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Language, Education and Race Relations

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The point of departure of this paper[1] is that what are called race relations are at bottom power relations. The corollary to this proposition is that a change in race relations in any direction necessarily implies a change in power relations. The distribution and maintenance of power depend on a network of historically evolved structures, institutions, processes and practices in all domains of social life. One of the most important domains of social reproduction, which is seldom foregrounded as such is that of language policy and language practice. Yet, it ought to be obvious that, oppressive, exploitative and discriminatory relations generally are always reflected in language policy and practice since, in the striking formulation of Halliday and Martin (1993:10), "the history of humanity is not simply the history of socio-economic activity, it is also the history of semiotic activity". There are many reasons for the continued silence in regard to what is on reflection an indispensable lubricant for the functioning of any human community. Most important among these is the susceptibility of language to the masking effects of hegemonic practices precisely because it is one of the main sites of the generation of ideology and thought. It is, consequently, one of the objectives of this paper to show up the fact that language policy, especially in the educational institutions, is one of the most effective strategies for both the entrenchment and the negation of racist practices and racist beliefs.

Although the paper focuses on the effects of language policy in education as an anti-racist strategy, two rather trite propositions have to be stated clearly at the outset. The first of these is that no single aspect of social policy can in and of itself bring about anything more than limited change within a social formation taken as a whole. Under favourable circumstances, transfomative initiatives having their origin in one or other sector of society, whether intended or not, can have catalytic effects but these usually derive from the peculiar historical conjuncture in that society. Any attempt, therefore, to abstract from the overall social policy environment, is bound to give rise to approximations that are so remote from the real situation as to be completely meaningless. It has to be stressed, secondly, that there are no universally valid formulae for the solution of global problems such as racism and racist practices. The peculiarity of the historical development in each social formation influences decisively which options are more likely to be successful in any given case. At best, we can hope to indicate the range of possible approaches based either on first principles or on the experience of people in other places and at other times.

In regard to the subject of this paper, I take it for granted that at the dawn of the 21st century, linguistic rights are inalienable human rights and that cultural diversity, which includes linguistic diversity, is an intrinsic positive value of a sustainable humane and civilised, i.e., democratic, society. These statements have gained axiomatic status among the vast majority of language scholars the world over and have found legal recognition in various international instruments[2]. Similarly, it is no longer necessary to canvas the status of "race" in biological science since there is now overwhelming

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[2] Among the more important of these are the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Draft Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights.

agreement that this is a non-question. Given the findings emerging from the human genome project, only flat-earthists can deny that "racial classification systems do not represent homogeneous genetic categories - that is, they are not rooted in biological difference" (Brown 2001:16). There is well-nigh 100% agreement among scholars that race is constructed socially and that "…because of the long history of racial discrimination, the social meaning of race is real, and can have real consequences for health"[for example, NA] (Brown 2001:16).

A raceless society?

The relevant overall social question that does arise in our context is whether a "raceless society" is possible. This is, to begin with, a question of definition. However, a simple way of putting it is to ask whether, generally speaking, physical differences (such as skin colour, hair texture, lip, eye and nose shapes) which trigger racial perceptions and under certain circumstances also racialist responses, can ever become as invisible as, for example, differences of stature on a continuum between the extremes of dwarfism and giganticism, or differences in body mass between the extremes of obesity and anorexic gauntness. The simple fact is that unless we revert to some primordialist explanation of why racial identities are so tenacious, this question posed in this manner translates into asking what it is that we have to do in order to render invisible the phenotypical features that stimulate racialist responses. To put the question in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework: is it possible to conceive of a humanity where a non-racial habitus has come into being and come to stay? The corollary question is how such a habitus differs from the opportunistic "colour-blind" discourse of dominant (usually white) majority or minority groups who oppose current affirmative action policies not so much because they might have the effect of perpetuating racial identities but merely in order to entrench their historically derived power, advantages and privileges. In the current debate over race and racism in South Africa, there is much pussyfooting around this issue of racial identities. Xolela Mangcu (2001:9) in an audacious move has tried to argue that we should simply accept racial identities in the same way that most people accept ethnic identities based on language, religious or other cultural differences that have acquired significance over time. He distinguishes between non-racialism as an "empirical concept" and non-racialism as a "normative concept". With reference to the dilemma confronting the post-apartheid South African government, he poses the problem we are examining here as follows:

From a purely empirical standpoint the reality of racial identities was just too powerful to ignore. From a normative standpoint there was a need to create a society in which differences in phenotype did not determine our individual and collective fate.... This indeed seemed like a powerful vision for a society founded on racial oppression. On the surface nothing would seem objectionable about such a stance…. The difference lay in the extent to which the black consciousness movement saw race as a cultural concept that gave people their identity and the extent to which the non-racialists saw race as a problematic physiognomic concept, a burden that had to be transcended in a broader search for certain universal values such as freedom and justice (Mangcu 2001:9).

