

A view on South Africa

Vivian DE KLERK (ed.). *Focus on South Africa*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1996. 328 pages.

Kathleen HEUGH, Amanda SIEGRÜHN and Peter PLÜDDEMANN (eds.). *Multilingual Education for South Africa*. Johannesburg: Heinmann, 1995. ix + 150 pages.

Russell H. KASCHULA and Christine ANTHONISSEN. *Communicating Across Cultures in South Africa: Towards a Critical Language Awareness*. Johannesburg etc.: Hodder & Stoughton, and Witwatersrand University Press, 1995. vii + 120 pages.

L.W. LANHAM, David LANGHAM, Arie BLACQUIERE and Laurence WRIGHT. *Getting the Message in South Africa. Intelligibility. Readability. Comprehensibility*. Howick: Brevitas, 1995. iii + 132 pages.

Rajend MESTHRIE (ed.). *Language and Social History. Studies in South African Sociolinguistics*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1995. xx + 352 pages.

The mid-1990s have seen the renewal of a vigorous debate in South Africa around the issue of language, as indicated by the appearance of the five books to be discussed here. Democratisation has been accompanied by major shifts in the language debate, away from the exclusive focus on English and Afrikaans, and towards the multiplicity signalled by the eleven official languages now enshrined in the Constitution. Of course the appearance of the Interim Constitution in 1993 and the final Constitution in 1996 does not mean that the language debate is now over. As Wright comments, '[t]he new political dispensation has quite rightly prompted language specialists and others to re-think the South African language conundrum. At such a historic juncture, it is appropriate to throw the full pack of cards in the air many times to see the different ways they could fall.' (Lanham et al. 1995: 1) Among the contributors to these publications, however, a high degree of consensus seems to have been reached as to the policies to be pursued: the multilingualism required by the Constitution must indeed be implemented, for this is the most promising

linguistic route to democracy and social justice. Yet English will long continue to play a substantial role. It is at this point that concern tends to be voiced, for the unquestioned perpetuation of the present hegemony of English is seen as one of the chief dangers to democracy.

This newly heralded multilingualism has consequences for any post-apartheid discussion of English — as a glance at the works under consideration soon shows. Linguists can no longer discuss English in isolation, or simply as an extension of the metropolitan English from which it originated; the varying impact of its present linguistic neighbours must be acknowledged. Furthermore the meaning of the term 'English language' has broadened substantially to include the different varieties of English spoken in South Africa, including non-standard varieties and specifically, the L2 varieties about which little is as yet known.

Of the five books under consideration, only de Klerk (1996) and Lanham et al. (1995) focus primarily on English. These two, together with Mesthrie's more wide-ranging volume (1995), are written from a sociolinguistic perspective

and for an academic readership. The collection of original articles edited by de Klerk seeks to provide an 'ongoing record of current scholarship' (1996: 9) in the field of English in South Africa, by presenting an historic and synchronic treatment of sociocultural and pedagogical issues. The five original articles in Lanham et al's volume (1995) focus on the crucial issue of 'effective communication' (1995: 1), with the intention of making a 'small but deliberate intervention in the debate on South Africa's linguistic future' (1995: 1). Mesthrie's substantial collection of articles (only five of the twenty-five have been previously published) seeks to 'build a solid foundation for the discipline of sociolinguistics in South Africa, by giving specialist treatments of salient sociohistorical and sociolinguistic issues concerning a variety of languages.' (1995: xviii) Its two main thrusts are the sociohistory of languages and language varieties, and language contact. The final two volumes, written for a broader readership, each address a specific issue, respectively education (Heugh et al. 1995) and cross-cultural communication (Kaschula and Anthonissen 1995). The hegemonic position of the English language is reflected in its pivotal position in the discussion of these more general topics.

In the following, I will look at selected themes which figure prominently both in these works and in the language debate generally: South African varieties of English, English in multilingual South Africa, the question of a standard variety, English in education, and cross-cultural communication.

The focus of research into *South African varieties of English* has shifted substantially in the last decade. Clearly, English is being reconceptualised to represent the varieties actually spoken in the country, in their numerical preponderance. Branford's valuable 'Preliminary overview' of English in South Africa, for

instance, considers L1 English last, 'because most South Africans experience English as a second language' (de Klerk 1996: 34). In Section 2 of de Klerk's book, the 'new' English varieties introduced historically by Branford are individually described and grounded in their respective communities: Gough presents Black South African English (1996: 53-77), Mesthrie, South African Indian English (1996: 79-98), Watermeyer, Afrikaans English (1996: 99-124) and Malan, Cape Flats English (1996: 125-148). Mesthrie's volume has a similar range: he includes a discussion of South African English by Lass (1995: 89-106), Black South African English by Buthelezi (a reprint of an earlier article, 1995: 242-250) and an article of his own on South African Indian English (1995: 251-264). In addition, McCormick discusses the language spoken in District Six, Cape Town, in terms of code-switching (1995: 193-208). It should be noted that the quantity of research on which these several contributions can draw varies greatly. As Gough points out: 'While research into white varieties of English in South Africa is fairly well established, research examining the English of black South Africans is still in its infancy' (de Klerk 1996: 53).

