INTERPRETING LANGUAGE POLICY: EQUITY, DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMNET IN SOUTH AFRICA

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In his recent book, *The idea of justice,* Nobel laureate Amartya Sen speaks of a deep-seated division in socio-political thought:

> between an *arrangement-focused* view of justice, and a *realization-focused* understanding of justice. The former line of thought proposes that justice should be conceptualized in terms of certain organizational arrangements – some institutions, some regulations, some behavioural rules – the active presence of which would indicate that justice is being done. The question to ask in this context is whether the analysis of justice must be so confined to getting the basic institutions and general rules right? Should we not also have to examine what emerges in the society, including the kind of lives that people can actually lead, given the institutions and rules, but also other influences, including actual behaviour, that would inescapably affect human lives? (Sen 2009: 10)

The first route he calls transcendental, in that it is based on the abstract consideration of "the just society", and does not take the present as its point of departure. The second route, which is the basis of his own work, is comparative, in that it works from present circumstances and an informed common-sense understanding of what would make these circumstances more just or even less unjust. However, Sen does not pursue a binary distinction between them which would force a choice between comparative or transcendental. Rather he is concerned with the starting point of the discussion: "in particular the selection of some questions to be answered (for example, 'how would justice be advanced?'), rather than others (for example, 'what would be perfectly just institutions?') (Sen 2009: 9).

We now turn to justice in relation to languages. The concern for giving a fuller currency to languages under threat and for the social and economic wellbeing of speakers of various languages is widely shared by linguists working in the field

of language and society. However, there are some fundamental theoretical differences among them, closely related to the distinctions made by Amartya Sen. These distinctions have important practical consequences. They are reflected in the policy and policy interpretation routes chosen to achieve the goals. At the risk of oversimplification, I should like to distinguish between two main orientations: an orientation to structure and compliance based on preconceived ideals, and an orientation to practice and needs based on an analysis of the actual situation.

Language policies arising from Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) generally take the form of important social commitments by a governing body which requires compliance of those within the ambit of its authority. Put crudely, such policies are based on the notion of a central authority, the custodian of what is right, which can ultimately achieve submission to its will through the coercive powers available to it in law, and they are formulated accordingly. Language policies arising from a more sociolinguistic understanding of the ways in which languages are actually used tend to take the form of enabling regulations for important social changes: they provide legitimating frameworks for moving beyond previously limiting views of language and of the relationships between languages and people in pursuing enhanced learning, social participation and empowerment. LHR emphasises the power of a central authority (the state, the province, the Council, the Board of Directors) as the means of achieving policy goals. Sociolinguistic approaches emphasise the power of the people as what policy must draw on for its realisation. The differences are not as clearcut in successful implementations of policy. Both sources of power are important for realisation of goals: authority to set broad requirements, and a common will to make sense of them in real situations. The most sophisticated policies attempt to give due recognition to the ways in which they relate to one another. As in Amartya Sen's discussion of justice, the key issue in achieving an

appropriate relation between them is the questions one starts with.

South African language policy is based on the finely conceived notions of judicable rights enshrined in the national Constitution and having to be interpreted contextually and particularly in relation to other rights by the Constitutional Court. That requirement of interpreting any single right in relation to other rights urges the Court in the direction of what can be realised in context. However, statutory bodies specifically mandated to adjudicate individual rights have no such built-in pressure to moderate their responses. The Pan South African Languages Board (PANSALB), for example, operates under the strong influence of the decontextualised notions of rights which characterise LHR discourse. Stroud and Heugh (2004) see both the Constitution and PANSALB in this light. Both, undoubtedly, emanate from a transcendental approach which prioritises structures. However, the role of the Constitutional Court with its necessarily wider points of reference makes for decidedly realization-focused practice related to specific situations.   PANSALB is structurally obliged to take its bearings on the magnetic North of constitutional language rights, and, encouraged by a hegemonic LHR discourse, drives South Africa inexorably towards that North regardless of the deserts and icefields on the way. With such an interpretation of rights, it is compromised from the start: it conceives and pursues rights within a predominantly legalistic, rather than a sociolinguistic or pragmatic frame, as if the rights it is concerned with take priority over all other rights. This poses at least five demonstrable risks for interpreting policy and addressing disadvantage, most acutely so in education.

