrust (Cherry and Shefner, 2004). Such challenges often result from HEIs undertaking research *on* communities and not *with* communities (Kearney, 2015). Alongside such 'extractive research' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021), CE undertaken from only a volunteerism basis is rarely sustainable (Bulbulia & van Niekerk, 2012) and efforts to engage with community that have only remained as 'community service' are often short-lived. This is in part because the underpinning ideology is one of 'doing good' in a way that conjures up patronising relationships rather than ones based on reciprocity and respect.

CE has inherent power differentials, and this can lead to highly problematic thwarted expectations on the part of the community and feelings of frustration from the university. Moseley (2007) notes that in some instances HEIs and the community engage in CE with different motives, expectations, constraints and challenges. In instances where either of the parties perceive their goals have not been met, then the original purpose of CE (which is to work together to achieve a shared goal guided by a commitment to a common set of values, principles and criteria) can be defeated (Driscoll and Sandmann, 2016). Thus, CE could serve to reinforce rather than dismantle the town-gown dichotomy where power plays out in dangerous ways.

CE has emerged as the third pillar of HEIs in an environment where the HEI landscape is beset with challenges that span from apartheid legacies and that include poor infrastructure and the need for transformation to cater for diversity. But the knowledge which CE provides as support structures for students to deal with these issues remains limited (Ogunsanya and Govender, 2020). Other issues that continue to plague HEIs are the issues related to dealing with challenges of a Eurocentric curriculum and epistemological traditions that are often based on hierarchical notions of knowledge and concepts of superiority. As discussed earlier, the #FeesMustFall student protests of 2015/16 called for these to be questioned within all aspects of HE activity (Heleta, 2016). Without such careful introspection, it is possible that CE

simply reasserts the power differentials that were fundamental to the system during apartheid.

While CE has been stated in national policy, as indicated earlier, as being central to HE taking up a new role of social cohesion and justice in post-apartheid South Africa, CE has arguably been introduced as a 'bandage' to bind up a wound that is still fresh and bleeding. Unless the ills of apartheid are addressed, including the unequal nature of the higher education sector and the challenges that students face economically and socially, CE may not really function fully to meet its intended purposes. There are issues of epistemic justice and challenges of access and success in HEIs that require redress, and it is amidst challenges of this nature that CE is viewed as either yet another responsibility and area of activity for academics to take on alongside their heavy teaching loads and pressure to publish (Bidandi et al., 2021). Bidandi et al. (2021) sum these challenges as follows:

South African educational landscape... has witnessed countless academic, socioeconomic, and political qualms, leading to disturbances within and around these institutions and their immediate communities. In an effort to address some of these challenges, the concept of 'community engagement' in South Africa's HEIs became paramount (p. 2)

CE is thus imagined as a means to address these and other ills within the HEI sector and society, yet there is need to find ways of addressing these challenges at the grassroots level while challenging assumptions that CE will have the ability to address such widespread structural ills.

Bednarz et al. (2008) note that the way in which CE is conceptualised by both academic staff and students often lacks the aspect of viewing it as an integral component of the curriculum linked to learning and teaching, to provide a form of experiential learning. This results in it being seen as an additional 'project' or initiative that can be done if time and resources allow. Furthermore, CE battles to get attention from academics' due performance management systems that generally reward metrics of research output. While Rhodes University, where this study is set, does not have performance management systems, there is nonetheless a strong focus on research output for promotion as is the case in all universities in the country. Academics who are confronted by heavy workloads often find it challenging to pay attention to CE. As a result, CE uptake often relies on champions who take on this work through personal interest and commitment (Hlengwa, 2010). Ogunsanya and Govender (2019) also

note that the university setting often locates CE in pockets of isolation in discrete domains through the individual work of academics, rather than it being fully institutionalised into the structures and practices of the university. Having CE as one of the five areas⁵ in which academics need to demonstrate competence for the purposes of promotion at Rhodes University, is for example, one means of ensuring it is better integrated into everyday activities. Integrating CE into institutional structures is a key means of moving it from the periphery to the core business of the university.

It is imperative to investigate ways in which CE not only impacts on outside communities, but also ways in which CE can influence teaching and learning within HEIs. CE has been understood as an initiative that is meant to promote engagement between universities and communities. On the other hand, it is imperative that research be carefully done as to the extent to which CE promotes learning and influences knowledge creation amongst the students within HEIs. There is a need to highlight how CE can influence research, teaching and learning in HEIs owing to the lack of conceptual clarity and need for a better theorised understanding of CE (Hall, 2010). This study's focus on students' language, identity and epistemic access is an attempt to contribute to such needs.

Van Eeden et al. (2021) state that

CE is still being treated as a hybrid, or not clearly articulated educational component of Higher Education Training (HET), there is need to understand whether research with and in communities over the past two decades in South Africa can be typified as being socially responsive and enhanced through embracing the other [HET] visionary responsibilities. (p. 2)

They further note that although there has been discussion "in workshops and open discussion forums, the integration of CE with research and innovation, or in teaching and learning prerogatives in HET, seems not fully matured" (p. 3).

Slamat (2010) suggests that a clear and established role of CE could help HEIs perform to core functions in more meaningful ways. CE in the form of both service learning and more particularly structured volunteerism, offers an interesting extension of the academic space that is neither entirely social nor entirely academic, hence it could provide potential spaces

⁵ The five areas are research, teaching, CE, professional involvement, and leadership, management and administration. While academics can select those areas in which they believe they excel, they need to obtain at least 'satisfactory' in all of them.

where students negotiate major issues associated with their times in HEIs around language practices, identity formation and belonging. This study thus sought to explore some less extensively addressed issues such as the differences in the spaces created for knowledge production within CE and within more formal learning spaces in HEIs; how academic language is typically understood to be centred in the areas of research, teaching and learning and rarely in relation to CE; and, how students understand language and learning within CE. These might inform our understanding of the impacts of CE programmes and contribute to the growing body of literature on the subject. The exploration was undertaken within Rhodes University.

3.4 Community Engagement at Rhodes University

According to the RU ECP handbook (2020,p.9), “RU offers an active role in the community development of Grahamstown and the province through targeted interventions within its area of expertise”. This follows the national policy (White Paper of 1997) which views CE as a core function of HEIs and integral to teaching, learning and research: an approach that has been taken up and adapted by RU.

RU is involved in a diverse range of community initiatives in the Eastern Cape through both staff and students. The Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) mission statement states that:

In pursuit of its vision and that of Rhodes University, the Community Engagement directorate will endeavor to promote a reciprocal process of knowledge construction and dissemination, develop and channel the civic and social responsibility of all students, student organisations and staff at Rhodes University through various community engagement activities, thereby contributing to individual transformation and sustainable human and community development in Makhanda and the Eastern Cape as a whole (ECP Handbook, 2020).

CE plays a role within the RU context given the many challenges that plague many universities currently in South Africa. Among these challenges which continue to bear down on higher education where RU is not spared, include “an interlocked set of social, demographic, economic, technological, environmental and political change forces” (Scott, 2013, p. 275). Given this state of affairs, in the context of Rhodes University, CE is understood to provide a nexus between research, knowledge application and learning. The relationship of knowledge co-creation between universities and communities (Paphitis, 2018; Muthama: 2018) makes CE an effective and strategic channel at RU. In a study on the nature of the ‘academic project’

at Rhodes University, Muthama (2021) found that CE was seen to be more than one of the three pillars of HEIs and was identified as fundamental to the specific identity of this university. Her study (which was based on surveys, focus groups and interviews) suggested that CE played a key role thanks to a few enabling conditions. These included that the university is small and placed in a poverty-stricken rural area. Though this geographical context brought numerous challenges for the university, Muthama (2021) found that it enabled the very widespread uptake of CE initiatives by staff and students. She also found that the institutional discourse of 'public good' and social justice enabled the focus on CE. There have been a number of structural affordances for CE at RU. CE is a required aspect in the promotions policy (as indicated earlier) and there is a Director of CE and a centre (RUCE) with staff funded by the institution. There is also an annual CE award alongside the annual awards for research and teaching and learning.

In a bid to enlighten students and staff members about social justice issues, CE provides avenues intended to expose students to the social realities of the RU community. This process is designed to allow students to engage with theoretical knowledge and at the same time engage with the lived experiences of the local community. CE at RU is also intended to ensure that the student is equipped and educated as a whole person to be someone who possesses social consciousness, who can be an agent of social transformation, who has the attitude, spirit and values of Ubuntu and human solidarity. Finally, the CE initiatives are intended to enhance the experiences of students through exposing them to encounters of different social, cultural and economic issues. This is consistent with Muthama's finding that "participation in CE, teaching specific vocations ... are among the many different functions that stakeholders in higher education around the world expect different types of universities to perform" (p. 26).

Since the establishment of CE at RU, the university has been involved in a variety of community initiatives in the Eastern Cape. CE activities at RU take place at different levels from involvement at government policy level, to engaged research, to curriculated service-learning, to practical, strategic volunteer interventions at a community level. The RUCE activities are coordinated through the CE unit. The CE unit at RU was formed in 2005 and it has gone through changes and developments to this date.

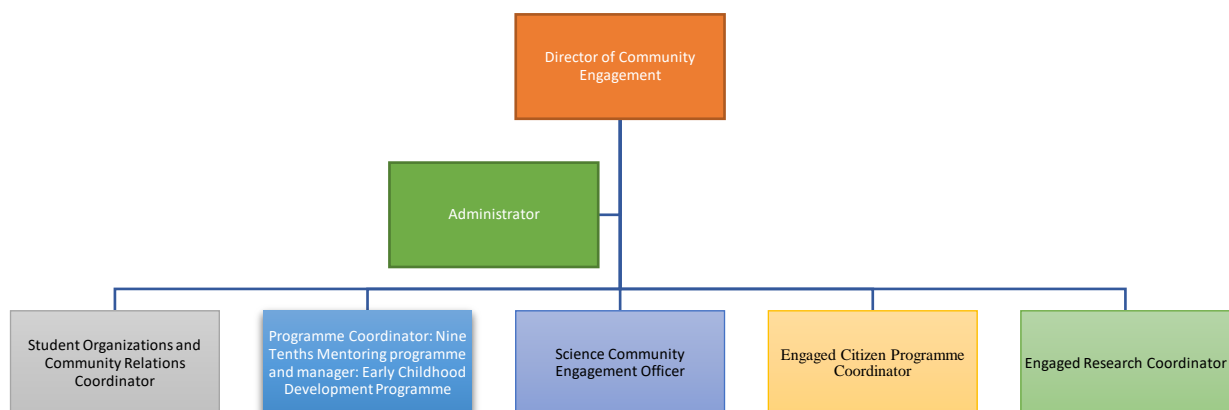


Figure 3.2: Organogram of the Rhodes University Community Engagement unit

The above structure oversees a wide network of initiatives and collaborations and aims to ensure effective intervention to the mutual benefit of students and the community. The CE unit has an ethos of community service that is shared between the university staff and student body that is expressed through sharing knowledge, resources and skills transfer. The CE unit also aims to contribute to the vision and mission of Rhodes University through focused and collaborative CE activities and give strategic directions to academics, support staff and students where needed. It also aims:

to promote leadership development of students in order to foster and enhance civic and social responsibilities, facilitate outreach programmes, volunteerism and service learning which are developmental in their approach, promote service learning in collaboration with academic departments and community partners; contribute to knowledge production and dissemination of knowledge through the functions of teaching and learning and research, contribute to the sustainable development of communities and contribute to the development of the Eastern Cape Province through partnership with provincial government departments, NGOs and other institutions of higher learning in the Province. (RU ECP Handbook 2020, p. 9)

The RUCE conceptualisation of CE in relation to the transformational definitions of CE shows that for RU, CE has to be more than outreach and must be accompanied by critical understandings of the context. The CE centre seems to have been successful in this regard, given that Muthama (2021) found in her study on the nature of the broader academic project at RU that:

The understanding of the university as an institution that offers to the public both new knowledges and the development of educated graduates to serve society is underpinned by a social justice imperative whereby a university is seen to have a responsibility to address the local and global problems and social injustices through its teaching, research and community engagement. (p. 15)

The RUCE unit has an understanding that good practice must be followed in terms of reciprocity for co-creation of knowledge beneficial for all participants (RU ECP Handbook, 2020). RUCE also offers other initiatives which include volunteerism, Engaged Scholarship, Service Learning, Partnering with Parents, Social Innovation and Vuka! Makana. Alongside all of these initiatives, the university has what it calls the 'Engaged Citizen Programme' which is where this study is placed.

3.5 The Engaged Citizen Programme at Rhodes University

The ECP is coordinated by the Director of CE and works with a team of about seven people that consist of an Administrator, Student Organisations and Community Relations Coordinator, Programme Coordinator: Nine Tenths Mentoring Programme, Science Community Engagement Officer and an Engaged Citizen Programme and Engaged Research Coordinator. This unit is connected with development partners including NGOs, which include GADRA and Access Music Project (AMP), CBO's such as Jabez AIDS Health Centre, Ikamva Youth and Home of Joy, institutions, government and private sector.

The Engaged Citizen Programme (ECP) at RU is understood to be a volunteerism activity. Volunteering is open to all students, across all faculties, whether in their first year of study or postgraduate, local or international, full-time or part-time. Rhodes University students are encouraged to actively participate in the ECP, giving at least "an hour of their time per week, skills and energy to make a positive difference in the Makhanda community" (RU ECP Handbook 2020, p. 24).

The RUCE unit believes that "volunteerism provides students with skills that are necessary for the production of well-rounded graduates and good citizens and that volunteering provides students with the soft skills that they need in order to be prepared for their work and social environments" (RUCE website, 2021). Information on how to participate in the ECP is shared via the university website and in the First Years Academic and Support guide. The programme is also introduced to students as part of their orientation programme. For students to be able to participate in the ECP they are required to complete an application form on the basis of

which they are allocated a placement. Placements are based on their choice, the volunteering opportunities available and on the time available in the students' academic timetable. Prior to the session's beginning, students are afforded the opportunity to meet with the community partners which also helps the students to make an informed decision about which activity to become involved in. The screening and placing of students has to be done with care as it should attempt to match the student to the needs of the placement.

The students who submit their applications are required to attend compulsory preparatory workshops and failure to attend means that they are not allowed to volunteer. These workshops are organised by the CE unit coordinators and the logistical aspects are attended to by the CE administrator. The students are offered the training and orientation that is necessary so that volunteers are able to contribute productively in their placements. The CE unit runs some workshops that cater for both new and returning students. For new students the workshop has some sessions that provide them with knowledge on CE as a core function of higher education in South Africa and prepare the students for participation in CE with relevant knowledge. This session ensures that the students understand the purpose of higher education and the role CE plays in effecting the purpose of higher education, at the same time as conceptualising CE as reciprocal and respectful. It includes an orientation to the various forms of CE and describes the skills and attributes required for CE. For the returning students, the workshops focus on student social responsibility, deepening their understanding of reciprocity and engagement in the community.

Amongst the activities offered within the ECP are offering support to learners with core academic skills such as maths, science, writing and English, offered through Awarenet⁶. There is also an activity focused on creating awareness with regard to environmental issues that help in mitigating the impact of climate change, facilitated through a community based organisation called Children of the Soil. Other activities which students can volunteer to assist with include helping children with their schoolwork and organising games for the children at Home of Joy, a non-governmental organisation, many of whom are orphans of HIV/AIDS and from abusive homes.

⁶ Awarenet is an ICT program which supports learners at the Youth Hub in Grahamstown location area. Volunteers from Rhodes University use Awarenet as a tool of learning and shows learners the possibility of self-structure and research skills.

The CE unit sees to it that all student volunteers are divided into small groups (student teams) ranging between eight and thirty-five, with each group volunteering at a specific site once a week for a minimum of an hour per week. As each group of students visits their community partner together, one Student Leader (SL) is nominated by members of the group to coordinate that group. In line with the RUCE requirements, a student leader is normally nominated based on being an experienced volunteer and someone who has the ability to coordinate the group they have been nominated to lead. The SL meets regularly with the RUCE (ECP) Coordinator at the Community Engagement Office.

The ECP coordinator, who is a staff member in RUCE, identifies the specific needs of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) such as one named Siyakhana@Makana which supports students to build meaningful relationships with community organisations. The RUCE (ECP) Coordinator also interacts with NGOs such as Enactus, an international non-profit organisation that works with leaders in HEIs to mobilise students to “make a difference in their communities while becoming socially responsible leaders” (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 22). The coordinator then translates these into the skills requirements needed in the volunteers. Students are then carefully matched depending on their passion, openness to learning and understanding of multiple contexts, and their existing skills base. The students should display an interest in other people’s development and should be “able to translate their university experience to social contexts in the community projects” (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 22).

The ECP learning outcomes include students being able to engage critically in the context they are in and relate this to their experiences in and outside of class (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 11). It is further stated in the RU ECP Handbook (2020) that students are also expected to use criticality to be socially conscious. The handbook suggests that students can become personally fulfilled through meaningful relationships with diverse people and achieve a sense of flourishing through their involvement in society.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the growth of CE around the world, emerging as part of the shift of higher education from serving an elite to being a massified system integrated within society. In South Africa, massification came at the same time as the restructuring of

higher education to form one coherent system, after the extreme racial divides of the sector under apartheid. CE was seen to have the potential to play a role in this restructuring and to ensure that the new higher education sector would be better connected to its context and take up a role in building social cohesion.

In response to such drivers, all public universities in South Africa have implemented some form of CE, as evidenced by the extent to which CE related activities are referred to in almost every mission and vision statement. Despite CE being positioned in national and institutional documentation as the ‘third pillar’ of higher education, there remain concerns that it is at times seen as peripheral to the functioning of the university or is positioned in patronising ways of ‘doing good’ in which reciprocity is absent. At Rhodes University, where this study takes place, there are significant institutional support structures and recognition of the value of CE, such that it is an integral part of the university’s identity.

As indicated, there is a need for further studies to make sense of how CE is understood and what purposes it serves. In particular, this study considers the ways in which issues of language, identity and epistemic access intersect within the CE space. For example, for the students at RU to be able to engage with the participants in the communities they need to be able to speak isiXhosa, which is one of South Africa’s official languages and mainly spoken in the Eastern Cape province in which RU is located, or they need to be able to speak Afrikaans – also one of South Africa’s official language and mainly used by the coloured⁷ population in Makhanda. The language used by the community depends on the specific site the RU students have volunteered to take part in. The apartheid geography, whereby different racial groups were designated to live in different areas, continues to play out in the distribution of people in the broader community.

While various studies have explored the role of CE in enhancing students’ learning (for example, Lazarus et al., 2008; Bednarz et al., 2008; Millican & Bourner, 2011; Bhagwan, 2017) and have interrogated how issues of power intersect with CE initiatives (for example, Bender, 2008; Bidandi, 2021), none, to my knowledge, have looked specifically at the role played by

⁷ The term ‘coloured’ is an apartheid term for people of ‘mixed race’. and refers to a person of mixed European (white) and black (inclusive of black African descent) or Asian ancestry. Since the demise of apartheid, the term is still used by the Department of Labour as a demographic identifier. Some people classified as ‘coloured’ have challenged the use of this term, preferring ‘mixed race’, while others have claimed it as fundamental to their identity.

language in CE initiatives. This study attempts to address this gap by engaging with student volunteers from the ECP programme around their language use during their ECP encounters and back on the university campus. In order to make this contribution, I used a phenomenological methodology, as I explain in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the phenomenological approach adopted in this study. The data for this study was collected through in-depth phenomenological interviews with second language English speaking students in the Engaged Citizen Programme (ECP), formerly known as Student Volunteer Programme (SVP) at Rhodes University. The students were mostly involved in working with children in teaching support roles. The programme has students from different backgrounds, both socially and academically, and the students in the programme work in sustained and ongoing ways in a CE activity with members of our local community, overseen by the Community Engagement Division. Having students from different backgrounds helped in getting varied responses which substantiated the aim of this study of establishing students' experiences of learning through CE, as well as other opportunities and challenges that these students might face in HEIs. The relevance of phenomenology as a research method suitable for a study of this nature is discussed in this chapter. The advantages and challenges of using a research method such as this one are also discussed. I also discuss in detail the participants' demographics, data collection and analysis processes and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research Questions

The study sought to explore the following questions:

1. What are second language English speaking students' experiences of language in CE learning activities within an English medium university?
2. What role does CE play for second language English speaking students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging within HEIs?

These research questions are the basis on which the three findings chapters are hinged to bring out the findings of the study.

4.3 Approach Selected

According to Stake (2010), a qualitative study becomes relevant and appropriate when the goal is to explain the phenomenon based on the experiences of the participants in a given situation. This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach, which aims at

investigating the meaning of the lived experiences of the people in a way that enables the identification of the *core essence* of the human experience or phenomena (how things appear to one's consciousness) (Stake, 2010) as described by research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of the people who are involved with the issue that is being researched (Groenewald, 2004; Sadala & Adorno, 2001). According to Smith et al. (2009), phenomenologists are concerned with understanding what the experiences in the world of participants are like and these experiences are to be examined as they actually occur.

