

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249024067>

Classroom Discourse and Discursive Practices in Higher Education in Tanzania

Article in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* · March 2008

DOI: 10.2167/jmmds48.0

CITATIONS

25

READS

443

2 authors:



Hashim Mohamed

Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA)

10 PUBLICATIONS 51 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Felix Banda

University of the Western Cape

69 PUBLICATIONS 692 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Language, Gender, HIV/AIDS and Health Communication [View project](#)



Multilingual Discourse [View project](#)

Classroom Discourse and Discursive Practices in Higher Education in Tanzania

Hashim Issa Mohamed

*Social Sciences Department, Sokoine University of Agriculture,
Morogoro, Tanzania*

Felix Banda

*Linguistics Department, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South
Africa*

The paper problematises student writing as social practice from the perspective of lecturers' discursive practices. The paper uses data from a major study at a higher learning institution in Tanzania to explore lecturers' discursive practices and familiarity with the university orders of discourse including English medium of instruction, in unequal power relations with students, for whom English is a foreign language. The lecturers' practices are scrutinised in terms of how they work against facilitating students' access to the privileged literacy practices of the academia and how they serve to enact and sustain dominance in Tanzania's education system, with its monolingual orientation, which privileges Kiswahili in primary school and English in secondary and higher education.

doi: 10.2167/jmmd548.0

Keywords: discourse, English, Kiswahili, Tanzania, writing

Introduction

English writing research in Tanzania has been inspired by the ongoing debate on the quest for effective pedagogical approaches to students' practices in writing. The discussion on this matter, which has been gaining currency every year, is usually motivated by frequent criticisms from school examiners. The examiners constantly register concerns about the students' seemingly unsuccessful performance in academic literacy at the post-primary education levels (Brock-Utne *et al.*, 2005), where in the dictum of Tanzania's language policy, English is the language of instruction. In this policy, however, Kiswahili, which is the national and official local language, spoken by over 90% of the population, is compulsory in primary education as a language of instruction, while English is taught as a subject from Grade 1. In secondary and higher education, Kiswahili is taught as a subject while English is the medium of instruction. As will become evident in this study, the switch to English medium of instruction after seven years of Kiswahili education has pedagogical implications in as far as academic writing is concerned. First, it is unlikely that students have acquired the necessary writing skills in English for

secondary and higher education after a few years of being taught the language as a subject. Second, after seven years or more of Kiswahili medium of instruction, it seems a waste of academic resources that the language is replaced with English in a monolingual education setup, without giving students recourse to a bilingual education in which both are used as languages of content matter instruction. We take bilingual education as one in which two or more languages are used as languages of learning and teaching of content matter, and not one where one is designated medium of instruction and the other a marginal role as subject (cf. Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993; Banda, 2000). The latter, which is characteristic of education, not only in Tanzania, but Africa generally, has a monolingual orientation. However, pertinent to this study, the switch to English has implications for classroom power relations, pitting teachers against students, as the former use their knowledge of institutionalised English as a means to undermine the latter, who struggle with the language.

Two underpinnings have so far permeated the English writing research in higher education in Tanzania. First, students' writing is a problem located around skills rather than literacy practice in the academic writing pedagogy. As a result, the teaching and learning in this research area have all along been considered as a matter of '*replacing* the students' existing repertoire of literacy practices rather than *refining* and *adding* to these' (Pardoe, 2000: 151) (italics in the original). Secondly, that unsuccessful writing is a result of the students' own, as Pardoe (2000: 150) puts it, 'failed attempts to access dominant standard form'. On the basis of the latter underpinning, the research on students' learning practices in English writing has traditionally used the student as an object of inquiry directly, leaving the lecturer in the peripheral discussion. Here lies the myth that lecturers' discourse is infallible, in that it is students' writing that is always flawed and should always be brought to scrutiny.

This paper endeavours to challenge both the above views and specifically seeks to make lecturers take responsibility for their own language and discursive practices, both of which bring to bear on students' unsuccessful writing practice.

