ESTHER RAMANI and MICHAEL JOSEPH

PROMOTING ACADEMIC COMPETENCE IN TWO LANGUAGES: A CASE STUDY OF A BILINGUAL BA DEGREE (IN ENGLISH AND SESOTHO SA LEBOA) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

ABSTRACT: Our paper shows how using an African language as medium of instruction and assessment along with English can promote academic competence in both languages among university students. We do this by theorizing a dual-medium undergraduate degree (BA in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies, BA CEMS) that we launched at the University of Limpopo in South Africa in 2003. In this paper, we describe the curricular structure of the degree and analyse the anatomy of one unit of learning: ‘Small Talk’, a low-prestige genre in African societies and an under-researched one globally. We use Cummins’ four-quadrant model to capture two kinds of learner effort, namely, language use and language study. We show a bi-directional transfer of skills across English and Sesotho sa Leboa, which upholds our claim that despite their differential historical and material status, they can be resources for each other to achieve academic excellence. We believe that bilingual education can facilitate the acquisition of language competence, especially for students who have had inadequate access to English at school and who struggle with the cognitive and linguistic demands of higher education.

KEYWORDS: bilingual education, academic biliteracy, Cummins’ four quadrants model, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), home-language maintenance, oral genres, small talk, ethnography of communication

0. INTRODUCTION

ELT/EFL profession has generally functioned with a monolingual consciousness that deprives students of a major learning resource: their mother tongues or home languages. In this paper, we show how taking a bilingual approach in university education facilitates the emergence of competence in both English and a home language. We do this by describing and theorising a dual-medium undergraduate degree, BA in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies (BA CEMS), being implemented at the University of Limpopo in South Africa. We believe that such an initiative has relevance for countries like India, in which the democratization of higher education has led to masses of students entering tertiary institutions without adequate preparation.

The BA CEMS degree offers two major subjects, one taught and assessed in English and the other in Sesotho sa Leboa (or Northern Sotho), an indigenous African language. Launched in 2003, it responds to the South African government’s commitment to the maintenance and promotion of African languages articulated in its Constitution (1996). The degree also seeks to implement a key recommendation of South Africa’s National Language Policy for Higher Education, namely “the development in the medium- to long-term of South African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education alongside English and Afrikaans” (Ministry of Education, 2002:15). Another goal of the degree is the development of higher-order cognition, critical for higher education.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinning for the BA CEMS degree is the concept of additive multilingualism, defined as the maintenance and development of the home language simultaneously with the acquisition of a second language.

The BA CEMS degree uses additive multilingualism in two senses. The first relates to multilingualism as content. The knowledge content of the degree is contemporary multilingualism, which has become a body of scholarship in its own right, drawing from established Applied
Linguistics disciplines such as Sociolinguistics (including Language Policy and Planning), Psycholinguistics, Syntax, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, Critical Language Awareness, and Language and Cognition. These disciplines increasingly recognise that we live in a multilingual world, which has been marginalised by a monolingual consciousness. Re-discovering this multilingual world, and our own multilingual identity within it, is seen as a form of cultural empowerment (Cummins 1996). Lectures, workshop activities and materials for the BA CEMS degree revolve around current language issues in South Africa, while simultaneously relating these issues to global perspectives, especially focussed on the African continent and other developing countries.

The second operational definition relates to multilingualism as dual-medium. This degree aims to develop knowledge of contemporary multilingual society through dual-medium instruction using both English and Sesotho sa Leboa. The degree represents a model of additive bilingualism as it seeks to improve students’ competence in English while simultaneously developing their knowledge and use of their own home language as a tool for higher-order cognitive work. The course content is multilingualism and the means by which students engage with that content is also multilingual. This is an alternative to accessing multilingual content through monolingual means, which in South Africa, is English. In other words in our new degree, both the ends and the means involve knowledge, analysis and use of the bi/multilingual competence of the learners. These two definitions relate to the terms ‘the study of languages as object’ and ‘the use of languages for learning’, taken up in Section 4.

