

Pre-emigration Reflections: Afrikaans speakers moving to New Zealand

Vivian de Klerk and Gary Barkhuizen

Vivian de Klerk

Dept of English Language & Linguistics

Rhodes University

Box 94 Grahamstown, 6140

South Africa

v.deklerk@ru.ac.za

Gary Barkhuizen

Dept of Applied Language Studies & Linguistics

University of Auckland

PBag 92019 Auckland

New Zealand

g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

Please correspond with Vivian de Klerk

Abstract:

This article reports on the pre-emigration reflections of 15 Afrikaans speakers, all of whom were in the final stages of preparing to emigrate to New Zealand. The study explores the linguistic histories of the participants, their attitudes to their mother tongue (Afrikaans) and to English, and their views on South Africa's language policy and how it has influenced their decisions to leave the country. The paper also offers a view on possible long-term linguistic outcomes for these families.

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1. Introduction

The status of Afrikaans in South Africa (SA) has undergone significant changes since the declaration of the new national language policy in 1994, and this has had a profound effect on the way Afrikaans speakers see themselves and their language, as well as on the status and usage patterns of Afrikaans. For some, linguistic issues such as these have contributed significantly to decisions to leave the country, even if it means going to a country where English predominates and Afrikaans has no official status whatsoever. The social attitudes of linguistic groups and the relative power and perceived status of languages, and their socio-political history always play a significant part in matters of language shift. Language maintenance is only likely with strong commitment and desire to maintain contact with a linguistic cultural background, and this is likely to be affected by external factors: if one of the languages has higher status than the other, or if socio-historical factors, and political or government policies make it more appealing, this can strengthen efforts towards the maintenance of that language (Janse & Tol 2003; Williams 1991; Bratt Paulston 1994; Pauwels 2004, Fasold, 1984; Schumann, 1986; Clyne, 1985; Appel & Muysken, 1987). In contrast, loss of status and functional viability can lead to a weakening of language loyalties. South Africa's recent linguistic history has had a particularly telling effect on the status of Afrikaans on a macro level, and as a consequence this has influenced linguistic experiences on a micro-level. This paper reports on the recent linguistic experiences of 15 Afrikaans participants who were interviewed immediately prior to emigrating to New Zealand. The interviews explore their reflections regarding language policy issues, their attitudes to Afrikaans, and how these factors (amongst others) have contributed to their decision to leave South Africa.

1.1 English and Afrikaans in South Africa since the 1990s

A great deal of effort has been devoted to creating and promoting a policy (1996) of parity between all of South Africa's 11 official languages, culminating in the establishment of PANSALB, and 9 provincial language committees, all tasked with the duty of upholding the policy and uplifting formerly disadvantaged languages. Despite all these efforts and despite the growing awareness of the possibility that elitism, domination and social injustice, as well

as personal language loss could result from the spread of English, there is plentiful evidence that the use of English is growing (See Nicol 2004; Mesthrie 1996; Smeija, 1998a & 1998b; de Klerk 2000a, 2001). In fact, the reality in South Africa, some would argue, is of state language policies that run counter to fairly sceptical attitudes about the value of indigenous South African languages (Mawasha 1996) and strong positive attitudes towards, and preference for English (Kamwangamalu 1995; Bowerman 2000; Dyers 2000).

In contrast, Afrikaans has experienced dramatic shifts. Prior to the 1980s, language loyalty (English versus Afrikaans as mother tongue) represented “the primary social division in white South African society”(Lanham and Macdonald (1979:26), and it has always been more intense among Afrikaans speakers than among English-speakers, because of the history of the fight for Afrikaans as a political tool over the past century (Malan, in du Plessis, 1986:71; Cameron, 1986:243; Watermeyer, 1996:101-2). From 1948, with the National Party in power, Afrikaner nationalism reached its zenith, and according to Edwards (1995:11) linguistic ethnicity was exploited for political ends, with language an important marker of group identity.