4.4 Phenomenology as a methodological framing

This research draws on phenomenology as a methodological and analytical framework. Although there is a broader phenomenological landscape that exists, this study uses Transcendental or Descriptive Phenomenology founded in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl in the 20th century. As I describe the different interpretations of phenomenology and why it is suitable for this study that seeks to establish the links between the use of English language in HEIs and CE projects, I will first discuss phenomenology in general and how it enhances our understanding through learning from the experiences of others, before unpacking in detail what phenomenology is and more specifically the nature of Transcendental Phenomenology.

Neubauer et al. (2019) note that experiences of other people help us to be informed and re-orient the ways in which we understand that experience. The process of re-orienting and being informed is especially important in HEI – a space beset with various challenges that have a bearing on issues of transformation, epistemic access and success, as discussed in the preceding chapters. In this study, I explored the learning experiences of students involved in CE activities at Rhodes University. Some of the tenets of phenomenology which drove me to choose the methods, analytical sensibilities and categorisation of themes are that phenomenology allows me to recognise everyday experiences as being central to how we make our way in the world (Neubauer et al., 2019).

In this study, experiences are understood as vitally important in understanding higher education, including in terms of agendas of social justice, equity and the role of language in enabling epistemic access and success. For example, where there is a poor understanding or non-recognition of particular kinds of experiences, certain academic practices and certain

assumptions about the role of language in supporting learning might remain unchallenged. This implies that HEIs might continue to permit, take part in and perpetuate problematic reproductions of hegemonic practices. Such practices might be a disservice to efforts aimed at achieving transformation.

The centrality of experience to our understanding informed my focus on students' experiences of language use in HEIs, and in CE activities in particular. The aim was to establish if there could be ways in which CE activities may have bearing on academic language development in formal classes within the university space. Neubauer et al. (2019) further discuss that by examining an experience as it is lived, new meanings and appreciations can be developed.

In the process of interviewing the students on their experiences of learning, I developed an insight into how they perceive learning through a language that is not their home language. Our understanding of these experiences may help us to develop ways in which language can enable learning consistent with the broader transformation goals of equitable epistemic access and success in universities.

Phenomenology is conceptualised as both a school of philosophy and a type of qualitative research method, grounded largely in the writings of Edmund Husserl (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a form of qualitative research, phenomenology focuses on the study of an individual's lived experience within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). It can also be understood as an approach to research that seeks to describe the *essence* of a phenomenon through the perspectives of those who have experienced it (Teherani et al, 2015). In order to understand phenomenology and a phenomenological approach then, we need to understand what an *essence* is.

The idea of essence is central in the Husserlian philosophy where he defines essences as aspects or qualities of objects as intended (by the participants or subjects' point of view) (Husserl, 1970, 1998, 2001a&b). The branch of phenomenology – Transcendental Phenomenology – which is used in this study can be described as an approach that seeks to describe the *essence* of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental Phenomenology is underpinned by the ontological assumption that social reality is internal to the knower which

gives us an understanding that the relationship between the subject and the object can be explicit once the subject opens up to the outside. We can only really understand a phenomenon from a Transcendental Phenomenological position, through understanding the experiences of those within the phenomenon. Whilst any phenomenon can be analysed from a researcher's perspective, phenomenology is concerned with understanding the issue from the perspective of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004; Sadala & Adorno, 2001). Transcendental Phenomenology focuses on the essential meanings of individual experiences (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). The experiences of the students in CE and other academic spaces can be understood when the students talk about these experiences. In the same vein, the epistemological assumption underpinning Transcendental Phenomenology is that the researcher must as far as possible separate themselves from the realities of the world they are researching and the knowledge or assumptions they may possess, to reach a stage of understanding the phenomena purely as experienced by the participants' descriptive means (Neubauer, 2019).

Essence thus means a set of properties that make an entity or substance what it fundamentally is, without which it loses its identity. Hopkins et al. (2016) define essence as features of something that make it what it is and differentiate it from other phenomena. A phenomenon becomes what it is because of the structure that makes it up (Dahlberg, 2009). Essences are important because they illuminate the characteristics of the phenomenon without which any given phenomenon would not be *that* particular phenomenon. The fundamental question that we must ask in terms of the present study, in phenomenological terms, is: 'What is the *essence* of the experiences of second English language students learning in an English HEIs?' and 'What is the *essence* of the of second English language students experiences of language use in CE activities?' Thus, the goal of Transcendental Phenomenology is to describe the meaning of the experience in terms of *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Natanson (1973) says an older tradition of philosophy speaks of essences as the 'whatness' or 'quiddity' of something. He further states that "the word essence has been given a bad name in philosophy partly because ordinary parlance gives it the connotation of mystery. The essence of something is almost an occult quality, a hiddenness of things" (pp. 13-14). However, Husserl (1998) noted that essences belong to the everyday world in which he says

“The truth is that everyone sees ‘ideas’, ‘essences’ and sees them, so to speak, continuously; they operate with them in their thinking, and they also make judgments about them. It is only that, from their theoretical ‘standpoint,’ people interpret them away” (p. 41). *Essences*, then, are not the outcome of interpretation by the researcher. Sometimes we reluctantly confront a phenomenon fearing the repercussions or we ‘interpret them away’. It could be that we are unaware of the extent to which we are constructing that ‘essence’ from the theoretical frames we wittingly or unwittingly wear. This must be guarded against in phenomenological research.

The process of doing phenomenological research requires a phenomenologist “to go directly into things themselves ... and turn toward phenomena which has been blocked from sight by the theoretical patterns in front of them” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 658). When a phenomenon is ‘blocked from sight’ it means that we cannot see it in other ways, or we consciously choose to ignore it because we might fear repercussions of looking at particular issues or that we are not ready to deal with the consequences of confronting the phenomena head on as it may move us from our comfort zones. It can also be the case that a person may have the phenomenon ‘blocked from sight’ during the interview because of the theoretical patterns that they use, of which they may or may not have knowledge.

The main aim of phenomenology is to remain ‘true to facts’ as presented by the participants whilst refraining from giving any prior understanding from the researcher (Groenewald, 2004). It is important to note that the idea of ‘facts’ may be understood differently because these may not be truths in the sense of incontestable absolutes, but they are ‘facts’ in the sense that they are the experiences of the participants. The ‘facts’ of the phenomenon are shared as experiences by the participant. The role of the researcher then is to make sense of these experiences without prejudgement of what the person *should* have experienced or how the participant *should* make sense of such experiences as they share them. According to Moustakas (1994):

Phenomenology attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgement or presupposition. It requires to look at things openly, undisturbed by the habits of the natural world. The challenge is to describe things as they are, to understand meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. (p. 27).

Flood (2010) has noted that phenomenology is about providing an understanding of the individual's perspective of a particular phenomenon and how this influences their lived experience. The participants' experiences are thus paramount in a phenomenological study and my task is to understand the essence of the phenomenon through the participants' discussion of their experiences. The experiences of the participants that participated in this study bring out the phenomenon as closely as possible from within the context in which they take place (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

It was through the recounting of experiences of the students involved in CE initiatives that I was able to get an understanding of what it is for them to learn in a language that is not their home language and what the relationship between CE and the academic language of HEIs is. The recounting of students' experiences involved in CE activities provides us with an understanding that phenomenology is a philosophical approach that argues that what participants directly perceive and feel is considered more reliable than explanations and interpretations given by outsiders (Remeyni et al., 1998). Furthermore, the students' experiences take us back to look at phenomenology in ways that it provides the understanding that we see the world through our own experiences and that this has effects on how we respond to the world. It may influence us to change the way we do things but also the choice not to change or do anything does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist. In order to understand the phenomenon of the student experience, we need to open ourselves to the student experience. I will now discuss my positionality based on the choice of phenomenology as a methodological framing.

4.5 My Positionality: *Thou must 'epoche'*

In this section, I discuss the choice of this methodological framing as a way of establishing my positionality as a researcher. Lacy (2017) states that for a phenomenological study to remain credible, the researcher must engage in "constant reflexivity through epoche or bracketing"(unpaged). Bracketing, which is also called *epoche*, or *phenomenological reduction*, is a process of setting aside personal experiences, biases and preconceived notions about the research topic in order to understand how the phenomenon is experienced by participants, instead of how it is perceived by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Tufford and Newman (2010) describe "bracketing as a method used to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p. 81). In other words, it

means deliberately setting aside thoughts or assumptions and judgements that may be considered as biased to the research findings. Transcendental Phenomenology entails assuming a *tabula rasa* position (an absence of preconceived ideas, a clean slate) to develop an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The ability to achieve a *tabula rasa* position may in practice be unachievable – as indicated by the discussion below on the limits of bracketing, but many strategies can be adopted to reduce the impact of one’s own positionality on the analysis of the essence of a phenomenon.

The phenomenon being explored in this study is that of students’ experiences of learning in a language that is not their home language – through the participants’ experiences in CE, as communicated to me. An example given by Husserl (1977) of phenomenology, is that of seeing and experiencing something differently. He states “the act of seeing a horse qualifies as an experience, whether one sees the horse in person, in a dream, or in a hallucination. 'Bracketing' the horse suspends any judgement about the horse as a *phenomenon*, and instead analyses the *phenomenon* of the horse as constituted in intentional acts” (Husserl, 1977). Phenomenological reduction further points to a suspension or bracketing out the researcher’s own presuppositions and not allowing the researcher’s meanings and interpretations or theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the informant/participant (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Sadala & Adorno, 2001). According to Lauer (1958), phenomenological reduction is a deliberate and purposeful opening by the researcher to the phenomenon “in its own right with its own meaning” (p. 50). The process of capturing rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings (Kensit, 2000) enabled me to “suspend [my] own attitudes, beliefs, and suppositions in order to focus on the participants’ experience of the phenomenon and identify the essences of the phenomenon” (Neubauer et al, 2019, p. 93).

An example of how beliefs need to be bracketed can be seen through a consideration of some of the dominant accounts of student success and failure. There is a generalised belief that students’ challenges may best be described as emerging from weaknesses inherent in the student, such as a lack of study skills or poor levels of motivation. Yet students may face challenges that emerge from the complexity of their social and academic backgrounds and from the alienating nature of the university and the lack of transparency of what is expected of them. As discussed in Chapter 2, research on student success takes very varied positions,

each underpinned by different assumptions. In what Boughey and McKenna (2016, 2021) call the 'decontextualised learner' account, students' inherent attributes such as intelligence and motivation are used as the key explanations for success or failure. This kind of explanation relies on psychologised, individualised theories (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). On the other hand, other studies draw on social understandings that look at the norms and values of students and those of the university to account for student success and failure. In a phenomenological study, what is crucial in coming to understand the phenomenon is to understand the perspective of the participant, that is the descriptions of experiences by the student themselves. In this study, the individual experiences that I sought to investigate were the language experiences of second language English speaking students in CE activities and the role that CE plays for second language English speaking students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging within HEIs.

It is often the case that when a researcher writes about a phenomenon that is close to their experiences, they tend to draw from their experiences as if to add more value and credibility to the data as it were. It is a common practice as noted by Creswell (2014), that "transformative writers often have a strong stimulus to pursue topics that are of personal interest, issues that relate to the marginalised people and an interest in creating a better society for them and everyone" (p. 21). This certainly influenced the basis for my choice to engage in a topic that is close to my personal experiences, as my higher education learning experiences were all in a language that is not my home language. But I had to employ a transcendental subjectivity because the experience I was interrogating is not mine – hence it was key that I encouraged the participant to narrate their own experiences and not overlay them with my own. Moustakas (1994) suggests that in phenomenological research no position should be taken whatsoever, and nothing should be determined in advance.

Instead of speaking about my own experiences in the data collection process, I imagined the value that could be drawn from highlighting the experiences of other second language English speaking students learning in an English medium institution. I regarded my opening up my understanding to alternative experiences of participants as significant and worked hard to refrain from clouding the process with my own 'theoretical patterns' (Spiegelberg, 1965) which had been developed from my own experiences. This process is one of bracketing as discussed above.

In the process of setting aside my own experiences and explanations and opening up to those of the participants, I found myself in a learning process and after the fact came to understand my own experiences in new ways that could help me manoeuvre through the challenges I encountered and continue to encounter as a second language speaker. I was aware of the likelihood of questions that might arise of my own experiences, influencing the way I conducted research of this nature, which could compromise my interpretation and by extension, the credibility of my results, given this is a phenomenological study. What continued to intrigue me in this study was the self-will to engage in research that my own experiences speak to and which is driven by interests emerging from my own experience and yet focused on identifying the essence of the phenomenon from other second language English speaking students' experiences.

It is of importance to note that in determining the importance of experiences, the object holds no inherent value. This can further be explained to mean that in phenomenology the only value of the objects is as given to them by the subjects (Applebaum, 2014). In this study, it is the students' *experiences* of language, the university, and CE that are of importance – and not some 'objective' account of language, the university, and CE as such. Through listening to the stories of the students that have detailed experiences of participation in various ECP sites such as Home of Joy, Children of the Soil and different primary and high schools, and also their experiences of studying in different disciplines including Information Systems, Pharmacy, Music and Organisational Psychology, I came to understand the essence of the phenomenon of learning in a language that is not one's home language and how involvement in CE initiatives contributed to such experiences.

In the context of this study, the experiences of students give us an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of learning in a language that is not one's mother tongue. Phenomenology argues that the only way to the essence of a phenomenon is through the experiences of those within the phenomenon and this can be achieved through in-depth interviews with the participants (Lacy, 2017). The concept of phenomenology is useful in this study because it emphasises subjectivity and maximises the depth of the information collected. Van Manen (2014) notes that Husserl explains subjectivity in terms of it directing our attention to our experiences and descriptions of external elements of life. He further explains that perception of reality is dependent on the subject (in this study the student is the

subject) and the interaction with the object/s (in this study the objects include language, institutional structures, disciplinary content).

As a second language English student myself, it was important that I attempted as much as I could to bracket my experiences and assumptions. As explained earlier, I made efforts to bracket my personal feelings and beliefs or experiences about something. I noted down my experiences which included the challenges I faced in classrooms, being taught in a language that I sometimes could not understand, and how I found some concepts in some disciplines to be challenging. I vividly remember how I went through a module entitled '*Multilateral Institutions and Development*' during my undergraduate studies and not understanding many of the terms that were discipline-specific. I failed that course. I had to repeat the module in my fourth year. To add to my embarrassment, I was sitting in the same class as the first years. I also experienced feelings of alienation in some of the courses such as '*Caribbean Literature*'. Apart from the course being taught in English and using discipline-specific terms, I could not relate to the literature of the Caribbean, given my complete lack of knowledge of the area, which made me realise that issues of language and identity cannot be separated. It's not that I thought that I should only read literature based in Zimbabwe, but that there seemed to be all sorts of assumptions about my understanding of context and I felt out of my depth. I noted such examples of own experiences so that I could set them aside and be open to the experiences presented by my participants.

Bearing in mind the desire to bracket my experiences and attempt to capture fully the experiences of the phenomenon for my participants, I shaped the interview questions and conducted the interview sessions as far as possible without leading questions and made efforts not to coerce the participants to feed my own assumptions of what it is like to be a second English language speaker in an English HEI. Hence, the interview questions went along the lines of 'Please tell me about your experiences of taking part in ECP' and 'What are your experiences of learning in a language that is not your home language?' I also interviewed students from diverse academic backgrounds in order to establish a range of learning experiences, as I will explain later.

4.5.1 Limitations of bracketing

I am cognisant of the criticisms of the notion of bracketing which I will discuss in this section, and at the same time discuss the reasons bracketing remained the approach I used for this

study. There are some critics on this mode of inquiry who state that there are broader assumptions that need to be identified and explained by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Bracketing is assumed to be a challenging method because of its lack of a uniform term to describe it or precise definition of what bracketing entails (Tufford and Newman, 2010). Inasmuch as I tried to employ bracketing during the data collection, I must admit that it is not humanly possible to totally bracket my own experiences. Hycner (1985) notes that there is

no way a phenomenologist can stand in some absolute and totally presuppositionless space'. He further states that such an assumption 'would be falling into a fallacy of pure objectivity thus, phenomenological reduction teaches us the impossibility of a complete and absolute phenomenological reduction. (p. 281).

Therefore, as a novice researcher I do not dispute that there could have been overlaps between my experiences and the participants' experiences and that my experiences may have coloured my understanding of their experiences and my attempts at reaching the essence thereof. Crotty (1996) states that it may even be difficult and painstaking getting back to, and re-encountering, the phenomena of immediate experience. From Heidegger's (1977) philosophical perspective, the world and the person are co-constituted such that the person has to make sense of the world through their existence. At this juncture, Heidegger rejects Husserl's idea of bracketing our presuppositions and previous experiences. Heidegger maintains that the researchers' subjectivity is not an undesired state, or something to control against and monitor, for more trustworthy research (Glesne, 2011).

Numerous authors describe differently what bracketing entails, for instance Beech (1999) states that what needs to be bracketed are beliefs and values when conducting a phenomenological study, whilst Starks and Trinidad (2007) state that thoughts and hypotheses need to be bracketed. Creswell (2002) and Crotty (1998) state that presuppositions are to be bracketed. This means that bracketing as a method can yield results that are dependent on the context in which it was used. As a result, bracketing draws its strength from the absence of a precise definition and it is not limited to a single method on conducting it, making it suitable to support a number of approaches – hence, it worked for this study based on this notion (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Tufford and Newman (2010) further state that the various facets of bracketing help researchers to identify their preconceptions and address them within one's selected qualitative methodology. Having noted that bracketing supports a number of approaches, I then put these concepts together

to enable me to draw from each of the different definitions so that I could learn as much as possible from the students' experience. Using bracketing becomes advantageous because a singular approach with a rigid set of rules for implementation may be counterproductive.

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and the ability to be aware of personal preconceptions is the key attribute affecting bracketing. In order to counter this challenge, I memoired my preconceptions and my experiences of the subject to the extent that it would not significantly interfere with how I collected data. The process of memoire-ing my experiences helped me to be always conscious of what I needed to avoid in interfering with my data collection. Moustakas (1994) notes that there must be "individual consciousness first of all, and as the last court of appeal to knowledge". This notion emphasises the importance of constant awareness to "be receptive to the participants' experiences without tainting them with the researchers' own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing as well as removing the usual ways of labelling or judging, or comparing" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89).

Through acknowledging my own experiences and writing them down, I was better able to set aside prejudices and previous knowledge and be open to deriving new knowledge and creating new ideas and new understandings. Moustakas (1994) further notes that the process of bracketing or epoche can rarely be achieved but it takes the "energy and attention, reflection and self-dialogue, to reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgements and biases" (p. 90). The process of memoire allowed me to experience a similar experience as if it were for the first time.

4.6 Data Collection and storage

4.6.1 NVivo use

NVivo is a computer assisted qualitative data software. It is used to aid data management and analysis. I used NVivo software for creating codes for particular aspects of the phenomenon and extracted excerpts that illuminated the phenomenon.

4.6.2 Phenomenological Interviews

In order to get to the essence of the participants' experiences, I made use of semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews. An interview, according to Amunuzzaman (1996) is "a very systematic method by which a person enters deeply into the life of even a stranger and

can bring out needed information and data for the research purpose” (p. 6). A semi-structured approach allows open and free-flowing discussions on the different participants’ perspective on the subject under study. Though the interview may continue with a few open questions about the topic (designed to evoke descriptions of the experiences), all the other questions flow from the dialogue as it unfolds (Pollio et al., 1997). The interviews were conducted in English mainly because it is the language of communication at Rhodes University and also because I am an international student with very limited command and knowledge of IsiXhosa, the dominant language in the Eastern Cape where Rhodes University is situated.

The first part of my interview schedule sought to establish biographical information. Recognising that students’ experiences have significance for the ways in which they (students) engage with their learning (Mann, 2001), – particularly within an increasingly diverse student body – brings to the fore affective concerns of inclusion and exclusion, information related to background and context (gender, race, academic background, level of study and ethnicity). The second part sought to obtain their reflections on the experiences of students in CE activities and the third part the experiences of the students in formal academic spaces. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to have flexibility in the way I worded the questions and to probe for more information and clarification (Kvale, 1996; Walker, 1985).

It is imperative to note that the phenomenological interview is described as meeting with the phenomenon that is being lived by a participant, who determines the characteristics of the phenomenon (Guerrero-Castaneda et al 2017). In a phenomenological interview, it is the participant who brings the phenomenon from their consciousness. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also state that the phenomenology interview is an affective, emotional and often intense human experience. I realised that the issues of language use evokes different emotions as one participant broke down in tears when they recalled the experiences they had. Other participants expressed some forms of anger in response to the experiences they shared. On these occasions, I was guided by some ethical considerations of the ‘duty of care’ of researchers to determine if the level of the participant distress reflects the kind of reactions that would normally be expected on a sensitive topic, I would pause the interview, allow them to catch their breath and ask them if they would be willing to continue with the interview or would want to stop. Although the interviews in a phenomenological study are expected to be lengthy and extensive in order to develop prolonged engagement, patterns and relationships

of meaning (Moustakas, 2004), my interview sessions were usually less than an hour, but they evinced rich and detailed data. The interview guide is included in the appendices though I endeavoured to let the participants take the discussion of their experiences in whatever direction they chose.

