Decolonising the Mind by Translingual Design: Pedagogy and Epistemic Justice in the Neoliberal South African University

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Abstract

The promotion of quality higher education through decolonising pedagogical practice remains a primary concern in higher education contexts. However, the contemporary neoliberal university project reinforces Eurocentric cultural standardisation through the continued hegemony of colonial languages that prioritise global marketability over local epistemic relevance. This critical decolonial conceptual article explores the structural relationships among language intellectualisation, classroom translanguaging and the broader mandate of epistemic justice in South African higher education. Drawing on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's conceptualisation of decolonisation and scholarship on decoloniality, the article analyses how indigenous languages can be conceptually reconstructed as essential pedagogical interventions to confront market-driven standardisation of knowledge that systematically marginalises the cultural identities of African students. Moving beyond an empirical critique of Eurocentric practices, the article theorises a framework for a transformative, translingual pedagogy to delineate how bridging the gap between students' indigenous linguistic repertoire and academic discourses fosters cultural heritage. Ultimately, the article provides a conceptual synthesis demonstrating that a multilingual shift can challenge the market-driven logic that views language as a commodity. Such a shift is necessary for fostering social equity and ensuring that the higher education sector serves as an emancipatory, pluriversal space that provides epistemic access for all students.

Keywords: African indigenous languages; decolonising pedagogy; epistemic justice; higher education; neoliberal university; translanguaging; social transformation

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Introduction

Linguistic imperialism and Eurocentric pedagogical practices in postcolonial African higher education continue to compromise the linguistic and educational rights of multilingual students (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2017; Smith 2021). Media of instruction policies that enforce the hegemony of English and other Western languages systematically marginalise indigenous knowledge systems, trapping African universities in a profound existential crisis (Hlatshwayo 2021; Kumalo 2020; Madadzhe 2019). This crisis is compounded by the contemporary neoliberal university project, which commodifies education and prioritises global marketability and institutional rankings over local epistemic relevance. Within this market-driven logic, language is treated as a commercial asset rather than as a tool for human liberation (Munyaradzi 2024; Ndlovu and Woldegiorgis 2024).

More than 30 years after the demise of apartheid, South African higher education faces multifaceted transformation imperatives. The 2015–2016 student protest movements underscored the urgency of decolonising curricula to reflect the lived experiences of historically marginalised students. While the South African government responded with progressive policy adjustments, specifically the amended Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions (DHET 2020), implementation remains impeded by institutional resistance and persistent conformity to Eurocentric standards (Madondo 2023; Theledi and Masote 2024). Consequently, in the South African higher education context, English continues to dominate teaching, learning and research at the expense of indigenous languages (Viriri and Ndimande-Hlongwa 2023).

This critical decolonial conceptual article argues that the intellectualisation of African indigenous languages is not merely a logistical or linguistic task, but also a political imperative for achieving epistemic justice. Drawing on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's conceptualisation of decolonising the mind and contemporary decolonial literature, the article critically examines how indigenous languages serve as an essential pedagogical intervention for epistemic access in the South African context. The article moves beyond a descriptive critique of Eurocentric language hegemony to articulate a transformative, translingual pedagogy. The article demonstrates how reclaiming indigenous linguistic repertoires disrupts the neoliberal commodification of knowledges, fosters inclusivity, and provides epistemic access for all students.

To ensure analytical rigour and prevent theoretical conflation, it is important to delineate the core concepts in this article, namely epistemic justice, epistemic access, language intellectualisation, translanguaging, and transformative translingual pedagogy. They form a dynamic, interlocking continuum that moves from macro-political ethical mandates and institutional policies to the operational classroom framework. By mapping the boundaries between these concepts, the article reveals how macro-structural scaffolding and micro-level human agency converge to disrupt the market-driven logic of the neoliberal university.