We are mindful that the term ESL is usually used where English is used for learning and teaching from Grade 1 or later, predominates as a language of wider communication and has official status or function in government or industry (Schmied, 1991). The term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often used in contexts where English is not widely used for wider communication, or as the medium of instruction. Theoretically, in ESL contexts, English is used for both '*intranational* and *international* communication', while in EFL it is usually only used for international communication (Schmied, 1991: 34). Using this description, Schmied (1991) identifies Tanzania and many other African countries as having both characteristics. In Tanzania, English is taught as a subject in primary school and is the official language of education in secondary and higher education. It also enjoys joint 'official' status with Kiswahili at national government levels. This qualifies English as ESL. However, in practice, English is certainly not the language of wider communication inside and outside government and business circles, a

role enjoyed by Kiswahili. This qualifies English as EFL. It is not surprising that Schmied (1991: 40) characterises Tanzania as ESL-EFL, an 'intermediate category'.

Theoretical Considerations

In trying to understand the processes and motivations behind Tanzania's language policy and classroom practice as described above, we shall use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which looks at language as socially constituted practice where text, whether written or spoken, is considered as discourse, that is, produced by speakers and writers who are socially situated. The notion of discourse relates to language use in a manner that signifies '... a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective' (Fairclough, 1995: 14). Looking at discourse as social practice, the focus of CDA transcends texts as objects of inquiry, thus calling for a theorisation and description not only of social process and structure of text production, but also 'of social process and structures within which individuals or groups as social historical subjects create meanings in their interaction with texts' (Wodak, 2001: 2).

Every discourse is historically processed and interpreted, that is, it is structured and located in time and space; and dominant structures are legitimatised by ideologies of the powerful groups (Wodak, 2001). The operational assumption in CDA is that discourse takes place within society, and can only be understood in the 'interplay of social situation, action, actor, and societal structures' (Meyer, 2001: 21). In this regard, discourse is seen as structured by power and dominance. Power involves control by one group over another, while dominance refers to hegemonic existence where the minds of the dominated are influenced 'in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will' (van Dijk, 1993: 255). Thus, in trying to understand classroom discourse in higher education in Tanzania, power and hegemony are some of the factors that can be used to explain why although Kiswahili is one of the most developed African languages and after more than 40 years after Ujamaa socialist policy of self-reliance, Kiswahili has not taken its place as a language of learning and teaching in secondary and higher education; not even as an equal partner with English in bilingual medium of instruction.

CDA can be approached from several perspectives ranging from socio-historical (Wodak, 2001) and sociocognitive (van Dijk, 1993) to discursive aspects of institutional orders of discourse (Fairclough, 1995, 2001). Whatever approach one adopts, CDA demands that it be multidisciplinary and that phenomena be analysed in social contexts (Wodak, 2001). It is for this reason that in critically examining writing in higher learning in Tanzania, CDA is supplemented by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach, in which academic writing is seen as social practice (Lillis, 2001; Street, 2001). The CDA approach followed in this paper owes much to Fairclough's (1995) notions of orders of discourse, ideology and hegemony. The institutional orders of discourse in this paper include lectures, seminars, student writing and lecturers' feedback.

To analyse the impact of institutional orders of discourse on academic writing, we adopt Fairclough's (2001: 125) framework, whose elements include a focus on 'a social problem'; in the case of this paper it is lecturers' discursive practices that are problematised. In Fairclough's framework, the social problem has a semiotic aspect. In this paper, some aspects of lecturers' discursive practices that are focused on are constitutive of language use, showing not only how lecturers' discourse is usually constructed around power, but also the damaging effects of such relations to students' access to literacy of the university. Next in the chronology of Fairclough's framework is the 'identification of obstacles' to it being tackled, in this case, through analysis of the network of practices the social problem is located in, the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practices concerned, and the discourse (the semiosis) itself. The other aspect is 'the identification of possible ways past the obstacles' (Fairclough, 2001: 125), i.e. suggesting appropriate actions to lecturers' engagement with students with a view to improving their writing performance. And lastly, reflecting critically on the analysis above in Tanzania's social context (Fairclough, 2001).

Student Writing as Social Practice

Looking at students' writing as social practice entails two things, among others. Firstly, 'students' writing takes place within a particular institution, which has a particular history, culture, values and practices' (Lillis, 2001: 31). Secondly, 'the students' academic writing constitutes a very particular kind of literacy practices which is bound up with the workings of a particular social institution' (Lillis, 2001: 39).