4.6.3 Interview procedure

I approached the ECP coordinator to help me in contacting students who are English second language speakers who had in the past, or who were presently, participating in the ECP. The co-ordinator sent out a message to the potential participants through the relevant RUconnected site (the online learning management system at the University) inviting them to take part in the research should they volunteer to do so. Those who were interested contacted me through the mobile instant messenger application, WhatsApp. The initial response of those who indicated availability did not match the minimum number of participants I required for this phenomenological study. I had to approach the co-ordinator again who then gave me the contact details of the participants. I sent messages to them through WhatsApp, inviting them to take part in the interview. I got responses from 18 students. I organised the interviews with the participants through WhatsApp and the participants indicated the times that were suitable to them, given that some were in the midst of writing and preparing for exams. The venue for the interview varied between meeting with them in the Community Engagement Division meeting room and the students' residence common rooms. The interviews were recorded using a Bell Office Pro-Series voice recorder and I also downloaded a GOM Recorder application on my phone as a backup. I used both of these devices at each interview session.

4.6.4 Informed Consent

Consistent with good ethical practices, the interviews proceeded only after permission had been granted from the Registrar at Rhodes University and also clearance to interview the students was given by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) (see appendices).

I explained the purpose of the research to each participant prior to beginning the interview and indicated that I was willing to accommodate and engage with the participants wherever they needed clarity. Creswell (2014) notes that it is important to disclose the purpose of the study to avoid deception, which may compromise the trust and credibility of the results. I

understood that it was my duty to protect the welfare of the participants and obtain their informed consent – which I did in writing, as they signed after I had ensured they had a clear understanding of what the research entailed (see appendices). The participants understood that the interview was a voluntary activity and that there was no incentive or payment for their participation. The study was conducted in a way that respected the wishes of the participants and I made it clear that I valued the contribution of every participant. I also made it clear that I respected the participants' willingness to share their experiences and that all views expressed would be held anonymised. I explained to the participants that they had the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage of the research.

4.6.5 Participants

For a phenomenological study, Creswell (1998) recommends a sample size of between five and twenty-five participants, whilst Morse (1994) recommends at least six participants to allow for an opportunity to delve more deeply into the issues under study. For this study, I interviewed 18 students, all of whom were involved or had been involved in the ECP. The participants included 14 South African students and four students from other African countries, all of whom had a home language that was not English. Following Hycner (1999), the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice versa), including the type of participants.

Subsequently, in a phenomenological research pattern, purposive sampling can be conducted to recruit only “those with experiences relating to the phenomenon being researched” (Kruger, 1988, p. 28) and to allow for fair representation of the social demographics at RU (such as race, gender, ethnicity, academic backgrounds - whether they went to ‘model C’⁸ or public⁹ schools or private schools¹⁰ - and home language). I asked those I interviewed to recommend their friends who were also participants in the ECP and might have missed the

⁸ ‘Model C’ schools are schools that receive government funding (i.e. public schools) but differ from other public schools in that they are administered and largely funded by the parent body. This is not an official designation but a widely used term. In the last years of apartheid, public schools that were designated for white students (and were therefore well funded) could elect to admit black students. These schools were designated ‘Model C’ and the term has remained in use to designate any public school which has high fees and is well-resourced.

⁹ Public schools, also known as government schools, are dependent on the government for funding and materials. Standards and facilities are in part dependent on the management. Many public schools in South Africa are fee free and entirely reliant on government funding.

¹⁰ Private schools are also known as independent schools and are not funded by the government. They are often owned and operated the trust, church or community and are characterised by smaller class sizes and good resources.

invitation. This snowball process worked well and enabled me to collect data from 18 participants. The table below shows the distribution of the participants according to their gender, degree, year of study, language spoken and race group.

Table 4.1: Participants' Demographics

	Gender	Race	Degree	Year of study	Languages spoken	Home language	Academic/School Background
1	M	Black	BA Music	4	isiXhosa, English	isiXhosa	Public
2	M	Black	BA Science in Information Systems	4	English, Shona, siSwati, isiZulu, Afrikaans	Shona English	Private
3	M	Black	BA Science in Information Systems	4	English, Shona, French, Spanish	Shona, English	Private
4	F	Black	BA Sociology	3	English, Setswana, Sesotho, siSwati, isiZulu, Afrikaans	Setswana	Private
5	F	Black	BA Undecided	2	English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans	isiXhosa	Public English Medium
6	M	Black	BA Psychology, Xhosa & Politics	2	isiXhosa, English, isiZulu	isiXhosa	Public English Medium
7	M	Black	BA Politics & International Relations	4	Xhosa, English, Afrikaans	isiXhosa	Public
8	F	Black	BA Science	2	English, Sesotho, Spanish	Sesotho	International Private School
9	Not disclosed	Black	BA Psychology, Politics & Industrial Sociology	3	Sesotho Setswana, Shona, isiXhosa, isiZulu	isiZulu	Public
10	F	Black	MA Science	1	Shona, English	Shona	Private
11	M	Black	Hons Organisational Psychology	1	isiXhosa, English, siSwati, isiZulu	isiXhosa	Model C
12	M	Black	BSc Physics and Mathematics	2	isiXhosa, English	isiXhosa	Public
13	M	Black	BA Commerce in Accounting	2	isiZulu, siSwati, English, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Setswana	siSwati, isiZulu	Public
14	F	Black	MA in Pharmaceutical Chemistry	2	isiXhosa, English	isiXhosa	Public
15	M		PhD Pharmacy	2	Afrikaans, English	Afrikaans	Model C
16	F	Black	BA Organisational Psychology	2	isiXhosa English, Afrikaans	isiXhosa Afrikaans	Model C
17	M	Black	BSc Geography	3	isiXhosa, English	isiXhosa	Mission
18	F	Black	BSc Environmental Science	2	isiXhosa, English Afrikaans	isiXhosa	Public

4.6.6 Data explication

Phenomenologists often avoid the term analysis and use the term 'explication' instead, which implies an investigation of the constituents of the phenomenon while keeping it as a whole. The term 'analysis' is often associated with breaking data into parts which could therefore result in a loss in the phenomenon (Hycner, 1999). Illustrative excerpts of participants' responses are included in the chapters that follow, as evidence to support claims about the phenomenon made by the researcher and to express meanings offered by the participants (Newing, 2010). In phenomenology, the focus is to describe what all participants have in common, the aim being to reduce individual experiences of a phenomenon to a description of the essence thereof (van Manen, 2014). This is not an assumption that participants' experiences will be identical, but rather that explicating what they have in common can help us to understand the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by these participants.

Whilst phenomenology provides a structured approach toward deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by different individuals, I am cognisant of my influence as a researcher in this study in that it is almost impossible to bracket my personal experience. In undertaking the phenomenological process, I needed to engage with the various critiques in relation to assumptions which may arise from my theories and beliefs. In following phenomenological analysis, the study followed the explication process set out by Hycner (1999).

Step 1: Bracketing and phenomenological reduction

In this first stage the researcher's ideas should not influence the information from the participant and so I employed bracketing, as discussed earlier. I realised that it was important to be aware of my presuppositions and discussed these with my supervisor which helped me in realising assumptions that I had (Hycner, 1985). It helped me to be in constant dialogue with my presuppositions and writing down my experiences as I analysed the data helped me to set aside my experiences and engage more with the experiences of the students.

Below is a table showing a few of my own presuppositions I had to 'bracket'.

Table 1.2: Some examples of presuppositions that I needed to 'bracket' during data collection and analysis

Experiences	Examples of presuppositions
My own experiences of schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges in relating to concepts unrelated to my own experiences. • Challenges in linking ‘content knowledge’ to my life. There was often no connection of the content knowledge made to my everyday life hence understanding was difficult. • I had exposure to good quality schooling, with all necessary resources, and to qualified and competent teachers - possibly very different from participants’ experiences. • I had the opportunity to engage with my teachers – an opportunity that some participants’ might not have had. • I came from a family where education was embedded in our culture and where reading and critical conversations took place – leading to a set of assumptions about education. • I needed to be wary of the extent to which my own agency and expectations about student engagement emerge from my own prior experiences.
My own experiences of studying in a MOI other than home language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of participating in class • Concerns about getting it wrong • Confusion or misunderstanding of concepts or terms • Forging own networks with classmates from the same home country to support each other’s use of English
Limited experience of CE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My preconceived idea of CE was that it was an activity mostly done by white people as a philanthropic activity. • My understanding of CE was limited- I had the ‘Ostrich model’ perspective: I was at the university to get my degree and believed that ‘engaging with communities was the government’s job’ (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 12) • CE was an activity designed to help poor people mainly with handouts such as food packages. • I did not think that there could be a reciprocal knowledge sharing process whereby communities could offer valuable knowledge as well. This is a preconception that was based on the ‘Good deeds model’ that CE was doing things <i>for</i> people rather than <i>with</i> people (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 12)

Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999) recommend that the researcher listens repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewee, in order to develop a holistic sense of how they experienced the phenomenon. I listened to the interview audios several times to familiarise myself with the data and to understand the

meaning of the experience from the participants' point of view (De Castro, 2003). After the process of listening to the audios a number of times, I transcribed them and read the written texts to prepare for the next stage of identifying the meaning.

Step 2: Delineating units of meaning

In phenomenological research, 'units of meaning' refers to parts of the data that communicate sufficient information to provide a piece of meaning to the reader, even when these parts are extracted from their context (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). At this point I had transcribed the interviews and I had endeavoured to bracket all presuppositions. I focused on analysing each word or phrase to elicit the participants' meaning.

In Step 2 the researcher pays attention to repetitions and non-verbal cues that depict the phenomenon. Creswell (1998), Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1997) point out that this is an important stage of explicating the data, in that those statements that are seen to illuminate the researched phenomenon are extracted or isolated. These non-verbal cues included feelings of anger and tears, which highlighted the frustration that they experienced. The researcher is required to make a substantial number of judgement calls while consciously bracketing their own presuppositions, in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements (Groenwald, 2004).

During this stage, I engaged my supervisors to reflect on this process in order to strengthen the validity of the delineation of units. The list of units of relevant meaning extracted from each interview was carefully scrutinised and the clearly redundant to units eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). As a researcher, I paid attention to repetitions and non-verbal cues that depicted the phenomenon and considered the literal content, the number of times a meaning was mentioned and also how it was stated.

According to Broome (2011), the length of the meaning unit is the researcher's call, though it is important to adopt a meaning unit size that is appropriate to the cognitive style at hand. The longer the meaning unit, the bigger the variety of meaning it contains and the clearer the contextual meaning will be. An example of coding is offered below and this illustrates an assertion by Saldana (2013) that whilst coding is important, it is equally important to keep in mind the purpose of the study. In the extracts in the table that follow, I highlighted various

phrases in different colours to indicate how they corresponded to different codes. Each code describes the idea or experience expressed in that part of the text.

Table 4.3: Initial coding to delineate units of meaning

Interview Extract	Codes
<p>I have been involved in mentoring since my first year and mentored at Ntsika under 9/10s programme. I joined because I was a mentee during my high school. I enjoyed sitting with my mentees and planning what we want to achieve and working through that plan throughout the year celebrating the goals that we would have achieved together, and have a backup plan if we failed to achieve. Some challenges we had were the attendance of the mentees, but in terms of communicating with them I did not have a problem because I could speak the home language of the mentees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Academic background ● Experiences of language ● ECP experiences
<p>Using Nvivo, I then coded on the codes, such that the code of ‘ECP experiences’ above, for example, was coded into various smaller units of meaning.</p>	
<p>I have noticed that CE initiatives are affected by language in the sense of when people who can’t speak IsiXhosa language are involved, students tend withhold because they are afraid and the fact that they will be speaking to Rhodes students they tend to look down upon themselves, they become shy and put IsiXhosa words unless there is someone who will translate their answers then they will engage willingly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiences of language use ● Self esteem ● Language and Identity ● Learning experiences
<p>I grew up in a white community in Stones Hill where my mother was a domestic worker hence I was in that community for most of my time. In order to communicate with children of my age, who were my mother’s boss’ children, I had to learn English. I also wanted to communicate with my mother’s boss.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social upbringing ● Language experiences ● Social class differences

Step 3: Clustering of units of meaning to form themes

In the third step of explication, I looked at the units of meaning within the holistic context and identified significant topics. This was done in an effort to tap into the “inner world of experience of the subjects” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 20). Groenewald (2004) further states that

the researcher must again bracket her or his presuppositions in order to remain true to the phenomenon. Colaizzi (1978) remarks that this step is whereby “the phenomenological researcher is engaged in something which cannot be precisely delineated, for here they are involved in that ineffable thing known as creative insight” (p.59). During the data analysis, I went through the isolated extracts to establish where the meaning was located. Broome (2011) states that the participants’ accounts have ‘landmarks’ in a way that is analogous to how we see the windings, rapids and falls in a stream. In order to establish these ‘landmarks’ within my data, I had to re-read the texts once again until the phenomenon was clearly established. Broome (2011) gives another example of how a bird’s flight is measured by where it perches and not the distance it has flown. This can be related to how the focus will be on the phenomenon under investigation that will stand out from all that would have been described by the participant.

As the participants were telling me about their experiences, I paid attention to issues of participation, identity and language. What I looked for in the meaning units were the students’ experiences of language use in CE activities. I re-grouped the meaning units that had similar meanings to establish the participants’ experiences of language use (Giorgi, 2009). I reviewed the codes in Step 3 again to identify patterns among the codes to form themes as shown in the table below. I combined several codes into a single theme because themes are generally broader than codes.

Table 4.4: Clustering of meaning to form themes Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self esteem • Social class differences • Social upbringing • Language and identity • Choice of friends • Family influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, academic literary practices, and identity development and belonging in the university space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic background • Experiences of learning • Language and access to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and learning experiences

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and participation 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECP experiences • CE and language use • Benefits and challenges of CE • CE and self esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CE as a space for self-development

Step 4: Summary of interview: extracting general and unique themes

In this step I summarised each interview, validating it and where necessary and modifying it to make a composite summary. This step requires that the researcher validates the interview data by returning to the informant to determine “if the essence of the interview has been correctly captured” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). I did not implement this step due to the fact that it was exam time, and the students were busy preparing for their exams, so it was difficult to schedule follow-up interviews. This step also requires modification of the interview data which would be as a result of the validity check (Groenewald, 2004). My data was not modified as I did not conduct the validity check process. The findings given in this study are based on the interviews that were captured in the initial stage only. This is a shortcoming in my study caused by the pragmatics of the academic calendar. This meant I had to be especially rigorous in my process of moving from the data recordings to the identification of themes.

In order to make use of all the data collected, the data from all the interviews was rearranged under the recurrent themes. In other words, I analysed the data by “reducing information to significant statements or quotes and these are combined into thematic categories” (Moustakas, 1994, cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 60). The study then followed a phenomenological analysis of developing a textural description of the experiences of the participants/students and a structural description of their experiences so that there could be a combination of descriptions conveying an overall essence of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). In this step, I examined the themes in each step and named them in a way that would help me understand the data. The challenge that I had to deal with in this step, was making sure that these themes were an accurate representation of my data. I had to go back to my data in an iterative process and compare it with the themes I identified.

4.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the research method that was used to answer the research questions. It also provided a basis for understanding the discussions that follow of what emerged in the data, how this was captured and analysed, and mostly importantly, shed light on phenomenology as a research tool suitable for a study of this nature. The steps that were followed in conducting phenomenological interviews, how the participants were selected, how the interviews were conducted and how data was transcribed and analysed were discussed in this chapter. The chapters that follow present the findings and discussion as the essence of the phenomenon emerged.

Chapter 5: Findings: Language use in Higher Education Institutions

5.1 Introduction

Based on the literature review and the two major topics for my study – language use in HEIs in general and in CE– the findings in this chapter respond to the following research question:

What are second language English speaking students’ experiences of language in CE activities within an English medium university?

Before focusing on language use in CE activities specifically, which follows in the next chapter, I first looked at how the participants experienced language use within the university itself.

As discussed in Chapter 4, to gain insight into the lived experiences of second language English students, I used Transcendental/Descriptive phenomenology. The higher education arena is beset with assumptions and preconceptions, such as: student failure being attributed to lack of motivation; the extent to which an early switch from home language can have an impact on learning; and the importance of students’ identities outlined in Chapter 2 in relation to issues of student access and success and learning in a language that is not their home language. There are also some assumptions discussed in Chapter 3 with regard to the role that CE plays in HEI, which includes the role CE plays as the third pillar of HEIs, the role CE plays in equipping students to be responsible citizens and the role of CE in the knowledge creation process. Transcendental/Descriptive phenomenology helped me in acquiring a detailed insight into the language experiences of those who were involved in the Engaged Citizens Programme (ECP) at Rhodes University both in their CE activities as well as in formal academic spaces.

The findings in this chapter describe the experiences of diverse students participating in the ECP, aimed at promoting enhanced academic engagement and improved chances of success at Rhodes University. This exploration provides ideas for academics and education managers not only relating to identifying the language challenges faced by students, but also the opportunities for promoting engaged learning. In this chapter, I consider the findings related to language use in formal academic learning spaces and lessons drawn from CE as well as the influence of academic background on students’ learning in HEIs.

5.2 Language as a resource for meaning making

From a student's perspective, language is an important tool for making meaning in formal academic activities. Central to students' experiences is the difficulty faced in deriving meaning from texts they encounter that are not in their home languages. Participants 7 and 13, for example, reflected:

The reality is that when learning in English you need more translation, you need to understand a text in your vernacular and how it is said in English. Sometimes you fail to understand something and when it is interpreted to you in isiXhosa that's when you realise that it was not that hard. So, it involves a lot of work of trying to interpret and listen whilst someone is speaking and this takes a lot of time. (Participant 7)

...to be able to say you have knowledge is to be able to understand, to be able to understand is to be able to have information, and to have information you need access to that information, to access that information you need to have language. So, I can't say I know something if I really don't understand it. If I say I understand, I should be able to explain what a component is to my dad in ways or a language that he understands. (Participant 13)

A major part of the student experiences centred on challenges related the language of instruction, which in some instances led to experiences of being assumed to be under-prepared. As stated by Boughey (2002, 2012a), and McKenna (2010; 2012), language continues to be a contentious issue in South African higher education. As discussed in Chapter 2, some educators assume that language is a technical skill, but Boughey and McKenna (2016) note that "language use is understood to be a system of choices which are made on the basis of a user's understanding of the context in which they are located" (p. 2). The academic context may make these challenges particularly difficult because the academic context is not necessarily familiar or close to the students' identities as emerged from participant reflections (and will be returned to in Chapter 7).

Challenges with the use of English as MOI in higher education spaces give rise to challenging experiences for students because they have been taught in their home language before coming to university. Despite legislation which requires that students learn English from a young age, many teachers are ill-equipped to teach in English and it was clear that many

students experienced the shift to teaching and learning in English as stressful. Central to the challenges highlighted in student experiences of learning in a language that is not the students' home language, are challenges in the learning process itself:

Coming from a public school where we were taught in isiXhosa almost everything, it was a shock when I got to university because I was used to maths in isiXhosa and now English had so many so many sophisticated words, it was like there is a wall ... it made it difficult for me to grasp concepts quickly. It was a barrier. (Participant 17)

[learning in English] is a bit difficult once you advance in education and the English advances also, because I have realised that I cannot express myself well in my own language because a lot of things or knowledge is created in English, I go back and try to think what a trapezium is in my own language, I don't think we have that word in our language. We also did not have pressure [at school] to learn English, we could learn maths in Sesotho the only thing we learned in English was English. (Participant 9)

The above quote from Participant 9 highlights the challenges for students related to the learning process, and they went on to reflect on how transitioning from learning in a home language to learning in English presented challenges to their learning: *'the transition that happened in higher grades was hard, learning a new language was hard on its own, constructing new sentences was a mission, the tenses, the grammar was hard'* (Participant 10). Though they wrote and passed their matriculation examination¹¹ in English and were admitted to Rhodes University on the basis of having English competence, the use of English as MOI presented enormous challenges for the participants.

Even though the national policy on language use in higher education (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2020), calls upon universities to adopt a flexible approach in the implementation of English as the language of teaching and learning, student experiences show us that there is still a lot of work to be done. There was no data indicating evidence that this flexibility is implemented in ways that improve students' educational encounters in HEIs. Many institutions continue to use English as the only MOI, despite the policy stating that

¹¹ The national school-leaving examinations are colloquially known as 'matric' in South Africa.

necessary support must be provided to students for whom English is not their first language, to ensure academic success (DHET Section 29, p.15).

Participant reflections consistently highlighted that both the English language as the MOI and the new literacy practices expected in the academy were challenging. There is an expectation that students must automatically familiarise themselves with ways of doing in higher education. As De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) and Mgwashu (2016) point out, students are expected to take on a set of literacy practices, or 'ways of being', but these practices are rarely made overt (see Chapter 2.3). Boughey and McKenna (2016, p. 3), state that "many of the difficulties experienced by students with regard to language can be seen to stem from the alien and alienating nature of higher education context" and this creates barriers to learning. It was clear that the participants found language use in the university to be a major hurdle and they felt unsure about their capacity to cope with the language expectations.

