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Negotiating language diversity and social inequality: Policies and practices at South City Primary School

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Negotiating language diversity and social inequality:
Policies and practices at South City Primary School [1]

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Abstract

This paper presents initial results from a study of language diversity among students in a Cape Town primary school and of school staff perceptions and responses to that diversity. It views classrooms and schools as sites where policy is 'enacted' (Ball, McGuire & Braun 2012), and undertakes a contextualizing description and analysis linking the details of classroom behavior and school organization to larger-scale education policies and debates. My initial questions were: (1) What are the general relationships between students' language diversity and their socioeconomic circumstances?; (2) Are such relationships reflected in classroom practices or school staff statements about teaching and learning?; and, lastly, (3) Do classroom practices and school staff statements influence the enactment of policy, that is, the day-to-day carrying out of education policies in schools? I hypothesize that these two dimensions of students' life experience – their language use and their socioeconomic circumstances – are always connected, at South City, in the rest of South Africa and throughout the world. The challenge is to explore *how* they are connected in specific institutional settings as well as the wider society.

What follows presents initial results from a study of language diversity among students in a Cape Town primary school and of school staff perceptions and responses to that diversity. It views classrooms and schools as sites where policy is 'enacted' (Ball, McGuire & Braun 2012), and undertakes a contextualizing description and analysis linking the details of classroom behavior and school organization to larger-scale education policies and debates. My initial questions were:

(1) What are the general relationships between students' language diversity and their socioeconomic circumstances?;

(2) Are such relationships reflected in classroom practices or school staff statements about teaching and learning?; and, lastly,

(3) Do classroom practices and school staff statements influence the enactment of policy, that is, the day-to-day carrying out of education policies in schools?

I present below a brief description of the school, henceforth called South City Primary, and its neighborhood context. This is followed by a description of the school's language policy, and a description and analysis of classroom interactions that explores the complexity of verbal interaction in classroom exchanges and how that interaction implements school language policy. I then examine how members of the school staff talked about and responded to the diversity of

students' languages in their classrooms and the difficult socioeconomic circumstances of many of their students.

I hypothesize that these two dimensions of students' life experience – their language use and their socioeconomic circumstances – are always connected, at South City, in the rest of South Africa and throughout the world. The challenge is to explore *how* they are connected in specific institutional settings as well as the wider society. In engaging this challenge, I use concepts of language ideology and register (Agha 2007; Irvine & Gal 2000) to analyze diacritics of class and race revealed in the classroom interactions and staff commentary about English, Afrikaans, and other languages at South City. In pursuing these questions, I explore quandaries faced by educators at South City, given how language diversity is perceived in South Africa and how school knowledge is assessed in the national education system. I argue that these quandaries are not unique to South City, though there is value in considering them in their specific detail as well as their national and international contexts.

A note on terminology: South Africa has distinctive phrases and conventions of language use, some of which I have tried to observe, while departing from others. While English-speaking South Africans refer to students in primary and secondary school as 'learners,' I have used American the term 'student,' which is readily recognized in both countries. Similarly, I use the term 'math' as the short form for mathematics, rather than 'maths,' which is common usage in South Africa. The apartheid-era racial categories – Black (African), Coloured (mixed race), Indian (of descent from the Indian subcontinent), and White (white) – no longer have official status as strategies of governance, and provoke political and interpersonal awkwardness, and yet (as in the U.S.) they are manifest in the segregation of the country and reflect continuing social divisions of wealth, education, and opportunity (Spaull 2013). I simply use the lower-case versions of each term, for example, 'formerly white schools,' except when referring to entities established in research literature as proper names, such as 'White South African English.' In the interests of preserving the privacy of my research participants, I avoid names, using pseudonyms where necessary, including the name of 'South City.'

The setting

South City Primary School is located in a socioeconomically mixed section of Cape Town, in what had historically been a racially mixed industrial area. The area has two main commercial streets, which show a multilingual mix of migrant, black African, and coloured small businesses, along with less frequent large businesses and upscale markets, bakeries, and design firms. Off the main thoroughfares, the residential streets are old and narrow, filled with modest concrete and plaster bungalows, many in need of paint and repair. There is plenty of pedestrian traffic, and older cars are parked along the streets.

When I first visited South City to discuss my study, the Principal informed me that based on a school-wide survey that he had conducted, two thirds of the students had first languages other than English. In subsequent conversations, he also informed me that nearly a third of the students were refugees, and that half of the student families were eligible for reduced- or no-tuition

subsidies. In brief, South City Primary is a diverse school serving a working-class and working poor population, a sizable portion of who lack the protections of citizenship. Despite its unusually high number of refugees, in its proportion of students on reduced fees and students who do not speak English as a first language, South City is not unusual. In South African schools a majority of students do not have English as their first language, and a majority are working poor families and living in poverty. [2]

School language policy

South City is an English-medium school, which means that from Reception through year six, teaching and learning are to be conducted in English. The school has a formal language policy, specifying hours of instruction to be devoted to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), the First Additional Language (FAL) and the Second Additional Language (SAL). These are shown in table 1:

Table 1: South City Primary School Language Policy

1.1. Language of learning and teaching of the school:
The LOLT from Grade R – Grade 7 will be English

1.2. Languages to be offered as subjects and the time allocations for these:
Years 1 and 2:
- 8¾ hours a week English
- ½ hour a week Afrikaans (FAL)
- ½ hour a week Xhosa (SAL)

Year 3:
- 6 hours a week English
- 3½ hours a week Afrikaans (FAL)
- 35 min a week Xhosa (SAL)

Years 4 to 6:
- 4 hours a week English
- 2½ hours a week Afrikaans (FAL)
- ½ hour a week Xhosa (SAL)

(adapted from South City Primary website)

What this distribution of instructional time shows is priority given to English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa, in descending order of importance and resources allocated. This reflects national policy

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[2] According to SA Statistics, 48% of South Africans lived in poverty in 2006. The figures are somewhat lower for Cape Town (36%), but vary dramatically within this still highly segregated metropolitan region (National Planning Commission 2014,[www.npconline.co.za/pebble.asp?relid=123]; SA statistics on City of Cape Town [http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1021&id=city-of-cape-town-municipality]).

