

## **Linguistic skills development in the Home Language and First Additional Language**

(presented by Cas Prinsloo)

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A specific need drives this presentation, as it does the National Research Foundation (NRF)-funded study about to start. The country has to work out a better dispensation for its many learners with an African language as the language they know best on entering school, i.e., in which they achieve basic literacy (oracy and auracy), but who are forced by a range of circumstances to make an early switch to a different teaching language. The latter mainly is English, which sooner than seems good for them, serves as their official LoLT (language of learning and teaching) or MOI (medium of instruction). The factors and systemic dynamics of this outcome are not the focus of the rest of the presentation, but are also important.

### **Introductory comments**

The value and importance of language are taken for granted. The following claims are accepted:

- Lack of language proficiency limits one's boundaries; proficiency expands one's horizons.
- Language is a sturdy vehicle for matters of culture and of the heart.
- Language underpins all education and learning (Ekkehard Wolf, 2006; Cummins, 1984, 1992 – especially academic proficiency).
- Language proficiency operates in cumulative and exponential (non-linear) ways (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner & Masterov, 2005; Heckman, 2000).
- Remediation is unnecessary and very expensive (with the intersection of the return-on-investment and opportunity-cost curves occurring at or below the age of 8!) (Heckman, 2000).
- The highest possible level of achievement of home- or first-language proficiency is required over as long a period of primary-school learning as possible, while sound second-language learning should occur in parallel (when indicated for a country or system) for producing the best result (Heugh, 2007; Heugh, Benson, Bogale & Yohannes, 2007a; Heugh, Diedericks, Prinsloo & Herbst, 2007b; Reeves *et al.*, 2008).
- Language issues (or language as crucial learning area) operate under conditions fraught with pitfalls.  
(Good practice could help learners overcome stiff challenges in achieving basic literacy and communication competencies in a multi-cultural society and for a global economy. The difference between learners' "home language" and the language of learning and teaching requires complex multi-lingual teaching (Taylor, 2007) and results in negative outcomes for achievement across learning areas, for instance Mathematics (Setati, 2005). Low socio-economic status seems to correlate with not being taught in one's home language and/or performing poorly. Such learners' parents are often unable to support them towards improved proficiency in both the first and second languages.
- Broader education and school reform forms an important context (Barber & Mourshed, (2007). The mentioned authors consider three factors (solutions) as crucial. Top school systems, in which learner performance improves consistently, are able to: get the right people to become teachers; develop these teachers into effective instructors; and ensure that the system can deliver the best possible instruction to every child.

Critical periods apply to (first-)language acquisition and development (Herschensohn, 2007).

- Foregoing certain childhood first-language competency and proficiency achievements can manifest in permanent deficits by age 12. Five seems critical too for many early proficiencies.

- Increasingly nuanced understandings have evolved about the contribution of sequenced incremental “deficits”, originating from 15 to 48 months of age in particular, but even up to eight, when language codification occurs in school for children learning to read and write.
- Between the ages of five and seven, two neurological phenomena, loss of plasticity and increased neuron specialisation, set in to slow down or end prolific language acquisition.
- With age, after that, first-language proficiency affects second-language acquisition and development (albeit within quite a large range of individual differences, depending on the nature of contributing or limiting dynamics).
- Double acquisition of first-language proficiency is possible under optimal conditions.

Evolution and other theory, and applied and other research, further support a critical chronology of linguistic proficiency clusters. Everyone progresses from listening to speaking; from reading to writing. Although they dovetail in complex ways, the sequence is universal, especially for onset:

- phonology (pronunciation) →
- lexicon (vocabulary) →
- morphology (word parts) →
- syntax →
- pragmatics (discourse and speech)

Although Daniel Ling’s (1978) model for speech development had been developed for understanding impairment, it holds important information on the sequence of acquisition of language and literacy skills in speaking, both through minute incremental steps, but also in terms of partly parallel development, and broad steps of progress each broken down into many sub-items.

In summary, the typical time at which literacy and first-language achievement happens, if understood in the light of theory and research, allows us to optimise our interactions with children and learners going through that process. A baby is born with immense neuronal and synaptic proliferation, in case, as it were, she needs access to such an extensive toolkit for making sense of possible stimuli or systems that determine her world. Plasticity now applies too, allowing rapid and innovative selection of mnemonic pathways that allow assimilating the world into the individual, so to speak. Once success recipes are discovered, plasticity switches to specialisation, first in terms of the strategies and ways in which the world is understood, but then through crystallisation into the proficiencies preferred for optimal task processing. It is also here that principles such as having to accept the value of automation of set (drilled, for that matter) routines to serve as subliminal or subconscious instruments of high-level processing of increasingly complex content (Abadzi, 2006) function. Finally, there is an inevitable, albeit variable, link between first- and second-language acquisition and development in that earlier proficiency levels determine the later speed and quality of proficiency development (Herschensohn, 2007).

### **Theoretical and conceptual (or teaching?) paradigms of language acquisition and development**

A recent study on literacy teaching in primary schools in Limpopo was imbedded in the province’s Literacy Development Strategy. This enabled the team to witness how the many available approaches to literacy teaching were confronted (Reeves et al., 2008). The client report pointed out how both literacy development strategy, but also day-to-day practices, were dealt with. The Education Department went a long way to counter accusations from all over that “Curriculum 2005”, “NCS” and “OBE” in a shallow manner determined that teachers subscribe to loose conversational approaches only. Without at this stage providing a taxonomy of approaches oneself, the Departmental documents made reference to a balanced approach to Foundation Phase practices (“all methods that work”), with emergent literacy, phonics, sentence construction, language experience, and in principle, also the text-based, communicative, critical, social, academic and

inclusive elements, present in a systematic and informed way. During the Intermediate and Senior Phases of school, the text-based, communicative, critical, social, academic and inclusive approaches obviously become much more central and structured. At the other end, in the period of early literacy (or pre-literacy), the development and sequencing of skills such as predicting / recalling events, differentiation between (and categorising) many elements in terms of shape, colour, number, type, etc., and becoming familiar with how books work (cover, pages, page numbers, table of contents, paging, pictures and text, book care, etc.) were also important.

