



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

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Recommended citation:

Turner, I. (2015). A Matter of Choice? The Role of English and Isixhosa for University Graduates in their Early Careers. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 3(2), 43–74. Retrieved from <https://edu.uhk.cz/africa/index.php/ModAfr/article/view/95>



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A MATTER OF CHOICE? THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AND ISIXHOSA FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN THEIR EARLY CAREERS

Irina Turner

Abstract: In multilingual South Africa, language use is more often than not a matter of choice than of ability. The application of indigenous languages like isiXhosa seems nevertheless less preferable in certain social contexts such as the job environment, where English is seen as the language of “success and status” (Casale and Posel 2010: 58). This paper probes the relationship between an isiXhosa language identity and career chances for university graduates. It examines, in a micro study, how young graduates from Fort Hare University in East London perceive the role and conception of English and isiXhosa for identity construction with a focus on employment opportunities. This view is contrasted with local employers’ perceptions on the matter. The interviews show that the dominance of English in the workplace as a global and “neutral” language remains largely unquestioned. In conclusion, the paper provides suggestions for further research into the role of indigenous languages in the South African business environment, on a broader scale.

Keywords: *isiXhosa, English Proficiency, Multilingualism at the Workplace, Language Identity, Career Chances*

1. Introduction: isiXhosa and English in South Africa

South Africa is a multilingual society “where languages have been [...] sites of resistance, empowerment and discrimination” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 263)¹. Up to today, the choice of language in a specific communicative context is also always a social and political matter; “power relations are today expressed in symbolic relations” (Park and Wee 2015: 5).

1 The author refers to Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004.

Although there are 11 official national languages and unofficially many more in South Africa, English is hereby increasingly prevalent; especially in the economic sphere (Kamwangamalu 2007: 271ff.). Skills in this language are considered an important qualification by the job market and English is seen as the language of “success and status” (Casale and Posel 2010: 58).

However, English is by no means accessible to everyone in South Africa. Township schools up until today suffer from historic and contemporary systematic undermining of educational quality (Kamwangamalu 2007: 271ff; Rudwick 2008: 103), of which instruction in and of English is a crucial element.

9.4% of all South Africans and 1% of Africans² speak English, and 23% isiXhosa as their home language (Casale and Posel 2010: 58ff.). In the province of the Eastern Cape, with about 8 million L1 speakers, isiXhosa is the dominant language in social spheres and education (Lewis et.al. 2015). At the same time, with 29.6%, the province has the third highest unemployment rate³ in the country (Statistics South Africa 2015: xiii) and poverty is rife. The National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS)⁴ found a positive correlation between family income and the degree of English language proficiency in South Africa (Casale and Posel 2010: 58ff).

Beyond that, few studies examine the relationship between “language and labour market outcomes in developing countries”⁵ and South Africa⁶ (Casale and Posel 2010: 63). Either the data on South Africa is outdated (Cornwell and Inder 2008; data from 1996-1998), or

2 This term is used by the authors (Casale & Posel) and refers to black South Africans. The terminology is contentious, since reference to skin colour on the one hand reaffirms apartheid categories of citizenship, on the other hand the term “Africans” used in this way, distinctly excludes white Africans.

3 The official unemployment rate only counts people who are actively looking for work. For a problematization of that data profiling see Posel et al 2013.

4 NIDS is a nationally representative household survey, designed as a panel study (with the first wave in 2008), by the Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), University of Cape Town (www.nids.uct.ac.za). The data for the study was collected in 2008, 7,300 households took part and 28,000 adults (15 years or older) were interviewed (Casale & Posel 2010: 58).

5 Chiswick BR & Miller PW 1995.

6 Deumert A, Inder B & Maitra P 2005. Cornwell K & Inder B 2008.

small-scale and very group-specific (Deumert et.al. 2005)⁷ (Casale and Posel 2010: 65).

The role of local languages against global English in European multinational companies has been examined by Gunnarson (2014). She found that the situation varies from one country to another (Gunnarson 2014: 27). While in France for instance, English is seen as a threat to the French language,⁸ its dominance is seen as unproblematic in Scandinavian countries⁹ and “perceived as a ‘must’” in Germany¹⁰; nevertheless, German maintains an important role in business communication (Gunnarson 2014: 16).

This paper examines in a micro study how young graduates from Fort Hare University in East London perceive the role of English and isiXhosa with regards to employment opportunities. This view is contrasted with the local employers’ perception of that matter. The following questions will be addressed:

Are chances of securing a job seemingly increased by portraying a “global” English identity? What are the consequences for using and identifying with isiXhosa for young university graduates seeking employment? Do employers systematically undermine vernacular language use in favour of English? Does English suffocate indigenous African languages like isiXhosa?

The paper sets out with a theoretical anchoring. After introducing method and interviewees’ profiles, the students’ self-description of language use and concepts of isiXhosa and English are presented and discussed. The role of those languages with regards to employment is then considered in more detail from the employers’ perspective. Concluding, the paper gives suggestions for further research on a broader scale.

2. Theoretical Anchoring

The paper moves within the disciplinary framework of sociolinguistics, as it examines a particular aspect of the relationship between language

7 This is a study on migrants in Cape Town.

8 Gunnarson refers to Deneire 2008.

9 Gunnarson refers to Firth 1995.

10 Gunnarson refers to Ehrenreich 2010.

and society (Crystal 2008: 440), namely the role of isiXhosa in an environment dominated by a notion of global English, i.e., the South African business world; albeit in the very specific and limited setting of Fort Hare University and two companies in East London.

The paper follows Park and Wee's call for a broader, market-theoretical, perspective on global English that "recognizes simultaneously the structural relations of power that shape the conditions by which different uses of English are evaluated and the various practices through which language users engage with such conditions by negotiating the identities and social positions they flexibly occupy through their use of English" (Park and Wee 2015: 24).

Their theoretical anchoring in the metaphor of Bourdieu's linguistic market (1984, 1986, 1991)¹¹ proves helpful for the enquiries at hand, as it "highlights practice as a link between structure and agency" and puts the focus on the "subjectivity and meaning-making practices of speakers" in their use of English (Park and Wee 2015: 40). In order to understand Bourdieu's metaphor, it is important to comprehend how English functions as an indexical sign and a value on three levels. Firstly, on a sociological level, English enables a marking of ethics and expression of values in terms of evaluating and distinguishing between good and bad; secondly, on an economic level, English serves as an exchange value, whereby language competence can be exchanged into material gain; and thirdly, as a linguistic value, English can serve as a "meaningful difference" in the construction of a speaker's identity (Park and Wee 2015: 25ff.). For the context at hand, the notion of English as a value is relevant, as the paper asks how the graduates employ these different types of values with regards to their career considerations.