and provincial language policies. Although each school is charged with developing its particular implementation of national and provincial language policy, the Western Cape's provincial policy of three official languages for instruction – English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa – shows in the South City policy. What is also indicated, in the small allocation given to Xhosa, is the ongoing difficulty of implementing Xhosa instruction in English or Afrikaans medium schools in the Western Cape. There appear to be multiple reasons for this neglect of classroom instruction in Xhosa, including shifts in education policy, staffing shortages, and popular opposition. Kerfoot (2014/in progress) argues that a promising 2007 provincial initiative to teach Xhosa on equal footing with Afrikaans and English, essentially to provide truly multilingual education, was curtailed by a 2009 national Basic Education Policy that instruction in a First Additional Language should begin in year one, giving further primacy to English. Staff at South City remarked on the difficulty finding qualified Xhosa instructors; university colleagues at UCT made similar comments. Upon beginning my study, I discovered that there was no Xhosa instruction at South City, nor in a majority of Cape Town primary schools. In late 2013 and early 2014, newspapers reported various pilot projects to introduce regular instruction in Xhosa as an Additional Language in the metropolitan region (John 2013), with the remaining majority of schools intended to implement Xhosa instruction in 2015 (interview notes, T2) . The electronic 'comments' to these articles contained strongly negative postings, decrying Xhosa as an unnecessary imposition, which would further weaken school test results (see Collins 2015 for additional discussion). Whatever the diverse causes, the delay implementing the three languages policy provides further evidence that English remains at the top of the language hierarchy in South Africa, at least in education sector. South City Primary fits within this broader national allocation of value to different languages.

School language diversity

During my first classroom visit and observation, Ms M., the teacher of the year three (third grade) classroom, informed me that the majority of the students spoke home languages other than English. She provided the information in Table 2:

Table 2: Language profile of a classroom at South City Primary:

Xhosa	12
English	9
Afrikaans	5
French	5 (several from the DRC)
Shona	5 (from Zimbabwe)
(first languages of 36 students; fieldnotes, 28 February 2014)	

The teachers that I subsequently interviewed reported similar proportions of English and non-English first languages for their classrooms, although they reported different sets of languages.

One teacher had students present for my benefit a 'language panel' featuring their seven first or home languages. The panel had initially been prepared as part of a geography lesson on parts of Africa. One by one, seven students said the same sentence 'We go to the shop' in their first languages. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Language Panel from a South City Classroom

English:	*We go to the shop*
Afrikaans:	*Ons gaan winkel toe*
Xhosa:	*Siya e evenkileni*
Swahili:	*Tirenda kushop*
Lingala:	*Duzuke ndishop*
French:	*On allez shop*
Shona:	*Takaenda kumashops*

(fieldnotes, 20 March 2014)[3]

In short, the preponderance of languages other than English among classroom students was reported by all teachers, though staff perceptions varied about how such diversity influenced classroom learning and how best to respond to it .

Classroom practices

In Ms M.'s classroom, the day began with regular routines, familiar in schools throughout the world. Students began the day by gathering on the rugs at the front of the room for attendance to be taken, announcements made and discussed, and achievements, such as prizes at a regional school sports competition, noted and congratulated. In lessons, whether English, Math, or Afrikaans, Ms M. strove to connect what students' knew to the subject at hand, though the organization of school subjects was shaped by South Africa's latest statement of a national curriculum, *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (CAPS).

CAPS intends to provide a framework for the African national curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 in public schools in South Africa. The implementation for grades 1-3 began in 2012, and CAPS classroom materials for those grades attempt to more closely regulate what teaching and learning consist of, focusing on 'Greater specification of content… [d]etailed teaching schedules… [and] [n]ew content in some cases' (WCED, 2014). In the English workbook used in this class, for example, there was early and continuing practice of identifying and learning recurring sounds in words (e.g. denoted by 'th' or 'y' or 'o' in given words and positions); there were 'who did what' questions asked of reading passages; there were grammar exercises (e.g. identifying past and future tense with verbs such as 'drive'); and there were frequent exercises in 'writing in sentences.' This is a familiar sequencing and arrangement of school knowledge, in which

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[3] I am indebted to Ms. Amani Manganyi for invaluable assistance transcribing this and other recordings involving multiple African languages.

students begin by naming and identifying parts of language; named parts are then assembled into larger segments (e.g. words into sentences); and cognitive tasks such are analogic reasoning or narrative inference come only later in the school career.[4]

Working in the confines of the CAPS approach to language, Ms M. focused on what the students knew about a given domain, typically by eliciting a set of words known by the students within a given field (e.g. food, animals, family), which then formed the basis for the exercises in grammar and sentence construction. One morning, for example, the teacher began by asking students 'who gets a newspaper?' and 'whose mommy buys a newspaper?' Eliciting the names of free local area papers '[Peoples'] Post' and 'the View' as well as the city's general newspapers, the 'Daily Argus' and 'Cape Times,' she set them the assignment to cut out 'a story from your newspaper', bring it to class, and be prepared to talk about it in a subsequent class. This was followed by a vocabulary activity, in which the children were asked about various 'emotion words.' Ms M. would ask 'What makes you (happy, angry, or jealous)' to which prompt children would eagerly bid for a turn at relating what situations or actions made them happy. These were usually short accounts intended to exemplify a state or emotion. As one boy said 'I feel jealous when I don't get chosen for soccer.' Ms M. usually evaluated the accounts, approving or suggesting modifications given her judgment of whether they illustrated the sense of a given word for an emotion. Ms M. then separated the class into their three 'teams' (ability groups): Cheetahs, Lions, and Tigers. The groups worked at three long tables, their only desk space, and during this exercise they completed worksheets for identifying synonyms within the lexical domain of emotion words.

