

Language policy in a multilingual school: the case of Windhoek International School in Namibia

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Abstract

The study presented in this paper examined language-in- education policy in a multilingual international school in Namibia. The central concern of this paper was to find out how language policy addresses possible language conflicts in this school in light of the fact that in studies of language structure, there is a presumption that all languages are equal and in sociolinguistic terms, there is an ecological perception which holds that all languages should be allowed to flourish (Hymes 1992). The conclusion drawn from the study is that in multilingual educational environments such as Windhoek International School (WIS), the choice of language as Medium of Instruction (MoI) is highly determined by the linguistic habitus. On the hand, the language(s) used outside of the classroom is/are influenced by the nature of the linguistic space. In this school, the language-in-education policy comprises a written language policy, that is, the overt policy which is monolingual and a covert policy that is found implicitly in the daily practices of learners and teachers. The covert policy may be described as multilingual and multi-voiced.

Keywords: multilingual, Language-in-education policy, linguistic markets, linguistic habitus, Windhoek International School

Introduction: spaces of multilingualism

Although in studies of language structure, there is a presumption that all languages are equal and in sociolinguistic terms, there is an ecological perception which holds that all languages should be allowed to flourish (Hymes, 1992), this is rarely the case in practice. Typically, in spaces where a variety of community languages is used, either one of the stronger local languages or a widely distributed international language with high status is selected as lingua franca. Various social circumstances determine that in most multilingual communities, some languages are given preferences over others in public spaces such as schools (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu (1991), states that ‘linguistic markets’-that is, the spaces in which human beings use language are hierarchical. These spaces give different values to different languages and people’s competences in them. In addition, the values that different languages enjoy are dependent on the background and social status, among other things, of the individual who uses the language.

Objectives of the paper

The central concern of this paper is: how does language policy address possible language conflicts regarding which languages to use and to develop in multilingual spaces such as schools? The paper offers an in-depth understanding of the challenges posed by multilingualism in one globalised educational context in Namibia. Globalisation has brought the world together but has also come with challenges such as language diversity and interaction that needs to be addressed in a systematic manner (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005: 198). This study examined the language policy of WIS and took a particular interest in the kinds of language policy that determine which languages are used in education in a context where both teachers and learners are L1 speakers of a considerable number of different languages.

Language policy

Shohamy (2006, 47 – 48) describes language policy, whether it is explicitly or implicitly given, as the “primary mechanism for manipulating and imposing language behaviours as it relates to decisions about languages and their uses in education and society”. Shohamy (2006, 48) also states that through language policy, “decisions are made regarding the preferred languages to be used, where, when and by whom”.

Shohamy makes a distinction between overt and covert language policies. Overt language policies refer to “those language policies that are explicit, formalised, *de jure*, codified and manifest” while covert language policies refer to those that are “implicit, informal, unstated, grassroot and latent” The distinction is used to elaborate the difference between the narrow and broader meaning of the term language policy. Thus, the real policy is one which can be observed, understood and interpreted (Shohamy (2006, 50)). Spolsky (2004, 2153) has pointed out that even where there is a formal written language policy, its effects on language practices is

neither guaranteed nor consistent¹. Thus, it is through the study of language practices that the covert language policy may be determined. Schiffman (1996, 3) proposition of linguistic culture is at the heart of his explanation of language policy. He defines linguistic culture as:

[the] sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures and all other cultural “baggage” that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture. Linguistic culture is also concerned with the transmission and codification of language and has bearing also on the culture’s notions of the value of literacy and the sanctity of text (Schiffman 1996, 2-3).

In other words, language policy, that is, the outcome of “decision-making about language” is inextricably connected to linguistic culture. He argues that defining language policy with an emphasis on its explicit and overt features is inadequate. According to him, such a definition ignores or overlooks the cultural notions about language that may profoundly affect the implementation of a language policy. Shohamy (2006, 50) also works with this distinction in her reference to “real” and “declared” language policies. She contends that the real language policy is one which can be observed, understood and interpreted. She contrasts this with the declared policy that is given in official documents, even though in many instances it is not reflected in the language practices of a given community. Language policy exists even where it has not been made explicit or established by authority.