Recently, however, things have changed radically for Afrikaans, which now finds itself beleaguered and associated with a host of negative connotations linked to the country's apartheid history. In a few years, what was formerly a deep pride in the history and prestige of Afrikaans has become a source of embarrassment, and researchers have monitored its decline, its loss of functions to English, and the ways in which the recognition of a new multi-ethnic speech community has resulted in the disappearance of boundary markers for Afrikanerdom. (Truter, 2002; Webb, 1992; Cluver, 1993). According to Schuring and Calteaux "Afrikaans ... has negative connotations in some of the townships and this does not bode well for its continued use" (1997:17).

Parallel to this steady decline in the status of Afrikaans, there is a growth among Afrikaans speakers of positive attitudes and a covert prestige attached to the ability to speak English (Bosch & de Klerk, 1993; de Klerk & Bosch, 1994; de Klerk 1996, 1997; Watermeyer, 1996). A report by Nieman (1997) claims that nearly one third of all pupils in English medium schools in Bloemfontein are Afrikaans-speaking because their parents see it as an advantage for them to be educated through the medium of English. As a consequence of this move, the Foundation for Afrikaans has now launched an awareness program to ensure that parents are better informed before making this decision, warning of the

intellectual and social consequences of subtractive bilingual environments, in which children lose self esteem etc.

2. Methodology

Barkhuizen (2003) investigated the retrospective linguistic accounts of 28 Afrikaans-speaking South Africans living in New Zealand (NZ) regarding their expectations and concerns about living in English-speaking NZ before leaving SA. At that time, some participants indicated that language was something that they had considered prior to immigration, and hinted at both emotional and instrumental reasons for their concerns. The present study aimed to gain a better understanding of these issues by generating accounts of the language-related experiences and expectations of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans currently living in South African but planning to immigrate to NZ within six months. 15 people (9 males, 6 females) agreed to participate in the study (2 in the 16-20 age group, 11 in the 35-50 age group, and 2 in the 60+ age group).

The participants were recruited through personal networks and advertisements in the newsletters of the two cultural/business associations based in NZ: The Afrikaans Club [Die Afrikaanse Klub] and the SANZ Charitable Trust (both associations are involved in assisting with the initial settling of newcomers from SA into NZ life, and they therefore establish and maintain contact with prospective immigrants). In addition Immigration Agencies alerted prospective immigrants to the study and invited them to contact the researcher. Interviews were conducted in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape in South Africa, which excluded prospective participants who lived further afield. While the interviews were wide-ranging, and included participants' linguistic experiences in South Africa, their awareness of and attitudes towards language policy in SA and NZ, and their linguistic expectations for the future (including how much Afrikaans and English they would use in NZ, how they might experience acculturation in NZ, and issues of identity), this paper confines itself to the ways in which the recent linguistic experiences and reflections on policy issues of these pre-immigrants have contributed (among other factors) to their decision to leave SA. Through in-depth interviews conducted by Barkhuizen (himself a recent immigrant to NZ from SA), participants were asked to tell their 'language stories' during their lives in SA, and to reflect on the effect of the 1994 national language policy on their lives as Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. They had all been briefed about the aims and topics to be covered before the

interview, to enable them to consider these issues in advance. Although an English speaker himself, the interviewer is fluent in Afrikaans, and offered interviewees the choice of which language they would prefer in their interviews. English was the chosen medium in all except one case, with some code-switching, and the one interview which began in Afrikaans moved naturally into English after a short while. In two cases couples chose to be interviewed together. In all other cases, interviews were conducted with one participant only.

3. Results:¹

3.1 *Linguistic backgrounds*

Without exception, all of the participants in the study had started off life in a thoroughly Afrikaans world. For some, this had changed very little over the years, but others had experienced increased exposure to English and some had found themselves approaching a position where their language loyalties were already on the brink of shifting away from Afrikaans.

