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To cite this article: Busani Maseko & Liqhwa Siziba (11 Jun 2024): Micro language planning as a contested space: evidence from a South African university, African Identities, DOI: [10.1080/14725843.2024.2365660](https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2365660)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2365660>



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Published online: 11 Jun 2024.



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Micro language planning as a contested space: evidence from a South African university

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ABSTRACT

Micro language planning is often framed as democratic, transformative, inclusive, and therefore, less contested as it reproduces community consensus and support. This is contrasted with macro or top-down language planning which is power inflected and weaponised to serve interests of the dominant class. Through a theorisation of institutional language policies as products of micro language planning, this article analyses the language policy of one university in South Africa and reveals that, contrary to this widely held view, bottom-up language planning is also a site of struggle and contestation. In particular, we focus on specific language policy provisions that reveal the university's underlying disposition towards multilingualism and linguistic identities. The analysis reveals multi-layered contestations on multilingualism and identity inherent in the university's language policy. While the language policy purports to foster transformation by promoting multilingualism through the university's 'languages of choice,' it is not exempt from the vagaries of essentialist identity politics and macro level language ideologies which legitimise English and Afrikaans. By identifying only four languages for promotion, the language policy envisages a kind of 'exclusionary multilingualism' that disregards the cosmopolitan character of the university and the identities marked by indigenous African languages left invisibilised by the language policy.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 July 2023
Accepted 4 June 2024

KEYWORDS

Micro language planning;
identity; multilingualism;
university language policy;
South Africa; indigenous
African languages

Introduction and background

At the end of apartheid in 1994, and the ushering in of a new constitutional dispensation in South Africa, there followed the need to dismantle structures of inequality that sustained and were sustained by the old order. In part, this involved the enunciation of a new constitution and a new language policy that reflected this disposition and direction the country was about to take. In line with the South African system of devolved governance, the approach to language policy proclamation was to be equally decentralised, granting provincial authorities the latitude to articulate language legislation which reflected the local sociolinguistic dynamics. Indeed, all forms of language policies were to

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comply with the requirements of the constitution and national language policy imperatives.

The South African language policy resides in several related documents which together spell out how languages are to be used in various domains, including the principles that regulate their usage. These documents include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) Act (Act 59 of 1996), the National Language Policy Framework (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003), the Republic of South Africa (2012) among other pronouncements in education and legal domains (Docrat, 2020; Docrat & Kaschula, 2015). In part, this devolved and decentralised approach in language policy has earned the country admiration and praise for having one of the most democratic, inclusive and progressive language policies in the world (Docrat, 2020; Maseko & Siziba, 2023; Ndhlovu, 2008). The decentralisation of language policy permits the participation of bottom-up agency in the formulation and implementation of local and institutionally relevant language policies (Alimi, 2016; Obaidul Hamid, 2019).

Consistent with this approach, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2020) mandated all public universities to individually formulate and implement institutional language policies that contribute to the transformation of higher education by embracing and entrenching diversity and multilingualism. This directive provided opportunities for universities to assert bottom-up agency and mainstream previously marginalised indigenous African languages in teaching and learning and foster multilingual practices across their campuses broadly.

Institutional language policies as bottom-up initiatives have been touted as being more democratic, inclusive and in touch with grassroots sociolinguistic realities (Alimi, 2016; Hassa, 2012; Obaidul Hamid, 2019). On the other hand, macro national language policies are often perceived as reflecting language ideologies of the state and the ruling elite who manipulate policy processes to maintain the status quo and further entrench structures of inequality. This is often achieved through exclusionary language policies that, while purporting to be inclusive, are designed to perpetuate the status quo through gatekeeping to foster elite closure (Alexander, 2004; Maseko, 2021a; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). Consequently, macro language policies are usually criticised for misrepresenting the collective aspirations of the people. Macro policies also tend to be coercive since they derive their legal force from legislative bodies and instruments (Alimi, 2016; Hungwe, 2007). In spite of their centring capacity in shaping language use and the sociolinguistic landscape broadly, macro language policies are often challenged, contested and even dismantled at the micro level implementation (Alexander, 2004; Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014).

