# The efficacy of translanguaging as pedagogic practice in selected Namibian multilingual primary classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the initial literacy and epistemic benefits of translanguaging as a pedagogic practice in multilingual Namibia. Using notions of recontextualization and translanguaging and classroom observation and data from documents, the article shows how pre-primary teachers and learners draw on heteroglossic repertoires for literacy development and epistemic access. It is argued that this reframes the classroom, not as a site of monolingual epistemic violence, but as a democratic space for initial literacy and epistemic development. The article concludes with an argument for the legitimization of heteroglossic practices in multilingual Namibian classrooms if effective teaching and learning of initial literacy is the goal of basic education.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Silozi, Multimodal, Heteroglossic, Monoglossic, Multilingualism

## INTRODUCTION

### The school system and medium of instruction policy in Namibia

The school system is divided into two main phases, primary and secondary. However, each of these has two sub phases. At the primary phase, there junior primary which has the pre-primary taking four years (grades 1-3) and senior primary which runs from grades 4 to 7. The secondary school phases has the junior secondary phases which take two years (grades 8 to 9)

while the senior secondary phase take three years from grades 10 to 12. There is also the optional grade 13 which is for A-levels (February, 2018).

The language policy for schools in Namibia states that learning through the medium of the mother tongue/home language, especially in the junior primary phase (Pre-Primary and Grades 1-3) is crucial for concept formation as well as for attaining literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC), 2003; Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC), 2016). The language of instruction in junior primary is therefore the mother tongue/home language of the learner, or the predominant local language. It is further states that "In multi-language schools, a class with a specific mother tongue/home language as medium of learning will be constituted if there are a sufficient number of learners for such a class. If there is insufficient number of learners to constitute a class, the medium of learning for those learners will be the predominant local language" (MEAC, 2016: 29). To this, Kavhura (2018) state that the children who find themselves in this situation are facing stigma to constitute a home language speaking group in order to qualify to learn their mother tongue in schools. Therefore, they opt to learn the foreign language or their colonial languages for alternatives (Totemeyer, 2013). Furthermore, the language policy alludes that "if parents or the school wish to use English as the medium of instruction in the Lower Primary phase, permission must be obtained from the Minister of Education with well-grounded, convincing motivation" (Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture, 2003:4). The policy here implies that the language of instruction in the junior primary will either be through the home language, predominant local language, or English (MEC, 1993). This leaves room for schools to disregard the aforesaid policy and opt for the full implementation of instruction in English as early as pre-primary.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that the policy was meant specifically to promote instruction in English over local languages. In fact, it has been argued that "The policy is not supporting multilingualism as was historically the case in Namibia. Traditionally, Namibians were multilingual but the policy is working against this" (quoted in Holmarsdottir, 2000:15). "The ambiguity of the policy has led to many schools opting to forego formal instruction in students' mother tongues and starting English-only instruction as early as Grade 1" (Chavez, 2016:90). In this regard, Tötemeyer (2010:55) mentions that due to the opaqueness of the policy, as of 2008, 243 schools in Namibia had received ministerial approval to do this and therefore more schools have since adopted an English-only policy. Among other reasons for the adoption of an English only policy is the notion that people who do not know English are unable to contribute to society and therefore the earlier one is exposed to it the more competent one would become in the language (Pienaar-Louw, 1997; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001). As a result, many parents are taking their children out of schools that offer mother tongue instruction and enrolling them in schools that use English as the sole language of instruction (Tötemeyer, 2010). As hinted earlier, there is a sense here in which learners, teachers and parents all hold negative attitudes towards local languages. This is mainly due to the economic benefits of acquiring English due to the coloniality which characterise the language policy in

Namibia and the misguided notion that African languages are not valuable when in fact, they are the most appropriate modalities for epistemic access especially in early grades before children acquire English proficiency.

Notwithstanding the argument above regarding the position of English in Namibia, it must be clarified that English is not the only language which the majority of children in Namibian schools do not understand. The local official languages which are assumed to be the familiar languages of children by zone are unfamiliar to some children in the same language zone. This is the case in the Zambezi region where mother tongue and/or predominant local language was taken to mean Silozi within the education circles (Kangumu, 2008; Kavhura, 2018). Thus, the policy only makes provision for the language of the majority group or the lingua franca in that community to be selected as the language of initial literacy instruction. This implies that not all learners are then taught in their home language (Harris, 2011; Iipinge, 2013; Iitula 2016; Koker 2019; Mashinja and Mwanza, 2020). In this kind of policy and practice, some local Namibian languages and speakers of those languages are elevated above other languages and speakers of the corresponding unofficial languages. Thus, one sees the marginalisation of African languages by other African languages at the hand of African policy makers. Clearly, if languages are in competition, Namibian languages are not just competing with English or Afrikaans, they also competing against other Namibian languages which have been assigned official status. In the Zambezi region, the UNICEF Trend and GAP Analysis (2011:41) report which reflect that there are "vast numbers of non-Silozi speakers who are being placed in Silozi medium instruction classes in grade 1 - 3".