The instructional procedures within systematic or structural approaches are well prescribed. An example of the teaching and learning sequence of one such approach cover: exploration, teaching, practice, application and extension (Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes & Kwok, 2008). Many pre-established and -prepared teaching strategies (e.g., visual scaffolding, communication games, bridging, manipulatives, dramatisation, word walls, story enactment, etc.) are also mentioned. Other classifications include the one by Ringborn (2007) as reviewed by Odlin (Pavlenko, 2008). It distinguishes between item learning (e.g., vocabulary) and system learning (creating sophisticated networks between (the learner's) knowledge and (new) language). It also has to be acknowledged that the conceptualisation of teaching and learning practices (from its detailed elements to underlying paradigms and approaches, with everything in between), as well as how information-collection activities pertaining to these develop later in any research programme, have to account for how processes and proficiencies operate at word-level, sentence-level and text-level (ideally within a balanced curriculum<sup>1</sup>). Processes of meta-cognition are also of relevance in this regard.

Recommendations made by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) made it clear that many aspects are central to literacy instruction in Grades 1 to 3 especially. Besides claiming that excellent instruction would prevent reading difficulties, Snow and colleagues also strongly recommended that attention be given “in every primary-grade classroom to the full array of early reading accomplishments: the alphabetic principle, reading sight words, reading words by mapping speech sounds to parts of words, achieving fluency, and comprehension.” They also claim that “(g)etting started in alphabetic reading depends critically on mapping the letters and spellings of words onto the speech units that they represent; failure to master word recognition can impede text comprehension. Explicit instruction that directs children's attention to the sound structure of oral language and to the connections between speech sounds and spellings assists children who have not grasped the alphabetic principle or who do not apply it productively when they encounter unfamiliar printed words.” Furthermore, “(c)omprehension difficulties can be prevented by actively building comprehension skills as well as linguistic and conceptual knowledge, beginning in the earliest grades. Comprehension can be enhanced through instruction focused on concept and vocabulary growth and background knowledge, instruction about the syntax and rhetorical structures of written language, and direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarising, predicting, and monitoring. Comprehension also takes practice, which is gained by reading independently, by reading in pairs or groups, and by being read aloud to.” Guided reading in the early grades, which requires highly skilled teaching, should also be the focus according to Reeves *et al.* (2008), who recommend that Grade 1 to 3 curricula include the following components, skills and familiarisations:

- For beginning readers: explicit instruction and practice; spoken words comprising smaller units of sounds; spelling-sound correspondences; common spelling conventions; the use of spelling in identifying printed words; "sight" recognition of frequent words; independent reading; reading aloud; promotion of fluency through practice (with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level).
- For children who have started to read independently (typically Grade 2s and above): sounding out and confirming visually unfamiliar words encountered in reading; recognising words

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<sup>1</sup> Also reiterated in personal communication with Alan Davies, 21 May 2009.

through their letter-sound relationships; judicious use of context and pictures to monitor word recognition (without substituting information provided by the letters in the word with this).

- Word recognition accuracy and reading fluency (to enhance the ability to obtain meaning from print); the regular assessment of these; and timely and effective instructional response in the case of difficulty or delay.
- Promoting comprehension (from the earliest grades) by building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in many domains and through direct instruction about comprehension strategies (e.g., summarising the main idea, predicting events and outcomes, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings), while adults read to learners or when learners read themselves.
- Frequent writing of letters, and using these to begin writing words or parts of words; using words to begin writing sentences; the use of both invented spelling and teaching correct spelling (helpful to understand the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships); the use of focused instruction and practice; using correct spelling in all later writing once previously studied and mastered; regular and frequent writing.
- Time, materials and resources should support daily: (a) independent reading of texts (selected to be interesting to the individual learner, and beneath his/her frustration level); and (b) assisted reading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure to advance learners' capabilities.
- Promotion of independent reading outside school (e.g., through daily at-home reading assignments, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and working with community groups, such as public librarians).

Much more work is required to create a coherent taxonomy of approaches, underpinnings and elements that are properly debated and known in the system in South Africa. An initial overview of existing frameworks is presented below. The six learning outcomes specified by the previous curriculum (NCS) for the Senior Phase (Grade 7-9) in South African schools largely overlapped with much of what has been said thus far, as well as the first conceptual framework below, and comprised: (1) *Listening*, (2) *Speaking*, (3) *Reading and Viewing*, (4) *Writing*, (5) *Thinking and Reasoning*, and (6) *Language Structure and Use*. The new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Foundation Phase (HL) proposes the following categories: (1) *Listening and Speaking*, (2) *Reading and Phonics*, (3) *Handwriting*, and (4) *Writing*. Each one of these is broken down further into detailed sub-requirements. Reading would, in illustration, entail shared reading (including elements of shared writing), group-guided reading, paired / independent reading, and phonics (including phonemic awareness). Under these belong steps to follow, or further components, and an overview of the literacy skills to be taught or achieved. For the Intermediate Phase, *Language Structure and Use* is added, and all writing is collapsed into one. The latter is also done for FAL in the Foundation Phase, while in the Intermediate Phase the second category is taken as *Reading and Viewing*.

