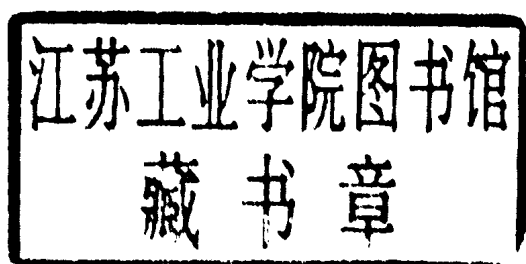


Focus on South Africa

EDITED BY *Vivian de Klerk*

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FOCUS ON SOUTH AFRICA



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Introduction

The spread of English to so many parts of the world and the increase in the number of those learning and using it (as first and other language) has been the most striking example of language expansion this century (Platt, Weber and Ho 1984:1). In the process of spreading, English has acquired various international identities and multiple ownerships (Kachru 1986:31) and has grown as the language of power, the international medium for the dissemination of knowledge in important world forums and the primary medium for twentieth century science and technology. Its demographic distribution, its apparent neutrality, its range of native and non-native users across cultures, its ability to fulfil a range of linguistic functions and its rich literary tradition has made English enormously appealing and powerful world-wide.

The South African linguistic situation provides plentiful evidence of the power and appeal of English. It has its early beginnings with the seizure of the Cape from the Dutch in 1806, but it truly began to take root after the migration of English-speaking people to the Eastern Cape in 1820, to Natal between 1848 and 1862 and to the Witwatersrand in the 1870s. Having been reinforced by the colonial administration, English did not really decline during the post-war era (when political power passed to Afrikaans speakers) and owing to its importance in commerce, science, technology and as the internal language of communication it continues to play an important role. South Africa is no different from other countries with English as *lingua franca*: knowledge of standard English is undeniably linked with social mobility and progress.

However, alongside its growth because of its perceived neutrality and its high status (Platt, Weber and Ho 1984:28), and despite a pragmatic recognition of what English can offer, there is a very real possibility that elitism, domination and social injustice, as well as personal language loss could result from the spread of English (Phillipson 1992; Kachru 1986:5; Cheshire 1991:2), and this is particularly true of South Africa. As Albie Sachs puts it (1994:1) "the omnipresence of English can be inconvenient and suffocating and induce a sense of disempowerment and exclusion. In a sense, all language rights are rights against English, which in the modern world is such a powerful language that it needs no protection at all ...". While English is seen by many as a medium of achieving and announcing independence and maturity, for many others English represents colonialism, power and elitism, and acts as a vehicle of values not always in harmony with local traditions and beliefs. They see its spread as evidence of (not so) subtle

linguistic imperialism, occurring at the expense of the local languages, stabilizing hierarchical structures and reinforcing existing status differentials.

In 1995 South Africa finds itself in a period of political transition which has resulted in increased sensitivity to and awareness of languages and language rights, owing to the recently declared language policy of its interim constitution. The debate about the current status of English in South Africa is highly emotive, the focus having moved from an ethno-linguistic (Afrikaans) and imperialistic (English) mode to a larger concern about the ecological diversity of South Africa's languages, which are now seen as the treasured cultural possessions of a nation - an ecological diversity akin to bio-diversity. In South Africa language has now become a terrain of struggle, a struggle over the basic human right to express oneself in one's mother tongue. It is all about self-worth and belonging and is underpinned by power: economic interests, political muscle and cultural concerns.

The languages clauses of the interim constitution entail a classic catch 22; Clause 3 states:

- (1) Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, SeSotho saLeboa, SeSotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, and isiZulu shall be the official South African languages at national level and conditions shall be created for their development and for the promotion of their equal use and enjoyment.
- (2) Rights relating to language and the status of languages existing at the commencement of this Constitution shall not be diminished, and provision shall be made by an Act of Parliament for rights relating to language and the status of languages existing only at regional level, to be extended nationally in accordance with the principles set out in subsection (9)

But how can one upgrade Xhosa or Setswana, for example, without reducing the existing status of English or Afrikaans? (or overspending massively). In August 1994, faced with budgeting problems and the easy (and cheap) availability of English radio and TV programmes, and faced with the fact that English is already a language of the world's major news organisations and of international communication and technology, the local media network (the South African Broadcasting Corporation) cautiously mentioned that it was considering making Channel 1 English only. But while this could enhance the marketability of English-medium South African programmes, enabling them to reach a far wider audience, consequential loss of airtime for other languages would have far-reaching practical and political implications. To ignore the explosive potential of the language issue by simply announcing English as the language which occupies preferential status on radio and television is to underestimate the dangers inherent in disempowering and marginalising the speakers of other languages, and the fiery debate which ensued in the press resulted in the rapid shelving of that idea.