The following exchange between Ms M. and a student occurs just after someone had asked a question about synonyms. Ms M. provides a definition, which is taken as a request for further examples. The interaction in (1) provides an example of both parties' tacit knowledge of classroom routines as well as lexical synonyms:

(1) Defining and Illustrating Synonyms (28 February 2014)

MM: synonyms are two words with the same meaning … HAPPY. GLAD.
C: ANGRY.MAD
MM: Yes, that's right.

In this quick back and forth, Ms M. provides an example of a pair of synonyms; a student quickly calls out 'ANGRY.MAD', to which Ms M. replies with an affirmative evaluation. It exemplifies the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence often encountered schools. It is, in fact, a specialized institutional routine (Cazden 20001), especially the evaluation component. The sequence is found in other institutional speech events featuring asymmetrical power and knowledge, such as doctor-patient interviews, but not usually in everyday conversation. In

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[4] As Heath described an analyzed in a classic paper on varieties of language and literacy in relation to school curricula, communities socialize children to different cognitive dispositions and aptitudes as they socialize them into language use (Heath 1982). Schools typically recognize only a few pathways to learning. There are frequently unspoken class biases in the selectivity of school knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Heath 1983; Lareau 2003)

conversations outside formal institutions, interlocutors initiate and respond, but typically one participant does not openly evaluate the just-so-rightness of another's contribution.

There are further contextual subtleties that deserve notice in this example. First, neither Ms M. nor the student announces that their word offerings are synonyms. When Ms M. opens with her definition, the status of the word pair 'happy/glad' as an example comes from several things: first, like synonyms, they are a pair of words, second, they are said rapidly, with equal stress on each (indicated with capitalization) and sentence-final intonation after GLAD. Likewise, the inference that C's response is an example of a synonym pair comes not from any lexical framing; he does not say 'These are also synonyms.' Instead, her (and our) inference is due to the response's formal identity with Ms M.'s initial utterance. Her utterance ends with an A-B frame (HAPPY.GLAD), and C's entire response is organized as an A-B frame, consisting of two rapidly said words, each stressed with only a slight pause (ANGRY.MAD). Recognizing this, and the aptness of the example, Ms M. concludes 'Yes, that's right,' which we could expand as 'Yes, that's right, those are also examples of synonyms.'

I describe and analyze this brief classroom exchange with such finicky detail in order that we not lose sight of a point argued earlier, that all language use depends on contextual reasoning for its interpretation, to which we may now add that prior discourse is a part of that co[n]text of interpretation. In this case, both teacher and student appear to recognize and share conventions for quoting examples. As we will see later, a recurrent problem mentioned by Ms M. and other teachers, was that students would appear to understand instructions and examples, but then would indicate by subsequent behavior that they did not in fact understand. Part of the reason may be that language interpretation of, say, instructions and examples, is often specialized in unexpected ways. In example (1) both pragmatic and semantic knowledge is required to understand and take part: Pragmatically, that the A-B sequence is here a contrast frame; semantically, that ANGRY.MAD, like HAPPY.GLAD, are 'words with the same meaning.'

Sometimes the subtleties of language use concerned social rather than grammatical expectations. In the following excerpt from field notes, the teacher is leading the students through a sentence-making exercise. She points to a word written on the blackboard, in this case READ, and the students, who are gathered as a full class, bid for turns at providing a sentence which uses the word:

(2) Making English Sentences with READ (28 February 2014)

C1:   I read books
MM: 'I read books', yes (*selecting next student*)
C2:   I like to read
MM: Good
C3:   I hate to read
MM: No, you're joking (*said with smile*)

C3's sentence contribution 'I hate to read' attracts Ms M.'s attention. Although it is a lexically and syntactically well-formed sentence using READ, it violates an unstated assumption: People

may indeed 'hate to read' in the wider world, but in schools, everyone is supposed to 'like to read.' The humor, suggested by Ms M.'s smile, depends on the juxtaposition of appropriate and expected content ('like to read') followed immediately by inappropriate or unexpected content ('hate to read').

Sometimes the issues of language use were ambiguously social or linguistic. Shortly after the exchange in (2), in the same lesson, the class took up the word SPIDER. Ms M. discussed with the children 'what kind of word' SPIDER was, that is, what part of speech. Having established that it was a noun, she then discussed words that 'accompany or qualify' a noun, that is, adjectives. She then asked for examples, stated in full sentences, of words that modify spider. The following sequence of answers was called out:

(3) English Only in English Sentences (28 February 2014)

C1:   It is a poisonous spider.
MM: Good, who else?
C2:   It is a scary spider
MM: 'It is a scary spider', yes (*selecting child with hand raised*)
C3:   '((xxxx?)) spinnenkop
MM: **No, that is Afrikaans**
C3:   (*smiles*)

This exchange deserves comment. C3 had earlier joined in the vocabulary- sentence exercises with several correct replies, but in example (2), she is the child who proclaims the mock-scandal of 'I hate to read'. This is said with a smile, probably because as she and the teacher know, she is in the top ability reading group. In the next part of the vocabulary lesson, when SPIDER is to be discussed and 'used in a sentence', C3 replies with a phrase or sentence ending with ',,,, spinnenkop'. It appears to be a lexically and syntactically apt insertion of an Afrikaans phrase into the lesson frame, and Ms M. immediately replies: 'No that is Afrikaans.' Meanwhile C3 smiles, probably to signal the non-serious nature of her answer. C3 is one of five or so students in the classroom whose first language is Afrikaans, though she also seemed to have very good control of English. But in this case she was offering a grammatically correct phrase, but one which combined English and Afrikaans. This pattern of students using an Afrikaans word or phrase during an English vocabulary lesson occurred at least once per day during the lessons that I observed, but Ms M. maintained a strict distinction between English and other languages, sanctioning each occurrence of an Afrikaans answer.

