Multilingualism as racialization

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Abstract

South African today remains a nation torn by violence and racial inequity. One of major challenges for its people is to create new futures across historically constituted racial divides, by finding ways to engage with each other across difference. In this regard, multilingualism holds out the promise of offering a way of bridging difference and opening spaces for engagement and empathy with Others. Today contemporary constructs of multilingualism, both in policy and everyday practice, continue to reinforce racialized divisions inherited from historical uses of language as a tool of colonialism, and a mechanism of governmentality in apartheid, the system of exploitation and state sanctioned institutional racism. In this paper we seek to demonstrate how multilingualism has always been, and remains today, an 'epistemic' site for managing constructed racialized diversity. In order to do so we trace periods of South Africa's history. By way of conclusion, we suggest that alternative linguistic orders require a decolonial rethinking of the role of language(s) in epistemic, social and political life.

INTRODUCTION

South African today remains a nation torn by violence and racial inequity. One of major challenges for its people is to create new futures across historically constituted racial divides, by finding ways to engage with each other across difference. In this regard, multilingualism holds out the promise of offering a way of bridging difference and opening spaces for engagement and empathy with Others. However, our point in this paper is that multilingualism has always been, and remains today, an 'epistemic' site for managing constructed racialized diversity. Contemporary constructs of multilingualism, both in policy and everyday practice, continue to reinforce racialized divisions inherited from historical uses of language as a tool of colonialism, and a mechanism of governmentality in apartheid, the system of exploitation and state sanctioned institutional racism. In order to illustrate this, we trace in section 2 the ways in which constructs of multilingualism are entwined with racialization as a building block of South African imaginary. In section 3, we focus particularly on present day constructs/ practices of multilingualism that centre decoloniality, social transformation, equitable education and livelihoods, and that encapsulate a dynamics of a society in transformation. In this

context, we discuss tensions in racialized multilingualism, as well as the limitations inherent in inherited constructs of multilingualism for new modes of co-existence across racialized differences. We suggest that at the present time, there a few opportunities for scoping a more constructive understanding of multilingualism within the prevailing discourses of liberal enlightenment views of language and race. By way of conclusion, we suggest that alternative linguistic orders require a decolonial rethinking of the role of language(s) in epistemic, social and political life.

SENSES OF MULTILINGUALISM

The current official account of multilingualism in South Africa since the democratic dispensation in 1996 delimits 11 official languages among a population of 56 million. This representation of multilingualism is the democratic state's recognition and repatriation of the indigenous languages that were not accorded official recognition by apartheid, but relegated to Bantustans. However, it is one conceptualization of multilingualism among a multitude, as the South African multilingual landscape has been construed and represented variously at different historical moments, as diverse representations and values of languages and their relationships (Woolard, 1998:3) have emerged out of turbulent moments of social and political change. In particular, it is an attempt to linguistically articulate the image of the 'rainbow nation'. Different multilingualisms reflect the complex socio-politics of colonialism and apartheid, the state sanctioned and institutionalized system of racial segregation, as well as the country's post-apartheid, democratic dispensation since

1994. Above all, multilingualism has been part of the many attempts of the State and its institutions throughout history to manage racialization, a foundational pillar of its design. Marx (1996: 163) remarks on how the State "emerges as a central actor in race-making, as it is the subject of contestation and responds to various challenges from the society in which is is embedded" and that "racial identities […] do not quickly fade even if the conditions that reinforced them changed" (p. 207). In South Africa, as the nation-state has engaged with the turbulence of 'change', different notions of race have superseded each other. Rasool remarks on the South African people's "long histories of racialization, of enracement, deracement and retracement" (ms.nd: 1). Across all of these conjunctures, reorganizations and turbulent shifts of state and race, multilingualism has served as the epistemic space and semiotic articulation of different racialized normative orders.

