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Game Changers? Multilingual learners in a Cape Town primary school

by

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Game Changers? Multilingual learners in a Cape Town Primary School

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Abstract

This paper engages with Bourdieu's notion of *field* as a 'space of play' to explore what happens to the educational field and the linguistic regimes operating within it in a site in which new discourses and practices of identity, language, 'race' and ethnicity become entangled with local economies of meaning. The context is a primary school in a low-income neighbourhood in Cape Town, South Africa. We draw on multilingual classroom and playground data from observations, interviews, and audio-recorded peer interactions among grade 6 learners to illuminate the strategic mobilisation of linguistic repertoires in encounters across difference: as identity-building resources and as means of shaping new interaction orders, restructuring hierarchies of value, subverting indexicalities, and sometimes resignifying racial categories. We further draw attention to a set of circumstances in which local actors have the potential to change, not only the rules of the game, but the game itself.

Introduction

It is often surprising to observers outside South Africa that race-based discourses still feature so prominently in what has been a non-racial democracy for 18 years. While the state retains apartheid-era group classifications to promote equity and redress, it might have been expected that, with increasing integration, essentialist categories would lose some of their potency. But apartheid has a long reach. While a visionary political settlement was reached in 1994, economic transformation has lagged far behind (Bhorat 2004; Marais 2011) and race, class and gender remain strongly articulated and complicated by location, language, and generation.

Part of the reason for the continuing power of these categories is that processes of racial integration since 1994 have been uneven. Despite the removal of legislation barring free movement, land ownership, and social intimacy, apartheid town planning remains largely intact (Christopher 2001). Although some city centres have integrated significantly, most towns and cities can still be seen as 'islands of spatial affluence' surrounded by a 'sea of geographical misery' (Williams 2000: 168). While urban townships are sites of vibrant self-stylization and identity formation (Nuttall 2008; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009), their inhabitants tend to have limited economic and social mobility. Thus while South Africa today can be seen to display the 'distinctive postcolonial realities of multiple arenas, fluid identities and positional relations of power' (Werbner 1996: 8), many of the old barriers and tensions remain.

Schools are microcosms of these realities, of the daily encounters across difference and of the resulting frictions and creative dynamisms. The few studies of racial integration in schools tend to focus on previously 'white' schools, in white areas, staffed by white teachers, to which large numbers of black students now travel daily. These studies emphasize processes of assimilation, accommodation, and resistance to dominant ideologies (e.g. Makubalo 2007; McKinney 2007; Nongogo 2007; Ndlangamandla 2010).

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In contrast, this paper focuses on a primary school in a low-income township that is almost unique in South Africa: it is only here that the poor are racially diverse (Muyeba and Seekings 2011). Children in the school come from two historically separated groups, 'coloured' and 'black African': the school can therefore be seen as a 'contact zone' in Pratt's sense (1992: 4), that is, as a social space 'where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other', but one in which the relations of domination and subordination tend to be less asymmetrical than in many such encounters in South African schools.

The aim of this paper is to illuminate some of these encounters across difference and in particular the sudden glimpses of wider social and political ideologies that pulse through them. Our focus is on the ways in which multilingual 10-12-year-olds negotiated difference using the semiotic resources at their disposal. We are interested in how young learners were able to use the frictions and dynamisms generated through contact to foreground particular aspects of their identities or to mobilize new ones. We argue that through these practices learners at times re-ordered interactional orders and language regimes, re-valued forms of linguistic and social capital including 'race' and ethnicity, and in so doing could be seen as 'game changers' in the education field. 'Game' here refers to Bourdieu's notion of *field* as a 'space of play' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 19) in which social agents struggle over the recognition and relative weight of different forms of capital. Finally we highlight the potential of such dynamic processes to transform language-in-education policies and practices.

At the time of the research (2008-2012), the school consisted of 70% black African learners but only 40% African teachers, 30% 'coloured' learners but 60% 'coloured' teachers and 80% 'coloured' administrative staff including the principal. This profile reflects that of the surrounding municipal ward in which 67% are African (Statistics SA 2013). This ward is located in Delft, a large township on the Cape Flats scrublands 30 km east of Cape Town city centre, in which the majority population is 'coloured' (51.5% in 2011, down from 73% in 2001) (City of Cape Town 2013).

This in turn reflects demographics in Cape Town, which differ from the rest of South Africa in that the majority are 'coloured' (42%) while 39% are black African, with an economically dominant white minority (16%) (City of Cape Town 2012). This demographic anomaly is a consequence of policies of forced removals from the 1950s onwards. The Western Cape was declared a 'Coloured Labour Preference Area' in the 1950s under which certain categories of jobs were reserved for people deemed to be 'coloured' making it almost impossible for Africans to find work in Cape Town. Only from the 1970s did numbers of largely isiXhosa-speaking African people begin to skirt state restrictions and migrate into Cape Town from the rural Eastern Cape (Muyeba and Seekings 2011).

Delft is a microcosm of these entangled histories. First established in 1989, it has since rapidly expanded. It is a context of precariousness: official unemployment levels for 2011 were 44% black African and 40% 'coloured' (Statistics SA 2013), although if those who work in the informal sector were included, this figure would be much higher. 69% of households have a monthly income of \$325 or less. Only 27% of those aged 20 years and older have completed Grade 12 (City of Cape Town 2013). Levels of economic and cultural capital in the form of education are thus low and equally distributed across groups.

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The particular form that integration has taken in parts of Delft is due to the housing policy of administrations since the late 1990s. Fifty percent of new houses built were allocated to the 'coloured' families on the existing municipal waiting-list while every alternate house was allocated to the mostly African residents of informal settlements: a deliberate attempt to promote integration.

