

PERSUASION - SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE IN ACTION

Elaine Ridge

The issue of which English should be privileged in South Africa has been hotly debated. This article argues against the binary thinking that has fuelled this debate. It contends that standard English should be taught since it is the proper or appropriate choice in particular contexts. Competence in standard English would extend and enhance learners' repertoires. However, unless the richly textured variety of "other" Englishes is accommodated in the classroom, there is a strong danger of what Phillipson (1992) terms linguisticism. The article argues that a possible means of exploring the richly textured varieties in use in South Africa would be to focus on the choice of accent in radio advertisements. Some suggestions are outlined as to how a critical awareness of the persuasive effect of particular accents in particular contexts can be developed. Finally, a plea is made for stylistic experimentation to be honoured in South African classrooms as a further means of exploring the language resources in South Africa.

Die debat rondom die soort Engels wat in Suid-Afrika bevoordeel behoort te word is nog steeds aan die gang. In hierdie artikel word daar aangevoer dat dit die gevolg is van die binêre denke oor hierdie saak. Daar word beweer dat Standaard-Engels onderrig behoort te word aangesien dit die maak van 'n korrekte of geskikte keuse in bepaalde kontekste behels. Vaardigheid in Standaard-Engels sal leerders se repertoire uitbrei en versterk. Dit beteken egter nie dat die ryk tekstuurverskeidenheid van die "ander" soorte Engels in die klaskamer buite rekening gelaat mag word nie. Indien dit sou gebeur, bestaan die gevaar van wat Phillipson (1992) "linguïsmiese" noem. Volgens die artikel is die bestudering van radio-advertensies, met die fokus op die keuse van klem, 'n moontlike manier om die ryk tekstuurverskeidenheid van Engels wat in Suid-Afrika gebruik word te ondersoek. Bepaalde voorstelle word aan die hand gedoen oor hoe 'n kritiese bewustheid ontwikkel kan word ten opsigte van die vasstelling van die oorredende uitwerking wat 'n bepaalde aksentuering binne bepaalde kontekste kan hê. Ten slotte word 'n pleidooi gelewer ten gunste van eksperimentasie met styl in Suid-Afrikaanse klaskamers as 'n verdere wyse waarop bronne vir taal in Suid-Afrika ondersoek kan word.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

"Smit, my dear fellow. How well you look. But you seem much younger and you are no longer bald. You have started wearing glasses. You seem to be rather taller than you were."

"My name is not Smit. It is Cloete."

"Oh, so you've changed your name too."

This story, rather loosely adapted from one Peter Strevens once used, illustrates the confidence with which we accord meaning or value to phenomena. This applies also to what we call standards of language.

What constitutes "proper English" has been a hotly debated issue around the world. Widdowson (1993) usefully highlights two issues of standard English and standards of English which have been contentious, not least in South Africa. First, he takes the view that English should be judged against the standard of "proper words in proper places" (1993: 328). Second, while asserting the unanswerable case for standard English to be taught at schools, he argues against its being seen as *the* proper language. The test for each domain of use must be appropriacy.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Multilingualism is "enshrined" in the constitution. However, for obvious reasons both in terms of its long-term status as an official language and its apparent value as a powerful international language, English is, in practice, more equal than other languages. Tollefson (1991) and Phillipson (1992) have urged the need for an awareness of the powerful linguistic imperialism which has been exercised through English in the world, violating the linguistic human rights of others. There is a strong danger that English language teaching can itself contribute a wrong and powerful status for English. It seems to me that the key to avoiding this danger lies in a distinction between linguicism and a focus on needs to be met in a language. Linguicism implies a concern with power (and may be seen behind many of the vitriolic attacks made on SAm), whereas a focus on language needs implies an interest in dynamic language.

