Investigating the Role of Language in the Identity Construction of Scholars

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Coming to Terms with Inter-Cultural Communicative Competence

By

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ABSTRACT

Life in the twenty-first century globalised world brings people into contact with others from different cultures who use different languages. Through these contacts, the need for interaction forces them to find different ways of understanding one another and to generate knowledge. For them to achieve this objective, they need a strong medium. L2 and Foreign language education has been developed to unravel such challenges posed to competence in intercultural communication, with the emphasis placed on how to communicate with a different "other".

Foreign and second language teaching and learning (a social practice) in this study, is to eradicate linguistic and cultural barriers. In this case, it is not only necessary to promote competence through linguistic capital (language), but more importantly, to raise intercultural awareness. For these issues to develop and consolidate intercultural communicative competence, language practitioners need to deviate from the rationalist reductionist approaches to language teaching and learning in favour of an ecological or a constructivist perspective which views language learning as a social practice. In view of this, whatever language the participants may use for communication does not matter, what really matters is that they need to switch to any given language as the situation may demand. In upholding a constructivist perspective, this research hypothesized that engagement and participation in a social practice increases competence in the target language and helps the participants to develop in terms of emotional maturity.

This research made use of qualitative research methodology, revolving around an ethnographic design, to understand the outcomes and the fluidity of interactions among a diverse community of the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. Such an understanding can therefore only be deduced from the perspectives of the role-players through their engagements and participation in activities and events in and out of the classroom. The research population constituted lecturers, tutors and students of the above institution. The four principal tools used for data collection included: interviews, questionnaires, naturally occurring data and participant observation. The interviews were both formal and informal and as with the questionnaires, they were open-ended. This open-ended

nature was due to the interaction it provided between the researcher and the researched, the awareness-raising of diversity, and a need to understand otherness.

The findings from the study affirmed that the participants gained competence in intercultural communication through the different levels of interaction that were used to enhance participation, engagement and involvement. In view of this, the participants benefited from provisional understanding, tentative interpretations and the affective environment. Furthermore, it could be said that interaction provided them with the rationale to challenge, develop and explore ideas and meanings for communication. Holistically, the study attested to the importance and centrality of participation and engagement in a target language. An important aim was to motivate the participants to understand that there is no unique centralized understanding of notions such as correctness in meaning and proficiency in a language. Our understanding of the world is multi-centric.

PREFACE

I am pleased to have an opportunity to provide a preface for this important book. The book is important because it explores, systematically and rigorously, a central question of our time: how as educators we can assist in supporting our students to become more fully aware of the need to be not simply competent in communication but interculturally competent in communication.

Many people in the world today are experiencing an era characterised, if not by a sometimes enforced migration of populations, then by increasingly dynamic population mobility. It is consequently a time where previously held assumptions about the substance of individual and group identities, and about the social and political semiotics that shape them, seem inadequate. Languages and cultures are at the heart of what has been termed this superdiversity. In contemporary superdiverse societies the question of language poses a particularly difficult challenge. The new cultural realities raise new questions, empirical and normative alike: in such circumstances, how may linguistic and cultural identities be defined?

A key component of language and culture is characterised by what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) calls centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. Centripetal forces push towards unitary systems and political and cultural centralisation; centrifugal forces are anti-canonical and push against centripetal forces and towards variety and diversity. One or another of these tendencies has been present in the history of education in all cultures. The future is likely to see similar tensions and oppositions between centrifugal and centripetal forces; and tendencies towards globalisation allow some to suggest that culture is becoming increasingly uniform. This book illustrates the narrowness and reductiveness of such suggestions and underlines how important it is to embrace centrifugal forces and with particular resonance in a social-constructivist view of language teaching and learning. Central to this and to the practices argued for and researched ethnographically in this book is the need for greater intercultural awareness on the part of teachers, curriculum planners, teacher educators and, of course, their students. The book explores major hindrances to communication in the way in which we over-generalise, stereotype and

reduce the people we communicate with to something different or less than they are.