The structure of the linguistic market indicates the power relations within a society (Park and Wee 2015: 28). In the South African context, "white English" symbolizes cultural, social and linguistic capital in Bourdieu's sense (1986).

11 The authors argue that the critique from linguistics against Bourdieu's market theory, that too strong a focus on institutions negates the role of social actors and individual capacity, is unfounded, since both are integral parts of the notion of habitus (Park & Wee 2015: 33ff.).

The notion of global English as a value in the linguistic market reveals its problematic role between “postcolonial linguistic nationalism”, promoting and enforcing the use of local languages, vs. the “economically driven pursuit”, favouring English as a *lingua franca* (Park and Wee 2015: 10).

The close association of English with globalisation transforms the language into a symbol for its problems: “English [...] is a language of inequality, [...] renewing relations of [...] oppression on the global scale between the centre and the periphery”; through the “ideological distinction of native versus nonnative speaker” delegitimising non-Western appropriation, “and the class divisions” restricting “access to English” (Park and Wee 2015: 3ff.).

Despite the practical aspects of inequality, English also symbolises the estrangement and identity struggles of the colonised subject. It is “considered a language of the Other for many communities” (Park and Wee 2015: 12). This is not only a historical problem but continues to play out its power dominance today in the form of suggested incompetence resulting in insecurities:

The speaker comes to acknowledge the authority of Standard English but not by forced imposition or rational calculation of its economic value but by occupying a specific subject position in relation to the language-as-entity; the anxiety and insecurity the speaker feels in the relation to the abstract standard comes to be recognized as evidence of the legitimacy of the standard (Park and Wee 2015: 109).

In that way, promoting English as a global language, is a practice of gatekeeping; “especially in [...] the workplace, influencing individuals’ social trajectories” (Park and Wee 2015: 119). It is thus nowadays impossible to see English as an inexhaustible good that is free to all (Park and Wee 2015: 117)¹². Rather, English is a commodity and “an acquirable skill, obscuring and reproducing class-based inequalities of power that undergird the structure of the linguistic market” (Park and Wee 2015: 189).

12 Park & Wee point out that there is an inner logic in keeping up this estrangement, because “to appropriate the language of the Other is to go against the indexical meaning of English as Otherness” (Park & Wee 2015: 140).

When global English is conceived of as having value on the linguistic market, and as such as something measurable, by implication it is conceptualised as a thing and “capital” instead of a practice (Park and Wee 2015:105). Although identity, of which language is a constructive part, should not be “subject to exchange” or treated “as an economic resource to be cultivated for material profit”¹³ (Park and Wee 2015: 125), the dominance of English in international communication forces the speaker to choose between language use in order to mark ones “inherited identity” and the “perceived use-value” (Park and Wee 2015: 14).

English has come to play the role of a global commodity through the worldwide spread of neoliberalism symbolising some of its core aspects like the claim for ideological and national neutrality (Park and Wee 2015: 161). Not succeeding in the linguistic market is entirely framed as individual failure and as such a “neoliberal rationalization of unequal structures” (Park and Wee 2015: 188).

At the workplace, English is largely celebrated as an ideal means for intercultural communication. However, one needs to differentiate among various spheres of workplace discourses, i.e., local, national, and supranational, and its contextual frames; i.e., socio-cultural, legal-political, technical-economical, and linguistic (Gunnarson 2014: 23). For the question at hand, the linguistic framework is of special relevance. It describes the varying adherences of the local, national and global language community to language policies influencing verbal and written discourse at the workplace (Gunnarson 2014: 26).

To which extent are these language policies part of a larger Language Management Strategy? Sherman et al. define the Language Management Theory as firstly seeing “behavior toward language as a process”, of noting a “deviation from a norm at any level of language generation”, i.e., identifying certain linguistic behaviour as problematic, which results in the “design of an adjustment“ and its implementation (Sherman et al. 2012: 290). Secondly, this reaches an organisational stage and as soon as it transcends the individual self-correction but “occurs repeatedly in a number of situations, [it becomes] the subject of discussion, reflection, and [...] acts of policy or ‘strategy’, such as the determination of the language to be used

13 Park & Wee refer to Uricuoli 2008.

for meetings, it is called organized management” (Sherman et al. 2012: 290). It will be shown that these aspects play a role in the case studies at hand.

This paper does not exclusively see the problems of English but simultaneously considers the role of vernacular languages in the corporate world. Hence, the importance of local knowledge and vernacular linguistic practices in the workplace are of relevance. Gunnarson found that there is a potential conflict between local and international linguistic norms (Gunnarson 2014: 24). Sherman et al. point out the importance of local knowledge in international companies, as this is synonymous with interactional and tactical knowledge vital for successful business communication, which maintains “innovative capabilities in the new economy” (Sherman et al. 2012: 292ff.).

Multinational companies distinguish between “codified” knowledge, i.e., manifested in “manuals, books and instructive courses, measurable through some sort of testing”, and “tactic” knowledge, i.e., informal knowledge “acquired through experience in specific situations”¹⁴ (Sherman et al. 2012: 300). Pertaining to the case studies, the use of isiXhosa largely falls into the second category.

Although stressing the importance of vernacular languages and local knowledge in itself does not indicate a general shift in the conception of global English and changing power relations towards smaller languages in intercultural communication (Sherman et al. 2012: 303), their constitutive role for “effective communication” in multicultural companies should be re-evaluated (Sherman et al. 2012: 306).

This is particularly true for an environment like South Africa, where English is also a local language, i.e., not a second language to all,¹⁵ and

14 Sherman et al give an example that is applicable to the case study in this paper as well: “Machine operators in Company A, when asked by a researcher about the fact that there was software in German on a computer in their manufacturing space, stated that it was not the case that they would “know” or “use” German, but rather, that they had learned over time and with the use of manuals “where to click”, without actually mastering the language outside the given situation” (Sherman et al. 2012: 300).

15 In Kachru’s model of circles (1992), South Africa belongs to the Inner Circle, where English is used as a native language “by whites of British descent and by the younger generations of Indian South Africans”, as well as the Outer Circle, where it is used as

thus part of a complicated inner power set-up. It is hence not neutral, as the notion of global English implies, i.e., the false assumption that “it is no longer a language that is tied to anyone’s culture, and that it can benefit anyone economically through its acquisition” (Park and Wee 2015: 143).