Through a theorisation of institutional language policies as products of bottom-up or micro language planning (Baldauf, 2006), we analysed a language policy of one South African university (henceforth, The university) to reveal how contrary to the popular belief, bottom-up language planning initiatives are also sites of contestations and negotiations about multilingualism and identity (Henderson, 2017; Rudwick, 2018). The policy is available online through the following link: https://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-governance-management/policy/2022/LanguagePolicy/2P_2.5_2022_e1.pdf.

Although the university's language policy is intended to foster transformation of the university's language use by being responsive to the needs of the language speakers in

local contexts, we show that it is not exempt from the vagaries of essentialist identity politics and it reproduces macro level language ideologies (Rudwick, 2018; Woldemariam, 2017), thus revealing that there is always some interaction between dynamics of micro and macro language planning.

To make sense of the university's language policy as a site of multilingual and identity contestations, the study performed a qualitative content analysis of the university's revised language policy (The university, 2022). Our analysis specifically focused on selected policy provisions to uncover underlying contestations between named languages and by extension, the identities they represent. In the analysis, we paid attention to the wording of the policy text to uncover the opaque relations that are not readily apparent. The focus on the policy text was inspired by the observation that 'how we write language policies, who it empowers, and the extent to which other languages are "let in" are important factors to consider for how the policy will be taken up' (van der Merwe, 2022, p. 289).

The analysis suggests that macro language ideologies which influence state level language policies are reproduced in the university's language policy and sustained by the wording of the policy provisions. On closer scrutiny the vague and escapist provisions perpetuate inequalities that the policy intended to address in the first place. We therefore argue that the language policy of the university language is weaponised to service the politics of identity. As read and discerned from the policy text, the kind of multilingualism envisaged by the language policy of this university is exclusionary as it legitimises only those identities represented by the 'university's languages of choice,' much to the disregard of the cosmopolitan nature of the university and the higher education space in general.

Situating university language policies in bottom-up language planning

Language planning has previously been conceptualised and framed as a state or government sanctioned activity, whereby decisions about language status and function are made by elites and handed down for implementation by institutions, albeit without their input and involvement in policy formulation (Alexander, 2004; Chríst, 2006). Top-down language planning is used as a synonym for this kind of government-initiated macro-language planning. However, recent conceptualisations of language policy have begun to acknowledge the agency of non-state actors in the articulation of language policy at various levels of society (Obaidul Hamid, 2019). Language planning initiatives that typically originate or involve the participation of non-elites at the grassroots of society form part of bottom-up language planning, also used as a synonym for micro language planning. Micro language planning refers to cases where businesses, institutions, groups or individuals initiate recognisable language policies on how to use and develop their language resources (Baldauf, 2006; Chríst, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). The metaphors of top-down and bottom-up therefore relate to origin and direction of language policy decisions. Because it involves individuals and non-elites, bottom-up language planning has the potential to challenge the dominance of hegemonic languages by fostering the use of marginalised languages (Alimi, 2016). It is sometimes referred to as democratic language planning (Alexander, 2004; Baldauf, 2006; Obaidul Hamid, 2019). There is a strong belief therefore that bottom-up language planning

initiatives are transformative since they draw their relevance from communities and individuals that the same are meant to impact (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006). Any language planning endeavour that ignores micro and grassroots language dynamics is likely to be a futile and empty gesture (Rudwick, 2018).

Since university language policies typically originate within the institutions themselves, they are products of micro language planning or as Neville Alexander puts it, language planning from below (Alexander, 2004). A popular view of bottom-up language planning is that it operates through collective consensual support and shared community ideologies. Although the directive to enact and implement language policies in universities may have come from the government, through the DHET, the actual planning, operationalisation and implementation of university language policies is the culmination of a consultative process between university authorities, staff, students and other stakeholders. These bottom-up initiatives are necessary redress to social inequality and injustice at institutional level.