The title of this book: *Investigating the Role of Language in the Identity Construction of Scholars: Coming to Terms with Inter-Cultural Communicative Competence* captures perfectly the many subtle inflections in the book. It is a book packed with insights, templates for research and persuasive arguments. It is a book with which I am honoured, by means of this preface, to be associated.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

In an era characterised by globalization, travel and internet technology, intercultural communicative competence has become a 'must'. Today in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, many people go about their (often difficult) daily lives with little awareness of a growing need for a different perspective on interpersonal and intercultural interactions. Failure in communication is indicative of peoples' inability to understand and interpret the world around them. Our study prioritizes language and identity, exploring the ways in which the need for intercultural communicative competence is a lived reality on one South African university campus. At a time when multiple codes form an integrated repertoire for diaspora members as they shuttle between communities, we question the separate/bounded identities posited for languages and identities (Peirce 1995).

The learning of a foreign or an additional language is not simply mastering an object of academic study. Languages are learnt as a means of communication and interaction. Communication in its deep conceptualization is never used out of context, and because culture is a part of context, communication is never neutral or culture-free. Thus, it is increasingly recognized that language learning and learning about communication with other cultures cannot realistically be separated (Foncha 2015). We therefore start with the fundamental belief that learners of English as a foreign or second language need to become interculturally aware of both their own and other cultures.

The participants in this study are more than just sojourners in that they are solely dependent on the institution where they are learning the "hows" and "whats" of communication in 'another' language (English) (Foncha 2013: 1). There might be claims that they can come into contact with other cultures through other subjects such as anthropology, history or science. But it can be stated that language learning is inextricably tied up with the experience of otherness, as it requires the participants concerned to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of

another language. Byram (1997) notes that target language learning has a central aim of enabling learners to use that language to interact with people for whom it is their preferred and natural medium of experience, as well as a means of coping with the world. We should add that this goes well beyond the traditional notions of 'native speaker' or mono-cultural 'speech community'. Engagement in the target language in a multicultural campus community takes place when it is perceived as an expansion and an exploration of a learner's sense of self, rather than as a threat to identity or an imposition of unwelcome cultural practices (Brown 2007:47).

As day-to-day situations and contexts change, some components of cultural identity become more or less salient. Even when day-to-day conditions change, other components of cultural identity remain central, important and relevant to a person's core identity. Cultural identity evolves slowly over an extended period of time. Though no one changes their 'native' language, many come to use new dialects or languages in daily life. All these types of changes can affect people's cultural identity and therefore require role-players to gain certain skills and abilities to become interculturally competent in communication. Kim (2002) argues that people adapt when they cross cultural boundaries, especially when they relocate on a long-term basis as immigrants or refugees. The process of learning about the new culture (acculturation) is balanced by unlearning of the old culture (deculturation). During acculturation or deculturation, "the original cultural identity begins to lose its distinctiveness and rigidity while an expanded and more flexible definition of self emerges" (Kim 1991: 180). However, in our new century, there are many regular but less permanent ways of crossing borders that require a permanent ability to adapt to unpredictable situations.

The participants in this study found it difficult to make sense of new experiences in a context where English was a lingua franca within their own country. Our analysis of the participants' attempts to interpret the world around them identified the following barriers to intercultural learning:

- A system of engagement and participation (teaching and learning) that seeks only to pass exams as its primary goal;
- Denial of space and initiative for thinking, emotional engagement and interaction in the target language;
- Socialization into a process of participation that rewards "correct English" instead of meaning making, expressive use of language and exploratory thinking;

- A normative orientation to engagement and participation which ignores the perceptions of the participants in this context (Foncha 2013: 3).

The analysis signals the presence of a way of thinking in their setting, one which views language learning from a rationalist-reductionist stance. People tend to be seen as "nothing but competitors, successes or failures, winners or losers", a mind-set which acts as a demotivating factor in engagement and participation in activities and also impairs understanding of the world around them (Sivasubramaniam 2004:4).

