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INTRODUCTION

Special issue on bi/multilingual identity in Southern Africa

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This special issue on bi/multilingual identity in Southern Africa considers the way in which identity is perceived, constructed and lived in multilingual (education) contexts with specific reference to post-colonial attempts at constructing national identities through language policies. Although language is just one expression of identity, its role may be both important and complex in multilingual settings. As Ouane (2009, 53) points out:

> [I]n some places in Africa or India, a child can grow up with up to six languages at the same time. Each of these languages represents a different part of the culture in these areas. Cultural identity has several markers at various levels from local to community, national and even international. Each layer could be reflected or carried by a language in a multilingual set-up.

Banda (2009, 110) argues that in Africa 'people use linguistic repertoires rather than drawing on a singular monolingual system to communicate and perform different identity options, including hybrid ones'. However, this situation is not limited to Africa and India, and worldwide interest in hybrid identities is growing (see Marx 2002; Mills 2001), with the realisation that 'all people have multiple identities which change in interaction with other community members' (Marx 2002, 277).

Language may be one of the factors that could trigger a change or be evidence of such a change. De Waele and Nakano 3) provide an overview of ways in which multilinguals 'feel different' when they change to another language. He concludes, regarding his own investigation, that '[p]articipants reported feeling significantly less logical, less serious, less emotional and increasingly fake when using the L2, L3 and L4'. Of course, feelings cannot be equated with identity, but negative feelings about the use of a particular language will influence the expression of identity in such a language. In this case, perceptions of proficiency in a language have some effect on how these particular participants experience themselves when using this language.

The influence of language proficiency on people's ability to express themselves becomes vitally important in educational contexts. In this area many teachers and researchers are struck by the way in which normally outgoing students will become withdrawn, particularly if their home or community languages are not used in the school (formally or informally). Ceginskas (2010, 215), in her study of adults who grew up multilingually, finds that '[a]ll interviewees shared a complex sense of belonging due to their multilingual origins'. However, the degree to which they experienced this as a

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problem depended on the type of school they attended. Compared to state schools, where the multilingual participants experienced more pressure to conform to a perception of their 'otherness' as a possible negative, '[d]ue to continuous and dynamic interaction at international schools, [m]ticulturalism and multilingualism are taken for granted', with the result that there was 'positive feedback for multilingual individuals outside of their home environment' (Ceginskas 2010, 220).

It is at the point where multilingual students meet a (supposedly) monolingual classroom that students in Africa experience the harsh reality of being unable to manage or succeed at their studies in a former colonial language. All the contributions to this special issue discuss these crossroads, from the development of language policies at local levels to analyses of attempts to introduce Anglo-European schooling models in southern African schools and higher education institutions. The identity – language link in the context of high-status colonial languages as well as the urban–rural divide in bi/multilingual practices are described in terms of their effect on identity construction.

Wildsmith and Conduah start by looking at attempts to create a national (and increasingly, pan-African) identity by means of a common African language, Swahili. In the context of increasing immigration (from Africa) to South Africa and the development of economic partnerships across Africa, they argue that Swahili may be one of the ways in which to foster a pan-African identity. This argument is based on the ideological principle that it is not a European language as well as the structural principle that the language is related to the Proto-Bantu language family, which facilitates learning. The positive responses of South African and immigrant respondents to the introduction of Swahili, indicates that '[t]he focus in South Africa on the importance of English as an international language could well swing towards a perspective that sees the term "international" as inclusive of the African continent and its languages' (Wildsmith and Conduah 2014).

The issue of a (Southern) African identity forms the core of the contributions by Makoe (with a focus on primary school learners) and Makalela (with a focus on higher education students). In both cases the authors describe the fluidity of identities in multilingual contexts and both emphasise the hegemony of monolingual institutions that privilege the fluent use of English. Makoe argues that 'identity construction is inextricably interwoven with ideology' (2014). She provides evidence that shows not only how particular identities are imposed and valued at institutional level, but also how learners manage to resist them and she concludes in much the same vein as Ceginskas (2010), that there is a 'need for pedagogical practices that address diversity and difference' (Makoe 2014). The monoglossic nature of schools and the effects they have on identity is in sharp contrast to the vibrant multilingual culture described by Makalela. He argues that *Kasi-taal*, a 'hybrid language form' (Makalela 2014) spoken in townships, manages to make the perceived boundaries among languages permeable, thus allowing for translanguaging practices that re-affirm speakers' identity as multilinguals. Playing on the term 'coconut', a (sometimes insulting) term that is used to describe people who are dark skinned but whose identity is supposedly that of a light-skinned person, students use a variety of languages and translanguaging strategies 'to keep [their] *coco universe* alive' (Makalela 2014). By using a variety of languages, students enact hybrid identities that are varied and fluid.

Both Parmegiani and Ngcobo report on formal attempts to introduce an African language at higher education level. With reference to the conflicting attitudes among African languages speakers towards the use of African languages in higher education, Parmegiani notes the high value placed on these languages as identity markers.

Some students use images of loss when the possibility of using only one language (English) is presented to them and they make a clear choice for their home languages. Others do not want to exclude any language and argue that all the languages you know, become part of you.

In Ngcobo's case, participants also choose to use more than one language, except when it comes to assessment. This is evidence of what García (2009, 297) calls *monoliterate bilingualism*, whereby the dominant language is reserved for high-stakes literacy events.

Ceginskas (2010, 221) notes, 'Education is part of the complex process of identity formation and is a strong factor for enabling the multilingual individual to perceive his multiple identifications as a normal situation'. In most educational settings a monolingual orientation creates perceptions of 'otherness', or at least that the use of a language other than the dominant LoLT [illegible] appropriate. Even in multilingual communities, the force of a monolingual orientation convinces parents to enrol their children in schools where competence in a dominant language is valued above all other forms of expression. As these papers indicate, it takes extraordinary, individual efforts to go against the tide, but the Southern African contexts described here show how educators and linguists draw on competencies and multilingual identities that form the life blood and proud legacy of its citizens.

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