Kallie (82) and Bettina (77), the oldest of the informants, currently lived on a smallholding in southern Gauteng. They had been contacted about the research by their daughter in NZ, and planned to join their three daughters (all married to South African men) in NZ as soon as they sold their house. Bettina ‘grew up in an Afrikaans family, went to an Afrikaans school’, married an Afrikaans man at the age of seventeen and lived a life that was ‘mostly Afrikaans’. In her words: ‘I can’t recall anybody that I knew that was English speaking and we had a lot of friends’. Her proficiency in English was nonetheless good (the entire interview was conducted in English), despite her claims that ‘my English is very bad now because seeing that we don’t speak English at all, my husband and my son, we always speak Afrikaans and same to the people that works for us. But sometimes you know, somebody phones that speaks English. You help yourself, that’s how it is’. Her husband Kallie grew up in a farming district, went to an Afrikaans boarding school, and went straight into an Afrikaans work environment as a stock controller at a range of institutions. Apart from a few intervening years working with English people, his life had been in Afrikaans (‘it is about 19 years I didn’t speak any English’), and he had turned down an offer to go to London because of his strong family ties in the country.

Gerrie and Darlene (both in their 40s) and their two sons, Shawn (19) and Franz (17), from West Gauteng had responded to the Afrikaans Club advert. Darlene grew up in

Krugersdorp, her schooling was entirely in Afrikaans, and they mixed only with Afrikaans friends, and didn't speak any English except in class. She expressed some regret at the missed opportunities for learning English: 'you didn't realize what English would become one day in the world and that was a pity, and is a pity now'. She was employed as a secretary at an Afrikaans-medium institution, where, as she put it, 'you don't speak English. It's a Afrikaans community ... you get very little chance to speak with English people'. Her husband, Gerrie, a financial accountant, also had an entirely Afrikaans upbringing and education (including technikon) , after a year of (very Afrikaans) national service. He had spent 25 years working for the same company in a '90% Afrikaans environment I'm used to the Afrikaans side of work'. The couple's social life was all Afrikaans, heightened by the fact that they lived in a very Afrikaans-speaking town, where 'even the Indians ... are Afrikaans speaking people...they are black, coloured, Indian, they speak Afrikaans'.

Their sons Shawn and Franz were noticeably less Afrikaans than their parents, despite living in such an Afrikaans environment and leading a totally Afrikaans home life. Part of the reason for this was the fact that both had attended a dual-medium school, with Afrikaans and English widely spoken amongst classmates ('amongst my friends, I spoke English with the English speakers and Afrikaans with the Afrikaans speakers'). Shawn, now at university found himself increasingly reading and thinking in English when studying, and was reasonably confident about his competence: 'for me English isn't really a big problem for me. I can manage, I can talk and so on'. His younger brother was similarly fluent in English, which he claimed was the dominant language for him at school ('I think sixty percent English ... English is actually a big part of my life in fact') although he still used Afrikaans in his social life. He actually expressed some indifference (if not resentment) towards Afrikaans: 'I prefer English. I like speaking English, because Afrikaans is a strange language I think ... in English if you say something, it makes sense, but in Afrikaans you can say something, it don't make sense'. His irritation seemed to stem from his Afrikaans teacher. As he put it: 'she is totally Afrikaans Afrikaans. She is high and mighty Afrikaans actually and it is sometimes very difficult to understand her. Because the words she says she expects you to know what it means what she's saying, and if you say but you don't, it is actually she degrades you because you don't know what she is saying'. This also came through in his comments about broader Afrikaans culture: 'I don't listen to Afrikaans music. I don't watch Afrikaans programmes because it is, actually it's stupid. Really, like boeremusiek. It is

Afrikaans but it's, everything sounds the same, so why would I listen to it if everything is the same ... there is a lot of South African bands, but they sing English and I like that. But there is not actually not one Afrikaans band that I actually like'. Ironically, though, he made several errors in his spoken English during the interview.

Izak (40) and Netta (38) from the same town were very similar to Darlene and Gerrie. Izak's brother was already in NZ, and they had two sons and two daughters (13, 11, 8 and 5). Izak's background was farm-based, with Afrikaans-medium education, two years in the army and Afrikaans agricultural college, and a subsequent (very Afrikaans) farming life. In his social life, as he put it, 'I can't think of anything we do in English', and he could only think of two English friends he had had in his life, 'but we learned (sic) them to speak Afrikaans'. Only occasionally did he have to make a real effort to speak English ('now and then the course was in English so I had to actually present the things in English'), although he did a fair amount of written work in English. Much of his speech was peppered with ungrammatical utterances (e.g. 'There is some trials there'; 'that little guys'). His wife was also originally an Afrikaans farm girl with very little English in her community. She learned halting English at her Afrikaans medium school ('we started: 'she is skipping, she is walking, she is blowing her nose' ... that kind of thing'). She recalls only one family member, her grandmother, who knew some English and had encouraged her to improve her English. Her family life had been entirely an Afrikaans one, she went to an Afrikaans-medium university, and in her current job she interacted with far more Afrikaans people on a daily basis than English (40%).

