

SOME OF THE METAPHORS ABOUT LANGUAGE, IN LANGUAGE PLANNING DISCOURSES IN SOUTH AFRICA: BOUNDARIES, FRONTIERS AND COMMODIFICATION

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Since April 1994, when eleven languages (instead of two) were given official recognition, language planning debates have focused on implementability rather than policy options. This paper explores three of the metaphors which influence language planning discourses in South Africa: the boundaries metaphor, the frontiers metaphor and the commodity metaphor, and the effect they have on the way language is constructed. The discussion centres on the tensions between a "bounded" view of language and a frontier view of language. Aspects such as frequency of usage and the distribution of languages would be significant in language planning discourses based on a frontier view of language, whereas the number of mother tongue speakers would be significant in a "bounded" view of language. Finally, the paper stresses that commerce influences discourses about language.

Sedert April 1994, met die verlening van amptelike status aan 11 tale (in plaas van 2), het die debatte oor taalbeplanning 'n klemverskuiwing van beleidsmoonlikhede na implementeringsopsies ondergaan. In hierdie artikel word drie van die metafore wat taalbeplanningsdiskoerse in Suid-Afrika beïnvloed, ondersoek: die metafoor van afbakening, die metafoor van vooruitstrewing en die metafoor van verhandelbaarheid, asook die invloed wat hulle het op die metode van taalonderrig. Die bespreking sentreer om die spanning wat bestaan tussen 'n afgebakende en 'n vooruitstrewende benadering tot taal. Aspekte soos gebruiksfrekwensie en die verspreiding van tale sou belangrik wees vir taalbeplanningsdiskoerse wat op 'n vooruitstrewende benadering gebaseer is, terwyl die aantal moedertaalsprekers belangrik sou wees vir 'n afgebakende benadering tot taal. Ten slotte word beklemtoon dat handel 'n invloed het op die diskoerse oor taal.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to examine critically some of the assumptions about language in language planning discourses in South Africa. It does so by analysing various metaphors current in the debate. The following are the three main ways in which the construction of language has been metaphorised in discourses about language:

- i) language as a discrete category (the boundaries phenomena)
- ii) language as an interpenetrable phenomenon (the frontiers metaphor)
- iii) language as a commodifiable entity.

CONTEXTUALISING THE PAPER

Language planning policy can be loosely interpreted as an organised approach to language problems, typically at national level. This normally involves discussions about which languages to be accorded official recognition, or the role which some of the languages could play in education. In South Africa, the debates also involve the amount of air time some languages should be accorded on radio and TV. This does not preclude debates at a local level. Arguments about language planning policies at a national level are guided by metaphors about language which are different from those influencing the conceptualisation of language from local perspectives.

In the apartheid era, debates about the various language planning policy options which a future government in a post-apartheid era could adopt were often extremely volatile because language policy was interpreted by all the protagonists as a vehicle through which different political ideologies could be articulated. Since the announcement in April 1994 by the new democratic government that South Africa would officially recognise eleven languages, the debate has shifted from a discussion of policy options to the implementability of the policy. Because language implementation requires a long-term perspective, the discourse on language policy will soon begin to address issues about sustainability as well.

In the apartheid era, Afrikaans and English were the only two officially recognised languages in South Africa. In addition to the above two, nine other languages have been granted official status. The following table (Ridge 1994) lists the number of languages officially recognised in South Africa and the estimated number of speakers of each language. The table accounts for 98% of an estimated total population of approximately 40 million. The remaining 2 % is made up of community languages (also referred to as heritage languages) such as Hebrew, Gukurati, etc. have not been granted official recognition. Besides heritage languages, another notable language which has not been granted official recognition is Fanakalo, a South African pidgin spoken mainly in the mines.

Zulu	21.95%	8.8 million
Xhosa	17.03%	6.8 million
Afrikaans	15.03%	6.0 million
Northern Sotho	9.64%	3.8 million
English	9.01%	3.6 million
Tswana	8.59%	3.4 million
Southern Sotho	6.73%	2.7 million
Tsonga	4.35%	1.8 million

Swati	2.57%	1.0 million
Venda	2.22%	0.9 million
Ndebele	1.55%	0.6 million

The announcement that South Africa would officially recognise eleven languages and the entrenchment of language rights in the transitional Constitution were welcomed as improvements on a past situation in which only English and Afrikaans were recognised and there were no language rights entrenched in the Constitution.

LANGUAGES AS DISCRETE ENTITIES: THE BOUNDARIES METAPHOR AND OCCAM'S RAZOR PRINCIPLE

According to Fardon and Furniss (1994),

[i]n the process of interaction between state and citizens particular speech forms get converted by the state into languages; they become reified as social facts which are mutually exclusive.