The revelation above reflects the need for change of language-in-education formulation and instructional strategies in the Namibian schools, particularly multilingual schools where a particular language presumably predominant is used for initial literacy over the learners' familiar languages. This has made Tötemeyer (2010) comment that Namibian indigenous languages are under-utilized, consequently, the approach of language education in multilingual societies (Namibia) is a challenge for many students who are learning in the language of the majorities (Kavhura, 2018). We therefore argue that this under-utilization might result in learners developing unfavourable attitudes towards their mother tongue and underrate their sociocultural and linguistic heritage. Besides, it is not only the language which is lost but also the Literacy knowledge and other linguistic and cognitive skills that learners can use to learn target language such as Silozi and/or a second language like English. Therefore, it denies learners epistemic access and meaningful learning from known to unknown. In short, there is a high probability of delayed adequate literacy development in particular and educational development in general.

Like other regions of the country, the Zambezi region lacks congruence between the language a learner speaks at home and that used for teaching and learning at school (Tötemeyer 2010). The absence of this congruence is one of the major contributing factors to low literacy levels and high drop-out rates as concepts are not culturally situated (Tötemeyer, 2010). It is from this perspective that Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012) state that in a multilingual classroom, there is need to bridge

the home and school environment by drawing on the child's linguistic resources to help learners maximise their understanding and classroom performance. This calls for approaches like translanguaging which entails the new conceptualisation of language and multilingualism and calls for the decolonisation of the curriculum. Translanguaging entails allowing students to draw from their home languages in the process of learning the target language such as Silozi and educational authorities accept it as legitimate pedagogical practice (Lasagabaster & Garcia (2014) that help the students accomplish making meaning (Canagarajah, 2011b). It is from this stand point that this paper intends to explore the initial literacy and epistemic benefits of translanguaging as a pedagogic practice in Namibia. The Next section focuses on the notion of translanguaging and its benefits.

## TRANSLANGUAGING IN NAMIBIAN SCHOOLS

To get an insight of the prevalence of translanguaging in the Namibian classrooms, a review of a number of studies is presented below.

Shifidi (2014) explored the existence of translanguaging in Namibian schools, the extent to which translanguaging occurred during lessons as well as looking at opinions from teachers whether translanguaging had a potential to enhance learners' understanding of the subject contents. The findings established that translanguaging was indeed prevalent in Namibian schools. The findings further showed that translanguaging was more predominant in rural schools. Moreover, the study established that translanguaging has

potential in enhancing learning and understanding, participation, and socialization in multicultural/lingual classrooms. On the other hand, the study also discovered that certain schools had internal policies that prohibited learners from speaking their local languages within the school premises even to the extent of charging them to pay a certain amount as a punishment for using their local languages. This means that despite emphasis on mother tongue as language of instruction in the junior primary the reality is that it has no value in the education circles. Hence, stakeholders such as parents, teachers and learners may show contempt for their mother tongues and devalue their cultural and linguistic heritage. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the matter is that translanguaging is prevailing in Namibian schools.

Other studies also studied the prevalence of translanguaging through code switching as a translanguaging teaching strategy in Namibian schools. Studies such as those of Denuga, Abah, and Michael (2017), Denuga (2015) and Shilamba (2012) asserted that translanguaging was widespread in most Namibian classrooms and in various subjects. The deployment of translanguaging was mainly to facilitate meaningful teaching and learning. Denuga (2015) stated that teachers translanguaged to help learners understand the subject content, explain concepts, emphasize points and to include learners' participation in the subject. Also, Shilamba (ibid) indicated that teachers translanguaged because the majority of the learners' language familiarity was not good. A conclusion drawn is that translanguaging is a necessary tool for teachers to achieve teaching goals in content-based lessons involving students who lacked proficiency in the instructional language (Denuga,

Abah, & Michael, 2017). However, the findings also indicated that some teachers were against translanguaging because examinations were written in English and the language policy did not recommend the practice. Negative attitudes towards translanguaging were also reported by Ipinge (2018) who established that despite teachers' acknowledgement of learners' lack of familiarity with the language of instruction, did not use the learners' linguistic resources in their classrooms because of the notion that mother tongue (Oshiwambo) compromised the effective mastery of English and also that the current language policy did not allow it.

Furthermore, studies by Simasiku (2014) and Naha, Nkengbeza and Liswaniso (2018) on the effects of translanguaging on teaching and learning in Namibian schools established that it generally has positive effects on learning and teaching in all subjects. The scholars noted that it helped learners to understand difficult aspects of the lesson taught and therefore were able to follow the instructions given. When the teacher explained what was said in mother tongue, it helped learners participate especially those with English language difficulties. It also helped them to express themselves if they did not know how to say certain things in English. Furthermore, translanguaging helped teachers manage their classrooms. However, Simasiku, (ibid), indicated that the Language Policy did not empower teachers to use language as the situation dictated, but rather the Language Policy dictated to teachers to subscribe to its directives. According to Simasiku, this situation pushed teachers to using English in the presence of a ministerial official but as soon as the official left the classroom, they reverted to the language

that accommodated and eased teaching and learning. In that regard, Simasiku (ibid: ii) argued that "Language classrooms should become learning environments where learners actively participate and grasp the knowledge that they are taught in a language they are comfortable with."

