

(Re)Constructing Identities:

South African Domestic Workers,
English Language Learning,
and Power

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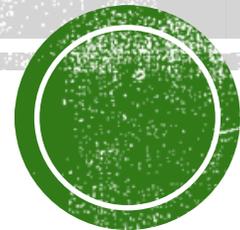
Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy

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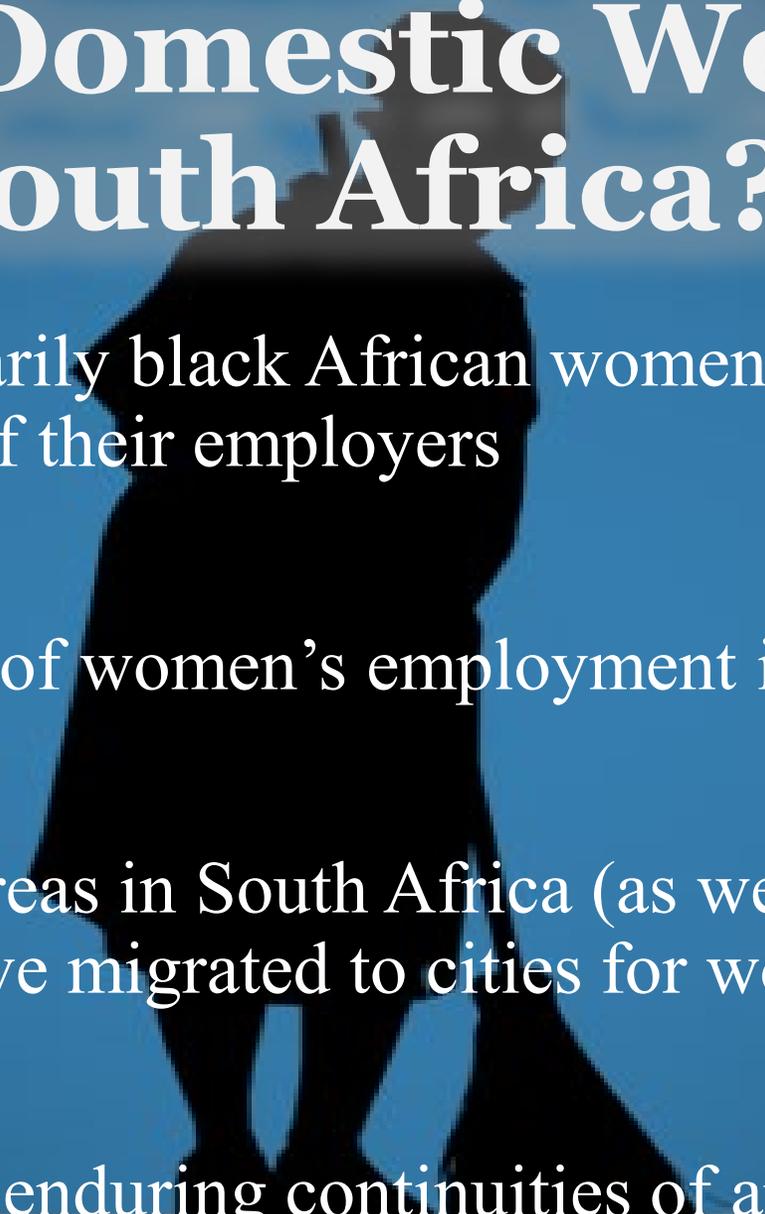
Brown Bag Series, 2020

