

Problematizing monolingual practices in multilingual classrooms in Lusaka: Towards more inclusive teaching and learning

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Introduction

There are different definitions of literacy. In this chapter, literacy is generally understood to be the ability to read and write in either an ordinary alphabet or in Braille. Since literacy is linked to the skills of reading and writing, literacy teaching and learning requires that it should be carried out in a language. It is not possible, therefore, to talk about literacy without talking about language because language constitutes the medium through which literacy is developed (Simwinda, 2006: 1). The language of instruction in literacy teaching and learning is guided by a language in education policy. Trask (1997) defines a language in education policy as an official government policy that regulates the form, teaching or use of one or more languages within the area controlled by that government. Zambia has not had a consistent language in education policy. The changes made to the policy, especially in the language of initial literacy teaching, have been done in search of a better policy that would enhance literacy levels in Zambia.

It can be argued that literacy (reading and writing) started with the missionaries who settled in various parts of the country where they set up churches, hospitals and schools. They used local languages to enhance their mission of evangelism, and to teach reading, writing and numeracy. In schools, the local language was the language of classroom instruction up to the fourth grade (Manchishi, 2004). This was effective as it connected the home to the school and it was easier for the learners to learn from the known to the unknown.

By the time Northern Rhodesia became a British protectorate in 1924, the British Colonial Office in London had set up an Advisory Committee on Education to examine the educational system in its colonies and advise on how it could be improved. At the time, the Second African Education Commission under the

auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and the International Education Board was visiting East and Central Africa.

In the Phelps-Stokes Report (1924), the commission recommended that English become the official language in education and government business while local languages were to be used for the preservation of national values and self-identity on the part of the Africans (Manchishi, 2004). As a result of the recommendations made by the African Education Commission, the government went further and formally recognised four main local languages—Cibemba, Cinyanja, Citonga and Silozi—as regional official languages to be used in the African government schools as media of instruction for the first four years of primary education. By 1953, there was a three-tier language policy for the territory, guided by the principle of complementarity. As a result, students were taught in the mother tongue for the first two years of primary education. Thereafter, pupils were taught in the dominant regional official language for another two years and then in English from the fifth year onwards (Kashoki, 1978: 26; Chanda, 1998: 63). It is important to note that although there were policy changes in 1977, 1992 and 1996, English continued to be the dominant language of instruction while local languages continued to play second fiddle.

By 2014, the policy was revised and the major change was the extension of the use of local languages to the first four years of schooling. Thus, the current language in education policy recommends Zambian regional official languages be used as languages of instruction for the first four years then English takes over as the sole medium of instruction across subjects from Grade 5 to university.

Although there have been several changes or revisions to the policy, literacy levels have not improved significantly in Zambia. For example, by 1998, the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) study on reading performance levels of Grade 6 pupils in the Zambian Basic schools revealed that in 1995, out of the 148 Grade 6 pupils in the target population, only 25 per cent were able to read at defined maximum levels and only 3 per cent were able to read at desired levels (Nkamba & Kanyika, 1998). From these statistics, it is clear that there was no improvement despite constant policy revision. In 2002, the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey conducted a study to assess reading abilities of children aged between 7 and 10 years. The findings showed that only 19 per cent of the children could read some or all of the sentences. In 2005, Matafwali also conducted a study in Lusaka which revealed that Grade 3 learners could not read and write at desirable levels and there was no difference in the abilities of rural and urban learners. In 2012, Mulenga also conducted a study in the Copperbelt to investigate pupils' readiness for the Read On Course. Grade 3 pupils were assessed in reading. The results showed that the majority of the pupils (63 per cent) could not read at desirable levels. What we see in these studies is confirmation of the observation that, despite several attempts to alter the language in education policy, literacy levels have remained significantly low. The big question is: why? We provide the answer later.