A contrast between macro and micro language planning is usually drawn by projecting the former as being autocratic and coercive and the latter as inclusive and based on consensual community beliefs. In this thinking, micro language policy is thus uncritically projected as less contested, organic and therefore aligned with the needs and aspirations of communities or institutions they are intended to serve (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). Bottom-up planning has thus been touted as essential in any language planning initiatives that seek to foster social transformation (Makalela & McCabe, 2013).

It is therefore prudent to discuss the obligation of university language policies to strategic national imperatives set by the South African constitution and the national language policy framework. Consistent with values and ideals of the constitution, the documented language policy of South Africa seeks to promote national unity within the country's linguistic and cultural diversity, to entrench democracy and foster the protection of language rights, to promote respect for, and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity, to promote multilingualism, to contribute to the elaboration and modernisation of African languages and to promote national economic development broadly (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003). To this end, Section 6 of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) recognises 11 (now 12 with the addition of sign language) official languages.¹ Together with the National Language Policy Framework (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003), these policy documents commit to promote and uphold multilingualism and diversity by according 'parity of esteem' and equitable functional and institutional status to the official languages (Docrat, 2020; Drummond, 2016; Rudwick, 2018). Building on the dictates of the constitution and the national language policy framework, the DHET through its Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2020) also pledges to entrench multilingualism in higher education institutions by promoting previously marginalised African languages and transforming the university spaces by addressing the skewed language practices left by the legacy of colonialism and apartheid (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Madadzhe, 2019; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). In particular, the grand aim of this transformation drive is to support the use of African languages as languages of teaching and learning and to ultimately dismantle the hegemony of English and Afrikaans in public higher learning institutions.

Since universities in South Africa have been empowered to exercise some degree of autonomy in making decisions about their language policies, university institutions represent interesting cases of bottom-up or micro language planning (van der Merwe, 2022). Because of the influence of language in constituting identities, such a view of university language policies will possibly illuminate their function as sites of social mobilisation and organisation where political outcomes are defined and contested (Rudwick, 2018; Woldemariam, 2017).

By locating university language policies within the micro language planning domain, this paper shows that while the macro-micro dichotomy can be drawn, a critical analysis of documented language of the university reveals that, just like macro language policies, institutional language policies are similarly contested spaces, seldom in harmony with the ethnolinguistic character and realities of respective institutions. Contestations about multilingualism and identity at the micro are also political, and tend to resemble macro language planning, reproducing similar ideologies and tensions. This reveals and reinforces the view that universities are gatekeeping institutions (Shohamy, 2007). The decision to selectively promote only 'some named languages' within the university is neither neutral nor arbitrary. It reproduces the power inflected macro level dynamics and contestations that exist between languages and their speakers, further revealing how macro and micro language planning exist in a continuum.

Institutional language policies as contested spaces: a review of literature

There is a growing body of literature focusing on language policy as a contested space. Within this burgeoning literature much light has been shone on how macro language policies reproduce the ideological, social, political and economic contestations of the various linguistic groups that are included or excluded by the policy provisions especially in education (e.g. Hawkey, 2023; Maseko, 2021b; Yao Sua & Hooi See, 2014). Within the education space, these language policy contestations have been investigated from a variety of perspectives. A common theme among these studies is to understand the role of language policy in furthering and perpetuating the legitimate language ideology and the subsequent backgrounding of alternative languages and ways of being (Maksimovtsova, 2017; Yao Sua & Hooi See, 2014).