There are very real dangers in imposing one language on a multi-cultural society, as evidenced by the Soweto riots in 1976 which erupted after the imposition of Afrikaans as medium of instruction for certain subjects in Black schools. The risk of giving unfair status to English is the entrenchment of a new elite, their power underpinned by their ability to use standard English with resultant marginalisation of speakers of all other languages. The issue of the protection of the language rights of all South Africans is clearly uppermost in the minds of ordinary people, alongside a realisation that South Africa needs its own variety of English - an English that can perform the various functions demanded of it, that promotes unity and expresses solidarity with the rest of Africa and the Commonwealth and that is accessible to its various peoples.

While it is possible that English may continue to spread in South Africa, the forms this English takes will be the focus of increased attention by linguists. The recently revised national syllabus for English teaching in South Africa laid down by the Education Department (January 1995) declares that "the multilingual nature of South African society has led to variation that should be acknowledged in the teaching and assessment of English as a subject" (principle 1.2), and that "using a language effectively ... should be valued more highly than the correct use of a single standard variety of the language". As South Africa stands on the brink of acknowledging and encouraging dialectal and varietal forms of English in the classroom, the country's languages are especially vulnerable. The debate about standards is bound to gather momentum, and the need to describe varietal forms accurately and monitor their changes and effects on each other grows commensurately.

Ethnic labels are problematic in a volume of this nature, and should not be read as primitives but rather as *post-hoc* descriptive tags. No ethnic group is neatly defined, and language boundaries are notoriously fluid, with groups overlapping rather than dividing neatly. The pan-ethnic terms *coloured*, *black*, *white* and *Indian*, while neither accurate nor wholly satisfactory, have been used in this volume to refer loosely to the wide range of people generally described by such terms. While they are unfortunately fraught with connotations in a country where racial issues have caused such acrimony and suffering, where they are used in this volume they are not intended to imply any clear-cut link with race or ethnicity.

This volume represents an attempt to provide an ongoing record of current scholarship in this field: contributors have given their insights regarding the position of English in this linguistic melting pot, and chapters offer a range of historical and synchronic sociocultural and pedagogical descriptions of existing variation in English in South Africa.

Section A: An Historical Perspective

SAfE, as an extraterritorial 'transported' English, exists in general in contrast to Northern Hemisphere varieties (such as US and Canadian English) and displays features of Southernness (with regard to its mainland source) (Lass 1995:91). Because of their different cultural and regional backgrounds and unique settlement dates and demographic details, South African and Australasian varieties are clearly distinguishable from Northern varieties, and in turn, AusE and SAfE are mutually distinguishable, despite their common origins in the mixed London dialect of the later eighteenth century. Among the salient differences are the tense front /aa/ (in *cart*) in AusE, and obstruent /r/ and low schwa in SAfE (Lanham and Macdonald 1979:90). While lectal distinctions in AusE are typically a matter of quantity and degree, unlikely to correlate in any well-defined way with regional or social differences (Mitchell and Delbridge 1965), the various lects in SAfE correlate strongly with social and regional factors. The standard in AusE is a home-grown local variety, but in South Africa the appeal of BrE has been far stronger, and the rejection of the local Cape English (present-day Extreme SAfE) has led to social and cultural divisions among white English South Africans. Despite the fact that both of these ETEs had the promise of developing in parallel, "AusE enjoys the support of the dominant values and attitudes of the society whereas typical SAfE does not" (Lanham and Macdonald 1979:92).

The two basic formative elements of modern SAfE were the largely vernacular settlement of the 1820s and the largely standard-speaking Natal settlement of the 1840s (Lass 1987:302). The majority of the 1820 settlers were probably from the South East of England (Lanham and Macdonald 1979:23), and "a large proportion ... were of rural rather than urban working-class origins, and there is evidence suggesting a fairly important component from the West country" (Lass 1987:302). While the effect of the later migration (from 1848) of settlers to Natal has been seen (Lanham and Macdonald 1979) as a particularly important source of certain (socially approved) variables, like glide-weakening of certain diphthongs, which are seen today as more prestigious, these processes are argued by Lass (1995:93) to be so widespread in English that they cannot be seen as having a specific regional input - they could have come from anywhere; he argues that the specifically Southern features evident in SAfE were brought with the larger groups in 1820 (Lass 1987:302).