At the ethical political level of the continuum is the concept of epistemic justice. Drawing on decolonial theory, epistemic justice refers to the radical recognition of historically marginalised speakers as legitimate knowers (Kerfoot and Bello-Nonjengele 2023), a process that requires the cultivation of collective interpretive resources to accurately represent their lived experiences and cultural heritages without distortion (Fricker 2007). In this article, it is an antithesis to colonial knowledge erasure and linguistic marginalisation that paves the way for epistemic access aligned with the transformative ideals of equality and dignity as promulgated in the South African Constitution (RSA 1996). At institutional and pedagogical levels, epistemic access serves as the practical gateway through which students meaningfully and critically participate, understand and independently produce academic knowledge (Khooi et al. 2020). While traditional institutional discourses often limit epistemic access to additive, tokenistic exercises, such translation of Eurocentric knowledge archives into local words (Xulu-Gama and Hadebe 2022; Zembylas 2018) and epistemic access under a decolonial framework requires that the curriculum is demystified and transformed to allow students to engage with it as human participants.

To bridge the gap between epistemic justice and the daily realities of the academy, the article uses language intellectualisation as macro-structural scaffolding, which entails the deliberate development of terminology, academic registers, and institutional use needed for language to effectively function in knowledge production, scientific research, and formal administration (Dlamini 2023; Khumalo 2017; Prah 2017). Ultimately, this builds the baseline linguistic capital necessary for the generation of autonomous African theories. While intellectualisation provides institutional resources and structural validation on a macro-scale, translanguaging represents a fluid, natural pedagogic strategy that allows use of a speaker's integrated linguistic repertoire to negotiate meaning, rejecting the idea of viewing languages as static, separate rigid boxes (Garcia and Wei 2014; Too 2023).

The nexus where these concepts intersect is the transformative translingual framework proposed in this article. A transformative translingual pedagogical approach intentionally synthesises macro-level language intellectualisation with micro-level translanguaging dynamics to transform tokenistic epistemic access into authentic epistemic justice. The article first articulates the methodology, before discussing the value of indigenous languages, to further contextualise an emancipatory translingual pedagogical approach in the South African context.

The Conceptual Methodology

To rigorously interrogate the intersection of language, power and market-driven imperatives in South African higher education, this article adopts a critical decolonial conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis does not necessarily collect new empirical data, although it may analyse existing empirical or documentary material (Lourie and McPhail 2024; Shizha 2012). In this article, this methodology functions as an analytical

tool to expose how coloniality and neoliberal logics are structurally embedded within seemingly neutral institutional pedagogical policies. Decolonial critical conceptual analysis operates on the premise that concepts are not passive instruments of thought, but active sites of political struggle that can either reinforce systemic subjugation or that serve as vectors for human liberation.

To ensure analytical rigour, the literature selection followed a purposeful, critical sampling strategy. The selection corpus targeted foundational decolonial theoretical insights from Global South scholars such as Wa Thiong'o, Mignolo, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and sociolinguists such as Garcia and Wei (2014), Canagarajah (2017), and Makalela (2015; 2021). The sources were selected based on their relevance to illuminate the intersection of language policy, marketisation, and epistemic equity in postcolonial and Global South contexts.

The analysis followed a dialectical synthesis protocol where these concepts were not merely juxtaposed but also actively cross examined. Specifically, the macro-structural critiques of coloniality and neoliberal marketisation were mapped against the micro-level sociolinguistic fluidities of translanguaging. This synthesis served to reconcile the tension between the structural constraints of the corporate university and the agential, linguistic resistance, revealing that linguistic boundary keeping is a direct apparatus of epistemic exclusion. I read and evaluated the selected sources and was guided by a central research question: how can reclamation of indigenous linguistic repertoires disrupt neoliberal commodification of knowledge and provide epistemic access within the post-apartheid university?