2. THE CURRICULUM FOR THE BA CEMS DEGREE

The content area of multilingualism is distributed across 12 modules, six each in English and Sesotho sa Leboa taught over three years. Each module is taught in six-month long semesters. All the Contemporary English (CELS) modules are taught and assessed in English and the Multilingual Studies (MUST) modules in Sesotho sa Leboa.
Modules in the two majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st year</th>
<th>CELS: modules taught and assessed in English</th>
<th>MUST: modules taught and assessed in Sesotho sa Leboa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CELS 101: English in context</td>
<td>MUST 101: Matseno go dipolelontšhi (Introduction to multilingualism)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CELS 102: The Structure of English</td>
<td>MUST 102: Polelo yeo e bolelwago ditšhabeng tša dipolelontšhi (Oral communication in a multilingual society)</td>
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<tr>
<th>2nd year</th>
<th>CELS 201: Critical Language Awareness</th>
<th>MUST 201: Mokgwae wa dipolelontshi to text le genre (A multilingual approach to text and genre)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CELS 202: Language and literacy learning in multilingual contexts</td>
<td>MUST 202: Taodiša semorafe go kgokagano (Workplace literacies)</td>
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<tr>
<th>3rd year</th>
<th>CELS 301: Language Policy and planning</th>
<th>MUST 301: Ditirelo tša dipolelontšhi mo Afrika (Multilingual services in Africa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CELS 302: Language and Cognition</td>
<td>MUST 302: Dinyakišišo tša dipolelontšhi (Researching Multilingualism)</td>
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Very broadly, the exit-level outcomes for this degree are organised around:

- a theoretical understanding of multilingualism in South Africa and the world
- researching multilingualism
- creating resources in Sesotho sa Leboa and other African languages and
- doing advocacy work for multilingualism in various spheres of public life.
3. MUST 102: ORAL COMMUNICATION IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

We turn now to a description of one unit of teaching and learning in MUST 102, to show how a dual-medium language degree can use multilingual content to achieve academic excellence. The unit we choose is ‘Small Talk’ from MUST 102, a module taught and assessed in Sesotho sa Leboa. We will focus on specific pedagogic ideas behind the teaching of small talk and how learners went about researching it.

The MUST 102 module forms part of the Sesotho sa Leboa strand of this degree. Sesotho sa Leboa is the medium of instruction, learning and assessment. The aim of MUST 102 is to introduce students to a variety of oral genres in Sesotho sa Leboa. We do this by getting students to read the scholarly literature, currently available only in English. This is then followed by tapping students’ own tacit knowledge of the genres through reflective activities and group discussions. Finally students undertake a small-scale research project of the genre through fieldwork. Local sites such as the campus and the neighbouring township community of Mankweng are suggested for convenience, but some students preferred to use their rural home communities located quite far away from the university. Guidelines and criteria for their written and oral assignment are also given through handouts and discussed with them.

3.1 Pre-determined and responsive curricula

The module was conceived by one of the authors of this paper, Joseph, who is also responsible for training Modiba, the Sesotho sa Leboa teacher. The training emphasised understanding the linguistic principles behind the materials usually in the form of handouts in English. Modiba translated the materials or explained them in Sesotho sa Leboa to the students. She would return with feedback to Joseph and new materials would be developed as a result. In this sense MUST 102 was a ‘responsive syllabus’ (Prabhu 1987) and employed ‘weak framing’ (Bernstein 1971).

Responsive syllabus construction and weak framing are concepts that we have deliberately operationalised in this dual-medium degree. These concepts enable the teacher to be open to learners’ perceptions and interests about content, processes and assessment. Learners’ views often
emerge in the context of teacher-learner talk in the classroom. To some extent this module could be said to be a ‘negotiated curriculum’, in which learners influence the shape of the module.

3.2 The oral genres
The oral genres studied on this module were traditional healer-patient discourse (whose structure students discovered is very different from doctor-patient interactions described in the literature), small talk, exploratory talk, traditional language games and oral academic discourse. We used a combination of English and Sesotho sa Leboa materials as an initial stimulus to introduce the genres, but discussion and writing about these genres was done in Sesotho sa Leboa. All of the genres were the basis for in-depth studies except for traditional language games.

Small talk and exploratory talk were topics for the two major assignments based on small-scale research projects, and together carried 40% of the total marks for this module. These and the other genres were also assessed through portfolios carrying another 40% of the marks. Exploratory talk was assessed also through a final examination that carried the remaining 20% of the marks.

