Chapter Three

Bridging the Multilingual Divide: Enhancing Academic Literacy through Metaphors in South African Writing

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Backstory

Archer and Parker (2016: 1) write that their paper 'Transitional and Transformational Spaces: mentoring Young Academics Through Writing Centres':

> changes the focus of investigation from student to consultant and, consequently, explores the way in which an academic writing centre can function as a mentoring environment for young academics.

And this is exactly where my story starts. Although I was no academic then and definitely not young anymore, I was mentored in and by, the writing centre (personification!).

I consider myself a late bloomer, particularly in the academic realm. After spending 25 years as a farmer's wife, I returned to university in 2015. Pursuing honours and master's degrees in Translation and Interpreting, I was inspired by my experiences on the farm and at a rural high school. These experiences highlighted the challenges faced by non-native English speakers within a monolingual education system. At that time, I was unaware of the concept of Academic Literacy. My motivation was solely to improve mutual understanding by delving into the mechanics of language and culture.

I chose to home-school my children. Over 15 years, I learned the power of figurative language in teaching abstract concepts to my diverse-thinking children. Armed with only a B.A. in languages, majoring in French, isiZulu and English, I voraciously studied teaching and learning strategies. Despite numerous obstacles, my commitment to instilling a love for learning, critical thinking and respect for all peoples in my children remained unshaken.

My home-schooling experience became a foundation when I became a consultant at a university

writing centre in 2016. Following my honours degree, I applied for the position upon the suggestion of one of my lecturers. Working in the writing centre opened the door to an exhilarating new world. Throughout my master's programme, I continued working as a consultant.

It was during a research project focused on the writing centre in 2018 that my use of metaphors during consultations gained attention. The research involved analysing hours of recorded consultations, revealing fascinating and unexpected data. The research focused on politeness strategies used by consultants to enhance interaction, with findings diverging from prior international research and highlighting the importance of context-specific studies.

This is where I come into the picture – a context-specific consultant. Being older, white and a '*gogo*' (grandmother), I faced the challenge of establishing common ground with much younger students from different backgrounds. Rejecting the notion of a generation gap, I believed in the responsibility of the older generation to bridge divides. As a solution, I turned to the use of figures of speech, particularly metaphors[1], when conventional teaching methods fell short.

I embody Archer and Parker's (2016) notion that writing centre pedagogy fosters critical thinking through discussion and argument. While grappling with my own academic literacy, I am also trying to confront the legacy of past government educational policies. My determination to level the academic playing field remains unwavering.

Introduction

> 'Language, like poetry, evolves through metaphors.'
> – Johann Adam Hartung (1831 cited in Jäkel, 1997:9)

Recent research (Carstens and Rambiritch 2018) has offered valuable insights into various aspects of writing centre theory, from the nature of tutor guidance (2021) to the importance of positive

1 Encyclopaedia Britannica gives the following definition for figures of speech: 'any intentional deviation from literal statement or common usage that emphasizes, clarifies, or embellishes both written and spoken language'. Examples are, amongst others, metaphors and similes. The difference between a simile and a metaphor is that with a simile the words *like* or *as* are used to compare two things whereas a metaphor is a direct comparison. For the purposes of this research, metaphor is used overarchingly in the spirit of Quintilian (1921) who defines metaphor in part in terms of simile: '*A metaphor is a short form of simile, contracted into one word*'.

politeness in consultations (2021). Among the intriguing findings, one consultant stood out by consistently employing metaphors to elucidate complex concepts during one-on-one sessions with undergraduate clients. It was noted that, after exhausting more literal explanations, students often grasped the subject matter only when they connected abstract concepts to concrete metaphors. This discovery prompts several questions:

1. Can the use of metaphors during consultations aid in simplifying complex metalanguage and help students understand, interpret and apply unfamiliar abstract concepts?

2. Can culturally specific metaphors foster a sense of belonging, addressing potential obstacles to student success?

3. Does this avenue warrant further exploration?

Though preliminary, these questions inspire optimism. This discussion is exploratory, grounded in two transcribed video sessions.

Background

The evolution of writing centres has been well-documented. From initial perceptions as remedial facilities (Nichols 2017; Slemming 2017), they have evolved into pedagogical spaces embracing diverse teaching approaches. These include the 'study skills approach' (Jacobs 2014; Boughey 2010), 'academic socialisation approach' (Lea and Street 1998) and the 'academic literacies approach' (Lea and Street 1998). Writing centres resisted being reduced to 'fix-it shops,' (Archer and Parker 2016; Drennan 2017; Moore 1950; North 1984) combatting the notion of solely improving grammatical proficiency. Today, writing centres are recognised as transformative realms amplifying student voices, particularly crucial in a country like South Africa, grappling with post-colonial and apartheid legacies.

Language, vital to expressing one's voice, has a contentious history in South Africa. Colonialism and apartheid imposed dominant languages, undermining indigenous identities. Consequently, the nation grapples with significant socio-political and educational challenges. Anyone that dares to take up the pen in this regard (metaphorically speaking) should do so with reverence for the

past. The writing centre stands at the crossroads of these issues, representing a battleground where unequal power dynamics become starkly visible. While students from diverse backgrounds engage in the same academic arena, disparate training and resources shape their experiences. It is therefore all the more important to keep the needs of the students firmly in mind. The writing centre today, is considered a transformed space, focussing on the voice of the student. This voice needs to be heard, understood and amplified.

Who is the student walking through the writing centre's doors today?

The typical student engaging with writing centres embodies complexity.

L2 English speaker

If the constitution of mother tongue speakers of South Africa's national languages is considered, it is a student whose mother tongue is not English (see Figure 1.). In other words, borrowing a term from the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), an L2 English speaker.

