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Decolonising Higher Education: Multilingualism, Linguistic Citizenship & Epistemic Justice

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Abstract

This paper explores in what ways language – and multilingualism in particular – can be rethought in order to further epistemic justice. In order to situate the question of language in a broader decolonial project, it starts by critically reviewing three main strategies that have been proposed to address epistemic *injustice* in South African Higher Education over the last thirty years: scaffolding into colonial metropolitan languages, intellectualization and/or endogenization, and the use of translanguaging. It argues that the role of language/multilingualism in such strategies is compromised by the ‘*coloniality of language*’ (Veronelli 2015), that is, understandings of language inherited from the colonial project. It further advances the notion of Linguistic Citizenship (LC) (Stroud 2001, 2017) as a way of disengaging from coloniality. LC informs epistemic justice by focusing on the potential carried by language(s) for ontological refashioning of selves, socialities, and concomitant knowledges, thereby offering a way to rethink multilingualism as a *transformative epistemology and methodology of difference*.

Introduction

Long simmering calls to decolonize South African universities gained explosive new energy from the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements in 2015. This surge of interest in decoloniality could be explained by a mix of factors. One factor was surely a critical mass of black scholars after 21 years of democracy, and an increase in the number of black graduates from about 3,400 in 1986 to more than 63,000 in 2012 (van Broekhuizen 2016). At the same time, retention and throughput rates for black students were tied to material inequalities in socioeconomic status and education quality (Nyamnjoh 2016, van Broekhuizen, Van der Berg and Hofmeyr 2016). Other factors were the substantial decline in state funding for the public universities, from 49% of institutions’ total income in 2000 to 39% in 2015 (Africa Check 2016), and despair and anger over deepening poverty and unemployment after almost nine years of ineffective and often predatory state management (2009-2018) combined with continuing immense disparities in wealth among groups.

All of these factors underscored the significant challenges facing post-apartheid reform attempts. It was not surprising, then, when under these circumstances, student movements called for free and decolonized education, democratized access, and Afrocentric institutions and curricula. What might be surprising, however, is that the issue of language in decolonial deconstruction was largely absent from ongoing student and academic debates (see, for example, Langa 2017). An exception is Mayaba et al. 2018.¹

¹ Language was, however, extensively discussed as part of decolonization debates under apartheid, for example, in the 1980s by the National Language Project, Neville Alexander, Kathleen Heugh, Es'kia Mphahlele, and others.

Both within and outside of universities worldwide, and South Africa in particular, languages and languaging practices continue to be ranked and regulated in ways that privilege communication and knowledge production through European languages – with insidious consequences such as educational failure. Just as important, an even more insidious consequence of exclusionary language policies remains unaddressed, namely that epistemic authority is removed from speakers of other, non-metropolitan languages (Alexander 1989; Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1994; Santos 2014). This raises deep concerns about 'epistemic (in)justice' (e.g. Miranda Fricker, 1998, 1999, 2007), and the need for epistemic justice, an 'ethical project of reversing epistemic exclusions, mitigating epistemic exploitation, and seeking parity of epistemic authority for the historically oppressed' (Kerfoot and Bello-Nonjengele nd: 1).

In this paper, we explore some of the ways we need to rethink language – and multilingualism in particular – in order to further epistemic justice. We take our departure in a critical review of some of the existing strategies or remedies proposed to overcome epistemic *in*justice in the last thirty years in order to situate the question of language in a broader decolonial project. We argue that the role of language/multilingualism in furthering epistemic justice is compromised by the understandings of language inherited from the colonial project, an inheritance that Veronelli (2015) refers to as the 'coloniality of language', that is the specific, linguistic instantiation of the more general phenomenon of 'coloniality'. 'Coloniality', which should not be confused with colonialism, refers to the patterns of power, control and hegemonic systems of knowledge that rationalized colonial domination. It has been kept alive in contemporary systems of oppression and dispossession, even after the demise of colonialism as a military or economic order (e.g. Maldonado-Torres 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2018). Pursuing epistemic justice means 'going beyond' colonialities of language, and critically engaging with contemporary ideas of multilingualism and the very notion of language itself.

In the third section of this paper, we advance the notion of Linguistic Citizenship (LC) (see Stroud 2001, 2009, 2018; Stroud and Heugh 2004; Williams and Stroud 2015), as a conceptual framing with which to disengage coloniality. We argue that LC can inform epistemic justice by focusing on the potential carried by language(s) for 'ontological refashioning' of selves, socialities and concomitant knowledges, and that it may offer a way to rethink multilingualism 'as a transformative epistemology and methodology of difference' (cf. Stroud and Kerfoot 2013) rather than a conserving, and even reproductive, force. The paper concludes with the proposal that creating spaces for the exercise of Linguistic Citizenship could be a key component in the decolonization of South African universities.

Epistemic (in)justice and the coloniality of language

The question of the role of language in epistemic justice cannot be detached from the uses to which both language and knowledge are, and have been, put in a politics of globalized inequity and dispossession. Vasquez (2011: 27) remarks on how global social inequality is far from merely a 'consequence of an incomplete modernity', and that inequalities of knowledge and an epistemic monoculture have contributed greatly to modern systems of oppression and destitution, comprising one essential bulwark in propping up an unjust world.² Grosfoguel (2011: 6) notes that this is the case even today as '[t]he success of the modern/colonial world-system consists precisely in making subjects that are socially located

² This is, of course, not to deny the all-important role of military might and land dispossession in the colonial oppression of peoples, but to draw attention to the important role of language and knowledge as ways of rationalizing these other forms of oppression.

on the oppressed side of the colonial difference think epistemically like the ones in dominant positions'. An epistemic monoculture is a form of (epistemic) oppression, the 'situation in which the social experiences of the powerless are not properly integrated into collective understandings of the social world' (Fricker 2007: 207), but are in fact deliberately excluded from it. Epistemic justice requires a form of life that is informed by the social experience of everyone and freed of the narrow interpretive practices of a privileged minority (Fricker 2007, 2009).