Within a legalistic frame, languages are reified. Reification means that each language is conceived of as one thing, context independent, based on a supposedly neutral standard, urging the policy thrust towards compliance, and making which

language is used in the classroom more important than the quality of education afforded. The first risk, then, is that the standard variety is all one is concerned with, leading one to ignore or be impatient of the non-standard varieties spoken by the majority of the population and to be disturbed by practices like code-switching which are common in any multilingual situation. The second risk is that reification makes language a tool independent of context, so that knowledge of grammar and lexis becomes the primary focus, supposedly putting one in a position to meet almost any linguistic challenge. The third risk, particularly in the case of the African languages in South Africa, is that arbitrary boundaries, often reflecting colonial or other repressive perspectives imposed on identities, are confirmed, and the social dynamics of the languages and the often time-honoured practices through which people put their linguistic repertoires to use are obscured. The fourth risk is that a reified view of language in the interpretation of policy focuses on measureable compliance and so on the minimum that is necessary for an institution to pass muster: this minimalist approach is inimical to broader aspirations. The fifth risk arises when the issue of which language should be used for learning and teaching becomes more important than the quality of education to be aspired to. Not infrequently, for example, the use of the reified "mother tongue" is seen as a panacea for all manner of educational ills so that the other pressing requirements for addressing those ills can be ignored. In that situation, the question of how language (including mediation between languages) may creatively be used to promote excellent education is usually brushed from the agenda with a pernicious moral authority. These are very serious risks. Any one of them can be profoundly disempowering or subversive of larger intentions.

Clearly, a sophisticated understanding of the actual roles of language — as well as of various specific languages — in education and in society must inform language policy in

education and its interpretation. This carries the risk that languages will be fixed in their current status and functions by such a *requirement*, but engaged practice in the classroom can avoid that trap. If the policy is to be conducive to improving access and success and so contributing to educational justice in a multilingual society, it has to take as its point of initial engagement the significance of each of the languages involved to the class or the learners concerned. When this does not happen, high-minded policy readily becomes a valorised means of avoidance of responsibility. Teachers are able to avoid the more complex needs of the class because they are teaching in language A in compliance with the policy and are able to ignore the relative possibilities of languages in a multilingual situation. Learners, too, are relieved of the pressure to make sense more effectively because the attitude of the teachers does not project a clear expectation that they will use all the sense-making resources (including all the linguistic resources) at their disposal. And most insidiously, leadership is able to avoid the fundamental challenges of disadvantage while garnering the moral kudos for supposedly addressing them.

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The issues at stake in interpreting language policy in a situation with a strong concern for democracy, equity and educational achievement have been articulated in various ways by progressive thinkers over many years. In this article, I shall not attempt to review the field, but I shall rather examine the some recent research in Flanders, the European Union and South Africa and seek to understand its significance.

The situation in Flanders is of more than passing interest in South Africa. In the later 19th century, the discourses of the Flemish *taalstrijdt* (language struggle) permeated the

