# Conceptualising a reflexive framework for leaders of opposites in diversity: Language complexity at higher education institutions


## JP Fleischmann

orcid.org/0000-0002-3625-5203


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Promoter: Prof J Heystek

Co-promoter: Prof R Balfour

Graduation ceremony: July 2022

Student number: 10144188

I, Johan Petrus Fleischman,

declare herewith that the thesis,

Conceptualising a reflexive framework for leaders of opposites in diversity: Language complexity at higher education institutions,

which I herewith submit to the North-West University is in compliance with the requirements set for the degree: is my own work, has been text-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not already been submitted to any other university.

JP Fleischmann

8 December 2021

# PREFACE

> *Since the beginning of storytelling Death has called on the unwitting.*
>
> *But what is rarely related is the fact that Life is every bit as devious as Death. It too can wear a hooded coat.*
>
> *It is inevitable that Life will pay a visit too.*
>
> (Extracts from Amor Towles, *A gentleman in Moscow*)

My gratitude to all those hooded visitors, bearing Life:

Giants past and present who uploaded their insights onto human consciousness.

Martha van der Walt and Christel Oosthuizen who helped me find giants.

Elsa Esterhuizen who made sure that others could trace the giants.

Professors Jan Heystek and Robert Balfour who directed Life.

Matthew Curr who allowed Life to speak eloquently.

Elma, my soul mate, who does Life with me.

May at least one person find Life visiting in this reflexion.

# ABSTRACT

This investigation provides two new reflexive frameworks. The first is a reflexive framework of opposites which interprets the dynamics of opposites in terms of five levels of interpretation: meaning, structure, power, the other, and dynamic balance. The second, a reflexive framework of diversity, interprets the dynamic balance of three oppositional perspectives on diversity: separation, disparity, and variety. In terms of this specific study, these two frameworks reveal the dynamics of imbalance in the current state of languages at public higher education institutions (HEIs) and provide leaders with insight and direction to realise equality between languages at public HEIs. Leaders from other disciplines can apply these frameworks in combination or separately to various complex social contexts.

This metatheoretical conceptual study is grounded in reflexive interpretation. The conceptualisation segment of the study sets out to discover the context of leadership in complexity. Reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity are then conceptualised through methods of differentiating and integrating.

The illustrative segment of this study explains these frameworks for utility and sufficiency. In discovering the context of language diversity at public HEIs, numerous considerations are expounded and contradictions explicated. This context serves as data for illustrating the conceptualised frameworks. Through reflexive interpretation, the data are interpreted by an open play of reflection across three levels of the reflexive framework of diversity and across five levels of the reflexive framework of opposites.



**Keywords:**
Reflexive, leadership, complexity, opposites, diversity, language, higher education, conceptual, illustration

# OPSOMMING

Hierdie ondersoek lewer twee nuwe refleksiewe raamwerke. Die eerste is ‘n refleksiewe raamwerk vir teenoorstaandes en interpreteer die dinamika van teenoorstaandes in terme van vyf vlakke van interpetasie: betekenis, struktuur, mag, die ander, en ‘n dinamiese balans. Die tweede, ‘n refleksiewe raamwerk van diversiteit, interpreteer die dinamiese balans tussen drie teenoorstaande perspektiewe op diversiteit, naamlik verdeling, ongelykheid, en verskeidenheid. Hierdie twee raamwerke lê in hierdie studie die dinamika van wanbalans in die huidige stand van tale aan hoër onderwysinstellings (HOIs) bloot en bied leiers insig en leiding om die gelykwaardigheid van tale binne HOIs te bevorder. Leiers van ander dissiplines kan hierdie raamwerke in kombinasie of afsonderlik binne verskeie komplekse sosiale kontekste toepas.

Hierdie metateoretiese, konseptuele studie is gebaseer op refleksiewe interpretasie. Die konseptuele komponent van die studie begin by die beskrywing van die aard van leierskap binne ‘n komplekse samelewing. Refleksiewe raamwerke van teenoorstaandes en van diversiteit word dan gekonsepsualiseer deur die toepassing van die beginsels van differensiasie en integrasie.

‘n Verdere komponent van die studie illustreer hierdie raamwerke om hulle bruikbaarheid en genoegsaamheid te bevestig. ‘n Studie oor die konteks van kompleksiteit in taalverskeidenheid by HOIs ontgin verskeie oorwegings en identifiseer teenstellings. Hierdie konteks dien as data waarop die konseptuele raamwerke geïllustreer word. Die data word deur middel van refleksiewe interpretasie geïnterpreteer aan die hand van drie vlakke van die refleksiewe raamwerk van diversiteit en vyf vlakke van die refleksiewe raamwerk van teenoorstaandes.

**Sleutelterme**

Refleksief, leierskap, kompleksiteit, teenoorstaandes, diversiteit, taal, hoër onderwys, konseptueel, illustreer.

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# LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ASHE | Association for the Study of Higher Education |
| BICS | Basic interpersonal communication skills |
| CALP | Cognitive/academic language skills |
| CAS | Complex adaptive systems |
| Constitution | Constitution of the Republic of South Africa |
| CUP | Common underlying proficiency |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DSI | Department of Science and Innovation |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| EduREC | Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education |
| GHS | General household survey |
| HEI | Higher education institution |
| IEA | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement |
| L1 (or 2,3…) | Language 1 (or 2,3…), first (or second or third) language |
| LoLT | Language of learning and teaching |
| NBT | National Benchmark Test |
| NIDS | National Income Dynamics Study |
| NWU | North-West University |
| Pan SALB | Pan South African Language Board |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| SADiLaR | South African Centre for Digital Language Resource |

| | |
|---|---|
| SAHO | South African History Online |
| SAHRC | South African Human Rights Commission |
| SU | Stellenbosch University |
| UCT | University of Cape Town |
| UCT | University of Cape Town |
| UFS | University of the Free State |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNISA | University of South Africa |

# LIST OF DEFINITIONS

**Conceptual research**, “a theoretical structure of assumptions, principles and rules that holds together the ideas comprising a broad concept” (Li *et al.*, 2018:139).

**Disposition**, as *habitus:* “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 2005:175).

**Ideology**, “ideas, beliefs and values are mobilised to legitimise powerful interests through distortion and misrepresentation” (Shepherd *et al.*, 2020:6)

**Leadership**, “influencing ideas, meanings, understandings and identities of others within an asymmetrical (unequal) relational context” (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:3).

**Opposites**, two elements that exist in various degrees of dynamic contradiction and interrelation.

**Perspective**, “a particular way of thinking about something, especially one that is influenced by your beliefs or experiences.” (Collins, 2020).

**Reflection**, “an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, thinking about it, mull it over and evaluate it” (Boud *et al.*, 1994:19).

**Reflexive interpretation**, is “a way of indicating the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:328).

**Reflexive leadership**, “engaging in exercises of influencing followers about meanings and understandings, whilst thoughtfully reviewing one’s own thoughts and actions (and those of others involved in the situation)” (Boak, 2017:293).

**Reflexivity** is “the ambition to carefully and systematically take a critical view of one’s own assumptions, ideas and favoured vocabulary and to consider if alternative ones make sense” (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:14).

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

*We have honestly avoided language as the elephant in our*
*higher education lecture rooms and examination halls…*
*Our policies have thus far been a case of declaration without implementation.*

(Nkomo, 2021)

## Introduction

This study conceptualises a reflexive framework to guide leaders through competing demands of complex diversity contexts. The framework is illustrated in one such context: language diversity at public higher education institutions (HEIs).

At the intersection of leadership, diversity, and language at public HEIs lies the problem of co-operatively constructing a transformed future. This problem is formulated into a purpose statement and expanded into one main question and five sub-questions. These research questions are then conceptualised into a research framework which aligns the questions and chapters, and illustrates the relations of one chapter to the others. Finally, a preview of the respective chapters is presented.

### 1.2 Research problem

The research problem is located at the intersection of three domains: leadership, diversity, and language.

Diversity is continually expanding as "one of the most vexing dilemmas on campus [at higher education institutions (HEIs)]" (Smith, 2015:57). What seem to be neutral descriptions of differences are transformed “to a contested and political domain” (Lumby, 2006:152).The #mustfall movement of 2015-2017 exemplifies the contested nature of diversity issues. At times, some public HEI campuses were thrown into anarchy (cf. Cerny & Prichard, 2017; Pedroso, 2016). What started at selected public HEIs soon spread to other public HEIs and became more than just an issue of student fees. Students “asked themselves what could fall at their own universities… racial institutional culture, around white privilege, *language politics* and inclusivity” (Maringira & Gukurume, 2017:36, italics added).The movement was lauded as a victory for access to higher education, free higher education for the poor, a step towards economic freedom for all, and a disruption in Eurocentric education (Malabela, 2017). Chikane (2018) triumphantly concluded that the movement “Broke the Rainbow Nation”.

From a leadership perspective, however, the #mustfall movement created social disruption. Damages to property at public HEIs were estimated at R786m (Daniel, 2018). Intangible consequences included short- and long-term psychological, emotional and motivational state of students and staff, and loss of learning culture and opportunities (Fikeni *et al.*, 2020). Two Vice-chancellors at the time reflected on their experiences at the helm of a public HEI during the #mustfall movement: *As by fire: the end of the South African university* (Jansen, 2017) and *Rebels and rage: reflecting on #FeesMustFall* (Habib, 2019). From the analysis by these leaders, it

becomes clear that both leaders were caught by surprise. Activists elevated one perspective that dominated all other considerations. The agenda of the protesters expanded and shifted continuously. The authors bemoan the irrational and shifting demands, forcing public HEI leadership into reactive mode. It seems that public HEI leadership was not equipped with a proactive, balanced, and holistic framework to tackle such complex diversity problems: competing demands on equality, justice, internal hegemonic power struggles, the value of being diverse, and basic psychological needs such as similarity attraction and a sense of belonging to a group, while trying to promote the core functions of research and teaching.

The focus of the research problem is the absence of a proactive, balanced, and holistic framework for leaders to engage in diversity complexities.

Language at public HEIs serves as a specific example of leaders engaging in diversity contexts. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Constitution,* 1996*)* sets out the vision of a nation "united in our diversity" (1996: Preamble). To this end, the organs of state, "must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of [the indigenous languages]" (1996:s. 6(2)) and ensure that all official languages "must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably" (1996:s. 6(4)). Education is a designated contributor to this vision when it is determined that "Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable".(1996:s. 29(2)). Yet, the *Report on the use of African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education* (DHET, 2015:32-33) bemoans the little progress made in the previous twenty years to elevate the Sintu[1] languages. There seems to be a vacuum "on who should **lead or drive its implementation**" (2015:38, emphasis original). Conversely, Afrikaans, the one indigenous language that had standing as academic language at some public HEIs, has been jettisoned as language of learning and teaching (LoLT) from several public HEIs (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019). The net effect is the growing dominance of English as LoLT at public HEIs. Except for isolated efforts, the general elevation of Sintu has languages can be described as lethargic. Afrikaans has been jettisoned as LoLT. The constitutional vision for languages at public HEIs and the reality on the ground seem to grow further apart.

Leadership is faced with an opportunity to bridge the space between vision and reality. Amongst all the specialists, it is leaders who are tasked with initiating change, influencing people, and

[1] In this text languages in Subgroup S of the Bantoid language group (Eberhard *et al.*, 2020) is called Sintu languages (Janson, 1991:98; Kotzé, 2018; Silva, 1996:639) from the -ntu stem meaning human (Bernhard, 2011:4-5). Sintu is chosen to prevent confusing Afrikaans for not being an indigenous language and avoid sensitivities around the term Bantu languages.

realising vision (Burcar, 2014:94; Bush, 2007:392). This study envisages a proactive, balanced, and holistic framework for leaders to engage in diversity complexities in general and specifically in the context of language at public HEIs.

The previous paragraphs investigated the lived experience of the problem: leaders need a proactive, balanced, and holistic framework to engage in diversity complexities such as language at public HEIs. The following paragraphs outline research on this problem.

A preliminary survey of scholarship on diversity reveals a considerable body of research. There is, however, no consensus on a definition for diversity. Dawson (2012:19) remarks that the term might describe different aspects and/or levels of social difference.

Recently, critical theory, with social transformation as its goal, dominated research on diversity. This transformation is often achieved by pitting new social sensitivities against hegemonic power structures, resulting in an adversarial process. Power, it is argued, must be wrested from those in power; it will not be shared voluntarily. A thesis-antithesis-syntheses frame dominates many of these texts (e.g. Burawoy, 2005; Cole, 2018; Duarte *et al.*, 2015; Grant *et al.*, 2018; Gross, 2013; Hull, 2019; Mac Donald, 2018; MacLatchy, 2017; Murray, 2019; Redding, 2001; Rothman *et al.*, 2005; Steyn, 2010, 2012, 2015; Weiss, 2017).

Language activism displays the adversarial nature of critical theory. Maringira and Gukurume (2017:36) argued that students embraced language politics during the #mustfall movement. Afrikaans was targeted at public HEIs for being a source of alienation and a barrier to access, and for diverting resources to the privileged (Beukes, 2017; SAHO, 2016). The language of critical theory actuated cut back on Afrikaans as LoLT. Afrikaans lobby groups pushed back through the courts, resulting in Constitutional Court cases (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019). The Court ruled the existing constitutional right to be instructed in the language of choice must be denied to Afrikaans speaking students on balance to the right of access by other language groups, being an instrument of continued racial separation, and not being reasonably financially practicable. A third case (*UNISA v Afriforum*, 2021) determined that in certain circumstances Afrikaans would not be detrimental to social cohesion nor a hindrance to the development of Sintu languages. Jansen (2017:69-77) observes that Afrikaans was targeted by the #mustfall movement primarily for reasons of cultural alienation and to fell a symbol of oppression; much as the fall of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town (UCT) symbolised the end of colonial oppression.

Critical theory is not, however, the only scholarly approach to diversity. When Williams and O'Reilly III (1998:83) and Qin *et al.* (2009:740) identified the most common approaches to diversity

research at the time of their writing, critical theory was not mentioned. Similarity-attraction theory, social categorisation theory, and the information/decision-making approach were listed as the most common research approaches to diversity. These theories have not been disproved but were seemingly displaced by the growing popularity of critical theory. A reflexive approach to diversity which considers all theories might counterbalance the dialectical nature of critical theory.

Amidst the myriad of diversity texts, Smith (2015:57-88) recognised a need for a framework enabling leaders at HEIs to engage in complex diversity at HEIs while lowering adversarial acuity. He proposes a framework for managing diversity at HEIs that focuses on four core areas of institutional life at a HEI: access and success, organisational climate and intergroup relations, education and scholarship, and institutional viability and vitality. The framework consists of organisational goals but does not provide leaders with a means to navigate contradictions in a specific diversity context.

Regarding language at public HEIs, Mwaniki (2018:34-35) remarks that the fall of Afrikaans broke the grip of whiteness at public HEIs and introduced a "new brave world… of advanced language politics", where "decision scientists" can enact a new dispensation based on historical materialism and economic value. Mwaniki recognises that advanced work incorporating value-based decision-making lies ahead now that he perceives the conflict phase to be settled (cf. Hibbert, 2016:143-146). But in this value-based framework a means to navigate the many contradictory forces will be helpful. Lingering resentments concerning the ambiguous role of English, the still diminished and ambivalent status of African languages, and renewed subjugation of coloured Afrikaans speakers after the fall of Afrikaans have to be dealt with. There are additional factors to consider. Some of these include global consensus on good language practice for education in multilingual societies (Ouane & Glanz, 2010), language proficiency in South Africa (Howie *et al.*, 2017), upliftment and sustainability of minority languages and cultures against global hegemony of English (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009), lack of progress in developing indigenous languages as academic languages (DHET, 2020:ss. 6-9; Zikode, 2017:144-148) and leadership that inspires followers (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:3).

On reviewing diversity literature, Jonsen *et al.* (2011:47-49) found that there exists a gap in research at the intersection of leadership, diversity and language. They refer to many of the arguments raised above to motivate the need for research at this intersection: languages are disappearing, English has become a historically determined "choice", local identity is undermined, local languages are excluded from power, diversity in culture-specific frames are being discarded and culture-specific competencies undermined. While it may be true that language as diversity trait is under-researched in diversity studies, many of the arguments Jonsen *et al.* proffer are

debated in other disciplines. The gap in research at the intersection of leadership, diversity, and language studies is confirmed.

In conclusion, leaders and society at large are in dire need of a way to overcome the combative thesis-antithesis-synthesis frame to co-operatively build a diverse society and realise a vision where languages enjoy parity of esteem. This study attempts to address this need. The problem framed in general terms above, can now be stated more clearly as a research purpose, questions, and framework.

### 1.3 Purpose of Research

The purpose (Creswell, 2009:123) of this study is to conceptualise and illustrate a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity for the benefit of leaders who deal with diversity in general, as illustrated in language complexity at public HEIs.

### 1.4 Research questions

The title of this study is repeated here to assist in alignment with research questions: Conceptualising a reflexive framework for leaders of opposites in diversity: language complexity at higher education institutions.

The main research question and research sub-questions are presented in Table 1-1. Sub-questions are classified according to their research nature and research design employed, and aligned with chapters of the study:

**Table 1-1 Main research question and sub-questions**

| **Main research question** | | |
|---|---|---|
| What framework can be conceptualised to assist leading in complex language diversity at public HEIs? | | |
| **Research sub-question** | **Research design** | **Chapter** |
| | | 2. Methodology |
| 1. How can leaders make sense of complex problems? | Context of discovery | 3. Leadership and complexity |

| | Research sub-question | Research design | | Chapter |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. | How can opposites assist leaders in making sense of complexities? | Conceptualisation: relating – differentiating, integrating | 4. | A reflexive framework of diversity |
| 3. | How can leaders make sense of diversity? | Conceptualisation: relating – differentiating, integrating | 5. | A reflexive framework of opposites |
| 4. | Why is language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at public HEIs deemed, from a leadership perspective, a complex problem? | Context of discovery | 6. | Complexity of language of teaching and learning at public HEIs |
| 5. | How does the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity illuminate leading language diversity at public HEIs? | Illustrating | 7. | An illustration of the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity when leading language diversity at public HEIs |

The research problem has been identified at the intersection of the domains of leadership, diversity, and language (§ 1.1). Situated in education leadership, research question 1 sets out to discover the scholarly context of leadership especially from the perspective of complexity theory. From complexity theory in leadership emerges the notions of opposites and reflexivity (§ 3.3). Research question 2 contributes to leadership and education leadership scholarship by conceptualising a new reflexive framework of opposites. Research question 3 contributes to diversity scholarship by conceptualising a new reflexive framework of diversity. In addition, this reflexive framework of diversity contributes to leadership scholarship as it prepares the terrain for leaders to view challenges in diversity through the reflexive framework of opposites. Research question 4 discovers the scholarly context of multilingualism as an expression of language diversity. Research question 5 contributes to the scholarly domains of leadership, diversity, and applied linguistics by integrating the reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity, and by illustrating the integrated framework on language diversity at public HEIs. Furthermore, the design of this study contributes to the grounding theory of reflexive interpretation, conceptual research as methodology, and relating as method (§ 2.2).

## 1.5 Research framework

For this conceptual study, the often-used empirical research framework, where a chapter on methodology splits literature review and empirical research, does not suffice. For this reason, the chapter on methodology follows immediately from the introduction. This reorganisation of chapters is necessary for two reasons. First, the conceptual nature of the study is emphasised by guiding readers about what to expect from the study. This is done by placing the methodology chapter up front and focussing attention immediately on conceptualisation as a methodological approach. Second, the flow of the argument is facilitated by placing chapters on context of discovery (equivalent to literature review chapters in empirical studies) adjacent to the conceptualisation and illustration chapters they inform. The chapters in this study are ordered to advance the flow of argument.

Figure 1-1 illustrates the flow of the argument and translates the research questions and chapters (§ Table 1-1) into a research framework. The context discovery chapters, leadership in complexity and language diversity at public HEIs, bookend the conceptualisation of two reflexive frameworks which could be integrated.

The context discovery chapters (leadership and language at public HEIs) provide a contextual frame for the study. At one end, this study is situated in leadership in general and educational leadership in particular. Placing leadership on the left side of Figure 1-1 leads the reader to understand leadership as the point of departure of the study. At the other end, the study aims to illustrate the context in which the frameworks are illustrated: language at public HEIs is placed at the right side of Figure 1-1. In this way these two aspects, leadership and language at public HEIs, are explored – discovering context – in Chapters 3 and 6 respectively. To allow for the flow of the argument in the text, the chapter on language at public HEIs is placed not at the end but is moved to precede the illustration of the conceptualised reflexive framework. Apart from these two chapters being contextual in nature, they both share complexity as a lens to focus the discovery of context. In Figure 1-1 these two contextual chapters are depicted by ovals and connected by dotted lines to communicate their function in framing the conceptual work in the rest of the study.

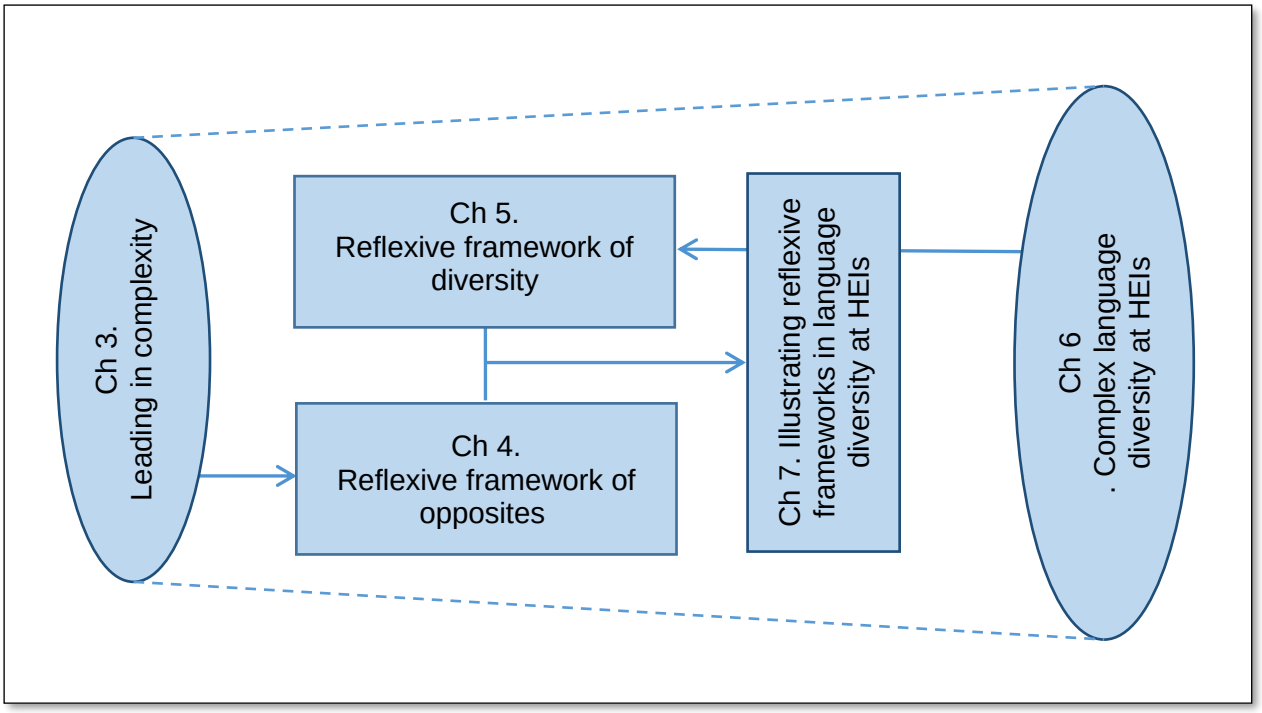



**Figure 1-1 Research conceptual framework**

While Figure 1-1 uses ovals to mark chapters discovering context, rectangles are used for conceptualisation chapters. Flowing forward (solid arrow) from the context discovery in Chapter 3 of contradictions in leadership complexity theory and of reflexive leadership, Chapter 4 conceptualises a reflexive framework of opposites. This framework is presented as an instrument to assist leaders to make sense of complex realities. Flowing backward (solid arrow) from the context discovery in Chapter 6 of language diversity at public HEIs, Chapter 5 conceptualises a reflexive framework of diversity. This framework is presented as a categorising instrument for leaders to make sense of diversity complexities. While the reflexive framework of opposites and the reflexive framework of diversity can function separately and autonomously, they can be combined into a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. It is this combined framework (see solid arrows) that is illustrated in Chapter 7 on the complexity of language diversity at public HEIs.

The conceptual framework illustrates the relation between the chapters and how their placement and function contribute to the cohesive argument of the study. The following section gives an overview of the content of each of these chapters.

## 1.6 Overview of chapters

Chapter 2 outlines the research design of the study. Following the framework of Crotty (1998), the research design is discussed by cascading from epistemology, guiding theory, methodology and methods used. Pragmatism serves as the epistemological paradigm. Pragmatism focuses on what is necessary to answer the research question by drawing knowledge from whatever theory contributes with a view towards practical application (Creswell & Poth, 2018:27). Reflexive interpretation is the grounding theory for this study. Various theories are constructively knitted together to view a problem reflexively through different lenses (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Conceptual research serves the study as methodology (Jaakkola, 2020). The study elevates different theories to a metatheoretical level and incorporates them into a single conceptual reflexive framework. In this sense, theories become the data in conceptual research. The method of relating (MacInnis, 2011:140) is used to differentiate between and/or integrate theories in conceptualising the reflexive framework. Limitations to the study are set with special reference to conceptual research. There is no risk in the study which is exempt of ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 (the first chapter in context discovery, § 1.5 above) explores organisational leadership as visionary and influencing agents in organisations and society. As leadership scholarship is characterised by a myriad of definitions and theories (see Evans (2021) for an overview), several attempts were made at a unifying theory of leadership (Avolio, 2007; Courturier, 2015; Dinh *et al.*, 2014; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010b; Wren, 2006). The unifying theory of leadership by Kilburg and Donohue (2011) is taken as a point of departure in this study. This perspective centres leadership as a complex, multidimensional, and emergent process (2011:12), clustering multiple approaches to leadership theories around complexity theory. This chapter then explores how contradictions as markers of complexity surface in three approaches – Cynefin framework, leadership in complex adaptive systems (CAS), and emergence and self-organisation – of complexity leadership theory (Rosenhead *et al.*, 2019). A final section in this chapter explores the presence of opposites as instruments for leadership to make sense of complexity (cf. Koall & Bruchhagen, 2009; Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Snowden & Boone, 2007; Stacey *et al.*, 2001). Reflexive leadership is a means to counter binary thinking and enable leaders to engage multidimensionally with complex phenomena where they encounter them (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016; Boak, 2017; Larsen, 2018).

Chapter 4 conceptualises opposites in a reflexive framework. Opposites are regarded as a useful instrument in the hands of leaders to make sense of complexity because opposites explicate contradictions within complexity and represent a generic attempt to view reality from more than one perspective (Johnson, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011:382). In the western intellectual tradition,

opposites have been central to the thinking of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Derrida. These scholars accentuate a different element in opposites, namely meaning, social context, power, and deconstruction. Yin-Yang, as employed in leadership research (Li, 2016), juxtaposes the western approaches of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Derrida with the eastern tradition and thereby brings dynamic balance into focus. These five accents on opposites – meaning, cultural context, power, deconstruction, and dynamic balance – are used to conceptualise a reflexive framework of opposites to analyse complex situations.

Chapter 5 conceptualises a reflexive framework of diversity. Diversity studies can be classified into three theoretical approaches, namely separation, disparity and variety (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Separation theories (e.g. Byrne, 1971; 1997) explain the psychological process of finding affirming identity in likeminded groups. Disparity theories (e.g., Frankfurt School) describe the sociological dynamics of understanding and transforming injustice towards equality. Variety theories (e.g. Gruenfeld *et al.*, 1996; Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996) stem from knowledge management sciences and make the case that addressing a problem through a plurality of knowledges yields richer understanding and more sustainable outcomes. For these three theoretical approaches, similarity, disparity, and variety, to communicate with one another, they are transposed to the level of the respective perspectives behind the theories. History has demonstrated when separation and disparity are left to grow unchecked, their respective perspectives grow into one-sided ideologies and systems (i.e., Apartheid and Communism) with dire consequences for society. It is conceptualised that when these three perspectives function as a balance point to each other, diversity attains a healthy environment in which to evolve.

Chapter 6 moves from conceptualisation back to discovering context, to complexity of language as a diversity trait at public HEIs. This discovery of context has the specific methodological function of representing the *results of interpretation*. This methodological function is imbedded in the grounding theory of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:10-13). Carrying forward the observation in Chapter 3 that contradictions characterise complex contexts (Mumford, 2000:14), this chapter explores contradictions in language diversity at public HEIs. Several aspects of language diversity at public HEIs are explored and scrutinised from a leadership perspective for internal contradictions. Language in South Africa is a mosaic of converged diverse society. Nationally there is no group of language 1 (L1) speakers that forms the majority. L1 speakers are regionally clustered. There exists remarkable multilingualism in South Africa. Yet English has become the de facto LoLT at public HEIs. A disparity in general and academic language proficiency exists, with only a minority of candidate higher education students demonstrating adequate proficiency. While the development of Sintu languages for academic purposes has been recognised in national language policies, little has been realised in practice.

Yet, UNESCO advises that late exit or additive multilingual education serves multilingual societies best. This advice has been institutionalised in the constitutional and legal framework for higher education. In addition to the demographic reality, scientific advice, and institutional imperative behind language complexity at public HEIs, there exists a psycho-socio trauma in South Africans that influences their motivation in, and discourse on, language complexity at public HEIs. The chapter demonstrates how language at public HEIs is a complex context, for numerous contradictions define aspects of language at public HEIs.

Chapter 7 combines the reflexive frameworks on opposites (Chapter 4) and diversity (Chapter 5) and illustrates how the combined framework can be applied to language diversity at public HEIs (Chapter 6). The specific methodological function of this illustration flows from reflexive interpretation and is what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:10-13) call *interpretation of interpretation*, which implies interpreting the results of Chapter 6 from different levels of interpretation. The five levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites (Chapter 4) structure this chapter. The first two levels of interpretation, meaning and social context, populate the triad of diversity opposites, separation-disparity-variety, with core contradictions in language at public HEIs. The next three levels of interpretation, power, deconstruction, and dynamic balance, explore the interrelatedness of the diversity triad of opposites as it is applied to language at public HEIs. By applying the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity to language complexity at public HEIs, the practitioner is forced to consider other aspects in addition to those he or she might favour, turning those aspects on his or her own disposition. Pollner (1991:370) calls this reflexivity "an 'unsettling,' i.e., an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality."

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a presentation of findings and recommendations. This chapter draws together reflections on the conceptualisation and illustration of a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. Reflexivity assists leaders with a balanced perspective in diversity contexts where one-dimensional opinions and perspective often compete for agency. While reflexivity is unsettling work, a framework assists leaders in becoming reflexive and establishing a reflexive organisational culture. The illustration of the framework in the context of language at public HEIs affirms the utility of the framework: three different but focused leadership interventions materialise which, if they are collectively pursued, stimulate each other and hold each other accountable in pursuit of realising the constitutional vision for languages.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This is a conceptual study that functions at the intersection of the domains of leadership, diversity, and language at public HEIs. All three these domains can be described as complex.

The problem researched is how a reflexive framework can assist leaders in engaging the opportunity that a diversity context such as language at public HEIs offers. The *Constitution* (1996) envisions a society where official languages enjoy parity of esteem. As leaders specialises in facilitating change, influencing people, and realising visions, they have the opportunity to impact the realisation of the constitutional vision.

To address this opportunity, this study conceptualises and illustrates a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity for the benefit of emergent leaders who deal with diversity in general. Such a reflexive framework creates a tool that leads practitioners to consider a balanced set of approaches to a social diversity context, even if it implies an unsettling of their own disposition.

The reflexive framework consists of two parts. The first part, a reflexive framework of opposites, is a specialisation in addressing contradictions in complexity leadership scholarship. This framework explores five theoretical approaches to opposites that serve as five levels of reflexive interpretation through the lens of opposites. The second part, a reflexive framework of diversity, stems from the domain of diversity and elevates three types of theories to the level of perspectives. These diversity perspectives form a triad of opposites in diversity that are theoretically applicable to most diversity contexts, including language diversity at public HEIs.

These reflexive frameworks are then combined into one reflexive framework of opposites in diversity and illustrated in the domain of language diversity at public HEIs. The purpose of this illustration is first to inform the working and use of the reflexive frameworks. A second purpose of the illustration is that it offers fresh insights and formulations regarding resolution of language difficulties at public HEIs, especially in how a multi-perspective approach enhance the probability of realising a vision.

This introduction provides an overview of the research problem, purpose, questions, framework, and a preview of the different chapters is offered. The next chapter explores the detail behind the research methodology governing this conceptual research.

# CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

*Reflexivity: "an 'unsettling,' i.e., an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality."*

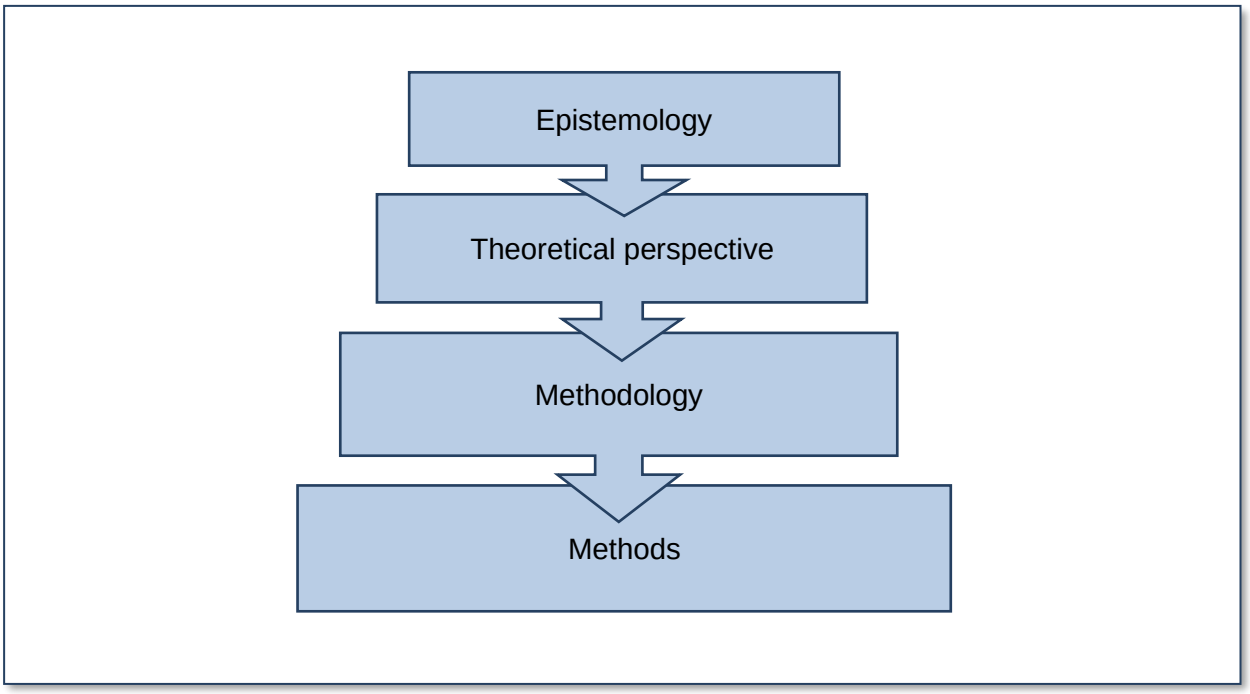
(Pollner, 1991:370)

## Introduction

The previous chapter described the focus of this conceptual study by discussing the research problem, purpose, questions, and conceptual framework. The purpose is to design and illustrate a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity for the benefit of emergent leaders who deal with the complexity of language at a higher education institution. This chapter discusses how this research purpose will be attained.

This study is a conceptual study (§ 2.2.3 below for a discussion of conceptual research). Jaakkola (2020:19-20) argues that conceptual research does to concepts, what empirical research does to data. Therefore the generic research framework of Crotty (1998) is employed to structure discussion of the design of this conceptual study. Pragmatism serves as epistemological worldview. This study is grounded in the theory of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Conceptual research is the methodology adopted to achieve the purpose of the study. Relating (differentiating and integrating) is the method employed in the conceptualisation process. The chapter closes with a discussion on the sufficiency, limitations and ethical considerations of this study.

## 2.2 Research design




(Crotty, 1998:4)

**Figure 2-1 Crotty's four elements of research design**

This section on the design of the project follows the research process, terminology and conceptual framework of Crotty (1998) who argues that the research process consists of four elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. The one informs the next, cascading from the philosophical to the practical (Figure 2-1).

### 2.2.1 Epistemology: pragmatism

This study is conducted from a pragmatic paradigm. Pragmatism is often described as a philosophy of “what works” (Denzin, 2010:422; Morgan, 2007:2), or in the words of Dennis (2011:471), delivering “practical cash value”. Creswell and Poth (2018:27) offer a precise description: pragmatism in research “focus[es] on the outcomes of the research – the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry – rather than antecedent conditions”. Pragmatism is more nuanced than these descriptions suggest. Garrison (1994:6-7) draws attention to “many different versions of pragmatism, with significant differences among Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty.” Shields (1998:222) concurs, typifying Peirce as an evolutionary realist, James as a radical empiricist, Dewey a progressive instrumentalist, and Adams an experimental progressivist. This study does not restrict itself to a single version of pragmatism as point of departure but aims to describe a generic consensus on what pragmatism means.

There are different shades of pragmatism. Pragmatism entails greater depth of philosophical thinking than could be captured by the two words “what works”. To illustrate the depth in pragmatism, it is vital to consider texts referencing the thinking of founders, in particular Pierce and Dewey. Two texts by Peirce and an exposition of Dewey by Morgan are employed to link these themes to the founders of pragmatism.

Peirce formulated one of the earliest descriptions of pragmatism: “[Pierce] framed the theory that a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life” (Peirce, 1905:162; restated from a 1877 text). He continues: "Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the object of your conception to have. Then your conception of those effects is the WHOLE of your conception of the object." (1905:171, emhasis original text).

For Dewey, this desired practical end is captured by the concept of experience. Morgan (2014:1046-1048) expounds on Dewey: truth is found in experience which is created by cyclical reflections on beliefs and actions and how beliefs and actions inform and shape each other: “Experiences create meaning by bringing beliefs and actions in contact with each other” (2014:1046). When beliefs and actions meet, interpretation is necessary. This interpretation occurs through two mechanisms. On the one hand, habits interface where beliefs and actions

meet through automated decisions. Habits require little conscious decision-making. On the other hand, new problems and contexts require conscious decision-making, termed inquiry which involves five systemic steps: recognising a problem, considering the nature of the problem, suggesting a solution, considering likely effects of solution, and acting. Research is inquiry "performed more carefully and more self-consciously" (2014:1047).

The following paragraphs extrapolate from the thoughts of Pierce and Dewey quoted above four themes behind pragmatism's primary focus on outcomes: practicality, conception, experience, and socially embeddedness. These themes have a particular bearing on this study.

The first theme, practicality, is explicit in Peirce's early definition of pragmatism cited above. The effect a conception has on the practical conduct of life becomes the exclusive arbiter ("exclusively" and "is the WHOLE") of a conception. The practical end has the practicality of the conduct of life as its aim (cf. Shields, 1998:196). In pragmatism, the goal shifts from pursuing knowledge as an end, to gaining knowledge in pursuit of a desired practical end (Morgan, 2007:69; Shields, 1998:196).

The second theme draws attention to the process of conception. A conception, "the rational purport of a word or other expression", solves many of the puzzles of life, both in conceiving the solution and its effects.

The third theme unpacks the process of conception through experience, which is said to be at the heart of truth and meaning. Experience happens where beliefs and actions meet. In academic research, this encounter takes place through inquiry of a special kind: beliefs and actions inform and transform one another.

The fourth theme hints at the social embeddedness of pragmatism. Life itself and experience are embedded in social contexts. Beliefs are often present in that which results in socially accepted outcomes. From this common understanding, actions are undertaken. When new contexts and problems are encountered, research inquiry ensues to find desired practical outcomes. Desired practical outcomes are embedded in habitual behaviour through repetition in the social consciousness. Morgan (2007:67, emphasis original text) terms pragmatism a celebration of "*shared meanings* and *joint action*".

The central pillar of pragmatism, the primacy of outcomes, and the four supporting themes, practicality, conception, experience, and socially embeddedness, are used in the following paragraphs to motivate why this study is conducted from the perspective of pragmatism.

- This study is situated in education, and more specifically at the intersection of leadership studies, diversity as social phenomenon and language in higher education. All these domains fit the preferences of the first and fourth themes discussed above, practicality and social embeddedness, of pragmatism. It has been argued that pragmatism is well suited to guide studies in social and applied sciences (cf. Biesta, 2012:147; Garrison, 1994; Hall & Preissle, 2015:359).

- Pragmatism enables a study to be designed as conceptual research. In the Peirce definition of pragmatism above, conceptualisation is placed at the centre of knowledge acquisition. In terms of Dewey's notion of experience and the event of enquiry, conceptualisation occurs as solutions to a problem are conceived and likely effects of the solutions are considered.

- Central to conceptual research design is the pursuit of a reflexive framework: to utilise multiple theoretical viewpoints of opposites to analyse complex problems, and of diversity research to analyse complex diversity problems such as language at public HEIs. Pragmatism enables antecedent conditions to a desired outcome which satisfy the need for theoretical cohesiveness (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:272; Biesta, 2012:147).

To summarise, the focus on outcomes, practicality, conception, experience, and social embeddedness of pragmatism directs this study with internal integrity in answering the research question. With the research framework of Crotty (1998:4) in mind, reflexive interpretation as cohesive theory and conceptualisation as methodology flow naturally from pragmatism.

### 2.2.2 Theoretical perspective: reflexive interpretation

Cascading from pragmatism as foundational epistemology, the theoretical perspective grounding this study is next to be discussed (Crotty, 1998:2-12; Figure 2.1 above). This study is grounded in the theory of reflexive interpretation as espoused by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). They define the term *reflexive interpretation* as "the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation" (2018:328).

#### 2.2.2.1 Footprint of reflexivity in research

The concept of reflexivity is well established in research. Cunliffe (2003:983-984) refers to numerous exponents of reflexivity in philosophy, linguistics, natural sciences, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Notably she refers *inter alia* to Derrida and Saussure, whose work plays a central role later in this study. In the following paragraphs three specific contributions to

reflexivity are mentioned: the first from a philosophical and research perspective, the second and third from leadership and management studies.

First, from a philosophical and research perspective, Pierre Bourdieu deserves special recognition with titles such as *Science of science and reflexivity* (Bourdieu, 2004) and *An invitation to reflexive sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For Bourdieu, reflexivity (from Latin *re-flectere*, to turn back on itself) is to turn science back on science itself as a collective phenomenon, targeting the social and intellectual unconsciousness or research (Wacquant, 1992:36). Reflexivity, however, seldom happens by itself. In times of crisis, when the default way is disrupted, taken-for-granted orientations are subjected to reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:131; Mouzelis, 2008:123-124). Bourdieu defines these dispositions as *habitus:* "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 2005:175). Of importance to this study is how dispositions, or *habitus* in Bourdieu's language, function as automated drivers for practice. Later in this study the term perspective is used to refer to an aspect of disposition. Leading in complex situations implies leaders are confronted with competing perspectives (or habitus) and competing practices. Reflexivity becomes the conscious process by which leaders rise above their own taken-for-granted perspectives as well as those of others, and the hegemonic perspective(s) in society, in order to understand interplay between perspectives (cf. Kenway & McLeod, 2004).

Two groups of theorists, Alvesson *et al.* (2016) and Blom and Alvesson (2015), discuss reflexivity in the domain of leadership. Reflexive leadership is a means to engage with complex problems by influencing voluntary followers through asymmetrical personal relations. Complex problems are often contextually sensitive and therefore require careful reflexive consideration and finely nuanced actions. The reflexive frameworks conceptualised in this study are aimed at these contextually sensitive situations. Reflexivity is not an automated practice driven by taken-for-granted perspectives and structures. Their aim is to advance reflexivity in leadership research, nudge leadership industry towards reflexivity, and foster reflexive practice in organisations (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:4-10). Reflexive interpretation, which this study takes as theoretical grounding, originates from the studies of this group of researchers.

Third, Ann Cunliffe's[2] (2004) article, *On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner*, was crowned with a Lasting Impact Award and republished more than a decade later (2016a, 2016b). The article aims to foster collaboration, responsiveness, and ethical values in practitioners. Cunliffe

[2] See also Cunliffe (2003, 2009).

explains her definition of reflexivity as “examining our own assumptions, decisions, actions, interactions, and the assumptions underpinning organizational policies and practices and the intended and potentially unintended impact” (2016b:742). Cunliffe (2016a:749, referencing Jun, 1994) cites three levels by which to structure reflection:

*Existential: Who am I and what kind of person do I want to be?*

*Relational: How do I relate to others and to the world around me?*

*Praxis: The need for self-conscious and ethical action based on a critical questioning of past actions and of future possibilities.*

In teaching critical reflexivity, the interplay between reflexive questioning, analysis and interaction is used to map experience (2016a:753-755).

The work of Cunliffe is relevant to this study in at least three ways: reflexivity is applied to leadership, the process of reflexivity is guided by levels of questions, and the reference to making sense of experience as a knowledge creating activity refers to what has been written above on the epistemology of Dewey (§ 2.2.1).

#### 2.2.2.2 Reflexive interpretation

This study is grounded in reflexive interpretation as championed by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). In reflexive interpretation, the terms reflective and reflexive have different meanings. Reflection is described by Boud *et al.* (2013:19) as “an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it”. While reflection is specialised and focused on one’s own perspective, being reflexive involves consciously reflecting across and/or between several perspectives; where perspectives, or, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:329) refer to them levels, which “are reflected in one another”. Reflexivity then is “the ambition to carefully and systematically take a critical view of one’s own assumptions, ideas and favoured vocabulary and to consider if alternative ones make sense” (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:14).[3] Reflection is used in this study to refer to a critical review of one’s own assumptions. Being reflexive includes both a critical review of one’s own disposition (reflection) and the dispositions of others.

In methodological terms, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:10-13) describe reflective research as two movements, “*results of interpretation*” and “*interpretation of interpretation*” (2018:11, emphasis original). *Results of interpretation* refers to empirical research and emphasises that the

[3] Cunliffe and Jun (2005:226-228) make a different, qualitative distinction between reflection and reflexivity: the first refers to calculative thinking and the second to meditative thinking.

disposition of the researcher is inevitably introduced when the relationship between facts and reality is transformed into text. For them, empirical research is always interpretation. *Interpretation of interpretation* refers to a second movement in reflective research: when researchers self-critically investigates the influence of their disposition on their first interpretation of empirical material. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:11) summarise their position:

*Thus, in reflective empirical research the centre of gravity is shifted from the handling of empirical material towards, as far a possible, a consideration of the perceptual, cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, (inter)textual, political and cultural circumstances that form the backdrop to – as well as impregnate – the interpretations.*

Reflexive interpretation structures the *interpretation of interpretation* by setting the reflection up from different philosophical or theoretical perspectives. Reflexive interpretation is "a way of indicating the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:328). Although Alvesson and Sköldberg state that the number and content of levels of interpretation are not important, they identify four levels that serve as "quadruple hermeneutics" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:329). These four levels or perspectives are used as lenses to interpret and reflect on the empirical data, hermeneutical positions in interpreting the data, power and structural hegemony, and the disruption and deconstruction of current structures and positions. The levels are presented as mapping a journey through the methodological landscape. These four levels can be described as follows:

- Data orientated methods: At this level of interpretation, the researcher engages with data at an empirical level. Fundamentally, the quest is to find out what the meaning of the data is. Examples of methods employed to analyse the data are grounded theory and ethno-methodology. Other qualitative methods could be employed (2018:68-114).

- Hermeneutics: The second level of interpretation involves considering various hermeneutical orientations present in the field of study. At the core of this level of reflection is the interaction between the part-whole ("the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole" (2018:116)) and pre-understanding-understanding (in the heat of the conflict hidden, preunderstanding, perspectives are uncovered) axes. These hermeneutic lenses can be employed on multiple types of sources, and through various lenses (2018:115-178).

- Critical theory: Third, critical theory, originating in the Frankfort School, espouses a sense of pessimism regarding culture and rationalism, and fosters awareness of the political dimension in research. Using injustice as lens, critical theory opens a view on how power and underlying disposition influence society, and where and how society has to transform (2018:179-221).

- Poststructuralism and post modernism: The fourth level in reflexive interpretation employs the methodological principle of pluralism, an openness to, and familiarity with, multiple theoretical perspectives. Multiple identities and viewpoints are considered, and alternative presentations and perspectives are formulated. Deconstruction is a powerful tool in producing alternative outcomes (2018:222-278).

These levels of interpretation are not mentioned here to prescribe the perspectives employed in conceptualising reflexive frameworks in Chapters 4 and 5. These levels of interpretation are mentioned here because the pragmatically and autonomously selected levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites in Chapter 4 resemble the levels selected by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:329).

#### 2.2.2.3 Themes from reflexive interpretation grounding this study

Reflexive interpretation is well suited to investigate and interpret complex diversity problems. In these problems, multiple dispositions or perspectives are at play, competing for hegemony. The following themes in reflexivity in general and reflexive interpretation in particular drive this study:

- Times of crisis and competing concerns in complex diversity create deeper reflexivity on clashes between disposition and reality. This reflexivity might result in changes in practice and adaptations in disposition. In the words of Delbridge and Fiss (2013:325): “Greater reflexivity over the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the dominant approaches would create greater space for alternative approaches.” This theme positions reflexivity theory in the domain of this study: leadership in the complexity of (language) diversity.

- Reflexive interpretation and its quadruple hermeneutics provide methodological structure and certainty to the process of reflexivity. A similar structure of hermeneutics forms the skeleton around which a reflexive framework of opposites and a reflexive framework for diversity are conceptualised in Chapters 4 and 5.

- A pluralist view on diversity complexity opens the eyes of all stakeholders to the perspectives and pursuits they themselves and others hold. The reflexive framework of diversity is conceptualised on the theme of plurality of perspectives.

Reflexive interpretation serves as theory that binds this study together. The next step is to describe conceptual research as methodology for this study.

### 2.2.3 Methodology: conceptual research

The discussion now cascades to the third element in the research framework of Crotty (1998:2-12; Figure 2.1 above). This study employs conceptual research as research methodology.

The detour from an empirical method is a deliberate action of stepping back to a metatheoretical level of research. At the metatheoretical level, reflection is possible on how different empirical and critical theories in social and applied sciences can supplement one another in a domain of inquiry (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Overton, 2006:20-21). For such a project, conceptual research is an appropriate methodology.