Thus, Schiffman (1996, 3) advocates an approach to the study of language policy that incorporates both the overtly declared policies and the covert *de facto* language policies. He believes that this approach will assure due recognition of the mismatches between what is provided in the law and what happens in practice. In multilingual communities, where the languages of various members have varying statuses, language policies take care of providing (or withholding) language rights. One of the functions of a language policy is to decide between multilingual or monolingual strategies in the organisation of discourses within public institutions (Wolff 2010, 2).

Spolsky (2004, 2153) has proposed a framework that shows the difference between policy and practice. First, he refers to what he terms “language beliefs” which are the ideologies that underlie each language policy. Second, there is the “language practice” which he defines as the ecology of language that focuses on the actual language practices that take place in the particular context. Third, he introduces the term “language management” to refer to the formulation and proclamation of an explicit plan or policy, usually but not necessarily written in a formal document, about language use in institutional settings.

¹The explicitness of a policy does not guarantee its implementation. The stated policy is often at odds with language use. The declared policy that is given in official documents is often not reflected in language practices.

Multilingual language in education policies

According to Spolsky (2004, 2155), one of the most important domains where language policy is applied is the educational environment. Shohamy (2006, 76) broadly defines language-in-education-policy (LiEP) as a way through which authorities create *de facto* language practices in educational institutions. Specifically, she contends that LiEP refers to how policy decisions about language in the contexts of schools are made in relation to home languages; thus the LiEP determines which language(s) will be used as MoI. The factors that determine the language policy of a school may include the sociolinguistic situation in which the school has been established, the school's ideology which often is not explicitly given but implicitly articulated in the organisational structures and practices, the wide distribution of a dominant language of wider communication such as English or French in African countries and the particular understandings of language rights circulated within the school as a community of practice. The policy can either steer in the direction of greater support of the lingua franca, or in the direction of respect for and maintenance of the local diversity. In the latter case, a bilingual education policy is selected with a view to protecting languages with smaller numbers of L1-speakers and to assuring access to education to L1-speakers of languages other than the chosen MoI.

Very often in multilingual communities, the MoI is the L2 of a significant number of learners. In such circumstances, the authorities manipulate and impose language decisions in such a way that they turn ideology into practice through formal education. Nonetheless, on some occasions, LiEP is also used to introduce alternative language policy if there is a demand from different sections of the educational community such as from grassroot organisations. LiEP always implies some form of language choice. Such a choice may be exercised by a body with authority over a defined group of people such as the school governing body. It may be made explicit in the formal language management in the planning decisions of an authorised body; alternatively, it may be implicitly given in established practices where the choice was informally made by those in power. Shohamy (2006, 77) states that in these situations, the LiEP is more difficult to detect as it is "hidden" from the public eye. Thus the policy would have to be gleaned from real language practices through the study of textbooks, teaching practices and especially testing systems. In education there may be a need to select a single language use in development. Consideration has to go to which kinds of educational resources are available – not only in the form of published work and teaching aids, but also in terms of financial support for development of resources for the languages of lower status. It must be mentioned that where the governing body of an educational institution adopts one language as a lingua franca and medium of instruction (MoI), the demands of developing proficiency in that MoI for examination purposes are considerable.

A number of basic questions arise regularly in LiEP. First and foremost is the decision regarding the language to be used as a MoI. In state (public) schools, there is often little choice left to the school itself. The case may be different in private schools where such a decision may rest with the governing body, parents, the examining authority or a combination of several

participants. The choice may be made explicit in the formal language management decisions of an authorised body or it may simply be introduced by undocumented mutual agreement. The school may select a single language as its desired MoI or it may decide to use more than one language in classrooms.