The creation of mutually exclusive speech forms gives rise to a way of thinking about language which can be neatly captured by the boundaries metaphor. The boundaries metaphor is based on the assumption that speech forms fall into separate boxes in spite of the fact that one can walk from the southernmost tip of South Africa to the northernmost point without being able to identify a specific point where one language ends and another begins.

The imposition of determinate linguistic boundaries on speech forms is typical of a top-down approach to language (starting from the assumption of the existence of diverse languages). The discourse of boundaries is also typical of language planning approaches which address language problems in terms of national, international, continental and intercontinental relations (Fardon and Furniss 1994: 3).

Paradoxically, in Africa and indeed even more so in South Africa, the boundaries conceptualisation of language which creates insiders and outsiders is also typical of colonialist and neo-apartheid discourses on language. Le Page and Tabournet-Keller (1982), citing a Bantu linguist, argue that the "existence of separate labelled (African) languages is a British innovation expedited by the work of Clement Doke and other like-minded linguists" with a dualist orientation to issues about language. It is linguists who decided to elevate Hurutse at the expense of other dialects in forming standard Tswana. They sought to divide the Sotho in the North from their cousins in the South using language as a dividing instrument. The point, I am trying to make here is that in some situations the "bounded" notion of language violates Occam's razor principle because it results in a creation of more "languages" than would be necessary.

The "boxing" of African speech forms into different languages is reinforced by state, legal and educational pressures. In South Africa when children enter school, they have a mother tongue

assigned to them even though the language may be as alien to them as English (Street 1993: 35). The essence of the point Street is making is that the speech forms most African children encounter during their primary socialisation are so radically different from the ones they encounter at school, even in situations in which they are supposed to be receiving instruction through their mother tongue, that I would like to argue that they are receiving the benefit of step-tongue (see Gupta 1994) and not mother tongue instruction. One way in which the drift between the language of primary socialisation and the language in step-tongue instruction could be restrained is through a process of restandardisation. The restandardisation would mean that the speech forms used as media of instruction would begin to resemble more closely those used in local communities in which the children live. This would require a liberation from the "boxing" of speech forms.

One of the sociolinguistic consequences of a top-down perspective about language is its reification arising from a separation of language from its users, as is demonstrated by the entrenchment of language rights in the constitution as opposed to the rights of the language users. One also seriously doubts the extent to which the language rights of all the speakers of the eleven official languages can be said to be honoured, if the Constitution in which those rights are entrenched, is available in English and Afrikaans only.

The entrenchment of these eleven languages in the South African Constitution has had the effect of conflating language and standardisation: all eleven are codes which for one reason or other have already been standardised. Such an announcement creates the impression that the complex relationship between language and dialect has been fixed. Experience from other parts of Africa has demonstrated that such fixing cannot be easily achieved. Bamgbose (1994) cites an interesting example which supports the dynamic nature of the relationship between languages and dialects. Using examples drawn from Ghana, he shows that the differences in dialects between Twi and Fante which were magnified in the immediate post-independent period (Ghana obtained its independence from Britain in 1957) to the status of separate languages are now being considerably downplayed, concomitantly reducing the number of languages which Ghana has 37 years after independence.

The converse also applies. The Efik-Ibibio dialect cluster in Nigeria has been accepted for years as one language, for all practical purposes, with Efik as the literary form of the language. The position is now being reversed and Ibibio is more and more being emphasised as a separate language. The trend is likely to be intensified with the creation of a new state in 1997 in which the Ibibio form the dominant group (Bamgbose 1994: 34).

The upshot of the argument is that the number of languages which a country officially recognises is not ultimately significant, because speech forms may change their status as separate languages to dialects of the same language (or vice versa) over the course of time. The Ghana example illustrates a situation in which differences between boundaries are downplayed, whereas in Nigeria the differences are magnified.

THE LIST AND THE MAP AS DISCURSIVE CONVENTIONS IN THE BOUNDARIES METAPHOR

The list and the linguistic atlas are the two main ways in which the boundaries metaphor is presented.

THE LIST

After the speech forms have been converted into discrete boxes, a demographic process is then set in motion. In the demographic process the number of speakers of each of the boxes is counted. A list is then presented reflecting the number of mother tongue speakers of each of the various languages. Implicit in the listing strategy is a view of the relative strength of each language partially dependent upon the number of mother tongue speakers of that particular language. There are two main limitations to the listing strategy. One of the limitations is peculiar to South Africa and another is more universal. The demographic data for users of African languages in South Africa is notoriously unreliable. The data on the number of speakers were gleaned from aerial photographs in 1980 rather than the result of comprehensive surveys. The listing strategy also fails to take into account that simply enumerating mother tongue speakers of each box (language) may not be adequate. As Derive and Derive (1986: 45) remind us, frequency of usage of the languages may be just as important as the number of speakers; if not even more important.