Equally, studies by Simasiku, Kasanda and Simit (2015a), Simasiku, Kasanda and Smit (2015b), Simasiku (2016a) and (Simasiku, 2016b) affirms the prevalence of translanguaging in the Namibia schools. However, teachers were reluctant to use it in their classrooms even when their learners failed to understand what they were saying. According to Simasiku, Kasanda and Simit (2015a) most Namibian teachers and politicians still subscribe to the idea that African languages cannot be used as medium of instruction in schools. Moreover, the scholars established that teachers feared that if mother tongue was used in the classrooms, learners might not be able to be employed and mother tongue might find its way in their writing. The study concluded that for both educators and politicians, coloniality was the main barriers to the use of translanguaging in the Namibian classrooms. Simasiku (2016a) advised that translanguaging should not be frowned upon, but rather be embraced and incorporated into the Namibian language policy.

Both Nzwala (2015) and Mashinja (2020) established that junior primary teachers resorted to multiple language practices when they realised that children had challenges understanding and communicating in the designated language of initial literacy (SiLozi). Similarly, Mukwambo, Mhakure and Sitwala (2020), established that teachers used different languages in the numeracy lessons to mediate learners understanding of the numeracy literacy

knowledge. All these studies validate the presence of translanguaging practices in the Namibian classrooms.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In terms of LoI in the teaching of initial literacy, language ideologies and social structuring of language is fundamental as Mogashoa (2014) states that language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology. This means that the manner in which language/multilingualism is conceived in Namibia and the Zambezi Region in particular plays a part in explaining whether translanguaging is an ideal instructional approach. The valuing of language as a resource to ensure epistemic access and meaningful learning to maximise initial literacy development leads this study to consider a combination of translanguaging theory and the code and pedagogic discourse theory together with its extended notion of recontextualisation of education knowledge.

Bernstein (1973:88) observes that "education may be wholly subordinate to the agencies of the state or it may be accorded a relatively autonomous space with respect to discourse areas and practices". This made Haugen (2009:12) comment that "power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse." This is true to the teaching of initial literacy in the Zambezi Region. Hence, the analysis of teaching and the choices about classroom language practices cannot be done in isolation. This is what makes this argument fundamental in the analysis of the finding in this study. It helps us to understand how language in education policy and the position of different indigenous languages influence teachers' ideologies and classroom language practices.

Like many schools around the world, Namibian schools are characterised by both vertical and horizontal discourses. Bernstein (1999:159) elaborated on the two concepts as he explained that the horizontal discourse as a form of knowledge usually typified as every day or common sense and unofficial knowledge, whereas vertical discourse is a coherent, explicitly and systematically principled structure that is hierarchically organised. In other words, these are official and unofficial languages. In relation to this study, the horizontal discourse in the classroom represents the unofficial languages (Sifwe and others) and home literacies that learners bring to the classroom whereas the vertical discourse is characterised by the school official and legitimate language (Silozi) and to large extent English. This implies that in terms of status and function, some languages have more power over others.

The concepts of vertical and horizontal discourses come to play when analysing the teaching of initial literacy in multilingual Zambezi Region, given a language situation characterised by local familiar languages and Silozi dominant language. The question is: do teachers accommodate the co-working of the formal and informal languages through translanguaging while still trying to teach initial literacy in Silozi the official Medium of instruction? This interrogation is important, in that in most cases, the horizontal discourse is decontextualized. Thus, the role of the teacher is to recontextualise the vertical and horizontal discourse so that it is responsive to the characteristics of the learners in class. The concept of 'recontextualisation' becomes crucial at this point. Bernstein (2000) in Robertson (2017) explained recontextualisation as the rules involving taking areas of

knowledge and skills from outside the schooling system (for example, linguistic knowledge or sociolinguistic backgrounds of learners) and relocating them within the schooling context. Further, Robertson (2017) stated that part of the recontextualisation process involves too, decisions relating to the selection of guiding pedagogical principles (interpretations of how teaching and learning is best achieved). Mwanza and Bwalya (2019) agree with this argument when they explained that it is the job of the classroom teacher to recontextualise the interpretation and application of the policy and methods of teaching in order for the policy and method to be relevant and appropriate to the specific learning and teaching situation.

In relation to this study, since learners come to school speaking other languages, it is expected that they may not be so familiar with Silozi. They learn Silozi upon entry into school. In this case, teachers may make use of the pedagogical language practices such translanguaging to adapt the lesson to the linguistic context of the learners. This implies that, teachers may renegotiate the language in education policy and apply it through the use of multiple languages in order to ensure epistemic access to the learners in a classroom where there is need. With this view, using the principle of contextualisation, the data was analysed to find out whether or not pre-primary teachers found learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds as suitable resources which they could use to help learners access the target language Silozi. As earlier mentioned, the basic principle of teaching from the known to the unknown also amplifies this point.

