

Black South African English: where to from here?

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ABSTRACT

Black South African English is generally regarded as the variety of English commonly used by mother-tongue speakers of South Africa's indigenous African languages in areas where English is not the language of the majority. This paper explores some of the problems involved in defining this variety, problems such as whether it is a 'new' variety of English or a dialect, and problems relating to whose English it is: the English of those learners who have encountered only a smattering of English in informal contexts or the variety of English acquired during formal schooling. The second half of the paper focuses on the possible future of Black South African English (BSAE) against the backdrop of South Africa's new multilingual policy. Reasons for the continued appeal of English are examined, alongside the range of factors influencing the possible future growth of BSAE as a distinct variety. It is argued that South Africans are unlikely ever to be free not to learn English, owing to the huge economic, political and ideological constraints which make the 'choice' of English inevitable. 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 cooperation of all speakers of English, world-wide, but on the rate at which the variety drifts away from recognised standard forms of English.

Introduction

Few can deny the power of English world-wide, and this is all too evident in the statistics regarding numbers of speakers: approximately one quarter of the world's population now uses English either as first, second or foreign language (Platt, Weber and Ho, 1984; Crystal, 1997). English is the only language whose second-language speakers outnumber its mother-tongue speakers, and this amazing fact is having a dramatic effect on the forms this chameleon language takes on. One of these so-called 'new' varieties of English with its own particular identity and ownership (Kachru, 1986: 31) is Black South African English (BSAE).

1. THE PAST: THE ROOTS OF BSAE

Some mention of the historical roots of BSAE is necessary, because new Englishes need to be defined ontologically, in terms of the acquisition history of their learners, rather than phylogenetically. BSAE results ultimately from colonialism, when English was brought to South Africa in early 1800 (when the British took over the Cape), imported by the ruling

classes to an area which already had its own very different indigenous languages. It thus fits Platt, Weber and Ho's criteria (1984: 2-3) for 'new Englishes' very nicely. Of course, English was desirable to the local people not so much because of the intrinsic linguistic appeal and aesthetic qualities of the language, but because of the military, economic and cultural power of its speakers -- they learned English not because they couldn't resist the attraction of its lilting accents, but because the people thrusting muzzles of guns in their faces, or employing labour at their lucrative gold and diamond mines, refused to oblige by learning their languages.

Thus, much like the indigenous inhabitants of Nigeria and India, local South Africans had English foisted upon them -- if they didn't learn it, they had little chance of social and economic advancement. By the early twentieth century English was becoming a necessary evil in the lives of many black South Africans, and, repeating the pattern in other colonies, these people were not in a position to get access to the best models of English: educational provisions for them were minimal, and they were lucky if they could pick it up on the side, as it were.

The situation deteriorated rapidly with the imposition of apartheid in 1948, and the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which, against the weight of informed black opinion at the time, entrenched mother-tongue instruction up to the highest possible level for black pupils, and slowly phased out mother-tongue English teachers. This effectively denied black pupils access to native English speakers, except in the few remaining mission schools.

This politically entrenched separateness, despite its potential to promote black consciousness and despite the obvious educational advantages in acquiring initial literacy in the mother tongue (MT), failed dismally, mainly because it led to a deep (and probably well-founded) suspicion that the government was intent on creating a semi-literate isolated labour force (Mawasha, 1982: 25). As a result, because it was forbidden, English became all the more desirable, seen by many as the magic key to socio-economic advancement and power. In contrast, indigenous languages were regarded by many of their own speakers as worthless because of their functional limitations with regard to access to participation and mobility in wider society.