Literature review

The language of education in multilingual societies has always been a concern of educators. As a result a number of studies have been done on LiEP in schools in different countries. For example, De Klerk (2002) focused on the decision of Xhosa-speaking parents in South Africa to send their children to English-medium schools. Other research has looked at the status of English in urban townships of Gauteng which is a multilingual community (Slabbert and Finlayson, 2000). Probyn et al. (2002) have been concerned with the gap between the theory and practice of South African LiEP. Other studies have addressed the controversy that surrounds which language to use in schools in Ghana (Owu-Ewie 2006; Davis & Agbenyega, 2012) or have explained the tensions that arise in translating multilingual language policy into classroom practice for multilingual populations seeking fair access to a globalizing economy (Hornberger and Vaish, 2009). Further research has examined the inherent contradictions in language policy that embraces multilingualism at the national level but is applied differently in the school setting (Nyaga & Anthonissen, 2012).

De Klerk's (2000) study in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa found that among the reasons parents gave for choosing an English – MoI school for their children were the need for a better education, the recognition that English is an international language and the hope that English would open the door to more job opportunities for their children. Slabbert and Finlayson (2000, 128) who undertook an ecologically informed study of language use and identity documented the high status of English among black people, for whom use of English marks the speaker as “educated, affluent, serious or authoritative”. In a related work, they note the ongoing threat to multilingual education posed by the common perception of English as a language of access (Finlayson and Slabbert, 2004). From the research it became obvious that although at the macro and policy levels multilingualism is deemed to be a right, in the classroom and at the micro levels English monolingualism is the practice.

Similarly, Probyn et al. (2002) in their investigation into the language policy and practice in four Eastern Cape districts in South Africa revealed an obvious gap between the policy goals and what actually happened in schools (Probyn et al 2000, 1). For instance, from a theoretical perspective, the research argued that although policy at the national level in South Africa was a response to particular political imperatives and pedagogical perspectives, the practical implementation of the policy in these schools was determined by a different set of imperatives (Probyn et. al. 2002, 31). In addition, it was clear that school governing bodies were not well equipped to make decisions about school language policy which met the requirements of the national LiEP. Furthermore, economic imperatives to acquire English overrode considerations of multilingualism and additive bilingualism that were expressed in the policy.

Hornberger & Vaish (2009) investigated the tensions in translating multilingual language policy into classroom practice in three different countries, and especially attended to the contradictory role of and quest for English as an instrument of decolonisation for multilingual populations seeking fair access to a globalising economy. The research focused on access to the linguistic capital of English and how multilingual classroom practice tries to meet the demands of the community for that access. It looked at English as MoI at policy and classroom levels in India, Singapore, and South Africa separately and comparatively. Indeed the language ideology of all the three countries, at both official and popular levels encompassed a view of multilingualism as a resource.

In India, Hornberger and Vaish (2009) uncovered that despite India's Three Language Formula (TLF) of 1968, many Indian children are educated in a language which is not their mother tongue. Singapore's bilingual policy with English as MoI and mother tongues taught as second languages leaves the linguistic capital of multilingual children who speak a pidginized variety of English (informally referred to as "Singlish") out of the equation, since the school MoI is Standard English. In South Africa it emerged that though its Constitution of 1994 embraces multilingualism as a national resource, raising nine major African languages to national official status together with English and Afrikaans, in practice an unequal dispensation remained. Even after the abolition of apartheid in 1994, for various reasons including the upward mobility afforded by English, large numbers of African language-speaking parents seek to place their children English – MoI schools. The Hornberger and Vaish (2009) study shows up the conflict between a drive for English on the one hand and spreading the value of multilingualism on the other. However, the same study (2009, 12) concluded that the use of mother tongue in the classroom, or as in the case of Singapore the judicious use of the quotidian register, can be a resource through which children can access Standard English while also continuing and indeed cultivating multilingual practices inclusive of their own local languages.

In Ghana, although the country's MoI policy stipulates the use of the L1 of localities as the MoI from primary year one to three and English as MoI from primary year four onwards (MOESS 2008), the empirical findings of Davis and Agbenyega (2012, 346) showed that the language policy was not being enforced in practice. The study revealed that Ghanaian headteachers and teachers had a more positive attitude towards English as MoI than towards the L1 of learners because of the perceived prestige of English in the Ghanaian society, its supposed linkage with high academic performance and its economic value.