Tové Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:137) in a discussion of the relationship between mother tongues and ethnic identities, poses the question in a manner that is most relevant to the concerns of this paper. She believes that it is necessary to study the circumstances under which people's ethnicity and languages can become positive forces and strengths that can help to empower them. It is against this background that the following exposition of the relationship between language policy in education and race relations has to be understood.

Before we proceed to discuss this relationship, however, it is appropriate to point to two other paradigmatic moments that frame such a discussion. The first is the realisation that in general, there

are four necessary conditions that have to be met if the salience of racial consciousness in any society or in the world at large is to be reduced and even negated. These are, stated baldly,

equitable distribution of material resources among the significant social units (individuals, historically evolved groups, strata, etc.);

democratic transparency in respect of all social policy issues;

critical citizenship based on free access to all relevant information;

a world government (or its dedicated agency) and an associated international network of civil society organisations which can function as a global watchdog to ensure that international and regional legal instruments prohibiting all forms of discrimination are strictly adhered to by all states.

The second moment relates to the emerging paradigm shift from assimilationism to what in this paper, I shall refer to broadly as multiculturalism. As the forces of industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation have intensified, transcontinental migrations of people in search of work and better life chances have accelerated. Societies, especially in the economic North of the globe, that were traditionally perceived as stable, cohesive and homogeneous by virtue of being allegedly monocultural, monolingual and homogenous, have suddenly woken up to the fact that they are countries of immigration in which, increasingly, people from many different cultural backgrounds interact as a matter of course and ostensibly on a permanent basis. In this situation, we have on the one hand racist, xenophobic responses couched in terms of a segregationist “multiculturalism” and on the other hand integrationist, democratic and even nation-building or “nationist” responses which emphasise intercultural and pluralist networks (see, for example, Rex 1996). For the former groups, notions of purity, including so-called racial purity, constitute the inarticulate major premise of their discourse whereas the discourse of the latter groups is informed by the assumption that hybridity is the normal human condition. What is becoming progressively untenable is the classic “melting-pot” assimilationism of the period before World War II where one dominant cultural tradition forces anything that comes into contact with it into the existing mould and discards everything that does not “fit”.

Of course, in most countries of the economic South, these issues have been, and are, usually posed in quite a different mode. Because their state boundaries were determined relatively recently by inter-imperialist competition, the populations of most ex- or post-colonial states in the South are extremely heterogeneous. In most of them, what we might call a multilingual and multicultural habitus exists as a result of patterns of interaction that have both pre-colonial and colonial origins (see Gupta-Basu 1999, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, among others)[3].

Contradictory tendencies in the rainbow

In view of such differences, it is paradoxical that the power relations in both North and South present themselves in identical ways. This has to do with the fact of a single world economy and its global-village effects based on the control of investment and financial markets by some 200 trans-

[3] Choudhry (1998:12), citing Pattanayak (1998:139) gives an excellent, if perhaps romanticised description of the situation in which this multilingual/multicultural habitus evolved in the course of India’s “unbroken tradition of 3,000 years of the oral transmission of knowledge.” and continues: “In a multilingual and multiethnic country, this tradition ensured (a) maintenance of group identity within an interdependent network of cultures; (b) maintenance of small communication zones within a broad communicational matrix through a gradual merging of borders and a shared common core; (c) maintenance of group autonomy and resistance against incursions by empire builders into the affairs of the people, and (d) awareness of individuals and groups comprising the Indian cultural area, the various linkages and balances at the micro and macro levels and participation in the maintenance and furtherance of tradition in the face of constant changes. Mother tongues held the key to this unique delicate balance....”

