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School language profiles: valorizing linguistic resources in heteroglossic situations in South Africa

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Although South Africa is committed to a policy of linguistic diversity, the language-in-education policy is still plagued by the racialization of language issues under apartheid and, more recently, by new challenges posed by internal African migration. Drawing on the experience of a school in the Western Cape Province, this paper explores the role of language profiles in a speaker-centered approach to school language policy. Attention is paid to the ways in which the attribution of learners to clear-cut linguistic categories – in this case English and Afrikaans – and their ‘monolingualization’ within the process of literacy learning are at odds with both their everyday experiences of language and their linguistic aspirations. Using biographic and topological multimodal approaches with 13- to 15-year-old students at the school, it makes a contribution to the growing corpus of research that foregrounds the learner perspective and emphasizes emotional dimensions of literacy and language learning.

Keywords: South Africa; heteroglossia; language policy; language profiles

Introduction: a learner centered approach to school language policy

The recognition of some 11 official languages in the 1993 South African Constitution has attracted considerable attention. However, progress in transforming the principles embedded in the Constitution into a coherent language-in-education policy has been slow. Drawing on the experience of a school in the Western Cape Province that has attempted to draft a school language policy using a learner-centered approach, this paper will provide insights into the complex language repertoires of a group of children in a Cape Town school. It will explore the ways in which monolingually oriented language ideologies and ascriptions of distinct social/linguistic identities can fuel tensions and conflict within a school community. More specifically, it will show how school language profiles can be used to highlight linguistic hierarchies and suggest possible ways forward.

A learner-centered school language policy acknowledges and valorizes the resources and aspirations that the school community – learners, teachers and parents – bring with them. It refuses to reduce the heteroglossia of individual speakers either to monolingualism or to a dichotomy between ‘mother tongue’ and ‘target language’. The awareness of diversity not only in the sense of a multitude of separate and bounded language communities but also within a community, within a network of communication or within a given situation relies on the concept of heteroglossia, i.e. the multilinguality, the multivoicedness and the multidiscursivity of society, developed by Bakhtin (1981). Such an approach views multilingualism in terms of situated practices and not as abstract and absolute competences.

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The idea of a perfect mastery of two or more languages is dismissed in favor of the notion of multilingual competencies organized around activities, situations and topics. In this view, linguistic practice differing from the normalized standard, such as language crossing (Rampton 2005), or the appropriation of elements across language boundaries, is understood as resource rather than as deficiency.

This paper explores the role which a biographic approach¹ to language profiles can play in the development of a school language policy, highlighting how individual actors experience the broader social context for their language practices, their ambitions and desires. Although this approach relies on individual narratives, it is not primarily interested in the uniqueness of a particular life story but rather in the social dimensions of the language practices and ideologies that it exposes. The value ascribed to particular language practices cannot be understood in isolation from the people who employ them or the larger networks and social relationships in which they are engaged. We understand repertoire not as static but as a bundle of linguistic dispositions subject to transformation or modification over time. Similar to Bourdieu's (1986) notion of habitus, the notion of 'dispositions' refers, on the one hand, to knowledge of language varieties, registers and pragmatics and, on the other hand, to the emotions (Pavlenko 2007) and desires (Kramsch 2006) linked to linguistic practices.

The paper examines the assumptions underlying a learner-centered approach to school language policy. Against the background of the post-apartheid language-in-education policy, it introduces the linguistic situation of the community in which Riverside School is based, explaining why it was decided to experiment with dual-medium English and Afrikaans classes as a means of addressing growing tensions between the separate English and Afrikaans streams. Next, it describes a specific intervention in the form of a workshop with students, discussions and interviews with teachers and an analysis of the linguistic landscape of the school. Finally, the implications for policy implementation of making linguistic diversity more visible are considered.

Language-in-education policy in South Africa

Language-in-education policy in the apartheid era in South Africa reflected a divide-and-rule strategy, which stipulated that each 'ethnic' group was to be taught in its own language. English and Afrikaans enjoyed equal status, although a de facto affirmative action policy was implemented in favor of Afrikaans-speaking whites (Alexander and Heugh 1999, 19). Language policy also played a role in the struggle against apartheid: the 1976 Soweto uprising was triggered by protests against attempts to establish Afrikaans as the main language of education by school students classified as black or colored. In post-apartheid South Africa, in contrast, language is seen as an important element in nation-building and language policy; its aim is to make linguistic diversity visible. The 1993 Constitution recognizes 11 official languages (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu). The raising of the status of the nine African languages was thus designed to reverse the effects of decades of language engineering.