Language subtleties often arose in the midst of apparently straightforward word analysis tasks. One morning, after a student had given the sentence 'I participated in the races' as her description of what she did at Sports Day, Ms M. wrote the word PARTICIPATE on the board and asked the students to 'identity all the words you can see.' In the excerpt which follows, the students call out a series of English words extractable from the letters or sounds in 'participate', but then the teacher encounters the unannounced issue of homonyms, in which words have the same form but different meaning:

(4) Identifying Lexical Homonyms (13 March 2014)

CC: … pea.. pear.. at.. eat.. pit .. trip
MM: One more word
C: trip
MM: We've had that word
CC: but there's one where you go and one where you fall
MM: they're spelled the same

In line 3 of this exchange a student C offers 'trip' as 'another word'. Ms M. responds that the word has already been used, to which several children reply 'there's one where you go and one where you fall'. By shifting to 'they're' Ms M. appears to concede that that there are two words, the nominal (as in 'a trip') and the verbal (as in 'to trip'), but counters that 'they're spelled the same', implying that while there may be two lexical items TRIP, they do not constitute two differently spelled words extracted from the focal word PARTICIPATE.

Just prior to the exchange in (4), students have called out a series of words extractable from PARTICIPATE, then a student calls out a word that is not extractable from PARTICIPATE, after which another student offers an Afrikaans word, the unsuitability of which is immediately noted:

(5) English Only in Word Choice (13 March 2014)

CC: part.. pate.. ate .. art.. tea
MM: good, that's [tea] different letters
C1: tape
MM: good
C2: elephant…
MM: No. (*said to entire class*:) Can you find 'elephant' in PARTICIPATE
    (*discussion follows*)
C3: ((papier?))
MM: No, that's an Afrikaans word

These five examples give some indication of the complex varieties of knowledge involved apparently simple matters such as identifying words and words sets, and using words in sentences. In the examples just discussed, students (a) identify synonyms and use implicit contrast frames for presentation (HAPPY.GLAD; ANGRY.MAD); (b) make jokes based on unstated shared knowledge of classroom expectations ('I hate to read'); (c) discover multiple word meanings encased in the same word form ('trip'); and (d) draw on their knowledge of multiple languages to offer words and phrases from one language in the appropriate lexical and phrasal environments of another ('papier', '…spinnenkop').

The policy-in-practice of keeping languages separated into distinct arenas of use, illustrated in examples (3) and (5), was also maintained in the teaching of languages other than English. Like many of the educators at South City, Ms M. spoke Afrikaans, and she taught the classroom's Afrikaans as a First Additional Language (FAL) lessons. She conducted them as immersion lessons, where all or almost all communication was in Afrikaans only. For example, in a lesson identifying names for animals, this was a common exchange:

(6) Making Afrikaans Sentences (17 April 2014)

MM: Gebruik BOK in 'n sin (‘*Use ‘goat’ in a sentence’*)
C: Hy het 'n bok (‘*He has a goat’*)
MM: Goede (‘*Good’*)

Occasionally, either Ms M. or a student would use English as well as Afrikaans in an Afrikaans lesson, but only for side remarks managing interaction, rather than direct elicitation or use of language examples. (7) provides an illustration, as a series of students take turns calling out paradigms, based on a sentence frame *Sy het...* , (‘She has...’), which is held constant, while students use different nouns (*hond*, *kinder*, *balle*) to create alternate sentences:

(7) Vigilance about English in Afrikaans (24 April 2014)

C1:   Sy het ‘n hond (‘*She has a dog’*)
          Sy het vyf kinder (‘*She has five children’*)
          Sy het vyf balle (‘*She has five balls’*)
          ...
CC: Sy het ‘n rat! (‘*She has a rat’*)
MM: Who said r<u>a</u>t? [ræt]
C: I said raht, miss [rat][5]

When pupils get to the word *rat*, which is spelled the same in Afrikaans and English, a chorus chant loudly *Sy het ‘n rat!’* Ms M. has heard an English pronunciation of the Afrikaans word *rat*, which is spelled the same but pronounced differently from its English counterpart (raht vs. raet). She questions the classroom ‘Who said r<u>a</u>t [ræt]?’, with emphasis on the vowel. One of the students responds with a claim of pronunciation fidelity: ‘I said raht, miss.’ We should note that both teacher and student break language frame, so to speak, asking and answering in English about their fidelity to Afrikaans pronunciation norms, but doing so in the effort to show faithfulness to the principle of strictly separated languages.

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[5] In phonetic notation, indicated in square brackets, [ae] is the vowel in American English ‘path’ or ‘tab’; [a] is the vowel sound in ‘hot’ or ‘father’. It would distinguish English and Afrikaans pronunciations of the lexical item written in both languages as ‘rat’.

In these lessons, students were corrected and encouraged to rephrase their answers in several different situations: a) when they did not put a vocabulary item in a full sentence; b) if they responded in English during an Afrikaans lesson; c) responded in Afrikaans during an English lesson. That is, they were encouraged to *use only the Standard registers of English and Afrikaans*, and *to use the two languages only in their separate classroom activities*. This pattern of maintaining strict boundaries between languages, and teaching only of the standard registers of languages, is typical of schools, whether in South Africa, North America, or Europe (Blommaert, Creve & Willaert 2006; Hornberger 2003; Murphy 2002; Scollon & Scollon 1981).

It is worth noting that in this community not only were there many languages spoken, but more particularly, there were many bilingual Afrikaans and English speakers, among both teachers and students. Although Ms M. was quick to discourage any cross-linguistic mixing of resources, it was a common enough occurrence in many of the homes from which the students came. Similar to practices that are found in settled, multi-generational bilingual communities throughout the world (Gumperz 1982; Heller 1995; Zentella 2005), the coloured Afrikaans speaking families whose students attended South City spoke both Afrikaans and English and, at least on informal occasions, moved easily and quickly between the two languages (McCormick 2006). During a parent education workshop at South City, many of the parents attending engaged several of the staff members in quick, jovial exchanges in Afrikaans and English in the informal conversation that preceded the program. Once the formal program began, however, it was conducted only in English (with the exception of side-comments among participants, who might tease each other in Afrikaans [*jou man…* 'your man…' said by one woman to another in what seemed a playful taunt]). During the tea break, both languages were used among parents and some staff, then returning to English only when the formal program begun.

