

Black South African English

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1 DEFINING BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

English is a world language, likely to continue to play a leading role internationally as an important language of education and as the language of choice for business, science and popular culture (Platt et al. 1984: 28). A consequence of its dominant position and growth as the language of power and as an important medium for the dissemination of knowledge is the striking increase in the number of those learning and using English as 'other' language. In this process English has acquired various identities and multiple ownerships (Kachru 1986: 31), one of them being black South African English (BSAE).

BSAE is the variety of English commonly used by mother-tongue speakers of South Africa's indigenous African languages. In terms of Platt et al.'s criteria (1984: 2-3), BSAE fits the category 'new English' in that it has developed through the education system as an L2* in an area where English is not the language of majority,

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* L2 = *second language*

and has become localised for use in intra-regional communication, as is typical of colonial contexts in which English has been imported to compete with indigenous languages.¹ However, defining BSAE precisely is problematic: strictly speaking, whose English is BSAE? Is it the English of those learners who have encountered only a smattering of English in informal contexts and use it occasionally for business or work purposes? Is it the variety of English used by those who have emerged from the education system at some stage after Grade 10, and who have experienced a more formal and extended exposure to English? Or is it a composite of all these varieties? Researchers will need to investigate this question more thoroughly before a definitive answer can be given.

Although reliable statistics are hard to come by, figures from the Central Statistical Services (1994) indicate that about 7 million black people in South Africa have a command of English as other language, a figure likely to expand commensurately with positive perceptions of the high instrumental value of English. Until recently BSAE tended to be discussed in prescriptive terms as a variety deviating from the norm, not acceptable in formal contexts at all, deficiencies in it attributable to interference from mother tongues or to poor tuition. The recent flood of heated and critical complaints from purists following its increasing use in public media underline its erstwhile status as second-rate 'non-standard' variety. But increasingly it is being viewed (and described) as a variety in its own right (Buthelezi 1995; Gough 1996;² Wade 1997), worthy of recognition, but more than that: an unavoidable fact of life. At the same time, its status and prestige appear to be undergoing a rapid change for the better.

1.1 The historical context

The roots of BSAE lie in the history of the teaching of English to the black people of South Africa. After early attempts to teach English to black children at missionary schools, a massive growth in the school population necessitated state assistance. From about 1935 in black schools the principle of education in the mother tongue was applied for the first eight years of school, and in 1953 the Bantu Education Act, against the weight of informed black opinion at the time, entrenched mother-tongue instruction up to the highest possible level for black pupils, and greatly increased the role of Afrikaans. Most of the mother-tongue English teachers in the system were slowly phased out, effectively denying black pupils access to native English speakers, except in the few remaining mission schools. This limited contact with native-speaker norms while learning English resulted in certain characteristic patterns of pronunciation and syntax (traceable to the mother tongue) being entrenched as norms of spoken BSAE, with consequential lowering of levels of comprehensibility (Wright 1996: 151).

The ideological force driving the education policy of the Nationalist government was apartheid, and studying through the mother tongue was a way of reinforcing separateness while at the same time supposedly supporting the inalienable human right to preserve separate identity, especially in the socio-political sphere. However, despite its potential to promote black consciousness and despite the obvious pedagogical advantages of acquiring initial literacy in the mother tongue, the

¹ Platt et al., however, seem uncertain about the status of BSAE, since to their thinking it developed in a territory where there was a sizeable presence of L1 (*first language*) speakers.

² The interested reader is referred to Gough (1996) for a fuller, more comprehensive literature survey of relevant works in this area. Reference to all of these works has not been repeated in this chapter.

policy failed, largely owing to deep suspicion regarding its ideological intention to create a semi-literate, isolated labour force (Mawasha 1982: 25). Demand for the forbidden grew: English was seen by many as the key to socio-economic advancement, and people failed to see the value of their own indigenous languages (which they already 'knew'), since these languages did not facilitate access to participation and mobility in wider society. As a result of the Soweto uprising of 1976 the Department of Bantu Education agreed in 1979 to allow schools, in consultation with parents, to choose their own medium of instruction (MOI) after the first four years of school, and hardly surprisingly, English emerged as the overwhelming choice. However, between 1984 and 1994 black education virtually collapsed, owing to the long-term effects of the underfunding of black education, overcrowded facilities and serious deficiencies in teacher training and teaching methodology. Exacerbating these problems was the fact that liberation forces increasingly began to use schools as a power base in the political struggle (Wright 1996: 151), causing major disruption.

By 1990, most teachers of English in Department of Education and Training (DET) schools were L2 speakers, products of Bantu education themselves, whose English was inadequate through no fault of their own. Despite an 'official' use of English as MOI, *de facto* there was and still is extensive use of African languages in the classroom, and pupils have little exposure to mother-tongue speakers of English, or varieties of English other than BSAE outside the classroom (Mugoya 1991, cited in Gough 1996: 54). Thus it is clear that for the average black child the context for learning English were highly inadequate and constrained during the apartheid era. High drop-out rates and low levels of proficiency in English have been the legacy of this system. For the vast majority, the quality of education has been abysmally low, and the extremely limited access to English (especially to a range of styles and functions) has resulted in very mixed levels of competence in English. It is difficult to ascertain how many South African black people have a 'knowledge of English', and estimates vary between 32 per cent and 61 per cent (see Gough 1996: 53). This difficulty is a reflection of the problem of defining exactly what constitutes 'knowledge of English'. It is also a reflection of the striking differences in competence among blacks, who range from completely fluent speakers and writers for whom English has become a 'second first language' (de Klerk 1996b) to those who are very low on the learner continuum, with almost no English at all. The question of which of these varieties on the learner continuum is a true reflection of BSAE is obviously also very difficult to answer.