Banda and Mwanza (2017) argued that Zambia is a multilingual country and almost all classrooms are multilingual and multi-ethnic. Thus, they argue that multilingual classrooms require multilingual language practices and this has not been the case in Zambia. Zambia follows a transitional bilingual education system, which Cummins (2009: 161) describes as follows:

Transitional bilingual education aims only to promote students' proficiency in English. When it is assumed that students have attained sufficient proficiency in the school language to follow instruction in the language, home language instruction is discontinued and students are transitioned into mainstream classes taught exclusively in English.

From this quote, it can be argued that the exclusive use of one language after the other means that transitional bilingual education policy is premised on monolingual language ideologies and practices. The use of regional languages in the first four years is seen here as preparatory for the medium of English. The problem here is the use and deployment of monolingual practices in multilingual classes. Closely connected to this problem is assigning one language to a particular region on the assumption that there is, or there can be, a single language that is familiar to everyone in a particular province. Based on language zoning in Zambia, Cinyanja is the language of initial literacy teaching for Eastern and Lusaka provinces, Cibemba is for Muchinga, Northern, Luapula and Copperbelt provinces, Silozi is for Western Province, Citonga is for Southern Province while Cilunda, Kikaonde and Ciluvale are for North-Western Province. Language zoning assumes, for example, that Cinyanja is the familiar language to everyone in Eastern and Lusaka provinces, despite the fact that places like Lusaka and Chipata are cosmopolitan. In this view, this phenomenon neglects the linguistic diversity inherent in these respective provinces. The misrecognition of the regional standard language as the legitimate language of initial literacy in multilingual contexts of Zambia is implicated in a number of studies reviewed later, which have clearly shown that language zoning, as well as monolingual practices in multilingual classrooms and regions, are problematic and a hindrance to literacy teaching and learning.

Problems associated with monolingual/monoglot language practices in multilingual classrooms

Mulenga (2012) conducted a study in which he wanted to establish Grade 3 pupils' preparedness to read and write in Cibemba and English. Most pupils in Grade 3 were unable to read and write at the desirable level. These included those who were judged to have broken through to literacy at the end of Grade 2. The pupils could not spell both English and Cibemba words, especially when they were asked to read words which had more than one syllable. Pupils failed to read words and sentences that were deemed to be at their reading level. Although it was expected that pupils

could transfer their literacy abilities from Cibemba to English, the conclusion was that, in fact, pupils had little or nothing at all to transfer from Cibemba as a first language to English as a second language by Grade 3.

Mwambazi (2011) set out to establish the factors and the nature of low reading achievement among Grade 2 pupils in selected schools in Mpika and Mbala districts. The findings showed that Grade 2 pupils were not able to read Zambian languages and English according to their grade level. Absenteeism, shortage of suitable teaching and learning materials, shortage of teachers who were trained in Primary Reading Programme (PRP) methodologies, large classes and a language of instruction unfamiliar to both teachers and pupils, all accounted for the low reading achievement (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

Phiri (2012) studied teachers' perceptions of factors that prevented some Grade 1 learners from acquiring the skills of reading and writing. The language of instruction unfamiliar to both teachers and pupils was found to be the major reason why pupils failed to break through to literacy. The challenge associated with the language of instruction was more pronounced in urban and in peri-urban schools because of the factor of multilingualism, which made it impracticable to use a regional standard language (Kikaonde) as the medium of instruction in the New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) programme. The situation was different in rural schools where language did not pose a threat to the learners because the language of instruction was also the regional ethnic language.

Kumwenda (2011) conducted a study to establish the initial reading performance in Cinyanja in multi-ethnic/multilingual Chipata urban areas. This was a comparative study of the reading performance between pupils for whom Cinyanja — the regional language of education — was not their first language and those who spoke Cinyanja as their first language. As expected, the results showed that pupils who had Cinyanja as their first language performed better than those who did not have Cinyanja as their first language.

