Language at the Grade Three and Four interface: The theory-policy-practice nexus

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This paper interrogates the complexity of language use at the Grade Three-Four transition, using the South African context as a microcosm of similar educational systems. The paper describes the complex nature of the transition, particularly within a second language (L2) instructional context. It explores the dissonance between and among theory, policy or curriculum, and practice; which aggravates an already complex transition. It draws on Cummins' Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) theory, the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) and the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH). Theory is considered in relation to the South African policy and curriculum ideals as espoused in the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) respectively, as well as in relation to the reality of the classroom instructional context. The paper argues for extensive research, which delineates the linguistic needs and thresholds second language learners need for the transition, a consideration of learners' attainment of the requisite linguistic thresholds as a condition for the use of a First Additional Language (FAL) as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), and deliberate teaching for transfer in the Foundation Phase, among other recommendations.

Keywords: BICS and CALP; cross-linguistic transfer; First Additional Language; Grade Three to Four transition; Language of Learning and Teaching; linguistic interdependence; linguistic threshold

Introduction
One critical schooling transitional landmark that either disorients or empowers learners in the South African context, and in other educational contexts, is the shift from the Foundation Phase (Grade R-Three) to the Intermediate Phase (Grade Four-Six). For academic success, there should be a seamless transition between Grade Three (the exit grade for Foundation Phase) and Grade Four (the initial grade into the intermediate phase). Internationally, there is general acknowledgement of the significant impact to future learning of the Third to Fourth Grade transition (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall & Gwynne, 2010). The transition involves challenges which impose particular competence needs on the learners, whose satisfaction determines the extent to which subsequent learning and attainment is constrained or expedited. Where the transition is too complex for learners, they hardly recover.

Once early literacy is founded on a shaky pedestal, it has foundational and lasting effects on later literacy and all future learning. Bruner (2010:5) calls reading proficiency by end of Grade Three, "… a key milestone in a child's educational development and a sentinel indicator of future educational success." Using multilevel regression models, he posits a correlation between third-grade and eighth-grade reading level. Wright (2012) identifies scarce vocabulary repertoire by fourth grade as a precursor to challenges in reading comprehension and according to Witt (2003:2) "… difficulties with reading literacy, if not addressed, then permeate all future educational undertaking as the gap between their reading literacy skills and the demands of the curriculum widens." All this underscores the importance of language proficiency within this transition.

Statement of the Problem
This paper is premised on the understanding that language issues, particularly the language of learning and teaching used, have an effect on the academic attainment of learners. It argues for the existence of a disconnect between theory and policy, both of which represent the ideal. The paper further argues that documented classroom pedagogical practices are constrained by, and further constrain, the attainment of the language related ideals espoused within theory and policy. These multiple levels of dissonance (theory-policy, theory-practice and policy-practice) militate against learner academic attainment.

It is important to establish what, for this paper, counts as theory, policy and practice. Theory in this paper denotes Cummins (2000) three hypotheses, namely the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) dichotomy, the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) and the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH). Although the BICS/CALP hypothesis is meant for monolingual English contexts, it is brought in to emphasise unequivocally, the fact that the policy and curriculum ideals make demands on First Additional Language (FAL) learners in bilingual contexts that are not even expected for Home Language (HL) learners in monolingual contexts. The LIH and LTH hypotheses provide alternative explanations to the relationship between the HL and the FAL and they are also incorporated to make the argument that either hypothesis is not sufficiently reflected in the South African context.

Policy refers here to the language and language development provisions enshrined in the 1997 Language in Education Policy of South Africa and the 2011 Curriculum, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). These are juxtaposed against theory and against practice reflected in teachers' pedagogical practices.

While some reviewed documented practices are not necessarily linguistic, they indicate the extent to which learners' languages can develop in the classroom to approximate the theory-policy ideals. The consonance or dissonance between and among theory, policy and pedagogy would constrain or enhance learning.

Research Questions
This paper therefore, seeks to respond to the following questions:
- To what extent are the ideals represented by theory, South African policy and Curriculum a reality in the South African context?
- To what extent do documented pedagogical practices in South African schools contribute to the realisation of the theory, policy and curriculum ideals?