According to Kamwangamalu (2007: 264), the role of English for the black majority in South Africa underwent different historic stages. While initially, English had been the language of the colonisers and thus was perceived as a distinct “*they-code*”. Later, during the anti-apartheid struggle, it had been positively connoted and adopted as a so-called “*we-code*”; i.e., as “a language that the black community used to inform the outside world about their opposition against apartheid” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 264). In the post-apartheid era, where race struggles have been largely replaced by class struggles (Tomaselli 2011: 171ff.), English is a “*they-code*” for people without access to a good education (mostly rural), and at the same time a “naturalized *we-code* for the black elite” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 264). Kamwangamalu defines this “naturalized *we-code* as an outgroup language that, because of its positive attributes (e.g. association with power, privilege, education, upward social mobility), has been adopted [and] [...] become their chief medium of communication” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 268ff.).

In the light of these theoretical deliberations, the paper follows Park and Wee in asking about the “values [...] speakers attribute to English when they appropriate it in contexts where it would otherwise be considered the language of the Other” (Park and Wee 2015: 13). Pursuing the larger question of the role of language in multilingual companies in an increasingly knowledge-based economic set-up (Sherman et al. 2012: 288), this paper starts from a micro study. It enquires specific argumentation strategies for the dominant use of English and for or against the acknowledgement of isiXhosa in business among employers and graduates. This preliminary study sets the direction for future in-depth research in companies to pay closer attention “to the specific conditions that limit or open up spaces for change in the linguistic market” (Park and Wee 2015: 140) and assessing the consequences for indigenous African languages

a second language; mostly by the black population and Afrikaners (Kamwangamalu 2007: 264).

(Kamwangamalu 2007: 270). Gunnarson identified a research gap for Europe:

Future research on multilingualism in the workplace needs to continue to explore how the gap between visions and practice can be overcome, thus increasing our understanding of how linguistic and cultural issues affect workplace discourse and how problems can be solved (Gunnarson 2014: 27).

This equally applies to South Africa; perhaps even more urgently.

3. Interviews

This probing micro-case study is based on four interviews with isiXhosa students in East London and two employer interviews with HR executives in the city. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in March 2015. The students, two women and two men, were mature isiXhosa mother tongue speakers currently studying at Fort Hare University with previous job experience.¹⁶

For the employers' view, I chose two large established companies that run a professional Human Resource (HR) department and operate within global structures. Rick¹⁷ is a Regional HR business partner (HR generalist) at a leading South African food and clothing retailer employing about 25,000 staff nationwide. While his function "covers the full spectrum of an employee's life cycle", his role in the recruitment process is to participate in the interviews (Interview 5: Rick).

Joleen is Manager of Executive Development and Performance Management at a large German car production company in the Eastern Cape. She is responsible for performance and management, Executive HR development, and the coordination of strategic HRD activities in the company (Interview 6: Joleen). In the recruitment process, Joleen

16 I had met those four students during a teaching stint at Fort Hare University in February-March 2015. My selection criteria were maturity and previous job experience. The fact that they were studying in the Humanities, were prepared to talk to me, and all had a very good command of English is owed to the context in which I had met them. Hence, they are not representative of all students at Fort Hare University.

17 All names are pseudonyms for the protection of privacy.

handles recruitment regulation and policy (Interview 6: Joleen). The company employs about 5,000 people in South Africa and of those about 3,500 in East London; it is the largest employer in the city.

Although the dominance of global English can be expected in these companies, due to their size and internationally linked operations at a higher management level, both have firm local ties in terms of their recruitment sources. While the car manufacturer needs a large pool of blue collar workers for its local production plant, the retailer nurtures a strong customer-orientation that requires professional face-to-face communication. Hence, it is feasible to assume that the dominant vernacular language isiXhosa plays an important role in skills resourcing; also pertaining to early career graduates. Even though, the chosen companies are not representative of the employment landscape in East London, as the language situation might be very different in small and medium sized businesses in the city, their degree of professionalism increases the likelihood of the existence of a strategic language management in line with the South African constitution and an increased awareness of language matters within the company.

4. Student's View

4.1. *Concepts and use of isiXhosa and English*

Three of the four students went to an English, so-called Model C school, formerly reserved to whites, and they assessed their English proficiency higher than their isiXhosa proficiency; although isiXhosa is named by all as their home language and mother tongue.

Andile is an Honours Philosophy student who pursues an academic career. In conversation with friends and in public places, he emphasizes the individual freedom in communication:

It depends on my mood. Today, I feel like I am in touch with a different side of myself. More close to the isiXhosa culture custom. [...] Sometimes I indulge people that can't speak; who I know that can't speak just to engage with them. It is never fixed (Interview 1: Andile).

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Andile finds communication in isiXhosa an advantage in terms of achieving certain things “quicker” when addressing people “in their own language” (Interview 1: Andile). For him, isiXhosa signifies home:

Home. It is where I come from. [...] Wherever I would be ...it is where I always remain. It is the idea of transcending, that is, presence and future, preserve but move forward. You move but you keep it. That is where I am with isiXhosa. I will always keep it there (Interview 1: Andile).

While isiXhosa seems to signify stability, English is the “door to the world”, to change, “access to culture” and “cross-cultural communication” (Interview 1: Andile). In contrast to the perceived stability of isiXhosa, Andile finds the instability of English unpleasant; “it is ever changing” (Interview 1: Andile). He describes the function of English as a commercial good and a link to the global world which comes with the promise of opportunities but needs rooting in individual cultures:

Perhaps it is OK that English connects us to the world, but it's our onus to fall back to what we know and make that a place of grounding. [...] We have the onus, - not me, unfortunately I am lower class - but the middle class has access to some mechanics, they can contribute back. This is how we cement what we know. The other people don't have to know. If we are standard with it, if we can communicate, that will be enough. [...] It is ours. Have English for income (Interview 1: Andile)

Andile considers the dominance of English in South Africa as problematic and potentially “threatening”; he finds that the standard of isiXhosa teaching is insufficient and it's “not doing the language justice” (Interview 1: Andile). He felt that he had to redress his Xhosa identity by taking isiXhosa classes in the 2nd and 3rd year at university “to preserve it”:

I have been associated with the term Coconut person. I needed a way of detaching myself from English; a way to try to understand isiXhosa better (Interview 1: Andile).

