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Epistemologies in multilingual education: translanguaging and genre – companions in conversation with policy and practice

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At the heart of this volume on multilingualism in South African education lies a serious concern with the failure of education systems and their epistemological frames to articulate productively with the linguistic and knowledge repertoires of students caught within ill-fitting educational regimes in southern contexts. Beneath this is an emerging recognition that multilingualism, particularly in education, means different things in different contexts. What is understood of multilingual education in South Africa, for example, is quite different from how this is understood in northern settings. The framing of the epistemological concern in this volume resonates with a three-decade history of substantive critical post-colonial theory, going back at least as far as Freire (e.g. 1990), and continuing in the present (see also Giroux 2010). However, the post-colonial condition, despite ongoing critique, has proven difficult to jettison. The default response of many stakeholders in southern contexts has been to look north and west for answers to troubling questions and dilemmas. Yet, each generation of new scholars points to the folly of looking north and the consequential reanimation of cycles of epistemological disjuncture with the south. Between the south-north tension lies ambiguity and systematic clarification is a matter of dialogic process, contradiction, trial and error. It is often within messy contradiction that promising opportunities emerge, as is the case in this volume.

The authors of this volume recognise mismatches between what seem to be policies and practices borrowed from the north and realities of the contemporary south. This is particularly in regard to the tension between rarefied views of language as hermetically sealed entities found in language policies and practices that emerged from late nineteenth century Europe on the one hand, and a recognition of the more fluid use of language in multilingual settings in Africa on the other hand. It is important to recall that scholars for much of the twentieth century grappled with the fluid and horizontal nature of multilingualism in Africa (e.g. Nhlapo 1944, Djité 1993, Fardon and Furniss 1994) and India (e.g. Agnihotri 1995) as well as with the constraints of the vertical nature of language as separated entities in standardised written texts of educational institutions. Although both the horizontal and vertical understanding of multilingualism informed the language education policy adopted in South Africa in 1997, it is only in more recent literature from North America and Europe that porous linguistic borders and fluidity have been recognised beyond Africa and India as a theoretical challenge for language education and curriculum (see also Stroud and Heugh

2011). The historicity of such theoretical considerations complicates the way that epistemologies are received, reflected and exchanged. This is particularly in evidence in discussions of who means what, when and where, when multilingual education is under discussion.

Authors in this volume focus on inequalities emphasised through language practices framed in school curricula and assessment policies for linguistically diverse school students in contemporary South Africa and Australia. Although at times the authors, particularly Plüddemann, point towards frailties in the South African language in education policy, what they reveal are contested classroom practices and teacher engagement with language and language education policy as conceptualised within the curriculum policy documents rather than the language policy document, *per se* (as will be discussed below). What sets this volume apart from many others is that these authors explore productive responses to linguistic inequalities. The responses lie with teachers as arbiters of policy, curriculum and pedagogical practice. They also lie within two contemporary theories within applied and educational linguistics, namely 'translanguaging' and 'genre theory'.

Translanguaging, a term initially coined in relation to bilingualism in Wales (Lewis, Jones and Baker 2012), has been popularised and redefined most notably through the work of García (e.g. 2009, García and Li Wei 2014). García's adoption of the term arises from a recognition that North Atlantic understandings of bilingual education, including in some of her own earlier work, had been limited to 'parallel monolingual' models (Heller 1999). Translanguaging, as discussed in this volume, is understood as part of the process of communicating across and between different varieties of language/s. It is worthwhile noting that purposeful or systematic metacognitive activity employed in a number of language activities that include comparative hypothesis-testing, translation, code-switching, and navigating the in-between spaces is found and has been recognised in the communicative patterns of multilingual children and adults in many southern contexts for a very long time (e.g. Wolff 2000). The extent to which 'translanguaging' goes beyond such common-place and strategic linguistic processes is yet to be evidenced in the literature from the US and UK (e.g. Blackledge and Creese 2010). What we can say is that its inclusion in a discourse of educational legitimacy offers considerable opportunity for teaching and learning in countries like South Africa. Such opportunity is clearly in evidence in two papers in this volume. In Probyn's meticulously crafted article, translanguaging is shown to facilitate an educational bridging of epistemological access between the everyday world of local contexts and the scientific knowledge of the school curriculum. The value of using and building on knowledge held in one language or variety as a pathway to gain entry to the world of scientific language cannot be sufficiently emphasised. If education officials and other stakeholders are able to view the use of translanguaging as a theoretical and pedagogical process in a favourable light, and one liberated from the stigma of illicit educational practice associated with the label of 'code-switching', then this is an excellent reason to promote the use of this term along with the pedagogical processes to which it offers access. The opportunities of translanguaging in Makalela's article are similarly promising. Makalela uses translanguaging as a strategic mechanism and process to enhance opportunities for expanding multilingual repertoires and expertise among several varieties of the Sotho cluster of languages in Southern Africa. In so doing, he takes up and reanimates earlier discussions of Nhlapo (1944) and Alexander (1989), both of whom argued that by focussing on the similarities rather than differences among varieties of Sotho and Nguni, the Sotho and also the Nguni clusters of language might be drawn towards closer proximity. Alexander's interest was primarily in relation to a nation-building exercise in which a new South Africa might be reimagined (Anderson 1983) and