Integration studies nationally have focused on better-resourced schools as sites for engagement with ideologies of whiteness. In the school studied here, however, the white 'Other' is absent from the site. Moreover, this is a new school so no group can claim the institutional history or the right to determine the prevailing institutional order. In contrast to previously white schools absorbing large numbers of black learners, no one group is positioned as the 'bearer of preferred knowledge' (Soudien 2007: 443) and therefore there is no explicit assimilationist agenda.

Further, in contrast to most schools in South Africa where speakers of other languages change to English as a language of learning and teaching after Grade 3, learners in this school were part of a provincial pilot project, the Language Transformation Plan (WCED 2007), in terms of which parents could choose any of the three languages of the Western Cape as medium of instruction to the end of Grade 6: isiXhosa, Afrikaans, or English. One consequence was that there was no clear cut 'official language' in the school and as a result, norms of interaction were under constant negotiation in classrooms, playgrounds, and staffroom. This particular school could therefore be characterised as a site in which 'what was once thought of as separate -- identities, spaces, histories -- come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways' (Nuttall 2009: 10). Multiple dynamics, multiple and partly overlapping histories were in constant motion, accompanied by high levels of flux in classroom organization, in school organization and scheduling, and in language and education policy, at institutional, provincial, and national scales.

Returning to Bourdieu's game metaphor, in schools 'play', that is, everyday activity, normally takes place within certain fixed parameters which shape the kind of moves that can take place and who can make them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 22). Here, however, was a site where the regulative principles of the field were not clear, were constantly contested and renegotiated. Players, both teachers and learners, were unsure of the value of different forms of capital, whether 'race', ethnicity, gender or language, and there was continuing negotiation over the rates of exchange operating at any given moment in this fluctuating linguistic market or in the broader organization of the school.

The creative communicative strategies triggered by the encounter of each individual *habitus* with this volatile field offer a lens on how questions of language and identities are played out in such contexts. *Habitus*, understood as a 'set of socially constituted dispositions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 145), predisposes individuals to speak and act in certain ways but also generates the strategies which enable them to cope with 'unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 19). Furthermore, children on the cusp of puberty are interesting precisely because it could be argued that for them the *habitus* may be less sedimented than in adolescents and adults and more open to change.

Conceptual framework

This research is framed by the ‘linguistics of contact’ (Pratt 1987) which looks beyond community, convention, and cooperation to division, disruption, and dispute. This framing enables attention to how language operates *across* lines of social differentiation and how speakers ‘constitute each other relationally and in difference’ (60). It complements poststructuralist views of culture as ‘processual’ rather than ‘essentialist’ (Baumann 1999), of identity as self-conscious and reflexive yet structurally constrained, and language as ‘an emergent property of social interaction and not a prior system tied to ethnicity, territory, business, or nation’ (Pennycook 2007: 67). From this perspective, language and other identities are performed and negotiated in interaction: influenced by both local contexts and wider ideologies in circulation, participants align with, contest, or subvert social categories of belonging.

An implication of the negotiated nature of identities is that pre-existing categories such as class, ‘race’, and ethnicity cannot be taken for granted nor the boundaries of such categories universally defined (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, *inter alia*). Instead, these are ‘interactional achievements grounded in concrete social contexts and evolving with them’ (De Fina 2007, 374). Consequently, in contexts of rapid social change, ethnic affiliations often contradict expected mappings between language and ‘race’ or ethnicity (e.g. Gumperz 1982a; Rampton 1995, Bucholtz 1999; Kamwangamalu 2007).

This paper aims to illuminate the construction of identities across boundaries as well as the field conditions which enable or constrain the agentive use of language. We explore, in particular, the identities generated by particular discursive moves, the temporary *orders of interaction* (Goffman 1983) they shape, and the more enduring social and cultural processes they index.

Method

In order to gain insight into these processes, we collected observational, interview, and audio-recorded interactional data among multilingual 10-12-year-olds in Grade 6. The study was designed as a Linguistic Ethnography, bringing together the counterhegemonic potential of ethnography (Blommaert 2009) and the illuminative power of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS). IS, grounded in the work of John Gumperz (1982a, b), sees interaction as a key site for the construction, negotiation and contestation of identities and relationships. It is concerned with how speakers create and interpret meaning in social interaction, integrating insights and tools from anthropology, linguistics, pragmatics, and conversation analysis into a framework for analyzing the often ‘fleeting, unconscious, and culturally variable conventions’ for meaning-making (Bailey 2008: 2314). It emphasises the importance of what speakers and listeners understand themselves to be doing with semiotic resources such as glances, words, intonation, codeswitches. IS enables a focus on face-to-face interactions in which there are considerable differences in participants’ forms of capital, and is therefore ideally suited to contexts, especially postcolonial ones, in which the field of play is uneven and subject to change. In such contexts, neither linguistic competence nor interactional expectations are fully shared or stable. (Gumperz 1972; Rampton 2006).

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Nine youngsters aged 10-13 (of which four were girls) were key participants in the project, a tenth decided to withdraw after a while. Selection was purposive to ensure half from each of the two major language groups – Afrikaans and isiXhosa -- and equal division by gender. Progressive widening of the participant group took place through individual learners' friendship rings. Participant observations were carried out by both authors; the second author followed participating children to different locations in school and home settings. Learners carried pocket recorders during group work, outdoor play, and extramural activities. The corpus of data consists of 120 hours of audio-recordings complemented by interviews; interviews were initiated in English but followed language switches as initiated by learners. Recordings were audio rather than video as the latter was found to be too intrusive. As a result, only field notes could testify to the use of embodied communicative resources in meaning-making. The focus of analysis is on episodes containing a large number of *translanguaging* (Garcia, 2009) phenomena, that is, those in which participants draw on multiple elements of their linguistic repertoires. Given the importance of participant commentary for interpretation, every attempt was made to take transcriptions back to participants for comment. However, the time-consuming nature of transcribing and translating multilingual data meant that the opportunity for retrospective participant checking was sometimes lost. Translations and interpretations were checked with home language speakers, both lay and academic. Transcription conventions are attached in Appendix A.

