TESTING IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROJECTS:
LESSONS LEARNT IN THE ABLE PROJECT

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Overview

- The two stages in research and testing in the ABLE project
- Lessons learnt about macro-contextual processes and “forces”
- Lessons learnt about translation/adaptation/bilingual testing
- Recommendations beyond ABLE
The two stages in ABLE research: implications for testing in the project

First stage: Experimental quantitative focus

- ABLE Project: Homelanguage based bilingual education – till grade 6 (model of late exit bilingual education)
- Three research aims: how and if improve learning if isiXhosa used as LOLT for longer
- Experimental design: compare our school – two others
  - cognitive development,
  - language development, and
  - academic performance
- Testing:
  - Grade 3, 7 (and 9)
  - KABC (cognitive); Woodcock Muñoz Language Survey (WMLS); Imbewu tests (grade 3); JET tests
  - Needed tests in English and isiXhosa

Adapted the English WMLS ->: isiXhosa

Second stage: action research and developmental focus

- ABLE symposium with EC DoE in 2008
  - Policy and model development, bi-literacy development, teacher development, terminology and materials and assessment
- Move away from testing to participatory action research
- Language Policy and model development: IsiXhosa only till end of grade 6
- Workshops, consultations
- 2010: ABLE children better on common tests than comparable schools
- Many problems -> no interventions during 2011
Testing lessons learnt: macro-contextual processes and “forces”

Current events at the school and project

- Drop in numbers and redeployment of teachers;
- Phasing out isiXhosa LOLT at school
Lessons learnt about macro–contextual processes and “forces” in testing

**Processes impacting on project**

- Testing in project continued in any case but driven by external forces
  - 2009: systemic tests -> forerunner of the Annual National Assessments (ANAs)
  - From 2009: common tests in the EC – twice yearly
  - From 2011: ANAs
- Contradictions between LiEP of DoE and language in tests: only grades 1 – 3 in isiXhosa; from grade 4 only English or Afrikaans (see doc on ANA)
- NO TRANSLATION OF THE TESTS FORTHCOMING FROM GRADE 4 ONWARDS
- 2011: ANAs and common tests: Sosebenza learners underperform

**Forces**

- Social constructionism as paradigm and post colonial theorising framework -> neo–Fanonian
- Shohamy, and USA activists: explore political agendas of language in tests + contest testing of bilingual children
  - Capitulation: transition into only English
  - Revitalisation: MT?
  - Radicalisation: the creation of third spaces and “languaging”: bilingual education and assessment
- Hypothesis: contradictions currently caught up/trapped in the first two stages
- Need to move into the third stage: bilingual tests to support
Distinctions and clarification of terms

- **Assessment**: a broad process of gathering information about a child (e.g. progress in a learning area);
  - tests form part of assessment and produce scores that must be **valid** (and interpretable)

- **Cross linguistic testing**: testing that takes place across language groups
  - Monolingual tests
  - Bilingual tests

- **Bilingual tests**: tests that are available in more than one language
  - tests that are available in two or more languages (two versions of the same tests)
  - Two languages in one test

Equivalence and bias as part of validity

**Equivalence**:  
- The scores of the different language groups must mean the same

**Bias**:  
- Items: when members of different groups with the same ability perform differently on an item
  - the whole test: different constructs
  - Method of administration

If bias is present: the scores do not mean the same thing

All tests in bilingual testing must be evaluated for bias: monolingual and bilingual tests
The Woodcock Munoz Language survey: an example a translated test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-tests</th>
<th>Linguistic and curriculum areas</th>
<th>Stimuli</th>
<th>Test requirement</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture Vocabulary (PV)</td>
<td>•Oral expression</td>
<td>Visual (Pictures)</td>
<td>Identify objects</td>
<td>Oral (Word) Total=57</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>•Language development</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>•Expressive vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal Analogies (VA)</td>
<td>•Receptive–expressive vocabulary</td>
<td>Auditory (Phrases)</td>
<td>Stating a word to complete and analogy</td>
<td>Oral (word) Total=35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter Word Recognition (LWR)</td>
<td>•Reading</td>
<td>Visual (text)</td>
<td>Identifying printed letters and words</td>
<td>Oral (letter name, word) Total= 56</td>
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<td></td>
<td>•Reading–decoding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dictation (Dict)</td>
<td>•Spelling, writing language development</td>
<td>Auditory (Words)</td>
<td>Writing skills and grammar</td>
<td>Motor (writing) Total=56</td>
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Bilingual testing: practice and research in ABLE

Practice of adaptation WMLS into isiXhosa

- Adapted into isiXhosa not translated
- Two workshops with multilingual and multidisciplinary team
- Linguistic and cognitive processes:
  - grading of difficulty of items;
  - underlying cognitive processes; relexification -> loan words, roots;
  - reformulation of items

Results on the WMLS

**English monolingual test across EL1 and XL1 groups:**
- All subtests have biased items; some up to 40% of items (LWI)
- VA: measuring different constructs in the two groups

**isiXhosa monolingual test across XR and XU groups:**
- The subtests have biased items but far fewer than English monolingual test
- PV: equivalent constructs, but scores need to be interpreted with caution; better to assess Vocabulary in context

**English (EL1) and isiXhosa (XL1) versions:**
- All subtests have biased items but mostly fewer than on English test
- Rasch modelling on VA: same variance, probably less bias and less error
Lessons learnt about bilingual testing

- Equivalence – always an issue in both monolingual tests and bilingual tests
- It is more valid to use the two-languages than the one language approach
- Propose to use tests in a criterion referenced manner:
  - What score indicates “proficiency” in a group? It may differ across groups
- Dialect differences do not impact that much on test scores of this nature: slight bias necessitate approaches that are more holistic
- Two languages in one test – in line with SIOP approach
Discourses around tests are powerful
Might be useful in large scale programme evaluations
Engage with the discourse around the language of tests and the purpose of tests
To engage:
  ◦ Purpose of testing and the purpose of bilingual testing: transition or developmental maintenance bilingualism and bi-literacy – in line with the model
  ◦ Then:
  • Language of test: 1) one language, 2) two different language versions or 3) two languages in one test
  • Content and format: in line with underlying processes e.g. Reading of bi-literate learners + assessment principles → improvement in instruction
  • An example of reading:
  • For research: Combine large scale test scores with samples using over the shoulder miscue analysis and running records to improve tests and interpret results
  • Feedback loop between test development and findings and practice
  • For instruction and evaluation: combine the test scores with holistic assessments (as above) for better understanding of where to go.