The article moves from critique to framework construction through an iterative process of epistemic de-linking (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). First, the descriptive critique exposes how current institutional language policies operate as compliance mechanisms that treat indigenous languages as translation tokens. Second, by moving beyond this negative critique, the analysis inverts these institutional deficits into agentic assets, using Wa Thiong'o's concept of re-membering to conceptually assemble the fractured components of student identity. This inductive theoretical leap informed the construction of the transformative translingual pedagogy framework, translating abstract decolonial resistance into operational classroom dimensions, such as lecture hall mechanics, assessment design and knowledge co-creation. The proposed framework was evaluated conceptually using three specific qualitative benchmarks, namely internal theoretical consistency, explanatory adequacy, and political-epistemic viability. This methodology does not seek to establish detached, objective abstractions. Instead, it uses critical decolonial conceptual analysis to build a solid theoretical bridge spanning the critique of Eurocentric linguistic hegemony to the articulation of an emancipatory translingual praxis. This advances the mandate of education as a practice of freedom.

Consequently, blending decolonial critique with a translanguaging framework moves the analysis beyond abstract theory (Makalela and Da Silva 2023). It grounds the critique directly in the material realities of South African lecture halls, exposing how the structural hegemony of English and Afrikaans fractures student recognition (Mbirimi-Hungwe and Matariro-Mutanha 2024) while actively reclaiming academic autonomy from neoliberal commodification.

Cultural and Epistemic Dimensions of African Indigenous Languages

Culture entails the totality of values, beliefs and practices that govern a community (Hantrais 1998; Makuvaza and Shizha 2017; Shava and Manyike 2018). As Wa Thiong'o (1993, 60) observes, "culture is a product of its people's history and language is the primary repository of that history". Thus, African indigenous languages are not just instruments of communication. They are core architectures of African identity, embodying unique traditions, philosophies, and worldviews (Theledi and Masote 2024). In his seminal text, *Decolonising the Mind*, Wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasises that language preserves a people's collective memory and knowledge systems. Through oral traditions and storytelling rituals, each generation retrieves historical values, and transmits intellectual wealth across generations. Conversely, the exclusion and marginalisation of indigenous languages from higher education practices fractures the collective memory, resulting in cultural alienation and epistemic erasure for multilingual students (Mkhize 2016).

Teaching and learning through indigenous languages constitute a deliberate act of resistance against Eurocentric dominance and erasure of memory. Lamentably, many educational stakeholders in postcolonial African contexts continue to defend Eurocentric language policies, operating in what Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2011) refer to as coloniality, increasingly exacerbated by the neoliberal university project which reduces language to a commodity (Munyaradzi 2024). Within this market-driven paradigm, English is valorised as the exclusive language of global capital and institutional rankings, while indigenous languages are dismissed as economically non-viable or unscientific. Clinging to these Eurocentric media of instruction such as English and Afrikaans under the guise of global marketability traps South African higher education in a state of linguistic subjugation.

As Idung (2015), Makalela (2015; 2021), and Wa Thiong'o (2016) argue, indigenous languages hold vast reserves for African philosophy and wisdom that Eurocentric metrics often misrecognise. Achieving this shift in the South African higher education context requires more than policy revisions. It demands an ontological and epistemological restructuring of the academy (Makuvaza and Shizha 2017; Ngara 2007), looking beyond the colonial archive to develop indigenous theories that allow Africa to find its own solutions to its own problems (Dei 2011). Integrating African ontological and epistemological springboards into pedagogy is an essential pre-requisite

for achievement of epistemic justice and for fostering genuine academic success among linguistically diverse students.

