

Translations as a Transformative Form of Language Support to English Additional Language Speaking Students at a South African University

Venicia McGhie¹ and Karen Dos Reis²

Abstract

This paper reports on an innovative translation intervention strategy piloted in the first semester of 2017 in the business faculty at a historically black university in South Africa. The pilot study covered the implementation and monitoring of translating instructions, questions and explanations into two of the students' first languages in the formative assessments in the first-year Management 131 subject. The pilot project was situated within a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm. The research design used for the pilot project was a case study design. A total of 259 first-year students (both English home language and additional language-speaking students) completed a survey. The findings show that the translations in their home languages assisted the students in comprehending the instructions and course content. In so doing, it levelled the playing field and enabled them to perform optimally, resulting in an increased pass rate in the subject. Additionally, the English-speaking students felt the intervention was a much-needed innovation. Also, other additional language-speaking students requested translations to be done in their home languages as well. The findings provide evidence that students who are English additional language speakers need innovative and transformative language interventions to succeed in their respective degree programmes at post-secondary institutions. The implication is that other colleges and universities should consider doing the same for their students to increase the retention and success rates of undergraduate students in higher education.

Keywords: *First-year students; English additional language; Translations; Language support, Intervention strategy; Academic success.*

Introduction

The South African constitution recognises eleven official languages for its multi-racial and multi-cultural population (Department of Basic Education, 2013; Republic of South Africa, 1996). IsiZulu (one of the eleven languages) is the most spoken language, with 11.58 million speakers (23%), followed by IsiXhosa, 8.15 million (16%), and Afrikaans, 6.85 million (13.5%). English is spoken by 4.89 million people (10%), followed by Sepedi with 4.62 million (9.1%), and Setswana with 4.07 million (8%) (Census, 2011; South Africa Information, 2018). However, based on South Africa's colonial past, English, as the fourth most spoken language in South Africa, is perceived as a 'global language', and hence, it is the preferred mode of communication and interaction in academia, trade, the economy and tech-

nology (Brenzinger, 2017; Hurst & Mona, 2017; Xue & Zuo, 2013; Xuyen & Trang, 2021). Consequently, English is used as the medium of instruction in primary schools (from Grade 4 onwards) and most high schools and post-secondary institutions in South Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2013).

The preference for English as the medium of instruction in schools and tertiary institutions in South Africa is problematic on at least three accounts. Firstly, it goes against the language policy and developmental plan for South Africa because it does not promote mother-tongue education. Globally, much research has been done on the issue of having to learn and construct new knowledge in one's home language versus in an additional language (Bada, 2017; Brock-Utne, Desai & Qorro, 2006; Gentry, 2022; Mqgwashu, 2011; Xuyen & Trang, 2021). The research findings show that

Full listing of authors and contacts can be found at the end of this article.



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learners who learn and construct new knowledge in their home language achieve a greater degree of academic success than learners who are English additional language speakers (Bada, 2017; Hoxha & Sumner, 2021; Hurst & Mona, 2017; Mgqwashu, 2011).

Secondly, the multilingual language policy is hindered by public funding constraints and a lack of educational resources (such as a lack of libraries and technological equipment in some schools) (Brenzinger, 2017; Heugh, 2013). Hence, not adhering to and implementing the approved language policy makes it contradictory as the intention is “praiseworthy,” but action is lacking. More recently, the education policy debate has gradually shifted from access to schooling to improving the quality of learning and teaching at post-secondary institutions because more students are failing nationally than succeeding in their respective degree programmes (Council on Higher Education, 2014; 2016; Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2015; Pather, 2018).

Thirdly, it is also about social justice imperatives because the emphasis on English, which is the colonial language, is to the detriment of developing the indigenous languages in South Africa (Hurst & Mona, 2017; Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2015; Mgqwashu, 2011). From a social justice perspective, the authors advocate for the liberation and empowerment of the poor and marginalised groups in society and for the provision of quality education that could lead to economic emancipation and development for all (Council on Higher Education, 2014; 2016; Leibowitz, 2009; Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2015).

It was for the above reasons, among others, that the post-apartheid government in 1995 embarked on a transformation process to eradicate the inequalities of the past through the acknowledgement of eleven official languages (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, while the intention was good in theory, the status quo remains three decades after democracy. The 2015 and 2016 student protests highlighted the need for decolonisation, and the #RhodesMustFall movement specifically foregrounded the language issue and the fact that the colonial language still dominates the medium of instruction at most higher education institutions in South Africa.

