Making and shaping participatory spaces:
Resemiotisation and citizenship agency

Caroline Kerfoot
Language Education Dept
University of the Western Cape
Overview

- This paper draws on a study of an educator training programme at a time of rapid social change in the Northern Cape, a context of severe poverty and inequality.

- It investigates the practices of adult educators trained to act as agents of development in multilingual contexts.

- It uses the notion of ‘resemiotisation’ to explore dynamic processes of meaning-making in new sites of possibility – in this case, a community-based workshop facilitated by participants.

- Draws out the implications for Adult Basic Education.
Challenges of democratic consolidation

- A progressive constitution and Bill of Rights
  
  BUT
  
  - political and civil rights have limited meaning unless socio-economic rights are made tangible
  - democratic consolidation involves not only building a new state but also new interfaces between state and society (Beall et al. 2005: 681).

  ➔ So a desired goal is **participatory citizenship** which goes beyond rights-based approaches, incorporates both development and governance

The role of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)

- A visionary post-apartheid policy

However

- Minimal relationship between the kinds of skills learnt in ABET classes and those needed for participatory citizenship

Emerging questions

- What kinds of local textual practices can and should be forged in relation to larger social dynamics (Luke & Freebody 1997:2) to facilitate participatory citizenship?
Data from impact study of partnership between Centre for Adult Education at UWC and the Northern Cape Education Dept (1996-1999)

- Key outcomes for participants on the Certificate for Educators of Adults were:
  - to operate effectively as development practitioners in the field of ABET.
  - ‘to nurture active citizens with some sort of broader vision of social good and help to sustain people's vision of what's possible’ (CACE Director).

- **Pedagogy**
  - roots in Popular Education
  - aimed to foster ‘critical consciousness’ (Freire 1990)
  - could be characterised as situated, research-oriented and participatory: a ‘pedagogy of possibility’ (Simon, 1987).
Student profile

Linguistic
- Seven language groups were represented, including minority languages such as Nama, !Xũ! and Khoe
- All participants spoke at least 2 of the languages in the province.

Other
- 43.5% of participants were ‘coloured’ and 56.5 African;
- 60% female,
- 54% from rural contexts.

- Most participants had completed their secondary schooling.
- Ten percent had some experience teaching adults in NGOs.
- 221 students registered over the 4 years.
- Completion rate: 67%, of whom 67% were women and 76% based in rural areas
Key findings: Areas of community involvement: helping others to realise socio-economic rights

- Housing: 3%
- Local/community development: 4%
- Tourism initiatives: 4%
- Community gardens: 4%
- Savings scheme: 1%
- Sports development: 2%
- Fundraising: 2%
- Prison Rehabilitation: 2%
- Affirmative action: 1%
- Counseling teenagers: 1%
- Academic development: 1%
- Small business development*: 19%
- Church projects: 12%
- Community health: 8%
- Small business development: 8%
- Women & family: 7%
- Youth development initiatives: 8%
- Community police forums: 6%
- HIV/AIDS awareness: 6%
Researching meaning-making in and across participatory spaces

How did participants use their multilingual repertoires to create and facilitate participation in new spaces by others, especially those with little or no formal education?
Why resemiotisation?

- The study of **multimodality**: allows a broadening of the focus from written texts to all modes of meaning-making and their interrelationships.

- *'Recontextualisation'* - how elements of one social practice are appropriated by, relocated in the context of, another* (Fairclough 2003:222).
  
  For example:
  - asking someone to shut the door, a written notice, a hydraulic door-closing device (Latour 1992: 250ff)

But: studies of recontextualization have tended to focus on finite and finished texts.

- Resemiotisation (Iedema 2003) offers a more dynamic view of semiosis, provides the analytical means for:
  - 'tracing how semiotics are translated from one into the other as social processes unfold, as well as for
  - **asking why these semiotics** (rather than others) are mobilized to do certain things at certain times’ (p. 29)
Mediating participation in multilingual spaces

Workshop held by three young male students in a township in Kimberley, the provincial capital. All three spoke Xhosa, Tswana, Afrikaans and English.

Participants: Xhosa or Tswana-speaking, each group able to understand the other language to some extent as well as Afrikaans which serves as a lingua franca in Kimberley.

The topic chosen for the workshop was health and hygiene.

- nearly 20,000 children under 5 years of age die each year in South Africa from a combination of diarrhoea, malnutrition and respiratory tract infections (Solarsh & Goga 2004).

- In 2000 many residents of Kimberley townships were without running water in their homes and still used the bucket system for sanitation.

The aim of the workshop was thus to raise awareness about the causes of diarrhoea in young children and to strategise interventions.