The names used for the various varieties present something of a problem, varying as they do between ethnic labels and derivations from first languages and place names. Branford lists the varieties spoken by 'white speakers of Afrikaans, coloured people, blacks, Indians and English-speaking whites' and comments: 'An alternative classification by language variety was tried and found impracticable. A racial classification has the advantage of opposing a social variable (racial or administrative grouping) to a linguistic one (language or language variety)' (de Klerk 1996: 34). De Klerk also finds it necessary to comment on the use of ethnic labels, which, she suggests,

«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» (1996: 9). Of course such labels may well suggest a greater unity than actually exists, and by utilising place names for the variety studied, McCormick (Mesthrie 1995: 193-208) and Malan (de Klerk 1996: 125-148) avoid the dangers of a term such as 'South African coloured English'. Beyond this, the inherent problems of the choice of terminology become clearer in that the term 'South African English' has been retained to apply to the English spoken by whites. As the only variety label without a qualifier, this must indicate the standard—an issue which will be discussed below.

In the early 90s, much energy was devoted to debating the future roles and standing of *English in multilingual South Africa*. The two main viewpoints are presented in de Klerk's volume by Titlestad and Webb. Titlestad argues in favour of leaving language developments to market values, which would clearly result in the wide-spread use of English as (international) lingua franca (de Klerk 1996: 163-173). (In the context of these volumes, this is clearly a minority view). Webb points to 'potential negative implications for South Africa's cultural and linguistic diversity if English is allowed to dominate' (de Klerk 1996: 177). Even though language rights are now enshrined in the Constitution, this particular debate retains its urgency, with the increasing hegemony of English raising doubts as to whether the unfolding multilingual language and language-in-education policies can indeed be implemented. These concerns are voiced especially by Heugh in her critical discussion of attitudes towards multilingualism in the Government of National Unity and the business sector (Mesthrie 1995: 329-

350). Heugh's article discusses the period up to late 1994, and the continuing overall trend towards English-language monolingualism—in spite of the appearance of important policy documents from the Ministries of Education and of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology—only serves to validate her concern.

With so many different varieties of English, the issue of the *future standard* remains as yet unresolved. Under apartheid, proponents of so-called 'restandardisation' had argued that a marked Black South African English should become the new standard. The two papers addressing the issue here concur in rejecting the extreme restandardisation thesis and in arguing that comprehensibility, both nationally and internationally, is of primary importance. In view of «phonological deviance as the major threat to the comprehensibility of spoken English» (Lanham et al. 1995: 39), Lanham makes the case for the use of the educated standard of the non-native speaker as formal norm. Wright endorses the «deliberate and informed cultivation of an educated variety of (Black South African English) closely allied to the linguistic systems of standard English», and continues: «This could well satisfy the desire for an English which expresses the cultural identity of its users while retaining the practical social advantages of a language which is comprehensible nationally and internationally» (de Klerk 1996: 160). It remains to be seen if this proposal will find wider acceptance.

The proposed 'cultivation' of such a variety of Black South African English presupposes the successful implementation of the current educational reforms, and there has been considerable debate as to the role of *English in education*. Heugh et al's volume (1995) is a product of the educational reform movement; papers were contributed by noted educationalists and activists within the ambit of the Project for the Study of Alterna-

tive Education in South Africa, and give a comprehensive overview of ongoing trends. The language-in-education policy presently envisaged is that of national additive bilingualism, as developed by Lockett (Heugh et al. 1995: 73-78), in which English is likely to play a substantial role. For, as Alexander argues, «for many years (possibly for as long as two generations) there will be very strong economic and social pressure on non-English speakers in South Africa to target English as a language of learning for their children» (Heugh et al. 1995: 80). Given the systematic deprivation suffered by blacks as regards L2 English teaching under apartheid, a renewal is now imperative; but such a renewal cannot focus exclusively on English, for in the typical classroom, English will often be one of several languages spoken by a bi- or multicultural group of pupils. This poses serious problems for teachers trained and experienced in monolingual teaching. Hence the enormous need for —and the success of —Heugh et al's volume. On the one hand, it addresses language planners and teacher-educators engaged in the democratisation process; on the other it is intended as a 'resource-book for teachers' —a book that 'make(s) available experiences of innovative work done in multilingual classrooms under conditions that may be typical of many teachers' experiences' (1995: v). The significance of English in education is underlined by further articles in the other volumes. Mesthrie has included a revised version of Hartshorne's important review of language policies in African education under apartheid (Mesthrie 1995: 306-318). In de Klerk's volume, Walthers focusses on English teaching in primary schools (de Klerk 1996: 211-230), and the crucial issue of more appropriate teacher training is addressed by Murray and van der Mescht (de Klerk 1996: 251-268). Education is the second focus of Wright et al. (1995): three arti-

cles are devoted to a critical consideration of primary level school texts (including the illustrations used) from a point of view of multicultural comprehensibility and readability.