In the first chapter of this volume Lanham adopts a sociohistorical perspective in tracing the early beginnings of English in South Africa up to the present time; he relates its development to major historical events since 1806, and traces shifting attitudes to the changes in form and functions that English underwent as it spread to various groups of speakers of other languages. In particular, he shows

how the educated standard (Conservative SAfE) (slightly divergent from St BrE) emerged as the prestigious form of English in contrast to the socially stigmatised extreme SAfE.

Branford's paper complements this overview by focusing on the sociopolitical status of English among white Afrikaans, coloured Afrikaans, African, Indian and white English speakers, taking as focal point the concept of dominance in terms of status, power and authority. In both papers one sees the steady groundswell of Anglicisation in language, culture and outlook within several groups.

Section B: Pan-ethnic Varieties

Current descriptions of non-standard dialects or 'new' varieties frequently list assorted departures from British or American standards with little attempt to determine the extent to which the local variety functions as an autonomous system. The patterns of any stable variety only emerge when that variety is entrenched in a community and reflects the social organisation of that society. In this section of the volume, contributors offer descriptions of specific varieties of English in South Africa and attempt to ground them in the communities which use them.

Gough's careful and detailed account of black English highlights the many problems associated with descriptions of sub-varieties of English: how many black speakers of English are there? What constitutes 'knowledge of English' in qualitative terms? What is the effect of the typical acquisitional context for most of these learners, who seldom hear mother-tongue English and learn it in crowded understaffed schools after inadequate mother-tongue training? After giving a detailed account of the phonological, syntactic, discourse and lexical features of BSAfE, Gough stresses the urgent need for further studies in this rapidly changing variety of English: the phenomenon of code-switching needs attention, as does the social value of the range of varieties of English which is emerging among black speakers. Black attitudes to standard English as opposed to the valorisation of 'indigenised' black varieties also need careful monitoring. While BSAfE is a recognisably distinct variety which has a degree of institutionalisation, its form and functions are crucially dependent on the concomitant (and ever-changing) acquisitional context, which ultimately determines the degree of success of each learner.

Mesthrie's chapter discusses the focused variety of English now used as a first language by most people of Indian descent in Natal and rapidly changing due to the influence of the media and multi-racial education. After sketching the historical background of these speakers since their arrival in South Africa in 1860, he gives a convincing account of how and why language shift and transmission

occurred among the Indian immigrants, using Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) model. He argues that the pidgin Fanagalo predates the arrival of Indians, and that SAfIndE is not a relexified variety of Fanagalo but rather shows the influence of Indian substrate grammar. He then describes the features and characteristic processes of each of the basic lects of SAfIndE, showing consistently strong (but not total) affinities between the basilect and typical creoles. Mesthrie concludes that SAfIndE speakers, while having allegiance to basilectal forms in intimate speech, frequently also acquire a range of more standard styles for formal contexts.

The developmental picture of SAfE is complicated in a way not true of other ETEs in that there has been, from the beginning, extensive and intimate contact with another language: Afrikaans (Lass 1987:302). In her paper on Afrikaans English, Watermeyer makes an important contribution to our knowledge of this variety which is frequently seen merely as part of the SAfE continuum. She describes the emergence of white Afrikaner nationalism in the face of Anglicisation policies from 1811 until 1948 and explains the consequent strong language loyalty among white Afrikaans speakers, which was always (and is) more intense than among others in South Africa and which is frequently equated with ethnic identity. Recent sociopolitical changes are shown to be having a significant effect on attitudes towards English, which carries increasing prestige for many. While most South Africans intuitively recognise this variety on the basis of accent only and are inclined to confuse it with Extreme SAfE, Watermeyer argues that the characteristic features of Afrikaans English distinguish it as a diffuse variety, with some unique core characteristics, but overlapping at one end of the continuum with Extreme SAfE and at the other end with Respectable SAfE.