After the tragic Soweto uprising of 1976, in which pupils protesting about language issues lost their lives, the education policy was rapidly changed to increase access to English, but changes came too late to save a teetering black educational system from ruin or to have any real impact on the course of development of BSAE. Despite the manifest desire for English, most could not acquire it in its prestigious form: for 50 years the contexts for learning English for the average black child had been appallingly inadequate; by 1980 most teachers of English in the Department of Education and Training (DET) (n2) schools were L2 speakers, products of an inadequate 'Bantu' education. The long-term effects of underfunding, overcrowding and teacher incompetence, combined with limited contact with native English speakers, led to characteristic patterns of pronunciation and syntax

becoming entrenched as norms of spoken BSAE, with resultant reduced levels of comprehensibility (Wright, 1996: 151).

2. DEFINITIONS OF BSAE: THE PROBLEMS

2.1 Variety or dialect?

Providing precise definitions of BSAE is an extremely problematic task for South African linguists. While BSAE is generally regarded today as the 'variety' of English commonly used by mother-tongue speakers of South Africa's indigenous African languages in areas where English is not the language of the majority, it is also commonly referred to as a 'new' English, and this is the first problem which deserves consideration: is it accurate to call BSAE (or other similar varieties) a 'new' variety of English? How long does it take before a new English ceases to be called 'new'? A hundred years? More? 'New' is an interestingly versatile and ambiguous word, and the fact that BSAE has been in existence for well over a hundred years makes the term somewhat inappropriate.

The term 'variety' is similarly problematic, as Banjo (1997: 85) makes clear: traditionally, the term 'dialect' is not used for foreign speaker habits (whose 'odd' linguistic behaviour is usually attributed to interference or transfer) and the term dialect is reserved to describe the quaint habits of native speakers of the language; yet, as will be shown later in this paper, for many black South Africans, English has become a second L1, and one wonders when, if ever, our local BSAE speakers will achieve dialectal status within their native territory.

2.2 Whose English is BSAE?

The problem South African linguists face is deciding whose English BSAE is. Is it the English of those learners who have encountered only a smattering of English in informal contexts and use it in the most rudimentary form as a communicative tool? Is it the variety of English acquired during formal schooling -- and if so, how many years of schooling are regarded as a minimum? At least 12 years or fewer than that? If fewer years are acceptable, then one must ask: how many fewer? Black people in South Africa often leave school after only a brief encounter of a year or two with English -- should they subsequently be regarded as speakers of BSAE?

The nature of the schooling provided in South Africa also deserves consideration: since the English taught and heard in former DET schools is vastly different from that used in the formerly whites-only schools, it would seem that one needs a narrower definition of the type of formal exposure to English that is experienced. Perhaps the expertise of the teacher should also be a factor, which complicates the issue even more. Nevertheless, this is a question which deserves serious consideration, since it is clear that BSAEs form a continuum in relation to such variables as educational level and degree of exposure to mother-tongue English speakers (Mugoya, 1991; Gough, 1996a: 54). The idea of a single uniform variety of BSAE is definitely just an optimistic figment of the linguistic

imagination. By way of illustration, consider the following examples, all of which might be called BSAE:

a. When I am home I play Toni Braxton song and also when I'm cleaning the house the song make me feel well and I like this patitular line `Don't leave me in on this pain ... come and take this tears away'. And I listen music to the television and on radio. I like love songs because I like to listen them and I be cool after I listen the love song. And I dreaming I'm in the sky when I listen the song. (Student of 16 years: Writing is Fun, 2, June 1998.)

b. Me is a first-born for girls ... He is not work all my brothers. He's nonsense en location. Say is no work. But is lazy, yes ... I'm try this year to night school, cos I'm start to nightschool, for the school. I'm try again next year because always the strike in schools. But a nightschool she is borrow me a English books. (Extract from an interview with a 40-year-old woman.)

c. My English teacher is black, but she think we are in the university. My teacher is speak Afrikaans sometimes, and then she teach, he, she teaches us Afrikaans. And then she speak English ... I like to go to technicon. After that I will like to be in -- I like to do marketing or management. (Extract from an interview with a school pupil aged 20.)

