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Publisher: Routledge

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## Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmm20>

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Published online: 22 Apr 2014.

To cite this article: Pinky Makoe & Carolyn McKinney (2014) Linguistic ideologies in multilingual South African suburban schools, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35:7, 658-673, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2014.908889](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908889)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908889>

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## Linguistic ideologies in multilingual South African suburban schools

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Existing research on language in South African schooling frequently draws attention to the problematic hegemony of English and the lack of access to quality education in the home language of the majority of learners, often drawing on the metaphor of a gap or a disjuncture between post-apartheid language in education policy (LiEP) and its implementation. We argue that the notion of a ‘gap’ obscures the significant continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid LiEPs, as well as conceptions of what language is and what counts as linguistic competence and capital. Language ideologies and the discursive operation of power serve as an analytical framework to make sense of the continuities between apartheid and present language policies and classroom practices. We argue that without an understanding of the language ideologies informing both policy and practices, we will not be able to shift practices in South African classrooms so that learners’ full multilingual repertoires can be legitimately used as resources for learning. The paper presents data focusing on the intersections of language ideologies, discourses and practices in two suburban schools, one primary and one secondary, in the urban metropolis of Johannesburg, South Africa, where black learners have replaced white learners, i.e. in de(re)segregated schools.

**Keywords:** linguistic ideologies; language policy; language regimes; multilingual resources; desegregated schools

### Introduction

This paper analyses language politics in post-apartheid schooling in an attempt to understand how the past continues to inform the present with regard to language policies and practices in education. The post-apartheid democratic constitution and the subsequent introduction of the national language in education policy (LiEP) in 1997 aimed to promote the use of previously marginalised African languages in different domains, including education. The LiEP in particular supports ‘additive bilingualism’ and the use of mother tongue as the language of learning and teaching in the first three years of schooling before switching to instruction in English. However, English is increasingly dominant, while multilingual practices are circumscribed. A number of studies attribute failure in South African primary schooling to early transition to English, which leads to learning in an unfamiliar language and negative attitudes of parents towards mother-tongue education (De Klerk 2000; Desai 2001; Heugh 2008). Research has also focused on the tension between post-apartheid LiEP and its implementation, often using a metaphor of a ‘gap’ or a ‘disjuncture’ between practices in schools and the intentions of

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LiEP (e.g. Probyn 2005; Prinsloo 2012). This metaphor is valuable in highlighting the incongruence between conceptions of languages as pure, standard and bounded entities and the hybrid, multilingual practices that characterise daily communication for many children in schools. However, we argue that the metaphor can obscure the significant continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid LiEPs, as well as the conceptions of what language is and of what counts (or does not count) as linguistic competence and capital.

Our research draws on language ideologies as an analytical framework in order to make sense of the parallels between the past and the present language regimes in policy and practice, and the implications of these regimes for the unequal distribution of linguistic power (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2002; Foucault 1972; Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). We argue that without an understanding of the language ideologies informing both policy and practices, we will not be able to shift practices in South African classrooms so that learners' full linguistic repertoires can be legitimately used as resources for learning. The paper focuses on two suburban schools, one primary and one secondary, in the urban metropolis of Johannesburg, South Africa, where black learners have replaced white learners. We begin by outlining our theoretical framework before moving on to a discussion of the research design and research sites. Data are presented and analysed as two case studies: one of a primary school, followed by one of a secondary school.

### **Theoretical/analytical framework**

Our theoretical framework draws on the concepts of language ideology (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), legitimate language (Bourdieu 1977, 1991) and language regimes (Blommaert 1999). We use this framework to make visible the conceptions of language informing policy and of what counts as linguistic competence, analysing how this plays out at the macro-level of the institution, as well as in practices on the ground, including language regimes at the micro-level. The notion of language ideologies enables us to provide an alternative account of the South African LiEP and its implementation in schools.

Language ideologies (Blommaert 1999; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, 2000; Blackledge and Pavlenko 2002) refer to the sets of beliefs, values and cultural frames that continually circulate in society, informing the ways in which language is conceptualised and represented as well as how it is used. Such ideologies are constructed through discourse, that is, systems of power/knowledge (Foucault 1980). Elaborating on Foucault's conception of discourse, Kress (1989, 7) argues that discourses 'define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say', and we would add, how and by whom it should be said, and whether it can be heard. Following Blackledge and Pavlenko (2002, 123), language ideologies 'include the values, practices and beliefs associated with language use by speakers, and the discourse which constructs values and beliefs at state, institutional, national, and global levels'. Thus, language ideologies provide the link between social structures and power relations and language use at the micro level (see also Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). Currently, the micro-level of schooling is (re)producing local language regimes informed by and in turn reinforcing language ideologies circulating in South African society. Language regimes, the common language order operating in an institution, construct and impose norms. Such regimes, we will argue, tend to homogenise learners and their language practices, reducing complex

heteroglossic language use to neat descriptions of full proficiency or lack of proficiency in a named language.