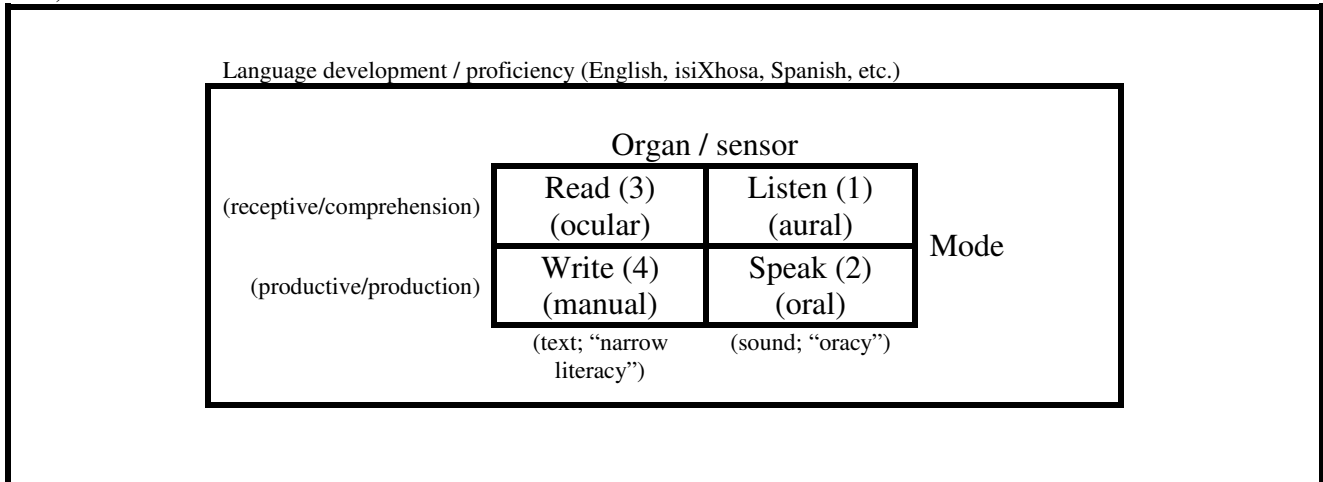
In all of the above, the “BICS” / “CALP” distinction should never be lost sight of, as well as progression from the one to the other. These two concepts refer to what Cummins (1984, 1992, and elsewhere) called ‘basic interpersonal communication skills’ (or BICS), and “cognitive academic language proficiency” (or CALP), with the latter requiring a substantive cognitive leap from learners.

The following proposed conceptual framework may serve well to anchor many of the basic elements relevant to literacy and language acquisition and development.

Routes to / sequences of literacy achievement is perceived as an open system, with many pathways and sub-systems at stake (also see the representation of elements indicated with “@” in the second diagram).

## Conceptual framework (language / literacy development aspects)

Literacy development as such (narrower language-related view, but could potentially include numeracy, social-, economic literacy, etc.)



One caveat to sound here is that free reign in making up one’s own eclectic mix of elements of practice runs the risk of trying to entertain clashing paradigms within one and the same practice.<sup>2</sup> This may provide one of the strongest rationales for the proposed NRF-funded investigation as a whole.

Cumulative learning for practitioners, academics, teacher trainers, producers of products and other service providers, consultants and managers within this whole domain of literacy development of necessity occurs through ongoing evaluation (also see “\*” in the next diagram, with the understanding that no up-front moratoriums can be placed on any implementation until better solutions have been found).

The points indicated with “@” in the next diagram also indicate specific places where weights and counter-weights have to be applied to keep a good balance between various sub-spheres of literacy attainment.

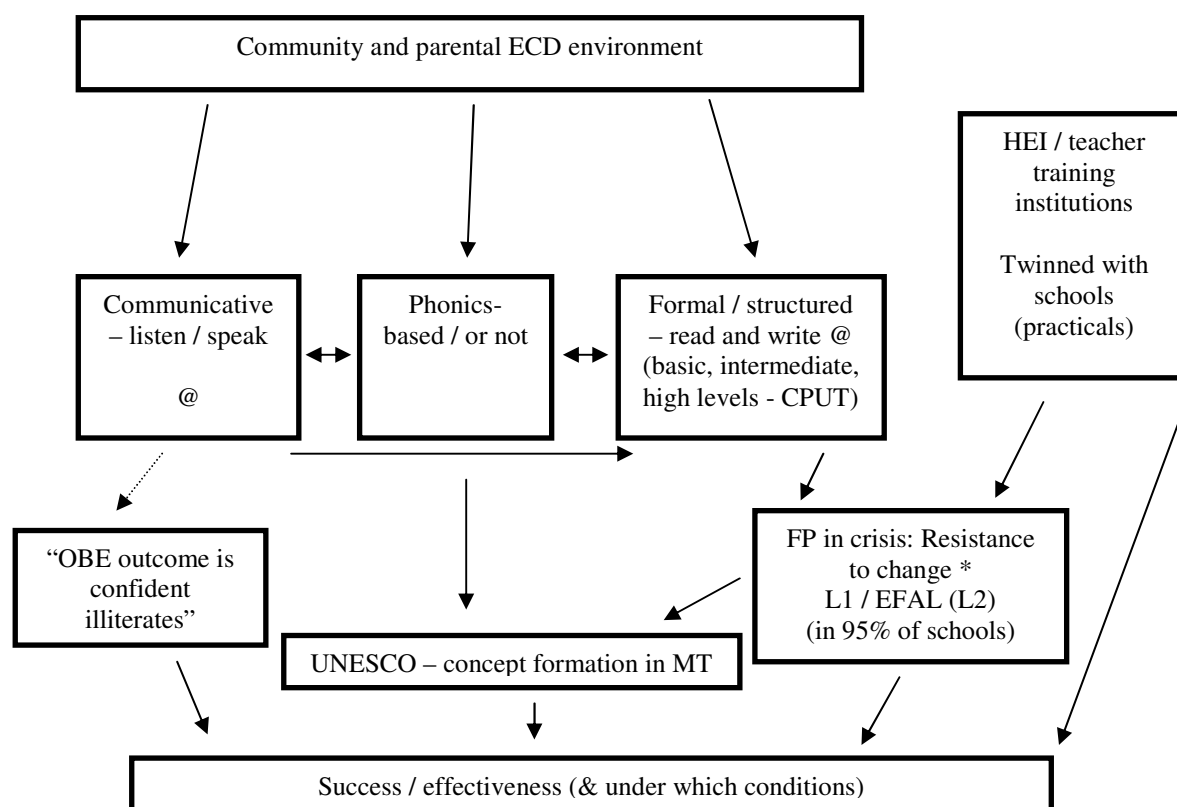
To end this introductory conversation about paradigms and approaches, reference is made next to key texts attempting to bring order with regard to taxonomies of language teaching / acquisition.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) arranged and identified approaches and methods in language teaching according to the following classification:

- I. Major 20<sup>th</sup>-century trends (in a way the classical and traditionally widespread approaches);
- II. Alternative approaches and methods (with varied support at different places and times; having developed over the last 30 years as alternatives to the former grammar-based approaches and methods; and striving for authentic communication in the classroom from a language-as-communication perspective); and
- III. Current communicative approaches (the new mainstream?).

<sup>2</sup> This would touch on the requirement of “fidelity to the model” (personal communication, Alan Davies, 21 May 2009).

## Routes to / sequences in literacy achievement



MT = mother tongue

Richards and Rodgers' treatment of these approaches and methods is useful in the way in which they use a consistent set of characteristics or a scheme to describe each of them. They accordingly cover each approach's:

- theoretical foundations (theory of the nature of language, and theory of the nature of language learning);
- design features (general and specific objectives, syllabus model adhered to, types of learning and teaching activities used, learner roles, teacher roles, and the role of instructional materials); and
- procedures employed (classroom techniques, practices and behaviours).

The first set ("classical" approaches; see Item I above) comprises:

- The grammar-translation method, based especially on first studying classic grammar and language structures (mostly through Latin, or Greek)<sup>3</sup> to master basic proficiency as a stepping stone towards advanced study of grammar and rhetoric, also known as the Ciceronian or Prussian method in the USA in the beginning. [The focus was on learning the language to access its literature, reading and writing above speaking and listening, memorising vocabulary relevant to literature in the language, the sentence as the basic unit, accuracy/correctness, deductive teaching of grammar in a strictly organised and sequential way, and using the student's native language as medium of instruction. Its heydays cover the period from the 1840s to the 1940s. It is quite removed from issues and devoid of theoretical position from the angle of linguistics, applied linguistics, psychology or education.]
- It was followed by a period of innovations to language teaching during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also called the Reform Movement. This was driven by more practical needs to communicate orally.

<sup>3</sup> Hence also being called the classical method (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Conversation through key routines drove the development of a “structural syllabus” mimicking the sequences, patterns and complexity levels observed and followed by children when learning. It had a strong linguistic (speech, and not the written word, as the primary form of language) and phonetic (scientific analysis / description of sound systems; to aid pronunciation) emphasis. [In addition to the foregoing two emphases, its focus was on conversation texts and dialogues, an inductive approach to teaching grammar, acquiring new meaning through establishing associations within the target language rather than the native language, selection of and limits to what is being taught, organising content in terms of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, progression from the simple to the complex, meaningful context, connected sentences, and an avoidance of translation.] This approach (or movement) actually provided the theoretical foundations for the discipline of applied linguistics, and as such operated before any particular method or approach was actually developed.

- The direct method, also called (or derived from the broader notion of) the natural method, which was characterised by intensive oral interaction in the target language, without translation or the use of the native language, making it essentially a monolingual approach. [It further has as focus the inductive approach to deriving grammar rules, speaking beginning with pronunciation, the teacher replacing the textbook in the early phases, teaching only everyday vocabulary and sentences, carefully graded progression of oral communication, intensive question-and-answer exchanges, teaching concrete vocabulary through physical demonstration, objects and pictures, and abstract vocabulary through association of ideas, teaching speaking and listening comprehension, and emphasising correct pronunciation and grammar equally.] It’s decline, from about the 1920s, was the result of the fact that public schools could not handle this approach as successfully as private schools (requiring small classes, high teacher competence, also in the target language, and extreme enthusiasm and physical innovation). During the 1950s to 1980s formal approaches and methods developed most actively, compared to any other era, and include the following two.
- The oral approach and situational language teaching rested on the theoretical assumptions that speech is the basis of language, and structure is the basis of speaking (hence the other description of this approach as structuralism in the United Kingdom at some point), and that knowledge of structures has to be linked to situations (the context) in which these would be used. The learning theory could be termed behaviourist habit-learning. Vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns also figure prominently. [The focus is on spoken language, with the target language the language in the classroom, vocabulary selection procedures prioritising essential words, grammar items being graded in a hierarchy from simple to complex, and reading and writing only introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis has been achieved.]
- The audio-lingual method emphasises the mechanistic aspects of language learning and use (also called structural linguistics in the USA<sup>4</sup>), and hence sees language, as many other forms of learning, as a formal, rule-governed system, which can be formally organised to maximise efficiency during teaching and learning. It shares many characteristics and theoretical assumptions with the previous approach. [It has as focus accuracy through drill and practice, describing foreign language learning as a process of mechanical habit formation, prioritising listening over writing, forming analogies through drills and not explanations, and imbedding meaning in its cultural and linguistic context.]

