

Introduction

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All countries in the Southern Hemisphere have had to grapple with language policies during the period following freedom from the grip of colonialism and, in the case of South Africa, from that of apartheid as well. While some have succeeded in at least partly overcoming the various problems that accompanied linguistic colonialism, there is a general feeling that the interpretation of sociolinguistic phenomena is inadequate and that the solutions to language problems fall short of solving the underlying issues.

The reasons that countries of the South have been unable to solve their language problems are varied and multi-faceted. However, there is now a growing consensus that the constructs from which research draws in order to interpret social phenomena, not only for academic research but also for the wider public, are borrowed from a vision of the world crafted by the European civilization of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Two terms that epitomise this approach to sociolinguistic phenomena in the Southern Hemisphere are “language” itself and “multilingualism”. These two constructs are indicative of a series of assumptions, values, and theoretical orientations that are never questioned when researchers construct knowledge. Languages have long been conceived of as entities established by linguists based on the theoretical tools that emerge from their discipline. Languages are not first-order realities whose boundaries are determined by academic research: the conception of identifiable languages is a Eurocentric notion that emerged from the nation-building process that took place in 19th-century Western civilization. This political process has obtained academic legitimacy following the structuralist theorisation of languages. Linguists like Haugen and Robins who adopt a deeper historical perspective claim that the notion actually originates from the link that the Greeks established between their political philosophy of the *polis* (city state) and language practice. Haugen (1996) not only acknowledges that Greek as a unified norm of several dialects became the communicative medium of the Greeks’ cultural and administrative centre, but also notes that the ambiguities and ‘unclarity’ of the distinction between dialect and language stems from the Greeks’ usage of the two terms. The well-known etymology of the term “barbarian” is a telling example of this development.

The starting point for the conceptualisation of multilingualism takes for granted the construct of ‘language’ as a system. Several sociolinguists have pointed out that the static notion of language has impacted significantly on the conceptualisation of multilingualism. As various scholars have rightly claimed, this understanding of multilingualism emerges in the prefixes used to describe the number of languages involved in a multilingual context: “multi-”, “bi-”,

and “poly-”. Beyond the terminology lies a whole ideology of language segregation which impacts the understanding of the architecture of human communities.

From the above, it can be concluded that the understanding of language issues and decisions regarding language policy are paradigmatically drawn, even in the post-colonial and post-apartheid era, from a monolingual and in fact monocultural ideology. It is indeed common knowledge that nation-building in Europe, based on the ideology of 19th-century European nationalism which is itself characterised by homogenization and a reduction of all forms of diversity, has exerted and is still exerting significant influence on the interpretation of sociolinguistic phenomena in Africa. Debates on language issues illustrate the strong influence of the social sciences on the ways in which people form their understanding of the world. Few people are aware that these terms are constructs borrowed from a trend in Western civilization, entrenched in a biased ideology of cultural differentiation. In fact, constructs impose blinkers upon researchers and limit their perspectives on social phenomena.

This can be demonstrated by social theories of differentiation versus theories of association of what is sometimes termed “diversity”. In Bhatti and Kimmich’s (2015) edited volume on similarity as an alternative to the Western discourse on identity and difference, Andreas Langenohl (2015:105-128) demonstrates that most traditional Western models of modern plurality understood plurality as an irreversible process of *differentiation*. All complex modern societies were believed to have emerged from small, homogenous and self-contained or separated communities with little or no differentiation. These models are based on the assumption of a homogeneously organised archetypal or primordial society (cf. Langenohl 2015:109). Such traditional discourses develop a vision of human communities founded on division and segregation, which at the same time ignores the role of fusion and creolisation in shaping identity. Indeed, while identities are hybrid because they are intersubjective and shifting, essentialism views them according to over-generalised categories in which all members of a group share the same characteristics. These categories are raised to the status of epistemes and they become the lenses through which social relations are understood, described, and explained. The production of knowledge in the social sciences and in sociolinguistics is based on these epistemes. A term that epitomises this doctrine is “diversity”, officially adopted by South Africa and Mauritius to depict their philosophy of nation-building. The label “plural society”, from which Mauritian and South African politicians have coined the slogans “Unity in diversity” and “The Rainbow Nation” which supposedly symbolise these two nations, stems from the belief that identity and cultural practices, including language practices, are grounded in a ‘boundaried’ world which defines groups and differentiates them from one another.