The process of imposing linguistic norms through a language regime at the level of school feeds into the broader process of social reproduction in schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Since schooling is one of the most important sites for social reproduction, it is not surprising that it is also one of the key sites ‘which impose the legitimate forms of discourse and the idea that discourse should be recognised if and only if it conforms to the legitimate norms’ (Bourdieu 1977, 650). This underpins the notion of a ‘legitimate language’ (Bourdieu 1977, 646), which describes a point in an ideological process where consensus has been manufactured or achieved on the language and language practices that count and are thus seen as worth teaching and listening to. To put it differently, command of the legitimate language is what gives one ‘voice’ in an institutional setting (Blommaert 2005a). Significantly, consensus on the legitimate language depends on both those who benefit from the ideology as well as those disadvantaged by it.

### **Language ideologies and South African language policy**

In considering the particular ideologies of language that inform current language policy in South Africa, the most significant is the conception of languages as stable, bounded entities clearly differentiated from one another. Makoni (1999) has pointed out the continuities between apartheid linguistic engineering, where language was used as a divide and rule strategy, in the official enshrining of a particular list of 11 languages in the post-apartheid constitution. There have been a number of comprehensive discussions on the ideology of languages as autonomous entities (e.g. Blommaert 1996, 2006; Heller 2007; Jørgensen 2008; Makoni and Pennycook 2007), an ideology as much sustained by linguistic research as held in popular views of language (Blommaert 2006). This ideology underlies many versions of the linguistic rights paradigm (LRP)<sup>1</sup> (Blommaert 2005b), which itself informs the South African constitution and post-apartheid language policy of additive bilingualism (Department of Education 1997). As De Klerk (2002) has pointed out, in the progressive ideal of additive bilingualism which encourages the maintenance of home language alongside ‘effective acquisition of additional language(s)’ (Department of Education 1997, Preamble 5), ‘there is the echo of a compartmentalized view of language’ (43; see also Banda 2010). May (2005) highlights a concern for the LRP regarding the

disjuncture between macro language rights claims and micro language practices in any given context (macro language claims necessarily require the codification and homogenisation of language groups and related languages and thus ignore the often far more complex, fluid, and at times contradictory, micro language practices of individuals from within those groups). (320)

Makoni and Pennycook (2007) refer to the notion of multilingualism, understood as the knowledge of separate languages, as a ‘pluralisation of monolingualism’ (22). This critique is in line with current critiques of mainstream approaches to bilingualism, variously named as ‘parallel monolingualism’, ‘bilingualism with diglossia’, ‘separate bilingualism’ and ‘bilingualism through monolingualism’; ‘each term describes the boundaries put up around languages that language varieties must conform to prescriptive norms and represents a view of the multilingual/bilingual student/teacher as “two

monolinguals in one body” (Creese and Blackledge 2010, 105; see also García and Sylvan 2011).

Recently, sociolinguistic work on multilingualism in urban contexts has emphasised the wide variation and complexity of individual linguistic repertoires (Jørgensen 2008; Blommaert and Backus 2011). The challenges of accounting for this ‘wide spectrum of variation’ (Jørgensen 2008, 165) has led to a proliferation of terms in studies of hybrid language practices in multilingual urban settings (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Jørgensen 2008; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Otsuiji and Pennycook 2010). While there is no consensus on defining codeswitching, broad definitions such as that offered by McCormick (2001, 447) would draw more agreement than most: ‘the term “codeswitching” refers to the juxtaposition of elements from two (or more) languages or dialects’. But even a broad definition such as this inevitably makes use of the notion of discrete, bounded languages. García (2009, 141, our emphasis) attempts to overcome this problem in her definition of the term ‘translanguaging’ as ‘the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are *described as autonomous languages*’. While distancing herself from the notion of autonomous languages, García’s definition is still necessarily informed by it. Jørgensen et al. (2011) have used the term ‘polylinguaging’ to refer to ‘the use of resources associated with different “languages” even when the speaker knows very little of these’ (27). Writing in the South Asian context, Canagarajah (2009, 5) has proposed the productive notion of plurilingualism where ‘proficiency in languages is not conceptualized individually, with separate competencies for each language. The different languages constitute an integrated system to constitute a repertoire’.