The Nature of the Linguistic Challenge in the Grade Three to Four Transition
Although the Grade Three to Four literacy transitional challenge is a global phenomenon, the transitional challenges are considered from within a South African educational landscape, which typifies that of several education systems, particularly in Africa. The multi-layered transitions at the Grade Three-Four interface are, not just horizontal (i.e. individual-specific, unpredictable and subtle everyday movements) but also vertical (i.e. systemic, predictable movements over time) leading to more discontinuities than continuities of experience as the paper seeks to show. The well-documented decline in learners' academic performance in Grade Four, particularly in their reading scores, which is designated the fourth grade slump (Hirsch, 2003), speaks to the sensitivity of this transition. Academic decline at this transitional stage, even within Home language (HL) speaking contexts, suggests the transitional challenges are more marked within First Additional Language (FAL) speaking contexts.

Transitional Challenges in the South African Context
A snapshot consideration of the transitional challenges is instructive to the interrogation of the extent to which theory, policies and practices at the Grade Three and Four intersection empower or constrain subsequent academic attainment.

Shift in LoLT
Early literacy has both been influenced and complicated by the emergence of English as a global lingua franca. English hegemony is supported by demands of the global economy. In South Africa, the majority of learners (over 80%) speaks an African language, but at Grade Four level, learns through the medium of English, which enjoys less than a 10% native speaker population (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Du Toit, Sherman & Archer, 2008). Schooling in the Foundation Phase (Grade R-Three) is in the HL before transitioning to English (for the majority of learners) in Grade Four. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 makes provision for learners to elect the LoLT at Grade Four (Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa, 2010), and in most cases the elected language and the language offered by the school as LoLT is English. According to Pretorius and Mampuru (2007), this is typical of the African continent, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where, despite the linguistic diversity, most learners school through the medium of English, a colonial language. This underscores the need for learner competence in English by end of Grade Three to effectively learn in the language at Grade Four. Prinsloo (2007) posits that the sudden transition from using an African language in the Foundation Phase (FP) to using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in Grade Four sets learners up for failure.

Shift in Reading Focus
The language shift is further complicated by a simultaneous vertical transition in the focus of reading, an integral skill in all learning, when learners move from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' (Lesnick et al., 2010). Sibanda (2014:3) denotes learning to read as "… automatisation of the rudiments that constitute the process and conventions of reading" and reading to learn as "… more cognitively involving as it employs the reading skill as a learning tool to unlock textual meaning." The reading to learn phase characteristic of reading focus at Grade Four presupposes learners' proficiency at CALP level, which Cummins reckons, requires five to seven years to develop. It is important to note that the five to seven year average time for the development of CALP was developed for a first language speaking context, where the learners have developed the language as tacit knowledge. There can only be the expectation for a greater length of time for the development of CALP within second language contexts. How second language learners, after three or four years of schooling, are expected to develop a competence expected of first language speakers in five to seven years is a question that has not received adequate consideration from LiEP makers. The problematic nature of the 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' shift is well documented even within first language learning contexts (Lesnick et al., 2010).

Shift in Nature of Texts Read
Texts learners read at Grade Four level are not only more voluminous than those they used to read in the Foundation Phase, but have also shifted from the narrative kind which approximate general language use, to expository or informational texts

replete with academic and technical language. What is more, the learning areas increase from four to eight; each with its own texts (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011).

The DBE, Republic of South Africa Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2011) acknowledges that only the learners' Home languages are sufficiently reinforced in and out of school. Setati and Adler (2000:243) equally confirm that "English as target language and LOLT is only heard, spoken and written in the formal school context." This is despite the LiEP making provision for an additional language(s) in the Foundation Phase which, in most cases, assume the status and role of LoLT in Grade Four. Lack of English language infrastructure outside of the classroom accentuates learners' linguistic deprivation in the language assuming LoLT status in Grade Four.