Students' construction of meaning in academic writing is structured and shaped by two other constructs, viz. voice and identity. In academic writing *voice*, as conceptualised by Bakhtin, has two inferences: voice as experience and voice as language. As experience, voice 'refers to the configurations of life experiences any one student writer brings with her to higher education' (Lillis, 2001: 46). Such experiences constitute an important scaffold that lecturers can exploit in mentoring students into literate academic writers. And as language, voice refers to the mediational means e.g. 'specific wording – words, phrases – drawn from the student-writers' habits of meaning construction ... and which they bring into academia' (Lillis, 2001: 46).

Identity in student writing signals the manner in which individuals assert and describe 'a sense of who they are'. Thus, 'student-writers sense of personal/social identity is a significant dimension to their experience of meaning making, influencing, as it does what students (don't) write and (don't) wish to write in academia' (Lillis, 2001: 50). Identity in this sense is comparable to Fairclough's notion on identification, 'where the production of text is also about the production – reproduction, transformation – of the self' (Lillis, 2001: 50).

In view of the discussion above, student writing literacy ought to be socially constructed as social practice. This view of literacy focuses not so much on how 'teachers can help students to learn the literacies of the university', but rather on how 'students and teachers understand the literacy practices of the

university' (Christiansen, 2004: 2). It is through understanding literacy that students can be meaningfully empowered to reflect critically on world realities and thereby question dominant practices and challenge the existing social order (cf. McKay & Hornberger, 1996). In this idiom, successful learning will only take place if students are allowed to critically reflect on the dominant practices and social order using their prior experiences and knowledge albeit in Kiswahili.

The Study

The data for this study were collected at one of the universities in Tanzania from October 2004 to February in 2005 and from October 2005 to February 2006 following a qualitative research design. The data came from (1) documentary review (i.e. students' essays and institutional documents e.g. writing guides, communication skills syllabus), (2) lecturers, who were involved in key informants' interviews and focus group discussions; and students, who were involved in questionnaires and focus group discussions; and (3) classroom observation, which involved five sessions.

Our study sample comprised 80 students from first- and second-year degree programmes and 20 lecturers. Except for the students' sample, we obtained lecturers using judgmental sampling based on the courses they teach; in this case, lecturers involved came from those courses whose evaluation of students' literacy practices constitute essay writing. We did not limit our sample in terms of rank or seniority, thus using judgmental sampling we selected the sample lecturers from the ranks of lecturer to professor. The judgmental sampling was also based on the availability of such lecturers on campus during the field research. The analysis of data follows a descriptive style, where the emerging issues are thematically categorised and discussed within the CDA mode of analysis explained above.

Lecturers' Understanding of Student Writing

One of the issues focused on in the interview and focus group discussions for lecturers pertained to lecturers' understanding of student writing. In this case, lecturers were required to give their judgement of students' writing practices at the university. Lecturers acknowledged the existence of the problem of students' unsuccessful writing in English. However, they frequently pointed out surface errors of grammar, tenses and vocabulary, among others, as criteria in judging students' unsuccessful writing. What this means is that lecturers' understanding of student writing is that of skills, as opposed to practice. The concepts skills vs. practices are best explained within two contending models of literacy, that is, Autonomous vs. Ideological Models of Literacy (Street, 2001).

These two models are central in the workings of the ethnography researchers in NLS (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2001). The details of NLS as a literacy theory are outside the scope of this paper, except to say that the notion 'autonomous' refers to a literacy model that looks at literacy as 'skills in use of literacy in decontextualised or isolated ways, and at the

expense of values and ideologies' (Christie, 2005: 233). In the academic writing pedagogy, this model problematises literacy teaching and learning as 'a matter of mastering certain important but essentially basic technical skills' (Christie, 2005: 233) such as spelling, and writing systems. Thus, writing is viewed only as 'a technology for encoding meanings' (Lillis, 2001: 28) and priority is attached to 'accuracy in control of the basic resources of literacy and beyond that persons are assumed to be free to use literacy in ways that fit their purposes' (Christie, 2005: 233). In other words, the model espouses the notions that literacy is simple and given.

The notion of literacy as being neutral or existing independently (i.e. not tied with any social context and its associated meanings) is not only central to the autonomous model, but also a factor for divergence in perspective between this model and the ideological model of literacy. The ideological model of literacy seeks to challenge this view by offering an alternative, 'a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another' (Street, 2001: 7). Unlike the autonomous model, the ideological model 'posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles' (Street, 2001: 2). Such practices, far from being neutral, are ideological, and have different meanings for different groups of people. The implications of lecturers' view towards literacy practice in Tanzanian social context are explained next.