Current research on language and literacy practices in multilingual classroom settings also draws attention to the highly productive use of ‘mixed’ codes to facilitate access to the curriculum (Canagarajah 2011; Creese and Blackledge 2010; García and Sylvan 2011; Gutiérrez 2008). In our own previous research (Makoe and McKinney 2009) of one First-Grade child who uses her multilingual resources in order to draw her peers into the routines and meaning-making processes of classroom life, we used the notion of *hybrid discursive practices* to describe the learner’s use of a range of linguistic codes as well as different voices (Bakhtin 1981). Here we drew on and expanded Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tajeda’s (1999) notion of hybrid language and literacy practices, the ‘commingling of ... different linguistic codes and registers’ (289) during classroom activities. Gutiérrez et al. (1999) emphasise that hybrid literacy practices are

not simply codeswitching as the alternation between two language codes. They are more a systematic, strategic, affiliative, and sense-making process among those who share the code, as they strive to achieve mutual understanding. (88)

Despite this literature on the use of hybrid language and literacy practices in the classroom and despite the fact that codeswitching is a very common language practice in schools in rural and township settings (Probyn 2005, 2009), the South African LiEP is silent on the possibilities of using more than one named language in the classroom simultaneously, and it is not uncommon for Education Department advisors and officials to condemn the use of codeswitching by teachers. It is the ideology of languages as pure and bounded that underlies the guilt commonly expressed by teachers who do use codeswitching in classrooms where the language of learning and teaching is English, despite English not being the home language of learners. For example, one of the teachers in Probyn’s (2009) research refers to her use of codeswitching as ‘smuggling in the

vernacular'. We will argue through the data analysis presented below that it is also this ideology together with the monolingual ideology of a single 'legitimate language' that prevents teachers from recognising the range of their learners' linguistic resources, and ultimately from using multilingualism as a productive resource for meaning-making in the literacy classroom.

### **Research sites**

Data presented in this paper are drawn from a larger research project exploring language, identity and practices of inclusion and exclusion in four desegregated suburban schools in Johannesburg. Here we focus on two suburban schools to the north-east of central Johannesburg, one primary co-educational school and one secondary girls-only school. Both schools were formerly for white learners but became racially desegregated after 1994 when the number of white learners at these schools dwindled. At the time of the research, the learner population was predominantly black with small numbers of Indian and coloured learners,<sup>2</sup> and fewer than 10 white children. Most of these children were multilinguals speaking a range of indigenous South African languages. Learners in the primary school (approximately 650 learners from Grade R, reception year, to Grade 7) came mainly from different townships around Johannesburg with a minority from suburban areas in Johannesburg, while learners in the secondary school (approximately 750 learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12) came mainly from townships and the inner-city. Hence, a large proportion of the learners travelled long distances to make it to school by 8:00 am when classes started. Most of the children in the schools came from working-class backgrounds and as a result less than 50% of the learners were paying their fees (R2640 or approximately USD338 per annum in the primary school and R5000 or approximately USD 640 in the secondary school). The language of learning and teaching in the schools was English with Afrikaans offered as a compulsory second language in Grades 4–7 in the primary school and Grades 8–12 in the secondary school. IsiZulu was offered as an additional subject only from Grade 4 in the primary school and as an optional subject to replace Afrikaans in Grade 12 at the secondary school. Interviews<sup>3</sup> were generally conducted in English and classroom discourse was translated by the researchers where necessary.

### **Methodology**

The research design drew on traditions of school ethnography in multilingual settings (Creese, Bhatt, and Martin 2009; Dagenais, Day, and Toohey 2006; Toohey 2000), as well as ethnography of communication (Gregory and Williams 2003; Heath 1983; Rampton 2006). Our use of an ethnographic approach is premised on the understanding that there is a dialectical relationship between micro and macro, the historical and present, and as such 'both levels can only be understood in terms of one another' (Blommaert 2005a, 16). Data collection tools included observation of lessons (captured in field notes and through selected video-recording), interviews with school principals and selected staff members, the completion of learner language network diagrams, and in Johannesburg Girls' secondary school, learner surveys and learner interviews. We focused on two Grade 1 classes in Johannesburg co-educational primary school, and two Grade 10 classes in the Johannesburg secondary school,<sup>4</sup> as well as observation of school assemblies and extramural activities. Data were analysed using 'critical discourse analysis' (Cheek 2004; Janks 2010) through which we identified dominant language

ideologies and practices. Specifically, we examined what ideologies are constructed, by what means and the extent to which these ideologies infiltrate everyday school experiences to produce and reproduce institutional practice. We will show that the discourses of language that exist in these settings 'order reality in a certain way. They both enable and constrain the production of knowledge, in that they allow for certain ways of thinking about reality while excluding others' (Cheek 2004, 1142). Discourse practices that exist here are not simply a neutral medium but act to construct and index as much as to reflect particular versions of social reality.