The foregoing animates the view of macro policies as undemocratic, more centralising and tailored to preserve the status quo. Attention to micro language policies as sites of similar contestations has, until recently, been marginal. The tendency has been to project micro language planning as a welcome alternative to top-down planning since it is based on community consensus (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Chríost, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Moriarty & Pietikäinen, 2011). While focus on micro language policy is increasing, the tendency has been to show how bottom-up initiatives are a source of hope for the revitalisation of minority and minoritised languages (e.g. Maseko, 2021a; Maseko & Mutasa, 2019). In particular, bottom-up initiatives such as the family language policy approach are foregrounded as a panacea to language endangerment since they involve speakers of minority languages and grassroots organisations taking active steps to ensure the intergenerational transmission of these languages (Gu & Han, 2021; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015; Maseko, 2021a; Ong, 2021).

Language planning has thus far been dominated by the macro approach which has been faulted for fostering policy circularity (Chríst, 2006). A common contestation exposed by the analyses of macro policies the world over has been the preponderance of the globally dominant English language which is legitimated in education and other official domains ahead of local languages, particularly in the Asian and African contexts. In post-colonial African contexts, the circularity of language policy has been shown to precipitate the diminishing status of indigenous languages in high function domains, resulting in language shift in some instances (Madadzhe, 2019; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; Ndhlovu, 2008).

Focusing on macro language policy in Malaysia, Yao Sua and Hooi See (2014) reveal how contestations between Malay and Chinese languages in education mirror existing tensions between the Malay and the Chinese ethnic groups. They show how the launch of the Chinese language movement to promote the use of Chinese was meant to challenge the English-Malay bilingual education which disregarded the cosmopolitan character of Malaysian society (Yao Sua & Hooi See, 2014). The ethnic composition of Malaysia consists of the Malays who are the majority and indigenous to Malaysia; the Chinese, the Indians and Pakistanis, and other ethnic groups who immigrated into the country to take advantage of the economic opportunities created by the British (Yao Sua & Hooi See, 2014). Language policy in education, therefore, tends to reproduce ethnic tensions. The Chinese feel that although they are not indigenous to Malaysia, they constitute a significant minority with strong economic and financial muscle to challenge the Malays through undertakings such as the self-financed Chinese education system foregrounding the Chinese language, culture and identity (Yao Sua & Hooi See, 2014). This shows how language planning is linked to identity politics and contestations. As also shown by Woldemariam (2017), these contestations also reveal that all language planning endeavours serve specific ideological ends and that there is no politically neutral language planning (Alexander, 2004; Woldemariam, 2017).

Under contexts of transnationalism resulting from migration and globalisation, school language policies in host countries are usually geared towards linguistic and cultural homogenisation by promoting instruction in the dominant language (Spotti & Kroon, 2020). The choice of language to be used ahead of others presents language in education planning as a contested space characterised by tensions. The choice of the dominant language is often to the detriment of learners whose language and culture do not coincide with that of the majority (Spotti & Kroon, 2020). This is certainly the common finding in most studies that focus on language education policies in immigrant contexts.

Focusing on the politics of language policy in Ethiopia, Woldemariam (2017) shows how the implementation of a multilingual policy is enmeshed with the ethno-political contestations in the Gamo area. The study suggests that local authorities reify an assimilationist attitude to language policy, epitomised by the prescription of a common language of instruction among groups who identify as ethnically dissimilar (Woldemariam, 2017). The assumed mutual intelligibility of their languages is used as the basis of homogenisation despite these groups' assertions of their ethnic differences. This top-down homogenising suppression of difference is reproduced in many language policy contexts. Similar studies on the African continent have shown how the ruling elite tend to favour this homogenising approach because of their subscription to the multilingualism as problem orientation (van der Merwe, 2022).