While much of the research in the fields of social and applied sciences are empirical in nature, conceptual research cannot be disposed of as absent, unscientific, or invalid. Conceptual studies are used in information systems (Hirschheim, 2008), marketing (Jaakkola, 2020), entrepreneurship (Hills & Hultman, 2013), management (Cropanzano, 2009; Fulmer, 2012; Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Meredith, 1993), education (Li *et al.*, 2018:136-139), psychology (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2004; Overton, 2006), and often mentioned by these sources – philosophy. In addition, conceptual research is an integral and essential part of theory building (Meredith, 1993:3-4; Yadav, 2010:3).

The researcher is cognisant that, by choosing conceptual research as research design, he releases the security of the trusted and prescribed empirical method, and provides examiners "more editorial rope with which to hang him/herself" (Fulmer, 2012:330). In the final analysis, Hirschheim (2008:440) warns of a "conceptual paper – it only stands on the strength of its argument and the originality of its thinking". This seems a rather high and subjective bar. Greater risk of conceptual research does not, however, always end in failure. In the *Journal of Management,* Cropanzano (2009:1304) reports that conceptual papers are often the most viewed papers.

#### 2.2.3.1 What is conceptual research?

"Conceptual research is a theoretical structure of assumptions, principles and rules that holds together the ideas comprising a broad concept" (Li *et al.*, 2018:139).

The following paragraphs elaborate upon this definition by comparing conceptual and empirical research, locating conceptual research in a taxonomy of research, and listing characteristics of conceptual research. First, in comparing empirical and conceptual research, the relief of conceptual research is accentuated. Jaakkola (2020:19-20) employs research design elements to make such a comparison. Theoretical framing in empirical research corresponds with selecting

theories and concepts in conceptual research. Data corresponds with analysis of theories and concepts. Unit of analysis corresponds with perspectives or level of analysis. Independent or dependent variables correspond with key concepts which are analysed or explained. Scales and measures correspond with the translation of phenomena in conceptual language and definitions. The approach to data analysis corresponds with the approach to integrate concepts and the quality of the argument. What empirical research does with data, conceptual research does with concepts. It follows that conceptual research explores and integrates concepts to a higher level than would be the case in the literature review section of empirical research. Fawcett *et al.* (2014:2) summarise the difference between empirical research and conceptual research as the first being data-driven and the latter relying upon abstract thinking.

Second, locating conceptual research in a taxonomy of research provides insight into the utility of conceptual research in the researcher's toolbox. Types and family trees of research presented in Table 2-1 were collated from Cropanzano (2009:1305-1309), Jaakkola (2020:21-24), and MacInnis (2011:137-139). The taxonomy does not pretend to be comprehensive but aims to illustrate that conceptual research has non-empirical research as a parent; review and critique research as siblings; and theory synthesis, theory adaptation, typology, and model as children.

**Table 2-1: Taxonomy of conceptual research**

| Parents | Siblings | Children |
|---|---|---|
| Empirical research | Quantitative | |
| | Qualitative | |
| | Mixed methods | |
| Non-empirical research | Conceptual | Theory synthesis \ integrating |
| | | Theory adaptation |
| | | Typology \ differentiating |
| | | Model |
| | Review | |
| | Critique | |

(Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Cropanzano, 2009:1305-1309; Jaakkola, 2020:21-24; MacInnis, 2011:137-139)

This study employs the methods of theory synthesis and typology (also called integrating and differentiating, § 2.2.4 below) in constructing a viable reflexive framework.

Third, listing characteristics of conceptual research breaks conceptual research down into a set of goals to be achieved in a conceptual study. There is no single template of structure or methodology guiding conceptual research. This can be expected since conceptual research is by nature focused on free thinking. Addressing this lack of a template, several studies attempt to present characteristics of conceptual research to provide some guidance for writing conceptual papers (Cornelissen, 2017:6-8; Cropanzano, 2009:1305-1306; Fawcett *et al.*, 2014:2-5; Fulmer, 2012; Gilson & Goldberg, 2015:127-129; Hirschheim, 2008:435). Conceptual research focuses on a problem, presents a new way of thinking about a phenomenon, integrates literatures (also across disciplines), provides multilevel insights, broadens the scope of thinking, and constructs an integrated framework. Conceptual research develops logical and complete arguments for associations, is often presented by a diagram or figure, adds value, and suggests future inquiry, and no empirical data is expected. Jaakkola (2020:18-21), while emphasising a methodological perspective, adds that conceptual studies should improve usability of knowledge. It takes a focus theory as a point of departure, builds supporting theoretical explanation, takes care to justify decisions about the research, frames new relations amongst concepts, and presents these new relations through a convincing argument. Concepts and theories, she concludes, are the data of conceptual research.

**Table 2-2 Evaluating guidelines of conceptual research addressed in this study**

| Categories of evaluating guidelines of conceptual research (Yadav, 2010:15-16) | Examples of measures in this study to address evaluating guidelines |
|---|---|
| Exposition: conceptual clarity, internal consistency | • Pragmatism offers internal consistency (§ 2.2.1)<br>• Meta-theoretical definitions for constructs with disputed definitions (§§ 2.2.3.2, 3.2.4, 5.2.1)<br>• Elevating theories to levels where relations are valid (§§ 2.2.3.2, 5.3.1)<br>• Represented by a figure (Figure 4-4, Figure 5-2, Figure 7-1) |
| Theory building: integration, rationale, theoretical precision, crafting | • Robust relating methodology (§ 2.2.4.1)<br>• Small logical steps in argument (§ 2.2.4.1)<br>• Conceptualising frameworks as initial step to theory building |
| Innovativeness: heuristic power | • Aim of the research – reflexive frameworks – is meant to be employed as a heuristic tool (§ 1.2)<br>• Focus theory, reflexive interpretation, is selected for its heuristic power (§ 2.2.2) |

| Categories (cont.) | Examples (continued) |
|---|---|
| Potential impact: scope and significance | • If frameworks are applied diligently, leaders will gain a balanced view on diversity problems (§§ 2.2.2, 3.3.2)<br>• A culture of reflexivity in organisations might bring wise decisions in time (§§ 2.2.2,. 3.3.2) |
| Validity: explanatory adequacy, conceptual robustness | • Sufficiency (§ 2.3.1)<br>• Illustration (§ Chapter 7) |

Yadav (2010:15-16) provides five categories of evaluating guidelines of conceptual research. Table 2-2 lists these five categories and indicates how this study addresses these guidelines.

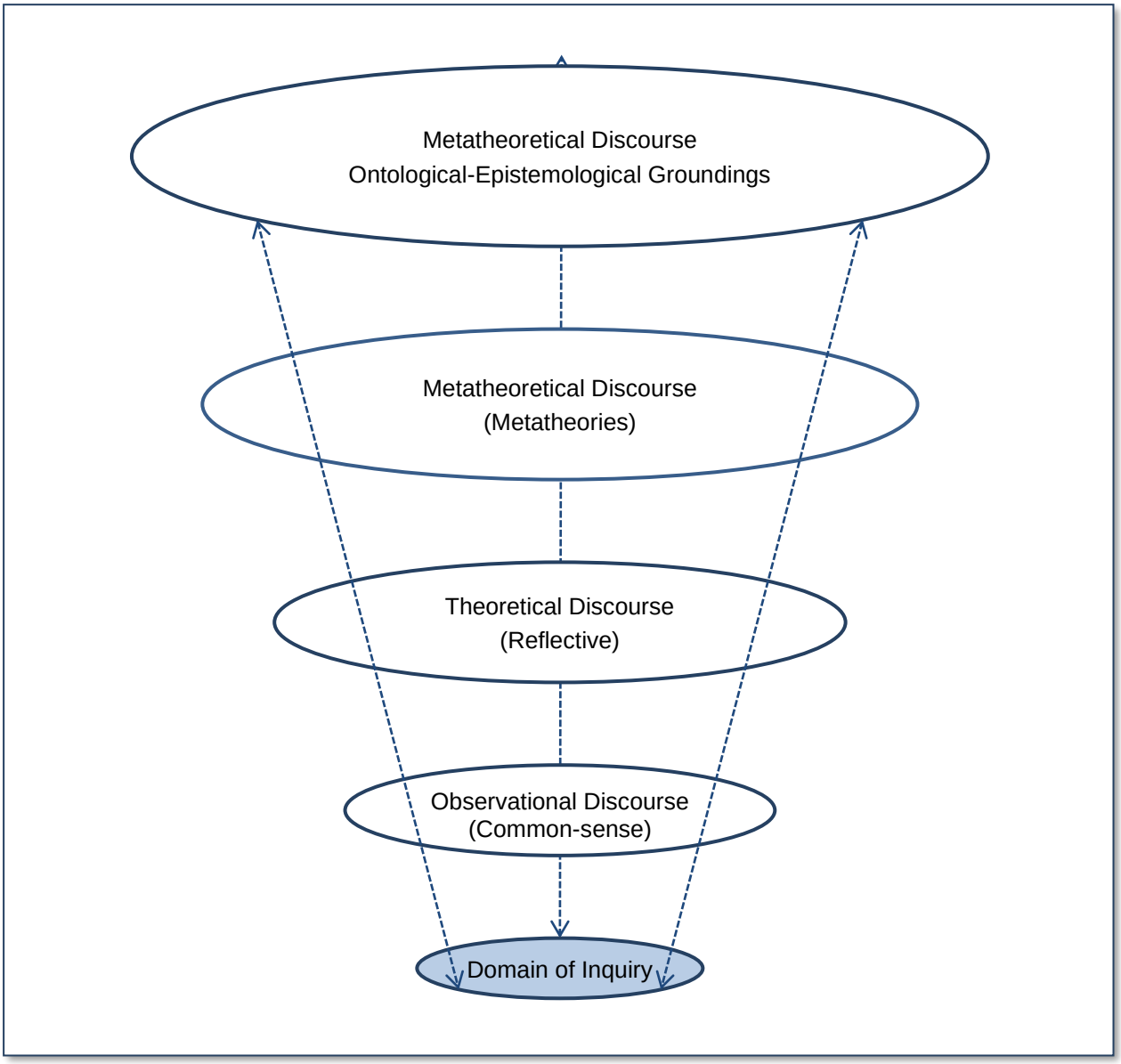
#### 2.2.3.2 Motivation for employing conceptual research

The following are motivating factors for employing conceptual research in this study:

First, conceptual research fits the metatheoretical nature, the reflexive (*vis-à-vis* reflective) approach, and aim of this study to construct a metatheoretical reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. Overton (2006:20-21) explains that there are four different levels of discourse to every domain of inquiry (§ Figure 2-2). The most basic level of inquiry is common-sense observations. At a next level, the theoretical discourse level, attention to these observations becomes focused and reflective. Theories are formulated and tested. These two levels, the observational discourse and theoretical discourse refer to the empirical world. Empirical studies are well suited to these two levels of discourse. The next two levels do not focus on the empirical world but on the theories themselves and are called metatheoretical discourses. These two metatheoretical levels explore the ideas and perspectives behind the theories, the foundational concepts that govern both the observational and theoretical discourses. These underlying ideas and perspectives are identified, explored, and employed in the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity, later conceptualised in this thesis. Conceptual research, where concepts and theories are the data, as described in section § 2.2.3.1, complements the metatheoretical nature, content, and aim of this study.

Second, conceptual research is suited to, and established as, research in the field of management and leadership studies (§ 2.2.3). In addition, Meredith (1993:11) argues that management and leadership studies benefit from conceptual research. Conceptual research builds valid theories, synthesises previous research, and provides a link to the world of practice and external validation of research findings.

Third, conceptual research complements the strengths of the researcher (Hofstee, 2006:17). Strengths in abstract thinking, engaging constructs, analogical reasoning, recognising possible links between them, and integrating them into a new framework are fundamental skills needed in conducting conceptual research (MacInnis, 2011:149-150).




(Adapted from Overton, 2006:20)

**Figure 2-2: Levels of discourse in understanding a domain of inquiry**

Now that conceptual research has been discussed as methodology of this study, the methods of relating and illustration are described.

### 2.2.4 Methods: relating (differentiating and integrating) and illustration

The discussion now cascades to the fourth element in the research framework of Crotty (1998:2-12; Figure 2.1 above). This study employs the methods of relating (differentiating and integrating synthesis) and illustration. The reflexive framework of opposites in diversity conceptualised in this study enables leaders to exercise their roles as visionaries and influencers in the complexity of diversity issues in general and is illustrated in the complexity of language diversity at public HEIs.

In this section, the conceptual methods and the process in which they will be employed in this study, are discussed. The relevant methods and process are relating (which includes differentiating and integrating) and illustrating.

#### 2.2.4.1 Relating

The framework of MacInnis (2011) for conceptual contributions is widely cited and used to position conceptual research methods (e.g. Andersson & Mattsson, 2015:87-88; Aven, 2018:2417; Fawcett *et al.*, 2014:5; Yadav, 2014). MacInnis (2011:140-150) identifies four types of contributions in conceptual research: envisioning, explicating, relating, and debating. This study is a relating, conceptual study.

The following sections explore differentiating and integrating[4] as two opposite but interactive sub-methods of the conceptual method relating. The process of the conceptual method is described.

##### 2.2.4.1.1 Differentiating and integrating

Relating conceptual research comprises two opposite yet interrelated methods, namely differentiating and integrating (MacInnis, 2011:140).

Differentiating and integrating are defined as follows:

- “Differentiation involves conceptual advances that add insight by distinguishing, parsing, dimensionalizing, classifying, or categorizing an entity (e.g., construct, theory, domain) under study.” (2011:145).

- “Integration involves synthesis – that is, the creation of a whole from diverse parts.” (2011:146).

[4] Differentiation is sometimes labelled as typology, taxonomy, or classification frameworks, and integrating as integrative frameworks (MacInnis, 2011:145-146). Jaakkola (2020:23-24) discusses typology and theory synthesis.

From the definitions above, the essence of distinguishing between differentiating and integrating is the direction and divergence/convergence of actions. Differentiating diverges from one base-line entity towards multiple types on the part level. Integrating converges from multiple base-line entities to one meta-level framework. MacInnis (2011:138-139) invokes metaphors to describe these relating methods. The differentiating researcher is like a naturalist with a magnifying glass while an integrating researcher is like an architect constructing a house from different materials. Figure 2-3 depicts the difference between differentiating and integrating. Integrating synthesises multiple entities and elevates the new whole to a meta-level. Differentiating breaks down an entity into parts of types.

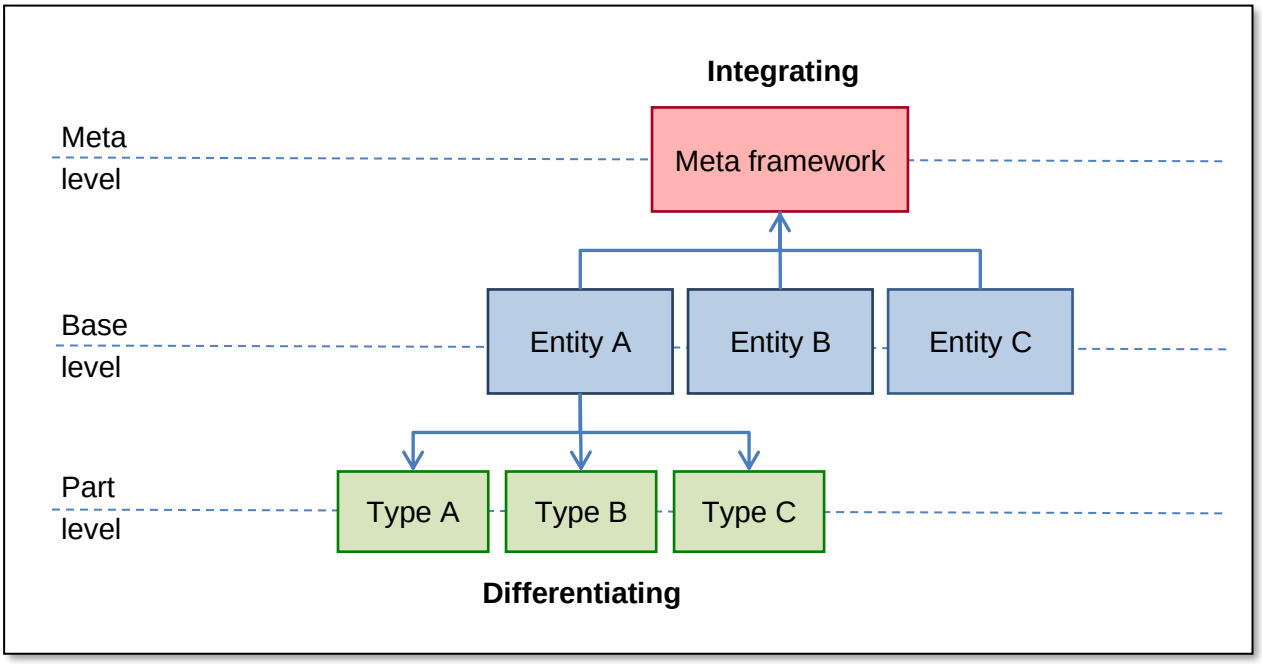



**Figure 2-3 Comparing differentiating and integrating**

2.2.4.1.2 Conceptual process of relating

The specific actions of differentiating and integrating are difficult to delineate, especially so for integrating: “It is said that research indicates that people who are skilled at integrative thinking cannot articulate how they developed their integrated ideas” (MacInnis, 2011:150).

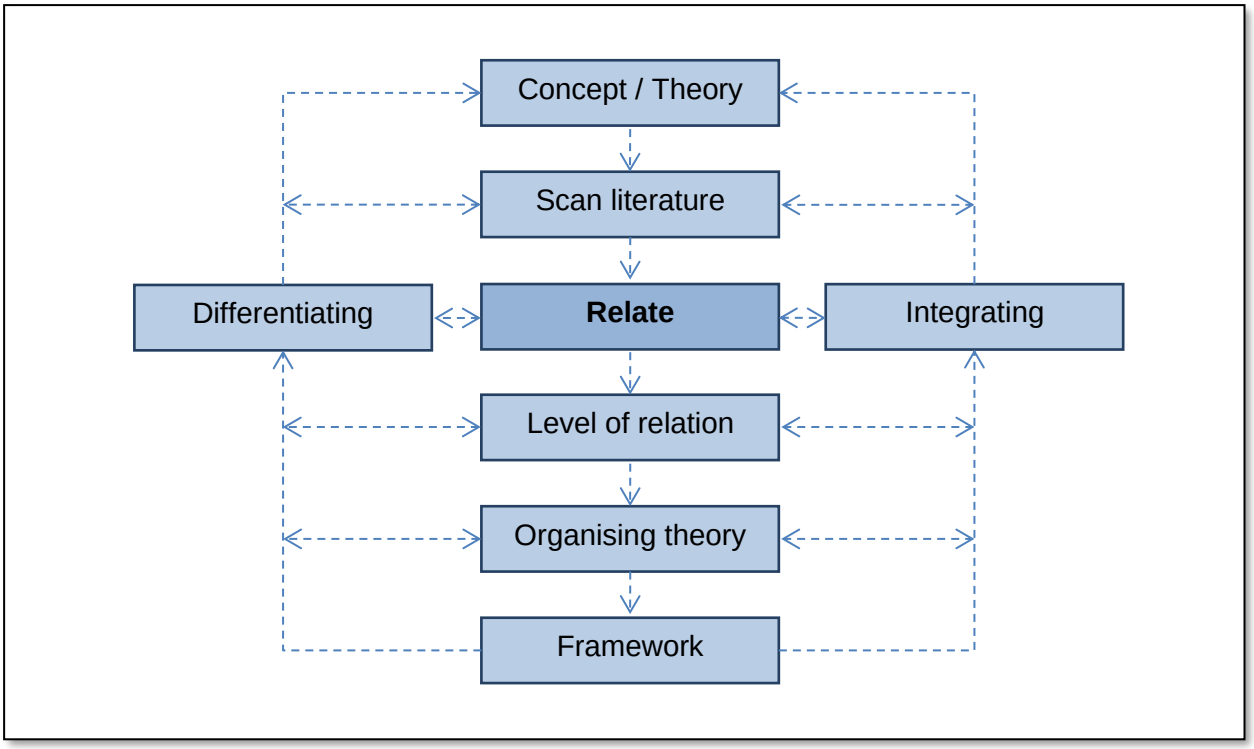
Two mechanisms are be employed to arrive at a description of the differentiating and integrating processes. First, the methods of differentiating and integrating are viewed as analogous to coding. It has been argued at § 2.2.3.1 above that conceptual research does to theory what empirical research does to data. To take this analogy to the level of methods employed, differentiating and integrating should do to theories and constructs what coding does to data. A dataset is coded,

categorised, described in themes and constructs, and synthesised in a model, framework or theory (Saldaña, 2016:14), this process is cyclical, and different filters (or in terms of relating, levels of analysis) can be employed (2016:67ff.). Viewed from the perspective of the directional comparison of differentiating and integrating depicted in Figure 2-3 above, integrating is analogous to the normal coding sequence and differentiating is analogous to coding in reverse: from the theory or framework, the underlying themes and categories are identified, and a typology is constructed.

As a second mechanism to arrive at a description of the differentiating and integrating processes, the action words are distilled and sequenced from the discussion by Adriaenssen and Johannessen (2015:598-599), Jaakkola (2020:21-24), MacInnis (2011:145-147,149-150) and (Yadav, 2010:3-4) of these relating methods. From these action words, the following indication of the processes of differentiating and integrating emerge:

- Both differentiating and integrating
    - examine resemblances, and
    - reflect resemblances in relations: similar or different.
    - Ensure apples are compared with apples by relating elements of the same level of analysis.
    - Use a different theory to explain and organise the typology or synthesis.
- Differentiating
    - see details of an entity, and
    - decompose an entity in constituent parts.
    - These parts are then appraised,
    - characterised, and
    - categorised.
    - Provide reasons why the differences matter.
- Integrating
    - reads many texts on the research entity,
    - differentiates between different texts,
    - draws connections,
    - finds a new, simplified and higher-order perspective on how entities are related, and
    - synthesises complexity into overarching ideas.

Figure 2-4 depicts the information gathered from coding as analogue and action words in the discussion of differentiating and integrating as a research process.




(Adapted and collated from Adriaenssen & Johannessen, 2015:598-599; Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011; Saldaña, 2016; Yadav, 2010)

**Figure 2-4 Process of relating as method in conceptual research**

The process starts by identifying an entity (concept or theory, or plural). This entity is then explored by scanning literature on existing knowledge on the entity(ies). Relations between parts of an entity or between entities are traced. This part of the process can occur in different directions: differentiating and integrating, separately or in conjunction with one another. Relations identified should be on the same level to compare apples with apples. If they are not on the same level, can the relations be transposed to a level where the relations are comparable? Order the relations according to an established theory or framework. Formalise the new insights into a formal integrative framework and/or typology.

This process is not linear. The process, or parts of the process, might be revisited multiple times. As understanding grows, initial thoughts and conclusions might be discarded and/or new avenues of research might open. The researcher stays in these loops of inquiry, guided by the pragmatic principle of what needs to be done to arrive at the answer to the research question, until the formalised framework displays internal integrity.

#### 2.2.4.1.3 Motivation for employing relating as method

Relating, and the sub-methods of differentiating and integrating, fit the goal of this study: to conceptualise a framework of opposites in diversity, which aids leaders in influencing followers. The following are the reasons for this fit:

First, differentiating brings clarity to fuzzy domains. This study draws together multiple domains of research where various theories and viewpoints exist. Basic definitions are not agreed upon. This is true of the three core domains under investigation: leadership, diversity, and language.

Second, integrating brings simplicity to complexity. The domains of leadership, diversity, and language can all be described as complex.

Third, these relating methods employed define links between different perspectives (on diversity and language). It is argued in this study that understanding the dynamics of these links provides new insight into diversity and language complexity.

### 2.2.4.2 Illustrating

Following the application of the relating method above to conceptualise a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity, the development of the framework is taken one step further by illustrating the framework. Illustration is often used in various disciplines as a method to explain conceptualised frameworks and link the frameworks to practical application (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:345-364; Michelson & Miller, 2019; Pedersen & Dunne, 2020; Pelzer, 2017).

In this study, an illustration first serves to illuminate (Black, 2014) the integrated reflexive framework conceptualised through the methods described § 2.2.4.1 above. By explaining the reflexive framework in another way and from a less theoretical angle, the communication of what the reflexive framework entails, becomes richer.

Second, the illustration bridges the divide between theory and practice. Applying the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity in real-life problems is the outcome pragmatism demands and applied sciences aim for. As Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:343) remark in their study, the illustration in this study moves the reader onwards from conceptualising a framework to “using our framework”.

## 2.3 Additional considerations

Remarks on sufficiency of the conceptualised framework, limitations to the study, and ethical considerations are in order.

### 2.3.1 Sufficiency

When is a conceptual framework ‘sufficient’? From an input perspective, the answer would be ‘that a conceptual framework is sufficient when the process of conceptualisation starts off from a base of scientifically valid theories or constructs and proceeds to build one logical block onto another, guaranteeing internal integrity (Hirschheim, 2008:439). From an output perspective, a pragmatist argues that a framework is sufficient when it demonstrates sufficient practicality (§ 2.2.1).

Another output-answer is that a conceptual framework is sufficient when it is generalisable. While many argue that empirical research only can result in generalisable outcomes, Bassey (2001:5-6) draws a distinction between scientific and fuzzy generalisation. The former implies that “particular events do lead to particular consequences”; the latter expects “particular events may lead to particular consequences”. Sufficiency lies in the domain of fuzzy generalisation.

Narrowing generalisability down to conceptual generalisation, Adriaenssen and Johannessen (2015:595) illustrate that conceptual analytical frameworks meet the minimum standard of sufficiency if such a scheme “establish relationships and finds patterns in social systems”. A higher standard of the sufficiency condition is attained if such insights for such schemes in addition “examine empirical relationships in their own data, and the construct empirical causal models to visualise relationships”. This study achieves the lower standard of sufficiency through an inductive process of conceptualising the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity and a deductive process of illustrating the framework on a real-life complexity.

### 2.3.2 Limitations

A major question to consider in the design of this study is limitations. The problem of limitation stems from at least two factors. First, it has been argued in § 1.2 above that the problem under investigation lies at the intersection of language, diversity, and leadership. Each of these domains has produced a considerable number of studies and theories, and each is characterised by a certain vagueness in definitions. How to delimit these constructs is a major question. Second, this study is conducted on the metatheoretical level (§ 2.2.3.2). The movement from theoretical to metatheoretical discourse is a movement from the empirical to the conceptual domains, and from the particular to the general. As the lens of the study zooms out, the boundaries of the image, and aspects included in the study, expands.

The following measures are put in place to address these concerns and limit the study:

- It is accepted that detail will have to be sacrificed in order to function on a metatheoretical level. In pragmatic spirit the amount of detail required to answer the research questions satisfactorily is pursued.

- It is accepted that theories referred to in this study are sufficiently discussed elsewhere. When referring to a theory, the amount of information about that theory to be supplied is determined by whether information contributes significantly to the argument of the framework conceptualised in this study.

- This study ventures into the maize of literature in the three domains of knowledge, namely leadership, diversity, and language. The pragmatic goal of answering the research questions sufficiently becomes the arbiter of accepting or rejecting theories in the framework. Will the reflexive frameworks of opposites and diversity sufficiently foster understanding of the dynamics of a diversity complexity in general, and language diversity at public HEIs in particular? The answer to this question results in a trade-off between utility and richness of data. As the frameworks already generate considerable information, this study tends to err on the side of favouring utility.

- Multiple defined areas of diversity were considered as a locus to illustrate the framework. From the many salient diversity complexities present in society, language at South African public HEIs is chosen as locus to illustrate the framework. Regarding language diversity, a range of possibilities from a single opinion piece about language at public HEIs to language diversity at public HEIs were considered and even explored in mini pilot projects. In the end, language diversity at public HEIs was chosen. As a first illustration of the frameworks, a more general field seemed more appropriate. There would be a fit between the general nature of the framework and the field of illustration. The field of illustration would relate to more readers. Research restraints in the era of Covid-19 and sensitivities relating to diversity issues further contributed to the more general area of illustration.

- Conceptualising the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity and illustrating the framework on language diversity public HEIs represents a first testing of the minimum standard of sufficiency. It is not within the scope of this study to test the framework for the maximum standard of sufficiency (§ 2.3.1).

- For two reasons, no fieldwork was undertaken in this study. First, the latter half of the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. At times, strict successive lockdowns were in place. There was little clarity about when these lockdowns would be enforced and when lifted. It was decided that fieldwork would be difficult to plan for and execute under these

circumstances. Second, conceptual research does not necessitate fieldwork. While empirical research is data-driven, conceptual research relies on abstract thinking (Fawcett *et al.*, 2014:2), theories become the data in conceptual research (Jaakkola, 2020:19-20). Journal articles (Cornell, 2020; Raza & Parbudyal, 2017; Zdolšek Draksler & Širec, 2018) and theses (Freed, 2009; Min, 2013) serve as examples of pure theoretical conceptual studies. Such studies are expected when meta-studies are undertaken and in the early stages of theory building (Meredith, 1993; Overton, 2006).

### 2.3.3 Ethical considerations

The North-West University (NWU) sets beneficence and non-maleficence, distributive justice (equality), and respect (dignity and autonomy) as principles determining ethical research (NWU, 2018a). None of these principles is under threat by this study.

Formally, this study corresponds with all the markers in the 'exempt' category of the risk level descriptors for education at the NWU (EduREC, 2019). This study entails a conceptual meta-analysis of existing theories of opposites and diversity, an illustration of the conceptual framework on language using publicly available data on language in South Africa and at public HEIs. There are no public interactions or interventions from the researcher to generate data. Being 'exempt' from risk implies that the benefit-harm scale is tipped heavily towards benefit and that no individual can be harmed, treated unequally or without dignity or autonomy.

Language diversity at public HEIs, is politicised and publicly disputed in South Africa (§ 1.2). It is necessary to reflect on how the research would be received by different and oppositional stakeholders. While reflexivity inadvertently implies an "unsettling" (Pollner, 1991:370), grace towards one another remains a virtue.

Boveda and Bhattacharya (2019) formulate an approach that deals with the problem of oppositionality in terms of research ethics. They plead for a post-oppositional approach in research ethics. This approach implies moving away from antagonistic binary oppositional discourse towards research ethics radically grounded in love: to embrace self-reflection and self-care, to offer caring criticism, to collaborate towards a transformed future, avoiding epistemicide (cancelling the knowledge and lenses of others), and avoiding dehumanisation. By these ethical principles, they argue, researchers and agents listen to each other's discourse and co-operatively consider possibilities for a transformative future. While these sentiments might seem utopian, their position agrees with the underlying argument of this study: reflexivity offers a way towards self-growth and fosters understanding for the viewpoints of others, which leads constructively towards a transformed future. Two practical examples illustrate the point. In this study, the handling of

oppositions aims at leading readers towards greater understanding of the other, rather than setting themselves up against the other. By leading readers to reflect upon the perspectives behind positions, proponents may escape the low-level debate that often deteriorates into conflict.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The research design focuses on realising the purpose of this study: to design and illustrate a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity for the benefit of emergent leaders to deal with language complexity at public HEIs (§ 1.3). This chapter describes how this research project is designed to achieve this goal.

A pragmatic perspective allows engagement with different theories, provides criteria for theories to be selected, and guides the study to practicability. Reflexive interpretation serves as grounding focus theory to bind the study together. Conceptual research as methodology provides the vehicle to elevate the envisioned reflexive framework to a meta-theoretical level. The conceptualising method of relating, incorporating differentiating and integrating, is employed to achieving the purpose of the study.

The envisaged reflexive framework of opposites is deemed sufficient when relations and patterns are found in the intersecting social systems of leadership and leadership. This study is limited to a lower resolution, meta-theoretical study, illustrating the conceptualised reflexive frameworks in the locus of language diversity at public HEIs. The risk level of the study is “exempt” and there are no salient ethical considerations to account for, exempt to be guided by a post-oppositionality ethics.

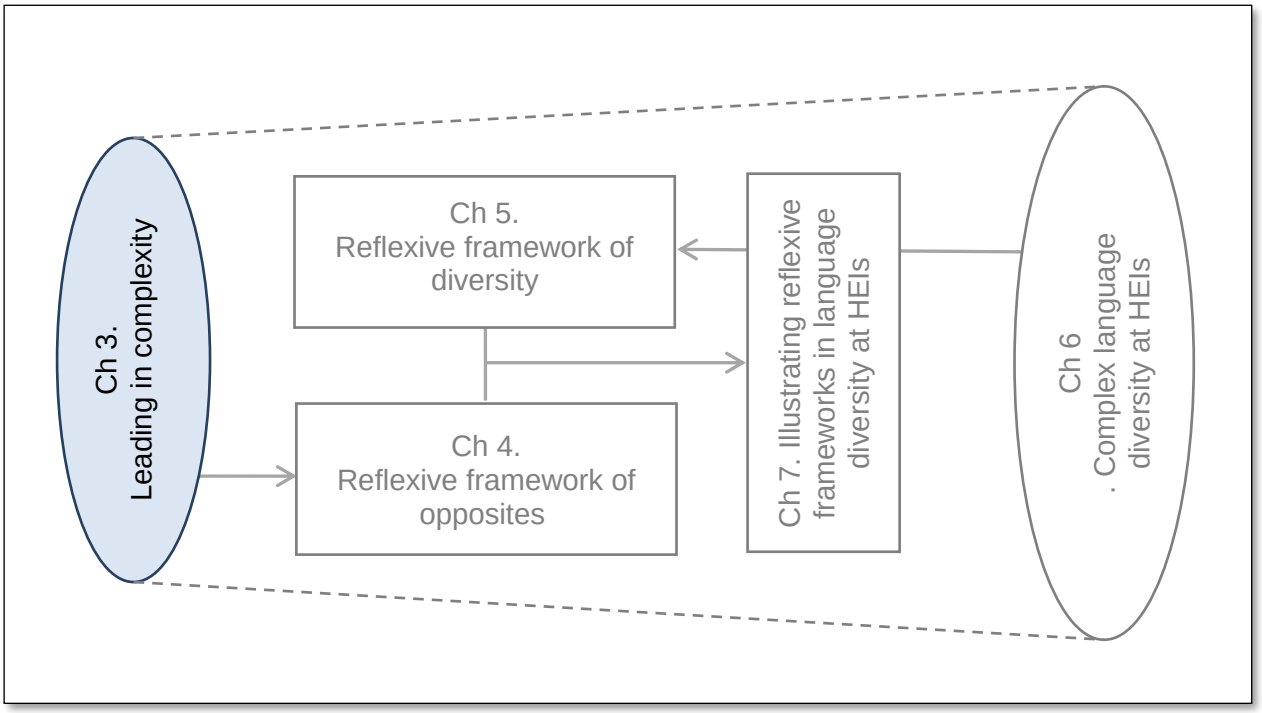
While all aspects of the methodology to accomplish the research purpose are important, reflexivity is the defining element. In complex contexts such as diversity in general and language diversity at public HEIs in particular, a reflexive practice enables leaders to understand problems from different perspectives and reflect on the strong and weak points of their own perspective on the matter. Reflexive interpretation as methodology offers a structured framework as guide to understand complexities. The result is wiser judgement, better decisions, and useful interventions.

# CHAPTER 3 LEADING IN COMPLEXITY

*…leadership talk often has an 'anti-reflexive' effect.*

*Striving for 'simplicity' is often the enemy of reflexivity.*

(Alvesson *et al.*, 2016:16)



## 3.1 Introduction

Leadership[5] at HEIs faces numerous competing demands and aims regarding diversity as a complex social problem (Gantasala, 2015:707-708; Mumford *et al.*, 2000:4). When these competing demands escalate to the brink of chaos, as the 2015-2016 #mustfall riots at public HEIs demonstrated, it becomes difficult to lead proactively towards a vision (Habib, 2019; Jansen, 2017; Snowden & Boone, 2007). The maxim that yesterday's solutions turn into today's problems is true of most complex contexts (Senge, 1990:57) but solutions created under pressure of conflict might be problematic while they are implemented. It important that leaders engage sufficiently with complex problems before matters escalate into conflict and chaos.

The aim of this chapter is framed by the following research question: how can leaders make sense of complex problems? (§ 1.4).

The first half of the chapter offers reflections on what leadership is. First, leadership is delimited from management. Leadership engages with the chaos end, management deals with the order end of the continuum. Second, the effect of a shift in worldview and a growing awareness of complexity is considered in framing current understandings of leadership. Third, the unifying theory on leadership of Kilburg and Donohue (2011) is reflected upon. This definition describes leadership as "an emergent property of complex, adaptive ecological systems" (2011:12). The concepts of 'complexity' and 'emergent' are central in describing the leadership process.

The second half of this chapter treats complexity and emergence as themes to explore ways in which leaders can make sense of, and take proactive action on, complex problems. Five approaches to leadership studies are discussed. First, the Cynefin framework of Snowden and Boone (2007) is used to differentiate roles of leaders in situations of different levels of complexity. Second, viewing organisations as complex adaptive systems (CAS) brings organisational identity and social mobility into focus (Schneider & Somers, 2006). Third, it is unwise for leaders to over-control. They should instead lead, influencing people by means of emergence and self-organisation (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Plowman *et al.*, 2007). These three approaches

[5] In this study, educational leadership is not viewed as a separate field, but as a specialisation of leadership studies in general. This specialisation is defined by being "centrally concerned with the purpose or aims of education. These purposes or goals provide the crucial sense of direction" in educational leadership (Bush, 2007:291). In the discussion here general leadership theory will be discussed, applied, and adapted to fit the purpose and aims of higher education leadership.

shape the fit between analysis of the complex problems, and tools of opposites and reflexivity deployed to engage these problems.

Two more approaches to leadership are discussed to determine the footprint of opposites and reflexivity in leadership literature. First, the presence of oppositions as a cognitive structure in leadership literature is explored. Opposites are found to be well represented in the field of leadership. Yet a reflexive framework of opposites is absent: such a framework can be used to foster a culture of reflexivity in organisations. Second, reflexivity in leadership literature is explored. This approach promotes leading and influencing followers to engage with problems from multiple perspectives (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016). The contribution of each of these approaches towards leading in complexity is summarised. In conclusion, a case is made for the conceptualisation of reflexive frameworks by utilising opposites and addressing diversity.

### 3.2 The landscape of leadership research

Avolio *et al.* (2009:441) observe a drastic increase in leadership research literature during the two decades following the turn of the 21st century. Coinciding with an increase in volume of literature, there was an increase in the diversity of theories of leadership. Gardner *et al.* (2010:934) terms an attempt to make sense of this chaos in leadership research "herding theoretical cats".

This section aims to survey the landscape of leadership research. This is first achieved by delimiting leadership from management. Leadership is focused on change, vision, and influencing people. Management concentrates upon implementation and maintenance. Leadership tasks are placed more towards the unordered (chaotic) end of the spectrum while management lies towards the ordered end. Second, two phenomena contributed to a shift in the focus of leadership studies. The rise of a postmodern worldview has brought a more nuanced and local sense to leadership, a realisation of complexity, and complexity theory (Rosenhead *et al.*, 2019:1) took hold of leadership studies. Third, the project by Kilburg and Donohue (2011) to distil a unifying theory from numerous current leadership theories, is considered. From this unifying theory of leadership, the concepts of complexity and emergence surface as key descriptors of the leadership process.

#### 3.2.1 Management and leadership

Following a literature review of the constructs of 'manager' and 'leader', Burcar (2014:94) concludes that "economic and educational sciences have developed a chaotic or multi-modelling theoretical explanation of the principal's role." There seems to be greater clarity about what is understood by 'manager' than by '"leader'. While leadership and management are related and equally important, Burcar (2014:89-91) and Bush (2007:392) quote several education studies that

separate the constructs in terms of their focus: change versus maintenance, vision versus implementation, influencing/enabling people versus controlling processes. This axial use of opposites to provide greater clarity in the meaning of the terms 'management' and 'leadership' coincides with similar studies from the perspective of general leadership studies. For example, Toor and Ofori (2008:66-67) scrutinise ten studies and compile a list of 38 opposites between leaders and managers. The editor of the Harvard Business Review introduces a reprint of a 1977 article, *Managers and Leaders: Are they different?,* by distinguishing leaders and managers according to the conceptions they hold of chaos and order (Zaleznik, 2004:74).

It is generally agreed in education studies that managerial functions have for some time been emphasised, to the detriment of leadership functions (Borgelt & Falk, 2007:124-125; Burcar, 2014:90-91; Bush & Glover, 2016; Jansen, 2009:17,196-179; Johnson, 1981). The often quoted words of Kotter (2000:3) are true today and applicable in many other environments: "Most U.S. corporations today are overmanaged and underled. They need to develop their capacity to exercise leadership."

The continued dominance of management over leadership might be in part the legacy of Taylor, introducing "scientific management" and coinciding with the appearance of large complex organisations almost a century ago: "(in) the past, the man has been first; in the future the system must be first" (Taylor, 1919:7). The problem with Taylorism seems not to be that the system fails to "develop first-class men" as he envisaged but that inbreeding occurs when a manage-by-numbers system develops people to maintain the system. A number of articles explores how less "scientific" approaches, such as art, for example, can bypass the constraints of the system itself and act as a supplementary way to enhance neglected leadership capabilities (Congram, 2008; Lindsey, 2011; Parush & Koivunen, 2014; Romanowska *et al.*, 2011).

In conclusion, it is essential to approach the dynamic complexity of social diversity from the perspective of leadership. To address issues of diversity primarily requires change, vision, and the capacity to influence people. The managerial focus of implementation, maintenance, and execution, of order, follow closely on where leadership leads. First, however, the contribution of leadership should be explored. Leadership is the focus of this study and is dealt with in the following sections.

### 3.2.2 Growing awareness of complexity

Senge (1990:57) among others popularised a growing awareness of complexity in leadership by his maxim that yesterday's solutions turn into today's problems. But the construct of complexity

has been present in organisational research since the realisation, during the middle of the twentieth century, that some organisations are actually open systems (Anderson, 1999:216).

Axley and McMahon (2006:295) term the current time "one of the most dynamic times in human history, with no end to the rampant change insight" resulting in "an organizational environment fraught with complexity, paradox and unrelenting uncertainty". Astin and Astin (2000:1) point out that this time is often described by words such as "turbulence, conflict, change, surprise, challenge, and possibility", evoking a "myriad emotions ranging from fear and anxiety to excitement, enthusiasm, and hope". These major changes seem to be multidimensional: affecting structures and patterns, and behaviour and emotions; individuals as well as organisations and whole communities. Global warming, globalisation, technological revolution, knowledge revolution, ease of communication, the advent of the internet and social media, and shifting worldviews towards the diverse views accommodated in post-modernism are some of the dominant drivers of major changes and increasing complexity (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007:298-299).

This escalating complexity has acquired a unique identity in the domain of higher education. Gantasala (2015:707-708) frames complexity in higher education in terms of four main themes: higher education is subjected to unique regulatory frameworks, accommodates diversity between faculties in one organisation, and between students. It consists, like other organisations, of complex adaptive systems (CAS, "systems that have a large numbers of components, often called agents, that interact and adapt or learn" (Holland, 2006:1)). Jansen (2009:17-22) provides a context for the extreme complexity faced at South African public HEIs from the time he acted as Dean at the University of Pretoria (2000-2007). In addition to the already significant challenges HEIs face all over the world, leaders in South Africa's public HEI must balance the imperative of social change with deep-seated prejudices, attitudes, fears, and expectations, woundedness and clashing cultures amongst individuals and groups. When he served as Vice-chancellor at the University of the Free State, the force of the contributors to complexity came to a head in the constantly altering chaos of the #mustfall movement. He had to deal with fire threatening to consume higher education itself (Jansen, 2017). Habib (2019), vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand at the time, felt compelled to document the rage and rebellion of that time.

In these complex environments, leadership has become an "overwhelmingly complex ecological phenomenon" (Kilburg & Donohue, 2011:13). The traditionally planned approach to organisational leadership, planning, organising, leading, controlling, has been overwhelmed by "invisible forces" such as expectations, culture and circumstances (Allio, 2012:5). Holistic leadership is needed which displays *inter alia* knowledge, skills, emotional intelligence, maturity and spiritual wisdom (Astin & Astin, 2000:1).

Against this background, complexity theory entered the study of leadership.

Like complexity itself, complexity theory in organisational literature is “far from (a) perfectly coherent” theory (Axley & McMahon, 2006:300). Axley and McMahon describe how complexity theory originated from a variety of disciplines such as “physics, biology, mathematics, economics, anthropology, ecology, sociology, information technology, psychology, and medicine”. It follows trails of diverse models. For example, dissipative structures and nonequilibrium thermodynamics, chaos theory, catastrophe theory, self-organized criticality, self-organisation theory, general systems theory, information theory, computational theory, game theory, evolutionary biology, and more” may be discerned in complexity theory.

### 3.2.3 New vista in leadership research

Coinciding with the growing awareness of complexity (§ 3.2.2) a shift occurred in organisational leadership research. Previously, organisational and leadership research were mainly grounded in a “traditional worldview”, which included assumptions such as “reductionism, objective observation, linear causation, (and) entity as unit of analysis” (Dent, 1999:8). At the turn of the 21st century, the general sense was that continued research under this traditional worldview was yielding diminishing returns. As an awareness of complexity grew, problems begged new approaches. A paradigm shift was needed to facilitate major breakthroughs in organisational and leadership research. “Emerging worldviews” gained traction to supplement and enrich organisational and leadership research. These emerging worldviews include assumptions such as “holism, perspectival observation, mutual causation, (and) relationship as unit of analysis” (Dent, 1999:8).

The same shift in worldview and research can be observed in research into higher education leadership (Biesta & Mirón, 2002). Comparing two reports for the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) illustrates the point.

In 1989 Bensimon *et al.* (1989:35-49) reviewed existing higher education leadership theories and sorted these theories into six categories: trait theories, power and influence theories, behavioural theories, contingency theories, cultural and symbolic theories, and cognitive theories. These theories are predominantly grounded in the traditional positivistic paradigm.

Seventeen years later, Kezar *et al.* (2006:15-29) argue that the rise of new paradigms, social constructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism ”led to the revolution that has altered the face of our understanding of leadership” (2006:28). Theories such as transformational theory, chaos and complexity theory, mental models and organisational learning, social and cultural theories of

leadership, procedural theory, and team or relational leadership embodied the new paradigms. These new theories supplemented the body of leadership knowledge derived from studies grounded in the old paradigms (Kezar *et al.*, 2006:31-70). Table 3-1 illustrates the shift in higher education leadership research.

**Table 3-1 The revolution in leadership research**

| Then | | Now |
|---|---|---|
| Search for universal leadership characteristics | → | Context bound |
| Examine power and hierarchy | → | Focus on mutual power and influence |
| Study individuals | → | Emphasis on the collective and the collaborative |
| Predict behaviour and outcomes | → | Promote learning, empowerment, change |
| Leader centred | → | Process oriented |

(Kezar *et al.*, 2006:34)

Eddy and Van der Linden (2006:7-12) cite several studies confirming this shift from a hierarchical view of higher education leadership towards a relational, collaborative, learning and process view of leadership. A transition in thinking has, however, at the time of the study not translated meaningfully into a new practice at the education environments reviewed (2006:22). This observation is affirmed when Jansen (2009:20) describes his experience of leadership at a South African public HEI as a "positivistic impulse applied to decision making and the deployment of a rigid organizational logic that substituted for genuine deliberation".

While there was a steady decline in traditional approaches in higher education leadership research, by 2010 the newly emerging approaches had not replaced traditional research (Gardner *et al.*, 2010:937). Emerging research approaches gained their own standing next to traditional research. The number of emergent theories, however, is still growing. The result is a plethora of diverse theories and approaches to research into leadership towards a unifying model for, and definition of, leadership. The explosion in leadership research itself, and the number of theoretical approaches to leadership research, resulted in a large number of definitions of leadership.

One example of the many definitions fits this study well. Leadership is “a complex interaction between people and environments that emerges through social systems” (Day *et al.*, 2014:78). In the discussion below, concepts of complexity, people, diverse environments, social systems, and the emerging nature of leadership take centre stage.

Kilburg and Donohue (2011:15) arrive at a more detailed definition. Their definition stems from a movement of researchers (see, for example, Avolio, 2007; Courturier, 2015; Dinh *et al.*, 2014; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010b; Kilburg & Donohue, 2011; Wren, 2006) trying their hand at what Allio (2012:4) terms a “grand unifying theory” of leadership. Yet the goal of researchers to generally agree on a grand unifying theory for leadership, remains elusive. After one expansive project where experts tried to formulate such a unifying theory, Allio (2012:11) comments that the result is still only ”work in progress”. The experts could not agree. The diversity of approaches to, and theories of, leadership extends to efforts for creating a unifying theory of leadership. From the various attempts referred to above, the “unifying” and “multicomponent model of leadership” by Kilburg and Donohue (2011) is taken here as a current reflection on the lay of leadership research. After conducting an overview of major approaches in the leadership research, they arrived at the following comprehensive definition of leadership (2011:15):

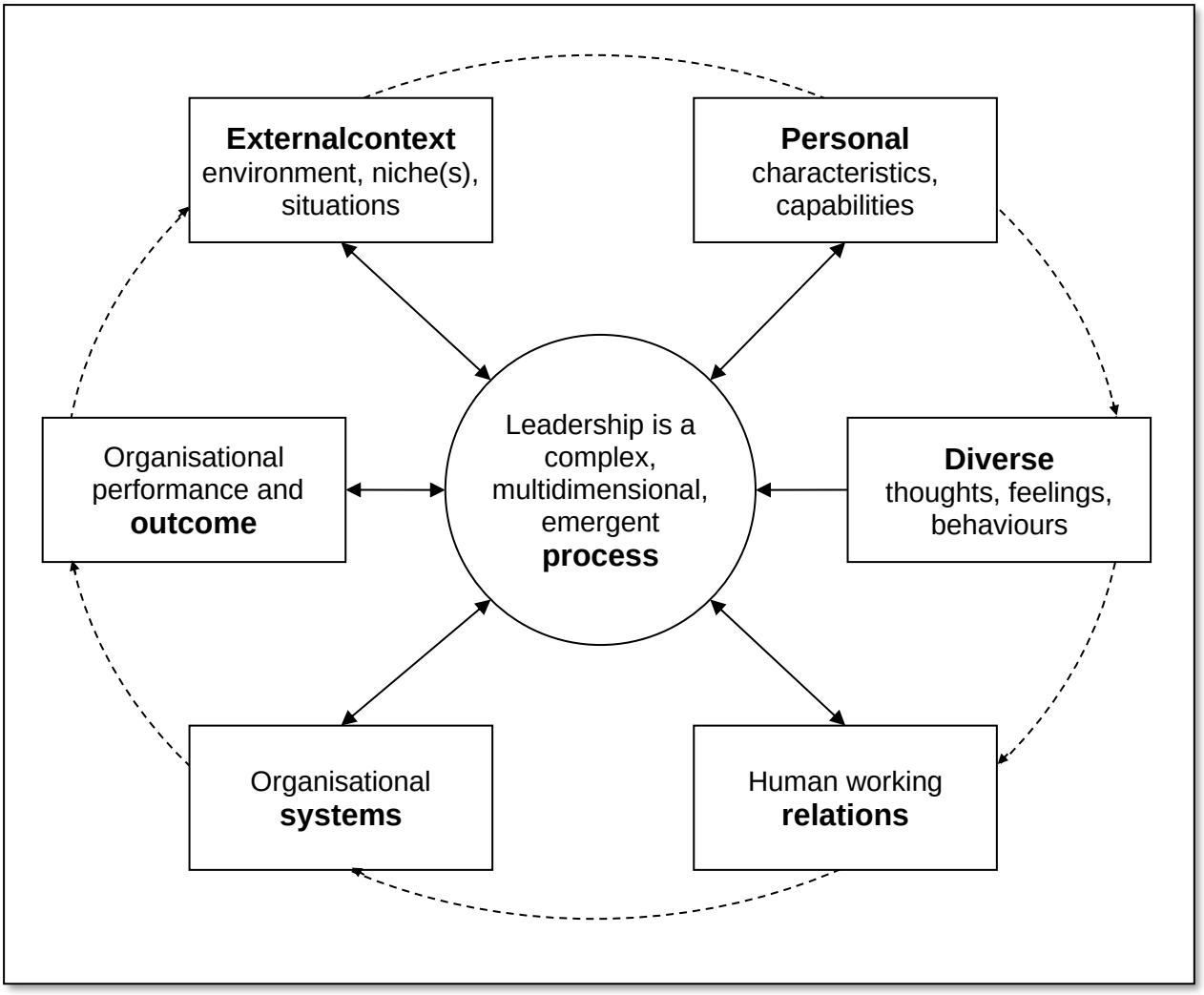
*Leadership is a complex, multidimensional, emergent process in which the leader(s), follower(s), and other formal and informal stakeholders in a human enterprise use their characteristics, capabilities, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, to create mutually influencing relationships that enable them to co-evolve strategies, tactics, structures, processes, directions, and other methods of building and managing human enterprises with the goal of producing adaptive success in their chosen niche(s) in the competitive, evaluative, and evolving global ecology of organisations.*

This definition formulated by Kilburg and Donohue (2011:15-16) explains leadership, at its core, as “a complex, multidimensional, emergent process”. Six “essential components” frame the exploration and exposition of leadership: personal characteristics and capabilities; diverse thoughts, feelings and behaviours that define exchanges between people; human working relations; organisational systems, organisational performance, and outcome; and the ecology of external context. Interaction between all these elements allows leadership to emerge in an organisation. Each of these components can dynamically interact with any of one or more of the other components which changes the contribution of the respective components to the emergence of leadership.