2.3 BSAE or incompetent English?

The extracts above reveal that the problem we face is deciding between BSAE or incompetent English. There are striking differences in competence among BSAE speakers, ranging from complete fluency (with English a `second first language') to minimal levels of proficiency, limited to a few very rudimentary (sometimes pidgin) formulaic phrases. South Africa's political history, while on the one hand forcing many people to develop some competence in English, on the other has 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 that on the whole they do not speak a recognisable variety of BSAE, but that each individual arrives at a different stage on a learner-language continuum (de Kadt, 1993: 314).

2.4 Assessing speaker numbers

Apart from the problem of deciding what counts as having a command of BSAE, assessing speaker numbers is also enormously problematic: of South Africa's total population of 40.5 million, 75% are speakers of the 9 indigenous African languages, while English is spoken as mother tongue by only about 8.6% of the population (Census, 1998). Apart from Gauteng (where nearly all the languages are spoken), indigenous languages tend to be geographically localised, and distribution varies considerably from province to province.

Recent surveys and censuses indicate a rapid increase in knowledge of English as an additional language (Schuring, 1993: 17) but the problem is that statistical estimates of those who command English vary between 69% (Market Research Africa 1994; Department of National Education, 1994: 7) and 32% -- a not insignificant difference, indicative of the level of confusion surrounding this issue (see Gough, 1996a: 53; Bua, 1993(n3)). Because, in South Africa, vast numbers of people live in rural areas inaccessible by car, and equally vast numbers are illiterate (and unable to fill in the census form), we have to regard these figures with a high level of scepticism.

2.5 Spoken or written varieties?

A further problem for linguists is the question of whether to see BSAE as a typically spoken variety, or whether they should base their descriptions on written texts. If they choose the latter, then further care needs to be taken in selecting the database, because of the dangerous bias inherent in using written material, especially edited corpuses such as local newspapers (e.g. Newbrook's description of Malaysian English).

If one goes for spoken varieties, it is extremely problematic to decide whether truly basilectal forms, reflecting an incomplete educational process, should be seen as BSAE. The tendency for linguists to focus on the acrolectal forms is understandable, but many (e.g. Begum and Kandiah, 1997: 192) vigorously oppose the idea of a variety being defined on the basis of the usage of its competent users only, and they make an impassioned plea to consider the usage of non-proficient speakers as well. Which of these varieties of English on the learner continuum is a true reflection of BSAE is a problem facing current researchers in the field. We should thus remain aware of the fact that new standards may be evolving, guided by speakers of basilectal and mesolectal forms, who are in the process of adapting and nativising English to their particular needs. Indeed, native-like competence is not necessarily desirable for BSAE speakers, and sounding like an Englishman in Africa can actually be socially ridiculous: signalling identity and loyalties by retaining variant non-native forms is a vitally important component of what it means to speak English. Achebe (1975: 61-2) makes the point strikingly when he says 'the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to different kinds of use ... I have been given this language and I intend to use it ... to carry the weight of my African experience.'

The debate continues between those who say we should rely on exonormative standards (excluding local pronunciation and lexis) and those who seek to develop local endonormative standards in the name of greater accessibility. Eventually, a distinct rule-governed system must emerge, sustained by a community of users in a particular area sharing the same norms, for whom the system serves a self-identificatory purpose and distinct semiotic and pragmatic needs. But, regardless of who is right in the debate, we still have the problem of deciding when an error becomes a feature. Gough (1996a) reports that among 20 Xhosa-speaking teachers, structures such as 'I tried that I might see her' were

described as ungrammatical by about 90% of the sample, but structures such as 'She was refusing with my book' were regarded as grammatical by about 80% of the sample. This suggests that, at least in more acrolectal varieties, certain features are more entrenched than others.

When does a substratal feature assert itself sufficiently to overcome the fear that if deviations are allowed, the rules will be abandoned and chaos will ensue? Is it when speakers use it often enough to silence or exhaust the prescriptors? Perhaps benign neglect is what is called for, rather than intervention, and time is the ultimate strategy towards legitimation (Gonzales, 1997: 210), although ultimately the test is the speakers' ability to deliver their message among themselves and to the outside world.