Other studies have demonstrated how language practices foreground languages of the politically and economically dominant class as the legitimate languages (Ndhlovu, 2006, 2008). In Zimbabwe for example, while the constitution purports to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism, and by extension, the associated identities, language practices in official domains privilege Shona language and identity as prime markers of Zimbabwean-ness (Ncube & Siziba, 2017). Although many related studies focus on language policy in domains such as education, healthcare, performance and the family sphere (see for example, Maseko, 2022; Maseko & Matunge, 2020; Ncube & Siziba, 2017), they illuminate the present study by showing how policy is often disconnected from practice, and that there is nothing arbitrary or random about the dominance of one language over others. Similar contradictions of policy and praxis are the bane of policy implementation in various levels of language planning in South Africa (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Drummond, 2016). These studies further show the ideological nature of both top-down and bottom-up language policy. Altogether, they resonate with the conceptualisation of language policies as social practices and symbolic systems through which identities are marked and represented (Woldemariam, 2017).

In the South African context, language policy research has largely been characterised by an analysis of documented top-down language planning to show that despite being hailed as having one of the progressive and democratic language policies in the world, the implementation of the policy has been lacking (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madiba & Mabiletja, 2008; Ndhlovu, 2008). This approach is punctuated by an analysis of language policy as enshrined in documents such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the PANSALB Act (Act 59 of 1996) and the National Language Policy Framework (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003).

Following the increasing conformity by universities to the DHET language policy directive for public higher institutions, research focusing on the analysis of these policies is predictably gaining traction. Notably, much of it examines the politics and technicalities of policy implementation and not so much on the policy text itself (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; van der Merwe, 2022). They show how the disconnection between policy provisions and practices militates against the realisation of multilingualism and multilingual education in universities (Madadzhe, 2019; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). However, these studies have neither framed their analysis through the lenses of a micro language planning approach nor conceptualised universities as bottom-up language planning spaces. Consequently, university language policies have been analysed through the lenses of a macro approach – Yet we argue here that although these language policies subordinate to the DHET framework, South African universities are semi-autonomous spaces with the latitude to assert agency and articulate the precise mechanics of language use when conducting university business. Therefore, a lot remains to be known regarding micro level identity contestations in documented university language policies. Previous analysis has seldom shown how language policy provisions reproduce identity contestations in multilingual institutions.

Studies linking language policy with identity politics and contestations are emerging. Rudwick (2018) shows how the language policy of one university in South Africa, read against a backdrop of strained racial relations is enmeshed with the politics of identity. Rudwick suggests that the ideologies of transformation which are packaged in the rhetoric of creating and nurturing of a ‘truly African’ university have tended to degenerate

into a view of the university's language policy as a weaponised document meant to impose the Zulu language and identity on speakers of other languages. By problematising the essentialist and primordial conceptualisations of the Zulu ethnicity and its conflation with the Zulu language, the study suggests that the university's language policy reproduces identity politics in Kwazulu-Natal (Rudwick, 2018). For instance, the requirement for speakers of other African languages to take mandatory Zulu language lessons is viewed as a 'Zulu-fication' strategy since there are no alternative indigenous language learning requirements for Zulu speakers to balance the equation (Rudwick, 2018). These contestations are synonymous with dominant language planning tendencies identified in other African contexts such as the homogenisation approach in Gamo (Woldemariam, 2017) and the Shonalisation strategy in Zimbabwe (Maseko & Matunge, 2020; Ncube & Siziba, 2017). Similarly, the foregrounding of Zulu as the shoe-in alternative to English and Afrikaans in the university is suspiciously viewed as a product of, and feeding into the 'Zulu cultural nationalism' discourse (Rudwick, 2018). In similar contexts, ex-colonial languages are often projected as agents of oppression to justify the narrow conception of African languages as means of emancipation. Studies have since begun to show how hegemonic African languages are assuming the role of the 'new oppressors', thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of homogenisation (Rudwick, 2018). Similarly, in monoglossic contexts, such homogenising ideologies tend to pit speakers of dominant dialects against those of non-dominant dialects (Hawkey, 2023).