Thumeka is a first year part-time Social Science BA student with several years of work experience. She works at the Department of Health as

an administrative officer and would like to advance to the Unit of Occupational Safety and Wellness as a qualified psychologist. She names isiXhosa as her mother tongue and assesses her English skills closely below those of isiXhosa. In the friends and family circle, Xhosa dominates; however, she sends her children to an English school: “We speak mainly Xhosa [at home]. I sometimes speak English to my five-year-old boy but my husband doesn’t like it. He wants me to speak Xhosa. At school they speak English” (Interview 2: Thumeka). At university, English seems to be a pre-determined communication code “because they are conducting the classes in English” (Interview 2: Thumeka). Xhosa is also the language of communication at work, when she is consulting in rural hospitals for instance, where people only understand isiXhosa (Interview 2: Thumeka).

English, for Thumeka, is an “important” and “universal” language, spoken by most South Africans “and abroad” (Interview 2: Thumeka). It is the language that allows her to “address whoever I want to address to different people of different nations” (Interview 2: Thumeka). Nevertheless, she advocates for an appreciation and marketing of African languages, especially “their own mother tongue”, while at the same time fostering an active interest in South African languages other than one’s own (Interview 2: Thumeka).

Thumeka does not feel that English is threatening other languages. Her emphasis is on freedom of choice: “Most people make it an issue that you must know and understand English, as if you are forced to, whereas you are not forced to speak English” (Interview 2: Thumeka).¹⁸

Vuyo, a first year Education student who is also running his own business selling cleaning detergents, went to an English Model C school and therefore is very fluent in English. He also used to work as a receptionist and as an apprentice for a Real Estate agency. Now at university, he takes an isiXhosa beginners course, although he describes it as his mother tongue, to improve his understanding,

18 This emphasis on forced language instruction has a special significance in the South African context as it is a reminder of the Soweto uprising in 1976, where pupils rebelled against being forcefully taught in Afrikaans and were consequently killed by the apartheid police. It is still remembered today “how intensely and even dangerously the issue of language is tied to South Africa’s past” (Rudwick 2008: 103ff.).

grammar, and “structure” (Interview 4: Vuyo). He describes the language situation at home as follows:

Zulu and Xhosa is practically the same thing. My parents, one is Zulu, one Xhosa. [...] My own language is sort of a mixture of the two languages together. We had a trilingual [language situation at home] ... Xhosa, Zulu, English. The whole family [...] would start a sentence in English but then to get to the depth of it, you would finish in Xhosa or Zulu. Some words in Xhosa and Zulu give it more of a definitive meaning (Interview 4: Vuyo).

While English gives him access, isiXhosa connects to emotions¹⁹:

For you to understand isiXhosa, it means you’ve been through the same things with this person; [...] like divorce. If divorce happens, you have a term in Xhosa [...] would actually really define the pain and suffering. You have to go through it, to actually understand it (Interview 4: Vuyo).

Vuyo finds the ability to switch between languages advantageous. He points out that sometimes, English, which is in his opinion “the most understood language in South Africa”, can be used as an ethnical neutralizer²⁰:

For example, if you go to Durban, which is a Zulu-speaking environment, and you speak isiXhosa, you are not gonna be welcomed as much. That is why I prefer speaking English, because English is sort of like a neutral thing. It puts everyone on the same level (Interview 4: Vuyo).

On the one hand, Vuyo associates English with “freedom”, on the other hand, it is a symbol of “superiority”; especially in his attitude towards rural isiXhosa speakers (Interview 4: Vuyo).

19 Vuyo gives another example: “Ubuntu is a Xhosa word [...]. The English translation of ubuntu is empathy, but ubuntu goes beyond empathy. Empathy is doing something for someone, but ubuntu is doing something for someone not out of feeling guilty but out of the goodness of your heart and not expecting anything in return. [...] Empathy would have not have defined that deep enough” (Interview 4: Vuyo).

20 However, elsewhere in the interview, he emphasizes contradictorily that ethnicity, e.g. clan names amongst Xhosa, plays a major role in the success of business communication within the small and medium enterprise environment he operates in.

Nomsa is in her second Master's year in Rural Development and considers a career at university. In her job environment as an English lecturer, the dominant language is English. When she moved to the Alice campus, which has a higher degree of Xhosa students and staff, Xhosa became more prevalent (Interview 3: Nomsa).

Her own English schooling background also raises identity tensions even within her family:

At home [...] I probably speak more English than Xhosa. My siblings mix, but I speak probably the most English. My sibling stayed within the township setting; I didn't. I went to boarding school with predominately white kids. Though, most of my friends are black, they are not Xhosa. [...] I dream in English (Interview 3: Nomsa).

There is still a felt identity gap in not speaking isiXhosa in depth. Nomsa feels that her own Xhosa knowledge is inadequate to teach her children. Hence, independent of whom she would marry, she'd send her children to "proper" Xhosa lessons (Interview 3: Nomsa). She puts her own identity struggles in these terms:

In the beginning, isiXhosa is a place of knowing who I am. A mixed space, privileged, when you went to a private school you get confused... lay a hold of figuring out what it means to be a Xhosa woman (Interview 3: Nomsa).

For Nomsa, isiXhosa is a door-opener in certain contexts: "Yes I think there are certain avenues. You are not welcome or you don't have favour unless you speak Xhosa. In the changing times that we live in, it is actually beneficial to be proficient in an African language" (Interview 3: Nomsa). In that regard, isiXhosa means "freedom" to her.

She considers English a threat that is killing other languages and observes that "the younger generation" is no longer as fluent in their "own languages" as in English (Interview 3: Nomsa). Furthermore, English even dominates in "all-Xhosa" environments like her church:

Everybody is Xhosa, and people are preaching in English. And you are like: why? God is not English. There is the fact that English is still seen as superior, therefore we neglect our own languages (Interview 3: Nomsa).

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However, Nomsa observes stereotypical connotations attached to a variety of English which comes with a certain accent:

People think you are smart because you sound good in English. It is a ridiculous assumption. So for example if I went to a job interview, I can go with a super smart person that is way smarter than me but let's say, they didn't go to a private school. Until I have proven to be dumb, I am going to get further than he does; the way I sound; socially (Interview 3: Nomsa).

She stated that these clichés can be exploited and can be used to advance a career. Nomsa “absolutely” agrees that portraying an English identity, beyond the use of language, has opened doors for her.

4.2. Language in the job

Three of four interviewees have secured their – mostly casual – jobs not through a formal process but through the random dropping of CVs and networking. Only Thumeka's government appointment followed a formal procedure.