Cape Flats English, the dialect spoken largely by people formerly classified coloured who live in the windswept semi-arid areas around Cape Town, is the focus of Karen Malan's fascinating paper. Again the linguistic effects of inequalities of power and privilege are highlighted in accounting for this unique variety which has resulted from a history of prolonged and intimate contact with Cape Dutch, later Afrikaans, and several other languages (of both indigenous and exotic slave communities). Functional code-mixing was the result of people from a variety of backgrounds having to develop competence in the two dominant languages of the colony, often lacking exposure to the standard forms of either language. The effect of South Africa's socio-political history on these speakers, who had no emotional investment in either English or Afrikaans, accounts for the prolific and skilful borrowing and code-mixing and code-switching evident in the variety. Malan provides a clear account of characteristic features of this variety and focuses on the ongoing shifts towards English which it is undergoing as a consequence of the current generation of children learning as their first language

an L2 variety of English from Afrikaans-dominant parents, and being exposed to a standard form of English at schools.

Section C: Language Planning and Standards

The chapters in this section focus on language planning and the question of standardisation. Wright examines the effects of a political legacy of apartheid in preventing normal indigenisation and entrenching BSAfE as a non-native variety, analysing claims and assumptions about its acceptability. After differentiating between features which impede comprehensibility and those which do not, he makes a range of suggestions aimed at securing a culturally viable and educated variety of BSAfE for intra- and international usage.

The papers by Titlestad and Webb offer opposing views on the future of English in South Africa in their discussions of the new language clauses of the constitution. Titlestad takes the stance that English will inevitably play a powerful role as a very important *lingua franca* because of its role internationally. He argues that allowing market forces to come into play, and ensuring that a standardised English and not an evolving polymodel is promoted, will result in English playing a leading role among the languages in this country; a standardised English is seen as best suited to perform all the necessary functions because of its well-developed infrastructure supported by a substantial group of mother-tongue speakers, and its international standing.

Webb takes an opposing stance: in the interests of serving the needs of speakers of all languages in terms of the constitutional principle of multilingualism, language planning should be conducted from an Afrocentric and not a Eurocentric perspective, based on sociolinguistically relevant facts. All languages have equal rights, and affirmative action on behalf of African languages should, in his view, be encouraged. He advocates a non-prescriptive, more tolerant approach to the use of non-standard English, and emphasises the crucial role of attitudes in the success or failure of future language plans.

Lexicography is closely linked to the question of standardisation and prescriptivism, and Silva's paper traces the development of awareness of differences between SFAfE and other Englishes. Her review of primary lexicographical texts reveals prescriptive tendencies in some of the early texts, emphasising the need for accurate and objective practices among dictionary makers. The history and workings of the Dictionary Unit for SFAfE provides a backdrop for the entry for *tickey*, which clearly illustrates the complexities involved in lexicography. Silva also points to future needs for accessible and 'indigenised' dictionaries for all age groups, levels of expertise and particular geographical regions.

Section D: Issues in Education and Society

Language is inevitably closely tied to educational issues, which, in turn, are closely linked to language attitudes. Walters focuses exclusively on primary education, and the problems associated with the use of English as medium in black non-mother-tongue schools. He traces the long-term effects of apartheid on the former black education system and discusses the pros and cons of using English as medium of instruction and the problems involved in assessing levels of competence. Walters provides a critical review of the work of the Molteno Project (aimed at early literacy in English) as one potential method for coping with an education system which is in tatters but in which the clamour for English grows daily.

Murray and Van der Mescht's paper also discusses the unfortunate consequences of apartheid on the teaching of English, which plays such a disproportionate role as the language perceived to provide access to education and privilege in our society. They focus on the problems and challenges involved in training English teachers to cope with rapidly changing and increasingly multilingual classrooms and offer some solutions in helping teachers respond to varied levels of proficiency and different needs in different contexts, without succumbing to the danger of over-emphasis on English compared with other languages, or of prescriptivism.

Language attitudes are crucial to the success or failure of any language policy, particularly when legislative and executive actions concerned with language have the potential to influence discrimination and employment. Stereotypical perceptions are especially powerful in language learning, and this is the focus of Bosch and de Klerk's report on a matched guise survey of attitudes to English, Afrikaans and Xhosa in the Eastern Cape. They distinguish between instrumental and integrative attitudes and report strongly positive feelings about English among all informants. The prevailing attitudes towards the other main languages in South Africa have significant implications for the teaching of English in multilingual classrooms, and point to an urgent need for further research into this area.