3.3 Small talk
Small Talk is regarded as a low-prestige genre in African speech communities. It is part of the more general view that defines African languages as belonging to an oral culture. We thought it would be interesting to get students to study this low-prestige, taken-for-granted genre through the lens of modern tools of analyses used in academic research, and to turn them into written products in Sesotho sa Leboa. Thus a low-prestige genre could acquire high-prestige status through such a discourse transformation. This is one way for African languages to be used as tools for modern rational discourse while also preserving their cultural uniqueness. In doing this we were aware of the false dichotomy between modern knowledge = English versus traditional culture = African languages.

Another reason for choosing ‘small talk’ is that it is a relative latecomer on the global sociolinguistic scene. First identified by Malinowski (1923)
as a social phenomenon, a number of scholars in various disciplinary
fields such as English in the world (Quirk in Schneider 1988),
Sociolinguistics (Schneider 1988), biological anthropology (Dunbar
1996), and more popular science books (Casti 2000:108) point out its
social importance and its neglect as an object of research. The study of
oral genres in African literary circles also values the sociolinguistic and
ethnographic studies listed above and emphasises a ‘performance’ rather
than ‘formalistic’ analysis of texts.

These arguments show that the genre of small talk has status from the
perspective of international scholarship. African language-speaking
students would therefore be studying a genre that is still at the frontiers
of sociolinguistic knowledge. In addition, they would be systematically
researching a local manifestation of this genre in multilingual contexts,
enabling them to contribute to new knowledge.

3.4 The epistemological framework: ethnography of communication

Oral genres have also been marginalised in academic teaching contexts
by privileging modern genres such as academic texts, the scientific article
and others. The study and valuing of oral genres is located in the branch
of study come to be known as Ethnography of Communication developed
originally by Dell Hymes (1962) and taken further by scholars such as
Saville-Troike (1989). Our pedagogy was shaped by insights from this
ethnographic tradition.

Ethnography operates with the principle that it is important to turn the
tacit knowledge (or competence) that speakers of a ‘variety of speech’
possess into explicit public knowledge. It is when the structure and
function of these ‘varieties of speech’ are made explicit that they acquire
the status of a genre.

A second important principle of Ethnography is that tacit knowledge
requires insiders, who have this knowledge, to be researchers of their
culture, specifically that part of a culture that is called its ‘communicative
competence’. This kind of research changes the relation between
researchers and research ‘subjects’, into researchers and co-researchers
through participant observation. Drawing insiders into research in order
to access their tacit knowledge was what we tried to do in the study of
the various oral genres, including small talk.
A third ethnographic principle is the one of exoticising the everyday. By this is meant the need for insiders to see their taken-for-granted everyday practices as exotic enough to motivate description. Several estrangement techniques were used in the study of ‘small talk’ in MUST 102 such as comparison with the small talk of non-African societies, the making of transcripts of conversation, and the English language teacher as outsider probing the tacit knowledge of students.

While our aim was not to teach students Ethnography of Communication at this early stage, we did aim at using its principles to produce tasks for students requiring practical analyses of a few oral genres. A practical hands-on experience, rather than an academic ‘textbook’ approach, would enable students to re-discover the value of this ‘African’ genre, and see themselves as contributing to an African cultural heritage and to global discourses. The ethnographic principles we used in this module could be recycled for more explicit teaching at a more advanced stage of the degree.

We wanted this study, as we have said earlier, to result in a high-prestige genre, namely academic writing, except that this would be in Sesotho sa Leboa rather than in English. This would help to dislodge the association of English with modern knowledge so widespread in higher education.

4. THE PEDAGOGIC FRAMEWORK

The framework we used for Small Talk is based upon: two kinds of language effort required of learners, and these are pedagogically conceptualised by using Cummins’ model of the ‘four quadrants’ which we are trying to develop in the whole dual-medium degree BA CEMS.

4.1 Language use
The two kinds of language effort required by learners are ‘language use’ and ‘language study’. By ‘language use’, we mean learners’ use of language as a means for learning. Prabhu (1987) used the term ‘communicational’ to refer to communication in the classroom, as
different from a ‘study’ of communication. Prabhu also used the term ‘deployment’ to describe the use of language in learning and in solving problems. Cummins, whose ideas have influenced us deeply, also employs the concept of ‘language use’ in his description of language proficiency. His model of four kinds of language proficiency is diagrammatically captured by the four quadrants A, B, C and D (Figure 2). Quadrant C does not capture language use but rather is what Prabhu called ‘form-focussed’ activity, for example, grammar drills and substitution exercises, which are widely believed to promote language use. Prabhu, as well as Krashen (1981) and Cummins (1996) reject such a belief, which is still strongly entrenched among language educators all over the world.