Another challenge for biliterate learners is mapping particular concepts onto two diverse languages. They need to have dual labels for objects and concepts which they cannot concurrently produce in both languages. Because reference to concepts and objects is shared between two languages, where each language's vocabulary is employed infrequently leading to some kind of verbal deficit (Bialystok, 2009), is a challenge the monolingual learner does not have. In a context where the HL is the one reinforced most, it gets more mileage than the FAL. Whether in practice, additive bilingualism among learners is a reality (which would forestall the verbal deficit on account of the combined vocabulary developed in both languages) is questionable, on account of poor literacy development even in the Home Languages, as this paper will argue.

The LiEP, which advocates, but does not mandate the use of the HL as LoLT in the Foundation Phase and the eventual takeover of the FAL as LoLT from Grade Four, makes two assumptions; first, that reading ability and literacy are developed in the HL by end of Grade Three, and second, that the learners have attained the language proficiency levels in the FAL (English) to enable them to transfer L1 reading abilities and literacy to the L2. The reality of the South African context, as will be apparent from the ensuing discussion, and that of most African contexts, hardly supports these assumptions. A review of Cummins' theories is instructive for further interrogation of language issues related to the transitions.

Literature and Theory in Relation to Practice
BICS and CALP
Jim Cummins' widely known theory is arguably the distinction he makes between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

(CALP). Because English-centricism, which occasions the use of English as LoLT from Grade Four is pervasive in South African schools, it necessitates the application of the BICS and CALP dichotomy, which is suited to the English paradigm. Arguments against its applicability even within the pro-English ideology espoused by most African Education systems, is an argument for a paradigm shift in the standard that needs to be applied to African language-speaking learners.

The BICS-CALP distinction suggests that within a language, two distinct languages which denote "… the extent to which an individual has access to, and command of, the oral and written academic registers of schooling" exist (Cummins, 2000:67). As Sibanda (2014:5) argues, BICS proficiency may be "… a linguistic façade masking the learner's serious limitations in CALP" and so "[e]xiting learners into an all-second language program [*sic*] on the basis of their oral fluency may therefore, be detrimental to second language learning." Both learners' HL and FAL should be developed to CALP level as CALP is characteristic of the language of schooling. Whether or not by end of Grade Three, South African learners would have developed their HL and FAL to CALP level is questionable, as the documented pedagogical practices in the South African school system reflect.

In terms of BICS and CALP across languages, Cummins (2000) posits an independent development of languages up to BICS level and their interdependence at the CALP level. Dalvit, Murray and Terzoli (2009) assert that the level of CALP in the FAL is dependent on the extent of its development in the HL. The question to ask is, to what extent is CALP developed in the African languages that are HLs for the majority of learners in the study context? What characterises CALP is the high cognitive demand that language imposes upon the learners (and not the cognitive demand of the task), and the extent to which it allows for discussion of abstract concepts not captured in the here and now. The academic aspect of CALP denotes its use of language that goes beyond the everyday into the academic and technical. Two questions come to mind: is that kind of abstraction of thought and expression captured in the use of African languages at the FP level to allow for transfer to the FAL? Are African languages sufficiently developed to meet learners' academic communication needs transferrable to the use of the FAL as LoLT? Even aspects which do not require real academic or technical language, like rainbow colours, are problematic to teach in African languages. It is also a question as to whether teachers are sufficiently qualified to teach concepts they learnt in English to their learners in African languages. While lack of proficiency in English is problematic within a context where English enjoys

hegemony, the pedagogical approach to its development determines the extent to which learners will access and use it for learning. Near native-like proficiency should not necessarily be the goal, but sufficient scaffolding ought to ensure learner access to, and communication in, the language. The teaching practices documented in some classroom observation research (reviewed later in this paper) are reason enough for some pessimism over whether the teachers are equal to the task of helping learners navigate the language challenges of the classroom.