1.2 The demographic context

In 1996 South Africa recognised its eleven major languages as official languages of the country in terms of its new constitution. Of its total population of 40.6 million, about 30.7 million are speakers of the nine indigenous African languages, while the former official languages, English and Afrikaans, are spoken by only 3.5 million and 5.8 million people respectively (Statistics South Africa 1996). Distribution of the indigenous languages tends to be geographically localised, and to vary significantly from province to province. For example, all eleven languages are spoken in Gauteng (formerly southern Transvaal) while only three are used to any significant degree in KwaZulu-Natal (Zulu, English and Afrikaans) and the Eastern Cape (Xhosa, English and Afrikaans), five in the Western Cape and nine in Mpumalanga (formerly

Eastern Transvaal).³ English is the only language that is significantly represented in all nine provinces, and consequently it is in demand as lingua franca for communication across language groups.

Although only 9 per cent of the country's population are mother-tongue speakers of English, there is a rapid increase in knowledge of English as an additional language (Schuring 1993: 17), with the RCM (Reaching Critical Mass) Survey reporting as many as 62 percent of South Africans having a knowledge of English and *Bua* (1993) reporting a figure of 43 per cent of South Africans speaking some English.⁴ Indeed, 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 have made it a strong candidate as internal *de facto* lingua franca: English is not only functionally attractive (providing access to higher education, the international arena and wealth and power) but it also carries positive connotations as the language of liberation and resistance to apartheid domination, because of its role in the ANC and PAC (*in the liberation struggle*)⁵ as the language of the struggle prior to 1994.

Despite the recent changes in state language policy, emphasising multilingualism and the rights of indigenous languages against English as a prerequisite for democracy (Sachs 1994), support for English in South Africa still seems to be relatively solid. Increasing efforts (since 1994) to preserve the ecological diversity of South Africa's languages do not seem to have had much effect in preventing English from showing an increasing tendency to monopolise many areas of public administration. In addition to its use in governmental contexts, and even more interesting, is the fact that English is increasingly predominant as the most popular default language in other multilingual contexts such as schools, university campuses or military camps, for talking to people from a variety of language backgrounds (de Klerk 1996b; de Klerk and Barkhuizen 1998). As one soldier in military camp put it: 'It's whereby you use English because I don't understand some languages like Venda and Sotho except Zulu which is similar to the Xhosa language. So it's whereby you have to speak English, and he has to speak English because he don't understand me as well' (de Klerk and Barkhuizen 1998: 166).

The Pan-South African Languages Board (PANSALB; a senate subcommittee, charged with a watchdog role in ensuring that the country's new language policy is carried out) has complained that the tendency in government tiers to use English as the sole medium of communication has showed a disturbing rise (*Eastern Province Herald*, 6 June 1997). In its most recent report, the Language Task Action Group (LANGTAG) (1996) explicitly denounced the steady drift at provincial and national level to the use of English only, and declared its intention to institute even stricter measures to counteract its insidious effect. Nevertheless, the power and appeal of English seems to be growing in South African, making the writings of Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994) and Sachs (1994: 1) about linguistic imperialism assume increasing relevance. It is in this context that BSAE has thrived, and has begun to develop fairly stable and recognisable linguistic features.

³ The big differences in estimates probably relate to the question of what constitutes 'knowledge of English' in qualitative terms - a highly problematic concept (see Gough 1996: 53)

⁴ Statistics from the Development Bank of South Africa cited in Democratic Party discussion document (1995:2).

⁵ editorial remarks (*italics in brackets*: here and subsequently)

2 FEATURES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

2.1 Phonology

2.1.1 Vowels

As is the case in other varieties of African English (Schmied 1991: 58 - 60), the vowel phonology of BSAE may be explained in terms of the influence of the native five-vowel system (as in the Nguni languages) or seven-vowel system (as in the Sotho languages) with a result in loss of contrasts in comparison to native varieties (Hundleby 1964; Adendorff and Savinni-Beck 1993). Thus, the vowels in words such as TRUT, BATH and PALM tend to be merged to /a/, while the vowels in TRAP, DRESS and NURS tend to be merged to /e/. The vowel in the set LOT and THOUGHT is /o/. The contrast between long and short vowels may be lost, so that the vowels in FLEECE and KIT may both be /i/ and the vowels in FOOT and GOOSE may be both /u/. Among the diphthongs, the vowels in PRICE, MOUTH and CHOICE may be extended over two syllables, giving <aji>, <awu> and <oji> respectively. The monophthongs <e> and <o> (raised allophones in Nguni, phonemes in Sotho) may be used as the vowel for FACE and GOAT. As stress is non-phonemic in Bantu languages, schwa tends to be realised as a full vowel (typically /a/ as in *mothər*; but it may also take on spelling pronunciation as in /e/ for *sevənty*).