Universities are traditionally powerful spaces for the reproduction of colonial knowledge projects (Connell 2013) and the privileging of minority interpretive frames characteristic of epistemic oppression. Epistemic justice requires that priority be given to the question of how to capture a broader spectrum of voices if universities are to truly decolonize and transform (Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper 2011, 2015, Mbembe 2016, Mungwini 2013, Ogone 2017). This means creating an inclusiveness and generosity of dialogue with those who live and speak from the other side of the 'abyssal line' that for Santos (2014: 118-124) separates 'modern' from other knowledges, that side of the line of (non-)being where 'reality becomes non-existent and is produced ... as not existing in any comprehensible way' (Santos 2014: 118). To think and engage with the incommensurable, so as to validate epistemic authority for subaltern actors, and mobilize collective knowledge production requires attention to how students' and lecturers' multilingual and multimodal semiotic resources might significantly enhance the audibility and affirmation of voices less heard.

In the South African Higher Education landscape, there have been roughly three different, but complementary, remedies or strategies for getting to grips with the problems of language in access to knowledge. These are (i) a continuation of the apartheid era *status quo* with the use of the old and established languages of power, English and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, as the main Languages of Teaching and Learning, complemented with a variety of scaffolding supports; (ii) the introduction (minimal) of African languages, bolstered by new, and increasingly 'urgent' government (and revised university) language policies; and (iii) the use of translanguaging, which purportedly allows 'the first languages of the learners into the L2 classroom as linguistic and cognitive resources, while retaining the focus on the target language' (Carstens 2016) (for overviews, see Antia and Dyers 2017; Hibbert and van der Walt 2014; Stroud and Kerfoot 2013). We look critically at each of the remedies in turn – aware that the studies we discuss, conducted under conditions of severe resource constraint, are all rigorously conceptualized and implemented attempts to improve students' chances of conceptual engagement and overcome histories of exclusion and discrimination.

Colonial Metropolitan languages: The absent Self

A large body of work has been done on ways of improving students' access to English and Afrikaans to facilitate epistemic access. However, these attempts have tended to underestimate the extent and complexity of (linguistic) coloniality layered into the historical formation of these languages. Veronelli, the Argentinian linguist and philosopher, describes how 'the communicative conditions created by coloniality /.../ restrict building /.../ connections of dialogue' even in what is ostensibly labelled the 'same language' (2016: 408). Historically, colonial ideologies and practices of languages played an important role in building the 'subjectivities' and knowledge frameworks whereby the cruelties of colonial dispossessions were rationalized as just and benevolent. Colonial languages were the foremost tool in the interpellation of a colonial Other: they displaced indigenous languages in public spaces, served to discipline the 'native' and determine legitimate forms of interaction and engagement among the colonized and colonial masters (Stroud 2007). They shaped and

were in turn moulded by the tangible, physical conditions of the moments of communication between Europeans and Africans (cf. Fabian 1986; Gilmour 2006; Stroud 2007). Importantly, colonial languages were cultivated as repositories of indigenous knowledge through tools of translation. Translation selectively ‘re-wrote’ indigenous knowledge in idioms that made available to colonizers powerful frames for making sense of, interacting with and managing worlds of difference. As modernity expanded, translation laid the foundation for a Western monovocality and monomodality of voice, as, with few exceptions, only forms of indigenous knowledge that could be written down, lexicalized and articulated discursively in ways that made sense to missionary linguists, were accommodated in colonial languages. In Vasquez’ words (2011: 27), translation rendered invisible everything that did not fit into the ‘parameters of legibility’ of modernity’s epistemic territory, thereby laying the basis for claims to the universality of European knowledge. This was not without deep and inherited trauma. Fanon (1967) noted how immersion in imposed alien structures and meanings, and the re-voicing of local knowledge, produced in the colonial subject a sense of existing ‘absolutely for the other’: a psychic split characterized by feelings of disconnect from an agentive sense of self and human value.

There are countless examples of how metropolitan languages still have ‘the potential to disempower those of us who are just learning to speak, who are just learning to claim language as a space where we make ourselves subjects’ (hooks 1994: 168. Also see Botsis 2017, Heugh 2017, Makoe and McKinney 2014 and Veronelli 2015, 2016). A telling, recent, example of how the monovocality of metropolitan languages continues to engage black bodies in a Fanonian echo is the recent #OpenStellenbosch movement at Stellenbosch University, an off-shoot of the #FeesMustFall movement documented in the video ‘Luister’ (Contraband Cape Town 2015). In the documentary, African language speaking students express a strong sense of distress and dehumanization both inside and outside of the lecture hall when required to engage with Afrikaans.³ In encounters with white Afrikaans speakers in the cafes and on the streets of Stellenbosch, they experienced the language to be a powerful tool in interactionally reinforcing an injurious form of black-white relationship. And, they lament the genuine physical pain brought on in the lecture hall when listening to Afrikaans through different forms of simultaneous, whispered translation that removed them both physically and temporally (resulting from translation lag) from the physical presence of their colleagues in class (cf. Stroud and Williams 2017). Their affective and corporeal engagements with Afrikaans suggest that the contemporary resonances of linguistic coloniality on subject formation go far beyond the mere formal repertoires of language; they engage deeply divisive historical chronotopes of affect and interpellation that are as yet poorly understood.