We can distinguish 4 distinct periods reflected in ideologies of multilingualism that roughly correspond to major shifts in the politics and economy of the country; (1) colonialism (2) apartheid (3) the negotiated settlement, and (4) the democratic dispensation. We trace underlying structural-ideological similarities across seemingly different constructs of multilingualism, and attempt to identify the subtext of parallel, emerging, ideologies of multilingualism yet to be clearly articulated.

Colonialism

Colonial understandings of languages and their speakers were an integral part of managing the colonial-imperial encounter. In all essentials, European constructs of language and linguistic diversity were mapped onto the linguistic space of colonized Africa. The historian

Patrick Harries notes with respect to missionary linguistic activity with the language Tsonga in the 'Transvaal' province in the North East that many of the linguistic givens and truths believed by the Swiss missionaries to be scientifically incontrovertible were, in fact, social constructs whose roots may be traced to nineteenth-century European codes of thought (1995: p, 162).

One such 'truth' was the mapping of languages onto bounded units of organization such as tribes and clans. These were European pre-feudal notions of social organization that allowed the missionaries to categorize and 'efficiently' manage people on terms they themselves were best acquainted with from their own contexts. Similarly, colonizers used European paradigms/ models of historical migration and mixture of peoples and their languages to account for what they understood to be unbridled linguistic hybridity and chaotic diversity of the African linguistic ecology. The missionaries found ready categorizations of the cultural traits and spirit of their tribes by mapping them onto a Franco-German rivalries model where for example Zulu's were likened to Germans as ferocious but industrious (1995: 163). One consequence of this was the production of an imaginary of shared ancestral languages across tribes, made distinct through separation and warfare, but possible to reclaim through tools of historical reconstruction (cf. also Makoni, 1998; Pennycook and Makoni, 2005) .

Veronelli (2016) refers to the notion of the coloniality of language as the "coloniality of power in its linguistic form: a process of dehumanization through racialization at the level of communication" (408). Coloniality refers to the patterns of power, control and hegemonic systems of knowledge that continue to determine forms of control and meaning across social orders, even subsequent to colonialism as a social, military or economic order. The other axis of coloniality is modernity, the specific organization of relationships of domination. The coloniality-modernity nexus that undergirds South African policies and practices of racialized multilingualism from colonialism until today

Apartheid

Building from earlier institutional and structural conditions2, racial segregation as an all- encompassing design of South African society was formally introduced with the election of the National Party in 1945. Apartheid was about structural and institutionalised racism through the implementation of judicially upheld racially discriminatory policies, for example, the prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949. From the 60s to the 80s, apartheid was best known in its guise of the Group Areas Act which reserved prime land for whites and forcibly removed other races to peripheral areas.

The apartheid idea of racial purity and national homogeneity found a potent resonance in the politically engineered cultivation of language and multilingualism as racial bordering, a massive investment in distinguishing people and languages following the European nation- state principle of one 'volk', one nation, one language. Because of the aversion of Afrikaners to entertaining a conceptualization of Afrikaans as "the result of a cross between the speech of the early settlers and the prattle of their black slaves" (Barnouw,1934: 20), language planning of Afrikaans was organized around three principles: (a) diachronic purism , that is, the idea that "Afrikaans is as

white and pure as the race" (Valkoff, 1971); (b) albocentrism, the stance that only the versions of the language spoken by whites could be an object of study; and (c) compartimentage, where different varieties of Afrikaans were studied as distinct phenomena, with then contemporary forms of standard Afrikaans seen as a direct and linear descendant of Dutch and subject to systemic change through internal factors alone (Valkoff, 1971).

The apartheid emphasis on 'bordering work'- and its embrace of the eighteenth century idea that single languages were constitutive of the nation-state – "justified" the artificial creation of territories for ethnolinguistically defined groups and a "balkanized state" (the so-called homelands or Bantustans) (Heugh, 2016: 236). All previous attempts at so-called harmonization of African languages (Nlapo 1944, 1945; cf. further references in Heugh, 2016), to a few orthographically unified 'clusters' as a way to counteract the colonially engineered linguistic divisiveness were quashed by the apartheid formation of separate language committees in 1957.