PSU College of Education Learning and Performance Systems Department/

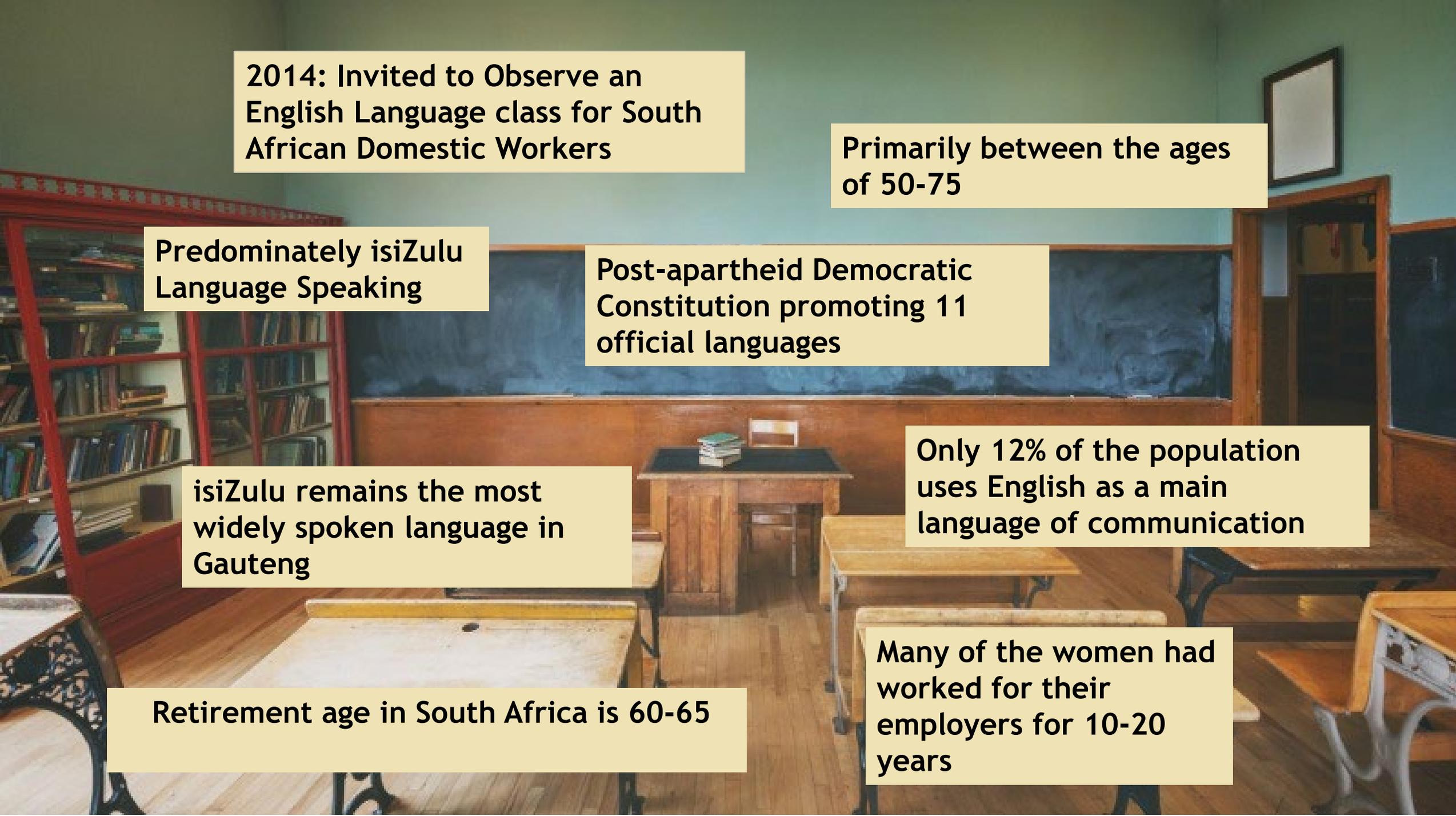
Comparative and International Education Program



Who are Domestic Workers in South Africa?

A black silhouette of a woman wearing a long, flowing dress, standing with her hands at her sides. The silhouette is centered in the background of the slide, behind the text.

- Often women (and primarily black African women) who both work in and often live in the homes of their employers
- The largest single sector of women's employment in South Africa
- Often come from rural areas in South Africa (as well as growing numbers from Zimbabwe) and have migrated to cities for work
- They remain “one of the enduring continuities of apartheid in contemporary South Africa” (Ally, 2011, p. 8).

A photograph of a classroom with wooden desks and a chalkboard. The room has light green walls and a wooden floor. There are bookshelves on the left side of the room. The text boxes are overlaid on the image.

2014: Invited to Observe an English Language class for South African Domestic Workers

Primarily between the ages of 50-75

Predominately isiZulu Language Speaking

Post-apartheid Democratic Constitution promoting 11 official languages

isiZulu remains the most widely spoken language in Gauteng

Only 12% of the population uses English as a main language of communication

Retirement age in South Africa is 60-65

Many of the women had worked for their employers for 10-20 years

Research Questions

- What personal, social, and historical forces shape South African domestic workers' desires to learn English?
- What role does language education play in the lives of these participants?
- Why might these participants focus on learning English specifically rather than increasing literacy skills in other languages such as their native languages?