Several observations are evident from this definition of leadership (§ Figure 3-1):

- Leading is a process.
- Complexity is central to this definition.

- Leadership is multidimensional.
- The act of leading is not restricted to one or even a group of leaders. Rather, through their empowered contribution, “any and all members of a system” (Kilburg & Donohue, 2011:12) becomes the emergent leadership process.
- Any one of the six essential components interacts with any other component(s).




Conceptualised from Kilburg and Donohue (2011:15-16)

**Figure 3-1 Graphic interpretation of the definition of ‘leadership’ by Kilburg and Donohue**

- Nevertheless, the six essential components of leadership are ordered along a continuum, with personal/micro at one end, the one building up to the next, towards impersonal/macro components at the other end. Consider how the consecutive verbs in the definition describe

a progression in the process from the personal/micro to impersonal/macro contexts: [stakeholders] use [personal attributes] to create [relations] that enable them to co-evolve [systems] building and managing [enterprises] producing [success].

- In this continuum, the first three essential components predominantly focus on humans: their personal capabilities, their ability to establish interpersonal exchanges, and human relations. Leadership is essentially a human endeavour. In the words of several experienced organisational leaders, "(e)ssentially, the human side of work… is the real work of the leader. Without success in the people arena, all other aspects of the leader's responsibilities will suffer" (Cangemi *et al.*, 2008:1027).

- Human endeavours crystallise in the last three essential components: organisational systems, outcomes, and the external context of global ecology.

Figure 3-1 represents a conceptualisation of the leadership definition and discussion by Kilburg and Donohue (2011:15-16), as well as the observations above.

The attempt by Kilburg and Donohue to contain many theories within a single framework, succeeds in presenting an overview of current leadership thinking. In this sense, their definition is presented here as an overview of current leadership thinking.

### 3.2.4 Reflections on the landscape of leadership research

Leadership, and not management, is the lens through which complex language diversity at public HEIs is approached in this study. Leadership centres on vision, change, and the role of people. Leadership research, however, is a domain with multiple definitions and theories. Recently, leadership research attempted to move away from a modernist approach towards emerging worldviews which include assumptions such as "holism, perspectival observation, mutual causation, (and) relationship as unit of analysis" (Dent, 1999:8).

In an effort to consolidate and unify leadership research, Kilburg and Donohue (2011:12) view leadership as "an emergent property of complex, adaptive ecological systems", where people play a central role (Day *et al.*, 2014:78). Since complexity and emergent processes are core concepts describing the leadership process, the next section explores these concepts from multiple leadership approaches.

## 3.3 Complex and emergent processes, opposites, and reflexive heuristics

At the centre of the unifying definition of leadership discussed in § 3.2.3 above, lie the concepts of complexity and emergent processes. These concepts appear in this definition by virtue of their prominence in complexity theory. This section first explores the roles that complexity theory assigns to leadership. It then identifies opposites and reflexivity as mechanisms to assist leaders in these roles. Exploring the roles of leaders in complex contexts, opposites and reflexivity are identified as constructs that could assist emerging solutions to complex problems. The roles of leaders are identified from three approaches to complexity theory in leaders, namely the Cynefin framework delimiting complex problems (Snowden & Boone, 2007), leadership in CASs (Schneider & Somers, 2006), and emergence and self-organisation (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Plowman *et al.*, 2007). Discussion concludes that opposites could serve as a heuristic to foster what Shapiro and Little (2020) term a culture of humility through participatory inquiry and reflexivity. Such a culture encourages the emergence of solutions to complex problems.

The second part of this section demonstrates that opposites and reflexivity are present in leadership literature. There is, however, a need for a practicable framework to exploit the potential of these mechanisms in organisations. Two more leadership approaches are discussed. They focus on how opposites and reflexivity are currently employed in leadership research. The first approach provides an overview of the use of opposites in leadership research, anchored in the view that Mumford *et al.* (2000) hold concerning opposites being at the centre complex social problems. The second approach turns attention to reflexive leadership (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016). By describing where opposites and reflexivity fit into the roles of leaders in complex contexts and exploring how opposites and reflexivity have been addressed in leadership research, this section makes a case for conceptualising a reflexive framework of opposites.

### 3.3.1 Accents in complexity theory in leadership

This section surveys three approaches to complexity theory to identify the role of leaders in complex contexts and find a mechanism that could assist them in these roles. Three approaches to complexity theory in leadership are discussed to identify these mechanisms. These three approaches are selected from six main approaches which Rosenhead *et al.* (2019) identified in their comprehensive review of literature on complexity theory and leadership. They were selected first for their explanation of the role of leaders in complex settings, and second for pointing towards the same heuristic concepts, opposites and reflexivity, that could function as mechanisms supporting leadership in complex problems. The three approaches to complexity theory in

leadership discussed are the Cynefin framework, leadership in CASs, and emergence and self-organisation.

The discussion concludes that leadership benefits from a framework involving opposites and reflexivity.

#### 3.3.1.1 Cynefin framework

The first approach to complexity in leadership, the Cynefin[6] framework, contributes to the line of reasoning by locating contradictions in complex contexts and emergent solutions behaviour as a way forward.

**Table 3-2 Cynefin framework for leading in ordered to unordered contexts**

| | Context | Description | Leadership action |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ordered** | Simple | Stable, predictable cause-effect, "known knowns" | Sense, categorise, respond |
| ↑ | Complicated | Cause-and-effect relation present but not clear, multiple right answers, "known unknowns". | Sense, analyse, respond |
| | Complex | At least one right answer, cannot ferret the right answer out, "unknown unknowns". | Probe, sense, respond |
| ↓ | Chaotic | No relation between cause and effect can be discerned, "unknowables" | Act, sense, respond |
| **Unordered** | | | |

This Cynefin framework determines the context of a problem on the ordered–unordered axis, linking the classification of the problem with leadership actions (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden & Boone, 2007). A problem could be simple, complicated, complex, or chaotic. For each context, different leadership actions are proposed. Table 3-2 summarises the framework according to the contexts, a description of the contexts, and proposed actions that leaders could take to fit the contexts.

[6] "*Cynefin*, pronounced ku-nev-in, is a Welsh word that signifies the multiple factors in our environment and our experience that influence us in ways we can never understand." (Snowden & Boone, 2007:2).

Simple contexts are depicted as the domain of best practice. They are stable and bring about results in predictable effects. How to solve these problems is generally known. Persons should be left to self-implement solutions in individual areas of responsibility. Leaders should look out for inaccurate classification, complacency, entrained thinking. In these contexts, people should not be micromanaged.

Complicated contexts are depicted as the domains of experts. These contexts are relatively stable. There are several right answers, but these are not easily discernible. Experts help to find the right answer for the right time. While experts might fall into entrained thinking, leaders should put innovative suggestions forward. Finding the right answer might take time and leaders should be cognisant of the trade-off between deciding and finding the right answer.

Complex contexts are depicted as the domain of emergence. These contexts are unordered, display flux and unpredictability. They are characterised by many competing ideas. There is at least one answer to a complex problem but the solution has not been defined so far. Often a context becomes complex following a major change. Here leaders should not resort to authoritarian styles to impose order. Proposed actions by leaders are: being open discussion, set only limits, foster attractors (the gathering points that become evident if stimuli resonate with people), encourage diverse views, manage the conditions for departure, and monitor what emerges.

Chaotic contexts are depicted as the domain of rapid response. These are high turbulence, causes and effects are disconnected, and there is no discernible link between cause and effect. The work of leaders is first to act to stabilise the situation, then sense areas of stability and instability, and work to turn the chaos into complexity.

The problem of language at public HEIs illustrates the Cynefin framework. Following liberation in 1994, experts formulated generic answers with regard to language at public HEIs in the *Constitution* (1996:s. 26(2)) and the Language policy for higher education by the Department of Education (DoE, 2002). Over time, however, contradictions surfaced which pushed the context into complexity. Markers of these unresolved contradictions are cases before the Constitutional Court on the use of Afrikaans at public HEIs (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019; *UNISA v Afriforum*, 2021) and the consultative investigation initiated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC, 2021) regarding language policy at Stellenbosch University. During the #mustfall movement of 2015-2016, however, language at public HEIs was added to the list of demands, pushing the problem into the domain of chaos (Jansen, 2017:69-77).

Important for the argument of this research is to notice how the presence of multiple solutions defines problems in complicated settings. Reflexivity encompasses the tasks of analysing and comparing these solutions. In complex settings, contradictions underlie problems. Resolving contradictions fits into the ambit of opposites and dynamic balance.

#### 3.3.1.2 Leadership in complex adaptive systems (CASs)

The second approach to complexity in leadership, leadership in CAS (Schneider & Somers, 2006), highlighted here, emphasises the role of organisational identity and social movements as indirect processes of leadership (cf. Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Sveningsson *et al.*, 2012). The discussion below first explains how CASs function as a model to analyse complexity and second turns to organisational identity and social movements as expression of CASs which function as indirect catalysts of stability and change.

First, CASs are often used in leadership research as a basic model to analyse complexity and map behaviour (Avolio *et al.*, 2009:430; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007:299). As in the case with various views of complexity theory itself, no unified definition of a CAS exists. Anderson (1999:219-225) uses four elements to describe the generic traits to all the versions of CASs, namely agents, connections, agents evolving together, and a CAS evolve when agents and/or connections evolve. The following bullets expand on these four traits (Anderson, 1999:219-225; cf. Axley & McMahon, 2006:300-301, 304-310; Schneider & Somers, 2006:353):

- An agent is the basic unit in modelling complex behaviour. Agents may be individuals, groups and/or combinations of groups. They are sensitive to environmental conditions. Cognitive structures govern the actions which agents might take, given a certain context. These cognitive structures might consist of a range of different ‘schemata’, forming a set of simple local rules to a neural network. In this study opposites are presented as a cognitive structure that can govern the choices and behaviour of agents.

- These agents are connected through feedback loops in networks or systems. These connections carry local information from one agent to other agents. There is no central or dominant agent but rather a distributive network of control. The network self-organises through the connections and feedback loops. The behaviour or state of one agent generates local information and affects the behaviour or state of other agents, and these other agents in turn create local information influencing the system.

- Agents evolve together. Each agent strives to maximise the payoff from its interaction with the environment and receive a payoff from choices other agents make. In this way, a dynamic

equilibrium is created, constantly adapting, changing, and evolving not to fall over the edge into chaos and simultaneously escaping the ultimate death of static equilibrium.

- A CAS evolves through changes in agents and/or in connections between agents. Agents change by transformation of existing agents, the entrance into, or exit from, the system by agents, and/or the formation of new combinations of agents. In turn, connections evolve by the creation of new connections, developing new patterns, changed strength and/or form of connections.

With these generic traits in mind, a CAS may be described as a network of agents and the interaction between them. This network evolves to maintain a dynamic equilibrium when agents and interactions adapt to new challenges. The structure of agents and networks in CASs enables problem solving and learning. Complexity theory concerns mapping these structural entities and provides a relational perspective on how meaning is constructed. Meaning is constructed when knowledge is created and distributed through social networks (Uhl-Bien, 2006:655; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007:299).

Second, discussion now turns to organisational identity and social movements as indirect catalysts for stability and change. Social identification is described as “a person’s perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate, reflecting both psychological and social processes” (Schneider & Somers, 2006:357). Organisational identities are formed by the interaction of various agents, such as the founders of the organisation, different departments or geographical regions, layers of seniority, individuals, and external stakeholders (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Organisational identity forms the internal skeleton of the organisation, directing values, sense-making, meaning, choices, and behaviour. The following statement by Albert *et al.* (2000:13) is valuable:

*Increasingly, an organization must reside in the heads and hearts of its members. Thus, in the absence of an externalized bureaucratic structure, it becomes more important to have an internalized cognitive structure of what the organization stands for and where it intends to go — in short, a clear sense of the organization's identity. A sense of identity serves as a rudder for navigating difficult waters.*

Schneider and Somers (2006:257-258) conclude that organisational identity exhibits an inertia to change. While identity contributes towards stability, an organisation should guard against rigidity. Reflexivity allows for dynamic stability (Hatch & Schultz, 2002:1000).Organisational identity may be a stabilising factor, social movements, sets of values and action, or urge for change. Factors which impact the ability of social movements to gain traction are the appeal of their ideology,

ability to mobilise people, the way they frame issues, and weaknesses of the opposition (Schneider & Somers, 2006:358-359).

Social movements can be highly successful in shifting the identity of an organisation. Consider, for instance, how the set of values and actions towards equality at public HEIs mobilised, gained momentum, and turned into the #mustfall movement, exploiting weaknesses of the opposition. The #mustfall movement did achieve change (Chikane, 2018; Davis, 2017). In the process, however, the movements have become incoherent (Lester *et al.*, 2017; RDM News Wire, 2015), disruptive towards teaching and learning (Habib, 2019; Jansen, 2017), and in instances might have contributed to personal tragedy (Fikeni *et al.*, 2020). Schneider and Somers (2006:359) warn that movements can result in unintended consequences (cf. Mutekwe, 2017).

In a perfect world new order emerges when agents put their positions forward to be debated and weighed by society in an inclusive and constructive way. But the danger is real that proponents of a certain position “play the game” by deliberately invoking aggression to overpower others and force their view as the solution to a complex problem. When their opponents feel they must counter the aggression at any cost, polarization can occur. Then the problem can transmogrify a complex context into a chaotic one, and top-down leadership is necessary to arrest the crisis. Against this background, Shapiro and Little (2020) argue for leaders to foster a climate of humility through participatory inquiry and reflexivity.

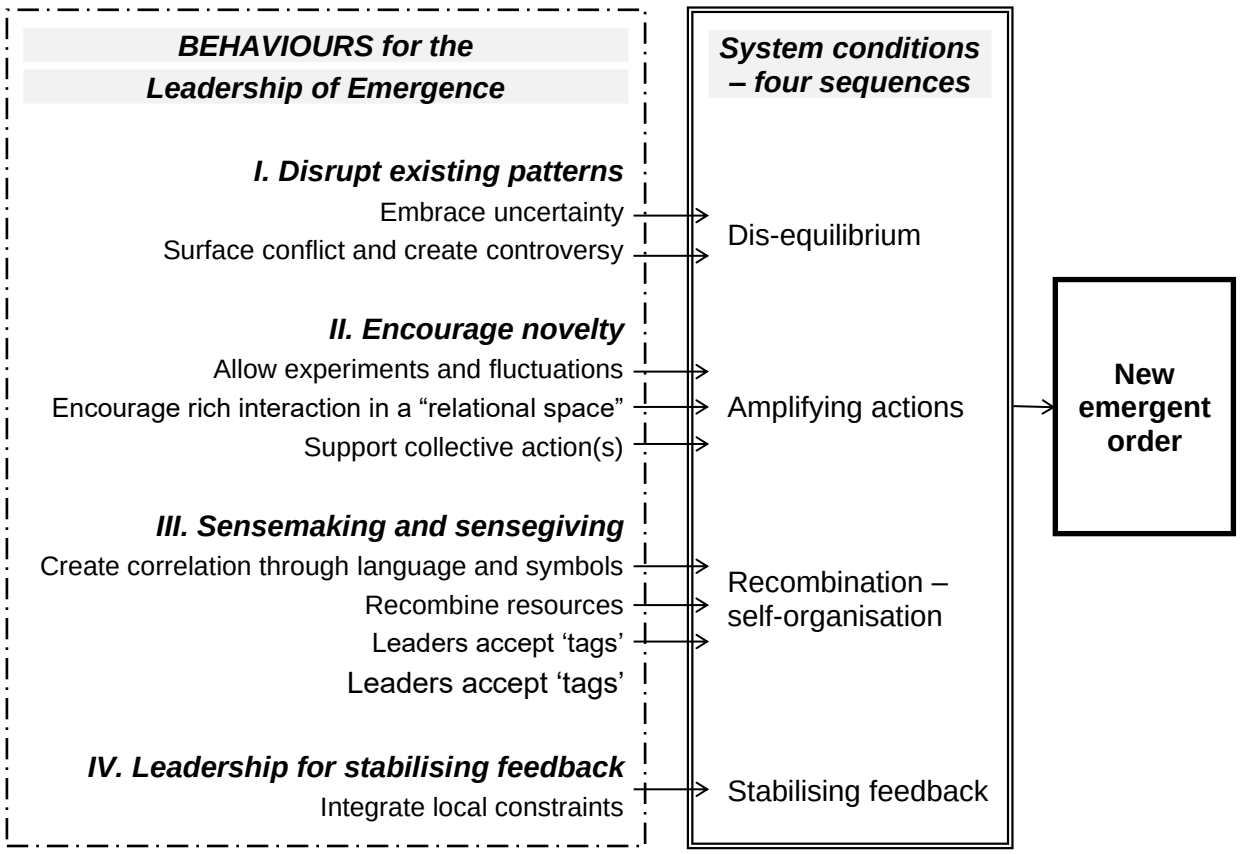
In conclusion, cognitive structures govern the actions of agents in CASs. Locally generated information flows through self-organised, relational, decentralised, and distributive networks. This flow of information socially constructs knowledge, resulting in problem solving and organisational learning. Opposites are one such cognitive structure.

Organisational identity and social movements dynamically balance the stability–change opposition in organisational life. Organisational identity represents broad consensus on belonging and fosters stability. Social movements consist of groups gathering around values and action to pressure current identity to change. Oppositions and reflexivity help to elucidate competing values and create a conceptual space in which agents interact. This conceptual space may function as a bulwark against extremism and prevent an emergent process from falling over the edge into chaos. It provides an environment where change can indeed take place.

#### 3.3.1.3 Emergence and self-organisation

The third approach to leadership in complexity highlighted here is emergence and self-organisation (Rosenhead *et al.*, 2019:12). Emergence and self-organisation clarify leadership

roles in terms of complexity. Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2007:304) use the term “informal emergence” to describe the opposite of a top-down leadership approach. Emergence refers to reformulation of, and self-organisation by, elements of a complex system of which the outcome is not predictable and often more complex than envisaged or estimated at the start (2007:308).




(Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009:621)

**Figure 3-2 Behaviours that co-generate the conditions for new emergent order**

In emergence and self-organisation, leaders do not act as directors or controllers but as enablers (Plowman *et al.*, 2007:343-345). Enablers disrupt existing patterns, encourage novelty, act as sensemakers, and stabilise through feedback to lead an organisation through the phases of dis-equilibrium, amplifying actions, recombination and stabilisation (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009:619-621; Plowman *et al.*, 2007:347-353). Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009:621) present the graphic replicated in (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009:621)

Figure 3-2 to illustrate how the four mechanisms enablers use, break down into nine behaviours of leaders, and how these behaviours correspond to the sequences in conditions of a system that generate a new emergent order.

Emergence and self-organising approach to complexity assign behaviours to leaders that enable agents and networks to devise solutions to complex problems. These solutions lead to self-re-organising of organisations. A reflexive framework of opposites can play a role in both disrupting existing patterns and enabling discourse in a relational space.

#### 3.3.1.4 Reflections on accents in complexity theory in leadership

This discussion of three approaches to complexity theory in leadership establishes opposites and reflexivity as heuristic mechanisms towards leading in complex settings. The Cynefin framework presents an opportunity for reflexivity to enrich analysis in complicated contexts and for opposites to explicate contradictions in complex contexts. From the discussion of leadership in CASs, it is apparent that an oppositional heuristic can engage the stability – change standoff between organisational identity and social movements. Furthermore, reflexivity can assist to moderate against extremes of inertia and chaos. Successful emergence and self-organisation rely upon critical maturity among agents, to engage reflexively with different perspectives and dynamically balancing oppositions. This maturity can be nurtured by investing in a heuristic culture of oppositional analysis and reflexivity. From a complexity perspective, opposites and reflexivity coincide with what Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2007:305-307) term enabling leadership. In conclusion, there is a feasible opportunity for mechanisms of opposites and reflexivity to operate in a complexity perspective on leadership.

The next section explores the presence of opposites and reflexivity in current leadership literature.

### 3.3.2 Frameworks to foster as culture of participatory inquiry and reflexivity

#### 3.3.2.1 Opposites in leadership studies

The aim of this section is to illustrate a link between opposites and leadership studies, and to position opposites as a tool to foster reflexivity. An expansive discussion of opposites follows in Chapter 4 where a reflexive framework of opposites is conceptualised. Mumford *et al.* (2000:14) capture the complexity of leadership when they describe leadership as “a complex form of *social* problem solving”. A social problem is deemed complex if the problem does not have a single solution but exhibits fundamental contradictions[7] (cf. Koall & Bruchhagen, 2009; Kurtz &

[7] In this text nuances in meaning between terms such as trade-offs, binaries, dualities, contradictions, paradoxes are incorporated in the generic term opposites. See Chapter 4 for discussion of the term opposites.

Snowden, 2003; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Snowden & Boone, 2007; Stacey *et al.*, 2001). These contradictions may be one or more of the following types (Mumford *et al.*, 2000:13):

- tendency toward stability versus the need for change,
- goals and strategies of one subsystem to solve a problem versus goals and strategies of other subsystems to solve the problem, and
- the niche performance outcome of the organisation versus recognising differentiated needs of the people comprising the organisation.

This section explores opposites in leadership studies and reflexive leadership as ways that scholars argue leaders do engage with contradictions present in complex and multidimensional problems.

The previous section concluded (§ 3.3.1.4) that opposites coincides with enabling leadership in complex contexts. Wilding *et al.* (2006:857) concur and introduce opposites, in their terminology "duality theory", to explicate generic principles and ordering rules in complex organisations. An important part of duality theory in ordering rules is what Li (2016:52) defines as "duality balance", constantly taking cognisance of time and space as context to a particular chaotic event.

What is the footprint of opposites in leadership theory? Coinciding with the shift in leadership studies (§ 3.2.3) towards a greater emphasis on context, shared power, collaboration, empowerment, and process (Kezar *et al.*, 2006:34) opposites re-emerged as a way to make sense of complexity in general (Johnson, 1996; Patel, 2016:610-612) and complexity in higher education in particular (Macfarlane, 2015). Identifying competing values has been proposed as a framework to analyse organisations (Cameron *et al.*, 2014; Lavine, 2014; Maurer *et al.*, 2011; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Since values are often drivers of choices and behaviour, it is pertinent for leaders to understand how competing or opposite values underlying an organisation and its individual stakeholders, can either undermine or enrich an organisation.

Opposites are proposed to foster flexible leadership (Kaiser & Overfield, 2010a; Lewis *et al.*, 2014). From this perspective, poles of opposites are contradictory and mutually exclusive, yet interrelated. Both poles are valid. The desirability of one of the opposites over the other might differ from time to time. Lewis *et al.* (2014:63-72) list 5 leadership practices with the use of opposites: learn to value opposites, proactively deal with tension, avoid anxiety, communicate both/and thinking, and enable different efforts to address both sides of the opposite. Notice the value of opposites in leading people.

Leading in the people side of change benefits from oppositional heuristics. Johnson (1996, 2014) describes a method to lead followers to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of both poles of the opposition, and to guide followers towards understanding which pole is, at that moment, preferable over the other. Smith and Lewis (2011) propose dynamic equilibrium as a mode of being for successful organisations.

In leadership literature, it is quite common to find the integration of Yin-Yang, from eastern Taoist philosophy, into western oppositional thinking. This integration has to do with balancing “struggle” narratives. Yin-Yang holds in harmony differences between opposites and the power struggle between the poles emphasised in western thinking. The emphasis in eastern thinking is on the equality of opposites and their interconnectivity (Chen, 2002, 2016; Gawlikowski, 2003). Some scholars (Du *et al.*, 2011; Li, 2008) consider Yin-Yang as a means to build trust in conflict management. Fang (2012) argues that Yin-Yang provides a framework for holistic, dynamic and dialectical culture. Rudall *et al.* (2008) employ Yin-Yang to formulate an information-based theory of social change. Collins (2007) illustrates the role of Yin-Yang in the highest level of competencies in leadership, the integration of the paradox humility and will. Viljoen-Terblanche (2008) point to the important role which Yin-Yang can play in sustainable development. Peter Li (1998, 2012b; 2016) has written extensively on the applicability of Yin-Yang in leadership research. His research has been used in formulating a guide to bridge eastern and western contexts in paradox management (Jing & Van de Ven, 2016). There is evidence that thinking in opposites enhances problem solving. Problems are seen in a new light. Any automatic response is forced to the background as the problem and solution are processed consciously (Bianchi *et al.*, 2019).

To summarise, opposites are extensively used in leadership research to explicate underlying tensions in complex social systems. In addition, opposites are used to lead in the people side of change. Change occurs when individuals are enabled to see the other side of the argument for what it is and are empowered to shift the current mode of functioning wisely to the other end of the opposite. By acknowledging the strong and weak points of both opposites, trust is built between opposing groups of people. From an eastern perspective, Yin-Yang is introduced to balance the western emphasis on difference in opposites with interconnectedness of the eastern tradition.

In Chapter 4, a framework of opposites is conceptualised to break down the process of considering opposites in reflexive five steps. This framework aims to assist leaders in empowering followers to emerge as reflexive leaders. Opposites in leadership theory can be a step to leading followers towards reflexivity. Individuals learn to see and evaluate the other side of a problem.

#### 3.3.2.2 Reflexive leadership

While opposites offer a first step in considering other viewpoints, reflexivity expands the depth and width of this way of thinking. The foundation of the concept of 'reflexivity' has been laid in Chapter 2 where reflexive interpretation is described as the grounding theory of this study. The reference here to reflexivity illustrates that this expanded consideration of one's own disposition and those of others, are echoed in leadership studies.

"Reflexive leadership" is a comparatively new phrase.[8] The basic premises, however, have been well known for some time in leadership literature. For example, double loop learning advanced by Argyris (1977) has found its way to education leadership research (Cartwright, 2002). Schön (2016), being republished multiple times since 1983, advanced reflection-in-action: thinking what one is doing while one is doing it – thinking on one's feet. Reflection-on-action is characterised as after the experience one analyses one's reaction to the situation and explores the reasons around, and the consequences of, one's actions.

Cunliffe has been productive on reflexivity in leadership and management studies for some years. Based on the reflexivity of opposites, she references Saussure and Derrida, which this study introduces in the discussion of opposites in Chapter 4. She introduces reflexive inquiry to "address fundamental questions about the nature of reality" in organisations (Cunliffe, 2003:999). Cunliffe wrote an award-winning article (Cunliffe, 2004) which was later updated and republished (2016b), mapping reflexive interaction, reflective analysis and critically reflexive questioning. Cunliffe and Jun (2005:234-238) argue the need for self- and critical reflexivity in public administration.

Recently Alvesson *et al.* (2016) published *Reflexive leadership: organising in an imperfect world*. Reflexive leadership serves as a counterpoint to simplistic approaches and catchy marketing slogans often advanced in leadership studies. It is not helpful to gloss over complexity: leaders need to engage with it (2016:1-3). Boak (2017:293) collates respective definitions by Alvesson *et al.* (2016) of reflexivity and leadership formulated to define reflexive leadership as "engaging in exercises of influencing followers about meanings and understandings, while thoughtfully reviewing one's own thoughts and actions (and those of others involved in the situation)".

Leaders are tasked to influence followers to do the same (2016:8). Figure 3-3 conceptualises the description by Alvesson *et al.* of reflexive leadership. The work of being reflexive entails reflection on one's own disposition, and a critical reflexive pondering of the dispositions of others (2016:14).

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[8] A Google Scholar search in 2021 for the phrase "reflexive leadership" in the title yielded 21 results. One was a reference to *Reflexive leadership: organising in an imperfect world* by Alvesson *et al.* (2016), Three of the remaining results were reviews of that text.

These processes are interrelated, continuously informing one another. Leaders set the example in being reflexive, and influence and guide followers to do the same (2016:190ff.). The goal is to foster an emergent reflexive leadership as organisational culture (2016:64ff.).

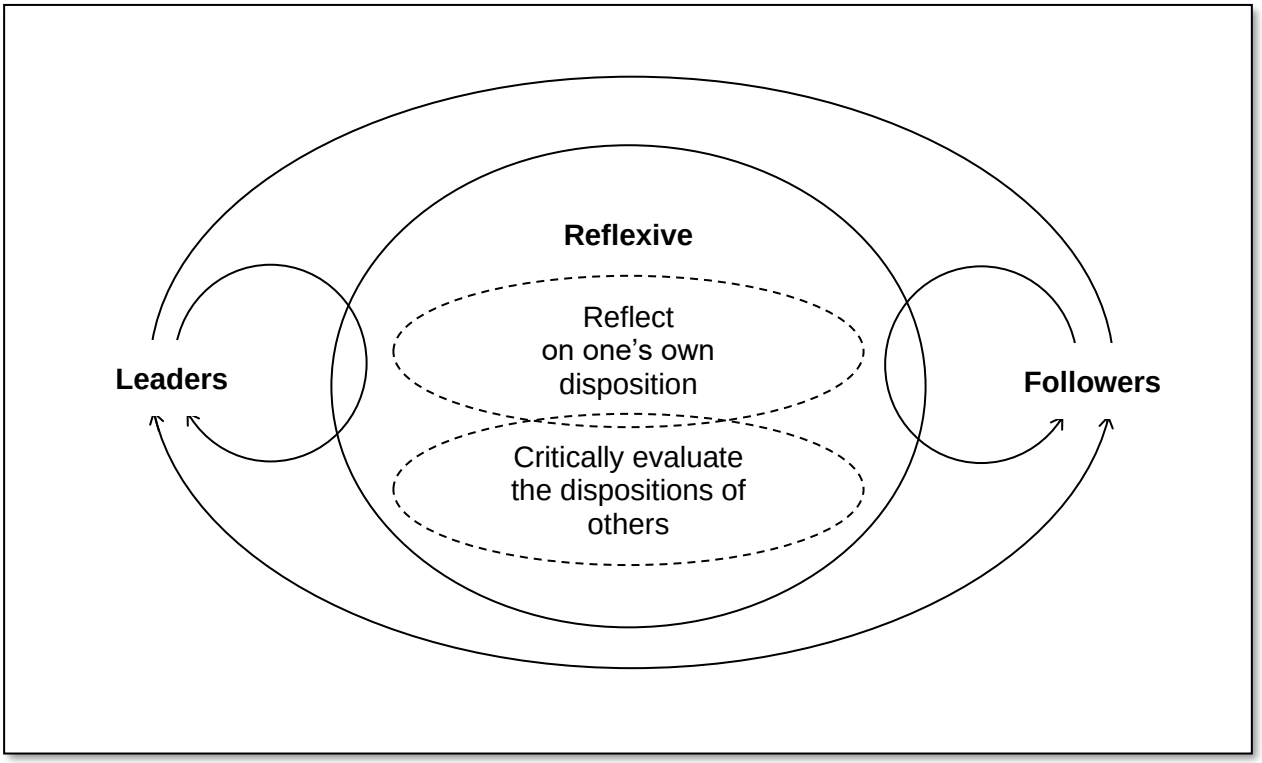



**Figure 3-3 Reflexive leadership**

Alvesson *et al.* (2016:216) introduce the vocabulary and proffer a framework to foster leaders and followers to engage consistently and reflexively. Becoming\being reflexive leaders and followers, however, is difficult. It is "an unsettling" of safe dispositions (Pollner, 1991:370). This study is grounded in the theory of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Reflection and reflexive interpretation are expounded in Chapter 2 and employed to conceptualise reflexive frameworks of opposites (Chapter 4) and of social diversity (Chapter 5).

#### 3.3.2.3 Reflections on fostering culture of participatory inquiry and reflexivity

Opposites have been employed in leadership studies. What is lacking among these studies, is a meta-theoretical conceptional reflexive framework of opposites. This venture is undertaken in Chapter 4. Reflexivity is a known concept in leadership literature. More work, however, can be done on integrating reflexivity in leadership practice. This study advances reflexive literature in

leadership research by grounding this study in reflexive interpretation. Reflexive interpretation is described in Chapter 2.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The complexity of institutions of higher education turns on unique regulatory frameworks, diversity between faculties, diversity amongst students, and complex adaptive systems. In South Africa, public HEIs deal with the added complexity of a nation attempting to heal from the wounds and legacy of the past and enacting a shared future. Leadership studies are marked by multiple leadership theories and no single agreed upon definition. Change, however, influencing people, and casting and realising a vision are recognised as core tasks of leaders. In being cognisant of the increasing (realisation of) the complexity of reality, complexity theory of leadership emerges as a dominant theory of leadership. In an attempt at a unifying definition of leadership, Kilburg and Donohue (2011:15) employ the term 'complex emergent process', indicating the dominant position that complexity theory enjoys in leadership research.

A selection of three approaches to complexity theory in leadership explicates leadership actions which would benefit from opposites and reflexivity. From the Cynefin framework, reflexivity could engage the complicated contexts and oppositions said to underpin complex contexts. From the perspective of leadership in CASs, opposites could provide a rational structure to govern interaction between agents in the stand-off between the stability that organisational identity brings and the change that social movements demand. Reflexivity could moderate interactions and prevent the extremes inertia and chaos might bring. The effectiveness of emergence and self-organisation could be enhanced by fostering a culture of dynamic balancing opposites and reflexive behaviour.

Oppositions and reflexivity have been studied from a leadership perspective. Oppositions are well established in leadership scholarship but relatively little work has been done on reflexivity. The use of opposites by leaders would be enriched by considering them from different perspectives. Chapter 4 proposes such a reflexive framework of opposites. Leaders can apply reflexivity to other complex problems, such as diversity. Chapter 5 proposes a reflexive framework of diversity.

Significantly, this chapter demonstrates that leadership is concerned with a process initiated by influencing people. In complex contexts, this influencing occurs largely through installing a reflexive culture and empowering emergent leadership to create well considered solutions. Such a reflexive culture enables agents closest to the problem to solve the problem. Through networks of agents and feedback loops, the solution permeates throughout the organisation. The quality of the solutions is determined by the vigour of the organisation's installed reflexive culture. One way

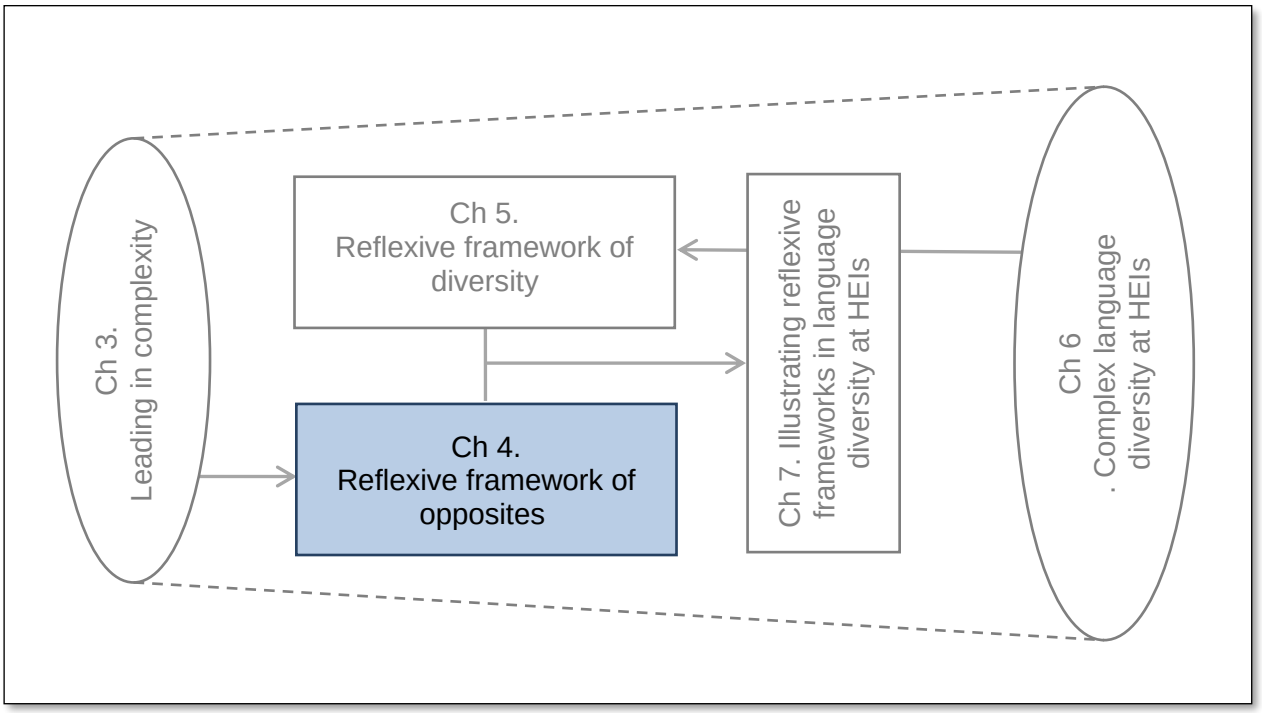
to foster a reflexive culture is to introduce reflexive frameworks as templates for use in the organisation. Repeated use of such templates would in time automate reflexive thinking.

This chapter set out to answer the research sub-question: how can leaders make sense of complex problems? The brief answer is, amongst other mechanisms, by fostering a reflexive culture in organisations. To this end, reflexive frameworks of opposites and diversity are conceptualised in Chapters 4 and 5.

# CHAPTER 4 CONCEPTUALISING A REFLEXIVE FRAMEWORK OF OPPOSITES

*(W)hen we reject the single story,*
*when we realize that there is never a single story about any place,*
*we regain a kind of paradise.*

(Adichie, 2009)



## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter conceptualises a reflexive framework of opposites in reply to the research sub-question: how can opposites assist leaders to make sense of complexities? (§ 1.4). It has been determined in § 3.3.1.4 that the complexity of social problems is characterised by a presence of contradictions. Opposites are recognised and exploited in leadership research and form a cognitive structure to explicate underlying contradictions. These explicated opposites simplify complexity so that humans do not feel overwhelmed by complex reality but are able to engage cognitively with reality. The need for a reflexive framework has been identified when reviewing leadership literature on opposites (§ 3.3.2.3). Such a framework provides a nuanced understanding of otherwise intractable contexts. This chapter conceptualises such a framework.

A few comments are necessary to affirm the methodological foundation behind this chapter. To gain the required degree of conceptualisation, the method of relating, which consists of differentiating and integrating (§ 2.2.4), is employed. This method entails surveying many texts relating to opposites, differentiating between these texts, drawing connections between them, and finding a new, simplified and higher-order perspective on how entities are related. Finally, the complexity is synthesised into overarching ideas by the grounding theory of this study, reflexive interpretation (§ 2.2.2). Reflexive interpretation is “a way of indicating the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:328). In the reflexive framework of opposites, various levels of interpretation are determined by various theories of opposites.The outcome of this conceptualisation is a framework that assists leaders to analyse complex problems in metatheoretical terms by “identifying elements and relationships among these elements” (Ostrom, 2007:25).

In conceptualising a reflexive framework of opposites, contributions of five theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites are explored. In this chapter it is demonstrated that Saussure proposed opposites to understand signified meaning. Lévi-Strauss employed opposites to explore how meaning may be embedded in, and shared amongst, societies. Foucault highlighted the dynamics of power between oppositional pairs in social life. Derrida asks what happens if the power-relation between oppositional pairs in societal life is reversed. Yin-Yang holds opposites in dynamic balance. Distinctions between these theoretical approaches to opposites imply different levels of interpretation of a reflexive framework. Relations between levels of interpretation bind them together in a cohesive framework.

A brief survey of opposites sets the context for the conceptualisation.

## 4.2 Surveying the landscape of opposites

Ever since antiquity, opposites have been used by humanity to make sense of reality. Opposites, or the notion of dialectic thinking, were employed millennia ago in the philosophic thinking of the West, as in Plato's metaphor of the black and white horses (Freeman, 1984), or Aristotle, and more recently Hegel. In the East, Taoism and Yin-Yang reflect a deep understanding of oppositional or axial cognition. Millennia before the Greek philosophers and Daoism, the so-called primitive societies of oral wisdom handed down their knowledge, and general and total understanding of the universe, through opposite-thinking embedded in myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1955:434; 2005:8,11-14). It is claimed that thinking in opposites is hardwired in us through the bilateral symmetry of the human body, and not least of all, the two hemispheres of the brain (Culler, 1975:15 on Jakobson; Hawkes, 2003:90 on Greimas; Li, 2016:44). This notion of mirroring opposites or symmetry perseveres through time and space. It is found across domains such as ideas, logic, mathematics, technology and language (Jeffries, 2010:7-25).

The term, "opposites", however, is by no means a universally agreed upon term. Terms such as polarities, binaries, dualities, paradoxes, tensions, contradictions and more are freely used, sometimes interchangeably, referencing the same meaning, or at other instances, the same yet subtly different meanings (Chen, 2002:181-182; Li, 2016:45,48; Smith & Lewis, 2011:386-388). What all these terms seem to have in common is contradiction and interrelations in a pair (Chen, 2016:513-520). What differentiates the terms from one another is the extent to which either contradiction or interrelation dominates, the dominance fluctuates, or both contradiction and interrelation remain present.

In search of a generic term which would embrace most of, if not all, the terms describing pairs on the contradiction-interrelation spectrum, Begley (2016:23) prefers the term "duality" because the term itself holds an "internal ambivalence" of the concept it refers to. The term "opposites" denotes mostly contradiction and little interrelation. Begley employs the term "opposites" to describe what a "duality" is. In this study, the term "opposites" is used purely for its generic and all-encompassing lexical function and attributions of meaning. "Opposites" comes to describe two elements that exist in various degrees of dynamic contradiction and interrelation.

It is important to address criticism of "binarism" in social sciences. Insistence on opposites to describe underlying values of dispensations, argue those critical of opposites, entrenches the *status quo* and subverts the other (Melrose, 2005:163). Structuralists hold a rather static view of opposites, implying that if one opposite dominates, it is most probably because it is the way reality works. The post-structuralist critique of the structuralist hegemony of the *status quo* is valid in

some contexts. Post-structuralism, however, may fall prey to the same binarism where it elevates change or the other as a point of departure above the *status quo*. Respecting the critical view and values behind the *status quo* creates the same problem but in reverse. Jacques (1997:96) ascribes this zero-sum dance in oppositional thinking: complex situations are simplified into two opposites, and the validity of the one opposite is accepted and the other discarded. Yet opposites in leadership literature generally do not stumble into binarism. Patel (2016:610-612) succinctly describes the use of opposites in leadership studies as "integrative complexity", allowing "paradigm crossing", by focusing on both differentiation (tolerating competing viewpoints) and integration (generating links between, allowing for trade-offs, and recognising interactive causation between competing viewpoints). The reflexive framework of opposites proposed here endeavours to follow the paradigm crossing Patel refers to by balancing western and eastern approaches, and by reflexively introducing multiple viewpoints which dynamically balances differentiation and integration of opposites.

### 4.3 Differentiating between theoretical contributions to opposites

Five levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites, each in their discrete capacities and in conjunction with one another, contribute to a framework for how leadership can employ opposites to engage with complexity. The five levels of interpretation discussed below are those offered by Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, and Yin-Yang.

In this section, differentiation is emphasised in terms of conceptualisation (§ 2.2.4). The focus here is to determine the distinct and unique aspect that each approach to opposites offers.

#### 4.3.1 Saussure: determining meaning

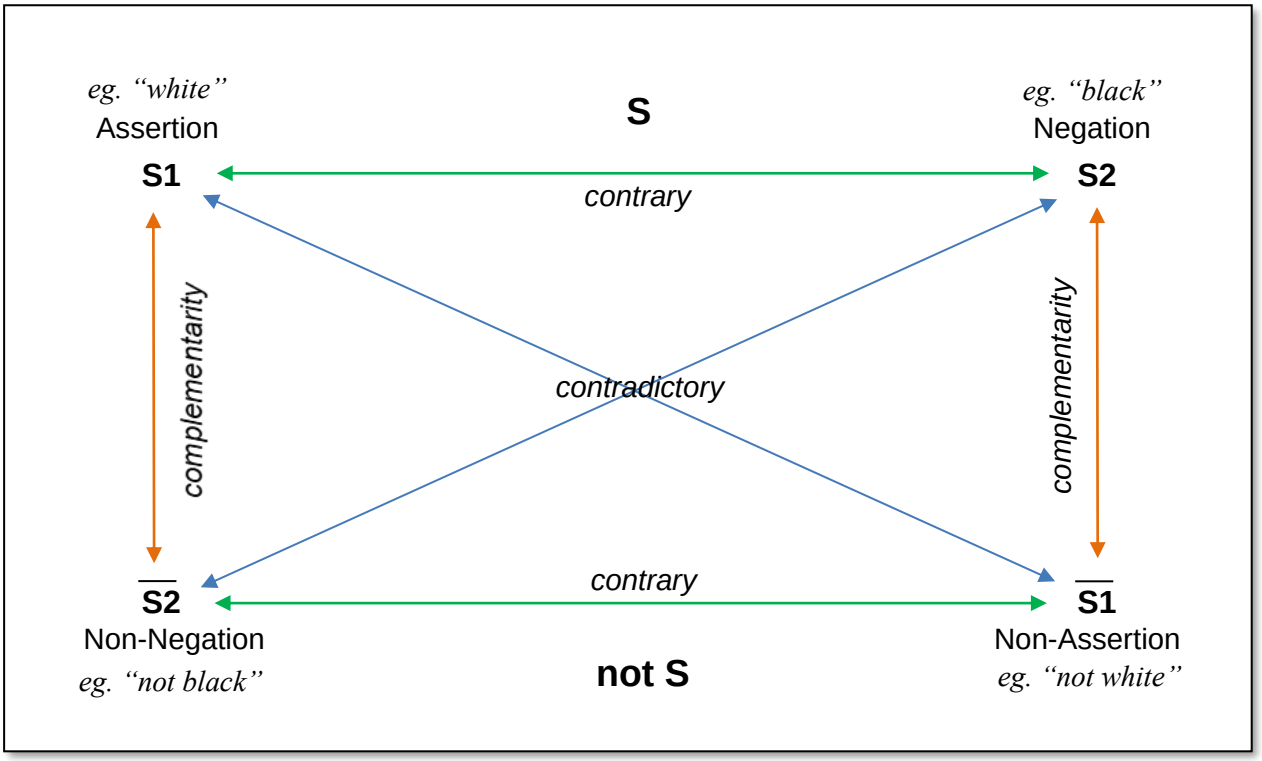
Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist, was one of the founders of the subject domain of semiology which comprises the science of signs, exploring the interaction between signifier, sign and signified (Hawkes, 2003:123-124). Oppositions are for Saussure the foundation of meaning. Consider the following two quotations posed by Saussure, from his *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure, 1985):

*In a language, as in every other semiological system, what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it* (Saussure, 1985:119).

*Concepts… are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is being whatever the others are not* (Saussure, 1985:115).

For Saussure, meaning differentiates signs. Meaning is more clearly defined by what it is not, than what it is. For example, the meaning of the word "life" is defined by "death", even to a greater

extent than the content of “life” itself defines what the word “life” conveys. Chandler (2005:24) concludes that, for Saussure, “language was … a system of functional differences and oppositions”. To determine what constitutes a pair of opposites, however, is often subjective and determined by context. To illustrate the point, Greimas (1983:49) applied the philosophical logical square to opposites in order to analyse the depth and dimensions of the meaning of opposites. Figure 4-1 illustrates how the square affords deeper reflection upon opposites. If we take the white-black opposition as an example and place “white” in the position of assertion (S1), “white” will be defined, in most cases, by a contrary negation (S2), “black”. Complementary to S1 is, however, the contradiction of S2, the non-negation, namely “not black” ($\overline{S2}$). This complementary of meaning to S1 tends to challenge the narrow boundaries of the meaning of S1. The non-assertion, “not white” ($\overline{S1}$), the contradiction to S1, is complementary to S2 and contrary to$\overline{S2}$. $\overline{S1}$, “not white”, which will, in turn, (as in the case of $\overline{S2}$ in relation to S1) challenge the narrow boundaries of the definition of S2, “black”. The broader complementary meaning of opposites is important since it brings the fluidity of meaning in context into focus.