In the academic writing pedagogy of higher education in Tanzania, the notion of literacy as autonomous has two implications. First is the structuring of academic Communication Skills courses, which, as at the university under study, focuses on skills provision, including strategies of manipulating grammatical rules, as discrete items and often decontextualised from a students' academic cultural context (i.e. having little relationship [if any] with students' other university courses). The second is the lecturers' engagement with students' writing, which, in the Tanzanian sociocultural contexts, is structured with the tension around the ambivalence as to what should be done, and who should do what. This tension becomes difficult to resolve in a situation where some lecturers revert to what can be considered as 'escapism' due to disclaiming responsibility for students' English writing. Lecturers' repudiation of responsibility was frequently reported during interviews, as is testified by this lecturer:

Yah! At an individual level one – one would say there's very little that I do personally because really what you are doing is that you are actually allocated to teach a class, and the only kind of influence that you have is when you mark the papers. But, really the marking and saying here you have made a mistake does not really improve; because you are teaching a technical subject and language is just a major problem to that.

This excerpt is prototypical of lecturers who do not see student academic writing as part of their primary responsibility. Teaching is seen as an independent entity, which is separate from students' apprenticeship and separate from language use because language is not a concern of those teaching technical subjects. This argument itself is a reflection of the extent to

which lecturers are oblivious of the symbiotic relationship between meaning and the language, which carries that meaning. However, meaning or the subject matter to which lecturers focus attention in dealing with students' writing cannot exist independently from the language in which these issues are expressed (Christie, 2005). In meaning-making, the student-writer draws upon and 'responds to voices as language and experience, from different domains of her socio-cultural life world' (Lillis, 2001: 47). Thus, it is up to the lecturers to redefine their theories about student writing so as to understand what student-writers go through as they grapple with constructing meaning in writing.

In essence, lecturers who disclaim responsibility in student writing fail to articulate their primary function of mentoring students into the world of literacy practices of the academia. But any attempts to ignore student writing are tantamount to disengaging students' knowledge of the subject matter from the knowledge of the (disciplinary) language within which they (students) are supposed to write. From the academic writing pedagogical point of view, such attempts undermine even the little effort the academic Communication Skills course makes in providing the basic writing skills to students.

Student-writers and Lecturer-readers' Sociodiscursive Relationship

The relationship between the student-writer and the lecturer-reader, which is that of an apprentice and a mentor respectively, is structured around authority and power imbalance. From the tradition of CDA, this power imbalance results from lecturers' privileged access to institutional power resources. Such resources include status as lecturers, knowledge of the discourse genres and, in the case of Tanzania's social context, the knowledge of English – the medium of instruction which is, at worst, opaque and unreliable knowledge to most students. It is this privileged position in the sociodiscursive relationship that lecturers capitalise in constructing and sustaining their dominant discourse in a communicative practice with students. In this case therefore, lecturers become part of not only the social-cultural makeup of Tanzania, but also of the student writing problem.

To understand the nature of the student-lecturer relationship, it is worth looking at two of the discursive events, namely feedback to students' writing and lecturers' classroom discourse practices. Feedback to students' writing and lecturers' classroom discourse practices are the areas within which lecturers and students not only commonly misunderstand the university orders of discourse, but also where student-writers' and lecturer-readers' relationships express power imbalance.

Feedback to student writing

Feedback to students' English writing was an important index of lecturers' overall contribution to mentoring students into academic literate writers. In both interviews and focus group discussions, lecturers acknowledged giving feedback to students. Lecturers indicated that this feedback involved

commenting on students' texts and sometimes talking to students about their writing. The issue of feedback revolves not so much around whether or not lecturers can give feedback, but rather on the ideological frames, particularly the manner in which feedback is constructed, and the type of feedback rendered to students. The extracts below are from the lecturers' interviews and focus group discussions respectively, regarding how lecturers respond to student writing.