The authors argue that transformative learning theory principles should be applied in post-secondary education in South Africa. Transformative learning is based on the premise that human beings interpret their experiences uniquely and that how they see the world results from their perceptions and experiences (Cran-

ton & Taylor, 2012). It is a process of examining, questioning, and revising those perceptions, so critical thought and self-reflection are part of it. The goal should be to teach students to become self-aware and critical, to question norms and perceptions and, in the process, to be transformed (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

Based on the above context, this paper reports on a pilot project conducted during the first semester of 2017 in the business faculty at a historically Black university in South Africa. The pilot project covered the implementation and monitoring of translations as an innovative intervention strategy that aimed to provide language support to new first-year students who were additional language speakers of English in the faculty. Hence, the paper attempts to fill the gap of English additional language speaking students’ challenge to construct meaning in a language that is not their mother tongue (Landsberg, 2005; Mgqwashu, 2011). While much research has been done on the challenges that these learners face in the learning process, not many studies focus on providing intervention strategies to assist them (Bada, 2017; Heugh, 2013; Hurst & Mona, 2017; Pather, 2018). The authors contend that these students need language support to succeed at post-secondary institutions in their respective degree programmes. The innovative translation support intervention strategy discussed in this paper is one such attempt.

Context of the Pilot Project

The university where the pilot project was conducted is one of four institutions of higher learning in one province in South Africa. The apartheid government established the university to provide for the higher education needs of the Coloured population in South Africa. The university’s language of learning and teaching was Afrikaans, one of the eleven official languages. However, because this university was directly involved in the struggle against apartheid, it became known as the “University of the Left” (Walker & Badsha, 1993) and opened its doors to African and Asian students as well (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Volbrecht, 2002). Most of these students came from working class communities and under-resourced public schooling (McGhie, 2012; Mgqwashu, 2011; Venter, 2020). To accommodate the African students who had different home languages, the university changed its language policy to a bilingual one with Afrikaans and English as the languages of learning and teaching (Academic Development Centre, 1998).



As a result of a steady increase in the number of African students over the years, there was a gradual move to English as the only language of learning and teaching at the university, but it was not without disparities and concerns among the university staff and management (Academic Development Centre, 1998; Volbrecht, 2002). In order to resolve the issue, the university management accepted a multilingual approach at its Council meeting held in June 1992 that reads: "Regarding the lingua franca to be used particularly by students, it was generally agreed that students be encouraged to write in the language they feel comfortable with" (Volbrecht, 2002, p. 217). Despite this decision, the university moved overwhelmingly to English as the only language of learning and teaching by the end of 1992. According to Dyers (1996), the reasons for the shift to English were:

- Most lecturers perceived English as the most viable academic lingua franca at that point in history;
- The majority of the lecturers were English-speaking or bilingual (English and Afrikaans), and only a small minority of the lecturers were IsiXhosa-speaking;
- Most students at the time were IsiXhosa-speaking (44%), and surveys conducted among students suggested that most IsiXhosa-speaking students preferred receiving instruction in English rather than in IsiXhosa.

English as the official language of instruction and communication meant that only English was used in lectures and tutorials, tasks, assignments, tests and examinations, and written material and learning resources used by staff. Ironically, the language of the colonisers and the oppressors who instigated discrimination and injustice became the language of teaching and language at this university and still is to this day.

This situation poses language learning challenges for the students (Hurst, E. & Mona, 2017; Landsberg, 2005; McGhie, Moodley & Naidoo, 2015). Since 1993, students who are additional language speakers of English have to learn and construct meaning in English at an advanced level. It is no wonder, then, that the overall throughput rate of the university's students is below the national South African benchmark mark of 29% (Council on Higher Education, 2016; 2017). It is against this backdrop that the authors advocate that transformative learning should take place where the status quo is challenged and students be empowered through the use of language support interventions in their home

languages. Such interventions can provide students with extra assistance to understand better the content of their different subjects and the instructions, questions and explanations they receive for tasks, assignments and tests. In this way, they will know what is required to complete these assessments correctly and, as a consequence, strengthen their chances of passing their assessments and their subjects well. Moreover, first-year students need more academic support than senior students, as they also have to deal with transitional and adjustment challenges (Council on Higher Education, 2017; Letseka, Cosser, Breier & Visser, 2010; Pather, 2018).