2.1.2 Consonants

Consonantal systems in the local African languages are fairly complex, and the only English phonemes lacking generally are (..) and (...). These are typically pronounced as dental or alveolar stops <d> and <t>. Other features can be attributed to specific native-language influences. /tsh/ is a marginal phoneme in Zulu and may be replaced with /sh/ by Zulu speakers (Jacobs 1994), while Sotho speakers may pronounce the consonant cluster /kl/ as an ejective lateral affricate /tʃʰ/, a phoneme which occurs in the Sotho languages. There is little evidence in the literature that such differential pronunciation features are generally evaluated as markers of ethnicity or regional origin as they may do in Nigeria (Schmied 1991: 57). However, anecdotal evidence from casual interviews suggests that African speakers interacting in English can very often identify a person as having a different first language from their own.

Other more widespread consonantal features are a trilled /r/ sound (as opposed to an approximant). In addition, stops in the indigenous South African languages also appear to have a later voice onset time in comparison to white South African English (WSAE), and may also tend to be devoiced in word-final position. This may result in voiced stops being perceived as voiceless. Jacobs (1994: 23) claims that the cumulative effect of such consonantal and vowel features in what she refers to as the 'Zulu English mesolect' is an increase in homophony and a fairly drastic decrease in intelligibility.

2.1.3 Suprasegmental features

Generally it is suprasegmental features (tone, stress and intonation) rather than segmental features that appear to affect the intelligibility of varieties of English, including BSAE. Word stress may be assigned idiosyncratically, very often on the penultimate syllable, following the phonological rule in indigenous South African languages where this syllable is lengthened (Hundleby 1964: 80-1). Thus one may find *seˈventy*, *hospiˈtaˈlity*, and *ciˈgˈareˈtte* (with a resultant full vowel rather than schwa). Forms like *ˈ**commitˈtee* have also been attested, however. Our experience

with BSAE-speaking students of linguistics indicates a very marginal ability to assign native-speaker stress patterns to words.

As with other new Englishes, BSAE leans towards syllable rather than stress timing, probably due to native-language prosodic patterns (Lanham 1984; Genrich de Lyle 1985: 96-7). There is very little vowel reduction in connected speech as such, tone groups tend to be very short and phonological prominence is far more common than in WSAE. Consider the following example demonstrating these features:

But I think that MAYbe//SOME of the PEOple are complaining// about SECTION (Genrich de Lyle 1985: 96).

<KEY: // - tone group boundary

CAPS - prominence

CAPS and italic - focal prominence>

In BSAE phonology, prominence may not have the discourse functions of signalling contrast and the difference between given and new information (as is typically the case in native varieties), because in the indigenous South African languages grammatical and syntactic means are used to indicate contrast and given and new information. Lanham (1984) finds that in BSAE such prominence appears to be assigned to content words generally in pre-coded speech (i.e. written text read out loud), while Genrich de Lyle (1985: 98) finds that it may be assigned more or less arbitrarily in conversation. Casual observation of speakers with an otherwise high degree of fluency in English also suggests that if there is an auxiliary within a sentence, this tends to attract sentence stress (without necessarily indicating contrast or emphasis) as in 'the result WILL be announced later'.

Very little study has been done on phonetic variation along the basilect-acrolect continuum. Hundleby (1964) does, however, discuss some variation in this respect and seems to indicate that differences between standard WSAE and BSAE tend to be more phonetic than phonological. This area of study is still a wide open one.

2.2 Grammatical features

BSAE shares grammatical features with a range of new Englishes generally (Platt et al. 1984), and new Englishes in Africa in particular (Schmied 1991: 64-76; Bokamba 1992; Bamgbose 1992; Jowatt and Nnamonou 1985). Those grammatical features listed have been typically derived from student writing at Grade 12 and university level (see Gough <1996: 61> for a comprehensive list of further references), since studies focusing on naturalistic data from speakers with differing individual profiles such as de Klerk (1997) and Mesthrie (1997) are somewhat rare. The following examples are typical of this cited generally:

(1) Non-count as count nouns

(a) You must put more *efforts* into your work.

(b) She was carrying *a luggage*.

(2) Omission of articles

(a) He was * good man

(3) Extensive use of resumptive pronouns

(a) My standard 9, I have enjoyed *it* very much.

(b) The man who I saw *him* was wearing a big hat.

- (4) Gender conflation in pronouns
She came to see me yesterday (where the referent is male).
- (5) Noun phrases not always marked for number
 We did all our *subject* in English.
- (6) Extension of the progressive
 (a) Even racism *is still existing*.
 (b) Men *are still dominating* the key positions in education.
 (c) She *was loving* him very much.
- (7) No singular third person indicative present
 The survival of a person depend on education
- (8) Idiosyncratic patterns of complementation
 (a) That thing made me *to know* God.
 (b) I felt inferior *to be* there.
 (c) I went to secondary school *for doing* my Standard 6.
 (d) I tried *that I might see her*.
- (9) Simplification of tense
 (a) I wish that people in the world *will* get educated.
 (b) We * supposed to stay in our homes.
- (10) Past tense not always marked
 (a) In 1980 the boycott *starts*
 (b) We stayed in our home until the boycott *stops*.
- (11) New prepositional verb forms
 (a) He *explained about* the situation.
 (b) They were *refusing with* my book.
 (c) I find it difficult *to cope up* with my work
- (12) Structures of comparison
 (a) She was beautiful *than* all other women.
 (b) Some people think they are better *to* others.
- (13) Use of *too* and *very much* as intensifiers
 (a) She is *too* beautiful (i.e. very).
 (b) Hatred is *very much* common.
- (14) Use of *in order that* in purpose clauses
 (a) He went there *in order that* he sees her.
- (15) Generalisation of *being* as a participial
 He left *being* thirsty (= 'He left in a thirsty state').
- (16) New pronoun forms
 She was very unhappy *of which* it was clear to see.
- (17) Question order retained in indirect questions
 I asked him *why did he go*.
- (18) Use of subordinators
 (a) *Although* she loved him *but* she didn't marry him.
 (b) *If at all* you do not pay, you will to to jail. ('If at II' seems to be internationally one unit.)
- (19) Invariant *nè* in tag questions (borrowed from Afrikaans)
 You start again by pushing this button, *nè?*
- (20) New quantifier forms
 (a) *Others* were drinking, *others* were eating.
 (b) I stay *some few* miles away.
- (21) *The most thing* for 'the thing I <verb> most'