Thumeka remembered the job interview for her current job as an officer at the department of health:

It was advertised in the local newspaper and on the departmental website and then I applied and they called me for an interview. It was in English. One guy was Coloured in the panel. There were about 4-5 people. The rest was Xhosa. If I had chosen to have my answers in Xhosa, it would have been possible. I chose to speak English though for one, there was that one Coloured guy, to accommodate him. And two, I thought I better express myself in English than in Xhosa, maybe some policies and other stuff I don't have in Xhosa so they are better in English (Interview 2: Thumeka).

What becomes clear from this statement is that there is a lack of lexis and professionalised terms in isiXhosa even for educated people who speak the language very comfortably.

Incidentally, I met Andile at a bookstore in East London where he was about to go into a job interview for a part-time job as a bookseller.

Afterwards, he told me that the interview had been conducted in English:

It is the language in that situation. [...] To a bookstore people are coming in the English language. You must know the industry and the market. Xhosas do have bookstores but not in a contribution to the economy. You must be versed in English. [...] There is a way of presenting yourself to different cultures; to people of a like-minded nature. A book in itself is a thing of learning. [...] Presenting yourself as someone who understands the people who buy these books. If you can't relate to that white person, do you think they are inclined to buy books? (Interview 1: Andile).

Here, it becomes evident that the English language is strongly associated with culture, education, and economic power.

Andile also remembered how he obtained a position as a salesman at a clothing trader. He described his search for jobs as going from shop to shop and handing in his CV randomly. Eventually, he was successful due to one personal interaction:

There was no opening; there is no other way to do it. The guy liked me, so he took [the CV] and he said I should come back the next day. [...] [The manager] was Coloured; biracial; so he himself was not so well versed in articulating himself in English. So we already had that understanding. So already it was almost sorted and being done (Interview 1: Andile).

It is interesting to note the racial implications of this comment. Belonging to a formerly disadvantaged group automatically grants a status of “understanding”, of struggling with the English – read white – culture; irrespective of the actual home language, of the interactors, which could easily be English.

Nomsa finds English essential to finding a job in South Africa; especially for the interview situation emphasising the importance of first impressions: “For being interviewed, you want to be able to speak English well” (Interview 3: Nomsa). A previous job interview at Fort Hare University had been quite peculiar:

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It was to teach English at Fort Hare. I didn't end up getting the job. And funnily enough, I didn't get it because I was Xhosa. The panel was mostly black Xhosa people. [...] It is always a confusing one. English is the medium of communication but of course we are Xhosa. So why would we speak in English? [...] I had to work very hard to prove that Xhosa is not going to be a [problem] [...] I think, I already sound pretty white, but I mean. I laid it on thick [...]. One of the things that they were worried about was that in teaching English [...] to the group; that I would revert to Xhosa. [...]. Coming into the interview, I really felt the pressure on my English to be very like.... "I am a white person." Excuse me, I am the right person. So I think that was an interesting situation where I had to shed any sort of evidence of being like [Xhosa]...I don't necessarily think that they were looking for [an English] mother tongue speaker. From a dominantly black university. A black panel. I thought that was crazy (Interview 3: Nomsa).

Again, it becomes evident that the language discourse is closely linked to a discourse on race relations.

Vuyo obtained his jobs through personal connections and did not go through a formal application process (Interview 4: Vuyo). At the Real Estate Agent, his isiXhosa skills were to his advantage:

I come from a sales background, my parents were sales people. It is a job where you make a living through people and you have to accommodate all types of people. [...] Like when I am around Coloured people, I'll speak a few words in Afrikaans just to make them feel more comfortable. And the same when I am around Xhosa people. It's sort of like playing with words. It breaks the communication barrier (Interview 4: Vuyo).

Code-switching is thus a sought after skill in the South African business world.

4.3. Discussion of results

There is a strong link between general literacy, education, home-language proficiency and English language proficiency (Casale and

Posel 2010: 62). In the nationwide NIDS study, 42% of all Africans²¹ self-assessed their English reading, and 41% their English writing skills with the highest score of “very well” equalling the criterion for “English proficiency”²² (Casale and Posel 2010: 59ff.). By contrast, the self-assessment of reading and writing in the home language was much higher (62%) (Casale and Posel 2010: 59). In the Eastern Cape, “less than a third of the adults” consider themselves English proficient (Casale and Posel 2010: 61). Younger Africans have a higher English proficiency and education than their parents, who often still suffer from the aftermath of Bantu education,²³ and there is a gap in English proficiency between urban and rural areas (Casale and Posel 2010: 61).

Due to the facts that we met at Fort Hare University, that they were aged between 20 and 25, that they had already been successful in the job market, and that we were conducting all interviews in English, the students I interviewed were part of an educated elite who are not representative of the population of the Eastern Cape in general when it comes to English proficiency. Nevertheless, they too find themselves within the dilemma of language use as a “marker of inherited identity” competing with its “perceived use-value” (Park and Wee 2015: 14).

The attitude towards English by non-mother tongue speakers in South Africa has been described as “merely instrumental” and ambivalent due to “a perceived dichotomy between the economic values of English

21 Unfortunately, the study did not differentiate among the African languages, because the point was here to make the racial skew evident: “Comparing the two extremes of South Africa’s racial polarization, home-language proficiency is more than 30 percent lower among African adults than among white adults (61 per cent compared to 94 per cent), whereas English-language proficiency is 40 percent lower (41 per cent compared to 81 per cent)” (Casale & Posel 2010: 60).

22 „We use the highest response option in the questions in NIDS in the light of concerns that self-reported data on literacy ability may be overestimated“ (Casale & Posel 2010: 60).

23 Hence, mother tongue instruction in primary schools is contentious today for didactic, historical and political reasons. While it is evidently favourable for learning and developing literacy skills in general (Casale & Posel 2010: 58ff.), during apartheid, unskilled and under-resourced teachers had systematically made black schools “dysfunctional” (Rudwick 2008: 103) and hence the association of vernacular instruction with a bad education is still strong amongst South African parents today. English schools are still seen as superior (e.g. Casale & Posel 2010: 58). For a differentiated discussion of this question, see Mesthrie (2008) and Hlatshwayo (2000).

in South Africa and their love” for their vernacular “home” language (Rudwick 2008: 110ff.).

In South Africa, the language shift towards English is ubiquously tangible and “the number of spheres in which languages other than English can be used is rapidly declining” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 270). Kamwangamalu describes the consequences of this language shift in the social migration of black township students into Model C-schools “in their quest to be educated through the medium of English only” and a decline in university enrolments into African language courses²⁴ (Kamwangamalu 2007: 271ff.).

In South Africa, there is a strong perceived link between a successful career and English language skills and respectively; mother-tongue learning of African languages is often still associated with inferior apartheid Bantu education (Casale and Posel 2010: 58).