Matafwali (2010) noted that, despite the introduction of a regional official language as the medium of instruction in 2000, children in Lusaka could still not read and write at a desirable level. It is important to state that Lusaka is more multilingual than Chipata, the research site of Kumwenda's (2011) study. Cinyanja is the designated regional official language of education and local administration, and the literature frames it as the 'mother tongue', 'language of play' and familiar language to school going children in Lusaka. This is misleading since there are so many languages spoken in Lusaka. In fact, Banda and Mwanza (2017) clearly state that 'the Cinyanja used for academic purposes is not exactly the same as the one spoken by the majority of pupils in Lusaka.' In this context, Matafwali's (2010) findings that the lack of proficiency in the initial language of instruction was the hallmark of the poor reading and writing skills observed in the majority of Zambian children make a lot of sense. There is clear evidence that in Lusaka, the regional language or 'mother tongue' was not so familiar to the majority of the

children. Thus, Matafwali (2010) concludes that when deficits in oral language converge with deficits in cognitive skills, children are at a substantial risk of developing reading difficulties. The argument is that since children in Lusaka District were not proficient in the standard Cinyanja recognised in schools, they experienced problems in initial literacy acquisition (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

Kalindi (2005) conducted a study on the reading problems experienced by 60 Grade 2 poor readers, who were identified by teachers from selected basic schools in Mpika and Kasama Urban in Northern Province in Zambia. Findings showed that 13 per cent were able to read two syllable words and only 8 per cent were able to identify 20 letters of the alphabet. The findings showed that even with excellent and intensive instruction in place, some pupils could not make satisfactory progress in reading and writing. Among the reasons for the lack of substantial progress by pupils was the exclusive use of standard Cibemba as the medium of instruction, which turned out to be a barrier to learning. The standard Cibemba used in multi-ethnic/multilingual classes was not the mother tongue or familiar language to most of the learners, so they struggled to learn to read and write in it.

Apart from the misrecognition of the standard language discussed earlier, the imposition of zonal languages as official languages of education has also contributed to the inability of most pupils to acquire the skills of reading and writing, especially in communities where the familiar language is different from the zonal language, which is officially sanctioned for initial literacy teaching. In this regard, Zimba (2007) set out to establish whether the use of Cinyanja in a predominantly Citumbuka-speaking community in Lumezi District in Eastern Province was effective as a medium of initial literacy. The findings showed that pupils consistently performed below expectation because they could not understand Cinyanja, which was the official language of instruction. The assumed mutual intelligibility between Citumbuka and Cinyanja appeared to have very little impact, if any, on mediating initial literacy development in Cinyanja (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

Similar findings were reported by Mubanga (2012), who wanted to establish the effect of using Cinyanja as the medium of instruction in a predominantly Cisoli-speaking area of Lwimba in Chongwe District, which falls under the Cinyanja language zone. The findings showed that children struggled to learn literacy because they could not speak and understand standard Cinyanja, which was the official medium of instruction. This finding is in line with that of Matafwali (2010), who also concluded that a lack of knowledge of the language of instruction by pupils was a barrier to literacy learning.

The negative effects of the institutionalised collective misrecognitions of the standard official language, as described earlier, are in part a consequence of, and compounded by, the rather outdated orthographies in place. Banda (2008;

forthcoming) lamented that opaque orthographic systems in Zambia and other African countries have also contributed to poor literacy levels in African languages. He explains that the outdated orthographies, which are being used in schools, present familiar sounds and words in unfamiliar ways due to faulty writing systems or spelling rules, which make children's knowledge of particular languages 'useless' (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

In Europe, the use of a familiar language as a medium of classroom instruction has proved very progressive in literacy development by children. For instance, the Finnish National Board of Education (2000) conducted a study to discover the factors that contributed to the good literacy performance of Finnish youth. The findings showed that the transparent or 'shallow' orthography of the Finnish language ('what you say is what you write') gave extra advantage in the initial phase of learning to read (Finnish National Board of Education, 2000: 3).

Since the Finnish orthography is premised on the same notion of transparency as the Zambian languages' orthography, the findings by the Finnish Board of Education should be a good sign for Zambia. This is because Zambian languages have a one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. Thus, once they are used as the medium of instruction for four years (as is the case now), they should provide the learner with an extra advantage in reading and writing abilities. However, the official Zambian orthography (Ministry of Education, 1977) still contains symbols that are not found in ordinary print, such as in school textbooks and newspapers.