- (22) *The most thing* I like is apples.
X's first time for 'the first time that X ...'
This is my first time to go on a journey.
- (23) *Can be able to* as modal verb phrase
 I *can be able to* go.

Explanations of such features are covered in depth by Gough (1994); they appear to relate both to mother-tongue transfer (which explains their specific African quality) as well as universal feature relating to principles of language learning and usage (which explains their similarities with other new Englishes generally). On the basis of naturalistic data collected in interviews with speakers of varying degrees of competence, de Klerk (1997) also notes that a number of the features listed here (including the lack of tense and concord marking) are common to pidginisation processes universally.

It is important not to treat all of these grammatical structures monolithically and as all equally representative of a uniform BSAE. There is, in this respect, some evidence of considerable variability with regard to the relative acceptability and utilisation of such structures. Gough (1996), for instance, shows that grammaticality judgements of twenty Xhosa-speaking teachers indicate that some grammatical features may be more acceptable than others among educated speakers of BSAE. Thus for example, structures such as (24) and (25) below were described as ungrammatical by about 90 per cent of the sample. However, structures such as (26) and (27) were typically regarded as grammatical, with only around 20 per cent of the sample indicating that they were ungrammatical.

- (24) I tried that I might see her.
 (25) He was carrying a luggage.
 (26) She was refusing with my book.
 (27) He explained about the situation.

Such figures suggest that, at least in more acrolectal varieties, certain features are more 'entrenched' or 'fossilised' than others. The study also suggests that among educated speakers a fairly traditional norm of 'correctness' continues to act as model. Somewhat contrary results, however, are suggested in preliminary research involving first-year students at the University of the Western Cape (a university with predominantly African and coloured students). Given the task of correcting sentences such as:

- (28) After chairperson have being chosen, she will leave for Cape Town.

Around 90 per cent of the 50 ('coloured') Afrikaans-speaking students produced standard versions of the sentence, while only around 30 per cent of the 250 speakers of African languages did so. Surprisingly, the feature most commonly changed in the above sentence by the students speaking African languages was to change *being* to *been* (around 50 per cent of students), while over 80 per cent of the students failed to correct either the missing article or to correct *have* to *has*. This may be due to the stigmatising of particular constructions in formal education, which may raise them more to the level of awareness than others. More generally we may note that there is increasing research that relates similar grammatical variation to pragmatic functions and social variables (Mesthrie 1997; Wade 1995).

2.3. Vocabulary

A range of words from African languages reflecting African experience are commonly used in BSAE and have indeed become part of SAE (and 'fanakalo') usage more generally. Examples include *kwela-kwela* ('minibus-taxi') or a police pick-up van', *mbaqanga* 'a type of music', *morabaraba* 'a board game', *impimpi* 'a police informant' and *mama* 'a term of address for a senior woman'. Some terms may have a regional basis. For instance, *skebenga* (= *sgebengu*) 'criminal' seems to be found in (SAE and fanakalo) in Xhosa-speaking areas, *madumbies* (= *amadumbe*) 'a type of edible root' in KwaZulu-Natal and *skeberesh* (= *iskebereshe*) 'a loose woman' is commonly used in Gauteng. Branford (1987) and Magura (1984) provide a rich source of such items.

The use of certain English words reveals the type of semantic extension common to other non-native varieties in general (Platt et al. 1984) and African varieties of English in particular (Bokama 1992: 135-138; Schmied 1991: 87-91). The following examples illustrate this phenomenon:

(33) He *proposed* love to her ('He told her that he loved her').

(34) *Pass* my regards to the family.

(35) I must quickly *touch* the beauty salon (i.e. 'drop into').

(36) You are *scarce* (i.e. 'I haven't seen you for a while').

The idioms in (34) and (36) may well be spreading in SAE. Other examples that have commonly been noted are the predicative use of *late* (as a euphemism for 'die') as in *My father is late*, and the use of *somebody* for 'person', as in *He is a very important somebody* (see Buthelezi (1995) and Adey (1997) for more South African examples). Another common feature is the redundant use of *each and every*, used synonymously with *each*. There are also differences and restrictions in stylistic range, so that word-pairs such as *abode/house* and *mommy/mother* may not necessarily be differentiated in terms of relative degrees of formality or informality. There may also be connotational differences: it appears, for instance, that the public use of terms for sexual organs is even more strongly tabooed than in Anglo-Saxon communities - a fact that has made AIDS education problematic (see Crawhall 1993). A number of these particular lexical characteristics have also been noted in African varieties of English outside South Africa (Jowatt and Nnamonou 1985).