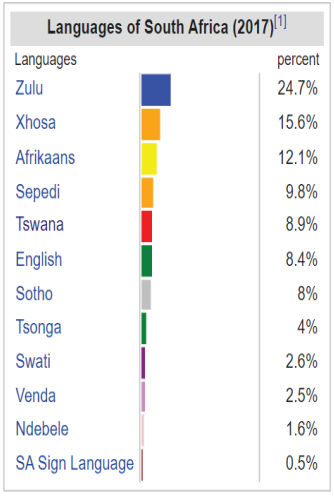


Figure 1: Mother tongue speakers of South Africa's National Languages (CIA 2023).

Apart from the South African citizenry, South Africa is also home to a large number of immigrants from all over the world, which means that a wide variety of other languages is also spoken in South Africa, not considering the many dialects and mixed languages.

Furthermore, in the South African context, of the 12 national languages of South Africa, only English and Afrikaans are developed to technical, academic and literacy levels (Krog et al. 2010: 18). If this is linked to the importance of language as an identity marker, it shows that nine people groups are still in the process of establishing their ethnic identity linguistically within the context of a multi-ethnical society. This leads to frustration on many levels. On the one hand, people are not able to communicate effectively as most of them need to communicate in a second language. The blame can easily be shifted onto South Africa's history of apartheid (Berkowitz 2013). On the other hand, as the cultures are so diverse, intercultural misunderstanding occurs even among various African cultures that one would normally mistake as being similar (Danisile 2012: 1). In the words of Ostler (2006: 9), language is 'the currency of human communities'. In South Africa, the different languages are not currencies of the same value and that must be rectified.

Indigenous Language Speaker

It can also be deduced that the student is a mother tongue speaker of an indigenous language, whose access to further education might be compromised by factors such as inadequate primary, as well as secondary schooling due to historical injustices. Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) point out that such inadequate schooling can also lead to low productivity growth, high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In turn, this has an impact on different facets of education including a compromised knowledge base, barriers to understanding of mother tongue as well as English and the lack of cognitive skills developed through school. Students, therefore, are impeded on many academic as well as emotional levels. Many students in the South African university today, therefore, find themselves in a multilingual, multicultural society which may be daunting and challenging as they have not adequately been prepared for the personal and academic demands of tertiary education.

Multilingual

Definition

De Bot (2019: 3) explains that when defining multilingualism, the difference between multilingualism at the group level and multilingualism at the individual level should be pointed out. This is an important distinction in the South African context. Due to the multilingual society at the group level, individuals are necessitated to be able to communicate in more than one language and, consequently, also be multilingual at the individual level (De Bot 2019:4). He follows the definition of multilingualism 'as the daily use of two or more languages' and asks why this is necessary. His answer is very pragmatic: 'Because one language is not enough' (De Bot 2019: 4). For De Bot, the motivation for multilingualism is always socioeconomic – being able to communicate in more than one language affords one chances to better oneself or one's children. This is demonstrated by the fact that the 'central aim of curricula developed during the colonial era was to reinforce socioeconomic relations between Africans and their colonizers, which advanced the imperial project' (Angu, Boakye and Eybers 2020: 3). Another important reason is actually as clear as daylight – in a multilingual community, being able to only speak one language excludes one from most of the daily activities, specifically education.

In South Africa, the medium for education at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is still predominantly English. Therefore, not being able to read, write and speak in English – be English literate – is a barrier to access to education and, by extension, employment. However, by creating opportunities, to turn the words of Angu (2019), Prah (2017) and Wa Thiong'o (1986) upside down, for 'African students to also read and write in their home languages', African students' right to study in the language of their culture as their European counterparts have done for centuries, will be acknowledged. This also means that in the process, African students will be presented with the opportunity to rewrite their narrative as they will have access to previous knowledge but be empowered to look at it through their cultural lenses. The preconception that one needs to be literate in English to be considered a literate person will be exposed as the fallacy that it is.

One way of creating opportunities is to create opportunities for multilingualism in the teaching and learning process. If communication is culture and language as a communication channel is such a strong identity marker, opening up spaces for students to connect to their world views, social experiences, traditions and values through the use of their languages will contribute to the decolonisation of South African curricula, as well as South African minds. But, more than that, it

might 'humanize and empower students to question and reject any form of human oppression' (Allen 2004), as their humanity is acknowledged, and dignity is restored.

Why is multilingualism such an important concept?

Firstly, multilingualism, in essence, challenges the dominant view that society is a monolingual society, which is considered a Western worldview—a residue of the 'us' and 'them' worldview where one group was forced to speak the language of the 'conqueror' and, consequently, became the subjugated. This created a power imbalance that has been in force since the Dutch set foot on the beach at the Cape of Good Hope.

However, by accepting the reality, not only of South Africa but globally, that we live in a multilingual society, as an expression of a multicultural citizenry, the hegemony of the monolingual worldview is broken and a more inclusive society is created. De Bot (2019: 3) writes that there are '30 times more languages than countries,' so even if there are a few countries that are possibly monolingual, most are not. Therefore, the rule is more multilingualism than monolingualism, with South Africa being an example of a multilingual, multicultural country, with the rights of the 12 national languages entrenched in The Constitution.