## **Data analysis**

### ***Case study 1 – Johannesburg primary school***

Our analysis begins with data-sets from the primary school (Extracts 1–2) followed by secondary school data (Extracts 3–6). We will examine a selection of moments from our data that are significant in illustrating how different languages are discursively constructed within school institutions, and how these constructions affect and effect the language socialisation processes and practices. Throughout our analysis, we will demonstrate the inextricable links between apartheid and post-apartheid conceptions of language in order to understand how school practices produce and reproduce structural hierarchies and power relations.

Extracts 1(a–c) below are drawn from the interview with the deputy principal (DP) and paint a picture of the language situation at the primary school.<sup>5</sup> Extract 2 is taken from field-notes recording discussions with one Grade 1 teacher. Referring to the language policy and practices at his school, the DP responded in this way:

#### *Extract 1 (a): 'English: The Dominant Order'*

Researcher (R): Does JP have an official language policy, that's been decided in the school, or I mean every school has a language policy in the sense of what they actually do ...

Deputy Principal (DP): mm yes we do actually have an official language policy because a few years ago (.) I stand under correction in terms of the year but I think it was in 1997 (R: ja) each school was supposed to draw up a language policy based on a survey ... prior to that the school was ... what was called the model C<sup>6</sup> school which had English as the medium of instruction ... when the school re-opened in 1992 ... it [English as the medium of instruction] remained the same ... ja eh that was the case and it has since continued like that even after the survey. English was still the language of teaching and learning (.) and eh it followed surprisingly from that that the second language of choice was Afrikaans and the third language of choice was Zulu (R:Really) ...

Extract 1 (a) highlights complex questions about the status of English and other languages in post-apartheid South Africa. Despite the fact that the racial dynamics at the school had changed with black learners in the majority by 1997, the year in which the language policy was decided upon in line with new democratic ideals, nothing much changed: 'English was still the language of teaching and learning (.) and eh it followed surprisingly from that that the second language of choice was Afrikaans and the third language of choice was Zulu'. The fact that English remained at the top of the hierarchy,

followed by Afrikaans shows clear continuity between apartheid and post-apartheid language policies and ideologies. It should be noted that the survey conducted in 1997 was done in consultation with parents, predominantly black, and the school governing body. By legitimating English as *the* main language and endorsing it through the school's language policy document, especially in the wake of transformation following the demise of apartheid, the historical linguistic order and the status quo when the school was still wholly white was maintained, produced and reproduced. The dominance of English can also be linked to its global position as a language of power that gives access to social and economic mobility. While it might appear that the school's language policy is liberal because it included Zulu, a previously marginalised African language, the reality is that African languages (unlike Afrikaans) are constructed in deficit terms as it shall be shown in extracts 1(b) and 3 below:

*Extract 1 (b): 'Unequal Positioning: A little bit of Zulu'*

R: so (.) if then Afrikaans was a second language of choice and Zulu a third language of choice, how do you accommodate those then? I mean would the parents want them to be taught as subjects or would they be used in other kinds of ways?

DP: ... eh they do English from grade 1, in grade 4 they are then introduced to Afrikaans and a little bit of Zulu and in grade 5 they take both Afrikaans and Zulu to be like second (.) what can I say ... it will be their second year of studying those languages ...

Extract 1(b) above, and 1(c) below, shows the positioning of languages, and how they are discursively constructed to perpetuate historical linguistic inequities and discrimination as experienced in school institutions. We see how multilingual Grade 1 learners are exposed to the idea that English is special or of superior status early on in their schooling careers. The fact that 'they do English from Grade 1' and additional languages are only taught in Grade 4 effectively means that learners will have their first three years of schooling immersed in highly monolingual practices – a stark contrast to the LiEP ideals of multilingualism with its social justice agenda. English is constructed and positioned as cultural capital and as having currency (Bourdieu 1991) within the linguistic market of the school. Thus, we argue that discourses of and about language, as well as day-to-day practices, are such that learners are socialised (and ultimately assimilated) into monoglot ideologies, right at the beginning of formal schooling. Through constant re-enactment of institutional behaviours and practices over time, English becomes 'normalised' and 'naturalised' (Foucault 1980) as the only order that counts.

