Language, Power and Emancipation
A South African Perspective*

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It is a great honour, and at the same time a considerable responsibility, to speak on the occasion when, each year, we remember and commemorate Richard Turner's contribution to the intellectual and political life of both this university and its wider society. His commitment to the creation of a democratic South Africa constantly, and in a variety of ways, acted as an inspiration to those around him, his friends and his students. Turner was well aware of the need to learn languages – some of my happiest memories of him are the hours we spent together when he was learning German – and at the end of his life he was beginning to explore the philosophy of language within the framework of critical theory. It is as someone who had the privilege of friendship with him that I hope that what I have to say about language today will be concordant with his life and ideals and, in its own small way, contribute to furthering the same goals.

One of the more important trends in the study of language over the last decade has been the long-overdue initiation of discussion around language and power. The realisation that language and power are interlinked has finally challenged the main-line preoccupation with purely formal studies and enabled the development of a branch of linguistics which looks critically at the ways in which language is implicated in societal power relations. For language, which pervades every aspect of our lives, is never neutral, it empowers and disempowers; and any talk of a 'better society', any hope for emancipation, requires as a precondition informed knowledge about the mutual dependancy of language and power. The discussion to date, associated with the names of Andersen 1988, Bourdieu 1991, Chick 1987, Fairclough 1989, Kachru 1986, Kramarae *et al* 1984 and Wodak 1989, has demonstrated widely diverging perceptions of this relationship, depending on perspective and object of study. There seem, however, to have been few serious attempts to consider the metaphor 'the power of language' rigorously and to develop a more general model which might be applicable, contrastively, to different languages. In this lecture I will therefore be attempting a first

approximation to such a model, testing its applicability to English in South Africa, and drawing a few tentative conclusions.

The traditional conception of power, as developed by the Anglo-American school, sees power, in the main, as exercised over others; of particular interest to us are the views of Steven Lukes and John Kenneth Galbraith. Lukes's critique of the lengthy discussion of overt power alone, of observable behaviour and conflict, led to his moving to include covert manifestations of power. In his view, 'the supreme and most insidious exercise of power (lies in) . . . shaping (peoples') perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things . . .'. (1974:24) The importance of this conception for an understanding of contemporary power is confirmed by Galbraith. In seeking to locate the sources of power in the context of later mid-20th century modernisation, Galbraith points to the 'rise of organisation as a source of power and the concurrent lessening in the comparative roles of personality and property.' (1986:219) This results in 'a hugely increased reliance on social conditioning as an instrument for the enforcement of power' (*ibid.*): 'conditioned power . . . exercised by changing belief' (*ibid.* 214) has gained enormous ground in the second half of the twentieth century. This conception of power will prove to be crucial when we turn to language.

Michel Foucault, on the other hand, rejects the idea of the agent exercising power. He urges that 'the analysis should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision . . . it should refrain from posing . . . the unanswerable questions "Who then has power and what has he in mind? . . ."'. (1976:233) Rather, it is the 'real and effected practices' of power that should be studied, '. . . how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. . . . we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects.' (*ibid.*) Hence Foucault sees power as 'something which circulates, . . . as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power . . .'. (*ibid.* 234) Hence Foucault's concept of power differs from the traditional understanding, in that he sees *all* individuals, even the most powerful, at the same time as *subject* to power: all people are in equal measure constituted by the various power mechanisms of society.

Clearly, Foucault is highlighting different issues and proferring different explanations. The existence of such radically different conceptions of power leads us to William Connolly, who in his investigation of the language of power has sought to understand why it is seemingly impossible to find a satisfactory definition for the concept. Connolly has firstly highlighted the link between definitions of power and ideology, and secondly he has given further backing to Lukes's thesis, that the concept of power is 'essentially contested'. Connolly hopes to 'dissolve the appearance of neutrality in conceptual analysis, to help render political discourse more self-reflective by bringing out contestable moral and political perspectives lodged in the language of politics . . . to delineate the point of view from which power is formed in our way of life, the standards and judgements, presumptions and prohibitions, expressed in the language of power.' (1983:213) He offers an explanation for why a generally-accepted definition of power is unlikely today.