The economic value of English proficiency as a “ticket for success” is “undisputed” (Rudwick 2008: 110). It is precisely this silencing undisputedness that gives reason for concern as dissatisfaction with this lingual hegemony is rising. The dominance of English often leads to the perception that other languages and by implication cultures are suppressed,²⁵ tampered and even threatened to die. Though scholars did not yet see an “immediate danger” for South African vernaculars (e.g., Reagan 2001: 63). Mesthrie points out that these assumptions about the decline of African language standards “should not be made lightly” (Mesthrie 2008: 19), since many vibrant urban varieties in South Africa defy essentialist notions of language use and heritage.

The preference of English is often described for situations where there is a lingually mixed audience and the language serves as the most common denominator. The students describe the reason to choose English in these situations “to accommodate,” “to indulge” (Interview

24 For instance, UNISA (the University of South Africa), the only institution that offers tuition in all eleven official languages, reports that the number of undergraduate students registered for courses in African languages dropped from 25,000 in 1997 to 3,000 in 2001“ (Kamwangamalu 2007: 271ff).

25 A study in Kwa-Zulu-Natal involving 200 high school learners found that 46% perceived English as having “a negative influence on their culture” and “suggesting that a good portion of these youths reject English as a marker of their cultural identity”; however, 95% were in agreement that this language can serve “as an empowerment device” (Rudwick 2008: 110).

1: Andile), “to engage with non-Xhosa speakers” (Interview 1: Andile), or “to make them comfortable” (Interview 4: Vuyo).

Three of the four interviewees carry markers of model C education, and “immaculate” English. The so-called “white” accent, though evidently not linked to an assumed better cognitive processing, carries heavy prestige among young South Africans and is thus often consciously acquired by L2 speakers (Mesthrie 2008: 17). Its perceived higher social status indicates that the wounds of apartheid have not yet been healed (see Mesthrie 2008: 14). A certain accent can serve on the one hand “as an index of a speaker’s identity”, and on the other hand, as “a resource for getting a particular job in another context” (Park and Wee 2015:126). However, there is also the trend to cultivate and promote a Black South African accent (see Mesthrie 2008: 18).

An overtly portrayal of English culture can lead to alienation by the community as an English identity is still “dichotomized” to “blackness” in contemporary South Africa (Rudwick 2008: 112). This is prevalent in the use of the derogatory term “coconut” (see Interview 1: Andile) referring to a black person who speaks “excessive” and “immaculate” English – i.e., with no trace of an African accent – implying that “although this person has dark skin on the outside, he or she is ‘white’ on the inside, just as a coconut’s shell is dark and its fruit is white” (Rudwick 2008: 102). This is not only a matter of linguistic but also of cultural crossing and the alleged loss of home identity (Mesthrie 2008: 14). In other words, a “coconut” acts and behaves “white” (Rudwick 2008: 102). The language switch to English presumably comes along with a loss of certain Xhosa values like “unbridged obedience to elders, practising certain rituals and customs, gender roles” and is thus seen as a threat and despicable behaviour by traditionalists (Mesthrie 2008: 17). Rudwick points out that these identity tensions mostly apply to young South Africans as the generation “most affected by recent changes in the sociolinguistic and socioeconomic landscape of South Africa” (Rudwick 2008: 109). She contends that these “coconut dynamics” are rooted in the “South African struggle to find clarity on the question of what it means ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’ an African” (Rudwick 2008:113). Hence, the language question is still inevitably linked to the racial question.

The three interviewed students who went to English schools felt the need to balance their Xhosa identity and improve on their isiXhosa skills to different degrees (Interview 1: Andile; Interview 3: Nomsa; Interview 4: Vuyo). This trend to redress the perceived lack of formal knowledge in the mother tongue through special tuition is not uncommon (Mesthrie 2008: 18).

Although not the only identity marker, the choice of language is a strong and easily perceivable distinction tool to establish “external boundaries as well as internal lines”, “to privilege and even worship the in-group while isolating the out-group” (Rudwick 2008: 108). Deumert shows that the use of certain old-fashioned isiXhosa lexis is an identity performance strategy that “indexes locality (rural) and origin (‘where we come from’; first-order indexicality). [...] it signals knowledge of the ‘deep’ [...] variant of the language, superiority over other (younger) speakers, and a claim to a true amaXhosa identity” (Deumert 2010: 257).

The Eastern Cape is seen as the place of “true”, “pure” and “deep” isiXhosa (Deumert 2010: 251). These terms are also used by my interviewees. Vuyo, for instance, points out that the “deep” isiXhosa is to a certain extent inaccessible and considered “a very challenging” language (Interview 4: Vuyo); which gives it a high social significance. IsiXhosa has several dialects, and the written standardisation is derived from the rural Eastern Cape varieties Ngqika and Gcaleka; hence “rural speech has become firmly associated in the minds of speakers with exemplary language use”; a “superior standard to which one should aspire” as it promises the link to traditional isiXhosa culture (Deumert 2010: 251). In contrast, urban varieties, with a higher degree of code-mixing, for instance in Cape Town or Port Elizabeth, are conceived of as being “simple”, “vague”, “weak”, “mixed”, “casual” or “watered-down” (Deumert 2010: 251).

Although identities are “never fixed” (Interview 1: Andile), people move between dichotomies of identity and position themselves through language use:

The categories of standard/non-standard, rural/urban, traditional/modern, pure/mixed, etc. are coordinates of an important semiotic field onto which speakers of isiXhosa place themselves

and others based on their language use [...] These categories are not a modernist binary, but points of orientation or positionings (Deumert 2010: 252).

As the interviews confirmed, the ability to code-switch in order to “accommodate” speakers from various language backgrounds is an important skill for the working environment; English thus becomes a “pragmatic *we-code*” for L2 speakers in South Africa aiding to negotiate “interpersonal communication with South Africans of different ethnic groups” (Kamwangamalu 2007: 267).

5. The employers’ view

The pragmatic “*we-code*” function of English (Kamwangamalu 2007: 267), i.e., its intercultural comprehension, is foregrounded by employers and its general importance in the workplace is not denied. However, the racial and social implications and inequalities seem to be glossed over by a “culture accommodating” discourse under the umbrella of Diversity Management.

In Rick’s company, the language for all written and verbal communication is in English; all interviews are conducted and job advertisements are published in English (Interview 5: Rick).

According to Rick, the company does nevertheless not have a problem with BEE²⁶ requirements, because they are a highly diversified company and employ people from all cultural groups (Interview 5: Rick).