Part of the rationale for the continued wide-spread appeal of metropolitan languages is their supposed communicative efficacy and universality, and the presumption that speaking the ‘same’ language implies an ‘essential similarity between what the Other and what We are saying’ (Vivieros de Castro 2004: 10). However, as Veronelli (2016: 408) has argued, the myth that metropolitan languages are conduits to global, regional understanding and mutuality of encounter does not take into account the way in which metropolitan languages shore up semiotic borders and temper multivocality. There is a wealth of literature on how metropolitan languages (in particular English) are a force in the production of global

³ The imperative to ‘transform’ has meant that South African Higher Education institutions have opened their doors to students who are historically not speakers of English or Afrikaans. This has meant considerable demands on workable language policies. The University of the Western Cape is perhaps the institution that has shown the greatest ingenuity in developing a flora of alternative language provisions for these students.

disadvantage (e.g. Tollefson, 1995). The question, then, is whether indigenous languages better allow a more equitable participation of different voices.

African languages: Discourses of the past

The use of African languages faces great challenges in offering solutions to the impasse of epistemic justice in the foreseeable future, given how they have been discursively constituted through linguistic coloniality. Material artefacts such as grammars, dictionaries and language-teaching materials, tools in the re-organization of the languages of the local people, aided in dividing and controlling their social interactions (Maseko 2017, Makoni 1998; Veronelli 2015), and provided colonial officials and missionaries with the tools of nation-state governance (see Blommaert 2008; Errington 2008; Gilmour 2006; Irvine 2008, Heugh, 2017). An important dimension of the coloniality of language was the discursive construction of African languages as vessels of the past. Hountondji (1997) has remarked on how Africa has generally been construed as residing in the past, and the speakers of its languages no less so. Discourses of pastness have provided a powerful rationale for the depiction of African language speakers as ‘simple communicators’, removed from the complexities of thought and expression necessary for life in modernity and requiring patronage and government.

Discourses of ‘past-ness’ underlie two ostensibly very different approaches to African languages as knowledge projects, namely so-called ‘intellectualization’ (see, for example, Prah 2017, Kaschula & Maseko 2014) and ‘endogenization’. The essence of intellectualization is found in the words of Kwesi Prah (2017: 215-16), one of its foremost African proponents, who contends that ‘the real challenge is how to bring African languages ... up to speed with the linguistic techniques of modernity and advanced contemporary thought’ (cf Alexander 1997). Contrary to intent, intellectualization poses a number of problems for epistemic justice. One of these is captured in a forthright critique of African education more generally by Nyamnjoh (2012: 129), which he sees as a ‘victim of a resilient colonial and colonizing epistemology’, justified by a postcolonial African elite through ‘rhetoric on the need to be competitive internationally. The outcome is often a devaluation of African ‘creativity, agency and value systems, and an internalized sense of inadequacy’, where the subjugated, alternative, and contemporary knowledges of the everyday remain sadly invisibilized. In a pluriverse of knowledges, epistemic justice cannot mean only equipping African languages with parity of expression in reproducing the ‘abstract rationality of the canonic philosophy of the North’ (Santos 2018).

‘Endogenization’ which refers to the expansion of epistemic registers with more home-grown knowledge systems would at first glance appear to offer better recourse to the ‘creativity, agency and value systems’ of African thought that intellectualization elides. Nevertheless, although ostensibly tapping into local knowledge systems, endogenization also builds on discourses of ‘pastness’. To the extent that the knowledge sought through endogenization is to be found in African pasts with little bearing on contemporary struggles, it also risks minimal engagement with the concerns of epistemic justice. The problem is compounded by the realization that any diversity of thought in precolonial societies may have gone undocumented, and even suffered attrition, and that what is considered as ‘endogenous’ knowledge may also have a colonial and elite pedigree that has selectively silenced subaltern voices through time (cf. Hountondji 1997; Mudimbe 1988, 1995). Mkhize (2016:146) makes a similar point when referencing in particular literary use of African languages: she calls for a ‘re-framing of the kind of ‘native subject’ or ‘implied reader’, what she calls, the ‘good Bantu’, inherited from the African language literary tradition. She suggests that the ‘institutionalization model’ of promoting African languages

fails because it reproduces conservative scholarly practices associated with African languages teaching and literary culture’ (ibid. 147). These practices include the close linkage between ethnic identity and language, the use of African language as cultural reclamation, and lack of inventiveness in literary production. She argues for a move away from ‘conservative themes, in which cultural pride, propriety and identity take centre stage’ (ibid. 146) and for new forms that ‘can handle plurality and intersectionalism and that ‘boldly use vernacular idiom to theorise the transgressive’ (ibid. 150).

Most problematic, is the question to what extent endogenous knowledge systems – in whatever condition – are even minimally functional in local ecologies and social systems that have undergone extensive colonial destruction? Without an understanding of ‘endogenous’ as indexing the contemporary ‘dynamism, negotiability, adaptability and capacity for autonomy and interdependence, creativity and innovation in African societies and beyond’ (Nyamnjoh 2012: 136), the potential of endogenization for transforming the academy is limited.

Thus, a key shortcoming of both intellectualization or endogenization for present-day speakers of African languages is that they risk the continuing exclusion of certain voices from participation in the knowledge project, those voices which cannot be accommodated within existing frameworks. In this sense, both strategies continue to select the same ‘ontological subjects’, and to return or keep captive those dispossessed and invisibilized subjects traditionally held hostage to colonialism on the ‘native’ side of the abyssal line. Subjugated voices have yet to be heard in ways that shift the perceptions of what constitutes knowledge and creates the necessary conditions for engaging with it. The third remedy, translanguaging, claims to address these shortcomings.

Translanguaging: A modality of social change?