> The concept 'power' . . . is one of the sites of a struggle between rival ideals of the good life competing – though not on equal terms – for hegemony in our civilization. If modernity is marked by rivalries in which efficiency and community, democratic citizenship and the imperative of economic growth, utility and autonomy, rights and interests, domination and appreciation of nature all compete for primacy, it is not surprising . . . to see microcosms of this rivalry inside the concepts which help to constitute that way of life. (*ibid.* 225)

Hence the thesis proposed by Lukes and Connolly that the concept of power, as, too, other central concepts of the discourse of politics, is 'essentially contested', which Connolly elucidates as follows:

> To say that a particular network of concepts is contestable is to say that standards and criteria of judgement it expresses are open to contestation. To say that such a network is *essentially* contestable is to contend that the universal criteria of reason, as we can now understand them, do not *suffice* to settle these contests definitively. The proponent of essentially contested concepts charges those who construe the standards operative in their own way of life to be fully expressive of God's will or reason or nature with transcendental provincialism; they treat the standards with which they are intimately familiar as universal criteria against which all other theories, practices and ideals are to be assessed.' (*ibid.* 225–226)

I have quoted Connolly at such length as his thinking points towards what I consider one of the most important manifestations of the 'power of language': the ideological nature of language, which wields all the more power in that it generally remains unperceived. As Joseph and Taylor have stated, 'Any enterprise which claims to be non-ideological and value-neutral, but which in fact remains covertly

ideological and value-laden, is the more dangerous for this deceptive subtlety'. (1990:2) Joseph and Taylor are referring to scientific language, but in fact our every-day language is equally 'ideological and value-laden'. We will return to this point later.

Let us now turn from the consideration of the concept of power to language, beginning with the phrase which first led me to this topic, 'the power of language'. For all of us who have grown up as English-speakers, this phrase is a truism: of course language has power – yet as soon as we begin to question the phrase we find it difficult, if not impossible, to come up with its precise meaning. 'The power of language': this implies that 'language in general' has power. What is 'language in general' – language in a vacuum? Does it exist? How can it 'have' something? Is power something that can be 'had'? We may conclude – and it would not be an unwise conclusion – that the phrase may well be leading us astray, leading us to accept something which is not necessarily correct – but have we not then caught language in the act of exercising power over us after all? Ah – but what is here exercising power over us? – not 'language in general' at all, but the English language as spoken in a particular setting at a particular time. And so the problem is solved: 'language in general' does not have power (or rather, it has a potential power to which we will return in due course); it is rather specific languages, located in specific societal contexts, which exercise power, a power, however, which is largely a function of the particular roles these languages fulfill in 'their' society: a language mediates the power relations pertaining to its societal context.

But few societies are egalitarian; and similarly, few language communities are egalitarian. The possibility of differential linguistic power relations in a language community rests on language variability. Every language community uses a continuum of differing codes: these can be constituted by slight differences in pronunciation or vocabulary, by what are considered different dialects, or finally, in multilingual communities, by different languages. These various codes are used for different functions, ranging from formal, public settings to informal, private ones. Such variability also contributes substantially towards 'social stratification', the definition of the social situation. These differing codes will be more or less powerful in the given speech community, according to the power relations of that society.

In what, then, does the 'power of language' consist? I will attempt to tease out several distinct strands, beginning, in Lukes's terms, with the differentiation between overt and covert power, although often there will be no clear boundary. Linguistic power manifests itself overtly in two different ways: as *pragmatic* power, based on the

communicative dimensions of language, and as *symbolic* power, drawing on the emotive and symbolic aspects of language. The pragmatic power of a language, the measure of the extent to which language has power as a means of communication, is by no means simply a function of the number of people who speak it: much more decisive are the answers to Fishman's famous questions, Who speaks what language to whom and when? For a language to attain significant pragmatic power, its speakers will have to have significant political and economic power, so that their language will be used for public purposes; use of the language in the private sphere is of little moment from a point of view of pragmatic power. On the other hand, the symbolic power of a language, which estimates and explains the esteem in which a language is held, derives in the main from the interpretation of the language as a symbol. Kachru, for example, has listed a number of symbolic components which contribute to explaining the worldwide domination of English: English is seen as a bearer of civilisation, of religion, of culture, knowledge and modernity. (1986:128f) Of course, the perception of a language as a bearer of negative forces could also lead to a symbolic power with negative implications: in parts of post-colonial Africa English has also been seen as a symbol of colonialism and has been rejected.