Ngũgĩ WaThiong'o on Decolonisation and the Language Question

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1986) posits that colonialism is not just a political or economic phenomenon, but also a fundamental cultural one that systematically oppresses othered societies by imposing Eurocentric languages while devaluing indigenous languages. To ground his framework analytically, it is necessary to acknowledge that Wa Thiong'o's arguments emerged from the post-independence crises of East Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, where the adoption of English by African elites was viewed as an ongoing subjugation of the peasantry and an erasure of national consciousness (Wa Thiong'o 1986; 2016). In adopting his concepts for contemporary South African higher education, the article does not assume that his structural framework directly resolves local language planning challenges. Instead, Wa Thiong'o's work is valuable for South Africa in as much as it frames language choices as active sites of power, a phenomenon sociological literature refers to as epistemicide (De Sousa Santos 2014). Rather than treating epistemicide as a rhetorical label, this article conceptualises it as the institutionalised marginalisation, and sometimes destruction, of localised, non-Westernised interpretive repertoires.

Also, a critical conceptual task of this article is to unpack Wa Thiong'o's concept of re-membering. Re-membering refers to the reconstruction of cultural memory severed by colonial violence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Wa Thiong'o 1986) as a legitimate vehicle of scholarship. Because European memory was intentionally planted on the colonised African mind through colonial naming and education systems (Shava and Manyike 2018), uprooting or re-membering, it requires deliberate adoption of ontological subversion to affirm language reclamation. As Wa Thiong'o (1993, vii) observes, "moving the centre … will contribute to freeing nationalism, class, race and gender … and true humanism can flower among the peoples of the earth rooted in the histories and cultures of the different peoples". Because memory anchors human aspirations across time and place (Chilisa 2012; Smith 1999), intellectualising indigenous languages for teaching and learning serves as a valid decolonising pedagogical practice that shifts the levels of unequal social structures of the postcolonial order (Shizha 2012). Re-membering entails reclaiming, reconstructing and validating indigenous knowledge systems and languages, a process that mirrors Linda Smith's (1999) Kaupapa Maori framework of reclamation. The adoption of Kaupapa Maori to the South African context can result in an African paradigm, a comprehensive assertion of the sovereignty of African indigenous languages and knowledges. Treating language as an aesthetic and conceptual tool would allow South African higher education to transcend neoliberal commodification by fostering genuine social transformation (Wa Thiong'o 1993).

However, language reclamation may become rigid if it merely seeks to create static monolingualism that mimics colonial principles (Mawonga and De Souza 2026). That

is where translanguaging serves as a vital pedagogical vehicle to bridge the reclamation of language with students' lived realities. It does so by shifting from politically bounded, rigid, standard languages to fluid communicative repertoires of the speakers themselves (Garcia and Wei 2014). The translanguaging intervention should move beyond the tendency of limiting indigenous African languages as mere tools for translating Eurocentric knowledge (Cakata 2023). An uncritical translation-only approach is restrictive and serves the market-driven logic of the neoliberal academy that reduces language to a commodified, cosmetic token of inclusion while leaving Eurocentric epistemic dominance flourishing. The use of indigenous languages exclusively to translate Eurocentric concepts reinforces the myth that African languages lack inherent theoretical grounding to generate independent thought (Kaya and Seleti 2013). Thus, translanguaging does not automatically lead to epistemic justice or decolonisation. It becomes a mechanism of decolonisation if it is structurally supported by language reclamation, otherwise it could remain a temporary coping mechanism that leaves unchallenged the dominance of English and Afrikaans text and assessment structures.

Investing in indigenous languages allows universities to cultivate spaces where students develop a strong intellectual affinity for their own heritages (Heugh 2018; Mabela and Ditsele 2024). Within South African university contexts, this could be achieved by implementing translingual practices that empower students to conceptualise, theorise, and produce knowledge through their integrated linguistic repertoires.

Navigating Structural Barriers to Indigenous Intellectualisation

Implementing African indigenous languages as primary intellectual vehicles within South African higher education presents complex logistical and structural challenges. Conventional critiques frequently cite the difficulty of managing hyper-diverse, multilingual classrooms alongside a chronic deficit of educational resources (Charamba 2023; Mbirimi-Hungwe 2023).