The authors' field notes provided an idea of how each interaction fitted into wider social relations, institutional structures, and individual biographies. A multilingual informed consent form was signed by class teachers and by all learners in the school and their parents or caregivers.

In the next section we illustrate the complex intersections of 'race', ethnicity, and language from the perspective of learners. We first present brief profiles of five learners and then two samples of interactional data in order to show how learners draw on all their linguistic resources to negotiate new identities and achieve classroom tasks. The names of individuals are fictional.

Complicating 'race' and language: trajectories and profiles

This section presents a sample of participants' profiles, illustrating the danger of assumptions built on one-to-one relationships between ethnicity and language.

Table 1. Sample of learners' self-ascribed linguistic repertoires

Name	Age	Gender	L1	L2	L3	Caregivers' language repertoire
Michelle	11	F	Afrikaans	English		mother Afrikaans, father English/ Afrikaans, grandmother English
Ismail	12	M	Afrikaans	English	isiXhosa	Afrikaans both
Odwa	11	F	English	isiXhosa	Afrikaans	mother isiXhosa

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Xolani	12	M	IsiXhosa	English	Afrikaans, isiZulu	mother isiXhosa; father isiXhosa-English
Zolile	13	M	IsiXhosa	Afrikaans	English	isiXhosa both parents

What is evident here is that the three last learners, who would be categorised as belonging to the Xhosa ethnic group, have markedly different linguistic profiles. Different social experiences and trajectories across the peripheries of Cape Town have resulted in repertoires which ‘follow the rhythms of human lives’ (Blommaert and Backus 2011: 9).

The high degree of variation thus arises out of differing patterns of mobility, different perceptions of social and symbolic capital on a fluctuating and non-unified linguistic market, and the availability of linguistic resources both in school and outside it. Zolile, for example, learnt Afrikaans from friends outside the school. Ismail’s Afrikaans-speaking mother is a community leader and encouraged him to take isiXhosa as an additional language in the interests of greater community integration; the school however advised against this.

Such accounts of complex linguistic identities and identifications are found in research in many parts of the world and illustrate the ways in which difference is positional, conditional, and conjunctural (Hall 1988). In South Africa this kind of data is significant because it highlights the ways in which naturalised and previously enforced relationships between language, ethnicity, and ‘race’ are disrupted. Language becomes a variable in defining cultural entities, rather than a constant (Hymes 1968: 30).

Renaturalising identity categories: subverting indexicalities

At school level, continuing tensions flow in from wider social discourses: older essentialist ways of thinking about race coexist with the new signifiers of race which learners are producing (Yon 2000; Gooskens 2006). Alongside some conventional racist taunting, observations showed youngsters often deliberately avoiding racist labelling and strategically defusing potentially racist tension. In an interview with Odwa, (the interviewer) was puzzled by a reference to ‘white’ learners and asked for clarification as it was clear that Odwa was talking about what the school would categorize as ‘coloured’ learners.

Interviewer: Why do you prefer to call them white, and not the other name that people call them?

Odwa: Cause they’re gonna call us ‘k-----s’¹.

[...]

Odwa: When, you see, when we talking, when maybe we talking Xhosa, then we say, ja, that’s white people. Ja, when we don’t want them to hear what we were saying, ja. We call them white.

The hesitations, the hedging of ‘you see’, the restarts, as well as a downward gaze and scuffing of one toe in the sandy ground all testify to the continuing difficulty of explicit ‘race’

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talk. Renaming the social category 'coloured' as 'white' in order to disguise the fact that a particular group is being discussed is one strategy for harmonious co-existence.

So in this context 'white' still carries the index 'other' but with a local twist, changing the economy of meaning. One could argue that this served to loosen the hold of essentialist understandings of 'whites' and 'blacks' or 'coloured' but it could also be seen as a renaturalization of meaning, of indexicality – as the connections drawn between particular groups of people in a particular context -- while serving to mask complex histories of engagement. We also see how the desire not to be labelled offensively by interlocutors from another group resulted in anticipatory and strategic projection of an absent social category: the social meaning of 'white' was reoriented from a 'fixed racial reference term to an intersubjectively negotiated identity category' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 595).

To sum up, here we see youngsters negotiating the transition between childhood and adolescence complicated by the uncertain and variable values placed on 'race', ethnicity, and language as forms of capital. To illuminate these negotiations in action, we present two extracts of audio-recorded interactional data. The samples present two forms of 'school' talk: casual conversation on the playground and task-focused group talk in the classroom.

In postcolonial and globalising contexts, the contours of the world can no longer be taken for granted and are thrown into sharp relief by increasingly routine encounters of difference. In such contexts, conversation often involves a heightened awareness of ways of speaking and a more conscious effort to negotiate social roles and relationships through strategic mobilization of linguistic resources. Analysing the discursive moves made by participants can illuminate the potential for each move to change the direction of play: how 'each manoeuvre undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished' (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 168-9).

In what follows we illustrate how youngsters use their meta-awareness of their own and others' linguistic repertoires to achieve social and educational goals in an unpredictable field of play.