Constitutional recognition of language rights, however, has yet to be translated into a coherent language-in-education policy (Plüddemann et al. 2004; Braam 2004, 9). Since the 1990s, Afrikaans has been seen mostly as the language of the oppressor, and English has been preferred in all public domains. Despite this, Afrikaans has remained the first language and the main language of communication among large sections of the formerly classified colored population in the rural areas of the Western Cape. Two basic tendencies have been

observed in Western Cape schools: the decision of isiXhosa-speaking families to send their children to previously English and Afrikaans mainstream schools and the growing interest in English as the medium of instruction. These developments have occurred at the expense of learners' home languages, with the consequence that Afrikaans and isiXhosa have become marginalized, even in those areas where English is used rarely or not at all by families or in daily communication. The failure to exploit children's first languages in learning and teaching is seen as one of the main reasons for underachievement and high dropout rates (Alexander 2000).

Constructing and deconstructing languages as categories

Riverside School² is located in the Cape Flats, a mixed working- and lower-middle-class area to the southeast of the central business district of Cape Town, where those able to find employment work mainly in nearby factories, orchards and vegetable gardens. Under apartheid, the Cape Flats was reserved for so-called coloreds, i.e. those classified as neither white nor black. Although most residents understand both Afrikaans and English, language is clearly a marker of social class. On one side of the river which runs through the area, lower-income residents speaking mostly Afrikaans are housed in blocks of flats. On the other side, their slightly more affluent neighbors live in rows of small houses; most of them originally spoke Afrikaans but have shifted to English later in life. While Afrikaans remains the most commonly spoken language in the Western Cape, English is considered the language of social mobility.

Until 1990, Afrikaans had been the sole language of instruction at Riverside. Ever since the introduction of English-medium classes, the demand for English has grown steadily. The school has two separate parallel streams from grades one to seven, one taught through the medium of Afrikaans, the other through English. Even parents whose children grow up only with Afrikaans increasingly insist on enrolling their children in the English stream (Braam 2004, 22). Differences in the socioeconomic status, attitudes toward literacy and the school enrollment policy all aggravate the cleavages between the two language streams. These differences are also mirrored in exam results, with a higher failure rate in the Afrikaans than in the English stream (Braam 2004, 34). Teachers reportedly move successful Afrikaans-speaking learners from the Afrikaans classes to the English stream because they are performing well.

In 2004, the school started to develop a language policy, monitored by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), an independent research and development unit attached to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town. Toward the end of the 2005 school year, the situation had escalated to the point where playground fights and the exchange of insults between the two streams were commonplace. To counter these problems, dual-medium classes were introduced on a trial basis in grades five to seven. Given the patterns of language use in the area, it could safely be assumed that nearly all learners had at least a passive competence in the other language.

Dividing the children into two language streams (roughly) according to their home languages means that they find themselves assigned to stable and clear-cut categories linked to ideological constructions of social, ethnic or racial belongings. Althusser (1970) talks in terms of the ideological construction of 'the subject' within and through the state apparatuses, and the internalization and recognition of the 'Self' as the structured 'Other'. 'Interpellating', or recognizing individuals as subjects with respect to an (imaginary) center, always entails elements of misrecognition. In our case, the ideological center is formed by a reified notion of language, by a mutually exclusive pure English or pure Afrikaans. At

Riverside, children are addressed either as ‘Afrikaans speakers’ or as ‘English speakers’, categories preestablished, for instance, by census, education and school language policies, before they have conceived of themselves as such.

To conceive of language as split into bounded units is the product of an ideological process (Blommaert 2006, 515) which reduces the complexity of heteroglossic life worlds. The school language profiles aim at deconstructing the preconceived dichotomies – in our case symbolically represented by Afrikaans or English – taking into consideration the linguistic dispositions of the learners, which comprise not only different varieties but also pragmatic knowledge, as well as desires and imaginations linked to language learning. Thus, the language profile approach as developed in this paper understands and addresses the learners as multilinguals.

Language portraits – multimodal biographic accounts

Three months after the start of the dual-medium program, we decided to organize a bilingual workshop with 13- to 15-year-old students in order to explore their linguistic practices and language attitudes. Students were asked to complete a language portrait by coloring in a body silhouette, using different colors to represent different elements of their linguistic dispositions. The drawings were used to elicit narratives on language practices. Learners also responded to a questionnaire which, together with the portraits and narratives, established a kind of personal language profile that addressed not only current language learning and language use but also plans and aspirations for the future. The data collected in this way was supplemented by group discussions with teachers and an analysis of the linguistic landscape of the school described below. We turn first, however, to the language portraits.