2.6 Code-switching

In defining BSAE, we inevitably come up against the thorny problem of 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. As Myers-Scotton (1989: 343) notes, while English symbolises membership of the elite, educated and powerful, because the participants' other (specifically African) group membership is also salient to them, it is not used exclusively but rather together with the vernacular. (See Kamwangamalu (1998) for an interesting account of the use of English as a neutral code-in-between.)

The level of code-switching evident in some simple exchanges suggests that there may be problems in saying exactly what language is being used -- and it may even be problematic for the speakers themselves to say what language they are speaking. Code-switching is not always a signal of ease and competence in two languages. Sadly, it can often be a signal of lack of competence in both: because of insufficient access to English and contexts of subtractive bilingualism, code-switching is, for many, a compensatory strategy (Murray, in press).

While it is convenient to say that the use of code-switching for specific effects such as solidarity or humour deserve separate study, and descriptions of BSAE would be needlessly clouded if we included code-switching, especially in certain urban varieties such as Soweto Zulu slang, we cannot get away that easily. This may in fact be where BSAE is heading, and the need to sprinkle one's English with one's mother-tongue may well become absolutely essential -- playing that all-important role of marking identity.

3. THE PRESENT: CURRENT POLICY AND PLANS

The new constitution of 1996 made all of South Africa's 11 languages official languages of the country. These changes in state language policy, the rights of indigenous languages against English (Sachs, 1994) have required huge efforts to uplift indigenous languages, and to preserve the ecological diversity of South Africa's languages; such efforts included the establishment of the Pan-South African Language Board (PANSALB) (a Senate subcommittee, charged with a watchdog role in ensuring that the country's new language policy is carried out), the Language Task Action Group (LANGTAG) (1996) and Provincial Language Councils as additional monitoring forces.

The idealistic goals of this new policy of multilingualism, which encourages the abandonment of old, separate identities and the acceptance of a complex and dynamic commonality (Murray, in press) are hard to argue with, but very difficult to adhere to in practice. Despite good intentions and legislation, the fact remains that English (be it standard varieties or BSAE) is the only language that is significantly represented in all nine provinces, and consequently it is in demand as lingua franca. Further reasons why English is in demand and is becoming an internal de facto lingua franca include the following:

1. For the vast majority of people in the country (keeping in mind the small proportion of L1 English speakers), English is nobody's mother-tongue and is therefore seen as being neutral (Kamwangamalu, 1998: 284): it advantages nobody, and in fact it could be seen as disempowering everyone equally. Choice of any one indigenous language for official purposes would significantly disadvantage others and probably cause ethnic tension;
2. English fulfils a range of linguistic functions and has a rich literary tradition which is not the case with most, if not all, the indigenous languages; written resources are readily available in English; even the bigger languages (e.g., Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho) have only relatively nascent linguistic and literary traditions. Particularly urgent is the need for technical vocabulary in indigenous languages if they are to be used successfully in such areas as government or military life (de Klerk and Barkhuizen, 1998);
3. English is functionally attractive, providing access to higher education, the international arena, wealth and power;
4. For many in South Africa, English carries positive connotations as the language of liberation and resistance to apartheid domination, because of its role in the ANC and PAC as the language of the struggle prior to 1994.

Because of all these factors, the power and appeal of English still seem to be growing and English is showing an increasing tendency to monopolise many areas of public administration in South Africa. It is pervasively used in government contexts (where L1 English speakers are few and far between) and in parliament, where the majority of

members are fluent in three or four African languages. Pandor (1995: 75) reports that 87% of all parliamentary speeches in 1994 were in English, and it is the most popular default language in other multilingual contexts such as business, schools, university campuses and military camps (de Klerk, 1996; de Klerk and Barkhuizen, 1998). There are also interesting patterns of English usage in South African television, where, on English programmes such as the news, non-English reports are avoided, or translated in cases where they are utilised; however, in programmes in all other languages, English inserts are frequent, and translations are not provided (Kamwangamalu, 1998: 284).