The two extracts of conversation presented here are not strictly casual, that is, they have a clear pragmatic and institutional purpose: one is to some extent regulative in the sense of a prefect preventing his peers from entering the junior playground, the other is the completion of a classroom task. Nevertheless the tone in both cases is informal and often playful. Interactions thus display many of the characteristics associated with casual interactions identified by Eggins and Slade (1997: 20–21): rapid speaker change, lengthy, often highly elliptical negotiations of challenges and disagreements, an informal and colloquial register, and humour.

Negotiating power: Gate-keeping in the playground

Xolani Jubase is a 12-year-old boy who grew up in the Eastern Cape and identified strongly with isiXhosa as his language of inheritance:

I see myself as a Xhosa person even though I speak English. I still love myself. [...] It is necessary for me to use English when I'm answering questions during the lesson that maybe is in English so I must answer in English. But during isiXhosa, I am answering in [hand to the chest] my language.

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Despite this attachment to his home language, he decided to move himself to the English medium class as he felt he would be more academically challenged. He was clear that this was his decision and not his mother's. Like the other learners, he displayed a reflexive understanding of his own language ideologies and of the need to make strategic choices based on the wider ideologies in circulation. In the extract that follows he was stationed at the gate between two sections of the school. His role as a school prefect was to prevent older learners from moving into the Foundation Phase playground where the younger children play. This is an extract from a 15-minute sequence during which he interacted with many different ages and groups in a variety of languages.

As the gatekeeper he had the authority to choose the language of the opening move. Here he was in this sense the 'animator' and 'author' in Goffman's (1981) terms of an institutional message that only certain people could pass through the gate: animator in that he actually produced or gave voice to the message, representing official positions and beliefs, and author in that he chose the mix of codes (language), the words and the tone in which to convey this message. His choice of isiXhosa to address a group of Afrikaans-speaking learners is striking. He knew very well that they might not understand him but nonetheless chose to disrupt the expected interactional order, which would be English as a mutually understood language. He saw the opportunity to assert not only his authority but also his understanding of the legitimate language for this interaction.

This moment of interaction is therefore dense with historicised and present meanings: in the stance he chooses here, he is indexing simultaneously a challenge to the linguistic regime implicit in the school's administrative hierarchies, and the political history of dominance of Afrikaans in relation to African languages both on the Cape Flats and more widely in apartheid policies and discourses. So indexicality here embraces both micro and macro scales.

He chose to use isiXhosa in his opening challenge to this particular group as he knew they could be troublesome. He explained that with younger Afrikaans speakers he might use Afrikaans or English depending on the circumstances. So the age and composition of the group was more salient in his language choice than social category.

Table 2 Recorded playground interaction

Turn	Speaker	
206	Xolani	Molweni, nizokuthini kwelicala? <i>Hello, what do you want this side?</i>
207	Martina	Huh?
208	Xolani	What is your problem with this side?
209	Martina	Nothing, we're just watching netball.
210	Xolani	No you can't just come here and watch... netball.
211	Alvina	Why not?
212	Xolani	Because it's not allowed, because you're not allowed in the... in the foundation phase area. Understand what I'm trying to say guys?

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- So stand up and go. Don't you understand what I'm trying to say?
Or must I = =
- 213 Martina = = Why can those but us can... can't sit?
214 Xolani They say they are waiting to play... to play netball.
215 Alvina No, they praat kak.
No, they talk shit
- 216 Xolani What is a kak? I don't know kak.
217 Martina Um, eh, it's kak... Look here = =
218 Alvina = = If they can't go, I'm also not going to go because it's unfair.
219 Xolani Unfair for who ?= =
220 Duane = =THE PRINCIPAL SAY I MUST STAY HERE AND WATCH
NETBALL, UNDERSTAND ME? ((They all laugh))

The interaction continued. Others responded in English rather than Afrikaans, their dominant language, to signal willingness to engage, and thereby aligning themselves with his authoritative stance. What is interesting here is that although interview data showed that he had a high level of investment in his Xhosa identity, he reduced the *loading*, the 'level of investment in the identity being negotiated' (Coupland 2007: 114), once his initial assertive stance had been taken up by his audience. Thereafter he switched to a lighter key, keeping a bantering note in the interaction and, in turn 216, strategically feigning ignorance of an Afrikaans vulgarity to counter resistance and the possibility of having to respond to an insult. Throughout, his authoritative stance was mobilised interactionally across turns through deft changes of footing and reflexive 'play' with the elements of his linguistic repertoire. Despite the intensified counter challenge in turn 220, the exchange continued in a jocular fashion with more wordplay in English and Afrikaans until the group eventually moved off. Xolani's success in asserting his identity as gatekeeper is thus evident in the 'stance follows' (Du Bois 2007: 161) of those in the group, the fact that after much contestation they did 'take up' the actions he requested.

Of interest here is the additional stance resource (Jaffe 2009: 119) available to multilingual speakers: language choice. This choice in turn is related to the speaker's position at the nexus of local and wider economies and ideologies of language.

This kind of data points to the usefulness of *heteroglossia* as a concept. As Bailey (2011) has argued, following Bakhtin (1981), what is distinctive about heteroglossia is not its reference to the concurrent use of different kinds of linguistic signs and forms, but rather its focus on the social tensions inherent in language. From this perspective,

language is not a neutral, abstract system of reference but a medium through which one participates in an historical flow of social relationships, struggles, and meanings. Linguistic signs come with social and historical associations, and they gain new ones in their situated use. (Bailey 2011: 499-500)

Building on this understanding of heteroglossia, we now present an example of the multilingual construction of relations of solidarity.