No marks! And others who write poorly I just write very poor communication skills or I normally cross until I get their paper (torn into) pieces like this! So, probably, this might remind them. (Interview)

[...] of course if the structures are – I mean the grammar, the language is not good I normally sort of indicate that *your language is appalling* here! (Focus Group discussion) (our italics)

I assist them to – I mean I put a lot of my red ink (laugh) to try to show them everywhere I see that this is not right; this is how – this is not how this should read. I will always either circle it and say – tell this person to rephrase or paraphrase to – to make it look better ... (Interview)

These extracts index the manner in which relations of power are enacted and perpetuated. In the first extract, for example, the lecturer made no attempt to conceal his indignation with students' 'unsuccessful' English writing, hence, 'I normally cross until I get their paper (torn into) pieces like this!' In the second extract the lecturer uses discourse to reflect the constructed relations of power with students, '... your language is appalling.' It is apparent that the lecturers consider students' unsuccessful writing as students' failed attempts to conform to the standard forms of the university discourse (cf. Pardoe, 2000) instead of a learning stage in the students' meaning-making. This is grounded, as alluded to earlier, in the wrong assumption that literacy is given and students need to know and use it in their academic writing practice.

In the third extract, the lecturer acknowledges putting effort into assisting students to write. But we see that the student is assumed to be a passive recipient here, where he/she is simply told what or how to write without necessarily making sense of why she/he should write in the way proposed by the lecturer. In other words, lecturers' response to student writing has some semiotic aspects attached to it, in that it makes some inscriptions that it is the lecturer who should assume the agency role because he is the all-powerful and knowledgeable. The lecturer gives orders, to which the students ought to comply, questioning neither the logicity nor the quality of the lecturer's suggestion. Such feedback does not invite students to understand the literacy practice of the university as per the socially constructed definition of literacy; instead lecturers focus on how they want students to learn literacy of the university. As a result, agency role in such feedback serves to exercise and reproduce dominance.

Admittedly, when one looks at students' texts, the overwhelming experience is the array of linguistic errors, which characterise such texts. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1994: 15) put it, 'Every academic has experienced

the difficulty of marking the mass of mediocre and middling scripts which offer no purchase for clear judgement ...'. Students' linguistic deficiencies have often been a prime focus of lecturers' feedback at universities in Tanzania, but this is not beneficial to students. The issue of what type of feedback should be rendered to students is a complex one. In the current study, lecturers' responses indicated that feedback was mainly on corrections of surface structural and grammatical errors, as this lecturer admits,

The commonest problem I – I encounter is something very basic, even get – getting the tenses right ... or some basic grammar. (Interview)

However, Myles (2002: 14) argues that attention to detailed feedback on sentence structural and grammar level may be a waste of lecturers' effort as 'improvement can be gained by practice alone'. It seems plausible that if the focus on error becomes the totality of the lecturers' response, then language, discourse and text are equated with structure (Myles, 2002). Myles (2002: 14) argues that such reduction of language, discourse and text into structure is problematic because it is assumed that the lecturer 'has the authority to change the student's text and correct it'. This means that the lecturers' preoccupation with error identification sends a negative signal to students that unless they conform to the dominant discourse (i.e. valued standard [English] forms) in writing, the lecturer will not be cognisant of experiences students are trying to communicate through language. To the contrary, we argue that feedback provided should motivate students to make modifications competently and with confidence. This includes, for example, expressing their voices both as experience and as language and asserting their own identities (cf. Lillis, 2001). If modification of an English academic writing problem can be arrived at through students expressing themselves in Kiswahili, then this should be encouraged. Failure to do so means the lecturer has failed in her/his duties to use all resources (including student's bilingual ability) at her/his disposal for teaching and learning purposes.

Lecturer as a dominant voice in students' learning

Classroom discourse at the university involved in the study predominantly privileges the lecturer as the dominant voice or what Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) refer to as professorial monologue. The lecturer's knowledge of English puts him in a privileged position compared to students in as far as classroom power relations are concerned. Here the teaching and learning is not only monolingual-oriented, but also unidirectional, as the lecturer assumes the role of the 'all-knowing' authority and the source of knowledge. Because of his privileged access to institutional power resources, the lecturer takes the rostrum and optimally uses his privilege of speaking including the implied privilege vested on him by the institutional, that is, the university's orders of discourse of controlling the speech of students who, in this case, become silent participants.

In the case of the sessions we observed, there were occasions where lecturers invited students to participate in the classroom discourse. In many cases students' invitation to participate in the classroom discourse was

inconsequential. However, in some other cases students were encouraged to participate in situations where lecturers wanted to cross-check students' understanding or to invite students wishing to seek clarification on issues covered in the lecture. In both cases, students' response was largely minimal. This phenomenon illuminated the complexity of classroom discourse often resulting from the interplay of the twin constructs, which Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) termed as linguistic misunderstanding and complicity in misunderstanding, which traditionally engulf pedagogical communication in higher education in Tanzania.