The second set (called “alternative” approaches; see Item II above) comprises the following:

- the total physical response method, which coordinates speech and action, endeavours to teach language through physical or motor activity, values the emotional (playful activity to reduce stress), uses instructions-based content (imperatives) and the central place of the verb to mimic first-language acquisition in toddlers, and pursues bio-programming (commencing with

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<sup>4</sup> Or the Michigan method, after its origins (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

listening proficiency) and brain lateralisation (concentrating on right-hemisphere learning, unlike grammar-based approaches) points of departure;

- the Silent Way, which requires the teacher to be quiet for as much time as possible so that the learner can produce as much language as possible, facilitates learning through learner discovery, aligns physical objects to the learning process, and places the learning content to be mastered in the context of problem solving, although it departs largely from traditional structural and lexical sequences and contents because it is actually rather a way of organising classroom activities;
- community language learning, which requires non-directive teachers to facilitate student-led learning contents and processes (even aspects of counselling), expects teachers to be very competent in both the target and original languages and the dynamics within individuals and communities (without access to / use of conventional materials), and involves the whole person, including emotions, behavioural skills and linguistic knowledge;
- suggestopedia, uses techniques, such as suggestion / desuggestion<sup>5</sup>, and the role of rituals / placebos, to foster language learning, attends much to the lay-out, furniture, décor, atmosphere (music, rhythm, breathing) and affect associated with the classroom in which the teacher acts with authoritative behaviour, remains a lexical or vocabulary-based technique, and essentially gives its procedures the air, but not substance, of science;
- the whole language approach, which is not a teaching method as such, but an approach to learning that treats language as a whole entity, focuses on experiences and activities relevant to the lives and needs of the learners, uses authentic materials, focuses on comprehension and real purpose, uses real audiences to convey and discover meaning, uses student-produced text, integrates reading writing and all the other language skills, and is essentially student-centred and interactional (in the sense of conversation and communication), although its critics say it is anti-direct teaching, anti-skills and anti-materials, though, fostering fluency at the expense of accuracy;<sup>6</sup>
- multiple intelligences, which is also a learner-based approach, acknowledges the uniqueness of (and differences between) every learner and adjusts instruction accordingly, takes into account in which area each learner excels (language/verbal/linguistic, logic/mathematics, spatial/visual, music/ rhythm, relationships, kinesthetics (body/movement), intrapersonal, etc.), and tries to progress from awakening the relevant intelligence, through amplifying and teaching with/for that, to transfer of intelligence (knowledge);
- neuro-linguistic programming, which is also not a language-teaching method as such, is a humanistic philosophy and set of beliefs / (communication) techniques rooted in popular psychology, from which language teachers could derive practical prescriptions empowering them to become effective teachers, is focused on rapport, personal growth and mind-body connection, and is learner-centred;
- the lexical approach, which is also not an approach or method as such, departs from the claim that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions or other units of planning and teaching, but words and word combinations (or *lexis*), believes in the centrality of the lexicon (ahead of language learning and language use) to language structure, gives vocabulary a more central role (also on the basis of analyses of frequency of use of words), emphasises lexical units (multi-word groups) learnt and used as single terms<sup>7</sup>, with the latter reflected in many labels, among which corpus linguistics is the latest from the viewpoint of computer-based studies of language (and of multi-word language units), requires massive volumes of language input (for instance through avid reading) to ensure effective learning and competence, and is keen on the study and documentation of collocation

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<sup>5</sup> Hence also the term desuggestopedia for this “method” (also see Larsen-Freeman, 2000), essentially by desuggesting the limitations we think we have, and, in so doing, freeing greater parts of our mental capacity.

<sup>6</sup> The whole-language approach coupled with good phonics instruction should in theory form a strong pair (personal communication, Alan Davies, 21 May 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Even Noam Chomsky, the “father” of present / recent studies in syntax, is said to have recently adopted lexical primacy (from the transformational/generative grammar or linguistics school of thought).



(the various ways in which multiple words combine and even reflect the same (depth) meanings, for example fixed expressions and figures of speech); and

- competency-based language teaching, which is an outcomes-based approach, emphasises the teaching and learning of the central or key competencies that would enable learners to function and participate actively in society (with all the value judgements and risks that could be attached to the process of deciding what (first) is taught to whom, etc, with one obvious outcome being attempts to maintain the status quo, and another serving as strong agent of change), considers as key what the learner has (is expected) to do with language, is task- or performance-centred, favours measurable descriptions of desired knowledge, skills and behaviours, uses the formulation of standards, indicators and other descriptors amply, follows modularised instruction patterns that are also individualised and learner-centred, uses ample continuous and ongoing assessment, tends to feature strongly in work-related and survival-oriented contexts (including life skills), and can be characterised as a functional or interactional approach.

Current (mainstream) communicative approaches in vogue (see Item III above) include:

- communicative language teaching, which has gained the status of present “classical” example (of communicative approaches) after replacing situational language teaching in the United Kingdom during the 1960s<sup>8</sup>, focuses on the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences and the functional and communicative potential of language (and communicative proficiency, rather than mere mastery of structures), provides learners opportunity to use the language (either by learning to use it (weak version of the approach) or using it to learn it (strong version of the approach)), and emphasises other aspects such as the importance of meaning, dialogue, contextualisation, effective communication, comprehensible pronunciation, minimal drilling, early reading and writing, struggling through initial barriers (trial and error), sequencing for any reason making sense, fluency (and accuracy, but subservient to context), and moving from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation;
- the natural approach<sup>9</sup>, which has been called by many other terms such as psychological, phonetic, new, reform, direct, analytic, imitative, and even evolutionary, adheres to the notion of learning a new language without recourse to a native language, or to grammatical analysis, drilling or any particular grammar theory, believes (also) that the principles underlying the approach conform largely with those observed for young children learning to talk, etc., emphasises exposure or input, rather than practice and repetition (especially teacher-driven), and emotional preparedness to learn, adheres to extended periods of listening before learners should attempt to produce language themselves, encourages the use of written and other materials, accepts communication as the primary function of language (as the vehicle), and endorses the acquisition (i.e., unconscious process) hypothesis (and not the learning hypothesis, developing conscious rules about language) for developing competence (learning cannot lead to acquisition, according to the theory), along with other elements or hypotheses such as monitoring, natural order / sequence, input and affective filtering;
- cooperative language learning, which is part of a more general instructional approach known as collaborative learning, makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups, depends on the socially structured exchange of information, holds each learner accountable for his/her own learning, motivates each learner to increase the learning of others (thus emphasising peer-tutoring and peer-mentoring instead of competition), often uses discussion groups, group work and pair work (not necessarily always cooperative in themselves), is learner-centred, provides opportunity to focus on particular parts of language development as required, develops communication strategies and social skills, and enhances learner motivation, although it can be very taxing for teachers, and it may be difficult to deal with learners with different proficiency levels;

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<sup>8</sup> Partly based on the criticisms that Chomsky had levelled at structural linguistic theory in 1957 (in Syntactic Structures).

<sup>9</sup> Not to be confused with the natural method, later known as the direct method (see Item I earlier).

- content-based instruction (of second language teaching in particular) organises teaching around the contents or information that students will / have to acquire (and not around a linguistic or other syllabus), minimises the direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the designated other learning content, prioritises meaning and the exchange of information, considers language the by-product (also vehicle) of learning about real-world content (akin almost to the language-across-the-curriculum proposals for reading and writing in all learning areas in the mid-1970s in the United Kingdom), requires all teachers to be (at least in part) language teachers, believes that using language as a means to acquire information results in the most successful language learning and better reflects the needs that learners have for learning a second language, considers language to draw upon or involve an extended set of integrated skills, and naturally leads to the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- task-based language teaching claims that tasks are the vehicle for promoting communication and authentic language use / learning, does not make use of or rely on a systematic grammatical (or another type of) syllabus, concentrates on developing task types, sequencing tasks and evaluating task performance, involves real communication and meaningful activity, focuses on process rather than product, emphasises interaction and purpose, sequences tasks according to difficulty and complexity, and considers language the main instrument for making meaning;
- and the post-methods era, which is a result, perhaps, of not yet having found the universal theory, approach or method for teaching language (with methods being more specific, and although concrete in a comforting way, having shorter spans of popularity, and approaches being more durable and flexible, because of their more general nature and being open to interpretation and implementation variants), where large similarities in all classroom situations and the general difficulty for teachers to adjust their teaching to any particular theory / paradigm, lead them to do what they do according to a personal approach. Such approach typically is born out of personal beliefs and principles, and perhaps also habits, previous example and personal experience, regarding his/her role in the classroom, what effective teaching and learning comprises, the difficulties faced by and needs of learners (and how to address these), learning activities that work or are successful (or considered to be that), and how a successful lesson is structured. Each teacher will derive a core set of principles for their teaching. These would typically cover the extent of: learner engagement, teacher vis-à-vis learner centeredness or focus, learner participation, learner responsibility, tolerance towards mistakes, development of learner confidence, teaching of learning strategies, responses to learner difficulties, learner peer activities, cooperation between learners, practicing accuracy and fluency, and addressing learner needs and interests.

Richards and Rodgers completed their overview by considering the following factors to be the most likely ones to continue determining language teaching trends: government policy directives (e.g., on accountability), trends in the profession, expert(“guru”)-led innovations, responses to technology (especially digital), influences from academic disciplines (especially linguistics and related ones), research influences, learner-based innovations, crossover educational trends (between some of the approaches and methods mentioned above), and crossovers from other disciplines (e.g., ethnography, human engineering and psychotherapy).<sup>10</sup>

It goes without saying that many of the techniques, learner and teacher roles, syllabus implications, etc., at stake are found in more than one approach and in various configurations, and that any intended evaluation of literacy or language teaching practice will have to be flexible in making a distinction between sub-elements (techniques and activities) and broader approaches and adherence to paradigms.

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<sup>10</sup> In practice, teachers themselves, and what they do from day to day in the classroom, would be the key determinant, with their learning area knowledge at the heart of the issue (personal communication, Alan Davies, 21 May 2009).

Although seemingly giving primacy here to the classification above, there are obviously many other ways of depicting and classifying paradigms of language acquisition and development (and teaching). The result could really be a war-field of battles and great confusion. Larsen-Freeman (2000) attempted a similar description, but without an overarching classification determining the structure of her book. She used similar criteria for presenting each approach. To avoid repetition, detailed contents are not discussed, and only the chapter headings of her book are cited, namely:

- the grammar-translation method,
- the direct method,
- the audio-lingual method,
- the silent way,
- desuggestopedia,
- community language learning,
- total physical response,
- communicative language teaching,
- content-based, task-based, and participatory approaches<sup>11</sup>, and
- learning strategy training, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligences.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) made two very important additional contributions in terms of classification and description:

- He situated his exposition deliberately within the context of the second-language acquisition<sup>12</sup> of English.
- His approach can be termed integrative in the broadest possible sense. Not only does he account well for the historical periods of development in the field, but he also provides a critical evaluation of the relationship between theory, research and practice.

The latter item guaranteed that theoretical principles and classroom procedures (as well as pedagogy, interactions and instructional design) remain linked to each other during discussions. A particular (and inevitable) outcome of this author's approach is explanations of why and how recent perspectives have resulted in the present "postmethod" condition.