Our multimodal approach develops the idea of language portraits originally employed in language awareness exercises (Krumm and Jenkins 2001); we draw on a growing body of work in social and cultural sciences that emphasizes the relevance of visual representations in meaning-making processes in almost all domains of social life. The change in mode of representation from the written or spoken word to the visual helps to shift the focus of attention (Busch 2006). Processes that influence language use tend to operate unconsciously and cannot easily be verbalized. The switch in mode of representation from word to image helps to deconstruct internalized categories, to reflect upon embodied practices and to generate narratives that are less bound to genre expectations. While the logic of the word is characterized by a time-bound linear sequence, visual representation is characterized by space and simultaneity and requires attention to the ways in which the various components of the picture relate to each other. Language portraits thus foreground the current situation rather than emphasizing the path which has led to it.

The language portrait of Elaine (see Figure 1) is similar to a range of other portraits drawn by her classmates. Her home languages are Afrikaans and English. Up to the start of the 2006 school year, she had attended the English stream. Interpreting her drawing, she reports speaking mainly English to her parents and siblings and Afrikaans to her grandparents and some friends. While she thinks that English is her stronger language, she claims Afrikaans to be her favorite language. In her language portrait, the brown color representing Afrikaans fills the body. She comments, ‘[Brown] because it is a very nice color and i love it and i am broun. Beacues God made me broun and i am bles of it’. Her proud identification with Afrikaans and her interweaving of language and identity stand in marked contrast to how she views English. In her portrait, English is located in her arms and hands, because she sees this language as the tools she needs, in particular ‘to write my assignments’. Elaine maps IsiZulu, brought into the family by her stepfather, onto the legs:



Figure 1. Elaine's language portrait.

she feels that knowledge of an additional South African language will be useful in helping her find a job. Her headspace (on the portrait) is taken up by 'Bee-Bee', the language of rap music.

The ways in which the languages relate to each other and to the different body parts and colors vary considerably from student to student. The silhouette possibly reinforces the use of body metaphors in structuring narratives about linguistic practices and facilitates the expression of emotions linked to language.

None of the drawings produced in workshops were monochrome, depicting monolingualism; even those with only two colors are the exception rather than the rule. People define for themselves which aspects of language use deserve a color of their own. In many cases, the varieties portrayed are low status, marginalized or nonstandard, but emotionally important means of expression closely linked with students' linguistic identity. Needless to say, language portraits allow speakers to attach positive value to these varieties. Often the same variety was represented in different colors, relating to different functions, e.g. English as a *lingua franca* and English for leisure time activities like music and film. Varieties with high emotional value are often represented in bright colors, such as red and yellow; those that only play a marginal role at the moment of the drawing tended to be depicted in pale shades; and those with negative connotations were frequently represented in the 'noncolor' gray. While no universal meaning can be attached to a particular hue, color nonetheless becomes a signifier, a bearer of meaning, in a particular situation and in association with its cultural history (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 59).

Afrikaans or English: monolingualization through literacy learning

Language choice in responses to a bilingual questionnaire also offered interesting insights. Twenty-one children chose to respond to this questionnaire in English, and 14 opted for Afrikaans, but many mixed the two languages. Language choice corresponded roughly, but not in all cases, to the division of the learners into the English and the Afrikaans classes before the two streams were merged. The responses demonstrated that one cannot simply divide the learners into Afrikaans speakers, English speakers and Afrikaans–English bilinguals. Most children report using both languages with different generations of their family and with their friends: Lizelle, for instance, said that she spoke mainly Afrikaans with her friends and Afrikaans and English with her elders and her brothers and sisters; Kim reported that she uses Afrikaans, English and sign language with her friends and Afrikaans at home with family members.

Children were asked which language they mostly thought in when in class. While we interpret their responses as an indication of their preferences rather than their actual linguistic practices, there were some interesting apparent peculiarities. From the 21 English responses to this question, three claimed to think in English and Afrikaans and three expressed a preference for Afrikaans only. In a similar way, among those who responded in Afrikaans, four claimed that they thought in both Afrikaans and English, and one in English only. This paradox highlights the problems associated with classifying students according to their 'home languages' or language streams.