Widdowson's call for "proper words in proper places" can now be returned to. Within South Africa, a continuum of Englishes has developed which richly reflects the sociocultural identities of small as well as large communities. The range is from functionally monolingual speakers of English, many of whom look to British English as their only standard, to those multilingual speakers of English who reject any recourse to "outside authorities". English is seen by the latter as an African language and they argue a case for standards of English which reflect the diversity of its local speakers and which are firmly grounded in culturally specific rules of discourse rather than pan-cultural ones.

There are many red herrings in this debate. "Standard" does not necessarily carry metropolitan or colonial baggage. Nor does it force a choice between British and American usage. Standard English is an international phenomenon. Quirk *et al.* (1985) point out that the differences are essentially trivial.

absurd as the Victorian lady who said of Darwin's work: "My dear, let us hope that it is not true - but if it is, let us pray that it does not become generally known".

The approach to education demanded by enshrined language rights must be sensitive. It must not involve prejudice and not involve binary judgements between, for example, British and African. A real concern for the rights of particular language groups means that we should promote understanding and appreciation of difference and variety, not least in the Englishes they speak.

Having said that, I must emphasise that I believe that the case for teaching standard English in both first and second language classrooms is a strong one. It has a firmly established role in public life and in education. It is clear that in the case of both written language and spoken language, standard English, as defined above, is necessary to realise the institutional objectives of language education. Not to teach standard English is to deny empowerment to the majority of pupils: effective entry will be denied them into whole areas of social and professional life.

Let me hasten to add that I am not advocating the predominance of the international standard at the expense of local varieties, and certainly not of other national languages. What I am advocating is that we extend and enhance learners' repertoires beyond what could be achieved through merely local experience. I would, in fact, also argue the case for attention to other codes. The standard form must be seen as having specific and important areas of appropriacy, and its value must not be underplayed. However, to return to Widdowson's point, standard English must not be viewed as *the* proper language in all instances. It must be seen as one of many varieties, each of which has possible areas of appropriacy. For example, he suggests that one of the domains of proper use of "other" Englishes is the domain of classroom interaction. There is no reason to assume that it is a condition of good learning for discussion to take place in standard English, even though final texts produced in an academic or formal context would privilege that variety.

BROAD INFORMING ASSUMPTIONS

At this point it would be as well if I clarified the broad assumptions informing my argument. I have drawn extensively on Carter (1992) and on Candlin (1983).

1. The common ground between speakers of a language is much larger than the areas of difference between them.
2. The process of deriving meaning is one of dynamic inference: meanings are plural and variable within an unfolding context and from one context to another and one set of users to another. Communication and understanding involve more than mere linguistic encoding and decoding.
3. Language reveals and conceals a great deal about human relationships. Examples of this are to be found in the close connections between language and social power, language and culture and language and gender.

users to another. Communication and understanding involve more than mere linguistic encoding and decoding.

3. Language reveals and conceals a great deal about human relationships. Examples of this are to be found in the close connections between language and social power, language and culture and language and gender.
4. Language reflects social and cultural values and is intimately connected to a particular user's unique and group identity.
5. Language is a system and is systematically organised.
6. Many language users have the ability to shift their accent and dialect depending on the context in which they are speaking.
7. Reflection on and analysis of language gives users insights into their own and other people's efforts to make meaning.

ADVERTISEMENTS AS A TEACHING RESOURCE

I believe that advertisements offer a rich resource for exploring the ways in which varieties of language are used persuasively. Advertisements have to meet the ruthless demands of the marketplace, so the use made of particular kinds of language is not a liberal indulgence. Choice is made on the grounds of what will be effective and what is current.