‘Translanguaging’ is the third, and most recent, linguistic remedy for the ills of the colonial language project. It claims to transcend the limitations of bordered languages by incorporating multiple identities in the learning process in order to accommodate subjugated knowledges. It is said to be able to ‘offset the symbolic violence of monoglossic ideologies’ (Makalela 2014: 668) (and thereby address a shortcoming of metropolitan languages noted earlier by allowing the students’ use of ‘highly complex identifying processes that mark fluid, multiple affiliations and mobile and creative negotiation of an identity matrix through hybrid language forms’ (thereby tapping into endogeneity). Especially, in recent years, approaches built on translanguaging have sought to make space for (linguistic) difference and to shift racialized attributions of symbolic value, in order to thereby improve epistemological access (see for example Antia & Dyers 2019; Makalela 2014; Ramani and Joseph 2002; Plüddemann, Nomlomo and Jabe 2010). Ultimately, claims are made that TL is a force in social transformation, able ‘to give back voice, transform cognitive structures, raise well-being and attainment levels and eventually transform an unequal society into a more just world’ (Jaspers 2018: 3, citing García and Li 2014).

There are a host of complexities in the debate around translanguaging (Block 2018; Charalambous, Charalambous and Zembylas 2016; Heugh 2017, 2019; Jaspers 2018). One is that translanguaging focuses on ‘bordering’, on moving between ‘named’ languages or codes, without engaging the powerful role this ‘technology’ has played in coloniality. It thereby risks replicating modernist ideas of language as a self-contained, logocentric system together with epistemologies of exclusion. Linguistic borders often served to consolidate core linkages between (ethnic) identities and language. In the South African context, the roots of bordering lie in the reconstructive work on African languages carried out to find the origins of languages and peoples that were perceived by colonialists to have been dispersed and

mixed through warfare and migration (Harries 2007). Determining the provenance and pedigree of languages aided the import by colonial managers of social categories such as ‘tribe’ and ‘kingdom’, social units of a type familiar to colonial administrators and missionaries that lent themselves readily to bringing order to a seemingly chaotic reality.

The claim that translanguaging moves ‘beyond’ named languages, and creates ‘new language practices’ that are different from ‘a synthesis of different language practices’ or ‘a hybrid mixture’ is not empirically supported (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2019: 19). Further, translanguaging ‘certainly does not enhance any theoretical understanding of bilingual language use beyond what the sociolinguistic studies of code-switching have offered’ (ibid.: 1). In fact, as a number of authors have pointed out, there is little to distinguish translanguaging from code-switching. Both paradigms as evident in research documenting contemporary classroom practices assume languages as structural entities between which speakers move, thus replicating the structural notion of language in modernist linguistics. And, to the extent that translanguaging as implemented pedagogically implicitly or explicitly relies on ‘named’ languages and their varieties, it cannot counter the critique that metropolitan and local languages remain captive to coloniality.⁴

Thus, rather than being transformative of the *status quo*, translanguaging could arguably be seen as one more version of the distinctions made in modernist ideologies of language between centrifugal versus centripetal dynamics of (standard) languages, between normativity and constraint in different language practices (cf. Jaspers 2018:8 on purity and hybridity). It is fundamentally an appeal to temporarily suspend a requirement of standard so that speakers on the margins may gradually become inculcated to normativity. For translanguaging to have a place in furthering epistemic justice as part of an agenda for social change, it would need to engage more extensively with concepts such as ‘transknowledging’ or the two-way exchange of knowledge (Heugh 2019a, b) and ‘intercultural/equivocal translation’ as an ethical relationship necessary in relating to epistemic difference, even when total mutual illegibility is not possible⁵ (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 2014). This would involve a sense of translanguaging as engaging new ontologies of speakers and languages (Heugh 2017) where the idea of language itself is shifted in the process.

Summary

The three remedies discussed in this section can be seen as related but distinct aspects of what Andreotti et al. (2015) have called ‘radical-reform’ strategies. These are approaches to inclusivity that use notions of equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution to facilitate access to the knowledge system. They are affirmative strategies in Nancy Fraser’s (1995) sense, premised on the institutional *status quo* and defining the problem of epistemic justice as one of diversity and access within existing educational formats and tweaked institutional arrangements.⁶

Although radical-reform approaches offer some valuable, gap-stopping, remedies, they do not change ontological dominance. In fact, as we have argued above, the effect of using

⁴ Although see work by Antia and Dyers for some interesting exceptions to this generalization.

⁵ ‘To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate by differences, instead of silencing the Other by presuming a univocality – the essential similarity – between what the Other and what We are saying’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 10).

⁶ This overview does not cover the significant work done by many scholars under the umbrella of ‘Academic Development’ over the past few decades – work which sought to enable academic access to the historically dominant disciplinary conversations and institutional spaces, albeit through the dominant language/English (e.g. Leibowitz and Volbrecht 1995; Thesen and Van Pletzen 2006)

metropolitan languages is to perpetuate exclusion; processes such as intellectualization and endogenization reproduce ideas of pastness and the temporal disconnect between African languages and their speakers; and translanguaging as implemented pedagogically in contemporary classrooms tends to reinforce in different terms the very notion of modernist colonial linguistics shared by all remedies.⁷ In other words, not one of the remedies can easily re-form language for epistemic justice unless the workings of language as a contemporary resonance of coloniality is addressed. This requires that linguistic issues be approached as one component in a broader project of transformative social change.

Each of the remedies are instances of what we can call, a ‘zero-point multilingualism’, reflecting what Castro-Gómez (2007) terms the ‘hubris of the zero point’ of observation, apparently unlocated but in fact masking a set of ethnocentric assumptions assumed to have universal validity’. This is a multilingualism of monovocality that has little place for pluriversality. It is thus unable to articulate subaltern knowledges, and redraws the abyssal line by reaffirming conventional fault lines of what can be said (and known) in a semiotic imaginary of the one-world of coloniality-modernity.