Banda (2008) blames the orthographies for advocating rules of writing and alphabetical symbols that make it unnecessarily difficult for speakers to write in the languages they speak very well. For instance, the Cinyanja orthography has <l> and <r> as symbols representing distinct sounds or phonemes. However, mother-tongue speakers mostly use <l> in all situations and a few use the flapped <r> throughout, or in borrowed words. The fact that the standard form distinguishes between <l> and <r> means that pupils have to learn new rules in order to write in the language they might know very well (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017). In short, our argument is that, unlike the Finnish situation, Zambian orthographies impede early literacy development because 'what you say is not what you write'.

From the preceding sections, it is clear that the Zambian language in education policy is premised on a monoglot/monolingual pupil, who speaks one particular standard or familiar language. This has proved problematic in initial literacy development because the policy is not reflective of the sociolinguistic situation and the linguistic repertoires of the target learners. Thus, there is a need to formulate a language policy that reflects the multilingual language practices on the ground, rather than depend on programmes that are framed in a monolingual/monocultural ideology. In this regard, Zambia's multilingualism and linguistic diversity should be at the centre of any policy implementation in schools. This implies that the status quo and the institutionalised hegemonic

existence of language varieties — where local varieties are displaced by zonal languages — should be challenged. The democratisation of the classroom, especially in as far as initial literacy development is concerned, means finding ways of using local languages such as Citumbuka in Lumezi and Cisoli in Chongwe districts, respectively. Experimentation with urban Cinyanja in Lusaka urban area and Cibemba in parts of the Copperbelt Province as the language of initial literacy needs to be encouraged in the continued search for better and practical ways of teaching initial literacy to children of diverse language abilities. Such a move would also help counter the language ideology behind the institutionalised collective misrecognition of the standard language, and hence mitigate its negative hegemonic effects, particularly in disadvantaging pupils who have little exposure or no access to the sanctioned language of initial literacy. This entails recognising local languages and/or pupils' multilingual repertoires as legitimate languages and resources in initial literacy development (see also Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

Significance of the study

Our study illustrates the weaknesses of monolingual/monoglot language policies and practices. The argument is that monolingual language practices create symbolic violence in which not only are learners unable to access knowledge but their voices are also silenced. Thus, this chapter proposes multilingual language practices and, in particular, translanguaging. The argument is that translanguaging, as a pedagogic practice, engenders multilingualism and connects the home and school so that home literacies work as cornerstones enabling access to school literacies.

Methods and materials

Our study was both qualitative and quantitative and employed interviews, observation and testing students' familiar language. A total of 94 respondents from two schools were sampled. From each school, 40 pupils participated in the language test and 10 teachers were sampled, while the head teacher and head of department also participated. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools because one needed to come from a high density area and the other one from a low density area. The 80 pupils were selected randomly. The data collection instruments included the interview guide, observation check list and the familiar language test. The data were analysed thematically and ethical issues were considered. In this regard, participation was voluntary and by informed consent. Participants were assured of confidentiality and that the data would be used only for academic purposes.

Findings

In the study, questions were about whether Cinyanja was a familiar language in Lusaka and whether teachers and pupils were familiar with Cinyanja. With regard

to pupils' familiarity with Cinyanja, teachers reported that while most of the pupils were familiar with Cinyanja, other were not as they spoke other languages such as English, Cibemba and Citonga. The following were some of the responses:

R1: *The majority of the pupils in Grade 1 are comfortable with Cinyanja because most of them have grown up in Lusaka; they are in the compounds where Nyanja is mostly spoken, so they know how to speak Nyanja.*

R2: *Some children come from parents who speak to them in English at home. Again, there are some children who passed through the preschools where the language of use was English. So to such children, the language of play is English. Some of the children go to preschool at the age of two and they grow up speaking English; to such pupils, the language of play is English.*

