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The English National Language Body (ENLB) is one of the eleven such bodies, one for each of the official languages, established in terms of the PanSALB Act. The general brief for the National Language Bodies, in terms of the Act, is the development and standardisation of the languages concerned and the promotion of multilingualism. It was soon apparent to the ENLB that English was not primarily in need of either development or standardisation, and that it should direct its energies and expertise to wider issues. The NLBs have the further function of advising the PanSALB Board, which is relevant to the purpose of these papers.

Three so-called “Technical Committees” were established, one for Literature, one for Education and one for “Varieties” of English. The Literature committee has concerned itself with people’s reading rooms, advice to libraries and the drawing up of reading lists for education. The Education committee secured a grant from the National Research Foundation to investigate CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) in the South African context, and also translation problems, by the translation and retranslation of suitable passages. The Varieties committee explored multilingualism and the related (and far too little discussed and researched) question of the “domains” of language use. The Varieties committee eventually became the focus for intensive participation from the whole ENLB. Outside the committee, members then devoted a good deal of their own time to the conceptualisation and writing of a set of essays which have been made available for this booklet.

In the process, it was found necessary to attempt a nuanced understanding of what might be meant by multilingualism, one of the concepts briefly mentioned in the PanSALB Act. Further, both the domains question and multilingualism were found to have important ramifications for education in South Africa, both in the school and in higher education. It became increasingly clear that the issues we were dealing with have significant and perhaps unanticipated implications, not only for English, but for all the official languages.

In part, the debate the ENLB hopes to stimulate by these papers bears on the practical implications of the distinction between equity and equality for the future of South African multilingualism. The Constitution, in terms of which PanSALB was established, calls for “equity” in the language dispensation and for all languages to enjoy “parity of esteem.” The PanSALB Act, however, in apparent conflict with the Constitution, calls for “equal use.” “Equity” and “equal,” though frequently thought to be synonymous, are not so, and to confuse them is to fail to do justice to the richness of language use and the different purposes which prompt different choices of language. The writers of the Constitution deliberately rejected the notion of equality, which was in early drafts, precisely for these reasons. Equity, on the other hand, is a notion required in any fair and realistic consideration of language domains and the changing character of multilingualism in South Africa.

The papers collected here bear the stamp of the individual writers involved. However, they have been deeply affected by debates in the ENLB, and they are considered by that body to make an important contribution at this stage of the development of our

language order. They are offered to the Board of PanSALB and to others concerned with language policy and planning in the spirit of stimulation and advice (advising the Board being one of the functions of the NLBs). It is hoped that these papers will be disseminated throughout the PanSALB structures, the NLBs, the Lexicography Units and the Provincial Language Committees. It is hoped, further, that the Ministers of Education and of Arts and Culture will receive copies and that these papers will be widely distributed in the academic and corporate worlds and become known to the general public. The debates they engender are vital to our multilingual future.