In addition, it explains that when students participate in events and activities simply to pass exams and graduate, it is unlikely that they will appreciate the value of the target language or gain a deep understanding of other cultures around them (Foncha 2009; Dyers and Foncha 2012). It is also likely that such a situation can lead the role-players to view language as a mechanical acquisition of communication skills, rather than as a means to understand otherness. Consequently, foreign/first additional language learning fails to transcend its literal meaning for want of a meaning that emphasizes its educational and social nature. In this regard, these participants can become casualties of "a cultural ignorance and categorical stupidity crucial to the silencing of all potentially critical voices" (Giroux 1987:13)". Based on this argument, these kinds of instrumental language skills do not cultivate intercultural communicative competence. On the contrary, the acquisition of language skills points to a lack of capacity to understand how their world is affected by their interaction and participation, and in turn how their engagement and involvement affect their world. In this respect, the participants should not be seen as interculturally competent even if they are fluent in the target language. Intercultural incompetence has far-reaching implications. It not only threatens the economic status of a society but also constitutes an injustice which can prevent the participants from making decisions for themselves or from participating in the process of educational and social change (Foncha 2013).

Accordingly, the poverty of participation and the culture of ignorance it creates urgently need to be addressed in institutions of higher learning and at workplaces (Rosenblatt 1995). A concept of communicative competence which encourages engagement and involvement is crucial. This entails educating people about the dialectical relationships between themselves and the world on the one hand, and language and change on the other

(Freire and Macedo 1987). This study searched for ways to help learners to participate, understand and transform their own experiences, and also, importantly, to redefine their relationship with their society. As a result, these participants will then be better equipped to process knowledge beyond their immediate experience (through improved intercultural communicative competence) and to view engagement and involvement as acts of empowerment (Freire and Macedo 1987).

The social and cultural issues we have raised provide the background to our research agenda. We are aware of the need to translate these points into specific educational proposals, practices and goals. Our study is an ambitious attempt to respond to these urgent and critical issues.

1.2 Aims and Scope of the Study

Our research investigated intercultural communicative competence in a multicultural and a multilingual institution - the University of the Western Cape (UWC). It also aims to explore the use of participation and group work as a means of language learning (social practice) and gaining competence in intercultural communication through the use of English as a lingua franca. It attempts to generate an understanding of intercultural communicative competence among participants whose mother tongue is not English. We illustrate the varied ways in which language and communicative competence are related and integrated to offer benefits to the multicultural and multilingual participants of the study (Brumfit and Carter 1986).

By addressing linguistic, methodological and motivational issues and the corresponding values that underlie them, this book appraises the use of participation and engagement in classroom activities and events as a means of promoting participant-centred practices. The rationale for this investigation is the need to find out how to use engagement and participation in a diverse setting to provide a basis for language learning, language development and the development intercultural communicative competence. Hence, we suggest that there is no need for the participants to acquire knowledge of the limited critical concepts, conventions and meta-language often used in traditional classrooms. Competence in intercultural communication should not be seen as belonging to a single or specific ideological, social or historical context.

Our study acknowledges Widdowson's (1975) view:

1. Participants are helped through engagement and participation to discover how meaningful and relevant interaction is to their personal experience;
2. The emphasis is placed on engagement and involvement (participation) as it provides a 'way-in' to intercultural communicative competence;
3. The participants act as enablers in helping the learner to develop a sense of engagement and involvement in activities and events that can help them to explore and express their perceptions that accrue from their emotional and experiential involvement in interactions.

Based on these points, participants should be given opportunities to discover the 'rules' of language and language use through sustained and initiated appreciations of the discoursal value of connected language (Widdowson 1975).

As a consequence of this view, we seek to;
- Examine how different demographic and individual characteristics influence the level of intercultural communicative competence.
- Investigate how different cultures perceive intercultural communicative competence and identity based on the relationship between competence and the multicultural/multilingual participants.
- Describe a relationship between intercultural communicative competence and identity construction.