discourse of the Afrikaans *taalstryd* and through it impacted heavily on the ways language was conceived and discussed in South Africa throughout the 20th century. It continues to exercise significant influence, not only on the Afrikaans language debate, but also on planning for other languages. In Flanders, too, the language struggle has taken out a new lease on life. The current political situation is strongly influenced by a nationalist movement which views a multilingual, multicultural reality with apprehension and ties identity and the health of the nation state to Dutch as the touchstone. In 2006, the Flemish Minister of Education, Frank Vandenbroucke, issued a policy letter predicated largely on this set of assumptions (Vandenbroucke 2006). The starting point is a relatively homogeneous view of the Flemish state, with "the Dutch language as an important element of the Flemish identity"[i] along with a sense of Dutch under threat globally in a situation where "more dominant languages are penetrating common life and playing a large role there."[ii] Vandenbroucke's policy letter has provoked illuminating responses from internationally prominent Flemish linguists. As its title suggests, Blommaert and Van Avermaet's (2008) book, *Taal, onderwijs en de samenleving: De kloof tussen beleid en realiteit,* reflects on "the gap between policy and reality". And in *De klank van de stad: Stedelijke meertaligheid en interculturele communicatie,* ed. Jürgen Jaspers (2009), eminent Flemish scholars take a fresh look at the multilingual realities of their society and explore the sociolinguistic features of the phenomena they observe, placing the Vandenbroucke debate in the context of an increasingly multicultural Flanders. It is worth examining some of these contributions more closely.

Jan Blommaert and Piet Van Avermaet (2008) argue that the expressed intentions behind the Vandenbroucke policy letter are good: improving schooling and social access and success, particularly for those who have been sidelined or disadvantaged. However, the Minister's policy is premised on

deeply misleading notions from the dominant language ideology which undermine his intentions. Four of these faulty premises are directly relevant to the theme of this paper.

1. The bad premise that language is a stable object one can possess: if you have adequate knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary you can manage in any situation (so genre, register, context etc are ignored). Once language is seen in relation to society, this reified, "linguistic" view of language doesn't bear scrutiny: language is used in a variety of ways with different "standards" in different social circumstances. For example, chances of success at school are not particularly related to mastery of a standard grammar and lexis: they have rather to do with "the manner in which one succeeds in mastering the school language competences, these being specific competences of reading, writing, understanding and speaking" [iii] needed for individual disciplines. (Blommaert and van Avermaet 2008: 33 – my translation).

2. The bad premise that standards of language competence exist in the abstract , so a single absolute standard must once more become dominant in a situation where, troublingly, "linguistic communication appears to be subject to a process of fragmentation" (Vandenbroucke 2006:2 – my translation). In fact, this is deeply misleading: significant diversity of language use is normal in any society, and effectiveness, accuracy and appropriateness is related to context, not to correctness in the abstract. "Learning a language means one further step in the development of a multilingual repertoire that is constituted from asymmetrical and contextualised competences. This all takes place within a field of power relations, in relation to which certain (linguistic) resources are accorded high value, while others are disqualified. Multilingualism is thus neither a level field nor a horizontal space, but a vertical,

layered, hierarchically structured space: a mirror of the society"[iv] (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008: 79 – my translation)

3. The bad premise that mastery of the standard language is the prerequisite for real accuracy of thought and it underpins the integrity of the society. Accordingly multilingualism is conceived as serial monolingualism in the standard varieties, and dialects and other variants are excluded or suppressed in the interests of accuracy of thought and social coherence. The value of the standard version is not at issue, but the argument ignores the variety inherent in a language, the diversity of all societies, and human capacity for accurate and effective communication in all languages and varieties in appropriate contexts.

4. The bad premise that language exists apart from the society. This is probably the most deceptive of the premises because language is a social construct. Context is crucial. "Language competences exist only as such – as valid and valuable competences – in specific contexts" (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008: 48 – my translation) and for the purposes of those contexts. Gaining a sense of appropriacy and when to apply various norms involves reading social situations in some of which learners already have substantial knowledge. By adopting this approach, "our children learn better, not only how to understand the language, but also how to understand the society. They come to understand that society is not a level space, but is layered and full of niches that relate to one another in a relatively stable order" (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008: 100f – my translation).[v]

Blommaert and van Avermaet conclude that failure to take account of the ways languages and varieties of languages are used in our society inexorably implies that we are "damaging the educational prospects of generations of children under the

banner of equal opportunities" (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008: 117 – my translation).[vi]