Secondly, in most HEIs, the primary language of instruction is still English. Although this contribution recognises that this is a pedagogical issue that is receiving a lot of attention, it also holds that there is still a lot of work to be done. As explained, language is the entry into different domains, specifically education. If the student does not understand the language of instruction, the student is, in effect, denied epistemological access. The concept of epistemological access was coined by Wally Morrow (2009: 77-78) denoting the need to 'democratize access to higher education.' This presupposes certain barriers. The barriers indicated here are expressed in the term itself—epistemology—the Theory of Knowledge. It concerns what exactly is considered knowledge. Can people know things? How and when do people know things? In South Africa, this is a burning issue as the knowledge that is presented in tertiary education is still considered the Western reality of the world; expressed in the western language. The greater number of the students in HEIs are not European anymore. Therefore, the knowledge that they possess, the way in which that knowledge was created and internalised and expressed in their languages, largely do not correspond with the curricula at the HEIs. There is, in effect, a disconnect between what is being offered and to whom it is being offered.

Consequently, being multilingual can present significant challenges for students in tertiary education. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from universities to provide the necessary resources and support.

Possible obstacles faced by multilingual students

Second language English speakers in South Africa may face a variety of challenges when studying at the tertiary level:

1. Limited English proficiency, which can make it difficult to follow lectures, understand readings and express ideas clearly in writing.

2. Cultural differences: Due to South Africa's diverse cultural landscape, it might be challenging to understand and communicate with their peers and lecturers.

3. Academic expectations: The gap between academic expectations at high school and at the university level can lead to difficulty managing the workload and can lead to stress.

4. Lack of support: Second language English speakers, or multilingual students, may not receive adequate support from their universities, for instance, language assistance or tutoring services, which can negatively impact their academic progress.

5. Discrimination: Unfortunately, some students may face discrimination or prejudice based on their race, language, or nationality, which again might negatively impact their academic performance and well-being.

Disadvantaged background

Additionally, the Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity[2] (WISE) in

2 WISE is a part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, with whom South Africa partners in 6 bodies and projects and is a participant in 15 (oecd.org, 2018).

the United Kingdom explains in a 2022 report that growing up on the fringes of society has an impact on most all areas of children's lives. Clarke et al. (2022), show that children from lower socio-economic circumstances are more likely to:

1. experience poor material outcomes;
2. poor health;
3. do worse in their education; and
4. report poorer social and emotional outcomes, including lower self-belief and lower life satisfaction.

Today, the above is illustrated in South Africa in that the people groups denied quality primary and secondary education by the apartheid government display the worst educational outcomes. Consequently, the literacy rate is also a reflection of this disparity in the previous education system. The disparity between the literacy levels of the different racial groups in South Africa is illustrated by Table 1. The illiteracy rate is still the lowest amongst white students although there has been a significant increase in literacy rates amongst the previous disadvantaged racial groups.

Table 1: Number and percentage of persons in the population aged 20 and above who have not complete Grade 7 and above by population group, 2009 and 2019 (StatsSA, 2019)

Population Group	2009			2019		
	Number	% Share	Illiteracy rate	Number	% Share	Illiteracy rate
Black African	5 289 177	92.0%	23.4%	4 037 328	91.3%	14.0%
Coloured	399 305	6.9%	14.3%	336 637	7.6%	10.3%
Indian	46 704	0.8%	5.3%	35 502	0.8%	3.3%
White	11 516	0.2%	0.3%	12 117	0.3%	0.3%
Total	**5 746 702**	**100.0%**	**19.2%**	**4 421 585**	**100.0%**	**12.1%**

Source: General Household Survey (GHS). Statistics South Africa

In South Africa, the school drop-out rate has stabilised at around 17 per cent (DHET 2016), with only around 4 per cent of students that enrol in Grade 1 to Grade 12 completing a four-year degree. According to the Minister of Education, Blade Nzimande, university drop-out rates are therefore extremely high with between 50 to 60 per cent of first years dropping out (Dyomfana 2022).

Apart from the reasons mentioned, the same complaints regarding the quality of education in primary and secondary schooling, cannot be tabled concerning the quality of South Africa's tertiary education (Mlachila and Moeletsi 2019). They show that according to The Times Higher Education projection for 2023, four of Africa's best universities are South African. Additionally, three of South Africa's universities feature in the top 300 of the worldwide rankings: the University of Cape Town is Africa's top university, sitting at 160th position, while Stellenbosch University and the University of the Witwatersrand are in the 251–300 bracket. On the other hand, South Africa's secondary education system scores very low on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study[3] (TIMMS) scale (Reddy et al. 2019). In the 2019 survey, in which a total of 64 countries were included, South Africa ranked 62nd, only slightly ahead of the lowest ranking countries namely Pakistan and the Philippines (Reddy et al. 2019:3). The same holds true for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) PISA test. This illustrated gap between the quality of education in secondary school and university, as reflected by the international rankings, might partly explain the low completion rate in South African universities (Mlachila and Moeletsi 2019). The fact that the jump from secondary to tertiary education in South Africa is challenging for many students due to learning deficits acquired during primary and secondary school is concerning.

First-generation university student

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the fact that about 75 per cent of first-year students are the first in their family to enrol for a qualification at a tertiary institution, according to Strydom

3 Definition quoted from TIMSS SA Newsletter: 'The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an assessment of the mathematics and science knowledge of fourth and eighth grade learners around the world. TIMSS is conducted every four years. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) designed TIMSS to allow participating nations to monitor their educational achievements and how these change over time, as well as to compare educational achievement across borders in the key subjects of mathematics and science. In addition to achievement data, TIMSS collects contextual information about the home, school and classroom to explain learner achievement' (Reddy et al 2019).

(2022) from the University of the Free State. 'First in family' (FiF) refers specifically to students whose parents who do not hold university degrees. He adds that

'Although these students come to university with an inspiring motivation to succeed, higher-education research shows that these students are at risk because of a lack of role models in their immediate family.' Consequently, FiF-students might not receive sufficient support to navigate their new reality. Tinto (1975/2012) names support as one of the four components vital for student success. Inadequate support might contribute to the high drop-out level for first year students which is currently as high as 17 per cent (Fourie 2020). Additionally, FiF-students do not only have high expectations of themselves but also carry the hopes of a better future, for their family.

