

Published in 2014 by University of KwaZulu-Natal Press
 Private Bag X01
 Scottsville, 3209
 Pietermaritzburg
 South Africa
 Email: books@ukzn.ac.za
 Website: www.ukznpress.co.za

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ISBN: 978-1-86914-277-3

Managing editor: Louis Gaigher
 Editor and compiler: Karen Press
 Proofreader: Sean Fraser
 Typesetter: Patricia Comrie
 Indexer: Ethné Clarke

Cover design: Nicolene van Loggerenberg: IdeaExchange
 Cover photograph: The Estate of Neville Alexander
 Inside cover: Neville Alexander's language portrait, drawn in 2010

An earlier version of Part 1 was originally published in German as *Neville Alexander im Gespräch: Mit der Macht der Sprachen gegen die Sprache der Macht* by Drava Verlag (Klagenfurt) in 2011. The book design of this edition is based on Lucijan Busch's original design.

Typeset in Garamond 10.5pt

Printed in South Africa by Paarl Media Paarl

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Acronyms

ACALAN	African Academy of Languages
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CODESRIA	Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
ECCSA	Education Coordinating Council of South Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
LACOM	Labour and Community Resource Project
LANGTAG	Language Plan Task Group
LEAP	Newsletter of the Language in Education in Africa Project
NECC	National Education Coordinating Committee
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NLF	National Liberation Front
NLP	National Language Project
NP	National Party
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress

Page 65, members of the Catholic Students' Association in Tübingen. Source: Karen Press archive

Pages 70–1, Robben Island lime quarry. Source: Albert Hess archive

Page 75, page from the court record of Neville Alexander's trial.

Page 79, entrance to the isolation section at Robben Island Prison. Source: Albert Hess archive

Page 84, Neville Alexander's 'Notes on Beauty' was circulated amongst the prisoners.

Pages 94–5, Three fists in different shades of black/grey/white. Source: from the cover of the first edition of *One Azania, One Nation* (London: Zed Press, 1979)

Page 103, the first two books written by Neville Alexander after his release from Robben Island.

Page 109, Hendrik Witbooi, a leader of the Herero-Nama uprising of 1904.

Pages 114–15, photo of men marching. Source: James Marsh archive

Page 124, image from the cover of P. Christie (1985) *The Right to Learn*. SACHED Books/Ravan Press.

Page 125, cover of an issue of the Language Projects' Review. Source: PRAESA archive

Page 129, political pamphlet calling for a boycott of the 'dummy elections'.

Pages 134–5, extract from handwritten notes by Neville Alexander.

Page 153, pages in different languages from *Raez Writes*. Source: PRAESA archive

Page 160, group photo of participants in the International Seminar on Languages organised by PRAESA in 1996.

Page 175, the Vulindlela Reading Club. Source: PRAESA archive

Pages 164–5, images of African scripts/symbol sets.

Introduction

Brigitta Busch

Neville Alexander's language biography – the narration of his earliest experiences with language and different ways of speaking, his lifelong involvement with and commitment to questions of language policy and language planning, his thoughts on language issues, and some insights into his reflections on language – is based on many hours of conversation between us, recorded between 2006 and 2010. These conversations took place mainly in the early morning hours before the beginning of a conference or a visit to a school, sometimes also late in the evening hours after a day of work in the office. They took place in a tiny studio apartment in the University of Cape Town's All Africa House, in a garden on the outskirts of Vienna, in the corridors of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, in a hotel in Bamako – basically whenever we met for a common project or happened to meet at an academic event in the world of applied linguistics. Neville chose to tell the story of his life in and with language in English, sometimes weaving in a quote or a few sentences in German, a language he loved to practise and mastered with accuracy and precision, drawing from the rich and diversified vocabulary he had acquired in his ample readings of German literature during his studies at the University of Tübingen. To talk about some of the topics covered in the last chapters of his language biography Neville spoke to another interviewer, my son, Lucijan Busch. This was especially appropriate when activities and experiences that Neville and I had shared were the focus of the story, so that too much 'insider talk' –

the you-knows and you-remembers that can make a conversation almost inaccessible to third persons – could be avoided.