5.3 Language as a tool for participation

Participant reflections showed clearly that language and emotions are linked. Participants reflected that participating actively in higher education spaces is often emotionally charged and that this affects their ability to participate in classroom activities. The emotions that are evoked in a person when using a particular language and enacting specific literacy practices that are not familiar to them, can have an impact on participation. Central to many reflections was the experience of fear for students when they wanted to participate in class using English. Participants 18 and 9 reflected on this as follows:

As for participation in class, I would not want to speak [in English] because of the fear of mispronouncing a certain word. (Participant 18)

Even now in my 3rd year, I am still scared to say things in class. I have to think and get my words right. I am scared, shy that I might sound stupid. It's very hard to say things not in your home language. (Participant 9)

It was evident from their reflections that fear of embarrassment around language use is central to the student experience and curtails participation in class. Participants 7 and 10 reflected on this by saying:

There was once a debate in my class where there were about 400 students in the Barrat lecture theatre and the discussion was about the salaries that nurses were getting. I was coming from a family with a healthcare worker and knew exactly that nurses were receiving peanuts. I could not speak up because of the language, I knew English would fail me and I held back my contribution. (Participant 7)

I did not learn with only Sesotho speaking people where I could express what I understood and believed, there were things I felt I could express better in Sesotho than I could express in English, and it really gets hard when you are trying to put words in English and the English won't cooperate with you at that time. (Participant 10)

Participants reflected that they did not have the courage to participate in class because they needed time to think about the issue in their home language first and then translate it back to English:

I do not experience much challenges when it came to English but I do acknowledge that the thought process of those who were taught in English additional language is much harder because they think first in their home language and then translate into English and it takes a lot of time (Participant 13)

Participants' reflections highlighted language-related challenges due to lack of confidence in pronouncing certain words and that this had an impact on their participation in class activities.

Participant 8 reflected on their experience of this as follows:

I took a German module in 2nd semester, I felt what the learners feel when they hear me speak in English because it's like you are being slapped in all directions and you have no idea. You might think you know the answer, but you are so scared, there is also this self-esteem that is being built or destroyed in that language, so I am not going to lie, I feel it's rough when learning in a language that is not your home language. (Participant 8)

Participants indicated in their reflections that they did not participate in class because of their lack of competence in the English language, fearing they might sound 'stupid' (Participant 9) – highlighting that English competence remains linked to perceived notions of intelligence. Given the status of English in the university and schooling systems, it is perhaps unsurprising

that there was this misattribution of intelligence to competence in English. Participant 10 reflected, for example:

When it comes to communicating, it can be hard sometimes because you have to constantly think and arrange your ideas because English is not your native language and you will be afraid that people will judge you and your intelligence based on what you would have said, so you have to be organised otherwise you will mess it up so that was one of the challenges I faced. (Participant 10)

The experiences of participants highlighted in this research are also evidence of the history of English being regarded as a high-status language and the colonial positioning of English competence as tied to intelligence. The link between English competence and status which was fostered during apartheid (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014) was a theme that pervaded participant reflections. Illustratively, participant 14 reflected on this, saying:

Sometimes you really want to say something in class, but you are not sure whether you will be able to articulate it or whether it will come out as smart to other people. For example, in whole science undergrad, I always never wanted to speak in class because I was afraid of sounding ignorant and you end up keeping your ideas to yourself whereas if you could speak in isiXhosa, you will be able to engage in the conversation and literature. (Participant 14)

Concerns about being judged as less than intelligent due to language errors were not only experienced in the university but are experienced as pervasive in social situations that students encounter outside of higher education settings. Experiences such as these could mutually re-enforce each other. Participant 15 highlighted, for example, this experience in a religious setting:

... even now when I go to the pulpit, I am so conscious of how I read the English Bible such that it makes me shiver and I will be thinking people are not listening to what I am saying but how am saying it and It's really crippling when I do that. (Participant 15)

Importantly, participant reflections revealed that while they experience and are influenced by perceptions and beliefs about the links between language and learning, they

simultaneously resist holding on to these beliefs fully. One participant in particular, emphatically resisted the link between language competence and intelligence, saying:

*...that is not a depiction of my intellect but just shows that because of the language barrier I may not be able absorb as much information as I can as well as understand it.
(Participant 3)*

Participation is considered as an essential element in almost every form of class activity to ensure understanding and engagement. There is an assumption that 'good' students are the ones that normally participate and students who do not are considered lazy, unprepared, and passive and could be penalised accordingly (Vandrick, 2000). As was evident from participant reflections, participation is understood by students as the form of speaking in class, being ready to answer questions and engaging in discussions. Amongst the factors that may constrain participation in class such as gender, race and culture, the participants consistently highlighted language as a major constraint to participation.

The participants were aware of the challenges they would face had they tried to engage in class discussions. The fact that they had to use a language that was not entirely familiar to them contributed to them holding back as a way of avoiding judgement or embarrassment. The positioning of English as high status and as being linked to intelligence, which was central to the colonial project and intersected with the racism of apartheid in South Africa, was also evident. Such problematic positionings remain powerful, despite years of democracy. Students are cognisant of this and actively resist these positionings. Nevertheless, the issue of language continues to contribute to the current status of students who may be labelled as 'underprepared'. Butler (2013, p. 72) states that "one of the critical focuses of student under preparedness is their levels of academic literacy (AL) in the languages of learning at South African universities (which are still mainly English and Afrikaans)". Patau (2018) notes:

speaking (in which participation takes place) is the productive skill in the oral mode. It, like other skills, is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information. (p. 31)

This process is even harder when one has to do it in a language that is not ones' home language. I will now discuss findings on the use of language as a means of accessing information.

5.4 Language as a tool for accessing information

Throughout the participant reflections, issues of language use were inseparably intertwined with taking on new literacy practices and coming to grips with new concepts. Participant 5 put it this way:

Many times I do have questions but you look at the students in your class and the type of questions they ask and it makes you feel like doubting your own question and doubt your understanding and your intelligence, because you get there and they will be asking high grade questions and you simply wanna know what the word 'reciprocal' means and there are these students asking high grade questions, complex questions about theories and models.(Participant 5)

Participant reflections also highlighted that participation in class was a challenge for them as they had to do some extra reading to process the information before they could participate. Participant 6 reflects on this, saying:

I think it does take a bit of time to grasp more concepts because in a lecture venue you get these huge terms like 'liberalism', 'internationalisation', and I don't personally engage in a topic until I go home and research about it. People who are able to respond in lectures are people who understand that concept in that venue and respond to the lecturer whereas for me I need to go and listen very attentively and write notes and go home and read then I will be able to come back to class and fully participate after having time to digest the material. (Participant 6)

Participants highlighted that their access to information or discipline specific content was challenging, as the content was available in English which was not their home language. Participants 14 and 9 reflect on how the process became laboured as they would need to translate their readings into their home languages, saying:

It was a long process for me because I had to read the books and then write it in my own language to see if I understand, so this makes you do a task that a person who speaks in English would do once and you do it two times and sometimes you might lack the words like the names of bacteria etc. I remember in Biotech Honours class there was this word 'fluorescence' that I don't even understand up to now. Every single time they would give us papers to read and present in class and the English that was used

there was very hard, I would have to read it five times over to understand. It's always a struggle and depends on what kind of meaning you want from the text. I always had to use a dictionary all the time and that would be difficult as some words are not there in isiXhosa. (Participant 14)

I think it becomes hard when accessing information because there are things I cannot translate into isiZulu. You can use a dictionary, but it still makes no sense. It was not a problem of me not reading, I just could not understand. It changed when we did things around African philosophy where I could identify with concepts like 'Ubuntu'. I have known this word all my life even though I might have not thought of it as a political concept, but I knew what it meant without even thinking about it. (Participant 9)

Some participants reflected that learning in a language that is not their home language had an impact on their learning process. Participants 13 and 1 reflected on the challenges they encountered, saying:

When it comes to language, learning something in my home language is good because it makes it easier to understand but it becomes a challenge when you have to write an examination. It has to do with ways in which the content is made available to the people. (Participant 13)

Now I need to be referencing in an academic paper and the only content that is available is in English and in my language, it's unavailable. That creates a setback in knowledge sharing and dissemination on information. (Participant 1)

The participants' reflections reveal that language is not only a tool for communication but also a resource for making meanings and these meanings are specific to disciplinary contexts (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Boughey and McKenna (2021) further state that it is important for language users to be aware of their context so that they can make the appropriate choices for language use based on the context. As a result, language becomes a 'problem' because the students are not familiar with the academic context, hence the choices they make with regards to language use are based on this misunderstanding. Trying to make meaning in any discipline can be challenging, and this process is even harder when the language is not one's home language. The extent to which the problem lies in the opaque and alienating nature of the literacy practices is rarely considered.

Language does not only curtail participation (see 5.3), but also curtails access to content knowledge. It was evident from the participants' reflections on experiences of accessing information that there was a dominance of the English language. Some of the participants noted that English holds a superior position and that other languages continue to be, as the literature indicates, 'silenced, repressed or damned' (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2011) or 'considered unworthy of epistemological recognition' (Keet, 2014).

Language plays a key factor because when something is said in English. At times you think that it is new then when you understand it your home language you find that it has always been there but because it has been spoken in English you think it's a new thing. (Participant 7)

Some participants also highlighted the assumptions that are made in HEIs about shared understandings and experiences and how these are communicated in English. They stated that language can act as a barrier in shared educational activities. For example, Participant 7 reflects on this, saying:

One might be very intellectual but when it comes to accessing information in a particular discipline in a language that is not your own, it becomes a mission. For instance, operating a computer for the first time might not be easy if you come across terms like 'shutdown', 'restart', 'PowerPoint' etc. and it's you who needs to make sense of it though they are minor details. It matters most when the language being used is not your home language, these terms become barriers to access to information. (Participant 7)

Slay et al. (2008) discuss the importance of shared experiences amongst students in HEIs in enhancing epistemological access and state that students need to engage in social participation as a process of learning and knowing, because learning does not happen in a void. They further state that learning occurs within a social environment which not only brings with it the history, traditions and wisdom of the social environment or particular society, but also provides the student with a resource of other students, each with their own knowledge, experience and expertise with whom to share ideas, negotiate meaning and work towards shared understandings. Students are often left to their own devices with the assumption that since they have made it to university, they should be able to make their way through – even

when it comes to things they have never used, such as a computer. Words like ‘restart’ or ‘shut down’ might not be as simple and easy for every student, even if they can easily restart or shut down the computer.

Some participants noted that the barrier of language to access to information extended beyond the formal academic spaces to their places of residence. Participant 5 illustratively reflected on this saying:

...language does not [only] affect us in the school setting, even here in res¹², because we come from different backgrounds, homes and how things are done is different. I have seen it first-hand when we have house meetings and things are gonna be explained in English and you think that everyone has understood but there would be that one person who doesn't understand – for example when it comes to hygiene and in a female res we talk about ‘she-bins¹³’. We talk with the assumption that everyone knows what a she-bin is, unaware that there is someone who has never heard what a she-bin is, it would be different if you speak to someone in a language they understand, the practicality of doing something or using something becomes relatively easy. (Participant 5)

Although some participants indicated that they personally did not experience any challenges when accessing information, they acknowledged the challenges faced by their counterparts saying:

[Language affects access to information] because if I were brought up in an environment such as the one that speaks Xhosa and I grow up speaking that, and come to RU where the the medium of instruction is predominantly English, from what I have seen around a couple of people are struggling, not because they are not smart enough, but because they have to get past the language barrier for them to process it and then get information – whereas for me it is just second nature to hear something [in English] and have an answer so I think it does play a big role in the way people access information. (Participant 3)

¹² Res is short for residence, often used by students to refer to the halls they stay in on campus.

¹³ ‘She-bin’ is a waste container used to dispose sanitary towels in female bathrooms.

Assumptions are made that admission to university equals to exposure to a number of things perceived as 'common', for instance going through the registration process or using the library. It is important to recognise students' backgrounds as some might be more privileged than others in terms of access to facilities and technology. It was clear from the participants' reflections that certain measures should be put in place to ensure inclusion of all. Participants' reflections highlighted that some of the challenges that students face may be as a result of the unfamiliarity of the university space.

5.5 Academic background and impact on language use and learning

The success and failure of students in HEIs can be attributed to a range of issues, including different levels of academic exposure. It was evident that the students who had been to schools that were fully resourced and where the teachers were fluent in the MOI (English), and who were exposed to reading, had far less struggle when they enrolled in university. Participants 3 and 12 highlighted this when they reflected:

The schools that I have been to have been predominantly English medium, but from the social circles that is where you get other languages coming in. From a learning perspective I adapted quite well because even at home we speak a lot of English though my parents speak more Shona than we do. So, I think my aptitude for learning has been quite high because I understand English relatively well and it's comfortable for me. I have learnt quite well because I have a good understanding of that language. (Participant 3)

I would just read, I am able to engage in both spaces where English is a predominant language or where isiXhosa is the main language. But it doesn't mean that I do not see the problems and struggles that people who are not as fluent face, people end up grouping themselves and it doesn't happen by choice. If language hinders you from learning, you will struggle communicating that problem to others or because you have fear that deters you from speaking. (Participant 12)

Some participants noted that having a single MOI in the university actually made communication between students, lecturers and others easier. Whereas some universities

have dual MOI, RU has just English. Participant 2 reflects on how this was an advantage to their understanding, saying:

If I wasn't learning in English I was not gonna get anything done at all and because RU is an English institution. It makes me a lot comfortable when am going for lectures and confident in answering questions in classes and examinations as opposed to other institutions that may have a bilingual vibe of Afrikaans and English. You never know what to expect and because it's not their home language and they are not fluent in English, it will affect my learning but I have not had that experience when I came to RU, the lecturers that I have come across are fluent in English and that has made my learning easier and beneficial to my education. (Participant 2)

Some of the participants who spoke a home language other than English had high levels of competence in the MOI and were confident using it. One participant stated that for them English flowed and they never had any problems, because they loved to read, they read from a very young age and used to practice English through flashcards (Participant 16). It was clear from some of the participants that their home literacy practices enabled participants to cope well with their studies over and above issues of technical language competence.

I was privileged to grow up in an environment that favours reading and also I had an interest in English books. (Participant 12)

The reflections pointed to how social upbringing and academic backgrounds shaped students' perceptions and experiences of language use in the higher education context. Participants 18 and 15 did not face language challenges and attributed this to their social upbringing which prepared them to speak in English, saying:

I grew up in a white community in Stones Hill where my mother was a domestic worker. In order to communicate with children of my age and answer my mother's boss, I had to learn English. (Participant 18)

[B]ecause I went to a missionary school I had to read the English bible every day, and that was a challenge to reading English in public and also because I could not understand it, it slowly came up [improved]. (Participant 15)

From the participants' reflections it was evident that some parents' preference for English influenced their children's development in the language:

My mum was very passionate about English, her energy kind of like influenced me to learn more and there was a way of playing games that made me understand and learn more, and the affirmation my mom would give to my friends when we playing a word game would encourage to read more. (Participant 16)

Family played a significant role in the language competence in the MOI and the literacy practices that they brought with them to university. Thomas (2002) asserts that parents with higher education levels were more likely to promote the kind of home environment that included literacy practices similar to those of the university, as described by Participant 16 above.

The choices and efforts that parents put on the languages that their children learnt affected the learning process for these children in either positive or negative ways. Participant 15 reflects on how his parents valued a good education and were willing to pay for it:

My father got a job and took me to a Model C school and it was mostly Afrikaans and English and the languages were used interchangeably. My home language is Afrikaans and I grew up in an Afrikaans environment. I started speaking English in Grade 4 after my mother realised university was going to be English and they shifted me to an English medium class, and that was a huge adjustment for me. I failed every spelling test. (Participant 15)

Clarence (2019) states that the successes and struggles that students may face at the university are only partially to do with individual motivation and drive. She discussed the many deeper influential constraints which include access to funding, access to family support, counselling and advice, access to particular literacy practices and to important networks thereafter. The participants' reflections above are evident of some levels of commitment that some families put into the education of their family members in the belief that educational preparedness, and in particular English competence, were key to their future success.

In contrast to this, some participants reflected on how the lack of exposure to a culture of reading in their homes presented challenges to them, compared to their counterparts who

had a head start given the opportunities available to them. Participant 5 reflects on this, saying:

...not wanting to bring the culture thing in, but in our black households reading at home is not something that emphasised from an early age and by chance if you have highly educated parents who love reading then you might have a home library but in most of households we dont have that privilege. And when you get here, it gets real, and I mean that I still struggle even though I went to a fancy school. I still read two or three times and still don't understand... It takes a bit more effort for us to learn because we don't have that foundation and the reading is complex when we come here. There are students in my psychology class and noting that we have to do our own reading [they are] pushing themselves but in terms of content, some students start questioning things you would be asking in postgrad and I think it mainly goes to the exposure because they were equipped on how to further interrogate issues whereas some of us are limited to information that you are given in the text book. (Participant 5)

The data suggests that one aspect of the essence of language use in the academy went beyond language competence and included the extent to which the participant's prior school and home practices dovetailed with those expected at university.

5.6 Getting to the essence – Language use in HE

This chapter considered the role of language in students' experiences in an English MOI institution. The essences of the phenomenon established thus far are as follows.

The findings from the students' experiences show us that language plays a significant role in students' learning. For some who have not been exposed to extensive teaching and learning in English at school and home prior to coming to university, the challenges that they face may be greater than those who have. The apartheid education system that was inherited by the South African education system was characterised by underfunding, poor resources and poor teacher qualifications (Lombard, 2020). This continues to affect and influence students' access and success in HEIs. The extent to which students felt prepared for HE and the extent to which they experienced themselves as having sufficient language competence in the MOI was at the essence of many students' experiences of HE.

But the experience ascribed to language was also about literacy practices and the expectations around reading and meaning making. The participants had experiences of being unable to access meaning in the information they were engaged with. The experiences of having to read large amounts of text were identified as at odds with many of their home and school experiences to date. While the participants did not distinguish between basic language competence and the taking on of specific academic literacies, their reported experiences indicate that both were implicated, especially where students experienced hurdles and challenges.

It was not only in terms of access to information and taking on literacy practices that students encountered language problems, but it also affected their levels of participation and their self-esteem. At the heart of the experiences of second language learners in HEIs learning in English, was that language competence is so closely tied to students' confidence that it often functions as a constraint to their participation in class. Linked to this was the centrality in their experiences of the close relationship between language and meaning making. Students vary in their ability to come to understand the discipline-specific concepts and clearly identify the role of language competence in this regard – they are highly attuned to it and cognisant of it. The students largely drew on an autonomous model of literacy in that there was little explicit understanding of the extent to which the practices of higher education were specific to university study and to their specific disciplines, and not only to general English competence as such.

The status of English as a 'mark of intelligence' also played a potent role in defining their experiences and has profound consequence for their self-worth and participation. There was variation in the extent to which students were able to critically reflect on this problematic belief or understand its colonial roots, but the essence of English language supremacy nonetheless had effects on their higher education experience.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter offered a consideration of students' experiences within the university generally, before moving, in the next chapter, to their experiences of CE activities. While their experiences were varied, the essence that can be elicited at this stage is that language competence has a profound impact on students' experiences of studying in an HEI where the

MOI is not their home language. This goes beyond technical language ability to include academic literacy practices for which some students' schooling and home experiences left them ill-prepared. The essence of this sense of language challenge included significant affective issues where students felt embarrassed, and this constrained their participation in class activities. Language competence, literacy practices and a sense of self-worth were found to be tightly interwoven in these students' experiences.

Chapter 6: Findings: Language use in Community Engagement

6.1 Introduction

The findings in this chapter are based on the research question:

What are second language English speaking students' experiences of language in CE activities within an English medium university?

While in the previous chapter I looked at participants' experiences of learning in English within the HEI generally, in this chapter I hone in on their experiences of language use within various CE activities. These participants had all previously, or at the time of the data collection, participated in one of the range of ECP activities. This chapter discusses how language acts as an enablement or constraint to CE activities by working towards the essence of the participants' experiences. In the chapter, I discuss participants' experiences of taking part in CE, the benefits they experienced, the issue of shared languages, and how issues of power were shaped by language use.

6.2 Benefits of participating in Community Engagement activities

Throughout the participants' reflections, it was clear that CE provided opportunities for students to participate in something they experienced as meaningful while developing key skills and responsibilities. The participants enjoyed taking part in ECP and reflected on their feelings of contributing to 'the bigger picture' as responsible citizens:

...knowing that it's contributing to the bigger picture, even if it's just one child it contributes to the bigger spectrum which I think is pretty amazing. (Participant 9)

I am very much involved in ECP, and volunteer from Wednesday to Friday every week with different organisations. For me, I have always seen volunteerism in ECP as serving, something that I have done for as far as I can remember and so for me it came naturally. Also, I have learnt how to be patient, the learners have taught me how to smile. (Participant 17)

I would say by doing CE activities, you are playing your part in being socially responsible and sustainable human development. I see it coming through the help that we give to the learners at the sites. (Participant 5)

Since 1945, UNESCO has indicated that higher education should be a 'public good' whereby the benefits of the university go beyond the benefits enjoyed by individual graduates. It was very evident in the data that CE was experienced to be a key vehicle in achieving this. It was evident from the participants' experiences that CE had contributed to their social outcomes in that the participants spontaneously reported improved social responsibility and citizenship skills, intercultural understanding, and reduced stereotyping.