4.2 Language study
We use this term to refer to the study of language as an object, similar to the way, say, Physics studies matter as an object. A study of language as object develops knowledge about language. This is often referred to as ‘declarative knowledge’ and in many English Second Language (ESL) courses involves knowledge of the rules of grammar. ESL courses restrict such study to de-contextualised language, by focussing on sentence structures and levels below the sentence. If however, we extend such study to discourse, i.e. to ‘language varieties’ that are used by people in actual contexts, we develop an explicit knowledge of discoursal or communicative competence. It is the study of discourse that the BA CEMS focuses on. Even in CELS 102 (The Structure of English), syntax (grammar) is studied from a discoursal/contextual perspective.

In the BA CEMS degree, the two kinds of language effort are seen as separate goals for learners to achieve. But they are also seen developmentally as means (i.e. language use) to a goal (language study). The interrelation of these two goals is probably essential for degrees that aim at producing language specialists but not for dual-medium instruction for Science or other specializations (incidentally, not yet available in South African higher education). It follows therefore that in a bilingual medium for multilingual content, such as the one we are developing, both forms of competence for both the languages are
essential. These two kinds of competence (Figure 1) are depicted through our use of Cummins’ model below (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

To summarise, the study of oral genres requires the use of language as a tool for learning. This perspective is also perhaps similar to one of the specific goals related to Languages of the OBE, which is that language should be developed for learning purposes. Diagrammatically we represent this as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Use</th>
<th>Language Study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proficient use of language for learning (exploratory talk or talking to learn)</td>
<td>Declarative knowledge of the rules of language (including syntax, the structure of different kinds of discourse and theories of language and of language teaching and learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative competence; use of language in speech or writing in discoursally appropriate ways in two languages; academic biliteracy</td>
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Figure 1: Language use and language study in the bilingual degree

5. CUMMINS’ MODELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The two objectives mentioned above, language proficiency through language use, and knowledge of language through language study, were re-organised pedagogically with the help of Cummins’ model of language proficiency captured in an elegant and useful diagram that we will call the ‘Four quadrants’. Figure 2 represents Cummins’ original model, whereas Figure 3 represents our extension of the model to map the ‘language study’ of genres. Taken together, Figures 1, 2 and 3 capture the way our pedagogy works. However, an explanation of the Cummins model is now in order.
5.1 BICS and CALP

Before Cummins developed the four quadrants diagram, he offered a very simple but powerful model that popularly came to be called BICS and CALP. BICS stands for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and CALP for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. BICS refers to the kind of proficiency (or competence) that lies behind conversation. Learners acquire conversational competence in their first language (or L1) prior to school. CALP refers to the cognitive effort learners are required to display in order to access academic knowledge found in genres such as text books or examination instructions (involving receptive competence), or to convey knowledge through written essays or tests (productive competence).

According to Cummins, since the goal of education is to achieve competence in CALP, BICS could only be a starting point to achieve
this. Cummins’ model was often used in ESL contexts where a BICS-level English was often mistaken for a CALP-level achievement. The communicative movement was often criticised for remaining within oral English competence of a BICS level (MacDonald 1990) though they saw this as playing a necessary but insufficient developmental role in achieving CALP. The more serious danger in our view lay in teachers wanting to get learners to achieve CALP English proficiency directly through grammar teaching of the ‘drill-and-kill’ kind, rote memorisation and so forth, all of which have proved ineffective.

However, in the multilingual debates in South Africa, the use of the concepts, BICS and CALP, has played a significant role. When the straight-for-English approach displaced transitional bilingualism (which occurs in South Africa in the fourth or fifth year of schooling), students had suddenly to cope with a CALP English. This was the research of MacDonald, which reported adverse effects on both the learning of content, and of English. Macdonald’s work was admittedly based on young school learners, but her insights apply to other levels in the educational spectrum as well.