An extensive review of the intercultural communication literature provides an understanding of the current research trends in this field. Based on our review provided below, we will argue that by integrating engagement and involvement (interaction), intercultural communicative competence can be gainfully deployed in the educational and social practices of participation. Secondly, we suggest that provisional interpretations through interaction can bring about constructive social change.

The scheme of investigation made use of a qualitative research methodology with a blend of phenomenology, ethnography and case study. Based on this choice, the book attempts to describe the dynamics and shortcomings of foreign/ additional language phenomena influenced by classroom interaction which uses English as a lingua franca and the language of instruction. It is hoped that such a description can provide an understanding from the perspective of the research participants.

This book is seen as a means to achieve an understanding of intercultural communicative competence that can accrue from interaction, engagement and participation. To fulfil the aims and objectives of this study, we required a research design that allowed for multiple source of data collection. In this regard, the data collection procedures formed the core of the interaction story that this book proposes to construct. Therefore, the procedures to be used are seen as an indivisible part of participation signifying the overall intercultural communicative competence ideology of the researchers. It is hoped that such interaction encouraged participants to view their activities and events as acts of social involvement.

1.3 Attitude and Beliefs Underlying the Researchers' Stance

We attempt to define the governing dynamics of intercultural communicative competence in terms of the chosen epistemology. This epistemology challenges the scientific reductionist approach to the world and its resultant narrow and one-sided view of human beings, especially in academic contexts. The following quotation can shed some light on this argument.

There appears to be a mismatch between what science projects as a rationalistic representation of life and the real, personally meaningful lived life of the human being. This is to suggest that the quantitatively measured, value-free knowledge of science is fundamentally different from the personalized and the perspectival knowledge that human beings live by in their everyday real life (Sivasubramaniam 2004:15).

For this reason, the conceptualization of language teaching and language learning attempted by the rationalistic–scientific epistemology in quantitative approaches fails to account for the lived through experiences of the participants (Kohonen et al 2001).

Given that our data is obtained from human beings, the compulsion to quantify them as seen in a rationalist epistemology reduces human beings to test scores, mean scores, and experimental objects (Bailey 1998:81-82). Such a position is not consistent with the social values that underlie this study. Therefore, we discard an objectivist epistemology in favour of a constructivist epistemology, meaning that we do not expect knowledge to come as a product of impersonal procedures designed to support a scientific inquiry from a so-called neutral perspective. On the contrary, we

regard knowledge and its meaning as outcomes of experience in a given social context and at a given time and place (Bleich 1985: 269-272). Sivasubramaniam (2004:15) elucidates this point in the following quotation:

In articulating a subjectivist/constructivist epistemology, the study signals urgency to question research postures that direct focus and energy to fitting human nature and society into exact rational categories (Sivasubramaniam 2004:15).

At this juncture we are aware of how and why research in the bygone era, influenced by the Newtonian view of nature and the Cartesian search for certainty, sought for knowledge independent of context (Sivasubramaniam 2004). We argue that such an intellectual posture is unhelpful, especially in a world where ideas of nature and society are subject to frequent change and re-inquiry. Thus the need to contextualize questions and interpret knowledge as the outcome of that contextualization has to be recognized (Chopra 2000). In order to determine a way of describing the uniqueness of individual perceptions and the uniqueness of others' perceptions both from the participants' point of view and the researchers', we assign immediacy and primacy to the dynamics of participation. Finally, we turn to an examination of the implications of such an epistemology.

A researcher's position can be conceptualized from an externalist or internalist angle. An externalist position views social reality as something that exists externally and is independent of thinking. We are considered to be separate from the world that is being investigated (Toulmin 1990). Hence, this position defines truth as an "instance of correspondence between the mind and the external world" (Sivasubramaniam 2004:17). Therefore to obtain the truth, it is important to follow certain prescribed conventions that insist on so-called 'objectivity' by separating the mind and the world (validity) which are measured in interrelated terms.