2.4 Discourse patterns

While the development of particular styles of discourse has been seen as a fundamental part of the process of nativisation of English (Kachru 1992), in South Africa there has been comparatively little research into discourse features of BSAE, particularly outside academic contexts. Pragmatic transfer has been claimed in BSAE in terms of a preference for indirectness over the Anglo-Saxon norm of directness or getting to the point (see Chick 1985, 1989). It has also been noted that African norms of deference towards superordinates may be carried over to English interaction (Gough 1996; Genrich de Lyle 1985: 125). This may be particularly prevalent in the educational context, where lack of student participation may indicate respect for the teacher as the repository of knowledge. Peires (1992: 11) also notes very little participation from females in mixed-sex conversations, a carry-over of the traditional subservience of African women in African society (cf. de Klerk 1997).

2.4.1. *Speech acts*

In terms of differences in the *realisation* of specific speech acts (as discussed generally by Kasper 1992), we may note that, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, the expression *sorry* does not necessarily indicate apology involving the acceptance of blame by the speaker. Instead, it tends to be used as a general marker of sympathy for hearer of misfortune, whatever its source, and may thus be used, for example, when a speaker sees the hearer bump herself or trip accidentally.

In requests it is commonly noted that the performative *I request* or *I ask* is often used by African speakers in unequal encounters, as in *I ask for an extension*. Such uses reflect a transfer of African-language structures and indicate the African norm of acknowledging the status of a superordinate as a person in the *are-giving* position of granting a request to the subordinate petitioner. This is different from the Anglo-Saxon norm in which there is often the expectation, witnessed by the use of modal forms (as in *Could you please give me an extension*), that a person in authority may have the ability but not the desire to grant a request.

2.4.2 *Conversational norms*

With regard to conversational norms, Peires (1992: 10-11) noted that self-selection rather than other-selection is the norm in discourse in English between Xhosa speakers, and that interruption and overlapping are far less frequent than in English first-language discourse. She found that interlocutors will wait until the current speaker has finished, and then will self-select to make a response. In addition, speakers took significantly longer between turns than is common for native speakers of English. Such intervals were not (as they would be in native-speaker interaction) filled with hesitation markers or floor-holding devices, and apparently caused no discomfort (cf. Chick 1985, 1989). Of possible significance here is the fact that Ndiki (1997), in his research on the development of conversational competence among African high-school pupil, noted that very little attention is given to developing conversational interaction in the English-language class, and pupils have far less confidence in conversational interaction than in producing written language.

2.4.3 *Discourse markers*

BSE discourse is also characterised by idiosyncratic discourse markers (as described by Schiffrin 1986) that appear to be strongly influenced by the mother tongue.

(i) *in fact*

The phrase *in fact* in native English conversation (as in *In fact, he's very rich*, for instance) is used for emphasis or to underscore a point. In Black South African English discourse this marker is particularly common and does not appear to have this meaning, as is evident in the following conversation:

A. Hello, doctor.

B. Hi, Vuyisile. (pause)

A. *In fact*, I want to talk to you about my essay.

(ii) *I can say that*

The use of the italicised expressions below is another feature of BSAE conversation:

(37) *In my opinion* I can say he is not correct.

(38) *I can say that* this is an interesting book.

(39) *On my side* I do not think this is relevant.

These expressions are essentially equivalent to a common expression in African language discourse, such as *ndingathi*, 'I can say' or *ngoluvo lwam*, 'in my opinion'. They are routinely and formulaically used in conversation in a way somewhat equivalent to the English 'I think'. The phrase *I can say* does not really mean what it does in native-speaker conversation (cf. also Peires 1992: 6; Wissing 1987: 84).

(iii) *Again*

Again may be used as a marker of additional information (something like 'in addition'). This also appears to be due to the influence of a marker common in African languages which covers the sense of both 'again' and 'in addition':

(40) Smoking is bad for health. *Again* it affects people around the smokers.

(iv) *By all means*

The phrase *by all means*, rather than being a discourse marker of assurance, as it is in native-speaker English, typically functions as an intensifier, as exemplified in (41), which could be glossed as 'You should try to do the best you can':

(41) You should try *by all means* to do your best.

(v) *Information structure*

While information structure in discourse is typically signalled in native-speaker English by stress and intonation, in BSAE (as is the case in the African languages themselves) word order and morphological devices appear to be used far more often for signalling informational relatedness. As we have seen, in fact, stress within the sentence may not indicate salience at all, and very often seems somewhat randomly assigned, as the following relevant examples from BSAE show (Gough 1996: 67; Wissing 1987: 151):

(42) The best education, I need to get it.

(43) A student, if he cheats, he will be expelled.

(44) She informed her lecturer that the extension, she wanted it for another reason.

Mesthrie (1997) notes that, as opposed to the general explanation of simple transfer from African languages, such instances, although occurring more frequently in BSAE, are very similar in function to topicalisation, contrast and focusing in general English usage. Wade (1995) holds, on the other hand, that in many instances such topicalisation constructions, unlike the case of native varieties, may be used to indicate change of topic in extended discourse.