It should be noted that pragmatic and symbolic power are by no means mutually dependant. A language can rate high or low as regards pragmatic and/or symbolic power; any combination is possible; for these two types of power are codetermined and realised by factors external to language – by the political, economic and social relations obtaining in the society under consideration. In this way it would be possible to determine aspects of the linguistic power relations of a society, by assigning to each participating code a value for its pragmatic and symbolic power respectively.

In addition to this overt power, language also has covert power, power which it exerts over its speakers. We will provisionally term this the *signitive* power of language. Signitive power derives from the fact that reality is to a large extent linguistically constructed. This can be in part due to manipulation from above, but on the whole it arises from the mutual dependancy between language and its location in a specific society. Even though the stronger versions of the linguistic relativity thesis have been rejected, it is generally accepted that the daily linguistic habits of ordinary people, which have developed over the years in a process of accommodation between linguistic system and environment, economy, culture, history etc., propagate a view of reality and at the same time a set of values and concepts which are then taken for granted. As this is normally at a subconscious level, such an interpretation of reality exercises a kind of compulsion on every

speaker of the language. (For example, in English we speak of the sun rising – and is this not the way in which we 'see' what is in reality 'earth-rise'?) Clearly this power is inherent in any language and even exists as potential power in 'language in general'; yet in the context of a given society a dominant language may become 'imperialistic' and prescribe 'its' reality to speakers of other languages. In this way a language with a higher rating for pragmatic and symbolic power will of necessity gain in actual signitive power. Hence Lukes's 'third dimension or power', or Galbraith's 'conditioned power' becomes crucial for a consideration of linguistic power.

Let us at this point again refer briefly to Michel Foucault, who postulates a perhaps even more fundamental form of linguistic power. Language has power, language *is* power, he claims, in that it is one of the 'multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, thoughts etc.' (1976:233) by which people are constituted in the particular discourse prevailing in their society. Foucault sees these organisms etc. constituting people as individuals or subjects, in that he limits his investigations to Western society where the discourse of the subject prevails. The open question remains as to the prevailing discourses in other parts of the world – the ways in which people are constituted elsewhere by the respective organisms etc. of those societies (which include language); and this especially in the areas of Africa which are relevant for us.

In the following we will seek to apply our analysis of linguistic power to the English language in South Africa, and subsequently ask in what ways language, and the consideration of languages, can contribute to emancipation.

Individual and societal multilingualism in South Africa lend themselves to a discussion of linguistic power. From the outset it will be clear that numbers alone will bear little relationship to the actual power of our individual languages. There are substantially more first language speakers of Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans than of English, but the pragmatic power of the latter two languages is entrenched in the constitution and further ensured by the dominant position of English- and Afrikaans-speakers as regards political and economic power. English and Afrikaans are the chief languages of what Fishman has termed 'nationism', being used for administrative functions, for education etc. While Afrikaans is probably dominant in the present bureaucracy, English is the language of capital, and to a large extent the language of access to the international community. English has furthermore been the almost exclusive medium of instruction in DET schools since 1977, and is at present the focus of a large quantity of literacy and adult education work. As a first language, English may be of lesser demographic importance, but as a second language it is

rapidly gaining in stature; and this tendency is likely to continue. This privileged position of English seems to be little questioned by speakers of indigenous languages – doubtless in large part because competence in English, theoretically open to all but in practice only achieved by relatively few, has so far eased access to employment and certainly to status. It is English, not Afrikaans or Zulu, that is continually spoken of as the lingua franca – although, as Rene Dirven (1990:26) has pointed out, if one simply takes numbers into consideration, Afrikaans and Zulu are at least as much lingua francas as English.