secondly in the educational opportunities for increasing effective communication across the linguistic divides. In other words, both Nhlapo and Alexander rejected the notion of rarefied hermetically sealed borders between or among languages, and multilingualism understood by them was not restricted to the northern belief in parallel monolingualisms. So, if translanguaging can be used as a pedagogical tool to strengthen awareness of the horizontal use of languages as dynamic, and temporally and spatially fluid, then this does offer much promise. The quantitative data collected in Makalela's study shows positive results in terms of vocabulary recognition but it is clear that other findings are not yet conclusive and there is every reason to encourage further research that might demonstrate the efficacy of translanguaging in relation to the expansion of linguistic repertoires and broadening multilingual expertise.

The second theoretical approach, genre theory, as discussed by Kerfoot and Van Heerden in the contexts of schools in the Western Cape as well as by White, Mammone and Caldwell in the Australian context is interesting. White, Mammone and Caldwell point out that the original intention of genre theory was to ensure that school-based literacy expectations were made explicit to students. Kerfoot and Van Heerden have taken up genre as a pedagogical tool to reduce epistemological distance between the linguistic repertoire and knowledge system of the learner/s and the school curriculum which is for many learners, something quite alien. Understanding the mechanics of the genre has the potential to equip the learner to 'crack the code' of reading and writing academic texts. In both articles (i.e. Kerfoot and Van Heerden, and White, Mammone and Caldwell) the authors acknowledge one of the criticisms of genre theory is that it has sometimes been misused (or misunderstood by teachers) as restricted to formulaic patterns of writing and they advance a strong argument to indicate that genre offers far more than mere formulae or recipes. I confess to being a reluctant convert to genre in my own teaching. I do find that the teaching of writing that follows genre theory in Australian schools and universities is often formulaic and dull. Even if teachers have misinterpreted genre theory, what they do with this is frequently in formulaic terms. However, I, like White, Mammone and Caldwell, and Kerfoot and Van Heerden, have also found genre to be particularly useful with students who find English language learning particularly challenging, and in classes in which students come from many different background contexts. In my work with university students, I have come to understand that genre theory helps to provide explicit scaffolding for academic writing tasks and that this develops students' confidence. In other words, it offers a pathway towards independent writing and towards understanding the structure of written texts. So I increasingly use this as an important resource in an Australian university. Being familiar with school, teacher education and university classrooms in several sub-Saharan countries of Africa, I think that genre theory has strong pedagogical potential for enriching education in multilingual contexts of both school and higher education.

It seems to me then that translanguaging may be used to encourage multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies in the classroom. It also seems that both translanguaging and genre can be used to increase epistemic access to the curriculum, especially where this has been developed to align with curricula generated in northern contexts for learners whose worlds belong to epistemologies which differ from those found in southern contexts such as South Africa. So translanguaging and genre theory therefore serve as useful pedagogies for bridging epistemological divides and for these reasons, deserve greater exploration in South African schools and classrooms. At the end of the day, we have to acknowledge that contemporary curricula, even in southern contexts, continue to be framed within northern epistemologies

and this is one reason why it is difficult to maintain a consistent stance of resistance towards the north.

