Commentary

Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenbergen*, Mieke Van Herreweghe

Ghent University, Belgium

It may seem presumptuous that we – as Europeans – have committed ourselves to writing a commentary on the views expounded in this volume by our African colleagues on issues which are specific to the Southern African reality. We are fully aware of our position as outsiders and of the danger we are running to miss the point, to misrepresent facts and misunderstand the complexity of the attitudes and sensibilities. We therefore feel the need to make our reading position clear and to explain how we envisage this writing task. We have both had a long-standing interest in South African education and have been keen listeners to what our colleagues from various South African universities have to say about language issues in education, at primary, secondary and university levels. What we think we can bring into the discussion is simply an outsiders' analysis of what appear to be key issues in the different papers brought together here and to try and formulate common threads, shared views and points of difference.

Furthermore, we can trace parallels with European educational problems at the moment. For more than two centuries many Western and Central European states have embraced a centralising concept of monolingualism resulting from what Gogolin (2011:242) calls a "monolingual habitus". Indeed,

> [a]ccording to this concept, the monolingualism of a whole country or territories in a country is one of the key characteristics of a well functioning and "sound" nation-state. Information about the language (or languages) a person operates in therefore signified not only a matter of language usage, but also the allegiance to one (their) country and state. The official language of the nation mutated to the "mother tongue" of its constituents. Since then, use of the "correct" language in the sense of the language of the nation – which was later on a standardised version of one selected vernacular – implied solidarity with the community of all those living in the respective state. (Gogolin, 2011:242)

Due to this monolingual habitus, minority languages and cultures within an officially monolingual society were completely ignored, whether they were indigenous or immigrant minority languages and cultures. An important educational consequence is that this has led to the construction of children and young people who are bi- or multilingual in languages other than the national language of being ""at risk", and their language abilities in other languages than the language of schooling (or the national or majority language) are widely neglected" (Gogolin, 2011:243).

> In Europe, immigrant minority languages especially are the languages with the lowest esteem in most countries. Consequently, only very few speakers have access to education and literacy in these languages. In our research we assume that, put simply, this represents one of the main reasons for the lasting disadvantage of immigrant minority children in schools in Central European countries: The monolingual habitus works for the protection of linguistic hierarchies and for the *wasting of language potential* that accompanies the refusal to accept multilingualism as a general feature of a contemporary society. At the same time, it is to the detriment of immigrant minority students because it prevents them from revealing their full language potential (Cummins, 2000; Gogolin & Neumann, 2009). (Gogolin, 2011:243)

Moreover, since the early 1990s the multilingual and multicultural reality has become even more complex in many European (and North-American) cities leading to what Vertovec (2007) calls "super-diversity". His central claim is that looking at diversity today in terms of ethnicity only is too simplistic.

* Corresponding author.
 E-mail address: annemarie.vandenbergen@ugent.be (A.-M. Simon-Vandenbergen).

The 'new immigration' and its outcomes in Britain have entailed the arrival and interplay of multifaceted characteristics and conditions among migrants. This has resulted in a contemporary situation of 'super-diversity'. Compared to the large-scale immigration of the 1950s-early 1970s, the 1990s-early 2000s have seen more migrants from more places entailing more socio-cultural differences going through more migration channels leading to more, as well as more significantly stratified, legal categories (which themselves have acted to internally diversify various groups), and who maintain more intensely an array of links with places of origin and diasporas elsewhere. Super-diversity is now all around the UK, and particularly in London. It has not brought with it particular problems or conflicts, but it certainly presents some challenges to policy-makers and social scientists alike. (Vertovec, 2007:1043)

To give just one example, Baker and Mohieldeen (2000)'s survey of 896,743 London schoolchildren revealed that in London at least 300 languages are spoken as home languages.