The third couple from the same town, Bertus and Thelma (both in their 40s), had a slightly different story. Their one son was in NZ already, and they planned to take their daughter and other son (both recently completed high school) with them as well, together with his girlfriend. Bertus had grown up in Namibia and attended Afrikaans schools ('Up to matric I've had virtually no English'). After some work exposure to English, he had opened his own business with minimal interaction with English clients. In contrast, Thelma grew up on a farm with an English mother and Afrikaans father, and although the home language was Afrikaans, and she went to an Afrikaans school, she heard a lot of English because her parents spoke English to each other. After marrying Bertus she worked for two years in an English primary school, speaking English the whole day, and had acquired some confidence in using it: 'Somehow when you speak English all the time you tend to overcome the

embarrassment, because we Afrikaans speaking people ... feel a little bit embarrassed speaking English’.

Ernie (43) (manager of employer relations) and Madeleine, an editor (41) had made contact through the SANZ Charitable Trust. They lived in a Northern Gauteng city, with their three children (12, 10 and 2 years) and already seemed well on their way to a shift in language. Ernie had grown up in Bloemfontein and attended a parallel medium school and so had a good foundation in English throughout his school years. His mother had insisted on one day per week of English, and he had a lot of English friends. In the army, contrary to the norm, he did a lot of work in English. As he put it, ‘okay, it’s a predominantly Afrikaans environment, but I had a lot of English speaking troops under my command’. After university (in Afrikaans) he ‘really got confronted with English in the working environment’, and was immersed in English throughout his working day as a labour relations expert, especially since the new national language policy: ‘the last five years everything became English’. He had found himself steadily shifting towards English as a consequence, to the point where he battled to find the right technical Afrikaans word in English, and in his recent tertiary studies he had chosen to write his exam papers and assignments in English: ‘I am quite comfortable, there is no problem’.

Madeleine had a similarly Afrikaans childhood and schooling, but she had excelled at languages, including English, had an English school-friend, read a fair amount of English, and at University she actually chose to take English as a major. After some experience at an Afrikaans newspaper she worked on the news desk in the English section of the national broadcaster, translating Afrikaans material in English. Her career at the time of interview was as professional editor, writing in English for people ‘who is [sic] more English than I am ... I’m fixing their language’. She did admit that her spoken language was not as good as her written language, and made some simple concord errors (see above). They both felt so confident about their English that they planned to get special permission not to write the IELTS language test required by NZ, and rather to obtain testimonials regarding their English ability.

Marlene and Matt lived in the Eastern Cape with their two children (aged 2 and 4). Matt had been retrenched and was leaving a few weeks ahead of his family to seek a job in NZ. He had an English mother and Afrikaans father, but they had decided to raise their children in Afrikaans, so he attended an Afrikaans schools. His subsequent work experience

had been increasingly conducted in English, especially since 1994, when his company switched to English. As a result he felt able to cope, although 'just sometimes when I'm a bit nervous then I'm struggling to get the English okay'.

Marlene had experienced a thoroughly Afrikaans upbringing ('there's no English there') but had attended a dual-medium school, where she had acquired a fair proficiency in English. In her subsequent job as creditors clerk most of her official interaction (telephonic) with suppliers and customers was in English. They too were on the road to voluntary language switch, having consciously agreed (before the decision to emigrate) that, despite both being Afrikaans, they would raise their children (both of whom had been given English names) as English speakers because of the growing power of English. Matt explained that 'Ag, it is just easier for them and we are not attached to Afrikaans, for me it is not about the language ... all the years, all my English was, it was difficult for me as a Afrikaner to learn English. I had to learn slower. It will be easier for the children if you English and just bring them up English'. For this reason Marlene had always bought only English story books for the children