When asked about the variety of Cinyanja spoken by pupils in Lusaka, all the respondents reported that the variety spoken by pupils was different from the Cinyanja that was supposed to be the standard in schools and the one written in textbooks. The following were some of the responses:

R3: *The Cinyanja in the Grade 1 books is different from the one they are using because even for me as a teacher, I fail to understand some of the words. I use English sometimes ... this Nyanja is difficulty.*

R4: *They are different. The one [Cinyanja] spoken in Lusaka has many foreign words. In fact, teachers do not use the classroom Nyanja. They use the Lusaka Nyanja which the pupils understand; the only problem is in Grade 7 where they are supposed to write the exams which are set in standard Nyanja again.*

R5: *There is a big difference — at home they call it milisi [maize] but here we call it cimanga. In addition, they call it 'door' at home but here we call it citseko. Even when it comes to the word for grass, we call it msipu in class but here in Lusaka they call it mauzu.*

To verify whether pupils were familiar with standard Cinyanja—which was the officially recommended variety for use in schools in literacy teaching and learning—a familiar language test was administered. This was done by showing an object or picture to a pupil and asking them to name of the object in Cinyanja. The findings are recorded in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Findings from a familiar language test

SL #	Name of object in English	Name of object in standard Cinyanja	Names of object according to pupils' responses	Names of object in Cinyanja which were mutually intelligible
1	Vehicle	Galimoto	Motoka, kamotoka, cimotoka, mota	✓
2	Bird	Mbalame	Kanyoni, nyoni, cinyoni, bird, akoni	✗
3	Radio	Wailesi	Cilimba, kalimba, radio, wailesi, icilimba	✓
4	Mirror	Kalilole	Mirror	✗
5	Mother	Amai	Mummy, amai, amummy, ba mummy	✓
6	Teacher	Aphunzitsi	A teacher, ba teacher, teacher	✗
7	Egg	Dzira	Egg, eggs, amani, ilini	✗
8	Pencil	Pensulo	Pencil, a pencil, colemba	✓
9	Hoe	Khasu	Kambwiri, hoe, a hoe, colimilako	✗
10	Rat	Khoswe	Koswe, kakoswe, cikoswe, mbeba, kambeba, rat, a rat	✓
11	Door	Citseko	Door, a door, I don't know	✗
12	Trousers	Buluku	Trousers, buluku, toloshi, a trousers	✓
13	Cat	Cona	Pusi, kapusi, cipusi, pushi, cat, a cat, kit, ka kit	✗
14	Girl	Mtsikana	Mkazi, girl, a girl, jelita, misozi	✓
15	Water	Madzi	Manzi, water, menda, mezi	✓
16	Milk	Mkaka	Milk, cowbell, meleki	✗
17	Grass	Msipu	Mauzu, grass, uzu, vimauzu, tumauzu	✗
18	Ball	Mpira	Bola, ball, a ball	✗
19	Groundnuts	Mtedza	Nshawa, nyemu, groundnuts	✗
20	Lion	Mkango	Nkhalamu, lion, I don't know	✗

Source: The authors

Discussion of findings

The findings revealed that there were many differences between the Cinyanja spoken during play and the standard Cinyanja, which is officially recognised and is the 'language' of initial literacy—most pupils were not familiar with the standard

variety, while others spoke completely different languages from Cinyanja such as English. There is an emerging sociolinguistic trend in Lusaka where English has become the first language to some of the pupils. Due to the high prestige associated with English, some parents opt to teach their children English at home, right from the start. In this case, the mother tongue or familiar language is English and not necessarily an indigenous Zambian language. Therefore, this moves the sociolinguistic discourse from considering English as 'always' being the unfamiliar language to considering it as one of the familiar languages and even the mother tongue of some Zambians.