Financial constraints

The Department of Higher Education's student numbers for 2019 indicate that there were approximately 1,2 million students enrolled in public HEIs and 200 000 in private HEIs (DHET 2021). Considering that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has confirmed funding for 691,432 students for the 2022 academic year, it is clear that more than 50 per cent of the 1, 093, 353 students that have enrolled at public universities (including Unisa) are not able to fund their own studies. The effect of the constant stress due to financial challenges may have a negative influence on their academic performance, apart from the fact that it also impacts on their mental and physical health.

Not taking into account the direct stress related to not being able to pay for their education, studies have also shown that food insecurity, which differs from hunger[4], is also increasing in HEIs (Sabi et al. 2015; Van den Bergh and Raubenheimer 2015; Rudolp et al. 2018). Due to more students gaining entry into HEIs because of the NSFAS funding, which targets working class and poor families, more students are also at risk of not having the financial means to have access to nutritional meals.

Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006: 6) reported that nutrition influences cognition, behaviour and physical development. Picket et al. (2015: 529) add that 'students who are often hungry exhibit psychosomatic symptoms, including depression, dizziness, headaches and irritability'.

4 Hunger is defined by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (FAO 2023) as an 'uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient food energy consumption', whereas food insecurity is not a physical feeling but rather a term that describes 'insufficient access to food that is nutritious, safe and meeting special dietary requirements'. In effect, the risk of hunger is heightened by food insecurity.

Struggling to belong

The reasons for student dropouts are many and varied ranging from academic difficulties, adjustment problems and uncertain goals to poor fit for the institution (Burke 2016; Tinto 2001; Williams 2016). Various in-depth studies have revealed that there are certain issues that universities can help with, like finances, but that overall, student retention is a more nuanced socio-cultural conversation (Quinn 2004; Walker, Matthew and Black 2004). Fourie (2020: 3) shows that 'the interaction between individuals, institutions and the wider society also plays an important role in the drop-out phenomenon'. He specifically highlights the crucial role of 'identity and identity-related constructs' in students' academic perseverance and points out the importance of students' sense of belonging to the institution. Recognising this, South African universities should focus on fostering a sense of belonging to mitigate drop-out rates.

Post-#FeesMustFall era

The students entering through the writing centre's doors today entered academia after the #feesmustfall movement, reflecting changing educational dynamics. During these 2015 protests, demands were made for accessible higher education through free decolonised education for Black people; also, that the languages used in higher education should reflect the multilingual citizenry (Nkoala 2020: 1).

An answer to the question posed in Point 3: Who is the student walking through the doors of the writing centre?

This student is most likely an L2 English speaker, whose mother tongue is an indigenous language, from a previously disadvantaged background, who is a first in family student, possibly struggling with inadequate finances and finding it difficult to belong. They are also a student entering the academic arena after the #feesmustfall protests in 2015.

Possible problem statement

In a diverse and multilingual South African higher education landscape, students navigate a complex terrain laden with linguistic, cultural and socio-economic challenges. Understanding their experiences and addressing their needs is essential to enhancing student success and achieving more equitable educational outcomes. This exploration underscores the significance of employing metaphors as a pedagogical tool to bridge the multilingual divide, fostering understanding, inclusivity and a sense of belonging among students in South African writing centres.

Recognising the fundamental importance of effective communication, particularly in an academic context, it is acknowledged that students entering through the writing centres doors must engage in consultations conducted in English. However, we are acutely aware of the linguistic gap this requirement may create. This gap, if unaddressed, could lead to potential social alienation and hinder academic success, highlighting a need for bridging this linguistic and cultural divide. This realisation acts as a prompt to explore innovative strategies to make our writing centre approach more inclusive and representative of the multicultural and multilingual diversity of our student body.

Purpose statement

The focal point of the proposed research lies in determining whether the utilisation of metaphors, especially culturally specific ones, during consultation sessions between consultants and students can serve as a tool for dismantling the barriers of academic metalanguage. The intention is twofold: first, to enhance comprehension and overall engagement among students; second, to foster a sense of belonging and reinforce individual identities within the academic community.

This research endeavour aims to establish the viability and effectiveness of incorporating metaphors into the writing centre framework. The anticipated outcomes of integrating metaphors are compelling:

1. Metaphors can serve as a bridge between a student's native language and the language of academic writing, facilitating smoother communication.

2. Consultants can employ metaphors to facilitate the connection between students' cultural experiences and the target language, thereby aiding them in expressing their ideas in writing more effectively.

3. Utilising metaphors can lead to a more nuanced grasp of the target language, enhancing multilingual students' understanding.

4. Exploring the subtleties and connotations of various metaphors can deepen students' comprehension of the language itself.

5. The use of metaphors in writing centres resonates with the African oral tradition, where metaphors are integral to conveying intricate concepts and cultural values.

6. In cases where students and consultants have diverse cultural backgrounds, strategically incorporating culturally specific metaphors can serve as an effective tutoring strategy.

It is crucial to emphasise that consultants must exercise sensitivity in selecting metaphors, mindful of potential offense. Research indicates that making genuine efforts to understand and embrace a different culture is typically viewed positively, even fostering reciprocal understanding. Additionally, the process of comprehending a cultural metaphor can facilitate engagement and participation from both parties, further enriching the consultation experience.

The overarching objective of this research is to advocate for an increased use of metaphors in the South African context and to propose practical techniques for harnessing metaphors to impart academic literacy skills.