Nyaga and Anthonissen (2012) refer to language-in-education policy in Kenya, where a gap between *de jure* and *de facto* policy is apparent and little progress has been made in implementing a policy that encourages the use of Kenyan mother tongues in early primary school education. In – class observation and interviews with teachers indicated that in the urban and peri – urban schools, where the learner population is highly multilingual, the policy has not been implemented in line with its explicit intention. Even in the rural areas where there is comparatively minimal diversity, practical aspects of the use of the mother tongue in education

seemed not to be in accordance with the policy provisions. In spite of the diversity of languages in Kenya, the most important languages in education are Kiswahili and English which are widely used as lingua francae. In late primary and secondary education and even at the early primary school level, English is the only language of formal testing.

Namibia's language-in-education policy

The paper presents a complex picture of multilingual repertoires and practices in an international high school in Windhoek, Namibia and how language policy is used to address the language imbalance in the school. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to reflect on language policy and policy implementation both inside and outside of the classroom at Windhoek International School (WIS). It aimed, in part, at reflecting on language policy and its implementation in general and in particular at WIS.

Formerly, a German colony and later administratively entrusted to South Africa, Namibia did not have English as its colonial language. The languages of power were German and Afrikaans. It was only after independence in 1990 that the Namibian constitution proclaimed English as its official language (Constitution, Republic of Namibia 1990 Sub-Article 3.1). As far as the linguistic diversity is concerned, there are thirteen written languages which have standardised orthography in the country (PRASE-Occasional Papers No. 37, 9).

In order to appreciate the language ecology of Namibia, it is appropriate that Namibia's LiEP is subject to scrutiny. Namibia's LiEP has been influenced by its history, linguistic diversity and educational goals. Namibia's LiEP recognises the instrumental role of language in the realisation of educational goals and works with the presumption that all languages are equal in terms of language structure. It has worked with the ecological perception which holds that all languages should be allowed to flourish, and thus acknowledges the cultural value of the indigenous Namibian languages. While recognising the sociolinguistic reality of various language communities, it decided that one language should be used as MoI and lingua franca. Educationally, the choice of language for education has been motivated by the desire to take advantage of the linguistic capital of English (Ruiz 1984). Thus, specifically, the Discussion Document which eventually became the Language Policy for schools in Namibia (2003: 1 – 4) stipulates that the MoI for the early years, that is, (Grade 1 – 3) should be the L1 of learners. As of Grade 4, English becomes the only MoI. The rationale for the policy is that for concept formation, literacy and numeracy attainment, it is necessary that learners be taught in their L1. Schools that wish to use English as the only MoI as from the first school year are only allowed to do so with the permission of the Minister of Education. Grade 4 is the stage where it is expected that there will be a full transition from learners' various L1s to English, while the L1 is expected still to be taught as a subject. In addition, every learner is required to learn two languages from Grade 1 onwards with one of them being English. Foreigners could, however, study only one language (The Language Policy for Schools in Namibia: Discussion Document 2003: 1 – 4). These are governmental requirements for public school where the state prescribes the policy. However, there are no such prescriptions as far as private schools are concerned.

Research site: Windhoek International School (WIS)

As mentioned earlier, the site for this study was WIS. The school is one of a small number of private and independent schools in Namibia and was established to serve the educational needs of the international and local community of the capital city, Windhoek. WIS is fully accredited by the American based New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and the Council of International Schools (CIS). WIS runs two academic programmes, namely, the Cambridge International programme based on the Cambridge system used in the United Kingdom and the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme based in Cardiff, also in the United Kingdom. These academic programmes prepare learners for participation in well-organised international educational examinations. In terms of what is taught, the school subscribes to an educational programme which intends to prepare students for advanced tertiary education in an international market. A school with such an international positioning is of particular interest when it comes to the recognition of indigenous language variety while also giving access to a global language.