The data showed that even the teachers were not fluent in Cinyanja and, as observed, the type of Cinyanja they spoke was not the standard one recognised in schools and there were many instances of 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing'. For example, in school X, the teacher started the lesson with a statement in English and the pupils responded in English. In her second sentence, she spoke in Cinyanja with two instances of 'code-switching'. Interestingly, her third sentence was in English. This clearly showed that either the teacher was not proficient in Cinyanja or her pupils were not and she was translanguaging in order to communicate with those who could not understand standard Cinyanja. It was evident throughout the lesson that whenever she had problems expressing herself in Cinyanja, she resorted to English.

A similar scenario was observed in school Y, where the teacher only asked the pupils to stand and sit down in Cinyanja and greeted them in English. The greetings went on for some time before the teacher went back to Cinyanja. Strikingly, the pupils were able to understand and speak to the teacher in English. It appears that many teachers are more comfortable with English but teach in Cinyanja only because the policy demands it of them. In both schools, when the teachers felt that the pupils did not understand them, they resorted to English. Therefore, English seemed to be one of the most preferred languages of communication in Lusaka, both by the teachers and the pupils. This explains why, during interviews, most respondents said that they were better off teaching initial literacy in English as opposed to Cinyanja.

In addition, the teachers mispronounced many of the words in Cinyanja—mostly due to mother tongue influence. It was observed that most words that have an aspirated /p/ marked by the consonant cluster 'ph', as in *kuphunzisa*, were pronounced without the /h/. This was also observed in *tikhale* which was pronounced as *tinkale* by the teacher. To be specific, the teacher pronounced Cinyanja words as if they were Cibemba words. It must be noted that in Bantu languages, there is a one-to-one correspondence between pronunciation and spelling—that is, words are written phonetically. By implication, this means that the Grade 1 teachers were misleading their pupils when they mispronounced words because the pupils would eventually learn the wrong spelling which would mean a different word to a native speaker of the language. This has a negative impact,

not only on the pupils but also on the teachers because they write the incorrect words on the blackboard. These mismatches between the official orthography and the actual language use by the teachers impacts negatively on learners' literacy acquisition.

In addition, as seen in both schools, it appears that both teachers and pupils lack sufficient vocabulary to speak fluently in Cinyanja. For example, in school X, the teacher did not know the word for 'match' (*kuyanjanitsa*) while in school Y, the teacher did not know the Cinyanja word for flower (*duwa/maluwa*). These are just a few examples of how limited the teachers were in Cinyanja and, in these instances, they used English equivalents. What we see is a consistent mismatch between the familiar languages of both the teacher and the pupils and the standard variety recommended for literacy teaching in Lusaka. The Cinyanja spoken in Lusaka has a lot of borrowed words.

Miti and Monaka (2009) reported that because of multilingualism, when teachers are recruited to teach at primary school, some are taken to regions where the language of instruction is not their mother tongue and they fail to teach initial literacy using the recommended Zambian language in the region. This meant that most teachers had problems handling Grade 1s in the era of the New Breakthrough to Literacy. Banda and Mwanza (2017) also argued that in Zambia, there is institutionalised misrecognition of standard varieties of language, where the standard prescribed for use in a particular region is not actually the familiar language in the locality.

In the study, while the pupils could understand the teachers when they spoke in 'Lusaka Nyanja', almost all the pupils were not able to understand when the teacher gave instruction in the standard Cinyanja recognised in schools. For example, in school X situated in a high-density area, there was a stage in the lesson when a teacher read sentences from the Grade 1 content book and asked the pupils to explain what they understood from the sentences. It soon became clear that pupils were neither familiar nor proficient with the standard Cinyanja used in the Grade 1 books and they did not understand the culture of the Cinyanja language. Mwanza (2012) noted that language is a vehicle of culture, which implies that the effective use and understanding of a language depends on knowledge of the culture of the first speakers of the language. This means that even if learners are familiar with the syntax of a sentence, this will not necessarily help them to understand the meaning of the statement.

Snow (1991) noted that a child's language proficiency at entry into kindergarten was an excellent prediction of their reading skills during early to middle primary school years. Thus, the language of instruction in early years of primary education should be one which pupils are familiar with especially considering the inseparability of language and cognition — language helps us to communicate effectively and understand our world and to shape our concepts and thoughts. This suggests that the prevailing language situation in Lusaka District in terms of

policy and practice is a recipe for poor literacy development. Pupils are likely to continue performing below expectation because they cannot understand ‘standard’ Cinyanja, which is supposed to be their language of instruction and thinking.