Towards the end of the 20th century, these theories were paradigmatically questioned. In contrast to those theories that understand modernisation as differentiation, now, so-called modernisation theories of *association* (e.g. Simmel, Tarde, Goffman, Latour) use “as prime constitution of society one entity by means of others” (cf. Langenohl 2015:111). According to Latour, “entities only come into existence by means of the interconnection or ‘articulations’ of other entities” (cf. Langenohl 2015:112). The similarity to the foundations of the philosophy of ubuntu is obvious. Adapted to the pluralistic language situation in Africa, it becomes clear that all forms of creolisation are inherently imitations, transformations, and re-contextualisations, and that they are actually at the heart of linguistic identity-creation (in Goffman’s sense), prior to the existence of a particular, standardised or self-contained homogenous ‘language’.

Taking one further example of the transition from homogeneity to heterogenic processes, Naoki Sakai (2015:129-152), in the same volume, argues that translation (in a broader sense, following Lotman's (1974) view that every speech is translation), like transnationality, is prior to the notion of 'language' or 'nation'. This is because "translation has to take place before the ascription of identity to a language, just as transnationality exists prior to nationality" (cf. Sakai 2015:144).

These new sociological theories that conceive of identity as a result of complex heterogenic relations are in contradiction with research undertaken up until the end of the 20th century on the communicative skills of multilingual speakers. This research was carried out from a monolingual perspective, in which the language practices of multilingual speakers are measured against the yardstick of the ideal native speaker. A renewed approach in the scholarship on language use in multilingual settings shows that speakers use all the resources at their disposal.

There is an urgent need to document language practices in official institutions, in everyday interactions, and, in particular, in educational settings in Africa with a view to recommending a modified understanding of multilingualism. It is indeed high time that the major problems confronting educational failure and the wastage of resources are solved.

In cognizance of the new debates around transformation, this "language ideology" or paradigm should be deconstructed in order to show that its underlying assumption of homogenous groups or languages in a diverse setting among other homogenous groups and languages is not depicting reality.

Scholarship during the colonial period essentialised identities. In response to this, there is now growing consensus among researchers that scholarship should take into account the multi-layered facets of human communities in Africa. Sen (2006) and Appiah's (2006) monographs and Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) critique of the concept of 'identity' are indicative of this consensus.

In order to uncover the different types of beliefs around and experiences of what could be termed "common sense knowledge of agents on languages and society in Africa", researchers first need to deconstruct dominant discourses of a series of issues regarding language and society.

Because of the critical importance of constructs like 'language' and 'multilingualism', which are central to the production of knowledge in the language sciences, this volume of Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus is devoted to the issue of multilingualism. From an academic perspective, the aim of this volume is to offer the possibility for researchers in different contexts to deconstruct the meanings attached to 'multilingualism', preferably from a meta-theoretical perspective.

The volume's ultimate aim is to lay down the foundations for an alternative paradigmatic choice for knowledge production in the field. This is based on the principle that researchers should not limit their role to the description and explanation of patterns of social behaviour and to making predictions. In doing so, they are denying themselves the right to think critically and to interrogate analytical typologies and research paradigms. Research undertaken from this perspective is based on the premise that meaning is fixed and permanent. This is one of the

basic tenets of positivism. We firmly believe that there is scope in our discipline for questioning the ontological vision of sociolinguistic research within an alternative epistemological paradigm. This is the path for a change in perspective in knowledge production in our world.