1. Advertisements focus attention on what is being said and make it possible to explore the ways in which meaning and value are achieved. They are unlikely to give rise to the kind of intense emotive comment which was heard from both management and listeners when "new voices" were introduced on the media as part of the launching of SAfm.
2. Advertisements, as my title suggests, constitute carefully calculated use of language to effect powerful persuasion. The use of a variety of what might otherwise be seen as less prestigious accents or forms is a powerful endorsement of these varieties as significant elements of South African reality. In the TV *Sunlight Liquid* advertisement, the juxtaposition of white and black homemakers is an illustration of their equally valid claims to effectively increase sales of this product. The *Vodacom* advertisement, uses the words "Yebo Gogo" as a symbol of the way in which the true power relationship between the two men involved becomes evident. Here accent, too, is a key feature in demonstrating the ways in which language reflects socio-cultural identity. This is a very complex advertisement and would repay close analysis of both paralinguistic as well as linguistic features.

I have opted for radio advertisements because the radio is still the most powerful medium in South Africa. I suggest that a useful way of approaching this would be to challenge pupils to

make a collection of as many accents as possible, drawing on radio or TV advertisements to do so. This could include American accents, which still signal the desirability of particular marketplace items and influence the speech patterns of many South Africans. In groups, learners could be involved in identifying the different accents and finding ways of describing them and the effect that they have on listeners. This would be an inductive approach to internal consistency by describing the differences or key aspects which make up particular accents. It could also be a means of debating the value of being able to shift one's accent depending on the situation in which one speaks.

It would also be useful to explore some of the more problematic aspects. One's accent can affect one's life quite strongly. During a 6-month stay in England our daughter retained her South African accent. Until her bitter tears in the playground towards the end of our stay, we had no idea how alien she seemed to the others. A classmate, now suddenly empathetic said "She talks posh, but she sure don't cry posh!" Another actual case has a well-known American colleague taking years of speech therapy to remove her Southern accent. This was necessary to overcome the prejudice against her academic capability that the first sounds of "a Southern belle" created.

Many advertisements could be used to develop a critical awareness of the roles of accent among the ways in which people use spoken language to construct meaning and to influence others, since advertisements increasingly use personal or "cultural" identity as a means of selling their products.

Transcriptions of five vigorous advertisements, current on radio in 1995, are provided in the Addendum. In what follows, a brief commentary is provided on the advertisements and a few suggestions are made as to the ways in which they could be used.

SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

The first advertisement deals with stereotypes and relies on humorous effect. The first speaker is a black man for whom the job probably represents mobility. His accent is closer to what Lanham (1978) has termed Respectable South African English (Resp SAE). It is fair to deduce that he has had his schooling at an English school which would explain his "middle-class" accent. The other man's accent could be described as Extreme South African English (Ext SA) which is typically a colloquial style pattern.

The first speaker is the initiator of the conversation and also the one to come up with an idea. His syntax is formal and his choice of language is conservative. The second speaker uses Afrikaans words and slang like "brilliant" and "100 k's". The policeman who stops the two of them has a stereotypical Afrikaans accent.

Clearly, this advertisement would lend itself to discussions of the choice of accent. Interesting experiments could be conducted in which the accent of the various role players changes. Questions to guide discussion might include:

- * How does the change of accent affect the tenor of the advertisement?
- * How does accent change the power relationships in the advertisement?
- * What other stereotypical accents could be used by the policeman (particularly interesting in the new South Africa)?

If students are allowed to experiment by using the various accents themselves, it would provide interesting opportunities for them to reflect on some of the changes to the text that might be needed as a result of the change in accent (lexical choices, for instance, and allusions that are likely to be made). Goodwyn (1988) suggests that this process of reflection plays an important role in the development of language skills.

The second advertisement portrays a male teenager reflecting aloud. His strong bonds with his peer group are evident in his accent.

Some possible questions to generate discussion and observation on this would be:

- * How old do you think the boy is?
- * What kind of school do you think he attends?
- * What kind of suburb do you think he lives in?
- * What kind of person do you think he is?

The same kind of experimentation with accent as was suggested above could be tried in the case of this advertisement.

The third advertisement makes use of a number of accents. There are a range of accents, both American and South African. The recording would provide a useful exercise in the identification of the various accents. It could also lead to a discussion of the way in which other paralinguistic features such as stress, intonation and volume are used to convey meaning and influence listeners.