In multilingual debates in the South African context, BICS and CALP have been used to support equity arguments (i.e. arguing that African languages should not be allowed to remain at a BICS level but should be promoted through education to a CALP level, like English and Afrikaans (a dominant South African language, derived from Dutch and the home language of the Afrikaaners). While BICS and CALP have been a powerful metaphor in South African discourse, they did not go far enough in tackling the issue of academic excellence in terms of the use of African languages for cognitive purposes, and the accompanying psycholinguistic processes of acquisition and transfer of skills across languages. This is perhaps because the BICS and CALP model did not sufficiently distinguish between language and cognition, subsuming the latter under the former, thus opening itself to the suspicion of constructing learners as cognitively deficient. Such a deficit hypothesis was exacerbated by the English-only medium of education.
5.2 The four quadrants
Cummins’ later model addressed the issue of cognitive skills as a separate kind of effort from language effort. The cognitive effort was along a scale from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding. The language effort as in the earlier BICS and CALP distinction was along a scale from context-embedded language to context-reduced language. Bringing these two kinds of efforts together into one model resulted in the 4-quadrant diagram (see Figure 2) which depicts four kinds of language proficiency. Cummins, however, went further to stress that these were not just four different kinds of proficiency, but they were also related developmentally. By this he meant that ideally learners’ language proficiency begins with conversational ability, which is context-embedded and requiring a low cognitive effort (quadrant A, Figure 2) as a starting point in classroom talk. The learner then should be encouraged to proceed to context-embedded but cognitively demanding talk (through problem-solving tasks, quadrant B in Figure 2). And from this quadrant the learner would be more easily able to achieve the linguistic and cognitively-demanding quadrant D competence, which ultimately is what academic excellence is about.

5.3 Centrality of Quadrant B
Our perception of language as a tool for thinking based on Vygotsky (1986) converges with Cummins’ own view of the centrality of quadrant B. Quadrant B is the quadrant where learners get the kind of support that has been called ‘scaffolding’. Cummins recognised this quadrant also in terms of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. It is now clear that quadrant B is a means to achieving quadrant D competence, what he referred to originally as CALP. Retrospectively, what was ignored in the earlier BICS and CALP distinction was quadrant B.

Our reflection on the relation between language and cognition in quadrant B however, showed a more complex relation than the one in quadrant D. Thinking as a process is different from thought as a product. Context-embedded language alone can do the work of thinking. Or in other words, we think through context-embedded language. Or to use Prabhu’s terms, language gets ‘deployed’ in solving problems generated by ‘tasks’. This
view of language as a tool to do cognitive work is similar to Vygotsky’s ‘egocentric thought’ and Barnes ‘exploratory talk’ (1976). Thus, seeing links between Prabhu, Barnes and Vygotsky, we think we have a more powerful theory to support Cummins’ insight about quadrant B.

5.4 Applying the four quadrants in additive bilingual programmes
Quadrant D academic discourses should be the target for African languages and not for English only. Quadrant D should be arrived at through quadrant B proficiencies first developed through ‘exploratory talk’ in the learners’ first language. Quadrant B in an African language, in our case, Sesotho sa Leboa, should be the means for both quadrant D English and Sesotho discourse. Quadrant B should be a site designed to bring about ‘exploratory talk’ in the first language through task-based and research-oriented materials and assignments. Quadrant B should not in other words be the site for the mere spontaneous occurrence of unintended and often unwanted forms of African language use, which is now in a laissez-faire way beginning to be tolerated through the language policies of some universities.

While such tolerance may give symbolic status and is better than an aggressive rejection of African languages for learning subject content, it is not the same as quadrant B ‘exploratory talk’ which is designed to happen. The unstoppable use of learners’ African language in classroom contexts suggests the need to go beyond the symbolic to the active role of these languages in accessing and producing quadrant D discourses. Efforts to achieve quadrant D competence in African languages in ‘the medium to long term’ (Ministry of Education 2002:15) fail to see the potential of the spontaneous use of African language in quadrant B and the possibility of developing it further through cognitively-demanding tasks.
6. STAGES IN THE UNIT ON SMALL TALK

We briefly describe below the stages in the unit on Small Talk, reconstructed retrospectively.

i) Students were exposed to scholarly studies of small talk based on the research findings of Schneider (1988). Excerpts from Schneider’s text were made available through handouts in English. Students read the excerpts in class. The scholarly excerpts are examples of academic genres of quadrant D English. They are marked V in the diagram above.