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the pilot project was two-fold. First, the authors wanted to provide translations as a transformative intervention strategy in the students' home languages to aid new first-year students' understanding of instructions, questions and explanations in their assignments so that they would know what and how to do their assignments correctly. Secondly, by implementing the intervention strategy, the authors wanted to strengthen first-year students' chances of succeeding academically. The objectives were to:

- legitimise the other two official languages used in the province (Afrikaans and IsiXhosa) in order to strengthen students' understanding and academic integration; and
- increase students' academic performance and success in their different subjects.

To achieve the aim and objectives, the main research question was:

Can the provision of translations as a transformative intervention strategy enhance students' academic success?

Literature Review

The student movements, #FeesmustFall and #RhodesmustFall in 2015 and 2016, were outcries from the students to South African universities' management and the Department of Higher Education to adhere to the Bill of Rights in the South African constitution and the language policy (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Tinto (2009, p. 2) explains, "To be serious about student retention, universities would recognize that the roots of student attrition lie not only in their students and the situations they face, but also in the very character of the educational settings in which they ask students to



learn, namely the classrooms, laboratories, and studios of the campus.”

This quote implies that university management and staff should be mindful of the learning contexts they create for their students and the institutional culture and practices that could alienate them. It means that university management should place the students first and provide the necessary resources and support to assist students’ social and academic integration into the university environment (Tinto, 2006, 2009). The authors agree with Tinto that student success does not happen by chance (Tinto, 2009). According to him, student success results from an intentional, structured and proactive set of coherent, systematic, and carefully aligned strategies, with the first year of university studies as the most critical period to make it happen (Tinto, 2009). As a consequence of this commitment, providing translation as a transformative language intervention strategy to English additional language speaking students is one form of language support that could increase students’ pass rates.

Cummins (2007, 2008) explains that a minimum of five to seven years is needed for English additional language learners to catch up academically, that is, to acquire the language proficiency needed in English to succeed at the tertiary level. Cummins (2007, 2008) distinguishes (based on research that was conducted into the role of language proficiency and bilingualism in academic achievements) between conversation proficiency (what he used to term BICS – basic interpersonal communicative skills) and academic proficiency (formerly termed CALP – cognitive academic language proficiency).

Cummins (2008) further explains that language proficiency in a social situation (BICS) is characterised by interpersonal interaction and requires only basic interpersonal language proficiency from the communicator. Meaning is negotiated by the participants in the conversation and conveyed through language. The context within which the communication takes place supports conveying meaning. Interpretations are embedded in the situation and often associated with non-verbal clues. He explains that CALP is usually language in its primary and written form, and it is not, for example, possible to obtain additional information from non-verbal clues (Cummins, 2008). He argues that more advanced language skills than those required for an informal, personal conversation are needed to read or write a scientific report or academic assignment (Cummins, 2008).

As such, the shortcomings in additional language speaking students’ language skills would inhibit their achievements in academic tasks much more than it would in the case of interpersonal communication (Cummins, 2007, 2008). For this author, academic language proficiency refers to an absolute concept of expertise in understanding and using the specific language employed in an educational context and required to complete academic tasks (Cummins, 2008). Consequently, he argues that academic language proficiency means that one has ‘the language knowledge together with the associated knowledge of the world and metacognitive strategies necessary to function effectively in the language of communication and instruction at the university level (Cummins, 2008).

An inference can be made from Cummins’ explanation of what ‘knowing a language means’ - that English additional language speakers have a demanding and daunting task ahead of them when they embark on the learning journey at the post-secondary level. Most of these students have difficulty achieving good grades in their subjects, not because they are ‘dumb’ or ‘weak’ or ‘lazy’ (labelling terms often ascribed to these students by some academics), but simply because English is not their home language (Gentry, 2022; Hoxha & Sumner, 2021; Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2015). Hence, the English language proficiency of additional language speaking students is not developed sufficiently to enable them to perform well in their different subjects, which is why they need transformative and innovative language intervention support.