What is most striking here is how Zulu, the home language to most learners, is positioned. Constructions such as 'a little bit of Zulu' and 'Zulu a third language of choice' showing its status in the hierarchy of languages, mediate everyday practice at this school. Through these discourses, we learn that Zulu is not as valued a resource as English, or even Afrikaans. In other words, the dominant meanings of English as the language of power and Afrikaans as the second best inevitably contribute to the disadvantaged position of Zulu as a language without power. It is important to realise that while Zulu is officially a third language of preference, only 'a little bit of Zulu' is introduced in Grade 4. The Zulu that is taught is mainly oral, and very basic communication, including practices like greetings because unlike English and Afrikaans, there is no required formal assessment for Zulu. Such institutional conceptions of and attitudes towards Zulu not only contribute to its lower stratum status but also show lack of political will or reluctance on the part of the school to give Zulu, or other African



languages, meaningful 'air time' in both formal and informal spaces. For instance, we have observed that African languages are used occasionally and, when used, these languages are restricted to social events such as assemblies<sup>7</sup> with very limited time allocation. This kind of tokenistic/symbolic display of African languages further culminates in the 'devaluing' and negative perceptions of the languages. Despite the school's rhetoric of diversity, the meanings and values attached to English surpassed those attached to other 'official' languages at the school.

The following extract further alludes to ideologies and practices consistent with the apartheid era, especially with the regard to the adoption of Afrikaans as a second official language in the school after 1994:

*Extract 1 (c): 'Linguistic Reproduction: Zulu Revolution'*

R: ... it's about parents' choices really ... if you were to speculate ... what do you think the reasons are [for choosing Afrikaans as a second language] and maybe it's not speculation you may know very well.

DP: eh (.) you see, I think there is logic also in that thing [parent choice of Afrikaans] (R: ja) .... there is a perception that you know the economy is still sitting in the hands of non-Africans. And if you're putting good stats in terms of finding a job or maybe doing well outside school, if you have this extra, or accent in terms of you having Afrikaans as a language, it will put you in a good position in terms of finding a job. I think that's the basic logic that I find to be true.

R: and the same logic applies for English, the choice of English to be the main language?

DP: I think yes, of course. Well if you were to say let's have Zulu as a source language we would have a revolution ... (laughter).

Despite the language rights bestowed in government policy, the changed racial demographics at the school and the school language policy as endorsed by the parents continues the legacy of the apartheid education where only English and Afrikaans were considered official. Based on the DP's reflection '... I think there is also logic in that thing...' and the fact that 'there is a perception that ... the economy is still sitting in the hands of non-Africans' poignantly shows the intricate connection between language and socioeconomic factors/power. Black parents believe that education in English, and some knowledge of Afrikaans, will eventually give their children access to the job market:

if you have this extra [Afrikaans] or accent in terms of you having Afrikaans ... it will put you in a good position in terms of finding a job ... that's the basic logic that I find to be true

This perhaps explains the ostensibly strong resistance towards African languages, arguably the basis for discourses such as 'Zulu as a source language ... we would have a revolution'. With such a pessimistic view of Zulu, it is not surprising then to learn that the school only taught 'a little bit of Zulu'. After all, only English and Afrikaans will maximise one's chances of finding a job.

The following extract underscores the relationship between dominant linguistic culture and assimilationist practices at the school:

*Extract 2: 'Assimilation: they cannot pronounce things properly because of the influence of their languages'*

R: ... I have noticed in the morning that neither you nor Mrs Mokwena<sup>8</sup> (assistant teacher) attempted to use other languages when I wondered whether there is a particular reason for that or (.) let me put it this way; why is it that using other languages did not seem to come naturally?