4. THE FUTURE: SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

4.1 Which English? Attitudes to BSAE

BSAE has to rub shoulders daily with so-called 'standard' varieties of English in South Africa, and this is obviously going to influence its future prospects; the notion of standard English privileges the dominant group, in terms of which other varieties are seen as 'deviant', and this results in a hegemony being imposed, bringing with it an ideological bias and ultimately a 'linguocracy' (Pendley, 1983) -- a minority group who control the registers necessary to enter influential levels of decision-making, leadership and power.

A recent response to such linguocracy has been to reject the exonormative standards of English and to valorise its local indigenous varieties; a refreshing development has been that instead of non-MT speakers fighting this cause (e.g. Alexander, 1990; Buthelezi, 1995; Webb, 1996), MT English speakers in South Africa (e.g. Gough, 1996b; Silva, 1997; Wade, 1995, 1997) are beginning to do so as well. As Silva puts it, 'if they do not wish to be considered irrelevant, English speakers will need to adopt a more realistic approach ... and a more generous attitude towards second-language users of English' (1997: 175). Thus, outdated prescriptivist views of BSAE as a non-standard variety, unacceptable in formal contexts and deficient because of interference from mother-tongues and poor tuition have been replaced in recent years by strong pressure to recognise and describe BSAE as a variety in its own right -- a variety worthy of recognition and enjoying a steady upturn in terms of its local status and prestige.

Further impetus for this improved image and increased vitality of BSAE comes from radical shifts in socio-political power in South Africa and the growing status of its speakers. What was formerly regarded as the covert prestige of BSAE (see Smit, 1996) now carries signs of having a more overtly positive value, greatly facilitated by the fact that English is used almost exclusively by all politicians in official circles.

Also, the rising socio-economic status of BSAE speakers lends great credence to the way they speak: the Financial Mail (13 June 1997) shows that almost as many blacks (3.5 m) as whites (4 m) comprise the top socio-economic bracket in the country (cited in Wade, 1997). While most educated speakers manipulate English as if it were their first language,

there are increasing numbers of others (politicians and entertainers) whose fame and money are generated by means independent of their lack of mastery of standard English (cf. Shields-Brodber, 1997: 65).

The changing perceptions of the status, authority and persuasive appeal of BSAE in business, entertainment and the media has led to the increased use of BSAE accents both in serious announcements and in up-market advertisements. (n4) The stigma associated with the use of BSAE does not seem as strong as it was in the past, and another sign of increasing confidence in its value is the fact that a recently launched regional radio program (YFM) almost exclusively for the use of BSAE speakers registered a weekly listenership of 611,000 in two months. As this extract from the Sunday Times (1998) shows, its appeal comes from its brand of English:

Yona ke Yona is for the young -- they use street sass, have a cool attitude, they speak the language of the streets 'we reflect how the youth of Gauteng speak, how they relate to each other' (Station manager, Randall Abrahams). While it may be brash, the station broadcasts primarily in English and established big advertisers such as Coke are using it: 'young people all over the country want a station that speaks their language ... they want a station that stays in touch with their ever-changing trends in ... language and fashion. We are it'.

In South Africa, democracy and equality are the order of the day, especially where language matters are concerned, and old-fashioned judgemental prescriptive concern for correctness has been replaced by greater tolerance and more emphasis on getting the message across. The loud, indeed vociferous wave of disapproval from mother-tongue speakers about the use of non-MT radio and TV announcers on English channels during the past three years, claiming that their tongue was being savagely mauled by illiterates, and that their own 'rights' to hear English as she should be spoke were being abused, has quietened down to a muted whimper, and South African ears have become attuned to a wide range of accents which have, ironically enough, proved to be mutually comprehensible (despite occasionally bizarre stress patterns). English has not yet disintegrated, the sun has continued to shine, and some people in South Africa are actually beginning to enjoy this new variety of English.