Although the presence of English in the urban public space is overwhelming, it is important to bear in mind that this does not reflect language preferences in daily life. The 2001 census disclosed English to be only the third language after isiXhosa in the Western Cape, where Afrikaans is the first language of most respondents. English cannot be considered as a widespread *lingua franca* either. As the Pan South African Language

Board survey (2000, cited in Deumert 2008, 73) shows, 'more than 40% of the people in South Africa often do not, or seldom, understand what is being communicated in English'.

Children had only positive things to say about English – in itself no surprise, given the high status and prestige enjoyed by English in the wider society. Reflections include the following:

English is the langu that I like most because it is a nice langu. It is esy to lerne and also fun to learn.

English is my best, my friends are mostly English.

Om det is hull taal praat dan kan ek die vir staan.

[When they speak their language I can understand it.]

I would like to no English well so that I can camunicate well.

The fear expressed by the Riverside School management that learners from the former English stream would experience Afrikaans as the language of learning and teaching as an additional and unnecessary burden proved unfounded. On the contrary, the language profiles confirmed that for many children who had formerly attended the English stream, Afrikaans was the main home language, as teachers in the dual-medium classes had long suspected. Only one girl who said she spoke Hindi within the family expressed a negative attitude toward Afrikaans: 'Im not interested in knowin it but I have to'. The importance of Afrikaans was usually related to the immediate environment:

Ek hou van Afrikaans ondat meeste kinders in die omgewing Afrikaans is. Ek dink dis beter vir my om dit te praat. Ek kan ok ander tale prat.

[I like Afrikaans because most of the children in the area are Afrikaans. I think it's better for me to speak it. I can also speak other languages.]

Surprisingly, among those who responded in English, several indicated that Afrikaans was important for finding a job; one also noted, 'Chines is cool, Afrikaans is also cool'.

The children's positive attitudes came as a surprise to teachers who seem to have internalized the double stigmatization attached to Afrikaans. On the one hand, the standard variety is seen as the 'language of the oppressor' used to reinforce the racist agenda of the white establishment. On the other hand, Afrikaans, as spoken in parts of Cape Town, is generally stigmatized as '*kombuis* (kitchen) Afrikaans or *die slang* (the slang), i.e. not a language but an informal disreputable mixture of terms' (Stone 2002, 385). Kaaps, the variety associated with the non-white working class, is still to a large extent ignored, although it figures in some literary texts and in music (Kriel 2008). It was certainly the case that some of the Riverside teachers expressed negative views, such as: 'Most of the children come out of the [Flats] – out of a certain area where the spoken language is more a slang – there's not the correct Afrikaans'. A type of reappropriation, however, appears to be taking place in which Afrikaans – or at least certain varieties of Afrikaans – is being freed from its negative image as the language of the oppressor and defined as an African language (Wicomb 2001, 167–8). It was also the case that Riverside students expressed more positive attitudes, as in the comment already quoted in which Afrikaans was associated with being brown and proud.

Of the 35 language profiles from the dual-medium class, only two learners regarded themselves as monolingual: one in Afrikaans, the other in English. The others viewed themselves as bilingual at the very least. Practically all learners felt comfortable in both languages in oral communication (understanding and speaking). Not so for written communication

(reading and writing), however. At the start of the year, most children in the English stream experienced considerable difficulties in reading Afrikaans, while those in the Afrikaans stream struggled with complex texts in English. One of the teachers confirmed:

The problem is that a lot of them can't, man, a lot of the English children can't read Afrikaans, but they understand it if you speaking it to them, and same with the Afrikaans children – they can't read English . . . ja, a lot of them can't read the other language.

The school compels parents and children to choose only one language for teaching and learning. Because in many cases this will be the language of higher status – namely English – children find themselves in a diglossic situation: one language is limited to oral communication within the circle of family and friends, while another becomes the sole language for use in 'higher' domains, i.e. those linked to print. Learning to read and write is more than a mere technical skill. For students in the English stream, there is hardly any exposure to the standard variety of Afrikaans associated with writing. This serves to strengthen the assumption that English is, per se, the language of education and often goes hand in hand with the devaluing of Afrikaans and the stereotyping of its speakers. The high prestige of English leads parents to enroll their children in the English stream even if they have only limited contact with English at home. One of the Riverside teachers explains how problematic this can be:

Then I've got from the English [stream] children who I just speak Afrikaans with because the Afrikaans is their home language. So this one girl in front said, now, yesterday, juffrou ek wil nie meer in die Engelse klas wees [Teacher, I do not want to go to the English class ever again, you know].