Brief Historical Overview: English in South Africa

Pre-Apartheid

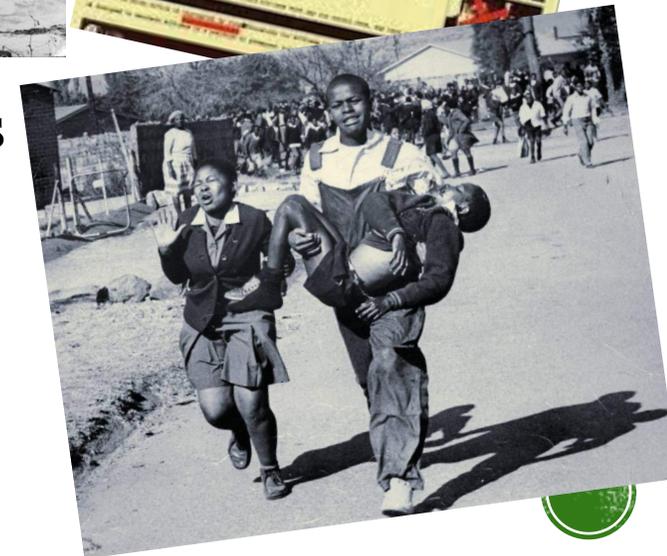
- **1652: Dutch Colonize Cape of Good Hope**
 - Later developed into Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaners
- **1795: British arrival to Cape of Good Hope**
 - English becomes language of public administration
- **1814: English established as the formal language of the colony**
 - British missionaries used English as medium of instruction for native learners
- **Provoked immense resistance amongst the Dutch/Afrikaners**
- **1925: Afrikaans declared official language along with English**



Brief Historical Overview: English in South Africa

During Apartheid

- 1948: Apartheid Implemented
- 1953: Bantu Education Act Enforced
- Promotion of Afrikaans language as dominant language as well as “mother tongue” education
- 1976: Soweto Uprisings- English becomes a main language of protest



Brief Historical Overview: English in South Africa

Post-Apartheid

- 1994: Apartheid ends
- 1996: 11 official languages implemented in democratic constitution
- Policies and practices seeking to further implement African language teaching and learning
- AND YET...
- Residual feelings of “mother-tongue” language of instruction as a form of oppression remain evident
- English remains connected to past protest and current power (Kamwangamalu, 2007; Wet & Wolhuter, 2009)



Domestic Work in South Africa

- *18th century*: Began as a form of slavery
- *Early 19th century*: British settlers brought white servants from England
 - Upon arrival, many married- shifted domestic servitude from an occupation of white European women to one of black African women
- *1921-1936*: Urbanization of domestic “servants”
- *1986*: South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) formed
- *1996*: Democratic constitution focuses on Domestic “Workers” rather than “Servants”
- Continued low levels of education and political /social support for domestic workers today



■ *“I think it's almost that they're the forgotten generation. I think you've got to understand them and locate them in the context of the country. The Bantu Education Act of 1953- they were victims of that...they are also products of the migrant labor system and that was a system in which they were taken away from their families or their homelands, right? And they were supposed to work in these commercial white centers, or white South African centers... I think in so many ways, government has done a lot in terms of ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training), which is providing education for older people, but I think society has, to a large extent, forgotten these women”*

- (Emmanuel, personal communication, September 1, 2015)



Data Collection

- **Research over a 3 year span (2014-2016)**
- **3 main sites:**
 - *Site #1: Gauteng English Literacy Program*
 - *Site #2: Johannesburg English Classes*
 - *Site #3: Word of Mouth in an Affluent Johannesburg Suburb*
- **28 South African Domestic Workers**
- **7 Supplemental Participants (Educators/Researchers/Policy Makers)**
- **Data Collection:** Interviews, Narratives, and Participant Observation; use of HERstories (Kaiper, 2018); Policy Analysis



Name of Participant	Age	Site #	Home Language(s)	Other Languages Spoken	Received Matric	Years in Domestic Work	Family members in Domestic Work	Dream Job
Alile	42	#3	Chichewa	isiZulu, Afrikaans, English	Unknown	7 years	Grandmother, mother	Start a small business in Malawi
Amahle	50	#2	isiZulu	seTswana, sePedi, Tsonga, isiXhosa, English, Fanagalo	No	30 years	Mother	Publish a book in English about her life story
Bernice	54	#3	seTswana	Afrikaans, English, isiZulu	Yes	30+ years	Mother	Own a Spaza shop in Rustenburg
Bongi	45	#1	seSotho, isiZulu	English, Afrikaans	No	15+ years	Unknown	Nurse
Clara	66	#3	xiTsonga	isiZulu, Afrikaans, English	No	35 years	Sister, Cousin	Nurse

Combined Methodologies

- **Critical Ethnographic Narrative Analysis (CENA)** (Kaiper, 2018)