A cautionary note that I would venture is that in both cases the theoretical vocabulary was generated in contexts quite unlike those found in South Africa, and it is important to recognise that while we may not see particular pitfalls in this in the present, there is also every likelihood that when debates follow new directions, educators in South Africa may again find themselves accused of adopting ill-fitting northern approaches. In regard to translanguaging, I am still not convinced that we need to use this term as a blanket term in preference to code-switching, translating and interpreting. In my view, code-switching conveys a sense that this could be two or multidirectional whereas 'trans' as in translanguaging suggests in the South African context, at least, of moving from one place to another, moving from one language to another, and possibly from an African language to English. If one interrogates its educational use in the US and the UK, translanguaging is not used in the kind of formal multilingual educational contexts that exist in South Africa or India, for example. It is certainly used in the context of valuing the learner's prior knowledge and linguistic expertise, but the trajectory is ineluctably mostly one-directional and toward English. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, if the term permits educational stakeholders to sanction the educative opportunities which purposeful code-switching offers, then this may be good reason to make strategic use of the label for now. What is most important is the cognitive engagement with working with two or more languages or varieties simultaneously rather than separately, and the label one applies to this process is to a certain extent less significant.

Plüddemann discusses the agency of teachers who are able to take up one or more of four positions in which they consciously: resist or 'violate' policy; interpret or reinterpret policy; engage with or take performative stances towards policy; and/or advocate for policy. This author contextualises his discussion of the 1997 Language in education policy (LIEP) (DoE 1997) drawing attention to what have become frequently invoked critiques of others who have assumed that LIEP was based on the Euro-North Atlantic view of bilingualism as parallel monolingualisms. Yet, the policy was shaped far less by northern theory, and far more by theoretical findings of (South) African research and other southern understandings of critical pedagogy and multilingualism (Malherbe 1946, Ianco-Worrall 1972, Bamgbose 1987, Freire 1990, Fardon and Furniss 1994, Agnihotri 1995, de Klerk 1995, amongst others), in other words, 'southern epistemologies' (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). It is certainly the case that vocabulary in use in North America in the mid-1990s, e.g. 'transitional' and 'additive' bilingualism, was invoked in order to distance early post-apartheid discourse from apartheid vocabulary of 'mother tongue' and bilingual education. Nevertheless, this instrumental use of the vocabulary was carefully contextualised within the LIEP to avoid the prescriptivism of any particular model or models of bilingual or multilingual education. An additive approach to multilingualism, i.e. expanding repertoires, is evident in the excerpts below:

> The new language in education policy is …. meant to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and religion …. in line with the fact that both societal and individual multilingualism are the global norm today…. A wide spectrum of opinions exists as to the locally viable approaches towards multilingual education …. Whichever route is followed, the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s).

> Hence … an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the normal orientation of …policy….
> This paradigm also presupposes a more fluid relationship between languages and culture than is generally understood in the Eurocentric model which we have inherited in South Africa….
> The main aims of the …policy [are] ….to pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst learners, and hence to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language education …. to counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching…(DoE 1997) [author's emphasis].

The policy document refers to only one model, the Eurocentric model, which is discarded. Instead of advocating any particular model, the document emphasises an approach that reflects local variability. Behind this lay an understanding of 'functional multilingualism' which includes both horizontal and vertical dimensions of language. Where misconceptions have arisen these are in relation to incorrect interpretations of LIEP in curriculum documents and by a number of authors who may not have had an opportunity to have first-hand access to the policy document itself. Nevertheless, LIEP was developed over a period of 15 years (1983-1997) and based on research and expertise available during that historical period. A review and revision of this policy is therefore long overdue.

The value in this collection of articles is that they articulate within contemporary debates in educational linguistics, particularly as these are concerned with multilingualism. The fine scholarship of research in the articles by Probyn, and Kerfoot and Van Heerden, and Makalela's exploration of translanguaging as a tool for expanding linguistic repertoires are exciting developments for the field. White, Mammone and Caldwell's excellent paper draws attention to the kind of pedagogies that can be most useful for students who may not have had foundations that permit access to academic writing. The potential of genre theory as a means of bridging epistemologies certainly requires further research in African contexts. Plüddemann's discussion of the agency of teachers is encouraging and in contexts where teachers are often positioned as recalcitrant, this article serves as a reminder of the important role which teachers can and should make to ensure that their students gain greater epistemological access to learning. Together the collection of articles offer an invigorating set of opportunities that cast light in what has for many years been a rather gloomy space of language education in South Africa.

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