A biographical account is a narration about personal experience, a reinterpretation of a life history from a certain point in that life, but it is also a situated production that follows genre and other conventions. The act of narration is already in its very structure dialogic in nature, it is directed to another person – a listener, an interviewer, a future reader, a larger audience. Transcription and editing submit the spoken text to further transformation before it is published, and also leave their traces, inscribing other voices and perspectives. Lucijan's participation in the German version of Neville's language biography brought in the perspective of a generation born 50 years after Neville's own generation. He also transcribed the interviews and edited the German version which was published in 2011 on the occasion of Neville's 75th birthday.¹

The English edition of Neville Alexander's language biography closely follows the structure of the German version but is not identical. Going back to the transcript of the original interviews, Karen Press arranged the text for a South African readership that is more aware of and interested in Neville's involvement and insider knowledge concerning the process of developing a new language policy for South Africa. In addition, this English edition contains a selection of some of his writings and talks on language and language policy. These texts offer a sense of how he expanded on many of the themes and concerns referred to in the interviews when addressing audiences in South Africa and internationally.

Why a language biography?

It was tempting to ask Neville Alexander to recount his language biography, to look back on his own experience with language, as his life was very much centred on language. He willingly agreed to speak about his very first conscious experiences with language as a child, the languages he learned and acquired through formal and informal education, about how he lived everyday multilingualism and shared it with others – not least in the environment of the 'Robben Island University' that he and fellow prisoners created while incarcerated on Robben Island, about how language became

the focus of his political and academic commitment. And above all he seized the occasion of the interview to reflect upon his experience of the power relations inherent in language, of processes of inclusion and exclusion linked to ways of speaking. This language biography gives us some idea of why Neville Alexander thought that language policy and language as such – not only in terms of its referential function, but, when it comes to questions of identity and social relations, also in relation to what Karl Bühler (1990 [1934]) called its expressive and appealing functions – were such an important element in the struggle against apartheid, in the vision of a new South Africa, of a more egalitarian society.

A growing public interest in life stories manifests itself not only in an impressive number of autobiographies and biographies on the shelves in popular bookstores, but also in the social sciences and the humanities, where some even speak of a 'biographical turn'. In applied linguistics biographically oriented research has gained in momentum since the 1990s. This is specifically the case in the German- and French-speaking academic milieus, where a tradition of phenomenological thinking has strong and vigorous roots. The strength of the biographical approach, which is indebted philosophically to Edmund Husserl's theory of phenomenology, lies in the change of perspective from the observed object to the perceiving and experiencing subject. The language biographic approach foregrounds language experience, and encourages scholars of language to explore thus far rather neglected aspects such as emotions and attitudes, hopes and fears linked to ways of speaking. It thus brings the speaking subject back into linguistics.

A language biography is a personal account based on the singularity of individual experience, but it is more than that, as it also reflects how personal experience is linked to the social and the political, how language ideologies impact on the ways in which experience is lived, how language attitudes are forged. As the account presented in this book shows, Neville Alexander reads and understands his own language biography as inscribed into socio-historical processes and political events, as connected to specific time-spaces. In doing so he follows Antonio Gramsci, whom he esteemed highly. In one of his prison notebooks Gramsci (1971: 324)

makes the point that there is an interdependence between personal biography and historical processes:

The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory. (Gramsci 1932–33, Prison Notebooks, Q11 §12, 1376)

Neville Alexander does not content himself with understanding his language biography as one formed by social and political conditions; he insists that self-awareness is not an aim in itself, but a precondition for necessary transformative action.

The biographical approach played a role in several projects initiated by Neville Alexander as the director of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA)² in which I had the opportunity to participate. One such project was the 'Training of Trainers in Southern Africa' programme for educators in multilingual education, which was run at the University of Cape Town for many years from 2002 onwards. During these pan-African courses participants with different language backgrounds and professional and academic orientations came together, from countries with very different language policies and approaches to education, such as Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Malawi, Madagascar, Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa. The heterogeneous nature of the group was a great challenge and at the same time a valuable resource. That is why we decided to use a biographical approach as one of our pedagogical strategies. The students' reflection on their personal experiences with language, literacy, school and language learning, and their writing of autobiographical texts, facilitated their access to academic work on multilingualism, language policy and education. In this course we invited participants to draw a language portrait, i.e. to map their languages and different ways of speaking onto the outline of a body silhouette using pencils in different colours. It was then that we began to adapt a creative tool that had originally been developed for language awareness exercises

with children, to become an element in a multimodal biographical research method (Busch et al., 2006). Language portraits were also employed in projects led by Neville Alexander that centred on multilingualism in schools. Making the multiple language resources that children brought with them visible helped to provoke questions about the monolingual *habitus* of school routines among teachers, and to help them understand that school language policies should be open also to the unexpected, should take into account the resources, aspirations and desires of their students even beyond the canon of the language or languages of instruction (Busch 2010). The method of drawing language portraits that we used in our courses has become widespread as an introduction to courses on topics of language and language learning at a tertiary level, as well as an instrument used in defining school language policies. The language portrait that Neville drew at the end of our interview sessions in 2010 is included in this volume on the inside front cover.