Methods

The pilot project was situated within a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014). There were two reasons for this choice. The first was based on the fact that the authors wanted to assist English additional language-speaking students in their daily lived experiences of having to study and construct meaning in English, which is referred to as their ‘natural setting’ (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014). The second reason was that qualitative research acknowledges that reality is socially constructed, as people’s experiences happen within personal, cultural, historical and social contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). The students’ meaning-making process happened within a colonised set-up where they had to acquire and construct advanced knowledge in English. This meant that their own personal, cultural,



historical and social contexts had to be replaced with a 'foreign one' as they had to learn the English language and the associated knowledge and metacognitive strategies necessary to function effectively, as Cummins (2008) explains. These principles are also in line with transformative learning theories – that meaning is negotiated and should be questioned and critically analysed to effect change and allow students to use their agency (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

The research design used for the pilot project was a case study design (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). A case study design assisted in understanding and gaining insights into first-year, English additional language speaking students' language needs, and in decolonising the usage of English as the medium of instruction at the university (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The authors' approach to decolonising the usage of English through the provision of translations was based on Le Grange's (2016) notion that decolonisation is the phenomenon that encompasses providing language support to first-year students. Thus, the authors propose that the provision of translations as a language support intervention strategy for English additional language speaking students can be used as an initial step towards the decolonisation of the use of English in higher education institutions in South Africa and globally.

The pilot project was rolled out in all the first-year subjects in the university's business faculty at the beginning of the first semester in 2017. The lecturers teaching first-year subjects were invited to send their instructions, questions and explanations of their different tutorial assignments (which form part of the formative assessments during the course of the semester) to the teaching and learning specialist who coordinated and facilitated the translation thereof into Afrikaans and IsiXhosa (the two dominant languages spoken in the Western Cape Province where the university is situated). Notices were placed on the university's online student learning platform inviting the students to download the translated assignments. Announcements about this service available to the students were also made in the different lectures during the semester.

The teaching and learning specialist sent the tutorial assignments to a team of translators recommended by the subject lecturers and selected based on a proficiency test. Regular meetings with the translators and the different lecturers were held to ensure that the translations were on par with the English versions. In addition, there was ongoing email communication between the teaching and learning specialist and the

lecturers to monitor and quality assure the process. Lecturers from six different departments in the faculty participated in the process. At the end of the semester, a report was drawn from the students' learning management system that indicated how many students downloaded the translations in the six departments. The report reflected that the most downloads (782) occurred in the Management (Man 131) first-year subject. Based on the fact that the most downloads occurred in this subject, the authors decided to use the information of all the first-year students who were registered for Man 131 as data for this paper. The results are divided into five data sets.

Data Set 1 consists of a breakdown of how many IsiXhosa-speaking students and how many Afrikaans-speaking students downloaded the instructions in the Man 131 subject. Data Set 2 presents a breakdown of the students' home languages, and Data Set 3 gives an account of the two tutorial assignments, which were translated into IsiXhosa and Afrikaans.

Finally, two surveys were conducted towards the end of the first semester to establish the students' and academics' views and experiences of the language support intervention strategy. In keeping with ethical principles, the staff and students were invited to participate voluntarily in the survey. The surveys were sent to all the academics and first-year students in the faculty. For this paper, only the students' responses are analysed and discussed. The responses of the staff will be discussed in another paper. A total of 259 first-year students (both English home language and additional language speaking students) completed the survey. The students had to indicate if they were English home language or additional language speaking students. However, only 100 of the students answered all the questions and provided explanations for their answers. Thus, only the 100 responses (23 English home language and 77 additional language speaking students) were analysed and reported on in this paper.

Four questions were asked in the student survey. These ask whether or not students:

1. Were aware of the language support programme;
2. Downloaded the translated instructions, questions and explanations of the tutorial assignments from the university's student learning management system;
3. Thought that the translated instructions, questions and explanations in the tutorial assignments improved their understanding of the content of their subjects (they had first to tick a box, (Yes or No),



- and then explain their answers); and
- Whether they thought there was a need for such an intervention (again, they had to tick a box (Yes or No) and then explain their answers).

The students' responses to the four questions were quantitative (yes/no answers) and were entered into Excel software to present the number of similar and different responses visually. These responses are referred to as Data Set 4.

The students' explanations to the last two questions were qualitative in nature and analysed through content analysis, using a three-stage, open coding process (Henning, 2004). The first stage involved a general reading and noting of the explanations on a Word document. The second stage involved a second, closer reading where similar responses were categorised under main themes and entered on another Word document. The last stage of the open coding process involved a further reduction of the responses into sub-themes on a new Word document. The authors worked through the responses carefully and requested another colleague to check and verify that the responses were correctly documented on the three Word documents. These explanations are referred to as Data Set 5.