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Maintaining solidarity in the classroom

The focus is again on Xolani but this time as part of a group of long-standing friends working together on a classroom task. All have chosen an English-medium stream. As is evident in Table 1 above, a complexity of repertoires and *interests* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) or *investments* (Norton 2000) are hidden in the organization of the school by an imposed and artificial bureaucratic order which labels language and subject choices in ways that often do not reflect lived realities.

Classroom setting

The next extract is taken from a multi-grade (Grades 4, 5, and 6) Technology lesson with English as official language of instruction ('home language'). As mentioned above, this school was part of a pilot in the Western Cape of a transformative multilingual policy under which all three local languages were offered as languages of learning and teaching until the end of Grade 6.

Moreover, training for teachers on the pilot encouraged *translanguaging*² (García 2009; Baker 2011), that is, the use of any language or language variety in learners' repertoires to promote classroom learning regardless of the 'official' medium of instruction. The school was therefore unusual in that code-switching was promoted rather than frowned on in the classroom. In this multigrade class the teacher, a Xhosa-speaking woman in her late thirties, moved between the different grades arranged around small tables with 4 or 5 per group with a straight passage demarcating each grade. The teacher gave the instruction for the task for Grade 6 and started another topic with Grade 5, leaving the learners to complete the task in groups. The instruction that framed the recorded interaction was as follows:

Grade 6, you have different objects in front of you. What I want you to do for me, I want you to look closely into the object in front of you and observe what it is. Some have one, some two. Is that a chips or empty container or whatever. What do you see? [...] You first discuss and then you write, nè?[...] You can use your language of choice.

This excerpt is taken from one long sequence in which the boys jointly negotiate answers to the task set: to write down what they see on a packet of crisps ('chips' in South African English). The extract is an extended negotiation about which English word they should write down as one of the ingredients of the crisps and the marshalling of different kinds of multimodal evidence (pictures, text, vocal, gestural) in support of the opposing positions. Maize is known as 'mealies' or 'mielies' in South African English (indexical of Afrikaans). Mielies is also frequently used in urban varieties of isiXhosa (*imilizi*), as is maize (*imeyizi*). Both terms, mielies and maize, are known as *umbona* in 'deep' isiXhosa while maize meal or mealie meal refers to ground mealies (*umgubo wombona*) used for porridge. Hence the difficulty of their task.

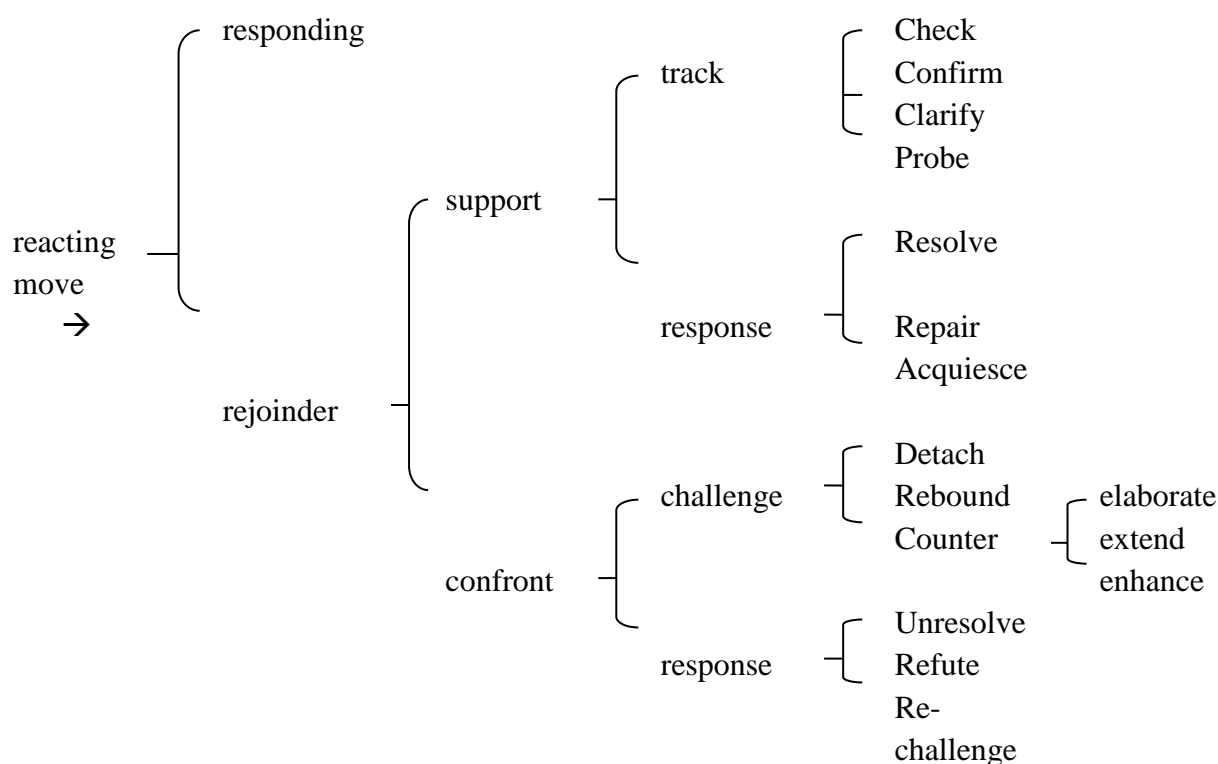
In analysing this data, we focused both on mood structures of conversational clauses and the 'moves' made by participants and the languages in which they are made. A *move* is

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defined here by two criteria: as ‘a clause which selects independently for mood’ (Martin 1992: 40) and prosodic factors such as rhythm and intonation which ‘interact with grammatical structure to signal points of possible turn transfer’ (Eggins and Slade 1997: 188). One speaker turn can realize several discourse *moves* (or speech functions) through one or more clauses and through non-verbal means.