In reference to HL contexts, Cummins (2000) posits that, unlike BICS which takes two to three years to develop, CALP requires five to seven years to develop, implying the requisite time frames could be longer for FAL contexts. What these time frames suggest is that by end of Grade Three, children are just starting to develop requisite BICS proficiency in the FAL and still need three to four more years to develop CALP proficiency in the language. Despite learners needing some measure of proficiency in the FAL CALP to survive the Grade Four language demands, and notwithstanding the three to four year deficit referred to above, they are catapulted into an English as LoLT instructional context in Grade Four. What is more, there is no basis for assuming that most African language speaking learners would have developed BICS in the FAL by the time they get to Grade Four. A higher level of linguistic proficiency is required of them when they lack the basic grammatical structures and oral language of the FAL as tacit knowledge. The question then is; is the school system operating with some missing grades between Grades Three and Four?

In South Africa, the eighties saw the landmark commissioning of the Macdonald (1990) Threshold Project meant to account for extensive failure among African learners. One cause of the failure was identified as the shift from instruction in the HL to instruction in the FAL too early and too abruptly before learners were ready for it. Three years of instruction in the FAL were deemed insufficient for learners to have developed proficiency to allow for them to benefit from its use as LoLT. Current practice has not taken that finding seriously.

Linguistic interdependence hypothesis
Research has consistently endorsed schooling in the HL as ideal in the early stages of literacy learning and beneficial to future learning (Heugh, 2006; Jiang, 2011; Macdonald, 1990). This agrees with Cummins' (2005) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH), which posits that L1 competences are positively transferrable to corresponding L2 abilities. The literacy operations and constructs transfer across languages and do not

have to be relearned in the other language making the HL "… the launch pad for the second language" (Morgan & Rinvolucri, 2004:8).

Cummins' (2000) iceberg analogy argues that linguistic differences are only surface and peripheral, but that deep down, languages coalesce at the level of CALP. The hypothesis assumes that the HL is sufficiently developed to CALP levels but the question is; by the end of Third Grade, have our learners acquired CALP literacy in their own language to allow for cross-linguistic transfer?

Sibanda (2014:8) observes that, "[w]hile aspects like decoding are transferrable from an African Language to English, the structural and orthographic distinctions between the languages do not allow for full transfer." Some linguistic competences defy cross-linguistic transfer. According to Cummins (2005:4),

> … although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages. This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency from one language to another.

Correlation between languages and the perceived innate linguistic properties characteristic of human languages, even those quite dissimilar, account for the LIH.

Cummins (2005) notes that, for dissimilar languages, transfer is primarily on conceptual and cognitive elements, whereas for cognate languages, it is on both linguistic and conceptual elements. He posits five possible cross-linguistic transfers namely: conceptual (e.g. terminology such as photosynthesis); metacognitive and metalinguistic (e.g. vocabulary acquisition strategies); pragmatic (e.g. non-verbal communication strategies); specific linguistic elements (e.g. word formation); and phonological awareness (words representing particular sounds).

The challenge with cross-linguistic transfer of competencies is not only confined to inadequately developed competencies in the HL, but also to the reality of linguistic competencies that defy cross-linguistic transfer even for cognate languages, no matter how well developed in the HL. This further complicates the transition and renders the LIH inadequate to account for the linguistic needs of learners for the transitional phase. Research has shown that "… lexical and syntactic skills are not likely to be readily transferred between L1 and L2, and these skills are strong predictors of L2 reading abilities" (Jiang, 2011:179). The general assumption has been that the transfer is unidirectional from L1 to L2, rather than bidirectional, which does not account for learners who have better reading skills in the L2 than the L1. Lebese and Mtapuri (2014) identify phonological awareness (sound-symbol correspondence), creative spelling, and other decoding strategies, as aspects that transfer across

languages. While the regularity of African languages with their phonetic spelling allow for grapheme-phoneme correspondence in reading, English is discrepant and opaque in its writing and pronunciation of words and requires lexical reading for some words. The orthographic distance between non-cognates like African languages and English in this case, impacts learners' reading (Bergman, 2006) and the extent of cross-linguistic transfer even for those linguistic aspects that supposedly transfer across languages.