(Adapted from Chandler, 2005:103; Corso, 2014:71)

**Figure 4-1 Greimas’s semiotic square**

What constitutes oppositions could vary between contexts and cultures, and is defined by “some kind of agreement between members of speech communities” (Jeffries, 2010:2). As an example, Jeffries uses an election slogan on a photograph of a black man, *Labour says he’s black, Tories say he’s British.* Labour and Tories are deemed to be politically polar or oppositional in a certain political context, so what they say must be oppositional, the reasoning goes. A whole group of people might assume there to be an opposition between being “black” and being “British”. The fact, however, that “black” and “British” are not putting apples with apples is of little concern to those who formulated this opposition. They wanted to move the terms “black” and “British” to a domain where they are mutually exclusive. Many will ask what about a black-British person? Some will ask what does “black” have to do with anything anyway? Opposites then, are often not pure in their oppositional tension but highly contextual, locating and deriving their oppositionality from what people perceive to be oppositional and not from an absolute disposition of inherent oppositionality.

From the discussion above, the following conclusion is formulated: opposites mutually assist each other in defining meaning, much as magnetic poles define the disposition of iron filings in the field between them. Care should be taken to allow for some fluidity in the meaning of each of the oppositional elements because it is often contextually determined by some kind of agreement in a group.

### 4.3.2 Lévi-Strauss: explicating structure of shared mental representations in complexity

The word ‘structure’ indicates that the meaning of elements lies in their relations to one another (Hawkes, 2003:18). In this sense, structuralism seeks to explicate the rational structure underlying all, seemingly diverse, phenomena. In the quest to explicate this structure, structuralism considers how both conscious and unconscious factors contribute towards complex phenomena. Opposites are the primary tool by which complexity is organised in order to explicate the nature, patterns and arrangement of an underlying rational structure (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010:298-299).

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) applied the semiotic principles of Saussure to anthropology in a quest to explicate an underlying rational structure of societal thinking: “to try to find an order behind this apparent disorder”, because it is “absolutely impossible to conceive of meaning without order” (Lévi-Strauss, 2005:3-4). His method was to deploy language and myths to determine how the so-called ‘primitive mind’, that is, those without the ability to write down information, encodes complex reality into manageable structures (Hawkes, 2003:40-44). As with the linguists, opposites are central to explicating these structures. This encoding first occurs in the culture–nature opposite. Culture institutes meaning to nature by revealing the underlying

structure of nature and its relations. Second, opposites create a classifying system by which culture makes sense of nature (Hawkes, 2003:52).

Lévi-Strauss (2005:6-7) distinguishes between scientific and mythological thinking. The aim of scientific thinking, he argues, is to break difficulties down into as many smaller units as is necessary to simplify each unit to the point where it can be no further resolved. Each of these minor solutions are recorded and used as a starting point for future research to add to the body of knowledge. For this methodology to succeed, scientific thinking depends upon its ability to record and store data externally to the human mind. Orally-based knowledge communities have no written means of preserving and transmitting information. Memory and oral preservation are not called upon to break problems down into ever smaller units, creating more and more data to be remembered. Pre-literate communities observed underlying structures that many phenomena share. These observations were then coded into myths which invariably drew upon opposites for their basic structure (Lévi-Strauss, 2005:11-14).

This observation that opposites are suited to capture the overall patterns is of great significance for this study. The advantage for leaders in drawing upon a framework of opposites lies in the creation of a low-resolution map of tensions between oppositional ideologies present in complex contexts. Such a map helps to understand the dynamic ebb and flow in a given area of diversity and complexity, a guide to determine direction. This map does not profess to provide a detailed analysis or solutions to small problems. It is a leadership tool by which to gain and share a bird's eye view of a difficulty and stimulate emerging leadership in organisations. The value Lévi-Strauss contributes to this study lies in the application of opposites to explicate an underlying wisdom, or perspective, and present this perspective. In the definition of Van Dijk (2003:208) opposites are "socially shared mental representation of groups".

There are several points of critique levelled at structuralism (Culler, 1975:15-16). Any two terms may be pitted against one another as opposites, granting the subjective judgement of an individual to decide on what the opposites are and how they enforce enforcing structural power over society. In setting two items in opposition to one another, the distinguishing features of each element may be of qualitatively different relevance to the matter at hand. There is, however, always a subjective element to any coding process where interpreted meaning is assigned to discourse units (Saldaña, 2016:4).

From the discussion above, the following core principle regarding a theoretical approach to opposites may be formulated: opposites may be employed to provide rational structure to complex problems by explicating shared mental representations of groups.

### 4.3.3 Foucault: structures wield power

Post-structuralists rebelled against the deterministic, structuralist notion that all reality is governed by an underlying rational structure. The so-called rationally explicated structure is a subjective coding that usurps power to govern society, they argue. Post-structuralism is, however, neither a clearly defined term nor is it always clear who its proponents are. Post-structuralism is a catch-all term for those that opposed structuralism, and can be typified as a specific philosophical manifestation of post-modernism (Reynolds, 2010:458). Often there is little else binding these opponents of structuralism together than their critique of structuralism. In the current and next subsections the work of Foucault and Derrida illustrates a progression that post-structuralists brought to the reflection on opposites.

Michael Foucault (1926-1984) is often associated with post-structuralism (Reynolds, 2010:455; Rivkin & Ryan, 2004) and finds himself classified here, possibly against his will: "(d)o not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1984:xiix), amongst those opposed to structuralism. "(H)e has sought to avoid the structural analysis which eliminates notions of meaning altogether and substitutes a formal model of human behaviour as rule-governed transformations of meaningless elements" (1984:xxiii). While Foucault severely criticises the power that structuralism exerts, he manages to recruit certain elements of structuralism in his reasoning (1984:xxvii).

For example, near the end of his life, Foucault (1984:208) reflected upon his work and stated that the objective was not to study power as such, but rather to study how humans are made subjects. By 'subject' he implies both "to be subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (1984:212). To study this dynamic, he sets forms of resistance against forms of power as a point of departure, and then uses opposites as a tool to differentiate between power and resistance. Consider the following quotations (1984:211, empahsis added):

*For example, to find out what our society means by* sanity*, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of* insanity*.*

*And what we mean by* legality *in the field of* illegality*.*

*And, in order to understand what* power relations *we are about, perhaps should investigate the* forms of resistance *and attempts made to* dissociate *these relations.*

*As a starting point, let us take a series of oppositions which have developed over the last few years: opposition to the power of* men *over* women*, of* parents *over* children*, of* psychiatry *over the* mentally ill*, of* medicine *over the* population*, of* administration *over the* ways people live*.*

Foucault (1984:211-212) proceeds in typical holistic structuralist manner when he concludes what these power struggles have in common. They traverse contexts, aim at the effects of power, and are concerned with the immediate but not the chief enemy. They are concerned with the status of the individual and oppose the way knowledge is disseminated: they ask who we individually are. Analysing institutions of power can, for Foucault (1984:222), best be achieved by viewing these institutions from their power relations with their opposites. Power exists where "certain actions modify others", fundamentally not through consent but by subjectivation which employs some form of violence (1984:219-220). Foucault uses the structuralist method of opposites and explicating an underlying rational structure, to interrogate existing (structuralist) power positions and subjectivation. In conclusion, opposites, explicating an underlying rational structure to reality, interrogate existing power positions and resulting subjectivation in society.

### 4.3.4 Derrida: listening to the voice of the other

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a true post-structuralist, introduces deconstruction to unpack the hold of metaphysical exigency first to assign the priority and then the derivation, first the identity then the other (Culler, 1985:93), the privileged over the subjected. He is not merely advocating a reversing of roles but argues that opposites are inextricably embedded in culture and superimpose their structures on every form of being. The worldview that elicits these hierarchical oppositions should be broken in favour of a worldview where truth is subjective (Derrida, 2005:147-148; Rivkin & Ryan, 2004:298). In this quest, Derrida obsessively analyses all angles: "refus(ing) to simplify, and to sustain complexity – to infinity" (Lechte, 2008:135).

Deconstruction devotes itself to "uncovering everything that covers up being" (Lechte, 2008:130). This uncovering occurs by means of two closely interwoven and interlaced strategies (Derrida, 1982a:135). The first works within, and re-shapes, the very thought system that Derrida deems problematic. The second transforms the terrain (Wortham, 2010:33). In Derrida's own words:

*Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system* (Derrida, 1982a:329).

Through the first strategy, Derrida reverses the hold that the dominant element holds over its opposing other. Deconstruction then breaks down the position of the dominant concept and uses its own building blocks to rebuild the opposite other in a way that the voice of the other is heard and the dominance of the other is exerted (Culler, 1985:85-86; Derrida, 1982a:135). Derrida expresses this act, giving voice to the voiceless:

*In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies*

*the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy (Derrida, 1982b:41).*

This fist strategy brings the logic behind the dominance of both the opposites to aporia or impasse; where "(e)ach perspective shows the error of the other in an irresolvable alternation or aporia" (Culler, 1985:96). Here, where logic itself fails, the second strategy then breaks the hold of the logocentrism of western philosophy. Deconstruction does not offer another, better, theory. Rather, deconstruction becomes "a practice of reading and writing attuned to the aporias that arise in attempts to tell us the truth" (1985:155).

*To decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference*(Derrida, 1982a:135).

In this manner, deconstruction arrives at subjective truth, at *difference,* at the acceptance of aporia. Derrida, in an essay titled *Difference* (1968) and published by Rivkin and Ryan (2004:279-299) explores the concept of difference to argue that everything is related. At different moments in time and at different positions in space, the meaning of thoughts, perceptions, words, and reality differs. He calls these differences traces of one another. "Difference indicates the middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity... the origin or production of differences… the play of differences" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004:279). Truth then, becomes not something that is static or can be objectively known but something which hides and plays amongst the many present moments and subjective *loci* of differences.

On a philosophical level, critique has been levelled at Derrida that deconstruction cuts off the branch that he stands on to make his argument (Kates, 2005:14-18). The result of the work of these post-structuralist French thinkers, Llosa (2015:69-70) laments, is "the demolition of what is, and its replacement with a verbose unreality." These critiques would have left Derrida deeply satisfied. After all, if the branch is cut, for Derrida there is no ground to fall on.

This study pragmatically traces from Derrida the value of exploring the full force of the subjected other end of the opposition, so overturning classical opposition.

Derrida's second strategy of a general displacement of the system of opposites is not extended to this study. For him, the deconstruction of an opposite breaks the hold of the dominant end of that opposite. The process of employing opposites illustrates the folly of notions of opposites themselves. To displace the system of opposites does not pragmatically add value to this study. After all, this study does not entertain opposites as a structuralist regulative structure, but only as a technique to make (some) sense of complexities (§ 4.2). For the pragmatic purpose of this study, it is more valuable to hold opposites in dynamic balance than to displace the system of opposites altogether.

### 4.3.5 Yin-Yang: balancing holistic content and dynamic processes

Peter Li (2016:43-46) contrasts western and eastern philosophy in terms of typical opposition-thinking. He argues that western philosophies tend to separate idealism and realism, that they are logocentric by reducing knowledge to rationality, analytical, viewing ambiguity and inconsistency as undesirable, and focusing on 'being'. Western philosophy often chooses consistency *over* completeness. Eastern philosophies, on the other hand, Li continues, hold logical analysis and intuitive imagination in balance, and focus on 'becoming'. Eastern philosophies integrate science and art to explore and balance consistency *and* completeness. Opposites are embraced, by balancing opposites as holistic content and dynamic process.

While metaphors are often used in eastern philosophy to gain insight (Li, 2016:50), Chen (2002:180) illustrates the difference between western and eastern philosophies as the difference between a tossed salad and a melting pot. If western leadership were to supplement their analytical western approach by embracing the integrative eastern mindset, western organisations could put the pieces of Humpty Dumpty, dissected through the western mindset, back together again (Chen, 2016; Li, 2012c). This is particularly true of Yin-Yang. In response to critique by Xin Li (2014b), Peter Li (2014a:322) remains adamant and makes a convincing case that Yin-Yang presents opposites neither as either/or nor as both/and, but as either/and – Yin-Yang to Li "is the only frame that fully recognizes and appreciates the coexistence of true opposite elements in the same place at the same time" (2014a:323-324).

In this spirit of reflexivity, this study combines an eastern perspective of Yin-Yang and a western tradition of opposites into a single integrated framework.

The seeding quotation for Yin-Yang is found in *Tao Te Ching,* "the quintessence of Chinese culture" (Ma & Yang, 2017:55). A recent count totals 182 English translations of *Tao Te Ching*, and various translations into other languages (2017:56). The existence of such a large number of translations bears witness to the West's growing recognition of eastern thinking, and to the continued sense of the elusive depth of this text (Bebell & Fera, 2000). Two parallel translations, seemingly one more direct and the other more interpretative, are presented below to facilitate more accurate and deeper understanding of the original text on Yin-Yang in Chapter 42 of *Tao Te Ching*:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tao produces one* | *The Tao gives birth to One.* |
| *One produces two* | *One gives birth to Two.* |
| *Two produces three* | *Two gives birth to Three.* |
| *Three produces myriad things* | *Three gives birth to all things.* |
| *Myriad things,* | *All things* |
| *backed by yin* | *have their backs to the female* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *and embracing yang*<br>*Achieve harmony*<br>*by integrating their energy*<br>Translated by Lin (2006:85) | *and stand facing the male.*<br>*When male and female combine,*<br>*all things achieve harmony.*<br>Translation by Mitchell (2006:46) |

Fang (2012:9) explains that: "(Tao) means natural course; 'One' the entire universe; 'Two' the Yin and Yang; and 'Three' heaven, earth, and humans, which have produced all things". Deeply situated opposites are in eastern ontology; to such an extent that opposites precede and conceive the material world. "Myriad things" engage somehow differently with Yin and Yang respectively or Yin and Yang respectively engage differently with myriad things. Yet both Yin and Yang are equally present. The energy of opposites combines and there is harmony. Li (2014a:323-324) concludes that Tao represents eastern ontology and Yin-yang represents eastern epistemology.

Peter Li (1998, 2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2014a, 2016) writes extensively on the application of Yin-Yang in organisational research and practices. The following paragraphs follow his exposition. Yin-Yang balancing rests on three core tenets: holistic content, dynamic process, and anchoring the first two tenets – duality balance. Li (2016) describes these tenets as follows:

- Holistic content refers to *spatial balancing* and consists of "reflect(ing) the complex interdependence and interpenetration between opposite elements" (2016:52). In *spatial terms* the elements are mutually inclusive and overlap partially.

- Dynamic process refers to *temporal balancing* and consists of "reflect(ing) the complex interaction and inter-transformation between opposite elements" (2016:52). In *temporal terms* the elements are mutually inclusive and overlap partially.

- Dualities balance through mutual affirmation and negation of opposites *in relative terms.* That is, mutual affirmation in relative terms partially integrates opposites to be complementary. Mutual negation in relative terms partially separates opposites to be contrary. Through this complementary, partial affirmation and contrary partial negation opposites co-exist as "opposites-in-unity" (cf. 2016:52-53).

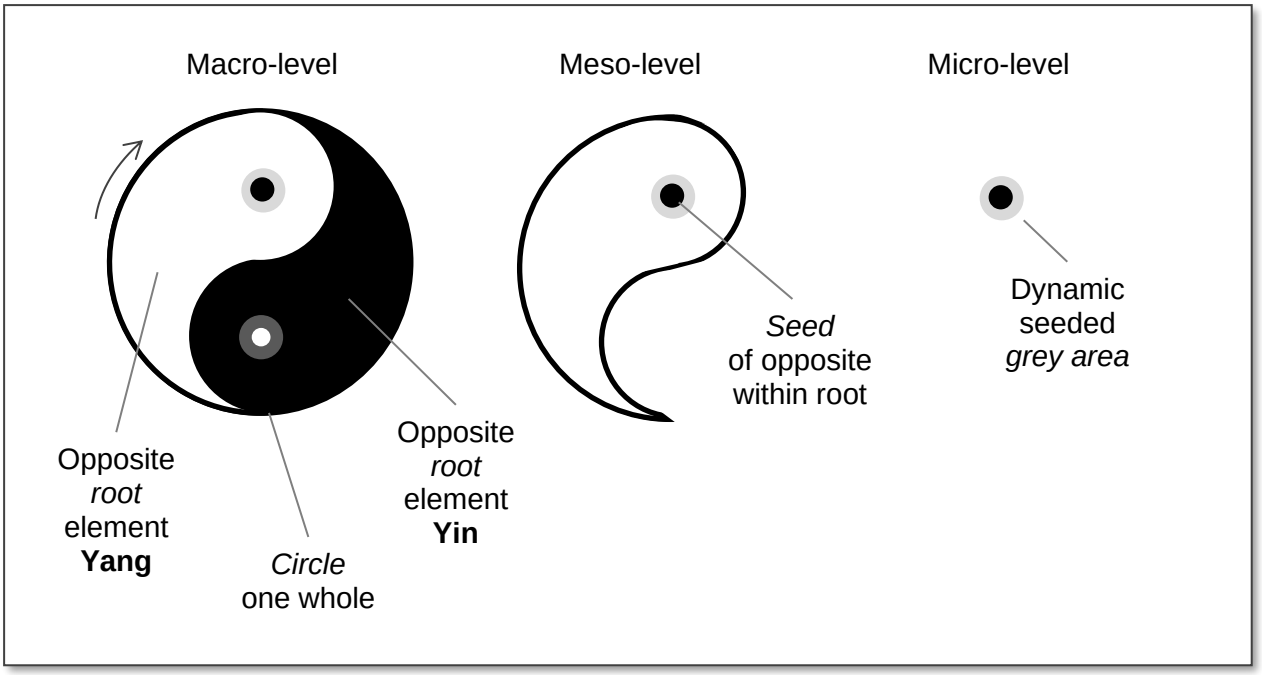
Duality balance anchors both the holistic spatial content and dynamic temporal process. Relative mutual affirmation partially integrates complementary elements of opposites with regard to holistic content "in different 'spatial' aspects and levels", and/or with regard to dynamic process "at different temporal stages and steps"(2016:52). Relative mutual negation partially separates contrary elements of opposites with regard to spatial holistic content and/or temporal dynamic processes.

Metaphors are often used in eastern philosophy to gain insight (Li, 2016:50). Three types of metaphors are employed to explain the tenets above and offer further insight into the dynamics of Yin-Yang balancing: the first events in nature, and the second two graphical representations of holistic content and duality, and dynamic process and duality balance, and the third an example from the dynamics of social life.

First then, metaphors from nature: The phases of the moon serve as a simplistic metaphor. The moon changes as the celestial bodies (spatial content) move relative to one another (temporal process). A more complex metaphor from nature relates to how light and dark move in a valley. As the position of the sun changes through the day, the position and extent of light and shadow, change on the eastern and western slopes of a valley. In the early morning, the slope facing the east basks in light while the slope facing west will be in shadow. At noon, the sun is at its zenith, lighting up both slopes simultaneously. Pockets of shade are still present as rocks and plants and animals cast their shadows. In the afternoon, the slope facing west is lit up while shadow grows on the east facing slope. The very object once basking in light becomes the object casting a growing shadow. When the sun sets, light makes way for shadow to dominate but still the play of light and shadow continues, in relative terms, the temporal movement of the earth relative to the sun and spatial, the valley, aspects in the metaphor find balance in mutual and partial affirmation and separation of light and darkness.

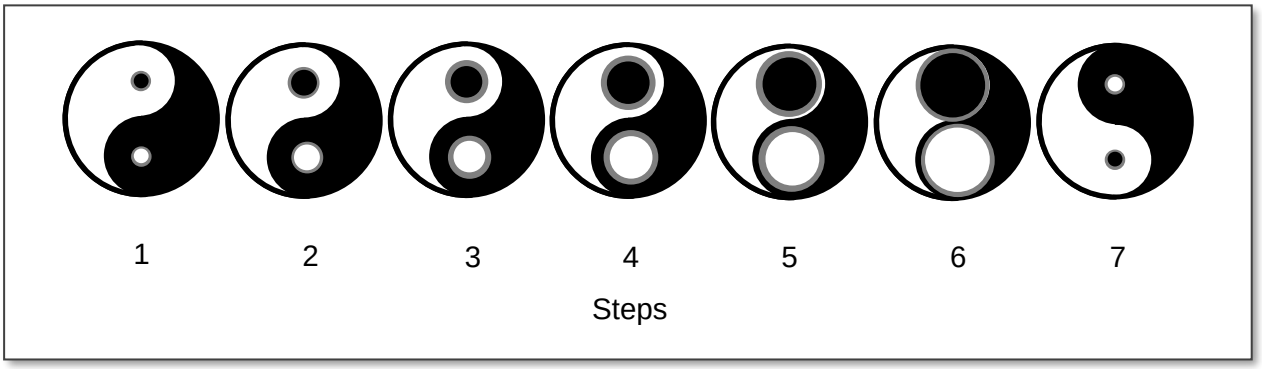
Second, the Yin-Yang symbol represents a graphical metaphor by which to gain insight into Yin-Yang balancing. Figure 4-2 emphasises holistic content and duality, and Figure 4-3 emphasises dynamic process and duality balance.

In Figure 4-2 the encompassing circle represents the whole domain, as a holistic entity. The whole consists of two sub-domains, the root opposites represented by black and white, Yin and Yang. These sub-domains represent both the partial separation of contrary elements and balancing duality by revolving around one another. Within each root opposite, the seed of the other root opposite is present. Around each seed there is a grey area, indicating the partial integration of the elements as complementary. Each one of the seeds, together with its grey area, represents the micro-level structure. The seeds, grey area, and adjacent root sub-domain represent the meso-level structure. The two meso-level structures, embracing each other to represent the whole domain, are referred to as the macro-level structure.




(Adapted from Li, 2016:55)

**Figure 4-2 Yin-Yang symbol – holistic content and duality balance**




(Adapted from Li, 2016:56)

**Figure 4-3 Yin-Yang symbol – dynamic process and duality balance**

Figure 4-3 illustrates stages in the dynamic process of duality balance. Over time, the respective seeds, and their overlapping surrounding grey areas, grow and in turn impact the balance between the root and seed in each respective sub-domain. If the seed and surrounding area grow until the balance of power between the extreme opposites is reversed, the structure at macro-, meso- and micro-level shifts from one opposite to the other. Steps 1 and 7 represent an extreme imbalance. The respective seeds and surrounding grey areas are small. Step 4 represents the transitional point where the impact of the seeds and their surrounding grey areas will start

fundamentally to change the sub-domains. Steps 2 and 6 represent the minimum and Steps 3 and 5 the maximum sub-end of moderate balance within a sub-domain.

The third type of metaphor aims to apply Yin-Yang to the domain where its primary strength lies – complex and uncertain organic life (Li, 2016:43,62). The opposition-based bi-party electoral system in the USA populates Figure 4-2 and Figure 4-3 above. Democrats are idealistic and high on social values. Republicans are pragmatic and high on financial profit. Both groups consist of extremists and moderates, leaving by and large four major groups: extremist Democrats, moderate Democrats, moderate Republicans, and extremist Republicans. In terms of Figure 4-2. Democrats are represented by Yang on the meso-level, and on the micro-level extremist Democrats are represented by the white root and moderate Democrats by the grey-and-black seed. Likewise, Republicans are represented by Yin on the meso-level, and on the micro-level extremist Republicans by the black root and moderate Republicans by the grey-and-white seed on the micro-level. Which party is elected, is determined by how many moderates from one side vote for the other side. Figure 4-3 illustrate how seeds grow and contract in reaction to the threshold between healthy and unhealthy tension between the groups. If the threshold is breached, the oppositional party is voted into power(2016:63-64). Threshold relates to “balancing with both partial synergy and partial tradeoff” (2016:58).

To summarise the mechanics of Yin-Yang: opposites exist in balance when they partially affirm and partially negate each other, that is being both contrary and complementary. This contrary–complementary balance is *spatially* present in the holistic content of opposite roots, each holding the seed and encircling grey area of the other root as moderate positions. The contrary-complementary balance is *temporally* present in the dynamic balance holding the expanding and contracting seeds and surrounding grey areas within the borders of the healthy and harmonious threshold. In this dynamic balancing, static opposites do not hold: “The art of balancing would be more effective than the aim of optimising in a continuously organizing process” (Jing & Van de Ven, 2016:560-561).

In our increasingly interconnected world, it has become more complex to synthesise social issues. Yin-Yang is well suited to understand how harmony is maintained. (Li, 2016:54). This is achieved through the recognition that each pair of an opposite contains the dynamic seed of the other opposite. When these seeds are recognised as moderate positions in oppositions, absolute separation and total integration of opposites are overcome, and opposites are held in contrary yet complementary balance.

From Yin-Yang, this study pragmatically incorporates into the framework of opposites that the presence and dynamic balance of moderate positions determine whether healthy or unhealthy tension, harmony or conflict, prevails.

### 4.3.6 Reflections on theoretical contributions to opposites

The following unique and distinct aspects of opposites differentiate the contribution between five approaches:

- Saussure: Opposites mutually assist each other in defining meaning. Care should be exercised to allow for some fluidity in the meaning of each of the opposite elements, as it is often contextually determined by some kind of agreement in a group.
- Lévi-Strauss: Opposites can be employed to provide rational structure to complex problems by explicating shared mental representations of groups.
- Foucault: Opposites, and explicating an underlying rational structure to reality, interrogate existing power positions and resulting subjectification in society.
- Derrida: Dare to exploring the full force of the subjected other end of the opposition, thereby overturning the classical opposition.
- Yin-Yang: The presence and dynamic balance of moderate positions in opposites determine whether healthy or unhealthy tension, harmony or conflict, prevails.

## 4.4 Integrating different contributions to opposites

The conceptualising method of relating entails differentiating and integrating (§ 2.2.4). While the previous section (4.3) emphasises differentiating between different contributions by approaches to opposites, this current section focuses on integrating these different contributions into one framework through the lens of reflexive interpretation (§ 2.2.2). The sequence of the five theories of opposites above reveals relations between them and allows them to be integrated as levels of reflexive interpretation.

In western tradition, the work of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Derrida demonstrates a distinct chronology (in time) and progression (in thought), a trajectory in scientific endeavour. Each subsequent approach to opposites builds on the strong points of, and attempts to address, critique on the previous theories. Applying the four core principles of the four successive

theoretical approaches in the same order of their logical development to complex contexts, may assist leaders in better understanding complex situations.

**Table 4-1 Comparison between quadruple levels of reflexive interpretation and theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites**

| Quadruple levels of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018) | Levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites identified in this study |
|---|---|
| Data orientated methods | Determining meaning |
| Hermeneutics | Explicating shared mental representations |
| Critical theory | Wielding power to subject |
| Poststructuralism and postmodernism | Full force of the other end of opposition |
| | Dynamic balance |

The first four theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites have not specifically been selected with the "quadruple hermeneutics" of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:329) in mind. These levels of reflexive interpretation emerged from theories reviewed for relevance to this framework. There is a marked correlation between the levels of interpretation chosen by Alvesson and Scöldberg (§ 2.2.2) and the theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites discussed above. Table 4-1 illustrates how data orientated methods and determining meaning, hermeneutics and explicating structure in complexity, critical theory and power that subject, and poststructuralism and postmodernism on the one hand and deconstruction on the other hand relate. It can be concluded that, benchmarked against quadruple levels of reflexive interpretation of (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018), the first four theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites represent a balanced overview of western thought on opposites.

The Yin-Yang approach to opposites logically positions itself as a fifth level of reflexive interpretation, providing an eastern counterbalance to western thought, balancing differentiating with interconnectedness. Derrida's second strategy (§4.3.4) aims to solve the problematic power dominance of differentiation in western treatment of opposites by displacing the system of opposites all together. To dissolve opposites at this stage in a framework of reflexive interpretation, however, does not pragmatically add value to the framework. Yin-Yang solves the same problem of power dominance by one end of an opposition, by dynamically balancing holistic content and dynamic processes. In this study then, Yin-Yang dynamic balance replaces Derrida's second strategy of displacement to solve the problem of systemic power dominance. Just as

Derrida's second strategy is meant to be the end of the trajectory in opposites thinking, Yin-Yang brings the reflexive framework of opposites to a conclusion.

### 4.5 A reflexive framework of opposites

The respective theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites discussed above (§4.3) and the links between these levels (§4.4) contribute towards a framework to assist leaders in making greater sense of complex realities. This contribution is located between administrative and adaptive leadership (§ 3.3.2.1), both regarding the cognitive structures that govern the actions of agents in complex adaptive systems (§ 3.3.1.3), and the role that enabling leadership plays in mediating the entanglement.

Figure 4-4 presents a graphical depiction of the reflexive framework of opposites. This framework is a tool by which a reflexive practitioner systematically and through feedback loops, considers the underlying rational oppositional structure from five different interpretative levels (of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, and Yin-Yang) in order to gain insight into a complex social problem.

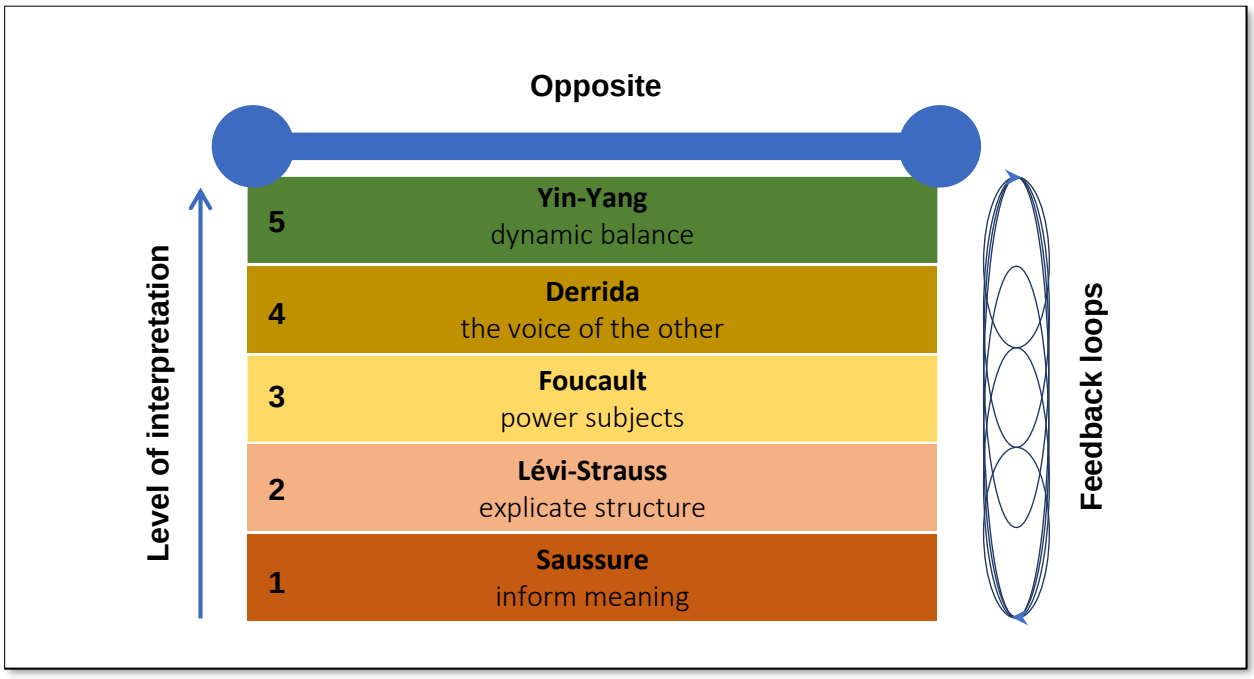



**Figure 4-4 Reflexive framework of opposites**

The core principles derived from the five theoretical approaches to opposites are now reformulated as questions. Since Socrates, asking questions has defined the quest of knowledge. Questions prompt individual engagement and reflection, social collaboration, integration of

diverse knowledge prompted by the levels of reflexive interpretation, even to the point of challenging belief systems. The role of questioning is still today widely recognised in the domains of leadership and knowledge creation (Anderson, 2016:75-76; McFarland, 2001; Peschl & Fundneider, 2014:351).To empower leadership with a questioning attitude, the five core unique contributions (§ 4.3.6) derived from the five theoretical approaches discussed above are re-written into questions. These five questions are:

- How do the opposites explicate the current complex reality?
- How are the positions of the opposites imbedded in culture?
- Which is the dominant element in the opposition and how does the dominant element subject the other element?
- How can the dominant positions be reversed for the subjected element to become the element in power? How would this transition challenge the current worldview?
- What forces influence the dynamic balance of the contrary-yet-dynamic opposites in the current complexity?

collates all the conceptualising processes discussed above into a reflexive framework of opposites. The different contributions of the five levels on interpretation opposites, the integrating links between these contributions, and transforming these contributions to practicable questions, are presented.

**Table 4-2 From five theoretical conclusions on opposites to questions**

| Theoretical grounding | | | Five core conclusions from five theoretical levels of reflexive interpretation (RI) of opposites | Core questions derived from core principles | Level of RI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western philosophy | Structuralism | Saussure | Opposites mutually assist each other in defining meaning. However, care should be taken to allow for some fluidity in the meaning of each of the opposite elements, as it is often contextually determined by some kind of agreement in a group. | What does each of the opposites signify? How do the opposites define the meaning of each other? | 1 |
| | | Lévi-Strauss | Opposites can be employed to provide rational structure to complex problems by explicating shared mental representations of groups. | How are the respective opposites imbedded in culture? | 2 |
| | Post-structuralism | Foucault | Opposites – and explicating an underlying rational structure to reality – interrogate existing power positions and resulting subjectivation in society. | Which is the dominant element in the opposition? How does the dominant element subject the other element? | 3 |
| | | Derrida | Exploring the full force of the subjected other end of the opposition, thereby overturning the classical opposition. | How can the dominant positions be reversed for the subjected element to become the element in power? How would this transition challenge the prevailing worldview? | 4 |
| Eastern | Tao | Yin-Yang | The presence and dynamic balance of moderate positions in opposites determine whether healthy or unhealthy tension – harmony or conflict – prevails. | What forces influence the dynamic balance of the contrary-yet-dynamic opposites in the current complexity? | 5 |

## 4.6 Conclusions

The term ‘opposites’ describes two elements that exist in various degrees of dynamic contradiction and interrelation.

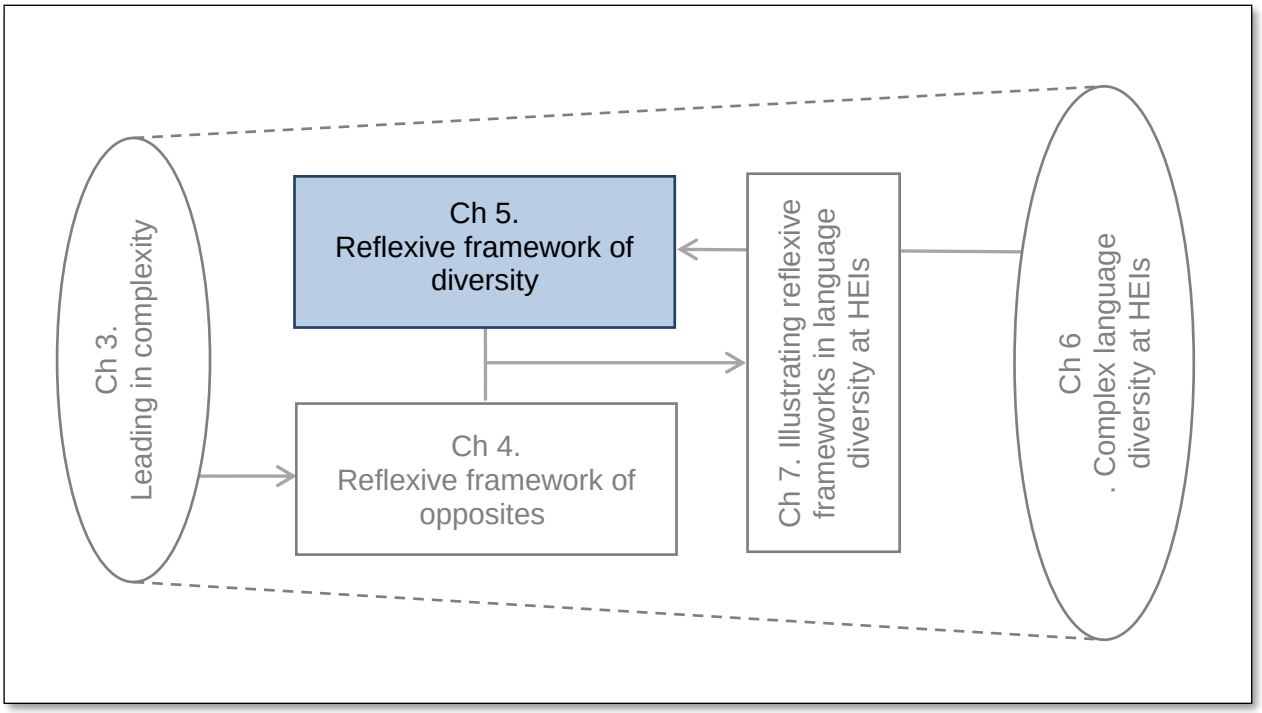
Throughout history, opposites are employed as a rational means to simplify complexity. This simplification enables greater understanding of underlying positions and relations between these positions. By pragmatically gleaning five perspectives on opposites from Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, and Yin-Yang, each in sequence contributing and building on one another, a tentative reflexive framework of opposites has been conceptualised. This framework could assist leaders in understanding and making wise decisions in complex and difficult situations. The five contributions gleaned from the five theoretical perspectives, informing meaning, explicating structure, revealing subjecting power, listening to the voice of the other, and dynamic balance of opposites, were then translated into five practicable questions. Questions, after all, is a powerful tool to find truth.

Opposites are useful for leaders to understand and lead in the dynamic presence, the ebb and flow, of forces in complex contexts. While opposites are reflexive by offering two perspectives, richer reflexivity can be achieved by viewing a pair of opposites from different perspectives. The reflexive framework of opposites facilitates rich understanding through five levels of reflexive interpretation.

# CHAPTER 5 CONCEPTUALISING A REFLEXIVE FRAMEWORK OF DIVERSITY

*We, the people of South Africa,*
*Recognise the injustices of our past;*
*Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;*
*Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and*
*Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

(Constitution, 1996)



## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter conceptualises a reflexive framework of diversity in reply to the research sub-question: how can leaders make sense of diversity? (§ 1.4).This research sub-question is set against the background that diversity is "one of the most vexing dilemmas on campus" (Smith, 2015:57). The dilemma seems to be expanding continually (2015:70). Neutral descriptions of difference become contested and political (Lumby, 2006:152). Leadership is necessary in such complex social problems (Chapter 3) so it is proposed that a reflexive framework of diversity can assist leaders in understanding of, and leading in, diversity. This chapter conceptualises such a framework.

This present chapter and the previous chapter (Chapter 4) employ conceptual research as methodology. A method of relating is employed which consists of differentiating and integrating (§ 2.2.4). This method entails surveying many texts relating to opposites, differentiating between these texts, drawing connections between them, and finding a new, simplified and higher order perspective on how entities are related. Finally, the complexity of diversity is synthesised into overarching ideas by the grounding theory of this study, which is reflexive interpretation (§ 2.2.2). In the reflexive framework of opposites, various perspectives on diversity are identified, related to each other, and presented as a triad of opposites. The outcome of this conceptualisation is a framework that assists leaders to analyse diversity in metatheoretical terms by “identifying elements and relationships among these elements” (Ostrom, 2007:25).

In conceptualising a reflexive framework of diversity, three types of diversity theories are located: separation, disparity, and variety. These types of diversity are transposed to the level of perspectives behind the theories. Diversity perspectives allow for integration, which types do not. The perspectives are integrated into a triad of diversity perspectives which forms a reflexive framework of diversity that, when applied to diversity complexities, presents leaders with greater understanding of forces at play in a complex social situation.

A brief survey of diversity and its attributes sets the context for the conceptualisation.

## 5.2 Surveying the landscape of diversity

This section discusses definitions and attributes of diversity. Attempts are explored to group attributes and the shift from attributes to identities.

### 5.2.1 Defining diversity

Research on diversity is itself diverse and at times simply contradictory. There is no agreed-upon, unifying definition of diversity. Without such a definition, research can hardly build on previous research. Meta-studies become almost impossible. Dawson (2012:19) concludes that it might be best not to view the term diversity "as a single construct, but as an overarching idea embracing a number of different definitions". Others describe the term 'diversity' as subjective (Qin *et al.*, 2014:147). Conscious of this ever-expanding, subjective and multifaceted landscape of defining diversity, this study specifically adopts the definition of Harrison and Klein (2007:1200): "'diversity'…describe(s) the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute, X". One reason for choosing this definition as a foundation for the discussion here, is the seminal nature of the paper on diversity presented by Harrison and Klein (2007).

Qin *et al.* (2014:135) observe that most definitions of diversity share three aspects: scholars differ on multiple attributes; how these personal attributes configure into diversity; and whether the construct of diversity functions on the individual or group level. The following paragraphs explore these three aspects in more depth.

### 5.2.2 Attributes of diversity

There seems to be an ever-growing list of diversity attributes by which to define diversity. These attributes are as diverse in nature, content, and stability as diversity itself. To navigate a way through the attributes, attempts have been made to group the attributes are grouped into oppositional pairs, such as surface-level or deep-level, or social (relational) or job-related (informational) attributes. The post-modern movement introduced identities to replace attributes as domains of difference, personalising the rather distant and separate notion of attributes.

#### 5.2.2.1 Multiple attributes

While the definition of diversity formulated by Harrison and Klein (2007:1200) is attribute specific, the definition does not limit the attributes to a set number. A list of attributes, collated from a random selection of diversity studies (Bassett-Jones, 2005:38; Cavanaugh, 1997:108; Harrison & Klein, 2007:1200; Harrison *et al.*, 1998:97-98; Marsden, 1997:38; Smith, 2015:67) yield the following attributes: ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, weight, function, ability, religion, lifestyle, tenure, disability, mental health, culture, intellectual capability, attitudes, beliefs, values, conscientiousness, task, pay, and language. The assertion by Smith (2015:67) that "(r)ace, ethnicity, class, and gender" constitute salient aspects of diversity at

institutions of higher learning in the United States, might be true, with the possible addition of language, in South Africa as well.

These very attributes contribute to the inexact nature of the term ‘diversity’. What criteria are used, and which attributes are selected by a particular diversity study, is largely determined by the saliency of an attribute and its political actuality in a particular context. Lumby (2006:152) states the issue lucidly: “what the differences and their implications may be immediately transform a neutral description to a contested and political domain”. The political struggle around attributes, observed Cavanaugh (1997:38), constantly transforms attributes to an “an unstable and ‘decentred’ complex of social meaning”. Discussing similarities and dissimilarities in classroom diversity in the United Kingdom and South Africa, Lumby and Heystek (2012:7) point out that attributes are mutable, “a mosaic of privilege and advantage”.

#### 5.2.2.2 Grouping attributes

There have been several proposed systems to categorise these multiple attributes, to class apples with apples and to allow studies to include several attributes. These classifications are varied and fail to set clear definitions.

##### 5.2.2.2.1 Social and information diversity

A first system of categorisation classifies attributes as social or information diversity (Pelled, 1996:617-618; Qin *et al.*, 2009:740; Qin *et al.*, 2012:286; Qin *et al.*, 2014:146-147). Social diversity is defined by the high visibility and relational focus of attributes. Information diversity refers to the job-relatedness of an attribute. This social and information categorisation assists in separating social aspects of relations, justice, and equality from job-related needs in the diversity conversation. Researchers and leaders are encouraged to differentiate between different types of diversity.

##### 5.2.2.2.2 Surface and deep level diversity

A second system of categorisation is to classify attributes of diversity as either surface-level or deep-level attributes, resulting in surface-level diversity and deep-level diversity.

What constitutes surface and deep-level, is, again, like many aspects in diversity research, contested and not clearly defined. Initially, Harrison *et al.* (1998:97-99) describe surface versus deep-level attributes as overtly biological, physical versus psychological characteristics. Yet later, as part of a different study, Harrison *et al.* (2002:1030-1032) omit “biological” and “physical” as indicators of surface-level diversity. Other descriptions of deep-level versus surface-level

attributes are overt, biological and immediate versus not immediately observable but discovered over time (Lauring & Selmer, 2010:163-164); apparent versus not identifiable by appearance (Kim, 2017:1256); ascriptive versus individual attributes (Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998:80); “unique primary (inborn)” versus “secondary (learnt)” (Cilliers, 2007:33). The description of Phillips *et al.* (2006:469) seems to capture the essence of the difference: surface-level attributes are “immediately salient in groups”; deep-level attributes “become known only over time through verbal and nonverbal communication”. The studies above generally cite race/ethnicity, sex, and age as examples of surface-level attributes, and attitudes, values, and beliefs as examples of deep-level diversity.

The distinction between surface-level and deep-level diversity attributes is crucial for at least two reasons. First, it has been found that over time, deep-level attributes overtake surface-level attributes in group cohesion (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Harrison *et al.*, 2002). A fixation on surface-level attributes at the expense of deep-level attributes in diversity research and management, may jeopardise the goal of greater cohesion. Second, the distinction between surface and deep-level attributes plays an important role in one of the major diversity theories, namely Similarity attraction theory. The impact of this theory should be recognised in language diversity at public HEIs.

5.2.2.2.3 Considering language diversity through the lens of surface and deep level diversity

Surface-level attributes are “immediately salient in groups” while deep-level attributes “become known only over time through verbal and nonverbal communication” (Phillips *et al.*, 2006:469). This distinction in levels of diversity is useful in answering the extent to which languages differ, and explains languages “as proxies for culture, identity/ethnicity and, more broadly, belonging” (Posel *et al.*, 2020:12).

At surface-level, where language functions as a means of communication, language is immediately salient. Here language “is a naturally acquired system of communication consisting of spoken symbols, for which in most cases corresponding written forms have been devised” (Harran, 2016:35). A sender encodes meaning in a set of audial and visual signs and a receiver decodes the meaning by mastering the same set of signs. On surface-level then, one language can be distinguished from another by differences in the sets of signs deployed.

The question of difference between languages, however, becomes less distinct when the argument extends beyond communication. Harran (2016:35), quoted above, continues that language “…is used for encoding and decoding information, expressing thoughts and storing ideas, and also plays an important role in our mental development and in nurturing our

imagination". Fundamental questions arise here: Does a difference in surface-level communication signal differences at a deeper level? Do differences in sign-sets signal differences in thoughts, values, culture, and world views? Answers have been fiercely debated amongst scholars.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a valid starting point in searching for answers to these questions. Answers have been attempted before Sapir-Whorf but the hypothesis made provocative claims. For example, that "the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which have to be organized in our minds – and this means, largely, by die linguistic system in our minds" (Whorf, 1956:213). Whorf, however, is open to interpretation. In the ensuing discussion, Brown (1976:128) summarises what Whorf hypothesises (cf. Kay & Kempton, 1984:66; Lenneberg, 1953):

I *Structural differences between language systems will, in general, be paralleled by nonlinguistic cognitive differences, of an unspecified sort, in the native speakers of the two languages.*

II *The structure of anyone's native language strongly influences or fully determines the world-view he will acquire as he learns the language.*

The implication of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is that the observation of different languages at surface-level implies difference in deep-level attributes of thinking and worldview. If this implication is true, the easily observed surface-level communicative aspect of a specific language makes assumptions on the deep-level attributes of the complexity of thinking, values, and worldview of a speaker of that language. Such assumptions are not unique to language as a diversity trait. For example, from the similarity perspective (§ 5.3.2 below) individuals use similar assumptions to find groups of shared values, beliefs and worldviews where a sense of self-worth and belonging is fostered. The disparity perspective (§ 5.3.2.2 below) employs surface-level traits such as race and gender to group people as either oppressor or oppressed. If these surface-level proxies remain generalised descriptions, they offer some value. Once the proxies become prescriptive stereotypes, however, they mark the presence of an ideology (§ 5.3.1 below for discussion of ideologies).

Pinker (1995), on the other hand, uncouples the causative semantic link between surface-level language and deep-level thinking. He argues that thought is instinctive and separate from natural language. Bloom and Keil (2001:364) regard this as the obvious, mainstream view: language "is a tool for the expression and storage of ideas. It is not a mechanism that gives rise to the capacity to generate and appreciate these ideas in the first place". Why, they ask dismissively, has the idea that language has influence on thought not gone extinct already?

Kay and Kempton (1984:77) suggest a view of “limited linguistic relativity and determinism”: Natural language does influence thought quite directly as “habitual thought *tends* to be fitted to a particular linguistic mold”. Although the terminology differs, this moderate position is taken up by many scholars. Lupyan and Bergen (2016) claim that language is about communication, and acts as a control system for thinking, it programmes the mind. Lupyan (2016:3-4) argues for the centrality of language when considering culture and intelligence, especially the role that culturally transmitted knowledge plays in the functioning of the mind. Hays (2000) discusses language changing perception of reality. Wang (2017:22) concludes that there is a close relation between language and culture, and the way we perceive reality. Cowley (2001:89) suggests an interaction between cultural development and many social practices, amongst which is language. Harran (2016:36) describes the relation between language and thought as symbiotic and dynamic:

*In short, language and thought not are (sic) independent, but have a reciprocal relationship. Language enables us to think and articulate our thoughts and thoughts help us to develop our language and, our thoughts are also influenced by the environment in which we live.*

The relation between language and thought seems to be symbiotic and dynamic. Language concerns itself with communication: language as holder of cultural knowledge is employed in the act of constructing thoughts. The relation, however, is to a limited extent deterministic. It would be precipitate to stereotype the surface-level aspect of language prescriptively and judgementally to deep-level thinking patterns and worldviews.

#### 5.2.2.3 Identity

Identity has surfaced in the diversity discourse as a thread that draws attributes together (Cilliers, 2007; Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000; Marsden, 1997:108). Hicks-Clarke and Iles (2000:325) advance the idea that “(g)enerally speaking” diversity is “usually conceptualised in terms of differences of particular relevance to issues of identity, that is; gender, age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation”. The construct of identity selects those attributes which are sometimes described as salient or politically charged. Identity is often associated with power struggles (Lumby & Heystek, 2012:8).

Social categorisation theory offers a gateway to identity in diversity research. Social categorisation theory deals with interaction of individuals with groups: a need for self-esteem and the formation of personal identity (§ 5.3.2 below). Post-modernism, with its focus on the subjective reality of the individual, stresses the significance of identity. Identity is often related to power and found a home in the dialectic method of critical diversity theory (§ 5.3.2.2.1 below).

Erik Erikson, the perceived father of the psychosocial construct, views identity as “the partly conscious, largely unconscious sense of who one is both as a person and as a contributor to society” (Hoare, 2013:53). He operationalised the “movement from adolescence to adulthood” into “progressive developmental shifts” (Waterman, 1982:343) through four identity statuses: achievement, diffusion, foreclosure and moratorium (Marcia, 1966). Relatively recent longitudinal and meta-studies studies (Klimstra *et al.*, 2010; Kroger *et al.*, 2010; Meeus *et al.*, 2010) have confirmed that identity formation during this period is stable and consists of progressive changes. Klimstra *et al.* (2010:158-159) note how changes in context during late adolescence, when individuals advance from high school to institutions of higher learning and social networks, often prompt re-evaluation of commitments and changes in identity.