Although all the articles in this volume do not espouse the theoretical orientations that were defined in the call for the papers, they convincingly demonstrate that a conception of multilingualism based on the notion of ‘systems’ is flawed. Such a conception cannot capture the complex linguistic strategies of a speaker in a complex and dynamic multilingual situation. **Wolff** explains in his article that most African countries are facing antagonistic ideological positions. On the one hand is what one might call “19th-century European nation-state ideology”, a mindset built on notions linked to linguistically and culturally homogenous *nations*. On the other, there is ‘20th/21st-century African Renaissance ideology’, which conceives of Africa as different from ‘the West’, i.e. characterised by extreme ethnolinguistic plurality and diversity. This contribution adopts a third position which bridges this ideological divide by advocating multilingual policies for Africa which would combine indigenous languages of local and regional relevance with imported languages of global reach, with the strategic goal of implementing mother-tongue-based multilingualism (MTBML). However, MTBML is exactly the ‘language(s)-in-education policy’ that most so-called “developed” countries have long since installed to best serve their own political interests and economic progress. Wolff states that it therefore remains somewhat paradoxical that African postcolonial governments copy from European models those features that are incompatible with sociolinguistic facts on the ground.

Wolff argues that in the formal educational system, this means that the almost exclusive use of ex-colonial and foreign languages will leave masses of dropouts and class-repeaters behind. Studies in Africa and on a global scale show the benefits of systems that are based on continuing mother-tongue instruction, including improved performance in the learning of foreign languages. This contribution therefore appeals to language policy-makers in Africa to consider these findings.

Ferreira-Meyers and Horne’s article, entitled “Multilingualism and the language curriculum in South Africa: Contextualising French within the local language ecology” questions the conception of multilingualism from a language policy perspective. The starting point of the authors’ reflection is the post-apartheid South African government’s aim to promote multilingualism. This is in fact enshrined in the Constitution of the country. However, confronted with the need to recognise the various components of the *patrimoine linguistique national* (‘national linguistic heritage’), it is unable to develop a conception of multilingualism that prepares South African children for the global linguistic (and economic) market. Furthermore, it cannot espouse the transnational and transcultural trends that are driving the major educational reforms of countries with foresight. The authors illustrate their argument by demonstrating how the country cannot benefit from the French language, although the educational community perceives the language’s potential from both an instrumental and a cultural perspective.

In their article entitled “Deconstructing and re-inventing the concept of multilingualism: A case study of the Mauritian sociolinguistic landscape”, **Tirvassen and Ramasawmy** deconstruct the conception of multilingualism developed in mainstream sociolinguistics. They use Mauritius as a case study and conduct a meta-analysis of sociolinguistic studies carried out on the island

to showcase that scholarship undertaken on the Mauritian sociolinguistic landscape has been based on structuralist concepts. They demonstrate that the conception of multilingualism underlying language practices and attitudes towards languages has been based on the assumption that there exists a functional differentiation of languages that can be captured by the notion of ‘complementary distribution’. This notion implies that each language has its own territory, with possible overlap able to be captured by the notions of ‘borrowing’ and ‘code-switching’. Using examples of situated language practices drawn from their research, the authors argue that the constructs with which sociolinguists have operated cannot model verbal interactions that occur in official institutions or in everyday communication. They then open up a discussion on the need to adopt an alternative epistemological posture in order to construct a different interpretation of multilingualism, following the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Makoni and Pennycook (2007), Herdina and Jessner (2002), Blackledge and Creese (2010), Garcia (2009), and de Robillard (2005, 2007).

Auckle analyses the socio-pragmatics of swearing in face-to-face multilingual conversational encounters, based on a series of multi-party recordings carried out between 2011 and 2012 with 40 adolescent speakers in Mauritius. She shows that the conversational locus of playfulness favours, amongst others, the co-occurrence of slang and code-switching that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group.

By focusing on the performance-oriented nature of code-switching, it can be deduced that an interpretation of language alternation is more sensitive to the sociocultural realities of the speech community on which it focuses. Auckle’s article therefore shows that it is high time for sociolinguistic theory in the field of language alternation to take into account the culture and context-specific particularities of a speech community.

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