Contrary to the externalist perspective, the internalist position views social reality as an outcome of psychological involvement, which is a process of interpretation and reinterpretation of a given subject. This kind of relationship may make it impossible to separate the researcher from the researched. In this regard, the 'truth' is seen as an imperfect social agreement based on similar purposes or interests. When (inevitable) differences occur, they can be addressed through dialogue and justification instead of appealing to an external reality (Toulmin 1990). Here, validity is understood as an attempted agreement influenced by "place, time and

the instruments' participation in constructing reality in a given context"
(Sivasubramaniam 2004:17). Thus, an internalist perspective has been
used to conceptualize the relationship between the researcher and the
subjects of investigation. This position is vital because for value
judgements to be more transparent, we as researchers need to acknowledge
our roles as participant observers, a role that provided a 'meeting point'
for all participants. At the same time, a phenomenological view promotes
the ability to provisionally suspend judgement and stand outside our
experience. While neutrality is in our view impossible even provisionally,
we are also aware that participant involvement alone has its own
limitations.

We propose to present this book as a lived through experience by
constructing narratives based on the naturally occurring data collected
from intercultural and interpersonal interaction. This means that the
narrators will interpret the live data discursively and often
impressionistically to relate the story of lived through experiences. This
book is not a scientific account of the subject under investigation but
rather a discursive narrative in which our diverse participants voice their
subjective knowledge about intercultural communicative competence,
together with the beliefs, intuitions and the (often hidden) values that
underlie it. Support for this stance is provided in the literature.
Polkinghorne (1988:13) notes that "narratives are the fundamental scheme
for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of
an understandable composite". By illustrating identifiable features of
interaction and participation as social activities, this book suggests an
approach to interpreting intercultural communicative competence. The
book is therefore intended to articulate our attempt to construct knowledge
through the interpretative experiences of the participants and the context in
which these experiences acquire meaning. Once the experience has been
adequately narrated by the participants, the ability to stand outside it and
make sense of it through reflection is important (Nunn and Brandt, 2016).
(This has been the primary role of our two non-participant researcher/
authors in the analysis and interpretation of this study.)

Sivasubramaniam (2004:20) argues that researchers in every qualitative
study are inevitably influenced by the "faceless and impersonal use of
language that has come to prevail in research writing". However, we are
also aware that a "faceless and impersonal" use of language cannot be
helpful in the formulation of value-based statements that represent the
''context-bound characteristics'' of the phenomenon under investigation

(Bailey and Nunan 1996). As this research is driven by the dynamic that "reality is not given but constructed" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 112), we find it unconvincing to disregard the aspects and characteristics of what is received and what is produced as a result. Such a position signals a view that understanding is "always someone understanding something in a certain light, from a certain point of view" (Lehtovaara 2001: 148). This type of understanding embraces diverse views of the world of daily life in terms of their potential for uncertainty, ambiguity and indeterminacy. In this regard, we believe that the understanding of the interpretations of the narratives depend on the discourses available. Therefore, we argue that even four authors from divergent backgrounds are not capable of writing a narrative "in which everything is said to everyone" (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 349). The use of language will thus draw on the meaning potential of figurative language, especially metaphor, for representing the phenomenon under investigation and supporting our personalized voice. The need to (selectively) use the first person plural "we" and its extensions is an essential aspect of our language choice (Sivasubramaniam 2004:20). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) support this view by asserting that while the use of the first person serves to signal a researcher's presence and participation in the phenomenon that a study investigates, it also serves to signal the researcher's stance and the language needed to express it. This is in the interests of clarity and transparency of the authors' positioning.