Postmodernity steered the construct of identity away from a set journey from adolescence to adulthood. Schachter (2005:143) demonstrates how postmodernity as context changed the demands on identity: “constant change, juxtaposed multiple contexts, lack of direction and scepticism toward the hope for progress, an atmosphere of relativity, extreme individualization, and a sense that reality is frail”; incessantly asking if a formed identity in one time and space is still relevant in another. He argues that postmodern theory on identity critiques Erikson’s work on the grounds of its “excessive individualism; essentialism; a limiting of freedom; and a blindness to its own context of development, its ethical judgments regarding the essence of human nature, and its moral consequences” (2005:152) that sustain the hegemony of Western society. The current interest is in the fluidity of identity (cf. Coats, 2011; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Reddy, 2019; Ross & Razon, 2015; Small & Major, 2019; Snyder, 2012; Wiese *et al.*, 2018).

Nevertheless, Erikson did view identity as dynamic. “(W)hat I am in space, changes in time; what I was is now in me; and what I become is more than the sum of all that I have been” (Erikson, 1974:81). These changes are especially dynamic in movement from adolescence to adulthood and continuously present through later adult life. The sense of the self is reconfigured over time to balance internal and external factors and circumstances. At the same time, identity remains loyal to what is deemed worthy of “me”, remaining faithful to what is deserving.

Identity provides a perspective on why diversity should be important to public HEIs. Although identity construction is an ongoing and lifelong process, the “abstract future-orientated thought, pubertal and postpubertal cognitive development, an expanding social horizon, and for many, embeddedness in a self-chosen group” of adolescence “holds the first opportunity to mentally construct a future, one filled with content, meaning and images of utopia” (Hoare, 2013:53). In South Africa many children, even after two and a half decades of democracy, grow up in predominantly apartheid era social structures. Many would, for the first time, encounter greater

diversity at public HEIs. Initial identities formed in early adolescence in largely segregated environments are confronted by a more diverse world for the first time in their lives at public HEIs (Jansen, 2009).

A caveat is in order here. Smith (2015:190) expresses the concern that overemphasis of a politicised notion of identity at higher education institutions might polarise identity groupings. Polarised groupings make meaningful discussions about diversity almost impossible. When individuals realise that agency is realised in identity groupings, more and more subgroup and intersections of identity are formed. This ever-growing list of identities dilutes inequity and the celebration of difference.

## 5.3 Relating perspectives of diversity

To conceptualise a reflexive framework of opposites, a conceptual method of relating is employed (§ 2.2.4.1). This method entails an interactive process between scanning literature, employing differentiating and integrating conceptualisation, finding a level of relation, and grounding the framework in reflexive interpretation as organising theory (Figure 2-4). The following subsections discuss the outcomes of this process.

### 5.3.1 Level of relation: diversity theories, types, perspectives and ideologies

In an effort to bring conceptual clarity to the domain of diversity, Harrison and Klein (2007) review diversity theories and conceptualise a typology of diversity. They discern three types of diversity: separation, disparity, and variety. Dawson (2012) takes the work of Harrison and Klein one step further and describes different statistical measures tailor made to the specific characteristics of each type of diversity. This is an example of the differentiating aspect relating as conceptual method (Figure 2-3).

While these constructs of separation, disparity, and variety, are accepted here as categories of diversity research, the discrete differentiating characteristic of types alone does not serve the aim of conceptualising a framework. Conceptualising a framework demands differentiation and integration. MacInnis (2011:145-146) points out that the level of comparison determines whether theories can be differentiated and/or integrated. If the level of comparison is moved from types to perspectives, the categorisation of similarity, disparity, and variety comprises entities to be integrated in a meta-framework.

Perspective, or point of view, can retain some of the characteristics of types. Table 5-1 builds a profile of separation, disparity, and variety as diversity perspectives. First, characteristics of

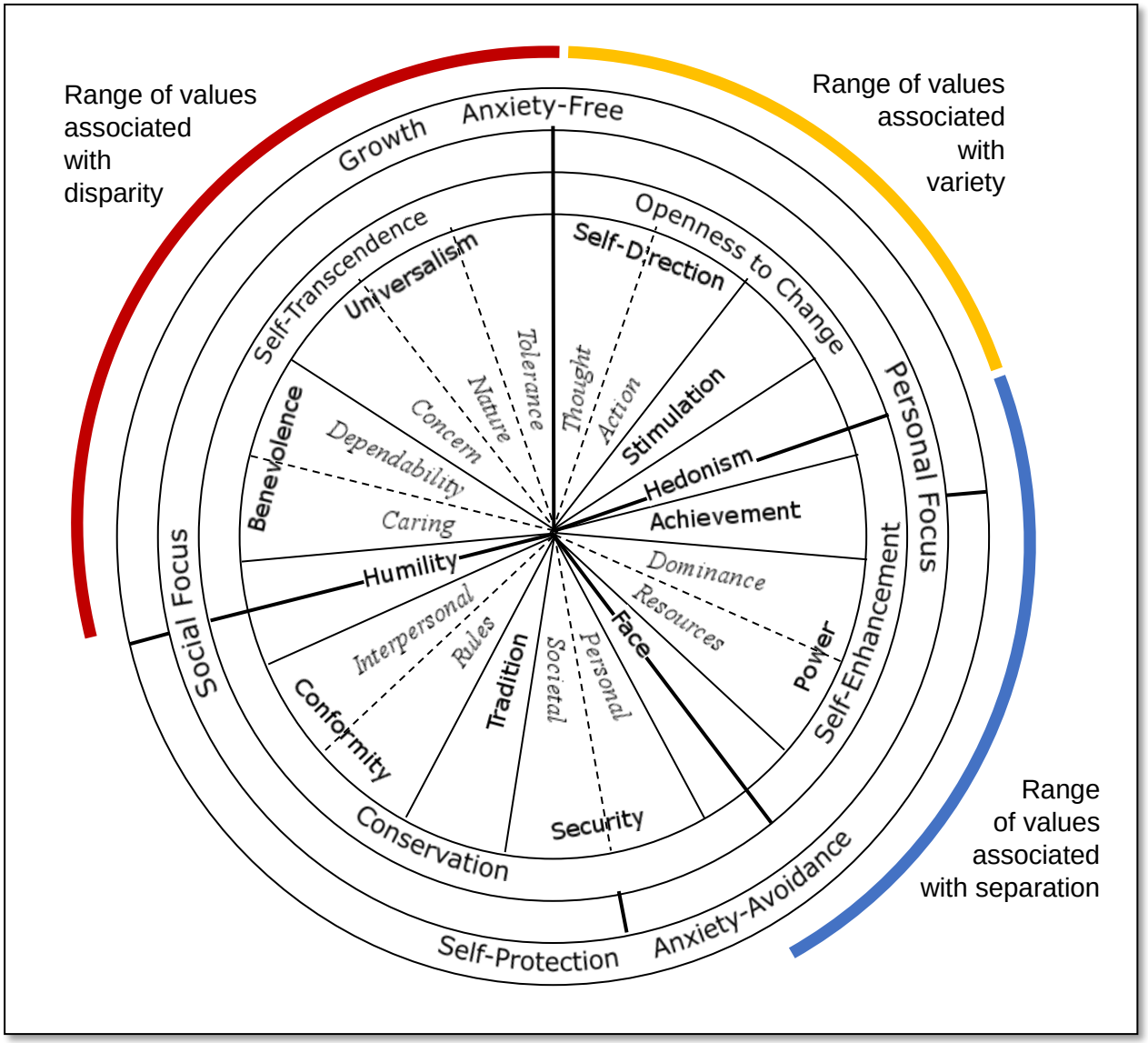
diversity types are imported from Harrison and Klein (2007). These speak for themselves and are well recognised in science.

**Table 5-1 Characteristics of diversity perspectives**

| Type | Characteristics of diversity types (Harrison & Klein, 2007) | | | Basic human values (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012) | Prominent diversity theories |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Differ in** | **Meaning and synonyms** | **Attribute examples** | | |
| **Separation** | Position or opinion | Disagreement or opposition | Opinions, values, beliefs, attitudes | Self-protection<br>personal focus<br>self enhancement:<br>• face<br>• resources<br>• dominance<br>• achievement | Psychology<br>• similarity-attraction theory<br>• social categorisation theory |
| **Disparity** | Proportion or assets held | Inequality or relative concentration | Pay, income, prestige, status | Growth-<br>social focus-<br>self-transcendence:<br>• caring<br>• dependability<br>• concern<br>• nature<br>• tolerance | Sociology<br>• critical diversity theory |
| **Variety** | Kind, source, or category | Unique or distinctive | Content expertise, functional background | Growth<br>personal focus<br>openness to change:<br>• thought<br>• action<br>• stimulation<br>• hedonism | Knowledge management<br>• information/ decision-making approach |

Second, armed with the characteristics of types, perspectives are plotted on the continuum of basic human values of Schwartz *et al.* (2012). These basic human values have been validated in different contexts (Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz *et al.*, 2017; Spini, 2003). The continuum adds value to the description of a perspective by plotting the points of view against an external framework. Schwartz lists nineteen basic human values on a circular continuum (Figure 5-1). The circle is described by two intersecting oppositions: growth vs self-protection, and social vs personal focus. These four quadrants (growth-social, growth-personal, self-protection–personal, and self-protection–social) coincide with approximately four other groups of values: self-transcendence, openness to change, self-enhancement and conservation.

In this framework reside nineteen basic values. The two pairs of spheres, the quadrants, and separate values which correspond with the perspectives of separation, disparity and variety are listed in Table 5-1.




(cf. Schwartz *et al.*, 2012:669)

**Figure 5-1 Range of basic human values associated with diversity perspectives**

Third, the most prominent four diversity theories associated with diversity perspectives are classified according to the perspectives (Table 5-1). These four theories correspond with the theories that Harrison and Klein (2007) used to construct their typology. These theories are interrogated for the perspectives these theories exude (§ 5.3.2 below). Arguably critical diversity theory is currently the most prominent theory in diversity studies. This theory is a springboard for

the social justice movement. It embeds itself in the culture and structures at HEIs all over the world, in South Africa, and society at large (Burawoy, 2005; Cole, 2018; Duarte *et al.*, 2015; Grant *et al.*, 2018; Gross, 2013; Hull, 2019; Mac Donald, 2018; MacLatchy, 2017; Murray, 2019; Redding, 2001; Rothman *et al.*, 2005; Steyn, 2010, 2012, 2015; Weiss, 2017). Critical diversity theory originates in Sociology and corresponds with the disparity perspective. Qin *et al.* (2009:740) and Williams and O'Reilly III (1998:83) list three other prominent theories in diversity research. They include similarity-attraction theory, social categorisation theory, and the information/decision-making approach as the most common in diversity research. Similarity-attraction theory and social categorisation theory originate in Psychology and correspond with the separation perspective. The information/decision-making approach originates in knowledge management and corresponds with the variety perspective.

When Alvesson *et al.* (2016:52) remark that ”all theories are to some extent ideological”. They mean by ideology a “coherent belief system that describe reality, point out what is desirable and show how this desirable state can be achieved”. This meaning of ideology shares a semantic domain with the concept of scientific disposition which Bourdieu introduced in the context of reflexivity (§ 2.2.2.1). In this text, the word ‘perspective’ is used to refer to this meaning of ideology or disposition within which theories reside.

In this text, however, the word ‘ideology’ is reserved for a specific kind of perspective: a perspective which turned malignant. From the many meanings and complex genealogy of the term ‘ideology’, a pejorative meaning is intended here: “ideas, beliefs and values are mobilised to legitimise powerful interests through distortion and misrepresentation” (Shepherd *et al.*, 2020:6). Ideology is a system of ideas that has grown out of control. The dogma of a secular religion in service of some ideal/idol becomes the mono-coloured lens that renders the whole of reality in the mind of the devotees (Eagleton, 2014:1-20; Moazzam, 2017; Zizek, 2012). In this sense, ideology is a perspective turned malignant.

Above it has been argued that perspective is an appropriate level of relation to integrate different diversity perspectives into an interrelated framework. Three perspectives are borrowed from the typology of diversity (Harrison & Klein, 2007) and defined against the circular continuum of basic values (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012). These diversity perspectives, their implications, and the effect when these perspectives turn into ideologies are discussed in the following sections.

### 5.3.2 Differentiating between diversity perspectives

In this section, the three types of diversity which Harrison and Klein (2007) identified are transposed from type to perspective. This is achieved by populating the meaning of perspectives

and discussing diversity theories that fall in the ambit of the perspectives of separation, disparity, and variety (Table 5-1).

#### 5.3.2.1 Separation perspective

##### 5.3.2.1.1 Similarity attraction theory

Similarity-attraction theory relates to the separation perspective of diversity (Table 5-1).

Foundational work on similarity-attraction theory stems from the research undertaken by David Byrne (1971; 1997). Similarity-attraction theory describes relations between similarity in attitudes, values and beliefs, and interpersonal attraction. In dyads, individuals tend to be more attracted to those who are more similar in surface-level or immediately salient attributes and/or deep-level attributes known only over time (§ 5.2.2.2.2). Deep-level attributes are the more enduring in attractions between people.

The motivation for this similarity-attraction, it is theorised, is that individuals expect that their own attitudes, values and beliefs or deep-level attributes will be reinforced when they interact with individuals who possess similar attitudes, values, and beliefs. Such encounters are experienced as positive interactions. Information about the deep-level attributes of attitudes, values and beliefs of other people is often not readily available. Surface-level attributes are then employed as immediately salient proxies for deep-level attributes. Individuals with similar surface-level attributes, the reasoning goes, are exposed to similar contexts and experiences, and develop similar deep-level attributes. While surface-level proxies give some expectation of deep-level attributes, they are by no means accurate predictors. Individuals of similar surface-level attributes are initially attracted to one another and come to know over time if the proxy was an accurate predictor of the deep-level attribute. In this way surface-level similarity-attractions are re-evaluated if the deep-level attributes present reinforce the goal of re-enforcing deep-level attitudes, values and/or beliefs (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Qin *et al.*, 2009:741-742; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998:85-86).

Similarity-attraction theory exudes the value classes of self-protection, personal focus, and self-enhancement, and relates to the values of face, resources, dominance, and achievement (§ 5.3.1, Figure 5-1).

##### 5.3.2.1.2 Social categorisation theory

Social categorisation theory relates to the separation perspective of diversity (Table 5-1).Tajfel (1981), and Turner *et al.* (1987) describe the theory of social categorisation, building on formation

of psychological identity theories. Since identity plays a significant role in social categorisation theory, it is useful to consider the following definition of identity (Lumby & Heystek, 2012:8):

*(A) system of negotiated, fluid choices which are in part controlled by the individual and in part imposed. Identity is a performance where what is constructed is part of the battery to create, maintain, defend and enhance self-worth and status in the eyes of others . . . It is intimately related to notions of power.*

Social categorisation theory posits the following process: individuals have a psychological need for self-esteem. To maintain a high self-esteem, individuals compare themselves to others. This social comparison, however, necessitates that individuals categorise themselves and others into groups according to salient or surface-level attributes such as age, race, status, or religion, rather than underlying, deep-level attributes such as attitudes, values, and beliefs. While many social categories might be at play, the salient social category of an individual induces the categorisation process. In this way, individuals define themselves in terms of a social identity. The result is that individuals find themselves as members and non-members of different categories or groups.

The process of maintaining a high self-esteem does not stop once membership and non-membership of categories or groups are defined. The in-group might be further categorised by how salient the salient attribute is for each of the members, thus creating a network of in- and out-groups even in the initial in-group. By developing and maintaining negative perceptions about the characteristics of out-group individuals and groups, positive perceptions about the characteristics of in-group members of groups, a high self-esteem is maintained.

Perceiving of out-groups as “the other” leads to stereotyping and polarisation. Heterogeneous groups often display higher levels of conflict and lower levels of cooperation and communication. Studies based on social categorisation theory generally confirm negative outcomes of greater diversity on groups. It is important to note that the process of social categorisation is dynamic, not fixed. Saliencies of attributes might change and over time deep-level attributes can lead individuals to re-evaluate their categorisations, resulting in re-categorisation (Qin *et al.*, 2009:742-744; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998:83-85).

Social categorisation theory exudes the value classes of self-protection, personal focus, and self enhancement, and relates to the values of face, resources, dominance, and achievement (§ 5.3.1, Figure 5-1).

#### 5.3.2.1.3 Dynamics of the separation perspective

Separation theories describe how groups are formed and illustrate a migration of individuals to groups. This migration is driven by psychological needs. Humans make sense of a complex world

by simplifying reality into categories. Individuals find affirmation of their identities by associating with groups that enhance their self-worth. Once part of groups, individuals find social acceptance and they are imbedded in a network of social relations. Individuals acquire the agency that the group enjoys.

Krueger and DiDonato (2008) argue that this perspective develops an in-group and out-group mentality. In-group individuals are viewed with a positive bias and out-group members with a negative bias. This tension in perception leads to in-group favouritism and “othering” of the out-group, intergroup stereotyping, and discrimination. When a particular perspective is left unchallenged by an opposite perspective for some time, the downside increasingly supersedes the upside of that perspective in prevalence and agency. If this process remains unchecked, the consequences are dire (Johnson, 2014).

Before its fall, Goudzwaard (1981:39-48) introduces Apartheid as an example of how a separation perspective grew in the minds of its proponents and became their master, a world possessed by the idol of ethnicity and served by die dogma of separatism. An ideology can be recognised by a great significance that is assigned to the ultimate goal of the perspective. Any means are employed to reach that end, distorting norms and values, and creating its own false enemies, while any opposing perspectives are demonized and silenced. Two decades earlier, in the contexts of the Apartheid state, Geyser (1961) already warned about the deception and lure of ideologies. What started out as self-validation ended up as dehumanisation of others. The ideology and practice of Apartheid was declared a crime against humanity (United Nations, 2004:art. 7).

Writing about her experiences of being confronted at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the excesses of the separation perspective turned ideology as told from an opposing perspective, Krog (2007:278-279) captures what engaging reality through multiple voices and perspectives offer:

*For us all; all voices, all victims:*
*because of you*
*this country no longer lies*
*between us but within*
*it breathes becalmed*
*after being wounded*
*in its wondrous throat*
*in the cradle of my skull*
*it sings, it ignites*
*my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart*
*shudders towards the outline*
*new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals*

*of my soul the retina learns to expand*
*daily because by a thousand stories*
*I was scorched*
*a new skin.*
*I am changed for ever. I want to say:*
*forgive me*
*forgive me*
*forgive me*
*You whom I have wronged, please*
*take me*
*with you.*

For perspectives to display this malignant growth, Goudzwaard (1981:39) states: “They need deep injustice or threat to take hold” (cf. Jansen, 2009:47-49). It is true of the story of the separation perspective in South Africa. The South African wars and its concentration camps preceded Apartheid by half a century.

#### 5.3.2.2 Disparity perspective

##### 5.3.2.2.1 Critical diversity theory

Critical diversity theory relates to the disparity perspective of diversity (Table 5-1). Critical theory stems from the Institute of Social Research, commonly known as the ‘Frankfurt School’. Critical theory, the school argues, is an epistemology for social sciences separate from the traditional functionalist or interpretive approaches, catering for both the historical formation of the objects studied and for the individual or group doing the studying. To engage with the dynamic flow of social life, dialectic is chosen as scientific method. Many critical researchers regard their role as activists (Carr, 2000:209-214; Patel, 2016:603-604).

Max Horkheimer became director of the Frankfort School in 1931 and steered the school towards critical theory. He famously defined the goal of critical theory “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982:244). In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer *et al.* (2002:99) describe a process of enslavement: “The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry” and the dialectic approach is there to free the world from this slavery. Culture becomes the battleground between opposing forces.

Steyn (2010:53-54) explains critical diversity theory: “[it] focuses on multiple axes of difference where power dynamics operate to create the centres and margins of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, age etc. as well as their varying intersections”. In the South African context, these power dynamics are scrutinised through a lens of colonialism and imbedded notions of white superiority and black inferiority in institutional culture and interpersonal interactions. Critical diversity theory has a stated value predisposition of “democracy, social justice, equity and

empowerment" (2010:53). The aim of profound cultural transformation is to increase democracy and equity in the deep structure and values of organisations.

To effect this transformation, Steyn (2010, 2015) proceeds to coin the concept critical diversity literacy, and oversaw a two-semester undergraduate course (2012) at a South African public HEI. The goal of "conscientisation" is a process of becoming conscious of personal and social contradictions and doing something about it (2012:3). The proposed goals for critical diversity literacy provide insight. Critical diversity theory actively strives to transform society through a dialectic engagement in power struggles (2015:381-388):

a. *a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, ablebodiedness, middleclassness. etc;*

b. *analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of privilege intersect, interlock co-construct and constitute each other;*

c. *the definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems and not only historical legacy*

d. *an understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices;*

e. *the possession of a diversity grammar and vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism and antiracism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression;*

f. *the ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices;*

g. *an analysis of the ways in that diversity hierarchies and institutional oppressions are mediated by class inequality and inflected in specific social contexts; and*

h. *an engagement with issues of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening democracy/social justice in all levels of social organisation.*

Critical diversity theory sets out the value classes of growth, social focus, and self-transcendence and relates to the values of caring, dependability, concern, nature, and tolerance. (§ 5.3.1, Figure 5-1).

#### 5.3.2.2.2 Dynamics of the disparity perspective

The section on the dynamics of the separation perspective (§ 5.3.2.1.3 above) closed with the observation that a perspective usually displays characteristics of an ideology when the perspective grows in an environment of deep injustice or of a threat. The disparity perspective states the alleviation of injustice as a clear objective.

The disparity perspective draws individuals together in pressure groups with shared oppressed, lived experiences. These oppressed groups are then pitted against their oppressors in the 'us vs

them' quest against inequality. The natural longing for personal upliftment to standards of fairness and equality is a major driving factor behind any viable disparity framework.

A disparity perspective adds great value through its relentless critique of everything, exposing power relations, oppressive structures, and culture, giving the outsider a voice, to storm the castles of hierarchy fearlessly. Social justice and equality need a voice. Are there fault lines in the disparity perspective? Schmid (2018:199-207) contends that ontological and methodological dualism, objective analysis of systems vs subjective normative life-world, end up as being separated and compartmentalised dimensions. The subjective life-world dimension becomes ensnared in generalised utopianism with doubtful objective grounding in factual reality. In the context of the 1968 student uprisings, Habermas (cited by Maier, 1988:48) describes the effect of this separation from objective analysis: "From a false assessment of the situation is drawn a fatal strategy, which will not only permanently isolate students in universities and schools, but will weaken all social and political voices that demand democratization." Well-grounded voices, weakened by the "militant minorities who can articulate the needs and aspirations of the silent masses" (1988:41) have to become "angry" and take anarchy to a new level in order to be heard, only to lose credibility.

These comments made by Habermas, are echoed in commentaries by Habib (2019) and Jansen (2017) on the #mustfall movement in South Africa. Anger and anarchy are taken to another level through social media mobs and bots. By casting aspersions, de-platforming, and cancel culture thought police rule in aggressive numbers, harassing and silencing everybody who does not actively support them. Anarchists are blind to the devastation and personal harm they leave in their wake (Fikeni *et al.*, 2020). Long (2021:129) observes that "the bullying tactics of the left runs the risk of alienating even fair-minded people. Intimidation cannot win the day…"

This disparity perspective can grow out, over the heads of societies, and turn into an ideology (Goudzwaard, 1981:29-38). The disparity perspective and Marxism share a concern for fairness and equality, the use of opposites with one dominating the other as a frame, and the dialectic methodology of bringing about change. It enlightens to follow the trajectory of Marxist socialism. Ideologies can grow out of proportion if allowed to grow unrestricted, and are eventually enforced upon followers and dissidents alike. Nietzsche (1968:77-78) predicted almost three decades before the Russian Revolution that socialism would bring many deaths to Europe. In Russia "terror upon terror" rained on Russia in the late 1930's as the state was "purified" of those with competing perspectives (Service, 2015:210ff.). It is not clear, and that in itself is significant, how many deaths the socialist experiment brought to the world but around 100 million has been suggested (Courtois

*et al.*, 1999). The tragedy of this unbalanced, out of control ideology, is captured by one of the victims of this perspective, Solzhenitsyn (1974:175):

*Evidently evildoing also has a threshold magnitude. Yes, a human being hesitates and bobs back and forth between good and evil all his life. He slips, falls back, clambers up, repents, things begin to darken again. But just so long as the threshold of evildoing is not crossed, the possibility of returning remains, and he himself is still within reach of our hope. But when, through the density of evil actions, the result either of their own extreme degree or of the absoluteness of his power, he suddenly crosses that threshold, he has left humanity behind, and without, perhaps, the possibility of return.*

What Arato (2016) defines as the "critical silence" of the Frankfurt School about the excesses of Marxism during this period, is significant. The school failed to turn its critical apparatus on a great structural injustice. Goudzwaard (1981:15, emphasis original) warns at a time when Apartheid and the Berlin wall were still in place: "The *real* enemy lies within *ourselves*; we who on occasion transform these powers into tyrannical idols." In the turbulent waters of diversity, a reflexive framework checks one-sided ideologies and equips leaders with the ability to hold disparate perspectives in tension.

#### 5.3.2.3 Variety perspective

##### 5.3.2.3.1 Information/decision-making approach

The variety perspective on diversity is represented by the theory of the information/decision-making approach (Table 5-1). Information/decision-making approaches to diversity argue that a more demographically, surface-level, diverse group of individuals possesses a broader range of deep-level attributes in terms of experiences, knowledge, skills, and abilities. This greater pool of deep-level diversity enables a group to make better informed decisions, avoid group-think and enhanced performance. The effect of a greater pool of deep-level diversity is greater in more complex, non-routine and uncertain tasks.

Critics of the information/decision making approach point out that problems resulting from diversity restrict free and unbiased access to a greater pool of deep-level attributes. Any assumption that greater deep-level diversity could be assumed from surface-level attributes, is challenged (Qin *et al.*, 2009:745; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998:86-87).

Information/decision-making approaches express the value classes of growth, personal focus, openness to change and relate to the values of thought, action, stimulation, and hedonism (§ 5.3.1, Figure 5-1).

#### 5.3.2.3.2 Dynamics of the variety perspective

Diversity as construct and object of scientific research is not old. It is alleged that diversity studies came to the fore in the USA from the time of the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Yet American society was aware of the issues long before. Almost a century earlier, comments by Harvard presidents illustrate that there was an earlier awareness of managing diversity in society. Cornelius Felton, president of Harvard 1860-1862, remarked that some concerted effort should be made to gather students from backgrounds "to remove prejudices by bringing them into friendly relations" (cited by Rudenstine, 2001:32). Charles Elliot, president of Harvard 1869-1909, was of the view that Harvard should attract students from different backgrounds to learn from "the wholesome influence that comes from observation of and contact with people different from themselves" (cited by Rudenstine, 2001:32).

These sentiments from Felton and Eliot correspond with current reasoning behind variety. Diversity has educational value at public HEIs. With a diverse student body and academic staff, students engage with different perspectives and experiences. They learn to see the world from different viewpoints. Their own perspectives are challenged and group-think is minimised (Hurtado, 2005; Hurtado *et al.*, 2012; Rudenstine, 2001:31). At an interpersonal level, students learn social skills to relate to different people and prejudices are challenged through exposure. At the level of the workforce, public HEIs prepare individuals to serve society, graduates are equipped to work in diverse work teams, and understand and penetrate diverse markets (Dahm *et al.*, 2009:288-289; Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000:324-325). This line of reasoning corresponds with research on multilingualism discussed below.

While the variety perspective on diversity envisions a world where diversity adds value to society, some studies caution that the process of achieving visionary goals runs against the grain of separation and disparity perspectives. For example, Knouse and Dansby (1999:491) found that for race, a team functions to optimal effectiveness when the minority group populates between 11-30% of that group. The separation perspective demands a subgroup of more than 10% for the group to have the agency to gain a voice. The disparity perspective starts to dominate the workgroup through power struggles if the minority group exceeds 30% of the workgroup (cf. Cavanaugh, 1997:44-45; Elmes & Connelley, 1997:149-150). It remains unclear, however, how shifting cultural values over time influence these numbers. Other studies (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Harrison *et al.*, 2002) find that while, over time, surface-level diversity diminishes as a factor in task performance of groups, inversely, diversity in deep-level attributes such as values, beliefs and attitudes actually become a more important factor in failure to perform tasks in groups. The

value of these deep-level attributes in the variety perspective benefit groups and organisations the most.

There is a difference between the driving forces behind separation and disparity perspectives on the one hand and a variety perspective on the other. Separation and disparity perspectives are driven by an individual's psychological need for affirmation and the social need of fairness and equality. These two needs are natural. They exert a gravitational pull. The more acute the need for affirmation and equality, the greater momentum these perspectives will exert. The variety perspective is propelled by the power of the vision that greater variety brings greater depth in thought, action, stimulation, and hedonism (Table 5-1). Visionary leadership may play a crucial role in advancing the variety perspective.

### 5.3.3 Integrating the perspectives of separation, disparity, and variety

The reflexive framework of opposites conceptualised in Chapter 2 enables leaders to view opposing perspectives from structuralist and post-structuralist frames, and according to tenets of eastern philosophy. As the saliency of politicised diversity issues ebbs and flows in social life, it becomes especially important for leaders not to be swept away by a flood of activism nor become radically opposed to social messages. Through a reflexive framework, a situation or issue of complexity can be approached from multiple viewpoints. Such a framework provides structure to balanced, fair and wise leadership (§ 3.3.2.2).

It is suggested here that a reflexive framework of diversity perspectives helps combat the devastating effect of one-sided diversity ideologies on societies. Such a reflexive framework is enriched if the "competition" between the diversity perspectives is viewed through the lens of the reflexive framework of opposites conceptualised in Chapter 4.

The perspectives on diversity often compete for attention and recognition. Since policy-making in complex environments is precisely about balancing competing expectations, values, frameworks, and perspectives (Sabatier, 2007:3-4), it could be of value to see the three diversity perspectives as three separate viewpoints while exploring their oppositional interdependent character.

Figure 5-2 illustrates a dynamic balance between perspectives of separation, disparity, and variety. In separation, the groups are formed through identity formation. The disparity perspective utilises the lens of power to understand and transform inequalities between groups. The variety perspective envisions depth in experience and outcome by assimilating a variety of surface and deep-level attributes into one group.

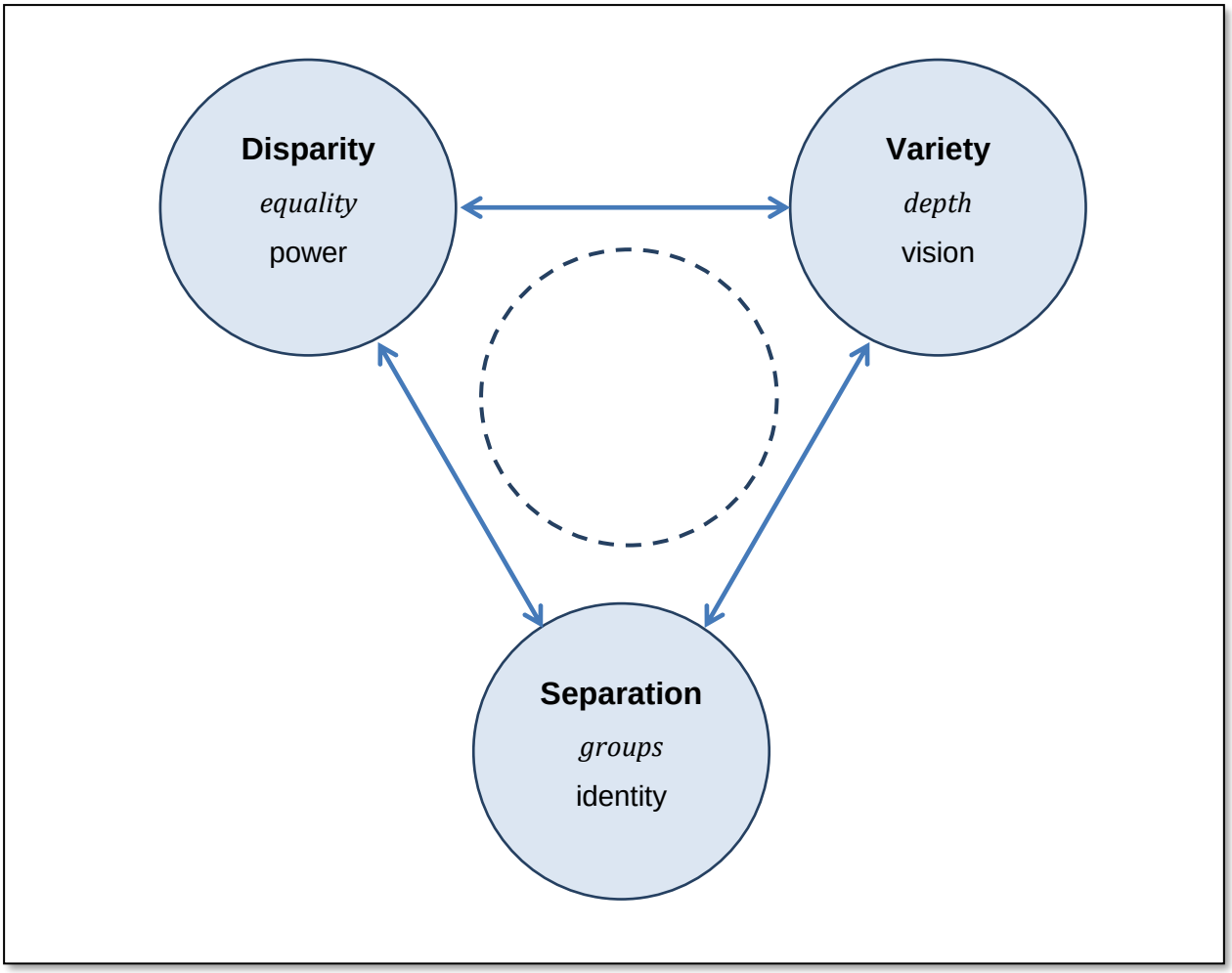



**Figure 5-2: A reflexive framework of diversity perspectives**

Dynamic interaction between separation and disparity entails disparity using the seed of separation in identity formation to grow opposing groups. These opposing groups gain power through dialectic competition. Since power is wrested from the dominant group, the means to gain equality comes within the grasp of the subjected group. The opposing forces between separation and disparity identify a need for a separation perspective to sustain its own identity and power. The disparity perspective is needed to realise the needs of the 'other'. In effect, a separation perspective aims for the development of the own, while the disparity perspective aims for the sharing of resources. The separation perspective might be more open to 'growing the cake' while the dialectic approach of the disparity is more prone to 're-dividing the cake' arguments.

While disparity and variety perspectives share the value of equality of status, the former focuses on exposing disparity and pulling down hierarchical structures enabling disparity. The latter works with variety as if everybody already has a seat at the table. The disparity perspective asserts that

a community is *en route* to equality, while the variety perspective states that a community is already living in equality. Where disparity powerfully forces transformation, variety invites many to live transformed lives. On the downside, the disparity perspective leaves new classes of jubilant conquerors and bruised victims, while the variety perspective does not have the force to break down resilient hierarchies and embedded social structures.

The variety and separation perspectives stand in opposition as to the composition of the group and the goal of the group. While the variety perspective consists of heterogeneous individuals and aims for depth in different experiences, values, beliefs, knowledge and perspectives, the separation perspective brings homogeneous groups together and aims to develop and advance that particular group. While separation brings the energy to develop elements peculiar to that group, the dangers of groupthink, losing the greater perspective and becoming self-serving are real. The separation perspective needs the variety perspective to draw the group outside their in-group and to foster an awareness of, and an active engagement with, life outside their in-group. The variety perspective seeks discrete contributions from different members of the group. The contribution of the separation perspective is to foster these discrete opinions, experiences, values, beliefs, and perspectives.

### 5.4 Conclusion

The uncertain world of diversity engagement with this complexity becomes more structured and therefore accessible by differentiating between different perspectives on diversity. A reflexive framework of diversity offers leaders an instrument to engage in a structured manner with diversity complexities from multiple perspectives.

Conceptualising a reflexive framework of diversity entails transposing three types of diversity, separation, disparity, and variety (Harrison & Klein, 2007), to three perspectives of diversity. The three diversity perspectives arose from diversity theories and were grounded in the circular continuum of basic human values (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012). The separation perspective of diversity has self-protection, personal focus, and self-enhance as vantage point; and is rooted in Psychology. The disparity perspective has growth, social focus, and self-transcendence as vantage point; and is rooted in Sociology. The variety perspective has growth, social focus, and self-transcendence as vantage point; and is rooted in Knowledge management. Juxtaposing these perspectives within a triad of oppositions, enables a framework to unlock reflexive interpretation of diversity complexities; gaining insight into three distinct dispositions towards diversity and turning them on each other by examining their differences and interrelatedness.

Significantly, politicised and contested issues often become a shouting match between proponents with singular perspectives on the matter. This is indeed true of aspects of diversity. The reflexive framework of diversity offers an opportunity for anyone interested to see a diversity complexity from three perspectives. In addition, such a framework offers an opportunity to interrogate the interaction between the perspectives. This framework proffers a means to understand the perspectives of other proponents and, to predict how the interaction between proponents of different perspectives would transpire.

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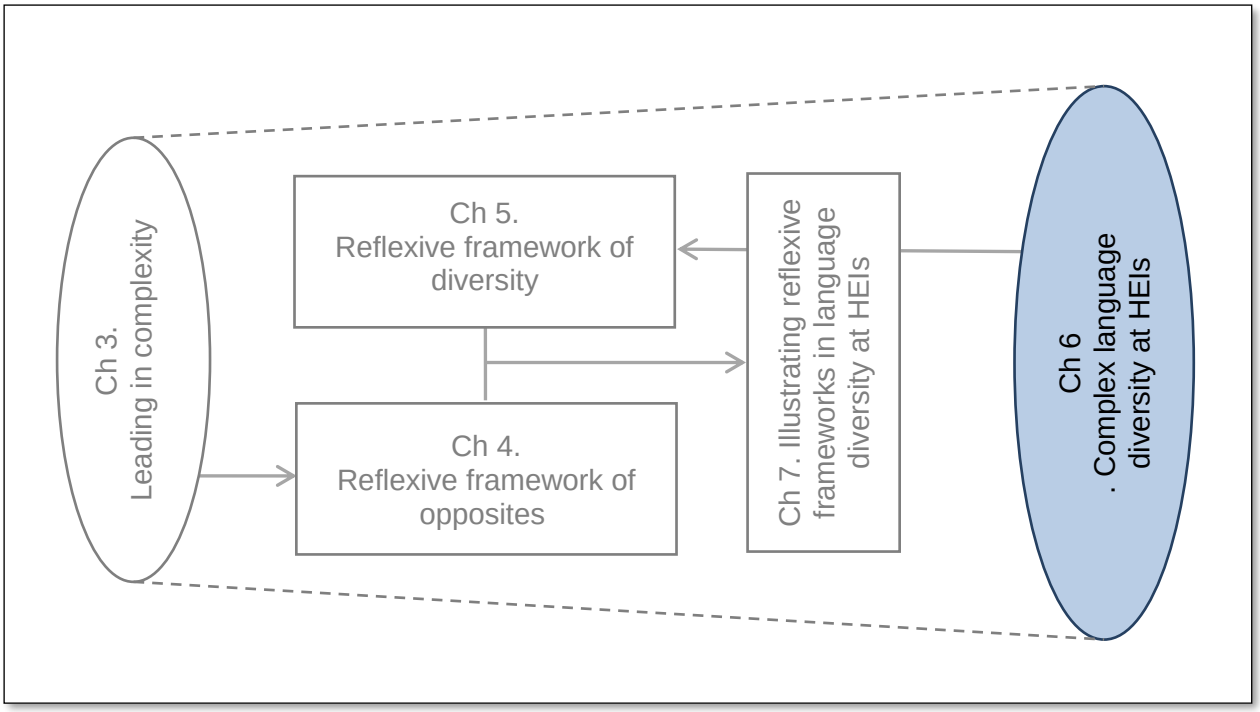
# CHAPTER 6 CONTRADICTIONS IN LANGUAGE AT PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

*in the cradle of my skull*
*it sings, it ignites*
*my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart*
*shudders towards the outline*
*new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals*

(Krog, 2007:278-279)



## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores language diversity at public HEIs and answers the research sub-question: why is language of learning and teaching at public HEIs, from a leadership perspective, considered to be a complex problem?

The problem of language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at public HEIs can be described in material and in leadership terms. In material terms, the question remains how to meet the constitutional mandate that "(e)veryone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions" (*Constitution*, 1996:s. 26(2)). In leadership terms, this study frames the problem in terms of oppositional difficulties and issues of diversity, specifically language at public HEIs pose (§ 1.2). While keeping the material problem in mind, the focus of this chapter is leadership perspective.

The research question above is answered by identifying contradictions present in various aspects of language at public HEIs. Chapter 3 illustrated that complexity is identified as a core element of leadership (§ 3.2.4), that leadership theories identify the presence of contradictions as a marker of complexity (§ 3.3.1), and that leadership scholarship engages opposites to make sense of complex problems (§ 3.3.2). In § 3.3.2.1, leadership has *inter alia* been described as the process of representing "a complex form of *social* problem solving" (Mumford, 2000:14). A social problem is deemed complex if the problem does not have a single solution but displays fundamental contradictions. These contradictions can be of one or more of the following types (2000:13):

- tendency toward stability versus change,
- goals and strategies of one sub-system to solve a problem versus goals and strategies of other sub-systems to solve a problem, and
- the niche performance outcome of the organisation versus recognising differentiated needs of the people comprising the organisation.

By framing complex social problems within leadership, this chapter explores different aspects of the language problem at public HEIs and highlights contradictions within and between these aspects. Selection of aspects was determined by three factors: First, aspects were selected for their saliency in demonstrating complexity, i.e., those that clearly demonstrate fundamental contradictions in social problems. Second, a unifying model and definition of leadership (§ 3.2.4) spans six essential components of leadership on a continuum, with personal/micro elements at one end and impersonal/macro components at the other end. Aspects of language at public HEIs

relating to these six components have been selected for discussion in this chapter. Such aspects are included and may be viewed as fringe elements in a pure language study. For example, a unifying definition of leadership describes a socio-psychological lens as a critical and foundational element in leadership processes. It is paramount that a socio-psychological lens is deployed concerning language at public HEIs. At the other end of the leadership continuum, the global hegemony of English is selected as an aspect to discuss, since it refers to the external contexts and global ecology in which language at public HEIs resides. Third, this chapter applies leadership perspectives on language, yet the rich body of language scholarship cannot be neglected. Selection of aspects represents a broad but not necessarily a comprehensive, range of aspects considered in language scholarship.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how multiple aspects of language at public HEIs exhibit complexity through the presence of contradictions. The following aspects of language in South Africa and public HEIs are discussed: diverse origins of languages, demography of first languages (L1), multilingualism, English hegemony, proficiency, scientific perspective on language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in multilingual societies, constitutional framework, reflection on success of national language policies, development of Situ languages as academic languages, language activism, and how psycho-socio fears play out in language at public HEIs.

The methodological purpose of this chapter flows from the grounding theory, reflexive interpretation (§ 2.2.2). In the frame of reflexive interpretation this chapter serves as *result of interpretation* on which the next chapter builds as *interpretation of interpretation* (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:11). This means Chapter 6 provides the data that are reflexively re-interpreted in Chapter 7.

## 6.2 The language mosaic in South Africa formed by diverse societies

South African students attending public HEIs speak many languages. Records indicate that Southern Africa was inhabited as early as 20-40 thousand years ago, while three major migrations during the last 2000 years crafted the current mosaic of languages in South Africa (Mesthrie & Rajend, 2002; Mohohlwane, 2020:1-20; Sengupta *et al.*, 2021:2).

The first migrations were made by pastoralists from East Africa. On arrival in Southern Africa, they assimilated with the local San hunter-gatherer population (Greenberg, 1963:66-84,177; Skoglund *et al.*, 2017). Today the Khoi, San and Nama language groups are scattered over a large area from the Northern Cape province in South Africa to Southern Angola. According to Brenzinger (2009) these communities are small and marginalised.

The second migration (approximately 3000 – 2000 years ago) originated in West Africa, moving East and South across the continent. This migration created the Bantoid language family, comprising 83 language sub-families and a total of 695 separate languages. The subgroup of Sintu languages[9] (known as Subgroup S or the South-Eastern Bantu language branch) settled in Southern Africa with 25 separate languages (Bryan, 2018; Eberhard *et al.*, 2020:98; Guthrie, 2017; Janson, 1991). In South Africa, 9 languages from this group are currently recognised as official languages:[10] Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, and Ndebele (from the Nguni language family), Sotho, Tswana, and Pedi (from the Sotho-Tswana language family), and Venda, and Tsonga (as independent languages) (Guthrie, 2017; Janson, 1991:98).

The third migration took place in the colonial era. The first Dutch settlers arrived in South Africa in the 17th century. European languages were introduced by the Dutch East India Company (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007:41) and English, German, French, Belgian, Spanish, Portuguese, Germain, Italian, and Portuguese-speaking explorers and settlers (Pakenham, 1991:670). Colonisers brought slaves from the East, mostly from India and Indonesia, who in turn enriched the cultural admixture with Asian languages, crafts, religions, and knowledge. Before 1925, English and Dutch were retained as official languages in the *Official Languages of the Union Act* (1925). Afrikaans grew as an indigenous creole language mainly from Dutch and other third migration languages. Many Dutch settlers married slave women. Slaves played a major role in forging this new language, to such an extent that Afrikaans was known as *kombuistaal*, i.e., kitchen language spoken by slaves and masters (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007:53). Over the years, the use of the other third migration languages diminished, leaving English and Afrikaans as dominant languages.

From a leadership perspective the convergence of multiple languages in South Africa reached a significant moment in 1994 when a democratic dispensation was agreed upon. The difficulty of multiple languages being recognised as official languages is encapsulated in the preamble of the negotiated *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Constitution, 1996)*: “South Africa belongs

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9 In the family tree of languages, the closest common ancestor of English and Afrikaans is Germanic-West; and for Pedi, Sotho, Tswana, Swati, Venda, Tsonga, Ndebele, Xhosa and Zulu the closest common language group is Subgroup S of the Bantoid group (Eberhard *et al.*, 2020). Subgroup S has been called the Sintu language group (Janson, 1991:98; Kotzé, 2018; Silva, 1996:639) from the -ntu stem meaning human (Bernhard, 2011:4-5). This text will use the closest parent language groups, Germanic-West and Sintu, as collective adjectives to refer to the South African “European” and “African” languages.

10 Following recent examples in academic texts (e.g. Carstens & Raidt, 2019; Sengupta *et al.*, 2021), endonyms for indigenous languages are not appropriated in this text.

to all who live in it, united in our diversity." The languages of the first migration, the Khoi-San were excluded.

The following sections explore many and varied contradictions flowing from this fundamental contradiction.

### 6.3 First language demography

The discussion below limits itself to eleven officially recognised languages of South Africa: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu (*Constitution*, 1996:s. 6).

First languages (L1s) in South Africa are by and large geographically clustered, coinciding loosely with the nine provinces of South Africa (Figure 6-1a). English is nationally the fourth largest language: it is distributed through the country and clustered around the large metropolitan areas. According to data from Census 2011, the national proportional representation of L1s is depicted in Figure 6-1b. Zulu speakers represent 22.78% of the population of South Africa, Xhosa 15.98%, Afrikaans 13.45%, English 9.6%, Pedi, 9.08%, Tswana 7.95%, Sotho 7.56%, Tsonga 4.46%, Swati 2.54%, Venda 2.37%, Ndebele 2.14% and Other 2.08% (Statistics South Africa, 2012:23). No single language dominates proportional national representation.

The situation at provincial level is slightly different regarding proportional L1 representation (Figure 6-1c[11]). Gauteng, and to a lesser degree Mpumalanga, follow the national trend of no dominant language. The other provinces are dominated by regional L1s: Eastern Cape 78.8% Xhosa; KwaZulu-Natal 77.8% Zulu; Free State 64.2% Sotho; North West 63.4% Tswana; Northern Cape 58% Afrikaans; Limpopo 52.9% Pedi; and Western Cape 49.7% Afrikaans (Statistics South Africa, 2012:23).

The relation between language use and race[12]offers some understanding of the legacy of previous injustices. Figure 6-1d presents the racial distribution amongst various language groups. L1 racial

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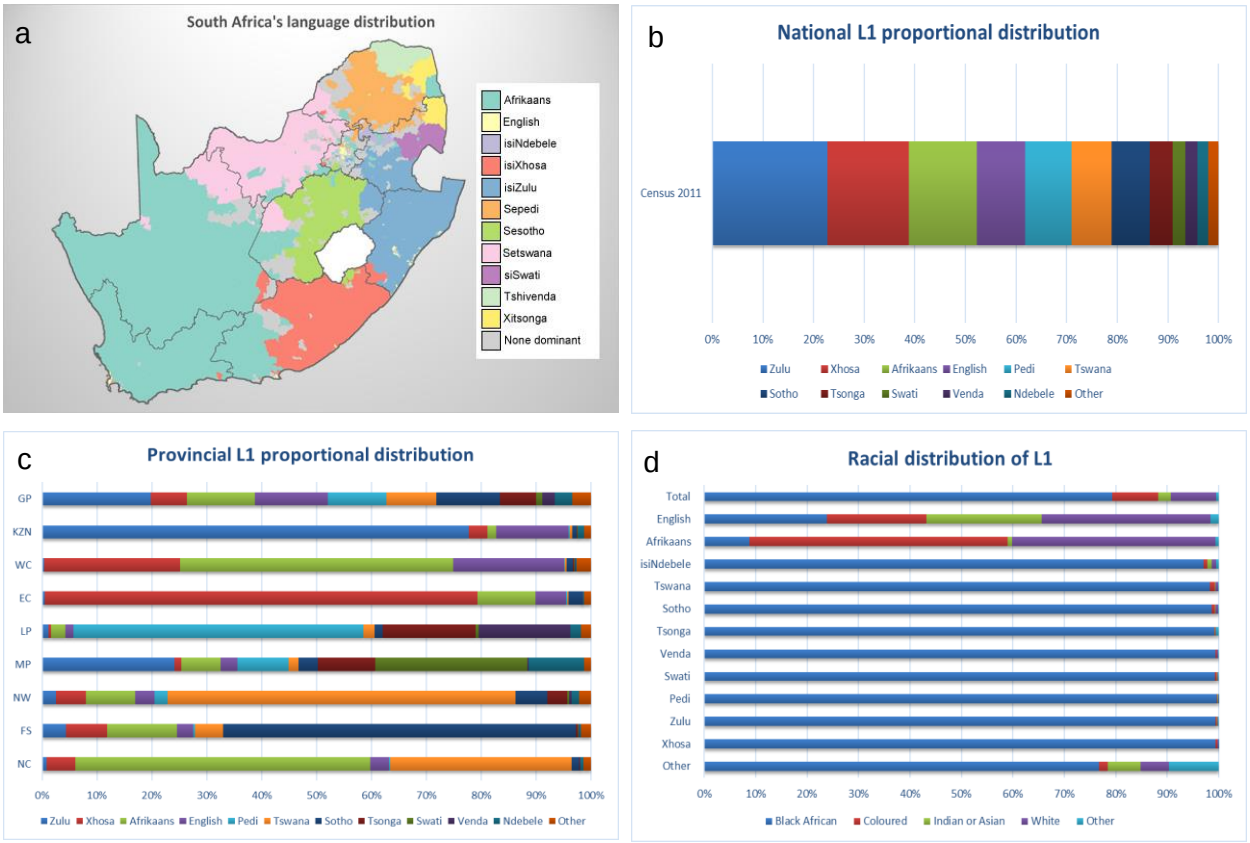
11 Abbreviation of province names in Figure 6-1c: GP Gauteng, KZN KwaZulu-Natal, WC Western Cape, EC Eastern Cape, LP Limpopo, MP Mpumalanga, NW North-West, FS Free State, NC Northern Cape.