Grade 1 Teacher: We stick to English so that they can get used to it and understand things better ... sometimes our children cannot pronounce things properly because of the influence of their languages [i.e. African languages] ... some children come to me and say 'mam she is starting me'; 'and I [would ask] ... are you a car?' ... you see ... they just translate like that ... [reconstructed from field notes]

Similar to Extracts 1 (b) and 1 (c), African languages, home languages to the majority of the learners, are disregarded and constructed as 'a problem for the learning of English'. According to the Grade 1 teacher, a black multilingual speaker herself, teachers tend to 'stick to English so that [children] can get used to it and understand things' because 'sometimes our children cannot pronounce things properly because of the influence of their languages'. Multilingualism is seen as an impediment and monolingualism as a resource for learning English subject matter content. Therefore, the highly assimilationist practices evidenced here, particularly in the early stages, may not only contribute to low achievements in English, but also lead to a decline in first-language proficiency. The irony is that in spite of the teachers' good intentions and efforts to provide learners with access to English as *the* cultural capital, compromising African languages ignores the linguistic and educational needs of learners. In this way then, the education field continues to be responsible for maintaining and reproducing language hierarchies.

### ***Case study 2 – Johannesburg Girls' secondary school***

An analysis of the language policy and of staff discourses on language at the secondary school shows striking similarities with the primary school data. According to the school language policy, English is the official language of learning and teaching and the only language allowed in the formal space of the classroom. Like the primary school, the secondary school offered English as home or first language. On their first day of school, Grade 8 learners write an English proficiency test, as well as a mathematics test, which are used to stream, or divide, learners into classes according to their results, ranging from a 'top' class to the lowest-achieving class. In explaining this procedure, the head of language made it clear that the English test carried more weight than mathematics: 'Because the headmistress says when in doubt or if there is a big difference between the English and the mathematics [results] then go on the English' (Interview with the head of language). Here one sees the association of high proficiency in English with academic ability.

The conflation of English competence with intelligence was further evidenced in the head of language's views on the use of codeswitching in the classroom:

#### *Extract 3: 'Brighter girls ... good English'*

And in an academic class, the brighter girls usually do speak English to each other and lapse into their languages less. So, I am just assuming that if you do well academically, your English is of a higher standard. I am making that assumption. ... It can be just an assumption, in a weaker class they will speak vernacular more often. (Interview with Ms Smith)

The assumption the teacher makes about 'brighter girls' lapsing into 'their language less', while girls in a 'weaker class ... speak vernacular more' reinforces the reasoning underlying the streaming according to the English proficiency test that conflates good proficiency in English with intelligence. The teacher's deficit view of the use of learner's African language resources is clear in her characterisation of codeswitching as 'laps[ing] into their languages'. As in the primary school, use of African languages is viewed as a practice to be avoided if one wants to be perceived as highly proficient in English. A second English teacher interviewed expressed a similar position: 'I believe some of them [students], if I listen in the passageway and so on, some of them speak English to one another and you normally find that those are the stronger students ...' (English teacher 2).

In continuity with apartheid language education policy, the secondary school's language policy echoed that of the primary school with Afrikaans offered as the compulsory second language and Zulu only offered as an optional additional language in the final year, Grade 12. Never having observed a Zulu lesson or met a Zulu teacher at the school during fieldwork, the researcher followed up on this policy with the principal:

*Extract 4: 'Zulu as an undesirable language'*

CM: ... Is there Zulu as the seventh subject? Is that part of the policy or is that extra?

Principal: No, that is extra ... And we basically do it for kids who battle with this subject [Afrikaans] so that they have a chance, so it helps them to pass.

CM: ... So do you think in the longer term there might be a possibility in replacing Afrikaans rather than being an extra subject, or the students having a choice?

Principal: I think that they will still have a choice as Afrikaans is still the easiest you know? They do not find Zulu that easy and if you are not Zulu speaking you cannot do Zulu. [CM: Yes] It is very difficult and of course they do not speak pure Zulu anymore, it is pidgin Zulu ...

The principal produces contradictory discourses in her positioning of Zulu in the school's language policy. On the one hand, the provision of Zulu as an alternative additional language for Grade 12 learners is constructed as providing an easier option for the 'kids who battle to pass' Afrikaans, but, on the other hand, the fact that the school is unlikely to replace Afrikaans as additional language with Zulu is justified with the perceived 'difficulty' of the language; since Zulu is taken as an additional rather than home language, it is ironic that she argues that 'if you are not Zulu speaking you cannot do Zulu'. This is, of course, only the case as the school is not offering the language as subject from Grade 8–12 but rather learners are expected to pass Grade 12 after only one year of afterhours study. While the discourses are contradictory, there is, however, continuity in their construction of a linguistic ideology which positions Zulu as undesirable in school. In line with the sentiment expressed by the DP at the primary school that Zulu as language of learning and teaching ('source language') would cause a revolution, it is beyond imagination that Afrikaans could be replaced as compulsory additional language with an African language, even when the overwhelming majority of learners are speakers of African languages. The ideology of legitimate languages as pure, bounded entities is produced in the principal's description of learners' competence in Zulu as 'pidgin Zulu' and no longer 'pure', thus de-legitimising this resource.