WIS was selected as a site for the study for a number of reasons. It is a site in constant flux and a meeting point for learners and teachers from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Most of the students who come from outside of Namibia will spend only two to three years in the school before their parents who are in the country for international assignments leave for other duty posts in other countries. The idea is that such students will receive a foundation that will allow easy integration in a new educational environment elsewhere. The school is thus a constantly changing site where learners from different nationalities and cultures meet. In addition, the school was selected because the student body represents a diverse range of nationalities and cultures which include a tapestry of languages.

Methodology

The study was qualitative and the sampling technique was purposive in that the participants were selected on the basis of their multilingual repertoires. The study used a mixed method approach for the collection of data. The first source of data was the school's records. Data were accessed from the school records on how many languages were represented as L1s among learners and teachers as well as the numbers of L1 speakers of each language. The school records were used to find information on the different linguistic backgrounds of teachers and students. The school records also provided data on the number of students whose tested levels of English proficiency indicated that they needed additional lessons in the MoI. In addition, the study established the number of local Namibian languages that were represented among learners in the school.

The population of WIS is multilingual and multicultural. At the time of the study, the school had a learner population of 446. Across the entire school 263 reported English as their

L1. A total of eight Namibian languages were reported as L1 and spoken by 90 learners across the entire school. In addition, seven other African languages were used by eight learners as L1. Eight European languages spoken by 78 learners as L1 were also represented in the school. Finally, seven other languages spoken by 21 learners were represented across entire the school. The following data was gathered about the language profile of teachers across the school. Eleven teachers reported English as their L1 while 32 teachers reported LotE as L1. Four Namibian languages were represented by teachers across the school, namely, Afrikaans, Oshiwambo, Rukwangali and Herero. Other languages spoken as L1 by teachers were Russian, Polish, Shona, Portuguese, Dutch, Kikuyu, Yoruba, Twi and Zulu.

Participants' linguistic profile

The learner – participants for this research who were grade 9 learners in the secondary school listed the following languages as their L1s: English (5), Portuguese (5), Afrikaans (3), German (2), Herero (2), Otjiherero (1), Damara (1) and Swahili (1). They indicated that they knew and used the following languages as L1 or L2: English (20), Afrikaans (10), French (9), German (7), Portuguese (7), Spanish (5), Herero (2), Otjiherero (1), Damara (1), and Swahili (1). Four of them mentioned that they knew five languages, 12 learners mentioned four languages as the languages that they knew and four learners pointed out that they knew three languages. All the learners were multilingual. There were no bilinguals or monolinguals among the learner – participants.

In addition, five learners were purposively selected on the basis of their linguistic profile and their willingness to participate in the interview. They were made up of one male and four females. The reason for the gender imbalance is that the male learners were reluctant to be recorded. The five learners who were interviewed were either bilingual or multilingual. Two of them were bilingual while three were multilingual. The two bilingual learners, Pedro and Ursula, knew and used Portuguese (L1) and English and German (L1) and English respectively. Maria reported that she knew three languages, namely, Afrikaans (L1), English (L2) and French. Louisa said she knew four languages which were Otjiherero (L1), English (L2), Afrikaans and French. Ursula reported her knowledge of two languages, namely, English (L1) and German (L2). Sandra, reported that she knew four languages, namely, English (L1), German (L2), Afrikaans and a little bit of Spanish. All the learners knew and used English in their communication. However, in their interaction with their Portuguese and German teachers outside of the classroom, they sometimes used Portuguese and German.

The teacher – participants who were all teachers in the secondary school indicated that they knew the following languages as their L1: English (4), Afrikaans (6), French (1), German (2), Portuguese (2), Malayalam (1), Russian (1), Yoruba (1) Kikuyu (1) and Dutch (1). Languages that the teachers mentioned they spoke as L2 or as additional languages were English (20), Afrikaans (10), French (8), German (6), Portuguese (4), Spanish (3), Dutch (3), Zulu (1), Xhosa (1), Oshikwanyama (1), Hindi (1), Tamil (1), Kannada (1), Malayalam (1), Xistwa (1), Kiswahili (1), Changana (1), Rukwaangali (1), Nama (1), Swahili (1), Kikuyu (1),