I believe the CE programme has been effective in developing more responsible students. I would like to consider myself more socially responsible than I was then before I started this programme, and you feel this immense responsibility to lend a hand and help out. It is nice to grow but growing with others is nicer, I feel this responsibility to involve others. (Participant 14)

The participants felt that CE provided a space for growth and development for the learners at the community sites. The participants suggested that the learners gained knowledge and viewed the participants in CE as role models. The participants' engagement was experienced as producing growth in their emotions and intellect, giving them happiness and improving their self-esteem.

Volunteering taught me patience and how valuable it is to teach children. They take everything to heart, so you have to be careful what you tell and expose them to, because you are more like a role model to them. (Participant 2).

It's more about establishing relationships that achieve something, especially working with people who are receptive to new ideas and are willing to take part. It's an amazing thing when you start something with people, and they are not dependent on you to finish it, but they actually progress with the idea. (Participant 10)

These benefits were experienced as increasing over time as the participants found their footing in the programme:

I ended up working with the ones that struggled the most and the teachers confirmed there was improvement and there was noticeable excitement when I got there compared to the other days when I was new there and the confidence was growing too. (Participant 5)

I found the engaged programmes' space rewarding. What was motivating for me was the idea of going out to interact with people and working with schools whereby you would see the kids so thirsty for what you had to offer, which excited me. (Participant 1)

The idea that a higher education should have a normative purpose is not accepted by all. Under apartheid, all education, schooling and university etc., was framed as instrumentalist. In other words, students were to have access to 'neutral' knowledge and skills (Bloch's, (2009) 'toxic mix' discussed in Chapter 2). But of course, though the knowledge project was framed under the guise of being about ensuring learners at school and students at university acquire appropriate skills and that ideology and politics be kept out of the education system, this was never the case. The Bantu Education system was explicitly about preparing students for their roles in the apartheid system (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) and universities were subject to state interference (Bunting, 2006).

Education is always normative though this is sadly rarely made explicit or reflected upon in the curriculum and teaching and learning process. Ashwin et al (2020) argues that higher education should enable students to enjoy a transformative relationship to knowledge. Acquiring knowledge thus has identity implications and should prepare students to be ethical citizens. The White Paper of 1997 called for higher education to play a role in preparing the critical citizenship needed for the new democracy.

The idea that higher education should do more than transmit skills and knowledge, but also be a place of personal growth, ethical development and a sense of responsibility for critical citizens has enormous implications for the curriculum. The experiences shared in this study suggest that the ECP provided powerful spaces for such reflection and development. Indeed, the identity development was part of the essence of the CE experience. It is however unclear the extent to which this is garnered across the university and the lessons in this regard gained from CE are used to inform curriculum development.

It is important to note from these experiences, that much of this personal growth, ethical development and sense of responsibility as critical citizens did not emerge because CE experiences enabled students to interact with 'the other'. As indicated earlier, many assumptions abound that CE entails middle-class students engaging with poor communities

(Bender, 2008; Butin, 2010; Bidandi, 2021) but it was clear from the reflections on the participants' experiences that this was not always the case. In many cases, the participants were themselves members of the community with whom they worked, or they shared similar cultural contexts.

While CE literature repeatedly calls for reciprocity, there is very little in literature on the possibilities of the participants in CE being members of the community. This was, however, a common experience for a number of participants in this study. Participant 7 clearly reflects on the benefits of this context:

I can say without prejudice that my involvement in CE has helped me in to so many ways to develop as an individual and also to see that I am not the only one who comes from a poor background but there are others hence this provides some healing of some sort. When you engage more with the community you begin to understand what they experience more than what may be portrayed in the media. You can have the opportunity to transform your mindset and understanding. (Participant 7)

The sense of contributing in meaningful ways was also linked to the positive feedback the participants received from the learners. It was clear that ECP provided spaces for the participants to be the experts and role models, which was not part of their experiences on the university campus.

...the most joyous moment for me was the ability to move around and identify the challenges you may face, mainly because you have grown in similar conditions. You tend to relate to the way the children will be feeling and that places you in a better way to help. The children gain a sense of confidence through the help you offer them. Even though you are not recognised in a broader space, the impact that you would have made in someone's life is shown when you see them in the same institution as you, it becomes more fulfilling. (Participant 7)

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) state that CE is a two-way reciprocal relationship that is mutually beneficial. The process between the students and the learners is in line with the definition from the Carnegie Foundation (2018) that CE is a mutually beneficial partnership between communities and the university.

It was also evident from the participants' experiences that they had the desire to make a difference and see the growth of the community through volunteerism and contributing to the sustainable development of Makhanda community. For example, Participant 10 reflected:

When it comes to community development, you look at the challenges that you have, like water crisis and you think about how you can help because you don't want to go to the communities blindly without knowing the issues affecting people and may cause conflict. One needs to know the gaps in the society and what is needed because RU is not on its own, we are also part of the community. So when I was doing my engagement we knew that we have a water crisis but we still need to plant veggies so that we can sustain our food and nutrition so there is need to save water through tanks to sustain the nutrition programme. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 further reflected on how they felt a sense of oneness with the communities as they would identify the problem and then become part of solving the problem. The participants contributed to knowledge production and dissemination:

I understand CE as reciprocal, you give something and you also learn something. You teach what you already know, and they also teach you something, they remind you what you have learnt and you are also contributing to individual transformation and community development. (Participant 10)

These aspects of contributing to the bigger picture are linked to notions of promoting social justice and expressing active citizenry (Jiranek et al., 2013; RU ECP Handbook, 2020). As indicated earlier, addressing inequalities and developing critical citizens through CE has been stated in many of the 26 public universities' mission statements [see Table 3.1, Chapter 3]. Such notions are also in line the RUC mission statement. The RU Vice Chancellor, Dr Mabizela, has stated that CE has an integral role in ensuring that when

students graduate they have been educated as a whole person and they have gained a heightened sense of social consciousness and are able to serve as agents for social change, societal transformation and that graduates are imbued with attitude, spirit and values of Ubuntu and human solidarity' (RU ECP Handbook, 2020, p. 3).

There is also a link between these characteristics which are in line with the higher education policy to include CE as a core pillar aimed to promote socially responsible graduates and active

citizenship (DoE, 1997). It was explicitly evident in the participants' reflections that they had experienced CE in the ways that were intended in such institutional statements.

I now turn to look specifically at the extent to which CE intersected with language.

6.3 Language for planning voluntary work

It was interesting to note that even in the planning stages, before the participants entered the community space, some reported using isiXhosa to a large extent. This is significant given that the planning took place in a university campus setting, where English is the medium of instruction. While translanguaging¹⁴ is common and smaller student study groups often coalesce around language groups, typically tutorials and other smaller student discussions take place almost entirely in English, as the common language for all students and as the MOI. This suggests that from the start, CE activities were seen to be more open to a variety of languages and possibly suggests that participants felt that such activities were sufficiently aligned to their 'isiXhosa identities' that they could chat about CE plans in their home language. While this was generally seen to be a positive aspect, the participants reflected on how this brought challenges for those who did not speak isiXhosa.

the fact that not all of us speak isiXhosa and the schools that we went to [for the ECP] were predominantly isiXhosa when we planned, those who did not speak isiXhosa would experience challenges. (Participant 5)

We mainly use isiXhosa in our planning, though we have teammates who are not Xhosa, they do get help with interpretation. (Participant 17)

It becomes difficult if the group does not have everyone who speaks isiXhosa and this becomes a barrier to communication. (Participant 3)

It was clear that language played a pivotal role for the communication which is necessary for planning their CE ECP activities. Despite the planning taking place on campus, there was a

¹⁴ Translanguaging is when a person draws from their whole linguistic repertoire, often moving fluidly between languages in a single sentence. Code-switching also entails moving between languages. The term 'translanguaging' is often focused more broadly on how people make meaning across languages and even other modes of communication, such as body language. In Linguistic analyses, code-switching often entails identifying which languages are used where, whereas translanguaging analyses are often more focused on how meaning is made. Despite these terms being used to refer to slightly different aspects of linguistic fluidity in the field of linguistics, in this thesis, I have used the terms interchangeably to indicate where participants move easily between two or more languages.

high degree of code-switching, especially in groups with lots of isiXhosa speaking participants. One participant reflected on how English, even with its associated challenges, served to allow communication amongst participants who spoke different languages, saying: *'thank goodness it always happened that when we planned, we used English with my team members'* (Participant 8). This data suggests that the planning phase of CE allowed for extensive code-switching whereby participants could move between languages as needed, and highlights the status of English as means to bridge language barriers.

There is a strong move, since the 2015/2016 #RhodesMustFall protests for more translanguaging to occur in higher education spaces and for more languages to be used for teaching and learning and assessment (Asfour et al, 2020; Probyn: 2017). The Language Policy at Rhodes University (2019: unpagged), where this study takes place, indicates that:

... South Africa is a multilingual country and that Rhodes University reflects this multilingual diversity. The policy promotes multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage in a way that creates and fosters a supportive, inclusive and non-discriminatory environment. This policy recognises that language has the potential to contribute to transformation in various ways.

Despite this, as Chapter 5, many students experience the use of English as the MOI as a hurdle to their studies and their ability to enjoy the 'transformative relationship with knowledge' called for by Ashwin (2020). The policy goes on to suggest that translanguaging can be a powerful way of recognising other languages used by the diverse student body. But there has been very little movement in this regard on campus, possibly because the majority of the lecturers are monolingual English speakers. The experiences of translanguaging in the ECP may well offer examples of how this practice could be used to enhance student engagement and learning within formal HEI spaces too.

6.4 Language course for enhancing communication

It was evident from the participants' reflection that while English competence was considered vital for participation in formal learning (as discussed in Chapter 5), it was competence in isiXhosa, the main language of the community, that was most valued in CE activities and played an important part in enabling participants' engagement – an issue to which I turn in the next section. This pivotal role of language as medium of communication is also emphasised through some measures implemented by RUC. These includes a short introductory isiXhosa and Afrikaans 101 course that is run during CE training to equip

participants with the basic language necessary for communication (RU ECP Handbook, 2020; pp. 41- 43). Participants 10 and 1 reflected on how this course was beneficial to them:

..thanks to ECP for organising an isiXhosa course, I took that one and it was interesting to learn the language and I picked up a few things from that. There are a lot of words that you can use with the kids and helps you understand what they will be saying and be able to respond. (Participant 10)

I think the CE office has done an incredible job by introducing isiXhosa for volunteers so that they can bridge the language gap. (Participant 1)

Despite its short length and introductory focus, this short course by RUCCE was experienced as enabling non-speakers of isiXhosa and Afrikaans to gain some basic knowledge of the languages and some core vocabulary that would help them to engage when they visited the communities. Machimana et al. (2018) acknowledge that “in a culturally diverse environment, language can be a barrier in CE partnerships” (p. 188). RUCCE’s implementation of the short course was a bid to mitigate the drawbacks that can be brought about when language is a barrier.

However, although the short course was beneficial to some, others had reservations about it, referring to the initiative as just addressing the tip of the iceberg. Some participants indicated that a short course is not enough to equip them to engage successfully at the sites, saying:

it [the short course] covers the basics only and when you get to the sites, it’s not about the basics only, there is need to interact with the people, so I don’t know how there could be a way to bridge that gap. (Participant 5)

There were also complaints about the lack of regularity in offering the course and the lack of depth in what was covered:

there used to be short course that was run in the previous years, but I don’t know why they have stopped running it. It was never communicated. I guess it depends on who will be running the programme. (Participant 6)

There is no consistency in the language course. This year it’s there, the other year it’s not there. And surely these basic phrases are not enough to sustain engagement when

you get to the sites. You get there and you say 'molweni' or 'môre' then what? I think more should be done to equip students, language wise. (Participant 15)

The course was experienced as useful by some participants, but given the complex relationship between language and identity (Chapter 2), it seems evident that a basic course cannot overcome the extent to which language is challenge. Nonetheless, it was clear that the continued running of the introductory language programmes could be beneficial to some extent. The basic conversational nature of the language courses entailed a focus on enabling relationships to be formed, rather than on allowing for ongoing conversations to take place in that language.

6.5 Shared language as a tool for building relationships in CE activities

Literature tells us that communication is what makes us human (Christie, 1985; Rabiah, 2012). The extent to which language played a role in forging connections and enabling personal growth in the CE activities cannot be overemphasised. The participants repeatedly referred, in their reflections on ECP experiences, to connecting through shared language, or to struggling with connections because of a lack of shared language. The extent to which language was central to participants' experiences in the HEI context continued to be evidenced in their reflections on the ECP activities, albeit that those participants who felt embattled with (English) language related issues in the HEI context, now found themselves engaged through their (isiXhosa) competence.

The participants noticed that the closest bonds forged during CE activities were formed between those with shared languages. It was evident that speaking the same language fostered a bond and there were many experiences that the participants shared of enjoying a close-knit relationship between those students who shared a particular language when they went out to the ECP activities, and between participants and learners in the case of the language used by the community partners, isiXhosa. The connection between language, identity and relationship formation was strong.

A shared language was important for connecting with the learners that the participants were engaging with at the community sites. For example, Participant 14 said:

I believe that without the ability to communicate there is no engagement and you can only build a partnership through communication and using a language, and if the

language is not mutual, you end up not forming good relations or partnerships whereas if you are using the same language, you bond, and trust is formed.
(Participant 14)

ECP participants who could speak different languages including a shared local isiXhosa language, felt that their language backgrounds and capabilities were central to their experiences of positive communication with the learners at the sites and establishing working relationships with local communities, which provided a rewarding experience for them.

I would not say I faced any challenges especially concerning making connections with people, because it's within me to connect with people. But I would say the highlight for me was being more aware of a lot of things particularly language. I feel like I have been using the three languages that I know all at once with different set of kids.
(Participant 13)

The connection between being adept at the relevant language and feelings of self-esteem and confidence was strong.

A shared language helped the participants at the sites to feel that they are an integral part of the group of students fostering stronger involvement with the community. Participant 17 indicated that since their CE activities required working together as a team, this was far easier to achieve when the group had shared languages:

Some of our team members were not Xhosa hence we had to use English. I think it takes a lot of time trying to explain. And you know, English being English, it is a problem. (Participant 17)

The extent to which a shared language among the participants enhanced community building was very evident in their telling of the ECP experiences. It was significant that though most conversations on campus would have been in English, the connections forged between the students going off in teams to undertake ECP activities involved significant translanguaging, and in particular, a large amount of isiXhosa, with some English blended in.

The data shows that this entailed some students having to have discussions translated for them into English, and potentially this meant a sense of exclusion or alienation by those students, who would have usually had few language challenges in class discussions, given

their English competence. Because I only collected data from students who spoke a home language other than English, it is not clear how these students experienced the extent to which isiXhosa was used in the ECP activities. However, it should be noted that I did collect data from students for whom neither English nor isiXhosa was their home language and they did not express concerns about being excluded from conversations with fellow students, though they did express concerns in relation to their communication with community members, an issue to which I now turn.

6.6 Language for relationships with community members

Undertaking CE activities is never a simple process. Intellectually, psychologically and practically, it can be fraught (Bandy, 2011). Students, who are developing their own identities as learners within a specialist field and focused on submitting an assignment or studying for an exam, now find themselves as partners with community members and focused towards a joint goal. It was therefore unsurprising that the data suggested a range of experiences in working with local communities in the CE's ECP. But it was evident that the use of language was at the very centre of these diverse experiences.

For ECP activities to work well, it was clear from the reflections that there was a need for at least some of the participants in each team to have a basic understanding of the dominant language used in that community, in order to execute their voluntary work. Some participants reflected on this saying:

...because a lot of the 'native' people here speak isiXhosa and I speak Sesotho it was difficult for me to engage fully, but when we got to the sites some of the students who were fluent in isiXhosa would take the leading role and sometimes, I would try isiXhosa to bridge that language gap. (Participant 8)

Close relationships were possible where participants and learners at the sites shared a language. The experience of having a shared language went beyond easy communication, to include issues of connection and self-esteem.

Language does not only become a means of communicating but an important thing we have that is common. And it's a way to unite people other than just language being a mode of communication. (Participant 1)

Some isiXhosa speaking participants reflected enthusiastically about their confidence in the CE space saying:

..some students are not isiXhosa home language speakers, they come and use English when trying to help the children at the sites and that creates a barrier because the MOI in many schools here is isiXhosa so it's difficult because the children then become more receptive to someone who speaks their language. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 reflected on the benefits of having a shared language, emphasised through one of Nelson Mandela quotes that talks about the importance of a person's language:

according to Nelson Mandela, speak to a man in a language that he does not understand and it will go to his head, but speak to a man in a language that he understands that goes to his heart. (Participant 6)

Through the participant's evocation of the Mandela quote, they demonstrated a tacit awareness of the relationship between language, literary practices and identity that was repeated time and again through the data.

While there was little reflection on challenges in language use between participants and other RU students on the ECP projects despite the use of isiXhosa being prolific in this context as indicated earlier, there was a reflection on challenges of being unable to talk the language of the community members with whom the participants worked.

Some participants revealed deep concerns about the difficulties they faced in participating meaningfully in the ECP due to the lack of a shared language. The concerns were centred on challenges of establishing working relationship with local communities, problems with basic communication and a lack of engagement.

I needed to relate to local communities in terms of their language, culture, and social context and I feel that this is my biggest challenge. And if I can't speak the language that is spoken in the community that will also be another challenge as I can't really work with them without an interpreter. Even with an interpreter, I can see that am not connecting with them the way that I want to. (Participant 7)

The reflections point to the need for trust and partnerships for successful CE initiatives, and the role of shared language as one means of building communities of practice. Some

participants indicated that having a shared language was not only beneficial for working together as a team as mentioned above, but having a shared language with community members, in this case learners from different primary and high schools, had an effect on their participation because community members preferred to interact with participants fluent in their home language. While interpreters were available where needed (often in the form of other students), this made developing a personal connection challenging. The connection between language, identity and connection was evident across almost all of the data.

If there is someone who speaks isiXhosa the children are more inclined to go to someone who speaks the same language as they do. So, language becomes a barrier between the community member and the volunteer. (Participant 3)

The challenges in working with children where the volunteer student does not speak the language in which the child is fluent, may seem self-evident. But what was important to note is that much of the data pertained to language not just as a means of ease of communication but as a means of establishing a rapport, of building trust, and of forging a connection. It was the affective issues and concerns about trust and connection that permeated the data far more than experiences of logistical problems in communication or being unable to understand each other from a practical level. This explains why even where an interpreter could assist in ensuring that the meaning of the conversation was communicated, the lack of shared language emerged repeatedly as a key issue in the experience of the ECP.

6.7 Language and power

The participants' reflections also point to the existence of asymmetrical power between the participants and the learners at the sites. It appears age difference and status created potential divides which could work against a productive educational engagement, and this was exacerbated where the student and learner did not share a language. Participants 18 and 12 reflected on this as follows:

...the children would withhold because they were afraid and the fact that they would be speaking to Rhodes students. The students continued to note the learners would [to] look down upon themselves, they become shy... (Participant 18)

...if children are not able to communicate in the learning space, they start feeling ashamed and won't be willing to learn, they close off and are not willing to engage... (Participant 12)

In both of these quotes and others like them, the participants link the problems with communicating to feelings of inadequacy amongst the learners with whom the students were working. This had implications for the extent to which the students could interact with these children. Most significantly, in both of these examples above, the participants went on to link this to issues of language:

... they become shy and put isiXhosa words unless there was someone who would translate their answers then they would engage willingly. (Participant 18)

... are not willing to engage because they think that there is someone who is better than them so language plays a crucial role in enabling student learning. (Participant 12)

Language problems were experienced as far more than challenges to communicating meaning. They were experienced as being about identity, values and trust. If the learners at the various ECP projects with which students engaged felt alienated by the language of participant volunteers, they could actually feel ashamed.

According to the Capire Consulting Group (2012), barriers to participation in CE may be as a result of cultural factors. Language emerged as such a cultural factor in this study, in that a lack of shared language made communication challenging, but it also made it difficult to foster connection and trust. Communities might have shared languages and words that they use to describe social phenomena, hence language becomes a key principle for inclusion (Urban Safety Reference Group [USRG], 2014). Participant 17 reflects on how having a shared language with the learners had eliminated challenges of communication saying:

...communicating with them, I did not have a problem because I could speak the home language of the mentees. (Participant 17)

Language was seen to be a key means of reducing the potential power differences between the older students and the younger learners because it enabled the students who could speak isiXhosa to more rapidly connect. What is important to note is that even where the

participants were not fluent in isiXhosa, their attempts to speak it were highly valued and still went some way towards fostering connections. The attempts to communicate in isiXhosa, even just in the form of initial greetings, was experienced as enhancing the possibilities for connection. It is possible that such attempts, in which the participants had to risk mispronunciation or incorrect grammar and vocabulary, served to make the participants vulnerable in front of the learners and it somehow enhanced connections with the learners. Shared languages, even just at the most basic level of greetings, seems to have been crucial for bridging gaps created by power, age and language differences, thereby enhancing engagement as reflected on by Participant 3:

I tried to use some isiXhosa, I am not really good but I tried a few phrases and I think they could tell more than I could so I was trying to make the environment more comfortable for them. It made me a little uncomfortable because I could tell from their reaction [that I had made some mistakes] but they appreciated the fact that we were trying. (Participant 3)

It was interesting to note that both the status of the university and the alienating nature of English served as power divides between the learners and participants. The students entering the various ECP project sites were entering as 'others' from the university at the top end of town, in many ways far removed from the day-to-day realities of these children. Furthermore, they spoke English, a language which many of the learners may have found alienating and associated with the world of business. The participants' reflections on their experiences indicate an awareness of these power differences and the need to connect across them if a meaningful relationship was to be forged. The data shows that the use of isiXhosa by the participants was a key means of reducing such divides.