The point I want to emphasize is that schools regulate language, attempting to maintain sharp boundaries between languages or between language registers. In the case at hand, it might be between English and Afrikaans, or the less-acknowledged distinction between conversational versus school registers of English or Afrikaans. The oft-repeated classroom injunction to 'speak in sentences' is a practice for written varieties of language. It is in written prose that we expect all utterances to be sentences. (Conversations often take short cuts: If someone asks me what the time is, I may reply '5:30' but am not likely to reply in full sentence 'The time is 5:30.') As we saw in example (1) above, participants in verbal interaction are constantly making inferences about each other's communicative intentions, and adapting their contributions in an exchange based on implicit contextual and co-textual cues. This is in part why transcripts of actual conversation do not look like written prose, nor like the literary representations of talk found in plays and novels. The difference between written and spoken registers of language are fundamental but only one dimension of register variation, as is dicussed more below. Like many other teachers, Ms M. sought to maintain institutional norms at South City by drawing sharp boundaries between what are seen as distinct and separate languages, despite the home and neighborhood contexts in which frequent switching blurred such boundaries.

Staff perspectives on language diversity

Interviews with other teachers at the school, exploring their experience of language diversity in their classrooms, offered further perceptions of and responses to such diversity. A teacher whose classroom had a large proportion of students from other African countries thought that such students would do better if their homes languages were treated as second languages, at least to the extent of providing them with bilingual dictionaries and other resources to use during lessons and especially during assessments, which are currently conducted only in English for all subjects. This teacher said that for many students English was likely to be their third or fourth additional language, and so their language learning needed curricular support: '... in English you must do the same like Afrikaans [teach as a second language] because if ... [a student has English as]... the 3rd or 4th language then use of the books to explain must be allowed' (T1 interview, 20 March 2014). Drawing on personal knowledge of several African languages, consulting with staff, and using digital resources to access lesson materials in Xhosa, this teacher tried various ways of using student's other languages in support of their learning in English. Another teacher, who spoke Afrikaans as well as 'a little Xhosa,' indicated that she would use her knowledge of Xhosa words or phrases if she was working with a Xhosa-speaking child and the child appeared not to undertand a task rendered only in English. She also turned to digital resources for language resources to support her students and reported searching for Xhosa terms for animal names if students did not know the English terms.[6] A third teacher described shifting systematically between English and Afrikaans in her Afrikaans lessons, so that students who did not know Afrikaans could use their knowledge of English to assist in learning the new language. This practice acknowledged the large number of refugee students at the school, whose home language repertoires would not include Afrikaans, but who would have some knowledge of English. Not all staff, however, chose to make accomodations to students' diverse language backgrounds.

A teacher who was fluent in Shona as well as English took a stance more aligned with Ms M.'s approach. She said that she would not use Shona to assist a Shona-speaking student in the English language classroom. Her reasoning was that 'next year I will not be there to help them' (T4 interview 24 April 2014), implying that it was best for students to cope with language learning through school immersion in the target language, rather than for them to receive intermittent assistance in their home languages. When the school Principal was asked about responses to language diversity, he said that he would be concerned about combining the use of English and Afrikaans in a classroom activity. In his view, this could lead to a mixed language, the mingling of English and Afrikaans, or as he put it '*kombuis Engels*' (kitchen English), which he did not see as a good thing (interview, 9 May 2014).

Teaching and administrative staff took a variety of positions on the issue of how to respond to the diversity of languages spoken by the students. The school's limited resources for coping

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[6] South City had limited computer resources, but did provide access to Khanya, an IT project of the Western Cape Educational Department, which provides lesson materials in Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English, the three official provincial languages.
http://downloads01.smarttech.com/media/sitecore/en/pdf/research_library/implementation_profiles/110104_southafrican_moe_profile.pdf

with students' language diversity was a preoccupation for both the Principal and the teaching staff. The issue was typically talked about in terms of 'language barriers', though staff used the phrase to refer to different cases and situations.

For example, as discussed earlier, the school Principal had recently begun an annual language survey of the students at the school and discovered, with some dismay, that the numbers of those learning English was higher than anticipated. An initial survey in 2013 had revealed that 63% of the schools' students had first languages other than English; a 2014 survey reported a slight rise, showing 66% of students with first languages other than English. This was due, he thought, both to an increase in refugee students and to the steady intake of Xhosa speaking students. The Principal was acutely aware that his students, a majority of whom spoke languages other than English, and whose families were working poor, were not going to perform on required tests as well as 'the schools in the suburbs with all the resources [where]... most of the children already know English' (interview, 9 May 2014).

Ms M. expressed concern each time there was a provincial or national assessment for her students. Like other teachers, she was aware that small changes in classroom composition could affect assessment scores for a given year. Her classroom's English language assessments had declined slightly between 2012 and 2013, because, as she put it, there were 'more foreigners' among the 2013 students. She had raised her concern with foreigner students on several occasions. It seemed motivated by two pedagogical concerns. First, a teacher could not know how much, if any, English instruction students had received in their previous years of schooling. Second, a teacher could not know what the quality of their previous schooling had been, including whether they had any previous experience with South African schools. Consequently, it would not be clear what the mandated assessments were measuring.

Another teacher felt that there was always a potential influence from the primary languages that students knew. Unless a teacher took particular care in providing very clear, explicit instruction, a misunderstanding of one or two words could 'change the whole question... because... some words the way to interpret it or explain it in your language is different and you have different meanings' (T1, interview 20 March 2104).This point arose when we were discussing the subtleties of vocabularies and technical idioms in Science and Math in the upper primary years, but it was also germane in the earlier primary years.