12 Apartheid enforced the stationary categorisation of people through terms such as "White", "Black", "Coloured", "Indian", and "Non-White". This categorisation of people seems to live on in the psyche of South Africans, even after the abolishment of its legal framework with the adoption of *Constitution* (1996). Where other authors are quoted in this text, their use of these terms will be honoured. Here, however, these terms are used with reservation. Class names are deconstructed by uncapping the names and where possible adding the noun "people" to humanise any reference to race. I am cognisant of harm and damage these terms have done and continue to do through persistent generalisation and stereotyping. I do, however, also recognise that it would be impossible to talk about the past and transform society without using these burdened terms. Let us be gracious in our discourses.

distribution among Germanic-West speakers exhibits variety, while Sintu languages are almost exclusively spoken by black people. This phenomenon might be ascribed to the historic hegemony of Germanic-West languages. The majority of Afrikaans L1 speakers are coloured people (50.2%), followed by white (39.5%), black (8.9%), and Asian (0.8%) people (Statistics South Africa, 2012:26). Afrikaans is sometimes regarded as a symbol of racism, oppression, and exclusion for being "the language most closely associated with the formalisation and execution of apartheid" (Afriforum v UFS, 2017:ss. 89ff.), 60.5% Afrikaans L1 speakers are not, however, white people.




(a) Brand South Africa (2007), see also Sengupta *et al.* (2021:3);
(b-d) Statistics South Africa (2012:23)

**Figure 6-1: L1 demographic data**

Recently unofficial languages such as Khoi, Nama, and San gained traction when these languages were specifically mentioned alongside the historically marginalised official languages in the national *Language policy framework for public higher education institutions* (DHET, 2020:s. 25) as languages to be developed.

From a leadership perspective on complex social problems, language demographic data illustrate competition between languages for language of instruction at public HEIs. At face value, there is a need to provide higher education at least in the dominant language of that region. On the other hand, many of these languages are not sufficiently developed to be adopted at public HEIs as academic languages. Afrikaans and English can. One of the greatest contradictions emerges: can higher education be offered in one of the existing academic languages or can local indigenous languages be developed as academic languages? As the following subsections illustrate, this contradiction is fed by numerous other contradictions.

If there are diverse L1s in South Africa, with no clear dominant language L1, how do South Africans communicate and relate? The next section explores this question by discussing multilingualism.

### 6.4 Multilingualism in South Africa

Multilingual education and training form one option for public HEIs in their language policies, mirroring how South Africans generally communicate with one another and build social cohesion. Heugh (2009:104) observes: "dynamic multilingualism[13], rather than a static monolingual variety, is the African *lingua franca".* Regional studies conducted at different times, places and with different target groups, support the statement by Heugh. The following three examples illustrate the presence of multilingualism in South Africa.

- Broeder *et al.* (2002:44-45) found that 51%, 37% and 13%[14] of primary school children in the Durban metropole report to speak one, two, or multiple languages respectively at home. It is a remarkable finding that almost half of children in this demographic are multilingual at home.

- Coetzee-Van Rooy (2012:94-97) commented on multilingualism of the 2010 cohort of black first-year students at a public HEI campus in the Vaal Triangle. Data illustrate that: 99% of Sotho home language students (n=347) reported to speak up to 2 languages; 87% up to 3 languages; 58% up to 4 languages, and 36% up to 5 languages. The language family effect in multilingualism can play a role in this multilingualism.

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[13] A multilingual (including a bilingual) is "a person who… is able to comprehend or produce two or more languages in oral, manual, or written form regardless of the level of proficiency or use and the age at which the languages were learned" (Grech & McLeod, 2012:121).

[14] Percentages quoted as presented, although they do not add up to 100%. This might be due to adding rounded numbers.

**Table 6-1 Multilingualism amongst students**

| Completed survey in | Number of respondents | Average number of languages spoken at home | Average number of additional languages spoken per student |
|---|---|---|---|
| Afrikaans | 6681 | 1.09 | 1.19 |
| English | 11864 | 1.26 | 1.81 |
| Sotho | 170 | 1.05 | 0.94 |
| Tswana | 207 | 1.20 | 0.95 |
| Total | 18922 | 1.20 | 1.58 |

Calculated from NWU (2018b)

**Table 6-2 Desire of students to learn another language**

| Survey completed in | Would like to learn to speak more languages? | If you would like to learn to speak more languages, which languages? | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Afrikaans | 65% | 19% | Tswana |
| | | 13% | Sotho |
| | | 8% | English |
| English | 86% | 15% | Afrikaans |
| | | 12% | Zulu |
| | | 10% | Xhosa |
| Sotho | 88% | 17% | Afrikaans |
| | | 11% | English |
| | | 10% | Zulu, Venda |
| Tswana | 91% | 15% | Zulu |
| | | 12% | Afrikaans, Xhosa, Venda |
| | | 10% | English |

(NWU, 2018b)

- A language survey with 18922 respondents at an inland public HEI (NWU, 2018b) returned a number of key findings among undergraduate and Honours students. For example, students speak an average of 1.2 languages at home and 1.58 additional languages to the language mostly spoken at home (Table 6-1). In addition, most of the students desire to learn another

language. Those students who completed the survey in Afrikaans had the least number (by some 21 points) of students desiring to learn another language. 65% of these Afrikaans-speaking students affirmed that they would like to learn another language (Table 6-2).

These statistics of selected regional instances of multilingualism illustrate degrees of multilingualism among South Africans. In some instances, the level of multilingualism with confidence is significant.

The presence of multilingualism adds a third element to the contradiction commented on in 6.3 above: can higher education be offered in one of the existing academic languages or can local indigenous languages be developed as academic language, or could translanguaging be introduced as pedagogy?

### 6.5 The science of language of instruction in multilingual settings

The preceding discussion (6.2 - 6.4) illustrated how peoples of different regions and backgrounds converged in South Africa. They brought with them different languages and forged a new language. These languages are carriers of a variety of cultures and epistemologies. Eleven of these languages are recognised as official languages. They are mainly regionally clustered but English is more dispersed through South Africa and has a greater density around the metropoles. A significant degree of multilingualism exists among South Africans. Low levels of language proficiency persist.

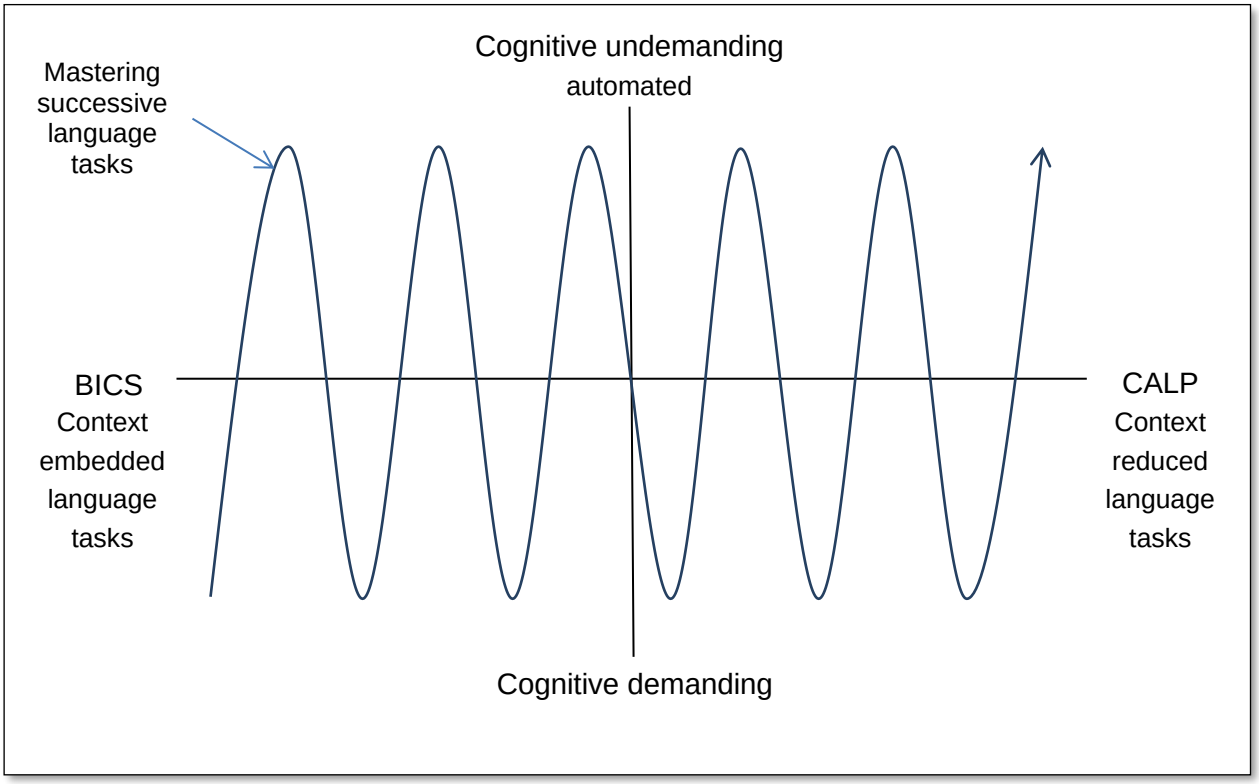
How can a country of such language diversity educate her citizens? “The science is clear” states Heugh (2019) on education and language of instruction in societies with multiple L1s. The work of Cummins (1979, 2000, 2008, 2014, 2016, 1999), and especially *The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students* (1984), serves as *locus classicus* on the subject of language of instruction for minority language groups. After decades of further research, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) validated the framework of Cummins. UNESCO’s findings culminated in a report by Ouane and Glanz (2010) which recommends late exit or additive multilingual education strategies for multi-lingual Africa. The following paragraphs explain recommended scientific LoLT strategies for multilingual societies, referring to Cummins and UNESCO as the bookends of research.

Cummins (1984) researched aspects of language of instruction where a L1 minority had to study in an environment where the language of instruction was the L1 of the majority of students. He conceptually divided language proficiency into two distinct dimensions: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), referring “to conversational fluency in a language” and

cognitive/academic language skills (CALP), referring “to students’ ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (Cummins, 2008:71).

Cummins (1984:11-14; 2008:74) presents a theoretical framework for the development of language proficiency by way of a matrix (Figure 6-1):

- On the horizontal axis BICS is associated with communication events that are embedded in contexts. Examples of context in context-embedded events are voice intonation, gestures, facial expressions and other contextual clues assisting in conversation fluency. CALP is associated with context-reduced activities where little or no contextual clues other than language itself assist in conveying meaning. In CALP language use must be precise and able to convey meaning by its own. There is no clear distinction between context-embedded (BICS) and context-reduced (CALP) events. These events exist on a continuum where context would be increasingly present or absent towards the extremes. This continuum is presented on the horizontal axis of a matrix.




(Adapted from Cummins, 1984:12)

**Figure 6-2 Cummins’s development of language proficiency**

- The vertical axis of the matrix is represented by the amount of conscious cognition that a person employs to enable a language event. When a language is learnt, each language task at first must be consciously and cognitively engaged. As that task is mastered, it becomes automized. Once a task is automized, space in cognition is freed to engage consciously with the next, more context-reduced, language task.

- Development of language proficiency, growing from BICS to CALP, is then presented in the matrix by automizing (moving up along the vertical axis) progressively more context-reduced (moving along the horizontal axis) language tasks.

Cummins (1984) highlights pedagogical principles when learning a language:

- BICS is acquired through interpersonal involvement, CALP is learnt in formal school settings (1984:11).

- Language skills, developed in context-embedded tasks, enable mastering of context-reduced tasks. It is as if context-embedded skills form the lower foundation on which context-reduced skills can build. If the former bricks are not laid, the latter has no foundation to keep it in position (1984:14).

- A common underlying proficiency (CUP) functions independently of any language. In the process of mastering L1 (to continue the metaphor) each brick laid assists in constructing the independent CUP. And the process of learning L2 uses this same CUP, thereby speeding up the mastering of L2 (1984:23-25).

- Children take approximately 2 years to master L2 BICS, and 5-7 years to master L2 CALP. Adults generally master L2 BICS and CALP faster because an established CUP is present (1984:16).

- Once a certain threshold in L1 proficiency is reached (or CUP is sufficiently constructed through L1 learning), mastering L2 has cognitive advantages. There are, however, disadvantages and cognitive deficits in teaching L2 in a way that subtracts L1 from the learner's repertoire before CUP is sufficiently developed (1984:39).

- Negative attitudes towards one's own identity or L1, or towards L2 and the identity L2 represents, impacts negatively on the motivation to learn L1 and/or L2. Validation of L1 and the self has a significant impact on building a strong CUP, enabling faster mastering of L2 (1984:34; 2009:26-29).

The context of South Africa today is somewhat different from the context within which Cummins formulated his framework. Cummins studied communities where a minority of L1 students had to learn in a majority L1 setting. In South Africa today there is no majority language. While only 9% of South Africans report English as their L1, English dominates as *lingua franca.* This is illustrated by the fact that English is the reported L2 of choice of every other language group (§ 6.6 below) and recognised as such by the *Language policy framework for public higher education institutions* (DHET, 2020:s. 29). From the perspective of hegemony then, every other language group in South Africa is a minority language, and every student other than L1 English speakers is a language minority student. In this sense, the principles of Cummins's theories fit the South African context well.

To apply Cummins's theoretical framework to the context of South Africa, schooling should start with L1 as language of instruction, to solidify BICS, begin developing CALP, simultaneously building up CUP, while affirming positive attitudes towards the self and L1. L2 BICS is gradually added during primary school and L1 remains the primary language of instruction. In South Africa: if L1 of a pupil is English, L2 comes from one of the other official languages; if L1 is a language other than English, English becomes L2. When children enter secondary school at Grade 8, by then L1 CALP and L2 BICS are settled, and CUP is significantly present. An additive dual medium or additive functional multilingual L1-L2 education can be pursued. During these years, CALP in both L1 and L2 are developed, and a strong CUP is constructed. At tertiary level, it might on balance be beneficial for English to be the anchor language of instruction and research. To reap the full promise of multilingualism, of cognitive development, validating the other languages as motivation to learn, developing the other languages as protection against a language shift, and social cohesion, an additive multilingual use of language should still be pursued.

The UNESCO researched language policy in Africa and elsewhere for almost seven decades. Their research validated .the framework of Cummins and culminated in a report by Ouane and Glanz (2010). This UNESCO report advises that schooling commence with 6-8 years L1 teaching with added instruction in a second language of education (L2). After these first years of L1 schooling, L1 has developed in communicative and cognitive proficiency to such an extent that L1 becomes a scaffold for late exit or additive multilingual education. According to Ouane and Glanz, this approach results in optimal learning, validation of psychological and social dignity in diversity, and social cohesion (2010:10). These principles have been echoed and explored in depth by numerous scholars, amongst whom are Heugh (2000), Alexander (2003) and Benson (2009). Late exit or additive multilingual education is UNESCO's recommended language strategy for education in multi-lingual Africa.

There are signs that late exit or additive multilingual education are changing into a more dynamic simultaneous biliteracy (Kotzé, 2014:23), what García *et al.* (2006:26) terms "dynamic and fluid plurilingualism". The strict separation between languages falls away and a functional movement between languages, by means of translanguaging, comes to the fore. This is not an overturning of UNESCO's recommendations. It is taking those recommendations to a next logical level, taking a step further away for monolingual education in the dominant language. This scientific best practice for language of learning and instruction stands in contradiction to other subsystems. What if the foundational development of language proficiency has not occurred by the time students enrol? public HEIs inherit students educated by systems out of their sphere of control. If the school system deliver students academically proficient in L1 and L2 English, it is imperative that some form of validation of the different indigenous language populations occurs through translanguaging and multilingual pedagogies. The scientific recommendation for LoLT competes with the idea that English alone provides an avenue to power and wealth, or that public HEIs should be sanitised of Afrikaans for its association with the exclusion and racism of Apartheid. The science behind language of learning and teaching defines one more subsystem competing with many others for recognition in the problem of language at public HEIs.

The next section discusses how these scientific best practices for LoLT found its way into the constitutional dispensation of South Africa.

### 6.6 Constitutional framework for languages in higher education

UNESCO's recommendation (§ 6.5) of late exit or additive multilingual education expresses best scientific principles of language in education in multilingual societies and adheres to the philosophy of the United Nations (UN). After the devastation of two world wars in the first half of the 20th century, the United Nations was founded in 1945. It became a forum where nations could engage on matters affecting development as well as conflict, with a view to foster the dignity of persons and nations through equal human rights (Engle, 2006; United Nations, 1945:219-225). Fundamentally, language diversity is rooted in the *Universal declaration of human rights* (United Nations, 1948). Article 2[15] lists language as one of the aspects by which there may not be discrimination between people when considering their human rights. Article 27[16] declares free participation in cultural life, including language, as a human right. UNESCO elaborated on Article

[15] *Universal declaration of human rights* (1948:art. 2): "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

[16] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948:art. 27(1)): "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."

27 through the *Universal declaration on cultural diversity* (UNESCO, 2001), especially through Article 5[17] and Annex II para. 5-7[18]. With regard to language, the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) follows the principles set out by the UN.

The *Constitution* (1996) strives to heal the marginalisation, exclusion, inequality, injustices, and suffering, especially with regard to language (*Afriforum v UP*, 2016:ss. 1-6; DHET, 2020:ss. 1-2), Apartheid brought upon the country, and reach for a future where "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity" (*Constitution*, 1996). Significantly, from a language perspective, the closing statement of the Preamble is repeated in 6 languages.

The *Constitution* (1996) entrenches language as a particularly important aspect of South African life by positioning language in Chapters 1 ("Founding provisions") and 2 (Bill of Rights). In Chapter 1, the *Constitution* (1996:s. 6) affirms Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu as official languages of South Africa (s. 6(1)). The state bears the obligation to advance indigenous languages (s. 6(2)), prescribe the use (s. 6(3)), and regulation and monitoring all languages for parity of esteem and equal treatment (s. 6(4)) of language by government at all levels. A Pan South African Language Board (Pan SALB) was established to "promote, and create conditions for, the development and use" of official and other prominent languages, and "promote and ensure respect" for less common languages spoken by communities in South Africa (s. 6(5)).

The Bill of Rights, Chapter 2 of the *Constitution* (1996), is presented as "a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa" (s. 7). The Bill of Rights refers to language in five subsections. Under equality, language is listed as a ground on which the State may not discriminate against anyone (s. 9(3)), even during a state of emergency (s. 37). Regarding language and culture, citizens may use the language of their choice and participate in their own cultural life (s. 30). Cultural, religious,

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17 *Universal declaration on cultural diversity,* (UNESCO, 2001:art. 5): "Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent… All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.".

18 *Universal declaration on cultural diversity* (2001:Anex II para. 5-7): "5. Safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages. 6. Encouraging linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age. 7. Promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.".

and linguistic communities may associate freely (s. 31). Persons arrested, detained, and accused have the right to understand proceedings (s. 35).

The fifth subsection of the Bill of Rights, on education, is especially relevant to this study. The *Constitution* (1996:s. 26(2))[19] determines that, in public educational institutions, everyone may receive education in the official language of their choice. The state must consider all reasonable alternatives to ensure access to educational institutions by facilitating education in the language of the learner's choice.

In summary: The *Constitution* (1996) follows the *Universal declaration of human rights* (United Nations, 1948) on language and its explication by UNESCO closely in gravity and content. It is prohibited to discriminate on the ground of language. Everybody has the right to practise and assimilate with others around the language of their choice. An entity, the Pan South African Language Board, was established to protect and advance indigenous languages, and the state has a duty to develop disadvantaged languages and establish parity of esteem between languages, also at public HEIs. These principles materialised by and large in national language policies for higher education.

The *Constitution* (1996) balanced the science behind language of learning and instruction against the demands of social transformation towards social cohesion, dignity, equality, and access to public HEIs. The caveat in Section 26(2), however, was tested at the Constitutional Court (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019; *UNISA v Afriforum*, 2021) when contradictions emerged between the right to receive education in the language of choice, equity, practicability (also affordability), and the need to redress the fallout of the racially discriminatory past. Language of instruction and learning at public HEIs proved to be a complex social, legal, cultural, economic, educational, and political problem.

The great constitutional vision met several challenges: language proficiency of students (§ 6.7), hegemony of English (§ 6.8), development of indigenous languages for academic use (§ 6.9), alienation of Afrikaans (§ 6.10), and possible psycho-socio trauma informing language politics (§ 6.11). These challenges are discussed in the following sections.

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[19] *Constitution* (1996:s. 26(2)): "Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account – (a) equity; (b) practicability; and (c) the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices."

## 6.7 Language proficiency

The language proficiency of students in language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is a first challenge in realising the constitutional vision (§ 6.6). Proficiency is a level of language competency enabling functional use in the intended context (Peyper, 2014:31). These "contexts" can be ordered on a continuum of complexity of language use. One way to describe a continuum of complexity of language use is to apply a distinction made by Cummins (1984:11-12; 2008) between context embedded and context reduced communicative activities. For him, context embedded communication activities correspond with basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). BICS are defined as "conversational fluency in a language". Context reduced conversation activities correspond with cognitive/academic language skills (CALP) which he describes as "students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (2008:71). In 6.5 above, where the science of LoLT is discussed, the contribution of Cummins to learning, multilingualism, and proficiency is explored in greater depth. Here, the point is made that CALP is needed for student success at public HEIs.

Two studies[20] are referred to below to gain an indication of academic language proficiency for higher education. The first study is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the second study is the National Benchmark Test (NBT). Although PIRLS focuses on reading literacy of Grade 4 learners, the data are still relevant to the language proficiency of higher education students: (i) reading proficiency is a basic building block of academic proficiency; (ii) language proficiency is developed over years. When a foundation is not laid during early school years, it becomes more difficult to build a solid foundation and walls of proficiency to carry the roof of academic literacy (§ 6.5 above). A third reason (iii) could confirm the first two statements. The target group of learners who participated in PIRLS 2011 took part in the NBT 2019.

The PIRLS 2011 and 2016, which is administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA, 2020), tests reading ability as an integral part of CALP, of Grade 4 learners from 50 participating countries. As language proficiency is developed over time, the foundation laid in early years of education indicates proficiency in later years. PIRLS measures reading literacy of Grade 4 students on a scale of 0 to 1000, with 500 as centre point.

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[20] Posel and Zeller (2011:116) lamented that there seemed to be no studies on a national scale in South Africa on language proficiency of multilinguals. In an effort to provide some indication on proficiency, they used data from the *National Income Dynamics Study* (NIDS) 2008. However, the NIDS used self-assessed proficiency data, and there is doubt whether self-assessment serves as an objective measure in proficiency (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2011; Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef, 2000).

South Africa scored an average of 320 for PIRLS 2016, well below the centre point, and testing last amongst the 50 participating countries. In PIRLS 2016, 95% of South African participants achieved a score of less than 500. To put South Africa's poor performance in perspective, while the international average in 2016 for all 50 countries is 47% of students achieved high or advanced proficiency, only 3.5% of South African students achieved these levels of proficiency. There are differences in proficiency between those taking the tests in Germanic-West and Sintu languages, and between different regions in South Africa (Howie *et al.*, 2017:12; Mullis *et al.*, 2017:20).

While PIRLS does not aim to test proficiency among multilinguals, PIRLS presents primary data concerning English amongst non-native speakers. The mean scores of South African learners writing the test in their L1 (315) were slightly lower than those writing the test in a language other than their L1 (333). Many of these students writing PIRLS in a language other than their L1 have written in English, as 78% of learners writing the test in English, had another language as L1. English scored the highest mean (372) of all the languages (Howie *et al.*, 2017:3-4). Those who wrote PIRLS in English when English was not their L1, displayed unexpectedly high levels of language proficiency.

Taking the PIRLS 2011 data on review, Gustafsson (2020:19-20) convinced the IAE to adjust down the interpretation of South Africa's 2011 data. Efforts to enhance proficiency between 2011 and 2016 were validated. What happens in primary school is essential to the development of CALP and to attain success at public HEIs (§6.5 above). The National Benchmark Test (NBT) has been commissioned by South African public HEIs to assess *inter alia* entry level academic literacy of candidates. Data from these tests are not internationally benchmarked as is the case in PIRLS and do not provide specific information about multilingual proficiency. These data, however, provide clarity on the proficiency of candidate students.[21]

Data from NBT 2018 and 2019 (Prince *et al.*, 2019; Prince *et al.*, 2018) confirm a deficit in language proficiency for higher education purposes foreseen in the discussion of PIRLS above. Afrikaans and English are functional as academic languages so that the tests are written in these two languages. More than two thirds of the candidates who wrote the tests in English were not English L1 speakers, bearing further testimony to the hegemony of English at public HEIs in South Africa.

[21] It should be considered though, that some HEIs exempt applicants with high Grade 12 marks from NBT testing. The upper end of the intake cohort might therefore not be represented in NBT and skew the results to a lower mean.

Turning to levels in academic literacy, the results indicate a continuance of the trend established by PIRLS, discussed above. Students performing at the upper intermediate level of academic literacy, need additional language support programmes. The recommendation is that students performing at the lower intermediate level should be placed on an extended programme (Prince *et al.*, 2019:18). Those who aspire to attend a public HEI, and therefore write the NBT, are candidates at a higher end of language proficiency. 38% of those writing NBT in Afrikaans, and 22% of those writing in English 22% achieved proficiency levels in academic literacy (2019:35). This data set indicates that public HEIs need substantial investment in programmes to assist students to develop their proficiency in language.

Snow and Uccelli (2009:119-124) collated a list of standards for CALP at public HEIs as nested challenges; organising discourse nested in representing the message nested in representing the self and representing the audience. Taking cognisance of this list, Weideman and Patterson (2013:141-143) constructed a list of 16 abilities describing CALP for higher education from three language batteries[22] and adding critical thinking for special attention.

To complicate the aspect of proficiency even more, it is a stated aim of the Language policy framework for public higher education institutions to develop Sintu languages to the level of academic proficiency (DHET, 2020:s. 25). In conclusion, public HEIs in South Africa face a monumental language challenge. Even if every student could study in his or her L1, the academic language proficiency of many students would still be a major obstacle to success. As it stands, most students must study in a language other than their L1. For these students, it would be hard to acquire the desired academic language proficiency without L1 CALP to scaffold language development in the language of instruction.

From the leadership perspective of social problems, language proficiency adds another competing element to the niche outcomes of public HEIs. Data from PIRLS and NBT suggest that public HEIs have to engage in fostering advanced academic literacy as all public HEIs do, but they become centres where work that the primary and secondary education structures should have done, is repeated. This additional demand stands in contradiction to the niche purpose of the public HEIs. The language proficiency of students needs interventions and some official languages have still to be developed as academic languages. The next section discusses this developmental task.

[22] Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL), Teaching and Academic Growth (TAG) and Total Army Language Program (TALP)

## 6.8 English as lingua franca

In the previous sections it has been demonstrated that most South Africans, consisting of speakers of multiple L1s (§ 6.3), generally communicate and relate multilingually (§ 6.4), and what scientifically the best practices are for LoLT in multilingual societies (§ 6.5). The constitutional expectation is that LoLT mirrors the parity of esteem of languages (§ 6.6). This section explores how English is expanding its presence as the one common language everyone uses to communicate. English, which 9.6% of the population indicated in 2011 to speak as their L1 (§ 6.3), has recently been recognised as the *de facto* LoLT at public HEIs (DHET, 2020:s. 29).

While multilingualism exists amongst South Africans, English has strengthened its position as the language of choice for communication out of home, and especially in the areas of government, business, and education. English is seen as an avenue to power, employment, and economic upliftment (Mohohlwane, 2020:42-43).Posel and Zeller (2016:364), working with a 10% sample of data from Censuses 1996 and 2011, confirm a significant rise in the use of main second languages (L2 I and II) from 1996 to 2011 amongst black people of all L1 groups. Data show that, although from a low base, the percentage of black people reporting English to be their L1 rose 8.57 times from 0.35% in 1996 to 2.89% in 2011. A similar exponential rise, now from a slightly higher base, occurred with the use of English as first and second L2. The percentage of black people reporting English to be their L2 I rose 8.27 times from 3.3% in 1996 to 27.3% in 2011. The percentage of black people claiming English to be their L2 II rose 2.61 times from 1.8% in 1996 to 4.7% in 2011. While 6 of the 9 Sintu language groups states that another Sintu language to be their L2 I in 1996, every Sintu language group reported in 2011 English was their L2 I of choice.

Another indication of the rise in the use of English in South Africa is offered by the General Household Survey (GHS) of 2018. Where Posel and Zeller (2016) focussed on language spoken by black people, the GHS presents data for all population groups. GHS 2018 data (Statistics South Africa, 2019:8-9) affirms the prevalence of English as L2 amongst all South Africans. English is the second biggest language spoken outside the home (16.6%) although it is the fourth biggest language spoken in the home (8.1%). This 105% increase in the use of English out of the home over the use of English in the home breaks down to a 438% increase amongst black people, 41% amongst coloured people, and 68% amongst white people. If the difference between in and out of home use of a language is taken as an indicator of the strength that language has in multilingual settings, English alone has a positive value.

The growing trend to regard English as the language of access to public HEIs has increasingly been institutionalised in public HEIs (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019; *UNISA v*

*Afriforum*, 2021). The most recent national language policy framework for public HEIs recognises "the *de facto* status of English as the language of learning and teaching across South African higher education institutions" but calls on public HEIs to continue to have a "flexible approach in the implementation of English as the language of learning and teaching" (DHET, 2020:s. 29). Balfour (2019) concludes publicly that "English monolingualism gains the upper hand" at public HEIs (cf. Bangeni & Kapp, 2007; Dalvit & De Klerk, 2005).

While data indicate that English is establishing itself as the *lingua franca,* in the country in general and specifically at public HEIs, this does not necessarily imply that there is a L1 shift to English overall in society. Language groups still find their identity in their native languages while using English as L2 to gain access to government, business, and education (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014:122; Deumert, 2010:15; Mufwene, 2005; Posel & Zeller, 2016:367-368; Posel *et al.*, 2020:12ff.).

The global dominance of English,[23] however, via the internet, media and social media exerts increasing pressure on other languages. At the time of this writing, 2926 of 7117 living languages in the world are deemed to be endangered (Eberhard *et al.*, 2020). There is a trend to marginalise, impoverish, and neglect languages of marginalised peoples in the face of expanding English (Mohanty, 2009:4-5). Skutnabb-Kangas (2009:58-60) reminds intellectuals of their duty of care towards marginalised languages. Future generations will judge them harshly on their silence and inaction in the face of the current global extinction of marginalised languages. In South Africa Kamwangamalu (2003:237) likened English almost two decades ago to the alien mynah bird aggressively displacing indigenous bird life. Berg *et al.* (2001:306) argue that the occupation by English of "elite domains" such as education, business, and government shapes a climate for language shift. With the benefit of hindsight, Dorian (1981:70) warned: while a language shift could occur relatively fast, within a generation or two, the climate creating "the forces and attitudes which led to the tip had long been felt".

The spontaneous growth of English as *lingua franca* challenges leadership to preserve indigenous languages by using these languages at public HEIs and uplifting them to academic languages. The use and development of indigenous languages demand considerable input in time, effort, and leadership from public HEIs. This additional task competes with numerous other

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[23] The expansion of World Englishes has been well documented (cf. Fenyő, 2003:56; Kachru, 1992:356). Phillipson (2009:85-87,89-92) recounts how Mahatma Gandhi felt England enslaved India through colonising language. To put in perspective the expansion of English as the dominant language of the European Union (EU) official communication – in spite of the multilingual policies of the EU. Such is the forceful presence of English that it is speculated Brexit might yield the benefit of a "European English" (Modiano, 2017:321-324).

demands in the niche of higher education. For public HEIs, the social responsibility of uplifting Sintu languages is pitted against their mission to strife towards academic excellence.

### 6.9 Development of the Sintu languages as academic languages

The *Language policy framework for public higher education institutions* (DHET, 2020:s. 3) emphasises the need to develop and strengthen indigenous languages to function as sources of knowledge and participate in meaningful academic discourse. At stake are both the academic competency of a language and the motivation of public HEIs and students to use their own languages as academic discourse. The disposition that Sintu languages represent (Hibbert, 2016:144), has to find a home in higher education. To realise this goal, three drives seem necessary.

First, a language can function as an academic language at public HEIs when it possesses general and content-specific vocabulary, enables complex grammatical structures, and facilitates multiple language functions and discourses (Snow & Uccelli, 2009:113). Since Sintu languages have not functioned before 1996 as academic languages, their vocabulary and structure need development (DoE, 2002:s. 15.2).There are projects evolving at some public HEIs working towards the development of indigenous languages. The South African Centre for Digital Language Resource (SADiLaR, 2021) supports research and development of language and language technologies for the eleven official languages of South Africa. In collaboration with units at some public HEIs (UNISA, UFS, US and NWU) and with other entities, a collection of 238 resources is catalogued at the date that their web page was accessed. These resources are speech and text based. Amongst the resources are separate African speech technology text corpuses for Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, and Zulu. Spellcheck functions are offered for Afrikaans, Ndebele, Sotho, Swati, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu. Projects under way include an African wordnet and linguistic terminology, development of a multi-level, multi-genre learner corpus for academic writing, digitising language resources, mobile dictionaries, and developing parallel data sets between two languages. public HEIs employing these resources, aim to provide students greater access to Sintu languages (cf. NWU, 2021).

Recently, BAQONDE was launched. This is an internationally funded and collaborative project “to facilitate and promote the use of indigenous African languages as medium of instruction at HE institutions in the South African context” (BAQONDE, 2021). Multilingual teaching methodologies and resources for training in multilingual pedagogies provide an overarching structure for linguistically inclusive access to public HEIs. Three international, and four South African, universities partner in this project.

Second, pedagogies for multilingual settings need to be developed and refined. Efforts should be made to “move away from endless policy discussions to cutting-edge experimentation at the interface of social and linguistic realities proposed” (Hibbert & Van der Walt, 2014b:7). Examples of such experimentations are concept literacy at the University of Cape Town (UCT) through multilingual glossaries (Mabida, 2014). A positive attitude towards a language fosters learning in that language, and such positive attitudes can be fostered by using the L1 more than L2 in educational settings (Hibbert & Foncha, 2019; Ngcobo, 2014). When lecturers view multilingualism as a resource, their language practices are more inclined to include: code-switching and the appreciation of indigenous languages as language of instruction (Mashiyi, 2014); and theorising the introduction of multilingual pedagogies through a process raising awareness of multilingualism, introducing code-switching, using interpreters and assessing in more than one language (Hibbert & Van der Walt, 2014a:211-215).

Third, a movement that stimulates the use of Sintu languages as academic languages has to be stimulated (Alberts, 2016:324-331).The *Report on the use of African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education* (DHET, 2015:19) summarises Giliomee on the main strategies that resulted in the upliftment of Afrikaans to the status of an academic language. These practices provide insight into how to approach the development of indigenous Sintu languages. Of the six actions mentioned in the upliftment of Afrikaans, five had to do with mobilising the use of Afrikaans, and one focused on the technicalities of language itself. To develop Sintu languages has to incorporate installing a sense of being African while transcending “race, colour, gender or historical origins” (Thabo Mbeki as quoted by Hibbert, 2016:91)

The need for development of Sintu languages as academic languages contributes to the complexity of languages at public HEIs. public HEIs are appointed as the main actors in uplifting Sintu languages. The full weight of this assignment, however, is not always balanced by funding, human resources, leadership, motivation, and mobilisation. The project for uplifting Sintu languages cries out for leadership yet this long-term demand competes with all the pressing domain specific leadership tasks at public HEIs.

### 6.10 Creole but exclusive Afrikaans

In three instances, the Constitutional Court adjudicated on balancing the right to receive higher education in Afrikaans versus equal access for all and cost of sustaining multiple LoLTs at public HEIs (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017; *Gelyke Kanse v SU*, 2019; *UNISA v Afriforum*, 2021). The first two rulings diminished the right to receive higher education in Afrikaans in favour of ensuring access to all and reducing costs for public HEIs, and in offering English as the sole LoLT. In the third

case, however, Afrikaans was retained for technical reasons and ruled that it is not a precondition for developing Sintu languages that Afrikaans should be diminished.

By 1700 slaves formed the majority of the inhabitants, and their inter-language became the language of the Cape (Carstens & Raidt, 2019:43ff.). Afrikaans survived anglicization and replaced Dutch as an official language next to English in 1925. It became a language of academic learning and retained its status as an equal language in 1996. The *Language policy for higher education* (DoE, 2002:s. 15.4) recognised that "Afrikaans as a language of scholarship and science is a national resource". Sachs is quoted in *Afriforum v UFS* (2017s. 133):

*(T)he Afrikaans language is one of the cultural treasures of South African national life, widely spoken and deeply implanted, the vehicle of outstanding literature, the bearer of a rich scientific and legal vocabulary and possibly the most creole or 'rainbow' of all South African tongues.*[24]

Alexander (2009) discerns three dialectical hinges in the story of Afrikaans. The first hinge was forged at the birth of the language. Khan (2019), asserts that the Afrikaans spoken by the slaves was a language of "resistance and survival". Afrikaans was a Dutch dialect forged by non-Dutch speaking people to communicate with their masters and husbands in many cases (Davids & Willemse, 2018:13-27).

At this point, Afrikaans could have become the language that brought diverse people together. Almost everybody in the Cape spoke Afrikaans. After the South African wars between the English and the Afrikaans-speaking Boers at the turn of the 20th century, white Afrikaner nationalism incubated and grew into full blown Apartheid. Afrikaans became a symbol of the rise from the ashes, through standardisation, official status, and Afrikaans universities, by white Afrikaners (Carstens & Raidt, 2019:285ff.). Afrikaans was for a second time unhinged, this time by its success. Through its rise, Afrikaans was associated with racial exclusion to the detriment of others (Giliomee, 2004).

The third hinge, argues Alexander (2009), was the forced use of Afrikaans in segregated black schools. Excluded black children were forced to learn in Afrikaans. No longer was Afrikaans the symbol of exclusion: it became the symbol of oppression. This moment is captured by the Soweto riots on 16 June 1976, when 20000 school children demonstrated in the streets against Afrikaans in schools. The 13 year old Hector Pieterson was the first of 23 people killed that day (Carstens

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[24] "Unless we consider Arabic an African tongue… Afrikaans is the only non-European/non-Asiatic language to have attained full university status and to be used in all branches of life and learning… All other university languages have their main basis in either Europe or Asia… There is a strong likelihood that of the *new* university languages outside Europe (new ones as against old ones such as Japanese, Arabic or Chinese) only Hindi, used by some 250 million speakers, Indonesian by 100 million speakers, and Hebrew match the development of Afrikaans." (Kloss, 1977:10).

& Raidt, 2019:638ff.). In 1995, July 16 was declared national Youth Day; a day on which the youth resisted an oppressive regime when they stood up against Afrikaans. The promise of the creole language forged by slaves, was shattered.

On these three hinges turns the fate of Afrikaans at public HEIs in the judgements by the Constitutional Court referred to above. Froneman writes that diminishing the rights of Afrikaans at UFS by the majority judgement did not bode well for the academic development of indigenous languages (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017:s. 127), and that the future of Afrikaans lies in the younger generation to start a third language movement "for an inclusive Afrikaans" (2017:s. 135).

In the matter of Afrikaans, multiple contradictions surface. The most creole language in South Africa became exclusive. The language of slaves was accepted by their masters yet turned into a tool to oppress. A national treasure was wasted. Afrikaans is now shunned for being associated with racism of white people, yet most Afrikaans speakers are not white. The complexity of Afrikaans as a social problem highlights alienation as a driving force in South African society today.

### 6.11 Psycho-social trauma among South Africans

From a leadership perspective, the "characteristics, capabilities, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour" (Kilburg & Donohue, 2011:15) of all formal and informal stakeholders in an enterprise are the point of departure for mobilising followers to realise a vision (§ 3.2.4). This angle of investigation is not foreign to linguistic studies. Parmegiani and Rudwick (2014:107) state:

*…in order to be successfully implemented: (a) language policies need to be supported by the speakers of those languages, and (b) in order to garner this support, it is crucial to understand how attitudes towards languages are inextricably related to complex processes of identity construction and of negotiation of power relations.*

This section explores how possible psycho-social dynamics inform the language problem at public HEIs.

Following the #mustfall student movement of 2015-2016, Long (2021) explored how unmetabolized psychological trauma continues to play out in social alienation, or in the words of Jaeggi and Jaeggi (2014:1), our "relation of relationlessness". Long (2021:19,32) attempts to "catalogue and examine the monsters of our deep" to illuminate what happens where social structures and individual experiences meet. This project is reminiscent of a project undertaken more than a decade earlier by Jansen (2009) when he ventured into the same troubled waters, investigating the "knowledge in the blood" of white Afrikaner students. The promise in the

introduction of Jansen's book of a similar analysis of knowledge in the blood of other racial groups, has not yet materialised.

Long (2021) structures his analysis around three emotions of alienation: shame, envy, and impasse. These emotions are generalised as trends among different classes and races. The underclass feels deeply ashamed by the indignity of deprivation (2021:39-68). Part of every person's soul "craves recognition of dignity" (Fukuyama, 2018:102). Poverty strips whole communities of a sense of respect and self-worth. Resulting shame acts out in violence against other marginalised groups or/and substance abuse to escape deep despair which in turn feeds more shame. With regard to language, it can be envisioned that these individuals project their shame on their mother tongue and do not want to carry their underdeveloped mother tongue into spheres of higher education. This might be a major reason for the lethargy in developing Sintu languages.

Middle-class black students often bear envy (Long, 2021:69-100). When people escape from the underclass and encounter white people in the middle class, shame can turn into resentment, and resentment is easily harnessed by demagogues with a weak cause (Ciulla, 2020:27). As an example, when children from poor schools enrol at historically white public HEIs and come into contact with middle-class students from good schools, they frequently feel envy for not being as well prepared to achieve success in higher education. The #mustfall movement may have been driven by this sense of envy, trying to decolonise the institution away from the world of the privileged and towards their lived experiences. In the process, however, they risked breaking the precise avenue into living amongst the higher classes. *As by fire: the end of the South African university* (Jansen, 2017) makes this point, calling for the death of the very institution that serves as an access point to the economy. The connection between envy and the #Afrikaansmustfall movement is evident. English, with its colonial past, is retained as an avenue to economic access. It seems another driving force than envy is needed to unlock the project of uplifting marginalised languages.

The alienation of predominantly rich and white classes are driven by what Long (2021:101-132) terms an impasse. Culler (1985:96) frames impasse as "(e)ach perspective shows the error of the other in an irresolvable alternation or aporia". The dilemma the rich class face is that assimilation into South Africa comes at the cost of giving up their privileges, resulting in a "pathological avoidance of human contact" (Long, 2021:116). Through this impasse they retreat into neighbourhoods and shrinking circles of security estates. For this they pay the price of not having a voice or standing in post-apartheid society. Long uses the metaphor of white people caring for dogs that "investigate, interpret and negotiate the world on behalf of uncertain masters…

(however) they cannot shield their owners form life's caprices forever" (2021:113). This metaphor is expressed in how this group engaged in the struggle around Afrikaans: the war was fought in the upper echelons of the courts by paid advocates.

A psychological turn in focus offers hope (Long, 2021:133-184). By focussing on the other and doing to others as you would want them to do to you, the psychological needs of fellow South Africans may be addressed. Creativity, sociality, and autonomy are nurtured. These attributes can turn alienation into social cohesion.

From a leadership perspective of contradictions, the language problem becomes even more complex if the generalisation of psychological trends to social subsystems by Long is considered. Some upper-class subsystems wish to maintain the status quo but middle- and under-class subsystems demand change. Emotions of shame, envy, and impasse compete for different outcomes and strategies. The niche purpose of public HEIs stands in opposition to the psychological needs of different subsystems.

## 6.12 Reflecting on the South African national language policy framework for public HEIs up to 2020

Previously, Tait (2007:179-180) and Nkuna (2010:257) found that public HEIs in South Africa generally failed to implement policy imperatives to uplift indigenous languages to academic languages. Two more recent investigations found the same.

The *Report on the use of African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education* (DHET, 2015:32-33) observes that there is a growing trend at some public HEIs to offer certain courses in Sintu languages, usually those that work with people and where the subject is related to these languages, Some post-graduate research is done in Sintu languages, and there are projects compiling discipline-specific glossaries. There seems, however, to be a vacuum "on who should **lead or drive its implementation**" (emphasis original, 2015:38). The report (2015:39-44) recommends measures to strengthen implementation, collaboration between public HEIs and national education departments, research on developing Sintu languages, funding, and promoting teacher training for teaching in Sintu languages, and translation facilities at public HEIs.

Zikode (2017) focused on Sintu languages as languages of instruction at four public HEI's. While some universities maintain permanent structures addressing the development of Sintu languages and work on compiling terminology lists, much more needs to be done. Zikode (2017:144-148) lists recommendations typical of managerial and leadership tasks. Managerial tasks include institutional collaboration, monitoring and evaluation, permanent structures in universities,

implementation plan, and assistance for indigenous language speakers at public HEI's. Leadership tasks include creating political will, community engagement, language speakers' activism, stakeholder engagement, engagement with non-indigenous language speakers for public HEI's to enhance the academic potency of indigenous languages.

The *Language policy framework for public higher education institutions* (DHET, 2020:ss. 6-9) took note that implementation, enforceable mechanisms, funding, directives on how public HEI's should realise multilingualism, aligning curriculum and language policy, and partnerships between public HEI's did not meaningfully materialise since the previous policy (DoE, 2002). These aspects are addressed in the 2020 policy, with specific emphasis on the development of Sintu languages.

The focus and scope of this study does not allow for an in-depth evaluation of the relative success of the remarkable uniform language policies drawn from the United Nations through the *Constitution* (1996) and culminating in the 2002 national language policy for public HEI's (§ 6.6 above). Nevertheless, some reflection on the success of these policies is necessary.

McConnell (2010:349-357) proposes a framework by which to evaluate the relative success of policies. According to his framework, a policy is divided into three strands: process, programme, and politics, and categorised according to a spectrum of relative success: success, resilient success, conflicted success, precarious success, and failure. Evaluating the relative success of a policy by categorising a policy according to these categories "involves judgement rather than scientific precision" (2010:357).

If the driving values behind the policies discussed above (§ 6.6 above) are distilled into dignity and protection of, and equality between the maximum number of languages as a means to social inclusion, and these values are to be advanced by developing languages, and promoting multilingualism and proficiency, then the language policy framework discussed above has to be categorised in the lower half of the spectrum of relative success, possibly even as low as precarious success. Data show that language proficiency remains well below international benchmarks. Proficiency has, however, shown noticeable improvement from 2011 to 2016 (§ 6.6). The Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education (DHET, 2020:ss. 6-9) reports that, while some public HEI's did make progress, public HEI's in general have failed to develop indigenous languages and install multilingualism as a mode of instruction. The execution of the policies did not contribute meaningfully to the values of dignity and protection of vulnerable languages, and equality between languages. Regarding Afrikaans, the opposite has happened (Afriforum v UFS, 2016; Gelyke Kanse v SU, 2019) as to what was envisaged in the *Language*

*policy for higher education* (DoE, 2002s. 15.4): Afrikaans should be acknowledged as a "language of scholarship and science" to be "a national resource". The net effect of the inertia in developing indigenous languages as academic languages and in protecting and integrating into society the one other language that had academic status, resulted in the *Language policy framework for public higher education institutions* stating as a point of departure that: "Recognising the *de facto* status of English as the language of learning and teaching across South African public higher education institutions…" (DHET, 2020:s. 29). It is predominantly the *programme* strand and to a lesser extent the *politics* strand that must be blamed for the poor level of success attributed to the national language policies in South Africa. The *process* strand remained well aligned with international benchmarks and sentiments.

The contradiction between what is envisaged by policies and what is delivered might be one of the most pressing problems regarding language of instruction at public HEIs. The reasons for this poor delivery are documented in the studies above. Generally, it seems that public HEIs are burdened with the long-term task of solving a complex social problem for which they do not have the political will, capacity, and/or expertise. This task stands in contradiction to the immediate niche demands of a public HEI.

### 6.13 Conclusion

This chapter addresses the research sub-question: Why is language of learning and teaching at public HEIs deemed, from a leadership perspective, a complex problem?

The short answer is because language at public HEIs is a social problem infused with contradictions. Mumford *et al.* (2000:13-14) argue that leadership is "a complex form of *social* problem solving". Three basic underlying contradictions cause the social problems to be complex: stability versus change, competing goals and strategies of different subsystems, and niche performance outcomes versus different needs of stakeholders. Eleven aspects around language at public HEIs have been discussed to illustrate some of the contradictions. The status quo is that English has dominated and does dominate global and South African higher education. Against this *status quo* it was relatively easy to ostracise Afrikaans and it proves difficult to uplift the Sintu languages.

Numerous subsystems compete for different strategies and outcomes: Eleven languages each have their own demands. Best scientific practices in language of instruction compete with psychological and social sentiments, required proficiency by public HEIs competes with proficiency delivered by the school system. The language which did achieve academic standard is shunned while an effort is made to uplift other languages to that standard. The disconnect

between policy making and execution, and struggles of various classes with different types of alienation grows.