Negotiated settlement

The negotiated settlement in the twilight years of the apartheid state had as its overriding goal the construction of a non-racial order. The government in waiting, the African National Congress (ANC), embraced non-racialism as a founding principle of the new democracy. In exile, this had translated ideologically into the wide use of English as the language of the liberation movement, and as a perceived neutral language, and a medium for equality, aspiration and national development (Heugh, 2016). Albert Luthuli, one of the founding leaders of the party had always been explicitly in favour of English as a language of unification, and had earlier vehemently rejected education in African languages (so-called

Bantu education) as a strategic ruse on behalf of the apartheid state to divide and dispossess Africans. In line with this, the National English Language Project (NELP) was formed in 1985 on the initiative of Neville Alexander. The NELP put forward the idea of English as the link language together with a small number of secondary languages as regional languages. Alexander subsequently also suggested harmonization to two language clusters in order to "unify the nation (Heugh 2016).3

Given the lacklustre experiences among newly independent colonies that had chosen the languages of the former colonial metropole, it was inevitable that the NELP's promotion of English would be critically questioned. In 1987, following contributions by Kathleen Heugh in particular, multilingualism in African languages was recognized as an essential condition in the broader struggle for a free, democratic and united South Africa. As a result the NELP was re-conceptualized in 1987 as the, the National Language Project (NLP) (cf. Heugh 2016). In particular, the NLP emphasized the importance of the educational use of African languages for democratic and equitable development and access.

The period prior to the inauguration of a democratic South Africa was one of intense work on sketching the contours of a multilingual language policy for the new State to be. The historical landmark conference under the auspices of the NLP on the cusp of democracy (1991, planned in 1987) entitled Democratic Approaches to Language Planning and Standardization introduced an unprecedented range

and complexity of understandings of multilingualism into political debate. Besides reopening discussions around African language harmonization from the 1920s and 40s, the conference put forward notions of multilingualism as "more than the sum of discrete languages and linguistic balkanization", and as a "complex ecology of language practices […] ranging over grassroots and fluid practices of languages to a more conventional and hierarchical language construct" (Heugh, and Stroud 2019) – what Heugh (1996) termed functional multilingualism. During the period of 1992-1995, a resource view of language came to complement the initial discourses on language rights (Language Plan Task Group, 1995:111). Perhaps most importantly, although less noted, was the challenge to the exclusivity of the State in language planning, and the emphasis put on the necessary involvement of non-government bodies. Regrettably very few of these many insights were followed through in the concrete roll out of the democratic state.

In retrospect, it is remarkable that little attention was paid to the racial underpinnings of the linguistic order that the language planners inherited. Witz et al (2017) note how "the idea of discrete races and ethnic groups was somehow present in the politics of accommodation and reconciliation that gave birth to post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, with South Africans framed as a 'rainbow nation' marked by diversity and many cultures". Rasool (ms, nd) notes how "as much as race was made through structures and systems of rule, it was also produced through articulations and contests within different sections of the broad liberation movement, notwithstanding their avowed antiracism" (ms, p. 1) The idea of non-racialism defaulted to a liberal enlightenment idea of equal treatment of blacks and whites; of recognition, parity of treatment and legislative incorporation into State structures and public spaces. It did not mean the dismantling as such of the idea of race. However, recognition of indigenous languages and their speakers did not equate to the recognition of the deeply racialized colonial subjectivities layered into African languages. Neither did it offer strategic interruption of the historical mechanisms of multilingualism in the continued reproduction of these subjectivities. As one more mode of racialization, multilingualism would become apparent in the roll-out of the 'postracial state'.