Towards multilingual language practices in multilingual classrooms

It is clear that there is a disparity between the recommended standard variety of Cinyanja and that with which pupils and teachers are familiar. This creates misunderstanding in some cases and failure to relay information in other cases. As a coping strategy, both teachers and pupils resorted to other languages, including the informal variety of Cinyanja. This is contrary to the language policy which stipulates the use of one language, that is monolingual/monoglot language practices, in the classroom. Observations of actual classroom practices show that policy can be negotiated and, in some cases, neglected. As Huckin, Andrus and Clary-Lemon (2012: 115) explain: ‘the classroom is a place in which power is circulated, managed, exploited, resisted and often directly impacted by institutional policies and changes’. In this case, teachers and pupils use their power to negotiate and at times neglect the policy directive to use standard Cinyanja as the language of classroom communication.

We wish to argue for the legitimisation of languages spoken by pupils without limitation to the standard variety. This will entail an appreciation of both teachers and learners’ linguistic repertoires including the informal varieties of Cinyanja spoken in Lusaka. When these varieties are legitimised, teachers and pupils will be able to use them in the classroom without feeling guilty. In essence, the legalisation of learners’ linguistic repertoires will mean that translanguaging should become the norm rather than the exception in the multilingual classrooms of Lusaka. By definition, translanguaging refers to ‘the purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes’ (Hornberger & Link, 2012: 262; see Williams, 1994). The basic principle of translanguaging as a classroom practice is to engender multilingual and multimodal literacies. As García (2009: 44) notes, translanguaging is about ‘engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices [and] not on languages as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable’. Whereas standard Cinyanja, for example, may work in some homogenous groups in some remote areas of Katete and Chadiza and Chadiza, in most parts of urbanising Zambia—where heterogeneity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are the norm—it is not pedagogically valid to propose and recommend monolingual policies, practices and ideologies. This means attempts to champion home language or familiar language are misplaced because they do not account for pupils’ multilingual linguistic behaviour. This may partly explain why initial literacy development initiatives through a singular mother tongue or familiar language have not yielded the desired results.

Conclusion

Zambia, and Lusaka in particular, is multilingual. It has been noted that official policy recommends monolingualism, which is at variance with the sociolinguistic reality and language practices of the teachers and learners. It is time to consider alternative models, especially those that focus on multilingual discourses in the classroom. In the translanguaging model, for example, the teacher may teach in standard Cinyanja and/or English, while pupils may respond or discuss in different language varieties. This would enable the learners to participate fully in the classroom and, at the same time, get exposed to the different language varieties (including the standard ones) (Banda, 2010).

Are translanguaging and code-switching one and the same? In clarifying the difference, Hornberger and Link (2012: 263) contend that research on code-switching ‘tended to focus on issues of language interference, transfer or borrowing’ while ‘translanguaging “shifts the lens from cross-linguistic influence” to how multilinguals “intermingle linguistic features that have hereto been administratively or linguistically assigned to a particular language or language variety”’. In addition, translanguaging is multimodal and, thus, widens the research possibilities in that it transcends verbal communication (both spoken and written language) to other mediated and mediated modes and related literacies that pupils bring to the classroom. Zambian children, including those in rural areas, have been exposed to, and continue to be introduced to, new technologies such as cell phones and other computerised gadgetry. More important, following Banda (2010) and Blackledge and Creese (2010), we want to argue that alternative bilingual models of classroom practice, such as translanguaging, can help the pupils, their families and educators to mitigate and counteract the negative effects of monolingual language ideologies and policies, as well as bridge home and school multilingual literacy practices and identities. In this case, the horizontal and vertical discourses will co-work in literacy teaching/learning and development. As a result, pupils will have a voice and classroom symbolic violence will be avoided.

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