THE LINGUISTIC ATLAS

Another discursive practice whose conventions for the representation of language are influenced by the boundaries metaphor is the linguistic atlas. The map shows how speakers of different languages are geographically distributed and consequently language becomes **objectified spatially**. Because the map "orders" language in a two-dimensional space, the reader has to appeal to other socio-linguistic processes in order to understand why certain speech forms are regarded as an instance of a language and not a dialect and vice versa. Furthermore, language maps are hard pressed to represent any area in terms of more than one salient language. Thus, for instance in some maps a large part of the Western Cape is represented in terms of Afrikaans only, while in the urban areas there are clearly a large number of other languages spoken in addition to Afrikaans. The discourse of the language map tends to perpetuate a myth of monolingualism when multilingualism might be the norm.

DISCOURSE OF THE PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD

Another group whose principles of talking about language are closely related to those of the linguistic atlas is the Pan South African Board. The linguistic map distributes languages **geographically**, but the Pan South African board distributes them **functionally** according to the role and purposes the languages are to play in the various sectors. In other words, the discourse

conventions of the linguistic map are concerned with geographic location, while the Pan South African Language Board concerns itself with sectoral location.

In spite of the importance attached to functional location by the Pan South African Language Board, the Board does not officially recognise the role played by Fanakalo in South African mines, nor is it likely to do so. In my view, a recognition of the importance of Fanakalo would have rehabilitated its image and begun the process of dispensing with the apartheid and colonialist baggage the language carries. This would create the possibility of raising its status and consequently setting in motion a series of processes which would subsequently lead to its elaboration and standardisation. Unfortunately, the Pan South African Board is too bureaucratic in its thinking to adopt such a revolutionary policy. As Latin (1992) suggests, it would take a populist government keen on gaining and consolidating political capital to recognise such speech forms such as Fanakalo since they are held in painful disregard by bureaucrats and in some cases even by those who speak them.

Perhaps the distinction between a geographical and sectoral division of languages is inevitable because as Whitley (1974) insists it might always be necessary to make choices at different levels, even within a single institution, e.g. the educational or legal system. It may not be prudent to opt for a unilingual solution because "it is always necessary to be aware of differential function and of the presence of variable domains.... Efficiency is not necessarily always achieved by uniformity, rather by sympathetic understanding of complex demands and dynamic uncertainty" (Davies 1986: 8). Thus, for instance, English and Afrikaans may have a similar distribution in South Africa since they are both used as media of instruction in tertiary education. The differences may, however, be of scope and extent, since English has a much wider distribution than Afrikaans.

LANGUAGE FRONTIERS

Another type of metaphoric description of language which is radically different from the boundaries metaphor and the listing and linguistic atlas conventions, which are associated with the boundaries metaphor, is the frontiers metaphor. The frontiers metaphor is strongly influenced by microethnographic research, particularly the work of Gumperz 1971; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1989, etc. Microethnographic approaches prioritise local-level language practices, arguing that discourses which discuss language as discrete and more or less given misrepresent the socio-linguistic situation on the ground. Thus, for Le Page the language or languages an individual uses cannot be determined by her geographical location, but by the identity which she seeks to project at any individual moment.

Giddens (1991) uses the phrase "the reflexive project of the self" to deny the existence of a fixed identity and, by extension, a fixed bounded language. Within a perspective which places emphasis on local practices, identity is interactionally accomplished and since individuals engage in different communicative acts, their identity is consequently a variable one.

In terms of a microethnographic perspective, language and language boundaries are permeable and therefore language should be seen as interpenetrable hence the appropriacy of the frontiers metaphor. Research within the frontiers metaphor tradition emphasises how, in spite of the large number of languages cited within the boundaries tradition, it is rare to find any extended conversations within a single language. "Conversations drift into and out of particular languages as the subject matter and register require, making it difficult in some cases to determine in which language the conversation occurred because the languages are in state of semi-permanent mixture. Language is therefore construed to be a multilayered and interconnected chain offering a range of options in terms of registers and styles, depending on how the user seeks to align herself to her changing circumstances.

This permanent mixture is creating conditions which favour the creolisation of African speech forms. It is interesting that the creolisation of African languages is occurring without the languages having gone through a precreole stage. This situation challenges the view that a creole necessarily has to have its origins in a pidgin. However, the situation of a creole without a preceding pidgin is not unique to South Africa; it has also been reported in Réunion. Baker and Corne (1982) demonstrate that a creole was established in Réunion without a pidgin emerging, because of the presence of a large proportion of white French native speakers.