Kumaravadivelu first presents three orientation chapters (as Part 1 of his book) covering:

- language, to explain its systemic, discursal and ideological orientation<sup>13</sup>, as part of his presentation of theoretical concepts and pedagogical precepts about competence, knowledge and ability;
- learning, to describe input and the intake factors and processes governing (adult) second language learning in formal contexts; and
- teaching, to explain how classroom language has to be modified in order to provide learners with accessible and acceptable linguistic input, and also to describe various types of interactional activity that would promote comprehension in order to lead to acquisition.

In Part 2, after an introductory chapter on the constituents (method and methodology; approach, method and technique; approach, design and procedure; and principles and procedures) and categories of methods, the following three groups of methods are discussed:

- language-centred methods, such as the audio-lingual method (in America, paralleling the structural-situational method in the United Kingdom), with their principle concern with linguistic forms / structures;

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<sup>11</sup> Originating from the work of Paulo Freire in the early 1960s, but only becoming formalised in the 1980s.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard, a host of literature is available, and has to be accounted for, on the differences between first- and second-language acquisition, and the age or critical/actual periods during which each typically happens (e.g., Herschensohn, 2007; Brown, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Or put differently, language as system, language as discourse, and language as ideology.

- learner-centred methods, such as communicative language teaching, with their principle concern with the needs, wants and situations of learners; and
- learning-centred methods, such as the natural and communicational approaches, with their principle concern with the cognitive processes of language learning. (The latter developed during the 1980s when (after) various proponents also experimented with approaches such as the comprehension approach, the proficiency-oriented approach, the lexical approach and the process approach.)

Discussion of a range of “new methods” (also called “designer nonmethods”) then follow, all advocating a humanistic approach to language teaching/learning. These methods include community language learning, the silent way, (de)suggestopedia and total physical response. Task-based language teaching is seen as another (later) reaction that followed when the novelty of the communicative language teaching approaches started to wane. The complexity of the interfaces between approach, method and techniques is illustrated when observing that the tasks belonging to the level of techniques could be language-, learner- or learning-centred tasks.

Part 3 is used to discuss the condition, pedagogy and predicament of post-method perspectives.

In terms of the post-method condition, the author points out how recent critical thinking questioned the nature and scope of method, not only in terms of contents and quality, but also (and especially) the concept of method itself. It is claimed that the language teaching profession has arrived at a point where it got caught up in an endless search for an unavailable solution (e.g., for the one and only correct or best way to go about the task). The resulting call is to end the repetitive cycle of repackaging the same ideas. The restart should happen outside method, hence the post-method (or could it be “a-method”?) position or condition. After exploring the meaning and myth<sup>14</sup> (and therefore also death) of method (also through distinguishing between method as construct and methodology as conduct), the logic of a post-method perspective (or condition) is argued. The essential implication and claim of this is that teacher education has to be reconfigured by eliminating the petrified / reified relationship between theory and practice, especially along new pedagogic parameters<sup>15</sup> and with new indicators<sup>16</sup>.

Three frameworks are then discussed as part of the (proposed) post-method pedagogy.

- The three-dimensional framework, originally attributed to Stern, abandoned the method concept and opted for a strategy concept concentrating on strategies and techniques (practical action) across three dimensions, being intralingual-crosslingual, analytic-experiential and explicit-implicit.
- The exploratory practice framework, introduced by Allwright, encourages teacher-researchers to shape their own understanding and practice as they go, is based on a number of uniquely defined underlying principles<sup>17</sup> and practices<sup>18</sup>, and makes much of collegiality. The notion of a

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<sup>14</sup> That: (i) there is a best method; (ii) method is the organising principle for language teaching; (iii) method has universal and a-historical value; (iv) theorists conceive and teachers consume knowledge; and (v) method is neutral, without ideological motivation (with method actually entrenching scholastic, linguistic, cultural and economic marginalisation).

<sup>15</sup> That account for particularity (a particular group of teachers teaching specific learners pursuing a particular set of goals in a particular institutional context within a specific socio-cultural milieu), practicality (teachers’ own enquiry, professional theory, effectiveness and meaning making) and possibility (*a la* Paulo Freire, in terms of empowerment and equity).

<sup>16</sup> Which identify the functions and features of the roles of the post-method learner, teacher and teacher trainer / educator.

<sup>17</sup> Prioritising quality of life; working primarily to understand language classroom life; involving everybody; working to bring people together; working also for mutual development; integrating work for understanding into classroom practice; and making the work (effort) a continuous enterprise.

<sup>18</sup> Identifying a puzzle (the *why*, rather than *how* of it); reflecting on it; monitoring it; taking direct action to generate data; considering the initial outcomes and adjusting what is done next; moving on; and going public.

crude loop diagram progressing from global thinking, to local action and local thinking, and back to the beginning, is also accepted.

- Kumaravadivelu's own macro-strategic framework, developed through his cultural studies in post-structuralism, -modernism and -colonialism, puts forward broad operational guidelines (or guiding principles) in the form of macro-strategies<sup>19</sup> linked through the pivotal pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility (as before). Any number of micro-strategies, or classroom procedures, would be designed to realise the objectives of any macro-strategy.

The post-method predicament lies in its resistance against changing (abandoning) the concept of method, especially pedagogically and ideologically, although local awareness may still facilitate particular developments.

Obviously, there would be many more concrete and substantive contributions over a range of perspectives, such as the one by Gibbons (2006) in her analysis of bridging discourses in the English second-language classroom, which one could investigate further at the opportune points.