To circumvent the rigid, orthodox boundaries of politically constructed languages in South Africa's diverse university spaces, progressive scholars such as Canagarajah (2017) and Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) advocate a shift towards translanguaging pedagogical practices. A translingual pedagogical practice functions as a disruptive, decolonial tool (Wei 2016) that allows students to fluidly utilise their entire linguistic repertoires in the classroom, breaking down Eurocentric linguistic barriers (Garcia and Wei 2014) and fostering immediate epistemic access. Beyond pedagogy, the structural development of the languages themselves remains a site of intense contestation (Kaschula and Maseko 2014). To build necessary academic terminology, Owolabi (2006) proposes a pragmatic approximating process (PAP). This framework requires linguists, philosophers, scholars, and educationists to collaborate across three distinct phases, namely explanation, pondering, and approximation, which are guided by the pillars of exhaustiveness, precision, and consistency. However, PAP should not be reduced to a tool for uncritical translation of Eurocentric knowledge archives (Cakata

2023). Rather, this article positions technical intellectualisation as a foundational stepping stone and a process to equip indigenous languages with the baseline register necessary to generate autonomous African theories and philosophies.

Furthermore, efforts to address terminology deficit through macro-level harmonisation of orthographies (Prah 2017) face localised resistance. In the South African context, merging mutually intelligible speech forms usually risks exacerbating historical, colonial-era ethnic divisions (Finlayson and Madiba 2002; Theledi and Masote 2024). To bypass this impasse, universities could strategically embed intellectualisation within initial teacher education programmes that immerse student teachers in translingual methodologies to create sustainable pipelines (Alexander 2003). These future educators would, in turn, join the basic education sector equipped to teach and assess in indigenous languages, normalising their use long before students reach the tertiary level of education.

In examining the landscape of South African higher education, the transition towards multilingualism is not entirely without precedent. Notable institutional efforts include the University of KwaZulu-Natal pioneering dual language policy (Dlamini 2022), Rhodes University development of trilingual glossaries (Kaschula 2021; Kaschula and Maseko 2014), and the University of South Africa's (Unisa's) systematic African language initiatives that led to the launch of the recent 2025 multilingual language policy at the institution (Unisa 2025). However, a critical decolonial lens reveals that these progressive attempts remain severely constrained by the overarching neoliberal architecture. While these institutions successfully draft progressive language policies on paper, actual classroom implementation is often characterised by a lack of material resources and professional development for tutors, and a corporate institutional culture that continues to elevate academic prestige through monolingual English benchmarks (De Swaan 2023; Kaschula 2021; Ndimande-Hlongwa and Ndebele 2017). Consequently, such institutional endeavours often devolve into what scholars call administrative compliance practices (Cele 2021; Madadzhe 2019; Makoni 2017; Namakula, Kimani, and Kadenge 2025) rather than transformative sites. This underscores the dire need to move beyond top-down policy mandates towards an active, classroom-level translingual praxis.

Towards Epistemic and Cognitive Injustice in South African Higher Education

Within contemporary South African university contexts, epistemicide is actively sustained through the continued hegemony of English and Afrikaans as primary media of instruction. This linguistic hegemony serves as a major conduit for coloniality, ensuring that Eurocentric ways of knowing continue to be universalised while indigenous knowledge systems are rendered subaltern, primitive, and invisible (Ndlovu 2014). In this context, the struggle for language rights across South Africa's 26 public universities is intricately bound to the broader political project of cognitive justice, a

concept which asserts that authentic social transformation cannot occur without the recognition of the diversity of knowledges that exists globally.