The democratic dispensation

Formal transition to democracy came with the general election of the ANC to government in 1994 and the writing of the Constitution 1996. The new language policy became a central part of the structural replacement of the apartheid State. Alexander (1998:1) noted that "unless linguistic human rights and the equal status and usage of African languages were translated into practice, the democratization of South Africa [the country will] remain in the realm of mere rhetoric." Not surprisingly, the implementation of the language policy came to focus on institutional structures, such as legalization to encourage the promotion and use of African languages in all public spaces. The belief in 'multilingualism' as an 'instrument' of social and epistemological justice became embedded in national policy, state institutions (education being the most important) and so-called Chapter 9 institutions, such as the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb), the brief of which was to protect the rights of all languages and their speakers. Through recognition and institutional accommodation of 'diversity', a once divided nation would be unified by

"maximizing the democratic potential of social formations within which South Africans lived" (Alexander, 2003:9) .

The tension identified (although not elaborated) in the conference Democratic Approaches to Language Planning and Standardization between a multilingualism of state institutions and a more fluid and bottom-up construct came to a head in conjunction with the implementation of the Language in Education Policy (DOE 1997). The wording of the document is replete with radical wordings such as 'fluidity', and the recognition of a spectrum of multilingual practices and engagements with pupils' repertoires. However, when the proposals were inserted into the practicalities of everyday, institutionalized schooling, what was an expansive, generous and complex construct of multilingualism defaulted to a traditional hierarchical relationship between English/Afrikaans and African languages (Heugh and Stroud, 2019). Even more insidiously, the policy overtime has undergirded an increasing monolingualization as modus operandi in the school system, and increasingly so in catchment areas of great diversity. It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into the concrete details of these developments. Nevertheless, defaulting to monolingual English schooling is likely one part of a much wider 'capture' or 'repopulation' of State and private structures by elites (black and white) for whom English is a capital investment in increasingly transnational markets of 'whiteness' (see Christie and McKinney, 2017). In other words, state institutions have despite the good intentions of their architects defaulted to an increasing monolingual whitening as a motor of elite privilege.

POST-RACIAL SOUTH AFRICA

The tension identified in the conference between State management of language and bottom- up initiatives has come to characterize developments around multilingualism in South Africa in the last 5 years explicitly. More generally, complex strands of historical debate continue to re-surface in different configurations and with different stakeholders, and contemporary ideological constructs of multilingualism are best seen as kaleidoscopes of inherited fragments of past multilingualisms, and contemporary subtexts or responses to these. As noted above, education has been – and remains – one of the key sites for the production and circulation of ideologies on multilingualism. The school is where the complex interweaving of subjectivities, bodies, and aesthetics with different languages created under colonialism and apartheid are most visible (cf. Veronelli, 2016; Williams and Stroud, 2017). It is a space in the South African context where inter-racial and 'inter-lingual' relationships are played out on a daily basis, and where tensions in differently racialized constructs of language and multilingualism, as well as tensions between grassroots and institutions, are increasingly taking centre stage and finding their most explicit articulations. On the one hand, the school is a prototypical force for integration, segregation and disciplining; on the other, it is also an institution rich with potential for change.

School policies and practices reflect the weight given to English in South African society generally and the belief that African languages constitute a hinder for learning it. Colonial and apartheid values of the inferiority of African languages, and the superiority

of metropolitan languages remain strong: The equation of English with intelligence and academic ability, and streaming according to English language ability serve to reinforce the indexical weights and values given to English and African languages and perpetuate a monolingual mind-set (Makoe and McKinney, 2014: 669). The variety of English valued in schools is white South African English and 'ethnolinguistic' repertoires of whiteness more generally (Makoe and McKinney, 2016), while township accents or Black Englishes - are delegitimized. Teachers step out of teaching content subjects (such as Maths) to produce disciplinary asides in order to correct learners on, for example, points of English pronunciation. Makoe and McKinney (2014: 669) note how despite their multilingual proficiencies, African language speakers are seen as deficient monolinguals, and schools produce dominant ideologies of "linguistic homogeneity and inequity".