This will be achieved through a theoretical discussion of:

1. the importance of language as an identity marker;

2. what is meant by metaphors;

3. how metaphors are representative of culture;

4. multilingualism in a South African context; and

5. how the focused use of metaphors during consultations can facilitate meaning making by the student.

Considering the realities of demographics and budget constraints, expecting writing centres to offer consultations in every national language remains unrealistic currently. To address this challenge, our research suggests the development of context-specific metaphors tailored to multilingual educational spaces. By doing so, we endeavour to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and empower students to engage with previously elusive concepts.

The writing centre

The writing centre's multifaceted role

Pamela Nichols (2017) anchors her exploration of writing centres in South Africa within the context of a concrete incident – a brick shattering a window at the Wits Writing Centre. This event underscores the tangible connection between theory and application, a juncture at which academia meets real-world dynamics. Rambiritch (2018: 47) reiterated that social justice issues, as was playing off in front of our eyes, do not need to be

> abstract concepts or discussion tools for the experts who must make policy decisions, but, equally important, must/can be applied in practice in the academic literacy classroom/writing centre, so that those of us "on the ground" should be able to practically apply these principles to our teaching and the support we render in higher education.

She adds that 'within the act of dialogue between writing centre consultant and student, there was evidence of the social justice principles of problem solving, critical thinking, student empowerment, social responsibility, student-centred focus, holistic education and an analysis of power' (Rambiritch 2018:51). The writing centre, in its role as a nexus of dialogue between consultants and students,

holds a unique position to bridge cultural divides. By engaging with students' aspirations, anxieties and ambitions, the writing centre transcends conventional boundaries and becomes a vehicle for cultural exchange.

The significance of identity

The concept of identity, as expounded by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1968), encompasses the continuity of the self across time and space. Baumeister (1986: 405–416) and Rouse (1995: 380–385), on the other hand, emphasise uniqueness as a defining attribute. Erikson's psychosocial stages of development provide a foundation for understanding identity's evolution, acknowledging both individual and societal influences. His term 'psychosocial identity' encompassed the different identities of an individual – as a person on his own and as part of various social groups (1968).

Tajfel's insights underscore the influence of social groups on identity formation. Tajfel puts forward that membership of different social groups is internalised as part of the self-concept and as such forms an integral part of the identity of an individual (1981). Tajfel explains that the 'us' and 'them' mentality was created by a normal cognitive process of mankind, namely the tendency to group things together. In this process, the differences and the similarities between groups are emphasised. The same is done with people – the differences and similarities between the group an individual belongs to and other groups are highlighted. The result is social categorisation which may lead to prejudiced attitudes between members of different groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that there are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as 'us' or 'them'. These take place in a particular order: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

With specific reference to national and regional origins, Ramutsindela (1997: 99) views a nation as a 'modern form of collective identity'. Furthermore, Cockburn (1998), when discussing national identities, classified under Thornborrow's (2004) master identity, emphasises that identity in a national arena is crucial as it works to 'ensure compliance and hold existing lines of power in place'. Regarding the building process of identities, as Thornborrow (2004) terms it, Castells (1997:6-16) describes three forms of identity that embody the 'dichotomy between the self and the power of the search for meaning within society'. These definitions are applicable to understanding the current social structure of South Africa. Firstly, 'legitimising' identities are ascribed and upheld by the central establishments in society. In South Africa, it was historically the identity conferred on

members of society by apartheid. 'Resistance' identities are the second type of identity, generated in opposition to the 'legitimising' identity. In South Africa an example would be the 'construction of *Black* as a political and not only a racialised identity in the South African struggle for liberation' (Walker and Unterhalter 2004: 288). The identity that is specifically relevant to this study is the third type of identity defined by Castells, namely the 'project' identity. This constitutes the negotiating of new identities that seek to reconceptualise 'subjectivities and by doing so seek transformation of the overall social structure, for example, anti-racist identities' (Walker and Unterhalter 2004: 288).

The debate regarding identity is also a burning issue in postcolonial studies and again, relevant to this research. Postcolonial studies include the discussion of the impact of colonisation on the colonised and also gives insight into the forging of a new identity emerging after liberation. Students today find themselves in the sociopolitical arena of rewriting their identities, with reference to the definition of the term identity suggested, by Bornman (2003: 24) who regards it as a social construction through which people acquire meaning and a sense of belonging. Due to South Africa's history of social injustices, many students, on all the sides of the racial divide, find themselves in a totally different situation as their parents and grandparents. They must find a way to traverse their new social reality.

Language as a cultural identity marker

> The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces [indigenous and imperialist] in the Africa of the twentieth century (Wa Thiong'o 1981: 4)

Wa Thiong'o (1981: 4) above, explains the importance of language for a people group's definition of themselves. In other words, he considers language as an important marker of identity. Identity markers are unique characteristics that distinguish one person or a group of persons from another. In the context of this research, it refers specifically to markers of an individual's social identity, which is, according to Tajfel (1979) a person's expression of who they are based on the social groups which they feel they belong to.

The term 'language', according to Fishman (1999: 25), includes 'varieties' of socially linked

human codes, as well as the different attitudes, behaviours, functions and usage conventions that typify each of them. He adds that all varieties are capable of being ideologically or politically laden (Fishman 1999: 25). It can be deduced; therefore, that language is a very important identity marker.

To further understand why this is so, it is necessary to understand the distinction that De Saussure makes in separating language from speaking and in doing that he separates what is social from what is individual (1959). He theorises that language is not a function of the speaker but 'a product that is passively assimilated by the individual' (1959: 14). Speaking, on the other hand, is a decision that the individual makes himself. Language, therefore, is the 'social side of speech', which 'exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by members of a community' (1959:14).