ii) These excerpts were mediated by Modiba in Sesotho, and by Joseph in English (quadrant B, largely Sesotho ‘exploratory talk’, marked W)

iii) Students then planned their research through group discussions, Teacher-fronted classes, and individual consultations (except for
the last, this was quadrant B, Sesotho ‘exploratory talk’, also marked W).

iv) Students carried out their research interviews (invariably in Sesotho - Quadrant B, exploratory talk, except perhaps where formal questionnaires were used; also marked W).

v) Students then wrote up drafts of their research (quadrant D Sesotho, marked as Y) though it would be more accurate to say that they fell somewhere between quadrants B and D.

vi) Students’ first drafts were mediated by the African teacher resulting in revisions. (This composing process is in quadrant B and marked W).

vii) Students individually edited their drafts for the final version of the assignment (quadrant D, marked Y).

viii) Students made oral presentations of their research on small talk based on their written assignment (quadrant D marked Z).

ix) Students provided peer feedback on oral presentations (quadrant B, marked as W).

The detailed breakdown of steps involved broadly illustrates students accessing and producing quadrant D texts and reports. But students invariably deployed quadrant B ‘exploratory talk’ in Sesotho for achieving quadrant D academic excellence. These uses of language in quadrant B and D in Figure 3 were deployed for creating knowledge about Small Talk (object of study), which occurs in natural interaction in quadrant A of Figure 3.

6.1 Findings of student research on small talk
This part of the paper deals with Figure 3, quadrant A, i.e. language study. Below are some of the findings that emerged from the students’ written and oral assignments. While the formulation is ours, the insights are the students’.

Small talk is a research-worthy topic: Students were surprised that small talk could be an object of research in any culture, but especially their own.
Small talk is a genre: Small talk was defined through consensual discussion as ‘talk about nothing for something’. The ‘nothing’ stood for the non-information focus, the ‘something’ for the social bonding purpose.

Small talk is universal: Students expressed surprise at the use of this genre in western societies. One student remarked, “We did not know that whites also use small talk. We thought only Africans do”.

Small talk has a universal structure: The students were alerted to look at the features of conversation to see if it is structured and well organized. They realized that Sesotho small talk has a similar structure to English small talk.

Small talk has been lost in rural settings: Some students who interviewed their grand-parents felt that small talk was disappearing in relations between the older generation and the younger generations. They felt this loss was due to young people moving to urban areas and receiving modern education.

Small talk has been lost in urban settings: While all students felt pride in the politeness of Sesotho culture as compared to the formality of English, they pointed out the difficulty of sustaining politeness when cell phone conversations were making the cost of small talk prohibitive.

Small talk has been regained as a modern genre: Students discovered small talk in business settings: One student convinced the rest that one of his research subjects got a job because of small talk with a garage owner.

Small talk is gender sensitive: All students investigated gender differences as part of their assignment. They generally agreed there were strong gender differences pointing out to African males using sports as a favourite topic for small talk whereas females focussed on family members.

This ‘barefoot research’ on Small Talk may lack the scope, rigour and depth of specialist research. However students found Small Talk to be a new and exciting genre. Their research on Small Talk opened up a new perspective for them on language in relation to culture. It also positioned
them as knowledge creators of the cultural practices of their own community. The fact that they took their assignments and portfolios of MUST 102 to show their parents in their rural homes suggested they took pride in their work. This sense of ownership arising from creating original knowledge cannot be underestimated when we consider the value that intellectual ownership holds for academics, who want authorship through publication. It is for this reason that getting students to create new knowledge and turn it into a finished product (quadrant D) at the earliest stages of university education is a central curricular principle for our degree.

It creates an atmosphere of students and teachers participating in collective research, where the teacher can learn from the students. It also generates materials and hypotheses for the next cohort of students.

6.2 Exploratory talk (Quadrant B)

As we have said earlier, the research findings on Small Talk (as an instance of quadrant A communication in Figure 3) are possible because of the scaffolding provided (through quadrant B in Figure 2). The kind of facilitative interaction which takes place in quadrant B can be called ‘exploratory talk’ (Barnes 1976).

Exploratory talk is the deployment of whatever language and commonsense knowledge resources learners and teachers have to process academic knowledge/content (in this case Small Talk) to convert, through research, this knowledge into academic knowledge (of quadrant D, figure 2). Such exploratory talk is possible through a task-based curriculum, namely one that forces learners to acquire knowledge through doing their own thinking - i.e. cognitive tasks that require learners to think about and carry out activities to process and acquire knowledge. The language which learners use is unconsciously and inevitably syntactically imprecise and is the opposite of the final draft language required in quadrant D.