national giant corporations. In this connection, the hold which the modernisation project and the supposed imperatives of globalisation have on the minds of post-colonial elites is decisive for the explanation of the symmetry as well as the complementarity of power relations. What tends to happen in practice is that the global economic and social conjuncture shapes the political tactics of the giant corporations and of their political representatives in all parts of the world (see Castells 1998). The invariable outcome is that minorities in the North and majorities in the ex-colonial South are the victims of discriminatory policies that originate in the metropolitan centres. A simple example is the manner in which the very same owners of big capital who had supported the racist ideology of the apartheid regime in South Africa, once this became untenable on both political (the collapse of Soviet communism) and economic (financial sanctions) grounds, had no difficulty in performing a perfect somersault and, today, support the "non-racial" ideology of the African National Congress government. That government, for its part, has jettisoned virtually all the pro-socialism elements in its ideological baggage and has adapted with a minimum of *angst* to the dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy. Besides reminding us of the infinite flexibility of the capitalist system, this fact points to the difficulties inherent in the implementation of educational policies which are calculated to set up counter-hegemonic or transformative trajectories rather than merely to reproduce the existing social, economic and political relations within a given society or region.

By way of illustrating the contradictory tendencies that have been set up through the globalisation process, let us consider briefly the dynamics relating to language policy in general and to language policy in education more specifically within the evolving European Union. On the one hand, for both economic and cultural reasons, the individual countries of the EU insist on the complete equality of the 11 official languages of the current Union. In effect as well as in intention, this amounts to a policy of promoting multilingualism and, consequently, multilingual education. Thus, we have the paradox of a relatively successful policy of multilingualism driven by the historically determined domestic linguistic market which is based on the monolingual habitus (Gogolin 1994) and the dominant national language in each of the countries of the EU. This has had the possibly unintended effect of bringing about a renaissance of the languages of regional minorities[4] in Europe (see Extra and Gorter 2001). On the other hand, with very few exceptions (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 and Extra and Gorter 2001), minimal provision is made for accommodating the languages of immigrant minorities educationally or otherwise. This is a question which is inescapable, however. In the words of Manuel Castells (2000:7)

> Europe is fast becoming a continent of ethnic minorities. The proportion of foreign-born population in Germany is already almost the same as the African-American population in the U.S., at about 12%. And, as... [in the case of] African-Americans, most people from ethnic minorities concentrate in the largest metropolitan areas, thus increasing their visibility. Because of the differential birth rate vis-à-vis native populations, the coming two decades will bring a spectacular increase of multiethnicity throughout Europe. If we add the future integration of Eastern European[s] and Turks in the European Union, Europe must design from now on specific policies of cultural integration, based on equal rights, and respect...[for] differences, that should be applied throughout the continent.

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[4] We deal with three categories of "minorities" in Europe. Traditional "regional minorities" have lived as minorities on the territory of their respective states in most cases for centuries and are usually derived from populations that predate the arrival of the majority populations. Well known examples are the Welsh in Britain and the Basques in Spain and France. "National minorities" refer to people who, because of historical conflicts and the vicissitudes of war find themselves under the legal jurisdiction of states that border on their original homelands. The Albanian population in Macedonia or the Hungarian population in Slovakia are cases in point. "Immigrant minorities" denote those people who have been pulled to Europe after World War II by the desire to find work and security from persecution in their home countries. Most of these people have come from the South, mainly from Africa and South East Asia. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many recent immigrants originate in Eastern Europe.

For Castells (2000:6), language policy is one of the most important of these integrationist policies. Busch (2001:11-12), indeed, makes the point that it is precisely the linguistic diversity of Europe that has compelled the Union to open itself to a multiculturalist paradigm as opposed to the assimilationist paradigm of the individual nation states. Like Castells, therefore, she places particular emphasis on a multilingual language policy as a defining feature of a new European identity. With reference to the strong anti-Slovenian Austro-German nationalism in Carinthia, she says that the imminent integration of Slovenia into the E.U. (Austria has been a member since 1995), the widespread Austrian/Carinthian stereotypes of Slovenians as "enemies" have become obsolete and a much more Euro-orientation is taking root among the youth:

Identity constructions among the younger generation point ...[in] the direction that there might be another possibility between assimilation and ethnic affirmation, a construction that reaches beyond the monolingual "imagined" community in including bi- or multilingualism as something perfectly "normal", a construction that does not comprehend affiliation to a particular group as something exclusive.... (Busch 2001:12).