1.4 Problematique

In the context of this study, English is the language of instruction and also a lingua franca. As noted in chapter 2, English is the second and/or third additional language to most of the participants. It poses many challenges for most students and points to a need for intercultural communicative competence. Banda (2009) and Heese (2010) are both of the opinion that in South African Universities (where English is the language of instruction in most cases), students whose mother tongue is not English face problems in using English as the language of instruction. They are disadvantaged due to a lack of a broad range of study skills in the language of instruction, such as reading skills, writing skills, note-taking skills, critical thinking, examinations skills etc. A majority of UWC students have never been required to utilize such skills in the English language. Such a deficiency might have led to their reliance on the traditional notion of the grammar-translation method where they learn through "a continuous process of rote memorization that they got used to while at school and with which they think they can pass their courses and obtain degrees from the university"

(Sivasubramaniam 2004:188). Foncha (2013) argues that such deficiencies manifest themselves in most students finding many of their studies increasingly unmanageable due to an inability to read and write in English.

If pressured into learning by rote, the students miss out on the joys and delights of higher learning, such as initiating discussions with the teacher in class; developing critical/analytical attitudes to things around them; discovering the inter-connectedness of texts that might have been gained through reading and taking part in inter-collegiate symposiums, debates and various other organizations and clubs that promote learning and awareness. Imbibed with an examination-oriented mentality, many students believe passing courses and exams are the ultimate goal of university education. At a higher level, their inability to think critically in English makes for a stifling study experience as they struggle with English-medium instruction in courses that demand analytical ability (Foncha 2013:139).

Within the UWC context, the above pointers assume particular relevance and significance. There is a probable link between literacy courses offered by the different university departments and the deficient language backgrounds of the students. It appears to us that these literacy courses are neither learning-oriented nor student-centred in terms of their materials and methodologies. Secondly, these literacy courses are detrimental to education in so far as they only project examinations as the ultimate end in University education.

1.5 Organization of the Chapters of the Study

This study consists of six chapters:

Chapter one serves as an introduction in which we discuss a set of educational and social concerns which act as an awareness-building exercise and a point of departure for this study. We discuss the aims, scope, rationale, context and our epistemological stance underlying the study.

In chapter two we review the literature of issues of identity and intercultural communicative competence. We also examine various models and assign centrality to the integrated intercultural communicative competence model. The review further examines the theoretical orientations in second language acquisition which are relevant to the study

and which have influenced or helped us evolve our own stances, intuitions, beliefs and value systems. We discuss crucial theoretical constructs that relate to the deployment of interaction in the classrooms and critically analyse methods and materials that articulate participation as a resource for language teaching and their implications for intercultural communicative competence. As a sequel to this, we discuss the importance of a constructivist approach to knowledge.

Chapter three addresses the design and methodology. We revisit the context and describe the setting of the study. An explanation and expansion of the research questions are given with reference to our stance and approach to knowledge. We present a rationale for selecting our particular methodology and discuss the procedures for data collection, focusing on the procedures for triangulation, given the importance of multiple perspectives of evaluation and interpretation.

Chapter four presents our data analysis, showing the findings with reference to the research questions.

In chapter five we present a discussion of the findings by interpreting them according to the underlying epistemology of the study.

Chapter six provides the conclusions of the study in light of the research questions and key findings. We discuss the limitations of the study, revisit pertinent ideas presented in the literature review, and consider implications of our findings for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The participants in this study are investigated through the lenses of our understanding of identity and intercultural communicative competence. All have diverse backgrounds in language, culture and identity which they negotiate constantly in everyday practice (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2002), resulting in a potentially complex analysis of interweaving themes and contexts. We have therefore argued that clarity in such a complex investigation is best achieved by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in an ethnographic framework as it reveals the discursive construction of individual and group identities. Due to the limitations of discourse analysis alone, this study also employs an integrated intercultural communicative competence model and analyses part of the data for reflexivity and reliability.

In our literature review, we focus on the language situation in South Africa and in Africa at large to reveal diversity and the need for intercultural communicative competence. It then moves onto the theme of English as an international language (EIL), then the theoretical framework for the context of this study, UWC, where English is pivotal in educational processes and interpersonal interactions. Fundamentally, language is seen here as dynamic and varied. Additionally, the relevance of an ecological view of language is also brought into play as the notion of 'affordances' can offer alternative ways of looking at the dynamics of a language.