In processing knowledge (of Small Talk in this module, and of other kinds of knowledge in other modules), learners have to use cognitive strategies such as hypothesising, comparing, defining, generalising etc. Exploratory talk (i.e. quadrant B) is the best route in our view to quadrant

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D. This is endorsed by Cummins. But it is this use of language for cognitive purposes that is also weakest in educational contexts, teachers often preferring to fall back on quadrant C language drills, and rote learning of content. The importance of quadrant B exploratory talk was recognised in this module as an important variety of talk not only as a means to enable students to reach quadrant D oral and written assignments on small talk but also as an object of study in itself. We had therefore prior to the start of this module in 2004 collected samples of exploratory talk by first-year university students through an out of class research project funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) called ‘Exploratory communication in African languages’. Postgraduate researchers video-recorded group discussions around problem-solving tasks, made transcripts and translations (of largely Sesotho exploratory talk).

These transcripts were used by students on MUST 102 to study the features of exploratory talk based on frameworks drawn from Barnes, Ochs, and Givon. Students also had to generate further samples of exploratory talk, video record it, and transcribe one-minute episodes as part of their assignments. The NRF data, and data from MUST 102 together constitute our strategy for creating self-generated materials through the pedagogic process - in other words ‘exploratory teaching’ a research strategy developed for the first time by Allwright (1988) to reduce the gap between research and pedagogy.

7. BI-DIRECTIONAL TRANSFER OF SKILLS ACROSS THE TWO LANGUAGES

We now report on what we learnt from the OHP transparencies used by students during their formal oral presentations of their research on Small Talk. They made these presentations in Sesotho sa Leboa. The OHP transparencies of all seven students provide the data for analysing the language used. A look at the OHP transparencies of the students confirmed the combination of quadrant D features with quadrant B features, and we have therefore located these oral presentations (see Z in quadrant D of Figure 3) closer to the context-embedded end of this quadrant. Due to lack of space, we present only one transparency in the Appendix.
In looking closely at the transparencies used by the students, we were motivated by another idea of Cummins, that of the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) which argues that language skills transfer across languages. Cummins recognises that such transfer of skills is usually from first to second language. This would mean that skills acquired in our students’ use of Sesotho would transfer to English. However because of the inequality between English and Sesotho, English being currently more advanced in terms of quadrant D materials, and also being the language that students associate with modern knowledge, we expected that there could very well be transfer of skills from English to Sesotho. Cummins in fact recognises transfer as being bi-directional.

We found the presence of English in varying amounts and performing varying functions in the students’ transparencies. Though our research is impressionistic and limited to just the overhead transparencies of students, and not to their written assignment, we find evidence of transfer of academic literacy skills across the two languages, English and Sesotho sa Leboa.

Students overall tended to use the macro discoursal features of academic discourse (headings and subheadings) from English, with examples of details, and explanations in Sesotho. The OHP transparency (Appendix 2) depicts this.

It was interesting to find that for the term Small Talk, six out of the seven students retained the English term. One student, however, attempted to use a Sesotho equivalent ‘polelo e nyane’. Two Sesotho lexicographers, Selokela and Mphahlele (personal communication) examined the transparencies and pointed out that the student had coined the term ‘polelo e nyane’ as a literal translation of ‘small’ and ‘talk’ taken from the bilingual English-Sesotho dictionary (Pharos 1997/2003). However both lexicographers believe there is no specific term for Small Talk in Sesotho.

We also found that at least two students used mind maps to present their findings visually. The use of mind maps was not explicitly taught by the teacher, but it had been taught in CELS 101, the English module, and the students’ use of it is an example of students transferring what they learnt in one language to another.
We do not present empirical evidence of transfer from the learners’ first language (L1) to English (L2) but we observe the constant use of Sesotho sa Leboa in unstructured and structured group work both in the MUST classes and in the CELS classes. It is only in teacher-fronted interactions of CELS classes and when the English language teacher interacts with the students in the MUST class that English is used. Since the materials make a strong cognitive demand on the students, we assume that their talk can be characterized as quadrant B-type, and our surmise is that it is a form of exploratory talk in Sesotho sa Leboa.