The debate on multilingualism is thus necessarily an exploration of language use in the full range of social contexts in the society, with inescapable implications for satisfactory access to social amenities. *De klank van de stad* explores these issues on the basis of a number of studies in different social situations. The editor, Jürgen Jaspers, observes that:

The persistent effect of socio-economic background on achievement in school has resulted in an exclusive focus on language competence threatening to narrow our perspective to just one symptom of a much larger problem.[vii] (Jaspers 2009: 25 – my translation)

He and his fellow authors are at pains to deal with the reality that their society is multilingual and produces a range of multilingual practices which cannot be divorced from the ways in which the society actually works. In the Epilogue, Jef Verschueren (2009: 214) emphasises that "A creative treatment of multilingualism means nothing other than taking account of the multilingual reality and thus working within the outline determined by reality itself" (my translation).[viii] The aspect of most importance to our topic, then, is the need for a careful situated analysis of that reality. Van den Branden and Verhelst (2009: 134) point out that:

> . . . in order to determine precisely *how* space is created for the home languages of learners, one has to take serious account of the characteristics of the regional and local context and of the specific goals that one has in mind.[ix] (my translation)

Slembrouck (2009: 39) teases out the issues in more detail:

> Multilingualism is traditionally rather one-sidedly

conceptualised as a question of, on the one hand, the repertoires which speakers have … and, on the other hand, the characteristics of collectives. More recent work emphasises how this view may easily cause one to lose sight of the fact that multilingualism is especially a function of time and place and of the dynamic which characterises the way a situation plays itself out: the type of institution, the activities organised in it, the interactions which take place, the degree of involvement expressed in relation to the topic of conversation, and so on.[x] (my translation)

The results are often counter-intuitive. Reporting on empirical research, Allain and Ceulers (2009: 161) show that the dynamics of a multilingual classroom, rather than diminishing the learning of Dutch, have the potential to promote it, provided that the learners are secure in the knowledge that their language is respected within a multilingual approach:

Our hypothesis is that [Dutch-speaking] learners, when they are confronted through CLIL with a situation in which their own language (or rather their 'we'-code) has a place and is appropriately valued [while the medium is French in an environment where French has high utility], are more inclined to adapt to a policy which is strongly focused on Dutch. [xi] (my translation).

To surmount the discursive difficulties which bedevil debate and policy making, and to enable engagement with social and linguistic realities in the interests of democracy, equity and education, Slembrouck (2009: 54) urges a response from scholarship:

in which the insights gained from the study of complex situated and valorised activities help build a barrier against illegitimate generalisations. But the story does not end there, because scholarship must also be in a position tactfully and sensitively to sketch alternatives or at least

to touch on the foundations of such alternatives. Precisely there lies a substantial challenge of which we are only now beginning to understand the dimensions. One favourable condition for addressing this challenge is met in a scale- and activity-sensitive analysis of language use and multilingual interaction augmented with a good understanding of the ways practices are structured in the field, the logic of domains … and the already less centralised but still very real role of the nation state in the defining of a (multilingual) language policy.[xii] (my translation)

It is precisely on the point of "scale and activity sensitive analysis of language use and multilingual interaction" in higher education that the European Union Sixth Framework Dylan Project is beginning to make a contribution. Dylan stands for "Language dynamics and the management of diversity" and the project involves researchers in a range of countries. The first publicly accessible Dylan working papers were released in March 2009 after 30 months of project work. The report on Workpackage 3 of the project, which is of the most direct interest to us, was prepared by universities in Spain, Italy, Belgium, Romania and Finland. It has as its goals:

‣ To analyse multilingual practices in educational institutions, focusing on higher

education settings;

‣ To examine language policies and strategies at the national and institutional

level;

‣ To investigate representations by different actors of multilingualism and of

multilingual education. (Dylan Working Paper 3:3)