Critical
Narrative
Analysis
(Souto Manning,
2012)

Critical
Discourse
Analysis
(Fairclough, 1992a;
1992b; 2013; 2015)

Theoretical Framework

**Poststructural
Theories of
Language,
Identity, and
Power**

(Bourdieu, 1991; Butler,
1997; Norton, 1997; 2013;
Weedon, 1997)

**Postcolonial
Theories of
English Language
Learning**

(Brock-Utne, 2015; Heugh,
2007; Pennycook, 2013;
Praah, 2009)



“Education” and “Literacy”

“Education” and “Literacy” act as
metonyms for “English language
literacy” and “English language
education”

Zothile: Yeah, I'm not feeling good because as I say, I'm not educated.

Anna: You are educated!

Z: Yes. I've got a matric certificate but the problem is that I didn't go to college or university and then I ended up being a domestic worker. At least I have a chance to go to school. Even if I don't know English, proper English, but I'm happy that I get that. I know to write my name, I know to fill out the forms, I know to understand some of the words. I'm ok for now.

A: Do you consider English a sign of education? Like if someone speaks English well then they're more educated, and if someone doesn't speak English then they're not as educated?

Z: Yeah, because the people who know English very well, they think the people that don't know English very well- they think they're stupid. They think that she is a useless one because she don't know English.

The 1997 Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training

- ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) is directly linked to notions of becoming literate
- Literacy is connected to “intellectual and cultural development”

? *What languages are connected with “being literate”?*

“the right of every student to be instructed in the language of his or her choice where this is reasonable and practicable”

- Use of hedging every time language choice is being:
 - “where this is reasonable and practicable”
 - “when appropriate”
 - “when possible”



“the Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles reveals that **in South African English** the word **maid** denotes both **‘black woman’** and **‘servant’**” (Baderoon, 2014, p. 173)



R
Anna: And
understand

Anna: Is it difficult to talk to me because I'm white?

ish- I mean, I
think

Bernice: You can talk to me nice but you're not nice. **Nobody trusts the white people.** She can talk to you very nice, but if you go to her house, she's not nice anymore. **You know people, the black people who are working in the kitchens are dying because you iron too much, you work too much.** At night you go to the room, **you're tired, your feet are tired and swollen.** If you go take a bath the next day to relieve your pain, she says "don't take a bath because it is too expensive to heat up the water."