Based on a constructivist stance of language in the context of this research, this chapter also explores issues in CDA which signpost the creative nature of language and generate themes for data analysis. Language is a social construct requiring understanding of identity and culture. Our review therefore looks at the methodological considerations surrounding the choice of intercultural communication as a means of analysing UWC students' identities. This also involves conceptualizing intercultural

communicative competence and issues which shape the integrated intercultural communication model, a central analytical framework for our study.

2.1.1 Language use in South Africa

Fonlon (1969) asserts that a "confusion of tongues" in Africa renders it impossible to achieve teaching and learning through an African language. As a consequence, English has taken on this pedagogical role as a medium of instruction, representing for its users a second or additional language. Language learning needs to be viewed as a contextualized and socially constituted undertaking and, as academic language varies across disciplines, can be likened to border crossing, whether it be physical, linguistic, disciplinary or cultural.

Language is not merely a tool for delivering a message, but also a reflection of national character, culture, and national philosophy (Lewis 1998). Important to our recurrent theme of context throughout this study, it also reflects the shifting, local contexts that participants migrate to, termed by Pennycook (2010:7) as "grassroots language use". People from different countries and regions use language(s) in different ways and so bring their own (mis)understandings to interaction (Matveev 2002:33).

As in many global contexts, the situation prevalent in South African schools is that most schools do not prepare their pupils adequately for university-related literacy practices (Banda 2009; Parkinson and Crouch 2011). English is used principally for instrumental purposes in South African universities as most parents see English as the only way to success. Banda (2009) observes that most non-English speaking black South African parents send their children to schools where English is the medium of instruction with an eye to employability when they graduate. Thus the only way to gain upward mobility is to learn and use English. This contrasts with Heese's (2010) argument that students could perform better if given an opportunity to study in their mother tongue and with current arguments in favour of L1 classroom use in L2 acquisition (Cummins, 2005). Contentious issues exist surrounding the colonial positioning of English in South African society but according to Fonlon (1969) and Banda (2009), English should now assume the role of a lingua franca and act as a cohesive force to overcome the challenges of diversity in universities with multilingual student populations.

English is one of 11 official languages in South Africa with sizeable, indigenous communities of native speakers all over the country but represents a problem in UWC because of its position as either an additional/second language among the demographically, culturally and linguistically diverse society at large. English is not officially a foreign language in South Africa, yet in the context of our study is seen as the language of academic literacy despite being the language of only a 5% white minority (Kaschula and Antonnissen 1995). Further to this dominance of English on the curriculum, UWC boasts a very high number of locals from adjoining rural areas and foreign students partly because tuition fees are affordable. Such an influx leads to challenges for students continually crossing language and cultural borders on a daily basis. In this sense, the practice of intercultural communicative competence on campus needs to be regarded as a skill alongside the acquisition of new academic literacy practices.

2.2 Theoretical Framing

Theoretically, this study is structured within Sivasubramaniam's (2011) framework of English as an international language and is consistent with the views of Fonlon (1969) and Banda (2009) which focus on intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC needs to be understood in this study in a more specific sense than simply crossing national borders and interacting with foreign nationals and unfamiliar cultures. Culture in this study has been conceptualized beyond this traditional definition and extends to an understanding of 'culture' as new academic literacy practice (Turner 2012), language acquisition, and the student's ability to attain "network capital" (Plickert et al 2007: 406) in new surroundings. Whether these students are South African or from outside South Africa, they all engage in acquiring ICC. As in an "academic literacies" (Turner, 2012: 18) approach to understanding student experiences in their new university environment, there needs to be an emphasis on "social and cultural practice" (Turner 2012: 19) for individuals which necessitates a "widening [of] scope to include the socio-political dimension of its context of situation, and not restricting its focus to student engagement with texts".

