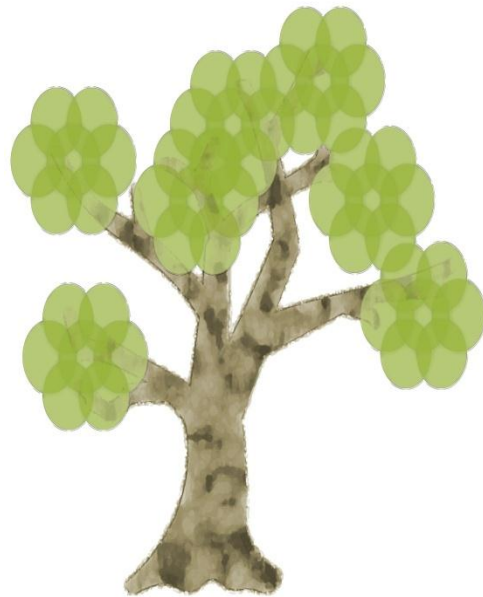# International disappointment in *whole language* literacy and *communicative* language teaching:
reconfiguring debates from the global south

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Outline

1. What led to the *communicative language* and *whole language literacy* approaches?
   - 1970s - 2000
2. **Unintended consequences**
   - 1990s - 2010
3. *Dreams and realities*: literacy and English language teaching (ELT) in development
   - evidential concerns from 2000
   - in global south and north
4. **Repriortisation**
   - Field of linguistics
   - Education in development
5. **Conclusions**
   - Reclaiming African expertise & what we've learned from Timbuktu
   - Communities, voice, agency, participation
     - from the margins to centre

Disciplinary and theoretical divisions in linguistics affect pedagogy

From 1970s onwards

disciplinary division within the field of Linguistics widened

- **General/theoretical linguistics**
  - Focus on structure/Form
  - Generative grammar (Chomsky)
  - Systemic functional grammar / SFG (Halliday)
- **Psycholinguistics**
  - Focus on language & cognition
    - Behaviourist 1950s – early 1990s
    - Post-behaviourist late 1990s onwards
- **Applied Linguistics**
  - English language teaching/industry dominated
- **Sociolinguistics**
  - Language policy & planning (Fishman)
  - Social uses and contexts
- **Educational linguistics** (Spolsky)
  - Attempt towards reconvergence

Unintended consequences of division

General linguistics | Loss of direct interest, except in SFL.

Psycholinguistics | Stigmatised as limited to behaviourist theory – new developments insufficiently understood outside the sub-field.

Applied linguistics | Increasingly focussed on ESL and EFL, from English dominant & gobal north perspective; deficit models
    IELTS/TOEFL – focus on international testing
    Communicative language teaching

Sociolinguistics | Critical, social contextualisation;
    New literacies studies (cf. Street 1995)
    'whole language' literacy (cf. Goodman 1986)

Educational linguistics | Attempt towards reconvergence & more inclusive branch of linguistics (e.g. Spolsky & Hult 2008)

Communicative approach in second/foreign language learning

Intention

- To move beyond focus on sterile reading and writing

- Emphasis towards listening and speaking
  - but not intended to crowd out reading and writing

- Coincided with de-emphasis
  - of structure/Form of language
  - of cognitive processes involved in language learning

Unintended consequences

- Ambiguous signals given to teachers

- Inadequate training of teachers

- De-emphasis on reading and writing skills development

T in Ethiopia: *We now know that we can use 'broken English' with our students. It is important to practice our spoken English.* **(Heugh et al 2012)**

Whole language approach to literacy

Intention

Over-emphasis on bits and pieces of words believed to impede understanding

- phonics became unfashionable

De-emphasis of rote-learning in other educational contexts

Emphasis on increased exposure to whole texts

- sentences, paragraphs, stories, books, genres

Social uses of literacy/ies

- multiliteracies

Literacy

- viewed as distinct from language development

Unanticipated consequences

Success limited to context

North (e.g. UK, US, Canada, Australia and NZ contexts);

predominantly middle class/professional homes;

L1 /home language speakers

Has not yet proven successful in

Contexts of poverty (Abadzi 2006)

Developing countries (Wedell 2011)

Literacy (mis)understood as delinked from language

Divisions in Linguistics widen

Inform curriculum development from late 1990s

Intersection of Curriculum, Literacy & Language education in developing countries

Constructivist/discovery based Curriculum

Facilitation often misinterpreted as 'hands-off' teaching (Macdonald 2002, Abadzi 2006)

Communicative language teaching

Misunderstood as speaking not reading and writing (Heugh et al 2007; Reeves et al. 2008; Heugh et al 2012; Williams 2011)

Whole language literacy

In the absence of community reading cultures; and books

- default methodologies
- mixed messages to teachers

Low returns on investment

Results
(e.g. Abadzi 2006, 2010; Ouane and Glanz 2010, 2011)

Systems fail students, tax-payers, aid agencies, governments

Dreams and Realities: literacy and ELT

Development literature and literacy

(e.g. UNESCO 2012, Carr-Hill & Peart 2005, Krätli & Dyer 2009.)