Discourses constructing languages as 'easier' or more 'difficult' to pass in examinations reveal a further goal of the school's language policy (beyond sustaining

continuities with the language policy of the past) which is to produce a maximum number of passing students in the national exit examinations in Grade 12. The Grade 10 Afrikaans teacher echoed this goal in a brief conversation prior to the researcher's first observation of an Afrikaans lesson:

*Extract 5: 'Devaluing Afrikaans'*

Afrikaans T: [speaking to me in corridor as girls line up outside the door] I just thought I should tell you that you'll find I speak English 60% and Afrikaans only about 40% of the time but my girls don't fail Afrikaans though they miss out on some vocab [vocabulary]. (Field notes Day 1, 14 February 2005)

During this lesson and subsequent lesson observations, the teacher spoke English almost all the time, using Afrikaans only when reading from texts or mediating the textbook. The notion that a learner should study an additional language in order to expand their linguistic repertoires and develop communicative competence, in line with the principle expressed in the language policy that multilingualism should be 'a defining characteristic of South African citizens' is subverted by the goal to produce passing students. To be fair to the school though, the pressure from the national Department of Education to maximise throughput and the almost exclusive focus on a schools' exit examination results to determine their quality, drives this goal.

In continuity with the language regime operating in the primary school, the discourses presented and analysed thus far show how 'speaking English' is valued, while speaking 'vernacular' or even the official additional language at the school, Afrikaans, is not. This monoglot linguistic ideology which exclusively valued proficiency in English was further limited to a particular high prestige variety, which draws its features from the 'ethnolinguistic repertoire' (Benor 2010) of White South African English (WSAE) (McKinney 2007; Mesthrie 2010). In the same interview with Ms Smith, head of languages, referred to above, she was asked what problems in relation to language the learners might experience in the school if any:

*Extract 6 (a): 'Marginalising English varieties other than Standard English'*

T: Yes, what we have noticed in the English department is the pronunciation, like the *li:v*<sup>9</sup> (WSAE pronunciation of 'live') and the 'lêve' (leeve BSAE) and 'sIt' (sut, WSAE pronunciation) and *sēt* (seet) some of the matriculants made a joke out of that on the board, the other day 'I leeve in Alexandra townsheep' they spelt it like that deliberately but they know what it is so (CM: Yes) So maybe pronunciation, long and short vowels

In this response, the teacher shows no awareness of different accents and norms attached to different varieties or repertoires of English in South Africa. In her view, correct pronunciation is equivalent to that used in the ethnolinguistic repertoire of WSAE, while accents from the repertoire of Black South African English (BSAE) (van Rooy 2004) are characterised as a language problem. This resonates with the Grade 1 teacher in Extract 2 above who said she avoided using African languages in the classroom as these 'interfered' with learners' 'correct' pronunciation of English. In parallel with Bangeni and Kapp's (2007, 256) finding concerning working-class students entering an elite academic institution in South Africa, the 'home identities and languages [of learners] are constructed as a problem that needs to be fixed'.

Ms Smith returned to the theme of accent later in the interview confirming her deficit view of BSAE accents which she refers to somewhat uncomfortably as ‘the township accent’: ‘T: Yes, there is an improvement for most of them, but some of them never lose the (pause) (CM: yes) township accent or whatever’. Finally, in a discussion of whether she has heard the descriptor that girls often use ‘model-c English’<sup>10</sup> the teacher replies:

*Extract 6(b): ‘Normative ways of being: black or white Accents?’*

T: Yes, well I think of it [accent of girls using phonological features of WSAE] as neutral.

CM: Yes.

T: You do not know hear the black or the white

CM: Yes, you do not hear it, well it sounds like you

T: Yes, yes so, yes, it is sort of comforting or whatever (inaudible) you would say you identify to relate to that.

In describing her own accent and girls that use the same accent as ‘neutral’ and as neither black or white, the teacher highlights the normativity (and invisibility) of white ways of speaking English, what one might call an ethnolinguistic repertoire of *whiteness*. The accents of this ethnolinguistic repertoire are not audible to the English teacher; they are constructed as the norm or the standard. In response to the researcher’s comment that rather than being ‘neutral’, the accent ‘sounds like you’, the teacher emphasises her preference for this way of speaking (‘it is comforting’), encoding a discourse of comfort in similarity and discomfort in difference. This data shows that it is not just English that is exclusively constituted as the legitimate language in the school space but rather the particular ethnolinguistic repertoire of WSAE, which has accrued the invisible prestige of whiteness.