Results

The results from the four quantitative data sets are presented first and, after that, the themes and sub-themes identified in the qualitative data set.

Data Set 1: Downloaded IsiXhosa and Afrikaans translated tutorials in Management 131

As stated in the previous section, 782 downloads were made. Of these, 263 downloads were made by the IsiXhosa-speaking students for tutorial assignment 1 and 243 for the second tutorial, while the Afrikaans-speaking students made a total of 164 downloads for tutorial 1 and 112 downloads for tutorial 2. Table 1 reflects the downloads in percentages.

The percentages for the IsiXhosa downloads are more or less on par with the number of students who reported that IsiXhosa is their first language (refer to Data Set 2). This, however, is not the case for the number of Afrikaans downloads made, as only 47 students

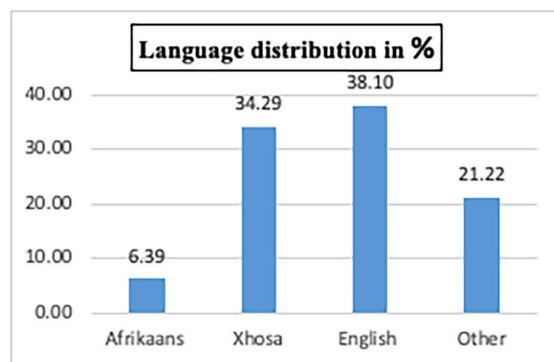


Figure 1. Percentages of different languages spoken by students registered in Management 131, 2017.

declared that Afrikaans was their first language (refer to Figure 1). Possible reasons for the discrepancy are discussed in the next section.

Data Set 2: Language distribution of registered first-year students in Management 131

A total of 735 first-year students was registered in Management 131 in the first semester of 2017. Of the 735 students, 47 indicated on their registration information that they were Afrikaans-speaking students (6.39%), 252 IsiXhosa-speaking (34.29%), 280 English (38.10%), and 156 other language speakers (21.22%). Figure 1 gives a visual presentation of the percentages.

Figure 1 shows that 61.90% (that is 6.39 + 34.29 + 21.22) of the students registered in Management 131 were English additional language speaking students, and 38.10% were English home language speakers. This finding reflects the university's general trend of language distribution (Institutional Planning Office, 2017).

Data Set 3: Comparison of students' performance in the two tutorial assignments

Figure 2 illustrates the students' performance averages in the two tutorial assignments translated compared with the English-first-language-speaking students' average results.

The results indicate that the Afrikaans-speaking students' average was 78.6%, the IsiXhosa-speaking students was 71.90%, and the English mother tongue students' average was 76.21%.

Table 1. Downloaded IsiXhosa and Afrikaans translations

IsiXhosa translations	Afrikaans translations
Tutorial 1: 263 downloads (33.6%)	Tutorial 1: 164 downloads (20.9%)
Tutorial 2: 243 downloads (31%)	Tutorial 2: 112 downloads (14.3%)



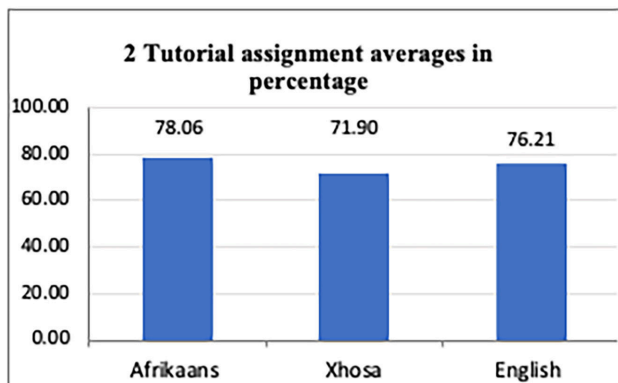


Figure 2. Students’ performance averages in percentages for the two tutorial assignments

The results further reflect that the students who used the translated assignments’ instructions, questions and explanations indicated that the translations assisted them in better understanding the work covered in the module. Lastly, most students (92%) thought there was a need for such an intervention, and they provided reasons for their stance in Data Set 5.

Data Set 5: Students’ explanations of the answers given to the last two questions

Two main themes were identified from the students’ explanations for their answers to Questions 3 and 4: (i) positive explanations and (ii) challenges identified. Four sub-themes were identified under the first theme and two under the second theme. These are described below.

Theme 1: Positive explanations.