This growth in BSAE's prestige probably presages increasing confidence in this variety among its learners, who, because they can identify strongly and positively with its speakers, are likely to master it more easily; in addition, BSAE is very likely to act as a powerful national unifier, bridging the gap between speakers of often very different indigenous languages. But despite the growth of more positive attitudes to BSAE in South Africa, support for it is not unequivocal, and it will probably be slowed down by the following factors:

1. Because of the love-hate relationship which many speakers of African languages experience with English, attitudes to BSAE may continue to be jeopardised: forced to make an effort to master English only for limited instrumental reasons, many African learners experience deep ambivalences towards it (Peirce (1995: 19) uses the notion of 'investment' in this regard) and lack the truly integrative motivation to learn and speak English. An investment 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.
2. Die-hard prescriptivists will undoubtedly continue to rage against the 'damage' which English is suffering at the hands of BSAE.
3. A growing voice among informed academics (see Wright, 1996) and ambitious parents sees BSAE as short-changing their speakers, providing them with a second-best, less-than-adequate model which will disadvantage them in the long run, and reinforce the very stereotypes which people try to counteract by learning English. If a cultivated BSAE becomes too 'deviant' in comparison to standard norms, its speakers would then be excluded from education and from public forums and would be severely disadvantaged all over again (Gorlach, 1998: 118).
4. There is a sudden upsurge in the number of middle and upper-class black parents who are sending their children to formerly whites-only English medium schools. They want their children to learn 'proper' English, and in due course these children will acquire something closer to standard SAE by the time they leave school, and their influence is very likely to counteract the appeal of BSAE. With their privileged educational backgrounds, 'elite closure' (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Wade, 1997) is likely to result from their conservative influence in maintaining the normative value of exonormative English. Indeed, they are the future members of the 'linguatoocracy' mentioned earlier.

Patterns of language choice and use are related to socio-economic and political processes, 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. It is all very well to see BSAE, or 'People's English' as the form of English appropriated in the interests of democracy (Peirce, 1990: 108), but its ultimate value depends on the uses to which such a variety (if it is one) is put, and what meanings it may carry. Advocates of BSAE are, it has often been noted, those who have mastered the prestige variety themselves, and none, to my knowledge, have been mother-tongue speakers of English. One may pause to consider why it is that persuasive arguments to resist conformist pressures (e.g. Webb, 1996) and to recognise naturally-evolved local forms of English suited to the needs of their speakers come only from such people -- and whether it is not important to establish the BSAE speakers' own views as to whether they are also satisfied with their variety of English. This is something that researchers will need to turn their attention to soon.

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 still somewhat misguided, and we have to admit that at present BSAE offers no guarantee to any of these. The problem seems to lie in what 'democratic language rights' are. For some, this implies the need to recognise and promote the localised forms which 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 standard English. Proponents of this point of view recognise that black varieties of English are legitimate and meet the immediate communicative needs of local speakers; but they 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 world-wide. 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.

4.2 Language loss because of the growth of English

Since the opening of all schools to all races in 1994, there has been an unprecedented rush to English-medium state schools. Initially, the flood was controlled by admission tests which required minimal levels of proficiency, but these tests have been abolished as undemocratic, and now anyone willing and able to pay the requisite fee (and living in the appropriate area) has the right of admission to any school. This has had some interesting consequences.

Firstly, a loss of loyalty to the mother-tongue, and consequential steady language shift among the new generation of children now attending English-medium schools is beginning to make itself felt. Support among mother-tongue speakers for their own languages is worryingly low (an attitude partly attributable to apartheid policies of the past which reinforced a view that indigenous languages must be inferior if they were reserved for black people). Much recent research (e.g. Pather, 1994; Winkler, 1997) reports strongly positive perceptions of the value of English, and increased usage of English as part of the home repertoire; indeed, de Klerk and Bosch (1998) found quite a few black children (in the Eastern Cape) being required by their parents to speak only English at home.