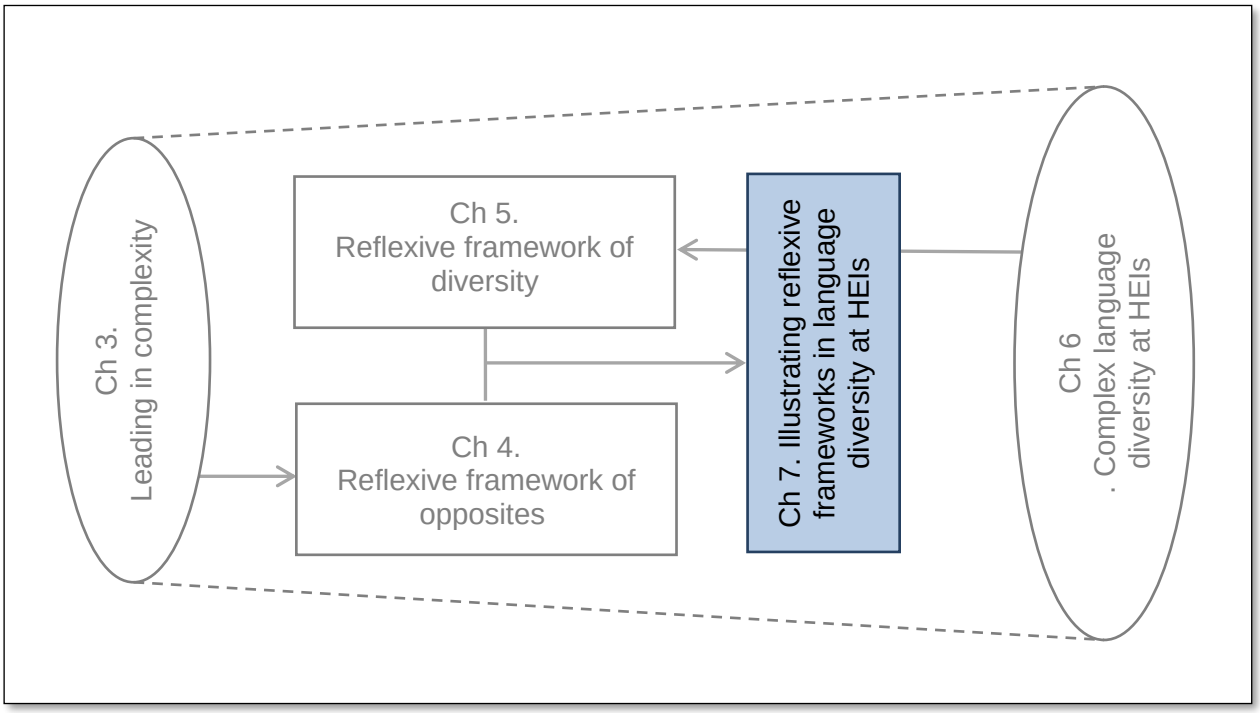
A recent literature review (Rodríguez-Castro & Aparicio, 2021) of 205 articles published all over the globe about the efficiency in public HEIs found that their "two basic functions [are], teaching and research-knowledge transfer, and two basic capabilities, the mobilization of resources and the improvement of activities" (2021:259). The perception that public HEIs are playing a role in "social, cultural and environmental development" is mainly evaluated in the sample of papers in terms of the knowledge transfer function (2021:255). The disjunction between niche performance outcomes of public HEIs and the expected engagement in matters of language of instruction and teaching in South Africa is considerable: accommodating multiple languages, uplifting proficiency of students to have a realistic chance of academic success, dealing with language politics, uplifting various languages to academic level, rectify injustices of the past, dealing with contradictory historic traumas.

Languages at South African public HEIs form a complex and ever-changing issue of great emotive resonance in almost all spheres: economic, historic, political, social, religious, cultural, and educational. It does not matter from which angle this diversity complexity is considered, contradictions, friction, aggrievement and a search for reparation surface. Much of the responsibility for realising the constitutional dream of languages enjoying "parity of esteem" (*Constitution*, 1996:s. 6(4)) at public HEIs is placed on public HEIs themselves. public HEIs have, however, not uniformly and enthusiastically taken up this task during the last two and a half decades. The net effect of this lethargy is that the natural hegemony of English has grown, to the detriment of all other languages. There is an opportunity for leadership to realise the constitutional vision of dignity and equality through languages.

# CHAPTER 7 ILLUSTRATING A REFLEXIVE FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERS OF OPPOSITES IN DIVERSITY: LANGUAGE AT PUBLIC HEIs

*The problem is not simple and the answer is not going to be simple either.*

*Lewis (1952:35)*



## 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided the grounding theory of reflexive interpretation. The argument integrating all these elements is complex. Chapters 3 and 6 discover the contexts of leadership and language respectively. Chapter 3 informs Chapters 4 and 5 to conceptualise frameworks by which leaders can analyse and determine where and how to lead in the context of languages at public HEIs. Chapter 6 serves as, what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:11) call *results of interpretation* to inform *interpretation of interpretation* in this chapter. This chapter illustrates the use of a combined reflexive framework of opposites in diversity by applying the combined framework to the data on language diversity at public HEIs.

The research sub-question governing this chapter is: how does a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity illuminate leading language diversity at public HEIs? This reflexive framework of opposites in diversity was conceptualised to assist leaders in reflexively making sense of complexities (§ 3.3) by using opposites (Chapter 4) in complex and difficult areas of diversity (Chapter 5). The complexity of language diversity at public HEIs has been explored (Chapter 6). This chapter integrates leadership principles, the reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity, and language diversity at public HEIs through an illustration[25] of an integrated reflexive framework for leaders of opposites in diversity (§ 7.2).

Three measures are taken to assist the reader to follow the cohesive argument here: First, references to the relevant sections in the study are inserted where the argument leans on a particular section. Second, the text in this chapter is not burdened with repeating references to external sources which have been referred to the previous chapters. Third, Figure 7-1 offers a graphic roadmap of the argument.

A final introductory remark is in order: The epistemology governing this study is pragmatism (§ 2.2.1). Pragmatism in research "focus[es] on the outcomes of the research – the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry – rather than antecedent conditions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018:27). As this study conceptualises a framework for leaders and leadership has been distinguished from management as being visionary, change orientated and influencing people (§ 3.2.1) this Chapter illustrates the framework in a visionary manner.

[25] See Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018:343-363) for examples of illustrations of reflexive interpretation.

## 7.2 Integrated framework of opposites in diversity

The first task is to discuss integration of reflexive frameworks of opposites (Chapter 4) and diversity (Chapter 5) within a single framework. This integrated framework enables horizontal and vertical analysis of complex issues of diversity contexts. A reflexive framework of diversity perspectives is arranged in a lateral triad of opposites (§ 5.3.3). This triad of diversity opposites is vertically analysed for depth through the reflexive framework of opposites (§ 4.5). Figure 7-1 depicts this integrated framework for leaders of opposites in diversity and shows how the integrated framework can be applied to language diversity at public HEIs.

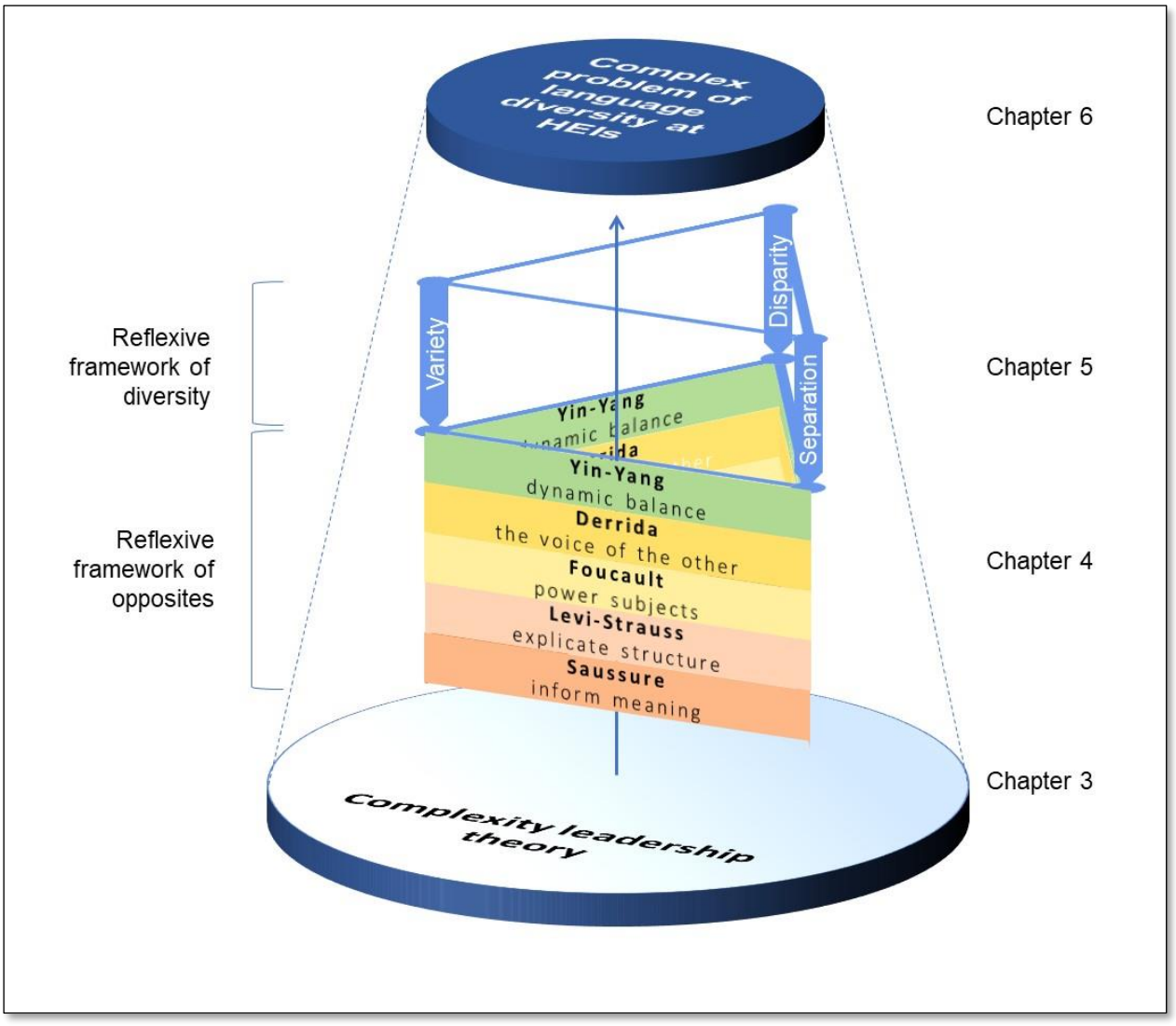



**Figure 7-1 Reflexive framework of opposites in diversity**

Figure 7-1 first illustrates how complexity leadership theory can be employed as a point of departure. It has been concluded in § 3.3.1.4 that those complex difficulties offer opportunities for reflexive leadership. Oppositions, as an example of reflexive interpretation, can exploit contradictions in complex contexts. A heuristic of opposites engages the stability-change standoff between organisational identity and social movements. Reflexivity can moderate against extremes of inertia and chaos. Emergence and self-organisation rely upon critical maturity among agents. This maturity relates to the ability of agents to engage reflexively with different perspectives and dynamically balance oppositions. To nurture this maturity of agents, leaders can invest in a heuristic culture of oppositional analysis and reflexivity. From a complexity leadership perspective, opposites and reflexivity corroborate with what Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2007:305-307) term enabling leadership.

Second, Figure 7-1 demonstrates how, from this foundation of complexity leadership theory, the complexity of language diversity at public HEIs can be addressed. In Chapter 6, language at public HEIs, in the South African context, was explored as an issue of complexity and difficulty. This thematic consideration of the nexus of language difficulties comprises the dataset to this current chapter.

Third, Figure 7-1 depicts that a combined reflexive framework of opposites in diversity can be used to interpret the thematic data in Chapter 6 on language diversity at public HEIs. The reflexive frameworks for opposites and for diversity, conceptualised in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, can each function as an autonomous framework within their own domains to make sense of complexities. The reflexive framework of opposites is available, however, as a generic tool to analyse any complex social difficulty. This reflexive framework of diversity is conceptualised to analyse any diversity related complexity. When the reflexive framework of opposites is applied to aspects of diversity, the two frameworks can be combined. Since language diversity at public HEIs warrants such a combination, this chapter combines the two separate reflexive frameworks (Figure 4-4 Reflexive framework of opposites and Figure 5-2) into one reflexive framework of opposites in diversity.

Fourth, Figure 7-1 presents detail on the combined reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. Regarding the reflexive framework of diversity, contradictions underlying the complexity of language diversity at public HEIs can be explicated by categorising them according to three generic diversity perspectives: separation, disparity, and variety (Chapter 5). These three perspectives are positioned as oppositional to each other, to form a triad of opposites. This triad of opposites is then interpreted by means of a reflexive framework of opposites (Chapter 4). The reflexive framework of opposites consists of five consecutive and interrelated levels of reflexive

interpretation: informing meaning, explicating structure, power subjects, the voice of the other, and dynamic balance.

Section 7.3 below follows on from Figure 7-1. The reflexive framework of diversity is used to explicate complex language diversity at public HEIs according to a triad of oppositional diversity perspectives. These oppositions underlie the nexus of language difficulties and are then interpreted through the five levels of interpretation of the reflexive framework of opposites. During the first two levels of reflexive interpretation of opposites, informing meaning and explicating structure, the focus is predominantly upon explicating differences between respective poles. The core of the last three levels of interpretation, power subjects, the voice of the other, and dynamic balance, lies chiefly in interrelations between opposites. While this section is structured according to five levels of interpretation from the reflexive framework of opposites, the structure of the respective subsections differs to reflect the shifting focus from first sorting aspects of language diversity in perspectives of diversity, then differentiating between the perspectives, and finally focussing on the interrelatedness of the opposites (§ 4.5). Illustrating the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity comprises modelling reflexive leadership in complex contexts. Section 7.4 reflects on the outcomes of the reflexive framework of opposites in language diversity and on implications for leadership in this complex context.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that this chapter illustrates reflexive interpretation (§ 2.2.2). Reflexive interpretation is defined in this study as “a way of indicating the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018:328). This open play of reflection refers to the researcher’s own reflection through various lenses. There is a freedom, an interactive play, in how the researcher interprets the matter at hand. This chapter is not a literature review. Literature reviews and conceptualisations are found in previous chapters. This chapter is an illustration of how the reflexive framework of opposites assists a practitioner in reflecting on language difficulties at public HEIs.

## 7.3 Five levels of reflexive interpretation: opposites in language diversity at public HEIs

When reflexively interpreting language diversity at public HEIs, it is important to consider language aspects unique to public HEIs. While language diversity at public HEIs differs from other contexts, it does not exist in a vacuum. Consider the description of leadership in § 3.2.4: leadership is a process where stakeholders use personal attributes to create relations that enable them to co-evolve systems, building and managing enterprises which produce success in the global ecology. The essential components of leadership, personal, relational, systems, enterprises, and global ecology, range from personal/micro at one end, to impersonal/macro

contexts at the other end. When leaders consider language diversity at public HEIs, aspects ranging from the whole spectrum, personal/micro to impersonal/macro, must be considered.

### 7.3.1 Informing meaning

In this section the first level of reflexive interpretation of opposites is employed to inform meaning (§ 4.3.1). The question to answer is how do the opposites explicate the current complex reality? (§ 4.5). This answer entails three elements. First, different aspects of language at public HEIs, as discussed in Chapter 6, are categorised according to the three generic perspectives of diversity offered by the reflexive framework of diversity: separation, disparity, and variety. Second, the core meaning of language at public HEIs for each of the perspectives is formulated. Third, the meaning of each of the three descriptive codes is considered when they are placed in a triad of opposites. The first and second steps correspond with coding practices of categorising and formulating descriptive codes, and the third step with elements of versus coding (Saldaña, 2016).

First, aspects of language at public HEIs were discussed in Chapter 6. In Table 7-1 these aspects have been categorised according to the three perspectives identified in the reflexive framework of diversity, separation, disparity, and variety. Surface-level aspects of language distinguish one language from another such as: communicability, regionality, correlation between language and race, descriptors of languages as official languages, and deep-level aspects such as different histories, cultures, and epistemologies, possible differences in psycho-socio dispositions amongst language groups. Disparities between languages become evident in the privileged position of English, the diminishing space of Afrikaans and the slow pace at which Sintu languages are gaining any foothold as academic languages. Other disparities between languages at public HEIs are the abilities of languages to function as academic languages, differences in language proficiency of students perpetuated by functional versus dysfunctional schools, and how the racial profiling of languages functions as proxy for positions of disadvantage and privilege. The variety perspective relates to the presence of multilingualism among students, and to multilingual pedagogies, unlocking multiple cultures and epistemologies.

**Table 7-1 Transforming descriptors of language complexity at public HEIs to meaning in the reflexive framework of diversity**

| Separation perspective | Core meaning |
|---|---|
| • The first, obvious, characteristic is the communicability of a language. Different sound-symbols communicate different meanings in different languages. People tend to assemble around a set of symbols they know | |

| Separation perspective | Core meaning |
|---|---|
| and can use to communicate. These sets of symbols tend to represent different dispositions (§ 5.2.2.2.3).<br><br>• Languages tend to cluster in regions. Although languages dispersed to some degree over time (some languages more than others) languages remain in South Africa by and large regionally based. English, however, has national (especially in the cities) and global presence (§ 6.3).<br><br>• The correlation between language and race is another differentiating aspect. While some movement towards greater use of English by all race groups can be observed (§ 6.8), the Sintu languages is almost exclusively spoken by black people, while coloured and white people mostly speak either Afrikaans or English, and Asian people predominately English (§ 6.3). | Identity of mother tongue (L1) |

| Separation perspective (continued) | Core meaning |
|---|---|
| • The separation of languages is recorded in the *Constitution* (1996:ss. 6,26(2)) when eleven languages are declared official languages to be equal before the law, and people have the right to education in the language of their preference (§ 6.6).<br><br>• Different languages represent different histories, cultures, and epistemologies. These different histories, cultures, and epistemologies are the result of developing in, and arriving from, different areas and eras. While these differences between individual languages exists, some languages are closer to each other because of partially shared histories. (§ 6.2).<br><br>• Without forcing the generalisations by Long (2021) of the socio-psychological disposition of different layers of society, it might be considered as a trend that speakers of West Germanic languages are likely to be burdened by the alienation of impasse and Sintu language speakers by the alienations of shame and envy (§ 6.11). | Identity of mother tongue (L1) (repeated) |

| Disparity perspective | Core meaning |
|---|---|
| • English maintains and expands its privileged position amongst all the official languages. The growth in English L1 and preferred L2 bears testimony to the perceived power of English to open opportunities in livelihood and education (§ 6.8). Afrikaans, also previously advantaged, is losing some of its privilege. The Sintu language were previously disadvantaged through successive oppressions of colonialization and Apartheid. At public HEIs the continued disadvantage of Sintu languages is evident in the reported slow pace to develop these languages as academic languages (§ 6.10). | Equal resources for all languages |

| | |
|---|---|
| • There is a vast difference in the ability of languages to serve as academic language. English has functioned for some centuries as academic languages and commands global presence in the academic sphere. Afrikaans has had academic status for less than a century, facilitates some international communication with Netherlands and Belgium, and local spaces for academic work have recently been curtailed. Sintu languages have not functioned as academic languages. Some languages are in the process of being developed to use at public HEIs (§§ 6.8,6.10).<br>• Vast differences in efficient schooling result in lower language proficiency of many Sintu speakers, putting further restraint on entrance to, and success at, public HEIs by these students (§ 6.7).<br>• In South Africa race often functions as a proxy to understand the privilege and disadvantage different languages hold (§ 6.3,6.11). | |

| Variety perspective | Core meaning |
|---|---|
| • Remarkable multilingual ability of many South Africans enables the sharing of the variety in history, culture, and epistemology different languages represent (§ 6.4).<br>• Multilingual societies offer the opportunity to enrich learning and teaching through late exit or additive multilingual education. Innovative strategies such as translanguaging and multilingual pedagogies unlock richness to knowledge that would not be accessible in monolingual learning environments (§ 6.5). | Knowledge-synergy of languages |

The second step in determining meaning is to formulate descriptive codes of the core meaning of language at public HEIs for each of the diversity perspectives. In formulating the descriptive codes, the theoretical base of the respective diversity perspectives (§ 5.3.2) is referenced and the core value underlying the perspective (§ 5.3.1) codified. An affirmative formulation is preferred to negative formulations to capture a sense of a vision or goal. The following codes are defined for the respective diversity perspectives:

- From a separation perspective, the language position at public HEIs is described as “identity of mother tongues (L1s)”. Identity refers to the theoretical role that identity affirmation plays in the separation theories: mother tongue is preferred to L1 to highlight its relation to others through language. The value of self-enhancement is incorporated in the term ‘identity’.

- The formulation ‘equal resources for all languages’ is chosen to code the core meaning of language at public HEIs from the disparity perspective. Equality of resources is preferred to

the term ‘power’ in the formulation because equality indicates shared power and is closer to actionable goals regarding equal access, participation, opportunities, and success at public HEIs. The term links to the core tenets of critical theory.

- From the variety perspective, language at public HEIs is described as “knowledge-synergy of languages”. Knowledge refers to knowledge management theories that the variety perspective in diversity stems from. Synergy is included to allude to the richness that multiple knowledges bring, advantages in learning, and social cohesion resulting from affirming multiple languages.

The third step is to consider how various perspectives mutually inform the meaning of one another when placed in opposition (§ 4.3.2). The three perspectives on language diversity at public HEIs are placed in opposition to each other and form a triad of opposites (Figure 7-2). The discussion below compares the three perspectives to one another regarding their grounding theory, motivation, role players, action, and their view on language.

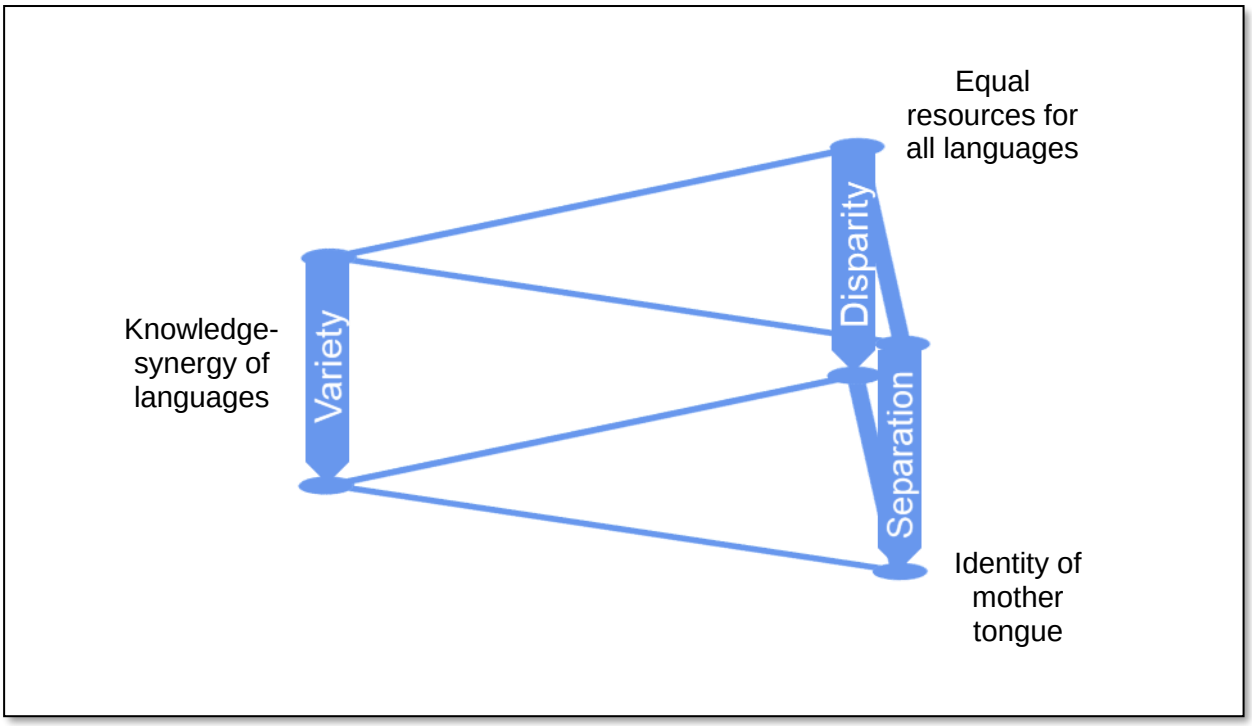



**Figure 7-2 Triad of basic diversity oppositions in language at public HEIs**

In 5.3.2 it is argued that the three perspectives are rooted in three different fields of study: separation perspective in Psychology, disparity perspective in Sociology, and variety perspective in Knowledge Management. These fields have different roots, so the three perspectives have

different motivations to solve different problems. The separation perspective focuses on the drive of the individual to find and grow meaningful identity. This psychological need for affirming identity is propelled by a natural drive. The disparity perspective attends to problems of inequality in society. Inequality assaults the sense of fairness and compassion. There is, however, a difference in how the disadvantaged and advantaged react to inequality. The disadvantaged experience inequality, driven by the degradation of their own circumstances. They experience the urge to either pull down structures sustaining inequality or pull themselves up by their bootstraps, or some combination of two. The advantaged are not actuated in the same way. It is not the experience of disadvantage that moves those who are advantaged: they are moved by the assault of inequality on value systems of fairness and compassion. Some refuse to be moved or to address inequality. How the advantaged react to fairness and compassion have consequences for their own lived experience. The disparity perspective inadvertently sets up one group against another. The variety perspective seeks to gain rich knowledge. The motivation behind this perspective does not come from a psychological need or a social affront but from a vision of richer knowledge and lived experiences. Motivation in the variety perspective has to be nurtured until the vision that richer knowledge leads to a better life becomes the culture that permeates a society.

The role players in the three perspectives differ. In the separation perspective, the main actor is first-person singular, 'I'. Even in the support actor, 'my group', the first-person singular is forcefully present. In the disparity perspective, 'my group' is pitted against 'y o u r[26] groups'. In the variety perspective, role players are 'us together'. Through separation, disparity, and variety perspectives, there is progression from the singular first-person through group versus group to an inclusive first-person plural.

The actions of the three perspectives differ. The separation perspective focuses on finding and growing identity. The disparity perspective demands that rival groups offer each other space, room, time, acknowledgement, material, and intangible resources. The variety perspective generates, unlocks, and constructs. The separation perspective proposes that an individual finds a home in a language. The disparity perspective pits my language against y o u r languages. The variety perspective regards multiple languages as resources, as means, to realise the dream of rich knowledge. Table 7-2 summarises the meaning of the separation, disparity, and variety perspectives in the triad of opposites.

[26] Expanded formatting, y o u / y o u r, indicates plural, normal text singular.

**Table 7-2 Comparing meaning of the separation, disparity, and variety perspectives on language at public HEIs**

| | Separation | Disparity | Variety |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Code** | Identity of mother tongue | Equal resources for all languages | Knowledge-synergy of languages |
| **Grounded in** | Psychology | Sociology | Knowledge management |
| **Motivation** | Identity | Inequality | Rich knowledge |
| **Role players** | I / my group | Our group / y o u r group | Us together |
| **Action** | Find and grow | Offers means to grow and live | Generate and unlock |
| **Language** | My home | Mine versus y o u r s | Multiple assets |

### 7.3.2 Explicating structure

In this section, a second level of reflexive interpretation through opposites (§ 4.3.2) is employed to explore the socio-cultural context of the triad of diversity opposites as applied to language difficulties at public HEIs. The question to answer is how the positions of the opposites are imbedded in culture (§ 4.5). The process of "explicating structure" underpinning social reality is, however, inverted: the existing structure of diversity, the triad of opposites, is employed as a frame to flesh out the cultural context of language at public HEIs.

The reader is reminded of what has previously been discussed (§§ 7.3 & 3.2.4): when leadership concerns itself with aspects specific to a certain domain (i.e., language diversity at public HEIs), a broad range of related contexts, from personal/micro to impersonal/macro environments, are considered. This panoramic view of leadership includes the important role of culture in organisational behaviour and the lag that culture imposes on organisational change (Schein, 1985, 1990, 1996, 2010). The maxim is that culture eats strategy for breakfast (Moore & Rose, 2000:28). With these leadership demands in mind, Annexure in § 7.6 offers a reflection on how languages capture the socio-cultural development in South Africa, much like growth rings capture the history of a tree. The aim of this reflection is to formulate an informed disposition for a researcher seeking dignity for different population groups, and how this search has shaped attitudes towards languages over years of interaction between population groups. The following subsections interpret this reflection on the socio-cultural history of South Africa against levels of diversity perspectives (§ 5.3.2 & 5.3.3).

#### 7.3.2.1 Separation

The following discussion of socio-cultural background to the separation perspective (§ 5.3.2.1) on language at public HEIs, identity of own language, is structured around separate languages and language groups: Afrikaans, Sintu languages, and English. In South Africa, the separation perspective was taken to the extreme by the Apartheid government (§ 7.6). Under the separate development dogma of Apartheid, different language groups were obliged to develop their separate interests, and languages. The regime, however, privileged white people in power and stripped non-white people of their dignity, freedom, and opportunities. Racial superiority was a construct by which people were separated, and race and language became conflated. Apartheid was the legislated form of colonial separation, extending English domination to include Afrikaans. This dehumanising formalisation of what had been informal racism of the colonial era was, and still is, perceived to be introduced by white Afrikaans-speaking people, branding Afrikaans as a symbol of colonial oppression and the pinnacle of the separation perspective. This negative branding, in conjunction with the opportunities English promises, might explain why today many coloured Afrikaans-speaking people surrender the language their ancestors created and prefer English as their L1. Anti-Afrikaans sentiments held by some coloured people might have their roots even further back in history: by turning the dialect of Afrikaans mostly spoken by the free burghers in the Cape settlement into standard Afrikaans, other dialects of Afrikaans and their speakers have been disenfranchised. Post-apartheid so-called white Afrikaans speakers still take pride in what they take to be their own language, the language of struggle against colonial English oppression and of the achievement of academic standing (§§ 6.8, 6.10, 6.11).

People from the Sintu language groups found Apartheid especially foreign to their worldview of ubuntu (§ 7.6). Their history bears testimony to close familial ties between different dialects in the same language and within language families. While they had strong social bonds in their circular settlements, they were open to alliances in the face of danger. Neighbours in a neighbouring village might have been family, bearing in mind their slow migration. The shared suffering under Apartheid and common struggle became entrenched in an anti-separation stance. When the Apartheid government attempted to introduce mother-tongue education, the Sintu speaking people rejected this policy as furthering Apartheid. Apartheid created the opportunity for Sintu speakers to develop their languages around homelands, but this opportunity was foiled by resistance against the homeland policy and the government dispersing resources unequally. Many questions arise: Which dialect of a language should be developed? Or should one language in a language family be chosen? Which one? And how do we then deal with the rejection of the speakers of the dialect or language that was not chosen? Is it viable to develop all Sintu languages (cf. Mohohlwane, 2020)? These socio-cultural considerations might be a major barrier to

developing Sintu languages. The separation perspective to language at public HEIs seems to have low traction among Sintu speakers.

During the nineteenth century, English settlers were introduced to the Cape society (§ 7.6). The free burghers resisted English colonisation and the use of English. Eventually, the free burghers moved further inland and founded two Boer Republics. Several battles ensued between the British and Sintu communities, and the Boers and the Sintu communities. The Sintu-speaking people were defeated. When the English and Boers clashed in the South African Wars, the English conquered. But the struggle for Afrikaans continued. In 1925 Afrikaans became an official language in addition to English. It was the English that set up universities in Southern Africa. The push for Apartheid by some members of the white Afrikaans-speaking community has demonstrated a difference between the belief systems of English and Afrikaans cultures. While English culture embodies an expansive colonial culture which naturalises peoples into their culture, Afrikaans culture is embodied by rural living, coming together in laagers when threatened and excluding others from their circle. This inclusive/exclusive frame might help explain English being embraced as *de facto* language of LoLT at public HEIs while Afrikaans is stigmatized as the speech of oppression. Apart from the reasons mentioned in Chapter 6 this inclusive/exclusive frame might be another angle to explain why English is currently growing and Afrikaans waning at public HEIs.

#### 7.3.2.2 Disparity

The disparity perspective (§ 5.3.2.2) is rooted in the colonial and Apartheid eras (§ 7.6). With greater material and intangible resources, European settlers subjugated, exploited, and humiliated indigenous people in almost every sphere of life. This domination entailed exploitation of indigenous people for the benefit of the oppressors. For example, the privilege of Afrikaans during Apartheid was deliberately employed to develop Afrikaans as an academic language. Education took place in the language and from the epistemology of the oppressors, in English and Afrikaans. The Sintu-speaking victims were effectively hog-tied and unable to promote their own language and engage in their own academic work from their own epistemology. Even if such a venture could be achieved with meagre resources, to do so would be to validate, in some ways, the oppressive and philosophy of Apartheid. From the disparity perspective, Afrikaans has recently been branded as an oppressive language and stripped of some of its privileges as LoLT at public HEIs. Yet marginalising Afrikaans has not resulted in uplifting Sintu languages to be languages of academic endeavour at public HEIs and has elevated English as the *de facto* LoLT. The disparity perspective, equality, provided motivation to bring Afrikaans down to equal academic opportunities compared to the Sintu languages, but did not provide the drive to do the

hard work of gaining equality through developing Sintu languages far enough to grasp the same opportunities as Afrikaans. The disparity between languages has grown, with one language enjoying all the opportunities and leaving the rest of the languages as the 'other'.

Disparities in levels of language proficiency pose another major challenge in terms of equal access to, and success in, higher education. This disparity is founded in centuries of neglect in basic education in many communities. This neglect is confined to material resources such as funding, buildings, and textbooks, and includes intangible aspects such as learning culture, learning support at home, and training of educators. public HEIs carry an additional burden to help students catch up with their peers in terms of language proficiency.

#### 7.3.2.3 Variety

From the variety perspective (§ 5.3.2.3), multilingualism nevertheless persists (§ 6.4). Throughout the years of oppression, the ancient honouring of familial languages remained in place among Sintu- speaking people. This multilingualism expanded among Sintu speakers when they were forced to add to their repertoire the West Germanic languages of their oppressors. While English and Afrikaans communities learnt each other's languages at school, they seldom returned the compliment and learnt Sintu languages. The presence and extent of multilingualism among Sintu speakers is a valuable resource for higher education (§ 6.5). This multilingualism offers a pathway to a variety of knowledges that the different languages present, and a mindset of engaging with different languages and epistemologies. The debate on decolonising public HEIs should reflect how the multilingual Sintu speaking community could lead in fostering institutions of rich knowledge and education. Many West Germanic speakers in South Africa are bilingual, speaking English and Afrikaans (§ 6.4). To truly submerge themselves in the epistemologies of Sintu-speaking people, they will have to make an effort to learn Sintu languages.

#### 7.3.2.4 Reflection on explicated structure of language

The reflexive framework of opposites in diversity identifies three perspectives on language: separation, disparity, and variety, in a triad as opposites to each other. The separation – disparity opposition in language set the development and nurturing of one's own language against the equitable development and nurturing of the languages of the others. The disparity – variety opposition in language pitched the resources of different languages against the optimum contribution of each language to rich knowledge. The variety – separation opposition in language sets up 'together we are more' against 'my own is beautiful'. These three oppositions are summarised in Table 7-3.

**Table 7-3 Level 2 interpretation: explicating structure**

| Separation | - | Disparity | Disparity | - | Variety | Variety | - | Separation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aversion, due to over-the-top Apartheid | - | Extreme inequality due to years of oppression | Extreme inequality due to years of oppression | - | Persistent multi-lingualism in Sintu-speaking communities | Persistent multi-lingualism in Sintu-speaking communities | - | Aversion due to over-the-top Apartheid |

### 7.3.3 Power subjects

The third level of reflexive interpretation (§ 4.3.3) illustrates how power is explored in the separation-disparity-variety triad of opposites that explicates language diversity at public HEIs. The question to answer is which is the dominant element in the opposition and to what extent does the dominant element subject the other element? (§ 4.5).

Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, the first two levels of reflexive interpretation, focussed on the meaning of the respective oppositional positions and how these positions explicate the socio-cultural contexts of language at public HEIs. The next three levels of reflexive require discussion of the interactive relation between oppositional positions.

This section is structured around the three opposites in the triad of language diversity oppositions (Figure 7-2).

#### 7.3.3.1 Separation – disparity opposition

The separation – disparity opposition in the context of language at public HEIs was described in § 7.3.1 as *identity of own language – equal resources for all languages*. In this opposition, the disparity position (§ 5.3.2.2) is in the dominant position. This is the opposition where the essential tension was played out in Apartheid (separation as ideology) and the struggle against Apartheid (disparity). During the Apartheid era, the separation perspective held sway. Since Apartheid fell, the dominant narrative in South Africa is persistent inequality among South Africans. Efforts to separate peoples is frowned upon. Two examples illustrate the hegemony of the disparity perspective over the separation perspective in the domain of language at public HEIs.

Rejection of separation was one of the main arguments in expurgating Afrikaans as LoLT at UFS and US (§ 6.10): language groups were separated into different classrooms. Afrikaans speakers have an advantage over Sintu L1 speakers, and Afrikaans speakers continued to benefit from

resources directed to their right to LoLT while other indigenous language did not have the same privilege. English is preferred as the great leveller in access, opportunities, and distributer of resources. The privilege of only English L1 speakers studying in their L1 over all other indigenous L1 students which must study in their L2+ language, is ignored. The more visible markers of equality prevailed, such as sharing the same lecture rooms and resources pouring into one LoLT. The disparity perspective has been used to equalise all non-English languages by reducing them to the lowest common denominator, and not developing them to highest common denominator. Efforts from the disparity perspective have thus far succeeded only in affirming the absolute power of English as the de facto LoLT. Ironically, in the name of disparity English has been separated from the other languages to be the sole language which grants access to self-enhancement and power – the values of the separation perspective.

Further evidence of the hegemony of the disparity perspective over the separation perspective is the slow pace of developing Sintu languages into LoLT (§ 6.9). This work in development must be done from the separation perspective, yet motivation seems to be low. It seems Sintu speakers have settled for their L1s to play a supportive role for English LoLT at public HEIs and not to function themselves as LoLT (§ 6.12).

The skewed power relation between the disparity and similarity perspectives results in a greater imbalance between English and indigenous languages, Sintu languages and Afrikaans, and a loss of the constitutional vision that students learn, and are taught in, the language of their choice. There is a parity of esteem between languages, and South Africans are united in their diversity (§ 6.6). There are some indications, however, that the power of the disparity perspective has run its course and that the contributions of the similarity perspective are gaining in value. Projects have emerged for development of indigenous languages, for example SADiLaR and BAQONDE (§ 6.9). Recently, the Constitutional Court found in favour of retaining Afrikaans as LoLT at UNISA (*UNISA v Afriforum*, 2021). Yet these indicators are by no means testimony that the constitutional goal for languages at public HEIs has become a national project. If the constitutional vision is to be attained, there is much work to be done from the separation to realise equality.

#### 7.3.3.2 Disparity – variety opposition

The disparity – variety opposition in the context of language at public HEIs was described in § 7.3.1 as *equal resources for all languages – knowledge-synergy of languages*. In this opposition, the disparity perspective (§ 5.3.2.2) dominates as well. Equal distribution of resources as value dominates discourses as persistent inequality grows. The narrative that everyone brings their unique resources and skills to build a common vision of an equal society is hardly present.

The mechanics of dominance by the disparity perspective was discussed in § 7.3.3.1 above. Years of dominance by colonial powers and Apartheid resulted in English and Afrikaans asserting hegemony as the languages of learning and teaching at public HEIs. The struggle against these powers dominated the history of South Africa for two centuries. While the structural power of English and Afrikaans was constitutionally broken in 1996, the *de facto* dominance of these languages persisted. Since 1996, the struggle against the hegemony of English and Afrikaans as languages used at public HEIs, has targeted Afrikaans only. English, however, survived this purging of power by virtue of its greater openness to diversity and global dominance - generally and academically.

Against the disparity perspective's sociological motivation to combat discrimination and inequality (§ 5.3.2.2), the motivational force of a vision that variety offers a richer lived experience (§ 5.3.2.3, Table 5-1) does not prevail. It has been argued in Chapter 3 that the core description of a leader is someone who influences people to realise change in pursuit of a vision (§ 3.2.1). When we apply this description of leadership to the language complexity at public HEIs, the conclusion is that an opportunity lies in anticipation that leaders actively influence people to realise change in the use of languages at public HEIs in pursuit of the constitutional vision of "united in our diversity", developing languages towards "parity of esteem", and "(e)veryone has the right to receive education in the official language of languages of their choice" (*Constitution*, 1996:Preamble, ss.6(2,4), 29(2)).

Today, the richness in thought and life experiences that variety offers, the presence of different languages and the disposition they represent, is neglected in the language discourse. An important way to introduce the notion of variety into the language discourse is through multilingual pedagogies. Some research into multilingual pedagogies has been published, and the need is expressed for more research (§ 6.9). While research is important, *We make the road by walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990).

The disparity perspective failed to provide the impetus for developing Sintu languages and positioning them together with Afrikaans and English at the same level of LoLT at public HEIs. To attain some semblance of parity, indigenous Afrikaans was demoted to function together with Sintu languages as support to English as only LoLT. Now that Afrikaans has been equalised in public HEIs with Sintu languages, there is no other target of power for the disparity perspective left to deconstruct (§§ 4.3.4, 5.3.2.2). It does not seem that English will be challenged. The result is that the receding dominance of the disparity perspective in the disparity – variety opposition creates room for the variety perspective to assert itself. The seed of variety might finally gain some sunlight and be allowed to germinate (§ 4.3.5), but for that to happen leaders must commit

to the constitutional vision. The pivotal question is whether leaders will recognise the opportunity and actively promote the vision that variety offers.

#### 7.3.3.3 Variety – separation opposition

The variety – separation opposition in the context of language at public HEIs was described in § 7.3.1 as *equal resources for all languages – knowledge-synergy of languages*. Both the variety and separation perspectives on language at public HEIs have been subjected to the disparity perspective (§ 7.3.3.1, 7.3.3.2). The current difference between the power positions of the separation and variety perspectives is, in the metaphor used in the description of Yin-Yang, that the separation perspective is waning, and the variety perspective is waxing (Figure 4-3).

At the height of its power, the separation perspective elevated Afrikaans to be an academic language, able to facilitate learning and teaching at the level of higher education. The Sintu languages had neither the material nor intangible resources to realise academic competency. More importantly, speakers of the Sintu languages did not want to validate the separatism of Apartheid by taking part in such a project (§ 7.3.2.1). The resulting disparity in academic ability between Sintu languages and Afrikaans drew further attention to historic inequality and brought yet more power to the disparity position over both the separation and variety positions.

On the one hand, the power position of separation as defined by the lingering presence of Afrikaans as LoLT at some public HEIs is falling out of favour. Yet, silently, English has been separated from all other languages as *de facto* LoLT. In this sense the separation perspective is present, affirming English as the way to achievement, power, and self-enhancement. On the other hand, the power position of the variety perspective is the growing interest in multilingual pedagogies at public HEIs. For this vision to be realised, however, the variety perspective needs the Sintu languages to flourish under the self-enhancement values which the separation perspective offers (Figure 5-1).

Silently its dominance propels the further enhancement of English as academic language, gaining power as an avenue to achievement. These are typical separation perspective traits (Figure 5-1). English will voluntarily have to allow variety space to function.

#### 7.3.3.4 Reflections on the power dynamics in the triad of language diversity opposites

When language diversity at public HEIs is viewed through the separation – disparity – variety triad of opposites, there are clear imbalances of power. Figure 5-2 graphically illustrates the power relations between the three oppositions. While the size of the three perspectives represents their respective powers, the figure does not attempt to provide exact measurement of their respective

power positions. Disparity dominates both separation and variety. Disparity between English and all the other languages is at its maximum. The separation perspective is hardly present with regard to the Sintu languages and the separatist inclination of Afrikaans has been rejected. English, however, derives its hegemony from centuries of the separation values of self-enhancement and power. Variety is the least dominant of the three perspectives. The power of variety lies in vision, and leaders must gather momentum behind the constitutional vision.

Dominance of one perspective inhibits growth of the whole system. The subjected separation and variety perspectives have to increase their power to propel languages at public HEIs to achieve the constitutional vision.

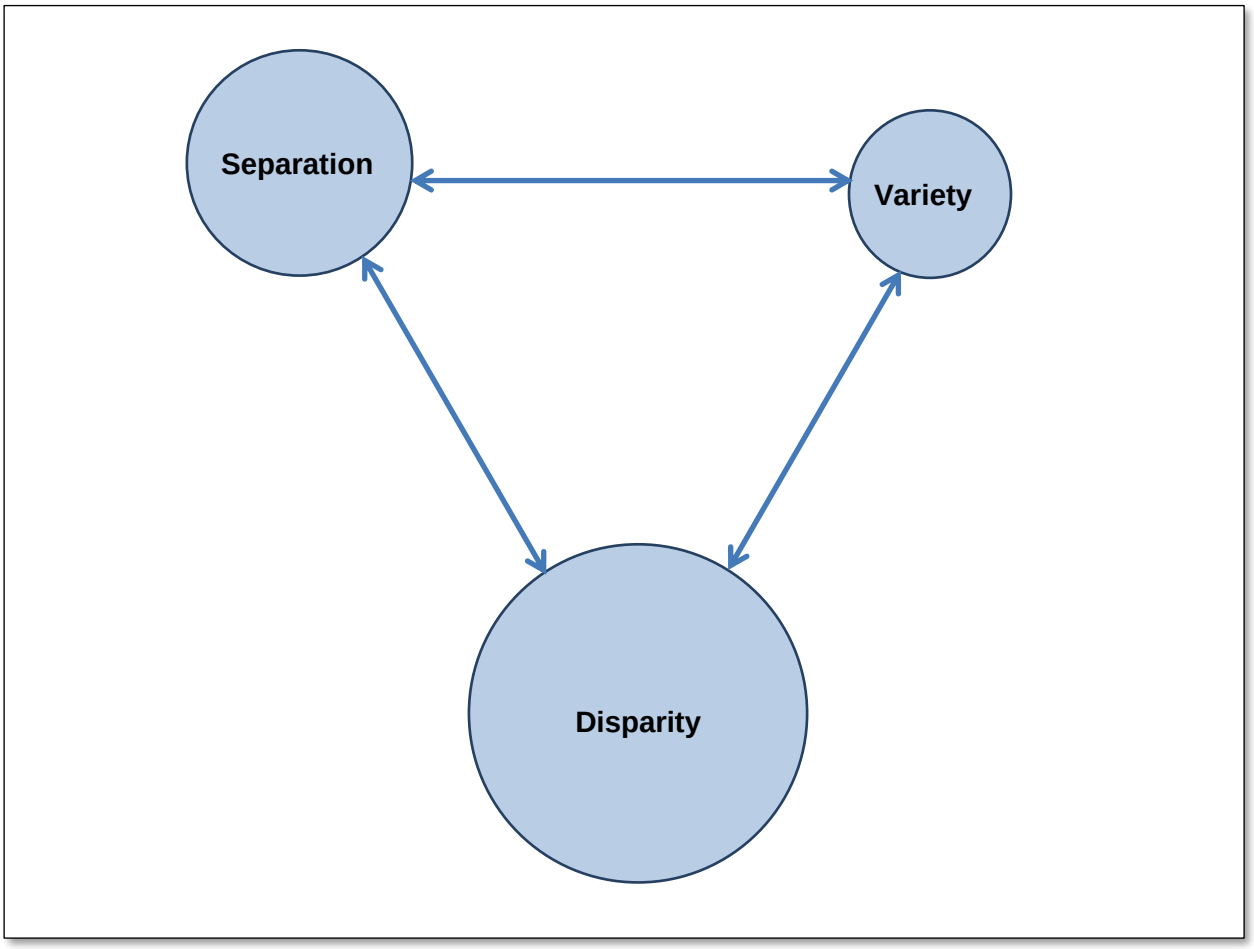



**Figure 7-3: Relative power of the triad of diversity perspectives in language diversity at public HEIs**

### 7.3.4 The voice of the other

In this section, the fourth level of reflexive interpretation (§ 4.3.4) is illustrated. How can dominant positions in the triad of diversity perspectives (Figure 5-2) be reversed for the subjected element to become an equal element in power? How would this transition challenge the prevailing balance in diversity perspectives? (§ 4.5). These questions require imagining a set of circumstances opposite to the power relations described in § 7.3.3. This set of circumstances does not need to be realistic. In § 4.3.2 myths have been explored as a means to capture and transfer knowledge and perspectives. Fantasy opens the mind to what cannot logically be reached (cf. Todorov & Todorov, 1975). It can be dreamlike, opening the mind to creativity, deconstructing reality. Once the inversion of power is imagined, it becomes possible to reflect on what must be done to realise the reversed position.

The movie *Maleficent* serves as a metaphor for the imagining part of this level of interpretation: The saving prince in Snow White becomes the servant. The witch becomes the heroine and the leader of a vast army, but inverting the stereotypical hero, with her own vulnerability, bitterness, and growth on display. Snow White choose the witch as mentor. The king turns into a weak figure with a dark past. The females in the movie have agency, life happens to the males – contrary to stereotypical power positions of Disney productions.

Imagine a room where a group of academics multilingually discuss an academic problem. Most of the discussion is in a mix of Sintu languages. Many of the academics have written their theses in a Sintu language. Several Sintu languages have become languages of learning and teaching. An English and an Afrikaans L1 academics are part of the group, they cannot follow the Sintu languages. Their world does not revolve around English, nor Afrikaans. Or should we imagine the English and Afrikaans colleagues have each learnt a Sintu language and can be part of the discussion. But then power hegemony is broken, and that is not the object of this level of reflexive interpretation. Someone asks: “What is the solution of the Afrikaans academia on this matter? You have been in this position for some time.” The academic problem they discuss will not be inverted: How can multilingual learning and teaching at their public HEI make its academic work available to the global academic fraternity? It must be possible for the Germans, French, Chinese. But their languages are spoken by many more people and their resources are endless. What could we do to recruit international examiners for theses written in one of the indigenous languages? The English academic proposes that the policy of their public HEI should be that theses be written in English. Our language support unit can assist Ph.D. students. The Afrikaans academic suggests a specialised translation service. Sintu academics shake their heads: We have worked so hard to develop our languages and enhance the language proficiency of our

students. We create rich knowledge through our diverse backgrounds. To share this knowledge, English remains a *lingua franca* in academia. No dream could change that. At least, they conclude, our different communities take pride in their languages. Our languages enable us to have complex conversations. We value learning through the epistemologies of each other.

In this imagined scenario, Sintu languages have been developed and their speakers found their voice in these languages. By weight of their majority, their needs dominate the discussion. The community of Afrikaans speakers has been reconnected to society. This community embraced the inclusiveness of their language. English still serves as a conduit of rich knowledge and life experiences, created by diverse communities, to the world. The subjugating grip of the colonial era on South African public HEIs has been broken. The dignity of indigenous people and their heritage has been restored and they are proud of what they could offer. Diverse people work together and create rich knowledge through multilingual ubuntu.

This deconstruction of language diversity at South African public HEIs illustrates that some aspects cannot and will not change, for example: English remains a global academic language for now. Other aspects will need considerable work to change the power relations: Sintu languages must be developed to become more than supportive languages at public HEIs. They must become languages of learning and teaching. A movement has to be launched towards multilingual teaching and learning at public HEIs. West Germanic L1 speakers must learn Sintu languages. English has to step back from its dominant role in higher education and take on a facilitating role. Afrikaans speakers have to reclaim the genetic inclusivity of their mixed racial, sociological and linguistic past to recognise and revive a new reality of inclusion. Collectively, these tasks are a steep mountain to climb.