The manifestation of epistemic injustice in the neoliberal South African university can be comprehensively mapped using Fricker's (2007) foundational framework. This framework differentiates between testimonial justice and hermeneutical justice. In the context of historically "white" universities in the country, the institutions undergo complex language transitions. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's credibility is deflated due to structural prejudices against their linguistic identities, accent or dialect. Building on this critique, Ndofirepi and Gwavaranda (2018) have argued that African universities function as colonial implants where Eurocentric structural prejudices systematically de-legitimise indigenous linguistic identities, creating a testimonial credibility deficit that mischaracterises multilingual "black" students as intellectually deficient and in need of academic remediation. The institutional devaluation reflects a profound hermeneutical injustice as it relies on rigid, Westernised academic registers that produce an interpretive gap that excludes lived experiences and cognitive styles of marginalised speakers from the broader politics of knowledge production (Hungwe and Ndofirepi 2022). Multilingual "black" students who enter these institutions are often subjected to this credibility deficit. Because they may lack native fluency or specific academic registers in English or Afrikaans, their intellectual contribution, lived experiences and cognitive capabilities are systematically undervalued by lecturers and institutional structures as those of deficit people who require remediation and academic development (Munyaradzi 2025). At its worst, the deficit model shifts the blame for academic failure from the Eurocentric institutions to the marginalised student, reinforcing a racialised and class-based knowledge hierarchy that associates intellectual capacity exclusively with Westernised linguistic performance.

Hermeneutical injustice, conversely, manifests when a particular society lacks collective interpretive resources to make sense of marginalised groups of people, consequently disadvantaging them in both social and academic lives (Fricker 2007). In a neoliberalised South African university where the curriculum and media of instruction remain overwhelmingly Eurocentric, bi/multilingual students suffer from a profound hermeneutical injustice since they are compelled to conceptualise their cultural values and lived experiences through Eurocentric concepts and vocabularies (Munyaradzi 2025), a process that Wa Thiong'o (1986) identifies as viewing oneself from the outside through a looking glass provided by Europe. Because the collective interpretive resource of the South African university is monopolised by Western archives, the pedagogical practices leave the multilingual student epistemically housed, unable to render their unique, historical and ontological realities intelligible within formal academic discourse.

The dual manifestation of epistemic injustice is further compounded by coloniality of knowledge that separates the world into producers and those whose function is to

provide data (Mignolo 2011). English and Afrikaans are positioned as primary media of high-level conceptualisation, abstract theorisation, and scientific innovation. Thus, nine official African indigenous languages recognised by the South African Constitution are relegated to the private and peripheral space. This division reinforces the Eurocentric myth that Western languages possess an inherent, universal capacity for scientific thought, while African indigenous languages are structurally limited to emotional, descriptive, or unscientific functions. This foregrounds linguistic apartheid that denies cognitive justice to the majority of the student body, thereby blocking epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), the right of the marginalised students to think, theorise, and write from their own geographical, historical, and linguistic locations.

The contemporary neoliberalisation of South African higher education acts as a tentacle for forms of epistemic and cognitive injustices (Munyaradzi 2025; Ndlovu and Woldegiorgis 2024). The South African university currently operates under dual pressure. It has to respond to the democratic mandate for demographic transformation while simultaneously functioning as a corporate enterprise that fiercely competes for global institutional ranking systems that are fundamentally Eurocentric. To elevate and maintain their standing within the global marketplace, South African universities encounter intense structural pressure to valorise English as the language of human capital and global marketability. As a result, the intellectualisation of African languages is often dismissed by university managers operating under the market-driven logic as a costly, inefficient and economically non-viable obstacle to global competitiveness (Mugwaze 2025; Munyaradzi 2024). In that global competitiveness, most universities in Africa often treat language as an economic asset to be leveraged for institutional profit and prestige. In South Africa, and under the neoliberal university management, the national policy directives, such as the DHET amended language policy framework for public higher education, are relegated to tokenistic compliance mechanisms (Council on Higher Education 2025; Mugwaze 2025) that redefine students as consumers whose linguistic repertoire is framed for liability that hinders their integration into the Global North.