– Emphasis on retention of girls in school – UNESCO EfA, MDGs etc. from 1990

– Relationship between literacy and health (especially in girls' education) is not well-established in Africa

– Risks may outweigh rewards for girls

Development literature and ELT

(e.g. Appleby et al. 2002; Capstick, Hailemariam et al., Kennedy, Lamb, Seargeant & Erling – in Coleman (ed.) 2011)

– No evidence that ELT improves opportunities for the poor

– Evidence that ELT increases opportunities for privileged

   Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, India (authors in Coleman 2011)

– ELT methodology & access widens gaps

Dreams and realities: in the global north

Diversity in the Europe & N America

Late 20th and 21st century mobility and migration increases socio-economic-educational pressure on systems:

- Mainstream school systems with small minorities falter
- Approaches to language & literacy/ies of 1990s – do not suit diverse students cohorts
- Sociolinguists reconsider nature of language & literacy
- New research in cognitive linguistics
- Applied linguistics and ESL methodologies out of sync
- EU invites partners from the south: Africa, India, Latin America –www.susdiv.org (e.g. Gorter et al 2011)

Diversity in Australia

Increasing migration from

Asia

Middle East

Afghanistan, Pakistan, India

Africa: Sudan, Zimbabwe, Rwanda

Failure of mainstream education, ESL & literacy

Indigenous Australian communities

Migrants – especially refugees

Slow to respond

to changing discourses of the north and

research from the south (Stroud & Heugh 2011)

Risks and benefits: literacy and education in Africa

- Although countless documents (e.g. EfA) claim
  - education & literacy increases the life chances of students, especially girls (e.g. UNESCO 2005, 2010, 2012) access to economic enterprises
    - health & well-being of families
- In Africa – the data and assertions require close interrogation
  - because the risks may outweigh the benefits
  - ill-fitting education provision amplifies attrition

Naïve & dangerous generalisations

- Literacy & secondary education = lower incidence of HIV/AIDS or improves prospects of family health

- Delinking literacy from the language in which literacy is developed

- Falsification of links between home language /L1 literacy and under-achievement

- Using secondary enrolment to age 15 as proxy for literacy

Some studies, e.g. in Zimbabwe, do show this
  - But: teachers have the highest incidence of HIV/Aids in South Africa

May distort the data
  - Assessment of literacy of students from Grade 4 onwards in most African countries is in the L2/3

Poorly resourced L1/MT literacy compared with better resourced literacy in English in urban settings

HSRC study of Grade 8 students in the Western Cape shows that 75% students in Grade 8 cannot read or write extended texts (sentences, paragraphs) (Heugh et al 2007)

Literacy & retention (of girls) in formal school

Pastoralists/Nomads

- Education systems
  - Traditional schools
  - Madrassas/Koranic schools
  - Non-formal/alternative education – state provided
    - Low provision, participation & retention
  - Mobile schools (tents)
    - Iran, Algeria, Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya (Tibet, Central Asia, India, Afghanistan, Arctic Circle)
  - Boarding schools & resistance
  - Open & distance learning (ODL) (Krätli et al 2009, Carr-Hill et al 2005)

Southern Africa

- Education systems
  - Focus on literacy
    - Often without specifying in which language
  - Inflated reporting on 'literacy'
  - South Africa 86.4% literacy (UNESCO 2005:18)
  - But: Western Cape 2006
    - Grade 8 constructed response items, literacy = 25% average achievement
  - Secondary school participation does not guarantee literacy

Contested matters

State administration

- National curriculum & assessment
- Nation-state ideology and impetus towards homogeneity, including language & literacy
- Stigmatisation of marginalised communities
- Political or faith-based conflict
  - Christian administration vs. Islamic pastoralists (e.g. in Ethiopia)
  - Language differences
- Teachers: outsiders or predatory
- 'Placed resources' (see work of Mastin Prinsloo, UCT)

Local participation

- Diversification requires greater local consultation, decision-making & contributions to curriculum
- Medium of instruction & languages across the curriculum
- Community (Adult) & school-based education
- Mobile schools, timetabling to suit rhythms of pastoral life
- Teacher recruitment - local communities
- Careful selection of resources – radio vs. 'plasma' TV, computers etc.

What do we mean by 'literacy' for girls in vulnerable settings?