There is no doubt that the L1 is being used as a resource to understand concepts, process English academic texts, understand handouts in English, plan research, argue with each other about features of genres, agree with each other, reformulate, speculate and suggest alternatives. These are some of the functions of exploratory talk identified by Barnes (1976), especially the last: ‘speculation’ and open-mindedness. Some of these discussions have been recorded and await analysis by Sesotho sa Leboa researchers.

In light of Cummins’ belief in the transfer of skills, our own analysis supports his principle of a Common Underlying Proficiency, which states that literacy and cognitive skills are ‘deep’ level skills and transfer across languages. It is therefore unnecessary to re-learn every skill twice. If by ‘deep’ Cummins means cognition and literacy skills, then he must be referring to quadrants B and D (of figure 2). If learners are exposed to the skills of skimming for information as a reading strategy in Sesotho sa Leboa, then they are likely to apply this technique to English texts.

8. CONCLUSION

We have long argued that the resources of English language pedagogy and language studies need to be transferred to the African languages (Ramani & Joseph 1998). We have found excellent materials produced by South African English language specialists with a strong multilingual and social sensitivity and have used them in our modules. Outstanding among these are the teacher-friendly articles on multilingualism in
journals like *Bua*, the Storyteller Group’s comics of African classics, the Critical Language Awareness (CLA) series edited by Hilary Janks (1993) and books on reading and writing related to academic development by Murray and Johannsen (1990). With the exception of the last, we have translated excerpts from all the above.

We argue that we need a minimal amount of material resources, and enthusiastic staff and students, to launch a programme of bilingual instruction. The argument that there are not enough resources or trained teachers can be crippling, and needs to be offset by an approach that values the *resourcefulness* of teachers and learners. We have found that operating with a responsive and developmental curriculum rather than a fully pre-determined one gives us the space to experiment with new kinds of materials, such as transcripts of various kinds of discourse, audio taped and transcribed by the students themselves.

The emphasis placed on ‘contemporary’ multilingual society in the dual-medium degree takes us in directions away from relying on materials as ‘printed texts designed for pedagogic purposes’ to ‘contexts where speech communities deploy their verbal repertoire’. The notion of ‘speech communities’ is central to the discipline of Ethnography. Our modules aim at bringing taken-for-granted genres such as Small Talk, as well as genres in more celebrated and exotic settings into our curriculum. Thus new forms of cultural enrichment that we envisage are visits to Soweto, Hominid sites, museums, producing bilingual newspapers and campus magazines, short video films and multilingual poetry club activities. At present we have already developed a book club with African films and books at a very low cost. These low cost resources are now beginning to attract funding, enabling us to build on them. Put very simply, students can only exercise their human right to choose their own language if it is on offer. That is why it is necessary to engage in small scale educational practices that make a culturally-enriched multilingualism a *curricular* reality, so that students have an option based on this reality.
NOTES

1. The University of Limpopo (formerly University of the North) is a Historically Black University (HBU) set up during the apartheid regime to offer low-quality education to Black students. HBUs are still characterized by apathy and underperformance, despite material and financial support from the South African government since the onset of democracy in 1994. Despite racial integration, students at HBUs remain almost entirely Black and come from extremely impoverished socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Staff is more mixed racially but the culture of mediocrity is entrenched and cuts across all racial groupings.

2. Modiba was teaching this module for the first time. Joseph often team-taught with her; Ramani observed lessons and helped to theorize the pedagogic processes.

3. Features of context-embedded language, better described as the ‘pragmatic mode’ or ‘unplanned discourse,’ were discussed with the students. These are features such as hesitation phenomena, ellipsis, left dislocation, referent deletion, exophoric references and general or everyday lexical items (Ochs 1979). Students used this framework for context-embeddedness more systematically in their second and final assignment on ‘exploratory talk’.
APPENDIX

AIM

Nyakišisó ka
boholoka bja
Small Talk
Dihlalošo, mafelo e.tc
ke
Ngwadile
dipotsišo

METHOD

mafelo
kgwebo
Gender

MENGWAGA

DEF
matsago
Re ka se
tsebe seo se
loba bagwero
diregago

FINDINGS

boholoka

Interpretations

Setso
bontšha
botho

baо ba re
ble bago feela

Ema nako e
telele ntle le
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