Labelling what interactants are doing as they speak to one another, for example, ‘challenging’, or ‘supporting’, and relating these *move* types to the grammatical and semantic resources used to realize them offers ‘sophisticated tools for exploring the negotiation of interpersonal relationships in talk’ (Eggins and Slade 1997: 177). Moves have been categorised following Eggins and Slade (1997) with a focus on a subset of ‘sustaining’ moves necessary to keep a conversation going: reacting speech functions. Reacting moves are generally either ‘responses’, which move the exchange towards completion, or ‘rejoinders’, moves representing dispreferred options which ‘in some way prolong the exchange, .. set underway sequences of talk that interrupt, abort, or suspend the initial speech function sequence’ (Eggins and Slade 1997: 200).

Figure 1. Reacting moves: Rejoinder speech functions in conversation (adapted with permission from Eggins and Slade, 1997: 209, Figure 5.5)



Our aim is to establish the ways in which social relations are constructed through discursive moves within and across turns and in different languages.

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Table 3 Extract of Grade 6 task-focused peer interaction

Key

1, 2, 3 etc: turn numbers

a, b, c etc: move numbers

i, ii, iii etc: clause numbers

O = Opening move

R = Reacting move

P = Prolonging move

s = supporting

c = confronting

NV = Non-Verbal

Conversational structure	Turn/move	Speaker	Text (numbered for clauses) with translation in italics
O: initiate	14/a	Zolile	I see a picture of chips.
Rc: challenge: NV leave open for self-repair	15/a	Xolani, Ismail	((laugh))
Rs: respond: repair	16/a	Zolile	(i) I see mielies,(.) (ii) I see [mielies.
Rc: refute	17/a	Xolani	(i)[Maize.
Rs: track: check	18/a	Zolile	(i)Yintoni? <i>What?</i>
Rs: resolve	19/a	Xolani	Maize.
Rc: counter: elaborate <u>restate</u>	20/a	Zolile	(i)Yimielies, (ii) yimielies. <i>It's mielies, it's mielies.</i>
Rc: rechallenge	21/a	Xolani	MAIZE
Rc: counter	22/a	Ismail	(i) Yimielies leyo, (.) (ii) yimielies. <i>That is mealies. It is mealies</i>
Rc: counter	23/a	Xolani	(i)Jonga (ii) yimaize leyo. <i>Look, that is maize, that.</i>
Rc: refute	24/a	Zolile	(i) " Hayi <i>No</i>
Rc: counter	24/b		(ii) yimielies Xolani. <i>it's mielies, Xolani</i>
[side sequence]			
Rc: counter	52/a	Xolani	(i)Ndiyi bona imaize (.) <i>I see maize.</i>
P: elaborate	52/b		(ii) uba ngumbona::a,(iii) ndibona::a

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P:enhance (challenge implied) P: elaborate	52/c 52/d		umbona:: a. ((speaking slowly while writing)) <i>It is maize. I see maize.</i> (iv) ↑Ufuna ndithethe i-Afrikaans? <i>Do you want me to speak Afrikaans?</i> (v) Ndibona::a umbona::a. <i>I see maize.</i>
Rs: develop: extend Rc: challenge: rebound	53/a	Zolile	(i) You must bhala, ‘ngumbona’. ((pointing to Xolani’s book)) <i>You must write ‘It is maize’.</i> (ii) (Ng-) um- -bona laa ? ((pointing to the picture on the packet)) <i>Is that thing there maize?</i>
RS: track: confirm	54/a	Ismail	(i) Jy moet hier write, nè? ((Also pointing to Xolani’s book)) <i>You must write here, not so?</i>
Rc: counter	55/a	Xolani	(i) Ndibona :a Umbona.. ((writing)) <i>I see maize.</i>
Rc: counter	58/a	Zolile	(i) ((shaking his head)) I see mielies
Rs: elaborate	59/a	Ismail	(i) Oh ho ↓↑lombo:na:: ((imitates the call of women who sell mielies))
Rc: rechallenge	60/a	Xolani	(i) ``maize
Rc: rechallenge	61/a	Zolile	(i) ((looking at the picture on the pack)) ``mielies
Rc: rechallenge	62/a	Xolani	(i) ((looking at the pack)) ``maize
Rc: counter	63/a	Ismail	(i) ((pointing to the product with his pen)) ↑ Yimielies leya. <i>That there is mealies.</i>
Rc: rechallenge	64/a	Xolani	(i) ``maize
Rc: counter: elaborate	65/a	Ismail	(i) You see (ii) the lady who works here says. (.)↓↑Mie::li::es:: \↓↑Mie::li::es: ↓↑ubo:na eh:: ↑ubo:na:. ((imitates the cry of the mielie seller))

The argument was eventually resolved several turns later when Xolani agreed to ‘mielies’.

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In order to illustrate the semiotic means through which the boys enact and construct their friendship during the interaction, we will analyse the dialogue from two perspectives: that of grammar (the constituent mood structures of conversational clauses) and that of discourse (the types of moves made).

Social roles and mood choice

Grammatical patterns of mood choice can be seen as a key resource for enacting and constructing status differences and for negotiating degrees of familiarity (Eggins and Slade 1997: 53,54). The marked patterns of reciprocal mood choice which carry the repeated statements of position, counters, and re-challenges indicate ‘functional equality of roles’ (Eggins and Slade 1997: 53). Moreover ‘dense cross-turn parallelism can signify [...] ‘connectedness’ or ‘intimacy’ (Lempert 2008: 573). The choice of largely declarative speech functions, either full (e.g. turn 20) or elliptical (e.g. turn 21), therefore serves to consolidate relations of friendship. There is also a marked lack of evaluative lexis, which works to keep the debate on an even keel, and of overt indexing of disagreement: the only negative polarity appears in turn 24/a.