A second consequence of the 'rush' for English has been a dramatic decrease in competence in the mother tongue (Schlebusch, 1994: 98); informal observations confirm an incomplete command of an African language among many black children. Despite

energetic attempts by the state to legislate and entrench language rights, little is being achieved on the ground to maintain the indigenous languages: 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 second-language syllabuses for the indigenous languages is slow.

To make matters worse, most open (formerly white) schools are multilingual and multicultural in composition but not in practice, and their ethos is Western and white. Many teachers firmly believe that educational success (and access to social and educational mobility and advancement) is only possible through mastery of English. So subtractive, not additive models of bilingualism are practised at present (Luckett, 1993), and dramatic language loss and identity crises are in store for many new 'converts' to English.

Research (de Klerk and Bosch, 1998) reveals a context in which parents, while half-heartedly (in some cases not at all) maintaining their own Xhosa identity and lifestyle, have supported the development of anglicised language behaviour for their children (cf. Veltman, 1983: 91). These parents belong to the wealthier, better-educated sector of society, and have clearly decided on cultural and linguistic assimilation for their children, despite the loss which will result. Such sentiments are echoed in parallel research by Verhoef (1998) in the North West Province and in a recent survey by Pluddeman (1995) where less than half of the Xhosa parents interviewed regarded first-language support for their children as important. And these parents do not want BSAE for their children, they want English 'proper', as these interview extracts show (de Klerk and Bosch, 1998):

English is good, it is an international language, you know she can communicate with another person. I think English in South Africa is just here to stay ... English is important.

Many people are speaking English even Zulus. If you see a Zulu and you are Xhosa you can't speak Zulu and she can't speak Xhosa you speak English ... It's useful because mostly communicate in English mostly, even in schools. In street, everywhere in South Africa.

Everyday you can't get nothing without English and you can't get education without English because English comes with education and vice versa.

4.3 'Proper' English or BSAE?

Ironically, it is possible that the hopes of these parents for their children to acquire a command of 'good' English (rather than BSAE) may not be fulfilled. For successful assimilation to take place, high levels of social integration, sufficient contacts with the other language group and psychological openness between source and target groups is desirable. While motivation to have their offspring master English, and almost to 'become English' is generally very high among black middle- and upper-class parents, not all of the other conditions are met in South Africa's schools, for several reasons:

1. English schools are not available in some parts of South Africa, especially in some rural areas. Also, some parts of the country are heavily Afrikaans and in large cities the formerly whites-only schools have remained that way, by virtue of their geographical location: daily transport to such schools for other-than-white children living far away would be impossible.
2. For many, financial constraints simply forbid entrance into such schools (as is the case in most private schools).
3. High social enclosure (the extent to which separate groups maintain separateness) still exists between groups in South Africa, and there are only limited contact opportunities across language and cultural groups outside of schools. Because congruence and similarity between the two cultures is low, likelihood for easy transition is further reduced. This remark from one of the parents confirms this: 'The problem is that she has no friends here [in the township] who she speaks English to. The ones she does have, who speak English, live far away. So it's very difficult for her to get experience and the accent and to be fluent.'
4. Rapidly decreasing numbers of members of the majority culture at some of these schools have reduced opportunities for exposure and for genuine assimilation. A consequence of the flood of non-English children into English schools has been a steady exodus of English children from these schools into private (and prohibitively expensive) schools, in an attempt to preserve their culture and linguistic heritage. A cursory look at registration figures at three formerly white-sonly English medium schools in Grahamstown (in the Eastern Cape Province) over a two-year period (see Table 1) shows this trend graphically: as the non-English children have come in, so the English children have left.
5. BSAE is likely to flourish simply by default, because the means to teach standard varieties of English have deteriorated rapidly in the past 5 years and the country faces an unprecedented educational crisis, (n5) with fewer English-speaking teachers than ever before to provide some sort of acceptable model to learners in schools. Apart from those privileged few who can afford the luxury of private education, South African black learners face the bleak prospect of unmotivated and poorly-trained teachers in cash-strapped schools.