If only conceptual and cognitive elements potentially transfer from African Languages (ALs) to English, on account of the linguistic distance between them, where will learners get the other three elements (from the five that Cummins identifies), which would not transfer, but which are requisite for the use of English as LoLT? By Grade Three, have learners developed the conceptual and cognitive elements that should transfer? Although the other three elements may not transfer, the development of all the five elements in the HL requires, not only the use of the HL as LoLT, but also effective instruction in the HL in the Foundation Phase. I argue that the depth of both HL proficiency and HL instruction needs to be interrogated. Another critical question is; if the LIH reflects the nature of the interplay between the L1 and the L2, why then is learner assessment largely made on their proficiency in the L2 without factoring in their L1 proficiency?

The South African national benchmark tests, the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) (2011) conducted by the Department of Education across the nine provinces, show that Grade Three learners performed poorly in the reading comprehension tests they took in their Home Languages. The assessments indicate poor literacy even in the HL, which begs the question, what will transfer from where? Are the HLs effectively taught as learning areas to develop the requisite repertoire of competencies that learners will use as a springboard for the learning and acquisition of the FAL? From a study within the South African context, Lebese and Mtapuri (2014:85) observe that "[T]he teaching of literacy in the home language is so superficial that there is no solid foundation for the learners to build on either to develop their own language further or to transfer skills to English." If a reasonably sound foundation of learning to read is established in learners' HL, biliterate learners' L2 reading challenge would primarily be a language challenge, a challenge of finding suitable labels. With lack of effective instruction, the L2 reading challenge may be both a reading and a language problem. Proficiency in the language should precede its assumption of LoLT status, which is why the HL is initially the best to use as LoLT since learners already have some proficiency in it. The problem comes when the tacit knowledge (BICS) learners have in their Home Language is regarded sufficient to warrant no further literacy development. Two challenges are apparent; that very little teaching and learning takes place in English in most classrooms, and that literacy development in the home language also seems to stagnate once English takes over.

While the question of whether the HLs can sufficiently take on the role of LoLT in the Foundation Phase is a valid one to consider, I choose rather to question the extent to which HLs are being effectively employed as LoLT to allow for both the development of the languages themselves and the effective mediation of learning. Are the HLs not under-utilised even as they perform the role of LoLT, to account for their lack of development to CALP levels? Are the HLs ones in which learners and teachers are both proficient? It seems the school system, as currently constituted, will be hard-pressed to find a basis for cross-linguistic transfer of linguistic competencies from the HL to the FAL.

Rosekrans, Sherris and Chatry-Komarek (2012) posit a correlation between the length of time learners spend learning in the HL and the effectiveness of their transfer to learning through an additional language. The question then would be; is three years of HL instruction and use as LoLT sufficient time to develop the requisite HL proficiency to allow for cross-linguistic transfer? It is problematic if the FAL is used as LoLT before the requisite proficiency is developed, even in the Home Language. Increase in the duration of HL without concomitant and commensurate development in the literacy skills and reading proficiency of both the HL and FAL needed to allow for a seamless transition to FAL as LoLT does not avail much. Whether literacy is adequately acquired in L1 (to the extent that it allows access to knowledge and information and is applied, practised and situated within the learning context) is not clear, seeing that only three or four years of initial education are in the L1. Cummins' (2000) alternative hypothesis, the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH), needs to be interrogated in relation to the South African linguistic context and instructional practices at the Grade Three-Four transition.

Linguistic threshold hypothesis
The LTH is premised on the assumption that reading in a second language is intricately linked to L2 proficiency as well as L1 and L2 reading. Unlike the LIH, where HL competences need to be developed to proficiency and transferred to the FAL, the LTH introduces a condition upon which cross-linguistic transfer occurs. Alderson (2000: 38–39) represents the LTH by saying "… second-language knowledge is more important than first-language reading abilities, and [...] a linguistic

threshold exists which must be crossed before first-language reading ability can transfer to the second-language reading context." Koda (2007:29) notes that research is unanimous that

> L2 variables were found to have a stronger impact, overriding the variance attributable to L1 experience. Thus, although L2 print information processing is guided by insights stemming from literacy experiences in the two languages, L2 print input appears to be the dominant force in shaping reading sub skills in that language.

Although in South Africa, the Home Language is mostly used in and out of school (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011; Setati & Adler, 2000), the linguistic threshold which needs to be crossed is that of the FAL, whose proficiency matters more for textual comprehension than do HL competencies. According to Pretorius and Mampuru (2007:42), "A lack of L2 knowledge will short-circuit the use of L1 reading skills."