During an interview with a foundational level teacher, I commented that many of the students with whom I interacted seemed comfortable with basic conversational English. She responded in a way that showed insight into the layered nature of knowledge of a language. She agreed that by years two or three most students were able to interact with peers and follow the routines of the school day in English, but added that they would nonetheless be challenged by vocabulary or instructions regarding lessons or work assignments. Her view that students could be capable of everyday conversation but still lack the linguistic resources necessary for learning and working in school subjects was echoed by other teachers. What their collective response points to is the largely unacknowledged issue of academic *registers* vis a vis other registers of English, for example, the ones we denote with the word 'conversation.'[7]

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[7] The distinction between conversational-interactional abilities in a language versus the specialized demands of educational inquiry was popularized in the literature on second language learning and education by Cummins and

Language registers

No language, including English, is a single, unified norm for making sentences or other descriptive and informational statements. What gets called 'English' contains a wide variety of specialized uses of language for groups with particular endeavors and identities, what are technically called 'registers.' Such groups, their specialized endeavors and forms of language range widely, from criminal gangs to air traffic controllers, video game enthusiasts to wine connoiseurs, from sports announcers and fans to military organizations, from professions such as law and medicine to academic disciplines (Agha 2007; Blommaert 2010; Gee 2004; Silverstein 2003).

No one person has knowledge of or proficiency in all registers in a given language. As an example of school register differences, let me say that what drives parents in the U.S. crazy is when schools change curricula for teaching mathematics, and parents suddenly find that they can no longer help their children with math homework. This is not because the parents have suddenly become innumerate, but because the register of math instruction, the terminology as well as implicit assumptions, has changed. In short: *registers index values and kinds of person as well as scaffold activities and describe events in the world*.

I have discussed registers elsewhere (Collins 2014a; 2014b), arguing that the concept of register alerts us to language variation, cultural stereotyping, and group processes, providing new perspectives on how social inequality and language evaluation interpenetrate. Here I will make a few brief observations on Afrikaans, English, and black African languages in South Africa.

Register differences in English in South Africa are suggested by the existence of recognized varieties of English associated with major apartheid-era racial categories, including 'White South African English,' 'Coloured South African English,' 'South African Indian English,' and 'Black South African English' (McKinney 2013; Mesthrie 2014). There are also emergent registers, associated with educationally upwardly mobile black South Africans who occupy racially ambiguous social categories. Such persons are derided as 'Model C' or 'coconut', and identified by their distinctive ways of speaking 'like a white person' (McKinney 2013; Mesthrie; Wales 2010). That is, they speak a variety of English with which their presumed racial category is not stereotypically associated. In addition, there appear to be distinct registers of English used for classroom instruction (Prinsloo 2006) and written examinations (Kapp & Arend 2011) in the South African 'Matric' or High School graduation examinations.

Examples of register differences in South Africa would include the contrast between *suiver Afrikaans* and *kombuis Afrikaans* (McCormick 2006; Stone 2002).The latter may be what the Principal at South City, himself a speaker of English as well as Afrikaans, wants to discourage in society and especially in school, a perceived 'mixing' of Afrikaans and English, which he terms

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others with the distinction between *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* and *Cognitive Academic Learning Proficiency* (Cummins 1984). Without going into the controversy over this dichotomy, let us note that research shows that conversational language may be acquired relatively quickly, but the acquiring of proficiencies in an academic language can take six to seven years. The argument made in this paper refers to a more differentiated field of registers, especially but not exclusively within 'academic language' (see Kapp & Arend 2011 for an analysis of differing registers within South African educational policy and matric assessments).

kombuis Engels. Varieties of Afrikaans associated with working-class Coloured communities are frequently stigmatized (Athenissen 2013), in ways we will consider more fully below.

Lastly, there is extensive research attesting to register differences in black African languages. There are two generalizations relevant for our argument. First, the urban vernaculars of Zulu, Xhosa, Setswana, and so forth, spoken by the majority of speakers, are always sharply distinguished from the 'standard' language registers, which are promoted in schools but used only by a minority (Murray 2002; Herbert 2002). Second, successive subcultural registers emerge, flourish, and are superceded by others in the dynamic urban life of South Africa's cities. These subcultural registers draw from one or more urban vernaculars as well as more esoteric repertoires; are associated with specific social groups, such as youth, the working class, racialized groups; and form a pole of normativity (value, prestige) opposed to standard and schooled varieties of the given languages and often to society more generally (Brookes 2014; Mesthrie & Hurst 2013; Stone 2002). Let us keep these facts and generalizations in mind as we turn to consider how staff at South City expressed concerns with social inequalties as well as language diversity.

Staff perspectives on student hardship: Or, connecting language diversity and social disadvantage

I had begun my study focused on what school staff thought and did about language diversity among students, but as I interviewed teachers and administrators at South City, they talked with me about this topic but also about the social deprivations many students experienced. When asked in an interview about challenges that students faced, the Principal quickly listed high unemployment, single-parent households, and high rates of drug abuse. He also expressed a sense that in the many years he had worked in the area, the neighborhood had declined economically and socially. This was plausible: Much of South Africa had suffered losses in manufacturing jobs since the end of apartheid, and it had particularly affected textiles, which were well-represented in Cape Town (Bond 2003; Seekings & Nattras 2006). The Principal was aware that most of the students at this English-medium school did not have English as a first language. In other conversations he talked about the standardized tests which the students were expected to take, on the basis of which they would be compared with the students from affluent suburban schools, expressing a keen sense of the unfairness of such comparisons, with no allowance made for the difficult economic circumstances faced by South City students or their struggles to learn English. He said that 'no excuses' was the response from administrative higher ups when he or other Principals raised such issues (fieldnotes 26 March; interview 9 May 2014).

The Principal also spoke about the circumstances of students and families in staff meetings. During one meeting he related an unsettling account of a home visit to a nearby area notorious for drug use and associated crimes. There he had found a six year old student with signs of fetal alcohol syndrome, absent from school, and thus the object of the Principal's home visit. The child shared a squalid room with a younger sibling and an intoxicated, incapacitated mother. The message the Principal gave the staff that day was 'remember the children's lives' when frustrated

or angered by their absences or missing homework. He also promoted a food drive to collect food baskets for the families of students in need and organized a multi-week workshop for the families of the youngest students, which provided practical advice on how parents could support their children's learning.