Dholuo (1), Russian (1) and Yoruba (1). Similar to the learner profiles, there were no monolinguals among the teacher – participants. The language most widely listed as L1s are English, Portuguese, French and German, Afrikaans and Oshiwambo. Five teachers were purposively selected for the interview on the basis of their linguistic profile and the subjects they taught. They were made up of one male and four females. Teachers A and B who taught Portuguese as modern foreign language knew six languages respectively. Teacher C who is a learning support teacher mentioned that she knew five languages. Finally, Teachers D and E mentioned that they knew three languages. Teacher D taught French while Teacher E taught EAL. Teacher A who is a Namibian stated that she knew six languages, namely, Portuguese (L1), English, Afrikaans, German, Spanish and French. Teacher B, a Mozambican, mentioned that he knew the following six languages Xistwa (L1), Portuguese, English, Kiswahili, Changana and Spanish. Teacher C who is a Dutch national knew Dutch (L1), English, German, French and Afrikaans. Teacher D who is French mentioned that she knew French (L1), English and Spanish and finally Teacher E who is Canadian mentioned that she knew English (L1), French and Rukukwangali.

Contextualising WIS' language policy

Language policy documents are often articulated in very general terms without attention to practical support for contexts where conflict is likely to arise. WIS' Whole School Language Policy (a requirement of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO)² thus gives general guidelines for language use in the school. The policy states that it recognises both the individual and societal multilingualism of its learners and teachers. The philosophy underlying the policy is as follows. Firstly, it seeks to develop a culture of acceptance of all languages. Secondly, the policy states that its aim is to provide an inclusive, authentic context for learning in all areas of the curriculum. Thirdly, the policy also recognises the cultural value of language, its potential for fostering intercultural understanding and international – mindedness (Windhoek International School 2012, 2). It is clearly stated that the school embraces the diversity of a language – rich community with the various cultures, nationalities and identities. In this regard, the aim of the policy “is to develop a culture of acceptance of all languages, first language, mother- tongue and second language, foreign language, English as an Additional Language, and provide an inclusive, authentic context for learning in all areas of the curriculum” (Windhoek International School, Whole School Language Policy 2012, 2). In other words, the policy recognises that language development is integral to learners' academic progress. As a matter of policy, the school encourages the use and development of different languages. In addition, requirements of the two examination bodies, namely- the CIE and the IB, are that each learner must study at least one other language apart from English. At the secondary level, CIE requires each learner to study an L1 which could be English or another language that the school offers and then a foreign language. Where a learner studies English as L1, he/she needs to study

²The IBO requires such an official school policy, which in this case has been developed but has not yet been ratified by the Board of Trustees.

another language, for example, French, German or Portuguese as a foreign Language. There is also the possibility of opting for German or Portuguese as L1. French and Portuguese are taught at all levels as L2. The situation is similar at the IBDP level where English is taught as L1 and the other languages are offered as foreign language subjects. Although almost 50% of the students are Namibians, none of the local Namibian languages was taught in the school. At the same time, however, the policy recognises that in this particular context, learners are expected to access a curriculum in a language other than their mother tongue.

As a private school three key factors that influenced the school's language policy are the following. Firstly, at the inception of the school, the governing body decided that English should be the official language of communication of the school in line with the official policy of Namibia where English was adopted as MoI in all schools at independence. Secondly, English is singled out as the working language in which the school communicates with its stakeholders and in which it is committed to providing a range of services for the implementation of its programmes. English is also the school's internal working language, in which most operational and development activities takes place (Windhoek International School 2012, 2).