Nelson Mandela's assertion underscores the emotional resonance of language. He said that 'if you talk to a man in a language that he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart' (Mandela 2011). As 'the social side of speech', language is, therefore, again, considered a very important identity marker. According to Dieckhoff (2004), a common language may be the primary expression of the inimitable features of a social group. Here it is argued that 'language can be a robust marker of social identity, capable of binding and dividing groups and that its salience may displace other (for example, ethnic or religious) identities (Jaspal and Coyle 2009).

Furthermore, more than half of the citizens interviewed for the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey in 2017, expressed their willingness to more interaction between races in private as well as public spaces (Potgieter 2017). But, also according to the SA Reconciliation Barometer, the barriers to greater integration are identified as language and confidence (Potgieter 2017: 8). Language, even more than race, is therefore considered the primary identity marker in South Africa. See Table 3, Primary identity, from the SA Reconciliation Barometer 2017 (Potgieter 2017: 15). The report consequently recommends more active promotion of multilingualism as it is suggested that fostering multilingualism can actively contribute to breaking down barriers and nurturing a more integrated society (Potgieter 2017: 8).

Table 2: Primary Identity

Primary identity			
	Primary	**Secondary**	**Combined**
Language	30.0	16.4	46.4
Race	23.4	28.0	51.4
Economic class	14.0	13.1	27.1
South African	11.1	7.7	18.8
Religion	7.1	13.1	20.2
None	4.5	7.7	12.1
Don't know/Refused	7.3	3.4	10.7
Political party	2.5	10.5	13.0
Other	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Adapted from Potgieter (2017: 15)

More about metaphors

The theoretical grounding

The main theoretical framework within which this research is situated is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The primary principle of CMT is that metaphors are an expression of thinking and, although expressed through language, it is not primarily an expression of language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3).

The foundation for their theory is that

> the concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world and how we relate to other people (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3).

They add that one's conceptual system is not something that one is normally aware of. Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster n.d.) gives the following definition for a concept:

(noun)

1. something conceived in the mind: thought or notion;

2. an abstract or generic idea generalised from particular instances.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) show that humans usually act according to how they conceptualise their world. And one way to understand how they do that is to look at how is expressed by their language. They found, primarily based on linguistic evidence, that for the largest part human being's conceptual system is metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4). Their research led them to identify the overarching metaphors that give structure to how humans perceive the world around them, how they think and how they act.

Arguably one of their most famous conceptual metaphors is:

- Argument is war.
- Mainly, an argument is won or lost.

They then show that, in a culture where argument is not perceived as war, but as a dance, people would think differently about arguments and therefore, argue differently. And, this is the essence of their theory: Understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5).

Lakoff and Turner (1989) summarise the five tenets of CMT as follows:

1. Metaphors structure thinking;

2. Metaphors structure knowledge;

3. Metaphor is central to abstract language;

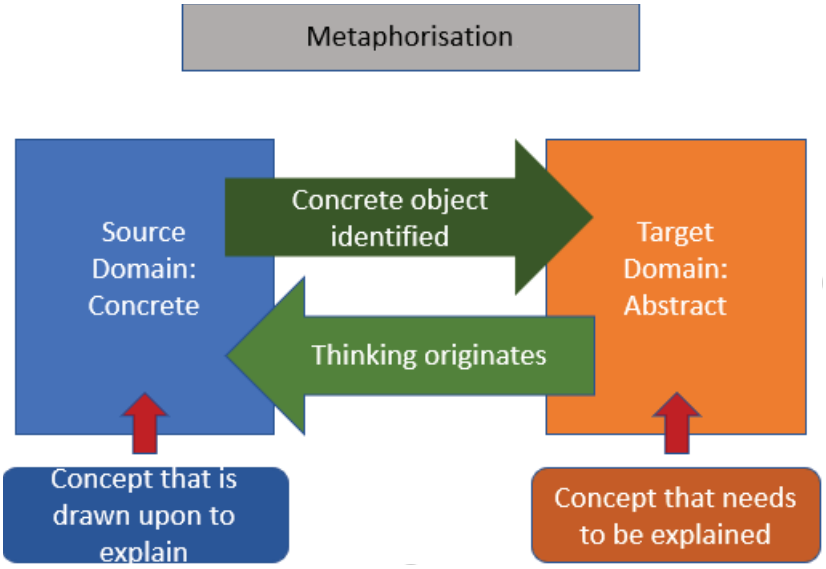
4. Metaphor is grounded in physical experience; and

5. Metaphor is ideological.

How metaphors function

Since the introduction of the conceptual metaphor in 1980 by Lakoff and Johnson, the field of metaphor studies has gained significant traction. One of the pivotal aspects of this theory is understanding the mechanics of a metaphor. A conceptual metaphor involves grasping one idea or concept by relating it to another idea or concept. In essence, this entails making an abstract concept more tangible by associating it with a concrete, physical object or situation, as illustrated below. This process is often described as mapping, where meaning is transferred from one domain to another.