To challenge this convergence of coloniality and neoliberalism, the South African academy should embrace De Sousa Santos's (2014) call for an ecology of knowledges premised on the radical recognition that all knowledges are incomplete and that no single language or culture can claim a monopoly on understanding human existence. Adopting an ecology of diverse knowledges demands a pluriversal space where different linguistic and epistemological frameworks engage in horizontal, non-hegemonic dialogue (Wa Thiong'o 2025). Nevertheless, implementing an ecology of such knowledge systems in South African higher education is difficult without the systematic intellectualisation and pedagogical integration of indigenous languages.

When a South African university excludes indigenous languages from its lecture halls, it actively enforces a cognitive blockade against the unique ethics, values, and

ecological wisdom embedded within those languages (Alexander 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Spivak 1988). A practical example is the African indigenous concept of ubuntu, a philosophy of relational humanity and communal ethics. When ubuntu is passed through the filtering mechanism of English translation to be considered academically valid within the South African research structures, its radical and transformative essence is diluted, co-opted and forced to conform to Western individualistic paradigms (Makalela 2021; Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021). Such a concept demands to be studied, debated, and developed within and through the indigenous languages that gave them birth to retain their full theoretical and transformative potential. Mapping epistemic and cognitive justice in the neoliberalised South African university illuminates that language policy is a central battlefield for the liberation of postcolonial education.

Achieving social transformation requires dismantling the corporate, market-driven logic that views language as a commodity. Language should be embraced as an indispensable tool for epistemic liberation, democratic access, and cognitive justice. Only when African indigenous languages are fully integrated as valid, self-sustaining vehicles of scientific research and pedagogical practice can the South African university transcend its apartheid past and its neoliberalised present, transforming itself into an authentic, pluriversal space of freedom to all knowers.

Towards a Framework for Transformative, Translingual Pedagogy in Action

To move beyond a purely descriptive critique of Eurocentric linguistic hegemony, South African higher education should transition towards an actionable, disruptive classroom praxis. This article articulates a framework for a transformative translingual pedagogy (TTP), an approach to teaching and learning that strategically coordinates multilingualism to achieve epistemic justice (McKinney and Tyler 2024). TTP does not assume that translanguaging is inherently decolonial since simple multilingual mixing may easily be co-opted if underlying institutional structures remain unchanged. TTP becomes decolonial by actively confronting three variables that govern classroom dynamics: the classroom power relations, assessment practices, and lecturer competencies (Chimbunde and Brown 2026; Rakgogo 2024). The implementation of TTP requires a radical restructuring of three core areas of academic life, namely lecture hall mechanics, assessment design, and knowledge co-creation.

The traditional university lecture hall as a site of linguistic apartheid is disrupted when TTP is implemented. Rather than treating the occasional use of indigenous languages as an accident or forbidden lapse in disciplines, lecturers and academics should intentionally design bilingual and multilingual interactions (Madiba 2024). For example, a lecturer introducing complex, abstract theories could alternate between languages to maximise conceptual depth (Mbirimi-Hungwe 2023). A core theoretical concept could be introduced in English, followed by structured, small-group discussions

where students use their indigenous languages to untangle, debate, and apply the concept to their lived experiences (Mbirimi-Hungwe 2023; Yafele 2021). The groups then report back to the broader class, fluidly blending their indigenous linguistic repertoires with formal academic discourse (McKinney and Tyler 2024). Such a fluid movement ensures that students are no longer passive spectators struggling with either English or Afrikaans as a second or third language register. They become active agents who use their primary languages as high-level tools for critical thought and cognitive processing. This pedagogical shift depends on lecturer competencies. While lecturers in diverse classrooms do not need to be completely fluent in every language present in a classroom, they should possess critical multilingual awareness. This awareness helps to create a safe conversational environment and to step back as the absolute linguistic authority to validate students' fluid communicative practices as legitimate forms of cognitive processing (Garcia and Wei 2014). Such a shift promotes classroom power balance, transforming students from passive spectators struggling with a second or third language register into active agents of knowledge production.