Mwanza (2016) observed that, in a multilingual setting, it is impossible for one to teach the official language without recognising the linguistic resources and knowledge which learners come with to the classroom. In fact, Bernstein (1990:169) explains that in multilingual classrooms, "segments of horizontal discourse become resources to facilitate access to vertical discourse..." This implies that the interplay of both the horizontal and vertical discourse is central in ensuring epistemic access and meaning making among learners for initial literacy development. This part of Bernstein's argument brings to picture the language as resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984) which questions language hierarchies by valuing and encouraging multilingualism. A resource perspective on language mirrors the pedagogical language practices such as translanguaging.

Translanguaging is linked to Cen Williams (García, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2007) and describes a "pedagogical practice in a multilingual classroom in which a learner receives input in one language and gives output in a different one. The practice deliberately switches the language mode of input and output in a well-planned and organised manner to mediate information processing" (Mgijima & Makalela, 2016: 88). Therefore, translanguaging refers to any pedagogic language practice of alternation between languages viewed not as separate entities but as a single unit for ensuring epistemic access and as a meaning making resource. Thus, translanguaging pedagogy proposes a shift from monoglossic to heteroglossic ideologies in the education of multilingual students (Parra, 2018). Context to the study, translanguaging pedagogy challenges the strict language separation fostered in multilingual contexts like that of the Zambezi education region of Namibia where Silozi is the language of initial literacy.

The alternation, integration and flexible use of languages have proven beneficial for language learning, especially in the initial stages (García & Li Wei, 2014; Jones & Lewis, 2014). In fact, Parra (2018) notes that integrating languages supports more efficient and targeted instruction since students are able to compare and contrast their languages, and draw on their prior linguistic knowledge and skills. Consequently, language and initial literacy instruction could be achieved. Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012: 36), contemplated that "the central rationale for integration across languages is that learning efficiencies can be achieved when teachers explicitly draw children's attention to similarities and differences between their languages and reinforce effective learning strategies in a coordinated way across languages".

In summary, the study has used both Bernstein's notions of code and pedagogical discourse and Cen Williams's translanguaging. The two notions are used to analyse the teachers and learners' classroom language choices and practices to enhance the learning of initial literacy and to identify the efficacy of translanguaging as a pedagogic practice in multilingual literacy classrooms. The purpose of the study was to establish whether the use of translanguaging as pedagogic practice can be an ideal teaching practice in the Namibian multilingual primary schools in the Zambezi region.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

In this study, two pre-primary classrooms were purposively sampled. Since there was only one pre-primary classroom managed by a single teacher in the selected two schools, the two teachers and all the learners that formed part of the two classrooms were observed. Thus, the participants were the pre-primary teachers and learners. Qualitative case study methods were suitable for this study. As Bricki and Green (2002) stated, qualitative studies are designed specifically to observe social interaction, in which individuals' experiences, understandings and perceptions regarding a certain issue are elicited (Quinlan et al., 2015:124), through a small group of participants in order to obtain a richer description of the phenomenon in question (Masenya, 2018). Thus, qualitative methods of data collection were chosen in order to collect rich and detailed data. The study area was Sibbinda circuit in the Zambezi region of Namibia. The schools are located in a multilingual context with Sifwe as predominant local language for communication. Although Silozi is hardly used, it is the Language of Initial Literacy in the Zambezi region as mandated by the Language Policy for schools in Namibia. Data was collected through interviews with pre-primary teachers and observation of the teachers and learners interaction in the classroom. The other instrument used to generate data was documents analysis of the syllabus and curricular resources. This data was analysed thematically. Data was grouped into themes that emerged and discussed qualitatively following the themes.

## PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS

The study sought to establish whether the use of multiple language practices could be an ideal teaching practice in the Namibian schools given that the country is both multilingual and multicultural.

## Translation Data from face to face Interviews with Teachers

During interviews, teachers mentioned that they used heteroglossic practices in their instruction, from the beginning to the end of the lesson. This was done through recognising the languages and dialects represented in the classroom whether they were official or not. These scaffolding practices aided meaning-making and literacy learning in the target language. One of the two teachers mentioned that although she had challenges with some local varieties, she used some learners especially those who seemed to understand what she communicated. In so doing, the teacher and learners became co-teachers and learners in the process. Another teacher also stated that she employed multiple practices basically for emphasis and clarification to scaffold pupils. She stated further that during that process, pupils learn the Silozi language and its lexis including the lesson content. Consider the responses below:

**T1:** *…, I introduce the lesson in Silozi and translate in the mother tongue to help my learner understand and learn how to speak Silozi, even though sometimes I have challenges with their language here, but I use learners who understand the language to help explain to others.*

**T2:** *Since they don't understand the medium of instruction, I begin the lesson in Silozi then I interpret in their mother tongue to emphasise and clarify what I said in Silozi so that they can also make connections and be able to associate the words of the two languages. So you will find that they learn two things; the Silozi language and its vocabulary and the content to understand those concepts better, so they don't forget because they remember using their language first then associate to Silozi.*

## Translanguaging Data from Classroom Observation

While the two teachers mentioned the use of multiple language practice during interviews, lesson observations were also conducted to establish the actual language choices and classroom practices. However, the data presented in this particular area are extracts from the transcribed lesson verbatim and not the complete lesson verbatim. Therefore, observed in the lessons was that the discourse patterns in class were characterised by heteroglossic practices by both teachers and learners. The excerpts (below) present the observed lessons on drawing and body parts and their functions in two pre-primary classrooms.