Studies reviewed here reveal that while the motif of identity contestation in language policies is gaining prominence, most of these are located on the macro level. The focus on university policies has thus far been limited to discussions about the mismatch between policy and praxis, and in particular, the lack of implementation of documented language policies (e.g. Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Drummond, 2016; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madiba & Mabilejja, 2008). Little has been done in terms of analysing language policy text. This is despite the widely accepted view of the analysis of policy text as the starting point to reveal the underlying dispositions of universities towards embracing transformation and multilingual education (van der Merwe, 2022).

Findings and discussion

The language policy of the university in brief

This article focuses on the language policy of one South African university to show how some of its language policy provisions reproduce multilingual and identity contestations that are often associated with top-down language planning. In this section, we provide an overview of the language policy provisions, linking their objectives to the historical context of the university. The university is a designated Historically White University (HWU), also used as a synonym for former Afrikaans medium universities along others such as Stellenbosch University (SU) and the University of Pretoria (UP). These universities previously promoted Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Makalela & McCabe, 2013). The institution is a multi-campus university with three campuses; one located in Potchefstroom, the other in Vanderbijlpark (formerly Vaal Triangle campus) and another in Mahikeng (formerly Mafikeng campus). As a former Afrikaans medium university, the DHET language policy directive to universities provided

a window of opportunity for the university to dismantle its Afrikaans centredness by the inclusion of indigenous African languages in its linguistic architecture. The university's response to the DHET directive was to formulate a language policy wherein Sesotho and Setswana were identified for development and use as languages of teaching and learning alongside English and Afrikaans. The inclusion of the two languages in the language policy was meant to embrace and foster diversity and transformation in conformity with the provisions of the national constitution, the national language policy framework and the DHET directive (Maseko & Siziba, 2023).

Although the language policy of the university has previous versions such as the one passed and adopted in 2018, this study focuses on the recent revision of the policy adopted in June 2022. Despite the suggestion that the current and previous versions of the university's language policies are characterised by continuities rather than change (Maseko & Siziba, 2023), it is our considered view that the current revision of the policy as a product of a consultative process reflects consolidated views from all stakeholders.

As a point of departure, the policy acknowledges the multilingual realities of the university's three campuses and commits to promote a linguistic environment characterised by inclusive functional multilingualism. As used in the policy, functional multilingualism 'means that the choice of a particular language in a particular situation is determined by the situation of context in which it is used' (The university, 2022, p. 1). In particular, the policy commits to develop Sesotho and Setswana as part of the university's 'languages of choice' alongside English and Afrikaans. In the policy, the 'languages of choice' are defined as the four languages (English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana) identified by the university to be foregrounded for acquisition, learning and development (The university, 2022). By extension, they are the languages officially recognised and legitimised by the language policy whose teaching, learning and use form the basis for inclusive multilingualism and transformation in the university. However, the policy is quick to caution that among the four languages identified, the promotion of Sesotho and Setswana must not be to the detriment of English and Afrikaans (The university, 2022). Ironically, it is the same languages synonymous with colonialism and apartheid respectively that are likely to profit from this provision. This perpetuates the language development paradox synonymous with South African higher education language policies. Maseko and Siziba (2023) view this protectionism as a veiled attempt to foster a safe space for the two languages within the university and insulate them from potential 'harm' likely to accompany African language affirmative action in the university. Later in the analysis, we will discuss how this caveat underlines not only the contestations on multilingualism but also serves to underscore enduring 'racio-linguistic' (Rudwick, 2018) and identity contestations in the university at large.

Identity contestations in the language policy of the university

Thus far, we have discussed how bottom-up language planning and policy is often projected as reflective of community consensus and therefore less prone to contestations. In this section, we discuss how the language policy of the university, just like macro language policy, is enmeshed with contestations about multilingualism and identities represented by the staff and student body. Our observations about the wording of the

university's language policy resonates with the argument that all language planning is ideological and power inflected (Alexander, 2004; Woldemariam, 2017).

