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.

- 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