Such steadily increasing proportions of non-English children in English schools together with ever decreasing capacity to teach English suggest that, for possibly the wrong reasons, the future of BSAE in South Africa is bright: so-called standard (or at least native) varieties of English are simply going to be inaccessible to the vast majority of South Africa's citizens.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The structured inequalities of South African society are played out in language, and specifically in English (de Klerk, 1997: 114). Despite recent changes in the country to redress former linguistic imbalances by improving the status of the indigenous languages and down-grading English and Afrikaans, the pressure to master English has not declined,

because it holds the upper hand and has a privileged status compared with African languages. Ordinary South Africans who do not speak English as a mother tongue are unlikely ever to be free not to learn English, owing to the huge economic, political and ideological constraints which make the `choice' of English inevitable. There is also not much choice as to what sort of English they learn: economic constraints will decide for them whether they acquire standard English or BSAE.

The power and elitism of the privileged few who have mastered standard English will probably be enhanced and entrenched in the decades to come, while the masses will find themselves unable to improve their own English, even if they wanted to, owing to the current massive national decline in educational infrastructure. Extreme forms of BSAE will probably be further pulled along by a natural desire for group identity. Counterforces to this pull will come from ever-growing exposure to the media, and most especially to (the all-too-appealing) American culture and the American model of English. Whatever form BSAE takes in the next decade will be determined by the quality of formal and informal exposure to English, but if this drops below a certain minimum, the comprehensibility of BSAE will almost certainly be jeopardised, and along with this will come inevitable value judgements as to its effectiveness.

What will be very interesting to monitor is the degree to which variants of BSAE will drift away from the standard 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 cooperation of all speakers of English, world-wide, but on the rate at which the variety drifts away from recognised standard forms of English.

So it remains to be seen whether a recognisable BSAE will make its mark proudly and globally as a distinctive variety of English, equal in all respects to British, Australian or South African standard varieties, or whether it will skulk ignominiously on the fringes of so-called `decent' society, used only by those who had no alternative in the first place.

NOTES

*(n1.) This paper is about Black South African English (BSAE), but its concern is not so much to describe this variety (interested readers can refer to de Klerk and Gough (in press) for a comprehensive overview of its linguistic characteristics). Instead I will offer an overview of some of the broader sociolinguistic problems and issues which deserve the attention of linguists, in the hope that these issues will be equally pertinent to scholars of other **world Englishes**.*

(n2.) There were four separate Education Departments until 1994. The Department of Education and Training controlled black education.

(n3.) *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, 1996a: 53). As Webb (1998: 126) points out, the literacy rate for black South Africans over 20 years of age is 45%, yet only 5% of the black teacher trainees in colleges in the four northern provinces were found to be functionally literate in English, their language of learning.*

(n4.) *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.*

(n5.) *Huge numbers of experienced mother-tongue English teachers left the profession from 1996, enticed by severance packages offered in order to adjust the racial demography of the teaching profession.*

Table 1. Percentages of non-English children: 1997/1998

Legend for Chart:

- A - Grade
- B - Girls' School 1997
- C - Girls' School 1998
- D - Mixed 1997
- E - Mixed 1998
- F - Boys' School 1997
- G - Boys' School 1998

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
9	[*]	47	[*]	[*]	31	47
8	[*]	49	[*]	[*]	49	56
7	52	52	[*]	[*]	28	44
6	56	63	[*]	[*]	45	40
5	67	59	[*]	[*]	41	31
4	64	59	[*]	[*]	42	43
3	83	81	28	49	39	38
2	74	77	37	33	33	35
1	82	95	24	40	45	39
0	[*]	[*]	23	56	[*]	[*]

[*] These grades not on offer at the school concerned.

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