Uwe (28) of the Eastern Cape was a very successful businessman whose wife (33) was very keen to go to NZ, along with their 3 children, and he had also already begun the shift to English. Like most of the other interviewees, he had grown up in a totally Afrikaans environment in terms of home and school life ('My English wasn't very good. I was really Afrikaans. My whole family [and] background is Afrikaans. I come out of basically a *boere* background'). However, his professional life as a businessman was conducted predominantly in English. In addition, eight years earlier he had married an English woman and all his communication with her and their three children at home had always been in English. In his words 'my kids is growing up English, they can understand Afrikaans but they can't talk Afrikaans ... when you talk to them in Afrikaans, they understand it, but ... I don't think one of them can really even talk a sentence in Afrikaans'. He wryly admitted that of his solidly Afrikaans family, his was 'the only family that is semi-English'; 'you know my home language now is English, so we bring up our kids in English and my business is conducted, if I can call it like that, 80% in English as well'.

3.2 *Pre-immigrants' views about language issues in South Africa*

Interviewees were all asked about the effect of the new national language policy, and all

reported that they had noticed a sudden and dramatic shift away from Afrikaans and into English in the workplace:

They [the company] changed... in 1994 I think and then ... they said ... everything has to be in English ... From there on actually basically we all have to work in English [Matt].

Everything is going to be English now. It is now going to change [Marlene].

For some, this was not an issue:

The only thing that happened in the workplace was that they say English is the business language. It is not Afrikaans or Tswana But at our workplace myself when I write a letter to someone I write it in Afrikaans ... So all my correspondence is in Afrikaans, most of it actually [Gerrie].

Others were philosophical. Netta, for example, had noticed that ‘these days more of the blacks are speaking English’, but she thought it was fair. Although it had not directly affected her life, she could see that ‘it doesn’t help you [to] insist on speaking Afrikaans ... if you insist on being Afrikaans because you are Afrikaans born, where will you be?’ Nevertheless, she pointed out that ‘it is difficult ... you can never expect someone to help you in all of the eleven languages, I mean who will be able to speak eleven languages?’ Similarly, Uwe had noted significant changes, but did not see them as a threat: ‘I changed over to English because you know in a business environment ... you had to live and cope with it’. Madeleine and Ernie had also noticed a big change to English since 1994, prior to which Afrikaans had predominated in both their places of work. Ernie ‘took it comfortably because of his background experience’ and training which had prepared him for it. Madeleine had noticed the same phenomenon, and commented on high levels of misunderstanding between people from different language groups:

I’m Afrikaans, somebody else is Zulu, but we are communicating in English and the one person isn’t getting what the other person is saying and *vice versa*. So there is a frustration there.

Others were somewhat flippant. For example Kallie said he was unaffected because ‘I don’t care about language’, and Bettina felt that ‘in a few years time there won’t be Afrikaans here, unless something very big happens. But if things go on as it is at the moment, Afrikaans will be dead’. But overwhelmingly the feeling was one of irritation bordering on anger at the

sense that people were using the new language policy simply as an excuse to use more English and to avoid Afrikaans.

We start with English now that the race issue with the blacks coming into the workplace and they don't speak Afrikaans. So, actually now we start speaking English in the workplace [Gerrie].

So what is the use .. If you can't speak your language in your country? Like here. I mean if you go to a shop or if you got to phone someone in connection with anything, it's English. They don't understand Afrikaans, although I'm sure they do, but they won't speak Afrikaans. You see [Bettina].

For them, the prospect of using English in public intercourse in NZ was no different from the current reality they were experiencing in SA: 'when I communicate with people outside, it will be English and that's the same here. I mean there is no difference' [Bettina]. Izak reported much the same phenomenon at his workplace: 'I don't think Afrikaans will ever die out or something, but this English thing they bring into place, it is just, they force it all over the place' He added:

In 1996 about, in my job they started to bring all the English forms, everything must be completed in English. At that stage I haven't got any idea of going to New Zealand, so I was angry with all this new stuff forced down our throats ... And then I was thinking of New Zealand and then part of me feel like this is a good thing this English, but the other was so angry, this is Afrikaans firm, so why all this English. I don't notice, I don't bother anymore.