. Andreotti and colleagues (2015) are emphatic that while it is important, and necessary, in the short term, to value remedies that are not ontologically transformative, ‘there needs to be something ‘beyond-reform’, that goes beyond advocating for inclusion in a system of exclusion. To avoid treading the fault lines of linguistic coloniality and so as to engage subjugated Selves in pursuit of epistemic justice, a radically different conceptualization of language and language use, ultimately, a very different construct of multilingualism, is required (Heugh, 2017). This is one that would be able to attend to a multitude of meanings (pluriversality) in ethical engagements with different others in ways that acknowledge their subjecthood and agency, and that admit of forms of ‘subjugated’ knowledges emerging out of contemporary conditions of existence. We turn in the next section to the idea of Linguistic Citizenship as such a ‘beyond-reform strategy to explore under what conditions we might build multilingualism as a transformative dynamic for epistemic justice.

Transformative/decolonial multilingualism through Linguistic Citizenship: Reconfiguring language

Santos (2014) writes on the importance of everyday struggle against colonialism – against the inequities and unjustness of the capitalist modes of existence – as a decolonial epistemological event, where a plurality of alternative, complex and competing voices emerges on the back of a politics for social change. However, struggle alone can never be sufficient. Struggle needs to be acknowledged as such by an invested community of actors, and be part of an emerging sociality, communion, or an alternative citizenship, a necessity recognized by Fanon – and later Mbembe for South Africa – in their emphasis on new socialities for a new humanity. ‘Citizenship’ in this sense is understood as **acts** of engagement that make visible/audible subjects and their claims. This should not be understood as only claims to ‘recognition’ (cf. Isin 2008) or for the betterment of lives, but rather demands for the fundamentals of existence to be met, to a ‘being or ‘becoming’, and to ‘count’ in ways not previously recognized or imagined possible by institutions. The significance of acts of citizenship in this sense is as a modality of action that seeks to radically transform the conditions for ‘legitimate’ political actorhood – to repopulate the political arena and its priorities, and to offer new ways of seeing, being in, and understanding the world for those hitherto existing outside of it on the other side of Santos’s abyssal line

⁷ Exceptions are, for example, Antia and Dyers 2019, Makalela 2014.

(Fanon 1967; Fraser 1995). Such acts of citizenship have conceptual affinities with other acts of citizenship (Isin 2008) meant to expand the scope of legitimate political subjectivity and its material consequences, and to introduce alternative forms of knowledge in the process (such as feminist citizenship, ecological citizenship) as new collective identities (Alcoff 2011). This is a sense of citizenship ‘permitting’ of new ontologies of self and others, living in a sociality that is ontologically populated by possibility and the (engaged) human means for its actualization.

Language is at the centre of citizenship struggles; ontologically ‘refashioned selves’ require ‘refashioned languages’, just as in like manner, the refashioning of languages needs new speakers. **Linguistic Citizenship** (Stroud 2001, 2017) refers to acts of language, frequently and of necessity, performed outside of the institutional *status quo*, that engage with voices on the margins to create conditions for a transformative agency. It is a modality of struggle that seeks to capture the close, material links between language and the struggles of everyday politics. LC is about people using language to build alternative, caring, relationships with Others (the ‘new’ socialities of Fanon 1967). In turn, these relationships allow for the possibility of crafting alternative Selves, and ultimately contributing to grounding new ways of thinking and changing the world and its politics. LC attempts to accommodate the unintelligible or incommensurable by according voice and epistemological authority to the poor and to the marginalized, that is, those whose lives and experiences as ‘abyssal subjects’ lie beyond, or are marginalized, by the ‘dialectic of intelligible possibilities’ (Alcoff 2011: 3). In like manner to the way feminist and ecological citizenships have shifted the meaning and political import of sexuality, gender, nature and other social categories, LC carries the potential to move the linguistic centre of gravity away from a constraining colonial construct of language towards one that affirms decolonial modalities of interaction and engagement, as exemplified by Afrikaaps later in this paper. LC, then, is about the way languages are used and re-formed in struggle to introduce and make audible neglected subjectivities. In the process, LC generates new understandings of the potential of self and other, and the possibility of epistemic justice. Importantly, acts of LC also re-signify the meaning of language.

The workings of acts of LC are nicely illustrated in the following example of a contemporary emerging movement in South Africa to reconfigure Kaaps, a stigmatized variety of Afrikaans spoken predominantly among the so-called ‘coloured’ population in the townships of the Cape Flats, into Afrikaaps (cf. Hendricks and Dyers 2016). Afrikaaps is the ‘struggle name’ given by activists to this emerging decolonial Afrikaans, the language that together with English, was one of the two official languages of pre-democratic South Africa. Afrikaans, as the politically engineered language of the apartheid regime, was sanitized in the 1940s of any remnants of its complex colonial contact heritage, and given a full-bloodied European ancestry as a direct descendant of Dutch. It remains today in many circles a language associated with the apartheid past. Kaaps, the Afrikaans of the so-called Cape Coloureds in pre-democracy South Africa, was considered an imperfect system, and bastardized variety, *gamtaal*, the language of Gam, ‘kitchen Afrikaans,’⁸ subject to its own laws and trajectories of change. In post-apartheid South Africa, it remains a salient marker of racial and socioeconomic disadvantage, indexing dispossession, ‘victimhood’, gross inequity and the violence and social deprivation of contemporary South Africa in general, and the Cape Flats in particular. Given this history, the politically named language Afrikaaps encapsulates a clear politicization of Kaaps, a construct of language firmly anchored in the ambition of its speakers for historical redress, and privileging the perspective of ‘the poor’

⁸ Gamtaal [gam language] is an appropriation of the term *gam*, a reference to the curse of Ham in the Bible and its use as a justification for slavery (Adhikari 2006).

and the excluded. The momentum of the Afrikaaps movement has until now been carried by a troupe of young rappers intent on decentring the official, dominant, narrative of Afrikaans and its fictional claims to universality, but is rapidly gaining purchase among a wider demographic.