Sub-theme 1: Better understanding of the subject matter

The thirty-nine students who downloaded the translated assignments explained that it assisted them in understanding the content of the subject better. Below are examples of pertinent responses received:

- *It helps me a lot as I did not understand at first.*
- *It helps because I understand the work better.*
- *I understand the work much better.*

Thus, the fact that students felt that the translations assisted them in better understanding the content of the subject could be one of the contributing reasons why the Afrikaans-speaking students’ performances in the two tutorial assignments were better than the English mother tongue students’ performance.

Sub-theme 2: Receiving translated assignments was advantageous

Thirty-two students responded positively and said receiving the assignments in their first language was ‘great’. Below are specific sentiments expressed by the students:

- *The program is doing a great job!*
- *The translated tutorials are a good idea.*
- *This is a great service and students are lucky to have this service available.*

These comments imply that the students were satisfied with the intervention. In addition, the third response implies that the students did not think of the intervention as a right they had. Instead, receiving the

Table 2: Students’ responses to four survey questions

Questions asked	Number of responses	
Were you aware of the language support programme?	Yes: 71	No: 29
Did you download the translated instructions, questions, and explanations for the tutorial assignments?	Yes: 39	No: 61
Did these assist you in better understanding the work in the module?	Yes: 39	No: 0
Do you think that there is a need for such an intervention?	Yes: 92	Not sure: 8

Data Set 4: Quantitative responses from the students’ survey

Table 2 reflects the 100 students’ responses to the four questions asked in the survey.

The results show that 71 students (71%) were aware of the language support programme, while 29 said they were unaware. Thirty-nine of the 100 students downloaded the translated tutorials, and 61 did not. One can infer that the 23 English home language students were part of the 61 who did not download the translations because there was no need to do so. Hence, the remaining 38 were English additional language speaking students, which could mean that they considered downloading the instructions as ‘extra work’ and decided not to download the translations. Alternatively, it could have been some other language-speaking students who did not download the translations as they were not in their first languages. However, it should be noted that the other Afrikaans downloads (see Table 1) could have been made by some of the remaining 159 students whose responses were omitted, as explained in the Methods section.



tutorial assignments in IsiXhosa and Afrikaans was perceived as 'being lucky', which could be inferred as 'being privileged'. An inference can be made that the students did not expect to receive translations in their first language as they knew that the university used English as its medium of instruction. Also, language support interventions in the form of translations are not standard practice at the school level (the policy does not require schools to implement such interventions), which could be another reason why the students regarded it as a 'privilege' (Department of Basic Education, 2019).

Sub-theme 3: Empathy showed by English home language speaking students

Another positive response was that the 23 English home language speaking students who completed the survey showed empathy towards students who were additional language speakers of English. They explained that having the tutorial assignments translated into IsiXhosa and Afrikaans was an innovative idea because these students would better understand what the assignments were about, which could assist them in doing better in their modules. Certain students provided the following recommendations for the way forward:

- *I feel it will benefit second language students tremendously.*
- *I think the translated tutorials do assist students, as English is not their first language.*
- *Basically, I think translated tutorials are good because some students struggle to understand in English.*

Moreover, one student felt that this initiative could lower the dropout rates. An inference can be made that the student was aware that learning in English is challenging for additional language speaking students and that it could be one of the reasons why many students fail and do not complete their degree programmes on time. Thus, the student thought that receiving the tutorial instructions and explanations in Afrikaans or IsiXhosa would aid the students' understanding and strengthen their chances of passing their subjects, which correlates with the aim and objectives of this paper.

Sub-theme 4: Creating equality

One student noted:

- *I think they are a good venture, they create a sense of equality.*

The comment from the student implies that he/she thought that the translations levelled the playing field.

That is, students who were additional language speakers of English could make sense of and understand the tutorial assignments better because it was in their mother tongue (similar to students who received it in English and who were English home-language speaking students). In this instance, an inference could be made that this response alluded to decolonising the curriculum and breaking the dominance of English in the classroom, on the one hand, and providing these students with an equal opportunity to pass their respective subjects, on the other hand.