Ms M. voiced similar concerns, though with more focus on the classroom context. As discussed earlier, she expressed nervousness about standardized assessments, aware that small shifts in the composition of her classroom could change the class' literacy or math assessments. She spoke often about the difficult social and economic circumstances of many South City students, connecting this to reasons for difficulty in school performance, whether they be from refugee families, children living in orphanages, or those who had no working parents. She also took practical actions based on these concerns, for example, discussing the issue of 'hungry families' with her class when announcing a school-wide food drive and encouraging students and their families to participate. After talking with the students about who 'poor people' were, eliciting the students' understandings and experiences,[8] she reminded the classroom that among the 'families needing food' were families of fellow South City students. She had also arranged an informal classroom lunch supplement for her own room: Students who could afford to, brought two sandwiches with their lunches; the second sandwich would be shared with a fellow student who typically did not have a lunch. Like the Principal, she advocated and participated without pay in the program of weekend workshops for parents who wished to learn more about how to support their children as students at South City.

When I asked other teachers 'In your experience, what are the major challenges your students face?' the majority referred to students' home circumstances and the difficulties that families faced in supporting students in their learning, arguing that for a variety of reasons, the families of students did not adequately support the education of their children. One teacher gave as example that only five out of thirty seven parents had signed an acknowledgment box on their child's spelling homework, indicating that they had reviewed the child's work. Another argued that among reasons families had difficulties supporting children's schoolwork were that the fathers of households often worked great distances from Cape Town, either as foreign or 'internal' labor migrants, a historical pattern with roots in colonial and apartheid labor control (Bond 2003; Fredrickson 1981). In addition, mothers were often the *de facto* single heads of households, relying on remittances from absent partners, when these were available, and often working themselves: 'and the big challenge is … even if they want to read at- like at home, sometimes the parents working conditions, maybe when they get home the mother is at work or the father is at work so there's no one to assist the children' (T5 interview 9 May 2014)

One teacher mentioned the fact that many children commuted long distances to come to South City. Many came, for example, from townships such as Khayelitsha, over 15 kilometers distance from South City. They used the minibus taxis, the essential base of the black African transport system of South Africa, and had a long commute each day. As the teacher noted: 'It's

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[8] One boy in the class recounted that he had been stopped by a man on the street who said that he was hungry and had not eaten. The boy had given the man an apple, because he, the boy, 'did not have a sandwich' to give to the man.

also the distance itself, traveling to school and sometimes you are tired' (T1 interview, 20 March).

A different teacher suggested a link between social circumstances and the valuation placed on language. When I commented to her that many parents I met at a workshop spoke Afrikaans and English, and asked whether the children also spoke Afrikaans, she qualified my understanding by suggesting that the claim to be English speakers might be more hope than actuality:

> The thing is you know often the parents say- when they're writing when they fill in the form they say English speaking .. but very often you find they have Afrikaans backgrounds or it's through a mixture.. a kind of a slang between English and Afrikaans .. because that's what the community's like, you see?
> (T5 interview, 9 May 2014)

Although a resource-strapped school serving a working poor population, South City's status as a Cape Town school that is English-medium is a draw for refugee, coloured, and black African parents who have strong hopes for their children's education. This is why many children commute to attend the school. It may also explain why parents would claim to be English-speaking when not. Or, it may be that what some parents simply use as two languages in their repertoire, English and Afrikaans, the teacher and other school staff see as a more problematic mixing of languages.

The words above deserve close attention, for they suggest a mind grappling with recent historical changes as well as more enduring language prejudices. In the phrases 'a mixture .. a kind of a slang between English and Afrikaans.. because that's what the community's like, you see?', two processes are at issue, one is linguistic – a 'mixture .. a kind of a slang between English and Afrikaans' – and the second is social and historical and seen as causing the first 'because that's what the community's like, you see?' The phrase 'what the community's like' refers to a multilingual working-class and working-poor neighborhood, which is troubled by the crime and social dislocation that often accompany economic hardship. Similar remarks about the neighborhood were also expressed by the Principal, and like his remarks, the teacher's comments have a general plausibility. South Africa and Cape Town, in particular, have lost many manufacturing and retail jobs. Cape Town has a high poverty rate (see note 1, above) and is a highly segregated metropolitan area; as in South Africa more generally, economic resources still follow the color line (Hall, Woolard, Lake & Smith 2012).

I propose that connecting the social imagery 'what the community's like' to the problematic language origin – 'a mixture.. a kind of a slang between English and Afrikaans' should be seen as register process: the recognition that there are *repertoires of forms* that are stereotypically *associated with kinds of speakers and activities*, as perceived by historically specific groups (Agha 2007).[9] I would suggest that for educated, middle-class speakers of English and Afrikaans,

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[9] Examples in the US would be middle class whites talking about 'Black Dialect' or 'Spanglish' and the kinds of person who stereotypically use these forms of language.

as both the Principal, the teacher and most other staff at South City are, the register(s) of Afrikaans and English spoken by South City parents are problematic because they are suggestive of 'slang' or 'mixture.' *De slang* is one of many derogatory terms for Cape Afrikaans[10]; *Kombuis Afrikaans* is another, often described as 'a mixture of Afrikaans and English.' Similarly, *Kombuis Engels* refers to a variety of language that is perceived as mixed. Both terms refer to bilingual practices involving English and Afrikaans resources. As the school Principal remarked to me, however, when warning of speaking practices that might bring together English and Afrikaans, school systems have formalized expectations about language and relations between varieties of language. As he put the matter: 'the curriculum is clear... we speak grammatically correct [English].' Of course, speaking is never the only issue. As the Principal and most teachers at South City were vividly aware, linguistically diverse students at South City, as throughout South Africa, would be assessed through written exams in standard English.