As is to be expected, however, a large number of varieties of English exist: among native speakers these range from the present standard, so-called Respectable South African English, to Extreme SAE with its somewhat negative social connotations. Access to the standard has to date been carefully controlled through education policy and social apartheid, and so it remains unavailable to the majority of second language speakers, who speak a range of nativized varieties which tend to be classed together, somewhat controversially, as South African Black English. This has consequences, because, as Braj Kachru points out, 'Native speakers (of English) have traditionally viewed non-native innovations in (and nativizations of) English with ambivalence. Nativization has essentially been seen as *deficiency*, not as *difference* . . .' (1985:213) (The use of SABE by no means necessarily implies the imprecise use of language, leading to 'muddled thinking'; any more than the use of Respectable South African English necessarily leads our mother-tongue students to think precisely and with clarity.) Clearly, quite apart from the greater or lesser communicative success of first- and second-language English, the societal power these speakers wield will be a function of their closeness to the standard: our society recognizes the educated users of English, not of the vernaculars, as elites. In this way, the power relations of society are perpetuated in and through language. These linguistic power relations will only change if and when English is restandardised away from SAE in the direction of SABE, when a wide range of different varieties gains equal acceptability, and when it is realised that second-language speakers of English, not first-language speakers, are the norm in our country.

The privileged position of English in South Africa cannot be explained through pragmatic considerations alone; these are complemented by a highly effective symbolic power, at present seen largely in terms of the 'language of freedom'. This is a surprising turn in the history of English as one of the languages of colonialism, but can be explained by our particular political constellation. As antagonism towards English was here appropriated by white Afrikaners, Kathleen Heugh notes, it

has, to a very large extent, been played down in Black politics, and the
opposition to the colonial language has been and is currently directed
towards Afrikaans in black circles. The irony lies in the emergent attitude
towards English as the vehicle for ideologies of freedom and indepen-
dence. (1987:206)

Certainly this is a central component, but I would suggest that more is
involved: command of English is also seen generally as an indication
of education and hence social status. Be this as it may, Heugh has
detailed the attitudes of the various black political groupings towards
English and has concluded that English will almost certainly remain
the dominant language, at least in the immediate future.

But this − if we bear in mind the signitive power of English − may
have more than the foreseen consequences. Accepting English as
lingua franca means simultaneously − and generally unwittingly −
accepting a particular interpretation of the world, and at that one
which is located in the context of colonialism and apartheid. This was
first pointed out by Njabulo Ndebele in 1987, who, in an important
lecture to the English Academy of South Africa, rejected the idea of
the 'innocence of English' and continued:

> The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant
> language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social
> perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb en-
> trenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English then must be
> recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated.
> (1987:11)

This issue was taken up again by the People's English Commission in
the context of the NECC. In speaking of the aims of this commission,
Bronwyn Peirce notes:

> The intention . . . is not to distinguish People's English from British
> English or American English, but People's English from Apartheid
> English. The issues at stake here are *not* the linguistic features of English
> spoken in South Africa, but the central political issue of how English is to
> be taught in the schools; who has access to the language; how English is
> implicated in the power relations dominant in South Africa, and the effect
> of English on the way speakers of the language perceive themselves, their
> society, and the possibility for change in that society. (1990:8)

It is doubtless a reflection of the pragmatic power of English that
awareness of these considerations remains limited. But surely this
suggests that at the very least the dominant goal of state-of-the-art
foreign language teaching, communicative competence, should be
reviewed, for the development of native-like competence in the

foreign language must of necessity include its ideological aspects. In this way, the best-meant foreign language teaching can unwittingly contribute towards the perpetuation of the dominant class configurations and power relations.

Yet in Foucault's terms it could be argued that the English language has a still more encompassing power over us; but at this point my argument can no longer focus solely on English. Together with the other societal power mechanisms all South African languages (but perhaps especially the two most dominant ones) have contributed, each in its own way, to what might be called the discourse of apartheid in South Africa, in terms of which we have all been constituted and constrained as creatures of apartheid. This poses all the more sharply the question as to how – or whether – it is possible to free ourselves from this discourse – to become, in some degree, emancipated.