Bertus and Thelma confirmed this tendency ('even if they can't speak English they speak English') and expressed a fairly strong irritation:

You get fed up when you switch on the television and you can't even understand a word that is on the TV. Because you pay a license fee and everything and you can't even understand anything. That was something we actually discussed [Thelma].

Everywhere you go, I mean it's in the army, it's in the hospital, everywhere you go in South Africa, everything is in English, whether you like it or not. Whether you agree with it or not. Okay, let it be like that then [Thelma].

I've got no problem with other languages on the TV as well, but then at least give us each our own channel [Bertus].

Bertus resented what he saw as an attempt to suppress ('put out') Afrikaans, and felt that many of these people using English were actually incompetent in English and didn't fully understand it:

I've got a big problem with that and that makes me rebellious and if I go to any place, government places and they speak English, I insist on speaking to somebody who can speak Afrikaans. Just to be difficult, to tell them, I don't agree with their policy. I don't mind speaking English and I will even do that with a government department I'm working with, I've got no problems, but the attitudes of trying to get Afrikaans out, I'm rebellious about that. I just go and I refuse to speak English whatsoever.

Uwe reported a similar phenomenon:

We had certain conflicts at work where you would get a black walking in there and where previously you could speak to him in Afrikaans and he would answer you in English, I mean it was no offence and *vice versa*, but we did get the small percentage saying to you, 'I don't understand' you although you know he does understand you.

In similar vein, Madeleine regretted the loss of status of Afrikaans, especially its decline in academic domains. She reported several Afrikaans friends who 'put their kids in an English school to sort of prepare them for the world outside', and felt that the loss of Afrikaans in academic domains would eventually affect the language quality. She had already detected signs of linguistic 'sloppiness' in her own usage ('I speak two languages sometimes at the same time').

3.3 Reasons for emigration

While participants were not directly questioned on their reasons for emigration, several reasons emerged during the interviews, and it was clear that interactants all had fairly different reasons for doing so. With only one exception (Netta), it was clear that all of them actually wanted to leave SA, mostly because of various negative perceptions and experiences primarily linked to crime and political issues, and secondarily for economic, educational and linguistic reasons. This section will explore these linguistic aspects in more detail.

For Bettina and Kallie the 'pull' was greater than the 'push', and the driving force behind their decision was the need to be with their extended family in NZ ('to get to my

children and to live with them. They are phoning every weekend to ask me when I'm coming'). They anticipated speaking only Afrikaans with their family, and were of the view that the lack of Afrikaans in NZ more broadly would not be much of a change from what had already happened in SA (which they commented on with a sense of futility), so they would not be sacrificing anything. Kallie also expressed dissatisfaction with political and administrative changes in SA: 'I'm not a government supporter. And that I can tell you because we have too much bloody trouble in this country. The roads department is bankrupt, the railway is bankrupt'.

Gerrie expressed the same irritation about the noticeable decline in the use of Afrikaans, and Darlene was worried about the future of their children: 'there is no work for these children, for boys there is no work, for men there is no work'. Their son Shawn also expressed a certain amount of bitterness about the consequences of affirmative action:

I was a big big big sports fan. I played sports my whole life through, sports were my life ... And since this whole black white issue, because when we went for Northwest with rugby, we went for Northwest, so they said they must give us a chance to play but the team is already selected actually, so it doesn't help if we are playing really ... *dit het my 'n bietjie afgesit.* [it put me off].

But I think this whole racism, this whole black white thing in Afrikaans is ... a big issue in South Africa and you've got a lot of trouble with the black and white racism. Izak's views about the decline of Afrikaans at work verged on anger, and clearly had contributed to his decision to leave: 'At that stage I haven't got any idea of going to New Zealand, so I was angry with all this new stuff forced down our throats ... And then I was thinking of New Zealand and then part of me feel like this is a good thing this English, but the other was so angry'. He had also experienced some financial problems and job insecurity and felt similarly unhappy with the political situation in SA. As he put it:

I'm a person, *'n rustige, 'n ou met 'n gooie geduld, 'n geduldige persoon.* [a peaceful good-humoured, patient person] But this last year *ek kom agteraan* [came across as] very tense, *en kort af* [short tempered]. I hope this will change once you are settled and we haven't got all this crime and political things.