I suggest that we think about the quandaries of South City as indicative of those confronting many South African schools, not because it is statistically or demographically representative – that is debatable – but because of the lesson it provides in how a system of education typically offers a stratified set of linguistic choices, choices which strongly correlate with social inequality. The teachers and Principal at South City were all thoughtful, hardworking professionals. They were aware and compassionate about the social and economic challenges faced by students at their primary school. Many also sought creative tactics for lessening the gap students faced between their first languages and English. But the way of talking about and categorizing languages, as well as the system of assessment in Standard English, made it tremendously difficult to view language diversity as anything other than 'a barrier.'[11] That is why the concept of register is important: It enables us to re-connect social value and linguistic value, and in so doing to ask new questions about language in education.

South City discussion

We have seen aspects of how South City Primary functioned as an 'English Medium' school, including its formal language policy, classroom practices maintaining sharp boundaries between languages, and staff view of language diversity among students as a barrier to school learning. As also discussed, many staff members argued that social and economic conditions, the deprived and precarious household circumstances of many students, posed obstacles to their students' educational engagement and attainment, along with issues of linguistic difference. We will want to consider these two dimensions – the socieconomic and linguistic – together. Doing so will require that we contextualize South City Primary in its wider South African context, as well as consider how global forces influence South Africa. Let us begin with the issue of 'language barriers,' for which there

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[10] As a lingua franca in the region (McCormick 2006), Cape Afrikaans historically preceded the standardization of Afrikaans; in the twentieth century it has been marginalized and stigmatized in relation to that same Standard Afrikaans (Anthonissen 2013).

[11] Taylor (2014) provides four statistical measures of what that 'barrier' means in terms of national graduation rates for secondary education for speakers of African languages when tested in English.

are external causes located in national assessment practices, evolving language and education policies, and globalized 'education reform' models.

The view that language diversity presents 'language problems' for schools is widely reported, for example, in the United States (Alim & Smitherman 2012; Collins 2012; Menken 2008); the UK (Martin Jones & Jones 2002; Rampton 2006) and Europe (Blommert, Creve & Willaert 2006; Martin-Rojo 2011). These are reported, however, of nation-states with strong monolingual traditions, for whom the problematic language diversity is understood as involving ethnoracial minorities or migrants, who are economically dominated and socially stigmatized as well as linguistically differentiated. The issues arise, however, in countries such as South Africa, and many others in 'the Global South', in which a discourse of 'language barriers' sits uneasily beside constitutional commitments to multicultural and multilingual societies, including citizens' rights to education in a number of official languages. Developing a response to this question requires that we keep track of tensions between egalitarian commitments to diversity and enduring connections between linguistic differences and social inequality.

As previously noted, a shift is underway in South Africa, such that the majority of educational assessment after year three of primary school is to be conducted in English, despite it being a minority language. The shift from the multilingual openness of the post-apartheid constitution to a *de facto* Anglophone dominance in the education system has been discussed by many (Alexander 2002; Heugh 2002, 2012; Hornberger & Vaish 2008, p. 8). Despite various multilingual education efforts in different provinces, a national Department of Basic Education policy of 2009 mandated a preferred language of instruction after year three, to be taught as the 'First Additional Language' from year one onward. The intended FAL was widely understood to be English, and the DBE policy of 2009 provides a mechanism for the *de facto* ascendance of English as primary language for all South African education beyond the early primary years (Kerfoot 2014).

There appears to be wide support for education in English, a minority language register in South Africa (Taylor 2014). Outside of ethnic Afrikaners, Afrikaans is not preferred as a Language of Teaching and Learning (Jansen 2011); in informal varieties, however, speaking some Afrikaans is of value in blue collar and service sector labor markets in the Western Cape (Deumert & Mabandla 2009). Post-apartheid South Africa has experienced economic difficulties and widespread job loss, with an estimated half of the black African population consigned to 'irrediable pauperization... because of rising rates of unemployment' (Alexander 2002, p. 7). In response, many black African families, largely urban and middle-class, from townships as well as (previously white, affluent) suburbs, have pursued the hope of economic betterment through 'linguistic betterment,' that is, by seeking English-medium education for their children (Blommaert et al. 2014; Hornberger & Vaish 2008; Prinsloo 2011). Given the symbolic status of English as the 'language of global business' and 'educational opportunity', many South Africans want their children educated in English.

Such desires are not unique to South Africa. The view that 'English equals success' is an image of society that associates kinds of persons with kinds of language, in this case, 'successful persons with the register of 'good [Standard English]. It is a widespread belief, encountered throughout the world, including many multilingual countries of the Global South, such as India

(LaDousa 2005), Indonesia (Tamtomo 2014), Singapore (Loh 2010; Stroud & Wee 2012). However, although English is ideologically represented in such countries as a single, clearly-identified entity, different varieties exist which are typically associated with particular classes and class fractions, often with differing 'nationalist' and 'global cosmopolitan' orientations (Loh 2010, Tamtomo 2014). Subtle class antagonisms are expressed through policies and debates about the value of different varieties of English, in particular, decrying the negative value of 'mixed' varieties of the language (LaDousa; Stroud & Wee 2010).

Although they are widespread, discourses equating 'good English' and economic progress are selective ideologies of language. Among other things, they ignore the differentiated, stratified nature of the massive, transnational English speech community (Alim & Smitherman 2012; Blommaert 2010; Friedman 2003; Mesthrie 2002; Prinsloo 2011; Rampton 2006; Urciuoli 1996). This holds true between countries and within particular countries as well. In particular, family wealth is a powerful predictor of whether one has access to 'good English' and how likely one is to succeed in formal schooling. In the twenty-first century, economic status remains the most powerful predictor of educational success in South Africa (Spaull 2013) and, for example, the United States (Mischel & Rothstein 2007; Rothstein 2004). We need to better understand how economic and educational inequality map onto varieties of language, reproducing language hierarchies in which a few varieties are valued and the majority devalued.

It was a sense of the differentiated, stratified nature of English that teachers at South City were implicating when they commented on English language student students as having basic conversational skills but struggling more with academic instructions and tasks. The English language students at the school posed problems of 'language barriers' because their struggles and achievements in education were going to be framed by a national education discourse and assessment system in which 'good' or 'proper English' is the narrow gate which rations who has success in the competition for education and, by extension, in the competition for jobs, income, and wealth.

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