The language policy shows that English language is the most important language at WIS. It is the lingua franca, MoI and language of official communication. English has been adopted as the lingua franca for the sake of "fairness and transparency and also as the working language both internal and external. It is also the language of governance and management" (Windhoek International School 2012, 2). In other words, by choosing English as the official language of communication, the policy has elected a language that is intended to create a level playing field for all the members of the WIS community so that all can effectively participate in the activities of the community. In that light, WIS' LiEP supports, promotes and prescribes the use of English. The practical implementation of the English-only policy is demonstrated by the fact that English is the only language taught as an additional language. The school has a department for English as an Additional Language (EAL) which is responsible for learners whose tested English proficiency has indicated that they need additional lessons in English to cope with the studies in the classroom and to participate effectively in the school's community. EAL support is offered to accelerate the learners' integration into the mainstream language use. This support is devised to improve learners' understanding, listening and speaking skills in English. In other words, EAL support, in and out of lessons, is provided to students who have little or no prior knowledge of English until they reach a sufficient level of communication to enable them to be able to use English effectively both in and out of the classroom. The need for the EAL department is motivated by the fact that since English is the MoI, learners need a high proficiency in English to be able to participate effectively in the lessons and also be able to write examinations which are conducted in English. It is also indicative of monolingual bias that English is the only language that is given such additional support.

For example, the results from the survey conducted with the learners and from their knowledge and use of English, the choice of English as MoI is appropriate. In the interviews and especially observation of school practices, teachers and learners recognise the importance

and value of English in their daily lives. English is the language most commonly used at school and at home by both learners and teachers. Although the learners and teachers mentioned that their proficiency levels in English were high, they mentioned that they still wanted to learn it better not only to improve their proficiency but also take advantage of it as a global language. They also reported that they watch television and listen to the radio in English; in addition they write emails and send text messages in English. All the learners and teachers who participated in the research mentioned that they wanted to improve their English. The learners particularly indicated a preference for English as MoI, especially because of how it could be of use to them in their education. It is interesting that none of the learners complained that they felt that the MoI limited their ability to show how well they knew their work. Other research (De Klerk's (2000; Slabbert and Finlayson 2000) has indicated these kinds of concerns in using a single powerful language as MoI in multilingual communities.

The main reason for the wide use of English in school, according to the learners, was that the curriculum was in English and the examinations were set and written in English. The learners also expressed their awareness of being part of a world where English affords mobility and improvement of life chances. In these statements learners echoed a widely recorded view of the importance of belonging to a global village and English was seen as a route to globalisation. Teachers, overall, also seemed not to question the monolingual policy of the school. In fact, one of the teachers in the interview mentioned that she found it frustrating that at times she was unable to express her thoughts in English and felt the need to learn the language better. The preference – for – English policy worked best in the classroom where English is the MoI. From the information obtained through the questionnaires, interviews and observation of two lessons, it is clear that (in line with the policy), English is the language most commonly used by teachers and learners whether as L1, L2, or as an additional language. Thus, one can say that English enjoys a privileged position among the many languages spoken in the school.

The school also expects a particular standard variety of English to be used in teaching and learning. However, among the teachers and learners, a number of different varieties are found. In the prescribed work, the language standard is set by the curriculum developers- that is, by educationists living and working in the USA or the UK. The expectation is that the language used as MoI and for official communication should be Standard English. Although at times the differences between different varieties of English are subtle or superficial, these have been noted and well documented. Regardless of the particular varieties represented, the school holds the view that instruction in the “standard language” is the responsibility of all teachers in all subject areas. Such an instruction also holds for the teaching of English as a school subject.

Discussion

The linguistic situation at WIS is a complex one. The choice of language in this multilingual environment is highly determined by the habitus, the linguistic space and the different domains of language use. Particularly the habitus which Bourdieu (1991: 13) defines as a ‘set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways’ plays a major role

in the linguistic choices that the individual makes. 'Linguistic habitus' influences the way that individuals and groups think about, value and use languages. While the habitus in the classroom is generally monolingual in accordance with the English-only policy of the school, the research revealed code switching from French to Afrikaans and vice versa in the French classroom and the occasional use of Portuguese in the English classroom for purposes of bridging the knowledge gap. In the classroom code switching takes place between English and the other languages such as Portuguese, German and Afrikaans. Yet, the monolingual habitus is unquestioned because all the interviewees claimed an excellent proficiency in English.