Is this revivified multiracialism a solution for languages at public HEIs? Not necessarily. By inverting the power relations, new vistas open up to be considered.

### 7.3.5 Dynamic balance

In this section, the fifth level of reflexive interpretation (§ 4.3.5) is illustrated. Dynamic balance is explored in the diversity triad of opposites explicating language diversity at public HEIs. The question is: What forces influence the dynamic balance of the contrary-yet-dynamic opposites in the current complexity? (§ 4.5). The temporal and spatial principles of Yin-Yang discussed in § 4.3.5 offer the underlying forces by which the dynamic balance between two opposites can be analysed and predicted. Depending on the forces that are allowed to play out in language diversity at public HEIs, three possible scenarios are envisioned. These scenarios are termed the low,

middle, and high roads of LoLT at public HEIs with regard to their alignment of scientific best practice and constitutional vision for LoLT at public HEIs (§§ 6.5, 6.6).

#### 7.3.5.1 The low road scenario – 'do nothing'

In this approach, the natural and present forces underlying language diversity at public HEIs are left to find their own way in dealing with the complexity. As little as possible is done regarding language at public HEIs.

The major force driving this scenario is the hegemony of English. In most domains in South Africa, English is regarded as the language which provides access to power, opportunity, and business. In the academic world, English dominates as LoLT, in research, and international communication. The language is available and structures are entrenched. Communicating with academic peers is easy. There are no extra costs for running additional languages of learning and teaching. International scholars can readily be appointed at South African public HEIs. Offering a single LoLT at public HEIs is seen as levelling the playing field for all indigenous languages and building social cohesion. English becomes the *lingua franca* to merge diverse language communities.

Reflecting on this scenario from a diversity perspective, the power of disparity is sustained (Figure 5-2) by equalising all indigenous languages. Afrikaans is stripped of its academic capability at public public HEIs to have equal standing with other indigenous languages. At surface level, the playing field of access to public HEIs and social cohesion would be achieved through the melting pot model. The majority of people learn in another language. While the disparity perspective is in full force, the disparity between English and the privilege English L1 speakers enjoy, and the indigenous languages becomes larger. English has all the privilege, and the indigenous languages have none. The separation and variety perspectives that could provide dignity and standing to these languages have little leverage in this scenario.

The long-term outcome of this scenario is that English emerges as the only language of education. As parents realise that English is the only pathway through higher education to upward socio-economic movement, they enrol their children at an earlier age in English schools to prepare them for higher education. In the end, English-only education trickles down the education system to the lower grades. Sintu speakers might hold on to their languages as markers of their identity but these identities are increasingly perceived as lesser than the identity that English exude (§ 5.2.2.2.3). Language shift is lurking down this road. The existing academic competency of Afrikaans will be privatised, as is already evident through the establishment of institutions such

as Academia. Academia already networks with universities in Belgium and the Netherlands[27]. Under this scenario this trend will grow until Afrikaans functions as LoLT in silos separate from public public HEIs.

This scenario ignores the diversity goals of multiple identities. From the disparity perspective, this scenario is the most unequal possible, with one language receiving all the resources and the rest nothing. It betrays the constitutional vision on languages in education and scientific consensus on best practices for learning in multilingual societies. The variety perspective has no traction. For failing diversity goals, the constitutional vision, and scientific best practices, the 'do nothing' scenario is typified as the low road.

Many of the public public HEIs in South Africa are currently travelling down this low road.

#### 7.3.5.2 The middle road scenario – 'assisted proficiency'

In this scenario the 'do nothing' approach is amended to include assistance in language proficiency, especially for non-English L1 students. This middle road scenario is termed the 'assisted proficiency' approach.

This scenario utilises the same balance of forces as the 'do nothing' scenario (e.g., hegemony of English, disadvantaged Sintu languages, and marginalised Afrikaans). To these dynamics, language support is added to assist English academic proficiency. Typically, the bulk of this assistance focuses upon non-English L1 speakers. The support at an public HEI level could entail the availability of multilingual glossaries, developing reading and writing academic proficiency, and translating and interpreting services, and introducing language technologies. A centre would be established and resourced to render support. In addressing proficiency, the support programmes recognise the presence of multiple L1 speakers, meet students at their separate language dispositions, build common underlying proficiency (CUP), and work towards cognitive/academic language skills (CALP) in English (§ 6.5, 6.7).

The long-term outcome of this scenario is not fundamentally different from the 'do nothing' scenario. In time, levels of English proficiency might raise, trickling down the grades of the education system as perception grows that the road to academic achievement and economic prosperity is paved with English bricks. If the indigenous languages hold their ground as L1s and education is received in English only at lower grades, CALP and CUP might not develop

[27] Traveling by train between Ghent and Kortrijk in 2019 this researcher came across students of Academia visiting Belgium as part of an academic programme.

sufficiently in their L1s to support proficiency in English. These support services are rendered by language specialists.

From a diversity perspective, the ‘assisted proficiency’ scenario employs aspects of separation and variety to enhance proficiency in English as language of learning and teaching. Students from Sintu and Afrikaans communities soon understand that their languages are not regarded as good enough to facilitate learning and teaching. The high level of disparity between English and all the other languages remains the dominant force in this scenario, resulting in high inequality. Some public HEIs follows this scenario of ‘assisted proficiency’. More students may achieve academic success in English, but the indigenous languages are destined to remain inferior.

#### 7.3.5.3 The high road scenario – ‘realising the vision’

The ‘do nothing’ scenario requires little intervention. In the ‘assisted proficiency’ scenario language specialists support proficiency. The high road scenario, called ‘realising the vision’, needs the intervention of language specialists and leaders. The role of the language specialists expands in this scenario from supporting students in developing proficiency to include developing languages as academic languages and establish multilingual pedagogies (§ 6.5, 6.9). Intervention by leaders is necessary over and above the input of language specialists to cast a vision of, and create a movement towards, multilingual LoLT at public HEIs, channelling the flow of natural forces underlying language diversity at public HEIs. The University of KwaZulu-Natal might be the best South African example of progress in this scenario.

The disparity perspective currently dominates the separation and variety perspectives on language diversity at public HEIs (§ 7.3.3). To realise the constitutional vision and implement the scientific best practices regarding LoLT in multilingual societies, the benefits of the separation and disparity perspectives must be unlocked. The seeds of the separation and variety perspectives are already present in the disparity perspective. Nurturing these seeds will grow and hold the triad of opposites in language diversity at public HEIs in dynamic balance. When each of the three diversity perspectives contributes its strengths to language at public HEIs (§ 4.3.5) the full spectrum of diversity forces is seen, building scientific best practices and fulfilling the constitutional promise.

The seeds (Figure 4-2) of the separation and variety perspectives are already present in the disparity perspective. The seed of the separation perspective is present when the disparity perspective defines separate groups to analyse the power relation between the groups. Dignity and pride are to be found in these groups. By nurturing this seed, the psychological forces of motivation and identity will grow this seed to balance the separation and disparity perspectives

dynamically. In terms of LoLT, disparity between the academic competency of Sintu languages and English will be balanced when dignity and pride is found in Sintu languages, when these languages are no longer languages to be ashamed of (§ 6.11), but languages around which speakers find identity and affirmation (§ 5.2.2.3). While language specialists labour to develop the competency of these languages, leaders identify the development of these languages as a vital aspect in transforming our society, building a vision of an academia that is united in diversity, and gathering a following amongst the speakers of these languages to realise this vision.

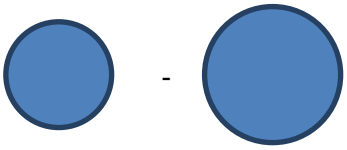
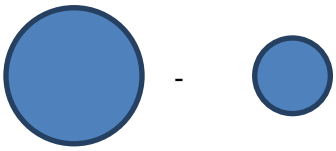
The seed of the variety perspective is present in the disparity perspective. When the disparity perspective aims for equal academically resourced languages, the seed of the variety perspectives are present in providing direction how these diverse but equal languages can function together towards a common goal of rich knowledge. In the variety perspective lies the dynamic balance against a separatist breach of the separation perspective (§ 5.3.2.1.3) and against the desolate landscape of totalitarian equality (§ 5.3.2.2.2). While language specialists work to develop the competency of the Sintu languages, leaders identify the development of these languages as vital to balance excesses of separatism and totalitarianism, build a vision of united towards rich knowledge through in diverse languages, and gather a following amongst the speakers of all the languages: English, Sintu languages, and Afrikaans.

A major moment in realising the vision is when a prototype or two emerge of a public HEI where the triad of diversity perspectives holds each other in balance, where learning, teaching and research are in two or three South African languages, where knowledge is ordinarily transferred through multilingual pedagogies, where the goal of rich knowledge is celebrated. These prototypes become the laboratory where best practices are tried and tested and show the way towards realising the scientific benchmarks and constitutional vision of higher education in multilingual societies.

### 7.3.6 Summary

Sections 7.3.1 to 7.3.5 illustrate an interpretation of language complexity at public HEIs through the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. Table 7-4 provides an overview of the main points of the discussion.

**Table 7-4 Summary: five levels reflexive interpretation of language at public HEIs**

| **Level 1: informing meaning** | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Separation*<br>Identity of mother tongue | *Disparity*<br>Equal resources for all languages | *Variety*<br>Knowledge-synergy of languages |
| **Level 2: explicating structure** | | |
| *Separation* - *Disparity*<br>Aversion, due to over-the-top Apartheid - Extreme inequality due to years of oppression | *Disparity* - *Variety*<br>Extreme inequality due to years of oppression - Persistent multi-lingualism in Sintu-speaking communities | *Variety* - *Separation*<br>Persistent multi-lingualism in Sintu-speaking communities - Aversion due to over-the-top Apartheid |
| **Level 3: power subjects** | | |
| *Separation* - *Disparity*<br>  | *Disparity* - *Variety*<br>  | *Variety* - *Separation*<br> |
| **Level 4: the voice of the other** | | |
| *Separation* - *Disparity*<br>Sintu languages functions as LoLT - Hegemony of English is contained | *Disparity* - *Variety*<br>Hegemony of English is contained - All languages contribute to learning. English facilitates link to global academic fraternity | *Variety* - *Separation*<br>All languages contribute to learning. English facilitates link to global academic fraternity - Sintu languages functions as LoLT |
| **Level 5: dynamic balance** | | |
| *Separation* - *Disparity*<br>Level of intervention correlates to what extent identity can be harnessed as a force in realising the constitu-tional - Extent to which the seeds of separation and variety in disparity grow, determines if the plateau in the process | *Disparity* - *Variety*<br>Extent to which the seeds of separation and variety in disparity grow, determines if the plateau in the process - Fostering a multilingual vision of creating rich knowledge guards against extremes and holds separation | *Variety* - *Separation*<br>Fostering a multilingual vision of creating rich knowledge guards against extremes and holds separation - Level of intervention correlates to what extent identity can be harnessed as a force in realising the constitu- |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| vision | of bringing equality between languages will advance to another growth cycle | of bringing equality between languages will advance to another growth cycle | and disparity in balance | and disparity in balance | tionnal vision |

### 7.4 Implication for leadership in language diversity at public HEIs

Having analysed the language complexity at public HEIs through a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity, this section explores the leadership tasks that emerge from this analysis. To identify these leadership tasks, aspects of leadership identified in Chapter 3 are weighed against the needs of realising the scientific best practices in and constitutional vision of language diversity at public HEIs.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the generic tasks of leaders are to initiate change, create vision, and influence and enable people (§ 3.2.1). In complex contexts, reflexivity, including opposites as a basic expression of reflexivity, is an essential instrument to deliver these essential tasks (§ 3.3). The discussion below continues the reflexive argument of this chapter and is structured around the initiating change, realising a vision, and influencing and enable followers.

#### 7.4.1 Initiate change and realise a vision

It has been demonstrated (§ 7.3.5) that the current imbalance of forces, in the triad of opposites explicating language diversity, propels this language complexity towards total dominance of English as LoLT at public HEIs. If this imbalance persists, there will eventually be little room for other languages at public HEIs, negating the notion of language diversity. Leadership is needed if this trajectory is to be changed. It is, however, no simple decision for leaders to initiate and realise such a change.

Section 7.3 above demonstrated the disconnect between reality and the constitutional vision for languages at public HEIs. Reality is that English is an established global academic language, growing in acceptance and use in South Africa amongst the general population and at public HEIs, offers the lower cost option to LoLT, and is seen by many as a common ground to social cohesion. The *Constitution* (1996), however, envisions a united diversity: restoring and enhancing dignity of indigenous peoples by developing these languages as LoLT, building social cohesion through respect for the dignity of others, and educating the citizens through the language that would provide for them the easiest access to and success in higher education. Is it worthwhile to

attempt changing the current trajectory towards English only LoLT (§ “doing nothing”, 7.3.5.1 & “assisted proficiency”, 7.3.5.2) towards the constitutional vision of providing choices to students on LoLT (§ “realising the vision”, 7.3.5.3)? And if the constitutional vision is worth pursuing, what is expected of leaders?

The following changes and elements of a vision are identified from the reflexive interpretation on language complexity at public HEIs above (§ 7.3) for leaders to consider if “realising the vision” is to be pursued. It is the work of leaders to initiate change and cast a vision:

- The separation perspective is undervalued in the language at public HEIs debate. This perspective needs to be awakened to provide drive behind the development of Sintu languages. But was that not what the Apartheid regime did? The South African society would be hesitant to engage in such a process. On the other hand, without the motivation, pride in one’s own language brings, it is hard to see how the work of developing the languages and the acceptance of these languages as LoLT at public HEIs by the public would become a reality.

- The current dominance of the disparity perspective is partly in reaction to previous excesses of the separation perspective. It is challenging to convince society to scale back on the primacy of equality. Society does not need, however, to scale back on their disparity perspective. Leaders can be instrumental in changing the focus of this perspective. The counterbalancing presence of equality between languages and the communities speaking these languages is indispensable to keep separation under control. The change needed is an introduction of a second wave disparity. While the current actions deriving from the disparity perspective focus on letting the power structures of the oppressive languages fall, leaders need to convince society that it is time to build the presence and capacity of the oppressed languages. For example, there is little use in attaining equality by railing against Afrikaans or trying to bring English to a fall at public HEIs. It is time for the Sintu languages to be developed to close the language equality gap.

- Separation and disparity are two strong forces in a diversity argument of the languages at public HEIs. The impetus that they bring stems from the psychological drive towards identity and the social insistence on equality (§ Table 5-1). But these forces need direction. The variety perspective can provide this direction. The value of a rich variety of experiences and epistemologies must become the vision behind which most of society mobilise and unite. The prospect of partaking in a round table exercise in unlocking rich knowledges directs the energies of the separation perspective away from separatism. The disparity perspective

moves beyond dismantling external oppressive structures and starts the developmental work of building up previously disadvantaged languages.

If the constitutional vision of LoLT at public HEIs is to be realised, changes are necessary in the power balance between the separation, disparity, and variety perspectives. Without these structural changes, there will not be the required motivation or direction to realise the constitutional vision for LoLT at public HEIs. These changes must be initialised by leaders.

### 7.4.2 Influence and enable people

It has been established (§ 3.2.4) that a major focus of leadership is to build institutions on the diverse and unique individual dispositions of people, through their interaction with each other and codifying these interactions into policies and structures, to realise aims peculiar to the organisation. The argument from a leadership perspective, highlights human capital in organisations. To facilitate the change and construct the lived vision discussed in the previous section, leaders need to cultivate a following amongst stakeholders.

While the most important stakeholders in language complexity at public HEIs are the students and staff, whole language communities and South Africa in general have a stake in the matter. Solving the language question at public HEIs affects the ability of students to learn and language communities to think about, formulate, and discuss complex matters. The dignity of whole language societies is on the table. The constitutional vision of LoLT at public HEIs is the practical demonstration of how diverse people in South Africa can live in social cohesion and unity. The elements to be nurtured in the constitutional vision of languages at public HEIs include both the academic community and society at large. If public HEIs see their role in South Africa as building society by uplifting education and preparing competent contributors to the South African project, their impact will be more significant: equal dignity and valued variety are lived through languages at public HEIs.

Attention has been drawn to the importance of emergent leadership in complex contexts (§ 3.2.4). Emergent leadership refers to the phenomenon that where problems surface, those closest to the problems begin solving the problems. In complexity theory, the emphasis is on leadership that emerges bottom-up from agents rather than top-down autocratic leadership. The task of persons in institutional leadership positions is to create an empowered environment where leadership can emerge. With regard to language at public HEIs, such an environment is fostered when solutions are contemplated by “experts” in “upper rooms” and every stakeholder is confronted with the problem and engages jointly in creating solutions. When these solutions permeate networks and feedback loops throughout the organisation, every emergent leader becomes a follower of the

vision. People who took responsibility for creating a solution are invested in the process (§ 3.3.1.3).

There are several techniques to add momentum to a movement towards the constitutional vision. The following examples initiate creative thinking and are not proffered as recommendations: Gatekeepers, individuals who have influence over other people, inside and outside higher education are encouraged to live and talk about the dream. Advantages are offered for a specific language group if they assist other language groups in their development. Language support services such as proficiency enhancement, textbooks and multimedia in indigenous languages, multilingual pedagogies, can be provided up the educational value chain to secondary and primary schools. Space can be made for success stories of multilingual learning and advances in disadvantaged languages to be told and celebrated (i.e. “Dr Mavela received his Ph.D. in Education – written in Xhosa! He tells the story lunchtime in the amphitheatre. Free Mavela for president T-shirts” or “Prof Venter gave his first lecture in Tswana, we recorded what the students think”). Launch ‘learn a new language’ campaign with pull (i.e., discount on enrolment fees) and push motivators (i.e., a compulsory subject for every course, to be attended in a L3). Institutional leaders must be innovative, always looking for ways how any event related to language at public HEIs can be used to gather followers and give impetus to the movement. The best policy on paper is just as good as the motivation and skill of the people who have to execute it.

A major task of leaders is to foster a reflexive culture at public HEIs (§ 3.3.2.2). In a sense, multilingualism is a form of reflexivity. Promoting a reflexive culture supports multilingual thinking. A reflexive culture assists a public HEI-community to have higher order debates, respect other viewpoints, and come to thoughtful decisions. Institutional leaders need to be innovative in deliberately fostering reflexivity. For example: Ask for proposals that at least consider two options, with strong and weak points of both options. Organise public debate-lunches where the speakers have to say in the end what they learnt from opponents and what the strongest argument of opponents was: the weak points of the opposing argument would already be addressed in the debate. Put diverse people with diverse opinions in work groups and challenge them to deliver a unanimous recommendation. They may record reservations about the recommendation.

Provide resources, support, encouragement, and affirmation to language specialists working on the vision. The language specialists are building the house. They often work alone and without recognition. “How can I help you?” is one of the most powerful questions that shows support, especially if the help is delivered straightaway and effectively. Often appreciation is the best motivator. Put processes in place to construct language policy from the bottom up rather than formulating the policy in some upper room. Participation, however small, in the policymaking

process builds loyalty to the policy. Executing the second-best policy is better than the best policy that remains on paper. Align lean structures to the policy. But take care to make the language project everyone's project at the public HEI. Put accountability measures in place.

People speak languages. The languages which they use at public HEIs have to do with their competence in a language and their perceptions of a language. While language specialists build the house of uplifting Sintu languages, proficiency, and multilingual education, it is the task of leaders to motivate people to inhabit the house.

## 7.5 Conclusions

The research sub-question which this chapter addresses is: how does the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity illuminate leading language diversity at public HEIs?

The answer to the question was structured first by discussing integration of reflexive frameworks of opposites (Chapter 4) and of diversity (Chapter 5). First, five levels of interpretation of opposites are applied to the triad of diversity opposites. Then the integrated reflexive framework of opposites in diversity were applied to language diversity at public HEIs (Chapter 6). The triad of diversity opposites was used to explicate language complexity at public HEIs and this triad of opposites was analysed by the five levels of interpretation of opposites. The final section commented on the role of leadership (Chapter 3) in realising the constitutional vision of LoLT at public HEIs. This illustration of the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity tied together the body of context informing and conceptualising chapters.

Conceptualising this study, this chapter illustrates a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity. Integration of five interpretation levels of opposites with three diversity perspectives applied to language at public HEIs proved at times to be complex. For this reason, a separate subsection was employed to apply the insights gained from this integration and application was applied to leadership practices. The illustration did prove useful in obliging the practitioner to consider various angles of the complexity. The most significant contribution of this chapter is how, through the application of the integrated framework, a balancing of diversity perspectives in a triad of opposites corresponds with a constitutional vision of a healed future. This agreement between the theoretical balance of diversity perspectives and a healed future in a context where diversity was violated, affirms the sufficiency of the integrated framework.

Regarding language diversity at public HEIs, an integrated framework opens new angles to a vibrant research domain. This framework allows practitioners to step back for a moment, and to see the wood from the trees. From this holistic view, priorities and direction become clear:

motivation to develop Sintu languages is to be gained by stimulating pride in these languages. Emphasis on inequality between languages must shift its focus from the languages in power to the languages to be developed. Celebrating the richness various languages serves as a bulwark against dangerous extremes in language at public HEIs.

Theory on leadership in complex contexts affirms the findings of this illustration. To change the current trajectory towards English only education at public HEIs, urgent leadership intervention is needed. The integrated framework identified where the change should be brought about, and where possible dangers in change lies. Unless leadership focuses on mobilising a broad spectrum of people towards realising the constitutional vision for languages at public HEIs, the dream will in all probability not be realised.

### 7.6 Annexure: reflection on the history of South Africa's socio-cultural formation

While several aspects of language at public HEIs have been documented in Chapter 6, this annexure acts as an additional survey of the socio-cultural context of languages at public HEIs. Like growth rings mark the history of a tree, a language captures the socio-cultural development or stagnation of a community. This section re-interprets and contextualises the discussion in Chapter 6 to make the socio-cultural context explicit. The narration of this context does not pretend to be a literature study, in the reflexive spirit of this chapter, this survey is presented as an open play of reflection, i.e. reflexive interpretation (§7.1). The researcher did consult Davids and Willemse (2018),.Giliomee and Mbenga (2007), Mohohlwane (2020), and Sengupta *et al.* (2021):

> Three periods characterise the formation of the socio-cultural embeddedness of languages in South Africa, and languages at public HEIs. These three periods are the early inhabitant, colonial, and democratic eras.
>
> *The first era, early inhabitants.*
>
> On the outskirts of Johannesburg lies the Cradle of Humankind. The precursors to homo sapiens and homo sapiens itself lived here long before Asia and Europe were populated. The history of these inhabitants is written in archaeological finds and scientific interpretation.
>
> The Khoi people are descendants of these early hunter-gatherer societies. Over time they transformed into a pastural society. Those that stayed hunter-gatherers were called San. Several groups of Khoisan peoples lived in Southern Africa, each with a related but different dialect. The Khoisan languages are distinct from Sintu languages.

Circa 280 AD farmers arrived from East Africa in Southern Africa. Usually, these farmers settled close to water sources. The organisation of their settlements shed some light on the organisation of society. The settlements reflected a hierarchical social order and a clear division of roles between men and women. The huts of the women were situated in a circle at the perimeter of the settlement. It is here that food was also stored. The centre of the settlement was the domain of the men. Leaders of the clan stayed there. Social ceremonies were conducted, and even important people buried in this central space. Intricate works of art dated around 900 were found, indicating high levels of culture. Around 1220, with the establishment of Mapungubwe, a new social order, a class distinction can be observed. International trade flourished. As agricultural farming became more specialised, greater numbers could be sustained in the settlements. In Mapungubwe the king did not live in the centre of the settlement but on a hilltop, indicating a elevation in the ruling class.

After the turn of the second millennium, Sotho-Tswana and Nguni speaking people became prominent in the highveld the eastern regions respectively. The 'migration' from the north and northeast did not displace other groups but expanded as households divided and settled on adjacent land. Small separate communities found allegiance through familial bonds and broader political groupings. The chiefs of these clans did not reign over a defined territory but acted through loyalty and a need to stand together. The land was the property of the chief. The poor offered their services to the rich as a means to build their own security and livelihood. Initially chiefs reigned by and large through voluntary agreement, but over time gained more power. As the population grew, the chief became the person to allot land. The close familial relations between clans and resulting sibling dialects might have contributed to multilingualism amongst the Sintu speaking people.

*The second era, colonialization and apartheid.*

Following the discovery of means to navigate the open sea, those daring enough set sail from Europe to explore the world. The first of these European explorers to sail around the southern tip of Africa was Bartolomeu Dias in 1486. By 1652 the United East India Company, a Dutch venture, set up a refreshment post at Cape of Good Hope to supply trade ships *en route* between India and Europe with fresh produce and meat. The community at the Cape grew, through the arrival of, and intermarriage with, slaves from the East and Africa. By 1700 slaves formed the majority of the inhabitants. They created an inter-language, later named Afrikaans, to be able to communicate with their Dutch

masters. Four classes determined life: company officials, free burghers, slaves, and foreigners. The settlers traded with the Khoi, but relations were not friendly. The settlement slowly expanded to surrounding areas. Farming was left to the free burghers and the preferred workers were slaves. As the settlement expanded, clashes in the east occurred with the Xhosas.

The nineteenth century proved to be a period of turmoil. By 1806 the British permanently annexed the Cape. English was introduced as language of the colony. Missionaries ventured inland and offered education and literacy to Sintu speaking communities. Slaves were freed. Conflict escalated between free burghers and Xhosas. The farmers were left without a workforce and insecure at the eastern border. By 1838 many farmers, or Boers as they were called after the Dutch word for farmer, left the British colony to settle further inland. African communities experienced a time of instability and subjugation. Suffering followed the Mfecane, disruption and population migration. There was competition for, and conflict over, resources between different tribes, and the Zulus became a subjugating force. Eventually these wars were displaced by conflict with the Boers and the English. The English fought successive battles against the Nguni tribes. The Boers who trekked inland to escape English reign in the Cape, established two republics, the Free State and Transvaal. This brought them into conflict with Sotho's, Tswana's, Pedi's, and Swazi's. With diamonds discovered at Kimberley, gold on the Witwatersrand, and the imperialistic Cecil John Rhodes as prime minister at the Cape Colony, annexation of the two Boer Republics by England was inevitable. The nineteenth century concluded with the second South African War (1899-1902), which left the English in total control of what would become South Africa. The Union of South Africa was proclaimed in 1910. The constitution of the Union bestowed voting rights only to white men.

During the twentieth century those suppressed eventually gained dignity and freedom. But first the Afrikaans speaking white community emerged as a political force. By 1925 Afrikaans supplanted Dutch to accompany English as official language. Afrikaner nationalism grew and in 1948 the National Party won the vote of the white electorate and in 1961 South Africa became a Republic. The National Party was in power for the latter half of the century, pursuing segregation and "separate development" as policies, known as Apartheid. The laws ensuring these policies effectively relegated non-white people to second class citizens, severely limiting their dignity and rights. The Apartheid regime promoted mother tongue education, but only succeeded in contaminating what had become best practice elsewhere. Already in 1912, the African National Congress (ANC)

was founded to unite black people and to defend and promote their rights and freedoms. As the rights and freedoms of the black people diminished, the struggle against Apartheid oppressors became more intense. Non-violent protests in time turned into a guerrilla war. The ban of the ANC in 1960 was repealed in 1990 and Nelson Mandela was freed. In 1994 the first democratic and free election in which all races could participate was held.

During this era, the western concept of higher education was introduced to South Africa. Formal higher education existed in England since the start of the second millennium (Oxford, 1096). The first university in Netherland was established in Leiden, 1575. Since the seventeenth century, work has been done on the empirical scientific method. By the time universities in South Africa took root in the nineteenth century (for example, University of Cape Town in 1827, Witwatersrand in 1896, and Stellenbosch in 1864), universities were settled institutions in Europe. The concept of higher education was imported from England, rather than developed locally.

*Third era, democracy*

The ANC won the first democratic election and the advent of the new, democratic South Africa in 1994 was embraced with joy and hope by most inhabitants. Finally, South Africa began to build an inclusive society. A new constitution was agreed upon and promulgated in 1996. The preamble states, “united in our diversity”. It, however, took great effort to overcome centuries of suppression, disadvantage, and inequality. Culture constrains strategy. During the first decade, the economy grew, and unemployment shrank. Houses were built and social grants were instituted for the destitute. Language policies foresaw a multilingual society where neglected languages could be developed, and higher education provided in the language of choice, as far as possible.

The second decade of ANC rule, however, was plagued by growing failure of service delivery and grand scale corruption. The economy stalled and unemployment rose by 2021 to be the highest in the world. The early vision of a prosperous, fair, and multilingual society where previously disadvantaged languages would be developed to foster higher education did not materialise. In the absence of delivery on the early language policies, the opposite happened. English settled to be the *de facto* language of higher education. Some public HEIs made an effort to develop Sintu languages, but the impact on multilingual higher education was slight.

Because of the vastly different lived experiences of different language groups in South Africa over many years, with regard to higher education, the triad of diversity perspectives functions differently in the respective language communities.

# CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

*…we must know one another, and live with that knowledge,*
*or end marooned in a Beckett-world of colliding soliloquy.*

(Geertz, 2000:84)

## 8.1 Introduction

A concise summary and synthesis introduce this chapter. These conclusions are structured according to the research questions and chapters that answered the questions. One way for leaders to make sense of complex problems is through reflexivity, and opposites as a basic form of reflexivity. Two reflexive frameworks were conceptualised to offer leaders a means of making sense of complex diversity contexts, one focussing on opposites and the other on diversity. Languages at public HEIs are complex contexts because they are fraught with contradictions. The combined reflexive framework of opposites in diversity sufficiently illustrates the value of this framework in solving the real-life problems of language at public HEIs. This last chapter concludes with reflections on the contributions of the study and makes suggestions for further research.

## 8.2 Summary and synthesis

The *Constitution* (1996) is a visionary document which holds out the prospect of a transformed society where citizens are united in diversity. Being united in diversity implies that diverse languages enjoy parity of esteem, and everyone has the right to education in the language of their choice (1996:ss. 6(4),29(2)). LoLT at public HEIs, however, is rapidly declining towards the opposite: English is growing more dominant and in many cases accepted as the sole *de facto* LoLT (DHET, 2020:s. 29). Afrikaans as LoLT is disappearing from public higher education (*Afriforum v UFS*, 2017:ss. 129-135). The uncoordinated effort to develop Sintu languages as LoLT is considered largely inadequate (DHET, 2015; Zikode, 2017).

While many factors cause this neglect of all official languages except English Es, it is by definition the work of leaders to revive and realise the constitutional vision (Burcar, 2014:94; Bush, 2007:392). In complex contexts, such as diversity and language diversity, an important method for leaders to facilitate change and realise a fading vision is an empowering organisational culture where agents and feedback networks emerge as drivers towards a shared vision (Kilburg & Donohue, 2011; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007). As complex contexts are fraught with contradictions, such an organisational culture usually incorporates some process to consider all sides of the contradictions with a view to synthesis. Oppositions have long been present in, and reflexivity has recently been introduced to, scholarship concerned with leadership (Alvesson *et al.*, 2016; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010a; Li, 2016).

This study sought to conceptualise reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity to assist leaders in realising a vision. This meta-theoretical work of conceptualisation was grounded in reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Cunliffe, 2016b).The reflexive framework of opposites developed in his thesis enriches the general work on opposites in leadership

scholarship. By employing five successive theoretical viewpoints of opposites as levels of reflection, rich information can be gathered on contradictions underlying any complex context. The five levels of interpretation are meaning (Saussure, 1985), underlying structure (Lévi-Strauss, 2005), power (Foucault, 1984), the other (1982a; Derrida, 1982b), and dynamic balance (Li, 2016).

The reflexive framework of diversity brings balance in understanding contractionary perspectives underlying various diversity contexts. Separation, disparity, and variety are transposed from a typology (Harrison & Klein, 2007) to perspectives on diversity through underlying human values (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012) and the respective theories underlying each type. History teaches that emphasis of one of these diversity perspectives at the cost of the other perspectives has adverse effects, even catastrophic in some instances (Goudzwaard, 1981; Solzhenitsyn, 1974; United Nations, 2004:art. 7). The framework developed here encourages leaders to consider diversity through reflexive interpretation from these three identified perspectives of diversity.

This study began by arguing that identifying regression from the constitutional vision of language diversity at public HEIs presents an opportunity for leaders. The work of leaders is to initiate change, influence people, and realise a vision (Burcar, 2014:94; Bush, 2007:392). After conceptualising reflexive frameworks of opposites and diversity to assist leaders in fostering a reflexive culture, this study circled back to language at public HEIs and illustrated the value of reflexive frameworks for language policy and practice at public HEIs. A background study of language at public HEIs found it to be a complex context because most aspects relating to language at public HEIs are fraught with contradictions (Chapter 6). It was confirmed that best scientific practices for education in multilingual societies support the constitutional vision but that little progress had been made in realising this vision. Applying the reflexive frameworks of opposites and diversity to language at public HEIs illustrated the use of such frameworks and offered the hope of a solution. The reflexive frameworks are found to be sufficient in that a balanced consideration of the problem is facilitated, and the outcome of the consideration confirms the foundational theoretical notion that leadership is needed to realise vision. With regard to language at public HEIs, the illustration guided leaders to focus their contribution upon realising the constitutional vision, The psychological forces of the separation perspective could provide impetus to the development of Sintu languages, and the vision of rich knowledge and lived experiences brought about by the variety perspective could keep the separation and disparity perspectives in check. When leaders dynamically balance these perspectives in language at public HEIs, South Africa might be on the road to realising constitutional vision.

## 8.3 Reflections on answers to the research questions

The following reflections on the outcomes of this study are conditioned by the sub-research questions, which correspond to the chapters of the study. From the reflections prompted by the research sub-questions, the conclusion answering the main research question is formulated.

### 8.3.1 How can leaders make sense of complex problems?

From Chapter 3, discovering the context of leadership in complexity, three observations stand out:

- Leadership is about influencing people.
- In complex contexts, leadership should be allowed to emerge and permeate a network of agents.
- The role of institutional leaders is to create a climate where emerging leadership is free to consider various options and viewpoints.

At the intersection of these three observations, lie the leadership tools of opposites and reflexivity. A reflexive framework structures an open play of reflecting on complexity across several levels of interpretation. The structural side of such a framework serves as a guiding rail directing the interpretation. Within the safety of this structure, emergent leaders can engage in the open play of reflection on complexity. By introducing such a framework into organisational culture, every emergent leader is equipped to make sense of complex problems.

### 8.3.2 How can opposites assist leaders in making sense of complexities?

Chapter 4 took up the call of the previous chapter for conceptualising a reflexive framework for the benefit of leaders. Oppositions are rife in complex contexts. Conceptualising a reflexive framework of opposites structures the open play of reflection on a particular opposite. Positioning opposites laterally presents the most basic form of being reflexive, reflecting across two levels of interpretation. Conceptualising a reflexive framework to guide an open play of reflection across vertical levels of interpretation offers rich knowledge of the nuances and perspectives afforded by opposites.

There is a progression in the use of opposites in western thinking. Saussure focussed on the meaning of the two opposing concepts. Lévi-Strauss drew attention to how an opposition explicates a culture in a society. Foucault interrogated the power of one opposite subjecting the other. Derrida ventured to deconstruct the opposition by turning the power relation around. This

western trajectory of the use of opposites accentuates differentiation between opposing poles. Yin-Yang offers a counterbalance to the occidental polarities by probing the spatial and temporal interdependence, the dynamic balance, between opposing poles.

The western trajectory and eastern counterbalance of the reflexive framework of opposites draw upon theoretical perspectives representing a broad range of worldviews and epistemologies. In most instances, a leader finds his or her own perspective represented somewhere in the five levels of interpretation. In addition, the framework guides the leader to reflect on the concerns, dynamics, and aims of other perspectives. Often, the concept of oppositions is dismissed for being simplistic and a means to entrench structural cultural hegemony (Jacques, 1997:96; Melrose, 2005). The reflexive framework of opposites overcomes this critique by adding rich understanding from various perspectives and nuance to opposites. The framework enhances the use of opposites in leadership.

### 8.3.3 How can leaders make sense of diversity?

The domain of diversity is beset with multiple viewpoints, demands, emotions, goals, definitions, theories, and attributes. While a typology of diversity assists research, another kind of framework is needed to apply what is known about diversity and lead in a multitude of unique and complex settings.

Chapter 5 conceptualises a reflexive framework of diversity. This framework is reflexive because it encourages practitioners to reflect on the complexity of a particular instance or aspect of diversity from three perspectives. A balanced, reflexive consideration is especially important in contexts that are so often marked by clashes of antagonists with single-issue goals and one-sided arguments. As explained in § 8.3.2, such a framework assists institutional leaders to foster a culture of reflexive interpretation and empowers emergent leaders to grow in well-considered leadership.

Three perspectives, derived from different types of diversity and their respective theories, were identified: separation, disparity, and variety. Using the circular continuum of basic human values to provide value-based definitions of the three perspectives allows these perspectives to be placed in a triad of oppositions. This triad of oppositional perspectives on diversity can, in turn, be viewed through this reflexive framework of opposites. The result of such a combined framework of opposites in diversity is a lateral open play of reflection against three perspectives on diversity and a vertical open play of reflections against the five levels of interpreting opposites. Applying this unique reflexive framework of opposites in diversity leaders provides a profound and

reliable understanding of not only the positions of various perspectives on diversity, and how these perspectives dynamically interact and need each other for the system to reach equilibrium.

### 8.3.4 Why is language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at public HEIs deemed, from a leadership perspective, a complex problem?

The reflexive framework of opposites in diversity requires an illustration to communicate how it works and acts as a first test for its sufficiency. Chapter 6 reveals the broad and narrow contexts of the specific diversity complexity where the framework could be illustrated, LoLT at public HEIs. This background study comprises the data on which the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity is illustrated in Chapter 7.

Language, and specifically LoLT, at public HEIs is a complex problem. A range of aspects were analysed: the origin of language diversity in South Africa, language demography, multilingualism, the science of language of instruction in multilingual settings, the constitutional mandate for language in education, proficiency, current standing of different languages as public HEIs, a psycho-social perspective on language and policy implementation. In all aspects analysed, inherent contradictions were identified. Typical contradictions identified were the demographic reality that a L1 of less than 10% of the population dominates higher education. Despite the fact that a vision of parity between languages was constitutionally created and sanctioned, language disparity is growing at public HEIs. public HEIs have the mandate to facilitate research and offer higher learning but are burdened with tasks which other entities failed to deliver. Where leadership is most needed, the opportunity remains largely vacant. It is generally accepted that contradictions mark complex social problems. These contradictions are classified in Chapter 7 into the diversity triad of oppositional perspectives. It is therefore concluded that identifying, implementing, and sustaining LoLT fairly at public HEIs is a complex problem.

### 8.3.5 How does the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity illuminate leading language diversity at public HEIs?

Chapter 7 illustrates the value, viable applications, and flexibility of a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity by considering language diversity at public HEIs in terms of it and formulating insights for leadership. From this illustration, two levels of conclusions can be drawn with certainty: the first regarding the utility and sufficiency of the integrated reflexive framework of opposites in diversity, and the second regarding insights gained in the complexity of language at public HEIs.

#### 8.3.5.1 Utility of the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity

The aim to illustrate the conceptualised reflexive framework of opposites in diversity is pursued in Chapter 7 by categorising aspects of language diversity at public HEIs according to the triad of diversity perspectives. This triad is then reflexively interpreted as three sets of opposites. As this illustration serves as a first assessment of the framework, the following reflection on the process of compiling the illustration is proffered:

- The categorisation of aspects of the diversity complexity is useful to untangle the many intersecting and conflicting demands and forces.

- Recognition of the categories as perspectives with equal reflexive standing leads the practitioner to be aware of biases towards some and against other perspectives. The framework facilitated greater balance in considering the complexity.

- By positioning the triad of diversity perspectives as three pairs of opposites assisted in clearly differentiating between the different perspectives and the unique disposition each represents.

- The three pairs of opposites allowed reflection on where hegemony lies, and which perspectives are subjected by the perspective in power. This realisation was helpful in discerning why some perspectives exert power over other perspectives.

- To reflect on reverse power positions without constraints of what is practicable or viable, or what the effect such reverse positions would have on the complexity, allowed visualisation and consideration of other possibilities. The question came to mind: what would need to happen to make this position viable?

- Reflection on dynamic balance as level of interpretation enabled awareness of how the perspectives hold each other accountable and which perspectives should be focussed upon to generate growth towards the vision of diversity.

- The reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity fit complex diversity contexts well.

From this reflection follows the conclusion that the combined use of the reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity grants a clearer, more pertinent, and useful comprehension of underlying forces and a greater sense of where and when leadership is most needed. The reflexive framework of opposites in diversity provides sufficient utility to assist leaders in diversity complexities.

#### 8.3.5.2 Reflections on language at public HEIs

The illustration of applying the reflexive framework of opposites in diversity to language at public HEIs introduces a new frame by which to understand the notion of complexity. Leadership is required in the following areas if the constitutional vision of being united in our diversity, parity of esteem between languages, and education offered in the (official) language of choice is to be attained:

- English has become, through its global hegemony, the *de facto* LoLT at public HEIs in South Africa. This hegemony is a major barrier to the realisation of an egalitarian constitutional vision. To overcome this barrier, leaders, from the disparity perspective, must challenge the sole use of English, to transcend its hegemony through benevolence and universalism towards other languages at risk. This challenge should be enhanced from the variety perspective by actively creating a vision of personal growth and openness to change offered in environments rich in diverse languages and dispositions. It is vital for emergent leaders to intervene in the hegemony of English if space is to be created for other languages to exist and flourish at public HEIs.

- Sintu languages have become the victim of lacklustre efforts to develop them. This lack of development is the second major barrier to realisation of the constitutional vision for LoLT at public HEIs. Centuries of suppression and disallowing values such as face, power, and achievement contributed to a lack of self-enhancement. To raise the barrier further, these values of the separation perspective are viewed with suspicion and scepticism after Apartheid has demonstrated what happens if these values become entrenched in an ideology. Leaders must influence followers to be proud of their Sintu languages heritage, motivate them, and enable them to work towards the development of these languages. Without this pride, languages might never be developed by dedicated language specialists to be used as LoLT, and the groundswell of political will to align the whole education system, outside local public HEIs, to foster learning in Sintu languages, will remain absent. A desire has to be cultivated in education systems to teach and in the general public to learn in Situ languages. While stimulating the separating perspective, leaders must actively keep this perspective in check by promoting the variety perspective of rich knowledge and personal growth.

- Afrikaans carries the stigma of an separatist ideology that birthed Apartheid. For Afrikaans to be part of the constitutional vision of languages at public HEIs, leaders must stimulate the disparity and variety perspectives in the domain of Afrikaans. The disparity perspective will lead Afrikaans-speaking people to transcend their language and perceptions about the

language through benevolence and universalism. The disparity perspective provides a vision of being stimulated by rich knowledge and dispositions.

The constitutional vision of unity in diversity, parity of esteem of languages, and education offered by the language of choice relies on leaders nurturing a dynamic balance between the separation, disparity, and variety perspectives in languages at public HEIs.

### 8.3.6 Reflections on the main research question: what framework can be conceptualised to assist leading in complex language diversity at public HEIs?

A reflexive framework of opposites in diversity assists leaders in complex language diversity at public HEIs. This framework has been conceptualised as two separate reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity and illustrated on complex language diversity at public HEIs, as one integrated framework. The following is implied by the terms used:

- The term ‘reflexive’ refers to the framework, facilitating an open play of reflection against several levels of interpretation. The framework is designed to be reflexive, to enable users to view a complexity from multiple perspectives, and to guard against personal bias and one-sided consideration.

- A framework was constructed to act as a structure by which reflexive interpretation is systematically practiced. Through repeated use, some of the aspects of reflexive interpretation will become automated.

- This new reflexive framework of opposites interprets the dynamics of opposites against five levels of interpretation: meaning, structure, power, the other, and dynamic balance. This framework can be used in complex social contexts.

- The reflexive framework of diversity interprets a diversity complexity in terms of three diversity perspectives. These three perspectives can be positioned in a triad of three sets of opposites.

- The combined reflexive framework of opposites in diversity interprets a diversity complexity in terms of the triad of diversity opposites by interpreting each of the three diversity opposites from the five levels of interpretation for opposites.

- Language at public HEIs has been found to be a complex diversity context. The usefulness of the framework has been illustrated in this context.

## 8.4 Contributions

This study makes the following contributions to scholarship:

- An authentic and quite new reflexive framework of opposites is presented by which complex contexts can be comprehensively, balanced, and practicably interpreted. In this research into opposites, no existing comprehensive overview and integration of the theoretical foundations of opposites were found. Literature generally tended to favour one level of interpretation of opposites, while this reflexive framework proposes using opposites from five perspectives. The conceptualisation of this framework contributes a practicable framework to the field of leadership scholarship and assists in analysis of complex contexts.

- A reflexive framework of diversity is proffered to facilitate a balanced understanding of a diversity context. Diversity research is currently dominated by research from the disparity perspective. This strand of research, however, does not annul diversity research from other perspectives. It would benefit diversity research greatly to embark on reflexive research.

- The reflexive framework of opposites in diversity offers a new insight to the scholarly area of leadership and applied linguistics in that a fresh frame is provided here to analyse what needs to be stimulated and where to trigger countermeasures in steering the language project at public HEIs towards the constitutional vision. These insights, in short, include that:

    - public HEIs are major agents in facilitating the realisation of the constitutional vision;

    - that leadership is essential to steer the ship by stimulating the separation perspective for the development and acceptance of Sintu languages while putting the counterweight of the variety perspective in place;

    - to challenge the use English, to transcend itself to serve the greater good with the promise of exhilarating research from a variety of perspectives; and

    - and to release Afrikaans of its stigma through the variety and disparity perspectives. The work of leaders in this regard is different for management tasks. Leaders create a following in pursuit of a vision.

## 8.5 Suggestions for further research

The following suggestions are made for further research.

- This unique reflexive framework of opposites offers a western and eastern perspective on opposites. It adds considerable value if a study scrutinises perspectives on opposites from the perspective of the global south.

- Although the researcher should through this research be well equipped to apply the frameworks, the researcher found it at times a complex endeavour. Especially the reflexive framework of opposites required deep knowledge of respective levels of interpretation. Work to simplify the frameworks further will add value. For example, action research could be employed to simplify the reflexive framework of opposites.

- This study focussed on conceptualising the reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity. By illustrating the frameworks in a real-world context, an initial step was taken to test the utility and sufficiency of the frameworks. More work needs to be done in applying and calibrating the frameworks (see Meredith, 1998:3-6). While the design of further research is better left to the researchers, it might stimulate ideas to present an example of further research: empirical testing of the depth of and balanced approach to complex problems by leaders pre and post training in either or both the reflexive frameworks of opposites and diversity could be compared to determine the utility of the framework(s). The results of pre and post testing can be compared across different complexity contexts.

- The reflexive frameworks of opposites and of diversity have been illustrated to add value if applied to the domain of language diversity at public HEIs. The general nature of these metatheoretical frameworks should be able to stimulate insights at other types of institutions and complex diversity contexts. The reflexive framework of opposites should be applicable to most complex social contexts. The frameworks should be tested in multiple environments and contexts.

## 8.6 Conclusion

The most significant conclusions from this study are:

- A unique and new reflexive framework of opposites interprets the dynamics of opposites in terms of five levels of interpretation: meaning, structure, power, the other, and dynamic balance. This framework can be used in complex social contexts.

- A unique and new reflexive framework of diversity interprets the dynamic balance of three oppositional perspectives on diversity, namely separation, disparity, and variety.

- This reflexive framework of opposites in diversity reveals an imbalance in the current state of languages at public HEIs. This imbalance contributes to a disjunction between the language reality at public HEIs and the constitutional vision of parity of esteem. The framework provides leaders with insight and clear direction to realise the constitutional vision.

These conclusions were reached by the following reasoning:

Diversity is one of the vexing problems with which public HEIs constantly grapple. Language diversity at public HEIs serves as a case in point. The constitutional vision for equality of languages at public HEIs entails unity in diversity, parity of esteem between languages, and offering education to citizens in the official language of their choice. Since the promulgation of the *Constitution* (1996) public HEIs have not substantially realised the constitutional vision. Maximum disparity between languages persists and even grows in some instances: where one language only serves as LoLT and no other language has academic standing.

The failure to realise the constitutional vision points to shortcomings in what is typically identified as the role of leadership. The most basic understanding of the role of leaders in complex contexts is to influence people to change the *status quo* and realise a vision through emergent leadership by agents in networks. As complex contexts are fraught with contradictions, a framework that explicates tensions and interactions within diversity complexities greatly assists leaders to steer an organisation towards realising a vision.

This study conceptualised a reflexive framework of opposites in diversity that aids leadership in diversity complexities. This assistance includes the nurturing of a reflexive culture from which considered leadership emerges. A reflexive culture is at the core of the framework: to practise an open play of reflection across several levels of interpretation as an automated routine in an organisation. Reflexivity, it is concluded, enhances meaningful engagement with complex contexts.

This framework consists of two parts which can be applied separately or in conjunction with one another according to the needs of a specific context. This reflexive framework of opposites is generic and can be applied to any complexity where contradictions can be identified. This framework offers five levels of interpretation across the spectrum of western approaches to opposites, and balances western thought with an eastern perspective. It offers in-depth interpretation of the underlying competing issues in a specific context and leads to reflection on the relations between these issues.

The second part of the framework comprises a reflexive framework of diversity. This framework singles out diversity as a complex context type. This framework offers three generic perspectives on diversity as three levels of interpretation. These three perspectives can be placed in a triad of opposites which can, in turn, be analysed by a reflexive framework of opposites.

This reflexive framework of opposites in diversity enables leaders the opportunity to rise above the noise generated in a diversity context. This framework assists leaders in appreciating the presence of different perspectives, understanding the interconnectedness of these perspectives, and generating interventions to steer an organisation through a dynamically balanced process towards the realisation of a vision. In addition, the framework provides institutional leaders with a structured instrument to scaffold reflexive interpretation in an organisation and over time embed a culture of reflexivity.

In terms of language diversity at public HEIs, this study offers a context to illustrate the use of the framework. From this illustration emerged the need for leadership in this language project. Leaders should *inter alia* focus on creating sufficient pride in Sintu languages to release energy and the political will to develop these languages, stimulating self-transcendence and an openness to change in the use of English at public HEIs so that space opens for Sintu languages to develop; freeing Afrikaans of its stigma through self-transcendence and openness to change. Releasing and dynamically balancing these values has great potential to realise the constitutional vision for language diversity at public HEIs.

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
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Co-promotor: Prof. Robert Balfour

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