In the fourth recording, the voice chosen is that of an African man whose accent reflects his education and social class. Possible lines of inquiry are:

- * Do you find the speaker persuasive? (Why/ why not?)
- * Do you think he was a good choice as a presenter of this subject matter?
- * What other accents could have been effective? (Explain your suggestions.)

In the fifth recording, the accent of the African woman proclaims her position of empowerment. Her personal confidence is reflected in her authoritative approach and her command of very formal, lengthy sentences. It would be interesting to use it to create an opportunity for pupils or students to identify the various choices she has made and the socio-cultural and political identity it reflects.

Some useful material on accent was produced as part of the LINC materials in Britain. It demonstrates the way in which a person's accent and dialect are essential elements of that person's individual and social identity. This material could be used as a means of

objectifying the discussion or as a pattern for collecting a South African data file of the same kind. One of the people involved is a barrister who uses two distinctly different dialects in the court room and in his personal life.

BROAD CONCLUSIONS

1. This paper is exploratory. It would be enhanced by the development of a firmer theoretical framework and more sophisticated interpretative strategies. Such interpretative strategies would demand an understanding of the way in which language is inextricably bound to the context in which it occurs. Definition or typology of context, however, remains elusive. Figueroa (1994) demonstrates the complexity of this concept, and draws together the common ground in the typologies of Schiffrin 1987, Lyons (1977, which incorporates Hymes 1974), Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Givon (1989), respectively.

All four typologies share a number of general factors. They all include linguistic (prior text) and non-linguistic (e.g. physical location) factors. They all include culture whether in the form of beliefs, assumptions, expectations, or norms of behaviour. And they all include the participants (e.g. their social relationship to each other, their shared and unshared knowledge) without whom any discussion of context would be moot. Context is multi-dimensional, it includes the past (prior-text, memory, cultural norms, discourse routines, etc.), the present (the physical environment, the speech situation, etc.) and the future (hypotheses, hopes, desires, goals, fears, etc.), and it includes a range of "worlds" - worlds of discourse, worlds of experience, worlds of fancy, material worlds - so that one is simultaneously experiencing many times, many places and many selves in relation to others and in relation to the worlds one is inhabiting Figueroa 1994: 148).

2. Language teaching in South Africa has complex issues to face. I have suggested in outline some of the ways in which advertisements could be used as a means of appreciating the richly textured variety of Englishes available in South Africa. I would argue that we should honour much more stylistic experiment in this area as well. This is a call for dynamic new Englishes that will strike a distinctive note. Fairclough (1990) has argued that demonstrating the power of standard English might trivialise other varieties as a consequence. It is important in a multilingualism context that we need to privilege creativity. Perhaps it is appropriate then that the Indian poet, Kamala Das, should have the last word.

... I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions....

The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- CANDLIN, C. 1983. Discoursal patterning and the equalizing of interpretative opportunity. In Smith, LE (Ed.) *Readings in English as an international language: 125-46.*
- CARTER, R. 1992. *LINC. Language in the national curriculum materials.*
- FAIRCLOUGH, N. 1992. *Critical language awareness.* London: Longman.
- FIGUERO, E. 1994. *Sociolinguistic metatheory.* London: Pergamon.
- GIVON, T. 1989. *Mind, code and context. essays in pragmatics.* London: Lawrence Rolbaum and Assoc.
- GODWYN, A. 1988 *English and ability.* London: David Fulton.
- HYMES, D. 1974. *Foundations in sociolinguistics. an ethnographic approach.* Philadelphia: University of Penn. Press.
- LANHAM, LW. 1978. South African English. In Lanham, LW and Prinsloo, KP. *Language and communication studies in South Africa.* Cape Town: OUP.
- LYONS, J. 1977. *Semantics (2 Vols).*
- PHILLIPSON, R. 1992 *Linguistic imperialism.* Oxford:OUP.
- QUIRK, R, S GREENBAUM, G LEECH, AND J SVARTVIK. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language.* London: Longman.
- SCHIFFRIN, D. 1987. Discovering the context of an utterance. *Linguistics* 25:11-32.
- SPERBER, P. AND D WILSON. 1986. *Relevance: communication and cognition.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

TOLLEFSON, JW. 1991. *Language planning inequality: language policy in the community*.
London: Longman.