Linguistic Misunderstanding and Complicity in Misunderstanding

Bourdieu and Passeron (1994: 4) describe linguistic misunderstanding as a situation where university students fail 'to cope with the technical and scholastic demands made on their use of language as students'. For example, in all five classroom sessions we attended, lecturers' questions to students were often greeted with either silence or, better still, inaudible mumblings or, at best, a few isolated voices, which very often sounded uncertain. This phenomenon underlies one of the most popular complaints from among the lecturers at the university used in the study that students do not participate in the classroom discourse as actively as they should.

Linguistic misunderstanding in Tanzania's multilingual social contexts should be understood at two levels; first, at the level of linguistic and cultural code resulting from English-only rather than Kiswahili or Kiswahili-English bilingual classroom practice; second, at the level of inaccessibility and opacity of academic discourse or institutionalised academic language generally. Whereas it could be argued that lecturers in the present study have varying degrees of access to both levels, the same cannot be said about the students, for some of whom English is a foreign language at best.

Lecturers have often attributed students' minimal participation in classroom discourse to students' inadequate control of the linguistic and cultural code of the university community of practice. But in view of the findings of this study, the lecturers' argument for students' reduced interactive response in the classroom may well not be the only argument. Lecturers' own discursive practices, for example, also explain students' reduced classroom participation. As will be illustrated, during classroom observations for this study there were instances where lecturers' questions to students were either obscure or structured in such a way as to remind students that they are not expected to ask questions.

In addition to linguistic misunderstanding is the phenomenon of 'complicity in misunderstanding', referred to above (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994), which can conveniently be related to and explain some of the aspects observed in the classroom discourse, as illustrated in the following extract.

Lecturer: Any question with regards to cast iron as we just said about?
Students: (Silence)

Lecturer: Does this mean that everything is making at least some sense?

Students: (Few voices) Yes!

Lecturer: Okay if everything is making sense here then we can move one step further and start worrying about steels. We spent a substantial amount of time talking steels. To begin with why are we talking of steels and not steel?

Students: (Silence)
(Classroom Observation)

In the excerpt above, the lecturer invites questions from students as a way of checking students' understanding of that section of the lecture. The lecturer's invitation was first greeted with silence from the students. But when the lecturer asked the students whether everything was understood (*'does this mean that everything is making at least some sense?'*), the reply was affirmative. Students knew if they had said 'No!' to such a question they would probably have found themselves 'in the dock' trying to explain why things did not make any sense to them! However, the lecturer's follow-up question (*'why are we talking of steels and not steel?'*) did not only prove that the lecturer's assumption on students' understanding was incorrect, but also indicated that students were actually reluctant to admit that they did not understand in the first place. This is where complicity in misunderstanding comes in. Indeed the lecturer knew that students were possibly not following his arguments in the lecture, and that is one reason for him to pose the question *'Does this mean that everything is making at least some sense?'* Students too seemed to have known what their lecturer was thinking about them, but both parties decided to treat the situation as normal in this classroom discourse. Here is another example from a classroom discourse illustrating the same aspect.

Lecturer: You only mention the item on which the action was what ... was performed! Is that clear?

Students: (Silence)

Lecturer: Are we – are we working the same – bus all of us here?

Students: (Chorus) Yes!

Lecturer: Do you know what we are doing?

Students: (Chorus) Yes!
(Classroom Observation)

When a lecturer asks the students 'Is that clear?', as is the case with the above question, it 'rules out any question it might be clear' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994: 11) although often the correct assumption is that *it is not clear*. The lecturer knows this, but s/he would normally continue with the lecture nonchalantly, perhaps to conform to what one can call the university culture of mystery, which privileges, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1994: 14) '... the marvels of professional language' that gives little room for 'methodical and explicit presentations'. Students also know that it is not clear, but the reason that they refrain from interrupting their lecturer is because of resorting to, using Bourdieu and Passeron's metaphor, the 'rhetoric of despair' in that, 'If students would not even dream of interrupting a professorial monologue

which they do not understand, this is because the part of them that obeys the logic of the situation reminds them that if they do not understand, then they should not be present' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994: 17). In this way, lecturers unwittingly invite students to enter into the relationship of complicity of misunderstanding.