Both HR managers stated that although English is the dominant language of communication, the corporate culture tries to accommodate the diversified cultures of South Africa in some ways.²⁷

26 Black Economic Empowerment is a programme based on employment preference of previously disadvantaged social groups introduced by the South African government in 1994, to reach racial equality in the South African economy. For an assessment of the failures and successes of BEE, see e.g., Wesenmüller 2005.

27 As an example of accommodating cultural diversity, Joleen mentions the performance of a Xhosa poet at a plant opening, who wrote an English poem “about this plant and how we work here, and the standards that we have” (Interview 6: Joleen). This seems rather a glossy gesture than real diversity management.

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There are no activities, policies or language guidelines in Rick's company to accommodate multilingualism in particular (Interview 5: Rick). However, if at disciplinary hearings an employee requests a translator, this right is not impeded (Interview 5: Rick). Apparently, the dominance of English is not openly questioned, because in a recent internal company survey employees did not address the issue of multilingualism (Interview 5: Rick).

Rick's company puts high emphasis on the question of culture; "attitude" and "a set of values that underpins everything" relating not "specifically to language but to someone's ability to communicate [...]" in accordance with the values":

I would think that improving our culture and making it conducive is definitely a strategy. It is high on our agenda. And it goes back to what I said about attitude versus skills. You can't teach someone certain values or personal attributes of character, so that is what we look for in the recruitment process (Interview 5: Rick) [emphasis added].

Although he did not want to specify the values for fear of identification, they belong to a neo-liberal discourse and represent a specific corporate culture.

In Joleen's company which employs more blue-collar workers, multilingualism seems to be accommodated to a higher degree; directly as well as indirectly:

If there would be a plant town hall meeting, you would have English as the common language. [...] In any big communication, there is always a translator. Especially, if there is a specific message from the leader. Because here, we are in the culture of Xhosa tradition, the leader is actually a very important figurehead. [...] We have the praise singers, who welcome the leader into this plant like a big home and he is the leader of this home. It is accommodated (Interview 6: Joleen).

A distinction is made between language and culture, since accommodating culture comes with more vagueness and has less costly implications:

Although we are a German company, we have to take into account that we work within an African context [...]. And that we have our own South African culture. [...]. One, we are the largest employer here. People like to work for this company. [...] That pride is instilled in the very accommodation that we speak about of language and culture. [...] If you go around, you will see a lot of stuff written in Xhosa but also in English. Some key messages around the plant. I think that builds spirit. Posters and things. Take the names that we are using. For example, the in-house agreement between the union and management is called *Siyaphambili*. It is a Xhosa word, not an English not a German word. It means moving forward together. It is that spirit that keeps the people (Interview 6: Joleen).

The issue of re-naming programmes and political projects in vernacular languages is a popular marketing tool, especially promoted by the South African post-apartheid government (Turner 2015). In business, it is question-able whether these programmes reach beyond a window-dressing function.

There is a strong connection between general education and English language skills and as the two HR executives put it, “communication skills” in general. This is confirmed by the findings of Casale and Posel: “Home-language proficiency and education (specifically having a matric or tertiary education) were found to be the most important predictors of English-language proficiency” (Casale and Posel 2010: 62).

This taken for granted equivalence between education, communication and English carries discrimination potential. When looking at the English skills of some top managers in Germany, for instance, it is quite evident, that there is not necessarily a correlation between the three factors (Education First 2014: 18).

In Joleen’s company, BEE and employment equity play an important role (Interview 6: Joleen). Most people employed at the manufacturing plant in East London are black and isiXhosa speaking (Interview 6: Joleen). However, the distribution through the career steps is very uneven:

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At the lowest operating level, you would have these 70-80% Xhosa speaking people. As you go higher, skills become few and far between. For example, we only have two Xhosa-speaking level three senior managers in the whole plant. Difficult one. At level three. The language. It is Germans, but also locals, who had been in the job long enough (Interview 6: Joleen).

Joleen relates that English proficiency is becoming more important on all kinds of job levels, as the manufacturing becomes increasingly more specialised and thus more bureaucratically monitored, e.g. in terms of “work instructions” (Interview 6: Joleen). Even though the people working the factory are “mainly from a Xhosa background”, “they have to understand English” well (Interview 6: Joleen).

The NDSI study found that there is a distinct correlation between age, income, and English proficiency:

The gap in earnings by English language proficiency starts to grow from age 28 onwards. By age 40, African adults with at least a matric education earn more than four times as much, on average, if they are proficient in the English-language. It is interesting that even among those who would be considered well-educated in South Africa, the average earnings trajectory is relatively flat if they are not English-language proficient (Casale and Posel 2010: 63).

Mother-tongue speakers of African languages who ascribe themselves as being proficiency good in English can “earn almost three times more, on average, than African adults who do not report these skills“ (Casale and Posel 2010: 65). This is also related to the time span someone is employed at the company. Those with high English proficiency apparently receive more opportunities for training and advancing their careers within the company (Casale and Posel 2010: 63).

Joleen’s company belongs to a world-wide operating conglomerate. The policies regarding language use apply to the company as a whole and the “official business language is English worldwide”; this pertains to written communication at management level down to security boards in the plant (Interview 6: Joleen). The globalisation argument in the corporate world does not allow for the consideration of boosting

the indigenous language presence, as this seems counterintuitive and anachronistic.

Nevertheless, since the company originates from Germany, German is also very prevalent as a communication language: “If we get communication from the mother company, the first text will be in German and the second text will be in English, not in Afrikaans or Chinese” (Interview 6: Joleen). This is also expressed in the aspiration of many employee’s, including Joleen, to learn German (Interview 6: Joleen). German, here, seems to hold a higher esteem in the company than local languages. Hence it can be argued that there is a link between economic power and cultural alignment resulting in language dominance, which is not necessarily English (see Gunnarson 2014: 16).

From Joleen’s statements, it has become clear that there are different levels of language practice in this multinational company: “language for communication vs. language as a symbol, language for communication vs. language for social purposes, language for communication vs. language for emotion, and language for communication vs. language for privacy” (Sherman et al. 2012: 300). The differentiation between the language of the German mother company, as the language of “economic power”, and the language of most employees (see Sherman et al. 2012: 301) – in this case the isiXhosa blue collar workers – are important. Even though there seems to be no specific Language Management for the East London plant, especially with regards to isiXhosa, certain features identified as Language Management Strategy are in place: “recruiting native speakers with language skills, website adaptation, the use of translators and interpreters and offering language training” (Sherman et al. 2012: 303).