Because the frontiers metaphor is sensitive to local language practices, the information it provides would be invaluable in addressing the "step-tongue syndrome" because it provides insight into true community usage.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF LANGUAGE

The third and last type of metaphor which I would like to explore in relation to language is the one which has its origins in the world of commerce, i.e. the commodification metaphor. The discourse of acquisitional planning discusses language in terms of a commodity. The commodification of language manifests itself most clearly in the domain of second and foreign language learning and teaching (Coulmas 1992). Fairclough (1992: 206) succinctly describes the commodification of language as the "process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrow economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to be organised and conceptualised in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption." The commodification of language has been taken to its most extreme extent by the British Council in its promotion of English language. The Director General of the British Council, John Hanson CBE, describes teaching as an industry in the 1992/3 British Council annual report:

The global spread of the English language is fundamental to Britain's trade, culture and development. English Language Teaching (ELT) is therefore one of the main pillars of the Council's overseas operations. It is closely integrated with other elements of our work, particularly the promotion of British arts and education, and is a significant element of

Britain's aid programme in many Third World countries. It also brings major earnings to British publishers and suppliers of E.L.T. materials.

The commodification of English is unlike the commodification of African languages in South Africa. Whereas the commodification of English is promoted by a British institution manned largely by the British, the commodification of African languages is a European project seeking to promote African languages by making knowledge of an African language a strong recommendation for a job.

The commodification reflects the extent to which discursive practices about language have come to be dominated by the world of economics. The impact of the process of commodification is felt in two ways. First, language learners are constructed as clients or customers who may opt to buy one or more of the eleven commodities. The commodification of language conjures up a sociolinguistic situation in which languages are in competition and not in a complementary relationship with each other.

Second, if the eleven languages in South Africa are seen as commodities in competition with one another, the competition is unfortunately not an equal one. For example, if all the eleven official languages as constructed in the boundaries metaphor were to function as media of instruction (pushing aside the step-tongue phenomenon), materials would have to be provided in each of the individual languages. Provision of these materials is very expensive and requires a high degree of expertise. Hard economic realities mean that governments have to rely heavily on commercial publishers. "Unfortunately, because economies of scale dictate that publishers invest in instructional materials for languages with relatively large numbers of speakers, it means that languages with relatively few speakers may not receive fair treatment" (Makoni, 1993: 17). This may perpetuate a situation inherited from the apartheid era in which some languages are accorded fewer resources than others, a form of linguistic racism which Phillipson aptly (if emotively) describes as "lingualism".

Central to the commodification of language is the notion of the market value of language. In this type of discourse the idea that language is a commodity is seen as justifiable because acquiring a second foreign language is costly both to the individual and society. In the South African context, as pointed out earlier, knowledge of an African language is seen as economically exploitable because it is linked to provision of jobs, as the following advertisement illustrates:

SABC Radio News has three vacancies for experienced reporters in its Johannesburg news office.

Two of the posts will go to Sesotho-speaking reporters, although an ability to speak several South African languages will in all cases be an advantage. We are looking for energetic people with drive and enthusiasm, lively curiosity and a good news sense. Applicants must be prepared to work odd hours. A driver's licence and typing skills are essential. Radio experience, a good broadcasting voice and computer literacy could all be advantageous.

In the Western Cape, if the educational system cannot successfully meet the demands for African languages, a niche would be created for the private entrepreneur. Demands for African languages are likely to lead to more people wanting to learn them. This has, what Coulmas calls, a "snowball" effect because the more people learn a particular language, the more useful it becomes; and the more useful it becomes, the more people want to learn it. In the South African context another argument may also have to be used: as opportunities for learning particular languages were formerly so few and so unsatisfactory, the desire has accumulated. Both teachers and learners are benefiting from arrears. The number of people learning a language is, however, not a perfect criterion of the value of that language to a community. For instance, there are a large number of students learning Latin at the University of the Western Cape because it is a prerequisite for legal training.

The metaphor of a language also has some in-built self contradiction. On the one hand, language is commodified through dictionaries and grammar books which objectify and reify the vocabulary of a language by turning it into potential material resources. On the other hand, language is an intangible commodity. When a student pays to learn a language, the teacher does not diminish his resources by teaching.

MARKETING SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGES - MARKETING A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

There are some interesting parallels between the way African languages are being marketed and the way English is being marketed in the former Eastern European countries. In the former Eastern European countries, English is being marketed as the language which facilitates democracy, free markets, etc. In South Africa, African languages are being marketed as the languages which facilitate integration into a new democratic South Africa. In both cases learning either English or an African language is projected as a symbolic acceptance of a new era. The languages are being marketed not for some "undefined communicative purposes", but because they are a reflection of specific ideological positions (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1994).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried to explore three different ways of talking about language, arguing that the manner in which language is constructed depends on the manner in which we talk about it. I have also argued that there is tension between a "bounded" conception of language and one which places emphasis on local practices (the frontiers metaphor). I have concluded the paper by demonstrating how the discourses about language are not only influenced by state apparatus, but by the world of commerce as well.

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