Whereas the university's language audit of 2021 shows that the institution is increasingly becoming more and more cosmopolitan, with an increase in the number of students and staff who speak other African languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sepedi (The university, 2021), the revised language policy of 2022 has maintained its stance to promote only the four university's 'languages of choice'. Despite the university's awareness of these demographics, the revised language policy of 2022 does not take into consideration that the university has become more multilingual and cosmopolitan than the language policy acknowledges. This reality therefore requires the language policy to expand its scope to align with the dynamic language repositories within the institution.

The above shows that in its endeavour to promote multilingualism, the misalignment between the language audit findings and the language policy could be interpreted as being prescriptive rather than organic. It is therefore highly unlikely that the university's revised language policy is informed by the linguistic demographics on the ground. As the language audit of the university has shown, there are so many other South African indigenous languages that are spoken by students and staff within the three campuses, that could be added to the named four languages of choice. However, this is not a notion peculiar to this institution. It is a resonating trend amongst most universities in South Africa, in a way demonstrating the complexities of language policy implementation in cosmopolitan contexts, and the interaction between macro and micro dimensions of language policy.

To further reinforce this seemingly exclusionary and restrictive approach to multilingualism, the provisions for multilingual pedagogies are similarly prescriptive in an exclusionary sense. For example, while making provisions for translanguaging as a multilingual pedagogy in section 9.6, the localised definition of translanguaging suggests that translanguaging will only be supported and promoted within the university's 'languages of choice.' In the policy, translanguaging is conceived thus:

Translanguaging means that in the teaching and learning situation, various languages are used to explore key concepts with a view to making this clear and understandable to the students their own languages, as well as learning new insights arising from the interpretation of the concept in the university's languages of choice. (The university, 2022, p. 1)

This restriction of translanguaging by the policy to the languages of choice is limiting and exclusionary since it only supports the practice in only the four identified languages. While this provides opportunities for the legitimisation of Sesotho and Setswana in the university's business, it is silent about the rest of the other indigenous languages. The analysis of the unsaid is therefore revealing of the policy's disposition towards other indigenous African languages spoken by the staff and student body. What is deliberately left unsaid about the other languages constitutes some kind of exclusion as their speakers have no legal or policy basis to lobby for the use of their languages in the university. This has implications not only for the languages in question, but also for the identities which the same languages mark and represent. The concerns arising from this approach to language policy resonate with those raised in other studies on language policy contestations in other South African universities (e.g. Rudwick, 2018). The university, through the language policy, therefore appears to selectively apply multilingualism in the same way

that isiZulu seems to be legitimated by another South African university despite its similarly cosmopolitan character (see Rudwick, 2018).

Although English and Afrikaans continue to dominate the linguistic landscape of the university (Maseko & Siziba, 2023), the policy deliberately earmarks Sesotho and Setswana as the preferred alternatives to the English and Afrikaans. Part of the explanation for the identification of these two languages has to do with the location of the university's campuses in the predominantly Sesotho and Setswana speaking province of South Africa. This notwithstanding, a university is by its nature an open entity which should cater for the diversity of students and staff across the length and breadth of a named geographic space. As such, the policy's silence regarding this diversity is an interesting case of 'letting the sleeping dogs lie.'

Multilayered contestations in the university's language policy

Although Sesotho and Setswana are identified for development and promotion as languages of teaching, learning and the conducting of university business, a critical reading of the university's language policy exposes the insincerity of this commitment. For example (Maseko & Siziba, 2023), have argued that the inclusion of the two African languages is a window dressing strategy and a public relations rhetoric to give a semblance of inclusion, considering the litany of caveats which are likely to militate against their implementation. In particular, the condition that Sesotho and Setswana are to be promoted 'without the diminishment of the use of English and Afrikaans' (The university, 2022, p. 2) effectively fosters a safe space for, and legitimises the use of English and Afrikaans in the university (Maseko & Siziba, 2023). This English and Afrikaans 'protectionism' is detrimental to the promotion of Sesotho and Setswana, whose development and use are conditional and discretionary. Conversely, the absence of an explicit provision to protect Setswana and Sesotho reveals the underlying disposition towards indigenous African languages in general.

