MULTILINGUALISMIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE

VANNIE NAIDOO

School of Management, Information Technology and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, Westville Campus, Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000, South Africa
E-mail: naidoova@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract - South Africa is a democratic state that has many ethnical groups that is made of a diversity of different race groups, religions and ethnicities. Language has a special place in a people's culture. Within South Africa, we have eleven official languages namely; Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. Most South Africans can speak more than one language. Having eleven official languages are especially beneficial to such a diverse country. In the world German, English, Mandarin, Hindi and French are the most prominent business languages used in industry worldwide. In South Africa, a common language in business is English. It is also an official business language used within business circles around the world. Most of the universities in South Africa teach students in English. However, universities are now becoming more ethnic to a region and having a second language being introduced as an elective. For example at the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal that is situated geographically in the province of KwaZulu-Natal,there are predominantly Zulu speaking people. The university offers all its lectures in English but an elective that non-Zulu speaking students have to take is Zulu. Thisvery good language policythat assists students in business, medicine, engineering and humanities in understanding and communicating in the local language in the province. Culture and language has raised many contentious issues in the workplace within South African.This is a qualitative paper that will explore the following themes:

- Multilingualism within the workplace
- Psycholinguistics and Multilingual Cognition in Human Creativity
- Developing intercultural communication to improve workplace dynamics

Keywords - Apartheid, English,Multilingualism, South African languages, Workplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

The advances in technology and globalization hasaffected societies throughout the world. South Africa has a broad multicultural society that needs to have tolerance and understanding in the workplace. In order to achieve tolerance it is best that people from different cultures learn about other cultures. An integral part of culture is language. Organisations that have multicultural organisations must have staff in place to cope with staff from different languages. This can assist in making the workplace environment healthy, happy, respected and tolerant. Most prejudices or miscommunication stem from a lack of cultural understanding. The discussion that follows will highlight the importance of multiculturalism dynamics in the workplace. The theme multilingualism within the workplace will be discussed. Examples from the South African workplace will be extensively discussedin detail throughout the paper. The link between psycholinguistics and multilingual cognition in human creativity will be also be explored.

The discussion will begin with discussing multilingualism within the workplace.

II. MULTILINGUALISM WITHINTHE WORKPLACE

Language has a direct impact on the workplace. Since language is so closely tied to culture of people within the organisation, this is also indication of the importance of multilingualism within the workplace. However, if people cannot understand the rules or duties in the workplace because of language difficulty then accidents and production downtimes can occur. Multilingualism affects workers differently within a company, depending on their jobs, roles and geographic location of the company they work for.

Within the workplace in order to have strategic alignment within all levels of the organisation there needs to be effective channels of communication throughout the organisation. The workplace is characterised by different languages that are spoken by its employees. In South African we have eleven official languages spoken. To offer ease in communication English is a common business language used throughout the South African workplace by companies and many small businesses and NGO's. Some workers may speak their home language but understand at least English or Afrikaans.Angouri (2007) posits that Multinational Companies (MNCs) , more often than not, are formed by branches and subsidiaries and hence a number of languages co-exist not only because MNCs are geographically dispersed across national (and linguistic) borders but also because of the multilingual profile of their workforce.

According to the (OECD, 2016) "global competence requires numerous skills, including the ability to: communicate in more than one language; communicate appropriately and effectively with people from other cultures or countries; comprehend other people's thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and see the world from their perspectives; adjust one's thoughts, feelings or behaviours to fit new contexts

and situations; and analyse and think critically in order to scrutinise and appraise information and meanings."Gunesch(2008) examined the role of language in the development of cosmopolitanism as a global personal cultural identity, empirically finding that knowledge of languages certainly facilitates a broader worldview. Most importantly, foreign language skills tend to make us more tolerant and open to other ideas.

Within South Africa we have multilingualism within the workplace. It is encouraged by the department of education within South Africa that students learn different languages. At school level students are asked to take on more than one language. Within some SA universities, language policy indicates that students need to understand and speak the local language. An Example at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the local language spoken in the province in which the university is located is Zulu. All students who are enrolled at the university have to take Zulu, a fist year module that is compulsory. The researcher agrees that this policy assists her students in understanding the language and gives them exposure to the local language which they can use when they liaise and work with clients and customers and co-workers that come from Zulu culture.

Organisations can also send staff to English language skills short courses. This is very beneficial to workers who have poor or no English skills. Rural workers, workers from the local communitiesand African immigrants can enrol in these courses to improve their English understanding and literacy so that they can communicate better with workers within the workplace. Since English is a business language in the world, it is crucial that companies invest in training their staff in English speaking skills. Edwards (2009) argues that this is the era of bilingualism, which means that, at a given period of time, people learn a language other than their own because of its prevalent instrumental value and prestige at that specific time. At this particular moment, English can be considered as the second language of today's e´lite bilinguals, educated and trained for knowledge work in the information society. Levenson (2001) adds that researchers have described direct and indirect benefits that employers realize as a result of improving language skills. Primary benefits include cost savings associated with experiencing fewer accidents and errors, the ability to report problems, suggest solutions, relate better to colleagues, and provide better customer service.