Theme 2: Challenges identified

Sub-theme 1: A need to translate the assignments into other languages

Nine students suggested that the assignments' instructions, questions and explanations should also be translated into other languages and not only into IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. Below are some of the students' suggestions:

- *IsiZulu must be catered for.*
- *I think all 11 languages should be catered for.*
- *Consider adding other languages.*

These students' responses indicate a need for language support and that IsiXhosa and Afrikaans speaking students benefited from the support, but they did not. It thus provides evidence for the argument in this paper, which is that English additional language speaking students need transformative language support interventions to improve their understanding of instructions, questions and explanations given in tutorial assignments, tests and examinations in their different subjects.

Sub-theme 2: Not making use of the translation provided

Seven students indicated that they did not download the translated assignments because they were "lazy" and thereby not "creating more work" for themselves. The students concurred with the response below:

- *I was too lazy to download the translations.*

This response is not uncommon, as there will be students who do not want to make the extra effort to help themselves. At least they were honest in explaining why they did not use the support provided



Discussion

The analysis in the previous section focuses on three main issues, namely:

1. The language distribution of the first-year students who were registered for the Management 131 subject;
2. The results of the students in the two tutorial assignments that were translated, and
3. The students' survey responses, which can be grouped into three findings: First, the translations aided the students' understanding of the content in the module. Second, it was an innovative transformative idea to provide language support in the form of translations to English additional language speaking students. Third, translations of the formative assessments should also be provided to students who speak other South African languages.

Figure 1 shows the language distribution of the first-year students registered for the Management (MAN 131) subject in the first semester of 2017, where most of the downloads occurred. However, if one compares this finding with the results in Table 1, it is only the IsiXhosa finding that correlates with the number of students who reported IsiXhosa as their first language. Table 1 reflects that only 47 students indicated that Afrikaans is their first language, but 163 Afrikaans translations were downloaded for the first assignment and 112 for the second.

A possible reason for the discrepancy in the Afrikaans downloads could be that the same students could have downloaded the translations more than once. It could also be that some of the students who indicated that they were English home language speakers downloaded the translations as well because they came from Afrikaans-speaking home environments. This inference points to the dominance of English and the fact that it is regarded as the 'language of choice' (Bada, 2017; Heugh, 2013; Xue & Zuo, 2013). Moreover, both students and their parents regard English as 'superior' to the other indigenous languages, as it is seen as the 'global language that can open doors' and as a result, parents would intentionally use English to communicate with their children so that the children can become fluent in the English language (Dyers, 1996, 2001; Xue & Zuo, 2013). That is why the children, when they come to university, regard English as their first language, despite their parents speaking Afrikaans (Dyers, 1996, 2001). It could be argued that the preference for the English language is one of the reasons why the other indigenous

languages in South Africa are not further developed and strengthened (Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2015; Matsinhe, 2004; Mgwashu, 2011).

However, this inference also speaks to Cummins' (2008) division of BICS and CALP and his explanation of language proficiency in a social situation (BICS), which is characterised by interpersonal interaction and requires only basic interpersonal language proficiency from the communicator because meaning is negotiated by the participants in the conversation and is conveyed using language. As such, students who come from an Afrikaans-speaking background and switched to English only will have BICS that is better developed than their CALP. As a result, they will think that they have mastered the English language and will regard themselves as English mother tongue students. However, when it comes to CALP, they will need assistance, which could be why more Afrikaans downloads were made (163 and 112) than the number of students (47) who reported they were Afrikaans-speaking.

The second finding that emerged from the data is the results presented in Figure 2. The results reflect that the Afrikaans-speaking students' performance (78.6%) was higher than the English-speaking students (76.21%), followed by the IsiXhosa-speaking students' performance (71.90%). Thus, the results validate what the students reported in the survey – the translated tutorial assignments improved their understanding of what was required of them and, in so doing, enhanced their performance in the two assessments. In addition, the fact that their results compared favourably to the results of their English counterparts is further proof that the transformative translation intervention strategy produced the desired result. When students are empowered to understand better instructions, questions and explanations given in formative assessments, they could perform close to, or better than, the English mother tongue students, as the results showed. This finding is also in line with what Cummins (2008) argues for – that English additional language speaking students require language support to succeed academically since they have to learn the language of instruction and, at the same time, learn the academic content. It also speaks to an element of transformative learning in that the students were provided with the opportunity to read and understand the instructions in their own language, and not in the colonial language.