His wife Netta was less happy about going, but his brother had already made the move to NZ successfully, and this helped to put her mind at rest. Bertus also resented what he saw as a

deliberate attempt to suppress Afrikaans, and he and Madeleine were keen to get the move over before they got any older: 'I think the thing is with age it becomes more difficult to transfer yourself ... what drives us now is the realization that it's now or never'.

For Uwe, the decision to leave had been particularly difficult. Initially he had gone over to NZ to take a look, because of pressure from his wife, and had been pleasantly surprised at what he had found. He also had SA friends in NZ who had encouraged him and given him a lot of information. The final factor which had persuaded him to go was the future of his children: 'if it wasn't for my kids at the end of the day I probably wouldn't'.

Without exception, these prospective emigrants have noted with resignation, sadness or annoyance that their MT is declining rapidly and losing ground to English. All of them had experienced increasing levels of English usage in their work environments since the new policy, and in several cases it was clear that linguistic issues had contributed in no small way to their ultimate disenchantment with South Africa and the decision to leave. The fact that several of them had already made subtle moves towards improving their own English, and that of their children, will probably predispose them to adjust to an English lifestyle in NZ very easily. Overall, the attitudes of these interviewees towards their new homeland was an overwhelmingly positive one, despite their strongly Afrikaans cultural and linguistic roots.

The social attitudes of the majority group and the relative power and perceived status of the two languages, and their socio-political history always play a significant part in matters of language shift. Language maintenance is only likely with strong commitment and desire to maintain contact with a linguistic cultural background, and this is likely to be affected by external factors: if one of the languages has higher status than the other, or if socio-historical factors, and political or government policies make it more appealing (Fasold, 1984; Schumann, 1986; Clyne, 1985; Appel & Muysken, 1987), this can strengthen efforts towards the maintenance of that language.

4. Final Remarks

As a result of the social engineering which resulted from the language planning of the apartheid regime since the 1940s, Afrikaans was strengthened and took the lead in many social, political and educational spheres (see Msimang 1996:125). Because of the negative experiences and linguistic disparities which resulted from this, over the past 10 years in South Africa, a great deal of effort and energy has been expended on a new burst of language

planning, and there have been very deliberate efforts “to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes” (Cooper 1989:45). However, while South Africa’s new language policy explicitly set out to ensure that all languages are treated equally in all domains, “the force of history may overwhelm any policy attempt, even in the case of ... a large indigenous language” (Hornberger (1998:452), and this seems to have been the case for Afrikaans in South Africa. Despite all the recent efforts by the government to ensure linguistic and cultural diversity, a certain linguistic momentum seems to be involved here, which is driven not so much by the numbers of speakers of the languages concerned but rather by the unequal social, political and economic power of their speakers (Mac Poilin, 1996, cited in Hornberger, 1998:452). The interviews conducted in this study suggest that the language planning that has taken place in South Africa over the past decade has been a very powerful instrument in channelling and accelerating social trends and influencing attitudes.

Thus, while language planning in a multilingual society usually aims to reduce distances between groups, to break down stereotypes, and to increase mutual understanding, one of the ironic (and perhaps unforeseen) consequences of all this sustained and conscious effort to change the linguistic functions in society and to uplift formerly disadvantaged languages, has been the steady decline in status and functions of Afrikaans. While definitely not an explicit part of the language policy, the replacement of Afrikaans with English in the workplace has been a natural consequence of a commonly held perception that English is neutral, it is the language of no particular social or ethnic group, and it has generally positive connotations⁴, and the participants in this study show similar evidence of support for English and a somewhat jaundiced disaffection from their own mother tongue.