Rick confirms that language skills – and by implication that refers to English language skills – are a vital recruitment criterion. The measured competency, “someone’s ability to interpret your questions”, is communication²⁸ (Interview 5: Rick). Indirectly, the dominance

28 Rick’s company puts high emphasis on training and runs an annual 6 month formal graduate programme. Of those, 1.5 thousand recruits are from the Eastern Cape (Interview 5: Rick). Skills are assessed through different methods, in order to “assess the individual’s ability to communicate effectively” (Interview 5: Rick). In Rick’s opinion, measuring communication skills is quite accurate and easily conducted: “We have indicators in the business that shows us how communication

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of English is thus sustained, argued from a “large customer base” and “most common language” (Interview 5: Rick). As a result, Rick’s company hires “people who are conversant in at least one language”; and naturally, this is English (Interview 5: Rick). In the English job advertisement, English proficiency is as indirectly required as legally possible:

The description needs to be very clear. So we do highlight that the individual needs very strong written and verbal communication skills; preferably in English (Interview 5: Rick) [emphasis added].

Even though, proficiency in an African language is a nice-to-have-add-on which is “increasingly” called for in job advertisements, “proficiency in English remains the unspoken prerequisite” (Rudwick 2008: 107).

Rick says that especially in the Eastern Cape, the recruitment does not target graduates in particular as the “principle is to hire for attitude” (Interview 5: Rick). On a positive note, “attitude” can of course also go beyond language proficiency and might not merely be a euphemism. However, both are often linked.

Casale and Posel describe this so-called “selection-effect” which refers to other attributes such as self-confidence and interpersonal skills, which people who are English-proficient might bring into their workplace and hence have a generally better chance of being employed and promoted; “part of the premium that is associated with English-language proficiency may reflect these character differences, rather than English language skill per se” (Casale and Posel 2010: 65). This can also be a positive effect, since it downplays the importance of language accuracy in favour of “carrying yourself well” and displaying confidence; these features are not necessarily related.

A matter also stressed by Joleen:

Maybe one of our criteria is not English proficiency, but it is definitely in the manner you would come across to us. I wouldn’t say to someone who didn’t speak good English or couldn’t carry his

has improved. [...] What you put in, you get out. Discuss goals, challenges, etc. in a certain way, in a certain order, and the output is easy to see and measurable” (Interview 5: Rick).

or her ideas through the assessment center, just because you have a BSc I would allow you in. They wouldn't be successful (Interview 6: Joleen).

The recruitment methods draw from a variety of tools like “psychometric assessment”, “online test”, or “assessment centre” where you “can definitely get people who speak better English” (Interview 6: Joleen).

Joleen states that there is a shortage of engineering skills in graduates; even though this is a core function at the car manufacturing plant (Interview 6: Joleen). Hence, HR seeks matriculants with good maths and science marks in particular. Nevertheless, English language proficiency is equally important, as she explains:

We have to recruit people who speak very good English and who could then learn German. [...] For me, English is very, very critical in this environment that I am in, because it is a group environment. You have to write regulations, you have to write processes. Communication goes out to the entire company (Interview 6: Joleen).

Proficiency is foremost checked based on tests from Matric exams and Matric marks; English language proficiency is not a specific but one of many qualifications. This framing of qualification and skills makes evident that a high English proficiency is implicitly taken for granted (“Obviously we take it that you've studied English”, Interview 6: Joleen).

The dominance of English and the vital need for English proficiency is not spelled out directly in both companies, as succinctly put by Joleen:

English is crucial but more in the background. Communication is definitely one of the competencies we look for. Although we don't say English language proficiency, it is an unwritten thing (Interview 6: Joleen).

The requirement is “unwritten” because it is controversial. Striking here is that both Rick and Joleen euphemistically circumscribe English proficiency as a “communication skill” and “attitude”. This indirectness is a rhetoric device to avoid negative legal implications as the Employment Equity Act specifically prohibits discrimination due

to language (Act 55/1998 Section 25(1) chapter 2.1. UFS n.d.). The interviews at hand confirm Casale and Posel's finding that "employers use English-language proficiency as a way of 'screening' the quality of education of a job applicant" (Casale and Posel 2010: 64).

6. Conclusion

The results of this preliminary micro-study on the role of English and isiXhosa in the recruitment process and career environment suggest that the hegemony of English in the business world in South Africa is a form of modernist language standardisation (see Deumert 2010: 245ff.). The companies do not really question the dominance of English as it befits the modernisation, globalisation, and internationalisation discourse. Strikingly prominent is the unquestioned link between general conduct and "communication skills" and English proficiency.

Why should businesses then promote the use of indigenous African languages within their company? Not only does the use of local languages boost innovation and tactical communication (Sherman et al. 2012: 292ff.), but it is also a constitutional right and political will to realize linguistic diversity in all social spheres in South Africa; including the workplace. Not least, it is a matter of fairness and equity; and the question of language impacts on hard facts like employment and remuneration (see Casale and Posel 2010: 63).

The unquestioned dominance of English in South Africa is problematic as there is always an underlying racial bias implied, as the interviews confirmed. Vuyo says that the continuous racism in South Africa, i.e., "the fact that a specific race, not through being taught and told, somehow thinks that specific things were meant to be done by them", maintains an attitude of "superiority" which "will never bring ourselves down to neutral and understand each other" (Interview 4: Vuyo).

The students described the ideal multilingual society as a place, "where everyone has the right to converse in their mother tongue at every place" (Interview 1: Andile), where "people are proud to speak their mother tongue and still converse with other people in their languages" (Interview 2: Thumeka), "where people value the

languages” (Interview 3: Nomsa), where everyone understands all the languages (Interview 4: Vuyo).

The paper has offered some views and experiences from graduates and employers on the role of English and isiXhosa in relation to recruitment with regards to identity, policy, and strategy. This micro-study can only serve as a preliminary probing which indicates the need for a larger scale analysis of the internal dynamics in companies with regard to the use and promotion of indigenous African languages. Hereby, a closer examination of policies, job advertisements (see Gunnarson 2009), the various formalised and non-formalised indexical functions of isiXhosa in the workplace, a comparison of medium and small businesses, and the integration of the employees’ views, e.g., informal bottom-up de-standardisation strategies²⁹ by employees to break the hegemony of English at work are further avenues for research.

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29 For de-standardization in isiXhosa, see Deumert 2010.

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- Interview 4: Vuyo, 30 March 2015, 16:00, East London.
- Interview 5: Rick, 25 March 2015, 21:00, East London.
- Interview 6: Joleen, 30 March 2015, 13:00, East London.