2.4.5 Stylistic features

With regard to stylistic features, formal written BSAE shares with other new Englishes the penchant to the florid – a tendency towards ornamental English, using circumlocution, the idiosyncratic use of proverbs and Latinate vocabulary, such as the extensive use of *whereby*, as exemplified in the words of the soldier interviewed at the military camp (see section 1.2).

The following extract from a letter by a black academic published in the *University of Transkei News* (August/September 1992) illustrates these features nicely:

It is important not to forget that there is a struggle at an advanced stage going on in South Africa, Transkei and logically also at the Faculty of Education at Unitra. Our struggle, with an important dimension of empowering the indigenous black victims of apartheid, is to be pursued in every corner and sphere of life in our country including in the Faculty of Education in Unitra. It must be waged here and everywhere ... Indigenous people in the faculty must be given way to take the bull by the horns and advance our struggle. We cannot sit idly by and read about contributions from (names of various universities) while we sit like frightened frogs in the face of a dying snake ... Indigenous people are knocking on the door to take what is their birthright.

A range of explanations for the occurrence of this style has been offered both for new Englishes in general (Platt et al. 1984: 148-50) and BSAE in particular (Wissing 1987: 179; Scheffler 1978: 26). Such explanations include rhetorical transfer from native language, the attitude that the only good English is more formal English, or simply restrictions in the knowledge of English register.

In the formal academic prose of students from disadvantaged backgrounds there are often indications of a lack of exposure to the formal conventions of academic literacy and basic skills (Jefferay 1993), a limited ability in 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' (Murray 1990), a dominance of a narrative rather than expository mode (Genrich de Lyle 1985: 125) and the possible effects of the transfer of strategies found in formal oral styles in African languages (Gouch 1998). Consider the following example produced by a student of linguistics at Rhodes University who is a mother-tongue Xhosa speaker, writing on the topic of how she acquired English:

Problem I experienced with second language was that I was not able to perform and also not good in writing as well. I only speak second language when I was going to the shop by asking prices of the goods. The only thing that motivated me was because I wanted to pass and my teacher used to tell us whoever wants a job one will be forced to speak English.

I was having problem speaking English. I was having an attitude towards second language but there wasn't choice. I was forced. I was experiencing some problem with learning second language because in my family English was not a spoken language even by mistake. I was speaking English in the classroom after that I was not speaking because there wasn't a person to speak with. The fact that I was coming from a working class family made me to suffer at school because every subject was taught in English during my Higher Primary (Standard 3-5). There were no people through which I can speak the second language with except with my teacher at school

The worst of all because I was from working class there were no enough source like libraries within the location and even at home there were no English

books to read not television unlike middle class and upper class homes whereby one was enjoying the privileges of many be having some magazines and books.

Besides poignantly revealing many of the grammatical features discussed above, this essay also demonstrates the 'waffle phenomenon' characteristic of certain types of non-native referential discourse more generally. This phenomenon appears to result from writers feeling that they are not expressing their ideas clearly in the linguistic forms to which they are restricted and needing to repeat themselves in order to get their message across.

2.5 Code-switching

The mixing of English and vernacular languages in the same conversation is a common feature of black south African discourse, as is the case more generally in the new English-speaking world (Myers-Scotton 1989; D'Souza 1992), where it forms part of its users' total stylistic repertoire. It may be the norm or, in Myers-Scotton's terms, the unmarked choice among certain social groups (typically the educated elite) whose membership is symbolised by using both languages. As Myers-Scotton (1989: 343) notes, while English symbolises membership of the elite, educated and powerful, because the participants' other (specially African) group membership is also salient to them, it is not used exclusively but rather together with the vernacular. Consider the following example recorded on a university campus (Herbert 1996: 3), where such switching is particularly common. The three students are discussing a student protest at the University of Witwatersrand:

- A. I-*Adminiyazi ukuthi i-power yama-students ikwi-mass-sction. And if they discredit mass action they will have conquered.* (The administration knows that student power lies in mass action ...)
- B. Yinye into abangayazi ukuthi *we cannot let them get away with this.* (There is one thing they don't know that ...)
- C. Into ecasulayo ukuthi kube iqenjana elincane eli-*protestayo*. (The annoying thing is that it turns out to be a small group that is involved in the protest action.)

Code-switching also appears to be a feature of certain urban varieties, such as Soweto Zulu slang. Consider the following example from Mfusi (1989: 31), which also includes switches to Afrikaans (in bold):

I-Chiefs isidle nge-*referee*'as *optional time*, *otherwise* ngabe ihambe sleg. Maar *whybengastochi this system ye-injury time?*

(Chiefs <a local soccer team> have won owing to referee's optional time, otherwise they could have lost. But why is this system of injury time not phased out?)⁵

3 SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

3.1. Attitudes

Given the dramatic shifts in socio-political power in South Africa recently, and because of the growing demographic status of its speakers, attitudes towards BSAE are rapidly changing and it is enjoying increased vitality in a very favourable ideo-

⁵ *Referees* and *injury time* are better considered loanwords rather than examples of code-switching.

logical milieu (Wade 1997). The stigma associated with the use of non-standard varieties, so strong in the past, has been replaced by a growing assertiveness and confidence in the value of SAE varieties, including BSAE. One may go so far as to say that it is no longer simply a case of covert prestige being attached to BSAE (see Smit 1996); instead, the prestige is becoming more overt. Contributing factors are its use as a major language of government combined with the rising socio-economic status of its speakers, who are rapidly forming a black middle class: the *Financial Mail* (13 June 1997) shows that almost as many blacks (3.5 million) as whites (4 million) comprise the top socio-economic bracket in the country (cited in Wade 1997).