I have hitherto attempted to show how languages in South Africa, and especially English, are implicated in the power systems of apartheid. Clearly, there has been little space for emancipation in apartheid South Africa. Apartheid has not only resulted in highly visible external constraints for the majority, but also in less visible but equally stringent internal constraints which affect all of us. The high degree of closure in apartheid society has conditioned us to fear and reject the wealth of 'otherness' around us. With the coming transition to majority rule we have the opportunity to seek to realise a form of society in which a greater degree of freedom might be possible for more people, freedom from physical and material needs, as well as freedom of action and thought. I would suggest that language can make a substantial contribution to this process, through the choice of a language policy with emancipatory potential, which on the one hand presupposes knowledge about the links between language and power, and on the other leads to a greater awareness of the nature of language.

Let us consider the question of language policy. To judge by the recent National Language Forum conference on language planning, the language debate in concerned circles is now firmly centred on English. Although it is assumed and proclaimed that our indigenous languages will be supported and further developed, the impetus of the debate seems to have moved to the question how English can be made more accessible to all, to the restandardization of English, to the problem of empowering teachers towards competence and confidence in their task of teaching English. Certainly these are important matters; but if the indigenous languages are in practice as well as in theory to be accorded equal status with English, clarification of a number of key issues is imperative: the possible consequences and dangers of such an empowerment of English, the crucial question of

ethnicity and language, the means to achieve the necessary spread of linguistic power across a number of languages. And these issues must be addressed within the context of the modernity that characterizes advanced industrial societies – for South Africa is clearly such a society in the making.

In a previous Turner lecture Raphael de Kadt analysed the highly discordant concept of modernity. He distinguishes two central strands, modernity with its conception of the person as a free, equal and rational being, and modernisation, the enormous surge of scientific and technological progress from which have evolved the principal institutional forms of modern societies: 'the market as a system not only of exchange but of power, the state as a labyrinthine and often inscrutable apparatus of surveillance, administrative control and coercion.' (1989:50) Zygmunt Bauman, moreover, elucidates the concern of modernisation with the 'quest for order'; he sees it as 'effected and sustained by design, manipulation, management, engineering' (1991:7), and in this, clearly, language will play a central role. De Kadt argues that advanced industrial societies are characterized by a 'tension between the values of modernity and many of the forces and consequences of modernisation' (1989:50), a tension which preserves the hope of retaining the values of modernity in the face of the overpowering forces of modernisation. In South Africa, this tension has taken on a unique form. The exercise in social and political engineering, in ordering and disciplining which became apartheid, can be seen as a distorted extension of modernisation, embedded in our local context. Yet apartheid is also concerned with the ideal values of modernity. As Bauman has put it, 'all visions of artificial order are by necessity . . . inherently asymmetrical and thereby dichotomizing. They split the human world into a group for whom the ideal order is to be created, and another which enters the picture and the strategy only as a resistance to be overcome . . .'. (1991:38) Hence apartheid, the 'democracy for some' based on a complete violation of human rights for the majority, is a logical consequence of modernity as well as of modernisation. Yet however distorted South African modernity may be, it is modernity which contains the promise of emancipation – in occidental terms.

Even after the removal of apartheid from the statute books, these skewed versions of modernity and modernisation will continue to structure our society. But it is important that we work towards resolving these in some form of, perhaps, post-modern society which will be able to reconcile positive aspects of modernity with elements of African cultures. A future language policy must be able to contribute to this. Clearly, the imperatives of modernisation point to the use of English as single dominant language. English has the