In summing up what insights this research offers, the issue of generalisability deserves comment. These interviews represent the views of a somewhat arbitrary collection of 15 people who were self-selected, in a way, by virtue of their intention to emigrate and their willingness to be interviewed. They therefore cannot be seen as fully representative of the Afrikaans emigrant community in general. It is also possible that the interviewer’s Englishness (despite his efforts to use Afrikaans) might have influenced responses in subtle ways, biasing them slightly in the direction of English (the tendency to switch to English in the interviews is possible evidence of this). Nonetheless, the overall trends remain clear, and there seems little doubt that language shift and language loss are imminent among most

respondents once they have emigrated.

Previous findings of similar research on language shift to English among people still resident in South Africa reports similar trends. Moyo (2003) bemoans the loss and decay of Malawian indigenous languages in favour of English. Mesthrie (1992) very ably documents the same process among South African speakers of Indian languages, and Bosch & de Klerk (1993) report on the steady decline in language loyalty among Afrikaans speakers. In Bosch & de Klerk (1997) and de Klerk & Bosch (1998) 10 couples in linguistically mixed (English / Afrikaans) marriages were interviewed, and comments by respondents revealed that, for them, Afrikaans was problematic: they were aware of its negative connotations, and, in addition, they acknowledged its functional limitations. It was evident that English usage was increasing in at least half of the informants' homes, and most had come to terms with the shift they saw occurring before their eyes. While they might not have originally realised the linguistic consequences of their actions, most had accepted that their children were rapidly becoming Anglicised. Studies on language shift from Xhosa and from Afrikaans to English resulting from placement in English medium schools (de Klerk 2001; 2002) reveal similar patterns of language shift and loss of language loyalty among the parents and children involved. In de Klerk (2001), 10 of the 12 parents interviewed saw the writing on the wall, so to speak, as far as their children's future linguistic identity was concerned, and admitted that they would probably be English in the future.

In their studies on immigrant populations in NZ, Holmes et al. (1993) emphasise the need for active and conscious strategies to ensure language maintenance. There, the predominant language of administration, education and entertainment is English, and research (e.g. Holmes et al. 1993) has indicated that shift to English among immigrants and ethnic minority groups occurs over at most four generations, or as few as two. They report steadily declining proficiency in ethnic languages as the language retreats from more and more social settings and domains. In addition one has to take into account the fact that in NZ the necessary institutional support for minority languages, such as community newspapers, church services, language schools and preschools (Holmes et al. 1993:15) are limited: Afrikaans speakers are scattered across the country, and only limited cultural and linguistic support is available for Afrikaans through the Afrikaans Club (established in 1999), and through Afrikaans church services in various places². Other attempts to promote Afrikaans through official channels, such as offering it as an optional school subject have met with strong resistance³.

The Constitution of South Africa (1996, section 32) enshrines the language rights of all its citizens and provides the means to promote the vitality, versatility and stability of these languages and the rights of their speakers, but policy can take you so far and no further. For the continued resilience and growth of an indigenous language, it is crucial that the speakers involve themselves in keeping it alive, and shoulder the responsibility of carrying these languages forward into the future. All the participants in this study have decided to shrug off this responsibility, and to pass the baton of Afrikaans on to those remaining behind. They reflect an overall lack of commitment to Afrikaans, which has resulted from socio-political events in SA. The irony is that their decision to opt for an English-only world will deprive them even more of their beloved language. But instead of making an effort to fight the tide against Afrikaans, these people have opted to join it, with some evidence of sour grapes coming through. In a sense there is a very obtuse rationale involved, with several participants seemingly saying 'if they keep pushing English down my throat here, and I can't have a totally comfortable Afrikaans environment I'd rather have a totally English lifestyle in NZ'. It is very likely that they will.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.
2. There is an Afrikaans shelf at a North Shore library, where they regularly host story-readings for Afrikaans toddlers.
3. In 1999 a SA resident in Auckland suggested this, and a flurry of angry letters to the press resulted in the Afrikaans Club dropping the idea (Smith 2001:62).
4. Recent research reports strongly positive perceptions of the value of English, and increased usage of English in schools and as part of the home repertoire (Pather, 1994; Pluddeman, 1995; de Klerk, 1996; Mutasa, 1996; Winkler, 1997; Verhoef, 1998).

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