A cross-section of Neville Alexander's texts on language policy

This volume offers the reader a small selection of Neville Alexander's vast body of academic writing on issues of language and language policy. He considered himself primarily as a language *activist*; he listened attentively to discontents and aspirations expressed by different groups in society, gave his voice to make them heard and merged these claims to become a driving force for a language policy 'from below' with the goal of achieving social change. Nevertheless, Neville Alexander was an acclaimed academic with an international reputation, frequently invited all over the world to give keynote addresses at international conferences or as an expert on questions of multilingualism, among others by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. It was not an easy task to choose from among hundreds of articles and speeches a small sample to accompany his language biography. The six texts included in this volume represent a cross-section of his work spanning more than 30 years and addressing a wide range of topics that were important to him.

The first one is an extract from *One Azania, One Nation*,³ the key theoretical text on which Neville Alexander based his

later work. He secretly started to work on this book during his imprisonment on Robben Island, and completed it during the period of his house arrest in Cape Town; it was published in 1979 in the UK under the pseudonym of No Sizwe. As he explains in his language biography, his writing was to a large extent motivated by his sometimes controversial exchange of ideas with Nelson Mandela while they were both imprisoned on the island, on how to imagine the nation-building project in post-apartheid South Africa. Though the language question plays rather a subordinate role in *One Azania, One Nation*, the chapter reprinted here contains the outline of what would become the basis of Alexander's later ground-breaking work on language policy. He rejects the idea of a monolingual nation and advocates a multilingual society in which all can communicate in more than one language.

In *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (Alexander 1989), published by Buchu Books in Cape Town ten years after *One Azania, One Nation*, the language question has moved to the centre of Alexander's interest as he realises that an inclusive language policy can become a tool to overcome the deliberate division of South African society into separate groups according to racial categories. From the very first pages, he makes it clear that for him, dealing with language issues is not an end in itself but is part of the struggle for national liberation. The initial question is not how to promote this or that language, but rather: 'How do we abolish social inequality based on colour, class, religious belief, sex, language group or any other basis?' The extracts chosen for this publication focus on a critical analysis of language policy under colonial and apartheid regimes in South Africa and on an outline of a future language policy for a post-apartheid South Africa.

The four following texts are written versions of speeches Neville Alexander gave after the turn of the millennium at different conferences in Oegstgeest (the Netherlands, 2001), Pune (India, 2003), Eisenstadt (Austria, 2008) and Tampere (Finland, 2010). These papers provide an insight into the topics to which Neville Alexander dedicated the last ten years of his life: the critical assessment of the post-apartheid language

policy in South Africa and more specifically the claim for a language-in-education policy aiming at equal opportunity; the development of counter-hegemonic strategies against the effects of imperialism and globalisation on linguistic diversity; the plea for a flexible, inclusive approach to standard language so that it cannot be misused as a shibboleth that justifies exclusion or even xenophobic violence; and finally, the commitment to a pan-African perspective, the promotion and intellectualisation of African languages as undertaken within the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN). Together these texts testify to the richness and multifaceted nature of Neville Alexander's thinking and writing, as well as the amazing continuity of its principal concerns.

Notes

1. *Neville Alexander im Gespräch: Mit der Macht der Sprachen gegen die Sprache der Macht*. Edited by Lucijan Busch. Klagenfurt/Celovec 2011: Drava.
2. PRAESA is an independent project based at the University of Cape Town.
3. *One Azania, One Nation* as well as *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* have been out of print for many years. Digital versions of both texts are now available online at: <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/35930902/Neville%20Alexander%20works/One%20Azania%20One%20Nation.pdf> and <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/35930902/Neville%20Alexander%20works/Language%20Policy%20and%20National%20Unity.pdf>

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Part 1

Neville Alexander's language biography