greatest potential for mass communication, it has already developed the categories and vocabulary requisite of language in an advanced industrial society, it can cope with the transnational or multinational trend of all modern economies. But the question must be posed as to whether such a language policy would have emancipatory potential: would not this simply perpetuate to a large extent the present internal and external constraints on the autonomy of our citizens? Only 8,68% of our total population speak English as a mother tongue; just over 40% of our population can communicate in English. Choosing English as a sole official language would immediately preclude direct access to the mechanisms of power such as administration, law courts etc. for over half our population – and for the presently disempowered sectors of our population. To help redress this imbalance, a massive and sustained teaching input would be required. Do we have sufficient and adequately trained teachers? Do we have the financial resources? A restandardisation of English is seen as a precondition for its future central role: written English is to remain more or less unchanged (to allow access to the world community), whereas tolerance of a wide range of spoken varieties is to be encouraged. Crucial, however, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, would be what varieties will be spoken for public purposes. Without a policy of deliberate promotion of today's non-standard forms, it is likely that the prestige automatically accorded to an official language would again lead to a continued dominance of forms approximating to the written version and so seriously jeopardise any attempts to give other spoken varieties equal status. Furthermore, would not the elevation of English to sole official language simply reconfirm the 'second-rate' status which has been the lot of African languages under apartheid? And finally: Western-style thought patterns and value judgements would continue to be given legitimacy, and through English would dominate and constitute the discourse by means of which the 'new South Africa' is created. In short: English as sole official language would in a variety of ways mitigate against an increased autonomy of South Africa's presently disadvantaged citizens; and it would certainly not encourage English-speakers to break out of the limitations of their own language.

What type of language policy might be more emancipatory? As stated in the Freedom Charter, language equality would first seem to require the positive recognition of our many different first languages – and as an important resource, not as a problem. Yet this on its own would simply perpetuate inequality: as Hobsbawm has succinctly pointed out, 'To be monolingual is to be shackled, unless your local language happens to be a *de facto* world language.' (1990:116) Rather, as Michael Gardiner has suggested, this recognition could be

implemented by asserting the right of all South Africans to pro-
ficiency in at least one local language and in English – and
knowledge of a second local language (as is many cases already
exists) should certainly be encouraged. While attempting to make the
necessary provision for the continued learning of English, this
suggestion does not solve the problem of the dominance of English. A
closer approach to equality could only be achieved by consciously
instituting the use of some indigenous languages for public purposes
in contexts where hitherto only English or Afrikaans have been
spoken, such as in a general Parliament, and in this way symbolically
and practically laying claim to their rightful positions in our country.
Simultaneous translation could ensure that English-speakers would
be no more disadvantaged than Blacks have been hitherto. In this way,
the pragmatic power at present held by English could, in time, be
spread across a number of languages and so institute a more
widely-based access to power.

Clearly, such a policy is not without its problems and dangers. I will
not attempt to address the logistical problems here – whatever
language policy we adopt, enormous logistical problems are involved;
but it must be asked whether the promotion of indigenous languages
might not lead to a regression into anti-modernistic stances such as
ethnicity and language-based nationalism. Certainly our indigenous
languages have through Government policies become constituted on
the basis of ethnicity, and it would be unwise to try to ignore this.
Rather we should seek a mode of accommodating different ethnic
groups in a way which might, as Joshua Fishman suggests, eventually
lead to 'simultaneously transcending ethnicity as a complete, self-
contained system, but of retaining it as a selectively preferred,
evolving participatory system'. (1989:18) A policy of individual
multilingualism might well contribute to this, in that it would facilitate
the development of multiple cross-cutting identities and hence
hopefully reduce the potential for ethnic conflict.

Similarly, the greater use of indigenous languages would not, *in
itself*, promote nationalist movements. As Eric Hobsbawm has
pointed out, '~~nblems of power, status, politics and ideology and not
of communicaon or even culture, lie at the heart of nationalism of
language.' (1990:110) It is these questions of power, etc. which need
to be addressed, if we are to avoid these 'reactions of weakness and
fear, attempts to erect barricades to keep at bay the forces of the
modern world' (*ibid.* 165); and gaining clarity about the linkages
between language and power may be one way of contributing to
this.