The LiEP of WIS can, therefore, be described in both overt and covert terms. The written language policy that originates from the school governing body in response to the demands of the IBO is the overt policy. The principles and practices set out in the official written policy make explicit the terms that guide communication in the school. The document addresses the question of the various learning domains and the various languages that the school recognises for use by learners and teachers. The covert aspects of the policy are those that are found implicitly in the daily practices of learners and teachers. The daily practices may be described as multilingual and multi-voiced. At the level of the school community, the learners who come from a variety of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds form a linguistic community that can be described as multilingual.

The policy is unambiguous about its requirement that all learners and teachers be proficient in English even if it is not their L1. In the context of WIS, which has been clearly identified as a multilingual community, the conflict that its language policy sought to resolve was which language to use as MoI and lingua franca. Considering the particular organisations to which the WIS is affiliated and the curricula that they work with, the choice of English was inevitable, as it is the only official language of the country, and the language most commonly used as lingua franca among both learners and teachers. Though the school is multilingual, the dominant language is English which majority of the students are proficient in. Although they have a multilingual repertoire, they prefer to use English in most of their communication. Outside of the classroom, however, multiple languages are used with English still featuring prominently.

The linguistic culture of WIS has been influenced by the sociolinguistic composition of its learners and teachers, its linguistic landscape³ and its educational goals. A close look at this landscape betrays the covert policies that are honoured. The covert policy is one that is not written, but that becomes clear in the ways people use languages, in the way status is afforded, and in how practices implement the official policy (or fail to do so). Schiffman (1996: 30) describes such aspects of covert language policy as aspects of policy that relate to linguistic rights, but are not given in any legal document. Such aspects are covert in that they must be inferred from other policies, constitutional provisions, 'the spirit of the law', or the ways in

³Technically linguistic landscape refers to public displays of language in forms of signs, labels, names of shops etc. However, in this study, it is used to refer to the overall linguistic situation or context at WIS.

which regulations are followed.

The school's general educational ideology is a factor in the determination of its language policy. The LiEP at WIS at once takes care of and withholds language rights. It withholds the multilingual rights (as determined in international language rights context) of its teachers and especially its students in the classroom, while at the same time upholding those rights outside of the classroom. Following Shohamy's (2006, 47-48) reflection on language policy as a manipulation and imposition of language behaviours as it relates to decisions about languages and their uses in education in society, it is clear that the LiEP of WIS imposes monolingual norms and a situation of "monolingual habitus" on its community of learners and teachers.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to find out how language policy addresses possible language conflicts regarding which languages to use and to develop in a multilingual educational space. The study sought to reflect on language policy. It was suggested in the review of scholarly literature that one of the primary aims of language policy is to address potential conflicts that may arise in multilingual spaces. It is clear from the discussion above that based on its written policy, WIS recognises individual multilingualism to the extent that each student is encouraged to speak his/her L1 and a language apart from English even though English is the lingua franca of the school. Yet on the whole with the prominence given to English, one can say that the policy is articulated with a monolingual bias. The findings of the research have shown that a written language policy may only address part of the conflict. The real solution should be found in the linguistic culture and language practices of WIS. In this globalised educational context in Namibia with such language diversity and interaction language policy, both overt and covert should address possible language conflicts holistically (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouk 2005: 198). In the course of reflecting on language policy and policy implementation both inside and outside of the classroom at WIS, it has emerged that language functions as a resource especially for purposes of scaffolding and bridging the knowledge gap in the classroom. In addition, due recognition must be given to indigenous Namibian languages. It is acknowledged, however, that the implementation of this is likely to come with its own and all efforts should be made to reduce these conflicts to the barest minimum. It is also suggested that current practices in the policy that must be maintained are that for examination purposes, the school should still focus on extensive use of English to enable its learners to meet the requirements of its external examiners and accreditors. The policy should be the same for its communication with its other stakeholders. The policy must maintain its position where English is perceived as a source of linguistic capital which provides opportunities in the global community. It is recommended that where a learner comes to WIS with little or no proficiency in English lessons in EAL must be introduced and continued over a sufficient period of time, to ensure the easy integration of the learner into the school, both inside and outside of the classroom. In order to make this effective, the L1 of learners should form part of the teaching process where he/she would be allowed to use his L1 freely during EAL lessons.

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