The real development of language policy in the E.U. has been complex and contradictory because of the impact of assimilationist, alternatively multiculturalist, push-pull factors on both the immigrant and the native populations. Extra and Gorter (2001:29-30) have described the typical evolution of policy in respect of immigrant minority languages in most European Union member states. It is a path that began in some countries with the languages of these minorities being taught as a subject to the children in the primary school for purposes of facilitating family remigration (repatriation). However, because remigration failed to materialise on any significant scale, this approach was mostly replaced in the 1970s by the classic deficit paradigm where the language of the home is treated as a problem because it is not the same as the (national, or dominant) language of teaching and learning at school. In this phase, the immigrant minority children were subject to different variants of compensatory and remedial education in order to bring them to "the same level" as their native European peers. Because the permanence of the "immigrant" populations was becoming increasingly evident, some of the smaller, more xenophile countries such as the Benelux and the Nordic states began reforming their curricula on the assumption of their being multicultural societies, along the same lines as Pierre Trudeau's government had pioneered in Canada in 1971 (see, among many others, Leman 1999; Extra and Gorter 2001). Despite some progress in these countries in regard to the peaceful integration of foreign workers and their families, there was hardly any movement in this direction in the more powerful larger countries, especially in Great Britain and France. Indeed, the overall conclusion of these authors, whose findings are based on a wide-ranging study, is quite negative.

It should... be noted that cultural-political arguments for IMLI [Immigrant Minority Language Instruction - NA] have not led to an educational policy in which the status of IM languages has been substantially advanced in any of the countries involved in this study (Extra and Gorter 20001:30).

In an earlier article (Broeder and Extra1999:109-110), the authors demonstrate clearly that the status of immigrant minority languages originating in non-EU countries is extremely low and that the process of setting aside the restrictive interpretations placed on the concept of "minority languages" in the individual member states of the EU is strongly entrenched and will require energetic advocacy.

In Eastern Europe, on the territories of the former Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires, the question of the status of national minorities and the treatment of their languages arises in addition to those of regional and immigrant minority languages (see, e.g., Busch 2001, Gstettner and Larcher 1985, Reisigl and Wodak 2000). Because of the post-Berlin Wall civil and international wars that broke out in Eastern Europe, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for National Minorities

and the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages became vitally important documents that served to provide guidelines for finding solutions to such conflicts, however reluctantly the warring factions may have made use of them. An eloquent example of this influence is the series of events around the use of the Albanian language as a language of tuition at university level in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (see AIM 1996). The language question is one of the central issues in this conflict and the Macedonian government at the time (1995) went through a most intricate dance in order to avoid jeopardising the acceptance of Macedonia into the EU[5].

The influence of these instruments is also evident in the recent (draft) Vienna Manifesto emanating from a conference on “the costs of multilingualism”, which was held in Vienna on 7-9 June 2001. One of the crucial clauses of the Manifesto states simply that

It is a *sine qua non* for building a European identity to assure citizens that their mother tongues will form part of it. In some cases understanding will not be possible without a lingua franca (e.g. English) but European communication processes should not rely exclusively on it. The introduction of a “leading” European language would mean to favour the native speakers of this “single language” politically and economically. This fact would result in political conflicts and unforeseeable consequences. (Anon. 2001:1)

Language policy in education as a component of an anti-racist strategy

The Vienna Manifesto also stresses the role of the educational institutions, especially of the universities and the schools, in the promotion of multilingualism and the maintenance of the linguistic wealth of all these societies. Given the many thousands of books and articles on the question of language policy in education, it is essential to repeat that in this paper, the focus is on language policy in education as a component of an anti-racist strategy. At the most general level, it should be said that in any multilingual society at the beginning of the 21st century, it ought to be axiomatic that all children - and all learners - have the right to be taught and to learn in the language of their choice. For most people, it goes without saying that if they had the opportunity, they would choose to be taught through the medium of the mother tongue[6]. However, the power relations in any given social formation make this almost impossible for most children and other learners beyond the phase of primary or basic education. Because of the paramount importance of the ruling strata of Europe in the history of the modern era, it is appropriate to consider briefly the relationship between language practice in education and the development and the reproduction of capitalist (free-market) social relations. This question has been dealt with in great detail by many different scholars in Europe and in the non-European world, in recent scholarship most notably by Pierre Bourdieu. His analytical

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