If girls have limited opportunities to attend school, whether because of

- Mobile pastoralist lifestyles
- Distance from situated schools
- Domestic responsibilities
  - Including caring for ill parents/siblings
  - Child-headed household duties
  - Herding related
- Socio-cultural stigmatisation
- Lack of sanitation & running water in schools

THEN: state provided education needs to reflect flexibility and inclusivity of local systems and participation, to:

- Ensure that every moment in school is meaningful
- Grained analysis of systemic data on literacy and educational achievement required
- Close attention to how girls establish literacy, in which languages and for which purposes
- Unlikely without sustained local language literacy throughout
- Add L2 literacy (where possible) – for increased mobility post-school
- Build on traditional, faith-based or other local educational practices
- Acknowledge & validate existing human resources

Literacy and language do matter in girls' education

Risks

- Generalisation at the expense of contextualisation

- 'Literacy' in the wrong language is neither helpful nor feasible

- Literacy & educational statistics in less developed contexts are often unreliable

- 'Literacy' in the wrong context may be unhelpful

Opportunities

- Localisation with an eye on core-curriculum

- Literacies which strengthen access to local as well as regional knowledge systems are helpful for community cohesion and health

- Strong evidence supports women teaching girls in formal and non-formal education, e.g. West African markets (Stroud & Heugh 2004); in Mali (www.worlded.com)

What does language learning in linguistically complex settings mean now?

Conventional view:

- Two (or more) languages, taught as separate entities (e.g. In work of Wallace Lambert in the 1960s onwards)

- Focus on Form (structure – lexis, syntax, 4 skills)

- Code-switching and code-mixing – regarded as illegitimate practices

- Grammar-translation methodology gave way to other methods (direct, audio-lingual, communicative etc.)

Contemporary view:

- Two (or more) languages, part of student's repertoire (bilinguality/multilinguality) (Agnihotri 2007)

- Focus on (social) process – 'languaging' (Merill Swain 2006); 'translanguaging' (Ofelia García 2009) requires re-evaluation of the value of code-switching

- Increasing awareness of what bi-/multi-lingual learners do to make meaning

- Reappraisal of the role of translation and interpreting

Which rules are really necessary in writing?

- Keeping languages separated prevents most multilingual children from writing and speaking.
- Mixing languages (code-mixing, code-switching) is normal.
- If most vocabulary used in English has been borrowed and absorbed from other languages, what does this suggest to us in our teaching contexts?
- Most students are paralysed by the fear that they have to write text which is in the 'correct' language. If they know that they can write, aiming to use as much as possible of the target language, but that they can use vocabulary or syntax of another language in order to avoid interrupting their writing, the anxiety is reduced.
- Writing is a process, one can always go back and edit one's work later.
- Beginning with what the students know in spoken language and using this to begin and encourage writing will not prevent a gradual process , whereby as confidence grows, the students will increasingly develop text which draws closer to target language conventions.
- This process strengthens writing in the home/local language and the target language

    (These techniques are currently being used at the University of South Australia for international students learning English. See also code-meshing as discussed by Suresh Canagarajah, Univ of Penn State. See notes attached to this slide.)

Who are the model teachers and which methods work best?

Allow teachers to reclaim their expertise and AGENCY

If your methods work and your students make good progress – then you are doing well.

If your methods don't work, ask yourself questions, and explore alternatives.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater: do not stop using methods which you know work.

Encourage teachers to reclaim their VOICE

We can all learn from one another.

We can add to our toolbox – bit by bit.

We only have to add what we understand and what makes sense to us.

What makes sense to me may not make sense to you and vice versa.

Concluding notes

- Multiple languages written in Arabic script for scholarly literature in the manuscripts of Timbuktu and the University Mosques of West Africa offer evidence that African languages are not in need of 'intellectualisation'.

- They have been used for scholarly mathematics, science, medicine, law, philosophy etc. for at least 1000 years (2000 years in the Horn of Africa and Egypt).

- The South is not dependent upon the North for knowledge of literacy and education.

- The oral tradition is a powerful educational resource – the value of which has been underutilised by systems too heavily influenced by the global north.

- 21st century educational linguistics draws on psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and theoretical linguistics

  – Multilingualism does not mean multiple parallel separated systems; it includes language repertoires and code-mixing/translanguaging (not restricted to idealised rarefied conventions) (Stroud & Heugh 2011).

Conclusions continued

- Maximise both reading and writing opportunities in the students repertoire of languages (both / all languages – including new urban varieties).
- Integration of reading and writing, and ensuring opportunities for awareness of the formulae in multiple genres, exponentially increases academic literacy.
- Increasing awareness of academic literacy as an ongoing process across:
  - the entire curriculum and school;
  - students, staff, parents, school community.
- Visibility of bilingual (multilingual) texts across the school.
- Localisation, greater participation (agency and voice) of communities and teachers.
- Relax the grip of overly centralised systems which are too unwieldy to respond to changes on the ground.
- The global north borrows code-mixing & code-switching practices of the south and validates these as translanguaging and code-meshing practices - to be encouraged in classrooms with linguistically diverse students (i.e. the north borrows educational practices from the south, while much of the south ignores the potential of its own knowledge systems and expertise).

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