### Excerpt 1: Subject: Visual Art Topic: Drawing

The class comprised 25 pre-primary pupils who sat following each other in rows. The pre-primary teacher was 38 years old, and her familiar language is Mbalangwe. She had six (6) years of teaching experience in primary school. She was teaching pre-primary (grade 0). However, she was also a final year student enrolled in the In-Service Teacher Education Diploma in Junior Primary Education, INSET program at the time of this study.

**Teacher:** Kachenu luituta zamibili yamina. Kuna ni lilama zepanga ona mubili wahao wo. Ki lilama mañi zepanga mubili? (Lozi: *Today we are learning about your bodies. There are parts that form up your body. What parts makes up the body?*) Teacher points to the chart on the board shown in Figure 1 below.
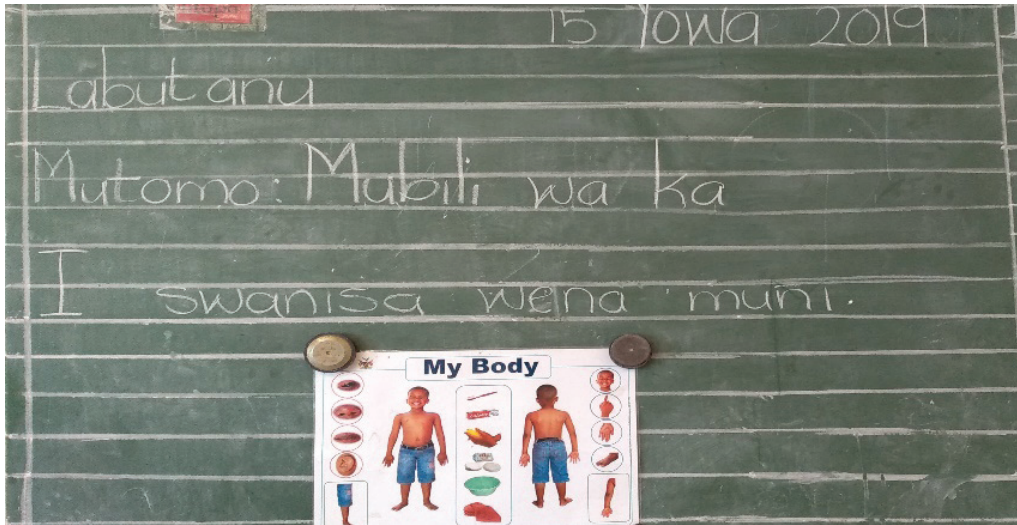
**Figure 1: Body Parts**

**Pupil 1:** Mazoho (*Lozi: hands*)

**Pupil 2:** Mautu (*Lozi: legs*)

**Pupil 3:** Meeto (*Lozi: eyes*)

**Pupil 4: Mutwi** {*Sifwe: head*}

**Pupil 5:** *Toes*

**Pupil 6: Matwi** {*Sifwe: ears*}

**Teacher:** Ehe, mazebe. Talima facati falitapa, ki zeñata lilama zepanga mubili mi uswanela kuliziba, muutwile? (*Lozi: Yes, ears. Look on the chart on the board, there are many parts that makes up the body and you should know them, do you understand?*)

**Pupils:** Eni (*in chorus, Lozi: yes*)

**Teacher:** Cwale fa mwabuka yahao, **dulowa** mutu yaswana niwena, lwautwa? **Udulowe muntu yo swana newe mwimbuka yako, mwasuwa?** (*Lozi: Now, in your book, draw a person like yourself, do we understand? {Mbalangwe: draw a person who looks like you in your book, did you understand?}*)

**Pupils:** eni (*in chorus, Lozi: yes*)

**Teacher:** Lu **dulowa** sikwenda pili, toho – **mutwi**, kona lutaha kwamulala- **insingo yako**, wo, wo kona mulala- **ensingo**. (*Lozi: We draw a circle first, heard – heard (Sifwe), then the neck (Lozi) – your neck {Mbalangwe}, Lozi: demonstrating, this, this is the neck- neck [Sifwe]*)

**Pupils:** *Silently, follow instructions*

**Teacher:** Beya mazoho amabeli kifo - **durowe mayanja obire mpaho**, mautu muabiza cwani mwa Sifwe? **Matende wena, mumushobo wako cinzi?** (*Lozi: Now draw two hands – [Sifwe]; draw two hands now, Lozi: how do you call the legs in Sifwe? {Mbalangwe: legs, what they are in your language?}*).