Practices are at the centre of interest, with the relationship

to policies and to the ways in which the actors in multilingual university settings understand what they are doing as important considerations. For our purposes, the following points are of high significance:

1. There is a gap between policy and dynamic practice. All the universities concerned have policies which provide for or prescribe multilingual practices. "However, policies do not mention using more than one language in the same event as a possible way to establish relationships or to interact at universities. As will be seen, this issue contrasts with some of the observed practices"(Dylan Working Paper 3:3) All the multilingual policies assume that one language will be used at a time or in one formal unit of the academic programme, however, in some classrooms several languages are used, and in others there is extensive code-switching: the participants use their multilingual repertoire in flexible ways. The project refers to this form of multilingual practice as "plurilingualism".

2. What people think they do and what they actually do are significantly different. "The actors directly implicated in practices (students, teaching and administration staff) understand multilingualism in different ways when talking about it and when they interact with other people in intercultural or/and in classroom settings. In talking about it, multilingualism is seen by actors as a means to communicate and as a competence to be acquired. In that sense, actors' representations coincide with policies. However, the representations emerging in interactions are more complex and frequently multilingualism is seen as a repertoire without boundaries that can be exploited to accomplish multiple activities in a given situation" (Dylan Working Papers 3:5). On the same theme, " the official multilingual orientation of the Free University of Bozen- Bolzano is conjugated in quite different forms in practice" across

the full spectrum (Dylan Working Papers 3: 12). Similarly, at the University of Lausanne and other Swiss institutions studied, the researchers report that their "analyses show above all the diversity of plurilingual practices in tertiary teaching" (Dylan Working Papers 3: 17 – my translation).[xiii]

3. Plurilingualism seems to promote better learning in ways that require more investigation. "Some teams propose the hypotheses, based on their data analysis, that the use of more than one language in the same event could be a procedure for deepening the construction of knowledge when the object of discourse becomes dense or impenetrable"(Dylan Working Papers 3: 6). The Autonomous University of Barcelona reports that "plurilingualism is inextricably linked to situated cognition in multilingual learning settings and … individuals use their plurilingual resources to construct knowledge. [The team's] data analysis suggests that the plurilingual mode creates a favourable framework for dealing with both metalinguistic and metacognitive tasks in an integrated way and provides novel tools for the problematisation and for the construction of knowledge" (Dylan Working Papers 3:9). The University of Lausanne team reports that "In effect, the impact of the linguistic dimension would seem to depend not only on the degree of multilingualism in practice, but also the extent of interactivity, which permits or works against the co-construction of knowledge" (Dylan Working Papers 3: 19 – my translation).[xiv] Interactivity of this kind in a multilingual situation requires negotiation of language use. The team from Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania reports that: "As compared to classes in the native language, classes in foreign languages (LSP, CLIL), with their high redundancy and the rephrasing strategies, seem to have greater cognitive benefits, since such operations (defining and categorizing, classifying, explaining and exemplifying, resuming of

the content in LSP and in CLIL) enable better fixing of knowledge" (Dylan Working Papers 3: 28).

4. There is a marked difference between the status, functions and effectiveness of languages in educational environments in different countries. This depends, among other things, on the general linguistic climate in the country, perceptions of identity and affinity, and on understandings of utility. The University of Helsinki team reports of their comparative study that: "The role of the national languages is undergoing new developments that may change the balance between priorities in a nearby future. In some cases this heightens attention to the language spoken by the majority of the population (Sweden and Finland), in other cases it affects languages spoken by a minority (Norway and Finland), the consequences of which are still unclear" (Dylan Working Papers 3:24). Formal status and actual status can differ widely in ways inconvenient to notions of linguistic hegemony in a market-ordered society. The Autonomous University of Barcelona is in an environment where Spanish is the dominant national language, but Catalan is the local language with large political significance. English is the third language in order of importance nationally, but has a higher formal significance in the university. "Despite institutional promotion of English as a *lingua franca* to facilitate international communication, sometimes, as observed in our corpus, individuals do not share this goal. On the contrary, our corpus suggests that they sometimes seek to display and/or improve their competences in languages *other than* English" (Dylan Working Papers 3:10). In other words, understandings of identity and perceived affinities can defy even the most complex of "markets". Perceptions of utility, on the other hand, can make a qualitative difference to learner motivation. At Babeş-Bolyai University: "students seem to be less aware of the importance of widely spoken modern languages for study