Figure 2: Metaphorisation



To illustrate this process within the context of the consultation transcript, the concept is applied to one of the metaphors used in the transcribed consultation, namely the metaphor of the '*stokswiet*':

Figure 3: A stokswiet as metaphor for the basic structure of an academic text

The mapping can be explained as follows:

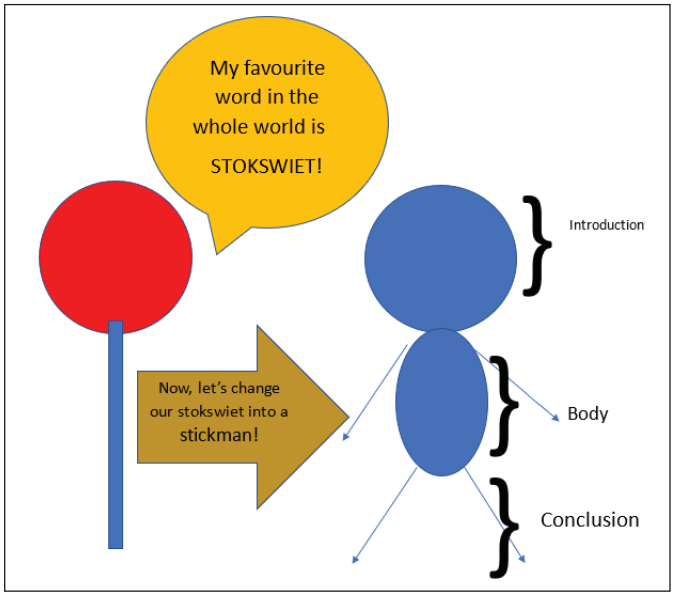


Table 3: Mapping of the stokswiet metaphor

Source domain	Rationale	Target domain
The stokswiet -	Coming from the farm, I knew that *istokswiet* is the Zulu word for a lollypop. Actually, known in all indigenous languages.	Basic structure of an academic text
Transformed into a stickman		
Head		Introduction
Mouth		
Body		Body
Legs		Conclusion

Utilising the '*stokswiet*' metaphor, along with the analogy of a sosatie-stick, explained below, generated smiles, visibly relaxed the student and encouraged active participation in the conversation.

Figure 4: The importance of identifying the main idea in paragraphs

A paragraph is a grouping of sentences around a single idea or topic sentence. (The sosatie-stick!)
Supporting sentences or ideas then expand on or develop the topic sentence by:
1. Defining
2. Explaining
Giving examples or evidence

Metaphors identified in the relevant consultation

It needs to be explained here that during this consultation:

1. the metaphors were drawn on an A3 laminated paper and explanations written;

2. the student was given a set of highlighters to identify the elements of the text when asked to do so.

Table 4: Metaphors identified in the relevant consultation

Line	Example	Type
41	So it seems to me like you need a marketing company	
92 -136	Introduction explained in terms of a *stokswiet* transformed into a stickman: Mouth – Introduction Eyes – Hook Not crazy eyes like in the Walking Dead that scares the reader away Love dovey eyes So that the reader wants to look into the eyes.	
208	Background compared to laying the table: There's a plate, but there's no food. There's a knife and fork, everything is there, but the food is to follow. After this explanation, when asked to highlight the background, the student indicates that from own observation, there is minimal background to highlight.	
228	Explaining why the thesis statement is given in the introduction already: An essay is like a TV series, but there's one difference. We tell them who the murderer is right at the beginning	
232	The introduction is compared to a seed. Everything needed to write a good essay is already in the introduction. It then blossoms and grows into the body and in the conclusion, it is harvested. [What was drawn was a mealie seed]	

Line	Example	Type
240	Reference to a Disney movie titled Brave. Then, the bravery transferred to the stick man – which the student immediately understands and responds with 'Oh *ja*, because you want to tell them'.	
254	Refer the student to a *Shisa Nyama* and telling them that they are eating a sosatie or a kebab and saying that the stick inside the kebab is the thesis statement. Upon which the student immediately replies that it is because the stick holds everything together.	
266–269	The repetition of ingredients is like the paragraphs.	
274–277	And, a pink marshmallow does not go with peppers and meat. Inferring that irrelevant information does not fit. The student then finishes the tutor's sentence:	
	Tutor: So if you keep in mind your thesis statement, your kebab stick, then you will not be tempted to –	
	Student: To put irrelevant information. (nods)	
310-315	The student is asked whether the student now understood the introduction as a unit? And can see that it is a launch pad? To which the student replies affirmative.	
381-	When explaining cohesiveness with regard to the linking of the arguments, reference is made to a number of movies where the characters wore medieval gear, like ring chain gear. It was then explained that there should be no gaps in logic through which any arguments can pierce the author's argument, with specific reference to linking devices.	

Line	Example	Type
425	At the beginning of the consultation, the student indicated that the student wanted to juice up their essay. Here the consultant likens the linking devices to Super Juice.	
463	In explaining the conclusion, the consultant draws but also explains that academic writing is like a snake that eats it own tail – one has to end where one started. The introduction needs to look at the tail.	
68/474	The student picks up on the metaphor of an argumentative essay as a fight and compares the conclusion to the final knock-out punch.	
521	Explaining that grammar mistakes in a text are like a giant jumping in front of one as one is only strolling peacefully through the forest.	
629	The student confessed to having a negative attitude towards the academic literacy module upon which the consultant points out that the module is like an antidote!	

The following excerpt from the consultation further demonstrates the positive impact of metaphors on understanding as well as dynamics between the consultant and the student:

Tutor: Of the fence. Okay. So. Then, furthermore, now this is the important part. Okay. Because it will immediately help you (.) with your introduction. With any (.) I actually (.) want to say (.) with any piece of communication, you have an outer structure and you have an inner structure. (writes) So. Let's first have a look at the outer structure. Okay. Now. My favourite word in the whole world (.) is.
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: Do you know what?
Student: No: (laughter)
Tutor: What's your favourite word?
Student: I don't have one.
Tutor: You don't have a favourite word! No, you must have a favourite word! My favourite word is – What is your home language?
Student: Shona.
Tutor: Shona? Okay.
Student: But (.) I can speak several.
Tutor: *Ja*. I am jealous of that. That is amazing.
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: So my favourite word is the Zulu and the Xhosa and the Tswana word for a lollipop. Do you know what it is? (4s) i-stok-sweet!
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: (laughter) Why?
Student: I was thinking of like (.) a deeper one. (laughter)
Tutor: (laughter) No. i-stok-sweet. Because it's English, Afrikaans and all the Nguni languages –
Student: Oh, *ja*.