Given the findings discussed in Chapter 5 that English holds meanings of superiority for many and that this positioned the participants in uncomfortable ways in the HE classrooms, their ability to connect and succeed in establishing relationships in the CE setting thanks to their competence in isiXhosa, is significant.

While much of the discussion on the student experience of CE thus far has been about the extent to which being able to speak isiXhosa enhanced or constrained the likelihood of fostering a close relationship with the children in the ECP project, the essence of the

experience can be seen to go beyond pragmatics and to indicate the extent to which language was central to both identity and connection.

While the use of English in the academy was at times a constraint on students' sense of self-competence, this was not the case in their ECP engagements at all. In the ECP, it was competence in isiXhosa that allowed for a strong sense of self-competence. In both cases, those students who battled with the relevant language had some sense of exclusion, but there were also notable distinctions in the essence of the experience. In the academy, being unable to cope with the MOI was experienced as impacting negatively on students' self-esteem, especially as this had implications on their ability to access the information needed to succeed in their studies. But in their CE activities, being unable to speak isiXhosa – the dominant language in the various ECP projects – was experienced as making it challenging to connect with the children. While this was a hurdle, this was not experienced in the same affective manner as impacting negatively on their self-esteem.

Significantly, there were other differences in the experiences between campus, where English was the expected language, and the ECP, where translanguaging was the norm and isiXhosa was dominant, but was used alongside various other languages. Chief among these differences were that the participants' experienced CE as providing multiple spaces for more comfortable movement between languages and a flexibility in language use rarely found in the classroom.

If we make a mistake, we laugh, it's not the same thing in a serious environment like the university where you don't just laugh when you make a mistake, but when I am with the children, I just laugh. They hug me. (Participant 4)

The learning space in CE was seen to be flexible, such that it allowed for code switching during the activities and this was noted as a powerful means of enhancing understanding. Participant 16 reflects on this, saying:

The main language that I picked up that needs to be emphasised at my [ECP] site is English so I teach English and read English to some of my smaller kids and I noticed that they don't understand what I will be saying, then I code switch to other languages to accommodate them. So, a lot of times me using isiXhosa and Afrikaans is to get their attention and make them see, for example, I am talking to a kid and I ask them what

*colour is this and they say its 'rooi'¹⁵, I tell them they are right and in English it's red.
(Participant 16)*

This discussion on the ability to switch languages in the ECP space was often connected to their experiences of a general lack of hierarchy in CE activities and more freedom for the students to express themselves generally. Participants 3 and 2 below reflect on how CE allows more interaction of many kinds, provides a space that is not rigid and allows for easy engagement:

CE allows for a more comfortable space and there are no authoritative figures that prescribe what must be done as opposed to in lectures where you are told what to do and what not to do. (Participant 3).

... CE is less structured, ...when it comes to CE, I go there and learn something from the kids and this might actually change my perspective and I think there is more space to learn from one another in CE, the process is reciprocal and less structured, and you don't have to sit there and listen to the same thing over and over again. Each party gets to express themselves more freely. (Participant 2)

The participants experienced the CE space as one that is neither entirely a social setting nor entirely academic. The discussions around translanguaging were closely connected to experiences of freedom and engagement. The experience was of an interesting space for interaction including, and going beyond issues of language.

If I were to put formal academic learning on a scale of 0-100, I would say there is 40% engagement and with CE there is 70% engagement. That makes learning in CE a lot more insightful even though you don't have tests or assignments but what you learn becomes engraved in you automatically through that boosting engagement. In CE you understand what you are learning, you unlearn and relearn. So, for me learning through practicals and making mistakes, this makes a difference and solidifies the learning process. (Participant 10)

The extent to which the English MOI was a hindrance to class participation was discussed in the previous chapter but the reflections on the participants' experiences of interaction and

¹⁵ 'Rooi' is the Afrikaans word for 'red'.

engagement in the CE context suggest that it is not only English competence *per se* that constrains classroom involvement. The language flexibility, reduced hierarchy, and sense of self-worth associated with CE all functioned together to produce their experiences thereof.

The participants repeatedly reflected on the value of having an authentic, engaged learning space in CE. A number of them went so far as to make the connection to their experiences in the classroom and suggested how the culture of CE could be of benefit in formal academic spaces for enriching development:

I know that CE provides spaces for learning and developing ways of thinking through helping others. (Participant 12)

... for me I feel like being able to talk and discuss things that are bigger than the curriculum is something more important. We go to our sites to discuss Shakespeare but so many times we begin to discuss about the issues that are not in the curriculum, not to be destructive but to broaden people's knowledge and to learn from each other. While we discussing Shakespeare, I feel that there are issues that come up from real life and this helps the learners to view and change their perspective on life and that makes a difference because you have that kind of impact on their lives. (Participant 2)

When it comes to CE, it's more like you are dropped in the ocean and you have to use your brains on how you can get to the land. It's unlike in formal academic spaces where I feel that there is too much theory and none of it is equipping me for my reality or my future. If I had a broken pipe now I would still would not know how to fix it because all that I have been taught is what the pipe is meant to do but not how to fix it. I am supposed to write essays in class that are not constructive for my reality. (Participant 4)

In CE just like in formal academic classes you meet different people but it's much easier to relate with people in CE [even though] you only see them for an hour and you come together and work towards a similar goal. In CE, you are put in different groups to interact with people who don't have the same beliefs with, you realise that there is a lot that you can learn from the different people. There is need to acknowledge our differences in order to work towards a common goal. If that could happen in formal academic classes, knowledge creation could be much easier. I love that CE gives you

space to be you and think for yourself, and it would be nice if that were to be brought to the classrooms because every time that you are in a class you are being taught and you can't think outside the box. You can come up with an idea in CE and no one can shut you down. And you can have fun whilst learning, but in formal academic classes you just learn to pass. (Participant 10)

When something is seen as academic it means there should be a wrong answer or correct answer but when we meet for CE, the environment is different mainly because of how we feel and because of the fact that it's a free space you can express yourself whereas I feel that academically you are more inclined to stick by rules and thereby you feel afraid to say something that might be wrong and appear as not so smart and intelligent and I feel that is the biggest challenge. (Participant 14)

The experience of CE was very different to the participants' experiences of formal HE teaching and learning. Much has been said about the 'performativity' of higher education, whereby students are expected to memorise and transmit knowledge – that is they must 'perform' their learning (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). It may be that this is implicated in the extent to which students' described experiences of formal HE classes and assignments from the perspective of figuring out what needed to be done to 'get through' and less about their engagements with knowledge and the extent to which this impacted on identity or led to personal growth. This may have been because of the nature of the interview, with its focus on the ECP, but possibly indicates that CE had a more explicitly stated normative agenda and was experienced more directly in terms of identity formation and personal growth than their on-campus experiences. While the normative goals of CE are explicitly stated in the orientation and the RU ECP handbook, the normative aspects of higher education are arguably less explicit. Various authors, for example, Case et al. (2018), Boughey and McKenna (2021) and Ashwin (2020), have argued that there is a need to make the purposes of a higher education more explicit to students. They may arrive with fairly instrumentalist ideas of having to learn some knowledge or acquire some skills to pass their courses and they may not have considered the extent to which a higher education can be about personal growth and transformation, or about taking on the responsibilities as a critical citizen, or about participating in a public good. Conversations about reciprocity and respect abound in CE activities and in research about CE, but similar conversations about the ideological nature of

undertaking higher education studies is arguably often neglected. Once again, the essence of students' experiences of CE suggests that there may be much that HE spaces and curricula could benefit from, in reflecting on CE spaces and processes.

6.8 Connections between Community Engagement and learning in Higher Education courses

Another benefit of for the students from participation in the ECP, besides a sense of responsibility and self-worth, was that the process of teaching the children or helping them with their homework entailed having to reflect on their own understandings. This was particularly where the students were working with older children in the same fields that they were studying at university. As indicated above, Participant 2 found himself reflecting on the connections between the Shakespeare learned in an English literature class and the learners' life experiences and his own life experiences. Participant 8, below, shows how having to teach basic biology concepts made her reflect on how much she really understood these concepts at a fundamental level, beyond simply parroting their definition.

It was more of me learning from them because having to explain a simple term was a bit difficult because you are thinking 'How do I explain this simple term in a way that the children will understand?' You learn about things and terms such as components of a cell in biology but to try to explain what a cell is to a Grade 9 pupil, you start to question yourself whether you really understand what a cell is. (Participant 8)

Later Participant 8 brings the same reflections to her teaching maths concepts to the children:

When you have to explain why you have to square root something, it makes you realise that it's just about taking concepts in, but you need to know what the concepts mean, so that makes you conscious of what you are saying (Participant 8).

The significance of CE learning was in part about the opportunities that teaching content gave to the students to deepen their own understanding, and in part related to their experiences of CE being a very deep kind of engagement, often in contrast to the levels of engagement in formal classroom settings. Engagement, that is active participation and moving beyond memorising, to actually understanding and being able to apply knowledge, has long been held to be the key to meaningful education (Dewey, 1922; Freire, 1985). In many senses, the key to teaching and learning is moving students from memorising to understanding to actually

being able to use the knowledge (Ashwin, 2020). The students' experiences of CE suggest that it provided a platform where they were having to engage with materials at a deeper level, albeit often more basic content knowledge at school level. As indicated in the previous chapter, it would seem that engagement in the formal classrooms was often limited, in part because of constraints of language competence, but also as a result of issues of hierarchy and a lack of awareness of the literacy practices required of them.

In the large scale national SASSE project (South African Surveys of Student Engagement), University of Free State (UFS) researchers have identified key conceptual elements that underpin engagement. These include (i) academic and social integration, (ii) participation in events and activities and (iii) quality of relationships (Strydom et al., 2017, p. 5). There is need to reflect on how the participants' experiences seem to show that these conceptual elements were in evidence in their CE experiences, but were often constrained in their experiences in the formal spaces of HEIs. Regarding (i), the data was replete with experiences of social integration and CE seems to have allowed a set of connections to be established between students more readily than in the more formal education spaces. In regard to (ii), it should be noted that the participants in this study all elected to participate in the ECP voluntarily and so their participation in events and activities may be different to the experiences of those students participating in CE as part of their course requirements. However, it should also be noted that the university prides itself on including CE experiences of various forms for all its students and this has been found to be central to the undergraduate experience at RU (see Case et al, 2018, Muthama, 2021). The benefits for student engagement through "participation in events and activities" (Strydom et al., 2017) are hopefully more widespread than only those who take up the ECP opportunity. The data also clearly indicated that the quality of relationships (with the learners in the ECP programme, with other students participating on the programme, and with those working in the RUC office) have all been enhanced by these participants' involvement in the ECP. The forging of relationships is a key issue in students' feelings of belonging and self-worth and is also linked to student retention and throughput (Case et al., 2018). The data includes reflections on how these strong relationships emerged from collective experiences.

I think the manner in which we approach CE is different with the way lecturers approach teaching in class, I think CE breaks those barriers. And there is a statement

[a proverb] that says 'If you wanna go fast, go alone, but if you wanna go far, let's go together' so it's a collective experience of growing together. (Participant 1)

This participant also reflected on how this collective learning experience meant that anyone who had only partial understanding of the problem or the context would be assisted by others to get the full understanding:

If I go to a community and say 'You should go to the councillor and report this' but there are certain things that are not allowing people to go to the councillor such as the unavailability of the councillor. I should be exposed to these realities and not think that my knowledge of how things should be done is the only ultimate way because those people in the community can think, reason or question. (Participant 1)

Once again, the collective nature of knowledge making was indicated to be key to the students' experience. In contrast to this, where students reported on making errors in the formal classroom as indicated in the previous chapter, this was seen to be a risk to self-esteem, to the extent that students would elect not to engage in class for fear of making errors. The nature of CE as a space where trial-and-error and mistake making are seen to be central to learning also seemed to emerge as being part of the essence of the CE experience. It was thus evident that the participants were highly engaged in their ECP activities and grew to make authentic meaning that took context into account.

For CE to be beneficial to the participants, they needed to understand why they were taking part in it. The culture of social responsibility and being part of something bigger than oneself was evident across the data and seems to have been at odds with any mention of why students were engaged in formal classrooms. For example:

It [CE] does mention that they want the community to develop and also sustainable human development, it needs one to understand their role whilst in community engagement. It is not simply getting the certificate ...it's a process to develop people and your role as a volunteer is bigger than just a qualification and it may help in changing your attitude around people in the community and how you aim to bring development to individual environments hence I said it ties to what you would be working on. (Participant 3)

The last part of the above quote touches on a related issue. The ECP experiences had provided a space for improving participants' ability to link what they would have learned in formal academic spaces to the real world, thereby gaining self-confidence and applying critical thinking.

I need something to help me build a bridge for my reality, maybe that could help in addressing social injustices issues such as unemployment - just maybe who knows. If we all could take CE seriously it would work out. (Participant 4)

While the discussion about the purposes of the participants' voluntary engagement in ECP focused on commitment and social responsibility and other public good issues, there was little about similar purposes to their activities in the formal HEI spaces, which seemed to be more focused on 'getting through' and 'passing' and 'getting the qualification.' The difference between the more externally focused purposes of CE and the more instrumentally focused purposes of HE suggests the potential for a conversation across the spaces, such that the students' emerging social responsibility in their CE activities be brought back into the classroom to build a stronger sense of the potential for social responsibility in their studies and future workplaces. Certainly, the ability of the participants to bring their learning from CE back to HEIs was significant.

It is important to note that while the participants repeatedly praised the practical nature of CE learning and some participants complained about the 'heavy theory' of their formal HE learning, this should not be taken at face value. While the participants' reflections clearly demonstrate the benefits of and need for authentic learning and student engagement, it would be a mistake to assume that this would lead to a recommendation for some HEIs to be focused on the practical. Much of the theoretical learning students battle with may comprise the fundamental powerful principled knowledge that HE offers. Principled knowledge is never easy to acquire and so levels of discomfort are a necessary part of a higher education.

Nonetheless the variations between learning experiences in CE and HEI contexts was stark in the reflections and suggests that there is space for the practical and the normative aspects of CE to more explicitly influence HEI teaching and learning.

The participants' reflections indicated that CE created a space for greater interpersonal development, ability to work with others and to build leadership and communication skills, as also indicated in the literature (Ahmed et al., 2017). Participant 7 reflects on how CE offers a space for interpersonal developments as follows:

In CE we mainly draw from the slogan that 'If you have come to help me you are wasting your time but if you have come because your liberation is bound to mine then we can work together'. And also, drawing from the asset-based module whereby you strengthen the weakness of someone and vice-versa to identify the opportunity that is there to grow. (Participant 7)

This participant draws on both the knowledge from RUCE, in that the first part of the data quote is a quote by Lilla Watson which is used in the ECP orientation, and from his HEI courses, as he is a politics student and they had been learning about asset-based approaches. The participant draws from both sources to reflect on his experiences of how his involvement in the ECP has been a time of personal growth.

Participant 10 reflects on how they were able to draw on the theoretical concepts to which they had been exposed in HEI formal spaces to reflect on their CE engagement, saying:

CE is a reciprocal process so it's not you going there to teach/give out but it's a learning process, you teach what you already know but they also be teaching you what they are learning and they remind you what you have learnt. And also contributing to individual transformation and community development. If one thing that you learn from the community engagement is that you grow as a person and it's something that you take from CE. If you don't learn that I don't feel you would have learned anything from CE because it's an opportunity for you to grow as an individual, you learn things that you did not know as a person and your patience and dedication to things. (Participant 10)

6.9 Not all Community Engagement experiences are positive

Despite the strong evidence of CE as a powerful space of learning and self-development, in some of the reflections, there was a perceived mismatch between what CE endeavours to achieve as stated in the RUCE mission statement and some participants' experiences. Some participants felt that they were not given enough information about the sites and the

challenges they would face. This presented challenges for them as they needed to quickly devise ways of dealing with the problems on the spot and at times this meant students felt overwhelmed.

It's different at the sites from how it is put theoretically. The mission statement does not give it to you as it is. It doesn't fully encapsulate what CE does, because it's not as rosy as it seems. There are a lot of challenges, you go to a site thinking it would be smooth flowing but when you get to the actual site it's not like that. I don't feel the training equips us for the actual scene. The training gives an airy-fairy idea of what's gonna happen. But when you get to the site it's something else. You have to literally think on your feet, it's trial and error until you get it right. (Participant 5)

We do have inductions to make the students aware of the volunteering sites but it's like they cut out some information because what you see when you get to the sites is totally different from what you see on the snapshots. For example, disability centres - you are shown a picture of a child sitting on the wheelchair and you are not given information about how bad it is. I would often hear some of my fellow students saying they did not warn us it was that bad and they would never go back because they were not prepared for what they encountered. (Participant 16)

The participants' reflections showed that engaging with ECP was at times emotionally fraught and that some of them experienced this as overwhelming and as being out of their depth. While the formal higher education spaces have been flagged during the 2015/2016 protests as being alienating to many students, it would be a mistake to assume that the CE spaces are always comfortable for all students. In part this discomfort may be a necessary aspect of CE in that it offers students an opportunity to engage with authentic learning and to come to understand the inequalities and injustices of South Africa in many community settings. But such discomfort would need to be mediated so that students do not feel overwhelmed by their CE experiences. Some participants reflect on the absence of sufficient channels of communication about their challenges and that this impacted on their participation and personal development, saying:

I would love for them to explain what they mean by social responsibility - is it signing the register and going to the site and not fully engaging or the opposite? I feel like

there is no reciprocal process because they ask us to fill in the reflection forms, but you come back things are still the same, is anyone even reading these things so that there is reciprocation? ... There is need for clarity, I feel there are too many big words here [in RUCE] compared to what is being done. (Participant 4)

It's like they just drop you at the sites and there is little follow up on how you will be managing. You have to be creative, and if volunteering is not in you, you leave it. I have seen so many students who have stopped volunteering because there is lack of support. (Participant 7)

For us to achieve the reciprocal process of self-development, each party needs to know what they want to achieve, because that has been my biggest drawback because the site managers were not committed into encouraging the kids to attend, because one time you would go there and there about 5 kids the next time you go there would be 40 kids so this would affect my progress and as a result most of my team members stopped coming to the site because of that. (Participant 11)

In the existing literature, much focus tends to be on the benefits of CE (Fluks & Naidoo, 2019) whilst little attention is given to the difficulties students may encounter and how they can work their way through these challenges. Normah and Lukman (2020) discuss some of the reasons why people's involvement in CE may decline and they state negative experiences, dissatisfaction, lack of encouragement and the unattractive nature of certain activities as some of the factors that may discourage people from volunteering. Tuhiwai-Smith (2021) reflected on lack of organisational support and help as some of the factors discouraging involvement.

What this suggests is that CE should not be seen to be a simple process and the students' experiences in the ECP were certainly complex. The extent to which the essence of the ECP was about identity formation is relevant here too. Identity formation, and the related issues explicated earlier, such as a sense of responsibility and self-worth, is not always an entirely comfortable or easy process (Herman, 2011). This is not to say that students should be left to 'sink or swim' or that CE experiences should never be overwhelming, but rather that it is important to note that identity processes are often challenging. Preparedness for this in the orientation and the information given in the ECP handbook and support provided during the

period of ECP engagements are essential. Some students experienced this as being insufficient, but it must be noted that discomfort will always be part of identity formation. While such comments about problems in preparedness for the ECP contexts and communication with RUCCE were very much in the minority, they do bear careful consideration, not only for improving the CE processes, but also for making sense of the complexities of identity development.

6.10 Getting to the essence - Language use in CE

In this chapter, I have looked at the data related to experiences of language use in CE. Eliciting the essence of this experience is a challenge because the nature of experiences is that phenomena are intertwined (Neubauer, 2019). Thus, while this chapter considered the experiences of language use, various other aspects of the participants' ECP experiences were discussed too. For example, the essence of the benefits of their CE experiences, that is personal growth, awareness of social responsibilities and fostering a sense of critical citizenship, are all closely tied to issues of identity – and even where language was not directly articulated in the reporting of these experiences, language and identity seemed inseparable across the data.

CE was experienced as being explicitly normative in nature and this made the focus on identity formation central to the ECP experience. There seem to be possibilities for formal HE learning spaces to reflect on some of the lessons from the CE space around deliberating normative aspects in more explicit ways.

Furthermore, the benefits were not only in terms of personal growth, but they were also related to the connections between what was learned in the ECP projects and what was learned in the classroom. While not all learning can be pinned to immediate practice, and access to principled knowledge is fundamental to a higher education (Ashwin, 2020, 2021), the extent to which CE allows for connections to be made between more abstracted concepts and the real world was evidenced in the experiences participants shared. Having to teach concepts to children also helped the participants to establish the extent to which they genuinely understood these concepts themselves.