To understand the role that English as the medium of instruction (EMI) plays in intercultural communicative competence within this research, it is necessary to reinforce the relevance of competence in the context of interaction. From this perspective, meaning from language should not be seen as static and objective but rather as a "dynamic and a discursive

structure" which is co-constructed and observed by the researcher as an insider (Sivasubramaniam 2011: 53). This can be explained as the emotional and the affirmative involvement of the researcher with the participants in the study to understand the context as a sociocultural phenomenon. In other words, the conceptualization of intercultural communicative competence can only be seen in terms of context-based confirmations rather than as a universal truth of "atemporal" knowledge (Sivasubramaniam 2004:54). This suggests a local, social and sociolinguistically sensitive interpretation of intercultural communicative competence.

In the search for a means to understand how language learning relates to the complexities of life in a multicultural and multilingual university setting, Leontiev's (1981) Activity Theory presents an appropriate theoretical backdrop. This conceives humans as those who use their involvement with activity to construct their sociocultural histories (Leontiev 1981). The relationship between theory, activity and language is best understood through psychological constructs (Hare and Gillet 1994) which demonstrate how the human mind functions and also how any given context can help in the construction of meaning making. Cognition is an essential ingredient for competence in any language(s) and should not be reduced to "good English" or "good grammar" alone, but seen as interacting with social practice. Language learning is creative, dynamic, and not static and requires a socially-aware means of investigation. This points to a qualitative approach to understanding how the participants in this study cope with the diversity surrounding them to achieve academic goals.

2.2.1 The Ecological View of Language and Affordances

The views mentioned so far suggest that an ecological view of language is relevant to this study because it sees language as connected with the sociocultural aspects of life. Language in this regard is not just the grammar or native speaker proficiency, but rather an agent through which any culture is portrayed. Hence, an ecological view of language looks at every phenomenon of a language as emergent and not as a reduced set of components that present phenomena in simplistic terms (van Lier 2000). Secondly, an ecological view also stresses the perceptual ability and social involvement of a learner in interaction. Thirdly, an ecological view of language supports the view that a complete explanation of cognition and

learning cannot be made on the bases of the process that takes place inside the brain.

At this juncture, the concept of "affordances" comes into play as it elucidates the relationship between the ecological context, the participant, and the communicative means that are employed to negotiate pathways through that context. Shotter and Newson (1982) argue that the linguistic world which the learner is actively involved in "demands and requirements, opportunities and limitations, rejections and invitations, enablement and constraints - in short, affordances" (1982:34). In the context of this study, 'affordances' offer an alternative way of looking at the dynamics of a language. For instance, students are immersed in various "learning spaces" (Savin-Baden 2007: 13) filled with meaning-making potential and negotiable to various degrees in terms of how interaction is to take place. As in Matveev's (2002) intercultural communicative competence model, these meanings become available gradually as learners act and interact in the spaces. Thus cognition and learning rely on both representational (schematic, historical, cultural etc.) and ecological (perceptual, emergent, action-based) processes and systems (Neisser 1982). Therefore language is seen as both representational and ecological in nature (van Lier 2000). For this study then an ecological approach to language learning complements Matveev's intercultural communicative competence model.

The ecological view of language conceptualizes language as an innovative force. When we learn a language, we also learn its sociocultural aspects which points to participants' differences in their interpretations. Learning should not therefore be seen as "a piecemeal migration of meaning to the inside of the learner's head, but rather the development of the increasingly effective ways of dealing with words and their meaning" (Leontiev 1981:246).

Since a constructivist view of language locates meaning in language use in context, it aligns itself with an ecological approach where particular prominence is placed on the learning environment. Following this, language is representational and figurative (McRae 1991), dialogic (Bakhtin 1981), imminent and therefore semiotic (Peirce 1995). These aspects reinforce an ecological view of language which complements intercultural communication. Acquiring ICC requires recognition that it is a fluid and locally-situated construct which plays out in meaning-making trial and error among student. In this regard, it challenges the rationalist