Assessment Design and De-linking from Monolingual Gatekeeping

Translanguaging in classroom discussion remains less effective if the final assessment remains strictly monolingual. To shift from a deficit evaluation model to an epistemic one, institutions should counter exclusionary gatekeeping of monolingual English or Afrikaans examinations as models that operate on a deficit paradigm and that exclude marginalised students. To accommodate this linguistically, translanguaging in assessment would allow students to shuttle "between all their existing linguistic resources" (Ngubane 2026, 1) to demonstrate what they know and what they can do with language. This shift aligns with contemporary decolonial frameworks for academic writing that advocate structural overhaul in curriculum and assessment to disrupt Eurocentric monolingual gatekeeping and foster epistemic plurality (Nendauni 2026). Under a TTP framework, continuous assessment tasks should be redesigned to allow students to synthesise and write assignments drawing from multiple linguistic resources. Across their linguistic spectrum, for high-stakes examinations, institutions should invest in the development of multilingual examination papers where questions are presented alongside standardised translations in regionally dominant African languages. Although this is a rigorous method, it guarantees epistemic access, ensuring that a student's academic success reflects their actual intellectual capacity rather than their level of fluency in English or Afrikaans.

Knowledge Co-creation and Restructuring Language Status

Finally, a transformative pedagogy must resist neoliberal co-option, as identified by Cakata (2023), where indigenous languages are merely used to translate Western thought. TTP addresses this trap by positioning students and academics as co-creators of autonomous African knowledge, thereby elevating the socio-economic and intellectual status of African indigenous languages. This can be achieved through

collective generation of discipline-specific multilingual glossaries and the documentation of oral knowledge archives. Within specific modules, students and lecturers or academics can collaborate to build running, digital glossaries that map complex academic terms to indigenous concepts. Such a process directly implements Owolabi's (2006) pragmatic approximation process, but elevates it by asking questions such as how does this concept change, expand or shift when viewed through an African ontological lens? Furthermore, research and postgraduate assignments could incorporate oral histories, interviews conducted in indigenous languages, and community struggles recorded without Western mediation. By archiving and elevating these contributions as valid academic literature, TTP directly challenges the coloniality of knowledge, shifting the university from a mono-cultural Western archive into a pluriversal epistemic space. This structural transformation ensures TTP survives the market-driven logic of university management, provided that institutions support these initiatives with funding and embedded translingual methodologies within teacher education pipelines so that TTP becomes the baseline standard of education before students reach tertiary levels of education (Alexander 2003).

Conclusion

The article provides a conceptual analysis demonstrating that the intellectualisation of African indigenous languages is not a minor operational adjustment, but a fundamental structural pre-requisite for achieving epistemic justice and social transformation in the post-apartheid South African academy. By moving beyond descriptive critiques of Eurocentric hegemony, the article has developed a theoretical synthesis that bridges macro-level language planning and micro-level classroom interactions. This synthesis reveals that while macro-level language intellectualisation provides institutional resources and structural validation necessary for indigenous languages to generate independent thought, micro-level translanguaging serves as the fluid vehicle through which multilingual students negotiate and assert their identity as legitimate knowers and knowledge creators. The central contribution of the article is the framework for a pedagogy, which theorises how the South African university can move beyond token compliance mechanisms. TTP addresses the underlying power dynamics of the lecture hall, delinks forms of assessment from monolingual gatekeeping, and elevates the intellectual status of indigenous languages through co-creation of autonomous African knowledge. Ultimately, the TTP framework demonstrates that resisting the market-driven, corporate logic of the neoliberal university requires more than an additive inclusion of languages. It demands an ontological and epistemological restructuring of pedagogical spaces. By structurally leveraging fluid translingual practices and backing them with robust institutional resources, South African universities can transcend the colonial past and corporate present, transforming the academy into an inclusive, pluriversal space of freedom for all knowers.

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