Therefore theories and policies developed in the past may need to be revised in order to be applicable to today's super-diversity. Vertovec maintains that multicultural policies should be developed (at least in the UK, but by extension in many European countries with similar patterns of super-diversity) "modifying public services (including education, health, policing and courts) in order to accommodate culture-based differences of value, language and social practice." (Vertovec, 2007:1027). This is clearly reminiscent of what the authors of the papers in the current collection have put forward with respect to the Southern African multilingual and multicultural situation. Consequently, we strongly believe that parallels between the multilingual and multicultural aspects of society in Southern Africa and of super-diversity in Europe may be of value to both Southern Africans and Europeans, as – no matter how different the social and political contexts – north and south can learn from each other in their quests for more equitable, accessible and efficient forms of education.

We shall deal with the following issues which are recurrent themes in the contributions: (i) The official policy of the promotion of multilingualism, both at governmental and institutional levels; (ii) A critical assessment of the policy's implementation; (iii) The multiple meanings and interpretations of multilingualism and the effect of these divergent meanings on the factual situation in higher education; (iv) The problems which the authors lay bare; (v) Finally, the solutions proposed and what should and could be the way forward.

(i) The official policy

Multilingualism for official purposes is constitutionally guaranteed in South Africa. The 1996 constitution of the new democratic republic wanted to promote the indigenous languages and therefore gave all nine languages which had regional status in the former regime official status nationwide. With the addition of English and Afrikaans, this means that South Africa has eleven official languages. The text of the constitution makes clear that it is the purpose of the state to take measures to ensure the elevation of the status of the indigenous languages, out of respect for the people of South Africa whose languages had been given lesser status and been in diminished use. This dedication of the government was a crucial step in the recognition of the multilingual identity of the South African people. It was evident that education is one important domain in which indigenous languages should be introduced. In fact, Section 29 (2) provides that "everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable". However, the theoretical commitment raises the question of implementation, and the potential difficulties are recognised in the clause "where that education is reasonably practicable". Restricting ourselves here to higher education, the Language Policy for Higher Education (2002) makes some provisions which on the one hand stimulate the promotion of South African languages for use in higher education, while on the other hand recognizing that the current dominant status of Afrikaans and especially English in higher education will necessarily have to be accepted until the other languages have been developed for the purposes of university teaching and research. We infer from the contributions to this volume that there are several ways in which universities can interpret and implement the policy. There are also different ways in which the present situation can be read, as a first step forward, or as a missed opportunity due to misconstruals of what multilingualism in education should imply if it wishes to benefit the majority of students.

By contrast the official policy with respect to languages in Mozambique is quite strikingly different. Since independence in 1975, Portuguese has been the sole official language in the country and the language of education, but there are dozens of unofficial Bantu languages (e.g. Emakhuwa, Xitsonga (Xichangana), Cisena, Elomwe, Echuwabo, etc.) as well as four Asian languages (Gujarati, Memane, Hindi and Urdu). Only a minority of Mozambicans, mostly those living in the cities and a growing number of young people, speak Portuguese as their first language. English and French are compulsory school subjects, respectively from primary and secondary school onwards; the Bantu languages are not. However, in 2003 the National Institute of Education Development started a project titled "An Experience of Bilingual Education in Mozambique" in primary education, involving 16 Bantu languages and 15,000 pupils from all ten provinces. Pupils are supposed to use only a Bantu language up to grade 3, and from grades 4 to 5 onwards they are expected to use both their first language and Portuguese as a second language (Nhapulo, in press). At the level of secondary and tertiary education Portuguese remains the sole medium of instruction, thereby neglecting the (Bantu language) linguistic repertoires students may bring. So, even though in reality Mozambique is clearly multilingual, its official linguistic policy seems to be firmly rooted in a "monolingual habitus".

(ii) Critical assessment of the implementation of the policy at different universities.

The papers by Stroud & Kerfoot, Madiba and Makalela & McCabe describe three historically different universities in South Africa: the University of the Western Cape, the University of Cape Town and the University of Limpopo respectively. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was established as a bilingual English/Afrikaans university college catering for the