Discursive moves and interpersonal relations

The summary in Table 4 similarly indicates equal participation rights: the number of moves made by Zolile and Xolani are almost equal. While Ismail makes fewer moves in this extract, in the full sequence he makes only 2 moves less than Xolani (Xolani, 15; Zolile, 16; Ismail, 13). Turns too are roughly equal when the full interaction is considered. This indicates that turn-taking is open and power distributed symmetrically, consistent with the negotiation of a task among friends.

As shown in Table 5 and consistent with the nature of arguments in casual conversation, 24 of 30 moves (75%) are rejoinders. Rejoinders keep channels open, either by sustaining the interaction without implying any interpersonal confrontation (Rs) or by challenging a prior move (Rc), querying it or rejecting it and offering alternatives (Eggins and Slade 1997). Of the rejoinders 83% are confronting rather than supporting: ‘because they invariably lead to further talk in which positions must be justified or modified, confronting moves contribute most assertively to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships’ (Eggins and Slade 1997: 213). The constant challenge and counter-challenge accompanied by tight latching of utterances thus functions to keep the conversation going; any ‘face’ threats are mitigated by the tone, which is friendly throughout and often playful.

Interestingly, moves are realized almost equally in English and isiXhosa with a small number of mixed utterances where Afrikaans surfaces briefly (Tables 4, 5). This pattern is sustained throughout the long interaction, only a part of which is presented here. This is deceptive however as many ‘rechallenging’ moves in English are ‘single word’ utterances based on the argument over mielies or maize. Most negotiation is therefore carried out in isiXhosa by all 3 participants, elaborating or enhancing positions largely through restating with increasing emphasis, using a variety of lexico-grammatical resources of isiXhosa (turns 22-24, 52, 63), as well as augmenting positions through amplification (the loud rechallenge in

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turn 21) and opening stress (e.g. turns 24/a, 55, 60, 61, 62, 64). This might seem to prejudice Ismail for whom isiXhosa is not a home language, yet his understanding of the interaction is never in doubt and he holds his own, moving between all 3 languages.

Table 4 Summary of speech function choices by participant and language

Key

A: Afrikaans

E: English

NV: Non-verbal

X: isiXhosa

Speech function	Xolani	Zolile	Ismail
no. of turns	9	8	5
no. of moves	13	11	6
no. of clauses	14	13	7
Open		1E	
Prolong elaborate enhance	2X 1X		
React: responding (R) Support develop: extend develop: elaborate		1E/X	1X
React: rejoinder Support (Rs) tracking: confirm tracking: check response: resolve response: repair Confront (Rc) non-verbal challenging: rebound challenging: counter* challenging: refute challenging: rechallenge challenge: unresolve Total rejoinder moves	1E 1NV 2X 1E 4E 1X 3X, 6E, 1NV= 10	1X 1E 1X 2X, 1E 1X 1E 5X, 3E, 1 E/X= 9	1A/E 1NV 2X, 1E/X 2X, 1 A/E, 1X/E, 1NV = 5
Total moves	6X, 6E, 1NV=13	5X, 5E, 1E/X=11	3X, 1A/E, 1X/E, 1NV=6

Table 5 Summary of speech function choices by language

Speech function	E	X	A/E	X/E	NV	TOTAL
Open	1					1
Prolong		3				3
Response		1		1		2
Rejoinder	2	1	1			

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	Confront	7	9		2	2	24
Total		10	14	1	3	2	30

The playful multilingual jousting in the collaborative negotiation of the task points to the ways in which social identification and learning partly constitute each other (Wortham 2004): encouraging translanguaging practices such as these enabled the ongoing construction of relations of solidarity carried through a variety of interactional features as illustrated above: an informal and colloquial register, humour as in Ismail's ventriloquating (Bakhtin 1981) of the voices of mielie sellers, a series of rapid counter-challenging moves constructed nonetheless to avoid 'face' threats, and so on. At the same time, it allowed all three participants to use of a range of linguistic resources to negotiate academic authority in completing the task.

What is important here is that multilingual learners have access to additional stance-taking resources (Jaffe 2009), whole new systems of linguistic engagement. Here translanguaging works in the interests of communicative multivocality (Jaffe 2007): it is not strongly oriented to indexing social claims but more towards maintaining social camaraderie. It was not possible to check with the participants why they chose these linguistic realizations for these moves – at first glance the interaction appeared less interesting than later analysis showed, and the window of opportunity for participant commentary passed. While Afrikaans is often dominant in the bureaucratic and instructional order of the school, in this micro-interaction we argue that this group of learners were creating new ideologies of *legitimate language* and *legitimate speakers*, building what Blommaert (2009) calls *nested normativities* which contrast with other linguistic regimes operating in the school, in homes and the wider community.

Discussion

The interactional, observational and interview data presented above have shown how different social experiences and trajectories across Cape Town's peripheries have resulted in repertoires, 'biographically organised complexes' (Blommaert and Backus 2011: 9), which denaturalize associations between specific linguistic forms and specific social categories. In the site of contact created by the school and the surrounding neighbourhood, young learners use their meta-awareness of their own and others' linguistic repertoires to construct linguistic and social identities, some fleeting, some more enduring. Strategic identity choices are often in conflict with parental ideologies, subverting essentialist notions of linguistic ownership (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Such ruptures reflect both broad generational shifts and microlevel situational negotiations. Thus it could be argued that, in this context of constant disruption between habitus and field, what we see in the choice of code and the formulation of the utterances are less 'a makeshift aimed at covering up the misfirings of habitus' (Wacquant 1992: 24, n. 43 citing Bourdieu 1972: 205) than the conscious and strategic use of semiotic repertoires as identity building resources. Where the boundaries of interactions and the roles to be enacted are relatively indeterminate (Goffman 1971), spaces open for performative

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linguistic choices in the pursuit of particular identities and for negotiations of hierarchies of value.