movement and equal chances on the job market with other European citizens" (Dylan Working Papers 3:27). This affects their willingness to persevere with higher order functions for study and research.

5. A technical view of language as a means of transmission, ignoring the sociolinguistic factors involved in its use, is an inhibition to learning and multilingual development. The University of Lausanne team comments: "a transparent view of language, that is one which sees it simply as a vehicle for conveying content . . . would not seem to be conducive to putting the plurilingual dimension to profitable use" (Dylan Working Papers 3:19f — my translation).[xv]

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The key insights that arise from such carefully researched findings from a range of more or less related environments in Europe have important implications for South Africa. Language policy in higher education — and higher education itself — in South Africa is situated within the large transformation project initiated with the shift to democracy in 1994. That project has shown itself to be vulnerable to the same problems of reductive reification as have been evident in the discussion of language. For that reason it is perhaps important to assert here that transformation in South Africa is only secondarily about race. It is first and foremost about the empowerment of all citizens to exercise their citizenship and use their skill and capacity for the good of the larger society. The end effect in terms of participation by members of a particular race should be the same in a country with as large a proportion of black people as South Africa, but that end effect must be much more than a changing of faces: genuine

transformation will reflect a huge shift in the capacity of the people to use their talents and to take control of their future. If we lose sight of that ambitious goal, we land up with the disillusionment of neo-colonialism. W B Yeats (1961: 358) was disillusioned in that way with what happened in the Irish revolution: "The beggars have changed places," he wrote, "but the lash goes on." Any view of language and its role which is not conducive to citizens participating fully in the society is out of line with transformation as a key imperative of the developmental state.

Engaged with these challenges, Stroud and Heugh (2004) introduce the powerful notion of linguistic citizenship to provide a basis for exploring the role of language and a linguistic repertoire in the exercise of citizenship and participation in the economy.

Linguistic citizenship pertains to a view of language as a symbolic, material, intimate and global resource in the service of participatory governance. Language as a *symbolic resource* emphasises *actorhood* through the ways in which citizens choose to represent themselves as speakers and members of speech communities in structures of power and resistance in ways that carry political implications. Language as a *material resource* highlights the role of language as a political and economic site of struggle, playing an integral role in the reconceptualization of the role of informal economies in developing contexts. Language as a *global resource* acknowledges that language is one of the main ways in which more global and regional concerns are interpreted and negotiated locally. And finally, language as an *intimate resource*, embodies respect for diversity and difference, recognition of multiple and shifting identities and the deconstruction of localized national and exclusionary identities in the service of transnational/ regional cooperation and security. (Stroud and Heugh 2004: 209)[xvi]

Effective development and implementation of language policy in

higher education in South Africa must be conceived within such a context if it is to have genuinely transformative consequences. To that end, the full range of research and theorisation discussed above suggests five considerations for reviewing and interpreting our language policies.

1. Our philosophy of policy matters. If it is primarily arrangement-focused we are likely to fail, because we are not reading our situation and nurturing the vision of our people but thinking in terms of compliance. If our philosophy is primarily realisation-focused, we are more likely to succeed because our formulation and interpretation of policy will be enabling, helping people to achieve more and use their creativity in attaining goals. A realisation-focused philosophy does not prevent us from having a larger frame of aspirations to be taken very seriously. It does rescue us from thinking that we can compel people to realise aspirations.