Given the current focus in South Africa on democracy, non-racialism and egalitarianism, there has been increasing emphasis on democratic language rights as well as an awareness of the linguistic difficulties prevailing in the country. As a result, prescriptive concern for correctness has declined, and tolerance and mutual respect have led to more emphasis on getting the message across, rather than on elitist requirements regarding concord, tense and other grammatical niceties. The prospects are very good for greater acceptance of variability in educational contexts and in business. We are certainly witnessing this in the media, where serious announcements and up-market advertisements are increasingly in BSAE accents,⁶ reflecting changing perceptions of its status, authority and persuasive appeal. This growth in the prestige of BSAE is likely to lead to increasing confidence among BSAE speakers and learners, who, because they can identify strongly and positively with the variety, are likely to master it more easily. In addition, such a variety may act as a powerful national unifier, bridging the gap between speakers of often very different indigenous languages.

While acknowledging the growth of more positive attitudes to BSAE in South Africa, it would be inaccurate to claim that support for English (of any variety) is unequivocal: trends in the growth of the appeal of BSAE will probably be slowed down by three different factors. First, the traditional voices of prescriptivists, both academic and non-academic, continuing to make themselves heard, fighting against changes in standards and refusing to recognise the validity of BSAE. Second, it is very likely that the steadily increasing numbers of young black South Africans emerging from former whites-only English-medium schools, who typically acquire something closer to standard SAE by the time they leave school, will counteract the appeal of BSAE. With their privileged educational backgrounds, these young people undoubtedly will form the elite class of the future, and are very likely to work towards maintaining the normative value of SAE, or even conservative (exonormative) English as opposed to ethnical marked BSAE ('elite closure' in Myers-Scotton's terms (1993); see also Wade 1997). Third, many speakers of African languages experience a love-hate relationship with English, and find themselves forced to make an effort to master it only for instrumental reasons. Many learners of English experience deep ambivalences in their relationship to it, and Peirce (1995: 19) uses the notion of 'investment' instead of instrumental or integrative motivation to explain the apparent contradiction between learners' motivation to learn English and their sometimes ambivalent desire to speak it. An invest-

⁶ One needs to be careful to distinguish between accent and other features of BSAE. While the phonological effect on English of indigenous black languages is distinctive and almost unavoidable, the syntactic and lexical aspects of BSAE are not much in evidence in formal contexts of use at this stage.

ment in English will pay off only in certain aspects of the lives of non-English South Africans, and it needs to be worth their effort.

In addition it will be increasingly important to monitor ongoing changes in the role and status of BSAE. Patterns of language choice and use are related to socio-economic and political process, and to the distribution of knowledge and power, and for these reasons the role, status and development of BSAE in South Africa are likely to change dramatically in the next decade, significantly altering patterns of communication.

Peirce (1990: 108) argued that 'People's English ... is a struggle to appropriate English in the interests of democracy in South Africa': nevertheless one must ask to what uses such a variety (if it is one) is put, and what meanings it may carry. Several educationists support efforts to maintain some sort of a standard (Wright 1996; Titlestad 1996), while others argue persuasively for the need to resist these pressures (Webb 1996) and advocate the recognition of **naturally evolved local forms of English suited to the needs of their speakers**. Wright (1996: 154) points out the irony inherent in the support of BSAE by elite black writers and academics who express their views in sE (*standard English*).

The problem seems to lie in interpretations of the concept of 'democratic language rights'. For some, this implies the need to recognise and promote the **localised forms that language takes** as equally viable and effective as the standard. For others, it implies an obligation (on the part of the state and educators) to deliver to learners a model of English that has international currency and will afford them the advantages that others the world over enjoy once they have mastered sE. Proponents of this point of view recognise that black varieties of English are legitimate and meet the immediate communicative needs of local speakers. However, they also see such varieties as stigmatising their speakers in wider linguistic contexts, and limiting their comprehensibility and their opportunities to participate in the global village on an equal intellectual and economic footing with speakers of other varieties of English which have greater currency worldwide. The attitudes towards BSAE of both South Africans and other speakers of English will need careful investigation before any serious claims can be made about changes in the status of BSAE.

3.2 Bilingualism and literacy

It is only speakers of dominant and prestigious languages who can afford to be monolingual; fluent speakers of the indigenous languages of South Africa in their day-to-day lives, because they speak subordinate (*subordinated!*) languages, have been deprived of power, prestige and economic benefits and have been confronted with a need for English as well. They have had to become bilingual or multilingual. As Phillipson et al. (1995: 487-8) put it, 'it is possible that we are witnessing, in tandem with an increased recognition of minority language rights, the emergence at the ... global levels, of a diglossia in which "international" languages (English is the most obvious case) are used for high-prestige purposes, while the local language is progressively confined to the domestic, private sphere'. In the case of South Africa, the variety of English that is very likely to take precedence is BSAE, rather than any other standardised form of English. However, not all speakers of BSAE can be seen as being really proficient in English.