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just as

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you're



Inter

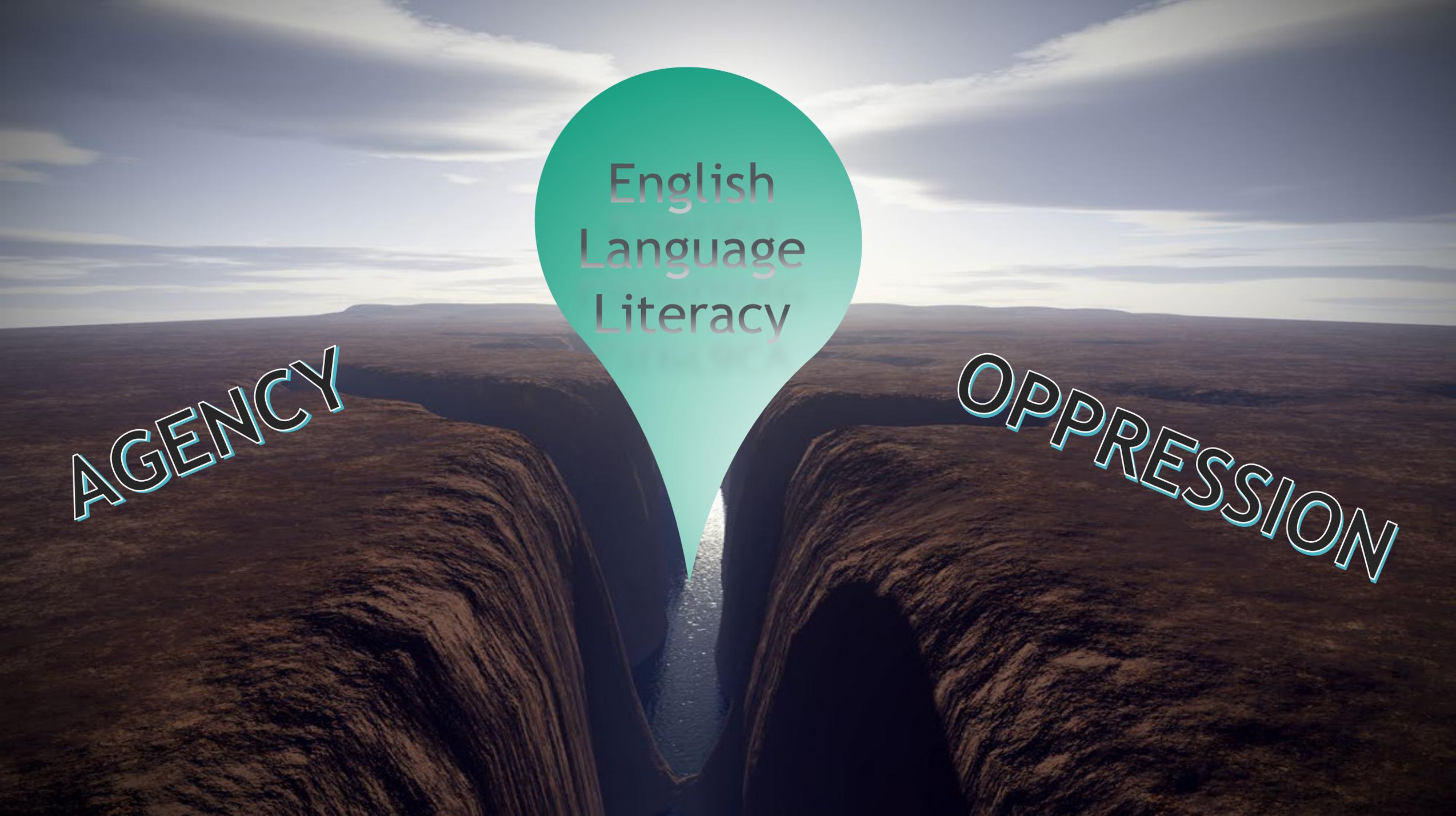
Rose: That is why I say to you I love the English. Because I hear now what you are saying. One day it was May. Now again he (Rose's employer) shouted at me again. I got so cross cross cross cross. My madam said "hey Rose hey." I said "hello." She said "what's wrong?" I said "I'm so cross and double cross and double cross. He shouted at me in front of people. No. If I'm wrong, you must take me to the side. You must talk with me." Now the people know if they see me, they see I'm not stupid.

Thuli: When Nelson Mandela came into office, I knew that English would be really important in this country. Maybe people will say I'm being brainwashed, but English is the only language that you can communicate with other Africans and with White people. And it's the language that I talk to Karrie (Thuli's employer) in.

Anna: Thuli, I've been meaning to ask you a question. Do you always call Karrie "Karrie" or did she ever ask you to call her "madam"?

T: You know what Anna? Every woman is a madam. I am a madam just like Karrie is. Karrie's friend- her friend Leti- told Karrie that I was treated more like a madam in the house than like a maid. I said "you know what? We are like flowers. We are each different colors and I happen to be black. But when we cut ourselves, we all bleed the same color." I deserve to be treated like a madam just like everyone else.



A landscape photograph of a deep canyon with a river flowing through it. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. A teal callout bubble is positioned in the center of the canyon, containing the text 'English Language Literacy'. The word 'AGENCY' is written in a stylized, outlined font on the left side of the canyon, and 'OPPRESSION' is written in a similar font on the right side.

English
Language
Literacy

AGENCY

OPPRESSION

So What?



- **While the South African democratic constitution supports multilingualism, and although the importance of multilingual literacy is reinforced through numerous educational policies, learners throughout South Africa continue to make links between being literate, being educated, and knowing English.**
- **The connections between education, domestic work, and language produce forms of symbolic violence (which can exacerbate verbal and physical violence).**
- **South African domestic workers live within interstices in which they are showcasing aspects of agency and autonomy in their work, home, and educational spaces while concurrently remaining within the boundaries of metonymic and historic discourse that binds them to these spaces.**



While **current theories and research** surrounding adult education and language learning often **ignore the intricacies of adult learners' narratives** and **disregard how researchers impact the narratives** being produced and the analyses being made, this neglect produces **stagnant theories, policies, and practices** that **overlook the changing nature of identities, of histories, and of language itself.**

Ke ya leboga

Ke a leboha

Ke a leboga

Ngiyabonga

Ndiyabulela

Ngiyathokoza

Ngiyabonga

Inkomu

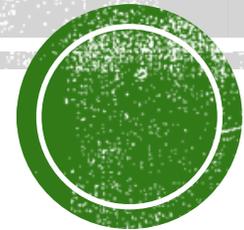
Ndi khou livhuha

Dankie

Thank you



QUESTIONS?



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