A final focus in these works is *English in cross-cultural communication*. Again the pivotal position of English —in the work of linguists, as well as in society— becomes clear, in that both Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995), and Chick in his two articles (Mesthrie 1995: 230-241; de Klerk 1996: 269-283) focus on cross-cultural communication as involving English. While English is not yet the country's main lingua franca, its role in this regard appears very likely to grow. Chick's two studies of complimenting behaviour in English and Zulu address an academic readership and represent the growing range of studies in cross-cultural pragmatics. Kaschula and Anthonissen, on the other hand, seek to address the low general awareness of differences in culturally based communicative strategies and have produced a useful book with a very practical intent. They wish to provide 'accessible material ... (to) ... assist South Africans in communicating across cultures, not only in the corporate world and the educational sphere, but also in everyday life.' (1995: v). From a critical language studies perspective, they discuss in turn language and power, culture, prejudice, social interaction, cross-cultural communication and gender, by applying sociolinguistic theory mainly to Xhosa and English. Both Chick and Kaschula and Anthonissen reject simplistic explanations in terms of 'cultural differences' (found in much work in this field), and instead seek to address the ideological and power dimensions of cross-cultural communication.

In all, the five volumes give a good overview of the present state of research into English in South Africa, and also point in the direction of future research. Clearly, the varieties presently grouped

under the label Black South African English must become a focus of research; black attitudes towards these and other language varieties must also be investigated. But in addition, Wright notes a 'tremendous imbalance' in research into language in South Africa, in so far as '(l)anguage policy has been emphasised to the virtual exclusion of any attention to language cultivation' (Lanham et al. 1995: 5). This is certainly true; but the publications under review here should

perhaps be seen as an indication of a new interest in issues of language cultivation: the clarification and implementation of the standard-to-be, and the development of strategies to facilitate and enhance the acquisition of L2 English, especially in the multicultural classroom.

Elizabeth de Kadt
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Ayo BAMGBOSE, et al. (eds.). *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*. Ibadan: Mosuro, 1995. xvii + 417 pages.

This volume is a compilation of several talks presented at the international conference on «Communicative Competence and the Role of English as a Second Language» organized by the British Council in December 1993 in Ibadan, to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary in Nigeria. It contains a tasteful and timely collection of papers and opening addresses, the bulk of which discuss the role of English in Nigeria. On a broad level, the papers reflect three geographical perspectives —that of noted Nigerian linguists, language teachers, and administrators; that of the British representatives of the British Council and the British High Commission in Nigeria; and the view of a few Cameroonian and Ghanaian linguists.

The book contains 21 articles (14 of which are written by Nigerians) and is organized into five parts, viz. «English in Language Policy» (Part I), «English Language Teaching» (Part II), «Varieties of English and Domains of Use» (Part III), «Literature in English» (Part IV), and «Corpus Research on English» (Part V). Four opening addresses delivered at the conference are also included in this volume. They include the one given by the Director of the British Council in Niger-

ia, the speech delivered by the vice-chancellor of the University of Ibadan, the British High Commissioner's opening address, and the one given by the Nigerian Minister for Education and Youth Development. The powerful foreword is written by none other than the guru of New Englishes, Braj Kachru. Attention will be drawn to points of interest in the different articles.

The volume emphasizes the pivotal role English plays in Nigeria (and also in Cameroon and Ghana) and identifies legitimate linguistic concerns such as the need for a current language census in Ghana and in Nigeria (see Dolphyn: 27-33; Jowitt: 34-56), the need for a curricular change to address the «mass failure syndrome» at the Nigerian secondary level (see Mohammed: 130-52), the nonchalance displayed by the English language examination boards such as WAEC and JAMB in Nigeria toward Nigerian English (see Jowitt: 34-56; Adekunle: 57-86; Bowers: 87-98; Brumfit: 99-112; Afolayan: 113-129; Akere: 178-202), and the continued stigmatization of Nigerian Pidgin, in spite of its widespread use, its inherent creativity, and the unique process of «de-pidginisation» it appears to be undergoing (see Ji-