**Pupil 5** (stands up): **Oho! matende bulyaho** (*[Sifwe: Oh! they are legs like that]*)

**Teacher:** Ehe, matende kona mautu mwa Silozi, cwale fa udulowe mautu.

**Ozyu nafetuki, insingo namatende ziya hansi wena** (*Silozi: Yes, {Malangwe}: matende (legs) are mautu (legs) in Silozi, so now draw the legs. [Sifwe mixed with Mbalangwe}: this one is upside down, the neck and legs should face down {Mbalangwe}.*

**Pupils**: Silently follows the teacher's instruction.

**Excerpt 2: Subject: Language Development**

**Topic: Body Parts and Functions**

The lesson was taught to a class of 33 learners by a female teacher aged 30. Sifwe is her familiar language and she has five (5) years of experience in teaching pre-primary. The teacher was also in her last year of the In-Service Teacher Education Diploma in Junior Primary Education, INSET program.
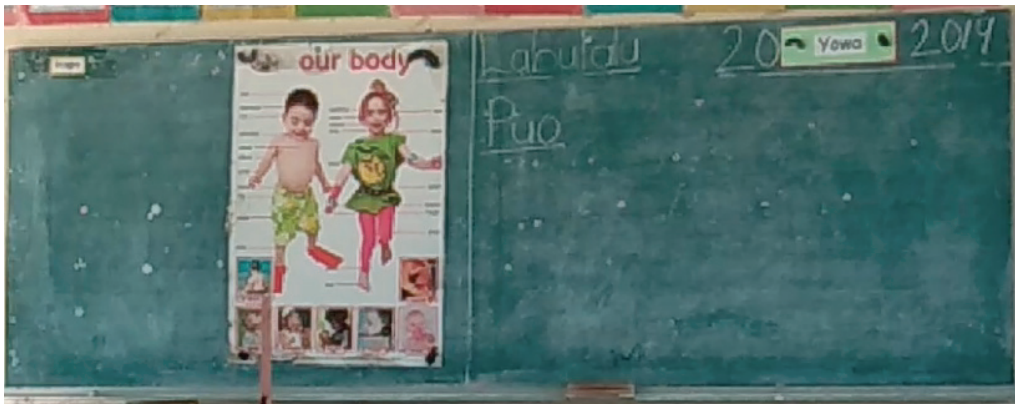


**Figure 2: Body Parts and Functions**

Teacher: Neluitutile lilama zafamubili. **[Cware ndishaka kuti mundisumwine zirama nitwalituta, shaka tumane inga ndimisumwine musebezi wezo zirama, mwashuwi?]** (*Lozi: We learnt about the body parts. Sifwe: So I want you to tell me the parts we learnt, then I will tell you the functions of those parts, do you understand?*).

**Pupils**: Eni (*in chorus, Sifwe: yes*)

**Teacher:** Kwasifateho kona kokufumaneha meeto, [**a mensho**], hape kona kokunzi ngo [**ezyuru**]… kwatoho kikwa kokunani milili. Toho [**mutwi, kwina enshuki**] milili… Cwale fa lubone musebeze walilama ze (*Reminds children of the body parts and explains using another pupil in front, Lozi: On the face we find the eyes, [Sifwe: eyes], we also find the nose [Sifwe: nose]… Lozi: the head is here where there are hairs. Head [Sifwe: head, there are hairs]… Lozi: now let us look at the functions of these parts.*)

**Pupils**: Eni (*in chorus, Lozi: yes*)

**Teacher**: Luna ni mazoho [**mayanja**], luasebelisa kwakuswala [**kukwata**] …ngo, ngo *[ezyuru, X1, cinji mulisebelisanga ezyuru?]* (*Lozi: We have hands (Sifwe: hands), we use them to touch [Sifwe: to touch]… Lozi: nose, nose [Sifwe: nose, X1, what do you use the nose for?*)

**Pupil X1**: *Kuhemba* (*Sifwe: to blow*)

**Teacher**: *ehe! kuhemba, ohemba nezyuru* {wa mina}. *Ozyu natiye kuhemba, cinji cimwi mulisebelisanga ezyuru, X2, ezyuru?* (*SiFwe: yes, you blow with your nose {Lozi: you blow}. Sifwe: this one said that you blow, what else do you use the nose for, X2, the nose?*)

**Pupil X2**: *Kuhuzya* (*SiFwe: to breathe*)

**Teacher**: Very good, **kuhuzya**. Kuti wabuyela ni ngo...**zonshe zizi mwaambi mwakumbi**. Mwakona kumina, kubuyela, hape wakona kuutwa minko, kulupelela...Cwale **muromo cinji usebeliswa**? *Points at a child whose hand is up.* (*Sifwe: to breathe, Lozi: He breathes through the nose ...Sifwe: all the answers are correct. Lozi: you can blow, breathe and smell things... Sifwe: what about the mouth, what is its function?*)