English as Dominant Literacy in Tanzania

From the notions of CDA and NLS, people's ways of doing things and literacy practices are shaped by socially valued ideologies and beliefs. These ideologies not only influence people's attitudes towards particular practices, but they also configure their thinking about such practices. Issues on what structures lecturers' and students' attitudes towards English language use in Tanzania are explicable within the framework of ideological formation and hegemony. We have seen that hegemony entails influence of the dominated to an extent of accepting the status quo as legitimate.

Tanzania for many years had been under Ujamaa policy whereby, using Lillis's (2001: 12) phrase, the 'institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge' engendered distribution of Kiswahili in all social and government institutions, including primary and secondary schools. But, years of Ujamaa and the 'Kiswahilisation' project have not successfully dismantled the influence and lure of English in Tanzania (Mohamed, 2006). If anything, the demand for English as the language of education at all levels has increased in the last two decades (see Brock-Utne *et al.*, 2005).

In this study for example, there was an interesting phenomenon about attitudes structuring lecturers' as well as students' use of English. In the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires, both lecturers and students overwhelmingly maintained that English should continue to be the language of instruction at the universities in Tanzania, rather than Kiswahili. The lecturers' position on this matter was in conflict with not only their perceived discomfort towards using English outside academics (i.e. lecturers reported experiencing silent disapproval from cohorts and the society, when they use English outside classrooms) but also their own linguistic practices on campus. Lecturers' linguistic practices on campus are also paradoxical in two ways: first, lecturers accused students of codemixing (CM) and codeswitching (CS) between English and Kiswahili during classroom discourse practices. But, CM and CS phenomena were also noted among lecturers during classroom observation. Thus, lecturers were performing exactly that for which they blamed students of doing. Thus, lecturers fail to see the point that students' linguistics behaviour is indeed a reflection of lecturers' own discursive practices.

Secondly, because they believe that using CM and CS is against the institutional cultural practice, which privileges English as the dominant literacy, lecturers allow neither themselves nor students to exercise their full potential in employing both Kiswahili and English as a useful strategy in academic literacy mediation in the university orders of discourse. Thus, in the current practice it is not that CM and CS are considered as a hindrance to students' writing practice, but more critically, Kiswahili language itself is prevented from being used as language of content matter education in

bilingual symbiosis with English. As it turns out, students could only do discussion and written academic work in English. In other words, lecturers are more concerned with 'their obligation to protect the sanctity of core beliefs' (Christiansen, 1994: 13) even when such core values impinge negatively on the students' meaning-making potential. As a result, lecturers 'have only reproduced the powerful sources of discourses that may lead to subordination and manipulation'. And this, according to Christiansen (1994: 13) 'ignores the difficult worlds students are encountering as they try to negotiate the complex collision of their world and the world of academia'.

Towards Bilingual Education in Higher Education in Tanzania

In the view of pedagogy of multilingual literacy, 'there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitutes the ends of literacy learning' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000: 6). Students need to be provided with not just one set, but with several cultural and linguistic standards. Teachers' role is to arbitrate this cultural and linguistic diversity as 'classroom resource just as powerful as it is a social resource in the formation of new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000: 6). However, the potential benefits for bilingual proficiency are curtailed by the switch in medium of instruction after three or more years of 'mother-tongue' education, which is symbolic of transition from African-language-based monolingual education to English-based monolingual education in secondary and higher education. It is our belief that only properly constituted bilingual education can lead to students achieving multiliteracy and their full potential in multilingual contexts. In the case of the current study, the switch to English as *de facto* language of learning and teaching content matter from secondary school onwards, means that the linguistic knowledge and capital in Kiswahili gained over seven years of primary education is underutilised, discouraged or ignored altogether.

The problem with the English monolingual orientation at secondary and higher education levels is that students are expected to operate way beyond their means using English only, in educational and national contexts that are essentially EFL. The question is why language-in-education policy and classroom practice favour an English-only approach, rather than Kiswahili, the language of seven years' initial literacy development. Kucer (2005: 222) uses the metaphor of the 'master myth' in which 'the dominant group within a society may reflect and enforce values that are complicit with the oppression of nonmainstream groups'. Schools are the prime 'culprits' for reflecting the values of the dominant groups. Thus, according to Kucer (2005: 222), 'Becoming literate ... often requires taking on the master myths of those in control [which] for children from nondominant groups ... require the acceptance of beliefs and practices that are, in fact, used to subjugate them'.