The foregoing animates the multilayered contestations about multilingualism and identity in the language policy of the university. As previously argued, the inclusion of Sesotho and Setswana among the university's languages of choice is a welcome development for their speakers, yet for speakers of other indigenous African languages that are not mentioned and legitimated by the policy, this may be interpreted as deliberate exclusion. The contestations between the languages mentioned by the policy and those that are left out reproduce the macro language policy. In South Africa generally, language policy and practices continue to valorise English and Afrikaans to the detriment of indigenous African languages (Madadzhe, 2019; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). This is probably because of the language economics which have set English as an attractive vehicle for upward social mobility in the wider society. The provisions in the language policy therefore replicate these macro level contestations and dynamics.

Moreover, the principle of 'functional multilingualism' as conceptualised in the policy is limiting and limited to the institutional context. For the university, it poses a potential barrier to the development of Sesotho and Setswana and their use in the business of the university. The policy only provides for the use of the two languages within the considerations of 'functional multilingualism.' It is likely to restrict their use to contexts outside the classroom and precipitate the further entrenchment of English as the

compromise default language of instruction ostensibly to accommodate learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Given that micro language planning is resource intensive, it is often difficult, if not impossible to facilitate the use of all languages within the institution's linguistic repertoire. The continued use of English and Afrikaans could therefore be defensible on the grounds that the languages are already supported by significant investment in the skills and resources for their use in teaching and learning. Further to this, there is still a considerable population of students and staff who speak English and Afrikaans as first languages. What is apparent however is that the multilayered contestations between African indigenous languages and these two dominant languages reproduce the macro language policy dynamics at the national level. The identities marked by English and Afrikaans are also legitimated by the policy while identities marked by indigenous African languages are in different states of instability. Just like it is at the macro level, some African languages and identities have different levels of legitimacy. This study thus shows that while university language policies are considered as outcomes of micro language planning, they are not immune to the broader societal language ideologies and attitudes since universities generally exist as part of this multilayered ecology.

Conclusion

The scope of this paper was limited to an analysis of the language policy of a university in South Africa. It sought to unravel contestations about multilingualism and identity inherent in the language policy. The study focused on the language policy of a Historically White University which is under pressure to demonstrate commitment towards transformation in alignment with the language policy directive of the DHET. The study has shown that, although being a product of bottom-up language planning, the language policy of the university, just like top-down national language policy is a site of multi-layered contestations. The contestations inherent in the policy reproduce ideological struggles about multilingualism and identity in other macro language policy documents. The language policy, while purporting to promote multilingualism in line with the constitutional and other national imperatives, a critical reading of some of the policy provisions unwittingly betrays the university's underlying dispositions about indigenous African languages, and by extension, the identities marked by these languages. Even though the language policy identifies Sesotho and Setswana for promotion and use as the 'university's languages of choice,' a close analysis of the text revealed that the various caveats and conditions for their use invariably legitimises English and Afrikaans ahead of indigenous African languages. Further, while the university language audit has revealed an increasing presence of African languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sepedi in the university's three campuses, the recently revised language policy has remained silent about them. This silence is a validation of 'exclusive multilingualism' also evident in other universities in South Africa (Rudwick, 2018). The invisibilisation of these languages and the 'protectionism' of English and Afrikaans suggest that the power dynamics that characterise the national language policy are also reproduced in institutional language policies. Since this study focused on the analysis of the policy document, future studies could extend on it to examine experiences of students and staff regarding language practices. This could facilitate a deeper understanding of how language policies influence practices.

Note

1. English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Sepedi, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, isiZulu.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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