For phonological awareness in the HL to transfer to the FAL for example, learners need sufficient knowledge of FAL to be able to hear syllables and individual sounds. The linguistic distance between the African languages and English is quite high, and may compromise such transfer if the learner is bankrupt in the knowledge of the English sound system.

Instruction through the HL induces proficiency in the FAL, provided exposure to the FAL is sufficient; a condition for cross-linguistic transfer of competencies which most South African FP classrooms hardly meet, considering the Department of Basic Education's acknowledgement of the prevailing poor FAL language infrastructure for English second language learners. The question remains the extent to which the quality of English literacy instruction in the FAL is such as to equip learners with the requisite proficiency threshold in English to allow for cross linguistic transfer from the HL in preparation for its eventual takeover as LoLT in Grade Four.

Appraising the South African Instructional Context
In his study of Grade Three isiXhosa teachers' teaching practices, Sibanda (2014) observed that the teachers, being non-native speakers of English, were not competent in the language, as was manifest in their classroom talk, which was riddled with grammatical inaccuracies, their habitual, constant and needless reversion to the HL in the teaching of English, and in some cases, their teaching of outright erroneous information. Un-principled code switching, employed at the spur of the moment, was rife in the classrooms. It robbed learners of exposure to the FAL, which ironically, was used for assessment. Code switching was an oral strategy for classroom discourse, and English was the language of written communication and assessment. This partly explains the poor reading trajectory and the low proficiency in the FAL with

which learners are initially equipped.

Clegg's (2007) appraisal of the typical African L2 classroom context, characterised by learners with low L2 proficiency; L2 teachers who are not confident in the language; the L2, which is marginally employed in reading, writing and speech; much repetition and memorisation; and lessons lacking a measure of cognitive challenge, is not encouraging either. Lebese and Mtapuri (2014:85) also note that the same routinised teaching practices are employed for both English and the HL despite the manifest differences in the learning trajectories of the languages. From Chick's (1996) study, Hoadley (2010:8–9) observes that

> chorusing and rhythmic chanting in classrooms, and absence of individual, evaluated performances (what he terms 'safe-talk') was a strategy to mask both teacher's and students' poor command of English and their lack of understanding of academic content. In a sense it represented a form of learning that enabled them to hide the absence of substance.

Such pedagogical practices do not scaffold the development of literacy in both the HL and the FAL, and potentially compromise learners' academic achievement more than their poor language proficiency might.

A baseline study of 24 randomly selected primary schools in two rural districts of Limpopo province revealed chorusing, low cognitive demand, weak assessment, slow pacing, poor quality and quantity of reading and writing as characteristics of learning at Grade Three level (Taylor & Moyane, 2005). Learners individually interacted with books for only 3% of classroom time and the typical reading was choral reading of three or four sentences on the board after the teacher. What counted for typical writing was writing decontextualised words and not even sentences. This had the effect of restricting learners' exposure to language and its use.

A large scale study conducted in twenty schools in Limpopo involving 2 hour observations in 77 classes (Grade 1–4) reported by Hoadley (2010) revealed virtually no reading in 12% of the classrooms, and where scarce reading was evident, it lacked teacher modeling and was confined to isolated words and not extended texts. For 69% of the time, no elaboration was made on learner responses. The study concluded that "… the scale of exposure to vocabulary (even pedestrian vocabulary) and text falls way below what should be expected at each grade level observed" (Hoadley, 2010:18). Such communalised, decontextualised instructional practices reported in the studies reviewed renders it naïve to assume that the requisite linguistic resources needed to allow for the use of English as LoLT in Grade Four can be met from learners' four hours a week Grade Three English FAL lessons. Such a pedagogy did not support meaningful and deep learning in whichever

language the practices were.