Normally in education sites, *play* takes place within certain fixed parameters shaping the kind of moves that can take place and who can make them. Here, however in a context ‘permanently in a state of unfolding through processes of ordering and disordering’ (Cresswell and Martin 2012: 526), playing with interactional and representational rules and boundaries became part of the game.

Along with the reshuffling of interaction orders, racial categories were sometimes resignified and indexicalities subverted as, for example, in the strategic use of ‘white’ as a label for those historically categorised as ‘coloured’. In this process, new sets of indexical ties were created from the bottom-up, often in the interests of harmony. Racialised language is thus shown to be a ‘negotiated process’ which ‘intersects with local ideologies of race, gender, class and authenticity’ (Chun 2011: 404) and race or ethnicity a social and interactional construct ‘enacted, produced and negotiated in specific social contexts’ (De Fina 2007: 373). This school is a postcolonial site ‘where difference and sameness are hitched together, brought to self-awareness, denied or displaced into third terms’ (Nuttall 2009: 6), but it is given a particular twist by the continuing reverberations of apartheid discourses.

Ongoing contestations over the use of racial signifiers in post-apartheid South Africa alongside dynamic new practices result in frictions but also new forms of conviviality in which differences are re-formed and sometimes partially dissolved. New identities are not clear-cut or permanent, rather they arise ‘in the gap between mark and demark, in co-constitution’ (Mbembe 2008: 3), in the complex entanglements of trajectories and histories evident in learners’ profiles and in the continual disruption of historicised language/‘race’/ethnicity relations through acts of stance. These acts are both interactional, in everyday encounters, and individual in, for example, the choice of ‘home’ language for instruction.

This decoupling of the links between linguistic forms and social categories, the basis of apartheid policies, has fundamental implications for current language-in-education policies still based on essentialised understandings of ethnicity, race, and language. The challenge is to incorporate into policy decisions the fluid and contextual ways in which heteroglossic language resources are mobilised for knowledge construction and for the negotiation of new identities. We need a revised conception of language learners and the fluid multi-normed communities through which they move. We also need a revised understanding of what language learning in such contexts involves and what multilingual education might mean. It is in this sense that the participants in this study can be seen as ‘game changers’, affording glimpses of a field where the distances, gaps and asymmetries between positions, the structure of capital held by players, and the relations of power among them can be modified. The frequent reordering of expected Afrikaans >English>Xhosa hierarchies, the harmonious use of isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans in working on school tasks, the egalitarian multilingual exchanges, all work to revalue linguistic capital both in the classroom and outside it.

Conclusion

This paper has described some moments in the life of a school over three years. These moments, representative of a wide range of multilingual interactions recorded during this time, seemed to show the kinds of openings necessary for transformative social relations. However, such moments are fragile and have already been shown to be vulnerable to shifts in institutional policies and practices as well as wider regional and national politics. The additive multilingual ethos of the Language Transformation Plan has been fatally undermined by national curriculum policy since 2009 (Department of Basic Education 2009) which prescribes that ‘the first additional language (read English) be taught from grade 1, with a view to its probable use as language of learning and teaching from grade 4’ (Plüddemann 2013: 35). Moreover, longitudinal ethnographic findings show that the learners moved into more strongly ethnically- and linguistically-based high schools which has resulted in some resegregation and the reassertion of difference.

Nevertheless, the value of such fleeting moments is that they offer an alternative angle of vision, one which can inform new discursive and policy frameworks for education. The challenge for schools is to find ways of nurturing post-racial identities and of accurately and fairly valuing the linguistic and cultural capital that learners bring to school (Luke 2009). This study has shown how, for a few years, the rules of interaction in the school field, the pedagogic practices and social interactions, while filled with tensions and contradictions, nevertheless provide a basis for rethinking institutional policies, structures, and categories. It has shown how learners as agents, along with an enabling teacher, created, maintained or modified local economies of meaning, redrawing borders among languages, changing some of the ways in which linguistic resources were attributed value and circulated at local level, and pointing the way to innovative plurilingual pedagogies. It has also shown how the ‘messy and surprising features of such encounters across difference [could] inform our models of cultural production’ (Tsing 2004: 3): in this complex heteroglossic context, it was the learners who, in their everyday translanguaging practices, forged new forms of conviviality out of everyday frictions, thus establishing ‘new lines of force in which the action [...] unfolds’ (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 168-9). It was the learners, to a far greater extent than the teachers, school, or educational policies, who constructed the emerging ideologies of postracial solidarity, challenging existing economies of meaning, and modelling the processes by which schools can create transformative practices and pedagogies. Such examples of counter-hegemonic processes have the potential to provide theoretical, policy, and pedagogical insights that could modify the structure of the field and, in this way, change the game.

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Appendix A Transcription key

- ↑ rising pitch in the following segment
↓↑ pitch falls and rises within the next word
“ very high stress

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:: lengthened speech

= latched speech

[beginning of overlap of speech or nonverbal actions

CAPITALS : louder volume

(()) stage notes

(.) a pause of less than a second

¹ An extremely derogatory, outlawed term for black Africans.

² The term was first introduced by Cen Williams in 1994 but has since been redefined.