School thus functions as an 'engine' that reduces the linguistic complexity of students' everyday lives and monolingualizes heteroglossic speakers by making them literate in a language which is often, in Derrida's words, 'the language of the other' (1996, 47).

The monolingual habitus of the multilingual school produces learners who are not necessarily recognized as legitimate speakers of the language they learn for the purposes of literacy. Educational discourse constructs and institutionalizes categories describing children as learners of English as a second language or nonnative speakers; they are thus defined in terms of a quality they lack. There is an obvious danger that students will begin to perceive themselves as double semilinguals who have failed to 'master' any of their languages 'properly'.

Languages of imagination and desire

Almost half of the children in class mention isiXhosa and/or another African language (isiZulu or Setswana) as playing a role in their lives, because they are present within the family (e.g. stepfather, brother-in-law), within the community or because they aspire to learn an African language:

Ek wou graag Xhosa meer leer ken omdat is iemand Xhosa praat dan verstan ek ook. En om 'n werk te kry.

[I would really like to learn more Xhosa, because when someone speaks Xhosa, I will understand. And to get work.]

Xhosa almal praat dit by ons huis en ek kan det nie praat nie.

[Everyone in our house speaks Xhosa and I cannot speak it.]

Im going to need to get a job one day.

Immigration from the rural Eastern Cape has increased the importance of isiXhosa in the Cape Town metropolitan area where, according to the 2001 census, it is the second most commonly spoken language after Afrikaans. The strong interest in African languages, however, came as a surprise to the school authorities. Linking African languages with increasing opportunities in the labor market thus indicates that African languages have gained considerably in prestige among this generation. Taking into consideration these developments, it is obvious that isiXhosa should play a role in the language policy in this school, perhaps in the form of a second additional language.

Another language that was also mentioned by almost half the children was Arabic. This is less surprising, as many of them encounter Arabic through the mosque and in greetings. But the interest in Arabic goes also beyond reciting and listening to the Qur'an. Statements such as 'Arabic, it's cool' or 'I want to learn Arabic to make my life a success' indicate its high prestige, sometimes linked with positive attitudes toward Dubai and the Emirates.

French is mentioned by eight children as a language they would like to know. This choice can probably be explained by the increasing number of people from Francophone Central and West African countries that have settled in the area. Chinese is mentioned by five children, possibly because of the considerable number of Chinese shops in the area selling toys, clothes and other affordable 'goodies' at accessible prices. One of the girls indicated in her language portrait that she speaks sign language with her brother; four other students already know some signs and claim that they would like to learn more. Linguistic encounters with the media are also evident in the children's biographical accounts, from the Spanish of the popular telenovelas ('I love the way they speak there slang') to the language of text messages and Bee-Bee, the language of rap music. Students linked their attraction to given languages with aspirations to travel or to particular lifestyles, or simply to the promise of a better life.

Finally, a number of languages in the portraits play a role as family languages: 'Hindi is my favorite. Its culture and languages touches my heart'. Others figure as heritage languages and as the focus of desire and imagination: 'German because im german, my momy is a German my all uncles and pa. I am going to germany [*sic*] when I am 17 years old with my family'. The figure of the (lost) heritage language that is mentioned in several of the children's language biographies under the label of German, Scottish [*sic*] or Dutch corresponds to the topos that Derrida (1996, 118) describes as the invention of a first language or rather an antecedent of the first language. The interest in these languages cannot be explained simply as a 'back to the roots' phenomenon, but is rather a desire for a third space (Bhabha 2005) beyond ethnonational categories. Applied to language, this concept designates a space beyond languages as distinct and separated systems serving as markers for ascribed unambiguous belongings.

Local language regimes: a topological approach

The learners' language experiences are not the only source of data for a school language profile. The resources and attitudes of other members of the school community – parents and staff – are also important. The teachers' linguistic repertoires and practices went well beyond the competence acquired through formal language learning and teacher training. These neglected resources have a potentially important role in the everyday life of the school. Interviews with Riverside teachers revealed that – although all had been employed to teach either in the Afrikaans or in the English stream – many felt confident to work in dual-medium classrooms. While older teachers were often ambivalent about the use of vernacular Afrikaans, younger teachers tended to consider it a valuable resource. Further, some teachers

were competent in ‘foreign’ languages, such as French, an asset of considerable interest in working with the growing numbers of students from a migrant background.