However, the authors are mindful that other factors (such as having sufficient time to complete the tutorial assignments and consultation with the lecturer and



tutors) could have also contributed to the students' good performance. Also, since this was a pilot project, there were no previous findings that could be used to compare or benchmark the students' performance. The only comparison that could be made was with the overall pass and failure rates of the MAN 131 subject in 2016, where there was a 74.2% pass rate and a 25.8% failure rate. The pass rate of MAN 131 in 2017 was 89.5%, and the failure rate was 10.5% (Department of Management, 2017). This means that there was an increase of more than 15% in the pass rate in 2017. The authors propose that the provision of translations in the students' mother tongues contributed to the increase in the pass rate in the module in 2017.

Lastly, the fact that the English home language students and the students who downloaded the translated assignments felt that the intervention strategy was an innovative and much-needed step, underscores the need for students to be taught in their native language as it will improve and enhance their understanding of what they read and learn (Cummins, 2008; Department of Basic Education, 2018, 2019; Whiteside, Gooch & Norbury, 2017). This need for mother-tongue education is further highlighted by the nine students who indicated that translations into their first languages should also be provided since they spoke some of the other eleven languages.

Smith (1999) and Chilisa (2012) advocate that the concepts of "deconstruction and reconstruction" question that which is understood as "the norm" in order to rewrite history so that indigenous people's norms, traditions and cultures rightfully be acknowledged as legitimate and valid. Similarly, transformative learning pedagogy emphasises the need to question and challenge experiences and perceptions from a colonial nature. These should be critically analysed, and students should be empowered and encouraged to exercise their agency in a transformative manner. In this regard, the additional language-speaking students exercised their right to construct meaning in their home languages, which form part of their culture, values and traditions. They were pleased that they were provided with the opportunity to receive the instructions, questions and explanations of the tutorial assignments in their mother tongues. Therefore, the translation intervention strategy validated the students' knowledge and lived realities, which is what Gentry (2022), Hurst and Mona (2017) and Cranton and Taylor (2012) also argued for.

Equally important is the comment by another student - "...they [the translated instructions, questions

and explanations] create a sense of equality." The two responses (an innovative idea and equality) drive the message home – that indigenous languages should be acknowledged, respected, and embraced so that transformative learning can occur. The authors propose that students and the broader communities in South Africa and elsewhere should be allowed to practise their right to be taught in their home languages. If that is not feasible (as is the current situation in South Africa), transformative language support interventions should be in place to assist these students, which is what Tinto (2009), Cummins (2007, 2008), Strydom and Mentz (2010) and Whiteside et al. (2017) (amongst others) suggest should happen.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Three overall findings could be inferred from the analysis and discussion of the data collected for this pilot project.

- There are still more students who are English additional language speaking students in the business faculty at the university than those who are English mother tongue speakers;
- The translation intervention strategy aided the English additional language speaking students' comprehension of the instructions, questions and explanations received in the tutorial assignments. In so doing, it levelled the playing field and enabled them to perform optimally, which increased the pass rate in the Management 131 subject.
- The acknowledgement from English-speaking students that the intervention strategy was an innovative idea, together with the additional language speaking students who suggested that it should be done for their languages as well, is a strong indication that there is a need for transformative language support for students whose first language is not English.

Therefore, it is recommended that more language support interventions be created and implemented for additional-language-speaking students of English to assist them in better understanding the content of their different subjects.

A second recommendation is that the faculty and the university management attempt to provide more financial support so that translation interventions are also offered to students who speak the other official languages.



The last recommendation is that the translation support intervention should also be extended to second and third-year students so that they, too, can benefit from an enhanced understanding of instructions, questions and explanations in their assignments and be able to perform as well as the English home language speaking students and even better, as was the case for the Afrikaans-speaking students.

The authors acknowledge that this was a pilot project, and they did not have a control group or a pre-and post-test to compare the results. However, the fact that the students passed the two assignments well, none of them failed, and the overall pass rate in the module increased by 15% demonstrates that language support interventions are essential enablers for students who are not mother-tongue speakers of English at post-secondary institutions.

Therefore, the findings discussed draw attention to the fact that higher education institutions globally should take the lead in supporting and advocating for language support interventions in the form of translations for both formative and summative assessments for their students who are non-native speakers of English. In so doing, undergraduate students' retention and success rates would increase. Finally, providing innovative translations as a form of language support will instil a sense of equality among all students regardless of their home languages. Such provisions will assist with the quest for transformative education.

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Authors

¹ Venicia McGhie (vmcghie@uwc.ac.za) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.

² Karen Dos Reis (kdosreis@sun.ac.za) is a Research Associate at the University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