While bilingualism can broadly be viewed as an ability to process two languages in the oral and written modes, wide ranges of relative proficiency are possible, especially in the oral domain. The most powerful factor influencing a person's bilingualism is the social context, and South Africa's political history, while

on the one hand forcing many people to develop some competence in English, has on the other prevented them from acquiring sufficient competence in it to further their personal ambitions, by failing to provide adequate support for its acquisition and by severely limiting access to mother-tongue English speakers. Most speakers of African languages encounter very little English of any kind, and it could be argued in some cases that they do not speak a recognisable variety of BSAE, but that each has arrived at a different stage on a learner-language continuum (de Kadt 1993: 314). The very rudimentary (pidgin-like) forms of English used by many black South Africans cannot be classified as representative of BSAE, and in such cases speakers could not be termed 'bilingual' in the stricter sense of the word. Their level of competence in English reflects an incomplete educational process and this explains why descriptions of black varieties of English often tend to highlight negative aspects and to compare them with better-recognised varieties of English, rather than acknowledge the development of a unique BSAE.

Indeed, to view BSAE uncritically as a means of access to power and self-improvement which will automatically be accompanied by a range of social and educational benefits is grossly misguided. At present BSAE offers no guarantee to any of these, and 'to lead students to believe that there is a one-way relationship between particular genres taught in school and those positions (of power) is to set them up for disappointment and disillusion' (Street 1993: 122). Literacy is a set of social practices that function to empower or disempower people, and the real literacies of true power, while being understood implicitly by those who use them, in commerce and government, are not taught in educational institutions. They certainly are not taught through the medium of BSAE, written or spoken. It would probably be true to say that the vast majority of black South Africans achieve, at best, a functional command of English, enabling them to understand signs, read newspaper headlines, fill out applications, etc. They lack the more empowering cultural and critical literacies (see Williams and Snipper 1990) which usually operate through more prestigious forms of English.

3.3 Language loss

A possible consequence of the growing appeal of English, whether traditional standardised varieties or BSAE, is language shift among generations of children who now attend English-medium (formerly white, often private) schools. Their competence in the mother tongue is already decreasing (Schlebusch 1994: 98), and informal observations confirm an incomplete command of an African language among many black children attending such schools. Despite energetic attempts by the state to legislate and entrench language rights, little is being achieved on the ground to maintain the indigenous languages: many teachers are not equipped or trained to teach these languages, and prospects for the establishment of adequate training facilities are not promising. Progress on devising L2 syllabuses for the indigenous languages is slow, and support among mother-tongue speakers for their own languages is worryingly low. This attitude is partly attributable to apartheid policies of the past: while the Nationalist government ensured the development of the nine indigenous languages (via separate language boards and enforced mother-tongue instruction), this reinforced a view (among mother-tongue speakers) that these languages must be inferior if they were reserved for black people. This attitude shows now in rising registration figures of black children at English-medium schools, and in increasing evidence of lack of support from mother-tongue speakers for their indigenous languages. In addition, reports of some African children speak-

ing English at home and African languages at school are indicative of an identity crisis among these children.

3.4 The future of BSAE

The structured inequalities of South African society are played out in language, and specifically in English (de Klerk 1997: 114). Ordinary South Africans who do not speak English as a mother tongue face a dilemma in a world where English holds the upper hand and has a privileged status compared with African languages.

South Africa's people are unlikely ever to be free not to learn English, owing to the huge economic, political and ideological constraints that make the 'choice' of English inevitable.

This would further reinforce English as the language of power and prestige, the crucial gatekeeper to social, educational and economic progress and full participation by the mass of people in political and economic processes. Despite recent changes in the country to redress former linguistic imbalances by improving the status of the indigenous languages and downgrading English and Afrikaans, the pressure to master English has not declined. But the means to do so have deteriorated rapidly: the country now faces an unprecedented educational crisis: huge numbers of experienced teachers left the profession in 1997, enticed by severance packages in order to adjust the racial demography of the teaching profession. At the turn of the twentieth century there are fewer English-speaking teachers than ever before to provide some sort of acceptable model to learners in schools, and provincial governments admit to being unable to meet the cost of paying salaries, electricity bills and buying textbooks. Apart from those privileged few who can afford the luxury of private education, black South African learners face the bleak prospect of unmotivated and poorly trained teachers in cash-strapped schools. Whatever form BSAE takes in the next decade will be determined by levels of formal and informal exposure to English, but if these drop below a certain minimum, the comprehensibility of BSAE will almost certainly be jeopardised.

With such a rapid decline in levels of competence in English, the power and elitism of the privileged few who have mastered sE will probably be enhanced and entrenched, while the masses will find themselves unable to improve their own English because of a massive national decline in competence. The question that therefore remains to be answered is the degree to which variants of BSAE will drift away from L1 English before a backlash arises, either from educators or from the learners themselves. The success of current efforts to resist value judgements and recognise the worth of BSAE will depend not only on the goodwill of South Africans, and on the co-operation of all speakers of English, worldwide, but on the rate at which the variety drifts away from recognised standard forms of English. It remains to be seen whether a recognisable variety of BSAE will make its mark proudly and globally as a distinctive and recognisable variety of English, equal in all respects to British, Australian or South African standard varieties.

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