**Pupil 1**: *Kuwamba* (*Sifwe: to speak*)

**Pupil 2**: *Kulya* (*Sifwe: to eat*)

**Teacher**: Kuca, mulomo wo kiona omusebelisa kwakucisa, waca... Mautu, **[amatende]**, luasebeilsa kwañi? (*Lozi: To eat, you use your mouth to eat, you eat.... Legs (Sifwe: legs) what do we use them for?*)

**Pupil 3**: *Kuyenda* (*SiFwe: to walk*)

**Pupil 4**: *Kuraha* (*SiFwe: to kick*)

**Teacher**: *Kuyenda* (kuzamaya)... *very good*, **oraha embora namatende,** *wazaya ni mautu.* **Osizyimana henji ozyimana, hamutwi? Cinji sakaosebelise kukuzyimana** (*Sifwe: To walk (Lozi: to walk)... very good, you kick the ball with legs (demonstrates with a ball, Lozi: you walk with legs. SiFwe: When you stand, what do you stand on, the heard? What will you use to stand?*)

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data shows that teachers and students used multiple language repertoires to make meaning during lessons in the predominant local language (Silozi) instruction. This deployment decolonised the curriculum, negotiated and contested a monoglossic ideology, while heteroglossic practices facilitated epistemic access and thus, counteracted symbolic violence and recontextualised the practices to the learners' needs and experiences in the classroom.

The contention between the multilingual reality and the mandated mother tongue language instruction informed the teachers' language choices and use in their classrooms. Complementing the use of the target language instruction and other language, the teachers provided support for the pupils, negotiated the prevalent language in education policy and the multilingual reality inherent in the classrooms. The teachers' language of instruction choices revealed the power relation that existed between government, teachers and learners in the classroom as Haugen (2009:12) observed that "power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse" in classrooms. Moreover, the teachers heteroglossic choices meant that "... pedagogically, learners should not be discriminated against from participating in classroom interaction simply because they cannot speak the target language" Mwanza (2017: 104). In this case, the teachers re-negotiated the top-down directives by involving language choices and practices which were not recommended but were responsive to the linguistic abilities of the learners in ensuring epistemic access, enhancing effective instruction and facilitating initial literacy development. As seen in this study, teachers, when

in the classroom, have the power to choose language practices according to their own judgment of the classroom (Mwanza, 2016).

The heteroglossic choices also entail that teachers should not just receive and implement policies because they are from central government. Instead, they should negotiate changes that will not only be beneficial to them but enhance and mediate students learning. As observed by Paradowski (2020: 26) "Instruction should always be a reasoned and strategic response to the local circumstances and ecology of the classroom, tailored to the situation and the needs and abilities of the learners; pedagogical decisions ought therefore to be more a critical and judicious choice than a reflexive use of trend solutions." Thus, a change from a monolingual towards a multilingual approach regarding home languages in education would be most successful when initiated by teachers at school and classroom level. However, such decisions should be made with consideration that conditions and possibilities may be divergent and require dissimilar methodologies. Nevertheless, the teachers' choices of language of initial literacy acknowledge that a narrow-minded outlook that prevents teachers from assisting their learners in all possible ways, such as by employing translanguaging to enhance comprehension should not be frowned upon, but rather be embraced and incorporated into the Namibian language policy (Simasiku 2016a).

Therefore, if effective teaching and learning is the goal of basic education in Namibia, then "Language classrooms should become learning environments where learners actively participate and grasp the knowledge that they are taught in a language they are comfortable with." (Simasiku, 2014: ii). This means that a

promising perspective in addressing the challenges of linguistic diversity in the Namibian classrooms is through the lens of translanguaging. Therefore, there is need to view language as a resource and accept multilingual discursive practices as legitimate and part of the classroom; a normal mode of effective communication and a strategic sense- and meaning-making practice in the educational setting, while upholding and validating learners' linguistic resources (Paradowski, 2020).

Further, it has been observed that teachers deployed multiple communicative repertoires in the Silozi medium classes. The study indicated that the use of translanguaging enabled the pre-primary learners with opportunities to make sense of the subject content and to maximise their participation. As mentioned by the teachers, translanguaging pedagogy scaffolded students' learning and that during that process, pupils learned the Silozi language: its lexis and the content. Thus, learners acquired the literacy knowledge and the target language. The teachers acknowledged the importance of communicating in the language familiar to learners to help them benefit from the importance of speech in their thinking processes (Kiramba, 2016). Learners in this case were given an opportunity to learn from the known to the unknown (Mwanza, 2016). In that regard, learners found their prior knowledge validated at school during initial literacy lessons, a precondition for ensuring meaningful and successful learning (Kiramba, 2016).