But the policy of individual bi- or multilingualism I am advocating
would benefit not only the presently disadvantaged, but also the

advantaged. It is, after all, we English-speakers whose traditions probably incline us most strongly to the poverty and constrainedness of monolingualism – and I say this in spite of the great English-language achievements in literature, philosophy etc. Yet South Africa has particularly rich linguistic resources, in that it includes languages representing a wide variety of language families and cultures. In depth learning of a further language, especially when it is an adult learning a language of a completely different type, is not simply a matter of acquiring a new set of grammatical and sociolinguistic routines, but simultaneously involves opening a window onto a different interpretation of the world; and this brings with it the experience of the contingency of one's own perceptions, the perceptions and habits with which one has grown up. It is this type of experience which may lead to openness to the other, to the overcoming of linguistic – and other – intolerance. But are we to replace intolerance with toleration, which, as Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, often means: 'you are abominable; but I, being generous, shall let you live'? (1991:8) 'Shared fate would do with mutual tolerance', muses Bauman, but 'joint destiny requires solidarity'. (*ibid.* 236) For 'the right of the Other to his strangerhood is the only way in which my own right may express, establish and defend itself'. (*ibid.*) The insights into the Other obtained through acquiring competence in his or her language may help to achieve the paradigm shift from intolerance/tolerance to solidarity, and to emancipation. And similarly we proponents of the values of occidental modernity may come to realise that Africa, too, may have something to offer our changing society: qualities and ideas as yet so unrealised by our academic discourse that we do not have the concepts in which we could talk about them.

Finally I wish to ask: how does this concern us at the University of Natal, an English-medium institution? I most certainly do not wish to denigrate the sterling efforts of some sectors of our university community in Student Support and the various enrichment programmes; nor would I wish to deny that it is crucial for our students – for any students of this day and age in a globally-linked society – to learn English. Yet I wonder whether we have ever considered seriously possible roles of indigenous languages at our university – other than in their 'correct places' as an academic discipline and as the language of the cleaning staff. Have we perhaps accepted our role as an English-medium institution somewhat too readily? Certainly we strive to be tolerant – but have we, in our present context, any real hope of achieving solidarity? Are we ignoring an opportunity to work towards emancipation?

I would like to suggest that we attempt to draw on the linguistic riches of our context by cultivating a conscious ethos of multi-

lingualism among academic and administrative staff and students. After all, if we have grown up here, we are already potential if not practicing bilinguals – yet perhaps we still tend to view the South African situation with Western eyes, accepting monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as something which, somehow, should be overcome. From our present English-Afrikaans bilingualism it is a big step, but, I would suggest, a crucial one for our country, to include an African language. Certainly learning a new language requires considerable time and effort, which we could well put to other very legitimate uses. Yet: do we insist that all teaching activity takes place in English on purely academic grounds – or more for reasons of our own convenience? Might bilingual teaching not, in part, be an answer to some of the problems facing our first-year non-mother-tongue students? Should a certain fluency in, say, Zulu, not in due course come to be expected of academics on the Natal seaboard? We expect our students to acquire English and are at times somewhat concerned at their lack of success – perhaps we academics, given our supposed intellectual competence and the decidedly superior resources at our disposal, might be more successful in acquiring Zulu. Might there not be this linguistic component to our responsibility to society, with its stress on change and innovation, effectiveness and justness, as detailed by the Mission Statement? I do not pretend to have answers to these questions – but I find it crucial at the present time that these issues begin to be discussed on campus.

In conclusion: as an English-speaking academic I have here attempted to explore the power implications of language in society – and especially those of my, and our, language. Perhaps it is the sheer familiarity and ease of our first-language use of English which tends to deprive us of the realisation that, in our given context, when we speak English we are of necessity exercising power, a power which may frustrate our best efforts to achieve a more egalitarian society. It is under a deliberate policy of multilingualism, I have argued, that such a society is more likely to emerge.

But the power of language is not only a power over others, made possible through language; it is also the even more pervasive power that language wields over us. And with this insight it becomes possible to view multilingualism not as a burden, a duty, but as a gateway to the worlds of the 'Other', as a means of realizing something of the contingency of our own occidental world-views and, to adapt Nietzsche's image, of escaping to some extent from the prison-house of our own language. (Jameson 1972)

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