WIDDOWSON, HG. Proper words in proper places. *ELT Journal* 47(4):317-329.

ADDENDUM

1.

[1st man] How tall is our truck?

[2nd man] 2 metres 2 centimetres.

[1st man] That tunnel clearance is two metres.

[2nd man] Ag no man! It's 100 k's back to the last turn off.

[Voice of authority intervenes: When you need a break, have a kitkat. Crisp biscuit wafer fingers covered in creamy milk chocolate.]

[1st man] Why, I know, just let some air out the tyres.

[2nd man] That's brilliant!

The two sing in country and western style " We 're on the road again - on the road again. "

Siren sounds.

[Policeman using loudhailer] Police. Pull over.

[2nd man] Yes officer.

[Policeman] Underinflated tyres. 100 bucks a tyre times 18 gives us.... Let's see now (voice drops to an almost inaudible level) 10 times 18.....

[Voice of authority: Have a break. Have a kitkat.]

2.

Teenager

Hey Mark, is this your *Quinoderm* ? Can I use some for my pimples?

Last week I was headbanging. This week I shaved it. Mmph! Maybe I should get my other ear pierced. Wouldn't it look good with a stud? But some things never change. Huh, like pimples. Hey, if I used *Quinoderm* I wouldn't need to grow a bokie.

Voice of authority intervenes.

Don't give pimples a say. Clear them away with *Quinoderm*.

Teenager

And look the way you want.

Voice of authority

Quinoderm - the visible difference in acne treatment.

3.

In this advertisements the different voices follow on without the usual break that is suggested by the way in which this has been set out. The divisions made here are to emphasise the number of different voices used.

Voice from space centre

Ignition, sequence start. Six, five, four, three, two, one, zero. Lift off. We have a liftoff!

Salacious female voice

Let's do it.

American disembodied voice having the effect of some kind of controlling presence.

This should be played at high volume in a residential area.

Suggestive whisper (female voice)

Pepsi

[Female teenage voice]

It's so cool.

FWde Klerk

The steps that have been decided are the following:

Enthusiastic male singing voices

P-a-r-t-y -

Female voice

I love your choice,

(Inane laugh - ? The Riddler)

Voice of ecstatic rugby commentator

It's all over. SA are the world champions.

American gangster voice

Okay. Get in there kids.

Suggestive whisper (female voice)

Sounds fantastic.

Martin Luther King 's Voice

I have a dream.

American voice of not too intelligent person

What's that?

Voice on public broadcasting system

Ameri-meri-ca

American public broadcasting official

This is a public announcement brought to you by Pepsi.

[Sound of bottle being opened]

Ah! Say it - *PEPSI*: THE CHOICE OF A NATION.

This is a public service announcement brought to you by Pepsi

4.

Right now clear across our land you'll find the colours of our National Flag proudly displayed on everything from T-shirts to bumper stickers. It is a symbol of our nation's caring, sharing and nurturing. How appropriate, then, that Nestle milk chocolate slabs now have the symbol of national unity on every 100g pack. Share the taste of a nation and win prizes worth R70,000.

Nestle chocolates - it's the taste that will melt your heart.

5.

During colonialism, apartheid and even traditional African rule, women were denied rights such as equal access to land, education, housing, job opportunities and finance, equal protection under the law and equal representation at all levels of government to name a few. Now that the new constitution has been written, the voice of women needs to be heard. How can we ensure that women enjoy these and other rights? If you have any suggestions, contact any member of the Constitutional Assembly - or write to the Director at PO Box 15, CAPE TOWN 8 000.