

Multilingualism and participatory citizenship

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INtroduction

- Finding solutions to problems of contemporary South Africa requires engagement of all sectors of the population
- Reiterate the importance of language for a transformative and participative democracy
- The Constitution recognizes 11 official languages and accords rights to their speakers

- However, increasingly apparent that routes to (linguistically mediated) participative democracy need to be sought
 - beyond conventional understandings of language and multilingualism
 - beyond or outside of the formal institutions, legitimate discourses and organizations which currently work with language

Problems

- Contemporary approaches to language and politics tend to entrench a system that reproduces the basis of the very inequities that it is designed to dismantle
 - linguistic diversity is regulated and ordered (competition between languages and among varieties); many speakers excluded
 - powerful groups are more visible and successful in linking rights to language: unequal opportunities for agency (Afrikaans)
 - essentialist and separatist strategies potentially ethnically divisive

Ways forward

- Look outside language *per se* and search for ways of facilitating the expression of voice and agency. Note: speakers continually working *with and through* different modalities, conventional language, registers, social languages, genres etc.
- Thus an emphasis on *linguistic diversity, i.e.*
 - rather than view 'language' as a system of ordering and regulating – a centering core set of forms and speakers – focus on the *polycentricity* of speech forms
 - rather than view *diversity* of semiotic practices as multilingualism (multiple monolingualisms), focus on heteroglossia

Linguistic citizenship

- refers predominantly to a view on language and politics that takes as a central point
 - of departure the desirability of constructing agency and maintaining voice
 - across media, modalities, and context. Language,
 - from the perspective of linguistic citizenship, is both the means and the
 - target for democratic “effort,” and multilingualism is both a facilitative and
 - constraining factor in the exercise of democratic citizenship and voice.
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- Linguistic citizenship takes linguistic diversity and difference as a prime means (rather
 - than a problem) for the material realization of democracy. It recognizes the
 - manifold sites and the many linguistic practices through which citizenship
 - is managed, attempting to account for the way both local and transnational
 - solidarities are built across categorical identities through interpersonal
 - negotiation in multiscaled spaces (Linguistic citizenship thus
 - contributes toward the political theorization of a linguistics-of-*contact*
 - rather than a linguistics-of-community (Pratt, 1998).

Questions

- What forms of heteroglossia and polycentric practices do speakers employ? How do these critique conventional understandings of multilingualism? (Banda)
- What are the material constraints on access and portability of different forms of semiotic resource/repertoires (across scales)? (Dyers)
- How can semiotic diversity be consciously deployed to enhance voice and learning in literacy contexts