2. Our view of language matters. If we see language as a transparent vehicle for conveying knowledge we must know that this is not in any way conducive to understanding what actually happens in learning and social interaction in multilingual situations. If we see it as a resource, we may get further, but we still run the risk of losing sight of language use as profoundly shaped by context. If we view language as dynamic (and as a dynamic resource and vehicle) we are open to the ways in which people creatively use language for their purposes and the ways in which they are able to escape the constraints of their social pasts. Such a situated view of language will provide a keener sense of the immediate value of the varieties of any particular language and of negotiated and transformative multilingual practices. Situate analysis is crucial. Human behaviour in significantly different environments may have much in common, but the ways in which South Africa is not

Flanders, and more importantly Cape Town is not Stellenbosch or Durban, have to be taken very seriously. An interpretation of language policy which takes account of the language dynamics of Bloemfontein will almost certainly not be suitable for transplantation holus bolus to Johannesburg.

3. Our view of multilingualism matters. If we envisage multilingualism in terms of serial monolingualism as most policies do, we ignore the complex and potentially rich ways in which people negotiate ways of using language productively in situations where more than one language is current. Serial monolingualism is also predicated on the assumption that the standard language stands for the language, and so misses the textural complexity that "sub-standard" varieties bring into real communication situations. Blommaert and Van Avermaet (2008: 79) make the critical point that: "Multilingualism is . . . neither a level field nor a horizontal space, but a vertical, layered, hierarchically structured space: a mirror of the society"[xvii] (my translation). If we understand multilingualism in these terms, all the languages and varieties of languages at play in a socially structured and stratified situation provide a dynamic and so shifting basis for negotiating meaning. That places us on more challenging ground for discussing language policy and its implementation.

4. Our view of education matters. Variations on a hermetic understanding of education as acquiring a body of knowledge of inherent value regardless of circumstances and a related sense of validation through a particular kind of autonomous testing are common. At one end, they view education as a sophisticated ivory tower business, and at the other they view it as a kind of initiation process with success measured as it were by ability to jump through a hoop. The alternative views education as going far beyond subject knowledge to an ability to

bring together disparate information in solving real problems or in finding relevance. It is an engaged process, helping the learner to equip him or herself for increasingly adept engagement in the world outside educational institutions. A hermetic understanding is well served by a transparent view of language – of the standard language. The engaged view requires a dynamic sense of language in which learners become increasingly skilled at using their full and varied linguistic repertoires in making sense of the world and participating in the society and the economy.

5. Our view of the society matters. The ideology of the nation state, that posits national identity as static, monolingual and monocultural, is not helpful in the face of the heterogeneity of modern society with its shifting and dynamic cultural and linguistic constitution. Such a society calls for an ability to employ a repertoire of identities and transformatively create new ones.

As we find our way through these varied considerations, we are likely to develop and interpret language policy in ways which not only promote better education, but substantially further equity and contribute to giving substance to our democracy.

NOTES

[i] … specifiek voor de Vlaamse situatie, is de Nederlandse taal een belangrijke element van de Vlaamse identiteit.

[ii] … meer dominante talen de levenssfeer binnendringen en daar een grote rol vervullen.

(Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008: 48 – my translation)

[iii] … de manier waarop je erin slaagt de

schooltaalcompetenties onder de knie te krygen, en dit zijn specifieke competenties van lezen, schrijven, begrijpen en spreken.

[iv] Het leren van een taal betekent een verdere stap in de ontwikkeling van een meertalige repertoire dat is samengesteld uit asymmetrische en gecontextualiseerde competenties. Dat alles verloopt binnen een veld van machtsrelaties, waarbij bepaalde middelen veel waarde zullen worden toegekend, terwyl andere worden gediskwalificeerd. Meertaligheid is daarom geen vlak veld, geen horizontale ruimte, maar een vertical, gelaagde en hiërarchisch gestructureerde ruimte, een spiegel van de samenleving.