Clegg (2007) sees the profile of African learners in the classroom as a far cry from the ideal profile of learners characterised by a sound literacy background, solid grounding in Home Language literacy, sufficient exposure to the L2 (manifest in the pedagogical practices reviewed above where very little language was presented and meaningfully recycled), a reasonable measure of proficiency in L2, and comprehensibility of the reading materials used. In view of the nature of the FAL exposure and instruction in the classroom, Pretorius and Mampuru's (2007:42) question as to whether the transfer of L1 reading to L2 still occur when the educational context is less than ideal, becomes pertinent. The broader literature confirms the headstart enjoyed by learners who hail from linguistically and materially rich backgrounds (Rosenberg, 2010) and English language proficiency offers the linguistic capital compatible with the school system's literacy forms and practices in and beyond the Foundation Phase; a linguistic capital the majority of the learners' lack.

Conclusion

No foolproof research-based criteria have been identified for the determination of learners' attainment of the thresholds in L2 reading and proficiency to allow for cross-linguistic transfer of competencies from the HL and for effective use of the FAL as LoLT. An assumption of learners' transcending the thresholds based on years of study views learners as a homogeneous group, and denies their differential exposure to the FAL and militating contextual variables.

The shift in LoLT should not be an arbitrary policy pronouncement based on the years of learning, but should be dependent on learner proficiency in both the HL and the FAL to allow for cross-linguistic transfer of skills, and to enable them to profit from use of the FAL as LoLT. Research is needed to delineate the thresholds that second language learners need to cross on different linguistic aspects for them to profit from the use of the FAL as LoLT, and juxtapose them with the learners' own linguistic competences. Once a significant majority of the students is found to have crossed the requisite thresholds, FAL as LoLT can be implemented. This would ensure learner readiness for the LoLT when it is introduced. What compounds the determination of the linguistic threshold is its relativity to task, rather than it being absolute (Alderson, 2000).

While the language threshold for reading is largely, but not exclusively, a lexical one (Nation, 2006), available literature on the vocabulary thresholds is, however, based on L1 learning contexts, and not on the needs of English L2 learners. An expression of the lexical thresholds in terms of the actual words learners need to know for the transition is key. Sibanda and Baxen (2016) raise interesting factors to consider when determining the key vocabulary needs of learners.

The implication of the LIH is actively teaching for transfer across languages, which, according to Cummins (2005), entails the creation of dual language multimedia books, among other things. The FP should teach for the transition and the key linguistic competencies needed for the transition should be spread and taught across the Foundation Phase grades. The FP should be the foundation providing those tools needed in the Intermediate Phase. If more than three years are needed to provide the requisite foundation then more time needs to be accorded to the FP. Dalvit et al. (2009) cite Sweetnam-Evans (2001), who advocate for the maintenance of HL instruction or late transitional bilingual education, rather than having a FAL compelled on learners by circumstances. In teaching for transfer, monolingual strategies may not be adequate to optimising bilingual development.

The success of the transitional approach (as opposed to the subtractive/immersion and the additive approach) the South Africa education system has adopted is itself not problematic; implementation is. While the approach rests on both the HL and FAL being developed to high proficiency levels in the learners in the FP, the appraisal of the South African classroom instructional landscape suggests that neither the HL nor the FAL literacy is sufficiently developed. In my view, the HL needs to be developed to CALP proficiency levels and the FAL beyond the BICS level to reasonable initial CALP levels. English L2 learners "… must reach a high level of competence in English by the end of Grade Three, and they need to be able to read and write well in English. For these reasons, their progress in literacy must be accelerated in Grades 2 and 3 [*sic*]" (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011:11). The documented instructional practices hardly accelerate learners' literacy progress as envisaged.

Heugh (2006:9) observes of the majority of South African learners that they "simply fall into the gap between learning in the mother tongue and learning through a second language of education, English" and that most teachers are uninformed as to how to help learners bridge and navigate the divide. Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is questionable, as according to Pretorius and Machet (2004:48), "… poor literacy results cannot be solely attributed to second language instruction as teachers and learners are struggling with literacy in the African Languages [AL] as well as English." Related to the language issues is the need to strengthen a multiplicity of variables like teachers' language proficiency, learner motivation, instructional methods used, time allocated to language instruction, and FAL infrastructure outside the

classroom, amongst other aspects.

Note

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