Flexible language use offered the probability for a coherent linkage between home and school knowledge and helped the students to comprehend the initial literacy knowledge and learn the target language by mediating between common sense knowledge

and the literacy knowledge. Similar findings have been reported in other studies conducted in multilingual Namibian classrooms (Shifidi, 2014; Mashinja & Mwanza, 2020; Mukwambo, Mhakure, & Sitwala, 2020). These practices demonstrate the possibility of translanguaging as an alternative multilingual strategy that can address the linguistically structured inequalities affecting Namibian schools. Mwinda and van der Walt (2015) observe that the multilingual context, where teachers and learners code switch in classrooms, is regarded as one of the elements that create possibilities for translanguaging.

Multiple language practices also increased participation, target language learning and initial literacy acquisition. As observed from the lessons, for instance, in excerpt 1, the teacher probed learners in Silozi to mention how legs were called in their mother tongue. Having realized that pupils did not understand, she interpreted the question in her familiar language (Mbalangwe). This practice mediated comprehension of the question by those pupils who understood the teacher's language, as one pupil exclaimed (aha) to show realization and understanding upon hearing the teachers' explanation of the question which triggered recall and linkage to her mother tongue, hence she managed to respond to the question using her familiar language (Sifwe). It is this interplay of both the horizontal and vertical discourse in ensuring epistemic access and meaning making that is in line with Bernstein's (1990) argument that aspects of the horizontal discourse function as pedagogic resources which engender access to curricular knowledge. Also, Parra (2018) notes that integrating languages supports more efficient and targeted instruction since students are able to compare and

contrast their languages, and draw on their prior linguistic knowledge and skills. Consequently, language and initial literacy instruction could be achieved. Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012: 36), contemplate that "the central rationale for integration across languages is that learning efficiencies can be achieved when teachers explicitly draw children's attention to similarities and differences between their languages and reinforce effective learning strategies in a coordinated way across languages".

In this study, there was target language learning and acquisition, language production and lexis development when children compared and contrasted between the words {matende [legs]} in both Sifwe and Mbalangwe to the word {mautu [legs]} in Silozi. According to Hassan and Ahmed (2015), translanguaging as a pedagogical language practice enables certain concepts to be reinforced through repetition in several languages and clarified in much more details as opposed to using one language. Garcia and Li-Wei (2014) also observe that translanguaging involves issues of language production, the function of language and thought process behind language use. Here, the findings highlight the weakness of monolingual classroom practice in Silozi language where the where the learners' familiar languages are often excluded.

It is this complex way of making sense of the language of instruction, translanguaging pedagogical practice enhances epistemic access and makes teaching and learning become more effective and meaningful in heterogeneous classrooms. The findings support the benefits of translanguaging as an effective medium of instruction in initial literacy pedagogy in the pre-primary. Moreover, Makalela (2015: 27) notes that classroom translanguaging

is concomitant to the view that multilingualism is a social practice and its practices form part of a normal brain activity where language systems are not separated and used in segmented and isolated boxes (Wei, 2011). Therefore, the teaching of initial literacy in isolation of the learners' familiar languages in the Silozi medium classes is not appropriate, given that language and literacy are socially situated processes in which learners are socialized into a particular community's meaning making practice (Parra, 2018).

This affirms the shortfalls of the monolingual instruction for initial literacy premised on predominant language in the pre-primary classrooms in the Zambezi Region. Moreover, epistemic access was enabled when teachers translated teaching materials and lessons from English to Silozi and pupils' familiar language (Sifwe). Translanguaging has the potential to enhance teachers and learners' simultaneous development of language and literacy in Silozi, English, and Sifwe, while also disrupting the existing power and status gap that exists between the three languages, eventually disrupting the monoglossic ideology.

Observed in this study also is that teachers were multimodal and eclectic in their teaching. They used a variety of resources to communicate meaning in the classroom and make learning more relevant, interesting and motivating for learners (see figures 1 and 2). Multimodal teaching helped the teachers to easily clarify concepts and made it easier for learners to easily understand the concepts under consideration. Mwanza (2016) argues that translanguaging is multimodal in that it transcends verbal and written modes of language to other mediated and mediatized modes and related literacies learners bring to the classroom. In this study, teachers repurposed materials (meant for English teaching) and resemiotised the content to teach initial literacy in mother tongue (Silozi). Thus, learners were provided with scaffolded instruction and multimodal meaning-making fostered, via the use of visuals and gestures. Again, this supports heteroglossic practices as efficacious teaching modes in multilingual Namibian schools, as translanguaging recognises the inherently multimodal and multisemiotic nature of communicative repertoires (Creese & Blackledge 2015; Kusters, Spotti, Swanwick & Tapio 2017; Paradowski, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that translanguaging enables epistemic access to the multilingual pre-primary children learning initial literacy in Silozi in the pre-primary classrooms in Sibbinda circuit. The findings of the study have shown that the pre-primary teachers' uptake of translanguaging gave room for changing the conceptualization of language, particularly towards pupil's linguistic repertoires as social communicative and learning tools worthy ensuring meaningful learning opportunities for all learners; enhancing positive language teaching and learning experiences; engendering and naturalizing multilingualism as a classroom norm and investing in their multiple linguistic identities (Makalela, 2015).

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