In contrast to these macro-level studies, Chick's contribution focuses on the microlinguistic interpersonal aspects of English use in South Africa, reminding readers of the importance of a diachronic perspective on the interaction between sociolinguistic conventions and economic and sociopolitical changes. In reporting on socio-linguistic diversity among students on the Natal University campus with regard to cross-cultural compliment-response behaviour, he argues that relationships occurring in everyday encounters are mirrored in wider society and offers insights into how what takes place in interpersonal interactions has an effect on the opportunities available to people in broader society.

Section E: The Northern Neighbours

South Africa has much in common with its Northern neighbours, and in the final section of this volume, the status of English in some of these countries is discussed. Kamwangamalu and Chisanga provide a sociolinguistic description of English in the Swaziland context, using the 'New Englishes' paradigm and showing that Swaziland English is a unique colloquial second-language variety which has been institutionalised and indigenised to suit the needs of siSwati speakers in Swaziland.

Schmied presents a state-of-the-art overview of existing linguistic research on the status of English in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, the three landlocked neighbours of South Africa. The article critically assesses the concept of Central African English as an intermediate variety of sociolinguistic and linguistic features distinguishable from East and South African English. Schmied argues that there are valuable lessons to be learned from the language experiences of these countries, particularly regarding the pace of change and attempts to promote African languages in order to balance the need for efficient communication with the language rights of minority indigenous groups.

Both chapters highlight the interrelationships existing between South Africa and its neighbours, and the backwash effect of the apartheid (language) policy in South Africa and point to a stronger role for English in the whole Southern African region in future.

Directions for Future Research on English in South Africa

In trying to describe the identity of English in South Africa, and surveying the range of research by linguists over the years, one rapidly becomes aware of the fact that English in South Africa embraces a large number of varieties which, in their different ways, all reflect and embody aspects of the complex and subtle cultural unity they share. The chapters in this volume make it very clear that the varieties of English found in Southern Africa are recognizably distinct and have proven to be more than worthy of careful study and analysis.

English in South Africa does not have one defining context, but many - across cultures and languages (cf. Mesthrie 1992). In each context the language is manipulated differently as a medium of power, authority or cohesion. Many factors will determine the ultimate future of any language: Who uses it? What attitudes prevail towards its users? Does it have official status? Is it actively promoted? Is it a medium of instruction? Does it play an important role in official

education policy? What are the other languages of the region with which it shares functions in the community? During the next decade South Africa's languages, English included, will find themselves buffeted, constantly changing in form and function in a symbiotic response to the pushes and pulls of society and other languages with which they rub shoulders.

Ongoing descriptive work is necessary in order to monitor the effect of the media and of government policy on English and to make generalisations, especially regarding regional and social varieties of English. South African society is in transition and language, being the site both of cooperation and struggle, will inevitably mirror these tensions and loyalties, reflecting the various groups who use it, their heterogeneous viewpoints and the activities they engage in. These will need close monitoring over the next few years, especially with respect to the differences between native-speaker communities and non-native users.

An important focus of research should be on linguistic attitudes: will native speakers of English abandon linguistic chauvinism and replace it with tolerance? What sort of value will be placed on different varieties of English by members of all language groups? Kachru (1986:113) exhorts the appreciation and encouragement of the individuality of third world varieties of English in contributing to the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of English have created in the English-speaking world, but one needs to balance this with some acknowledgment of the ESL learner's resistance to learning a 'second-rate' version of English; their attitudes towards standard English need to be monitored too. Despite proponents of local, nativised or reduced forms of English it is likely to be difficult for such varieties to compete with standard varieties. As with all processes of language planning, it is not the selection or codification of the norm that is the problem, but its subsequent acceptance and implementation.

The new South African language policy will require researchers to focus their energies on the nature of the rapidly developing materials for ESL learners from African language backgrounds, and the success rates of an inadequate educational system in responding to the growing demand for teaching English. In a country where multilingualism is explicitly promoted, it will be important to monitor evidence of discrimination against people on the basis of their language, and of the effects on English on the promotion of previously marginalised languages. Closely related to this is the question of the economic value of languages other than English in the market-place: how valued are teachers of other languages? How much prestige do the other languages carry and what integrative value do they have, lacking, as they do, mutual intelligibility or the ability to serve as a neutral *lingua franca*?

English continues to be used for modernisation and social change, and to provide unprecedented access to mobility and advancement to native and non-