Freirean problem-posing cycle

as logic for workshop
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of problem-posing practice</th>
<th>(Inter)actions</th>
<th>Semiotic modes</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ice-breaker</td>
<td>Introduce observer&lt;br&gt;Prayer&lt;br&gt;Song</td>
<td>Speech&lt;br&gt;Speech&lt;br&gt;Music, song</td>
<td>Voice&lt;br&gt;Voice</td>
<td>English&lt;br&gt;Xhosa, Tswana&lt;br&gt;Xhosa, Tswana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of topic</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Xhosa with check for understanding by Tswana speakers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code or trigger</td>
<td>Images with verbal explanations</td>
<td>Spatial, visual + speech</td>
<td>Voice&lt;br&gt;Objects and the relations between them</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse deeper causes and plan for action</td>
<td>Group discussion&lt;br&gt;Speech, writing, spatial</td>
<td>Voice&lt;br&gt;Bulleted points on newsprint</td>
<td>Language-based groups: Xhosa, Tswana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reportback</td>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>Speech&lt;br&gt;Writing, spatial</td>
<td>Voice&lt;br&gt;Bulleted points on newsprint</td>
<td>Xhosa, Tswana with translation into English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resemiotising moves

Meaning-making processes were driven by the sequential logic of the popular education cycle:
This logic was realised through the shift in semiotic modes which accompanied each stage of the
cycle.
Each ‘resemiotising move’ (Iedema 2003: 43) thus brought about a progressive shifting of
responsibility for analytical work and decision-making towards the participants, signalling a
shift in ‘footing’ (Goffman 1975, 1981)

→ redefinition of roles and expectations, re-ordering of communicative organisation
At the moments of greatest analytical depth, the lack of hierarchy implicit in mindmaps and bullets (space-based modes) constructed participants as equals capable of collectively addressing social issues.

The use of spatial logics in writing changed both the ‘force’ and the ‘feel’ of the text (Kress 2003: 16), crystallising key moments of synthesis while representing in material form the restructured roles and relationships of the facilitator and the other participants.

At the same time, it provided a durable, accessible and legitimate record of discussions and decisions.
Recoding moves

These materialisations were entwined with shifts in and amongst languages, language varieties or registers for the purposes of mutual understanding and inclusion.

- These multiple shifts served to legitimise speakers – to reorganise and restructure the linguistic hierarchies historically associated with public forums and to constitute all participants as equals.
- Deformalised proceedings and altered perceptions of roles and status relations.

So non-hierarchical communicative organisation was mirrored in semiotic materialisations
Creating linguistic and epistemic authority

Meaning-making processes were driven by a ‘social action’ imperative: the desire to construct participants as valued, equal and active citizens and the need to reconfigure power in this space to enable participatory processes

- where successful, legitimised language varieties, re-organised language hierarchies, de-emphasised literacy as the ‘semiotics of power’
- harnessing energy and validating the ‘linguistic and epistemic authority’ (Chandoke 2003: 186) of subaltern actors
- opportunities for citizenship agency.

Promoting this form of ‘linguistic citizenship’ (Stroud 2001) through adult basic education appears to have a greater chance of equipping people with the ‘capabilities’ to engage in participatory development, access socio-economic rights and hold government to account.

The challenge for ABET and development

to investigate which kind of semiotic resources might be important for whom, in what contexts and in which languages or combinations of languages, and to use these findings to reshape policy and pedagogical practices.
Thank you!
Where successful

- Less formal and ritualised forms of interaction than in established democracies succeed in harnessing energy and validating the ‘linguistic and epistemic authority’ (Chandoke 2003: 186) of subaltern actors.
- Creates new social rules and confidence to begin a process of engaging with the state.
- Importance of state employees as CACE participants – build capacity on both sides of interface and enable participatory governance.

Where unsuccessful

- Unable to suppress or reconfigure the traces of power relations and subjectivities from other sites; strong counter-discourses.
- → the more stratified and fragmented the participant profile, the more necessary the ‘third language’ of participatory discourses: accessibility, negotiability, joint production → re-order communicative organisation, redefine roles and expectations, codes of conduct, reconfigure power relations.
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Aligning ABET more strongly with development goals could be achieved by:

- Taking the spotlight off ‘literacy’: contextualising literacy, language and other modes of semiosis as resources within the broader discourses necessary for bringing about social, economic and political change.

- Recognising that different purposes will be accomplished in different languages and through different modes at different times: languages do not need to be taught as rigidly bounded systems at arbitrary stages in the curriculum.

- Providing a set of tools of inquiry to help adult learning groups engage in collective research and development.

- In this way, expanding people’s existing repertoires and equipping them with the capabilities to access citizenship rights and hold government to account.
Methods

- Original DFID-funded study from July 2000 to January 2001
- multilingual team of researchers including some past programme participants
- interviews, observations and document analysis

Examples

- verbal accounts of community workshops by lecturers
- field notes of other events initiated by participants in community spaces,
- interviews and focus group discussions with participants, lecturers, community members, and state officials,
- documents created by participants, either as part of their course work or in later initiatives, e.g. assignments, workshop evaluations, research reports, minutes of meetings, business plans.

While language, literacy and other semiotic practices were not the focus of the research, evidence of patterns of use was embedded in narrative accounts and in field notes.