Acts of LC around Afrikaaps speak to the concerns raised in the previous section, namely, the problem of language and subjectification, the question of engaging local and contemporary voice in struggle; and a construct of ‘language’ that goes beyond its conventional coloniality. Most importantly, the knowledge that emerges out of the acts of LC – a struggle knowledge – is what directly mobilizes speakers into a ‘community’ with the potential for increasingly sophisticated and far-reaching claims to historical redress and its material consequences.

Linguistic Citizenship: Language and subjectification

We noted above how metropolitan languages created a crisis of identity and belonging, a sense of dissonance and alienation, as a result of their imposition under circumstances of apartheid-stymied subjectification. In contrast, Afrikaaps was literally born out of the lives of speakers, and is made up of a multitude of registers through which speakers ‘feel at home’. In fact, an essential feature in the emergence of Afrikaaps is the recognition its speakers accord to a manifold of ‘voices’, manners and modes to be ‘legitimate’ speakers of the variety. Acknowledgement of the colourful and diverse local voices that contribute to the complex, unfolding of its history in musical genres, street performances, criminal argots, slave dances, and in contemporary local neighbourhood voices is a hallmark of present-day Afrikaaps (Stroud 2017; Williams 2019). It is a variety that admits to having many roots and that interrupts any account of Afrikaans as a homogenous European lineage or any one social, imposed and estranging, identity or alignment. Rather Afrikaaps emerges out of a web and multiplicity of relations and histories, encounters and entanglements as a repertoire of ‘practices attuned to a multitude of identities, subject positions and positions of interest’ (Stroud 2009: 213).

In this respect, Afrikaaps illustrates an important dimension of LC, namely what the philosopher Hanna Arendt (1958) calls ‘pluriversality’, the many voices that are the necessary condition of actorhood. To be recognized in the voices and eyes of others, and, in turn, to mutually recognize ourselves in this recognition, is what gives individuals ‘unique identities’, and interpellates individuals as agents/actors. It is out of the plural recognition of the active appearance of participants in the public space that selves are constituted. Acts of LC engage pluriversality by lifting forth the voices of those ‘exterior’ to official Afrikaans in non-normative systems of meaning, and creating opportunities for individuals and groups historically captured in circuits of invisibilization, to demand recognition and lay claims to dignity. Afrikaaps illustrates LC as a ‘struggle’ notion, referring to acts that transgress conventional semiotic normativities in order to give voice to those who have historically inhabited the other side of the ‘abyssal line’. The many different voices around Afrikaaps lend nuance and novelty to what it means to speak it, in the process interpellating new senses of self as speaker and a new agency. These new selves offer an alternative perspective on familiar and conventionalized worlds of coloniality. Their becoming visible in pluriversality is also an important dynamic is what re-forms stigmatized Kaaps into Afrikaaps. Concurrent with the import of what it means to be a speaker of Afrikaaps is the refashioning of the significance of the variety itself in claims to ‘language-hood’.

Linguistic Citizenship: local and contemporary voice

We have pointed out how African languages and speakers have been figured as ‘out of time’, and traced discourses of ‘pastness’ in practices of both intellectualization and endogenization that do not engage with the contemporary voices of subjugated populations. Rather than risk voices undergoing reduction through intellectualization and endogenization as in the case with African languages, Afrikaaps intellectualizes out of a broad constituency of speakers and reaches into endogenous knowledges relevant to the contemporary struggles of its speakers (cf. Nyamnjoh 2012). Many of the activities profiling Afrikaaps as a struggle variety lift forward the historical context around the genesis of the language during the apartheid years. During this time specifically, what was to become official Afrikaans underwent extensive linguistic purification, where the many early influences on the language from Malay, Tamil, and Khoi were expunged from the language to give it a whiter and more European pedigree. The processes behind what was to become Kaaps’, ‘gamtaal’, etc. were those of bordering and exclusion, and other co-temporaneous forms of exclusion and purification, such as forced removals, and prohibition against mixed marriages. There is extensive local knowledge of these historical events, which continue to impact on the community in many ways, and where the sociopolitics of the genesis of Afrikaaps engage contemporary political arenas, such as education.

Intellectualization **of** and **in** Afrikaaps is also underway with initiatives from academics and NGOs to work in concert to ‘vitalize’ Afrikaaps registers (cf. Williams 2017). In contradistinction to Afrikaans and the critique levelled against ‘revitalization’ practices for African languages generally, these activities emerge out of the engagement of Afrikaaps’ speakers with ‘standard Afrikaans’ and its forms. Viveiros de Castro (2004) has called such processes of engagement ‘equivocation’, a process where one voice does not silence the other ‘by presuming a univocality’ and reducing the terms of engagement to ‘sameness’, but one that works with difference and indeterminacy. ‘Equivocal translation’ (Vivieros de Castro 2004; de Souza 2017) is a highly productive strategy in the reconstitution of Afrikaaps, where hegemonic and subjugated knowledges are brought into contrast and allowed to ‘play out’ at the borders of ‘named’ languages. The juxtapositions of Afrikaaps and Afrikaans produces novelty and indeterminacy of meaning and expression, flaunting opacity, the ontological and aesthetic condition of irreducible difference (see Glissant 1997).

Lugones (2006: 75) characterizes the border as the ‘limen’, the space ‘at the edge of hardened structures, a place where transgression of the reigning order is possible’, with Blaser remarking on how equivocal translation in contexts of coloniality necessarily involves addressing power and overcoming epistemic racism (Blaser 2016). Afrikaaps illustrates well how the ‘borders’ between ‘modernist Afrikaans’ and Kaaps constitute such sites of rebellion where the coloniality of language is starkly revealed, and insights offered into how historical invisibilities can be linguistically made visible for present day concerns.