To explore the local language regime in and around the school, the biographic approach described above was complemented by a topological approach also based on multimodal data (Busch 2009). Understanding school as a nexus of practice (Scollon and Scollon 2004) makes it possible to examine how linguistic dispositions are enacted in an institutional setting. The ethnographic description of the school as a spatial entity can make apparent linguistic hierarchies and power relations, as well as competing and subversive practices. Involving students in taking photographs of the linguistic landscape (Shohamy and Gorter 2009), including both official notices and posters and also graffiti and writing on walls and desks, can be an interesting language awareness activity. Similarly, observation of linguistic practices encompassed communication during break times, with the parents and with the school authorities, as well as teaching and learning. The exploration of the local language regime questions tacit routines and can be the beginning of the negotiation of a school language policy understood as an ongoing process.

The Riverside analysis confirmed the predominant status of English in the current South African school system. The school administration was completely anglicized: English was the preferred language in matters such as correspondence with the Department of Education, drafting lesson plans for the attention of curriculum advisors, writing reports and answering telephone calls. Even in the Afrikaans stream, the authoritative discourse of timetables, inventories and school rules was presented only in English. In the bilingual Afrikaans–English stream, most of the new and colorful posters related to actual learning areas were in English; the few in Afrikaans were mainly homemade. Examining the inventory of books in the school library and the stock of teaching and learning material showed that the present language hierarchy was superimposed on a previous one enforced by the apartheid regime in which pure, ‘*suiwer*’ Afrikaans and English figured as the languages of the (white) ruling class. Materials from the apartheid period with their overtly racializing discourse were still in use in some of the classrooms.

Discussion and conclusions

The merging of the Afrikaans and English streams had initially been more an emergency measure to counteract the growing polarization between learners. However, the language biography workshop with the learners, the group discussion and interviews with teachers and the exploration of the linguistic practices and environment which made linguistic hierarchies visible all contributed to raising understanding and awareness of the dual-medium approach. It opened up debates on how dual-medium teaching practice can be implemented in a structured and conscious way and on the possibility of introducing isiXhosa as an additional subject in the school curriculum. Teachers’ observations suggested that communication among learners during leisure time had significantly increased within six months of the merger:

It was amazing to see how, by June, they were already interacting with each other, making jokes with each other, socializing so nicely – and that whole barrier of language, it wasn’t there any more. The other good thing is you’ll find now that they’ll try and talk to each other in their language.

What was especially striking in the example of the Cape Town school was that learners who enter school with multilingual repertoires and desires corresponding to their heteroglossic life worlds are within the education system reduced to an either–or monolingualism – in

the case discussed above, either to English or to Afrikaans. Learners are identified as mother tongue speakers of either the one or the other language. Failing to recognize the learners as multilingual subjects and to valorize their linguistic dispositions in a comprehensive way, this identification is per se a misidentification and leads to a reduction of complexity. In the context of the South African education system, the mismatch between their heteroglossic environments and the monolingualizing school practices is reinforced by the tendency of parents to enroll their children in English-medium schools and streams. Literacy learning through the language of the other, becoming literate in a standard language which is not considered as theirs, defines learners as deficient according to a norm which is by definition an unattainable ideal. Internalizing ascriptions that draw attention to what learners lack inevitably has negative implications for students' self-concept. However, the damage inflicted by categorization according to the ascribed mother tongues can – as the experience of Riverside shows – be reversed when these categories are deconstructed.

This speaker-centered approach to school language policy understands school as a location, as a nexus of practice, where heteroglossic practices intersect. These practices comprise, in the Bakhtinian sense, a plurality of individual voices expressing personal experiences and desires, the diversity of codes, languages and registers present in the local environment and finally a copresence of competing discourses on language and, more particularly, on language in education. A speaker-centered school language policy aims at acknowledging, making visible and valorizing the heteroglossic resources present within the school community; at developing strategies which guarantee comprehension and mutual understanding; and at enabling learners to make themselves heard. The valorizing of the heteroglossic practices has the effect of raising understanding and awareness of the dual-medium approach and points to ways in which the principles of linguistic equality laid out in the South African constitution can be implemented at the level of school and classroom.

Notes

1. The multimodal biographic approach presented here is being further developed at the research group 'Spracherleben' at the University of Vienna. See www.cis.or.at.
2. This paper is based on data deriving from a study of bilingual education in South Africa, coordinated by PRAESA (University of Cape Town). I wish to thank the PRAESA staff – especially Daryl Braam, with whom I jointly gathered the data on which this paper is based. The names of the school and the learners have been changed.

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