The essence of language use in CE was around connecting with others. Language was seen to be central to communicating meaning but was also seen to go beyond this to be a necessary

tool for forging connections. Even where the students only shared some basic greetings in the children's home language, this was seen to enable some sense of trust to be developed. Because English was experienced as being positioned as superior, as also discussed in Chapter 5, there was a boundary between students who could only speak English and the children with whom they worked. Where students were willing to make themselves vulnerable and try out phrases in the learner's home language (mainly isiXhosa), this was a powerful means of reducing these power differences.

Though not related to language use per se, it should be noted that not all the ECP experiences were positive. Students reported feeling overwhelmed and out of their depth at times and called for more support. Though these calls need to be taken very seriously and students should not be allowed to feel as if they are alone in the CE experiences, it should also be noted that the personal growth at the essence of the CE experience always entails some degree of discomfort. As students engage with community members, they are having to reflect on their own identities and consider their responses on the go.

6.11 Conclusion

Overall, the experiences reported by participants suggests that CE activities provide a powerful space that benefits the participants from the university and learners at the sites. If this two-way reciprocal channel is marred by language challenges, the CE activities become constrained. These reflections can help in understanding how we can address the issues of epistemic justice and success in higher education. This chapter considered the variations in participants' experiences of CE with particular reference to language use. While a few participants found the ECP process overwhelming, most found it to be a space of self-development and engaged learning. The ability to use code-switching and translanguaging was a profound asset as communication through isiXhosa was common in both planning and ECP activities. Emerging as a central essence of the phenomenon was the idea of language being tied to relationships – this went beyond ease of communication to include trust between parties and the ability to reduce power differentials associated with English.

Chapter 7: Findings: Language and Identity in HEIs

7.1 Introduction

Across all the reflections, it was clear that success in HEIs is tied to issues of language and that these in turn are tied to identity and belonging. The focus on language use and CE in this study intersected with issues of identity and belonging in complex ways. Wenger (1998) states that identity is defined socially not merely because it is reified in a social discourse of the self and social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities. This was profoundly the case in the data for this study where both the off-campus CE experiences and the on-campus HEI experiences shaped and challenged students' sense of self and had affective implications for their sense of self-worth.

The connections between language and identity were so entwined that I have discussed some pertinent aspects already in the previous two findings chapters, but in this chapter, I hone in specifically on identity experiences in order to consider the second research question of this study:

2. What role does CE play for second language English speaking students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging within HEIs?

In order to establish how CE provides particular kinds of spaces for identity development and a sense of belonging (which hopefully includes a sense of belonging on campus), I first discuss in more detail some of the reflections on how language plays a role in facilitating relationships more generally and how that leads to students' experiences of identity and belonging.

7.2 Language and identity

In the explication of the reflections, it became evident that key to the essence of participants' experiences of language use was the issue of identity and belonging because language consistently emerged as central to their sense of self and their ability to participate fully.

Inasmuch as I identify with English, it's not my culture, my culture is black and to be specific, Xhosa, so there are a lot of things that I have conflict with. For example, at a white friend's house, we can call my friend's mum by her first name, Sherry, whereas where I come from, we have to say Mama, Aunty, before we say her name. That is

where I clash with my English home language speakers' friends because culture comes into play and I just can't call an older person by their first name. (Participant 14)

The reflection above illustrates how language is interwoven with culture. It could seem a simple matter of determining in the context whether to use a person's first name or call them by a generic 'Mama' or 'Gogo'¹⁶ but this goes beyond that, to deal with issues of respect, family structures, beliefs about social status and so on. As discussed in Chapter 2, appropriate language use is about making choices which entail a deep understanding of context. This is not simply a matter of proficiency in vocabulary and grammar. The ways language manifests in the form of literacy practices that emerge from the norms and values of that specific social setting, requires some shared understanding of the norms and values at play in that social setting.

Even the concept of 'friend' was seen to vary across social groups, as Participant 7 gives a reflection below. Again, this indicates distinctions that go beyond technical aspects of language and relates to variations in social settings:

And also, the English language has the words 'friend' and 'acquaintance' and that is not well articulated in our Xhosa language, we don't have such differences, a friend is friend but when it comes to English you are told there is a difference. (Participant 7)

Making friends across language, ethnic and racial groups is made more challenging in South Africa because of the legacy of apartheid. Language is central in allowing individuals to make personal connections with their social surroundings. Agha (2007) argues that "language connects people to each other in social relationships and allows them to participate in a variety of activities in everyday life". Given that higher education has a normative value (as discussed in the previous chapter) and this would include coming to understand diverse ways of being in the world and connecting across social divides, the extent to which relationship building emerged in the participants' experiences of CE is worth considering in more depth.

¹⁶ Gogo means grandmother in isiXhosa. Terms such as Mama, Sisi (sister), and Gogo are not kept for direct relatives only but rather are used for any woman of that general age group. Similarly, it is considered respectful to refer to all men as Tata (father), Bhuti (brother), and utatomkhulu (or just 'Mkhulu', grandfather), depending on their age groups.

7.3 Language as a tool for forming relationships

In the reflections, some participants indicated that they had to learn the basics of a particular language at some point in their lives to make connections to social groups around them or to be able to identify or belong to certain groups.

I had to grow confidence because I found myself in English environments coming from an Afrikaans background. So, I decided to do debating and public speaking so that I could be able to speak English confidently and also at church I read the bible and the audience is proper English-speaking people, they would expect to hear me read fluently and eloquently and speak with real emotion. (Participant 15)

The reflections from the participants show that language was central to allowing individuals to make personal connections with their social surroundings, including fostering friendships as discussed above and joining social groups. While some found that the language used in particular settings excluded them, others became determined to learn that language to forge connections. For some participants, coming to a university that is situated in the Eastern Cape where isiXhosa is predominantly spoken, meant that English would be the only way they could communicate with others as this would be the only shared language. Thus, they also formed bonds based on who they could communicate with, as Participant 3 says:

When I came to Rhodes not knowing anyone, language was a key factor in choosing my friends, so it was easy to make friends with people who are English speakers. But as time goes on you realise that one person is of good character so that brings you together or being in the same class and have the same interests. (Participant 3)

Initially connections were made on the basis of shared language, whereas later the connections were based on other issues, such as shared interests. It is important to reflect that while English is the MOI and entrance to the university requires competence in the language, this does not mean that this would be the language chosen to communicate in outside of class. Much has been written on the extent to which using English, especially 'high English', outside of class has been connected to accusations of being a 'coconut'¹⁷ or having a sense of superiority (O'Shea et al, 2018). The extent to which English continues to be

¹⁷ The term "coconut" is a pejorative often used to refer to a young black person who speaks mostly English, or speaks a particular kind of English, or who is considered to be "acting white." (O'Shea et al., 2018, p. 6)

associated with superiority within the complex racialised nature of the country, emerged a few times in the experiences shared in this study, as was discussed earlier.

The participants' experiences of language repeatedly highlighted attributes of the relationships between language and identity. The reflections revealed that speaking a common language or having a shared language brought participants together in friendship circles. Participant 16 reflects on this saying:

So, the type of contact that I have is a book worm, she loves English so much, so we just speak English even though that's not technically who we are, we just love English, so we just English everything, we are just those kids. (Participant 16)

Participant 16 and her friend thus elect to communicate in English, though she notes that this is not the norm for students who share a language other than English. A number of participants reflected on how using English in settings outside of the formal classroom was not only an issue of social inclusion, but it also entailed an additional layer of work which was seen as undesirable:

I think language forms a big part of who I am as a person and I tend to gravitate towards people who speak the same language as I do, because I find that space more liberating and easy to navigate, unlike in a space where it's strictly English. I can't survive in that space, the level of comfort is not the same. There is a certain time span that I can in such a space and when I stay there for too long, it becomes a discomfort to an extent that I have decided that making friends is more about people who speak in my language. It is easier to express myself. (Participant 11)

I tend to make friends with those who speak the same language as I do because I wouldn't want to speak English all the time. (Participant 18)

... mostly because I cannot speak English in class, trying to speak it again out of class is a lot of work. So, I just hang out with my isiXhosa friends. (Participant 7)

It was therefore clear that there was a problematic accordance of superiority to English, despite the reflections suggesting that participants saw their home languages as a vehicle for sustaining their culture:

Most of the time English has been the superior language and other minority languages are not so much important as compared to English and that is very difficult because there are certain things that I can understand in my language. For instance, there are certain proverbs in my language that speak to our humanity, social issues, norms and beliefs that you cannot find in other languages. (Participant 1)

A lot of my friendship circle is composed of people who know and speak isiXhosa, because at times I can't relay [sic] myself properly in English so it does play a role. I might know the concept in isiXhosa but trying to explain the concept to someone who doesn't, may actually feel uncomfortable and takes a lot of time. (Participant 5)

The issue of selecting friends on the basis of being able to communicate comfortably in one's home language was also raised yet again in relation to the issue of English carrying a particular status. This issue again suggested that English was both seen to be intimidating, of higher status and simultaneously as alienating.

When I speak to someone who speaks English fluently, I tend to make a lot of mistakes, I don't know why, my thought process becomes slow, I don't know why there is this sudden urge to prove to the person that I can speak English better. (Participant 13)

Personally, when speaking to someone whom you think is better than you, you get that inferiority complex, you feel like you will never be good enough and when you are in an environment surrounded by English native speakers you feel that they are better than me because they have been speaking English all their lives and have a better command of the language so it ends up affecting you as an individual because you feel inferior and feel like you don't belong there. (Participant 10)

Some participants noted that language divisions in students' friendship groups continue along lines of race and ethnicity. It is important to recall that language, race and social class continue to be inscribed on each other in highly problematic ways more than two decades into democracy. Given the history of this country, where language, race and ethnicity were all actively used to separate groups of people, it is perhaps unsurprising that these social categories continue to have such influence over students' friendships.

English is perceived as being linked to an educated identity. The participants both desired and rejected this construction. Students who were very fluent in English often felt that they were judged as being snobby or superior as a result of this and so they elected to only mix with others who were very fluent. In some cases, accusations of superiority or being a 'coconut', led students to elect to keep to themselves:

When you speak in English it appears as if you are coming with superior knowledge, hence I just end up spending most of my time in my room. (Participant 13)

Where students were able to easily code-switch and utilise fluent English in certain spaces, this was at times seen as them trying to claim superiority. When such students were not as fluent in their home language of isiXhosa, this reinforced the social divides. Students who had isiXhosa as a home language but who attended a Model C or private school where English was both the MOI and the language used in social spaces, indicated that their home language was no longer very strong and that they spoke English in most of the spaces of their lives:

The schools that I have been to have been predominantly English medium... From a learning perspective I adapted quite well because even at home we speak a lot of English, and my parents speak more Shona than we do. (Participant 3)

Being unable to speak easily in their shared home language and, on the other hand, being comfortable speaking in English, was often seen to be problematic and to indicate that the student had either lost touch with their cultural identity and/or had a sense of superiority.

When I speak isiXhosa my accent changes so the way I speak also changes, so there is always that conflict whereby they [fellow isiXhosa speakers] say: 'Oh, so you think you are better than us now because you can speak English?' So, there is always that tension when I say a word in isiXhosa and it doesn't have the correct accent or [click] am judged, so I end up speaking English throughout a safe place when I am with my people. I find that I am judged more when am speaking my home language more than when I am speaking English. (Participant 16)

If my friends were speaking isiXhosa throughout and I am speaking English, they would perceive that you think you are up there - not trying to be like your own people, like you are neglecting your own people, forgetting who you are. So, there is that

perception, so I try not to stay in that space or around that energy for too long because they make me feel bad as if it were my fault that I was taught English at a very young age. (Participant, 11)

There was thus a strong correlation between language, identity and belonging, but this played out in complex ways. O'Shea et al. (2019) identified the 'Better Than Us' discourse in which "black students who overtly engaged in reading and expressed an enjoyment of reading were positioned as being boastful and trying to separate themselves from their social groups" (p. 8). Their study, which took place at a nearby university, also found that the 'Better than Us' discourse around both reading and the use of English by isiXhosa speaking students meant that these practices were associated with a sense of superiority and were denigrated by their peers.

So it was that peers were represented in this Discourse of 'Better Than Us' as teasing those who might want to read once the school day is done, calling them names and accusing them, especially if they are from a 'Model C' school, of having inflated egos (O'Shea et al., 2019, p. 6).

According to the Human Science Research Council (2021, unpagged), "the social categories that people inhabit can exacerbate or ease their differences and the extent to which they feel they belong". It was evident that some participants' social identities were formed by being part (or not) of membership in certain groups into which they are born, such as gender, race, religion, geography, income group, ethnic group and so on. This had various implications for the relationship between identity, language and friendship groups. The essence of these experiences was that using or choosing not to use a particular language was a profoundly political and social act and went far beyond simple choices around shared meaning-making.

I have been noticing a trend every year that I have been undergrad that the people I have been friends with - and that is based on culture, ethnicity, race - are still the same. You find Zimbabweans in their corner, the Xhosa, Zulu, Indians like that because people want to associate with people [that] they think they are best to relate to and I think that it's just human nature, it's easier to make friends with people whom you come from the same background. (Participant 10)

It just happens subconsciously, I think that even during classes you tend to sit with those who speak your language rather than those who speak English. (Participant 18)

It was clear that that 'language' was rarely separated from other social categories in making decisions around friendship groups and identity representation. These were intersectionally drawn upon by participants in forging friendships. Language was rarely spoken of in terms of mutual understanding or ensuring meaning, beyond the experiences of battling to study in an MOI that was not the students' mother tongue, as discussed in Chapter 5. In that case, language was indeed referred to in terms of accessing meaning, but in all the other language experiences that participants shared, language was referred to in terms of identity and connection.

... but I just feel more comfortable speaking to people of my own language, I think that language is not everything, but who we are as people. (Participant 17)

Language and identity, 'who we are as people', were bound together across the reflections. While they were less evident, it must be noted that there were some reflections that suggested that connections were made on the basis of issues tied less to language and social identities, such as personal interests as Participant 8 put it:

I tend to want to have friends who look at life the same way I do. It's a lot more engaging to be with a science student such that if I find a plant interesting or something cool with a locust then we can talk about it, it becomes easier, and they make me realise things that I didn't even know. (Participant 8)

Some participants reported finding it difficult to belong or to identify with other groupings in the university, arguing that language affected whom they could befriend – especially in the face of its inseparable connections to perceived racial and ethnicity divisions.

I feel very comfortable when I finish school and I pick up the phone and my mother answers in Afrikaans, I feel good. I just call my family and we speak in Afrikaans, and I let go. When I come back to school from home my accent is ten times thicker because I go home and tell myself that English is a Grahamstown¹⁸ thing. Though I feel that it's wrong for language to play out in choice of friends, it happens naturally that you want to be closer to people you feel are supportive and not be reminded of the insecurities that you have. (Participant 15)

¹⁸ Rhodes University is in the small town called 'Grahamstown', which has been renamed 'Makhanda'.

Once again, the issue of language confidence was seen to be central in how friendship group membership was established.

It's amazing, you feel like you are now in that space, you become more relaxed –even the jokes you don't struggle because these are people you can relate to. (Participant 10)

I have never realised how happy I could be in a space where language is the same, until I had to leave home to a place where language is not the same. I am more relaxed and feel less anxious when I am with people who speak the same language. (Participant 13)

The reflections show that within friendship groups, often based on a shared language, race and ethnicity, there are also subgroups. The sub-groups were at times separated not by language but also by accent as these were also seen to be markers of identity and belonging amongst the participants. Some participants reflected that within their identified ethnic groups there were some who spoke 'high English', that is more formal and educated English rather than informal and slang English. While reference was made to accent and vocabulary, this needs to be understood as intersecting with issues of social class.

[I]f you have people coming from the same background and you have some speaking this bourgeoisie English and those coming from the location¹⁹, you always don't have the same interests so you remove yourself from those kinds of people and you associate with those who are at the same level of speaking as you. (Participant 14)

The hypocrisies related to language use and the problematic links between English and status emerged in the reflections when Participant 6 gives an example, saying:

When some people try to speak in my language, I often criticise them because of the way they pronounce the clicks and other terms, for example my surname has one of the simplest clicks which is 'Cula' they often change it to an 's' or 'x'. But we are able to say some of the longest and difficult surnames such as 'Van Logenberg' with ease.

¹⁹ Location was a term used under apartheid interchangeably with the term 'township' to mean racially segregated area for black people. These areas remain underdeveloped. The term 'location' is used in various Southern African countries to refer to areas set aside for black people during colonial rule.

And another example is that of the former mayor of P.E.²⁰. Everyone was so excited to hear him speak isiXhosa words, and I am, like, 'What is the fuss all about?' Black people have been doing this all their life and no one is celebrating us because [when we speak in English] it's not our first language.(Participant 6)

The complexities of identity and language use emerged in terms of concerns about black students feeling disparaged because of their English fluency or feeling critical of other black students who potentially saw themselves as 'superior' due to their English proficiency. But the data was not only about divisions along lines of English language proficiency within the black isiXhosa speaking student group, but it also related to divides along racial lines in the student group. Some participants noted that relating to English first language speakers, who would in the South African context usually be white, was a challenge as they felt they did not belong in the same spaces as English speakers:

Though I speak to many people who speak different languages, I still feel uncomfortable speaking to English speakers because I have to make sure I use the right term, tone and accent because they will me when I mispronounce certain words such as 'development'. Because of my personality, I will not tell the person that I am feeling uncomfortable or anxious. (Participant 5)

I don't have any English first language speaking friends because I don't want to be reminded of how terrible my language might be and accent is. (Participant 15)

Over and over again, English language proficiency was tied in the reflections to issues of insecurity or accusations of superiority. One participant reflected an awareness of this in his interactions with others and suggested that his fluency in English could be intimidating to others:

Personally, it's not a big deal for me because I am a person who has been exposed to a lot of different cultures and languages, so I have learnt to adapt and to live with those people so that I actually gain something from them. I know a lot of people who may be afraid that I might be judging them when I am speaking to them fluently in

²⁰ P.E. stands for Port Elizabeth, the nearest big city to Rhodes University, 120 km away. The name of P.E. has been recently changed to Gqeberha.

English, they make the conversation short and run away from it because they assume that I am not being receptive of them. (Participant 2)

This participant showed an awareness of how language fluency can cause schisms and insecurities between peers. Given that one might assume that language problems would occur when students do not understand each other, it is important to note the significance of this data. Language fluency was not experienced so much as a matter of miscommunication and misunderstandings of meaning but rather was seen to illustrate matters of cultural identity or concerns about displays of superiority.

7.4 Language, identity development and belonging in CE

Language use in CE, as discussed in Chapter 6, was seen to allow for far more fluidity than language use in formal HE spaces, and this was central to the CE experience. It was evident that CE provided a space that was less alienating and for some participants, this allowed stronger connections to their identities. Participants indicated that CE is a dynamic space that allows learning and participants had the freedom to engage in ways that is rarely available in formal academic spaces.

The thing I have loved the most about my involvement in the ECP is the relationship that you can create with your mentees, and you constantly check on one another. In formal classes you just get there and look at lecture slides while the lecturer is explaining and you leave. In CE we learn from each other and support each other. (Participant 18)

I feel like am more of a holistic person if I should say that from CE more than living through my university years whereby my story is just being a university student studying science. But being involved in this programme helped me to engage with a lot of different people of all walks of life and learning about how they perceive the world. (Participant 11)

It was evident that the ECP offered opportunities to build relationships and develop friendships that were perhaps less possible in the formal classroom.

...within the CE, independence and creativity is something that is encouraged, and I believe that it is something that other departments in the formal academic spaces

could bring in, to encourage students to be creative, to take ownership and leadership. In the CE programme we are encouraged to be creative and take ownership of what we do in our sites and engagement, I think it should be encouraged in formal academic spaces because I have seen that in some departments, creativity is not something that is encouraged. (Participant 17)

Participant 7 reflects on how it would be beneficial for educators to draw from some CE practices that allow students to use their home languages as this would encourage knowledge creation, saying:

Well, I think CE engagement part is very important, how we engage, and language is a very important tool for engagement. In politics department, am not sure about other departments, they allow their students to write their tutorials in isiXhosa and they will find someone who will be able to read and mark it. (Participant 7)

The reflections offered some suggestion that the mainstream curriculum could benefit from the kind of translanguaging that was characteristic of CE. This was seen to also have potential for the decolonisation project.

So, I think in the university space where we are trying to make other languages other than English, languages of intellect and not just focus on English, it becomes very important because we are talking about decolonising education. It's very important to promote other languages, we have a myriad of countries represented here at Rhodes university so why not celebrate that diversity instead of just focusing on English. (Participant 6)

The extent to which CE enabled engagement and interaction was highly valued and this was seen to be something that could be more explicitly brought into the formal classroom space.

It will be more beneficial if there were interactive platforms as those in CE where lecturers and students would be able to interact better and some students might be struggling because of the language barrier and that might hinder participation so being more personal about interactions might be helpful. (Participant 3)

The participants highlighted the need for spaces in HEIs that promote engagement or discussions that allow for a greater understanding through discussions.