The (argued need for) coherence between paradigms and practices, or fit between *theoria* and *praxis*, to use the Greek roots pertaining to present terminology in a naughty way), may well exist best in the imperative to avoid clashing assumptions, sequencing, objectives, and approaches, that may erode learning and teaching rather than facilitate them, unless one is aware of the complex dynamics. Some of the hopes entertained in the process will include:

- The abovementioned fit (including with and through research) would guarantee that theoretical principles and classroom procedures (as well as pedagogy, interactions and instructional design) remain linked and mutually strengthening of each other.
- Coherence should apply during debate and in classroom practice, and between the two.
- A particular (and inevitable) outcome of the debate about approaches (as intended by Gibbons, for instance) should be explanations of why and how recent perspectives have resulted in the present "post-method" condition.
- In this regard, the host of literature available on the differences between first- and second-language acquisition, and the age or critical / actual periods during which each typically happens, should also be factored in.

Without exploring that in detail here, the determining role of teacher training (for both theory and practice, again), can never be taken out of the equation here.

### **Implications of the theory-practice debate for the consortium's study/studies**

Requiring the investigators, collaborators and researchers, including research students, to keep abreast of debate, argument and paradigm overviews, as above, will be paramount in the run up to and execution of the envisaged course of the work over three years. This will be relevant in the following expected ways (collectively functioning as the rationale for the study, in fact):

- Ensuring the accommodation of the various literacy development approaches and their components, service providers, related products (e.g., textbooks and readers), and formal role players (teacher-trainers, university researchers, department officials, teachers, funding organisations/donors, etc);
- Providing a sufficiently large research and collaboration enterprise (with a strong conceptual, empirical, comparative and potentially longitudinal focus);

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<sup>19</sup> Maximise learning opportunities; facilitate negotiated interaction; minimise perceptual mismatches; activate intuitive heuristics; foster language awareness; contextualise linguistic input; integrate language skills; promote learner autonomy; ensure social relevance; and raise cultural awareness.

- Aiming at evaluating the relative effectiveness of a range of strategies and practices; and
- Standing the best chance of identifying those conceptual and theoretical viewpoints, approaches and practices, and the conditions under which these would hold, that would consistently, comprehensively, and sustainably be associated with successful literacy attainment by young learners (within a national school system).

Everything that has been presented up to this point is relevant when the consortium study as a whole, but also each individual project, attempts to formulate its own rationale, hypotheses, design and methodology features.

Taking note of some anticipated features of design and method<sup>20</sup> already now will go far in retaining a coherent research dynamic in the consortium over three years too.

The central strategy through which to **identify and refine the constructs and design** of the study is anticipated to comprise: networking with role players (for instance, academic departments of language teaching at university education faculties, the producers of language and grammar textbooks and readers, methodologies, and so on, and curriculum specialists within and outside the national education department); literature review; identifying and studying various conceptual approaches and practical strategies; and analysing a selection of teaching materials and textbooks.

The proposed broad **collaboration** between stakeholders should add great value to the study. This type of work is not easy to achieve or common practice in South African research. After that, identifying (selecting) and **empirically evaluating** the (systemic) effectiveness of a range of literacy development techniques should follow, especially towards conclusions about the link between the assumed variety of techniques and the backdrops of contextual conditions that they operate under. **Contextual conditions** have to include within-programme factors (for example, implementation levels, coordination by champions or committees, levels of training, etc.), conditions associated with the direct beneficiaries (the individual learners), and the systems in which learners find themselves at the time (e.g., conditions, expertise and many other applicable elements at local school level). In the case of training, the effects of general teacher training (pre- and in-service) as well as specific preparation for the implementation of any given literacy / language development approach or its materials, have to be covered. The empirical part (over the course of the consortium's work) is deliberately split into an exploratory (even more qualitative), phase and a more specific evaluative (increasingly also using quantified criterion and predictor information) phase to enable incremental honing of the study, while at the same time enabling the early release of **findings** and engagement in **academic and policy debate**.

A few reasons for having to think and talk about all of the above now before tackling the rest of the NRF-funded 2011 to 2013 path, may include:

- Giving a sense of the complexity of language acquisition and the available knowledge;
- Firing ourselves and others up sufficiently;
- Accepting only the most solid foundations, expertise and approaches to teacher training and classroom practice; and
- Putting us in a position to make a sufficient dent in literacy and language development in S.A.

### **Outlines for a sub-study on paradigmatic exploration**

In the first exploratory phase of the study, if not the whole study, we want to establish if and how it would be possible to establish if teachers understand the conceptual and paradigmatic underpinnings of their training and eventual deliberate classroom practice.

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<sup>20</sup> Hinkel (2005) provides an extensive and valuable source on approaches to research on second-language acquisition.

*The problems to be addressed in the sub-theme*

Teachers (assumedly) have an insufficient understanding of the paradigms and theoretical positions that underpin literacy and language acquisition and development. This applies to both how learners acquire and develop such proficiency, but also how teachers facilitate that in formal schooling.

Researchers do not know how best to study this towards improving language teaching and learning.

*Specific research questions to be dealt with by the sub-theme team*

Which typology/-ies “best” describe/s: literacy acquisition; literacy development; language acquisition; and language development? Do these differ for first and second languages?

Do teachers get trained in these? Do they deliberately integrate that into their classroom practice? What are their current levels of awareness of and proficiency in this regard?

How is the link between teacher paradigms and classroom practice studied sufficiently well to make valid conclusions about its effectiveness in improving proficiency outcomes among learners?

*The conceptual framework within which the research topic will be researched*

Exploratory, qualitative (especially over the first 15 to 18 months). (To be expanded.)

*Methods to be used for collecting information so that the research questions can be answered.*

Interviews (teachers and teacher trainers), classroom observation (teachers), and literature review.

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