South Africa is actively involved in tourism, this is a sector that contributes greatly to our country's ' GDP. South African need to speak English to communicate with foreign guests. For an employee in the tourism speaking French, German, Mandarin or Hindi can be an added advantage to the organisation/employer. A bilingual employee in the tourism industry is highly employable.Hua (2014) adds that language has become a double-edged sword in the workplace. It can be inclusive and exclusive at the same time. Knowing the right language can open all sorts of opportunities for an employee. If the employee speaks the right language, then he or she can establish a rapport with other employees, facilitate career progression, open doors to the job market, and increase mobility.

In the discussion that follows psycholinguistics and multilingual Cognition in Human creativity will be explored.

III. PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND MULTILINGUAL COGNITION IN HUMAN CREATIVITY

Studies on respondents that speak one language and those that speak more than one language is looked at to access how it impacts on creativity. The human mind is complex and understanding how a respondent knowing a second language can impact on his/ her creativity will be explored. Leading researchers suchAdesopeet. al. (2010), Kharkhurin, (2012), Ricciardelli, (1992) and Simonton (2008) have indicated in their studies that a positive correlations exist between bilingualism and creativity.

Kharkhurin (2012) states that: all reviewed cognitive models of creativity converge on at least one important property of creative thought – ability to establish distant associations that link concepts from distant categories. The communication between concepts is assumed to be an unconscious process during which the activation is propagated throughout the conceptual network. This property constitutes a key mechanism of divergent thinking, which is perceived by many researchers as one of the major components of creativity.Kharkhurin (2012) stresses the use of metaphors. Metaphors are widely believed to emerge from a selective projection of knowledge from one domain onto another domain, i.e. a partial comparison of associatively distant domains. This cognitive process of projection (or mapping) which generates new associative bonds can thus be an indication for a creative process of divergent thinking. Furlong (2009) is in agreement with Kharhhurin (2012) and reports that in her studies an increased use of metaphors among bilinguals compared to monolinguals was present.

Lasagabaster (2000), posits in his research that took place in the second half of the 20th century that respondents who were bilingual had better creative abilities. He found that pupils in the bilingual and immersion schools significantly outperformed their peers in monolingual programs on the traits of flexibility and originality, while there were no differences in verbal fluency. Cummins (1976) argued that bilingual respondentshad greater creativity as their experiences in different languages and cultures allowed them to switch between languages, and to their enhanced objectification of language (i.e. their metalinguistic awareness), which

allowed them to consciously compare and contrast their language systems.

Studies conducted in the last decade show that bilingualism has a strong influence not only on the development of language ability and linguistic skills but on cognitive development as well (Bialystok, 2009).In Germany, Lamsfuss-Schenk (2008) reported on research outcomes which argued that learners in bilingual classes showed significantly better results not only in the target language but also in the other subjects.Leikin (2012) investigated the potential influence of bilingual and monolingual educational environments on creative abilities. He compared monolingual Hebrew children with bilingual Russian and Hebrew children attending monolingual and bilingual immersion kindergartens. Performance on a pictorial multiple solution task and a creating equal numbers task showed significantly better results for bilingual children on measures of originality and creativity.Braun's study indicated similar results asLeikins. In Brauns' study he looked at creativity between the Dutch bilingual programmes in Belgium, where a clear superiority was found in pupils in an immersion-type programme compared with their monolingual peers.

After exploring different studies on bilinguals and monolinguals and the impact creativity has on them, the literature strongly affirms that respondents who speak more than one language are more creative to that of a respondent that speaks only one language. If we look at some renowned historical icons and creative thinkers in the world they have spoken more than one language (Petersilka, 2005). Nelson Mandela spoke English Afrikaans and Xhosa. He was one of the founding fathers of freedom and democracy in South Africa.

A way forward in developing intercultural communication will be put forward in the discussion below.

IV. DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

Intercultural communication is pivotal for a world that is so diverse in cultures. Businesses operate in a multicultural dimension with clients and business partners and suppliers from all over the world. It is therefore important that employees be trained on how to communicate with people from different cultures so that good communication prevails and business alliances continue.The researcher puts forward some practical ways to improve intercultural communication within the workplace as follows:

- The Human resource department of any organisation must be prepared to work with professional therapists and phycologists to unpack conflict arising from multiculturalism in the workplace.
- An important or valuable tool is for the organisation to invest in English language classes since English is recognised as one of the global business languages of the world.
- Employees must be involved in some social activity within the workplace. Proper spaces in the workplaceshould be created for staff to interact and socialise.
- Staff training on verbal and non-verbal ques should take place within the organisation so that employees from different cultures do not feel afraid or intimidated by working with a person from another culture because of their dominant cultural identity.
- Companies must partner up with NGO's so that more can be done to bridge the gap between the local and foreign employees.
- Employees must be trained in valuing other people be it other employees, clients or stakeholders as they would value themselves.
- Employees must think before speaking so that unnecessary rudeness or misunderstandings in the workplace can be eliminated.
- Employeesmust be trained in respecting and embracing all cultures.
- Proper policy on cultural conflict in the workplace must be developed by executive management at strategic level and filtered throughout the organisation.
- Employees need to be educated continuously within the workplace on how to behaviour with others in the workplace on issues of gender sensitivity, sexual orientation sensitivity, race and class sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

The world of work is constantly changing. One way to keep a healthy, happy and tolerant workplace devoid of conflict is to ensure employees and managementare schooled in cultural tolerance. Conflict will occur at some point between people from different cultures. Educating and training workers in English language, cultural diversity and respect and tolerance is imperative ensure a productive workplace that is free of conflict? Globally, the people of the world want peace and want to sustain the world as we know it. Organisations within the world want less conflict or no conflict within the workplace so that more can be done towards achieving the organisations goals and objectives in an efficient and productive manner. The key to workplace wellness is healthy respectful communication within the organisation and workplace.