Tutor: = And actually all the people in South Africa –
Student: Just use stok-sweet
Tutor: Just we, use stok-sweet. Okay. So. If you um immediately when you start writing, whether it's an exam, an assignment, draw yourself a little stok-sweet there in the corner and you cannot go wrong. Okay.
Student: *Ja*.
Tutor: Now I always make my little stok-sweet a stok *mannetjie* like that (draws) and why? This is now my outer structure. So the head, when you stuck your head around the corner there and you said hi, I'm Beaula. So. The head is a symbol of your (.) introduction because your mouth is there.
Student: Hm. (nods) *Ja*.
Tutor: And you introduce yourself with your mouth. Okay. So. Your introduction needs (.) um (.) to be (takes out pens) made up of four, we are like feeling like a kid again you know like Kentucky fried what is that? (makes ice cream licking gesture)
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: That ice cream ad? So. Introduction. So the first part of your essay, your paragraph, our oral presentation, is your? Introduction.
Student: Introduction.
Tutor: (draws) Okay. So the mouth has to open.
Student: *Ja*.
Tutor: Introduction. Now the introduction (.) on, in it's turn (.) is composed of four (.) segments. The very first segment (.) is called (.) a hook. Do you know about hook?
Student: Oh, to grab it, (makes hand gesture indicating pulling) to grab the attention.
Tutor: Yes. To catch that fish! So. You remember the hook by – do you ever watch those (.) those movies um like The Walking Dead, um, zombies,

Student: *Ja*, *ja*.
Tutor: Where they have those crazy eyes, you know?
Student: *Ja*. (nods, laughter)
Tutor: So if you see one of those people at night, you want to run away.
Student: *Ja*. (laughter)
Tutor: Okay. Now we don't want crazy eyes for your essay.
Student: No.
Tutor: We want those lovey dovey eyes, you know, those little hearty eyes when you tell your mother (.) or your grandmother, I have now, I have, I <u>have</u> gained acceptance!
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: Yes, I'm going to be a doctor! So you need those lovey dovey eyes. And those love dovey eyes is your?
Student: Hook.
Tutor: Hook. (nods) Like you said, they want to look deeper into those eyes, they don't want to run away. Now that is something relevant (clears throat) still relevant to your topic, you can't say um Beyoncé um has a new baby, you know.
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: So what does that have to do, oh maybe because they're dieting, yes. (laughter)
Student: With food, *ja*. (laughter)

If we now consider the possible outcomes mentioned earlier, we can see that the use of the cultural specific metaphors, as well as more commonly known metaphors, did transcend the language barrier but also the possible power imbalance between an older, white, female consultant and a much younger, African student. It is also clear from the above that the student understood the abstract academic concepts that were unfamiliar at the beginning. Linking these new, abstract concepts to something enjoyable in their lives, made them reconsider their apprehension of being able to apply the new knowledge.

Metaphors as representation of culture

Concerning metaphors and cultural coherence, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 22) argue that 'the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. Considering that a conservative estimate of the percentage of our basic values stemming from culture falls between 25 per cent and 50 per cent (Hofstede 2001), studying a specific culture's metaphors provides insight into their thoughts. Gannon (2011: 2) defines a cultural metaphor as 'some unique or distinctive institution, phenomenon, or activity expressive of a nation's values' .

Metaphors in education

Acknowledging that metaphors ground abstract concepts in concrete descriptions, the pedagogical value of metaphors, extensively explored in various fields of study, warrants revisiting in the modern writing centre setting. Sticht (1993: 485) proposed that 'just as the repeated use of a hammer may strengthen the arm, so the repeated use of metaphors may strengthen the power of analysis and synthesis.' Furthermore, it has been suggested that 'the act of stretching the resources of language involved in metaphor is a way of forging a stronger bond between speaker and hearer' (Charteris-Black 2004), also bridging the gap between instructor and learner. Additionally, research has established that metaphors effectively convey 'complex meaning' (Carter and Pitcher 2010: 579).

Hewet and Thonus (2019), in their report on the use of conceptual metaphors in writing consultants' online feedback on first-year students' essay drafts, found that students were more inclined to understand the metaphorical feedback. They explained that 'we speculate that metaphorical feedback, particularly in online settings, activates embodied cognition through semantic integrity, enabling students to make the cognitive leap between instructional feedback and to revise a deeper meaning-focused levels' (Hewit and Thonus 2018: 1).

Conclusion

This study is clearly exploratory, and I am eagerly anticipating whether the anticipated benefits of using metaphors will be substantiated:

- To acknowledge that we do not live in a monolingual society and thereby recognise the identity

and dignity of each student who enters our doors.
- To unlock new knowledge and facilitate personal meaning-making;
- To empower writing centre consultants by sensitising them to the importance of acknowledging their clients' existing literacies and equipping them with skills to unlock existing knowledge using culturally specific metaphors;
- To encourage diverse tutors to apply their creativity in developing their own metaphors.

In essence, the proposed research will strive to leverage the power of metaphors to surmount linguistic and cultural barriers within the writing centre. By doing so, the aim is to facilitate not only better comprehension of academic discourse but also a stronger sense of belonging and shared identity among South Africa's diverse student population.

Aristotle aptly stated, 'To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest.' The application of metaphors in our writing centre endeavours aligns with this sentiment, fostering an enriched and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to embrace their academic journey with confidence and cultural resonance.

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