[v] … onze kinderen leren er niet enkel de taal beter mee snappen, maar ook de samenleving. Ze leren begrijpen dat de samenleving niet één vlakke ruimte is maar een gelaagde ruimte vol met niches, die zich in een relatief stabiele order tot elkaar verhouden.

[vi] [zolan we ons daar geen rekenschap van geven] verprutsen we, onder de banier van gelijke kansen, de onderwijskansen van generaties kinderen.

[vii] Het hardnekkige effect van socio-ekonomische achtergrond op leerprestasies op school geeft aan dat een exclusieve focus op taalvaardigheid het blikveld dreigt te vernauwen tot slechts één symptom van een grotere problematiek.

[viii] Een creatieve omgang met meertaligheid betekent niets anders dan rekening houden met de meertalige realiteit en daarmee werken binnen de contouren die door die realiteit zelf worden bepaald.

[ix] . . . om te bepalen *hoe* er precies ruimte wordt geboden aan de thuistalen van de leerlingen, er zeer sterk rekening gehouden moet worden met de kenmerken van de regionale en locale context en met de specifieke doelstellingen die men voor ogen heeft.

[x] Meertaligheid wordt traditioneel nogal eenzijdig geconceptualiseerd als een kwestie van, eenerzijds, de repertoires waarover sprekers beschikken … en, anderzijds, de kenmerken van collectiviteiten…. Recenter werk benadrukt hoe men hierbij makkelijk over het hoofd ziet dat meertaligheid vooral ook een functie is van tijd en plaats en van de dynamiek die eigen is aan het verloop van een situatie: het type instelling, de activiteiten die er georganiseerd worden, de interactie die plaasvindt, de betrokkenheid die wordt uitgedrukt ten opzichte van het gespreksonderwerp, enzovoort ….

[xi] Onze hypothese is dat leerlingen, wanneeer zij via CLIL geconfronteerd worden met een situatie waarin hun eigen taal (of althans hun 'we'-code) een plaats krijgt en naar waarde geschat wordt, meer geneigd zijn zich aan te passen aan een beleid dat sterk gericht is op het Nederlands.

[xii] een repliek waarin de inzichten verworven uit de studie van het complex gesitueerde en gevaloriseerde handelen een dam helpt opwerpen tegen ongeoorloofde veralgemeningen. Maar het verhaal eindigt niet hier, want de wetenschap moet ook in staat zijn om beleidsmatig alternatieven uit te tekenen of toch de fundamenten daarvoor aan te reiken. En daar precies ligt een grote uitdaging waarvan we de draagwijdte nog maar beginnen te begrijpen. Eén gunstige voorwaarde bij het aanpakken van deze uitdaging ligt vervat in een schaal- en activiteitsgevoelige analyse van taalgebruik en meertalige interactie die wordt aangevuld met een goed begrip van de structurering van de praktijken in het veld, de logika der domeinen … en de steeds minder gecentraliseerde maar toch nog zeer reële rol van de natiestaat in het uitstippelen van een (meer)talig beleid.

[xiii] nos analyses montrent avant tout la diversité des pratiques plurilingues dans l'enseignement tertiaire.

[xiv] En effet, l'impact de la dimension linguistique semble

non seulement dépendre du degré de multilinguisme dans la pratique, mais aussi du degré d'interactivité, permettant ou non la co-construction des savoirs.

[xv] une vision transparente de la langue, c'est-à-dire la considérant comme simple véhicule du contenu . . . semble défavorable à une mise à profit de la dimension plurilingue.

[xvi] Kerfoot (2009) is in the same conversation. Her reflective account of 20 years of adult basic education practice in South Africa provides an invaluable review of the shifting socio-political climate with a bearing on the outcomes of such education and of the theoretical options available at different times and places.

[xvii] Meertaligheid is . . . geen vlak veld, geen horizontale ruimte, maar een vertical, gelaagde en hiërarchisch gestructureerde ruimte, een spiegel van de samenleving.

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