... when you come to university there is a sort of vibe that [I] am learning from the lecturer and the lecturer is not gaining anything from me, my answer should be based on the lecturer's knowledge or the memo and I don't feel that the lecturer is receptive or open to understanding my answer and considering if it might work as opposed to the memo that I have or my prior knowledge. (Participant 2)

... while with formal education its more of listening to the lecturer, reading a book and you ask yourself what you learnt. With formal education the square root of 16 is 4, you don't argue, if you fail to get the formula, you fail. (Participant 10)

The reciprocal nature of learning in the CE spaces was something the participants indicated that they would like to experience in their HE classrooms:

I feel that in lectures we need to have that space whereby a correlation exists between academic work and any other example should be acknowledged because trying to limit that is very destructive to people's knowledge, which then results in getting people who can answer a question from a textbook but cannot have a proper conversation because it's very two dimensional It should be a three dimensional conversation so it helps people develop their speech and knowledge. I think if there is the opportunity to have that kind of space in formal academic spaces, such as in CE, it would help a lot. (Participant 4)

I found it straining for some classes whereby you go to the class and the teacher has the knowledge and he tells you what they know and there is no engagement and discussion. So I think if academia can incorporate that kind of space where there are discussions in class about different thoughts and views of the content that can add excellence to students in class. The approach of teaching at university is 'what the teacher says is final'. (Participant 1)

Participant 15 reflected on how having their ethnicity and languages represented on campus (and these were understood as related concepts) impacted on their sense of belonging. It also had an effect on how they integrated and performed on campus:

It was a huge shock when I came to university. The community I grew up in is Afrikaans, and when I came here it was a big challenge because you seldomly hear people

speaking Afrikaans, people are always speaking English and for me the only time I could hear people speaking English was during the English lesson. It was a challenge for me especially the first couple of weeks, I did not see people of my race. People would interact with me and start using big fancy words and I would feel lost and I hated feeling lost. I then made friends with some Indian English-speaking people and they helped me a lot with my English. (Participant 15)

Participant 15 is a 'coloured' male student. As indicated in Chapter 4, coloured and Indian students are minority groups and while most Indian students have English as their home language, most coloured students speak Afrikaans as their first language. Participant 10 reflects on how easy it is to engage with someone who speaks the same language:

When you meet someone who speaks your language you just engage and your relationship is free flowing as opposed to trying to speak English, the communication becomes hindered and you are not able to express yourself better as the native speakers of that language would do which is highly likely to foster a relationship. (Participant 10)

Morris (2021) notes that when students come to university, they bring all their social identities with them. Morris further notes that individual identity includes culture, family, relationships and embodied knowledge that would have been acquired through multiple spaces. Roux (2012) states that there are assumptions that diversity is necessary in HEIs and that HEIs provide a safe space for reflection on such differences. Yet, according to Brink (2010), diversity has been known to be a source of contradiction, inequality and exclusion and can challenge the ideal of a cohesive academic community. Lewis and Hodges (2015) state that belonging is an important predictor of positive academic outcomes. As indicated in Chapter 6, the data suggests that CE could foster such a sense of belonging for many of the participants. It may be possible to then consider how this essence could be brought into formal higher education spaces.

According to Morris (2021), the identity of a person is important for building knowledge and meaning making but if the identity is not recognised or somehow erased, it will have an effect on the students' access and success in HEIs. Morris (2021) further argues that students who feel they belong, tend to seek out and use campus resources to a greater extent. When they

are able to use language as a resource, they further their success and it reduces feelings of stress.

Unfortunately, the extent to which language could be harnessed for connections and communication is constrained by the political weighting of black students' English fluency, as discussed earlier. The perceived superiority of the English language influences who the students identify with and affected their sense of belonging, illustrating the alienating effects of the politics of language:

..as a black person who enjoys English literature, it becomes a problem because you reach a space whereby you become too black for white people and too white for black people because both sides do judge you for being that kind of person. (Participant 13)

When I was in Bloemfontein at Central University of Technology, I had to do ballroom dancing and when I spoke English to them, they were not very welcoming because they thought how can a black guy speak English to us. (Participant 17)

The alienating nature of the university space (in part because of language use) can result in students feeling lost. In the reflections, language, race, ethnicity and culture were used in interconnected ways. Race has been noted to be a maker of identity (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). Students' use and understanding of language may place them in precarious spaces because specific languages are often linked to specific identities and cultures, as was so clear in the study data. Students can experience alienation if their use of language is deemed inadequate to allow for belonging to a certain group. As Barroso (2015) explains, there can be a "double consciousness that creates anxiety-provoking experience for black students where they do not belong anywhere: they are a 'coconut' but not a white person, and not 'black enough' because of their level of education which is associated with being a white person".

It was evident that the assumed superiority of English also had impact on identity and belonging issues and compromised participants' sense of belonging. Participant 16 reflects on this saying:

If my friends were speaking IsiXhosa throughout and am speaking English, especially back home they would perceive that you think you are up there not trying to be like

your own people, like you are neglecting your own people, forgetting who you are. So there is that perception so I try not to stay in that space or around that energy for too long because they make me feel bad as if it were my fault that I was taught English at a very young age. (Participant 16)

7.5 Community Engagement as an identity development space

The role of language and CE in identity formation in the experiences of the participants is interwoven and it may be challenging to discuss these as mutually exclusive. It was also clear that language (including literacy practices), culture, race and ethnicity all worked in tightly interwoven ways that emerged from the country's racist history. CE provides a powerful space for students to reflect on who they are and how they can make it in the world, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, CE provides a crucial space in identity formation that is focused on responsibilities to others and to the environment and not only personal development or development of skills. A number of participants reflected how beneficial the CE space was to them, saying:

CE has improved my leadership qualities and the manner in which I teach music, so there is a sense of development on my side and it's amazing to work with someone towards a better society. (Participant 1)

... to see the children grow and learn to express themselves in a different manner because a lot of these kids don't know or have the exposure of going out there, or saying things in front of other people and expressing themselves in a theatre. Some of them grow in confidence from being shy and do their best to express themselves. (Participant 2)

I have seen the development amongst my team members and the learners themselves. I didn't know until I started that I love kids and I love teaching, so it was that moment of realisation. (Participant 10)

during the course of the year, we rehearsed with them, and we saw them developing and growing in ways that I didn't even anticipate up to the time we had to perform at the festival - it was amazing. The most rewarding experience was being able to invest in someone's life and I also learnt a lot from those children more than I was giving to those children. The experience for me was more rewarding and if more people were

conscious of the fact that the world around them needs them to change then we would acknowledge that we have the power to change the world. (Participant 3)

Some participants who did not experience challenges with the use of English language reflected on benefits of using the language in ECP as linked to building of their own self-esteem, saying:

I feel like the children, I call them my children, they grow me, they let me explore myself, I look for innovative ways of teaching English. They make me be creative at the same time I am helping them they are helping me more. They grow me personally and they also learn, it's a win-win situation. (Participant 16)

The learning experience I got there was something that I enjoyed. When I got there the children were willing to learn, though you would read the same book over and over certain learners would not get it but what was fulfilling was that there was improvement even when I spoke to the teachers...(Participant 7)

Yuval-Davis (2006) defines *belonging* as “an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way”. Central to acts of self-identification and identity in general, are exclusionary and inclusionary elements which mark the invisible borders of that collective or group. Thus, if some students feel alienated from university spaces due to language, then we are not meeting the key goal of higher education that is to make sure there is equitable epistemic access and success. Individuals can adapt to and uphold the characteristics of the groups they belong to or identify with for the relational capital it lends them by association, or out of fear of being marginalised outside of its bounds (Thondhlana & Belluigi, 2017). Thus, understanding how identities are assumed by individuals in response to institutional conditions (such as CE activities) can allow researchers and university managers to identify conditions that constrain learning and craft interventions for promoting relationships that are critical for student learning. The use of language within HEIs can play a key role in the processes of identity formation and subjugation – projecting and rewarding certain values, norms and practices (Thondhlana & Belluigi, 2017).

7.6 Getting to the Essence - Language and Identity

The community engagement space is clearly a key area for engagement around issues of language and identity. It would seem that there might be a need for CE coordinators to

grapple with issues of identity and language use when they plan CE activities and when they engage with students who undertake ECP activities. While the experiences of language and identity are fraught, it is possible that CE may provide a productive space for students to consider the implications of some of their assumptions about the relationship between language and identity. There is the possibility of using CE as an opportunity to reflect on the extent to which the apartheid continues to affect attitudes towards different languages and towards the people who use them.

The experiences explicated in this chapter also suggest a need for HEIs to engage more widely in reflection on the implications of these issues. Echoing other studies (such as O'Shea et al., 2019, Case et al., 2019), this study found that at times the peer pressure to avoid using English or to avoid embarking on activities which may deem them to be 'coconuts', could have deleterious effects on students' studies.

The students indicated that they sought out social groupings with whom they would have particular characteristics in common. These shared social characteristics were often simultaneously racial, ethnic and language. For example, many students noted that race (black, white, coloured, or Indian) *and* ethnic group (such as Shona or Xhosa or Zulu or nationality, for example Zimbabwean) *and* home language (such as isiXhosa or isiZulu or Tshivenda), all worked together to form the identity through which friendship groups were selected.

However, it is important to note that such identifiers were not absolute and there were a number of examples where even within such a particular group, subgroups emerged. This was often on the basis of English fluency and extent of use of English. English fluency might be a proxy for social class given that the acquisition of 'high English' was often associated with attending Model C or private schools. Some students reported that using English outside of formal classrooms in either CE activities or in social spaces was associated with 'showing off', a sense of superiority, or even having a 'coconut' attitude.

The explication of the participants' experiences suggests that CE offers a powerful space for students to grapple with identity formation and language use, though this needs to be undertaken with care. Given how ideologically loaded and politically charged language is

within this context, it seems that there is a need for more direct engagement with these issues in both CE activities and on campus.

7.7 Conclusion

More generally, the intersectionality of various forms of diversity (language, culture, ethnicity, race and so on) is non-linear and at times ambiguous and these issues are arguably more important and evident in contexts where, for the majority of students, the language used in teaching and learning is not their home language. Concerning language and learning, if some students feel alienated from university spaces due to language (e.g. fear of expression and engagement in the class as discussed in Chapter 5), then it can be argued that we are not meeting the key goal of higher education, that is, to make sure there is equitable epistemic access (discussed in Chapter 2).

Aziakpono and Bekker (2010) highlight the importance of the functions of language in symbolising identity and distinguishing societal groups. Therefore, this means that as universities open their doors to such students consistent with transformation imperatives, many non-traditional students might lack the command required for the language of learning and teaching in their respective institutions. Therefore, supporting epistemic access using the functional and non-functional aspects of language remains a challenge for researchers and high education managers for the foreseeable future.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study was a reflection of what emerged from the students' experiences of language use in an English medium university. The questions that the study sought to explore were:

1. What are second language English speaking students' experiences of language in CE learning activities within an English medium university?
2. What role does CE play for second language English speaking students as they navigate complex questions of identity and belonging within HEIs?

8.1 Overview of the study

8.1.1 Limitations of the study

The study is significant in highlighting the challenges that students might face in HEIs, but the results are however not generalizable as the experiences of other students who are not involved in ECP are not known. The findings also do not allow for a comparative analysis with the learning experiences of students in other universities other than Rhodes University. Limitations brought by language use were also acknowledged in conducting the interviews for this study. The interviews were conducted in English, the very language that presents students with challenges due to reasons including that English is the language used as a terrain for epistemic access at Rhodes University. It is also evident that no disciplinary concepts are taught in indigenous languages and it will be almost difficult to engage with conceptual issues in languages that are not the medium of instruction.

The problem that led to the study was the challenges that students face as a result of English being used as the MOI in many HEIs. **Chapter 2** offered an exploration of the notion of the 'language problem'. The use of the English language in many HEIs has caused learning challenges for many students. These challenges were part of the issues highlighted in the 2015/16 #FeesMustFall student protests where students called for the decolonisation of the curriculum and where debates about language use played a central role. The use of the English language presented many challenges for the students in this study who were all second language English speakers. The challenges experienced by students as a result of English being used as MOI had a direct impact on issues of epistemic justice, on access, success and social justice issues of identity formation amongst students.

The study falls under a bigger transformation project that seeks to establish the challenges resulting from language use in HEIs. While the focus on community engagement (CE) has largely been on the role it can play in allowing for authentic learning and in the role it can play in nurturing a critical citizenship, there is a potential for it to play a role in developing language competence and confidence. Thus, **Chapter 3** explored CE as the third pillar of HEIs, alongside teaching and learning and research. CE offers a range of activities including service learning and volunteerism that are meant to empower university students to apply theory knowledge into everyday experiences. It also explored the benefits of engagement between communities and universities where communities are now recognised as equal participants in the knowledge creation process. This chapter explored the different facets of CE and narrowed down to look at the context at Rhodes University where this study is situated. The CE space was depicted to be a space that allows for a wide range of activities to take place and therefore support language use.

Chapter 4 offered the methodological contribution which supports the scope of this study. The challenges that students face as a result of using English as MOI, can best be understood from the point of view of those who had first-hand experience. The aim of the chapter was to understand the student's perspective of a particular experience (learning in CE) as well as how this influenced their lived experience (Flood, 2010). Phenomenology is a concept that draws on experiences and meanings, that capture as closely as possible the ways in which the phenomenon is experienced in this context – by students in HEIs whose home language is not English. At the root of phenomenology is the intent to understand phenomena under investigation in their own terms – to give a description of the human experiences as they are experienced by the individual and allowing the essences of the phenomena to emerge (Groenewald, 2004). The chapter offered a step-by-step explanation of how the phenomenological method was employed – by interviewing students who are participants in a CE activity.

The remainder of the study explicated the participants' experiences in an attempt to reach the essence. **Chapter 5** focused on language use within formal HEI spaces, **Chapter 6** focused on language use in the ECP project, and **Chapter 7** considered the essence of the intersection of language and identity. The overlaps between these issues was strong, indicating that the

phenomenon of language use and the phenomenon of identity were often understood as being indivisible.

The role of language in students' experiences in an English MOI institution was explored based on the reflections of the participants. Given the significant variance in students' English proficiency, the recognisable essence was the close link between language competence and students' confidence, to the extent of language competence functioning as a constraint to students' participation in class. The close relationship between language and meaning making also emerged from the reflections and it was evident that students had varied abilities in understanding discipline-specific concepts, owing to the role of language competence. As a result, the reflections highlighted how the autonomous model of literacy best describes the experiences of many students in HEIs. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the ways in which the practices of higher education are specific to university studies and their specific disciplines and not limited to general English competence. The status of English as a mark of intelligence had enormous implications on students' confidence and participation and this impacted on their higher education experience.

The experiences of language use in CE was based on the nature of the space that CE presented. Though the different CE activities were found by some to be overwhelming, some expressed how the space had been beneficial for engaged learning and self-development. Communication became relatively easier as students could code-switch and practice translanguaging which was beneficial for their planning and engagement with learners at the sites. The students' ability to use language flexibly lessens the power differences associated with English and creates spaces that not only facilitate communication, but also build trust between the parties. The intersections between language use in HEIs and language use in CE were shown to be intertwined with issues of identity and belonging. The use of language in these spaces cannot be ignored as these have far reaching implications on how the students conduct themselves in these spaces. Students bring their social and cultural backgrounds into the HEI spaces and if these are ignored it may impact on their successes.

Given the challenges that students face in HEIs, this study suggests that CE could provide a potential space for academic language development and epistemic access. It is important to note the differences in the spaces created for knowledge production within CE and within more formal learning spaces in HEIs. It is evident how academic language is typically

understood to be centred in the areas of research, teaching and learning and rarely in relation to CE.

Through the data that emerged regarding the intersection between HEIs and CE, the study contributes to the literature on how second language speaking English students find accommodation in the knowledge production and dissemination process within CE activities, and what this tells us about the process of democratisation of the knowledge economy which is purportedly achieved through CE. The potential space that CE offers as an interim space between academic setting and social setting could help transition to academic language. This understanding of CE is different from the usual understandings of CE that are prevalent, such as CE as an activity through which the university reaches out to the communities to offer their expertise and more recently, as studies on CE begin to acknowledge communities as equal partners in the knowledge-sharing process. CE could also be a space through which to challenge some academic language norms and values of authentic, engaged learning which can enrich academic language. The study is significant in that it provides a possible lens that we can use in viewing the purpose of the curriculum in HEIs. The reflections from the students tell us that a flexible space encourages learning, rather than rigid ways that do not encourage engagement. It is also key to note that when students call for the decolonising of the curriculum as seen during the #FeesMustFall protests, it may not necessarily mean doing away with the forms of knowledge that are packaged in it. It could be high time that we package the curriculum in ways that are close to the students' identities, in ways that allow engagement, and for students to be able to challenge certain aspects of the curriculum in ways that are closer to their everyday contexts.

The study highlighted the role CE plays in students' lives within HEIs more broadly, particularly in relation to how they navigate key issues such as language, identity formation and belonging. These are key issues in looking at the development of students in HEIs and we need to question whether the current state of our education system is helping to produce students who are fully aware of their identity and have a sense of belonging. There is still work to do in terms of how we can implement the potential of CE in higher education spaces so that students are fully aware of their identity and have a sense of belonging. There is a need to fully make use of the spaces that CE provides in supporting the students and move away from the space of 'glorifying' CE in our mission statements and visions, yet still treating it as a

different entity in which teaching and learning and research are placed on a pedestal, whilst CE remains in the shadows. The findings do affirm the contribution of CE in promoting engagement of students outside formal classes without restrictions. The study prompts us to think critically of ways of actively promoting CE in supporting student access and addressing issues of epistemic justice in HEIs.

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APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:	The nexus between Community Engagement and Academic Language Development.
Principal Investigator(s):	Mazvita Mollin Thondhlana

Participation Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I understand the purpose of the research study and my involvement in it - I understand the risks and benefits of participating in this research study - I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any stage without any penalty - I understand that participation in this research study is done on a voluntary basis - I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will remain anonymous and no reference will be made to me by name or student number - I understand that audio recording (other data collection requirements particular to this research, e.g. test results, personal information, video recording) may be used - I understand and agree that the interviews will be recorded electronically - I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read and comment on the transcribed interview notes - I confirm that I am not participating in this study for financial gain

Information Explanation
The above information was explained to me by:
The above information was explained to me in English and I am in command of this language:

Voluntary Consent	
I,	
hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.	
Signature:	Date: / /

--	--

Investigator Declaration

I, Mazvita Mollin Thondhlana declare that I have explained all the participant information to the participant and have truthfully answered all questions ask me by the participant.

Signature: <i>M. Thondhlana</i>

Date: 18 / 03 / 2019

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews will be conversational making use of follow-up questions. This schedule is very much only a guide. I have included some second-level questions which I will ask only if necessary, if the information does not emerge naturally during the interview process.

- 1) I would like you to begin by telling me a little about yourself. How did you come to study at Rhodes University and what are you studying here?
 - a) What year are you in?
 - b) What degree/courses are you doing?
 - c) What gender do you identify with?
 - d) How many languages do you speak?
 - e) Which school did you attend?
 - f) What would you consider your home language to be?

Language and engagement.

- 2) Could you please describe to me your experiences in CE initiatives that you have been involved in, such as the ECP? Tell me about the experiences you have found challenging and those that were enjoyable?
- 3) Did you ever use languages other than English in your CE experiences?
- 4) How do you experience language use in CE initiatives?
 - a) How is CE learning affected by language?
 - b) Can you share an example of how language played a role in your CE experiences?
- 5) I will hand the relevant portion of the Rhodes University CE mission statement to the participants and ask them to comment the extent to which this tallies with their experiences, and ask them to share examples of how this did or did not play out in their CE experiences.

The mission statement of CE at Rhodes University states *'the Community Engagement directorate will endeavour to promote a reciprocal process of knowledge construction and dissemination, develop and channel the civic and social responsibility of all students, student organisations and staff at Rhodes University through various community engagement activities, thereby contributing to individual transformation*

and sustainable human and community development in Grahamstown and the Eastern Cape as a whole'.

Language and university learning

- 6) As someone who doesn't speak English as your first language, can you tell me a bit about what it is like to learn in English?
 - a) Do you think learning in English has impacted on your participation in the classroom? (If so, probe for some examples.)
 - b) In what ways does the language used affect the way in which you access information in your discipline/courses?
 - c) I would like you to tell me if you ever had experiences in lectures where you found yourself in a situation where concepts were difficult to understand due to the language used.

Language and belonging

- 7) Is there any aspect of your identity that affects how you relate to English first language speakers during CE programmes, during formal classes or in other spaces on campus?
- 8) How is it different when you're interacting with people who speak the same home language as you do?
 - a) Do you think language use has ever impacted on how you make friends or participate socially or in groups in various contexts?
 - b) Do you think language is a key factor in the choice of your friends? In what ways has language influenced the choice of your friends in our class, residence and university?
 - c) Do you think something else about your identity has played a role in forming your social group? For example, do you think you select friends because they attend the same church, or come from the same country, or they are the same race group, or share the same values or sense of humour?
- 9) Thank you for your time and for letting me get to know you a bit more. As you know my study is about the individual student's experiences of language use in the university

classroom and also in community engagement initiatives. Do you have anything to add about your own experiences of language use in the classroom or in the ECP?

APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA



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Ms Mazvita Thondhlana
G13N6541
CHERTL

14 August 2019

Dear Ms Thondhlana

Name of research proposal: The nexus between Community Engagement and Academic Language Development (2).

This serves to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct your proposed research at Rhodes University as requested.

The University is not obliged to make any arrangements in terms of this research. The onus is on the researcher.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adèle Moodly
REGISTRAR