Linguistic Citizenship: Decolonial constructs of language

Our brief discussion of translanguaging suggested that despite claims to the contrary, translanguaging risks reinstating a modernist and colonial construct of language as a self-contained system. However, as noted above, linguistic borders are sites of potential contest and a significant part of social struggle which can ‘challenge and redefine the oppressive grammars of power, displacing and re-signifying terms (Vasquez 2011: 41). This is the case in the processes of ‘bordering’ in Afrikaaps, where the meaning and significance of Afrikaaps emerges simultaneously with the unfolding of social processes; the movement

across varieties is not just a formal exercise in structure, but an essential part of a changing landscape of power relations. What we also find in Afrikaaps, is that bordering work goes beyond the formalia of the linguistic system to involve a variety of semioses across different modalities, media and spaces of engagement, what we could call ‘trans-semioticity’ or inter-mediality. These trans-semioticities offer expressive possibilities beyond normed codes or registers (cf. Heugh 2019; Kerfoot 2011). In fact, given the silenced and invisibilized position of the subjugated/abyssal subject, overcoming linguistic exclusion, of necessity, requires forms of meaning-making able to transcend the constraints of fixed understandings of legitimised language. The meaning of Afrikaaps is literally fashioned across a series of modes and modalities – poetry, Hip Hop, song, dance and styles of speaking in character sketches (the gangster, the traditional healer, the Spaza store keeper), and everyday, mundane interactions.

As social processes and linguistic forms unfold synergistically, flows of power are altered through ‘resemiotization’ (Iedema 2001), so that invisibilized voices and silenced knowledges in one variety, modality or mode find space to be heard in other varieties, modalities or modes (Kerfoot 2011). Through resemiotization, the terms of the conversation emerge, are negotiated and/or contested differently in each space, permitting speakers to claim an authoritative voice, unconventionally articulated, that goes beyond standard accounts of what it means to know a language. These different genres give different speakers opportunity to step forward and contribute their own stories and experiences of speaking Afrikaaps. Thus, the multiple modes of articulating knowledge of Afrikaaps are acts of LC that also broaden participation and allow for the legitimate recognition of novel agencies at the same time as the meaning of Afrikaaps takes on new dimensions.

Summary

We have offered LC as a blueprint for getting to grips with some of the shortcomings of the radical reform remedies we have pointed to above. Firstly, it offers a model of how subjugated speakers can ‘appropriate’ (indigenized) ex-colonial languages (Afrikaans) in ways that reconnect self and language and avoid replicating the colonial experience of a Fanonian ‘linguistically induced psychic split’. In Afrikaaps, we have a community of speakers establishing syncretic language and knowledge projects in a collective process of struggle. Secondly, the example of Afrikaaps speaks to issues of indigenous language ‘intellectualization’ and endogenization with potential lessons for how to revitalize or reconfigure local languages, and to build registers for epistemic justice ‘bottom-up’. Finally, the manner with which speakers of Afrikaaps negotiate various forms of bordered, ‘inter-lingual’ negotiation with Afrikaans in conjunction with the unfolding of social processes, may carry insights into ways of rethinking translanguaging as a force in linguistic re-formation and concomitant social transformation. By interrupting and reshaping forms of speech and practices of speakerhood, the construct of Afrikaaps unsettles existing power relations bound up in its forms. It means that authority over the language and its ownership is momentarily at least ‘shifted away’ from the grammarians and lexicographers of institutionalized Afrikanerdom to the speakers of Afrikaaps, allowing hitherto unscripted knowledges to become visible.

As with the politics of sexuality and gender citizenship, a focus on the politics of the ‘linguistic’ opens up new vistas for living language and life differently. The gradual emergence of a different construct of language is in itself a precondition for, as well as a consequence of, the knowledge project. The work that LC does of crafting forms of life’ that

are informed by – and simultaneously inform – the social experience of everyone’ speaks to its suitability in the pursuit of a decolonial approach to epistemic justice.

By way of introduction to this paper, we argued that multilingualism can be re-conceptualized as a transformative epistemology and methodology of difference. What, then, are the more direct implications of acts of LC for a revised view of multilingualism?

Multilingualism as transformative

In the South African context, conditions for an epistemic justice cannot be delinked from strategic considerations towards a new non-racialized order. This requires an ontological (non-racial) re-fashioning of selves and others, and engagements across difference characterized by openness, imagination and wonder. In unleashing restorative social processes and the generation of new knowledge frameworks to engage with the racial constructions still rife in South African society, multilingualism refigured through acts of LC offers the terrain for the creation of new relations, ethical and knowledge systems. A decolonial perspective on Afrikaans has shown how linguistic technologies of classification and control can be muted and the coloniality of hierarchical arrangements of bordered languages and persons delinked. In effect, the restoration of Afrikaans is nothing less than an event of ‘transformative multilingualism’ (cf. Stroud and Kerfoot 2013). It is the outcome of acts of citizenship (Isin 2008) characterized by bottom-up pluriversality, an unfolding of voices across spaces and multi-modal representations that generate unpredictable significance and a multiplication of agencies. The new construct of Afrikaans emerges out of speakers ‘capacity to act in relation’ (Osborne and Rose 1999: 758) on the cusp and in the fissures of normative, institutionalized regimes, across conventionalized identities. It also reveals how re-borderings, processes of equivocal translation, and resemiotizations across bounded languages can be redeployed in creative ways to produce new forms of actorhood, sociality and ways of knowing. All of this suggests a vantage point on multilingualism as a ‘semiotic of relationality’, that is, multilingualism as a mode of engaging with difference, as the process of ordering encounters linguistically.