The 'master myth' not only accounts for hegemonic existence, but also explains students' contradictory claim about their ability in English in Tanzania. The current study revealed that, despite their unsuccessful linguistic performance, students claim to know English and want English to continue as the only medium of instruction even when it effectively disadvantages them. This 'master myth' also explains why over 40 years of independence and in

spite of massive campaigns of Kiswahili distribution, which started soon after independence in 1961, English is still valued as the dominant literacy in Tanzania. Thus, being literate or educated is equated with having education in English.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that lecturers' powerful positioning makes some of the discursive practices work against facilitating students' access to the privileged literacy practice of the academia in the Tanzanian social cultural context. Using CDA, lecturers' discursive practices were scrutinised in terms of not only how such actions hinder students' meaning-making, but also how some lecturers' actions serve in the enactment and sustenance of relations of power and dominance. It is this lecturer–student relation of dominance which the lecturers do not realise they are helping to perpetuate which constitutes the real tension between the lecturer-mentor and the student-apprentice in the Tanzanian social context. Another dimension of this tension hinges on the lecturers' lack of clear judgement in how to invite students into a community of discourse to work into a common understanding of literacy practices. In this connection, we critiqued a system of education that pits Kiswahili against English instead of utilising the potential embedded in both in a bilingual model of classroom interaction. Thus, at universities in the Tanzanian social context, real opportunities for dialogue between lecturers and students as real participants in the construction and interpretation of texts do not seem to exist. Lecturers, however, fail to see themselves as part of the problem of student writing, in that they too are the product of this social and cultural makeup. From a pedagogical perspective, there is no recourse to bilingualism as a resource, as the institutional orders of discourse discourage and prevent dialogue between Kiswahili and English language systems, leading to students underachieving academically.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Felix Banda, Linguistics Department, University of the Western Cape, P/B X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa (fbanda@uwc.ac.za).

References

- Baetens-Beardsmore, H. (1993) An overview of European models of bilingual education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 6 (3), 197–208.
- Banda, F. (2000) The dilemma of the mother tongue: Prospects for bilingual education in South Africa. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 13 (1), 51–66.
- Barton, D. and Hamilton, M. (2000) Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton and R. Ivanič (eds) *Situated Literacies* (pp. 7–15). New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1994) Language and relationship to language in the teaching situation. In P. Bourdieu, J. C. Passeron and M.S. Martin (eds) *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power* (pp. 1–34). The Hague: Polity Press.
- Brock-Utne, B., Desai, Z. and Qorro, M. (eds) (2005) *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. Dar-es-Salaam: KAD.

- Christiansen, R. (2004) Critical discourse analysis and academic literacies. <http://www.writinginstructor.com/essays/christiansen-all.html>. Accessed 24.06.2004.
- Christie, F. (2005) *Language Education in the Primary Years*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. (2000) A pedagogy of multiliteracies designing social futures. In B. Cope and M. Kalantzis (eds) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (pp. 9–37). London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2001) Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 121–138). London: Sage.
- Kucer, S.B. (2005) *Dimensions of Literacy: A Conceptual Base for Teaching Reading and Writing in School Settings*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lillis, T.M. (2001) *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire*. New York: Routledge.
- McKay, S.L. and Hornberger, N.H. (eds) (1996) *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, M. (2001) Between theory, method and politics: Positioning of approaches to CDA. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 14–31). London: Sage.
- Mohamed, H.I. (2006) Academic writing as social practice: A critical discourse analysis of student writing in higher education in Tanzania. PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape.
- Myles, J. (2002) Second language writing research. Vol. 6, No. A-1. <http://iteslj.org/links/TESL/Articles/Writing>. Accessed 02.09.2002.
- Pardoe, S. (2000) Respect and the pursuit of 'symmetry' in researching literacy and student writing. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič (eds) *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (pp. 149–166). London: Routledge.
- Schmied, J. (1991) *English in Africa: An Introduction*. London: Longman.
- Street, B.V. (2001) *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993) *Discourse & Society*. London: Sage.
- Wodak, R. (2001) What CDA is about. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 1–13). London: Sage.
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds) (2001) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.