Our analysis has shown that the two schools produce dominant language ideologies that are consistent: linguistic homogeneity and inequity are the order of the day. Thus, while the majority of the learners have wide linguistic repertoires with competence in several named languages fitting the usual definition of multilinguals, the regime of language at the schools constitutes them as monolinguals and frequently as deficient monolinguals. This data provides evidence for Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck’s (2005, 213) argument that ‘[m]ultilingualism is not what individuals have or lack, but what the environment, as structured determination and interactional emergence, enables and disables them to deploy’. In line with Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck’s analysis, we have shown that the language regimes at the schools effectively limit what ‘counts as competence in real environments’ (2005, 200), and significantly, what counts as resources for learning.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have demonstrated the complex relationship between the present and historical conceptions of what language is (should be or ought to be) and its perceived functions and role in a multilingual and plurilingual society. We have shown that limiting discourses constructing legitimate languages as discrete, bounded and pure forms in this democratic dispensation are consistent with ideologies that informed apartheid language policy. As was the case in the past, post-apartheid policies continue to advance and invest

in monoglot ideologies that legitimise and give authority to standard English language at the expense of pluralism and diversity. In the case studies presented, the notions that languages other than English are a hindrance to learning, that English is best learned monolingually, that WSAE is valued and BSAE is constructed in deficit terms, all illustrate the effects of monoglot ideologies (and the weight of history, cf de Klerk 2002) in post-apartheid education. Despite the post-apartheid transformation, in official discourses, English continues to be viewed as a powerful commodity and its position unassailable, while multilingual and plurilingual practices are not equally acknowledged as resources and rendered inadequate, deficient and ineffective for communication purposes, teaching and learning.

In a society still as deeply divided and unequal as South Africa, ideological practices such as the ones illustrated here continue to reproduce social stratification and racialised patterns of domination and subordination in education. This glaringly unequal positioning of resources (particularly in multilingual spaces where learners have linguistic repertoires including two or more languages), its powers of exclusion, its role in shaping what knowledge should count and not count serve to perpetuate linguistic discrimination. There needs to be greater recognition of the historical language ideologies that serve to perpetuate, maintain and reinforce inequitable relations of power by privileging certain language practices, knowledge, register and style. We conclude that for some of these linguistic imbalances to be addressed, it will be crucial for policymakers (and relevant stakeholders) to critically interrogate deeply entrenched historical ideologies that seem to persist in our language policies today with the aim of 'crafting' a new order of ideologies: with multilingualism understood as the ability to use a range of linguistic resources, at the centre rather than at the periphery. In this way, we will be able to enrich our conception of additive bilingualism (largely seen in monolingual terms in its current formation) particularly in the context of learners' complex heteroglossic language repertoires. With such political will, we believe that school systems will begin to acknowledge learners' diversity and to use multilingualism and plurilingualism as resources for formal education in order to create and provide equal learning opportunities and access to all.

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank Jacqui Dombrack, Bonny Norton and the reviewers for their useful comments on this article.

### **Notes**

1. Also often referred to as minority language rights (MLRs) (May 2005).
2. We use the racial categories of 'blacks', 'whites', 'Indians' and 'coloured' to reflect classifications that underscored apartheid policies. Although we do not support the use of these racial categories, they continue to function in post-apartheid South Africa.
3. Makoe has proficiency in Sotho, Tswana and Zulu languages; McKinney has proficiency in Afrikaans and basic Xhosa.
4. Note that we use pseudonyms for the names of the schools and participants involved.
5. The DP is proficient in Zulu, Sotho and Afrikaans.
6. Former Model C is a term used to describe those schools that were previously reserved for white learners under apartheid.
7. The school assembly is a grand event often attended by company representative sponsoring some children or activities in the school; parents as well as community members. The assembly was a forum in which individual learners were rewarded for various academic and extra-curricular achievements with certificates or prizes. Normally, the social activities would include practices like singing, drama, and occasionally the reading of the Bible in which 'a little bit of Zulu' or other African languages was used.

8. Mrs Mokwena is proficient in several African languages including Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Sepedi and Venda. The Grade 1 teacher speaks Tswana as a home language.
9. Bold font indicates International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transliteration.
10. 'Model-C English' is used as a descriptor for black learners drawing on their ethnolinguistic repertoire of WSAE.

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