A central feature of these processes, equivocation, points to how a multilingualism conceived in such terms as a semiotic of relationality could work as a transformative dynamic in recalibrating the racial order. Lugones’s (2006: 75) notion of ‘complex communication’ captures a key feature of equivocation when she speaks about ‘praxical awareness of one’s own multiplicity and a recognition of the other’s opacity that does not attempt to assimilate it into one’s own familiar meanings’. One of the consequences of equivocal translation – not getting at meanings necessarily, not being able to assume knowledge of the other – is uncertainty, and vulnerability. Vulnerability is a useful lens with which to approach ‘ontological refashioning’. On the one hand, being vulnerable opens to discomfort, while simultaneously comprising a condition of openness to others, and therefore carries the potential for alternative engagement with selves. The notion of vulnerability also finds resonance with Arendt’s notions of pluriversality, as it is the human capacity for action (pluriversality) that continually brings forth newness and makes the world unpredictable, and its inhabitants subsequently vulnerable. Thinking about vulnerability in conjunction with Arendt’s notion of pluriversality highlights the relational aspects of mutual dependence, as conditions of vulnerability require joint, ‘collaborative’ interventions to ameliorate and benefit from change. LC is an approach to a politics of language and multilingualism that starts from a notion of vulnerability, in the sense of the emergent and sensitive process of ‘disinhabiting’, stepping out of, imposed and linguistically mediated and entangled subjectivities.

Equivocation in acts of LC is found in epistemologies of the exteriority (Dussel 1977/2003) and of the borders (Mignolo 2011) and ethical translation (Santos 2017), and is enhanced by understanding pedagogic encounters as ‘spaces of equivocation’ where qualitatively and hegemonically different sets of knowledge and culture are in contact and require equivocal translation. ‘To translate is to emphasise or potentialize the equivocation, that is to open and widen the space imagined not to exist between the conceptual languages in contact’ (Vivieros de Castro 2004: 10), simultaneously establishing the ethical relationship necessary in relating to epistemic difference, an ethics of ‘becoming with others’.

There are a number of pedagogical frameworks that could accommodate working around multilingual vulnerabilities, and provide spaces of experimentation for epistemic justice (for overviews cf. Bozalek & Zembylas 2017; Bozalek and Zembylas 2018; Stroud and Kerfoot 2013). All of these pedagogical initiatives interrogate legitimised ‘representational resources’ (Kress 1996: 18), or routinely accepted ways of using language and other forms of semiosis, in tertiary educational spaces.

One such approach that directly engages language in the formation of new subjectivities (2.1. and 3.1.) is the pedagogical use of Deleuzian ‘fabulation’ and ‘people-becoming’ (cf. Kruger and Le Roux 2017)⁹. Also of interest here are ‘pedagogies of discomfort’ (Boler and Zembylas 2003; Leibowitz and Bozalek 2016)¹⁰ that attend to the question of developing new empathetic and response-able Others. (cf. also ‘unquiet pedagogies’ Berthoff 1987). What Bozalek and Zembylas (2017: 62) term ‘response-able pedagogies’, are pedagogies that nurture ‘ethico-political practices such as attentiveness, responsibility, curiosity, and rendering each other capable’, and that ‘incorporate a relational ontology into teaching and learning activities’ (Ibid. 64). There are also a number of enticing approaches where languages are negotiated to articulate the contemporary and everyday worries of students. Antia’s (2017) research on the classroom use of invisibilized practices such as ‘hushed translanguaging’ is particularly promising here.

It would be desirable to interrogate the potential of these pedagogical framings as epistemic resources, and, beyond this, to trace students’ processes of resemiotization across spaces of learning both formal and informal, physical and virtual, to uncover the vectors along which knowledge flows. As meanings are translated from one mode to another, resemiotization offers the analytical means for tracking processes of engagement among multilingual speakers, knowledges, and values in the potential emergence of new ecologies of knowledge (Santos 2014).

Conclusion

We have argued that there are deep colonial relationalities that remain embedded in our view of language as a pedagogical resource, and that these are reaffirming of colonial and apartheid identities and ways of understanding the world. Afrikaaps is born out of struggle as part of a more general transformative dynamic in contemporary South Africa contesting deep historical and racialized tensions. Although this paper has used Afrikaaps as an example of

⁹ For Deleuze (1989) ‘fabulation’ is a beneficial artistic force that enables the invention of ‘a people to come’. For Kruger and Le Roux (2017: 54) operationalizing fabulation in pedagogy is about ‘short-circuiting impasses’ of thought and expression in order to create ‘new opportunities for experimenting with emerging social collectivities’.

¹⁰ For Boler and Zembylas (2003: 108), a pedagogy of discomfort ‘emphasizes the need for both the educator and students to move outside of their comfort zones.... [It] recognizes and problematizes the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines, and unconscious complicity with hegemony. ... By closely examining emotional reactions and responses ... one begins to identify unconscious privileges as well as invisible ways in which one complies with dominant ideology.’

potentialities, this argument would apply to many urban metropolitan registers. We have exemplified how LC in struggles over the legitimization of a subjugated linguistic ‘variety’ rejuvenated this variety in the process of building a new convivial community with transformative implications for the dignity, visibility, and material benefit of its speakers.

We have underscored how epistemology and language both emerge simultaneously in the ontological construction of the self, and that these constructs of self and other are what open and close for ‘ways of knowing’ (Papadoupoulos 2018). This allows for alternative understandings of what there *is*, unlocking elements of history, culture, aesthetics – a new ontology and epistemology – simultaneous with the reworkings of language, and the problematization of linguistic borders. The conclusion is that a reconstructed notion of multilingualism must be part and parcel of the specific epistemological/ontological work that goes into rethinking and engaging with knowledge areas. While the implications for educational contexts, including teacher education, are significant, the consequences of this approach offer multilingualism as a transformative and decolonial instrument of social change and epistemic justice more broadly.¹¹

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¹¹ We recognize that our structural location as white limits our right to suggest how transformation might take place.

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