Former elite (white) schools are taking African languages off the curriculum in accordance with the Basic Education Department's New Curriculum Policy that only one first additional language should be offered, and less time is given in the curriculum for any other language than English and Afrikaans. In fact, African language parents have also voiced unhappiness with their perception that the variety of the African language taught is debased: Schools teach 'Kitchen Zulu' (Ntombeble Nkosi (Chief Executive Officer of Pansalb). This then is not just a 'monolingual' bias, but a particular white language bias, a situation that reproduces apartheid language hierarchies/regimes (Makoe and McKinney, 2014). Such a predominant 'white positionality' on language matters is nicely captured in the words of one member of a prominent

Governing Body Foundation, who publicly stated in 2017 that; Afrikaans is a much easier language to master. There are no clicks, the vocabulary and the structure are part of the same family of languages as English and therefore easier to pick up…

One reaction to the racialization of language – that incidentally also clearly illustrates bodily invasive features of 'language ideology' comes from a Cape Town elite girls' school. The school habitually penalized the children for speaking isiXhosa on the school premises, formally noting the transgression in a special book. The language prohibition was one part of a more extensive 'black' disciplinary discourse, formalized in the Code of Conduct, that stipulated that learners must keep their 'hair tidy'. Students were literally chastised to the very fibres of their black body, and took widely to social media in attempts to change antiquated codes of conduct and propriety modelled on whiteness (see Christie and McKinney, 2017).

Beyond the more institutionalized (non)use of named languages, is the way in which school children us multiple languages to circumvent official racial categories. Kerfoot's (2016) important study of primary school learners in a low-income neighbourhood in Cape Town showed how students' strategic use of repertoires in encounters across (racial) difference contributed new identity-building resources. Among other things, they used multiple languages also as as a means of shaping new interaction orders - restructuring hierarchies of value and subverting racial indexicalities, and sometimes even resignifiying the very meanings of racial categories.

CONCLUSION

Any singular notion of multilingualism obscures the centuries' long, shifting

idea of language and conceals the de facto complexity and multiplicity of multilingualism(s) as plural responses to moments of turbulent transition. Throughout South African history, State structures, policies and institutions have engaged with constructs of the nation-state that are deeply racialized, with either the goal of constructing, separating and disempowering 'non- white races' or in order to further social transformation through addressing historically race-based inequalities. In both cases, the default is a celebration of 'whiteness', itself an ever- changing construct (Alcoff, 2015), deeply entangled with transnational, neoliberal marketization. Constructs of multilingualism have been central as epistemological and strategic sites for the play of racialized state dynamics. They have been heavily determined by racial bordering, from the early beginnings of first colonial contact until today. As part of a larger discursive regime, or battery of historical procedures and institutionalized discourses, they have helped either to invisibilize or discipline the black body, or attempted to re-stylize it and its relationships to whiteness. We have touched on how fragments of institutionally racialized ideologies of multilingualism appear in the contemporary thoughts and practices of the everyday, highlighting specifically how speakers deploy and attempt to circumvent (not always successfully) these constructs of language in their everyday practice (see also Guzula, McKinney and Tyler, 2006; Krause and Prinsloo, 2016; Makoe and McKinney, 2009).

By way of brief conclusion, there is clearly a need to re-think multilingualism as a 'semiotics of relationality', the articulation in language(s) (or other forms of semiosis) of relationships between individuals, groups and/or institutions, and its role as a site for racial contestation.

A rethought multilingualism can provide one necessary space to interrogate the 'unmaking' of race.

NOTES:

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2 An important moment (not covered here) was the racialized defeat in the South African war of Afrikaners by the British, and the formation of the Union of South Africa. Rasool ms notes that Afrikaners, a creole population of slave and Khoesan ancestry ultimately only really became white at this juncture. This whiteness was to assert itself in Afrikaner nationalism and later apartheid.

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