REFERENCES

[1] Adesope, O.O., Lavin, T., Thompson, T., & Ungerleider, C. (2010). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the cognitive correlates of bilingualism. *Review of Educational Research, 80*(2), 207-245.

[2] Angouri, J. (2007) ." Language in the Workplace. A Multimethod Study of Communicative Activity in Seven Multinational Companies Situated in Europe ." Unpublished doctoral diss. , University of Essex . [Google Scholar]
[3] Bandura, A). (2008). Social cognitive theory. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), The international encyclopaedia of communication [electronic version]. London, England: Blackwell.
[4] Bialystok, E. (1993). Metalinguistic awareness: The development of children's representations of language.In C. Pratt, & A. Garton (Eds), *Systems of representation in children: Development and use* (pp. 211–233). London, UK: Wiley & Sons.
[5] Braun, A. (2007). Immersion et compréhensionen lecture, in Puren, L. &Babault, S. (eds)L'Éducation au-delà des frontières, Paris, L'Harmattan. 215-257.
[6] Burns, A., &Mohapatra, S. (2008). International migration and technological progress. Migration and Development Brief, 4 (February 1). Washington, DC: World Bank.
[7] Cummins, J. (1976). The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypotheses. Working Papers on Bilingualism, 9, 1–44.
[8] Edwards J.(2009). Language and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[9] Furlong, A. (2009). The relation of plurilingualism/culturalism to creativity: A matter of perception. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 6*(4), 343–368.
[10] Gillespie, M. (1996), Learning to Work in a New Land, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC. [Google Scholar]
[11] Gunesch, K. (2008). Multilingualism and Cosmopolitanism. Saabrucken: VDM
[12] Hua, Z. (2014). Piecing together the 'workplace multilingualism' jigsaw puzzle.*Multilingua, 33*(1–2): 233–242.
[13] Kharkhurin, A. V. (2012). Multilingualism and Creativity. Bristol: Multilingual Materials.
[14] Kankaanranta, A. (2010). BELF competence as business knowledge of internationally operating business professionals. *Journal of Business Communication,47*(4):380-407.
[15] Keyton, J., Caputo, J. M., Ford, E. A., Fu, R., Leibowitz, S. A., Liu, T., Polasik, S. S., Ghosh, P. & Wu, C.(2013). Investigating verbal workplace communication behaviours. *Journal of Business Communication, 50*(2), 152-169.
[16] Lamsfuss-Schenk, S. (2008). FremdverstehenimbilingualenGeschichtsunterricht. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang.
[17] Lasagabaster, D. (2000). The effects of three bilingual education models on linguistic creativity. International Review of Applied Linguistics, 38, 213–228.
[18] Leikin, M. (2012). The effect of bilingualism on creativity: Developmental and educational perspectives. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 17*(4), 431–447.
[19] Levenson, A. (2001), Investing in Workers' Basic Skills: Lessons from Company-funded Workplace-based Programs, National Institute for Literacy, Washington, DC. [Google Scholar]Lott, B. (2010). Multiculturalism and diversity: A social psychological perspective. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
[20] Louhiala-Salminen, L., Charles, M., &Kankaanranta, A. (2005). English as a lingua franca in Nordic corporate mergers: Two case companies. *English for Specific Purposes, 24*(1): 401-421
[21] OECD (2016). Global Competency for an Inclusive World. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/Globalcompetency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf
[22] Office of Trade and Economic Analysis. (2016). Jobs Attributable to Foreign Direct Investment in the United States http://www.trade.gov/mas/ian/build/groups/public/@tg_ian/documents/webcontent/tg_ian_005496.pdf
[23] Peberdy, S. (2001). Imagining immigration: Inclusive identities and exclusive policies in post-1994 South Africa: Evaluating South African immigration policy after Apartheid. *Africa Today*, 48(3), 15–32.
[24] Petersilka, C. (2005). Die ZweisprachigkeitFriedrichs des Großen. EinlinguistischesPorträt. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
[25] Ricciardelli, L. A. (1992). Bilingualism and cognitive development in relation to threshold theory. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 21* (4), 301–316.
[26] Seidlhofer, B. (2011). Understanding English as a lingua franca. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[27] Simonton, D. K. (2008). Bilingualism and creativity. In J. Altarriba& R.R. Heredia (Eds.), An Introduction to Bilingualism: Principles and Processes (pp. 147-166). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

★★★